

POWER STRUGGLES IN HAROLD PINTER'S *OLD TIMES*

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Abstract

British playwright Harold Pinter, who is well-known for his comedy of menace, is consistently preoccupied with the themes of domination, subjugation, victimization, and exploitation in his works. His typical setting is a room which protects the characters from the menace coming from the outside in disguise of a human. However, it turns out that the menace or the threat or the outsider does actually already exist in the room. Memories, which the characters reconstruct or fabricate according to their need, are the best weapons in this duel to gain control and manipulate all doings of their rivals. *Old Times* (1990) exemplifies such multiple power struggles through the characters Deeley, Kate and Anna. The main conflict revolves around the main character, Kate, which transforms into a battle for manipulation of power over Deeley and Anna. In the play, Kate is precious since she is desired by the two people who become rivals for each other. Both Deeley and Anna need Kate to fulfil their own desires. This conflict gets complicated when Kate resists and does not respond to their attempts to possess and dominate her. Thus, she reaches to the position of an ultimate winner through the power structures she employs in the course of the play. Thus, *Old Times* is a model of power structures, and such nature of power can be clearly observed throughout the play when it is exercised by Kate who has a great influence on Deeley and Anna. The aim of this paper is to analyse power struggles in relationships of Kate, Deeley and Anna in *Old Times*.

Keywords: Old Times, Power Struggles, Silence, Comedy of Menace, Memory

HAROLD PINTER'İN *ESKİ ZAMANLAR* OYUNUNDA İKTİDAR MÜCADELELERİ

Öz

Tehdit komedyası ile tanınan İngiliz oyun yazarı Harold Pinter, yapıtlarında hakimiyet, boyun eğdirme, mağduriyet, istismar gibi temaları sıklıkla işler. Oyunları genellikle karakterlerin insan kılığında gelen dış tehditlerden korunduğu bir odada geçer. Bununla birlikte, kötülük, tehdit ve "dış" aslında zaten içeridedir. İhtiyaçlarına göre yeniden kurguladıkları ya da uydurdukları anıları, karakterlerin kontrol kazanmak ve rakiplerini ida-

re etmek için en iyi silahlarıdır. *Eski Zamanlar* (1990) karakterleri Deeley, Kate ve Anna aracılığı ile güç savaşlarını örnekler. Temel çatışma ana karakter Kate'in Deeley ve Anna üzerindeki güç idaresi etrafında yoğunlaşır. Oyunda Kate birbirine rakip olan iki insan tarafından arzu edildiği için değer kazanır. Hem Deeley, hem de Anna kendi isteklerini tatmin etmek için Kate'e ihtiyaç duyar. Bu çatışma Kate'in diğerlerinin ona sahip olma ve onu idare etme teşebbüslerine bir karşılık vermediği ve onlara direndiği için karmaşık bir hal alır. Böylece Kate, oyun boyunca uyguladığı güç savaşları ile nihai kazanan pozisyonuna ulaşır. Bu nedenle *Eski Zamanlar*, bir iktidar mücadeleleri örneğidir ve bu tarzdaki iktidar, açık bir biçimde oyun boyunca Deeley ve Anna üzerinde hakimiyet kuran Kate'in edimlerinde gözlemlenebilir. Bu makalenin amacı *Eski Zamanlar*'da Kate, Deeley ve Anna'nın ilişkilerinde iktidar mücadelelerini incelemektir

Anahtar Kelimeler: Eski Zamanlar, İktidar Mücadeleleri, Sessizlik, Tehdit Komedyası, Anı

"By the power of Memories"

Shee-man: Kate

Harold Pinter is a leading playwright not only in British literature but also in world literature. His unique style and certain characteristics of his works, later called "pinteresque", have brought him a well-deserved world-wide fame. Certain features such as his powerful use of language, the choice of emotionally brutal characters and the preference of a setting, creating an obscure atmosphere, describe only some part of his writing style in his works. *Old Times*, the main text of this study, skilfully exemplifies these features. Together with touching some of these features, the chief goal of this study is to analyse power struggles/relations in *Old Times*.

Old Times, briefly, can be regarded as the dramatization of desire for power. When the play begins, the married couple, Deeley and Kate, are expecting a visitor, Anna, Kate's former roommate whom she met 20 years ago. Anna is coming to "celebrate a very old and treasured friendship" (Pinter 64), which means to restore her past friendship with Kate. Anna's expected visit is perceived as a territorial threat by Deeley who feels uneasy because of the danger of the invasion to their lives by Anna as an intruder. Anna's arrival disturbs the power equation in the wife-husband relationship which is seemingly constructed and rooted within a power relation. This threat initiates the power struggle between the characters.

Kate uses some strategies to have dominance over Deeley. In order to manage this, she utilizes some tactics such as silence, sense of foreboding, power of knowledge, undercutting and ignorance, indifference and memory games. However, the most powerful weapon is

silence used by Kate very effectively through which she expels both Deeley and Anna from her life at the end of the play. Pinter often defined "silence" as a wall of language that hides true meaning. In an interview, he asserted that "The speech we hear is an indication of that which we don't hear. When true silence falls we are still left with echo but are nearer nakedness. One way of looking at speech is to say that it is a constant stratagem to cover nakedness."¹ Throughout the conversations with Deeley and Anna, Kate used the most important weapon from the very beginning of the play: the silence which can be disconcerting and can make people feel uncomfortable and alone. Her silence is the source of her power.

In addition to her *silence* Kate also gives *short and unsatisfactory answers* to Deeley's questions - such as "Mmnn. *Pause*" (5), "One.", "Hundreds." (11), "Mmmnn?", "Didn't you?", "We did" (12), "Of course it was. *Pause*" (13), - which is another method to dominate Deeley. The speed with which Deeley questions Kate reveals his obsession in demanding answers to his questions about Anna. Kate, knowing how crucial this information to Deeley, "plays with him, baits him, tells him half truth", provides short answers or asks him to direct his questions to Anna (Akçeşme 52). As a result, Deeley cannot get what he wants. He gets frustrated and accuses her of being indifferent, "Haven't you any curiosity?" (Pinter 10). Moreover, she denies that Anna is her "best" friend although she admits that she is her "one and only" friend (5). This point shows that Kate was the powerful one.

Leaving him in the middle of a steadily escalating sense of *foreboding* is another strategy Kate employs to manage Deeley. With a masterful strategy she controls Deeley, sometimes with a single phrase when she tells him that she and Anna "lived together" (12). By this way, she turns the conversation from herself to Anna, forcing Deeley to confront once again the real object of his inquiry and his fear that the stability of their marriage and the stability of his central position in Kate's life run into danger with the coming of an intruder, Anna, for Kate and Anna could have been involved in a lesbian relationship, which would risk their marriage in terms of fidelity to truth.

¹ <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2008/dec/31/harold-pinter-early-essay-writing>

Knowledge is power, and with this power, “those who can control the past can also control the present, and those who can control the present can control the future” (Akçeşme 39). However, Kate’s answers to his questions reveal that her past is a mystery to Deeley. When Deeley learns that Kate and Anna lived together before Kate married him, he gets surprised at how little he knows about his wife’s past, “I knew you had shared with someone at one time...Pause. But I didn’t know it was her.” (Pinter 13). Thus, lack of knowledge about his wife leads Deeley to a sense of insecurity while strengthening Kate’s power over him.

Baldwin has good point while commenting on the conversation or dialogue in the play. She claims that despite Kate’s deceptive passivity, she is always *in control* of the conversation with Deeley even at the very beginning of the play. When he resists, Kate asks “do you want me to ask your questions for you?” (9), effectively asserting her dominance “with a relationship where she appears emotionally detached” (Sidney 117). Kate displays that she is the one who directs the others as a ‘manipulator’. In addition, when Deeley tells Anna how he “takes her face in [his] hands and look at it”, Kate attacks him, “My head is quite fixed. I have it on.” (20). Kate is always there and keeps an eye on them. Kate controls Deeley and Anna with her awareness of the ongoing battle around her. The other characters lose their battle of dominance since they are totally unaware that Kate is not withdrawn into a passive state; on the contrary, she actively watches everything, though silently.

Kate never hides her strategies while talking both character and it can be said that she deliberately and boldly tries to show this:

Kate: Do you have marble floors?

[...]

Deeley: I had a great crew in Sicily. A marvellous cameraman. Best in the business. I wrote the film and directed it.

Kate: (To Anna) Do you drink orange juice on your terrace in the morning?

Anna: Sometimes, Yes.

Deeley: As a matter of fact I am at the top of my profession. (37-38)

Kate assaults Deeley even more directly by ignoring and excluding him when he is boasting about his profession to assert his sense of superiority over Anna. In the first act, it is revealed in a conversation that ac-

tually Deeley envies Anna. Deeley asks questions about Anna's life, but Kate undermines him by *undercutting* and inquires about Anna's house in Sicily. Kate always has something else on her agenda. What Deeley and Anna say about her shows that Kate does not take them seriously.

Kate also shows her power in the lines which epitomize her *indifference* to Deeley: "I was interested once in the arts, but I can't remember now which ones they were" (33). Kate's answer to Anna - when she expresses her delight in the fact that Kate has chosen to marry an artistic man like Deeley since "Katey had always been interested in arts" (33) - may unnerve both Deeley and Anna. However, it is actually more destructive for Deeley since Kate's reply tends to display both "the indictment of their present culturally sterile life or the critique of Deeley's modest work as a filmmaker" (Sidney, 117) since she makes it clear that Deeley's artistic disposition, which had attracted her to him, no longer stimulates her. Hence, Kate eliminates her husband's desperate attempts to assert his existence by remaining indifferent towards him.

Another tactic is the *memory games* by which Kate gains superiority over Deeley by correcting his version of the past. When Anna reminds her of their old good days in London, Deeley attempts to defeat Anna by saying "We rarely get to London", but Kate's answer "Yes I remember" (14) causes him to lose power in the battle. By doing this, she subjugates Deeley and makes him realize her powerful being at any case, even when he is so sure of himself.

Similarly, Kate's own version of memory at the end of the play confirms her dominance over Deeley. Whilst Kate's last speech or monologue is addressed to Anna, she also attacks Deeley, as Baldwin asserts, "reducing his poetic memories of their sexual relationship to grinding noses and treating his teaching with scorn and derision by cruelly mocking his earnestness and expectation" (21):

When I brought him into the room your body of course had gone. What a relief it was to have a different body in my room, a male body behaving quite differently, doing all those things they do and which they think are good, like sitting with one leg over the arm of an armchair. We had a choice of two beds. Your bed or my bed. To lie in, or on. To grind noses together, in or on. He liked your bed, and thought he was different in it because he was a man. But one night I said let me do something, a

little thing, a little trick. He lay there in your bed. He thought I had profited from his teaching. He thought I was going to be sexually forthcoming, that I was about to take a long promised initiative. I dug about in the window box, where you had planted our pretty pansies, scooped, filled the bowl, and plastered his face with dirt. He resisted... with force. He would not let me dirty his face, or smudge it, he wouldn't let me. He suggested a wedding instead, and a change of environment.

Slight pause

Neither mattered.

Pause (67-68)

For Kate, Deeleey's sexual act is as repulsive as Anna's own efforts to possess her. She does not let Deeleey assert his masculine power and authority on her. She clears herself from the dirt, and exploits Deeleey to get rid of Anna. Kate also identifies him with dirt. It is clear that she married Deeleey so as not to find happiness or for the sake of her love for him, but just for a change of environment. In the end, Anna and Deeleey are dispossessed of their status, power, discourse and territory. Meanwhile, Kate's lines "He asked me once, at about that time, who had slept in that bed before him. I told him no one. No one at all" (69) indicate that Deeleey is here reduced to "He" and "him" (69) as if he is dead or does not exist. By this way, Kate violates Deeleey's endeavour to insert his identity and existence, and creates the effect of alienation since it causes Deeleey to feel that he is not being personally addressed.

Kate uses similar strategies to gain dominance over Anna, too. Her methods are always same: she employs silence that is the essence of her self-confidence and exert her authority, memory games, ignorance, and indifference. *Silence* becomes Kate's ultimate weapon, a tool of power to subjugate the other characters. In a way, silence functions as a "liberating force through which Kate frees herself from oppression and suppression" (Akçeşme 52). Her silent discourse prevents the other two from having access to her thoughts, feelings and her life. In other words, she chooses to be silent; she makes herself "inaccessible" and "indecipherable", and thus "unpossessible" (Akçeşme 51). When Anna and Deeleey are talking about her, she rarely interferes in their conversation, instead, she prefers to be silent. By giving no reply, being silent, or giving rather *short answers* such as "Yes, I remember" (14), "I don't

know. *Pause*" (40), "September" (21), Kate evades Anna's attempts to make her acknowledge that how special their friendship was. It is noticeable that Kate is reluctant about recreating the past or re-establishing their relationship with Anna. The ultimate purpose of Kate's silences and short answers which play an important role in gaining control over her is to dissatisfy Anna's demands from a friend, as a friend.

Just like with Deeley, Kate is the *self-confident* and dominated figure in her relationship with Anna. In the scene in which she decides to have a bath, Kate displays her first direct challenge to Anna's so-called authority, and subjugates her:

KATE : I'll think about it in the bath.

ANNA : Shall I run your bath for you?

KATE : (Standing.) No. I'll run it myself tonight.

KATE slowly walks to the bedroom door, goes out, doses it. (42)

Kate's rejection of Anna's assistance suggests that Kate remains the ultimate winner in this round for she remains autonomous by running her own bath. Correspondingly, Kate produces counter power to establish an independent, competent, adequate position with strength, contrary to Deeley and Anna. For instance, Anna had a lot of friends whereas she was Kate's "only friend" (5) in London, and it was her preference. Moreover, when Anna feels sorry for Kate's being left alone in that isolated place when Deeley "travel[s] the globe" (35) for his job, Kate makes it clear that it does not matter to her at all:

DELEEY: I travel the globe in my job.

ANNA: [To Deeley] And poor Katey when you're away? What does she do?

KATE: Oh, I continue. (35)

Kate even goes further in this power struggle and reverses Anna's patronizing efforts. She rules over Anna by treating her as if she were a servant:

KATE: This coffee's cold.

ANNA: Oh, I'm sorry. I'll make some fresh

KATE: No, I don't want any, thank you (57)

After the bath scene, this is Kate's second remarkable reaction to Anna, which again underlines her own progressive power and illuminates her gradually increasing dominance over Anna.

Whether used in order to assert and perpetuate identity and existence, to establish dominance over others, or to cope with dissatisfaction, *memories* are utilized by all the characters in the play so as to attain a desired present. As a part of memory games, not participating in their reminiscences and refusing to confirm their accounts, Kate uses lack of memory to disengage herself this time from Anna;

ANNA: Ah, those songs. We used to play them, all of them, all the time, late at night, lying on the floor, lovely old things.

[...]

KATE: (to ANNA) I don't know that song. Did we have it? (23)

Memory is a versatile means for Kate. She either pretends not to remember some sort of information related to the past as mentioned above, or uses memory as a weapon which bestows power to her. Albeit to Anna's effort to bring the past as a confirmation of her existence, Kate's recollection of their past life together are not as pleasant as Anna's. She *excludes* Anna from her life forever as she kills her in her memory by saying "But I remember you. I remember you dead" (67).

Deeley's and Anna's fixation on the past and their failure to move on into the future as self-sufficient beings bring about their end. In her speech, Kate underlines the fact that her relationship cannot be what it used to be both with Deeley and Anna. Anna cannot be part of her life anymore since she is dead in the past and cannot be reborn in the present. Kate describes Anna as dirt and her relationship with Anna as dirty, which shows that Anna is of no importance or value in Kate's eyes. She also implies that it is not Anna but she herself who dominates her by watching. Therefore, Anna has been kept in control by Kate:

I remember you lying dead. You didn't know I was watching you. I leaned over you. Your face was dirty. Your face scrawled with dirt...You were dead in my room...sat naked beside you and watched you. (67)

Earlier subtle or verbal, Kate's dominance is now apparent and physical. The repetition of 'dead' suggests Kate's view of the female friendship as being over. In this final speech, Kate's perception of Anna's 'dirty' face as well as her own preoccupation with bathing throughout the play reveals her *indifference* towards Anna, and also a desire "to be cleansed of Anna, her past and indeed the sexual side of herself that she abandons when she agrees to marry Deeley" (Sidney 121). Apart from that, it is also

significant that Kate's silence is shattered when she rejects "any sense of shared history" (120) with Anna and Deeley in this monologue, the last utterance. Indeed, it is Kate's version of events which is left "unquestioned and unchallenged by the other characters, therefore the audience assume it is a fact, the truth of what happened between them" (120)

In conclusion, the battle between the characters is fought primarily to deconstruct the existing power equations within the relationships. As they both battle for possession of Kate, they also try to subjugate her. However at the end it is the apparently passive character, Kate, whom Anna and Deeley thought they could control. However, it is Kate who finally dominates the situation by turning the past against her oppressors. In this battle, she has some kind of shields and weapons: a sense of foreboding, power of knowledge, undercutting and ignorance, indifference, self-confidence and above all silence and past memory. In Pinter's plays, the past has the power to intrude into, and change the present. In these works, the shape of the present is "determined by memories that characters are compelled to recall, by memories that the characters choose to recall, and by memories that characters claim to recall" (Cahn 90). That is one of the reasons that Kate managed to have dominance over Deeley and Anna at the end. Other main reason in the root of Kate's supremacy over the other characters is the power of her silence. Pinter's skilfully uses silence as a very successful strategy that actually mutes other characters, Deeley and Anna, not the performer, Kate. Kate's silence can be interpreted as a subversive and disobedient way of responding to Deeley's and Anna's practice of power. That is to say, considering the silence especially at the end of the play, Kate's story about her past illustrates that she is the one who knows everything. She is the actual subject who has got the power through this superiority while being the object of the desire at the same time.

Old Times, as it is evident from its name, deals with memory as a tool of power. The conflict in the play pictures a past that is relative and ambiguous, being true or false at the same time from different perspectives of the characters. Kate is the one who gains the strength in these power struggles since she is the talent who holds and uses/manipulates the knowledge as a power. Harold Pinter demonstrates the manipulation of knowledge influentially through his heroine who devel-

ops the strategies to control others in order to overcome uneasy circumstances. *Old Times*, featuring a domestic setting and three ordinary characters, is a microcosm of the whole world, as in other plays by Pinter, which reflects the power struggles masterfully.

Genişletilmiş Özet

Harold Pinter'in *Eski Zamanlar* Oyununda İktidar Mücadeleleri

Harold Pinter'in *Eski Zamanlar* (*Old Times*, 1990) adlı oyunu güç/iktidar mücadelelerini konu edinir. Kate ve Deeley'in sıradan yaşantılarında Kate'in 20 yıl önceki oda arkadaşı Anna'nın gelmesiyle büyük değişiklikler yaşanır.

Kate, Deeley ve Anna için bir arzu nesnesidir. Bunun farkında olan Kate ise bu durumdan rahatsızlık duyar ve iki rakip arasında pasif gözükse de güç dengelerinin sağlanmasında rol alan ana karakterdir. İki karakteri yönlendiren, büyük bir hakimiyet alanına sahip yegane figürdür. Bunu sağlamak için deyim yerindeyse kullandığı 'taktikler' sessizlik, hafıza oyunları, kayıtsızlık ve bilgiyi kontrol etme gücüdür.

Sözü edilen taktiksel yaklaşımlar ile birlikte Kate'in üstünlük sağlama da kullandığı diğer alan diyaloglardır. Normal koşullarda iletişimin sağlanması için kullanılan bir yöntem olan konuşma, sohbet etme veya diyalog kurma, Kate'in sohbet içerisinde özellikle kullandığı kısa ifadeleri ile iletişimin araçsallaştırılarak bir çeşit baskı ya da hakimiyet kurulmasını sağlar. Bu cevaplar tatmin edici olmadığı gibi kayıtsızlığını da gözler önüne serer: "Hmm. *Sessizlik*" (5), "Bir" (11), "Tabi ki öyle. *Sessizlik*" (13).

Kate'in stratejik olarak kullandığı ana malzemelerinden birisi de bilgidir. Deeley Kate'in geçmişi hakkında çok da bilgi sahibi değildir ve geçmişten gelen Anna bunu bir kez daha anlamasını sağlamıştır. Bu durum Deeley açısından güvensizlik yaratsa da Kate'in birbirine rakip olan bu kişilerden birine karşı güç üstünlüğü sağlamasına katkıda bulunmuştur.

Kate'in iktidar mücadelesinde edilgen değil etken konum alması için ikilinin kendi arasındaki ilişkiyi de ustaca düzenlemesi gerekmektedir. Bu nedenle örneğin birinci sahnede mesleği ve çevresi itibarıyla Anna'dan daha üstün konumda olduğunu göstermeye çalışan Deeley'in sorusunu ve konuşmasını bölerek Anna'dan yana tavır alması (37-38) onun bir kez daha ipleri elinde tutan kişi olduğunu vurgular.

Kate Deeley'in onun sahibi veya yegane koruyucusu pozisyonunu tasvip etmediği gibi Anna'nın da kendisine karşı koruyucu misyon üstlenmesine de karşıdır. Bununla birlikte Anna'nın arkadaşlıklarının ne kadar değerli olduğuna dair söylemini de yerle bir etmeye hazırdır. Anna'ya verdiği kısa cevaplar ya da sessizliler bunun en iyi göstergesidir. Hatta kimi yerde Anna'nın ona yardımcı olmaya dair kibar tekliflerini dahi reddetmesi kendisine hakim olmaya çalışan iki rakibin oyununu bozmaya dönüktür. Örneğin Kate için duşu hazırlayabileceğini söyleyen ve kibar olan Anna'nın olumsuz bir yanıt alması sessiz ya da soğuk savaş olarak tabir edilebilecek bu ilişki yumağında sert bir yanittir.

Sonuç olarak Harold Pinter'in iktidar ilişkilerini konu edinen *Eski Zamanlar* oyunu, domestik bir ortamda dahi iktidar mücadelelerinin ne kadar yıkıcı olduğunu gösteren yazarın en önemli oyunlarından biridir.

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