

Back to the future: anachronic narratives in Harold Pinter's screenplays

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Panel 5 – ADAPTATIONS

Friday 3 September (Day 2), Session 1, 8 am

Abstract

As a self-confessed luddite who used a portable typewriter long after the availability of the personal computer (Baker, 2018, p. 38) was British dramatist Harold Pinter's non-linear approach to structuring dramaturgy ahead of its time or rooted in the past? Pinter's influences, like others of his generation were to be found not only in nineteenth century playwrights Eugene Scribes' (1791-1861) well-made play, but paradoxically, in futuristic fractured forms of poetry, the temporal flexibility of literature, the experiments of modernism and in the cinema itself.

This paper examines the complex non-linear structures of Pinter's adapted screenplays: *The Go-Between* (1971) based on J.R. Hartley's 1950's novel; the unproduced but lauded version of Proust's 3,300-page novel, *The Proust Screenplay* (1973), and *Betrayal* (1983), a cinematic reworking of his own seventh full length theatre play described as "a love story told backwards" (Eberts, 2007). All three screenplays possess what post-digital theorist Alan Cameron identifies, four decades later, as "anachronic" narratives (Cameron, 2008). In them Pinter demonstrates that all time co-exists in the present, smashing the hierarchical unities and deconstructing the linearity of 'reality'. These "anti-illusive" (Brecht, 1950) structuring techniques also work to expose artifice, both within character and narrative construction, drawing on both past influences and at the same time anticipating the devices and forms of post-digital storytelling.

Keywords – Harold Pinter, adaptation, narrative forms, non-linear structure

Dr. **Eleanor Yule** (Liverpool John Moores University, UK) is a screenwriter, film director and senior lecturer at Liverpool John Moores University. Since her award-winning feature film, *Blinded* (2004), she has been commissioned to write numerous screenplays including drama documentaries, a feature length adaptation of a novel and a supernatural Rom Com. Her practice-based PhD, completed last year, pioneered a new screenwriting methodology for the writing of Medieval screenplays. Her most recent book publication was the co-authored with Dr David Manderson, *The Glass Half Full – Moving Beyond Scottish Miserablism* (2014, Luath Press), which looked at the impact of social realism in film and literature within Scottish culture.

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