

**“Loving Wrong” in the Worlds of Harold Pinter’s *Moonlight*  
and David Mamet’s *Cryptogram***

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... th’ winds whose pity ... / Did us but loving wrong.  
(Prospero in *The Tempest* 1.2.150-51)

If it were possibly true that life really is a dream, then life’s destroyings and creations, wars and loves, might in some way not only derive from, but also reflect, a reality that is dreaming us from beyond; and, as we interpret our dreams, that dreamer would be upon waking more confidently genuine than we in our playing at reality. It could follow, then, that the representation of life as a dream might be thought of as merely a verisimilitude, or as an allusive metaphorical dimension, or as in some sense a dreamed truth.

This way of feeling life is traditional and is echoed in the recurrences of the metaphors referred to as *theatrum mundi* and *mise en abyme*.<sup>1</sup> It is possible, however, to take life as either simple factuality or mere play, dream, inebriation, or game—to reduce it to the literalized metaphor—and to lose the truth and sincerity it bears as reflection of some other, perhaps unknown but possibly intuited, in some way “true” dimension. Any dimension, seen from within, immerses the inhabitant in its versions of truth and reality, its ethics, psychologies, aesthetics, politics, religions; but it might direct attention as well to such values as constituted in and revealed from some other dimension. When one dimension is, for instance, a world known in terms of scientific, naturalistic truths, it is taken as True and Real; and it must contend with the “higher” truths of a theology that reads this “natural” world as a stage that tests us for a life in Heaven. And, in this abutment of world views, the truth must be told; the story must be told.

Plato’s myth of Er dramatizes the story of such an interplay between this and that world; for Plato, the life between lives requiring the same commitment to knowledge and right action that any incarnation demands.<sup>2</sup> The souls in Plato’s story told by the “warrior bold, Er,”<sup>3</sup> gather in a meadow to share stories about their 1,000 years “up yonder” or below the earth;<sup>4</sup> the story told by Socrates contains the story of Er, who becomes “messenger” and is instructed not to drink from the river Lethe so that “the tale was saved, as the saying is, and was not lost.”<sup>5</sup> The

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verbal construct becomes a record and a creation, for an audience, of a world experienced. Er's story contains the stories of other souls, which are told by a prophet serving the messenger as Socrates serves Glaucon and Plato the reader—as mentor and interpreter. As I sense and search connections between the “this” and the “that,” I try to keep open the possibilities of connections, not only the relatedness of “worlds” in the sense of their being antithetical locales but also the possibility of transmigration from one to another. This relatedness entails those worlds in multiple reflections and interplays of both their geographies and the texts that preserve and present them—specifically plays, stories, anecdotes, and the word-play of metaphors and allusions. If a world is not mere fact but a constituted world as idea, it is manifest in the ways it might be imagined, or painted, or talked about. So constituted, it becomes an accessible version of reality in relationships with others, in represented action, in language, in metaphor, in allusion. The doubleness of the literal and figurative meanings in metaphor is an equation *manqué*, which instigates the search for relations rather than effecting mathematical closure. In allusion, too, the referring obliquely or indirectly generates an activity of seeing more rather than fixing, a sense of wonderment rather than simple recognition.

Waking up from a dream is both transition from one state to another and also, in itself, a state. When Miranda awakes from the sleep Prospero has induced, she declares that the “strangeness” of Prospero’s “story put / Heaviness in me,”<sup>6</sup> and Prospero instructs her to “shake it off.”<sup>7</sup> This condition felt as being between two worlds is indeed strange; it becomes an arena where love and strife occur within that strangeness, which confirms neither the solid reality of the naturalist’s certainties about this world nor the spiritual eternity of religious faith in the other. Its strangeness suspends the simple reassurances of actuality and finality; it becomes a playing with the real as dreams play freely with memories from the day, and the drama makes its world and teasingly refers to another. The possibility and potentiality of events in this dimension are like the free play of true false events in poetry and the imagination. They are the drama of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Romance*, played on a stage for which the author is empowered to “bring out or mellow the lights and deepen and enrich the shadows.”<sup>8</sup> They are transformed in this “moonlight . . . falling so white upon the carpet . . . Ghosts might enter here”;<sup>9</sup> they are realized not as events confirmed or validated by one or the other of the opposed worlds, the world of material Facts or that of spiritual Truth, but as a world of potential thought, as conceived or imagined reality: “All these details . . . are so spiritualized by the unusual light, that they seem to lose their actual substance, and become things of the intellect” (my emphasis). It is the freedom to imagine and to discover significance, to be subject to magical changes and to achieve restorative transformations, that makes Prospero’s island a world of romance, makes the “mysterious region” of Er’s story, the “meadow” to which the souls journeyed and

where they “encamped . . . *as at a festival*,”<sup>10</sup> not only an arena for important events involving knowledge and choice but also a respite and a sharing of stories.

The poetry of *The Tempest* is audacious, affronting the ordinary, the predictability and understandability of events. In the last scene Alonso, finding their experiences in this place “as strange a maze as e’er men trod” (5.1.242), calls for “some oracle” to “rectify our knowledge . . . in this business more than nature / Was ever conduct of” (5.1.243-44); and Prospero promises to “resolve” them with an interpretation of events that “shall seem probable,” an explanation “of every / These happen’d accidents” (248-50). The word “accidents” is repeated a few moments later when he promises to tell “the story of my life / And the particular accidents gone by” (304-05). When the action has ended, Prospero will become the interpreter of the events that now seem so strange (and accidental rather than probable). Those events will become transformed and worthy as realized in narrative or dramatic representation. Telling “the story of my life,” he will, having been the causal agent in strange but actual events, fulfill his role as poet, playwright, and metaphoric god by giving meaning, value, and shape to the events in the telling of them. That story as told will be, perhaps can only be, another event, an aftermath and consolation, when this confounding strife has ended.

This quality of “strangeness” on an island or in a meadow or a moonlit world envelops the events of Pinter’s *Moonlight* and Mamet’s *The Cryptogram*, both plays’ characters and actions rooted in and struggling against the determinative accidents of the natural world. To the extent that these plays are “poetic,”<sup>11</sup> they undermine the base of natural assumptions that are offended by hints, by allusiveness, by mysterious and strange implications in the events. They seem to allude to imaginative works of the past embodying that dynamic, that conflict between the unformed raw material of time and the illusion of meaning and form that art bestows (and the dream while the dreamer is in it).

The narrative force of fragmented, episodic events in *Moonlight* is overwhelmed by, and realized as, the strangeness of such poetic value. A man who is dying and a wife attending him, Andy and Bel, need their two sons, Jake and Fred, who are preoccupied with their own life’s business; and the parents need the daughter Bridget for apparently other reasons than they need the sons. The occasional presence of old friends Maria and Ralph aids in the recall of the past during this event of dying. The enveloping presence of the daughter Bridget, defined in the *dramatis personae* as “a girl of sixteen,” not only recalls the past but also looks to the future, since at the moment of death, if Andy is at that moment dying, his concern is with Bridget and her “babies,”<sup>12</sup> the “three beautiful grandchildren” (71); his last words express concern for her—“Tell Bridget I don’t want her to be frightened” (76). The participation of the sons and the old friends in this event is a confirmation of the accidental nature of life, of fragmentariness and contingency. They appear not by the probability of actions leading from one event

to another, but as if incidental, preoccupied, sometimes dragged on stage; they seem to be there by virtue of the dislocations and intrusions as well as the needs of the dream state. Although Bridget (at fourteen) seems to be there as the boys are, alive with self-interests such as Fred's getting a ride with Jake to a "gig" (30), Bridget's wanting "to be alone" like Garbo (30-31) because she wants "to read this book" (32), her presence expresses a coherence and meaningfulness that frames the play. "Real" events involving others take place in her "playing area" twice: in the scene with her brothers when she was fourteen, in the haunting scene at the play's center when Andy is searching in the dark for a drink and the "*Growing moonlight finds BRIDGET in background, standing still*" (48).

Bridget is alone on her stage when the play begins and when it ends and in one other scene; and those events, those brief moments when she appears in her world, are "such stuff / As dreams are made on" (Prospero 4.1.156-57)—ambiguously.<sup>13</sup> In the opening scene she explains her present moment: "There's no moon" (1); and in the final she is telling of a past time when she "stood there in the moonlight and waited for the moon to go down" (80); her condition of being between her parents' world of refractory occurrences and some dimension of clarity and continuity suggests that her nature is realized both in real-life events as daughter, sister, and mother and also in an imaginative world of Hawthorne's Romance, of moonlight. She seems to be for her parents, like Miranda for Prospero, the child whose beauty and innocence must be protected, whose welfare requires attentive care. Transcending that parental concern, she seems as well to invoke Socrates's ideas of the soul transmigrating from dimension to dimension. She is in all three of her scenes the traveler. In the first she wants to "go downstairs and walk about" (1), but her concern is for her parents, who "need to sleep / in peace and wake up rested." In the darkness and silence of that scene, without moon, her "task" is to care for them, since she is "all they have left of their life." Idealizing them, as they find their life realized in her, she expresses in this scene the need to be alone in the dark as well as the attachment of her identity to that of the sleepers. In her second scene Bridget describes herself "walking slowly" and alone "in a dense jungle" (21). This is a brilliant and rich sensory world, with bright flowers, "soft . . . turf under my feet," sounds and smells, the synesthesia of "velvet odour" (22). Being hidden in this safe and free world, she is "captive no longer . . . lost no longer," and she has come there through "fierce landscapes . . . stinging nettles . . . skeletons," a hellish world where there was "no solace, no shelter." In the invoked pastoral world, her being here seems as if she is a being free from care and involvement with the cares of others, as for instance when in the other scenes in her space she silently watches her father fumbling in the dark and tries to settle her brothers' dispute.

In the play's final scene she is neither free in an idyllic world nor, in the dark, bearing the responsibility of her sleeping parents' welfare. Here she tells

someone a story about “setting out” for a “house at the end of the lane” (79-80). As in the moonless darkness of the opening scene she “can’t sleep,” in the closing scene she tells a story about a time of moonlight, when the action can begin only when “the moon is down.” Her story about being invited to the party requires a waiting for the “moon to go down” so that she can enter the house that “was dark and all the windows were dark.” At the time of the telling, her mother and her father are a vague memory (if the person who “invited [her] to a party” was one of her parents). The story invokes the metaphor of her moonlit world being like the meadow in Er’s story, a place for telling stories, a place between lives, an interim and a transition, a readiness and an anticipation. The party she is invited to suggests a new life, new experience, the party metaphorically analogous to game, dream, stage, story, life. Life as a new play can begin; the curtain can go up, when the moon goes down on a world whose moment is its reality. As storyteller she also bears a metaphorical relationship to Prospero, speaking perhaps to no one but in fact to an available listener, the audience. As Prospero makes clear, the audience becomes critic and judge and new agent to decide whether he stays on the island or travels home. His being and his world for a bright moment are real in the audience’s world, and the audience can assume its authentic role. The audience is free to interpret Bridget’s story, to answer as for Prospero the either-or question of its own imagination, to become director of the character’s performance (whether her lines are delivered toward the audience or not), to discover in Bridget’s moment of going to a party relationships and meanings and values. Bridget’s moonlit state is, like that of Miranda’s moment between sleeping and being awake, referential. It catches an awareness of the before and the after; it alludes, is metaphorically “free” of the dramatic plotting and amplification that make life and the mimesis of it probable and believable; it is an act of transcending life as calculation and the business of being embedded in events rather than making stories about them. Her telling the story at the play’s end is like Plato’s telling the story of Er at the end of his proposal for a version of reality, a Republic, and like the tale that Prospero will tell. The telling constitutes a view of the events analogous to seeing *sub specie aeternitatis*, to the authorial creation and governance of events with perspicuity. Her story is, like Prospero’s, dislocated from the events of the plot, generating and deriving from a moonlit state.

Although intimations of their lives’ referring beyond the lived events are possible for others in Bridget’s world, for her parents and her brothers, their awareness is grounded in the moment’s substantiality of fact, the brothers’ getting on in the world, the father’s getting out of it. In the comic *reductio ad absurdum* of imagining Jake to be a poet (“the real thing . . . the authentic article” [8]), the brothers extend his beginning to write poems to and beyond his childhood: “before I could read [7] . . . before I was born [8].” Jake and Fred seem to sense their own recapitulation of Western philosophy and history, in their identifying with epic

heroes like Riley and wondering what “made men of them . . . and Gods” (52); Fred “always wanted to be a God.” Talking of the progress of modern science, of advancements with “things like light-meters” (54), Fred seems aware of a contradictory view of time, in that the world is decaying: “They can find *whatever light is left in the dark?*” (My emphasis). Making a momentary heroic image of their father, they praise him with Hamlet’s words: “He was a man, take him for all in all, I shall not look upon his like again” (60). Trying to characterize Andy (as, throughout the play, people seek or create identities for themselves and for others), Bel relates him to an epic past, in that “beneath this vicious some would say demented exterior” she sees “a delicate even poetic sensibility, the sensibility of a young horse in the golden age, in the golden past of our forefathers” (20). In Andy and Bel’s speculations on death, Andy worries that if, as Bel says, “Death will be your new horizon” (46), he might not move across but “just stay stuck in the middle of the horizon.” The horizon might become “endless . . . unceasing moonlight . . . or pitch black for ever and ever.” This condition is in Andy’s imagination not the fulfilling meadow or moonlit world of the imagination but a reduction of his solid reality, the life he has lived, to the game: if it is going to be “pitch black for ever what would have been the point of going through all these enervating charades in the first place?” The loss of identity in that place becomes terrifying, crawling through a “loophole” and meeting himself coming back, “screaming with fright at the sight of a stranger” who is himself in a mirror. Bel finally affirms a Platonic consolation for Andy, in that their grandchildren “know more about death than we do. We’ve forgotten death but they haven’t forgotten it. They remember it” (47). Life need not be thought as having beginning and end, but as a state between other states, with the metempsychosis of souls affirmed in the awareness that generates stories in the moonlight or the meadow, the state of remembering and anticipating other lives.

Although Mamet’s *The Cryptogram* hews to the line of naturalistic plotting, the poetry of strangeness is as alluring and intrusive as in *Moonlight*. Donny, her husband Robert, and Del have been friends since childhood, and Del plays the role of parent or older brother to Donny’s ten-year-old son John. John’s sleeplessness, explained by Del as excitement about a trip to the woods with his father, is treated with parental concern by Donny and Del. This conventional life is exploded when a letter from Robert appears, his announcement that he is leaving Donny. As tragedy is supposed to arrive at resolution and understanding, life is supposed to be based in the same probability or necessity, which yields its coherence. Counterpointed by John’s talk of the thing in Del’s game that will “surprise” them, the shock of Robert’s letter is not the “surprise” of tragedy, which is accompanied by the consolation that the surprising event is probable or necessary and therefore “right,” but an unresolved and unexplained fortuity for Donny. The resulting shock for her, the disruption of her life, produces attempts to solve the

problem in conventional ways (searching, for instance, for the absent husband); and the profound mysteries that arise from this surprise scarcely distract her attention from the immediate real-life problem.

When the action ends, questions abound, and the mysteries of past, present, and future remain. Who were Del, Donny, and Robert in the past, and what was their relationship? Why was Del wearing Robert's shirt when the photograph was taken, when was it taken,<sup>14</sup> and why are those questions so compelling? What is the triadic relationship between the "faggot" Del (94), the husband Robert, and the wife? If Del has lied about being at the cabin with Robert, is his explanation about the hotel room necessarily the whole truth (72, 74)? What is the outcome of acts not yet taken and words not yet spoken? Since in Act 3 John interrupts again, Del never says to Donny the "things" he has "been longing to say" when he begins as if telling a story: "For a long while . . ." (89) "Here is what I think: . . ." (95). What will John do with the knife after the play ends? What is the true story of the knife and its significance to the character of Robert? Such questions entail acts of interpretation, including speculation and supposition, on the parts of both characters in the events and the audience. Extrapolated questions in the characters' interpretations of the book that appears in Act 3, of the meaning and value of the book and the book's world and characters, specifically the Wizard, are for the audience mimetic—imposing, metaphorical, and reflective. This text and that are analogous. What does such questioning mean in a text and "outside" it? Is the play's title, the cryptogram in which "everything means something else,"<sup>15</sup> a representation in metaphor of such meanings and questionings? Is the epigraph about Mrs. O'Leary's lantern meant to raise questions about accidents and human inattention and carelessness? About causality and agents of destructive events? How are the play's mysteries concerned with design in events both in life and in drama, for instance "the three misfortunes" *in the book* or "Not in the book, here" *in reality* (30)? Is there a structure of mimetic relationship in the misfortunes there and here? What can be concluded about character, as in Del's saying that "the life that I lead is trash" (88), and in general about the world, which in her anger Donny calls "a cesspool . . . Because every man I ever met in this shithole . . ." (94; with the word "shithole" Donny echoes Del, who has used it earlier [62]). What about questions of knowledge and being, as in the lesson Donny seems to have learned in the experience of these events (or known already) when she teaches John that "Things occur. In our lives. And the meaning of them . . . the *meaning* of them . . . is not clear" (79)?

John, with his childish questioning and curiosity and his enthusiasm for adventure, is a representation of inexperience and potentiality, the openness to and desire for knowledge and experience; and his insistence on having his importunate questions heard becomes a voice from the meadow or moonlit world that echoes voices from yet another dimension. Naturalistic and psychological

explanations of his sleeplessness explain themselves in the ordinary world of probability, but they do not explain away possible other interpretations. The minimalist drama of naturalism might leave the door open to other worlds.<sup>16</sup> Since John's situation is never resolved, his angst not merely in the disappointment of his father's failure to appear but also for the meanings and values intuited as from beyond impels him toward the absent and the unknown. His negotiations between the adults and the voices from some other dimension he talks about can be read by those adults as dream or imagination, or mere confusion; but in his waking up beside Donny and Del in that confusion between dream and waking he echoes Miranda's sense of "strangeness." When he asks, "What did they say? What?" (43), the "they" is both someone else in the dream and the voices of Del and Donny whom he has heard in his sleep. His subsequent asking "Do you ever think you hear singing?" (47) invokes music and "voices" as mysterious as the sound effects in *The Tempest*. The music might be "outside" his head, a radio, or "just in my head." "Just before" he goes "to sleep" John can "hear voices . . . Outside my room" (47-48). He seems to live vitally in and to experience from the point of view of that interim state, the near-waking or ambiguous state that desires to negotiate between worlds.

As Del and Donny can express one version of their disillusionment in calling the world a naturalistic "shithole," John can raise profound questions about illusion and reality, invoking the more romantic metaphor of the *theatrum mundi*, of life as a dream. In the opening of Act 2, dressed for bed, he again expresses his sleeplessness as imagining and speculation, as a descant on the question of reality. He invokes, as well, persistent questions about art as a representation of reality. His correlation of the book with the real world begins with the "thought that maybe there was nothing there" (53). By analogy, the buildings in the book are like his "globe": "Maybe there's nothing in the buildings . . . or on my *globe*." Of course, the metaphorical relationship extends to the real world, both as it is and in its history, in what is not or has not been, and in thought. John maintains that we do not know about the reality of history, "the *history* of things. Or *thought*." Such speculation recalls history, in a way, the historical incidence of speculations about reality and how it is represented, as in Shakespeare's globe, his "wooden O." The possible inversions of the theater-dream metaphor lead toward questioning whether "we are in a dream" (54) and whether there is a dreamer dreaming us. Our thoughts and our words ("all we do is *say* things") make stories about living and dying, about life and hell; and perhaps "things . . . go on forever." If John is trying to make stories from the vantage of an interim state, from the insights that arise from the play between worlds, he is, like Bridget, comparable to the tellers and bringers of tales in/from the meadow, the world of moonlight, the aesthetic representation of that state as an island. Artists' creations, books and globes and plays, represent a world that becomes problematical in the representation of it, are in themselves



speculative, and are about relatedness. They provoke that speculation and ask leading questions, as for instance the magician in Del's book might suggest a comparison of himself with Del, the book might suggest a comparison with Prospero's books, and the analogy might extend to this play and its author.

As sleeplessness dramatizes the tenuous moment of being between, being amphibious, the stories of transition from one world to another are in themselves an interim, a state between and a referentiality. When at the end of the second act Del has revealed that Robert has used his room to be with a woman, Donny tells him to "get out" (75) and she is left alone, crying. John enters and asks if she is "dead." Again his awareness of her—"I heard you calling"—might be of someone from another dimension—"I heard voices"—an under/other world. Although the voices seem to have been Donny's and Del's, John speaks of them as if they were from the land of the dead: "And so I said, ' . . . there's someone troubled.'" His own mobility ("I walked around . . . and so I went outside") involves him in transition from one dimension to another, and in inversions. Outside, "in the dark," he looks back into his room to see a candle "burning there" (76). Moving out into the dark, he looks back into his own world, his room, and discovers that he is "perfectly alone." The movement back into the light retrieves an insight from the darkness that needs to be put into words; and the inchoate certainty in this statement needs confirmation, from Donny and evidently in writing it. He questions her, "Do you think that I was right?"; and he has come "downstairs to write it down."

John's story, which needs writing, is about discovery, transition, transformation, *bildung*.<sup>17</sup> It is about his experience of loss and about his quest for understanding. When a month later he persists in questioning a "wish you could die" (78-79), Donny teaches him that we have insufficient knowledge ("Things occur. . . . [Their] meaning . . . is not clear" [79]) and inadequate power ("I don't control the World" [80]). But she reassures him that "everyone has a story." His anguish and loss constitute the story that can be told in the future. Everyone, like the souls who meet in the meadow, has a story; and Donny declares that "This is yours." Her consolation is for John like Bel's vision of birth as a dying for Andy: it refers the personal to the general truth that transcends the moment's actuality and pain. To think that one's own story can be told and that it is like others is to recognize that the telling of stories happens when the individual is no longer in that condition wherein the life is merely being lived, in felt pain or frustration or vulnerability, and wherein meaningfulness comes as if from the "inside." John's speculations on life as a dream and Bridget's story of going to a party are such views from beyond the events of a life as a drama, in which the one who might tell the story is the protagonist. This generalizing impulse, the need to transcend the contingency of events in time, seeing the personal life in terms of similarities to others' lives, is to put the event into play as if that protagonist could be someone else. An actual life thought about as if it were a story, by which the telling constitutes

and maintains its particularity, can be a relief from the burden of the actual, the serious. The identity of the self seen from this angle is not, then, felt as the contradictory eternal and fixed self caught in the flux of time but as a possible version of a self who could be somebody else in another dimension—as that other dimension constitutes itself, its truths and values, and is constituted by its own internality and by its reference to and derivation from another. The message from Lachesis, “the maiden daughter of Necessity” who sings of “things that were,” is that souls who are at “the beginning of another cycle of mortal generation where birth is the beacon of death” must “select a life to which he shall cleave of necessity.”<sup>18</sup> In the toils of that new necessity, the soul might suffer a complete amnesia or might like John or Bridget or the child in Thomas Traherne’s poems, for instance “Shadows in the Water,” see as if through the “Water’s brink” into other dimensions.<sup>19</sup> The “sweet Mistake” of “unexperienc’d Infancy”<sup>20</sup> might yield an affirmative vision of those in another dimension, those “Whom I so near me, thro’ the Chink, / With Wonder see . . . / Our second selves those Shadows be.”<sup>21</sup>

As opposed to Traherne’s joyous affirmation, the uncertainty implicit in John’s erasure of substance and form, habitation and name, and in Bridget’s shadowy intimations seems to reduce this world’s meaning and value and put convictions into abeyance. Yet if life becomes game or play it is not reduced to a thoughtless activity of performance, the rote moves of a pawn. The game is metaphorical and allusive, as are events and identities: it refers to past instances, to the pattern or “rules” of play, to anticipated repetitions, and to analogical performances such as the drama and a life. The magical banquet and show Prospero creates for Ferdinand and Miranda is not merely a “baseless fabric” (4.1.151) but a *representation* of insubstantiality—of the “great globe itself” and of “all which it inherit” (153-54). The game of chess Miranda and Ferdinand are “discovered” playing in the last act affords a moment of speculation on the game, on meanings and relationships. Miranda first charges that Ferdinand “play[s] me false” (5.1.172), a literal statement—about how he is playing this chess game—that is expressed in the language of lovers and thus means more. Her change of heart upon his denial calls for deeper speculation: “Yes, for a score of kingdoms you should wrangle, / And I would call it fair play” (174-75). Whether she still remarks about the game or defines herself in their relationship that transcends the game, she can be read as projecting a future and elevating the story of their life. The game is not only a device, a convenient point of reference, for such observation but also a representation of the idea of how the game of life is played. She knows herself, her capacity to love and her power of transforming the actual into beneficent and beneficial illusion; she knows how she plays the game.

By the game and the play life becomes explicable, if not fully known at least an operatively knowing process that yields itself to the telling of stories about

it. Miranda makes the mere game metaphorical; Andy challenges the interpretation of life as meaningless if the “enervating charades” are played in a context of “pitch black forever” (46). As Maria reminds Jake and Fred, they first met Ralph when “he was refereeing a football match” (16), and Andy defines Ralph by that role of referee: “Referees are not obliged to answer questions. Referees are the law. . . . They have a whistle . . . And that whistle is the articulation of God’s justice” (68). The human figure who plays the role of referee can be understood by his likeness to God (and by analogy to any other author of worlds). Ralph, seeking definition of the identities of Jake and Fred, reads them of course in terms of his own pursuit of careers in art, music, pretensions as “thinker,” and “amateur refereeing”: “Were you keen on the game of soccer when you were lads, boys?” (27-28). His own life of retirement, his and Maria’s having moved to “a place in the country” with “a small lake” (68-69), means that he has “given up refereeing.” Maria remembers the children in terms of the “word games we all used to play” (16), and life’s rhythm in the play becomes manifest as wordplay. Bel praises one of Andy’s rhetorical deliveries, not in terms of the substance of what he has said but in response to his verbal skill: “What a lovely use of language” (19).

In one of their fugues on identity, Fred & Jake’s pervasive gamesmanship characteristically takes the form of name-dropping, knowing and naming and mistaking identities: Fred’s name is Macpherson, not Gonzalez (23), and “Kellaway’s other name” is Saunders, which Fred says is Jake’s name (27). The name-dropping about attendees at a meeting (41-44) invokes not only the inane repetition of names beginning with “B” but also implications of intrigue and power struggles. The penultimate scene, followed by Bridget’s story about the party, reveals Fred and Jake impressed by the names of attendees at “d’Orangerie’s memorial” (77-79) and by the number of “very moving speeches” paying tribute to d’Orangerie. Language as performance might become an expression of tribute, honor, exaltation—whether genuine, or mere performance, or ulterior in motive. In their first scene in the play, Fred and Jake, speaking of him in the past tense, pay tribute to their father (Jake’s father in this story); the vicar delivered an eloquent encomium for Andy at a “trustees meeting” (12-13), at which Andy too delivered “the speech either of a mountebank—a child—a shyster—a fool—a villain—” (15). The vicar’s speech praising Andy’s “rare and unusual” giving of “his personal fortune to his newborn son the very day of that baby’s birth” (12) has become echoed as Jake’s tribute to his father; and Fred notes (55-56) that the story, like history of an epic past, is founded in “deep-seated rumour” and might be nothing more than fiction, “in the lowest category of Ruritanian fantasy.” The language game easily ranges from the sometimes thoughtless and rote games of repetition and echo, pretense and power play, toward the impulse to create and transform, to elevate and preserve through tribute, to tell stories, to preserve a past in legend, and to create works of art.

Although Del and Donny might be read as like Jake and Fred, being caught up in the game of their life—discovering secrets and hiding truths, feeling pain and alienation, asking for love and understanding, trying to model a life according to others' representations of morals and responsibilities—they seem to take life more seriously. Having failed in his attempt to find Robert for Donny, Del offers to play cards, Casino or Gin; and her refusal leads to their having a drink, which Del justifies as a “ceremony . . . of *inebriation* . . . of *togetherness*” (60). Del as mentor educes from the eager John an engagement with both the game and the story. The game he devises for John in Act One is not mere pastime or diversion but, like some works of art (or appreciations of them) educative. John can play it with his father up at the cabin; it will “sharpen your skills” and “aid your camping” (32). The procedure is to “write down your *recollections*. Of the things you’ve seen. During the day. Then you compare them . . . To see who has observed the best” (33). (John’s wanting to “write down” what he has learned at the end of Act Two [76] echoes this instruction and implies a lesson--about writing things down--learned from the game.) The game could be “useful” because “If you were lost it could assist you to orient yourself” (34). It is, of course, about memory--“you see whose recollection was more accurate” (33)—and about the problem of experiencing things in a world of change: they “couldn’t choose the pond [to test their memory] . . . Because it’s changing” (35; repeated 36). Involving criteria for experiencing life--sharp perception of things as they appear, precise and accurate memory, careful recording of events—the game is both mimetic and integral; like the moonlit world and the dramatic representation, it refers to life and is an event in life; it is an interim, an island of seeming and being that reflects and impinges. The game, then, refers to the past and the future, as memory and anticipation; and the act of writing things down is a preservation and a utility for the future. It like the story and the play represents its own fragility in time and its need for realization of form as an appreciation of life.

The book is invoked in the first act of *The Cryptogram* and appears in Act Three, when Del first gives it to Donny (88) and then to John (97). It reveals in that giving an impulse to show appreciation for its significance and value by passing it on to another; it reveals as well the muddle of remembering and cross purposes and the need to find or create design, as in understanding and seeing clearly the “three misfortunes.” Talking of it in Act One as if it were scripture, John pursues the sequence of its principle of three misfortunes in their own immediate circumstances, from the first, the teapot that Donny broke, to the second, the blanket that John has torn, and to “waiting for” the third (28). In truth, Donny argues, John did not tear the blanket: “That happened long ago . . . You can absolve yourself” (30). John’s evidence, that he heard it tear, up in the attic, does not pertain. Reading life by a text that should yield understanding only demonstrates the problematical relationship between the coherence of thought in the text, its created form, and the life that makes itself in reference to the other world of the text. John’s attempt to construct

an understanding by seeing a structure of repetition elicits Del's denial. Del's admonition that "in reality, things unfold . . . independent of our fears of them" (31) teaches the lesson that belief and fear, as well as trusting to a bestowed form for interpreting, are of the subjective dimension and that "things" in the material world are not determined by the subjective. The book, then, imposes a connection that might or might not be instructive. It seems, as the product of a subjectivity, as text, as work of art, to project for its reader as the play repeats and projects. It is tempting to think of the play's ending in anticipation of the third misfortune, to concentrate on the knife that John takes with him upstairs, to wonder what he will do with it—perhaps not to remember that John takes the book with him as well. Del has given him practical advice along with the book, about using it for going to sleep; and he quotes the Wizard in formalizing the gift: "It was my copy. It's yours now. 'That's what the Wizard said.' It's yours" (97). Echoing the Wizard, Del identifies himself with that voice of power, benevolence, and wisdom; but that character, speaking like John's voices from a dimension of spirits and powers, contradicts Del's advice about things unfolding "independent of our fears." John and Del have shown in the first act their fellowship as devotees of the Wizard: Del has replied "That's what the Wizard said" to John's quoting the Wizard, "When we think of sickness, sickness is approaching," said the Wizard" (29). Del is both a responsible mentor in reality and an echo and a stand-in for that teacher from another world whose values, whose interpretation of reality, are not readily grasped and retained in this one, are perhaps for this world merely fictional and false. John has already learned from the Wizard, who is a figure of potency for John and Del, a lesson about the interdependence of the subjective and the objective, the impingement of the worlds of ideas and of "things."<sup>22</sup>

This fellowship seems to set Del and John apart from Donny: when they perform a litany from the fantasy and invite her to join them, she replies, "I don't remember it" (14); and when John talks of the "Third Misfortune" she asks, "What does he mean?" (28). Del attempts to give her the book before he gives it to John (88), and the idealized world, that particular world of fantasy, seems not to have captured her imagination. She does, however, have an instinct for, a vulnerability to, another world, another illusion. Before she learns of her husband's betrayal, she laments the passing of things, how "it goes so quickly" (22), and Del helps her in a brief "meditation" (23) to imagine herself as a "monk" in an "Oriental Fantasy." Their imaginations of this monk in his world differ, however, in that while the monk's sitting and gazing out is for Donny a gazing "out at his domain" the action is for Del "a form of meditation . . . A *form*. Of meditation. (*Pause*.) As are they all." Donny's imagination wants the ideas of self-determination, of release from responsibility, of detachment; Del's pursues ideas consistent with his interest in connection, in "togetherness"—whether in a world of fantasy or in a monk's or others' meditations—that takes them beyond themselves.

Del's attempts to touch Donny as well as John express a need for community. When Donny has "hurt" him, scoffing at him as a "fool" and a "fairy" because he has believed Robert's story about getting the knife, Del stresses his isolation: "I live in a *Hotel*" (87). He cares for and cares about John and Donny, but himself needs approval and support from Donny. Although Donny's refrain of alienation at the end of the play is "I don't care"—the words repeated concerning Del, John, and herself—Del's concern is for harmony. He needs from her, specifically, forgiveness: "I need you to forgive me" (94); but he is concerned that her forgiving him should make her "happy." Amidst misunderstandings, the restricted perceptions of this world of accident, and the illusions created even in trying to make things right, "loving wrong" is performed in acts intended to generate and express love and harmony. In the last scene Del brings the knife as a gift for John and the book for Donny (83). Donny destroys his illusions about the symbolic gift from the boy's father the hero, the "propitiation . . . [for] the boy"; and the book, which Del has thought to be Donny's, kept by him "[a]ll these years" (83), is his own copy with his "name in it" and an inscription "May you always be as . . ." (88). Expressions and acts of love, of the need for harmonious relations, are easily undermined, and good intentions often become deflected. When the goodness of one's own actions is questionable, the consequence of such attempts as Del's might be his self-condemnation: "The life that I lead is trash. I hate myself" (88). The pursuit of values impinging from other worlds—some idealized fantasy fiction, intimations of a previous world, dictates from heaven, John's disembodied voices, stories told by Bridget in the moonlight—expresses the need for assurance and the stability of knowing meaning and value, whether generated in the actual, inherited from the past, or derived from elsewhere.

In the confusion of things experienced and not fully known, things like the lake, which cannot be used in the game to sharpen the memory because it "changes," what then are the sources for ethical actions and how are rightness and goodness of actions known? Del's contradiction of the Wizard's truth that thought of sickness announces its approach bestows on John what would appear to be, from the truth of the Wizard's world, a betrayal. Donny's accusation that John has "promised" and "lied," her withdrawal of affection—"I love you, but I can't like you" (97)—is a betrayal as well, which John recognizes, reminding her that she has promised him that "I could have the blanket" (98). Del, John's spiritual guide into the world of fiction, has finally at the play's end joined with Donny as mortal voices demanding obedience to social forms—John's saying "I'm sorry" (100)—in that world of confusion and loss, of deafness to his voices. Donny's complaint that John treats her "like an animal" (99) is a remonstrance against the naturalistic world she and Del in their dismay define their world to be. Their demand for responsible and moral actions is in itself an affirmation of belief that their world is not a "shithole"; and it implicitly allows questions whether there could be

transcendent knowledge about this world and ethical values not determined by law and custom in it. Their care for John and their teaching are like “the winds” for Prospero, whose “pity . . . / Did us but loving wrong.” Del’s plea is that “if once we could speak the truth, do you see, for one instant. Then we would be free” (87-88), presumably a truth that he and Donny have not spoken and are not able to speak; a truth that might yet be heard—from a book, from a representation, from another world, from hearing mysterious voices, from adventuring. The freedom to range beyond the world of determinism and contingency, error and circumstance, would be a freedom in mobility and in the possibility of knowing more, perhaps a journey into another dimension for the discovery of genuine and lasting values, perhaps an acquisition of lore or stories for retelling to those embalmed in the actualities and ambitions of this world.

Bridget’s journeying in *Moonlight* is such a movement between worlds, her voice an articulation from a dimension that for her family yields only translunary hints and contradictory intimations. Her moonlit world like John’s raises questions about values by which the others in her world seem driven, their assumed roles and purposes that become determinative forces. The game Jake and Fred play with Bel, answering the telephone “Chinese laundry?” when she calls to say their “father is very ill” (73),<sup>23</sup> is self-fulfilling mere gamesmanship, and Bel succumbs to the game, asking finally “Do you do dry cleaning?” A noble past seems to echo for the characters as in T. S. Eliot’s poetry, both as an invocation of moving and reassuring truths and as a mocking voice receding into the darkness. In the sons’ first scene Jake has found Fred in bed, “Cheerful though gloomy. Uneasily poised” (6); and Jake provides reassurance by quoting the line “All will be well. And all manner of things shall be well,” perhaps from Eliot’s *Four Quartets*, perhaps from Eliot’s source Dame Julian of Norwich.<sup>24</sup> Although the voice in Eliot’s poem considers “the use of memory” to be “for liberation—not less of love but expanding/ Of love beyond desire,”<sup>25</sup> the words lead Fred and Jake to nothing beyond themselves, themselves as momentary and protean players of roles.

Bel’s echoes of Platonic metempsychosis in the idea of children’s remembering “death . . . the moment before their life began” (47), the building of identities out of an epic or heroic past, the maintaining of ostensible virtue and right actions in living models to be emulated—these shards of nobility never surely result in anything more than repetition, in the competitive desires in this world and in the “loving wrong” of actions toward the elusive children. It seems that Andy is at last, at the proverbial door of death, more aware of and concerned for Bridget and perhaps for others than in his ordinary living relationships with anyone: in the central scene he stands in the darkness, Bridget appears in moonlight, and he says to no one in particular, “Ah darling. Ah my darling” (49); his last words in the play are “Why don’t they come in? Are they frightened? Tell them not to be frightened . . . Tell Bridget not to be frightened” (76). Parental wrong is denied by the sel

interested parents in *Moonlight*, as by the self-congratulatory protestations of such parents as Maisie's in Henry James's *What Maisie Knew*, and Maisie is another demonstration that children like John and Bridget represent the uncertainty of the origins of value while embodying the values themselves. Bridget, John, and Maisie preserve or move toward outlooks that their parents feel and desire but cannot achieve and retain. Maisie succeeds through a persistence that is manifest in her equanimity in accepting the loss of Sir Claude at the novel's end, and her journeying has produced a maturation that can be sensed and appreciated but not analyzed. One expression of the adult's need for the child as idea of virtue and for the virtue itself appears in the way the world, feeling its deprivation, echoes values from the past and desires the equanimity, the potential, of the elusive child it, contradictorily, would train and make a place for in the common world.

The intuition that life is a dream or a play does not bring to resolution those doubts and contradictions of life, nor does it answer the need to live ethically in a context of fluctuation and detrition. The persistent conviction, however, that truths are fixed, that a moment's version of reality is the only truth, might be put into abeyance by entertainment of Bridget's or John's, Maisie's or Miranda's point of view. That point of view, open to the impinging game, the play, the story, can bring to the lived event meaningfulness and purposefulness and might allow an importing of values as if from the meadow or the moonlight. Guiding imperatives such as Donny's dictum that "we have to learn to face ourselves" (80) can be read as bland, rote assurance or as intuited truth; her playing the derived role of parent creates out of ferocity and resentments a gentleness like Prospero's for the child. Although Del's interpretation of her remains untold, he instigates for John the voyages into games of life and into books of truth-in-fiction that are discovery and *bildung*. Characters in *Moonlight* make themselves from remainders of the past made up like a game or story. To the extent that they are busy and inept magicians of their created lives they hear only faintly or inattentively, if at all, the voice from the moonlight. Yet they continually read or echo the influential books of ethics and knowledge that comment on their mistakes, their false giving and motives, their negligence. Gamesmanship and mere fictions have not erased the potential meaningfulness and purposiveness of life, rather pointing up its structures of relationship, its capacity for being transformed into structure. They manifest the need for values that last, that transcend the undermining of values in accidents, inattention, carelessness, hidden agents, and mystery. And they do not erase the mystery, mystery founded in discrepancies—between truths, between worlds. After all, could Mrs. O'Leary's leaving "A lantern in her shed" be an act of kindness? Could it be "Loving wrong?" The "loving wrong" of nature and of human beings are wrong and error in the world, the wrong of the actual that disappoints the ideal, wrong that is unintentional, then, if "loving," wrong particularly to the child who embodies the dream. The ethical is complicit with the epistemological, involving us



in the need for knowing that comes of the interpretation of the strangeness, the moonlit world, the event in the meadow that seems so irresolvable in interpretation or so unacceptable to the world's understanding. Is such interpretation inevitably rooted in mere presuppositions and imaginings, or is it an opening to a "brave new world" made possible by experiencing the strange, perhaps the alien child, the "puer" (of James Hillman's "psychological phenomenology") whose "impulses [are] messages from the spirit or . . . calls to the spirit"?<sup>26</sup>

## Notes

1. Lucien Dällenbach, *The Mirror in the Text*, trans. Jeremy Whitely and Emma Hughes (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989) 8, defines "mise en abyme" as "any aspect enclosed within a work that shows a similarity with the work that contains it." His discussion leads toward extrapolated ideas of the mirroring: "the inserted work of art can . . . reflect not only the fiction that contains it, but also the way in which the narrative conceives of its relationship to the author and the reader" (74).

2. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale UP, 1980) 21, reads Plato mimetically: "we must not overlook the mimetic character of Plato's dialogue." Mimesis is metaphorical in that there is a standing-in-for in the mimetic action, a reflection as in the standing-in of metaphorical language. Gadamer observes the process of the *Phaedo* as not thoroughly rhetorical or logical but dramatic: "after the point of dramatic equilibrium of the whole, marked by stunned silence of all . . . the discussion resumes. (29) . . . The high point of the whole dialogue . . . is underscored once again with characteristic dramatic means. Socrates remains silent for some time, completely withdrawn into himself, and only then does he enter upon the famous account of his way to philosophic thought" (32-33). Socrates is playing the sophist in order not to be type-cast as one.

3. Plato, *Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, Bollingen Series 71 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1961) *Republic* 10, 614b.

4. 614e-615a.

5. 621b.

6. William Shakespeare, *The Tempest, Complete Plays and Poems*, ed. William Allan Neilson and Charles Jarvis Hill (Cambridge, MA: Houghton, 1942) 1.2.307-08.

7. Shakespeare 309.

8. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables* (New York: Rinehart, 1957) "Preface" xxix.

9. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter: An Authoritative Text*, eds. Seymour Gross et al. 3rd ed. (New York: Norton, 1988) "The Custom House" 27-28.

10. Plato, 614c-e; my italics.

11. Richard Hornby, "Albee and Pinter," *Hudson Review* 46 (1994): 109-16, jud *Moonlight*, along with Edward Albee's *Listening*, harshly: "both Albee and Pinter appear to be degenerated, late in their careers, into mere poets. . . . In place of conflict and wit, we now

narrative and lyricism. . . . [These plays] belong in the study, not in the theater" (111-12). Since lyricism is unobjectionable in, for instance, J. M. Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*, Hornby's objection must be not to the poetic qualities but to the lack of dramatic action, which from Pinter's earliest plays has raised questions about mimesis and meaning. The most essential doubleness, or duplicity, in both Pinter's and Mamet's plays is the expectation they generate that their plays must be naturalistic or absurdist; my looking at these two plays as fulfilling both mimetic and poetic imperatives is a suggestion that they are of the "moonlight" dimension, both "natural" and as dreamlike as the dream seen from inside.

12. Harold Pinter, *Moonlight* (New York: Grove, 1993) 75.

13. Francis Gillen, "Whatever Light is Left in the Dark?": Harold Pinter's *Moonlight*," *The Pinter Review* 6 (1992-93): 31-37, reads Bridget as dead: "the dying Andy may be touched by the spirit of his dead daughter" (35).

14. David Mamet, *The Cryptogram* (New York: Vintage-Random House, 1995) 39.

15. John Lahr, "Betrayals," rev. of *The Cryptogram*, *The New Yorker* 1 Aug. 1994: 70-73, thus interprets the title's meaningfulness in the play's action (71).

16. Lahr reads the play as about "the adults' psychological obtuseness" (73), but suggests that the play becomes a "moral debate" (71) that only "goes some way toward illuminating . . . the dynamics of soul murder" (73). Going that "some way," I suggest, is movement toward the locus of worlds' trespass upon one another and the concomitant uncertainty arising in that interconnection.

17. In using the German *bildung* I recall Gadamer's insistence, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1989), that the growth and development of the individual is not entirely personal but in essence communal: "keeping oneself open to what is other--to other, more universal points of view" (17). It keeps the individual involved in the past; memory—more than a mere "psychological faculty—[is] an essential element of the finite historical being of man" (16). Considering the word *bildung* etymologically reminds us, too, that "in Bildung there is Bild" (11); the image endures; the concreteness of experience is not transcended as merely useful in achieving an end, as "the mere cultivation of given talents. . . . Everything is preserved" (12).

18. Plato, *Republic* 10.617 c-e.

19. Thomas Traherne, "Shadows in the Water," *Seventeenth-Century English Poetry*, ed. Miriam K. Starkman (New York: Borzoi-Knopf, 1967) pages 213-15 line 9.

20. 1-2.

21. 58-64.

22. My suggestion that the subjective and the objective are interdependent imagines that relationship as a condition not unlike that of stories told from a meadow or a world of moonlight. The demurrer, the uncertainty, about the literal truth of stories told in the meadow would identify them as events whose primordial truth is in the perception, the hearing, of them. Interpretations and judgments about their truthfulness, about whether they exist out there in the world or in the subject experiencing, come as ideas about them, and their essence in perception involves the subject in what Edmund Husserl terms "intentionality," the direct relationship and interdependence of subject and object in the act of experiencing.

23. I read this scene in terms of a dramatic structure of the play's end. The dying father needs the sons (this scene) and the daughter and her children (the next). This pair of scenes is followed by the two I have mentioned, which represent the children's absence for the father: first the sons' worldly admiration of the powerful man d'Orangerie and their interest in the others who cluster for tribute to him and finally the daughter's otherworldly story about darkness and parties.

24. Thomas Stearns Eliot, *Four Quartets* (New York: Harvest-Harcourt, 1971) "Little Gidding" 3, lines 167-68.

25. Eliot 156-58.

26. In James Hillman's "psychological phenomenology," "Senex and Puer," *Puer Papers*, ed. James Hillman (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1987) 3-53, "puer figures can be regarded as avatars of the Self's spiritual aspect . . . The puer eternus . . . is in special relation with the transcendent.

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