HAROLD PINTER: ESSAYS ON THE METAPHYSICS OF HIS THEATRE

Rodney Outhwaite Rogers
Arlington, Virginia

B.S., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1958
M.A., University of Virginia, 1966

A. E. Quigley.
5 April 1974

Douglas Day
5 Apr 74

A Dissertation Presented to the Graduate
Faculty of the University of Virginia
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English

University of Virginia

May 1974

ABSTRACT OF

"HAROLD PINTER: ESSAYS ON THE METAPHYSICS OF HIS THEATRE"

BY RODNEY O. ROGERS

Three related essays elucidate a single thesis: Pinter's drama illustrates--as his utterances about it defend--the idea that man by the very nature of the human condition is metaphysically isolated from the world he must inhabit. The first essay defines Pinter's metaphysic. The second explores how this metaphysic influences Pinter's concept and development of dramatic character and how it determines the typical conflict in his drama. The third systematically reads the various plays in the light of generalizations developed in the first two.

"Pinter and Beckett: The Philosophical Nexus" examines the implications of Pinter's professed admiration for and indebtedness to Samuel Beckett. Beckett's belief that man's intellect is inadequate to understand clearly the world around him is what Pinter finds philosophically and artistically stimulating. The solipsistic metaphysic enunciated by Beckett in Proust and later in "Three Dialogues" is also the one developed in a rudimentary way by Pinter in "Writing for the Theatre" and other similar comments about his drama. By contrast, Pinter's aesthetic is somewhat distinct from though clearly related to the aesthetic set forth in "Three Dialogues." Though one cannot prove conclusively that Beckett's philosophical predispositions in fact directly influenced Pinter, a comparison of the two men's similar and quintessentially modern ideas is nevertheless justified by

the light which Beckett's outlook sheds on Pinter's.

"Characterization and the Type-Situation in Pinter's Drama" examines the relationship between Pinter's metaphysic and his dramatic technique. Since he finds everything external to the self inscrutable, Pinter necessarily sees personality as an irrational. For the same reason he totally rejects conventional notions about predictability of behavior and verification of motive. Fear of the unknown is often evident in man's behavior, though exactly how this fear will be manifested remains a mystery until the behavior actually occurs. Pinter himself, in harmony with this view, insists on seeing his characters strictly from an "outside" point of view; he observes what they are doing physically without trying to understand precisely why they are doing it. Such notions also inform Pinter's conception of the type-situation in his plays, a situation where man confronts the unknowable and is victimized by it. This type-situation is epitomized by the conflict in Pinter's short story "The Examination" and clearly illustrated in his play The Collection.

"Exempla: Conflict in Pinter's Drama from The Room Through The Basement" studies the development of the type conflict situation in Pinter's drama. In The Room, The Dumb Waiter, and The Birthday Party, a menacing because undefinable stranger destroys the sanctity of another person's domicile. In The Caretaker, however, toward which these three earlier plays develop in depicting man's victimization by the unknown, menace is inside rather than outside the room, and conflict derives from the struggle of each of three protagonists to define and thus to control the other two. Five other plays--

A Slight Ache, A Night Out, Night School, The Lover, and The Homecoming--depict a similar conflict between individuals struggling to preserve their illusion of intellectual control over what appears to them (though not to the audience) as an ordered, rational environment. The sexual nature of the conflict in each of these plays underscores Pinter's conviction that man's efforts to love tacitly ignore the fact that everything outside one's mind is metaphysically unknowable and thus incapable of being loved satisfactorily. Still a third group of plays--The Dwarfs, Tea Party, and The Basement--intentionally foreshortens the audience's point of view to put the audience in the position of Pinter's typical protagonist--threatened by the indefinability and unpredictability of things and people.

CONTENTS

PREFACE: A RATIONALE

The following three essays on Harold Pinter attempt to elucidate a single thesis: Pinter's drama illustrates--as his utterances about it defend--the idea that man by the very nature of the human condition is metaphysically isolated from the world he must inhabit. To understand this point is to see with a fair degree of clarity and simplicity a body of dramatic work not infrequently taken to be more or less cryptic. If anyone object that such a reading of Pinter reduces him to the artistic stature of someone writing the same play over and over again, the proper reply is that it does because Pinter is. Nor should Pinter consider apologizing for this unless other playwrights who have done the same thing--Beckett and the later Eugene O'Neill are two who come immediately to mind--also areasked to recant their similar artistic heresies. What is important to see is how Pinter has been continually able to renew through art an idea that over the past hundred years has become a philosophical commonplace in the literature and philosophy of solipsistic modern man.

The defense of such a thesis divides logically into three parts more or less as equal in scope and length as they are discrete in focus. The first essay--"Pinter and Beckett: The Philosophical Nexus"--defines Pinter's metaphysic. The second--"Characterization and the Type-Situation in Pinter's Drama"--explores how such a metaphysic influences Pinter's concept and development of dramatic character and how it determines the typical

conflict in his drama. These two essays provide the background for the third--"Exempla: Pinter's Drama from The Room Through The Basement"--which consists simply of readings of the various plays in the light of generalizations developed earlier.

A few additional remarks may further elaborate my choice of such a rationale as well as explain other lesser authorial decisions. I am of course not unaware that repetition is a very real problem in a systematic reading of all Pinter's plays in terms of a single theme. On the other hand, such a strategy is clearly not without its merits. For instance difficult plays such as The Basement or The Dwarfs are much more easily understood when one finally discovers in them the type conflict more apparent in less cryptic Pinter plays. Nevertheless in my third essay I have attempted to forestall the dangers of repetition by pointing out how Pinter's expertise in handling the single type-situation of his drama develops from one play to the next. For example The Caretaker is seen as a more subtle and complex treatment of the same conflict situation treated in the three plays which precede it. Thus not simply sameness of theme but difference of artistic treatment is discussed in my play analyses. Moreover, I have likewise attempted to minimize unfruitful repetition by omitting discussion of the film plays entirely, even though these adaptations of novels by other writers clearly bear the thematic and stylistic trademark of the rest of Pinter's drama.

Finally, I would conclude with a justification of my decision to stop discussing Pinter's plays with The Basement. Pinter's most recent work--Landscape, Silence, Night, Old Times--though

related conceptually to his earlier work, obviously represents preliminary exploration of a somewhat new though apparently unified artistic terrain. He pretty clearly seems to be attempting to move beyond the limited scope of the earlier drama. Prudence if nothing else would dictate that critical illumination of this new landscape await Pinter's creation of additional landmarks in the form of new plays to indicate the extent and direction of his newest artistic journey.

PINTER AND BECKETT: THE PHILOSOPHICAL NEXUS

Harold Pinter's professed admiration for and indebtedness to Samuel Beckett provides a firm basis for comment and conjecture about the philosophical similarities between the two contemporary writers. Pinter's world view, as it turns out, is so markedly like Beckett's that a comparison of the two authors' philosophical outlooks could easily be made to shed light in either direction. Yet the potential for illuminating Pinter exceeds that for illuminating Beckett to precisely the extent that Beckett's work in certain places makes explicit a metaphysic that is by comparison relatively implicit in Pinter. Moreover, the chronological relationship between the two authors argues logically for the study of Beckett's influence on Pinter rather than the other way around. What follows, then, is an attempt to clarify Pinter's metaphysical and ontological predispositions by seeing them in the context of Beckett's similar views. The first section of the tripartite essay briefly rehearses the evidence implying that Pinter was in fact receptive to and influenced by Beckett's philosophical outlook. The second develops at some length the central ideas, explicit and implicit, in Beckett's metaphysic and in his aesthetic. The third part examines the many similarities and the few basic differences between Pinter's analagous views and those of his ostensible philosophical and artistic mentor.

I

Pinter's relationship with Beckett dates from as early as three

years before Pinter's first play, a fact established by the authority of Pinter's own testimony. "The farther he goes the more good it does me," Pinter--youthfully exuberant and characteristically unanalytic--wrote of Beckett in a 1954 letter to a friend.

> I don't want philosophies, tracts, dogmas, creeds, way outs, truths, answers, nothing from the bargain basement. He is the most courageous, remorseless writer going and the more he grinds my nose in the shit the more I am grateful to him. He's not fucking me about, he's not leading me up any garden, he's not slipping me any wink, he's not flogging me a remedy or a path or a revelation or a basinful of breadcrums, he's not selling me anything I don't want to buy, he doesn't give a ballock whether I buy or not, he hasn't got his hand over his heart.[1]

Such enthusiasm, interestingly enough, probably was generated not by Beckett's plays but by the early novel Watt, written in the forties but published only in 1953 in the wake of the commotion caused by Godot. At least Pinter remember in 1963 that his first contact with Beckett's work was with Watt, "an absolute knockout," and that he did not read Beckett's plays until a somewhat "later" time.[2] Moreover, Pinter subsequently corroborated such an assertion in a 1966 interview with Lawrence Bensky in which he implicitly denied the influence of Beckett's drama on his own early writing and simultaneously emphasized his admiration for Beckett's fiction by calling Beckett "the best prose writer living."[3] In any event, the relationship--Pinter has made clear--is as inevitable as it is explicit.

> There is no question that Beckett is a writer whom I admire very much and have admired for a number of years. If Beckett's influence shows in my works that's all right with me. You don't work in a vacuum; you're bound to absorb and digest other writing; and I admire Beckett's work so much that something of its texture might appear in my own.[4]

Significantly, however, Pinter insists upon emphasizing his personal rather than his professional affinity with Beckett. "I've

been influenced personally by everyone I've ever read," Pinter told Bensky; "but none of these writers particularly influenced my writing," he continued. "Beckett and Kafka stayed with me the most."[5] Of course such a statement, minimizing as it does the importance of Beckett's influence as craftsman or technician on Pinter, implicitly stresses the idea that Beckett's philosophical outlook is what makes him so particularly attractive to Pinter. By doing so it clearly touches on what is elsewhere made more explicit--that Pinter's infatuation with Beckett is frankly and expressly narcissistic, that he tends to see himself reflected in Beckett as in a pool of water. Certainly this is the substance of a remark Pinter made to B.B.C. interviewer John Sherwood early in 1960: "When I read [Kafka and Beckett] it rang a bell, that's all, within me. I thought: something is going on here which is going on in me too."[6]

Since Pinter's acquaintance with Beckett predates considerably his initial work as a playwright, presumably the phrase "in me too" refers specifically to Pinter's philosophical outlook rather than to his dramatic works. But even if the opposite is true, evidence suggesting Pinter's intellectual and philosophical similarity to Beckett is quite easily adduced. For instance Pinter praises Beckett's characteristic authorial autonomy, that dogged independence which led him to continue writing for years before he found an audience, and to do so without giving "a ballock"--as Pinter so succinctly expresses it in the early letter about Beckett--about whether or not his works were accepted by any particular public. But this is precisely an attitude which Pinter frequently has expressed as one of his own.

> I don't write with any audience in mind. I just write. I take a chance on the audience. If you've got something

> you want to say to the world, then you'd be worried that only a few thousand people might see your play. Therefore you'd do something else. You'd become a religious leader, or a politican perhaps. But if you don't want to give some particular message to the world, explicitly and directly, you just carry on writing, and you're quite content. . . . Firstly and finally, and all along the line, you write because there's something you want to write, have to write. For yourself.[7]

Similarly Pinter is--as he claims Beckett is also--disinclined to moralize in his writing, to flog "a remedy or a revelation," as Pinter also puts it in the letter about Beckett. This fact he makes clear in language which, significantly, seems likewise reminiscent of the early letter on Beckett.

> If I were to state any moral precept it might be: 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, a body of active and positive thought[,] is in fact a body lost in a prison of empty definition and cliche.[8]

At once more important and more interesting, however, is the metaphysical bias which Pinter shares with Beckett. Both writers focus in their works upon the dilemma implicit in the idea that man exists in and must operate in a world which his mind is powerless to know or understand with any considerable degree of satisfaction. For example, a doubt of the mind's ability to achieve valid insights into and to formulate valid conclusions about the human condition, probably underlies Pinter's declared distrust of "warnings, sermons, admonitions, ideological exhortations, moral judgments, defined problems with built in solutions,"[9] as it likewise presumably explains his praise of Beckett's remorseless refusal to tender his reader "philosophies,

tracts, dogmas, way out truths, answers" and similar intellectual bargains. Perhaps a more explicit indication that Pinter's solipsism is kin to Beckett's occurs, however, in Pinter's quoting from Beckett's The Unnamable to conclude a 1962 speech to the Seventh National Student Drama Festival at Bristol. The point of the quotation is to effect a comic dismissal of Pinter's avowed inability to explain himself satisfactorily to his audience.

> "The fact would seem to be, if in my situation one may speak of facts, not only that I shall have to speak of things of which I cannot speak, but also, which is even more interesting, but also that I, which is if possible even more interesting, that I shall have to, I forget, no matter."

Throughout this important speech at Bristol, Pinter attempts to preserve the quintessentially Beckettian comic despair of precise definition which is so clearly reflected in the passage from The Unnamable. Beginning from the assumption that "there are at least twenty-four possible aspects of any single statement, depending on where you're standing at the time or what the weather's like," he cautions his audience at the outset that no statement he makes "should be interpreted as final and definitive. One or two of them may sound final and definitive," he admits; but, he continues, "I won't regard them as such tomorrow, and I wouldn't like you to do so today." Correspondingly the speech ends up on the idea that if writing plays is "an extremely difficult task, . . . how much more difficult is it to attempt to rationalize this process, and how much more abortive, as I think I've clearly demonstrated to you this morning." Then follows the concluding quote in which Pinter expressly identifies his frustrated attempts at self-rationalization with those of the speaker in Beckett's novel.

Thus Pinter is in the main successful in the speech in suggesting, more perhaps through tone than by explicit statement, what mood it is that he shares personally with Beckett and that he finds so alluringly depicted in Beckett's The Unnamable: a comic response to the vagaries of a world which the mind is powerless to parcel and divide meaningfully. This is true despite the fact that what one of Pinter's friends has termed his obsession "to be confronted with the truth of an action"[11] threatens throughout the speech to dispel his comic detachment (as by contrast an analagous temptation to be merely serious so seldom overcomes Beckett). Yet the speech is finally less than a satisfying explanation of Pinter's metaphysical predispositions as dramatist precisely because it is so allusive, so full of undeveloped implication, so indebted to Beckett's philosophical outlook without ever making explicit the precise nature of this indebtedness. Moreover, though the speech is not particularly analytical, it is the most complete personal statement available explaining how Pinter conceives the world he embodies artistically in his drama. Thus perhaps the most satisfactory way to understand the philosophical bases of Pinter's drama as he advances them in rudimentary form in this speech is to see them against their implicit background, Beckett's metaphysic and aesthetic.

II

Two essential documents cast broad swaths of light across Beckett's philosophical landscape: Proust, that eloquent, amazing monograph, written at twenty-five, which Beckett reluctantly confessed he "hated" to work on after reading twice the entire A La Recherche du Temps Perdu and acquainting himself with "most of the criticism on Proust";[12] and

"Three Dialogues"--on the subject of painting--between Beckett and Georges Duthuit. Of these two, the former elaborates first a metaphysic common to both author and subject (as Pinter sees himself in the mirror of Beckett, so the Proustian ontology is coincidentally or not also Beckett's); and second an aesthetic toward which the Beckett of middle and old age is demonstrably aloof. The latter, ostensibly the outcome of actual conversations written "up"--as Beckett told Martin Esslin--into literary form,[13] by contrast propounds a somewhat more perplexing aesthetic which nevertheless remains the sole instance, however posed and playful, of Beckett's advancing in his own name anything like an artistic credo.

The metaphysic enunciated in Proust--it is also the one, wee shall see, which informs and describes Beckett's absurdly fluid artistic world--depends upon the ostensibly problematic nature of the mind's relationship with matter. The physical world is judged in Proust to be inscrutable, a mysteriously moveable object which the intellect's less than irresistible force struggles in vain to encounter firmly. Only the evanescence of the mind's interaction with matter is constant and predictable. Proust's "perspectivism" concedes in advance, Beckett explains, that the world is but "a projection of the individual's consciousness." Moreover, the authenticity of this projection is necessarily chimeric. Man occupies in time an infinite latitude, "a place extended beyond measure." Thus he is in fact immersed in an incommensurable which inevitably mutates him, indeed mutilates him: "We are not merely weary because of yesterday, we are other, no longer what we were before the calamity of yesterday."

As a consequence, man constantly pursues what by definition would

no longer exist if he could succeed in capturing it: "The aspirations of yesterday were valid for yesterday's ego, not for today's. We are disappointed at the nullity of what we are pleased to call attainment. But what is attainment? The identification of the subject with the object of his desire. The subject has died--and perhaps many times--on the way." This is so because "the creation of the world did not take place once and for all time, but takes place every day." It is in fact only convention--"habit," Beckett reminds us, is the Proustian term--which allows one to speak generically about the "ideal object, immutable and incorruptible." A more viable point of view denies that such an object in fact exists. For if "the observer infects the observed with his own mobility," then matter is an irrational consisting of "the countless treaties concluded between the countless subjects that constitute the individual and their countless correlative objects" (P, 1-8).[14]

Such a relativist ontology inevitably must view experience as thought (and vice versa), must in fact begin from the assumption that the two cannot be satisfactorily differentiated from each other and that the distinction implicit in the mere existence of the two terms is therefore arbitrary, indeed imaginary. Reality it likewise conceives as a product of the intellect, the totality of what the mind can think and say about the material world. Accordingly, to separate the real from the imaginary, the authentic act or object from one's conception of it, is an impossible and indeed a meaningless task. The world external, subject to every whim of man's capricious imagination, refuses to remain still. Things and events retain only the provisional kind of authenticity which--in Beckett's own artistic

world--challenges for instance Winnie's tireless patience in Happy Days (1961) when she observes her parasol in flames, her mirror shattered, yet doubts correctly that anything has in fact happened: "something seems to have occurred, something has seemed to occur, and nothing has occurred, nothing at all. . . . The sunshade will be there again tomorrow, beside me on this mound, to help me through the day. I take up this little glass, I shiver it on a stone--I throw it away--it will be in the bag again tomorrow, without a scratch, to help me through the day (HD, 29).[15]

Winnie's mind, Beckett is suggesting, has a limitless capacity to make assertions and judgments which, in a manner of speaking, obliterate the material world. "Should one day the earth cover my breasts," she realizes, "then I shall never have seen my breasts, no one ever seen my breasts" (HD, 38). Later, when she is submerged to her neck in the sand, the fact of her earlier ostensibly "physical" situation proves as inefficacious as she predicted it must be: "My arms. My breasts. What arms? What breasts?" (HD, 51). It is, indeed, her abortive effort to come to grips with her body's unfathomable transience, with her mind's reckless penchant for declaring itself without threat of contradiction from the physical past, which accounts for Winnie's assertion that corporeality is merely a fiction, a ludicrous outgrowth of one's ability to utter words and suppose that they mean something: "Then--now--what difficulties here, for the mind. To have been always what I am--and so changed from what I was. I am the one, I say the one, then the other. Now the one, then the other. There is so little one can say, one says it all. All one can. And no truth in it anywhere" (HD, 50-51).

It is, Beckett argues in Proust, precisely this difficulty inherent in the mind-matter relationship which dictates that frustration inevitably must proceed from Marcel's love for Albertine in A La Recherche du Temps Perdu. No object "prolonged" in time "tolerates possesion," for total possession is "only to be achieved by the complete identification of object and subject." Such an identification is an impossibility in as much as "all that is active, all that is enveloped in time and space, is endowed with what might be described as an abstract, ideal and absolute impermeability" (P, 41). When the thing to be possessed is a person--"an object whose mobility is not merely a function of the subject's, but independent and personal" (P, 6)--the terms of the relation are additional complicated, but in any event the intellect effectively constitutes a prison prohibiting man from the substantial world: "We are alone. We cannot know and we cannot be known. 'Man is the creature that cannot come forth from himself, who knows others only in himself, and who, if he asserts the contrary, lies'" (P, 49). Nothing--no object, no person--can be possessed. Proust's "pessimism" flows from this assumption and seeps through the roots of "the Marcel-Albertine liaison . . . the type-tragedy of the human relationship whose failure is preordained." Inevitably, Beckett asserts, these lovers remain "two separate and immanent dynamisms related by no system of synchronisation." Thus they become victims of the metaphysical prank which ensures that "whatever the object, our thirst for possession is, by definition, insatiable" (P, 6-7).

Man's relationship to the physical world is therefore essentially illusionary, Beckett argues in Proust. Nevertheless one

can exorcise the daemons of one's surroundings by addressing them as though they are something other than surds. Indeed, the mind's unchallenged autonomy to do precisely this is exactly what renders man's metaphysical isolation more or less inefficacious simply by reducing it to an irremediable, to a given. "The failure to possess may have the nobility of that which is tragic," Beckett notes in respect of Marcel's vain love for Albertine; "whereas the attempt to communicate where no communication is possible is merely a simian vulgarity, or horribly comic, like the madness that holds a conversation with the furniture" (P, 46).

Significantly, it is just such a bestial "madness," a lucidly comic self-awareness, which protects Beckett's characters--as it does not protect Proust's Marcel--against a feckless landscape which tenders them no intimacy and accepts none in return. For instance friendship in Godot is a symbiotic though virtually simian relationship which enables man to occupy the emptiness of time and space. Estragon and Vladimir--like Pozzo and Lucky, or indeed like Pozzo and the pair of stage clowns--play with each other like objects. They confront each other, to borrow Didi's metaphor--"Come on Gogo, return the ball" [16] --across a net which divides, from either player's point of view, the known from the unknown. Life is a game played against an aloof partner. One sees in one's adversary merely a reflection of oneself, of whatever significance one invests in the "furniture" of the universe, so that the net is in fact more precisely a bangboard which erratically and unpredictably bounces back the balls one serves, or--to change the figure--a screen where one arbitrarily projects his own features on the blank surface of the

universe.

Predictably, in such a barren and fluid landscape objects--including those invented with words--do in fact have the equivalent value of people, are equally one's "friends" in the Proustian sense of the word. Thus for instance Winnie, deprived without explanation of her adversary Willie, continues to play the game of passing time using non-human though none the less suitable props. Alternately she manipulates items--mirror, hairbrush, toothbrush, and so forth--from her bag, and tells herself stories about what she calls the "past," perhaps her own. "My two lamps," she designates the two pastimes, with a clear sense of relief in the knowledge that she can use them to light the metaphysical darkness precipitated by the ringing bell which persistently calls her to consciousness: "when one goes out the other burns brighter," she says of these two pastimes; "Oh yes, great mercies" (HD, 36-37).

Touchingly, Winnie--like Gogo and Didi and the rest of Bekcett's unsaved thieves--is consciously aware that her arbitrary acquaintance with her surroundings is, as Proust would have said of all friendship, simply "the negation of that irremediable solitude to which every human being is condemned" (P, 46). Consequently her "horribly comic" response to this condition is at best only a relative, a temporary triumph, only a momentary reprieve from man's uncommuted sentence for "the sin of having been born" (P, 49). For Winnie's comic evasion of despair signals the fact that she recognizes, as Beckett says Proust recognized, that friendship "is a function of cowardice," that it "implies an almost piteous acceptance of face values," is merely "a social expedient, like upholstery or the distribution of

garbage buckets."

In short Winnie--like all Beckett's personae, characteristically so self-aware--recognizes that friendship, though it counters man's isolation from the physical world simply by ignoring it, "has no spiritual significance" precisely because it tacitly if not consciously affirms a philosophical lie. Tantamount to the betrayal of heroic because vain hope, yet in its planned mediocrity an effective bridge over the most plunging depths of despair, friendship then is situated "somewhere between fatigue and ennui" (P, 46-47), a limbo where life, no longer tragic, is endurable merely because absurd. Accordingly, Beckett's characters in general conceive for themselves no more taxing an orientation among human "objects" and the other paraphernalia of existence than does Winnie. To reduce expectation to a cypher is for them to make life tolerable. Thus Hamm's great and abiding fear in Endgame is that he and Clov might begin to "mean something."[17]

In a more general sense, of course, friendship as Beckett conceives it in Proust is simply the manifestation of habituated intellectual responses toward the physical world. These responses are prompted by "the wisdom that consists not in the satisfaction but in the ablation of desire." For habit, "a compromise effected between the individual and his environment" (P, 7), enables man to reduce the incommensurate, the temporally and therefore infinitely extended, to a rational. Such an operation--Beckett quotes Proust--"'consists in the imposition of our own familiar soul on the terrifying soul of our surroundings'" (P, 26). Thus habit, "a minister of dulness" since it neutralizes the evanescence of an

object dissolved in time, is also "an agent of security" (P, 16) which wooes us with the lie that things of the physical world are not really eternal maidens persistently evading the ardent grasp of our intellect.

This prevarication--it is man's feeble concession to his own minimal sanity--is finally unconvincing, however. This fact, Beckett reminds us, is the gorgon at which Marcel ultimately must stare. For his attempts to possess Albertine can only lead him to the realization that the "permanent reality" of personality, "if any, can only be apprehended as a retrospective hypothesis" (P, 4). Inevitably the ever modulating relationship between subject and object, between lover and beloved, will undercut the stasis which is the essential condition of such a postulation. Thus the fact of Albertine's "plastic and moral multiplicity"--deriving from her "pictorial multiplicity" (P, 32): she is consecutively, to Marcel's consternated perception, maenad, vestal, and courtesan--is an indication of Marcel's predictable failure to establish habitual modes of conceiving Albertine, to reverse the enchantment, turn the gorgon to stone, and thus finally possess her. He cannot. Almost comically "the short journey of his lips to the cheek of Albertine creates ten Albertines, and transforms a human banality into a many-headed goddess" (P, 34). What remains for Marcel is merely "the bitter satisfaction of knowing that no rival shall enjoy what he himself cannot enjoy," since what he really worships in Albertine is unobtainable, is "less that nothing . . . an obscure and implacable Goddess . . . the Goddess of Time" (P, 40-41).

Ironically, it is Marcel's frustrated pursuit of Albertine--as

Beckett reasons--that finally fertilizes the soil from which the Proustian aesthetic and affirmation of art will blossom. Albertine's physical death, "her emancipation from time," cannot be the occasion of her absence from Marcel, since Marcel himself experiences no corresponding release. "For any given Albertine there exists a correlative narrator, and no anachronism can put apart what Time has coupled" (P, 43). Elusive as ever, then, she survives her own demise, even as the child Marcel's dead Grandmother had materialized out of his involuntary memory--catalyzed by his stopping to unbutton his boot--during his second visit to Balbec. In both cases, as in so many others, "the contrast between presence and irremediable obliteration is intolerable." Nevertheless it is precisely this intolerable contradiction that ultimately leads Proust, in the guise of Marcel, toward his artistic epiphany, "a religious experience in the only intelligible sense of that epithet." Art, not the possession of Albertine--Marcel finally realizes--is solely fundamental to his identity. All else is "infinite futility" (P, 51), since art alone defeats habituated perception and leads to the involuntary retrieval of memory and, with it, of the passionately desired reality.

Habituated perception--definition through voluntary as opposed to involuntary recollection--is "tantamount to a sacrifice of that only real and incommunicable essence to the exigencies of a frightened habit whose confidence requires to be restored by a dose of inattention" (P, 47-48). Thus the attempt by Marcel to "possess" Albertine, willfully to extract her precious essence from the solution of time, can only result in the unconscious absolute neglect of her reality, can

only insure that her tantalizingly evasive aroma will be stifled beneath the ordure of the quotidian. Since habit "has laid its veto" upon the perception of reality, nothing of the "real" Albertine can be seen in the voluntary memory's image of her, a habituated image and thus "merely a blurred and uniform projection once removed of our anxiety and opportunism," an inevitable concomitant of all futile attempts consciously to capture any object sovereign in time (P, 20).

Contrarily, the accidental suspension of habit--in the period before man's "total consciousness" averts disaster by creating "the new habit that will empty the mystery of its threat"--briefly opens a door on the realm of the real: "between this death and that birth [of old and new habit], reality, intolerable, [is] absorbed feverishly by . . . consciousness at the extreme limit of its intensity" (P, 10-11). These periods of transition between "separate consecutive adaptations" of habit, of habituated perception, "represent the perilous zones in the life of the individual, dangerous, precarious, painful, mysterious and fertile, when for a moment the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being" (P, 8).

The suspension of habituated perception involves, then, the spontaneous and unpredicted replacement of voluntary by involuntary memory and perception, that "unruly magician" whose conjuring "will not be importuned" (P, 20). This notion, finally understood, enables Marcel to accept that it is only possible to glimpse momentarily the reality he struggled so vainly to possess in the person of Albertine. For since the voluntary memory reproduces "for our gratified inspection [only] those impressions of the past that were consciously and

intelligently formed," its images--inevitably conditioned and compromised by habit--are "arbitrary" and "remote from reality" (P, 19). This is so because "the most trivial experience . . . is encrusted with elements that logically are not related to it and have consequently been rejected by our intelligence" (P, 55). Voluntary memory cannot recall such elements precisely because "it is conditioned by the prejudices of the intellect which abstracts from any given sensation, as being illogical and insignificant, . . . whatever word or gesture, sound or perfume, cannot be fitted into the puzzle of a concept" (P, 53). But involuntary memory--like voluntary memory, the term is Proust's--by contrast enables us to glimpse once again "what has been registered by our extreme inattention and stored in that ultimate and inaccessible dungeon of our being to which habit does not possess the key." In a word, involuntary memory enables us to glimpse reality, since it permits us access into "that '<u>gouffre interdit à nos sondes</u>'" wherein is stored "the essence . . . of our many selves and their concretions that simplists call the world" (P, 18-19).

Unlike voluntary or habituated perception, involuntary memory cannot be compelled: it "chooses its own time and place for the performance of its miracle." (The miracle, Beckett notes insistently, occurs at least "twelve or thirteen times" in <u>A La Recherche du Temps Perdu</u>, "a monument to involuntary memory and the epic of its action"; despite the fact that most commentators cite only the famous episode where "the long-forgotten taste of a madeleine steeped in an infusion of tea" conjures Marcel's childhood "in all the relief and color of its essential significance from the shallow well of a

cup's inscrutable banality.") Moreover, involuntary memory is "explosive, 'an immediate, total and delicious deflagration'" which "restores . . . the past object . . . because in its flame it has consumed Habit and all its works, and in its brightness revealed what the mock reality of experience never can and never will reveal--the real" (P, 20-21).

Such a purifying explosion is likely to occur "if by some miracle of analogy the central impression of a past sensation recurs as an immediate stimulus which can be instinctively identified by the subject"--if, in short, one experiences that transcendent moment which psychologists have taught us to call déjà vu. At such a moment "the total past sensation, not its echo or its copy, but the sensation itself"--exactly the senation "whose integral purity has been retained because it has been forgotten"--annihilates "every spacial and temporal restriction" and "comes in a rush to engulf the subject in all the beauty of its infallible proportion" (P, 54). In such a way a "tense and provisional lucidity," arriving suddenly and unexpected, carries one along helpless but uplifted on the crest of the real, but only in those rare moments when habituated perception is thwarted by "any circumstance unforeseen in her curriculum," as for instance by "the mystery of a strange sky or a strange room." Then and only then "the atrophied faculties come to the rescue, and the maximum value of our being is restored" (P, 9). And this is so precisely because "the only reality is provided by the hieroglyphics traced by inspired perception (identification of subject and object). The conclusions of the intelligence are merely of arbitrary value" (P, 64). For "the immediate joys and sorrows

of the body and the intelligence are so many superfoetations"; only the accidental interruption of habit can permit us a view of "the only world that has reality and significance, the world of our own latent consciousness" (P, 3; italics added).

It is just this lucidity, this enlightened glimpse of an accidentally discovered reality, which Beckett in Proust sees as at once the condition and the goal of the artistic experience. "Art is the apotheosis of solitude. There is no communication because there are no vehicles of communication" (P, 47). Nevertheless the artist, patiently abiding the catalyzing of his unconscious in the sure knowledge that involuntary suspension of habituated perception is the indespensible condition of creation through recreation, can exploit if not compel the availed opportunity to effect a "spiritual assimilation of the immaterial" (P, 48). In brief, he can effect, or more accurately can mystically conceive, an imaginative reinterpretation of a past experience.

Thus the artistic moment, Beckett argues in Proust, is in fact transcendent, "at once imaginative and empirical, at once an evocation and a direct perception, . . . the ideal real, the essential, the extra-temporal." In this sense at least the artistic act is "the negation of Time and Death." And Le Temps Rétrouvé, Beckett therefore reasons, is "inappropriate" as a title for Proust's last volume, since in fact "Time is not recovered [so much as] obliterated." Moreover, the artist's "identification of immediate with past experience . . . amounts to a participation between the ideal and the real, imagination and direct apprehension, symbol and substance. Such participation frees the essential reality that is denied to the

contemplative as to the active life." And thus the artist engagé is momentarily superhuman, psychically whole in precious moments, sinless and limitless in these moments as the unfallen Adam. For through the artistic act he breathes, momentarily rebreathes, "the true air of Paradise, of the only Paradies that is not the dream of a madman, the Paradise that has been lost" (P, 55-56).

That Beckett no longer shares--if indeed he ever did--the optimism with which Proust views the artistic experience is clear enough from "Three Dialogues," where B. (Beckett) argues that art is neither transcendent nor expressive, that in fact "there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express" (TD, 17).[18] Already in his 1938 essay on the Irish poet Denis Devlin, Beckett had observed that "the time is not perhaps altogether too green for the vile suggestion that art has nothing to do with clarity, does not dabble in the clear and does not make clear."[19] Then in 1945, in "The World and the Pair of Trousers," he answered humanistic critics of "non-naturalistic art" with "a vigorous defence of the works of the van Velde brothers, two abstract painters of the School of Paris." It was not, however, until the 1949 dialogues with Duthuit (editor of Transition, which originally published them), "on three painters then exhibiting in Paris, Tal Coat, Andre Masson and Bram van Velde,"[20] that Beckett produced a more precise if largely implicit and allusive statement about the relationship between the artist and his subject matter, that sensate reality which Beckett elsewhere has referred to as "the mess, . . . this buzzing confusion."[21]

Building implicitly upon the metaphysic attributed by Beckett to Proust, "Three Dialogues" struggles humorously and by intention unsuccessfully with the logically irrefutable objections to the common notion that art somehow recapitulates and interprets the material world, that world inhabited by our bodies. Doubting the objectivity of this world, Beckett consequently doubts that art can represent it objectively or be meaningfully communicative about it. The physical, artifically extracted from time, exists only in the mind. Thus the artist, like Milton's Jehovah, necessarily creates ex nihilo, since there is literally "nothing" to be represented which is commensurate with the intellect's ability to capture it. Wisely, "Three Dialogues" comes at this ostensible aesthetic conundrum from a consideration of painting, traditionally an art form which has been assumed to effect the representation of something material and sensuous.

B. of the dialogues, opposing such an idea, finds "untenable" any aesthetic which supposes that "the object remain[s]sovereign" (TD, 18). Though he apparently would not deny that something exists, nominally at least, that a camera can take a picture of, he nonetheless argues that the artist's relationship to his subject--it is identical, one can see, to the Proustian subject-object relationship--cannot be precisely summed up, cannot therefore be expressed objectively. Thus the physical world--a stone, a tree, a landscape, another person--cannot be represented not so much because it is not there as because there is no way to authenticate one's relationship to it, to divorce from their temporal context the "relations between the representer and the representee." Like a

photograph, then, a painting implies a metaphysical lie if it claims to represent something "real," despite the fact that paradoxically it is itself as "real" as whatever it falsely claims to represent. This is because, as B. believes, the reality of an object consists in an infinite sequence of amorphous impressions in the mind of whoever perceives it. That is, any object necessarily impinges upon the intellect with the "irrationality of pi," and in this sense at least is "nothing," an ontological zero, paradoxically a void because an infinite and therefore an incomprehensible.

As a consequence, B. argues, what only should concern the artist, what indeed must plague him, "is the acute and increasing anxiety" of the subject-object relation, a relation "shadowed more and more darkly by a sense of invalidity, of inadequacy" as one comes by degrees to a more sophisticated appreciation of its enormous complexity. Thus Bram van Velde, B. asserts, is the first philosophically honest painter because the "first to submit wholly to the incoercible absence of relation [of the artist to the sensate world], in the absence of terms or, if you like, in the presence of unavailable terms, the first to admit that to be an artist is to fail, . . . that failure is his world" (TD, 21). By contrast to van Velde, B. points out, Masson attempts--inevitably unsuccessfully--to transcend this metaphysical limitation of art. His notion of rejecting the object, of rendering it as an abstraction in order ostensibly to effect "the rehabilitation of the 'vaporous,'" betrays his metaphysically unsound postulation of a transcendent reality. Thus Masson simply rephrases an impossibility. "Opaque or transparent," for him "the object remains sovereign." But no one--B.

now argues in contrast to Beckett's earlier position in Proust--can take prisoners from time, and so "the void [Masson] speaks of is perhaps simply the obliteration of an unbearable presence, unbearable because neither to be wooed nor to be stormed. . . . In any case, it is hardly to be confused with the [true] void" (TD,18).

It is for these reasons that B. in "Three Dialogues" lauds Bram van Velde's success in making painting "independent of its occasion [i.e. subject], making it that is to say totally unconcerned with the relationship between the painter and the object he sometimes assumes he is representing. Though artists working in other media have "felt that art is not necessarily expression," painting "had to wait for van Velde to be rid of the misapprehension . . . that its function was to express, by means of paint." For van Velde is "the first whose painting is bereft, rid if you prefer, of occasion in every shape and form, ideal as well as material, and the first whose hands have not been tied by the certitude that expression is an impossible act" (TD, 20). His alone is the imminently logical position since--one hears the reverberations of Beckett's assertion in Proust that "the observer infects the observed with his own mobility"--"if the occasion appears as an unstable term of relation, the artist, who is the other term, is hardly less so, thanks to his warren of modes and attitudes." Moreover, "the objections to this dualist view of the creative process are unconvincing," despite the fact that the "history of painting [i.e. the movement from realism through impressionism toward abstractionism in its numerous manifestations] . . . is the history of its [vain] attempts to escape from [a] sense of failure, by means of more authentic, more ample,

less exclusive relations between representer and representee, in a kind of tropism toward a light as to the nature of which the best opinions continue to vary, and with a kind of Pythagorean terror, as though the irrationality of pi were an offense against the deity, not to mention his creature" (TD, 21).

To understand the implications of these assertions about Masson and van Velde is to realize how thoroughly Beckett in the guise of B. accepts the Proustian metaphysic while rejecting the Proustian aesthetic. Reality cannot be captured by any trick of life or art. Indeed it does not in any meaningful metaphysical sense exist; it is merely a word, the most abstract of nouns, the truly unknowable and hence unnamable as Beckett calls it in his novel of that name. Man is alone, eternally bereft of the presence of any real "friends," to use Beckett's term from Proust. The difference between the workings of the voluntary and involuntary memories is not a difference of kind but one merely of degree. Thus the artist who attempts, as Pope once put it, to follow Nature and frame his judgment by her just standard, is--for Beckett--philosophically a fraud.

Nevertheless--and this is perhaps the most provocative and certainly the most paradoxical assertion B. makes in "Three Dialogues"--an aesthetic imperative exists. The artist, we have seen, has "nothing to express . . . together with the obligation to express." When challenged by his friendly adversary D. (Duthuit) to explain this paradox--specifically to explain why van Velde is powerless yet "obliged" to paint--B. replies unequivocally, "I don't know" (TD, 19). Yet unless Beckett is being merely coy and verbally evasive--he

virtually never is, appreciating painfully as he does that language is far less than adequate to achieve its lofty implicit aims--such an answer implies not that some mysterious, enigmatic value attaches to the creative act, but simply that the intellect's ability to create is one of life's givens and hence beyond questioning.

Indeed, Beckett himself clearly conceives man's imaginative powers, his creative faculties, to be the most crucial, really the quintessential donné attaching to the human condition. Nor is this capability by any means a blessing. The mind, unable to conceive its own end, cannot escape functioning. Rest is the one unachievable. Neither, however, can the intellect explain the meaning of or the cause for its need to create, which is to say to function. This is one of the clear implications of Beckett's art even as B. says it is an idea reflected in van Velde's painting. It explains, for example, the "dead voices" of Godot, those archetypically Beckettian presences who cannot come to the desired end of their tether: "To have lived is not enough for them. They have to talk about it."[22]

Emphatically, Beckett declares, the mind's functionings have no particular relationship to that chimera--that fiction--which we have learned to call objective reality and to worship simply because it has a name, believing in it out of the same hopeless need that makes us believe, if we do, in a deity whose existence justifies and explains our own. Although the artist's effort is obligatory, B. realizes, it is inherently doomed to failure insofar as it attempts to open lines of communication, expression, understanding. Committed nominally at least to lusting comically after the unknowable without being able totally to reject his elusive lover, the artist confronts

the dilemma "of him who is helpless, cannot act, in the event cannot paint, since he is obliged to paint [i.e. of the man who is obliged to paint and who, being unable to paint, is completely helpless]."

In an important sense, then, the artist to B. as to Beckett represents man stripped to his metaphysical essence. For to exist is to perceive, more accurately to conceive, the world; yet the authenticity of one's perceptions remain unconfirmed and unconfirmable. Thus the painter, like every man living and consequently perceiving what remains unconceived and unknown, is defeated by the disparity between his perceptions and the unknowable sensate objects against which they operate. To rebel against this paradox, to attempt to express or alike to refuse to express the inexpressible, is not heroic; it is simply human and inevitable, unavoidable. Van Velde is exemplary precisely because of his awareness and lucidity. He epitomizes the completely rational man who, acknowledging his metaphysical isolation and making no pretense of being able to transcend it, simply goes on living because in fact his condition permits him no other choice. He is everyman who "helpless, unable to act, acts" (TD,19). And in this sense at least van Velde is moreover the surrogate of every Beckettian character--and finally of Beckett himself--who, with words rather than with paint, attempts to defeat time by exhausting it and thus to reach the nirvana of silence, of mindlessness, of oblivion. Unlike Proust's Marcel, then, Beckett's characters are unsuccessful. Striving futilely is the limit of man's potential. For Beckett, if not for Proust, the lost Paradise cannot be regained.

> . . . all words, there's nothing else, you must go on, that's all I know, . . . you must go on, I can't go on,

> you must go on, I'll go on, you must say words, as long as there are any . . . you must go on, . . . it will be in silence, where I am, I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on.[23]

To sum up, then, creating is Beckett's metaphor for living. Translated into terms more relevant to writing than to painting, the aesthetic expressed in "Three Dialogues" asks us to consider that language constitutes only the possible clothes--and indeed the only possible clothes--which we can use to conceal our metaphysical nakedness. Thus like the narrator of The Unnamable, quoted above, men talk merely to pass time. This is quite precisely the main point for instance of Godot or Endgame, both--like so many other Beckett works--studies in the art of exploiting diminished human possibility, of consuming--but never quite completely--one's seemingly endless existence. In a more general, far more interesting sense, it is moreover the only convincing explanation for why Beckett himself--who otherwise whiles away hour after playing chess with himself[24] in an effort, like his characters, to kill time--continues to write. To be human is to conceive, to create with words, those horribly inefficacious tools of the intellect. Thus one talks, in the event writes--or paints, as B. says of van Velde--simply because he cannot voluntarily be reprieved from the human sentence to conceive, which is to say to create, the world. Indeed, talking and writing are one, as is made clear by Beckett's ironic reply to Niklaus Gessner when Gessner inquired why Beckett continued to write when he believes that language is incapable of expressing meaning. "Que voulez-vous, Monsieur?" Beckett asked him. "C'est les mots; on n'a rien d'autre."[25]

A similar outlook likewise explains Beckett's disenchantment with overinterpretation, even more irksome than misinterpretation--the result, Beckett says, of the mistaken assumption that "the writer is necessarily presenting some experience which he has had, and that he necessarily writes in order to affirm some general truth."[26] For, Beckett emphasizes, art is something far other than expression and communication. "I produce an object," he insists. "What people make of it is not my concern."[27] Specifically, Endgame for instance--Beckett has said "is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended) made as fully as possible, and I accept responsibility for nothing else. If people want to have headaches among the overtones, let them"[28] Interpreting Beckett's works then, the metaphor implies, is a task as subjective as interpreting music, perhaps the least denotative, most cerebral of all the arts. Significantly, Beckett has referred to the "stylized movement" of Godot and compared the form of the play to "the kind of form one finds in music, for instance, where themes keep recurring."[29] And indeed, Beckett's work is precisely music: the music of ordered words sung to the metronome of time.

Finally it is possible to understand, then, that Beckett as artist effects with words what B. implies van Velde effects with paint: the consumption of time by means of wholly arbitrary action. Like van Velde, Beckett refuses to turn tail "before the ultimate penury" (TD, 22), refuses to be intimidated by the philosophical limitations inherent in the act committed by the artist.

> The kind of work I do is one in which I'm not master of my material. . . .I'm working with impotence, ignorance. I don't think impotence has been exploited in the past.

> There seems to be a kind of aesthetic axiom that expression is an achievement--must be an achievement. My little exploration is that whole zone of being that has always been set aside by artists as something unusable--as something by definition incompatible with art.[30]

It is, moreover, not difficult to imagine that composing must be for Beckett the most natural, most satisfying way of performing the unnatural, inexplicable act of living. Quite predictably, however, the "ultimate penury" of language insures that Beckett, like his characters, will quickly run short of words sufficient to consume time. In fact Beckett recognized as early as 1956 that this would be the case.

> The French work [i.e. the trilogy] brought me to the point where I felt I was saying the same thing over and over again. For some authors writing gets easier the more they write. For me it gets more and more difficult. For me the area of possibilities gets smaller and smaller. . . . At the end of my work there's nothing but dust. . . . In the last book, L'Innomable, there's complete disintegration. No "I", no "have", no "being." No nominative, no accusative, no verb. There's no way to go on.[31]

Yet like van Velde, like the narrator of The Unnamable, indeed like all his verbally bankrupt literary characters, Beckett did in fact go on, deeper and deeper into the depths of "smaller and smaller" intellectual and literary possibilities.

III

Pinter's conviction that the mind-matter relationship is mysterious and that objective reality is unknowable is what makes him philosophically kindred with Beckett. Like Beckett, Pinter is fascinated by the insistence with which sense experience resists the intellect's devoted scrutiny. Like Beckett, too, he sees the world as multi-faceted and infinitely various. Since each perceiver--

Beckett would prefer to say conceiver--of a situation apprehends aspects of it not necessarily coincidental with those apparent to others experiencing the same situation, corporeality never can be precisely, exhaustively defined. Thus, Pinter remarks, "the desire for verification on the part of all of us, with regard to our own experience and the experience of others, is understandable but cannot always be satisfied. I suggest there can be no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false." For instance, Pinter continues: "we are faced with the immense difficulty, if not the impossibility, of verifying the past. I don't mean merely years ago, but yesterday, this morning. What took place, what was the nature of what took place, what happened?"

Such metaphysical queries remain perplexing for Pinter, as they do for Beckett, whose Gogo and Didi for instance cannot be sure whether or not they have ever met Mr. Godot. Moreover, Pinter insists, the present is as slippery and as elusive as the past. "If one can speak of the difficulty of knowing what in fact took place yesterday, one can I think treat the present in the same way. What's happening now? We won't know until tomorrow or in six months time, and we won't know then, we'll have forgotten, or our imagination will have attributed quite false characteristics to it. A moment is sucked away and distorted, often even at the time of its birth." This is so because "we . . . all interpret a common experience quite differently," despite the fact that "we prefer to subscribe to the view that there's a shared common ground, a

known ground" in experience. Actually, Pinter believes, this shared ground is "more like a quicksand" than a firm foothold. There is in fact no valid reason to assume that our impression or interpretation of any particular part of the world is similar to anybody else's. "Because 'reality' is quite a strong firm word we tend to think, or to hope, that the state to which it refers is equally firm, settled and unequivocal." Nevertheless, Pinter concludes, "it doesn't seem to be, and in my opinion, it's no worse or better for that."[32]

Thus Pinter was speaking to a problem which also fascinates Beckett when in 1960, he asserted the inaccuracy of "the assumption that to verify what has happened and what is happened presents few problems."[33] Indeed, all these remarks by Pinter are more brilliantly illuminated, more clearly brought into focus, by the light of the congruent metaphysic expressed more eloquently and in far greater detail by Beckett in Proust. For both Beckett and Pinter subscribe to the epistemological conviction that--as Pinter has put it--"whenever anything is answered simply, you must be asking the wrong question."[34] Similarly, Pinter's dramatic characters, like Beckett's, remain intellectually alien to the world which they physically inhabit.

Yet there remains at least one crucial difference between Beckett and Pinter, both adherents of an ontology of ultimate and utter confusion. The mind-matter duality leads Beckett, as my foregoing remarks imply, in pursuit of a drama which depicts reality literally as whatever someone's mind decrees it to be. For Pinter, on the other hand, the sensate world never becomes

philsophically insubstantial or irrelevant. It cannot be imagined away or manipulated successfully in ultimate favor of the perceiving intellect. Its material recalcitrance accounts in fact for the essential conflict in Pinter's drama. Pinter's characters persistently are bombarded with sense information about a corporeality. Yet this information is rudimentary, inchoate, contradictory, incomplete and inconclusive, and thus frighteningly confusing. It confirms the presence of an other in the world, but does not clearly define the nature of this other or the exact dimensions of his ostensible claims and demands.

In Pinter's drama, then, the limitless multiplicity of the physical world--Beckett's "buzzing confusion"--is the adversary imperilling man in his comically inadequate attempts to orient himself securely among the furniture of the universe. In this world, the protean shape of physically real objects and people poses to man's psychic well-being a continual threat which we have learned to call by the now-cliche term "menace."[35] The typical result of confronting such a menace illustrates the existence of what Pinter calls a "kind of horror," a horror emanating from the fact that the everyday world, metaphysically speaking, "is verging on the unknown." And man's ludicrous, pathetically inadequate response to this horror begets the subject which, Pinter notes, "seems to occur in my plays,"[36] and which--as Pinter has said in respect of The Caretaker--is only "funny up to a point."[37] For if Pinter's genius in depicting "the absurdity of what we do an how we behave and . . . speak" in confronting the unknown accounts for the characteristic comic element in his drama, there just as

inevitably arrives a moment in a typical Pinter play where--because man believes himself hopelessly defeated--the situation "becomes no longer funny."[38]

Pinteresque humor depends, then, on the incoherence and confusion resulting inevitably from man's attempts to intellectualize his sense experience. From the point of view of Pinter's characters, this confusion builds gradually as the irrational resists and thus slowly disarranges the arbitrary creations of their intellects. Typically the confusion reaches a climactic point at which their continuing efforts to order the world around them end in sudden disaster. At this point--to borrow from Pinter a coy phrase with a serious connotation--"the weasel under the cocktail cabinet"[39] pops out to run amuck in a world no longer effete and comfortable because no longer controlled and predictable. Such a moment threatens a character's psychic integrity, indeed his very physical survival. Thus for instance Rose is suddenly blind in The Room; Stanley suffers a complete physical breakdown in The Birthday Party; Edward is the victim of bodily as well as psychic destruction in A Slight Ache; Sam suffers an apparent heart attack and the patriarch Max falls to the floor whimpering and sobbing at the end of The Homecoming--to mention only four of numerous instances of crisis and castrophe in Pinter's drama.

In only one respect is the reaction of Pinter's characters to these and lesser crises different from that of the audience of Pinter's plays. The characters' reaction to confusion and incoherence is invariably fear, whereas the audience often will attempt to find it funny or amusing. For instance the incongruity of a

typically Pinteresque exchange between Len and Mark in The Dwarfs could be expected to evoke a humorous response in an audience.

> LEN: . . . There's a time and place for everything.
> MARK: You're right there.
> LEN: What do you mean by that?
> MARK: There's a time and place for everything.
> LEN: You're right there.[40]

Yet the laughter provoked by such an exchange is necessarily tentative and precarious. One expects language to make logical sense. Here, however, Len and Mark's words do not mean what they say. Rather they mean what they cannot say: they illustrate how language, emptied of its nominally rational content, can become a kind of inconclusive sparring which tacitly confesses the inefficacy of the intellect to understand adequately and to verbalize logically what it confronts. Thus the incongruity of such a speech is in fact a threat penetrating to the core of our unstated conviction that language is the mind's useful tool for investing the world with rationality and order.

Impotence of language implies a congruent impotence of the intellect to reduce the world to logical, coherent proportions. Thus it is precisely the discomfort we feel in confronting evidence of our personal world's "verging on the unknown," which makes it imperative for us to use laughter--not infrequently a reaction "devised by the minds of men for evading the compulsion to suffer"--to reduce to insignificance the menace implicit in such dialogue. If we laugh at such an exchange it is because humor has been "strong enough to assert itself . . . in the face of the adverse real circumstance," strong enough that is to establish, however tenuously, the inefficacy of the irrational by implicitly asserting:

"Look here! this is all this seemingly dangerous world amounts to. Child's play--the very thing to jest about."[41]

A similar laughter is likewise frequently provoked in Pinter's drama by incongruity of situation as opposed to incongruity of language. Such a situation occurs for instance in Last to Go (1959), a review sketch where an old newspaper vender is engaging a barman in conversation in a coffee stall.

MAN: I went to see if I could get hold of George.
BARMAN: Who?
MAN: George.
Pause.
BARMAN: George who?
MAN: George . . . whatsisname.
BARMAN: Oh.
Pause.
Did you get hold of him?
MAN: No. No, I couldn't get hold of him. I couldn't locate him.
BARMAN: He's not about much now, is he?
Pause.
MAN: When did you last see him then?
BARMAN: Oh, I haven't seen him for years.
MAN: No, nor me.
Pause.
BARMAN: Used to suffer very bad from arthritis.
MAN: Arthritis?
BARMAN: Yes.
MAN: He never suffered from arthritis.
BARMAN: Suffered very bad.
Pause.
MAN: Not when I knew him.
Pause.
BARMAN: I think he must have left the area.[42]

Here laughter essays to declare irrelevant the unresolved and hence threatening problem of George's identity. It ridicules the triviality of a prolonged ostensible misunderstanding between two people mechanically and disinterestedly conversing with each other. Yet the assumption, however logical, that the conversation unintentionally confuses two different individuals with the same name, is not verified by the sketch. George remains to the audience

an unknown and hence a reminder that situations do not inevitably conform to the logic of our expectations. As in the previous example from The Dwarfs, incipient laughter here measures our need to defend ourselves against the possibility that the world does not actually make sense.

Such a response intentionally though no doubt unconsciously short-circuits recognition of the gravity of the situation being confronted. "More often than not," Pinter reminds us, incoherent dramatic speech or action "only seems to be funny," since ordinarily the characters involved are "actually fighting a battle" for their psychic lives.[43] Indeed, Pinter by design depicts such characters "at the extreme edge of their living, where they are . . . pretty much alone"[44] in their struggle against an adversary whose motives and actions they cannot adequately understand. Two Pinter metaphors for such struggles are Party and Game, a fact succinctly illustrated by titles such as Tea Party or The Birthday Party, as well as by Pete's statement to Len about Mark in The Dwarfs: "I sometimes think he's just playing a game. But what game?"[45] And to be sure Len and Mark--in the passage quoted above (p. 34) as indeed throughout The Dwarfs--are engaged in a gamelike psychic conflict catalyzed by their abortive efforts to understand and thus to trust each other. Because each fails to fathom the motives explaining the behavior of the other one toward him, neither is able to see the other as anything but a threatening enigma and thus as an adversary.

An audience experiencing a Pinter play is of course in a situation analagous to that of one of Pinter's characters confronting the adversaries of his own baffling world. Pinter's

enigmatic plots typically depict mysterious, baldly explained or indeed virtually unexplained conflicts between two or more covert and introverted characters. From the audience's point of view, the clear existence of such frequently brutal conflicts is not adequately buttressed by a concomitantly clear understanding of what specific reasons explain or specific motives underlie these conflicts. That is, the audience never knows--to extend Pinter's own metaphors--exactly who is giving the party or precisely what the rules of the game really are. Thus, not unlike Pinter's characters responding defensively to their mysterious and therefore threatening surroundings, the audience of a Pinter play employs the defense of humor against the inconculsive information which the play by design threatens it with.

A corollary of all these ideas is that laughter can constitute a refusal to identify with a Pinter character and thus come with him to the less than tolerable realization that the world is intellectually intractable. Predictably, Pinter objects to this kind of "indiscriminate mirth," as he calls it, because it indicates that "participation [on the part of the audience in the action and the conflict of the play] is avoided." Such a response, Pinter continues, "is in fact a mode of precaution, a smoke screen, a refusal to accept what is happening as recognizable." It is just this smoke screen which a Pinter play must dissipate to make its philosophical point that man is a victim of his impossible desires to rationalize his sense impressions. One therefore finally must not resist Pinter's avowed effort to push his audience, as he has put it, "beyond the point" where his drama's represented action

"ceases to be funny," particularly since "it was because of this point"--as Pinter has said in discussing The Caretaker--that his plays were written.[46]

Thus conflict in Pinter's drama stresses that man can apprehend what he cannot comprehend, that he can confront--indeed does confront every day--much more of the world than he possibly can intellectualize. Analogously, Pinter confronts his audiences with dramatic actions which cannot be completely rationalized, a fact not doubt accounting for much of the confused interest generated by Pinter's plays. But what is the nature of the fascination which such confrontations undeniably inspire? Interestingly, for Pinter its basis apparently is deeply personal. At least the defensiveness typically displayed by Pinter's characters has its parallels in Pinter's own life, as a comment he once made about his early manhood illustrates.

> Everyone encounters violence in some way or other. It so happens I did encounter it in quite an extreme form after the war, in the East End. . . . there were quite a lot of people often waiting with broken milk bottles in a particular alley we used to walk through. There were one or two ways of getting out of it--one was a purely physical way, of course, but you couldn't do anything about the milk bottles--we didn't have any milk bottles. The best way was to talk to them, you know, sort of "Are you all right?" "Yes, I'm all right." "Well, that's all right then, isn't it?" And all the time we kept walking toward the lights of the main road.[47]

Of course here the fear of violence may seem somewhat less irrational, the threat at least physically more immediate, than in many analogous situations in Pinter's drama. Yet to corroborate this implicit evidence of Pinter's personal involvement with his characters' plights, we have Pinter's explicit testimony about the similarity of his own situation and the situation of his characters.

> The last thing I would attempt to do is to disassociate myself from my work, to suggest that I am merely making a study of observable reality, from a distance. I am objective in my selection and arrangement, but, so far as I'm concerned, my characters and I inhabit the same world. The only difference between them and me is that they don't arrange and select. I do the donkey work. But they carry the can. I think we're all in the same boat.[48]

This similarity is worth further consideration, since it suggests a basis for speculating about the nature of Pinter's aesthetic as well as about the source of the fascination his drama inspires. Curiously, though he admits a congruence between his own situation and the precarious situations of his characters, Pinter apparently desires to be far less evasive than the typical character in his drama. Thus Charles Marowitz after interviewing Pinter reported that Pinter's look "tacitly challenges you to be as honest and direct as himself. His dealings with people are free of that ambiguity which permeates his work. . . . He . . . has neither the knack nor the inclination to mince matters." Moreover, Marowitz concluded, "it is curious that his own character is almost the antithesis of the philosophy that smolders behind his work. The words most people use in describing him are 'positive,' 'decisive,' 'clear-cut' and 'definite.'"[49] Similarly, artistic peers as well as collaborators in Pinter's work tend to think of him as an extremely straightforward person. For instance William Friedkin, director of the screenplay of The Birthday Party, found Pinter "brutally honest."[50] Likewise Liverpool playwright Alun Owen called Pinter "the most honest man I know and the most scrupulous observer of the truth."[51]

Pinter himself, however, is apparently somewhat less certain

of his own identity than are those people who have been closely associated with him. This fact is implicit first of all in a dream Pinter had about The Caretaker. In the dream, as Pinter explains it, he was threatened by Mick and Aston exactly as Davies likewise is menaced by the two brothers.

> I had a terrible dream, after I'd written The Caretaker, about the two brothers. My house burned down in the dream, and I tried to find out who was responsible. I was led through all sorts of alleys and cafes and eventually I arrived at an inner room somewhere and there were the two brothers from the play. And I said, so you burned down my house. They said don't be too worried about it, and I said I've got everything in there, everything, you don't realize what you've done, and they said it's all right, we'll compensate you for it, we'll look after you all right--the younger brother was talking--and thereupon I wrote them out a check for fifty quid. . . [.] I gave them a check for fifty quid!

One might surmise from this "terrible dream" that Pinter projected into it unconscious doubts about the security of his identity, precisely as Davies manifests similar doubts in the play itself.

A kindred attitude toward Pinter's doubtfulness about confirming his identity is reflected in Bensky's observation that Pinter seems preoccupied with his not entirely successful attempts to express himself to others.

> When speaking [Pinter] almost always tends to excessive qualification of any statement, as if coming to a final definition of things were obviously impossible. One gets the impression--as one does with many characters in the plays--of a man so deeply involved with what he's thinking that roughing it into speech is a painful necessity.

A related idea, moreover, is implicitly the point of Pinter's explanation about why there ostensibly is no character representing him in The Birthday Party, even though the play, as he has said, "was sparked off from a very distinct situation" in a boardinghouse where Pinter once lived: I had--I have--nothing to say about myself,

directly [italics supplied]. I wouldn't know where to begin. Particularly since I often look at myself in the mirror and say, 'Who the hell's that?'"[52] Such a statement seems to imply that though Pinter's conception of Stanley may have begun with someone Pinter knew in a boardinghouse, it is quite likely his own fears of existential precariousness which Pinter embodied indirectly--as opposed to directly--in Stanley.

What seems clear then--to come to the point--is that an approximate analogy exists between Pinter and the distressed characters of his drama. The nature of this analogy is expressed by the idea that Pinter through the act of writing confronts the inscrutable world with the same intense expectation of clarity--and with as little likelihood of its ultimate satisfaction--as do his dramatic characters in their struggles with mysterious adversaries. To be sure, Pinter professes an inability to tolerate disorder or intractability in the materials of his drama: "I am very concerned with the shape and consistency of mood in my plays. I cannot write anything which appears to me to be loose and unfinished. I like a feeling of order in what I write."[53] Yet--Pinter is obviously convinced--the world itself is exactly "loose and unfinished," so that it is consequently merely his artistic singularity of prupose, his scrupulous exclusion from his drama of details irrelevant to illustrating this idea, that Pinter's assertion about a "feeling of order" in his plays alludes to. Certainly this idea is supported by Pinter's response to one interviewer's praise of playwrights who consciously avoid "all the becauses and therefores and notwithstandings of psychological drama."

> What you are saying is biblical, it's holy writ for a dramatist--well, for me anyway. I do so hate the becauses of drama. Who are we to say that this happens because that happened, that one thing is the consequence of another? How do we know? What reason have we to suppose that life is so neat and tidy? The most we know for sure is that the things which have happened have happened in a certain order: any connections we think we see, or choose to make, are pure guess work. Life is much more mysterious than plays make it out to be. And it is this mystery which fascinates me: what happens between the words, what happens when no words are spoken.[54]

In a like mood, Pinter stresses as well his preoccupation with characters who are interesting precisely because they inhabit a distant and an alien land: "My characters tell me so much and no more, with reference to their experience, their aspirations, their motives, their history. Between my lack of biographical data about them and the ambiguity of what they say lies a territory which is not only worthy of exploration but which it is compulsory to explore."[55] It is always their mysteriousness, the problematic and uncertain nature of understanding them, which intrigues Pinter: "I've got an idea of what might happen--sometimes I'm absolutely right, but on many occasions I've been proved wrong by what does actually happen. Sometimes I'm going along and I find myself writing 'C. comes in' when I didn't know that he was going to come in."[56]

For Pinter, then, the act of writing drama--as alike for his audience the act of viewing it--seems to constitute something like a horrible and yet an exhilirating confrontation with the unknown. Thus he speaks of the possibility of "gaining a kind of freedom from writing," a freedom which involves overcoming the "nausea" caused by the "weight of words" used to express "ideas endlessly repeated and permutated, . . . platitudinous, trite, meaningless."

For, Pinter continues, "if it is possible to confront this nausea, to follow it to its hilt, to move through it and out of it, then it is possible to say that something has occurred, that something has been achieved."[57] What Pinter is driving at here, I suggest, is that the dramatist penetrates--as he tries to force his audience to penetrate--the smokescreen obscuring from us our frightening and therefore suppressed apprehension that the world does not make sense, that it is not rational and logical, and that our intellectual resources are inadequate to establish, through language, that relationship with the world which we instinctively seek.

In this sense, at least, it is possible to understand how Pinter can conceive the drama as "a kind of celebration,"[58] by which he must mean simply a grotesque reveling in the triumph over the rational as likewise over the power of language to assert evasively and falsely that the world has a discernable shape and size. In the same sense it is likewise accurate to speak--as one critic has--of the analogous muteness inspired in the audience by the silence of a defeated Pinter character as "a sign of our wonder at the more [less?] than human,"[59] if for "human" we accept the traditional Enlightenment definition of man as animal rational, and if by the phrase denoting "other than human" we consequently allude simply to something incommensurate with the intellect's ability to capture it with words, hence to understand it.

Thus Pinter's plays involve a merciless unmasking, an intentional stripping away of the face of the rational to reveal the formlessness of reality. Pinter, significantly, is almost obsessive in his anti-rationalism, at last practically violent in his reaction against any

implicit assertion that language and the intellect can conduct an efficacious assault on the citadel of the unknown.

> The other night I watched some politicians on television talking about Vietnam. I wanted very much to burst through the screen with a flame-thrower and burn their eyes out and their balls off and then inquire from them how they would assess this action from a political point of view.

In such a truly humanistic statement "political" seems synonymous with "rational," and Pinter's response to the politicians equivalent to an attack on man's effete assumption that the unpredictable sensate world will yield to the perseverence of his logic and reason.

Of course a like attack is exactly the one mounted by a typical Pinter play against its audience. Not unlike the flame-thrower burning through the television screen, Pinter's drama impacts upon the audience so as to ravage the plausible, ostensibly logical surfaces of the world. In doing so it lays bare for our brief glimpsing a mystery whose menace our intellects are powerless to rebuff, a mystery which is exhilirating precisely because confronting it amounts to being dropped precipitously out of the realm of the quotidian. And this sense of grotesquerie is inspired in Pinter himself as dramatist even as it is inspired in the audiences of his plays.

> I want to write a play, it buzzes all the time in me, and I can't put pen to paper. Something people don't realize is the great boredom one has with oneself, and just to see those words come down again on paper, I think oh Christ, everything I do seems predictable, unsatisfactory, and hopeless. It keeps me awake. Distractions don't matter to me--if I had something to write I would write it. Don't ask me why I want to keep on with plays at all.[60]

In at least one fundamental and crucial sense, then, Pinter' aesthetic differs from Beckett's: Pinter imagines drama as inspiring a moment ofheightened intensity and increased though

frightening awareness, while Beckett finds it to be merely and inevitably a routine. For Beckett sees drama not so much as a representation of a human action as simply another human action in itself. This explains why Beckett's characters tend to be aware of the fact that they are only actors playing arbitrary roles on arbitrary stages, and to communicate this fact to the audience. Similarly, the audience's confrontation of the stage and actors during the performance of a Beckett play is meant to be understood as not different in kind from any other confrontation with the "mess" of the sensate world.

Thus "interpreting" a Beckett play--searching in it for unity--is, like giving meaning to the world generally, an inessential because a perfectly arbitrary task. What mainly is important to realize, philosophically speaking, is the fact that watching a Beckett play literally is an act of living, of waiting for the end which--figuratively at least--never comes. This idea Beckett stresses by using a form which parodies endless repetition. Play, for instance, like Godot or Happy Days--but even more emphatically--will go on repeating itself, we understand, even after the last person watching it has left the auditorium. For a like reason Beckett also intentionally destroys the illusion that the stage is mimetic and representational. In Godot, for instance, the auditorium and stage are united in one dramatically non-illusory world when Gogo reminds Didi, exiting to relieve himself, that the bathroom is "end of the corridor, on the left."[61] Similarly the same play intentionally deprives us of a chance to attach meaning to it as we would to a more conventional drama. It lifts us with the lever of anticipation for the sole purpose

of letting us down hard. Godot never arrives, nor do we discover who or what he is, or indeed whether or not he ever had any intention of coming. Thus as audience we wait expectantly and with ultimate frustration for something conclusive to emanate from the action, precisely as the clowns on stage (the exact analogues of the clowns in the audience) await the arrival of Godot. Thus if the play may be said to have a point, it is merely this: that it has no point, that writing it, seeing it, and acting in it are alike simply equivalent and arbitrary means of permitting oneself to be consumed by time.

This attitude in Beckett's drama emanates from his conviction that one cannot satisfactorily confront the "other," that any attempt to transcend this human limitation is inherently doomed to frustration (the agonizing frustration for instance of trying to "figure out" a Beckett play), and indeed that the other "out there" exists essentially in our minds only and thus does not merit particular concern nor evoke particular emotion beyond comic mild disdain. Pinter would agree in essence, but on the other hand remains preoccupied with the physicality of the "other" who, though he cannot be known, obviously possesses the ability to do us physical as well as psychic harm. Pinter translates the fear of this harm into the terror which his dramatic characters typically display in the face of the unknown and inexplicable. Predictably, then, Pinter's dramatic world is visceral, Beckett's increasingly cerebral, composed to a greater and greater degree of words and voices disappearing into mounds of sand, into urns, into darkness. This no doubt at least in part helps to explain why we tend to exit from a Beckett play feeling detached, mildly amused at ourselves,

predictably perhaps a trifle bored; while Pinter's drama conversely inspires us with a sense of the infinite and incomprehensible, thereby evoking in us perhaps a muted but certainly a very real fear and trembling.

NOTES FOR "PINTER AND BECKETT: THE PHILOSOPHICAL NEXUS"

1. Harold Pinter, "Beckett," in Beckett at 60, A Festschrift (London: Calder and Boyars, 1967), p. 86.

2. Arnold P. Hinchliffe, Harold Pinter (New York: Twayne, 1967), p. 171, n. 25.

3. Lawrence M. Bensky, "Harold Pinter, An Interview," Paris Review, X (Fall 1966), 19-20.

4. Harry Thompson, "Harold Pinter Replies," New Theatre Magazine, XI (January 1961), 8-9.

5. Bensky, "Harold Pinter, An Interview," pp. 19-20.

6. Interview with John Sherwood, B.B.C. European Service, 3 March 1960. Quoted by Martin Esslin, The Peopled Wound, The Work of Harold Pinter (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970), p. 29.

7. Harold Pinter, "Writing for Myself," Twentieth Century, 169 (February 1961), 174.

8. Harold Pinter, "Writing for the Theatre," Evergreen Review, No. 33 (August-September 1964), 81.

9. Pinter, "Writing for the Theatre," p. 81.

10. Harold Pinter, "Pinter Between the Lines," The London Sunday Times Magazine, 4 March 1962, p. 25. See also "Writing for the Theatre," a later version of the same speech.

11. Charles Marowitz, "'Pinterism' is Maximum Tension Through Minimum Information," New York Times Magazine, 1 October 1967, p. 36.

12. John Fletcher, Samuel Beckett's Art (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), p. 19.

13. Samuel Beckett, A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 2.

14. Parenthetical page numbers preceded by a capital "P" refer to Samuel Beckett, Proust (New York: Grove, n.d.).

15. Parenthetical page numbers preceded by a capital "HD" refer to Samuel Beckett, Happy Days (New York: Grove, 1961).

16. Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot (New York: Grove, 1954), p. 9 verso.

17. Samuel Beckett, Endgame (New York: Grove, 1958), p. 32.

18. Parenthetical page numbers preceded by a capital "TD" refer to Samuel Beckett and Georges Duthuit, "Three Dialogues," in Samuel Beckett, A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Esslin, p. 16-22.

19. Quoted by Fletcher, Samuel Beckett's Art, p. 17.

20. Quoted by Fletcher, Samuel Beckett's Art, pp. 20-21.

21. Tom F. Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine," Columbia University Forum, IV (Summer 1961), 22.

22. Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 40 recto.

23. Samuel Beckett, The Unnamable (New York: Grove, 1958), p. 179.

24. Hugh Kenner, Samuel Beckett, A Critical Study, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California, 1968), p. 157.

25. Quoted by Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, rev. ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1969), p. 62.

26. Kenner, Samuel Beckett, A Critical Study, 2nd. ed., p. 10.

27. Quoted in Samuel Beckett, En attendant Godot, ed. Colin Duckworth (London: George Harrup, 1966), p. xxiv.

28. Quoted in Samuel Beckett, A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Esslin, p. 1.

29. Quoted by Fletcher, Samuel Beckett's Art, pp. 63-64.

30. Israel Shenker, "Moody Man of Letters," New York Times, 6 May 1956, sec. II, pp. 1, 3.

31. Quoted by John Fletcher, The Novels of Samuel Beckett (London: Chatto & Windus, 1964), p. 194.

32. Pinter, "Writing for the Theatre," pp. 80-81.

33. Quoted by Esslin, Theatre of the Absurd, rev. ed., p. 239, from a program note written by Pinter for the performance of The Room and The Dumb Waiter at the Royal Court Theatre, London, March 1960. This program note contains some of the same ideas, similarly phrased, which later appeared in "Pinter Between the Lines" and "Writing for the Theatre."

34. "Pinterview," Newsweek, LX (July 23, 1962), 69.

35. Popularized as early as 1961 by Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1961), pp. 199ff; but first used (according to Esslin, The Peopled Wound, p. 46) "by Irving Wardle in an article which appeared in Encore in September 1958."

36. Quoted by Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, rev. ed., p. 239.

37. Harold Pinter, Letter to The London Sunday Times, 14 August 1960, p. 21.

38. Quoted by Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, rev. ed., p. 238.

39. Quoted in John Russell Taylor, Anger and After, rev. ed. (Baltimore: Penguin, 1963), p. 285.

40. Harold Pinter, Three Plays (New York: Grove, n.d.), p. 89.

41. Sigmund Freud, "Humor," Collected Papers, 5 vols., ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1950), V, 217.

42. Harold Pinter, A Night Out, Night School, Revue Sketches (New York: Grove, n.d.), pp. 101-102.

43. Bensky, "Harold Pinter, An Interview," p. 34.

44. Quoted by Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, rev. ed., p. 256.

45. Pinter, Three Plays, p. 91. Similarly Mick asks Davies in The Caretaker: "What's the game?" See Harold Pinter, The Caretaker and The Dumb Waiter (New York: Grove, 1965), p. 29.

46. Pinter, Letter to The London Sunday Times, 14 August 1960, p. 21.

47. Bensky, "Harold Pinter, An Interview," p. 31.

48. Thompson, "Harold Pinter Replies," p. 9.

49. Marowitz, "'Pinterism' is Maximum Tension Through Minimum Information," pp. 36, 95.

50. Judith Crist, "A Mystery: Pinter on Pinter," Look, 32 (December 24, 1968), 80.

51. Kathleen Tynan, "In Search of Harold Pinter: Is He the Mystery His Critics Allege?" Part I, London Evening Standard, April 25, 1968, p. 7.

52. Bensky, "Harold Pinter, An Interview," pp. 29, 13, 16-17.

53. Quoted by Taylor, Anger and After, rev. ed., p. 314.

54. John Russell Taylor, "Accident," Sight and Sound, 35 (Autumn 1966), 184.

55. Pinter, "Writing for the Theatre," pp. 81-82.

56. Bensky, "Harold Pinter, An Interview," p. 25.

57. Pinter, "Writing for the Theatre," pp. 81-82.

58. Pinter, "Writing for the Theatre," p. 82.

59. James R. Hollis, Harold Pinter, The Poetics of Silence (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1970), p. 17.

60. Bensky, "Harold Pinter, An Interview," pp. 28, 38.

61. Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 23 recto.

CHARACTERIZATION AND THE TYPE-SITUATION IN PINTER'S DRAMA

Pinter once said he regards himself as an "old fashioned writer," explaining that such a statement means he likes "to create character and follow a situation to its end. I write quite visually," he continued. "I watch the invisible faces quite closely. The characters take on a physical shape. I watch the faces as closely as I can. And the bodies."[1] By doing this, Pinter has explained elsewhere, he is able to create a consistent character--"to make a kind of physical sense" out of what is written, though "perhaps 'sense' isn't the right word. What I mean is that I know it to be so. I feel it to be true to the given character."

The paradoxical nature of the final comment in particular implies that Pinter's attitude toward his characters is neither old-fashioned nor traditional in at least one important sense--the fact that they do not make "sense." Their consistency does not allow us, as it would for instance in a Henry James novel or an Ibsen play, to predict their future behavior on the basis of what they have already done or said. In particular, the speech of a Pinter dramatic character is not in any conventional sense a reliable index of what he intends to do. Indeed, the whole assumption of a logical connection between what a person thinks and says on the one hand, and how he behaves on the other, is a completely unverifiable conjecture. Simply because we expect people to speak and to behave rationally and logically is no insurance that they will in fact do so. Moreover, as Pinter stresses, one can never

really know beyond doubt what someone else is thinking anyway: "it would be an impertinence to go into the thoughts of a character. What they do and say is all we know."[2] It follows therefore that one can never hope to know precisely what conscious and unconscious motives underly someone else's action. Thus Pinter insists upon remaining merely a describer rather than an interpreter of his characters' actions.

> Finding the characters and letting them speak for themselves is the great excitement of writing. I would never distort the consistence of a character by a kind of hoarding in which I say, "by the way, these characters are doing this because of such and such." I find out what they are doing, allow them to do it, and keep out of it.[3]

Such a statement speaks indirectly to a point which Pinter's plays everywhere make clear--that Pinter considers his characters unknowable in any objective sense. Accordingly, Pinter condemns audiences who insist upon viewing people on stage "as actors always and not as characters,"[4] implying thereby that his own dramatic characters are not coherent and predictable as are actors following a prepared script. On the contrary, Pinter believes, there are mysterious sensuous entities whose reality, like all people's, is only an arbitrary reflection in the mirror of someone else's intellect. This interesting attitude--discussed in the first part of the following essay--derives from Pinter's solipsistic ontology and reinforces his non-traditional "realism" in character development. It is worth exploring both for its own sake and because it opens so directly on Pinter's somewhat unusual concept of personality--discussed in the second part of the essay. Such a concept is in turn related to the type-situation in Pinter's plays, a situation--as I have

suggested--which depicts man confronting the unknowable and being victimized by it. This type-situation is defined by the third and illustrated by the fourth and final part of what follows. To consider all these ideas in some detail is to make specific the sense in which Pinter's metaphysic is the philosophical basis of his drama. At the same time such a discussion gathers together generalizations which provide a background for later specific discussions of Pinter's various plays.

I

That Pinter's epistemological predispositions are reflected in his attitude toward his characters is made clear by his statement to B.B.C. interviewer John Sherwood in 1960.

> The explicit form which is so often taken in twentieth-century drama is . . . cheating. The playwright assumes that we have a great deal of information about all his characters, who explain themselves to the audience. In fact, what they are doing most of the time is conforming to the author's own ideology. They don't create themselves as they go along, they are being fixed on the stage for one purpose, to speak for the author, who has a point of view to put over. When the curtain goes up on one of my plays, you are faced with a situation, a particular situation, two people sitting in a room, which hasn't happened before, and is just happening at this moment, and we know no more about them than I know about you, sitting at this table. The world is full of surprises. A door can open at any moment and someone will come in. We'd love to know who it is, we'd love to know exactly what he has on his mind and why he comes in, but how often do we know what someone has on his mind or who this somebody is, and what goes to make him and make him what he is, and what his relationship is to others.[5]

Here Pinter voices the uncertain, provisional attitude also implicit in the actions of his characters, whose inexhaustible and typically frustrating task is defining the undefinable and knowing the unknowable. Accordingly, Pinter comes at his char-

actors from the outside, "just moving"--as he says--"from one thing to another to see what's going to happen next." For him writing is most accurately a discovery of whatever little it is that can be known about another person. "I don't know," he confesses, "what kind of characters my plays will have until they . . . well, until they are. Until they indicate to me what they are. I don't conceptualize in any way. Once I've got the clues I follow them--that's my job, really, to follow the clues."[6] "I only formulate conclusions after I've written the plays."[7] Thus Pinter discovered rather than conceived in advance the dramatic moment near the end of The Homecoming when Sam abruptly collapses after blurting out to Max the story of Jessie's ostensible infidelity with MacGregor: "It suddenly seemed to me right. It just came. I knew he'd have to say something at one time in this section and this is what happened, that's what he said."[8] Conversely, Pinter found that the end he initially envisioned for The Caretaker was unsuitable for the characters as they had revealed themselves to him in the course of writing the play.

> All the preconceived notions I have [about how a play will end] are invariably wrong, for they are remedied by the characters in the writing. At the end of The Caretaker, there are two people alone in a room, and one of the must go in such a way as to produce a sense of complete separation and finality. I thought originally that the play must end with the violent death of one at the hands of the other. But then I realised, when I got to the point, that the characters as they had grown could never act in this way. Characters always grow out of all proportion to your original conception of them, and if they don't the play is a bad one.[9]

Pinter's information about his characters is limited, then--necessarily, he thinks--to what he can discover about them by scrutinizing them carefully as one might observe a friend or

acquaintance. This is particularly true with respect to the author-character relationship in its formative period, when a character is virtually a stranger to Pinter. Thus Pinter remarked to Kathleen Tynan in 1968 about Landscape, a play then in progress: "It's simply, as it stands, about a woman around fifty. That's all I bloody well know. I don't know where she is. Certainly it's not a room."[10] But Pinter's characters remain enigmatic to him even after he understands them as fully as he ever will, and presumably as fully as anyone ever can. For instance Pinter's remark about The Birthday Party--made after the play was long completed--illustrates just how mysterious his characters ultimately are to him.

> I don't know who Goldberg and McCann are, apart from being Goldberg and McCann. Monty is a fact. All we know about Stanley's past is what he says about it, and that can't be the whole truth. He has lived and has a past, but what he says is all he can say of it. Not every fact is an accurate assessment of what has taken place, but some facts have to be faced. What Stanley says about his concert is based on fact, and, for my money, Goldberg and McCann have come down to get Stanley.[11]

Similarly, Pinter's attitude remains provisional about details of certain implicit circumstances in Landscape.

> The man on the beach is Duff. I think there are elements of Mr. Sykes in her [Beth's] memory of this Duff, which she might be attributing to Duff, but the man remains Duff. I think that Duff detests and is jealous of Mr. Sykes, although I do not believe that Mr. Sykes and Beth were ever lovers. I formed these conclusions after I had written the plays [Landscape and Silence] and after learning about them through rehearsals.[12]

Nor, more specifically, is Pinter absolutely certain even about the occupation of someone like Mick in The Caretaker: "All I know is that whatever he did, he had his own van."[13]

All these statements reflect the extent to which Pinter regards his characters as inscrutable because inalienably a part of the sensate world which the mind can know only provisionally. On the other hand, Pinter stresses, though we see his characters in confined settings which typically furnish us limited information about them, we should not assume that they have no access to a physically more expansive world. "We are concerned with what is happening . . . in [a] particular moment of these people's lives," he explains; "there is no reason to suppose that at one time or another they did not listen at a political meeting . . . or that they haven't ever had girl friends."[14] Accordingly, Pinter relished the opportunity to demonstrate in the film of The Caretaker that his characters do in fact sometimes venture outside their confined, carefully protected rooms.

> What I'm very pleased about myself is that in the film, as opposed to the play, we see a real house and real snow outside, dirty snow and the streets. We don't see them very often but they're there, the backs of houses and windows, attics in the distance. There is actually a sky as well, a dirty one, and these characters move in the context of a real world--as I believe they do. In the play, when people were confronted with just a set, a room and a door, they often assumed it was all taking place in limbo, in a vacuum, and the world outside hardly existed, or had existed at some point but was only half remembered.[15]

Thus Pinter insists his characters are physically as "real" as they are metaphysically unknowable. Similarly, he considers the human actions represented in his plays to be, however mysterious, within the realm of the plausible. "I'm convinced that what happens in my plays could happen anywhere, at any time, in any place, although the events may seem unfamiliar at first glance." That is, the mysterious in Pinter's plays is unfamiliar only because we are

habituated to overlook the strange and irrational in the non-dramatic world, to refine and reduce it to the quotidian by unconscious acts of intellection. Nevertheless, we ultimately must identify the "unfamiliar" in Pinter's drama as a truthful depiction of how the world really is. Thus, Pinter continues, "if you press me . . . , I'd say that what goes on in my plays is realistic, but what I'm doing is not realism."[16]

Such an assertion toys with two dissonant meanings of the term "real" and in doing so moves toward a definition of artistic realism not consonant with conventionsof characterization in the psychological novel or drama. For depth psychology's conspicuous contribution to modern literature is summed up in the idea that author and reader can move from the outside in--or more properly from the consciousness down into the unconscious--by way of journeying systematically toward the psychic dead center of a literary character. But, Pinter believes, such an idea is only an arbitrary assumption whose validity cannot be verified. One cannot know unequivocally the thoughts and motives of another person. Thus the most "realistic" view of character is not the inside or depth view but strictly an outside one--one which abstains from pretending to know more than can be in fact known unequivocally about another person--even though this view is antipathetic to the conventions of "realism" as the twentieth century traditionally has understood the term.

Related to Pinter's outside view of character is had adamant prejudice against attempts to understand his characters symbolically. Such attempts, he feels, constitute just as arbitrary a refusal to

confront a character's unrationalized presence as assuming that one can ascertain definitely why a character behaves as he does. In writing his drama, Pinter himself--as he claims--rigorously eschews symbolic thought.

> I have usually begun a play in quite a simple manner: found a couple of characters in a particular context, thrown them together and listened to what they said, keeping my nose to the ground. The context has always been, for me, concrete and particular, and the characters concrete also. 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 or, in other words, as allegorical representations of any particular force, whatever that may mean. 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. In this way, it is easy to put up a pretty efficient smoke screen, on the part of the critics or the audience, against recognition, against active and willing participation.[17]

In fact, Pinter declares elsewhere, "I have never been conscious of allegorical significance in my plays, either while writing or after writing. I have never intended any specific religious reference or been conscious of using anything as a symbol for anything else."[18] Indeed, he asserts--playfully yet with essential seriousness: "I wouldn't know a symbol if I saw one."[19]

Pinter's antipathy for symbolism is in fact nothing less than an outright rejection of the logic by which certain kinds of symbols invest the physical world with discrete meaning. In allegory, for instance, a symbol tends to have a rather precise meaning. Thus in Pilgrim's Progress when Christian's burden slides from his back into a hole excavated in the ground next to a tree growing at the crest of a hill, we understand the described human action by identifying the hill as Calvary, the tree as the Cross, the hole as

Christ's tomb, and the burden as Original Sin. Such a symbolic interpretation allows us to suppose we understand exactly and quantitatively the meaning of a complex physical event. It intellectualizes the sensate world, making it orderly, tractable, in short rational. Pinter distrusts such an intellectualization, sees it indeed as a prevarication precisely because for him the world does not make sense and because man cannot truthfully pretend that it does.

For Pinter, by contrast, the meaning of something is only the fact that it exists and must be dealt with on a sensuous, non-intellectual level. Symbols he sees as one convenient way of rationalizing the implicit menace in something irrational which we need to convince ourselves can be understood logically. Thus for instance Pinter would emphasize that an enigmatic character like Riley in The Room is not a symbol of death, ironically the most immense of all mysterious which, after we symbolically equate Riley with it, nevertheless paradoxically makes Riley seem somehow more familiar and hence less menacing to us. Pinter's point would be that Riley is merely a stranger who is threatening to Rose, and likewise to the audience, precisely because he cannot be understood logically the way certains kinds of symbols can. Rose's reaction to him is of course simply a measure of the extreme anxiety which such an ab-surd can arouse in someone. But to say all this is merely to reiterate Pinter's notion that everything external to one's intellect is in kind equally aloof and étranger.

These ideas explain and also are themselves illuminated by Pinter's reaction to The Hothouse, written after The Caretaker and

subsequently abandoned. Because Pinter considers the aloofness of the author-character relationship to be an inevitable result of man's limited ability to rationalize sense experience, he objects--we have seen--"to the stage being used as a substitute for a soap box, where the author desires to make a direct statement at all costs, and forces his characters into fixed and artificial postures in order to achieve this." Such forcing amounts to pretending an objective understanding that is beyond man's metaphysical grasp and thus, Pinter continues, "is hardly fair on the characters."[20] Yet it is just his own pretense that he understands a person better than the person is capable of being understood, which Pinter says accounts for his failure to create convincing characters in The Hothouse.

> I have occasionally out of irritation thought about writing a play with a satirical point. I once did, actually, a play that no one knows about. A full-length play written after The Caretaker. Wrote the whole damn thing in three drafts. It was called The Hothouse and was about an institution in which patients were kept: all that was presented was the hierarchy, the people who ran the institution; one never knew what happened to the patients or what they were there for or who they were. It was heavily satirical and it was quite useless. I never began to like any of the characters, they really didn't live at all. So I discarded the play at once. The charactors were so purely cardboard. I was intentionally--for the only time, I think--trying to make a point, an explicit point, that these were nasty people and I disapproved of them. And therefore they didn't begin to live. Whereas in other plays of mine every single character, even a bastard like Goldberg in The Birthday Party, I care for.[21]

In typically Pinteresque fasion, such a statement objects to the inside view of character, which supposes that a person can be understood objectively and that it is merely necessary for the dramatist to discover the visual and verbal correlatives of his characters' personalities in order to make them explicable to the

audience. Pinter does not "care for" such characters--considers them, that is, unnatural and unrealistic--because their being is exhaustible in terms of ideas exactly as the value of certain symbols is establishable in intellectually precise terms. For instance the algebraic symbol "x," a concept of the intellect conventionally employed to represent the unknown, implies and anticipates an absolute solution of an identity. Such a symbol obviously is not an "unknown" so much as a "to be known." Pinter's point is that "real" (as opposed to invented or postulated) characters cannot be similarly known precisely because the sensate world itself is an inexhaustible unknown, a surd.

A rare instance of a Pinter character created mainly from an inside view would be Miss Piffs in the sketch "Applicant," Pinter's claim notwithstanding that in the Revue Sketches as well as in the plays he wants "to present living people to the audience, worthy of their interest primarily because they are, they exist, not because of any moral the author may draw from them."[22] The sketch, derived in part from an episode in The Hothouse,[23] depicts the sacrifice of Lamb, a job applicant, to the psychic appetite of his interviewer, the wolfish Miss Piffs. After attaching electrodes to Lamb's palms, putting earphones over his ears, and subsequently bombarding him with shocks and high-pitched noise, Miss Piffs interogates Lamb about his feelings toward women.

PIFFS: Are you virgo intacta?
LAMB: I beg your pardon?
PIFFS: Are you virgo intacta?
LAMB: Oh, I say, that's rather embarrassing. I mean--
in front of a lady--
PIFFS: Are you virgo intacta?
LAMB: Yes, I am, actually. I'll make no secret of it.

PIFFS: Have you always been virgo intacta?
LAMB: Oh yes, always. Always.
PIFFS: From the word go?
LAMB: Go? Oh yes, from the word go.
PIFFS: Do women frighten you?
She presses a button on the other side of her stool. The stage is plunged into redness, which flashes on and off in time with her questions.
PIFFS (*building*): Their clothes? Their shoes? Their voices? Their laughter? Their stares? Their way of walking? Their way of sitting? Their way of smiling? Their way of talking? Their mouths? Their hands? Their feet? Their shins? Their thighs? Their knees? Their eyes? Their (*Drumbeat*). Their (*Cymbal bang*). Their (*Trombone chord*). Their (*Bass note*).[24]

The interview ends with Lamb lying prostrate on the floor.

In this passage, as throughout the sketch, Pinter appears to understand Miss Piffs in terms of the idea that authority typically exploits those under its control by establishing linguistic supremacy over them. Miss Piffs represents authority bludgeoning conformity into those who must seek accomodation from it. Similarly, her language exemplifies the cliche and cant of the establishment hardening into the weapons it uses to inflict its will upon recalcitrant subject. Piffs has power because she commands language. The sketch's apparent aim is to satirize the abuse of this power by depicting language in the process of degenerating into sounds void of denotation. Humor is created through intentional exaggeration.

For these reasons, and also because her identity can accurately be equated with what she says, the atypical Miss Piffs resembles the caricature personae of such plays by Ionesco as *Jacques* or *The Lesson*, plays where cartoon-like characters exemplifying what Ionesco calls the *petit-bourgeois* mentality employ

language to punish someone in their authority. Similarly, Pinter's treatment of the situation in "Applicant" is likely to recall the interrogation scene where Stanley is broken by Goldberg and McCann in The Birthday Party. Significantly, this scene invariably is dwelled on by commentators who see the play as an allegory of convention triumphing over non-conformism.[25] But Pinter's point in his remarks about the failure of The Hothouse is that characters who can be understood by means of such labels--Goldberg and McCann ultimately cannot!--disinterest him because they are "unrealistic." To be sure, one thinks for instance of Wills in "Trouble in the Works,"[26] or of Jakes in "Interview,"[27] as examples of "unrealistic" Pinteresque characters in precisely this sense of the word. But both these works are atypical of Pinter because they are satires, the former a debunking of technological jargon, the latter a spoof of the police state and its fascist, witch-hunting mentality. And both Wills and Jakes likewise--precisely because they are what they say and little or nothing more--remain distinct from Pinter's more typical characters, whose speech is never really an accurate index of their mysterious and ultimately unverifiable identities.

II

Pinter's remarks about how he conceives his characters make it clear that he rejects traditional notions regarding coherence of personality and the predictability of behavior, In fact, Pinter suggests, such a concept of personality is simply a convenient illusion of social man, since it is virtually impossible to interact cooperatively--which is to say socially--with someone whose

behavior is unpredictable. Thus in a social sense personality is the discrete average of the numerous though ostensibly finite identities according to which a group agrees to "know" a person, to allow him to "be known." In such a manner, man in a social context is defined by his peers and his conduct assumed by them to be predictable within certain broad yet establishable limits. Under the terms of such an implicit contract, as the legal nonconformist may be fined or imprisoned, so the man whose extralegal behavior is erratic beyond accepted norms may also be punished. He can be judged irrational or even declared insane and banished from the group through incarceration, ostracism, or similar forms of ritual exclusion.

Pinter's view, by contrast, is that man's most "human" behavior is characteristically not rational but emotional. People at the edge of their existence step to a drummer not social but metaphysical. This idea is illustrated in the asocial, which is to say the unpredictable, behavior of his dramatic characters. Their erratic actions and contradictory speeches inform us that a detailed correlation between motive and behavior is not formulable, and thus dispel cherished illusions about the logical shape of a world decreed by Pinter to be metaphysically more complex than our ability to rationalize it is sophisticated. Ultimately such behavior forces us to confront the unknowable behind the manifold familiar masks we project, rather than apprehend, from moment to moment on the formless face of reality. Indeed, catastrophe in a typical Pinter play occurs--as we shall see--at precisely the moment when the last illusory mask falls to reveal, from the

point of view of characters and audience alike, the intractable shapelessness of sense experience.

Accordingly, it is not rewarding to plumb the psychic depths of Pinter's dramatic characters, who remain psychologically simplistic. Yet if no consistent, complex rationale adequately explains their consequently baffling behavior, it is nevertheless possible to talk accurately though in an elementary fashion about a relationship between their deep feelings and the manifestation of these feeling. Briefly, Pinter conceives man's must human because most characteristic emotion to be a fear of the inadequacy of his powers of ratiocination. Man's most characteristic response to the world he correspondingly sees as an attempt to build adequate defenses against the onslaught of the irrational. Thus his drama depicts characters whose apparently illogical behavior--seen from an intellectually less demanding, more simplistic point of view--reflects man's instinctive defensiveness against the world's metaphysical impenetrability. In this sense only, Pinter's characters are less than cryptic, though to the same extent they are of course unidimensional, all versions of the type-man protectively sheltering the brief candle of his intellect from the vague currents of unbounded metaphysical darkness.

The manifestations of this protectiveness are likewise nearly monolithic. Language is man's sole treasure trove, and consequently the key to understanding man's response to the metaphysical void. "I see things pretty clearly, certainly," Pinter admits. "I don't know, however, that the visual is more important than the verbal. . . . It is a matter of tying the words to the image of

the character standing on the stage. The two things go very closely together."[28] Thus speech is still for Pinter as playwright the crucial measure of being, though not in a traditional sense, since it is not possible to take at face value anything a person says. Rather, language constitutes a defense against the unknown, and one gages the attempts of Pinter's dramatic characters to exorcise existential fear in terms of the sound of their language in the broadest sense of the word. By contrast, the cognitive content of a character's language--just that aspect by which we traditionally in literature as in life measure the coherence of personality--will inevitably lead toward judgments which declare him to be what Pinter asserts man in fact basically is--contradictory, incongruous, irrational, anomalous.

To realize this is to begin to comprehend what Pinter means when he asserts that speech is "a constant stratagem to cover nakedness."[29] Likewise it is to understand what feelings inform the less than logical crosstalk characteristically engaged in by Pinter's dramatic characters. Man, Pinter stresses, reacts defensively to the unknown. Confronted by something which their intellects cannot reduce to managable proportions, people tend to "fall back on anything they can lay their hands on verbally to keep away from the danger of knowing, of being known."[30] A corollary of this idea is that when language decays into silence, man's defenses are virtually exhausted: "when true silence falls we are still left with echo but are nearer nakedness." And it is precisely language used as a defense which attempts to cover nakedness. This kind of speech Pinter also accurately calls

silence because it is intellectually empty, explaining that such silence occurs "when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed. This speech is speaking of a [non-verbal] language locked beneath it. That is its continual reference. The speech we hear is an indication that which we don't hear. It is a necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, anguished or mocking smoke screen which keeps the other in its place."[31]

Pinter's conviction that defensive language is therefore "a highly ambiguous business"[32] is illustrated for instance in The Black and White (1959), one of the brief but characteristic Revue Sketches between which and his full-length plays Pinter sees "no real difference." The title of this "complete play which just happened to be four minutes long"[33] alludes to the darkness of a late night which two nervous old tramp women pass together in the comforting light of an all night milk bar. The second woman's muted hysteria--like the first woman's, but more obviously--is a response to an unspecified menace whose ambiguity is suggested by the connotations of the night's blackness which she is attempting to escape. The equation of the unseen with the unknown seems less than disputable. More particularly, the second woman's personification of the menace as a masculine sexual aggressor is especially appropriate to Pinter's philosophical outlook--since it is precisely her uncertainty about the identity of her pursuer and exactly what he will do to her and when, which makes him so terrifying to a sexually pursued woman.

SECOND: Did you see that one come up and speak to me at the counter?
FIRST: Who?

SECOND: Comes up to me, he says, hullo, he says, what's the time by your clock? Bloody liberty. I was just standing there getting your soup.
FIRST: It's tomato soup.
SECOND: What's the time by your clock? he says.
FIRST: I bet you answered him back.
SECOND: I told him all right. Go on, I said, why don't you get back into your scraghole, I said, clear off out of it before I call a copper.[34]

Such linguistic aggression masks fear and is thus in fact a defensive rather than an offensive act. In Pinter's terms, it is merely a smoke screen, a stratagem to cover metaphysical nakedness. Beneath the second woman's small talk about all night busses and free bread with her soup, echoes her clear dread of the unknown. Thus her admonition to the first woman to avoid strangers in fact reflects her own acute anguish in confronting whatever remains undefined: "I see you talking to two strangers as I come in. You want to stop talking to strangers, old piece of boot like you, you mind who you talk to." Such a remark illustrates how language is often used not to communicate with another person but for the purpose of distracting one's own attention from unconfrontable fears. Similarly, even the second woman's threat to call a policeman is diversionary, since the police themselves are étranger and thus related to the menacing aliens lurking in the irrational world outside the milk bar.

SECOND: . . . You talk to strangers they'll take you in. Mind my word. Coppers'll take you in.
FIRST: I don't talk to strangers.
SECOND: They took me away in the wagon once.
FIRST: They didn't keep you though.
SECOND: They didn't keep me, but that was only because they took a fancy to me. They took a fancy to me when they got me in the wagon.
FIRST: Do you think they'd take a fancy to me?
SECOND: I wouldn't back on it.[35]

Here, then--as so often in Pinter's drama--one hears the language of defensiveness, where "below the word spoken, is the thing known and unspoken," where "under what is said, another thing is being said."[36] For Pinter depicts language as a series of verbal thrusts and parries interesting more for "what people are doing to each other through it than [for] the conceptual content of what they are saying."[37] And it is precisely because language is so often not thought but a patent refusal to think and thus to countenance unrationalized feeling that the dialogue in Pinter's plays, "while authentic colloquial speech, is stripped bare of reflective or conceptual thought."[38] Such an idea likewise explains the logical disjuncture between utterance and intention in typically Pinteresque dialogue.

A disparity between what Pinter's characters say and what their speech actually "means," then, is evidence that they are using language as a defense mechanism. In this respect they typically engage in what Pinter calls "a continual cross talk, a continual talking about other things, rather than what is at the root" of relationships between people. Consequently their language constitutes, in Pinter's words, "a deliberate evasion of communication"[39] which frequently pits people inadvertently against each other as adversaries rather than uniting them as co-operators. Characteristically, such evasiveness employs one or both of two equivalent tactics. The first of these two stratagems involves the attempt--intentional or unconscious--to confuse one's adversary and thus reduce him to the same state of intellectual poverty and nakedness that likewise is threatening oneself.

The second is characterized by a person's attempts to obscure from himself the fact that he is in fact confused and unsuccessful in his attempts to understand and verbally order his immediate world.

Both these stratagems are really muted efforts--inevitably doomed to ultimate failure--to triumph intellectually over another person and, congruently, over the threatening intractability of sense experience in general. They proceed from the assumption--declared everywhere by Pinter to be philosophically dubious--that it is possible to know a person's motives and so predict his actions with considerable certainty. According to the illogic of such attempts, possessing objective information about someone is equivalent to wielding power over him because it allows one to anticipate his behavior and to respond accordingly in advance of his overt act. Conversely, someone who can avoid being so known by another person can resist being controlled and manipulated by him. Typically, then, Pinter's characters abortively attempt to know and to manipulate the "other" while simultaneously avoiding being known and likewise manipulated by him.

One sees such tactics at work for instance in the scene from The Caretaker where Davies--apparently instinctively rather than by overt design--employs the first of the two defensive stratagems defined above.

ASTON. What did you say your name was?
DAVIES. Bernard Jenkins is my assumed one.
ASTON. No, your other one?
DAVIES. Davies. Mac Davies.
ASTON. Welsh, are you?
DAVIES. Eh?
ASTON. You Welsh?
Pause.
DAVIES. Well, I been around, you know . . . what I mean . . . I been about. . . .

ASTON. Where were you born then?
DAVIES. (darkly). What do you mean?
ASTON. Where were you born?
DAVIES. I was . . . uh . . . oh, it's a bit hard, like to set your mind back . . . see what I mean . . . going back . . . . a good way . . . lose a bit of track, like . . . you know . . . .[40]

Here as throughout the first part of the play Davies is attempting to keep Aston confused as he gains time in which to discern why Aston has brought him to the room. While he is struggling to define Aston and thus discover the ostensible nature of Aston's demands on him--he never does, of course--he will attempt himself to avoid being similarly defined by Aston. Thus Davies here employs equivocation (or perhaps simply begs questions he honestly cannot answer) in order to forestall Aston's likewise unsuccessful efforts to categorize him, to see him in this case as a vagrant who desperately needs a room to stay in and who can thus be dealt with on the basis of such simplistic expectations.

Precisely this tactic, indeed, is what is reflected in Davies' strange behavior all through The Caretaker. Consciously or unconsciously, he will go to extreme lengths to contravert Aston's ostensible supposition that Davies' extreme physical needs subject him to easy manipulation. Thus Davies conceives--intentionally perhaps in this case in contrast to the previous example--improbable stories implying his respectability, such as the ones about his identity papers at Sidcup and his job prospects at Wembley.

DAVIES. I might get down to Wembley later on in the day.
ASTON. Un-uh.
DAVIES. There's a caff down there, you see, might be able to get fixed up there. I was there, see? I know they were a bit short-handed. They might be in need of a bit of staff.
ASTON. When was that?

> DAVIES. Eh? Oh, well, that was . . . near on . . . that'll be . . . that'll be a little while ago now. But of course what it is, they can't find the right kind of people in these places. What they want to do, they're trying to do away with these foreigners, you see, in catering. They want an Englishman to pour their tea, that's what they want, that's what they're crying for. It's only common sense, en't? Oh, I got all that underway . . . that's . . . uh . . . what I'll be doing.
> Pause.
> If only I could get down there.[41]

Of course--Pinter would insist--one cannot with certainty discredit Davies' claims, despite the fact that his stories, if not downright intentional fabrications, seem only to recall dreams lost in the distant past. Whether or not Davies' stories are "true" is really irrelevant, however. True or false, prepared or ad libbed, they accomplished an immediate goal by creating an incongruity between Davies' averred identity and the identity implied by his obviously seedy appearance. This incongruity makes it difficult for Aston--as likewise for the audience--to come to any clear understanding of Davies at all. Yet without such an understanding, Aston will remain confused and thus--as Davies must hope--be unwilling to risk modifying the present situation which, for the moment at least, appears to Davies to be working in his favor.

Davies' stories are fairly innocuous attempts to confuse and threaten Aston with Davies' mysteriousness and thus to neutralize the similar threat which Aston as an unknown likewise offers to Davies. Moreover, in the case of the second example discussed above, Davies is also employing the stratagem whereby a character works to preserve the illusion (in his own mind) that

he is not in fact living on the edge of confusion and psychic defenselessness. Specifically, Davies' story about his job prospect at Wembly short-circuits his fear of being cast adrift in the world without adequate means of financial support and protection. Sometimes, however, such attempts to order one's own world intellectually while reducing the world of one's adversary to confusion, are not nearly so subtle or gentle as they are in the case of Davies in The Caretaker.

For instance Mick in the same play employs malicious double-talk and jargon, along with non-sequitur and related illogic, to imply a mastery of a situation completely beyond Davies' intellectual capacity to comprehend. At one point Mick buries Davies under a landslide of place names and other trivia. The clear implication of the speech is that Mick moves gracefully through an ordered universe while Davies by contrast stumbles awkwardly through a world which is utterly confused and disorganized.

> You know, believe it or not, you've got a funny kind of resemblance to a bloke I once knew in Shoreditch. Actually he lived in Aldgate. I was staying with a cousin in Camden Town. This chap, he used to have a pitch in Finsbury Park, just by the bus depot. When I got to know him I found out he was brought up in Putney. That didn't make any difference to me. I know quite a few people who were born in Putney. Even if they weren't born in Putney they were born in Fulham. The only trouble was, he wasn't born in Putney, he was only brought up in Putney. It turned out he was born in the Caledonian Road, just before you get to the Nag's Head. His old mum was still living at the Angel. All the buses passed right by the door. She could get a 38, 581, 30 or 38A, take her down to the Essex Road to Dalston Junction in next to no time. Well, of course, if she got the 30 he'd take her up Upper Street way, round by Highbury Corner and down to St. Paul's Church, but she'd get to Dalston Junction just the same in the end. I used to leave my bike in her garden on my way to work. Yes, it was a curious affair. Dead spit of you he was. Bit bigger round the nose but there was nothing in it.[42]

Similarly Mick later stifles Davies with a barrage of decorator's terms in a speech which, like the previous one, appears to baffle Davies completely.

> I could turn this place into a penthouse. For instance . . . this room. This room you could have as the kitchen. Right size, nice windows, sun comes in. I'd have . . . I'd have teal-blue, copper and parchment linoleum squares. I'd have those colours re-echoed in the walls. * * * You could put the dining-room across the landing, see. Yes. Venetian blinds on the window, cork floor, cork tiles. You could have an off-white pile linen rug, a table in . . . in afromosia teak veneer, sideboard with matt black drawers, curved chairs with cushioned seats, armchairs in oatmeal tweed, a beech frame settee with a woven sea-grass seat. * * * Then the bedroom. * * * Furniture . . . mahogany and rosewood. Deep azure-blue carpet, unglazed blue and white curtains, a bedspread with a pattern of small blue roses on a white ground, dressing-table with a lift up top containing a plastic tray, table lamp of white raffia * * * it wouldn't be a flat it'd be a palace.[43]

In both examples--each reflecting verbal behavior typical of Pinter's dramatic characters--the speaker defends himself against potential manipulation from the listener by aggressively attacking the listener to confuse him and thus render him psychically impotent. In such a way the speaker's illusions of intellectual control--they are always merely illusions, Pinter's drama insists--are preserved when he forcefully dispels his adversary's similar illusions. Such a tactic in Pinter's plays sometimes involves an even more extreme degree of implicit violence than it does in Mick's aggressive behavior in The Caretaker. For instance in The Homecoming, in the scene where Lennie and Ruth meet for the first time, each with suppressed fears feels out the other in an effort to define him and thus establish an advantage over him. In the course of the strange conversation, Lennie relates a story which illustrates his ostensible

success in violently dominating women.

> One night, not too long ago, one night down by the docks, I was standing alone under an arch, watching all the men jibbing the boom, out in the harbour, and playing around with the yardarm, when a certain lady came up to me and made me a certain proposal. This lady had been searching for me for days. She'd lost track of my whereabouts. However, the fact was she eventually caught up with me, and when she caught up with me she made me this certain proposal. Well, this proposal wasn't entirely out of order and normally I would have subscribed to it. I mean I would have subscribed to it in the normal course of events. The only trouble was she was falling apart with the pox. So I turned it down. Well, this lady was very insistent and started taking liberties with me down under this arch, liberties which by any criterion I couldn't be expected to tolerate, the facts being what they were, so I clumped her one. It was on my mind at the time to do away with her, you know, to kill her, and the fact is, that as killings go, it would have been a simple matter, nothing to it. Her chauffeur, who had located me for her, he'd popped round the corner to have a drink, which just left this lady and myself, you see, alone, standing underneath this arch, watching all the steamers steaming up, no one about, all quiet on the Western Front, and there she was up against this wall--well, just sliding down the wall, following the blow I'd given her. Well, to sum up, everything was in my favor, for a killing. Don't worry about the chauffeur. The chauffeur would never have spoken. He was an old friend of the family. But . . . in the end I thought . . . Aaah, why go to all the bother . . . you know, getting rid of the corpse and all that, getting yourself into a state of tension. So I just gave her another belt in the nose and a couple of turns of the boot and sort of left it at that.[44]

Such a speech is part of the continuing battle between Lennie and Ruth. Each fears--quite aptly, as the manifold betrayals depicted in the play illustrate--sexual manipulation and exploitation by the other. Lennie's rhetoric strives to defeat Ruth by threatening her with the fear of sexual domination at the same time that it attempts to sustain Lennie's own illusions about his sexual prowess and power. The story's too facile and frightening because incongruous employment of cliche, the high-handedness and arbitrariness of the violent actions it described, its implicit suggestion that Lennie

is backed by an organization which trafficks in prostitutes and routinely engages in murders--all these are calculated to establish a picture of Lennie's mastery of women in general and, implicitly, of Ruth in particular.

Such a characteristic threat in Pinter's drama involves, then, offering to inflict upon another person the same punishment which one anticipates from him in return. Related to such a defensive stratagem--but differing from it in that a third party rather than the challenged person is the more immediate menace--is the attempt to use language strategically to reassure oneself by transferring one's fears to another person. Thus in the passage from The Black and White discussed above (pp. 68-69), the second woman threatens the first woman with being taken away by strangers; in fact, of course, it is she herself who fears precisely this fate. Similarly Stanley in The Birthday Party threatens his landlady Meg with the same frightening dispossession which he himself fears and which indeed he ultimately suffers at the hands of Goldberg and McCann.

STANLEY. Meg. Do you know what.
MEG. What?
STANLEY. Have you heard the latest?
MEG. No.
STANLEY. I'll bet you have.
MEG. I haven't.
STANLEY. Shall I tell you.
MEG. What latest?
STANLEY. You haven't heard it?
MEG. No.
STANLEY (advancing). They're coming today.
MEG. Who?
STANLEY. They're coming in a van.
MEG. Who?
STANLEY. And do you know what they've got in that van?
MEG. What?
STANLEY. They've got a wheelbarrow in that van.
MEG (breathlessly). They haven't.
STANLEY. Oh yes they have.

MEG. You're a liar.
STANLEY (advancing upon her). A big wheelbarrow. And when the van stops they wheel it out, and they wheel it up the garden path, and then they knock at the front door.
MEG. They don't.
STANLEY. They're looking for someone.
MEG. They're not.
STANLEY. They're looking for someone. A certain person.
MEG (hoarsly). No, they're not!
STANLEY. Shall I tell you who they're looking for?
MEG. No!
STANLEY. You don't want me to tell you?
MEG. You're a liar.[45]

III

Though Pinter's characters use patterns of language as stratagems to cover metaphysical nakedness, eventually these stratagems no longer achieve their goal. No intellectual defense againse the irrational, Pinter is saying, ultimately is effective. Since, moreover, the subject of Pinter's drama is precisely the disastrous failures of such stratagems, the protagonist of a Pinter play typically reaches a point where his speech and behavior, normally "inexpressive, giving little away, unreliable, elusive, obstructive, unwilling," becomes transparent. "I am not suggesting that no character in a play can ever say what he in fact means," Pinter stresses. "Not at all. I have found that there invariably does come a moment when this happens, when he says something, perhaps, which he has never said before. And when this happens, what he says is irrevocable, and can never be taken back."[46] At such a moment a character involuntarily achieves what Pinter euphemistically calls "communication" with the other--"a very fearful matter . . . to participate with someone." Such communication in fact constitutes

a moment of defenselessness, of psychic poverty which comes predictably when one's ability to protect himself intellectually is exhausted. It is this moment of defenselessness which Pinter's protagonists struggle, always unsuccessfully, to avoid.

> I think that we communicate only too well, in our silence, in what is unsaid, and that what takes place is a continual evasion, desperate rear guard attempts to keep ourselves to ourselves. Communication is too alarming. To enter into someone else's life is too frightening. To disclose to others the poverty within us is too fearsomea possibility.[48]

These assertions about communication, as well as his idea that man instinctively is defensive toward other people, are comprehended in the idea that one of Pinter's major themes is the inability of man to love satisfactorily. To love is to trust, consequently to have no ready defense against the ultimate vulgarity, betrayal. Yet philosophicallly the beloved is untrustworthy--undefinable, unpredictable, hence unreliable. Betrayal therefore inevitably must come. A crucial point of Pinter's drama is simply, then, that the metaphysical mutability of the world seriously compromises--if indeed it does not actually negate--man's desperate attempts to love. One cannot go outside oneself into a wholly comprehended and therefore wholly sympathetic realm of another person. Man is the creature--as Pinter might paraphrase Proust--who cannot know, who consequently loves others only in fear, and who, if he asserts the contrary, deceives himself.

Pinter's drama illustrates how the attempted journey outside one's self frequently only lays one open to manipulation by another person. Because such moments of betrayal are as devastating as they are imminent, Pinter's characters avoid them compulsively. Yet the

need to share oneself with another person runs equally deep in these people. Thus Pinter's drama depicts men, needful of love, reacting instinctively to form defenses against the "tenacles" which--as Pinter says--just as instinctively "go out very strongly to each other" as an implicit measure of the need for human communication.[49] In this sense at least an interpretation of The Homecoming favored by Pinter serves as an admirable summary of the essence of all Pinter's plays--plays about "the family of man waged in so desperate a search for love that it reverts to the barbaric and animalistic whenever challenged and confronted by such love."[50]

To speak of such barbarism and animalism is simply to offer one accurate description of the stratagems devised by Pinter's characters to protect themselves against betrayal. Since Pinter's characters want to love but fear the risks, they instinctively or intentionally build up defenses which isolate them from the "other." Characters who employ these defensive stratagems--virtually all Pinter's personae do--display a kind of violence, as Pinter calls it, which "is really an expression of the question of dominance and subservience" and which, Pinter stresses, "is possibly a repeated theme in my plays."[51] For violence--manifested for instance as linguistic reticence, linguistic aggressiveness, or any intermediate use of diversionary language--signals like all forms of defensiveness a desire to repel or subdue another person and thus to make oneself safe at his expense.

In Pinter's drama through The Basement, this desire characteristically is reflected in a person's efforts to defend his stronghold against intruders. Typically, such a stronghold will be a room,

Pinter's "image"--as one commentator has called it--"of man's struggle for order in a chaotic world."[52] Indeed, Pinter's continuing interest, he himself admits, is with "two people in a room. . . . 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."[53] Thus the room represents for Pinter, as for its occupants, a defense against the irrational. Inside the room things are familiar, arranged, ostensibly--at least--predictable. Outside the room is the unknown and the uncontrolled. Accordingly, possession of a room and management of what happens in it constitutes the basis of a desirable though--as it always turns out in a Pinter play--thoroughly tenuous psychic security.

Predictably, the struggle for control of such a room is fierce and--in Pinter's broad sense of the term--violent, though paradoxically enough it not infrequently is muted. Indeed, violence in Pinter's plays in fact quite commonly involves a constrained "battle for positions." This battle, "a very common everyday thing," Pinter believes, need not erupt into physical brutality, since there are ways at least as efficatious as the purely physical to resolve "the question of being in the uppermost position or attempting to be." Such for instance is the case in "The Examination" (1959), a short story from which--by Pinter's own admission--his"ideas of violence carried on." According to Pinter, this short story "very explicitly" evolves the type-situation of his drama: "two people in a room having a battle of an unspecified nature, in which the question [is] one of who [is] dominant at what point and how [he is] going to be

dominant and what tools [he will] use to achieve dominance and how [he will] try to undermine the other person's dominance."[54]

In "The Examination," the conflict between the narrator and Kullus reveals the psychic needs of Pinter's typical protagonist and illustrates as well the impossibility of his ever achieving lasting satisfaction for these needs. The narrator of the story desires confirmation of his authority over Kullus. As the examiner, he is "obliged to remark, and, if possible, to verify, any ostensible change" in Kullus's manner during the examination (E, 88).[55] Initially such verification seems forthcoming to the narrator. Kullus's devotion, as he says, is "actual and unequivocal, besides, as it seemed to me, obligatory" (E, 89). Proof of such devotion is the fact that the narrator arbitrarily dictates the form and pace of the examination to which Kullus must submit. Moreover, the Examiner unilaterally controls the room's environment to his own liking: he causes window and curtain to remain open, though Kullus desires the opposite; refrains from burning a fire in the fireplace when Kullus prefers that one be lighted; and introduces into the room a blackboard and stool, properties of the examination which are not to Kullus's liking.

Thus the story begins with the Examiner ascendant. "I was," he explains

> naturally dominant, by virtue of my owning the room; he [Kullus] having entered through the door I now closed. To be confronted with the especial properties of my abode, bearing the seal and arrangement of their tenant, allowed only for recognition on the part of my visitor, and through recognition to acknowledgement and through acknowledgement to appreciation, and through appreciation to subservience. At least, I trusted that such a development would take place, and initially believed it to have done so. . . .

> For it seemed, at this time, that the advantage was mine.
> Had not Kullus been obliged to attend this examination?
> And was not his attendance an admission of that obligation?
> And was not his admission an acknowledgement of my position?
> And my position therefore a position of dominance (E, 89-90).

This is true despite the fact that an earlier time had been witness to Kullus's similar control of the narrator.

> I had myself suffered under his preoccupation upon previous occasions, when the order of his room had been maintained by particular arrangement of window and curtain . . . and seldom to my taste or comfort. But now he maintained no such order and did not determine their opening or closing. For we were no longer in Kullus's room (E, 88).

The Examiner's perogative, however--like the authority desperately sought by all Pinter's protagonists--turns out tc be precarious and indeed perhaps more illusory than real. Ironically, the story ends with Kullus once again in a position of dominance.

> And when Kullus remarked the absence of a flame in the g[r]ate, I was bound to acknowledge this. And when he remarked the presence of the stool I was equally bound. And when he removed the blackboard, I offered no criticism. And when he closed the curtains I did not object.
> For we were now in Kullus's room (E, 92).

As such a summary implies, the subject of the story is how the Examiner loses the illusion of his control over the room and of his authority over Kullus. In organizing the examination proceedings, the Examiner finds it prudent to allow Kullus "intervals" during which to recuperate from the arduousness of the examination talks. Kullus mysteriously passes these intervals in silence, retiring automatically to the window and staring out in a studied manner the "convention and habit" of which seems to the Examiner calculated to prevent Kullus's becoming "hopelessly estranged within [the room's] boundaries" (E, 90). Similarly Kullus remains silent, as much as is possible, during the progress of the examination talks

themselves.

Initially this behavior does not disconcert the Examiner, since he can distinguish--as he supposes--the nature of Kullus's silence during the talks from the nature of his silence during the intervals, and thus can still chart the course of Kullus's mental voyages.

> For if Kullus fell silent, he did not cease to participate in our examination. Never, at any time, had I reason to doubt his active participation, through word and through silence, between interval and interval. . . . And so the nature of our silence within the frame of our examination, and the nature of our silence outside the frame of our examination, were entirely opposed (E, 87).

At a certain point, however, Kullus's silences become, from the narrator's point of view, "too deep for echo" (E, 89). Kullus journeys "from silence to silence," and the narrator has--as he says--"no course but to follow. . . . But I could not always follow his courses, and where I could not follow, I was no longer dominant" (E, 88). Subsequently the Examiner attempts to terminate the intervals, since the two silences now are "no longer opposed" but "indeed . . . indistinguishable, and . . . one silence, dictated by Kullus" (E, 91). Yet this effort by the Examiner to preserve the illusion even of diminished authority is inefficacious. Gradually, as the narrator says, the intervals proceed according to Kullus's terms. "And where both allotment and duration had rested with me, and had become my imposition, they now proceeded according to his dictates, and became his imposition" (E, 88). Ultimately Kullus is able peremptorily to initiate "intervals at his own inclination" and to pursue "his courses at will" (E, 92).

The Examiner's dilemma constitutes the type-situation endured endured by all Pinter's characters, whose unachievable goal is always to clarify and verify their relationship to an objective, known reality--in this case to another person. Kullus's baffling silence--not to be confused with the impoverished silence of linguistic and hence intellectual nakedness--is an emblem of the external world's inscrutable mysteriousness. A metaphysical vacuum separates the Examiner from what he apprehends in Kullus but fails to comprehend satisfactorily. Kullus remains shrouded by impenetrable silence, separated from the Examiner by a gulf which the intellect can only pretend to bridge. Accordingly, the Examiner's attempts to maintain order in the room--hopefully his private compartment in a precisely limited and objectively defined world--are necessarily abortive. The irrational, personified as Kullus in his enigmatic, less than human silence, inevitably encroaches upon the precincts of the ostensibly known. There are, Pinter stresses here as well as elsewhere, no absolute boundaries between the known and the unknown, the true and the false, the real and the chimerical. The man--in the case The Examiner--who pretends that there are will ultimately be undeceived.

IV

Pinter's plays consist of dramatic actions where each character struggles to avoid a fate similar to the narrator's in "The Examination." Each strives to create and preserve the sense of his secure relationship to an ordered, understood world. Since this illusion of clarity--as the conflict in "The Examination" implies--

ordinarily is achieved at the expense of someone else's similar but conflicting illusions, there is typically in a Pinter play at least one character who suffers dispossession at the hands of the others. Thus while the conflict in Pinter's drama ultimately is always against the metaphysical limits of human knowledge--and always results, to borrow a felicitous phrase, in "a cry of anguish over the insufferable state of being human"[56] --the nominal struggle almost invariably is between characters vying for the same unattainable goal, clarity about the human condition. This is the case for instance in The Collection (1961), a play which succinctly illustrates how the type-situation in Pinter's drama results from the conflicting needs of various characters to believe that the metaphysically enigmatic world can be clearly understood.

In The Collection, written for TV and later adapted by Pinter for the stage,[57] conflict develops when the equilibrium is disturbed in the relationship between each of two couples. James Horne and his wife Stella reside in a tasteful middle-class flat in Chelsea. Harry Kane and his young friend Bill Lloyd, both apparently homosexuals, live in Harry's elegant town house in the fashionable Belgravia section of London. Here as always in a Pinter play, one's dwelling is a stronghold of psychic security. In both households, however, the sense of an ordered, comprehended situation has been destroyed by the suspected sexual infidelity of one member of either couple. Bill and Stella attended a dress designer's convention in Leeds about a week before the action of the play begins. While there overnight, they ostensibly slept together in Stella's hotel room.

The play depicts the efforts of each of the two betrayed individuals to restore the ordered situation disturbed by the unanticipated behavior of his mate. As the action begins, James confronts Bill with a barrage of facts about the transgression, apparently supplied him by his wife. He claims to know, for instance, what room of which hotel the affair transpired in, what color pajamas Bill wore, what song Bill sang in the shower after making love to Stella. Initially, even in the face of these and similar intimidating "facts," Bill disclaims any knowledge of the affair. Later, however, he corroborates parts of James's account, yet claims he and Stella only kissed a few minutes in the hallway and that she went alone to her room after that. Still later he affirms the smallest detail of James's story, but subsequently repudiates his confession, saying he had confirmed James's accusations merely to amuse himself. Finally he advances yet another version of what happened in Leeds: he and Stella never touched or went to her room; they merely sat on a sofa in a lounge and discussed the possibility of sleeping together.

Like the audience, James is never able to establish the "truth" about his wife's relationship with Bill, a fact consonant with Pinter's conviction that the human desire for verification of facts cannot invariably be satisfied. Consequently he is never able to regain self-assurance about his own relationship with Stella. Indeed, a major point of the play is the inevitable failure of such an effort. Thus James's initial linguistic and physical aggressiveness toward Bill is only a smoke screen obscuring his own desperation. When Bill's evanascent, continually changing and thus contradictory account of the affair fails to corroborate what Stella has told her husband

about it, James returns to his wife more confused than ever. His subsequent intimidation of Stella is therefore best understood as a covert effort to test her version of the story by putting her on the defensive. At the same time, James apparently wishes to make Stella think she is being repaid in kind when he hints about a physical attraction between himself and Bill.

Stella takes the gambit. After she breaks down and cries in regret and remorse, James confidently asserts his complete understanding of the situation: "Now I'm perfectly happy. I can see it both ways, three ways, all ways . . . every way. It's perfectly clear, there's nothing to it, everything's back to normal" (C, 66).[58] Such professed confidence is qualified and undercut, however, by the fact that James immediately resumes his defensive linguistic attack on Stella, tacitly implying that he may be considering repaying his wife's infidelity by becoming Bill's lover: "He's a very cultivated bloke, your bloke, quite a considerable intelligence at work there, I thought. . . . I mean, you couldn't say he wasn't a man of taste. He's brimming over with it. . . . No, really, I think I should thank you, rather than anything else. After two years of marriage it looks as though, by accident, you've opened up a whole new world for me" (C, 67).

The futility of the desire for clarity--James' as alike the audience's--becomes even more apparent during James's second confrontation with Bill. From the audience's point of view, the unlikely possibility that a homosexual liaison actually exists between James and Bill is tantilizingly suggested by the fact that Bill has prepared hor d'oeuvres for James which include the olives

James requested on his first visit. Further developments, however, make James's reciprocal overtures to Bill seem more a ploy to disarm Bill than a tactic to seduce him physically. The essentially antagonistic--though symbolically sexual--relationship between the two men is reflected in James's refusal of the offered olives as well as in the game the two men play with a fruit knife and a cheese knife. James threatens Bill with sexual suggestiveness by telling him to swallow a knife which he then throws maliciously at his face. Later he mocks his homosexuality again by telling him: "You're lucky you caught it [in your hand], of course. Otherwise it might have cut your mouth" (C, 79).

Bill's response, aggravated additionally by Harry's overt antagonism toward him, is a desperate effort to regain the upper hand by destroying James's newly achieved self-confidence. In a speech where the hesitations suggest Bill's perilous approach to linguistic and thus to psychic nakedness, he intentionally casts new doubts on James's belief that James finally knows the truth about his wife's ostensible behavior.

> I never touched her . . . we sat . . . in the lounge, on a sofa . . . for two hours . . . talked . . . we talked about it . . . we didn't . . . move from the lounge . . . never went to her room . . . just talked . . . about what we would do . . . if we did get to her room . . . two hours . . . we never touched . . . we just talked about it . . . (C, 79).

That Bill's ploy to gain psychic ascendancy is successful is implied by James's subsequent attempts to confirm Bill's latest claims about the affair. "You didn't do anything, did you?" he implores his wife. "He wasn't in your room. You just talked about it, in the lounge. . . . That's the truth . . . isn't it?" he asks defeatedly.

At blackout, however, Stella enigmatically sits looking at him, "friendly, sympathetic," her face "neither confirming nor denying" what he says (C, 79-80).

James's failure in his quest for clarity is an inevitable result of the evanescent nature of reality. On the defensive throughout despite his overt aggression, he is finally defeated irrevocably at the end of the play when his arsenal of words is depleted and thus the basis of his assertiveness undermined. He no longer can preserve the illusion that he knows the "truth" about his wife's conduct. As in the case of the protagonist of "The Examination," James's belief that he clearly understands and thus controls his situation has been destroyed. In this sense, however, he differs only in degree from the other characters of the play, all of whome are likewise in retreat from the fear that their situation masters them rather than the other way around. Thus for instance Bill continually modifies his story about his part in the affair to avoid being definitively accused and thereby manipulated by James and Harry. Similarly Stella, threatened at one point by Harry's intimidating innuendo during his unexpected visit to her house, changes her story and maintains that the affair is completely a product of her jealous husband's imagination. This retreat, of course, is in addition to her other strategies to keep her husband intentionally confused.

The four principals of the play, then, are alike mystified in their attempts to understand the meaning of and truth about what is happening to them. In fact, of the four only Harry perhaps--certainly to a much greater extent than either Stella or Bill--is even moderately

successful in dealing with the threat of uncertainty emanating from such an involved situation. He simply decides tacitly to accept the mystery and threat rather than attempting foolishly to triumph over it. Harry's treatment of Bill in particular is a cloaked way of advising him not to continue disturbing the tenuous equilibrium of their only nominally clear agreement. Thus when he interrupts the second meeting between James and Bill, he attempts merely to placate James by insisting untruthfully that Stella now admits she "made the whole damn thing up" (C, 77). At the same time he intimidates Bill by speaking of him as a "slum slug" who "confirms stupid sordid little stories just to amuse himself, while everyone else has to run around in circles to get to the root of the matter and smooth the whole thing out." Yet truth in fact does not interest Harry. He apparently knows the roots of the problem are as manifold as its numerous and confusing branches, and he is therefore really only concerned with "smoothing things out." Previously he had told Stella that he found Bill in a slum and "gave him a roof, gave him a job" (C, 70), and whether or not this is true, Harry's deprecation of Bill may be understood as precisely what Bill takes it to be--a veiled threat of dispossession if Bill fails to terminate his relationship with both James and Stella.

Harry's ploy is only relatively successful. At least it leads, however, to the near breakdown which betrays Bill's own fear of the same confusion which ultimately engulfs James, a confusion which Bill escapes only by tacitly agreeing to play the game Harry's way. Yet Harry's victory itself is achieved only through his decision to avoid pursuing the question of truth and motive in the matter of his partner's

infidelity. In this way alone Harry--unlike James--avoids impaling himself on the horns of the insoluble metaphysical dilemma. Nevertheless he is tacitly agreeing to live with unspoken, unrelieved uncertainty. Did Bill really betray him? If he did, why did he? Is Bill trying to tell Harry something through his unpredictable and menacing behavior? If so, what? Will Harry's temporarily reordered existence with Bill be disturbed again? When? How? Like all Pinter's characters, then, even Harry ends contemplating the ineffable unknown and obscuring it--in this case apparently intentionally--behind a smoke screen of tenuously preserved illusions.

NOTES FOR "CHARACTERIZATION AND THE TYPE-SITUATION IN PINTER'S DRAMA"

1. "Two People in a Room," The New Yorker, 43 (February 15, 1967), 36.

2. Judith Crist, "A Mystery: Pinter on Pinter," Look, 32 (December 24, 1967), 78.

3. Henry Hewes, "Probing Pinter's Plays," Saturday Review, 50 (April 18, 1967), 58.

4. Harold Pinter, Letter to The London Sunday Times, 14 August 1960, p. 21.

5. Quoted by Martin Esslin, The Peopled Wound, The Work of Harold Pinter (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970), p. 31.

6. Lawrence M. Bensky, "Harold Pinter, An Interview," Paris Review, X(Fall 1966), 22, 24.

7. Kathleen Tynan, "In Search of Harold Pinter: Is He the Mystery His Critics Allege?" Part II, The London Evening Standard, April 26, 1968, p. 8.

8. Bensky, "Harold Pinter, An Interview," p. 25.

9. Harry Thompson, "Harold Pinter Replies," New Theatre Magazine, XI (January 1961), 10.

10. Tynan, "In Search of Harold Pinter: Is He the Mystery His Critics Allege?" Part II, p. 8.

11. Crist, "A Mystery: Pinter on Pinter," p. 80. Elsewhere Pinter is slightly more specific about Goldberg and McCann at least: "I would say they worked for a large organization with an office completely above board." See Hewes, "Probing Pinter's Plays," p. 97.

12. Quoted by Esslin, The Peopled Wound, The Work of Harold Pinter, p. 187.

13. Hewes, "Probing Pinter's Plays," p. 97.

14. Quoted by Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, rev. ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1969), p. 256.

15. Quoted by Arnold P. Hinchliffe, Harold Pinter (New York: Twayne, 1967), p. 99.

16. Harold Pinter, "Writing for Myself," Twentieth Century, 169 (February 1961), 174.

17. Harold Pinter, "Writing for the Theatre," Evergreen Review, No. 33 (August-September 1964), 80. A similar irrelevant and inefficacious effort at rationalization, Pinter feels, is the attempt to categorize dramatic actions presented in his plays: "Most critics apparently are not able to view a play as it is by itself, distinctly and simply. They must relate it to what they saw last week or last year; usually this relation is tenuous, cockeyed, unjust to both works. The critic is afraid to either sink or swim when he sees a play; he must grasp the lifebelt of a category." See Thompson, "Harold Pinter Replies," p. 8.

18. Hewes, "Probing Pinter's Plays," p. 97.

19. Pinter, "Writing for Myself," p. 174.

20. Thompson, "Harold Pinter Replies," p. 9.

21. Bensky, "Harold Pinter, An Interview," pp. 28-29.

22. Quoted by John Russell Taylor, Anger and After, rev. ed. (Baltimore: Penguin, 1963), p. 296.

23. Esslin, The Peopled Wound, The Work of Harold Pinter, p. 105.

24. Harold Pinter, A Night Out, Night School, Revue Sketches (New York: Grove, n.d.), pp. 105-106.

25. See, for example, Ruby Cohn, "The World of Harold Pinter," Tulane Drama Review, VI (March 1962), 55-68.

26. Pinter, A Night Out, Night School, Revue Sketches, pp. 91-93.

27. Harold Pinter, The Dwarfs and Eight Review Sketches (New York: Dramatist Play Service, 1965), pp. 42-44.

28. Thompson, "Harold Pinter Replies," p. 9.

29. Pinter, "Writing for the Theatre," p. 82.

30. Bensky, "Harold Pinter, An Interview," p. 27.

31. Pinter, "Writing for the Theatre," p. 82.

32. Pinter, "Writing for the Theatre," p. 81.

33. Taylor, Anger and After, rev. ed., pp. 195-196.

34. Pinter, A Night Out, Night School, Revue Sketches, p. 94.

35. Pinter, A Night Out, Night School, Revue Sketches, pp. 95-96.

36. Pinter, "Writing for the Theatre," pp. 81-82.

37. Esslin, The Peopled Wound, The Work of Harold Pinter, p. 213.

38. Robert Brustein, Seasons of Discontent: Dramatic Opinions 1959-1965 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), p. 181. Cf. James R. Hollis, Harold Pinter: The Poetics of Silence (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1970), p. 92.

39. Quoted by Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, rev. ed., p. 240.

40. Harold Pinter, The Caretaker and The Dumb Waiter (New York: Grove, 1961), pp. 25-26.

41. Pinter, The Caretaker and The Dumb Waiter, p. 27.

42. Pinter, The Caretaker and The Dumb Waiter, p. 32.

43. Pinter, The Caretaker and The Dumb Waiter, p. 60.

44. Harold Pinter, The Homecoming (New York: Grove, n.d.), pp. 30-31.

45. Harold Pinter, The Birthday Party and The Room (New York: Grove, 1961), pp. 24-25.

46. Pinter, "Writing for the Theatre," p. 82.

47. Quoted by Kay Dick, "Mr. Pinter and the Fearful Matter," Texas Quarterly, IV (Autumn 1961), 265.

48. Pinter, "Writing for the Theatre," p. 82.

49. Dick, "Mr. Pinter and the Fearful Matter," p. 265.

50. Quoted by Hewes, "Probing Pinter's Plays," p. 56.

51. Bensky, "Harold Pinter, An Interview," p. 30

52. Esslin, The Peopled Wound, The Work of Harold Pinter, p. 113.

53. Quoted by Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, rev. ed., p. 232.

54. Bensky, "Harold Pinter, An Interview," pp. 30-31.

55. Parenthetical page numbers preceeded by a capital "E" refer to Harold Pinter, "The Examination," in The Collection and The Lover (London: Methuen, 1963).

56. Robert Brustein, The Theatre of Revolt (Boston: Little, Brown, 1964), p. 26.

57. Harold Pinter, Three Plays (New York: Grove, 1962), p. 42.

58. Parenthetical page numbers preceded by a capital "C" refer to Harold Pinter, The Collection, in Three Plays.

EXEMPLA: CONFLICT IN PINTER'S DRAMA FROM THE ROOM THROUGH THE BASEMENT

Menace in Pinter's drama always derives from man's continuing confrontation with the imperfectly known. Yet if Pinter's protagonist is typically in conflict with and defeated by the less than rational, the artistic depiction of this conflict situation varies considerably from one play to another. Four early works--The Room, The Dumb Waiter, The Birthday Party, and The Caretaker--dramatize the intrusion of a stranger into the sanctity of another person's domicile. These four plays are discussed in the first part of the following essay. In the first three of these plays, the inside of the room affords its occupants ostensible security which is interrupted and destroyed by a threat from without. In The Caretaker, however--toward which these three plays develop in depicting man's universal metaphysical quandry--menace is inside rather than external to the room, and conflict in the play derives from the struggles of each of the room's three occupants to establish control and thus gain a concomitant psychic security. Five other plays--discussed in the second part of what follows--depict a similar struggle between individuals vying for the ascendancy in and control of what appears to them as an ordered, rational environment, often a room. In each of these plays--A Slight Ache, A Night Out, Night School, The Lover, and The Homecoming--the sexual conflict is characterized by a person's selfish and aggressive attempts to exploit a loved object. This situation is thus commensurate with Pinter's conviction that man's efforts to love tacitly ignore the fact that everything

external to oneself is metaphysically unknowable, and that man defensively attempts to manipulate and thus make familiar whatever he cannot comprehend. Still a third group of plays intentionally places the audience in a position analagous to that of Pinter's type-protagonist--baffled by the complexity of the intellect's relationship with sense experience, in this case with the experience of the play itself. These three plays are discussed in the third and final part of the following essay. In The Dwarfs, the audience's point of view is intentionally foreshortened by Pinter's atypical use of dialogue employing extensive figurative language. In Tea Party and The Basement, by contrast, Pinter exploits the potentials of the film medium for controlling point of view to present a dramatic action ultimately beyond the ability of the audience to rationalize with complete satisfaction. The philosophical outlook of all three plays, however, remains the same as in Pinter's other drama.

I

Pinter's expertise in dramatizing the metaphysical uncertainty of the human condition develops markedly from his one-act first play, The Room (1957), to his second full length work, The Caretaker (1960). In his earliest plays, existential menace tends to be frankly and explicitly étranger. An example is Riley in The Room. Pinter's retrospective evaluation of Riley implies his dissatisfaction with characters who verge on being symbolic of rather than illustrative of the metaphysically unknowable: "Well, it's very peculiar, . . . the man from the basement had to be introduced, and he just was

a blind negro. I don't think there's anything radically wrong with the character himself, but he behaves too differently from the other characters: if I were writing the play now I'd make him sit down, have a cup of tea."[1] By contrast, Pinter's plays following The Dumb Waiter (1957) and The Birthday Party (1957) are increasingly "quiet," a characteristic more to Pinter's liking.[2] For instance the ending of The Caretaker intentionally avoids the sort of histrionics characterizing the curtain scene of The Room, where Riley mysteriously falls dead and Rose is struck blind: "The original idea [in The Caretaker] . . . was . . . to end the play with the violent death of the tramp. . . . It suddenly struck me that it was not necessary. And I think that in this play . . . I have developed, that I have no need to use cabaret turns and black-outs and screams in the dark to the extent that I enjoyed using them before. I feel that I can deal, without resorting to this kind of thing, with a human situation . . . concerning three particular people and not, incidentally . . . symbols."[3] Thus the thematic similarity between the later and the three earlier plays is balanced against a succinct difference in techniques employed. Pinter moves from a conflict situation which pits man expressly against a somewhat artifically contrived unknown to one which pits man more directly against man, and only indirectly and thus much more subtly against the undefined implicit in everything external to self.

Like The Dumb Waiter and The Birthday Party, for both of which it establishes a pattern, The Room depicts the unsuccessful attempt of Pinter's protagonist to protect his abode against a more or less

unparticularized menace. In all three plays neither the audience nor the person threatened ever arrives at a satisfactory explanation of who the attacker is or why the attack is being conducted. Such a technique for "creating maximum tension by providing minimum information" makes possible the accusation that artistically Pinter is "peevish" and "arbitrary," that if the withheld information were ever made available to the audience, his first plays would become "empty melodramas, utterly trivial."[4] Yet Pinter in fact is neither coy nor intentionally cryptic; his point is precisely that the world ever is and inevitably remains inherently mysterious. His artistic aim in these early plays is already what it will be in The Caretaker, where such charges are far less well founded, a fact which affords the first three plays a retrospective clarity they perhaps lacked before Pinter's remarkably consistently corpus became extensive enough to establish unequivocally what he is attempting to do in a philosophical sense.

The Room begins as it might if the play were intended primarily as a satire on lower-class domestic infelicity. Rose's inane patter about food, about the weather outside, about the adverse living conditions endured by the tenant of the basement apartment in her rooming house--coupled with the uninterested silence of her husband Bert--serves to underscore the quite desperation of the Hudds' guarded, somber lives. Yet the contrast between their situation at the beginning and the end of the play establishes clearly the relative desirability of Rose and Bert's measured, patterned existence. Inside the room--at least as Rose sees it--the world is warm and bright; they control, or believe they control, what happens to them

within its premises. Outside their room it is cold and dark; the unstructured world, seen microcosmically as an apartment house with unknown residents and an indeterminate number of floors, threatens man with a persistent recklessness. At the end, duly prepared for in terms of visitations by his lesser precursors, it comes crashing in upon the Hudds in the person of Riley. The theme of the play is thus man's need to feel certain and secure, enisled safely in the perilous flow and flux of reality; and what the play dramatically illustrates is the inevitable disillusionment awaiting the person who believes that he can actually reduce the intellectually boundless world to rational, known dimensions.

Three increasingly threatening intrusions of the unknown into the Hudds' room serve as a prelude to Riley's ultimate destruction of their precarious psychic security. These three are Mr. Kidd's first visit, the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Sands, and Mr. Kidd's second and final appearance. From the point of view of the Hudds and of the audience alike, each of these three episodes invests the situs of the dramatic action with a deeper, more somber shade of mystery. The humorously threatening evasiveness of Mr. Kidd is initially seen by the audience more or less exclusively from Rose's confused point of view. Thus Kidd inexplicably appears to recognize as his own property a rocking chair which Rose says she herself brought into the room; equivocates about where his bedroom is located in the apartment house and about how many floors the house has; relates an amusingly incongruous and therefore menacing story about his mother and sister; and implicitly contradicts himself about whether the house where the Hudds live is fully occupied or not (R,

100-103).[5] Similarly, when he returns later he is noncommittal about whether or not he is acually the landlord of the house (R, 113), thereby creating a crux which in fact remains unresolved in the play. The effect of such verbal histrionics is to create a sense of the Hudds' room existing in a time-space limbo where logical cause-effect relationships are mysteriously held in abeyance.[6] As a result the audience--not unlike Rose who at one point desperately asks Mr. Kidd if the room she occupies is vacant (R,113)--is led up a blind alley of dreamlike confusion about the precise situation existing inside as well as outside the Hudds' room.

The visit by Mr. and Mrs. Sands serves to befuddle Rose even further. The Sands' argument about whether or not they saw a star while wandering in the dark house (R, 107-108) creates confusion about the existing weather outside, and indeed perhaps about the time of day as well. At the same time it insidiously lends an insane creditability to Mr. Kidd's implicit suggestion that the house where the Hudds live is lacking a roof or even an entire upper story (R, 102). Likewise the Sands' contradictory stories about whether they were ascending or descending the stairs prior to knocking on the Hudds' door (R, 105,111) only thickens the aura of mystery about what is happening outside the room. Finally Rose's (and the audience's) confusion is further deepened by Mr. Sand's statement that the man living in the basement informed him that the Hudds' apartment is for rent (R, 112). Such an assertion, coupled with Mr. Sands' long speech describing the Sands' conversation with this man (R, 111), reinforces Rose's previously expressed apprehensions about a threatening stranger who lives in

the basement (R, 96, 97, 102), and sets the stage for Mr. Kidd's frantic return to announce that the man downstairs has been waiting impatiently for Mr. Hudd to leave so that he can visit Rose privately in her room (R, 114-116).

Throughout these encounters, Mr. Kidd and the Sands, like Riley later in the play, remain more or less obscure antagonists confronting Rose. In succeeding plays, notably in The Caretaker, Pinter by contrast is more careful to make all his characters alike protagonist and antagonist simultaneously in his efforts to illustrate the universality of man's fruitless attempts to define the undefinable. In The Room, however, primarily Rose's situation--and only to a much lesser degree her silent though imperilled husband's as well--is exemplary of the confusion that inevitably attends man's instinctive desire for absolute understanding. Thus while Mr. Kidd's confusing equivocations may be understood by comparing them for instance to the verbal defensiveness of Davies in The Caretaker, Pinter does not develop the earlier character's own personal conflict extensively enough to make his fear of the unknown easily recognizable (as say Rose's is). Thus Kidd seems more a threat than threatened himself; and only in a retrospective looking backward from the later play, perhaps, is one apt to conclude that Kidd's irrational behavior, like Davies', is a result of his own fear of the unknown, personified in The Room as Riley who is using him as an intermediary to Rose. Similarly the inane, frightened bickering between the Sands looks ahead to the confused arguments between figures such as Goldberg and McCann in The Birthday Party, though again the earlier characters are brought by Pinter so slightly into the type-conflict in the play

that they remain more external to than involved in and threatened by man's confrontation of the unknowable--more, that is, object of rather than subject to the inalienable mysteriousness of the world.

Such an idea is obviously most particularly applicable to Riley himself, who--by Pinter's own admission--is an artifically enigmatic character.[7] According to one fairly plausible view, the introduction of this "near-parody of a death symbol" to climax Rose's catastrophic fall from psychic security, amounts to little more than "threadbare mystification on Pinter's part."[8] Even more particularized and therefore less convincing an interpretation sees Rose as a hiding jewish Sarah (Sal, as Riley calls her) exposed by the black man who is himself an alien in an anglo-saxon world.[9] Perhaps a more plausible because more general outlook, however, is that the play dramatizes Rose's loss of identity. This idea is accurate in the sense at least that she is dispossessed of the security of her room--figuratively of the untenable illusion that she can be mistress of the known world around her, a security whose desirability is implied in the immensity of the futile effort which Bert Hudd exerts to protect it when he brutally attacks Riley. Similarly the blindness which besets Rose, immersing her in the darkness which she has feared throughout the play, suggests the destruction of her illusion of lucidity. One would not wish to push the point too far, however, since "Pinter's dramatized metaphors" cannot legitimately be allegorized, partaking as they do of "that [unknowable] reality which logic-driven moderns deny in their effort to fix upon absolutes."[10]

The conflict situation in The Dumb Waiter (1957) is markedly

similar to that in The Room. Like Rose securely entrenched in her flat, Ben and Gus--ostensibly hit men for a large British crime syndicate--wait more or less comfortably in an assigned basement room to dispatch their as yet unknown victim. The situation is not unfamiliar to them. They have, as one of them puts it, proved themselves long ago to Wilson, the mysterious and elusive stranger who is nominally their immediate superior in the company and who arranges the details of the murder contracts the two men routinely negotiate: "We've been through our tests, . . . right through our tests, years ago. . . . We took them together. . . . We're proved ourselves before now. . . . We've always done our job" (DW, 118).[11] Nevertheless, again like Rose, the two protagonists of The Dumb Waiter almost compulsively seek to verify that what they assume about their situation is true--to verify, that is, that they alone exercise control within the well defined boundaries and precincts of their cloistered hideout. Finally, however, Ben and Gus end--as Rose does also--deprived of their illusion that they are in control of what happens within their known, familiar world.

As in The Room, the assault in The Dumb Waiter on the protagonists' psychic security occurs in a gradually building crescendo. Near the outset of the dramatic action, Gus's abortive efforts to flush the offstage lavatory terminate frighteningly if humorously ten minutes later when the lavatory flushes spontaneously in defiance of the laws of cause and effect. Subsequently an envelope containing matches is mysteriously slid under the door to the room as though in illogical reply to Gus and Ben's yet unstated desire to light the gas stove in the basement room and make a cup of tea.

Still later the kitchen dumb waiter discovered opening into the room begins to arrive with humorously mysterious messages demanding increasingly complicated and exotic orders of food--Macaroni Pastitsio, Ormitha Macarounada, Scampi, to name a few. Initially the two men attempt to fill the ridiculous orders, but finally they have sent all their meagre food supply up the dumb waiter, and in Ben's deferentially spoken words, physically and emotionally "haven't got anything left" (DW, 111).[12] Shortly thereafter Ben receives information through the dumb waiter speaking-tube that their victim "has arrived and will be coming in straight away" (DW, 120). Ultimately the curtain falls on Ben confronting the victim Gus who, stripped of his upper clothes and his revolver, is thrust back into the room by some unrevealed outside force after having exited excited moments earlier to get a drink of water.

As such a summary implies, the outside menace in The Dumb Waiter is at once conceptually more sophisticated and incongruously more humorous than it is in The Room. In the astute words of J. W. Lambert, "on the one hand [in the play] open abysses of bottomless inanity, on the other loom the fearful ways of an irrational, implacable cruelty."[13] What has happened is that Pinter has exploited a convention established in The Room by refusing to reveal to the audience the specific nature of a threat upon an individual. He consciously toys with the audience's desire for verification, teasing them to the brink of understanding only to disappoint them intentionally by way of advising them that man's instinctive drive for clarification, given the nature of the human condition, will always be disappointed. Thus for instance Ben (DW, 93) argues both that he was and was not present at a soccer game he is discussing with Gus, a contradiction never reconciled by

Pinter in the play. Throughout, similar unrationalized incongruities threaten the audience--as likewise Ben and Gus also are threatened--with respect to the questions of who is operating the dumb waiter; what in particular Wilson has in mind for Ben and Gus on their present assignment, and why; and who precisely their victim will be. No unequivocal answers are forthcoming; neither Ben nor the audience learns who is manipulating the two hired murderers or why Gus meets the fate he does. Thus to a degree unexceeded in Pinter's early drama, menace in The Dumb Waiter remains physically aloof and unconfronted, a fact which no doubt explains why this play is the one most frequently cited by critics attempting to establish a link between Pinter and Kafka (who, along with Beckett--in Pinter's own words--"stayed with me the most" of all the authors Pinter read before he began writing drama).[14]

The Dumb Waiter, then, represents a technical refinement of the conflict situation in The Room, a situation which pits a protagonist inside a secure environment against a mysterious unspecified menace threatening him from without. What distinguishes the later from the earlier play, on the other hand, is the manner in which Pinter demarcates the response of The Dumb Waiter's two protagonists to the outside menace, thereby creating an additional internal conflict which is essentially lacking in The Room. This conflict within the secure environment itself is obvious in the more or less humorously antithetical personalities of Ben and Gus. Ben abhors conversation, Gus abhors silence; Ben is accepting, Gus questioning; Ben assumes that everything in their present operation is proceeding normally, Gus fears that Wilson is not treating

them according to their customary expectations. The antithesis is also evident in the petty arguments the two men engage in, for instance in the humorous yet heatedly aggravated discussion between Ben and Gus about whether one properly says "light the kettle" or "light the gas" (DW, 97-99).

Such a conflict, developed throughout the play, comes to a head during the denouement which leaves both Ben and Gus victims of the outside menace their similar fear of which is reflected in the only nominally diverse responses of the two men to the mysterious activities going on outside and impacting upon the safe environment of their room. "Why did he send us matches if he knew there was no gas?" Gus asks Ben about Wilson. "Who sent us those matches? . . . Who is it upstairs? . . . What's he doing all this for? What's the idea? What's he playing these games for?" (DW, 117-118). So formidable is the threat of such inquiries that Ben hits Gus "viciously on the shoulder" and silences him "savagely." He will brook no challenge from Gus that everything around them is less than known and familiar. Nevertheless the conclusion of the play effects what amounts to a resolution of the conflict between the two men. Ben's illusion of living in a familiar world is shattered while Gus's deepest fears about the world's unpredictability are likewise confirmed. Before the curtain, during a period of typically pinteresque "long silence," the two men "stare at each other" in sudden recognition of the fact that each represents to the other precisely what the outside menace also threatens them with--the strangeness and unknowableness of everything outside oneself.

A similar interest in both internal and external menace likewise characterizes Pinter's first full-length play, The Birthday Party (1957). Like Rose on the one hand and Gus and Ben on the other, Stanley--in his "safe" retreat of a seaside town boarding house--is intimidated by an outside force threatening the security of his position as adopted son of his pseudo-parents Meg and Petey. Goldberg and McCann, the outside intruders, arrive to dispossess Stanley of his physical and emotional security much as Riley's appearance in The Room dispossesses Rose. In a situation which foreshadows sexual combat in general in Pinter's succeeding plays--and in particular masculine rivalry for the female trophy in plays like The Homecoming or The Basement--Goldberg, assisted by McCann, systematically deprives Stanley first of Meg's motherly love and then of the affection of the substitute lover Lulu, finally leading him mute and physically shattered from Meg and Petey's protection to whatever eventuality awaits him.

What distinguishes the external conflict in The Birthday Party from similar conflict in The Room is that the other principals occupying the boarding house in The Birthday Party are brought somewhat more fully into the play's psychic conflict. At the end of The Birthday Party, both Meg and Petey make an effort to recapture the security Stanley represents to them which Goldberg and McCann inexplicably are depriving them of. Petey succumbs to Goldberg's "insidious" suggestion that he too may be forced to join Stanley in the mysterious trip: "Why don't you come with us, Mr. Boles? . . . Come with us to Monty. There's plenty of room in the car? (BDP, 90);[15] while Meg, fearful (BDP, 71) that the men with the

wheelbarrow which Stanley earlier alluded to (BDP, 24) have come to get her, conveniently disappears behind the illusion that the birthday celebration for Stanley was not the walpurgis nacht one critic calls it[16] but instead a "lovely party" at which she was "the belle of the ball" (BDP, 91).

Similarly, what distinguishes the external conflict in The Birthday Party from that in The Dumb Waiter is the degree to which the outside menace is made to seem more plausible and realistic. Goldberg and McCann are not unvisualized mysterious forces pulling cords on dumb waiters or enigmatically sliding envelopes under doors, but flesh and blood people who interact frighteningly yet believably with the characters they menace. "What Stanley says about his concert is based on fact," Pinter reminds us, "and, for my money, Goldberg and McCann have come down to get Stanley"[17] -- an assertion which apparently insists upon the aristotelian "probableness" of the dramatic action in The Birthday Party and which therefore mitigates to a degree against allegorical interpretations such as the one viewing the play as a parable of the isolated artist--Stanley the piano player--resisting society's "straight jacket of cliches"--McCann and Goldberg verbally intimidating Stanley (e.g. BDP, 50-55, 86-89).[18]

What speaks so convincingly against such an easy allegorizing of the play is the fact that Goldberg and McCann emphatically are not the monochromatic forces that their counterparts are in The Dumb Waiter. They are not one-dimensional characters and consequently not particularly apt symbols of the ostensibly monolithic conforming forces of society. Rather they are menaced as well as

menacers, threatened as well as agents of threat; and though the sea-saw struggle between Stanley and the Boles on the one hand and Goldberg and McCann on the other, finally swings down on the side of Goldberg and McCann, such a resolution to the external conflict does not occur without first occasioning a concomitant internal conflict. Thus for instance Goldberg and McCann, like Gus and Ben in The Dumb Waiter, evidence insecurity about their ability to define and cope with the task they apparently have been assigned to undertake.

Like Gus, McCann is initially extremely nervous, impatiently querying Goldberg about whether or not they have come to the right house and in general exhibiting conduct which leads to Goldberg's observation that "before you do a job you're all over the place" (BDP, 31). McCann's reply--"I'm just all right once I know what I'm doing. When I know what I'm doing, I'm all right" (BDP, 31)--betrays his insecurity and the concomitant desire for clarity and verification which is typical of almost all Pinter's characters. Goldberg subsequently calms McCann, but his efforts in this direction reveal his own disquietude. Like Ben in The Dumb Waiter, he as well as McCann is struggling to preserve the illusion that intellectually and physically he can master whatever situation he must confront in dealing with Stanley. Thus Goldberg's incongruous speeches to McCann--about how his Uncle Barney taught him to relax in a stress situation (BDP, 29), for instance; or about his respectability as a family man (BDP, 30)--are attempts to project a facade of calm and mastery. They are best understood, that is, as verbal smoke screens hiding Goldberg's own fear of the unknown in the situation he and

McCann have walked into. Such fear is likewise evident in Goldberg's manifestation, throughout the play, of a peculiar conduct which amusingly amalgamates calm and hysteria--for instance in the evasive speeches in which he contradicts himself about what his name is (BDP, 56, 79). Employing screening tactics to hide such hysteria from himself as well as from others, Goldberg remains only superficially in control. Finally he breaks down completely in his attempt to reassure himself that the world makes sense (BDP, 80-81) before ultimately rallying and winning the struggle with Stanley and the Boles for psychic supremacy, whereby he preserves his illusion that the world is logical and comprehensible.

Thus The Birthday Party, in a much different way than The Dumb Waiter, presents menacers as menaced themselves. Goldberg and McCann, initially outside menaces like Riley or like the forces manipulating the dumb waiter, are themselves ultimately brought unprotected into the secure environment occupied by Stanley and the Boles. There they must struggle at length and with very real if muted fierceness before they emerge victorious. Their illusion of mastery is established and preserved only through the destruction of Stanley's analogous but mutually exclusive sense of security. Only one side can win--or more precisely pretend to itself that it has won--such a psychic war; and so Goldberg and McCann must defeat or be defeated, dispossess Stanley or be themselves dispossessed. Thus The Birthday Party, unlike either The Room or The Dumb Waiter, depicts its combatants as being on somewhat equal terms. And in this sense at least the play looks directly toward The Caretaker, where conflict between forces respectively inside and outside a room

is replaced by an internal conflict in which each of three individuals vies to preserve his illusion of self-control by destroying the similar yet contradictory illusions of his antagonists.

The Caretaker (1960), then, is Pinter's first play to deal with a situation where menace exists principally within a room rather than entering it from without. Indeed Davies, in one respect at least an analogue of characters such as Riley or Goldberg and McCann--since he, like them, intrudes upon the sanctity of a guarded room--ultimately becomes the victim of metaphysical uncertainty rather than the harbinger of it as the earlier intruders had been. This contrast in itself reflects Pinter's modified manner of dealing with conflict as he develops as dramatist from The Room to The Caretaker. Moreover, Davies himself challenges the security of Aston and Mick, as he likewise is challenged by then, so that the play's conflict situation in fact involves a continually shifting ménage à trois where two people tacitly attempt to join league against a third and where "the game" Davies alludes to (C, 29)[19] might therefore aptly be called "odd man out." In Pinter's own words, the play dramatizes a situation in which on the one hand "there's an enormous amount of internal conflict within one of the characters"--Davies, "who is work shy, . . . doesn't want the job [as caretaker], but at the same time wants . . . to edge around it"; and on the other hand an "external conflict between [the three] of them"--Aston, Mick, and Davies.[20] As usual in Pinter's drama, the resolution of such conflict involves the utter and complete emotional dispossession of one of the combatants, as is evidenced by Davies' pathetic breakdown at the end of the play.

As Pinter sees it, then, The Caretaker is a play about an intimate relationship--more precisely perhaps about the failure of an intimate relationship--between three lonely, fearful people: "Well, it's about love . . . about this house . . . these people."[21] The human need for support from others--what Pinter correctly terms "love"--manifested alike by each of the three characters in the play, suggests man's desire for reinforcement in maintaining his illusions about successfully controlling and manipulating his relationship to the world. Thus, presumably, Aston invites Davies into his flat and asks him to stay on and be caretaker somehow to reinforce his own abortive dream of taking control over himself and his environment--of "doing up the upper part of the house" (C, 40), as he puts it. Davies in turn obviously needs the security of such an arrangement to deliver him from manipulation by the world at large, though just as clearly his wariness in committing himself to such a project betrays an instinctive fear of being used by Aston, whose behavior Davies--astutely as it so happens--is reluctant to count on as rational and predictable.

Mick for his part apparently finds the improbable friendship between Aston and Davies threatening to his own vaguely defined though obviously well-established relationship with Aston. Thus he seeks to destroy this relationship and alternately to find a secure place within it. In pursuit of the former goal, Aston terrorizes Davies both verbally and physically: at one point he attacks Davies partially unclothed and thus humorously defenseless (C, 29); at another he menaces him with a vacuum cleaner under the guise of doing spring cleaning in the winter darkness (C, 45). In pursuit of the latter

goal, by contrast, Aston cojoles and flatters Davies with offers of joining league with him against Aston, whom Davies more and more presumes to be untrustworthy after Aston's long speech about the mental hospital (C, 54-57) and his ensuing mysterious silence of several weeks' duration (see C, 61-63). Mick ultimately turns such overtures into a ploy, however. In a long speech (C, 35) he threatens Davies with a complicated financial arrange wholly implausible from Davies' point of view; later offers him the job as caretaker when Mick himself takes over the flat from Aston (C, 49-50) only to renege on the offer when he accuses Davies of legally voiding the contract by having falsely represented himself as an interior decorator (C, 71-73). When Mick ultimately tells Davies he has decided after all to leave the apartment in his brother's hands, Davies is utterly defeated. He tries unsuccessfully to make up his relationship with Aston, whom he earlier had attempted to dismiss from the flat. When the effort fails, he ends up rejected and summarily dismissed himself.

One plausible reading of the play sees the mysterious brothers thus demonically in league against Davies, whom they invite into their abode intentionally to victimize.[22] Such a view, which in a sense reverses the conflict situation in Pinter's earlier drama--where the room is a place of safety rather than an arena of peril, and where the intruder is menacer rather than victim--is in part supported by the scene where Mick and Aston, ordinarily uncommunicative when they are never more than briefly on stage together, "look at each other . . . smiling faintly" (C, 75) as though in silent conspiracy against Davies. Moreover, Pinter's own dream

about the two brothers working together against him[23] suggests that, on occasion at least, he considered Mick and Aston as consciously in league with one another. Yet the mutually supporting relationship ultimately reestablished between the two brothers is in fact precisely that relationship which Davies likewise seeks alternately to establish first with one brother and then with the other; so that primarily, perhaps, the fact that Pinter avoids putting the two brothers on stage together for any length of time is what makes possible the unverifiable assumption that they are conspiratorily united against Davies from the start.

A somewhat more balanced view of the play would see each of the three men alike fighting mutely but fiercely to bring a second man on his side against the third in order to support and reinforce his efforts to exert control over the room. To accomplish this each man attempts to manipulate the others without himself being similarly manipulated. As we have seen previously, such efforts are most evident in the stories told by each character--stories which use language both defensively and offensively in an effort to manipulate another person by deceiving him while appearing to confide in and reveal oneself to him. Davies for instance relates wholly improbable stories about his papers at Sidcup and about his trip to the monastery to obtain shoes (C, 14-16) in order to establish his respectability and personal efficacy in Aston's eyes. Mick tells Davies about his far-fetched business plans for the apartment to make Davies respect and trust him. Aston relates his experiences in an asylum in an attempt, perhaps, to make himself appear defenseless and thereby gain Davies' trust. None of these stories can in fact be credited,

of course. Mick's speeches are patent deceptions, while Davies is, by all odds, an uncommon if partly unconscious equivocator. Even Aston's story, as Pinter points out, may not be creditable except when seen as language used as a stratagem: "it isn't necessary to conclude that everything Aston says about his experiences in the mental hospital is true."[24] Of course, such efforts to manipulate someone and thus elicit his trust do not invariably succeed. For instance, Aston's story alienates rather than seduces Davies, leading paradoxically to Davies' committment to Mick and ultimately to his downfall.

Thus the language of each of the three men--as always in Pinter--is best understood as a reflection of his basic insecurity in facing the other two, always unpredictable adversaries. In The Caretaker, as in later plays, Pinter shows individuals as it were "taking care" to protect themselves against others by forming alliances of two where each partner agrees to support the other against a third. In such alliances, both partners--to a lesser or greater extent--are careful not to disturb each other's illusions about the control they exert together over their situation. The play ends, then, with just such an arrangement renewed between the two brothers after it has been violated earlier when Aston, for reasons never made clear, invited Davies into the room and persuaded him to stay on. The play's action shows this arrangement in the process of being threatened, and though Davies' bid for security--his attempt to displace one of the two brothers in the other's favor--at last fails, the brothers no less than he are severely threatened by the knowledge that their ordered world, the very world Davies seeks entry into, can be destroyed by an intrusion of the unknown into their controlled precincts.

II

The conflict situation in The Caretaker--internal in that it pits people inside a room against each other rather than against an outside menace--is typically found in Pinter's succeeding plays, most of which are characterized by intimate combat situations where characters threaten each other sexually. Interestingly, in two plays--A Night Out (1960) and Night School (1960)--Pinter flirts more than briefly with the possibility of assigning plausible psychological motives to a person's only nominally baffling behavior, before returning once again--first in The Lover (1963) and then in The Homecoming (1965)--to drama which implies that personality is at last only an irrational. The direction of this transition is already clear in A Slight Ache (1959), a radio drama subsequently adapted for the stage which precedes The Caretaker and which in its dual focus looks from the earlier works toward that play on the one hand, and on the other toward both A Night Out and Night School.

One way of seeing A Slight Ache is in terms of earlier drama such as The Room or The Birthday Party. In this view, the matchseller is the by now familiar outside menace whose inscrutable silence--recalling that of Kullus in "The Examination"--first baffles and then triumphs completely over Edward, demonically depriving him of both wife and abode and finally leaving him physically and psychically destroyed. The triumph from this perspective is consummated because Edward's compulsive attempts to assess the matchseller's identity and determine the motive for his oddly inert behavior are doomed--as are the similar attempts of earlier Pinter

protagonists--to inevitable defeat. Structurally this outcome suggests the act of soul possession--as Edward breaks down physically as well as emotionally, the matchseller becomes increasingly more virile, "younger . . . extraordinarily . . . youthful" (SA, 39),[25] And though no logical explanation for such a magical substitution is attempted by the play, clearly Edward has been replaced in Flora's life by the pathetic tramp from the outside: as the play ends she lovingly leads the matchseller by the hand into the interior of the house, now his, after first handing Edward the tray of matches in an action signifying the usurpation of Edward's identity and domain by the enigmatic intruder (SA, 40).

Thus in one sense A Slight Ache structurally resembles Pinter's earlier plays where a mysterious outsider arrives to threaten and defeat the occupant of an ostensibly secure have. In another light, however, the play can be read as a psychodrama depicting a man's struggle with and capitulation to his sexual inadequacies, personified in the quietly demanding figure of his wife. Such a view conceives Flora, whose name ironically suggests fertility, as a sexually frustrated and unfulfilled woman who seeks in the match-seller a surrogate husband and son, neither of which Edward has satisfactorily provided her with. She ludicrously yet significantly identifies the matchseller as sexually potent--a "bullock" (SA, 17, 19; cf. also 26); later equates him with a poacher whom she pleasurably imagines ravished her when as a young woman she rode through the countryside on horseback (SA, 30-31); finally proposes sensuously to put him in a bathtub and give him a "lovely lathery scrub . . . a good whacking great bath" (SA, 32-33), a

fantasy which explicitly suggests her identification of the matchseller as both lover and incestuously desired son.

Edward in this view is seen as a sexually inadequate male in the process of overtly discovering and externalizing his feared shortcomings. Once, as he says, his "grasp [was] firm, [his] command established, [his] life accounted for": "my progress was fluent, after my long struggling against all kinds of usurpers, disreputables, lists, literally lists of people anxious to do me down. . . I was number one sprinter at Howelles . . . licked men twice my strength" (SA, 37-39). Now, however, his straining masculinity is summarized in actions such as his sadistically drowning a wasp in boiling water (SA, 11-12) or ridiculously intimidating the silent old matchseller, who in such a reading is best understood as an externalization of the inner psychic doubts and fears which lead to Edward's ultimate breakdown. (In the radion version, the matchseller remains unperceived by the audience and thus easily accepted as a figment of Edward's masochistic and Flora's sadistic imagination.)

While both views of the play see it as a bridge between the early drama and The Caretaker, it is the latter reading which understands it as similar to the later play in the sense at least that both plays involve a struggle for supremacy waged between intimate occupants of a room. As Mick and Aston subdue Davies, so Flora triumphs over her physically and sexually impotent husband. It is precisely the fact that Flora's actions are explicable in terms of her perhaps unconscious desire for revenge on her husband's sexual inadequacies that sets the play apart from The Caretaker

however. Whereas Aston, Mick, and Davies remain inscrutable except in the sense that each is psychically insecure and therefore fearful and defensive toward the unknown others, both Flora and Edward can be understood by the audience as motivated by unconscious sexual desires and fears. To an extent, of course, this aspect of the play is accented because both characters are atypically self-conscious--because both speak, that is, in a language which for once in Pinter's drama is introspective and self-analytical. Nevertheless, such clarity in character revelation is uncommon in Pinter's drama, and A Slight Ache remains one of the few Pinter plays of which it cannot be accurately said that the principal characters remain virtually as mysterious to the audience as they do to each other.

Another such work is A Night Out (1960), a radio play written before The Caretaker and subsequently adapted for the stage. As in The Caretaker, the conflict situation in A Night Out involves menace internal to rather than external to a room. Nevertheless the play is distinct from The Caretaker in the sense that, as in the case of Edward in A Slight Ache, an uncharacteristic clarity similarly surrounds the motives behind the actions of Albert, its protagonist. Hounded mercilessly by an overbearing mother and taunted by his business associates about his mediocre performance in an inter-business soccer match, the ordinarily meek Albert is pushed to the brink of violent reaction by the unfair accusations of a young secretary who claims he has molested her at an office party. To be sure, the motives of Ryan, who actually--as the TV version of the play reveals (NO, 27) [26] --put his hand on Eileen's

knee, remain hazy; though one can assume that Ryan's willingness to cast suspicion on Albert is merely another act in a string of intentional antagonisms perpetrated by his peers on a man who, to borrow Willy Loman's favorite phrase, is not well liked. However Albert's responses, in contrast to Ryan's, are imminently well described by conventional notions about depth psychology. Albert's actions toward his mother after he leaves the party, as well as his later behavior with the street-walker, depict a clear transference of his animosity which has come to a head as a result of his embarrassment at the party on his night out. In particular, his behavior toward the street-walker in her apartment constitutes a rebuilding of his demolished ego at the expense of a peripherally involved third party. In this sense Albert's battle with the prostitute is a reenactment of his earlier struggle with Ryan, Eileen, and the others. What he loses in the way of psychological safety and advantage in the first encounter, he largely recoups in the second.

It is of course the somewhat bizarre actions of the girl which catalyze Albert's revitalization in the next to last scene in the play. Inadvertently perhaps, and certainly uncharacteristically from the point of view of her nominal identity as a prostitute, the street-walker assumes a role similar to that of Albert's mother. When her amusingly petty demands--not to light the heater with a cigarette lighter; not to sit on a needlework stool; not to cough without a handkerchief; not to drop a cigarette on the carpet; and so on (NO, 34-42)--finally become intolerable, Albert threatens to

strike her with a clock, even as he previously had threatened his carping mother with the same punishment. As he graudally becomes more aggressive, the girl becomes more subdued, until their relative positions are completely reversed. Shortly before Albert departs he is in complete psychological control and the girl is painfully feeling her way past overt and muted threats which are the counterparts of the earlier demands she has made on Albert.

Indeed in this sense the whole scene is quintessentially Pinteresque, depicting as it does two characters vying for psychological ascendancy and for the security which it represents. Albert ultimately becomes the type of the aggressive film director he pretends to be, while the girl is reduced psychologically to the stature of the pictured child who ironically she in fact is. Thus an exchange which begins with the street-walker in the role of a cruel mother harrassing a little boy, ends ironically enough with the elevation of the boy to masculine punisher and with the diminution of the mother to the stature of little girl. The scene is all the more disconcerting because no explanation is tendered for the street-walker's mysterious behavior. The distinct possiblity that she may be for instance a "respectable married woman" stepping out on her husband (NO, 39) is never credited. In any event, while she initially behaves in the apartment in a manner most improbable for a woman of her profession--this aspect of the scene perhaps most clearly underscores Pinter's belief that personality is an irrational--her character gradually becomes more and more creditable, largely because Pinter is able to stress the humorous and yet mystifying incongruity of inane small talk without allowing its

"realistic" aspect to become diminished. Thus the street-walker's subsequent reduction to a role of fear is made to seem virtually a theft of her life. In the end, when her peckish vitality has been usurped, it is as if she has literally been destroyed.

On the other hand Albert's character is not ultimately mysterious as the girl's is. It is only from the street-walker's point of view that his sudden aggressiveness, his explosive expansion to more formidable psychological proportions, is as unpredictable and inexplicable as it is frightening. The audience, by contrast, sees the scene in terms of the whole play and finds Albert's conduct far less baffling than does the girl. His aggressiveness with the girl is understood to be a logical result of all that preceded it during his night out. The audience cannot, however, satisfactorily rationalize the behavior of the street-walker, cannot that is make verifiable assumptions about her unusual behavior except to suppose that it is unsuccessfully defensive. It is in fact this scene alone in the entire play that deals even superficially with personality--specifically with the girl's personality--as elusive and irrational. Otherwise, Pinter's remark about Night School could apply as well to this play also: "I was slipping into a formula. . . . The words and ideas had become automatic, redundant."[27]

Pinter's objection in such a statement would appear to be two-fold. First, he is perhaps discrediting a tendency to conceal motivation arbitrarily in order to invest a personality artifically with mystery, as in the characterization of the street-walker. Second, he is certainly rejecting the development of character along lines which

imply that personality is a discrete rather than an irrational, as in the case of Albert. Both objections--as Pinter's remark suggests they would--apply even more accurately to Night School (1960, rev. 1966), the last play where Pinter deals with personality and motive as specifiables. Here again an internal struggle is waged by two characters for possession and control of a room, which as always in Pinter represents security and protection. Walter employs innuendo in his attempts to repossess the room from Sally, who has moved into it while he is absent, ostensibly serving a prison sentence for petty forgery. At one point, an obviously rhetorical question adds a new dimension to his apparently friendly overtures toward her: "You're not frightened of me now you know I'm a gunman, are you?" Subsequently he bombards her in typically Pinteresque fashion with improbable stories of his ghoulish activities digging up tombs to recover rare manuscripts buried with the bodies. Quite obliquely, he threatens her with drowning or cremation. Later he claims to be a triple bigamist on the lookout for yet another wife (NS, 73-75).[28] Ultimately Sally is driven to admit that she is considering moving out of Wally's room and away from the house.

In such transactions, Sally clearly is stunned by the barrage of incongruity set up by Walter's claims about himself. His previous reticence and unpretentiousness make his aggressive conduct all the more mysterious and alarming, and it is precisely the improbability of the picture Wally's behavior construes that makes him, in Sally's eyes at least, enigmatic and consequently frightening.

By the same token, it is a similar mysteriousness about Sally that later threatens and pierces Walter's attempt to prevent her continuing to occupy the room. After Walter discovers evidence in a photograph that Sally may not in fact be a teacher attending night school--that she may indeed be a hostess at an off-beat nightclub--he appears to find her perceptibly more menacing than she previously has been. When Walter tries to turn the incongruity to his own advantage by using the photo as evidence to intimidate her into moving out of the room, the plan in part backfires. To reestablish his advantage, Walter subsequently requests his friend Solto to visit the nightclub and find the girl in the picture, but when Solto locates her she denies knowing Walter. Reluctantly she agrees to take a seaside vacation with Solto rather than with Walter, an arrangement she apparently makes to prevent Solto from revealing her identity to Walter. Subsequently Solto falsely--as the audience realizes--advises Walter that he has been unable to locate the girl in the picture, and Walter's attack on the usurper of his room temporarily collapses.

The struggle over the room between Walter and Sally now almost totally gives way to Solto and Walter's battling for possession of the girl herself. Yet the designs of both men are confuted by the fact of Sally's unobtrusive departure from the boarding house. What remains--a second photo which clearly suggests that Sally after all is a school teacher--constitutes an obscure but potent threat to both men, neither of whom now knows what the girl's true identity really is. Both Solto and Walter are thus

paid off in kind for having intimidated the girl; and Solto's words, echoing a new and foreboding sense, return to haunt the two: "There's no one to know. You've never seen her. I've never seen her. There's no one to see. . . . All the same, look, the girl's there. That's the photo of someone" (NS, 86). Thus the play ends on a note whose effect is to shatter the assumptions of two of its principals. To the extent that Sally remains undefined and hence mysterious, she stalemates if not indeed triumphs over Walter and Solto, despite the fact that at the end of the play Walter has the room which Sally also had wanted.

In a more or less typical fashion, then, the conflict in Night School unsheathes the incongruities of personality which Pinter's stage figures in general use to triumph over their adversaries or hold them at bay. Yet the play differs markedly from the bulk of Pinter's drama in that the motives, and therefore in a sense the identities, of the various characters in Night School do not ultimately resist the audience's analysis, even though these same identities remain mysterious to the eyes of the on-stage adversaries. While the characters in large part baffle each other, that is, they do not particularly confound the people sitting in the auditorium watching them. Walter wants both Sally and the room; thus he is finally willing to forsake the woman without undue concern because he profits from the act of taking possession once again of his usurped domain. Similarly, Sally is not an enigmatic figure. Though Walter cannot himself reconcile the conflicting aspects of Sally's appearance--she remains to him both appealing and menacing, a confusing mixture of vestal and whore--the audience

is perfectly willing to accept her as a woman who wishes to conceal her actual unsavory identity as night-club hostess behind the quasi-respectability of a room in a lower middle class boarding house. She is, after all, explicitly shown to the audience--though not to Walter--working in a night-club. Moreover, the audience supposesthat Solto lies to Walter about finding Sally in the night club for no better reason than the fact that he wants for himself the sexual satisfaction which the girl potentially could afford either man. That all these statements seem logical, even plausible, indeed even likely, indicates the extent to which the play departs from Pinter's established norm by presenting personality as a rationally explicable entity.

In The Lover (1963), by contrast, Pinter returns to a situation of quintessential mysteriousness from the audience's point of view, contrary readings of the play notwithstanding.[29] As well as any work by Pinter, the play employs the one-against-one internal conflict situation to illustrate the bafflement and confusion that, in Pinter's view, must attend any attempt to rationalize even the least complex of personalities. Only in the most simplistic, least interesting sense does The Lover depict a situation where a staid middle-class couple, married ten years, agree to play the roles of lover and mistress to one another in order to revitalize their conjugal relationship. To be sure, The Lover leaves no doubt that Richard the husband and Max the lover are physically the same man; for although the two men dress and act differently, and are called by different names in the text of the play, Pinter directs both roles to be played by the same actor (L, 4, 19).[30] Similarly Sarah, in her twin roles as wife and mistress, is physically but one woman

despite the fact that she sheds her everyday household clothing and dons a suggestive, low cut dress and high heel shoes whenever Richard metamorphoses into Max. A less cursory description of their personalities and examination of the relationship existing between this ususual couple reveals, however, that the paired roles they actually play to one another are by no means as clearly defined as they superficially appear to be. Indeed, these roles are so arbitrary and ambiguous that the identities of the two characters who play them must be called into question and ultimately conceded to be indistinct and mysterious.

For instance when Max arrives to visit Sarah for the first time in the play, he only appears to assume a role which--according to a mutual prearrangement, we understand--complements that played by Sarah. First he is a molester threatening her; she feigns fear. Subsequently he is the park-keeper who rescues her from danger; she is gracious. Finally he becomes threatening once more, making increasingly grave demands and mysteriously calling Sarah by the names Delores and Mary. Overwhelmed emotionally and then physically, she sinks beneath the table where she makes love to Max (L, 20-23). Thus far, to be sure, the couple's act may plausibly be understood as proceeding according to play. Indeed, Max's declaration, "It's teatime" (L, 23), is as we later understand the couple's preagreed signal that the sexual act is now to be consummated. After the seduction, however, the play between Max and Sarah unpredictably begins to deviate from their ostensibly prepared script. Max questions Sarah about her husband's feelings toward her affair. He claims that he himself feels emotionally unable to go on deceiving

his wife with another woman. Finally he threatens to speak personally with Sarah's husband.

The mood of the entire performance strongly suggests that Max has ominously and mysteriously slipped out of his prepared character. Sarah is reduced to the quiet desperation of an actress left without a suitable retort to an ad libbed repartee. Her response reveals the depth of her plight: "Stop it! What's the matter with you? What's happened to you? (Quietly.) Please, please, stop it. What are you doing, playing a game?" When Sarah subsequently tries to force the play back into its prearranged routine, Max is recalcitrant. "I want to whisper something to you," Sarah pleads. "Listen. . . . Earlier it was teatime . . . Now it's whispering time. . . . You like me to whisper to you. You like me to love you, whispering." But Max ridicules Sarah for being too bony, claiming that this is what he finds most intolerable about the affair, despite Sarah's protest that she in fact is actually quite plump. The scene concludes with Max in complete though apparently unrehearsed control. At least one cannot discern satisfactorily which aspects of his act are rehearsed and which ad libbed. To Sarah's accusation that he is "having a joke," he replies, "It's no joke," and exits abruptly. The lights fade down on Sarah seated dejectedly on the foot of her bed (L, 27-29).

The effect of such an exchange is to confuse Sarah precisely in the manner that the entire scene has confused the audience. At whatever real yet unspecifiable point Max's actions become unrehearsed and unpredictable, Sarah is challenged by the threat of a mysterious behavior which she fears because she is unable to comprehend it, unable to explain precisely what is happening to her and why.

Similarly the audience finds Max and Sarah's behavior confusing and therefore threatening. The notion that Max and Sarah are playing voluntary roles of lover and mistress is implicitly contradicted by Max's patent refusal to play his part in a way which satisfies his spouse. The result is that the audience is driven back toward the state of confusion and intellectual chaos which existed at the outset of the play. Initially this confusion had existed over the question of why Richard was behaving as he was, why he was pretending to be the stranger calling himself Max. When an answer to this query seemed forthcoming, confusion again descended in the form of Max's refusal to act as the audience gradually assumes he is supposed to act. The genuineness of such confusion is intensified by Sarah's desperation, which justifies the judgment that Max's antagonism is unexpected. Such a state of intellectual limbo is preserved by the fact that insufficient evidence is advanced to conclude that Sarah is actually a masochist who enjoys being tortured and dominated sexually. Consequently, at the point that Sarah becomes threatened by Max's mysterious behavior, she becomes a focus of sympathy through which the audience feels its way--ultimately abortively--closer to a suitable explanation of and attitude toward Max's unpredictable actions.

What such an identification with Sarah specifically reveals is that the attempt to rationalize Max's behavior must end in failure. In a more general sense, the play implies that any effort to dispel the inherent irrationality of personality will ultimately be similarly defeated. For as Sarah stubbornly moves toward an unveiling of her husband's unpredictable behavior, she finds herself having to confess an inability to distinguish face from mask. When Richard

returns home that evening, his behavior remains enigmatic. His actions still reflect, amusingly and yet rather frighteningly, the antagonism which he had displayed--as Max--toward Sarah earlier in the afternoon. He berates his wife for her neglect of her domestic responsibilities, declaring that this neglect has resulted from her undue preoccupation with pleasing her lover. He forbids Sarah to meet Max at her house again, unsubtly threatening her with inspecific, unnamed horrors when he tells her henceforth to entertain him in a ditch, a slag heap, a rubbish dump, or a canoe adrift on a stagnant pond. He avows having broken off his liaison with his own mistress because she is too bony. Finally he calls Sarah an adulteress and ridicules her about the bongo drums which have for a number of years, as we understand, been part of the sexual play between Sarah and Max (L, 32-37). As earlier, Sarah's initial response is one of confusion and ensuing vague fear. She responds "with quiet anguish"--the stage direction tells us--to his interrogations about the drum: "You've no right to question me. No right at all. It was our arrangement. No questions of this kind. Please. Don't, don't. It was our arrangement" (L, 37).

The invalidity of such "arrangements"--in loving or in viewing the world--is precisely what the play underscores. Sarah's discomfort reflects her psychic dislocation resulting from the unpredictable and hence menacing behavior of the man who hitherto has ostensibly been at the psychological dead center of her well-ordered if unorthodox marital situation. In contrast with her behavior in the afternoon, however, this time Sarah strikes back

at Richard in kind. Moving swiftly away from Richard, she turns abruptly and "hisses"--as Pinter directs--to her husband an ostensible truth about her relationship with her lover Max: "Do you think he's the only one I entertain? Mmmnnn? Don't be silly. I have other visitors, other visitors, all the time, I receive all the time. Other afternoons, all the time. When neither of you know, neither of you. I give them strawberries in season. With cream. Strangers, total strangers. But not to me, not while they're here. They come to see the hollyhocks. And then they stay for tea. Always. Always" (L, 37). This speech's devestating effect on Richard is instantaneous. He immediately lapses again into the lovers' ritual of old, played now by husband and wife in the evening rather than by lover and mistress in the afternoon. Sarah is once again accepted as a satisfactory sexual partner. The curtain falls on the couple kneeling next to one another on the floor, rehearsing yet another prelude to sexual intercourse.

Lest the audience too facilely conclude, however, that Richard's unusual behavior has been a stratagem aimed at such a conclusion, that he has thus subtly engineered a change in the elaborate plan governing his rather bizarre love live, Pinter has constructed The Lover in such a way that the motives for the actions of Richard and Sarah ultimately cannot be stated so unequivocally. For to believe that Richard has finally achieved a desired new relationship with his wife, to believe that he has aroused in his evening companion a form of behavior previously characteristic of Sarah only in her afternoon role as mistress, we must be able to believe that Sarah's new role is in fact only a learned response to Richard's

modified behavior. We must be able to believe, that is, that her pretense of having entertained "other visitors" on "other afternoons"--giving them strawberries and cream and inviting them to tea (i.e. making love to them)--is just that, a pretense. We must be able to assume that she plays the evening role of femme fatale after finally and instinctively realizing that this is what Richard actually desires her to do, though for some reason he is hesitant to say it in so many words. Yet Pinter, by introducing briefly the character of the milkman John into the play, makes just this assumption unviable. For it is the milkman who makes Sarah precisely the kind of proposition she later claims to have accepted so many times from many man--and makes it in a way which seems to suggest both that he understands the code being spoken and that Sarah has not always been as unwilling as she is at the present moment to accept such an offer: "Cream? . . . Mrs. Owen just had three jars. Clotted. . . . Don't you fancy any cream. Mrs. Owen had three jars" (L, 18-19).

At the point where Sarah's claim to have had many lovers echoes the language of this scene and thereby gains in the audience's eyes a certain problematic validity which it otherwise could not have had, Sarah becomes unacceptable as an object of sympathy. Unsure of her motives, the audience likewise becomes unsure of her identity and thereby can no longer identify with her. The same statement is also true of the way in which the play facilitates an understanding of Richard. A multitude of possible, more or less equally probable explanations of Sarah's and Richard's behavior thus emerges. Perhaps Richard suspects Sarah and is trying to punish her, to trick her into confessing adultery. Perhaps he does not suspect her, but for

reasons never made clear is threatening her with his unpredictable behavior, only to be frightened back into his preestablished role by Sarah's own threatening because unpredictable behavior. Perhaps the whole play depicts an intensely elaborate sexual ritual whose limits and rules are not precisely established because constantly changing. The logical possibilities clearly are not well limited, and the audience is thus forced to admit that it lacks sufficient information logically to explain Sarah's and Richard's actions. Thus in The Lover character is once again ultimately mysterious, personality aloof and an irrational. The play implicitly dramatizes the idea that one can never gather sufficient information to discover precisely who another person is.

Ambiguous sexual identity is also the source of menace in The Homecoming (1965), a play in which conflict reflects a more complex working out of the each-man-for-himself struggle of The Caretaker. Though each character in The Homecoming attempts to align himself with one or more others, none is actually trusting enough of anyone else to form more than the tentative, arbitrary relationships with others which also characterize defensive human interaction in The Caretaker. Thus each character in The Homecoming--like Mick, Aston, and Davies in the earlier play--remains essentially isolated in his own fear of the unknowableness of others. For precisely this reason, the family of man depicted in the play is unsuccessful in opening lines of communication and love among its various members, a fact implicitly underscored both by Pinter's allusion to the family's "slightly desperate" behavior and by his more comprehensive description of the play as being "about love and

lack of love."[31]

The conflict dramatized in the play is created--perhaps it is more accurate to say that it becomes overt--when the long absent oldest brother of the family, Teddy, returns home for a visit accompanied by his wife, Ruth. The presence of the female Ruth in the house otherwise inhabited only by men provokes what one commentator has termed "the resentment of the male animal that he is born of woman and needs woman to create more people."[32] Ruth's arrival sounds a sympathetic vibration of the family's ambivalent need for and resentment of the deceased mother and wife, Jessie, former matriarch of the family whose inscrutable behavior before her death had terrorized and dominated her male attendants. Such inscrutability and dominance on Jessie's part is implied in a number of ways in the course of the play: for instance by the old-womanish authority with which her husband Max has assumed her role, evident in--among other things--his dutiful preparation of the meals for the family, his fretting with Sam when Sam threatens to be late for his job and thus compromise the family's financial livelihood (HC, 47),[33] and his claim to have given birth to three grown men (HC, 40); by Max's angry, jealous reference to his deceased wife's "rotten stinking face" (HC, 9) and his humorously equivocal equation of her with a prostitute (HC, 42); by Lenny's innuendo that Max may not in fact be his natural father (HC, 36), a threat implying Jessie's sexual autonomy and one explicitly reinforced by Sam's assertion that "MacGregor had Jessie in the back of my cab as I drove them along (HC, 78); by Lenny and Joe's overtly antagonistic attitude toward women, evidenced for example in the story they tell about forcefully abducting two

women parked in an urban lover's lane (HC, 66-68). Into such an environment charged with resentment against women, Ruth intrudes as subtly as a falling bombshell, evoking without specifically intending to do so a characteristic masculine love-hate ambivalence which she must deal with and defend herself against.

The play's male-female resentment and conflict is also evident in Teddy's subtle antagonism toward his wife, an attitude not at all atypical of the attitude toward women reflected in general by the men of his family. Pinter's assertion that Teddy and Ruth's was not "a happy marriage"[34] is reinforced from the outset of the play by the disparity between the desires and needs of Teddy and his wife. Ruth claims to be tired (HC, 20) and yet refuses to retire when Teddy offers to prepare her bed for her (HC, 22). Instead she decides to go for a late night walk against her husband's wishes. Teddy thereupon promises to wait up for her but neglects to do so (HC, 24-27), thereby forsaking her to the threatening interview with Lenny which she later is forced to endure alone. Moreover, this husband-wife conflict persists throughout the play, finally ending in a resolution which parallels the resolution of the broader conflict between man and woman in the play. Ruth, behaving as enigmatic woman, gains a temporary sexual ascendancy over her husband by overtly flirting seductively with his brothers; whereupon Teddy--in Pinter's words, to forestall "a messy fight . . . [which] this particular man would avoid"[35] --quitely disappears from the household and thus terminates his threat against his wife.

Thus the play from its beginning depicts a smouldering male-female antagonism between individuals in separate parts of the soon-

to-be reunited family. From the time the union transpires, each member strains to gain a psychological advantage by attempting to define and manipulate his adversaries while simultaneously appearing aloof and mysterious in their eyes. Commonly--as in The Caretaker, with the difference that in The Homecoming the subtle game is played not by three people gathered together two at a time but by six gathered into groups of varying numbers--a person will attempt to enlist another in his defense or to turn another's attack from himself to someone else. Thus the men attempt to unite in their common cause against the usurper Ruth on the one hand; while on the other Lenny, for example--threatened sexually by the unannounced arrival of his brother's wife--tries to turn Ruth's muted fury against Teddy by attacking his brothers competence as a Professor of Philosophy and thus discrediting him as a man in his wife's eyes (HC, 51-52).

Barring such possibilities--that is, if no third person is present--defensiveness in The Homecoming as elsewhere in Pinter is reflected in someone's attempt to turn an aggressor's threat back on the attacker. Thus when Ruth returns from her walk in Act I (HC, 30-33), she finds Lenny waiting to threaten her with stories implying his sexual dominance of women. Fighting fire with fire, and sensing no doubt Lenny's fear of her as female, she offers him sexual threat for sexual threat in an encounter which reaches a humorous though frightening climax with Ruth's literally offering to rape Lenny by pouring water down his throat and "taking" him on the floor. That is, by becoming woman as aggressor instead of woman as defender--which is what the women in Lenny's stories are--Ruth confuses Lenny about her sexual identity and, contraverting his expectations about her

response to him, temporarily gains the very sexual advantage over Lenny that he had striven to establish over her.

This typical kind of sexual combat continues in a similar vein to the end of the play. Lenny's confrontation with Ruth arouses all his suppressed familial fears of the mother figure as betrayer. In the heat of his first confrontation with Ruth, for example, Lenny cautions her threateningly not to call him by the name his mother gave him (HC, 33), thereby implicitly equating her with Jessie. Subsequently Lenny, by way of compensating his fears, attempts to transfer his discomfort of Ruth's female sexual ambiguity to his father Max. Lenny reminds Max that Jessie may have been unfaithful to him and that Max therefore may not be Lenny's father. The next morning Max similarly attempts to exorcise his own insecurity about women by threatening Ruth irrationally. He accuses her of being a diseased "filthy scrubber," the first "whore under[his] roof . . . since [Jessie] died" (HC, 42). His later reconciliation with her, moreover, is ultimately revealed as a ploy. Soon, temporarily joined with Lenny and the rest of the family in an attempt to minimize the menace of their female adversary, he devises a plan to make Ruth into the subservient prostitute he initially accused her of being.

Ruth in her own defense employs a series of chameleon-like stances to counter her being, in Pinter's words, "misinterpreted deliberately and used by this family" whose ambiguous actions reflect their need for yet defensive fear of her menacing because uncertain feminine love. Since, again according to Pinter, Ruth doesn't "want to go back to America with her husband," she must continue to deal

on their own terms with the men of her potential new family.[35] Initially in Act II, then, she is depicted as subservient to the men, serving them all coffee. Presumably this is a guise, however, Later she asserts her own prerogative when she intrudes into Lenny and Teddy's menacing conversation about metaphysics by calling attention to herself as sexual, therefore as needed and desirable presence: "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" (HC, 52-53).

Following through on such a ploy, Ruth indeed causes the men around her to misinterpret her. She teases them into accepting her merely as physical presence, then springs the trap by making demands which, acceded to by the family, finally leave her in a position of control over the men whose need of her she plays upon more than genuinely serves. At the end of the play she is--as Pinter has said--temporarily "in possession of a certain kind of freedom. She can do what she wants." That is, Pinter emphasizes, she has successfully manipulated her appearance to preserve the essential sexual mysteriousness which holds in abeyance kindred sexual threats levied against her by the men of the family. Yet her victory is no doubt ephemeral. Max--as Pinter also points out--"doesn't die. He's in fine form."[36] Thus he will, as seems likely, once again attempt to establish control over his house and family. Likewise, then, the struggle for territory[37] and for psychic sovereignty which characterizes the action of the play as a whole, will go on and on--as it always does in Pinter's drama--and continue to defeat all the efforts of the members of this most human family to transcend the mysteriousness

of the other and thus be united with him in love and mutual understanding.

III

In a very literal and intentional sense, the action dramatized in a typical Pinter play is incapable of being rationalized completely by its audience. Like Pinter's characters, it exists in excess of its ability to be understood. In The Homecoming, for instance, answers to crucial questions are not available. Why do Ruth and Teddy return for the strange visit? What precisely is the nature of the conflict being waged between Ruth and her new family. Is the amazingly consistent and elaborate defensiveness of the principals in this conflict conscious or unconscious? Of course, by leaving such questions and others like them unanswered, Pinter emphasizes the fact that the human need to know and to verify persists in the face of the impossibility of its satisfaction. All answers are arbitrary and capricious. Man cannot know unequivocally the meaning of what is external to his own consciousness. This is the entire force of the metaphysical threat exerted by Pinter's drama upon its audience as alike by its characters upon each other. The meaning of Pinter's drama, then, is simply that it can have no absolutely lucid meaning. It depicts mystery which remains--as it must--ultimately unresolved. Man like the world exists, and is therefore a threatening physical fact that must be dealt with and that can be dealt with only on a sensuous level. The keen desire for verification exerts exactly no leverage on the inscrutability with which the outside world impacts upon human consciousness.

While all of Pinter's plays underscore this inalienable point, several more explicitly than the rest intentionally threaten the audience with their perverse if artistically apt inscrutability. Such a work is The Dwarfs (1961), a radio play distilled from Pinter's early unpublished novel of the same title[38] and later rewritten for the stage. By Pinter's own admission an experimental work with a "mobile, flexible structure,"[39] The Dwarfs--as Pinter also says--is "a play about betrayal and distrust."[40] In intentionally cryptic fashion it chronicles "the breakup of the friendship, the alliance" between three intimate associates, Pete, Mark, and Len: an alliance--as Pete explains it in the unpublished novel--"of the three of them for the common good."[42] What the play dramatizes is the philosophical untenability of the alliance and the inevitability of its dissolution. The impact of the breakup is seen in the play pretty much exclusively from the point of view of Len, the first and perhaps most self-consciously expressive of a relatively few introspective Pinter dramatic characters. Len's poetic rendering of his impressions underscores the discomfort and disquietude evolving from his discovery that his companions essentially are unknowable and therefore untrustworthy. Thus the play is a sort of bildungsdrama in the sense at least that it focuses upon the disillusionment one experiences when his childish and naive assumptions about man's relationship to the physical world are shattered by the maturing and hardening forces of experience.

Specifically, Len's assumption about the world that the play reveals invalid is his belief that it can be closely embraced and understood. Like the Examiner in the face of adversary Kullus,

Len initially strives to maintain trust in his associates Mark and Pete. His obsession with order and clarity--in this sense he is both his author's man and typical ironically undercut protagonist--is revealed in his metaphorical description of a world envisioned as precisely understood: "I have my compartment. All is ordered, in its place, no error has been made. I am wedged. Here is my arrangement, and my kingdom. There are no voices. They make no hole in my side" (D, 88).[42] Nevertheless Len's compartment--his "corner" of the room, he frequently calls it--is far from sacrosanct. Reality distorts his orderly vision, as he is somewhat quick to confess: "The rooms we live in . . . open and shut. . . . They change shape at their own will. I wouldn't grumble if only they would keep to some consistency. But they don't. And I can't tell the limits, the boundaries, which I've been led to believe are natural." Indeed, the relativistic nature of perception precludes valid determinations of such absolute limits, as Len asserts at one point in barely muted hysteria.

> When . . . I look through a train window, at night, and see the yellow lights, very clearly, I can see what they are, and I see that they're still. But they're only still because I'm moving. I know that they do move along with me, and when we go round a bend, they bump off. But I know they are still, just the same. They are, after all, stuck on poles. . . . The point is . . . that I can only appreciate such facts when I'm moving. When I'm still, nothing around me follows a natural course of conduct. I'm not saying I'm any criteria. . . . After all, when I'm on a train I'm not really moving at all. That's obvious. I'm in a corner seat. . . . I do not move. Neither do the yellow lights. The train moves, granted, but what's a train got to do with it" (D, 89-90)?

The subject of the play then is Len's desperate inability figuratively to keep his room in order. His companions--there is a hint of homosexual flirtation and betrayal in the menage a trois'

jealous two-by-two reaction with each other--impinge upon his conceptually ordered universe with the force of absolute irrationality. Len cannot conceive the meaning of his friends' treatment of him. The play consists of a series of scenes (silence is the stage direction ordinarily denoting a shift in setting, as the acting version of the play makes clear [43]) in which Mark and Pete alternately warn Len that he cannot trust the absent member of the trio. What Len gradually realizes from such interviews and his ensuing retrospection is that the validity of such declarations is itself--like the remainder of his friendship with Mark and Pete--entirely problematical. Actually he has no clear notion of whether his friends are supporting him or deceiving him. His metaphorical statement of this fact involves his vision of a group of dwarfs, scavengers who are his ambivalent and frightening companions. Like Pete and Mark, these dwarfs have agreed to accept Len as a member of their group: "I have not been able to pay a subscription, but they've consented to take me into their gang, on a short term basis" (D, 92).

Len's equation of the dwarfs with his menacing friends Pete and Mark is made explicit in his metaphorically similar descriptions of the distasteful actions of both "friendly" groups. The dwarfs will accept the meal Len obligingly prepares for them only as part of a ritual where Len himself becomes the principal sacrifical offering to be devoured.

> They've gone on a picnic. . . . They've left me to sweep the yards, to pacify the rats. No sooner do they leave, these dwarfs, than in come the rats. . . . When they return from their picnics . . . they nod, they yawn, they gobble, they spew. . . . I tell them I've slaved like a

> martyr, I've skivvied till I was black in the face, what about a tip, what about the promise of a bonus, what about a little something? They yawn, they show the blood stuck between their teeth, they play their scratching game, they tongue their chops, they bring in the nets, their webs, their traps, they make monsters of their innocent catch, they gorge. . . . What about the job in hand? . . . What about the rats I dealt with? What about the rats I saved for you, that I plucked and hung out to dry, what about the rat steak I tried all ways to please you? They won't touch it, they don't see it. Where is it, they've hidden it, they're hiding it till the time I can no longer stand upright and I fall, they'll bring it out then, grimed then, green, varnished, rigid, and eat it as a victory dish (D, 96-97).

Similarly Pete is a scavenger whose voracious appetite threatens figuratively to devour Len's offering while simultaneously ignoring him.

> Pete walks by the river. Under the woodyard wall stops. Stops. The wood hangs. Deathmask on the water. Pete walks by the--gull. Slicing gull. Gull. Down. He stops. Stone. Watches. Rat corpse in the yellow grass. Gull pads. Gull probes. Gull stamps his feet. Gull whinnies up. Gull screams, tears, Pete tears, digs, Pete cuts, breaks, Pete stretches the corpse, flaps his wings, Pete's beak grows, probes, digs, pulls, the river jolts, no moon, what can I see, the dwarfs collect, they slide down the bridge, they scutter by the shoreside, the dwarfs collect, capable, industrious, they wear raincoats, it is going to rain, Pete digs, he screws in to the head, the dwarfs watch, Pete tugs, he tugs, he's tugging, he kills, he's killing, the rat's head, with a snap the cloth of the rat's head tears (D, 99-100).

The equation is similarly made clear in the speech where Len imagines Pete and Mark as spiders who, like the dwarfs, spin webs in his private realm--the corner of his room--and wait there patiently to martyr him by mutilation, then to devour him as a spider devours its prey. "You and Pete," he tells Mark, "you're too big. . . . I don't understand Pete. . . . I don't understand you either. You're not as simple as you look. Both of you bastards, you've made a hole in my side, I can't lug it! . . .

Everything's in my corner. . . . I do the corner's will. I slave my guts out. I thought, at one time, that I'd escaped it, but it never dies. . . . I feed it. It's well fed. . . . I have no resource but to give it to eat. . . . Nothing can be put aside, nothing can be hidden, nothing can be saved, it waits, it eats, it's voracious, you're in it, Pete's in it, you're all in my corner. There must be somewhere else!" (D, 97-98).

Len's complaint--it is also Pinter's point in the play--is that he cannot satisfactorily evaluate the experience of his friends' companionship, that indeed such an evaluation philosophically speaking is an impossibility. "The apprehension of experience must obviously be dependent upon discrimination," Pete tells Len. "What you've got to do is nourish the power of assessment" (D, 91). Yet the advice poses Len, as it would appear from the play's outcome at least, only a fool's gambit. The one valid assessment of experience, The Dwarfs implies, is that which admits the impotency of assessment, admits that is that the physical world runs together fluidly and at random and that it is not, as Len senses is is not, capable of being crystallized. Experience remains pliable, mysterious, menacing, waiting to devour man's puny endeavor to categorize it. Mark, Pete, the dwarfs--all are inscrutable and menacing companions, as Len ultimately realizes: "Under the twigs [the dwarfs] slide by the lilac bush, break the stems, sit, scutter to the edge of the lawn and there wait, capable, industrious, put up their sunshades, watch. Mark lies, heavy, content, . . . smiles at absent guests, sucks in all comers, arranges his web, lies there a spider" (D, 101).

Such a forced conclusion short circuits Len's rationalistic impulse. As a result, he suffers some sort of physical-emotional breakdown. Ultimately however he turns the world's uncertainty to his own end by using it as a defense against the threat of his menacing companions. At one point he evasively insults Mark: "You're the sum of so many reflections. How many reflections? Whose reflections? Is that what you consist of? What scum does the tide leave? What happens to the scum? When does it happen? I've seen what happens. But I can't speak when I see it. I can only point a finger. . . . The scum is broken and sucked back. I don't see where it goes, I don't see when, what do I see, what have I seen? What have I seen, the scum or the essence?" Subsequently he advises Mark that Pete is betraying him even as Mark previously had said that Pete is betraying Len: "Pete thinks you're a fool" (D, 103-104). The next scene shows Pete and Mark sparring defensively with one another, thereby distracted from their focus on Len. The play ends with Len temporarily in the ascendancy for the first time. To achieve this position, Len accepts the fact that he cannot know Pete and Mark but is therefore safe because he likewise cannot be known. Thus he maintains semblance of control in his private and mysterious corner of the world. The dwarfs' appetite is temporarily satiated, or at least will be fed from a dish other than the one Len unwillingly has been supplying.

> They sit, chock-full. . . . They seem to be anticipating a rarer dish, a choicer spread. And this change. All about me change. The yard as I know it is littered with scraps of cat's meat, pig bollocks, tin cans, bird brains, spare parts of all the little animals, a squelching squealing carpet, all the dwarfs' leavings spittled in the muck, worms stick in the poisoned shit heaps, the alleys a whirlpool of

> piss, slime, blood, and fruit juice. Now all is bare. All is clean. All is scrubbed. There is a lawn. There is a shrub. There is a flower (D, 108).

What Len's necessarily confused poetic outlook every confesses is the inability of the human intellect to rationalize sense experience; like the audience, Len cannot see "clearly" the meaning of his relationship with his companions. In this sense, then, the play's monodramatic style is didactic: its intentional ambiguity toward its dramatized "action"--the decline of the cryptic though ostensibly intimate relationship between Len, Pete, and Mark--declares the unknowability of people and things. Another play which similarly manipulates its audience to reinforce the same philosophical point is Tea Party (1965), a TV drama commissioned by the European Broadcasting Union and derived from Pinter's short story of the same name broadcast on the B.B.C. Third Program in April 1964 and subsequently printed in the January 1965 issue of Playboy. The play itself "was first presented by B.B.C. Television on 25 March 1965."[45]

As the action of The Dwarfs is seen from Len's limited and hence mystifying outlook, so that of Tea Party is seen from the point of view of Robert Disson, its protagonist. Yet while point of view is foreshortened linguistically in the former play, it is manipulated by cinematic means in the latter. Dission is a self-made businessman whose psychic insecurity is emphasized by his problematic sexual relationship with the two principal women in his life, his secretary Wendy and his wife Diana, a woman to his deceiving eyes as changing and evanescent as the moon goddess she is named for. Disson's marriage to a woman above him socially

precipitates fear of his inability to understand and fit in with the behavior--specifically the seemingly bizarre sexual behavior--of the aristocratic class. His hiring as a secretary a woman who has been sexually "touched" (as she puts it) by her former employer, and who has responded with predictable lower middle-class mores by resigning, is best understood then as an attempt by Disson to ensure he will have close at hand a woman whose manner of relating sexually to men is more typical of someone of his own background. Ironically enough, as the play depicts it, Disson loses both rounds of the dual male-female sexual conflict developed in Tea Party.

The play, then--as so many of Pinter's plays are--is about the unsuccessful attempts of a man and woman to know each other intimately. The loser in such an inevitable conflict relationship is the person who persists in what is seen as a foolish and reckless attempt to know and to love the unknowable. Disson is such a person, a man--Pinter's typical protagonist--obsessed with clarity. "I'm a thorough man," he tells his brother-in-law Willy upon accepting him into his sanitary engineering firm in what is an obvious attempt to establish understanding and intimacy with his new wife and her mysterious brother. "I don't like dithering. I don't like indulgence. I don't like self-doubt. I don't like fuzziness. I like clarity. Clear intention. Precise execution" (TP, 53).[46] Nevertheless, Both Disson's clarity of vision and his self-confidence are cruelly shattered by the end of the play, undercut by his inability precisely to understand the nature of the sexual threat apparently offered him by his brother-in-law and by the two women in his life. Willy's innocuously cliche-filled testimonials on

his sister's behalf at her wedding (TP, 48-49; see also TP, 73-75) inspire initially in Disson (TP, 73-75) a fear of some sexual attraction between his wife and her brother. Later this fear is aggravated when Diana wishes to and in fact does become her brother's private secretary after Willy has become a full partner in Disson's firm. To compensate perhaps for this fear, Disson establishes--or appears to establish--some sort of subdued, perhaps unconsummated sexual relationship with his secretary. For instance Wendy allows Disson to touch her body while she takes dictation after she has blindfolded him to comfort his failing eyes, the latter a sign--as the play emphasizes--of his disturbed efforts to "see" clearly his relationship to his wife, partner, and secretary.

As the conflict develops and becomes increasingly complex in the play, its mysteriousness to the audience--as alike to Disson--is preserved in large part because the TV camera looks increasingly through Disson's eyes alone, forcing the audience to see things with Disson's own blurred and confused vision. To emphasize this confusion, Disson is shown for instance at one point in a game of ping-pong with Willy. Disson, though ahead on score, is beginning to lose to his adversary in the game as alike in the play's larger combat, the battle for the two women. The camera is utilized to stress the fact that Disson is unable to understand his adversary clearly. "From DISSON'S point of view see two balls bounce and leap past both ears," the script reads (TP, 58). Yet willy denies Disson's accusation that he served two balls. In another scene depicting ping-pong, the screen goes blank to emphasize Disson's confusion when he misses a shot against Willy (TP, 77). Subsequently Disson visits an

optometrist who declares his vision physically sound. Clearly, then, the expressionistic technique is being employed to dramatize Disson's disturbed outlook resulting from his failure to understand clearly the motives and behavior of his intimates, Willy, Diana, and Wendy. A subsequent scene depicts Disson, blindfolded to comfort his eyes from the blinding though figuratively less than illuminating light, hearing "giggles, hissing, gurgles, squeals" which he interprets as evidence of animalistic sexual play going on in an inner office containing his wife, his secretary, and his brother-in-law (TP, 66-67). Still later Wendy's desirable though ironically untouchable body appears from Disson's point of view "in enormous close-up. Her buttocks fill the screen" (TP, 69).

The final scenes of the play depict the tea party itself, a gathering which concludes with the brutal victimization--it is perhaps best understood as an unintentional self-victimization--of its host, Disson. Shot primarily from Disson's limited and hence self-threatening outlook, these scenes emphasize--with his figurative deafness as well as with his blindness--Disson's inevitable metaphysical isolation. He is blindfolded. "No dialogue is heard in all shots from DISSON'S point of view." He merely observes threatening "figures mouthing silently, in conspiratorial postures, seemingly whispering together" (TP, 83). He sees, or imagines he sees--as does the audience along with him--Willy hand him a ping-pong ball. An objective shot subsequently follows showing Willy, Diana, and Wendy planning a vacation together in Spain. Then Wendy, Diana, and Willy are revealed from Disson's point of view stretched out toes to nose on a desk in an absurdly humorous version of sexual union.

The play concludes with Disson broken. His blindfold removed, he is virtually comotose, staring dully ahead in utter defeat over his inability to define precisely the nature of what is transpiring all around him. Implicitly the menace is self-created, the result of Disson's desperate yet hopeless attempt to transcend the isolation of the human condition. The other participants in the tea party appear unaware that anything out of the ordinary is going on, with the exception of course that they are politely deferential to Disson's physical disability and discomfort. The last shot of the play depicts four men trying unsuccessfully to lift Disson from his chair which has tumbled out of control to the floor. His metaphysical predispositions utterly destroyed, his sheer physical weight still resists the efforts of his untentionally threatening friends to lift him up from the despair which his expectations of clarity have caused him to fall to.

The cinematic manipulation of point of view to foreshorten and limit the audience's understanding of the action in Tea Party is proof of Pinter's assertion that TV as a medium "isn't limited to realism, necessarily."[47] To an even greater extent, The Basement (1967?) likewise confirms the truth of such an idea. Initially titled The Compartment and begun as early as 1963 as one of the three films in the Grove Press Project I--the other two are Beckett's Film and Ionesco's The Hard Boiled Egg[48] --the play was first presented in 1967 on B.B.C. Television.[49] It is, without question, Pinter's most intentionally mystifying work, and hence the one which perhaps most clearly because most flagrantly stresses Pinter's persistent belief that man is unable to rationalize the sensate world.

Pinter's technique in the play is intentionally to ring confusing changes on narrative film conventions which traditionally exploit the camera's ability to tell a story "realistically" in terms of chronological consistency as well as visual accuracy. In The Basement, while visual accuracy is conventional, Pinter no doubt intentionally juxtaposes scenes and situations so as to contradict the implicit relationship between events capable of being ordered in a logical time sequence. As a consequence the audience, unable in this particular sense at least to see the time scheme of the play as a sum of its various parts, must confess at least tacitly that the artistic arrangement of scenes in The Basement ultimately defeats their instinctive human desire to make chronological sense of it.

What makes this admission so telling is the fact that on the surface of it The Basement so closely resembles a chronologically consistent dramatic piece. The play's conflict situation--it is typically Pinteresque--is for instance fairly easy to discern: two men and a woman are sparring for position and advantage in a relationship which involves the men's competing for the woman and the woman's attempt to play them off against each other. At the beginning of the play, Stott and Jane are shown moving uninvited into the flat of Law, whose previous friendship with Stott has homosexual overtones: witness for example Law's careful choice of a "soft [towel] with a floral pattern" for Stott (B, 93),[50] or Stott's nostalgic recollection of the nights he and Law spent reading Proust together. (B, 102).

During the course of Stott and Jane's stay in Law's flat, the relationship between the three changes subtly and in ways that cannot be precisely defined on the basis of information supplied by the play. Nevertheless it is obvious that Stott and Law are vying for Jane's attention. Though Jane initially sleeps with Stott in Law's bed without overt complaint from Law, who must sleep on the floor, Jane later openly solicits Law's sexual attention in the play's beach scenes. At one point Law and Stott run a foot race for Jane's favor (B, 102-103). At another, they fight nakedly against each other with broken milk bottles while Jane prepares only two cups of coffee in the kitchen, one presumably for herself and one for the victor in the combat. In this scene the record on the phonograph--Debussy's "Girl with the Flaxen Hair"--suggests the prize awaiting the triumphant competitor. Finally the play concludes with Law in possession of the girl and Stott in possession of the basement flat, formerly Law's. Law and Jane are entering the flat in a reenactment of the play's initial scene with the difference that in the final scene the two men have completely changed roles. Even the dialogue of the first and last scenes is identical.

The cyclical structure of the play makes its main point clear--man struggles repeatedly and endlessly for territory and for property, represented respectively in the play by the flat on the one hand and the girl on the other. In his selfish schemes to protect his own interest against clearly perceived but vaguely understood threats, man can trust no one because he can understand no one. Everyone and everything is equally his enemy because aloof and inaccessible.

Yet this point is the one logical notion issuing from the play, whose carefully managed form declares the mind's inaccesibility to events and people. No plausible explanation is tendered for instance as to why Law so willingly trades apartment for girl, or why Stott accepts such a trade, if indeed he does not in fact intentionally engineer it. No hint is given as to who desires precisely what in the conflict between Jane, Law, and Stott; or as to which one or ones are actually triumphant.

Even more confusing, the continuing "play" of the play--at its end it is starting again--suggests that the trade consummated may be made once again in reverse, that Law may regain his apartment and Stott his girlfriend. Indeed, it is impossible to decide even which man knew Jane first. She is introduced to Law at the beginning of the play (winter setting) and appears not to know him. In the beach scenes (summer setting) she is shown becoming physically intimate with Law. Thus these scenes presumably follow the winter scenes chronologically. Yet in one of these summer beach scenes, Jane speaks to Law as though her friendship with him actually had predated her intimacy with Stott: "Why don't you tell [Stott] to go. We had such a lovely home. We had such a cosy home. It was so warm. Tell him to go. It's your place. Then we could be happy again. Like we used to. Like we used to. In our first blush of love" (B, 105).

Similarly the various furnishings of the flat--conventional, Scandinavian, Florentine, bare--are not and cannot be synchronized chronologically. For instance, as Stott gradually takes over the room, he changes the furniture to his preference, Scandinavian.

It is concomitantly summer; Law is receiving the favors of Jane, who is simultaneously rejecting Stott. Yet the next shot shows Stott and Jane in bed together--as at the outset (winter setting), but with the new decor unchanged (B, 101). It is impossible, then, because of such contradictions to establish logically the time relationship between such visually related shots. Indeed at one point the play appears to be baldly cryptic chronologically, presumably in an effort to offer a strong explicit insult to its audience's powers of ratiocination. In one summer day shot, Law searches feverishly for and finds a phonograph record. In the next shot, it is night and winter and Law is turning with the record in his hand in a room suddenly and mysteriously furnished not in Scandinavian decor but as it was--to quote the stage direction--"at the beginning" of the play (B, 104-105).

Pinter's technique in the play, then, is patently intended to confuse his viewer by first subtly encouraging and then unsubtly frustrating his efforts to arrange the events of the play chronologically. Intentionally, then, Pinter forces his audience into a defensive attitude toward the play's action that is exactly the correlative of the confused and defensive attitude each of the three protagonists of the play displays toward the other two. The technique is synthetic, to be sure, but apt in the sense at least that the play thereby makes its point starkly and tellingly upon its audience. The female-male conflict disclosed but in a literal sense not understood within the framework of the play is what accounts for the conflict waged by the viewer against the form of the play itself. Ultimately the play can be dealt with adequately primarily on a sensate level. It exists, and

its ostensibly ordered structure implies a chronological rationale which the audience is challenged to discover. Yet such an effort is doomed to failure. The play cannot be satisfactorily rationalized in this sense--and this idea, of course, is precisely Pinter's main point. This is not to say, by any means, that anything which is confusing can in a similar manner be subsumed under the heading of art. Far from it. It is the tension between the ordered and the disordered which establishes the play's undeniable effect upon its audience. And The Basement, certainly the baldest and perhaps therefore the clearest of Pinter's statements about man's metaphysical isolation and the menace which the sensate world as a consequence constitutes for him, is thus also one of his best.

NOTES FOR "EXEMPLA:

CONFLICT IN PINTER'S DRAMA FROM THE ROOM THROUGH THE BASEMENT"

1. Quoted by John Russell Taylor, Anger and After, rev. ed. (Baltimore: Penguin, 1963), p. 297.

2. Lawrence M. Bensky, "Harold Pinter, An Interview," Paris Review, X (Fall 1966), 37.

3. Quoted by Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, rev. ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1969), p. 245.

4. Charles Marowitz, "'Pinterism' Is Maximum Tension Through Minimum Information," New York Times Magazine, 1 October 1967, p. 92.

5. Parenthetical page numbers preceded by a capital "R" refer to Harold Pinter, The Room, in The Birthday Party and The Room (New York: Grove, 1961).

6. Though Pinter has protested that such an outlook is somewhat too limited, the play undeniably creates exactly this impression. See note 15 above (p. 57) to "Characterization and the Type-Situation in Pinter's Drama."

7. See note 1 directly above.

8. Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, rev. ed., p. 234.

9. Martin Esslin, The Peopled Wound, The Work of Harold Pinter (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970), pp. 65-66.

10. James R. Hollis, Harold Pinter, The Poetics of Silence (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1970), p. 29.

11. Parenthetical page numbers preceded by a capital "DW" refer to Harold Pinter, The Dumb Waiter, in The Caretaker and The Dumb Waiter (New York: Grove, 1960).

12. Cf. Gus's hysterical echo of Ben's much more muted remark, both of which reflect the fear of the unknown which the two men alike are experiencing: "WE'VE GOT NOTHING LEFT! NOTHING! DO YOU UNDERSTAND?" (DW, 118).

13. Quoted by Arnold P. Hinchliffe, Harold Pinter (New York: Twayne, 1967), p. 67.

14. Bensky, "Harold Pinter, An Interview," p. 20.

15. Parenthetical page numbers preceded by a capital "BDP" refer to Harold Pinter, The Birthday Party, in The Birthday Party and The Room (New York: Grove, 1961).

16. Hollis, Harold Pinter, The Poetics of Silence, p. 92.

17. Judith Crist, "A Mystery: Pinter on Pinter," Look, 32 (December 24, 1968), 80.

18. Jacqueline Hofer, "Pinter and Whiting: Two Attitudes Towards the Alienated Artist," Modern Drama, IV (February 1962), 402-408.

19. Parenthetical page numbers preceded by a capital "C" refer to Harold Pinter, The Caretaker, in The Caretaker and The Dumb Waiter (New York: Grove, 1960).

20. Quoted by Hinchliffe, Harold Pinter, p. 98. See also Hollis, Harold Pinter, The Poetics of Silence, p. 93.

21. Marowitz, "'Pinterism' Is Maximum Tension Through Minimum Information," p. 89.

22. Clifford Leach, "Two Romantics: Arnold Wesker and Harold Pinter," Contemporary Theatre, XX (1962), 11-31, esp. 29.

23. See Bensky, "Harold Pinter, An Interview," p. 29. See also above, note 52 (pp. 40-41) to "Pinter and Beckett: The Philosophical Nexus."

24. Bensky, "Harold Pinter, An Interview," p. 30.

25. Page references preceded by a capital "SA" refer to A Slight Ache, in Harold Pinter, Three Plays (New York: Grove, n.d.).

26. Parenthetical page numbers preceded by a capital "NO" refer to Harold Pinter, A Night Out, in A Night Out, Night School, Revue Sketches (New York: Grove, n.d.).

27. Harry Thompson, "Harold Pinter Replies," New Theatre Magazine, XI (January 1961), 9.

28. Parenthetical page numbers preceded by a capital "NS" refer to Harold Pinter, Night School, in A Night Out, Night School, Revue Sketches (New York: Grove, n.d.).

29. See e.g. Esslin, The Peopled Wound, The Work of Harold Pinter, pp. 137-143, which argues in the Freudian vein that the play depicts a typical dissynthesis in the modern female between

"mother/madonna/housewife" on the one hand and "whore/maenad" on the other; and that it suggests that moderns, in order to be psychically whole, must accept and integrate "both . . . social self and . . . instinctive self."

30. Parenthetical page numbers preceded by a capital "L" refer to Harold Pinter, The Lover, in The Lover, Tea Party, The Basement (New York: Grove, n.d.).

31. Henry Hewes, "Probing Pinter's Plays," Saturday Review, 50 (April 8, 1967), 58, 56.

32. Peter Hall, "A Director's Approach," in A Casebook on The Homecoming, ed. John Lahr (New York: Grove, 1971), p. 14.

33. Parenthetical page numbers preceded by a capital "HC" refer to Harold Pinter, The Homecoming (New York: Grove, n.d.).

34. Hewes, "Probing Pinter's Plays," p. 58.

35. Hewes, "Probing Pinter's Plays," p. 58.

36. Hewes, "Probing Pinter's Plays," p. 58.

37. See Irving Wardle, "The Territorial Struggle" (pp. 37-44); and Bernard F. Dukore, "A Woman's Place" (pp. 109-116) in A Casebook on The Homecoming, ed. Lahr.

38. Bensky, "Harold Pinter, An Interview," p. 23.

39. Harold Pinter, "Writing for Myself," Twentieth Century, 169 (February 1961), 175.

40. Bensky, "Harold Pinter, An Interview," p. 23.

41. Esslin, The Peopled Wound, The Work of Harold Pinter, pp. 130, 123.

42. Parenthetical page numbers preceded by a capital "D" refer to Harold Pinter, The Dwarfs, in Three Plays (New York: Grove, n.d.).

43. See The Dwarfs and Eight Review Sketches (New York: Dramatist Play Service, 1965). This version is indispensable for explicating the play; the Grove Press edition will not suffice.

44. Esslin, The Peopled Wound, The Work of Harold Pinter, p. 166.

45. Harold Pinter, The Lover, Tea Party, The Basement (New York: Grove, n.d.), p. 42.

46. Parenthetical page numbers preceded by a capital "TP" refer to Harold Pinter, Tea Party, in The Lover, Tea Party, The Basement (New York: Grove, n.d.).

47. Pinter, "Writing for Myself," p. 175.

48. Esslin, The Peopled Wound, The Work of Harold Pinter, p. 171.

49. Harold Pinter, The Lover, Tea Party, The Basement (New York: Grove, n.d.), p. 90.

50. Parenthetical page numbers preceded by a capital "B" refer to Harold Pinter, The Basement, in The Lover, Tea Party, The Basement (New York: Grove, n.d.).

LIST OF WORKS CITED

Beckett at 60, A Festschrift. London: Calder and Boyars, 1967.

Beckett, Samuel. En attendant Godot, ed. Colin Duckworth. London: George Harrup, 1966.

_____. Endgame. New York: Grove, 1958.

_____. Happy Days. New York: Grove, 1961.

_____. Proust. New York: Grove, n.d.

_____, and Georges Duthuit. "Three Dialogues," in Samuel Beckett, A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Martin Esslin. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965, pp. 16-22.

_____. The Unnamable. New York: Grove, 1958.

_____. Waiting for Godot. New York: Grove, 1954.

Bensky, Lawrence M. "Harold Pinter, An Interview." Paris Review, X (Fall 1966), 12-37.

Brustein, Robert. Seasons of Discontent: Dramatic Opinions 1959-65. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965.

_____. The Theatre of Revolt. Boston: Little, Brown, 1964.

Cohn, Ruby. "The World of Harold Pinter." Tulane Drama Review, VI (March 1962), 55-68.

Crist, Judith. "A Mystery: Pinter on Pinter." Look, 32 (December 24, 1968), 77-78, 80, 83.

Dick, Kay. "Mr. Pinter and the Fearful Matter." Texas Quarterly, IV (Autumn 1961), 257-265.

Driver, Tom F. "Beckett by the Madeleine." Columbia University Forum, IV (Summer 1961), 21-25.

Dukore, Bernard F. "A Woman's Place," in A Casebook on Harold Pinter's The Homecoming, ed. John Lahr. New York: Grove, 1971, pp. 109-116.

Esslin, Martin. The Peopled Wound, The Work of Harold Pinter. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970.

_____, ed. Samuel Beckett, A Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965.

_____. The Theatre of the Absurd, rev. ed. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1969.

Fletcher, John. The Novels of Samuel Beckett. London: Chatto and Windus, 1964.

_____. Samuel Beckett's Art. London: Chatto and Windus, 1967.

Freud, Sigmund. "Humor," in Collected Papers, vol 5, ed. James Strachey. London: Hogarth, 1950.

Hall, Peter. "A Director's Approach," in A Casebook on Harold Pinter's The Homecoming, ed. John Lahr. New York: Grove, 1971, pp. 9-25.

Hewes, Henry. "Probing Pinter's Plays." Saturday Review, 50 (April 18, 1967), 56, 58, 96-97.

Hinchliffe, Arnold P. Harold Pinter. New York: Twayne, 1967.

Hofer, Jacqueline. "Pinter and Whiting: Two Attitudes Towards the Alienated Artist." Modern Drama, IV (February 1962), 402-408.

Hollis, James R. Harold Pinter, The Poetics of Silence. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1970.

Kenner, Hugh. Samuel Beckett, A Critical Study, 2nd. ed. Berkeley: University of California, 1968.

Lahr, John, ed. A Casebook on Harold Pinter's The Homecoming. New York: Grove, 1971.

Leech, Clifford. "Two Romantics: Arnold Wesker and Harold Pinter." Contemporary Theatre, XX (1962), 11-31.

Marowitz, Charles. "'Pinterism' Is Maximum Tension Through Minimum Information." New York Times Magazine, 1 October 1967, pp. 36-37, 89-90, 92, 94-95.

Pinter, Harold. "Beckett," in Beckett at 60, A Festschrift. London: Calder and Boyars, 1967, p. 86.

_____. The Birthday Party and The Room. New York: Grove, 1961.

_____. The Caretaker and The Dumb Waiter. New York: Grove, 1961.

_____. The Collection and The Lover. London: Methuen, 1963.

_____. The Dwarfs and Eight Review Sketches. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1965.

_____. "The Examination," in The Collection and The Lover. London: Methuen, 1963, pp. 85-92.

_____. The Homecoming. New York: Grove, n.d.

_____. Letter to The London Sunday Times, 14 August 1960, p. 21.

_____. The Lover, Tea Party, The Basement. New York: Grove, n.d.

_____. A Night Out, Night School, Revue Sketches. New York: Grove, n.d.

_____. "Pinter Between the Lines." The London Sunday Times Magazine, 4 March 1962, p. 25

_____. Three Plays. New York: Grove, n.d.

_____. "Writing for Myself." Twentieth Century, 169 (February 1961), 172-175.

_____. "Writing for the Theatre." Evergreen Review, No. 33 (August-September 1964), 80-82.

"Pinterview." Newsweek, LX (July 23, 1962), 69.

Shenker, Israel. "Moody Man of Letters." New York Times, 6 May 1956, sec. II, pp. 1, 3.

Taylor, John Russell. "Accident." Sight and Sound, 35 (Autumn 1966), 179-184.

_____. Anger and After, rev. ed. Baltimore: Penguin, 1963.

Thompson, Harry. "Harold Pinter Replies." New Theatre Magazine, XI (January 1961), 8-10.

"Two People in a Room." The New Yorker, 43 (February 25, 1967), 34-36.

Tynan, Kathleen. "In Search of Harold Pinter: Is He the Mystery His Critics Allege?" Part I. The London Evening Standard, April 25, 1968, p. 7.

_____. "In Search of Harold Pinter: Is He the Mystery His Critics Allege?" Part II. The London Evening Standard, April 26, 1968, p. 8.

Wardle, Irving. "The Territorial Struggle," in A Casebook on Harold Pinter's The Homecoming, ed. John Lahr. New York: Grove, 1971, pp. 37-44.

LIST OF ADDITIONAL WORKS CONSULTED

Amend, Victor E. "Harold Pinter: Some Credits and Debits." Modern Drama, 10 (September 1967), 165-174.

Bernhard, F. J. "Beyond Realism: The Plays of Harold Pinter." Modern Drama, 8 (September 1965), 185-191.

Boulton, James T. "Harold Pinter: The Caretaker and Other Plays." Modern Drama, 6 (September 1963), 131-140.

Brown, John Russell. "Dialogue in Pinter and Others." Critical Quarterly, 7 (Autumn 1965), 225-243.

_____. "Mr. Pinter's Shakespeare." Critical Quarterly, 5 (Autumn 1963), 251-264.

Burkman, Katherine H. The Dramatic World of Harold Pinter: Its Basis in Ritual. Columbus: Ohio State University, 1971.

_____. "Pinter's A Slight Ache as Ritual." Modern Drama, 11 (December 1968), 326-335.

Canaday, Nicholas Jr. "Harold Pinter's 'Tea Party': Seeing and Not-Seeing." Studies in Short Fiction, 6 (Fall 1969), 580-585.

Cohen, Mark. "The Plays of Harold Pinter." Jewish Quarterly, 8 (Summer 1961), 21-22.

Cohn, Ruby. "Latter Day Pinter." Drama Survey, 3 (February 1964), 367-377.

_____. "The Absurdly Absurd: Avatars of Godot." Comparative Literature Studies, 2 (1965), 233-240.

Cook, David and Harold F. Brooks. "A Room with Three Views: Harold Pinter's The Caretaker." Kosmos, 1 (June 1967), 62-69.

Dawick, J. D. "'Punctuation' and Patterning in The Homecoming." Modern Drama, 14 (May 1971), 37-46.

Dean, Michael. "Harold Pinter Talks to Michael Dean." The Listener, 81 (6 March 1964), 312.

Donoghue, Denis. "London Letter: Moral West End." Hudson Review, 14 (Spring 1961), 93-103.

Downer, Alan S. "Experience of Heroes: Notes on the New York Theatre." Quarterly Journal of Speech, 48 (October 1962), 261-270.

Dukore, Bernard. "The Theatre of Harold Pinter." Tulane Drama Review, 6 (March 1962), 43-54.

_____. "A Woman's Place." Quarterly Journal of Speech, 52 (October 1966), 237-241.

Esslin, Martin. "Godot and His Children: The Theatre of Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter." Experimental Drama, 14 (1964), 128-146.

_____. "Pinter and the Absurd." The Twentieth Century, 169 (February 1961), 176-185.

_____. "Pinter Translated." Encounter, 30 (March 1968), 45-47.

Franzblau, Abraham N. "A Psychiatrist Looks at 'The Homecoming.'" Saturday Review, 50 (April 8, 1967), 58.

Free, William J. "Treatment of Character in Harold Pinter's The Homecoming." South Atlantic Bulletin, 34 (November 1969), 1-5.

Gallagher, Kent. "Harold Pinter's Dramaturgy." Quarterly Journal of Speech, 52 (October 1966), 242-248.

Ganz, Arthur. "A Clue to the Pinter Puzzle: The Triple Self in The Homecoming." Educational Theatre Journal, 21 (May 1969), 180-187.

_____. Pinter, A Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972.

Gassner, John. "Broadway in Review." Educational Theatre Journal, 13 (December 1961), 289-297.

Gill Brendan. "The Cry." New Yorker, 47 (November 27, 1971), 89.

Goldstone, Herbert. "Not So Puzzling Pinter: The Homecoming." Theatre Annual, 25 (1969), 20-27.

Goodman, Florence. "Pinter's Caretaker: The Lower Depths Descended." Midwest Quarterly, 5 (Winter 1964), 117-126.

Gordon, Lois G. "Harold Pinter--Past and Present." Kansas Quarterly, 3 (Spring 1971), 89-99.

_____. "Pigeonholing Pinter: A Bibliography." Theatre Documentation, 1 (Fall 1968), 3-20.

_____. Stratagems to Uncover Nakedness: The Dramas of Harold Pinter. Columbia: University of Missouri, 1968.

Gussow, Mel. "A Conversation (Pause) With Harold Pinter." New York Times Magazine, 5 December 1971, pp. 42-43, 124-136.

Hayman, Ronald. Harold Pinter. London: Heinemann, 1968.

Hays, H. R. "Transcending Naturalism." Modern Drama, 4 (May 1962), 27-36.

Hinchliffe, Arnold P. "Mr. Pinter's Belinda." Modern Drama, 11 (September 1968), 173-179.

Hobson, Harold. "Pinter's No-Contest 'Old Times.'" Christian Science Monitor, 14 June 1971, p. 4.

Kalem, T. E. "Is Memory a Cat or a Mouse?" Time, 98 (November 29, 1971), 70-71.

Kauffmann, Stanley. "Landscape and Silence." New Republic, 162 (April 25, 1970), 20.

_____. "Old Times." New Republic, 165 (December 18, 1971), 20, 29-30.

Kemper, Robert. "One Man's Family." Christian Century, 84 (March 1, 1967), 276-277.

Kerr, Walter. Harold Pinter. New York: Columbia University, 1967.

Kitchin, Laurence. "Realism in the English Mid-Century Drama." World Theatre, 14 (January 1965), 17-26.

Knight, G. Wilson. "The Kitchen Sink." Encounter, 21 (December 1963), 48-54.

Kunkel, Francis L. "The Dystopia of Harold Pinter." Renascence, 21 (Autumn 1968), 17-20.

Lahr, John. "Pinter and Chekhov: The Bond of Naturalism." Drama Review, 13 (Winter 1968), 137-145.

Langley, Lee. "From 'Caretaker' to 'Servant'" The Sunday New York Harold Tribune Magazine, 1 March 1964, p. 24.

Losey, Joseph. Losey on Losey, ed. Tom Milne. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968.

Manvell, Roger. "The Decade of Harold Pinter." Humanist, 132 (April 1967), 112-115.

Mast, Gerald. "Pinter's Homecoming." Drama Survey, 6 (Spring 1968), 266-277.

Mayersberg, Paul. "Harold Pinter's The Collection." Listener, 68 (5 July 1962), 26.

Minogue, Valerie. "Taking Care of the Caretaker." Twentieth Century, 168 (September 1960), 243-248.

Morris, Kelly. "The Homecoming." Tulane Drama Review, 11 (Winter 1966), 185-191.

Morrison, Kristin. "Pinter and the New Irony." Quarterly Journal of Speech, 55 (December 1969), 388-393.

Nelson, Gerald. "Harold Pinter Goes to the Movies." Chicago Review, 19 (Summer 1966), 33-43.

Palmer, David S. "A Harold Pinter Checklist." Twentieth Century Literature, 16 (October 1970), 287-296.

"Past, Present and Pinter." Newsweek, 77 (June 14, 1971), 70.

Pesta, John. "Pinter's Usurpers." Drama Survey, 6 (Spring-Summer 1967), 54-65.

Pinter, Harold. "The Black and White" (short story). Transatlantic Review, 21 (Summer 1966), 51-52.

_____, and Clive Donner. "Filming The Caretaker." Transatlantic Review, 13 (Summer 1963), 17-26.

_____. Five Screenplays. London: Methuen, 1971.

_____. "Getting Acquainted," in Arnold P. Hinchliffe, Harold Pinter. New York: Twayne, 1967, pp. 73-74.

_____. "Landscape." Evergreen Review, 68 (July 1969), 55-61.

_____. Landscape and Silence. London: Methuen, 1969.

_____. Old Times. London: Methuen, 1971.

_____. "Tea Party" (short story). Playboy, 12 (January 1965), 125, 218.

Pritchett, Oliver. "'Definitive Pinter' Is Film's Aim." Washintgon Post, 2 June 1968, sec. F, p. 1.

Pugh, Marshall. "Trying to Pin Down Pinter." The London Daily Mail, 7 March 1964, p. 8.

Rosador, Kurt T. "Pinter's Dramatic Method: Kullus, The Examination, The Basement." Modern Drama, 14 (September 1971), 195-204.

Schechner, Richard. "Puzzling Pinter." Tulane Drama Review, 11 (Winter 1966), 176-184.

Schroll, Herman T. Harold Pinter: A Study of His Reputation, 1958-1969. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1971.

"A Slight Case of Conversion." London Times, 23 June 1962, p. 4.

Sprague, Claire. "Possible or Necessary." New Theatre Magazine, 8 (Autumn 1967), 36-37.

States, Bert O. "Pinter's Homecoming: The Shock of Nonrecognition." Hudson Review, 21 (Autumn 1968), 474-486.

Storch, R. F. "Harold Pinter's Happy Families." Massachusetts Review, 8 (Autumn 1967), 703-712.

Sykes, Arlene. Harold Pinter. New York: Humanities, 1970.

_____. "Harold Pinter's Dwarfs." Kosmos, 1 (June 1967), 70-75.

Taylor, John R. "British Drama of the 50's." World Theatre, 11 (Autumn 1962), 241-254.

_____. Harold Pinter. London: Longmans, 1968.

Thornton, Peter C. "Blindness and the Confrontation with Death: Three Plays by Harold Pinter." Die Neueren Sprachen, 17 (May 1968), 213-223.

Walker, Augusta. "Messages from Pinter." Modern Drama, 10 (May 1967), 1-10.

Warner, John M. "The Epistemological Quest in Pinter's The Homecoming." Contemporary Literature, 11 (Summer 1970), 340-353.

Wellwarth, George E. The Theatre of Protest and Paradox. New York: New York University, 1964.