TOWARD A DEFINITION OF "PINTERESQUE": PLAYING GAMES WITH DRAMATIC IRONY

by

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Toward a Definition of "Pinteresque": Playing Games With Dramatic Irony

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Toward a Definition of "Pinteresque": Playing Games with Dramatic Irony.

ABSTRACT:

To examine one element of Pinter's plays in isolation is to define "the Pinteresque," explicitly or implicitly, in a narrow, restricted fashion that Pinter himself rejects. No one set of critical tools — be they thematic, Freudian, mythic, linguistic, production, existential, or any other — is sufficient to describe the essence of Pinter's work, because that essence is the essence of life itself, with all its unfathomable mystery. The critic who would be true to the real nature of Pinter's work must be eclectic, must use but transcend the standard approaches to describe what Pinter is actually doing in his plays. Such description cannot pinpoint a single thesis or essence because Pinter's work does not have a single thesis or essence.

To reproduce his sense of the complexity and ambiguity of life, Pinter employs various strategies; most notably he plays games with dramatic irony. Unlike classical dramatists who rely on their audience's previous knowledge of events, or provide a great deal of exposition, Pinter gives his audience characters who know only as much as, or even more than, the audience does. Because they never tell all they know or think or feel, Pinter's characters make the audience guess about their psychology; we try to explain their fears and their motivations based on their actions. We may adopt a critical idiom of psychology or philosophy in our efforts to understand and we may think we understand, but Pinter never allows us certainty. We end up still full of questions, often questioning the very nature and possibility of knowing, as puzzled and frightened as some of Pinter's characters themselves.

You can't be a rationalist in an irrational world. It isn't rational.

Joe Orton What the Butler Saw (1969)

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Introduction

The extent to which the plays of Harold Pinter have inspired critical commentary is not best measured merely by the large body of published criticism they have generated, but by there already being distinct schools of such criticism. Steven H. Gale, an early and ongoing contributor to Pinter criticism, has recently stated that since 1969 there have been eight major studies of Pinter, four or five shorter works, and over one thousand essays published concerning Pinter and his plays.[1] He goes on to point out the schools of criticism and their leading practitioners, updating but not significantly altering Lucina Paquet Gabbard's decade-old assessment.[2] Gale sees himself as the leader of the thematic approach to Pinter, Gabbard as the leading Freudian critic, and Katherine H. Burkman as the leading mythic critic. Other major approaches include linguistic, production, and existential, led by Austin E. Quigley, Alrene Sykes, and Walter Kerr respectively. Gale also acknowledges the existence of less well defined approaches such as the historical, structural, computer analysis, and reader-response.

To adequately survey such a large body of criticism would be an enormous task, and would not leave me adequate space to point out what I see to be a fundamental flaw in most critical discussions of the plays; however, some attention to these major schools of thought seems in order.

In Butter's Going Up: A Critical Analysis of Harold Pinter's Works (1977), Gale surveys other thematic critics and then forwards his own views on the logical evolution of themes in Pinter's work.[3] As is all too often

the case, Gale's views are best described in a subsequent article in which he claims that from Pinter's

> earliest dramas . . . through the present there has been a pattern of the playwright carefully working out thematic problems through a series of plays that culminates in a major work that provides a resolution to the problem being considered . . . Thus, in his career Pinter has written plays that expose the existence of menace and determining that it is psychologically based, and thence to an exploration of the mind in terms of the interrelated nature of reality, time, and memory.[4]

He concludes that Pinter's thematic growth may have ended because "he may have finally found a topic so comprehensive that he will expand within it rather than moving to another area . . ."[5] And certainly the theme of the "interrelated nature of reality, time and memory" should provide ample material, although "One For the Road" (1984) seems to be a departure of some magnitude. Pinter himself has noted in the Mel Gusson "conversation" that "The whole question of time and all its reverberations and possible meanings really seems to absorb me more and more."[6]

The psychoanalytic approach to Pinter, spearheaded by Gabbard and often shakily followed by others, is valuable if used with the knowledge that psychoanalysis is little more than myth; it is certainly not nor can it ever be a verified science. As George Steiner has noted,

> The status of a psychoanalytic proposition is not . . . that of a postulate in Darwin's theory of evolution . . . Its truths are those of an intuitive, aesthetic order such as we find in philosophy and in literature. Freud's peers, his allies in his great voyage into the interior, were . . . Schopenhauer, Proust, or Thomas Mann.[7]

Gabbard seems to understand this, and uses basic Freudian and Jungian concepts, particularly those of dream interpretation and the collective unconscious, to provide insight into the plays. Despite the fact that Pinter has stated, "I have never read Freud,"[8] psychoanalytic language, the language of the interior, is particularly apt in dealing with a playwright whose action has become increasingly cerebral.

With The Dramatic World of Harold Pinter: Its Basis in Ritual (1971), Burkman, like Gabbard, asserted herself as the standard-bearer of her particular school of criticism. She proposes that there are in Pinter

> two distinct kinds of rituals . . . in counterpoint with each other. On the one hand, the plays abound in those daily habitual activities which have become empty of meaning, an automatic way of coping with life. These automatic and meaningless activities contrast in the plays with echoes of sacred sacrificial rites which are loaded with meaning and force the characters into an awareness of life from which their daily activities have helped to protect them.[9]

She goes on to state her thesis absolutely succinctly.

> My contention is that beneath the daily secular rituals which Pinter weaves into the texture of his plays . . . beat the rhythms of ancient fertility rites, which form a significant counterpoint to the surface rituals of the plays and which often lend the dramas their shape and structure.[10]

Burkman's approach is of course very similar to that employed by Francis Cornford in The Origins of Attic Comedy (1914), and in substance not that radical a departure from that of Gabbard. Burkman contends that characters in Pinter "behave very often . . . like figures in a dream" (p. 3), and her "echoes of sacred sacrificial rites" sounds suspiciously akin to the collective unconscious.

It is on the strength of his book, The Pinter Problem (1975), that Quigley is rightly viewed as the leader of the linguistic school of Pinter criticism. He suggests that the "ever-increasing volume of writing devoted to Pinter's work"[11] is little more than recognition of "temporary critical failure" (p. 29). He goes on to point out that

> Arguments about the meaning of [Pinter's] plays, about his use of symbolism, the kind of characters he creates, and the kinds of communication problems they confront seem not to be moving toward any visible points of convergence. The field is proliferating, but not progressing. (p. 4)

And I think few would argue. Quigley places the blame for this on "critical failure," but more specifically on the tendency of critics to see meaning in Pinter as being conveyed by means other than language:

> whether the initial appeal is to symbol, subtext, metaphor, structure, hidden meanings, plays on their own terms, or whatever, the final position leads inexorably to a loss of contact between observable detail and reported response. (p. 23)

He asserts,

> What these writers are seeking is a dichotomy not between words and meaning ... but between different ways in which language can carry information [Quigley's italics]. Yet their error seems inescapable in Pinter criticism; wherever one turns, criticism is distorted by misleading distinctions between text and subtext, words and meaning, language and silence, what is said and how it is said, and so on. (p. 26)

He believes that Pinter criticism subscribes to the notions that "language carries information in only one way; it sets a standard for explicitness that is single and arbitrary," and, most problematically, it posits "dualistic distinctions in an area in which pluralistic distinctions are essential" (p. 27). Only when this dualism has been abandoned can criticism of Pinter "move out of the trough in which it has laboured for over a decade" (p. 31).

The linguistic school has grown in the decade since Quigley's book, but its position hasn't radically changed. Susan Melrose writes in "Theatre, Linguistics, and Two Productions of No Man's Land" (1985),

> No poetic sign, on page or stage, achieves its aesthetic value except through its combination with such other, modifying factors: to extract it artificially from those factors, to attempt to celebrate it, or understand it, or worship it in isolation, is utterly perverse, because it is to rob it of its theatricality, achieved by dint of those other factors — words and gestures and proxemics and lights and colours and movements and objects and the gaze of the spectator — which act upon it in dynamic hierarchies to transform it.[12]

Alrene Sykes' Harold Pinter (1970)[13] has earned her recognition by Gale as the leader of what he calls the production school of criticism. Given that she was at the time the Australian Broadcasting System's drama editor, this is not surprising. Gale's recent endorsement is somewhat of a surprise, however, as in his review of the book on its publication he expressed severe doubts amid his spotty praise:

> She makes legitimate statements, but fails to provide examples for some of her contentions; she raises questions without answering them, suggests the existence of additional levels of meaning without examining them, and presents information as though to relate two facts, but neglects to draw her comparison.

He concludes:

> The strength of Harold Pinter is also its weakness; there is a careful presentation of Pinter's technical evolution, but little attention is allotted to his thematic development.[14]

But apart from revealing his preference for thematic criticism, Gale's point seems mainly to be that Sykes does not explain enough, but given the enigmatic nature of Pinter, the same could be said about any book of

criticism. What appears important to her she explains masterfully, as is the case with her discussion of Pinter's characters:

> Many of Pinter's characters destroy themselves; and the natural state of a Pinter character is insecurity. This is not of course because he desires or seeks insecurity; Pinter is no James Bond. He often puts up a frantic struggle to keep his slipping foothold, he clings to the known, the comfortingly familiar, which may be represented by a room to live in, sheltered from the cold, as in The Room and The Caretaker, or, for the more sophisticated and "civilized" Teddy of The Homecoming, a way of life that will allow him to look down, securely aloof and uninvolved, on the jungle of action around him. It is a lost cause. In spite of his yearnings, the Pinter anti-hero is not allowed to be secure.[15]

Sykes approaches Pinter's plays with a keen, unencumbered mind tempered with sensitivity if not empathy.

With his 1967 book Harold Pinter, Walter Kerr became the leading existential critic of Pinter's work. He believed that at the time Pinter was "the only man working in the theatre . . . who writes existentialist plays existentially."[16] Kerr asserts that unlike other playwrights who deal with existential themes, Pinter really does reverse the Platonic maxim of "essence before existence." This reversal is important because

> If existence does indeed precede essence, if an actual thing precedes an abstract concept of the thing, then it should also do so on the stage. Exploratory movement in the void, without preconception or precommitment, should come first. Conceptualization should come later, if at all. (p. 6)

Kerr believes Pinter writes his plays in this fashion, existentially, on existential topics. Granted, he credits Samuel Beckett as being the "most influential in imposing upon contemporary theatregoers an awareness of existential loneliness, homelessness, facelessness" (pp. 6-7), and even allows that "our strongest image of the void comes from the careful emptiness

of his plays" (p. 7). However, Kerr maintains that Beckett does not write existentially because he "forms an abstract of man's nature" and then "presents it to us in its original conceptual form" (p. 7). In Beckett, "We are not concerned with persons forming themselves; we are concerned with persons inhabiting set forms they cannot escape" (p. 7).

In Pinter there are no set forms, no conceptual nubs: "I don't conceptualize in any way," Pinter has said in his interview with Lawrence M. Bensky.[17] In opposition to many readings of Pinter, which spend a good deal of time seeking a nub, Kerr says, while

> watching a Pinter play, we give over the scramble to stick pins in ideas and fix them forever to a drawing-board. We feel that the drawing-board isn't there and that our eager thumbs would only go through it. Instead of trying to bring matters to a halt by defining them, we permit them to move at will, understanding that we have been promised no terminal point. We give existence free rein, accept it as primary, refrain from demanding that it answer our questions, grant it the mystery of not yet having named itself.[18]

Kerr is on solid ground when he makes these comments, because Pinter, in a speech made in Bristol in 1962, has said,

> I've never started a play from any kind of abstract idea or theory and never envisaged my own characters as messengers of death, doom, heaven or the Milky Way . . . When a character cannot be comfortably defined or understood in terms of the familiar, the tendency is to perch him on a symbolic shelf, out of harm's way. Once there, he can be talked about but need not be lived with.[19]

These are the major schools, but what I have outlined is by no means an exhaustive list of valuable Pinter criticism. Martin Esslin's <u>Pinter: The Playwright</u> (1982) — formerly <u>Pinter: A Study of His Plays</u> (1973), and

before that The Peopled Wound: The Plays of Harold Pinter (1970) — is as essential to a meaningful understanding of the plays as his The Theatre of the Absurd (1961) is to an understanding of modern drama and Pinter's roots. It is simply that he does not fit into any clearly defined critical school, although he is perhaps best described as a "psychological and archetypal" critic.[20]

The present study will not fit into any "school" either; in fact, it will draw on any and all of the critical approaches in an eclectic manner. It will endeavour to describe and discuss rather than explain and classify. As for a working premise, I can do no better than David Mercer's statement concerning his writing of The Governor's Lady:

> I . . . see drama not as a theatre of ideas in which questions can be posed and conclusions reached, but as a sort of ritual, synthesizing disparate and contradictory elements, accepting that personalities are fragmented, that truths are infinitely ambiguous, and yet binding together all these centripetal elements of the universe so that they are all suspended, mysteriously bound by the very tensions that always threaten to tear them apart.[21]

Or as Peter Brook says in the preface to Jan Kott's Shakespeare Our Contemporary: "poetry is the rough magic that fuses opposites."[22]

But there is more in this paper than a blithe series of reader-response-like commentaries, even though these are my own readings of the play drawn from the body of plausible readings; I examine the techniques that Pinter employs to infuse his plays with what can only be called "the Pinteresque" despite his distaste for the term,[23] and the most important of these techniques is his uses of dramatic irony. For our present purpose, we will consider dramatic irony to be present "whenever the audience sees a character

confidently unaware of his ignorance,"[24] overlooking the equally representative manifestations of the-play-within-the-play and the character as playwright, director, scenarist, actor, or role-player. Dramatic irony can occur between the audience and those on stage, but is most powerful when it occurs between an ignorant character or characters and an informed character or characters whose knowledge the audience shares. From the beginning of Oedipus Tyrannus we know on whom Oedipus' curse is placed, and this is ironic in itself, but it becomes even more ironic when, after Teiresias is shown to share our knowledge, other characters come to share it as well. In Pinter, we rarely possess dramatic irony in this sense, although it would be naive to say that Pinter's audience is completely unaware of what to expect when they go to see a Pinter play. Pinter never grants his audience the sort of knowledge that Sophocles does, but he is nevertheless acutely aware of dramatic irony and its uses. At times, Pinter reverses dramatic irony — the characters have a much better idea of what is going on than does the audience, although this is not to suggest that the characters fully comprehend their situations. At other times the audience knows only what the characters know. Pinter even gives us, in Betrayal, the ending first, and betrays us into thinking we are in command of the facts as Sophocles' audience was. But we never are. He never uses classic dramatic irony.

Many critics have touched on the issue in passing. In Harold Pinter (1973), William Baker and Stephen Ely Tabachnick point out that "Pinter rarely makes use of dramatic irony; the audience knows no more than do the characters."[25] More recently Almansi and Henderson have noted that Pinter's "characters play their cards very close to their chests, so that the

reader/spectator is never in a position to understand what is really going on."[26] John Russell Brown has noted that "Exposition has become Development, and Conclusion as well"; in fact, he continues "the whole play is Exposition,"[27] while Esslin asserts that "What Pinter rejects in the well-made play" is precisely that it provides "too much information about the background and motivation of each character."[28] But this is not all — the characters often seem to know <u>more</u> than the audience. Gone is the smugness with which we can watch most plays, comfortable with our almost God-like knowledge of the play's situation; in its place we are given a striking reminder of our own weakness as human beings struggling to understand, be it a play or our universe. But as Peter C. Thornton has noted in "Blindness and the Confrontation with Death: Three Plays by Harold Pinter," "It is possible to be baffled by a Pinter play and yet leave the theatre with the feeling of having had an important and memorable experience."[29] It is precisely this experience this paper will examine.

Pinter gives us a sense of overhearing a conversation — events unfold in front of our eyes without explanation or exposition. The people we overhear seem to know what they are talking about, whereas we do not. Pinter merely transfers this life-like situation to the stage. The technique is as simple as it is disquieting. A Pinter audience is not a comfortable group — there is much nervous laughter and shifting about; there is none of the smugness that permeates what Brook calls "the deadly theatre," where some may enjoy the "lack of intensity and even a lack of entertainment, such as the scholar who emerges from routine performances of the classics smiling because nothing has distracted him from trying over and confirming his pet theories

to himself."[30] Pinter has called the laughter of his audiences "a mode of precaution, a smokescreen, a refusal to accept what is happening as recognizable."[31] The simplicity of the situations on stage, the sparseness of spectacle, may lure some into the belief that they are watching something much less realistic than Strindberg's Miss Julie, with the real pots and pans specified in its preface, or an Antoine or a Belasco set with its sides of beef or actual parts of the appropriate house or restaurant lying around, but they are mistaken. As Christopher C. Hudgins has recently noted, "what he [Pinter] is doing is realistic, but the form he so frequently expands is not traditional realism."[32] Pinter gives us the most realistic situation imaginable, with the exception of various forms of experimental theatre, most notably improvisation, where the "ending" or "outcome" is not even known to the players.[33] Like an overheard conversation, Pinter's plays provide us with no convenient exposition where people who know each other well enough to speak intimately ask questions that if they were close friends they would already know the answers to, or if they were not such close friends they would never ask. What's more, Pinter provides us with no way of ascertaining the truth of what we have just heard. The lines we hear will be sparse and terse, sprinkled with pronouns and vague references which we know little or nothing about. Much will be conveyed and hidden in the conversation through subtext and body language. If the people we are listening to stop talking, because they have exhausted the immediate topic or because their dinner has arrived, we have no real insight into these people. We have, after all, seen them in a single situation. We go home, or divert our attention elsewhere, or, if what we have witnessed intrigues us, we ponder it and talk to our

friends about it. If we are particularly simplistic, we will label the people we have overheard and the entire incident under a single rubric. This is of course a gross injustice, but it is different only in magnitude, not in type, from the sort of labelling Pinter and his plays are frequently exposed to by professional critics.

Pinter, a writer who reflects nature, does not deal with major themes in an overt fashion, or even in a conscious one. Pinter would agree with Andre Malraux's view that "It's not emotion that destroys a work of art, but the desire to demonstrate something."[34] In as close to a "moral precept" as he gets, Pinter warns:

> Beware of the writer who puts forward his concern for you to embrace, who leaves you in no doubt of his worthiness, his usefulness, his altruism, who declares that his heart is in the right place, and ensures that it can be seen in full view, a pulsating mass where his characters ought to be. What is presented, so much of the time, as a body of active and positive thought is in fact a body lost in a prison of empty definition and cliché.
>
> (I. 13)

He is not consciously or overtly concerned with death and its fickleness as is Jean-Paul Sartre in The Wall, or with the possibility, even the justifiability, of absolute evil in a godless cosmos as is Albert Camus in Caligula; nor is he concerned, to any extent at least, with Angst, as is Leo Tolstoy when he says "it [is] impossible to shut my eyes so as not to see that there was nothing before me but suffering and actual death, absolute annihilation."[35] Pinter's characters, on the whole, lack the foresight, but more than that they lack the time for reflection that is requisite to make such observations; what his characters do is merely exist. Pinter's characters do

not act out existential philosophies, as do the characters of Sartre and Camus, nor for that matter do they mouth political dogma as can be the case in Wesker or Arden (especially in those plays Arden has written in collaboration with his wife, Margaretta D'Arcy); Pinter's characters, like Pinter himself, simply exist. As Pinter said in one of his rare interviews, "my characters and I inhabit the same world." When one of them seems to present an argument for a particular philosophy, it is not because Pinter began with a specific message to put across; it is because Pinter's characters are manifestations of life and life is reflected in philosophy. Life is the raw material of which philosophy is made and Pinter is a purveyor of raw material; the only difference between him and his characters "is that they don't arrange and select" the material to be included in the plays. As he puts it, "They do the donkey work. But I carry the can."[36]

Characters in Pinter exist; they do not espouse; they do not represent. They exist amidst the detritus of an eroding society. Amid the dust, amid the crumbling masonry, amid the pungent smells of dampness, mildew, cooking, and decay, move Pinter's characters. This occurs literally in such plays as The Room, The Dumb Waiter, and A Slight Ache, and more metaphorically in such plays as The Homecoming and Betrayal, but it occurs, and so too do the discomfort and anxieties of watching/reading a Pinter play. Whether the menacing reversal of dramatic irony is complete, as it is in The Room, where the characters seem to know what's going on but we don't; whether the reversal is partial and the characters are in the dark as well as ourselves, as in The Dumb Waiter and A Slight Ache; whether our lack of information and our questions focus on the characters' sexuality as is the case in The

Homecoming and many of the middle plays; or whether the reversal of dramatic irony is maintained by the reverse chronology as in Betrayal — Pinter's manipulation of dramatic irony can be seen as a significant technique in his plays, and as a useful means to describe them. The characters who can exist in the mystery of Pinter's plays, just like the spectators/readers who can exist with the mystery of these plays, are the most successful. Existence precedes essence; the characters must create themselves within the mystery of the play, as we must create ourselves within the mystery of life.

Chapter I

The Room

More than twenty years ago Martin Esslin noted that Pinter's The Room "contains a good many of the basic themes and a great deal of the very personal style and idiom of Pinter's later . . . work — the uncannily cruel accuracy of his reproduction of the inflections and rambling irrelevancy of everyday speech; the commonplace situation that is gradually invested with menace, dread and mystery; the deliberate omission of an explanation or a motivation for the action."[1] It is the "omission of an explanation" that I see to be the single most salient characteristic of Pinter's plays, even those written most recently and long since Esslin suggested it. Of course Pinter's "everyday speech" is also a hallmark, and because it is so accurate and familiar it provides us with a window through which to view the subtext of his plays. The language also serves to underscore the commonness of the "commonplace situation," and the consequent recognition of ourselves, or at least fragments of ourselves, in the situation, leads to pathos. Drawn in by the familiar, we find the familiar soon transformed into something threatening; but unlike in the well-made play, that which we find threatening remains unexplained. And really, is there anything more menacing, more dreadful, and more mysterious than the unknown, especially to theatre audiences steeped in denouement and sweetened with the saccharine of dramatic irony?

Who is Riley? Why does a character on stage know more about him than I do, even after the final curtain? Rose may end the play sightless, but the audience is never sighted, at least not in the traditional manner. It is this curious mixture of pathos and what I am calling the reversal of dramatic irony, for lack of a better term, that makes Pinter's plays unique.

The Room is a first play of which anyone would be proud. Written in four days for his friend Henry Woolf, the play deserves more respect than it often receives. George E. Wellwarth says the play "shows all the defects of a first play,"[2] while Esslin calls Pinter's writing of it a "bout of spontaneous enthusiasm," "melodramatic," and "dealing in threadbare mystification."[3] However, more recently, Esslin has changed his view, calling The Room a "remarkable first play" in which "the dialogue is already masterly."[4] Nevertheless, the ending is frequently pointed to as a weakness. John Russell Taylor echoes Esslin's earlier views when he labels the finale "melodramatic," but goes beyond that in suggesting the ending is "particularly out of place, since it makes the terrors that beset Rose all too actual and immediate."[5] Wellwarth believes Pinter "spoiled the play by succumbing . . . to juvenile symbolism,"[6] and while Esslin agrees that "the perhaps too overtly symbolical and poetic figure of the blind negro . . . might be felt as a break in style," he finds "the brutal ending"[7] sudden. Henry Woolf disagrees, and sees the ending as being rooted in the text. He believes

> Bert's room is death, and . . . Rose, like the Sands, like Mr. Kidd, is a fugitive. Riley want to bring her back to life, to end her slavery to Bert by virtue of imposing his own virtue of order on events. Rose goes blind . . . out of hysterical guilt

> at Riley's death, but [also] as a self-inflicted punishment for the rejection of life as represented by Riley. Her blindness is only a physical manifestation of the life she has embraced.[8]

I too tend to see Rose's blindness as emblematic of her rejection of Riley's offer — she is subconsciously punishing herself for an inauthentic existence, for living in bad faith. The room, with its growing darkness and cold, is the central image of the play; it is paralleled by Rose's blindness and the death of her "self." When the blackout occurs at the end of the play, Rose sinks into the endless night of blindness, darkness, and symbolic death.

But let's return to the earlier scenes of the play for a moment. As is frequently the case in Pinter, the play opens innocently enough. Rose seems reasonably content to serve and cater to Bert, who may or may not be her husband. By talking and creating as pleasant an environment as possible, Rose maintains a peaceful but uneasy co-existence with Bert. She coddles and indulges him, but he refuses even to speak to her, preferring to read his magazine while sipping the tea that Rose not only makes for him but pours, puts milk in, and refills whenever it becomes low. She keeps up both ends of the conversation, a technique Pinter uses often; but more than that, she continually opens herself to Bert, receiving nothing in return, until she becomes visionless, drained, and exhausted in a manner somewhat similar to Edward in <u>A Slight Ache</u>.

As bleak as the opening moments are, they are among the warmest and brightest in the play. Figuratively the mood becomes blacker and colder very quickly, and literally this movement may be seen in Rose's comments of "It gets dark now" (I. 103), and, when rising from her rocker, "she wraps her

cardigan about her" (I. 104) after saying, "It's very cold out" (I. 101).

Darkness and coldness are as much intruders as are Mr. Kidd, the Sandses, and even Riley. This motif is underscored by the set itself. Upstage left is the stove, while downstage left is the gas-fire, both primary sources of warmth, but of some incidental light as well. A few fleeting moments of natural light are provided by the window up centre, but this quickly fades. The door is down right; therefore, darkness, coldness, and physical intruders must move from the audience's left to right, toward the sanctum in which we find Rose's rocker flanked in a protective manner by the stove and the gas fire.

It is no mere coincidence that Riley, the black, blind intruder, is killed or at least beaten senseless on the gas-stove, source of heat and light and at the furthest possible distance from his point of entry, diagonally across the stage. His intrusion has effected a loss of perceived innocence as "a shadow darker than the shadow of the night" has touched the very heart of the room and of Rose. Riley's presence is an assertion of truth, and the truth is that Rose (or Sal) has turned her back on her identity by becoming the eager mother to the younger son-like Bert. Riley, who may be Sal's father, presents Sal with evidence of her inauthenticity, but more than that, the last thing she sees before she is plunged into eternal darkness is Bert kicking Riley's "head against the gas-stove several times," and then Riley "lies still" (I. 126). Not only is she aware of her loss of identity, she is forced to face the fact that she cannot go back; it is her hysterical reaction to her dilemma, a dilemma completely of her own making and all the more agonizing because she realizes she cannot blame it on

a malevolent deity or on anyone else, that causes her blindness. Like Edward, and like Sam in The Homecoming, the objective correlative of extreme mental turmoil is a physical ailment or collapse.

But what exactly is wrong with Rose's existence? At first, of course, nothing seems to be. Pinter baits his trap with an opening scene of recognizable domestic interaction if not exactly bliss. Busy, worldly "hubby" is being fortified for his sally into the real world while his wife/mother dotes and fusses before she engages in what to him is a day of vicarious leisure. There is much idle chatter about the weather and how nice and cosy their flat is, especially when compared to the basement. But slowly we begin to feel discomfort about the situation, and begin to ask questions. Rose asks, "If they ever ask you, Bert, I'm quite happy where I am" (I. 103), but to whom does the vague pronoun refer? Moreover, the basement begins to take on a mysterious aura as well, and as we try to piece together elements in Rose's expository monologue that traditionally at least would inform us of the situation, we are met by completely illogical statements, such as "There isn't room for two down there, anyway, I think there was one first, before he moved out. Maybe they've got two now" (I. 103). We also meet marvellously haunting tautological statements, such as "I told him you hadn't been too grand, but I said, still, he's a marvellous driver. I wouldn't mind what time, where, nothing, Bert. You know how to drive. I told him" (I. 104), and "You've got a chance in a place like this. I look after you, don't I, Bert? Like when they offered us the basement here I said no straight off. I knew that'd be no good. The ceiling right on top of you. No, you've got a window here, you can move yourself, you can come home at night, if you have

to go out, you can do your job, you can come home, you're all right. And I'm here. You stand a chance" (I. 105).

By this point, we are well aware of Rose's "garrison mentality"; she is under siege. The threats of a breach increase. Already there have been insidious incursions by the cold and darkness, largely repelled by heat, light, and cardigan. But the forces arrayed against her become visible, if only fleetingly, when after "she rises, goes to the window, and looks out" (I. 104), she says, " 'I wonder who that is.' Pause 'No, I thought I saw someone.' Pause 'No.' She drops the curtain" (I. 104). How she says "No" and with what urgency she "drops the curtain" is of course a production variable, but given that Pinter chose the active verb "drop" as opposed to other adequate but less active choices such as "lowered," there can be no doubt that Rose is at least somewhat shaken by her observation. Did she see Riley? Did she think she saw Riley? Was she looking for Riley? Of course at this stage we don't even know that Riley exists, but Rose does, and we know she was looking, thought she saw someone, and then "drops the curtain" on the outside. We are on the wrong end of dramatic irony; the character knows more and continues to know more than the audience. The usual convention is reversed.

But the outside presents itself soon after at the door in the figure of Mr. Kidd, a deaf elderly man, probably a caretaker, as he has "been looking at the pipes" (I. 105) and is uncertain as to the size of the house even though Rose later tells Riley he is the landlord. The conversation is a delight, but more than that it serves to add mystery rather than dispel it. First we learn that Mr. Kidd is deaf:

Mr. Kidd	I knocked.	
Rose	I heard you.	
Mr. Kidd	Eh?	(I. 106)

and

Mr. Kidd	I went out. I came straight in again. Only to the corner, of course.
Rose	Not many people about today, Mr. Kidd.
Mr. Kidd	So I thought to myself, I'd better have a look at those pipes. (I. 106)

But in addition, we begin to wonder about Bert. Can he speak at all? He doesn't verbally acknowledge Mr. Kidd's presence and the text provides no clue as to his non-verbal reaction to the presence of Mr. Kidd. Surely, if he glances up from his magazine at all, as he is seen to do in the production-still of the Bristol (1957) production,[9] we would believe him to be rude, especially as Mr. Kidd addresses him by name and asks him direct questions; are we then to assume that Bert doesn't even glance at Mr. Kidd? and that his only response or even movement during the scene is that he "yawns and stretches, and continues looking at his magazine" (I. 107)? Why does Mr. Kidd accept this chastisement without comment? Why does Bert not even deign to speak to Mr. Kidd who intrudes into the room when he feels he must kill or attempt to kill Riley for a similar transgression? Are we to assume Bert is rude at this point or dumb? Part of the answer, especially as to why Mr. Kidd puts up with Bert's rudeness, lies in the fact that Mr. Kidd is there under false pretences. He is trying to determine when Bert is going out because Riley is waiting to see Rose and Mr. Kidd "can't get rid of him" (I. 120). He adds, "That's why I came up before" (I. 120).

The scene does more than set up a series of questions; it sets up a series of doubts as well. First there is the discussion centering on the rocking-chair:

Mr. Kidd	Eh, have I seen that before?
Rose	What?
Mr. Kidd	That.
Rose	I don't know. Have you?
Mr. Kidd	I seem to have some remembrance.
Rose	It's just an old rocking-chair.
Mr. Kidd	Was it here when you came?
Rose	No, I brought it myself.
Mr. Kidd	I could swear blind I've seen that before.
Rose	Perhaps you have.

Given that we later learn that Mr. Kidd once lived in the Hudds' apartment (I. 107), it is entirely possible that Mr. Kidd has seen the chair when he lived in the suite and is experiencing a touch of Sartre-esque "nauseau" at this point. Yet, Rose claims to have brought the chair with her, but then responds with the absolutely illogical statement that perhaps Mr. Kidd has seen the chair before. Where? When? The doubts continue to mount.

Mr. Kidd praises Bert for his smooth gear changes and the care he takes of his van, but when Rose points out that she thought Mr Kidd's bedroom was at the back of the house, he responds, "I wasn't in my bedroom" (I. 107), to which he adds enigmatically "I was up and about" (I. 107). When asked where his bedroom is now, he says in a vaguely threatening way, "I can take my pick" (I. 108). He is obviously also uncomfortable at this point, because he rises and seeks to end the exchange by gleaning the information he has come to obtain — "You'll be going out soon then, Mr. Hudd?" (I. 110) — and exits as soon as possible with his completely out of character "Arivederci" (I. 110).

At this point Bert "pushes his chair back and rises" (I. 110), but before he exits, without a word or even a perfunctory peck, Rose has him take off his coat and put on a jersey underneath it, and put on a muffler. After cautioning him not to "go too fast" and tempting him with cocoa on his return, she tells him to put on his overcoat. Whether he puts on his overcoat in obedience to her suggestion or ignores her as an assertion of independence the text does not tell. In either case, Rose appears agitated and uncertain once she is alone:

> She stands, watching the door, then turns slowly to the table, picks up the magazine, and puts it down. She stands and listens, goes to the fire, bends, lights the fire and warms her hands. She stands and looks about the room. (I. 110)

Like the opening of The Dumb Waiter, this stage direction describes a rather lengthy pantomime, and it says volumes. Three times we are told she is standing; she's obviously not at ease. She doesn't know what to do with herself or even with Bert's magazine. She's cognizant of the intrusion of the cold into the room, so she lights the fire and warms herself. Next,

> She looks at the window and listens, goes quickly to the window, stops, and straightens the curtain. She comes to the centre of the room, and looks towards the door. (I. 110-111)

She is straining to hear the first sounds of an intruder and thinks of the person she saw or thought she saw from the window. The curtain is untidy from her rough treatment of it earlier, and she straightens it, but doesn't close it; Bert will do that later (I. 125). As she knows and we know, the real intrusion will be by the door.

> She goes to the bed, puts on a shawl, goes to the sink, takes a bin from under the sink, goes to the door and opens it. (I. 111)

Rose's motivation seems to be ambiguous at this point. Taking out the garbage may merely be the most pressing task in her monotonous day, but it could also be more than that. She has been listening intently, but has she heard anything? Is it not completely possible that in an old house now converted to flats that she has heard the Sandses as they make their way about unfamiliar hallways "darker in than out" (I. 113) according to Mr. Sands? Is she making a brave foray to face the intruder beyond her door, using the trash as a ruse, or is she merely surprised when she says "Oh!" (I. 111) when she sees Mr. and Mrs. Sands on the landing?

At first it seems the Sandses provide no threat. They are simply a couple seeking a place to live. Toddy and Clarissa inject a bit of comedy into the scene as Pinter baits another trap. When Rose discovers Mrs. Sands' name is Clarissa she says, "What a pretty name" (I. 112), to which Clarissa inanely replies " 'Yes, it is nice, isn't it? My father and mother gave it to me.' Pause." This pause has to be filled with perhaps the least restrained laugh of the play. But of course the Sandses cannot exit before (like Gus and Ben and Edward and Flora to name just two other examples) they reveal their subconscious dislike for one another by their fight over semantics:

	He perches on the table.
Mrs. Sands	You're sitting down!
Mr. Sands	(jumping up). Who is?
Mrs. Sands	You were.
Mr. Sands	Don't be silly. I perched.
Mrs. Sands	I saw you sit down.
Mr. Sands	You did not see me sit down because I did not sit bloody well down. I perched!
Mrs. Sands	Do you think I can't perceive when someone's sitting down.

And off they go to further discuss perception and then how Mr. Sands takes after his uncle. Now of course we find the whole scene amusing; we're familiar enough with such conflicts to at least recognize them in others, and while we haven't the slightest idea of who Toddy's uncle is, it doesn't really matter. We've come to identify with Rose, and she doesn't know who he is either. Our level of information on this issue equals that of the protagonist, if one may still use such a term, and this is at least familiar territory. Depending on Rose's actions and behaviour during the exchange, the scene may actually be reasonably funny. But not completely so. If she maintains her concentration on the topic of discussion before Mr. Sands "perches on the table," the topic of a man living in the damp, dark basement, we will share Rose's insistence and annoyance when she renews her line of questioning as soon as possible, even while the two combatants are still muttering to themselves.

From this point on the tension rises sharply. After a page-long ramble describing their movements throughout the house, Mrs. Sands contradicts her earlier statement when she met Rose on the landing ("We've just come up the stairs" [I. 111]) with "we were just coming down again when you opened the door" (I. 117). The facts seem impossible to pin down, despite Rose's attempts. Mr. Kidd's vagueness about his function and living arrangements, the dark basement, the mysterious man/voice lurking there, the inability of the Sandses to reach the top of the house, all serve to isolate the Hudd flat. Its existence, ours for that matter, "is but a brief crack between two eternities of darkness."[10] Or as Esslin notes,

> the room becomes an image of the small area of light and warmth that our consciousness, the fact that we exist, opens up in the vast ocean of nothingness from which we gradually emerge before birth and into which we sink when we die.[11]

And writ large this is what the play is about, but it is also simply about a woman, one with whom we've identified, struggling to bring light and warmth, understanding and meaning, to her entire <u>life</u>, not merely to the moment. She asks questions, urgent questions, of the Sandses, as she tries to illuminate her future, to discover what will happen to her, but as we will discover, to a degree at least, she has plunged her past into the repressive and repressing darkness. Riley, an unresolved episode in her past, is about to burst into the present, into consciousness, into warmth and light, into the room. But what's more, Riley has told the Sandses the Hudds' room is vacant, and understandably this upsets the already insecure Rose.

After the Sandses leave, we have the second of three times Rose is alone in the room, and her second of three pantomimes. She is much less active in this one than the first, but considerably more so than in the third when, while waiting for Riley's entrance, she simply "<u>sits in the rocking chair</u>" (I. 122). In her second pantomime she "<u>watches the door close, starts towards it, and stops</u>" (I. 118). Presumably she is going to finish taking out the trash, which she has likely left on the landing, but for whatever reason she stops. As I'd have her keep on the shawl that she wore during her first attempt to take out the trash, in order to signify the inability of the flat to protect her from the cold, and from other intruders for that matter, she doesn't hesitate because she needs warm clothes. She simply isn't strong enough to sally forth. She "<u>takes the chair back to the table, picks up the</u>

magazine, looks at it, and puts it down. She goes to the rocking-chair, sits, rocks, stops, and sits still." She straightens things up a bit, but soon stops; she looks at Bert's magazine, but cannot concentrate enough to read it. She rocks in her chair, but even that takes too much energy. She waits in the chair, flanked by stove and fire, her back to the door.

When the intrusion comes, as we sense it must, it is in the person of Mr. Kidd, and Rose rising says, "Mr. Kidd! I was just going to find you" (I. 119), even though she obviously lacked the energy even to rock. We share Rose's sense of urgency, however, when she says "There were two people in here just now. They said the room was going vacant. What were they talking about?" (I. 119). But again, Rose's difficulties, our difficulties, are not central to the action; they are merely central to Rose and ourselves. Mr. Kidd has an equally pressing concern, the man in the basement who wants to talk to Rose. For several moments the two talk at cross-purposes, until Mr. Kidd tells Rose that the man will "come up when Mr. Hudd's here" (I. 121), which seems to convince her that her concerns over the Sandses' statement are secondary to the necessity of keeping the man in the basement from crossing paths with Bert. When Mr. Kidd leaves, "She sits in the rocking chair," drained, and after "a few movements" a blind Negro enters and sits.

While at this point we may still believe Rose to be the quietly doting innocent merely trying to deal with a problem so her spouse doesn't have to, as soon as she hears the name "Riley" this view begins to change. "My name is Riley," says the blind Negro, to which Rose replies with obvious recognition: "I don't care if it's — What?"; with denial: "That's not your name"; and finally with a vicious attack:

> You've got a grown-up woman in this room, do you hear? Or are you deaf too? You're not deaf too, are you? You're all deaf and dumb and blind, the lot of you. You're a bunch of cripples.
> (I. 122)

To begin with, this statement foreshadows the idea that Riley is Rose's father and that he should now treat her as an adult, which, given that she is sixty, seems reasonable. But more than foreshadowing what is to come, in this statement she attacks him, black men, and almost certainly the other men in the play. "You're all deaf and dumb and blind" she says, and they are. Mr. Kidd is deaf, Bert is speechless, and Riley is blind. Men are a "bunch of cripples," she concludes. Is this the Rose we have known? who lavished attention over an unresponsive Bert? She continues venomously:

> They say I know you. That's an insult, for a start. Because I can tell you, I wouldn't know you to spit on you, not from a mile off. (I. 123)

Her vehemence over not knowing him is of course further evidence that she does known him. She attacks Riley unmercifully, with only a pause between salvos to gauge the damage and to reload. He releases his words slowly. His name has a powerful effect on her, as noted above, but when he says "I have a message for you," she begins to soften during the pause after her final vituperous assault; she asks, "What message?" to which he responds, "Your father wants you to come home," which he later rephrases as "Come home, Sal." What follows is one of the most human and genuinely touching moments in Pinter.

> Rose Don't call me that.
> Riley Come, now.
> Rose Don't call me that.

Riley	So now you're here.
Rose	Not Sal.
Riley	Now I touch you.
Rose	Don't touch me.
Riley	Sal.
Rose	I can't.
Riley	I want you to come home.
Rose	No.
Riley	With me.
Rose	I can't.
Riley	I waited to see you.
Rose	Yes.
Riley	Now I see you.
Rose	Yes.
Riley	Sal.
Rose	Not that.
Riley	So, now.
	Pause.
	So, now.
Rose	I've been here.
Riley	Yes.
Rose	Long.
Riley	Yes.
Rose	The day is a hump. I never go out.
Riley	No.
Rose	I've been here.
Riley	Come home now, Sal.

She touches his eyes, the back of his head and his temples with her hands. (I. 124-5)

She caresses Riley, a blind black man of perhaps eighty years of age. It is real; it is authentic. She talks about herself and her life: "The day is a hump. I never go out." He understands and cares. But as soon as the authentic moment occurs, the price must be paid for leading an inauthentic existence. Bert enters and "_draws the curtains_," shutting out even the last light of day. "_He comes to the centre of the room and regards the woman._" It is the only time in the play Rose is referred to as a woman, and Pinter's nomenclature cannot be accidental. The stage direction is designed to accentuate the connection between Rose, the woman, and Bert's van, described with female pronouns. Not only is a woman an object, but she is a sexual

object, to be used, to be driven. The contrast between the dark, cold-blooded violence of this scene involving Bert, and the tenderness and warmth of the scene between Riley and Rose is striking. "I drove her down, hard," he says, "Then I drove her back, hard" (I. 125-6). "I caned her along . . . she was good . . . she don't mix it with me. I use my hand. Like that" (I. 126). Does he hit her at this point? Swing his hand in the air? Is she afraid of him? Embarrassed? Full of hate? In any event, he closes his speech as it began with "I got back all right" (I. 126). At what point he sees Riley is unclear; perhaps he has seen him from the moment he entered, but it is possible that with taking off his muffler and other outerwear he doesn't notice Riley immediately. He obviously notices him after his tautological speech, and "regards the Negro for some moments." Now whether he looks at Riley with mere contempt, or if his countenance is struck with the horror of familial and presumably racial resemblance between Sal and her father, is not as crucial as is the premeditation that is implied. Bert is deciding what to do, and in an absolutely horrific conclusion decides to kill, or try to kill, an eighty-year-old blind man. Riley "rises slowly," and shows respect to Bert by calling him mister and by calling Sal Bert's wife, gestures to which Bert responds with a single word, "Lice!" Bert knocks him down and "kicks his head against the gas-stove several times" (I. 126). In the silence that follows Rose "stands clutching her eyes," saying "Can't see. I can't see. I can't see" (I. 126).[12] Appropriately, a blackout precedes the curtain; Rose's blindness is emblematic of her guilt over Riley's death, caused by her leading an inauthentic existence with Bert, and of her knowledge that she can never go back to the life she once led, an

awareness made all the more keen by her having just recently seen how authentic, real and warm life could be. But we know very little else, and even this is interpretation, not "fact." We certainly cannot even begin to feel that we know enough to make absolute pronouncements. Like life, the play does not lend itself to such things. We know what we have seen, but we know very little else. Without a denouement to grant us God-like superiority over the characters, we must share Rose's terror and bewilderment and blindness. We see long before Oedipus sees and blinds himself — which is traditional dramatic irony. At the end of The Room, we have even less sight than Rose . . . or Sal. Pinter has reversed dramatic irony.

Chapter II

The Dumb Waiter

The Dumb Waiter was performed with The Room at the Royal Court Theatre in March of 1960. It is hard to imagine two more compatible plays. Both deal with people safely within a room being intruded upon; the door to the outside is the focus in both plays, and the dialogue reveals the tension between the occupants of the two rooms even as the characters try to hide their feelings. The only major difference lies in the premise underpinning the plays. While The Room starts with a common situation and moves to a more uncommon one, The Dumb Waiter begins with an uncommon situation to which we gradually become accustomed, and then delivers a surprise ending, making it arguably the most contrived play in Pinter. Dramatic irony is not reversed to the same extent in The Dumb Waiter as it is in The Room, but the reader/ spectator never knows more than the characters; we are exposed to mystery in both plays. And we tend to empathize with the characters, because we too are faced with a situation whose explanation eludes us. In a very real sense, these two plays are variations on a theme.

In an interview given in August of that year, Pinter seems very much aware of his use of the same kind of setting in these two plays and of its relationship to theme.

> I am dealing a great deal of the time with this image of two people in a room. The curtain goes up on the stage, and I see it as a very potent question: What is going to happen to these two people in the room? Is someone going to open the door and come in?[1]

When asked later that year by Kenneth Tynan what it was exactly that the two people were afraid was going to enter, Pinter elaborates:

> Obviously they are scared of what is outside the room. Outside the room there is a world bearing upon them which is frightening. I am sure it is frightening to you and me as well.[2]

And of course it is. Alienated as we are in the twentieth century, can we make sense of our surroundings, of our lives? After Chernobyl has delivered fallout to our very doors, what new intruder will arrive to burst open the door and enter? Just as Pinter's reply to Tynan moves the discussion from the abstract topic of his characters to the more immediate topic of his fears, Tynan's fears, and our fears, Pinter's plays are really as much about us as they are about his characters.[3] He doesn't allow his audience to answer questions about his characters (does Ben kill Gus?) or about the plot itself (who is on the other end of the dumb waiter?). The plays are really microcosms of life, replete with mystery. Sometimes the characters seem to know what's going on while we don't; this occurs in The Room, and seems best described as the reversal of dramatic irony. At other times, such as in The Dumb Waiter, the characters seem to know little more than we do. Both of these conditions are more life-like than traditional dramatic realism which allows, in fact demands, dramatic irony.

Dramatic irony is, in a very real sense, demanded by the metaphysics of the age of realism (still alive today in popular culture). It is the equivalent of omniscience, one-third of the Godhead. Just as Heaven promised such knowledge to its patrons, Art had to strike a similar bargain. Esslin calls the reversal of dramatic irony "a higher degree of realism," and

believes that what Pinter "rejects in the well-made play is precisely that it provides too much information about the background of each character." He adds that in "real life, we deal with people all the time whose early history, family relationships, or psychological motivations we totally ignore."[4] But I suspect that we remain deliberately ignorant of these factors in those around us, preferring to deal with objective and quantitative issues such as performance, often considering it a terrifying weakness to even enter into the morass of such vagaries as motivations. However, this doesn't mean we're not interested in observing people in a dramatic situation. As Esslin notes, "We stop and look in fascination at a quarrel in the street even if we do not know what is at issue." And yet we tend to ignore motivations as well as other subjective variables. Why? Esslin concludes that

> There is more to this rejection of an over-defined motivation of characters in drama than the desire for realism. There is the problem of the possibility of ever knowing the real motivations behind the actions of human beings who are complex and whose psychological make-up is contradictory and unverifiable.[5]

Esslin is right. Pinter seems to know exactly what his plays are about, and how they strive to convey his views. Inserted into the programme of the Royal Court twin-bill was the following; it would not be a gross exaggeration to term it "Pinter's manifesto":

> 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; 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 can 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.

Pinter ends his insert with a back-handed attack on the "well-made play": "The more acute the experience the less articulate its expression."[6] Plays which begin with an exposition, provide dramatic irony to their audience, and end with an untying or an unravelling of plot, may be in an illusory sense "articulate," but the experience they offer is not "acute." Perhaps Camus says it more clearly:

> A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger.[7]

Communicating these feelings of strangeness and alienation is a much more difficult, and therefore less articulate task, than that of passing off the latest simplistic solution. But it is precisely into this wilderness that Pinter leads us, and it is only very much later that he provides us with a way out in the authentic figure of Emma in Betrayal.

Pinter is, of course, not beyond teasing his audience with something that appears familiar before divesting it of this illusion in order to heighten feelings of alienation. In The Dumb Waiter we are given a situation that must be common to patrons of "action" fiction: paid assassins are waiting to commit a contract murder. But even before the first words are spoken we begin to be aware that the conflict of the play will not be between the assassins and their victim, but between the two assassins.

The play begins with an elaborate pantomime that reveals the hostility Gus and Ben feel toward each other; without a word of explanation we are made aware of this. In fact, when the characters do begin to speak, their language appears to be a stratagem to cover nakedness, the nakedness of the feelings that have been revealed to us by their actions.

The curtain rises, and we see two beds against the back wall with a serving hatch between. There are two doors: one, left, is to the lavatory and the kitchen, the other, right, is to the outside. Gus sits on the bed closest to the outside door, "tying his shoelaces, with difficulty" (I. 129), while Ben "is lying on a bed, left, reading a paper." He is closest to the door to the lavatory and the kitchen. When Gus finally succeeds in tying his laces, he "rises, yawns, and begins to walk slowly to the door, left," the door closest to Ben. "He stops, looks down, and shakes his foot." Ben, naturally enough, "lowers his paper and watches him," while Gus "kneels and unties his shoelace and slowly takes off the shoe." Gus, totally involved in his exploration, fails to notice the eyes of Ben upon him, and when he looks inside his shoe he discovers "a flattened matchbox. He shakes it and examines it." Having completed his task, and having placed the matchbox in his pocket, Gus only now becomes aware of Ben's gaze and "Their eyes meet." As the scene will build in intensity their eyes will meet again; this first encounter should be an uncomfortable but not completely acrimonious exchange. Ben breaks the contact with the quintessentially male exhibition of irritation: the rattling of the newspaper, and of condescension: the return to reading. Gus resumes walking to the door, but "stops and shakes the other foot. He kneels, unties his shoe-lace, and slowly takes off the shoe." In

this shoe, he discovers a flattened cigarette packet, a discovery that will probably wring a nervous laugh from an audience; he examines it with innocent, almost simple, curiosity, and presumably places it in his pocket. Again, "Their eyes meet." And because Gus has distracted Ben only moments before, and because they are closer at this point (Gus is moving directly in front of Ben to go to the lavatory), there is more acrimony in the exchange of looks. Ben "rattles his paper," one assumes more loudly than before, "and reads" with all the more diligence. Gus "wanders" along and exits to the lavatory.

As blatant as Ben's hostility has been to this point, when Gus leaves the room we discover just what amount of hostility he has repressed in Gus's presence. Ben "slams the paper down on the bed and glares after him." But after the calming effect of the cathartic outburst, he "picks up the paper and lies on his back, reading." After a momentary silence, the "lavatory chain is pulled twice," and Ben would inevitably show minor annoyance, but the fact that the "lavatory does not flush" is a masterful touch, as waiting for the sound is at least as interruptive to Ben as if the sound had occurred. Gus re-enters, and standing in the doorway "scratching his head" is the epitome of simpleness. He is obviously distracting to Ben, very likely even irritating, and when Ben "slams down the paper" we expect the worst, but what follows is a vigorously applied coating of language that calms the tempestuous surface of their relationship in an unctuous fashion.

Ben. Kaw!
He picks up the paper.
What about this? Listen to this!
He refers to the paper.

> A man of eighty-seven wanted to cross the road. But there was a lot of traffic, see? He couldn't see how he was going to squeeze through. So he crawled under a lorry.
>
> Gus. He what?
> Ben. He crawled under a lorry. A stationary lorry.
> Gus. No?
> Ben. The lorry started and ran over him.
> Gus. Go on!
> Ben. That's what it says here.
> Gus. Get away.
> Ben. It's enough to make you want to puke, isn't it?
> Gus. Who advised him to do a thing like that?
> Ben. A man of eighty-seven crawling under a lorry!
> Gus. It's unbelievable.
> Ben. It's down here in black and white.
> Gus. Incredible.

The "effect" is immediate; their relationship is calmer. And like some sort of playwright/experimenter, Pinter sends Gus off to pull the lavatory chain again so we can experience the same event with different affect. The mood has changed, but, of course the tempest still surges below. What has happened? Pinter explains in a 1962 speech:

> 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, 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. (I. 15)

Up until Gus and Ben begin to discuss the violent death of the pathetic man in the newspaper there is "true silence." They are "nearer nakedness," and given their frustrations and anxieties, they are nearer violence. However, as soon as language is employed, "the other," the way they truly feel, is repressed and kept in place. Their speech covers their nakedness; but from

the beginning of the play we know what lurks beneath the words, what "the other" is, and look to its return.

Pinter's analysis of the role of speech does not differ radically from that of Antonin Artaud. In his rambling Le Théâtre et son Double (1938), he voices many of these same concerns. "Beneath the poetry of the texts, there is the actual poetry, without form and without text,"[8] he says, and in a letter to his friend Jean Paulhan he adds,

> I make it my principle that words do not mean everything and that by their nature and defining character, fixed once and for all, they arrest and paralyze thought . . . .[9]

and finally,

> I am adding another language to the spoken language, and I am trying to restore to the language of speech its old magic, its essential spell-binding power, for its mysterious possibilities have been forgotten. . . . in the spectacles I produce there will be a preponderant physical share which could not be captured and written down in the customary language of words, and that even the spoken and written portions will be spoken and written in a new sense.[10]

While Artaud values language much less than Pinter, the difference is markedly less than one would at first assume. Granted Pinter gives us language, but how much of it is mere form, "a mocking smoke-screen"? Pinter certainly attempts to express more ideas than Artaud, but his plays are different from the "problem-plays" of Ibsen or Shaw. Pinter taunts us with the expectations of a "well-made play" but does not deliver; he lures us into responding in a cerebral fashion by providing many traditional forms, but we learn little or nothing. If the plays are to work, we must watch and feel as much as we listen and think. We simply never have sufficient information on

which to deal with issues and characters with assurance and finality. We are in a constant state of hypothesis formation and testing and hypothesis reformation. We are on the wrong side of dramatic irony.

When Gus returns from the lavatory, Ben is still reading his paper. Gus, buoyed by the civility of their recent exchange, says, "I want to ask you something" (I. 130), but Ben will not be drawn in by small-talk, and counters with the question, "What are you doing out there?" What follows is a marvellously inane exchange full of cross-purposes during which Ben manages to keep reading, despite Gus's tossing his crushed cigarette packet about, and finally "under his bed" (I. 131), at which point he remembers his original train of thought and says "Oh, I wanted to ask you something." While the dialogue has come back to where it began, so too does the action as Ben "slamming his paper down" says "Kaw," and they begin to discuss the newspaper again.

At the end of this interchange, Gus again remembers his original question:

Gus. Have you noticed the time that tank takes to fill?
Ben. What tank?
Gus. In the lavatory.
Ben. No, does it?
Gus. Terrible.
Ben. Well, what about it?
Gus. What do you think's the matter with it?
Ben. Nothing.
Gus. Nothing?
Ben. It's got a deficient ballcock, that's all.
Gus. A deficient what?
Ben. Ballcock.
Gus. No? Really.
Ben. That's what I should say.
Gus. Go on! That didn't occur to me.

Is Ben right? We don't know, but right or wrong, Gus considers the issue resolved and is satisfied: language has wrought its fraudulent magic. But the tank still takes too much time to fill despite the labelling, the diagnosis, the words.

Ben reads the paper, but Gus is bored, not agitated like a caged animal, but calm, almost pensive. His idle rambling wanders quickly from his fitful sleep, to a picture of cricketers, to the room's lack of a window. Ben's response to all of these things is uninterested remarks and the occasional query about tea. But when Gus begins to discuss the conditions of the job, Ben "lowering his paper" says,

> You kill me. Anyone would think you're working every day. How often do we do a job? Once a week? What are you complaining about?
>
> Gus. Yes, but we've got to be on tap, though, haven't we? You can't move out of the house in case a call comes.
>
> Ben. You know what your trouble is?
>
> Gus. What?
>
> Ben. You haven't got any interests.
>
> Gus. I've got interests.
>
> Ben. What? Tell me one of your interests.
>
> Pause.
>
> Gus. I've got interests.
>
> Ben. Look at me. What have I got.
>
> Gus. I don't know. What?
>
> Ben. I've got my woodwork. I've got my model boats . . .
>
> (I. 134)

Does Gus keep a straight face at this point? I suspect so, but only after scanning Ben's face for a sign of genuine humanity. He doesn't find it and asks, "Don't you ever get a bit fed up?" To which Ben replies, "Fed up? What with?" A silence ensues during which Ben, turtle-like, withdraws his head within the protective shell of his paper. After rummaging through his

coat, Gus, undaunted by Ben's retreat, but without respect for it either, asks Ben if he has cigarettes. Next, the lavatory flushes, an event Gus commemorates with the inane utterance, "There she goes" (I. 135). Already we expect Ben to slam his newspaper down, but when Gus goes on to further criticize the working conditions, Ben responds with the relatively mild, "When are you going to stop jabbering?" While their interaction at this point may not be always amiable, it is not overtly violent. By their exchange of words, "the other," their potential violence, is hidden. Whatever it was in Gus that was satisfied by Ben's statement of "ballcock" concerning the lavatory is satisfied in the audience by the discourse of the two on a variety of matters including football. The audience takes their talk of football as a sign of the good relationship of Gus and Ben just as Gus sees Ben's explanation as a sign that all's well; the world can be explained and understood. Gus and the audience frequently share a similar affective state.

When the envelope containing the matches is slipped under the door, however, things change rapidly, as is evidenced by their emotionally charged discussion over terminology. In typical fashion, Gus "probes his ear with a match" (I. 141) and Ben "slapping his hand" says "Don't waste them! Go on, go and light it."

Gus. Eh?
Ben. Go and light it!
Gus. Light what?
Ben. The kettle.
Gus. You mean the gas.
Ben. Who does?
Gus. You do.
Ben. (His eyes narrowing). What do you mean, I mean the gas?
Gus. Well, that's what you mean, don't you? The gas.

Ben.	(Powerfully). If I say go and light the kettle I mean go and light the kettle.
Gus.	How can you light a kettle.

If Gus doesn't have a self-satisfied grin on his face at this point, he never does in the play. He is baiting Ben, and is either unconcerned with or unaware of Ben's rising anger.

Ben.	It's a figure of speech! Light the kettle. It's a figure of speech.
Gus.	I've never heard of 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?

And again we find them, as "they stare at each other, breathing hard."

It is clearly Ben who is upset by the mystery of the matches, as it is forcing him to deal with the unknown. Gus with his simple sense of awe and wonder is better prepared. Ben, like many of Pinter's critics, must have a rational fabrication to explain events; mystery must be dispelled, labelled, and shelved. If he can label a thing with a noun, or concoct an explanation for an event, no matter how contrived, he is satisfied. Gus, on the other hand, revels in mystery, contemplates it, accepts it. His weakness is his tendency to believe Ben's explanations, thereby limiting his vision. He is amused by Ben's discomfort and seeks to observe it as he has the crockery, innocently and without malice. Ben, on the other hand, must convince himself and those around him that his world view is correct. His frustration rises, becomes violent, and quickly turns to despair.

Ben.	(Deliberately). I have never in all my life heard anyone say put on the kettle.
Gus.	I bet your mother used to say it.
Ben.	Your mother? When did you last see your mother?
Gus.	I don't know, about —
Ben.	Well, what are we talking about your mother for? They stare.
Gus.	Yes, but —
Ben.	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!

(l. 142)

Ben achieves catharsis at this point, and in its afterglow he is melancholic, if not actually calm. After Ben's ejaculation, Gus is able to take "the hands from his throat"; he calms his senior partner with "All right, all right." After a pause to compose himself, Ben wants to get on with the matter at hand, the lighting of the matches; he proceeds cautiously, but he is about to make a major blunder.

Ben.	Well, what are you waiting for?
Gus.	I want to see if they light.
Ben.	What?
Gus.	The matches.

Obviously, Ben's query meets with a satisfactory response from Gus. The response Ben feared was "the gas," but the one he hoped for was "the kettle." Satisfied, but not heartened, he watches Gus try to strike the matches on the flattened box he has taken from his pocket. When unsuccessful, he "throws the box under the bed" where it joins the cigarette packet. "Ben stares at him." Naturally, the retentive, tight-lipped Ben is appalled at his expulsive and talkative junior partner's littering, and perhaps not without

reason, as readers of action fiction are well aware; arrests have been made on such evidence.

Gus. Raises his foot. Shall I try it on here?
Ben stares. Gus strikes a match on his shoe. It lights.
Here we are.
Ben. (Wearily). Put on the bloody kettle, for Christ's sake.
(I. 143)

Ben doesn't realize immediately his error as "he goes to his bed, but, realizing what he has said, stops and half turns. They look at each other." To spare Ben too much embarrassment, Gus slowly exits to the lavatory. Although it isn't indicated at what point Ben picks up his paper, I would have him do so while standing, and turning away from Gus as a means of ending the eye contact between the two as he does so. It is obvious that the paper is simply something to hide behind while the tension abates because when Gus exits Ben "slams his paper down on the bed and sits on it, his head in his hands."

As troubling as his slip of the tongue is to Ben, it is really only a parallel to his major source of anxiety: the alienation he feels from his job and by generalization from his world. Ben is still clinging to a world view in which all things are at least explainable if not explained. Granted, he hides it well, but at some level he is aware that he is not responding adequately to Gus's questions. With every answer he bridges the abyss of the chaotic and uncertain world Gus seeks orderly explanations of. With every answer he once again crosses safely, but nevertheless aware of the potential for disaster if he abandons his explanations. The parallel to the audience sitting, watching the play, laughing nervously, and waiting for the

denouement is obvious. Pinter in an absolutely mimetic fashion creates the feeling of alienation in his audience that Ben experiences in the play.

Up to this point in the play, Ben's discomfort has been manifested in his dislike for Gus, but as Gus's questions begin to turn to those involving the job, tensions escalate and become energized by alienation. With the arrival of the dumb waiter, Ben's alienation extends to a much larger scale. But in all three instances, Ben versus Gus, Ben versus his job, Ben versus his world, it is Gus who bears the brunt of Ben's unwillingness to deal with the unknown.

The climax of Ben's irritation with Gus's presence comes when Gus returns from the kitchen to report he has lit the stove for their tea. The tension rises quickly when Gus invades Ben's space by sitting on Ben's bed, and when Gus asks a question it evokes considerable anger in Ben as he "looks at him." Gus persists with

> I thought perhaps you — I mean — have you got any idea — who it's going to be tonight?
> Ben. Who what's going to be?
> They look at each other.
> Gus. (At length). Who it's going to be.
> Silence.
> Ben. Are you feeling all right?
> Gus. Sure.
> Ben. Go and make the tea.
> Gus. Yes, sure.

When Gus exits we are not surprised that Ben "looks after him," but what is surprising is that Ben "takes his revolver from under the pillow and checks it for ammunition" (I. 144). Even if Ben does not brandish the weapon in Gus's direction while he checks it with flamboyant skill, the associative powers of the montage link the gun to Ben's anger at Gus. The scene echoes

previous scenes and foreshadows the ending.

When Gus returns we discover that the "gas has gone out," and that they have no money for the meter. But in the midst of this discussion Gus makes enquiries and more than one disparaging remark concerning Wilson, their employer. Ben defends Wilson, but his anxieties manifest themselves as he "holds the revolver up to the light and polishes it" (I. 145). Gus ignores or is unaware of the significance of Ben polishing his gun and sharpens his line of questioning. When he asks about their last job, a girl, Ben "grabs the paper" (I. 146) and tries to withdraw, but Gus persists. In his most aggressive act in the play he rises from his bed and looks down at Ben. I'd have him take one or two steps toward Ben as well for emphasis. What's more, Gus has violated Ben's space by looking at him over the top of his newspaper. To this invasion he adds, "How many times have you read that paper?" Ben "slams the paper down" for the first time in Gus's presence "and rises." They stare angrily at each other; the tension quickly abates, however, and they return to their corners. Gus persists.

> She wasn't much to look at, I know, but still. It was a mess, though, wasn't it? What a mess. Honest, I can't remember a mess like that one. They don't seem to hold together like men, women. A looser texture, like. Didn't she spread, eh? She didn't half spread. But I've been meaning to ask you. Who cleans up after we're gone?
>
> (I. 147)

Ben is agitated by this. He "sits up" and "clenches his eyes," but recovers with a rational explanation that so convinces himself that "pityingly" he says to Gus, "You mutt. Do you think we're the only branch of the organization? Have a bit of common. They got departments for everything." While

this explanation may appease Gus, and perhaps the audience, Ben, like the audience, will be hard pressed to "explain away" the dumb waiter, which now clatters into life.

After their initial panic concerning the noise, they discover the dumb waiter bears an order for "Two braised steak and chips. Two sago puddings. Two teas without sugar." When Gus notes that the situation is "a bit funny" (I. 148), Ben "quickly" tries to explain.

> No. It's not a bit funny. It probably used to be a cafe here, that's all. Upstairs. These places change hands very quickly.
> Gus. A cafe?
> Ben. Yes.
> Gus. What, you mean this was the kitchen, down here.
> Ben. Yes, they change hands overnight, these places. Go into liquidation. The people who run it, you know, they don't find it a going concern, they move out.
> Gus. You mean the people who ran this place didn't find it a going concern and moved out?
> Ben. Sure.
> Gus. WELL, WHO'S GOT IT NOW?
> Silence.

Ben needs a moment to think, so he stalls, and before he must posit his latest theory the dumb waiter again "descends with a clatter and a bang." Ben, who sees all intrusion as threat, "levels his revolver," but Gus, who is driven more by awe and wonder, takes the paper from the box and reads the order. "Soup of the day. Liver and onions. Jam tart." What follows is an intricate pantomime that reinforces the image of the play to this point.

Gus looks at Ben for guidance, and Ben "takes the note and reads it." He "walks slowly to the hatch" and Gus "follows." Ben "looks into the hatch but not up it," afraid perhaps of what he might see or whom or what he may offend by his glance. Gus reaches out and "puts his hand on Ben's shoulder."

This is apparently a sign of affection and support in the face of uncertainty, but Ben "throws it off." He is busy concocting a theory based on an incomplete examination of the phenomenon; he doesn't want to be reminded of the vagaries of his emotions. Gus, with typical curiosity, "puts his finger to his mouth" in an obvious signal to Ben to maintain his silence, but it is also a further gesture of camaraderie with Ben. Before Ben realizes his intent, Gus "leans on the hatch and looks swiftly up it" (I. 149). Ben is horrified at Gus's impudence and "flings him away in alarm." Ben, beginning to compose himself, "looks at the note" and "throws his revolver on the bed and speaks with decision": "We'd better send something up," says Ben, and with considerable relief they address their task.

All goes well as, in an effort to fill the order, they go through the meagre provisions Gus has brought along, until Ben discovers a packet of crisps.

> Ben. (Accusingly, holding up the crisps). Where did these come from?
> Gus. What?
> Ben. Where did these crisps come from?
> Gus. Where did you find them?
> Ben. (Hitting him on the shoulder). You're playing a dirty game my lad.
>
> (I. 150)

The presence of "the other" is felt even in the midst of this cooperative scene.

The orders become more complicated and Gus's questions more direct. Ben is at a loss for words, but tries to compensate mimetically for his inability to order his world by dressing carefully in preparation for "the job." After

he "puts on his shoulder holster, and starts to put on his tie," he has Gus do the same. Gus complies, and then says

	Hey, Ben.
Ben.	What?
Gus.	What's going on here?
	Pause.
Ben.	What do you mean?
Gus.	How can this be a cafe.
Ben.	It used to be a cafe.
Gus.	Have you seen the gas stove?
Ben.	What about it?
Gus.	It's only got three rings.
Ben.	So what?
Gus.	Well you couldn't cook much on three rings, not for a busy place like this.
Ben.	(Irritably). That's why the service is slow.
	Ben puts on his waistcoat.
Gus.	Yes, but what happens when we're not here? What do they do then? All these menus coming down and nothing going up. It might have been going on like this for years.
	Ben brushes his jacket.
	What happens when we go?
	Ben puts on his jacket.
	They can't do much business.
	The box descends. (I. 151)

They soon decide they should explain to the person or persons running the dumb waiter that they cannot fill the orders. Ben, ever responsible, is just about to write a note when Gus discovers the speaking tube. In his simple, direct style Gus says into the tube, "The larder's bare" (I. 155), at which point Ben "grabs the tube and puts it to his mouth," and says, "speaking with great deference,"

> Good evening. I'm sorry to – bother you, but we just thought we'd better let you know that we haven't got anything left. We sent up all we had. There's no more food down here.

The only reply Ben receives is a list of complaints concerning what they have sent up, and a demand for tea. Gus can't believe the impudence and says, "He wanted a cup of tea! What about me? I've been wanting a cup of tea all night!" (I. 157). In despair Ben says "What do we do now?" before he "sits on the bed, staring" for several moments while Gus raves at him. Finally, Ben, "wearily and in a low voice," decides it is time to give Gus his instructions. These are simple, and their form is ritualistic. Significantly, Ben doesn't mention Gus's gun, an ominous fact when noted by Gus as never having happened before.

The calming effect of the ritual wears off quickly, however, and there's not as much to do now that the dumb waiter is silent. Gus starts to think and asks,

> What do we do if it's a girl?
> Ben. We do the same.
> Gus. We do the same.
> Ben. Exactly.
> Pause.
> Gus. We don't do anything different.
> Ben. We do it exactly the same.
> Gus. Oh.
> Gus rises and shivers.
> Excuse me.

He exits to the lavatory and after a moment pulls the chain; it doesn't flush. There is silence. As he stands in the doorway "thinking" (I. 161), we are reminded of previous scenes which have begun in this manner. Gus, baffled by his impotence in the face of the lavatory, the apparent malignity of the inscrutable entity on the other end of the dumb waiter, the person who slipped the matches under the door, Wilson, and even eternity itself, is overwhelmed by his growing sense of the absurd. He asks Ben "slowly in a

low, tense voice," "Why did he send us matches if he knew there was no gas?" There is "silence." Gus, no longer to be put off by Ben ignoring him or hiding behind his newspaper, "crosses to the left side of Ben, to the foot of his bed, to get his other ear," and repeats his question, a question the audience would dearly like to have answered as well. But of course Ben can't answer the question, and that is the point: such questions cannot be answered, not realistically.

Gus's barrage continues unabated, and even Ben hitting him twice "viciously on the shoulder" (I. 162) seems to have no effect. His anger and frustration climax when the dumb waiter again descends, "accompanied by a shrill whistle," bearing an order for scampi. Gus "crumples up the note, picks up the tube, takes out the whistle, blows and speaks": "WE'VE GOT NOTHING LEFT! NOTHING! DO YOU UNDERSTAND?" All that Gus has brought with him has been served by the waiter-like pair, one who seems to be dumb because he asks questions and one who could be said to be dumb because of his reticence to speak as they wait for their victim. But more than that, Gus is emotionally drained by his ordeal, and after another violent outburst, Ben, too, has nothing left and "turns to his paper" while Gus sits on his own bed.

Their emptiness is underscored by their conversation concerning the newspaper. In typical fashion, Ben "throws the paper down" (I. 162) and says "Kaw!" What follows is a parallel to their earlier discussion of the pathetic old man who is crushed to death, but a discussion without content; the "thing" is not defined:

Ben.	Have you ever heard of such a thing?
Gus.	(Dully). Go on!
Ben.	It's true.
Gus.	Get away.
Ben.	It's down here in black and white.
Gus.	(Very low). Is that a fact?
Ben.	Can you imagine it.
Gus.	(Almost inaudible). Incredible.

All that keeps them from plunging into the abyss is form.

At this point Gus goes to the lavatory for a drink of water and Ben is beckoned to the speaking-tube by a whistle.

Ben. Yes.
To ear. He listens. To mouth.
Straight away. Right.
To ear. He listens. To mouth.
Sure we're ready.
To ear. He listens. To mouth.
Understood. Repeat. He has arrived and will be coming in straight away. The normal method to be employed. Understood.
To ear. He listens. To mouth.
Sure we're ready.
To ear. He listens. To mouth.
Right.
He hangs the tube up.
Gus!

(I. 164)

Ben has received instructions for the murder, and does not seem to be aware that it is Gus who will appear at the door, right, because he says, "Sure we're ready." Of course he could be aware of what is to come or naive about what is to come; the voice has in all probability said "Are you ready?" which could refer to Ben being ready to kill Gus or Gus and Ben being ready to kill another man. Pinter has deliberately created this ambiguous situation; we are meant to ponder Ben's level of awareness at this point. Had Ben repeated "She has arrived" rather than "He has arrived," we would know Ben to be as

surprised as we are when it is Gus who appears at the door, stripped of his gun and clothing. Will Ben kill Gus? Gus has presumably been overpowered. How did this happen without Ben or the audience being aware of it? Is it Wilson who desires Gus dead? Someone else? Or perhaps it is a dangerous attempt by Gus to make Ben think about their victims, their job, their existence. But all we know is that "they stare at each other" (l. 165) as they have in the past. Whether Ben's urge to aggress against Gus that we have seen manifest itself so often, merges with the sanction of his employer and results in Gus's death, we simply don't know. In a realistic manner, questions in Pinter outlast the experience. We experience no denouement; we have no knowledge of the play that exceeds what the characters know. Pinter, again, has not made use of dramatic irony, but he has not reversed it either. Unlike the characters in The Room who have more knowledge of the play than the reader/spectator, Gus and Ben at the end of the play have exactly as much knowledge of their situation as does the audience. When the curtain falls, everyone in the theatre, on both sides of the illusion/reality barrier, is asking the same thing.

Chapter III

A Slight Ache

A Slight Ache opens in the same manner as does The Room. In both cases, a maternal spouse is keeping up both ends of a conversation, and is, given the rules of propriety, being neglected. Unlike The Room, A Slight Ache does not keep the spectator/reader significantly less well informed than the characters, but as in The Dumb Waiter we share the bafflement of the characters. Flora and Edward are not any more certain about who or what the matchseller is than we are. Like Gus, Ben, and the audience, they make the best of a situation in which there is no absolute truth.

Why, then, include A Slight Ache in this discussion if the situation is similar to that of The Room and the degree of dramatic irony is similar to that of The Dumb Waiter? The reason is twofold. First, it introduces sexuality into the plays in a representative manner. Second, it is in many ways a rough sketch for Old Times, and the theme of remembrances of the past forming the present, especially if a third party (the matchseller or Anna for example) can be lured into endorsing them. What follows A Slight Ache is a series of plays in which our lack of information and our questions focus on the characters' sexuality.

The tension that exists between Edward and Flora is to be seen from the beginning of the play.

Flora. Have you noticed the honeysuckle this morning?
Edward. The what?
Flora. The honeysuckle.
Edward. Honeysuckle? Where?
Flora. By the back gate, Edward.
Edward. Is that honeysuckle? I thought it was . . . convolvulus or something.
Flora. But you know it's honeysuckle.
Edward. I tell you I thought it was convolvulus.
Pause.
Flora. It's a wonderful flower.
Edward. I must look.
Flora. The whole garden's in flower this morning. The clematis. The convolvulus. Everything. I was out at seven. I stood by the pool.
Edward. Did you say – that the convolvulus was in flower?
Flora. Yes.
Edward. But good God, you just denied there was any.
Flora. I was talking about the honeysuckle.

(I. 169-70)

Like the Sandses and their discussion about "perching," and Gus and Ben's interaction concerning the kettle, Edward and Flora's discussion reveals to us the tension that exists between the elderly couple. This can be seen in the pauses, which occur "because of what has happened in the minds and guts of the characters." Pinter adds that if the actors "play it properly they will find a pause . . . inevitable." "Something has happened to create the impossibility of anyone speaking for a certain amount of time — until they have recovered from whatever happened."[1] That "something" is of course their verbal sparring. But as uncomfortable as that sparring obviously is, language is, as Pinter has suggested, "a stratagem to cover nakedness" (I. 15), the nakedness of their dislike for one another and the inauthentic situation they have created.

During the pause in the exchange quoted above we are closer to this truth. Edward has reasserted himself with "I tell you I thought it was

convolvulus." His tone of voice would of course be quite irritated. Rather than escalate the confrontation by restating her previous reply of "But you know it's honeysuckle," with the appropriate sharp tone, after the pause, which is more uncomfortable for Flora because she has no paper to hide behind and little to toy with, she takes a different tack, changing the topic to how wonderful it is that the convolvulus is in flower. Like Rose, and like Gus, she is in a weaker position, and Pinter conveys this fact parsimoniously, using simple conversation and simple props: newspapers and magazines.

Their relative positions can be seen even more clearly in their subsequent dialogue.

Edward.	About the what?
Flora.	(Calmly). Edward — you know that shrub outside the toolshed . . .
Edward.	Yes, yes.
Flora.	That's convolvulus.
Edward.	That?
Flora.	Yes.
Edward.	Oh.
	Pause.
	I thought it was japonica.
Flora.	Oh, good Lord, no.
Edward.	Pass the teapot, please.
	Pause. She pours tea for him.
	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.
	Pause.
Flora.	(Rising). I was up at seven.

Edward is being difficult, and Flora is trying to be pleasant. She not only tries to keep the conversation polite through her tolerance and patience, she pours tea for Edward rather than merely passing it as he has requested, and does not rise to the bait when Edward says "It is clear that I don't."

Rather than attack him she rises, a time-honoured signal of discomfort and change, and switches topics:

> Flora. (Rising). I was up at seven. I stood by the pool. The peace. And everything in flower. The sun was up. You should work in the garden this morning. We could put up the canopy.
> Edward. The canopy? What for?
> Flora. To shade you from the sun.
> Edward. Is there a breeze?
> Flora. A light one.
> Edward. It's very treacherous weather, you know.
> Pause.
> Flora. Do you know what today is?

and during this pause we suddenly understand why Flora puts up with Edward being difficult: he is frail.

The set gives the sense of a fine morning in which to have breakfast in the garden. All the talk is of fine weather; Flora's only fear is that the sun may be too strong; a canopy has been suggested. We now know why Flora did not attack Edward when he made the comment "It is clear that I don't" in response to her "you know perfectly well what grows in your garden." The garden was once his responsibility and likely a major source of pride, and now Flora has taken it over as he is no longer able to maintain it properly; she is not as powerless as she is kind.

The play seems to be more about Flora's development as a person than any other single issue.[2] While she could hardly be said to "discover herself" in the play, her toying with authenticity, questioning her existence, leaves her in better shape than Rose at the end of The Room and in decidedly better shape than the inquisitive assassin Gus.

She has taken over the garden, and after they've entombed the first wasp of summer in the marmalade jar, "She sits on a chair . . . and reads the 'Telegraph.'" But aside from engaging in a sexual fantasy or two by discussing the spicier moments of her sex-life in front of the matchseller, who gives little indication of being alive let alone aware, her effort, like Rose's and Gus's, is a case of too little effort much too late in life. It is too late for Rose to go home as Riley suggests, Bert won't permit it, and her powerlessness and guilt are symbolized by her hysterical blindness. It is too late for Gus to begin to question his environment; he has entered into an organization that demands complete obedience, and he has very likely executed others whose "crime" was no worse than his own. It is too late for Flora to begin entertaining thoughts of another man to rekindle the passion of her youth. She feels she cannot simply abandon Edward in his old age, but when she seems to finally do so she is elderly and content with the matchseller, apparently a filthy man who lives on the streets selling mouldering matches. She cannot do other than appear absolutely heartless in giving Edward the tray of matches, symbolically sentencing him to the matchseller's existence, and this undercuts what remains a formal comic ending: girl gets boy, de facto marriage, images of summer, promises of food and an orderly environment, to say nothing of Flora's sexually suggestive statement "I want to show you my garden, your garden. You must see my japonica, my convolvulus . . . my honeysuckle, my clematis" (I. 199).

But enough of the play's end; let us return to Edward and Flora at breakfast. It's "the height of summer" (I. 171), and on that day what may be "the first wasp of summer" (I. 174) lands in the marmalade jar where it is

entombed by Edward. Shortly after scalding it to death with boiling water, Edward, appearing fully recovered from an earlier "slight ache" (I. 172) in his eyes, says:

> Edward. What a beautiful day it is. Beautiful. I think I shall work in the garden this morning. Where's the 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 a minute. Down to the pool. My God, look at that flowering shrub over there. Clematis. What a wonderful . . . (<u>He stops suddenly</u>).
>
> (I. 174)

Edward's resurgence is stopped in mid-sentence by the presence of the match-seller.

From this point, until the end of the scene, an exposition would not be out of place. But while Pinter gives us some knowledge of the matchseller, it doesn't really clarify anything. We are given the form of an exposition, but no significant content. We discover that the figure by the back gate sells, or at least seems to try to sell, matches on a road to a monastery, a road even the monks don't use on their way to the village. We le[illegible] Flora that the matchseller is "always there at seven" (I. 175), an[illegible] concludes that "For two months he's been standing on that spot" by t[illegible] gate. Tension mounts as Edward tries to understand the matchseller, audience can only endorse Edward's query, "Why doesn't he stand on t[illegible] road if he wants to sell matches, by the <u>front</u> gate?" We share hi[illegible]sess-ment, "The whole thing's preposterous," but the tension inexorably [illegible]inues

to build; we cannot distance ourselves from the characters' discomfort through the convention of dramatic irony, because we know nothing more than they do.

Flora tries to assuage the situation, tries to stem the rising tension before it gathers unstoppable momentum. She moves toward him, perhaps shading his eyes or at least touching his brow, while saying "I don't know why you're getting so excited about it. He's a quiet harmless old man, going about his business. He's quite harmless." Edward replies to her soothing words with a statement that shows as well as anywhere in Pinter the gulf if not the abyss that can lie between what is meant, what is felt, and what is said: "I didn't say he wasn't harmless. Of course he's harmless. How could he be other than harmless?" (I. 176).

Literally speaking, of course, the matchseller is harmless. He touches no-one,[3] says nothing, and in the radio version, at least, may not even exist in a concrete sense. In the stage version he should appear as nondescript as possible, be blocked upstage as much as feasible, and lighted dimly.[4] He should be nearly invisible, as Vivien Merchant was as Anna in the opening scene of Old Times directed by Peter Hall in 1971.[5] But in a sense the matchseller does exist; he is there, and as such he satisfies the tenets of realism by giving Flora and Edward someone to talk to while revealing aspects of themselves to the audience that they do not reveal to each other. (Pinter, despite the claims of many of his critics, is conservative to the point that Strindberg's seminal "Preface to Miss Julie," where the rules concerning the acceptable ruses for a monologue were set down at the turn of the century, is not violated in this play.)

The matchseller's silence is made much of in Esslin's Theatre of the Absurd where he labels it "a catalyst for the projection of the other's [Edward and Flora separately] deepest feelings."[6] If we are to say that Flora projects onto the matchseller, we must be prepared to say that she has sexual feelings for the man early in the play, perhaps from the moment she sees him, perhaps from the instant she first thinks of him. Because these feelings clash with the fact that she is married to Edward and with whatever ideals she has concerning the institution of marriage, she experiences anxiety, manifested in this case as guilt. In order to reduce this anxiety, Flora projects her feeling of sexual desire onto the matchseller, certainly no later than when she says after mopping his brow, "Tell me, have you a woman? Do you like women? Do you ever . . . think about women? (Pause). Have you ever . . . stopped a woman?" (I. 191). The pause must ooze sexuality, but at the same time it is anxiety-free, guilt-free. Flora is comfortable with herself and her relationship with the matchseller. She has projected her sexual desire. She has regressed to allow herself to experience a rape fantasy/memory that is almost certainly set in a period prior to her marriage to Edward. Before her marriage it was much more acceptable to indulge in such titillating thoughts. Finally, she uses a bit of denial to overlook the fact that the matchseller is almost certainly a filthy old man who lives outdoors.

Having thus used the defence mechanism of projection, as well as those of regression and denial, Flora frees herself of any lingering feelings of anxiety and guilt. What's more, she enjoys a sexual experience. Because she has projected her feelings of sexual interest onto the matchseller, she can

feel as she does toward him because he is the one initiating the sexual attraction; she is simply responding, a situation congruent with Edward's Edwardian lady. Any excessive anxiety caused by her being attracted by the Matchseller's advances is dissipated by her fanciful regression to a pre-marital state with its implicit freedoms. Any anxiety caused by the repulsiveness of the matchseller's person is simply denied.

Edward tries to project his deepest feelings onto the matchseller, but with much less success than Flora enjoys. His failure is not due to any lack of anxiety, however, as his exchange with Flora just prior to her inviting the matchseller in clearly shows:

> Edward. Christ blast it!
> Flora. You're frightening him.
> Edward. I'm not.
> Flora. He's a poor, harmless old man.
> Edward. Aaah my eyes.
> Flora. Let me bathe them.
> Edward. Keep away.
> (Pause).
> (Slowly). I want to speak to that man. I want to have a word with him.
> (Pause).
> It's really quite absurd, of course. I really can't tolerate something so . . . absurd, right on my door-step. I shall not tolerate it.
>
> (I. 178-9)

Edward's anxiety is evident both as the literal text shows and metaphorically as his outburst of "Aaah my eyes" suggests. His ache, that was seemingly banished by his successful destruction of the wasp, has returned.

Edward has also been carefully watching the activities of the man.

> He's sold nothing all morning. No-one passed. Yes. A monk passed. A non-smoker. In a loose garment. It's quite obvious he was a non-smoker but still, the man made no effort.
>
> (I. 179)

In fact, Edward has even concocted a theory concerning the matchseller and his activities, as husbands, leaders (like Ben), and critics are wont to do:

> He's not a matchseller at all. 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 whatever towards the monk . . . there is something very false about that man.

This concern for the identity, or authenticity, of the matchseller is, after all, but a projection of Edward's struggle for identity. Edward attempts to entice the matchseller into satisfying his need for external confirmation of his identity, and in fact his very existence. In Sartre-like fashion "he recognizes that he cannot be anything (in the sense in which one says one is spiritual, or that one is wicked or jealous) unless others recognize him as such."[7] It is this need for recognition, for identity, that drives Edward to command Flora to "Go and get him" (I. 180).

After Flora has collected the matchseller, Edward begins his monologue with the broken-down Beckett-like tramp by saying "make yourself comfortable. Thought you might like some refreshment, on a day like this. Sit down, old man. What will you have? Sherry? Or what about a double scotch? Eh?" (I. 182). The juxtaposition of wealth and poverty, refined speech and silence, cleanliness and filth, camaraderie and aloofness, to only begin to explore the oxymoronic image of this scene, is ironic at the very least. Even "the chill hand of reverence" that has "Pinter ['s plays] firmly by the neck"[8]

would be hard pressed to stop the possibilities for laughter here. The laughter will be nervous, and it should be allowed to stop in the pause that follows, before Edward begins again. This pause should be a microcosm of Edward's through line for the remainder of the play: a through line that is uncommonly long and straight for Pinter. It should reveal both the hope Edward has of being accepted, and show how close this hope is to being engulfed in a wave of terror: the terror of non-existence, of not being recognized, of not being valued, accepted. Edward desperately needs confirmation that his life is significant, that he even exists. He seeks to involve the matchseller in a conversation concerning fine liquor, exotic travel, esoteric essays, and well-kept wives, all properties of Edward's upper-middle-class existence. The matchseller, however, with his very different life, refuses to acknowledge, let alone embrace, Edward's. Like the schoolboy who seeks to reduce his anxiety about cheating on an exam by discussing the subject of cheating in front of a nodding or a politely smiling group of peers, Edward seeks to project his privileged lifestyle onto the matchseller, if he would only cooperate and speak, or nod, or even smile; but he doesn't. Edward's wealth and status do not exist to a man who makes "no move towards the monk," and is not awed by Edward's entertainment of "the villagers annually," his travels in Africa, or his "theological and philosophical essays."

In the second interview, Edward pulls out all the stops to have the matchseller respond in any manner whatsoever. He even tries to move his guest to laughter by laughing aloud himself in the hope of gaining a sympathetic response. When this fails, he calls him, "my oldest acquain-

tance. My nearest and dearest. My kith and kin" (I. 196). When even this fraternal gesture is ignored, as Edward's quest for external validation has been, he "falls to the floor" (I. 198) and says:

> . . . nothing entered my nook, nothing left it.
> (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're laughing. Your face. Your body. (Overwhelming nausea and horror.) Rocking . . . gasping . . . rocking . . . shaking . . . rocking . . . heaving . . . rocking . . . You're laughing at me! Aaaaahhhh!
>
> (I. 198-9)

While Edward's utterance is certainly open to any number of interpretations, it seems to me to be a summary of Edward's life as it appears in the play. His life for a period of time has been static, "nothing entered my nook, nothing left it." The wind, as metaphor for change, and the dust at the back gate (the matchseller?) indicate the time has come for change, and suddenly that moment is upon him. But it is not merely change that Edward faces; one is not subject to "overwhelming nausea and horror" at simple change; Edward is confronted with annihilation. He has not succeeded in convincing the matchseller that his past has occurred, and when Flora rejects him and hands him the tray of matches, she, in effect, strips him of his past, his present, and provides him with a future completely alien to him. He has, in a very real sense, been exterminated. Edward's last lines could very well be those of Signora Ponza in Luigi Pirandello's Cosi e, se vi pare! (It is so! If you think so): "I am [he] whom you believe me to be."[7] And he is believed to be a man who sells matches, without a wife, without a home, and without a past that can be verified even with a visit to Sidcup.

We tend to empathize with Edward, as we did with Gus — both face the death of themselves. While Gus's will likely be violent and painful, surely Edward's is equally painful for all its non-violence. Gus faces the loss of his existence, but it is somehow less terrifying than the loss of essence Edward faces. We all must deal with the loss of life, perhaps in a manner less violent than the way Gus seems about to lose his, perhaps not, but our deaths are a certainty. In a secular world we toy with "being" after death as a form of legacy: our contributions through teaching, other good works, our children. But no one acknowledges Edward's accomplishments, despite his concerted effort; he has no children; and his wife turns her back on him; his essence no longer exists, and when he moves off into the unknown his sense of confusion, mystery, and fear of annihilation are paralleled by our own. Gus's end seems less final; there is at least the possibility of some sort of legacy, some sort of mark noting his passing, albeit largely nefarious. Gus's legacy lives beyond his life while Edward's dies before he does. If we are aware of the injustice about to occur at the end of The Dumb Waiter we are horrified by the injustice that has occurred at the end of A Slight Ache. Flora rejected her elderly husband of many years for the matchseller, who seems to be more sexually titillating than Edward. While this is shocking in itself, her stripping him of his identity is even more shocking. While we rail at the injustice of this, we are painfully aware that Flora is acting deliberately and with as much knowledge as we possess. Edward's pain is not caused by characters being less aware of a situation than we are and acting in ignorance, but by characters with as much understanding of the situation as we have. Their, or at least her, action is deliberate, and we share

Edward's bafflement and horror. More than that, we glimpse what lies ahead through Edward's eyes, the frustration, the loneliness, and even the madness of knowing or even merely sensing your essence and being unable to validate or authenticate it. Rose's blindness, Gus's stripped and powerless body, Edward's aching eyes and tray of mouldering matches, all point to the failure of these characters to "make" themselves and suggest what happens to those who remain unmade; they are beaten and pounded into whatever form the nearest menacing figure desires.

As Pinter moves to increasing realism in his plots and characters, the menacing figures become more life-like, the mystery becomes more associated with the vagaries of sexual attraction, repulsion, and practices, and the motivations therefore more understandable; but we still have unanswered questions, and we are frequently very much in the dark. Even in the most realistic of plays, Pinter continues to manipulate dramatic irony as he strives to duplicate in his audience the anxieties felt by his characters.

Chapter IV

A Night Out and Other Plays

The plays that Pinter wrote following A Slight Ache (1958) up to and including The Basement (1966) rely less on mysterious strangers for their source of gnawing insecurity and more on sexuality than do the early plays.[1] They focus on the loss of peace of mind concerning a lover/marriage partner, but as in the early plays, the insecurity the characters feel is mimetically recreated for the audience through the manipulation of dramatic irony to various degrees. While the motivations for the attempted change in the love relationship vary with the plot details of each play, it seems that they form a nucleus around which the search for identity and authenticity is centred. The complication is that this search has begun rather late in the game, and it is often painful and complicated for change to occur after its time; the empathy of the reader/spectator tends to be split between the seeker and the blocking figure or relationship, largely because of the pain late changes seem to cause.

A Night Out (1960) was written for television, and clearly shows it; its dialogue is realistic, and there are frequent scene changes. Nevertheless, it provides no denouement, and thus it is at least as mysterious as The Dumb Waiter; what's more, the motivations of the characters, especially Gidney, are not at all clear. We watch the play's ending as we did its beginning — with many unanswered questions.

The play begins innocently enough, with the protagonist Albert Stokes trying to get dressed to go to a retirement dinner for a long-time employee of the firm at which he works. His mother is uncooperative, to say the least, and is not adverse to attacking her son with sarcasm or her loneliness, a delaying action in order to have him remain at home with her. Her strategy is irrational, of course, for she wants him to succeed at the firm, and to miss such an occasion would not help his advancement. She can't seem to help herself, however, as in fact it will be a lonely evening at home for her. There were once at least four people in the house, but Albert's Grandma and his father have died. The odd thing about their conversations is that Albert does not deal with her obvious attacks and equally obvious loneliness directly, preferring to ignore them.

Albert is cleaning his shoes when the play opens:

Mother. Albert, I've been calling you. (She watches him). What are you doing?
Albert. Nothing.
Mother. Didn't you hear me call you, Albert? I've been calling you from upstairs.
Albert. You seen my tie?
Mother. Oh, I say, I'll have to put the flag out.
Albert. What do you mean?
Mother. Cleaning your shoes, Albert? I'll have to put the flag out, won't I?
Albert puts the brush back under the sink and begins to search the sideboard and cupboard.
What are you looking for?
Albert. My tie. The striped one, the blue one.
Mother. The bulb's gone in Grandma's room.
Albert. Has it?
Mother. That's what I was calling you about. I went in and switched on the light and the bulb was gone.
She watches him open the kitchen cabinet and look into it.
Aren't those your best trousers, Albert? What have you put on your best trousers for?
Albert. Look, Mum, where's my tie?

(I. 203-4)

While the dialogue reveals one level of Albert's mother's attempt to keep him at home, the stage directions reveal another, where they are playing a game of hide-and-seek as he frantically searches sideboard, cupboard, and cabinet in a quest that only several moments later will lead to the discovery of his tie. Now of course the necktie is simply a necktie, without which Albert may be less well-dressed, granted, but he will still be able to go out. Hiding the tie is the objective correlative to Mrs Stokes' not wanting Albert to go to the firm's function as a responsible adult must; she wants to keep him at home with her as she was able to do when he was a boy. She wants to deny the fact that he is a grown man, and Pinter objectifies this desire by having her hide his tie. His tie parallels his adulthood, his being a man, and this is what his mother truly desires to hide. The parallel between tie and manhood is only strengthened by Freud's statment in The Interpretation of Dreams that "a necktie often appears as a symbol for the penis."[2] The rather lengthy scene closes with Albert's mother firing a salvo as he "runs up the stairs and disappears," presumably to his room:

> Well, what am I going to do while you're out? I can't go to Grandma's room because there's no light. I can't go down to the cellar in the dark, we were going to have a game of cards, it's Friday night, what about our game of rummy?
>
> (I. 208)

The second scene provides us with some useful exposition and a bit of low comedy in the persons of an old man (Henry) and his partner Fred. We discover that Albert plays soccer for the firm's team and that he has played poorly; Gidney seems to be the captain of the team and he is particularly upset concerning Albert's performance, although we are uncertain why Gidney

moved Albert to such a presumably responsible position against a very apt opponent. Did he have confidence in him and was it breached, or was his "confidence" a parallel to his arrangement with Joyce and Eileen to prove Albert's manliness: a test Albert was supposed to fail? The comedy comes from Henry's (the old man's) statement to his friend that Albert was "Compressed. I thought he looking compressed . . ." which the barman clarifies as "Depressed. He means depressed" (I. 209). While this revelation as to Albert's state is largely comedic, it takes on a more serious nature when we compare this evaluation to the previous scene and the one that follows. Albert's difficulties at home are obviously discernible to his peers; the relevance of this observation is not diminished by its being coated in humour.

Scene three is brief. It is really only the epilogue to the first. Albert is ready to go out, but his mother makes one last attempt to at least delay his departure by telling him his dinner's ready. And of course it is a special dish: "I didn't tell you what I made for you, did I? I made it specially. I made Shepherd's Pie tonight" (I. 212). As she says this "She dusts his jacket with her hands and straightens his tie." Albert "taking her hand from his tie" says "The tie's all right," and at the door he says, "Well, ta-ta" (I. 213), before she decides he needs a handkerchief in his breast pocket:

> You mustn't let me down, you know. You've got to be properly dressed. Your father was always properly dressed. You'd never see him out without a handkerchief in his breast pocket. He always looked like a gentleman.
>
> (I. 213)

In scene four, the action moves back to Seeley and Kedge who are waiting for Albert at the coffee stall. We quickly learn that Seeley is the steadier supporter of Albert, yet he is aware that what Kedge says is true; in fact, because of his efforts to portray how "normal" Albert and his mother's relationship is, he gives away his real feelings of doubt about Albert and his mother in the pause that follows this exchange.

> Kedge. Time we were there.
> Seeley. We'll give him five minutes.
> Kedge. I bet his Mum's combing his hair for him, eh?
> He chuckles and sits.
> You ever met her, Seeley?
> Seeley. Who?
> Kedge. His . . . mother.
> Seeley. Yes.
> Kedge. What's she like?
> Seeley. (Shortly). She's all right.
> Kedge. All right, is she?
> Seeley. I told you. I just said she was all right.
> (Pause).
>
> (I. 213)

When Albert arrives he is not feeling well, and Kedge, apparently eager to spend the evening with the women from the office, tries to pick up Albert's spirits, but Albert can't get excited over the thought: "I see them every day, don't I? What's new in that?" (I. 215). Seeley reveals his relative ineptitude when it turns out that he has been calling "The dark bit" that Kedge has had his eye on Hetty rather than Betty. When the promise of women fails to lure Albert to the function, Kedge tries another tactic; he taunts Albert, saying that he's afraid "Gidney'll be after [him]." Where the talk of women failed, talk of Gidney succeeds, and Albert says to Seeley, "You think I'm frightened of Gidney?" (I. 216) and then agrees to go to the retirement party. While Seeley goes to "get some fags," calling out the

musical phrase "Twenty 'Weights,' mate," Kedge asks Albert, "How's your Mum?" to which Albert replies, "All right," but a moment later continues, showing his sensitivity to the topic of his mother:

Albert. (Quietly). What do you mean, how's my Mum?
Kedge. I just asked how she was, that's all.
Albert. Why shouldn't she be all right?
Kedge. I didn't say she wasn't.
Albert. Well, she is.
Kedge. Well, that's all right then, isn't it?
Albert. What are you getting at?

The fifth and final scene of act one is simply a view of Albert's mother putting his dinner into the oven, playing patience, and watching the clock she has moved from the mantlepiece. As mentioned, objects, for the most part simple objects, are of vital importance in Pinter; the clock is no exception. But one object in act one receives a significant build-up, but is seemingly forgotten: Albert's handkerchief. How is it placed in his pocket? Neatly? Well-folded? Sloppily stuffed in? It is never mentioned again in the text, but it could be a powerful device. What if it was in plain sight and not at all flattering to his "nice bit of clobber" (I. 214), and Seeley tucked it into his pocket as a sign of tolerance, understanding, and friendship? Or if Gidney flipped it with his finger when they verbally spar prior to their physical altercation? It is only rarely that Pinter misses the opportunity to draw maximum utility from his few stage props.

As act two opens we are in the midst of the retirement party for Mr Ryan. The contrast between the end of the previous act and the opening of act two is striking. Albert's elderly mother, left sitting alone playing cards and watching the clock, is juxtaposed with the retiring Mr Ryan who is

the centre of attention. Oddly, both of these aging people clutch at the youth around them, Albert's mother in the manner already outlined and Mr Ryan more directly. The party scene shows the influence of Pinter writing for television as the "scenes" are very brief and involve only a few characters at most. The pace quickens as we jolt back and forth between conversation clusters, an effect that despite being spawned by the medium lends the added feeling of excitement to the party.

The opening gives us a clue to the motivations of Gidney, who remains enigmatic throughout: a sort of realism-based parallel of Riley, McCann and Goldberg, and the matchseller. He's involved in a conversation concerning exercise and bicycles with King:

> King. I recommend a bicycle, honestly. It really keeps you up to the mark. Out in the morning, on the bike, through the town . . . the air in your lungs, muscles working . . . you arrive at work . . . you arrive at work fresh . . . you know what I mean? Uplifted.[3]
> Gidney. Not so good in the rain.
> King. Refreshes you! Clears the cobwebs (he laughs).
> Seeley. You don't walk to work, do you, Gidney?
> Gidney. Me? I've got the car.
> King. I drive too, of course, but I often think seriously of taking up cycling again.
>
> (I. 219)

Gidney even makes a humourous sexual innuendo concerning Kedge's chances with Betty as they dance by: "He'll never get to the last lap with that one, I can tell you." To which King, who is obviously a superior to Albert and his peers, says while smiling, "Now, now, you young men, that's quite enough of that." Albert is laughing at this point and Gidney asks "(Pleasantly). What are you laughing at, Stokes?"

Albert. What?
Gidney. Sorry, I thought you were laughing.
Albert. I was laughing. You made a joke.
Gidney. Oh yes, of course. Sorry.
Pause.
Well, we've got Kedge back at left back next Saturday.
Seeley. That's a lovely pair of shoes you're wearing, Gidney.

(I. 219)

Gidney seems to be determined that the party will be uneventful, even though he is obviously annoyed at Albert for his play in the previous match, finds him irritating (I. 221), sets up a situation in which he can watch Albert dancing with a woman, "for a lark" (I. 220), and later calls him "a mother's boy" (I. 230) just prior to their fight.

Albert, who is uncomfortable in social situations, particularly in those concerning women, laughs, perhaps too heartily, at a joke made by Gidney. As this joke involved sexual innuendo we can safely assume Albert's discomfort and his inability to respond naturally. Because Albert's response was inappropriate to the joke, Gidney chides him pleasantly, but Albert is on the defensive immediately, using the ruse that he didn't understand the question, a delaying tactic used to perfection by his mother. Albert has clearly understood the question because Gidney is able to read denial on his face, as evidenced by his response of "Sorry, I thought you were laughing." Albert, in the meantime, has steeled himself, with the sort of stoicism which the determined emit rather than the confidence of the competent, and answers Gidney's first question forcefully and directly. Gidney backs down with "Oh yes, of course. Sorry," but the subtext is already coming alive while he speaks this line; his words barely mask his contempt, and in the pause that follows, naked contempt is seen; when the words begin again they are weapons,

extensions of contempt, not masks for it. Gidney says, "Well, we've got Kedge back at left half back next Saturday." King, sensing trouble, excuses himself, and Albert's faithful friend Seeley tries to change the topic to that of Gidney's "lovely pair of shoes." Gidney seems to be flattered and the ruse to be effective when the talk of shoes turns to carrying one's feet well, to dancing, and then of course to dancing with women. Seeley is swept off to dance by Eileen, and Gidney says:

> Gidney. Don't you dance, Stokes?
> Albert. Yes, sometimes.
> Gidney. Do you? You will excuse me, won't you.
> Albert. Yes.
> Albert is left standing.
>
> (I. 220)

Everyone is dancing or in a conversation but Albert, who is left alone. Albert goes to get a drink at the bar while Gidney talks Joyce into dancing with Albert so he can "see his reaction" (I. 221), and she is supposed to "Get hold of Eileen."

Gidney, with Joyce in tow, speaking loudly enough so that Albert could hear him at the bar, says,

> . . . with my qualifications I could go anywhere.
> He sees Albert at the bar.
> Couldn't I, Stokes.
> Albert. What?
> Gidney. I was saying, with my qualifications I could go anywhere and be anything.
> Albert. So could I.
> Gidney. Could you? What qualifications have you got?
> Albert. Well, I've got a few, you know.
> Gidney. Listen! Do you know Chelsea wanted to sign me up a few years ago? They had a scout down to one of our games. They wanted to sign me up. And I'll tell you another thing as well. I could turn professional cricketer any day I wanted to, if I wanted to.
>
> (I. 222)

As we have seen, Albert's home life is one in which submission to domination is rewarded, and independence is seen as just short of treason. He is struggling with his desire for independence and his desire to please his mother and be free of guilt. For whatever reason (the fact that Mrs Stokes would be alone is a major consideration, financial concerns are likely another), Albert is rooted in a situation that he has outgrown and that no longer reflects his needs; in short, he is living an inauthentic life, and the anxieties and pressures of such an existence are about to spawn changes, and change involves conflict.

Albert is anxious and tense; he cannot relax at the party, so he cannot brush off Gidney's remark of "couldn't I Stokes" with polite banter or a bit of social puffery; he takes the bait with stoic determination and challenges Gidney's boast with one of his own. When Gidney attacks with direct questions, Albert is forced into a vague defence as to his qualifications. Gidney then moves from his presumably business-related qualifications to boasts concerning his prowess at football and cricket; we sense these statements are hollow and are mainly directed to Joyce, whose gullibility seems to know no bounds. She is already contemplating how Gidney would look in competition trim in his white uniform. "You'd look lovely in white," she offers, oblivious to what's going on around her. When Gidney says he could still "turn professional cricketer any day [he] wanted to," we share Albert's rush for the rejoinder, "Then why don't you?" Gidney replies that he doesn't want to, and then says to Joyce, whose depth has already been plumbed and its shallowness revealed to us, "These people who talk about qualifications. Just make me laugh, that's all." Of course this is patently untrue and

unfair, but just as Albert's virility and worth have been compromised by his poor football game, so too are his virility and worth challenged by the verbal sparring in front of a woman. She will pick the winner and she has picked Gidney. While she does not judge on any reasonable grounds, she is the arbitrator, and as long as Albert desires to play the game, he must play by the one rule; in this game there is no ethical code, only what you get away with and what you don't. Only by playing the game better than Gidney or by refusing to play altogether is there any hope of relief. Albert must either become a better player than Gidney, or create a game of his own.

Gidney may be the active source of menace, but Ryan, with his silence, his nods and smiles, is much like the role chance plays in life. Despite Gidney's machinations, the most serious event of the evening occurs by chance: Albert is blamed by Eileen because he "took a liberty" (I. 226). Why she thinks it was Albert is uncertain; perhaps Ryan has developed a technique of shifting the blame to others in such situations; in any event Albert is blamed and the television audience at least is aware of another injustice toward Albert, and it is another one that will remain, in unromantic fashion, unresolved.

After a few moments' confusion, during which Seeley tries to serve as a buffer, Albert is called outside by Gidney. Albert is simply trying to leave, but Gidney catches him in the hallway. He attacks Albert for "that bloody awful game of football" (I. 228), asks him "what did you think you were doing with that girl" (I. 229), calls him Albert rather than Stokes as Albert requests, and presumptuously says to Seeley, who is again trying to protect Albert, "Unless I get a satisfactory explanation I shall think

seriously about recommending his dismissal." None of this, even Gidney "obstructing him" as he is "going to the door," moves Albert to act, but when Gidney says "(very deliberately)": "You're a mother's boy. That's what you are. That's your trouble. You're a mother's boy," "Albert hits him. There is a scuffle. Seeley tries to part them."

Scene two opens with a shot of Mrs Stokes asleep, the clock in full view. Albert enters and tries to go upstairs without awakening her. She awakens, of course, and proceeds to attack him in the same viperous manner as has Gidney. On the level of Freudian symbolism his tie is crumpled (I. 231), as his mother notes, and she proceeds to crumple it even further. She asks, "What have you been doing, mucking about with girls?" and the insensitive blind cruelty of the remark must sting him deeply. We must surely empathize with his bewilderment. She tells him that his father would have been displeased with his coming home so late, that his dinner's ruined, that he is drunk, and that he uses his home and by association his mother as a convenience. She then proceeds to take his "ruined" dinner from the oven even though "it's all dried up" and expects him to eat it while she bemoans the fact that she "couldn't even go up to Grandma's room and have a look round because there wasn't a bulb." After nearly another page of dialogue along this line without any response from Albert — in fact, he stands sipping water in absolute silence throughout the entire scene — she concludes with

> . . . if you're content to leave your own mother sitting here till midnight, and I wasn't feeling well, anyway, I didn't tell you because I didn't want to upset you, I keep things from you, you're the only one I've got, but what do you care, you don't care, you don't care, the least you can do is sit down and eat the dinner I cooked for you, specially for you, it's Shepherd's Pie —
>
> (I. 233)

Albert in a rage "picks up the clock and violently raises it above his head," and the scene closes with a scream from his mother. By not dealing with his growing need for independence as it was developing, Albert has put himself in a dilemma. He is trying to please his mother and fulfil her need for a companion, while at the same time devoting his energies to his job and the demands of his friends. There are numerous conflicts in this arrangement and Albert has tended to ignore them; during his eventful "night out" decisions must be made – Albert must define himself.

While standing outside the shuttered coffee stall in the first scene of the third act, Albert is picked up by a girl and returns with her to her flat. As soon as they enter her room the mood becomes tense. "She is brisk and nervous" (l. 234), and when we see she has a large alarm clock the connection to Albert's mother and what may have been her murder is recalled to us. Both Albert and the girl lie about their identity and status. Albert portrays himself as an assistant director while the girl fancies herself as well-bred, with a daughter, whose picture Albert picks up from the mantle-piece and examines, in "a very select boarding school" (I. 235). But unlike the discussion of "qualifications" with Gidney, Albert wins this battle of identities. She attacks with a direct question: "Where's your wife?" (l. 241), to which Albert replies "Nowhere."

She stubs her cigarette.

Girl.	And what film are you making at the moment?
Albert.	I'm on holiday.
Girl.	Where do you work?
Albert.	I'm a freelance.
Girl.	You're . . . rather young to be in such a . . . high position, aren't you?
Albert.	Oh?[4]

After she offers an explanation of herself that she feels approximates his, he lets his cigarette fall on the floor. There is a verbal and then physical struggle during which Albert grabs "the clock from the mantlepiece" and says "DON'T MUCK ME ABOUT!" (I. 242). Albert has clearly transferred the aggressive feelings he has toward his mother, and perhaps those he has toward Eileen, onto the girl, and he says, "You're all the same, you see, you're just a dead weight round my neck" (I. 243). He continues, "you haven't got any breeding. She hadn't either. And what of those girls tonight?" And finally he adds,

> I've got as many qualifications as the next man. Let's get that quite . . . straight. And I got the answer to her. I got the answer to her, you see, tonight . . . . I finished the conversation . . . I finished it . . . I finished her . . . [5]

After terrifying the girl, he strips her of her identity by breaking the picture frame and reading the back of the picture. The "daughter" is really "the girl." She is completely broken, and he has her put on his shoes for him and then "drops the clock" and "kicks it across the room." He pays her half a crown and leaves.

In the final scene Albert is again silent, and once we get over the surprise of finding his mother unhurt we wonder whether he has learned how to best interact with her. He seems more content with himself as "he yawns luxuriously, scratches his head . . . and stares ruminatively at the ceiling, a smile on his face" (I. 246). This aura of self-satisfaction vanishes when he hears his mother call his name. His mother is willing to forgive him, but can Albert ever reconcile the contentment he felt at the opening of the scene with how he feels now, with his mother saying "We'll have your holiday in a

fortnight. We can go away"? Surely he must still feel trapped, but the possibility exists that having asserted himself with "the girl" he can work toward a satisfactory relationship with his mother. Of course his silence is the source of mystery, and we have very few clues to help us decide what the resolution will be. In a manner similar to The Dumb Waiter the play ends before the questions are answered. Once again the audience leaves the theatre, or perhaps in this case turns off the television set, with more questions than answers.

As is the case with A Night Out, The Collection (1961) and The Lover (1962), also written for television and later adapted for the stage, tend to be more realistically plotted than the earlier plays, and the dialogue appears more natural. However, Pinter's hallmarks remain; his fascination with the manifestations and workings of various forms of anxiety, though less overtly metaphysical than in his plays written for the stage, leads him to deal with such significant issues as the mutability of identity, the subjectivity of memory, and the relativity of truth. What's more, Pinter maintains his aversion to denouement and traditional dramatic irony, leaving his television audience to ponder what they have seen, as he leaves the spectator/reader of his plays.

In The Collection, anxiety centres on the subjectivity of memory and the relativity of truth, and despite various attempts by the characters to present the truth, we are left with no way of deciding which version of the event, if any, is correct.

Very briefly, Stella, who is married to James, and Bill, who lives with Harry, have been to the same convention. Depending on which version of their evening we believe, the couple may have had sexual relations, may have not even spoken to one another, or may have merely interacted socially. The audience shares the same level of knowledge concerning Bill and Stella's involvement as do Harry and James, and never do we know as much as do Bill and Stella. Pinter creates in his audience a feeling of anxiously searching for an elusive truth that parallels the search of James and to a slightly lesser extent Harry. Through the manipulation of dramatic irony, that is, withholding information, and his unwillingness to provide a resolution, Pinter leaves us with significant unanswered questions at play's end, where James is talking to his wife, Stella:

> You didn't do anything, did you?
> _Pause._
> He wasn't in your room. You just talked about it, in the lounge.
> _Pause._
> That's the truth, isn't it?
> _Pause._
> You just sat and talked about what you would do if you went to your room. That's what you did.
> _Pause._
> Didn't you?
> _Pause._
> That's the truth . . . isn't it?
> _Stella loks at him, neither confirming nor denying. Her face is friendly, sympathetic._
> _Fade to half light._
> _The four figures are still, in the half light._
> _Fade to blackout._
>
> _Curtain._ (II. 157)

We can only endorse James' query as we too search for truth, and share his anxiety. But like the "four figures" we are "in the half light."

The Lover is a relatively light work that revels in the simplest of all theatrical effects: people pretending not to be aware of the deceit they are witnessing. Richard and his wife Sarah are simultaneously actor and audience for each other; they have "clandestine" meetings during the afternoons during which they pretend they are others: Sarah plays Richard's "whore" and Richard plays both roles in Sarah's rape/rescue fantasy. At no point in the play does our knowledge transcend that of the characters, but I suspect many readers/spectators would have the plot twists figured out before Pinter presents them to us directly. The play even provides a comic ending if not exactly a traditional denouement: Richard is taking off his formal attire emblematic of his role as a responsible employee/provider and Sarah is about to change into high-heels and tight black dress, leaving behind her image of homemaker/companion.

> Sarah. I'll change for you, darling. Shall I? Would you like that?
> *Silence. She is very close to him.*
> Richard. Yes.
> *Pause.*
> Change.
> *Pause.*
> Change.
> *Pause.*
> Change your clothes.
> *Pause.*
> You lovely whore.
> *They are still, kneeling, she leaning over him.*
>
> (II. 196)

And while the word "whore" is seldom a term of endearment, it is in this case. Abandoning the roles, the essence, laid out for them by society, Richard and Sarah have truly formed themselves. The potential for such change lies within; how we choose to use it or not to use it governs who we will be. The Lover looks forward to The Homecoming: Teddy maintains his role as does Richard at the beginning of the play, and Ruth becomes all things to a group of men who are almost allegories of the facets of a complete man. The Lover also looks forward to Betrayal where Emma abandons her marriage to Robert as a meaningless facade and her affair with Jerry as equally meaningless; she then attempts to create a relationship with Casey in which she can, like Sarah, attempt to fuse the roles of responsible homemaker/companion and whore into a single, dynamic relationship. For all its masquerade, The Lover is a significant play.

The middle plays put a more realistic face on the menace and mystery of the early plays, but their fundamental source of power, their distinguishing mark, remains unaltered. Through manipulation of dramatic irony, Pinter leaves his unmistakable stamp on his plays. While their subject matter may vary, their essence is that there is no essence, that there are no complete answers, only endless questions. The characters feel this; the reader/spectator feels this; the man on the street feels this.

Chapter V

The Homecoming

The Homecoming departs from the growing realism evident in the middle plays that were written for television and later adapted successfully to the stage. It relies on many of Pinter's standard techniques, the inscrutability of a character or characters being the major source of mystery, and in this play more than any other there is the mystery of action as well. Why does Teddy so calmly abandon his wife to his amoral family? Why does Ruth accept/ desire such a role? Do they not consider their children in this? As is the case regularly in Pinter, the audience asks these and myriad other questions throughout and after the play.

Is Teddy, like Ben in The Dumb Waiter, afraid to plunge into the unknown? For Ben the unknown is not knowing the answer to something and the horror of a universe without a code he can understand and espouse. For Teddy the unknown is his sexuality and the many things that don't "fall within [his] province" (III. 67), but even more than that it is Ruth's sexuality that terrifies Teddy. He is afraid to enter the labyrinth of sexuality because he fears he will be lost; Ruth, like Gus, delves into the chaos of the unknown, but it seems she does so with fewer doubts and questions than Gus.

Breaking out of the idea that essence precedes existence is a major step. Ruth breaks out of traditional roles; she asserts her independence;

what is lacking is an establishment of her essence as Emma seems to do in Betrayal. Gus asks a lot of questions, and clearly is at least contemplating his own escape from the inauthentic essence Ben and Wilson dictate to him and he uncomfortably accepts. And just as the faithful will persecute the heretic with far greater zeal than the heathen, so too is Gus persecuted for reasonably innocuous questions. Escape from essence need not merely result in anarchy; Ruth need not tolerate being a whore simply because she finds the structure of life in a small American college town too rigid, unless of course she desires to be a whore. She can recreate herself in any manner she sees fit, and unlike such clutching blocking figures as Bert, Ben, and Mrs. Stokes, Teddy presents no real obstacles. He sees himself as a detached observer of life; he doesn't want to be "lost in it" (III. 78).

The first scene involving Teddy and Ruth has them arriving at Teddy's parental home, unannounced, and is a relatively warm scene with Teddy very pleased to be home:

> He walks about the room.
> Nothing's changed. Still the same.
> Pause.
> Still, he'll get a surprise in the morning, won't he? The old man. I think you'll like him very much. Honestly. He's a . . . well, he's old, of course. Getting on.
> Pause.
> I was born here, do you realize that? (III. 38)

The overall mood is one of a pleasant homecoming; there are only two disturbing factors. One is that the ribald, traditionally masculine interaction of Teddy's father, uncle, and brothers may be a bit coarse for the couple who are obviously better dressed and better deported. Ruth's

reluctance to stay (III. 37-8) is natural enough; she's nervous about meeting her husband's family and concerned about her children. The other is her going out for a walk alone, sometime around midnight. The neighbourhood, by all indications, is not the most respectable, yet she exhibits no real reluctance, and Teddy offers no real objection. Her going out street-walking, more or less with Teddy's blessing, foreshadows the outcome of the play. Pinter changes the scene with emotion and foreboding.

> She goes out of the front door. Teddy goes to the window and peers out after her, half turns from the window, stands, suddenly chews his knuckles.

He is obviously aware that Ruth is in her element (we also discover later that she was born nearby), and Teddy fears what may transpire in her absence.

After a brief scene involving Teddy and his brother Lenny, Ruth returns. The scene involving Lenny and Ruth is one of Pinter's best. Almost immediately we sense, as does Lenny, that Ruth is powerful — sexually. She has absolute confidence in her chameleon-like identity, and that identity is based on her sexuality. Lenny begins to feel uncomfortable almost immediately. He offers her an unsolicited glass of water which she consciously accepts, sips in a business-like manner, and places smartly "on a small table by her chair" (III. 45); she turns back to him as if she has just completed a challenge or a dare. He reveals that her action, and her demeanour, have reached him by his comment, "Isn't it funny? I've got my pyjamas on and you're fully dressed." In short, she is stripping away his psychological clothing. Lenny, at this point, begins to throw up a smokescreen of language, long speeches curtly punctuated by Ruth's often monosyllabic

responses. Like Edward in A Slight Ache, Lenny is drawn out by a largely silent stranger. Granted, this theme of talking too much and leaving oneself naked and defenseless, which will culminate in Ruth exhibiting her power by sexually intimidating Lenny, exists only in embryo at this point. Lenny's comment on his relative state of undress is more overtly meant for its titillation value, and he tries to approach her physically by trying to touch her and asking for "a tickle" (III. 46). Next he tells her a story in which he is made a "certain proposal" by a lady who "had been searching for [him] for days." Because "she was falling apart with the pox" he "turned it down." He then beats her, thinks of killing her, but decides against it. He reasons, "why go to all the bother . . . you know, getting rid of the corpse and all that, getting yourself into a state of tension" (III. 47), and then to emphasize that he is primarily violent, not sexual, he concludes, "I got her another belt in the nose and a couple of turns with the boot and sort of left it at that." Ruth, completely in control, is not visibly disturbed by Lenny's statement, and asks the sensible question, "How did you know she was diseased?" which, apart from demonstrating her serene, almost inscrutable nature, moves the discussion down to its sexual roots. After a pause, Lenny repeats the question in order to compose himself, and then says as menacingly as he can in his growing state of apprehension, "I decided she was," and after a difficult silence in which he would almost surely fidget or preen, he changes the topic to Teddy and his academic accomplishments, and other things such as snow-clearing. Despite his lengthy discourse, he ends this monologue as he did the first, with a reference to whimsical violence he has perpetrated on a woman:

> 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.
>
> (III. 49)

He then tries to demonstrate his power by asking if he may move the ashtray that is close to her glass on the table; she declines his offer, but he insists, argues, and moves it. He then says, "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.
> Pause.
> Lenny. Don't call me that please.
> Ruth. Why not?
> Lenny. That's the name my mother gave me.
> Pause.
> Just give me the glass.
> Ruth. No.
> Pause.
> Lenny. I'll take it, then.
> 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?
> Pause.
> Lenny. You're joking.

In the pause that follows Lenny's last utterance, Ruth gives him a glance that convinces him that she isn't joking; Lenny suddenly becomes a moralist, dragging up her responsibility to Teddy, but then in a masterful scene that works on the age-old association between consuming food and drink and sex, Ruth prevails completely. She then

picks up the glass and lifts it towards him.
Ruth. Have a sip. Go on. Have a sip from my glass.
He is still.
Sit on my lap. Take a long cool sip.
She pats her lap. Pause.
She stands, moves to him with the glass.
Put your head back and open your mouth.
Lenny. Take that glass away from me.
Ruth. Lie down 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.

As is the case when Pinter provides the audience/reader with information that some of the other characters lack, in this instance Teddy's family, we are placed in the position not of relaxed awareness, but of tense wonderment. Our knowledge of Ruth's powerful sexuality, Teddy's desperate rationality, the amorality of Teddy's family, and that all these people must descend the stairway in the morning, does nothing to calm or assuage us. We know that this volatile combination of elements is explosive, but when and where the explosion will occur is difficult for us to predict.

Immediately upon Teddy and Ruth's descending the stairs in the morning, an explosion ensues, with Max calling Ruth a "dirty tart" (III. 57), "a smelly scrubber," and "a stinking pox-ridden slut." Strangely, Ruth does not seem disturbed by this, and Teddy seems too distant to take insults to heart, saying only, "Stop it! What are you talking about?" and "She's my wife! We're married" (III. 58). And after an outbreak of violence in which Max "hits Joey in the stomach with all his might," and Max hits Sam "across the head with his stick," Max seems appeased; he calls Ruth "Miss" (III. 59), inquires as to her children, and the scene ends with Teddy saying, "Come on,

Dad. I'm ready for the cuddle," and Max saying "He still loves his father" (III. 60); they almost certainly embrace at the curtain.

The second act begins in the contented comic aftermath of a good meal appreciated by all. While there may be some chuckles in the audience at the situational irony that exists when Max says to Ruth that Jessie, his late wife whom he has described as a whore,

> taught [her sons] all the morality they know. I'm telling you. Every single bit of the moral code they live by — was taught to them by their mother. (III. 62)

there is nevertheless some sincerity and longing in his recollection of better days when things looked brighter, when he had "entered into negotiations with a top-class group of butchers":

> 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. What fun we used to have in the bath, eh, boys? Then I came downstairs and I made Jessie put her feet up on a pouffe . . . And I said to her, Jessie, I think our ship is going to come home, I'm going to treat you to a couple of items . . . . Then I gave her a drop of cherry brandy. 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.

The spell is broken when Ruth asks Max, a butcher by trade, "what happened to the group of butchers?" (III. 63). Max, who has been smoking and enjoying a cigar up to this point, says, "They turned out to be a bunch of criminals like everyone else," and after a pause and as if to demonstrate his distaste for his memory of the "criminals," he says "This is a lousy cigar" and "stubs it out."

But again the confrontation is avoided. After a bitter exchange between Sam and Max, at the end of which Sam leaves, Max turns to Teddy and asks affably, "Well, how have you been keeping, son?" (III. 64). He chastises his son for not telling him of the marriage, and says, "I'd have been only too glad to bear the expense, my word of honour" (III. 65), which is, naturally enough, followed by an uncomfortable pause as Max and Teddy try to avoid eye contact while they chew this unsavoury morsel, which tastes of their past differences, looking as if they are searching for a napkin under which to hide it. After Max's brief praise of Teddy for his academic accomplishments, we are given the first direct evidence concerning Ruth's past:

> Max. But you're a charming woman.
> Pause.
> Ruth. I was . . .
> Max. What?
> Pause.
> What she say?
> They all look at her.
> Ruth. I was . . . different . . . when I met Teddy . . . first.
> Teddy. No you weren't. You were the same.
> Ruth. I wasn't. (III. 66)

In response to the philosophical queries and ruminations of Lenny concerning objects, Ruth adds indirect evidence as to her nature,

> 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. (III. 69)

Teddy, even better informed as to what Ruth is capable of than [illegible] suggests that they cut their visit short, and go home. He says,

> The boys'll be at the pool . . . now . . . swimming. Think of it. Morning over there. Sun. We'll go anyway, mmnn? It's so clean there. (III. 70)

and that

> Here, there's nowhere to bathe, except the swimming pool down the road. You know what it's like? It's like a urinal. A filthy urinal!

Teddy is beginning to realize that, despite the forgiving effect of time, things haven't changed, and that whatever sense of disgust and horror that drove him to seek a cerebral existence rather than a physical or a sexual one still exists.

Of course, Ruth seems to have grown up in a situation at least somewhat similar to Teddy's. We learn that she was "a photographic model for the body" (I. 73), and she certainly is much less upset than her husband concerning the atmosphere of the household. Teddy wants to go not only because he sees Ruth returning to her barely repressed self, but because he fears his own recidivism, so he goes to pack. His contempt for his family and its lifestyle drove him to leave home and marry unannounced, go to America, and enter that most rarified of professions, philosophy. As a thinker, a Doctor of Philosophy, he is as removed as possible from Max the butcher, Lenny the pimp, Joey the boxer, and Sam the chauffeur, who cut, sell, pummel, and transport bodies, bodies as objects and devoid, or nearly so, of rationality. Whether Teddy married Ruth because he understood her and wanted to help her escape her past as he had, or at bottom could not escape the Oedipal quest for a spouse like his mother, is not as important as the fact that he knows they must leave immediately.

They don't make it. When Teddy returns, packed, he sees Ruth is in what he correctly recognizes as an aroused state. He says to Lenny, "What have you been saying to her?" (III. 74), but it has been Ruth who has been doing the talking, describing a modelling job. Teddy tries to help her into her coat, to clothe her, to insulate her, to cover up her aroused body, but when Lenny offers to put on a record and dance with her, she accepts, and Teddy, secure in his own mantle of rationality, symbolized by his coat, is left holding Ruth's coat while she slowly dances with Lenny. When Lenny kisses her and Joey says "Christ, she's wide open" (III. 74), we expect indignation and action, but only Teddy's aloofness and our growing sense of confusion ensue.

Early in the play Pinter presented us with an attractive young couple whom we are lured into identifying with, and in the absence of exposition, identification can provide the audience with security, a sense that if they were in a similar situation this is how they would react. The object of identification need not succeed, only deport himself well; he may even expire at play's end; what Pinter does in this play is to give us two characters with whom to identify ourselves, gently tease Ruth away from us as someone suitable to identify with, and then strip Teddy away from us as well. We are left alone, with no knowledge that exceeds that of the characters, with no one figure to put our faith in. Up until this point we have identified with Teddy; suddenly he fails us. We are alone. We must make the best of it, even though the situation is absurd. At bottom, it is this scene that is the most disturbing in the play, not because of the sexual activity as much as our sense of outrage and confusion over the inappropriate reaction and emotion being demonstrated.

Teddy is standing, watching one of his brothers lie on his wife while another strokes her hair, yet he does or says nothing. His father "comes forward" (III. 75) and looks not at the couch but at the suitcase, and instead of expressing outrage and horror, he asks, "You going, Teddy? Already?" and then, as if in response to those who would contend he acts in this way because he didn't see anything, "He peers to see Ruth's face under Joey" and says,

> Mind you, she's a lovely girl. A beautiful woman. And a mother too. A mother of three. You've made a happy woman out of her. It's something to be proud of. I mean we're talking about a woman of quality. We're talking about a woman of feeling.
>
> (III. 75-6)

And as if this wasn't enough, Pinter has "Joey and Ruth roll off the sofa onto the floor." Ruth then gets to her feet and demands food and drink. Drinks are provided, and Ruth asks Teddy "Has your family read your critical works?" (III. 77), to which he replies in a way that isolates him nearly as far from the audience as he is from his family:

> You wouldn't understand my works. [. . .] You'd be lost. It's nothing to do with the question of intelligence. It's a way of being able to look at the world. It's a question of how far you can operate on things and not in things. [. . .] Might do you good . . . have a look at them . . . see how certain people can view . . . things . . . 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.
>
> (III. 77-8)

He goes on to say, "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." And he isn't and doesn't. He is

so concerned with not abandoning his rational being that he would rather give his wife to his brothers and father than plumb the depths of feeling as Ruth has.

As an audience we are alienated, both from the feeling Ruth and the rational Teddy; we search vainly for someone on stage to provide a reasonable explanation, but we receive none, because the point of Pinter's plays is that we must come to grips with the mystery on our own, as do the characters in the play, as we must deal with such issues in life. Ruth seems to embody all of the traditional roles ascribed to a woman: she is mother to Joey, whore to Lenny, and wife to Max. She is all these things, but as Rose says in The Room concerning the men in that play, "You're all . . . . A bunch of cripples" (I. 123), and they are. Nowhere in Pinter do we discover a man who is nearly as complete as most of the women. Even the hard-hearted Flora and the amoral Ruth retain full, well-rounded personalities. All Ruth seems to lack is an intellectual component through which she could interact with Teddy. Despite this, she has spent a number of years with him in America, and her last words to him are "Eddy. Don't become a stranger" (III. 96), so it seems she desires to maintain some level of interaction with the deliberately aloof Teddy, albeit in a cliche-filled emasculating manner.

Ruth is capable of being all of these things to all of these men. Her essence could be drawn from any combination of the facets of her existence. While it is easy to disparage Ruth for her amorality, perhaps we should equally disparage the men for their narrow, inauthentic, crippled selves. Ruth, unable to discover a man capable of interacting with her on all levels, is simply trying to construct a whole man out of a motley collection of

parts. The fact that Teddy could be so much more physical, like his brothers and father, is a source of terror for Teddy and an allurement to Ruth. She, like Flora, has finally given up on "Eddy," opting for the physical and the sexual over the cerebral and the intellectual. Ruth's "Eddy" and Flora's "Beddie-Weddie" are replaced by more malleable and more physical men. Given the composition of many Pinter audiences, this should again duplicate in the audience the anxiety felt on the stage, at least in the male portion of the audience. What it engenders in the female portion would likely run the gamut from contempt through contemplation.

Chapter VI

Betrayal

Betrayal (1978) is decidedly different from Pinter's previous plays. It is the most realistic, and there are no figures of menace, no characters that may or may not exist, no outlandish sexual practices. What is presented is a love triangle in a relatively elite social setting. The details of the affair and its intricacies are not particularly ingenious; in fact, the only truly ingenious device in the play is the largely reverse chronology[1] which allows Pinter to explore the vagaries of memory by first showing us how the event is remembered and then what actually happened. Again, as an audience, we must be constantly aware that we cannot rely on dramatic irony to guide us safely through the play, although learning the end first could make us think we have such a guide.

The play is about betrayal, and about how, even in this relatively straightforward and simple plot, the intricacies of memory and emotion provide an environment menacing in its own way.

The first scene opens in a pub in the spring of 1977. Emma and Jerry are discussing their affair, now nearly two years neglected. He is obviously the one who regrets the affair having lapsed, and is somewhat jealous of Emma's involvement with a writer named Casey (Roger). Emma and her husband Robert are going to separate after their long talk of the previous night, and the fact that Robert revealed to Emma that he had been betraying her for

years with other women has driven Emma to seek solace in Jerry, despite the fact that she broke off with him:

> I just phoned you this morning, you know, that's all, because I . . . because we're old friends . . . I've been up all night . . . the whole thing's finished . . . I suddenly felt I wanted to see you.
>
> (IV. 173)

Emma chooses this meeting as the time to tell Jerry that she has told Robert of their affair during their long talk the previous night. We assume that she did this to hurt Robert, but as we discover, this is not the case.

Scene two occurs later that day at Jerry's; he has invited Robert over in order to explain his actions. Jerry assumes that the paramount item on Robert's mind is Jerry's affair with Emma, but he learns that she told her husband about this four years earlier. Jerry turns out to be the one who feels betrayed. Betrayal abounds. Emma has betrayed Robert through her affair with Jerry, and she has betrayed Jerry by not telling him Robert knew of their affair. Robert has betrayed Emma with other women and Jerry by not telling him that he knew of his affair with Emma. Jerry has betrayed Robert, and, at least in some sense, Emma too.

The third scene occurs two years earlier (1975) during the last meeting Emma and Jerry have at their scarcely used flat. We sense that Emma wanted more from their relationship than a flat "for fucking" (IV. 197) as she puts it. She wanted it to be a home, different from the one she shared with Robert. They will let the flat go and their furniture because they have no time to meet. Jerry says, "It would not matter how much we wanted to if you're not free in the afternoons and I'm in America" (IV. 194), while Emma laments their lack of resolve:

> You see, in the past . . . we were inventive, we were determined, it was . . . it seemed impossible to meet . . . impossible . . . and yet we did. We met here, we took this flat and we met in this flat because we wanted to.

And this is how Jerry betrayed Emma, by not "wanting to" change their lives. She notes with some bitterness at the end of the scene, "Do you realize this is an afternoon? It's the Gallery's afternoon off. That's why I'm here. We close every Thursday afternoon" (IV. 200).

Scene four is revealing. We are aware of the fact that Robert knows of the affair, that Jerry doesn't know Robert knows, and that Robert is having an affair as well, but because we don't know all the intricacies of the plot this amount of knowledge tempts us to a degree of confidence we soon discover is unwarranted. We learn that Casey has left his wife and is living nearby, that Emma reads his novels, and contrary to Robert and Jerry's opinion thinks his last one is "bloody dishonest" (IV. 206). Jerry is Casey's agent and is going on a trip to America, and the scene ends with Emma crying quietly on Robert's shoulder.

Scene five occurs in Venice, while Robert and Emma are on holiday some years earlier. It is at this point that Robert discovers the affair through a chance visit to the American Express office that Emma and Jerry are corresponding through. Their son Ned's paternity is discussed and Emma assures Robert that he is the father. Robert's cruelty begins to become evident as he asks about Jerry,

> But did you tell him, was he happy to know I was to be a father?
> <u>Pause.</u>
> I've always liked Jerry. To be honest, I've always liked him rather more than I've liked you. Maybe I should have had an affair with him myself.
>
> (IV. 225)

Scene six occurs after the trip to Venice and the discovery of the affair. When Jerry and Emma see each other after Emma returns, they are clearly very pleased, but our joy in their reunion is undermined by our sense of dramatic irony; we know that Emma is afraid Robert will tell Jerry of his awareness of the affair;

> Jerry. I spoke to Robert this morning.
> Emma. Oh?
> Jerry. I'm taking him to lunch on Thursday.
> Emma. Thursday? Why?
> Jerry. Well, it's my turn.
> Emma. No, I mean why are you taking him to lunch?
> Jerry. Because it's my turn. Last time he took me to lunch.
> Emma. You know what I mean.
> Jerry. No. What?
> Emma. What is the subject or point of your lunch?
> Jerry. No subject or point. We've just been doing it for years. His turn, followed by my turn.
>
> (IV. 231)

Emma's protectiveness of the affair is paralleled by her nurturance of it. The importance Emma attaches to the flat, "the house," "Our home" (IV. 234), is evident by her use of such terms and her having purchased a tablecloth for it while in Venice. Details such as this inform retroactively our interpretation of previous scenes, which of course heightens our appreciation of them, but more than that tempers our belief that because we know how the play ends we know exactly what's going on. Just when we think we do understand, a plot detail is altered, not by whimsy as was the case in the early plays, but in a perfectly justifiable fashion: the details we had relied on were furnished by the characters'memories, not on the events themselves, or these details are only half-truths. What Pinter once achieved in other ways he now achieves more realistically.

Pinter points out the vagaries of memory early in the play. When Jerry and Emma are discussing a pleasant day in which Jerry threw Emma's daughter Charlotte into the air, Jerry believes the event to have occurred in Emma's house whereas Emma believes it to have occurred at Jerry's (IV. 166). Later Jerry seems to change his mind, telling Emma that happened "in my kitchen" (IV. 175). We, however, cannot be sure if Jerry has been convinced by Emma's assertion or if he is merely being polite by agreeing to her story; we never have the scene itself presented to us so we don't know the truth.

In other cases, Pinter combines the failure of memory and the possibility that the characters may be lying to provide mystery and doubt. People forget and people lie; both practices alter the way the way the past is perceived and govern the present, to some degree. In the opening scene Emma tells Jerry that during her long talk with Robert the night before, she told her husband about their affair. Not knowing any differently, we share Jerry's sense of betrayal when he goes to discuss the situation with Robert in scene two and Robert says, "She didn't tell me about you and her last night. She told me about you and her four years ago" (IV. 181). Is Emma telling the truth or lying? Why? Is Robert lying in order to appear undaunted by Jerry's revelation? We can't be sure, at least not until scene five, set four years earlier, in which Emma tells Robert that Jerry and she are lovers (IV. 222); only at that point can we ask ourselves the motivation behind Emma's lie.

A further example of Pinter's mixing potential motivations occurs when Robert is caught by Jerry in a lie concerning his vacation with Emma in Venice. Robert is reminded by Jerry about something he said:

Jerry. Don't you remember? Years ago. You went over to Torcello in the dawn, alone. And read. Yeats.
Robert. So I did. I told you that, yes.

(IV. 189-90)

We tend to accept this remark as true, until Emma tells Jerry that passage to Torcello was impossible during their visit because the "speedboats were on strike, or something" (IV. 229). Robert has told a lie, and Jerry knows it is a lie; during his humiliation in scene two, when Jerry discovers his betrayal by Emma concerning her not informing him of Robert's knowledge of their affair, he makes Robert restate his lie and suffer the discomfort of knowing Jerry likely knows the truth. With the knowledge we gain later in the play the exchange at the end of scene two becomes rich in subtext.

Robert. So I did. I told you that, yes.
Pause.
Yes.
Pause.
Where are you going this summer, you and the family?

(IV. 190)

During the pauses Robert's mind must be racing. Finally he can stand it no longer and changes the subject and brings up Jerry's familial obligations.

Another such exchange between the two takes place in scene seven. Emma and Robert have just returned from Venice where Robert was informed of Emma and Jerry's affair. Robert is upset and shows it by drinking heavily and talking loudly. He then is caught in a lie, but one Jerry must accept quietly.

Robert. I went for a trip to Torcello.
Jerry. Oh, really? Lovely place.

Robert. Incredible day. I got up very early and — whoomp — right across the lagoon — to Torcello. Not a soul stirring.
Jerry. What's the 'whoomp'?
Robert. Speedboat.
Jerry. Ah, I thought —
Robert. What?
Jerry. It's so long ago, I'm obviously wrong. I thought one went to Torcello by gondola.
Robert. It would take hours. No, no, — whoomp — across the lagoon in the dawn.

(IV. 246-7)

But there is more to the play than Pinter teasing us with something as solid as the ending of the play before he shows us that mystery, in this case caused by the vagaries of memory, deceit, or a combination of the two, is paramount. When Emma and Jerry meet at their flat in scene eight, where they speculate as to Jerry's wife Judith's awareness of their affair and whether she has an admirer, Emma comes out with what I see as the most crucial line in the play: "Have you ever thought of changing your life?" (IV. 259), to which Jerry responds "It's impossible" (IV. 260). Emma, of course, goes on to change her life, and at this point wants to do so with Jerry. She even asks him what he would do if Judith was being unfaithful, but he denies the possibility.

The final scene is chronologically the beginning. Jerry, quite intoxicated, has been waiting for Emma in Robert and Emma's bedroom. Even though his proposal is a rambling one it makes an impression. Jerry seems so alive and vital that Emma risks all to try to change her life with him, but perhaps it's not much of a risk after all. It is Robert who says,

> It's true that I've hit Emma once or twice. But that wasn't to defend a principle. I wasn't inspired to do it from any moral standpoint. I just felt like giving her a good bashing. The old itch . . . you understand.
>
> (IV. 185)

Emma tries to change her life. Robert fails her by being darkly malevolent, while Jerry fails her by seeing their relationship more for its sexual aspect than the dream of a new home and a new life for the two of them. Casey too may fail her, but she will not be alone when she plunges into life rather than staying safely on the sidelines. She will not be alone when she attempts to create a meaningful essence out of her existence, and unlike many other characters in Pinter, she has begun her quest before she was overwhelmed in self-created inertia.

Conclusion

Pinter, though playing games with dramatic irony, seeks to create in his audience an anxiety parallel to that of his characters. As his characters struggle on stage with situations that cannot be explained or can be explained only partially, the audience struggles with a play that cannot be explained or can be explained only partially. Pinter creates real anxiety in his audience: anxiety which cannot be distinguished from that created by living. Because his plays lack a denouement, the anxiety experienced by both the characters and the audience exists beyond play's end. This anxiety mingles with our own; it is not distanced from us by the illusion/reality barrier of the proscenium arch stage; we cannot seek sanctuary on our side of the stage apron. Yet like our own anxiety it has the power to move us to action.

Pinter tries to force his audience to shed its mantle of romantic expectation and grapple with the reality of the twentieth century, where anxiety and uncertainty reign. Pinter has said that "there are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false." This is the way Pinter sees the world, and this is the world he creates for his audience while they are watching his plays. The plays are microcosms, presenting the audience with an experience on which they can make no hard pronouncements. Yet, as in life, Pinter's plays contain many tantalizing allusions which tempt us to apply our powers of reason and explanation. He lures us into applying rational explanations to what we have seen, and then, with apparent satisfaction, leaves us hanging,

the terms of reference changed, the explanation that appeared to work working no longer. Like Ben, pursued by the inquisitive Gus who lies within us all, our earlier arguments no longer hold, and our frustration and anxiety rise rapidly as we scramble for new positions and rationalizations.

Perhaps the most alluring of Pinter's wares is his manipulation of dramatic irony. While things occur in his plays that stretch one's credulity, we are tempted by the mere possibility of understanding to seek rational explanations. We are driven, as Pinter is so keenly aware, to define a character or explain a play "in terms of the familiar." And once this is done, the character or the play "can be talked about but need not be lived with." Pinter teases us with the possibility of knowing; the characters seem to know what is going on but the audience has limited knowledge. Who is Riley? Who is the Matchseller? Does Bert kill Gus? Who is operating the dumb waiter? Even at play's end these questions remain unanswered. In the later plays Pinter abandons such overt embodiments of menace as Riley, the Matchseller, and the person operating the dumb waiter, and places increasing emphasis on motivations. Why does Gidney persecute Albert? Why does Stella play games about what she did at the convention? What are the motivations for the debauch in The Homecoming? And more recently, the plays question the possibility of knowing anything absolutely, even when the audience sees the conclusion of the play before the beginning. In which kitchen was Charlotte tossed into the air? Who was betrayed by whom? None of these questions is answerable. We may speculate but not conclude; the evidence presented to us is contradictory.

Pinter, however, does suggest a means of dealing with mystery and

uncertainty — an existence without deceit and insincerity, without lies and desperate rationalization. Perhaps the most touching moment in Pinter occurs when Rose caresses Riley (I. 124-5), and despite our almost complete ignorance concerning the relationship between the two, the sincerity of the interaction cannot be missed, especially in contrast with her relationship with Bert. For a brief moment there is something immediately understandable and meaningful that emerges from the mystery and menace of the room, something that transcends our lack of knowledge and our need to explain; but that moment is quickly lost — smothered in lifetimes filled with the dusty, choking remains of compromise, rationalization, and subterfuge.

There are other such moments when we sense characters may escape the web that their deceit and insincerity have woven. Gus's questions, Flora's new man, Albert's attack on his mother, are all moments struggling to grow into hours, days, even a lifetime, but like Rose's fleeting attempt they are futile, and result in the character becoming only more completely entangled. Gus pays for his questions, perhaps with his life, becaues he has not asked such things sooner. Flora's new man is a derelict, and while the play approaches comedy in its form, her late rejuvenation, and her distasteful rejection of her ailing spouse, undercut the value of an already depreciated new start. Albert's attack on his mother is a sincere expression of how he feels, but the very fact that it occurs at all stems from their never having expressed their feelings of frustration and anxiety or discussed how they might have been resolved.

When Pinter's characters discover that they are free, either by their own actions or serendipity, they are quickly engulfed in a sea of their own

previous decisions that run contrary to their new course. This is not the case with Ruth and Emma, however. Ruth, in a manner similar to Camus' Caligula, decides that freedom is anarchy; Emma too grants herself freedom, and moves beyond her marriage in an admittedly unimaginative and half-hearted attempt to change her life with the most convenient man at hand, her husband's friend Jerry. However, when she discovers that Jerry sees their relationship as sexual diversion rather than a new beginning, she balks and ends the affair. Emma seeks and demands meaning, and her appetite for it grows throughout the play. The fact that meaning is not usually forthcoming does not persuade her to settle for a comfortable but paralyzing web of deceit and subterfuge. She will try to change her life with Casey at her side, and while there is very little to lead us to expect he will be any closer to Emma's expectations than either Robert or Jerry, she is not defeated by this. Unlike most of Pinter's characters, Emma does not accept the likelihood of failure, and the fear of failure, as grounds for inaction, for accepting the lies of the present because of a fear of the future. She has the strength for a journey to Sidcup, and the strength to face whatever lies there; she refuses to be the caretaker of a life from which she is alienated, regardless of the superficial comforts.

Gus accepts lies of this sort, and Ben provides them, because of the comfort they afford and the facade of meaning they provide. Such rationalization helps to deal with the anxiety of their existence in the absence of confronting the source of this anxiety. They depend on each other to fulfil their roles, and create meaning, however false, for each other, but their roles are also traps; their existence is empty; their discourse is mere

form without content. In an impotent gesture of defiance Gus rebels, and while Emma's gesture may be at bottom equally futile, it is nevertheless potent. Rather than dissipating her anxiety, her motivation to seek change, in the sterile, insipid, and self-immobilizing fashion of most of Pinter's characters, Emma acts on it, with Gus-like inquisitiveness and a growing contempt for Ben-like subterfuge and rationalization.

Pinter's plays speak for the twentieth-century, and our growing sense of the unknowability, perhaps even the non-existence, of objective truth. They do this in a mimetic rather than a didactic manner, showing rather than telling us about the foibles of our existence. These are not plays one dissects and digests, but plays with which one lives and grows. They provide a schema and a vocabulary, a means of thinking about and of discussing the modern world; they provide not a manifesto but a mythos. And while they may lack the transient comforts of the latest dicta, they are teeming with the matter of life, replete with its mysteries. In the face of the unknowability, even the non-existence, of objective truth, the struggle to know continues.

NOTES

Introduction

[1] Stephen H. Gale, in a review of Guido Almansi and Simon Henderson's Harold Pinter, Modern Drama, 29 (March 1986), 143-4.

[2] Lucina Paquet Gabbard, The Dream Structure of Pinter's Plays: A Psycho-Analytic Approach (London: Associated University Presses, 1976), p. 276.

[3] Stephen H. Gale, Butter's Going Up: A Critical Analysis of Harold Pinter's Work (Durham: Duke University Press, 1977).

[4] Stephen H. Gale, "The Variable Nature of Reality: Harold Pinter's Plays in the 1970's," Kansas Quarterly, 12, No.4, (1980), 17-24.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Mel Gussow, "A Conversation [Pause] with Harold Pinter," New York Times Magazine (5 December, 1971), 42-3, 126-29, 131-36.

[7] George Steiner, Nostalgia For the Absolute (Toronto: CBC Publications, 1974), p. 14.

[8] Harold Pinter, "Probing Pinter's Play," Saturday Review, 50 (April 8, 1967), 57-8, 96-7.

[9] Katherine H. Burkman, The Dramatic World of Harold Pinter: Its Basis in Ritual (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1971).

[10] Ibid., p. 3.

[11] Austin E. Quigley, The Pinter Problem (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 3.

[12] Susan Melrose, "Theatre, Linguistics and Two Productions of No Man's Land," New Theatre Quarterly, 1, No.2 (May, 1985), 213-24.

[13] Alrene Sykes, Harold Pinter (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, and New York: Humanities Press, 1970).

[14] Gale, a review of Sykes' Harold Pinter in Literary Review, 3 (1971), 746-7.

[15] Sykes, p. 2.

[16] Walter Kerr, Harold Pinter (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 3.

[17] L. M. Bensky, "Harold Pinter: An Interview," Paris Review, 39 (Fall, 1966), 12-37.

[18] Kerr, p. 9.

[19] Harold Pinter, "Writing for the Theatre," Harold Pinter Plays: One (London: Eyre Methuen, 1980), p. 11. Unless otherwise noted, all references to Pinter's plays and other writings to be found in the four-volume set published by Eyre Methuen will be located in the text in the following manner (I. 11).

[20] Gabbard, p. 276.

[21] David Mercer, cited in John Russell Taylor, The Second Wave: British Drama of the Sixties (1971; rpt. rev. London: Eyre Methuen, 1980), p. 47.

[22] Peter Brook, in Jan Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary (1964; rpt. rev. London: Methuen, 1978), p. x.

[23] Bensky interview, p. 31: Pinter says, concerning the "Pinteresque": "That word! These damn words and that word Pinteresque particularly — I don't know what they're bloody well talking about!"

[24] D. C. Muecke, Irony and the Ironic (1970; 2nd ed. London: Methuen, 1982), p. 81.

[25] William Baker and Stephen Ely Tabachnick, Harold Pinter (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 27.

[26] Guido Almansi and Simon Henderson, Harold Pinter (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 28.

[27] John Russell Brown, "Mr. Pinter's Shakespeare," Critical Quarterly 5, No.3 (Autumn, 1963), 251-65.

[28] Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (1961; rev. New York: Doubleday, 1969), p. 239.

[29] Peter C. Thornton, "Blindness and the Confrontation with Death: Three Plays by Harold Pinter," Die Neueren Sprachen, 17 (May, 1968), 213-23.

[30] Peter Brook, The Empty Space (1968; rpt. London: Penguin, 1979), pp. 12-13.

[31] Pinter in a letter in The Sunday Times (London), 14 August 1960, p. 21. For a fuller discussion of the function of laughter in Pinter see Bernard F. Dukore, Where Laughter Stops: Pinter's Tragicomedy (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1976).

[32] Christopher C. Hudgins, "The Basement: Harold Pinter on BBC-TV," Modern Drama, 28 (1985), 81.

[33] There are various means of approaching the problem of the unknown. One is to supply an element of chance, and another is to alter perspective or point of view. Chance can be introduced by having the performance of one of several possible endings contingent on the roll of a die or some other form of random selection. The effect is not unlike that used by John Fowles in The French Lieutenant's Woman. A change in perspective is achieved in Alan Ayckbourn's ingenious trilogy, The Norman Conquests, where the same events are viewed from three different parts of a house, each providing its own emphasis and peculiarities. In the novel, the same effect is created by Ford Maddox Ford in The Good Soldier.

[34] André Malraux, "Author's Preface" to Days of Wrath, trans. Haakon M. Chevalier (New York: Random House, 1936) p. 5.

[35] "My Confession," in The Living Thoughts of Tolstoy, ed. Stefan Zweig (New York: Fawcett, 1963), p. 46, as quoted in Charles B. Harris, Contemporary American Novelists of the Absurd (New Haven, Conn.: College & University Press, 1971), p. 76.

[35] Thompson interview, p. 9.

Chapter 1: The Room

[1] Esslin, Theatre of the Absurd, p. 232.

[2] George E. Wellwarth, The Theatre of Protest and Paradox: Developments in the Avant-Garde Drama (New York: New York University Press, 1964), p. 200.

[3] Esslin, Theatre of the Absurd, p. 234.

[4] Esslin, Pinter the Playwright (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 69.

[5] John Russell Taylor, Anger and After: A Guide to the New British Drama (1962; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 288.

[6] Wellwarth, p. 200.

[7] Esslin, Pinter the Playwright, p. 69.

[8] Letter received from Henry Woolf, 26 January, 1985.

[9] Cited in Esslin Pinter, plate 1a. Henry Woolf (standing) is playing Mr. Kidd.

[10] Vladmir Nabokov, Speak Memory: An Autobiography Revisited (1947; rev. New York: Pyramid Books, 1970), p. 13. The previous title was Conclusive Evidence.

[11] Esslin, Theatre of the Absurd, p. 232

[12] For a fuller discussion see Messenger, Ann. "Blindness and the Problem of Identity in Pinter's Plays," Die Neuren Sprachen, 21 (1972), 481-490.

Chapter 2: The Dumb Waiter

[1] Pinter, interview with Hallam Tennyson, B.B.C. General Overseas Service, 7 August 1960. Cited in Esslin Theatre of the Absurd, p. 232.

[2] Pinter, interview with Kenneth Tynan, B.B.C. Home Service, 28 October 1960. Cited in Esslin, Theatre of the Absurd, p. 232.

[3] In a recent (1985) interview with Nicholas Hern, published with One for the Road (1984: rpt. London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 5-23, Pinter has specifically stated what he now feels The Dumb Waiter is about, since his political awakening.

NH It does seem to me that your attitude to your work has changed, in that you wrote One for the Road as a particular response to a particular situation, whereas plays such as The Birthday Party were written with no particular end in view.

HP I've been thinking about this. They're doing The Dumb Waiter on television, so I went to see a run-through of it. It was quite obvious to the actors that the chap who is upstairs and is never seen is a figure of authority. Gus questions this authority and rebels against it, and therefore is squashed at the end, or is about to be squashed. The political metaphor was very clear to the actors and director of the first production in 1960. It was not, however, clear to the critics of the time . . . . It never occurred to [them] that it was actually about anything. The Birthday Party, which I wrote more or less at the same time, in 1957, again has a central figure who is squeezed by certain authoritarian forces. I would say that The Hothouse — which actually followed quite shortly, the next year, I think — is essentially about the abuse of authority.

[4] Esslin, p. 239.

[5] Ibid., p. 239.

[6] Ibid., pp. 239-40.

[7] Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, trans. Justin O'Brien (1958; rpt. Harmondsworth Penguin, 1980), p. 13.

[8] Antonin Artaud, Le Théâtre et son Double, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (1938; rpt. New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 78.

[9] Ibid., p. 110.

[10] Ibid., p. 111.

Chapter 3: A Slight Ache

[1] Mel Gussow interview.

[2] I must add to this, however, that I feel Burkman's treatment of this play in her The Dramatic World of Harold Pinter (1971) is impressive (it works less well in her discussion of the other plays). For a concise discussion of Ache from her

mythological criticism approach see "Pinter's A Slight Ache as Ritual," Modern Drama, 11 (Dec. 1968), 326-35.

[3] I would have him move his hand to Flora's at her request at play's end, to accentuate his going over to her, and to justify her response of "Yes, Oh, wait a minute." She is saying "yes" to his touch.

[4] In a sense, the matchseller, and even Riley, are not unlike the curious figure of the schmurz in Borin Vian's Les Batissers d'Empire. This character, according to the stage directions in the text, is "covered in bandages, dressed in rags, one arm in a sling, he holds a walking stick in the other" ([Paris: L'Arche, 1959], p. 8). Periodically the schmurz is showered with unsolicited blows.

[5] See Donald Cooper's photograph in Douglas Colby's As the Curtain Rises: On Contemporary British Drama: 1966-1976 (London: Associated University Presses), p. 76.

[6] Esslin, p. 242.

[7] Jean-Paul Sartre, Existence and Humanism, trans. Philip Mairet (1946; rpt. London: Eyre Methuen, 1973), p. 45.

[8] Letter received from Henry Woolf, 26 January, 1985.

Chapter 4: A Night Out

[1] Of course there are exceptions to this: The Caretaker (1960). Apart from the fact that sexuality plays no major part in the play, Mick is sensitive to and tolerant of his brother Aston's attempt to re-establish his identity. This is the case even though Mick feels Aston's involvement with Davies is unwise. For a fuller discussion of this see Sykes' chapter on The Caretaker in Harold Pinter, her Introduction to The Caretaker, Sydney: Heinemann, 1965, and Errol Durbach's "The Caretaker: Text and Subtext," English Studies in Africa, 18, 1 (1975), 21-29.

[2] Sigmund Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams (trans. James Strachney), (1899; rpt. rev. New York: Avon Books, 1965), p. 391.

[3] This is an exact quotation; nothing has been omitted; the ellipses are Pinter's.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

Chapter 6: Betrayal

[1] As Quigley has noted in The Modern Stage and Other Worlds, Pinter's experimentation with time is not unique. J. B. Priestley's "time plays": Dangerous Corner (1932), I Have Been Here Before (1937), and An Inspector Calls (1945), "sought, not entirely successfully, to give structural embodiment to the varied nature of time" (p. 301). In their book J. B. Priestley, A. A. De Vitis and Albert E. Kalson describe "the split in time in Dangerous Corner" as "no more than a stage trick" (p. 153). Priestley himself notes in the "Introduction" to The Plays of J. B. Priestley that his first play is "merely an ingenious box of tricks" (Vol. 1, p. viii). Both descriptions are accurate; time is split into two branches: one involves a sequence of disclosures that lead to a suicide, the other involves these details being withheld. We follow the sequence of disclosures, up to and including the suicide, at which point we are abruptly returned to early in Act I where we see events taking quite a different course. Throughout, the characters remain ignorant of the existence of the other time branch. An Inspector Calls follows much the same idea, with the significant difference that an ironic awareness of the two branches is present in this play that is lacking in Dangerous Corner.

Time and the Conways is a more rewarding play; it is rich in Chekhovian echoes of The Cherry Orchard and The Three Sisters, and as Priestley says, "when well produced, . . . the third act can be very moving in its dramatic irony" (Vol. 1, p. ix). After the vision of what the future holds for the Renevskayaesque Conways, presented to us in Act II, Act III begins where Act I left off. Despite what I take to be a strongly rational tendency in Priestley, he takes pains not to allow his audience the comforting convention that the vision was a dream; it simply occurred,

and he does not permit us to explain it away. The pathos in the third act is extremely powerful, so powerful in fact that the first two acts are completely overshadowed. Priestley was well aware of this for De Vitis quotes him as saying of the play, "its whole point and quality are contained in the third act, when we know so much more about the characters than they know themselves" (p. 159). While De Vitis overstates his case somewhat when he asserts that Priestley "paves the way for such later works as Pinter's Old Times (1971) and No Man's Land (1975) in which past and present coexist on the stage" (p. 159), the lineage is certain, even if the resemblance is imperfect. We must remember after all that the vagaries of memory and the subjectivity of past events are also major elements in the Pinter plays mentioned, as well as the coexistence of past and present.

I Have Been Here Before seems more of an attempt to flesh out the views of P. D. Ouspensky, as expressed in his A New Model of the Universe, than an attempt to write a play. It is wooden and unmoving, despite the almost Gothic possibilities present at the opening of the first act. Priestley rewrote the piece several times, but despite this, one of the most favourable things he says about it is that it "is an excellent example of [my] stealthy edging away from naturalism" (Vol. 1, p. ix). It does, however, deal with time and the influence of past lives on the present.

It should be mentioned that there is much disagreement among critics as to exactly which plays are Priestley's "time plays." For example, De Vitis excludes An Inspector Calls, while adding People at Sea and The Long Mirror. Regardless of the specifics of these arguments, the fact remains that Priestley's influence on Pinter appears to be a promising research direction; and the connection is only strengthened by the strong similarity between Priestley's Mr. Kettle and Mrs. Moon and Pinter's The Birthday Party. Pinter's awareness of Priestley's play is documented in David T.

Thompson's valuable book Pinter: The Player's Playwright. Thompson's book details Pinter's career as an actor, along with the roles he played, including the Bank-Manager and a "minor role" in two separate productions of Mr. Kettle and Mrs. Moon (p. 133-4).

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