UDK 821.111.09-2 Pinter H.;
792.2.091(73)"2007/2008"

Ann C. Hall
Ohio Dominican University

"I'LL HAVE TO HOOVER THAT IN THE MORNING": MOVING LENNY AROUND IN *THE HOMECOMING*

This essay examines the use of space in Harold Pinter's 1965 play, The Homecoming, as well as the 2007-2008 New York production on Broadway directed by Daniel Sullivan. By examining the play and this production in terms of space, the meta-performative aspects of the play are illustrated.

Key Words: The Homecoming, Daniel Sullivan, Harold Pinter, Raul Esparza, Performance, performer, space, spectacle

The Homecoming (1965) is Pinter's masterpiece, a classic of modern drama, and one that defines him and his work. Pinter concurs, saying, "It is the most muscular thing I've written." For myself and many others, this work changed our lives and our understanding of theatre. John Lahr, for example, notes, "Before the play, I thought words were just vessels of meaning; after it, I saw them as weapons . . . [he continues] the position of a chair, the length of a pause, the choice of a gesture, I realized, could convey volumes" (54). And in Daniel Sullivan's fortieth anniversary production on Broadway last year, the blocking of one character, Lenny, made me, in a particularly Pinteresque way, pause.

Director Sullivan, of course, is a well-known, award winning craftsman who prides himself on "old school Method" acting. During one interview, he lamented current acting training which, he said, put more "focus on circus skills than the actual business of how humans behave." He, for example, believes the Stanislavsky method works, so there is no need to search for newfangled methods: "the question of intentions, subtext, actions, etc., are universal and eternal" (qtd. in Berson). In addition to the circus reference, Misha Berson likened him to Fred Astaire because Sullivan "can make something which has been carefully wrought, refined and polished appear nearly effortless." The performance and musical references, then, got me thinking about this production for a number of reasons. First, the play and this production in particular is riddled with performative moments, so I wondered, perhaps this show

is Sullivan's response to the circus-style performance he sees throughout the United States. Second, Raul Esparza, who played Lenny, had established himself as a musical performer, having been recently nominated for a Tony for his portrayal of Bobby in Sondheim's musical, Company. This role, then, was an opportunity for Esparza to demonstrate his abilities as a performer in serious drama. The reviews and his recent casting in David Mamet's Speed-the-Plow suggest that he can, in fact, do both musical and serious theatre. Third, the production emphasized the musical quality of the play, specifically the jazz-like rifts of the characters, violating harmony both thematically and structurally. Ian McShane, for instance, served as a kind of vaudevillian master of ceremonies, prompting John Lahr to praise his performance in musical terms, as well: McShane "gets all the music he can out of Max's scatalogical rants"--or rifts, to use the jazz terminology. There is a distinct emphasis on performance in this production that serves the play well. And, fourth, in a purely coincidental but not entirely unusual occurrence at a New York production, Sean Connery attended the night I watched the production. In this way, then, I watched The Homecoming, but I also experienced watching the play while Sean Connery, an actor who embodied James Bond, watched the play.

So, the performative nature of the play was highlighted, and it became clear that characters perform, watch, perform, watch. The play was a veritable dynamo of postmodern speculation. Authors such as Laura Mulvey and others discuss the relationship between spectacle and power, and so, of course, in a play about power and submission, it made perfect sense that the relationships among the characters, their roles as viewers or objects viewed should be emphasized. From the very opening scenes, characters perform. Lenny, most notably, tells his stories to Ruth in an attempt to dominate her, but she counters and disrupts the balance of power. Even a minor character like Sam has his moments. The question, however, in the Pinter play is who really has the power, the viewer or the object viewed? And like many questions raised by the play, the answers are ambiguous. In this way, the spectacular structure highlights the ambiguity Pinter attempted to construct through characterization and theme--there are no hard and fast answer to the characters' motivations or the questions raised by the play. At times, for example, being-looked-at is not presented as a position of weakness. Instead, the performer "owns" the stage, and the energy associated with that. Nowhere is this case more clearly presented than in Ruth's important interruption during the philosophical debate between Lenny and her husband, Teddy: "Look at me," she commands (228). She may be the object of their gaze,

but she is certainly not without power. In other instances, being the object of the gaze is a sign of weakness. The role of viewer is the powerful position. When Teddy, for example, proclaims, "I will not be lost in it" (237), he grasps at the role of viewer like a life preserver, one that offers him detachment and power.

So, when at the end of the production Lenny remains seated, watching the tableau at not being some part of it, I was given, as I mentioned before, pause. The stage directions in the play do not specify precisely where Lenny should be, but he is clearly standing and watching, and in most productions, the most famous being the 1973 film version, starring Pinter's former wife, Vivien Merchant, and Ian Holm, as Lenny, conclude with Lenny watching the tableau, while the camera moves behind the chair, so we are watching Lenny watching, and though he is not part of the Pinteresque Pieta, he is still part of the drama, and we, as film viewers, are clearly in the position of spectators.

Perhaps inspired by this film version, Sullivan's production places Lenny in the chair he began the play in, looking very much like the illustration used for the hit television series, Madmen, a man in a suit, with an arm over the back of a chair, holding a lit cigarette, watching. Lenny is now the ultimate spectator. Esparza himself admitted that it was very difficult for him to remain in the chair; it did not feel right initially--he was isolated, away from the family. Sullivan, he said, justified the positioning: with Lenny in the chair at the end, there is a certain satisfaction to the conclusion, since he began in the same chair and the same position. On the one hand, this interpretation would then offer the audience something the play itself does not, a sense of closure, some kind of answer, albeit a repetition of the family dynamic we have seen played out throughout the play. Though Ruth's arrival disrupts the family dynamic, there is a ritualistic reassurance in the return to the original chair.

But, of course, it is not the same as the opening scene. We did not have the experience of the play, so the position did not have the significance it does now, following the action of the play. Lenny has removed himself from the family's action, but he is still very much involved through his role of spectator. Unlike Teddy, who will not be lost in it, who operates on, not in things, and who literally leaves the stage, Lenny is very much a part of this family drama. He, like us, is involved, even though he is not part of the tableau. Spectatorship, then, does not necessarily indicate detachment. The positioning may inspire audiences to recognize their participation in these family dramas. The positioning may also be a way for Sullivan not only to show that the method-style of acting works, even in a play in which intentions, motives, and outcomes are unclear, but

it may also protect the play from the claims that these people are "not like us," that they are somehow inhuman. Esparza said as much during his discussion of the play. He noted that Americans, in spite of the forty years of changes in American family dynamics, will not accept the truth about family; they believe the veneer, and when a play challenges those assumptions, American audiences become uncomfortable. By positioning Lenny as audience to the family drama, we are reminded that we are just like him, watching, but from our perspective, what we see is not just the family tableau, but a dominant male surveying the family situation. As Esparza admitted, he kept trying to humanize Lenny, soften him, but Sullivan reminded him, "There is no positive spin on this! You want to dominate her and destroy her!" (qtd. in Kachka). But the final scene does not provide a definitive answer. Lenny's position may undercut Ruth's power over the other men in the family, but we are left watching watchers, a voyeur's paradise. The next step, the next power play appears to favor Ruth who has overcome the patriarchal structure of the family. The final scene in this production, then, becomes a lesson in watching theatre. Interpretations, stage placement, and productions change; every night is a new rift on the theme, so we audiences must watch, wait, look for more, enjoy the show, and begin our search for meaning anew, a real alternative to the entertainments and culture of today's news and media which promises answer quickly and efficiently. This theatre demands patience and careful viewing, and even a few glances in the direction of Sean Connery, and thankfully there are playwrights like Pinter who continue to challenge, directors and actors who continue to risk, and audiences who are willing to be challenged, changed, and entertained.

Works Cited

Berson, Misha. "Dan Sullivan's Travels." *American Theatre Magazine*. March 2007. 26-67.

Esparza, Raul. Personal Interview. March 8, 2008.

The Homecoming. Dir. Peter Hall. Perf. Ian Holm, Vivien Merchent, Paul Rogers. 1973. Kino Video. DVD. 2003.

Kachka, Boris. "From Bobby to Lenny, Raul Esparza." *New York*. 40.46 (24 Dec. 2007): 104-104. Academic Search Complete. EBSCO. Spangler Library, Columbus, Ohio. 5 Jan. 2009 <http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.ohiodominican.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=27966335&site=ehost-live>.

Lahr, John. "Demolition Man: Harold Pinter and *The Homecoming*." *The New Yorker*. December 24 and 31, 2007. 54+.

Pinter, Harold. "The Homecoming." *The Essential Pinter: Selections from the Work of Harold Pinter*. New York: Grove, 2006. 181-257.

Ann C. Hall

„МОРАЋУ ТО ДА УСИСАМ УЈУТРУ": ПРЕМЕШТАЊЕ ЛЕНИЈА У ПРОСТОРУ У ДРАМИ *ПОВРАТАК*

Резиме

У раду се разматра коришћење простора у драми *Повратак*, Харолда Пинтера из 1965, као и њујоршка продукција исте у периоду од 2007. до 2008. на Бродвеју, у режији Данијела Саливана. Проучавањем ове драме и њене продукције у контексту простора илустровани су мета-перформативни аспекти поменуте драме.