

## Pinter's "Semantic Uncertainty" and Critically "Inescapable" Certainties

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Well, some people would envy your certainty. . . .

—Lenny (to Teddy) in *The Homecoming* (3: 68)<sup>1</sup>

When Austin Quigley descried a lack of progress in Pinter criticism, in 1975, due to "the uncertainty that has characterized responses to Pinter's work" (*PP* xvii), he seemed to suggest that a sign of critical progress is the *reduction* of uncertainty. Debates about uncertainty recur frequently not only in commentary about Pinter but throughout much contemporary criticism. In the following account of attitudes toward uncertainty evinced by some Pinter critics, I try to relate changing directions in Pinter criticism to currents and crosscurrents influencing dramatic theory and criticism.

In 1973, the same year that Quigley completed "The Dynamics of Dialogue," the early version of *The Pinter Problem*, Tener argued, "no one has pointed out that Pinter varies a theme central to Ionesco's and Beckett's dramas": "the relationship between man and reality as expressed by man's mythmaking tendencies and as seen in his language" (175). "Everything is uncertain," and Pinter uncovers "the semantic uncertainty which underlies experience."

Today some would perhaps modify this statement to read that *nothing* "underlies" our experience and that, rather, it is we who impose structure on it. Projecting our own "semantic uncertainty" onto what we experience (live, read, and write), it is we who are uncertain. In part as a response to "modern" and "postmodern" writers—Beckett, Ionesco, Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, Borges, Calvino, Fowles, Pinter—we are able to see this "inescapable truth" about ourselves.

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Of course, Tener was not the first to point out the theme of “uncertainty” in Pinter’s work. By the seventies, Pinter’s “ambiguity” was already a cliché of criticism. In 1971, Rickert described a trend:

there is a growing body of Pinter criticism full of contradiction. Everyone has his explanation of a Pinter play, and the problem of puzzling Pinter has become so great that some critics have taken the position that it is impossible for us to know a Pinter play. We cannot explicate his work; we can only react to it, because he consciously and deliberately constructs his plays to create an unknowable world. (30)

This Sontagian stance characterizes some more recent Pinter criticism too.<sup>2</sup>

As Sontag created a strong impression on my own developing literary critical ideas in the late sixties, in part paving the way for my receptivity to reader- and audience-response approaches to writing by Pinter and others, so she has had a powerful impact on many others in literary studies.<sup>3</sup> Along with Sontag, who was herself an early reader of Barthes, importing this French critic’s writings to the United States (In 1982 she published *The Barthes Reader*), more “academic”-based critics have joined the “against interpretation” movement. Culler’s contribution is entitled “Beyond Interpretation.”<sup>4</sup> What we now refer to as “poststructuralism” has impulses in Sontag’s early manifesto urging an “erotics of art,” though it extends in a variety of ways to much other contemporary writing.<sup>5</sup>

As critics develop the “uncertainty” issue in writing about Pinter’s plays, then, they illustrate larger critical and theoretical trends. In this essay I chronicle changing views of Pinter’s “ambiguity,” beginning with Tener and Schechner, then moving through a debate about *The Dumb Waiter* (1957) in *Modern Drama* involving Carpenter, Quigley, and Van Laan. After this excursion through academic Pinter criticism, I try to show how my own experience of a (non-academic) production of *The Dumb Waiter* has enhanced my understanding of responses to the play and how it relates to this literary critical debate. Finally, I review Quigley’s more recent formulation of Pinter’s drama raising the issue of uncertainty to the level of Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle and Einstein’s theory of relativity, in order to suggest some far-reaching contexts for Pinter’s dramatic world.

Such metaphors empower critics as they transform uncertainty into certitude. When they build metaphors into interpretive strategies, critics formulate “concrete abstractions” theoretically expressing their own practical interactions with the experiences being interpreted and thus fulfill their own felt needs as audience members and readers. The value of these strategies—their truth-value for other critics—is mostly their usefulness in manufacturing more “certain” interpretations. I call critical certitude into question, urging greater tolerance of uncertainty to forge humanistic change.<sup>6</sup>

The earliest and perhaps most confident discussion of uncertainty or ambiguity in Pinter is Schechner’s “Puzzling Pinter,” published in 1966, the same year as Sontag’s *Against Interpretation*. Schechner argues that “the essential characteristic of Pinter’s work is its conceptual incompleteness” (177; emphasis added). Though Pinter presents “insoluble riddles,” he differs from “that other great riddler, Pirandello. Pirandello built his plays around contradic-

tions, Pinter around conceptual incompleteness. We cannot know in Pirandello; we shall not know in Pinter" (184).<sup>7</sup>

Anticipating Almansi and Henderson's "post-modernist" account of Pinter, Schechner warns critics away from explaining Pinter's "action" realistically so as not to deflect attention from "the moves and counter-moves [of the characters], and the thickening web of strategies" (182). Before Iser discussed indeterminacy and reading, before poststructuralist hermeneutics, Schechner writes, "The information we are given should be sufficient. The structure allows for gaps. To be prompted into filling them—either with thematic speculation or realistic detail—is to be misled" (182).<sup>8</sup>

"Semantic uncertainty" is Tener's label for "the Pinter formula."<sup>9</sup> As if the metaphor *formula* could help predict structure, texture, and theme in Pinter's plays, its usage militates against this perception of ambiguity. Like any formula, *semantic uncertainty* results from an aim to reduce *thematic uncertainty* to *critical certainty*.

For me the *Modern Drama* debate involving Carpenter, Quigley, and Van Laan about *The Dumb Waiter* symbolizes a shift from the positivistic objectivism of New Criticism and structuralism to the essentialism of nominal pluralism and poststructuralism.<sup>10</sup> Vis-à-vis their own somewhat conflicting interpretations of the same play, these critics register a certainty in the rightness of their methods and findings at odds with some of their own interpretive principles and hermeneutic pronouncements regarding Pinter's work.

Publishing in 1973, the same year as Tener on Pinter's "semantic uncertainty," Carpenter faults Pinter criticism for taking *The Dumb Waiter* too seriously as an example of "existential absurdity" and hence overemphasizing its "menace" at the expense of its comedy; previous critics "have drastically misunderstood the play." Instead: "Actually it is a mock-melodramatic farce"; even "an hour's worth of sheer, rich fun." The "blinders" resulting from earlier critics' "preconceptions of profundity" caused them "to misread clear-cut stage directions, to overlook giveaway lines of dialogue, to miscalculate obvious indicators of tone—in general, to resist perceiving the depths (or heights) of frivolity that the play achieves" (280).

Critics' detection of "portentous reverberations" in the "ludicrous" events of *The Dumb Waiter* like Ben and Gus's debate whether to say "light the kettle," "light the gas," or "put on the kettle" and their attempts to fill orders for such exotic dishes as "Ormitha Macarounada" (1: 141-43, 152) buttress Carpenter's thesis that "instead of reflecting the arbitrary, allogical meaninglessness of the Camus-Sartre universe in the manner of *Waiting for Godot*," *The Dumb Waiter* "establishes its own singular world: a nutty, unlife-like, non-allogical world of farce." Instead of depicting Heideggerian "dread" ("a generalized sense of hysteria prompted by the mere chaotic nature of things"), it is "mock melodrama" and a *parody* of absurdity (280-81).<sup>11</sup>

Despite its parodic manner, *The Dumb Waiter*, Carpenter argues, has *something* serious about it: Ben's "irked rejoinder" to Gus's repeated queries—"What's one thing to do with another?" (1: 161)—is "one of the few things in the play that can be taken seriously" (282). Ben is echoing "one of Harold Pinter's many warnings to critics," this one from an interview that Pinter

gave about his film *Accident*: "The most we know for sure is that the things which have happened have happened in a certain order: any connections we think we see, or choose to make, are pure guesswork" (282).<sup>12</sup>

Far more important to Carpenter than this motif of critical uncertainty are aspects of the play's *certain* lack of seriousness. He argues that the play's "astounding finale" (1: 164-65) is one thing that "certainly cannot be" taken seriously. As this sequence "absolutely defies critical gravity," "any feasible hypothesis" resulting from a "search for rational explanations" of it must be "fraught with improbability" (282-84). But, Carpenter supposes, even though "like the whole play, the last hovering image roguishly exposes the absurdity of dread," today's critics "have to say something else—perhaps the asininity of funk" (284-86).<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps challenged by Carpenter's admonitions against searching for "rational explanations" of the end of *The Dumb Waiter*, Quigley bravely (and gravely) enters the debate with his 1978 *Modern Drama* article. In describing *The Dumb Waiter* as "a puzzling play which is rendered even more puzzling by its abrupt termination at precisely the point at which we feel that something decisive is finally about to happen," Quigley reminds us that the play's "final tableau" is "climaxed not by a gunshot, nor by the lowering of Ben's gun, but by a long, silent stare." To surmise Gus's subsequent murder is "interesting but irrelevant speculation" (1).

Moving from the audience's uncertainty about Gus's fate to other ambiguities that he notices in the play, Quigley considers the general epistemological issue of uncertainty and the characters' relative attitudes toward their "incomplete" knowledge of what is going on in the play. He attempts to find a general meaning applicable to "a series of seemingly trivial incidents that would not be out of place in a music-hall sketch," which, he points out, are "so bizarre and so frequent" as to make Carpenter deny "any seriousness of theme" to *The Dumb Waiter* when he classifies it as a "mock-melodramatic farce" (7n2). Against Carpenter, "the seeming trivia of the play" acquire "a distinctly nontrivial function," and "the initially trivial" become "ultimately central" to what Quigley perceives as the play's epistemological theme of uncertainty (7).

Quigley's move here resembles the Derridean deconstructive strategy whereby the "marginal" or "supplemental" becomes "central" or "crucial," reversing a prior hierarchy of values.<sup>14</sup> Uncertainty permeates the world of *The Dumb Waiter*:

The incomplete nature of [Ben's and Gus's] knowledge of their professional situation might seem abnormal and bizarre, but placed in the context of the issues which the audience has accepted with laughter early in the play, it becomes a suddenly recognized norm. And by the same token, the similarity between the conclusion and these earlier [apparently trivial] events renders them no longer simply humorous, but disturbing examples of a world shaken suddenly loose from the security and certainty of its assumed moorings. (7)<sup>15</sup>

As Quigley extends this epistemological issue to "our" world, he recalls Schechner: "the worrying point . . . established by these incidents is that we

do indeed operate all of the time on information that is from one point of view or another disturbingly incomplete" (7). But he goes beyond Schechner:

In the context of the play, not having sufficient information upon which to base specific actions becomes only a special case of the wider problem of anyone ever having sufficient information upon which justifiably to base any action. (7-8)<sup>16</sup>

For Quigley "This is the final and climaxing dimension of the themes of incomplete information and displacement of cause from effect that permeate the play" (10). Pinter undermines "the tacit dimension of understanding." As the "trivial" becomes "crucial,"

The various attempts by both characters to explain the unexplained, to unite cause with effect and effect with cause, to transform the recurringly bizarre into the basically reasonable, gradually transcend the limited context in which they occur. . . .<sup>17</sup>

Quigley agrees with Carpenter; Pinter's "undermining" of the "tacit dimension of understanding" cannot adequately be described by "that much abused term, the Absurd." But he gives different reasons for the inadequacy of this label. While the play focuses on "the incompleteness of the characters' knowledge and control," it does not end by asserting the consequent *uselessness* of "the pursuit of knowledge and the exercise of control." Rather, *The Dumb Waiter*, Quigley argues, "demonstrates . . . the danger of losing sight of the inevitable incompleteness and inexactness of our knowledge in almost all situations in which we find ourselves involved." So Quigley generalizes again from the plight of the characters to that of the audience: "For the audience in the theatre, the organization for which Ben and Gus work remains appropriately and disturbingly offstage. . . ." Through this interpretive interpolation he transforms "the play itself" into "a manifestation of its own thematic concerns" (10).

Apparently unaware of his own critical intervention here, as he "makes sense" of Pinter's play, Quigley projects back onto it the "thematic concerns" that he considers "its own," himself displacing cause from effect.

Our belief in the existence of the organization, in its control of the situation in general and of the dumb waiter [sic] in particular, remains for us, as well as for Gus and Ben, a necessary but unconfirmed surmise—resting, as always, upon incomplete information. (10)

Undermining "the tacit dimension of understanding" creates what Quigley calls the audience's "epistemological impasse." But the critic's "epistemological impasse" also is reflected back upon itself (as Quigley's own later view of Pinter will suggest). Instead of "a denouement of a theatrical murder," the audience "finds itself . . . staring uncertainly at the two transfixed characters, who are also staring, equally uncertain, at each other" (11). With this last image, Quigley registers both the self-consciousness and the ambiguity of twentieth-century art forms.<sup>18</sup> Turning "the play's focus" away from meaninglessness to meaning by making *The Dumb Waiter* manifest "its own thematic concerns," Quigley "turns the screw" of interpretation of *The Dumb Waiter* (and Pinter's plays in general) one more turn.<sup>19</sup>

With another twist, Van Laan judges most previous commentaries “rather unsatisfactory” (494). “Instead of analyzing the play as Pinter wrote it,” he complains, “most commentators rely on distortions and fabrications—or, at best conclusions based on guesswork—to concoct a new play of their own making” (emphasis added). Though adept at using *The Dumb Waiter* against its other commentators, Van Laan never notices how his own commentary is implicated in the process he himself defines, even as my metacommentary “inevitably” is here.

Van Laan’s own “concoction” of *The Dumb Waiter* questioning the so-called “legitimacy” of “filling in” (495) recalls Schechner’s admonitions against “filling” Pinter’s “gaps.” The first variation on a “sequence of three occasions during which Ben calls attention to an item in his newspaper” (1: 130, 131-32, 163-64), when Ben reads to Gus about a girl who killed a cat and they decide her brother really did it, is “crucial.” Van Laan argues that Pinter uses Ben and Gus “to mirror his audience,” creating “a burlesque version of the commentators, a built-in before-the-fact put-down of their similar act of ‘filling in’ in order to make a presented situation conform to the sense of reality the viewer has brought to it” (495-96). The second variation, when Ben reads nothing aloud, may imply

that people like Ben and Gus (and most of his commentators) scarcely need *any* objective data to inspire them when making pronouncements about the reality external to their minds, that their “responses” may not be responses at all but self-activated and self-gratifying perceptions, relying almost exclusively on internalized stereotypes. (496-97)

Van Laan excepts from this generalization not only himself but “two commentators” on the play who “have managed to avoid sounding like Ben and Gus identifying the real murderer of a cat” (497): Carpenter and Quigley. Although at first he seems to *accept* both “concoctions,” ultimately Van Laan *rejects* Carpenter’s and Quigley’s in order to make his own.

Carpenter “properly” makes fun of “the typical responses” to the play but his account is flawed. Not only does he fail to recognize Pinter’s burlesque of commentary, but his “ultimate response” is “questionable and troublesome” because, as Quigley has already pointed out, it “refuses to take the play seriously,” distorting “what is *in actuality* a profound piece of drama” (Van Laan 497-98; emphasis added). We come full circle, back to Carpenter’s starting point, his idea that critics of *The Dumb Waiter* have taken the play as too profound, missing its farcical comedy.

While Quigley does take the play “very seriously,” providing “the best reading . . . yet to appear,” still “Excellent as it is,” it is “not entirely satisfying” for two main reasons: (1) Like the other commentators on *The Dumb Waiter*, Quigley provides “considerable explanation of what the characters are going through during their final stare, and while what he has to say is far subtler than the usual thing, it nonetheless borders upon ‘filling in’”; and (2) a “difficulty” Van Laan considers “far more important”—“like his brilliant and indispensable book, *The Pinter Problem*,” Quigley’s article on *The Dumb Waiter* “may very well make a bit too much sense” (497-98).

Through his readings of Pinter, Quigley provides us with a lens for viewing the plays which frees us from having to endure the kind of

experience that Ben and Gus go through and that so many spectators of Pinter's plays have felt themselves going through. In the case of *The Dumb Waiter*, by clarifying the real action of the play as thoroughly as he does and by ignoring some of its more refractory elements, Quigley domesticates it almost as effectively as do those who turn it into familiar melodrama. (498)<sup>20</sup>

This argument puts the commentator of the play in a "no win" situation; one cannot explain the "uncertainty" experience without being accused of reducing that experience of uncertainty to certainties: "too much sense."

As I have been saying about Tener's reduction of Pinter's writing to "the Pinter formula" and these other critics' formulaic extensions of uncertainty to "proper" interpretive procedure, given what commentators still generally aim to do—to *make meaning out of experience* (reading, theatre, art, other events)—this sort of reduction would seem inevitable. As we will see, Van Laan cannot escape reducing Pinter's plays to "too much sense" either.

But another way to regard this reduction (in each case) is to consider it as an *enhancement*. As in the chemical reduction occurring when metals are derived (purified) from ores, to some degree critics attempt to "concentrate" the "essence" of Pinter's plays. And like the reduction in entropy, or disorder, occurring when a compound precipitates from a solution, this critical concentration (or "essentializing") *reduces* uncertainty. Paradoxically, then, some *reductions* of Pinter's "puzzling" plays *enhance* them by increasing their intellectual value, or enlarging their worth as intellectual "currency."

As reducing bauxite to aluminum increases its value, a "critical strategy" can have economic value in the academic marketplace. And as for an owner of a metal processing plant, for a critic value comes not only from what is produced but also from the method, the "operation." If it is reproducible, replicable, capable of extensive duplication, like a metallurgist creating a new "refining" process, a critic is "in business." Carpenter's metaphor *scum/essence* borrowed from Pinter's *The Dwarfs* suggests likewise that a result of criticism, symbolic interpretations, is the "scum" skimmed off and either discarded or "sold" as "waste"; the valuable "essence" desired from the literary-critical transaction is thus the "by-product." From Pinter's viewpoint, critics' "guessing games" are a "waste of time" (Gussow 43). The *play* is its *own* essence; its value is self-contained or contained within it and not something extractable.<sup>21</sup>

As Van Laan reduces and enhances *The Dumb Waiter*, "the real focus of the play's energies"—the "real" theme—becomes "as much 'about' the relationship the dramatist has chosen to have with his audience as it is about anything else" (498). Van Laan describes this interplay as a kind of contradiction: "with one hand Pinter beckons us to speculate while with the other he disciplines us for so doing" (498). By reading *The Dumb Waiter* as a play about the dramatist's chosen relationship with his audience—by seeing this topic as *central* to the play—Van Laan engages in a common postmodern reduction/enhancement of literature: It is about itself. This parallels Quigley's notion that the play manifests "its own thematic concerns."<sup>22</sup>

But Van Laan answers anticipated objections to the circularity of this common thematic rendering:

All dramatists establish some kind of relationship with their spectators, but as long as it is the traditional—and comfortable—one in which the dramatist serves us as trustworthy and unobtrusive presenter of the material, we are not likely to notice the relationship as part of our experience of the play. (498-99)

In *The Dumb Waiter* Pinter alters “the traditional model” so that “his relationship to us becomes a *central element* of the drama” (499; emphasis added). To understand the play, Van Laan argues, we must explain his choice of this relationship.

Pinter *disorients* us “with regard to the *proper* rules for spectator response” in order to *force* us “to experience much the same kind of thing as Ben and Gus” (499; emphasis added). But potentially more interesting than this experience for Van Laan is an alternative “explanation” seeing Pinter as “a dramatist who is *exploring* his medium rather than merely exploiting it” (499). Instead of “making meaningful events,” like “the traditional dramatist,” Pinter may be “far more interested” in investigating “the process by which meaningful events are made” (499). To enhance the experience of *The Dumb Waiter* Van Laan thus stresses what he sees as *Pinter’s* shift of interest.

But he goes further. The *proper* way to regard *The Dumb Waiter* is to see it as a play that *mocks* the very “responses it encourages us to make” and makes us “far more conscious of our responses as such and of ourselves as responding beings than is normally the case when we are watching a play” (Van Laan 499).<sup>23</sup> *The Dumb Waiter* thus becomes “a *commentary* of sorts on our role as spectators while watching any play”; it enables us to notice our own meaning-making activities: how “by making connections of various kinds, we always *contribute* to the *shaping* of the meaningful events presented to us in the theatre” (499; emphasis added).

As his commentary *remakes* Pinter’s play *into* commentary, Van Laan considers the consequences of what he calls Pinter’s “manipulation of the audience,” turning the screw still further:

But since Pinter prompts us to reflect on our contributions to shaping his play’s *action* rather than to discerning the *meaning* of that action, his manipulation of the audience in *The Dumb Waiter* . . . calls into question the conventions of traditional drama and the familiar assumptions about reality upon which these conventions are based.<sup>24</sup>

As Van Laan countervails these “familiar assumptions,” he recalls Carpenter’s earlier objections to “rational explanations” of Pinter’s play.<sup>25</sup> This context puts Van Laan’s earlier criticism of Quigley for making “too much sense” into stronger terms: it makes what Van Laan labels Quigley’s critical traditionalism “inappropriate” to Pinter’s plays.

Turning the screw now a complete circle, Van Laan generalizes from the single Pinter play to drama overall: “Pinter’s manipulation of us in *The Dumb Waiter* asks us to question the validity of the traditional conventions of action in drama. . . .” But Pinter “probably does this only in passing, for he seems to be *after bigger game*” (emphasis added). What is the “bigger game” that Pinter is after? What is Van Laan’s own larger target?



Although we tend to respond to drama on the basis of what we have learned from our past exposure to drama—and other literary forms—we probably think of ourselves as responding to it as we respond to life outside the theater. Pinter is thus prompting us to review our assumptions about reality, to ask whether events themselves actually exist independently of our consciousness, our supposed response to them, or whether, on the contrary, our consciousness, instead of merely interpreting events, does not %—In fact also create them. *The Dumb Waiter* seems to ask, does an event acquire only its meaning from the way we connect data, or does it also acquire, through this process, its very existence? (499-500; emphasis added)

In support of this last alternative, echoing his own opening gambit against “conclusions based on guesswork,” Van Laan quotes Pinter, as cited earlier by Carpenter: “The most we know for sure is that the things which have happened have happened in a certain order: any connections we think we see, or choose to make, are pure guesswork” (500).

Van Laan builds a generalization about reading Pinter’s work as a whole from this discussion of reading *The Dumb Waiter*. This play teaches us how to read *all* of Pinter. It teaches us the lesson that “whatever legitimacy ‘filling in’ may have elsewhere—and its legitimacy for any dramatist remains undemonstrated—it is for Pinter at best a very risky process.”<sup>26</sup> Van Laan’s account of Pinter’s intention, of what he “actually” means, argues that Pinter is “not trying—and failing—to create a coherent action of the traditional sort”; rather, he is doing “something new and different.” As critics, we should not rely on “the traditional model . . . to complete his plotting for him,” but, instead, we should use it only “to discern exactly when and how he deviates from it.” Pinter did not *mean* us to *ignore* or to *discount* or to *argue away* the “atypical” in his plays (500).<sup>27</sup>

For Van Laan Pinter’s “very essence” is his *defiance* of “our expectations about life and/or drama” through “dizzying dislocations in which a stylistic mode that we have grown comfortable with [naturalism] abruptly gives way to a strikingly different one” (500). The “atypical effects” in Pinter’s plays substitute for “the coherent action” of traditional plays. Recalling Schechner, Van Laan argues that such effects—“not some action that we have ourselves invented”—are “the *proper* focus of our interpretive powers and *appropriately* engage our efforts to discern meaning and significance” (500; emphasis added).

As Van Laan issues these particular normative recommendations for reading Pinter, he *connects* the so-called “atypical” in Pinter’s plays with his “handling of the relationship between the dramatist and his audience” (500-01). Van Laan’s conclusion extends his metaphor of the game (Pinter “seems to be after bigger game”):

In keeping with our usual role as spectators at a Pinter drama, we have become a part of his play. He has, in other words, been playing with us and playing us in order to make sure that our responses get called into play and into *the* play—that they become not just passive adjuncts to the dramatic experience but active and indispensable elements of its total design. (501)<sup>28</sup>

While I myself feel sympathetic toward Van Laan's enhancement of Pinter, I also recognize that attitude as *both* a cause *and* an effect of my own immersion in reader- and audience-oriented critical inquiry. My leaning functions projectively on Pinter's plays and commentary about them. Whereas Van Laan sees himself as understanding what he regards as a "preoccupation" and an "interest" of Pinter's, I see both myself and Van Laan as *also* projecting our own critical preoccupations and interests on Pinter's plays (and on Pinter criticism)—and, hence, finding them there. As we enhance Pinter's plays, we reduce both them and commentary about them to allegories of our readings.<sup>29</sup>

Carpenter, Quigley, and Van Laan say nothing explicit about interrelations between the "texts" that they have concocted for *The Dumb Waiter* and specific actual performances of the play. Yet what they say could have important consequences for the theatrical production of *The Dumb Waiter* and other plays. Recent interest in performance study allying academic scholars with theatre professionals suggests the rich possibilities of exploring multiple interpretations in performing plays.<sup>30</sup>

*The Dumb Waiter* may not be produced as often as some of Pinter's others (like *The Birthday Party*, *The Caretaker*, *The Homecoming*, or *Old Times*) because it has generally not been considered "major," or as "important" as them.<sup>31</sup> That is one reason why I was delighted to attend a performance of *The Dumb Waiter* in a London pub in the summer of 1982. This "lunchtime" theatre performance at The Finborough Arms began with a sandwich on the way in, ordered from the playbill's "Lunchpack Menu," listing "Ormitha Macarounada" and "beer (with crisps)." (Balancing paper plates and cups throughout the performance further realized this metaphor of food being served.) Upstairs from the pub proper, the play was performed on a make-do stage by two actors on brief reprieve from a West-End production of *The Sound of Music*.

Their renditions bespoke definite ("certain") interpretations of their roles, accentuating Ben's assertive dominance and Gus's intermittent subservience. This Gus (Nicholas Lumley)—alternately passive and inquisitive, his interrogative mode punctuated by dependence and attendance on Ben's commands—and this Ben (Graham Fawcett)—continually annoyed by Gus's every question and gesture (no matter how slight), by his very presence—were an "odd couple": more like mismatched domestic partners than professional killers.<sup>32</sup> This portrayal underlined the comic dimension discussed by Carpenter; it was very funny and evoked much laughter, especially from me.<sup>33</sup>

I found this production both poignant and thought-provoking as well as funny. Ben's treatment of Gus as if his every gesture, his very being, was gratuitous—unnecessary, superfluous, absurdly *de trop*—took on a more serious dimension when Gus's superfluity in the process being dramatized on stage—his (hypothesized) replacement by another "killer" after he would be gone—became *both* a critical (crucial) assumption necessary for understanding *and* a critical (interpretive) consequence of my own response to *this particular theatrical interpretation* of the play.

Gus is *replaceable* if he does not behave *properly*, or according to Ben's (and/or Wilson's) purposes. To extend the domestic metaphor, there is a kind of

separation or divorce this “couple” is about to experience as a result of their incompatibility. They just don’t get along, and their various conflicts (such as whether one says “light the kettle” or “put on the kettle”) effectively dramatize this “fact” of their lives.<sup>34</sup>

My own experience and understanding of such discord enables me to elaborate the domestic metaphor in re-constructing this production. But whether a pair are life partners, business partners, partners in crime (the hitmen most presume Ben and Gus literally are), roommates (as Davies and Aston are, for a while, in *The Caretaker*), old friends (as Hirst and Spooner would have themselves in *No Man’s Land*)—even author and critic, or academic colleagues—merely varies this experiential gestalt. Each of us builds versions of *The Dumb Waiter* out of metaphors selected from (associations to) our own experiences. Everyday or common experiences form (if only in part) “bases” for our critical understanding, “grounds” for our eidetic reductions or enhancements of dramatic ambiguity, “foundations” for structures we impose.

As Van Laan suggests, what “underlies” our interpretations of experience is other experience. It can serve as “scaffolding” for our ideas as we rationalize our experience. Drawing critical metaphors from experience (“literary” and other kinds) supplies an important source of understanding. As Culler intimates, we use such “stories” to make the “incoherent” cohere.

On a literal level, often critics see Ben (“the senior partner”) as an agent of an organization; Wilson seems to be the boss. Then, in symbolically hierarchical readings, Ben stands (in) for some micro-authority figure: the “top banana,” even (as I have suggested) a husband, wife, or other partner; and Wilson for some macro-authority figure: He, They, God, the Supreme Author or Organization Man. In Van Laan’s re-symbolization, the micro-action (literal) and the macro-action (figurative) merge: the conflict is between a supreme author (Pinter) and his audience (us). This reductive enhancement stresses that, like Gus (and Ben), we are all “dumb waiters,” whose uncertain destiny may be at some other’s apparent bidding and at still another’s actual doing. Though we are “participating,” someone else “calls the shots.”

These allegorical re-constructions—whether epistemological or some other kind—relate to our own situations. That so many people *do* fill in (even if only momentarily) the murder of Gus, the expulsion of Davies, the punishment of Stanley, or the sexual background of Ruth (or any number of other omitted endings and beginnings) signals their horizons of understanding and their own humanness: their meaning-making authority. Interpreting a play (even while we are watching it)—connecting unconnected dots, crossing uncrossed ts, “filling in” gaps—does rationalize the irrational, but in this respect it merely resembles what we do with our other experience, which we have also learned “to interpret.” As Carpenter, Quigley, Van Laan, and the rest of us question one another’s procedures for meaning-making, we only substitute more or less sophisticated versions of the same.

Though to some it may appear arbitrary or improper, a theatrical production re-produces a play so as to re-create (for an audience) a so-called “meaningful experience,” just as any reading of a play (“critical” or otherwise) attempts to do. While fashionable, denying the importance of

meaning to dramatic experience can also appear as a kind of meaning-mongering.<sup>35</sup> To legislate an end to “filling in” missing dramatic details, as Van Laan seems to advocate, limits the procedure of making meaning for this experience. Yet, closing Pinter’s “openness” in his own way, Van Laan first plugs the holes with theory and then turns theory into a dramatic theme.

At The Finborough Arms, it seemed (to me, though not necessarily to Gus) that Ben was *hiding* not only his knowledge of what was going on (however limited it is), but also his own sense of his *lack* of knowledge. (Critics seem to hide the latter more than the former.) While Gus appeared sensitive to Ben’s discomfort yet ignorant of its source, Ben seemed extremely jumpy, defensive. I imagined that before the action begins, Ben has been asked to keep an eye on Gus (perhaps when the car stopped [1: 135]), that there are already some doubts about Gus’s ability to function. In the midst of their “linguistic” argument, Ben asks Gus: “Who’s the senior partner here, me or you?” and when Gus acknowledges that Ben is, Ben says, “I’m only looking after your interests, Gus. You’ve got to learn, mate.” Along with his lack of readiness to follow Ben’s orders, Gus’s recurrent questions and his express repugnance about the girl previously killed (1: 146-47) could imply his unsuitability for the job. In the course of the play, he does not “learn” or if he does (during the final stare), this learning occurs possibly too late for him to benefit from his knowledge: he is facing Ben’s pointed gun. At some time (in plays, in life) there may not be another chance to act “appropriately” toward “authority.” Even though we, like Gus, may have passed earlier “tests” (1: 162), we too may fail an ultimate one. There may be no “next time.” Imaginatively extending the end of the play creates dramatic afterlife.

The image of Ben, who presumably should know but may not, as *hiding*, *concealing* the “real meaning” of the action from Gus (for whatever motives) serves audiences and critics as an icon for Pinter, the author.<sup>36</sup> Like Ben, the “senior partner,” or Wilson, the author Pinter, they feel, is concealing the “real meaning” (of the movements of the dumbwaiter, of other events of the play, of the relationship between author and audience, of Life). When, like Ben, Pinter has protested that (no “prophet”) *he* does not know these “true” meanings (Once finished revising and rehearsing, he too enters the audience), many have argued that Pinter protests too much.<sup>37</sup>

Some interaction between Pinter’s plays (as texts and theatre experiences) and their audiences and commentators occurs; however, the causes and effects of the interaction probably cannot be pinpointed. Perhaps no one can be *certain exactly* where Pinter’s thematic “preoccupation” or “interest” begins and our own ends. The most we can do, as Pinter has suggested, is “guess.” With “informed” judgment, we can arrive at a qualified certainty—a certitude (a feeling of absolute sureness or conviction) at best—if indeed *certainty* is what we are after (as so many disclaim).<sup>38</sup>

Pinter enables what we must (on some “level”) already know, the so-called “familiar”—the “same old thing,” the “traditional,” the “conventional”—to interact with what we do *not* already know, the so-called “unfamiliar”—the “different,” the “new,” the “innovative,” the “non-traditional,” the “unconventional.”<sup>39</sup> As unfamiliar becomes recognizable, some would rather reject what they see and feel.

In *The Modern Stage and Other Worlds*, Quigley extensively reformulates his critical position on modern drama, Pinter's included. But, reminiscent of Tener's "the Pinter formula," Quigley's "reformulation" verges on the formulaic in some respects, as he presents it as a means of reading modern plays in "appropriate" ways. Like Van Laan's, Quigley's tendency towards defining what is appropriate in dramatic criticism is prescriptive; some approaches are more "proper" (right) than others.<sup>40</sup> For Quigley at this juncture, regarding plays as philosophical inquiries is more "appropriate" (right) than approaching them otherwise.<sup>41</sup> This position might confine critics who prefer to accentuate the experiential aspect of drama and theatre to intellectual inquiry, but it enlarges their role as theorists (philosophical workers).

Quigley extends Van Laan's insights, engaging "tradition" and "novelty," claiming that "these issues of relating old and new" acquire "a peculiar structural and thematic importance" in Pinter's play *Betrayal* (*MS* 221). To explain Pinter's "extensive use of well-made-play elements" alongside the unconventional, Quigley uses scientific paradigms, elaborating on both the "uncertainty theme" and Schechner's earlier concept of Pinter's use of "incomplete information" (222-24).<sup>42</sup> As we become involved in our "explanatory activities," most often we disregard this "potential for circularity" and feel as though, somehow, we have circumvented the problem. As my own critical allegorizing *The Finborough Arms* production of *The Dumb Waiter* does too (I see retrospectively), Quigley's discussion of *Betrayal* manifests this ability to repress cognitive awareness of "the hermeneutic circle" while making meaning.

Pinter's treatment of certainty and uncertainty reverses "one of the basic thematic consequences of the well-made-play structure . . . the reinforcement of an attitude towards the nature of explanation, experience and truth that is easily accepted as the only reasonable one" (Quigley, *MS* 224).<sup>43</sup> This attitude is "not . . . the only possible attitude, nor the only reasonable attitude, towards such things. . . . although it provides the basis for one mode of explanation in Pinter plays, it is by no means the dominant one, nor the one that gives the plays their disturbing and disorientating quality" (224). In contrast, what Quigley defines as Pinter's attitude duplicates parts of Quigley's own earlier theoretical argument; it favors pluralism over dualism or Hegelian dialectics.<sup>44</sup>

The "key point," says Quigley, is that "the characters, like the dramatist, are persistently engaged in a struggle not so much to locate the truths that underlie inherited structures, as to create the kinds of structures that will embody acceptable truths" (*MS* 225). Given Van Laan's concern with audience, one could extend this "struggle" to the domain of the audience; and, given my concern with critics as members of the audience with specialized interests, to their domain as well.

As Schechner was doing in conceptualizing Pinter's "conceptual incompleteness," Tener in devising "the Pinter formula," Carpenter in turning absurdity into farce, Quigley first in employing "the tacit dimension of understanding" and then again in relating structural, thematic, and textural "conventions" and "innovations" to epistemology, Van Laan in

playing with "Pinter's play with the audience," and as I am doing in structuring "critical strategies"—so we are all trying "to create the kinds of structures that will embody acceptable truths." The "theme of uncertainty" becomes the certain theme of both Pinter's plays and commentaries on them. And yet, in an important way, it remains the uncertain theme.<sup>45</sup>

Van Laan shows himself "filling in" omitted details of *The Caretaker* ostensibly to illustrate the risks of doing so with *The Dumb Waiter* and other Pinter plays and drama in general. But this interpolation enables him to construct his interpretive stance. Quigley seemed unaware of his own earlier intervention in *The Dumb Waiter*. Perhaps now he would acknowledge that his interpretation of the "issues" central to *Betrayal* is likely to be duplicating his own "reformulation" of the relationship between conventions of the modern stage and attitudes toward a "process of explanation" leading "back towards itself": this "dramatized recognition of the inescapable interaction for characters, for dramatist and for audience, of things known and the ways of knowing that help generate them."<sup>46</sup> Such an interactive circularity seems "inescapable": once one has turned the screw of interpretation far enough, it seems to unscrew itself, to deconstruct.

And yet I say "seems" inescapable, for I cannot be certain it is. This uncertainty is an effect of my own immersion "in" Pinter's plays and contemporary criticism and theory. In poststructuralist, functional terms, it would be called a *reading-effect*. Like the philosopher Teddy, in *The Homecoming*, some critics do not want to get "lost in it" (3: 77-78); yet, we do get implicated by the very stuff of our inquiry.<sup>47</sup> Given Quigley's own intertextual involvement in and intersubjective relationship with modern plays, philosophy, and criticism, given his reading and re-reading of Pinter in the context of his own experience (reading and otherwise) and his reading and re-reading of other writers in the context of this reading of Pinter—Pinter's "inquiry" (William James's, Goodman's, Quigley's)—where does it all "begin" and where does it "end?" We have Said's "beginnings" and Kermode's "endings"; but, to extend Lenny, "Philosophically speaking," *what* are they? What have we got and what are we "going to do with" them? Where are we "going to take" what we have gotten "hold" of?<sup>48</sup> We have all these reverberations of "the table leg"—the supposedly *certain* thing—the "thingness" of texts. Themes, rituals, games, fantasies, and dreams: this is the "stuff" criticism is made of, as critical Teddy boys strive to maintain "intellectual equilibrium," a "way of being able to look at the world."<sup>49</sup> While perhaps at times more nearly "lost in it," Pinter himself would perhaps rather savor living.<sup>50</sup>

As Holland once wrote, "Any critic is first and foremost a member of the audience. . . . A critic experiences the work of art initially as anyone else does" (*Psychoanalysis and Shakespeare* 314). Many theorists would question how closely "specialist" and "non-specialist" aesthetic encounters do resemble one another. Still, a "recognition of the inescapable interaction . . . of things known and the ways of knowing that help generate them" escapes many critics and scholars, as it does other audience members, characters, and dramatists. If this "recognition" is dramatized by Pinter in his plays and felt *dramatically* by critics, they *re-dramatize* it in their commentaries. Put into terms

that would antagonize any playwright, especially Pinter: as they “make” and “remake” the plays, “formulate and reformulate” them, the critics would seem the playwright’s *certain* “doing” and “undoing.” *They*—the critics—would seem *inescapable*.

I say “would seem” because to say otherwise would give critics a privilege that they do not always have.<sup>51</sup> Such Derridean “strategic interventions” occur when Quigley uses philosophical metaphors to describe modern dramatic literature as “drama of inquiry in a pluralistic world” and when I identify “rhetorical strategies” in critical discourse and see various “solutions” to Pinter’s “puzzles” (such as “semantic uncertainty” and “dramas of inquiry”) as *metaphors* for (understanding) them.<sup>52</sup>

If plays endure (both as theatre and as texts), it may be in part also because critics’ work returns readers to them. But when readers do turn back to dramas like Pinter’s after having read criticism of them, or turn to them first with criticism in hand, these texts are *altered* in the reading by the writing about them. They are re-read after they have been re-written. Such interactive alterations of Pinter’s work by Pinter criticism (and of Pinter criticism by Pinter and by other Pinter critics) seem inescapable, no matter how hard each of us may try to escape noticing them.

As this critically “inescapable” certainty, this certitude, becomes a platitude, Pinter criticism, and dramatic criticism and theory along with it, progresses, advances, as it were. Critical progress is metaphorical in that it occurs *through* metaphors—new ways of seeing—chosen by critics to substitute for (the experience of) plays.<sup>53</sup> As plays are both aspects of our environment and productions involving other people, to regard them experientially is to interact with them in ways that create what Lakoff and Johnson call “mutual change” (230): we change them and they change us, and through our criticism of them, we change one another.

When we accept other critics’ metaphors as truths, we are saying, “We understand,” in their terms.<sup>54</sup> Their metaphors, their new ways of seeing the dramatic world—and critical strategies built on them—become effective means to control the uncontrollable, name the unnamable, master the unmasterable: to know this unknowable but still inescapable member of our universe of discourse. As critics, we work to control, name, master, and know, but never can we escape language. Though we may strive to get “beyond” it, we cannot. Would we (who work and play in language) be more *happy* if we could? Or is a portion of our happiness the price of our knowledge?<sup>55</sup>

Our enhanced sense of the language of drama and theatre incorporates nonverbal as well as verbal performance. It enables us to “understand” these phenomena through a variety of structures—metaphors—in new ways, if no more or less *certainly*. If our *inability* to reach certain understanding has become a new inescapable critical certainty, our certitude founds new critical enterprises through which we hope to advance, at least intellectually.

Pinter’s most recent political plays may stimulate some of us to scrutinize where we, the human race, are heading. As we critics attempt to bridge the still vast chasm between invented categories of “experience” (personal, ethical, social, economic, political, professional, cultural, intellectual, semi-otic) and myths of “knowledge” (objectivist, subjectivist, experientialist), *do*

*we know* where we will go with the new structures, the new strategies? Even if progressing *uncertainly*, we venture exploring “mysterious” interrelations of life and drama, experience and knowledge. Whatever paths we choose entail risks and responsibilities, so we must proceed carefully.

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## Notes

1. Throughout this essay, parenthetical volume and page references to Pinter’s writings are to his *Complete Works*.

2. See Gale’s collection of seventeen new essays on Pinter, originally intended to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Pinter’s first play, *The Room*: “Neither this volume nor any of the individual essays . . . is trying to give the answer to what Pinter and his works are all about. Rather, as in the dramatist’s plays, the attempt has been made to provide a wide range of possibilities . . .” (HP 20). Most of these “representative examples of some of the diverse critical approaches that have been applied to Pinter’s writing” explicate Pinter’s themes and techniques, though some emphasize felt experience. Fuegi relates “the uncertainty principle” to Pinter’s “modern drama” in the concluding essay.

3. “Susan Sontag’s *Against Interpretation* was well received because her ardent attack upon the objectivism of traditional exegetical practice highlighted the contradiction that exists between modern literature and traditional interpretation when the latter reduces the polyvalence of the ‘open work’ (*opera aperta*) to an ostensibly pre-given meaning, hidden in the text or to be sought behind it” (Jauss, “Literature and Hermeneutics” 135). For Jauss’s source of this concept *open work*, see Eco 3-43. While “the creative or productive role of the reader” is celebrated “as a major insight of reader-oriented criticism,” Culler observes, “text and reader can switch places” so that “a story of the reader structuring the text easily becomes a story of the text provoking certain responses and actively controlling the reader.” This “easy shift between freedom and constraint” in some recent theoretical accounts (“narrative constructs”) of reading marks Eco’s discussions of “open works,” which “require readers to write the text through their reading.” In such “stories of reading” so-called open texts, “‘The free interpretive choices elicited by a purposeful strategy of openness’ [Eco 40] can be considered or narrated as acts provoked by the manipulative strategy of a scheming author.” In Fish’s story of reading a Walter Pater sentence, “the more active, projective, or creative the reader is, the more she [or he] is manipulated by the sentence or by the author” (OD 70-71). (Cf. de Man, *Blindness and Insight* 285-87.) An assumption of this phenomenon seems to operate in critics’ accounts of reading Pinter’s dramas. See Chaudhuri on cultivating reader- and spectator-orientations in dramatic criticism “in order to erase the gap between theory and its object” (296).

4. Culler’s claim here that “there are many tasks that confront criticism, many things we need to advance our understanding of literature, but . . . one thing we do not need . . . is more interpretations of literary works” (246) has raised much debate. Peck builds his arguments for reforms in critical practice and the curricula of advanced literary study on Culler’s essay. Cain observes an unresolved “tension” in Culler’s work between his argument against interpretation and his unintentional perpetuation of “the New Critical legacy of ‘interpretation’” (“English in America Reconsidered” 90n10).

5. Comparing Sontag’s “erotics,” which attempts to recover our sensory experience by attending to form rather than content, to Culler’s proposed “poetics” or “semiotics,” Ulmer contends that poetics (“the study of problems about the nature of literature: its forms, its components, their relations” [PS 218]) exchanges “the great realism of New Critical methods for the great abstraction of a theory whose purpose, as Tzvetan Todorov once noted, is to perfect its own discourse” (557).

6. Cain observes that “the intellectual . . . is not naturally a questioner and skeptic, is not necessarily responsive to or interested in change, but rather ‘craves certitude’ and is prone to accept half-truths” (*Crisis in Criticism* 10). (Cain’s own use of *half-truths* may imply a belief in some “whole truth.”) The following discussion of Pinter criticism shows several critics both engaged in skeptical questioning and concerned with change, but still craving certitude while negotiating a minefield of obstacles to truth, not the least of which is the concept of the “essential truth” about Pinter’s plays and dramatic phenomena in general.

7. Cf. Rickert 30.

8. Iser and some poststructuralists would be more concerned with textual and structural features requiring such “filling” in, examining this “process” of interpretation as a phenomenon (causes and effects), while those more sympathetic to psychology would scrutinize it as a behavioral or psychic activity (stimuli and responses, relations between “self” and “other,” “subject” and “object”).



9. This formula "contains two conflicting themes": (1) "a bare sketch of values anchored to a middle or lower social class perception of reality and of human behaviour by the monotonous linguistic habits of the speakers and the commonplace situations"; and (2) "a rich texture of ambiguity sutured to the primitive, inner, dark, mysterious, emotional biological man by what he fears, often some unknown external hostile force or agent reflected in a line or action or situation ultimately affecting all the characters." Pinter's "situations" occur "within a room," with "both" the room and the situations interacting with the characters. Their "linguistic habits" reveal "this interaction." The "result" is "a room-situation-character-language relationship which is continually developing throughout the time of the play" (176).

10. See Mitchell, *Pluralism*, for a series of articles by pluralists critical of the tendency towards dogmatism in pluralism. Yet even White's critique posits "a genuine pluralist" (as he identifies himself [486]) and is thus characteristic of essentialism (*true pluralism*). In "Writing for the Theatre," Pinter suggested that "there can be no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false" (1: 11). But White writes, "Stories are not true or false, but rather more or less intelligible, coherent, consistent, persuasive, and so on. And this is *true* of historical, no less than of fictional, stories" (492; emphasis added). Despite his willingness "to bear the label of radical relativist in matters having to do with *historical knowledge*" (486), White does not appear to see his own account of critical theories in the same terms. Culler speculates that *truth* may play "an indispensable role in argument and analysis" because of its "persistent duplicity": "Truth is both what can be demonstrated within an accepted framework and what simply is the case, whether or not anyone could believe it or validate it." A "paradox" often encountered in philosophy, literary criticism, and history "doubtless" occurs in other disciplines: on the one hand, "champions of an absolutist, correspondence theory of truth" appeal to "pragmatic grounds"—"it has desirable consequences, is necessary to the preservation of essential values"; on the other hand, "proponents of a pragmatist view" argue that "whatever the consequences of their relativism, we must live with them because this is the truth, the way things are: truth *is* relative, dependent on a conceptual framework." "Both attempts to maintain a position give rise to a deconstructive movement in which the logic of the argument used to defend a position contradicts the position affirmed" (*OD* 154-55).

11. Cf. Diamond 93-109. She sees the play's language as affirming "the parodist's careful and ironic overlay of material, making double entendres from colloquialisms just as he makes gags from simple movements" (108). "Stacking character confusion against audience uncertainty," Diamond argues, "Pinter places unverifiability at the center of our experience of the comic"; her analysis of Pinter's plays focuses on "the subtle relationship between stage comedy and uneasy audience response" (13).

12. Carpenter cites Taylor 184. Pinter also said: "I do so hate the because of drama. Who are we to say that this happens because that happened, that one thing is the consequence of another? How do we know? What reason have we to suppose that life is so neat and tidy? . . . Life is much more mysterious than plays make it out to be. And it is this mystery which fascinates me: what happens between the words, what happens when no words are spoken. . . . however much you see and guess at there is always that something more. . . ." (The last two ellipses are Taylor's.) Cf. Nightingale on characters' motives in *The Homecoming*: "We're never quite sure. . . something still remains uncertain and perhaps unknowable, doomed to elude our prying noses. Pinter has a respect for people's privacy: he always sets bounds to our, and probably his own, understanding of them" (74). Also cf. Mortimer 719. For Cima this "playwriting strategy" is "cinematic," creating specific demands on audiences and actors. *The Servant*, the first of Pinter's "revolutionary filmic experiments" (Cima 45), was written in 1962, five years after *The Dumb Waiter*. Pinter's text describes Ben's tone in his repeated rejoinder to Gus's questioning the connection between "Who sent" the matches and "Who" is upstairs as nervous ("*nervously*"). Ben may be nervous (as well as annoyed, bothered, or disgusted [irked]) because of the *implications* of "one thing" having "to do" with "another," since Gus implies a *connection* as opposed to a *lack* of a connection between what Ben may have at first considered unconnected events, or between what Ben may now *surmise* to be connected events (He *has* just spoken to someone upstairs, whose voice he may recognize [1: 156]). This reading infers a connection between Ben's tone and his knowledge or lack of knowledge about the two events. Though Carpenter generalizes the significance of Ben's rejoinder, connecting it to Pinter's statement about *Accident*, he also points out, "it would be ridiculous to grant Ben much intellectual acumen . . ." (282). There seems to be *some connection* between Carpenter's own "intellectual acumen" in tying Ben's lines to Pinter's "serious" statements about *Accident*—which, unquestioned, has in part spawned the responses by Quigley and Van Laan discussed below—and the prominence of the theme of uncertainty in Pinter criticism.

13. Cf. Carpenter's more recent commentaries on *The Birthday Party*, *The Caretaker*, and *The Homecoming* with the article on *The Dumb Waiter*. "Almost certainly the key to an understanding" of *The Caretaker* is Mick's statement to Davies, "Every word you speak is open to any number of different interpretations" ("Quicksand" 65; emphasis added). Contrary to his earlier position on

*The Dumb Waiter*, here he says that, despite Pinter's deliberate obscurity, it is "possible . . . to detect a broad framework of motives [near psychosis] which, when applied to baffling moments in the play, compels them to yield the gist (if not the totality) of their 'secrets'" (69). Reversing his anti-absurdism stance with respect to *The Dumb Waiter*, next he argues that "'Pinteresque' moments" put an audience "precisely in the dilemma of Camus's 'absurd man' described in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. We are confronted with bewilderment, disruption, chaos, what Beckett referred to as 'this buzzing confusion'" ("Victims" 490). "In response," he adds:

we involuntarily reach out for clarity, understanding, Godot: the little explanation that is not there. We become like Ionesco's Detective in *Victims of Duty*, who lays its underpinnings bare: "I don't believe in the absurd. Everything hangs together; everything can be comprehended . . . [sic] thanks to the achievements of human thought and science." (490)

Aiming "to exemplify the direction that might be taken by critical analysis which tries to be faithful to the *genuine* absurd experience of *The Homecoming* as it unfolds," though admitting it "might be approached from many other points of view," he still finds it "unfortunate" that "Few critics in the past fifteen years have taken an approach that accepts and even relishes the absurdity of Pinter's depicted world" and thus fail to *resist* "the urge to chase the will-o'-the-wisp of a solution to [its] mind-bending indeterminacies" (494-95; emphasis added). "Ionesco's Detectives have been at work," violating the play's "inherent nature" (495). Revising his article on *The Birthday Party*, Carpenter notes that its

reception . . . over the years has convinced me that the sceptical colouring I had given it is far too easy to ignore or shrug off. Yet a major point of the essay is that a critical reading of a Pinter play must be *essentially* speculative and inconclusive. This updated version therefore includes, not only further documentation of my argument, but also several "counter-notes" designed explicitly to undermine some of its shakier props—leaving them, in the mode of Derrida, "legible yet effaced." (931n; emphasis added)

The concluding paragraph remains the same in both versions. The title comes from Len's speech to Mark in *The Dwarfs* (1960), describing his uncertainty about who or what this other person is: "What have I seen, the scum or the essence?" (2: 112). (The metaphor is drawn from ocean tides.) A Derridean might observe the paradox that Carpenter *both* urges his readers to "bear in mind that fallout of any type"—symbolic or otherwise—"is more akin to scum than to essence" and stresses his "major point" still locating the "essence" of Pinter and of critical readings of his work ("essentially speculative and inconclusive").

14. For discussion of Derrida's writings and their influence on criticism, see Culler, Norris, and other works suggested by Jay and Miller 189. Cf. the hierarchical reversals in Derrida's critique of Saussure's "privileging" of speech over writing, wherein what Saussure judged "marginal" (writing) becomes "central" (See Culler, "Jacques Derrida" 167-68). For a summary of the "moves" involved in deconstructing an opposition, see Culler, *OD* 150. Cain observes that such handbooks or guides to Derrida "inevitably domesticate his work, untangle the gnarled, tortuous prose, and give us access to new interpretive schemes" ("English in America Reconsidered" 90).

15. Among other examples, Quigley considers Ben's "explanation of the misbehavior of the lavatory"—"It's got a deficient ballcock, that's all" (1: 133).

16. Quigley reassesses the play's title, finding a "further implication" to be that

like the dumb waiter itself, [the characters] are governed and controlled by forces beyond their ability to know and understand. The strings by which the dumb waiter is manipulated and controlled are no more visible and no more understandable than those which control not only the environment but also the behavior of the characters onstage. (9)

17. The characters' attempts at sense-making make more sense to Quigley in paradigmatic terms borrowed from Kermode: people's efforts "to make sense" of their life "span" through "fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives and to poems" (10, citing Kermode 7).

18. See Hutcheon's study of "the implications for theory of modern artistic practice" (1). Claiming to derive her "so-called 'theory' of parody" from "the teachings of the texts themselves, rather than from any theoretical structure imposed from without," she concludes:

Parody today cannot be explained *totally* in structuralist terms of form, in the hermeneutic context of response, in a semiotic-ideological framework, or in a post-structuralist absorption of everything into textuality. Yet the complex determinants of parody in some way involve all of these current critical perspectives—and many more. It is in this way that parody can, inadvertently perhaps, serve another useful function today: it can call into question the temptation toward the monolithic in modern theory. If many perspectives

help us understand this pervasive modern phenomenon, but if none is sufficient in itself, then how could we claim that a structuralist, semiotic, hermeneutic, or deconstructive approach was in itself totally adequate to the task? This is not so much an argument for critical pluralism as it is a plea for theory that is a response to aesthetic realities. (116)

19. I borrow this phrase from Felman's "poststructuralist" reading of Henry James's tale *The Turn of the Screw*. Cf. this maneuver in Schechner's concluding paragraph:

If there is a "meaning" in Pinter, it seems to me closely related to both Henry James and Franz Kafka. James was most interested in probing the human psyche to its depths of confusion and fragmentary bases. Kafka was always telling stories in which his heroes had no sense of what was happening to them. Combine these two, and I think you have what Pinter seeks. (184)

20. This argument against Quigley resembles Norris' description of deconstruction as "in part . . . a vigilant reaction against [a] tendency in structuralist thought to tame and domesticate its own best insights" (2-3). Some of Derrida's "most powerful" essays aim at "dismantling a concept of 'structure' that serves to immobilize the play of meaning in a text and reduce it to a manageable compass" (3).

21. Culler's analysis of "the idea of a discipline" as "the idea of an investigation in which writing might be brought to an end" may apply to writers like Pinter as well as critical writers:

Literary critics, dismayed by the proliferation of interpretations and the prospect of a future in which writing will breed ever more writing so long as academic journals and university presses survive, frequently attempt to imagine ways of bringing writing to an end by reformulating the goals of literary criticism to make it a true discipline. Claims about the true purpose of criticism usually define tasks that could in principle be completed. They invoke the hope of saying the last word, arresting the process of commentary. In fact, this hope of getting it right is what inspires critics to write, even though they simultaneously know that writing never puts an end to writing. Paradoxically, the more powerful and authoritative an interpretation, the more writing it generates. (OD 90)

22. Cf. Diamond's view of the play as a parody of the "established conventions" of American gangster films and British detective stage plays; for her it is "about" these conventions. Thompson claims that the "ambivalent ending" of *The Dumb Waiter* is necessitated by Pinter's mixing elements from circus, thrillers, and music-hall (77).

23. Van Laan uses a kind of stimulus-response model for Pinter's "play" with his audience. As Pinter *prompts* us "simultaneously to make guesses about what is happening in the play and to question ourselves self-consciously for doing so," he

asks us to focus not only on the play but also on ourselves, and to perceive ourselves not as passive attenders to a meaningful event shaped for us by another, but as quite uneasy collaborators with the dramatist, striving against difficulties and probably in vain to complete something that cannot fully exist without our participation. (499)

Van Laan's generalization from his own experience as an audience member aims to redress what he considers "inappropriate" responses to Pinter's plays. Even if Pinter does "prompt" his audience, many still fail to respond as dutifully as he would like. For Van Laan they would be responding "improperly" to the play. Cf. Hudgins 115.

24. Cf. Diamond:

In the theatre . . . Pinter's playful theatrical tricks prevent our dwelling on metaphysical ironies. Through a "long silence," 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. The fact that it does not go off mocks our tension and reminds us that Pinter's parody lays bare the conventions of realism. (108)

25. Van Laan considers traditional

the popular assumption that a phenomenon such as an event exists objectively, independent of the consciousness that apprehends it, and that the proper role of this consciousness in relation to such a phenomenon is to perceive it and, where necessary, to *interpret its significance by the appropriate means—usually, the laws of reason.* (499)

26. Van Laan argues that it is *misleading* to “fill in” Pinter’s gaps:

To decide that Gus is the next victim, or that Mick is troubled by his brother Aston’s evident inability to get hold of himself, or that Ruth used to be a whore before marrying Teddy may be extremely tempting, but conclusions of this sort put too much weight on inference; they tend to eliminate the uncertainty of detail and response which is a valid element of a Pinter play, and they distract our attention from what Pinter has *actually* put into the play toward what we think we find there. (500; emphasis added)

27. “Atypical qualities of Pinter’s plays” such as “the bizarre behavior of the dumb waiter,” “Mick’s surrealist speeches,” and “the non-transition-like transitions of *The Homecoming*,” Van Laan concludes, suggest that Pinter’s aims differ from those of the “naturalist.” Pinter, in contrast, “mixes naturalism and stylization so that the seams may show and, to change metaphors, one manner clash with another” (500).

28. Van Laan has already explained further:

Pinter tries to keep us disoriented so that we can remain aware of our own mental and emotional processes, of our involvement in the play and its making. This preoccupation of Pinter’s reflects his deep interest, not only in *The Dumb Waiter* but elsewhere, in the question of how events, in drama or life, are defined. (501)

The “faint smile” exchanged between Aston and Mick in *The Caretaker* also manifests “this interest,” as Pinter “encourages us to revise our entire conception of what is happening in the play”:

Before this smile . . . we had generally come to think of the action as being about Davies, about his efforts to maintain his beachhead in Aston’s room notwithstanding the odds posed against him by the peculiarities of the two brothers and his own antisocial characteristics. But the smile, by suggesting some kind of conspiratorial link between the two brothers, encourages us both to infer that the action really centers on them, and to see it, in the terms of Robert P. Murphy, as “a cruel game, a game consciously and maliciously played on [Davies] . . . by both Aston and Mick.” (See n7; the last ellipsis is Van Laan’s.)

As Van Laan “fills in” these missing details, his own example confirms his theory, but he qualifies Murphy’s “revelation” as “too stunning to be entirely convincing”: “Pinter steadfastly refuses to confirm or deny the validity of the new view. As a result, we *properly* leave *The Caretaker* with two different, discordant conceptions of its action” (501; emphasis added). Cf. Fuegi 204-06.

29. See Culler:

Reading is an attempt to understand writing by determining the referential and rhetorical modes of a text, translating the figurative into the literal, for example, and removing obstacles in the quest for a coherent result, but the construction of texts—especially of literary works, where pragmatic contexts do not so readily justify a confident distinction between the literal and the figurative or the referential and the nonreferential—may block this process of understanding. (OD 81)

Citing de Man on how “the possibility of reading can never be taken for granted” (*Blindness and Insight* 107) and how rhetoric “puts an insurmountable obstacle in the way of any reading or understanding” (*Allegories of Reading* 131), Culler observes: “The reader may be placed in impossible situations where there is no happy issue but only the possibility of playing out roles dramatized in the text.” Yet, as he adds, while those who believe that “one cannot authoritatively determine, by reading a text, what is in it and what is not” turn to “the experience of the reader” in order to establish “another basis for poetics and for particular interpretations,” it is “no easier to say what is in the reader’s or a reader’s experience than what is in the text”; for “‘experience’ is divided and deferred—already behind us as something to be recovered, yet still before us as something to be produced.” What results is “not a new foundation but stories of reading . . . [that] reinstate the text as an agent with definite qualities or properties, since this yields more precise and dramatic narratives as well as creating a possibility of learning that lets one celebrate great works.” That Culler sees deconstruction as able to explore “the problematic situation to which stories of reading have led us” and as “the culmination of recent work on reading” (OD 81-83) demonstrates the introjective/projective interplay at work in any reading-theory, including de Man’s.

30. Rabkin considers “The question of the relationship between the play and its theatrical interpreta[t]ion” to be “at the center of contemporary theatre theory” (142, 146). A review of Shakespeare scholarship by Paul reports this trend: “more scholars are consulting—either formally or informally—with directors on productions of Shakespeare’s plays. . . . Their goal is

to expand the options from which directors can choose, not to impose a particular interpretation" (6). Such consultation has taken place between some Pinter scholars and directors of his plays. Shewey reports on the "great influence" of Gabbard's psychoanalytical approach to Pinter on her former student John Malkovich, who directed the Steppenwolf Theatre Company productions of *The Caretaker* (1978 in Chicago, 1986 in New York). Gabbard corresponded with another American director, Terry Schreiber, who had already staged *The Birthday Party* and done "extensive pre-production work" on *The Homecoming*, *Old Times*, *The Dumb Waiter*, and *The Caretaker*, when he wrote her requesting advice about extending her theories to his staging of *Betrayal* for the Syracuse Stage Theatre in 1981.

31. Such canonic value judgments lead to revisionist debates (like the one I have been discussing)—attempts to re-evaluate the presumably "minor" works of a major author—and are the subject of "Critical Value Judgments of Pinter's Plays," the penultimate chapter of *Pinter in Play*.

32. Among the earliest critics to discuss Pinter's "couples," Cohn, in "The Absurdly Absurd," compares Ben and Gus to Beckett's vaudevillian "pair," Vladimir and Estragon; in "Latter Day Pinter," she discusses the relationships between Pinter's other characters in scenes "à deux." On Pinter's parody of vaudeville in the relation between Gus and Ben, see Diamond, whose research for *Pinter's Comic Play* was guided by Cohn (Diamond 9). On some earlier Pinter critics' metaphors for relationships between Pinter's male characters, see Elliott 356. See Thompson on links between Pinter's acting roles in the fifties and these character relationships.

33. In an interview on the occasion of the American première of *The Hothouse* (1958), in 1982, Pinter remarked that it disturbs him that people don't enjoy the humor of his plays as he would like:

Audiences and critics and possibly some productions, too, take these damn plays of mine so seriously and so solemnly and I find that very uncomfortable. . . . They are really quite funny. Mind you there is a point where they stop being funny. I'm not saying they are roaring farces. I'm just saying they are taken too seriously on the whole. But there isn't anything I can do about it. (Gale, "Pinter Believes" A16)

Reviews of the first London production of *The Dumb Waiter* were mixed; though some expressed frustration with "Pinter's" failure to provide a meaningful experience, at least one critic stressed how "extremely funny" it was (Alvarez 150). In "A Play and Its Politics," Pinter acknowledges that he still has a "sense of fun" but does not "consider it to be appropriate to [the] subject [of *One for the Road* (1984)]—torture, rape, and murder. He explains in some detail how his "objective" has changed since "the early days" when he wrote *The Dumb Waiter* (11).

34. Thompson observes that while "Gus and Ben seem to be carrying their linguistic argument to ludicrous extremes . . . [it] focuses our attention on the shakiness of the professional relationship between the two gunmen" (118). Mortimer uses this "linguistic argument" as a metaphor for "the habitual attitudes of the playwright and the critic," with Ben symbolizing "the defensive author" and Gus "the frowning literary journalist doggedly in search of his message" (718). As this allegory develops, Mortimer has Gus wondering "uneasily": "if there were no hidden meanings what need would there be for critics to reveal them?" It is "hard," Mortimer decides, "for critics and intelligent audiences to accept" what he calls "the truth": "that, as a kettle is made to boil water, so a play is written to work on the stage, and not as a messianic scroll containing the key to the universe." Complex linguistic arguments locating the "key" to Pinter's and other writers' "universes" often occur among critics whose work is not "properly" matched with one another's purposes, and academic "murders" may ensue.

35. My phrase alters Almansi and Henderson's "motive-mongering" (17). Cf. Carpenter's description of the critic as a "profundity-monger" ("The Absurdity of Dread" 281).

36. For all we know, this could be the end of an elaborate "con." Complaints that Pinter is such a con man have been common and are cited in Elliott 3. Cf. Almansi and Henderson esp. 11-23, 93; for them Pinter plays "con-tricks" on his audience, and his characters on one another. This view that Pinter plays games with his audience parallels Van Laan's concept of Pinter's play with the audience. Also see Prentice.

37. Early on, Pinter became impatient with demands for first "the meaning" and then "the meanings" of his plays. I discuss his reaction to these demands in "Harold Pinter on His Critics and Audiences," a section of *Pinter in Play*. He has expressed his displeasure with such demands in both his playwriting and his speaking and writing about it. As early as *Night School* (1959) he played upon this controversy (and was accused of self-parody and formula writing, which he has since accepted as just accusations); hints of self-mockery and mockery of his audiences and critics can be discerned in many of his plays. In 1964, in *Tea Party* he had one of Disson's twin sons (Tom) say, "I've often wondered what 'mean' means" (3: 115). Almansi and Henderson cite this dialogue, seeing it in the context of logical positivism and New Criticism as Pinter's "oblique jibe at the impossibility of [the] aim [of these enterprises]" (73).

38. See Elliott for a speculative study of this interaction. Since this work was completed, inquiry into such matters of literary response has burgeoned. Pinter himself has "said that he really had no idea how his works connected with audiences": "Something does happen. There's a lot of irritation and hatred. But there's also a good deal of positive response. But I can't say what it's all about really" (Gale, "Pinter Believes" A16). Perhaps we must accept undecidability or uncertainty when dealing with the function of audience response. For example, I do not *know* "which comes first" intellectual ("thoughtful") or emotional ("felt") identifications. Hudgins posits that intellectual identifications are prior to emotional ones (104-05). While I tend to think the opposite, I would acknowledge that distinctions between the so-called intellectual and the so-called emotional are questionable, for by the time we apprehend our thoughts and feelings, they have become mixed phenomena. Separation into intellectual and emotional is a dualistic convention, based on human observation.

39. This "experiential" perspective combines Iser's structuralist theory that readers learn from understanding the "unfamiliar" in literature (*The Act of Reading*) and more psychologically based theories expounded by Bleich and Holland that such learning is based on readers' associations with "familiar" aspects of texts. This perspective can also take into account Fish's pronouncements about the importance of "interpretive conventions."

40. Quigley bases his own philosophical pluralism on that of William James and on Nelson Goodman, who emphasizes "right versions" of "worlds." See especially *MS* 41-43. Quigley cites James on the philosopher's role of determining how "contrasting worlds" relate as he argues for "a correspondence between the activity of the philosopher, the role of the critic, and the engagement of an audience with a play because the unavoidable implication of the modern theatre's insistence on distinctive grounds of knowing is that participation in what the theatre has to offer involves philosophical work" (43). For Quigley Pinter's plays exemplify "the drama of inquiry in a pluralistic universe" (262) and are most "appropriately" approached as such.

41. Quigley refers to the *Modern Drama* articles on *The Dumb Waiter* by himself and Van Laan (225n7). Elsewhere Quigley observes that Van Laan "underestimates, to some extent, the degree to which audience understanding in general, and literary interpretation in particular, involve the making of connections between, and the locating of thematic patterns among, distinct textural elements," though he considers "entirely right" Van Laan's "two main points—that we can overread plays by inventing rather than inferring connections, and that to do so with a Pinter play is to eradicate one of its distinctive and important features"; the "task" of the critic, Quigley concludes, is "to achieve the *appropriate* generic balance between inferential connection and functional discontinuity" ("Design and Discovery" 83n2; emphasis added). Some feel that Pinter mocks such a notion in Teddy's only long speech, cited below, calling into question the philosopher's ability to "see" any more *appropriately* than anyone else.

42. Quigley's "enhancement" of Pinter extends Van Laan's:

The disturbing events in Pinter plays characteristically serve to remind us that the explanations we rely on in our daily lives tend often to be incomplete and that we frequently resort to rounding them out with guesses based upon not clearly justifiable assumptions. Consequently, further inspection of a situation is likely to generate not clearer explanations but more confusion, as our guesses and assumptions fail to stand up to further scrutiny.

Pinter parallels "Heisenberg's uncertainty principle in scientific inquiry" suggesting that "our methods of explanation can in part constitute the data to be explained" and providing "an alarming potential for circularity in our explanatory activities." Such circularity occurs in scientific analysis of matter into particles in accordance with Einstein's theory of relativity: "the proliferation of new particles might well result from the methods used to locate them. That which is to be explained in part results from, and is in part constituted by, the method of examining and explaining it" (*MS* 224). Cf. Klein on connections between Heisenberg's "radical revision of our conception of the universe and our epistemological relation to it" and "the rudimentary tension and mechanism of Pinter's work" (192); Fuegi on Beckett's and Pinter's "world where the principle of uncertainty is maintained in the form, structure, and language of the aesthetic construct itself" and on the "uncertain future" of "the drama of uncertainty" (207); Cima on effects of Pinter's use of "the Heisenberg principle of indeterminacy" on performance and interpretation (52); and Deemer on Pinter's developing "a world on stage that mirrors the strange new world of the new physics [Quantum Mechanics]."

43. The "well-made play" may persist, Quigley speculates, because it embodies

an attitude towards explanation and truth that is not at all untypical of attitudes we frequently bring to bear on our own lives. There is, we usually feel, for any situation in which we find ourselves, a basic explanation. If we have not yet found it, we fault

ourselves, not the situation. With more effort and more ingenuity, we could, we feel sure, locate the basic truths that govern a particular context in which we find ourselves. (*MS* 223)

It is "this assumption of available, if not immediately accessible, certainty" that Pinter aims "both to activate and to challenge" (223). Despite this recognition that Pinter questions our strategies for locating such "basic truths," nevertheless Quigley himself still locates what he calls the "basic theme" of *Betrayal* (244).

44. Quigley argues:

For Pinter, we live somewhere between the poles of objectivity and subjectivity . . . in worlds that threaten to slide towards one or the other. Consequently, we tend to alternate between, on the one hand, a comforting assumption that somewhere out there, just beyond our current reach, lie ultimate truths and final explanations, and, on the other, an intermittent awareness that a dizzying variety of possible truths and explanations seems to be available. It is the predominance of the former assumption, this expectation that certainty will ultimately be accessible, that Pinter finds most worrying, both in the typical themes of the well-made play and in the typical activities of our daily lives, and he is at pains to establish the importance of the other alternative. . . . But Pinter's concern is not to dramatize one alternative at the expense of another. Rather it is to explore social interaction in the context of certainty confronting and negotiating with doubt, doubt negotiating with other doubt, and certainty with other certainty. (*MS* 224-25)

45. Quigley's interactive model, though it uses "theatrical horizons" (borrowing Jauss's structure for reception—*horizons of expectations*), does not seem to address the issue of the *unpredictability* of response (See *MS* 32). In his "Introduction" to Jauss, *Aesthetics*, de Man suggests some limitations of this concept and "the horizon of Jauss's methodology," though he compares "an element of not-knowing . . . built within the model of the horizon" with "an element of indeterminacy and arbitrariness" implied by "the concept of literary sign" (xii-xviii). Cf. Hudgins' application of Jauss's "receptional aesthetic" in defining "indexes" of "intended audience response" for *The Homecoming* (esp. 103-05, 115).

46. This "reformulation . . . helps us to locate the importance of Pinter's attempts to combine the much maligned conventions of nineteenth-century theatre with the epistemologically based innovations of the modern theatre" (*MS* 226). Alluding to his own earlier writing about "the peculiar problems" of Pinter's dialogue, Quigley now locates "similar problems" throughout "the entire texture and structure" of Pinter's plays, extending his earlier thesis about the "interrelational function of dialogue" (*PP*) to all features of Pinter's plays. Now (for his present "purposes") "the key issue" in each play he examines is "the peculiar mode of interaction established between the commonplace and the unusual, the traditional and the experimental, the practical and the epistemological. . . ." Of course he finds these "factors" to "achieve a startling structural and thematic embodiment" in Pinter's "complex" play he is about to examine, *Betrayal* (*MS* 226-27).

47. Deemer sees Pinter mocking the "Newtonian" belief that "there is a world 'out there,' that we stand aside and observe this world objectively; that, like Teddy . . . we can operate 'on' things and not 'in' things. That it is possible to be an impartial observer." Cf. Hudgins: "Teddy briefly advocates a more healthful balance between objectivity and subjectivity, but ironically cannot achieve it and is even unaware of his failure"; Pinter intends "The audience . . . to identify with or recognize such failure, which necessitates both a refusal of escapist, objective 'certainty' and a willingness to change" (112). As Carpenter suggests, many critics of *The Homecoming* have demonstrated neither this refusal nor this willingness. Pinter has said, Lahr reports, "that if ever there was a villain in [*The Homecoming*], Teddy was it" (169). Michael Craig, who played Teddy in the 1967 NY production, said that "underneath" his rationalizations of his "aggressions," Teddy is "Eichmann" (quoted in Hewes 57). Also cf. Dukore 174-77. Elliott catalogues other responses to Teddy (464-68).

48. The arguments about *The Dumb Waiter* and Pinter's plays are "recapitulated" in the "philosophical" debate in *The Homecoming* (3: 68-69).

49. I allude here to a variety of critical approaches to Pinter's plays: the thematic, e.g., Gale, *Butter's Going Up*; the myth-ritual, e.g., Burkman; and the psychoanalytic, e.g., Gordon, Esslin, and Gabbard. I discuss them in detail in *Pinter in Play*.

50. Tener observes that for Ruth "as for Pinter in [*The Homecoming*], the essence of a thing lies in movement. . . . Things . . . have value as movement, as the senses perceive them, not as structures for the mind to create and hide behind" (179). Pinter has publicly eschewed criticism for living; sex, cricket, and language are among experiences that he has named his favorites. He reiterated his love for them in the discussion after his 1981 talk at the U of East Anglia. Pinter has said that he enjoys the process of writing, reading, acting, and other forms of working and playing

more than intellectual or theoretical analysis. "A Play and Its Politics" suggests a shift in this public attitude.

51. Still more common is the conventional or traditional hierarchy of values by which "literature" is more valued than "criticism." Some proponents of new versions of "cultural studies" are attempting to reverse this hierarchy. "This opposition between the literary and the philosophical is another version of the opposition between writing and speech," Culler says. "Certain qualities of language are attributed to writing/literature so that they can be treated as parasitical or derivative and so that the purity and direct relation to thought or truth of speech/philosophy may be preserved" ("Jacques Derrida" 177-78). Such "deconstructive reversals" or "strategic interventions" as those that Derrida has applied to the *speech/writing* and *philosophy/literature* oppositions have, since Derrida, been widely applied to the *criticism/literature* opposition, with criticism being considered either as a special case (a "kind," or "genre") of philosophical discourse or as a special case of literary discourse. For further discussion, see Culler, *PS* and *OD*. As distinctions between *literature* and *criticism* have been collapsed into *writing*, both "kinds" of writing are viewed as "rhetorical" in function and as characterized by "rhetorical strategies," resulting in a new critical "hegemony," whose status is also reversible.

52. Cf. de Man on reading as "an act of understanding that can never be observed, nor in any way prescribed or verified. . . . Criticism is a metaphor for the act of reading, and this act is itself inexhaustible" (*Blindness and Insight* 107). As some metaphors die, become clichés, others are born (invented) to take their place. Much writing would die sooner perhaps if other writing did not keep it alive, resulting in protracted overkill. "Crippled by their need to rely on a system of linguistic significance to explore Pinter's complex sign system, in which visual signs frequently overpower linguistic or even verbal ones," Cima observes, "Pinter critics and performers often depend upon metaphors to elucidate his work"; she recommends: "Those metaphors ought to share the objectivity and visual orientation, the mutability, of the scripts themselves" (56).

53. On this concept of metaphor (*la métaphore vive*), see Ricoeur. Cf. Lakoff and Johnson on "New Meaning" (139-46). See also their discussions of "limitations" and "inadequacies" of the "myths" of "objectivism" and "subjectivism" and what they call "the experientialist alternative" (210-28). Their summary sees "the experientialist myth as capable of satisfying the real and reasonable concerns that have motivated the myths of both subjectivism and objectivism but without either the objectivist obsession with absolute truth or the subjectivist insistence that imagination is totally unrestricted" (228). While they recognize understanding as the goal of all such myths, they recommend the experientialist myth as a "perspective" able to meet the concerns of objectivism with success in the *external* world and those of subjectivism with reaching *internal* or *self*-understanding. Taking this "perspective of man as part of his environment" yields understanding through "interaction," "constant negotiation with the environment and other people" (229-30).

54. Cohen cautions, "We ought not forget that 'subtext' is a metaphor for an author's unstated, unwritten 'text.' The actual subtext is written by the critic, who, in writing it, becomes himself an author" (381).

55. Lakoff and Johnson observe the importance of realizing "that the way we have been brought up to perceive our world is not the only way and that it is possible to see beyond the 'truths' of our culture" (239). "But," they qualify, "metaphors are not merely things to be seen beyond. In fact, one can see beyond them only by using other metaphors." (Their here is *in fact*: a figure of speech as much as Gus and Ben's "light the kettle.") They conclude:

It is as though the ability to comprehend experience through metaphor were a sense, like seeing or touching or hearing, with metaphors providing the only ways to perceive and experience much of the world. Metaphor is as much a part of our functioning as our sense of touch, and as precious.

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