The Final Blasphemy: *Moonlight*

Be careful how you talk about God. He’s the only God we have. If you let him go he won’t come back. He won’t even look back over his shoulder. And then what will you do? You know what it’ll be like, such a vacuum? It’ll be like England playing Brazil at Wembley and not a soul in the stadium. Can you imagine? Playing both halves to a totally empty house. The game of the century. Absolute silence. Not a soul watching. Absolute silence. Apart from the referee’s whistle and a fair bit of fucking and blinding. If you turn away from God it means that the great and noble game of soccer will fall into permanent oblivion. No score for extra time after extra time after extra time, no score for time everlasting, for time without end. Absence. Stalemate. Paralysis. A world without a winner. (AA 39–41)

In the year which followed the first production of *Family Voices*, Pinter wrote another two short plays – *A Kind of Alaska* and *Victoria Station*. All three of these pieces were subsequently published and performed under the collective title *Other Places* (1982). In retrospect, this title can now be viewed as an ironic signpost; an indication of the fact that the playwright was about to turn his attention elsewhere. In later years, Pinter had become increasingly alarmed at what was happening in other places – places like Chile, South Africa, Turkey, Nicaragua, East Timor, Israel and Nigeria. The dramatist who had long specialized in the representation of domestic intrigues and interior uncertainties was now forced to acknowledge that for most of his professional life he had been ‘sleepwalking’—impervious to the systematic cruelty that was being inflicted daily on his fellow human beings around the world. The time had come for him to answer the clarion call and to try to do something about this state of affairs. Frustrated and incensed at the antics of the British political establishment, he became actively involved in a number of liberal and humanitarian pressure groups, including Amnesty International, PEN,
CND and the 20th of June Society. He began to use his position as a public figure to highlight the plight of prisoners of conscience, persecuted writers and their families. He made it his business to speak out against injustice, whether at home or abroad, and set about exposing the hypocrisy of Western governments, championing the spirit of emerging democracies, and opposing censorship, discrimination and intolerance.

Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, it was clear that Pinter had decided to devote more of his energies to espousing political causes than to writing for the stage. Many were convinced that England's 'best living playwright' had finally abandoned the craft through which he had made his reputation. When he did make the occasional foray into the theatre, it was generally to practise his directorial skills – he took the helm for revivals of classic plays by Jean Giraudoux and Tennessee Williams and for productions of more recent works by Robert East, Simon Gray, Donald Freed and Jane Stanton Hitchcock – yet this only served to highlight his own lack of new material. During an interview in 1990, Pinter rejected as 'absolute nonsense' the suggestion that the curtain might already have descended on his playwrighting career, and, in a self-qualifying assertion worthy of Kafka, added: 'I've got plenty left in me, I think'. However, there was no escaping the fact that the creative fountain of this once extraordinarily prolific dramatist (who at the start of his career had penned seven plays – including The Birthday Party, The Hothouse and The Caretaker – and ten revue sketches within the space of two years) had latterly been reduced to a spasmodic trickle. Indeed, in the decade which followed Other Places, Pinter's gross theatrical product amounted to just three short plays – One for the Road (1984), Mountain Language (1988) and Party Time (1991) – and a couple of dramaticules – Precisely (1983) and The New World Order (1991). Not surprisingly, the author's more overt political concerns came top of the agenda in every one of them. Written with a combination of moral ferocity and surgical precision, each of these playlets is set in some undisclosed country peopled by mandarins and martinets, torturers and tyrants, and their prisoners and pathics. They describe in stark and sometimes chilling detail the sordid brutalities of everyday life under a totalitarian regime. Nevertheless, if all five of these pieces were to be performed consecutively on the same evening, the entire programme would last for less than two hours.