## THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN SUB-WORLDS AND HYPOTHETICALLY REAL CONSTRUCTS IN HAROLD PINTER'S *OLD TIMES*

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Abstract: Old Times, which was written by Nobel laureate playwright Harold Pinter, narrates the story of a couple named Deeley and Kate and their guest Anna. The play, which is set in a claustrophobic and somber atmosphere like many other Pinter's plays, turns out to be a narrative knotted with verbal violence, latent menace and hidden aims when opposing characters Deeley and Anna regard Kate as a battleground for domination and subjugation. While struggling to oppress and abuse one another, each character endeavors to impose his or her own version of reality upon other characters through the maneuvers of excluding and trivialization tactics. In doing so, particularly Deeley and Anna reveal their unuttered expectations, dreams and phantasies all of which can be easily missed if the work is analyzed in a lineer or literal manner and if the possibilities of multiple readings are ignored. By placing the Possible/Text(ual) World Theories on the basis of the study as a theoretical background, it is aimed to unearth the hypothetically real constructs exemplified under such titles as oneiric, deontic, epistemic, doxastic and boulomaic. Old Times, in which characters invade each other's personal space, provides referential wealth, extensive and rich interpretative opportunity by means of Text World Theory through which the study tries to enlarge the horizons of the readers and reset the nature of grasping a dramatic play by giving a chance a diverging reading on a theoretical basis.

**Keywords:** Harold Pinter, *Old Times*, Verbal Violence, Maneuvers of Exclusion and Trivialization Possible World Theory, Hypothetically Real Constructs.

### Harold Pinter'in *Eski Zamanlar* Adlı Eserinde Altdünyalar ve Varsayımsal Gerçek Yapılar Arasındaki Etkileşim

Öz: Nobel ödüllü oyun yazarı Harold Pinter tarafından yazılan *Eski Zamanlar* Deeley ve Kate adında bir çifti ve onların misafiri Anna'nın hikâyesini anlatır. Diğer pek çok Pinter oyunu gibi klostrofobik ve kasvetli bir ortamda geçen *Eski Zamanlar*, çatışan karakterler Deeley ve Anna'nın Kate'i boyun eğdirme ve tahakküm için savaş alanı

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olarak gördüklerinde; oyun, sözel şiddet, örtük tehdit ve gizli amaçlarla düğümlenen bir anlatıya dönüşür. Her bir karakter bir diğerini baskılamak ve taciz etmek için çaba gösterirken, dışlama ve itibarsızlaştırma manevralarıyla diğer karaktere kendine ait gerçeğin bir versiyonunu dayatır. Bu şekilde, özellikle Deeley ve Anna dillendirilmemiş beklentilerini, rüyalarını ve hayallerini açığa vururlar ki bunların tümü, eser doğrusal/düz ya da lafzi anlamıyla incelendiğinde ve çoklu okumanın olanakları önemsenmediğinde kolaylıkla gözden kaçırılabilirler. Olası/Metin(sel) Dünya Teorileri'ni çalışmanın alt katmanına kuramsal arka plan olarak yerleştirerek; düşsel, deontik, epistemik, boulamaik ve düşünsel başlıkları altında örneklendirilen varsayımsal gerçek yapıların ortaya çıkarılması amaçlanmıştır. Karakterlerin birbirlerinin kişisel alanını istila ettiği *Eski Zamanlar*, Metinsel Dünya Teorisi açısından göndergesel zenginlik, kapsamlı ve zengin yorum olanağı sağlar. Çalışma, okuyucuların ufkunu genişletmeyi ve kuramsal temelde farklı bir okumaya olanak sağlayarak dramatik bir oyunun doğasını kavramayı yeniden konumlandırmayı dener.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Harold Pinter, *Eski Zamanlar*, Sözel Şiddet, Dışlama ve İtibarsızlaştırma Manevraları, Olası Dünya Teorisi, Varsayımsal Gerçek Yapılar

If you just let a play speak, it may not make a sound<sup>1</sup>

## The Possible World Theory: A Riposte to the Insipidity or Re-setting the Tone of the Nature of Drama

A dramatic play is often presented as a detached reality beyond the scope and outside the domain of audiences' potential to regulate possible or more appropriately, alternative fictional constructs. While a taken for granted pseudoreality of a fictional world of a work restricts its addressees (the audience or the reader) to "receive" the work at hand in particular manner, Text World Theory<sup>2</sup> or Possible World Theory enlarges the horizon of spectators and readers in the investigation and interpretation of these works thereby allowing them to reveal the unuttered expectations, dreams and conflicts of characters. In a way, possible worlds reveal the incomplete nature of the literary works and indicate the assumption that "possible worlds are [the] way things [that] could have been" (Lewis, 1983:84). It is argued that these "could have been" possibilities are actualized either through the inevitability that the individual as a reader/spectator is a cultural 'product' or it may derive from the fact that "the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Brook, Peter (1991) quoted in *The Language of Drama Critical Theory and Practice* by David Birch, The Macmillan Press, London.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of the subject, see; Gavins, Joanna (2007): *Text World Theory: An Introduction*, Edinburg University Press. In her seminal book, Gavins both explains the theory together with its history and presents examples of its application to the texts extending from newspaper advertisements to car manuals.

clashing of different and often opposing possibilities" (Elam, 2005:62) in the plot of a narrative. At the heart of the issue, possible worlds foil the one dimensional interpretation of characters' interactions with each other and subsequent events taking place in the narration depending on the "counterfactual" reality and "as if" rule (Elam, 2005:62). The rationale of such a theory results from the supposition that a lineer reading of a work usually conspires against its purpose (to comprehend what a text fully means and may "possibly" refer) and fumbles the "requirements" of the act of reading and understanding. In relation to the central idea of the theory, it is also put forward that theory is "concerned with how language [...] and context in which it is produced and received leads participants [...] to build mental representations [...] to explain how fictional worlds are created and how they develop and change as a text progresses" (Hargreaves, 2010:1).

The hypothetically real constructs in a dramatic play mostly come to the fore by the statements of belief (doxastic world), expectations (boulomaic world), dreams/phantasies (oneiric world), commands (deontic world) and knowledge (epistemic world). And these worlds are usually expressed through or realized by means of "modalities" (Gavins, 2007:94) or modal lexical verbs such as wish, desire, think and so on. The sub-worlds are often diametrically opposed when the focus shifts from one character to another and it is fundamentally what moves the action(s) in a certain plot:

Old Hamlet orders his son to bring about the death of Claudius, while Claudius commands the death of Hamlet himself, first on the voyage to England and then through the duel with Laertes. It appears that the sub-worlds proposed are mutually exclusive (in logical jargon, 'incompossible'), since each involves the elimination of the protagonist of the other (Hamlet and Claudius respectively). But one of the ironies of the play is that both orders are carried out almost simultaneously in the final scene (Elam, 2005:70).

It is obvious that the desires of each character in *Hamlet* clash and oppose but dénouement of the play corroborates only one sort of sub-world of a character by excluding the other forms of possible ends/worlds. It is true that while a single form of end abrogates or supersedes other possible worlds, it must be highlighted that only in this particular way can a relationship between two worlds be constructed. In other words, the structured world or the subworld in a play is defined by the real world, which is termed as "accessibility" (Elam, 2005:63). Although accessibility catalyzes the definition or pinpoints the dominance of a particular world in relation to other world (between the actual and textual actual world), the boundary between worlds such as boulomaic and deontic might be blurred due to the world switches. Recognizing the participant-accessible, enactor accessible and the one who inhabits the discourse world will enable reader/audience to distinguish the ontological status or domain of any entity; however, it is out of question for the same addressees to state precisely the truth-value of worlds before the end of the play.

Text World Theory provides new insights for the interpretation of dramatic plays together with the conflicting desires, day-dreams and expectations of their characters. Harold Pinter, who is a Nobel laureate playwright and referred as "the playwright of silence" (Yerebakan and Göktekin, 2003:1) wrote plays of ample verbal violence, menace and hidden secrets the themes of which are very conformable with possible world theories. *Old Times* (1971) will be the subject of analysis in the matrix of text world since the play is a supreme example of distortion of memory, games of power and claustrophobic menace blended with the characters' almost hostile interrogation with one another all of which would provide rich data and new insights in the interpretation of the play.

## *Old Times*: Memory Battles, Games of Truth and Victimization among "Ménage à Trois"

Like many other Pinter's plays, which are set in somber rooms (Yerebakan, 2000:5) in which the characters are distressed without any overt reason, the actions of *Old Times* take place in a similar setting. It is the story of a couple named Kate and Deeley and their guest Anna whom Kate roomed together twenty years ago. Deeley interrogates Kate about her friend named Anna in order to gain knowledge about her so that he can dominate and have control over both of them. When Anna arrives, she talks about their past with a particular effort to exclude Deeley out of her conversation with Kate. Kate mums the word. Not to be completely dismissed from the discourse, Deeley takes the turn and mentions how he met Kate by pushing Anna outside of his discourse. To counter his excluding and trivialization tactics, Anna talks of her experiences with Kate while she was rooming with her and she mentions a man sobbing desperately in their room implying that he was nobody but Deeley himself. Kate does not conform or reject their different version of stories about themselves and herself and she exits to have a bath. After Kate having gone to have a bath, another and a more fierce verbal battle takes place between Deeley and Anna in the form of invading each other's privacy and deconstructing and reconstructing past in order to destabilize their present positions. Deeley and Anna construct fictional realities by the help of discourse; the power and manipulation of language. Deeley claims to have met Anna before and he denigrates Anna indicating her frivolity at the time they met. Anna, who is first anxious and hesitant to acknowledge that they met before, claims later that she tried to imitate Kate's coy demeanors. When Kate gets out of the bath, both of

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the "contenders" give up their tactics of subjugating Kate and instead they maneuver into having her appreciation. Each of their attempts ends up with failure for Kate preserves her silence. To push the boundaries even further, Anna brings about the issue how Kate once let her wear Kate's underwear; finally Kate responds firmly that she remembers Anna was "dead" (Pinter, 1997:209) in a way she metaphorically buries Anna in the past. Kate, who overpowers Anna, turns to her husband Deeley unfolding that she remembers him sobbing in her room, which reduces Deeley into the position of a helpless child.

What runs throughout Pinter's gripping drama is the story of subjugation, domination, degradation, invasion of privacy and exploitation all of which are realized by means of re-constructing of the self in accordance with the wishes, phantasies, hopes and desires of each separate character. In the play, the characters –particularly Deeley and Anna- utilize language so that they can fabricate hypothetically real constructs to impose a particular version of "reality" upon the character they are opposing. In this domination and subjugation *play*, the way characters use and manipulate language hints the relationship between their sub-worlds, which is termed as accessibility. This accessibility in terms of possible worlds unfolds when Kate becomes a "battleground" for characters' conflicting sub-worlds extending from epistemic worlds to that of deontic ones. That's why a wide range of desires and daydreams, the characters have and even their will to power provide an extensive and rich interpretative opportunity.

The play commences with Deeley's staccato-like interrogative crossexaminations about the physical attributes of Kate's friend and the degree of their friendship. The question and answer exchanges can be categorized mainly into the epistemic and doxastic worlds as it can be observed in the following curt conversation between Deeley and Anna:

Deeley: Fat or thin? Kate: Fuller than me. I think. Deeley: (Pause) She was then? KATE: I think so. Deeley: She may not be now. (Pause) Was she your best friend? [...] Deeley: But you remember her. She remembers you. Or why would she be coming here tonight? Kate: I suppose because she remembers me (Pinter, 1997:168).

Epistemic and doxastic worlds are conveyed through such modalities as "think" and "suppose". Beneath these worlds of speaker's knowledge and belief is lurking a deontic world in the disguise of questions which are looming indeed in the form of commands.

Deeley's epistemic and doxastic worlds coincide with his wish for exerting power over Anna and he desires to docilize Kate through his constant and close surveillance:

Deeley: Are you looking forward to seeing her? Kate: No. Deeley: I am. I shall be very interested. Kate: In what? Deeley: In you. I'll be watching you. Kate: Me? Why? Deeley: To see if she's the same person. Kate: You think you'll find that out through me? Deeley: Definitely (Pinter, 1997:171).

Although it seems that Deeley's statements and Anna's responses are in the form of epistemic/informative and doxastic linguistic referents, the undercurrent sense beneath Deeley's brief questions and answers hints the idea of an emerging boulomaic world conceivable in his statements such as he "shall be very interested" in the hope of figuring out Anna's resemblance out of Kate. The boulomaic implications are felt when Deeley asks: "Why isn't she married? I mean, why isn't she bringing her husband?" (Pinter, 1997:172). Deeley does not express any explicit statement referring the sense of boulomaic world; however, his sub-world reveals his quest for a latent heteropatriarchal solidarity as he may have to challenge two women on his own in the absence of Anna's husband.

Anna comes into the sight by the window and she reminisces her experiences with Kate whose memoires are full of epistemic modalities and referents: "[...] we loved, we were young then of course [...] to work in the morning, and to a concert, or the opera, or the ballet, that night, you haven't forgotten? and then riding on top of the bus down Kensington High Street, and the bus conductors, and then dashing for the matches for the gasfire [...] (Pinter, 1997: 175). It is, however; her reminiscence is interrupted by another epistemic statement by Deeley who tries to abolish or discard the importance of her memoir: Deeley who points out that "We rarely get to London" (Pinter, 1997: 175) is countered and refuted by another epistemic expression by Kate. She claims that she remembers those times with Anna, which is decisively conflicting with the possible world that Deeley endeavors to establish! Accordingly, it is these opposing possible worlds are argued that "The drama is structured on the clashing of different and often opposing possibilities, conflicting possible states of affairs, and cannot be understood unless some notion of hypothetical worlds-realized or abandoned in the course of the drama—is applied" (Elam, 2005:62).

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In the play, characters' statements may be diametrically opposed to their intentions. When Deeley articulates in oneiric manner that "I wish I had known you both then" (Pinter, 1997: 175), it is indeed he wishes either the total opposite of the situation or he desires to have known only Kate. When the play is taken into consideration in its totality, particularly the situation in which Deeley is reduced into a sobbing child in the end, Deeley may have further thought that if Kate had never meet Anna, he would not have to battle with Anna over the 'possession right' of his wife. The matter of possession dominates the play in every occasion and it even surfaces in slip of tongues indicating characters' doxastic world on the surface and oneiric world in deep strata:

Anna. You have a wonderful casserole.Deeley: What?Anna: I mean wife. So sorry. A wonderful wife.Deeley: AhAnna: I was referring to the casserole. I was referring to your wife's cooking (Pinter, 1997: 177).

Since the object of possession is Kate, Anna confuses Kate with the dinner that Kate prepared for her. Although her statement is in epistemic nature in terms of possible or sub-world theory, her oneiric desire without any explicit modality indicates the fact that she fancies to reduce Kate into a metaphorically edible meal. Deeley, who anxiously asks: "You're not a vegetarian, then?" (Pinter, 1997: 177) seems to have grasped the insight of the issue. Nevertheless, Deeley, who has to initiate into verbal battle over ostensible territorial ownership of his wife, seems to be allied with Anna on the efficacy of her visitation: "We're forcing her to think. We must [emphasis added] see you more often. You're a healthy influence" (Pinter, 1997: 180). Despite the literal meaning of his words, which are uttered by deontic modality of 'must', what Deeley wants in effect is in stark contrast with his expressions. The contrast between the opposition of words and the intended meanings are best recognizable in the song that Deeley and Anna sing mutually both of whom voice their own desires. While Deeley sings: "Oh no they can't take that away from me [...] I've got a woman crazy for me. She's funny that way" (Pinter, 1997: 181), Anna responds: "They asked me how I knew, my true love was true, I of course replied, something here inside cannot be denied" (Pinter, 1997: 182). Both Deeley and Anna express their deep-seated belief, desires and daydreams with a combination and reciprocal interaction of epistemic, doxastic and oneiric worlds. The territory is Kate, the object is to assume a superior hand over one another and the means is to surveillance and policing of Kate.

In the following defiance, Deeley resists embezzlement of Kate as if she was a commodity. He narrates the chain of incidents when he saw the movie named The Odd Man Out starring Robert Newton and he also mentions the events taking place while seeing the movie. Hinting that it is out of question for Anna to separate them, Deeley asserts that "It was Robert Newton who brought us together and it is only Robert Newton who can tear us apart" (Pinter, 1997: 183). To counter this assault, Anna fights back arguing that "There are some things one remembers even though they may never have happened. There are things I remember which may never have happened but as I recall them so they take place" (Pinter, 1997: 184). Through her counter attack, Anna, who demonstrates that what she and Deeley are trying to do is to construct past in order to deconstruct the present arguments of each other, displays that she and her rival are well aware of that reality is indeed conditioned "by belief[s], fantasies, fears and wishes that we projected onto it" (Elam, 2005:69). The better one constructs and imposes his/her reality over another, the closer s/he gets to the victory. As it can be observed, Anna's opposing epistemic remarks collide with that of Deeley and she refutes them on the basis that one can "remember" things even if they may never occurred in the past. Kate, who remains silent up to the point right after Anna mentions the man sobbing in their room, interferes Deeley and Anna's conversation by saying "You talk of me as if I were dead" (Pinter, 1997: 186). What Kate is doing is to create a hypothetical construction by generating an epistemic modal world. Anna's insistent use of past tense even if she argues the opposite of what she has just said indicates that Kate is still regarded as "dead": "No, no, you weren't dead, you were so lively, so animated, you used to laugh" (Pinter, 1997: 186). Kate, who wants to emphasize Anna's insistent use of past tense when she is at stake, emphatically underlines the present use of "to be": "I said you talk about me as if I AM [emphasis added] dead. Now." (Pinter, 1997: 186). After Anna touched upon lightly the happiness she felt for the marriage of her friend, she once again plunges into the day dreams of the memoirs with Kate and she maintains to talk about on her behalf: "She ravished them, and then insisted we visit that gallery [...]" (Pinter, 1997: 188). The subjunctive structure and the word "ravish" indicate the existence of an oneiric world but this is an invented oneiric world fabricated by Anna and made to fit for or imposed on Kate.

Anna changes her focus of attention from past to present in shifting to describe her present state with an emphasis on luxuries life she and her husband are leading. "We live in a rather fine villa and have done so for many years. It's very high up, on the cliffs" (Pinter, 1997: 189). The description, which Anna provides, stands as sharp contrast to the vicinity in which Deeley and Kate are leading their lives. Although her description falls into the category of epistemic world, Anna's portrayal may also be interpreted as a wish fulfillment through daydreaming, which is more appropriate to oneiric world. As the play takes

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place on psychological level and it is preoccupied with fabrication of possible world through imagination, it is heavily under the effects of epistemic, boulomaic and oneiric world and it allocates restrictive numbers of deontic modalities and words. Moreover, when characters employ words or statements connotating deontic expressions, they remain only on linguistic surface referring some other possible worlds. When Anna proposes to go out and tells Kate "Wear your green" (Pinter, 2007:193), the statement remains on epistemic level rather than on the level of deontic world.

When analyzed closely, it is seen that the epistemic and doxastic world of characters overlap with each other. Deeley seems to wonder if Kate has dried herself appropriately but he actually tries to treat Kate as if she was a child:

Deeley: Have you dried yourself properly, Kate? Kate: I think so. Deeley: Are you sure? All over? Kate: I think so. I feel quite dry. Deeley: Are you quite sure? I don't want you sitting here damply all over the place (Pinter, 2007:202).

Anna, who may possibly get accustomed to such disparaging attitudes and remarks towards her, indifferently responds Deeley by means of brief doxastic modalities such as "I think". To the end of the play, Kate gradually resists the depreciative demeanors shown to her by her husband and friend and she rejects their offers. "Anna: Oh, I'm sorry. I'll make some fresh. Kate: No, I don't want any, thank you." (Pinter, 2007:203). Although Kate's statement of rejection fits to the epistemic declaration, its tone is suitable for deontic quality not only because she firmly turns down the lineer meaning of a simple coffee offer, but also she refuses Deeley and Anna's shrouded aims of passivization. Nevertheless, this does not deter them to maintain to define Kate. "But when I knew her first she was so shy, as shy as a *fawn*, she really was [...] I put it down to her upbringing, a parson's daughter, and indeed there was a good deal of Brontë about her" (Pinter, 2007:205). Here, Anna employs epistemic expressions only to create a world more credible than the other possible worlds which might be otherwise less credible if they are created through oneiric or boulomaic expressions. Deeley and Anna, who try to repress Kate throughout the play, turn to each other, the act of which shows that they cannot manage their aims of subjugating Kate. Anna reminisces her 'old times' with Kate to which Deeley sarcastically responds "Sounds a perfect marriage" (Pinter, 2007:206). Anna who almost understands the fault of entering into the field of Deeley shrinks back and apologetically acknowledges her mistake: "I feel that is your province" (Pinter, 2007:206). In protest against Anna's epistemic

acknowledgement, he fulminates against his accomplice: "You fed [sic] it's my province? Well, you're damn right. It is my province. I'm glad someone's showing a bit of taste at last. Of course it's my bloody province. I'm her husband" (Pinter, 2007:206). After Deeley's accusation, Anna creates a boulomaic world in order to reach a compromise with Deeley: "I would like you to understand that I came here not to disrupt but to celebrate. To celebrate a very old and treasured friendship, something that was forged between us long before you knew of our existence" (Pinter, 2007:207). Nevertheless, her boulomaic world incorporates a world of doxastic one in which Anna obstinately claims that there is still a room for her existence between Kate and Deeley. Kate, who listens patiently, moves in for the fatal blow coercing Anna into an insignificant position which they first intended to place Kate. She claims that "But I remember you. I remember you dead" (Pinter, 2007:209). The epistemic expression, which is precise in nature, buries Anna into the memories which she eagerly narrates. Kate also humiliates Deeley stating that how he has to make a proposal to her so that he can save himself from Kate's latent potency, which metaphorically "castrates" Deeley and his heteronormative values determining the direction of discourse. Kate's overpowering of her rivals at the end provides different *possibilities* of reading the play: First of all, Kate might have killed first Anna out of jealousy and then Deeley and after the twenty years of her murder, she postulates in a hypothetically "real" world that Deeley still loves her. The second reading of the play conformable with the text world theory enables us to infer that Anna is the extension of Kate's single psyche which Kate suppresses by the metaphorical words of "dead." Kate, who kills Anna so as not to be torn between her husband and her second self, has to face Anna who surfaced over Kate's personality once more. In retaliation for Anna's re-appearance, Kate has to kill her alter ego once again. Accordingly, the play ends with the re-enaction of the scene occurred twenty years ago when Deeley was sobbing in Kate's room.

# A Bifurcated Showdown Foregrounded through the Possible World Theory

It is seen that the number of statements forming epistemic worlds outweights the rest of the worlds in quantity. Doxastic and boulomaic worlds can also be found in considerable amount. While the number of expressions referring to deontic worlds is restricted, the whole of the play is embroidered by oneiric world of the characters but this embroidery does not explicitly manifests itself on the level of words but by the unspoken intentions of characters farreaching the linguistic signifiers. In *Old Times*, the possible worlds of characters with their hidden desires, belief, expectations and the interactions among these worlds with regard to Deeley, Anna and Kate profoundly conflict with each

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other. In other words, it turns out that Harold Pinter deliberately makes *Old Times* into a mass of drastically contradicting memoirs. Accordingly, the text world theory served the necessity of seeing or interpreting the play with a more comprehensive way; first by distinguishing the compactness of each possible world, setting it apart, analyzing the respective worlds with their modalities and forms of statements peculiar to a specific hypothetical world which lead to unearth the truer version of the story and enabled readers to construe more sensible liaisons among characters.

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