SHADOWS WITH SUBSTANCE: PERFORMING THE CHARACTERS OF HAROLD PINTER

THESIS

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By

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This thesis considers first, the existence of a relatively new kind of characterization in the plays of Harold Pinter, and second, the need for the actor who performs Pinter to seek a new mode of acting. The purpose of the study is to identify the special problems or tasks which are thus imposed on the actor who plays a Pinter character.

An examination of Pinter's dramaturgy reveals an emphasis on character relationships and a combination of the three different styles of characterization defined by Lorenz Kjerbuhl-Petersen: the type, the individual, and the shadow.

This study concludes that the Pinter actor must simultaneously perceive a complex psyche in what seems a common human type, create an individualized concept of personality although information and behavior are misleading, and allow the actor's personality to color and expand that of the character.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When a drama is performed, the audience and the actor confront each other through the prism of the playwright's characters. As the actor presents a series of intentions and activities that delineate the fictitious personalities in the play, the spectators experience both the actor and the character simultaneously. In the play itself, the characters exist only from moment to moment; in a performance of the play, the actors are conscious at all times of the entire series of moments. While the audience may perceive each individual moment, the actor must somehow exhibit all of the moments at the same time he portrays a single moment.

Though many accomplished actors believe this process of delineation requires primarily their personal creativity, the illusion of characterization perceived by the audience, although incarnated by the actor, remains a specific creation of the playwright's. No matter how explicit the actor may want to be, dramatic characters are only as individualized as the playwright has allowed them to be. Kjerbuhl-Petersen, identifies three kinds of dramatic characters: the type, the individual, and the shadow. When producing the "type," a playwright provides a common and recognizable personality
with obvious physical traits. The character appears to be someone the audience already knows; his attitudes and actions are largely predictable. The actor, however, must essay unpredictability by developing, maintaining, and revealing an individual complex of human motivations. At other times, playwrights attempt to portray just such an individual, who may be perceived by the actors and the audience as an actual person they might meet in everyday circumstances. To accomplish such a portrayal, the actor must acquire almost total knowledge of the person the playwright has in mind, but then substitute experiences of his own that portray the idiosyncrasies of the character. The drama that results focuses on the psychological interaction of particular people within very specific environments. It is necessary for the actor to represent actuality rather than present the audience with a universal type. Even Greek and Elizabethan plays may be produced so that the characters are portrayed as actual people taking their falls or winning their struggles as a result of their human attributes. In such a case, the actor is required to create a characterization which is more detailed than Sophocles or Shakespeare—or their audiences—demanded.

Finally, a playwright may fill his play with "shadows"—characters that are only the author's mouthpieces. Such characters display few intricacies of personality, and the languages the actor employs are non-verbal as often as they
are verbal, of course, and he maintains his own personality. The presence of an actual person in the play—the "actor-as-person"—adds an ironic reality to what often seem to be distortions of language, situation, and idea. Moreover, the spectators must also take part in the characterization because the playwright requires them to project the human details upon his ideas.

Problem

The plays of Harold Pinter appear to contain characters who are each a combination of Kjerbuhl-Petersen's type, individual, and shadow. If this observation is accurate—that Pinter's characters are (1) simultaneously common and recognizable as universal beings, (2) actual persons with all the individuality and unpredictability that implies, and (3) only the author's mouthpieces—then the actor who performs Pinter should have to seek a new mode of acting.

The problem which this thesis deals with is two-fold: the existence of a relatively new kind of characterization in the plays of Harold Pinter and the ways an actor might present both a type and an individual while at the same time utilizing his own personality to serve as the author's mouthpiece and to add reality to the distortions of language, situation, and idea.
**Purpose**

The purpose of this thesis is to identify the methods of characterization that are required by the plays of Harold Pinter.

**Hypothesis**

The actor in a play by Harold Pinter must develop his characterization by means of a "fragmentary" approach that allows (1) perception of a deep and complex psyche within a common human type, (2) individualization in the midst of information that is deliberately misleading, and (3) variations in a character's personality from actor to actor.

**Background**

_The Theatre as a Presentation of "Characters."_—The history of Western European theatre indicates a preference for drama that is focused on the interaction of human choices and their consequences. Antonin Artaud was well within this mainstream when he defined the essential purpose of theatre as the exploitation of man's most primitive needs. "Like the plague," he wrote, "the theatre is a formidable call to the forces that impel the mind by example to the source of its conflicts." The theatre of Greece was a "theatre of communion" in which massive audiences watched actors submerge their personalities into their voices and bodies, which costumed and masked as universal types, then presented the complexities involved in human decision-making.
The theatre of medieval Europe--1000-1500 A.D., let us say--also provided a communal drama that chose as its primary purpose the guiding of man's soul towards salvation. Again, characterization was focused on types of people who were well-known to the audiences or who personified a particular human motive or attribute such as "greed."

Whether or not the medieval drama led directly to the performances of the commedia dell'arte, or whether these troupes continued the traditional drama of Greece and Rome--and scholars are divided on this point--the various commedia troupes began their hold on the popular audience during the medieval period and continued until the eighteenth century. Each actor in a troupe played a familiar type; even the costumes and masks were adapted to the specific roles. Though no doubt actors were chosen according to how well their voices, bodies, and personalities fit a particular role type, and even though different actors could play a single character (Arlecchino, for example) differently, the actor could not combine two or more types (Pantalone, say, with Arlecchino) in a single portrayal.

As the theatre became increasingly focused both on artistic and commercial success during the Renaissance, its audiences demanded a more spectacular realism. The sixteenth century world-view also inspired the dramatists to explore conflicts and ideas which were not "religious," but were universal rather than particular. Though the
psychology of the playwright's characters was important, and there was interest in creating a more natural but descriptive and narrative theatre that expressed the complexities of the human personality, the focus of their plays still lay on situations in which conflicting choices and motives could be given theatrical expression. The addition of dimensions to the characters still did not make them individuals. Instead, the psychological accuracy of the character types allowed the spectator a stronger means of identification and involvement. At the same time, the dramas continued to require audiences to engage in a "theatre of communion" through which the play could be adapted to their particular experiences and personal needs.

That is, traditional myths were played before a believing audience. What Robert Brustein defines as a general quality of "revolt"—revolutionary tendencies in art resulting from a culmination of the skepticism and despair which began in the late Renaissance—the advancement of science contributed to the destruction of the unity between man and nature, and intensified a growing sense of disorder and futility. These attitudes, combined with a desire for individualism inherited from Romanticism, combined to form the spiritual milieu of the modern dramatists. In his attempt to reconstruct what seemed a chaotic world, the modern playwright sought an explicit realism which mirrored his personal perception of life. It was the accuracy of
the situation rather than the universality of the conflict which received major attention.\textsuperscript{7}

Naturalism and realism were the dramatic styles that resulted. The drama became peopled with Kjerbuhl-Petersen's "individuals," and the situations of the drama represented not conflicts of man's existence but incidents which surround several particular lives. In plays of this kind, the psychological complexities which had begun to appear in the characters of Renaissance drama were developed more fully and emphatically. Unlike the traditional types, which existed only in their particular dramas, naturalistic and realistic characters were so actualized that their lives seemed to occur outside the boundaries of the play. This sense of past and future allowed the play to seem a "slice-of-life." The characters themselves dictated the outcome of the drama.\textsuperscript{8}

Such attempts to mirror life exactly led to a detachment of the spectator from the play. What happened on the stage became more important than what happened to the spectator. Thus, the "theatre of communion" became a "theatre of doctrine" which was informative in nature rather than celebrative.\textsuperscript{9}

When the doctrine presented in the play was focused on a confrontation between the human need for absolutes and a world of irrational uncertainties--on the human sense of "absurdity"--the playwright tried to isolate his
characters with ambiguity. Traditional dramaturgy was discarded. Rather than dramatizing themes, the playwright now forced the audience to experience purposelessness and hopelessness. Rational dramatic devices were abandoned to emphasize life's irrationality; word games and oblique dialogue signified the inaccuracy of verbal communication; ambiguous characters pointed out the isolation of man; questions were presented rather than statements. The spectator was asked to conceptualize his experience by becoming a participant, making personal decisions, and adopting personal points of view.

The Actor as a Theatre Craftsman.--The main task of the actor has always been to create an illusion within the spectator. Required for this task is an environment in which the spectator can submit consciously to the deception. A characterization must not appear to be an actuality because it will break the illusion; on the other hand, the characterization has to resemble life enough to induce the spectator to accept it as such.

In his characterization, an actor must submit to the guidelines presented by the playwright and fulfill the specific requirements of the play. The written role addresses the actor by means of certain words. The actor comprehends the meaning of these verbal images and presents an interpretation based on that meaning. He discovers an image of personality from his own speeches, the remarks of
other characters, and specific stage activities.¹¹

The actor's "method" is his own peculiar means of assembling what is given by the playwright in such a manner as to create a consistency which justifies his actions on the stage. This method is a process, a means to an end; its significance lies in the resulting characterization, and the method itself varies among actors and according to the style and requirements of a particular play. The extant plays of ancient Greece and Rome, and medieval Europe, which employ only types of characters, require the actor to function primarily as an imitator. He must physically represent a "type" which is simply but clearly designated by the playwright.¹²

Since the type often lacks realistic consistency, the actor must justify such an illusion privately by developing a self-image that allows the character to show some relation to nature. The character Everyman, for example, must not know that he is an allegory.

This realistic self-image is even more vital when the actor portrays a character type from Elizabethan or French neoclassic dramas. The introduction of a psychological dimension in these plays requires the actor to seek more than imitation. Although the characters are still vivid and familiar images, the presence of a psychological network makes their development more complex. The actor must explore the motivational possibilities in a multidimensional
character. Since he is faced with alternatives and choices, the clarity of his performance depends on his consistency. The actor's decisions involve a degree of self-expression and enable him to color this kind of role with his own idiosyncrasies. Thus, the characters may change according to the philosophies and ideas of different actors within different eras. Because they are still types, however, their individuality does not override the importance of the universal conflict in the play.

In the dramas that attempt to present a "slice-of-life," the actor's technique changes. He first tries to discover the particular individual that is suggested by the playwright. Then from clues in the script, the actor weaves a personality that has depth and complexity and which provides motivational justification for every statement or action the character makes. Finally, the actor molds his own body and voice to represent the explicit personality he has discovered. The audience must believe the actor has "become" the character. Whatever his method, the actor transposes the actuality of his own experience into that of the character using his own emotions, sensations, instincts, and memories as guides.

Once the actor has discovered the appropriate character and the personal means of relating to it and presenting it, he must make one important additional step. He must create a unique and individual soul which incorporates the playwright's specifications and the reality of his own
experiences, but remains separate from each. The actor must achieve a double existence; he must create a balance between life, which is offered through his own experiences, and acting, which makes those experiences the realistic pulse behind the character.

The absurdist playwright does not offer the clues necessary for an actor to make logical deductions concerning the inner personality or psychological structure of the characters. Very often they display no obvious personalities and show no surface detail which would cancel a deeper significance. The situations of the characters are often unrecognizable; personalities become interchangeable; actions are distorted and faces grotesque in appearance. The actor is required to represent a human being who is not totally conceivable. At the same time, the actor must maintain a basis in reality which will encourage the spectator to accept the moment-to-moment actions as real. Since the human personality is complex and ever-changing, the absurdist playwright does not attempt to define any specific personalities. Instead, he requires the actor to offer his own to the audience.

Methods and Procedures

This thesis is derived from considerable reading and study in the following areas: history and styles of characterization; Harold Pinter's life, writing, and world-view; the dramaturgy of Pinter's plays; the modes and styles of
characterization employed by Pinter; the psychology and general techniques of acting; the preparation of a role in a Pinter play. All of his works, plays by other dramatists whom critics have categorized as "theatre of the absurd" or "existentialist," and the writings that express or explain these approaches to man's understanding of the world through drama have been examined.

A study of Pinter's characters--their functions within the dramas and the explicitness of their behavior--is the basis for determining the particular means by which an actor may develop a Pinter role. Standard methods of analysis and physicalization are revised to enable the actor to perform the traditional task of actualizing a Pinter character. Those methods are applied to the task of dealing with the unpredictable tensions which result from the actor-audience relationship in a Pinter play.

The facts and ideas garnered from this research are organized in the following chapters:

I. Introduction

II. The Plays of Harold Pinter

III. The Actor in the Pinter Play

IV. Conclusion
NOTES


3 Kjerbuhl-Petersen, pp. 112-13.


8 Hardie Albright, p. 253.

Kjerbuhl-Petersen, p. 157.


Kjerbuhl-Petersen, pp. 128-29.


Grossvogel, p. 182.

CHAPTER II
THE PLAYS OF HAROLD PINTER

"What you are," states one of the characters in Harold Pinter's radio play, The Dwarfs, "or appear to be to me, or appear to be to you, changes so quickly, so horrifyingly, I certainly can't keep up with it and I'm damn sure you can't either. But who you are I can't even begin to recognize, and sometimes I recognize it so wholly, so forcibly, I can't look, and how can I be certain of what I see?"

Here, in one short speech, lies the crux of the problem faced by the actor and the audience when they seek to present or experience one of Pinter's characters. In an era when the primary motivational force in human beings is defined not as a drive for pleasure or a thirst for power, but as a "will to meaning," it is Pinter's philosophy that human beings will do anything to keep from being known.

The most distinctive element in Pinter's dramaturgy, therefore, is the surrounding of his characters with ambiguity. In a program note written early in his career, Pinter wrote:

The desire for verification is understandable but cannot always be satisfied. There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. The
thing is not necessarily true or false. The assumption that to verify what has happened and what is happening presents few problems I take to be inaccurate. It is the type of ambiguity, moreover, that involves the presentation of two or more logically incompatible beliefs at the same time.

The nature of Pinter’s ambiguity and the ways in which an actor must deal with it are the twofold subject of this thesis. In this chapter, the first part of this problem will be addressed.

Pinter the Absurdist

To receive anything of value from a play by Harold Pinter, the spectator must avoid searching the performance for meanings. By making a denial of meaning the cornerstone of his dramaturgy, Pinter forces the spectator into a situation that contains no assignable causes or values. As the spectator becomes more and more uneasy and defensive, the denial of any dramatic meaning becomes a philosophical denial of absolute meaning.⁵

Yet the spectator automatically and naturally wants there to be meaning. The conflict between this desire and the failure to find meaning leads to what Albert Camus describes as "absurdity"⁶:

⁵ A world that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty, is a familiar world. But in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories of a lost
homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity.

It is Camus' contention that the mind's first effort is to distinguish what is true from what is false and that this effort has been a fundamental concern of dramatists for centuries. The essential human impulse toward the drama, he believes, is the need for absolute truths and particularly for a means to separate truth from deception.

The dramatic form that has traditionally dealt with "absolute truths," of course, is tragedy. Although in various ways such dramas portray suffering and defeat, as a rule the central character who does the suffering also undergoes a passage from ignorance to self-knowledge. At the very least, there is hope because there seems to be order in the universe. The pity and terror which the tragic character's fall into misfortune engenders ultimately are purged; in their place, there develops enlightenment. Tragedy reinforces man's search for logic and unity—for absolutes, as it were.

In many tragic dramas, Walter Kerr points out, the ending contains if not happiness and fulfillment, then at least transfiguration. The Oresteia, for example, provides everyone with justice and the community with a new mode of conduct.

The bleakness that popular conceptions associate with tragedy may more properly be found today in plays identified
as "theatre of the absurd." Here the awareness that there is no absolute truth, no hope of rationalism or transfiguration—that everything in time and space is relative—has led playwrights to avoid theses and ideological propositions, the representation of events, the narration of fate, and the adventure of characters.\(^{10}\)

Even a cursory examination of Pinter's plays will reveal his abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought.\(^{11}\) He has rejected also the use of dramatic irony—wherein the spectator is aware of the incongruity between what might be expected in a dramatic situation and what actually occurs, even if the characters do not possess such awareness. Pinter's audiences are not allowed to witness conflict while maintaining a rational understanding of the overall action. The distortions that dramatists ordinarily confine to the stage are made to include the spectator.\(^{12}\)

Certainly Pinter avoids all techniques and devices which might verify or support absolute meanings. Insisting that there is more to a play than its "meaning" and that one single framework cannot begin to answer all questions, Pinter is much more interested in the idiosyncracy of truth.\(^{13}\) "I am interested in emotion which is contained and felt very, very deeply," Pinter stated.\(^{14}\)

Pinter's means of developing "deep emotions" is to withhold verification about the situations and characters in his plays. Whether or not this technique makes Pinter
an existential dramatist—indeed, as Kerr asserts, the only one whose plays happen existentially\textsuperscript{15}—may well be debatable. What is certain, however, is that Pinter involves his audiences in the same perplexities that confront his characters. This ambiguity is presented through not only a search for meaning but also a constant stream of reminders about its illusiveness. Each spectator thus must assume the responsibility for the assignment of meaning to Pinter's dramas.

As the spectator goes along carrying out this responsibility, he finds himself cruelly isolated from his fellows. Pinter thus reinforces the fact that each human being is locked forever into his own perception of reality. Such isolation is one of the central facts about a Pinter play. As Ganz puts it, "facts and impressions come to us filtered through the unreliable senses of unreliable people and what is true for one person is false for another."\textsuperscript{16}

The truth of a given situation, that is, depends on individual idiosyncrasies. The human personalities change and adapt to each specific moment. Since different facts are revealed differently to different observers on different occasions, there can be no consistent core of personality. Truth is behavioral and behavior is idiosyncratic.\textsuperscript{17}

Since idiosyncratic truth is a means of rationalizing an illogical universe, each man defends that truth violently. To protect himself from the intrusions of other men and their perceptions of actuality, every human being must fight.
Such violence, Pinter says, is actually "an expression of the question of dominance and subservience" and is a repeated theme in his plays. "The world is a pretty violent place, it's as simple as that, so any violence in the plays comes out quite naturally." 18

Although violence seems always present, it takes a different form and precedence in each Pinter play. 19 The early plays are often called "comedies of menace" because their events are plotted around the fear of an unknown invading power. 20 In The Dumb Waiter, for example, two hired killers wait for their mysterious victim; The Birthday Party is about a man named Stanley, who is trying to elude two representatives of an unknown organization; Edward, the major character in A Slight Ache, anticipates aggression from an old matchseller. The characters who live in fear exhibit an unpleasant feeling of helplessness and isolation sometimes accompanied by physiological manifestations of fear. In many of Pinter's plays of menace, this anxiety is eventually confirmed by some hostile physical act. One of the killers discovers that he is to be the target; Stanley is driven to madness and carried away by the organization men; Edward becomes an outcast and the matchseller takes over his house and his wife.

More often, whatever menace appears in Pinter's plays is perfectly ordinary. The characters who provide the threats or violence are not sinister creatures but common
people. Even the gangsters in *The Dumb Waiter* are quite normal outside of the context in which they are to perform the violent act.

In Pinter's more recent plays, such as *Landscape, Old Times, No Man's Land,* and *Betrayal,* acts of violence are few and the struggle for control is more subtle. Anxiety is present not only in the major crises of life, but in the simple conflicts which are present in every moment of every day. Pinter's characters remain submerged in a private battle for self-possession and often for dominance over each other. This self-containment makes them manifest an isolated, protected quality which is entirely self-instigated. The major action centers around each character's struggle to dominate the other—the menace is no longer a mysterious outsider, but one's own neighbor as well as oneself.

References to the past are often used to invalidate the perceptions of each character and hence of the audience. Unlike traditional dramatists, Pinter does not employ memory to explain or verify the events of the present. Sensory interpretations of past experiences can only represent a private truth. Once an experience is over, it has entered into each person's mind in a separate manner and is no longer subject to any absolute definition. For Pinter, then, a character's memories provide unresolvable conflicts. A Pinter character clings to his memories, however, because they are his own definition of truth. There is an "ever-
present quality of life" which makes the past an important dimension of the present personality.23

Yet the past is often depicted as an uncertainty. Stanley, in The Birthday Party, seems unclear about even the simplest of things which came before. "My father nearly came down to hear me," he says. "Well, I dropped him a card anyway. But I don't think he could make it. No, I lost the address, that was it."24 At other times, the characters are unconcerned about what went before; the spectator is thus encouraged to deal only with the present. Pinter believes it is "a waste of time to try to determine a character's past because, by the end of a segment of the play, the characters are sharing something more important—the present."25

The conflicts which arise from the past associations are more apparent in later Pinter plays because in them it is conceivable that the characters have met before and have been involved in similar past experiences. These conflicts are primary in The Collection, for example, because of the importance each character attributes to his own perceptions. Since Pinter verifies no particular interpretation of the past, thereby negating the importance of the incident itself, what matters is how the incident affected each character personally to make him what he is in the present.26

A clear focus on the present is a major quality of the Pinter plays. Like Antonin Artaud, Pinter believes the
only reality which occurs in drama is the moment-to-moment communication between the actor and the audience. To capitalize on that reality, Pinter's situations involve characters whose personalities and past experiences are disclosed only through the present action. He seeks to eliminate the spectator's concern for everything but the events of the play and the tangible actions of its characters. If there is a second level to be found in the thoughts of the characters and their motivations, and a third in the philosophical parameters of the thoughts and actions, Pinter denies verification for the second and third levels. If there are any subterranean ideas, they are undefinable, vague, and personal. Rather than distorting life into a single organized statement, Pinter suggests numerous possibilities in such a way that there is an illusion of meaning and a suggestion of causality which prevent the plays from seeming totally incoherent.

The Pinter Environment

The coherence of a Pinter play is achieved through the actual physical shape the drama manifests in its setting, its properties, and its spoken and unspoken language. Though the reliance on a play's "physical surfaces" for a second level of meaning may create unwanted and unnecessary confusion, Pinter insists that he is a "very traditional playwright" who is concerned with the shape and consistency of the mood in his plays. If the movement inherent in the
play's physical shape is carefully traced, a steady line of cause and effect may be detected. The characteristic setting of Pinter's plays, for example, is a single room. In *The Dumb Waiter*, it is "a basement room"; in *The Birthday Party*, the "living room of a house in a seaside town"; in *No Man's Land*, "a large room in a house in North West London." Usually there is no more than a general indication about where the room is located. It is a private, self-created setting which reinforces the characters' isolation from the rest of the world. In Pinter's first play, *The Room*, Rose explains, "...this room's all right for me. I mean, you know where you are." By focusing only on the immediate setting, Pinter hopes to block out the external world and to concentrate audience attention on the more central and immediate factors which involve his characters. At the opening curtain, the room appears to possess no more meaning than the eye can encompass. As the play progresses, however, the room seems to acquire the feelings and the attitudes of its inhabitants. As they become more tense, the room becomes a shelter against the outside void; the entrance or exit of any character is a matter of utmost consequence.

Within each Pinter "room" the properties also seem to function with simple, realistic purpose. The significance of the objects is brought into focus by Pinter's crucial detailing of food, clothing, and other such innocuous items. In *The Caretaker*, Davies explains that he must have a good
pair of shoes to get to Sidcup, "Shoes? It's life and death to me." 33 Yet through the course of the play he finds several excuses for rejecting the pair that Aston offers him. At first he admits they are good, hardly shoes with a nice shape but they don't fit, and then later, he says they are a "bit pointed." Still later, he refuses them because they have no shoe laces, and finally because the shoe laces are the wrong color. Such procrastination seems to be caused by the specific misfit of each pair of shoes and because of them it seems unlikely that Davies will ever get to Sidcup, where he says he could claim his identity papers.

The first confrontation between Lenny and Ruth in The Homecoming culminates in her gesture of offering him a glass of water. 34

RUTH. Have a sip. Go on. Have a sip from my glass. (He is still.) Sit on my lap. Take a cool sip. (She pats her lap. Pause. She stands, moves to him with the glass.) Put your head back and open your mouth.
LENNY. Take that glass away from me.
RUTH. Lie on the floor. Go on. I'll pour it down your throat.
LENNY. What are you doing, making me some kind of proposal? (She laughs shortly, drains the glass.)
RUTH. Oh, I was thirsty. (She smiles at him, puts the glass down, goes into the hall and up the stairs.)

With a simple prop, then, Ruth creates a sensual implication of her sexual conquest.

In The Birthday Party, Stanley's eyeglasses are taken away from him so that he can be blindfolded to play a game
of "blind man's buff." During the confusion that follows McCann snaps the frames in half, at which point Stanley completely succumbs to the will of the organization men. Even though they return the glasses to Stanley, they refuse to allow Petey to mend them. With an air of kindness, Goldberg insists that the broken glasses will "keep him quiet for the time being, keep his mind off other things." Near the end of the play Stanley appears, holding his glasses and staring "blankly at the floor." At that point Goldberg makes a generous offer.

GOLDBERG. We'll buy him another pair.
MCCANN. Out of our own pockets.
GOLDBERG. It goes without saying. Between you and me, Stan, it's about time you had a new pair of glasses.
MCCANN. You can't see straight.
GOLDBERG. It's true. You've been cockeyed for years.

When Stanley is asked his opinion, he only clenches and unclenches his eyes and his "hands clutching his glasses begin to tremble." It seems that his inability to retain his glasses affects his sight and eventually his personality.

Everyday, inanimate objects take on a frightening expressiveness in Pinter's plays; characters are drawn to them in search of a weapon stronger than silence or words. Toy drums, tea kettles, matches, cocoa, cheese-rolls, cigarettes, and green olives are all casual objects detailed to the point that they become images of a life-source. The conflict between characters thus centers around one or two "things" found within the room. A pair of shoes, a glass of water,
a pair of eyeglasses--each of these is used in such a way as to undermine the audience's faith in the neutrality of material things. 36

The Pinter Language

Nor is Pinter's verbal language neutral. Through a distinctive form of dramatic dialogue, he magnifies the deceptiveness of language and uses it to increase the isolation of his characters. 37 Unlike traditional stage dialogue, which exaggerates the amount of information and logic that spoken language is actually able to impart, Pinter's dialogue is such that his characters speak only as clearly and effectively as they would in real life. They do not talk explicitly about the dramatic situation, and their dialogue does not disguise essential expository information. In fact, Pinter clearly demonstrates the misleading quality of verbal language by allowing contradictions to exist among the statements or between the statements and the activities. 38

Pinter's plays also show that language, which may be inadequate for transmitting meaning, is nevertheless an effective means of communication--a medium through which a contest of wills is fought. 39 In a lecture given to the Seventh National Student Drama Festival in Bristol, Pinter refers to speech as either a barrier or a bridge between people which is used as an element of social combat--his
choice of words includes metaphors of warfare such as confront, overcome, smokescreen, strategem, and rearguard. According to Pinter, verbal language is used most effectively as a weapon for attack or self-defense.

It is understandable, Pinter states, "that what takes place is continual evasion, desperate rearguard 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 fearsome a possibility." It is this fear of vulnerability that encourages a language both unreliable and evasive, a language where "under what is said, another thing is being said." Very often, Pinter's characters are unaware of their hesitancy to communicate. The result is an "oblique" dialogue which is a rambling attempt to make contact without communicating anything vital. It usually occurs out of habit and solely on a social level, as in the first scene of A Slight Ache:

FLORA. Have you noticed the honeysuckle this morning?
EDWARD. The what?
FLORA. The honeysuckle.
EDWARD. Honeysuckle? Where?
FLORA. By the back gate, Edward.
EDWARD. Is that honeysuckle? I thought it was... convolvulus, or something.
FLORA. But you know it's honeysuckle.
EDWARD. I tell you I thought it was convolvulus.
(Pause)
FLORA. It's in wonderful flower.
EDWARD. I must look.

In other instances, characters are fully aware of the "thing" which is known and unspoken. A defensive language
results because they are either unwilling or unable to talk about it. In the final scene of *The Birthday Party*, Meg knows, perhaps, that Stanley is gone but she is unable to accept the fact; neither is Petey articulate enough to show his compassion and openly comfort his wife. The result is a repetitive, somewhat meaningless conversation about the previous evening:

MEG. Wasn't it a lovely party last night?
PETEY. I wasn't there.
MEG. Weren't you?
PETEY. I came in afterwards.
MEG. Oh,
(Pause)
It was a lovely party. I haven't laughed so much for years. We had dancing and singing. And games. You should have been there,
PETEY. It was good, eh?
(Pause)
MEG. I was the belle of the ball.
PETEY. Were you?
MEG. Oh yes. They all said I was.
PETEY. I bet you were, too.
MEG. Oh, it's true. I was.
(Pause)
I know I was.

CURTAIN

Many times Pinter's characters are aware of the matter at hand but are completely unwilling to discuss it. In such a case, Pinter does not hesitate to show the deceptiveness of words—he allows his characters to tell falsehoods. In the same scene of *The Birthday Party*, Meg asks Petey if Stanley is still in bed. Unwilling to face the problem which may be foreseen, Petey tells his wife, "Yes, he's asleep."
There are other ways a character may use language to hide himself from someone or something which is understood to be a threat. He can send out a torrent of words which Pinter describes as a "smoke screen." In The Homecoming, Lenny is unwilling to confront Ruth openly in their first meeting. Instead he cautiously creates an inane discussion about a clock which may or may not be interpreted by Ruth on a strict, literal basis. The speech makes very little sense, and its relevancy may certainly be questioned. At the same time, he is making an important advance in his relationship with Ruth while remaining securely shielded behind his own words.

What people do to each other with their language is often more obvious than the conceptual content of what they are saying. Pinter expresses this facet of language very clearly in one of the speeches in The Homecoming:

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

Although Pinter's language is often confusing, its effects are evident; the pertinent facts are found in the sounds and reactions of characters.

Words are of vital importance in Pinter's plays, not necessarily because of their meaning, but for the power
they give one character over another. In The Birthday Party, Goldberg and McCann are able to brainwash Stanley with a bombardment of nonsensical questions.49

GOLDBERG. Why don't you pay the rent?
MCCANN. Mother defiler!
GOLDBERG. Why do you pick your nose?
MCCANN. I demand justice!
GOLDBERG. What's your trade?
MCCANN. What about Ireland?
GOLDBERG. What's your trade?
STANLEY. I play the piano.
GOLDBERG. How many fingers do you use?
STANLEY. No hands!
GOLDBERG. No society would touch you. Not even a building society.
MCCANN. You're a traitor to the cloth.
GOLDBERG. What do you use for pyjamas?
STANLEY. Nothing.
GOLDBERG. You verminate the sheet of your birth.
MCCANN. What about the Albigensenist heresy?
GOLDBERG. Who watered the wicket in Melbourne?
MCCANN. What about the blessed Oliver Plunkett?
GOLDBERG. Speak up, Webber. Why did the chicken cross the road?
STANLEY. He wanted to--he wanted to--he wanted to....
MCCANN. He doesn't know!

Stanley is frustrated by his inability to answer, and he associates his speechlessness with ignorance and guilt; the result is panic.

There is comfort in communication because it is a relief from one's terrifying isolation. The expression of feelings and knowledge gives man an additional assurance of his actuality. This being the case, Pinter does not hesitate to show a character's pleasure at having discovered an appropriate word or phrase. In The Caretaker, Davies makes a statement about Mick's personality and, through repetition, he savors it and gradually accepts it as a comfort50:
DAVIES. Who was that feller?
ASTON. He's my brother.
DAVIES. Is he? He's a bit of a joker, en'he?
ASTON. Uh.
DAVIES. Yes...he's a real joker.
ASTON. He's got a sense of humour.
DAVIES. Yes, I noticed.
(Pause)
He's a real joker, that lad, you can see that.
(Pause)
ASTON. Yes, he tends...he tends to see the funny side of things.
DAVIES. Well, he's got a sense of humour, en'he?
ASTON. Yes.
DAVIES. Yes, you could tell that.
(Pause)
I could tell the first time I saw him he had his own way of looking at things.

Pinter's characters often use their control of language to confuse or belittle another character rather than to enlighten him. In The Homecoming, Lenny and Ruth's first meeting is a struggle for power, although neither person is able or willing to deal with the conflict openly. Lenny's first speech, which is intended to explain his desire to hold Ruth's hand, is filled with nautical terms--"...I was standing alone under an arch, watching all the men jibbing the boom, out in the harbor, and playing with the yardarm--as well as street lingo--"...The only trouble was she was falling apart with the pox." Neither field of technical jargon is one to which Ruth would relate. Lenny's effort is not to explain why he wants to touch her, but rather to demonstrate his verbal authority and thus communicate his power to control her.51

A character's attempt to confuse meaning may stem from aggressive or passive reasons. Lenny may want to conquer
Ruth, but Briggs, in *No Man's Land*, merely wishes to hide himself from Spooner's intrusion. The less the old man knows about Briggs's friendship with Jack, the less power he will have. In this account of their meeting, Briggs obviously intends to convey no information:

BRIGGS. ...I was standing at a street corner. A car drew up. It was him. He asked me the way to Bolsover street. I told him Bolsover street was in the middle of an intricate one-way system. It was a one-way system easy enough to get into. The only trouble was that, once in, you couldn't get out. I told him his best bet, if he really wanted to get to Bolsover street, was to take the first left, first right, second right, third on the left, keep his eye open for a hardware shop, go right round the square, keeping to the inside lane, take the second Mews on the right and then stop. He will find himself facing a very tall office block, with a crescent courtyard. He can take advantage of this office block...

The speech continues for nearly a page, discussing only his efforts to assist Jack in reaching Bolsover street.

Even if a character is honestly trying to communicate an idea, it is possible for him to fail. The other characters, as well as the spectator, are left in a state of confusion. In *Old Times*, Anna attempts to explain Kate's cautious personality:

ANNA. ...Some people throw a stone into a river to see if the water's too cold for jumping, others, a few others, will always wait for the ripples before they will jump.

DEELEY. Some people do what? (To Kate) What did she say?

ANNA. And I knew that Katey would always wait not just for the first emergence of ripple but for the ripples to pervade and pervade the surface, for of course as you know ripples on the surface indicate
a shimmering in depth down through every particle of water down to the river bed, but even when she felt that happen, when she was assured it was happening, she still might not jump. But in this case she did jump and I knew therefore she had fallen in love truly and was glad. And I deduced it must also have happened to you.

DEELEY. You mean the ripples?

ANNA. If you like.

DEELEY. Do men ripple too?

ANNA. Some, I would say.

DEELEY. I see.

(Pause)

It is interesting to note that Deeley assumes his own ignorance is the cause of the miscommunication and, for reasons of power, he will not give Anna the satisfaction of knowing he does not completely understand her analogy. At the same time, Anna delight in her ability to conceptualize an image—she repeats the word "ripple" four times.

The recurrence of words and phrases in Pinter's dialogue gives a "musical-poetic structure" to what would seem a closely observed reproduction of genuine speech. As Ruth suggests, the movement or rhythm in a speech is possibly more important than the words it supports. The psychological action which exists underneath the words may be detected from sounds, rhythms, and textures of spoken language. People tend to interact emotionally through language; their tone and color of voice often carries more significance than the actual meaning of their words.

An important aspect of Pinter's dialogue is the designation "pause," which controls the rhythm of a scene. Pinter's pauses are important because they allow a sensual,
non-verbal language to emerge. "The pause is a pause because of what has happened in the minds and guts of the characters," Pinter says. He sees speech as "a constant strategem to cover nakedness." When something happens to disrupt the flow of words, man is vulnerable because, as Pinter explains, "we communicate only too well, in our silence, in what is unsaid."

Silence falls on Pinter's characters when they are unable to speak; the problem may be permanent or temporary. In The Homecoming, for example, Lenny is surprised when Ruth is unmoved by his "shocking" story:

RUTH. How did you know she was diseased?
LENNY. How did I know?
(Pause)
I decided she was.
(Silence)
You and my brother are newly-weds, are you?

Lenny recovers during his silence and there plunges into another subject. Stanley's silence, in The Birthday Party, is sadly permanent and equated with the gradual dissolution of his personality. When asked his opinion, Stanley says, "Ug-gughh...uh-gughhh...Caaahhh...caaahhh." He has been denied a valuable medium of self-defense.

Pinter makes silence an important part of communication; he uses it to focus on and to extend the language of gesture, activity, and movement. "There is a poetry of the senses," wrote Artaud, "as there is a poetry of language." Physical language is a means of revealing that which is unspoken or
unspeakable; whether they intend to or not, characters give themselves away by a movement. In *The Birthday Party*, McCann is seen at the opening of Act II "sitting at the table tearing a sheet of newspaper into five equal strips." There is no explanation for his puzzling habit and when it is repeated in the third act, Goldberg demands, "Stop doing that! It's childish, it's pointless. It's without a solitary point." The action may be meaningless, just as words often are, but the feelings behind it—anxiety or impatience—are real and they must emerge somehow.

Gesture is a very powerful form of communication. People use it to express ideas or feelings which would not be delivered so effectively if spoken. In *The Homecoming*, Ruth challenges Lenny, "If you take the glass...I'll take you...Why don't I just take you?" She equates him with the glass, and then with very little effort, "She laughs shortly, drains the glass." In *The Collection*, Stella makes a similarly decisive statement with only the expression on her face:

JAMES. You didn't do anything, did you?
(Pause)
He wasn't in your room. You just talked about it, in the lounge.
(Pause)
That's the truth, isn't it?
(Pause)
You just sat and talked about what you would do if you went to your room. That's what you did.
(Pause)
Didn't you?
(Pause)
That's the truth...isn't it?
(STELLA looks at him, neither confirming nor denying. Her face is friendly, sympathetic. Fade flat to half light. The four figures are still, in the half light. Fade to blackout.)

CURTAIN

This "poetry of the senses" often seems more powerful than dialogue because it achieves the clarity and the pressure of a continuing image. The result is visual memory, an important factor in communication which Pinter uses to his advantage. "I always write," he said, "in direct relation to the visual image of people walking about and standing on the stage."62 Ruth's drink of water is a more powerful source of recall than any words she could have spoken. The final scene of The Collection ways nothing explicit but it is an image that can readily be recalled.

A great many of Pinter's plays begin with visual images wrapped in silence. Act I of The Birthday Party opens with an empty room; "Petey enters from the door on the left with a paper and sits at the table. He begins to read. Meg's voice comes through the kitchen hatch." In The Caretaker, there is a long description of Mick who is seen at the beginning of the play sitting in silence for "thirty seconds." This silence is repeated at the end of the play in a tableau. The Birthday Party ends almost as it began, with Meg and Petey seated at the breakfast table. The final image in The Caretaker is of Aston at a window with his back turned
against the stuttering old Davies. The Dumb Waiter, The Homecoming, The Collection, No Man's Land, and Betrayal each conclude in a silent, ambiguous freeze.

Old Times begins and ends with a tableau:

(Light dim. Three figures discerned. DEELEY slumped in armchair, still. KATE curled on a sofa, still. ANNA standing at the window, looking out. Silence. Lights up on DEELEY and KATE, smoking cigarettes...)

As the first scene progresses there is no movement except the flickering of Kate and Deeley's cigarettes. The final scene also has little movement, but it is carefully described:

(Long silence. ANNA stands, walks towards the door, stops, her back to them. Silence. DEELEY starts to sob, very quietly. ANNA stands still. ANNA turns, switches off the lamps, sits on her divan, and lies down. The sobbing stops. Silence. DEELEY stands. He walks a few paces, looks at both divans. He goes to ANNA's divan, looks down at her. She is still. Silence. DEELEY moves towards the door, stops, his back to them. Silence. DEELEY turns. He goes towards KATE's divan. He sits on her divan, lies across her lap. Long silence. DEELEY very slowly sits up. He gets off the divan. He walks slowly to the armchair. He sits, slumped. Silence. Lights up full sharply, very bright. DEELEY in armchair. ANNA lying on divan. KATE sitting on divan.)

The lighting effect seems to be an attempt to "blind" the spectator, then leave him in darkness with a final image etched in his mind.

Pinter is both economical and explicit with his verbal and non-verbal language. A "still, expressionless look" or a quiet verbal exchange can communicate as much or more than broad movement or eloquent speeches. "[Language] has to be absolutely specific," says Pinter. This means that no
matter how ambiguous, speech and movement must be direct, controlled, and structured.

The Pinter Characters

Although the setting, the properties, and the dialogue of a Pinter play contribute clearly-definable frames of reference by which meanings can be inferred though not verified, it is his characters who must provide the audience with a guide to what is happening in the play. They provide information through their actions, their functions, and their relationships.

Character actions.--Unfortunately, Pinter does not conceptualize a character before allowing him to develop or change as the play itself develops and changes. Yet Pinter does not willfully keep secrets from the audience. What he strives for is to have the characters experience fear and isolation as they struggle to locate their position as "men." The verisimilitude of this struggle is sought by offering little or no exposition about the character, either to the other characters or to the audience, so that they are all like strangers meeting on a street.

The problems that Pinter's ambiguous characterization may cause the actor and the spectator are both beside the point and the whole point. Pinter insists that "a character on stage who can present no convincing argument or information as to his past experience, his present behavior or his
aspirations, nor give a comprehensive analysis of his motives, is a legitimate and as worthy of attention as one who, alarmingly, can do all these things.\textsuperscript{70}

Be that as it may, it is necessary to avoid the false assumption that Pinter's characters are merely devices calculated to provoke a desired emotional reaction from the audience. Rather, they are multidimensional personalities whose motives are complex, unpredictable, and most important of all, unverifiable. Such qualities are sensed by the ostracised spectator who is able to observe a communication among the characters which is stronger than can be accounted for by the available information. The resulting confusion and mystery prompt the spectator to construct his own meanings based on what he can perceive from the behavior of the characters.

It is the actions of the characters, then, and the communication between them, which provide a key for understanding Pinter's plays. What can be seen of a human being is not inner motivations and psychological desires but their results: action and language. Pinter does not provide information to explain why a character behaves in a particular manner, but rather, focuses on the actions themselves as the only means of perceiving a personality. Since both characters and their ideas are uncertain--products of idiosyncratic perceptions--it is only the "here and now" of
human relationships which may be offered with accuracy.

Thus, while the characters of a Pinter play are difficult to understand, the relationships between them are an important source of information for the spectator. An overall view of Pinter's plays shows that the central conflict consistently involves three major characters rather than two. Indeed, many plays contain just three characters: A Slight Ache, The Caretaker, The Dwarfs, The Lover, The Basement, Silence, Old Times, and Betrayal.

Even in plays where there are only two characters, a third person is mentioned consistently. Whether or not he exists in actuality, his presence in the minds of the characters makes him as important as if he had appeared on the stage. In The Dumb Waifer, for example, the audience sees only Gus and Ben. Yet there are also the disruptive dumb waiter which demands the attention of the hired killers; the repeated mention of their boss or immediate contact, Wilson; and the voice at the other end of the speaker which demands food and eventually gives Ben instructions to kill. All of these outsiders may or may not be the same person. What remains important is the existence of a third party who serves as the controller and who complicates the relationship between Ben and Gus. Landscape also contains two characters, Beth and Duff, but there is a third party who emerges in the play through Beth's descriptions. He may be her fantasy or even an image of Duff as a younger man.
Whether he exists in her mind or in reality, that third character constitutes a source of conflict in Beth and Duff's marriage.

Although other Pinter plays contain more than three characters, only three are directly involved with the central conflict. *The Birthday Party*, for example, dramatizes Goldberg's pursuit and destruction of Stanley, and Meg's possession and loss of Stanley. Petey, Lulu, and McCann are secondary characters whose function is to further define the three major characters; they are not responsible for the central action of the play. Likewise, *No Man's Land* is about the struggle between Spooner, Hirst, and the younger men, Foster and Briggs, who are living in the house. The latter two characters are almost interchangeable and share the function of son, servant, secretary, and companion to Hirst.

With plays containing more than three characters, there are sometimes minor conflicts which initiate or contribute to the central conflict. One such play is *The Collection*, which is about an unusual *menage à trois*. It is assumed that Bill has had an affair with James' wife, Stella, before the action of the play begins. Since that relationship is part of the past, it is secondary and only important because it has triggered another situation: James's revengeful disruption of Bill and Harry's relationship. Bill and James, because they are involved in both triangles, constitute the
primary characters of the play.

_The Homecoming_ is another of Pinter's plays which is made up of more than one triangular relationship. The main struggle occurs between Teddy, Ruth, and Lenny, who represents his family. The other characters—Max, Sam, and Joey—represent the family unit and its three types of men. The original conflict between family members is reactivated when Teddy comes home and is complicated by the presence of his wife—an outsider and a woman.

These triangular relationships differ from traditional one-to-one struggles involving protagonist and antagonist characters. Instead, Pinter's plays usually begin by introducing two characters whose relationship seems to be in a state of balance. A third character then appears and creates a conflict in that "base relationship."

**Character functions.**—The base relationship which is initially established can involve many different kinds of personalities and be composed of a variety of role combinations. _The Birthday Party_ begins with Meg and Stanley assuming the roles of mother and son. Husband and wife relationships are the initial subjects of such plays as _A Slight Ache, The Collection, Landscape, Old Times, and Betrayal_. Other base characters introduce numerous kinds of relations including brother and brother, friend and friend, father and son, and master and servant. Although characters
within different plays portray similar life roles, their individual characteristics are highly variable. The women who are "wives," for example--Flora in A Slight Ache, Stella in The Collection, Kate in Old Times, Beth in Landscape, and Emma in Betrayal--are varied in age, intellect, social status, and most importantly in the nature of their relationship with their husbands.

Dominance and subservience are the keys to understanding a relationship; the distribution of power creates a balance between characters which is unique and which reflects individuality. If a character assumes a traditionally dominant role such as "husband" or "master," he does not necessarily control the relationship. In Old Times, for example, Deeley is not a particularly strong man and, matched with a self-assured woman such as Kate, he seems especially weak.

Besides these two base characters, as was noted above, Pinter's plays involve yet a third individual. By entering the play he disrupts the existing relationship; he is an "intruder." Such an invasion of privacy is a dreaded but inevitable fact of life. The intruder may be one man disrupting the solitude of another or an army destroying a civilization. It is the certainty of an intruder which constitutes the existential fear--the everyday struggle to stay in the uppermost position and to maintain control of one's own life. As Pinter explains in a program note: 73
Given a man in a room and he will sooner or later receive a visitor. A visitor entering the room will enter with intent. If two people inhabit the room the visitor will not be the same man for both. A man in a room who receives a visit is likely to be illuminated or horrified by it. The visitor himself might as easily be horrified or illuminated. The man may leave with the visitor or he may leave alone. The visitor may leave alone or stay in the room alone when the man is gone. Or they may both stay together in the room. Whatever the outcome in terms of movement, the original condition, in which a man sat alone in a room, will have been subjected to alterations. A man in a room and no one entering lives in expectation of a visit. He will be illuminated or horrified by the absence of a visitor. But however much it is expected, the entrance, when it comes, is unexpected, and almost always unwelcome. (He himself, of course, might go out of the door, knock and come in and be his own visitor. It has happened before.)

It is the undeterminable form of the intruder which is primarily responsible for the fear.

In Pinter's plays, as in life, the intruder is not easily defined. He can materialize in the form of any personality or social role. Although he "enters" with particular intentions, the goal of one intruder is not necessarily that of another. Most obviously, intruders do not possess any particular character traits. In The Birthday Party, for example, the first scene of the play establishes an existing relationship which includes Meg, Stanley, and Petey. The habitual morning behavior suggests a balance of power among those three characters—their quips and bickering are an accepted means of communication rather than an actual struggle for dominance. Into the room
comes Goldberg and his accomplice McCann. They are outsiders, gentlemen looking for a place to stay (it is only Stanley's overt anxiety which suggests they have an unspoken purpose). Goldberg is a well-mannered man in his fifties who has a kindly, flirtatious manner with women and self-assured dominance over men. His purpose is to remove Stanley and he does so. The result is the disruption of Meg and Stanley's relationship. The final scene of the play focuses on Meg's reaction to the change, and it is evident that Goldberg has intruded indirectly on the marriage of Meg and Petey as well.

A Slight Ache begins in a similar manner: the introduction of the base characters, Edward and Flora, over a ritual of breakfast. Their lives are interrupted by the appearance of a matchseller at the garden gate. Unlike Goldberg, the Matchseller is a very old man, a harmless beggar in ragged clothes. It is Edward who decides the Matchseller is an intruder and imagines the reason for his presence. Eventually the Matchseller does replace Edward, who is left holding a tray of matches. Pinter's earliest plays--such as The Room and The Birthday Party--have been labeled "comedies of menace" because they are concerned with an outside, invading conqueror. The Matchseller is such a menacing character, which Edward recognizes as one of "literally lists of people anxious to do me down." Yet A
Slight Ache takes a different turn and suggests that the intruder is not an outside force, but emerges from Edward's own mind.

The Dumb Waiter is a play in which Pinter explores the possibility of any character being a potential intruder. Ben and Gus, the only characters, are "staked out" in a basement room, each passing time in his own way while waiting for the unknown intruder whom they have been instructed to kill. The men have been partners for some time, and a harmony exists between them in their rituals of passing time. It is not until the final moment of the play that the intruder is identified: it is Gus himself. He has been an intruder throughout the play without knowing it; he has had no purpose as intruder, and he does not, in fact, intend to perform such a function. He enters the room, however, and that act of intrusion makes him the victim and changes his previous relationship with Ben, who might just as easily have become the intruder.

Since every character is a potential intruder, it is difficult in some of Pinter's plays to detect the central disruptive force. The opening scene of The Homecoming establishes a family relationship and introduces its members --Max, the father, Sam, his brother, and Lenny and Joey, his sons. Another relationship, however, is introduced in the second scene--the marriage of Ruth and Teddy, who is Max's third son. In the course of the play both relationships are
disrupted so that it is difficult to designate one character as "intruder." Ruth's presence changes the all-male balance of the family. Lenny, on the other hand, aggressively interferes in Ruth and Teddy's marital relations. The major intruder, however, must be Ruth since the play concerns Teddy's relationship with his family—his homecoming—rather than his marriage, which was probably in danger before their arrival in London.

Because there is something of an intruder in every personality, events of the immediate present are important for discovering the immediate source of conflict. Many of Pinter's most recent works—which have been called "memory plays"—are full of references to the past. Reminiscent discussions may reveal several imposing characters, but none are important, unless perhaps they reappear in the present.

Old Times is about an intruder who surfaces from the past. As the play begins, Kate and Deeley, a married couple, are discussing another character—Kate's old friend Anna, it is later presumed. During this opening conversation, Anna is actually in the room, "standing at the window, looking out." Her presence suggests that she has always been there lurking "in a dim light," and it is as if Kate's reminiscing conjures her into the room. Anna is the intruder of the play, but Deeley has been an intruder in the past; he has changed the relationship between the two women (whatever it was) by marrying Kate. The struggle which is central to the
play is Anna and Deeley's attempt to dominate or possess Kate. The final action of the play is Kate's attempt to destroy her relationship with both of the characters in order to protect her isolation.

Intruders are not always conquerors. Whether their efforts to dominate are aggressive, as with Anna and Deeley, or unintentional, like Gus, intruders are often victims. In *The Caretaker*, for example, Davies does not enter Aston's room as a destructive force. He is simply an old man in search of shelter—-one might go so far as to say acceptance, or even love. Since a relationship already exists in that environment between Aston and his brother Mick, it becomes apparent that Davies must replace one of them. In the end Aston and Mick band together to destroy Davies. The contrast between their pleased superiority and his pitiful weakness makes it appear they welcomed the intrusion as a means of proving their strength.

The intruder, then, is not necessarily a source of negative action. "Evil people. What the hell does that mean?" asks Pinter, "Or bad people. And who are you then if you say that, and what are you?" There are all different types of intruders and the play may be seen from their viewpoint as well as from that of the other characters. Some may be angry and somewhat violent, like James in *The Collection*. Others are as kind as Goldberg, and likeable as Gus, or as loving as Anna. Since it is possible for any
character to be an intruder, they vary in age, sex, and appearance. They will not be perceived in the same way by any of the other characters in the play, much less by each spectator.75

Just as the intruder characters have different personalities and traits, they possess different desires and vary in their strength and determination to fulfill them. Goldberg's intention is to destroy, Ruth wants to control, and the Matchseller needs a place to belong. Some intruders are strong and successful; others may be justified or determined but they are losers. Such variation makes it difficult to categorize a character except in terms of his immediate environment. Even so, it would be useless to judge him in terms of that role. A person may be at home in one situation, but his mere existence eventually causes him to enter a strange "room" in which he is an intruder.

The only constant of a Pinter character, then, remains the role itself—that is, the function of the character. The two base characters establish a relationship which is defeated by the intrusion of a third character. As Pinter states, "an intruder comes to upset the balance of everything."76 Whether the intruder succeeds or not, each character is subject to change. A cause-effect movement is evident in Pinter's characters, more so than in events or in the progression of ideas. It is therefore the function of characters and their matrix of interaction which is the
focus of Pinter's plays.

Character Relationships.--Although Pinter denies the possibility of conceptualizing a character's psyche, his transactions or methods of communication are clearly evident. In fact, it seems to be a mood or a quality of the transaction which inspires Pinter as a writer. *Old Times* was conceived as a "flashed image" of two people talking about someone else. Pinter says he wrote the first draft of the play so fast that he could not bother to give the characters names, "I called them A, B, and C."77

Using Pinter's alphabetical designations, it is possible to look at the characters as isolated points:

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A

B
C
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Fig. 1--Pinter's characters

This existential view of human beings trapped within their own perceptions and guarded against the danger of knowing and being known is a factor of each Pinter play. The density of these points is infinite, just as the complexity of the human personality is difficult to perceive. Eventually, however, the characters will contact each other. The
result is a visible line which spans the distance between the points.

\[ \\
\begin{array}{c}
1 \\
2 \\
3
\end{array} \\
\]

Fig. 2--Character transactions

The lines 1, 2, and 3 may be considered the transactions which occur between characters.

From the distance between the points and by the shape created from the lines, the relationship of the points may be determined. Two characters, for example, form a linear relationship which may be distant or very close. The introduction of a third character will produce a triangular relationship.

\[ \\
\begin{array}{c}
B \\
\text{linear} \\
C
\end{array} \\
\]

\[ \\
\begin{array}{c}
\text{triangular}
\end{array} \\
\]

Fig. 3--Character relationships

These are the least complex types of relationships. It is the linear type which depicts the traditional struggle between protagonist and antagonist.

Although many plays involve a linear struggle, they generally concern more than two characters. The transactions
between primary and secondary characters provide back-
ground and other information about those characters. 
Secondary characters may even have transactions or minor 
conflicts among themselves—as with points F and G. They 
relate to the major conflict only indirectly, through one 
of the primary characters.

Fig. 4--Traditional dramatic struggle

One way in which Pinter achieves ambiguity is by con-
trolling the character relationships which are visible to 
the spectator. He secludes his primary characters in a 
closed environment, such as a room, and allows only a 
limited source of transactions to reveal a limited number 
of perceptions of personality. Other characters may be 
mentioned—such as Ruth's children in The Homecoming, or 
Anna's husband in Old Times—but unless they are within 
the context of the room they offer very little information.
Since many of Pinter's plays include secondary characters, there are also one or more secondary relationships. In *The Birthday Party*, for example, the initial relationship is a triangle which exists between Meg, Petey, and Stanley. It is a secondary relationship because it includes a relatively minor character, Petey, whose major purpose is to reveal Meg in her role as wife. The more important triangle includes Meg, Stanley, and the intruder, Goldberg. The major conflict is within that triangular relationship at the point "X," where Goldberg interferes with the transactions between Meg and Stanley.

Fig. 5--Pinter's dramatic struggle

Fig. 6--Primary and secondary relationships
The climax of the play occurs when Goldberg destroys the mother-son relationship, leaving only a linear relationship between Meg and Petey.

It is the transience of these relationships which gives Pinter's characters a quality of appearing to be true or real. Personalities are as infinite as points A, B, and C because they change and adapt according to the lines which extend from other new points. It is possible to see a character in a different light every time he communicates with a new character. This idea is supported by Eric Berne's theory of Transactional Analysis.78

According to Berne, human beings possess three different "ego states" or sets of coherent behavior patterns.79 These ego states may be described as those which resemble those of parental figures (exteropsychic); those which are "autonomously directed toward objective appraisal of reality" (neopsychic); and those which are fixated in early childhood (archaeopsychic). In more common terms they are known as exhibitions of Parent, Adult, and Child. More importantly, Berne says that these ego states are normal psychological phenomena and it is natural and expected for a mind to shift and adapt to its immediate environment.

It should be noted that Berne lables his examples--Mr. Black, Mrs. White, Poet, Victim, Advisor--rather than giving them real names and disclosing their complete situation. Although they are actual cases and he is familiar with their personal
traits, he analyzes only their behavior. Each case reads like a Pinter play: a structural analysis of the behavior of actual people whose identity is never completely described.

Pinter admits that even he does not know everything about his characters. Instead of supplying an omniscient narrator, he assumes the dimensionality of the characters and allows them the span of the play in which to create and define themselves. Pinter works as a story-teller rather than a manipulator. He renders a meticulously accurate account of the movement of the play by giving a description of the situation at the beginning before the intrusion and by noting the changes that occur at the end.

Critic Pauline Kael describes Pinter as "the actor as dramatist" because his is an actor's view of what people come to see at the theatre. Another critic concludes that Pinter's plays are little more than actor's exercises. The Pinter characters do, in fact, require a great deal of personal decision-making which, though usual for an actor, is unexpected by an audience. "Between my lack of biographical data about characters," says Pinter, "and the ambiguity of what they say lies a territory which is not only worthy of exploration but which it is compulsory to explore." Such an open interpretation creates some problems for the spectator, and even for the actor who is possibly more experienced in discovering a character than
Pinter realizes that one of the problems in producing his plays is finding a balance between the actor's freedom to interpret and retaining the shape of the play. An actor must be able to bring his own experience to the role in order to simulate the dimensionality of Pinter's characters. On the other hand, the actor must realize that Pinter does not regard his characters as uncontrolled; he has definite intentions about their function, the shape of their words, and their balance with the structure of the play. The actor's special tasks and the ensuing problems will be covered more fully in Chapter III.
NOTES

1 Harold Pinter, Complete Works: Two (New York, 1977), p. 112.


7 Camus, pp. 12-14.


Free, pp. 1-2.


Bensky, p. 3.


Gussow, pp. 132-33.
24 Pinter, Complete Works: One, p. 33.
25 Gussow, p. 47.
26 Ganz, Pinter, pp. 4-5.
28 Free, p. 4.
30 Pinter, Complete Works: One, p. 102.
31 Ganz, Pinter, p. 13.
32 Ruby Cohn, "The World of Harold Pinter" Tulane Drama Review, 6 (1962), 56.
33 Pinter, Complete Works: Two, p. 22.
34 Pinter, The Homecoming, pp. 34-35.
35 Pinter Complete Works: One, pp. 91-92.
38 Esslin, The Peopled Wound, pp. 208-211.
39 Esslin, The Peopled Wound, pp. 208-211.


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45 Pinter, *The Homecoming*, p. 28.


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49 Pinter, *Complete Works: One*, p. 61.

50 Pinter, *Complete Works: Two*, pp. 48-49.


52 Pinter, *No Man's Land*, p. 62.

53 Pinter, *Old Times*, pp. 36-37.


57 Gussow, p. 132.

59 Pinter, The Homecoming, p. 31.

60 Artaud, p. 37.

61 Pinter, Complete Works: Two, p. 157.


63 Pinter, Old Times, p. 7.

64 Pinter, Old Times, p. 73-75.

65 Gussow, p. 128.


67 Gussow, p. 132.


69 Gale, p. 253.

70 Free, p. 1.


74 Gussow, p. 126.

75 Bensky, Writers At Work, p. 363.

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78 Eric Berne, Games People Play (New York, 1964), passim.


80 Harold Pinter, "Writing for the Theatre," cited in Complete Works: One, p. 13

81 Esslin, The Peopled Wound, p. 35.


83 Gussow, p. 126.

84 Esslin, The Peopled Wound, pp. 41-42.

85 Gussow, p. 43.

86 Bensky, "Harold Pinter: An Interview," p. 3.
CHAPTER III

PERFORMER VERSUS ROLE: THE ACTOR IN THE PINTER PLAY

The end of "playing," Shakespeare has Hamlet say (III, ii), "was and is, to hold the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure." And in general the three speeches that constitute Hamlet's advice to the players can serve very well as the beginning of a theory of acting. All that is needed is the specific techniques that may be employed to "suit the action to the word, the word to the action."

Yet just as each age has its "form and pressure," so also does it have specific concepts and styles of acting, not to mention "actor training." And just as Shakespeare apparently was voicing one Elizabethan view of acting style, so he may also have been struggling as a dramatist to encourage his actors to find a means of performance that was ideally suited to his own work.

Be that as it may, it is the contention of this thesis that the plays of any playwright, but those of Harold Pinter in particular, require acting techniques peculiar to that playwright's plays. In this chapter much of what has been
discovered about the craft of acting is applied to the methods of characterization used by Harold Pinter in his major plays and a special study of Kate in *Old Times* is used to exemplify these methods.

The Actor and His Craft

Each actor develops his own particular manner of using the elements of his art to perform his roles. Despite this idiosyncrasy, which seems to make up a large part of his effectiveness, his craft must focus on the control of his voice, his body, his imagination, and his powers of perception.¹ Perfecting a personal technique which incorporates each of those elements is usually the result of intensive training.

Until the end of the nineteenth century, an actor received his training primarily through his participation in the dramatic repertoire of a specific performing company.² As the actor began to emerge as an individual artist of the Renaissance, he might have been part of a commedia troupe. There the actor could practice his skills in the performances he gave on the streets, in the squares, and at festivals. Later, Elizabethan players learned their trade by joining companies such as the Lord Chamberlain's or the Lord Admiral's for wages or as apprentices. Even reputable actors of the twentieth century have used this method of training to learn their art through participation.
One such performer admits:

I don't think Helen Hayes ever took a lesson, or Shirly Booth or John Barrymore. They had an innate talent and they practiced their talent. They served an apprenticeship. People, actors told them what to do.

Although practical experience is still an effective method for learning the art of acting, other means of training have evolved. In the 1890's, Constantin Stanislavsky began to examine acting in terms of the principles which could be elaborated and defined for the purpose of training individuals:

All that has been written about the theatre is only philosophizing, very interesting, very deep, it is true, that speaks beautifully of the results desirable to reach in art, or criticism of the success or failure of results already reached. All these works are valuable and necessary, but not for the actual practical work in the theatre, for they are silent on how to reach certain results, on what is necessary to do firstly, secondly, thirdly, and so forth, with a beginner, or what is to be done with an experienced and spoiled actor.

Stanislavsky's research led to the identification of a number of core techniques which can be learned independently and then systematically applied to different characters in different plays.

Stanislavsky's theories have greatly influenced such American acting programs of the twentieth century as the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, the Neighborhood Playhouse School of the Theatre, the Lee Strasberg Theatre Institute and the Stella Adler Theatre Studio. Although these programs are quite diverse, each of them is effective because it
assists the actor in learning to perform certain essential tasks: creating a fictitious "person," physicalizing that fiction for the spectator, and maintaining a controlled relationship between himself, the spectator, and the character in the play.

Creating a character.--The objective of an actor is not so much to represent nature as to discover and reveal that which has already been created artistically; he must impersonate the choices set forth by the playwright. The role, therefore, addresses the actor in the form of printed words: his performance is preceded by an analysis of their meaning and implications.

To create a fictitious person, the actor must develop behavior which is consistent, believable, and relevant to the play as a whole. In addition, he must seek a general idea of the playwright's intent, the function of his particular character in the play, his relationship with other characters, and a definition of the character's long- and short-term goals. The actor achieves these goals, by formulating key questions that he attempts to answer during the course of rehearsal: (1) What are the circumstances of the character's life before the play begins? (2) What is the character's environment? That is, when does the play occur and what are the geographical, economical, political, social, and religious factors that affect the characters?
(3) What does the character look like? Is he male or female, how old is he, is he physically strong or weak, is he attractive, how does he stand, how does he move? (4) What does the character sound like; what is the strength of his voice, the pitch, the quality, the resonance? (5) What are the character's social roles (actual or assumed) within his family and his community? (6) What is the character's "will to meaning": his desires, needs, and motivations? (7) How strong-willed is he? (8) What is the character's moral stance, does he have integrity, and will he achieve his goals by "good" or "evil" means? (9) What is the character's purpose in the play, and how does he contribute to its overall effect?

There are several sources from which an actor may gather information to answer these questions. Actual facts are available only through the playwright's narrative description of time, setting, and character. This type of information is written parenthetically, outside the context of the play. In an introduction, for example, the playwright might give very specific instructions as to the time of the play and the appearance of the set.

Scene: The action takes place on the estate of Lyuboff Andreevna Ranevskaya...a room that is still called the nursery. One of the doors leads into Anya's room. Dawn, the sun will soon be rising. It is May, the cherry trees are in blossom but in the orchard it is cold, with a morning frost. The windows in the room are closed...
Also, upon a character's initial entrance, the playwright may choose to offer a detailed description of his age, size, coloring, or temperament:

ANDREW is, on the surface, a stoutish, easygoing elderly man, with kindly patient manners, and an engaging simplicity of character. But he has a watchful, deliberate, waiting, listening face, and formidable reserves of power, both bodily and mental, in his capacious chest and long head...10

Many playwrights interject the dialogue with descriptions of exactly how a character should speak or move:

HAPPY. (moving about with energy, expressiveness)
All I can do now is wait for the merchandise manager to die...11

The narrative facts offered by a playwright are important because of the information that can be inferred from them. Knowing where a character lives and within what time frame, for example, can lead to an understanding of his values of his social responsibilities. This method of inductive reasoning is a valid and practical means for the actor to define his character. It is also an important form of reasoning for the actor to perfect, because it is the only means of interpreting information from dialogue. Other than the facts offered by the playwright--and the inferences drawn from them--the actor must rely on the dialogue to answer all his questions concerning the character. From dialogue the actor may decipher three different viewpoints of the character: the character's perception of
himself, a perception of the character by other characters, and the actor/spectator perception of transactions which occur between characters. The character's self-perception may be determined, first, by what he says about himself. Often he will describe impressions of his station in life, praising or criticizing himself. Second, the actor can create an image of the character's "life-position" from what he says to other characters and the manner in which he treats them. For example, he may think highly of himself but not of others; he may be of the opinion that other people are better than himself; or he may be of a pessimistic nature and not see much good in himself or mankind. The opinions of the other characters may not be the same as a character's self-perception. Although the way he is treated usually coincides with the way he views himself, what characters say about him when he is not present is an important clue to their actual impression. In addition, the actor can consider his own impression of the characters' relationships with each other. As an outsider, he is able to objectively witness the kind of transactions that occur between characters and within different circumstances. All the information which is derived from the dialogue is subject to the actor's personal interpretation, and he generalizes an impression which is based on one or several particular incidents. In this stage of analysis, the actor intuitively contributes a part of himself—the experiences
and influences of his own life—to the character.

To realize the character's "personality," however, it is necessary for the actor to explore the implications of the dialogue of the play. In Chapters I and II, above, it was noted that one of the attributes of a so-called absurdist play is the lack of specific information that can be assembled about any character's background or individual traits. This does not mean that the characters can have no idiosyncrasies or that they require no exploration. Where possible it is important for the actor to find a correlation between the manner in which the character relates to his environment in the play and his own thoughts and feelings which might motivate that behavior. Consistency between thought and action will prevent the character from appearing unclear or altogether false and unbelievable. It is the steady flow from cause to effect that gives the play its vital form and its characters a desirable illusion of actuality.

Each character has his own peculiar desires which are constantly met by obstacles, often in the form of other characters. The progress of the play is thus affected by the development of conflicts which must be solved before the action may continue. The character is required to overcome an obstacle or else dissolve the conflict by changing his goal. As his wants are fulfilled or denied, new ones are formed, and these will be confronted by different
obstacles. In this way character relationships are constantly changing. With every new goal there is a different type of obstacle which causes a shift of intensity or mood. Each single mood may be called a "beat," and the patterns and the speed of the changes create the rhythm of the scene. By studying the transactions of the character, the actor is able to perceive these beat changes and thus make decisions concerning the motivations of his character which will correspond with those of the other characters and contribute to the consistency of the play. In such a way, it is possible for the actor to construct a "personality" for his character based on the action of the play rather than on biographical information.

Physicalizing a character.—As specific information about the character is being discovered through analysis, the actor is also seeking an effective means of communicating the fictitious person to the audience. Physicalization may be defined as that part of acting which pertains to the body or voice and is distinguished from the mental or spiritual aspects of the character. Actor training programs, although they differ in their emphasis and methods of analysis, generally agree on the actor's need to develop a control of speech and movement. If an actor cannot be heard, or if his body contradicts his emotions, then all the efforts of research will be to no avail. For this
reason, physicalization is an important aspect of acting.

The actor can use his body for various degrees of stage movement; his actions can openly demonstrate his feelings or reflect the intricacies of his subconscious motivations. For example, the character can change the rhythm of a scene by entering or exiting, by initiating a struggle with another character, or by moving from one side of the stage to the other with some intent or purpose. This kind of overt action is "blocked" into a production in the early stages of rehearsal, and its balance and flow must appear natural and well motivated. The character's subconscious movement does not directly affect the action of the play. Rather, it is a subtle way for the actor to clarify the character's feelings; it allows him to demonstrate certain aspects of the character which may only be considered the character's quirks or personal habits, such as the way he smokes a cigarette or how often he clears his throat or scratches his head.

It is also clearly the task of every actor to speak dialogue that has the same quality and effect as actual conversation. He must first recreate acceptable patterns of phrasing and a sense of intonation and pronunciation that will not sound odd or foreign to the spectator. Second, the actor must speak at the rate or with the dialect that is representative of his particular character. Like secondary
movement, certain speech habits will reflect idiosyncrasies which may not be mentioned in the dialogue. Third, the actor must speak in such a way as to communicate the intent of the playwright. With sufficient volume and clarity, he is expected to project a certain meaning or emphasize images which will imply a basis for understanding.

Controlling a performance.--The actor's responsibility, in addition to the analysis and communication of his character, is to maintain a controlled performer-performance relationship. It is an illusion of reality which is desirable in the theatre. For that reason, it is extremely important for the actor to give the audience a sense of the performer as well as the performance. To achieve a quality of aesthetic enjoyment, the actor must never disclaim himself in order to copy the original.

The actor must first exhibit a role which the audience will accept as part of a make-believe story. He should represent an image that is timeless, a metaphor or an analogy which can occur again and again. Thus, the audience will be able to witness the action from an "aesthetic distance"--the safety of a detached involvement. At the same time, however, the actor must transmit the illusion of a "real" personality. His actions must appear to be motivated and must affect the audience with immediacy and a sense of the unexpected. Although the audience knows differently, the
actor must seem to experience every moment as if it is occurring for the first and last time.

To create that dual illusion for the audience, the actor must develop a method of controlling the distance between himself and the character. Actor-character relationships are affected by the techniques of both the playwright and the actor. Some actors are trained to develop and maintain a strong psychological communication with the character. The goal of these actors is to find a source of energy in themselves which will enable them to discover and eventually become the characters who exist in the script (while yet remaining themselves). In short, it is assumed that there are two personalities--the actor and the role--one of which must fit inside the other. The audience thus witnesses a personality, like that in Figure 1, which has been transformed out of those two sources.

![Fig. 1--Actor-as-character](image)

Other actors perceive a role as a theatrical entity rather than a psychological being. This method of acting recognizes the importance of the transitory nature of drama.
There is variation in every performance due to changes in the actor as a human being, as well as in each individual spectator. Changes in the actors, in turn, cause a variation in the energy of interaction from performance to performance, as well as from play to play.²⁰

Fig. 2--The dynamics of performance

Thus dependent on the immediacy of performance, this acting method recognizes the idiosyncrasy of audience perception. There is the role and the person of the actor, both of which are visualized simultaneously by the spectator. Since the feelings of the actor are subject to the moment of performance, the spectator experiences neither the actor nor the role but the relationship between the two.²¹

Fig. 3--Actor-as-person
This relationship is immediate; a unique experience subject to the here and now of a particular performance.

These methods of acting are equally acceptable and effective. Although actor-character relationships vary according to actor technique, they are also subject to a particular playwright's technique. As noted above, some playwrights characterize what Kjerbuhl-Petersen refers to as "individuals," some provide "types," and some offer "shadows." Pinter is one playwright who suggests the imperceivable dimension of the human personality. In a Pinter play, the actor-character relationship becomes heavily weighted in favor of the actor. He is required to display the psychology of his motivations but is also given the freedom of using his own personality to produce the effect. Instead of searching for a particular character to simulate, the Pinter actor must use his own personality, where appropriate, to demonstrate observable impulses of motivation and action.

The Actor and the Pinter Character

"The progress of the art of acting is characterized and conditioned by the emancipation of the actor's individuality," writes Kjerbuhl-Petersen. That is to say, the more an actor is able to contribute his own psychic qualities along with his physical ones, the more creative and personally his presentation of a character becomes. His freedom to personify a character depends greatly on the text of the
play, however, and on the acting style dictated by his own times.

If "X" equals the character and "Y" the actor, "ABC" may be their respective physical appearance, actions, and visible conflicts, and "abc" may represent the psychic qualities which make up their personalities. The following formula may then be assembled for the audience to complete:\(^{23}\):

\[ X(=ABCabc)=Y(=ACbde) \]

In an ideal situation, the actor is required to take on as many physical and psychic traits as are indicated by the playwright; the dramatic illusion arises only when the "A" of the character is matched with the "A" of the actor. When complete correspondence cannot occur (as is the case of "B"), however, the spectator must complete the illusion according to the text. If the disparity between the actor and the character is too great, no illusion will take place. The actor's creative task is thus controlled by the amount of information about the characters in the text.

The goal of the actor in a Pinter play is to create and sustain an illusion of life which will encourage the audience to submit consciously to self-deception. Even in the midst of ambiguity, the actor must achieve a personal order which will correspond with the order of the text; he must still "suit the word to the action, the action to the word."
Although the psyche of a Pinter character is hidden by an innocuous surface of social ritual (see Chapter II, above), his behavior is clearly visible and indicates the complexity beneath the skin. The Pinter play offers the actor a great many possibilities and the audience a formula which is open-ended:

\[ X(=ABCa\infty)=Y(ACabcdefg\infty) \]

Pinter provides an exterior which is highly stylized and must be used to substantiate the character emotions that are "deeply contained."

The problem for a Pinter actor does not arise from the need to give the character a seemingly "natural" existence by setting free his own emotions and instincts; this task is required of every actor, identity and self-knowledge being the most vital sources of characterization. Rather, the difficulty of a Pinter portrayal is caused first by a lack of information leading to specific character traits and motivations and second, by the failure of the text to confirm or justify any private decisions the actor happens to make.

The actor's impulse is to play the surface (ABC) without any regard for the vague personality of the character (a\infty). Yet this instigates a puppetlike performance which is far from the intention of the playwright. To overcome the absurd contradiction of the actor's need for meticulous understanding and the play's lack of verification, a special
approach to analysis and physicalization of the Pinter character is necessary.

Analyzing the Pinter character.--By exploring the given circumstances of a play and applying specific questions concerning his background, the actor is generally able to determine an accurate impression of a playwright's intentions. Pinter discourages the actor from probing his plays in this manner, however, by disclosing very little information about the characters' past lives and few details concerning their present situations.

In Act I of The Birthday Party, for example, Stanley is introduced as follows:

STANLEY enters. He is unshaven, in his pyjama jacket and wears glasses. He sits at the table.

The "personae" list describes him only as "STANLEY; a man in his late thirties." Little more than these descriptions are provided in the text. In The Dumb Waiter, though only the characters' names—"Ben" and "Gus"—are given, the opening narration refers to them in this way:26

BEN is lying on a bed, left, reading a paper.
GUS is sitting on a bed, right, tying his shoelaces, with difficulty. Both are dressed in shirts, trousers and braces.

Although their actions are later given in detail, there is no more direct narrative information as to their ages, appearances, backgrounds, or personalities. Ruth, in The Homecoming, is never described physically, but only in the
character list as "RUTH, a woman in her early thirties." Upon her first entrance the narrative description is equally unrevealing.

LIGTHS UP.
Night.
TEDDY and RUTH stand at the threshold of the room. They are both well dressed in light summer suits and light raincoats. Two suitcases are by their side.

In Old Times, Kate is never clearly defined physically. No direct, narrative statement is ever offered from Pinter concerning her looks or charm, her personality, or her desires. In the list of characters she is given only a first name and included in the general statement, "All are in their forties." The first reference to Kate suggests only the initial position of her body: "KATE curled on a sofa, still."

Yet even though Pinter's descriptions of appearance refer to clothing or body attitude rather than physique or comeliness and there is never an introduction to the character which would offer any data on his life prior to the play, parenthetical descriptions are used profusely throughout Pinter's plays. They seldom refer to the character's emotional attitudes or motivations; rather, the characters' body movements, positions, and physical relationships to each other are indicated. In earlier plays, such as The Birthday Party, Pinter indicates only very major movements which suggest lines of action:
GOLDBERG. Where's your torch? (MCCANN shines the torch in GOLDBERG's face.) Not on me! (MCCANN shifts the torch. It is knocked from his hand and falls. It goes out.)

In later plays the movements become extremely magnified, though reduced, and Pinter describes the very subtle movements. Old Times, for example, has numerous descriptions of simple rituals of hospitality:

ANNA stands, goes to coffee, pours....
ANNA hands her her coffee.

In both early and late works, however, exact vocal patterns and qualities are suggested in the parenthetical descriptions. Some of these influence the rhythm or rate of the dialogue, as in The Birthday Party:

LULU. That's alright. I'm not hungry.
STANLEY. (abruptly) How would you like to go away with me?
LULU. Where?

Rhythm and rate are especially affected by Pinter's parenthetical interjection of the words "pause" and "silence," as in The Homecoming:

LENNY. Quite sufficient, in my opinion.
RUTH. Not in mine, Leonard.
(Pause)
LENNY. Don't call me that, please.
RUTH. Why not?
LENNY. That's the name my mother gave me.
(Pause)
Just give me the glass.
RUTH. No.
(Pause)
LENNY. I'll take it, then.
RUTH. If you take the glass...I'll take you.
(Pause)
LENNY. How about me taking the glass without you taking me?
RUTH. Why don't I just take You?
(Pause)
LENNY. You're joking.
(Pause)
You're in love, anyway, with another man....

The vocal descriptions also imply an attitude, as "quietly," "darkly," or "anxiously"; although such words help the actor color the dialogue in an appropriate manner, they give no real explanation of the emotion behind the words. Almost never does Pinter make a parenthetical statement which explains or discloses a character's inner psychology.

Lack of narrative assistance or clear parenthetical explanation is not an unusual hardship for the actor to overcome. Such guidelines are obviously missing from Greek and Elizabethan tragedies. The actor performing in plays such as those, however, has the opportunity to depend on the dialogue itself for such information. The language is very descriptive and, through the course of the play, discloses all the necessary information. Such is not the case in a Pinter play, however, because Pinter's dialogue contains few devices of exposition. Information about a character's appearance, for example, may not be found clearly in any character's speeches; The Birthday Party has only two characters who mention Meg's appearance: Stanley calls her a "succulent old washing bag" and an "old piece of rock cake," while Goldberg comments, "What a carriage!" and tells her, "You look like a Gladiola." Such descriptions are unreliable because they are strongly influenced by the
speaker's situation and needs.

The dialogue also reveals a scarcity of information concerning the background and the present circumstances of Pinter's characters. The actor will find no "exposition scene," for example, and the dialogue within the first moments of the play does not explicitly state or "set up" who the characters are, how they relate to each other, where they have come from, or why they are there. The first scene of The Birthday Party is an event surrounding corn flakes and fried bread, and it is only through the breakfast ritual that the actor can assume Meg and Petey are married. The scene does not establish Stanley's relation to these people, or where he came from, why he is there, how long he has been there, or how long he plans to stay. As the play progresses, other circumstances are also shrouded in mystery. For example, why is Stanley running from the organization? what did he do to cause Goldberg and McCann to come after him? how long has he been evading them? The Pinter actor will understandably be confused if he struggles to find answers to all of these obvious questions.

Pinter's dialogue is also unreliable for determining the actuality of any past instance. In The Birthday Party, for example, Stanley tells Meg about one of his piano concerts:

....It was all arranged, it was all worked out. My next concert. Somewhere else it was. In winter. I went down there to play. Then, when I got there, the hall was closed, the place was shuttered up, not even a caretaker. They'd locked it up."
Later Meg tells Goldberg about the same concert:

He once gave a concert...In...a big hall. His father gave him champagne. But then they locked the place up and he couldn't get out. The caretaker had gone home. So he had to wait until the morning before he could get out.

These contradicting stories are obvious to the audience in *The Birthday Party*, but comparisons are not so easily made in a "memory play" like *Old Times*. Since Kate never verifies any story that Anna tells, one can never be certain of its truth. Even through the characters' words Pinter gives reason to doubt their ability to remember twenty years back with any degree of accuracy. Anna says:

...The man came over to me, quickly, looked down at me, but I would have absolutely nothing to do with him, nothing. (Pause) No, no I'm quite wrong... he didn't move quickly...that's quite wrong...he moved...very slowly, the light was bad, and stopped....

The lack of biographical data in Pinter's plays thus impairs the traditional analytical process which enables an actor to discover his character. Moreover, another way to become familiar with the psyche of the character must be found; he must create the impulse for the character despite the fact that it is deeply "contained." Director Peter Hall explains the importance of using the "passion and instinct" of the actor in the character:

Now the minute the actors started to say, "Well, if we're going to contain everything, hide everything, then why bother to feel it?" the play went dead...if you just play the surface of Pinter it is apparently incoherent. One has seen productions of Pinter where the actors just said the words, or naturalized them, and they don't mean anything at all.
Given these problems in analyzing Pinter characters, the first step is to select only the questions which are essential to the immediate action of the play. "You may not allow a single word he writes to pass unnoticed," says one Pinter actor, "or go searching after complications that are irrelevant." Nothing in the play suffices to account for why a character does something, and any questions created for that end are a "waste of time." Pinter sets the actions of the character in many contexts, however, in order to enrich an understanding of what the character does. Through the discovery of this "what" the actor can achieve something like a traditional analysis of his character.

There are three levels of action which an actor is required to display for the audience. Pinter provides explicit instructions only for the surface action. In The Homecoming, for example, Max enters from the direction of the kitchen and makes a demand:

MAX. What have you done with the scissors?
(Pause)
I said I'm looking for the scissors. What have you done with them?
(Pause)
Did you hear me? I want to cut something out of the paper.

What the audience sees and hears is literally what happens. Of course there is an ulterior action: Max wants a coupon which is in an old paper and he does not mind making himself a nuisance about it. There is also the motivation underneath, something which is unthought by the character:
maybe he needs attention, maybe he was bored in the kitchen, it was too hot, or any number of other possibilities. The actor playing Max must know what he wants; the scissors for the purpose of cutting a coupon. That kind of information Pinter clearly states. The actor need not be concerned with why he acts in that manner at that moment, or at least he need not search for ways of displaying the unthought motive of the character. Such a degree of intellectualizing will only "muddy" the actor's interpretation. In the Pinter play the third level of action is something which is only sensed and is very personal.

The Pinter actor can create a series of questions, therefore, which will explain his impulses and validate his actions in the play. But there is another problem which then affects his analysis: a lack of verification for decisions and the obvious presence of contradictions. These barriers deny the actor any comfort of the absolute, except in terms of his own self-constructed reality. As previously noted, it is the essence of a multiple "truth" that Pinter is striving to communicate. To substantiate his character the actor has only one choice and that is to defend his own decisions, that is to say, to find strength in the "spirit of his convictions." In The Homecoming Lenny displays the key attribute of the Pinter actor39:

RUTH. How did you know she was diseased?
LENNY. How did I know?
(Pause)
I decided she was.
Anna takes much the same liberty in *Old Times* and explains:\(^40\):

> There are things I remember which may never have happened but as I recall them so they take place.

Since the information about a character is not available for scrutiny, there can be no absolute verification of it. Because one's impressions are subject to the perceptions of each individual, the actor should expect to find contradictions among the characters. Although analysis will reveal two impressions of a character—who he thinks he is and who the other characters think he is—the Pinter actor must always rely on the character's own sense of identity. He must accept that "truth" and examine the way in which the character protects and defends it. He must also determine how and when the character chooses to expose it. Davies in *The Caretaker*, for example, makes several doubtful statements. The actor playing that role must perceive what Davies says in such a way that it takes on a reality which is the actor's own. In Act I the old man claims, "I've had dinner with the best....I've eaten my dinner off the best of plates." From his manners of his attire, this statement seems highly unlikely; yet who is to say he has not seen better days? Or perhaps the week before he had enough money to eat in a diner where he happened to sit across from someone he respected—a man who looked important, or an unknown attractive woman. Whatever the situation, he believes it and so must the actor.
If the idiosyncrasy of truth is accepted, then contradictions should be welcomed. If two actors have analyzed their characters in detail and have made personal decisions, it is inevitable that they will disagree on certain points. Agreement is important only in terms of the action of the play; other scruples may never be uncovered. In an interview, one Pinter actor is informed of the view of another actor on a certain subject:

That is a marvelous point of view for John to have taken as an actor. It's very much the point of view that Sam [in *The Homecoming*] has got. But it has no actuality at all whatsoever.

In other words, the actor is speaking from the point of view of his own character. In this instance the disagreement can never be realized because Pinter does not choose to dramatize this particular conflict.

In *Old Times* the relationship of Anna and Kate in the past is highly questionable. Anna's attitude as well as several very intimate references may be interpreted to contain sexual overtones, as when she says to Kate in Act I, for example, "How can you say that, when I'm looking at you now, seeing you so shyly poised over me, looking down at me," or in another instance, "Doesn't she look beautiful?.... It is a very beautiful smile." The possibility of such a relationship is never confirmed by Kate however, perhaps because it existed for one and not for the other. Since the "disagreement" is never clarified or brought to the surface
in the present, the actors need not concern themselves with deciding whether it is true.

When two different perceptions confront each other openly, a conflict results. To solve that conflict one character must accept the "truth" of the other character. For this reason Pinter's characters rarely confront each other in open conflicts. Rather, they protect their own convictions and sidestep any open confrontations which might cause them to dissolve their perceptions in a compromise or a resolution of the conflict. In Old Times, for example, Anna and Deeley both have different visions of Kate. They never openly discuss their intimate relations with her, but rather enjoy suggesting their control over her. Since the rivalry between Anna and Deeley never really materializes, there is no need of resolution; a single "truth" need not be agreed upon. The actors, nevertheless must create their own realities based on personal evidence. It is the possibility of that conflict which is the "contained" action of Pinter's play.

In addition to analyzing the personality and the actions of a character, the actor must also explore and comprehend the function of the character within the play. He must create an objective viewpoint which is separate from the character's self-perception or other characters' perception of him. In Pinter's plays the characters' functions are not always clear because of the strength of
the impressions elicited by the characters themselves. Sam in *The Homecoming*, for example, believes himself to be a victim. Once the actor understands the many facets of that self-perception, however, he can see that Sam is as nasty as anyone else in the play. He is worse than nasty, in fact, because he doesn't play fair. He contains his bitterness and masks it behind acts of martyrdom, pretending (believing) that he is the besieged old man. Even though the actor must present Sam's self-pity, he must also recognize Sam's potential power within the family.

The complex function the actor decides upon must remain a far-away, ultimate goal. It is his "objective purpose." To play the moment the actor can depend only on the action created by the character's impulses. The meaning behind those impulses is mysterious, even unknowable, and the actor is allowed to create his own meaning. The sense of arrogance this act gives him provides the quality which convinces the audience that it is missing something and encourages them to struggle for meaning—a meaning they are sure exists underneath. This arrogance must be demonstrated in clear, concise mannerisms of the actor's voice and body.

**Physicalizing the Pinter character.**—If analysis enables the actor to discover the who and the what of his character, then physicalization is the process by which he projects those images; it is the how of acting. Since the
who and the what of Harold Pinter's dramas are not completely discernable, it is the how--the activities carried out by the character--that provides the insight into his plays.

The lack of factual information about Pinter's characters requires the audience to depend solely on the actor for sense impressions. Movements, gestures, vocal patterns, and rhythms--Pinter relies on the actor to use his voice and body to imply much of what he has discovered through analysis but is unable to disclose verbally. Since the presentation of personal perceptions depends on physicalization, it is important for the Pinter actor to execute every body attitude or movement which is stated in the script. Although the description of the characters' motives is not provided, Pinter does indicate specific images which are to be impressed upon an audience. The first and last moments of many of his plays are such that an audience may recall them clearly in retrospect. The beginning of The Caretaker, for example, calls for a particular introductory image:

MICK is alone in the room, sitting on the bed. He wears a leather jacket.
Silence.
He slowly looks about the room looking at each object in turn. He looks up at the ceiling, and stares at the bucket. Ceasing, he sits quite still, expressionless, looking out front.
Silence for thirty seconds.
A door bangs. Muffled voices are heard.
MICK turns his head. He stands, moves silently to the door, goes out, and closes the door quietly.
Silence.
The ending of The Collection is also very precise in its indication of body positions and even facial expression:

STELLA looks at him, neither confirming nor denying. Her face is friendly, sympathetic.
Fade flat to half light.
The four figures are still, in the half light.
Fade to blackout.

CURTAIN

In the same way, Pinter generally prescribes movement which occurs during a silence. This movement becomes a special kind of language; it must be interpreted or produced as clearly and as carefully as a line of dialogue. Movement like this, in fact, seems to become part of the dialogue:

(Slight pause)
DEELEY. We rarely get to London.
(KATE stands, goes to a small table and pours coffee from a pot.)
KATE. Yes, I remember.
(She adds milk and sugar to one cup and takes it to ANNA. She takes a black coffee to DEELEY and then sits with her own.)
DEELEY. (To ANNA) Do you drink brandy?
ANNA. I would love some brandy.
(DEELEY pours brandy for all and hands the glasses. He remains standing with his own.)

For the actors to interject their own movements into this fragile moment would be as much of a mistake as improvising the characters' speeches. It would also be inaccurate for the actress to prepare coffee during the previous discussion of London. The action of pouring coffee becomes more important than the conversation, becomes in fact the key intention of the moment. The verbal language and the idea of London are quite secondary.
This type of amplified movement is carried even further when it is used to indicate a subsurface matrix of character relationships and controls. The foregoing example from *Old Times* does not display any conflict; in another instance of hospitality, however, Pinter goes a step further and includes character reactions to Kate's action:

(DEELEY stands, goes to cigarette box, picks it up, smiles at KATE. KATE looks at him, watches him light a cigarette, takes the box from him. Crosses to ANNA, offers her a cigarette. ANNA takes one.)

KATE. I said you talk about me as if I am dead. Now.
ANNA. How can you say that? How can you say that, when I'm looking at you now, seeing you so shyly poised over me, looking down at me--
DEELEY. Stop that!
(Pause.
KATE sits.
DEELEY pours a drink.)

The properties act as physical extensions of Kate, and her offering to Anna causes alarm in Deeley. Thus, a series of movements is used to show an undercurrent of tension and clarify the control relationship among the three characters.

A similar circumstance occurs in Act I of *The Homecoming*:

RUTH. Have a sip. Go on. Have a sip from my glass.
(He is still.)
Sit on my lap. Take a long cool sip.
(She pats her lap. Pause.
She stands, moves to him with the glass.)
Put your head back and open your mouth.
LENNY. Take that glass away from me.
RUTH. Lie on the floor. Go on. I'll pour it down your throat.
LENNY. What are you doing, making me some kind of proposal?
(She laughs shortly, drains the glass.)
RUTH. Oh, I was thirsty.
(She smiles at him. Puts the glass down, goes into the hall and up the stairs.)
In this instance, the action completely dominates the text. A challenge is met, a conflict won, and a reaction is created, and each of these outcomes is completely beneath the surface of the mundane conversation.

For an actor creating such scenes as these, the problem lies in any attempt to use the action itself to mean something. Truthful behavior is usually spontaneous, and such gestures as are mentioned in these scenes must be played for their own sake. While the actor may perceive an ulterior implication, the character must achieve his action with a sincere and obvious intention. Nevertheless, although the actor is challenged to clarify and express the non-verbal language specified by Pinter, he need not refrain from contributing movement that will help color and project even greater dimension. Pinter does not offer anything like the amount of direction which is necessary to move the characters on and about the stage. Pinter's earlier plays—*The Birthday Party*, *The Homecoming*, and *The Dumb Waiter*—call for quite a bit of activity which must be cleverly staged. Scenes such as in Act II of *The Birthday Party* are clearly choreographed:

STANLEY is downstage, right, MEG moves about the room. GOLDBERG fondles LULU at arm's length. MEG touches MCCANN...MCCANN moves about. GOLDBERG fondles LULU at arm's length. MCCANN draws near STANLEY. He stretches his arm and touches STANLEY's glasses....

Much of the blocking for such a scene as this, however, must be determined by the particular actor within a specific
production.

Pinter's later plays—Old Times, No Man's Land, and Betrayal—are stagnant in comparison to the earlier ones, and primary movement is so limited that Pinter seems to have designated most of it. Even so, the actor maintains the freedom of the more intricate movements. In Old Times, Kate's every smile and turn of the head seems to be indicated. In Act II for example:

(The bathroom door opens. KATE comes into the bedroom. She wears a bathrobe. She smiles at DEELEY and ANNA... She walks to the window and looks out into the night. DEELEY and ANNA watch her...KATE turns from the window to look at them...KATE walks down towards them and stands, smiling...KATE sits on a divan.)

Yet there are long passages and even scenes where Pinter makes no reference to Kate's movement. In such moments the actress must give careful consideration to the person she is looking at, to when she lifts her tea cup, or to what pose she assumes as she continues to sit on the divan. It is not unlikely that in such an intense physicalization the angle of a body can distort the intent of the scene.

Non-verbal language is always present in Pinter's plays, of course, if only because they are performed by human bodies. Yet Pinter is able to magnify this type of communication by framing certain moments in silence. While these moments are specified in Pinter's text, it is the actor's responsibility to explore them, to determine their length, and to display them as a continuing part of the action.
The length of such silences is written in degrees of a beat (...), a "pause," or a "silence." There is no way to time these moments systematically, however, and Pinter explains that they are there because of what is happening in the "guts" of the characters; the length will depend on the discovery of the particular feeling involved. Pinter's designation of beat, pause, or silence is merely a clue to what the actor should be looking for.

In the selection from *Old Times* cited above (p. 94), Pinter indicates a pause before Kate sits or Deeley pours a drink. There is no overt movement in the pause itself—only communication. The efforts to sit or to drink are attempts to break that particular bridge of communication. Although a non-verbal silence covers the entire exchange, it is the "pause" which Pinter wants magnified; the actor must perform it separately from the movements that follow.

Although there may be a lack of movement in some pauses, the actors are not frozen. Their minds are working quickly, making choices; to the audience it should seem as if the actor could go one of four or five ways at any of those points. In those moments, a turn of the head or an expression in the actor's eyes can display a great deal:

KATE. Do you like the Sicilian people?
(ANNA stares at her. Silence.)

The silences, then, are a vital part of the Pinter play. They are carefully laid out for the actor, and he
must learn them as specifically as he memorizes the words. Peter Hall admits, "I did have a dot and pause rehearsal... to try and make the actors understand that we were dealing with something which was highly formed and highly wrought. And our first responsibility was to know what it was."46

The second avenue of physicalization—the voice—also gives special problems to the actor in a Pinter play. First of all, meticulous accuracy is required of the actor when he learns his lines and when he speaks. As one actor attests, "You cannot mess about with the text. You must say the line as you do Shakespeare. You can't cop out. You can't paraphrase Shakespeare and you can't paraphrase Pinter."47 The reason is that the rhythm—the movement—of Pinter's verbal language often communicates more than the meaning to be found in the words. The actor must attribute as much importance to how he is speaking as to what he is saying.

Second, the Pinter actor must consider the sounds contained in the words. The following selection from The Dumb Waiter, for example, shows that Gus is as impressed with the sound of "ballcock" as he is with Ben's solution to the problem 48:

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

Third, the actor must determine the inherent rhythm
of the speech or dialogue. The above dialogue between Gus
and Ben contains extremely short, even one-word phrases;
the result is a staccato effect. Another speech, such as
Kate's in *Old Times*, is slow and melodic:

KATE. ....That's one reason I like living in the country.
   Everything's softer. The water, the light, the
   shapes, the sounds. There aren't such edges here.
   And living close to the sea too. You can't say
   where it begins or ends. That appeals to me.
   I don't care for harsh lines. I deplore that kind
   of urgency. I'd like to go to the East, or some-
   where like that, somewhere very hot, where you can
   look through the flap of a tent and see sand, that
   kind of thing.

The feeling engendered here is like that which follows
a long, hot bath. Pinter's verbal language is thus a
physical means of communicating. The language presents sounds
which affect the senses totally but contain only the essence
or the feeling of an idea. Even when the speeches slip into
apparent nonsense, the Pinter actor can look to the structure
of the words for his own meaning: "Read the part," Pinter
once instructed a frusted actor, "and pay attention to the
stress of the words." These stresses, he insists, show
what the "meaning" is.
Controlling the actor-audience relationship.--Critic and director Richard Schechner describes the theatre experience as a set of transactions. One occurs among performers in the form of a text, another among audience members which is the theatre decorum, and a third between the audience and the performer. The latter type of transaction has become more and more essential to the effectiveness of twentieth-century drama. Pinter's plays demand that the actor and audience join in a "game" which is a search for personalized meaning. Because of this quality of involvement, Pinter's theatre is one of "communion."

Thus, the goal of the actor in a Pinter play is to conceive an essence of reality so strong that it will impel the audience into a feeling rather than an understanding. He is responsible for setting the rules for the theatre game.

All plays have an air of gamesmanship with their rules (stage conventions), and their prizes (understanding). Yet Pinter introduces a much more open-ended form of theatre game. For the Pinter actor, rhythm and pattern replace plot, activity replaces action, circularity replaces resolution, and characteristics replace the character. The Pinter actor is required to become the event, rather than to act the event.

The Pinter play is often frightening for the audience because it requires them to experience the inner world of the actor--the actor-as-person in search of the self.
Reactions vary from hostility to apathy to shock. Pinter is rarely disturbed by audience reactions, and neither should the actor be dismayed. If he finds the meaning for himself and displays it with concise accuracy, he can afford to be satisfied that he has awakened something in the audience—created some kind of third transaction. One actor describes such a transaction:

The audience heckled and booed. "What nonsense! Oh, what rubbish!". Harold was delighted and I don't think he was pretending. Because it has precisely the effect on them that he wanted. Just absolutely hit them below the belt... They'd come in their tiaras and they only want Flora Robson.

Kate in Old Times

The following is a study of the development of the character Kate in Harold Pinter's Old Times. This particular example occurred through a personal experience with the role. Although the problems and procedures would have been encountered by any actor, this description shows the influence of many personal decisions which may differ from actor to actor. The general approach, however, may be applied to any of Pinter's characters. Moreover, what must be described as a step-by-step process is actually achieved by an overlapping and intermingling of analysis and physicalization. Movement and thought can each grow out of the other until a cycle of indistinguishable impressions emerges and exhibits a total human being.
By analyzing Act One--specifically the first scene, prior to Anna's entrance--it is possible to gather considerable information about Kate. First, Pinter relates valuable information through his description of the setting and some of the initial action. The setting is the living area of a "converted farmhouse" with a dominating center window (overlooking the sea). It is night and the season is autumn--both of which suggest an ending. The first visual impression of characters is as follows:

Light dim. Three figures discerned.
DEELEY slumped in armchair, still.
KATE curled on sofa, still.
ANNA standing at the window, looking out.
Silence.
Lights up on DEELEY and KATE, smoking cigarettes.

A triangular relationship of characters is immediately implied. Kate is in a comfortable position, suggesting a sense of belonging--this is her home. Although these environmental elements give no direct information about Kate's personality, they do work to create initial subconscious impressions which will stay with the spectator. Thus, it is necessary for the actor to reproduce exactly the image prescribed by the playwright.

Kate is described in the list of characters as being in her "early forties." Other information about Kate's background and personality may be found, but only through the dialogue. Narration and dialogue simultaneously convey a "feeling" about this character, but Pinter does not clearly define "who" she is.
As the dialogue begins, a mood begins to form. It is "reflective," slow, but intense. Pinter has inserted numerous pauses which control the pace of the scene. At the very first it is apparent that Kate is married to Deeley and together they are awaiting the arrival of a dinner guest--Kate's roommate from her younger years. Kate tells Deeley that Anna was "my only friend"; yet she also states that she is not looking forward to the visit. It has been twenty years since the two last met and Kate insists that she has all but forgotten the woman.

The dialogue of this first scene is the source of many implications concerning Kate's personality and her relationship with both Anna and Deeley. In the conversation it is apparent that Kate reflects upon those earlier times, recalling impressions of Anna, while Deeley simultaneously continues to question her. Kate also seems preoccupied with the task of reflecting; several times she is surprised with a question and pulls out of her own thoughts with "Mmmnn?" or even "What?", as if she was not listening to Deeley. The scene suggests that Kate has a sense of dread, but one that comes from resignation, not anxiety. Although there does seem to be some uneasiness about Deeley's impression of the women's friendship, Kate avoids a discussion of Anna by succinctly answering Deeley's questions. She seems startled by his keen interest:
One of the most important things introduced about Kate in this first scene is her relationship to Deeley. Both the silences and the sparse, uneasy conversation help to create a distance between husband and wife; their thoughts move in different patterns and only touch on inconsequential points. If it were not for the encroaching outsider, one could wonder if they would find anything to talk about. Later in the play, Anna makes an ironic reference to their lifestyle when she says, "How wise you were to choose this part of the world, and how sensible and courageous of you both to stay permanently in such a silence."

Most obvious in this scene is Kate's cold, flippant attitude toward her husband. She seems bored with him and only slightly tolerant. She also makes rather sarcastic or demeaning statements to him, such as "Do you want me to ask your questions for you?" and "Of course we did. How else would she steal my underwear from me? In the street?"

Thus, the first scene clearly establishes Kate's elusiveness and her detached attitude toward both of the other characters. The scene introduces a distant and isolated personality for Kate. As the play progresses, Kate develops another dimension. A note of bitterness or resignation is introduced in Act I which colors her elusiveness with yet
another element:

I was interested once in the arts, but I can't remember now which ones they were.

Kate doesn't seem to have much interest in anything anymore:

(Pause)
KATE. Yes, I quite like those kinds of things, doing it. ANNA. What kind of things?
KATE. Oh, you know, that sort of thing.

Kate's apathy is especially evident in her failure to really enter the conversation.

Many of the comments about Kate seem to depict her as an escapist:

DEELEY. It's nice I know for Katey to see you. She hasn't many friends.
ANNA. She has you.
DEELEY. She hasn't made many friends, although there's been every opportunity for her to do so.
ANNA. Perhaps she has all she wants.
DEELEY. She lacks curiosity.
ANNA. Perhaps she's happy.

(Pause)
KATE. Are you talking about me?
DEELEY. Yes.
ANNA. She always was a dreamer.
DEELEY. She likes taking long walks. All that. You know. Raincoat on. Off down the lane, hands deep in pockets. All that kind of thing.

(ANNA turns to look at KATE.)
ANNA. Yes.
DEELEY. Sometimes I take her face in my hands and look at it.
ANNA. Really?
DEELEY. Yes, I look at it, holding it in my hands. Then I kind of let it go, take my hands away, leave it floating.
KATE. My head is quite fixed. I have it on.
DEELEY. (To ANNA.) It just floats away.
ANNA. She was always a dreamer.

This perception of vulnerability and escapism is also apparent in her environment and in the qualities of her
husband. She lives in a secluded place where she can spend most of her time alone. Her marriage seems undemanding; Deeley spends his time either in business travels or in setting Kate apart with idolatry.

DEELEY. I travel the globe in my job.
ANNA. And poor Katey when you're away? What does she do?
(ANNA looks at KATE)
KATE. Oh, I continue.
ANNA. Is he away for long periods?
KATE. I think, sometimes. Are you?

Kate questions her husband in Act I as if to suggest she never really misses him.

Kate's own speeches also reveal a sense of her delicate vulnerability. In Act II she says:

....That's one reason I like living in the country
Everything's softer. The water, the light, the shapes, the sounds. There aren't such edges here. And living close to the sea too. You can't say where it begins or ends. That appeals to me. I don't care for harsh lines. I deplore that kind of urgency.

A confusion about Kate's personality emerges when there are contradictions in the strongly established impression of isolation. For example, Anna insists that there was a time when "you were so lively, so animated, you used to laugh." Deeley agrees that she used to smile "fit to bust but he insists:

DEELEY. Animated is no word for it. When she smiled... how can I describe it?
ANNA. Her eyes lit up.
DEELEY. I couldn't have put it better myself.

Although Anna and Deeley have both witnessed this youthful animation and vivacity in Kate in the past, all traces of this side of her personality now seem to have disappeared.
The Kate which is visible does not seem to be the Kate of "old times." What caused the submerging of this portion of Kate's personality and initiated the present stage of her existence? The actor's answer to this question will provide a key for understanding Kate's aloofness and bitterness.

Additional confusion results because there appears to be a merging of the personalities of Anna and Kate. There are times when all three characters experience difficulty in determining whether Anna or Kate played a specific role in their friendship and in pinpointing whether an incident involved Anna or Kate. For example, in Act II Anna explains how she introduced Kate to a new kind of life:

I found her. She grew to know wonderful people, through my introduction. I took her to cafes, almost private ones, where artists and writers and sometimes actors collected, and others with dancers, and we sat hardly breathing with our coffee, listening to the life around us.

This statement suggests that Kate was living "through" Anna. Yet Anna also seems to have been living through Kate. She borrowed (stole) her underwear and her clothes:

DEELEY. But I was crass, wasn't I, looking up her skirt?
KATE. That's not crass.
DEELEY. If it was her skirt. If it was her.
ANNA. (Coldly) Oh, it was my skirt. It was me. I remember your look...very well. I remember you well.

Kate even accuses Anna of impersonating her mannerisms:

You tried to do my little trick, one of my tricks you had borrowed, my little slow smile, my little slow shy smile, my bend of the head, my half closing of the eyes....

Deeley adds even more to the confusion by recalling incidents
which might have involved either of the women. He tells Kate about meeting Anna in the Wayfarers Tavern:

She was pretending to be you at the time....She thought she was you, said little, so little. Maybe she was you. Maybe it was you, having coffee with me, saying little, so little.

These are examples of contradiction which demonstrates the importance of depending on the present rather than on the past. What happened twenty years ago is confusing and irrelevant. These glimpses into the past do illustrate how closely involved these women were, however, and how each influenced the other so that their identities were affected and their entire lives were changed. It is as if they will never be free of each other. No matter how often Kate expels Anna, the woman will always be present in the room, just as she is at the opening of the play. The relationship between Deeley and Kate will always be affected by Anna's presence in both of their lives.

Such a rationalization is only one possible explanation for the contradictions and vague inferences found within the play. Another actor might discover another set of circumstances which might be equally supported within the text. The importance lies in the fact that the actor must create some rationalization of his own in order to complete the fragmented personalities of Pinter's characters.

As the psyche and life-position of the character are being determined, the actor must begin to find the appropriate
physicalization for communicating those impressions. Kate's movement, established in the first scene, remains consistently slow, fluid, and economical. Anna's description of her in Act II is conceivable because it is the same personality which is visible to the spectator from the beginning:

She floats from the bath. Like a dream. Unaware of anyone standing, with her towel, waiting for her. waiting to wrap it round her. Quite absorbed.

Kate is not required to move much except for the rituals of serving and for her entrance and exit from the bath. When else should she move then, and how much? Questions like these must be answered through analysis, then physically executed with great care. For example, it would be inappropriate for Kate to be preoccupied with lighting a cigarette during the silence following this speech of Anna's:

...I remember one Sunday she said to me, looking up from the paper, come quick, quick, come with me quickly, and we seized our handbags and went, on a bus, to some totally obscure, some totally unfamiliar district and, almost alone, saw a wonderful film called Odd Man Out.
(Silence)
DEELEY. Yes, I do quite a bit of travelling in my job.

Rather, this is a moment when both women are tuned in to Deeley's reaction and are very much in control of the awkward moment.

In physicalization, the actress portraying Kate should incorporate all of the images of dreaming, floating, and soft lines. She is the object, however, over which Anna and Deeley "duel." So even in her "drifting" Kate must be aware
of the power of her body, "the tilt of her head," the
direction of her eyes. Since Pinter offers only few
descriptions, the actress is responsible for determining
whom she is relating to at any one moment. When is she
listening to Anna and Deeley, for instance, and when is her
attention fixed off in space or out the window? The dialogue
obviously indicates times when Kate has not been paying
attention:

KATE. Sometimes I walk to the sea. There aren't
many people. It's a long beach.
(Pause)
ANNA. But I would miss London, nevertheless. But
of course I was a girl in London. We were girls
together.
DEELEY. I wish I had known you both then.
ANNA. Do you?
DEELEY. Yes.
(DEELEY pours more brandy for himself.)
ANNA. You have a wonderful casserole.
DEELEY. What?
ANNA. I mean wife. So sorry. A wonderful wife.
DEELEY. Ah.
ANNA. I was referring to the casserole. I was
referring to your wife's cooking.
DEELEY. You're not a vegetarian, then?
ANNA. No. Oh no.
DEELEY. Yes, you need good food in the country,
substantial food, to keep you going, all the air...
you know.
(Pause)
KATE. Yes, I quite like those kind of things, doing it.
ANNA. What kind of things?
KATE. Oh, you know, that sort of thing.
(Pause)
DEELEY. Do you mean cooking?
KATE. All that thing.

It is probable that Kate is not referring to cooking but to
walking along the sea shore.
Again, near the end of Act I, Kate seems unaware of Deeley's attempt at conversation:

DEELEY. I suppose his business interests kept him from making the trip. What's his name? Gian Carlo or Per Paulo? KATE. (To ANNA.) Do you have marble floors?

From the structuring of subtextural thought patterns, the actors will be able to find consistency even in the slightest movement. If the actress knows what brings her to the next statement, she will know where she is to focus her attention and when to change her body position.

When the primary movements are so scarce, the secondary movements--facial expressions and exchanges of information through changes in eye position, for example--take on an added importance. Kate's mysterious smile can provoke more reaction than almost anything she says:

(KATE smiles.)
DEELEY. See that smile? That's the same smile she smiled when I was walking down the street with her, after Odd Man Out, well some time after. What did you think of it? ANNA. It is a very beautiful smile.
DEELEY. Do it again.
KATE. I'm still smiling.
DEELEY. You're not. Not like you were a moment ago, not like you did then.

This particular smile occurs only at special moments, and there must be a specific thought that creates it. It becomes an identifying feature which Kate accuses Anna of trying to steal:

You tried to do my little trick, one of my tricks you had borrowed, my little slow smile, my little slow shy smile...
What creates the facial expression is never clearly specified; it is something the actress must determine on her own—possibly an elusive, domineering, and compelling moment. In any case, it is the physicalization of what has been personally determined through analysis.

Along with the control of thought patterns, the Pinter actor must find and share a sense of pacing. Pinter has carefully controlled the rhythm and mood of his scenes through the specification of pauses and silences. The first scene of *Old Times* is a good example of how that pause can demand a certain thought pattern also. As Deeley probes for information concerning Anna, he must stop several times to regroup and form new tactics. Notice these two attempts:

(Pause)
DEELEY. Any idea what she drinks?
KATE. None.
DEELEY. She may be a vegetarian.
KATE. Ask her.
DEELEY. It's too late. You've cooked your casserole.
(Pause)
DEELEY. Why isn't she married? I mean, why isn't she bringing her husband?
KATE. Ask her.
DEELEY. Do I have to ask her everything?
KATE. Do you want me to ask your questions for you?
DEELEY. No. Not at all.
(Pause)
KATE. Of course she's married.
DEELEY. How do you know?
KATE. Everyone's married.
DEELEY. Then why isn't she bringing her husband?
KATE. Isn't she?
(Pause)

Kate answers each question curtly. Only in an afterthought does Kate break the third silence and propel the conversation
a little further. The entire scene should work into a stop-and-go flow of communication.

Another possible problem of physicalization lies with Kate's two major speeches; neither seems to make a lot of sense. What seems to be called for is a sensual quality through the sounds of the phrases rather than a projection of "meanings." The speech following the bath should be made to exhibit softness and peacefulness; the final speech a feeling of washing, purging, and death. If the final speech seems disruptive because it gives Kate a force not previously demonstrated, an understanding of her action will be made easier if she concentrates solely on the sounds of the words. Pinter's scene directions relative to activity by Kate show that by speaking she has returned the situation to its original state. The only difference is in Anna's position "lying on divan" rather than "standing at the window."

Thus, the process of creating a characterization for Kate will be simplified by four guidelines: (1) create through analysis a consistent and personal sense of being, which may be both supported and contradicted by the perceptions of other characters; (2) recreate Pinter's specifications of movement with great precision; (3) contribute only the most necessary movement that is clearly the result of internal thoughts; (4) stress the action of the language and allow meaning to be assigned according to the idiosyncratic views of all who observe.
NOTES


4 Cole and Chinoy, Actors On Acting, p. 477.


10 Barnet, Berman, Burto, Types of Drama, p. 404.
11. Barnet, Berman, Burto, *Types of Drama*, p. 188.


30 Harold Pinter, *Complete Works: One*, p. 36.
31 Harold Pinter, *The Homecoming*, pp. 33-34.
32 Harold Pinter, *Complete Works: One*, p. 33.
33 Harold Pinter, *Complete Works: One*, p. 42.
34 Harold Pinter, *Old Times*, p. 32.
38 Pinter, *The Homecoming*, p. 7
39 Pinter, *The Homecoming*, p. 31.
40 Pinter, *Old Times*, p. 32.
42 Pinter, *Old Times*, p. 18.
43 Pinter, *Old Times*, p. 35.
44 Pinter, *The Homecoming*, pp. 34-35.
45 Pinter, *Old Times*, p. 43.
47 Hewes, "Probing Pinter's Play," p. 58.
48 Pinter, Complete Works: One, pp. 132-133.

49 Pinter, Old Times, p. 59.


52 Schechner, Public Domain, p. 89.


54 This was a major production at Bowling Green State University in 1973, directed by Dr. David Addington.

55 For the following quotations from Old Times, see Harold Pinter, Old Times (New York, 1971).
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

This study examines the degree of individuality and the style of performance which is required of an actor when creating a role in a play by Harold Pinter. Various acting styles and methods of characterization are explored and applied to the idiosyncrasies of Pinter's dramas.

Summary of the Study

The goal of an actor is to create the illusion of another human being through the use of his own body, voice, and personality. Although the process of characterization requires the mastering of certain techniques, the actor's methods are primarily personal.

Yet the degree of individuality allowed the actor is specifically controlled by the playwright through his particular style of characterization. Kjerbuhl-Petersen identifies three basic kinds of characters: the type, the individual, and the shadow.

The "type" is a character for which the playwright provides a common and recognizable personality with obvious physical traits. Attitudes and actions are clearly indicated through the language and require little elaboration.
from the actor. The actor must carefully manage his voice and body and restrain from contributing personal, psychological aspects to the role.

The "individual" is a more complete characterization offered by a playwright. Through descriptive information and inferences which are drawn from dialogue, the actor assembled as much information about the character as possible. He then uses his own experiences to create and demonstrate a separate and unique personality.

The "shadow" is similar to the type in that the intricacies of personality are of secondary importance to the play. The shadow, however, demands that the actor substitute his own psyche rather than rely on the language for emotional actuality. Although this seems to allow the actor the greatest emotional freedom, his expression remains controlled by the playwright through language. Since there is a general lack of meaning in the dialogue of such plays, the sensation of the actor's own personality in the role offers a basis for realistic illusion.

Although these three kinds of characters are identified with certain periods of theatrical history, they are confined to none. Rather, the differences are attributed to the amount of individuality and self-expression offered by the actors. On a linear spectrum, the predictable character type may be considered at one end, the vague shadow at the other, with the intricate and unpredicatable
individual somewhere between the two.

Harold Pinter's characters appear confusing to the actor and the spectator because they do not clearly occupy any one point on this spectrum. Early in his career, the playwright was classified by critic Martin Esslin as an "absurdist." Pinter's relationship with other such playwrights was largely due to the existential philosophy which serves as basis for his themes. Pinter's works are also related to the absurdists in several other ways:

1) The spectator is isolated in a situation which lacks causes, values, or the verification of meaning.
2) Conventional dramatic devices of irony and conflict are distorted.
3) There is no rational or predictable flow of events.
4) Verbal language is confused and unreliable and non-verbal language is magnified.
5) Characters seem vaguely transfixed in time, their personalities inexplicit and their behavior often erratic.

Even so, it would be a mistake to accept Pinter's characters as shadows. The ambiguity which surrounds them is a means of creating the illusiveness of the human personality and emphasizing the deeper emotions. It is not Pinter's intention to symbolize characters or to de-emphasize the personalities of his characters in order to stress his ideas.
Rather, Pinter's ambiguity points to the idiosyncrasy of truth and the individuality of character. Even so, if his characters are considered to be individuals, the actor is faced with other problems. First, there is a general lack of information about a character's past, either in the narration or contained in the dialogue. There is also inconsistency or a lack of motivation in his behavior. Such circumstances make it difficult for the actor to conceptualize a character's psyche. This being the case, it would be inaccurate to classify the Pinter characters as individuals.

At the other end of the spectrum is the character type which allows little emancipation of the actor's own personality. Although Pinter's characters are acceptable, identifiable human beings, they are multi-dimensionally unique personalities and could not be classified as actual types. The Pinter characters are not secondary to the theme but form intricate relationships which are the spine of the play and its source of conflict.

It is necessary for the actor in a play by Harold Pinter, therefore, to experience the entire spectrum of characterization. First, he must perceive a deep and complex psyche within what seems a common human type. Second, he must create an individualized concept of personality although the available information and the character's behavior are misleading. Third, he must allow his own personality to interpret, color, and expand that of the character. That
is to say, the actor must exhibit a character which is simultaneously a type, an individual, and a shadow.

To accomplish this task, the actor must adapt his methods of analysis and physicalization to the special needs of the Pinter character. The actor must formulate the same key questions which would lead him to an understanding of any individual character. That is to say, he should examine the narration and the dialogue for any information concerning the environment, physicalization, vocalization, motivation, and dramatic function of the character. The actor must construct his own perceptions based on the character's actions and statements, and supported by his own personal references. Contradiction should be expected between actors due to the lack of verification. As long as each actor is consistent within his own role, Pinter's conflict of relationships will be achieved. Consequently, the transactions which occur between characters can be the primary source of information; action is more expressive than biographical information.

In the physicalization of a Pinter character the actor confronts several other problems. First, since there is generally a lack of overt action in Pinter's plays, the actor must be highly selective in his movement. Since truth is behavioral, the actor should recognize the power of a single gesture. Such emphasis is given to the properties that an actor can use them as an extension of himself. The
Pinter play may be divided into speech and silence: the pauses viewed as segments of physical communication and the words considered as tools of action. A glance can communicate a complete idea and the inflection of a sentence can speak more clearly than the meaning of its words.

In addition to the variations in the analysis and physicalization he uses, the Pinter actor experiences a special relationship with his audience. Although there is a distinct separation between the characters and each spectator—a confused sense of isolation—each is sharing a degree of uncertainty, anxiety, or fear. The Pinter actor and his audience are therefore united in what Brustein calls a "theatre of communion." The audience does not witness the actor as another character. Neither does he see a character mask presented by the actor, not the actor as himself. Instead, the spectator of a Pinter play is involved in the actor's ongoing struggle to visualize the character—he helps create a perception of a personality which is introduced by the playwright, clarified by the actor, and finalized by his own idiosyncratic perceptions.

Recommendations of Further Study

Harold Pinter's characters possess qualities of absurdism as well as traditional aspects of naturalism or presentation-alism. The actor's approach to this eclectic style of dramaturgy will be more fully discovered through an actual
performance of a Pinter character. A detailed case study of that performance should then examine the techniques of analysis and physicalization which are used.

A comparative study of acting style may also be applied to characterizations set forth by other contemporary playwrights.
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