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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Don S. Lawson entitled "The Intertextuality of the Room: A Reading of Selected Plays by Harold Pinter, Joe Orton, and David Mamet." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

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THE INTERTEXTUALITY OF THE ROOM:

A READING OF SELECTED PLAYS BY

HAROLD PINTER, JOE ORTON, AND DAVID MAMET

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation applies the critical technique of intertextual analysis to selected plays by the contemporary playwrights Harold Pinter, Joe Orton, and David Mamet. My basic argument is that the early plays of Harold Pinter--The Room, The Birthday Party, and The Dumb Waiter--articulate a set of signs which recur among them and in later plays by Pinter and Orton and Mamet as well. Since these later plays have often been seen as confusing and obscure, I hope to illuminate certain ways of apprehending these texts by providing readings of the early plays so that, when the signs from these early plays reappear in the later works, they are less obscure. In other words, I show that the later plays are transformations of and reflections of the earlier plays and thus a sign whose meaning is not clear in a later play may be sufficiently clarified by appealing to a reading of it from an earlier play. I begin with Pinter's The Room (1957) and end with Mamet's American Buffalo (1976).

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

One of the few generalizations that can be validly made of literature in the twentieth century is that every genre has seen an explosion of form. After the long, intricate, realistically detailed, social novels characteristic of the Victorian period--ranging from George Eliot, Dickens, and Trollope in England, to Flaubert in France, to Tolstoi in Russia--the modern novel opted for the intensely psychological focus seen in the novels of Proust, Joyce, and Faulkner. After the controlled, measured achievements in nineteenth century poetry--the dramatic monologues of Browning and the meditative, philosophical poems of Arnold--modern poetry opted for a collage effect using fragments, overheard thoughts, ineffectual attempts at action, and allusions typified by the work of Eliot and Pound.

This claim can be made for drama too. Perhaps the explosion of form in drama started late in the previous century when Ibsen moved drama out of the blank verse world of kings and queens and rooted it firmly in the living rooms of bourgeois households, and then Strindberg took drama into a surreal and expressionistic world which often bore only a passing resemblance to the world as com-

monly experienced. This century has seen a wide variety of drama: from Alfred Jarry's nonsense and non sequitur world in Ubu Roi; to George Bernard Shaw's staged ideology in such plays as Major Barbara and Man and Superman; to Eugene O'Neill's great experimentations with character development using the spoken internal monologue of Strange Interlude and the Freudian psychology of Desire Under the Elms; to Berthold Brecht's epic theatre which seeks to distance the audience from the action enough to elicit a politically critical response to that action as in Mother Courage; to drama ultimately influenced by German Expressionism which presents the non-realistic world inside a character's mind as in Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman; to deconstructions of well-known literary texts as in Edward Bond's Lear and Heiner Muller's Hamletmachine; to dramatized encounters between humans and all-too-human sea creatures in Edward Albee's Seascapes.

One of the most important exploders of dramatic forms in this century is Samuel Beckett, who took drama out of any recognizable locale and placed it firmly in the "waste land." In plays such as Waiting for Godot and Endgame, Beckett divests theatre of its representational dimension in order to concentrate on the role of man in a world devoid of recognizable landmarks or guideposts. Mixing philosophical sources as varied as Pascal and Sartre,

taking the slapstick and comedic elements of silent film comedy and circus routines, using the vaudeville cross-talk comedians as models for dialogue, Beckett dramatizes a world in which the characters cannot make sense of their own lives, in which they must "wait" for help (or salvation or simply relief) from outside sources which may never come, in which they invent games to fend off boredom, in which there is no hope for happiness or even escape, in which nothing can be taken for granted, and in which a cycle of repetition of suffering takes the place of the passage of time.

In Beckett's Waiting for Godot, two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, wait for the arrival of the mysterious Godot (of whose name they are uncertain, but who will assuredly arrive tomorrow). What they hope for from Godot is never articulated: salvation? occupation? reward? The cycle of waiting is apparently endless; every day, a boy comes with a message from Godot to announce that he cannot come today but will certainly come on the morrow. To pass the interminable time, the tramps play games, speak at length of trivial and meaningless subjects, and debate their memories of the past. Although they do not seem to be friends, they are obliged to stick with each other; they have no one else to rely upon, no one else with whom to wait.

Endgame takes another track. The characters (this time, two sets of couples) are trapped inside a room, Hamm unable to walk or see, Clov unable to sit down. Hamm's parents Nell and Nagg live in garbage cans. Although physically powerless, Hamm exerts dictatorial control over the other characters. Clov threatens to leave Hamm, but never does. In their immobility, Nell and Nagg have no choice but to endure Hamm's insults. This multi-leveled play makes reference to: the "end" of a "game" of chess, when the moves are few and predictable and the weakness of the king can be seen once his other pieces are gone; existence after a (nuclear?) holocaust; the end of a man's life and the impotence of old age; and the hopelessness of modern man in the "waste land" of contemporary life and culture.

Beckett continues his focus on the couple bound to each other without the chance to split in Happy Days. Winnie and Willie are, interestingly enough, Beckett's first foray into a male/female couple at the center of a play; Nell and Nagg are definitely secondary to Hamm and Clov. Willie and Winnie too endure a cycle of days in which everything is the same. This is underscored by having act one and act two represent different days. Winnie has her routine which continues even as the earth swallows her; she is buried to the waist in act one, to

the neck in act two. She babbles constantly, eliciting only desultory and sporadic replies from Willie.

In Play, three characters (apparently a husband, a wife, and a mistress), inurned throughout the repetitive cycle of the play, recite details of an affair when prompted by a light. The movement of the light from urn to urn is without pattern, and the entire story, with somewhat different details from each speaker, is repeated three times. These characters are locked in the urns of their memories, unable to do more than recount past events in a never changing present.

This theatre has come to be called "Theatre of the Absurd," (Esslin, Theatre of the Absurd 22)[1] a theatre in which the characters can no longer find any supernatural source of assistance or hope, and instead must rely upon each other and upon what meager material comforts can be found. The presentation of man in these plays is bleak: he is a selfish, driven creature with few redeeming qualities who often lives in his distorted memories and continues to exist by means of meaningless games and petty quarrels. Often asserting his existence both to himself

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[1] The literary use of the terms "absurd," "absurdist," or "absurdism" derives ultimately from Albert Camus (The Myth of Sisyphus) who uses the word "absurd" to describe the fundamental condition of man in the world. The phrase "Theatre of the Absurd" was coined by Martin Esslin who uses it to describe the work of playwrights as diverse as Ionesco, Genet, Beckett, and Pinter.

and to others is as important as existence itself. The characters feel they must be perceived in order to exist. Having attention paid to them is as necessary for life as food and water--perhaps more so. They struggle for attention and recognition and stick by each other not out of fondness or affection or love, but out of fear of isolation, loneliness, and disregard.

In the theatre after Beckett, Harold Pinter, Joe Orton, and David Mamet have established themselves as significant voices. In the post-Absurdist theatre, the Beckettian waste land has given way and recognizable settings, primarily the living rooms of Ibsen's drama, are restored. The full horror of living in an unpredictable and meaningless world is maintained, however, and thus magnified. If it is frightening to realize one's predicament as alone in the world out in an unnamed field, it is much more frightening to have this realization in one's home. Although characters in post-Absurdist drama find themselves in settings which the audience immediately recognizes and can claim for its own, they nevertheless fight for understanding, for validation, for recognition, for attention, and for meaning in their lives. The plays which transfer the Absurdist world into recognizable and familiar settings have come to be called "Comedies of

Menace,"[2] because the menace of the outside world continually threatens to disrupt the lives of the characters despite all their best efforts.

Thus the tramps of Beckett's Waiting for Godot become the occupants of a run-down house in Pinter's The Caretaker or even well-to-do men living in some comfort in Pinter's No Man's Land; the extended family of Beckett's Endgame becomes the incestuous and criminal family in Pinter's The Homecoming; the married couple trapped together and unable to communicate of Beckett's Happy Days becomes Deeley and Kate unable to make their memories of the past coincide in Pinter's Old Times (even the titles here sound alike); and the husband, wife, and mistress unable to agree on the details of a long ago affair in Play become the modern love triangle of Pinter's Betrayal.

One can see immediately that Pinter's major plays are in important ways reflections of and transformations of plays by Samuel Beckett. It is my contention that the early plays of Harold Pinter serve similarly as a model for plays by Joe Orton, David Mamet, and for Pinter's own later work in a way analogous to that described in the

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[2] Martin Esslin identifies this term as being "first used in 1957 by David Crompton in the subtitle of his play The Lunatic View, and first applied to Pinter by Irving Wardle in an article which appeared in Encore in September, 1958" (Pinter the Playwright 55).

preceding paragraph. By understanding and being familiar with Pinter's early work, obscure and mysterious elements of the later Pinter plays, as well as of plays by Orton and Mamet, can become clearer. The idea that literary works gain significance and clarity when read with knowledge of other texts which serve as models (as opposed to sources) is called intertextuality.

In critical theory, intertextuality has become an important tool for addressing texts in recent years. When a reader is explictly aware of the intertext (i.e., the model text or texts) for a given work under consideration (called the "focused text"), that work can be seen in light shed by the intertext.[3] This theory makes no claim for influence (Pinter, for example, says he had never read or seen a Beckett play when he started writing); rather it claims that a semiotic system, a system of signs, found in one work may be present in and thus illuminate another work. The theory is reader-centered; it matters what

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[3] Various critics and theorists have used different terms for the intertext and the focused text. Michael Riffaterre, for example, calls the intertext the "matrix" or the "hypogram" (Semiotics of Poetry). Julia Kristeva simply calls the focused text the "text" (Semiotike). Harold Bloom calls the intertext the "pretext" (The Anxiety of Influence). For the purposes of this study, I am adopting Owen Miller's terminology ("Intertextual Identity"), calling the model texts "intertexts" and the new text under consideration the "focused text."

intertexts the reader brings to the work in establishing how that reader apprehends or interprets the text.

Perhaps the originator of intertextuality is Martin Heidegger, who writes:

> Whenever something is interpreted as something, the interpretation will be founded essentially upon fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception. An interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us. If when one is engaged in a particular concrete kind of interpretation, in the sense of exact textual Interpretation, one likes to appeal to what "stands there", then one finds that what "stands there" in the first instance is nothing other than the obvious undiscussed assumption of the person who does the interpreting. In an interpretative approach there lies such an assumption, as that which has been "taken for granted" with the interpretation as such--that is to say, as that which has been presented in our fore-having, our fore-sight, and our fore-conception. (191-92)

Heidegger focuses attention on what a reader brings to the text he apprehends or interprets. One of the assumptions inherent in literary analysis is that a text can be interpreted, that a text means something which is important but not always readily apparent. Heidegger calls this meaning what "stands there" and asserts that finding it involves knowing what is "taken for granted"--in other words, what is brought to the text by the reader. Heidegger's theories led to considerations of literary texts in terms of the presuppositions with which readers addresed them.

What is fore-known is intimately involved in acquir-

ing or apprehending new texts. A reader can only engage a new text in terms of what he knows already about texts, about how one reads a text, about what texts usually do and mean when read. Through placing a new text in a paradigm created by his knowledge of texts already read, a reader is able to see what meaning a previously unknown text has.

The term "intertextuality" was coined by Julia Kristeva who speculates on the source of these presuppositions, writing that "every text takes shape as a mosaic of citations, every text is the absorption and transformation of other texts" (Semiotike 146). Thus, one could safely assume that a knowledge of the texts absorbed by and transformed into a given text would be important for a full understanding of that text. Later, Kristeva explictly defines intertextuality in terms of lifting signs from one text and placing them into another. She writes that intertextuality is "the transposition of one or more systems of signs into another [work], accompanied by a new articulation [of those signs]" (Desire in Language 15). The benefit of reading a work intertextually lies in seeing a sign or system of signs which was articulated by and understood in another work at operation in a new work. By gaining meaning through reference to signs

in other works, mysterious signs in a new work lose their opacity.

Roland Barthes also sees the importance of the reader's knowledge of other works when attempting to interpret new works when he writes, "The 'I' which approaches the text is itself already a plurality of other texts" (10). Thus, the reader can explicitly articulate the other texts which contribute to his reading of a given text as an aid to the interpretation of that text. Only by being aware of the intertexts can a reader see what is new and important in a text he sees for the first time.

Jonathan Culler advances this notion. He defines intertextuality as "the relation of a particular text to other texts" (Structuralist Poetics 139). He goes ever further in claiming that

> a work can only be read in connection with or against other texts, which provide a grid through which it is read and structured by establishing expectations which enable one to pick out salient features and give them a structure. And hence intersubjectivity--the shared knowledge which is applied in reading--is a function of these other texts. (Structuralist Poetics 139)

Presumably the reading which is achieved by reading "with or against other texts" is deeper and richer than a reading which mistakenly supposes that texts are independent

artifacts, which pretends to ignore the presuppositions which a reader brings to a new text when he reads it. Culler writes that an intertextual reading allows a "dialectical opposition which the text presents [resulting] in a synthesis at a higher level where the grounds of intelligibility are different" (Structuralist Poetics 151).

Culler also examines the nature of these presuppositions and shows how a new text can interact with the presuppositions a reader has:

> The notion of intertextuality emphasizes that to read is to place a work in a discursive space, relating it to other texts and to the codes of that space. . . . In its designation of a discursive space and its assertion of the primacy of this space for any systematic study of discourse, intertextuality is a theoretical construct of the first importance, and it is not without direct practical consequences. It leads one to think of a text as a dialogue with other texts, an act of absorption, parody, and criticism, rather than as autonomous artifact which harmoniously reconciles the possible attitudes towards a given problem; it alerts one to the artifice of literature, the special conventions and interpretive operations on which it is based; and it makes one particularly sensitive to the special referen-tiality of literary works: whenever a work seems to be referring to the world one can argue that this supposed reference is in fact a comment on other texts. ("Presupposition and Intertextuality" 1382-83)

Seeing texts as making reference to other texts is a recognition that "most works of literature, in emitting messages that refer to themselves, also make constant

reference to other works of literature" (Hawkes 144). Richard Harland writes that, when seeking significance in a heretofore unknown literary text, a reader unravels the text and runs "the threads of meaning back across all the other texts from which [the] given text was formed" (168). A reading which acknowledges and uses this reference, which unravels and runs back these threads, is a fuller and more holistic attempt at understanding a new text.

Owen Miller makes this point when he writes:

> Intertextuality comes into play when those approaches which insist on the text as a self-regulating unity and emphasize its functional independence are felt, for one reason or another, to be inadequate or untenable. (20)
>
> In this view, the identification of a specific intertext is not only admissible but an essential feature of intertextual identity. What signals the intertext as well as specifying it, is the notion of a <u>trace</u> discernible in the focused text [the new text]. . . . The trace left is of a cognitive nature, a form of unintelligibility which cannot be resolved at an intratextual level or by recourse to any possible institutionalized meaning of the trace. The reader is thus faced with an unresolved or an unsatisfactorily resolved aspect of the interpretation of the text which sets him in search of the appropriate intertext to resolve the problem. (31)

Traditional critical approaches--such as formalism and biographical/historical criticism--have indeed been inadequate for addressing works of post-Absurdist theatre. The mystification of otherwise sophisticated readers by these

plays is representative of the reaction of most readers and audiences; traditional criticism fails to add to the reader's ability to understand the texts. Readers, audiences, and critics alike have been mystified by the circular language, long silences, static inaction of plot, underdeveloped and unexplained characters, and sudden eruptions of violence which characterize these plays.

Thus, I propose to use intertextuality as a method for apprehending selected plays by Harold Pinter, Joe Orton, and David Mamet. Pinter's early plays can be seen as creating an intertext through the plays of Orton and Mamet can be interpreted without the unresolved questions left by traditional criticism. The key to understanding the complex later plays by Orton and Mamet can be found in Pinter's earlier work. In such plays as The Room, The Dumb Waiter,and The Birthday Party, Pinter creates an intertext for the other plays which can resolve certain problems of unintelligibility in these plays. When seen through the lens of Pinter's pioneering early plays, the plays which follow become clearer.

The choice of intertextuality as a way of apprehending these texts may seem a strange one. To date, critical studies using intertextuality have almost exclusively discussed poetry and fiction--genres in which the "text" is

certainly more stable and available than dramatic texts.[4] Keir Elam, however, defends intertextuality as a valuable tool for addressing dramatic texts:

> Appropriate decodification of a given text derives above all from the spectator's familiarity with other texts (and thus with learned textual rules). By this same token, the genesis of a performance itself is necessarily intertextual: it cannot but bear the traces of other performances at every level, whether that of the written text (bearing generic, structural and linguistic relations with other plays), the scenery (which will 'quote' its pictoral or proxemic influences), the actor (whose performance refers back, for the cognoscenti, to other displays), directorial style, and so on. . . . An 'ideal' spectator, in this sense, is one endowed with a sufficiently detailed, and judiciously employed, textual background to enable him to identify all relevant relations and use them as a grid for a correspondingly rich decodification. (93)

Not only can a knowledge of written, literary texts be important for "reading" drama, but a knowledge of performance is helpful too. These twin sources of intertexts both contribute to a "reading" of dramatic texts. Martin Esslin makes this point writing:

> For a certain number of audience members, moreover,

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[4] Noted studies using intertextuality include John Hannay's book on Margaret Drabble (The Intertextuality of Fate: A Study of Margaret Drabble) which examines changing connotations of the word "fate" in four Drabble novels and Faulkner and Intertextuality, a collection of essays edited by Michel Gresset and Noel Polk in which various critics examine the connections between Faulkner's novels set in Yoknapatawpha County.

> depending on their previous experience and sophistication, the meaning of a given performance will be influenced by a variety of other factors, such as items of information or knowledge inherent in the general cultural milieu of their particular society, culture or sub-culture. Such, for one, are the subtle undercurrents of meaning arising from 'intertextuality': references to, parallels with, or variations on matters presumed to be 'generally known' in that milieu. . . . In the context of present-day popular drama this is one of the basic sources for the audience's understanding and enjoyment. (The Field of Drama 142)

> Text does not merely denote the verbal element of the drama, but the entire 'texture' of interacting sign systems: gestures, visual patterns, [etc.] also carry the same subtle undercurrents of nostalgic, parodistic or dialectical significance. (The Field of Drama 143)

Perhaps readers and audiences of drama have an advantage over readers of fiction and poetry in that they have two sources of intertextual information on their texts.

If one remains aware that performance is at least as important as printed words in drama, and if one can see an audience as a transformation of a reader, intertextuality will function for drama as well. Production values are often prescribed in the written text. Playwrights such as Beckett and Pinter have seen the importance of staging to such a degree that they either insist upon directing their own plays or entrust "authorised" productions to a chosen, trusted director. Beckett and Pinter both have publicly criticized unauthorized productions which they felt

ignored their wishes for staging. With this in mind, the "texts" under consideration here can be examined intertextually.

Necessarily, one must begin with a description of the theatrical model in which all these plays operate, an examination of the conventions which are the hallmarks of these post-Absurdist, "Theatre of Menace" plays. This model, encompassing these conventions, is the intertext for the plays to be considered. The description which follows is a general one, including all the aspects of the model. No one play exhibits all these facets, but the intertextual model itself is composed of them; only by measuring individual plays against this model can the importance of the differences and omissions from the full-blown model be accurately seen.

The chief element of the model is a room. Martin Esslin sums up the importance of this in Pinter's work:

> The room. . . is one of the recurring motifs of Pinter's work. As he himself once put it, "Two people in a room--I am dealing a great deal of the time with this image of two people in a room. The curtain goes up on the stage, and I see it as a very potent question: What is going to happen to these two people in the room? Is someone going to open the door and come in?" The starting point of Pinter's theatre is thus a return to some of the basic elements of drama--the suspense created by the elementary ingredients of pure, preliterary theatre: a stage, two people, a door; a poetic image of an undefined fear and expectation. When asked by a

> critic what his two people in his room are afraid of, Pinter replied, "Obviously they are scared of what is outside the room. Outside the room there is a world bearing upon them which is frightening." (Theatre of the Absurd 235)

The action takes place in a single room, with entrances and exits. The characters fear what enters and do not themselves wish to exit. The natural desire for the shelter necessary for civilized life is the central metaphor in "Theatre of Menace"--wanting shelter is wanting life. The characters feel their hold on the shelter is tenuous at best and fear eviction and invasion.

The outside is feared above all else. Perhaps this derives ultimately from Beckett's Endgame, where the outside may possibly be the remains of the earth after a nuclear war, but existence outside the room is always represented negatively and none of the characters desires it. They wish to stay inside the room no matter how unpleasant the conditions may become, no matter how undesirable the partner who shares the room may be.

The room, inhabited by two people, is arranged for the comfort, convenience, and support of a couple only. Very often in this model, the threat from outside is embodied in an invader who desires a place in the room. For this to occur, the outsider must displace an insider if he is to remain in the place of security from the out-

side world. In the early forms of the model, the outsider is always a stranger; in later versions, this will not always be true. A friend, acquaintance, or family member can invade and disrupt as surely as a stranger can.

Early on, the invader uses the fear generated by his presence to dominate the two insiders, until they gang up on him and even, at times, force their will upon him. The shifting dynamics of the politics of the room make up the significant action of most of the plays in the "Theatre of Menace." The audience watches as a routine between the insiders is disrupted by the invasion, as the invader dominates and controls the room for a time, and finally as the insiders are able to supersede the invader once and for all. The tension of these dramas is essentially plotless; the details of the plot are unimportant in comparison to the struggle which they mask.

The other necessities of life--food, companionship, sex--quickly become as important as the room itself. Many of these plays center around obtaining and providing food. The characters eat or argue about eating. Discussing whether the food was any good takes up a great deal of time. Providing food when demanded is a never-ending and laborious task.

As in the Beckett plays described above, the couples

in the rooms often are trapped together because they fear loneliness and neglect without the continuation of their association, even if that association is patently unsatisfactory. Herein lies the tension: both members of the couple know that the other is unsatisfied and might be more satisfied with the outsider; thus one member of the couple could be forced into the horrors of the outside world to have the invader take his place.

In the middle versions of the model, the shifting domination first by the stranger, next of the stranger, will become explicitly sexual. The invader will sexually dominate the insiders until they together can assert their control of him and dominate him sexually. Thus the necessities of life--shelter, food, companionship, and sex--are the grounds over which the fight for a place in the room takes place.

In the early model, the couple is almost always a man and woman who face the invasion of another man. From the middle form of the model on, however, the couple will be two men in a room which is then invaded by another man. Although at first these men inside the room seem linked by male bonding (friendship is too sentimental a description here), the association will become explictly and exclusively homoerotic from the middle versions through the

culmination. In these plays, the threat from outside becomes identified with women: women could possibly take the place of one of the men; women take the food; women could dominate the men sexually; women are part of the feared outside.

As in the Beckett plays, time in the room is passed by game-playing (often apparently harmless, but always carrying the possibility of violence). The necessity to occupy the endless time becomes as important as obtaining food and shelter. Thus, the game-playing is taken very seriously; often the game alone keeps the characters from being aware of the hopelessness of their situations.

The characters speak at length of meaningless subjects. Often the insiders have developed an idiolect which marks them as insiders and which can be used against the invader. Defining the terms of this idiolect can be a source of friction between the insiders, heightening the possibility that one of them will choose to opt for the invader rather than the partner inside the room at the play's start. The language used inside the room by the insiders is different from that used outside the room. One hurdle which an insider can put up for the outsider is the language itself.

Common household objects take on significance when

they are the battlegrounds for dominance. These plays often end in violence, either symbolic (eviction from the room), figurative (via language), or physical (actual injury of a character). The insiders, with a knowledge of the room's contents can be at an advantage over the outsider, but the outsider may feel no hesitation in using (even comandeering) special or sacred objects inside the room whose use by the insiders is rare or taboo. This gives the outsider some advantages in the struggle.

Obviously, this model is sharpened by the dramaturgy, staging, and mise-en-scene. The room, whether cozy or dilapidated, can be seen as a "home" in opposition to the "homeless" quality of the outside world. Sometimes the invader is specifically characterized as homeless, as desperately needing a shelter from the outside. On stage, the insiders can be seen surrounded by their familiar and comfortable belongings in contrast to the outsider who does not know where things are or how exactly to behave. As the outsider becomes more comfortable, he may try to use the objects in the room against their owners, to exploit the welcome and expand his power. The always threatening outside may be glimpsed whenever a door opens or some new character enters. The sheer physical oppressiveness of the massive outside as opposed to the small-

ness of the room can be seen when these plays are staged.

Obviously this model was not created out of whole cloth in the early Pinter plays. Several other modern playwrights can be seen as forerunners of the "Theatre of Menace" because traces of this model appear in their plays. The identification of some of these plays may lead to a more complete understanding of these elements when they are examined in the plays by Pinter, Orton, and Mamet in later chapters.

One of the earliest appearances of the "room" as a recurring motif in drama, as noted above, is in the plays of Henrik Ibsen. In most of his mature, prose plays, Ibsen uses the room as a symbol for the comfort, shelter, and insulation from the hostile outside world which is necessary for his fragile characters if they are to live. Ibsen does not fit the model described above exactly. In several plays, his characters either desire to leave or actually do leave the room: Nora in A Doll's House leaves her husband to make a life for herself which she can control; Hedda Gabler in her eponymous play commits suicide when the stifling conditions in her room threaten to suffocate her utterly; Ellida Wangel in The Lady from the Sea struggles for and obtains the right to leave her room before deciding to stay; John Gabriel Borkman eventually

leaves his room to die outside, without the physical and symbolic protection his room has afforded him.

Ibsen treats the room masterfully. Not only does it offer warmth and shelter from the harsh Scandanavian weather outside, but it is a place of refuge from the lies and deceit which most of these characters have practiced in their lives outside the room. In plays such as Ghosts and John Gabriel Borkman, the audience is allowed to glimpse the weather outside and discover the lies told by the characters outside the place of shelter while at the same time seeing the comfort available inside; the bravery of the characters who choose to leave the room is never in doubt. In The Wild Duck, Ibsen uses the unseen attic where the wild duck is kept as a representative of the artificiality of the room. In contrast to the freedom the duck could have outside, the attic is man-made and stifling--a potent room symbol in the plays of Ibsen.

Ibsen's most complete use of the room as a theatrical motif occurs in his play Rosmersholm (1886). Beginning with its title (in English, Rosmer's House or Rosmer's Home), the play is concerned with the activities of finding and keeping a place in a desirable room. Shortly into the play, the audience discovers that an outsider, Rebecca West, invaded the house of John Rosmer and upset things

greatly. Rosmer was formerly the minister to the surrounding countryside, he was a solid conservative in local politics, and he was married to a woman who shared his religious and policital convictions. West's presence upset the balance of the Rosmers' room--Rosmer renounced the church and became a liberal, and his wife committed suicide.

Rebecca West has found herself a room, a shelter from her strange past and from the forbidding and inhospitable world outside. Her position is threatened when Dr. Kroll, the local newspaper publisher and Rosmer's former conservative cohort, returns after several years of refusing to set foot in Rosmersholm to attempt to win Rosmer back to his fold. The main action of the play is a psychomachia in which West and Kroll vie for Rosmer's soul, so to speak. When their position in the house becomes untenable--secrets from the past are revealed, guilt becomes too heavy to bear, sexual attraction impinges upon their relation-ship--Rosmer and West commit suicide together, echoing Rosmer's wife's suicide of years before.

The room had offered solace and shelter to two different couples. Ultimately no one is able to remain sheltered in Ibsen's world; even as large and comfortable

a room as Rosmers-holm is not enough to protect Ibsen's characters from their pasts, from their fates, from themselves. The motif here is used well: the room is a place where the characters desire to be, where they believe themselves to be immune to the battering of the outside world. In Ibsen's conception, characters are never finally exempt from punishment, from hardship, from acknowledging their own errors. Not even a room can save them.

Oscar Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest (1895) treats some of these motifs in a comic manner. The characters all desire places as members of a couple. To this end, they engage in witty talk and desultory occupation until the couples align. The ridiculous nature of the conditions necessary for coupling (i.e., the appropriate man must be named "Ernest"--punning on the desirability of an "earnest" man for a spouse) symbolizes the trivial reasons behind many encouplings. By heightening this ridiculousness, Wilde achieve high comedy. Under the comic surface, Algernon, Jack, Gwendolen, and Cecily are struggling to achieve comfort, shelter, and partners for themselves. At least partially, their strict attention to surface propriety and behavior is the result of a desire to escape the demands and pains of the world

outside that which they can control. If they can create an artificial world with rules which they control, the hostile--or at least indifferent--world outside them can impinge on them less. They hope to maintain this charade until they are able to find places in a couple which will then take the place of the charade and, theoretically, occupy them for the rest of their lives.

They engage in an elaborate game of Bunburying, creating a fictional, ill friend who requires their presence at inconvenient moments, or a troubled brother whose scrapes with the law necessitate assistance. The point of this game is to excuse the player from other activities he does not wish to pursue. The game evades reality and disguises the lives of its players. As such, it can be seen as an elder cousin of the games seen in the plays of "Theatre of Menace."

The plays of George Bernard Shaw can, in many ways, be seen as important forerunners of the "Theatre of Menace." In his fanatical focus on language, the discourse at length on various subjects as a way of deciding their validity, the occupation of large stretches of characters' lives in talk, Shaw addresses one of the central concerns of contemporary theatre. Language replaces action as the chief element of drama in Shaw's plays. One

need only think of the speechifying in plays such as Man and Superman, You Never Can Tell, and Heartbreak House to see the point. Moreover, Shaw also uses the room. Candida involves a woman who must choose whether to stay in her comfortable surroundings with her husband or accept the tempting possibility of a younger man's attentions. Heartbreak House has several characters jockeying for position in the household of aging Captain Shotover (curiously enough, the characters outside survive while the greediest character, who significantly is inside, gets killed when Heartbreak House is bombed). Yet Shaw's most concentrated use of these motifs is in Pygmalion (1912).

Not only does Eliza Doolitle desire a place in a room such as that occupied by Henry Higgins, and not only is much of the play filled with talk and discussion of what constitutes such a place, but her ability to find such a place is contingent upon language--if she can change her speech, she can transform herself from a flowergirl into a lady. With language at its center, Pygmalion clearly anticipates the concerns of "Theatre of Menace." Eliza's life in the outside has been cruel and bleak. The world opened to her through a life in Henry Higgins' household fulfills her conception of happiness--a room of comfort, shelter, and leisure. The key to achieving her dream lies

in language; if she can learn to speak the idiolect of the insiders, she too can become a person with a place, a person with a room.

Similarly, the plays of Noel Coward exhibit many of the same concerns. Coward's characters are constantly engaged in linguistic fencing and meaningless, witty wordplay. Indeed, the bulk of his plays consists of such surface elegance. Beneath that surface, however, is a struggle for a place as desperate as any fought in Pinter plays. In Private Lives, the characters couple and uncouple, trying to find the balance which will permit a stable life. In Present Laughter, three women and a man fight for a place in the household of Garry Essendine, hoping that such a place will redeem them from the lives outside which each finds troubling and unacceptable. The characters in Hay Fever struggle to maintain places as weekend guests in the household of a writer and his wife despite the unusual and upsetting family dynamics and hysterics to which they are witness.

In Design for Living (1933), Coward makes his most fruitful use of the elements under discussion. Three friends--Leo, Otto, and Gilda--couple and recouple: first Gilda/Otto; next Gilda/Leo; and then Otto/Leo. By play's end, they have agreed upon a menage a trois as the

only possible way to exist, the best possible "design for living" given each individual character's inabililty to function without the other two. Much of the play involves the kind of wordplay characteristic of "Theatre of Menace" and the fear of loneliness and neglect outside the various rooms the several different couples inhabit in the course of the play is overwhelming.

Furthermore, Coward builds in a repetitive cycle of events remarkably prescient of the dramatic structure used by Beckett and his successors. At the end of each coupling, a person outside the current couple arrives early in the morning without warning and is told by one member of the couple that the other is ill in bed. Shortly it becomes clear that the first member is lying and that the current outsider is actually in the bedroom where he has spent the night in the absence of the other member of the couple, thus signalling a restructuring of the threesome. Significantly, the last version of this scene happens at night rather than in the morning when Otto and Leo, both outsiders in Gilda's life by this time, intrude upon her house when her current partner truthfully is away. This shift makes possible a break from the cycle; no longer is there a shifting pattern of couples, but a trio, apparently one which will be able to last because it forms

in a manner representing a break with the cycle of repetition which characterizes the action of the play.

In its examination of the "couple" in a room threatened by the presence of an outsider, Design for Living is an important forerunner of the plays with which I am concerned. The use of language as an important element, the circular and repetitive structure of the play, and the centrality of the couple (whose membership may shift) all are elements which will be seen again and again in later plays by Pinter, Orton, and Mamet.

Finally, Samuel Beckett's importance must be acknowledged. As noted above, his plays can be seen as intertexts for Pinter's plays. Endgame (1956) particularly seems important for consideration as a forerunner of the "Theatre of Menace" plays. The two sets of couples here exist in a room of dubious comfort: they do not like each other particularly; the other three must exist under Hamm's thumb and Hamm himself seems appalled by his own wielding of power; their supplies are running out; and they are becoming weary of the games (including linguistic games) which occupy their time. They remain in the room only because the ruined world outside is too horrible even to contemplate.

Toward the end of the play, they are briefly

threatened by an outsider. Clov spots a young boy outside. Hamm fears he may be a procreator, someone who could continue the tedious cycle of days beyond the deaths of the four characters in the room. They make no attempt to contact him, but his presence is a shift in the routine of the room and may possibly signal the inevitable running down of the cycle in which Hamm, Clov, Nell, and Nagg have existed for an uncertain, but long, period of time.

The room, the outsider, the couples, the power structure of dominance and submission, the undesirable world outside, and the focus on language found in Endgame are elements which are also prominent in the plays by Pinter, Orton, and Mamet. These concerns are at the heart of the intertextual model which will emerge. Their presence in these key plays by Ibsen, Wilde, Shaw, Coward, and Beckett is evidence that they are important for dramatists other than the three under examination here. They perhaps are the issues common to and crucial in human experience, and thus can be seen as the focus of the plays by the most important dramatists of our age.

With the exception of the plays by Ibsen and Beckett, these plays can be called comedies, a word which seems inappropriate to the plays of "Theatre of Menace" of which they can be seen as precursors. Certainly the plays of

Pinter, Orton, and Mamet are funny in places, use wit and situational comedy freely, and sometimes can be seen at having "happy endings" in which couples coalesce possibly for a lifetime together. Yet the uncertain nature of the world in these plays, the constant threat from outside, the peculiar nature of the couple, the omnipresent possibility for violence, and the constant avoidance of reality through games all make these plays something other than comedy. Because of the worldview expressed by the "Theatre of Meance" and its nature as a new theatrical model, the terms of the past (such as comedy) simply do not apply. Like literature in the twentieth century generally, criticism itself must find a new form to describe the texts it examines. Perhaps intertextuality is one step along that path.

CHAPTER 2

HAROLD PINTER'S THE ROOM

A close reading of the early works of Harold Pinter reveals the key elements of the intertext which will serve to illuminate the later plays by Orton and Mamet. These plays articulate a system of signs which recurs throughout the plays under consideration here. By recognizing these signs in the early plays, a reader or audience member is better equipped to decode them when they appear, often in more oblique and sophisticated ways, in the later plays.

Important elements of this intertext range from set, to characterization, to interaction between characters, to stage properties invested with symbolic value. Pinter's early plays represent a remarkably rich theatrical world. Already in these plays such keys as the treatment of the room, the tentative nature of encoupling, and the powerful and feared menace from outside are clearly present. In other cases, such as the ambiguous nature of the relations between males in the plays, only the most primitive form of the motif exists yet.

Factors as diverse as the whole movement of a play to its climax to the small details of reading a newspaper or eating a meal, for example, become part of the fabric of the intertext itself. The model which will evolve from

this examination sheds light on plays written twenty years after the first play in which its seeds appear. It is ample testimony to the power of the early Pinter plays that echoes of them occur throughout the plays which follow, even up to David Mamet's American Buffalo.

The system of signs created in these early plays is a complex one which is read (at least partially unconsciously) by any audience or reader who encounters them. To a large degree, the sophistication with which one is able to read the later plays depends upon one's knowledge of these first plays. A familiarity with the motifs developed in Pinter's early work is essential to a full reading of the plays which follow. By examining the important plays of the Pinter canon in chronological order, the development of this system of signs--this intertext--can most clearly be seen.

Beginning with his earliest produced play, the one-act The Room (1957),[1] Harold Pinter has worked within a clearly discernable theatrical world. A set of recurring motifs characterizes Pinter's theatre, which Lois Gordon describes:

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[1] Pinter wrote an earlier full-length play, The Hothouse, but chose not to produce it at the time. The play was finally performed in 1980, in a production directed by Pinter himself. Because the play is clearly not in the mainstream of Pinter's work, I will not be concerned with it in this study.

> The Pinter idiom is familiar but puzzling. From the one-act The Room (1957) to the full-length The Homecoming (1965), a single pattern predominates: Within a womblike room rather ordinary people pursue their rather ordinary business; a mysterious figure enters, and the commonplace room becomes the violent scene of their mental and physical breakdown. Whether Pinter is dealing with a triangular situation among the lower class, as he does in the early plays, or with the better-educated, better-heeled middle class, his focus most recently, this womb-room, expulsion theme and its accompanying light-dark, dry-damp, warm-cold imagery establish the Pinter mode. (1)

Even in this first play, many of the elements which will be hallmarks of Pinter's work and which are the key components of the intertext for Pinter's later plays, as well as the plays by Joe Orton and by David Mamet, are already present and fully operational: the centrality of the room, the association of food with the comfort and safety of the room, the struggle for dominance in the room, the fear of the outside, the pervasive feeling of menace, the ambiguous treatment of women, and the males' withdrawal of their sexuality from the women.

Steven H. Gale sums up the elements introduced in The Room which form the heart of this nascent intertext:

> We are exposed to a small number of people, in this case two, who are enclosed in a room which serves to keep them secure from the horrors outside. Inside the room the inhabitants have created their own versions of reality which, like the very existence of the room, provide them with a sense of security and

> well-being. As the drama opens, however, the audience realizes that the participants in the play are not really communicating with one another--in fact, it often appears that they are consciously avoiding understanding. Their realistic speech, the uncertain and preoccupied pauses, also convey an awareness of something outside the room which threatens them. As the play progresses, there is a movement from apparent reality toward fantastic unreality, a movement emphasized by the use of realistic dialogue to contrast with the increasingly unrealistic situation. The menace on the other side of the door continues to be suggested until it actually intrudes as a physical presence. . . and destroys the security of those within the room. The play, then, essentially deals with three problems: the unexplained menace from without which threatens and finally breaks down the security of an individual; the individual's reactions to the disintegrating conditions; and the lack of communication between people which demands the maintenance of security and at the same time reflects the impossibility of such a goal. (Butter's Going Up 25)

One of the most important of these elements of Pinter's theatre is the language used by his characters. It has become a critical commonplace to comment on the accuracy of Pinter's ear for naturalistic dialogue: the repetitions, pauses, and meaningless exchanges which make up a significant portion of Pinter's characters lines. James T. Boulton describes Pinter's language:

> Evocative or disturbing speech, language which is an accurate reflection of colloquial English and yet reflects the mystery that Pinter sees as an inevitable feature of human relationships: this is the starting point for a consideration of his vision. It leads directly to what is perhaps the chief irony in his plays: the discrepancy between the implicit claim in any patois that it is the currency accepted

> and understood by all its users, and the dramatic fact that such language in actual usage reveals not complete communication between man and man but their essential apartness. (132)

Pinter's language, with its circularity and evident lack of ability to facilitate communication, is one of the hallmarks of Theatre of Menace from the very earliest Pinter play.

These elements are the defining aspects of what has come to be called the "Pinteresque," the recurring characteristics of Pinter's drama. Simon Trussler sees the essence of the Pinteresque as the "close observation of the inconsequential" (74). These elements largely define Theatre of Menace; insofar as they differ from the theatrical models which preceed them (including Theatre of the Absurd), they define one of the major trends in contemporary theatre.

By centering his drama on a room, Pinter is clearly moving out of Theatre of the Absurd (as typified by Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot or Happy Days) and moving into the realm of Theatre of Menace. Walter Kerr points out:

> Whatever exists in the room is made to exist at its maximum intensity. Nothing within our view is in any way abstract, as, say the landscape of Waiting for Godot is abstract. Waiting for Godot takes place Nowhere, or Anywhere. But in The Room we are Somewhere. Environment is utterly explicit. . . . At the same time that the tangible is insisted upon,

> literally thrust into our faces, the surrounding void is implied. The void is outside the room, upstairs, down-stairs, everywhere beyond the walls. (12)

These differences move Pinter's drama out of the waste land and into the living rooms of recognizable, if sometimes unpleasant, characters. This new setting is one of the central features in which Theatre of Menace and Theatre of the Absurd differ.

Pinter's focus on the room as the central theatrical image is already firmly established in The Room. Alrene Sykes claims: "The importance of the room, as a shelter and as a fiercely defended possession, is most forcibly stressed in the first play, The Room--as the title might suggest" (5). From its very title, the audience is aware of the play's true subject; Pinter has been quoted as saying, "My plays are what the titles are about" (Dukore, Harold Pinter 26). Thus, the subject of The Room is not the relationship between Rose and Bert, not the accidental visit of the young couple seeking lodgings, not the dithering landlord afraid of the man in the basement, and not the murder of the black man Riley by Bert--the subject of The Room is the room itself.

Bernard Dukore sees added significance in the title:

> Despite its resemblance to rhyming alternatives, The Room differs from The Tomb which permits no exit, and

> The Womb which, permitting no entry, is entirely secure. Nor is The Room the same as The Home, which might suggest ownership or belonging. (Harold Pinter 26)

Rose and Bert are indeed not in a tomb from which they cannot exit; in fact, Bert does leave to make a run in his van, and Rose is about to leave the room to take out the trash when she discovers Mr. and Mrs. Sands on the landing. Similarly, their room is not an impenetrable womb since the landlord Mr. Kidd, the Sandses, and the black man Riley all enter at various times. Finally, the room is not their home since this is clearly a rented room in some type of boarding house where they live.

Lucina Pacquet Gabbard, on the other hand, sees some of these alternatives as part of a montage of symbolic associations with the room:

> The montage consists of five layers. . . . The room, first of all, represents the stage setting itself. . . . Second, the room represents the character Rose. . . . As Bert's wife, Rose can then be envisioned as Bert's room. In this same context the room can be construed as a womb. It can be the womb in which Bert hides from the world. . . . As a womb, the room can also be Rose's nurturing mother from whom she fears separation. Ultimately, the room becomes more literally a tomb for Riley who is beaten to death by Bert. The final image condensed under the title of The Room requires that Rose's house be perceived as her psyche. The room, then, becomes Rose's conscious mind as opposed to the basement, the subconscious strata. (18-19)

The room is a complex symbol, not only in its eponymous play, but in the later Pinter plays as well. The range of associations which revolve around the room is rich already in this first play and will only become more so as subsequent plays are considered. Gabbard describes this range of associations:

> The room is a symbol with many meanings. In other words, it is overdetermined or ambiguous. However, all of these meanings have been grouped together, or condensed, because of a similar physical quality. Each meaning, like a room, is an enclosure--an area that can house something else. A room, a vagina, a womb, a tomb, a conscious mind--all are open spaces that can house what enters, even if it is only thoughts, as it is in the case of the mind. . . . No meaning is any more accurate than the other. The ambiguity of the symbol provides its depth and its wonder. (22)

Perhaps it is this ambiguous nature of Pinter's symbols which has confused many critics. Pinter, despite the surface realism of his plays, is not content to allow the surface to reveal the totality; his characters, the objects with which he surrounds them, and the set on which he places them are all "overdetermined" symbols, capable of being read on any number of levels at the same time.

Gale reads additional significance into the title:

> The very title of the play, <u>The Room</u>, is too significant to be ignored: a great deal of the early Pinter criticism focused on the notion of a room/womb association; and a room is a <u>physical</u> place,

> emphasizing the importance to Rose of her surroundings. Instead of calling the play something like "The Intruder," which would shift the emphasis, Pinter draws our attention to the idea of walls, with things inside as well as things outside certain defined boundaries. He wants us to realize the importance of the room itself. (Butter's Going Up 26)

As Pinter himself hinted in the previously quoted statement, the play is not about the intruder; rather it is about the room itself. What the audience sees in the set is, ultimately, the subject of the drama which is enacted on that set.

Hedwig Bock describes the importance of the room symbol to Pinter's drama: "All of Pinter's plays have as their key symbol the 'room,' either as room, garden, house or van, which gives warmth and protection against a threatening world, bit is a prison and a threat in itself" (171). One of the chief ironies in Pinter's plays is that the room so desperately sought after and fought for often ends up stifling and stultifying the character(s) in it.

In the stage directions to the play, Pinter describes the room rather simply:

> Scene: A room in a large house. A door down right. A gas-fire down left. A gas-stove and sink, up left. A window up centre. A table and chairs, centre. A rocking-chair, left centre. The foot of a double bed protrudes from alcove, up right. (91)

This description is deceptively simple, however; from these few elements of mise-en-scene, an audience can infer a great deal about the room and the people who live in it. Information about the characters' personal, social, and economic lives is revealed before a word is spoken. The set is, in fact, a complex arrangement of signs which the audience--perhaps unconsciously--reads for information. The system of signs begun with the set of Pinter's first play is the starting point from which a consideration of his plays, as well as those by Orton and Mamet, must necessarily begin.

The fact that the house is large suggests the presence of other rooms, the availability of shelter and comfort for persons other than the characters who are about to speak. The gas-fire, gas-stove, and sink all provide necessary comforts; although the room is not fancy or luxurious, it does have warmth and the equipment for preparing food. The table and chairs provide a space for eating, or working, or conversation. The rocking chair suggests some personal comforts beyond the functional comforts provided by the other furnishings. The double bed in the alcove which can be partially seen by the audience suggests this room is arranged for the support and comfort of a couple who sleep together, possibly

a husband and wife given that the characters revealed on stage when the curtain rises are a man and a woman.

Perhaps the life about to be seen in the room can be representative of the greater life outside the room, of life in general. Pinter himself has said: "There comes a point surely where . . . living in the world must be tied up with living in your own world, where you are--in your room."[2] Thus the situation which is about to be enacted on the stage may have implications more general, more universal, than just Rose and Bert and what happens to them; perhaps life in "the room" is, to a certain extent, life in any room.

More exists than just the ordinary surface described in the stage directions and seen when the house lights go down, however. As Eric Salmon writes, the room exists in "an atmosphere of half-hidden violence and indefinable menace" (363). The room's comforts, real though they may be, are the grounds for a possibly violent struggle.

This room-set is the locale for the interaction of the characters which begins when the curtain rises on The Room. The set, its furnishings and properties are the grounds for a struggle between the characters which makes

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[2] Pinter in an interview with Kenneth Tynan in the series People Today, B.B.C. Home Service, 28 October 1960. Quoted in Esslin, Pinter the Playwright 38.

up the action of the play. The need to control the room motivates the characters who inhabit it. Sykes makes this point:

> A room for Pinter is never simply a box in which his characters are encased. It represents security, of course, and somewhere to shelter from the cold; dominance within a room, so that you are in possession of it and what it contains, also confers certain important rights. (3)

The struggle for domination in the room will become one of Pinter's most important motifs, ranging from this, his earliest produced play, throughout his canon. The dynamics in operation between Rose and Bert will have echoes in all the plays to be considered.

The Room opens with Rose, "a woman of sixty" (90), serving food to Bert, "a man of fifty" (90). They are, apparently, husband and wife. Rose is at the stove preparing food while Bert sits at the table reading a magazine. This physical arrangement of the characters on the stage is revealing. Rose is active in the room; Bert is essentially passive. She prepares the food; he eats it. Curiously, Rose does not sit with him at the table and join him in the meal. This suggests some distance between them inappropriate to a married couple; they do not share even a common meal.

The opening sequence consists of a running monologue

by Rose the subjects of which range from the food Bert is eating, to the weather conditions outside, to how their room is to be preferred to the basement, to speculations concerning who resides in the basement, to commentary on her recent ill health. Elizabeth Sakellaridou sees these subjects as evidence that "it is not her husband but something else which occupies her mind" (20).

The first words out of her mouth, "Here you are. This'll keep the cold out" (91), make clear her association of food with warmth, of nourishment with the comforts availiable in the room. Her next words, "It's very cold out, I can tell you" (91), only reinforce this notion. The emphasis on food in this very first Pinter scene is one that will continue throughout the Theatre of Menace.

Interestingly, Rose's monologue is peppered with contradictions. Having just asserted that she can inform Bert as to the temperature outside, she subsequently states: "I haven't been out" (92). When she makes tea for Bert, she calls it "Nice weak tea. Lovely weak tea" (93), but quickly says, "I'll have it a bit stronger" (93), undercutting the notion that weak tea is nice or lovely since she claims, "I like mine a bit stronger" (95). When discussing the basement, she says, "There isn't room for two down there" (93), but speculates upon

the current resident(s), "Maybe they've got two now" (93). Gale sees this series of contradictions as a key to the menace, the threat which might possibly intrude into Rose's room: "Menace is created because the contradiction disrupts the verification process" (Butter's Going Up 27). Because facts can never be ascertained with any certainty, the security Rose so desperately seeks in the room will never be entirely hers.

Rose's monologue elicits no response whatsoever from Bert. He dutifully eats his food, but otherwise is buried in reading his magazine. The availability of a distraction such as a magazine or newspaper will become an important and recurring motif in these early plays. By reading a magazine silently, or by reciting the stories aloud to a listener, the person reading can avoid having to engage in meaningful communication with the other people on stage.

Martin Esslin characterizes this opening situation:

> Rose certainly seems very anxious to please Bert, to make herself as useful and agreeable to him as possible. She forces her solicitude upon him. But he shows no reaction whatever. (Pinter the Playwright 65)

Since they are a married couple, perhaps Rose fears rejection (after all, she is ten years older than Bert), and compensates for this fear by attempting to make her-

self indespensible to him. Her desire to please Bert is as strong as her conviction that their room is infinitely preferable to the basement; in fact, the two hobbyhorses she rides seem mysteriously linked. By constantly reminding Bert of the comfort of the room, Rose is hoping to make it pleasing to Bert, perhaps as a way of reminding him of her own role in creating his comfort.

Bernard F. Dukore sees the opening monologue as a key to the play's comic nature:

> Rose's extremely funny opening monologue reveals the sources of. . . the play's humor. . . . These sources are particularly noticeable in the first page and a half, which contains one-third of the monologue. The fact that Rose jabbers on, without as much as a peep from her huband Bert, is comic. . . . As Rose talks and talks in the first scene, often asking direct questions, she prepares and serves food to her husband, who utters no sound: a comic suggestion that he is very much the master of the house. (Where Laughter Stops 5-6)

Certainly it is funny as Rose blathers on for five pages of text with no response from Bert. She does ask direct questions (as Dukore notes), and then answers these questions herself. Bert's silence, however, should not be interpreted as an inability to get a word in edgewise. On eleven occasions in the monologue, Pinter gives "pause" as a stage direction, and on twenty-three occasions, he gives Rose specific stage directions concerning what she is to

do between her lines. Bert has ample opportunity to reply to her questions or just to make conversation, but chooses not to do so.

Austin E. Quigley sees the monologue which elicits no reply as important in the struggle for dominance in the room:

> Silence is not a neutral activity. By refusing to make the responses that would meet the demands of Rose's language, Bert is refusing to confirm that their relationship is as Rose would wish it to be. She casts him in the role of one dependent on her motherly supervision, and he simply refuses to participate in a conversation that defines their relationship in this way. But there is a second component to their relationship. Not only does Bert refuse to acknowledge Rose's demands, Rose also refuses to acknowledge Bert's silence. She continues to talk as if he were participating in her conversation on the terms she is dictating. There is no explicit acknowledgement of the friction between them. He never tells her to be quiet, and she never demands that he reply. We are faced with a relationship that has reached a fixed point of discord, a discord that is not acknowledged by either character but is manifest in every facet of their relationship. (80)

The opening monologue reveals much about their relationship. Rose attempts to make herself as pleasing to Bert as possible; her serving of food as she speaks connects her speech (the most obvious assertion of her presence) to that food, and she associates that food with the warmth of the room which stands in stark contrast to the "ice" (94) and "snow" (96) of the weather outside. Thus, she hopes

Bert will (at least subconsciously) associate her with the warmth and food to be had in the room. When he is about to leave to make a run in his van, Rose twice promises him, "I'll have you some nice cocoa on for when you get back" (94), thus tempting him to return by offering him something warm to consume.

As Gale points out, however, the monologue also does not reveal some facts about Rose and Bert which would be considered important in the kind of realist theatre typical of Ibsen and the early Strindberg:

> As is typical in Pinter, we know neither the date nor the month. . . whether Bert is working for himself or someone else, where he is going, or what he is hauling. Since these are outside-the-room matters, they are unimportant. The characters realistically discuss them as they would in actuality, providing no real information, since they would already be acquainted with the details. (Butter's Going Up 26)

The elliptical nature of the opening of The Room is part of the Pinter idiom, one of his most characteristic traits as a dramatist.

Lois G. Gordon sees added significance in this opening sequence:

> Rose ritualistically performs her daily routines, but her monologue--about trivia--reveals that her fears of the cold, the basement, foreigners, or even unsatisfactory rashers, are projections of an internal terror. . . . In saying, "You might as well have

> something inside you," [91] Rose concretely defines her emotional predicament. Perhaps one may fill the void of daily activity with games and that of the inner life with food. What Rose must avoid, at all costs, is the upset that the cold, damp, hunger, foreigner, or Negro would provoke within her room. . . . To ensure her safety, Rose plays a complicated game. (12-13)

Her game of mothering Bert is Rose's way of maintaining some level of control over a situation which is, ultimately, out of her hands. By assuming the position of a mother--whose power over her child borders on the absolute--Rose is able, at least partially, to ward off the anxiety created by her fear of the outside. Boulton explicitly claims: "The whole scene, linguistically and visually, suggests a mother-son relationship rather than wife-husband" (133). Sakellaridou notes that her age "agrees with her motherly attitude to her husband" (21). Since she feeds hims, clothes him, and entertains him as well, Rose believes herself to be meeting all his needs, thus making herself essential to him and protecting herself from the loss of her place.

Rose's constant assertion that she prefers their room to the basement is curious and revealing. Sakellaridou says this is "the major theme of the play" (20) and comments on her "preoccupation with the mystery of the basement and the coldness and darkness of the outside world"

(20). In the same vein, Esslin writes:

> From the very first moments of the play Pinter stresses Rose's fears by her constant insistence on the cosiness and warmth of the room, as against the dampness and obscurity of the basement flat which had at first been offered to them. Again and again she asks herself whether there are any tenants still living in that basement, and congratulates herself on living on the first floor. (Pinter the Playwright 65)

Rose fears having to leave her room, having to settle for less suitable or comfortable accommodations. Perhaps as Gabbard suggests, this is a symbol for Rose's separation anxiety (19). Perhaps it is the fear of being in a place over which she does not have the same control as she does over her room. The fear of the outside seems clearly to be related to the structured nature of the room. The outside is characterized as being without structure: even the landlord cannot say how many rooms are in the house or even how many storeys it has. He is vague--perhaps intentionally so--about where he sleeps so that Rose is unable to give the Sandses directions to him. Kerr makes the point:

> Though the immediate room, the direct experience of life, is entirely dimensional, the universe in which it exists is unstructured. There is not even any knowing where Mr. Kidd lives, once he leaves these tight, tangible four walls. (13)

Rose finds comfort in the structured environment of the

room and fears the outside.

Her view of the outside world is not entirely accurate, however. Quigley points out that Mr. Kidd seems able to get around the house quite well, that Bert has no trouble finding his way back to the house in his van, and that the Sandses comment on the quiet neighborhood and its pleasant appearance (85). Perhaps her view of the room as structured in contrast to the amorphous outside is meant to reveal someting about Rose, not something about the room. Certainly this can be read pyschoanalytically. The room is Rose's conscious mind, over which she has a certain amount (perhaps even a large amount) of control. The outside, particularly in its manifestation as the basement, represents Rose's unconscious mind, full of repressed id desires and fueled by her libido which is not redirected into harmless activities in her everyday life.

This dichotomy in Rose's mind between her desirable room and the outside is one of the most important facets of the first part of this play. Quigley gives a convincing account of the dramatic purpose of Rose's continual discussion of the merits of her room versus the basement:

> The cold, dark, damp, windy, alien world that Rose describes tells us more about Rose than about the world outside. She is fascinated by what she describes as repulsive. The unpleasantness of her view

> of the world outside is born of her need to believe it is ugly in order to substantiate her contentment at being inside. But even in its ugliness, the outer world obsesses her, and her internal tension is externalized in the back and forth motion of the rocking chair to which she repeatedly returns. (85)

Rose does seem fascinated with what goes on outside the room. Up to the point where the Sandses enter, Rose goes to the window and looks out three times. After both the first two trips to the window, she does indeed sit immediately in the rocking chair and rock. Her recurring curiosity about the occupants of the basement also reveals her concern with the outside world.

Even though her place in the room is precarious enough that she feels she must placate Bert constantly in order to secure it, Rose's room is nonetheless not without fault. Although she asserts, "The room keeps warm. It's better than the basement, anyway" (91), she obviously still is cold since the stage directions instruct "she wraps the cardigan about her" (94). Although she sees the room as a place where "we're not bothered" (93), in the play Mr. Kidd enters twice, the Sandses enter for a prolonged visit, and Riley enters near the play's conclusion. Rose chooses to ignore these factors which contradict her view of the room. Her insistence on the comforts and desirability of the room is meant, at least par-

tially, to convince herself that it is comfortable and desirable despite the evidence to the contrary.

Dukore sees this opening monologue as preparing the way for the rest of the play: "Rose's opening monologue contains linguistic links to various scenes of the play. Sprinkled throughout it are comments about darkness, sight, blindness, and murder" (Harold Pinter 27). In this way, the opening scene forshadows what is to come: the murder of Riley and Rose's subsequent blindness.

Elin Diamond sees this opening scene as an important link between Pinter's work in Theatre of Menace and earlier Theatre of the Absurd plays. She sees an important parallel between The Room and one of the landmark plays of Absurdist theatre:

> Talking to--and at--a silent Bert, Rose is branded a comic type, the nagging wife; his nose buried in a magazine, Bert acts the necessary supporting role of henpecked husband. Ionesco uses the same image in the opening scene of The Bald Soprano but relieves the oddity of Mrs. Smith's nonnaturalistic monologue with Mr. Smith's tongue clicking and, finally, his interruption. Pinter's comedy provokes greater tension: Bert never speaks, though Pinter designates pauses where he might respond. What strikes us as incongruous is that Rose talks on about Bert's illness, Bert's food, and Bert's driving, but never about Bert's silence. Instead her speech accommodates his silence. (21)

The recognition of comic stereotyping in Pinter's work is an important step to understanding its comedy. Certainly

Rose is a nagging housewife, but the events which follow an audience's recognition of her as such do not fit the expectations raised by that recognition. Bert is not the typical henpecked husband and theirs is not the situation comedy world such a couple inhabits. Whereas Ionesco's characters do silly, outlandish things while the dialogue proceeds, Pinter's characters follow their immediately recognizable daily routines--the same routines they (and the audience members, presumably) do every day. The link with Theatre of the Absurd is clear: despite its mundanity, the life of the Hudds does not conform to expectations, but instead is lived against a backdrop of incomprehensible and unforseeable events. This is the chief horror of Theatre of Menace: that the Absurdist world exists as well in a living room as anywhere else.

Katherine H. Burkman also notes a parallel with Theatre of the Absurd in this play:

> As in the rest of Pinter's dramatic world, the rituals of daily life are seen at one and the same time as comic and ineffectual, as tragic and pathetic. Their emptiness is exposed with all the intellectuality of Ionesco's kind of irony, but the effort to sustain them is explored with all the sympathy of Beckett for his two Godot clowns, desperately improvising their routines in a void. (12)

Clearly Pinter's dramatic world owes much to the Absurdist

theatre of Beckett and Ionesco, but he has made an important advance. No longer do Vladimir and Estragon desperately improvise a routine in a void; rather Rose and Bert play a game for control and maintenance of a room. The nature of the action changes from killing time during an unending wait to establishing control over one's living space. The locale shifts from the void to a rather ordinary living room. By maintaining the Absurdist situation in a new locale, Pinter's theatre takes Beckett's world into the lives of people not all that far removed from the audience members themselves.

An important difference between a room and a field (such as that of Waiting for Godot, for example) is that a room is a clearly defined space and thus is subject to invasion. A room can be clearly demarked as someone's area much more easily than a field. One of the crucial moments in Theatre of Menace occurs when the jealously guarded space is entered by someone not a resident of it. The first intrusion into Rose's room is made by Mr. Kidd who comes to check the pipes. Although the landlord is a kindly old man, there is something vaguely threatening and mysterious about him. The mere fact that he, not Rose, is the owner of the house is disturbing; as Michelene Wandor notes: "Rose has a landlord, and the home which means

everything to her does not belong to her" (31). Furthermore, the room was once his bedroom in the house (97), and he seems to remember the rocking chair in which Rose sits (96). Rose insists, "I brought it myself" (96). It seems odd, however, that he does not recall the armchair which Rose says was in the room when she moved in (97).

The discussion of the past history of the room when it was Mr. Kidd's bedroom is another struggle for dominance within the room. Rose feels threatened when anyone else has any knowledge of her room which is denied to her. That Mr. Kidd may have lived in her room once suggests he (or someone else) may come to live in it in the future and displace Rose.

When Mr. Kidd mentions his late sister, he mentions his mother, and finds himself in a confusing memory of the past. Quigley describes this scene:

> He becomes confused over whether his mother was a Jewess, whether his sister or mother had many children, and what his sister died of. An important indicator of the doubtful veracity of his statements and his loss of control of the situation is his misuse of two words. He refers to his mother's offspring as "babies" [99] (when they would be much more likely to come to mind as his brothers and sisters), and he refers to his sister's bedroom as her "boudoir" [99] (an indication of a possible confusion of memories of a sister with memories or fantasies of a different female relationship). It is partly this misuse of words that prompts Rose to exclaim on his exit "I don't believe he had a sister, ever" [100]. (91-92)

The confusion of a sister with a lover may be happening in Mr. Kidd's mind, but an alternative explanation is possible. The Kidds may have been sister and brother living as husband and wife; therefore, it would be appropriate for Mr. Kidd to think of the bedroom in terms of a boudoir. This possibility is underscored by the room's having once been Mr. Kidd's bedroom. Might it not also have been his sister's "lovely boudoir" (99)? Also, perhaps Mr. Kidd was not married to this woman and, to look more respectable in the eyes of his tenants, passed the woman off as his sister. By refusing to allow Rose (and, by extension, the audience) ever to be able to know the truth about Mr. Kidd and his sister, Pinter endows them with a level of menace; they are not fully <u>known</u>, and thus cannot be controlled. They refuse to conform to the orderly arrangement of the room by their very ambiguity. By raising the subject, Mr. Kidd attempts to exert control over Rose by claiming knowledge of past events.

The confusion over Mr. Kidd's relationship with his sister is magnified if one recalls that Mr. Kidd at first denies ever having had a woman to help him with the place:

> ROSE. Well, it's a shame you have to go out in this weather, Mr. Kidd. Don't you have a help?
> MR. KIDD. Eh?
> ROSE. I thought you had a woman to help.
> MR. KIDD. I haven't got any woman.
> ROSE. I thought you had one when we first came.

MR. KIDD. No women here.
ROSE. Maybe I was thinking of somewhere else.
MR. KIDD. Plenty of women round the corner. Not here though. (96)

This exchange with Rose directly contradicts his later assertion concerning his sister: "She used to keep things in very good trim. And I gave her a helping hand" (99). If Mr. Kidd did live incestuously with his sister or lived with a woman to whom he was not married, perhaps his initial denial of ever having had a woman is defensive. Curiously enough, directly after the above quoted passage Mr. Kidd begins his inquiry into the rocking chair, threatening Rose's feeling of control over and knowledge of her room. Perhaps he is diverting the subject and going on the attack to ward off any suspicions Rose may be harboring.

Her comment could certainly be taken as an indication that Rose thinks Mr. Kidd is creating a sister, or simply (because of old age) remembers something which never happened. The statement could as easily mean that Rose thinks the woman in question was not his sister, but had a relation to Mr. Kidd different from that of siblings. It also could indicate that Rose suspects this woman and Mr. Kidd were <u>more</u> than brother and sister.

Sakellaridou sees Mr. Kidd's confusion of mother and

sister and his sentimentalization of the sister as typical of "the male tendency to romanticise and idealise the woman for his own psychological satisfaction" (25). This will become part of the intertext as well. Many Pinter male characters have such revisionist memories.

At any rate, this first encounter with Mr. Kidd provides an example of two people engaging in a fight for dominance. Whether Rose's assertion that the rocking chair is hers and the armchair belongs to the house or Mr. Kidd's opposing assertion wins out is important in establishing dominance in the room, as is whether Mr. Kidd ever had a woman of any relation to him who helped out about the house. Thus, characters in Theatre of Menace plays continually wage a struggle over the past and how it is remembered. It is also important to note the implied threat in Mr. Kidd's words, "No women here" (96); he certainly seems to ignore the person, a woman, to whom he is speaking. This phrase could certainly be interpreted as a threat by Rose.

Mr. Kidd exits and Bert leaves to make the run in his van shortly afterwards. Rose briefly resumes her monologue as she readies Bert to leave the room. She brings Bert his jersey and his muffler and helps him into them (100). Sakellaridou notes that here "Rose becomes

once more the fussy, overprotective mother" (21). Her activity echoes back to her concern and solicitation over his breakfast; again she seems to be mothering him, trying to care for his every need as if he were a child unable to look after himself. Gale reads significance into Rose's taking the role of a mother:

> In this role she has some control over events and can thus create a certain amount of order in the chaos of life, although that order is limited to her one room. Things are all right in the room--it may be cold outside, but it is warm and comfortable inside. As a parent speaking to a child, she is allowed constantly to repeat herself so as to assure her "son" that things are all right. Because this contention is repeated over and over, it must be true, and the repetition helps convince Rose herself that she is speaking the truth. (Butter's Going Up 27)

By alluding back to Rose's opening monologue after Mr. Kidd has left, Pinter underscores the notion that she will continue to behave in the manner the audience has seen once the intrusion into her room is over. Her mothering mode of behavior with Bert is customary for her and part of her desire to order her surroundings, to maintain control over her room, to convince herself that this is all for the good, and to entice Bert into prolonging their relationship. Her offer of cocoa upon his return is simply another analogue of the breakfast she feeds him during the monologue.

After Bert has left, Rose straightens the curtains, puts on her shawl, and gets the trash bin from under the sink, apparently to throw it out (101). Perhaps she, like Mr. Kidd's sister, is concerned with keeping things in "very good trim" (99). Her actions continue her domestic associations even in Bert's absence. She is always trying to make the room as acceptable as possible, even when the partner with whom she shares that room is not there to be impressed directly. Rose knows Bert will like a clean room better than a dirty one and strives to have the room clean for him upon his return. When she opens the door to go out, she discovers the next invaders of her room, the Sandses, on the doorstep.

Mrs. Sands appears friendly enough at the outset. She apologizes to Rose for frightening her when Rose opens the door on them as they stand on the step. Mr. Sands is a different matter. When Rose asks "How do you do?" (101), Mr. Sands "grunts acknowledgement" (101) and speaks thereafter only in terse, clipped comments. Like the landlord (and perhaps like Bert himself to a certain extent) there is something vaguely threatening in Mr. Sands. His silence is threatening; his refusal to be seated or to admit being cold from the outside also seems strange. Since he will not behave in socially sanctioned

ways (acting at ease in a room, admitting the weather's ability to affect him), he cannot easily be pigeonholed. One does not know what to make of a man like this, and thus he is potentially a threat, a menace from that outside world.

Rose invites the Sandses in without much hesitation, thus revealing again her curiosity about the outside world. If the world outside were really as threatening as she sometimes imagines it to be, why would she so readily welcome emissaries from that world into her sanctum?

Very soon, however, the Sandses will become more directly threatening than they appear at first. They are looking for the landlord to inquire about a room to let. Furthermore, they have been in the basement to look for him and have direct news of it which they tell to Rose. They are thus associated with two of Rose's fears: eviction and the basement.

They tell Rose they spoke with a man in the basement, but did not see him because there was no light down there. The man told them that room "number seven" (108) was available. Rose's reply to this news is, "That's this room" (108). She quickly asserts, "This room is occupied" (108) and the Sandses leave. The prospective vacancy of Rose's room has some subterranean connection with Mr.

Kidd's implied denial of Rose's tenancy in the house--"no women here" (96). Both of these events lock together to form a more solid fear of eviction than Rose already had.

The appearance of the Sandses at the door enables Pinter to introduce another element into the mix. The Sandses too are in a struggle for domination in their marriage. One of the features of their struggle is linguistic fencing--a motif that will become central to the intertext which originates with The Room. The idea of battling through language is one of the chief elements of Theatre of Menace and its first appearance occurs with the Sandses' discussion of "sit" versus "perch" in The Room.

As noted above, Mr. Sands refuses to sit down even though he is directly asked to twice and the subject is alluded to on other occasions as, for example, when Mrs. Sands says of the room "You know, this is a room you can sit down and feel cosy in" (102). During the three-way conversation between Rose and the Sandses, the stage directions say of Mr. Sands, "he perches on the table" (106). When this occurs, Mrs. Sands pounces:

> MRS. SANDS. You're sitting down!
> MR. SANDS (jumping up). Who is?
> MRS. SANDS. You were.
> MR. SANDS. Don't be silly. I perched.
> MRS. SANDS. I saw you sit down.
> MR. SANDS. You did not see me sit down because I did not sit bloody well down. I perched!

> MRS. SANDS. Do you think I can't perceive when someone's sitting down? (106)

The argument over what to call some action may appear to be trivial. Gabbard reads psychological importance to this battle, however:

> When the child is born into the phallic phase, the concerns with standing up and sitting down take on added significance. [Norman] Holland explains it: "The phallus with its power to stand erect becomes identified with the boy's own recently acquired power to stand up and [with] his other skills, such as talking" [39]. To be forced to sit down becomes connected at this point with loss of manhood. (53)

For Mr. Sands, remaining standing throughout the scene where he and his wife visit Rose is emblematic of his masculinity, of his physical dominance over his wife, who sits. The conflict between sitting or standing will become important for subsequent male characters in Pinter's work as well.

For Pinter, whether the simple action of leaning against a table is sitting or perching is not what is important here. The crucial battle involves the language used to discuss it. Mr. Sands has indicated he does not care to sit down; if Mrs. Sands can demonstrate that he has indeed sat down, she can score a kind of victory over him. In the world of Theatre of Menace, such minor battles take on a great significance. Whoever first uses

the term which is finally agreed upon (or which finally wins out) shows a superiority over the character who advocated the other word choice. This is the sole direct example of this in The Room, but the motif will recur repeatedly in the plays under consideration.

This scene continues in a manner which echoes a previous scene. After Mrs. Sands asks her husband whether he believes she cannot perceive when someone is sitting down, the following exchange takes place:

> MR. SANDS. Perceive! That's all you do. Perceive.
> MRS. SANDS. You could do with a bit more of that instead of all that tripe you get up to.
> MR. SANDS. You don't mind some of that tripe!
> MRS. SANDS. You take after your uncle, that's who you take after!
> MR. SANDS. And who do you take after?
> MRS. SANDS (rising). I didn't bring you into the world.
> MR. SANDS. You didn't what?
> MRS. SANDS. I said I didn't bring you into the world.
> MR. SANDS. Well, who did then? That's what I want to know. Who did? Who did bring me into the world? (106)

This dialogue is curiously reminiscent of Mr. Kidd's confusion about his sister and his mother, and of his vague hints about the women around the corner. The possibility that Mrs. Sands is Mr. Sands' mother as well as his wife is not a strong one--Pinter describes them as "a young couple" (90)--but the possilibity is raised nonetheless,

perhaps as a marital red herring. It conceivably might be a topic to argue over when they wish to avoid their real conflicts. It is definitely an echo of the wife/mother role Rose plays throughout. Sakellaridou writes of this scene: "Mr. Sands seems to be confusing mother and wife into one archetypal image" (23). The mention of the obviously sexual "tripe" perhaps touches on the real sore spot in their relationship: Mr. Sands asserts Mrs. Sands does not mind that tripe even as she voices her complaints about it.

Another type of linguistic battle is fought by the Sandses just prior to this exchange. Although at first Mrs. Sands says that Rose's room is "the first crack" (103) of light they've seen since coming to the house, she subsequently remembers another source of light:

> MRS. SANDS. Now I come to think of it, I saw a star.
> MR. SANDS. You saw what?
> MRS. SANDS. Well, I think I did.
> MR. SANDS. You think you saw what?
> MRS. SANDS. A star.
> MR. SANDS. Where?
> MRS. SANDS. In the sky.
> MR. SANDS. When?
> MRS. SANDS. As we were coming along.
> MR. SANDS. Go home.
> MRS. SANDS. What do you mean?
> MR. SANDS. You didn't see a star.
> MRS. SANDS. Why not?
> MR. SANDS. Because I'm telling you. I'm telling you you didn't see a star. (103-104)

Apparently the question here is not whether a twinkling source of light was visible in the nighttime sky, but whether Mrs. Sands is permitted to have seen it. Mr. Sands achieves some type of control over his wife by telling her what she has and has not seen. Objective reality becomes lost, or merely becomes a field for the battle for dominance; at any rate, it is certainly of less importance than that battle itself.

Another example of this type of battle for dominance over what might otherwise be thought of as objective fact occurs when Rose asks them how long they have been in the house:

> MRS. SANDS. I don't know. How long have we been here, Toddy?
> MR. SANDS. About half an hour.
> MRS. SANDS. Longer than that, much longer.
> MR. SANDS. About thirty-five minutes. (104)

By admitting she does not know how long they have been in the house, Mrs. Sands opens up a realm for her husband to claim final authority over knowledge of the duration of their presence. When she unequivocally challenges his answer, he adjusts it--but only very slightly--in her favor. Since the matter is then dropped, the audience is left to assume that Mr. Sands, with a slight alteration in his initial answer, has won this round.

One apparently minor event during the Sandses' visit will have important echoes in later plays. At one point Mr. Sands addresses his wife by her first name, Clarissa. Rose says: "Clarissa? What a pretty name" (102). Mrs. Sands replies: "Yes, it's nice, isn't it? My father and mother gave it to me" (102). This answer appears on the surface to be an almost meaningless example of realistic polite dialogue taking place between strangers: who <u>else</u> would have given Mrs. Sands her name? Other things are being signified however. It seems particularly important that Mrs. Sands' name has no connection whatsoever with Mr. Sands: she has had it from birth; he did not give it to her. Apparently she will continue to have it without his permission. Also the issue of the name given by a parent will become important later when Riley calls Rose by another name. Finally, the question is implicitly raised, what else besides a name do these characters have as an inheritance from their parents?

Of this scene, Sakellaridou writes:

> The Sands interlude serves a double purpose in the play. On the one hand, it promotes Rose's investigation of the mystery of the unknown. On the other hand the Sandses, with their silly, childish quarrels, may well mirror an earlier stage of the Rose-Bert relationship, when there was still some verbal communication between them. Indeed, Mrs. Sands's domineering attitude reflects Rose's motherliness,

> while Mr. Sands's stubborn resistance sets the key for Bert's savage outburst at the end of the play. In both cases an oppressed husband rebels against an overbearing, motherly wife. The Sands case, embedded in the middle of the play, reinforces the archetypal situation presented in the first scene between Rose and Bert. (23)

The Sandses may indeed represent of "Rose and Bert at an earlier stage" (Esslin, Pinter the Playwright 70). Quigley too sees Rose and Bert as "a later stage in the same battle" (94). Certainly there are some similarities between the two couples: they are very concerned with obtaining a room; Mrs. Sands speaks much more than Mr. Sands; and they are uncertain of just how long they have been in the house looking for the landlord[3]. Esslin sees both relationships as existing between "a more intelligent woman and a lazy and dull man who dominates her by sheer brutality" (Pinter the Playwright 70). In addition to providing this important parallel, the Sandses highlight Rose's fears of eviction and of the basement, thus clearing the way for Mr. Kidd's return with the announcement that the man in the basement has been waiting all weekend to see Rose. Again Rose's fascination with the basement is underscored; as Quigley notes, "It is Rose, not Mr.

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[3] Curiously, another of Rose's inconsistencies concerns how long she has lived in the house. She tells Mr. Kidd, "We've just moved into this district" (111), but she twice tells the Sandses she was in the basement "a long time ago" (105).

Kidd, who locates the place where the unnamed visitor is waiting: 'ROSE: He lies there, in the basement?' [110]" (99).

Mr. Kidd's return adds another interesting piece to the Rose puzzle. Rose objects to Mr. Kidd's insistence that she see the man in the basement: "Do you expect me to see someone I don't know? With my husband not here too?" (110). When Mr. Kidd persists in believing Rose must know the man, perhaps from living previously in another district, she asks him: "Mr. Kidd, do you think I go around knowing men in one district after another?" (111). Sakellaridou notes that "the projection of a forbidden erotic element into the situation is a pure fabrication of Rose's mind and it probably reflects a neurotic state of a sexually repressed woman" (26).

Her reactions are those of one accused of prostitution. This immediately echoes Mr. Kidd's earlier assertion: "Plenty of women round the corner" (96). Perhaps Mr. Kidd believes she is a prostitute and suspects that the man in the basement is one of her customers. Curiously, she will imply that the man from the basement is a "customer" (113) after he arrives in her room. Also she will inform him that Mr. Kidd "lets a respectable house" (113), furthering the suspicion that the man may be

a former customer of hers who has shown up inconveniently and intruded into her new (reformed?) life.

Clearly the play is building to a climax. Quigley sees the imminent arrival of the man from the basement as a key moment in the play:

> At this point in the play, many threads of development converge on the basement. Apparently random details begin to form a pattern with its central focus pointing to this mysterious room. What began. . . as an innocuous comparison, "the room keeps warm. It's better than the basement anyway" [91], has gradually developed into a microcosm of Rose's version of the external macrocosm. Her fearful hints of the nautre of what lies outside her room have repeatedly invoked a cold, damp, dark, inhospitable world, peopled with strangers, and the basement has become something of an archetypal example. (96)

Rose's fears of and fascination with the basement are about to be directly confronted by a denizen of that world who invades her room. This is the climax to which the whole play has been leading. As Simon Trussler puts it, "The disquieting effect of the successive visitors is cumulative" (34).

When the man from the basement enters, the audience sees he is black and blind. He feels his way along the floor with a cane until he comes to the armchair; Rose tells him to sit in it. To a certain extent, the initial dynamics between Rose and Riley (the name by which the man

introduces himself) are similar to those between Rose and Bert in the opening scene. Riley says very little, next to nothing in fact, and Rose blathers on at length. As has already been demonstrated, Rose talks incessantly in response to fear of rejection, as her opening monologue with Bert is a complex of ploys to ingratiate herself with him. Perhaps she fears Riley, too, despite the fact that he is uniformly gentle and polite. In fact, by virtue of his occasional and brief responses to Rose, Riley is more conventionally polite (and perhaps thereby less overtly threatening) than Bert.

Clearly Rose feels this invasion to be the most serious she has faced:

> I don't want you up here. I don't know who you are. And the sooner you get out the better. . . . You can take a liberty too far, you know. What do you want? You force your way up here. You disturb my evening. You come in and sit down here. What do you want? (112)

She misrepresents Riley and his actions here. He has merely told the landlord he wishes to see Rose alone and then waited for the landlord to come up and announce him when he first finds her alone. In fact, after a brief discussion with Mr. Kidd, Rose has told him to fetch the man upstairs. Riley has not forced his way into Rose's room. As for her claim that he has disturbed her evening,

even though it is literally true, she does not make this accusation either of Mr. Kidd or of the Sandses.

Rose treats Riley impolitely, in stark contrast to her treatment of her other visitors. This might suggest that, despite her protests to the contrary, she knows him; curiously, one is much more likely to be impolite to someone one knows than to a stranger. Also, despite her claim not to know him, when he introduces himself as Riley she knows him well enough to say, "That's not your name" (112).[4] Her behavior is abrupt at first and then becomes positively insulting. She calls Riley "an old, poor blind man. . . . Can't see a dickeybird" (113), and says that he "come[s] in here and stink[s] the place out" (113). Finally, she accuses him of being "after a handout" (113), even though he has made no requests or demands of her.

Rose tries to have it both ways, however. As Simon Trussler points out:

> It's interesting to note how Mrs. Hudd herself swops assumptions to taste when fending off Riley's presence. At one moment he is an "old, poor blind man," [113] one of "these creeps" who "come in, smelling up my room" [113]. But just a few sentences

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[4] It is curious that Riley, a black man, has an Irish name. This may betoken some connection with outcasts--both the Irish and the blacks have been victims of centuries of discrimination. The appearance of subsequent Irishmen in Pinter's plays should sound echoes of Riley in the minds of the audience.

> later, the Negro is accused of attacking the landlord and it is Kidd who becomes the "poor, weak old man" [113]. (34-35)

Riley claims his visit is to pass a message to her from her father: "Your father wants you to come home" (114). After she rejects this out of hand, Riley begins to play the game of linguistic fencing with her; he says, "Come home, Sal" (114). As Dukore points out, "When Riley calls Rose 'Sal', she does not deny it is her name but tells him not to call her by it. . . . What matters is that the different name frightens her" (Harold Pinter 27).[5] Like Mr. Kidd's knowledge of what happened in Rose's room before she lived there, this name implies a threat: Riley has the same, or perhaps a greater knowledge of Rose than she has of herself.

Sakellaridou connects the dual names with the hint that Rose may have at one time been a prostitute:

> The change of her name from Sal to Rose. . . could imply her anxiety to wipe out a stained past and a desire to change identity and lifestyle. The association of Rose's former life, under the name of Sal, with prostitution becomes stronger if one connects the name with Sally, the young school-teacher in Night School, who was also a night-club hostess. Sally's double identity in this later play might bear some distant connection with the Rose-Sal of The

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[5] Dukore also sees an easy explanation to the different names: "both may be nicknames of Rosalie or she may have two given names, each used by different acquaintances" (Harold Pinter 27).

> Room, just as the very name Sal, as a homonym of the French "sale" for dirty, could have the connotation of moral filth. (26-7)

Certainly the possibility exists that Rose's former life was less than savory and lived under a different name. Given her fixation with maintaining what material comforts she has, her desire to keep that past from intruding into her room is understandable.

Another interesting possibility soon becomes apparent. Although at first Riley says that Rose's father wants her to come home, he then says "I want you to come home" (114). Esslin reads this unequivocally: "It seems that Riley is not only a messenger from Rose's--Sal's--father, but that he is her father" (Pinter the Playwright 68). Of course, one's own experience can remind one of examples of people whose parents call them one name even though they are known universally outside their family by another. Perhaps Sal is Rose's childhood name or the pet name her father calls her. Clearly the discussion of Mrs. Sands' name can be called to mind here: the audience has already seen one example of a name being conspicuously identified with the people who gave it. Perhaps Rose/Sal is another case of the same thing.

Esslin goes on to comment:

> Now Rose acquiesces in being called Sal, although only a few moments earlier she had angrily asked not to be called by that name. And she even, in what is clearly a moment of truth, confesses that her life is almost intolerable: "The day is a hump. I never go out" [115]. It is a moment of great lyrical intensity, for the phrase is simple, but memorable. (Pinter the Playwright 69)

Once Riley has made his claim to be her father, she drops her objection to the name Sal and opens herself up to him in a touching and tender manner; certainly this is more open than the audience has seen her be with Bert. Moreover, the stage directions say: "She touches his eyes, the back of his head and his temples with her hands" (115). If one of the comforts of sharing a room with someone is physical closeness, Rose has this kind of contact for the first and only time in the play with Riley. She never allows herself this intimacy with Bert. Interestingly, this might indicate that Rose feels more able to be herself, to allow her emotions to be expressed directly, with Riley. She might fear rejection from him less than from Bert, since Riley at least responds to her affection and has directly asked for her company, something the audience never sees Bert do. Her claim that she never goes out underscores the degree to which her room has become a burden, even a prison, to her.

At this point, one might assume she has decided to go

home with Riley. After all, her life in the room (now by her own admission) is not the heaven she has tried hard to convince herself it is. Even though the early part of this play can be seen as an attempt on Rose's part to talk herself into being happy with her room, clearly by this point even she knows this attempt has failed.

Just as the possibility she might leave her room is raised in the audience's mind, Bert returns from his run in the van. Because of this final intrusion into her room, the audience never learns how Rose might have responded to Riley's request. After entering the room, Bert draws the curtains against the darkness outside. Then, in Pinter's first great coup de theatre, Bert speaks for the first time: "I got back all right" (115). Because this is Bert's first line, the seemingly bland comment becomes loaded with significance. First, it seems to indicate some type of victory for Rose: whatever dangers (or temptations) exist outside the room have not been enough to keep Bert away from home. Second, it reinforces the already developing notion of Bert as a capable man; Rose has insisted all along that Bert's driving skills are adequate to handle the roads in the inclement weather. Both the Sandses and Mr. Kidd have commented on how the conditions are not the best for driving, but Bert

has mastered them and returned safely. Finally, it reintegrates Rose's room, makes her world again complete. If part of the room's attraction is that a couple shares it (i.e., that it is a refuge from loneliness), then Bert's return again establishes it as the whole, comforting place about which Rose has gone on at length throughout the play.

Once Bert begins to speak, however, his words hint at the reality of his relations with Rose. He describes his run in the van:

> I had a good bowl down there. . . . I drove her down, hard. . . . I caned her along. She was good. Then I got back. I could see the road all right. There was no cars. One there was. He wouldn't move. I bumped him. I got my road. I had all my way. There again and back. They shoved out of it. I kept on the straight. There was no mixing it. Not with her. She was good. She went with me. She don't mix it with me. I use my hand. Like that. I get hold of her. I go where I go. She took me there. She brought me back. (115-116)

His description of the trip is curious. Sakellaridou calls it an "outburst of an erotic fantasy with his van" (28). Esslin notes, "The erotic overtones of this impassioned outburst about the van, always referred to in the feminine gender, are unmistakable" (Pinter the Playwright 69). Quigley sees Bert's treatment of the van as parallel to Rose's treatment of Bert:

> His domineering references to the van parallel Rose's earlier domineering attitude toward him. Their incompatible urges to dominate are made clear in this speech, as is also Bert's parallel attempt to find outside their maladjusted relationship a means of manifesting that which compromise had repressed within it. (106)

Clearly Rose is no longer (if she ever was in the first place) at the center of Bert's sexual attention. The sexualizing language he uses about his van makes this certain. Esslin writes that Bert

> unmistakably reveals that she has failed to hold his affection; Bert's account of his trip in his van clearly shows that his sexual energy is no longer focused on Rose; the van, which Bert treats as a 'she', has ousted her from his affections. The journey into the winter night becomes an act of intercourse with its own triumphant orgasm. (Pinter the Playwright 73)

This might explain part of Rose's anxiety as expressed throughout the play: if she cannot keep Bert in her room by offering herself to him sexually, then she attempts to be pleasing, useful, and even necessary to him in every other way she can think of. If their relations are sexaully blank, Bert's libido seems to have found an outlet in his van.

A. R. Braunmuller reads Bert's speech slightly differently:

> The truck, carefully sexualized, becomes an object of Bert's hatred, a hatred transferred from its true object(s), and a threat of the punishment he could unleash. Any realistic reading of the play would regard the truck speech as otiose. (157)

Bert's dramatically introduced first lines may indeed be threatening. If part of the dynamics of the room (as discussed earlier) involves Bert's silent acquiescence in Rose's mothering attitude toward him, his speech could be interpreted as a violation of those dynamics, a change from the norm for the room. As with any change in the routine, this one is a potential threat to the continuation of the room's ability to shelter and comfort.

Until this point, Bert has given no indication of having noticed Riley's presence. Here, the stage directions instruct him:

> He takes the chair from the table and sits to the left of the NEGRO'S chair, close to it. He regards the NEGRO for some moments. Then with his foot he lifts the armchair up. The NEGRO falls on to the floor. He rises slowly. (116)

At this point, Riley speaks: "Mr. Hudd, your wife" (116), but cannot finish his sentence for Bert "strikes the NEGRO, knocking him down, and then kicks his head against the gas stove several times. The NEGRO lies still. BERT walks away" (116). In reaction to this, Rose clutches her eyes, exclaiming that she has gone blind.

Bert's outburst of violence is certainly dramatic and sudden, but it is not entirely surprising, for the audience has already been given hints of Bert's possibly violent nature. When he describes his trip, he speaks of having bumped another car that would not give way to him off the road. Perhaps the situation with Riley is analogous to the drive; he feels Riley is in his way with Rose (after all, he is being entertained in their room during Bert's absence). Sykes describes this possibility:

> If the scene were part of a naturalistic drama, faithfully mirroring life, we would probably not hesitate over the cause of his emotion: a perfectly understandable anger and possessive jealousy over Rose, akin to Rose's possessiveness towards the room. (13)

Gordon reads this scene in a somewhat analogous manner:

> In some way, Bert has regained a semblance of virility (he "bumped" his rival and had his "way" with her). Now faced with a parallel scene in his room, Bert reasserts his masculinity in the only way he knows, blind violence; he "bumps off" Riley. (19)

Gale also sees this as a possible explanation for Bert's outburst:

> There is no motivation apparent for Bert's outburst, but one realizes that he reacted in a similar manner

> in the incident during which his van "bumped" a car. When faced with a threat, he physically attacks. (Butter's Going Up 37)

Other possible explanations for Bert's outburst exist. Boulton claims that Bert "recognizes the threat represented by the intruding Negro" (133). Perhaps Bert shares Rose's dislike of foreigners. Since we are admitted into so little of Bert's inner processes, we cannot be sure that he, like Rose, does not have some knowledge and fear of the basement. Perhaps he intuitively recognizes that Riley comes from that netherworld and rejects his presence just as Rose probably would initially have done if she had the physical prowess to do so. If he shares her fears and prejudices, his actions--though still extreme--would at least be motivated in a way consistent with his character. He may simply fear Riley will take Rose away with him. Ultimately, however, Bert's reasons cannot be known; the complex association of possibilities all have a part in an audience's reaction to the play's ending.

Ironically, Rose's view of the world is most clearly shown to be false in this last scene. She has spent the bulk of this play ingratiating herself to Bert and has (at least initially) expressed dislike for Riley. Perhaps her fear of the outside world is all a mistake. Gabbard

writes:

> Rose has been observed to fear the outside world and an unknown person or persons from the basement. At the same time she treats Bert as a helpless child. Ultimately, however, the outside world--the Sands and Mr. Kidd--proves harmless and friendly. Even the man from the basement, Riley, is gentle and welcoming. It is Bert who is dangerous and violent. It is Bert--living inside the room with her--who needs to be feared, but Rose is unwilling to see it. (35)

Her blinding after the events of this scene may represent her blindness all along to the truth of her situation.

This final scene has elicited a negative response from some critics. Esslin sees it as the play's chief weakness:

> It is only the use of the perhaps too overtly symbolical and poetic figure of the blind Negro which might be felt as a break in style: for whereas in the rest of the play the dream-like and poetic quality arises directly from the realistic detail, here we are confronted almost with a cliche metaphor. (Pinter the Playwright 69-70)

Certainly this ending does represent a break in the realistic style of the earlier parts of the play. Pinter himself has been quoted as saying of Riley:

> Well, it's very peculiar. When I got to that point in the play, the man from the basement had to be introduced, and he just was a blind Negro. I don't think there's anything radically wrong with the character in himself, but he behaves too differently from the other characters; if I were writing the

> play now I'd make him sit down, have a cup of tea. (Gordon 19)

In future plays, Pinter will indeed humanize the invader; this will be one of the major advances in his theatrical technique. In his major, mature plays, Pinter will present a world in which the threat, the menace, the invader is as recognizable as the people in the room under seige.

The end is almost like a dream, in which elements which are otherwise comfortable and familiar begin to behave in strange and unexpected ways. In no way, however, does this reduce the play's effect. The dream-like nature of the conclusion only heightens the play's impact. By literalizing the stultified existence inside the room into an actual death and the refusal to see the truth into actual blindness, the ending attains a poetic power denied to the rest of the play.

As a whole, the play can be read as a psychological representation of Rose's unresolved Oedipal problems (thus adding another level of significance to her blindness at the end). Gabbard sees "splitting" as one of the psychological tricks operating in The Room. She defines splitting as "the division of one person into two or more, each representing differing character facets" (20). She describes the importance of this in The Room:

> An example of splitting in The Room occurs when Mr. Kidd is viewed as a manifestation of Rose's father. He is, symbolically speaking, the landlord of her house. The other half, from which Mr. Kidd is split, is Riley. Riley is that fellow in the basement who disturbs and harasses Mr. Kidd by simply lying there wishing to see Rose. He also rises up to beg her to return to her father. Riley, then is the fearsome side of Rose's father; Mr. Kidd is the harmless side. (20-21)

Gabbard posits that Rose has repressed the Riley elements of her father: "Her inability to remember who lives in the basement, when she was down there last, and who Riley is--all these failures of memory indicate her repression" (29). This reading certainly would account for both Rose's uneasy existence in her father's house and her sudden affection for Riley when she strokes his head and face. Riley's habitation in the basement--of which Rose is so afraid and which so fascinates her--hints at unresolved Oedipal attractions which she cannot permit to interfere with her relationship with Bert. Indeed, she seems to have overcompensated for her hidden daughter-like urges by assuming the role of mother with Bert. Attempting to render her attractions inert, she splits the father into a kindly man with whom she can have friendly landlord/tenant relations and a blind, black, mysterious figure whose possible intrusion into her life she fears at every moment.

Rose is the first of Pinter's women and, to a certain extent, can be seen as the prototype of the model. Gordon describes her: "Like most of Pinter's women, she is the wife-mother-bitch, not only to Bert, but to the other men who enter her room. She infantilizes, emasculates, and then plays the coquette with each" (13). Perhaps with the addition of "whore" to the compound list of characteristics, this description is accurate. Ronald Hayman, too, sees Rose as a typical representative of Pinter women:

> It's also characteristic of Pinter to make the woman the spokesman for static security. What she voices is the desire to stay where she is in space and time. She is safe and satisfied with things as they are. (23-24)

Seeing Rose as a prototype sheds much light on the subsequent Pinter women: Meg, Ruth, Kate, and Anna. They are, to some extent, reacting to the same fears as Rose, and can be seen as more sophisticated versions of the figure she initiates.

Critics have differed greatly in their overall assessment of the play. Bernard Dukore perhaps represents the most positive view of The Room:

> With such works as Georg Buchner's Danton's Death, Bernard Shaw's Widower's Houses, and Bertolt Brecht's Baal, Harold Pinter's The Room ranks among the most astonishing first plays ever written. Like the

> authors of these earlier works, that of The Room speaks in a distinctive, resounding, authoritative, and compelling voice, employing themes and techniques his later plays would develop. (Harold Pinter 25)

Martin Esslin also rates the play very highly, though not as highly as Dukore:

> The Room is a remarkable first play: the dialogue is already masterly; each character has his own style of speech and the wittily observed vernacular with its rambling syntax and tautologies is brilliantly modulated into the intensity of the poetic climax between Rose and Riley. The suddenness of the brutal ending, which comes as a complete surprise, also has a tremendous impact. (Pinter the Playwright 69)

Alrene Sykes takes the opposing view, calling The Room an "apprentice play" (13) and objecting particularly to the aforementioned difference in style between the scene with Riley and the rest of the play. Elizabeth Sakellaridou calls it "a relatively weak and immature play" (28). Certainly Pinter does not achieve in The Room the mastery of theatre which he will later do. This does not, however, lessen this play's importance. It articulates a complex set of theatrical motifs in a form which can easily be recognized as characteristically Pinteresque. Later plays will assuredly amplify these motifs--some plays will emphasize some motifs, some others--but The Room is, nonetheless, an amazing first play.

CHAPTER 3

HAROLD PINTER'S THE BIRTHDAY PARTY

With his next play, the three-act The Birthday Party, "on which Pinter started work immediately after seeing the first production of The Room" (Trussler 36), the model progresses. The Birthday Party is the first great Pinter play, exhibiting in a full-length context the features which distinguish Pinter from his Theatre of the Absurd forerunners. Furthermore, the Pinteresque elements already shown to be associated with Theatre of Menace are handled in this play with greater ease and even more distinctly in Pinter's own idiom.

Michael W. Kaufman writes that The Birthday Party is

> typical of his work and thus affords a clear insight into the dynamics of his theatre. Here external reality, created through casual conversations and ordinary encounters between characters, seems from the first nothing more than insipid dialogue and innocuous actions. But beneath the placid surfaces seethes the chaotic world of human emotions, and it is in this tension between society's ritualized conventions and men's violent impulses that the essential drama inheres. (168)

Clearly part of the menace which lies behind the surface normality of Pinter's set is the incongruence between the dialogue and actions on the one hand and the chaotic, emotional, violent world beneath them on the other.

The Birthday Party is divided into three acts of approximately equal length. In Act One, the audience is introduced to all the major characters; as in The Room an initial invasion from outside is harmless, but a more serious invasion follows soon. In Act Two, the invaders systematically brainwash their victim before throwing him a birthday party which culminates in a game of blind man's buff. The third act is basically a denouement in which the audience sees the results of the invasion and witnesses the permanent removal from the room of one character.

Many of the elements of the intertextual model first observed in The Room are again present. Often these intertextual elements are variations on those seen before; more importantly, however, some new elements are added, making the model more complex, more intricate. As Gabbard puts it, "this play enlarges on the theme of The Room" (61). Sakellaridou writes, "In The Birthday Party. . . the ontological and existential questions first introduced in The Room take a more concrete form and the exploration of the problem becomes more persistent and systematic" (29). Gale writes, "As in The Room, carried throughout The Birthday Party is the theme of the threat to a person's security by unknown outside powers and the disintegration of his individuality under the onslaught of

the attacking force" (Butter's Going Up 38).

Such intertextal elements as an insider who fears invasion, a room/womb/sactum which is compromised by menacing figures from outside, a dominating female figure, Oedipal desire and guilt, the "blinding" of a character, and the impossibility of verification, are once again present, but their articulation here is more complex than in The Room, a shorter and more primitive play. Significantly, Pinter expands to three the number of the insiders and to two the number of the invaders. Also, the invaders are more like the other characters, more complex and less overtly symbolic in their nature and function. A careful reading of the play from start to finish will show these elements and their development clearly.

The Birthday Party takes place in "the living room of a house in a seaside town" (9). This is a bed-and-breakfast boarding house run by Meg, "a woman in her sixties" (8), and her husband Petey, "a man in his sixties" (8), who is also a deck chair attendant (31) at the seaside. The first important parallels to The Room involve signs which can be read in the set. As in most aspects, however, these signs in The Birthday Party achieve more complex articulation than in The Room. This couple clearly inhabits a house, a living space considerably larger and more comfortable than Rose and

Bert's. Nothing in the whole play would indicate that they are tenants, and one is probably to assume that Meg and Petey own the house, unlike Rose and Bert in their room. At the opening curtain, Meg is in the kitchen (visible through a hatch) and Petey enters with a newspaper and sits at the table. The mere idea that the kitchen is a separate room, unlike the one-room bed-sitter of The Room, would lead a spectator to think of Meg and Petey as enjoying higher social and economic standards than Rose and Bert do.

Clearly the opening sequence of The Birthday Party owes a debt to the opening sequence of The Room. As Gale writes, "From the outset of the play we are reminded of characters, events, themes, and devices found in The Room" (Butter's Going Up 39). Meg is preparing Petey's breakfast: cornflakes and fried bread. This is an unmistakable echo of Rose and Bert. As if the mere situation of a woman providing breakfast to her husband were not enough, Pinter gives Petey a newspaper which, much like Bert's magazine, allows him a distraction from his talkative wife. Unlike Bert, however, Petey does reply to Meg's questions and engages in a sporadic, desultory conversation with her. In fact, in contrast to The Room, The Birthday Party's opening sequence consists of a stichomythia on various trivial subjects (mostly inspired

by newspaper stories Petey remarks upon) between Petey and Meg.

The first lines of the play sound like familiar Pinter dialogue:

> MEG. Is that you, Petey?
> Pause.
> Petey, is that you?
> Pause.
> Petey?
> PETEY. What?
> MEG. Is that you?
> PETEY. Yes, it's me. (9)

From the very beginning of the play, the audience is introduced to an important theme of The Birthday Party; as Bernard Dukore puts it, "The opening dialogue focuses upon identity" (Where Laughter Stops 9). The lack of much verifiable formal exposition here raises crucial questions in this play: who are these characters and what has their previous life been like?

Elin Diamond points out that the repeated questions and meaningless exchange of this sequence demonstrate "that Petey and Meg no longer listen to what they say. Speech has become habit, like morning tea" (51). This is an important comment on Pinter's dialogue: the existence of the speech is often more revealing and more significant than the content of that speech.

One of the subjects they discuss seems particularly important to the dynamics of The Birthday Party since it

introduces the birth theme to the play:

> PETEY. Someone's just had a baby.
> MEG. Oh, they haven't! Who?
> PETEY. I don't think you'd know her.
> MEG. What's her name?
> PETEY. Lady Mary Splatt.
> MEG. I don't know her.
> PETEY. No.
> MEG. What is it?
> PETEY (studying the paper). Er--a girl.
> MEG. Not a boy?
> PETEY. No.
> MEG. Oh, what a shame. I'd be sorry. I'd much rather have a little boy.
> PETEY. A little girl's all right.
> MEG. I'd much rather have a little boy. (11)

Meg's desire for a son is thus made explicit here. One can clearly see why she mothers Stanley throughout act one: he is a surrogate for the son she does not have. This birth motif will continue, in various forms, throughout the play. Of this exchange on the birth, Trussler notes:

> One's retrospective reaction to this passage emphasises. . . the necessity of digesting the play whole before ruminating over its parts: the simultaneous awareness that Stanley is not Meg's "little boy", but that she and Petey are discussing him as if he were, is much more helpful than the jolt from one state of awareness to the other inevitable on first acquaintance with the play. (39)

The introduction of the birth motif is indeed made more poignant if one is already aware that Stanley is not Meg's son and, in fact, will be taken away from her in the course of the play.

Petey introduces another important item of discussion into their conversation. Casually, he informs her that he met two men on the beach the previous night who wish to rent a room. After asking a few questions, Meg agrees that they can stay. Unlike Rose, she is not paralytically fearful of invasion, but she does find out as much about them as she can from Petey. This introduces quite clearly the threat into this play. Intertextually, one can recall from The Room that invasion from the outside by strangers is associated with discomfort and violence, both of which will shortly occur to the occupants of this house.

An important difference between The Birthday Party and The Room also emerges in the opening scene. Although Meg is preparing breakfast for her husband, Petey takes a more active role. Unlike Rose, Meg does not serve the meal to Petey. He does not sit passively and wait for her to tend his needs. When the cornflakes are ready, the stage directions instruct him: "He rises and takes the plate from her" (9). Later, when the fried bread is ready, "He rises, collects the plate, looks at it, sits at the table" (11). Also, as Simon Trussler points out: "Rose Hudd pours out her husband's tea for him: but Petey, as Meg dawdles aimlessly, doesn't even have time for a cup" (45). Meg does not wait on him hand and foot; perhaps she feels her place in his life is more secure

than Rose feels in Bert's life.

As she is developed in the play, Meg has certain traits in common with Rose. She mothers most of the men with whom she comes into contact. Gale remarks, "Rose's motherliness and play acting show up in Meg" (Butter's Going Up 37). Sakellaridou says, "her most prominent feature is the same that made Rose in The Room an unlikeable figure: that of an oppressive wife and mother" (31). Gabbard writes that both Meg and Rose "emasculate by their overprotectiveness" (61). Meg is concerned with maintaining her position in her household by providing sustenance to the men who surround her. She seems afraid of the outside world (cf. the discussion of the car which she fears will come with a wheelbarrow, examined below), but not to the extent that Rose is. Gabbard also notes, "As The Room hints as Rose's former promiscuity, so The Birthday Party reveals Meg's promiscuous desires and fantasies" (61).

Pinter does, however, add to this prototype. In the first act, Meg is associated with the sideboard, from which she takes socks and yarn for darning and to which she returns these items after her work is finished. This is the first instance of a new element of the intertext which will return, most obviously, in Kath and her sideboard in Orton's Entertaining Mr. Sloane.

Petey, on the other hand, though he has some clear

parallels with Bert, does not exhibit Bert's threatening silence or the violent tendencies Bert reveals at the end. Perhaps because he is some ten years older than Bert (and is the same age, more or less, as his wife), Petey seems a kindly, ineffectual old man. His only threatening characteristic is his lack of desire for real communication (always a warning sign in Pinter), but that threat never becomes physical in Petey's case.

Critics have noted the similarities between Bert and Petey. Their respective silences are noted by Martin Esslin who calls Petey "almost as silent as Rose's man Bert in The Room but in a kindly, benevolent way" (Pinter the Playwright 80). Steven Gale simply calls him "Bert without violence" (Butter's Going Up 37). Another parallel between them is that each "goes out of the house for long periods" (Esslin, Pinter the Playwright 89) and is out of the room when the most serious invasion from outside takes place. Lois Gordon notes how Petey has been supplanted as the focus of Meg's attention by Stanley and refers to him as "diminutively named" (21). It is germane to note that Petey's name is a diminutive for a man's name--Peter--a common slang term for the penis.

Unlike Bert in The Room, Petey will ultimately be unable to resort to any form of physical resistance to the invasion; his absence, the lack of stature suggested by

his little boy's name, and his peripheral position in the "family," all suggest his inability to lead and protect the other characters. This characteristic shows up in various forms throughout later Theatre of Menace works from Max in Pinter's The Homecoming through Don in Mamet's American Buffalo.

In The Birthday Party, the protagonist as seen in The Room undergoes the kind of psychological splitting Gabbard argues Rose does to her father (dividing him between Mr. Kidd and Riley). As shown above, Meg exhibits some of Rose's salient features, but so does Stanley Webber, the lodger who has been with Meg and Petey for over a year. In fact, Stanley is the character whose "room" is invaded and disrupted in the course of this play. Clearly, Stanley all along engages in some form of hiding from the world and dreads the intrusion from without which inevitably will come in Pinter's theatrical world. He, like Rose, exhibits the heightened fear of the outside world associated with the character whose security will be threatened in the course of the play.

In the play, Stanley functions as a surrogate son to Meg (and, to a lesser extent, to Petey as well). Sakellaridou explicitly claims that "Mr. and Mrs. Boles, the ageing couple who offer him shelter, can be seen as surrogate parents to Stanley" (30). "A man in his late

thirties" (8), Stanley is a reasonable age to be Meg and Petey's son. All the initial signs given to an audience would point to Stanley as the son, not the lodger. Perhaps part of Meg's concept of her "room" involves having both husband and son to care for and provide food for. This is Pinter's first foray into a "family unit," and the addition of another member, another resident of the room, will have an important impact on his handling of the dynamics of the room as well as on the nature of the threat from the outside which, in The Birthday Party, involves two strangers who disrupt the domestic idyll presented in the play's opening scene.

Stanley's first appearance is heralded by Meg's calls to him from downstairs:

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

This banter obviously plays on the mother/son roles into which the two have fallen, but their other roles--lovers--become apparent almost immediately. The stage directions instruct:

> She exits and goes upstairs. In a moment, shouts from STANLEY, wild laughter from MEG. PETEY takes his plate to the hatch. Shouts. Laughter. PETEY sits at the table. Silence. She returns. . . . She is panting and arranges her hair. (13-14)

The sounds emanating from above are much more like those of two people engaged in sex play than those of a mother wakening her son. Furthermore, Meg's panting and dishevelled hair add to this impression. Gale claims that "Meg's words and actions are more like those of a combination mother/mistress than a landlady" (Butter's Going Up 41). This confusion of landlord/tenant, mother/son, and lovers will recur in later plays as part of the intertext, particularly in Orton's Entertaining Mr. Sloane (Trussler 38).

Stanley's first appearance is less than impressive. The stage directions describe him: "He is unshaven, in his pyjama jacket and wears glasses" (14). Sakellaridou believes this is a result of Stanley's worries of invasion and eviction: "His disturbed psychological state has started affecting his physical appearance" (29). Apparently he is in a bad humor because he has not slept. He calls the cornflakes "horrible" (14) and says "the milk's off" (15). Significantly, both Meg and Petey wait on Stanley. Unlike Petey, Stanley is served his cornflakes and fried bread; Meg herself brings him the cornflakes and Petey fetches his fried bread. When he wants some hot food, Meg delays bringing it to him saying "I'm not going to give it to you" (15). At this point, Stanley begins to play a game with threatening overtones. He

says: "Well, I can see I'll have to go down to one of those smart hotels on the front" (15). In response to this, Meg immediately goes to the kitchen to fetch his fried bread to the hatch where Petey takes it to serve to Stanley, who then "yawns broadly" (15) to signify his victory over her.

This game is ironic. Stanley threatens to leave Meg, something she clearly fears, to get her to do his bidding. This initially comic enchange has a chilling echo, however, when Stanley is forcibly removed from the house in Act Three and Meg, at the play's end, has yet to be informed of his departure. The innocence with which this game is played early in the play makes its actualization later all the more horrifying.

The dynamics here have clearly shifted from those of The Room. Although Stanley is the character whose security is most clearly violated by invasion from outside, it is he who threatens to leave as part of the game he plays in that room. One can no more imagine Rose threatening Mr. Kidd that she will leave than one can imagine her flying to the moon. The "insider" character here has obviously undergone significant growth, exhibiting a marked difference from the insider of the earlier play.

Because Meg has been talking to Stanley and providing

his breakfast, she has ignored Petey's tea. When she remembers it, Petey says he does not have enough time for a cup and leaves. Immediately, the dynamics between Meg and Stanley shift. He begins to berate her:

> STANLEY. Tch, tch, tch, tch.
> MEG (defensively). What do you mean?
> STANLEY. You're a bad wife.
> MEG. I'm not. Who said I am?
> STANLEY. Not to make your husband a cup of tea. Terrible.
> MEG. He knows I'm not a bad wife.
> STANLEY. Giving him sour milk instead.
> MEG. It wasn't sour.
> STANLEY. Disgraceful.
> MEG. You mind your own business anyway. . . . You won't find many better wives than me, I can tell you. I keep a very nice house and I keep it clean. (16)

The exchange here is interesting. Only Stanley has ever claimed the milk was sour. Petey ate it on his cornflakes without complaint, calling them "very nice" (9). In fact, Meg has made Petey a cup of tea, but he has not had the time to drink it when she remembers to bring it out to him. There is also a vague hint that Stanley is not complaining about her treatment of Petey, but about her treatment of him (after all, he is the one who claims to have been brought sour milk and Meg has not brought his tea yet). He certainly speaks to her in a tone inappropriate for a son (though perhaps also inappropriate for a husband).

The important theme of identity in The Birthday Party

is reintroduced here. When Meg asks, "Who said I am?" she knows full well who said it; she has just heard Stanley say it. Significantly, Stanley does not answer her question, but goes on to document his complaint against her. The question raised here of who Stanley is and what he has said (and done) will become central to this play once the outsiders arrive and disrupt the domesticity of the room.

During Stanley's breakfast, the audience first learns he is not Meg and Petey's son despite the signs to the contrary. Trussler writes, "Meg evidently doesn't think of him [as a lodger instead of a son], as the eventual, casual revelation of their real relationship suggests" (38). Meg begins to brag about her boarding house:

> MEG. And this house is very well known, for a very good boarding house for visitors.
> STANLEY. Visitors? Do you know how many visitors you've had since I've been here?
> MEG. How many?
> STANLEY. One.
> MEG. Who?
> STANLEY. Me! I'm your visitor. (16-17)

Here the audience can for the first time recognize the truth of this situation. Gale reads some importance into this exchange: "Stan's observation on the lack of visitors is dramatic irony since the audience already knows that visitors are on their way, maybe even outside the door at this very moment" (Butter's Going Up 43). Indeed, Stanley is blind to the ironic nature of his

words, but the audience can hear the distinct, though faint, threat of the invaders behind his words. Again, this exchange raises the question of identity: Meg asks who the lone visitor is knowing full well it is Stanley.

At this point, Stanley begins to behave in the mode already firmly established as that of a husband in Pinter's idiom; the stage directions say: "He pushes his plate away and picks up the paper" (17). At this cue, Meg begins to act the same way she does with Petey, inquiring about Stanley's breakfast (initially, in the exact words she asked about Petey's breakfast):

> MEG. Was it nice?
> STANLEY. What?
> MEG. The fried bread?
> STANLEY. Succulent.
> MEG. You shouldn't say that word.
> STANLEY. What word?
> MEG. That word you said.
> STANLEY. What, succulent--?
> MEG. Don't say it!
> STANLEY. What's the matter with it?
> MEG. You shouldn't say that word to a married woman. (17)

The dynamics between them have changed once again. Immediately after each has assumed the role of a partner in a marriage, Stanley begins a linguistic flirtation with Meg, whom he will later call "you succulent old washing bag" (18). Stanley's answer of "succulent" to her question is in contrast to Petey's earlier answer in a parallel exchange when he says "Very nice" (10). Clearly Stan-

ley knows Meg has permitted his presence in the house for so long and catered to his every whim at least partially because she is sexually attracted to him. After all, Petey never gets this treatment. By arousing her libido from time to time, Stanley is buying some insurance that his comfortable world will continue to run smoothly.

Sakellaridou says of Meg in this exchange, "Reacting just like Rose, she becomes indignant at what she imagines to be a lack of respect for her marital status" (32). Just as Rose becomes indignant when Mr. Kidd suggests she see Riley when Bert is away, Meg feigns indignation when Stanley flirts with her too openly for her own comfort.

Critics have paid close attention to this scene, often focusing on Stanley's use of the word "succulent" and Meg's reaction to it. Gale writes:

> Meg's misunderstanding of the word succulent is symbolic both as a summary of her character and as a statement about life. It is not that she just does not understand this particular word, she has no true grasp of the meaning of most words and so, although she talks and listens, she says and hears nothing which bears on life as a meaningful experience. (Butter's Going Up 42)

Diamond points out that the mere introduction of this word changes the level of discourse in the play since it is the "first three-syllable adjective to be heard" (51).

Meg deflects Stanley's potentially dangerous flirtation by taking up a linguistic game. She introduces the

subject of his tea and attempts to dominate him linguistically:

> MEG. Do you want some tea? (STANLEY reads the paper.) Say please.
> STANLEY. Please.
> MEG. Say sorry first.
> STANLEY. Sorry first.
> MEG. No. Just sorry.
> STANLEY. Just sorry.
> MEG. You deserve the strap. (17-18)

She exerts control over Stanley by making him say what she wants him to say. Curiously, their game ends in a threat (albeit an unrealistic one) of violence. Bernard Dukore notes,

> Underlying these activities [i.e., forcing Stanley to come downstairs and to say please and sorry], what is often called the subtext, is that someone makes Stanley do what he does not want to do--a comic foreshadowing of a noncomic resolution. (Harold Pinter 30)

This scene certainly is an ironic prefiguring of the outcome of the play, in which the twin invaders force Stanley to do the things he most wishes to avoid doing. Ultimately, forces much greater than Meg will act on Stanley and force him to submit to their will, resulting in Stanley's loss of the ability to use language at all. His ability to fight off or deflect their pressures will be markedly less than his ability to defend himself against Meg.

When Meg returns with his tea, the intertext already

established from The Room becomes operative again:

> MEG. I brought the pot in.
> STANLEY (absently). I don't know what I'd do without you.
> MEG. You don't deserve it though.
> STANLEY. Why not?
> MEG (pouring the tea, coyly). Go on. Calling me that.
> STANLEY. How long has that tea been in the pot?
> MEG. It's good tea. Good strong tea.
> STANLEY. This isn't tea. It's gravy!
> MEG. It's not.
> STANLEY. Get out of it. You succulent old washing bag.
> MEG. I am not! And it isn't your place to tell me if I am!
> STANLEY. And it isn't your place to come into a man's bedroom and--wake him up.
> MEG. Stanny! Don't you like your cup of tea of a morning--the one I bring you?
> STANLEY. I can't drink this muck. Didn't anyone ever tell you to warm the pot, at least?
> MEG. That's good strong tea, that's all. (18)

This harks back to Rose's assertion that she likes her tea strong, even though she pours weak tea for Bert. Unlike in The Room, the tea provider here serves the tea the way she likes it, not the way the recipient likes it. Rather than try to please to secure her place in her room, Meg tries to dominate, to have things her own way.

Interestingly, Meg, not Stanley, indirectly reintroduces (by hinting at it) the word "succulent" into the conversation. As Sakellaridou puts it, "Meg deliberately takes up the word 'succulent' which she had formerly rejected with horror and she exhibits an erotic nature, which she had earlier tried to suppress" (33).

Stanley, ever eager to make himself feel secure in his surroundings, picks up on her hint and actually says the word again, as she apparently wants him to do. He does so, however, by way of complaining once again about the sustenance being served to him, thus linking together the two appearances of this word.

Esslin says of this scene that Meg exhibits a "crushing combination of motherliness and senile eroticism" (Pinter the Playwright 88). Sakellaridou picks up this point:

> What constitutes Meg's actual disadvantage is that she is a mother and a flirt at the same time, tainting her relationship to her lodger with quasi-incestuous desires. This makes her appear a more repellent figure than any of the male characters, whose vices do not touch upon such a deadly sin. (33)

Once again, the Oedipal element is introduced into the Pinter idiom. Meg and Stanley's relationship can easily be "seen from the viewpoint of an Oedipus complex" (Esslin, Pinter the Playwright 88). Trussler calls the play "an oedipal tragi-farce set in a seaside lodging house" (37). Gabbard claims that "Oedipal fears are Stanley's principal problem" (54). Like Rose's unresolved Oedipal problems in The Room, Stanley's will introduce the possibility of a psychoanalytical reading of The Birthday Party.

When Meg tries to tell Stanley what his place is, he counters by questioning if she always stays in her place. The well-placed dash in Stanley's line, "And it isn't your place to come into a man's bedroom and--wake him up" (18), hints at the possibility that Meg did more than wake him up. This echoes the laughter, Meg's panting, and her dis-sheveled hair upon her return from "waking" Stanley. Here, as before, the roles of mother/son and of lovers are being mixed.

Stanley claims to be tired (even though it is morning and he has slept late) and puts his head in his hands. Since she is being ignored, Meg goes to her sideboard (her usual haven when she is ignored) and takes up the duster. So that Stanley will be forced to notice her, she begins to dust the table at which he sits, head in hands. Stan-ley shouts, "Not the bloody table!" (18), and thereby ends his period of ignoring her.

At this juncture, Meg again introduces the word now firmly associated with their flirtation:

> MEG. Stan?
> STANLEY. What?
> MEG (shyly). Am I really succulent?
> STANLEY. Oh, you are. I'd rather have you than a cold in the head any day.
> MEG. You're just saying that.
> STANLEY (violently). Look, why don't you get this place cleared up! It's a pigsty. And another thing, what about my room? It needs sweeping. It needs papering. I need a new room!
> MEG (sensual, stroking his arm). Oh, Stan, that's a

> lovely room. I've had some lovely afternoons in that room. (19)

Meg reacts to Stanley's ignoring her by taking up their flirting game again. This phase of the game, however, contains the strongest hint that they have done more than just flirt. It is hard to imagine Meg would consider merely flirting in a man's bedroom a "lovely afternoon." The whole question of that room and what has happened during those lovely afternoons echoes the "lovely boudoir" of Mr. Kidd's sister in The Room: what may or may not have happened (and with whom) in those rooms can never ultimately be known, but questions about the past are raised and the impossibility of factual verification concerning past events becomes evident.

Stanley's answer to her question is curious. Who wouldn't rather have an attentive, caring person than a cold in the head? He answers her in a way which she will accept as positive, but which linguistically puts her on a level just above having an illness. Part of his game is to placate Meg without actually giving verbal acquiescence to her desires. His complaint about the cleanliness of the house seems particularly odd given that he has just interrupted her dusting.

Stanley's complaints underscore his difference from Rose who accepts her room as wonderful and desirable just

as it is. She complains about nothing; in fact, Rose is about to clean up (by taking out the garbage) the room herself when she is interrupted by the Sandses. Stanley makes no effort whatsoever to keep his room clean and tidy; rather, he disrupts Meg's dusting. When he proceeds to complain about his room, the difference between Stanley and Rose can most clearly be seen.

When she strokes his arm, Stanley "recoils from her hand in disgust, stands and exits quickly from the door on the left" (19). Perhaps he is horrified at the mere thought of a "lovely afternoon" in his room with Meg, or maybe he is disgusted by the memory of such an encounter. Sakellaridou, on the other hand, sees Stanley's recoil from Meg as a sign that "he is in danger of losing control" (33). This leads to Stanley's coldest treatment of her yet. While he is outside, Meg begins clearing the table. He returns smoking a cigarette. One can easily call to mind the Freudian associations with cigarettes as well as the almost cliched hunger for a cigarette after sex. Either of these readings could represent a sign that Stanley is flaunting his sexuality to Meg.

When she asks for a cigarette too (to become part of his sexuality?), he refuses. Meg says, "I like cigarettes" (19)--a comment easily read as a double entendre--and tickles Stanley's neck. Again, he shows his

displeasure at physical contact with her by pushing her away. He then declines to go out shopping with her (another hint of his fear of the outside).

In response to his cold shoulder, Meg plays the one card she has left by announcing the visitors who are coming: "I've got to get things in for the two gentlemen" (19). This attracts Stanley's attention immediately: "STANLEY slowly raises his head" (20). Stanley questions her, revealing a parallel to the previous flirtation scene:

> STANLEY. What are you talking about?
> MEG. Two gentlemen asked Petey if they could come and stay for a couple of nights. I'm expecting them. . . .
> STANLEY. I don't believe it.
> MEG. It's true.
> STANLEY (moving to her). You're saying it on purpose. (20)

Just as Meg doubted whether Stanley really found her "succulent," Stanley doubts whether two gentlemen are actually going to come. The responses to the repetition of each assertion sound alike: Meg responds, "You're just saying that" (19), while Stanley says, "You're saying it on purpose" (20). In each case, one implicitly accuses the other of introducing a red herring into the playacting already occuring, of raising the stakes in the game. Shortly after this, Stanley grinds out his cigarette, putting to an end his sexual teasing of Meg. In a fashion,

she has won what she sought--the teasing has ended--but the consequences of having introduced this subject are great.

Almost desperately, Stanley tries to deny they are coming, questions the likelihood that they will come, and then turns viciously on Meg, who has cleared the table: "Where's my tea?" (21). By reintroducing the tea, Stanley is able to distract his attention from the potentially threatening invasion of his room, back to a subject over which he feels he has established control. It seems peculiar that Stanley would want the tea he has already deemed undrinkable, so one is to assume he does not want to drink it, but uses it as a conversational subject which is safe, which he can dominate.

Meg defends herself: "You didn't want it. . . . You wouldn't drink it" (21), thus leading Stanley to change the level of discourse, to raise the stakes himself. In doing so, he brings the question of identity back into the play again:

> STANLEY (quietly). Who do you think you're talking to?
> MEG (uncertainly). What?
> STANLEY. Come here.
> MEG. What do you mean?
> STANLEY. Come over here.
> MEG. No.
> STANLEY. I want to ask you something. (MEG fidgets nervously. She does not go to him.) Come on. (Pause.) All right. I can ask it from here just as well. (Deliberately.) Tell me, Mrs. Boles,

> when you address yourself to me, do you ever ask yourself who exactly you are talking to? Eh? (21)

Stanley deliberately introduces a formal tone into the conversation, even going as far as to call her "Mrs. Boles," not Meg, and to use the haughty phrase "address yourself to" versus "talk to." This frightens Meg; it is not one of their usual roles of interaction. She replies "uncertainly," then will not allow Stanley to tell her what to do when she refuses to come over to him. The tension in this exchange is evident; the mere hint that invaders will appear changes the dynamics of the room and the interactions of those characters in it immediately.

This effort is too much for Stanley: "His trunk falls forward, his head falls into his hands" (21). Feebly, Meg tries to make amends by reintroducing a safe subject--whether Stanley enjoyed his breakfast. When this fails, she changes the subject and asks him about returning to his former career as a concert pianist. This is not the first hint of Stanley's musical abilities; when Petey earlier was reading from the newspaper, he told Meg of a new show on the pier and she commented that Stanley could have been in it and reminisced about hearing him play. Clearly, however, Meg has upped the ante in their conversation by bringing up a topic which she knows will elicit a response from Stanley.

Their discussion of Stanley's past career as a concert pianist raises another question whose answer is impossible to verify. Indeed, the impossibility of verification is perhaps the central important element of Theatre of Menace. Stanley's own account of his career is contradictory; when Meg repeats the story to her visitors, the facts will become even less clear.

At first, Stanley makes vague claims about having been offered a job touring the world as a musician. This seems related to his earlier threat of leaving the boarding house. Perhaps the news of the invaders has frightened Stanley so that he tries this red herring once again. After he lists the cities where he may play, Meg asks: "Have you played the piano in those places before?" (22) and Stanley replies: "I've played the piano all over the world. All over the country. (Pause.) I once gave a concert" (22). Gale notes how this episode echoes back to a model in The Room, "The whole speech has the same ring to it that Mr. Kidd's remembrances of his mother and sister had in The Room" (Butter's Going Up 44), thus establishing one more element of the intertext--the confusion of past events, even by those who lived through them. This is an important factor behind the ubiquitous menace in Pinter's theatrical world.

The shifting nature of Stanley's claims about his

past as a professional musician makes the truth of the matter impossible to determine. He goes from making grand claims of having played "all over the world," to more modest claims of "all over the country," to a very insignificant single concert. Because his own subsequent language undercuts the believability of his first claims, the truth-value of the final, more credible claim is lessened. Whether he even played the one concert cannot finally be known with any certainty. Of this scene, Dukore writes:

> Present speech and action are more important than exposition. Stanley's references to his career as a pianist dwindle, both comically and pathetically, from giving concerts throughout the world to giving them all over the country to once giving a concert. Dramatically what matters is not which if any of these statements is true but that Stanley makes them in this sequence, for by doing so he verbally non-entitises himself. (Harold Pinter 31)

Stanley claims his concert was given in "Lower Edmonton" (22). Esslin points out that this is unlikely since Edmonton is "anything but a major centre of artistic activity" (Pinter the Playwright 80), thus adding to the confusion as to whether the concert ever actually took place.

The uncertainties multiply when he describes his concert:

> I had a unique touch. Absolutely unique. They came up to me. They came up to me and said they were grateful. . . . My father nearly came down to hear

> me. Well, I dropped him a card anyway. But I don't think he could make it. No, I-- lost the address, that was it. . . . Champagne we had that night, the lot. . . . Then after that, you know what they did? They carved me up. Carved me up. It was all arranged, it was all worked out. My next concert. Somewhere else it was. In winter. I went down there to play. Then, when I got there, the hall was closed, the place was shuttered up, not even a caretaker. They'd locked it up. . . . A fast one. They pulled a fast one. I'd like to know who was responsible for that. . . . They want me to crawl on my bended knees. (22-23)

Stanley's account of his father's near presence at the concert adds to the impossibility of verification. Did his father nearly come down to see him play after Stanley wrote to inform him of the concert, or was he unable to make it, or did he never know of the concert since Stanley lost the address and never sent the card? All these possibilities exist at the same time and which of them, if any, was the truth at one time cannot be known.

This speech also reveals an important element of Stanley's character. His insistence on what "they" said and what "they" did, together with his belief that what happened was part of a plan worked out against him in advance, reveals a possibly paranoid facet of Stanley's personality. This revelation is particularly ironic given that Stanley will soon encounter two men who have arranged something unpleasant for him, who have conspired against him. Esslin points out that the positioning of this information in the plot of the play is important:

> We learn this before the arrival of the two terrorists; clearly Stanley has offended some powerful force. But who are they who want him to crawl on his bended knees? And what could he, a harmless pianist, have done to them? (Pinter the Playwright 81)

Esslin also believes these lines show that "Stanley is disappointed in the world which has rejected him" (Pinter the Playwright 80-81). Even if the threat is real, no clue is given as to who has plotted to end Stanley's career and who wants to make Stanley crawl.

This scene suggests that Stanley may be an artist who has turned his back on his art, on his responsibility to his audience and to culture generally. Stanley may also be read as an artist manque, an artist who poses, who has little real talent. Several critics' readings of this play argue that the action represents a call by the agents of western culture to the artist to end his retreat from engagement with the world and begin again to produce his art, his work.

At the end of this scene, Stanley turns his attention once again to Meg and says, "You're just an old piece of rock cake, aren't you? (He rises and leans across the table to her)" (23). Interestingly, Stanley is giving mixed signals here. His return to conversation with Meg and his physical movement toward her would indicate a cease in hostilities, a return to normal. He no longer describes her as "succulent," however, now preferring to

call her "an old piece of rock cake." Although his actions would indicate affection, his words do not connote the flirtation they did earlier in the play.

Meg accepts this immediately and seeks to negate Stanley's threat of leaving her:

> Don't you go away again, Stan. You stay here. You'll be better off. You stay with your old Meg. (He groans and lies across the table.) Aren't you feeling well this morning, Stan. [sic] Did you pay a visit this morning? (23)

Meg misinterprets Stanley's response to her invitation. When he groans and falls across the table, he is suffering the anguish of knowing that the sexual nature of the relationship will continue if he stays (while at the same time wanting to stay). He is not physically feeling unwell as Meg's questions would indicate she believes him to be.

Stanley evidently thinks Meg has carried the mothering routine too far when she inquires into his bowel movements, because he quickly brings up another game, threatening Meg with another red herring:

> STANLEY. Meg. Do you know what?
> MEG. What?
> STANLEY. Have you heard the latest?
> MEG. No.
> STANLEY. I'll bet you have.
> MEG. I haven't.
> STANLEY. Shall I tell you?
> MEG. What latest?
> STANLEY. You haven't heard it?
> MEG. No.
> STANLEY (advancing). They're coming today.

MEG. Who?
STANLEY. They're coming in a van.
MEG. Who?
STANLEY. And do you know what they've got in that van?
MEG. What?
STANLEY. They've got a wheelbarrow in that van.
MEG (breathlessly). They haven't.
STANLEY. Oh yes they have.
MEG. You're a liar.
STANLEY (advancing upon her). A big wheelbarrow. And when the van stops they wheel it out, and they wheel it up the garden path, and then they knock at the front door.
MEG. They don't.
STANLEY. They're looking for someone.
MEG. They're not.
STANLEY. They're looking for someone. A certain person.
MEG (hoarsely). No, they're not!
STANLEY. Shall I tell you who they're looking for?
MEG. No! (23-24)

Stanley's response to Meg's overt overprotectiveness is to threaten her with invasion. The threat of nameless people in a van with a wheelbarrow certainly frightens Meg, but it also confirms previously noted elements of Stanley's personality. The people in the van are consistently referred to as "they," harking back to those people who ruined Stanley's career as a concert pianist. Stanley does not or cannot identify them even when Meg twice asks him who they are (yet again raising the question of identity). The threat intensifies with the reference to the wheelbarrow--a vehicle which conceivably could remove someone, as Stanley implies is the purpose for the visit of the people in the van.[1]

This whole exchange is filled with dramatic irony since the audience knows that the invaders are actually coming, perhaps even just about to arrive as the characters speak. Trussler points out that

> They are, indeed, "coming today". They are, indeed, "looking for someone". But Meg, very relieved that the big car which turns up next morning doesn't contain a wheelbarrow, fails to recognize them. (43)

Sakellaridou notes "Stanley's mock-terrorisation of Meg takes the form--in fact becomes the precursor--of the brainwashing that will later be inflicted on him" (35). Certainly this exchange can be seen as foreshadowing the later interrogation of Stanley. Furthermore, the scene is filled with the elements of the linguistic games already seen in exchanges between Meg and Stanley. For example, when Meg begins to fear this threat, she accuses Stanley of making it up ("you're a liar") much in the same way she did when he introduced the word succulent into their conversation.

Many critics (among them Esslin, Pinter the Playwright 88) have seen the car with a wheelbarrow to take someone away as symbolic of a hearse with its gurney

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[1] That these men are supposedly coming in a van is a curious link to Bert in The Room. One wonders if Bert went to someone's home when he made his run and if he had a wheelbarrow with which to take someone away.

which could be coming to take away a corpse. This reading of the car does indeed reinforce the intertextual parallel between invasion of the room and death which is often seen in Pinter's plays. Another possible reading does exist however; since the play dramatizes Stanley's birthday party, it might be dramatizing the day of his birth, not the anniversary of that day. In this case, the car with the wheelbarrow could be an ambulance with a stretcher to carry out the expectant mother, or a bassinet to carry the newborn away. In either case, the threat of the car is signficant in that it points out the latent horror felt by the insiders whenever intrusion from outside is possible and because the vehicle is one which can remove one of the occupants of the room.

Another great Pinter coup de theatre follows this exchange. Just as Stanley's tale of invasion has Meg most alarmed, there is "a sudden knock on the front door" (24), which Gale calls "a sudden Macbethian knock at that door through which something unimaginable might emerge" (Butter's Going Up 45). Instead of preceding the entry of the men with the wheelbarrow or the two strangers whose arrival Stanley fears, the knock announces the arrival of Lulu, a neighbor and friend of the Boles. She enters car rying "a solid, round parcel" (25) which she leaves on the

sideboard after some mysterious, elliptical conversation with Meg (conducted off stage) concerning "it" (24). Clearly the audience is meant to be curious about this object. Stanley is curious too, since the stage directions instruct: "STANLEY sidles to the door and listens" (24), but he feigns indifference: "STANLEY quickly sits at the table" (25).

As Meg lets Lulu in, she departs to do her shopping, leaving Stanley and Lulu alone. Initially in his conversation, Stanley reveals his desire to know more about the parcel, "That's a bulky object" (25), but Lulu nips this subject in the bud: "You're not to touch it" (25). Stanley then begins to tell a series of lies to Lulu. When she complains that the room is stuffy, Stanley claims that he disinfected the place earlier in the morning--something the audience clearly knows he has not done since he has just arisen shortly before Lulu's appearance on the scene. When Lulu makes a remark about Stanley's lack of bodily cleanliness, he replies, "Me! I was in the sea at half past six. . . . I went right out to the headland and back before breakfast. Don't you believe me!" (25).

Stanley's lies are not credible for several reasons. Most importantly, the audience knows them to be untrue from having watched Stanley's actions since rising late.

Also, as Lulu proceeds to point out, his appearance is not that of someone who has bathed in the sea and disinfected a room. Curiously, his words in defence of his credibility themselves indicate that he has lied. He does not ask Lulu if she believes him since his words are not followed by a question mark; rather he commands her not to believe him, as indicated by the imperative mode suggested by the exclamation mark. This is yet another example of the failure of language in service of meaning, of communication--a hallmark of Pinter's theatre and of Theatre of Menace in general. It also again brings the impossibility of verification into focus: if Stanley is so clearly lying here, one can reasonably assume he may be lying about other important matters in the play.

Lulu's introduction into the play at this point serves a function other than arousing the audience's curiosity about the parcel she bears into the room. She is described as "a girl in her twenties" (8), and can be seen as a potential romantic or sexual partner for Stanley. Her harping on his untidy and unclean appearance may suggest that she would like him to be neat and clean, to appear as a suitable boyfriend or lover.

When Lulu remarks that she cannot understand how Meg can get any housework done with Stanley around all day,

Stanley replies, "I always stand on the table when she sweeps the floor" (26). This is curiously reminiscent of the superstition that any man who must move his feet when his mother cleans will never marry (perhaps because he is always around the house and not out being active in the world where he could potentially meet a mate).

Sakellaridou sees Lulu as another example of the Pinter woman:

> Another female character, a young girl called Lulu, is treated as unfavourably as Meg. Instead of bringing some sort of balance as a second female presence in the play, Lulu achieves exactly the opposite. Like Mrs Sands in The Room she undermines further the woman's precarious position in the world of the play. She is the stereotype of the young, provocative, empty-headed female, a sex object with no personality and no sense of responsibility. . . . Indeed Lulu is Meg's double in silliness and sluttishness. Her presence in the play by the side of the older woman intensifies, if anything, the disparaged image of the feminine. (42-43)

Sakellaridou points out an important intertextual echo between Lulu and Clarissa Sands. Significantly, both women are invaders of the sanctum, but both are ultimately harmless ones which precede the serious, potentially harmful invasions which shortly will come.

The character of Lulu is an important alteration in the intertext. Clearly, she is not an invader exactly like Mrs. Sands in The Room, but is of a somewhat dif-

ferent order. As a woman from outside who can offer sex as a bargaining chip for a place in the room (or merely to alter the dynamics of the room), Lulu is an important advance over Mrs. Sands. Her type will recur frequently, in Pinter's work most directly in Ruth in The Homecoming, but this character is translated later into Ed in Orton's Entertaining Mr. Sloane and Bobby in Mamet's American Buffalo.

Lulu reveals her interest in Stanley by inviting him out on a sort of picnic. She claims that he looks as though he needs some fresh air, then says: "It's lovely out. And I've got a few sandwiches" (26). Clearly she wants him out of his room, not in order overtly to threaten him (as will clearly be the case with the others who want him to leave later in the play), but in order to spend time with him, to be alone with him, to pursue him. Intertextually, however, any attempt to move an insider out of his room must be seen as a threat. This is thus the first instance of what will become an important hallmark of the intertext: the association of sex (particularly from a desirable female) with the threat from outside.

Again, however, this is a comic foreshadowing of what will happen later. An outsider will try to tempt Stanley

outside the house, will want to make Stanley over into a preconceived idea of what he should be rather than what he himself wants to be, and will try to make him behave in societally sanctioned ways in opposition to his own notions of how he should behave. The psuedo-romantic nature of this initial occurrence of the motif here is comic; its reappearance later is tragic and devastating.

For a moment, Stanley appears not only to give in to Lulu, but also to take several steps further and acquiesce in becoming her lover. He abruptly asks her, "How would you like to go away with me?" (26). Clearly this is what Lulu would indeed like to do. When she asks Stanley where they could go, he admits "Nowhere" (26), and they do not pursue the subject. Stanley's motivation here is unclear. Is he able to break his Oedipal attachment to Meg long enough to consider an attachment to a partner of a suitable age and status to be a lover? Does he view this as a potential escape from the two men he knows are coming and fears invasion from? Is he merely toying with Lulu by raising in conversation a possibility that exists in no form except linguistic? Why he rejects her ultimately remains a mystery, but Trussler offers a possibility, writing that Stanley's failure

> to respond to the good-natured come-hithering of Lulu. . . and his attraction-repulsion towards the two strangers [indicate] a sublimated homosexuality [which] might make sense in production, although it's not elaborated in the script. (40)

This may be the first faint hint of the homosexual element which will become central in the intertext in later plays such as Orton's Entertaining Mr. Sloane and Pinter's own No Man's Land. It could also merely be a tacit admission on Stanley's part that he knows no hiding place will protect him long, no flight or escape is possible from the forces converging upon him.

Lulu appears to realize that Stanley, for whatever reason, is not interested in her. One last time she tries: "So you're not coming out for a walk?" (26), before giving up the ghost and leaving. Upon her departure Stanley goes into the kitchen to wash his face; this seems curious since he has ignored all previous commentary on his lack of cleanliness, but it does get him out of the room when the real invasion occurs.[e] While Stanley is washing his face, Goldberg and McCann enter through the back door.

After the suspenseful and fairly elaborate buildup to

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[e] A possible reading of this action is that washing is a usual reaction to a feeling of guilt (e.g., Lady Macbeth). In the immediate vicinity of his accusers, Stanley may be trying to cleanse himself of whatever sins he has committed.

their entrance, the actual event is anti-climactic. They enter quietly through the back door--not the front door to which attention was drawn during the lead-in to Lulu's entrance. No theatrical knock at the door announces them and they seem unremarkable. The only immediate clue that they are to be feared is Stanley's reaction. Once Goldberg and McCann are in the roon, Stanley slips quietly from the kitchen, back into the room and out through the back door to escape them.

Many critics have seen Goldberg and McCann--a Jew and an Irish Catholic--as symbolic of the Judeo-Christian tradition[3], as representative of the cultural powers which, through these men, will attempt to establish hegemony over Stanley Webber in order to call him back into active life as an artist or to force him to conform to societal expectations. Gale makes this argument:

> There is also ample evidence that Goldberg and McCann may represent the ideals of society, with Stan filling the role of the artist forced back into the mold of conventionality. Stanley as a pianist was not much of a performer, vide his concert story, but even

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[3] See Gale Butter's Going Up 56, Cohn "The World of Harold Pinter" (55-68), and Dukore Harold Pinter 32. Dukore also points out that these two threatening invaders are members of minorities just as Riley is black in The Room (28); he also claims, "Appropriately they represent the two traditional religions of European civilisation, Judaism and Catholicism. For Protestants to make Stanley conform would be inappropriate" (32).

> as a quasi-artist his piano playing represents a threat to the status quo because it is not a thing that everyone can do equally well and because it requires a different set of goals from those held by the ordinary workingman; he is thus set apart from his fellow man, whether as an artist or merely as a sensitive individual. (Butter's Going Up 55)

The interpersonal dynamics between Goldberg and McCann are established immediately. Goldberg, "a man in his fifties" (8), is the wiser and more experienced of the pair; McCann "a man of thirty" (8), is a hesitant, uncertain sort who constantly looks to Goldberg for guidance and support. Their initial conversation economically demonstrates this:

> MCCANN: Is this it?
> GOLDBERG: This is it.
> MCCANN: Are you sure?
> GOLDBERG: Sure I'm sure.
> Pause.
> MCCANN: What now?
> GOLDBERG: Don't worry yourself, McCann. Take a seat.
> MCCANN: What about you? (27)

McCann's uncertainties whether this is the right place, whether Goldberg is sure this is the right place, and whether he should sit down unless Goldberg does as well, all add up to a clear image of him as the junior partner of the two. The stage direction tell that "MCCANN carries two suitcases, GOLDBERG a briefcase" (26), further reinforcing McCann's status as apprentice or helper to the

master or boss Goldberg. Dukore claims that Goldberg's briefcase suggests his "social conformity" and notes that his "conventional appearance contrasts with that of the unkempt Stanley" (Harold Pinter 31).

The question of whether they should sit is resolved when Goldberg says, "We'll both take a seat" (27). This is a clear echo of the Sandses' discussion of sitting and perching from The Room. It is germane to note here the association of sitting with loss of manhood, discussed earlier in connection with The Room. Gale notes, "It appears that getting the victim to sit down is part of the ritual pattern followed in the pyschological warfare these men subject their victims to" (Butter's Going Up 51), thus creating a possible explanation for why McCann is uncertain about sitting: he might fear that he himself is to be the victim (as Gus will be in The Dumb Waiter). This question of sitting will become even more important later in the play when Goldberg and McCann force Stanley to sit against his will.

These two men are important new elements of the intertext being established in the early Pinter plays. They are two men who must work together to do "a job" (28). One of them is unclear about the nature of the job and how to do it and must take instruction from and be

calmed by the other. Getting their job done threatens the stability of the room and its occupants. The most immediate and direct echo of them will be Ben and Gus in Pinter's next play, The Dumb Waiter, but the types will recur fairly directly even as late as Don and Teach in Mamet's American Buffalo. They could even be seen as prototypes for the more sophisticated Spooner and Hirst in Pinter's No Man's Land.

The nature of these two characters continues to develop as they converse in Meg's living room while waiting for her return. Goldberg reveals himself as a family man and raconteur, always telling stories about his apparently extensive, multi-generational family. McCann continues to reveal his nervousness and uncertainty:

> MCCANN: Nat. How do we know this is the right house?
> GOLDBERG: What makes you think it's the wrong house?
> MCCANN: I didn't see a number on the gate.
> GOLDBERG: I wasn't looking for a number.
> MCCANN: No? (28)

Rather than reassure McCann about how he knows this is the right house, Goldberg recommences his story about his Uncle Barney. Shortly Goldberg will chide McCann for his nervousness (much as Lulu chided Stanley for his appearance) and will then reassure McCann by telling him

how capable he is and by informing him that Goldberg asked for him specifically when this job came up.

The topic of "the job" discussed by Goldberg and McCann functions here much like the parcel does for Lulu: it is the focus of the audience's curiosity when the new character(s) enter. Goldberg and McCann, however, seem much more clearly identified with their job than Lulu does with her parcel; unlike Lulu, who merely brings in a package which Meg has purchased, their job is clearly the center of their role in the play.

As they keep talking, McCann continues to reveal his uncertainties. He seems positive that this job is not like their previous jobs, and he keeps pestering Goldberg, interrupting both Goldberg's family stories and his assurances about McCann's competence. This culminates when Goldberg--"in a quiet, fluent, offical tone" (30)--finally tells him about the job:

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

The "businesslike" jargon Goldberg adopts here is in stark contrast to his relaxed, jovial talk when telling family

stories and thus reveals a split in his character. Even though he is a friendly, kindly man in some circumstances, he is capable of being a no-nonsense businessman as well. The speech, although it reassures McCann tremendously, reveals nothing. Goldberg merely states that this job is "quite distinct" from McCann's "other activities" without telling either how it will be different or what those other activities were.

This speech is another example of the ironic foreshadowing which saturates this first act of The Birthday Party. Goldberg's assertion that there will be no "excessive aggravation" in carrying out the job stands in stark contrast to McCann's frantic state of upset in Act Three after the job has been done. At one point, even the cool and reassuring Goldberg will be at McCann's throat as a result of this non-aggravating job.

Immediately after Goldberg's business speech, Meg returns and meets her guests. The audience finally is assured that Goldberg and McCann have indeed reached the right place despite McCann's reservations, since Goldberg addresses Meg immediately as "Mrs. Boles" (30), demonstrating without a doubt that they have found the house for which they were looking.

Meg engages them in polite conversation, calling

everything "nice," much as she did in discussing breakfast earlier. Almost immediately, however, Goldberg begins to press Meg for information about her guests: how many there are, whether the lone guest is a man or woman, what his name is, what work he does. Under the guise of understandable curiosity, Goldberg is confirming that he is in the right place and has found the right subject for the job he must do. Gale notes of this scene:

> When Meg returns, the two visitors demonstrate an interest in Stanley, quizzing the landlady about him. Several things are working here. Stan's earlier uneasiness at the mention of strangers is recalled, and it is implied that their job has something to do with him. (Butter's Going Up 47)

In the conversation with Meg, Goldberg does all the talking; McCann only twice reacts to something which has been said, and then only briefly. This underscores the earlier impression of Goldberg as being in charge and of McCann as an apprentice who follows the lead given him.

In telling Goldberg about Stanley's career as a pianist, Meg recounts the story of his concert and gets the facts terribly wrong: "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" (32). Her altered ver-

sion of Stanley's story further confuses past events and makes them even less verifiable than the first recounting of them did. The details of the champagne and of being trapped in a room are ironic foreshadowing of what is to come in Act Two: a party (hinted at by the champagne) and a questioning/brainwashing from which Stanley will be unable to escape, from which his isolation in the room will be no defense.

Meg escapes from this awkward tale by concluding: "I wish he could have played tonight. . . . It's his birthday today. . . . But I'm not going to tell him until tonight" (32). Even Goldberg questions why Stanley does not know his own birthday, but the discrepancy is quickly glossed over. This is the first mention of the event which gives the play its title, and it establishes the pretext on which Goldberg offers: "We'll give him a party. Leave it to me" (30).

Meg seems unaware how strange it is that someone who does not know Stanley would want to give him a party. Since the audience knows that Goldberg is looking for Stanley, dramatic irony is created: the audience knows this will be no typical birthday party. The threat to Stanley implied by the party itself is underscored by the tone of Goldberg's remarks to McCann about the party:

> What do you think of that, McCann? There's a gentleman living here. He's got a birthday today, and he's forgotten all about it. So we're going to remind him. We're going to give him a party. . . . We'll bring him out of himself. (33)

These remarks seem designed to inform McCann that this party is part of their job and the gentleman for whom the party is to be given is the subject of that job. Gale notes how this speech clearly links the birthday party with Goldberg, "an omnious overtone thereby being attached to what would normally be a happy celebration" (Butter's Going Up 48).

When Meg goes to take Goldberg and McCann up to their room, Stanley peeks through the window and then re-enters. The convenient timing of his appearance suggests he may have been trying to listen to the conversation and spy on the two visitors (much as he did when Meg and Lulu spoke before Lulu's entrance), but his questions to Meg when she comes back downstairs imply that his eavesdropping was only partially successful.

He asks who the two men are three times, re-introducing the question of identity raised earlier in the play. Meg seems unable to answer the question; instead she informs Stanley how thrilled they are with their room and how wonderful they think the beds are. When he

presses Meg for their names, she finally remembers that one is called Goldberg.

Stanley's reaction to this is to sit slowly at the table, to be still, and to remain dumb while Meg chatters on. She attempts to reassure him that the visitors will have no impact on their daily lives, that she will make them be quiet so Stanley can sleep late, and that she will continue to bring him his morning tea in bed. Even she notices his strange behavior and asks if he knows them, but Stanley gives no answer. In an effort to rouse him, she plays a new card by informing him: "It's your birthday, Stan. I was going to keep it a secret until tonight" (35).

Stanley denies that it is his birthday. The audience would expect a man to know when his own birthday is, but would also expect that the mother-figure (Meg) would also know when the son was born, perhaps even better than he himself would. Why Stanley would deny his own birthday is naturally a question raised in the minds of the audience. Perhaps, if this is the anniversary of Stanley's birth, he wishes to avoid the growth and responsi-bilities involved in getting older. If this is symbolically the day of his birth, Stanley is clinging to the womb-room, not wanting to face the inhospitable outside world.

When he denies that it is his birthday, she gives him his present--the parcel which Lulu brought in--a boy's toy drum. She explains, "It's because you haven't got a piano" (36). Gale reads the present as being significant since a boy's drum is an appropriate gift for a mother to give a young son, not for a landlady to give her boarder; he sees the gift as underscoring the complex confusion of relationships which exist between them (Butter's Going Up 41). Stanley takes the drum and drumsticks and ends the act in a dramatic climax, marching around the room as the beat on the drum becomes less and less regular and more "savage and possessed" (36), recalling his earlier violent reaction against Meg.

Gale reads the end of Act One as of great importance:

> The abrupt ending of Act I, with Stanley beating wildly on the toy drum, is further evidence that he is losing control of himself under the influence of menace. Stan's savage possession similarly ties the action of the play to a ritualistic theme and his beating of the drum is a desperate, semimagical attempt to try to drive away a set of demons. (Butter's Going Up 48)

Esslin reads the end of the act in a similar manner, but stresses also Meg's role:

> At first Stanley is stupefied. But, then, he puts the drum round his neck and begins to beat it, in a normal rhythm at first, but then more and more wildly and uncontrolled. It is clear: Meg has succeeded in

> making him regress to the status of a little boy, a child. Thus the savagery of his reaction seems to signify the depth of his despair; for Stanley seems to understand the meaning of his acceptance of the little boy's drum only too well. (Pinter the Playwright 82)[4]

Dukore sees this scene as important theatrically as well as symbolically:

> At the close of Act I the visual combines with non-verbal sound to create meaning: a climax of terror as Stanley, drum hanging from his neck, marches around the table beating the drum regularly, then erratically and uncontrolled, and when he arrives at Meg's chair his face and drumbeat are savage. (Harold Pinter 35)

In this climactic ending of Act One, Pinter ties together several threads introduced earlier on in the act: Stanley is more clearly Meg's little boy here than ever before; he is disintegrating under the menace of invasion (much as he verbally disintegrated himself when discussing his concert career); and he is again established as a musician, a potential artist, albeit of a very primitive kind.

In several important ways, Act Two is the center of the play with Act One functioning as exposition and build-up and Act Three as denouement. Esslin succinctly summarizes Act Two: "The second act is devoted to the

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[4] The use of a drum to signify the immaturity or reversion to childhood of a character appears elsewhere in post-modern literature, most notably in Gunter Grass' novel The Tin Drum (1959, English translation 1962).

'birthday party' itself, the ritual of Stanley's destruction by his two pursuers" (Pinter the Playwright 82). As one might expect, the act which encompasses the title event of the play is the play's focus. The dynamics of the party (especially playing the blind man's buff game) are radically different from the usual workings of the room as depicted in Act One. This disruption is what the insider figure (in this case Stanley), has feared much as Rose feared the disruption from the basement in The Room. Goldberg's appropriation of Lulu during the game removes Stanley's one tenuous possibility for escape into a normal life.

What happens at the beginning of the second act becomes important when its intertextual significance is realized. The stage directions read: "MCCANN is sitting at the table tearing a sheet of newspaper into five equal strips. It is evening" (37). Curiously enough, the first action of Act Two involves the newspaper, already established in the Pinter theatrical idiom as a vehicle for ignoring an unpleasant reality. Can McCann's destruction of it here represent the present unavailability of that means of escape?

Dukore reads this action:

> To be sure one can interpret McCann's action as the destruction of a medium of communication, which it

> is, yet this interpretation reveals nothing essential about the play for communication is not a major theme. More important is that the action simultaneously calms McCann and unnerves Stanley. (Harold Pinter 29)

Arguably, Dukore misses part of the point here. McCann's symbolic elimination of a medium of communication (the printed word) foreshadows his later elimination of another communicative medium when, in Act Three, he has robbed Stanley of speech.

When Stanley enters the room, they exchange a polite greeting and then "STANLEY goes into the kitchen and pours a glass of water. He drinks it looking through the hatch" (37). The glass of water will become an important element of the intertext. Its full significance can be seen later in Pinter's The Homecoming when it represents power--in that play whoever gets to drink the glass of water has power over the person to whom the drink is denied. If the water here is read as a sign having the same reference, Stanley's drink may be his last, futile attempt to assert his power over the forces which have invaded his sanctum.

The subsequent events have an ironic twist: Stanley weakly tries to leave, to avoid whatever is coming from the invaders, but McCann prevents him from doing so, both by physically obstructing him and by engaging him in a conversation which probes Stanley's past. The irony derives from the fact that Stanley is willingly attempting

to leave (which both Meg and Lulu earlier tried to convince him to do, and which Goldberg and McCann will later force him to do) but is prevented.

McCann's questions appear to be harmless curiosity, the kind of questions strangers who meet at a seaside boarding house are quite likely to ask one another: "What's your name?" (38); "Where are you going?" (39); "You in business?" (40). Given the prevailing atmosphere of menace in The Birthday Party, however, such apparently harmless questions take on a sinister edge.

Immediately, Stanley and McCann start a game (foreshadowing the blind man's buff which is to follow and is the heart of this act). McCann begins whistling "The Mountains of Morne" and Stanley joins him, one whistling as the other speaks, thus enabling both the conversation and the song to run simultaneously and continuously. All the while, McCann and Stanley dance a tentative pas de deux: as Stanley attempts to leave, McCann maintains his position between Stanley and the door, not allowing him to leave since a party is to be held in his honor.

Stanley suspiciously inquires about the other party guests and McCann thrice warns Stanley not to touch the shredded newspaper, perhaps not allowing him to hide behind it as he earlier did with Meg and as both Petey and Bert did with their wives; at least McCann is directly

exerting his ability to control Stanley, to tell him what to do, to remove from him one of his usual escape mechanisms.

Stanley asserts to McCann that he has "a feeling that we've met before" (39), then asks McCann, "Ever been anywhere near Maidenhead? . . . There's a Fuller's teashop. I used to have my tea there. . . . And a Boots Library. I seem to connect you with High Street" (39). McCann flatly denies any connection with the place on four occasions. The obvious symbolism of the town's name is a bit heavyhanded, but the idea that Stanley not only finds McCann familiar, but also can pinpoint the location of his former acquaintance with McCann only serves to heighten the atmosphere of menace which permeates this scene.

During McCann's questioning, Stanley describes his life prior to coming to Meg's house as a boarder:

> I used to live very quietly--played records, that's about all. Everything delivered to the door. Then I started a little private business, in a small way, and it compelled me to come down here--kept me longer than I expected. You never get used to living in someone else's house. Don't you agree? I lived so quietly. You can only appreciate what you've had when things change. (40)

This description of Stanley's former life sounds reminiscent of Rose's life in The Room. Perhaps we are to conclude that Stanley at one time tried Rose's method of escape, found it wanting, and was forced to find another

means to hide (Gale, Butter's Going Up 53).

Interestingly, after this description of his life, Stanley offers McCann a cigarette, only to be rebuffed: "I don't smoke" (40). The smoking of a cigarette took on obvious sexual meaning and was part of a power game in Act One. Perhaps Stanley here is offering himself sexually in hopes of avoiding whatever is in store for him (presumably he has been offering himself sexually to Meg for a year in order to maintain his safe hiding place). An alternate intertextual reading is that the offer is an acknowledgement of his lack of power over McCann since earlier the withholding of a cigarette represented of his power over Meg.

Stanley continues his earlier description of his life, this time more desperately:

> STANLEY. You know what? To look at me, I bet you wouldn't think I'd led such a quiet life. The lines on my face, eh? It's the drink. Been drinking a bit down here. But what I mean is. . . you know how it is. . . away from your own. . . all wrong, of course. . . I'll be all right when I get back. . . but what I mean is, the way some people look at me you'd think I was a different person. I suppose I have changed, but I'm still the same man that I always was. I mean, you wouldn't think, to look at me, really. . . I mean, not really, that I was the sort of bloke to--to cause any trouble, would you? (MCCANN looks at him.) Do you know what I mean?
> MCCANN. No. (40)

Stanley is pleading here, to be sure. He offers an

explanation for his retreat, for his behavior--excessive drinking--but promises he will be better, will be as he always was, when he gets back (when he returns where he belongs?). This is an acknowledgement that Stanley knows or suspects why these men have come. The atmosphere of menace is only magnified when McCann refuses to admit knowing anything about what Stanley is saying.

Boulton writes of this scene:

> The idiom is that of casual conversation; Stanley's mounting fear and his pleading tone of voice are authentically suggested by the changes of speed with which the speech is delivered; and his confusion increases the longer he is allowed to go on unchecked by his hearer. (136)

Stanley's discomfort is manifested in his increasingly desperate language, in his growing inability to speak coherently and directly. His intuition as to what will be in store for him affects his verbal abilities even at this early point, a faint forshadowing of his later total lack of verbal capacity.

Another part of their exchange echoes The Room:

> MCCANN. You know, sir, you're a bit depressed for a man on his birthday.
> STANLEY (sharply). Why do you call me sir?
> MCCANN. You don't like it?
> STANLEY (to the table). Listen. Don't call me sir. (41)

This seems remarkably like Rose's plea to Riley not to

call her Sal. One remembers from the discussion of The Room that the switch in names implies that the person using an alternate name has known the person being addressed before and is in possession of information not priviliged to the other characters. This exchange also foreshadows the confusion of two of Goldberg's names, Nat and Simey, later in the play when Goldberg will violently resist being called by a familiar name, even by his partner McCann.

Almost immediately Stanley recognizes that he is in trouble--his assurance that he is not "the sort of bloke to--to cause any trouble" (40). Next he questions why they have chosen Meg's house to stay in calling it "a ridiculous house to pick on" (41) and asserting "it's not a boarding house. It never was" (41). His subsequent ploy is to tell McCann that Meg is crazy. Finally, he confronts McCann directly. Perhaps recognizing that McCann is the junior partner of the two, Stanley asks: "Has he told you anything? Do you know what you're here for? Tell me. You needn't be frightened of me. Or hasn't he told you?" (42).

Stanley here once again reveals his paranoia, which later events will justify. He assures McCann that he is not to be feared, then attempts to trick McCann into forming an alliance with him (rather than Goldberg) by

insinuating that Goldberg has not trusted McCann enough to tell him what is to occur. He continues this ploy, telling McCann how much he loves Ireland, its people, and its policemen in particular. He offers McCann an escape with him, saying, "What about coming out to have a drink with me? There's a pub down the road serves draught Guinness. Very difficult to get in these parts" (42).

While this offer is a clever ruse as an escape attempt, it is also an example of the impossibility of verification. As far as the reader or audience can tell, Stanley never leaves the house, so how is he to know if a pub serving draught Guinness is there or not? The intense focus on the room and its occupants brings into question the reality, the reliability, and the verifiability of everything outside.

Stanley's hope of converting McCann to his cause (or merely of deceiving him) is lost, however, when Goldberg enters with Petey in tow. Goldberg says, "I was telling Mr. Boles about my old mum" (43), but the story he actually tells is about "a girl who lived down my road" (43) with whom Goldberg used to walk by the canal and whom he kissed on the cheek. This story once again calls to mind the story of Mr. Kidd and his sister from The Room. Is this girl down the road Goldberg's mother as his introduction to the story states? If so, it would once again

tap the thread of Oedipal desire so often raised in Pinter's theatrical world.

Goldberg's continuation of the story would seem to deny this possibility, however, as he claims his mother had "the nicest piece of gefilte fish you could wish to find on a plate" (43) waiting for him when he came home. In this story, Goldberg tells that he was once called "Simey" (43) and even McCann questions this:

> MCCANN. I thought your name was Nat.
> GOLDBERG. She called me Simey. (43)

Furthermore, Goldberg will in Act Three say that his father called him "Benny" (78). Obviously the question of identity is raised again here, echoing the Rose/Sal dichotomy from The Room. Its immediate importance, however, appears in the questioning of Stanley which shortly will occur: apparently Goldberg thinks nothing of having had multiple names, but will accusingly question Stanley, "Why did you change your name?" (50) in just a few pages.

Petey quickly excuses himself to go off to his weekly chess game, saying, "I'm sorry, Stan. I didn't know about it till just now. And we've got a game on. I'll try and get back early" (44). When Petey leaves, Gale notes that Stanley has lost his "last hope, the only thing that might actually stand between him and his tormentors" (Butter's

Going Up 49). Like Bert in The Room, Petey is absent when the serious threat from invasion occurs. The reaction of the invaders to Petey's departure directly contrasts Stanley's attempt to leave; when Stanley tried to leave, he was prevented, but Goldberg wishes Petey luck with his game and promises to save him some drink.

An important intertextual element appears here: the inability of the father (or father figure) to stay and/or protect the inhabitants of the room from invasion. This started with Bert's absence in The Room and echoes of it will continue, not only in Pinter plays (cf. Max in The Homecoming), but also in Kemp in Orton's Entertaining Mr. Sloane and in Don in Mamet's American Buffalo.

When Petey goes off to his game, McCann goes to fetch the liquor for the party. At this point, Stanley turns on Goldberg in a last-ditch effort to avoid what is coming, to assert control over his room. He tries to convince Goldberg that some mistake has been made and his room is already booked for the night, but Goldberg side-steps this ploy by congratulating Stanley on his birthday:

> What a curious thing to celebrate--birth! Like getting up in the morning. Marvellous! Some people don't like the idea of getting up in the morning. I've heard them. Getting up in the morning, they say, what is it? Your skin's crabby, you need a shave, your eyes are full of muck, your mouth is like a boghouse, the palms of your hands are full of sweat, your nose is clogged up, your feet stink, what are you but a corpse waiting to be washed? (45)

This speech is important for two reasons. First, the negative picture of those who like to sleep late becomes ominous as one remembers how Stanley likes to sleep late. Second, the parallel drawn between birth and getting up involves a description of the waker as a corpse, drawing again the connection between birth and death. Gabbard (50) sees a connection between the title event of The Birthday Party and the giving birth "astride of a grave" (58) from Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett, Pinter's Theatre of the Absurd forerunner. Dukore reads a dual significance into the title event:

> Birthday not only means the anniversary of one's birth, it also means the day of one's birth, and in The Birthday Party the celebration of the former helps to create the latter. The intruders turn Stanley into what McCann calls a new man. At their hands he is reborn, made into a different kind of person on a birthday that becomes a birth-day. (Harold Pinter 29)

If this is Stanley's birthday, Goldberg seems to hint, it can also be his death day.

As Gale notes, "Game playing is reintroduced in The Birthday Party when McCann comes back and Goldberg, McCann, and Stan suggest to one another that they take a seat" (Butter's Going Up 50). This game is now well established intertextually, referring back to the Sandses in The Room and to the initial appearance of Goldberg and McCann in Act One. One can recall Gabbard's assertion

that sitting down can be associated with fear of emasculation; Gale also claims that "getting the victim to sit down is part of the ritual pattern followed in the pyschological warfare these men subject their victims to" (Butter's Going Up 51).

The usual resistance to the request to be seated is given by Stanley, who plays a trick on his tormentors. He agrees to sit if McCann does, but McCann must go first. When McCann sits, Stanley remains standing and insists that both he and Goldberg must leave. McCann's violent reaction to being tricked--"That's a dirty trick! I'll kick the shite out of him!" (47)--only serves to underscore the deadly earnestness of the game. Gale notes, "Stan's reaction when he tricks McCann into sitting down first indicates that he recognizes the seriousness of the interplay" (Butter's Going Up 51).

Stanley, having scored one by his trick, is then strong-armed into sitting and offers no further resistance. Then his torment begins for real. The non sequitur, sometimes contradictory, third degree questioning which Goldberg and McCann put to Stanley accuses him of various acts, asks him to account for his actions much like a police interrogation, sets him up with the punch lines of jokes, and raises unanswerable philosophical queries.

It begins much like an examination by police: "Webber, what were you doing yesterday? . . . And the day before. What did you do the day before that?" (47). The cultural assumption naturally made by a reader or audience is that Stanley has done something wrong, since this type of questioning is part of the investigation of a crime, part of the treatment of criminals.

The next line of questioning revolves around Stanley's actions since coming to Meg and Petey's: "Why are you wasting everybody's time, Webber? Why are you getting in everybody's way? . . . Why are you driving that old lady off her conk? . . . Why do you behave so badly, Webber? Why do you force that old man out to play chess? . . . Why do you treat that young lady like a leper?" (47). The implication here is that Stanley has done something wrong and behaved badly since coming to Meg's house, in addition to whatever he has done initially necessitating his period of hiding out at Meg and Petey's boarding house.

McCann then takes the interrogation in a new direction: "Why did you leave the organization? . . . You betrayed the organization" (48).[5] His betrayal of the

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[5] Gale calls this organization "an allegorical representation of society" (Butter's Going Up 37). Perhaps it represents in concrete form for the play the Judeo-Christian tradition which various critics have seen as exerting control over the errant artist, Stanley. The use

organization apparently has something to do with Ireland (a place he earlier admitted having been and loving) since McCann terms his betrayal "a black and tan fact" (48) referring to the colors worn by the British occupying forces, and McCann later directly asks Stanley "What about Ireland?" (51).

In the middle of this grueling examination, Goldberg orders McCann to take Stanley's glasses. This relates intertextually to Rose and Riley in The Room: one effect of invasion is that the insider is rendered blind. Gale notes the "linking of blindness and guilt as in The Room" (Butter's Going Up 54).

One of the contradictory elements of the inquisition is soon raised:

> GOLDBERG. Where was your wife?
> STANLEY. In--
> GOLDBERG. Answer.
> STANLEY (turning, crouched). What wife?
> GOLDBERG. What have you done with your wife?
> MCCANN. He's killed his wife!
> GOLDBERG. Why did you kill your wife?
> STANLEY (sitting, his back to the audience). What wife?
> MCCANN. How did he kill her?
> GOLDBERG. How did you kill her?
> MCCANN. You throttled her.
> GOLDBERG. With arsenic.
> MCCANN. There's your man! . . .
> GOLDBERG. Why did you never get married?

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of an "organization" as the vehicle for menace is clearly an advance over the overtly symbolic use of a blind black man in The Room.

MCCANN. She was waiting at the porch.
GOLDBERG. You skedaddled from the wedding.
MCCANN. He left her in the lurch.
GOLDBERG. You left her in the pudding club.
MCCANN. She was waiting at the church. (49-50)

Again, the impossibility of verification is raised by this line of questioning. Did Stanley kill his wife? How did he kill her? Was he ever married in the first place? Did he leave his bride waiting at the altar? The implication of the accusation about the pudding club is that Stanley's jilted bride was pregnant, "pudding club" being a British slang expression roughly equivalent to the American expression "having a bun in the oven." The implication here is that Stanley has left her with a "pudding in the oven"--in other words, "in the pudding club." Importantly, Wilson in Orton's The Ruffian on the Stair will use this same expression in a direct echo of this scene when he treatens the "insider" character of that play.

The questions and accusations brought up by Goldberg and McCann simply can never be answered: no verifiable factual information about them can be deduced. That they are raised at all is part of the menace: since Stanley's answers (should he offer any) cannot be verified, the answers themselves are not what Goldberg and McCann seek here; rather they seek to force Stanley to undergo the questioning as part of the process of making "a new man"

(83) of him.

The next question also has significance:

> GOLDBERG. Webber! Why did you change your name?
> STANLEY. I forgot the other one.
> GOLDBERG. What's your name now?
> STANLEY. Joe Soap. (50)

The mere fact that Stanley is being asked about his change of name indicates that Goldberg thinks there is something wrong with changing a name, but he is curiously silent about having more than one name--Nat, Simey, Benny--himself. Stanley's answer of "Joe Soap" may be an attempt at humor, reacting to Lulu's earlier assertion that Stanley was not clean and to an earlier question from Goldberg "When did you last have a bath?" (48). This ties in with Stanley's description in Act One as unkempt and unshaven--completely the reverse of his subsequent appearance in Act Three. "Joe Soap" is also British slang roughly equivalent to the American expression of "the fall guy," someone who is tricked or cheated (or on whom a trick or cheat is attempted). In response to such an attempt, a British person might say, "Who do you think I am, Joe Soap?"

The questioning proceeds to cover religious grounds: "Do you recognise an external force, responsible for you, suffering for you?" (50); "You're a traitor to the cloth"

(51); and "What about the Albigensenist heresy?" (51). Again, an irony is created. The accusers seem to think Stanley has done something wrong by betraying "the cloth," but we later find out that McCann is a recently defrocked priest (81); without having to pay any consequences or submit to any sanctions, McCann is allowed to behave in a way Stanley is not.

Stanley is also asked philosophical questions: "Is the number 846 possible or necessary" (50); and "What makes you think you exist?" (52).[*] Stanley is also accused of various actions--"You stuff yourself with dry toast" (51) and "You verminate the sheet of your birth" (51)--again touching on the Oedipal theme of the curious relations between Meg and Stanley. He is also questioned about various "crimes" without any proof that he ever committed them: "Why don't you pay the rent?" (51) and "Why do you pick your nose?" (51). Stanley is also asked about his "old mum" whom he claims is "in the sanatorium" (49).

This apparently random pattern of questions is at least partially ordered by association:

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[*] This is an interesting variation on the Cartesian assertion of existence, "Cogito, ergo sum" ("I think, therefore I exist"). The semantic implication of Goldberg's question here is that if Stanley thinks, then he can only <u>think</u> he exists, not <u>know</u> that he does.

GOLDBERG. Why did the chicken cross the road?
STANLEY. He wanted to--he wanted to--he wanted to. . . .
MCCANN. He doesn't know!
GOLDBERG. Why did the chicken cross the road?
STANLEY. He wanted to--he wanted to. . . .
GOLDBERG. Why did the chicken cross the road?
STANLEY. He wanted. . . .
MCCANN. He doesn't know. He doesn't know which came first!
GOLDBERG. Which came first?
MCCANN. Chicken? Egg? Which came first?
GOLDBERG and MCCANN. Which came first? Which came first? Which came first?

STANLEY screams.

GOLDBERG. He doesn't know. (51-52)

Goldberg and McCann switch from the set-up of one chicken joke to the set-up of another chicken joke apparently for no reason other than the association between the two as set-up lines for chicken jokes. Stanley's answer is interesting. The obvious reading is that he does not know the punch line and is vamping or stalling for time. If his answer is read as a complete sentence (admittedly as the punctuation indicates that it should not), it could be an assertion of individual will (i.e., the chicken crossed the road because he wanted to) in the face of two men who are seeking to stifle Stanley's individual will.

In the end, the interrogation scene erupts into the violence which was inherent in it from the beginning: after having been declared dead by Goldberg, Stanley

"looks up slowly and kicks GOLDBERG in the stomach. GOLDBERG falls. STANLEY stands. MCCANN seizes a chair and lifts it above his head. STANLEY seizes a chair and covers his head with it. MCCANN and STANLEY circle" (52). The linguistic violence which has been inflicted upon Stanley is changed into physical violence and redirected at Goldberg. Trussler notes that Stanley is the "only person to use physical violence in the play" (47). The violence here is of course reminiscent of the beating of Riley at the conclusion of The Room: part of the intertextual model thus far includes physical resistance to the invader(s).

Critics have interpreted this crucial scene in various ways. Gale argues, "The crimes attributed to Stanley are mostly antisocial--murder, failure to keep a clean house, refusal to marry" (Butter's Going Up 56), underscoring the notion that Goldberg and McCann are societal representatives who come to force conformity upon the errant artist. He also writes "they accuse him of everything--the generalizating effect which says, it does not matter what you did, all that matters is that you did something" (Butter's Going Up 48). Sykes notes that "the majority of the accusations and questions relate to treachery and defilement. Not all; the occasional

seemingly illogical indictment. . . increases the terror. . . in that it leaves us as well as Stanley at sea and groping" (20-21). Esslin stresses that "The seemingly nonsensical brainwashing sessions in which Stanley is drowned in a welter of quick-fire questions and statements by the two terrorists contain innumerable references to the main metaphors of the play" (Pinter the Playwright 90-91), implying that this scene conflates a number of the main themes of and issues raised by the play (Oedipal desire and guilt, the role of the artist in society, etc.). Carpenter sees Goldberg and McCann's actions in the questioning as an attempt to

> goad Webber's dormant sense of reponsibility toward others: his "old mum" and (perhaps) a fiancee he left in the lurch; an "external force" he must acknowledge; the fellow members of his "trade," his "society," his "breed". . . . After provoking his guilt to the point that he finally screams, the menacers consider their preliminary task of killing the old Webber done. ("Scum or Essence" 394)

Clearly Carpenter sees part of the job of these menacers as creating an awareness in Stanley of the impact of his actions upon others and of his responsibility to them as a prelude to forming Stanley into a societally acceptable figure.

McCann's and Goldberg's declaration that Stanley is

"dead" (52) signals an end to this phase of the torment, and Meg conveniently arrives from upstairs, beating the drum and "dressed for the party" (53), bedizened in a fancy gown. Another intertextual echo of The Room occurs when Goldberg compliments her on the dress and Meg says, "My father gave it to me" (53). Her dress, like Clarissa Sands' name, is a vestige of patriarchal inheritance. This image also raises several now familiar questions: the impossibility of verification (did her father give the dress to her? why is this the only mention of the father? what else has he given her?); the Oedipal element (could "father" refer to Petey, the father-figure of the play?); and game playing (the beating of the drum signifying that the party proper is about to begin).

Stanley uses the occasion for one final attempt at resistance to his oppressors: he asks for his glasses back. Interestingly, he asks Goldberg if he can have the glasses (obviously Stanley fully recognizes by this point that Goldberg is in charge), but it is McCann who has them and returns them when Goldberg assents. Carpenter notes that Stanley's request for the return of his glasses "are his last words in the play" ("Scum or Essence" 395); apparently this small victory over the forces of menace are Stanley's last gasp.

After distributing the glasses and pouring drink, Goldberg forces Meg to propose a toast for the occasion. She initially resists in a somewhat coy manner, but finally offers her toast:

> Well--it's very, very nice to be here tonight in my house, and I want to propose a toast to Stanley, because it's his birthday, and he's lived here for a long while now, and he's my Stanley now. And I think he's a good boy, although sometimes he's bad . . . . And he's the only Stanley I know, and I know him better than all the world, although he doesn't think so . . . . Well, I could cry because I'm so happy, having him here and not gone away, on his birthday, and there isn't anything I wouldn't do for him, and all you good people here tonight. . . . (<u>She sobs</u>.) (55)

The toast is interesting for a number of reasons. Most importantly, Meg is forced here to articulate her emotions, something Rose in <u>The Room</u> never does; thus this speech represents an advance in the model over that earlier play. The line "very, very nice" (reminiscent of the opening of the play with the discussion of the breakfast) is a reminder that the language used by these characters is often meaningless pleasantry, totally devoid of the capacity to convey significance or communication. The Oedipal element is underscored by Meg's calling Stanley her "boy." Her assertion that "he's my Stanley now" is certainly ironic, given that it is uttered in the presence of two whose design is to take him away from her.

That Meg's mind works in routine patterns is suggested by two sentences in a row which have the same structure: "And I think he's a good boy, although he's sometimes bad" and "And he's the only Stanley I know, and I know him better than all the world, although he doesn't think so." Apparently the sentence structure STATEMENT/ALTHOUGH/CONVERSE is one of the routine ways in which Meg's mind functions, one of the habitual ways in which she attempts to make sense of the world. One can easily supply the mental model for these sentences, the basic premise under which Meg has lived the last year of her life: "Stanley is my little boy although he clearly is not."

Lulu enters just after the toast, but before the drinking, so a bit of stage business is involved in getting her a drink before the toast is drunk:

> GOLDBERG. Everyone standing up? No, not you Stanley, You must sit down.
> MCCANN. Yes, that's right. He must sit down.
> GOLDBERG. You don't mind sitting down a minute? We're going to drink to you.
> MEG. Come on!
> LULU. Come on!
>
> STANLEY sits in a chair at the table. (55-56)

Once again the "sitting down" game is played and once again Stanley is forced to sit, has his will subverted to

that of his tormenters, is symbolically robbed of his masculinity.

Meg's emotional toast causes Goldberg to go off on a tangent of memory about the past. During his speech he describes "the sort of man I am. . . . A little Austin, tea in Fullers, a library book from Boots, and I'm satisfied" (56). This apparently innocuous speech heightens the element of menace since the Fullers tea shop and the Boots library were prominently mentioned by Stanley earlier in the act when he claimed to know McCann from somewhere. Although the impossibility of verification is once again operative here, Goldberg seems to have some knowledge of Stanley's former life in Maidenhead. Even if Goldberg himself was not there (perhaps as part of some organization there which Stanley betrayed or a victim of something Stanley did), at the very least he is familiar with the details of how Stanley lived there.

At this point, a curious sort of flirtation begins between Goldberg and Lulu, who keeps complimenting him on his "wonderful speech" (56). Goldberg claims to be an accomplished speaker, having given a lecture at the Ethical Hall, Bayswater, on the subject of "The Necessary and the Possible" (57)--a clear tie to his questioning of Stanley about the number 846 during the earlier scene. He

says that the lecture was "a bomb. Since then I always speak at weddings" (57). One wonders in what sense the party for Stanley's birthday at which Goldberg has just spoken is a wedding.

The act continues with a curious quartet of dialogue: as he gets her quite drunk, McCann and Meg are speaking on the subject of mixing liquor and its consequences while Goldberg sucessfully talks Lulu into sitting on his lap and tells her about his late wife and her funeral. Part of Goldberg and Lulu's seduction conversation again raises the Oedipal element so common in Pinter's theatrical world:

> LULU. Do you think you knew me when I was a little girl?
> GOLDBERG. Were you a nice little girl?
> LULU. I was. . . .
> GOLDBERG. Maybe I played piggy-back with you.
> LULU. Maybe you did. . . .
> GOLDBERG. Or pop goes the weasel. . . .
> LULU. You're tickling me!
> GOLDBERG. You should worry. (59-60)

The Oedipal connotations of this conversation are clear, but Lulu further articulates them when she says to Goldberg, "You're the dead image of the first man I ever loved" (61); the first man most little girls ever love is their father.

In the middle of this flirtation, Meg and McCann con-

tinue to talk and Meg tells him about her childhood, which puts McCann in a nostalgic mood, so he sings an Irish song about a man named Reilly (a clear intertextual connection to the invader figure from The Room). Meg interrupts the song saying, "I want to play a game!" (61). The game of blind man's buff ensues and serves as the climax of this act.

Concerning the game of blind man's buff, Kaufman writes:

> Because this party game requires that the players be blind-folded and that the game proceed in silence, Pinter may exploit two of his recurring motifs. The first is the figure of the blind man which variously relates to the dark mysteries of human experience or to the character's refusal or inability to penetrate beyond the surfaces. The second motif, more properly a technique, is silence. In blind man's buff the silence necessary to avoid being "it" corresponds to the notorious Pinter pauses, revealing stillnesses that essentially serve the same protective function outside the game. . . . This game is the perfect vehicle for Pinter's view that people fail to communicate, not because they are unable to, but because they are afraid to. (169)

Indeed, the game at the heart of Act Two is a metaphor for the whole play: characters blindly feel for someone to take away their blindness, to reintegrate them into a familiar world, while other characters--Goldberg and McCann--act to subvert that process.

Also, the game offers an interesting parallel to

previously described events. When Stanley recounts his career as a concert pianist, he tells of his music being "silenced" because the theatre at which he was to perform was locked up. Given Stanley's verbosity in Act One and thus far into Act Two, the silence of the game is a distant, but powerful echo of this artistic silence and, like it, is at least partially imposed by outside factors--the rules of the game.

At first, Meg is "it" and, while she wanders about blindfolded, the stage directions instruct "GOLDBERG fondles LULU" (62)--thus they carry their private game on into the public one. Meg first touches McCann and he becomes "it"; in turn McCann touches Stanley--significantly, one of the tormentors, not Meg, makes Stanley "it." In order for Stanley to have the scarf tied around his eyes, he must remove his glasses; McCann takes them, thus reasserting his control over Stanley and blinding him not only through the scarf but also through the removal of his glasses. Of course, this completes the maneuver begun during the questioning scene. Significantly, after Stanley is blindfolded, McCann deliberately breaks Stanley's glasses, removing the possibility that he can simply ask for them back after the game is over.

While Stanley walks blindfolded across the stage, McCann takes his drum and places it is his path: "STANLEY walks into the drum and falls over with his foot caught in it" (63). This can be read in many ways: as simply a nasty trick to play on a blindfolded man; as symbolic of the severance of Stanley's ties to Meg (she, after all, gave him the drum, and Goldberg and McCann are there to take Stanley away from her and out of her sphere of influence); as symbolic of the final theft of Stanley's potential as an artist (the drum was initially described as a substitute for a piano); and, as Trussler notes, the "parallel [is drawn] between the shattered instrument and its . . . owner" (51), thus reading the drum as representative of Stanley and what Goldberg and McCann are doing to him.

Stanley wanders over to Meg and puts his hands around her throat. As he begins to strangle her, the lights go out. In an almost comic slapstick squence, the members of the party struggle to find each other and to get a flashlight to work. When it finally does, Stanley is discovered leaning over a prone Lulu whom he has placed up on the table. He giggles in response to having the light shined on him. The stage directions call for the giggle to rise and grow "as he flattens himself against the wall.

Their figures converge upon him" (66); then the act ends.

Esslin gives the standard reading of this climactic scene:

> Thus Stanley, having tried to strangle Meg and to rape Lulu, seems to have gone out of his mind as the avenging representatives of the organization finally lay hands on him. (Pinter the Playwright 83)

Gale echoes this view claiming that Stanley "turns on the two women, first trying to strangle Meg and then trying to rape Lulu" (Butter's Going Up 54). Also, Katherine Burkman shares this view: "Stanley becomes more than a victim when he attempts to strangle his landlady Meg and rape the visiting Lulu" (21). Kaufman reads the scene in the same manner: "The blind man Stanley shatters the ritual framework of the game. . . with violent and passionate gestures of murder and rape" (168).

An alternative reading of this scene is possible, however. Carpenter persuasively argues that the scene can be interpreted according to his view that the play represents an actual birth. Thus he reads part of McCann's role at the party as "an obstetrical assignment. . . to ply the mother with anaesthetizing whisky" ("Scum or Essence" 396). Carpenter stresses that Stanley, both blindfolded and in the dark, "cannot see the person he is

choking" (395) and argues that his reaction of attempted strangulation is an unconscious response to her betrayal of the "edenic womb-life" (395) he had been enjoying at her house.[7]

Carpenter goes on to claim that the Lulu episode has also been radically misread by critics:

> Virtually every commentator on The Birthday Party, from the casual to the cumbersome, has dismissed this as an attempted rape. . . . These critics have remained oblivious to the plain fact that Stanley has moved Lulu from an advantageous raping position, flat on the floor, to an utterly impossible one (barring a unique expertise at table-raping). The fact is that he does not have sex on his mind at all. Unconsciously, as revealed by this further step in his recent series of symbolic activities, he seeks a new source of the Edenic womb-life he has lost. Meg has failed him; perhaps Lulu (who brought the drum originally) will not. In the blackness, he weirdly and ritualistically "measures" her for the task. ("Scum or Essence" 396)

This reading certainly sheds new light on the scene. The game of blind man's buff is thus possibly an enactment of a birth--Carpenter even claims that one of Goldberg's names, Nat, is short for nativity (392).

After this harrowing conclusion to Act Two, the third

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[7] Carpenter reads Stanley's calling Meg a "succulent old washing bag" (18) as a reference to the bag of waters which bursts symbolically when Stanley ruptures the membrane of the drum while blindfolded ("Scum or Essence" 395). Read in this light, the drum becomes an objectification of Meg herself, and its destruction is necessary for the birth to proceed.

act is anti-climactic; Gale calls it "an epilogue in which we see the results of Stanley's ordeal" (Butter's Going Up 54). Sykes notes that "The third act is largely concerned with the effect of [Stanley's] fate on other people--one reason why The Birthday Party is a more complex and wider-reaching play" (22). Whether this act is described in terms of "results" or "effects," it represents an advance over the end of The Room since the actions do have an impact on all the characters; Stanley's fate is more complex than Rose's simply because his life is not the only one affected by what happens to him.

In Act Three several loose ends are tied up: for example, an echo of the first act occurs when Meg and Petey have another breakfast (but Meg has run out of bacon, giving the last of it to Goldberg and McCann)[e]; Goldberg asserts that Stanley has had a nervous breakdown and needs professional treatment; Meg and Petey discuss Goldberg's car (reminiscent of Stanley's threat of the van which is coming with the wheelbarrow from Act One); Goldberg and McCann both appear to be upset and testy over the happenings of last night (this is in fact the scene where Goldberg violently resists when McCann calls him Simey);

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[e] Trussler notes the change here from The Room where Bert has a rasher of bacon for his breakfast (45). Admittedly, it would be hard to imagine Rose letting Bert go without hot food for his breakfast.

Meg leaves to do her marketing and Lulu arrives, accusing Goldberg of having sexaully abused her. Goldberg rather lamely defends himself by claiming that the encounter occured as a result of Lulu's desires, not his.

This act functions basically as a denoument, but there are nevertheless three important scenes. The first is Goldberg's apparent lapse into mental distress, at least partially caused, one assumes, by the stress of the job he has just finished (the stress also indicated by his nearly strangling McCann when he calls Goldberg Simey).

Goldberg recites a rambling psuedo-autobiography, filled with bits of advice to McCann, mostly a combination of "business" rules and familial homilies. In the middle of this speech, Goldberg breaks down:

> And you'll find--that what I say is true. Because I believe that the world. . . (Vacant.). . . Because I believe that the world. . . (Desperate.). . . . BECAUSE I BELIEVE THAT THE WORLD. . . (Lost.). . . . (78)[9]

At the end of his rambling talk, Goldberg asks McCann to "blow in my mouth" (79)--a kind of symbolic breath of life, a mouth-to-mouth resuscitation made necessary by the strain of the job. Significantly, Goldberg seems more

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[9] The ellipses here are Pinter's. Nothing in the text has been omitted from this quotation.

like he has earlier in the play after this scene. Burkman says this scene has great importance, claiming that Stanley "is victimized by two men who are themselves frightened, potential victims of the power they serve" (21). Sakellaridou echoes this notion writing, "This revelation of weakness in two people who posed as the victimisers suggest [sic] that, in a way, they are as vulnerable as their own victims" (42). Sykes notes, "In this scene they. . . show signs of being themselves affected by the torment they have inflicted on Stanley" (10). That the invaders themselves are potential victims and that they too suffer as a result of their actions is an important new piece of the intertextual puzzle, one that will be the focus of Pinter's next play, The Dumb Waiter.

Gale reads this scene somewhat differently, claiming that

> Goldberg has lost his faith in himself and finds nothing to believe about the world. Retreating into the past, he finds a renewal of strength, and like Meg creating a meaningful world for herself when she recounts Stanley's tale of pianistic accomplishements in Act I, Goldberg grows more certain of himself as he proceeds with his repetition of the advice his father used to give him. (Butter's Going Up 55-56)

Even this reading acknowledges that Goldberg is as subject to uncertainty as the other characters and exhibits defensive or compensatory behavior just as they do. The

tormentor--the invader--is, in some important ways, the same as the victim.

The second important scene of Act Three occurs when Stanley at last makes his appearance downstairs after Meg and Lulu have both left. The stage directions state: "MCCANN goes to the door, left, and goes out. He ushers in STANLEY, who is dressed in a dark well cut suit and white collar. He holds his broken glasses in his hand. He is clean-shaven" (81). His appearance here contrasts his initial appearance in Act One; the change to a well-dressed, respectable look for Stanley is a visual reminder that Goldberg and McCann have won, have forced Stanley into conventionality; as Dukore writes, "the very sight of him indicates the intruders' triumph and his conformity" (Harold Pinter 35). In another contrast to an earlier scene, McCann has no trouble whatsoever seating Stanley in the chair.

What follows is an attempt on the part of Goldberg and McCann to "woo" (82) Stanley. Esslin describes this scene: "Goldberg and McCann subject him to another flood of verbiage, reminiscent of the previous brainwashing scene, but this time composed of cliches about recovery, treatment, recuperation and success in the conventional world" (Pinter the Playwright 84). In a ritual

stichomythia, they reassure Stanley about his glasses, saying the old ones were bad and promising to buy a new pair "out of our own pockets" (82). They promise to watch out for Stanley's mental, physical, and spiritual health. They even promise to improve his condition:

> GOLDBERG. You'll be re-oriented.
> MCCANN. You'll be rich.
> GOLDBERG. You'll be adjusted.
> MCCANN. You'll be our pride and joy.
> GOLDBERG. You'll be a mensch.
> MCCANN. You'll be a success.
> GOLDBERG. You'll be integrated.
> MCCANN. You'll give orders.
> GOLDBERG. You'll make decisions.
> MCCANN. You'll be a magnate.
> GOLDBERG. A statesman.
> MCCANN. You'll own yachts.
> GOLDBERG. Animals.
> MCCANN. Animals.
>
> GOLDBERG <u>looks at</u> MCCANN.
>
> GOLDBERG. I said animals. (83-84)

This scene is an important parallel to the interrogation scene of Act Two. The ploy there was to disconcert Stanley and reduce him to a level where Goldberg and McCann could rebuild him--this parallel scene is the beginning of that rebuilding process. Importantly, the promises are of worldly success and material gain; any personal goals or private notions of happiness are not considered here.

The end of the wooing also shows the dynamics operat-

ing between the two invaders. Their working relationship has shown signs of strain after the "job" they have done on Stanley. When McCann repeats Goldberg's line "animals," he is violating the rules of the wooing ritual which clearly call for each man in turn to add something new and attractive to the list of temptations being offered to Stanley. Kaufman reads this as "Goldberg reasserting his authority" (176), but the clear thrust of the rhythmic dialogue here is the advancement of the temptations from one subject to another, so Goldberg is pointing out the violation of the ritual.

The final important scene of Act Three occurs when Petey returns (he has been in the garden to check his peas during the wooing scene). When Goldberg and McCann are about to take Stanley off to "Monty" (85), presumably a doctor who will treat Stanley's nervous breakdown, Petey offers resistance to them for the first time in the play:

> PETEY. He can stay here.
> GOLDBERG. Don't be silly.
> PETEY. We can look after him here.
> GOLDBERG. Why do you want to look after him?
> PETEY. He's my guest.
> GOLDBERG. He needs special treatment.
> PETEY. We'll find someone.
> GOLDBERG. No. Monty's the best there is. Bring him, McCann.
>
> They help STANLEY out of the chair. GOLDBERG puts the bowler hat on STANLEY'S head. They all three move towards the door, left.

PETEY. Leave him alone!

They stop. GOLDBERG studies him.

GOLDBERG (insidiously). Why don't you come with us, Mr. Boles?
MCCANN. Yes, why don't you come with us?
GOLDBERG. Come with us to Monty. There's plenty of room in the car.

PETEY makes no move. They pass him and reach the door. MCCANN opens the door and picks up the suitcases.

PETEY (broken). Stan, don't let them tell you what to do! (85-86)

This feeble attempt on Petey's part to defend his guest, his surrogate son, is touching. He realizes his helplessness when the two tormentors imply that they can treat him just as they have treated Stanley. His final words to Stanley create the saddest moment of the play, since Goldberg and McCann exist solely for the purpose of telling Stanley what to do. Trussler writes that "The gesture is a tiny one, but it is also the only one anybody makes in the play" (46). Hinchliffe reads this as the most significant moment of the play, stating that "At the end of the play, Petey's guilt is our own" (54), drawing a connection between Petey's lack of willingness or ability to protect Stanley and real world apathy to violence and oppression.

The play ends when Meg returns and asks about Stan-

ley. Petey lies to her, telling her that he's still asleep. He tries his usual behavior of hiding in the newspaper, but, when he opens it, the strips into which McCann has shredded it fall to the floor--a symbol not only of the impossibility of hiding behind it anymore, but also of the tearing up of his and Meg's lives, at least as they have lived them for the past year. Carpenter writes of this scene: "When he opens his most reliable escape hatch, the paper, five strips of an inside sheet flutter to the floor. Moreover, they remain on stage, mockingly radiating the destructive power of Goldberg and McCann" ("Scum or Essence" 390). The curtain falls on Meg telling Petey about the party and how she was "the belle of the ball" (87).

Critical evaluations of this play have generally been positive. Esslin writes, "Pinter's play, his first mature contribution to dramatic literature, is a wholly individual, wholly original creation" (Pinter the Playwright 91). Gale praises The Birthday Party for making the menace more concrete, less overtly symbolic than the blind black man of The Room:

> The Birthday Party continues the theme of menace initiated in The Room, but the menace is less mysterious and more specifically concerned with matters of society in the second play, and in addition,

> where we fear for Rose in the first drama, Stan makes us aware that we should fear for ourselves. We cannot create a secure environment as attempted by Rose, nor can we hide from insecurity in an already existing situation as tried by Stan. (Butter's Going Up 58-59)

Indeed, the humanization of the threat, the menace, is an advance over The Room. One of the developing features of the intertext is the increasingly human and familiar face of the invader.

This play is often compared to other landmarks of twentieth century literature. Boulton (134) and Hinchliffe (59) note the similarities between the world of The Birthday Party and the seedy world of small-time hoods and henchmen in the novels of Graham Greene (particularly Brighton Rock). Esslin compares it to Franz Kafka's The Trial since in both works "the hero. . . suffers from unaccountable guilt feelings and is also, at the end, taken away to his execution by two angels of death in the guise of respectable-looking gentlemen" (Pinter the Playwright 91). Trussler compares the work to Max Frisch's The Fire Raisers, seeing both works as the "domestication of apathy in the face of violence, of the turning not of the other cheek towards pain inflicted upon oneself, but of the blind eye toward humiliation inflicted on others" (44).

As we have seen, The Birthday Party exhibits in a full-length context, important elements of the intertext developing in the early Pinter plays. It adds some new elements, to be sure, and refocuses others, but this play can be read as a variation on a theme familiar to readers or audiences who know The Room. The insider who hides in a room reappears as does the invasion from outside, but the invaders now function more like the other characters and less overtly as symbols; even when read symbolically, they are not stark avatars of death, but representatives of the Western culture which exerts its hegemony on Stanley through these two men. Because of the range Pinter gives himself in this longer play and because of the increased sophistication with which he treats the invaders, The Birthday Party is obviously a stronger, better play.

In his next play, the one act The Dumb Waiter, Pinter will concentrate more heavily on one particular aspect of the intertextual model being established: the world of the invaders. In this play, the invaders will be further humanized and their world will be shown to be as fraught with menace and uncertainty as the world of the room. Like the previous two plays, The Dumb Waiter also happens in a room, but this time it does not "belong" to any of

the characters and thus whatever protection and comfort it can offer is only temporary and transient. Since this play is so short and deals with only one aspect of the model, the intertextual elements here are usually presented in a truncated form, but these hallmarks of Pinter's theatrical world continue to be articulated nevertheless.

CHAPTER 4

HAROLD PINTER'S THE DUMB WAITER

Pinter's next play, the one-act The Dumb Waiter, was the third he wrote during 1957 (Trussler 51). In this short play, the focus is narrowed to a small element of the intertextual model which Pinter develops during the first two plays. The Dumb Waiter has echoes of both The Room and The Birthday Party, to be sure, but takes a single segment of the multi-play model as its basis. The play takes place in the basement of a house--allowing Pinter to limn that region so feared by Rose--and concerns two hoods--akin to Goldberg and McCann--who apparently have been hired to kill someone.

The chief contribution of The Dumb Waiter to the model taking shape is the notion that the world of the invaders is as uncertain and as subject to menace and threat as the world which they invade. Although this concept was vaguely hinted at in the workings of Goldberg and McCann in The Birthday Party, it is the central controlling idea of The Dumb Waiter; as Dukore puts it, "Whereas The Birthday Party chiefly focuses on the victim, The Dumb Waiter centres upon the victimisers" (Harold Pinter 36). Also, for the first time, this play takes Pinter into an all-male world, a feature developed more explicitly later

in plays such as Pinter's own The Caretaker and No Man's Land and Mamet's American Buffalo.

Many features of the model surface in this relatively simple play: the reading of a newspaper, an argument over what words are proper for describing a certain action, the threat to a character who questions the system, the impossibility of verifying past events, the tight focus on the actions inside a single room "enclosed by a dark, mysterious world outside" (Esslin, Pinter the Playwright 73). As in The Birthday Party, the threat is associated with a system or "organization" and thus is more complex, more identifiable with forces outside the characters themselves, but as in The Room the menace to these hoodlums is overtly symbolic and abstracted from actual, realistic characters. Esslin sees this feature of The Dumb Waiter as "a considerable step forward in Pinter's personal style" (Pinter the Playwright 76), since he sees the threat to these realistically drawn characters as being clearly expressions of their subconsciouses. Also the threat here is directed against figures whose type was seen as the threat in The Birthday Party.

The action of the play is simple enough: two hoods, Ben and Gus, wait in the basement of a supposedly abandoned and empty house for instructions to do a job--to kill someone. Ben reads the paper and expresses amazement

to Gus at some of the stories he reads. The two argue over conflicting memories of the past. Matches are slipped under the door, but no one is outside when they check to see who is there. They nearly come to blows discussing the proper terminology for lighting a gas stove. In their discussion of a recent job, Gus reveals his growing discomfort with what they are required to do. Suddenly, the dumb waiter in the room begins to move, and it brings down orders from above for food. As the two men send up what little food they have, the meals requested become more and more exotic. Ben tries the speaking tube to talk to the sender of the orders, but gets only complaints about what has been sent up. When Gus goes off to get a drink of water, the voice on the tube tells Ben that the victim has arrived and will be the next person to enter the basement. Then Gus, stripped of his coat, vest, tie, and revolver, stumbles into the room. The curtain descends on Ben pointing his gun at Gus.

Again as is the case in The Room, the title of this play is multivalent. Dukore sees the title as having three possible referents:

> One is the machine with its unexplained, perhaps inexplicable, descents and ascents. This referent stresses the irrational universe in which man finds himself. Perhaps the title alludes to Gus, the inquisitive killer who, while waiting, foolishly questions his colleague Ben about why people in the newspaper stories did what they did, why it takes the

> lavatory tank so long to fill, and--more dangerously--matters concerning their job . . . . The title may also refer to Ben, the waiter who is dumb in that he displays no intellectual curiosity about motives and actions, and in that he mutely accepts orders. (Harold Pinter 36)

Gale sees the ambiguity of the title as important to the theme of ambiguous or indeterminate meaning in Pinter's work generally:

> Ambiguity is a keystone in Pinter's drama, and the title of this play is in line with such a technique. Does it refer to the actual machine, Ben's lack of insight, or the silent killer waiting for his prey? Probably all three are involved. Such ambiguity is symptomatic of Pinter's view of the universe. (Butter's Going Up 62)

Certainly Dukore accurately delineates the possible meanings of the title and Gale argues that the multiplicity of referents for the title is part of Pinter's technique. They both ignore a metatheatrical possibility for the meaning of the title, however. The title could refer to the audience in the theatre, waiting silently to see what will happen, as entrapped in the conventions of how an audience behaves and what a play is supposed to be and do as Ben and Gus are entrapped in their routine.[1]

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[1] Elin Diamond raises this possible metatheatrical referent for the title specifically in regards to the end of the play: "We stare at the tableau of Ben aiming his gun at Gus. Once again they are dumb waiters. So are we: on the edge of our seats wondering if the gun will go off" (108).

The events at the start of the play are by now familiar Theatre of Menace cliches from Pinter's earlier works. Esslin connects the start of The Dumb Waiter with that of The Room:

> The variation of the opening situation of The Room is brilliantly ingenious and intelligent. Rose, in her room, looking at her door, was clearly a victim-to-be. Ben and Gus are looking at the door waiting for the victim to walk into the trap. This provides a very different element of suspense and a very different focus for the spectator's fears and hopes. (Pinter the Playwright 74)

In this play, Pinter executes a variation on a theme already known through its appearance in an earlier play. Knowledge of The Room thus is essential for a full reading of The Dumb Waiter since the variations only achieve their full significance when their original theme is familiar.

The first stage directions read: "BEN is lying on a bed, left, reading a paper. GUS is sitting on a bed, right, tying his shoelaces, with difficulty" (85). The roles here are firmly established based on an intertextual reading. Ben is the dominant character, the one who will be served. His attitude of relaxation while the other character is active and his newspaper establish this through their echo of Bert in The Room. Later in the play, this echo will become even stronger since Gus is the

character who finds and prepares what little food gets sent up in the dumb waiter (as Rose in The Room and Meg in The Birthday Party were the purveyors of food in their respective plays).

Ben's paper is once again a mechanism for limiting or controlling communication; wrapped up in reading his paper, he can avoid conversation with or even notice of Gus if he wishes. The paper here is imperfect for its task, however, since Gus's recurring trouble with his shoes--his untying and retying them and retrieving objects from inside them--tempts Ben to look over his paper in annoyance to see what is the matter.[e]

Dukore reads Gus's trouble with his shoes as important for the theme of the play as a whole. Gus does not find either the cigarettes or matches he looks for in his shoes. Dukore writes:

> Although one hesitates to overload a short comic

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[e] Gus' trouble with his shoes early in The Dumb Waiter seems a faint but deliberate allusion to Estragon's problems with his shoes at the opening of Beckett's Waiting for Godot. Beckett's impact on Pinter is discussed briefly in Chapter One. This allusion might be construed as important since Estragon is betrayed by Vladimir when the boy with a message from Godot returns while Estragon is asleep in Act Two of that play, just as Ben is ordered to betray Gus, who is at that point off-stage temporarily, in The Dumb Waiter. Carpenter calls the parallels of the two plays' opening scenes, not an allusion, but "a light note of parody" ("Absurdity of Dread" 281).

> scene with heavy symbolism, the pantomime comically hints at a noncomic conclusion, for the absence of cigarettes and matches symbolizes the depletion of Gus's sustenance, and their condition anticipates his dishevelment and danger of imminent destruction. (Where Laughter Stops 17)

Thus, Gus's inability to find himself a cigarette can be seen as foreshadowing his inability to provide the requested food later in the play; this failure is one of a series of Gus's failures to accomplish what he sets out to do.

Gus goes off-stage to the lavatory, but cannot get the toilet to flush. This small detail has great significance, however, since Gus will have trouble "working" things ranging from the dumb waiter itself to the speaking tube next to it to the toilet in the course of the play. Continuing this motif, even his own job will present him great troubles in performing the tasks required of him. Gus's difficulties--such as the shoes and the toilet--are part of a continuing leitmotif here: Gus simply cannot get ordinary things to cooperate with him.

When he returns to the room, Ben distracts him by referring to the stories in the newspaper he is reading:

> What about this? Listen to this. . . . A man of eighty-seven wanted to cross the road. But there was a lot of traffic, see? He couldn't see how he was going to squeeze through. So he crawled under a lorry. . . . He crawled under a lorry. A stationary

> lorry. . . . The lorry started and ran over him. . . . That's what it says here. (86)

As in The Birthday Party, the subject of the newspaper story introduces an important theme into the play, but that theme here is death, not birth as in the earlier play. In fact, all the stories referred to by Ben from the newspaper will deal with death: for example, "A child of eight killed a cat!" (87). Significantly, Gus reacts with incredulity to each of them. Apparently one of the givens of The Dumb Waiter is that two men who are hired to murder people have trouble believing in somewhat extraordinary deaths other than the ones for which they are directly responsible.[3] This is the first instance of a theme which comes to dominate this play--the omnipresent possibility of immediate death. As soon becomes clear, these are two hired assassins, murderers, hit-men who are in the midst of a job.

When Ben raises the question of their tea, another element of the intertext is clearly alluded to: the providing of nourishment. Once again the roles are clear: Ben dominates by requesting the tea and waiting for it to

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[3] Dukore notes this point, writing, "their shocked and indignant reaction to newspaper stories about the deaths of an old man and a cat [are comically incongruous] in contrast to their unemotional attitude toward the murder they will commit" (Harold Pinter 38).

be served and Gus serves by preparing it.

The introduction of the tea is accompianied by an echo of Pinter's forerunner Samuel Beckett. When Ben introduces the tea, the dialogue and the stage directions are at odds:

> BEN. What about the tea?
> GUS. I'm just going to make it.
> BEN. Well, go on, make it.
> GUS. Yes, I will. (He sits in a chair.) (86)

Like Vladimir and Estragon at the end of each act of Beckett's Waiting for Godot, who speak of going off but do not move, Gus's speech indicates that he will go to make the tea, but the stage directions call for him to sit down.

After being seated, Gus reveals his concern with comfort by discussing the crockery left for them on this job. As is by now firmly established for the "insider" figure, one of Gus's worries is the comfort of his room. Even though this is not his permanent space, Gus is gratified with the "very nice crockery" (87) provided for their use.

Even after this digression, Gus does not go off to make the tea. The newspaper story of the child killing the cat follows; curiously enough, Ben and Gus come to the conclusion when discussing this story, that the actual cat-murderer has gotten away with the crime by passing off

the blame onto someone else. This seems particularly ironic coming from two professional killers.

Next, Ben and Gus discuss the toilet which does not work, underscoring Gus's inability to get the machinery of life to function for him. Finally, in this play's most clear echo of Rose and her concern with the basement, Gus complains about their accommodations on the current job:

> I wouldn't like to live in this dump. I wouldn't mind if you had a window, you could see what it looked like outside. . . . I like to have a bit of a view. . . . I like to look at the scenery. (89-90)

The model established in The Room clearly indicates the basement as a dark, damp, dank, unpleasant place, infinitely less preferable than the room Rose inhabits with Bert. One wonders to what extent Ben and Gus are like Riley from The Room, waiting in the nether regions of a house for someone to leave so they can go upstairs to do their job on some unsuspecting victim, some person who loves his or her room and fears the basement. The figurative identification of Riley with death has been literalized in The Dumb Waiter through the criminal occupation of its two characters.

More conversation about the accommodations follows. Despite Ben's continuing requests for tea, Gus does not

prepare it, but complains about the lack of a blanket, the necessity of having to wait for a call about their weekly "job," and the fact that this room--unlike others in which they have waited--has no wireless. Gus's final complaint in this series of gripes is that the sheets on the bed were dirty: "I don't want to share my bed-sheets. I told you things were going down the drain" (92).

This scene serves several purposes. Gus's matter-of-fact discussion of the working conditions reinforces the businesslike atmosphere established about the job these two characters perform. It also demonstrates again that Ben is the superior, more experienced of the two since Gus's discovery that the sheets had been used by others comes when Ben explains why he stopped the car and waited outside the house for the previous occupants of this room to leave; Ben is clearly running this operation and knows more than Gus whose complaints are disturbing in the face of Ben's complacent acceptance of whatever "he" (91)--apparently their boss in the organization--provides for them. In retrospect, one can see the reasons why the organization may well want to be rid of Gus: he does not blindly accept what demands are made upon him and does not perform his job--e.g., making the tea--immediately when called upon to do so by a superior. Gus is perhaps a

transformation of Stanley from The Birthday Party, a potential betrayer of an organization which may exact retribution on him; as Gale puts it, Gus is "presenting a threat to society because he questions rather than accepts" (Butter's Going Up 59).

Next, Ben and Gus discuss a common memory, reintroducing the intertextual theme of the impossibility of verification. The disputed incident involves a soccer match they may have seen sometime in the past during a break from an earlier job:

> GUS. I saw the Villa get beat in a cup tie once. Who was it against now? White shirts. It was one-all at half-time. I'll never forget it. Their opponents won by a penalty. Talk about drama. Yes, it was a disputed penalty. Disputed. They got beat two-one, anyway, because of it. You were there yourself.
> BEN. Not me.
> GUS. Yes, you were there. Don't you remember that disputed penalty?
> BEN. No.
> GUS. He went down just inside the area. Then they said he was just acting. I didn't think the other bloke touched him myself. But the referee had the ball on the spot.
> BEN. Didn't touch him! What are you talking about? He laid him out flat! (93)

This memory is simply a substitute version of Stanley Webber's concert career: an event from the past which can never be accurately discussed since any true knowledge of the events is beyond retrieval. The dynamics of such dis-

cussions allow the character whose memory is finally agreed upon to claim a victory over the other character, to solidify power. Also the impossibility of determining the facts adds to the atmosphere of menace; by merely juxtaposing "mutually contradictory statements of fact" (Gale, Butter's Going Up 154), Pinter reinforces the menace surrounding the room in which these men argue.

Curiously, Ben twice denies being at the game under discussion, but he still wants his version to become the final, mutually accepted version of the past. Whether Ben was actually at the game is less important than the fact that he wishes to claim a superior knowledge of its events; to permit Gus to narrate an event from the past unquestioned or unchallenged would be to sacrifice some authority, to retreat from a powerful position to one with less power.

The discussion becomes further clouded when they begin to discuss whether the game took place in Birmingham--where Ben says they are during the play and the home city of the Aston Villa--or at Tottenham--where Gus claims never to have visited. Ben further tries to establish expertise on this subject by insisting that the Villa were playing an away game when the disputed call caused their eventual defeat. Just like Mr. Kidd and his

sister from The Room and Stanley's career as a pianist in The Birthday Party, the game between the Aston Villa and the Tottenham Hotspur is forever beyond the reach of verification and its discussion by characrers in a Pinter play is not an attempt to recall anything true about the past but a ploy for grabbing power by using the past.

This argument is interrupted when an envelope containing matches is slid under the door. Gus notices it and calls Ben's attention to it. Ben is again clearly defined as the partner in charge since he commands Gus to "pick it up" (95)--like a leader both giving orders and avoiding the possibility of personal risk in a potentially dangerous situation. Furthermore, Ben orders Gus to investigate the source of the matches, but no one is outside when Gus opens the door. Ironically, upon discovering that no one is behind the door, Ben says, "They must have been pretty quick" (96), but a whole page and a half of dialogue and stage business takes place between the arrival of the matches and the opening of the door.[4] These killers seem curiously inept. That the victimizers

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[4] Gale reads the significance of this: "it is funny because the audience is aware that the actual amount of time which elapsed between the envelope's appearance and Gus's opening of the door is not a matter of mere seconds, and from this discrepancy some insight into the characters' very subjective view of the universe is gained" (Butter's Going Up 61).

themselves are inept, unable to perform their jobs efficiently, is an important element of the intertext which will have a faint echo in Sloane's past criminal activities in Orton's Entertaining Mr. Sloane but will most clearly be heard in the never completed robbery from Mamet's American Buffalo.

Gale sees the mysterious origin of the matches as important in establishing the menace of this play:

> Pinter's use of the incident of the envelope of matches being pushed under the door is admirable. Terror of the unknown is evoked from the fact that no logical explanation is offered for the existence of the envelope. . . . The element of the unknown is further compounded when no one is discovered in the passageway who could have pushed the enigmatic object under the door. (Butter's Going Up 60)

This element of the unknown, mysterious threat will become the center of the play when the dumb waiter begins to function and make demands upon the two characters. The matches simply foreshadow what is to come.

The arrival of the matches introduces what is perhaps the most famous scene of The Dumb Waiter. Now that matches are available, Gus can finally go to make the tea which Ben has demanded for the duration of the action thus far. Almost immediately, however, they get into a linguistic argument of the kind already seen in Pinter's dramatic world:

GUS. I can light the kettle now.
BEN. Yes, you're always cadging matches. . . . Go on, go and light it.
GUS. Eh?
BEN. Go and light it.
GUS. Light what?
BEN. The kettle.
GUS. You mean the gas.
BEN. Who does?
GUS. You do.
BEN (his eyes narrowing). What do you mean, I mean the gas?
GUS. Well, that's what you mean, don't you? The gas.
BEN (powerfully). If I say go and light the kettle I mean go and light the kettle.
GUS. How can you light a kettle?
BEN. It's a figure of speech! Light the kettle. It's a figure of speech!
GUS. I've never heard it.
BEN. Light the kettle! It's common usage!
GUS. I think you've got it wrong.
BEN (menacing). What do you mean?
GUS. They say put on the kettle.
BEN (taut). Who says?

They stare at each other, breathing hard.

(Deliberately). I have never in all my life heard anyone say light the kettle. (97-98)

This is by now familiar Pinter territory. Dukore claims that in this scene "what is at stake is not correct usage. . . . the issue is not language but who sets the rules and who obeys" (Harold Pinter 37), a view which Esslin shares: "The dispute about language is here quite manifestly a dispute about authority, a fight for dominance" (Pinter the Playwright 78-79). Clearly this is

the Sandses' discussion of "perch" versus "sit" from The Room recast with "light the kettle" versus "light the gas." The connection of that earlier discussion with sitting down (and the subconscious association with emasculation and being seated already noted by Gabbard) draws the parallel between this discussion and the "sit-down" exchange between Goldberg and McCann in The Birthday Party; in fact, Gale claims that this argument is simply "another version of the sit-down game. It is a means through which the characters try to demonstrate their superiority over each other, to dominate each other" (Butter's Going Up 51).

Gus defends the use of the phrase by saying that his mother used it, but Ben challenges this: "Your mother? When did you last see your mother?" (98)--a clear echo of the interrogation scene in The Birthday Party. Gus reaches back into the unverifiable past to justify his terminology, but Ben will not allow himself to be beaten at this linguistic game. Finally, Ben calls upon his position in the organization: "Who's the senior partner here, me or you?" (98). By drawing upon this trump card, Ben hopes to settle this argument--in his own favor--once and for all, but Gus continues to resist using the "gas" phrase.

The argument ultimately ceases when violence erupts: the stage directions call for Ben to grab Gus "with two hands by the throat, at arm's length" (98)--an obvious parallel to the scene in The Birthday Party where McCann calls Goldberg Simey rather than Nat and is violently resisted. Clearly, one of the elements of the intertextual model developing in these two plays is that the continued use of the improper terminology by the beaten party brings with it the threat of physical harm. This will appear again in the "business" vocabulary of Mamet's American Buffalo.

One of the important factors here for the subsequent action of the play is that Gus, once again, exhibits behavior which challenges the organization, which questions its authority. If he can not do even a simple thing such as use the words provided by his boss, how can he be relied upon to perform other, more complex and dangerous tasks. Unwilling to accept the hegemony of the "organization" in this small matter, Gus further reveals his nature as a trouble-maker, a man fully prepared to disrupt the smooth flow of the chain of command.

Under duress, Gus agrees to the use of Ben's phrase, but wants to test the matches:

GUS. I want to see if they light.

BEN. What?
GUS. The matches. (98)

Esslin sees this brief exchange as fraught with menace: "Ben's 'What?' is full of the fear that Gus might be persisting in his error, that he might reply: 'if they light the gas.' He is relieved at Gus's reply" (Pinter the Playwright 79).

Ben's relief leads to the curious note on which this discussion ends. After violently coercing Gus to agree upon his terminology, Ben carelessly says, "Put on the bloody kettle, for Christ's sake" (99), inadvertently making use of the phrase Gus suggested as an alternative for "light the kettle" in the first place. Almost immediately, Ben recognizes his tactical error, for the stage directions read: "BEN goes to his bed, but, realising what he has said, stops and half turns. They look at each other. GUS slowly exits, left. BEN slams his paper down on the bed and sits on it, head in hands" (99). Esslin reads this as foreshadowing "the final confrontation of executioner and victim" (Pinter the Playwright 79). He also claims that this scene is emblematic of the theme of dumbness in the play as a whole: "The failure--on the part of Gus and Ben--to understand the workings of their organization, their frustration and irritation finds

its expression in the dialogue, which bristles with their difficulties of communication" (Pinter the Playwright 77).

Gus immediately returns once the stove is going and begins another important exchange:

> GUS. . . . I wonder who it'll be tonight. . . . Eh, I've been wanting to ask you something. . . .
> BEN. . . . What's the matter with you? You're always asking me questions. What's the matter with you?
> GUS. Nothing.
> BEN. You never used to ask so many damn questions. What's come over you?
> GUS. No, I was just wondering.
> BEN. Stop wondering. You've got a job to do. Why don't you just do it and shut up? (99)

In a clear intertextual parallel to The Birthday Party, Gus is like Stanley--threatening the system by questioning it. Significantly, Ben wants Gus to be silent like Stanley at the end of that play, dumbly and complacently going along with whatever is demanded of him by the powers which control his fate. Again, all these questions viewed in retrospect provide the reason Gus will be eliminated.

Gale describes the parallel in more detail:

> Gus's recent penchant for asking questions. . . serves as a foreboding, since society requires obedience. Because Ben accepts everything as it is, as Goldberg advised McCann to do in The Birthday Party, he has no problems. His secret of success, "just do it and shut up," is reminiscent of Goldberg's words in the earlier play (Act I). Gus's questioning of the system leads him in front of Ben's pistol by the end of the drama. Unlike Stan, he can-

> not be forced back into an acceptable mold--he pays no attention to Ben's pleas that he remain silent. (Butter's Going Up 59)

Thus the threat existing to the victimizers is clearly connected to the threat they exert upon the victim: if Gus does not uncomplainingly go along with what is required of him, he too can become a victim. He can shift from being a McCann-like character to being a Stanley-like character. That the intertextual roles are able to shift is an important new aspect of the threat, an advance over the previous static model. The shifting nature of the roles will be significant in many plays that follow, particularly when "outsider" characters try to establish themselves as "insiders": for example Ruth in Pinter's The Homecoming, Sloane in Orton's Entertaining Mr. Sloane, and Teach in Mamet's American Buffalo.

Despite Ben's warnings not to proceed with his question, Gus does, and this provides another clue that Ben knows more than he is telling. Gus asks him, "I thought perhaps you--I mean--have you got any idea--who it's going to be tonight?" (100). Ben pretends not to understand the question; when Gus repeats it, Ben changes the subject. Of this exchange, Trussler notes, "Because of [Ben's refusal to answer the question], one gets the feeling that he 'knows something'--that he has been entrusted with more

information than Gus" (55). Arguably, Ben knows already that Gus is to be the victim. After all, Gus's questioning behavior has presumably persisted for a while prior to the night on which the action of the play takes place. If the "organization" is as tired of it as Ben seems to be, then it may have arranged with him to set Gus up. The dramatic irony of this scene adds to the effect of the end of the play since the audience must wait for it to happen as Ben must also wait for his orders to proceed.

Ben changes the subject by once again reminding Gus about the tea he has neglected all along. Gus goes off to the other room but returns; the gas has gone out and neither of them has any money for the meter:

> BEN. You'll have to wait.
> GUS. What for?
> BEN. For Wilson.
> GUS. He might not come. He might just send a message. He doesn't always come. (100)

Apparently Wilson is the "he" whom Gus has discussed earlier. This is yet another clear echo of Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot in which the two tramps wait day after day for Godot who never actually arrives but always sends a message promising to come tomorrow. This echo is part of a pattern of allusions to that landmark Theatre of the Absurd play in The Dumb Waiter, the most obvious of which

is the use of the verb "to wait" in both titles. Elin Diamond sees Beckett's play as providing "a comic model of man waiting" (96) which Pinter exploits in The Dumb Waiter.

Trussler insists, "This verbal echo of Godot is no doubt a deliberate parody, and not to be taken too seriously" (54). Carpenter seconds this notion calling The Dumb Waiter a parody of Godot, but "of an amiable sort" ("Absurdity of Dread" 280). The idea of waiting for a superior who may not come becomes a minor part of the intertextual model taking shape. It reappears in the second act of Mamet's American Buffalo in which the small-time hoods of that play wait for Fletcher--whom they see as some kind of master criminal--to appear and help them in their theft.[5]

This echo of Beckett is foregrounded soon when Gus continues his disparaging harangue on the conditions: "You go to this address, there's a key there, there's a teapot, there's never a soul in sight. . . . All you do is wait, eh? Half the time he doesn't even bother to put

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[5] Esslin, although not commenting on this specific scene, also notes an important area of overlap between The Dumb Waiter and Beckett's play, claiming that Pinter's play is "about the relationship between a pair of human beings, on the pattern of Beckett's Nec tecum, nec sine te in Waiting for Godot" (Pinter the Playwright 79).

in an appearance, Wilson" (101). Gus also complains that Wilson is a hard man to talk to and claims, "There are a number of things I want to ask him" (102). Once again, Gus is identified with thoughts (perhaps even objections) which run counter to the goals of the organization which he serves, whose orders he is charged with carrying out.

Gus's most serious problems with his job come out in his next specific comment. After twice being warned by Ben that he is carrying these questions too far--"Scrub round it, will you?" (102) and "You'll get a swipe round your earhole if you don't watch your step" (102)--Gus brings up the victim of their last job:

> I've been thinking about the last one. . . . I was just thinking about that girl. . . . She wasn't much to look at, I know, but still. It was a mess though, wasn't it? What a mess. Honest, I can't remember a mess like that one. They don't seem to hold together like men, women. A looser texture, like. Didn't she spread, eh? She didn't half spread. Kaw! But I've been meaning to ask you.
>
> BEN <u>sits up and clenches his eyes</u>.
>
> Who clears up after we've gone? I'm curious about that. Who does the clearing up? Maybe they don't clear up. Maybe they just leave them there, eh? What do you think? How many jobs have we done? Blimey, I can't count them. What if they never clear anything up after we've gone. [sic] (102-103)

This monologue suggests Gus's basic reservations about the tasks he is required to perform. He is upset at the

memory of having killed a woman. The graphic "mess" still haunts him; apparently he has a vivid visual memory of the scene. A sort of sick gallows' humor arises out of the sexual double entendre of "spread"--referring possibly both to "spread her legs" and the mess made by her blood when they killed her. Perhaps unable to stand the joke he has made of something serious enough to bother him, Gus begins to inquire about the aftermath of their jobs--a subject he seems never to have considered before. When he realizes the aftermath of the job on him personally--translating the murder into a joke as well as being disturbed by its memory--he begins to consider another aftermath--the cleanup. From this, only one short step would lead to a third aftermath--the victim and his or her family and friends. A hired murderer cannot afford such thoughts since they would inhibit his effectiveness. Clearly, Gus is a liability to his employers. Since he pays no heed to Ben's continual warnings and is not, like Stanley Webber, relegated to silent compliance, Gus must eventually face another, more permanent sanction.

The association of a woman with Gus's discomfort over his job is the first hint of a new, important element of the intertextual model. Increasingly in later plays, the threat outside the room will be linked to women and the

room will become an all male enclave in several plays. Although this feature is present in The Dumb Waiter only in a nascent form, it will become increasingly important, particularly in the character of Ruth who is the invader figure in Pinter's The Homecoming, in the temporary bonding of Wilson and Mike in Orton's The Ruffian on the Stair, and the discussion of Grace and Ruthie (the name is probably not coincidental) in Mamet's American Buffalo who influence the action of that play although they never actually appear on stage.

At this crucial point in the play, the dumb waiter which has gone unnoticed in the wall thus far, begins to move. It alarms Gus and Ben, and "They grab their revolvers, jump up and face the wall" (103). The dumb waiter is a perfect symbol for the mysterious organization which these characters serve: it gives them orders which they sometimes cannot understand and often cannot fulfill; it complains about their performance; it is without reason or explanation; and they fear it.

Gale reads the dumb waiter as having

> a twofold significance. Most obviously it is a mystery. It represents the unknown and thus is a potential source of menace, for it begins functioning suddenly, for no apparent reason. It continues to operate in the same manner, making demands on the occupants of the room, but it is as though it were working automatically, since it takes no notice of

> the responses stimulated by its actions. . . . The actions of the machine are godlike too. It preexisted, and it initiates action of its own volition. As a representative of authority, it descends to present demands for food sacrifices. (Butter's Going Up 59)

But Gale fails to push this idea to its logical conclusion. If indeed the dumb waiter is godlike, requiring a food sacrifice to appease it, shortly the voice on the speaking tube--which both the audience and the characters assume controls the dumb waiter itself--will demand a blood sacrifice, will demand the life of one who labors to serve it.

Lois Gordon reads the dumb waiter itself as taking on one of the intertextual roles--that of the invader--identified as part of Pinter's technique in these early plays: "Pinter omits his usual third-party intruder and introduces a mechanical dumb-waiter as the external barometer of his characters' internal turmoil" (29). This reading clearly helps establish the notion that the lives of the invaders are as subject to threat as those of their victims, since the invaders themselves are invaded here.

The food orders brought by the dumb waiter begin as typical English fare: "Two braised steak and chips. Two sago puddings. Two teas without sugar" (103). They soon turn to more exotic delicacies, however: "Macaroni

Pastitsio. Ormitha Macarounada" (108). Finally the orders are for "Bamboo Shoots, Water Chestnuts and Chicken. One Char Siu and Beansprouts" (110).

Ironically, these two men have been waiting for their orders for the length of the play, but are unable to follow them or perceive their purpose when they do come. Dukore claims that in this play, "one is accustomed to an arbitrary world in which human beings have insufficient equipment to cope effectively" (Harold Pinter 37). The orders for food are part of Pinter's post-Absurdist world. They serve roughly as this play's equivalents of Riley's call for Rose to come home in The Room and the interrogation of Stanley in The Birthday Party. Dukore points out an important shift from those earlier plays to The Dumb Waiter:

> In Pinter's earlier plays, such nonrealistic elements as Rose's blindness and Stanley's interrogation are not comic. In The Dumb Waiter, demands from above for increasingly unusual dishes (from the conventional braised steak and chips to the unconventional char siu and bean-sprouts) and the incongruity of what the hired killers supply--including crisps and chocolate--are very funny. (Harold Pinter 38)

The incongruity is carried into the play itself as well; the incongruity between the petty bickering and comic frenzied attempts to provide the mysteriously ordered food on the one hand and the brutal climax of the play on the

other is part of Pinter's technique here. This incongruity, however--like the nonrealistic elements enumerated by Dukore--is not funny at all.

Gus's attempts to fill the orders reveal more tension between him and Ben. They rifle through Gus's bag in search of whatever food they can send up. Gus comes up with "Biscuits. A bar of chocolate. Half a pint of milk. . . . Packet of tea" (105) and they duly send them up the dumb waiter. Gus also finds "One Eccles cake" (103). Ben does not like this: "You never told me you had an Eccles cake. . . . Why only one? Didn't you bring one for me?" (103), underscoring the idea that Gus has been holding back on his senior partner, not telling him everything he has, everything he is thinking.

Furthermore, after Gus claims that he has given up all his food, Ben finds a packet of crisps in Gus's bag; Ben asks him, "Where did these crisps come from? . . . You're playing a dirty game, my lad! . . . I'll remember this" (106). Gus's holding out on Ben is yet another in a series of actions which indicates his lack of total loyalty and obedience to the organization which he serves. Simply put, he does not follow orders--in this case to surrender all his food. As Esslin puts it, "These efforts reveal to Ben, who clearly is the senior partner, that Gus

has been less than candid with him" (Pinter the Playwright 75). One wonders if, at the end of the play as Ben nervously points his pistol at Gus, Ben is remembering--as he threatens to do--Gus's withholding of the food earlier on.

Importantly, Ben also tries to stop Gus from communicating with whoever is operating the dumb waiter. When Gus shouts, "Wait a minute" (105) up the serving hatch, Ben sharply warns him, "Don't do that!" (105) and later will advise him, "You shouldn't shout like that" (108). Significantly, once they discover the speaking tube, it works only for Ben (Gale, Butter's Going Up 61). Not only is this yet another of the things which Gus cannot get to work for him, but it is also an important reminder that Ben is in charge and to a large extent controls what happens to Gus.

Gus and Ben discuss among themselves a reasonable explanation for these strange occurrences: namely, that the basement used to be the kitchen for a cafe. What is important about this discussion is that Gus is attempting to find a plausible, logical explanation for what happens to him. Rather than unquestioningly obeying his orders, he attempts to find reasons for them, to understand them. By attempting to reason why, he threatens the process. Since he cannot be trusted to act quickly, without con-

templation, he is a liability to his organization. Also, one should remember from The Birthday Party that the logic of the examination by agents of the society outside is tenuous at best.

Perhaps the sudden activity of the dumb waiter is a signal to Ben, for he warns Gus, "Get dressed, will you? It'll be any minute now" (108), after the activity ceases for a moment. Ben also lodges more complaints about Gus calling him "lazy" (108), "slack" (109), and insisting that he does not take adequate care of his equipment--i.e., his gun--in yet another in the list of problems with Gus's performance on the job. In response to this, Gus offers a rhetorical defense of himself and, in doing so, links his own performance with Ben's: "We've never let him down though, have we? We've never let him down. . . . We're reliable, aren't we?" (109). He also provides an excuse for his behavior on this particular job: "I've got a splitting headache" (109).

At this point, they discover the speaking tube which initially will not work for Gus, but functions properly for Ben. Significantly, Gus shouts his complaints into the tube while Ben speaks "with great deference" (111), reminding the audience of the differing attitudes toward authority exhibited by these characters. Ben relays what

he hears: "The Eccles cake was stale. . . . The chocolate was melted. . . . The milk was sour. . . . The biscuits were mouldy" (112). These complaints seem remarkably similar to Stanley's litany of what was wrong with Meg's breakfast in Act One of The Birthday Party. Also, the voice on the speaking tube legitimizes Ben's use of "light the kettle" in the argument discussed above:

> BEN. You know what he said? Light the kettle! Not put on the kettle! Not light the gas! But light the kettle!
> GUS. How can we light the kettle?
> BEN. What do you mean?
> GUS. There's no gas. (112-113)

As in the aforementioned scene, Gus's question, "How can we light the kettle?" is fraught with menace since Ben (naturally enough) fears that Gus is starting the argument over again (i.e., means "how can we light the kettle when it is the gas that lights?") when all Gus means is that there is no gas and no money for the meter. The repetition of this motif is important since it reinforces the idea that language is a powerful medium for conflict in Pinter's theatrical world. It also reminds the audience that these men are in important ways at odds with each other and have relatively short fuses by this point in the play.

Once again, Gus begins to complain. He has not had his snack and tea and is hungry, so he compares their position down in the basement with the imagined comfort of the world upstairs, in an important reversal of The Room where Rose sat in the comfort of her room and feared the horrors of the basement:

> We send him up all we've got and he's not satisfied. No, honest, it's enough to make the cat laugh. Why did you send him up all that stuff? (Thoughtfully.) Why did I send it up?
>
> Pause.
>
> Who knows what he's got upstairs? He's probably got a salad bowl. They must have something up there. They won't get much from down here. You notice they didn't ask for any salads? They've probably got a salad bowl up there. Cold meat, radishes, cucumbers. Watercress. Roll mops.
>
> Pause.
>
> Hardboiled eggs.
>
> Pause.
>
> The lot. They're probably got a crate of beer too. Probably eating my crisps with a pint of beer now. Didn't have anything to say about those crisps, did he? They do all right, don't worry about that. You don't think they're just going to sit there and wait for stuff to come up from down here, do you? That'll get them nowhere. (113-114)

In contrast to the world upstairs inside the house, Gus imagines the basement to be infinitely less preferable. He associates comfort and food--just as characters in The

Room and The Birthday Party do--with the world inside the room; the subtext of his comments is that he wants to be in the room upstairs, that he too wants to be an insider. This is an important feature of later plays using this intertextual model. Outsiders such as Sloane in Orton's comedy, Ruth in Pinter's The Homecoming, and Teach in Mamet's American Buffalo will desire insider status with their whole hearts and risk freedom or erupt into violence in order to obtain that condition.

The play then proceeds to a ritual stichomythia much like that seen in earlier Pinter plays. Ben tells Gus, "Let me give you your instructions" (114), despite Gus's query, "What for? We always do it the same way, don't we?" (114). As if any further proof were needed, the audience clearly must understand by now that this is not one of their typical jobs, since Ben delivers a series of short instructions which Gus must repeat aloud. Significantly, in the meticulous instructions, Ben fails to have Gus get out his gun. Gus again raises the question of what to do if the victim is a girl--the victim in the instructions is referred to as "he" (115)--but is told, "We do the same" (116), which elicits a shiver from him.

Gus leaves to go to the toilet, but again it will not flush for him. When he returns, Gus begins nervously and

with increasing agitation to question their situation:

> GUS. Why did he send us matches if he knew there was no gas?. . . Why did he do that? . . . (thickly). Who is it upstairs?
> BEN (nervously). What's one thing to do with another?
> GUS. Who is it, though?
> BEN. What's one thing to do with another?
>
> BEN fumbles for his paper on the bed.
>
> GUS. I asked you a question.
> BEN. Enough!

Gus is beginning to realize that the whole job is different: they've waited outside in the car; the accommodations are less than their usual cleanliness and comfort; Ben has given him instructions; the dumb waiter is making demands upon them. He seems clearly aware that Ben knows more than he himself does. Ben reaches for his newspaper in that classic Pinter gesture of cutting off communication, but Gus will not allow this retreat.

The scene continues and blossoms into the violence which was inherent in this situation from the beginning:

> GUS (feverishly). I told you before who owned this place, didn't I? I told you.
>
> BEN hits him viciously on the shoulder.
>
> I told you who ran this place, didn't I?
>
> BEN hits him viciously on the shoulder.
>
> (Violently.) Well, what's he playing all these games

for? That's what I want to know. What's he doing it for?

BEN. What games?

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

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

(Reading.) Scampi!

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

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

BEN seizes the tube and flings GUS away. He follows GUS and slaps him hard, back-handed, across the chest.

BEN. Stop it! You maniac! (118)

The violence here is merely an outgrowth of the conflict which has existed between these two men throughout the entire play; its seeds ultimately run back to Gus's disturbing Ben by fooling with his shoes as the curtain rose at the play's outset. The play has seen a series of demands made upon Gus--demands which he is increasingly unable to meet. As the senior partner, the representative of the management of the organization which both serve, Ben may be testing Gus, to see if the ultimate punishment

is really necessary. Gus's questions concerning the reason behind all this indicate that he knows Ben is aware of much more than he has told Gus.

As a symbolic representation of the business world where employees are often put to tests without their knowledge and their loyalty is examined repeatedly, this play is a serious indictment of the treatment of sensitive individuals who must exist in that world. Gale makes this argument (substituting "society" for "business world"):

> This picture of a job for everyone and everything, with everyone performing his own specialty is close enough to a description of modern society for a correlation to be drawn. Here, then, the play becomes a depiction of the fate of a sensitive man. . . presenting a threat to society because he questions rather than accepts, and who must therefore be destroyed before he destroys. (Butter's Going Up 59)

Like Stanley Webber, Gus is tested by society and found wanting; unlike Stanley, however, Gus is eliminated rather than reprogrammed. The plight of a sensitive man in the world of business will become the focus of Mamet's American Buffalo, a later play using motifs from the intertextual model Pinter establishes in these early plays.

After this violent exchange, Ben returns to that haven of peace, his newspaper, and re-examines the same stories he looked at earlier. This time, he and Gus

repeat their reactions to the stories, but without actually speaking aloud the subjects of those stories. When this repetition is completed, Gus goes off-stage "to have a glass of water" (120), just as Stanley tried initially to escape his menacers by retreating to the kitchen for a drink.

While Gus is gone, the whistle in the tube blows and Ben gets his instructions: "He has arrived and will be coming in straight away. The normal method to be employed" (120). Gus, who has exited the door left, is shoved through the door right--the door no one has entered throughout the play, the door under which the mysterious matches were slipped--and "is stripped of his jacket, waistcoat, tie, holster and revolver" (121). Obviously he has not fared well at the hands of whoever has been giving the orders. The curtain falls with the two men staring at each other.

Gale reads Gus's appearance at the end of the play as significant since it suggests "the reduction of a man to his most basic and vulnerable state" (Butter's Going Up 61); in this sense, the removal of Gus's clothing is akin to the breaking of Stanley's glasses and the blinding of Rose--representative of the death of these characters (at least of them as they have been constituted throughout the

plays in the first two cases).

The place of The Dumb Waiter is important in the model being established here. Gale delineates the important intertextual thrust of this play:

> While clearly related to The Room, The Dumb Waiter is more closely allied to The Birthday Party, which openly sets the individual against society (or the system, or the organization) and demonstrates that the man who questions must either be made to comform or be destroyed by society for its own preservation. (Butter's Going Up 63)

Trussler sums up the intertextual development of Pinter's first three plays:

> So Pinter's storey-by-storey exploration finally descends from that upper-floor Room, by way of the ground-floor lounge of The Birthday Party, into the windowless and no doubt damp basement so feared by Rose Hudd. (51)

Rose's fears are fully realized in this third play of Pinter's unofficial "house" trilogy--the world down in the basement is much as she feared it would be. One wonders to what extent the intertextual "house" motif is intentional? The model starts with a woman living in a rented room who is threatened by a mysterious figure from the basement, proceeds to a man who rents a room (are his interactions with Meg and Petey as two-faced as Rose's with Mr. Kidd?) and is threatened by two businesslike men

from outside, and concludes in the basement of a house as two businesslike men wait to find their victim who perhaps waits upstairs.

Boulton points out another important parallel between two of these early plays: "In The Birthday Party Stanley rarely, if ever, goes out of the boardinghouse, and in The Dumb Waiter the two hired killers, Ben and Gus, have no significance except within doors" (135). Boulton's point seems particularly relevant to the idea of the impossibility of verification in these plays: neither the audience nor the characters can ever positively be sure what transpired before the play began, outside the confines of the rooms because these things lack significance. The attempt to talk about them is what is important--not the events themselves.

Although admitting the connection between the earlier plays and The Dumb Waiter,[6] Martin Esslin argues for a political reading of this play:

> Is an army so different from the organization which employs Gus and Ben? In an army too men are sent to destinations where they have to await further orders as to when they are to start to shoot. Nor does the machinery by which orders pass in an army differ so very much from the manner in which Gus and Ben receive theirs. (Remember: Pinter was a con-

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[6] Particularly in that both plays use "the intervention of supernatural powers" (Pinter the Playwright 76).

> scientious objector and is a determined opponent of any organization which requires its members to use violence). (Pinter the Playwright 77)

Esslin's notion is given support by a later Pinter interview in which he claims that the overtly political later plays he will write (i.e., One for the Road and Mountain Language) treat in a literal fashion the same subjects he treated metaphorically in earlier plays (One for the Road 8).

Pinter has created a set of dramatic and theatrical motifs in these important early plays which will continue to inform his work as well as work by other playwrights working in the Theatre of Menace. Having made these advances, Pinter will turn to other concerns for a while. Gale sees his next play A Slight Ache as "a change in content" and "a new thematic exploration" (Butter's Going Up 64), and characterizes his work for the next several years as an "interlude during which he experimented with his techniques" (Butter's Going Up 64). To use Trussler's terminology, perhaps Pinter must go outside his "house" model since he has exhausted all the "stories" of it. Therefore, for the next advance on the model being discussed here, we must turn to the early work of Joe Orton, a playwright primarily known for his contemporary use of farce in his later plays such as Loot and What the Butler

Saw, but whose early work is undeniably influenced by Pinter's groundbreaking early plays and who adds some important elements which Pinter himself will use when he returns to this form in mid-career.

CHAPTER 5

JOE ORTON'S THE RUFFIAN ON THE STAIR

Joe Orton's first play, The Ruffian on the Stair, exists in two distinct versions--a radio play from 1964 (published in New Radio Drama) and a stage version from 1966 (first performed in 1967 and published in The Complete Plays edited by John Lahr). Both versions are transformations of an unpublished work Orton wrote with Kenneth Halliwell entitled The Boy Hairdresser (1960), which began as a verse satire, but then became a novel which formed the loose basis for The Ruffian on the Stair (Lahr, Prick Up Your Ears 120). This play, consisting of five short scenes, clearly shows the impact of Pinter's early work, sharing many characteristics already seen to be part of the Theatre of Menace: the isolation in a room by a woman whose husband leaves her for long stretches of time and is away when the room is first invaded; the providing of nourishment within the room; the hint of impropriety in the past life of the woman who lives in the room; the eruption of violence when the room is invaded. Orton's debt to Pinter in this play is indisputable.[1]

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[1] The best source for biographical information on Joe Orton is John Lahr's Prick Up Your Ears, a model for what a literary biography should be.

The play owes much to The Birthday Party, showing as it does the arrival of a young man seeking accommodations at what he apparently believes is a boardinghouse. The would-be lodger, Wilson--the "ruffian" of the title--frightens the "insider" figure of the room, a woman called variously Joyce and Maddy (and who was at one time called Sarah), enough that she complains to her husband Mike, who does not take the situation seriously at all. The play ends when Wilson returns (after having earlier broken windows and trashed the hall leading to the door) and creates a situation which resembles a seduction of Joyce/Maddy; Mike shoots him and he and Joyce agree to lie to the police about what has happened in an attempt to free themselves from legal troubles over the death.

Despite the play's brevity and simple plot, a number of important new elements of the intertextual model appear here for the first time, and several facets of Pinter's model are elaborated or transformed. Wilson appears to be a homosexual--a characteristic hinted at in Stanley Webber, but not fully developed. Mike has killed Wilson's brother (apparently being paid to do so) by running him down in a van. This mixture of Bert Hudd who also drives a van in his line of work in The Room, and Gus and Ben who kill for a living in The Dumb Waiter is an important

advance for this character type: the "husband" figure inside the room has been clearly identified here as a character who exerts menace on others outside the room.[e] Bigsby notes as well that "Like Pinter, Orton is concerned with underscoring the emotional and metaphysical void that he sees as lying beneath the surface of existence" (Joe Orton 26); the similarities in the set also extend to the sub-text--what happens beneath the surface of an Orton play is similar to what happens beneath the surface of a Pinter play just as the sets are alike.

Bigsby also notes that the two playwrights share a common "type" of character:

> Orton's early characters, like Pinter's, seem to inhabit a social and moral no man's land between the working class and the lower middle class to which they aspire; they are not quite at home in either. They reveal a severely limited emotional range which is reflected in a similarly restricted linguistic competence. (Joe Orton 27)

Clearly the socioeconomic conditions of the characters used in the early plays of both playwrights are quite similar. In these plays, both Orton and Pinter are exploring some of the same ground.

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[e] This feature of the model was vaguely hinted at by the connection of the van which Bert drives in The Room and the van which Meg fears is coming to take someone away in The Birthday Party, but it is clearly developed here and represents a more distinct addition to the intertextual model.

Furthermore, the confusion of names between Joyce and Maddy is reminiscent of the Rose and Sal dichotomy in The Room. Whereas that play hints that the doubly named character changed her name in an attempt to cover up a past as a prostitute, in The Ruffian on the Stair Joyce is clearly a reformed prostitute who has changed her name as part of her new, respectable life. Also, in the Pinter model the character who knows and uses a previous name holds power over the character who has a new name; that feature reappears here when Wilson knows Joyce used to be called Maddy and proceeds to use that name for her. The ultimate lack of mystery surrounding a character's history is distinctly not part of Pinter's theatrical world.

Although the 1967 stage version of The Ruffian on the Stair has come to be the accepted version usually referred to in critical discussions of the play, the early version--which was Orton's "first performed work" (Charney 45)--is important. Also important is the reason the changes were made. John Lahr explains that

> The radio version of Ruffian had grafted Orton's obsessions on to a structure borrowed from Pinter who, along with Beckett, was the only contemporary playwright besides himself Orton respected. The opening of Ruffian was alibied from the opening of The Birthday Party, a steal which Orton eschewed two years later when, with success and in control of his talent, he rewrote the play for the stage. ("Intro-

duction" to The Complete Plays 17)

In his biography of Orton, Lahr characterizes this same issue more directly: "the radio play, erected on the scaffold of Pinter's plots for The Room and The Birthday Party, was embarrassingly derivative" (Prick Up Your Ears 130). Charney sees Orton in this short play as "still working out his relation to Pinter" (45-46) and claims the play "shows an enormous debt to Pinter, and. . . is almost a parody of Pinter's early comedies of menace" (14). Bigsby claims that "The resemblance between The Ruffian on the Stair and Pinter's The Room or The Dumb Waiter is too striking for comfort" (Joe Orton 24).

Orton clearly reveals his concern over the similarities between his play and Pinter's work, writing in production notes for the first stage production of the play: "The play mustn't be presented as an example of the now out-dated 'mystery' school--vide early Pinter" (quoted in Lahr, "Introduction" 17). Even after its transformation to a less embarrassing, more original play, the echoes of Pinter discussed above still appear. That the borrowing occurred in the first place only demonstrates in the clearest form the principle of intertextuality and the development of a tradition through influence.

Despite the many obvious parallels between Pinter's

work and Orton's, Lahr sees the two playwrights as having some significant differences; Orton uses Pinter's theatrical world, but for his own effects and purposes:

> Pinter invented images of entropy; Orton of action. In Pinter's world, characters hide their needs and decoy the facts of their life. . . . Orton was in stylistic rebellion against this obfuscation. . . . In Orton's world there is no uncertainty and no secrets. Reality is outrageous enough without mystifying it. People say what they mean--but the truth still does not help them. (Prick Up Your Ears 131)

Thus, a clear transformation of Pinter's world has occurred. The reflection of Pinter's world in Orton's mirror is clear enough for the resemblance to be discerned, but Orton's own features are clear as well. In The Ruffian on the Stair, the mixture of Pinter and Orton is still awkward; as Charney puts it, "the two styles are uncomfortably juxtaposed" (47). Orton's advances on the model Pinter created will reach their fullest expression in his first full-length play, Entertaining Mr. Sloane, and Pinter himself will use them later in his play The Homecoming when he returns to Theatre of Menace after his first experimental period of playwrighting.

The original radio version of the play is almost a direct copy of Pinter strategies from The Birthday Party (Bull and Gray 85-86):

JOYCE. Did you enjoy your breakfast?
MIKE. What?
JOYCE. Did you enjoy your breakfast? The egg was nice, wasn't it? The eggs are perfect now that I have the timer. Have you noticed? (Pause.) Did it go down well?
MIKE. The egg was nice. (Lahr, Prick Up Your Ears 132)

The opening scene of this early version of the play continues in much the same vein. Bull and Gray point out that the change in menu is not the sole important difference between Pinter's play and Orton's:

> If we are aware of the dullness and boredom of Meg and Petey's existence, we are also aware of their mutual concern, and, in the solicitous repetition of the talismanic 'nice,' of Meg's role as mother-figure which will be developed later in all its strengths and limitations. . . . Orton, by contrast, has changed the pace of his very similar exchanges simply by putting them in a different medium. Radio cannot support the dead air time required to exchange plates, set up a defensive newspaper, leave and enter rooms. With the sharper pace the sense of trouble taken on another's behalf disappears and Joyce's repeated question. . . becomes harrassment. (86)

Despite this important shift, one can easily see why the scene made Orton uncomfortable when he returned to the play after a break of several years during which he became a playwright more comfortable with his own voice and techniques.

Even the stage version of the play begins with an

image straight out of vintage Pinter. The set is described: "A kitchen/living-room with a bedroom alcove. MIKE is shaving by the sink. JOYCE enters from the bedroom carrying a tray with cups, saucers, egg cup, etc." (31). The one room bed-sitter which is part of a larger house is a direct visual reminder of The Room. The opening scene of breakfast is a feature of both The Room and The Birthday Party. Mike is preparing to go out to work (as are both Bert Hudd and Petey Boles at the start of their respective plays). Missing at the outset is the trademark Pinter newspaper (which will shortly appear), but Mike's shaving and dressing can be seen as serving the same basic function of allowing the man to ignore the woman.

The first few lines of dialogue, however, are distinctly Orton and are most definitely not Pinteresque:

> JOYCE. Have you got an appointment today?
> MIKE. Yes. I'm to be at King's Cross station at eleven. I'm meeting a man in the toilet. . . .
> JOYCE. You always go to such interesting places. (32)

Orton's sexual comedy is already present here in the first lines of his first play. The homosexual implication of meeting a man in the toilet of a train station is titillating, but Joyce, merely commenting on how Mike gets to

such interesting places while she is stuck in the house, seems unaware of the possible nature of his appointment. This odd dislocation between the subject of a conversation and the attitude of the characters toward it or the tone used by the characters in it is the defining feature of what has come to be called the "Ortonesque." This opening sequence is definitely far removed from either the monologue of The Room or the desultory stichomythic question and answer opening of The Birthday Party; Orton's emphasis on comedy as opposed to Pinter's immediate establishment of mystery and menace is immediately discernable.

Joyce and Mike discuss the van which is "still under repair" (31) and Mike tells her about a man he met the previous day; this meeting also has a vaguely homosexual cast to it, and the man is clearly identified as being engaged in a criminal enterprise--cheating an insurance company. The conversation takes a turn toward a more significant subject almost immediately, however:

> JOYCE. Have you seen the date?
> MIKE. No.
> JOYCE. It's our anniversary.
> MIKE. As long as that, is it? How time flies.
> JOYCE. Two years ago you came to my flat and persuaded me to give up the life I'd been leading.
> MIKE. You're better off.
> JOYCE. Nobody ever calls me Maddy now.
> MIKE (pause). What?
> JOYCE. Nobody calls me Madelein. I used that name for five years. Before that I was Sarah up North

somewhere.
MIKE (pause, he frowns). Have you ever, since I met you, allowed another man to be intimate with you?
JOYCE. No!
MIKE. Good. I'd kill any man who messed with you. Oh, yes. I'd murder him. (32)

Mike takes no notice of this sentimentally important date, but the mention of Joyce's former life causes him to question her faithfulness to him--a clear indication of the nature of her prior life as a prostitute. Perhaps Joyce is a bit sad at never being called Maddy; at any rate, it seems strange of her to mention it, but the reference does come immediately after she documents that Mike pays little attention to at least one thing she finds important. Mike's threat against anyone who would seduce Joyce becomes important later in the play when Wilson contrives to appear with Joyce in a compromising position.

Joyce then mentions the newspapers and tells of a story she read on the morning on which the scene takes place; like Pinter's use of the newspaper stories in both The Birthday Party and The Dumb Waiter, Orton will introduce an important theme into The Ruffian on the Stair by this same ploy: "I see where a man has appeared in court charged with locking his wife in a wardrobe. She tells of her night of terror. (Pause.) What a way to celebrate your wedding anniversary" (32). The theme of spouse abuse

or neglect is raised here and will recur in this short play. In response to Joyce's reading this story, Mike says, "I'd do the same. I'd lock you up if you gave me cause for displeasure" (32). The dynamics established here persist throughout the entire play: Joyce will complain about something (either indirectly--as is the case in this scene--or quite openly) and be ignored. Arguably, by leaving her alone in the flat all day while he is out (later Joyce will claim that no one else in the house is at home in the daytime), he is locking her in a very large, figurative wardrobe.

Clearly in this instance, Orton is appropriating a Pinter technique for his own play, but an important difference can be seen as well. Joyce's earlier lines about Mike's going to such interesting places and about his leading "a more interesting life" (31) than she does combine with her mention of the newspaper story to give the audience or reader a subliminal idea that she feels stifled in her room and would like to leave it for a while each day as Mike does. This is a clear departure from Pinter characters such as Rose Hudd and Stanley Webber. The idea that the room may be both a longed for, desperately protected shelter and a stifling prison at the same time is a new aspect of the "room" element of the

intertextual model.

Joyce continues to recite newspaper stories:

> I saw there'd been an accident involving a tattooed man. He had a heart, a clenched fist and a rose all on one arm. And the name 'Ronny' was on his body in two different places. . . . A van ran him down. (32-33)

As will become clear shortly, Mike has run down this man--whose name is Frank--with his van, hence its need for repairs. The images tattooed on the man's arm seem overtly symbolic: the rose and heart being traditional symbols of love while the clenched fist seems militaristic or fascistic. An element of odd coincidence such as the reading of the story and Mike's involvement in its content will recur in Orton's plays and is part of his creation of menace; a chance reading of a newspaper story or revelation about the past may lead in strange and unexpected directions in an Orton play.

Mike leaves and Joyce begins to clean up the room, just as Rose Hudd does when Bert goes to make his run in the van. In the clearest echo from The Room to be found in this play, the doorbell rings and Joyce discovers a man in the hallway:

> WILSON (smiling). I've come about the room.
> JOYCE. I'm afraid there's been a mistake. I've nothing to do with allotting rooms. Make your

enquiries elsewhere.
WILSON. I'm not coloured. I was brought up in the Home Counties.
JOYCE. That doesn't ring a bell with me, I'm afraid.
WILSON. Is that the room?
JOYCE. That's my room.
WILSON. I couldn't share. What rent are you asking?
JOYCE. I'm not asking any.
WILSON. I don't want charity. I'd pay for my room.
JOYCE. You must've come to the wrong door. I'm sorry you've been troubled. (33)

This is clearly a recitation of the visit of the Sandses to Rose Hudd. Like the Sandses, Wilson is seeking a room and has come to the wrong door. Joyce's line "That's my room" sounds as if it could come straight from Rose's mouth in Pinter's The Room when the Sandses arrive. The conversation of two characters who are at odds on a subject is taken from Pinter territory as well.[3]

Bigsby notes the parallel to Pinter, writing, "The similarity between this and an exchange in The Room is obvious and even embarrassing" (Joe Orton 25). Clearly at this early point in his career, Orton is heavily influenced by the leading British dramatist of his time and The Ruffian on the Stair cannot help but suffer in comparison to Pinter's work.

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[3] One can easily imagine Wilson's arrival as something like what must have occurred when Stanley Webber showed up at Meg Boles' door a year or so before the events of The Birthday Party, but one should also keep in mind that the people who actually show up seeking accommodations in that play are Goldberg and McCann, the invaders who threaten.

The comedy of the line, "That doesn't ring a bell with me," is pure Orton, however. Joyce has just responded to a ring of the bell, so the line could be a figurative denial of what has just happened. Since it follows the line about Wilson's being from the Home Counties, it could also imply that Joyce is from a more exotic place of origin (or wishes to deny her past history in the Home Counties).

At any rate, the pattern established in The Room persists, since Joyce invites Wilson in for a cup of tea. Wilson begins to tell Joyce about his job--"I'm a Gents hairdresser" (34)--a job stereotypically held by homosexuals. He claims, "My brother was in the business too. Until he was involved in an accident. . . . A van knocked him down" (34). This apparently casual remark becomes ominous when connected to the newspaper story Joyce mentioned to Mike earlier on in this scene and to Mike's van being in the shop for repairs.

Joyce makes this connection immediately:

> JOYCE. Was he tattooed?
> WILSON. You've heard of him?
> JOYCE. I've heard of his tattoos. (34)

Wilson proceeds to tell her that he is wearing a pair of his brother's underwear: "I'm wearing a pair of his white

shorts at this moment. They're inconvenient . . . because . . . (He blurts it out.)--there's no fly" (34). The idea that these two men were homosexual partners--in fact were committing "homosexual incest" (Esslin, "Comedy of [Ill] Manners" 95)--is raised here since the brother apparently wore women's underwear--white shorts with no fly. Wilson hastens to add: "They weren't mentioned in the press. They didn't realise the important part I played in Frank's life" (34-35)--another element adding to the implication that the two were gay lovers.

Almost immediately, however, Orton veers off into Pinter territory once again. Speaking of Frank's death, Wilson says:

> WILSON. It wasn't an accident. . . . He was murdered.
> JOYCE. You don't know that.
> WILSON. Don't contradict me!
>
> JOYCE stares in surprise.
>
> JOYCE (angry). This is a private house. What do you mean by raising your voice? I'm not having perfect strangers talking to me like that. . . . Drink your tea and clear off. I don't want to see you here again. My husband will be back soon.
> WILSON. He's not your husband.
> JOYCE (furious). How dare you. You've gone too far. Leave my room at once.
> WILSON. You're not married. You want to watch yourself.
> JOYCE. I've a good mind to call a policeman.
> WILSON. You aren't on the phone.
> JOYCE. I can knock on the floor.

WILSON. There's nobody downstairs. (35)

The element of menace is unmistakable here. Joyce, having attempted to be cordial by inviting what she takes to be a lost young man in to tea, is thrust into a situation in which she is conceivably in grave physical danger, for, as Wilson says, "Do you know I could murder you. . . . That's how these assaults on lonely women are all committed. I could make a very nasty attack on you at this moment. If I was so inclined" (35).

Suddenly Wilson has become the kind of overtly threatening invader typified by Goldberg and McCann. He has already expressed a desire to live in Joyce's room and now threatens her physically. At this point, Wilson begins asking the frightened Joyce about her husband: "Is your husband passionate with you? . . . If I were to assault you would he avenge it? . . . Where does he keep his gun?" (36). Joyce tells him that Mike would indeed avenge an assault upon her and, after first denying the presence of a gun, tells Wilson where it is. Wilson checks to see that the gun is loaded and replaces it in the drawer where he found it.

This alone should be a clue that Wilson is not going to assault Joyce, that he is after something else altogether. After all, what better circumstances could

there be than the absence of the husband, no telephone on which to call police, no one at home to hear the cries for help and the availability of a gun?

Wilson then politely thanks Joyce for the tea and admits that he knows the room is not for rent. He asks her for some money so he won't have to walk all the way back and leaves, ending the first scene. The curious mixture of Pinteresque elements with Orton's sharp comedic technique is apparent here as well. Wilson's threats against Joyce are straight out of Pinter territory, being linguistic versions of what characters such as Riley, Goldberg and McCann, and Gus and Ben do in their respective plays. The unruffled propriety with which Wilson takes his leave, however, is pure Orton--an example of a character using words appropriate for polite social conversation, but inappropriate for the circumstances in which he finds himself.

The opening of Scene Two uses the Pinter technique of mystifying events which take place outside of the room. After the evening meal, Mike tells Joyce of his meeting in the King's Cross men's room:

> I went to the King's Cross toilet like I told you. I met my contact. He was a man with bad feet. He looked as though life had treated him rough. He hadn't much to live for. I gave him the message from

> the--er--(Pause.) The message was delivered. I went outside on to the platform. It was cold. I saw an old girl hardly able to breathe. Had something wrong with her. Hardly able to breathe. Her face was blue. (37)

The mysterious "message"--of which no previous mention has been made and which will not be mentioned again--seems straight out of Pinter. The vagueness of this speech has the same ring to it as Bert Hudd's description of his run in the van from The Room--ultimately, the audience knows nothing more about what Mike has done than it does of what Bert did. Noting the debt to Pinter, Charney writes, "the whole speech sounds like a bad imitation of Pinter, complete with pregnant repetitions and pauses and the withholding of crucial information" (46). The man with the bad feet and the ill woman both sound like the kind of seedy characters found in Pinter's low-life world. The idea that the world outside the comfortable room is cold and inhospitable (particularly to a woman) is straight out of Rose's fears as revealed in The Room.

Joyce does not actively respond to Mike's description of his day, so he inquires about her health, blaming her lack of interest on poor diet. She reveals the extent to which Wilson's visit has unnerved her; after saying she will go out to the library the next day (to be away from home should Wilson return?), she raises an odd subject:

JOYCE . . . . What if I were done in?
MIKE. Who'd do you in?
JOYCE. Somebody might. You read of attacks every day on lonely defenceless women.
MIKE. You could call for help.
JOYCE. Who to?
MIKE. Mary.
JOYCE. She's not in. She's working again. I'm alone in the house.
MIKE. You could break a window. That would attract attention.
JOYCE (pause). Don't go out tomorrow. (38)

Since Joyce brings up this subject, the audience is left to conclude that Wilson's strange visit is still on her mind. By implicitly comparing herself to the women in the fictitious newspaper stories she cites as proof of her condition, the idea that she is unsatisfied alone all day in her room is raised. Her being lonely in the house all day and the threat of a return visit from Wilson combine to prompt her to beg Mike to stay at home with her.[4]

Mike raises Mary's faith as a possible means for Joyce to cope with her life. Mary is a Catholic (as the audience will later discover Mike is) and "she carries her

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[4] The name of the neighbor--Mary--raises a possible religious reading of this detail. Just as the dumb waiter was seen as having religious significance in Pinter's play, so might this name here, especially in light of Joyce's later line when she contemplates prayer while left alone in the house, but decides not to pray since, "The Virgin would turn a deaf ear to a Protestant" (39). Just as the neighbor Mary is away and not present to help, the Virgin Mary would not respond to a call for assistance either.

Faith into her private life" (38). Mike feels that the Catholic religion would be able to help Joyce, but she rejects this notion out of hand: "I'd still be alone" (38). When she tells Mike that she has been crying, he asks if she is pregnant. Then she breaks down and tells Mike of Wilson's visit:

> JOYCE. Mike. . . (Pause.) A kid came here today. . . . He tried to molest me.
> MIKE. These kids see you coming. Why didn't you call for Mary?
> JOYCE. She's not in! She's not in! Do I talk for the sake of it? (Pause.) Mike. . . If he pays another visit--what shall I do? Give me a word of advice? . . .
> MIKE. Bring me my overcoat, will you? It's raw tonight. We'll need extra on the bed. (39)

Mike's total lack of sympathy (or even of much attention) to Joyce's plight, to Joyce's fear is as chilling as the weather outside their little room. The picture of a woman all alone and faced with the threat from a young hood is clearly menace in the same sense that Pinter's characters face menace--a dangerous threat from outside the room.

Scene Three shows a desperate Joyce alone in the room. She rejects various options for escape: it is too cold to go to the park and the Virgin will not answer her calls for help. The scene is one of growing menace as, at the zenith of her feeling of helplessness, "three short

rings are given on the doorbell" (40). Although Joyce is sure the caller is Wilson, she feebly asks through the door, "Is it the milk? . . . Are you the insurance? . . . Are you from the Assistance?" (40). She quickly gives up the pretense, however, when these questions go unanswered.

The sound of breaking glass is heard as two bricks come hurtling through the window. She stamps on the floor calling for Mary, then quickly opens the door calling for another neighbor, Mrs. O'Connor. When she slams the door shut in case Wilson should return to the hall, "The lock drops with a crash on the floor" (41). In a desperate attempt to protect herself, she slides the settee in front of the door, saying, "I've--told him to--mend it! . . . Oh, Michael, I'm to be murdered because you're too bone idle to fix a lock" (41).

She shouts out to the hall that the police are waiting in ambush for Wilson, but he kicks the door in, pushing away the settee. From in the hall comes the sound of splintering wood. Her mental strength fading, Joyce shouts to him: "Go away. There's a good boy. I don't know what you want. I've no money. Please go away. Please, please, please" (41).

The picture of menace here is as frightening as anything in the Pinter canon. Joyce, lonely and frightened,

cowers in her room fearing every ring of the doorbell. Clearly Wilson is up to something strange, however; he has broken through the door and removed the obstacle to his entrance, but does not come inside. Like his replacing the pistol in the drawer at the end of the first scene, his choice not to enter after breaking through the door in Scene Three is a powerful clue that violence, robbery, or overt immediate physical threat to Joyce is not what Wilson is after.

Orton's literalization of the menace Pinter's characters face is an important advance on the intertextual model. Orton's characters face actual, immediate physical violence, not non sequitur questioning or symbolic blinding. The closest Pinter has yet come to this Ortonesque world is the very end of The Dumb Waiter with its threat to Gus' life. The other violent episodes from Pinter's plays (the beating of Riley or the brief fight between Stanley and Goldberg in Act Two of The Birthday Party) have clearly been only part of a much larger struggle which exists mostly on a symbolic plane; Orton's struggle is both symbolic and physical--and the physical is often foregrounded, brought to the immediate attention of the audience, as in Scene Three of The Ruffian on the Stair.

Scene Four opens with another nod to Pinter: "MIKE

sits at the table reading a newspaper. JOYCE enters in outdoor clothes" (42). Joyce has fled her room and remained away until she sees by the light that Mike has returned. The newspaper here indicates Mike's displeasure; his tea was not waiting for him upon his return. He seems cool to Joyce's account of Wilson's tormenting her; she even claims, "He pissed on the floor in the passage. I had to clean it up" (42).

Mike questions her idly about the episode, but is amazed that she never actually saw Wilson and can provide no direct evidence that the potential intruder was indeed him. Joyce answers this objection:

> JOYCE. He'd have killed me.
> MIKE. How do you know that? You've no evidence to support your theory.
> JOYCE. But. . . (Wide-eyed.) . . . I'd be dead if I'd got evidence.
> MIKE. I'd prosecute him on your behalf, Joycie. (43)

Mike's rejection of Joyce's fears is as frightening as Wilson's visit in the previous scene. He operates almost mechanically: he must have properly witnessed evidence before he can become alarmed. If the evidence should turn out to be his wife's corpse, then of course he would prosecute. His use of the diminuative "Joycie" merely underscores his humoring of his wife, his contempt for her

fear. Mike's lone expression of concern is "Did he try to get into the room?" (44), an indication that Mike, like all the insider characters seen thus far, feels protective about his living space. In contrast to the violence which he promised would be the result of her sexual infidelity, Mike's reaction to her potential death is shocking. The audience is left to conclude that Mike would rather have Joyce dead than unfaithful. Perhaps Wilson too has reached this conclusion since he does not take the opportunities he has to kill her, but contrives to have Mike catch them in a compromising position together.

The bell rings and Wilson appears again. Joyce must call Mike several times before he pays any attention at all and, during this interim, she must endure the cheek of Wilson when she accuses him of behaving badly on his earlier visit: "Don't speak to me like that, lady. I'm not used to it" (44).

When Mike finally comes to her assistance (after being called four times), he responds "coolly" (45) and asks Wilson for an explanation. Wilson, hearing Mike's voice for the first time, responds, "You're Irish! My mother was Irish" (45), immediately establishing a camaraderie between the two men, excluding Joyce altogether. Wilson is invited in for a drink of water

over Joyce's nearly hysterical protests; Mike merely comments, "take no notice of her. She can't help herself" (45).

This scene is a crucial one in the play and is replete with echoes of Pinter. The ambivalence of the husband figure to the threat and his unwillingness or inability to counter it are reminiscent of Petey in Act Three of The Birthday Party, not able to keep Goldberg and McCann from taking Stanley away. The issue of Ireland echoes the names Riley from The Room and McCann from The Birthday Party, as well as McCann and Stanley's conversation about Ireland and the Irish allusions during the brainwashing scene in Act Two of that play.

It is germane to note here that the men bond together, excluding the woman. This is possibly related to the sublimated homosexuality of The Ruffian on the Stair, but it has its ultimate roots in Gus and Ben's job previous to the one they are on during the action of The Dumb Waiter where they killed a girl. The bonding of two male characters--possibly a homosexual bonding, but at least homoerotic in nature--will become an important feature of the intertextual model and can be seen in Ed and Sloane in Orton's next play Entertaining Mr. Sloane, in Spooner and Hirst in Pinter's No Man's Land, and in Don

and Bobby in Mamet's American Buffalo.

Mike and Wilson then discuss Ireland, and Mike asks Wilson to bring in his bag and to stay for tea. Joyce is incredulous that Mike is inviting Wilson to stay "after what he's done to me" (47), but Mike tells her, "Shut up! . . . You're heading for a belt around the ear" (47). The woman who treasures her room here faces a threat of physical violence from her man, a clear echo of the hint of violence which surrounds Bert Hudd in The Room. Importantly, Mike's threat to Joyce is similar to Ben's warning to Gus: "You'll get a swipe round your earhole if you don't watch your step" (102).

Joyce retreats into the bed alcove while Wilson and Mike discuss various Catholic and Irish topics, but Mike calls out to her: "Ignorant cow. . . . Are you going to behave decent?" (48). When Wilson offers to leave if his presence is unwelcome, Mike tells him, "Don't let her drive you away. You stay" (48). In the space of a few moments of conversation (and apparently on the basis of nothing more than a shared ethnic and religious heritage) Wilson has earned a welcome from Mike to such an extent that he drives his wife away (she announces that she is going downstairs to visit Mary) in order to keep sharing Wilson's company.

After Joyce departs, Wilson brings up the topic of his brother to Mike for the first time:

> WILSON. . . We were bosom friends. . . . We had separate beds--he was a stickler for convention, but that's as far as it went. We spent every night in each other's company. . . .
> MIKE. There's no word in the Irish language for what you were doing.
> WILSON. In Lapland they have no word for snow. . . . I wasn't with him when he died. I'm going round the twist with heartbreak.
> MIKE. He's dead?
> WILSON. Yes. I thought of topping myself. As a gesture. I would've done but for my strict upbringing. Suicide is difficult when you've got a pious mum. (49-50)

Wilson's cards are on the table now. He openly admits his incestuous homosexual relations with his brother (the act for which there is "no word in the Irish language"). Wilson's reply concerning the absence of a word for snow in Lapland is pure Orton, suggesting as it does that homosexual incest is so common in Ireland that the language requires no word for it. The topic of suicide raised here brings to light Wilson's true purpose in troubling Mike and Joyce. He wants to die, but cannot commit suicide; he is also fully aware that Mike killed Frank, his brother/lover.

Bigsby reads Wilson's motives in this play as quite simple:

> The Ruffian on the Stair is concerned with the efforts of one character to fool another into collaborating in his own suicide. Wilson's brother has been murdered by Mike. Genuinely dismayed at the loss of a brother who was also a homosexual companion, Wilson provokes Mike into shooting him. (Joe Orton 26)

Esslin shares this view and further explains Wilson's motives:

> So the young man, Wilson, decides to revenge himself on the murderer by pretending to be making love to the murderer's mistress, so that the jealous brute will kill him; in this way he can fulfill his two objectives simultaneously: to commit suicide and to have his brother's murderer hanged. ("Comedy of [Ill] Manners" 95)

These explanations for Wilson's behavior remove the element of mystery which pervades the previous scenes. When faced with what Wilson does earlier in the play, an audience might rightly feel that Pinteresque mystery and menace were being raised by the odd events: no other obvious explanation for the actions presents itself. Once the actions are understood, however, no mystery surrounds them. In Orton's world, the truth is strange, terrifying, and menacing enough--no mystery need surround it. Clearly, by using this technique, Orton shows at least one key difference between his theatrical world and Pinter's.

When Wilson goes to take his leave at the end of Scene Four, he reveals to Mike what he really knows about

Joyce by saying, "Give my love to Maddy" (53). Deliberately here, Wilson is testing Mike's reaction. He boasts of having sex with Maddy--what he calls Joyce's "trade name" (53). He attributes Mike's hostile reaction to the fact that Joyce and he are not having sex: "You ought to get it regular. You'd feel better then" (53).

True to form, Mike becomes angry and threatens violence when Joyce's fidelity is questioned, despite showing no concern with her safety earlier. Clearly, he is solely interested in controlling her sexuality, not in protecting her well-being. Mike, recognizing Wilson's homosexuality, taunts him that he has no experience of a woman, but Wilson merely complains, "I wish she'd change the sheets on the bed" (53).[5]

Wilson reveals to Mike his knowledge of Mike's involvement in Frank's death, questioning him about his actions on the day Frank was murdered and chiding Mike on his dangerous driving. This frightens Mike, who first tells Wilson to leave and then asks, "What are you going to do?" (52). So far, this follows true to Pinter's form: the invader has come in and upset the dynamics and routine of

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[5] This comment echoes both Stanley's complaints about the cleanliness of his room in The Birthday Party and is almost directly taken from Gus' complaint in The Dumb Waiter: "I thought these sheets didn't look too bright. . . . I don't want to share my bed-sheets" (92).

the room and dominates the helpless insiders both by physically threatening them and claiming knowledge of their actions and past lives.

Obviously Wilson has been testing Mike in this scene. He wants to make very sure that Mike will respond as he wishes:

> MIKE. If you've had her I'll swing for you.
> WILSON. Would you kill me?
> MIKE. I would. I'd throttle you with my bare hands. I'd choke the filth out of you.
> WILSON. You've got a gun. Kill me with that. (Pause.) I'll be back tomorrow. Tell Maddy I'll see her.
> MIKE. You can believe me. I never murdered your brother. Don't you believe me?
> WILSON. No. (Pause.) I might decide to put Maddy in the pudding club. Just to show my contempt for your way of life. I never take precautions. We're skin to skin. Nature's method. (53-54)

This exchange is significant for several reasons. Mike's comment "I'll swing for you" indicates his willingness to be hanged for the murder of Wilson if Wilson has cuckolded him. This feeds Wilson's desire for revenge on Mike for Frank's death. Mike's willingness to murder Wilson gratifies Wilson's death wish. Wilson's sexual taunting of Mike is important not only in the dynamics of this particular scene, but also because its slang usage echoes one of the accusations made against Stanley in the interrogation scene of The Birthday Party (a woman's being in the

"pudding club").

Wilson then indicates on his sweater precisely where his heart is, telling Mike, "Don't miss, will you? I don't want to be injured. I want to be dead" (54), acknowledging his hope that Mike will indeed kill him in retaliation for his part in Joyce's infidelity. Mike finally convinces Wilson to leave, then begins a long monologue on Joyce, revealing various elements of her past life as a whore and calling her a number of names.

Joyce arrives from downstairs in the middle of his diatribe and asks what the matter is. After figuring out what has happened, she denies any sexual encounter with Wilson--a denial Mike patently rejects. Mike then erupts into violence, slapping Joyce's face and threatening to murder her, but he collapses and reveals the true nature of his hurt: "I don't want to lose you. I don't want to be on my own again. I was so lonely before" (57). In a chilling reversal of the end of Scene Two, Joyce replies, "Shall I put your coat on your feet? It's freezing again" (57). Like Mike in the earlier scene, she ignores a deeply felt fear and responds in a manner as cold as the weather she discusses. The two parallel scenes reveal the extent to which this play is about the horrible things two people can do to each other. Unlike Pinter's early con-

ception of the room, Orton's includes the notion that the people in the room sometimes do not even pretend to comfort each other; in this scene Mike and Joyce seem more like Gus and Ben, uneasily existing together in an atmosphere of harm potentially coming from one another, than they do like Bert and Rose, living together in a routine of daily events originally based on some type of solicitation and concern.

Mike's fear of loneliness is heartbreaking despite his earlier callous treatment of Joyce. Echoing as it does Rose's fears from The Room, Mike's phobia is the now familiar response to the coldness of the world outside the room. Even if the room--as is the case here--is the locale of violent invasion and doubts are raised about the comfort of being part of a couple of companions in such a room, the room remains preferable to the cold world outside its walls.

Scene Five ties up the threads of this play in the way the audience has been allowed to expect. Wilson once again intrudes upon Joyce alone in the room, but he knows Mike is downstairs. Wilson shuts the door and wedges a chair under it. He tells Joyce, "I told [Mike] we were having an affair last night" (57), and begins undressing.

Wilson also reveals a grudge against Joyce. When she

asks who told Wilson about her past life, he replies:

> My brother. He had it off with you after seeing The Sound of Music. I waited downstairs. He was as pissed as a fart. He would never have had a prostitute and seen The Sound of Music otherwise. (58)

Wilson's plan will avenge all those who have wronged him and result in his own longed-for death: Mike will be hanged for murder; Joyce will be robbed of her husband in return for seducing Wilson's beloved brother; and Wilson himself will be dead and out of his grief over his loss.

Throughout this scene, Wilson undresses while delivering a description of his life and troubles. Joyce, in spite of the obvious threat Wilson imposes on her, is touched and kisses him on the cheek, saying, "You poor boy. Oh, you poor boy" (60). At precisely this moment, Mike arrives, sees the undressed Wilson being kissed by Joyce, and shoots Wilson.

Joyce and Mike agree to tell the police that Mike killed Wilson while protecting her from rape. They kiss to seal their new arrangement. Joyce will now have new power over Mike: he will have to pay more attention to her since she can tell the police the truth about what Mike has done, but Mike will not be alone as he so feared he would be. Although the arrangement is based upon

deceit and represents a power-play on Joyce's part, each member of this couple gains something important from it.

As is the case at the end of Pinter's The Room, in The Ruffian on the Stair the two insiders come to dominate the invader who had held sway briefly in their sanctum. Concerning the parallels to the Pinter play, Bigsby writes that Wilson "serves much the same function as the blind Negro in The Room" (Joe Orton 25); furthermore, he meets the same fate as Riley--death at the hands of those he threatened. Although he does not leave Joyce blind, he does rob her of the illusion that Mike loves her, since he agrees to stay with her merely to cover up his crimes and to ward off loneliness. John Bull and Frances Gray's notion that Wilson is an "intruder from Mike's homosexual past" (78) is just not borne out in the play itself. Clearly Mike is implicated in homosexual activity and Wilson is overtly homosexual in the play, but there is no evidence that the two have ever met before.

Of Mike himself, Charney notes, "Mike, the hired killer, seems to come right out of the pages of Pinter's Dumb Waiter" (46), further underscoring the debt Orton's characters in this play owe to Pinter. The ultimate violence of the play, however, is based more upon Pinter's first play, The Room, than on the later manifestations of

menace in Pinter's early plays. Certainly the structure of The Ruffian on the Stair seems to be modeled on The Room: the mysterious and threatening stranger who arrives when the husband figure is away, threatens the wife, and then is killed by the husband. This could be a plot summary of either play. Pinter removes overt physical violence from his practice of the intertextual model after The Room. Had Pinter written The Ruffian on the Stair, one can easily imagine him ending this play as he does The Dumb Waiter, with Mike pointing the gun at Wilson, leaving the audience wondering whether he will indeed comply with the role in Wilson's plan devised for him. Pinter's handling of this scene would thus highlight the extent to which Mike's actions are part of a plan (created by Wilson) which controls him, which has power over him. Orton, on the other hand, ends his play so that the power of the characters to resist such a coercive universe is foregrounded: Mike and Joyce are able to control their fate by conspiring against it; by agreeing to lie to the police, they gain a measure of control over their lives and create a situation which empowers them. This collusion which involves lying to the police will become part of Orton's theatrical world hereafter.

This ending is a type which Orton will use again, but

it is part of the revision of the play. Just as Orton changed the beginning of the play to remove embarrassingly derivative echoes of Pinter, he altered the ending significantly as well. The differences between the original radio version--which had Mike accepting that he would be hanged as punishment for the murder of Wilson--and the final stage version--which features the conspiracy to lie to the authorities--show how much Orton had grown as a playwright in the ensuing years. As Esslin puts it:

> The mature revised version of The Ruffian on the Stair . . . includes the very characteristically Ortonian motif of a 'good' ending brought about by the happy collusion of the guilty bourgeois and the police, also found in Entertaining Mr. Sloane (at least in so far as all concerned agree to conceal Sloane's murder from the police), Loot, and What the Butler Saw. ("Comedy of [Ill] Manners" 99)

Orton's revision is clearly a departure from Pinter's model and takes the play more into Orton's theatrical world, in which the characters, by conspiring together, are able to achieve a measure of control over their threatening surroundings.

Many of these same elements--both the wholly original ones and ones borrowed from the early Pinter plays--will appear in Orton's next play, the full-length Entertaining Mr. Sloane, which represents the culmination of Orton's use of the intertextual model and includes elements which

Pinter himself will adopt in later plays. It is to Orton's next play that this examination of the intertextual development of the theatrical model must turn to follow the growth of these conventions of Theatre of Menace.

CHAPTER 6

JOE ORTON'S ENTERTAINING MR. SLOANE

Encouraged by the acceptance for a BBC broadcast of the one-act The Ruffian on the Stair, Orton began work on a longer play, the three-act Entertaining Mr. Sloane (1964). From the very beginning of this his first full-length play, the audience is reminded of motifs from Pinter's early work and from Orton's first play, the one-act The Ruffian on the Stair. Bigsby notes these similarities, writing:

> Like [Orton's] first play, Entertaining Mr. Sloane owes a great deal to Pinter. Sloane himself is close kin to Stanley in The Birthday Party. Both are lodgers pursued by repulsive middle-aged landladies. Both move from being contemptuously dominant to being the pliant victims of others. . . . In many respects Meg and Kath are simply two versions of the same character. Both display a grotesque mixture of motherly love and lust; both are the uncomprehending victims of impulses and circumstances which they fail to perceive in any adequate way, animated as they are only by a grotesque sexual urge. The object of that urge, here, as in The Ruffian on the Stair, is himself a grotesque, for Sloane is in truth an idle, violent psychopath. (Joe Orton 29)

Esslin believes the basic situation of Entertaining Mr. Sloane owes a debt to Pinter: "The Pinter influence can still be discerned in the basic situation: an intruder who enters a household and disrupts it" ("Comedy of [Ill] Manners" 99). Katherine Worth concurs, calling the play

"cast on . . . Pinteresque lines" (78). Michelene Wandor calls the play "an apparent return to Pinterland" (55). Even in a play which is obviously that of an original and cognizant playwright in command of his own style and techniques, the traces of the intertextual model persist.

Despite these intertextual echoes, Entertaining Mr. Sloane is the first great Orton play, exhibiting in a full-length context the Ortonesque theatrical world with all its characteristic features. While showing the impact of Pinter's groundbreaking early work, this play advances the intertextual model in several important ways. Once again, we see an invasion of a room by an outsider. The outsider comes to dominate the insider figures briefly (even to the extent of murdering one of them), but the remaining insiders gang up on the invader and dominate him by the play's end. As in The Ruffian on the Stair, Entertaining Mr. Sloane ends with a collusion between characters to lie to the police about a murder. The most significant advance on the earlier forms of the intertextual model in this play is the sexual domination of the invader by the insiders who agree to share his sexual favors at the play's conclusion. The number of the insiders is again three as it was in The Birthday Party, not two as in The Room, The Dumb Waiter, and The Ruffian on the Stair. Furthermore, in this play the outsider is

not attempting to ruin the lives of those inside the room, but in fact wants to join them in the room, to become an insider himself.

Bigsby discusses a significant difference between Orton's theatrical practice and Pinter's, writing:

> Orton seems intent. . . on underscoring the absurd determinism that directs human relationships--the destructive centrality of a sexual impulse that transforms those relationships into a battle for survival, an exploitative arena. And sex is central to his work in a way that it is not, to the same degree, to Pinter's. For Orton, in his early works, it is at the heart of events, maiming, infantilizing, brutalizing. All other activity, with the exception of a sexually derived violence, is relegated to the wings. The grotesque power of the sexual drive is presented not only as an image of alienation but as, in some degree, its cause. The social world is merely cover for an aggression that projects tensions on to a public screen. For Pinter, sex is not the source of the menace he dramatizes so effectively. It is only one form of human vulnerability, since to desire is to become a victim, to reveal a weakness. The battle for dominance may assume a sexual dimension in The Homecoming or in Old Times, but this in turn is a single aspect of a struggle that is inherent in human nature. (Joe Orton 29-30)

Certainly, sex is of central importance not only in Orton's early work under consideration here, but also in the Orton oeuvre as a whole. Bigsby's point about the sexual dimension of the struggles in Pinter's later plays is well taken, but he fails to note that the inclusion of an explictly sexual element in these later works demonstrates the extent to which Pinter is influenced by Orton's contributions to the intertextual model.[1]

Charney notes what he sees as an important shift away from Pinter's world in Entertaining Mr. Sloane:

> One may understand how superficial Orton's relation is to Pinter, the model for his early plays. Orton ruthlessly cuts away Pinter's 'significances', so that comedy of menace would seem a pretentious and misguided term for Orton's savage, anarchic and turbulent farces of daily life and its empty deceptions. His sense of language as farcical exhibitionism undercuts and neutralises any feeling of menace. Orton does not write comedies of menace, but rather comedies of need and greed. (71-72)

I would argue, on the other hand, that Entertaining Mr. Sloane is indeed a comedy of menace and hope to demonstrate, through an intertextual reading, why this is so. I do not see the resemblances between Orton's play and the early work of Pinter as superficial; rather, I see the Pinter plays as creating an intertext through which the focused text of Entertaining Mr. Sloane can be fully apprehended. Any reading which ignores or dismisses these intertextual traces is necessarily incomplete.

The action of Entertaining Mr. Sloane is as

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[1] Bigsby fails to mention Pinter's later play, No Man's Land, in which two men, Spooner and Hirst, engage in social talk and behavior which masks the sexual dimension of the struggle which exists between them. This is perhaps one of the clearest examples of Orton's influence on the later Pinter work, involving as it does both the strategem of covering sexuality by language and the homosexual element introduced to the intertextual model by Orton.

straightforward as the action of an Orton play ever gets. Act One shows Sloane arriving to inspect a room for rent in the house Kath shares with her father (variously referred to as Kemp and the Dadda). She flirts outrageously with him and he agrees to take the room. Kemp finds Sloane vaguely familiar and finally recognizes him as the murderer of his former employer. He attacks Sloane with a toasting fork and wounds his leg. While treating the minor injury, Kath gets Sloane's trousers off and comments on his smooth skin and surprisingly dark body hair. Kath's brother Ed arrives and also flirts outrageously with Sloane; after first trying to make Sloane leave, Ed decides to hire Sloane as his chauffeur. Act One ends with Kath on top of Sloane on the settee, pretending he is forcing himself upon her as she paws at him.

Act Two takes place several months later. Sloane is in the employ of Ed, but apparently does little work. The act opens with Sloane lying on the settee, complaining of discomfort after a night of drinking. Ed is outside working on the car, which, as Kath points out, is Sloane's job. She announces to Sloane that she is pregnant and suggests they get married. Sloane wants to hide this news from Ed, who enters and asksSloane if he took the car the previous night. Sloane denies this and Kath lies to sup-

port his story. Ed finally manages to get Sloane to admit taking the car for a drive with three friends, but Ed presents him with a lipstick he found in the back seat. Sloane again lies, but eventually admits to driving around with a girl. Kemp enters and asks for a word alone with Ed; he tells Ed that Sloane is physically abusing him and has impregnated Kath. Sloane re-enters just as Kemp is about to tell Ed of Sloane's murder two years prior to the action of the play. Ed accuses Sloane, who pleads for understanding on the grounds that he is an orphan and lacked a proper upbringing. Ed forgives him and suggests that Sloane come to live with him, away from the corrupting influence of Kath. Ed leaves to go buy cigarettes. Sloane attempts to strong-arm Kemp into silence. When he realizes that Kemp will tell all he knows, Sloane savagely beats Kemp. The act ends with Sloane calling for help.

The action of Act Three is continuous with the end of Act Two. Ed and Kath discover Kemp lying on the floor barely conscious. Ed takes Kemp upstairs while Kath tries to find out what happened. Sloane is quite open about having beaten Kemp. Ed returns and tells Sloane that Kemp is dead, but keeps the news from Kath. Ed expresses disapproval of Sloane's actions and does not respond to Sloane's explanations. Finally Sloane makes his most

overt offer yet to be Ed's catamite and Ed agrees, telling Kath she should lie about what has happened and say that Kemp fell down the stairs. At first she agrees, even offering to polish the linoleum on the stairs and put Kemp's new shoes on his feet. She demurs, however, when Sloane and Ed announce that they plan to go off together. She will call the police and tell all if Sloane leaves her, but Ed will do the same if he leaves Ed. Finally they come to an agreement: they will share Sloane in six month intervals and tell a false story to the police.

Even from its title, Entertaining Mr. Sloane shares a characteristic with the Theatre of Menace plays we have examined. As we have seen with the titles of earlier--especially The Room and The Dumb Waiter--this has no one settled meaning. The ambiguity arises from the word "entertaining"--is it to be read as a gerund or a gerundive? That is, does the title indicate that Sloane is someone who is to be entertained or someone who is entertaining? The action of this play traces the shift from one referent to the other: as Taylor puts it, "the meaning of [entertaining] inexorably shifts in the course of the play from providing entertainment for Mr Sloane to using Mr Sloane as an occasion of entertainment" (Second Wave 131). Sloane begins the play as the object of Kath

and Ed's attempts to keep him entertained, but ends the play as the source of entertainment for them. From the very title of the play, the audience is again reminded of the difficulties of direct, unambiguous communication in plays of the Theatre of Menace.

The next similarities can be noted in the opening of the play when Kath and Sloane enter the "lounge" (65) which is simply described in the stage directions as "a room" (65). Sloane is seeking lodgings. Kath apologizes profusely for the condition of the house and the room, but Sloane regards the accommodations as "perfect" (65). He even says he is sure that the toilet, which Kath has neglected to show him, will be "satisfactory" (65). Sloane's agreeability in the face of what Kath perceives as less-than-adequate conditions seems strange. One is immediately reminded of Stanley's complaints about Meg's house in Pinter's The Birthday Party, but the dynamics have shifted from that play. Sloane, the lodger-to-be in this play, thinks everything is quite acceptable, whereas Stanley, the lodger in The Birthday Party, found plenty to criticize. Kath, the landlady in Orton's play, derides her house, whereas Pinter's Meg defends her home.

Kath's lines sound more like those of the invader:

You mustn't imagine it's always like this. . . . I

> should change them curtains. Those are our winter ones. The summer ones are more of a chintz. . . . The walls need re-doing. (65)

Clearly some changes have taken place. Kath devalues her room--something it would be hard to imagine Rose or Meg doing--and Sloane approves of it--something Stanley would not do. Quite obviously, Sloane does not threaten to leave the room (as Stanley does) because he is desperately seeking the protection and comfort which have come intertextually to be associated with a place in a room. Later in the play, once he has become confident of his position in the room, he, like Stanley, will also threaten to leave in an attempt to manipulate Kath. At this point, however, he is not particularly choosy; he just wants to be a resident of a room.

Despite these changes, the situation is definitely familiar territory. Something like this must have happened when Stanley arrived initially at Meg and Petey's house, would-be lodgers come to the door in both The Room and The Ruffian on the Stair, and Goldberg and McCann take a room in The Birthday Party. Even though Sloane appears to be harmless enough and despite the fact the Kath welcomes him warmly, intertextually the appearance of an invader always denotes menace since an invader always disrupts the lives of those inside the room. Orton's prac-

tice of this facet of the intertextual model stresses that the invader is a victim himself: Sloane is an orphan who has suffered Spartan conditions at the orphanage and, as becomes clear later, has been exploited by people such as the photographer who took obscene pictures of him. As Pinter did in The Birthday Party, Orton makes his invader less overtly symbolic and depicts him as just another character--as wholly flesh and blood as Kath or Kemp.

The conversation between Kath and Sloane continues and provides an example of the comic motif of characters who say one thing and do another:

> SLOANE. I can't give you a decision right away.
> KATH. I don't want to rush you. (Pause.) What do you think? I'd be happy to have you.

As is the case with Gus and Ben's conversations about making the tea from The Dumb Waiter, Kath says one thing but acts in a manner contrary to her stated intentions. Having said she will not rush Sloane, she proceeds immediately to pressure him to decide upon the room.[e]

Sloane presses Kath for details of her history, and she tells him that she was married when she was young and

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[e] As I indicated in my discussion of this motif in Chapter Four, ultimately this dichotomy between language and action can be traced back to Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot in which each of the two acts ends with the characters agreeing to go but standing still.

that she had a son who was killed "in very sad circumstances" (65). By introducing this bit of exposition, Orton is working with the motif of the impossibility of verifying any events outside the room or prior to the action of the play. Very shortly we learn that Kath in fact never married the man in question and that her child was put up for adoption. In a mere half-page of dialogue, Kath goes from saying, "I married out of school" (66), to answering "No" (66) to Sloane's question, "You were never married then?" (66).

Kath's past as an unwed mother is yet another in a series of histories of women in the rooms of the plays who have led spotted lives. One remembers that Rose was hinted to have a checkered past in The Room and that Joyce is explicitly shown to be a former prostitute in The Ruffian on the Stair. This feature of the model will continue in future Theatre of Menace plays, particularly in the seamy past sexual history of Ruth in Pinter's The Homecoming.

By introducing the idea that facts about Kath's child cannot be known, Orton is working with a familiar Theatre of Menace technique. The dynamics of this exchange are clear: Kath hopes to exert power over Sloane by claiming knowledge of events of which Sloane is ignorant. This

exchange becomes even more important when we discover that Sloane is an orphan and is about the same age as Kath's son would be.[3] Orton deliberately raises some expectations in the minds of his audience: if this were a well-made play, Sloane would turn out to be Kath's long-lost son. His claims to have known his parents (who he says committed suicide when he was eight) can be dismissed as possible lies; after all, Kath's introduction of the subject is linked with her lying about it to Sloane, so why should Sloane's introduction of the subject not also be a lie?

Furthermore, Kath's lines, "You're almost the same age as he would be. You've got the same refinement" (68), are almost stereotypical lines of a well-made play. When Kath kisses Sloane soon after this discussion, she says, "Just a motherly kiss. A real mother's kiss" (68). Her use of the word "mother" only heightens the audience's expectation that she will turn out to be Sloane's "real mother"--an outcome which Orton does not provide. The

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[3] Kath's discussion of the age of her son demonstrates that she is flirting with Sloane even while discussing her little boy. Sloane, about the same age as Kath's son would be, is twenty (85) and Kath is forty-one (66). She lies and says she married out of school and was "very young" (67) when the child was born. Twenty-one is not usually considered to be "very young," so clearly Kath wants Sloane to think she is younger in hopes that her "youth" might prove to be an attraction.

superimposition of the mother/son roles onto those of landlady and lodger raises the possibility of a psychoanalytical reading of this play, just as the confusion of roles in The Birthday Party did.[4] Perhaps Sloane can be seen as a bit like Stanley--both are unemployment and end up sponging off their landladies who see them as delicate and sensitive.

Kath concludes the arrangement for Sloane to move in, asking him, "You'll live with us then as one of the family?" (67), to which Sloane replies, "I never had no family of my own" (67). Wandor sees this exchange as clearly exhibiting the influence of Pinter: "Here again we have two displaced people in search of a family" (55).

Kath's father arrives at this time and is introduced to Sloane. Kath is infuriated at Kemp's behavior--he claims there is no room for a lodger and is stand-offish to Sloane--and she berates Kemp quite soundly for his actions. A hint of menace is introduced when Sloane finds Kemp familiar: "Haven't we met before? . . . Your face is familiar. . . . I've seen you somewhere. I very rarely forget a face" (70). The intertextual model is rife with invaders who presumably are strangers, yet who know the

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[4] This similarity was duly noted by Trussler (38) in his discussion of The Birthday Party quoted in Chapter Three.

people in the room: Riley claims to know Rose in The Room; Goldberg and McCann come looking for Stanley Webber in The Birthday Party; and Wilson is definitely seeking Mike in The Ruffian on the Stair. Orton, however, will twist this echo around; Sloane has walked into this room inadvertently. He finds Kemp familiar because Kemp witnessed a murder Sloane committed two years prior to the action of this play. Rather than coming to the room to manipulate the insiders through his knowledge of them, Sloane finds that their knowledge of his past gives them power over him. Kemp almost immediately recognizes Sloane, who very quickly drops his questioning of Kemp when he realizes where he knows Kemp from, and says, "I could still identify you" (74), threatening Sloane with his knowledge. Kemp bears traces of Petey from The Birthday Party, however, and ultimately he will be unable to exert any power over the invader of his room.

The recognition of Sloane by Kemp is achieved by a standard Ortonian technique: the linking of a casual revelation about the past with present circumstance. The house in which Kemp and Kath live is located in the middle of a garbage dump. Kemp tells Sloane he wishes something could be done about all the people who come there to dump their rubbish. He says, "If my boss were here I'd go to

him" (72). This casual, chance reference to his late boss leads Kemp to connect Sloane to the murder which happened two years earlier. In Orton's theatrical world, a discussion of past events is not only an attempt to achieve power over someone lacking knowledge of them, but also a coincidental discovery concerning present circumstance. This technique occurred in The Ruffian on the Stair in which the tattooed man who was killed by a van is linked both to Mike and Wilson.

As Sloane and Kemp figure out where they have seen each other, the subject of Ed (Kemp's son and Kath's brother) comes up. Kemp and Ed have not spoken for twenty years (the same amount of time since the birth of Kath's child), ever since Kemp caught Ed "committing some kind of felony in the bedroom" (71). Apparently Kemp found Ed in a compromising position with another man. Catching someone in the middle of a sex act is part of Orton's practice of the model since it also appears in The Ruffian on the Stair. Sloane gives the first indication that he too engages in homosexual activities when he tells Kemp, "For myself, I usually lock the door" (71). Sloane is no innocent virgin and does not pretend to be one. The irony of the situation is that Kath and very soon Ed too both believe that he is an innocent young man and their

attempts to seduce him become hilarious given the fact that Sloane has traded his body for advantages many times before. The dramatic irony of the audience's knowledge of Sloane's sexual attitudes and history and the ignorance of Ed and Kath as they gently try to work their respective ways into Sloane's pants is the chief source of humor in Act One.[5]

After the conversation concerning Ed is over, Kemp finally recognizes Sloane for sure and attacks him with the fork he has been using to toast crumpets for tea. Kath comes running to Sloane's aid. In order to treat his very slight wound, she asks Sloane, "I wonder, Mr Sloane, if you'd take your trousers off?" (76).[6] Kath has been a

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[5] In a letter to a director of Entertaining Mr. Sloane, Orton discusses this ironic situation: "Sloane knows Eddie wants him. He has absolutely no qualms about surrendering his body. None. He's done it many, many times. Sloane is no virgin. He's been in bed with men and women in the past. But he isn't going to give in until he has to. . . . Eddie, naturally, doesn't know how amoral Sloane is. He imagines that he has a virgin on his hands. He thinks he can get Sloane. Sure he can. But it may take a bit of time cause Sloane is such a nice kid" (quoted in Lahr, "Introduction" 16).

[6] In the 1981 revival of this play at the Cherry Lane Theatre in New York, Maxwell Caulfield played this scene without underwear, so that he was naked from the waist down once Kath had his trousers off. Kath then proceeded to look at his crotch throughout the following dialogue, and her comment about the oddity of his dark body hair despite his being a blond was definitely not made in reference to the hair on his legs.

fast worker--Sloane has barely been in the house fifteen minutes and she is undressing him. One wonders if Meg worked that fast when Stanley showed up a year before the events of The Birthday Party. In retrospect, Mike's suspicions in The Ruffian on the Stair about Joyce and Wilson become more understandable as well. As Ed will shortly say, "You know what they say about landladies? . . . They say they'd sleep with a broom handle in trousers, that's what they say" (81). The randy landlady who behaves like a mother and the compliant lodger who grudgingly accepts the role of a son are central elements of the intertext working in these plays. They will reappear in Mamet's play American Buffalo in the curious relationship between the young Bobby--who is clearly an adaptation of the lodger character--and Don, who provides him with food and a place to live.

Kath fetches most of the items necessary for treating Sloane's wound from her sideboard (which also houses the supply of sweets she constantly nibbles); this is an echo of Meg's sideboard from The Birthday Party. To a certain extent, it serves the same function that the newspaper serves in the intertextual model, since both Meg and Kath retreat to their sideboards in times of trouble or confusion. It offers a refuge from the upheavals taking place

in the room and is clearly shown to be the sole domain of the woman who owns it.

In her most directly flirtatious behavior yet, Kath calls attention to her clothing:

> I've been doing my washing today and haven't a stitch on . . . except my shoes. . . I'm in the rude under this dress. I tell you because you're bound to have noticed. . . I've got long legs. Long elegant legs. (Kicks out her leg.) I could give one or two of them a surprise. (Pause.) My look is quite different when I'm private. (Leans over him.) You can't see through this dress can you? I been worried for fear of embarrassing you. (78)

The echoes of Meg and Stanley here are quite clear, and one can easily imagine Sloane and Kath as nascent versions of those characters from Pinter's The Birthday Party. At this point the stage directions instruct: "SLOANE lifts his hand and touches the point where he judges her nipple to be" (78). Kath pretends to be incensed (just as Rose took exception to Mr. Kidd's insinuations concerning her past), but shifts all the blame onto Sloane:

> I know what you thought. You wanted to see if my titties were all my own. You're all the same. (Smirks.) I must be careful of you. Have me naked on the floor if I give you a chance. If my brother was to know. . . (Pause.). . . he's such a possessive man. (Silence. Stands up.) Would you like to go to bed? (79)

These lines are ironic. Kath is thinking as fast as she

possibly can how to seduce Sloane, but her lines indicate a fear of his advances. Sloane has definitely figured Kath out by this point. His touching her breast indicates his full awareness of what will be expected of him and his willingness to provide it.

Her question to Sloane as to whether he wants to go to bed is an obvious double entendre: the question both implies that he should rest from his wound and inquires if he would like to have sex with Kath. Sloane's noncommittal reply, "It's early" (79), does not in the least rebuff her advances. Sloane wants to keep all his options open for the time being. She persists, however, claiming that Sloane needs rest after his injury and offers to bring his supper up to his room, so he exits.

Kath sends Kemp off to retrieve Sloane's belongings, claiming that his injury makes him unable to fetch them himself. As Kemp leaves, Ed arrives. Ed has rung the bell before--while Kath had Sloane semi-nude on the settee--but she declined to answer the door. The upshot of this is that Ed has hovered outside the window and knows all about Sloane. His knowledge of his sister's ways (as we will soon discover, the father of Kath's child was the same man Kemp caught in bed with Ed) leads him to challenge her:

ED. You've got a kid staying here.
KATH. No . . .
ED. Don't lie to me.
KATH. He's a guest. He's not a lodger.
ED. Who told you to take in lodgers?

Pause.

KATH. I needed a bit extra. . . .
ED. I don't want men hanging around.
KATH. He's a nice young man.
ED. You know what these fellows are--young men with no fixed abode.
KATH. No. . . . This young man is quite respectable.
ED. . . . How old is he?
KATH. He's young.
ED. These fellows sleep with their landladies automatic. Has he made suggestions? Suggested you bring him supper in bed?
KATH. No.
ED. That's what they do. Then they take advantage.
KATH. Mr Sloane is superior to that.
ED. Where did you find him?
KATH. In the library.
ED. Picked him up, did you?
KATH. He was having trouble. With his rent. . . .
ED. How long have you been going with him?
KATH. He's a good boy.

ED sees the trousers, picks them up.

KATH. It was an accident.
ED. Had the trousers off him already I see. (81-82)

This exchange is significant for a number of reasons. First, it is vaguely reminiscent of Goldberg and McCann's interrogation of Stanley. While it lacks the non sequitur and hostility of that scene, it does feature a character from outside who is associated with the business world who interrogates someone inside the room. There is certainly

a threat to Kath in the questioning. The situation is different, however, since Ed clearly knows Kath and her past and has heard at least some of what transpired in the room prior to his entrance. His suspicions are more easily understood.

The scene also gives the audience the opportunity to look more deeply into Kath's character. Obviously, she does not invite Sloane into her home as she claims to make some extra money from his rent, since she admits knowing that he cannot pay the rent. The confusion of the roles of guest and lodger also remind one of Stanley's situation in The Birthday Party. When Ed asks if Sloane has suggested that Kath bring his supper to him in bed, Ed reveals a lack of knowledge of his sister, however, since it was she, not Sloane, who suggested the supper in bed. Kath is a faster worker than even Ed suspects.

Ed demands that Kath call Sloane down to the lounge, so that he can ask Sloane to leave. Kath pleads with him, and he agrees to see Sloane first and then decide. Obviously, Ed is impressed with Sloane:

> KATH. This is my brother, Mr Sloane. He expressed a desire to meet you.
> ED (turns, faces SLOANE). I . . . my sister was telling me about you.
>
> Pause.

My sister was telling me about your being an orphan, Mr Sloane.
SLOANE (smiling). Oh, yes?
ED. Must be a rotten life for a kid. (83)

The dynamics of this exchange are clear. Ed falls for Sloane immediately. He starts his initial remark to Sloane before turing around, but changes in mid-sentence once he has a look at the boy. Sloane's smile (it does seem curious for a parentless child to smile when the subject of orphanhood is raised) indicates he is fully aware that he has won Ed over. Although Ed indeed gets Kath out of the room and suggests to Sloane that this might not be the ideal place for him to live, he quickly changes his original plan and decides to hire Sloane as his driver.

Ed's questioning of Sloane before deciding to let him stay and employ him is a marvel of Orton's sexually charged dialogue. When he asks Sloane about life at the orphanage, Sloane tells of sleeping eight to a room with boys of various ages, and Ed replies, "Oh well, you had compensations then" (84). The obvious homosexual implications of this remark clearly lead to the conclusion that Ed is fishing to see if Sloane is possible bait for seduction. He clearly believes that Sloane has engaged in the kind of innocent homoerotic sex play that many teenaged boys experience (especially in an all male-preserve such

as an orphanage) and hopes that Sloane will be willing to do something somewhat less innocent with him.

Ed asks what Sloane knows about Kath's past and tells him, "She married a mate of mine--a valiant man--we were together in Africa" (85). The army is another place stereotypically where homosexual activity occurs, and Ed plays on this notion, asking Sloane, "You're interested in the army, eh? Soldiers, garrison towns, etc. Does that interest you?" (85). He also asks if Sloane is married or has girlfriends, and Sloane gives Ed exactly the answers he is seeking: admitting interest in army life and denying being married or having a girlfriend.

He offers to give Sloane a gift, "Anything you care to name. Within reason" (85), but says a Jaguar is out of the question, to which Sloane half-jokingly replies, "I was going to suggest an Aston Martin" (85). The stage directions call for Sloane to relax, underscoring the notion that he knows he has Ed where he wants him, that Ed is attracted to him.

Ed continues his erotically charged questioning: "Are you a sports fan? Eh? Fond of sport? You look as though you might be" (85). Sloane continues to feed Ed just the answers he is seeking. The comic business associated with Ed's questioning is pure Orton:

ED. You're fond of swimming?
SLOANE. I like a plunge now and then.
ED. Bodybuilding?
SLOANE. We has a nice little gym at the orphanage. Put me in the teams they did. Relays. . .

ED looks interested.

. . . soccer . . .

ED nods.

. . . pole vault, . . . long distance. . .

ED opens his mouth.

. . . 100 yards, discus, putting the shot.

ED rubs his hands together.

Yes. yes. [sic] I'm an all rounder. A great all rounder. In anything you care to mention. Even in life. . . . yes I like a good work out now and then. (86)

Ed's growing interest in Sloane is accompanied by increasingly apparent physical signs as the two discuss sports with obviously sexual connotations. Ed would certainly like to take a "plunge" into Sloane and "put his shot" into him, and his jaw drops open at associating length with Sloane's "pole." Leslie Smith notes of this scene, "The catalogue would be more believable were it less amusingly extensive; although, of course, it serves Sloane's purpose well enough in leading up to the veiled sexual invitation of the last few phrases" (78). Smith

sees Sloane mentioning every sport he can think of in hopes of hitting on whatever one will arouse Ed the most. Sloane's claim that he is a "great all rounder. . . . in anything you care to mention" is certainly as open a sexual invitation as Ed is going to get at this point.

Ed continues the flirtatious questioning:

> ED. . . (Breathless.) A little body builder are you? I bet you are. . . (Slowly.) . . . do you. . . (Shy.) exercise regular?
> SLOANE. As clockwork.
> ED. Good, good. Stripped?
> SLOANE. Fully. . . .
> ED. Ever done any wrestling?
> SLOANE. On occasions. . . .
> ED. Do you wear leather. . . next to the skin? Leather jeans, say? Without. . . aah. . .
> SLOANE. Pants? (87)

Sloane is playing Ed's game fully by this point. He discusses being naked and wrestling. When Ed's nerve falters momentarily, Sloane raises the possibility of his wearing leather without underwear beneath. Ed's approach is certainly different from Kath's: Ed asks questions, working in what he presumes is a subtle way into sexual areas, whereas Kath kisses, paws, and undresses Sloane quite nonchalantly.

Ed proceeds to warn Sloane against women and seems disappointed when Sloane merely says, "I've no interest in her" (87), about Kath instead of agreeing, as Ed wishes

him to do, that he finds her repulsive. Ed begins to discuss his business dealings, presumably to impress Sloane, but veers immediately into his most directly homosexual questioning of Sloane: "Give my your word you're not vaginalatrous?" (88), to which Sloane replies, "I'm not" (88).

At this point, Ed finally agrees not only to let Sloane stay, but also to hire him as a chauffeur. Ed's mounting sexual excitement is obvious as he describes the uniform he will buy for Sloane: "Boots, pants, a guaranteed 100 per cent no imitation jacket . . . an . . . er . . . a white brushed nylon T-shirt . . . with a little leather cap" (88). Like Kath, who wants to buy Sloane a shirt and agrees to mend his trousers, Ed also wants to dress Sloane in an image created for him. As Lahr says:

> Ed is decking out Sloane in the paraphernalia of sexual fantasy; Sloane, who can step into a new set of clothes as easily as a new identity, adjusts instantaneously. He has Ed firmly hooked. He will be Ed's "little matey," "the boy," in contrast to Kath's "baby." (Prick Up Your Ears 152)

Michael Beehler reads the importance of this scene: "It is . . . through clothing that Ed seeks to determine (first decide, then fix) Sloane's sexual significance" (90). Sloane is clearly being dominated by these characters here, but he is exerting power as well. By agreeing

to behave and dress in whatever manner they wish, in whatever "look" will keep them aroused, Sloane can guarantee his place in the room, can exploit the weakness that their obvious desire represents. He is certainly willing to trade his sexual favors--both homosexual and heterosexual--for a secure place.

Ed sends Sloane out of the room and calls Kath back in for a private conversation. He assures her that Sloane can indeed stay and tells her, "Don't take any money from him. I'll pay" (89). Ed and Kath are clearly after the same thing. They are at the same time comrades in arms seeking the same goal, and opponents vying for the same prize. Orton recognized this as the center of the comedic thrust of the play, writing, "His stalking of the boy's arse was as funny and wildly alarming as Kath's stalking of his cock. Unless this is so--you're in trouble" (quoted in Lahr, "Introduction" 16).

After all of this hilarious, sexually charged dialogue, Ed and Kath turn to a more serious subject, and thus introduce another element of the intertextual model--the exclusion of women from the male world. Obviously, Ed's questioning of Sloane about women and his sending Kath out of the room during his interview with Sloane both partake of this facet of the model, but Ed and Kath raise

it directly in conversation. Discussing the out of town trip Ed must make on business, he says:

> ED. . . . My colleagues and me will have a quiet drink before the business of the day.
> KATH. Are your friends nice?
> ED. Mature men.
> KATH. No ladies?
>
> Pause.
>
> ED. What are you talking about? I live in a world of top decisions. We've no time for ladies.
> KATH. Ladies are nice at a gathering.
> ED. We don't want a lot of half-witted tarts.
> KATH. They add colour and gaiety.
> ED. Frightening everyone with their clothes. (90)

The exclusion of women from the business world of men is used by Pinter in The Dumb Waiter, where that exclusion is clearly dangerous to women (vide the previous victim of Gus and Ben). Clearly Ed believes that women are not capable of serious business, lumping all women together into a category of "half-witted tarts." Kath's question, "Are your friends nice?" introduces that talismanic word "nice" into the discourse here, reminding a reader familiar with the intertextual model of Rose's and Meg's questions about their husbands' breakfasts in The Room and The Birthday Party, and also reminding one of the original radio script for The Ruffian on the Stair. The exclusion of women from the male-dominated world will recur in plays

by the dramatists under consideration here: most notably in the all-male enclave of Spooner and Hirst in Pinter's No Man's Land and in the "business" world of Don and Bobby and Teach in Mamet's American Buffalo.

Ed leaves and Kemp returns with Sloane's belongings. The entrances and exits of Ed and Kemp in this first act are conveniently timed so that they pass--without speaking, but with the opportunity to speak--twice. Kath's conversation with Kemp upon his return shows how dramatically the dynamics of the room have changed in the half hour or so that Sloane has been present. Kemp is exhausted by the trek to get Sloane's things, and he tells her, "I'm going to die, Kath. . . I'm dying" (92). In response, she accuses him of eating the ham she had intended for Sloane's supper.

Obviously Kath feels she has a new partner, Sloane, to share the comforts of her room and no longer needs Kemp. Her cold response to Kemp's fear of death--and death is always associated with being displaced from a spot in the room--echoes the twin cold replies to fear on the parts of Joyce and Mike in Orton's The Ruffian on the Stair. If being a member of a couple is inherently part of the comfort associated with living in a room, the rejection when that encoupling ends is a painful part of

the menace of invasion.

When Kemp retires for the night, Kath goes off stage and changes into a "transparent neglige" (93) before calling Sloane into the lounge. She pretends to be doing "a quiet bit of knitting before I go to bed" (93), but soon she "realizes that there is only one needle in the knitting" (93). In her nearly nude state, she has Sloane sitting on the settee next to her and she leans over Sloane to plump the pillow at his head, saying, "They make garments so thin nowadays you'd think they intended to provoke a rape" (93). Obviously, she wants sex from Sloane and wants it soon, but she (in true Theatre of Menace fashion) uses language inaccurate for what happens, implying as she does that forces other than her own libido are at work.

She shows Sloane photographs of herself as a young woman and of the spot in the woods where her baby was conceived. She has been looking for her final letter from the father of her baby, but is unable to locate it. In describing that sexual experience to Sloane, Kath says:

> KATH. . . . He was rough with me.
> SLOANE. Uncomfortable, eh?
> KATH. I couldn't describe my feelings. (Pause.) I don't think the fastening on this thing I'm wearing will last much longer. (The snapshots slip from her hand.) There! you've knocked the photos on the floor.

(Pause: he attempts to move; she is almost on top of him.)

Mr Sloane. . . (Rolls on to him.) You should wear more clothes, Mr Sloane. I believe you're as naked as me. And there's no excuse for it. (Silence.) I'll be your mamma. I need to be loved. Gently. Oh! I shall be so ashamed in the morning. (Switches off the light.) What a big heavy baby you are. Such a big heavy baby.

CURTAIN (94-95)

The ending of Act One uses several techniques which have appeared before. Of course, Kath's comments, which misrepresent what is happening (e.g., that Sloane knocks the photographs on the ground, that the fastening of her nightgown is giving way, etc.), are part of the continuing pattern of language as an ineffective and misleading medium for communicating the truth.

The Oedipal element here is foregrounded. Kath calls herself Sloane's "mamma" and him her "baby" at the same time they are copulating. The psychoanalytical thrust of this is that Kath seeks a replacement for both her lost son and her lost lover. The aforementioned similarities between Sloane and the child only heighten the Oedipal effect of this scene.

Lahr defines how Sloane's character is depicted and established in Act One:

> Sloane's innocent appearance disguises his predatory instincts. He molds himself into the expectations of others, transforming himself variously as son and lover to Kath; rude youngster and intruding lout to Kemp; and virgnal muscular Adonis to Eddie. . . . In Act 1, Orton emphasizes Sloane's role-playing by engineering the characters so Sloane is seen in bold relief with each of them. Sloane's initial passivity with Kath is replaced by tight-lipped aggression when he is left to chat with the feeble and squint-eyed Kemp. (Prick Up Your Ears 150)

Indeed Sloane adopts a different persona with each character. With Kath, Sloane is a nice, innocent, but compliant young man. With Kemp, he adopts a sardonic tone, commenting on how lovely the view of the dump is, pretending horror that the murderer of Kemp's boss has never been brought to justice. With Ed, Sloane metamorphoses himself into the image of Ed's lascivious dreams.

Orton realized that the ending of this first act would cause problems since the censorship of the Lord Chamberlain was still in effect. In a note to one direc tor of Entertaining Mr. Sloane, Orton warned, "Must be a quick curtain to Act 1. Actually the Lord Chamberlain said there must be no attempt to simulate copulation" (quoted in Lahr, Prick Up Your Ears, 159). Clearly the bisexual nature of Orton's hero in this play pushed the limits of British theatre in the early 1960's and Orton knew it.

At the start of Act Two, several months have passed.

Sloane reclines on the settee in the uniform which Ed has pantingly imagined him wearing. Kath comes in from her shopping and asks why Sloane is resting in the lounge while Ed works on the car; Sloane explains, "I was on the beer. My guts is playing up" (96). Obviously Sloane is in complete control of the situation here: he has Ed doing his job for him while still paying his salary, and he has Kath cooking and cleaning for him. At this early point in Act Two, the invader has clearly come to dominate the insiders totally.

Kath persists in reminding Sloane that he should help Ed and terms Ed a "good employer" (96), but she soon abandons this tack to ask whom Sloane was drinking with on the previous night:

> KATH. Did you go up West? You were late coming home. (Pause.) Very late.
> SLOANE. Three of my mates and me had a night out.
> KATH. Are they nice boys?
> SLOANE. We have interests in common.
> KATH. They aren't roughs are they? Mamma doesn't like you associating with them.
> SLOANE. Not on your life. They're gentle. Refined youths. . . . We toured the nighteries in the motor. . . . We ended up at a fabulous place. Soft music, pink shades, lovely atmosphere.
> KATH. I hope you behaved yourself.
> SLOANE. One of the hostesses gave me her number. Told me to ring her.
> KATH. Take no notice of her. She might not be nice.
> SLOANE. Not nice?
> KATH. She might be a party girl.

Pause.

SLOANE. What exactly do you mean?
KATH. Mamma worries for you.
SLOANE. You're attempting to run my life. (97)

Sloane exercises his power over Kath in this exchange. He clearly understands that Kath likes to have him home at night, but he responds to her questions with details about encounters of which he knows she disapproves: she doesn't like the boys he associates with because they are "roughs," but she is even more uncomfortable with the idea of Sloane associating with a nightclub hostess. Once again, in this exchange, that omnipresent work "nice" is used, further underscoring the idea that these characters really lack a substantive vocabulary with which to discuss their lives.

Kath reveals her true concern about the girl--that Sloane might catch venereal disease from her. In reaction to this suggestion, Sloane erupts violently against Kath:

> How dare you. [sic] Making filthy insinuations. I won't have it. You disgust me you do. Standing there without your teeth. My don't you get smarted up? Get a new rig-out. . . . You horrify me. (Pause.) You think I'm kidding. I'll give up my room if you don't watch out. (99)

In a clear echo of Stanley's complaints about Meg in The Birthday Party, Sloane attacks the overly mothering land-

lady figure of Kath, just as Stanley attacks Meg. Sloane also threatens to leave, just as Stanley did, to exercise his power over his situation. By threatening to do what Kath fears most, Sloane is able to control her acceptable range of reactions to his behavior. In this scene Kath asks Sloane, "Do I disgust you?" (99), to which Sloane replies, "Yes" (99). This is important since Sloane here uses the word "disgust"--the word Ed had hoped he would use to describe his reaction to Kath back in Act One. Clearly, Sloane is not above appropriating the language of one character to torment another. This scene is the zenith of Sloane's ability to control his surroundings in Entertaining Mr. Sloane, since circumstances soon change.

At this point, Kemp enters, looking for his pills. In a scene reminiscent of the early section of the party scene of The Birthday Party, two parallel conversations overlap one another to comic effect; in the scene from the Pinter play, the menace was maximized since the audience was laughing at the dialogue and fearing what was about to happen to Stanley at the same time. In Orton's play, Kath simultaneously carries on one conversation with her father about how foreigners are taking over Great Britain while telling Sloane that she is pregnant.

The subjects of these parallel conversations are

linked in an important way: both discuss how outsiders are exerting an influence where at least some of the insiders would rather they did not. Kemp's question as to whether the foreigners Kath has seen were colored is an echo of Wilson's disclaimer in The Ruffian on the Stair that he is not colored--tying the two scenes from the Orton plays together. Kemp overhears Kath saying, "I'm going to have a . . ." (101), and asks, "What are you having?" (101). This provides Orton with an opportunity for comedy, since Kath replies, "A . . . bath, Dadda" (101), and Kemp asks, "Are you having it after tea?" (101). The audience, aware of Kath's duplicity in her answer to Kemp's first question, should be amused at the second question, since its logic would apply to bathing, not to having a child.

Lahr reads the early part of Act Two as "fleshing out [Sloane's] fantasy of festival liberty" (Prick Up Your Ears 156). Certainly, at this point in the play Sloane enjoys a comfortable life: all of his needs and whims are met and all he must do in return is sleep with a man and his sister and, at least initially, keep each in the dark about what he does with the other. The news of the pregnancy, however, changes this fantasy world.

Kath presses Sloane to marry her, but he refuses,

claiming that Ed would not like it. Kath agrees merely to take a token so that she can pretend that they're married; over Sloane's protests, she takes his mother's locket, saying, "I'm your mamma now" (103)--again underscoring the Oedipal nature of their relationship. Clearly, Kath's announcement has diminished Sloane's power. Five minutes before, Sloane was lording it over Kath, threatening to leave if everything was not arranged to suit his fancy. Kath's pregnancy empowers her over Sloane, however, since news of it would displease Ed and wrest Sloane from his comfortable sinecure as Ed's chauffeur. History is repeating itself in this scene: once again, Kath has become pregnant by Ed's boyfriend. Since Sloane knows that Ed turned his back on that other man after Kath became pregnant, he fears the same may happen again in this instance.

Kath promises to buy Sloane a sweater for his birthday (which apparently is imminent, since Ed also promises to buy him something). This is another echo of The Birthday Party, and clearly these characters--like Meg in Pinter's play--hope to keep their lodger under their thumbs by treating him like a little boy. One wonders what Sloane's party might be like: would he finally have to face what he has done in the past and be held account-

able for it? Although there is no party dramatized in Orton's play, Sloane's past is revealed and he is forced into a sort of punishment for his crimes.

At this point, Ed comes in from outside, and asks if Sloane used the car the night before. The audience already knows Sloane claims to have gone with three friends to a nightclub, but Sloane denies having been out. Ed drops the subject, but takes Sloane's hand. In yet another of his flirtations with Sloane, Ed says, "What a grip you've got. . . . You've grown bolder since we met. Bigger and bolder. Don't get too bold will you? Eh?" (105). Presumably Ed must like how much "bigger" Sloane has grown, since he does not warn Sloane not to get too big, but only not to get too bold.

When Sloane goes off to the kitchen, Ed immediately questions Kath about the night before:

> ED. Where was he last night?
> KATH. He watched telly. A programme where people guessed each other's names.
> ED. What else?
> KATH. Nothing else.
> ED. He used the car last night.
> KATH. No. (105)

Despite her complaints to Sloane about being alone at night and her disapproval of his friends, Kath readily lies to cover up Sloane's absence from the house.

Clearly, she would rather have him at home at least some of the time than have him thrown out as Ed threatens to do if Sloane does not begin toeing the line more carefully. Ed, of course, sees through the lie as easily as Sloane sees through Kath's nighty.

The subject of television raised here is one of the most important elements of the play. Terence Rattigan wrote of this play, "What Orton had to say about England and society had never been said before. The first thing it showed was a society diminished by telly-technology. Everybody expresses themselves as if they were brought up on television" (quoted in Lahr, Prick Up Your Ears 153). Certainly this is true of Kath who claims, "I married out of school," and is in Act Three not so shocked that Sloane reveals her seduction of him as she is by his use of the word "seduce" itself. By raising the subject even briefly here, Orton foregrounds the social commentary his play is making.

The social critique of a television society will recur in an altered form in David Mamet's American Buffalo. In that play, the debased, commercialized society will be symbolized by the junkshop which serves as the set for the play. The modern world is figuratively represented as an accumulation of junk, relics from the

past which have only limited usefulness to contemporary men. The seed of this powerful symbol in American Buffalo is Orton's television world of Entertaining Mr. Sloane.

When Ed raises the subject of Sloane's forced departure, Kath is immediately upset and begs Ed to let him stay:

> KATH. . . I love him 'cause I have no little boy of my own. And if you send him away I shall cry like the time you took my real baby.
> ED. You were wicked then.
> KATH. I know.
> ED. Being rude. Ruining my little matie. Teaching him nasty things. That's why I sent it away. (Pause.) You're not doing rude things with this kiddy, are you, like you did with Tommy?
> KATH. No. . . .
> ED. I can't trust you.
> KATH. I'm a trustworthy lady.
> ED. Allowing him to kip here was a mistake.
>
> Silence.
>
> KATH. I never wanted to do rude things. Tommy made me.
> ED. Liar!
> KATH. Insisted. Pestered me he did. All summer. . . .
> ED. He didn't want anything to do with you. He told me that.
> KATH. You're making it up. . . . He loved me. . . . He wanted to marry me.
> ED. Marry you? You're a ridiculous figure and no mistake.
> KATH. He'd have married me only his folks were against it.
> ED. I always imagined you were an intelligent woman. I find you're not. . . . Let me disillusion you. . . . They wanted you to marry him. Tommy and me had our first set-to about it. You should have heard the language he used to me.
> KATH. I was loved. How can you say that?

ED. Forget it.
KATH. He sent me the letter I treasure.
ED. I burned it. . . .
KATH. It was his last words to me.
ED. And that kiddy out there. I'm not having him go the same way. . . .
KATH. Did you burn my letter?
ED. Yes. (Pause.) And that old photo as well. I thought you were taking an unhealthy interest in the past. (107-108)

This is truly one of the most terrifying scenes in contemporary drama, depicting as it does the horrible things human beings can do to each other. Out of jealousy and anger twenty years ago, Ed drove Kath's lover away and took her baby off to be adopted. Still troubled by these feelings twenty years later, he destroys her only two links to that past. One recalls with retrospective sympathy her search for the letter in Act One to show to Sloane.

This scene's linkage of Tommy and Sloane is important for the dynamics of the rest of the play. Not only does Sloane fear that the news of Kath's pregnancy will deprive him of his job, but Kath fears that the news would deprive her both of Sloane and the baby. The past haunts Kath here, and this scene is fraught with a very personal and direct menace which Pinter will not find until the family secrets come out and threaten to disrupt lives in his play The Homecoming.

This scene once again raises the impossibility of verification: we simply shall never know the truth of what happened twenty years ago. Did Tommy really love Kath? Did his parents support a marriage? Ed tries to hurt Kath by claiming a greater knowledge of the past than she has; once again the past has become a battleground for a power game in the present in a Theatre of Menace play, just as it did in Pinter's early work.

Kath's desperation is revealed in her lie about not having sex with Sloane. Clearly hurt and made vulnerable by Ed's actions--both in the past by taking her child and in the present by burning her mementos and destroying her illusions about Tommy--Kath fears a repeat of what happened before. Just as Ed burned the letter and the photograph, he attempts to render invalid her image and memory of what happened. He wants to make even her memories of the past unable to comfort her.

When Sloane returns from the kitchen, an interesting, brief three-way conversation takes place. Ed calls Sloane, "A good boy" (109) and starts the exchange:

> KATH. Mr Sloane.
> SLOANE. What?
> KATH. Can I call you Boy?
> SLOANE. I don't think you'd better.
> KATH. Why not?
> ED. I'm his employer, see. He knows that you're only his landlady.

SLOANE smiles.

KATH. I don't mean in front of strangers. (Pause.)
I'd be very sparing with the use of the name.
ED. No! (109-110)

Lahr notes that "Ed and Kath even haggle about sharing these epithets for Sloane, verbal demarkations of their territorial rights to his body" (Prick Up Your Ears 152-53). Some kind of power game is going on here. The intertextual model established that a person using an alternate name for another gains a great deal of power from this (e.g., Riley calling Rose Sal in Pinter's The Room or Wilson calling Joyce Maddy in Orton's The Ruffian on the Stair). Kath wants the power over Sloane that calling him "boy" would represent, but Ed wants all the power to himself. Since he does not yet know that Sloane has slept with Kath and made her pregnant, he is unaffected by the shift in power that occurred earlier in the act.

At the end of this exchange, Ed notes, "Getting fat as a pig, she is" (110), marking the first notice on Ed's part of Kath's obvious pregnancy. Orton wrote a director of the play, "Kath has to be pretty fat, brother. A belly you could loaf on. Six months gone. . . . This is the pregnant Mother-Goddess in her lair!" (quoted in Lahr,

Prick Up Your Ears 156). Once he too becomes aware of the truth, Ed will have to make some important adjustments himself.

After Kath exits, Ed presses Sloane about whether he did indeed take the car on the previous night. Sloane finally admits, "I went for a spin. I had a headache" (110). Although he at first tells Ed he went alone, he is finally forced to say, "Three mates come with me" (111), to which Ed replies, "They had headaches too?" (111). Ed is not satisfied even with this; he produces a lipstick he found in the back seat, but Sloane has an excuse for this as well: "Oh . . . you jogged my memory. . . yes. . . [one of my mates is] married . . . an' we took his wife along" (111). Ed refuses to believe this, berates Sloane for "taking birds out in my motor" (111), but immediately accepts Sloane's "unconditional apology" (111).

This exchange reveals an important similarity between Ed and Kath. Just as Kath never expected Sloane to be able to pay rent, Ed does not expect truthfulness or sexual fidelity from Sloane. He rejects several untruthful versions of Sloane's story before agreeing to forgive Sloane and believe that this was an isolated incident which Sloane promises not to repeat. Any reasonably intelligent person would see that Sloane is lying here,

just as all the previous explanations were lies. Ed's decision to accept this version as the "truth" reveals how strong Sloane's hold is on him. He presses Sloane for alternate versions of the previous night's events until he finds one he can live with and then ceases to press for more details. Again the unverifiability of past events is raised, but the clear implication here is not only that Sloane accrues power over Ed by dictating what versions of events will ultimately be believed, but also that Ed knows this and is complicit in Sloane's exploitation of him.

Ed then proceeds to tell Sloane his version of Kath's child from twenty years before. Clearly, Ed believes Sloane is hearing these details for the first time. One can recall Kath's shifting versions of her child from Act One and understand that the same attempt to wield power over Sloane Kath made in recounting past events in that act is being made by Ed here. Significantly, Ed's version emphasizes some details Kath left out:

> She had a kiddy once. . . . On the wrong side of the blanket. . . . I had a matie. What times we had. Fished. Swam. Rolled home pissed at two in the morning. We were innocent I tell you. Until she came on the scene. (Pause.) Teaching him things he shouldn't 'a done. It was over . . . gone . . . finished. (Clears his throat.) She got him to put her in the family way that's what I always maintain. Nothing was the same after. . . . I put him to one side which was difficult because he was alluring. I managed it though. (114)

Not only is Ed's account of the past an attempt to exert power over Sloane, but it is also a direct threat to the young lodger. Ed is warning Sloane that, if he fools around with Kath, he will be evicted from his comfortable place in the room. Sloane has been aware all along that there was a price to pay for his position, but Ed is now raising the stakes. Clearly after learning of Sloane's trip in the car with a young girl, Ed wants Sloane's sexual favors exclusively to himself. Sloane is put into a difficult position since Kath clearly expects sex from him as well. For Sloane, the room itself is becoming a somewhat dangerous place where any number of actions on his part could result in a decrease in the level of comfort he enjoys or in expulsion from the room altogether.

At this point Kemp comes in, wanting a word in private with Ed. After some initial business in which Sloane tries to remain in the room while the conversation goes on, Ed tells Sloane to leave. The lack of willingness on Sloane's part to leave is significant. He fears that Kemp will tell Ed of Sloane's murder (and of the violent treatment he has been giving Kemp himself). This is an important moment in the play structurally as well. Knowing that the father and son have not spoken for twenty years,

the audience expects this scene to be one of reconciliation or at least of explanation, as the conventions of theatre would dictate. What happens here, however, is not what the audience expects at all.

Kemp reveals Sloane's psychological and physical abuse: "He comes to my room at night. . . . I can't get to sleep. He talks all the time. . . . I can't sleep for worry. . . . He kicked me yesterday" (116-117). Sloane interrupts, claiming that a man outside wants a word with Kemp. This transparent ruse does not work, however. Kemp promises to come "in a minute, boy" (117) and, once Sloane leaves, proceeds to tell Ed, "He's in bed with her most nights. People talk. The woman from the shop spotted it first. Four months gone, she reckons. . . . She's like the side of a house lately. It's not what she eats" (117). Now Ed is fully aware of Sloane's actions.

Ed professes interest in Kemp's information, but Kemp is not yet finished. He tries to tell Ed about Sloane's "crime" (118), but Ed has had enough: "I don't want to hear. (Pause.) I'm surprised to find you spreading stories about the kiddy. Shocked. . . . That's slander" (118). This scene is fraught with menace. Once again in an Orton scene, one character reveals a painful secret to another in hopes of remedying the situation, of alleviat-

ing the hurt, but is rebuffed. This motif occurred twice in The Ruffian on the Stair and is analogous to Ed's hurtful treatment of Kath's mementoes earlier in this play.

Once Kemp leaves the room, Ed questions Sloane, who admits talking to Kemp at night and kicking him. He then asks Sloane if Kath is pregnant, but tells Sloane, "Convince me it isn't true. . . . Lie to me" (119). Ed clearly wants Sloane to create an explanation just as he did about taking a girl out in the car: a version which Ed knows to be a lie but which he can accept as the truth. Sloane does not play the game this time around, however, telling Ed, "She threw herself at me" (119).

Ed is hurt by this, but wants to save whatever part of his fantasy, his illusion of Sloane, that he can salvage:

> SLOANE. I put up a fight.
> ED. She had your cherry?
> SLOANE. No.
> ED. Not the first time?
> SLOANE. No.
> ED. Or the second?
> SLOANE. No.
> ED. Dare I go on?
> SLOANE. It's my upbringing. Lack of training. No proper parental control.
> ED. I'm sorry for you.
> SLOANE. I'm glad of that. I wouldn't want to upset you.
> ED. That does you credit.
> SLOANE. You've no idea what I've been through. (Pause.) I prayed for guidance.
> ED. I'd imagine the prayer for your situation would

be hard to come by. (119)

Ed's illusions are being shattered. Whereas he had hoped Sloane was a nice, innocent kid he could manipulate, he is increasingly becoming aware that Sloane is a "whoreson" (119) who has in fact been manipulating him all along. Sloane's line, "You've no idea what I've been through" is ironic: indeed Ed has no idea what Sloane has been through, but is being informed of it in this scene.

Once again, faced with a revelation from Sloane which negates his fantasy image, Ed finds a version of the events which he can live with and forgives Sloane. Crediting Sloane's behavior to never having attended church, he then forgives Sloane, saying, "I don't condemn out of hand like some" (121). Significantly, Sloane defines the nature of their renewed friendship, calling Ed, "One of my mates" (121). Sloane has appropriated Ed's term for Tommy, his former friend who had impregnated Kath years before. Sloane is clearly equating himself with Tommy, offering to have the same kind of relationship with Ed that Tommy had. Ed makes Sloane promise to eschew women for the future, asking him, "Why conform to the standards of the cowshed? . . . It's a thing you grow out of. With me behind you, you'll grow out of it" (121). Ed's equation of heterosexual activity with the breeding

of cattle is a source of humor, but is not nearly as funny as the image of Ed "behind" Sloane, helping him grow out of his attraction to women.

Thinking that he has regained some measure of control over his situation, Sloane attacks Kemp, telling Ed, "Gets on my nerves he does. . . . I seriously consider leaving as a result of the way he carries on" (121). Sloane is playing the same card here he played with Kath earlier in the act: threatening to leave if something is not made to suit him just as Stanley did in The Birthday Party. He obviously recognizes the threat Kemp represents and wishes to create as many negative feelings about Kemp as he can; furthermore, he wants to make sure Ed knows that Kemp has it out for him, hoping that Ed thus will not believe Kemp's story. Ed promises to "have a word with the old man" (121), and Sloane gives an especially smarmy line, "How is it such a father has such a son?" (122)--a line too much even for a slick operater like Sloane.

Ed leaves to go to the shop for cigarettes, providing Sloane an opportunity to be alone with Kemp. Sloane immediately pounces on Kemp: "What you been saying about me? . . . What have you told him? What were you going to tell him? . . . Told him she's up the stick did you?" (123). Sloane's questioning of the helpless Kemp has much

the same threatening tone as Goldberg and McCann's interrogation of Stanley, but lacks the non sequitur thrust and jab of that scene.

Kemp denies having told anything and then is evasive, but he finally gives in and admits what he has done:

> SLOANE. . . . Why did you tell him?
> KEMP. He's her brother. He ought to know.
> SLOANE. Fair enough.
> KEMP. Got to know sometime.
> SLOANE. Right. (Silence.) What else did you tell him? (KEMP attempts to rise, SLOANE pushes him back.) Did you say anything else? (KEMP attempts to rise.) Eh?
> KEMP. No.
> SLOANE. Were you going to?
> KEMP. Yes. (123)

This scene is a frightening one. The virile young Sloane is bullying a helpless old man. Intertextually, one can recall the danger associated with making someone be seated against his will (e.g., the sit-down game in The Birthday Party) as Sloane pushes Kemp down. Kemp finally admits that he was going to tell Ed about the murder. When Sloane challenges Kemp's ability to see and identify him, Kemp says, "They got fingerprints" (124).

Sloane now knows that he cannot permit Kemp to notify the police since he could be convicted despite the old man's faulty vision. At first he attempts to convince Kemp of extenuating circumstances, to make Kemp feel what

he did was justified and understandable:

> One day I take a trip to the old man's grave. Hic Jacets in profusion. Ashes to ashes. Alas the fleeting. The sun was declining. A few press-ups on a tomb belonging to a family name of Cavanaugh, and I left the graveyard. I thumbs a lift from a geyser who promises me a bed. Gives me a bath. And a meal. Very friendly. All you could wish he was, a photographer. He shows me one or two experimental studies. An experience for the retina and no mistake. He wanted to photo me. For certain interesting features I had that he wanted the exclusive right of preserving. You know how it is. I didn't like to refuse. No harm in it I suppose. But then I got to thinking . . . I knew a kid once called MacBride that happened to. Oh, yes . . . so when I gets to think of this I decide I got to do something about it. And I gets up in the middle of the night looking for the film see. He has a lot of expensive equipment about in his studio see. Well it appears that he gets the wrong idea. Runs in. Gives a shout. And the long and the short of it is I loses my head which is a thing I never ought to a done with the worry of them photos an all. And I hits him. I hits him.
>
> Pause.
>
> He must have had a weak heart. Something like that I should imagine. Definitely should have seen his doctor before that. I wasn't to know was I? I'm not to blame. (124-125)

Sloane is trying his usual ploy here. Whenever he is found out as having done something wrong, Sloane offers an explanation with apology: he did something he should never have done and regrets it, thus he is not truly to blame. Like a child saying sorry, he believes himself to be absolved of all responsibility.

Charney writes of this scene, and of the appearance of sexuality in the play as a whole, "The blatant sexuality is always guarded and disguised--not part of a system of pleasure or hedonism, but only an expression of need and greed, the overpowering desire to use and possess another person" (75). Clearly Sloane does not particularly object to the sexual nature of the photographer's interest in him and does not offer this as his excuse for the crime; what troubles Sloane is that the photographs represent power over Sloane, symbolize a form of possession of Sloane. Furthermore, the photographer is not merely interested in the boy's body, but wants to control Sloane and possibly profit from the distribution of these photographs.

Sloane's strategy has worked both with Ed and Kath, but Sloane immediately finds that it will not work with Kemp, who says, "He was healthy. Sound as a bell" (125). Kemp's refusal to concede that the old man's heart might have been the cause of his death is a direct threat to Sloane. Here, a character refuses to go along with an alternate version of past events and does not allow another character to dictate history. The challenge of a version of the past is always intertextually associated with a power struggle, and Kemp has just made a critical

move in a deadly contest.

Sloane becomes desperate, fearing a loss of his comfortable arrangement. He pleads with Kemp: "Ed and me are going away. Let's have your word you'll forget it" (126), but Kemp will not agree, saying, "I'll see the police" (126). At this point, Sloane erupts in the violence which has been inherent in him, boiling under the cool, manipulative surface all along:

> You don't know what's good for you. (He knocks KEMP behind the settee. Kicks him.) You bring this on yourself. (He kicks him again.) All this could've been avoided. (KEMP half-rises, collapses again. Pause. SLOANE kicks him gently with the toe of his boot.) Eh, then. Wake up. (Pause.) Wakey, wakey. (126-127)

Yet again, Sloane attempts to blame someone else for his own actions, "You bring this on yourself," even as he is killing a man. The scene ends with Sloane calling for Ed, and pushing Kath out the door as she comes in response to the racket.

The dynamics have changed here from Pinter's early plays. One recalls the ending of The Room where the invader, not an insider, is beaten to death. In The Birthday Party, however, Stanley, who is forced to leave the room, is not an obvious victim of physical violence. The Dumb Waiter ends ambiguously, leaving the audience

uncertain whether Ben will kill Gus. Orton avoids these endings, opting for a third act.

This would be the climax of a traditional play, so that whatever follows would be a denouement, a quick tying up of the loose ends of the plot. That a whole act, of approximately the same length as either of the first two, remains demonstrates how original Orton's play truly is. He is not interested in the traditional effects of theatre or the overtly symbolic representation of menace practiced in the endings of Pinter's early plays. What he hopes to show here is the personal repercussions of violence. He does not show Sloane being brought to justice as a well-made play or a murder mystery might do; rather, Orton shows how Sloane's eruption into violence is a mistake for him personally since it alters the dynamics of the room and allows Ed and Kath to hold power over him. Since they know of his actions, they can use their knowledge as a lever to get Sloane to do as they wish. This is the stuff of Act Three.

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The business of Act Three is accomplished relatively quickly, but is of great importance as an advance on the intertextual model. At the opening of the act, the action is continuous from Act Two. Kemp lies semi-conscious on the floor and Ed and Kath come in response to Sloane's shouts. Sloane attributes Kemp's condition to "some kind

of attack" (129). Ed struggles with Kemp to get him upstairs to bed. By this point in the play, even Kath recognizes what Sloane is capable of and asks him, "Mr Sloane, did you strike the Dadda?" (129), and Sloane willingly admits his actions, claiming, "He upset me" (129).

Kath is understanding but firm. She believes Sloane has done something wrong, but concedes that Sloane must have had a good reason for what he did, speculating, "Did he insult you? (Pause.) Was it a bad word? (Pause.) I don't expect you can tell me what it was. I'd blush" (128). Kath is patently ridiculous here. She knows that Sloane has beaten her father, but she coyly pretends that she cannot bear to hear whatever naughty word Kemp might have said to provoke such an attack. Again, the audience sits in a position of knowing facts unknown to a character. The dramatic irony of knowing why Sloane did what he did undercuts Kath's silly lines, making her appear all the more foolish. Again the use of language here is foregrounded. Kath is willing to excuse physical violence if it was instigated by linguistic violence. She believes such language, however, would only make her blush, not drive her to violence herself. That language is both deadly serious and insufficient for genuine communication is a given in the world of Theatre of Menace.

Sloane readily admits, "I hit him several times"

(129), but Kath refuses to believe it, saying, "You're exaggerating. You're not that type of young man. . . . But don't do it again" (129). When Ed returns, he tells Kath that Kemp is all right, so she leaves the room. As soon as Kath is gone, however, the truth of the situation comes out:

> ED (taking SLOANE aside). How hard did you hit him?
> SLOANE. Not hard.
> ED. You don't know your own strength, boy. Using him like a punchbag.
> SLOANE. I've told you--
> ED. He's dead.
> SLOANE. Dead? His heart.
> ED. Whatever it was it's murder, boy. You'll have some explaining to do. (129)

Interestingly, Sloane uses the same explanation for Kemp's death--a weak heart--that he did for the death of Kemp's photographer employer. Kemp did not believe the initial use of this reasoning, and Ed will not believe its subsequent use. Sloane has trouble convincing people he is not guilty of the murders he commits.

Kath, oblivious of what has actually transpired, begins to vacuum the rug and wants to play a game with Sloane: "Guess what's for dinner Mr Sloane" (129). Orton savagely ridicules Kath here, using the audience's knowledge of events of which she is ignorant to show her in a negative light. Even Ed, however, does not react as one might expect a son to react to his father's death. True,

he does dismiss the guess-the-dinner game as inappropriate, but he says, "All you think of is food. He'll be out of shape before long" (130). Apparently Ed is more concerned with Sloane's physique than with with Kemp's death.

Sloane's murder of Kemp has changed the dynamics of the room yet again and decreased the power he can wield. When Kath persists with her game, Sloane exclaims, "I don't give a sod what's for dinner!" (130), but Ed will not allow this: "Don't use those tones to my relations" (130). Apparently Sloane will not get away with his loutish attitude any more now that Ed's knowledge of Sloane's murder empowers him over the young man.

Sloane wants to make sure of his situation and questions Ed:

> SLOANE. Are you sure he's--
> ED. As forty dodos. I tried the usual methods of ascertaining; no heartbeats, no misting on my cigarette case. The finest legal brains in the country can't save you now. (131)

Trapped in his situation, Sloane turns to Ed for help: "Accept my apology, Ed. Sorry I was rude, but my nerves won't stand much more, I can tell you" (132). He begins packing, hoping that Ed will take him away as they had discussed when the news of Kath's pregnancy was revealed to Ed, but Ed will have none of it. He rejects Sloane's

apology and discounts Sloane's theory that Kemp's heart was weak or that the pills he was taking undermined his health. Ed merely states, "You'll have to face the authorities" (133).

Ed fully exerts the power that the murder has given him. He wants to frighten Sloane with the prospects of punishment before extracting whatever concessions he can from the boy:

> ED. Get on the blower and call the law. We're finished.
> SLOANE. You wouldn't put me away, would you?
> ED. Without a qualm.
> SLOANE. You're my friend.
> ED. No friend of thugs.
> SLOANE. He died of heart failure. You can't ruin my life. I'm impressionable. Think what the nick would do to me. I'd pick up criminal connexions.
> ED. You already got criminal connexions. (133-134)

Sloane's usual ploys are not working for him. He becomes increasingly desperate for any thread to hold onto. He thinks Ed offers him an out when he says, "You must accept responsibility for your actions" (134). He agrees to do so and puts his hand on Ed's knee, but Ed asks him, "Remove that hand, will you?" (135). Clearly, not even Sloane's indirect admission of his total sexual availability--indicated by the hand on the knee--is enough.

In a final attempt to sway Ed, Sloane makes his most direct move yet on Ed:

> I'm very bad. Only you can help me on the road to a useful life. (Pause.) A couple of years ago I met a man similar to yourself. Same outlook on life. A dead ringer for you as far as physique went. He was an expert on the adolescent male body. He's completed an exhaustive study of his subject before I met him. During the course of one magical night he talked to me of his principles--offered me a job if I would accept them. Like a fool I turned him down. What an opportunity I lost, Ed. If you were to make the same demands, I'd answer loudly in the affirmative. (135)

Sloane blends his usual approach--admitting his badness and calling for help--with some new material. He uses the ploy of telling Ed that he and he alone can help, and makes his most explicit offer of sexual availability yet. Sloane's equation of Ed and the man (same physique and outlook on life) makes it clear that Ed too can become an expert on the adolescent male anatomy if he wishes. Smith terms Sloane's speech here, "hastily improvised to reassure Ed [and to accept] the preposterous version of their relationship Ed [desires]" (80).

He even makes his proposal more direct, offering to play whatever sexual role Ed wishes:

> SLOANE. Let me live with you. I'd wear my jeans out in your service. Cook for you.
> ED. I eat out.
> SLOANE. Bring you your tea in bed.
> ED. Only women drink tea in bed.
> SLOANE. You bring me my tea in bed, then. Any arrangement you fancy. (135)

Sloane is offering to play any sex role Ed wants. As

Beehler puts it, "he seeks to accomodate Ed by trying on both masculine and feminine roles" (89). Sloane can be the active or passive partner in whatever game Ed wishes to play. Sloane's desperation reduces him to a position of utter powerlessness. He so fears expulsion from companionship, from the room, and the isolation and privation which prison would represent that he is willing to do whatever it takes to stay in the room, in the partnership with Ed. No matter how unappealing or unappetizing he might otherwise find the arrangement, Sloane is willing to make the sacrifice to protect himself. Significantly, Orton makes sex the barter through which Sloane hopes to insure his place. This will become a part of the practice of the intertextual model henceforth.

At this point, Kath screams upstairs and comes running with the "news" of Kemp's death. Ed admits knowledge of this fact and begins to plan what they must do. He convinces Kath that the police will never believe that Sloane was justified in striking the old man, and tells her they must make the police believe that he fell down the stairs. Obviously, Sloane has convinced Ed to lie since Ed is cooking up a story quickly to cover up the facts.

Perhaps we are witnessing in this scene one of the reasons behind the unverifiability of past events--even as

the events themselves are happening, the characters plot to disguise the events, to lie about them, to use language which does not accurately describe them. No wonder that, years after an event, what did happen can never truly be known.

Kath agrees, even planning to make the phony story look more plausible by polishing the stairs and putting Kemp's new shoes on his feet. She readily takes on the task of hiding the truth in order to protect Sloane. Believing herself to be empowered by her collusion with Ed, she announces her pregnancy and claims that Sloane loves her. In one of the most harrowing scenes in contemporary drama, Ed attacks her verbally with great viciousness:

> KATH. I attracted him instantly.
> ED. You couldn't attract a blind man.
> KATH. He wanted to marry me.
> ED. What a bride!
> KATH. We were to ask your consent.
> ED. Look in the glass, lady. Let's enjoy a laugh. (He takes her to the mirror.) What do you see?
> KATH. Me.
> ED. What are you?
> KATH. My hair is nice. Natural. I'm mature, but still able to command a certain appeal.
> ED. You look like death!
>
> She shakes him off. He drags her back to the mirror.
>
> ED. Flabby mouth. Wrinkled neck. Puffy hands . . . . Sagging tits. . . .
> KATH. He said I was a Venus. I held him in my arms.
> ED. What a martyrdom! . . . You're [sic] appetite appalled him.

KATH. I loved him. . . .
ED. He aches at every organ. (142-143)

Ed's gratuitously vicious linguistic attack on Kath is riveting. She is unable to comprehend fully what he is doing, but he attempts to rob her of her illusions about herself just as he destroyed her mementoes of the past. Her use of that ubiquitous word "nice" to describe her hair only underscores her lack of a vocabulary to discuss anything at all, even herself.

Ed continues the attack with unabated fervor:

ED. What have you to offer? You're fat and the crows-feet under your eyes would make you an object of terror. Pack it in, I tell you. . . . You've nothing to lure any man.
KATH. Is that the truth, Mr Sloane?
SLOANE. More or less.
KATH. Why didn't you tell me?
ED. How could he tell you? You showed him the gates of Hell every night. He abandoned Hope when he entered there. (143)

Ed is painting an unnecessarily vile--even if essentially accurate--portrait of Kath in order to make sure of Sloane's choice to leave her for him. He is making her seem repulsive--as he had hoped Sloane would characterize her back in Act One. Ed's meanness and desire know no bounds. In this scene, he reveals himself to be a truly despicible character.

When she finds that Sloane is planning to leave with Ed, however, she changes her tune: "I shall never under

any circumstances allow anyone to perjure me. It was murder" (144). Apparently Kath feels she has a card to play. Sloane becomes even more desperate than before: "Look--mamma . . . see" (144)--calling her "mamma" for the first time (even though she has used the word for herself several times throughout the play). Kath does not yet threaten to call the police herself, but she claims that she would "go to pieces under cross examination" (144).

Ed and Sloane both try to convince her to lie, but she will have none of it. She also reveals that she knows of Sloane's prior murder: "In the course of conversations before his death he told me one or two things of interest. . . . I could hardly give credence to the report of your crimes. I didn't believe the old man. I'm paid for it now" (145).

Kath is playing a risky gambit, but she makes Sloane's options clear to him:

> KATH. Stay with me.
> SLOANE. No.
> KATH. Hold me tight again.
> SLOANE. No.
> KATH. There's no need to go away, dear. Don't make me unhappy.
> SLOANE. I'm going with Ed.
> KATH. I was never subtle, Mr Sloane . . . If you go with Eddie, I'll tell the police.
> SLOANE. If I stay here he'll do the same. (145)

Kath's characterization of herself as "never subtle" is one of her few accurate statements of self-description.

In a clear tie to Act One in which she articulated one reason for wanting Sloane to move in (to make extra income from his rent) but acknowledged that her stated reason was not a valid one (since she knew he could not pay the rent to his current landlady), Kath wants Sloane to stay, to love her. He has directly told her that he does not find her sexually appealing or personally interesting. She attempts to use the power that her knowledge of his deed gives her to make him behave as if he does love her. That his actual emotions would not be connected to his forced actions seems to be of very little consequence to Kath.

Sloane is indeed in a dilemma--whatever he does will result in his apprehension by the police. In response to this, Sloane once again turns violent. He smacks Kath hard, shoves Ed away from him, and struggles with Kath in the corner of the room, shaking her while demanding, "Support me, you mare! Support me!" (146). Finally he shakes Kath the hardest yet, and her false teeth come flying loose. He relents his attack on her as she scrambles under the settee to retrieve them.

Sloane demands that Ed help him, but Ed replies: "I won't be dictated to" (146), before coming up with his brilliant idea: "Perhaps we can share you" (146). Although Sloane recoils at the idea of marrying Kath, he is powerless to stop the arrangement they make. Ed des-

cribes the arrangement, "You've had him six months; I'll have him the next six. I'm not robbing you of him permanently. . . . I've got no objections if he visits you from time to time. Briefly. We could put it in the contract" (148-149). Wandor calls this arrangement "an inverted Persephone myth" (56) and argues that the blending of parent and child and brother and sister and lover is an "incestuous brother-and-sister-parent relationship, as if the presence of tabooed sexualities. . . have themselves totally overthrown all standard familial and sexual values" (56). Beehler calles the resolution of the play "a re-assertion of Sloane's original sexual doubleness" (90), arguing that it is completely appropriate given the homosexual and heterosexual roles Sloane has so readily adopted throughout the play.

Ed also agrees to allow Sloane to be present at the birth of Kath's child. He takes Sloane's locket as a token of his "ownership" of Sloane, telling Kath, "You'll get it back in March" (149). Having come to an amicable agreement on Sloane's dispensation, Ed leaves, saying, "Well, it's been a pleasant morning. See you later" (149). The curtain comes down on Kath rummaging in her sideboard for a sweet.

This ending is certainly vintage Orton, but even it has traces of Pinter's influence, most notably in its

resemblance to the end of The Room in which the insiders are able to repulse the threat exerted by the invader. Orton, however, achieves this end differently. Whereas Pinter has Riley beaten into harmlessness and presumably death, Orton allows his insiders to gang up on the outsider, to conspire to dominate him. Once again, through their ability to work together, Orton's insiders are able to manipulate and control their fate just at Mike and Joyce did in The Ruffian on the Stair. Taylor succinctly describes the change in the play from the dominating to the dominated invader: "What looked like being a story of a cuckoo in the nest has turned, almost before we know what is happening, into another tale of the spider and the fly" (Second Wave 131). In another study, Taylor writes, "He will terrorize his silly, motherly landlady and her businessman brother. . . [until] the tables are turned and they end up terrorizing him" (Anger and After 370); this switch in role from victimizer to victimized was originally hinted at in Gus's situation in Pinter's The Dumb Waiter and, now that Orton has enshrined it in this play, will become an integral part of the intertextual model in future plays.

The idea that the tension between the invader and the insiders is primarily a sexual one is pure Orton, as is the agreement to share the sexual favors of the desired

person at the end of the play. This is an important new element of the intertextual model--one which Pinter himself will use when he returns to Theatre of Menace with his play The Homecoming, a play which shows his obvious debt to Orton's work. Just as Orton's plays show the traces of Pinter's early work, Pinter's mature work show the traces of Orton as well.

Indeed Pinter's major plays of his middle period--The Homecoming, Old Times, and No Man's Land--all use Ortonian elements. Most importantly, in all three of these plays, sex is a much more central issue than in Pinter's early work. Each of these plays involves sex as an important element both of the threat and of its resolution. In some ways, The Homecoming seems a retelling of Entertaining Mr. Sloane, ending as it does with the agreement of a family of men to share the favors of Ruth, the invader. Like Sloane, Ruth enters as a threatening outsider and part of her threat is her powerful sexuality. Like Joyce from The Ruffian on the Stair, she is patently a former prostitute. The play ends with her husband abandoning her to be shared in the household of his father and brothers as a commonly held sexual partner.

In his diary, Orton himself noted his impact on Pinter:

> The Homecoming couldn't have been written without

> Sloane. And, you know, in a way the second act--although I admire it very much--isn't true. Harold, I'm sure, would never share anyone sexually. I would. And so Sloane springs from the way I think. The Homecoming doesn't spring from the way Harold thinks. (Diaries 238)

Orton also wrote to a friend, "Sexual sharing takes place in [The Homecoming] too. A girl though. Makes it more wholesome, I suppose" (quoted in Lahr, Prick Up Your Ears 131). Apparently Orton felt his use of the motif was more true to his own weltanschauung than Pinter's use of it was to his.

Charney discusses this influence on Pinter:

> Although Orton's early work was undoubtedly shaped by early Pinter, Entertaining Mr. Sloane, written a year before Pinter's The Homecoming (1964), seems to have influenced that play. Pinter's Ruth develops the mother-whore stereotype of Orton's Kath and, more pointedly, Pinter's overbearing hustler, Lenny, has a type resemblance to Orton's hollowly successful and vaguely criminal Ed. (73)

Certainly Orton's influence on Pinter's mature work cannot be denied and extends to plays other than just The Homecoming. In Old Times Pinter utilizes the notion of the past history of a character--including his sexual history--coming back to haunt him as the actions of twenty years ago get discussed (without becoming completely clear) between a man, his wife, and his wife's college roommate. In this play Deeley, Kate and Anna work out a variation of the basic situation we have seen throughout

the intertextual model. Deeley and Kate entertain Anna for an evening and unanswerable questions about the past get raised. Even though the invader of this play is clearly known to the insiders, her entry is nonetheless menacing and the exploration of the past in this play evokes the unverifiability of events outside the room.

Also, in No Man's Land Pinter makes a foray into the homosexual world explored farcically by Orton. In this play two men, who may or may not have ever met before, meet at an arts evening and end up spending the night together. Their encoupling, however temporary and tenuous it might be, disrupts the living conditions of the partner at whose home they spend the evening. Pinter's handling of this motif uses the element of mystery and non-specific menace (much like in The Room), avoiding Orton's practice of always specifically explaining what is happening to his characters.

Even though these three plays do represent Pinter's return to Theatre of Menace after his experimental period, even though they certainly use the intertextual model under discussion here, and even though these plays are generally seen as representing Pinter's finest work, they do not add anything specifically new to the model. Orton abandons overt practice of the model in favor of a more original farce structure while still using in isolation

some elements of the model being discussed. Pinter's mature work represents an entrenching into elements of the model already discussed and his most recent work has taken on an overtly political nature. Therefore, we must look elsewhere for the next and final step in the model.

American dramatist David Mamet's play American Buffalo takes on the elements of the model and uses them in a way both original yet obviously influenced by Pinter and Orton. This play is as sophisticated and important as Pinter's mature work; moreover, it adds to the model rather than just practicing it at a very high level and, in my opinion, represents the culmination of the threads we have been tracing through five plays. It is to this important work that we must next turn.

CHAPTER 7

DAVID MAMET'S AMERICAN BUFFALO

That David Mamet owes a debt to the work of Harold Pinter is beyond dispute. Perhaps the clearest indication of this debt is Mamet's dedication of his Pulitzer Prize-winning play Glengarry Glen Ross (1982) to Harold Pinter. Furthermore, in an interview with Henry Schvey, Mamet says:

> Well, Pinter and Beckett really made the most impression on me, because I discovered them at the time when I had no connection with any sort of dramatic literature. . . and this was the first exposure to drama as literature, drama as a living expression of things which people felt. It was a kind of a revelation. (90)

In another interview, Mamet states, "Beckett and Pinter--of course I'm influenced by them. If you're in modern dance, how could you not be influenced by Martha Graham?" (quoted in Carroll 147). Mamet's tough, spare dialogue certainly bears traces of Pinter's, though Mamet's language tends to be both more poetic and more filled with harshly offensive words than Pinter's. Mamet's characters usually are surrounded by a sort of aura of mystery much like Pinter's, but Mamet often provides an explanation for his characters and their behavior, as does Orton.[1]

Mamet also uses the elements of the intertextual model created in Pinter's early works, though he only uses pieces of it in his own early work. For example, Sexual Perversity in Chicago involves the tenuous and temporary encoupling to two characters. This encoupling disrupts the friendships the two have had with people who become excluded from the couple. In a very Pinteresque scene, the male member of the couple helps the female to pack in preparation for her to move out of her current room with a female roommate and move in with him. The scene is full of hostility on the part of the roommate, who is being deprived of one of the chief pleasures of the room--companionship. Clearly Pinter's influence can be seen in the resistance to having an insider removed from the room.

Mamet uses most of the elements of the intertexual model in American Buffalo (1976), arguably his finest play, and his first play to reach Broadway (Herman 139). The situation is vintage early Pinter. The play begins with two men, one older and one younger, discussing what they refer to as "business." The older man, Don, attempts to educate the younger one, Bobby, on the business world and its requisite behaviors and langauge. Soon, in true

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[1] Among the critics who have noted various parallels between Pinter's work and Mamet's are C. W. E. Bigsby (David Mamet 20, 65, 69), Dennis Carroll (147-49), John Ditsky (29), and Steven Gale ("David Mamet" 207).

Theatre of Menace fashion, the subject of breakfast comes up and arrangements for eating must be made. The action takes place in a single room, a junkshop in Chicago. Soon an outsider, Teach, appears and enters with a violent burst of language against two women who are known to all three men.

The dynamics here are quite clear based on an inter-textual reading: Teach is a hostile invader who threatens the domestic world of Don and Bobby. In fact, he wishes to usurp Bobby's place in the room, and much of the action of the play will involve Teach's belittling and exclusion of Bobby in an attempt to secure a place. Teach's hostility to the women (who never actually appear in the play) is part of the continuing Theatre of Menace motif of distrust of and exclusion of women from the world of men--in this play, the "business" world. Much like Ed who did not want any "half-witted tarts" in his world of "top decisions," women are here excluded from the vaguely criminal world of Mamet's characters.

The exclusion of the women also would seem to involve a homosexual relationship between Don and Bobby; although this is never made explicitly clear in American Buffalo, several signs do point to a sexual element in their involvement. This too represents a continuity between the

plays so far examined and Mamet's theatrical world. Clearly Don is a father-figure to Bobby, attempting to teach him about the business world and providing shelter and nourishment for him. The mixing of parental and sexual relationships is a hallmark of Theatre of Menace. Moreover, Don is somewhat like Petey from The Birthday Party and will be unable to protect his "son" from the dangerous violence of the man who invades their room.

Like the titles of other Theatre of Menace plays, American Buffalo is a somewhat ambiguous title. Of course, it refers to the buffalo nickel, the center of the plot involving the theft of the coin collection of a man who has purchased the nickel in Don's Resale Shop. Another, more figurative, referent for the title perhaps exists. It may be that the characters of the play are being metaphorized as the actual animal. This might be a subtle attempt to show that the activities of these men are as inappropriate to modern Chicago as the presence of a buffalo would be. These men who believe that they are a law unto themselves and that their code of business honor comes before all other considerations might be construed as acting in a "frontier" mentality, acting appropriately for the world in which buffalo roamed the environs of northern Illinois, but not appropriate for the modern

world of a major city. Dennis Carrol sees the constant emphasis on business in this play as evidence that the characters have inherited "principles of operation. . . from a debased frontier code of enterprise and initiative" (33). At any rate, the title, like Pinter's and Orton's, provides the very first key to the ambiguity of meaning in Mamet's play.

The play begins with Bobby apologizing to Don who tries to explain how he should have followed and observed a man; Bobby has lost sight of the man he was assigned to follow, and Don is trying to tell him what he should have done. Don's tone is patient but firm. He wants to make clear that he believes Bobby has done something badly, but he also wants to stress that Bobby needs to act properly: "Just one thing, Bob. Action counts. . . . Action talks and bullshit walks" (4). Even though he is displeased by Bobby's failure to maintain his surveillance of the man, he says, "I'm not mad at you" (4).

Don is patently acting like a father here. He is concerned that his "son" has not performed as expected at an important task. He sees his duty to explain and correct, but not to punish or berate. He is clearly affectionate to the boy, telling him, "don't go fuck yourself around with these excuses" (4) and "the only thing I'm

trying to teach you something here" (4). As soon as he believes that he has made his point, he and Bobby begin to clear up the mess from the previous night's poker game and to discuss how each player did.

They spend some time talking about Fletch, who is "a standup guy" (4) and "a real good card player" (4). Fletch is clearly someone they both admire; he was also the big winner of the game: "The fucker won four hundred bucks last night" (5). They also mention Teach, who did not do well in the game. Several other players are named, most importantly Ruthie, who won some money and is termed "an okay card player" (5).

Clearly one thing these two admire is the ability to win. This applies not only to the card game, but it also carries over into the world of "business" (3)--an omnibus word used for anything not considered "friendship" (7). Business includes, but is not limited to, the card game, Bobby's assignment to follow the man whom he lost, and the operation of the junkshop. Schvey calls business, "the most significant and often-used word in American Buffalo (aside from the ubiquitous 'fuck')" (81) and ties the appearance of this word to the play's theme of "the corruptive force of American society and its dreams, and the effect of this corruption on individuals" (81). Bernard

Herman reads this word's significance in a somewhat different manner:

> Both Don and Teach use the word <u>business</u> frequently, but the play is only marginally about business. Business here seems to mean something like being tough and clearheaded about the world and what one has to do to get along in it. Basically the characters are less businesslike than incorrigibly criminal or ignorant. (142)

Whether business itself or merely the distorted perceptions of business held by the characters is the referent of this word, the discussion of and acting upon "business" is at the heart of the play.

As they clean up and discuss the game, Don attempts to teach Bobby more about what he was saying earlier, but this time casting it in more general terms than merely failing to fulfill a particular job:

> Everything, Bobby: it's going to happen to you, it's <u>not</u> going to happen to you, the important thing is can you deal with it, and can you <u>learn</u> from it. [sic]
>
> <u>Pause</u>.
>
> And this is why I'm telling you to stand up. It's no different with you than with anyone else. Everything that I or Fletcher know we picked up on the street. That's all business is . . . common sense, experience, and talent. (6)

Don sees all of life as an arena in which one should

strive to win, in which "business" takes place. Surely this is a comment on America, the leader of the capitalist world where a central value is to make as much money as possible in a lifetime. The reduction of life, indeed of "everything," to business is part of the problem these characters have and part of why they fail so miserably as they do to achieve any of their goals or to obtain any happiness in the course of this play. Don defines business and "People taking <u>care</u> of themselves" (7), establishing the philosophy of selfishness which will motivate Teach's actions throughout the play. In the world of <u>American Buffalo</u>, Teach is not behaving reprehensibly, but in a businesslike manner.

Don continues in this vein, distinguishing between business and friendship:

> 'Cause there's business and there's friendship, Bobby . . . there are many things, and when you walk around you <u>hear</u> a lot of things, and what you got to do is keep clear who your friends are, and who treated you like what. Or else the rest is garbage, Bob, because I want to tell you something. . . . Things are not always what they seem to be. (7-8)

Despite the pat nature of Don's homilies on life, he is genuinely attempting to teach Bobby something he honestly believes will be useful to him someday.[2]

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[2] For a further discussion of this important aspect of the relationship between Don and Bobby see Hubert-Leibler 559-60, 564, and 567-8.

At this point the subject of breakfast arises. Again a familiarity with the intertextual model assists a reading of this scene:

DON: . . . You want some breakfast?
BOB: I'm not hungry.

Pause.

DON: Never skip breakfast, Bob.
BOB: Why?
DON: Breakfast . . . is the most important meal of the day.
BOB: I'm not hungry.
DON: It makes no earthly difference in the world. You know how much nutritive benefits they got in coffee? Zero. Not one thing. The stuff eats you up. You can't live on coffee, Bobby. (And I've told you this before.) You cannot live on cigarettes. You may feel good, you may feel fine, but something's getting overworked, and you are going to pay for it.

Now: What do you see me eat when I come in here every day?
BOB: Coffee.
DON: Come on, Bob, don't fuck with me. I drink a little coffee . . . but what do I eat?
BOB: Yogurt.
DON: Why?
BOB: Because it's good for you.
DON: You're goddamn right. And it wouldn't kill you to take a vitamin [sic]
BOB: They're too expensive.
DON: Don't worry about it. You should just take 'em.
BOB: I can't afford 'em.
DON: Don't worry about it.
BOB: You'll buy some for me?
DON: Do you need 'em?
BOB: Yeah.
DON: Well, then, I'll get you some. What do you think?

BOB: Thanks, Donny.
DON: It's for your own good. Don't thank me. (8-9)

This exchange demonstrates some features of Mamet's dramatic language. He puts certain words inside parentheses to indicate "a slight change of outlook on the part of the speaker--perhaps a momentary change to a more introspective regard" (American Buffalo 5). Just as Pinter's characters place an emphasis on using the exact word (cf. the "light the kettle" vs. "light the gas" discussion in The Dumb Waiter or the "sit" vs. "perch" scene of The Room), Mamet's characters insist on the important distinction between "eat" and "drink"--as indicated by the italics in Don's line.

Just as Meg tries to baby Stanley and Petey and Rose tries to infantilize Bert by their meticulous attention to the providing of and discussion of food, Don can be seen as attempting to exert and maintain control over Bobby by his management of Bobby's breakfast. The idea that Bobby needs vitamins is also important, since Don's question "What do you think?" indicates his surprise that Bobby even questions whether Don will buy him something important. Apparently it is given in their relationship that Don will provide financial support for the necessities of Bobby's life.

The intertexual echoes among the beginnings of at least three plays (The Room, The Birthday Party, and the radio script of The Ruffian on the Stair) can be heard in this scene.[3] Mamet is clearly working within the Theatre of Menace tradition established by the intertextual model under examination in this study. Schvey calls Don's concern about Bobby's breakfast a "fatherly lecture" (82), clearly identifying the roles into which these two have fallen.

The entrance of Walter Cole, called Teach by the other characters, interrupts the discussion of breakfast. Teach enters with a blast of invective against Ruthie, one of the other card players from the previous night's game, using the phrase, "fuckin' Ruthie" (9) six times running. When he explains the source of his anger, he again raises the subject of breakfast:

> I come into the Riverside to get a cup of coffee, right? I sit down at the table Grace and Ruthie. . . . I'm just gonna order a cup of coffee. . . . So Grace and Ruthie's having breakfast and they're done. Plates . . . crusts of stuff all over . . . So we'll shoot the shit. . . . Talk about the game . . . so on. Down I sit. "Hi, hi." I take a piece of toast off Grace's plate . . . and she goes "Help yourself."

Help myself.

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[3] Arguably this scene also bears the trace of the preparation of the tea and the scrambling to provide the requested food in The Dumb Waiter as well.

> I should help myself to a piece of toast it's four slices for a quarter. I should have a nickel every time we're over at the game, I pop for coffee . . . cigarettes . . . a sweet roll, never say a word.
>
> "Bobby, see who wants what." Huh? A fucking roast-beef sandwich. (To BOB) Am I right? (To DON) Ahh, shit. We're sitting down, how many times do I pick up the check? But (No!) because I never go and make a big thing out of it--it's no big thing--and flaunt like "This one's on me" like some bust-out asshole, but I naturally assume that I'm with friends, and don't forget who's who when someone gets behind a half a yard or needs some help with (huh?) some fucking rent, or drops enormous piles of money at the track, or someone's sick or something. . . . Only (and I tell you this, Don). Only, and I'm not, I don't think, casting anything on anyone: from the mouth of a Southern bulldyke asshole ingrate of a vicious nowhere cunt can this trash come. (10-11)

This outburst is important for a variety of reasons. First, it is a prime example of Mamet's aesthetics of language: filled with the most vile and obscene words in current English usage, the speech nevertheless has a poetic feel and rhythm to it. Particularly, the iambic thrust of Teach's line, "A Southern bulldyke asshole ingrate of a vicious nowhere cunt can this trash come," makes the line read like poetry. I would argue that Mamet's use of obscenity is merely a foregrounding techinque--a way of making an audience or a reader pay attention to what these characters are saying.

That the attack occurs on a woman is of significance, since the exclusion of and hostility toward women have

become a part of the intertextual model since Orton added homosexuality to Pinter's practice with Ed's world of "top decisions." Furthermore, these women, who are always mentioned together as a couple, are apparently lesbians--Teach calls Ruthie a "bulldyke" in this speech and will later call her "vicious dyke" (17) and "that dyke" (54). The unavailabilty of these women to the men for sexual encounters seems only to intensify the hatred and anger Teach expresses.

That the women resented providing nourishment to Teach is also important. Since obtaining food is an important part of the action of many of these plays (and since the subject has already been raised in American Buffalo), one can easily read Ruthie's response to Teach's taking a piece of toast as an attack on his very life, on his attempt to survive by obtaining sustenance. The intertextual model clearly shows that food is one of the comforts of the room and necessities of life, one of the methods of establishing the dynamics of the room.

Since Teach was eating at a restaurant, he is seeking the comforts of the room in an inappropriate place. Soon it will become very clear what Teach is up to. He is an outsider. He does not have a real room of his own since he lives at a "hotel" (54). In the course of the play,

Teach will attempt to remove Bobby from the room and take his place. The intertextual model shows that invasion from outside always disrupts the dynamics of the room and threatens at least one resident of the room; the case is no different here, even though the invader is someone clearly known by the insiders.[4]

It is germane to note that Teach acknowledges Bobby's friendship with Grace and Ruthie, saying to Bobby, "I know you're close with them" (11). Teach's verbal assault on Grace and Ruthie is thus also indirectly an attack on Bobby himself: when he calls Ruthie "an asshole" (11), he is also insulting Bobby. When he says of Ruthie, "The only way to teach these people is to kill them" (11), Bobby is being threatened too. As Dennis Carroll puts it: "Teach's major intention through the play is to gain the respect and approval of Don at the same time as he is driving home the business maxims which will exclude Bob from the deal" (35-36).

Teach's anger seems all out of proportion to the incident which instigated it. This could clearly be an

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[4] The idea that the invader is someone known to the insiders he threatens comes from Pinter's mature work: Ruth, the invader of The Homecoming, is a member of the family whose house she enters; Anna, the invader of Old Times, is the college roommate of the woman whose house she invades; and in No Man's Land it is left ambiguous whether Spooner and Hirst have ever met before.

instance of what Don said earlier: "Things are not always what they seem" (8). Perhaps Teach interrupted Grace and Ruthie during a fight or at a tender, romantic moment, so that Ruthie's comment would not necessarily be a direct attack on Teach--as he seems to interpret it and as the intertextual model would dictate--but merely a reaction of annoyance and displeasure. Don seems to believe that one of these alternatives is in fact the case, telling Teach, "They were probably, uh, talking about something" (11).

The distinction made earlier between business and friendship also seems pertinent to Teach's diatribe. He is hurt--as he soon says, "This hurts me in a way I don't know what the fuck to do" (11)--because he feels betrayed by someone whom he considered a friend. Teach has not learned to distinguish the important differences Don attempts to teach Bobby early on in the act. Clearly Mamet invites us to compare Bobby and Teach--both of whom look to Don for advice and comfort. Ultimately, the dichotomy between these two facets of personal life probably arises from Gus and Ben in The Dumb Waiter: the two men are "friends" (in a loose sense of the word), yet Gus finds that his "business" requires him to divest himself of responsibility to his friend. In this play very shortly business will cause Don to distance himself from

Bobby in order to form an alliance with Teach.

Finally, Teach's line, "I wish I had a nickel," is also important since the main through-line of the play's action will involve a plot to rob a coin collection containing a certain nickel. While Teach's wish for a nickel in the dialogue is merely a common figure of speech, it is also is a figurative way of expressing something they will literally plan to do.

Don changes the subject by again raising the question of breakfast. Since none of the men here has yet had his breakfast, Don offers to include Teach in his provision of food. He tells Bobby:

> Get me a Boston, and go for the yogurt . . . . You know, plain, and, if they don't got it, uh, something else. And get something for yourself. . . . Whatever you want. But get something to <u>eat</u>, and whatever you want to drink, and get Teacher a coffee. (12)

Teach will finally concede his hunger and asks for "an order of bacon, real dry, real crisp" (13). The inclusion of Teach in the plans for breakfast is significant; it represents his first toe in the door of the room in which he wishes to obtain a place since Don is now not exclusively concerned with Bobby's breakfast. Herman terms Don's willingness to pay for the breakfast "a healing ges-

ture" (144). Intertextually, a concern with someone's breakfast also marks a concern for that person generally. Don tells Bobby three times to get himself something to eat, but when he returns, he does not have anything for himself. Don is obviously concerned for Bobby's health and well being, much like Rose and Meg and Kath were concerned for their husbands and/or lodgers.

While Bobby is away, Don and Teach discuss the game. Teach believes that Grace and Ruthie cheated, that Grace looked at everyone else's hand when she went to fetch an ashtray or go for coffee and then stood by Ruthie's shoulder. Clearly this is at least partially the root of Teach's anger at the women. In raising this point, Teach echoes Don's remarks about business versus friendship:

> We're talking about money for chrissake, huh? We're talking about cards. Friendship is friendship, and a wonderful thing, and I am all for it. I have never said different, and you know me on this point.
>
> Okay.
>
> But let's just keep it <u>separate</u> huh, let's just keep the two apart and maybe we can deal with each other like some human beings. (15)

Teach apparently feels it is justified and proper not to trust the "friends" with whom he plays cards, but he finds it an unconscienable violation of decorum for Grace and Ruthie not to welcome him to their table at breakfast.

Certainly the audience is being invited here to compare the notions of business (or money, as Teach calls it here) and friendship, to ask where the boundaries between them lie. One of the subjects being examined in this play is exactly where these boundaries should be drawn.

After some desultory talk about Teach's misplaced hat and about when Fletch might be coming in, Don talks about the resale shop. He often has collectors coming in looking for items "from 1933. . . . from the thing" (17). Part of his business seems to depend upon collectors who want memorabilia from the Chicago World Exposition. This demonstrates that Don is used to dealing with collectors and to charging them inflated prices for items he calls "shit" (18).

Bobby returns with the food from the diner, but the waitress has forgotten Teach's coffee. Don also sees that Bobby has not gotten anything for himself, so he sends the boy back for the coffee and again tells Bobby to get himself something to eat. Bobby also says, "I saw him. . . . The guy. . . . He's going somewhere" (22). Don questions Bobby, who recounts having seen the man putting suitcases in the car and carrying a raincoat; they conclude that the man is indeed going away.

Bobby's departure leads into a bit of exposition

which explains why Bobby was trailing a man earlier in the day. Don calls someone on the telephone and says:

> Hello? This is Donny Dubrow. We were talking the other day. Lookit, sir, if I could get ahold of some of that stuff you were interested in, would you be interested in some of it? (27)

Again, this is a prime example of Mamet's use of language, particularly the dual meanings assigned to "interested": the first time it means "that you were asking about" and the second time it means "be willing to buy." Between Bobby's report of sighting "the guy" and Don's phone call, Teach's curiosity is raised, so he directly asks for some information about what is happening. After first attempting to play the subject low key, Don opens up and reveals what has happened:

> The guy with the suitcase, he's the mark. . . . He comes in here one day, like a week ago. . . . Just browsing. So he's looking in the case, he comes up and with this buffalo-head nickel . . . from nineteen-something. (I don't know. I didn't even know it's there. . .) . . . and he goes, "How much would that be?" . . . So I'm about to go, "Two bits," jerk that I am, but some thing tells me to shut up, so I go, "You tell me" [sic] . . . so then he thinks a munute, and he tells me he'll just shop a bit . . . . And so he's shopping. And he's picking up a beat-up mirror . . . an old kid's toy . . . a shaving mug . . . Maybe five, six things, comes to eight bucks. I get 'em and I put 'em in a box and then he tells me he'll go fifty dollars for the nickel . . . . So I tell him (get this), "Not a chance." . . . So I say, "Not a chance," he tells me eighty is his

> highest offer. . . . So I go, "Ninety-five." . . . We settle down on ninety, takes the nickel, leaves the box of shit. . . . The next day back he comes and he goes through the whole bit again. . . . And he tells me he's the guy was in here yesterday and bought the buffalo off me and do I maybe have some other articles of interest. . . . And so I tell him, "Not offhand." He says that could I get in touch with him, I get some in, so I say "sure," he leaves me his card, I'm s'posed to call him anything crops up. . . . He takes me off my coin and will I call him if I find another one. . . . Doing me this favor by just coming in my shop. (29-31)[5]

Clearly Don feels he has been cheated at business here. He believes the coin was worth substantially more than ninety dollars and that he has made a foolish mistake. His anger carries over to business generally, however; the comment, "doing me this favor by just coming in my shop," is mysterious since one of the givens of the business world is that the customer is indeed doing the businessman a favor by offering his trade, by patronizing an establishment.

The anger Don feels drives him to seek revenge, so he decides to rob the man not only of the coin itself, but also of the whole coin collection Don imagines must be there in his apartment. June Schlueter and Elizabeth Forsyth read Don's desire to rob the man an attempt to "prove

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[5] In quoting the exposition here, I have omitted Teach's recurrent questions and interjections--"Yeah," "Yeah, huh?" and "Uh-huh" are typical examples--in the interest of making the narrative more fluid and easier to follow.

himself the superior businessman" (492), showing how Don (and the world Mamet depicts in the play) equates business and criminal activity.

Teach alertly notices an opportunity for himself to score some points with Don:

> TEACH: And who's going in?
>
> Pause.
>
> DON: Bobby.
>
> Pause.
>
> He's a good kid, Teach.
> TEACH: He's a great kid, Don. You know how I feel about the kid.
>
> Pause.
>
> I like him.
> DON: He's doing good.
> TEACH: I can see that. . . . But I gotta say something here. . . . Only this--and I don't think I'm getting at anything-- . . . Don't send the kid in. (33)

Teach knows that Bobby has blown his assignment to follow the "mark" earlier this morning and thus is on Don's bad side. Teach sees an opening through which he can ingratiate himself with Don by offering to go into the apartment himself and commit the burglary. This is the first instance of Teach's continuing attempts to take Bobby's place in the junkshop and in Don's life.

Clearly, despite his denial, Teach is "getting at" something here. He wants to displace Bobby and feels that presenting himself as a more adept burglar is one way to worm his way into a spot in the room. Teach continues trying to talk Don into trusting him with the job. He tells Don that Bobby would be fine for a simple job, "You're taking his high-speed blender and a Magnavox, you send the kid in" (34), but that a more complex job is beyond the capabilities of the young man:

> You're talking maybe a safe, certainly a good lock or two, and you need a guy's looking for valuable shit, he's not going to mess with the stainles steel silverware, huh, or some digital clock.
>
> Pause.
>
> We both know what we're sayiing here. We both know we're talking about some job needs more than the kid's gonna skin-pop go in there with a crowbar. (34)

Although Teach is clearly scoring points with Don here, he does make a tactical mistake. Teach's reference to Bobby's "skin-pop" is apparently an allusion to intervenous drug use, a problem which Bobby has had in the past. Raising this subject angers Don who says, "I don't want you mentioning that. . . . You know the fucking kid's clean. He's trying hard, he's working hard, and you leave him alone" (34-35).

Don is protecting his ward here. Teach, in his desire to make Bobby look bad in Don's eyes, has gone too far, has stepped over a line which Don does not want crossed. Don's anger at the mention of the subject, however, is a measure of how much it troubles him. At least part of the reason Teach soon succeeds in talking Don into excluding Bobby from the robbery is that Don shares Teach's concerns about Bobby's drug habit.

Gale notes that Don "shows some concern over the young man's drug habits" ("David Mamet" 212), but does not see how Don's feelings might be a key to understanding the depth or complexity of their relationship. Furthermore, he does not see that, beneath the concern, Don at least partially shares Teach's view of Bobby. Schvey merely calls Bobby, "the reformed junkie" (82), ignoring the possibility that Bobby may still be using drugs (despite Don's belief to the contrary). Certainly Don must still at least suspect Bobby since he questions Bobby's repeated requests for money later in the play. Bigsby calls Bobby "a mentally damaged young drug addict whose dependence eliminates him as a threat" (<u>David Mamet</u> 73).

Bobby's incapacity--whether due to drug addiction, brain damage, youthful inexperience, or perhaps other factors--makes him curiously passive in the play.

Although he does take some action, he is clearly vulnerable to what the other characters say and do. He strongly desires to please Don: "the frenetic Bob--whether fetching coffee, reporting on his lookout, or trying to get back into the deal--desperately needs to please Don" (Schlueter and Forsyth 495). Bobby understands that his place in the room and the support and sustenance which it guarantees are wholly dependent on Don's good will, and Bobby wants to insure that his place will be safe despite his recent failures.

Schlueter and Forsyth clearly believe that Bobby is still abusing drugs:

> As a drug addict, Bob is incapable of decisive action or clear expression. Nervously flapping his hands at his sides as he talks, the junkie shuttles between the drug world and Don's junkshop, caring about only two things: his next fix and Don. For both reasons, the robbery is important to him. By helping Don pull off the deal, he would receive continued assurance of the older man's paternalism, as well as money for his next fix. (497)

Bobby knows that Don disapproves of his drug use and seeks to hide it as best he can. He hopes that, by vindicting himself in the deal to rob the coin collection, he can demonstrate to Don either that he is off drugs and capable of performing dangerous, important business tasks, or at least that his drug use does not interfere with his

ability to complete the jobs Don needs him to do.

Teach is well on his way to convincing Don to let him in on the deal, but he gives one more persuasive reason:

> All that I'm saying, there's the least chance something might fuck up, you'd get the law down, you would take the shot, and couldn't find the coins whatever: if you see the least chance, you cannot afford to take that chance! Don? I want to go in there and gut this motherfucker. Don? Where is the shame in this? You take care of him, fine. (Now this is loyalty.) But Bobby's got his own best interests, too. And you cannot afford (and simply as a business proposition) you cannot afford to take the chance. (35)

> And what if (God forbid) the guy walks in? Somebody's nervous, whacks him with a table lamp--you wanna get touchy--and you can take your ninety dollars from the nickel and shove it up your ass--the good it did you--and you wanna know why? (And I'm not saying anything. . .) because you didn't take the time to go first-class. (37)

Teach convinces Don by pulling two strings: Bobby's well-being and the nature of the transaction as a business deal. Don clearly does not want to do anything to endanger Bobby: whether the police could apprehend him or he could be injured by the mark. Also, Don understands the money potentially involved in the robbery. Against his better judgment, but out of concern for Bobby and a sense of business coming before friendship, Don agrees to let Teach in on the deal, agrees to go first class.[4]

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[4] The notion of going "first class" here seems to be an echo of that other great American play dealing with the effects of the business system on individuals, Death of a

When Bobby returns, he has Teach's coffee and has bought "a piece of pie and a Pepsi" (37) for himself. Bobby asks Don for some money "up front" (39) on the robbery deal, requesting fifty dollars. Clearly this alerts Don's suspicions that Bobby is going to use the money for drugs, since he asks, "Do you need it?" (39) and "What do you need it for?" (39). Don offers to give Bobby twenty for spotting the mark again and to lend him twenty, saying, "That's the deal" (42), but Bobby persists in wanting fifty dollars:

> BOB: . . . Could you let me have fifty?
> DON: That's not the deal.
> BOB: We could make it the deal.
>
> Pause.
>
> Donny? We could make it the deal. Huh?
> DON: Bob, lookit. Here it is: I give you fifty, next week you give me back twenty-five. . . . You get to keep twenty-five, you pay me back twenty-five.
> BOB: And what about the thing?
> DON: Forget about it.
> BOB: You tell me when you want me to do it.
> DON: I don't know that I want you to do it. (42)

Bobby wins the case for his full fifty dollars despite

Salesman. A great part of Willy Loman's problem in that play is that he does not merely want to be successful, but that he wants to be number one. To the extent that Don does not want merely to pull off a successful robbery, but wants to go "first class," he is making some of the same mistakes Willy Loman made.

Don's suspicions, but Teach has won as well, since apparently Bobby is now out of the deal on the burglary altogether. Teach is clearly making advances on his plans of securing for himself a place in the room, a place in Don's concerns. After getting his cash, Bobby leaves, allowing Teach and Don to discuss the robbery in more detail.

Don questions Teach about exactly what he intends to do once he begins the robbery, but finds Teach's answers unsastisfactory:

> DON: How are you getting in the house?
> TEACH: The house?
> DON: Yeah.
> TEACH: Aah, you go in through a <u>window</u> they left open, something.
> DON: Yeah.
> TEACH: There's always something.
> DON: Yeah. What else, if not the window?
> TEACH: How the fuck to <u>I</u> know?
>
> <u>Pause</u>.
>
> If not the window, something else.
> DON: What?
> TEACH: We'll see when we get there.
> DON: Okay, all I'm asking, what it <u>might</u> be.
> TEACH: Hey, you didn't warn us we were going to have a <u>quiz</u> . . .
> DON: It's just a question. . . . What is the answer?
> TEACH: We're seeing when we get there.
> DON: Oh. You can't answer me, Teach?
> TEACH: You have your job, I have my job, Don. I am not here to smother you in theory. Think about it.
> DON: I am thinking about it. I'd like you to answer my question. (50-51)

Don obviously is becoming worried over Teach's competence to commit the robbery. When he sees how simplistic Teach's conception of the robbery is, Don realizes that Teach is as incapable of the job as Bobby is. He decides, "I'm going to have Fletch come with us" (50). At first Teach resists this idea, hoping to prove his worthiness to Don, but eventually he capitulates, wanting more to go along with Don and please him than to risk his wrath.

Perhaps because of his early success, Teach thinks he has taken over Bobby's place completely. When Teach returns to the resale shop in Act Two to commit the burglary, he is angered to find Bobby there:

> TEACH enters the store.
> DON: What time is it?
> TEACH: Fuck is he doing here?
> DON: What fucking time is it?. . .
> BOB: Hi, Teach.
> TEACH (to DON): What is he doing here?
> BOB: I came in.
> DON: Do you know what time it is?
> TEACH: What? I'm late?
> DON: Damn right you're late.
> TEACH: I'm fucked up since my watch broke.
> DON: Your watch broke?
> TEACH: I just told you that.
> DON: When did your watch break? (62-63)

Teach is quite angry to find Bobby in the place he had assumed to be his now (a fact of which Bobby curiously seems to be unaware). Don realizes the tension inherent

in Teach's anger and attempts to redirect the anger by assuming the paternal role and dressing Teach down for his lateness. When he sees this will not end the inquiry into Bobby's presence, he changes the subject to Teach's broken watch in an attempt to diffuse the situation. Significantly, just as Bobby failed his first assignment--following the mark--Teach fails his--arriving on time.

Shortly, the inquiry resumes:

> TEACH: . . . I don't know what the fuck he's doing here. . .
> DON: Leave him alone.
> TEACH: Now I'm picking on him.
> DON: Leave him alone.
> TEACH: What's he doing here?
> DON: He came in. (64)

Teach appears to be playing the role of a disfavored sibling objecting to the parental attention given to the favored sibling. This type of intense sibling rivalry can be seen in Pinter's The Homecoming. This certainly fits in with Teach's desire to supplant Bobby, and Don must therefore protect Bobby. Don's and Bobby's explanation of why Bobby is there-that he "came in"--suggests that the outside is an unknown and probably dangerous place which can be avoided in the sanctuary of the room; this motif comes directly from Rose's fear of the outside in Pinter's The Room and is echoed in many subsequent Pinter plays.

Clearly Teach wants to enjoy the safety of the room as much as Bobby does and is aware that there is not "room" enough for both of them.

When Teach's anger turns to actual physical violence against Bobby, Don makes his choice in favor of letting Bobby stay in the safety of the room and expelling Teach into the unknown outside world. Bobby has taken the fifty dollars he borrowed from Don in Act One and purchased a coin (like the one they plan to steal) in an attempt to make up for his earlier mistake of losing sight of the man whom they hoped to rob. He gives it to Don, saying, "I found a nickel" (64). Furthermore, Bobby also knows that Fletcher, the master criminal manque, will not be coming. When Don and Teach make it clear that they are waiting for him, Bobby tells them that Fletcher is in the hospital, having been injured by muggers who robbed him. The idea that this prince of crime is hospitalized after a mugging is one of Mamet's funniest touches in this play.

Unfortunately for Bobby, he first names the wrong hospital, and when Don calls that hospital, they tell him that Fletcher is not there. This arouses Don's suspicions even more:

> DON: You know what, you look funny, Bob.
> BOB: I'm late.

DON: It's after midnight, Bob. What are you late for?
BOB: Nothing.
DON (very sadly): Jesus. Are you fucking with me here?
BOB: No.
DON: (Bobby.)
BOB: I'm not fucking with you, Donny. (90-91)

Don is disappointed. He believes either that Bobby is lying to him or is so deeply messed up with drugs that he cannot discern truth from illusion. He is seeing something he fears taking place before his eyes. Bobby is right, however; Fletch has indeed been mugged, but Bobby has merely named the wrong hospital. They do not discover this, however, until after some significant events have occurred.

Teach sees that Don is touched by Bobby's gesture of having bought the nickel, but also sees Don's disappointment at Bobby's report on the hospital. He also believes Bobby is lying about Fletcher, whom he believes has gone ahead with the robbery without them and given Bobby the nickel he wants to give Don. In a desperate attempt to assert control over his circumstance, he lashes out violently against Bobby, beating Bobby's head "viciously" (94) with a piece of junk:

> You don't fuck with us, I'll kick your fucking head in. (I don't give a shit. . .)

Pause.

You twerp . . .

A pause near the end of which BOB starts whimpering.

I don't give a shit. (Come in here with your fucking stories . . .) Imaginary people in the hospital. . .

BOB starts to cry.

That don't mean shit to me, you fruit. (94)

Teach fears he may be losing whatever gains he has made, and he attempts to impress Don by his willingness to act. Apparently, Don supports this, telling Bob, "You brought it on yourself" (94). By this point, Don has lost faith in Bobby, but Bobby still has the truth on his side. At this point, Ruthie calls the shop and confirms that Fletch is indeed in the hospital. Ruthie tells Don what hospital Fletch is actually in, and Don calls to ask about Fletch's condition. When it is clear that Bobby was not lying, the dynamics shift back in his favor.

Teach, infuriated that Bobby was not indeed lying about Fletcher, begins to wonder where Bobby got the nickel if Fletcher did not steal it from the mark:

TEACH. Where did you get that nickel. . . .
BOB. I bought it.
TEACH. (Mother Fucking Junkies.)
DON. Shut up.
TEACH. What are you saying that you bought that coin?

BOB. Yeah.
TEACH. Where?
BOB. A coin store

Pause.

TEACH. You bought it in a coin store. [sic]
BOB. Yeah.

Pause.

TEACH. Why?
DON: Go and get your car.
TEACH. What did you pay for it? . . .
BOB. Fifty dollars. . . .
TEACH. Why would you do a thing like that?
BOB. For Donny. (98-99)

Clearly this scene owes a debt to Orton. Bob confesses something important and private in hopes of ameliorating his situation. He tells them that he spent the fifty dollars he borrowed from Don earlier in the play to purchase a coin in hopes of pleasing Don, of winning back his good graces. The ploy is obviously successful since Don tells Teach to "shut up" and "go and get your car."

Don opts for Bobby over Teach:

DON: Go and get your car.
TEACH: I am not your nigger. I am not your wife.
DON: I'm through with you. . . .
BOB: He hit me.
DON: I know, Bob.
TEACH: Yes, I hit him. For his own good. For the good of all.
DON: Get out of here.
TEACH: "Get out of here"? And now you throw me out like trash? I'm doing this for you. What do I have to wreck this joint apart? He told you that he bought it in a coin store.

DON: I don't care. (100)

When Don demands that Teach leave, Teach reminds Don that he has not allowed him to supplant Bobby and thus does not have the parental prerogative of ordering Teach around. Teach makes one last attempt to discredit Bobby, but it fails when Don admits that he does not care what Bobby has done; like the ideal parent, Don will love and support Bobby regardless of Bobby's actions. Thus Don chooses the friendship with Bobby over the business commitment represented by Teach. In the end, Bobby will stay and Teach will be forced to go.

Teach will not leave easily, however. He resists, saying, "I am not going anywhere. I have a piece of this" (101). When he sees he will not be able to secure a place for himself, Teach turns on Don: "You seek your friends with junkies. You're a joke on this street, you and him" (101). He also calls Don, "a man who has to buy his friends" (101). The sour grapes here explode onto the shop itself.

The violence inherent in Teach all along erupts into an attack on the room he had coveted a place in. The stage directions instruct: "TEACH picks up the dead-pig sticker and starts trashing the junkshop" (103). While tearing the shop apart, Teach recounts his view of the

world: "The Whole Entire World. There Is No Law. There Is No Right And Wrong. The World Is Lies. There Is No Friendship. Every Fucking Thing. . . . Every God-forsaken Thing" (103).

This speech is remarkably like Goldberg's speech during his moment of doubt in the third act of The Birthday Party. Goldberg says, "Because I believe that the world. . ." but is unable to finish the statement. Teach's bleak view is an articulation of the same hopelessness and dread Goldberg feels in Pinter's play. Don's reaction to this outburst is significant, since, while trying to quiet Teach's anger, he says, "Calm down, Walt" (103), calling Teach by his given name for the first time. Clearly this parallels the other instances of dual names (Rose/Sal, Nat/Simey, Joyce/Maddy) in the intertextual model. Intertextually, the use of an alternate name is always associated with power on the part of the person using it and weakness on the part of the person being called it. By calling Teach Walt, Don is trying to exert his power over him, to weaken him and end the violence.

In another echo of the intertextual model, the relationship between Don and Bobby is not exclusively characterized as paternalistic. There is a clear homosexual undertone to the situation. In a moment of anger, Teach

says to Don: "No wonder you fuck this kid around" (100). At one point Teach calls Bobby, "You fruit" (94). Earlier, when Don makes Teach apologize to Bobby and is not satisfied with the sincerity of the apology, Teach complains: "So what do you want me to do? Dress up and lick him all over?" (65). The clear implication here is that Don does just that as the natural conclusion to this sentence would be "dress up and lick him all over [like you do]?" Also, the idea that the other people on the street laugh at Don and Bobby supports this conclusion. Since Grace and Ruthie themselves never appear in the play, they are associated solely with the outside, which has already been shown to be a threatening and dangerous place from which one escapes into the room. Thus women can be seen as part of the threat existing outside the room and part of the room's attraction may be the opportunity for sexual fulfillment.

This too is classic Pinter. As early as The Dumb Waiter, with Gus and Ben's previous victim, Pinter has equated women with the threat from outside. In The Homecoming, Ruth (even the name here is the same as the character from Mamet's play) invades her in-law's home and comes to dominate the house sexually, disrupting the balance which had enabled the family to continue function-

ing despite the tensions which threaten to tear them apart. In Old Times, Anna's arrival is associated with the threats to stability, and her sexuality is dangerous to Deeley. The male bonding which arises as a result of this perceived threat from women is explicitly homosexual in Pinter's plays The Collection and is hinted to be homosexual in No Man's Land. The bonding also owes a debt to Orton's additions to the intertexual model in the form of Ed's prurient interest in Sloane and in the exclusion of women from his business world.

Surely one of the subjects under examination in this play is that of the American free enterprise system. Just as Orton lambasted the television society of 1960's England in Entertaining Mr. Sloane, Mamet is attacking the Me-decade atmosphere of 1970's America--the milieu which allows Don and Teach to equate the selfish desire for profit and gain with success and makes them feel justified in planning to commit a crime. Mamet sees the unbridled capitalism of his characters as twisting human relationships unnecessarily, as superseding those human relationships to the detriment of the humans themselves.

Teach gives his definition of the free enterprise system: "The freedom . . . of the individual . . . To Embark on Any Fucking Course that he sees fit. . . . In

order to secure his honest chance to make a profit" (72-73). For Teach and Don, this includes theft. Bigsby notes that Teach's "elegant defence of American individualism and the centrality of private property is delivered in justification of his intention to steal a private hoard of money" (David Mamet 74).

Mamet's critique of the free enterprise system suggests that businessmen of the real world are not so different from Don and Teach; as Jack Barbera puts it, "Part of Mamet's intent in American Buffalo is to expose the shoddiness of the American business ethic by having his low-lives transparently voice it" (273). Herman claims that the "lower-class hoodlums are similar in aspiration and tactics to higher-level corporate pirates" (141). Mamet's powerful image of the world as a collection of junk--visually underscored for an audience who must look at the single set throughout the performance--is one of the central thrusts of the play.

Clearly Mamet is working with key elements of the intertexual model in this complex play. He refers to motifs which go back as far as Pinter's first play, The Room, and he uses some facets of the model added by later Pinter plays and by the work of Joe Orton. Because of its system of allusions to these plays, American Buffalo can

only be fully apprehended by a reader familiar with those intertextual features.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

In the fall of 1981 just before beginning graduate school, I took a trip to New York for ten days with three friends. Early on in the trip, we all saw the off-Broadway revival of American Buffalo at Circle-in-the-Square downtown which starred Al Pacino as Teach. My friends were all relatively sophisticated and regular theatre goers. All of them had college degrees, and three of the four of us went on to graduate programs in various disciplines at universities around the country. Despite our feeling that we had witnessed a great performance from Pacino and that the play itself was a powerful piece of theatre, we felt that we had missed something very important while watching the performance: none of us felt that we had "understood" the play.

Several days later, we saw the off-Broadway revival of Entertaining Mr. Sloane at the Cherry Lane Theatre which starred Maxwell Caulfield as Sloane. At least on the surface, this play presented fewer problems of interpretation since the action was more straightforward and less opaque and mysterious. It occured to me immediately after the performance of Orton's play that I had seen an action roughly parallel to what had mystified me several

nights before in watching Mamet's play. I recognized the parallel roles of invader and insider from both plays, I saw the importance of sex and business in the action of both plays, and I understood that the surface action of both plays masked a desperate struggle for survival on the part of the characters who could not articulate (or even understand in any really satisfactory way) what was happening to them.

I filed away these observations somewhere in the back of my mind for future use. As I began seriously to study modern and contemporary drama in graduate school, I recognized that both of these plays owed a debt to the work of Harold Pinter. Before the trip to New York and subsequent study in graduate school, I had seen only one Pinter play, Old Times, which thoroughly confused me despite that fact that I enjoyed it on a superficial level, and had read only one other, The Homecoming, a play I did not then care for (or even remember very well) at all: I found it to be boring because I could not see the point of what the characters were doing.

The more I read and learned about Pinter's early work, the clearer the connection between these plays became to me. Only late in my graduate career did I begin in any systematic way to study and use contemporary literary theory in forming my views of literature. Having

gone to a university for undergraduate work which stressed new critical, formalist readings, I simply had little exposure to other notions of how to apprehend literary texts.

When I discovered intertextualty--first through Kristeva, then later through the important work of other thinkers and scholars--I realized that the connections I had been making between plays by Pinter, Orton, and Mamet were of an intertextual nature. I have subsequently come to see that the model described in this work--the room, the invader, the insiders, the threat or menace from outside, the ambiguous role of women, the male bonding, the provision of food, etc.--allows a reader who is aware of it to read these plays more fully and to clarify obscurities in the plays by being able to recognize and interpret signs intertextually--that is to say, to take a reading of a sign which was lucid in one play and transfer the reading of that sign to another play where its expression is less clear.

What began merely as a vacation to prepare myself for the unknown (and, frankly, feared) rigors of graduate school which awaited me at the end of ten days in New York, ended up being a significant event for me. It solidified my interest in contemporary drama which was already strong but was, by no means, settled as the area

to which I wished to devote the majority of my studies, and it gave me access to two plays--American Buffalo and Entertaining Mr. Sloane--which I believe are two of the finest works contemporary drama has to offer.

I believe my intertexual reading of the plays considered here provides a fresh approach to apprehend these plays more fully. I have come to be convinced that any reader who does not see and take into consideration the intertextual nature of the signs articulated in the later plays dealt with here will be as confused and baffled by them as I was eight years ago. By drawing our attentions to key similarities in the works of these important contemporary dramatists, the intertextual approach enables us to understand and appreciate more fully these key works of Pinter, Orton, and Mamet.

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