CRUELTY AS A DRAMATIC METHOD

A STUDY OF THE PLAYS OF HAROLD PINTER

by

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ABSTRACT

The basic aim of the thesis was to show how the British playwright, Harold Pinter, has embodied many of the theories of the French poet and visionary, Antonin Artaud, in creating a modern Theater of Cruelty. It was decided that a direct influence of Artaud on Pinter would be difficult to trace but it would be worthwhile to show similarities in concept and methods between the two writers. Artaud influenced many of the avant-garde dramatists, including Beckett, and Pinter has acknowledged a debt to Beckett.

The principal method used by Pinter to manifest the concept of cruelty is victimization. Cruelty is found in the process of victimization whereby one character confronts another in a battle for control, dominance and survival. This type of encounter produces a victim and victimizers. All rationalizations, stratagems or defense mechanisms are removed in this encounter and the victim is left naked and defenceless. Cruelty is not only the process of victimization but is also the result of that victimization. Cruelty is, therefore, both a means and an end. Cruelty is also equated with the metaphysical, since man is stripped of his rationalizations, is confronted with all the mystery and perversioness of his own being.

The aim, then, was to show how Pinter embodied the philosophical idea of cruelty in a practical way. No attempt was made to discuss the effect of the Theater of Cruelty on the spectator. The principal works studied were The Caretaker, The Birthday Party, The Homecoming, The Dumb Waiter, A Slight Ache, Tea Party, Landscape. Various types of victimization, for example, sexual victimization in The Homecoming, social victimization in
The Dumb Waiter were discussed.

The results of the investigation showed that there is a definite similarity between Artaud and Pinter in aims and methods. The investigation tended to confirm the premise that Pinter belongs with the modern European theatre movement more than he does with his English contemporaries. A comparison was made with Büchner's Woyzeck, a nineteenth century forerunner of the Theater of Cruelty and one of the earliest modern European dramas, and a strong parallel in method between Büchner and Pinter was discovered. Further investigation of Pinter's relationship to the avant-garde theatre movement seems to be warranted in light of the conclusions reached.
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CHAPTER I

THE CONCEPT OF CRUELTY

Antonin Artaud concluded the preface to his 1938 manifesto on the Theater of Cruelty, *The Theater and Its Double*, with the following paragraph:

... when we speak the word "life," it must be understood we are not referring to life as we know it from its surface of fact, but to that fragile, fluctuating centre which forms never reach. And if there is still one hellish, truly accursed thing in our time, it is our artistic dallying with forms, instead of being like victims burnt at the stake, signaling through the flames. 1

Harold Pinter made the following comment in a programme note for the Royal Court production of *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Room* in London in March, 1960:

The desire for verification is understandable but cannot always be satisfied. There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. The thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false. The assumption that to verify what has happened and what is happening presents few problems I take to be inaccurate. A character on the stage who present no convincing argument or information as to his past experience, his present behaviour or his aspirations, nor give a comprehensive analysis of his motives, is as legitimate and as worthy of attention as one who alarmingly, can do all these things. The more acute the experience the less articulate its expression. 2

Both Pinter and Artaud seek to express the reality behind all attempts to rationalize or conceptualize human behaviour. Beneath the rational framework of civilization lies a reality, a core of human existence, which cannot be expressed solely through language or the conventional dramatic plot with its pattern of action, climax, denouement. Artaud conceived the Theater of Cruelty to reflect this hidden and unknown reality. Pinter, I believe, has manifested a modern version of Artaud's concept of cruelty, though he has acknowledged no direct influence from the French poet and visionary. He has acknowledged a debt to Beckett, however, and Beckett was influenced by the theories of Artaud. Pinter and Artaud have similar ideas as to the function of the theater and their views on the nature of man and the world he inhabits are also akin, as the above quotations indicate.
Artaud attacks the restrictive nature of such forms as language, which are like bandages covering the raw sore of reality. Artaud thought the Theater of Cruelty should expose the wound:

... the domain of the theater is not psychological but plastic and physical. And it is not a question of whether the physical language of theater is capable of achieving the same psychological resolutions as the language of words, whether it is able to express feelings and passions as well as words, but whether there are not attitudes in the realm of thought and intelligence that words are incapable of grasping and that gestures and everything partaking of a spatial language attain with more precision than they. (p. 71)

Here is Harold Pinter's statement on the articulateness of silence:

There are two silences. One when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed. This speech is speaking of a language locked beneath it. That is its continual reference. The speech we hear is an indication of that which we don't hear. It is a necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, anguished or mocking smoke screen which keeps the other in its place. When true silence falls we are still left with echo but are nearer nakedness. One way of looking at speech is to say that it is a constant stratagem to cover nakedness. 

Pinter's concept of nakedness is, I think, very close to one aspect of what Artaud meant by cruelty [2] in the Pinter canon, a man is most naked when he is most vulnerable and this vulnerability comes at the point where he has no more stratagems such as language with which to cover himself. Cruelty, as envisioned by Artaud, and manifested by Pinter, is the process by which man is rendered naked and vulnerable, and is also the result of that process - the state of nakedness itself. The stratagems are removed through inevitable confrontations with other human beings in the struggle to acquire the basic necessities of life such as food, shelter and clothing, and to satisfy basic emotional demands for sex, love, friendship; in the necessity to endure pain, loneliness, fear, and, ultimately, death; in the struggle to acquire such necessities and satisfy such demands. The weaker inevitably perish in this struggle, while the strong survive.
The confrontations involve a certain degree of violence but this violence is a consequence of the confrontations and not the cause. In the same way, violence is not the cause of cruelty, as envisioned by Artaud, nor is it the cruelty itself, but may occur as a result of the existence of cruelty. This is an important distinction which should be kept in mind in all discussion of the term.

Cruelty is basically an absurdist and existential viewpoint. A man is facing the cruelty of existence when he finds himself stripped of all pretence, helpless, unable to defend himself; finds himself clinging to life when he knows it is absurd and meaningless; when he finds, like Hamm, in Beckett's *Endgame*, blind and helpless, that there are no more bicycle wheels or painkiller:

GLOV There's no more pain-killer.
(Pause)

HAMM (Appalled) Good . . . ! (Pause) No more pain-killer.

GLOV No more pain-killer. You'll never get anymore pain-killer.
(Pause)

HAMM But the little round box. It was full!

GLOV Yes. But now it's empty.
(Pause) GLOV starts to move about the room. He is looking for a place to put down the alarm clock.

HAMM (soft) What'll I do? (Pause. In a scream) What'll I do? . . . 5

The action by which this exposure is made is an example of cruelty manifesting itself into being. The process of victimization is the method by which man is made aware of his true self and the true nature of the world.

In Pinter, the principal method by which the state of cruelty is manifested is victimization. Characters like Davies in *The Caretaker* and Stanley Webber in *The Birthday Party* are truly akin to Artaud's "victims burnt at the stake signaling through the flames."
There is no cruelty without consciousness and without the application of consciousness. It is consciousness that gives to the exercise of every act of life its blood-red color, its cruel nuance, since it is understood that life is always someone's death. (p. 102)

The victimization in Pinter's plays is closely linked to the struggle for dominance, control and survival. The victimization most often takes the form of manipulation of one character by another or by a group of characters. The victimization may have a sexual basis, as in The Homecoming, where Ruth dominates a trio of males, or in A Slight Ache, where a woman, Flora, brings about the impotence of her aging husband through a desire to keep him young and vital. Victimization may be social, as in The Dumb Waiter, where the organization victimizes its own members, or in The Birthday Party, where an intended victim becomes an executioner, both of himself and the organization, when the attempted victimization releases instinctual forces within him.

I wish to emphasize that it is the process of victimization and the end result of that victimization that constitutes cruelty, as Pinter manifests it, and as Artaud envisioned it. Cruelty is the inevitable movement of life itself, a movement which occurs without any rational, pre-conceived plan. A conventional plot cannot reflect this movement because it employs a beginning, middle and an end. Life moves inevitably but irrationally, according to necessity. The process of victimization involves pressure, which is also cruel. Victimization is the closest dramatic approximation to this inevitable pressure of existence, which strips away layers of pretence and exposes whatever is fearful and hidden. It is no wonder that Artaud likened the power of the Theater of Cruelty to that of the plague: If the essential theater is like the plague, it is not because it is contagious, but because like the plague it is the revelation, the bringing forth, the exteriorization of a depth of latent cruelty by means of which all the perverse possibilities of the mind, whether of an individual or a people, are localized. Like the plague the theater
is a time of evil, the triumph of dark powers that are nourished by a power even more profound until extinction. (p. 30)

This "latent cruelty" is equated with the metaphysical, according to Artaud, because it represents everything that is unknown, perverse, mysterious, fearful, both within man and surrounding him. The process of victimization in Pinter's plays uncovers this metaphysical reality. The Matchseller in A Slight Ache is a giant symbol of this metaphysical awareness. He is mysterious, unmoving, an object of fear, yet possessing attractiveness.

He corresponds to Artaud's "fabricated Being," an image that is savage, elemental, violent, disquieting:

... a fabricated Being, made of wood and cloth, entirely invented, corresponding to nothing, yet disquieting by nature, capable of re-introducing on the stage a little breath of that great metaphysical fear which is at the root of all ancient theatre. (p. 44)

The analogy of the plague represents force and a scourge and this is another reason why Artaud used the analogy for his Theater of Cruelty. The theater should reproduce the force of every act instead of merely imitating the act itself. It is this force which Artaud said should result in purification or enlightenment on the part of the spectator:

Our long habit of seeking diversion has made us forget the idea of a serious theater, which, overturning all our preconceptions, inspires us with the fiery magnetism of its images and acts upon us like a spiritual therapists whose touch can never be forgotten.

Everything that acts is a cruelty. It is upon this idea of extreme action, pushed beyond all limits, that the theater must be rebuilt. (pp 84-85)

It must be emphasized here that the scope of this thesis does not include the result or effect of the Theater of Cruelty on the spectator. My aim is to describe a method by which Harold Pinter has created a modern Theater of Cruelty which may or may not produce the effect Artaud envisioned. Paul Arnold argues that the whole philosophical basis of Artaud's Theater of Cruelty, namely, that the release of evil in order to extinguish it can bring about a mystic purge, is in error. I think Arnold is in error. It is the release, not the purge, which is important. Whether Artaud's concept of spiritual
purgation works or not is not the issue in this thesis. It is as pointless as debating whether or not Brecht's theory of alienation works. We can still describe the kind of plays Brecht wrote and the theory he formulated. In the same way, we can discuss Pinter and his methods and show similarities in technique and intent with Artaud without stating that Pinter faithfully followed the Artaudian concept of cruelty designed to purge the spectator of his own most violent impulses.

I believe Artaud's concept of cruelty reflects a broad philosophical outlook on life which goes beyond the mere effect of the Theater of Cruelty on the spectator. He thought the theater of his time was bourgeois and artificial and did not accurately reflect man or his world. Robert Corrigan, editor of the recent anthology, The Modern Theatre, said that the plays of modern playwrights "express the contemporary theatre's tremendous concern to find a metaphor for universal modern man as he lives on the brink of disaster." 7 Artaud was stating the same thing back in the 1930's:

We are living through a period probably unique in the history of the world, when the world, passed through a sieve, sees its old values crumble. Our calcined life is dissolving at its base, and on the moral or social level this is expressed by a monstrous unleashing of appetites, a liberation of the basest instincts, a crackling of burnt lives prematurely exposed to the flame. (pp 115-116)

The Theater of Cruelty, then, reflects the condition of modern man as he sees his old and artificial values crumbling. But only in this process of disintegration can truth emerge and if this truth is evil, it is, nevertheless, reality, Artaud believed.

Harold Pinter's metaphor for the condition of man in the modern world is the room or enclosed space in which the confrontations and the battles for control, dominance and survival take place. In this choice of metaphor, Pinter comes very close, I think, to the type of image Artaud would have employed had he taken his Theater of Cruelty into a practical realm beyond the philosophical basis. In a letter to a friend, dated November 16, 1932, Artaud suggested the concept of the closed world:
There is in life's flame, life's appetite, life's irrational impulse, a kind of initial perversity: the desire characteristic of Eros is cruelty since it feeds upon contingencies; death is a cruelty, resurrection is cruelty, transfiguration is cruelty, since nowhere in a circular and closed world is there room for true death, since ascension is a rending, since closed space is fed with lives, and each stronger life tramples down the others, consuming them in a massacre which is a transfiguration and a bliss. In the manifested world, metaphysically speaking, evil is the permanent law, and what is good is an effort and already one more cruelty added to the other. (p. 103)

Only one production of Artaud's Theater of Cruelty took place and that was the Cenci, based on texts by Shelley and Stendhal, which Artaud directed in 1935. The production was a commercial failure. A planned production of Büchner's Woyzeck never came off. It is interesting to note Artaud's choice of this play for the Theater of Cruelty, because Woyzeck, with its themes of madness, isolation, violence and death, is often considered the first truly modern drama and prefigures the Theater of the Absurd and Brecht. The play was written in the 1830's but was not performed until 1913, in Munich.

Artaud did not live to see many of his theories put into practice. He had been propounding his theories as early as 1925 and in 1927 he helped found the Alfred Jarry Theater. By 1937, he was suffering fits of insanity brought on by meningitis, suffered when he was a child. He contracted cancer in 1946 and died in 1948. While many of Artaud's theories were the product of an unbalanced mind and are couched in frenzied and imprecise language, Artaud was, in many respects, the one who paved the way for much that is vital in the theater today. His theory of a total spectacle, with the audience seated on swivel chairs watching scenes of violence taking place on catwalks above the auditorium, was the product of an unstable mind. But the basic idea of cruelty embodied in The Theater and Its Double is a valid one and has found expression not only in the work of Harold Pinter but in the plays of Jean Genet, Ionesco, Sartre, Beckett, John Arden, Edward Albee and Peter Shaffer. Cruelty for Ionesco, for example, is a world full of fear and shadows:
I have no images of the world aside from those expressing evanescence and hardness, vanity and anger, nothingness or hideous, useless hatred. Existence has continued to appear to me in this light. Everything has tended to confirm that I had seen, what I had understood in my childhood: vain and sordid fury, sudden shrieks stifled by silence, shadows swallowed forever in the night. What else have I to say? 8

Jack Guicharnaud, in Modern French Theater, sees Artaud as having been an influence on Adamov, Jean Genet, Camus, Pichette, Vauthier and Ionesco. He makes an interesting comment on cruelty as a dramatic method:

Almost all the great playwrights of today try to prevent the spectator from drowning in a peaceful definition of man. Few of course go as far as Artaud in rejecting Western thought as a whole, but all question the basic values of our world, the conceptions of Good and Evil, the satisfactions of rationalism. Although except for certain poets, they do not invoke the return to a totally magical and mystical vision of the world, they do use violence, cruelty, derangement, and crime as methods for awakening in the spectator a consciousness of his possibilities and for trying to bring out, beyond the qualifications of civilizations, what is truly man -- man being situated at a level that would traditionally be called inhuman. 9

Guicharnaud is talking about an effect on the spectator, but, obviously, the theatre which re- defines man for the spectator cannot present an image of man being re-defined. In Pinter, this image results from the process of victimization. This stripping away of the false masks of civilization, for example, the concept of man as a strictly limited creature, operating within a specific and rational framework, constitutes cruelty. Victimization is a dramatic manifestation of the philosophical idea of cruelty. Pinter appears to be carrying on the Theater of Cruelty, not specifically as Artaud envisioned it, but consciously or unconsciously making use of the concepts Artaud formulated, adapting them or extending them for his own purposes. John Arden seems to embody some of the principles of the Theater of Cruelty in such plays as Sergeant Musgrave's Dance and Ars Longa Vita Brevis, but Arden's principal aim is a re-definition of modern man through the use of historical devices and the creation of historical atmosphere. Pinter's plays have no historical basis, except that the past, as it affects the lives of the characters, is one of the forms that restrict and bind them and keep them from perceiving that
inner reality, metaphysical awareness or consciousness of self that is cruelty totally manifested. Pinter's plays have a social context but he is far from being a social realist. Society, like the past, is another form which tries to restrict the individual's capacity for growth or decay. This idea is most forcibly expressed in The Birthday Party, where representatives of the system, Goldberg and McCann, in their attempts to make Stanley Webber a useful member of the organization, release instinctual forces which give Stanley a brief, but violent, identity, and consume him.

The cruelty in Pinter always involves a struggle for control, dominance and survival, and ultimately, the establishment of identity. In this struggle, one person is victim and the others are victimizers. If there is one room and three people to share it, one or more persons are ejected. If there are two men and one woman, the men must either share the woman or fight for possession; if there are two men and one cheese roll, one man eats while the other goes hungry. Pinter, like Artaud, seeks to return the theater to its origins to make it express what is most elemental and basic in man.

One of Pinter's strongest characteristics is his use of language, not to convey a realistic impression of life, but rather to show the superficial reality that is created by words. Language in the plays is a defense mechanism the characters employ to hide their vulnerability. Language is also employed to give force and direction to the plastic and visual elements in the plays, and, paradoxically, it is these elements which help to expose the superficial reality the language represents. Pinter's language provides verbal reinforcement for the visual images which he is trying to project. Not words, but actions are remembered in thinking of Pinter's plays — Stanley in The Birthday Party, blindfolded and groping, trying to rape Lulu who is spreadeagled on the table; Edward crushing the wasp in A Slight Ache;
Mick terrorizing Davies with a vacuum cleaner in The Caretaker. One of the objectives of Artaud's Theater of Cruelty was the break with "actuality." Only in this way could the theater return to its religious and metaphysical beginnings:

One therefore understands that the theater, to the very degree that it remains confined within its own language and in correlation with it, must break with actuality. Its object is not to resolve social or psychological conflicts, to serve as battlefield for moral passions, but to express objectively certain secret truths, to bring into the light of day by means of active gestures certain aspects of truth that have been buried under forms in their encounters with Becoming. To do that, to link the theater to the expressive possibilities of forms, to everything in the domain of gestures, noises, colors, movements, etc., is to restore it to its original direction, to reintroduce it in its religious and metaphysical aspect, is to reconcile it with the universe. (p. 70)

The metaphysical is the "double" referred to in Artaud's title of his manifesto, The Theater and Its Double:

Where alchemy, through its symbols, is the spiritual Double of an operation which functions only on the level of real matter, the theater must also be considered as the Double, not of this direct everyday reality of which it is gradually being reduced to a mere inert replica — as empty as it is sugar coated — but of another archetypal and dangerous reality, a reality of which the Principles, like dolphins, since they have shown their heads, hurry to dive back into the obscurity of the deep. (p. 48)

Pinter is unique among modern English dramatists in possessing this keen metaphysical sense. The Matchseller, Goldberg and McCann, the dumb waiter, the Blacks, are all "doubles." They are agencies by which this unseen and dangerous reality manifests itself, and this reality is a key component of the Theater of Cruelty.

As examples of cruelty manifested in the plays, I cite the anguish of Davies, the wretched old derelict, expelled from the room at the conclusion of The Caretaker, the mute and lifeless Stanley Webber being led away to Monty by Goldberg and McCann at the conclusion of The Birthday Party, and Edward's slow realization of the meaning of the Matchseller, climaxing A Slight Ache.
and perhaps Pinter's finest visual image of the Theater of Cruelty, the two gunmen facing each other as victim and executioner at the climax of The Dumb Waiter. This thesis will attempt to show how cruelty is manifested through the process of victimization, and will conclude with a discussion and summary of the components of Pinter's Theater of Cruelty, with emphasis on its beginnings in his first play, The Room and its ultimate refinement in his latest play, Landscape. A comparison will be made with Büchner's Woyzeck, a nineteenth century forerunner of the Theater of Cruelty.
CHAPTER II

THE VICTIM AS HERO

Cruelty is above all lucid, a kind of rigid control and submission to necessity. There is no cruelty without consciousness and without the application of consciousness. It is consciousness that gives to the exercise of every act of life its blood-red color, its cruel nuance, since it is understood that life is always someone's death. (p. 102)

Antonin Artaud sees the basic cruelty of life in the deterministic struggle of human beings for dominance, control and survival. The necessity of continual interaction produces victimization, since the weaker inevitably perish. Harold Pinter's three-character drama, The Caretaker (1960), is an effective expression of this concept of cruelty envisioned by Artaud in The Theater and Its Double. Davies, a filthy, wretched old derelict, appears to be the disrupting force in the lives of two brothers, Mick and Aston, when he is brought home as a guest by one of them. But Davies is the intended victim of the other two from the beginning, as I hope to show.

They must destroy him to assure their own survival. Davies appears to be the villain because he is irascible and abusive and tries to play one brother off against the other to assure himself of a permanent place in the room. But the two brothers play a game with Davies, setting the old man up for sadistic attack and brainwashing. They destroy his last vestige of respectability before ejecting him from the premises. Davies is a victim who takes on the stature of hero because sympathy is gradually aroused for the old wretch. The hero, by definition, is the central male character in the play with whom the audience is supposed to sympathize. He is the protagonist, as opposed to the villain. The audience slowly becomes aware that it is the two brothers who are successfully manipulating the tramp and not the tramp who is manipulating them.
Davies accepts hospitality from Aston, a man he has never seen before, because he is destitute, cold, hungry, in poor health. The room will assure him of survival, at least temporarily. The motives of the two manipulators are more complex. Aston, the elder brother, who brings the tramp home, has had an operation to his brain, either a frontal lobotomy or shock treatment. He was once violent but is now subdued. Mick, the younger brother, is aggressive and sadistic. It is possible that Aston, looking for the person or persons who hurt him, sees a scapegoat in Davies. He brings the tramp home for the night, hoping Mick will abuse him. Aston sets Davies up for victimization by Mick, for example, assigning to Davies the bed that Mick sleeps in during his periodic visits, then letting Mick discover the tramp has been sleeping in it. Aston is subdued so that he cannot vent his revenge on whoever has hurt him, but Mick is violent. Aston, therefore, may be using Mick as his instrument of revenge.

The degree of Mick's awareness of what Aston is doing is left in doubt. But Mick seems to enjoy tormenting the old man, and Aston definitely sets up situations whereby Mick can practice his sadism. The tramp has little awareness of what the brothers are doing. His need is to survive by acquiring the basic necessities of life -- food, shelter, clothing, companionship. He has to trust someone in order to acquire these things, or he must manipulate someone to get them. Davies at no time poses any real threat to the security of the brothers. They maintain their solidarity.

Davies is a victim who takes on the stature of a hero through the process of victimization. The subtle shift in emphasis and in sympathy accounts for the extraordinary power of the play. The audience will tolerate Davies as an irascible old man, complaining about his bed and the shoes that do not fit,
and attempting to manipulate the two brothers for his own benefit; however, it will not tolerate two young men tormenting an old man in the manner in which Mick and Aston torment Davies. There is a change in perspective on the part of the audience, and it is through the conscious victimization of the old tramp that this change is brought about. The victimization assures survival for Mick and Aston. This is the basic kind of situation that Artaud envisioned as one of the key components of his Theater of Cruelty: "... it is understood that life is always someone's death." (p. 102)

The tramp is invited to the house by Aston; he is not an intruder. This is important for a proper understanding of the play. However, as soon as Davies becomes established he tries to consolidate his position in the household by attempting to play one brother off against the other. Davies, of course, is the intended victim of the other two, but the extent and quality of his victimization only become apparent when he fails in his efforts to crack their family solidarity. Davies' inability to work, his terrible insecurity and fear, his general wretchedness and homelessness, his lack of material possessions, the filthy condition of his body and clothes, the lack of any positive identity (he calls himself Bernard Jenkins but says his real name is Mac Davies) are all factors used as the basis for ridicule, contempt and scorn by the brothers. Somehow, Davies emerges as a positive entity for the audience, someone they can identify with. Through the victimization of Davies, we get a picture of man, naked, defenceless, vulnerable.

It is the necessity of Davies to have food, shelter, a bed to sleep in, the companionship of other humans, that leads him to accept Aston's invitation. This is self preservation, hence consciousness on the part of Davies. But ironically, he perishes as a distinct entity in trying to acquire these
necessities. Aston rescues the tramp from an encounter with the proprietor of a cafe. Aston needs companionship, since his brother, Mick, only visits occasionally, but why bring home a dirty old derelict for company? Aston was hurt by some men in a cafe, which resulted in his confinement in the mental hospital. Aston rescues Davies out of sympathetic identification, but also, paradoxically, because he thinks Davies might be one of those who hurt him.

The struggle in Aston's house for control, dominance, and survival also involves a search for identity. Davies hopes to get to Sidcup to find the man who has his identity papers. Davies hopes Aston will give him a good pair of shoes that will make his journey possible. Thus Davies, who goes by the name of Bernard Jenkins but is really Mac Davies, struggles to get to Sidcup but meets Aston and his brother Mick on the way, and a secondary quest for identity develops. The three characters define themselves sharply in the tragic situation which develops as a result of their encounter. Ironically, Pinter reveals the dignity of Davies by showing the removal of the tramp's last shred of respectability and hope of survival. The spectator is gradually made aware that Davies is not just a dirty, wretched old tramp, but a human being, who, in the final struggle to assert his own worth, ends up alone and friendless.¹

(Pinter's The caretaker is a brilliant dramatization of the essential truth, that in the working out of the struggle for existence, man's basic humanity is revealed and his worth evaluated.) This is the core of the Artaudian concept of cruelty:

... creation and life itself are defined only by a kind of rigor, hence a fundamental cruelty, which leads things to their ineluctable end at whatever cost. (p. 103)

At the point where the realization is made that Davies is the victim, the mood of the play changes from comic to tragic intensity. Davies' harassment of his hosts produces a comic effect because the efforts of the tramp to
manipulate the brothers are shown to be futile and petty, and we are inclined to look down on him. But the victimization of the tramp produces feelings of pity, and an atmosphere of terror is created because the treatment is brutal and sadistic. Pinter wondered why people laughed at the London production of The Caretaker, because the play is not intended to be comic, as he explained in an interview with Leonard Russell of The Sunday Times:

I did not intend it to be merely a laughable farce. If there hadn't been other issues at stake the play would not have been written .... From this kind of easy jollification I must, of course, dissociate myself .... As far as I'm concerned, The Caretaker is funny, up to a point. Beyond that point it ceases to be funny, and it was because of that point that I wrote it. 2

Pinter had more to say about the relation of humor to the struggle for existence, in an interview with Lawrence Densky in Paris Review, 1966:

INTERVIEWER

Do you consciously make crisis situations humorous? Often an audience at your plays finds its laughter turning against itself as it realizes what the situation in the play actually is.

PINTER

Yes, that's very true, yes. I'm rarely consciously writing humor, but sometimes I find myself laughing at some particular point which has suddenly struck me as being funny. I agree that more often than not the speech only seems to be funny -- the man in question is actually fighting a battle for his life. 3

In The Caretaker, Davies fights for his life, meaning his right to exist as an independent entity. Ironically, the more he fights, the more he loses, because his need for self preservation inevitably poses a threat to the existence of others. He in turn is manipulated, but, ironically and tragically, he does not seem to be aware of what is happening. At the conclusion of the play he is still pleading to be allowed to stay in the room, still trying to play one brother off against the other. In The Caretaker, then, we have a hero who is also a victim, not only of other individuals but of his own individual need to survive. Davies is consciously manipulated (cruelty is
consciousness, Artaud said) and ultimately destroyed by the other two characters in the play. Davies consciously tries to manipulate Nick and Aston and is defeated. Through this complex inter-relationship of three men, Pinter defines the universal human struggle and builds up a generalized image of the condition of man in the modern world. Davies becomes an archetypal figure, symbolic of life's continual fluctuation between hope and despair. We saw in the brief quote from Beckett's _Endgame_ that the gap between expectation and reality is one of the primary areas of experience dealt with by modern playwrights. Pinter's tramp will have no more expectations and his final reality is loneliness, despair and death.

Pinter creates, in _The Caretaker_, the lucidity which Artaud says is the essence of cruelty. (p. 102). We see through Davies' struggle the rigorous necessity that drives men inevitably to destruction. It is the ultimate cruelty of life that man must exist only that he may die. Aston and Nick work quietly and efficiently to finish off what is left of Davies, as Richard Schechner points out in _Tulane Drama Review_:

> The over-all game is simple. Invite Davies in, make him feel welcome, offer him a job. When Davies' relationship with one brother breaks down, make him feel he has an ally in the other. But all the time, underneath this, the two brothers are working together to cut away from Davies the very expectations they plant in him. Davies does not even realize he is trapped by the brothers. They are rarely together; they seem so different. But they are a team.

I will now try to trace the pattern of victimization through the play to its conclusion.

As a guest in Aston's house, Davies, particularly as he is old and wretched, would expect to be treated with some consideration. Similarly, Davies, as a guest, should show some consideration for his hosts, accepting the hospitality gratefully. Neither of these expectations is fulfilled. Pinter, in _The Caretaker_, seems to be stressing the Artaudian idea of perversity. Aston treats his guest indifferently, sometimes cruelly, and Davies proves to be irascible
and abusive. This behaviour of the characters is caused by their confinement in a small space and their continued inter-action. Davies sets about consolidating his position as soon as he gets a roof over his head and a bed to sleep in. He will adopt any defensive measures necessary to avoid being ejected into the outside world, which he thinks is hostile.

Mick is the more aggressive of the brothers, thinks Davies stinks and wants the old man out. Aston is not as benevolent as he seems, and appears to be somewhat indifferent to Davies from the beginning. Initially, he is more curious about the tramp than concerned over the old man's welfare. In the opening scene, Aston lets Davies do most of the talking. It is significant that Mick is alone on the stage when the play opens. When he hears Aston and Davies coming, he goes out. Mick apparently knows that Aston has brought home a visitor and I think Aston knows Mick is in the house when he brings the tramp home. Aston and Davies are alone on the stage until near the end of Act One, when Aston suddenly leaves. Then Mick sneaks back into the room and catches Davies by surprise, demanding, "What's the game?", twisting Davies' arm up behind his back. Through all the exchange in Act One, from Davies' first entry into the house, through his being assigned the bed and sleeping through the night, Aston never once mentions to Davies that he has a brother, let alone an aggressive one like Mick. Even more significant is the fact that the bed Aston assigns to Davies belongs to Mick. It seems probable, from this evidence, that Mick is in the house, has come for one of his periodic visits and that he knows Aston has brought home the muddy old derelict (he could have been watching for Aston to come home). It seems likely that Aston deliberately gives Davies Mick's bed to antagonize his brother, hoping Mick will attack Davies. Possibly Aston is trying to ingratiate himself with his brother and plans to use Davies as the scapegoat. He may be trying to make Mick jealous by pretending to befriend Davies. This would indicate that Davies is the
intended victim from the beginning. Davies' irascibility and abusiveness only serve to strengthen the desire of the brothers to manipulate the old man. Davies appears to be the middleman who disrupts relations between Nick and his brother, but I say appears because Davies is not initially responsible. Davies is innocent and knows nothing of the household or its affairs. Aston is responsible for Davies' presence in the house, therefore Aston must be blamed if any disruption occurs.

When the play opens, it is a winter night. Aston enters first, apparently calm and collected. Davies comes in, however, "shambling, breathing heavily." Davies is wearing a worn brown overcoat, shapeless trousers, waistcoat, sandals. Davies is obviously in poor health and destitute. His need for food, shelter, clothing and companionship, is obvious. When Aston offers him a seat, the tramp is grateful.

DAVIES. Sit down? Huh . . . I haven't had a good sit down . . . I haven't had a proper sit down . . . well, I couldn't tell you . . .

ASTON (placing the chair). Here you are.

DAVIES. Ten minutes off for tea-break in the middle of the night in that place and I couldn't find a seat, not one. All them Greeks had it, Poles, Greeks, Blacks, the lot of them, all them aliens had it. And they had me working there . . . they had me working . . .

ASTON sits on the bed, takes out a tobacco tin and papers and begins to roll himself a cigarette. DAVIES watches him.

All them Blacks had it, Blacks, Greeks, Poles, the lot of them, that's what, doing me out of a seat, treating me like dirt. When he comes at me tonight I told him.

Pause.

ASTON. Take a seat. (p. 8)

Little is revealed about Aston in this exchange except that he is a man of few words, but Davies shows the fear which is one of his chief characteristics and the one the brothers ultimately take advantage of to work their victimization of the old man. All the Blacks, Greeks, Poles, etc., are "aliens" to Davies,
unknown quantities that pose a threat to his existence, and he therefore fears
them. They are a majority against Davies, who is only one. Davies' irrational fear is one of the principal reasons why he turns down the job
of caretaker. As caretaker, he would have to open the door and perhaps let
in the aliens. He would also have to wear a uniform, which is a badge of
recognition, and also represents conformity. Davies would be at the mercy of
Aston and Mick, as his employers. In other words, Davies is exposed to all the
hazards of the occupations he chooses. Man, in order to exist by earning his
keep through a legitimate occupation, must make himself vulnerable. Ironi-
cally, Davies has made himself vulnerable the moment he steps into Aston's
house. Davies does not recognize his enemies when he meets them. He fails
to recognize that Mick and Aston are more alien than the Blacks.

Davies reveals his basically defensive nature during the "Loosening up"
routine (p. 8). He wants to be ready to counter any threat of aggressiveness
against him. Aston defines himself by association with the tobacco can, the
electric plug and the toaster which he is constantly repairing, also the shed
he is building behind the house. Each of the characters possesses objects
which identify him or occupies an area that is uniquely his own. It is when
one character intrudes into the area of another or tries to possess or destroy
an object belonging to someone else, that conflict is aroused. When Aston
gives Davies Mick's bed, the tramp becomes a trespasser on Mick's territory.
Davies has the general run of the house, since he is Aston's guest, but so close
is the confinement that Davies, no matter what he does, cannot help infringing
on another's territory. Aston deliberately leads him to infringe on Mick.
Davies is a miserable old wretch, but he too has his likes and dislikes and
is entitled to them. He is also entitled to consideration.

DAVIES... I've eaten my dinner off the best of plates. But I'm not
young anymore. I remember the days when I was as handy as any of them.
They didn't take any liberties with me. But I haven't been so well
lately. I've had a few attacks. (p. 9)
Davies is irascible and abusive but his demands throughout the play are, for the most part, sensible and reasonable. When he states that he has had a few attacks, he should be believed, for it is reasonable to expect poor health in an old man, particularly one in Davies' wretched condition. Davies, also, has not lost his sense of discrimination, and points out to Aston exactly what he considered his job in the cafe to be:

DAVIES. . . . It's not my job to take out the bucket! They got a boy there for taking out the bucket. I wasn't engaged to take out buckets. My job's cleaning the floor, clearing up the tables, doing a bit of washing up, nothing to do with taking out buckets. (p. 9)

It is Davies' essential humanity that Pinter is describing in The Care-taker. Davies is Pinter's symbol of the universal human need for love, companionship, food, shelter and clothing; at the same time, he is the symbol for the ultimate result of man's journey through life—cold, pain, loneliness, despair, death. The portrait of Davies constitutes one of those "burning images" that Artaud conceived should be the basis of the Theater of Cruelty.

Davies' task in the play is to try and establish his identity, which is equivalent to survival, in a sense. He wants a pair of shoes from Aston so he can get down to Sidcup and get his identity papers from a man he left them with years ago. However, consciously, or unconsciously, he knows he will never get to Sidcup. Things will never be exactly right to enable him to make the journey. Davies admires the shoes Aston gives him, but says they do not fit. And the weather will have to be right before he can venture out. When and if he ever gets to Sidcup, the man he left the papers with will probably be dead or gone. Sidcup is actually a mythical destination for Davies. The thing which will define him most exactly is a secure position in the room, which contains almost everything he needs. It gives him warmth, shelter, and food; and, he thinks, companionship. The shoes, however, actually represent a threat to this security, since if he accepts
them, Davies will have to go out in the cold. This is why he tells Aston the shoes do not fit. With warmth, shelter and food provided, why should Davies want to venture out? The Sidcup destination and the identity papers constitute a technique Davies has formulated for enlisting sympathy from other people and manipulating them. The Sidcup stratagem breaks down at the end, with Davies pleading to be allowed to stay in the room. The audience sees through the stratagem, but because he has been cruelly victimized, tremendous pity and sympathy is aroused for the tramp in the final moments.

The Sidcup papers represent an imaginary identity; Davies' real identity is expressed by what he says and does and by what he carries with him, his ragged clothes, for example. His name may be Bernard Jenkins or Mac Davies but he is, quite simply and naturally, a tramp. An object which tends to identify Davies is his bag or valise which he has left in the cafe.

DAVIES... I left all my belongings in that place, in the back room there. All of them, the lot there was, you see, in this bag. Every lousy bit of all my bleeding belongings I left down there now... . .

ASTON. I'll pop down sometime and pick them up for you. (p. 10)

The bag is Davies' immediate identification but it becomes one of the chief objects used by Aston and Mick to torment the old man. The other principal object used to terrorize and victimize the tramp is an ordinary vacuum cleaner.

In Act One, Pinter sets the stage for the victimization of Davies. The first real indication that Davies is being victimized comes with the assigning of his bed for the night. Not only is this bed the property of Mick, but, it stands beneath a draughty window. Davies cannot stand draughts:

DAVIES. Gets very draughty.

ASTON. Ah.

DAVIES. I'm very sensitive to it.
ASTON. Are you?

DAVIES. Always have been. (p. 11)

The tramp is trying to wangle an invitation to sleep in Aston's bed, which is well out of any draught. He does not know at this point that there is a second bed which Aston keeps for Mick during his occasional visits. This second bed, with the draughty window above it, is offered to Davies. Aston not only offers Davies Mick's bed, but refuses to close the window when Davies requests it. A draught would not bother a young man like Mick, however, it could conceivably bring on pneumonia in an old man like Davies, who is already wheezing and coughing. The business over the bed is just one more indication of Aston's complicity in the victimization of Davies. Aston is often deliberately evasive with Davies:

DAVIES. This your house then, is it?

Pause.

ASTON. I'm in charge.

DAVIES. You the landlord, are you? (p. 12)

Aston deliberately avoids telling Davies that the house is owned by his brother. A basic antagonism grows between Aston and Davies. The tramp makes noises in his sleep, which Aston objects to. Davies denies having made any noises.

DAVIES. I don't jabber, man. Nobody ever told me that before.

Pause.

What would I be jabbering about?

ASTON. I don't know.

DAVIES. I mean, where's the sense in it?

Pause.

Nobody ever told me that before.

Pause.

You got hold of the wrong bloke, mate. (p. 23)
When Aston prepares to get out, he deliberately discourages Davies from coming with him, for three possible reasons: one, he is fed up with Davies already and wants to get away (he has a jigsaw he wants to see); two, he knows Mick is in the house and he wants to let Mick catch Davies unawares; three, he wants to see what Davies will do when left alone. As soon as Aston goes out, Davies starts poking around, infringing on the hospitality of the brothers and their right of privacy, opening cases and disarranging papers. This snooping gives Mick motivation for his sudden attack.

He [Davies] picks up another case and tries to open it. MICK moves upstage silently.
MICK slides across the room.
DAVIES half turns. MICK seizes his arm and forces it up his back.
DAVIES screams.
Ummmmuhhh! Ummmmuhhh! What! What! What! Ummmmuhhh!

MICK swiftly forces him to the floor, with DAVIES struggling, whimpering and staring. (pp. 28-29)

Davies is stunned and surprised by Mick's attack and he crouches in terror while Mick prowls about the room, uncovering the bed Davies has slept in, picking up his trousers. When Davies attempts to rise, Mick places his foot on him and presses him down. Finally, Mick, expressionless, sits back in a chair, watches Davies, and asks, "What's the game?" (p. 29)

Mick certainly knows what kind of game is going on and so does Aston. They have already begun to terrorize the old man. If Aston's motives are sincere, why does he leave Davies alone in the house when he knows full well the old wretch will go snooping around? My answer is that Aston is setting Davies up for the assault by Mick. It is reasonable to suggest that the two brothers are watching everything Davies does. The assault on Davies is carefully calculated and vicious. It is not necessary for Mick to twist the old man's arm brutally, in order to subdue him. A double shock is provided because Davies is caught unawares. He has no idea there is anyone else in the house. Either Aston is so dim-witted he forgets to tell Davies he has a brother and
that Davies has been sleeping in his bed, or else he deliberately neglects
to tell him. Most significant for the theory that Davies is being victimized
is the fact that rarely are all three characters on the stage at one time.
One or other of the brothers is usually alone with the tramp, and one brother
usually leaves before the other comes on.

From the start of Act Two, it appears obvious that Mick is deliberately
baiting the old man and Davies' folly is that he never comprehends what is
going on. Mick's long speech likening Davies to his uncle's brother who was
"a bit of an athlete" and "long jump specialist" (p. 31) is so patently
fabricated that only a wretch like Davies would miss its intent. The audience
is supposed to know what Mick is up to. To make doubly sure, Hinter gives him
another long speech about a "bloke in Shoreditch" who is the "dead spit" of
Davies but "bigger round the nose." (p. 32) He is ridiculing Davies'
appearance as well as his state of vagrancy and homelessness. Finally, Mick
discloses that Davies has been sleeping in his bed:

MICK (pointing to DAVIES' bed). That's my bed.

DAVIES. What about that, then?

MICK. That's my mother's bed.

DAVIES. Well she wasn't in it last night!

MICK (moving to him). Now don't get perky, son, don't get perky. Keep
your hands off my old man. (p. 35)

After telling Davies he is "stinking the place out," Mick offers to let the
tramp purchase it for "three thousand down," then demands to know whom he banks
with. (p. 36) This is straightforwardly sadistic, since the tramp has nothing
of any material value. Aston enters with the bag he has gone to fetch.

MICK. What's this?

DAVIES. Give us it, that's my bag!
MICK (warding him off). I've seen this bag before.

DAVIES. That's my bag!

MICK (eluding him). This bag's very familiar.

DAVIES. What do you mean?

MICK. Where'd you get it? (p. 38)

Mick and Aston proceed to play a toss game with the bag, letting Davies get the bag, then taking it away from him again.

ASTON. Here you are. (ASTON offers the bag to DAVIES).

MICK grabs it. ASTON takes it.
MICK grabs it. DAVIES reaches for it.
ASTON takes it. MICK reaches for it.
ASTON gives it to DAVIES. MICK grabs it.
Pause
ASTON takes it. DAVIES takes it. MICK takes it. DAVIES reaches for it. ASTON takes it.
Pause
ASTON gives it to MICK. MICK gives it to DAVIES.
DAVIES grasps it to him.
Pause
MICK looks at ASTON. DAVIES moves away with the bag.
They watch him. He picks it up. Goes to his bed, and sits. ASTON goes to his bed, sits, and begins to roll a cigarette. MICK stands still. (p. 39)

Davies is tormented and victimized here because the bag (which he thinks is his) is all he possesses except for the ragged clothes he wears; it is the chief object by which he can be identified. Not only has Aston fooled the old man into thinking the bag is his, but he has once again set Davies up for Mick by giving him a bag which actually belongs to Mick. Aston is evasive, but we can be reasonably sure from what he says that the bag is Mick's. I do not think Aston has been out of the house. Aston certainly did not go to the cafe to pick up Davies' bag. He is afraid to enter cafes after what the men did to him. It is likely he took the bag out of a closet.

DAVIES. No, this ain't my bag. My bag, it was another kind of bag altogether, you see. I know what they've done. What they done, they kept my bag, and they given you another one altogether.

ASTON. No... what happened was, some one had gone off with your bag.
DAVIES (rising). That's what I said!

ASTON. Anyway, I picked that bag up somewhere else. It's got a few . . . pieces of clothes in it too. He let me have the whole lot cheap. (p. 41)

At this point, Aston offers Davies the job of caretaker, but Aston is actually offering Davies his own job since Aston has been caretaker for his brother, Mick. Thus, Aston places Davies in a position where he could come under the authority of Mick, which would set Davies up for further victimization. However, Davies refuses the job, perhaps because he is lazy, but more probably because of his irrational fear that some enemy might get in the door.

ASTON. . . . I could fit a bell at the bottom, outside the front door, with "Caretaker" on it. And you could answer any queries.

DAVIES. Oh, I don't know about that.

ASTON. Why not?

DAVIES. Well, I mean you don't know who might come up them front steps, do you? I got to be a bit careful.

ASTON. Why, someone after you?

DAVIES. After me? Well, I could have that Scotch git coming looking after me, couldn't I? All I'd do, I'd hear the bell, I'd go down there, open the door, who might be there, any Harry might be there. I could be bugged as easy as that, man. . . . (pp. 43-44)

Davies never knows where he stands during these ingratiating sessions with the brothers. Davies seeks to stand in the shadow of the one who has got the most authority in the house and in that way, consolidate his own position. Davies thus tries to separate the brothers, get on the good side of the one who is the strongest and team up with him to eject the other brother. Instead, the two brothers maintain solidarity and eject Davies. It is important to note that Davies makes no attempt to play one brother off against the other until after both brothers have offered him the position of caretaker. In other words, the brothers are actually responsible for Davies' attempts to manipulate them because they deliberately put him in a position where he has to choose between them. Mick and Aston make all the moves,
until they catch Davies in a squeeze play where he is forced to act.

The principal scene of victimization and expression of cruelty in the play is that involving Mick, Davies and the electrolux. The scene provides a complex image of man, weak, cowardly, defensive, facing darkness, an unseen menace, perhaps death. Each man goes the route of Davies because the tramp represents all men and everywhere there is a Mick who is a manipulator, who inflicts the cruelty which is the condition of existence. Mick is the conscious manipulator of the old man, destroying him slowly, seeming to enjoy the experience. Mick torments Davies beyond endurance until the old wretch, knife in hand, stands screaming in terror at the unknown thing that is coming at him in the dark.

The electrolux scene is built on the exact counterpoint between words and action, one reinforcing the other, and the setting enhancing both. Pinter's dialogue is highly stylized and structured and is far from being the airless, rambling, incoherent speech of everyday life. Every word, every line, every intonation, every pause, is designed to contribute to the total effect. Pinter's dialogue reinforces the visual image which he is building up. Notice, as the scene progresses, how dialogue and action are intertwined and reinforce each other. Davies comes into the darkened room looking for the light switch.

DAVIES (muttering). What's this? (He switches on and off.)
What's the matter with this damn light? (He switches on and off.) Aaah.
Don't tell me the damn light's gone now...

Pause.

What'll I do now? (He moves, stumbles). Ah, God, what's that? Give me a light. Wait a minute.

He feels for matches in his pocket, takes out a box and lights one. The match goes out. The box falls.

Aaaah! Where is it? (Stooping) Where's the bloody box?

The box is kicked.

What's that? What? Who's that? What's that?

Pause. He moves.
Where's my box? It was down here. Who's this? Who's moving it?

Silence.

Come on. Who's this? Who's got my box?

Pause.

Who's in here?

Pause.

I got a knife here. I'm ready. Come on then, who are you? (pp. 14-45)

The movement is dialogue-action-dialogue, punctuated by pauses. Pinter chooses actions and selects props precisely and carefully to motivate Davies' terror and increase the suspense. The first thing Davies does is to try the light switch. The light does not work. He repeats the action. Then he tries lighting a match. The match goes out, the box falls, and Davies starts groping for the box. Someone kicks the box. Davies is on his hands and knees, groping for the box. Only after the business with the light switch, the match and the box, does Pinter introduce the electrolux, the principal instrument of victimization and terror. We have been subtly prepared for the real terror by steady progression. Each small action that Davies performs, each frustration that he undergoes, increases his terror. Davies uses simple words and only one line is given to express what takes place in each action, although successive repetition of the lines is used for added emphasis. This is primarily a visual scene, the dialogue used to reinforce the action.

Dialogue here serves as a barometer of the pressure Davies is being subjected to. After Davies pulls out the knife, he moves, stumbles, falls, then whimpers and stands, terrified:

Suddenly the electrolux starts to hum. A figure moves with it, guiding it. The nozzle moves along the floor after DAVIES, who skips, dives away from it and falls, breathlessly.

ah, ah, ah, ah! Get away-y-y-y-y!

The electrolux stops. The figure jumps on ASTON'S bed.

I'm ready for you! I'm ... I'm ... here!
The figure takes out the electrolux plug from the light socket and fits the bulb. The light goes on. DAVIES flattens himself against the right wall, knife in hand. MICK stands on the bed, holding the plug.

MICK. I was just doing some spring cleaning. . . . (p. 45)

Pinter has prepared us meticulously for the final horrific effect, which is punctuated by Mick's laconic remark about spring cleaning. When Mick says, "How do you think the place is looking? I gave it a good going over," we must be aware of the irony, because it is not the place, but Davies, who has got the going over. Notice how short the business with the electrolux is. The timing here is of immense importance. If Mick pursues Davies too long with that nozzle, the whole effect is destroyed. A few thrusts with the nozzle, the jump on the bed, then the turning on of the light, a pause, before Mick delivers his punch line. There is a laugh at the climax but this is caused by the discrepancy between what Mick says he is doing and what is actually taking place. Who does spring cleaning in the dark? Mick lies in wait for Davies in that darkened room. This is proved by the fact that the light does not work when Davies enters (Mick has probably unscrewed the bulb), and someone kicks the box of matches when Davies drops it. Mick has the vacuum cleaner all set up and starts it humming as soon as Davies is properly frightened. I think it is here that the audience becomes fully aware that Davies is being systematically terrorized and victimized. There is a subtle shift of emphasis. Pity becomes mingled with the former disgust felt for Davies. The terror has produced it. I think the sympathy of the audience is entirely with Davies after this scene. Mick's line about spring cleaning is beautifully timed and placed. Delivered in a flat, commonplace manner, the line provides an ironic contrast to the pathetic, terrified figure of Davies, knife in hand, backed up against the wall. Here Pinter uses dialogue as an ironic counterpoint to the action, because what Mick says and the way he says it, is in direct opposition to what is actually
taking place. The technique is similar to that used by absurdists like Ionesco, where dialogue is in opposition to events on the stage.

After terrorizing Davies with the electrolux, Mick proceeds to allay his fears, offering him a sandwich, leading him into a conversation. He uses a familiar brainwashing technique -- break the subject down while pretending to be his friend. Mick proceeds to trap Davies into making derogatory statements about Aston that he can use as a basis for attack.

MICK. He's supposed to be doing a little job for me... I keep him here to do a little job... but I don't know... I'm coming to the conclusion he's a slow worker.

Pause.

What would your advice be?

DAVIES. Well... he's a funny bloke, your brother.

MICK. What?

DAVIES. I was saying, he's... he's a bit of a funny bloke; your brother.

MICK. Funny? Why?

DAVIES. Well... he's funny...

MICK. What's funny about him?

Pause.

DAVIES. Not liking work.

MICK. What's funny about that?

DAVIES. Nothing.

Pause.

MICK. I don't call it funny.

DAVIES. Nor me.

MICK. You don't want to start getting hypercritical.

DAVIES. No, no, I wasn't that, I wasn't... I was only saying...

MICK. Don't get too glib. (pp. 49-50)

Davies does not have an idea that Mick is simply throwing his words back in his
face. Even after the business with the electrolux, Davies is willing to listen to Mick and be his confidant. Mick now proposes that Davies take on the job as caretaker, the same proposition that was made by Aston. Davies is now put in the perfect position to try to play one brother off against the other. Davies thinks he can manipulate them, but they are really manipulating him. Mick and Aston actually force Davies to try to disrupt their relationship.

The next important exchange, near the end of Act Two, shows Aston's indifference to the welfare of Davies, as his guest, and further strengthens the argument that Aston is a confederate in the victimization. Davies complains about the rain coming in on his head when he is sleeping, but Aston refuses to close the window.

ASTON. I couldn't sleep in here without that window open.

DAVIES. Yes, but what about me? What... what you got to say about my position?

ASTON. Why don't you sleep the other way around?

DAVIES. What do you mean?

ASTON. Sleep with your feet to the window.

DAVIES. What good would that do?

ASTON. The rain wouldn't come in on your head. (p. 53)

Davies' request is perfectly reasonable. Aston, as a considerate host, would not hesitate to close the window. Davies is an old man. The rain coming in on his head could give him pneumonia. Aston's proposal that Davies put his feet to the window instead of his head is pure nonsense. Davies is quite logical when he asks, "What good would that do?" Davies will still get wet no matter which end of him is facing the window. The clue to Aston's real attitude here lies in his misinterpretation of Davies' remark about his "position". Davies is referring to the relative position of a man who has to sleep below a draughty window and is in danger of getting wet and cold. Aston interprets the word as meaning Davies' physical position or location in the bed.
That is why he suggests Davies turn the other way around. Aston's misinterpretation, I believe, is deliberate. He is just trying to confuse the old man, and he has now become completely indifferent to the welfare of Davies.

We see, in his long speech at the end of Act Two, about the mental hospital, that Aston is lost in a reverie. At the close of the scene, as Pinter points out in the stage directions, the light has grown dim, and only Aston can be seen clearly. Aston's remark about the cafe (p. 54) sets him off thinking about the men who have hurt him, and about his session in the mental hospital when they performed the lobotomy or shock treatment. Despite the brain operation, there are still strong feelings of resentment in Aston as he relates how the men came and put the pincers on him:

ASTON... So I stood up and then one or two of them came for me, well, I was younger then, I was much stronger than I am now, I was quite strong then, I laid one of them out and I had another one round the throat, and then suddenly this chief had these pincers on my skull and I knew he wasn't supposed to do it while I was standing up, that's why I... anyway, he did it. So I did get out... (p. 57)

Aston's monologue about his own victimization offers a striking parallel to what is happening to Davies. Although Davies does not have pincers on his skull, he too has been effectively brainwashed and victimized. I think Aston's last words in the monologue lend credence to the theory that he has been trying to hurt Davies because someone hurt him, years ago:

ASTON... The thing is, I should have been dead. I should have died. Anyway, I feel much better now. But I don't talk to people now. I steer clear of places like that cafe. I never go into them now. I don't talk to anyone... like that. I've often thought of going back and trying to find the man who did that to me. But I want to do something first. I want to build that shed out in the garden. (p. 57)

When Aston refers to going back, I think he means the cafe, not the mental hospital, since this was the source of his trouble. And somehow, if he can get that shed built, Aston will regain his former strength. I think his tentative explorations around cafes turned up Davies, perhaps even more than one Davies. This final monologue of Aston's has the rambling incoherence of a dream. When Aston refers to his brother he says that "he was younger than
The past tense suggests that Aston has his time sequence confused. In this kind of state, Aston could very easily bring home a tramp as his guest and ostensibly treat him with kindness while trying to find out if he is the one who hurt him. I also pointed out that Aston might be trying to make Mick jealous. He may also be trying to antagonize his brother, hoping Mick will throw the tramp out. To a person of Aston's mentality, this gesture on the part of Mick could be interpreted as an expression of loyalty. In any case, Davies is ultimately the victim. From this point on, Davies' ejection from the house is assured.

Since Aston has become indifferent to him, Davies tries to turn Mick against his brother, hoping that Mick will assure him the job of caretaker, thus making himself and Mick a team. Davies tries to ingratiate himself with Mick and Mick, being the aggressive one, looks as if he could dominate Aston. Davies' attempted manipulation of Mick is futile and only serves to assure his own eventual rejection. Davies fails to realize the solidarity of the brothers, even after Mick makes that long speech in Act Three about redecorating the flat:

MICK. . . Deep azure-blue carpet, unglazed blue and white curtains, a bedspreadd with a pattern of small blue roses on a white ground, dressing-table with a lift-up top containing a plastic tray, table lamp of white raffia. . . (MICK sits up)

it wouldn't be a flat it'd be a palace.

DAVIES. I'd say it would, man.

MICK. A palace

DAVIES. Who would live there?

MICK. I would. My brother and me. (pp. 60-61)

Davies tries to ingratiate himself with Mick by running down Aston. Mick just leads him on, but then Davies berates Aston to his face, thinking that he and Mick are to be partners in "decorating the flat." When Aston again offers Davies a pair of shoes, it is not so much out of generosity as a desire to get rid of the old man. When Aston complains about Davies making noises in the night,
Davies accuses Aston of being mentally unbalanced. Davies pulls a knife and Aston asks him to leave:

ASTON. I... I think it's about time you found somewhere else. I don't think we're hitting it off.

DAVIES. Find somewhere else?

ASTON. Yes.

DAVIES. Me? You talking to me? Not me, man! You!

ASTON. What?

DAVIES. You! You better find somewhere else!

ASTON. I live here. You don't. (p. 68)

As Davies picks up his bag and goes to the door, he says, "Now I know who I can trust" (p. 69), which is the clincher that prepares the way for the final ejection of the tramp.

Mick's smashing the Buddha signifies the end of victimization of the tramp, as does his gesture of paying Davies off for the caretaking work he has not done. Mick and Aston have tired of the sadistic sport of tormenting the old man. They now prepare to eject him. After Mick smashes the Buddha, Davies makes a final appeal to Aston to be allowed to stay in the room but is simply ignored.

The Buddha represents silence, repose, peace, contentment, but the choice of such an ornament for the house of Mick and Aston can only be ironic. Since the room represents the arena of the world, the Buddha is a universal symbol here of peace and repose destroyed by violence and pain. Mick's smashing of the Buddha is an effective expression of the play's meaning. There is no rest or comfort for man in this life. "Existence through effort is a cruelty," said Artaud. The Buddha is a seated figure, which implies rest, but Davies has trouble finding a place to sit down, just as he had trouble finding a bed to sleep in:

DAVIES. ... Huh... I haven't had a good sit down. ... I haven't had a proper sit down. ... well, I couldn't tell you. ... (p. 7)
The Buddha figure, then, ironically reflects the cruelty of existence, and Mick's smashing of it lends support to this idea of cruelty. After Mick smashes the Buddha, Aston returns and the stage directions indicate that he faces Mick and both smile faintly. This seems to further indicate their solidarity. Davies, in his appeal to Aston to remain in the room, proposes that they switch beds. Aston can have the bed with the draughty window and the window can remain open. But Aston is as perverse as Davies.

ASTON. No, I like sleeping in this bed.

DAVIES. But you don't understand my meaning!

ASTON. Anyway, that one's my brother's bed.

DAVIES. Your brother?

ASTON. Any time he stays here. This is my bed. It's the only bed I can sleep in. (p. 76)

Davies' final appeal to be allowed to stay in the room is a moving and dramatic example of Artaud's concept of determinism. The end was inevitable for Davies because the law of existence is that the strong survive and the weak perish.

DAVIES... What am I going to do?

Pause.

What shall I do?

Pause.

Where am I going to go?

Pause.

If you want me to go... I'll go. You just say the word.

Pause.

I'll tell you what though... then shoes... then shoes you give me... they're working out all right... they're all right. Maybe I could... get down...
ASTON remains still, his back to him, at the window.

Listen. . . if I. . . got down. . . if I was to. . . get my papers. . . would you. . . would you let. . . would you. . . if I got down. . . and got my. . . . (pp. 77-78)

Davies expresses both hope and despair in this speech and that is the source of the anguish. The function of man is to express hope, even when he knows it is futile, as Beckett's tramps do in Waiting for Godot. Pinter's old tramp knows the end has come but he keeps fighting it off, still trying to manipulate Aston with his ruse of the Sidcup identity papers. The series of pauses and dots punctuate Davies' fluctuations between hope and despair, but towards the end of the speech, Davies becomes less articulate. The pauses become longer as he realizes the finality of Aston's decision. The final stage directions calling for a long silence adds the final note of anguish. The great irony is that Davies is as much a victim of his own fundamental desire to perpetuate his life as he is a victim of Aston and Mick. At the same time, if Aston and Mick are to survive, Davies must perish, even though he represents a comparatively minor threat to their solidarity. Pinter is illustrating one of the laws of existence in depicting the struggle of these three men. Davies is a victim of his own necessity to survive and he is a victim of the necessity of others to perpetuate their own individual lives.
CHAPTER III
THE VICTIM AS EXECUTIONER

Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* (1958) presents a victimization through brainwashing and terrorization, similar to that which takes place in *The Caretaker*. The intended victim in this case is Stanley Webber, a nondescript pianist living in a seaside boarding house. The two manipulators are Goldberg, a wealthy Jew, and McCann, a defrocked priest. The men go through an elaborate ritual or systemic brainwashing and terrorization of Stanley Webber, during which they stage a "birthday" celebration for him. In the final scene, Stanley appears, formally dressed, meek and submissive, and is carted off in a big black car by the two men to a place or person called "Monty." Goldberg and McCann can be seen as agents of the "system" and the point seems to be that you cannot run away and pursue an independent existence because there is always a Goldberg and McCann who will emerge from the shadows and take you back and try to make you conform.

The difficulty is that Pinter's plays are never that simple. *The Birthday Party*, his first full-length work, provides a good illustration. Goldberg and McCann fail, I think, in their attempt to victimize Stanley, because instead of making him a suitable and useful representative of the system, they render him useless and inarticulate. The birthday party ritual releases violent and destructive impulses in Stanley and his brief existence is consumed when he apparently tries to strangle his landlady, Meg, and rape Lulu, a floozie, who lives nearby. The birthday party reveals Stanley, not as an apostle of conformity, but as a potential murderer and rapist. Goldberg is visibly shaken at the unexpected turn of events. Stanley's birthday celebration releases similar destructive impulses in Goldberg, who attacks his co-manipulator, McCann. In this sense then, the intended victim actually victimizes his tormentors. *The Birthday Party* provides a fine example of that rigid and
inexorable determinism which Artaud said was an essential ingredient of the Theater of Cruelty:

From the point of view of the mind, cruelty signifies rigor, implacable intention and decision, irreversible and absolute determinism. . .
In the practice of cruelty there is a kind of higher determinism to which the executioner-torturer himself is subjected and which he must be determined to endure when the time comes. . . . (p. 102)

Goldberg and McCann are Stanley's executioners and tormenters, but, ironically he is their executioner and torturer as well. While they try to make Stanley useful to the system, they find they themselves are of no use to it because they are unable to make it work effectively. Pinter may be trying to show the uselessness of all abstract systems that try to mold the individual to their own shape. The representatives of the system, in trying to make non-conforming members fall into line, victimize themselves, because there is no account taken in the abstract system of the perverseness and unpredictability of human beings.

In the tension produced by the inter-action of victim and victimizers, we have a fine example of Artaud's concept of action pushed beyond all limits. The instinctual, elemental and savage aspects of man's nature are released through this kind of inexorable pressure:

The theater will never find itself again--i.e., constitute a means of true illusion--except by furnishing the spectator with the truthful precipitates of dreams, in which his taste for crime, his erotic obsessions, his savagery, his chimeras, his utopian sense of life and matter, even his cannibalism, pour out, on a level not counterfeit and illusionary, but interior. (p. 92)

Pinter is trying to show that the ordinary individual may be capable of lust and murder under the kind of pressure exerted by a Goldberg and McCann. The instinctual life in man may be violent and elemental, but it is one of the things that help define his humanity. We saw, in The Caretaker, how Davies' essential humanity--his loneliness, his fear, his need for food, shelter, clothing and companionship--was revealed through the pressure exerted by Mick and Aston in their victimization. We got a total picture of man as a terrified,
lonely, helpless creature, seeking a place of refuge and comfort, and having to manipulate others in order to get it. In the earlier play, The Birthday Party, Pinter is vindicating the rights of the individual over the pressure of group conformity. Davies, in The Caretaker, was a victim who became a hero through being victimized. The Caretaker, though written later than The Birthday Party, was discussed first because the Pinter technique is most clearly defined in that play. Stanley Webber, in The Birthday Party, is a victim who becomes an executioner through being victimized. As in The Caretaker, we are only gradually made aware of what is really happening in the play. It is not until Act Three that Goldberg and McCann, through the change in their relationship, reveal the essential failure of the victim-

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not true. A leviathan exists, balances them over the
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job at hand. Milam wants to know, "job", and they plan to get it over quickly. But when they strip away convinced that there is just another job.
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Stanley's outer face of seeming meekness (in a paradoxical attempt to make him even meeker) they uncover the evil which is his true nature. As Artaud said:

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It is cruelty that cements matter together, cruelty that molds the features of the created world. Good is always upon the outer face, but the face within is evil. Evil which will eventually be reduced, but at the supreme instant when everything that was form will be on the point of returning to chaos. (p. 104)
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The play is indeed a representation of chaos as Artaud defines the term. It depicts the division point between something which has form and meaning and is therefore considered good and desirable, and something which is formless and is therefore regarded as evil. The birthday party celebration is an expression of this evil being released out of the form in which it was cast.

The Birthday Party provides a grim look at life, stripped of all pretence. Pinter's plays have no plot in the conventional sense, because plot implies a series of conventional misunderstandings which are resolved. Stanley Webber
can have no pretensions after Goldberg and McCann get through with him. Ironically, neither can Goldberg and McCann. The inter-action of victim and victimizers strips them both raw. In trying to manipulate Stanley, Goldberg and McCann are venturing into unknown territory. The human being, says Pinter, is an unknown quantity, and is unpredictable.

When Goldberg and McCann take Stanley off at the end of the play, they tell Petey, Meg's husband, that they are taking him to "Monty", which may be the centre of government, the hub of the system's operations, or perhaps a person, even the director of the organization and boss of Goldberg and McCann. Goldberg and McCann have failed, apparently, to cure Stanley of his anti-system tendencies. Instead, they have rendered him inarticulate and useless. Perhaps "Monty" will be able to rectify their error. Judging by Stanley's condition at the end, this will be difficult if not impossible. Stanley has had his instinctual life, however brief it was. The manipulators, in trying to give him a false identity which will conform to the ideals of the organization, release that instinctual and evil existence which destroys him. Stanley's "birthday" becomes his "death-day." The irony is made stronger by the fact that it may not actually be Stanley's birthday at all. Goldberg and McCann want it to be his "re-birth day" into the organization, but their victimization turns the birthday into a funeral celebration. Stanley is dressed in a dark suit, tie, white shirt and bowler hat, when he is led away. Goldberg's car is big and black, and, as he explains to Petey, has "room in the front and room in the back."  

Goldberg and McCann appear to be the villains in *The Birthday Party* because they are the manipulators, but the audience realizes, near the end of the play, that they are victimizing themselves as well as Stanley, and that Stanley ultimately victimizes them. The manipulators are redeemers, in a
sense, because they release that brief flash of instinctual life in Stanley. But they are forever types, possessing little individuality, although we get a glimpse of something strongly individualistic in Goldberg when he savagely attacks McCann. The manipulators represent the ineffectiveness of the organization, because of their failure. Stanley's extinction prevents him from being redrafted into the organization. Monty will never be able to rectify the error of Goldberg and McCann. Pinter is illustrating the perverseness and unpredictability of human nature, which no organization will ever be able to control. It is the effort to control, to manipulate, to victimize, that brings the perversity to the surface. Ironically, this perversity exists in Goldberg and McCann as well, and in their effort to make Stanley conform, they release the perversity in themselves as well as in Stanley.

In The Birthday Party, we again have the room or enclosed space in which the characters are confined and in which the action of victimization takes place. In Artaud's conception of the rigor of life, each thing tramples down the other and there is no time for "true death" (p. 103) or slow decay and disintegration of mind and body. Everything is too violent, too much a rending. Pinter exploits this idea to the fullest. The characters in his plays, confined together in a small space, tear each other to shreds in their efforts to survive, which means trying to maintain their identities and control over the corner of the room which is theirs by right or by possession.

Kay Dick, in her analysis of The Birthday Party, says that Stanley has "protection" from his landlady, Meg, her husband, Pete, and Lulu, the flirt, although Miss Dick admits the "protective solidarity" proves "pretty ineffectual." I think Pinter is stressing the idea that man has no protection. His efforts to provide himself with such protection are shown to be futile. Meg does not protect Stanley. She actually aids Goldberg and McCann in their victimization by going along with the birthday party celebration when Goldberg
proposes it. Meg, ironically, aids Stanley by contributing to the release of that savagery which constitutes his instinctual life and the only genuine identity he has. She gives him a toy drum (a sexual image) which drives him to a frenzy when he beats it, and she continually flirts with him, trying to seduce him.

Stanley's refuge from the system is a seaside boarding house run by Meg and Petey Boles. The seaside, in conventional terms, means peace, quiet, a chance to get away from it all, but in the Pinter world, this heaven is also hell. The boarding house serves the same kind of ironic and symbolic function as the Buddha in The Caretaker. There is really no haven or refuge for man. He cannot hide and shun existence, which means confrontation with other human beings who will manipulate him if they can for their own benefit. This existence means violence, pain, perverseness, loneliness, despair, anguish. And we saw, in The Caretaker, some people get trampled in the inevitable confrontation, while others survive. It is in the trampling down that man's essential nature is revealed. Pinter explained his attitude to violence in the Bensky interview for Paris Review:

INTERVIEWER

There's a sense of terror and a threat of violence in most of your plays. Do you see the world as an essentially violent place?

PINTER

The world is a pretty violent place, it's as simple as that, so any violence in the plays comes out quite naturally. It seems to me an essential and inevitable factor. . . . The violence is really only an expression of the question of dominance and subservience, which is possibly a repeated theme in my plays. . . . A threat is constantly there: it's got to do with this question of being the uppermost position or attempting to be. That's something of what attracted me to do the screenplay of The Servant, which was someone else's story, you know. I wouldn't call this violence as much as a battle for positions, it's a very common, everyday thing. 3

Thus, Pinter acknowledges the battle for control, dominance and survival, which involves victimization, as a principal theme in his plays. 7 Violence is a part
of this struggle and an expression of it. The confrontation of Stanley with Goldberg and McCann and the victimization which takes place contain scenes of violence, but it is not the violence that produces the cruelty, as I am trying to define it in terms of Artaud. Violence can be seen as an expression of the cruelty that exists because of the inevitable confrontations of human beings. Cruelty comes from the tension existing between opposites and this cruelty may be expressed through violent means. When the action is pushed to its outermost limit, a breaking point is reached and violence may result. But it is not violence for its own sake that produces cruelty, according to Artaud.

The action of The Caretaker took place in mid-winter, which added to the pathos of the victimization of the old derelict, Davies. The Birthday Party takes place in mid-summer, which suggests, like the seaside setting, an idyllic, peaceful period. When The Birthday Party opens, Meg and Petey are enjoying their breakfast of cornflakes and fried bread. The scene is full of commonplace, meaningless dialogue and reactions. Pinter aims to stress the essential sterility of the place and of the routine in which Petey and Meg engage.

MEG. I've got your cornflakes ready. (She disappears and reappears.) Here's your cornflakes.

He rises and takes the plate from her, sits at the table, props up the paper and begins to eat. MEG enters by the kitchen door.

Are they nice?

PETEY. Very nice.

MEG. I thought they'd be nice. (She sits at the table.) You got your paper?

PETEY. Yes

MEG. Is it good?

PETEY. Not bad.

MEG. What does it say?

PETEY. Nothing much. (pp. 9-10)
This atmosphere of sterility, represented by soggy cornflakes and dull conversation, provides a contrast to the violence and terror which is soon to break upon the scene. Stanley is not an inoffensive little man like Petey, but Goldberg and McCann make the mistake of thinking that he is. When Stanley comes down to breakfast, Meg asks him how he slept, and he says he didn't sleep at all. When she asks him how the cornflakes are, he says "Horrible" (p. 14). It is apparent from this, and his subsequent remark about the milk being "off" (p. 15) that Stanley is very much the non-conformist. Stanley's strong sexual nature is revealed in the exchange with Meg over fried bread:

MEG ... Was it nice?

STANLEY. What?

MEG. The fried bread.

STANLEY. Succulent. (p. 17)

Later, Stanley refers to Meg as a "succulent old washing bag" (p. 19) and Meg is secretly flattered. Stanley, however, is not amused.

MEG (shyly). Am I really succulent?

STANLEY. Oh, you are. I'd rather have you than a cold in the nose any day.

MEG. You're just saying that.

STANLEY (violently). Look, why don't you get this place cleared up! It's a pigsty. And another thing, what about my room? It needs sweeping. It needs papering. I need a new room!

MEG (sensual, stroking his arm). Oh, Stan, that's a lovely room. I've had some lovely afternoons in that room.

He recoils from her hand in disgust, stands and exits quickly by the door on the left... (p. 19)

Stanley is sexually repressed. Meg's combination of motherliness and sensuality both attracts and disgusts him. Stanley's violent reaction to Meg's sexual advances and mothering is a foreshadowing of what is to come in the birthday scene.
Stanley is nursing a grudge. He has been thwarted in his ambition to become a concert pianist. He is supposed to be considering a job playing the piano in a night club in Berlin, with stops in Athens, Constantinople, Zagreb and Vladivostock.

MEG (sitting at the table). Have you played the piano in those places before?

STANLEY. Played the piano? I've played the piano all over the world. All over the country. (Pause.) I once gave a concert. (p. 22)

Here we see expressed once again the gap between expectation and reality, which was a major theme in The Caretaker. Stanley has been able to give only one concert, although he likes to dream that he has given and will give concerts all over the world. His first concert was a success but the officials, after promising him a second one, cancelled it. He is bitter. — How do we know this??

STANLEY. . . . Carved me up. It was all arranged, it was all worked out. My next concert. Somewhere else it was. In winter. I went down there to play. Then when I got there the hall was closed, the place was shuttered up, not even a caretaker. They'd locked it up. (p. 23)

Stanley is soon to stage another concert, this time with a toy drum instead of a piano. Through these first few scenes in the play, we get a picture of a bitter, disillusioned, sexually repressed and potentially violent young man who has come to Meg's boarding house, not because he is meek and timid and afraid of the world, but because he has rejected the world. Stanley's repressed but essentially violent nature leads him to victimize others when he has the chance. He frightens Meg with his talk about somebody coming in a van, with a wheelbarrow.

STANLEY. . . . A big wheelbarrow. And when the van stops they wheel it out, and they wheel it up the garden path, and then they knock at the front door.

MEG. They don't.

STANLEY. They're looking for someone. A certain person.

MEG (hoarsely). No, they're not!

STANLEY. Shall I tell you who they're looking for?

MEG. No!

STANLEY. You don't want me to tell you?
MEG. You're a liar. (p. 24)

Goldberg and McCann enter and survey the situation. Goldberg is the more calm and collected. McCann is nervous and keeps wanting to know if they have the right house. Then he asks Goldberg about the job.

MCCANN. This job--no, listen--this job, is it going to be like anything we've ever done before?

GOLDBERG. Tch, tch, tch.

MCCANN. No, just tell me that. Just that, and I won't ask any more.

GOLDBERG sighs, stands behind the table, ponders, looks at MCCANN, and then speaks in a quiet, fluent, official tone.

GOLDBERG. The main issue is a singular issue and quite distinct from your previous work. Certain elements, however, might well approximate in points of procedure to some of your other activities. All is dependent on the attitude of our subject. At all events, McCann, I can assure you that the assignment will be carried out and the mission accomplished with no excessive aggravation to you or myself. Satisfied? (p. 30)

Goldberg's expectations are not fulfilled, as we discover in Act Three. The mission results in considerable aggravation. But Goldberg, here, is all composure and officialdom. The nature of the assignment they are to undertake is not revealed, but that it involves Stanley Webber is made clear when Goldberg and McCann start questioning Meg about him. When Meg mentions it is Stanley's birthday, Goldberg sees the opportunity he has been waiting for.

GOLDBERG. What do you think of that, McCann? There's a gentleman living here. He's got a birthday today, and he's forgotten all about it. So we're going to remind him. We're going to give him a party.

MCCANN. Oh, is that a fact?

GOLDBERG. Tonight... .

MEG. And I'll invite Lulu this afternoon. Oh this is going to cheer Stanley up. It will. He's been down in the dumps lately.

GOLDBERG. We'll bring him out of himself. (p. 33)

Goldberg's last words are prophetic, because the manipulators do bring Stanley - violent, unpredictable, murderous, lustful - out of himself. The
boy's drum which Meg gives Stanley for a birthday present is a magnificent visual image of the savagery that is soon to be released in Stanley. When Meg gives him the drum, Stanley is subdued. He takes the drum almost mechanically, takes the drumsticks and taps them, tentatively.

STANLEY. Shall I put it round my neck?

She watches him, uncertainly. He hangs the drum around his neck, taps it gently with the sticks, then marches around the table, beating it regularly. Meg, pleased, watches him. Still beating it regularly, he begins to go round the table a second time. Halfway around the beat becomes erratic, uncontrolled. Meg expresses dismay. He arrives at her chair, banging the drum, his face and the drumbeat now savage and possessed. (p. 36)

Beating the drum releases all Stanley's murderous rage and frustrated sexuality. Meg becomes the object of this savagery and the scene foreshadows Stanley's later attempted strangulation of Meg. Note how Meg's reaction ranges from pleasure to acute dismay as she watches Stanley become obsessed with the drum. Violence and savagery seem here to be equated with sexual potency. In Act One, then, we are introduced to the supposed victim, Stanley Webber, who, on the surface, appears to be mild mannered, but who displays an aggressive temperament, especially when irritated by his overheated landlady. The two manipulators, Goldberg and McCann, arrive on the scene and Goldberg expresses confidence that the "job" will go smoothly. However, as was pointed out in the discussion of The Caretaker, the expectations that Pinter arouses are not always fulfilled. Pinter deals with the unpredictability of human beings and it is the human beings in the plays that we have to study, not what they represent. Pinter writes about people, not institutions or ideologies, as he pointed out in the Bensky interview:

INTERVIEWER

Has it ever occurred to you to express political opinions through your characters?

PINTER

No. Ultimately, politics do bore me, though I recognize they are responsible for a good deal of suffering. I distrust ideological statements of any kind.
Act Two of The Birthday Party opens with McCann, the less assured of the
two manipulators, tearing a sheet of newspaper into five equal strips. The
action is destructive and provides a good foreshadowing of what Goldberg and
McCann are about to do to Stanley. They are going to strip him of all claims
to individuality and make him conform; make him uniform and regular. Note
that McCann tears the newspaper into equal strips. The rending is precise,
which indicates systematic victimization. The tearing of the newspaper is
one of the theatrical devices Pinter often employs to build atmosphere and
suspense. In the film version of the play, the tearing sound of the newspaper
was strongly amplified and produced a shattering effect on the spectator.
The tearing of the newspaper is a visual image which reinforces the action of
the play. McCann’s tearing the newspaper is similar to the action of Aston
repairing the toaster plug or building the shed, in The Caretaker, or Mick
employing the vacuum cleaner to terrorize Davies. McCann’s action, while not
directly related to the intended victimization, suggests it. These images
are what tie the Pinter plays together in lieu of plot. They speak more
eloquently than any well-made play device of the conflicts, the absurdities,
the attitudes, the terror and the uncertainty, that is the core of human
experience.

Stanley reveals his essential isolation when he confides to McCann that he
was born and brought up in Maidenhead and lived "well away from the main road"
(p. 39). Stanley makes it plain to McCann that he is not living in Mag’s house
by choice. It is not a retreat for him and he implies that Goldberg and McCann
have made a ridiculous choice, picking on Mag’s place to visit. Mag, he says,
is crazy, and someone is leading McCann up the garden path (p. 41). Stanley,
I believe, is trying to shake McCann’s composure because he senses that McCann
is unsure of himself. He may be trying to turn McCann against Goldberg when
he tells McCann he is being made a fool of (p. 42).
Goldberg enters and reveals himself immediately as a pseudo-sentimentalist, living in a shadowy and perhaps terrifying past:

Goldberg. ... Humming away I'd be, past the children's playground. I'd tip my hat to the toddlers. I'd give a helping hand to a couple of stray dogs, everything came natural. I can see it like yesterday. The sun falling behind the dog stadium. Ah! (He leans back contentedly). (p. 43)

It must be apparent to the audience that Goldberg is no more what he seems than Stanley Webber is. What Pinter does, through his scenes of confrontation and victimization, is to reveal the metaphysical reality of his characters. It is this revelation that is akin to the Artaudian concept of cruelty.

Pinter has broken with actuality, that is, with the surface appearance of things. He shows us the depths beneath, which is what Artaud envisioned as one of the chief functions of the Theater of Cruelty:

... Its object is not to resolve social or psychological conflicts, to serve as battlefield for moral passions, but to express objectively certain secret truths, to bring into the light of day by means of active gestures, certain aspects of truth that have been buried under forms in their encounters with Becoming. (p. 70)

Goldberg reflects on his past in a sentimental way because he is covering up the fact that it was painful:

Goldberg. ... Up the street, into my gate, inside the door, home. "Simey!" my old mam used to shout, "quick before it gets cold." And there on the table what would I see? The nicest piece of gefilte fish you could wish to find on a plate.

McCann. I thought your name was Nat.

Goldberg. She called me Simey.

Petey. Yes, we all remember our childhood. (p. 43)

Goldberg reveals that he has another identity, connected with the name "Simey" and that the name carries connotations which are terrifying, as is shown later. The exchange also shows that Goldberg and McCann do not know each other very well, although they have worked together as a team in the past. The victimization of Stanley Webber actually turns them against one another,
as I will shortly point out. The same thing occurs in *The Dumb Waiter*, which will be discussed in Chapter V. Petey's remark about remembering childhood is ironic, because he implies, as Goldberg does, that childhood is something idyllic, when actually, it was terrifying.


After his eulogy on childhood, Goldberg comes out in praise of birthdays:

GOLDBERG... What a thing to celebrate--birth! Like getting up in the morning. Marvellous! Some people don't like the idea of getting up in the morning. I've heard them. Getting up in the morning, they say, what is it? Your skin's crabby, you need a shave, your eyes are full of muck, your mouth is like a boghouse, the palms of your hands are full of sweat, your nose is clogged up, your feet stink, what are you but a corpse waiting to be washed? Whenever I hear that point of view I feel cheerful. Because I know what it is to wake up with the sun shining, to the sound of the lawnmower, all the little birds, the smell of the grass, church bells, tomato juice--

STANLEY. Get out. (p. 15)

Goldberg's speech foreshadows the end of the play because a corpse is what Goldberg and McCann turn Stanley into. Ironically, he is thoroughly "washed" in the process--brainwashed. Goldberg's speech also reflects the dramatist's concern for the discrepancy between expectation and reality. Man expects to be fit in the morning, bursting with life and energy when, in actuality, he is a walking corpse with stinking feet. Goldberg casts himself into the physically healthy, cheerful, optimistic role, but this is a pose for Stanley's benefit. The battle for control, dominance and survival, which we saw is one of the chief characteristics of the Theater of Cruelty, has begun here in earnest.

Charles Marowitz, in a revealing article entitled "'Pinterism' is Maximum Tension Through Minimum Information," offered the following description of Pinter's "territory":

... the endless battle for positions, the subtle violence people inflict upon one another in their attempts either to dominate or to elude domination, the ruthless sabotage and subversion of the sex war, the perpetual power struggles behind relationships which
determine the curve and contour of surface reality. A Pinter play is always an X-ray touched up to suggest it is a snapshot, and its details reveal the deep seated struggle of the organism to eject deadly bacteria. . . .

Stanley Webber is perverse, refusing to sit down; after Goldberg repeatedly requests him to do so. Goldberg finally sits, requesting McCann to ask Stanley to sit. But Stanley manipulates McCann so that McCann sits first.

MCCANN (to STANLEY). Sit down.

STANLEY. Why?

MCCANN. You'd be more comfortable.

STANLEY. So would you.

Pause.

MCCANN. All right. If you will I will.

STANLEY. You first.

MCCANN slowly sits at the table, left.

MCCANN. Well?

STANLEY. Right. Now you've both had a rest you can get out! (pp. 46-47)

Stanley has emerged victorious here, but the battle for control, dominance and survival is mounting to its climax. Stanley finally yields to pressure and sits. Goldberg and McCann now proceed to verbally brainwash Stanley. His answers are, for the most part, rational, but there comes a point when there is no verbal reply to such interrogations as the following:

MCCANN. What about the Albigensianist heresy?

GOLDBERG. Who watered the wicket in Melbourne?

MCCANN. What about the blessed Oliver Plunkett?

GOLDBERG. Speak up Webber. Why did the chicken cross the road? (p. 51)

Stanley, rendered inarticulate, screams. Goldberg presses home the attack.

GOLDBERG. You're dead. You can't live, you can't think, you can't love. You're dead. You're a plague gone bad. There's no juice in you. You're nothing but an odour! (p. 52)
Stanley, however, is very much alive, despite Goldberg's taunts, and proves it by kicking Goldberg in the stomach. When Goldberg falls, Stanley stands. He and McCann then seize chairs and begin to circle each other. Stanley has lost the power of speech but has revealed the violence which is an essential part of his nature. Thus, the verbal brainwashing, while rendering Stanley inarticulate, has made him capable of violence. McCann inadvertently aids the release of these instinctual forces in Stanley when he snatches his glasses.

The glasses are Stanley's outward symbol of respectability. When wearing them he is able to articulate and appears rational. When they are removed, we see the real Stanley. It is when his glasses are removed that Stanley menaces McCann with the chair. Stanley's murderous assault on Meg and his probable attempted rape of Lulu take place following the removal of his glasses. This time McCann smashes them by breaking the frames. Stanley never speaks an intelligible word for the rest of the play, but his inner savagery is released during the game of blind man's buff and he attacks Meg and Lulu. The stage becomes completely dark, Stanley moves around in the blackness, minus his glasses, beating the drum. Stanley picks up Lulu in the dark and places her on the table. It is probable that he intends to rape her.

As soon as Goldberg and McCann move in to rescue Lulu, and shine the torch in his face, Stanley begins to giggle. Stanley appears to be the menace in the blind man's buff orgy, rather than Goldberg and McCann. They stumble around in the dark while Stanley, minus his glasses and blindfolded, seems to move unerringly toward his victims, Meg and Lulu. Goldberg and McCann aimed to inflict subtle torture, like shining the light in his face, throwing the drum in his path. The breaking of Stanley's glasses was apparently not in their plan of victimization, but was an inspiration on the part of McCann, as I will show. However, it seems to symbolize the breaking of the last
threads of rational behaviour in Stanley Webber. Goldberg and McCann, I think, are properly surprised at the reaction of Stanley to their game. They have underestimated Stanley. Their actions are general. They take no account, for example, of Stanley's repressed sexuality and his feelings of hostility to Meg. Perhaps they are unaware of these things. The blindfold releases Stanley from inhibition as the glasses held him back, and he acts instinctively. In the film version of the play, the party scene was shot in black and white, almost expressionistically. It was almost like seeing Stanley's brain exploded.

The last thing we are aware of as the act closes, are the shadowy figures of Goldberg and McCann converging on Stanley as he stands backed against the wall, giggling. Lulu is lying spreadeagled on the table, and their concern appears to be her rescue, not the victimization of Stanley Webber. The tables have apparently been turned on the manipulators again.

MCCANN. She's not here.

GOLDBERG (moving downstage, left) She must be.

MCCANN. She's gone.

MCCANN finds the torch on the floor, shines it on the table and STANLEY. LULU is lying spread-eagled on the table, STANLEY bent over her. STANLEY as soon as the torchlight hits him, begins to giggle. GOLDBERG and MCCANN move towards him. He backs, giggling, the torch on his face. They follow him upstage left. He backs against the hatch, giggling. The torch grows closer. His giggle rises and grows as he flattens himself against the wall. Their figures converge upon him. (pp. 65-66)

In trying to make Stanley conform, and by ritually victimizing and brain-washing him and inflicting subtle torture, Goldberg and McCann have released the demon in Stanley Webber. This demon quickly extinguishes him. But the murderous instincts, released, give him a brief, but violent existence.

In Artaudian terms, this is liberation. It is what Guichamau5 meant when he said modern playwrights try to prevent the spectator from drowsing in a peaceful definition of man.?
... they do use violence, cruelty, derangement and crime as methods for awakening in the spectator a consciousness of his possibilities and for trying to bring out, beyond the falsifications of civilization, what is truly man — man being situated at a level that would traditionally be called inhuman.

At the beginning of Act Three of The Birthday Party, we learn that the cornflakes are gone, the fried bread (vicelence) has been eaten up, and the drum has been broken. The parallel with Beckett's Endgame, where there are no more bicycle wheels or painkiller, is striking. Meg has a headache. Stanley has been up early, contrary to his usual custom, and has returned to bed. Goldberg comes in, pre-occupied, makes a few remarks about his car, sips his tea.

PETEY. How is he this morning?

GOLDBERG. Who?

PETEY. Stanley. Is he any better?

GOLDBERG (a little uncertainly). Oh, ... a little better, I think, a little better. Of course, I'm not really qualified to say, Mr. Boles, I mean I haven't got the ... qualifications. The best thing would be if someone with the proper ... mm. ... qualifications ... was to have a look at him. Someone with a few letters after his name. It makes all the difference. (p. 71)

Goldberg's hesitations show his puzzlement over Stanley's condition. The double pause before "qualifications" indicates not only Goldberg's failure, but his decision to take Stanley elsewhere for treatment. The someone with a few letters after his name may be "Monty". Goldberg is worried.

PETEY. It's a terrible thing.

GOLDBERG (sighs). Yes. The birthday celebration was too much for him.

PETEY. What came over him?


Goldberg is on the defensive here, and his explanation of nervous breakdown is thought up on the spur of the moment, I believe. Goldberg speaks sharply
to Petey, probably hoping his brief explanation will suffice, but when Petey persists in his questioning, Goldberg has to formulate a more elaborate explanation for Stanley's breakdown. Goldberg is extremely nervous and hesitant, in contrast, for example, to his demeanor in Act One.

PETEY. But what brought it on so suddenly?

GOLDBERG (rising and moving upstage). Well, Mr. Boles, it can happen in all sorts of ways. A friend of mine was telling me about it only the other day. He'd both been concerned with another case -- not entirely similar, of course, but . . . quite alike, quite alike. (He pauses.) Anyway, he was telling me, you see, this friend of mine, that sometimes it happens gradual -- day by day it grows and grows and grows . . . day by day . . . And then other times it happens all at once. Poof! Like that! The nerves break. There's no guarantee how it's going to happen, but with certain people . . . it's a foregone conclusion. (pp. 71-72)

Goldberg is covering up. He does not understand what brought on Stanley's murderous behaviour at the party any more than Stanley does. Things have not gone according to plan. If Goldberg and McCann hoped to make Stanley a puppet who spoke when spoken to and articulated only when his glasses were put in place, they certainly could not have counted on him turning into a wild beast. Goldberg and McCann have been up early, discussing what to do with Stanley, and their decision is to take him to "Monty", who is probably a doctor, perhaps a psychiatrist who works for the organization. Monty may or may not be a legitimate doctor, but he is Goldberg's kind of doctor -- someone who will fix Stanley up according to prescribed standards.

When McCann comes downstairs and he and Goldberg start conferring, the change in their relationship is immediately obvious. McCann is fed up. He will not go up to Stanley any more. He tells Goldberg that he returned Stanley's glasses and this served to quiet him.

MCCANN. I gave him his glasses.

GOLDBERG. Wasn't he glad to get them back?

MCCANN. The frames are bust.

GOLDBERG. How did that happen?
MCCANN. He tried to fit the eyeholes into his eyes. I left him doing it. (pp. 73-74)

McCann is deliberately evasive when Goldberg asks him how the glasses got broken. He will not confess he snapped the frames and crunched them. The breaking of the glasses was not in the plan of victimization, which is proved by the fact that Goldberg has known nothing of the incident. The breaking of the glasses symbolizes the release of savagery in Stanley and his final immobility.

McCann begins to tear up strips of paper again, but this time the gesture gets on Goldberg's nerves.

GOLDBERG. Stop doing that!

MCCANN. What?

GOLDBERG. Why do you do that all the time? It's childish, it's pointless. It's without a solitary point.

MCCANN. What's the matter with you today?

GOLDBERG. Questions, questions. Stop asking me so many questions. What do you think I am? (p. 75)

Goldberg sits and broods, while McCann keeps demanding to know what is to be done. Finally, he provokes a murderous assault from Goldberg by referring to him as "Simey":

GOLDBERG (opening his eyes, regarding MCCANN). What-did-you-call-me?

MCCANN. Who?

GOLDBERG (murderously). Don't call me that! (He seizes MCCANN by the throat.) NEVER CALL ME THAT!

MCCANN (wringing). Nat, Nat, Nat, NAT! I called you Nat. I was asking you, Nat. Honest to God. Just a question, do you see, do you follow me? (p. 76)

Goldberg's composure appears to be completely shattered. He can no longer perform in the way in which he was trained. He can no longer repress the "Simey" aspect of his personality, which is the irrational, murderous instinct that lies just below the surface. In trying to make Stanley conform,
he has shattered his own conventional armor, at least temporarily. Goldberg tries to reaffirm his old position:

GOLDBERG. . . . Nothing's changed. (He gets up.) That's why I've reached my position, McCann. Because I've always been fit as a fiddle. All my life I've said the same. Play, play up and play the game. Honour thy father and thy mother. All along the line. Follow the line, the line, McCann, and you can't go wrong. What do you think, I'm a self made man? No! I sat where I was told to sit. I kept my eye on the ball. School? Don't talk to me about school. Top in all subjects. And for why? Because I'm telling you, I'm telling you, follow my line? Follow my mental? Learn by heart. Never write down a thing. And don't go too near the water. And you'll find—that what I say is true. Because I believe that the world. . . (Vacant.). . .
Because I believe that the world. . . (Desperate.). . .
BECAUSE I BELIEVE THAT THE WORLD. . . (Lost.). . . (pp. 77-78)

This sounds like T.S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men":

This is the way the world ends,

This is the way the world ends,

This is the way the world ends,

Not with a bang but a whimper.9

Something has gone wrong with the system. Goldberg, one link in the chain of cause and effect, has broken down and is now unable to function as he should. It may be partly due to McCann breaking Stanley's glasses. A wrong move somewhere along the line has thrown the machinery of victimization out of kilter.

Goldberg's breakdown explains why he needs McCann to blow in his mouth. Breath from the de-frocked priest will supposedly set Goldberg back on the straight and narrow path again as a functioning representative of the system, whether it be anarchistic, atheistic, heretical, etc.

When McCann ushers in Stanley, who is holding his broken glasses in his hand, we see that Stanley is dressed in a well cut, dark suit, white collar, and tie, and he is clean shaven. Despite his formal attire, which indicates respectability and conformity, he is lifeless. Goldberg pledges to buy him
another pair of glasses, but this will be useless, because even with the aid of glasses, Stanley is not likely to be able to perform. Goldberg and McCann now proceed to woo Stanley instead of brainwashing him. Stanley has been "cockeyed for years" and "anaemic," "rheumatic," "myopic" and "epileptic." (p. 82) Now Goldberg and McCann will see that he is well protected with the safeguards, comforters and healing devices that the system provides:

GOLDBERG. The vest and pants.
MCCANN. The ointment.
GOLDBERG. The hot poultice.
MCCANN. The fingerstall.
GOLDBERG. The abdomen belt.
MCCANN. The ear plugs.
GOLDBERG. The baby powder.
MCCANN. The back scratcher.
GOLDBERG. The spare tyre.
MCCANN. The stomach pump.
GOLDBERG. The oxygen tent.
MCCANN. The prayer wheel.
GOLDBERG. The plaster of Paris.
MCCANN. The crash helmet.
GOLDBERG. The crutches. (p. 83)

Nothing can possibly happen to Stanley with safeguards like the spare tyre, the stomach pump and the crash helmet, according to Goldberg and McCann. Even if he was hurt they could stick him back together with plaster of Paris and provide him with crutches until he healed. In this way, making use of all the safety devices the system offers, Stanley will assuredly be a success.
Stanley sits, absolutely motionless, throughout the wooing, in contrast to his screaming and violent behaviour during the brainwashing in Act Two. Brainwashing and terrorization proved to be an inadequate means of assuring conformity on the part of the subject. The results were unpredictable, so now Goldberg and McCann proceed to put honey on the wounds in the hope that this will do the trick. When Goldberg and McCann finally take Stanley out of the door, Petey is in despair:

PETEY (Broken). Stan, don't let them tell you what to do! (p. 86)

Petey's words are tragic, not because Goldberg and McCann will be able to manipulate Stanley, but because Stanley is beyond manipulation. He has escaped the clutches of the system but the price has been brainwashing, terrorization, loss of articulation and vital energy. However, in the process, Stanley has had a brief but violent existence. He is not a tragic hero because there is no self knowledge acquired on his part, or at least he cannot express it if there is. But the value of the individual has been vindicated in this play as in The Caretaker. Ironically, Pinter seems to be saying that the only way man's essential dignity can be revealed is through victimization and terrorization, which, in this case, brings out the latent perverseness and cruelty in his nature. This perverseness is part of the true nature of man, even if it does result in lust and attempted murder. In The Caretaker, Pinter shows man as lonely, wretched, terrified, frightened. In The Birthday Party, he is shown as perverse, cruel and violent, but he is still triumphant. His essential humanity is revealed. I think we have, in The Birthday Party, Artaud's concept of determinism, accurately played out.

Stanley Webber faces this kind of torment, as does Davies, in The Caretaker. In both cases, the victims have been, in part, their own executioners,
because of the necessity of preserving life, limb and personal uniqueness. The practice of living demands torment and, ultimately, execution, Artaud says. The reverse is equally true. The only life possible comes through torment, with execution as the inevitable end. I think this is the lesson that Goldberg learns in The Birthday Party. Man is his own executioner. Man's birthday is also his death-day. The Birthday Party closes with a vivid and pathetic image—the strips of paper McCann had been tearing, falling to the floor as Petey picks up the newspaper. Pinter has found an appropriate image for man's dismembered, tormented and painful existence in the mid-twentieth century, very much in the Artaudian mold.
CHAPTER IV
SEXUAL VICTIMIZATION
INTRODUCTION

Sexuality is a principal component of cruelty in many of Harold Pinter's plays, notably, The Birthday Party, The Homecoming, A Night Out, Tea Party and A Slight Ache. Exposure of latent sexuality, or victimization by means of the sex drive, constitutes cruelty, since the sex drive is man's metaphysical core. It is the source of his life. He tries constantly to hide his sexuality, or disguise it, by means of stratagems. In the sexual confrontations, manipulations and victimizations, as with other types, these stratagems are removed.

The mother-whore figure plays a prominent part in the manifestation of sexual cruelty. Sometimes she is the principal agent of victimization, sometimes she indirectly aids the victimizers. A woman may be asked to play mother or whore, or both simultaneously, but refuses, or finds herself unable to perform both functions. In this case, the role may be split between two women. The mother-whore figure is a familiar one in drama, the most famous example being Jocasta in Oedipus Rex. A less familiar example, directly related to the Theater of Cruelty is Marie, the prostitute wife, in Büchner's Woyzeck. Marie has had a child by Woyzeck, out of wedlock, and this is a principal cause of her guilt and religious mania. Marie indirectly aids the victimization of Woyzeck because her intrigue with another man makes Woyzeck insanely jealous. Woyzeck kills her in a fit of madness at the climax of the play.

In Pinter's The Birthday Party, Meg, the landlady, alternately treats her boarder, Stanley Webber, with lust and motherliness, which disgusts him. Meg indirectly aids the manipulators, Goldberg and McCann, because she helps release the latent sexuality in the meek appearing Stanley Webber. But
ironically, she is also aiding Stanley because this latent sexuality is part of an emerging identity, the only real one he has. The repressed hatred Stanley feels for Meg comes out in the birthday ritual when he tries to strangle her. The ambiguity of Meg's character is expressed in her reference to Webber as "Stan" and "Stanny" when she calls him for breakfast:

Meg... Stan. Stanny! (She listens.) Stan! I'm coming to fetch you if you don't come down! (I'm coming up! I'm going to count three! One! Two! Three! I'm coming to get you! (p. 13)

Meg disguises her lust for Stanley as a children's game. This is further emphasized when she gives Stanley the toy drum, which becomes an instrument of sexual release. Meg victimizes and manipulates Stanley by trying to mother him, hiding her lust for him beneath her motherly exterior. But this motherliness helps to awaken the hatred and disgust Stanley feels for his landlady and he victimizes her by attempting to strangle her. In this case, the mother-whore figure does not maintain effective control over the male.

In A Night Cut, the role of mother-whore is split between Mrs. Stokes, who mothers her son, Albert, and the prostitute that Albert picks up, who tries to hide her whoring instincts by pretending she is a mother. Albert symbolically breaks the domination of his mother by exposing the prostitute as a liar. Albert's aggressive, masculine nature is released through the encounter. Both Mrs. Stokes and the prostitute attempt to manipulate and control Albert, but the pressure they exert only serves to release Albert's aggressiveness. Albert is a victim who victimizes his oppressors, much in the way that Stanley Webber victimizes Goldberg and McCann. It is the prostitute trying to play the role of mother that sets Albert off:

Girl... Don't know why you had to pick on me, at this time of night... I'm a respectable mother, you know, with a child at boarding school.
You couldn't call me ... anything else. All I do, I just entertain a few gentlemen of my own choice, now and again. What girl doesn't?

His hand screws the cigarette. He lets it fall on the carpet.

(outraged.) What do you think you're doing?

She stares at him.

Pick it up! Pick that up, I tell you! It's my carpet! ...

ALBERT (seizing the clock from the mantelpiece): DON'T MUCK ME ABOUT!

Albert had earlier threatened his mother with a clock; now he symbolically, and in fantasy, finishes the job by terrorizing the girl with a clock. Albert must subdue the mother image the girl is presenting because his emerging aggressiveness demands it. Just as his mother tried to keep his sexuality in limbo, so the girl tries the same thing. Albert destroys the mother image which has been restricting his masculinity. However, Albert does not have sexual relations with the whore. It may be that the mother's influence has been permanently damaging, that Albert may have broken the domination, emerged as aggressive and masculine, but is unable to move one step further into normal sexual relations. Pinter leaves the question of Albert's future sex life unanswered; however, Albert's general attitude to women seems clear. He will degrade them. He makes the whore tie up his shoes, and, on leaving, flips her a coin and says, "Buy yourself a seat ... buy yourself a seat at a circus." (p. 69)

At the conclusion of the play, the relationship of mother and son appears to have altered. When Albert comes home, Mrs. Stokes tries to pretend that Albert is still the dutiful son and that he never threatened her with a clock. But the pauses show her uncertainty.

MOTHER: ... You're good, you're not bad, you're a good boy ... I know you are ... you are, aren't you? (p. 87)
In the three principal plays to be studied as examples of sexual victimization, *A Slight Ache*, *Tea Party* and *Homecoming*, the woman emerges victorious over the male.

*A Slight Ache* (1959) presents a wife, Flora, who victimizes her husband, Edward, through a desire to keep him young and vital. Edward becomes impotent through the pressure of his wife's demands. The Matchseller, with whom Edward changes places, is an objectified image of what Flora is doing to her husband. Flora's sexuality is ambiguously tied to a maternal instinct because her desire is to keep Edward young. In other words, if she keeps him young by mothering him, she will be able to enjoy him sexually. She acts out this fantasy wish in her relationship with the Matchseller. Her motherliness is as deadly as her sexuality and Edward is rendered impotent.

*Tea Party* (1965), a film script, has the mother-whore role assigned to two women. A businessman, Robert Disson, a widower with two sons, marries Diana, a rather intellectual type of woman, for whom he seems to have no sexual attraction. She is supposed to be the mother who will take her place by his side to reconstitute the family and look after his two boys. But Disson has to find a sexual partner as well as mother, since Diana cannot play this role. He hires a pretty secretary, Wendy, with whom he plays sexual games in the office. She is supposed to satisfy his whoring instincts while Diana satisfies his maternal needs. However, instead of being satisfied, Disson ends up emasculated due to the pressure of these sexual and maternal demands and the necessity of maintaining a respectable business front and social image.

It is in *Homecoming* (1965) that the mother-whore figure becomes the most potent instrument of victimization. Ruth is supposed to be the mother returned, who will also act as whore, thus satisfying maternal and sexual demands of widower Max and his sons, Lenny and Joey. Ruth manipulates the
men, pretending to play the role of mother and whore, but only to maintain control over them. Ruth wishes to consolidate her position as the admired female figure in a group of males. Ruth's manipulation of the men releases long repressed sexual feelings in them, but she provides no gratification for these feelings. Ruth's awareness of how much she is victimizing the men is perhaps limited, but the cruelty which she manifests is nonetheless potent.
I

THE HOMECOMING

Kathleen Melton, interviewing Harold Pinter for Vogue in 1967, asked the playwright about critical disapproval of "gamesmanship" in The Honeymoon and elicited the following comment:

The game is the least of it. What takes place is a mode of expression, a chosen device. It's the way the characters face each other under the game that interests me. The woman [Ruth] is not a nymphomaniac as some writers claimed. In fact she's not very sexy. She's in a kind of despair which gives her a kind of freedom. Certain facts like marriage and the family for this woman have clearly ceased to have any meaning. 2

Pinter's remarks provide the key to a correct understanding of The Honeymoon (1965), his most complex work, that took five years to write. The play involves a confrontation between several men and one woman and a genuine struggle for dominance, control and survival. Teddy, a young philosophy professor who has lived in America for six years, brings his wife, Ruth, home to England to meet his father, Max, a widower, and his brothers, Lenny and Joey. Ruth is attracted to the men and they to her, because each party senses it has a need that the other can fill. Ruth receives a proposal by the men that she remain with the "family" and earn her keep by prostituting herself for them. Max and his sons have been without a woman since the wife and mother, Jessie, died, some years before. In the end, Ruth appears to accept the proposal, becoming the centre of an admiring trio of males. Teddy, presumably, returns to America, wifeless, to care for his three sons.

As we saw with The Birthday Party, Pinter's plays are never that simple and the expectations he arouses are not always fulfilled. The usual interpretation of The Honeymoon is that Max and his sons are the victimizers, and, taking advantage of Ruth's presence in the house, and her sexuality, ruthlessly absorb her into the all-male household to replace the lost Jessie as the mother-whore figure. Both Ruth and Teddy, in this sense, are then
the victims. Actually, Ruth is the victimizer. She is the only one in the play who achieves a measure of gratification and she dominates the men because she has something they require. The men, motherless, perhaps sexually impotent, deprived of the influence of woman for years, are suddenly confronted with a woman who is both maternally and sexually desirable. Ruth's presence in the house wakens all the latent sexuality in the men, especially in the father, Max.

Ruth is not a nymphomaniac, although Martin Esslin, in The Theater of the Absurd, declares that she is in direct opposition to what Pinter says about her. Ruth may not even be very sexy, but she is able to arouse sexuality in the men because they see in her the mother-whore figure they have lost, a replacement for the dead Jessie. Sam, Max's brother, confesses that a family friend, MacGregor, had had sexual relations with Jessie in the back of his car. Ruth is taken for mother and whore by the three men but her own desires are different. She seems to lack the mother instinct and perhaps even the whore instinct. Ruth seems to be tired of her family and marriage, wants to be once again the centre of admiration, the dominant figure among a group of males. She was a nude "model for the body" before she got married. When Ruth comes to Max's London home she finds a trio of males eager to worship the female. Here, Ruth can once again be the centre of a male circle, the admired female once again. She arouses the men without having to participate sexually with them, which gives her power over them, and thus, she is able to victimize them.

There are other power struggles in the play which result in victimizations. Max tries to play the role of father-patriarch and is continually trying to dominate his sons. He also tries to dominate Sam, his brother. There is a battle for control and dominance between Max, Lenny and Joey on the one hand,
and Teddy, the returning son, on the other. But these struggles are secondary to the main one between Ruth and the three men. Ruth is the victor in the end. It is out of the necessity for mother love and the expression of sexuality on the part of the men, and the desire for flattery, adulation, male approval on the part of Ruth, that Pinter creates a powerful statement of the Theater of Cruelty. The cruelty lies in the agony produced by the impossible confrontation between this woman who must feed on flattery and admiration and these men, who are sexually deprived, yet who have a mother fixation. The relationship between Ruth and the men is an impossible one and must inevitably end in a stalemate.

In The Homecoming, we have another example of what Barovitz called "the ruthless sabotage and subversion of the sex war, the perpetual power struggles behind relationships which determine the curve and contour of surface reality." Pinter probes beneath surface appearances to find the motivations that produce patterns of action. He attacks outward forms that restrict inner action. This, we saw, is one of Artaud's concepts. In The Homecoming, Pinter shows, through the confrontation of Ruth and the three men, that the traditional family unit of father, sons, wife and mother, is an inadequate framework for individual growth and freedom. The question of identity in the play is closely linked with re-establishment of the family that was lost when Jessie died. Max will be head of that re-established family. He battles with his two sons for the dominant position in the household, and with his brother, Sam, who is relegated to the position of cook. Max, the two boys and Sam each have a special interest which helps to define them. Lenny is a pimp; Josy works in demolition, training for the boxing ring in his spare time; Sam is a professional chauffeur; Max is a butcher who
thinks he is a great authority on boxing, racehorses and women. As we saw in *The Caretaker*, Aston was building a shed and repairing a toaster cord. Davies' need was for a good pair of shoes and identity papers. Stanley Webber dreamed of giving concerts all over the world. Teddy, in *The Homecoming*, is immersed in his philosophical works. Ruth wants male adulation. Max dreams of re-establishing the family.

*The Homecoming* closely parallels *The Caretaker* in dramatic technique. Only gradually does the audience become aware that the men are being victimized by Ruth, but paradoxically, this is the way they reveal themselves. Pinter wants to uncover the emptiness of their dreams. Ruth manipulates Max, Lenny and Joey in much the same way as Aston and Mick toy with Davies in *The Caretaker*. We saw how Davies' anguish at the final rejection was intensified because of the pressure of Aston and Mick. Ruth, in *The Homecoming*, increases the sexual and maternal frustrations of Max and his sons because she arouses them from sterility and impotence, but she is unable to satisfy them. Either she is not capable of doing so, or she deliberately refuses, or she lacks sympathetic understanding of their problems. She is also immersed in her own quest for identity and survival. Her needs collide with those of Max and his sons. She obviously enjoys having the men in her power but does not respond to their desires. Max's agony at the end, his demand for maternal love and sexual gratification from this unmoving woman, is similar to the anguish of Davies at the conclusion of *The Caretaker*.

It is in the tension and pressure produced by the interaction of the characters in their efforts to preserve individual identities and survive, that Pinter creates his modern *Theater of Cruelty*. Henry Hewes, in an article for *Saturday Review*, asked Pinter what *The Homecoming* was about, and whether the family represented a disintegration into pure evil, and Pinter replied:
It's about love and lack of love. The people are harsh and cruel, to be sure. Still, they aren't acting arbitrarily but for very deep-seated reasons.

There's no question that the family does behave very calculatedly and pretty horribly to each other and to the returning son. But they do it out of the texture of their lives and for other reasons which are not evil but slightly desperate.

Sexual gratification and maternal love are necessities for Max, Lenny and Joey and their frustrated efforts to obtain these gratifications produce the cruelty. Pinter equates cruelty with the struggle to acquire and maintain the basic necessities of existence, which is what Artaud meant by the concept:

... Life cannot help exercising some blind rigor that carries with it all its conditions, otherwise it would not be life; but this rigor, this life that exceeds all bounds and is exercised in the torture and trampling down of everything, this pure unplaceable feeling is what cruelty is. (p. 111)

The setting for *The Homecoming* is again the room or enclosed space, and is part of an old house in North London. Pinter seems obsessed with old and decrepit things, like houses and tramps, bits of ancient furniture like the bed in *The Caretaker*, old and worn out clothing, dusty blankets, a bucket that leaks, an old cardigan and cap that Max wears in *The Homecoming*.

This obsession with the old and worn out things of life seems to reflect Pinter's concern with the past as it reflects the lives of his characters.

Max opens the play with reflections on MacGregor, his comrade-in-arms of years before:

MAX. Huhh! We were two of the worst hated men in the West End of London. I tell you I still got the scars. We'd walk into a place, the whole room'd stand up, they'd make a way to let us pass. . . . He was very fond of your mother, Mac was. Very fond. He always had a good word for her.  

Max, I think, is embellishing this quite a bit to impress Lenny. Max's reflections and observations are always ambiguous, as for example, his remarks about Jessie, the lost wife:
Max. Mind you, she wasn't such a bad woman. Even though it made me sick just to look at her rotten stinking face, she wasn't such a bad bitch. I gave her the best bleeding years of my life, anyway. (p. 9)

Max is still trying to preserve the picture of Jessie as devoted wife and mother, even though he knows she deserted them, and even during their years together, was sluttish and slovenly. The discrepancy between expectation and reality is very clearly defined here. The agony of people like Max lies in the dichotomy between what life should be like and what it really is. Max still wishes Jessie had been different. Max's ramblings provoke Lenny, who is trying to read the newspaper:

Lenny. Flug it, will you, you stupid sod, I'm trying to read the paper.

Max. Listen! I'll chop your spine off, you talk to me like that! You understand? Talking to your lousy filthy father like that! (p. 9)

The battle for dominance between the older and younger generations is obvious here, although the exchange takes place in a bantering tone. What is interesting is Max's self-deprecation, which is likely why Lenny says he is demented. Max's self-hatred and disgust may have something to do with his sexual repression and his inability to project a satisfactory father image for his sons. Lenny and Joey do not respect his authority and Max resents it and feels inadequate because of it.

Max's long speech about horses is mostly fabrication, as are most of his assertions about the kind of life he has led, but it is important, because his declaration about knowing a good horse when he sees one, especially a filly, seems to equate directly with his subsequent appraisal of Ruth as a wife and mother for the family.

Max. . . . I always had the smell of a good horse. I could smell him. And not only the colts but the fillies. Because the fillies are more highly strung than the colts, they're more unreliable, did you know that? No, what do you know? Nothing. But I was always able to tell a good filly by one particular trick. I'd look her in the eye. You see? I'd stand in front of her and look her straight in the eye,
it was a kind of hypnosis, and by the look deep down in her eye I could tell whether she was a stayer or not. It was a gift. I had a gift. (p. 10)

Compare this with what Max says about Ruth at the very end of the play:

MAX... Listen, I've got a funny idea she'll do the dirty on us, you want to bet? She'll use us, she'll make use of us, I can tell you! I can smell it! You want to bet? (p. 81)

Max thinks Ruth is an "unreliable filly" and not a "stayer." The trouble is that his instinct has warned him about Ruth too late. By this time she has already used them to a considerable degree.

One of Miller's great themes is loneliness, and the need to be loved; the desire to have others recognize one's own individuality and uniqueness.

Max is pathetic in his need to be noticed. His desire for recognition is similar to Ruth's need for adulation. Sam comes in and starts a conversation with Lenny and Max feels completely left out. This causes him to pick on Sam.

MAX. I'm here too, you know.

SAM looks at him.

I said I'm here too. I'm sitting here.

SAM. I know you're here. (p. 12)

Max accuses Sam of having intercourse with lady passengers in the back of his car. Sam says he leaves that to other people and does not "mess up" his car:

MAX. Other people? What other people?

Pause.

What other people?

Pause.

SAM. Other people. (p. 15)

The "other people" are MacGregor and Jessie, who had intercourse in the car while Sam drove them along. But Sam here is only giving a hint of
what he will fully reveal later. That Max suspects that Jessie was carrying on in Sam's car with someone, is borne out by his tone and his insistence on knowing who the "other people" were. Sam too is covering up. When Max suggests he bring his bride home, Sam says he would not bring a girl to Max's house, then he hastens to assure Max that he could never get a bride like Jessie. (p. 16)

The principal quest of the men in the play is to find a replacement for Jessie, and Max comes out with it as soon as Joey enters:

JOEY. Feel a bit hungry

SAM. Me, too.

MAX. Who do you think I am, your mother? Eh? Honest. They walk in here every time of the day and night like bloody animals. Go and find yourself a mother. (p. 16)

Max is in an impossible position. He is forced to play the mother role and hates it, but cannot play the father role adequately, perhaps because of his sexual inadequacy. In his role of father, the boys mock him, and Max cannot stand it:

LENNY. What the boys want, Dad, is your own special brand of cooking, Dad. That's what the boys look forward to. The special understanding of food, you know, that you've got.

MAX. Stop calling me Dad. Just stop calling me Dad, do you understand?

LENNY. But I'm your son. You used to tuck me up in bed every night. He tucked you up too, didn't he Joey? (p. 17)

Joey confides that he has been working out in the boxing ring. Max has some words to say about that also. The language he uses assumes a symbolic function.

MAX. . . . What you've got to do is you've got to learn how to defend yourself and you've got to learn how to attack. That's your only trouble as a boxer. You don't know how to defend yourself, and you don't know how to attack.

Pause.
Once you've mastered those arts you can go straight to the top.

Pause.

JOEY. I've got a pretty good idea... of how to do that. (p. 18)

Max is, in effect, telling Joey that he does not know a thing about boxing, since there are only two positions in the ring, as in life, defense and attack, and Joey has not learned either. Ironically, I think Pinter is saying that Max has not learned them either. The boxing ring parallels the room or enclosed space as the arena wherein the battles for supremacy take place. Joey's pause in the middle of his line shows that he really has no idea of how to defend himself or attack.

The inability of Max to play the father role adequately has something to do with his attitude to his own father and this comes out quite clearly in his next long speech, straight out of his recollections of childhood. The speech is similar to that given by Goldberg in The Birthday Party, recollecting his childhood. Max does not sentimentalize as Goldberg does, however.

MAX. ... Our father? I remember him. Don't worry. You kid yourself. He used to come over to me and look down at me. My old man did. He'd bend right over me, then he'd pick me up. I was only that big. Then he'd dangle me. Give me the bottle. Wipe me clean. Give me a smile. Pat me on the bum. Pass me around, pass me from hand to hand. Toss me up in the air. Catch me coming down. I remember my father. (p. 19)

The stage is now set for the entrance of Teddy and Ruth. The major conflicts between the men have now been clearly defined. Max is trying to assume the dominant role but is unable to make his authority felt. Not only is Max unable to dominate, he is totally unable to give or receive affection, as we will see.

The marriage relationship of Teddy and Ruth is clearly defined in their long exchange about going to bed and about getting some air immediately
after their arrival. For a couple who have been married six years and have
had three children, they are extremely ill at ease, especially Teddy.

TEDDY. You don't have to go to bed. I'm not saying you have to.
I mean, you can stay up with me. Perhaps I'll make a cup of tea
or something. The only thing is we don't want to make too much
noise, we don't want to wake anyone up.

RUTH. I'm not making any noise.

TEDDY. I know you're not.

He goes to her.

(Gently.) Look, it's all right, really. I'm here. I mean... I'm
with you. There's no need to be nervous. Are you nervous?

RUTH. No.

TEDDY. There's no need to be. (p. 23)

Ruth is clearly in control here and Teddy is the one who is nervous. Ruth's
decision to go out on her own in the middle of the night and get a breath
of air astounds Teddy. He absurdly demands to know what she wants a breath
of air for. Teddy is obviously very dependent on Ruth. It is hard to
equate this seeming dependence with his later apparent casual acquiescence
to Max's proposal that Ruth stay with the family. But the pauses, the small
talk about who is going to bed and who is not, Teddy's over concern with his
wife's state of health ("Are you tired? Are you nervous?" (p. 24), all
indicate a lack of communication and understanding between this married
couple. Teddy will not go to bed without Ruth, and when she goes out the
front door, he peeks out the window after her and "chews his knuckles." (p. 24)

The confrontation between Lenny and Ruth is important because it depicts
Lenny's attempt to play the role of sadistic, aggressive male, and Ruth's
calm assumption of the superior and dominant role. Lenny tries to set
Ruth up for victimization through seduction, but, at the end, Ruth has
victimized him, and Lenny is left wondering what kind of game she is playing.
Lenny introduces himself when he meets Ruth coming in from her walk, inquires if she is cold and if she wants a drink. Ruth declines. He then tries to impress her with his intellectual capabilities with regard to the relationship of clocks and the supernatural.

LENNY. Eh, listen, I wonder if you can advise me. I've been having a bit of a rough time with this clock. The tick's been keeping me up. The trouble is I'm not all convinced it was the clock. I mean there are lots of things that tick in the night, don't you find that. All sorts of objects, which, in the day, you wouldn't call anything else but common place. They give you no trouble. But in the night any given one of a number of them is liable to start letting out a bit of a tick. . . . (p. 29)

Lenny's next stratagem is to compromise Ruth. "Isn't it funny? I've got my pyjamas on and you're fully dressed?" (p. 29) The meaning here is that both he and Ruth should be wearing pyjamas. Lenny's assumption that if he had been old enough to have been a soldier in the last war, he would most certainly have gone with his battalion to "dear old Venice" (p. 30) is absolute nonsense. Since Ruth has been in Venice, Lenny feigns familiarity with the place, just to ingratiate himself with her. His next move is to ask to hold her hand.

LENNY. . . . Do you mind if I hold your hand?

RUTH. Why?

LENNY. Just a touch.

He stands and goes to her.

Just a tickle.

RUTH. Why? (p. 30)

Lenny's tale of his encounter with a diseased prostitute is another stratagem, this one designed not only to impress Ruth with his sexual desirability, but with his brute strength as well. Lenny emphasizes the fact that he is not a man to fool about with. But what comes out most
strongly here is Lenny's attempt at puritanism. The whole speech is paradoxical. He is not averse to having sex with a prostitute, but he draws the line at a diseased one. He first intends to kill her but decides it is too much bother to get rid of the corpse.

LENNY. . . . So I just gave her another belt in the nose and a couple of turns of the boot and sort of left it at that.

RUTH. How did you know she was diseased?

LENNY. How did I know?

Pause.

I decided she was. (p. 31)

Ruth's rejoinder shows she is questioning the whole fabric of Lenny's story. If he did not have intercourse with the woman and become diseased himself, how did he know she was diseased? The question throws Lenny off guard and he has no ready answer, simply because there was no woman, no disease, no nothing. Lenny has made the whole story up to impress Ruth and she shrewdly guesses Lenny's strategy. Lenny quickly changes the subject when he has no ready answer to her question. Lenny's next stratagem, involving the snow clearing and the old lady and the mangle, is designed to show that Lenny is sensitive, Lenny is big hearted, Lenny is put upon by all sorts of people, Lenny fights back and Lenny is not a man to be fooled with.

LENNY. . . . So there I was, doing a bit of shoulders on with the mangle, risking a rupture, and this old lady was just standing there, waving me on, not even lifting a little finger to give me a helping hand. So after a few minutes, I said to her, now look here, why don't you stuff this iron mangle up your arse? Anyway, I said, they're out of date, you want to get a spin drier. I had a good mind to give her a workover there and then, but as I was feeling jubilant with the snow clearing I just gave her a short-arm jab to the belly and jumped on a bus outside. Excuse me, shall I take this ashtray out of your way? (p. 33)

Ruth, no doubt bored by Lenny's posturing, now proceeds to take command, throwing Lenny completely off his guard:
LENNY. . . . And now perhaps I'll relieve you of your glass.

RUTH. I haven't quite finished,

LENNY. You've consumed quite enough in my opinion.

RUTH. No, I haven't.

LENNY. Quite sufficient, in my own opinion.

RUTH. Not in mine, Leonard. (p. 33)

When Lenny declares that he will take the glass, Ruth makes a declaration of her own:

RUTH. If you take the glass. . . I'll take you.

Pause.

LENNY. How about me taking the glass without you taking me?

RUTH. Why don't I just take you?

LENNY. You're joking. (p. 34)

Ruth invites Lenny to sip from her glass and sit on her lap. When he declines, she tells him to lie on the floor and she will pour the drink down his throat.

RUTH. Lie on the floor. Go on. I'll pour it down your throat.

LENNY. What are you doing, making me some kind of proposal?

She laughs shortly, drains the glass.

RUTH. Oh, I was thirsty.

She smiles at him, puts the glass down, goes into the hall and up the stairs. He follows into the hall and shouts up the stairs.

LENNY. What was that supposed to be? Some kind of proposal? (pp. 34-35)

Lenny is completely dumbfounded. Ruth has got the better of him and he does not know how. Ruth shrewdly sees that the only way to counter Lenny's aggressiveness is to be aggressive herself and do the unexpected.

The nasty scene between Max and Lenny that follows is directly concerned with Lenny's origins and further points up the antagonism between father and
son. When Max demands to know who Lenny has hiding in the house, Lenny counters
with a demand to know what it was like the night Max and Jessie conceived him.
There is a hint that Max might not be the father. Lenny may be the illegitimate offspring of Jessie and MacGregor. In any case, Lenny's origins are
obscure.

LENNY. . . . that night with Mum, what was it like? Eh? When I was just a
glint in your eye. What was it like? What was the background to it?
I mean, I want to know the real facts about my background. I mean, for
instance, is it a fact you had me in mind all the time, or is it a fact
that I was the last thing you had in mind? . . .

MAX. You'll drown in your own blood.

LENNY. If you prefer to answer the question in writing I've got no
objection.

MAX stands.

I should have asked my dear mother. Why didn't I ask my dear mother?
Now it's too late. She's passed over to the other side.

MAX spits at him.

LENNY looks down at the carpet.

Now look what you've done. I'll have to Hoover that in the morning,
you know. (pp. 36-37)

The nature of Lenny's paternity is one of the things that remains obscure
in The Homecoming, but the question itself is not as important as the con-
flict it produces. Pinter's object is not to give specific answers to questions
such as this, but to show the antagonism that such a question arouses.
Lenny's facetious probing of his origins brings out the smouldering rivalry
between father and son. It is the tensions created by such confrontations
that produce cruelty. It is not bodily harm but spiritual and intellectual
laceration that takes place and this is cruelty exactly as Artaud defined it.

Max is at his contradictory best in the speech he makes to Sam, just
before Teddy and Ruth arrive on the scene. Before, he indicated contempt for
his father; here, he praises him. Since Lenny has questioned his origins,
Max feels the family lineage may be threatened so he hastens to build up the
image of family solidarity. If Lenny refuses to uphold the family tradition, Sam at least should do so. Max's fear that Lenny may discover some disgrace and crow about it no doubt prompts Max to jump on Sam. Whenever Max cannot get anywhere with his sons, he picks on Sam. Notice how he relegates the feminine role to Sam, as he does to Lenny and Joey sometimes. He calls Sam "tit." He often calls Lenny and Joey "bitch."

MAX. . . . He's even prepared to spit on the memory of our Dad. What kind of a son were you, you wet wick? You spent half your time doing crossword puzzles! . . . Well, I'll tell you one thing. I respected my father not only as a man but as a number one butcher! And to prove it I followed him into the shop. I learned to carve a carcass at his knee. I commemorated his name in blood. I gave birth to three grown men! All on my own bet. What have you done?

Pause.

What have you done? You tit! (pp. 39-40)

While relegateing Sam to the status of kitchen chore girl, Max tries to build up the image of mighty hunter for himself. The speech is hilariously funny because Max carves up his meat in the butcher shop, not the wilderness. He implies he was working in the butcher shop twenty-four hours a day and "going all over the country to find meat" (p. 40). The traditional image of the father-patriarch, mighty hunter and provider, is being parodied in these speeches of Max. The mighty hunter has become a second rate butcher, in modern civilization, Pinter seems to be saying.

Max's condemnation of Ruth as a "smelly scrubber" and "stinking pox-ridden slut" (p. 41) is an attempt, I think, to assert male supremacy before the female, who has just now confronted him, but it seems to be also an attempt to cover up. If there ever was any lechery in the house when Jessie was alive, Max can hide it by an attempt at prudery. His stratagem is akin to Lenny's speech about the prostitute. Teddy insists that he and Ruth are
married but Max is insistent. He tells Joey to throw them out. Joey's refusal infuriates Max.

TEDDY. She's my wife.

MAX (to JOEY). Chuck them out.

Pause

A Doctor of Philosophy. Sam, you want to meet a Doctor of Philosophy?

Pause.

What's matter? You deaf?

JOEY. You're an old man. (To TEDDY.) He's an old man. (p. l2)

Max cannot brook this assertion of superiority on the part of Joey, even if it is the truth. Max keeps the upper hand by hitting Joey in the stomach. The blow almost sends the old man into a state of collapse. When Sam moves to help Joey, Max clouts Sam on the head with his stick. Both actions are pathetic. In trying to show brute strength, Max reveals only the weakness of old age. This kind of revelation constitutes cruelty. To his sons, Max may appear the mighty patriarch; to the audience he is revealed as a pathetic old man. The scene foreshadows his anguish at the end of the play when he pleads for Ruth's affection. After asserting his "authority," Max can afford to be cordial to Ruth and Teddy.

MAX. . . . Teddy, why don't we have a nice cuddle and kiss, eh? Like the old days? What about a nice cuddle and kiss, eh?

TEDDY. Come on then.

Pause.

MAX. You want to kiss your old father. Want a cuddle with your old father?

TEDDY. Come on then. (pp. l3-lh)

The curtain drops before Max moves, if he moves at all, but it would seem that Max is unable to move. He cannot go to Teddy and give him affection, nor can
he receive the affection he craves. The curtain dropping when it does seems to emphasize Max's inability to move. Max seems unable to do anything but reveal his helplessness in this confrontation with Teddy:

MAX. You still love your old Dad, eh?

They face each other.

TEDDY. Come on, Dad. I'm ready for the cuddle.

MAX begins to chuckle, gurgling.
He turns to the family and addresses them.

MAX. He still loves his father! (p. 44)

There is something bestial about the prospect of two grown men hugging, kissing and cuddling. The long absence of the female in Max's household has resulted in a loss of masculinity on the part of Mr. He cannot greet his returning son in a normal male fashion. He needs the woman to restore his masculinity, but Ruth, as we shall see, is unable to perform this function. Max is left, pleading, at the conclusion, expressing a hope for manhood, but seems forever doomed.

Act Two opens with Ruth serving coffee to the men. Ruth's position at the centre of the male circle reconstitutes the family as it was when Jessie died and Max begins to reminisce. His two long speeches near the start of Act Two provide a fine illustration of the expectation-reality gap. In the first, Max reveals the aspirations he had when Jessie was alive and his sons were youngsters:

MAX. . . . I remember one year I entered into negotiations with a top-class group of butchers with continental connections. I was going into association with them. I remember the night I came home, I kept quiet. First of all I gave Lenny a bath, then Teddy a bath, then Joey a bath. . . . Then I came downstairs and I made Jessie put her feet up on a pouf—what happened to that pouf, I haven't seen it for years—she put her feet up on the pouf and I said to her, Jessie, I think our ship is going to come home . . . . I remember the boys came down, in their pyjamas, all their hair shining, their faces pink, it was before they started shaving, and they knelt down at our feet, Jessie's and mine. I tell you it was like Christmas. —(p. 46)
The dreams for the future, the innocence of the boys, the joy of family living, have all disappeared, like the pouffe:

RUTH. What happened to the group of butchers?

MAX. The group? They turned out to be a bunch of criminals like everyone else.

Pause.

This is a lousy cigar. (pp. 46-47)

Ironically, Max does not seem to realize the significance of what he is saying. He keeps debunking those dreams born in the past and that have no present, but he always returns to them. The butcher shop, the centre of all his worldly and business aspirations one minute, has become a "chopper and slab" factory in the next (p. 47). The happy family has become "three bastard sons and a slut bitch of a wife" (p. 47).

The play now moves swiftly toward the second climax, when Ruth takes command again. A minor skirmish between Teddy and Lenny leads to Ruth's most revealing and provocative statement about her function as a woman. A seemingly trivial exchange between Ruth, Teddy and Max sheds much insight on their backgrounds and attitudes:

RUTH. I was ... different ... when I met Teddy ... first.

TEDDY. No you weren't. You were the same.

RUTH. I wasn't.

MAX. Who cares? Listen, live in the present, what are you worrying about? I mean don't forget the earth's about five thousand million years old, at least. Who can afford to live in the past?

Pause.

TEDDY. She's a great help to me over there. She's a wonderful wife and mother. She's a very popular woman. She's got lots of friends. It's a great life, at the University ... you know ... it's a very good life. We've got a lovely house ... we've got all ... we've got everything we want. It's a very stimulating environment.
Pause.

My department... is highly successful. (p. 50)

Ruth's statement that she was different before she was married, indicates a sense of loss. Ruth would like to recapture the past. Max's speech about living in the present is ironic and ludicrous, since he does not practice what he preaches. Teddy's speech is pathetic and shows he is desperately trying to affirm his marriage and life in America as good.

The philosophical discussion about the table leads right into Ruth's declaration about the purpose of her body. Like the table, she would like to be an object of discussion and observation, but mostly, she would like to be admired, like a fine piece of furniture. The sensuality which she arouses is like a cloth on a highly polished table, obscuring the grain and finish. The table and cloth bear the same relation as leg and underwear that Ruth speaks of. When she moves her leg, the underwear moves with it, but the underwear gets the attention, not the leg.

RUTH... Look at me. I... move my leg. That's all it is. But I wear... underwear... which moves with me... it... captures your attention. Perhaps you misinterpret. The action is simple. It's a leg... moving. My lips move... why don't you restrict... your observations to that? Perhaps the fact that they move is more significant... than the words which come through them. You must bear... that... possibility... in mind. (pp. 52-53)

It is following this that Ruth makes her speech about America being a desert with "lots of insects" (p. 53). As Pinter said in the Vogue article by Kathleen Malton, "Certain facts like marriage and the family for this woman have clearly ceased to have any meaning." I think sexuality has ceased to have much meaning for Ruth as well, although she is still able to arouse it in men. The loss of sexuality seems to be related to her marriage and the birth of her children, and her previous job as photographer's model.
for the body. Ruth, I think, indicates through the speech above, and a
subsequent one in the following scene with Lenny, that sexuality ultimately
led to the loss of her job as a model for the body, and subsequently, to
the birth of children and breakdown of her marriage. Ruth indicates to
Lenny that she was not able to return to her job as model after her children
were born. Because of the necessity for sex, Ruth lost her role of the
admired figure, the female surrounded by males. Marriage relegated her to
being admired by one man only. Sexuality and childbirth were components of
this condition. Ruth, then, was victimized by her own sexual desires and
the sexual desires she aroused in others. She was victimized by conventional
things like marriage and having children. She lost her true function in
life, which was to be the model for the body, the admired female figure.

RUTH. ... I was a model for the body. A photographic model for the
body.

LENNY. Indoor work?

RUTH. That was before I had ... all my children.

Pause.

No, not always indoors.

Pause.

Once or twice we went to a place in the country, by train. Oh, six
or seven times. We used to pass a ... large white water tower.
This place ... this house ... was very big. ... the trees ... there was a lake you see ... we used to change and walk down
towards the lake ... we went down a path ... on stones ... there were ... on this path. Oh, just ... wait ... yes ... when we changed in the house we had a drink. There was a cold
buffet.

Pause.

Sometimes we stayed in the house but ... most often ... we walked
down to the lake ... and did our modelling there.

Pause.
Just before we went to America I went down there. I walked from the station to the gate and then I walked up the drive. There were lights on... I stood in the drive... and the house was very light. (pp. 57-58)

This was paradise for Ruth, compared to the desert she found in America.

Notice the sense of freedom expressed in the recollections—the open space, the trees, the big house. There were lights on in the house. Ruth emphasizes the fact that the house was very light. Light is obviously equated here with freedom and happiness. No wonder Ruth is trying to recapture the past. It represents an ideal life which she once enjoyed but has no longer. She was not confined in the room or enclosed space. There was a house, but it was big and open. She was able to model either indoors or outdoors. It was sexuality, I think, that destroyed this ideal life. Teddy desired her to bear his children. The role of model or admired female figure was replaced by the role of compliant sexual partner, admiring wife and mother. It is no wonder that Ruth does not appear to desire sexual relations with Max and his sons. They fail to understand her, simply seeing her as an object of sexual gratification and mother figure.

When Lenny dances with Ruth he begins to kiss her. Joey, seeing this, immediately assumes that Ruth is a tart and a willing sexual partner.

JOEY. Christ, she's wide open. Dad, look at that.

Pause.

She's a tart.

Pause.

Old Lenny's got a tart in here. (pp. 58-59)

Joey starts embracing and kissing Ruth, lying on top of her. Finally, they roll off the sofa onto the floor. At this point, Ruth tires of the game and simply pushes Joey away. I do not think Ruth has the least sexual desire
for Lenny or Joey but simply tolerates the men until she tires of them.

Henry Heves, interviewing Pinter for Saturday Review, asked if it was realistic for a husband to stand by while his wife rolls on the couch with another man, and Pinter commented:

Look! What would happen if he interfered. He would have had a messy fight on his hands, wouldn't he? And this particular man would avoid that. As for rolling on the couch, there are thousands of women in this very country who at this very moment are falling off couches with their brothers, or cousins, or their next-door neighbors. The most respectable women do this. It's a splendid activity. It's a little curious, certainly, when your husband is looking on, but it doesn't mean you're a harlot. 6

Ruth now demands food and drink. She is very much in command at this point, and from now on until the end of the play. Ruth's demands here, show her control. When Max and his sons propose to set her up as a prostitute, it is Ruth who takes control of the situation, not the men. Ironically, the men make themselves ridiculous because they fail to realize it is Ruth who is manipulating them.

RUTH. I'd like something to eat. (To LENNY.) I'd like a drink. Did you get any drink?

LENNY. We've got drink.

RUTH. I'd like one, please.

LENNY. What drink?

RUTH. Whiskey.

LENNY. I've got it.

Pause.

RUTH. Well, get it. (p. 60)

Ruth victimizes and controls Lenny here as she did in their first encounter the night she and Teddy arrived, but Lenny is too stupid to see what is happening.
While Ruth seeks control, Teddy tries to remain detached from the complexity of life, as he shows in his discussion of his critical works.

Max and the rest of them would not understand his critical works. Teddy can add two and two, can keep things in balance and maintain his equilibrium.

TEDDY. . . . To see, to be able to see! I'm the one who can see. That's why I can write my critical works. Right do you good . . . have a look at them. . . see how certain people can maintain. . . intellectual equilibrium. Intellectual equilibrium. You're just objects. You just. . . move about. I can observe it. I can see what you do. It's the same as I do. But you're lost in it. You won't get me being. . . I won't be lost in it. (p. 62)

Teddy's eating of Lenny's cheese roll further emphasizes his separation from this so-called family unit. Teddy, in effect, gives Lenny some of his own medicine. Lenny has been trying to seduce Ruth, in other words, to victimize Teddy, so Teddy proceeds to get his own back. But Teddy is indirectly revealing the crudity, selfishness, the ridiculousness of the power struggles that take place in Max's household.

LENNY. You took my cheese roll?

TEDDY. Yes.

LENNY. I made that roll myself. I cut it and put the butter on. I sliced a piece of cheese and put it between. I put it on a plate and I put it in the sideboard. I did all that before I went out. Now I come back and you've eaten it.

TEDDY. Well, what are you going to do about it?

LENNY. I'm waiting for you to apologize.

TEDDY. But I took it deliberately, Lenny. (p. 63)

Since Teddy is apparently mocking the family structure and relationships in this scene, Lenny's long speech about the structural unity of the family and Teddy's place in it can only be ironic and ludicrous. Lenny's "... there's always an empty chair standing in the circle, which is in fact yours" (p. 65), is a non-sequitur, as is his assertion that Teddy, with his intellectual background, sets a standard that Max and his sons look up to.
There is nothing remotely resembling admiration, affection or understanding on the part of Max and his younger sons toward the older brother, Teddy. The separation is as wide as intellectual barriers, the Atlantic ocean and six years of non-contact can make it.

When Joey comes down and confides that he has had Ruth upstairs two hours and "didn't get all the way" (p. 67), Lenny immediately assumes that Ruth is not only a whore but a tease. In his limited view of existence, woman is either a whore or a saint, with nothing in between. He can no more fathom a woman of Ruth's complexity than he can understand why Teddy took his cheese roll. If Ruth lies beside Joey on a bed for two hours, she must be a whore. If she does not give him what he wants, she is a tease. Max thinks Ruth is a tease, too. Joey, after his encounter with Ruth, becomes jealous and possessive, probably due to his sexual frustration. When Lenny says that Teddy "gets the gravy," obviously meaning sexual intercourse from Ruth, Joey blows up.

LENNY. He gets the gravy.

MAX. You think so?

JOEY. No he don't.

Pause.

SAM. He's her lawful husband. She's his lawful wife.

JOEY. No he don't! He don't get no gravy! I'm telling you. I'm telling all of you. I'll kill the next man who says he gets the gravy. (p. 69)

I think Joey is revealing that the marriage of Ruth and Teddy is now sexless. Ruth may have said something about her relationship with her husband while she and Joey were upstairs. Teddy's remark that Ruth does not want any more children (p. 70) lends support to the conclusion that their marriage is now sexless.
When Max gets the idea of keeping Ruth in the family, he simply ignores Teddy's suggestion that she would be better off in America. Max, Lenny and Joey discuss Ruth's proposed role as a prostitute as a practical business venture, oblivious to anything Teddy says. But their proposition turns into one of those pipe dreams that have little chance of materializing. They even propose that Teddy become their United States representative, sending over prospective customers for his own wife's services. The absurdity of Max's daydreaming is emphasized by Teddy's assertion about Ruth aging from the effect of prostitution: "She'd get old... very quickly." (p. 75) Teddy implies there would not be time to build up an international clientele before Ruth got old. He is, in effect, telling Max that his proposition is absurd. I think Teddy appears to accept the proposal of Max, Lenny and Joey, that Ruth stay, because he wants to see what Ruth's reaction to the proposition will be. Ruth is sarcastic at first?

TEDDY. Ruth... the family have invited you to stay, for a little while longer. As a... kind of guest. If you like the idea, I don't mind. We can manage very easily at home... until you come back.

RUTH. How very nice of them.

Pause.

MAX. It's an offer from our heart.

RUTH. It's very sweet of you.

MAX. Listen... it would be our pleasure. (p. 75)

Max tries to encourage Ruth to stay by indicating that Ruth will replace the lost Jessie as the woman of the house, while all the time he and Lenny are planning to send her up to Greek Street to work as a prostitute.
His argument is that Ruth belongs in the family, that she is "kith and kin" (p. 75). The issue comes to a head after Max indicates to Ruth she will have to earn her keep. Teddy is still hoping she will come back to America with him.

TEDDY. Or you can come home with me.

LENNY. We'd get you a flat.

Pause.

RUTH. A flat? (p. 76)

I think it is the prospect of having a flat of her own and being independent that attracts Ruth, not the idea of becoming kith and kin, second mother and wife to Max and his sons. Before Ruth has finished with the men she has extracted a promise from them to supply the "capital investment" (p. 77) to set her up in a three room flat, with a personal maid, wardrobe, all conveniences. Ruth treats the proposition strictly as business. After Ruth's demands for a flat and personal maid, the suggestion of Max and Lenny that she could "do a bit of cooking," "scrub the place out" and "make the beds" (p. 78), sounds pathetic. Teddy's suggestion that she "keep everyone company" (p. 78), makes more sense. It indicates that Teddy realizes how lonely his father and brothers are.

Sam's collapse comes because he is disgusted at what Max and his sons are trying to do to Ruth. Their proposition brings back to him all the ugliness surrounding the affair of MacGregor and Jessie.

SAM (in one breath). MacGregor had Jessie in the back of my cab as I drove them along.

He croaks and collapses.
He lies still.
They look at him.

MAX. What's he done? Dropped dead?

LENNY. Yes.

MAX. A corpse? A corpse on my floor? Get him out of here!
Clear him out of here! (p. 78)
Max's speech is pretty ironic, since he has had a "corpse on his floor" for years. The family has been "dead" since Jessie passed away.

One of the most important things to note about The Homecoming is that Ruth does not definitely accept the proposal of Max and his sons about the flat, nor do Max and the boys make it absolutely clear to Ruth what she is to do at the flat. The whole proposition is deliberately left vague. But in the Saturday Review article, Hewes asked Pinter if it was credible that the wife stay behind and become a prostitute, and here is what the playwright said:

If this had been a happy marriage it wouldn't have happened. But she didn't want to go back to America with her husband, so what the hell's she going to do? She's misinterpreted deliberately and used by this family. But eventually she comes back at them with a whip. She says, 'if you want to play this game I can play it as well as you.' She does not become a harlot. At the end of the play she's in possession of a certain kind of freedom. She can do what she wants, and it is not at all certain she will go off to Greek Street. But even if she did, she would not be a harlot in her own mind.

After Max makes the proposal about the flat, Ruth appears to think it over.

RUTH. Yes, it sounds a very attractive idea.

MAX. Do you want to shake on it now, or do you want to leave it till later?

RUTH. Oh, we'll leave it till later. (p. 79)

Neither are we sure that Teddy definitely goes back to America. However, the separation between himself and Ruth seems definite. I think this is one of the things being stressed here. It is not so much the proposition that Ruth stay with the family that brings the separation but the fact that Ruth and Teddy realize through exposure to this situation, that they have very little in common. In other words, it is the future of Ruth and Teddy that is being decided here, not what is going to happen to Max, Lenny and Joey. Ruth's parting from her husband sounds like one of those situations where two people realize they have little in common but will still remain friends.
RUTH. Eddie

TEDDY turns.

Pause.

Don't become a stranger. (p. 80)

The final scene has Ruth the centre of the male circle, Max, Lenny and Joey all clamoring for her attention. Ruth sits in her chair, relaxed (p. 80). Ruth does not speak during all of Max's pleading. She merely sits and touches Joey's head, lightly. Now that the woman is apparently going to stay, and the prospect of sexual gratification appears imminent, Max makes a desperate plea for love. But Max's desire has become that of a pathetic old man, pleading with the woman to reassure him he is not getting old, that he is still attractive and desirable.

MAX. I'm too old, I suppose. She thinks I'm an old man.

Pause.

I'm not such an old man.

Pause.

(To RUTH). You think I'm too old for you? (p. 81)

Max, at this point, is frantic because he does not think Ruth has got the proposition clear, and he is afraid that she will "do the dirty" on them.

MAX. . . . I don't think she's got it clear.

Pause.

You understand what I mean? Listen, I've got a funny idea she'll do the dirty on us, you want to bet? She'll use us, she'll make use of us, I can tell you! I can smell it! You want to bet?

Pause.

She won't . . . be adaptable! (p. 81)

I think Max senses that Ruth has got the upper hand, that she will use them for her own purposes, and that there is nothing they can do about it. But what builds the pathos is, that even though Max perceives the truth, he continues to plead. His need for the return of the mother-whore figure is
so great that it outweighs his reason. The necessity for such gratification, for reassurance that he still has substance as a man, makes him continue to plead, even though he realizes Ruth is unmoving. The same kind of necessity for the basic gratifications in life drove Davies to plead to remain in the room in the final scene of The Caretaker. Max is even more pathetic than Davies. Ruth is unmoving and he knows it, yet he also knows that if she goes, there will never be another woman in the house.

He falls to his knees, whimpers, begins to moan and sob. He stops sobbing, crawls past SAM'S body round her chair, to the other side of her.

I'm not an old man.

He looks up at her.

Do you hear me?

He raises his face to her.

Kiss me.

She continues to touch JOEY'S head, lightly.
LENNY stands, watching. (p. 82)

There are no more stratagems for Max. He cannot impress Ruth with his tales about being a first class butcher and having the right connections. He can only plead with Ruth to stay and caress him, and mother him, because he has no more defences. Here is the real Max, stripped of all illusion, a cringing, pathetic, helpless and lonely old man. The scene is Pinter at his best and an excellent example of the Theater of Cruelty in action. Max has become his own executioner-torturer like Stanley and Goldberg in The Birthday Party and Davies in The Caretaker. Man lives on pretence and illusion as long as he can because he is trying to hide his vulnerability, but sooner or later, along comes a Ruth, or a Goldberg or a Mick, who strips away the layers of illusion and leaves man naked. Max's protective armor was his
desire to live in the past, to reconstitute the family as it was when Jessie was alive. He and Lenny and Joey attempt to manipulate Ruth for their own purposes but are themselves victimized by Ruth because she is stronger and more intelligent than they are and because she refuses to live under pretense. This refusal may be a principal reason for the break with Teddy. Ruth may not be a conscious executioner at the end, but she is consciously manipulating the men. Her awareness of the agony she is causing Max, Lenny and Joey, is probably limited because she is concerned with her own survival. But she has effectively executed Max and his sons, nevertheless, because she cannot or will not give them what they need. Max continues to plead because he can do nothing else. Pinter has perfectly expressed Artaud's concept of consciousness in torment, which is cruelty in action.
II
A SLIGHT ACHE

In *A Slight Ache* (1959), Harold Pinter presents a complex example of sexual victimization in which a woman, who may represent nature or the life force, is shown in the process of robbing her husband, Edward, of his potency in her efforts to keep him young and vital.

To represent this process of sexual disintegration, Pinter has chosen the mysterious and disquieting figure of the Matchseller. He is one of those visual images the Theater of Cruelty employs when verbalizations become inadequate to express a particular meaning. The Matchseller is akin to what Artaud called the "objective unforeseen":

... the unforeseen not in situations but in things, the abrupt, untimely transition from an intellectual image to a true image; for example, a man who is blaspheming sees suddenly and realistically materialized before him the image of his blasphemy. ... (p. 111)

The Matchseller then, is not a character in the play but an image, representing the disintegration of Edward's sexual vitality through his marriage to Flora, a sensuous woman. The Matchseller's change from an old man to a more youthful one represents the wish fulfillment that Flora has for Edward. Flora may be associated with nature because of the connotations of her name and the fact she is identified with plants such as clematis, convolvulous, honeysuckle and japonica. The first three are climbing vines with fragrant, colorful flowers. Japonica is the name applied to the Japanese quince which bears apple-shaped fruit, and to a variety of camellia, which is fragrant. The plants suggest sensuousness, fruitfulness, but clinging and binding as well. Pinter, I think, is suggesting the strangulating, debilitating effect of sexual demands beyond a man's prime, also the crippling effect of excessive mothering. In other words, Flora demands sexuality of
Edward when he is no longer capable of giving it without danger to his health. She also mothers him in her efforts to keep him young. Flora continually tries to make Edward recognize the flowers (sexuality, fruitfulness) but he continually gets them mixed up and she continually confuses him. At times, Flora gets them mixed up herself.

Edward changes places with the Matchseller at the end. This constitutes death for him, but for Flora, the change represents his rebirth. Flora, then, victimizes Edward sexually, and the appearance of the Matchseller represents what she does to him, or what she has been doing to him for years. Edward's conversations with the Matchseller represent his growing awareness of his loss of potency.

The Matchseller is an externalized and objectified image of the sexual relationship of Edward and Flora. In their conversations with him, Edward and Flora reveal their attitudes to life and each other. Pinter, through the use of this objective, dramatic device, reveals what is happening to this married couple as they approach old age. Edward should be permitted the loss of sexual vitality in his old age, but Flora, still sensuous, makes demands on him which drain him of his last spark of life. It is significant that she calls the Matchseller Barnabas, which means "son of exhortation." Exhortation means to urge or invite. Katherine Burkman equates the Matchseller or Barnabas with mid-summer:

The day of Saint Barnabas, June eleventh in the old style calendar, was the day of the summer solstice, while Barnabys-bright is the name for the longest day and shortest night of the year. Flora merely recognizes her new god as the incarnation of summer itself, the advent of which is considered to take place at its height. 10

The coming of Barnabas is the result of Flora's incessant demands that Edward retain his youthful vitality long past the age when he should be permitted
to do so. Ironically, Flora does not realize that the coming of Barnabas, the wish fulfillment, means death for her husband, Edward. Nature, then, is paradoxical. She endows a man with sexual vitality and beauty but this vitality also consumes and destroys him. This resurrection-destruction theme is prominent in Pinter's plays. In The Birthday Party, Goldberg and McCann release instinctual forces in Stanley Webber which destroy him. Ruth arouses sexuality in the males of The Homecoming, but this sexuality finds no effective outlet and consumes them. In The Caretaker, Nick and Aston rob Davies of his last spark of vitality. Death for Davies means survival for them. In A Slight Ache, Flora perpetuates her sexuality by feeding on Edward.

Harold Pinter has abandoned the room or enclosed space as setting for A Slight Ache. Here the scene is a country house, but a study and a scullery, the principal rooms, are only suggested, with a minimum of scenery. A large, well-kept garden is suggested at the back of the stage, with flower beds and hedges. The garden gate, where the Matchseller enters, cannot be seen by the audience. This is important because the Matchseller must not be seen too soon. He appears as a manifestation of the consciousness of Flora and Edward and they draw him into view as the action progresses. In other words, the image comes from the characters, and they make the audience aware of it. The audience must not see the Matchseller first, which they would do if the gate was in view. The air of mystery surrounding the Matchseller must be preserved. If he represents the consciousness of the characters, he can also represent a metaphysical awareness, the equivalent of Artaud's "fabricated Being" (p. 114).

We can see from the foregoing discussion that an image like the Matchseller offers unlimited possibilities for the theater. This is why Artaud considered such images an important aspect of the Theater of Cruelty. In this essay, I emphasize the Matchseller as a manifestation of the cruelty involved in the sexual relationship of man and woman, or man and nature, but it should be
kept in mind that a variety of roles and meanings can be assigned to such an image.

When the play opens, Flora and Edward are eating breakfast. The time is mid-summer, the height of the natural growing season. Flora asks Edward if he has noticed the honeysuckle, then claims it was convolvulous, completely confusing him.

FLORA: The whole garden's in flower this morning. The clematis. The convolvulous. Everything. I was out at seven. I stood by the pool.

EDWARD: Did you say—that the convolvulous was in flower?

FLORA: Yes.

EDWARD: But good God, you just denied there was any.

FLORA: I was talking about the honeysuckle.

EDWARD: About the what?

FLORA (calmly): Edward—you know that shrub outside the toolshed... . .

EDWARD: Yes, yes.

FLORA: That's convolvulous.

EDWARD: That?

FLORA: Yes.

EDWARD: Oh.

Pause.

I thought it was japonica.

Edward reveals, in the next few lines, that his time for noticing and appreciating sensuous things has passed, but they still beset him. He cannot find any peace.

EDWARD: . . . I don't see why I should be expected to distinguish between these plants. It's not my job.

FLORA: You know perfectly well what grows in your garden.

EDWARD: Quite the contrary. It is clear that I don't. (p. 10)
Edward, here, has no interest in working in the garden. He is afraid, because the weather is "treacherous." For Edward, the day is Saturday, the end of the week; for Flora, it is "the longest day of the year." (p. 10) Edward does not display any interest in working in the garden until after he kills the wasp in the marmalade. When the wasp is dead, Edward is able to enjoy the flowers, but this is because they have no sensuous attraction for him any more. Edward, himself, is the wasp, but when he is dead (sexually) he appreciates the flowers but is not attracted to them as a wasp is attracted to them for the nectar. After the wasp episode, the weather is no longer treacherous.

The wasp in the marmalade is the most important image in the play, next to the Hatchseller, and serves the same function. The wasp, an aggressive insect, must be associated with the male, while the marmalade suggests woman. The marmalade is linked to the flower imagery in the play since it is a product of the fruit of the orange. The wasp and marmalade image, then, may represent the sexual relationship, which is destructive, in Pinter's view. It also symbolizes the loss of potency, and death, which is clearly suggested by the "slight ache" which Edward gets in his eyes when the wasp is drowning in the marmalade. Flora thinks drowning in the marmalade is a horrible death for the wasp, but Edward disagrees. This serves to show that Flora wishes to perpetuate sexual activity, while Edward would as soon be done with it, quickly. Instead, he gets a slight ache, which is the torture of slowly increasing debility. Edward's slight ache is an expression of the pain and cruelty of existence, and sexual expression is, of course, a major part of existence. The sexual urge is agony for Edward at his time of life so it is no wonder that he finds the death of the wasp exhilarating. Edward kills the wasp by pouring boiling water down the spool hole of the marmalade jar. After the wasp is dead, Edward feels wonderful.
EDWARD: Beautiful. I think I shall work in the garden this morning. Where's that canopy?

FLORA: It's in the shed.

EDWARD: Yes, we must get it out. My goodness, just look at that sky. Not a cloud. Did you say it was the longest day of the year today?

FLORA: Yes.

EDWARD: Ah, it's a good day. I feel it in my bones. In my muscles. I think I'll stretch my legs in a minute. Down to the pool. My God, look at that flowering shrub over there. Clematis. What a wonderful... (p. 14)

Edward is stopped by the appearance of the Matchseller at the back gate. The wasp is dead and the Matchseller appears. Edward finds temporary relief when the wasp dies but the appearance of the Matchseller shows that his agony is not yet over. After loss of potency comes awareness of death and the meaning of one's past life. Edward, from this point on, starts recollecting his past, when he was young and vital, and could live comfortably with his desires.

EDWARD (to himself): It used to give me great pleasure, such pleasure, to stroll along through the long grass, out through the back gate, pass into the lane. That pleasure is now denied me. It's my own house, isn't it. It's my own gate. (pp. 15-16)

Edward, found by Flora, hiding in the darkened scullery, says he has been writing an essay on the "dimensionality and continuity of space... and time... for years" (p. 17), which indicates that Edward has been concerned with the problem of his own existence for years. A little later he indicates that his life is nearing completion. Peter C. Thornton, writing on the blindness motif in A Slight Ache, equates the Matchseller with death:

... the Matchseller is here symbolising the passage of time towards death, the inevitable changes that accompany it, and, by being identified as Edward's "oldest acquaintance", the transience of the worldly existence of Edward himself.12

The symbolic meaning of the Matchseller is indicated by Flora when she refers to him as a "bullock," which means a castrated bull.
FLORA: Good Lord, what's that? Is that a bullock let loose? No, It's the matchseller! My goodness, you can see him ... through the hedge. He looks bigger. Have you been watching him? He looks ... like a bullock. (p. 17)

Edward also calls the Matchseller a bullock and an imposter and indicates his intention of discovering the Matchseller's true identity:

EDWARD: ... The bastard isn't a matchseller at all. Curious, I never realized that before. He's an imposter. I watched him very closely. He made no move towards the monk. As for the monk, the monk made no move towards him. The monk was moving along the lane. He didn't pause, or halt, or in any way alter his step. As for the matchseller—how ridiculous to go on calling him by that title. What a farce. No, there is something very false about that man. I intend to get to the bottom of it. I'll soon get rid of him. He can go and ply his trade somewhere else. Instead of standing like a bullock ... a bullock, outside my back gate.

FLORA: But if he isn't a matchseller, what is his trade?

EDWARD: We'll soon find out. (p. 19)

The Matchseller bears no relationship to anyone but Edward and Flora, which is indicated by the fact that he makes no move toward the monk, who is passing, and the monk appears not to see him. The Matchseller has no trade or useful occupation, which is indicated by the fact that he sells no matches and the matches he does have for sale are soggy and will not ignite. Flora is attracted to him immediately, and invites him for lunch. Her words to him are suggestive. She wants to buy his matches (vitality), indicating that she and Edward have run out of them. She then tells the Matchseller that they have "goose" for lunch, and wants to know if he cares for "goose." The sexual connotation seems obvious. She then points out the various flowers to him.

FLORA: ... That's honeysuckle. And that's convolvulus. There's clematis. And do you see that plant by the conservatory? That's japonica. (p. 21)

In contrast to Flora's reaction to the Matchseller, Edward says he "smells him" (p. 21). Later, he says the wet matches feel like "fungus" (p. 20). The references to the Matchseller as a bullock (castrated bull),
matches that are soggy like fungus, and a bad smell, all indicate sterility and decay. Edward says the Matchseller is "shivering" and "sagging" (p. 27), which lends further support to the idea of decay.

Edward specifically equates the Matchseller with himself:

EDWARD: ... Come, quick, quick. There. Sit here. Sit. ... sit in this.

The MATCHSELLER stumbles and sits. Pause.

Aaaah! You're sat. At last. What a relief. You must be tired.
(Slight pause.) Chair comfortable? I bought it in a sale. I bought all the furniture in this house in a sale. The same sale. When I was a young man. You too, perhaps. You too, perhaps.

(Pause.)

At the same time, perhaps!

(Pause.)

(Muttering.) I must get some air. I must get a breath of air. (p. 27) Edward indicates that he will discover the reason for the Matchseller's arrival "by nightfall" (p. 28), and night is associated with the end of life's journey or death. Since the Matchseller, among other things, stands for Edward's slow realization of his approaching impotence and death, it is no wonder that Edward becomes nervous and violent under the influence of this mysterious and disquieting figure. Logically, Edward vents his violence upon Flora. When she says she can deal with the Matchseller, Edward seizes her arms, violently, hurting her.

Edward pretends he is not afraid of the Matchseller but his behaviour gives him away. In describing the condition of the Matchseller, ironically, he does not know he is describing himself.

EDWARD: Frightened of him? Of him: Have you seen him?

(Pause.)

He's like jelly. A great bullockfat of jelly. He can't see straight. I think as a matter of fact he wears a glass eye. He's almost stone
He's very nearly dead on his feet. Why should he frighten me? No, you're a woman, you know nothing. . . . (p. 29)

Flora likens the Matchseller to a poacher who raped her when she was young, but she admits that she let the poacher off when he appeared before her, when she sat on the bench as a Justice of the Peace (p. 31). The poacher is a sexual fantasy, possibly an image of Edward as Flora imagines she would like him to be. Flora now expresses all of her sexual and maternal frustrations in an imaginary sexual rite with the Matchseller. She finds him old and ugly, "quite repellant," with a "vile smell" (p. 32), so she decides to transform him by giving him a bath and calling him Barnabas; then she will keep him. The bathing is an explicit sexual image. Flora will restore virility to the old and dirty Matchseller, and make him a thing of beauty. The fantasy represents Flora's wish that Edward will stay young and virile, instead of becoming old and impotent.

FLORA. . . . All you need is a bath. A lovely latherly bath. And a good scrub. A lovely latherly scrub. (Pause.) Don't you? It will be a pleasure. (She throws her arms around him.) I'm going to keep you. I'm going to keep you, you dreadful chap and call you Barnabas. Isn't it dark, Barnabas? Your eyes, your eyes, your great big eyes. . . . (p. 32)

The reference to the Matchseller as a "dreadful chap" who has "great big eyes", indicates the desire of Flora to transform and renew. Edward's eyes are all the time aching.

In the next speech, Flora returns in fantasy to her own youth, picking daisies in the woods in her apron, while the Matchseller waits for her at the gate. Flora now decides to take the Matchseller to bed where he will have "little toys to play with" and "die happy", meaning he will die while experiencing orgasm (p. 33). This indicates clearly Flora's attitude to sexuality and life. To die while young and sexually competent is desirable.
To die of old age and impotence is unthinkable. So when Flora says the Matchseller is dying, she means he is dying in a youthful way. Flora wants to live, enjoy her sexuality, and die quickly and happily, and she wishes the Matchseller (Edward) would do the same. However, Flora's wish is a fantasy of cruelty both for herself and for Edward. Both are moving into old age. A youthful, vital death is impossible. Edward is old and cannot be made young. His impotence and death from old age and senility is inevitable, but Flora wishes and pretends that it is not. Since we equated Flora with nature, the fantasy wish shows that nature is paradoxical. Youth, vitality and sexuality inevitably lead one to impotence and death. The vitality obscures the growing impotence. Nature robs people of youth while urging them to perpetuate it. This, then, is victimization by nature. Edward would like to let go but Flora (nature) will not let him. She leads him inevitably to impotent and feeble extinction. The coming of the Matchseller (Barnabas) is an expression of this truth.

The following dialogue between Edward and Flora is an expression of this process of perpetuation versus disintegration, a simultaneous ebb and flow movement. Flora wishes renewal, since, if the Matchseller is dying, she can restore him. Edward categorically denies the necessity of sexual renewal by insisting that the Matchseller is not dying. He is defying Flora, or nature, here, and expressing a wish to be left alone. The reference to Flora (nature) as a "lying slut" (p. 33) is indicative of the truth being expressed:

**FLORA:** He's dying.

**EDWARD:** Dying? He's not dying.

**FLORA:** I tell you, he's very ill.

**EDWARD:** He's not dying! Nowhere near. He'll see you cremated.
FLORA: The man is desperately ill!

EDWARD: Ill? You lying slut. Get back to your trough! (p. 33)

Edward's final confrontation with the Matchseller is a visual expression of Flora's wish fulfillment for Edward that he should remain young. But Edward suffers agony and is brought to the point of death in the scene. When Flora passes Edward the Matchseller's tray at the end, she indicates that renewal has taken place. In actuality, it has not. Edward and the Matchseller have become one and Flora leaves, triumphant, having accomplished her purpose, which is both affirming and renewing life and destroying it at the same time.

The confrontation and dialogue shows how Edward is transformed symbolically into the Matchseller. He starts off with recollections of his youth when he was athletic and "kept wicket and batted number seven." (p. 34) Those were the days when the garden was "sharp, lucid, in the rain, in the sun" and the house, banisters, stair rods and curtain rods were all "polished." (p. 35)

EDWARD: I was polished. (Nostalgic.) I could stand on the hill and look through my telescope at the sea. And follow the path of the three-masted schooner, feeling fit, well aware of my sinews, their suppleness, my arms lifted holding the telescope steady, easily, no trembling, my aim was perfect, I could pour hot water down the spoonhole, yes, easily, no difficulty, my grasp firm, my command established, my life was accounted for... my progress was fluent, after my long struggling against all kinds of usurpers, disreputables, all summer I would breakfast, survey my landscapes, take my telescope, examine the overhanging of my hedges, pursue the narrow past the monastery, climb the hill, adjust the lens (he mimes a telescope), watch the progress of the three-masted schooner, my progress was as sure, as fluent...

Pause. He drops his arms.

Yes, yes, you're quite right, it is funny. (pp. 35-36)

Edward specifically equates the Matchseller with himself by referring to the old man as "kith and kin" and his "nearest and dearest." (p. 36)
This represents growing recognition on the part of Edward that he and the Matchseller are merging. As the realization grows, Edward's agony increases. When the Matchseller laughs, Edward laughs, when the Matchseller cries, Edward cries. When Edward sneezes and says he has caught a "germ" in the eyes (p. 38), the final moment of truth is near. In the speech that follows, there is both hope and despair, an affirmation and a denial of life. As his nausea and horror grow at the realization of his coming death, Edward grows weaker, until finally he can only talk in a whisper and with great effort:

EDWARD: Not that I had any difficulty in seeing you, no, no, it was not so much my sight, my sight is excellent— in winter I run about with nothing on but a pair of polo shorts— no, it was not so much any deficiency in my sight as the air between me and my object— don't weep— the change of air, the currents obtaining in the space between me and my object... sometimes, of course I would take shelter... Yes, I would seek a tree, a cranny of bushes, erect my canopy and make shelter. And rest. (Low murmur,) And then I no longer heard the wind or saw the sun. Nothing entered, nothing left my nook. I lay on my side in my polo shorts, my fingers lightly in contact with the blades of grass, the earthflowers, the petals of the earthflowers flaking, lying on my palm, the underside of all the great foliage dark, above me...

(Pause.)

But then, the time came. I saw the wind. I saw the wind, swirling, and the dust at my back gate, lifting, and the long grass, scything together... (Slowly, in horror,) You are laughing. You're laughing. Your face. Your body. (Overwhelming nausea and horror.) Rocking... gasping... rocking... shaking... rocking... heaving... rocking... You're laughing at me! Aaaaahhhh! (pp. 38 - 39)

This is an extraordinary speech, because in it, Edward literally expresses the whole cycle of his life, from youth to old age and death. Here is the fertility ritual emerging again. There is the emergence of the sex urge, the change from adolescence to maturity, the slow change from fertility to impotence and old age. The image of the grass "scything

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together" suggests the ebb and flow of time and the slow wearing away of
the sex urge, and the imminence of death. The transformation has taken
place. The Matchseller returns to youth and Edward offers to show him
the garden, but now he is too weak.

EDWARD: ... I would like to join you... explain... show you...
the garden... explain... the plants... where I run...
my track... in training... I was number one sprinter at
Howells... when a stripling... no more than a stripling...
licked... men twice my strength... when a stripling...
like yourself.

(Pause.)

(Flatly.)

The pool must be glistening. In the moonlight. And the lawn.
I remember it well: The cliff. The sea. The three-masted schooner.

(Pause.)

(With great, final effort—a whisper.) Who are you? (p. 39)

Flora calls offstage, as if in answer to Edward’s question, "Barnabas?"
(p. 39) She takes the Matchseller by the hand to show him the garden—
the japonica, convolvulous, honeysuckle and clematis—because "summer is
coming" (p. 40). Flora, then, returns to a more youthful time, the ap-
proach of summer, and the Matchseller has become young and joined her.
The tray for the matches is handed to Edward and the transformation is com-
plete. Flora’s life wish results in Edward’s death.

I think Pinter has created, in A Slight Ache, what Artaud called "a
poetry of space," which is intended for the senses and not for the mind,
and which expresses relationships, feelings, habits, attitudes, etc. which
cannot be expressed in words. The changing relationship of man and nature,
through the course of a lifetime, is too complex a subject for words to
adequately express. It must be suggested through a language of signs and
gestures, and I think this is what Pinter has accomplished. Pinter has
made a recovery of that "religious and mystic preference" of which Artaud said the modern theatre has completely lost the sense:

The question then for the theater, is to create a metaphysics of speech, gesture, and expression, in order to rescue it from its servitude to psychology and "human interest." But all this can be of no use unless behind such an effort there is some kind of real metaphysical inclination, an appeal to certain unobvious ideas, which by their very nature cannot be limited or even formally depicted. These ideas which touch on Creation, Becoming, and Chaos, are all of a cosmic order and furnish a primary notion of a domain from which the theater is now entirely alien. They are able to create a kind of passionate equation between Man, Society, Nature and Objects. (p. 90)
Harold Pinter’s *Tea Party*, written for television in 1965, examines the paralyzing and destructive effect of the sexual drive on a middle-aged businessman, Robert Disson. The play resembles *A Slight Ache* except that it is more diffuse, less poetic, and substitutes several visual images of the destruction instead of a single one, like the Matchseller. These images include ping-pong balls, a cigarette lighter, a chiffon scarf and a bandage.

The play depicts Disson’s gradual emasculation because of conflict between the necessity of maintaining a respectable business front and an acceptable social image on the one hand and the increasing desire, on the other hand, to indulge in sexual games and fantasy. Disson, a widower with twin sons, marries in middle age and, at the same time, hires an attractive secretary. The women, Diana and Wendy, with the help of the brother-in-law, Willy, succeed in emasculating Disson. Disson is also victimized by his own necessity for sexual indulgence. I think we have, in *Tea Party*, another example of Artaud’s executioner-tormentor concept with the sexual drive specifically causing the suffering.

We saw, in *The Birthday Party*, how Goldberg and McCann released instinctual forces like lust and murder in Stanley Webber and how these gave him a brief identity while leading to his annihilation in a ritual of violence. Similar instinctual forces are released in Disson, but here his extinction is more gradual and there is no sense of identity established. Disson suffers from increasing weakness and loss of potency, like Edward in *A Slight Ache*. Disson, however, has no moment of truth, when his life flashes before him, as Edward does. Disson suffers and slowly expires through increasing sexual pressure.
The opening sequence shows Disson interviewing a prospective new secretary, Wendy. He appears to be seeking an efficient employee, someone who will be a credit to his firm and help smooth out his operations. Actually, he is seeking a partner who will indulge in sexual games with him, the only means he has of relieving the boredom of routine business existence and a marriage which seems to be mainly one of convenience. But while seeking release for his sexual fantasies, Disson repeatedly denies and suppresses them. This is one of the principal causes of his breakdown.

While seemingly examining Wendy's references, Disson is scrutinizing her legs, which she keeps crossing and re-crossing:

**DISSON.** You've heard of us, have you?

**WENDY.** Oh yes.

**WENDY** crosses her left leg over her right.

**DISSON.** Well, do you think you'd be interested in ... in this area of work? 13

The pause in the middle of the last line shows that Disson is disturbed by Wendy's action in crossing and uncrossing her legs. He becomes even more agitated when she keeps doing it.

**DISSON.** Well now, this ... post is, in fact, that of my personal assistant. Did you understand that? A very private secretary, in fact. And a good deal of responsibility would undoubtedly devolve upon you. Would you ... feel yourself capable of discharging it?

**WENDY.** Once I'd correlated all the fundamental features of the work, sir, I think so, yes.

**DISSON.** All the fundamental features, yes. Good.

**WENDY crosses her left leg over her right.** (p. 45)

Disson concludes that Wendy's "credentials are excellent" and that she possesses "an active and inquiring intelligence and a pleasing demeanour" (p. 46) and asks her to start immediately.

Disson is continually the underdog in his relationship with Wendy,
Diana, and his brother-in-law, Willy. During the wedding sequence, Disson has lost his best man, so Willy not only proposes the toast to the bride, but to the groom as well. After a long speech praising Diana, Willy starts on the toast to the groom. But this turns into a toast to the bride as well. Disson's response to the two toasts consists of one line: "This is the happiest day of my life." (p. 50)

The honeymoon-bedroom scene consists only of voices. The camera rests at the foot of the bed and the characters are not seen. The insecurity of both bride and groom and their pretensions to happiness are conveyed beautifully through cliched dialogue, pauses and repetition. The dialogue suggests exactly the opposite of what is actually spoken.

DISSON. Are you happy?

DIANA. Yes.

DISSON. Very happy?

DIANA. Yes.

DISSON. Have you ever been happier? With any other man?

DIANA. Never.

Pause

DISSON. I make you happy, don't I? Happier than you've ever been... with any other man.

DIANA. Yes. You do.

Pause.

Yes.

Silence. (p. 50)

The same kind of dialogue continues at a breakfast sequence, with Disson desperately trying to affirm his masculinity:

DISSON. ... I'm glad you didn't marry that ... Jerry ... whatever-his-name was ...

DIANA. Oh, him...
DISSON. Why didn't you?

DIANA. He was weak.

Pause.

DISSON. I'm not weak.

DIANA. No.

DISSON. Am I?

He takes her hand.

DIANA. You're strong. (p. 51.)

Disson's speech to Willy about his philosophy of life is pretty ironic from what we know of the man by this time. "I go right to the centre," he says. "I believe life can be conducted efficiently. I never waste my energies in any kind of timorous expectation. Neither do I ask to be loved." (p. 53) These are, of course, the things Disson does ask for. Disson is guilty of self deception. But as with so many of Pinter's heroes, the surface pretensions are removed during the interaction with other characters and the real person emerges.

Pinter's technique in Tea Party is to depict the situation which causes Disson's breakdown, in one scene, and then provide a concrete illustration of it in the next. For example, Disson is giving dictation to his secretary, and her wiggling about in the chair bothers him, so he asks her to sit on the desk. She has difficulty climbing up, finally putting her feet on a chair and hoisting herself onto the desk. Disson watches every move she makes. Obviously, the intent of the scene is to show that Disson is sexually aroused and ogling the girl as she climbs on the desk. But Pinter does not show this in the scene. Disson's sexual frustration comes out in the next scene, when he is playing ping-pong at his home. Disson is winning a match against Willy when he fantasizes two balls coming across the table at him. The two balls are an objectified image of the frustration and
emasculating the scene. Here we have another example of Artaud's concept of the "objective unforeseen." (p. 68)

DISSON. You sent me two balls.

WILLY. No, no. Only one.

DISSON. Two.

Pause.

JOHN. One, Dad.

DISSON. What?

TOM. One.

Pause.

WILLY walks to DISSON'S end, bends.

WILLY. Look.

WILLY picks up one ball.

One ball. Catch!

He throws the ball. DISSON groges, loses sight of the ball. It bounces under the table. He crouches, leans under the table for it. Gets it, withdraws, looks up. WILLY and THE TWINS look down at him. (p. 58)

It is immediately after this that Disson visits the eye specialist, Disley. There is nothing physically wrong with Disson's eyes, they merely reflect the agony of the sexual pressure he is being subjected to. Edward, in A Slight Ache, had a similar problem, except that his eyes ached. Disson's eyes are reflecting images of emasculation and castration, like the ping-pong balls.

DISSON. Listen . . . I never said I couldn't see. You don't understand. Most of the time . . . my eyesight is excellent. It always has been. But . . . it's become unreliable. It's become . . . erratic. Sometimes, quite suddenly, very occasionally, something happens. . . . something . . . goes wrong . . . with my eyes.

Pause.

DISLEY. I can find no evidence that your sight is in any way deficient.
DISSON. You don't understand. (p. 60)

From this point on, Disson's frustration and emotional instability increase. Pinter, delighting in the effect of small visual details, makes use of such commonplace things as Disson knotting his tie, to depict his frustration. Disson has to knot his tie three times before he gets both ends of equal length. Pinter's technique is to use small visual details to suggest something larger and more complex. Disson comes to terms with his frustrations, momentarily, when he gets the two ends of his tie of equal length.

Disson specifically asks Diana not to work so he can "see her in the daytime" (p. 62), presumably, so they can have sexual relations. Diana refuses. Disson, frustrated, is cross with Wendy next morning.

DISSON. You're late.

WENDY. You were sitting in my chair, Mr. Disson.

DISSON. I said you're late.

WENDY. I'm not at all. (p. 63)

The effect of the day's frustrations is suggested by Disson's behaviour in the workroom that evening, when he is trying to carve an unspecified article for his sons. He nearly cuts Tom's fingers off saving the wood.

DISSON. Where did I say I was going to saw it?

He stares at the wood. TOM holds it still.

Hold it still. Hold it. Don't let it move.

DISSON sabe. The saw is very near TOM'S fingers. TOM looks down tensely. DISSON saws through.

TOM. You nearly cut my fingers off.

DISSON. No, I didn't ... I didn't ...

He glances suddenly at TOM.

You didn't hold the wood still! (p. 65)
Disson's eyes now commence to ache (like Edward's in A Slight Ache) but when he ties Wendy's chiffon scarf around his eyes, he is able to make contact with her. He touches her body several times while she is checking a phone order. The scarf, applying pressure to the eyes, relieves the ache, which is probably a manifestation of guilt, as much as frustration at the demands of the sex urge. With the ache relieved, and minus guilt, Disson is able to pursue his fantasies.

The handle on the door leading to Willy's office serves the same function as the scarf when Disson peeks through the keyhole at Wendy and Willy playing games in the other office. With the door handle pressing into his skull (he was unable to see anything through the keyhole), Disson is able to indulge in voyeurism. Suddenly, the door opens, and Diana confronts Disson, kneeling. He gropes, feeling her leg. Diana has been in the room with Wendy and Willy. The nature of the goings-on in Willy's office is unspecified, but we gain an idea later in the play when, at the tea party, Wendy and Diana lie head to toe and Willy caresses them. In the confrontation with Disson here, I think Diana reveals that she is engaging in abnormal sexual practices with her brother and Wendy. Diana's words are pretty ironic, since she demands to know what kind of "game" Disson is playing.

DIANA. What game is this?

He remains.

Get up. What are you doing? What are you doing with that scarf? Get up from the floor. What are you doing?

DISSON. Looking for something.

DIANA. What?

WILLY walks to the door, smiles, closes the door.
What were you looking for? Get up.

DISSON (standing). Don't speak to me like that. How dare you speak to me like that? I'll knock your teeth out.

She covers her face.

What were you doing in there? I thought you'd gone home. What were you doing in there?

DIANA. I came back.

DISSON. You mean you were in there with both of them? In there with both of them?

DIANA. Yes! So what? (p. 67)

The next scene shows clearly Disson's conflict between the necessity of maintaining a respectable business front, on the one hand, and his increasing desire to indulge in sexual games and fantasy, on the other. While Wendy is bending over the filing cabinet, Disson stares at her buttocks, and suddenly they assume enormous proportions, a visual image of Disson's thoughts. In his efforts to ward off the vision of Wendy's buttocks, Disson knocks a cigarette lighter on the floor and the game of touch rugby begins. Disson, however, is unable to carry it through to the inevitable conclusion.

DISSON. Tackle me. Get the ball.

WENDY. What do I tackle with?

DISSON. Your feet.

She moves forward deliberately. He dribbles away, turns, kicks the lighter along the carpet towards her. Her foot stops the lighter. She turns with it at her foot.

Ah!

She stands, legs apart, the lighter between them, staring at him. She taps her foot.

WENDY. Come on, then! . . . Come on, come on. Tackle me, tackle me. Come on, tackle! Get the ball! Fight for the ball! (p. 70)

But when Disson moves to tackle, he sinks to the floor. Wendy goes to him.
WENDY... What's the matter?
DISSON. Nothing. All right. Nothing.
WENDY. Let me help you up.
DISSON. No. Stay. You're very valuable in this office. Good worker. Excellent. If you have complaints, just tell me. I'll soon put them right. You're a very efficient secretary. Something I've always needed. Have you everything you want? Are your working conditions satisfactory?
WENDY. Perfectly.
DISSON. Oh Good. Good... Good. (pp. 69-70)
Disson appears not to be able to act out his sexual fantasies in the clear light of day, only in the dark, or when his eyes are bandaged or covered. Perception of what he is doing makes Disson stop. The screen goes black in the next scene and Disson feels Wendy in the blackout. Immediately after this, he goes to Disley to have his eyes checked again. When the bandage or the chiffon scarf is applied, everyday reality is blotted out and fantasy takes over. A sexual release is effected and it is this release that causes Disson's breakdown. The same kind of destructive release operated in The Birthday Party, as we saw.
DISSON. Are my eyes open?
WENDY. Mr. Disson, really... 
DISSON. Is this you? This I feel?
WENDY. Yes.
DISSON. What, all this I can feel?
WENDY. You're playing one of your games, Mr. Disson. You're being naughty again.

Vision back.

DISSON looks at her.

You sly old thing. (p. 72)
In the strange scene with Willy, dealing with Sunderley, the place where Diana and Willy grew up, Disson attempts to fathom the relationship of brother and sister. He also attempts to break down the idealistic picture that Willy paints of the relationship and the place.

**WILLY.** Music playing.

**DISSON.** On the piano.

**WILLY.** The summer night. The wild swans.

**DISSON.** What swans? What bloody swans?

**WILLY.** The owls.

**DISSON.** Negroes at the gate, under the trees.

**WILLY.** No Negroes.

**DISSON.** Why not?

**WILLY.** We had no Negroes.

**DISSON.** Why in God's name not? (p. 74)

Disson is trying to break in and present his own version of the life at Sunderley. In other words, Disson is engaged in a struggle for supremacy with Willy, and Disson loses. Disson's answer to Diana's suggestion that they go to bed reveals that he suspects some kind of incestuous relationship between Diana and her brother.

**DIANA (standing).** Robert.

Pause.

Come to bed.

**DISSON.** You can say that, in front of him?

**DIANA.** Please.

**DISSON.** In front of him?

He goes to her.

Why did you marry me?

**DIANA.** I admired you... (pp. 74-75)
Immediately after this Disson offers to make Willy his "partner", wants him to "share full responsibility." On the surface it appears that Disson wants Willy to be his business partner, but I think his words carry a sexual implication. Disson means that Willy should share his sexual games with Wendy, perhaps share Diana in a sexual way as well.

The scene between Wendy and Diana, in which the two women decide to have lunch and discuss men touching women, seems to hint at a collaboration, with Disson being the scapegoat. The next scene is again Willy and Disson and a game of ping-pong. Here, the image of emasculation is even more explicitly presented than previously. Disson is shown playing wildly and defensively. As Willy slams a shot at Disson, the screen goes black and Disson skids. When vision comes back, Disson is bent over, clutching the table as if in pain. Willy throws the ping-pong ball on the table and it bounces gently across it. (p. 77) Willy's vicious slam and the ball bouncing gently on the table seem to suggest castration.

Wendy ties a chiffon around Disson's eyes in order that the sexual games in the office may proceed, but the chiffon proves to be inadequate for the purpose. Disson is not able to perform. Disson takes off the chiffon and phones Disley. He now needs a tighter bandage.

WENDY. Don't you like my chiffon anymore, to put round your eyes? My lovely chiffon?

Pause.
He sits still.

I always feel like kissing you when you've got that on round your eyes. Do you know that? Because you're all in the dark.

Pause.

Put it on.

She picks up the chiffon and folds it.
I'll put it on... for you. Very gently.

She leans forward.
He touches her.

No - you mustn't touch me, if you're not wearing your chiffon.

She places the chiffon on his eyes.
He trembles, puts his hand to the chiffon, slowly lowers it, lets it fall.
It flutters to the floor.
As she looks at him, he reaches for the telephone. (p. 74)

Disson visits Disley, who puts a tight bandage around his eyes, but instead of contributing to the release of instinctual forces, the bandage seems to inhibit them. Disson becomes inarticulate and remains so during the tea party scene, which is similar to the birthday celebration of Stanley Webber in The Birthday Party, except that Disson does not break out into attempts at rape and murder. Actually, what happens is that Willy symbolically completes the emasculation of Disson by handing him another ping-pong ball. It is after Willy gets Wendy and Diana lying on the desk and Wendy drops her shoe on the floor, that Disson cracks. He falls to the floor in his chair and his tea cup drops and spills. People in the room try to pull Disson out of the chair but they cannot move him. He is paralyzed, with his eyes open. Diana comes to him and kneels.

DIANA. This... Diana. . . . It's me. It's me, darling.

Slight pause.

It's your wife.

DISSON'S face in close-up.

DISSON'S eyes. Open. (pp. 87-88)

I think Disson has experienced fear, intimidation, frustration, to such a degree, that he has become emasculated, and even the tight bandage will not permit him to take part in the sexual rite which Willy has prepared with
Diana and Wendy. It is noteworthy too that Disson had decided not to go to Spain for a holiday but Willy, Diana and Wendy decide to go together. A situation has developed where Willy has taken over as the head of the harem, and Disson has become the emasculated ex-leader, the outcast from the family. He is a victim of his own sexual desires and from the pressure induced by the manipulations of the other three characters. They are his executioners and he is his own executioner as well.
CHAPTER V
SOCIAL VICTIMIZATIONS

INTRODUCTION

In The Dumb Waiter (1960) and the two revue sketches, "Trouble in the Works" (1959) and "Applicant," Harold Pinter shows that an abstract social system damages itself by reducing its human membership to puppets. The only alternative to destruction of both system and individuals is an impossible confrontation and stalemate, which we see in some of Pinter's plays. Pinter's most perfect visual image of this stalemate between society and the individual is that of the two gunmen, Ben and Gus, facing each other as victim and executioner at the climax of The Dumb Waiter. It is also a fine example of Artaud's theater of fiery images and cruelty.

The revue sketches are examples of what Artaud called "humorous poetry in space" because they employ what he termed "inversions of form" and "displacements of signification" (p. 43). We do not expect the employees of a firm that manufactures tapered spiral flute reamers to want to make brandy balls, as in "Trouble in the Works," nor do we expect that efficiency experts like Miss Piffs in "Applicant" will display sexual obsessions during an employment interview. Pinter, in these sketches, breaks down our preconceived ideas about technology, employment interviews, mass production, etc. Pinter, like Artaud, is anarchic in this sense. Artaud said it is agreed that a beautiful woman has a melodious voice, but, if since the world began, all beautiful women had greeted us like bellowing elephants, we would have eternally associated the idea of bellowing with the idea of a beautiful woman. (p. 43)

This helps us to understand that poetry is anarchic to the degree that it brings into play all the relationships of object to object and of form to signification. It is anarchic also to the degree that its occurrence is the consequence of a disorder that draws us closer to chaos. (p. 43)
The sketch, "Trouble in the Works," shows that a stalemate exists between the manufacturer of the tapered spiral flute reamers and the firm's employees who want to make brandy balls. The representative of the firm, Mr. Fibbs, is brainwashed and de-mechanized by the workers' representative, Mr. Wills. In "Applicant," a young man looking for employment is brainwashed and rendered useless by a female representative of the firm in question. This female, Miss Piffs, is sexually obsessed. This obsession is revealed through her brainwashing of the applicant, Lamb. The same kind of action occurs in The Birthday Party. Instinctual forces are released in Stanley Webber which give him a brief but violent existence and one victimizer is turned against the other when violence is released in him. A similar pattern occurs in The Dumb Waiter except that the violence is held in check. The cruelty produced in The Birthday Party by the confrontation of the sexually repressed Stanley Webber and the would-be executioners, Goldberg and McCann, explodes suddenly into violence. In The Dumb Waiter, the tension is held at the breaking point. There is violence but it is part of a slowly increasing tension which never quite reaches its maximum. Ben confronts Gus with the weapon of execution but does not actually kill him. This is an excellent example of Artaud's division point between form and chaos.
THE EXECUTIONER AS VICTIM

In _The Dumb Waiter_, the administrators of the system have ordered Ben and Gus, two hired killers, to do another "job." Possibly the mysterious "Wilson," who lays out tea cups for the two gunmen, is in charge. Who is to be exterminated and when the job is to be done is not made clear. But the essential point is that, as far as we know, Gus is not the intended victim at the beginning but becomes the victim of Ben and the system through the action of the play. It is the necessity of working together in partnership, confined in close quarters, and the tension produced by the job, the waiting for the word when to begin, that cause the split between the two gunmen and finally force the organization to order the stronger one to eliminate the weaker. The battle for control, dominance and survival erupts again. The system decrees that Ben must kill Gus because they are no longer capable of working together as a team, and Gus, having shown weakness, is no longer of any value to the system. In _The Dumb Waiter_, then, we have an executioner who becomes a victim because he can no longer function as an executioner. We have the reverse of _The Birthday Party_ where the victim became, to some extent, the executioner. But paradoxically, Ben may also be a potential victim since he too is close to cracking from the pressure exerted by the organization.

The setting is again the familiar room, this time a basement. Ben and Gus are waiting for word from the organization as to when the job will begin. Even in the opening sequence, before a line of dialogue is spoken, Gus is getting on Ben's nerves. Ben tries to read the paper while Gus pokes around in his shoes, looking for matches and cigarettes. Gus is restless and inefficient, forever going to the lavatory. But every time he pulls the
lavatory chain, the lavatory does not flush. The two men have obviously worked together in the past and a routine has been established, but now they are bored with it. Gus would like to have a window in the basement room:

BEN. What do you want a window for?

GUS. Well, I like to have a bit of a view, Ben. It whiles away the time.

He walks about the room.

I mean you come into a place when it's still dark, you come into a room you've never seen before, you sleep all day, you do your job, and then you go away in the night again.

Pause.

I like to look at the scenery. You never get the chance in this job.¹

Gus symbolically depicts the emergence of man from the womb, a dark place, but warm, into the world, where he sleeps and does his job before passing into death and darkness again. Once again we see Pinter's concern with the room as the microcosm of the world, where man acts out the drama of his existence. Ben and Gus, like Harm and Clov in Beckett's Endgame, are playing their roles for the last time. "The end is in the beginning and yet you go on," says Clov.² Like Beckett, Pinter believes that man's lot is to endure, and this too was the basis of Artaud's theory of cruelty. Things move inevitably through the "ineluctable necessity" of pain and evil, to their end, Artaud said. (pp. 102-103)

In The Dumb Waiter, as in Pinter's other plays, the cruelty is expressed through the pressure exerted by the characters in their efforts to preserve themselves and yet carry out their appointed and necessary tasks. Ben and Gus have a job to do, but risks and pressures involved in carrying out this job bring them to the inevitable final confrontation. On this their last
job, things do not go smoothly at all. Gus is worried because the bed-
sheets are dirty. He thinks someone else has been in the room before
them, sleeping in the bed.

GUS. . . . I thought these sheets didn't look too bright. I thought
they ponged a bit. I was too tired to notice when I got in this
morning. Eh, that's taking a bit of a liberty, isn't it? I don't
want to share my bed sheets. I told you things were going down the
drain. I mean, we've always had clean sheets laid on up till now.
I've noticed it.

BEN. How do you know those sheets weren't clean?

GUS. What do you mean?

BEN. How do you know they weren't clean? You've spent the whole day
in them, haven't you?

GUS. What, you mean it might be my pong? (He sniffs sheets.) Yes.
(He sits slowly on bed.) It could be my pong, I suppose. It's
difficult to tell, I don't really know what I pong like, that's
the trouble. (p. 42)

Gus is saying, in a roundabout way, that he does not understand himself, but
his concern over what he "pongs" like, shows that he is beginning to probe
the meaning of his existence and to question established values. This is,
of course, fatal to the organization and may be a principal reason why Gus
is chosen for elimination.

I think the organization may be testing both Ben and Gus to see whether
they are fit and efficient operators. This testing may be the reason for
the envelope of matches pushed under the door, because the matches provoke
the first real clash between Ben and Gus. Ben says "Light the kettle"
and Gus says "put on the kettle" (p. 47) and the confrontation provokes a
murderous assault by Ben. Gus is questioning Ben's strength and leadership
and Ben cannot stand it.

BEN. Light the kettle! It's common usage!

GUS. I think you've got it wrong.

BEN (menacing). What do you mean?
GUS. They say put on the kettle.

BEN (taut). Who says? ... Who's the senior partner here, me or you?

GUS. You.

BEN. I'm only looking after your interests, Gus. You've got to learn mate.

GUS. Yes, but I've never heard--

BEN (vehemently). Nobody says light the gas! What does the gas light?

GUS. What does the gas--?

BEN (grabbing him with two hands by the throat, at arm's length).

THE KETTLE, YOU FOOL! (pp. 47-48)

Ben's attack on Gus is similar to Goldbert's assault on McCann in The Birthday Party, except that here the issue is one of authority, whereas in the earlier play, the assault was provoked because McCann was probing Goldberg's identity. But Ben here is protecting himself in the same way that Goldberg was. The characters maintain their stratagems for their own protection, as long as possible. The difference between Ben and Gus is that Ben is at all times concerned with preserving the image of conformity. He is the efficient, working member of the organization. Gus is the one who is questioning everything and showing that he has sensitivity and feeling. Ben desperately tries to hide the fact that he too is sensitive and is bothered by the job he has to do. The newspaper is a stratagem he can use to hide his vulnerability. Gus, by asking questions and continually probing Ben's reactions, is actually victimizing his partner because he is effectively breaking down Ben's protective cover and destroying him as an efficient worker for the organization. There is thus the struggle for dominance, control and survival going on in The Dumb Waiter, as is usual in Pinter's plays.

Ben tries to hide behind his paper but Gus will not let him. He demands to know what kind of job they are to do and who the victim is to be. Ben
tries to evade the issue and Gus needles him about reading the paper.

GUS... How many times have you read that paper?

BEN slams the paper down and rises.

BEN (angrily). What do you mean?

GUS. I was just wondering how many times you'd--

BEN. What are you doing, criticising me?

GUS. No, I was just--

BEN. You'll get a swipe round your earhole if you don't watch your step.

GUS. Now look here, Ben--

BEN. I'm not looking anywhere! (He addresses the room.) How many times have I--! A bloody liberty!

GUS. I didn't mean that.

BEN. You just get on with it, mate. Get on with it, that's all. (p. 52)

Ben is afraid that Gus's continual questioning will expose him as weak and inefficient in front of the organization. This seems to be the explanation for the curious stage direction calling for him to address the room. Presumably, the representatives of the organization are watching everything the two men do and listening to their conversations. Ben, when he addresses the room, is defending himself before the organization and proving himself an efficient operator. He is also trying to expose Gus as weak and inefficient.

Ben must destroy Gus in order to ensure his own survival. The same situation prevailed in *The Caretaker*, where Mick and Aston had to destroy Davies to ensure their own survival.

The dumb waiter is a kind of telegraph by which the organization communicates with the two hired gunmen. The orders for food represent a means by which the organization tests the gunmen. The first orders are for fairly simple dishes, although difficult to fill because there is no food except
for what Ben and Gus have brought with them. The first order is for braised steak and chips, sago puddings, two teas without sugar. A second order follows for liver and onions and jam tart. Ben desperately tries to approximate what is required, piling everything that they have on a plate—biscuits, a bar of chocolate, half a pint of milk, an Eccles cake and crisps. But the dumb waiter goes up without the plate of food.

Back comes the dumb waiter with an order for Macaroni Pastitsio and Ommitha Macaroni (p. 58). The order for the exotic dishes seems to indicate increasing pressure on the men, from the organization. The men send the plate up with everything they have piled on it. But this fails to satisfy the organization or whoever, or whatever it is that is sending down the orders. The next request is for an even more exotic dish—Bamboo Shoots, Water Chestnuts and Chicken, Char Siu and Bean sprouts. The symbol of rejection of the previous orders is the packet of tea that is returned. The organization also complains, via the speaking tube that Ben discovers, that the Eccles cake was stale, the chocolate was melted, the milk was sour and the biscuits were moldy. But Ben is elated because the organization appears to confirm his version of lighting the kettle:

**BEN.** . . . (excitedly). Did you hear that?

**GUS.** What?

**BEN.** You know what he said? Light the kettle! Not just put on the kettle! Not light the gas! But light the kettle!

**GUS.** How can we light the kettle?

**BEN.** What do you mean?

**GUS.** There's no gas.

**BEN** (clapping his hand to forehead). Now what do we do? (p. 63)
Gus is disgusted because the organization, Wilson, or whoever it is that is controlling the dumb waiter, wants a cup of tea and Gus has nothing for himself. Gus does not understand that by complaining, he is signing his own death warrant.

GUS. . . . We send him up all we've got and he's not satisfied. No, honest, it's enough to make the cat laugh. Why did you send him up all that stuff? (Thoughtfully) Why did I send it up?

Pause.

Who knows what he's got upstairs? He's probably got a salad bowl. They must have something up there. They won't get much from down here. You notice they didn't ask for any salads? They've probably got a salad bowl up there. Cold meat, radishes, cucumbers. Water cress. Roll mops. . . . They do all right, don't worry about that. You don't think they're just going to sit there and wait for stuff to come up from down here, do you?

Pause.

They do all right. . . . (pp. 63-64)

Ben, in a low voice, cautions Gus that "Time's getting on" (p. 64), which, in effect, is telling him to keep his mouth shut or he will be sorry.

The two men repeat the ritual of instructions for carrying out the "job" but this time something has gone wrong. The first indication is given here, ironically, that Gus may be in danger.

BEN. You're there.

GUS. I'm here.

BEN frowns and presses his forehead.

You've missed something out.

BEN. I know. What?

GUS. I haven't taken my gun out, according to you.

BEN. You take your gun out----

GUS. After I've closed the door.

BEN. After you've closed the door.

GUS. You've never missed that out before, you know that?

The business about the gun seems to foreshadow the climax of the play when Gus
stumbles in, minus holster and gun, and confronts Ben holding his revolver. The omission in the routine bothers Gus terribly and provokes another vicious assault from Ben. Gus begins to violently question the whole purpose of the assignment. Ben desperately tries to pretend that nothing as amiss.

GUS. . . . (violently.) Well, what's he playing all these games for? That's what I want to know. What's he doing it for?

BEN. What games?

GUS (passionately, advancing.) What's he doing it for? We've been through our tests, haven't we? We got right through our tests, years ago, didn't we? We took them together, don't you remember, didn't we? We've proved ourselves before now, haven't we? We've always done our job. What's he doing all this for? What's the idea? What's he playing these games for?

The box in the shaft comes down behind them. The noise is this time accompanied by a shrill whistle as it falls. Gus rushes to the hatch and seizes the note.

(Reading.) Scampi!

He crumples the note, picks up the tube, takes out the whistle, blows and speaks.

WE'VE GOT NOTHING LEFT! NOTHING! DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

BEN seizes the tube and flings Gus away. He follows Gus and slaps him hard, back-handed across the chest. (p. 68)

Ben once more tries to immerse himself in his paper but the attempt is futile and Gus is not even listening. He merely answers dully and mechanically.

When Gus goes off left to get the glass of water (a somewhat arbitrary stage direction, but it seems to get him out of the way), Ben receives his final instructions on carrying out the assignment.

BEN. . . . Understood. Repeat. He has arrived and will be coming in straight away. The normal method is to be employed. Understood. (p. 70)

There is no explanation of how Gus gets from the lavatory on the left to the door on the right and stumbles in, stripped of jacket, waistcoat, tie, holster and revolver. But opening stage directions say that the door on the right
leads to a passage and the door on the left leads to the lavatory and kitchen. It is possible the passage connects both areas of the house. In any case, Gus enters as the victim and Ben turns, levelling his gun at him. The two men confront each other and are staring as the curtain falls. There is some kind of realization passing between them at the end but the nature of it is unspecified. Neither man seems to have been aware that the organization has been deftly turning them against one another through the tests. Ben seems to be confronted with a further test at the end because his choice is between neglecting to kill his friend, Gus, and becoming an outcast from the organization, probably rendering himself eligible for execution in the near future, or carrying out the assignment, killing his friend, and maintaining his status as an efficient executioner for the organization. Pinter, typically, leaves the final choice as to what is going to happen, up to the audience. But the confrontation results in a stalemate. The organization has destroyed one of its own members (Gus) and may have destroyed another as well (Ben), since many of his protective defenses were removed during the testing. And we do not know whether he will pass his final test or not. The organization must admit a flaw in its structure when it has to order the execution of one of its own members for incompetence and weakness, and the possible execution of a second member.

Pinter seems to be here testing the validity of abstract social power structures against human values such as friendship. If Ben fails to kill Gus, the system is dead. The only indication we have that the human values might prevail is that Ben has demonstrated, through the events in the play, that he is human. Gus has been able to crack his shell of conformity and expose the sensitive person beneath. The question is, how long will Ben be able to patch up his amor, or is the rent already too wide? The confrontation between Ben and Gus is inevitable because the two men represent the
ambiguity of the system. Its members are human but its principles are abstract. In trying to enforce its principles, it attempts to mechanize its human members, but only succeeds in exposing their inability to act as machines at the moment of crisis. The system must continue to destroy its human members in its efforts to make them conform. The system has no choice but to continue to perpetuate itself or it ceases to be a system. I think we have, in The Dumb Waiter, an excellent example of Artaud's theory of rigorous determinism and the executioner-torturer concept.
In the sketch "Trouble in the Works," Mr. Fibbs, the manufacturer of the tapered spiral flute reamers, the hemi unibal spherical rod end and the gunmetal side outlet relief with handwheel, is confronted by the employee representative, Mr. Wills, who places Mr. Fibbs in a position of having to defend his products. Mr. Wills, with increasing pressure, convinces Mr. Fibbs that his employees are no longer interested in any of his products. Mr. Wills destroys Mr. Fibbs very effectively.

WILLS. They hate and detest your lovely parallel male stud couplings and the straight flange pump connectors, and back nuts, and front nuts, and the bronzedraw off cock with handwheel and the bronzedraw off cock without handwheel!

FIBBS: Not the bronzedraw off cock with handwheel?

WILLS. And without handwheel.

FIBBS: Without handwheel?

WILLS. And with handwheel.

FIBBS: Not with handwheel?

WILLS: And without handwheel.

FIBBS: Without handwheel?

WILLS: With handwheel and without handwheel.

FIBBS: With handwheel and without handwheel?

WILLS: With or without!

Pause.

FIBBS (broken): Tell me. What do they want to make in its place?

WILLS: Brandy balls.3

The joke is that Mr. Fibbs is obviously a mechanical man and Mr. Wills systematically dismantles him. The hemi unibal spherical rod end could
be an arm, and the parallel male stud couplings might well represent the genital organs. Wills also asserts the superiority of the human over the mechanical system. But the confrontation results in a stalemate because is obviously impossible for the machinery which manufactures tapered spiral flute reamers to be adapted for the production of brandy balls.

In "Applicant," the confrontation is between Miss Piffs, a super-efficient representative of the system, and Lamb (the significance of the name becomes obvious when the slaughter commences), an eager, cheerful and enthusiastic young man. Miss Piffs softens Lamb up by putting electrodes on his palms and earphones on his head and giving him a jolt of electricity that sends him out of his chair. The interrogator then proceeds to "interview" Lamb with a technique that starts with general questions and becomes more and more personal and sexual in nature:


Miss Piffs want to know if he is "virgo intacta" and if women frighten him (pp. 135-136). She then presses a button which plunges the stage into redness, which flashes on and off in time with her questions.


The interesting thing about this sketch is that the interrogation takes on the character of the interrogator. In other words, the confrontation reveals that Miss Piffs is sexually obsessed, even though the firm she works for has obviously tried to make her an automaton. The whole interrogation is in the nature of a sexual experience, with the frustrated female
victimizing and destroying the male applicant. Perhaps Lamb is not only an applicant for a job, but an applicant for Miss Piff's sexual favors as well. The brainwashing is supposed to reflect the mechanization of industry and show how such mechanization victimizes human beings, but actually it is Miss Piff's sexual obsession (human) which becomes the victimizer of Lamb and herself. In trying to manipulate Lamb, Miss Piffs reveals that she is a sexually obsessed neurotic. Her employers have not been able to suppress the instinctual part of her nature. In this sketch, we see again how the inevitable confrontation removes the surface mask and exposes the real person beneath.
CHAPTER VI
THE ELEMENTS OF CRUELTY—CONCLUSION

I
THE ROOM

All the elements of the Theater of Cruelty are present in Harold Pinter's first play, *The Room* (1957), but the technique of victimization which produces the cruelty is not adequately developed. Pinter introduced in his first play the room or enclosed space where the battles for control, dominance and survival take place. There is the sense of mystery, which is connected with the metaphysical. The characters have an inner life which is hidden beneath a commonplace exterior. The blind Negro, Riley, is the agent that supposedly produces victimization, and thus exposure of the inner life of the characters. In the process of victimization, the Negro is himself victimized and destroyed by Bert Hudd. Pinter fails to make the Negro an effective agent of victimization and exposure. Confusion is created by the melodramatic ending when Bert, who has not spoken through the early part of the play, makes a long speech about how he drove his van, and strikes the Negro, knocking him down, and kicks his head against the gas stove. Is the Negro meant to be the victim of Bert or is the Negro supposed to be the agent whereby Bert's essentially violent nature is released and given expression? I take the latter view but the emphasis is confused. The blinding of Rose also creates confusion because the general assumption is that the blinding is connected with Bert's striking of the Negro. I believe Rose's blinding is totally unrelated to Bert's action. Just before Bert comes in, Rose touches the Negro's eyes, the back of his head and his temples. He has called her "Sal" and asked her to come home, meaning I think, she should return to the identity associated with the name Sal. Rose's blinding comes from having
touched the Negro, not from Bert assaulting him and causing a transference of guilt to the wife, manifested as blindness. The Negro is meant to cause a change in the lives of Bert and Rose by affecting each one of them independently, releasing the metaphysical or inner life within them. But confusion results from the fact that there has been no inter-action between Bert and the Negro before the assault takes place. In other words, the Negro has not attempted to manipulate Bert in the way that he has tried to manipulate Rose. Bert's action in striking the Negro comes from a desire to test the strength he has acquired in driving and guiding his van over an icy road. His speech about the van, the only long speech he has in the play, points up this idea:

BERT. . . . I caned her along. She was good. Then I got back. I could see the road all right. There was no cars. One there was. He wouldn't move. I bumped him. I got my road. I had all my way. There again and back. They shoved out of it. I kept on the straight. There was no mixing it. Not with her. She was good. She went with me. She don't mix it with me. I use my hand. Like that. I got hold of her. I go where I go. She took me there. She brought me back.

The blind Negro, I believe, is meant to serve a function similar to that of the Matchseller in A Slight Ache. He is meant to be an objectified image (Artaud's "objective unforeseen") of the inner lives of Bert and Rose and he is meant to objectify a climactic moment in their lives. The melodramatic ending represents a failure in technique, reflecting perhaps Pinter's inability to make the blind Negro as effective an image of metaphysical reality as the Matchseller in A Slight Ache.

The Room is supposed to end with some kind of revelation, but the climactic scene in which this revelation is supposed to take place is awkwardly handled. There is violence but it is not the result of any extended process of victimization. The air of mystery surrounding the
characters has been lifted to some extent, especially in the case of Bert, but there is not that sense of necessity or absolute determinism working in *The Room* to make it an effective example of Pinter's Theater of Cruelty.
II

LANDSCAPE

Harold Pinter's Theater of Cruelty reaches a high level of development in the one act play for voices, Landscape, presented on BBC radio, April 25, 1968. Pinter suggests the process of victimization and the cruelty of existence solely through the dialogue of the two characters, Beth and Duff, a middle-aged couple. Violence has completely disappeared from the play and so has the metaphysical image such as the Matchseller and the blind Negro. But the inner lives of Beth and Duff are still ruthlessly exposed, not through the intrusion of an outside agent, but through their own reflections. These are the voices of two souls in torment. The irony is that Beth and Duff appear to be completely unaware of what they are doing to each other, and they do not appear to hear each other. But both are longing for love and companionship. Their inability to achieve this intimate communication while uttering anguished pleas for it, constitutes the cruelty in the play. Beth and Duff are servants in a large country estate, living and working together, but totally unable to communicate. Each lives within the scope of his or her own memories. Pinter has created a "landscape" for each of them and these two landscapes reflect the disparity of their relationship. Duff's landscape is a rough, masculine one, made up of the atmosphere of pubs and park walks littered with duck shit. His dialogue is naturalistic, as when he describes the handling of beer kegs:

A cellarman is the man responsible. He's the earliest up in the morning. Give the drayman a hand with the barrels. Down the slope through the cellarflaps. Lower them by rope to the rocks. Rock them on the belly, put a rim up them, use balance and leverage, hike them up onto the racks.2

Beth's landscape is the sea and sand, and mist on the river. Her reflections in the play are on a past love affair, which may be imaginary.
The man could be a younger Duff. There is a rhapsodic, lyrical quality to Beth's dialogue, in contrast to the rough masculinity of Duff's:

*All it is, you see ... I said ... is the lightness of your touch, the lightness of your look, my neck, your eyes, the silence, that is my meaning, the loveliness of my flowers, my hands touching my flowers, that is my meaning.* (p. 35)

Duff seems to represent the purely physical, while Beth stands for the spiritual and lyrical in life. Somehow, the two never come together. Pinter shows both levels operating simultaneously but never in harmony. The play throbs with the anguish of Beth and Duff, who perhaps enjoyed love and communication when they were young, but now they have lost all contact with each other, although they are still desperately trying to communicate.

Critic Ronald Hayman, writing in *London Magazine*, July, 1968, says *Landscape* is totally unlike anything else Pinter has written, but I disagree. All the Pinter ingredients that make up his Theater of Cruelty are present—the lack of love, the failure to communicate, the anguish and loneliness, the struggle to define one's own identity which ensures survival. Beth and Duff may not appear to be engaged in the battle for dominance, control and survival, but in reality, there is a desperate struggle going on, with each one trying to assert the importance of his individual landscape. The setting is still the room or enclosed space, though here it has become less realistic. The only outside menace in the play is time, which seems to have brought Beth and Duff to this impossible confrontation where they neither hear, see nor speak to each other. The play resembles Pinter's earlier work, *The Lover*, in that both deal with a sterile marriage relationship. However, Beth and Duff do not find relief and escape in acting out fantasy roles as do Richard and Sarah in the earlier play. The two characters tell us in *Landscape* that there is no escape from the pain and loneliness of existence. A retreat into memories and dreams only intensifies the anguish.
Georg Buchner’s Woyzeck is a nineteenth century forerunner of the Theater of Cruelty and bears a striking similarity to Harold Pinter’s Birthday Party with its theme of savagery released through victimization. Woyzeck was one of the plays chosen by Artaud for his Theater of Cruelty, though it was never performed. A brief analysis of Buchner’s play may help to cement the relationship of Pinter with the Theater of Cruelty and show that this British dramatist belongs with the modern European movement.

The extant version of Woyzeck consists of fragments compiled by editors. Buchner died in 1837 without having completed the play. The drama was not performed until 1913. In this brief but violent drama, Georg Buchner anticipates all the elements of the modern theatre—loneliness, fear, pain, lust, madness, murder. But the element that specifically makes Woyzeck the forerunner of the Theater of Cruelty is victimization. Woyzeck, a soldier, is the subject of a scientific experiment by a certain doctor who puts him on a diet of peas and observes his reactions. The experiment leads to hallucinations, madness, and finally, murder. The doctor destroys the fabric of the rational man and the victimization produces a madman who destroys himself in an orgy of jealousy, lust and murder. In Harold Pinter’s Birthday Party, Stanley Webber was manipulated and brainwashed by Goldberg and McCam but this victimization released instinctual forces which gave him a brief but violent identity but destroyed him. In Buchner’s Woyzeck, the cruelty is manifested similarly, through the pressure of the doctor’s experimentation on Woyzeck, a process that destroys him because it dehumanizes him. The doctor tries to experiment with a cat but it runs off. He concludes that the cat has no scientific spirit. Woyzeck, however, he is able to hold captive.
DOCTOR. ... Animals, gentlemen, simply have no scientific instincts. But in its place you may see something else. Now, observe: for three months this man has eaten nothing but peas. Notice the effect. Feel how irregularly his pulse beats! And look at his eyes!

WOYZECK. Doctor, sir, everything's going dark! ...

DOCTOR. Courage, Woyzeck! Just a few more days, and then it will be all over with. Feel, gentlemen, feel! (They fumble over his temples, pulse and chest.) Apropos, Woyzeck, wiggle your ears for the gentlemen! ... He uses only two muscles. Let's go, let's go! You stupid animal, shall I wiggle them for you? Trying to run out on us like the cat? ... How much hair has your mother pulled out recently for sentimental remembrance of you? It's become so thin these last few days. It's the peas, gentlemen, the peas!

Woyzeck's speech to the Sergeant on the nature of man and the world is a beautiful image of cruelty—the anguish of man as he contemplates the nakedness of his existence:

WOYZECK. What is this? Woyzeck's arm, flesh, bones, veins. What is this? Dung. Why is it rooted in dung? Must I cut off my arm? No, Man is selfish, he beats, shoots, stabs his own kind. (He sobs.) We must be friends. I wish our noses were two bottles that we could pour down each other's throats. What a beautiful place the world is! Friend! My friend! The world! (moved) Look! The sun coming through the clouds—like God emptying His bedpan on the world. (He cries) (p. 15)

Woyzeck, in his growing madness, brought on by the pressure of experiments and the diet of peas, pisses on the wall and is condemned by the doctor because he cannot hold his urine. Then Woyzeck becomes insanely jealous of his wife, Marie, who is vain and burdened with guilt, which expresses itself in religious frenzy. Woyzeck discovers that Marie has been carrying on with a certain Drum Major and begins to have dreams in which he stabs her to death. Finally, he purchases a knife and objectifies the dream into reality. Dream imagery was to be an important component of Artaud's Theater of Cruelty a century later.

Woyzeck is expiating his own most violent impulses when he repeatedly stabs Marie. The killing takes on a religious significance since Woyzeck,
in a sense, is trying to rid himself of guilt. Marie has had an illegitimate child by him and this is a contributing factor to his sense of guilt. Her death is a purification for both of them. But it is the victimization by the doctor which has brought Woyzeck to the state of madness where he can perform the killing. The three month diet of peas, the threats and intimidation, combined with jealousy and a sense of guilt, release the savage in him:

WOYZECK Are you freezing, Marie? And still you're so warm. Your lips are hot as coals! Hot as coals, the hot breath of a whore! And still I'd give up heaven just to kiss them again. Are you freezing? When you're cold through, you won't freeze any more. The morning dew won't freeze you.

MARIE What are you talking about?

WOYZECK Nothing (silence)

MARIE Look how red the moon is! It's rising.

WOYZECK Like a sword washed in blood.

MARIE What are you going to do? Franz, you're so pale. (He raises the knife) Franz, stop! For heaven's sake! Help me! Help me!

WOYZECK (stabs madly) Take that and that! Why can't you die? There! There! Ha, she's still shivering! Still not dead? Still shivering? (stabbing at her again) Are you dead? Dead! Dead! (he drops the knife and runs away) (p. 17)

In the concluding scene, in the morgue, Woyzeck stands in the midst of a group of civic officials, looking dumbly at the body of Marie. The stage directions indicate that he is "bound, the dogmatic atheist, tall, haggard, timid, good-natured and scientific" (p. 19). Out of the victimization and a murderous dream which was precipitated into reality, the metaphysical man has emerged and died. Woyzeck, at the climax, is an automaton, with a basic ugliness that causes a child to run from him in terror when he tries to embrace it. Woyzeck lives his brief violent existence and expires.

Martin Esslin says that Buchner's Woyzeck reflects the tensions of the
modern age and constitutes a total and radical break with the classical
tradition. Woyzeck is a victim, not a classical hero:

... it is rough, violent and written in a popular idiom: above all,
however, it abandons the classical conception of tragedy in that it
has no hero in the classical sense, an exceptional individual who
defies the moral order through guilt arising from the depths of his
personality which he nobly and proudly takes upon himself. Buchner's
Woyzeck is no such hero—he is a victim driven to guilt by a society
that manipulates him like a puppet. The doctor who uses poor Woyzeck
as a guinea-pig in a scientific experiment and so involves him in
personal tragedy and guilt is an astonishing anticipation of develop-
ments which in Buchner's own time only a genius of almost superhuman
prescience could divine. For here we have man enslaved by science,
the basic problem of our own age, from Hitler's concentration camps
to the effects of nuclear tests on unborn children.5

Buchner, in a letter to his fiancée, written in 1833, anticipated by
a century Artaud's vision of man and his concept of absolute determinism:

I have been studying the history of the French Revolution. I have
felt as if crushed beneath the gruesome fatalism of History. I find
in human nature a terrifying sameness, in the human condition an in-
exorable force, granted to all and to none. The individual mere atom
on the wave, greatness sheer chance, the mastery of genius a marionette
play, a ridiculous struggle against brazen law; to recognize it, the
supreme achievement, to control it impossible... 6

Artaud phrased the idea this way: "I employ the word 'cruelty' in the
sense of an appetite for life, a cosmic rigor and implacable necessity
in the gnostic sense of a living whirlwind that devours the darkness, in
the sense of that pain apart from whose ineluctable necessity life could
not continue ..." (pp. 102-103).

Martin Eslin finds the same relationship between man and the universe
in the work of Harold Pinter:

Everything is funny until the horror of the human situation rises to
the surface ... life is funny because it is arbitrary, based on
illusions and self deceptions, like Stanley's dream that he is
going on a world tour as a pianist, because it is built out of
pretense and the grotesque over-estimation each individual makes
of himself. But in our present-day world, everything is uncertain
and relative. There is no fixed point; we are surrounded by the
unknown. 7
Esslín then quotes Pinter directly, on the next step: "... the fact that it is verging on the unknown leads us to the next step, which seems to occur in my plays. There is a kind of horror about and I think that this horror and absurdity to together." 8

It is that "horror of the human situation rising to the surface," as Esslin says, that constitutes cruelty, and the principal method by which this cruelty is manifested in Harold Pinter's plays is through victimization.
FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER I


3 Harold Pinter, in an interview with Lawrence M. Bensky, Paris Review, XXXIX (Fall 1966), was asked which writers influenced him the most; and he said, "Beckett and Kafka stayed with me the most--I think Beckett is best prose writer living" (pp. 19-20).

4 Harold Pinter, "Writing for the Theatre," Evergreen Review, VIII, xxxiii (August-September 1964), 82.


CHAPTER II

1 This is the tragedy of modern life as Arthur Miller defines it in "Tragedy and the Common Man":

As a general rule, to which there may be exceptions unknown to me, I think the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing--his sense of personal dignity. From Orestes to Hamlet, Medea to Macbeth, the underlying struggle is that of the individual attempting to gain his "rightful" place in society. Sometimes he is one who has been displaced from it, sometimes one who seeks to attain it for the first time, but the fateful wound from which the inevitable events spiral is the wound of indignity, and its dominant force is indignation. Tragedy, then, is the consequence of a man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly. (Reprinted in The Modern Theatre, ed., Robert W. Corrigan, pp. 1248-1250.)
FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER II


3 Harold Pinter, interview with Lawrence M. Bensky, Paris Review, XXXIX (Fall 1966), 33-34.


CHAPTER III

1 Harold Pinter, The Birthday Party (London, 1960), p. 70. All subsequent references and quotations are from this edition.


3 Harold Pinter, interview with Lawrence M. Bensky, Paris Review, XXXIX (Fall 1966), 30.

4 The concern with the season of the year relating to the events in the lives of human beings may reflect Pinter's interest in a cyclical fertility ritual. The ironic contrast between the season of the year and the kind of events taking place heightens interest in the play. Since Pinter is out to build up a composite picture of man as he really exists, he may be trying to show us the cycle of man's existence from birth to death, through relating him archetypally to the seasons of the year. A Slight Ache, concerned with sexual victimization, also takes place in mid-summer, the height of the growing season. For an interesting study of this play as a fertility ritual, see Katherine H. Burkman, "Pinter's A Slight Ache As Ritual," Modern Drama, XI, iii (December 1968), pp. 325-335.

5 Pinter, Bensky interview, pp. 27-28.


7 Guichardinaud, Modern French Theatre, p. 228

8 Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

1 Harold Pinter, "A Night Out," A Slight Ache and Other Plays (London, 1961), p. 82. All subsequent references and quotations are from this edition.


3 Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, p. 287.


6 Harold Pinter, The Homecoming (London, 1965), pp. 8-9. All subsequent references and quotations are from this edition.

7 Halton, p. 245

8 Hewes, pp. 57-58.

9 Hewes, p. 58.


11 Harold Pinter, "A Slight Ache," A Slight Ache and Other Plays (London, 1961), pp. 9-10. All subsequent references and quotations are from this edition.


CHAPTER V

1 Harold Pinter, "The Dumb Waiter," The Room and the Dumb Waiter (London, 1960), p. 110. All subsequent references and quotations are from this edition.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER V


4 Harold Pinter, "Applicant," A Slight Ache and Other Plays (London, 1961) p. 135. All subsequent references and quotations are from this edition.

CHAPTER VI

1 Harold Pinter, "The Room," The Room and the Dumb Waiter (London, 1960) p. 32. All subsequent references and quotations are from this edition.

2 Harold Pinter, Landscape (London, 1968), p. 7. All subsequent references and quotations are from this edition.


5 Martin Esslin, Introduction to Three German Plays (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1963), p. 9.


7 Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, p. 272.

8 Harold Pinter, interview with Hallam Tennyson, cited by Martin Esslin in The Theatre of the Absurd, p. 273.
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