

# "Some People Would Envy Your Certainty": On the 'Desire for Verification' in Pinter

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## Abstract

Much critical commentary on the work of Harold Pinter has focused on his epistemological skepticism concerning the possibility of satisfying our "desire for verification". While this criticism usually takes the form of contextualizing Pinter within the absurdist tradition and worldview, little attention has been paid to the specific linguistic constraints that frustrate this desire. Using Ludwig Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* and Fredric Jameson's work on the linguistic nature of schizophrenia within postmodern culture, I argue that Pinter's work enacts its own version of the Wittgensteinian opposition between knowledge and certainty as a way of exploring why language, inherently incapable of grounding knowledge, must necessarily fail to fulfill the 'desire for verification'.

In his speech "Writing for the Theatre", Harold Pinter observes that "the desire for verification on the part of all of us ... is understandable but cannot always be satisfied" (1977, 11). Much ink has been spilled over this assertion, particularly in criticism that follows Martin Esslin's lead in locating Pinter's works within the so-called 'theatre of the absurd', viewing him as a playwright expressing "metaphysical anguish" over the futility of "man trying to stake out a modest place for himself in the cold and darkness that envelopes him" (1980, 23-4, 401-2)—a "darkness" whose impenetrability resists our efforts to delineate truth from falsehood, being from seeing, reality from appearance. Since Pinter offers his comments on verification in the context of discussing "language ... [a]s a highly ambiguous business" (1977, 13), however, I want to reopen the question of "the desire for verification" in order to explore the kinds of linguistic constraints Pinter sees as frustrating that desire—constraints pointing to what I would identify as a postmodern conception of how language functions in relation to epistemology.

Although I will focus on Pinter's one-act play *The Dwarfs* (1960), I want to begin by considering a moment from *The Homecoming* in which Lenny raises the precise nature of this relationship when he asks Teddy, "Take a table. Philosophically speaking. What is it?" After receiving Teddy's laconic reply, "A table", Lenny responds, "You mean it's nothing else but a table. Well, some people would envy your certainty" (1978, 68). Lenny's query possesses a certain ambiguity since it is not immediately clear if the question is ontological (an attempt to ascertain the 'being' of tables) or, given the qualifier "philosophically speaking", epistemological (an attempt to ascertain the linguistic function through which we posit the characteristics allowing us to know and to verify that, as Teddy remarks, a table is indeed a table). The ambiguity resolves itself as long as we assume that the relationship between ontology and epistemology, between being and our

knowledge of being, is guaranteed either by a correspondence theory of language in which words mirror and disclose the nature of objects, or by a Saussurean theory of language in which, no matter how arbitrary the relationship, signs do attach themselves to referents.

Rather than reinforcing these assumptions, however, Lenny calls them into question by the implicit suggestion that we encounter an unbridgeable gap between the table as object and the table "philosophically speaking"; that is, between the table's 'thingness' and the table as a sign that can be 'known' only through recourse to an ensemble of other signs. Lenny's posing the question "philosophically speaking. What is a table?" (with its unspoken but necessarily associated question, "and how do we know?"), squarely confronts us with the problem of "the desire for verification", since it refuses to collapse the grammatical category of the predicate into the phenomenological 'real'; refuses to transform into substances those attributes that exist only through 'speaking', within what Lacan calls 'the defiles of the signifier'.

Teddy's response that, "philosophically speaking", a table is a table demonstrates that, unlike Lenny, he does conflate the grammatical and the phenomenal. His "certainty" demonstrates a willingness to locate the metaphysics of substance in the ontological reality of objects that precede, but allow themselves to pass transparently into, language. For Teddy, we can know the 'being' of tables since everything that language posits as defining an object can be verified by demonstrating the object's correspondence to its definition. Signs and referents not only mirror each other, they are interchangeable, a point made by Max and Joey's responses to Lenny's next question, "all right ... take it, take a table, but once you've taken it, what you going to do with it?" Max's "you'd probably sell it" and Joey's "chop it up for firewood" (1978, 68) reveal that, like Teddy, they can easily negotiate the space between words and things, since their knowledge of the latter is guaranteed by what they believe to be the referential and communicative stability of the former.

Lenny's ironic rejoinder to Teddy, "Well, some people would envy your certainty", however, raises further questions about the 'knowledge' Teddy, Max and Joey implicitly claim. Do their various assertions about tables indeed demonstrate language's ability to serve as an epistemological framework within which we can apprehend being and thingness? On the other hand, do their assertions merely reveal the speakers' understanding of the communicative contexts in which we talk about phenomena *as if* signs could disclose being? In other words, does language serve the epistemological function of verification, or is epistemology what Wittgenstein (to whom I will return) would identify as one of the various kinds of language game? If the latter is the case, then we cannot expect to derive knowledge from language. Instead, we can only learn how to play the epistemological game and hope that 'reality' subscribes to the rules of the game—the rules that obscure the primary role of language *as* a game rather than as an ensemble of definitional categories mimetically capturing the word beyond the sign.

I read Lenny's comment about envying Teddy's "certainty" as raising the issue of language games because the line contains an allusion (admittedly, one that appears unintentional on Pinter's part) to a philosophical text arguing that the epistemological

language game *can* yield “certainty” but *cannot* satisfy “the desire for verification” by granting us knowledge, since certainty and knowledge are distinct categories that prove irreducible to each other. I am referring to Wittgenstein’s *On Certainty*, a text in terms of which I want to situate Pinter’s exploration of how language resists “the desire for verification”; a text that anticipates the kind of postmodern linguistic schizophrenia that Pinter embodies in Len, the central character of *The Dwarfs*. Such an approach to the play necessitates what may seem a somewhat lengthy detour through Wittgenstein, but this detour will help clarify not only why Pinter sees language as inhibiting “the desire for verification”, but will also illuminate what I would call Pinter’s general quarrel with referentiality.

*On Certainty* marks a final, decisive break from the early Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*—the Wittgenstein committed to exploring how language could meet the demand for an univocal correspondence between words and the constituent elements of the phenomenal world. Wittgenstein took the approach of conceiving language as a system of nomenclature, an ensemble of names capable of grounding a world beyond themselves, hence verifying the stability of being. In the *Tractatus*, naming serves as the logical extension of the insistence on representation governing language: “The requirement that simple signs be possible is the requirement that sense be determinate” (1961, no. 3.23). Although this statement appears to equate the two requirements, we can read it as privileging the determinacy of sense. In other words, we can see Wittgenstein positing meaning and essence as substances inhering in the world that language must make intelligible through elaborating taxonomic categories that cover the entire field of the empirically knowable. Here, names offer us what Wittgenstein calls a *Weltbild* (‘world-picture’ or ‘world-image’). This visual metaphor grants language the metaphysical power of direct revelation—an almost Heideggerian unconcealment of being—while positing a symbiotic relationship between the visual and the verbal that, as we shall see, both *On Certainty* and *The Dwarfs* call into question.

It is beyond the scope of this essay to chart the course that led Wittgenstein from the view of language as mimetic *Weltbild* to the conception of linguistic meaning in terms of instrumentality set forth in *Philosophical Investigations* (and encapsulated in that text’s famous axiom, “‘Meaning’ ... can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language” (1958, no. 43)) to the fully self-reflexive view of language we find in *On Certainty*. At the risk of oversimplification, we can attribute this conceptual shift to Wittgenstein’s ongoing attempts to answer the question, what kind of knowledge do we presume to gain from names? In his later works, he focuses on how we come to engage in the process of naming, and the emphasis on process at least partly accounts for his theory of the language game. The ninety-fourth axiom of *On Certainty* announces an irrevocable rupture with the philosopher’s earlier sense of nomenclature as representational: “I d[o] not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness; nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is the *inherited background* against which I distinguish true and false” (1972, no. 94; emphasis added).

Rather than disclosing essence or being, the *Weltbild*, Wittgenstein now argues, can only disclose the "inherited background"—the rules of the language game—through which we learn to attach names to objects. Indeed, it is precisely this sense of naming as "inherited" through socialization and education, rather than acting as a spontaneous reflection of the phenomenal world, that leads to the book's fundamental distinction between knowledge and certainty. If we "distinguish true and false" based on the naming game each of us "learned ... as a child" (1972, no. 167), then the ability of others to understand our use of names only means that we have "inherited" the same linguistic culture, that we play the game according to the same rules. Under these conditions, the names and linguistic propositions which serve the function of naming cease to present a *Weltbild* that we can *know* as true. "It is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting* which lies at the bottom of the language-game" of naming (1972, no. 204)—"our acting" with certainty about the rules of the game rather than with knowledge about the world.

Wittgenstein elaborates this certainty/knowledge opposition as a response to G. E. Moore's attempt to refute skepticism by claiming that when he holds his hand in front of his face, he knows beyond doubt that it is a hand (just as Teddy knows that a table is a table). For Wittgenstein, however, such a claim only proves Moore's adroitness at playing the naming game we learn as children when someone offers an ostensive definition, then points to an object as an example of that definition. Thus, Moore's 'verification' of his hand's being reveals that, as a language game, epistemology parts company with ontology: "We teach a child 'that is your hand' ... An investigation or question, 'whether this is really a hand' never occurs to him. Nor, on the other hand, does he learn that he *knows* that this is a hand" (1972, no. 374). To count as knowledge for Wittgenstein, an assertion must both admit the possibility of doubt and error and provide criteria for its verification, but naming—what I am calling the language-game of epistemology—forecloses the act of questioning and providing evidence for our claims. Even if the object we claim to know as an hand obeys all the propositions contained within the definitional field of the word 'hand', even if the world 'agrees' with the word, "at the very best it shows us what 'agreement' means. We find it...difficult to make use of it" (1972, no. 203), since names lack the power to stabilize objects, nailing them in place.

If this "agreement" amounts to little more than a fortuitous coincidence between names and objects, then we can never free ourselves from the menacing possibility that the "agreement" will break down, that the phenomenal world will assert its primacy over and autonomy from the structure of nomenclature. The fear of this disjuncture—the fear that we may lose certainty as well as knowledge—haunts the pages of *On Certainty* as it does no earlier Wittgenstein text. Indeed, it is this fear that edges the book towards a focus on what theorists as different as Jean Baudrillard and Fredric Jameson both define as the quintessential postmodern experience—schizophrenia. For Wittgenstein, 'schizophrenia' results not from a lack of knowledge (since language cannot guarantee knowledge), but from a lack of certainty arising from a visual experience that deconstructs the imaginary correspondence between word and world, the verbal and the visual. In other words, Wittgenstein imagines the possibility of a visual experience that remains inexplicable

according to the rules of the naming game, thus preventing our invoking those rules with any certainty regarding their reliability: "What if something *really unheard-of* happened?—If I, say, saw houses turning into steam without any obvious cause, if the cattle in the field stood on their heads and laughed and spoke comprehensible words; if trees gradually changed into men and men into trees" (1972, no. 513).

That such bizarre metamorphoses probably don't occur does not mean that they *can't* occur, and it is precisely Wittgenstein's point that the language-game of naming possesses no immanent safety mechanism to prevent their occurrence. If it can never be the case "that on some points men know the truth with perfect certainty ... [since] perfect certainty is only a matter of their attitude" and not a question of knowledge (1972, no. 404), it is nevertheless the case that we can lose that certainty. We can lose the linguistic mediation through which we negotiate the world, and find ourselves immersed within the frighteningly intense immediacy of a reality that outstrips the power of names to contain it. As Pete observes to Len, the exploration of whose loss of certainty and linguistic schizophrenia forms the dramatic core of Pinter's *The Dwarfs*,

The apprehension of experience must obviously be dependent upon discrimination if it's to be considered valuable. That's what you lack. You've got no idea how to preserve a distance between what you smell and what you think about [it]. You haven't got the faculty for making a simple distinction between one thing and another. (1965, 12)

Or, as Wittgenstein might say, Len hasn't got the certainty that passes—but *only* passes—for true knowledge.

Without the names that allow us to make "a simple distinction between one thing and another", Len becomes like the Wittgensteinian observer who sees men and trees transformed into each other. Occupying such an uninhabitable space, Len cannot extricate himself from the chaotic amorphousness of experience, from immersion within a pure state of being beyond the definitional reach of any *Weltbild*: "I can see the mirror I have to look through. I see the other side. The other side. But I can't see the mirror side. (*Pause.* ) I want to break it, all of it. But how can I break it? How can I break it when I can't see it?" (1965, 14). In both *The Dwarfs* and *On Certainty*, we see less the shift from epistemology to ontology that Brian McHale, David Harvey and others have discussed as a defining feature of the postmodern condition, than we do an absolute rupture between the two that language no longer even gives the illusion of being able to suture. For Pinter and the late Wittgenstein, we can no longer ask, in Harvey's words, how language can create "the kind of perspectivism that allowed the modernist to get a better bearing on the meaning of a complex but nevertheless singular reality" (1989, 41), since 'reality' now appears as fluid and multiple, the site of an absolute coincidence between subject and object that radically undermines even a provisional sense of subjectivity.

I want to emphasize that when Wittgenstein imagines "something *really unheard-of*", and when Len loses his linguistic "mirror"—the names that promise to contain

experience by submitting that which we see to the regulatory control of that which we say—we are *not* confronted with the failure of referentiality. Rather, we discover that the 'agreement' between sign and referent has always been fundamentally illusory, a product of an *imaginary* (in Lacan's sense of the word) series of equivalences, samenesses and identities promoted by the naming game. I am suggesting that, for Wittgenstein and Pinter, we confuse certainty with knowledge because the language game dissimulates its own status *as a game*. After all, if the child does not "learn that he *knows* that this is a hand" (Wittgenstein 1972, no. 374), neither does he learn that he is playing a language game that has no epistemological purchase on the real. It is precisely the imaginary dimension of language that Pinter both reveals and deconstructs through Len's experience of spatial indeterminacy:

The rooms we live in ... open and shut. (*Pause.* ) Can't you see? They change shape at their own will I wouldn't grumble if only they would keep to some consistency. But they don't. And I can't tell the limits, the boundaries, which I've been led to believe are natural. I'm all for the natural behavior of rooms, doors, staircases, the lot. But I can't rely on them ... nothing around me follows a natural course of conduct. (1965, 11)

Len's speech reveals the extent to which we both misrecognize certainty as knowledge and misrecognize the linguistic as the phenomenal. Len claims that he can't trust "the natural behavior" of objects, but, since our sense of that "behavior" arises from the *inherently* tenuous and unstable "agreement" between word and world, it is less the world of objects than the linguistic order of categories, concepts, definitions and names that he "can't rely on". Indeed, as his experience suggests, what could be more *unnatural* than deriving our sense of the 'natural' from what Wittgenstein calls the 'inherited background' of rules and conventions for playing language games that are fundamentally incapable of satisfying our 'desire for verification'? Pinter accentuates this unnaturalness, this extreme dissociation of language from the world when Len desperately attempts to guarantee the "natural behavior" of his room with a literal act of naming investing the word with the incantatory power to structure and solidify the 'being' of his world:

There is my table. That is a table. There is my chair. There is my table. That is a bowl of fruit. There is my chair. There are my curtains. There is no wind. It is past night and before morning. This is my room. This is a room. There is the wall-paper, on the walls. There are six walls. Eight walls. An octagon. This room is an octagon. (1965, 9)

As *On Certainty* reminds us, however, such assertions can only grant us a certainty that we are competent to play the naming game. Such 'certainty' utterly fails to save Len from the terror of a world that fails to subscribe to the linguistic rules by which he plays, a world that "change[s] shape at [its] own will".

If names cannot call a halt to the unchecked transformations surrounding Len, perhaps he needs to switch to another language game; a game based on the assumption of likeness rather than equivalence between the word and the object it presumes to identify; a game employing metaphor and simile rather than iconic referentiality. He attempts this strategy when discussing an insect he killed: "I squashed a tiny insect on a plate the other day, and I brushed the remains off my finger, with my thumb. Then I saw that the fragments were growing, like fluff. As they were falling, they were becoming larger, like fluff. I had put my hand into the body of a dead bird" (1965, 15). Like the metamorphoses Wittgenstein describes, the immediacy of Len's contact with the insect shatters the 'knowledge' that insects do not grow and transform themselves into birds after death. Nor can the insistence with which Len clings to the simile "like fluff" grant him the kind of epistemological or narrative mastery that would enable him, in Pete's words, "to preserve a distance" necessary for "the apprehension of experience". Like the assumption that names provide us with a transparent *Weltbild*, the belief that simile can approximate the phenomenological impact of our encounter with the world ultimately proves untenable. Lacking knowledge, and growing increasingly aware that certainty about how to play language games does not produce knowledge, Len finds himself a prey to the instability of a reality marked by a chaotic indeterminacy refusing to submit to control by any linguistic practice.

Such ontological instability marks Len's own subjectivity as well as his world, and it is for this reason that I see him as embodying that peculiarly postmodern form of schizophrenia which, as Jameson and Baudrillard both observe (and here *On Certainty* implicitly anticipates them), is less a psychological state than a linguistic condition. When Len describes the sensation of squashing the insect as "[sticking] my hand into the body of a dead bird", we see the absolute immersion of the subject within the object. This immersion deconstructs the subject/object, interior/exterior dichotomies upon which subjectivity founds itself, violently inhibiting the process of subject-formation by failing to present Len with a world that can become the site of a self-constituting project. As Jameson notes, "we do not ... simply receive the outside world as an undifferentiated vision: we are always engaged in using it, in threading certain paths through it, in attending to this or that object or person within it" (1983, 119).

The mysterious dwarfs of Pinter's title repeatedly set Len the task of shaping the amorphous "mess" (1965, 16) surrounding him. Lacking what Jameson calls the "interrelationship of material signifiers" that produces "personal identity in our sense ... of the 'I' and the 'me' over time" (1983, 119), however, Len cannot hope to extricate himself from the "mess". As Teddy phrases it in *The Homecoming*, Len has never learned how to "operate on things and not in things" (1978, 77). Without this distinction, the external "mess" of Len's yard becomes coextensive with the internal "mess" of his schizophrenic subjectivity: "They've left me to sweep the yard, to pacify the rats. No sooner do they leave, these dwarfs, then in come the rats. They've left me to attend to the abode, to make their landscape congenial. I can't do a good job. It's a hopeless task. The longer they stay the greater the mess" (1965, 16).

"Operat[ing] on things and not in things," distancing oneself from the encroaching "mess" of the phenomenal world, demands an entrenched structure of language games that does not dissolve under the pressure of the real. Even if we conceptualize the signified in Jameson's terms as an "illusion ... or mirage of the signified and of meaning in general" (1983, 119), even if we misrecognize certainty as knowledge, such "illusion" and misrecognition are all that protect the subject from the vertigo of unmediated schizophrenic experience. Ordering his world and extracting anything recognizable as a 'self' from that order are "hopeless task[s]" for Len, since "schizophrenic experience is an experience of isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers which fail to link up into a coherent sequence ... the world comes before the schizophrenic with heightened intensity, bearing a mysterious and oppressive charge of affect" (Jameson 1983, 119-20).

The more the schizophrenic tries to force signifiers to yield signifieds, to verify referents, to transform flux into fixity, the more impossible such an undertaking becomes. Len can repeat similes ("the fragments were growing, *like fluff* ... They were growing larger, *like fluff*") and names ("there is my table"), but such repetition merely confirms the doubly 'discontinuous' nature of language as an incoherent collection of signifiers bearing no relationship either to each other or to the phenomenal world. Under such conditions, as Pinter observes, language is indeed "a highly ambiguous business" since it can only speak its own unspeakability. As Jameson asserts, when the schizophrenic "repeat[s] a word over and over again ... its sense is lost and it becomes an incomprehensible incantation ... a signifier that has lost its signified has thereby been transformed into an image" (1983, 120).

Once the signifier transforms itself into an "image" (with all the visual associations the word implies), the schizophrenic can no longer master the phenomenological recalcitrance of the real through cognitively mapping space, bringing it under linguistic control. When the verbal and visual fields bleed into each other to such an extent that any saving act of nomination becomes impossible, when the seen becomes obscene, then the self dissolves into the "mess", incapable of extricating itself from what Len calls the "whirlpool" (1965, 24) of an undifferentiated reality. Len captures the schizophrenic foreclosure of subjectivity produced by the collapse of even the illusion that language games guarantee our knowledge of spatial determinacy and integrity in his final speech before being institutionalized, a speech worth quoting at some length:

What you are, or *appear* to be to me, or *appear* to be to you, changes so quickly, so horrifyingly, I certainly can't keep up with it and I'm damn sure you can't either. But who you are I can't even begin to *recognize*, and sometimes I *recognize* it so wholly, so forcibly, I can't *look*, and how can I be certain of what I *see* ? ... Where am I to *look*, where am I to *look*, what is there to *locate*, so as to have some surety, to have some rest from this whole bloody racket? You're the sum of so many *reflections*. How many *reflections* ? Whose *reflections* ? ... I've *seen* what happens. But I can't speak when I *see* it ... I don't *see* when, what do I *see*, what have I *seen* ? What have I *seen*, the scum or the essence? (1965, 21;

emphasis added)

The extreme emphasis on vision and viscosity throughout this speech seeks to enforce a correspondence between word and world; to render the world transparent before the names that serve as referents disclosing the revelation of "essence" rather than the mystification of "scum", to erase the "image" by restoring Jameson's lost signified. Unable to fix the borders of this site beyond sight, however, language can only articulate its own failure to articulate the rules of 'agreement' to which reality must subscribe in order to satisfy "the desire for verification". I am not suggesting that Pinter (or Wittgenstein, for that matter) always sees the world as a "whirlpool" of phenomena that never manifests the "natural behavior" to which names, definitions and identity categories accustom us. Rather, just as Wittgenstein argues that examples of 'agreement' between sign and referent "at the very best ... show us what 'agreement' means" and do not constitute an epistemologically binding description of the world, so Len sees such examples as "pure accident": "Occasionally I believe I perceive a little of what you are but that's pure accident. Pure accident on both our parts, the perceived and the perceiver ... We depend on these accidents, on these contrived accidents, to continue. It's not important then that it's ... hallucination" (1965, 21). In the postmodern linguistic condition Pinter dramatizes, "hallucination" becomes synonymous with re-presentation, referentiality, the word as iconic *Weltbild*, and the seamless fit between epistemological assertion and ontological fact. Conversely, schizophrenia becomes synonymous with the experience of reality as the hyperreal, and with "the apprehension of experience" as that which resists the linguistic framework through which we seek to apprehend experience.

"I see what happens. But I can't speak when I see it." And if Len could speak, what could he say to extricate himself from the "whirlpool", to distinguish "the scum" from "the essence", to order the "mess", to make the correspondence between the linguistic and the phenomenal more than a case of "pure accident"? Lacking such a magically creative word, the Logos that guarantees being, Len, as Baudrillard writes of the schizophrenic,

will have to suffer ... this forced extroversion of all interiority, this forced injection of all exteriority ... we are now in a new form of schizophrenia ... too great a proximity of everything, the unclean promiscuity of everything which touches, invests and penetrates without resistance [cf. Len's image of the world as a "whirlpool" of "muck ... poisoned shit heaps ... piss, slime, blood, and fruit juice" (Pinter 1965, 24)], with no halo of private protection, not even his own body, to protect him anymore. (1983, 132)

If this utter defenselessness, this condition of "being open to everything in spite of himself ... the obscene prey of the world's obscenity" (Baudrillard 1983, 133) defines the postmodern schizophrenic for Baudrillard and Pinter, it also defines the condition of mortality. Whether in a pre-modern, modern or postmodern era, death has always defied

"the desire for verification". In doing so, death sharply accentuates the distance separating certainty (the ability to play the various philosophical and theological language games that allow us to make culturally intelligible statements about death) from knowledge (the ability to verify truth claims about the 'being' of death). I raise the issue of mortality because it is the subject of Pinter's recent play *Moonlight* (1993), a work which, while written thirty-three years after *The Dwarfs*, demonstrates Pinter's continuing concern with language's inability to satisfy our "desire for verification".

In *Moonlight*, Andy lies dying, vainly searching for a name that would disclose the meaning of death. His wife, Bel, provides him with a metaphor for what is seemingly the experience that proves most resistant to signification: "Death is your new horizon". Andy picks up the metaphor, but the more he attempts to play it out in the hope of gaining an epistemological purchase on his experience of mortality, the more he confronts the irreducible divide between death and knowledge:

The big question is, will I cross it [the horizon] as I die or after I'm dead? Or perhaps I won't cross it at all. Perhaps I'll just stay stuck in the middle of the horizon. In which case, can I see over it? Can I see to the other side? Or is the horizon endless? And what's the weather like? Is it uncertain with showers or sunny with fogpatches? Or unceasing moonlight with no cloud? Or pitch black for ever and ever? You may say you haven't the faintest fucking idea and you would be right. (1994, 46)

Like Len, Andy lacks a linguistic lens through which he could "see to the other side" of language, a structure of nomenclature granting him the perspective to offer a categorical, definitive statement about death. Like postmodern schizophrenia, death removes all lines of demarcation between the subject and the "whirlpool" of undifferentiated experience it remains "stuck in the middle of". If schizophrenia signals, as Baudrillard argues, "the end of interiority and intimacy", then death similarly marks the subject's inability to "produce the limits of [its] own being" (Baudrillard 1983, 133).

I conclude with this allusion to *Moonlight* not for the sake of the comparison between schizophrenia and death, but in order to highlight Pinter's concern, throughout his career, with exploring those moments that throw into relief the specific linguistic constraints frustrating "the desire for verification". Such moments make visible a kind of solipsism that becomes definitive of language even on those occasions of "pure accident" when the world *appears*—but only appears—to conduct itself according to what names presume to tell us about it. As Len, Lenny and Andy discover, however, and as Wittgenstein knew when he wrote *On Certainty*, although "we depend on these accidents, on these contrived accidents, to continue", we cannot ensure that they will. And if by some chance these 'accidents' do continue, if we never have to confront tables and rooms whose failure to manifest natural behavior calls the relation between language and knowledge into question, we will—like Andy—eventually face the immediacy of death, which resists all names and metaphors, which reduces all language to the confession of its own

epistemological inadequacy: "You may say you haven't the faintest fucking idea and you would be right". Finally, then, all we can verify is the utter impossibility of verification. As Pinter observes in "Writing for the Theatre", "Because 'reality' is quite a strong firm word we tend to think, or to hope, that the state to which it refers is equally firm, settled and unequivocal. It doesn't seem to be" (1977, 12). Given this chasm between words and their referents, we can continue to play language games that promote the illusion of knowledge, but, as Pinter admits with ironic understatement, all we can know is that the language we use to negotiate a complex, fluid and multifaceted reality, is "a highly ambiguous business".

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