

*Harold Pinter*

## The Examination

WHEN WE BEGAN, I allowed him intervals. He expressed no desire for these, nor any objection. And so I took it upon myself to adjudge their allotment and duration. They were not consistent, but took alternation with what I must call the progress of our talks. With the chalk I kept I marked the proposed times upon the blackboard, before the beginning of a session, for him to examine, and to offer any criticism if he felt so moved. But he made no objection, nor, during our talks, expressed any desire for a break in the proceedings. However, as I suspected they might benefit both of us, I allowed him intervals.

The intervals themselves, when they occurred, at whatever juncture, at whatever crucial point, preceded by whatever deadlock, were passed, naturally, in silence. It was not uncommon for them to be both preceded and followed by an equal silence, but this is not to say that on such occasions their purpose was offended. Frequently his disposition would be such that little could be achieved by insistence, or by persuasion. When Kullus was disposed to silence I invariably acquiesced, and prided myself on those occasions with tactical acumen. But I did not regard these silences as intervals, for they were not, and neither, I think, did Kullus so regard them. For if Kullus fell silent, he did not cease to participate in our examination. Never, at any time, had I reason to doubt his active participation, through word and through silence, between interval and interval, and I recognised what I took to be his devotion as actual and unequivocal, besides, as it seemed to me, obligatory. And so the

nature of our silence within the frame of our examination, and the nature of our silence outside the frame of our examination, were entirely opposed.

Upon my announcement of an interval Kullus would change, or act in such a manner as would suggest change. His behaviour, on these occasions, was not consistent, nor, I am convinced, was it initiated by motives of resentment or enmity, although I suspect Kullus was aware of my watchfulness. Not that I made any pretence to be otherwise. I was obliged to remark, and, if possible, to verify, any ostensible change in his manner, whether it was outside the frame of our examination or not. And it is upon this point that I could be accused of error. For gradually it appeared that these intervals proceeded according to his terms. And where both allotment and duration had rested with me, and had become my imposition, they now proceeded according to his dictates, and became his imposition.

For he journeyed from silence to silence, and I had no course but to follow. Kullus's silence, where he was entitled to silence, was compounded of numerous characteristics, the which I duly noted. But I could not always follow his courses, and where I could not follow, I was no longer his dominant.

KULLUS's predilection for windows was not assumed. At every interval, he retired to the window, and began from its vantage, as from a source. On approaching initially when the break was stated, he paid no attention to the aspect beyond, either in day-time or in night-time. And only in his

automatic course to the window, and his lack of interest in the aspect beyond, did he prove consistent.

Neither was Kullus's predilection for windows a deviation from former times. I had myself suffered under his preoccupation upon previous occasions, when the order of his room had been maintained by particular arrangement of window and curtain, according to day and to night, and seldom to my taste or my comfort. But now he maintained no such order and did not determine their opening or closing. For we were no longer in Kullus's room.

And the window was always open, and the curtains were always open.

Not that Kullus displayed any interest in this constant arrangement, in the intervals, when he might note it. But as I suspect he was aware of my watchfulness, so I suspect he was aware of my arrangement. Dependent on the intensity of his silence I could suspect and conclude, but where his silence was too deep for echo, I could neither suspect nor conclude. And so gradually, where this occurred, I began to take the only course open to me, and terminated the intervals arbitrarily, cutting short the proposed duration, when I could no longer follow him, and was no longer his dominant.

But this was not until later.

**W**HEN the door opened. When Kullus, unattended, entered, and the interim ended. I turned from all light in the window, to pay him due regard and welcome. Whereupon without reserve or hesitation, he moved from the door as from shelter, and stood in the light from the window. So I watched the entrance become vacant, which had been his shelter. And observed the man I had welcomed, he having crossed my border.

Equally, now, I observed the selected properties, each in their place; the blackboard, the window, the stool. And the door had closed and was absent, and of no moment. Imminent upon opening and welcoming it had possessed moment. Now only one area was to witness activity and to suffer procedure, and that only was necessary and

valid. For the door was closed and so closed.

Whereupon I offered Kullus the stool, the which I placed for him. He showed, at this early juncture, no disregard for my directions; if he did not so much obey, he extended his voluntary co-operation. This was sufficient for my requirements. That I detected in him a desire for a summation of our efforts spoke well for the progress of our examination. It was my aim to avoid the appearance of subjection; a common policy, I understand, in like examinations. Yet I was naturally dominant, by virtue of my owning the room; he having entered through the door I now closed. To be confronted with the especial properties of my abode, bearing the seal and arrangement of their tenant, allowed only for recognition on the part of my visitor, and through recognition to acknowledgement and through acknowledgement to appreciation, and through appreciation to subservience. At least, I trusted that such a development would take place, and initially believed it to have done so. It must be said, however, that his manner, from time to time, seemed to border upon indifference, yet I was not deluded by this, or offended. I viewed it as a utility he was compelled, and entitled, to fall back on, and equally as a tribute to my own incisiveness and patience. And if then I viewed it as a tactical measure, it caused me little concern. For it seemed, at this time, that the advantage was mine. Had not Kullus been obliged to attend this examination? And was not his attendance an admission of that obligation? And was not his admission an acknowledgement of my position? And my position therefore a position of dominance? I calculated this to be so, and no early event caused me to re-assess this calculation. Indeed so confident was I in the outcome of our talks, that I decided to allow him intervals.

To institute these periods seemed to me both charitable and politic. For I hoped he might benefit from a period of no demand, so be better equipped for the periods of increased demand which would follow. And, for a time, I had no reason to doubt the wisdom of this arrangement. Also, the con-

text of the room in which Kullus moved during the intervals was familiar and sympathetic to me, and not so to him. For Kullus had known it, and now knew it no longer, and took his place in it as a stranger, and when each break was stated, was compelled to pursue a particular convention and habit in his course, so as not to become hopelessly estranged within its boundaries. But gradually it became apparent that only in his automatic course to the window, and his lack of interest in the aspect beyond, did he prove consistent.

Prior to his arrival, I had omitted to establish one property in the room, which I knew to be familiar to him, and so liable to bring him ease. And never once did he remark the absence of a flame in the grate. I concluded he did not recognise this absence. To balance this, I emphasised the presence of the stool, indeed, placed it for him, but as he never once remarked this presence, I concluded his concern did not embrace it. Not that it was at any time simple to determine by what particular his concern might be engaged. However, in the intervals, when I was able to observe him with possibly a finer detachment, I hoped to determine this.

Until his inconsistency began to cause me alarm, and his silence to confound me.

I CAN ONLY assume Kullus was aware, on these occasions, of the scrutiny of which he was the object, and was persuaded to resist it, and to act against it. He did so by deepening the intensity of his silence, and by taking courses I could by no means follow, so that I remained isolated, and outside his silence, and thus of negligible influence. And so I took the only course open to me, and terminated the intervals arbi-

trarily, cutting short the proposed duration, when I could no longer follow him, and was no longer his dominant.

For where the intervals had been my imposition, they had now become his imposition.

Kullus made no objection to this adjustment, though without doubt he noted my anxiety. For I suffered anxiety with good cause, out of concern for the progress of our talks, which now seemed to me to be affected. I was no longer certain whether Kullus participated in our examination, nor certain whether he still understood that as being the object of our meeting. Equally, the nature of our silences, which formerly were distinct in their opposition: that is; a silence within the frame of our examination, and a silence outside the frame of our examination; seemed to me no longer opposed, indeed were indistinguishable, and were one silence, dictated by Kullus.

And so the time came when Kullus initiated intervals at his own inclination, and pursued his courses at will, and I was able to remark some consistency in his behaviour. For now I followed him in his courses without difficulty, and there was no especial duration for interval or examination, but one duration, in which I participated. My devotion was actual and unequivocal. I extended my voluntary co-operation, and made no objection to procedure. For I desired a summation of our efforts. And when Kullus remarked the absence of a flame in the grate, I was bound to acknowledge this. And when he remarked the presence of the stool, I was equally bound. And when he removed the blackboard, I offered no criticism. And when he closed the curtains I did not object.

For we were now in Kullus's room.

Edward Shils

# Indian Students

*Rather Sadhus than Philistines*

YOUR CURIOSITY, idle or ordered, takes you to an Indian university or college. You walk across the dusty sun-struck grounds, or through damp, dark corridors and past malodorous lavatories; and you see clumps of boys, chirruping like birds, an occasional pair walking hand in hand, sometimes a little knot of girls in pigtails. They look extraordinarily childlike, with all the melting tenderness of children, terribly shy, soft-eyed, gentle, fragile, and very quick to smile. Even those with moustaches are only boys—the moustaches can be the products either of the studied cultivation of a frail plant, or of that unevenly feathery condition of the male visage before daily shaving has become an obligatory matutinal discomfort. Their voices are low and soft, their movements light, elastic, lamb-like. If one of them, darting about in the suddenly ignited outburst of a boyish prank, nearly collides with you, he apologises with timorous embarrassment. If you ask one of them where to find a certain professor or the principal of a particular department, he will go far out of his way to lead you to the right place, and you will be impressed by his shyness and deferentiality. When he has delivered you to your destination, and you thank him, he will say something like “Not to mention” and will turn and dash off as light-footedly as a young deer.

A few days later, you might drop into the Student Union to listen for a while to a debate. Torrents of eloquence, not always intelligible, the thundering smoky rumbles of a volcano, sputtering abuse, excited denunciations of authority, will dominate the atmosphere. Your sweet young Virgil will be there. You can see him alight with excitement, tremulous with pleasure when the name or office of some dignitary is spattered with debater’s mud. If he is

on the platform, you will be surprised by his quacking volubility and the heat of his easily released passions.

AT ALMOST ANY TIME in the past half-decade, you might find, taking up your daily paper, a news report which reads like this one in *The Hindu* of the 14th of May, 1960:

STUDENTS ASSAULT COLLEGE STAFF, PATNA, May 12.—A mob of about four hundred students to-day made a forced entry into the premises of the Patna Commercial College and assaulted the Principal and four professors of the College, causing grievous injury to one of them.

Three of the professors have been admitted to the Patna Medical College.

The trouble started following the expulsion of four student examinees from the examination hall for using unfair means during the annual examination in the College. One of them died later.

On another day, you might read that in Mysore the students have stoned buses and cars, have committed arson, and attacked the police who attempted to stop them and, failing, had to resort to using tear-gas against them. On still other days, you could read of the arrest of fifty-nine students in Patiala in the Punjab, for defiance of an order banning processions; of the demonstration of students at the University of Utkal, when the Home Minister visited Cuttack, to impress on him the urgency of attaching the former princely states of Sarai Kela and Kharsawan to their state of Orissa. In Lucknow, the University had to be closed for a long time because of student disturbances. Banaras Hindu University had to be closed, because of student disorders, by action of the President of the Republic. Allahabad University had to be closed by its Vice-Chancellor on similar grounds; at Visvabharati University, an eminent teacher,