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SECOND SHEPHERD'S AND HOMECOMING TWO DRAMATIC IMITATIONS OF LIFE

John H. Cleland

Literature reveals much about the cultum res from which it grows, especially, perhaps, when the authors purport to depict life in a realistic manner. In the penetrating study which follows, John H. Cleland examines the dramatic realism of two plays from the medieval and modern eras in an effort to show something of the different value systems by which men may govern their activities. The result of Cleland's analysis is an arresting contrast between the secular, relativistic values at work in the modern play and the religious values operative in its fourteenth century counterpart. The contrast outlined by the author stems directly from the specific resolutions of universal problems presented to the reader by both playwrights. The differences thus revealed are both civilizational and philosophical in scope, and so constitute an incisive commentary on life in any age.

IDENTIFYING THE TECHNICAL CAUSES OF A PLAY'S EFFECTS IS THE PROPER WORK of literary criticism and not that of philosophical analysis. The particular investigation I hope to complete here, however, makes it necessary at the outset to consider the metaphysics of what is "real" in life. For if art is the practical work of making something, and if the something in this case is a dramatic representation of what it is like to be alive, then we had better know with at least some theoretical precision what it is like to be alive, alive both mentally and sensibly, before we can judge how effectively a play imitates that state. What is further needed to make an impartial comparison of two plays on this basis—especially two so radically different as a medieval English Nativity play and a London-life-in-the-raw production of the mid-1960's—is a single standard of critical judgment about dramatic realism.

Erich Auerbach's study of the representation of reality in Western literature, for all its penetrating insights into medieval and modern theories of realism, yields no such single standard. Of the medieval conception of reality, which he identifies as "figural realism", Auerbach says:

In this conception, an occurrence on earth signifies not only itself but at the same time another, which it predicts or confirms, without prejudice to the power of its concrete reality here and now. The connection between occurrences is not regarded as primarily a chronological or causal development but as a oneness with the divine plan, of which all occurrences are parts and reflections. Their direct earthly connection is of secondary importance, and often their interpretation can altogether dispense with any knowledge of it.¹

The same author, in another section of his book, calls "temporal concentration" the chief identifying mark of modern realism.²

Obviously Auerbach's definitions of medieval and modern realism lean in opposite directions: the medieval propensity being to concentrate on the next world, the modern propensity being to concentrate on this one. The world we now live in is the only one we existentially know, however, so it is the only one a writer—even a writer of imaginative literature—can realistically portray. This applies even to Dante.³

I believe it is reasonable to limit my own search for a metaphysical yardstick for dramatic realism to the three main contending views about reality itself in Western thought: the theory from Heraclitus onward that sensible matter constitutes the exclusive reality; Platonic idealism, in which intellectual reality constitutes the exclusive reality; and the claim originated by Aristotle that both matter and ideas really exist in an indissoluble fusion. Of these, the Aristotelian thesis is in my judgment most cogently argued, and is the one on which I shall ground this analysis of dramatic realism. From that thesis it follows that dramatic portrayals treat human life realistically if they pay scrupulous attention, first of all, to both sides of the Aristotelian formula, the animal and the rational; and that they are even more fully realistic if they concentrate on those events of life in which men reach out intellectually to act on their material environment, by imposing rational form on concrete reality—rather than on life's more numerous but less significant events, humanly speaking, in which men are driven by material forces outside themselves. It is within this simplified but not altogether arbitrary framework that I will work toward understanding the dramatic particulars of two plays of widely acknowledged merit, the *Second Shepherd's Play* and Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming*.

SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PLAYS

The main question I want to answer about *Second Shepherd's* is not how its author—an anonymous playwright we know only as “the Wakefield Master”—demolished the medieval convention, held over from classical style, that exalted subjects are to be exclusively presented in elevated diction and syntax. Nor am I going to analyze how the play violates the ancient, and in their own way realism-producing, unities of time and place; or similarly violates the twentieth century taste for “cup and saucer” realism. The central question I see touching on the play's realism is this: if the scriptural basis for the last section—an angelically prompted journey and paying of homage by some shepherds to the child Jesus—is taken as an account of an

event that literally happened in history, how life-like are the playwright's dramatic deductions about the human implications of such an event? Is it reasonable to believe that the shepherds he portrays are like the real men who came and adored in the gospel accounts?

Is it psychologically probable for three ignorant English rustics, fancifully transposed in space and time to the crib of a baby grandly proclaimed by angels to be their creator and savior, to become so suddenly positive about the encounter that they can then claim immediate understanding of the great secret of the universe and of all time? On the basis of a dream vision, a halo, and a *Gloria in excelsis*? Or does the playwright embed in his dramatic particulars a more convincing link between the play's apparently disjunct lines of action?

Another way of looking at these questions would be to ask: Does the Wakefield Master, for all his generally acknowledged technical skill as a playwright, nevertheless bank on the religious predispositions of some rather unsophisticated late medieval audiences to “bring home” his controlling theological ideas? Or does he try to bring them home himself, with a realism that can stand rational investigation?

I think back in this context to Chaucer's *Man of Law*, who seems to me to be relying ultimately, in his moral tale of Constance, on the unreflective habits of believers in miracles.⁴ While I recognize that this suggestion is not in the mainstream of Chaucerian criticism, it is nonetheless true that to the extent that the Wakefield Master fits my conception of the Man of Law, his play will according to my standard lack dramatic realism.

Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming* seems in one important sense to be less ambitious as a venture into dramatic realism than the Wakefield Master's drawing out of the human implications of the mystery of the Incarnation. Apart from the life-in-the-raw aspect of both plays, Pinter's work embodies no attempt to represent what might happen to men who respond positively to a tangible divine intervention in their lives, which as a Christian I take to be a rare but distinct possibility. Pinter's characters, like so many characters in modern imaginative literature, are completely oblivious to that possibility. Pinter thus spares himself not only the ultimate dramatic problem of the Wakefield Master, to deduce and depict what observably happens when the Holy Spirit enters the human soul, but also the task Samuel Beckett apparently

undertook in *Waiting for Godot*, that of clearing away some of the psychic debris that separates the human spirit from the Holy Spirit.

And yet *The Homecoming* does suggest some sense of spiritual mystery. In one way, the grotesquely debased actions in the play seem so mindless that the supposed “motiveless malignity” of Iago is starkly intelligible by comparison. The high level of general intelligence in all the play’s main characters, and especially in the philosophy professor who is the protagonist, suggests, however, that the actions are something other than mindless. And this in turn suggests that there may be a principle, in the Aristotelian scheme of reference, that underlies all the grotesqueness. If there is, its very obscurity would seem to remove it from the strictly material outside forces in life. For these forces usually have clearcut identities, down to and including the one in Strindberg’s list that reads “the strongly aphrodisiac influence of flowers.”

Whatever its basis, there is much in *The Homecoming* that I would call evil. Pinter himself chooses to characterize the thrust of his play, in remarks I shall subsequently quote, as “slightly desperate”. Whether I am an alarmist or he is deluded, should his play turn out to incorporate the sort of rational dominance that makes human action specifically human, then it cannot simply be classed as one more loathing-filled attempt by modern art to escape from and destroy lived reality. On the contrary, his effort would then in fact be approximately as ambitious as that of rendering the human manifestations of the Holy Spirit, and could be compared to some purpose with the *Second Shepherd’s Play*. I will return to these and related considerations after analyzing the work of the Wakefield Master.



THE SECOND SHEPHERD’S PLAYS

This play contains two main lines of action. The first, initiated by the tricky character Mak, shows the shepherds losing and then recovering their property—a stolen sheep. The second line, initiated by angels in a dream vision, shows them discovering and paying homage to their spiritual king—the Christ child. Does whatever realistic power the play as a whole has depend mainly on

the second line of action being a consequence of the first? According to the principle I have chosen, I have to say yes. Otherwise, the critics who characterize the Mak-initiated secular line of events as realistic but then feel constrained to place quotation marks around the same word when analyzing the play’s Nativity events would be quite right—and that would be a bad indicator for the realism of the play as a whole.

I do not claim that causality is the only way to unite actions in a play, or even that a play whose lines of action are not causally unified cannot imitate life in some sense. What I do assert is that the only way a play can fully impart the human experience is when the effects it portrays flow from certain or presumable causes, when the play as a whole constitutes one consecutive action, when everything that happens is probable.

In that scheme of reference, the principle of causality must even apply in a play that purports to imitate events that contain the supernatural—and because supernatural, cannot attain common probability. It must even apply to events that by definition are historically unique—and because historically unique, cannot even aspire to the probability of the unusual. Before analyzing whatever causal relationships may exist between the two lines of action in this play, however, I want to consider the kinds of probability that underlie the events constituting each line.

Common natural probability is what the Wakefield Master employs in the first five-sixths of his play, the secular line. The particulars of Mak’s ingenuity, including whatever help he may be receiving from the evil spirits he invokes, are uncommon, but what observably happens may be found in ordinary experience. Conditional probability underlies the second line of action, the shepherd’s concluding spiritual mission. The Wakefield Master believes to be literally true the gospel accounts about the announcement of Christ’s birth to some shepherds. From this, he deduces certain consequent probabilities about the characteristics of men who would respond positively to such an announcement.

The play opens with one of the shepherds complaining bitterly about the economic exploitation that he and his fellows suffer at the hands of the arrogant, robbing, lying, feckless landlords of their day (pp. 110-111). The next shepherd complains about the marriage shackles that tie men to sour home existences, and particularly

about his own remarkably unpleasant wife. The complaint of another shepherd who soon joins them, and is younger than the other two, concerns what he considers the conspiracy of even the natural elements to plague and torment the hapless outdoor worker. The shepherds become merrier when they meet, however. After railing at each other a bit, they launch into a song in three-part harmony.

Then Mak comes along, disguised in a large cloak and “speaking with an odd southern accent” (p. 117). The shepherds quickly unmask him, and recognize a man they know to be a sheep-stealer. Mak threatens that he will complain about them to the authorities, and have them flogged. The first shepherd responds:

But, Mak, is that sothe?
Now take out that southern tooth,
And put it in a torde (p. 119).

The second shepherd strikes Mak. The third threatens to do the same. Then Mak snivels about how hungry he is, a story the third shepherd does not believe. But the first shepherd asks this villager in a neighborly way how his wife is. Mak answers with another diatribe, this time about how she and their ever-growing number of children have impoverished him.

At this point the cold and tired shepherds lie down to get some sleep, forcing Mak to lie between them so he cannot make an attempted theft without rousing them. The rascal is able to do that anyway, carrying home a sheep that his wife, Gill, suggests they disguise as a baby in a cradle. Mak soon returns to the sleeping shepherds, and lies down in his former place. When the three shepherds wake up, the third tells the other two that he dreamt he saw Mak wrapped in a wolf skin stealing one of their sheep. The two tell their companion that his dream is a phantom and to be quiet about it. Soon Mak is up and telling all three about a dream he had, that his wife delivered another baby during the night. And he departs once again for his home, unsuspected by the two more experienced shepherds.

The third shepherd discovers a sheep to be missing and again accuses Mak of theft, an accusation that the first shepherd calls slanderous. But to make sure about Mak’s possible responsibility in the matter, the three decide to visit his home. They are completely taken in by the new-baby strategem and soon leave, apologiz-

ing for their intrusion and wishing the baby happiness. Having left the house, however, they decide they should give some gift to the baby; so the third shepherd, the young skeptic, goes back in to leave sixpence.

The first line of action ends when the shepherds recover their sheep, angrily drag Mak outside and toss him in a blanket (the blanket being the means of the upward toss, after which the body drops and thuds to the ground). Then the shepherds lie down again to rest their sore and tired bodies.

In the natural order of life he imitates, then, the Wakefield Master thus far has set the stage for the spiritual mission to come by portraying shepherds with the following qualities: bitter, angrily expressed frustration, much of it presumably justified, about the various ills and wrongs they suffer; occasional mirth and irony; a good deal of worldly shrewdness; a willingness at the same time to give a known thief the benefit of the doubt, but with no sentimental shying away from looking after their own interests; a willingness to consider the truth dreams may contain, but only in the light of other evidence; a sense of respect in the presence of mothers and babies; generosity, the conventional quality of which is at least balanced by the fact that they know this baby’s father has larceny in his heart; common sense enough to know that the one thing wrong-doers generally understand is physical force; and a habit of mind that easily incorporates natural and supernatural truths and that might at any time take the form, say, of making the sign of the cross with one hand and a threatening fist with the other. These shepherds are Christian; if the shepherds in the gospels were observant Jews, as is likely, they probably had similar habitual actions signifying their faith. Running beneath these qualities, wholly unthought-out of course, is that Aristotelian fusion between the materialistic and the idealistic.

Some would question whether the foregoing qualities correspond well enough to the luminous supernatural wisdom and charity we find in the shepherds in the concluding adoration scene. But these questioners, in terms of the three-way metaphysical argument mentioned earlier, would probably be Platonic idealists, the kind of all-or-nothing moralists who among other things tend to look down their noses at the emotionalism of ordinary men, without understanding that human emotions are both real and potentially very good. These idealists are the same people who originally split the or-

der of natural reality from the order of supernatural reality, not by banishing from existence such things as sheep and shepherds, which they cannot do, but by mistakenly supposing that sheep have no “real” existence despite the evidence of our eyes, and that the existence of men is so barely real that it is at best a pale reflection of the spiritual world of eternal verities with initial capital letters (in the company of which the giving of sixpence to the neighbor’s new baby is a puny virtue). Erich Auerbach’s definition of figural realism displays these Platonic tendencies.

It is true, of course, that an understanding of the microcosmic world of one’s immediate surroundings is of quite a different order than cosmic insight, although both are cosmos. It is also true that giving sixpence to the neighbor’s baby does not compare to giving even a common gift to the king of the universe, although both are gifts. Still, there is a consistency in these qualities. They are connected with what I would call doing the best you can, where you are, with what you’ve got.

To a Christian realist in the Aristotelian sense, natural and supernatural wisdom and virtue, distinct as they are, still exist on the same long continuum of reality. A Christian’s faith tells him that he needs help beyond the power of his own natural wisdom and virtue. His common sense tells him that even divine intervention needs a little something to work with at the front end, that to complete a man’s sense of justice with a subsuming sense of charity requires first of all a well developed sense of justice, that the towering charity of St. Paul was not exploded out of nowhere but out of the justice-haunted Saul of Tarsus. All of which explains why the events of the play’s first line of action are so heavily oriented, I believe, on natural justice. The Wakefield Master puts his shepherds on the low end of a long continuum, in order to give God something to work with and transform. The playwright is looking at his human subject matter realistically, in terms of its present flaws, its present strengths, and its possible strengths.

In the concluding adoration scene, the Wakefield Master has three different kinds of probabilities converging. He restates the natural probability of the first sequence of events, by having the shepherds think and speak and act in their habitual rustic ways. He restates the conditional probability of the dream vision by having these practical, hard-fisted men of faith verify the objective data they have received from the angel. And to these

two probabilities the playwright adds a third, an emotional probability. Here he puts pressure on a viewer or reader to consider the transference possibilities of what he sees or reads, the kind of thing that gives a thoughtful Christian, for example, the opportunity to do more than piously nod his head in the affirmative upon encountering yet another rendering of the Nativity story, the kind of emotional transference that could prompt that Christian to say to himself, in effect: Now I understand that story, which I believe is true, a little better; I understand more about the kind of real men the shepherds very likely were; perhaps I can even find something in what I now know about them that applies, or might apply, to me.

This emotional probability issues mainly in my opinion from the two-kinds-of-world-at-once picture the Wakefield Master has been painting all along. He has blurred the distinctions between the world of nature and the world of the human spirit, not by diluting either one of them, but rather by daubing each in its own strong colors and at the same time moving his plot line almost imperceptibly back and forth between the two; by confirming dreamt truth with eyes and observed truth with dreams; by stressing the thought content of action and the action potential of thought.

The world of this play is the world of real men who fight about the possession of real sheep. It is a world where men lose their tempers about injustices, having first defined, rightly or wrongly, those injustices. It is a world where necessary shrewdness does not rule out frankness and fair play and generosity. It is a world where the Holy Spirit prompts men to think and to fight and to laugh, and to confront a baby, no matter how exalted, on its own terms, with a bird and bob of cherries and a ball; and then to exit singing.

It is an intensely real world, in short, because it imitates-by uniting with three converging probabilities two otherwise unconsecutive actions into one consecutive action-at least the humanly knowable half of the real world as convincingly formulated by Aristotle.

THE HOMECOMING⁶

Either the writhing world of Mr. Pinter’s play is different in kind from that of *Second Shepherd’s*; or, as I am suggesting, it is a different aspect of the same Aristotelian model.

The play begins with four members of a London family (two brothers, their father and their uncle) exchanging vicious insults. Then when a third brother, who had left the family six years earlier to get married and move to an American university as a professor, pays the group an unexpected visit with his wife, the couple is greeted with a similar torrent of abuse. One of the brothers sets out immediately to dominate and seduce the wife. A little later, in front of her unprotesting husband, the wife rolls on the couch and floor with another brother. Eventually she stays behind when her husband leaves to return to their real family in America. The plan everyone agrees on is that she will service the sexual needs of the London family and earn her own living working as a part-time prostitute. The play ends with the uncle apparently dead on the floor from a heart attack and the old father of the three men circling round the woman, falling to his knees, and begging her for a kiss.

We could perhaps dismiss all this moral idiocy as sleazy black humor if home and family were not so centrally involved—and if the actions were not so finely tuned to the anti-family sentiments of modern society. What is even more disturbing than the actions themselves, however, is the lack of appropriate responses by the man and woman who are victimized. As they impotently accept and dumbly witness all manner of mental and physical violence, these two do not lift a hand or say one serious word to stop it. Can being alive, in any important sense, be like this? Is Pinter exaggerating? Or does he falsify reality with a hole-in-the-curtain method that restricts our view to an image of constipation and sweat and sexual garbage? If the latter is true, his play ends up, in my construct of reality, deficient in dramatic realism.

Pinter himself has claimed he was not distorting reality. In an American magazine interview, the English playwright characterized himself as a conventional dramatic artist. He said he was not only not exaggerating real life in *The Homecoming* but that he saw nothing particularly evil in the moral passivity that underlies the play's overall action:

The whole play happens on quite a realistic level from my point of view There's no question that the family does behave very calculatedly and pretty horribly to each other and to the returning son. But they do it out of the texture of their lives and for other reasons which are not evil but slightly desperate Look! What would happen if he [Teddy, when he watches his wife and one

of his brothers roll on the couch] interfered. He would have had a messy fight on his hands, wouldn't he? And this particular man would avoid that. As for rolling on the couch, there are thousands of women in this very country who at this very moment are rolling off couches with their brothers, or cousins, or their next-door neighbors. The most respectable women do this. It's a splendid activity. It's a little curious, certainly, when your husband is looking on, but it doesn't mean you're a harlot.⁷

Martin Esslin, the noted expositor of modern theater, supports Pinter's claim to realism in this play. He finds *The Homecoming* valid "as a realistic and perfectly explicable series of events as they could, in fact, happen to a family living in the circumstances outlined and clearly indicated by the author."⁸ While these comments do not relate precisely to my Aristotelian standard, by which essential incidents must be connected with causal relationships, they at least indicate Pinter's interest in rational structure and suggest that in some sense he has succeeded.

Part of his ability to break free of mere absurdity stems from patterning seemingly irrational nonsense along the rational lines of associative thinking. Pinter is at such pains to do this that he actually gives an elaborate pseudo-syllogistic form to many of his Freudian and other nightmare associations. One example will suffice, since I do not intend here to use Freudian or other specialized critical principles to analyze Pinter's play. After the sexual games involving Ruth have begun, and after Teddy has also deliberately taken and eaten a cheese-roll he knows to be his brother Lenny's, Lenny upbraids him.

No, listen, Ted, there's no question that we live a less rich life here than you do over there. We live a closer life. We're busy, of course, Joey's busy with this boxing, I'm busy with my occupation, Dad still plays a good game of poker, and he does the cooking as well, well up to his old standard, and Uncle Sam's the best chauffeur in the firm. But nevertheless we do make up a unit, Teddy, and you're an integral part of it. When we all sit round the backyard having a quiet gander at the night sky, there's always an empty chair standing in the circle, which is in fact yours. And so when you at length return to us, we do expect a bit of grace, a bit of *je ne sais quoi*, a bit of generosity of mind, a bit of liberality of spirit, to reassure us. We do expect that. But do we get it? Have we got it? Is that what you've given us? (p. 65)

Lenny is explicitly referring to the stolen cheese-roll. Teddy answers yes to Lenny's questions, obviously referring to his willingness to share his wife's sexual favors with Lenny and the other men. Pinter's unstated pseudo-syllogism, then, starts with a major premise that both not-sharing cheese-rolls and sharing wives bear on family unity. The minor is that while Teddy fails by one standard he succeeds by the other. The conclusion is that cheese-rolls and wives have roughly equivalent importance in family life.

I need to know, however, if these characters are rationally imposing form on matter or whether, for all their surface displays of intelligence and verbal brilliance, they are blindly stumbling from one human exploitation to the next. If they are imposing form on matter, I also need to know what rational principle or principles they are using to do that.

The action of the play as a whole is Teddy's. He is the protagonist. The place where Teddy's father, Max, and the three other men live is Teddy's former home. It will become the home of his wife, Ruth, but it is not a home she returns to in the strict literal sense that Teddy does. The initiating incident of his homecoming is also Teddy's: his decision made some time before the play begins, that he and Ruth end their European jaunt with a visit to his former family in London. The second essential incident brings out the probability of Teddy having made that decision. This incident takes place just after the couple has arrived late at night at the London home, and before they encounter anyone in Teddy's former family. Ruth does not like the idea of the visit:

RUTH: Do you want to stay? TEDDY: Stay? Pause.

We've come to stay. We're bound to stay ... for a few days.

RUTH: I think ..., the children ..., might be missing us (pp. 21-22).

Ruth's opening encounter with Teddy's brother Lenny, after Teddy has gone to bed, is the third essential incident. Lenny introduces an erotic note into the conversation, and erotic images and references soon come to dominate both ends of the dialogue. Ruth ends up in command of the encounter, however, not Lenny. Her initial reservation about the visit has turned to sexual zest.

The fourth essential incident takes place the next morning. Before Teddy has a chance to introduce Ruth to this father, the old man begins calling her a tart:

MAX: Who asked you to bring dirty tarts into this house?

TEDDY: Listen, don't be silly (p. 41).

Max then hits and staggers his son Joey and smashes his walking stick over the head of his Brother Sam. The old man's mood changes, and the incident ends with Teddy inately responding in the affirmative to his father's suggestion that the two of them have a "kiss and a cuddle". The effect of the incident shows that Teddy is able to endure, without serious objection, a gratuitous verbal assault on his wife and vicious physical assaults on others.



In the fifth essential incident, that afternoon, Lenny and Ruth team up to ridicule Teddy-as-professor. Lenny exposes his brother's intellectual impotence, and Ruth this time shows the strength of her mind as well as her sexual drive when she plausibly turns metaphysics into an erotically-supercharged subject. Teddy suggests that they leave. Now it is Ruth who does not want to leave:

TEDDY: I think we'll go back. Mnnn? Pause.

RUTH: Why? (p. 54)

After a little more conversation, Teddy goes upstairs to pack. Ruth begins reminiscing to Lenny about when she had been a "photographic model for the body." Teddy comes down with the suitcases. Lenny, over Teddy's mild objection, dances with and kisses Ruth. Joey then leads her to the couch, where the rolling begins.

This fifth essential incident ends with a few more taunts about Teddy's "critical works" and with the whole group sitting around eating and drinking. Teddy shows in this incident that he is intelligent enough to want to leave, but he also shows his ability to tolerate what his mind tells him is an unhealthy development, the same ability that surfaced in his impotent response to the actions of the preceding incident. This time, he does not insist that

the sexual games involving his wife stop and that he and Ruth really leave.

What I am suggesting, and what the following incident proves, is that Teddy's acquiescence to evil here is not a failure to act; not the product of a paralyzed will; not the result of fearing a messy fight, as Pinter assures us. Rather, Teddy's insipid response is a fully human act, a positive decision to do nothing. And the reason why it is a fully human act in my Aristotelian framework is that it is not accidental. It is caused. It is based on a principle that has been becoming clearer as the play progresses. The heart of the principle is the conviction that anyone has a perfect right to do anything he pleases.

The cheese-roll incident mentioned earlier, while not itself essential to the action of the play, bears this out. It proves how centrally important the principle is in Teddy's mind. The incident takes place that evening. Teddy challenges Lenny to do something about the deliberate act of theft. We know from the two preceding essential incidents what Teddy is not willing to engage in a messy fight about: violence done to his wife and others in his presence; the truth of philosophy and his own intellectual integrity as a professor of that truth; Ruth's honor as a woman, wife, and mother; his own honor as a man, husband, and father. Now we know what he is willing to fight about: his right to eat someone else's cheese-roll. As a piece of farce, which no doubt is why the playwright put it in here, this incident is technically brilliant. But it also relegates to sophistry Pinter's own quoted remarks about Teddy's character.

When in the sixth and last essential incident Teddy chooses not to stand in the way of the loss of his wife and his children's mother-and departs alone-he again shows that he is acting on principle and not merely frightened or bewildered and thereby unable to act. He actually helps Ruth understand the "logic", for example, behind the London family's insistence that she should pull her own weight financially. But the line that most effectively reveals Teddy's principle is:

TEDDY: Or you can come home with me (p. 76).

Pinter's understated use of the word or once again exhibits his verbal brilliance. But with it he also lays bare the principle he has built into Teddy's mind, the principle that since any two actions are of roughly

equivalent importance and moral stature, anything goes. So here we have a man who visits his former family, surely for the reason of strengthening weakened familiar ties with a father, two brothers, and an uncle he has not seen for six years, and who the next night leaves alone, cut off from his wife. The reversal that frustrates his original intention and destroys his marriage begins in the third essential incident, when Ruth becomes playful about her highly developed sexual drive, and builds in the fourth when Teddy and she respond to the violence done to them and others with respectful silence, acquiescence, and banality. Ruth's overt nymphomania and the brothers' exploitation of that in the fifth essential incident come as direct consequences of the two preceding incidents, where Teddy has given clear evidence that he will not stop anyone from hurting Ruth. The sixth incident proves he will not even stop Ruth from destroying herself.

The sexual games in the fifth incident do not directly result, in my opinion, from Ruth's nymphomania or from the facts established earlier that Lenny is a pimp and Joey is a rapist. Ruth's initial reluctance to visit the London group in the first place, a family she no doubt had heard more than a little about, suggests an ability to repress her own nymphomania-an ability presumably based on her role for six years as wife and mother. It is rather Teddy who makes the sexual games possible and in a sense inevitable. His departure and the family's elaborate agreement with Ruth are consequences of all the essential incidents that preceded them.

All the essential incidents, then, have a natural probability. The first two essential incidents-Teddy's initial decision to visit the London family and his later decision to stay there for a few days over Ruth's objection-exhibit a common natural probability. Conditional natural probability characterizes the last four essential incidents: the sexual conversation Ruth and Lenny have; the verbal and physical assaults on Ruth, Sam and Joey by Max, with Teddy's acquiescence; the family's further assaults on Teddy and Ruth, made with Teddy's tush-tushing; and the general agreement to destroy a marriage, a family and a woman's integrity, made with Teddy's full consent. The three conditions required by these unusual events are Ruth's latent nymphomania, the bizarre and amoral London family, and Teddy's principle that anyone has a perfect right to do anything he pleases. Each incident in the sequence grows out of the incidents preceding it. The overall plot consists of a single consecutive action

carried initially in one direction and then, with no link in the causal chain missing, reversed. The Homecoming is naturally probable at all vital points. Pinter was not exaggerating.

SOME CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ABOUT THE TWO PLAYS

If my analysis of *The Homecoming* is correct, mere unreflective brutishness does not account for the human disintegration it contains. Stanley Kowalski's code of behavior in *A Streetcar Named Desire* might reasonably be likened to that of an ape. But Stanley Kowalski looks good next to Teddy and the rest of Pinter's crowd, mainly because he looks less responsible for his actions than they do for theirs. Teddy is a fully realized human being. He acts, and he acts with forethought.

He is well aware of what is going on around him, for example, while at the same time possessing a highly developed sense of self. He and the other characters behave with calculation toward each other, just as Pinter says they do. They behave intelligently as well. Despite all the silences and cross-purposes, they always know what other people mean. Teddy and the cheese-roll incident prove his will operates positively when he wants it to, just as Ruth's haggling over her projected working conditions proves she is no Strindbergian puppet. Teddy and Ruth constantly impose form on their lives in the strict Aristotelian sense. In every essential incident of which he is part, Teddy consciously reaches out intellectually to do or not do something, from deciding to reconcile himself with his London family to deciding that he and his children are just going to have to accept what he considers a bad decision on Ruth's part.

These deliberate actions, moreover, bear no tinge of malice. Apart from his slight row with Lenny, Teddy exhibits an unfailingly generous spirit in his dealings with others. He showers good will on everyone when the most charitable thing he could do for his wife and the other characters would be to cover them with contempt and buy a horsewhip. Teddy resembles the Christian who perceives no intellectual distance between peace on earth, good will to men and peace on earth to men of good will-and who therefore chooses in the interests of good manners to mistranslate and misunderstand what Luke says the shepherds were actually told about human responsibility. Neither Teddy nor such a Christian can really understand, let alone hate, evil, because neither one

can understand the full implications of human liberty. Teddy worships that liberty, but he worships it by cheapening all human action to one worthless level. He simply lacks the power to distinguish-with anything more than his feelings-the right of one person to drink milk and that of another to make lampshades out of Jews. That is an intellectual scandal, not a moral one, because Teddy himself would feel more kindly toward-or at least esthetically prefer-a milk drinker to the Beast of Belsen.

The point is not, of course, that human liberty ought to be extinguished because people like Teddy debase it. The point is that liberty ought never to be worshipped. The true greatness of human sovereignty comes from the fact that it brings a full measure of human responsibility to both the good and the evil that we do. But that is the greatness of means, and therefore a secondary greatness. What we do is at least as important as our intentions, and usually more important. By denying that, Teddy reveals the shambles that his principle of a value-free intellect makes of the human personality. It is Max, however, who gives this principle its clearest utterance in the play. When Teddy wants to leave with his wife, this wretched man says to him:

Listen, you think I don't know why you didn't tell me you were married? I know why. You were ashamed. You thought I'd be annoyed because you married a woman beneath you. You should have known me better. I'm broadminded. I'm a broadminded man. (p. 59)

Here, then, we have the core of the immeasurable meanness in *The Homecoming*. It is a principle that makes Teddy's actions more degraded than Kowalski's because they proceed from the mind and not from the glands. And this principle has a name: tolerance, born of indifference to truth and goodness. Usually it is disguised in a civilized veneer, hemmed in by such polite constraints as "within reason", or "so long as you don't hurt anyone else", or "between consenting adults", or "in the first trimester". But Harold Pinter is no gentleman. He shows us what the principle looks like, naked.

During the course of a memorial tribute he dedicated to the poet Yeats, W.H. Auden stated what I find as the human consequences of irresponsible tolerance:

Intellectual disgrace
Stares from every human face,
And the seas of pity lie

Locked and frozen in each eye.

These consequences are surely repulsive, but we may at least be grateful that, in presenting them, Harold Pinter, consciously or not, has heeded the artistic counsel of Auden also voiced in the Yeats tribute:

Follow, poet, follow right To the bottom of the night.

Pinter does proceed to the bottom of the-night in Aristotle's world, and there he not only shows us the human personality in ruins but the way that the subversion has been accomplished.

Both Pinter and the Wakefield Master pay scrupulous attention to each element in Aristotle's formula of human reality. More realistically still, each playwright's emphasis descends upon the rational element of that formula. With prompting, but under their own power, all the main characters in both plays go to homes of their choosing, the shepherds to one, Teddy and his crowd to another. Each of these homes is filled with so palpable a spirit that, according to the critical standard I used here,

both plays are realistic to the last degree. Their apparent absurdity cannot belie the fact that the free and potent intellectual choices they present not only determine that their characters drive themselves but that they are driving themselves in opposite directions.

Using tools every bit as realistic as Pinter's, the Wakefield Master presents a way for men to climb out of darkness and into the sunlight of Aristotle's world-and stay there. This playwright also shows us a principle, one that integrates and enlivens the human personality, not by changing what is there to begin with but by perfecting it with unearned supernatural gifts that nevertheless require earnest pursuit, a principle that transforms human weakness into surpassing strength-perhaps the only principle that can do that. It is a principle that laughs out loud at the great-man and voice-of-the-people theories of history by giving a certified thief the first ticket to eternal life and telling some fishermen and a tax collector and one well-schooled pharisee to go out, check with nobody, and rebuild the world. This principle too, the Wakefield Master reminds us, has a name: the same eternal Christ, in whose person shepherds and sophisticates and every-one else can find the way, the truth, and the life.



NOTES

1 Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, tr. W.R. Trask (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968) p. 555.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 459.

3 One of the consistently stunning aspects of *The Divine Comedy* is its intense realism. The geography, the metaphors, and the enormous amount of political and religious detail the poet develops in his conversations with the spirits of hell, purgatory, and heaven almost always come from this world. Nor is this preponderant temporal emphasis accidental; Dante has constructed a work whose overall nature is didactic, and his thesis concerns this world. His argument is that since God's justice is supreme in heaven, hell, and purgatory, it is also operative on earth, and that men had therefore better be guided by that justice now. The effect of this structure is to turn Auerbach's theory of figural realism on its head, for in Dante's scheme of reality the events of the next life are the inevitable consequences of the events of this life. Temporal events to Dante do prefigure those of the next, life, but only because the concrete reality in this life has such lasting consequences. So the connection Dante sees between temporal and eternal occurrences is primarily a chronological or causal development and is of capital importance. And so far from being able to dispense altogether with any knowledge of this temporal-eternal connection, Dante's theory of realism in effect says of that knowledge, "the more the better."

4 Among the several dozen miracles Chaucer puts in the mouth of his man of Law-which include the sheer survival of the unfortunate Constance on two ocean journeys across tens of thousands of miles of the Mediterranean and Atlantic, in little rudderless boats, with no food, etc.-is one I shall never forget: her ultimate sea rescue by the very same Roman ship that is setting out to avenge the Syrian butchery of Christians, a butchery Constance herself had

escaped between 9 and 11 years before her rescue. This is a “miracle” of slow reaction, even for those days; and I can’t believe Chaucer would have accepted it at face value from his sources as a true manifestation of the supernatural. It seems far more likely that Chaucer is satirizing charlatans who tell “moral” tales with realistic details that sound plausible but in fact are preposterous-and also satirizing those who are uncritically edified, in Chaucer’s own time and ever since, by such travesties.

5 *Medieval Mysteries, Moralities and Interludes*, ed. V. Hopper and G. Lahey (Woodbury, N.Y.: Barron’s Educational Series, 1962).

6 Harold Pinter, *The Homecoming* (New York City: Random House, 1965).

7 *Probing Pinter’s Play* in *Sturday Review* (April 8, 1967) pp. 57-8, 96-7.

8 Martin Esslin, *The Peopled Wound: The Work of Harold Pinter* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970) p. 157.