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STORYTELLING IN PINTER'S *HOMECOMING*

One of the most significant features of Harold Pinter's dramatic workshop is the extensive use of narratives. In a unique way, a story is intermingled with ongoing dialogue. The result is captivating. While it might seem that the insertion of a narrative within the dialogue could hinder the development of the action, Pinter's dramatic works prove just the opposite. The stories expose the truth about the characters which the meanderings of the plot would never expose. In this way, by the conscious use of the stories, there emerges a new significant dramatic technique.

Pinter's employment of the story has been already analysed by Kristin Morrison in her book: *Canters and Chronicles. The Use of Narrative in the Plays of Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter*. My work is going to develop the study of the playwright's storytelling technique further on. My goal is not a mere interpretation of the narratives, but an analysis of their function in the structure of the play and in the delineation of the characters as well as in the enactment of their relationships.

I have decided to analyse *The Homecoming*, which is generally considered to be the best developed and the most mature of Pinter's plays. It is also a play where the use of the stories is most versatile. Pinter's masterful command of dramatic language creates a unique opportunity for studying a wide variety of stories, their purposes and dramatic functions.

Pinter shows us an old, bleak North London household inhabited by Max, his two sons: Lenny and Joey, and his brother Sam. It seems that in this family love and mutual understanding have been long replaced by rivalry and violence as the characters quarrel, swear and shout instead of communicating. During the visit of Teddy, Max's eldest son, and Ruth, his wife, an intricate emotional transformation occurs. As a result, Ruth decides to abandon her husband and three sons, stay in London and work as a prostitute. Teddy is to go back to America, where he works at the university as a lecturer in philosophy.

Pinter's economical style does not supply us with many helpful hints for a proper understanding of *The Homecoming*. In introducing the characters

the playwright tells us nothing more than their age and sex. We are never fully aware of their past, motives and desires. Fortunately, Pinter makes them tell stories, the analyses of which should provide some useful insight into the oblique action of the play. Let us explore what each storyteller says depending on the addressee of the narrative and the circumstances in which it is told.

Max is the first to take his turn as a storyteller. His initial narrative is produced during the conversation with Lenny. The old man is looking for a pair of scissors and interrupts the younger who is reading the paper. Max's question provokes a violent outburst on the part of Lenny who looks up and quietly swears. Max, in turn, points a stick at him and gives him a warning. Then he asks Lenny for a cigarette but does not receive any response. He lights his own, crumpled one and begins his first story:

> "You think I wasn't a tearaway? I could have taken care of you, twice over. I'm still strong. You ask your Uncle Sam what I was. But at the same time I always had a kind heart. Always."[1]

He recollects his friend MacGregor, whom he used to call "Mac". They were a perfect match whom everybody feared and respected:

> "Huhh! We were two of the worst hated men in the West End of London. I tell you, I still got the scars. We'd walk into a place, the whole room'd stand up, they'd make way to let us pass. You never heard such silence. Mind you, he was a big man, he was over six foot tall." (p. 8)

Max finishes off with a remark that Mac used to be very fond of Lenny's mother. The description of the woman is more than disturbing:

> "Mind you, she wasn't such a bad woman. Even though it made me sick just to look at her rotten stinking face, she wasn't such a bad bitch. I gave her the best bleeding years of my life, anyway." (p. 9)

The story exposes relations in the family. It turns out that Max is Lenny's father although their conversation lacks warmth and understanding. The old man resorts to a narrative about his youth, when he was strong and powerful. The recollection serves as self-defence against ageing and the dearth of respect. On the surface, Max recounts an incident from the past, while on an underlying level, he calls for deference and respect. The image of a mighty friend constitutes a childish attempt at warning and alarming Lenny.

Max's next story is told after another fierce verbal exchange. Savage quarrels must be common in their relationship since they quickly forget

[1] H. Pinter, *The Homecoming* (London: Methuen, 1982) p. 8. All further references in the text will be to this edition.

about it and go on discussing horseracing. Lenny does not share his father's views on the potential winner and in this way undermines the old man's competence. It incites Max to tell another story:

> "I used to live on the course. One of the loves of my life. Epsom? I knew it like the back of my hand. I was one of the best-known faces down at the paddock. What a marvellous open-air life." (p. 9)

He talks about his unusual gift of handling and understanding horses, which almost provided him with a prestigious job for one of the Dukes. Since he had family obligations, however, he had to turn the offer down. His declaration of having particular abilities in training fillies contains sexual overtones. In this narrative the memories mingle with the general knowledge on the subject:

> "Because the fillies are more highly strung than the colts, they are more unreliable, did you know that?" (p. 10)

The purpose of the narratives is to emphasise Max's importance. While in the first one he presents himself as strong and masculine, in this one he stresses his professional skills. Although the old man attempts to convince others and himself of his dominant position in the family, the stories betray his sense of loss and insecurity.

Sam is another member of the family who tells stories. Prompted by Lenny's compliments on his professional abilities he eagerly launches into his narrative:

> "After all, I'm experienced. I was driving a dust cart at the age of nineteen. Then I was in a long-distance haulage. I had ten years as a taxi-driver and I've had five as a private chauffeur." (p. 14)

Sam works as a private chauffeur and is very proud of his prominent job. It gives him pleasure, satisfaction and a sense of independence. The fact that he still earns money upsets and irritates his brother, who spends all the time at home serving the rest of the family. Later Max accuses Sam of taking liberties with women customers and teases him by alluding to his future bride because the man is still single. Therefore the story incites a certain antagonism between the two brothers, which will become even more evident in the ensuing narratives.

Soon it is Max's turn to tell Sam a story. The old man is infuriated with his brother's allusions to his ex-wife, Jessie, and his friend Mac. He threatens to expel Sam from the household. When Sam claims equal rights for the house, Max provides another story:

"Our father! I remember him. Don't worry. You kid yourself. He used to come over to me and look down at me. My old man did. He'd bend right over me, then he'd pick me up." (p. 19)

Though it sounds like a pure eulogy of a father-figure, the narrative carries another message as well. In Pinter's plays there is frequently a contradiction between the words that are spoken and the emotional and psychological action that underlies them.[2] The sentimental image of paternal love and care becomes a powerful weapon. Max implies that he was their father's favourite and thus he is the one to dictate the rules. This story is an act of verbal aggression and humiliation directed at Sam. Max, who was himself a victim of Lenny's cruelty, now takes revenge and projects his frustration on the younger brother.

Later in the play, Max produces another narrative directed at Sam. It is morning and Sam is cleaning the kitchen. Max is irritated by his brother's precision in doing the housework which he treats as an expression of resentment towards his cooking. The anger prompts him to tell a story about his father. The narrative is another glorification of the old man who was "a number one butcher" (p. 39) and who made Max responsible for his brothers. Sam is presented as a clumsy and lazy person:

"What kind of a son were you, you wet wick? You spent half your time doing crossword puzzles! We took you into the butcher's shop, you couldn't even sweep the dust off the floor." (p. 39)

It is in contrast to the cleverness and resourcefulness of MacGregor, who learned to run the shop in the week. Max's viciousness and sadistic contempt of Sam become obsessive. He humiliates his brother using every opportunity and Sam does not retaliate.

Max's next narrative is provided after the arrival of Teddy and his wife. Initially, the old man insults Ruth because he thinks she is a tart. He is petrified that his son dared to bring her home. Ruth, however, remains in perfect control of herself during this hilarious scene. As soon as she admits having three children, she is accepted by the family. It is now that Max tells a story praising his wife. The narrative starts in the mood of wishful thinking describing the hypothetical reaction of Jessie to the family gathering. Max dwells on her allegedly emotional reaction towards the grandchildren:

"She'd have petted them and cooed over them, wouldn't she, Sam? She'd have fussed over them and played with them, told them stories, tickled them – I tell you she'd have been hysterical." (p. 45)

[2] M. Esslin, *Pinter. The Playwright* (London: Methuen, 1984) p. 238.

The references to Jessie's attitude to children in themselves constitute a miniature story. They present her as a kind, warm-hearted and family-centred person. According to Max, Jessie taught his sons "everything they know" (p. 45), "every single bit of the moral code they live by" (p. 46). She was "the backbone to this family" (p. 46), a woman "with a will of iron, a heart of gold and a mind" (p. 46). Later, he recollects one evening when he gave her a drop of cherry brandy and promised to buy her some new clothes. The boys surrounded the happy couple. The ideal image of the family is probably meant to impress Ruth. In order to achieve the desired effect Max employs "a whole thesaurus of sentimental clichés, in its evocation of 'fine grown-up lads' and 'lovely daughter-in-law'".[3] The sentimental, stereotypical phrases undermine the truthfulness of the narrative.

The idyllic vision created by the story contradicts the notion of the family provided by the play. The discrepancy can be attributed to Max's troubled mind which mixes fancy and truth and substitutes wishful thinking for facts. The fact that the narrative is concerned with the figure of wife and mother and is provided on meeting Ruth, who also performs these functions in the family, seems to signal its additional purpose. Though the story narrates past events, it indirectly refers to the present by the contrast it evokes. Just as Jessie in real life differed from Max's description, just as Lenny and Joey are far from ideal sons and citizens, so Ruth contradicts the conventional image of a professor's wife. Since Max previously referred to his unusual gift of understanding females (p. 10) it seems probable that he is the first to sense a certain incongruity in her conduct. Therefore his story may serve as a deliberate strategy to show Ruth what he thinks of her and what he imagines she should be. In this way the narrative subtly prepares the audience for what is to come.

Max's next story is juxtaposed with the previous one. He feels hurt and humiliated when he hears that Sam is going to work soon. Bad memories come back and the image of the family he presents now contradicts the previous one:

> "A crippled family, three bastard sons, a slutbitch of a wife – don't talk to me about the pain of childbirth – I suffered the pain, I've still got the pangs – when I give a little cough my back collapses-and here I've got a lazy bugger of a brother who won't even get to work on time." (p. 47)

The story abounds in images of physical violence and effort. The underlying anger and frustration are evident. Since both narratives are very personal and subjective it is difficult to detect where the truth lies.

[3] A. Kennedy, *Six Dramatists in Search of a Language: Studies in Dramatic Language.* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975) p. 185.

No matter whether in the cosy atmosphere of a happy household, or in the brutal struggle for survival, Max is constantly presented as the head of the family. His significance and responsibility are overtly emphasised. It appears, though, that the stories instead of re-establishing his reign betray his inferiority complex and the desperate need to be appreciated.

Max tells stories to almost all members of the household. Though on the surface the narratives recount the past, it appears that they unwittingly betray what the teller desperately tries to hide: his vulnerability and sense of failure. The attempts to impress Lenny with his knowledge and power expose the old man's inferior position in the family and his yearning for respect. The stories aimed at humiliating Sam betray Max's dissatisfaction with his current passivity and poverty. The one directed to affect Ruth also unintentionally reveals the discrepancy between his expectations and crude reality. Therefore the stories become an original, unconscious self-characterisation method.

The stories directed at Sam and Ruth perform an essential structural function as well. By the emotional strain that Pinter forces Max to endure while recollecting the oblique incidents, by obsessive allusions to MacGregor and self-contradictory images of Jessie, the playwright implies the existence of some suppressed feelings and motivations that are of great consequence for the final scene.[4]

Another storyteller in the play is Lenny. He addresses his first story to Ruth on meeting her in the living room just after her arrival. He courteously offers her a drink although there is no alcohol in the house. Then he launches into his first story:

> "Eh listen, I wonder if you can advise me. I've been having a bit of a rough time with this clock. The tick's been keeping me up. The trouble is I'm not at all convinced it was the clock. I mean there are lots of things which tick in the night, don't you find that? All sorts of objects, which, in the day, you wouldn't call anything else but commonplace. They give you no trouble. But in the night any given one of a number of them is liable to start letting out a bit of a tick." (p. 28)

He dwells on the malicious nature of objects that keep quiet at day and make disturbing noises at night. Although he speaks to her in a manner suggesting respect and intimacy (earnestly seeking her advice), he actually insults her by the complete inappropriateness of what he says.[5] The ending of the story, however, alters its meaning and exposes its purpose:

> "So ... all things being equal this question of me saying it was the clock that woke me up, well, that could very easily prove something of a false hypothesis." (p. 28)

[4] K. Morrison, *Canters and Chronicles. The Use of Narrative in the Plays of Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) p. 178.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 182.

He indicates that it may not have been the ticking that woke him up. In an indirect, elegant way he blames the visitors for disrupting his sleep. Thus the clever narrative exposes his verbal abilities, courteous manners and sense of humour. Moreover, although Lenny's first story initially appears to bear no relation to the situation, it turns out to be the speaker's personal comment on the recent happenings.

His next story is from the very beginning strictly connected with the ongoing conversation. Ruth and Lenny talk about travelling and visiting Italy. Suddenly the man asks:

> "Do you mind if I hold your hand?
> Ruth. Why?
> Lenny. Just a touch.
> *He looks down at her.*
> Lenny. I'll tell you why." (p. 30)

Instead of providing an answer, however, he tells her a long story about his encounter with a woman. According to Esslin[6] the beginning of the narrative reminds us of an opening of a novel or a short story:

> "One night, not too long ago, one night by the docks, I was standing alone under an arch, watching all the men jibbing the boom, out in the harbour, and playing about with a yardarm, ..." (p. 30)

The use of professional, nautical vocabulary implies Lenny's connections with the sea. The impression is ruined when the style of the story alters and his associations with the underworld become conspicuous:

> "... when a certain lady came up to me and made me a certain proposal. This lady had been searching for me for days. She'd lost tracks of my whereabouts." (p. 30)

Had the woman not been diseased, Lenny would have accepted the proposal. Nevertheless, her illness and insistence irritated him and he decided to dispose of her:

> "Well, this lady was very insistent and started taking liberties with me down under this arch, liberties which by any criterion I couldn't be expected to tolerate, the facts being what they were, so I clumped her one. It was on my mind at the time to do away with her, you know, to kill her, and the fact is, that as killings go, it would have been a simple matter, nothing to it." (p. 31)

Even the presence of the chauffeur would not have prevented him from committing murder. Finally, however, he considered his peace of mind more important and gave up the whole idea:

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[6] M. Esslin, *op. cit.*, p. 256.

> "Aaah, why go to all the bother...you know, getting rid of the corpse and all that, getting yourself into a state of tension. So I just gave her another belt in the nose and a couple of turns of the boot and sort of left it at that." (p. 31)

Lenny's story does not explain why he wants to hold Ruth's hand. Instead, it indicates why she should comply with his rules. The narrative depicting his aggression towards women serves as a threat and a warning for those who may act against his will. The very fact of telling it constitutes an act of psychological violence against her, an attempt at intimidation and control that is clear despite its displacement into story.[7] Through the narrative Lenny has been able to exercise his own desire for cruelty and his hatred of women, neither of which he enacts physically. He establishes his superiority over women by presenting them as seducible and himself as desirable. The bragging is meant to emphasise his masculine power but in fact turns him into "an impotent, but sadistic rapist in spoken fantasy".[8] Thus the story provides an important insight into his personality. It also marks the first step in developing Ruth and Lenny's relationship.

The story is preceded and followed by the dialogue between the couple. The initial conversation, during which Ruth's unwillingness to follow Lenny's orders becomes conspicuous, incites the man to produce a narrative which will teach her obedience. Her reaction to the story, however, reveals her understanding of the message and the rules of the game. Ruth is neither shocked nor frightened, on the contrary, she challenges Lenny by questioning the truthfulness of the story:

> "Ruth. How did you know she was diseased?
> Lenny. How did I know?
> *Pause.*
> I decided I was.
> *Silence.*" (p. 31)

Lenny again stresses his position as the dictator of the rules. The silence following his statement and the sudden change of the subject, however, undermine the import of his words.

Lenny's third story is put in the context of a verbal fight between the two characters. In a casual conversation that follows Lenny praises Teddy and expresses his wish to be as sensitive as his brother, on which Ruth doubts. Lenny explains his desire. Ruth questions his wish again. She is deliberately provocative in her behaviour. She challenges him and in this way declares the verbal war. She has no intention of being intimidated and

[7] K. Morrison, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

[8] K. Morris, *"The Homecoming," Tulane Drama Review* 11 (Winter 1966): p. 185.

suppressed by him and thus slowly begins to retaliate. The words are weapons in their struggle for domination in the relationship, "language becomes the medium through which a contest of wills is fought out".[9] At this moment Lenny begins his story, which aims at illustrating the situation in which Lenny got desensitised having unreasonable demands made on him. He describes how he decided to do some snow-clearing one winter morning out of mere love of brisk, cold air. Feeling refreshed and exuberant he worked eagerly. During the break he was approached by an old lady who asked him if he could help her move an iron mangle. He agreed and went to her house. The heaviness of the object and the unwillingness of the woman to participate in lifting it made Lenny furious:

> "So after a few minutes I said to her, now look here, why don't you stuff this iron mangle up your arse? Anyway, I said, they're out of date, you want to get a spin drier. I had a good mind to give her a workover there and then, but as I was feeling jubilant with the snow-clearing I just gave her a short-arm jab to the belly and jumped on a bus outside." (p. 32)

Lenny's memory contains direct quotations of his conversation with the woman. It is a characteristic feature of Pinter's dramatic workshop. The playwright intentionally frames and disrupts the narrative style with a dialogue form. As a result, the narratives become dramatic and therefore more appealing to the listener.

This story is in many aspects similar to the previous one. Again he demonstrates his contempt for women. He abuses them physically by beating and humiliating them and simultaneously offends Ruth verbally by exposing her to verbal violence. Immediately after the end of the narrative, as if to check Ruth's understanding of it, Lenny insists on moving the ashtray despite her protests. Next, he attempts to take her glass although she has not finished her drink. The battle is being fought out and soon the "contest of wills" reaches its peak. While Lenny's strategy involves verbal abuse, Ruth resorts to physical action and threatens to seduce him. Lenny is bewildered by this sudden defence. When she victoriously goes to her bedroom he still does not comprehend what her attack meant.

Both stories significantly push the action forward. They expose personality traits of both participants and drastically alter their mutual relationship.

Lenny's fourth story is the exemplification of the change in his attitude to Ruth. Complaining that she cannot buy the shoes she likes in America, she states that she used to be a model in the past. Lenny assumes that she was a hat model and tells her a miniature story about a girl he once knew:

[9] M. Esslin, *op. cit.*, p. 258.

> "I bought a girl a hat once. We saw it in a glass case, in a shop. I tell you what it had. It had a bunch of daffodils on it, tied with a black satin bow, and then it was covered with a cloche black veiling. A cloche. I'm telling you. She was made for it." (p. 57)

The narrative is different from the ones he previously delivered. In the recounted event Lenny is courteous towards the woman he wants to impress. By employing this story he attempts to convince Ruth of his chivalry and generosity. Therefore the narrative illustrates his personal transformation. It also demonstrates the progress of the action, i.e. the change of Ruth's position in the family: from the unimportant guest to the queen of the household who deserves flattery and respect.

Lenny also employs a story as a means of communicating with Teddy. The narrative is produced when he finds out that Teddy has eaten his cheese-roll. Lenny treats the trivial incident as a violation of his territory and principles and delivers a monologue about his disappointment. He says he expected Teddy to become more forthcoming and friendly in America:

> "I mean with the sun and all that, the open spaces, on the old campus, in your position, lecturing, in the centre of all the intellectual life out there, on the old campus, all the social whirl, all the stimulation of it all, all your kids and all that, to have fun with, down by the pool, the Greyhound buses and all that, tons of iced water, all the comfort of those Bermuda shorts and all that,..." (p. 64)

Here, as in most of the narratives, the teller addresses directly the listener so that the story is integrated with the dialogue form:

> "Mind you,..." (p. 64)
> "No, listen, Ted,..." (p. 65)
> "Your family looks up to you, boy, and you know what it does?" (p. 64)

The enumeration of the advantages of American life-style creates a vivid image, which again proves Lenny's skilful use of language. His frustration results from Teddy's failure to make use of the beneficial conditions and to become a new man. Although the story shifts us in time and place to America, it tacitly unveils the immediate discord between the brothers.

Teddy's only answer to the long list of accusations is one word: 'yes'. He realises the import of his crime of dispossession but has no intention of regretting or apologising. The relationship of the two brothers, devoid of warmth and understanding, seems to parallel the peculiar bond between Max and Sam.

Lenny's next story also deals with the antagonism between the brothers. It is told together with Joey, who has been with Ruth for two hours but has not received what he expected. Lenny becomes furious and calls the woman a "tease". When Teddy mentions that the boy probably lacks the

right touch Lenny tells Joey to describe his latest love affair. Accompanied by Lenny, the youngest brother recollects meeting two girls with their escorts. The brothers frightened the boys away and took the girls to a bomb site. There they raped them:

> "Joey. And then we ... well, by the kerb, we saw this parked car ... with a couple of girls in it.
> Lenny. And their escorts.
> Joey. Yes, there were two geezers in it. Anyway ... we got out ... and we told the ... two escorts ... to go away ... which they did ... and then we ... got the girls out of the car ...
> Lenny. We didn't take them to the Scrubs.
> Joey. Oh, no. Not over the Scrubs. Well, the police would have noticed us there ... you see. We took them over a bombed site.
> Lenny. Rubble. In the rubble.
> Joey. Yes, plenty of rubble.
> *Pause.*
> Well ... you know ... then we had them." (p. 67)

Joey's awkward command of language, exposed by numerous pauses, repetitions, and simple vocabulary, results in the story being told in a dialogue form. Lenny not only helps him narrate the event but also wants to prove Joey's sexual prowess:

> "So you can't say old Joey isn't a knockout when he gets going, can you? And here he is upstairs with your wife for two hours and he hasn't go the whole hog. Well, your wife sounds like a bit of a tease to me, Ted." (p. 68)

On the surface, the story aims to demonstrate Joey's masculinity and Ruth's hypocrisy. It is directed at Teddy, however, and thus it constitutes another covert attack on him. Lenny's decision to recollect such violent and cruel incident and tell it to a man of refinement is deliberate. He strives to offend and frighten Teddy in return for the crime he has committed. Therefore the story becomes an act of verbal revenge.

Lenny is a prolific and skilful storyteller. He can express a variety of emotions by his narratives. By applying them he intimidates, flatters, repels or tests the listener. His stories also expose some of his underlying characteristics: desire for domination, ruthlessness towards the weaker, flattery of his superiors. They also betray his profession. From a structural point of view his stories trace and develop the action of the play. The ones told to Ruth illustrate her rise as a ruler of the family. Those addressed at Teddy unmask the hostile indifference between the two, which makes the addressee feel a stranger and prompts him to leave.

Ruth is another character who tells stories in the play. Though she does not speak frequently, her narratives are of an essential importance for the

progress of the action. Complemented by Max on being a charming woman and wonderful wife she tries to deny the ideal image but Teddy interrupts her confession:

"Ruth. I was ... different ... when I met Teddy ... first.
Teddy. No you weren't. You were the same." (p. 50)

Owing to Teddy's intervention the statement does not develop into the story. Ruth's slow, emotional declaration and the haste with which her husband prevents her from continuation turn the single sentence into a miniature narrative. The remark that she was different in the past implies some mysterious events in her biography. Teddy's prompt reaction to his wife's confession demonstrates a certain conflict between them and his lack of respect for her decision to speak. Therefore the quasi-story gradually prepares the audience for the incidents to follow.

Before she produces a story about her life in America, she comments on the underlying layers of all phenomena:

"Don't be so sure though. You've forgotten something. Look at me. I ... move my leg. That's all it is. but I wear ... wear underwear ... which moves with me ... it ... captures your attention. Perhaps you misinterpret. The action is simple. It's a leg ... moving. My lips move. Why don't you restrict ... your observation to that? Perhaps the fact that they move is more significant ... than the words which come through them. You must bear that ... possibility ... in mind" (p. 53)

As Morris[10] rightly observes, Ruth's speech appears to be an "author's note" because it is so explicit in its warning. "It seems to say: beware of the suggestive rustle which accompanies the real action, beware dead ends and non-questions, beware distraction by ornament, beware extrapolation. The action in Pinter is always 'dressed' and often elaborately, always affords glimpses of its 'underwear', but clothing is not the core..."

Having attracted everybody's attention to the importance of the hidden and the suppressed, Ruth declares she was born here. Her vision of life in America is drastically different from Teddy's euphoric description:

"I was born quite near here.
Pause.
Then ... six years ago, I went to America.
Pause.
It's all rock. And sand. It stretches ... so far ... everywhere you look. And there's lots of insects there.
Pause.
And there's lots of insects there." (p. 53)

[10] K. Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

The barren and infertile desert symbolises the emptiness of her existence and probably signifies the failure of her marriage. Her speech is slow and disrupted. The pauses and silences indicate great emotional tension.

Ruth's next story recollects her job as a professional model. She used to do modelling inside and outside and from the tone of her reminiscences it appears that she enjoyed the profession:

> "Once or twice we went to a place in the country, by train. Oh, six or seven times. We used to pass a ... large white water tower. This place ... this house ... was very big ... the trees ... there was a lake, you see ... we used to change and walk down towards the lake ... we went down a path ... on stones ... there were ... on this path. Oh, just ... wait ... yes ... when we changed in the house we had a drink. There was a cold buffet." (p. 57)

She remembers visiting the place soon before moving to America. It was difficult for her to part with the life she used to lead here.

Ruth's story is a turning point in the play since it alters completely her image. In addition to being a wife and mother, she presents herself as a woman of sexuality. The narrative reveals her previous connections with the underworld, which makes her decision to stay in London more plausible. The nostalgia with which she refers to the old days shows her dissatisfaction with her present life. The narrative makes the men understand her motives and, consequently, ask her to live with them. Therefore, the story forwards her comeback to the men who need and desire her, and for whom she becomes a personification of a long-awaited mother, wife and whore.

Ruth's three stories occupy a central position in the play. Pinter makes her a rather silent, reserved person and therefore every word she says is significant. Her narratives expose the most intimate things about her: her disreputable profession and the satisfaction it gave her, the failure of her marriage, and the inability to accustom to the life in America. All three stories constitute a meaningful unity: the first one, so promptly disrupted by Teddy, is finished by the last one. Both of them unmask the past, while the second one complements them with the image of Ruth's existence in America. The fact that she reveals the mystery despite Teddy's protests turns the stories into deliberate strategies of both self-defence and attack. In the course of the play Ruth matures and gradually turns against her husband's domination. The stories she tells mark her personal transformation into an independent, strong person.

The Homecoming, with its abundance and variety of narrative element, epitomises the main functions of the stories in Pinter's drama. The diversity of the form and content of the narratives in the play exemplifies how the narratives have been employed in his previous works and envisages what is to follow in later plays. Therefore my concluding remarks refer not only to this particular play, but to all Pinter's dramas.

With the mysterious obscurity of action and the lack of biographical background concerning the characters we are tempted to perceive the stories they tell as valuable sources of information. The narratives appear to reveal the past incidents and expose the present ruling emotions and therefore provide a key to comprehending the puzzle. Nevertheless, taking into consideration the fact that the accounts are extremely emotional, subjective and frequently self-contradictory they should not be interpreted as purely explanatory. Pinter himself comments on the dubious credibility of his characters' statements:

> The desire for verification is understandable but cannot always be satisfied. There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. The thing is not necessarily either true or false: it can be both true and false. ... A character on the stage who can present no convincing argument or information as to his past experience, his present behaviour or his aspirations, nor give a comprehensive analysis of his motives is as legitimate and as worthy of attention as one who, alarmingly, can do all these things. the more acute the experience, the less articulate its expression.[11]

Though the content of the stories may not always be factual, the very act of telling them is essential. In *No Man's Land* Pinter uses a metaphor "the shark in the harbour"[12] which vividly describes the way narratives function in his plays. The characters do not communicate in a straightforward manner but instead employ enigmatic monologues, which is ambiguous and alarming. Just as the shark reference epitomises the notion of hidden menace so do the stories. Though submerged in the general flow of language and action they signal the suppressed trauma.[13]

Morris aptly calls Pinter a poet of the surface because what the audience watches is a mere fragment of an intricate process that is going on in the characters' souls. The stories are an invaluable method of signalling deep-hidden emotions. Seemingly redundant for the development of the external action, the stories evoke or stifle overruling passions and therefore contribute to the agonising dénouement.[14] With their vague and foreboding subtexts they constitute an important structural tool of enhancing the overall atmosphere of tension and mystery.

Additionally, the stories help to develop the action. In Pinter's works the traditional, linear development is relatively rare and the progress usually takes place in the minds of his characters and in the relationship between

[11] H. Pinter, quot. in M. Esslin, *The Peopled Wound: The Work of Harold Pinter* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1970) pp. 33–34.

[12] H. Pinter, *No Man's Land* (New York: Grove Press, 1975) p. 60.

[13] K. Morrison, "Pinter, Albee, and 'he Maiden in the Shark Pond'," *American Imago* 35 (1978), p. 265.

[14] K. Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

them. Therefore, the very choice to tell the story rather than to continue with the current conversation, or verbal fight, constitutes the action since it covertly betrays the inward conflict of the speaker. The decision to narrate rather than to act is essential because it epitomises the inner dilemma of the tellers, the struggle between facing the complex issues and fleeing them. It is owing to the employment of the story that this clash is revealed.

The stories are employed as deliberate strategies of affecting the present condition. All of the narratives are delivered at moments of heightened emotion when the speakers face difficult decisions, feel unhappy, desperately want to change something or retain the old state of affairs. The results that the tellers expect their stories to achieve vary. Some narrators want to evoke pity and compassion (Max), others wish to frighten and intimidate (Max, Lenny), or call for respect and appreciation (Max). They recollect the past to establish their position in the relationship (Lenny, Max, Ruth, Sam), or explain their current status and behaviour (Ruth). Whether the awaited outcome is accomplished or not, the stories strive to influence the present situation by narrating the past. Therefore they become a method of pushing the dramatic action forward.

The form of the stories depends on the teller. The most articulate ones produce lengthy monologues. Other launch shorter, even miniature narratives. The language employed in the story usually betrays the condition of the speaker. Intermittent pauses and silences indicate emotional tension and effort. Rhetorical questions imply euphoria and excitement. Vocabulary and syntax of the stories expose the intellectual level of the speakers. Organisation and logic of the narratives, or the lack of it, also shed some light on the teller. In this way the stories implicitly characterise the narrators.

Some of the stories are told in a traditional monologue form. Others, however, contain elements of dialogue or are entirely told in the framework of a discourse between the two participants. Regardless of the form, however, the tellers directly address their listeners in order to involve them in the story. They ask questions, negate, or interrupt. In this way Pinter dramatises the narratives, makes them more suitable for the stage and more effective for the audience.

Contrary to conventional stories, Pinter's narratives refer not only to the old days. They simultaneously develop the action in three dimensions: in the past, present and future. By exposing what the characters used to do and what they would like to do, the stories tacitly comment on the present condition of the speakers.

The stories are invaluable sources of information about the characters. The language unmasks their education, family background, and intellectual level. The tone unveils the underlying emotions. The stories expose the past of the characters and thus justify their current behaviour. They unwittingly

reveal the tellers' anger, dreams, desires, fears and frustrations. Therefore storytelling is an integral part of Pinter's dramatic workshop. With its dual function of evasion and revelation it constitutes a unique, creative technique of developing dramatic action.

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FUNKCJA NARRACJI W *THE HOMECOMING* PINTERA

Jedną z osobliwości warsztatu pisarskiego Harolda Pintera jest bogactwo elementu narracyjnego. Bohaterowie sztuk tego wybitnego brytyjskiego dramatopisarza rzadko porozumiewają się ze sobą w tradycyjny sposób i zamiast oczekiwanej konwersacji słyszymy zaskakujące historie i opowieści. To niezwykłe wtopienie elementów narracji w tworzywo dramatyczne jest oryginalnym i niezwykle efektownym zamierzeniem autora.

Celem tego artykułu jest próba ukazania roli historii opowiadanych przez bohaterów najdojrzalszej i najbardziej znanej sztuki Pintera pt. *The Homecoming*. W poniższej analizie szczególną uwagę poświęcono roli opowieści w rozwoju akcji dramatycznej. Historie opowiadane przez bohaterów demaskują pewne zdarzenia z przeszłości, stosunek opowiadającego do sytuacji obecnej oraz odsłaniają najskrytsze marzenia i dążenia. Subiektywny i emocjonalny charakter opowieści nie pozwala na ich dosłowną interpretację, jednakże dostarcza cennego materiału do analizy psychologicznej narratora.

Artykuł podejmuje również zagadnienie roli opowieści jako zwierciadła wzajemnych relacji między bohaterami i narzędzia powodującego zmianę tych stosunków.