Ethics, Politics, and Alterity in Selected Plays and Other Works by Harold Pinter

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This thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

Abstract

This thesis offers a comprehensive critical examination of the intersections between Pinter's political output – most notably his drama – and contemporary ethical thought. In order to so, I build on the recent few discussions of Pinter's ethics by arguing that the ethical has always been a critical focus at every stage of Pinter's work. In short, this study challenges both the earlier tendency that takes Pinter as an Absurdist and the late one that regards him as purely political. I shall then seek to explore the nexus between politics and ethics in various Pinter texts that deal explicitly or suggestively with the political. In order to so, I shall look at the question of alterity as that which structures the irreducible gap between ethics and politics in Pinter's work. In particular, I approach the conception of otherness in Pinter in the double sense of the unknowable and that which always already inhabits the same. In either case, alterity, for Pinter, I argue, appears as a disruptive force, displacing the inclination towards hegemony, totality and sameness. In short, Pinter, I argue, does not offer a prescriptive treatise on how to overcome the ethical-political opposition; however, his plays, I would argue, glance towards a different configuration of the political, one that is grounded in an ethical responsiveness or openness towards the other. Comparatively speaking, the academic field of drama and theatre studies has been a latecomer to the growing interest in ethics that was mainly triggered by an increasing interest in the work of Levinas during the last two decades of the twentieth century. It is not until the late 2000s that a turn to ethics became manifest in theatre studies. And it is particularly this turn towards ethics within drama studies, in general, and the contemporary British stage, in particular, that sets the context for my current investigation of Pinter's ethics.

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INTRODUCTION

Facing the Other

In the past three decades, Harold Pinter scholarship has shifted its attention to the political turn in Pinter's career, when he became more expressly engaged with the field of politics. In his last twenty-five years, Pinter increasingly focused his essays, speeches, interviews and literary readings on issues such as the first Gulf War, the NATO bombing campaign in Yugoslavia during the Kosovo War, and the West's incursions in Afghanistan and invasion of Iraq. This interest in politics clearly fed into his later dramatic oeuvre. For example, in an interview with Nicolas Hern, Pinter confesses that his writing of *One for the Road* (1984) was prompted by two very particular political concerns: 'One', he declares, 'is the fact of torture, of official torture, subscribed to by so many governments. And the other is the whole nuclear situation'.[1] Martin Esslin identifies this play, along with *Mountain Language* (1988) and the dramatic sketch *Precisely* (1983), as the blueprint for Pinter's later theatre – '[S]ince 1982', Esslin writes, 'his work has become entirely political, devoted to attacks on dictators who torture their subjects and civil servants who are unperturbed by the menace of a nuclear holocaust'.[2]

Esslin, indeed, goes on to revisit Pinter's earlier theatre in the light of his later political output, arguing that 'much of his earlier work was, if not on the surface, at least subtextually political'.[3] Esslin is not, of course, the only critic to argue this – many having argued that the early plays explore the oppression of the individual by forces of totalitarianism, masquerading as, say, 'the organization' in *The Dumb Waiter* (1957) and *The Birthday Party* (1957), a 'rest

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[1] Harold Pinter, 'A Play and its Politics: A Conversation between Harold Pinter and Nicholas Hern', in *One for the Road* (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 7-24 (p. 12).

[2] Martin Esslin, 'Harold Pinter's Theatre of Cruelty', in *Pinter at Sixty*, ed. by Katherine Burkman and John Kundert-Gibbs (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 27-36 (p.27).

[3] Ibid., p. 28.

home' in *The Hothouse* (1958), or the 'hospital' in *The Caretaker* (1959).[4] As John Stokes argues, 'Pinter's early visions of local totalitarianism spoke directly to a constituency that, like himself, was steeped in Orwell and Kafka and the anti-fascist plays of Sartre and John Whiting'.[5] And many critics trace this recurring theme in Pinter's work to his growing up in the era of Fascism – as Francesca Coppa puts it:

> It is certainly tempting to read Pinter's early plays bleakly, as narratives of sudden, hostile isolation. After all, Pinter's background as a British Jew, growing up in the 1940s under the spectre of fascism and nazism [*sic*], certainly encourages such a reading. […] The largest, summarizable plot of *The Birthday Party*, 'two men arrive unexpectedly and take a third man away', is hardly 'abstract' or 'absurd' or 'mysterious' […] [This] plotline […] was being played out as the most utter realism throughout Europe during Pinter's childhood and teens.[6]

While many critics read the classic scene of intrusion in Pinter's early plays as some form of state-led invasion, others, like Charles Grimes, find in this intrusion a call for individual political responsibility. Grimes identifies 'the plot' of many of these works as 'that of an individual who existed in a purely private sense, supposedly insulated from the larger social world, suddenly confronted with broad social and political forces, and thus called to political awareness and responsibility'.[7]

While Grimes's reading accounts for the notion of political responsibility in Pinter's early plays, it tends to represent this responsibility in polarized terms. Standing before and/ or

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[4] Harold Pinter, *The Dumb Waiter*, in *Harold Pinter: Plays 1* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), pp. 113-149 (p. 131); *The Birthday Party*, in Ibid, pp. 2-81 (p. 42); *The Hothouse*, in Ibid., pp. 189-328 (p. 214); and *The Caretaker*, in *Harold Pinter: Plays 2* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), pp. 5-76 (p. 53).
[5] John Stokes, 'Pinter and the 1950s', in *The Cambridge Companion to Harold Pinter, ed. by Peter Raby*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 28-43 (p. 31).
[6] Francesca Coppa, 'The Sacred Joke: Comedy and Politics in Pinter's Early Plays', in Ibid., pp. 44-56 (pp.49-50).
[7] Charles Grimes, Harold *Pinter's Politics: A Silence Beyond Echo* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickenson University Press, 2005), p. 20.

against 'the larger social world', that is, the Pinterian subject, in Grimes's view, seems to be intrinsically lone and heroic. This, though, is a view which Pinter very particularly refutes, saying:

> In contemporary drama so often we have a villain society and the hero individual. And a lot of people have said that about *The Birthday Party*. Well, it isn't like that. These two things – the man in relation to society – both exist and one makes the other. Society wouldn't be there without the man, but they're both dependent on one another and there's no question of hero and villain.[8]

To put this another way, for all his political awareness, Pinter is very much concerned with characters of 'flesh and blood', as he describes them.[9] Pinter's characters, that is, are not so much confronted with an abstract social or political reality as with very particular people – such as, the vagrant Davies in *The Caretaker* (1959), the 'blind Negro' Riley in *The Room* (1957), the pointedly silent 'matchseller' in *A Slight Ache* (1958), and the about-to-be-murdered 'victim' in *The Dumb Waiter* (1957). Although these characters remain elusive and indiscernible, endowed, as it were, with a radical sense of alterity, what they share in common is a profound sense of corporeal vulnerability, a basic need to be fed, sheltered, and, most importantly, not to be killed. Nevertheless, these 'victim' figures, for all their vulnerability, appear threatening. And it is precisely the paradox of the vulnerability of these 'visitors' and yet the threat they pose, I would argue, that complicates the sense of responsibility evoked in Pinter's early plays.

The vulnerability of the visitors that populate Pinter's early plays is, in fact, mirrored by the tortured and mutilated bodies evoked frequently in his late political theatre. Note, for

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[8] Pinter, quoted in Michael Billington, *Harold Pinter* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), p. 89.
[9] Harold Pinter, 'Art, Truth and Politics', Nobel Prize Lecture, 2005
<http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2005/pinter-lecture-e.html> [accessed 23 July 2017].

example, how 'the Waiter' in Pinter's *Celebration* (1999) disrupts the protected world of an up-market restaurant by evoking the brutal reality of worldwide torture – as he says:

> He [his grandfather] knew these people [the tortured] where they were isolated, where they were alone, where they fought against pitiless and savage odds, where they suffered vast wounds to their bodies, their bellies, their legs, their trunks, their eyes, their throats, their breasts, their balls.[10]

Here, of course, the vulnerability of dissident victims contrasts sharply with the comfort of the rich diners who enjoy exclusive access to food at the restaurant.[11] In other words, Pinter seems to foreground how power operates at the level of corporeal life itself, and in this respect his work very much reflects Michel Foucault's assertion 'that the ancient right to *take* life or *let* live [has been] replaced by a power to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death'.[12] In his explicitly political drama, that is, the late Pinter objects to biopolitcial forces that he sees as overriding the ethical value of the human body by promoting the lives of some at the expense of others. And it is with the value of the *other's* life that the late Pinter is, I argue, above all concerned. I shall, though, seek to trace the representation of *vulnerable* otherness in not only late Pinter but also early Pinter.

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[10] Harold Pinter, *Celebration*, in *Harold Pinter: Plays 4* (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), pp. 439-508 (p. 502). Pinter's *Celebration* (1999) opens in an upscale restaurant, with three affluent couples thrusting and parrying for dominance. As the tension escalates, a servile waiter bustles in to smooth things over, and, for a time, the outside world is held at bay while the restaurant sanctuary caters to every mood and whim. '[W]hen I'm sitting in this restaurant […] I have a sense of equilibrium', says one of the celebrants in an epiphany moment (*Celebration*, p. 475). Even the restaurant staff agrees – 'This place is like a womb to me', says the Waiter (p. 469). 'I prefer to stay in my womb'. The womblike cocoon of the restaurant, though, is disrupted, for a moment as the Waiter recalls the acts of torture to which the 'people' his grandfather 'knew' were subjected. By remembering the precarious condition of those victims, the Waiter seems to disturb and question the veneer of safety provided by the restaurant – as Peter Raby writes: 'One of Pinter's most powerful effects is his ability to introduce other places and times, and other voices, into the dramatic world he has created […] The most noticeable way, perhaps, is through memory, through the stories the characters tell, or imply, or invent' – Peter Raby, 'Tales of the City: Some Places and Voices in Pinter's Plays', in *The Cambridge Companion to Harold Pinter*, ed. by Peter Raby, 1st edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 57-72 (p. 60).

[11] The connection between catering, as suggested by the act of serving food at the restaurant, and power is a common motif in Pinter's political plays. For another example, see his *Party Time* (1991) which I treat in more depth in Chapter Four.

[12] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*, trans. by Robert Hurley, 3 vols (London: Penguin, 1978 [1976]), I, p. 138.

Dramatizing the Face

In an interview in 1985, Pinter draws a parallel between his early plays (of '1957-60 or so') and his late ones by underlining their shared dramatization of the 'abuse of authority', an abuse that is manifested by nothing less than the physical subjugation of the other: 'Certainly the [early] plays use metaphor to a great extent', he says, 'whereas in *One for the Road* the deed is much more specific and direct. […] You have the torturer, you have the victim. And you can *see* that two of the victims have been physically tortured'.[13] What interests me here is Pinter's stressing of the word 'see', which suggests his insistence on rendering the physical suffering of victims of torture visible on the stage. Differently put, Pinter here seems to foreground the link between the invisibility of victims of torture and the vulnerability to which they are exposed.

Crucial here, I argue, is the recurrence of the figure of the 'face' in Pinter's works as an important signifier delineating the vulnerability of the other. In *New World Order* (1991) and *Mountain Language* (1988), for example, Pinter seems to foreground the 'facelessness' of political victims by presenting us with 'blindfolded' or 'hooded' prisoners, respectively.[14] In *Party Time* (1991), too, Pinter seems to call attention to the invisibility of the political 'other' by inviting the offstage prisoner, Jimmy, to come on to the stage, almost as a shadow or ghost, and directly *face* the audience. Pinter's stage-directions here require 'burn[ing]' light to give 'face' to one who is, otherwise, kept 'faceless', and turn the visible 'party' of powerful people into mere 'silhouette'.[15] However, it is in *One for the Road* (1984) where violence against the 'face' of the other is most directly referred to, as the torturer, Nicolas, reveals his obsession

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[13] Pinter, 'A Play and its Politics', p. 8; Pinter's emphasis.
[14] Harold Pinter, *The New World Order*, in *Pinter: Plays 4*, pp. 271-278 (p. 271); *Mountain Language*, in Ibid., pp. 251-267 (p. 262).
[15] Harold Pinter, *Party Time,* in Ibid., pp. 281-314 (p. 313).

with the 'eyes' of his tortured victims and fantasizes about waving his 'boot' and 'penis' before them.[16]

It might be suggested, I think, that, with respect to concealing or revealing the 'face' of the prisoner, Pinter is particularly influenced by Samuel Beckett's *Catastrophe* (1982), which, unusually for Beckett, deals explicitly with a political theme.[17] It is important to note here that Pinter played the role of the autocratic 'director' (D) in the film version of the play, directed by David Mamet as part of the *Beckett on Film* project in 2000. What particularly interests me in this play is how Beckett draws attention to the 'face' of the 'protagonist'-cum-victim by using different lighting techniques (such as 'blackout', 'fade-out of light', 'light on head alone', etc), fragmentary costume (namely a 'black wide-brimmed hat' to 'help hide the face'), and physical gesture (such as 'bow[ing] the head further' down), all of which seem to be evoked, invariably, in Pinter's political plays.[18]

And this applies to not only late but also early Pinter. Note, for instance, in *The Caretaker* how Davies complains about Aston's making him sleep with the 'oven', or 'gas stove', 'right next to [his] *face'* with the possibility that 'it might blow up' and 'do him harm' any moment.[19] Note, too, how at the end of *The Hothouse* Pinter alternates between using

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[16] Harold Pinter, *One for the Road*, in Ibid., pp. 223-247 (p. 224).

[17] The play is dedicated to the then imprisoned Czech reformer and playwright, Václav Havel. In 1979, Havel was sentenced by the Czechoslovak communist regime to four and a half years imprisonment for his dissident activities.

[18] Throughout *Catastrophe*, the director (D) tries to conceal the face of the protagonist (P), whom we take to be a prisoner, either by putting a 'hat' on his head, or by insisting that he stands with his 'head bowed' down. Finally D orders to 'blackout the stage' and focus the 'light on [P's] head alone'. Eventually, we see '*P rais[ing] his head*, [and] *fix[ing] the audience'* with his gaze. The play ends with the *'fade-out of light on* [P's] *face'*. See Samuel Beckett, *Catastrophe*, in *Krapp's Last Tape and Other Shorter Plays* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009 [1982]), pp. 143-147, in *Drama Online* <doi:10.5040/9780571293766.40000098> [accessed 27 July 2017]. Other critics have noted parallels between Beckett's *Catastrophe* and Pinter's political theatre – see for example, Judith Roof, 'Staging the Ideology behind the Power: Pinter's *One for the Road* and Beckett's *Catastrophe'*, *Pinter Review*, 2 (1988), 8-18. While concurring with this comparison, I would add that the subversive potential of the political theatre presented by both dramatists does not only reside in laying bare the ideology of power, or reversing theatrically, its disciplinary 'gaze', but also in *displaying* the hidden 'face' of the victim, and hearing its silent appeal. The purpose of this theatrical tactic, I argue, is not purely and simply political; rather, it is deeply ethical in that it goes beyond the denunciation of repressive power to questioning the brutal *means* by which the 'justified' end is often pursued.

[19] *Caretaker*, p. 57; my emphasis.

'blackouts' and 'lights' to focus the attention on the 'catatonic' face of 'lamb' who is left 'staring' at the audience in 'a sound-proof room'.[20] Even in a play that is as apolitical as *A Slight Ache*, there is an intriguing interest in the face of the other: note, for example, that the Matchseller first appears wearing a 'balaclava' and when he takes it off, Edward (the host) tells him, 'You looked quite different without a head—I mean without a hat—I mean without a headcovering, of any kind'.[21] In *The Dumb Waiter*, on the other hand, the vulnerability of the 'face' is , of course, primarily signified by the final face-to-face encounter where Gus stands disarmed right before Ben's pointed gun and the play ends with the two men 'staring at each other'.[22]

What I see in Pinter's fascination with revealing, or confronting, the absent 'face' of the victim is a call for a particular kind of responsibility, namely, one that *responds* to his corporeal vulnerability. This claim, I admit, is difficult to accept given the profound sense of antagonism underwriting most of Pinter's plays – 'The world', he says in an interview with *The Paris Review* in 1966, '*is* a pretty violent place, it's as simple as that, so any violence in […] [my] plays comes out quite naturally. It seems to me an essential and inevitable factor'.[23] However, by dramatizing this violence, Pinter seems to gesture towards the question of responsibility, which is essentially the question of ethics. To clarify, Pinter's plays, I argue, do not so much explore ethical questions as enact the *subterranean* structure of the ethical, namely the intersubjective encounter between the self and other. I here have in mind Emmanuel Levinas's conception of 'the ethical' (*L 'Ethique*) which is significantly distinct from the more pragmatic and traditional concept of ethics.[24] The ethical, for Levinas, is not a deontological

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[20] *Hothouse*, p. 328.

[21] Harold Pinter, *A Slight Ache*, in *Pinter Plays 1*, pp. 153-184 (p. 181).

[22] *Dumb Waiter*, p. 149.

[23] Harold Pinter, 'The Art of Theatre No. 3', interviewed by Larry Bensky, *Paris Review*, 39 (Fall 1966) <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/4351/harold-pinter-the-art-of-theater-no-3-harold-pinter> [accessed 20 May 2017].

[24] I here have in mind Kant's ethical theory that refers to a universal *system* of rational morality – what he calls 'the Categorical Imperative'. I discuss this concept fully in Chapter Three.

theory which prescribes norms and standards for moral behaviour; rather, it denotes the experience of that long-forgotten moment when the 'spontaneity' of the self is *challenged* by the presence of the other.[25] The ethical, in this sense, refers to the primordial mode of interpersonal existence that awakens the self to its relation with the other. This relation, though, does not denote a harmonious union; rather, it is a relation with a *pure* alterity which cannot be understood or dominated; Levinas refers to this absolute alterity as 'the Other' which he locates in the face-to-face encounter with the other person.[26]

The structure of this immediate encounter, for Levinas, though, is underwritten by a profound sense of tension triggered by nothing less than the 'temptation to murder'. He writes:

> To kill is not to dominate but to annihilate; it is to renounce comprehension absolutely. Murder exercises a power over what escapes power. […] I can wish to kill only an existent which is absolutely independent, which exceeds my powers infinitely, and therefore does not oppose them but paralyses the very power of power. *The Other is the sole being I can wish to kill.*[27]

Levinas attributes the deep-seated desire for murdering the Other to his absolute inviolability, transcending, as he does, the self's capacity for comprehension. Hence, the impossibility of dominating the Other. Levinas, of course, acknowledges that murder is a practical possibility, what he calls the 'most banal incident of human history'; however, he maintains that the absolute alterity of the Other renders murder *ethically* impossible.[28] Murder, that is, can physically eliminate the other person; yet it fails to dominate his infinite alterity, which, for Levinas, is particularly figured by 'the face of the Other'.

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[25] For Levinas, ethics is not derived from the 'spontaneity' of the ego, i.e. its freedom and autonomy. Rather, it is the suspension of this 'egoist spontaneity': 'We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics' – Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969 [1961]), p. 43.

[26] Levinas calls the ethical relationship that does not establish *understanding* of the Other a 'relation without relation' (Ibid., p. 80).

[27] Ibid., p. 198; my emphasis.

[28] Ibid., p. 198

But why the *face*? What is distinctly 'infinite', for Levinas, in the 'face' of the other? To start answering this question, let us consider what Levinas says about 'the face' in an interview in 1982:

> [T]he first obvious thing in the other's face is the directness of exposure and [its] defenselessness. The human being in his face is the most naked; nakedness itself. But at the same time, his face faces. It is in his way of being all alone in his facing that the violence of death is to be assessed. A third moment in the epiphany of the face: it requires me. The face looks at me, calls out to me. It claims me.[29]

In other words, there are, for Levinas, three main aspects that fascinate 'me' about the 'face' of the other – namely: the other's directness of exposure to my power; the other's directness of exposure to death; and an exhortation that calls out to me – 'do not kill' or 'preserve my life'. From this, we see that the experience of the 'face' is inherently concrete, rather than fleeting or abstract; it is a concrete experience, though, in so far it transcends its own immediacy to point towards a concrete response from me, a response that, for Levinas, can simply materialize by 'my presence' for the other, by my 'not leav[ing] it alone'.[30]

What is, for Levinas, fundamentally important in this immediate encounter with the 'face' is that it lacks any mediation by comprehension, reason, language, or culture; the face-to-face encounter, that is, is an immediate experience that reveals the other in its full 'nudity':[31]

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[29] Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Philosopher and Death', in *Alterity and Transcendence*, trans. by Michael B. Smith (London: The Athlone Press, 1999 [1995]), pp. 153-168 (p. 163). ('The Philosopher and Death' was originally published as '*Le philosophe et la mort*', an interview with Christian Chabanis, 'La mort, un terme ou un commencement?', Fayard, 1982.)

[30] Ibid., pp. 153-168.

[31] In its appearing, the face presents itself as naked; it is, as it were, handed over defencelessly before my gaze that observes and explores it, hence the temptation to do violence to it. The nudity of the face, though, as Levinas puts it, is a 'decent nudity', one that testifies to an essential destitution. The face, then, is the most exposed, most vulnerable, and most expressive aspect of the other's 'living presence'. And it is particularly from this position of undeniable exposure that the face calls out to be spared: 'The skin of the face', Levinas writes, 'is that which stays most naked, most destitute. [...]: there is', he goes on, 'an essential poverty in the face; the proof of this is that one tries to mask this poverty by putting on poses, by taking on a countenance. The face is exposed, menaced, as if inviting us to an act of violence. At the same time, the face is what forbids us to kill'. See Emmanuel Levinas,

> The nakedness of the face is not what is presented to me because I disclose it, what would therefore be presented to me, to my powers, to my eyes, to my perceptions, in a light exterior to it. The face has turned to me – and this is its very nudity. It *is* by itself and not by reference to a system.[32]

And since the 'face' does not signify a conceptual object, it reveals the fundamental alterity of the other, a revelation that Levinas describes as 'infinite'.[33] The infinity of the other's face not only reveals his fundamental alterity but also maintains it because it means that he cannot be fully comprehended and so always appears as other. As a consequence, Levinas claims that the infinity of the face is intimately connected to transcendence. The 'face', he argues, expresses 'the infinity of his transcendence'.[34] And, from this position of 'transcendence' comes the ethical command 'thou shall not commit murder', concretized, paradoxically, by 'the face'.[35]

Put differently, Levinasian ethics is expressed as a particular form of non-violent resistance – 'the resistance of what has no resistance'– that paralyses the power of the same and exposes its futility.[36] The self's adherence to the command of the other, of course, is what forestalls violence and potentiates the ethical relationship. We conclude from this account that the ethical, for Levinas, is not a code of conduct that regulates our relationships with others; rather, it is more like an epiphany of something so primordial that we can only experience it at a subliminal level. Put differently, for Levinas, there seems to be, if you will, an ethical subconscious lodged within every interpersonal encounter, regardless of whether this encounter eventually follows an ethical course of action or not.[37]

Ethics and Infinity: *Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. by Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985 [1982]), p. 86.

[32] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 74–5.

[33] Ibid., p. 49.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Some recent readings of Levinas make an analogy between Lacan's psychoanalysis and Levinas's ethics. See, for example, Terry Eagleton, *Trouble with Strangers: A Study of Ethics* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 223-272; and Simon Critchley, *Ethics, Politics, Subjectivity: Essays on Derrida, Levinas and Contemporary French Thought* (London: Verso, 1999), pp. 183-216.

Nevertheless, Levinas's concept of 'the face', being both what incites and *resists* the desire for murder, seems to presuppose, I argue, the primacy of violence in the inter-human relationship.[38] In other words, Levinas's conception of inter-subjectivity, for all its ethical character, appears to be construed in adversarial or oppositional terms. It can be argued, though, that it is particularly from this sense of adversity that the ethical quandary emerges –that of being torn between the violent impulse of the same and the plea of the other against that violence. The ethical encounter, for Levinas, then, appears less as mutual correspondence than a *confrontation* that interrupts the very freedom of the self and calls it, instead, to responsibility for the other. This responsibility, though, should not be understood as a form of self-willed agency or volition; rather, it is more of a responsive susceptibility to the 'living presence' of the other.[39] And it is this sense of *response*-ability, I would argue, that structures the ethical gap underlying the scenes of violence ubiquitous in Pinter's drama.

Ethical (Re)Turn

In his *Paris Review* interview, Pinter expresses a lack of interest in politics as such – '[P]olitics do bore me,' he remarks. However, he goes on to express a profound concern for how politics causes 'a great deal of suffering' to other humans:

> I don't feel myself threatened by *any* political body or activity at all. […] I don't care about political structures – they don't alarm me, but they cause a great deal of suffering to millions of people. I'll tell you what I really think about politicians. The other night I watched some politicians on television talking

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[38] Levinas does not explicitly recognize the immediacy of violence in the face-to-face relation. In fact, 'the face of the other', for him, 'is […] at once the temptation to kill and the call to peace'. See Emmanuel Levinas, 'Peace and Proximity', in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. by Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 161-169 (p. 167). However, I find in the necessity of pronouncing the ethical imperative against murder a presupposition of an immanent desire in the ego to kill the other.

[39] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 66.

about Vietnam. I wanted very much to burst through the screen with a flamethrower and burn their eyes out and their balls off and then inquire from them how they would assess this action from a political point of view.[40]

This is from 1966, and yet in the early years, Pinter did not write works that explicitly depict his anger against the political endorsement of violence.[41] This early statement seems, then, to anticipate the ethical orientation of Pinter's late 'political' plays which he very often dedicates to attacking regimes that see in the other's vulnerability an opportunity to coerce him, inflict suffering on him, or even kill him.

In view of this, I propose that the 'political turn' in the late Pinter, as noted by many critics, is, in fact, essentially an ethical (re)turn. In his late plays, that is, Pinter presents us with violent scenes that seek to enhance our awareness of the ways in which we, either individually or societally, justify the pain of others. Put differently, the purpose of his late theatre, which Esslin names a 'theatre of cruelty', is not simply to criticize or object to particular ideological or political structures.[42] Rather, it is to develop our capacity to *respond* to the suffering of others with compassion rather than cruelty. In other words, Pinter tries to reawaken his audience to their implicit identification with power structures that see the other's vulnerability as contrasting with their own sense of security and stability. As David Ian Rabey hints, Pinter implicates the 'law-abiding' citizen in the brutality undertaken by his government: 'Pinter's explicit dramatic target', Rabey writes, 'was henceforth active or passive complicity in such

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[40] Pinter, 'The Art of Theatre No. 3', Web.

[41] The only early work of Pinter's that dealt so explicitly with his anger at how representatives of institutional power turn blind eyes to the suffering that their self-protectionism perpetuates was *The Hothouse* (1958). However, it is interesting to note that Pinter decided to shelve the play, unconvinced by it, and it was left unpublished and unperformed until 1980. Taylor-Batty argues that *The Hothouse,* rediscovered in 1979-80*,* 'inaugurat[es] Pinter's political period […] [and] connect[s] his new artistic objectives to those of his first plays'. Mark Taylor-Batty, *The Theatre of Harold Pinter* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), p. 163, in *Drama Online* <doi:10.5040/9781408175293> [accessed May 16, 2017].

[42] Esslin, 'Harold Pinter's Theatre of Cruelty', in Burkman and Kundert-Gibbs, pp. 27-36.

postures and regimes: not just the torturer, but the successful law-abiding citizen sucked into a political structure that was essentially if complacently debilitating'.[43]

What I argue characterizes the regimes dramatized in Pinter's late plays is their reduction of the political to a sovereign entity concerned with nothing but its own power and superiority, and evacuated of any sense of sympathy towards the other. The ultimate purpose of Pinter's 'political turn' is, then, to isolate a distinctively *ethical* moment at the very centre of political drama. In doing so, Pinter seems to suggest that the chief task of political theatre is to recall us to the ethical imperative arising from a human woundability dissimulated by media coverage to such an extent that 'we' have become desensitized to human suffering and finitude. In short, he places responsibility for the other at the core of his theatre.

In connection with what I refer to as Pinter's ethical (re)turn, I will revisit some of his early plays with the purpose of probing their ethical underpinnings. In particular, I propose to re-interpret the scene of unwanted intrusion dramatized there as a metaphorical enactment of the primordial intrusion of the other into the domain of the same. It is only through such intrusion, I would argue, that Pinter's domestic spaces, notorious for their claustrophobic interiority, are to be viewed as spaces of inter-subjectivity and heteronomy. That is not to say, of course, that Pinter dramatizes the ethical by presenting cohesive and peaceful encounters between his characters. Rather, it is precisely in the discordant nature of these encounters, I argue, that the ethical is reconceptualized by Pinter as a rupture or fissure within the same. After all, what is the other if not an intruder, a parasitical presence which 'is equivalent', as Levinas puts it, 'to the calling into question of my joyous possession of the world'?[44]

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[43] David Ian Rabey, *English Drama Since 1940* (London: Longman, 2003), p. 58.
[44] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 76; 'The [Levinasian] other […]', Eagleton writes in *Trouble with Strangers*, 'is someone one has under one's skin, an image which is meant to suggest an irritant rather than an agreeable merging of egos' (p. 224). Critchley seems to have a similar opinion: 'The other', he writes in *Ethics, Politics, Subjectivity*, 'is like a parasite that gets under my skin' (p. 66).

Pinter's dramatization of the ethical is, though, two-fold: while the encounter with the other in the early plays appears as concrete and individual, i.e. face-to-face, it is usually mediated through a formal structure of social or political reality, such as, for example, 'the organization'. In other words, in Pinter the ethical has a double-structure informed as it is by not only a one-to-one self-other encounter but also a one-to-*many* self-other relationship.[45]

Many critics have read this encounter with the multiple other as merely a form of intrusion on the secure and private world of the Pinterian subject – 'The basic situation, which was so frequently to recur [in a Pinter play]', Martin Esslin writes, 'is that of a room, a room with a door; and outside the door, a cold, hostile world'.[46] And this sense of spatial demarcation is what has generally informed the reading of the early Pinter. The call for existential individuality that Esslin sees in Pinter is, for example, paralleled by the call for political individuality that Grimes finds in Pinter – 'Individual freedom from arbitrary power', Grimes writes, 'in fact becomes one of the principal themes of [Pinter's] politics'.[47] I, though, see in such binarism a profound misunderstanding of the Pinterian subject as a separate and isolated entity which struggles to maintain its individuality against the malevolent forces of the external world.

I propose, then, an alternative model to Esslin's, one in which I identify Pinter's basic situation in more relational terms – namely a room within which there is *always* both a host and a guest. In other words, I will argue that there is a structure of hospitality, or what Jacques Derrida calls 'hostipitality', underlying Pinter's early plays, which calls for a revised and ex-centric, or other-centric, reading of these plays. On this understanding, the famous and/or infamous Pinter room becomes the site of radical exposure to the other rather than of enclosure

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[45] I will attend to Pinter's complex dramatization of both an immediate and mediated relation with the other in the conclusion of my thesis where I dwell on the double-bind of the ethico-politcal and the question of 'the third'.

[46] Marin Esslin, *Pinter: A Study of his Plays* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1973), p 60 (Previously publ. as *The Peopled Wound: The Plays of Harold Pinter*).

[47] Grimes, p.15.

and solitude. In particular, I find in the host-guest dialectic presented in most Pinter plays a gesture towards the notion of 'exteriority', which Levinas defines as 'a going outside oneself that is addressed to the other, the stranger'.[48]

Pinter and Levinas

I am prompted to read Levinas and Pinter together chiefly because of their shared interest in the question of alterity – Levinas's ethics being derived from an encounter with the other, and Pinter's early dramatic situations being derived from the arrival of the stranger. My thesis, though, does not only and exclusively draw on Levinas but also on the *legacy* of his thought around the subjects of ethics and alterity, as manifested and developed in the works of other philosophers, most notably, of course, Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler.[49]

Whilst neither Levinas nor Pinter discuss one another, there are, I argue, obvious conceptual and historical reasons as to why they should be brought together. Many of these reasons relate to the horrors of WWII and both Pinter and Levinas's being Jewish. Levinas lost many of his family members in the Nazi death camps and was himself in a prisoner-of-war camp for nearly five years after 1940. In 'Signature' – the autobiographical sketch that closes *Difficult Freedom* (1963) – Levinas described his life as a 'disparate inventory [...] dominated by the presentiment and memory of the Nazi horror'.[50] Meanwhile, as it were, in wartime England, Pinter endured a traumatic series of evacuations which have an obvious bearing on

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[48] Levinas, 'The Proximity of the Other', in *Alterity and Transcendence*, pp. 97-109, p. 97.

[49] I consider Derrida's theory of unconditional hospitality in Chapter Two. Derrida's discourse on hospitality is very much developed from his engagement with Levinas. I here have in mind Derrida's book *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* (1997), written in homage to the dead philosopher. *Adieu* is a reading of Levinas's *Totality and Infinity* which, Derrida calls 'an immense treatise *of hospitality'*. See Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press: 1999 [1997]), p. 21. I particularly draw on Butler's discourse on precarity and grievability in Chapter Four. These theories are clearly developed from Levinas's concept of the 'face'. Levinas's influence on Butler is mostly obvious in her *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004) where she explicitly and extensively references Levinas. For more details, see Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), pp. 128-151.

[50] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Signature', in *Difficult Freedom*: *Essays on Judaism*, trans. by Sean Hand (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990 [1976]), pp. 291-295 (p. 291).

the themes of 'loneliness, bewilderment, separation and loss' that, as Michael Billington argues, 'recur in all his works'.[51] As an adolescent, too, Pinter suffered this time from anti-Semitic violence with the resurgence of fascism in the post-war East End, something that, according to Billington, 'developed [Pinter's] instinctual hatred of any form of injustice'.[52] In a 1996 interview published in *Various Voices* (1999) concerning what prompted him to write *Ashes to* Ashes (1996), Pinter remarks:

> I was brought up in the Second World War. I was about fifteen when the war ended; I could listen and hear and add two and two, so these images of horror and man's inhumanity to man were very strong in my mind as a young man. They've been with me all my life, really. You can't avoid them, because they're around you simply all the time.[53]

In short, Pinter's and Levinas's shared concern for alterity stems, I argue, from their personal experience of being 'othered' by very similar forces of political injustice.

Crucial here is Pinter's and Levinas's shared criticism of the political ideology of fascist and totalitarian governments of the twentieth century. Shortly after Hitler came to power, Levinas wrote 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism'(1934), an article that traces 'the source of the bloody barbarism of National Socialism' back to the foundational 'logic' of Western philosophy – 'The philosophy of Hitlerism', Levinas writes, '[…] goes beyond the philosophy of Hitlerians. It questions the very principles of a civilization'.[54] While Levinas excavates the philosophical foundation of fascism, Pinter, I argue, writes plays saturated with elements of fascist ideology – for example, the construction of otherness as a crime, the evasion of responsibility, and the rationalization of oppression as merely following orders. Indeed, the

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[51] Billington, p. 6.

[52] Ibid., p. 19.

[53] Harold Pinter, 'Writing, Politics and *Ashes to* Ashes', interviewed by M. Aragay and R. Simó, in *Various Voices: Prose, Poetry, Politics 1948–1998* (London: Faber, 1998), pp. 58-70 (p. 64).

[54] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism', *Critical Inquiry*, 17 (Autumn 1990), 62-71 (pp. 63-64) <http://ww w.jstor.org/stable/1343726> [accessed 21 May 2017].

Third Reich appears explicitly in other areas of Pinter's oeuvre: two plays he directed, Robert Shaw's *The Man in the Glass Booth* (1967) and Ronald Harwood's *Taking Sides* (1995), address the trials of Nazis; whilst his screenplays *The Quiller Memorandum* (1965), *The Heat of the Day* (1989), *Reunion* (1990) and *The Remains of the Day* (1993) all refract features of Nazi Germany.

Mark Taylor-Batty is one critic amongst many who see in Pinter's post-war dramas a critique of the way authoritarian governments adopt coercive policies either to assimilate difference or completely annihilate it – as he writes:

> If *The Dumb Waiter* might be considered as an exploration of the aggravation that Goldberg and McCann experience as willing components of a self-sustaining system of authoritarian power that relies upon and establishes obedience in those who are subject to it, then *The Hothouse*, written in the winter of 1958, might be considered a further examination of the processes of correction, obedience and corruption that such power systems exhibit.[55]

Rosette C. Lamont seems to make a similar point as she argues that the state-run sanatorium of *The Hothouse* is modelled, in particular, upon Nazi hospitals which condoned mass killing: '[W]hen *The Hothouse*, is read for its subtext', she writes, 'it becomes a parable of the systematic annihilation of "inferior" races by a nation bent on mass death'.[56]

There are other critics, though, who read the holocaustal subtext of Pinter's early plays not simply as a reference to Nazism but as a condemnation of the totalitarian ideology which, for Pinter, can be traced in the politics of our contemporary world. As Lislie Kane writes:

> Certainly […] the Nazis' perpetration of the 'final solution' was the specific historical event casting its shadow over the writing of *The Hothouse*, but to read

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[55] Taylor-Batty, *The Theatre of Harold Pinter*, p. 34.
[56] Rosette C. Lamont, 'Harold Pinter's *The Hothouse*: A Parable of the Holocaust', in *Pinter at Sixty*, ed. by Burkman and Kundert-Gibbs, pp. 37-48 (p. 38).

the play as a meditation on Nazism runs the risk of ignoring how the play both allows us to perceive the totalitarian tendencies present even in nations constituted as democratic republics […] and uses its setting to dramatize, through a kind of defamiliarization, the ideological processes of subject formation.[57]

As is clear, many Pinter critics have observed within his work not only holocaustal scenarios but also allusions to much later and less violent political scenes. But what is the purpose of this dramatic representation of violence? Is it possible to limit Pinter's theatre to his all-too familiar denunciation of repressive regimes? Or is there something more profound to this denunciation? Put differently, in what ways does Pinter's theatre function, or *act*, as political theatre? To answer these question, let us have a look at what distinguishes Pinter's political theatre from that of his contemporaries.

Post-War Political Theatre

Theatre has, of course, always been compatible with politics, not least because it is, as Michael Patterson puts it, 'a much more public forum than any other art'.[58] What distinguishes theatre from, say, the novel, poetry, or film, is that theatre is necessarily experienced communally, rather than individually. And this shared or communal aspect of theatre, necessarily gives it a social or political function; hence, Patterson's generalizing statement, 'All theatre is political'.[59]

In theatre studies, however, the term 'political theatre' is usually defined in much more specific terms. In his comprehensive survey of post-war British drama, Patterson, defines

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[57] Lislie Kane, *The Art of Crime: The Plays and Films of Harold Pinter and David Mamet* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 44.
[58] Michael Patterson, *Strategies of Political Theatre: Post-War British Playwrights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 1.
[59] Ibid., p. 1.

'political theatre' as 'a kind of theatre that not only depicts social interaction and political events but implies the possibility of radical change on socialist lines: the removal of injustice and autocracy and their replacement by the fairer distribution of wealth and more democratic systems'.[60] With this definition in mind, I am not surprised that none of Pinter's post-war plays are mentioned in Patterson's book. While some of Pinter's early plays do allude to a certain form of 'injustice' and 'autocracy', they are not specifically framed in ideological or propagandist terms, be it socialist or otherwise. Note how Pinter sets his theatre apart from that of his British contemporaries: 'There is certainly a good deal of prophecy indulged in by playwrights these days', he remarks in 1962. '[…] Warnings, sermons, admonitions, ideological exhortations, moral judgments, defined problems with built-in solutions; all can', he adds, 'camp under the banner of prophecy'.[61] One may argue, though, that his attitude as to the purpose of theatre changed drastically in his later years. However, while I concur with the standard view that his plays became expressly, rather than suggestively, political, I would argue that his aversion to ideological drama remains: 'Sermonizing', he observes in his Nobel Prize lecture (2005), 'has to be avoided at all cost. […] The author cannot confine and constrict [his characters] to satisfy his own taste or disposition or prejudice'.[62]

In view of this, I shall attempt to explore Pinter's politics at a much deeper level than that of history or ideology. Indeed, I would sum up my interest in Pinter's political theatre in two ways. First, I am interested in how it functions as a meta-political space, *interrogating* the very nature of the notions that lurk beneath the mere surface of politics. Second, I am interested in its *performative* and *enabling* dimensions. In other words, Pinter's theatre, I argue, does not merely and simply represent political injustice, or criticize it; rather, it *dramatizes* the very

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[60] Ibid., pp. 3-4.
[61] Pinter, 'Writing for the Theatre', in *Various Voices*, pp. 16-20 (p. 18).
[62] Pinter, 'Art, Truth and Politics', Web.

structure and conditions that give rise to this injustice or make it possible. We are thus invited to rethink our political reality by means of, and not according to, his dramatic texts.

To understand Pinter's political dramaturgy better, it is necessary to consider the conventional modes of Western theatrical discourse of his time. Political theatre in the twentieth century, according to Patterson, belongs to two main traditions – what he calls 'the reflectionist and the interventionist':

> The reflectionist tradition asserts that the main function of art and indeed theatre is to hold up a mirror to nature and to reflect reality as accurately as possible, what Aristotle called the 'imitation (*mimesis*) of an action'. The interventionist mode asserts that, even if it were possible to reflect reality accurately, the undertaking is futile, since it is the task of the artist and playwright to interpret reality and to challenge our perception of it.[63]

The reflectionist tradition, then, is broadly realist, if not fully naturalist, seeking to provide an accurate representation of the contemporary world. The interventionist tendency, on the other hand, employs a variety of theatrical elements within a fragmented and open-ended text that does not so much seek to represent reality as *challenge* our perception of it. Representative of the interventionist attitude is, perhaps, Bertolt Brecht's dictum – 'Art is not a mirror to reflect reality, but a hammer with which to shape it'.[64] Patterson names Bertolt Brecht, best known for his 'epic theatre', as the most influential figure in the 'interventionist' camp: 'Reality, however complete', Brecht writes, 'has to be altered by being turned into art, so that it can be seen as alterable and treated as such'.[65] Brecht, that is, did not write plays to entertain passive

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[63] Patterson, p. 15.

[64] Brecht, quoted in Rob Rosenthal and Richard Flacks, *Playing for Change: Music and Musicians in the Service of Social Movements* (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 8.

[65] Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. & trans. by John Willett (London: Eyre Methuen, 1964 [1918-1956]), p. 219.

spectators; rather, his plays were written to *challenge* the audience to think and see possibilities for change. This was what Brecht liked to call 'dialectical theatre'.

One can easily recognize the socialist overtones of Brecht's work from his borrowing of the Marxist jargon 'dialectical' to name his theatre. Unlike traditional theatre, the purpose of 'dialectical theatre' was to compel the audience to question their own actions and attitudes, persuading them to change the social order. In order to achieve this, Brecht deems it best that the audience should maintain a critical distance from what is happening on stage.[66] This distance is often termed 'alienation', 'distanciation', or 'V-effect' (*Verfremdungseffekt*): 'The aim of […] the *Verfremdung* effect', he explains, 'was to make the spectator adopt an attitude of inquiry and criticism'.[67] This, for Brecht, involves the use of techniques designed to make the events on the stage appear remarkable, or extraordinary, rather than simply natural: '*Verfremdung* estranges an incident or character simply by taking from the incident or character what is self-evident, familiar, obvious in order to produce wonder and curiosity'.[68] And it is only by making the familiar strange and the strange familiar, as it were, that the audience, Brecht believed, can *judge* the action on the stage, rather than empathize with it. To this end, Brecht's theatre employs multiple devices and effects to enhance the artificiality of the theatrical performance, rather than its naturalism.

Brecht's new style of 'dialectical theatre' proved hugely influential on the evolution of the post-war British stage. This was, in part, because the general political climate of post-war Britain was hospitable to Brecht's socially-oriented theatre. It was a time when Britain was building its 'post-war consensus', which involved establishing a strong welfare state. And this consensus very much established the discursive field within which cultural production

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[66] Brecht here tries to develop a new *critical* approach for his audience to adopt as a substitute for the Aristotelian principle of *catharsis*, that is 'the spectator's spiritual cleansing […] brought about by means of *mimesis*'. See Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. by Marc Silberman and others, trans. by Jack Davis and others, 3rd edn (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 141.

[67] Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 184.

[68] Ibid., p. 143.

operated. Hence, the rise of state-subsided theatres – for example. the Berliner Ensemble which performed in London for the first time in 1956, presenting a host of Brecht's plays and adaptations, such as *Mother Courage* (1939), *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1944), and *Drums and Trumpets* (1955). As Esslin comments:

> Brecht became the focal point [in Britain], the rallying cry for the younger generation of theatrical artists who had realized that the future of the theatre as a serious vehicle for ideas, enlightenment, and beauty, depended on the recognition that the commercial system was no longer able to provide the basis for viable drama.[69]

The growing popularity of Brechtian theories and texts in late 1950s- and early 1960s-Britain coincided with, if not contributed to, the emergence of several young male dramatists of working-class origin, namely the 'kitchen sink dramatists', also known as the 'angry young men'. Demanding a share in the economic good-life for those not born into it, the 'angry young men' sought changes in the organization of a tradition-bound, class-based society. The unifying trope of anger brought socialist playwrights such as Edward Bond, John Arden, and John Osborne to public attention and created a very visible alliance between theatre and leftist politics. Although the 'kitchen sink' dramatists are at variance as to the dramaturgical strategies they adopt, they seem united, as Taylor-Batty puts it, in 'creat[ing] a very specific intellectual and creative community of political dramaturgy'.[70] And, indeed, this 'community' continued to dominate British theatre in the 1970s.[71]

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[69] Martin Esslin, 'Brecht and the English Theatre', in *Brecht Sourcebook*, ed. by Carol Martin and Henry Bial (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 147-55 (p. 148).
[70] Taylor-Batty, *The Theatre of Harold Pinter*, p. 162.
[71] 'Not every playwright of the '70s was politically on the left', Richard Eyre and Nicholas Wright observe, 'but being left-wing was the mood of the time.' See Richard Eyre and Nicholas Wright, quoted in Amelia Howe Kritzer, *Political Theatre in Post-Thatcher Britain: New Writing, 1995-2005* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 5 <http://www.myilibrary.com?ID=197584> [accessed 27 May 2017].

Leftist theatre struggled to survive, though, once the Conservative Party, led by Margret Thatcher, came to power in 1979. Nevertheless, a number of British playwrights expressed opposition to Thatcherism by maintaining the left-wing energies of the 1970s theatre. Their opposition often focused on very specific policies of the Thatcher government. Howard Brenton and David Hare, for example, satirized the takeover of a large sector of British journalism by a wealth-obsessed entrepreneur who embodied Thatcher's free market ideals in *Pravda* (1985); whilst Caryl Churchill sharply interrogated the monetarist values of Thatcherism in *Top Girls* (1982) and *Serious Money* (1987).

While Pinter seems to follow the Brechtian legacy of adapting theatre for the purpose of interrogating reality and reforming it, he does not see the writer's role as putting across a message: 'I've never started a play from any kind of abstract idea or theory'.[72] Pinter's political theatre, then, is unlike much contemporaneous writing in that it lacks commitment to a particular program of reform. Although in 1996 Pinter expressed his endorsement of socialism in connection with human rights, nowhere in his plays does he particularly employ a socialist discourse.[73] As Grimes puts it:

> Pinter's definition of 'political theatre' seems unspecific and unware of the extensive theorization of this term carried out by political playwrights of his generation. His politics have no reference to specific political groups or ideologies — as he says, he doesn't write out of 'ideological desire' […] If this nonideological focus frees Pinter from representing traditional left/right distinctions in his works, it may be that to write without ideological desire is to write without ideological focus.[74]

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[72] Pinter, 'Writing for the Theatre', in *Various Voices*, (p. 17).

[73] Pinter expresses pro-socialist tendencies in an article first published in *Red Pepper* (1996), debunking US allegations against violations of human rights in Cuba, see Harold Pinter, 'Caribbean Cold War', in *Various Voices: Prose, Poetry, Politics 1948–1998*, revised edn (London: Faber, 2005), pp. 209-12.

[74] Grimes, p. 26.

Pinter's freedom from 'ideological desire' begs the question of to what extent his theatre and/or drama can be considered political when it does not confessedly commit itself to a particular political cause or movement? And this question prompts another – namely: how can his theatre *move* the audience to political activism when he does not have any particular political vision?

To both questions, the answer, I would propose, lies in the performative, rather than didactic, force of Pinter's political plays. We might be tempted to say that Pinter's political drama is performative insofar as it enacts a relation with the future by pointing towards that which may disrupt the present. On the surface, Pinter's late plays, I argue, may simply appear as representing, or re-enacting political reality. However, what they actually try to represent is the *orchestrated* representation of this political reality. In other words, the theatrical spectacles in Pinter's late plays, I argue, invariably reflect the theatricality of the political order, or the State, which imposes itself as something permanent, self-evident or given. The State, dramatized by Pinter, then, appears as a rigid structure that *creates* itself by means of excluding all the elements that may disrupt its ordering function. In Pinter, those excluded elements, though, are still not granted full representation; instead, they appear in the form of a masked, silenced, or ghosted otherness that draws attention to itself as a non-presence or lacuna in the political order. However, it is particularly through this ephemeral representation of otherness, I would argue, that Pinter's plays rupture the continuum of normality and open a space to rethink political reality – a task left for the audience to complete.

It would be impossible, of course, to separate the late plays completely from the early ones in terms of form and aesthetics, especially in that they have many techniques and devices in common. However, in order to explain the performative capacity of Pinter's political drama, it is important to make a distinction between the generic frameworks he adopts in his early and late plays. In either case, Pinter's plays, as I shall explain in the following sections, act as an

enabling space where social and political change can be dynamically *performed* rather than simply presented or demanded.

Parables of Alterity

Owing to their eccentricity and indeterminacy, Pinter's early plays have often been pigeonholed as absurdist. In his influential work, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1961), Esslin sees the 'sense of metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of the human condition' as the 'theme of the plays of Beckett, Adamov, Genet, and the other writers discussed in [his] book', including, of course, Pinter.[75] While concurring that Pinter's plays share the Absurdists' dismay with the human condition, I see in his plays a call for remaking human reality. In other words, Pinter's plays do not only defamiliarize reality but also invite the spectator to participate in the process of reshaping it. It is in this sense, I would argue, that Pinter's plays *perform* change.

It is in this respect that Pinter follows in the footsteps of Brecht. As Victor E. Amend, writing in particular about *The Birthday Party*, remarks:

> The claim of kinship to Brecht may not seem at first a valid one. Pinter, of course, does not write the epic drama in the Brechtean [*sic*] manner. His kinship to Brecht is not [though] in form but in the effect sought and achieved – what Brecht calls the A-effect, or alienation. […] Like Brecht, Pinter seeks to alienate, or distance, his character from the spectator in order that the spectator will become involved […] in what is happening on the stage.[76]

In other words, it can be argued that Pinter's early plays are not strictly Brechtian in political orientation or aesthetics, but they do seem to draw on Brecht's non-Aristotelian method of dramatization, which focuses less on maintaining the classical unity of action than on

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[75] Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, 3rd edn (New York: Vintage Books, 2004 [1961]), pp. 23-24. For more on Pinter and the absurd, see Esslin's chapter, 'Harold Pinter: Certainties and Uncertainties', pp. 234-264.
[76] Victor E. Amend, 'Harold Pinter—Some Credits and Debits', *Modern Drama*, 10 (1967), 165-174 (p.166) <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/499789/summary> [accessed 1 September 2017].

fragmenting it. This fragmentation, I argue, acts as a method of 'alienation' in so far it 'others' on-stage reality which, in its turn, serves to 'other' off-stage 'real-world' reality. In this respect, Pinter's plays are distinct from Brecht's in that they do not just make the 'familiar strange' but make it infinitely 'other'. This, though, is not to be seen as some kind of a negation of meaning. Rather, what we have in Pinter is a space in which signifiers exist in a kind of 'free play' (to echo Derrida) without succumbing to a transcendental signifier.

In this connection, my thesis does not so much attempt to read or interpret Pinter's texts as try to show how these texts can act as interpretive machines by which the notions underpinning political and social reality can be re-conceptualized. Of particular significance here is the quasi-naturalist scene of everyday reality with which Pinter's early plays usually start. As these plays unfold, of course, the ordinary is soon rendered 'other', or uncanny; hence, the sobriquet 'comedies of menace'. In its place, though, I propose to refer to Pinter's early plays as 'parables of alterity'.

I here glance towards Michael Y. Bennett's use of the term 'parable' to re-evaluate plays commonly understood as absurdist:

> Since 1960, with Esslin's introduction of the term in an article by the same name—the Theatre of the Absurd—the prominent idea of absurdity expressed in these plays has been largely accepted as a given when understanding these plays. […] I will suggest, instead, that these texts, rather, revolt against existentialism and are *ethical parables* that force the audience to make life meaningful. Ultimately, I argue that the limiting thematic label of Theatre of the Absurd can be replaced with an alternative, more structural term, 'parabolic drama'.[77]

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[77] Michael Y. Bennett, *Reassessing the Theatre of the Absurd: Camus, Beckett, Ionesco, Genet, and Pinter* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 2 <http://www.myilibrary.com?ID=309686> [accessed 23 May 2015]; my emphasis. Among the modernist plays Bennett revisits in his book is Pinter's *The Birthday Party*, which Bennett reads as 'a parable about an unhealthy family relationship that resembles Oedipus's family due to their own

The use of parable is not, of course, uncommon in modern theatre. Perhaps the most prominent figure in this regard is Brecht who uses the parable form in his plays for purposes of clarity.[78] In a conversation with Ernst Schumacher, Brecht argues that 'the parable is much more cunning than any other form. […] For the playwright, the parable is the egg of Columbus, since it is concrete in abstraction, making essentials clearly visible'.[79] G. W. Brandt, however, argues that the essence of Brechtian parables is their being 'negative parables' that 'illustrate a *wrong* state of affairs or *wrong* conduct'. He adds:

> Brecht does not imply that there is no such thing as *right* conduct; but the audience are not spoon-fed with a readily digestible moral; they have to chew on the facts for themselves and come to their own conclusions.[80]

Echoing Brandt, I propose to read Pinter's early plays as 'negative parables' that offer a dystopian model of the world in order to construct a non-mimetic parallel between the imaginatively posited reality of the text and our own 'real-world' reality. Pinter's parable plays, then, do not simply provide, or even propose, correctives; rather, they offer a *riddling* representation of reality that leaves the audience with questions, rather than answers. This chimes with Bennett's definition of the 'parable' as 'a *performative* didactic metaphor that usually contains both a metonymic *paradox* and an open-ended dilemma that calls for interpretation from the audience'.[81]

Bearing this definition in mind, let us consider the paradoxical plots of *The Birthday Party*, *The Caretaker* and *The Dumb Waiter*, respectively. In the first, a tenant in a guest-house

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inability to interrogate themselves and their own situation' (p. 54). Also note (as I mention above) that Lamont reads Pinter's *The Hothouse* as a 'parable of the Holocaust'. See Lamont, 'Harold Pinter's *The Hothouse*: A Parable of the Holocaust', in Burkman and Kundert-Gibbs, pp. 37-48.

[78] Brecht called his play, *The Good Woman of Setzuan* (1941), a 'parable play'; however, the term later became linked with Brecht's theatre in general, and Eric Bentley entitled both his translation of this play and another one by Brecht – namely, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1944) – 'Parables for the Theatre'.

[79] Quoted in Ernst Schumacher, 'He Will Remain', in *Brecht As They Knew Him*, trans. by John Peet, ed. by Hubert Witt (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), pp. 215-228 (p. 225).

[80] G. W. Brandt, 'Realism and Parables (From Brecht to Auden)', in *Contemporary Theatre*, ed. by J.R. Brown and B. Harris (London: Edward Arnold, 1962), pp. 33-56 (p. 34).

[81] Bennett, p. 112; my emphasis.

is publically and inexplicably abducted – or dare we say, 'arrested'– by two mysterious visitors whom he does, and yet does not, seem to know.[82]   In the second, a homeless 'guest' is graciously 'invited' into a 'room', rented by one man and owned by his enemy-brother, only to be later menaced, coerced and, eventually, expelled by his co-hosts. In the third, two hired gun-men wait in the basement room of a derelict building for a mysterious 'call' that signals the arrival of their next victim only to find out, eventually, that one of *them* is chosen – or dare we say 'elected' – to be killed by the other. Each of these dramatic situations *subverts* our usual understanding of reality. And it is particularly because of this subversive force that I describe Pinter's plays as performative. Performativity, of course, is distinct from performance in that performativity *transforms* reality even as it enacts it. Particularly relevant here is Bennett's characterization of the parable as a distinctively 'performative' discourse:

> In orientation and disorientation, the work is done by the parable. However, the job of reorienting is left up to the reader or listener of the parable. The reader or listener must pick up all the pieces of our now deconstructed world and put them back together to try to reinstate order, stability, and sense. This is why all parables are *performative*: they demand immediate action from the reader or listener.[83]

While I agree with Bennett that the parable (as a play or narrative) offers a scrambled or inverted view of everyday reality, I take issue with his suggestion that we should ideally respond to the parable by 'pick[ing] up all the pieces of our now deconstructed world and put[ting] them back together'. I would argue, instead, that the parable, as a form of riddle, lends

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[82] I here draw on Franz Kafka's *The Trial* (1925) which famously starts with the sentence: 'Someone must have been telling lies about Josef K., he knew he had done nothing wrong but, one morning, he was arrested'. See Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, in *The Metamorphosis and The Trial*, trans. by David Wyllie (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Borders Classics, 2000), pp. 53-226 (p.53). *The Trial* is, of course, recognized as a major intertext for Pinter's *The Birthday Party*.

[83] Bennett, p. 113; my emphasis.

shape to truth without betraying its essential indeterminacy.[84] Put differently, parabolic truth is not simply restored, or 'reinstated'; rather, it can only be squinted at out of the corner of one's eye. In short, a parable, I believe, requires a parabolic kind of reading. This is something that Franz Kafka, the master of modern parables, gestures towards in his meta-parabolic text, 'On Parables':

> All these parables really set out to say merely that the incomprehensible is incomprehensible […] But the cares we have to struggle with every day: that is a different matter. Concerning this a man once said: Why such reluctance? If you only followed the parables you yourselves would *become* parables and with that rid yourself of all your daily cares.[85]

Kafka here interrogates the conventional didactic function of the parable and implies that the parable is not simply a text from which we can learn how to live a better life; rather, it is something by which, and indeed into which, we are transformed.

In view of these teasing words and given Pinter's well-known affiliation to Kafka, I would argue that many of Pinter's characters are themselves parables in the sense that they exist somewhere just the other side of the everyday. And it is toward this just-the-other-side-of-the-real that Pinter's plays beckon us. Particularly significant here is the famous exchange between himself and a woman who once wrote to him after seeing a production of *The Birthday Party* – her letter reads:

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[84] I here draw on the etymological link between the 'parable' and the genre of the 'riddle', which Bernard Brandon Scott makes in *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus*. Scott explains that the word 'parable' comes from the Greek word *parabolē* which translates in Hebrew as *mashal*. And it is particularly to this broad literary genre which the Hebrews call *mashal*, Scott adds, that Jesus's parables belong (pp. 7-9): 'Throughout the Hebrew Bible', he writes, '*mashal* is associated with riddle and taunt' (p. 11). For more on the Hebrew etymology of the parable, see Bernard Brandon Scott, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), pp. 7-13.

[85] Franz Kafka, 'On Parables', in *Parables and Paradoxes* <http://zork.net/~patty/pattyland/kafka/parables/onparables.htm> [accessed 3 September 2017]; my emphasis. This metaparable was presumably written in 1922 and posthumously published in 1936 by Max Brod who gave it the title '*Von den Gleichnissen*'. See Richard T. Gray, Ruth V. Gross., and Goebel Rolf J., *A Franz Kafka Encyclopedia* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 2005), p. 287.

> Dear Sir, I would be obliged if you would kindly explain to me the meaning of your play *The Birthday Party*. These are the points which I do not understand: 1.Who are the two men? 2. Where did Stanley come from? 3. Were they all supposed to be normal? You will appreciate that without the answers to my questions I cannot fully understand your play.[86]

Pinter's reply is:

> Dear Madam, I would be obliged if you would kindly explain to me the meaning of your letter. These are the points which I do not understand: 1. Who are you? 2. Where do you come from? 3. Are you supposed to be normal? You will appreciate that without the answers to my questions I cannot fully understand your letter.[87]

Summary

It is important to note that there have been, especially in the last few years, several attempts to investigate the ethical considerations of Pinter's work. For instance, in her article 'The Dead are Still Looking at Us' (2013), Maria Germanou examines a number of Pinter's late essays and speeches that address issues central to contemporary political and philosophical debates – most notably, the ethics of responsibility, the relational nature of human rights and the politics of death. Discussing Pinter's treatment of these issues, Germanou draws very briefly on the Levinasian notion of ethical responsibility and argues that 'Pinter's concerns are compatible with those of […] Levinas, who', as she writes, 'places the encounter with the other at the core of ethics'.[88] In similar vein, both Hanna Scolnicov and Taylor-Batty explore, in two separate

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[86] Quoted in Martin Esslin, *Pinter: The Playwright*, rev. edn (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1982), pp. 29
[87] Ibid., pp. 29-30.
[88] Germanou, Maria, ''The Dead Are Still Looking at Us': Harold Pinter, the Spectral Face, and Human Rights', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 29 (2013), 360-69 (p. 367) <doi:10.1017/S0266464X13000687> [accessed 16 May 2017].

articles, the ethical implications of Pinter's *Ashes to Ashes* (1996), which, they argue, dramatizes the act of bearing witness to the death of the other (as figured, presumably, by the Holocaust) as a form of ethical responsibility.[89] And finally, Iván Nyusztay takes up, again, Pinter's and Levinas's common fascination with alterity to explore how two of Pinter early plays, namely *The Birthday Party* and *The Caretaker*, offer dramatic encounters that illustrate, as well as challenge, Levinas's notion of 'infinite responsibility'.[90]

Although these attempts offer a valuable engagement with Pinter's ethics, especially vis-à-vis Levians, they fail to offer a *comprehensive* critical study, combining Pinter's interest in ethics, politics and alterity across both the early and late phases of his dramatic and public career. My thesis, then, builds on these recent discussions of Pinter's ethics by arguing that the ethical has always been a critical focus at every stage of Pinter's work. In short, this study challenges both the earlier tendency that takes Pinter as an Absurdist and the late one that regards him as purely political. I shall then seek to explore the nexus between politics and ethics in various Pinter texts that deal explicitly or suggestively with the political. In order to so, I shall look at the question of alterity as that which structures the irreducible gap between ethics and politics in Pinter's work. In particular, I approach the conception of otherness in Pinter in the double sense of the unknowable and that which always already inhabits the same. In either case, alterity, for Pinter, I argue, appears as a disruptive force, displacing the inclination towards hegemony, totality and sameness. In short, Pinter, I argue, does not offer a prescriptive treatise on how to overcome the ethical-political opposition; however, his plays, I would argue, glance towards a different configuration of the political, one that is grounded in an ethical responsiveness or openness towards the other.

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[89] See Hanna Scolnicov, 'Bearing Witness and Ethical Responsibility in Harold Pinter's *Ashes to Ashes*', in *Ethical Speculations in Contemporary British Theatre*, ed by M. Aragay and E. Monforte (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 42-58; and Mark Taylor-Batty, 'How to Mourn: Kane, Pinter and Theatre as Monument to Loss in the 1990s' in Ibid, pp. 59-75.

[90] Iván Nyusztay, 'Infinite Responsibility and the Third in Emmanuel Levinas and Harold Pinter', *Literature and Theology*, 29 (2015) 153–165.

The thesis consists of four chapters, an introduction and a conclusion. Each of the first three chapters engages with one of Pinter's early plays – namely, *The Birthday Party, The Caretaker*, and *The Dumb Waiter*, respectively. In the first chapter, I take up the issue of contaminated identity, one that is always already otherwise than itself. In particular, I focus on the figure of Stanley in Pinter's *The Birthday Party* in whom I identify evocations of the figure of not only the Jew but also the anti-Jew, or anti-Semite, and even the Nazi. By exploring how one character can evoke two antithetical identities, I argue that, in Pinter, the self does not exist simply over or against the other but is always already contaminated by the other. In the second chapter, I look at the demystified version of the home presented in *The Caretaker* as a trope for national home or 'homeland'. In particular, I argue that the presence of the homeless figure of Davies in the brothers' house serves to problematize any stable conception of the 'home' which can no longer be regarded as a guarantor of identity, rootedness, and belonging. In the third chapter, I take the double scene of waiting presented in *The Dumb Waiter*, namely waiting both *for* and *on* 'the call', as a metaphor for ethical service and *respons*ibility. I argue that the play uses its double scene of waiting to provoke new ways of re-conceptualizing responsibility in both ethical and political terms. In the fourth chapter, I explore the political works of the late Pinter, including his plays, poetry and prose. My exploration of these works will focus chiefly on their ethical enquiry into the reality status of human vulnerability within political agendas. I am particularly interested in Pinter's contention that the notion of self-protection is used to re-define political violence as expedient, necessary, or even just. For this reason I shall propose to call his late theatre a 'theatre of precarity'. I conclude my thesis with a brief essay on Pinter's dramatic version of the Levinasian concept of the 'third'.

CHAPTER 1

Identity: *The Birthday Party*

> Auschwitz confirmed the philosopheme of pure identity as death.
> —Theodore Adorno[1]

The Birthday Party, written in 1957 and first performed in 1958, not so long after the end of World War II, is one of Pinter's early plays which has been reinterpreted in light of the so called 'Pinter's political turn'. Grimes, for example, probes the play's political message by examining 'how history—notably the Holocaust—shapes the play's political vision'.[2] In 1994, Pinter, himself, admits that Nazism and the Holocaust were in the background of *The Birthday Party*:

> I think *The Birthday Party* is certainly shaped by persecution […] I remember feeling when I was asked once or twice what the hell does *The Birthday Party* mean? […] It always surprised me then, the fact that people seemed to have forgotten the Gestapo had been knocking on people's doors not too long ago. And people have been knocking on people's doors for centuries in fact. *The Birthday Party* doesn't express anything unusual, it expresses something that is actually common.[3]

We can gather from this that Pinter is less interested in dramatizing the historical particularities of Nazi 'persecution' than in how this persecution becomes a recurrent historical pattern – given Pinter's claim that *The Birthday Party* shows something quite 'common'.

In view of Pinter's statement, I will explore the pattern of domination dramatized in the play by tracing its evocation of Nazism and the Holocaust. The historical context of the play's

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[1] Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 362.
[2] Grimes, p. 36.
[3] Pinter, quoted in Fintan O'Toole, 'Our Own Jacobean', *The New York Review of Books*, 7 October 1999 <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1999/10/07/our-own-jacobean> [accessed 12 May 2014].

publication, the choice of Jewish surnames for central characters, such as Webber and Goldberg, and the explicit and coded references to Nazi-related terms and notions – such as, 'steriliz[ing]' and 'special treatment' – all plausibly beg for a Jewish-cum-Nazi-focused reading of *The Birthday Party*.[4] That is not so say, of course, that the play simply allegorizes the Third Reich or Holocaust. Rather, the play seems to employ Jewish and Nazi signifiers to address a universal kind of problematic, one that is *figured* by the two antithetical, yet co-dependent, categories of Jew and anti-Semite. In short, the play, I argue, is less interested in the specific cultural identities of Nazi or Jew than in the *positions* of identity they occupy – namely those of same and other, respectively.

The figure of the same and/or anti-Semite is particularly evoked in the play by Goldberg and McCann, who are mainly characterized by their collective identification with the 'organization'. Note how McCann uses the plural pronoun 'us' to refer to the authoritarian self of the 'organization' that he and Goldberg represent: 'Why did you leave the organization?' he asks Stanley, '[…] Why did you betray *us*?'[5] The 'organization' here serves as a surrogate for the identity of its followers. And it is particularly through this *positive* identification with something as solid and homogenous as the 'organization' that I see in Goldberg and McCann potential Nazis or anti-Semites. Key here, I suggest, is Jean-Paul Sartre's description of the anti-Semite as he who 'choos[es] for his own personality the *permanence of rock* [and] for his morality a scale of *petrified* values'.[6] In other words, the anti-Semitic self, for Sartre, denies its own existential contingency by cultivating a sense of pure identity or essence. It follows then that Sartre regards identity as 'bad faith', securing the self against a feeling of existential

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[4] Pinter, *The Birthday Party* in *Pinter: Plays 1*, pp. 2-81 (p. 47) & (p. 79); Webber is a variant of the Jewish (Ashkenazic) name Weber, which is the occupational name for a weaver. It comes from the German *wëber*, which is an agent derivative of *weben*, meaning 'to weave'. This name is widespread throughout central and eastern Europe, being found for example as a Czech, Polish, Slovenian, and Hungarian name. 'Goldberg', too, is a surname of German origin, meaning 'gold mountain'; it is common among Ashkenazi Jews – see Patrick Hans (ed.), *Dictionary of American Family Names* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
[5] *Birthday Party*, p. 42.
[6] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, trans. by George Joseph Becker, 1st edn (New York: Schocken, 1965 [1946]), p. 19; my emphasis.

groundlessness. The mechanism of self-deception that Sartre believes to be at work in the anti-Semitic personality is also expressed by Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: *Philosophical Fragments* (1944-1947): 'The closed circle of perpetual sameness', they write, 'becomes a surrogate for omnipotence'.[7]

We can glance in Goldberg's life account a hint at the *illusion* of 'perpetual sameness' necessary to cover over the 'nothingness' of existence:

> All my life I've said the same. Play up, play up, and play the game. […] Follow the line, the line, McCann, and you can't go wrong. What do you think, I'm a self-made man? No! I sat where I was told to sit. […] School? Don't talk to me about school. Top in all subjects. And for why? Because I'm telling you, I'm telling you, follow my line? Follow my mental? Learn by heart. Never write down a thing. And don't go too near the water. And you'll find—that what I say is true.
>
> Because I believe that the world… (*Vacant.*)….
>
> Because I believe that the world… (*Desperate.*)….
>
> BECAUSE I BELIEVE THAT THE WORLD … (*Lost.*)….[8]

Goldberg's inability to finish his last sentence, I argue, seems to betray the groundlessness of his belief system, something he tries to escape by 'follow[ing] the line'.

In the eyes of the 'organization', it seems, then, anyone who does not 'follow the line' is regarded as 'other'. And in the play there is some sense in which this form of 'othered' identity is particularly enacted by Stanley. Stanley's 'othered' identity, I argue, is primarily suggested by his abstract relation with place, commonly understood as a guarantor of durable identity. Of particular importance here is Stanley's status as 'guest' in the Boles's 'boarding

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[7] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott, ed. by Gunzelin Noerr (California: Stanford University Press, 2002 [1944-1947]), p. 157.
[8] *Birthday Party*, pp. 71-72.

house' for 'about a year now', which associates him with a mode of dwelling based largely on lack of proper ownership. Also important is his account of having *toured* the world as *former* pianist – 'I've played the piano all over the world', he says – which makes him appear more as a wandering rather than rooted figure.[9] Mark that Stanley's present inability to play the piano is partly attributed to his not *owning* one anymore:

> MEG […] Stan? When are you going to play the piano again?
>
> (STANLEY *grunts.*)
>
> Like you used to?
>
> […]
>
> STANLEY   I can't, can I?
>
> MEG   Why not?
>
> STANLEY   I haven't got a piano, have I?
>
> MEG   No, I meant like when you were working. *That piano*.[10]

And it is particularly this negative relation to place and property, I would argue, that makes Stanley function as a figure for the Jew, he who belongs nowhere and to whom nothing properly belongs – as Paul Celan puts it: 'The Jew, you know, what does he have that is really his own, that is not borrowed, taken, and never returned'.[11]

In *The Birthday Party*, though, the personae of Jew and anti-Semite, I argue, do not always appear as strictly oppositional but rather as dialectical, if not reversible at times. This becomes especially manifest in that each of the three characters can evoke both the figure of the same and other alternately. Of notable significance here is how the 'organization', for all its insistence on sameness, is paradoxically represented by two of the most famous 'other' archetypes in Western history, namely the Jew and Irishman – Goldberg having a

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[9] *Birthday Party*, p. 25; p. 16.
[10] Ibid, pp. 15-16.; my emphasis.
[11] Paul Celan, 'Conversation in the Mountains', in *Paul Celan: Selections*, ed. by Pierre Joris (Berkley, Los Angeles, and California: University of California Press, 2005 [1959]), p. 149 (pp. 149-153)

typically Jewish name and McCann an Irish one. These two types, of course, are historically united by a similar experience of persecution, diaspora, and prejudice.[12] By choosing two 'other' figures to be representatives of such a 'same' structure as the 'organization', the play, I would argue, seems to demystify the *myth* of sameness that this structure embodies. Far from being self-identical, that is, the 'organization', it seems then, is other to itself. This unacknowledged otherness mirrors the way identity groups reject and project their own 'foreignness', namely the impulses that they must suppress in order to construct an illusion of plenitude and sameness. In this sense, the other appears to be closer to the same than the latter would be willing to admit. And it is precisely for this reason that Sartre writes, 'If the Jew did not exist, the anti-Semite would invent him'.[13] Put differently, the Jew, for Sartre, merely functions as a reflection of the Nazi's other self.

In short, the roles of Jew and anti-Semite as they appear to be enacted in Pinter's play, I shall argue, are far from being stable or easily predictable; rather, they appear as mutable and, even, reversible. It could be argued, then, that the play presents us with a fragmented, or even inverted, scene of persecution, where the identities of persecutor and persecuted, same and other, can appear indistinguishable. And it is precisely through this indistinguishable characterization of Jew and anti-Semite that the play can subvert the power relation between them. In view of this, then, I will, read *The Birthday Party* as a parable on negative identity, particularly framed within a Nazi-cum-Jewish dialectic.

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[12] The crossover between Jewish and Irish identities is particularly concretized in James Joyce's Ulysses, where the central character, Bloom, happens to be an Irish Jew or 'Jew-Greek' – as Terry Eagleton writes in his review of Detlev Claussen's *Theodor Adorno: One Last Genius* (2008): 'The Jew and the Irishman could find common ground in this stark extremity [i.e. "Irish memory of famine" and the "image" of what he calls "the poor forked creatures of Auschwitz"], as they find common ground in Ulysses and in many popular jokes' – see Terry Eagleton, 'Determinacy kills', review of *Theodor Adorno: One Last Genius*, *London Review of Books*, 30 (2008), 9-10 <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v30/n12/terry-eagleton/determinacy-kills> [accessed 24 September 2014]. For more on parallels between the Jew and Irishman, see Sofia Ricottilli, '"Others Have a Nationality. The Irish and the Jews Have a Psychosis": Identity and Humour in Howard Jacobson's *The Finkler Question* and Paul Murray's *An Evening of Long Goodbyes*', (unpublished doctoral thesis, Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, 2015) <http://dspace.unive.it/bitstream/handle/10579/6521/955797-1158593.pdf;sequence=2> [accessed 24 September 2014].

[13] Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, p. 8.

Musical Metamorphosis

How can a pianist exist without his piano, or a drummer without his drum? *The Birthday Party* conjures up such a question, featuring as it does a musician, Stanley Webber, who never seems able to maintain his instruments – he appears initially as a pianist without a piano and later as a drummer with a broken drum. Stanley's unequivocal association with music runs throughout the play, but his musical life does not remain consistent as he undergoes in the course of the play a metamorphosis from pianist to drummer, and thus his very sense of identity appears susceptible to change. In order to achieve a better understanding of the protagonist's unstable identity, the role of music, and in particular that of piano and drum, should be interpreted in light of its association with the identities of Jew and Nazi evoked in the play.

The Nazi era featured the drum as a key percussion instrument in its military parades, owing to its traditional association with military rallies and marches which constituted a fundamental aspect of the military-dominated Nazi ideology. Michael H. Kater cites the drum as one of the indispensable musical instruments included in military music instruction received by members of *Hitler-Jugend* (Hitler Youth):

> Hitler Youth music cadres came to adopt military forms of organization […] The favored instruments were those of the army: fifes, trumpets, and *drums*. During the war the Hitler Youth leadership expended a lot energy on selecting suitable boys […] the drummer 'had to be physically capable of carrying the parade corps drum, even on longer marches'.[14]

Bearing this in mind, I see within the scene where Stanley strikes 'a *boy's* drum' – a gift given to him by Meg on his 'birthday' – a shadow of a military parade.[15] Here, Stanley, I suggest, almost evokes the image of a Hitler Youth, beating his drum whilst marching in a Nazi parade.

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[14] Michael H. Kater, *The Twisted Muse: Musicians and Their Music in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 141-142; my emphasis.

[15] *Birthday Party*, p. 30.

On the other hand, Stanley paradoxically acts as a symbolic Jew in the sense that his former career as a pianist is suggested to have been terminated forcibly, evoking, I suggest, the Nazi ban on Jewish musicians, in particular Jewish pianists:

> Then after that, you know what they did? They carved me up. Carved me up. It was all arranged, it was all worked out. My next concert. Somewhere else it was. In winter. I went down there to play. Then, when I got there, the hall was closed, the place was shuttered up, not even a caretaker. They'd locked it up.[16]

There is, then, we should note, a transition for Stanley from piano to drum especially in that the drum is given as a *replacement* for the piano – 'It's because you haven't got a piano', Meg tells Stanley.[17] This transition is suggestive of the double role Stanley performs in the play as he seems to represent two figures concurrently, for, at one moment, he plays the part of a Jewish musician and, at the next, the part of a Nazi. This leaves open the possibility of interpreting the play as, paradoxically, symbolizing *both* the birth and death of the Nazi subject, something I will return to in the last section of this chapter.

Interestingly, the setting of the three-act play features 'a living room' in a boarding house. The concept of 'living room' is intimately linked with Nazi ideology via the infamous policy of *Lebensraum* ('living space'), the name given to Nazi Germany's supposed need for territorial expansion, and hence the occupation and depopulation of Eastern Europe.[18] Note that Stanley expresses his dissatisfaction about the living room's lack of cleanliness and, in the same breath, demands 'a new room': 'Look, why don't you get this place cleared up! It's a

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[16] Ibid, p. 17
[17] Ibid, p. 30.
[18] *Lebensraum* (Living space) was an essential element of Hitler's ideology: namely, that living space was needed for Germany because it was overpopulated and lacked the natural resources to maintain its population. This living space was to be gained by a war and genocide in the east' – see Robert Michael and Karin Doerr, *Nazi-Deutsch/ Nazi-German: An English Lexicon of the Language of the Third Reich* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2002), p. 260<search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=86659&site=ehost-live&authtype=ip,shib&user=s1523151> [accessed 14 May 2014].

pigsty. And another thing, what about my room? It needs papering. I need a new room!'[19]

Stanley's protest may be interpreted, I suggest, as a parody or echo of Nazi rhetoric and invites

us almost to view the 'living room' which Stanley inhabits, in a sense, as Hitler's Germany.

At the same time, however, Stanley can also, paradoxically, be seen as a Jewish figure,

by virtue of being a pianist who is somehow coerced into relinquishing his passion for his

music:

> STANLEY   […] A fast one. They pulled a fast one. I'd like to know who
> was responsible for that. (*Bitterly*) Alright, Jack, I can take a tip. They want me
> to crawl down on my bended knees. Well I can take a tip . . . any day of the
> week.[20]

Stanley is clearly troubled by this seemingly humiliating experience, wherein he is envisioned

crawling on bended knees to take a tip – a vision that, in a sense, is suggestive of the fate of

Jewish pianists who were made to entertain their Nazi masters. I would suggest here that

Stanley's fate recalls to mind Wladyslaw Szpilman's World War II memoir, *The Pianist*

(1946), which was adapted into a film in 2002.[21] Szpilman's memoir features the experience

of many Jewish musicians whose musical careers were destroyed, either due to being deported

to concentration camps or to being banned from performing under a music Nazification policy.

In the Nazi imagination, music had a unique power to seduce and sway the masses. The

Party made widespread use of music in its publicity campaigns, and music featured

prominently at rallies and other public events. The Nazi's zeal for music was accompanied by

a campaign aimed at purging the Aryan musical scene of its 'undesirables', most notably, of

course, were Jewish musicians. Shirili Gilbirt explains the impact of the infamous music

programme developed by the Nazi leadership on non-Aryan musicians:

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[19] *Birthday Party*, p. 13.

[20] Ibid, p. 17.

[21] Szpilman's memoir was first published in 1946 in Polish under the title, *Death of a City*.

Music was an effective means of propaganda and indoctrination, and in 1938, the infamous *Entartete Musik* (Degenerate Music) exhibition was mounted in order to identify to the German public what music was 'degenerate' and to demonstrate its dangers. Many promising musical careers were destroyed and musicians forced into exile, concentration camps, or 'inner emigration'.[22]

Historically and biblically, though, music has played a massive role in Jewish culture. As Velvel Pasternak writes:

The importance of music in the life of the Jewish people is found almost at the beginning of Genesis. There music is mentioned as being one of the three fundamental professions: that of the herdsman, of the metal forger, and of the musician. Music was looked upon as a necessity in everyday life, enjoying equal rights with other professions, as a beautifying and enriching complement of human existence.[23]

In fact, because the Jewish community is typically musical, it would not be an exaggeration to say that Jewishness signifies musicality or, even, that musicality is one important marker of Jewish identity.[24] This is particularly evident in literary representations of Jews as musicians in Victorian literature, for example.[25] It could be argued, then, that the Holocaust was aimed at wiping out Jewish existence, not only through physical extermination but also spiritual or

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[22] Rita Horvath, 'The Role of The Survivors in the Remembrance of the Holocaust: Memorial Monuments and Yizkor Books', in *The Routledge History of the Holocaust,* ed. by Jonathan C. Friedman (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 473. This policy targeted the so-called *entartete Musik* (Degenerate music), that is 'alien music […] that was considered non German (e.g., Jazz, modern music, and music composed by Jews)' – see Michael and Doerr, p. 145.

[23] Velvel Pasternak, *The Jewish Music Companion: Historical Overview, Personalities, Annotated Folksongs* (New York: Tara Publications 2002), p. 9.

[24] For an extensive account on the musical life of the Jewish communities, see Philip Bohlman*, Jewish Music and Modernity* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[25] For more on the figure of the Jewish musician in Victorian literature, see Jonathan Taylor, 'The Music Master and "the Jew" in Victorian Writing: Thomas Carlyle, Richard Wagner, George Eliot and George Du Maurier', in *The Idea of Music in Victorian Fiction*, ed. by Sophie Fuller and Nicky Losseff (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 225-244.

cultural deprivation, not least through the destruction of Jewish music. Stanley, the dispossessed pianist, thus resembles the surviving Jewish violinist in Szpilman's memoir who tells the captured German soldiers: 'You always claimed to be a cultured people, but you took everything I had from me, a musician – my violin!'[26] Similarly, for Stanley, it seems, the absence of his music and instrument bears on his own sense of selfhood. Hence, his inexplicable frustration and debility, as made particularly evident through his physical expression – 'He groans, his trunk falls forward, his head falls into his hands'.[27]

However, Stanley's musical trajectory, as already observed, undergoes some shift in the play once he is given on his birthday 'a boy's drum'. Of notable significance is the occasion on which Stanley is given the drum, for a birthday promises renewal and the beginning of a new episode in one's life. Thus, Stanley's birthday may be interpreted, I suggest, as a moment of conversion or initiation, one that is underwritten by military overtones – note how the description of Stanley's drumming is strongly suggestive of fanatical and even savage militarism:

> *He hangs the drum around his neck, taps it gently with the sticks,*
> *then marches round the table, beating it regularly.* MEG*,*
> *pleased, watches him. Still beating regularly, he begins to go*
> *round the table a second time. Halfway round the beat becomes*
> *erratic, uncontrolled.* MEG *expresses dismay. He arrives at her*
> *chair, banging the drum, his face and the drumbeat now savage*
> *and possessed.*[28]

[26] Wladyslaw Szpilman, *The Pianist: The Extraordinary Story of One Man's Survival in Warsaw, 1939-1945,* trans. by Anthea Bell (London: Phoenix, 2000 [1946]), p. 188.
[27] *Birthday Party,* p. 15.
[28] Ibid, p. 30.

The 'savage' manner of Stanley's drumbeating, I would argue, foreshadows and corresponds to the inhuman portrait Goldberg and McCann paint of him in the mock-trial scene:

> GOLDBERG Why did you kill your wife?
>
> STANLEY (*sitting, his back to the audience*). What wife?
>
> […]
>
> GOLDBERG You stink of sin.
>
> MCCANN I can smell it.
>
> GOLDBERG Where is your lechery leading you?
>
> […]
>
> MCCANN You contaminate womankind.
>
> […]
>
> MCCANN Mother defiler!
>
> GOLDBERG Why do you pick your nose?[29]

Stanley here, I argue, is being accused of 'crimes' that *construct* him as less than human. Stanley clearly has no actual connection with the charges addressed to him, as especially suggested by the far-fetched possibility of his involvement in some of them – as in, for example, his questioning about, 'Drogheda', the 'Albigensenist heresy' or 'the blessed Oliver Plunkett'. The unlikelihood of Stanley's link to any of these 'crimes', I argue, illustrates how self-image, to echo Sartre, is a product of the 'gaze' of the other.

Sartre's concept of the 'gaze' basically maintains that the self is not a pure identity with the structure of 'it-is-what-it-is' or what he calls the 'in-itself'. Rather, the self, for Sartre, is a consciousness or what he refers to as 'for-itself':

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[29] Ibid, pp. 43-45.

> The being of consciousness qua consciousness is to exist *at a distance from*
>
> *itself* as a presence to itself, and this empty distance which being carries in its
>
> being is Nothingness. Thus in order for the self to exist, it is necessary that the
>
> unity of this being include its own nothingness as the nihilation of identity.[30]

To explain, the structure of consciousness, for Sartre, is characterized by negativity rather than

essence which involves accepting a characterization of one's self as something constituted by

the 'gaze' of the other. In this sense, the other is essentially the one who *looks* at me. In

apprehending the other, that is, I apprehend that I am the object of his gaze. By being seen by

the other, I receive for the first time my sense of selfhood as an object in the world:

> This means that all of a sudden I am conscious of myself as escaping myself,
>
> not in that I am the foundation for my own nothingness but in that I have a
>
> foundation *outside of myself*. I am for myself only as I am a pure reference for
>
> the Other.[31]

Sartre develops the concept of the 'gaze', which he originally theorizes in his *Being*

and Nothingness (1943), to build the premise that being a Jew is not a matter of essence or

identity but rather a condition predetermined by the 'look' of the anti-Semite:

> The anti-Semites are right in saying that the Jew eats, drinks, reads, sleeps, and
>
> dies like a Jew. What else could he do? They have subtly poisoned his food, his
>
> sleep, and even his death. How else could it be for him, subjected every moment
>
> to this poisoning? As soon as he steps outside, as soon as he encounters others,
>
> in the street or in public places, as soon as he feels upon him the *look* of those
>
> whom a Jewish newspaper calls 'Them'—a look that is a mixture of fear,

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[30] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*: *An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. by Hazel E. Barnes (London: Methuen, 1958 [1943]), p. 78.
[31] Ibid., p. 260.

disdain, reproach, and brotherly love—he must decide: does he or does he not

consent to be the person whose role they make him play?[32]

And we can see something of the predicament of Sartre's Jew in Stanley's mock trial, for he

too, it seems, must 'consent' to playing the role of the defendant or suspect that Goldberg and

McCann ascribe for him.

Stanley's refusal to consent, nevertheless, is not going to change the fact that he *is*

condemned to be on trial. In this respect, Stanley's situation most obviously echoes Josef K's

in Kafka's *The Trial* (1925), which famously starts with the sentence: 'Someone must have

been telling lies about Josef K., he knew he had done nothing wrong but, one morning, he was

arrested'.[33] Both Stanley and K., I argue, are not so much accused as pre-judged, for they both

appear to be cross-examined without being given the chance to justify or defend themselves –

Stanley being bombarded with disorienting and nonsensical accusations and K being denied

the right to know the reasons for his 'arrest'.

Crucial here is Sartre's finding an echo of his own portrait of the Jew in Kafka's *The

Trial*:

> This is perhaps one of the meanings of *The Trial* by the Jewish Kafka. Like the
>
> hero of that novel, the Jewish person is engaged in a long trial. He does not
>
> know his judges, scarcely even his lawyers; he does not know what he is charged
>
> with, yet he knows that he is considered guilty; judgment is continually put off
>
> […] and it happens eventually … that men seize him, carry him off on the

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[32] Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, pp. 63-64.

[33] Kafka, *The Trial*, p.53; Pinter's work, especially *The Birthday Party*, has been widely read by critics in relation to Kafka, especially his *The Trial* which Pinter adapted into a screenplay in 1993. In an interview with BBC 4, Pinter acknowledges that 'Kafka has an undeniable influence on [him] in [his] early life'. Kafka, quoted in Steven H. Gale, *Sharp Cut: Harold Pinter's Screenplays and the Artistic Process* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2003), p. 339.

pretense that he has lost his case, and murder him in some vague area of the suburbs.[34]

We can gather from this that Jewishness, for Sartre, is a not simply a state of being; rather, it seems more like a verdict of guilt, something with which the Jew seems to be convicted, as it were. And I see something of the predetermined guilt of the Jew in the series of accusations and questions addressed to Stanley.

Stanley's confirmed guilt, I argue, becomes mostly manifest as McCann concludes his cross-examination by calling Stanley 'Judas'.[35] In the Christian imagination, of course, the name Judas is associated with betrayal, being the name of the apostle, Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus by identifying him to the Roman guards. Anti-Semitism, though, exploits the figure of Judas, whose name clearly reflects his Jewish roots in the town of Judea, to stereotype all Jewish people as treacherous.[36] This form of cultural prejudice has resulted in rendering the Jew a perpetual suspect of treason. One of the most famous examples of this suspicion is the French scandal of the Dreyfus Affair (1894-1906). As is known, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a French artillery officer of Jewish descent, was falsely charged of national treason twice, which resulted in his trial and conviction each time. Eventually all the accusations against Dreyfus were demonstrated to be baseless. Another famous example is, of course, the German nationalists' belief that Germany had lost the First World War due to betrayal from within; socialists, communists and particularly Jews were blamed, even though more than 100,000 German and Austrian Jews had served in the war and 12,000 had been killed. The belief in Jewish treason, of course, was embraced by Nazi propaganda and was employed to justify the persecution of Jews.

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[34] Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, p. 63.
[35] *Birthday Party*, p. 46.
[36] One infamous example was the Nazi propaganda film, *Jud Süss* ('Süss the Jew') (1940), seen by 20 million Germans. Its central character was a Judas-look-a-like moneylender who sells out the people of Württemberg to fill his own pockets and those of fellow Jews. The director later stood trial for war crimes.

There is a coded reference to the perpetual charge of treason directed at the Jew in Goldberg's and McCann's respective questions to Stanley: 'Why did you leave the organization?' and 'Why did you betray us?'[37] In short, the mock trial, for all its seeming absurdity, I would argue, has an important function, namely making Stanley apprehend his own identity through shame; hence, the emphasis not only on Stanley's treason but also on his violence, sinfulness, lechery, and uncleanliness. All these qualities serve to exclude him from human civilization. Interestingly, though, Stanley's 'savage' character, so to speak, becomes mostly apparent the moment he starts striking the drum, shortly before he is cross-examined by Goldberg and McCann. Note how his drumming is described as 'erratic' and 'uncontrolled', and eventually both 'his face and the drumbeat' become 'savage and possessed'.[38]

Stanley's beating the drum in a 'savage' way, I argue, can be read as a reversal of the Nazi 'gaze' that perceives the Jew as uncultivated or animal-like, for it is now the drummer who looks 'savage'. The 'savage' look on Stanley's face foreshadows his violent and uncontrollable behavior during the birthday party, especially when he attempts to 'strangle' Meg and rape Lulu – as suggested by the latter being found 'lying spread-eagled on the table' and Stanley 'bent over her'.[39] Put differently, Stanley's inexplicable violence, I argue, appears to be connected with the transformation that starts happening to him, particularly after his receiving the drum-gift. Cue the word 'possessed' suggesting the quasi-magical effect that the drum seems to have on the one who strikes it.

Another important scene signalling a change in Stanley's character is by the time of his last appearance when he seems to have quite lost the capacity to reason and articulate:

> MCCANN   What's your opinion, sir? Of this prospect, sir?
>
> [...]

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[37] *Birthday Party*, p. 42.
[38] Ibid., p. 30.
[39] Ibid.*,* pp. 58-59.

> STANLEY *concentrates, his mouth opens, he attempts to speak, fail and emit*
>
> *sounds from his throat.*
>
> STANLEY Uh-gug … uh-gug … eeehhh-gag … (*On the breath.*)
>
> Caahh ... caahh….[40]

I see in Stanley's speech loss following the birthday party a gesture towards the regressive nature of his transformation. Rene Descartes identifies the ability to express thoughts and act with rational deliberation as the main signs distinguishing humans from animals:

> Now in just these two ways we can also know the difference between man and beast. For it is quite remarkable that there are no men so dull-witted or stupid – and this includes even madmen – that they are incapable of arranging various words together and forming an utterance from them in order to make their thoughts understood; whereas there is no other animal, however perfect and well-endowed it may be, that can do the like. This does not happen because they lack organs, for we see that magpies and parrots can utter words as we do, and yet they cannot speak as we do: that is, they cannot show that they are thinking what they are saying. […] This shows not merely that the beasts have less reason than men, but that they have no reason at all.[41]

In view of this Cartesian distinction between man and beast, Stanley's mere 'emit[ting]' of incomprehensible 'sounds' as a response to being questioned about his 'opinion' can reflect a weakening of his rational capacity, which to some extent, renders him animal-like. In other words, the transformation of Stanley's musical identity (from pianist to drummer), I argue, is significantly paralleled by his *metaphorical* regression from the state of human to that of sub-human, or even, animal.

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[40] Ibid., p. 78.

[41] Rene Descartes, 'Discourse on the Method', in *Descartes: Selected Philosophical Writings*, trans. by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge & NY: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 20-56 (p. 45).

The regression from human to animal is, of course, a recurrent leitmotif in literature. A notable example of this is Kafka's novella *The Metamorphosis* (1915), where the protagonist, Gregor Samsa, wakes up one morning to find that he has been magically and inexplicably transformed into an enormous insect. And I can see some parallels between Gregor's metamorphosis and the kind of transformation Stanley undergoes in *The Birthday Party*. Note that Goldberg clearly regards Stanley's birthday as a regenerative event: 'What a thing to celebrate–birth! Like *getting up in the morning*. Marvellous!'[42] This line is evocative, I suggest, of the opening sentence in *The Metamorphosis*: 'When Gregor Samsa awoke *one morning* from troubled dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a monstrous insect'.[43] Both Kafka's story and Pinter's play, I would argue, then, paradoxically employ a regenerative signifier – namely a birthday and waking up in the morning – to express a degeneration in the protagonists' appearance or character.

What is especially interesting about this degeneration is that, in both cases, the protagonists only *appear* as though they converted from one state to another. However, there is a sense where this conversion is suggested to be a mere resurfacing of a suppressed otherness, signified by the figure of the 'insect' in Gregor's case and the 'savage' in Stanley's. Gregor, for example, is dehumanized by his society even prior to his physical transformation. Note how he is made to think of himself as 'a mere tool of the chief, *spineless* and *stupid*'.[44] It could be argued that Gregor's metamorphosis is an outward expression of the internalized gaze of his society that treats him as nothing better than an insignificant insect. Kafka's absurdist story, then, presents in a single metaphor a man inhabiting the body of animal, and an animal inhabiting the body of man. Through his capacity for consciousness, manifest in his ability to remember, reflect and comprehend, the metamorphosed Gregor Samsa perceives himself, and

[42] *Birthday Party,* p. 39; my emphasis.
[43] Franz kafka, *The Metamorphosis* in *Metamorphosis and Other Stories: Works Published during Kafka's Lifetime* (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. 76-126 (p.76); my emphasis.
[44] Ibid., p. 78; my emphasis.

is still perceived by the readers, as human. To his family and everyone else in the story, though, he is regarded as animal. His sister eventually says, 'He's got to go [...] that's the only solution'.[45]

The Birthday Party suggests a similar interplay between fundamental binaries – namely, pianist and drummer; human and beast; artist and soldier; and, let's not forget, Jew and anti-Semite – all of which seem to collide in the figure of Stanley. Like the metamorphosed Gregor, Stanley has a twofold identity: he is experienced throughout the play, dually, as both victimized artist or pianist and savage drummer. Moreover, like Gregor, Stanley's subsequent savagery, manifest in his irrational and hostile behaviour, seems to be stirred up or awakened, rather than caused, by the drum beating. Remember how he alone appears 'possessed' by the drum, unlike Meg who 'expresses dismay' at his uncontrolled drumming. In this sense, Stanley's savage and/or drummer self, I would argue, appears as his alter ego, i.e. the other of his human and/or pianist self.

In this respect, *The Birthday Party*, I would suggest, bears interesting resemblance to a Yiddish play that Kafka draws on for in *The Metamorphosis*, namely Yakov Gordon's *Der Vilder Mentsh* (*The Savage One*) (1893).[46] In particular, I see some likeness between Stanley and Lemech, the idiot son of the Leiblich's family. Both Lemech and Stanley, it seem to me, show similar behavioural transformation that results in actual or figurative matricide –

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[45] Ibid., p. 120.

[46] Kafka clearly used this play as a model for his *Metamorphosis*, with Lemech as a counterpart to Gregor. Kafka outlines the play's plot in his *Diaries* in detail: 'Parts of the plot of *Der Wilde Mensch* are very spirited. A young widow marries an old man with four children and immediately brings her lover, Vladimir Vorobeitchik, along into the marriage. The two proceed to ruin the whole family, Shmul Leiblich (Pipes) must soon hand over all his money and becomes sick, the oldest son, Simon (Klug), a student, leaves the house, Alexander becomes a gambler and drunkard, Lise (Tschissisk) becomes a prostitute and Lemech (Lowy), the idiot, is driven to idiotic insanity by hate of Mrs. Selde, because she takes the place of his mother, and by love, because she is the first young woman to whom he feels close. At this point, the plot reaches a climax with the murder of Selde by Lemech' – quoted in Evelyn Beck, *Kafka and the Yiddish Theater: Its Impact on his Work* (London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1971), p. 136.

as manifested by Lemech's murdering his step mother, and Stanley's attempting to 'strangle' Meg.[47] The Yiddish play ends with a profound comment by Lemech's brother on the conflict between the bestial and civilized forces in humanity:

> What – where is this savage one? A savage who observes our behaviour and our ways is buried deep within each of us …. When we improve ourselves, when the spirit in us wakens, when our souls reign over our bodies, then the savage one within us sleeps. But when we strive only for material goals, when we have no ideals, when our spirit sleeps, then the savage one awakens and forces us to go against civilization, against the laws of humanity.[48]

Here, Lemech's decline into savagery is viewed in broader terms as, for Lemech's brother, it mirrors not merely the degeneration of family but also of humanity. In short, Lemech's brother implies that there are two sides to human being: the civilized and the barbaric. And there is something of this vision, I would argue, in Stanley's transition from piano to drum which I read as a gesture towards the double character of civilization: the human and barbaric – a duality that Walter Benjamin clearly has in mind when he famously writes: 'There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism'.[49]

Unfit for Life

> Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity.
> — Horkheimer and Adorno

The regression into barbarism that Western civilization witnessed in the first half of the twentieth century manifested itself primarily in the *systematic* killing of six million Jews. This human catastrophe is still hard to conceptualize not only for its sheer cruelty but also for its

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[47] *Birthday Party*, p. 58.
[48] Quoted in Beck, p. 145.
[49] Walter Benjamin, 'Thesis on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1973), pp. 255-266 (p. 258).

being intricately and paradoxically connected with the narrative of the Enlightenment. In the preface to their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno speculate on 'why humanity, instead of entering a truly human state, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism'.[50] In other words, they wanted to find out not only why Auschwitz was allowed to happen in the 'enlightened' West, but rather how such an atrocity was a *product* of Western progress. Horkheimer and Adorno here have in mind the Baconian unity of knowledge and power, evident in their conception of the Enlightenment – 'What human beings seek to *learn* from nature', they write, 'is how to use it to *dominate* wholly both it and human beings. Nothing else counts'.[51] In short, for Adorno and Horkheimer, the positivist narrative of progress promised by the Enlightenment is inextricably intertwined with another kind of ruthless 'myth' which considers everything and everybody as mere instruments which can be used to achieve absolute mastery over everything.[52] Horkheimer and Adorno demystify the unquestionable faith in the story of the Enlightenment by warning against imminent atomic destruction: 'Yet the wholly enlightened earth', they famously write, 'is radiant with triumphant calamity'.[53]

What interests me in Horkheimer and Adorno's statement is its punning on the word 'enlightened' to hint at the possibility of a nuclear apocalypse. Of particular relevance here, I argue, is the special employment of light and darkness in the scene of Stanley's birthday party, which I suggest reading as a metaphoric enactment of birth. To explain, I see in the violence and confusion permeating the scene an echo of the labour pain – note that most of the action is experienced as flashes of fast-moving images intensifying the absurdity of scene. The feeling of confusion is heightened by the darkness caused, firstly by turning off the light to propose the birthday toast, and then by the sudden inexplicable 'blackout', immediately succeeding the

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[50] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic,* Preface, p. xiv.

[51] Ibid, p. 2; my emphasis.

[52] 'Myth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology' (Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic,* Preface, p. xviii).

[53] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, p. 1.

game-playing.[54] The turbulence of the birthday party comes to a close with the torchlight hitting Stanley's face while he is seen 'giggling' hysterically – 'The torch draws closer. His giggle rises and grows as he flattens himself against the wall. Their figures [Goldberg and McCann] converge upon him.'[55] One way or another, Stanley appears as though he were standing at one end of a tunnel created by the torchlight focussed upon him in the darkness. This image, I would argue, is evocative of the natal experience, which is often depicted as traveling down a dark tunnel into the light. Here, though, light is employed to capture and confine Stanley, and thus it seems to be perceived as a sign of death, rather than of life.

Light in Western culture often signifies revelation, knowledge and progress, especially that light in the biblical narrative appears as the basis of physical and spiritual life; two significant examples of this are God's first command of creation being 'Let there be light' (Genesis 1:3) and Jesus's saying, 'I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life' (John 8:12).[56] Contrary to expectations, though, light is not always viewed positively for, in Adorno and Horkheimer's already-quoted statement, light is not associated with birth or life, but with death: the Earth, traditionally symbol of the womb, when 'fully enlightened', 'radiates' disaster and death. This seemingly trans-historical statement warns, prophetically, that a completely 'enlightened' human civilization may, at some point in time, radiate enough light to kill, just like there was, in Auschwitz, Hiroshima and Nagasaki around the same era, enough 'light' by which babies were murdered.

It is this paradox that I see in the wavering shift between light and darkness in *The Birthday Party*, which begs the question: who or what is born? I here propose we read the word 'party' not merely as a celebration but also as a coded reference to the Nazi Party. The advent

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[54] *Birthday Party*, p. 48.
[55] Ibid., pp. 59-60.
[56] The imagery of light permeates the Bible, both literally and figuratively – after all, light symbolizes God Himself: 'God is light, and in him is no darkness at all' (1 John 1:5).

of Nazism was hailed by its proponents as a vision of apocalyptic birth or rebirth. Note how Hitler prophesizes the Phoenix-like rise of National Germany from the ashes of destruction surrounding it:

> Everything on this earth is capable of improvement. Every defeat can become the father of a subsequent victory, every lost war the cause of a later resurgence, every hardship the fertilization of human energy, and from every oppression the forces for a new spiritual *rebirth* can come – as long as the blood is preserved pure.[57]

Particularly notable in Hitler's quote is the positivist world-view summarized by the idea of 'rebirth'. And it is particularly in promising to bring to the world a new *order* that Nazism corresponds to the story of progress, central to Enlightenment thinking.

The Birthday Party, I argue, seems to gesture towards the ambivalence of the positivist ideology of Nazism, as particularly expressed by the Nazi kind of rhetoric used by Goldberg and McCann. Consider, for example, how the 'organization' promises progress and advancement for its members:

> GOLDBERG You'll be re-orientated.
>
> [...]
>
> GOLDBERG You'll be adjusted.
>
> MCCANN   You'll be our pride and joy.
>
> GOLDBERG You'll be a *mensch*.
>
> [...]
>
> GOLDBERG You'll be integrated.
>
> MCCANN   You'll give orders.

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[57] Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. by Ralph Manheim (London: Hutchinson, 1969), p. 297; my emphasis.

GOLDBERG You'll make decisions.[58]

Particularly interesting is the use of the word 'mensch', originally Yiddish and German, which means a person of integrity and honour. The German word 'mensch', though, literally means human being or man. In his current state, Stanley, it seems then, is viewed by the 'organization' as not fully 'mensch', or dare we say *untermensch*.[59]

Relevant here is the way Stanley appears to be infantilized throughout the play. Meg, for instance, frequently refers to him as 'boy' and often addresses him in a child-like manner – 'You're a liar, a *little* liar'.[60] Goldberg, too, repeatedly calls Stanley 'boy'.[61] But most importantly is his being given, as already said, 'a *boy's* drum' despite his being an adult musician. In this sense, Stanley, I argue, is reminiscent of the boy-drummer, Oskar Matzerath, in Gunter Grass's novel *The Tin Drum* (1959), published just a year after *The Birthday Party*. Oskar decides to distance himself from the Nazi-led world of adults, by freezing his physical growth to the size of a three-year old boy and, ironically, sticking to his drum.[62] And it is particularly for this reason that I see a striking resemblance between Grass's novel and *The Birthday Party*. The peculiar juvenility of both protagonists, I argue, situates them outside the boundaries of 'normal' society and somehow marks them, especially in Nazi terms, as unfit for survival. This is especially evidenced in Grass's novel by the Reich's Ministry of Health's 'document' requesting consent to end Oskar's life, and in Pinter's play by Goldberg's ominous reference to Stanley's need for 'special treatment'.[63]

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[58] *Birthday Party*, p. 77.
[59] In Nazi terminology, the category *Untermensch* (subhuman) included 'non-Aryans such as Jews, Poles, Russians, Serbs, SintiRomani, and Bolsheviks' (Michael and Doerr, p. 408).
[60] *Birthday Party,* p. 7, p. 49, p. 62, and p. 18.
[61] Ibid., p. 48 and pp. 78-79.
[62] Gunter Grass, *The Tin Drum*, trans. by Breon Mitchell (London: Vintage, 2010), p. 49.
[63] Ibid., p. 343; *Birthday Party,* p. 7.

The phrase 'special treatment', of course, recalls the coded language that was used by the Nazis as a euphemism for mass murder.[64] The notion of unfitness for life was first introduced by Social Darwinism to refer to humans deemed inferior due to their non-productivity or infirmity, and hence considered a burden and threat to the well-being of society. Theories of Social Darwinism were later adopted by Nazism and the criteria of unfitness were extended to link biological inferiority to race – hence the Nazi-dictated category of the *Untermensch* or (subhuman).

Oskar, being half Polish and deformed, is evidently portrayed as belonging to the *Untermenschen* order, which, as Peter Arnds says, 'included not only the physically and mentally disabled but also criminals, vagabonds, aimless wanderers, and other social outsiders – […] those who did not or could not work'.[65] For the Nazis, Oskar's mental and physical stunted growth places him amongst the undesirable or *Asozial* (asocial).[66] The attitude of Nazi ideology towards the likes of Oskar characterizes the consciousness of many characters in the novel. For example, in reference to Oskar posing as an academic model at the Art Academy, Professor Kuchen tells his students, 'Don't draw this cripple – slaughter him, crucify him, nail him to the paper with charcoal!'[67] Though, here, the professor speaks figuratively, he subconsciously expresses Nazi thinking, dictating that some groups, marked as 'asocial' should be sacrificed to develop and improve the human race. In this Crucifixion image, the deformed Oskar 'nail[ed]' to paper evokes the image of Christ nailed to the Cross. Even more interesting is the connection made between the Crucifixion and the Holocaust, especially suggested by the

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[64] 'Special treatment', also known as '14 f. 13' was a 'code placed on false insanity certificates and on files of "asocial prisoners" already in concentration camps to indicate [the] prisoner to be murdered: Jews, Gypsies, Poles, and Russians' (Michael and Doerr, p. 260).

[65] Peter Arnds, *Representation, Subversion, and Eugenics in Gunter Grass's The Tin Drum* (NY: Camden House, 2004), p. 3.

[66] 'One of several categories of people in Germany targeted for, and prisoners in, concentration camps, including the biologically criminal, beggars, vagrants, thieves, habitual criminals, homosexuals, prostitutes, Gypsies (Romani and Sinti), and the unemployed' (Michael and Doerr, p. 75).

[67] *Tin Drum*, p. 442.

Holocaustally charged words, 'slaughter' and 'charcoal'.[68] This analogy is very important, I would argue, given the fact that Jesus Himself, in spite of his Divinity, is a Jew. Oskar's Christ-likeness, then, is layered with other sacrificial figures, namely, the deformed artist and the Jew. In other words, the eternal sacrifice of the Jew is employed, here, as exemplary of the sacrifice of all 'asocial' groups.

Particularly important here is the notion of 'life unworthy of life' which advocated the murder of the so-called 'undesirables', including the mentally and physically handicapped.[69] This is manifest in Oskar's step-mother's attempt to persuade his father to give consent to the Reich's Ministry of Health to kill Oskar, a direct reference to the 'euthanasia' laws implemented at the time to rid Germany of its 'ballast lives':

> Well, you can understand that, her being the mother and all, always hoping he might get better. But you see he's not, he's just shoved here and don't know how to live or how to die![70]

Maria's view of Oskar as mentally dead is very similar to the judgment Goldberg and McCann pass on Stanley at the end of the pseudo-trial:

> MCCANN   You're dead.
>
> GOLDBERG You're dead. You can't live, you can't think, you can't love. You're dead. You're a plague gone bad. There's no juice in you. There's nothing but an odour![71]

Stanley is, here, considered physically alive, but mentally dead, since he is deemed unable to 'live', 'think', or 'love,' similar to Oskar, who, for Maria, does not 'know how to live or how to die'. Indeed, the last 'You're dead' reiterated by Goldberg suggests a coded death sentence

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[68] A similar analogy is made by Paul Celan's poem 'Tenebrae' (1959) which connects the Holocaust with the Crucifixion of Jesus.
[69] For full definition, see Michael and Doerr, p. 260.
[70] *Tin Drum*, p. 343.
[71] *Birthday Party,* p. 46.

being passed on Stanley. Stanley, it seems then, is regarded as 'life unworthy of life' and, hence, deemed killable in the eyes of Goldberg and McCann. The terms in which Stanley is described – 'plague', 'pong', 'no juice in you', and 'what is left' – suggest death and decay, which hint at the possibility of execution.

To put this in Agambenian terms, Stanley, here, evokes the figure of *der Muselmänn* (the Muslim), the wretched inhabitant of the concentration camp, whom Agamben describes as 'a being from whom humiliation, horror, and fear had so taken away all consciousness and all personality as to make him absolutely apathetic'.[72] Living a life, unworthy of being lived, the *Muselmänn* figure exemplifies, in Agamben's terminology, 'bare life' and, thus, 'can be killed with impunity'.[73] This idea is alluded to when Goldberg vaguely answers Petey's question as to where he is taking Stanley that the latter 'needs special treatment'.[74] The concept of 'special treatment', as I mentioned, was first introduced in the Third Reich to camouflage the disposal of 'ballast lives' by sending them to killing institutions. Leni Yahil points out that the use of the term 'special treatment' extended to refer 'to killing by gas' to achieve 'racial hygiene'. [75]

The oft-repeated notion of 'racial hygiene' or cleansing, fundamental to Nazi ideology, is discernible in Goldberg and McCann's language. Remember, for example, how Stanley is accused of 'contaminat[ing] womankind', being a 'mother defiler' and 'verminat[ing] the sheet of [his] birth' – all of which are suggestive of impurity and uncleanliness.[76] Stanley here, I suggest, evokes the figure of the Jew who is accused of threatening the purity of the Aryan 'breed' through race poisoning. The accusation of 'contaminat[ing] womankind' echoes with Hitler's reference to the 'bastardization of other peoples' as 'the ultimate aim' of the Jew.[77]

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[72] Agamben, *Homo Sacer,* p. 103; here, Agamben famously invokes Primo Levi's discussion of the 'extreme figure of the camp', ironically named 'The Muslim' [*Der Muselmänn*].
[73] Ibid, p. 47.
[74] *Birthday Party,* p. 79.
[75] Leni Yahil, *The Holocaust: The Fate of European Jewry, 1932-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 309; for more on 'racial hygiene', see Michael and Doerr, p. 32.
[76] *Birthday Party,* p. 45.
[77] Hitler, quoted in David Redles, *Hitle's Millennial Reich: Apocalyptic Belief and the Search for Salvation* (NY: New York University Press, 2005), p. 62.

Goldberg and McCann's claim to have 'the answer' to Stanley's problem evokes the Nazi's notion of the 'final *solution* to the Jewish problem or question', another euphemism, of course, for the death camps.[78]

One of the 'solutions' which was infamously put to practice at the time was the coercive sterilization of the Jews in concentration camps, an idea echoed when Goldberg tells Stanley – 'We can sterilize you'.[79] Yahil observes that 'in Auschwitz the aim of [sterilization] experiments […] was to advance the war against the Jews – especially the *offspring* of mixed marriages – and to enhance the Aryan race'.[80] In other words, the Nazis, via coercive sterilization, were waging a war against not so much already-existing Jews as against the as-yet-unborn Jew, which is precisely an example of what Arthur Bradley calls 'un-born' or 'unbearable life' – '"[U]n-born" or "unbearable" life', Bradley writes, 'is not life that can be killed with impunity because it is not deemed worthy of life […] but rather "life" that does not need to be killed because it is not permitted to live in the first place. It is "life"', he goes on to explain, 'that is […] forbidden to be born'.[81]

In the mock trial, Stanley is asked – 'What makes you think you exist?' – which suggests that Stanley's existence or life is not regarded as a given, but rather as something that needs to be proven.[82] The 'right to life' during the Nazi era, Yahil argues, became contingent upon the individuals' capacity to prove that they merit living according to standards set by the state, chief among them, of course, was one's usefulness to the state.[83] This idea occurs as a leitmotif in *The Tin Drum* as Oskar employs his two gifts – his drumming and glass-shattering

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[78] For more on this, see Michael and Doerr, p. 32.

[79] *Birthday Party,* p. 45.

[80] *Tin Drum*, p. 369.

[81] Arthur Bradley, '"Untimely Ripp'd": On Natality, Sovereignty and Unbearable Life', *English Studies*, 94 (2013), 788-798 (p. 790) <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/10.1080/0013838X.2013.840123> [accessed 2 May 2014].

[82] *Birthday Party,* p. 46.

[83] *Tin Drum*, p. 307.

voice – to prove that he is worthy of life by accepting to entertain the Nazi soldiers at Bebra's front-line troupe.[84]

On their first meeting, Bebra, the musical clown, ominously predicts the forthcoming persecution of Oskar's kind by the Nazis and gives him advice on how to escape it:

> The likes of us should never be part of the audience. We have to be on the stage, in the arena. We have to perform and direct the action, otherwise our kind will be manipulated by those who do. And they'll all too happily pull a fast one on us.[85]

That is to say, figures, such as Oskar and Bebra, are exploited by the Nazis; for as long as their talent is found entertaining, their lives are provisionally spared. However, no sooner are their gifts exhausted than their lives become imperilled. Stanley, it seems, understands this vision very well, but, unlike Oskar who manages to survive by performing to the Nazis, Stanley is unable to sustain the interest in his music and is forced to discontinue his performance. Mark that whilst Bebra warns that 'they'll all too happily pull a fast one on us', Stanley already laments that 'they pulled a fast one' on him.[86] Though it remains ambiguous in both cases who 'they' exactly are, it seems very tempting to assume that this is an implicit reference to the Nazis. Stanley clearly feels that he has been 'manipulated', being initially applauded for his music but later banned from performing:

> STANLEY   […] they came up to me and said they were grateful. Champaign we had that night, the lot […] Then after that, you know what they did? They carved me up […] My next concert. somewhere else it was. In winter. I went down there to play. Then, when I got there, the hall was closed, the place was shuttered

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[84] Ibid., p. 303.
[85] Ibid., p. 102.
[86] *Birthday Party,* p. 17.

up, not even a caretaker. They'd locked it up. A fast one. They pulled a fast one.[87]

Having his music banned, Stanley, I would argue, then, is figuratively denied the right to existence – after all, music is the primary marker of a musician's life.

Stanley, it seems, is deemed 'unfit for life', not only by virtue of his uselessness but also by constituting an *obstruction* to life – as Goldberg asks him, 'Why are you wasting everybody's time, Webber? Why are you getting in everybody's way?'[88] Indeed, the crimes with which Stanley is charged construct him as the very opposite to life – namely evil – as Goldberg tells him, 'You stink of sin'.[89] We know, of course, that in Nazi ideology the Jews were largely demonized and depicted as the Evil Other. Hitler believed that the Jewry must be destroyed due to their diabolical ambitions in bringing down God's newly chosen people, allegedly the German Nordic Aryan race, by stressing the Jews' alleged satanic descent:

> Symbolically? No! It's the sheer simple undiluted truth. Two worlds face one another – the men of God and the men of Satan! The Jew is the anti-man, the creature of another god […] Not that I call the Jew a beast […] He is a creature outside nature and alien to nature.[90]

The depiction of Stanley or the Jew as the anti-human, the one who is excluded from the collective body of society, is, again, most evident in the mock trial scene. Here, Stanley is bombarded with baffling questions and charges from Goldberg and McCann, who curiously finish each other's sentences, almost as if they were one person:

> GOLBERG   You're a plague, Webber. You're an overthrow.
>
> MCCANN   You're what's left!
>
> GOLBERG   But we've got the answer to you. We can sterilize you.

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[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid., p. 41.
[89] Ibid., p. 44.
[90] Hitler, quoted in Redles, pp. 67-68.

> MCCANN   What about Drogheda?
>
> GOLBERG   Your bite is dead. Only your pong is left.
>
> MCCANN   You betrayed our land.
>
> GOLBERG   You betrayed our breed.[91]

The way Goldberg and McCann almost merge into one person corresponds with the Nazi idea of the *Volkskörper* ('People's Body'), according to which 'the German people [is seen as] a biological-racial unity, a single organism'.[92] Hitler expresses the view of the German nation as one sovereign body when he says, 'A united *Volk* must come into being! One faith! One will!'[93] The *Volkskörper* idea, I suggest, reverberates with McCann's reference to 'the organization'. The concept of 'organization' is very much consonant with the idea of the German people as one organism. The words 'organism' and 'organization' are both derived from the verb 'organize', which has its origin in the Latin word *organum* or the Greek word *organon,* both meaning implement, tool or organ of the body.[94] In this sense, the Nazi party can be viewed as both an organism as well an organization, by virtue of being a self-organizing structure – presumably run by the people – wherein the overall health of the collective body is contingent upon the well-being and contribution of each organ, i.e. each member. Goldberg and McCann's use of the in-group pronoun 'we' – as in 'Right? Of course right! *We're* right and *you're* wrong, Webber, all along the line'– consolidates the collective spirit inherent in the so-called 'organization'.[95] In-group identification, Janet Ruscher, points out that is shaped *linguistically*: '[Th]e first person plurals (we, us)', she explains, 'reflect a sense of ingroup cohesion, belongingness, and positive evaluation of the ingroup'.[96] In light of this, Stanley is

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[91] *Birthday Party,* p. 46.
[92] Michael and Doerr, p. 424.
[93] Hitler, quoted in Redles, p. 96.
[94] Robert K. Barnhart (ed.), *Chambers Dictionary Etymology* (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1988), p. 735.
[95] *Birthday Party,* p. 45; my emphasis.
[96] Janet Ruscher, *Prejudiced Communication: A Social Psychological Perspective* (NY: Guilford Press, 2001), p. 36.

clearly considered an outsider, as particularly evidenced by Goldberg and McCann's addressing him with the group-irrelevant pronoun 'you', hence his being constructed as 'other'.

There is some sense, I would argue, though, in which both 'othered' figures, Stanley and Oskar, appear as subversive agents, rather than simply passive victims. I here have in mind the employment of the drum in both works to counter the ideological and propagandist drumming of the Nazi Party, of which the most notable drummer was Hitler himself –'It was not out of modesty that I wanted to become a drummer', he once said. 'That is the highest thing, the rest is trifle.'[97] This idea becomes manifest in *The Tin Drum* as Oskar crawls under one of the grandstands during a Nazi parade and disturbs its consistent rhythm by drumming out of tune. In this, Oskar can be seen as a counter-Hitlerian prophet, drumming a new *Untermenschen* order, antithetical to that of the Nazis' – 'Now my people', he exclaims, 'now my Volk, hearken unto me!'[98] In this connection, Stanley's '*erratic*' and '*uncontrolled*' drumming, I suggest, parallels Oskar's disharmonious drumbeat. Even more significant is Stanley's destroying of his drum during his birthday party when he 'walks [blindfolded] into the drum and falls over with his foot caught in it'.[99] Here, again, Stanley appears as the anti-drummer drummer, one who drums against the drum.

Purim

Subversion, I would argue, is an important motif in *The Birthday Party*, as exemplified not only by Stanley breaking the 'drum', but also by the fact that the senior member of the

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[97] Hitler, quoted in Joachim C. Fest, *The Face of the Third Reich*, trans. by Michael Bullock (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 35.
[98] *Tin Drum*, p. 108; Oskar's speech here clearly draws on religious and/or biblical expression to suggest his calling for a new 'cult' that counters the Nazis 'cult' of the 'superman'. For biblical analogies of calling, see, for example, (Proverbs 8:32): 'Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: for blessed are they that keep my ways'. Also see (Isaiah 51:4): 'Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation: for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light of the people'.
[99] *Birthday Party,* p. 57.

'organization', Goldberg, is significantly marked as Jewish – note that Goldberg appears

Jewish not only by surname but also by his use of Yiddish words such as '*mazoltov*!' and

'shabbuss'.[100] Throughout the play, then, Pinter seems to invite the audience to imagine the

Jew speaking, as it were, with a Nazi tongue, which I read as a gesture towards the possibility

of subverting the power relation between the Jew and anti-Semite. Such subversion, I argue,

brings to mind the Judaic story of Purim in the Book of Esther which celebrates the victory of

the Jews over their enemies.[101]

The biblical narrative begins with Esther, a Jewish girl, taken by her cousin, Mordecai,

into King Ahasuerus's palace to be selected from amongst other girls as queen. Mordecai asks

Esther to keep her Jewish identity hidden and she manages to win the King's favour and become

queen. Later, though, when Mordecai refuses to bow to the King's advisor, Haman, the latter

decides to take revenge by convincing the King to kill all the Jews. Haman casts the lots, or

pur, to determine the date of the massacre, which happens to be on the 13 of Adar. Mordecai,

then, demands Esther to reveal her identity to the King and urge him to save her people. The

king agrees and issues another decree permitting the Jews to defend themselves and fight their

enemies. Eventually, Haman and his ten sons are executed and his companions are massacred

by the Jews:

> Now in the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, on the thirteenth day of the
>
> same, when the king's commandment and his decree drew near to be put in
>
> execution, in the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to have rule over them;
>
> whereas it was turned to the contrary, that the Jews had rule over them that hated
>
> them. (Esther 9:1)

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[100] Ibid., p. 50; p. 21.
[101] The Book of Esther is the only book not to be represented in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Instead, it appears in 'the Scroll' (*Megillah*), which is in the third section of the Hebrew Bible.

The day of lots, or Purim, thus turns from being a day of mourning to a day of joy celebrating Jewish victory and deliverance and is subsequently commemorated in an annual festival called Purim. The festival is usually observed by 'creat[ing] a riotous carnival-like atmosphere replete with role-reversals, masquerades, drinking and noise-making'.[102]

And I can see an echo of the Purim in Pinter's play, as particularly signified by Stanley's being questioned and judged by the *Jewish* Goldberg. Stanley, who initially demands 'I need a new room!', ends up being hunted down, put on trial, and taken away by Goldberg and his *other* friend, McCann. In this sense, I suggest reading Stanley and Goldberg/McCann's relationship as a farcical version of the Haman-Mordecai one. Stanley's mock trial, that is, seems to suggest a reversal in the hierarchical anti-Semite/Jew dichotomy and thus gestures towards the possibility of its subversion.

In order to explain the subversive potential of both Pinter's play and the Purim, I will draw on Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the carnival. Bakhtin defines the carnival, or what he calls 'carnivalistic life' as '"life turned inside out", "the reverse side of the world"'.[103] Bakhtin identifies 'the primary carnivalistic act [as] *the mock crowning* and subsequent *decrowning* of the carnival King':

> Crowning/decrowning is a dualistic ambivalent ritual, expressing the inevitability and at the same time the creative power of the shift-and-renewal, the *joyful relativity* of all structure and order, of all authority and all (hierarchical) positions.[104]

The carnivalistic elements, I argue, are not only obvious in the festival of Purim but also and more importantly within the story of Purim itself. In other words, the story of Purim can be

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[102] Frank A. Salamone, *Encyclopedia of Religious Rites, Rituals, and Festivals* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 206.
[103] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* ed. and trans. by Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 122 <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.08865.0001.001> [accessed 24 May 2014]; my emphasis.
[104] Bakhtin, p. 124; emphasis in the original.

understood in terms of the double act of 'crowning and decrowning' which expresses, for Bakhtin, the '*joyful relativity*' of power.

To explain, witness how Haman's initial promotion to the King's advisor almost appears as ritual of crowning:

> After these things did King Ahasuerus promote Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him. And all the King's servants, that were in the King's gate, bowed down, and prostrated themselves before Haman.
>
> (Esther 3:1-2)

However, Haman's authority does not last long for the King orders to have him 'hanged […] on the [same] gallows he [Haman] prepared for Mordecai' (Esther 7:10). In this sense, Haman, appears to be 'decrowned'. Through 'decrowning', though, Bakhtin remarks, 'a new crowning already glimmers'.[105] This becomes manifest by ordering Haman to dress Mordecai the Jew in royal clothes and set him on a royal horse (Esther 6:10). Thus, with the subsequent 'crowning' of Mordecai, the process of crowning/decrowning is put into play.

By the same token, Stanley's birthday party, I argue, metaphorically expresses the dualistic ritual of crowning and decrowning. Significant here is Stanley's acting as 'the birthday boy', which makes him appear as a slapstick version of the carnival king.[106] Witness how Stanley stands out as if he were a newly-crowned king when the torchlight is shone on his 'face' at the beginning of the party:

> GOLDBERG   Switch out the light and put on your torch.
>
> (MCCANN *goes to the door, switches off the light, comes back, shines the torch on* MEG. *Outside the window there is still a faint light.*) Not

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[105] Ibid., p. 125.
[106] *Birthday Party,* p. 48.

> on the lady, on the gentleman! You must shine it on the birthday boy.
>
> (MCCANN *shines the torch in* STANLEY'S *face.*)[107]

Also important is how the birthday party commences with a quasi-military note:

> *A loud drumbeat off left, descending the stairs*. […]. *Enter* MEG, *in evening dress, holding sticks and drum*.[108]

Shortly afterwards, Goldberg calls the drum to attention as he says, 'It's a fine piece of work. Maybe Stan'll play us a little tune afterwards'.[109] Given the Nazi subtext of the play, I see in the military character of Stanley's *birth*day party a shadow of Nazi coronation.

Conversely, the 'decrowning' of the 'birthday boy' seems to begin during the game playing when Stanley, blindfolded, stumbles upon the drum – hence, the destruction of the emblem of authority, as it were. Furthermore, Stanley is bullied and humiliated especially when McCann 'breaks [his] glasses', which echoes with Bakhtin's account of decrowning – '[R]egal vestments are stripped off the decrowned king, his crown is removed, the other symbols of authority are taken away, he is ridiculed and beaten'.[110] Shortly afterwards, the scene is dominated by a sudden blackout, followed by Goldberg and McCann chasing Stanley in the dark until they finally capture him. Stanley, the birthday 'king', seems now to become a prisoner:

> MCCANN *finds the torch on the floor, shines it on the table and* STANLEY [...] GOLDBERG *and* MCCANN *move towards him. He backs, giggling, the torch on his face. They follow him upstage, left. He backs against the hatch, giggling. The torch draws closer. His giggle rises and grows as he flattens himself against the wall. Their figures converge upon him*.[111]

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[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid., p. 47.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid., p. 57; Bakhtin, p. 125
[111] Ibid., pp. 59-60.

It is important to emphasize that, for Bakhtin, both acts of crowning and decrowning are ambivalent: crowning foreshadows imminent decrowning, and the reverse is true. That is to say, the meaning and purpose of the 'carnival' lies primarily in the completion and inseparability of both acts. In this sense, there is a doubleness to carnival that gives expression to what Bakhtin calls 'the very core of the carnival sense of the world – the pathos of shifts and changes, of death and renewal'.[112] This ambivalent experience of the carnival problematizes, of course, the hierarchies of the noncarnival world. Fixed or stable positions in a hierarchical world, that is, become reversible in the playful world of the carnival where categories, otherwise kept distinct, are brought in contact with each other in what Bakhtin refers to as '*carnivalistic mésalliance*':

> All things that were once self-enclosed, disunified, distanced from one another by a noncarnivalistic hierarchical world-view are drawn into carnivalistic contacts and combinations. Carnival brings together, unifies, weds, and combines the sacred and profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid.[113]

The dialectic of crowning and decrowning, to some extent, recalls to mind Hitler's rise to power and his subsequent fall. Indeed, Hitler is not only exemplary of the Bakhtinian carnival king but also, and very particularly, of Haman – as Jo Carruthers puts it:

> Perhaps the most infamous Haman is Hitler (who interpreted himself as such, declaring in a speech delivered on 30 January 1944 that if he were defeated, the Jews would have a 'second triumphant Purim'.[114]

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[112] Bakhtin, p.124.
[113] Ibid., p. 123.
[114] Jo Carruthers, *Esther Through the Centuries* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), p. 32.

In connection to this, I see in Stanley's 'arrest' an echo of Hitler's downfall and the subsequent prosecution of his party members.[115] There is, though, another sense where Hitler can serve as a Purimesque and/or carnivalesque figure in that he, for some, exemplifies the dissolution of the Jew-Nazi distinction.

Despite being one of the most fervent advocate of the Jews' racial inferiority, Hitler was believed, by some, to have Jewish origins from his paternal grandfather. As Eugene Davidson writes,

> In 1930 [Hans] Frank was commissioned by Adolf Hitler to investigate the mystery of Alois Hitler's birth because of the rumours of a non-Aryan stain on Hitler's family tree. Frank wrote in Nuremberg, before his execution, that stories spread by a 'stepbrother' of Adolf Hitler's to the effect that the Fuhrer had Jewish blood in his veins were being published around 1930 in various papers.[116]

The legal advisor to the National Socialist Party, Hans Frank, claimed that Hitler's grandmother, Fräulein Schicklgruber, worked in a Jewish household in Graz, in Lower Austria, and that she had Hitler's father from an affair with the son of the Jewish family for whom she had worked. Although this story had been refuted, the purity of Hitler's German blood continues to be contested: 'There were', writes Davidson, 'a number of rumours of Adolf Hitler's Jewish ancestry in circulation, and no matter how preposterous they were, a good many people who heard them wanted to believe they were true'.[117] A *Telegraph* article in 2010 postulates that Hitler had Jewish lineage as 'saliva samples taken from 39 relatives of the Nazi

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[115] I here have in mind the in The Nuremberg trials (1945-1949) which were a series of military tribunals held by the Allied forces under international law and the laws of war after World War II. The trials were most notable for the prosecution of prominent leadership members of Nazi Germany, who planned, carried out, or participated in the Holocaust and other war crimes. The trials were held in the city of Nuremberg, Germany.

[116] Eugene Davidson, *The Making of Adolf Hitler: The Birth and Rise of Nazism* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), p. 5.

[117] Davidson, p. 6.

leader show he may have had biological links to the "subhuman" races that he tried to exterminate during the Holocaust'.[118] Despite the inconclusiveness of all these accounts, they do construct or represent Hitler as an oddly double figure. In short, Hitler's identity, like Stanley's, might just be viewed as a liminal site, where the Jew and Nazi collide, and where mutually exclusive meanings are brought together in one sign, or one figure.

Stanley's identity, wavering between the Jew and anti-Semite, can also be understood as part of a 'Purimesque' experience, featuring as it does the state of '*ad lo yada*', an Aramic phrase meaning 'until he cannot tell the difference', which Jewish revellers observing the Purim festival are expected to reach. The renowned Babylonian Talmudic scholar, Raba, dictates that: 'It is the *duty* of a man to mellow himself [with wine] on Purim until he cannot tell the difference between "cursed be Haman" and "blessed be Mordecai "'.[119] The effect of this total intoxication unsettles the polarity of good and evil, represented in the Book of Esther by Mordecai and Haman, respectively. As Ronald Eisenberg succinctly puts it:

> Rather than a drunken daze, *ad lo yada* can imply a mystical moment of insight, when there truly is no difference between Mordecai and Haman – just as good and evil are encompassed within God who, as Isaiah (45:7) observed, 'form[s] light and create[s] darkness, make[s] peace and create[s] evil'.[120]

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[118] Heidi Blake, 'Hitler had "Jewish and African Roots", DNA Tests Show', *Telegraph*, 24 Aug 2010 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-two/7961211/Hitler-had-Jewish-and-African-roots-DNA-tests-show.html> [accessed 18 May 2014].
[119] Talmud - *Megilah* 7b.
[120] Ronald L. Eisenberg, *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2004) p. 263.

CHAPTER 2

Dwelling: *The Caretaker*

> Man is that inability to remain and is yet unable to leave his place.
> — Martin Heidegger[1]
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> All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone.
> — Blaise Pascal[2]

The 'room', it is agreed, is a classic Pinter motif. Indeed, in 1961, Pinter himself says this:

> I went into a room and saw one person standing up and one person sitting down, and a few days later I wrote *The Room*. I went into another room and saw two people sitting down, and a few years later I wrote *The Birthday Party*. I looked through a door into a third room, and saw two people standing up and wrote *The Caretaker*.[3]

The spatial dimension of Pinter's early plays tends to be analysed either in existential terms, psychoanalytic terms, or domestic terms.[4] With respect to the domestic, Una Chaudhuri argues that there inheres in the very physicality of 'the room' something that triggers feelings of both 'primal pleasure' and 'fear':

> The structure of the room as a boundaried space, capable of keeping out as well as keeping in, allows it to function as a referent for such thematics as danger

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[1] Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. by William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 365.

[2] This quote is famously attributed to Blaise Pascal, but the original version of this quote as it appears in one translation of his *Pensées* (1670) is '[A]ll the unhappiness of men arises from one single fact, that they cannot sit quietly in their own chamber' – see Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. by W.F. Trotter (London: J.M. Dent and New York: E.P. Dutton, 1931), p. 39.

[3] Harold Pinter, 'Writing for Myself' (1961), in *Pinter: Plays* 2, pp. vii- xi (p. ix).

[4] For an existentialist approach to Pinter, see Esslin, *Pinter: A Study of his Plays*, pp. 32-55; for a psychoanalytic approach to Pinter's plays, see Lucina Gabbard, *The Dream Structure of Pinter's Plays: A Psychoanalytic Approach* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1976); for more on the domestic and familial world of Pinter's plays, see Elizabeth Sakellaridou, *Pinter's Female Portraits: A Study of Female Characters in the Plays of Harold Pinter* (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble, 1988), p. 19.

versus safety, infantile sexuality versus oedipal threat, political passivity versus

active resistance.[5]

In this chapter, however, I argue that the domestic world of *The Caretaker* (1959), as

manifested in the play's setting – 'a room' in 'a house in West London' – functions as a figure

for place in general, and its relation to the identity of the political subject.[6] In short, I argue that

the notion of 'home' resonates far beyond the play's immediate, West London location,

serving, as it does, as a trope for national home or 'homeland'.

The notion of 'home' or 'at-homeness' and its opposite – homelessness – are

particularly important in this play, given that it was written just fourteen years after World War

Two. In the opening of the preface to the first edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1950),

Hannah Arendt identifies homelessness as one major facet of the post-war era: 'Under the most

diverse conditions and disparate circumstances', she writes, 'we watch the development of the

same phenomena – homelessness on an unprecedented scale, rootlessness to an unprecedented

depth'.[7] Pertinent, here, I suggest, is Davies's evocation of post-war displacement whenever

he mentions his long-lost identification 'papers' – papers that have, he says, been in Sidcup

since 'the war': 'Oh, must be… it was in the war… must be… about near on fifteen year ago'.[8]

Given the play is written in 1960, this would, of course, suggest the papers have been in Sidcup

since the end of the War.

My intention in this chapter, then, is to argue that *The Caretaker* presents us with a

demystified version of 'home' which can no longer be regarded as a guarantor of identity,

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[5] Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1997), p. 93.

[6] Pinter*, The Caretaker,* in *Pinter: Plays 2*, pp. 5-76 (p. 4); I very deliberately use the word 'place' here, bearing in mind the distinction between space as a more abstract term, and place as the precise configuration of space at a particular time. As Dean Wilcox puts it: '[P]lace […] is viewed as defined, specific, occupied, whereas space offers the potential for occupation, which endows it with the apparent quality of infinite emptiness' – Dean Wilcox, 'Ambient Space in Twentieth-Century Theatre: The Space of Silence', *Modern Drama*, 46 (Winter 2003), 542-557 (p. 543) <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/500734/pdf> [accessed 7 August 2017].

[7] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 3rd edn (London: Allen & Unwin, 1967 [1951]), p. xxix.

[8] *Caretaker*, pp. 18-19; my emphasis.

rootedness, and sheltering. Through a series of theorized readings on and around the trope of the 'room', I will explore a range of interconnected ideas, including: notions of space and territory, drawing here on Gaston Bachelard and Julia Kristeva; the question of radical hospitality and the complex dialectical relationship between host and guest, here drawing on Derrida; the idea of dwelling and being/Being, here drawing on Martin Heidegger; the figure of the father and the homely/unhomely, here drawing on Sigmund Freud; and, finally, the notion of fraternal enmity, here drawing on René Girard.

The 'Room': Performing the Uncanny

> [I]n the graphic economy of theatre symbolism, rooms, like all images, must eventually justify their presence: they must inhabit the people who inhabit them.
>
> — Bert O. States[9]

The study of space in relation to theatre has in recent years enjoyed special attention in theatre studies, with many arguing that space is an integral part of the theatrical event. The centrality of space in the creation of theatre is vividly summarized by the opening lines of Peter Brook's *The Empty Space* (1968) which became, according to an article in *The Guardian* (2010), 'the commandments on which modern theatre was built':[10]

> I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged.[11]

In other words, theatre, it can be said, is pre-eminently a spatial medium, capable as it is of dispensing with language, but never with space.[12] However, theatrical space is not to be

[9] Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theatre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 46.
[10] Fiachra Gibbons, 'The Prayer of Peter Brook', *Guardian*, Sunday 17 January 2010 <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2010/jan/17/peter-brook-eleven-twelve> [accessed 8 August 2017].
[11] Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996 [1968]), p. 7.
[12] This is particularly true of Pinter's dramatic texts famed, as they are, for their 'silences' and 'pauses'. Peter Hall comments on the significance of silence in Pinter's dramatic language and how Beckett's use of it, before Pinter,

conceived as simply a fixed site in which a play is staged or a mere background against which characters act; rather, it is to be understood as a semiotic *process* that contributes to the production of the theatrical event. Hence, Anne Ubersfeld's foundational remark – '[t]heatre is space'. [13]

Elsewhere, in her *Reading Theatre* (1996), Ubersfeld expands on this remark, arguing that 'space is a given that is immediately received as we read theatrical text. This is because concrete space is the (two-fold) referent of all theatrical texts'.[14] She goes on to outline the textual elements that constitute theatrical space – namely, the 'dialogue' and stage directions, or what she calls '*didascalia*':

> The essence of this spatiality […] is found in *didascalia*, which provide: a/ place
> directions that are more or less precise and detailed, depending on the individual
> text; b/ the characters' names […]; c/ indications concerning gestures and
> movements […] that […] allow us to understand how space will be occupied.[15]

In this sense, space comprises an amalgam of signifiers interacting altogether to create theatre. These signifiers structure both the stage and the characters' *kinetic* relation to it. The combination of this she calls 'dramatic space'.[16]

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became a major influence: 'These three signs in the text all indicate moments of turbulence and crisis – the Three Dots, the Pause and the Silence. By their use, the unsaid becomes sometimes more terrifying and more eloquent than the said. Pinter actually *writes* silence, and he appropriates it as a part of his dialogue. […] I have always supposed that Pinter gained confidence in this technique because of Beckett's use of pauses. Certainly Beckett is the first dramatist to use silence as a written form of communication'. See Peter Hall, 'Directing the Plays of Harold Pinter', in *Cambridge Companion to Harold Pinter*, ed. by Peter Raby, 1st edn, pp. 145-154 (p.148).

[13] Anne Ubersfeld, quoted in Chris Morash and Shaun Richards, *Mapping Irish Theatre: Theories of Space and Place* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.33.

[14] Anne Ubersfeld, *Reading Theatre*, trans. by Frank Collins, ed. by Paul Perron and Patrick Debbeche (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999 [1996]), p. 95. First published in France in 1976, Anne Ubersfeld's three-volume work, *Lire le theatre*, has had made a huge impact on the semiological study of drama. In this major theoretical work, Ubersfeld addresses the dynamic relation between text and performance, considering the text as 'the primary object of study and performance its horizon of analysis' − Paul Perron and Patrick Debbeche, 'Foreward', in Ibid., pp. xiii-xx (p. xviii).

[15] Ibid., pp. 95-96.

[16] Ubersfeld defines 'dramatic spaces' as 'sign collections in which we can find all the signs of the text and the stage: characters, objects, props, [and] various elements of the stage'. She goes on to suggest that the link between space and characters is essentially phenomenonlogical: 'In this sense', she argues, 'we cannot separate and contrast the phenomena that are essentially relevant to dramatic space and phenomena that are essentially of the

Drawing on Ubersfeld's semiotic method, I will analyse the various meanings of dramatic space in *The Caretaker*, very much keeping in mind the importance of the characters' *occupation* of that space.[17] I will depart, though, from Ubersfeld's tendency to read dramatic space as something 'given'. I will argue, instead, that the presentation of the 'room' in Pinter's play is, in fact, profoundly underwritten by a dynamic interplay of signifiers that unsettle the concept of 'home'.[18] In short, dramatic space in *The Caretaker* appears, I argue, as not so much a stable sign-system as a differential or deferring process of signification.

Vital to this process, I suggest, is the spatial language Pinter uses throughout the play. Note, for example, how the first words spoken in the play – namely, Aston's invitation for Davies to 'sit down' – initiate a spatial relation between them, with Aston as host, and Davies as guest. This on-stage invitation to 'sit', to be anchored to dramatic place, is, though, immediately countered, or complicated, as Davies proceeds to evoke an off-stage world in which he has no seat: 'All them Blacks had it', he says, 'Blacks, Greeks, Poles, the lot of them, that's what, *doing me out of a seat*'.[19] In this way, the chair (as an onstage object) serves as a relational or liminal object connecting the onstage space with the offstage. And this sense of spatial liminality, I argue, results in the dislocation of the dramatic space, that is the 'room'.

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character. Indeed even temporal categories are part of dramatic space when we understand that term in its broadest sense' (p. 116).

[17] I here have in mind Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1976) where he offers a dynamic understanding of space as something which is produced and reproduced through social action and interaction. He contends that space is not an abstract concept; rather, it is *lived*, experienced and embodied: 'Vis-a-vis lived experience', he writes, 'space is neither a mere 'frame', after the fashion of the frame of a painting, nor form or container of a virtually neutral kind, designed simply to receive whatever is poured into it. Space is social morphology: it is to lived experience what form itself is to the living organism, and just as intimately bound up with function and structure' – see Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford, Cambridge, and Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1991 [1974]), pp. 93-94. This way of thinking about space has made Lefebvre's work an important point of reference for studies focusing on the spatial aspect of performance. For more on this, see Philip Auslander, *Theory for Performance Studies: A student's Guide* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 123-127 <http://www.mohamedrabeea.com/books/book1_13905.pdf> [accessed 10 August 2017].

[18] In my reading of *The Caretaker*, here, I will not address the significance of the 'room' from a theatrical perspective; rather, I will focus pre-imminently on its semiotic significance in the dramatic text. For a future project, though, I propose looking at theatrical space, based on a double act of text-performance reading, drawing in particular on my close textual analysis here and previous productions of the play.

[19] *Caretaker*, p. 6; my emphasis.

The 'room', in *The Caretaker,* is especially important because each character seems to be defined by his relation to it. Note, in particular, how Aston dwells in the room without owning it; Mick allegedly owns the room without inhabiting it; and Davies is temporarily accommodated in the room but promised residence in it – though to no avail. In other words, by virtue of the room, all three characters are spatially determined – as, respectively, a resident, a displaced landlord, and a homeless guest. The three men are, then, tethered to the room despite their claims to having a life outside of its confines. It is, in this sense, *home* three times over.

The homeliness of the room is particularly suggested by the repeated acts of return in the play. All three men get to leave the room or house at intervals, but they are all witnessed returning to the room with varying frequency – Aston three times, Mick once, and Davies twice.[20] Many of the returns are accompanied by the stage direction 'the door opens' – invariably, we presume, with a key since the two brothers already have keys to the room, while Davies obtains them later from Aston.[21] On a psychoanalytic reading, the image of a man entering or, re-entering, a room by opening its door with a key, a phallic signifier, evokes, of course, the fantasy of 'return to the womb' – that longing to recuperate an abandoned intra-uterine existence, that is, the primal home. As Freud argues in his 1919 essay of 'The Uncanny':

> This *unheimlich* place […] is the entrance to the former *Heim* [home] of all human beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning. There is a joking saying that 'Love is home-sickness'; and whenever a man dreams of a place or a country and says to himself, while he is still dreaming: 'this place is familiar to me, I've been here before', we may interpret the place as being his mother's genitals or her body.[22]

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[20] *Caretaker*, p. 5, p. 34, p. 62, p. 42 & p. 68.

[21] Ibid., p. 22.

[22] Freud, 'The Uncanny', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. by James Strachey, 24 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1955 [1948]), XVII, pp. 217-252 (p. 245).

The room, a closed and interior space, is, according to Freud, a common symbol in dreams for the mother's womb, and the door for female genitalia[23] – '[T]he windows, and doors in and out of rooms, take over', he writes, 'the meaning of orifices in the body', whilst 'the *key* that opens it is a decidedly male symbol'.[24] We should note, of course, that many critics have observed the womb-room symbolism in Pinter's works. One such critic is Irving Wardle, who describes Pinter, as 'a writer dogged by one image — the womb'.[25] 'Place', as Gillian Rose points out, 'is [invariably] understood in the same terms as a maternal Woman', and this is particularly true of the place that is the room in *The Caretaker*.[26]

References to an actual or literal mother are, though, few and far between in the play. We do know from Aston that his mother 'signed their [the doctors'] form, giving them permission at the hospital 'to do something to […] [his] brain' when he 'was a minor'.[27] Aston's mother, it seems, has, in the past, been more of a presence than his father – 'That was when', Aston says, 'I lived with my mother. And my brother.'[28] But now, of course, the mother appears to be missing, if not dead; nevertheless, the room seems to be haunted by an impalpable sense of maternity, especially when Mick notes that one of the beds in the room belongs to his mother:[29]

> MICK (*pointing to* DAVIES' *bed*)   That's my bed.
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> DAVIES   What about that, then?
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> MICK   That's my mother's bed.[30]

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[23] Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p.189.
[24] Ibid., p. 192.
[25] Irving Wardle, 'The Birthday Party', *Encore*, 5 (1958), 39–40.
[26] Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p.59.
[27] *Caretaker*, p. 53.
[28] Ibid., p. 55.
[29] Objects, of course, are very important in defining the spatiality of a play, especially in avant-garde theatres, where objects are liberated from their representational function to fulfill multiple expressive functions – as Gay McAuley puts it, 'The object, being physically present in the space, necessarily serves to shape and define that space and, equally necessarily, has an impact upon the human users of space'. See Gay McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), p. 173.
[30] *Caretaker*, p. 33.

Implicit in the association of the mother with the bed is the suggestion that the mother owns the space of sleep, which Freud identifies as a psychological need 'from time to time [to] withdraw to the premundane state, into existence in the womb'.[31] Moreover, the kind of sleep Aston claims to have in his mother's bed is dreamless –

> DAVIES   I don't dream. I've never dreamed.
>
> ASTON   No, nor have I.[32]

– which redoubles the suggestion of a primordial state, characteristic of pre-natal existence. As Freud argues, dreams are 'residues of mental activity', and 'if it [the mind] begins to stir', he writes, 'we have not succeeded in establishing the foetal state of rest'.[33] In short, the palpable presence of the mother's bed in the room can be seen as a nostalgic attempt to recuperate the lost mother by imagining a womb-like existence there.

In Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1958), a phenomenological investigation of place, it is argued that the house, one's 'corner in the world', is the location of native attachment, where one's primary sense of place is founded. 'All really inhabited space', writes Bachelard, 'bears the essence of the notion of home'.[34] For Bachelard, one's consciousness is shaped by the embodied memories of the childhood house:

> In the life of man, the house thrusts aside contingencies, its councils of continuity are unceasing. Without it, man would be a dispersed being. Before he is 'cast into the world,' as claimed by certain hasty metaphysics, man is laid in the cradle of the house. And always, in our daydreams, the house is a large cradle. […] Life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house.[35]

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[31] Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, p. 117.
[32] *Caretaker*, p. 20.
[33] Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, p. 117.
[34] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by John R. Stilgoe (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994 [1957]), pp. 4-5.
[35] Ibid., p. 7.

The version of home evoked in *The Caretaker* is, though, a far cry from Bachelard's; for here life does *not* seem to begin well – the play's evocation of home, or the homely, being always already questioned by the presence of the homeless Davies, who seems compelled, as he puts it, 'to be moving about […] try[ing] to get fixed up'.[36] Indeed, the notion of homeliness in the play seems to be more in agreement with Freud's analysis of 'the uncanny', which focuses on how in German the word for 'homely' – namely, *heimlich*, drifts in its meaning toward an 'an ambivalence [and] finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*', or un-homely.[37]

The play presents, then, a kind of riddle – namely, how can a homeless man be housed? Note that Davies appears to have no memory of his birthplace and can only remember that he has 'been around'.[38] He cannot be tied to any address and seems apprehensive about Aston's proposition to put 'Caretaker' 'outside the front door', fearful as he is of being found by any of his nameless pursuers.[39] Moreover, we are confused by the tramp's two names – not only, Mac Davies but also Bernard Jenkins – which makes us, like Mick, wonder if he has yet other names. As Mick puts it, 'What about the rest?' Davies, indeed, is unable to achieve any fixed identity via work, constantly being, as he says, 'give[n] the bullet'.[40] No wonder, then, that time and again, he reiterates his wish to walk to Sidcup to obtain his 'papers'. These are papers, however, that apparently he 'can't move without' – as if to suggest, absurdly, that he moves only in order to move.[41]

It is true that Davies is accommodated by Aston as a 'guest'; however, Davies's presence in the house is increasingly felt to be intrusive, particularly when Mick calls him 'an

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[36] *Caretaker*, p.14; David Morley reminds us that, especially in the West, the word 'house' is sometimes used interchangeably with 'home': 'Conventionally in the West a home is, of course, inscribed in the particular physical structure of a house' – see David Morley, *Home Territories: Media, Mobility, and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p.19.
[37] Freud, 'The Uncanny', p. 226.
[38] *Caretaker*, p. 23.
[39] Ibid., p. 42.
[40] Ibid., p.71; p. 8.
[41] Ibid., p.14.

old robber […] [who] does not belong in a nice place like this'.[42] Later on, Mick offers a summary of Davies's unhomely characteristics:

> What a *strange* man you are. Aren't you? You're really strange. Ever since you come into this house there's been nothing but *trouble*. Honest. I can take nothing you say at face value. Every word you speak is open to any number of different interpretations. Most of what you say is *lies*. You're *violent*, you're *erratic*, you're just completely *unpredictable*. You're nothing else but a *wild animal*, when you come down to it. You're a *barbarian*. And to put the old tin lid on it, you *stink* from arse-hole to breakfast time.[43]

Mick protests against Davies's strangeness or un-homliness, but both he and Aston have backgrounds which also render them 'strange'. For instance, the story Aston relates of the mental hospital could be said to be 'open to any number of different interpretations', or even be dismissed as a bunch of 'lies'. Again, it might be said that Mick himself is 'violent', 'erratic', and 'unpredictable'. In short, the insider figures, namely the brothers, seem just as unhomely as the outsider figure, namely Davies. The play's outside-inside dichotomy is thus conceived dialectically, rather than dualistically, with the outside functioning as an alter-ego for the inside. To put it in another way, the play is marked by a profound sense of the unhomely-homely or homely-unhomely dialectic that is, as we have seen, for Freud, the uncanny.

The failing condition of the house and/or room underlines a sense of the uncanny. We learn from Aston that 'the garden' is 'overgrown' and needs 'clear[ing]', that the other rooms '[a]re out of commission' and 'need a lot of doing to', and that 'downstairs' is 'closed up'.[44] Again, Mick tells us that the 'flat' is 'unfurnished', whilst the stage direction – '*a drip sounds in the bucket*'– reminds us, every now and then, of the leak in the ceiling.[45] The house's

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[42] Ibid., p. 33; Mick refers to Davies as 'my brother's guest' (p. 44).
[43] Ibid., pp. 71-72; my emphasis.
[44] Ibid., p. 15; p. 10.
[45] Ibid., p. 15; p. 28.

dysfunctional condition imparts, then, an overall sense of disorder which, I argue, reflects the fractured selves of its inhabitants. I am, here, taking the house to be a signifier of the self, drawing on Karl Jung's famous interpretation of the house as a symbol of the psyche: 'It was plain to me', he writes, 'that the house represented a kind of image of the psyche'.[46] Mick and Aston's inability to set their actual house in order thus parallels, I suggest, their inability to master their inner selves. Central to this is Davies – 'This is my room', says Mick to him, 'You are standing in my house'.[47] We are reminded of Freud's classic line, 'the ego is not master in his own house'.[48]

The Caretaker, then, complicates notions of self and other by blurring the demarcation between the inside and outside. That is to say, Davies, the outsider figure in the house, signifies not so much the strangeness without as within. As already mentioned, the brothers project onto the tramp many of their own unhomely or undesirable qualities and do so in order to claim homeliness as their own and proper identity. In other words, the play suggests that the brothers reject the otherness within themselves, projecting it outwards. Hence, their construction of Davies, the figure of the outsider, or stranger, as the 'other'. Indeed, the finality of the brothers' refusal to grant Davies another chance to stay in their house at the end of the last act suggests their inability to be reconciled with the otherness within themselves. Nevertheless, when at the end of the play we see the curtain descending on Davies still standing in the room and Aston 'remain[ing] still, his back to him', there is a clear suggestion that the 'other', even if denied, cannot be expelled entirely.[49]

In Strangers to Ourselves (1988), Kristeva draws a parallel between Freud's analysis of 'the uncanny' and xenophobia arguing that both of them relate to the fear of facing the

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[46] Christopher Hauke, *Jung and the Postmodern: The Interpretation of Realities* (East Sussex: Routledge, 2000), p. 104.
[47] *Caretaker*, p. 32.
[48] Sigmund Freud, 'A Difficulty in the Path of Psychoanalysis', in *Complete Psychological Works*, xvii, pp. 137-144 (p. 143).
[49] *Caretaker*, p. 76.

'other'. She asks the question – 'How could one tolerate a foreigner if one did not know one was a stranger to oneself?'[50] In other words, only when apprised of our own strangeness, she would argue, are we able to overcome the fear of the foreigner. Kristeva thus makes a link between the respective fields of psychoanalysis and politics by suggesting that the figure of the foreigner is constructed by an unconscious process of 'identification-projection'.[51] That is to say, the political subject, or subject-as-citizen, projects on to the figure of the foreigner all those internal traits to which the citizen is unable to be reconciled, thus enabling the categories of the homely 'self' and unhomely 'other' to emerge – '[T]he foreigner', writes Kristeva, 'lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode'.[52]

In *The Caretaker*, the role of the 'foreigner' is mostly played by Davies. Note how both brothers seem particularly attentive to Davies's origins or potential racial difference – for instance, Aston inquires if Davies is 'Welsh' and Mick demands to know whether Davies is 'a foreigner' or 'born and bred in the British Isles'.[53] Davies, however, views himself as very much a native – recall how he rants about the foreigners who had taken his seat at the café where he works: 'All them Greeks had it, Poles, Greeks, Blacks, the lot of them, all them aliens had it'.[54] Davies also stresses his racial superiority, by claiming that he is 'clean' and 'keep[s] [himself] up', unlike his foreign co-workers, whom he describes as 'toe-rags' with 'the manners of pigs'.[55] And he is particularly scornful of the 'Scot git' who, as Davies tells us, does not know 'how to talk to people with the proper respect' – unlike himself, of course, 'who was brought up with the right ideas'.[56] Davies's xenophobia is probably most explicit when he seems unusually apprehensive about Aston's neighbours, the 'family of Indians', whom Davies

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[50] Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991 [1988]), p.182.

[51] Ibid., p. 187.

[52] Ibid., p. 1.

[53] *Caretaker*, p. 23; p. 31.

[54] Ibid., p. 6.

[55] Ibid., p. 7.

[56] Ibid., p. 8.

indiscriminately calls, 'Blacks', and nonsensically blames for all the noises he himself makes at night: 'Them you got. Next door. Maybe it were them Blacks making noises, coming up through the walls'.[57]

All this suspicion of racial or national outsiders is, though, always already complicated in the play by the fact that the three men – not just Davies – do, at times, themselves appear as outsider figures. For instance, despite being the 'landlord' of the house, Mick acts, at times, as if he were intruding into his brother's private space. Observe how, at the very outset of the play, Mick suddenly leaves the room when Aston arrives:

> MICK *is alone in the room, sitting on the bed. He wears a leather jacket. Silence. He slowly looks about the room looking at each object in turn.* […] *Silence for thirty seconds. A door bangs. Muffled voices are heard.* MICK *turns his head. He stands, moves silently to the door, goes out, and closes the door quietly.*[58]

From this moment on, Mick only enters the room when Aston is not there and always leaves, even if not instantly, when Aston arrives, which makes us question Mick's claim to own the house. Moreover, we are told that Mick 'live[s] somewhere else', which somehow undermines his rootedness in the house, unlike his brother Aston, who, when asked by Davies 'to find somewhere else', firmly responds – 'I live here'.[59]

That is not to say that Aston himself is always seen as an insider figure in the play. He, too, can sometimes appear as an outsider in the room he occupies, especially when we learn from Mick that he is only 'doing him [Aston] a favour [by] letting him live there'.[60] Of course, as already mentioned, the most obvious outsider figure in the play, is Davies, whom, as we have seen, Mick describes, first, as a 'robber […][who] does not belong in a nice place like

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[57] Ibid., pp. 11-12.
[58] Ibid., p. 5.
[59] Ibid., p. 44; p. 66.
[60] Ibid., p. 72.

this', and next, as a 'guest'.[61] Either way, Davies remains an outsider. It is true that they *allow* him to stay in the room, in what might be regarded as an act of considerable generosity; however, there is no promise of full integration. And indeed, at the end of the play, the brothers seem firmly united in their decision to throw Davies out. This brings us to another central question in the play, namely, the question of hospitality, which, I argue, is indissociable from the play's equivocal presentation of place and dwelling.

'Hostipitality'

> You're probably surprised to find us so inhospitable […] but hospitality isn't a custom here, and we don't need any visitors.
> — Kafka[62]

The Caretaker, you might say, offers or presents one long and ambivalent scene of hospitality which begins with an invitation to 'sit down' and ends with the expulsion of the invited.[63] Significant in this connection is, of course, the title of the film version of the play, which, when released in the USA became, *The Guest* (1963).[64] The arrival of a guest, be it anticipated or not, is, according to Péter Müller, a common 'dramaturgical device' that 'creates the dramatic situation'.[65] And this is very true of *The Caretaker*, beginning as it does, of course, with Aston inviting Davies into the house. This, though, would not, for Derrida, count as 'radical hospitality' – '[R]adical hospitality', he argues, 'consists, *would have to* consist, in *receiving*

[61] In fact, the word 'guest', derived from the Latin *hostis*, has a political edge, for it originally designated, as Emile Benveniste points out, 'a bond of equality and reciprocity […] between […] [the] stranger and the citizens of Rome' – see Emile Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1973 [1969]), p.77.

[62] Franz Kafka, *The Castle*, trans. by Anthea Bell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [1926]), p. 15.

[63] *Caretaker*, p. 5.

[64] Note that the film version of *The Caretaker* was 're-titled *The Guest* when it was released in the United States' (Steven Gale, 'Harold Pinter, Screen Writer: An Overview', in Raby, 1st edn, pp. 87-104, (p.93).

[65] Péter P. Müller, 'Guests, Hosts, and Ghosts: Variations of Hostipitality (Hospitality/Hostility) on the Irish and the Continental Stage', *Focus: Papers in English Literary and Cultural Studies* (2012), 105-114 <http://www.academia.edu/9073989/Guests_Hosts_and_Ghosts_Variations_of_Hostipitality_Hospitality_Hostility_on_the_Irish_and_the_Continental_Stage> [accessed 8 August 2014].

without invitation, beyond or before the invitation'.[66] To put it differently, 'pure and unconditional hospitality' is, for Derrida, 'a hospitality of *visitation* rather than *invitation*'.[67]

Davies's invited status is underlined when Mick demands that Davies should account for his presence in the room, to which the latter responds: 'I was brought here, last night […] bloke saved me from a punch up, brought me here, brought me right here'.[68] It is no accident that Mick's open hostility toward Davies lessens after it becomes clear to him that Davies is, indeed, Aston's 'guest' – 'I'm sorry if I gave you a start. [...] I mean, *my brother's guest*. We got to think of your comfort, en't we?'[69] Davies, it seems, is guaranteed hospitality only in so far he is recognized as a 'guest'.

The word 'guest', according to Emile Benveniste, is derived from the Latin *hostis*, which, by virtue of reciprocity, originally denoted the stranger-as-friend: 'The primitive notion conveyed by *hostis*', Benveniste explains, 'is that of equality by compensation: a *hostis* is one who repays my gift with a counter-gift'.[70] The term 'hospitality', Benveniste continues, is derived from the 'ancient compound' *hospes*, made up of two distinct elements that 'finally link up' in *hosti-pet-s*: *hostis*, meaning guest, and *pet-*, a derivation of *pot*, signifying 'master'. *Hospes*, on Benveniste's reading, thus transliterates as, 'the guest-master'.[71]

And in *The Caretaker* there is some sense that the guest might be master – 'We got to think of your comfort', says Mick to his brother's guest. Nevertheless, the way that Mick adds to this statement the rhetorical question 'en't we?' does add an edge, reminding Davies of who is, perhaps, the true master – namely, the host. Here again the play gives us a scene of hospitality underwritten by power, in which Mick and Aston, as fellow hosts, demonstrate their

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[66] Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 360.
[67] Jacque Derrida, 'Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicide – A Dialogue with Jacque Derrida', in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*, ed. by Giovanna Borradori (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 85-136 (pp. 128-129).
[68] *Caretaker*, p. 32; my emphasis.
[69] Ibid., p. 44.
[70] Benveniste, p. 71.
[71] Ibid., p. 72.

mastery of the house. There is, as Derrida puts it, 'no hospitality, in the classic sense, without sovereignty of oneself over one's home'.[72] To put this another way, there is an essential inhospitality, or even 'hostility', built into the conventional idea of hospitality. Hence, Derrida's neologism '*hostpitality*'.[73]

It is true that Aston acts as a very good host, offering Davies shoes, clothes, money, and a bed; however, Aston's hospitality is not unlimited, which is particularly obvious when he tells Davies, 'The other rooms would […] be no good to you'.[74] Moreover, Davies criticizes Aston's hospitality in a number of ways – citing, in particular, 'waking […] [him] up in the middle of the night', keeping the 'window open', and refusing to provide him with a 'knife', 'clock', or 'heating'.[75] If we are to believe Davies, then, Aston is the kind of host, who, for Derrida, 'remains the *patron*, the master of the household, […] he [who] maintains his authority *in his own home* […] and thereby affirms the law of hospitality as the law of the household'.[76] Indeed, the self-contradiction inherent in this logic of conditional hospitality, or 'hostpitality', is articulated by Davies when he asks Aston, 'Why do you invite me in here in the first place if you was going to treat me like this?'[77]

There is an even more profound sense of hostility when Mick interrogates Davies regarding his name:

> MICK   What's your name?
>
> DAVIES   I don't know you. I don't know who you are.
>
> *Pause*.
>
> MICK   Eh?

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[72] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, trans. by Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000 [1997]), p. 55; sometimes Derrida uses another variation of this neologism – namely, *hostipitality*.
[73] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, p. 45.
[74] *Caretaker*, p. 14.
[75] Ibid., p. 64, p. 56, p. 60, and p. 65.
[76] Jacques Derrida, 'Hospitality', *Angelaki,* 5 (2000), 3-18 (p. 4). <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080> [accessed 3 July 2015].
[77] *Caretaker*, p. 65.

> DAVIES   Jenkins.
>
> MICK   Jenkins?
>
> DAVIES   Yes.
>
> MICK   Jen . . . kins.
>
> > *Pause*.
>
> […]
>
> MICK   […] What did you say your name was?
>
> DAVIES   Jenkins
>
> MICK   I beg your pardon?
>
> DAVIES   Jenkins![78]

The use of the 'pause' in this exchange is particularly significant in that it communicates an undeniable sense of mistrust and unknowability – 'the pause', Peter Hall argues, 'is a threat, a moment of non-verbal tension'.[79] Both Mick and Davies are, we presume, strangers to each other, but here it is the host who seems entitled to know the guest's name and not the reverse. When Mick first asks Davies his name, Davies replies, 'I don't know who you are', but gets no reply at all from Mick. Pertinent here, I would suggest, is Derrida's question: 'Does it [hospitality] begin with the question addressed to the newcomer […]: what is your name? […] Or else does hospitality begin with the unquestioning welcome, in a double effacement, the effacement of the question *and* the name?'[80] In other words, there is an element of 'not-knowing' that is key in 'absolute hospitality', a form of hospitality which, for Derrida, welcomes 'the absolute, unknown, anonymous other'.[81] Mick, then, does not count as a

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[78] Ibid., p. 29.
[79] Hall, p.148.
[80] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, pp. 27-29.
[81] Derrida, 'Hospitality', p.8; Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, p. 25.

Derridean host, especially since he again invokes the question of identification when he asks

Davies for 'references' as a precondition for hiring him as a 'caretaker'.[82]

I take this caretaking proposition as another manifestation of conditional hospitality,

for Davies is only promised residence in the room in exchange for 'looking after the place'.[83]

According to Benveniste, the notion of hospitality, in its Roman origin, was 'founded on the

idea that a man is bound to another […] by the obligation to compensate a gift or service from

which he has benefited'.[84] A similar notion of social and political hospitality, as Benveniste

points out, 'exists in the Greek world under […] [the] name: *xenos*' which signifies 'a pact' of

rights and obligations binding foreigners and non-foreigners.[85] This contractual version of

Western hospitality, Derrida argues, still informs the politics of hospitality in modern times,

which is largely indebted to the political philosophy of the Enlightenment thinker, Immanuel

Kant.[86] In his famous *Third Definitive Article of a Perpetual Peace* (1795), Kant asserts that

his concept of 'universal hospitality' is not 'concerned […] with philanthropy, but with *right*'.[87]

And this juridical conception of hospitality, I would argue, is played out in *The Caretaker*.

What the play shows us of hospitality seems, that is, to be less concerned with the *ethics*

of hospitality than with the *laws* of hospitality. Note, for example, how Mick implicates Davies

in an imaginary tenancy agreement:

> MICK   As a matter of fact, I was going to suggest that we'd lower
>
>   your rent, make it just a nominal sum, I mean until you get fixed up.[88]

Mick suggests a similarly 'contractual' arrangement when he offers Davies work as 'caretaker':

> MICK   How would you like to stay on here, as caretaker?

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[82] *Caretaker*, p. 49.
[83] Ibid., p. 49.
[84] Benveniste, p. 77.
[85] Ibid., p. 77.
[86] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, p. 77.
[87] Immanuel Kant, 'Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch', in *Kant*: *Political Writing*, trans. by Hans Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 93-130 (p. 105).
[88] *Caretaker*, p. 44.

[…]

Of course we'd come to a small financial agreement, mutually

beneficial.[89]

By imagining a contractual frame for their relationship, Mick seems to adopt the Kantian

condition of hospitality: 'the stranger', writes Kant, 'cannot claim the *right of a guest* to be

entertained, for this would require a special friendly agreement whereby he might become a

member of the native household for a certain time'.[90] In other words, Mick, it seems, can only

regard Davies as a guest in so far as he accedes to some kind of '*friendly* agreement' (my

emphasis). It is no accident, then, that Mick calls Davies a 'friend of […] [his] brother's',

shortly after calling him his 'brother's guest'.[91] This Kantian version of hospitality harbours,

of course, a profound contradiction, for it dictates that the guest can 'become a member of the

household', but only 'for a certain time'. This is very true of Davies, who is reminded, time

and again, of the temporary nature of his stay with the brothers – for instance, when Mick asks

Davies, 'How long you thinking of staying here, by the way?' or when Aston tells him he can

stay just 'till […] [Davies] get[s] […] [himself] fixed up'.[92] As it stands, then, Davies's right

to hospitality seems to be limited to what Kant calls 'the right of resort' or 'visitation

(*Besuchsrecht*)', and not the 'right of residence (*Gastrecht*)'.[93]

Kant's specification of hospitality as a 'right', I would claim, is frequently evoked in

the play, particularly when Davies talks of protesting to the 'guvnor' that he 'got […] [his]

rights' – as he says, ' I told him […] I might have been on the road but nobody's got more

rights than I have'.[94] Significant here, I suggest, is the word 'guvnor', which carries a juridical

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[89] Ibid., pp. 48-9.
[90] Kant, 'Perpetual Peace', p. 106.
[91] *Caretaker*, p. 45.
[92] Ibid., p. 44; p. 14.
[93] Kant, quoted in Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. by Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes (New York: Routledge, 2001 [1997]), p. 21.
[94] C*aretaker*, p. 8.

force, beyond its immediate reference to Davies's employer. A Kantian reading of this account would see that Davies can, indeed, claim what Kant calls 'the right of a stranger not to be treated with hostility' but should never forget that he, as Kant puts it, 'can indeed be turned away'.[95] A Kantian host is not necessarily compelled to maintain his visitor, especially if the visitor, as Kant would say, ceases to 'behave […] in a peaceable manner'.[96] Note how the 'guvnor', according to Davies, 'gave […] [him] the bullet' on the grounds that Davies is 'making too much commotion'.[97] Davies's eviction from the restaurant thus provides not only another scenario of conditional hospitality but one which mirrors the main scene of hospitality in the play – the guvnor's complaint that Davies is 'making too much commotion' being echoed in the play's ending when Aston banishes Davies on the basis that he 'make[s] too much noise'.[98] These complaints both, in turn, resonate with Mick's last address to Davies before he, too, asks him to leave – as Mick tells him, 'Ever since you come into this house there's been nothing but *trouble*'.[99] Davies, it seems, is, or at least is imagined to be, a hostile guest.

This hostility is, perhaps, most obvious when we see him pulling his knife, first, on Mick and then on Aston.[100] It is no accident, then, that Aston, earlier on, refuses to give him a 'knife to cut […] [his] bread'.[101] In other words, there is, again, a certain hostility embedded in the play's presentation of hospitality, but this time it is the hostility of the *hostis*, or guest, that is underlined. This should, perhaps, be no surprise in the sense that in Roman law, the Latin word *hostis*, originally denoting the guest-as-friend, later acquired dangerous connotations. As Benveniste observes, 'By a development of which we do not know the exact conditions, the word *hostis* assumed a "hostile" flavor and henceforward it is only applied to the "enemy"'.[102]

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[95] Kant, 'Perpetual Peace', p. 105.
[96] Ibid., p. 106.
[97] *Caretaker*, p. 8.
[98] Ibid., p. 75.
[99] Ibid., p. 71; my emphasis.
[100] Ibid., p. 44 and pp. 65-7.
[101] Ibid., p. 56.
[102] Benveniste, p. 78.

Pertinent here, I would suggest, is Mick's guarded question to Davies, '[Y]ou're my brother's friend, *aren't* you?' which entails the possibility that Davies might just be his brother's enemy, not friend.[103] It is no accident, then, that, in the same setting, Mick suspiciously asks Davies: 'you're not the violent sort, *are* you?' Again the question presupposes the possibility of the guest's hostility. This connects, I think, with Derrida's remark that 'anyone who encroaches on my "at home", on my ipseity, on my power of hospitality, on my sovereignty as host, I start to regard as an undesirable foreigner, and virtually as an enemy'.[104]

Another way of looking at this would be to say that the play explores the risk, or danger, entailed in any kind of hospitality. It shows, that is, how the host necessarily relinquishes his sovereignty by virtue of sharing it with the guest – 'a pure sovereignty', as Derrida puts it, 'is indivisible or it is not at all'.[105] In this sense, a host will always lose some authority over the guest and to that extent himself become a guest. Pertinent here, I would suggest, is J. Hillis Miller's claim that 'the double antithetical relation of host and guest' is contained in the very word 'host'.[106] Here, Miller compares the guest to a 'parasite', which 'originally' meant, as he puts it, 'a fellow guest, someone sharing the food with you'; in this sense, Miller goes on to argue that 'a host is both the eater and the eaten'. Hence, his remark 'a host is a guest, and a guest is a host'.[107]

This dialectical notion of hospitality, I would suggest, is subtly evoked in the play, especially by the brief moments of role reversal between host and guest. Consider, for instance, the following scene where Davies and Aston seem to exchange positions:

> DAVIES   […] I better come with you.

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[103] *Caretaker*, p. 45; my emphasis.
[104] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, pp. 54-5.
[105] Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005 [2003]), p. 101.
[106] J. Hillis Miller, 'The Critic as Host', *Critical Inquiry*, 3 (Spring 1977), 439-447 (p. 442) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1342933> [accessed 1 August 2015].
[107] Ibid., p. 442.

ASTON   Why?

DAVIES   I mean, I better come out with you, anyway.

ASTON   Why?

DAVIES   Well . . . don't you want me to go out?

ASTON   What for?

DAVIES   I mean . . . when you're out. Don't you want me to get

out . . . when you're out?

ASTON   You don't have to go out.

DAVIES   You mean . . . I can stay here?

ASTON   Do what you like. You don't have to come out just

because I go out.

DAVIES   You don't mind me staying here?

ASTON   I've got a couple of keys. (*He goes to a box by his bed and finds*

them.) This door and the front door. (*He hands them*

to DAVIES.)[108]

This scene, I would propose, presents a glimpse of absolute hospitality, in which the guest, for a moment, takes over the position of the host. I find in Pinter's use of ellipses here a sense of confusion or turbulence that results from the reversal of the host-guest relationship – note Hall's reading of the ellipses in Pinter as 'a sign of a pressure point, a search for a word, a momentary incoherence'.[109] Particularly relevant to the host-guest reversal is Aston's gesture of handing Davies the keys to the house, for whoever 'has the key', as Derrida puts it, '[…] controls the conditions of hospitality'.[110]

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[108] *Caretaker*, pp. 21-2.
[109] Hall, p. 148.
[110] Derrida, 'Hospitality', p. 14.

To put this another way, this scene of inverted hospitality effectively literalizes Derrida's claim that the scene of absolute hospitality is one in which, 'it is *as if* the stranger or foreigner held the keys'.[111] There is some sense, then, in which Aston indirectly invites Davies to dominate his space, especially in saying, 'Do what you like'; indeed, in so speaking Aston evokes the figure of the radical host, he who, according to Derrida, 'call[s] out to […] [his guest] […]: occupy me, take place in me, […] take my place'.[112] The 'strange logic', as Derrida describes it, of such radical hospitality is here manifested by Aston's leaving the house and Davies's staying in – a gesture that resonates with Derrida's talk of reversal: 'The master thus enters from the inside *as if* he came from the outside'.[113] This drama of reversal, or even substitution, is echoed later in the play when Davies demands that he replace Aston – 'You!' he says to Aston, 'You better find somewhere else!'[114] Still more important here is that Davies says this whilst pointing his knife at Aston, which I take as a reminder of the menace or threat posed by the guest-become-host. This time, though, Aston does not say, 'Do what you like'; instead, he seems to reclaim his sovereignty by telling Davies, 'I live here. You don't'.[115]

Crucial here is the implication that the sovereignty of the host is founded on residence or dwelling, being 'at-home' – a notion that is central to the very idea of identity or self-identity: to be is to be-at-home with oneself, as it were. And the question of identity is certainly part and parcel of the notion of hospitality. According to Benveniste, the Latin *potis* (in *hospes* or *hosti-pet*-s) signifies the notion of mastery whilst the related roots, *pet*-, *pot*- and *-pt-* (Latin *-pte*, *ipse*-), 'originally meant personal identity' – hence, the word, ipseity. Thus, *potis* is the master who is 'eminently "himself"'.[116] From here comes, we presume, the traditional understanding of the host as the one who receives his guests from a position of ipseity, or of being, if you will,

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[111] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, p. 12.
[112] Ibid., p. 123.
[113] Ibid., p. 123.
[114] *Caretaker*, p. 66.
[115] Ibid., p. 66.
[116] Benveniste, p. 71.

'at home' with himself. In this respect, the home is a figure for self-identity, and rootedness in the home signifies one's sovereignty. In emphasizing his status as a resident or dweller ('I live here'), Aston, then, reclaims his identity as the true master of the home.

The interrelatedness between notions of identity and home reverberates, in fact, throughout the play, particularly in the figure of Davies, the homeless man in pursuit of his 'papers', as he calls them:

> A man I know has got them. I left them with him. You see? They prove who I am! I can't be moving without them papers. They tell you who I am. You see! I am stuck without them.[117]

Note here that, for Davies, identity is associated with movement, rather than rootedness, for he needs the papers, he claims, to go on 'moving', not to be 'stuck'. In contradistinction with the home-based notion of being, as represented by Aston, the tenant, and Mick, the owner, Davies seems to represent being-as-homelessness. By choosing the hero – or, in the modernist sense, the anti-hero – of the play to be a man whose identity is defined by his mobility, Pinter seems to reverse the late-Heideggerian notion that 'to be a human *being* means […] to dwell'.[118] To put this another way, Davies's quest, as it were, does not seem to *end* in Sidcup, where, as he says, his 'papers' can be found – instead, it is imagined to *begin* there. Still more important is that Davies needs the 'papers' to 'prove' who he is; or, shall we say, prove *that* he is, which makes him an anti-ontological subject, as it were – a subject whose being is always already in question.

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[117] *Caretaker*, p. 18.
[118] Martin Heidegger, 'Dwelling, Building, Thinking', in *Poetry, Language, Thought,* trans. by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), pp. 145-161 (p. 147.) Here, Heidegger traces the relation between being and dwelling etymologically, for the *bin* of '*ich bin*' (I am) comes from the Old German *buan* which means to dwell. Hence, Heidegger's point: '[T]he manner in which we humans *are* on the earth, is *Buan*, dwelling'.

Fraternity and the Patriarch

> DAVIES   Who would live there?
>
> MICK   I would. My brother and me.
>
>   Pause.
>
> DAVIES   What about me?[119]

Davies's non-belonging to the house and/or room is, first and foremost, grounded in the simple fact that he is not a brother. Note how Mick's words are effectively echoed by Aston, who, when 'discussing' beds with Davies, simply fixates upon his 'brother's bed':

> DAVIES   […] so I been thinking, what I mean to say, if you was to give me your bed, and you have my bed, there's not all that difference between them […] so I reckon that'd be the best way out of it, we swap beds […]
>
>   *Pause*.
>
>   What do you think of this I'm saying?
>
> ASTON   No I like sleeping in this bed.
>
> DAVIS   But you don't understand my meaning!
>
> ASTON   Anyway, that one's my brother's bed.
>
> DAVIES   Your brother?
>
> ASTON   Any time he stays here.[120]

Central to the presentation of place, then, is the fraternal relationship between Mick and Aston, which, I suggest, again invites a reading of the idea of home in the play as a trope for the nation.

Nations, according to Liisa Malkki, are commonly conceived as communities inherently rooted in certain lands or territories. She attributes this pervasive assumption to a

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[119] *Caretaker*, p. 59.
[120] Ibid., p.74.

'metaphysics of sedentarism', which 'actively territorializes our identities, whether cultural or national'.[121] This very particular metaphysics is connected, I suggest, to the common conception of 'land' as a maternal figure – hence the concept 'motherland'. This connection serves to naturalize one's ties to a certain territory and, thus, produces a genealogical or ancestral relation with the (mother)land. Consider the following definition of the German concept *Heimat*, which draws on the mother(land)-son(s) metaphor to express nationalist sentiments – '*Heimat* is first of all the mother earth who has given birth to our folk and race, who is the holy soil'.[122] As is clear, there is often a sense or dream that a people are attached to their homeland by birth which, of course, gives rise, under patriarchy, to conceptualizing the nation as a form of place-bound brotherhood. An example of this is how the word 'fraternity' becomes an intergral part of the national motto of post-revolutionary France – *Liberté, égalité, fraternité*.

The question of fraternity is, of course, intertwined with that of nativity, or birth. This is particularly clear in *The Caretaker* where Mick and Aston's natal ties, implicit in the emphasis on their common relation to the mother and/or womb-room, serve as the core of their brotherhood. And indeed it is a brotherhood that shades almost into the image of nationhood in so far as it implies the exclusion of the non-fraternal figure of Davies. Davies seems, as I say, at times to play the role of the 'foreigner', particularly because, I would suggest, he represents, in Kristevan terms, 'the other of the family, the clan, the tribe'.[123] As Derrida argues in *Rogues*, the notion of birth is so thoroughly implicated in any 'confraternal or fraternizing community' that the figure of the brother always 'ends up getting politicized':[124]

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[121] Liisa Malkki, 'National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees', *Cultural Anthropology*, 7 (Feb., 1992), 24-44 (p. 31) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/656519> [Accessed 12 December 2014].

[122] This definition, translated by Leonard Doob, is provided by a South Tryolean almanac (1953). (Quoted in Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. 156.

[123] Kristeva, p. 95.

[124] Derrida, *Rogues*, p. 58; p. 61.

I am simply concerned that when it comes to politics and democracy this fraternalism might follow at least the temptation of a genealogical descent back to autochthony, to the nation, if not actually to nature, in any case, to birth, to *naissance*. I would wish to put this crucial word from the same family, this word *naissance*, before nature and before nation.[125]

For Derrida, the fraternal analogy within political discourse implies the sovereignty of the fraternal members, all of whom are, then, united by 'birth right'.[126] It is no accident that citizenship law in the modern nation-state defines foreignness, as Kristeva points out, 'mainly according to two legal systems: *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis*, the law according to soil and the law according to blood' – both of which appeal to birth. [127] This is made particularly clear in Mick's forcing the question of whether Davies was a 'foreigner' or 'born and bred in the British Isles'. Indeed, mark how Mick reacts when Davies questions Aston's belonging to the room:

DAVIES   I tell you he should go back where he come from!

MICK (*turning to look at him*)   Come from?

DAVIES   Yes.

MICK   Where did he come from?

DAVIES   Well . . . he . . .he . . .

MICK   You get a bit out of your depth sometimes, don't you?

Pause.[128]

It is, of course, ironic that Davies, who finds it 'a bit hard […] to set [his] mind back' to where he was born, demands that Aston 'should go back where he come from'.[129] In fact, one answer to Mick's question – 'Where did he [Aston] come from?' – would, obviously, be the womb or

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[125] Ibid., p. 61.
[126] Ibid., p. 61.
[127] Kristeva, p. 95.
[128] *Caretaker* p.69.
[129] Ibid., p. 23; it is not quite clear where Davies thinks Aston comes from, but it becomes clearer from a later exchange that Davies seems to be referring to the mental hospital where Aston is previously held.

womb-room, which, again, gestures towards the question of nativity, already effectively foregrounded by the brothers' repeated questioning of Davies's birthplace. Unlike Davies, Mick and Aston never have their citizenship explicitly questioned, as if citizenship is something grounded in the fact that they are 'brothers'.

Fraternity, of course, has a special relationship with patriarchy – 'In order to have brothers', Louis-Francois says, 'there must be a father'.[130]And for many critics of *The Caretaker*, Davies is to be interpreted as a symbolic father.[131] Indeed, on a psychoanalytic reading, the situation of the brothers in the play, I argue, evokes Freud's interpretation of the myth of the 'primal horde' of brothers, who, as Freud writes in *Totem and Taboo* (1913), 'one day […] came together, killed and devoured their father and so made an end of the patriarchal horde'.[132] Being analogous to the classic 'father-complex', as Freud puts it, the anthropological myth is concluded by the sons' 'identification' with the dead father as an expression of 'their filial sense of guilt'.[133] The primal brothers thus institute a 'festival of the totem meal, in which [they regard it] a duty to repeat the crime of parricide again and again in the sacrifice of the totem animal', that is the 'substitute for their father'.[134] According to this psychoanalytic reading, the development of fraternal society depends upon the repetition of the primal parricide. And the play, I would argue, almost redoubles the myth of the primal horde, particularly in the way Davies is ultimately treated. In an interview, Pinter admits to having once intended to conclude the play with Davies's murder – 'The original idea was to end the play with the violent death of the tramp'.[135] Pinter chooses, instead, that Davies is simply

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[130] Louis-Francois, quoted in Kristeva, p.192.

[131] Esslin, for example, reads this play as an allegory for the father-son(s) conflict: 'Mick and Aston on the one hand, Davies on the other, are meticulously observed individuals; but they are also archetypes. Archetypes, for example, of the conflict between two young men and an old one, of the battle between the sons and the father'. See Esslin, *Pinter: The Playwright*, pp. 112-113.

[132] Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, trans. by James Strachey (London: Routledge & Paul, 1950), p. 141. *<ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=661522&site=ehost-live>* [accessed 2 May 2014].

[133] Ibid., pp. 141-143.

[134] Ibid., p.145; p.143.

[135] Pinter, quoted in Penelope Prentice, *The Pinter Ethic: The Erotic Aesthetic* (New York: Garland, 2000), p. 87.

expelled by the brothers, but I would suggest that we can read this expulsion as a symbolic re-enactment of the murder of the primal father.

References to Mick and Aston's actual father are, as it happens, few and far between in the play. In fact, the only time their father is referred to is when Mick says, rather obscurely, that Davies reminds him of his 'uncle's brother'– that is to say, very possibly, his father.[136] If so Mick here goes out of his way to avoid using the name of the father, which, from a Freudian perspective, might be read as a repressed father complex. However, the repressed, as Freud never fails to say, always returns; and, here, the image of the repressed father seems to return, I suggest, in the symbolic figure of the 'caretaker'. Caretaking, of course, has a paternal resonance, evoking, biblically, the task of the primal patriarch, Adam: 'And the Lord God took the man [Adam], and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and keep it' (Genesis 2:15). Thus, Davies's caretaking duties – that is 'keeping an eye on things', and 'looking after the place' – endows him, at least symbolically, with some kind of paternal status.[137]

Davies's role as the symbolic father is again suggested when he waves his knife at Mick as the latter attacks him in the dark.[138] Initially, Mick seems threatened by Davies's rather unexpected move: 'What are you waving that about for?' he asks Davies. '[Y]ou're not thinking of doing any violence on me, are you?'[139] Later, though, Mick praises Davies for his possession of the knife – 'Well, I could see before, when you took out that knife, that you wouldn't let anyone mess you about'.[140] According to Freud, 'All elongated and sharp weapons […] [such as] knives' can be interpreted as phallic symbols, which makes particular sense given the Freudian father's possession of what Roland Barthes calls the 'power to castrate'.[141] Note, in this connection that when Davies complains that Aston 'don't give [him] no knife to cut [his]

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[136] *Caretaker*, p. 29.
[137] Ibid., p. 48.
[138] Ibid., pp. 43-44.
[139] Ibid., p. 44.
[140] Ibid., p. 48.
[141] Ronald Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), p.36.

bread', Mick observes, 'You've [already] got a knife'.[142] Mick, it seems, has a preoccupation with Davies's knife which might be read as evidence of a latent castration anxiety.

The castration threat that Davies seems to possess, or symbolize, is particularly related to the room, which, as I argued, is suggestive of the mother. Note, for example, how Davies's intrusion into the room is seen by Mick in almost Oedipal terms:

MICK   That's my mother's bed.

DAVIES   Well she wasn't in it last night!

MICK (*moving to him*)   Now don't get perky, son, don't get perky.

Keep your hands off my old mum.

DAVIES   I ain't . . . I haven't. . . .

MICK   Don't get out of your depth, friend, don't start taking

liberties with my old mother, let's have a bit of respect.[143]

By calling Davies, 'son', Mick infantilizes Davies – that is, he reverses the Freudian castrator-castrated relationship. As Luciana Gabbard puts it, 'Mick will not let the old man dispossess him, he will dispossess and castrate the old man first'.[144] Indeed, Davies's castration threat is, above all, represented in the way he implicitly threatens to dislodge one or either of the brothers from the maternal room. It is no accident that, later, he explicitly challenges Aston's right of access to the maternal room by demanding that the latter should 'find somewhere else'.[145] In this connection, I would recall the 'violent and jealous' patriarch of 'Darwin's primal horde […] who', as Freud writes, 'keeps all the females for himself and drives away his sons as they grow up'.[146] In Pinter's play, too, the brothers, I argue, seem threatened in much the same way by Davies, keen, as he seems to be, to possess their mother-room.

[142] *Caretaker*, p. 57.
[143] Ibid., p. 33.
[144] Gabbard, p.109.
[145] *Caretaker*, p.66.
[146] Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, p. 141.

In both cases, though, the question of power is complicated by having two scenes of rivalry – not just the paternal-filial but also the fraternal: 'Though the brothers had banded together in order to overcome their father', Freud notes, 'they were all one another's rivals in regard to the women. Each of them would have wished, like his father, to have all the women to himself'.[147] This fraternal rivalry is echoed, I suggest, by the tacit battle between Mick and Aston over which of them is in control of the room. While it is true that both brothers acknowledge that Mick is the legal owner of not merely the room but the entire house, Aston, by virtue of inhabiting the room, acts as if *he* were unrivalled master of the place. Note how he feels fully entitled to bring to the room whatever he desires, to hire as caretaker for the room whomever he wants, and to decorate the house however he likes.[148] Aston does, though, admit that Mick is, in effect, the 'landlord' of the house and that, as already noted, he stays in the room in exchange for 'doing up the upper part of the house for [Mick]'.[149] It is true that when asked by Davies, '[W]ho's the landlord here, him or you?' Mick, firmly responds, 'Me. I am. I got deeds to prove it'; however, the need to 'prove' something, of course, is always already a questioning of that which is to be proven.[150]

The brothers' rivalry seems to come to an end the moment they finally 'face' and 'look at each other'.[151] This encounter, marked by the brothers' 'smiling faintly' to one another, is, I suggest, the cruelest possible answer to Davies's pathetic question, 'What about me?' – for what seems to unite Aston and Mick here is their banishing of the 'caretaker'. Mick and Aston's 'smile of recognition', as Austin E. Quigley puts it, can be interpreted as a gesture of 'reestablish[ing] the priority of the link between the two brothers'.[152] Put in Freudian terms, Mick and Aston seem to realize, like the primal horde, that 'if they were to live together', they

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[147] Ibid., p. 141.
[148] *Caretaker*, pp. 38-41.
[149] Ibid., p. 40.
[150] Ibid., p. 49.
[151] Ibid., p. 73.
[152] Austin E. Quigley, *Pinter Problem* (Princeton and London: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp.166-167.

should renounce what Freud calls 'the struggle of all against all'.[153]And this moment of recognition, according to Freud, constitutes 'a sort of social contract'.[154]

In fact, this moment of smiling is probably the only time in the play where Mick and Aston's fraternity is foregrounded, constituting an unprecedented moment of tacit communication between them. As Richard Cave puts it:

> The smile was in part the token of acceptance; but it also intimated new levels of understanding, trust, and compatibility between the brothers. It is difficult to convey the impact of that steady gaze which contrasted so starkly with the evasive or aggressive staring looks which had previously obtained between the characters.[155]

Indeed, it is as if Aston and Mick actually *become* brothers the moment they agree to expel Davies. This sense is underlined by Aston's claim, as the play closes, that the other bed is his brother's and at '[a]ny time he stays here', which suggests that the brothers come to terms with their equal sharing of the place immediately after Davies's expulsion.[156] Of particular significance here is the 'long silence' that follows Davies's final pleading to be allowed to stay in the room. Pinter could have ended the play with Davies's broken speech – 'Listen … if I … got down … if I was to … get my papers … would you … would you let … would you … if I got down … and got my …' – but he chooses, instead, to end it with a 'long silence'.[157] Hall interprets Pinter's use of the stage direction, 'silence' (as distinct from the 'pause' and ellipses) as an expression of an 'extreme crisis point' from which 'the character [often] emerges […] with his attitude completely changed'.[158] And this change of attitude, I would suggest, here takes the form of the affirmation, or reaffirmation, of Mick and Aston's fraternity.

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[153] Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, p. 144.
[154] Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. by Katherine Jones (London: Hogarth, 1932), p.132.
[155] Cave, p. 132.
[156] *Caretaker*, p. 74.
[157] Ibid., p. 76.
[158] Hall, p. 148.

Crucial, of course, to the resolution of Freud's theory of the primal horde is the communal consumption of the remains of the dead father, which Jean-Luc Nancy rephrases in quasi-eucharistic terms: 'Such are, in Freud', Nancy writes, 'the sons of the inhuman Father of the horde: becoming brothers in the *sharing* of his *dismembered* body'.[159] Although Pinter's play makes no an explicit reference to a totemic meal, a repressed memory of the 'dismembered' father, I would suggest, is evoked when Mick, immediately after dismissing Davies from his 'caretaking work', shatters the Buddha statue 'against the gas stove'.[160] Note how breaking the Buddha is suggested to be tantamount to discharging Davies:

> DAVIES (*slowly*)   All right then . . . you do that . . . you do it . . . if
>
> that's what you want….
>
> MICK   THAT'S WHAT I WANT!'
>
> *He hurls the Buddha against the gas stove. It breaks.*[161]

Also significant, here, is that Aston, surprisingly, remains wholly composed at seeing the broken '*pieces*' of his much cherished Buddha, suggesting, in a way, that this is what he wants too.[162] We should note that some kind of connection between Davies and the Buddha is suggested very early in the play when Davies '*comes face to face with* [the] *statue of Buddha standing on the gas stove*'.[163] The statue, of which we are reminded a few times, functions, I suggest, in much the same way as the painted 'eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg' in Scott Fitzgerald's classic novel, *The Great Gatsby* (1925). According to John T. Irvin, these disembodied eyes suggest 'the unseeing all-seeing eye of God derived from the notion of conscience as the introjected gaze of the father'.[164] However, unlike 'Doctor Eckleburg's

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[159] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, trans. by Bridget McDonald (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 72.
[160] *Caretaker*, p. 72.
[161] Ibid., p. 72.
[162] Ibid., p. 73.
[163] Ibid., p. 7.
[164] John T. Irwin, *Unless the Threat of Death is Behind Them: Hard-Boiled Fiction and Film Noir* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), p. 196.

persistent stare', in *The Caretaker* we have, presumably, the closed or semi-closed eyes of the Buddha statue, which would suggest, of course, a castrated father – since for Freud, blinding is a metaphor for castration.[165] It might, then, be tempting, once again, to read the play in terms of the ousted father narrative, which according to Freud, haunts all fraternal political groupings. And this notion of 'ghosted' or uncanny fraternity is going to be the subject of my final section.

The Scapegoat

In his response to Freud's reading of Darwin's theory of the primal horde, the anthropological philosopher, Girard shifts the focus of attention away from the notion of primal parricide to what he calls 'the concept of collective murder':[166]

> If we hope to get to the root of the matter we must put the father out of our minds and concentrate on the fact that the enormous impression made on the community by the collective murder is not due to the victim's identity per se, but to his role as unifying agent.[167]

In other words, Girard takes issue with the psychoanalytic emphasis on the paternal identity of the victim and focuses, instead, on how the primal-horde myth is compatible with his 'theory of the surrogate victim as the foundation of culture'.[168] Communities, for Girard, are constituted by the 'enemy brothers' who engage in a cycle of reciprocal rivalry and violence expiated only by an act of 'collective murder' against what he calls a 'surrogate victim'.[169] In what follows, then, I will try to demonstrate how *The Caretaker* can be read as a Girardian

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[165] F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 [1925]), p.22.
[166] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. by Patrick Gregory (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013 [1972]), p. 245.
[167] Ibid., p. 242.
[168] Ibid., p. 245.
[169] Ibid., p. 67; p. 243.

allegory of the origin of human community.[170] Central to this reading, will be the scene of fraternal rivalry enacted by Aston and Mick, and Davies's role as the scapegoat-redeemer.

Far from designating a natural bond, the figure of the brother, as the English word 'br*other*' might suggest, for Girard, is the '*enemy* brother'.[171]

> We instinctively tend to regard the fraternal relationship as an affectionate one; yet the mythological, historical, and literary examples that spring to mind tell a different story: Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Eteocles and Polyneices, Romulus and Remus, Richard the Lion-Hearted and John Lackland.[172]

Girard traces the reciprocal enmity between brothers to the fact that 'the difference between them is less than that between all other degrees of relations'.[173] In other words, for Girard, the closer and more similar people are, the more divided they are likely to be. Enmity, in Girardian terms, is particularly rooted in the common desire to obtain an object that cannot be shared: 'It is not only in myths', Girard notes, 'that brothers are simultaneously drawn together and driven apart by something they both ardently desire and which they will not or cannot share – a throne, a woman or, in more general terms, a paternal heritage' – or even, dare we say it, a room.[174]

What we have, then, in *The Caretaker* is, I suggest, the classic motif of fraternal enmity, tacitly played out as the two brothers compete for exclusive possession of the room. In fact, the question of the room's ownership appears to be an elusive matter throughout the play, which

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[170] My Girardian reading of Pinter's *The Caretaker* is of particular significance in view of Girard's contribution to the study of dramatic literature. I here have in mind his reading of classical Greek tragedy through the lens of his theories on mimetic desire and rivalry as well as his ground-breaking book, *A Theater of Envy: William Shakespeare* (1991), where he explores the relevance of his 'mimetic theory' to Shakespeare. My intention here is to extend the usefulness of Girard's theories to modern drama through Pinter – one of the modern master-dramatists of rivalry and violence. In particular, I look at *The Caretaker* as an exemplary dramatic exploration of mimetic contagion. I explain the full implication of Girard's 'mimetic theory' in the following pages.

[171] This idea, to some extent, finds an echo in Carl Schmitt's 1950 *Ex Captivitate Salus*: 'The Other is my brother', writes Schmitt. 'The Other reveals himself as my brother and the Brother, as my Enemy' – Carl Schmitt, quoted in Gabriella Slomp, *Carl Schmitt and the Politics of Hostility, Violence and Terror* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 18.

[172] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 67

[173] Ibid., p. 67.

[174] Ibid., p. 69.

begs the question: should the room belong to the man who has 'got the deeds', namely Mick, or to the one who lives in the room, namely Aston? The play, of course, does not offer a straightforward or conclusive answer but presents possession of the room as the cornerstone of the conflict between the two brothers.

Seeing Mick initially sitting alone in the room and on the bed suggests that he is either the owner or tenant, but his abrupt departure, once Aston arrives, calls the legitimacy of his presence in the room into question. Indeed, following Mick's withdrawal and Aston's taking over the scene for most of the first act, one is led to assume that the room belongs to Aston, hence his ability to accommodate Davies and even hire him as 'caretaker'. Aston, of course, never explicitly refers to himself as the landlord, but he almost gives the impression he is one, especially when he answers Davies's initial question 'This your room?' with a ready 'yes'.[175] Compare this with Aston's somewhat vague answer when asked about his possession of the entire house:

> DAVIES   This your *house* then, is it?
>
> *Pause.*
>
> ASTON   I'm in charge.
>
> DAVIES   You the landlord, are you?[176]

Aston's evasive claim to be 'in charge', preceded by the classic Pinter pause, casts further doubt on the question of ownership in the play. Here, of course, Aston does not confirm that he is the landlord, but he does not deny it, either.

Our impression of Aston as a potential landlord is again called into question when Mick announces his possession of the entire place, telling Davies, 'You're speaking to the *owner*. This is *my room*. You're standing in *my house*'.[177] The confidence and resolution with which

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[175] *Caretaker*, p. 9.
[176] Ibid., p. 12.
[177] Ibid., p.32; my emphasis.

Mick speaks here is, of course, in stark contrast with Aston's earlier evasiveness. Still more important, though, is that Aston himself confirms Mick's claim of ownership when he acknowledges that he works for his younger brother:

> ASTON   I am supposed to be doing up the upper part of the house for
>
>   him.
>
> DAVIS   What . . . you mean . . . you mean it's his house?
>
> ASTON   Yes. I am supposed to be decorating this landing for him.
>
>   Make a flat out of it.[178]

In spite of hearing this, Davies still seems unable to identify the rightful 'master' of the house since he raises the issue of ownership four times in the play, twice with each brother. What Davies does not seem to comprehend is that owning the room and mastering it is not one and the same thing. In other words, Mick's being the landlord, it seems, would not necessarily entail that he has the upper-hand in the house. Note, for example, the ambiguity of Mick's account of the power relationship between him and his brother:

> MICK   Yes. I could tell him to go. I mean, I'm the landlord. On the
>
>   other hand, he's [Aston] the sitting tenant. Giving him notice, you see,
>
>   what it is, it's a technical matter, that what it is. It depends how you
>
>   regard this room. I mean it depends whether you regard this room as
>
>   furnished or unfurnished. See what I mean?[179]

Although the brothers differ in their legal status vis-à-vis the room, one being a tenant and the other a landlord, they both, it seems, are equal in their control or authority over the place. Note, for example, how Mick and his brother share the responsibility of cleaning the room evenly: 'We take it *in turns* […] *my brother and me*, to give the place a thorough going

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[178] Ibid., p. 40.
[179] Ibid., p. 69.

over'.[180] Here, in particular, the brothers appear as interchangeable doubles – which, ironically perhaps, only underlines the sense of rivalry between them. As Girard argues, rivalry between brothers arises precisely because they 'seem to have more rights, duties, and functions in common than other family members'.[181] It is no accident, then, that Mick plans to take over the room from Aston – as he tells Davies, 'I'm thinking of *taking over* the running of the place, you see? I think it could be run a bit more efficiently'.[182] In other words, it seems that Mick is less interested in the room as a dwelling place per se than in what being 'in charge' of it might signify: 'It's not that I actually live here. I don't', he says. 'As a matter of fact', he continues, 'I live somewhere else. But after all, I'm *responsible* for the upkeep of the premises, *en't I*? Can't help being house-*proud*'.[183] Here, of course, Mick seems to echo Aston's earlier claim to be 'in charge'. However, the way that Mick adds to his statement the rhetorical 'en't I?' is enough to put his claim into some kind of question.

To put all this another way, the more divided the brothers are the more similar they appear to be – and this can be theorized, I would propose, via Girard's popular theory of 'mimetic rivalry'. Rivalry, as we know, usually happens when two or more parties desire the same object; however, 'desire itself', according to Girard, 'is essentially mimetic, directed [that is] toward an object desired by the model'.[184] Crucial, for Girard is that the rival serves not only as an adversary but also 'as a model for the subject', especially 'in regard to desires':

> Rivalry does not arise because of the fortuitous convergence of two desires on a single object; rather, *the subject desires the object because his rival desires it*. In desiring an object the rival alerts the subject to the desirability of the object.

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[180] Ibid., p. 43; my emphasis.
[181] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 67.
[182] *Caretaker*, p. 48; my emphasis.
[183] Ibid., p. 44; my emphasis.
[184] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 164.

What we have in *The Caretaker* is, then, a scene of 'mimetic rivalry' in which the brothers act as model-rivals for each other, particularly in terms of desire. The brothers appear alike, of course, in their mutual interest in the room; however, it seems that the room is not the only object the brothers reciprocally desire. Davies, too, is a mutually desired object – or at least the hiring of him as 'caretaker' is. We know, of course, that Aston precedes Mick in knowing Davies and offering him work as caretaker; and we also know that Mick drops his hostility towards Davies and tries to win him over only after witnessing the special attention Aston pays him. Although it is suggested that both brothers offer Davies the same job only by coincidence, it is possible that Mick has overheard Aston mentioning the offer to Davies first – especially since Mick, as we know, has a habit of entering the room rather surreptitiously. Therefore, it would be tempting to say that Mick does not *authentically* desire to hire Davies as 'caretaker' but only does so to mimic Aston. To borrow Girard's words, it is as if Mick needs Aston to 'inform him of what he should desire'.[185]

For Girard, then, the mimetic relation is essentially triangular, that is, it always involves a subject, object and a third party, who acts, as a 'model' or *'mediator* of desire':[186] 'The spatial metaphor which expresses this relationship', he writes, 'is obviously the triangle. The object changes […] but the triangle remains the same'.[187] In *The Caretaker*, the triangular structure of desire is most dramatically illustrated, I would suggest, by the farcical routine of passing the bag around the three characters:

> ASTON   Here you are. (ASTON *offers the bag to* DAVIES.)
>
> MICK *grabs it*. ASTON *takes it*.
>
> MICK *grabs it*. DAVIES *reaches for it*.
>
> ASTON *takes it*. MICK *reaches for it*.

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[185] Ibid.

[186] René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. by Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976 [1961]), p. 2.

[187] Ibid., p. 72.

ASTON *gives it to* DAVIES. MICK *grabs it.*

Pause.

ASTON *takes it.* DAVIES *takes it.* MICK *takes it.* DAVIES *reaches*

for it. ASTON *takes it.*

Pause.

ASTON *gives it to* MICK. MICK *gives it to* DAVIES.

DAVIES *grasps it to him.*

Pause.

MICK *looks at* ASTON. DAVIES *moves away with the bag. He drops*

it. Pause.[188]

What is most important here is that Aston himself, who initially intends to deliver the bag to

Davies, intercepts the bag several times even as Davies reaches for it, which underlines what

Girard calls the 'intersubjective' structure of mimetic desire.[189]

Mimesis, of course, can lead to conflict when entangled with desire, and this is crucial

for Girard who locates 'the origin of mimetic rivalry in acquisitive mimesis'.[190] In other words,

conflict arises when two or more antagonists imitate not only each other's desire but also each

other's attempt to seize the desired object and, indeed, 'attempt', as Girard puts it, 'to wrest [it]

from one another'.[191]An obvious example of 'acquisitive mimesis' would be the moment in

which Mick 'snatches' the bag from Davies's hands immediately after Aston gives it to him

and accuses Davies of 'laying […] [his] hands on anything he can lay his hands on'.[192] This

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[188] *Caretaker*, p. 37. This scene does itself, perhaps, mimic the hat-passing scene in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1948-1949). The play, clearly, has other intertextual links to Beckett's classic – as Esslin writes: 'There are echoes here […] of *Waiting for Godot*: the tramp, the two complementary brothers, the shoes that will not fit; in Beckett's play the two main characters are waiting for salvation to come; in Pinter's one of the characters is within sight of salvation and is then driven out of paradise by his original sin' (*Pinter: The Playwright*, p. 109).

[189] Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel,* p. 2.

[190] René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, trans. by Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (London: Athlone Press, 1987 [1978]) , p.16.

[191] Ibid., p. 15.

[192] *Caretaker*, p. 36.

remark could be taken as a coded accusation against Aston, arguably his original rival – being

he who brings the bag to the room. Although Mick is the one who clearly initiates the

aggression by first seizing the bag from Davies, he seems to believe that, by doing so, he is

actually defending what originally belongs to him. This, I suggest, illustrates Girard's point

that in the mimetic process '*the aggressor has always already been attacked*'– or, as he puts it

elsewhere:[193]

> In the quarrel which puts him in opposition to his rival, the subject reverses the
>
> logical and chronological order of desires in order to hide his imitation. He
>
> asserts that his own desire is prior to that of his rival; according to him, it is the
>
> mediator who is responsible for the rivalry. […] Now the mediator is a shrewd
>
> and diabolical enemy; he tries to rob the subject of his most prized
>
> possessions.[194]

In other words, the mimetic process is so internalized that the 'subject', or what Girard also

terms the 'disciple', cannot tell the difference between his own desire and that of the rival or

model.

Mick's desire, then, seems to illustrate what Girard calls the 'desire *according to*

Another', which he contrasts with the 'desire *according to Oneself*'.[195] In other words, desire,

for Girard, is anything but autonomous; that is, it is always borrowed from 'the Other' – or the

br*other*, as we see in *The Caretaker*.[196] In fact, Mick does not only try to appropriate Aston's

desire but, indeed, seems, at times, to emulate Aston himself, especially when he attempts to

assume Aston's multiple roles, not only as Davies's host and potential employer but also as an

interior decorator. Note, for example, how Mick comes up with an exaggerated plan for

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[193] René Girard, *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre*, trans. by Mary Baker
(East Lansing: Michigan State University, 2010 [2007]), p. 18 <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/lib/lancaster/detail.action?docID=3338251> [accessed 13 Aug 2014].
[194] Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, p. 11.
[195] Ibid., p. 4.
[196] Ibid., p.5.

decorating the house and 'turn[ing] the place into a penthouse', which clearly outdoes Aston's plan to build 'a shed […] outside' and 'put in a partition . . . in one of the rooms along the landing'.[197] Still more important, I argue, is how Mick attempts to reverse the older-brother/ younger-brother positions as he claims to be concerned about Aston's future – 'If you got an *older brother*', Mick tells Davies, 'you want to push him on, you want to see him make his way. Can't have him idle. He's only doing himself harm. That's what I say'.[198]

To put this in Girardian terms, Mick's desire is not aimed so much at Aston's desire as at his '*being*' – for 'imitative desire', as Girard puts it, 'is always a desire to *be* Another'.[199] This interpretation, I admit, is not easy to accept, especially since the taciturn Aston does not make a very convincing 'model'. However, it is in exactly this taciturnity, I would argue, that Aston's power lies – as Valerie Minogue rightly observes, 'While Mick, the younger brother is a bundle of undirected energies, flexing his muscles, but achieving nothing, it is Aston, the gentle elder brother who has authority. This', Minogue goes on to explain, 'appears to derive from his having his silences under control'.[200]

Aston's authority is, perhaps, most dramatically illustrated by Mick's repeated departure from the room each time Aston comes in, as though Aston's presence would eliminate Mick's. Also significant here is how Mick's '*iron bed*', the only item he keeps in the room, is buried under Aston's 'furniture', as if to suggest Mick is overshadowed by Aston. In fact, even when their fraternal 'conflict' appears to reach its climax, with Mick breaking Aston's Buddha, it is Mick, again, who makes to leave the house – as he tells Davies, '[…] Anyone would think this house was all I got to worry about. […] I'm not worried about this house. I'm not interested. My brother can worry about it. He can do it up, he can decorate it,

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[197] *Caretaker*, p. 58; pp. 38-9.
[198] Ibid., p. 47; my emphasis.
[199] Girard*, Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, p. 53; Ibid., p. 83; my emphasis.
[200] Valerie Minogue, 'Taking Care of the Caretaker', in *Pinter*: *A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Arthur Ganz (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1972), p.77.

he can do what he likes with it'.[201] Not surprisingly, Davies seems to interpret this as a sign of Mick's definitive departure, declaring to Aston, 'But your brother's gone! He's gone!'[202]

The displacement of one sibling by the other has, of course, resonance with the fraternal narratives of the Hebrew Bible. As Naomi Steinberg points out:

> In Genesis the behavior of men in conflict appears … [as an] attempt to displace [one's] opponent from the scene. In other words, one man has to deprive another of something in order for the first man to succeed. Abraham expels Ishmael; Jacob cheats Esau out of his birthright.[203]

A biblical reading of the fraternal conflict in the play would, then, see the Mick-Aston relationship as a *reversal* of the fraternal pairings in Genesis, where, of course, the older brother or first-born son is usually supplanted by the younger one.

Steinberg makes clear that, within the Hebrew Bible, it is invariably necessary for the heir to dwell in the father's household or land if he is to operate as a future patriarch:

> Inheritance is patrilocal; it depends upon the heir residing in his father's family household. […] The situation of multiple offspring (Ishmael and Isaac, and Jacob and Esau) inevitably leads to the separation of brothers to different lands. This is because of a concern that the family land not be divided; land as livelihood requires that the property remain intact.[204]

Thus, in territorial terms, the younger brother in these biblical fraternal pairings operates, as it were, as a settler figure, whilst the older one as a displaced or dispossessed one. For instance, in the Isaac-Ishmael narrative, Isaac, the designated heir, settles in the land of his father, Abraham, while Ishmael, the disinherited son, 'dwelt in the wilderness' (Genesis 21:20). By the same token, Jacob, Isaac's designated heir, eventually 'dwelt in the land wherein his father

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[201] *Caretaker*, p. 72.
[202] Ibid., p. 74.
[203] Naomi Steinberg, *Kinship and Marriage in Genesis* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), p.105.
[204] Ibid., pp. 25-26.

was a stranger, in the land of Canaan' (Genesis 37:1), whilst his older twin brother, Esau, 'went into the country [far] from the face of his brother Jacob' and 'thus dwelt […] in mount Seir' (Genesis 36:6-8). And it is only in this sense, I would suggest, that Aston mirrors the settler figures of Isaac and Jacob, whilst Mick, the younger brother, mirrors the biblical dispossessed brothers – namely Ishmael and Esau. The Aston-Mick pair, thus, functions as, I say, as a reversal of the older-younger fraternal pairs of Genesis, for, in the play, it is the eldest brother who is technically property-less yet settles in his younger brother's rightfully owned property, whereas the younger brother is the one who appears to be dislodged.

Girard, of course, pays special attention to fraternal conflict in the Hebrew Bible: 'In every case', he writes, 'from the first lines of Genesis, we have the theme of warring brothers or twins: Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his eleven brothers, etc'.[205] Girard cites these biblical narratives to exemplify what he calls 'the sacrificial crisis', which he defines as

> a crisis of distinctions […] affecting the cultural order […] [which] is nothing more than a relegated system of distinctions in which differences among individuals are used to establish their 'identity' and mutual relationship.[206]

In other words, Girard believes that reciprocal enmity in the fraternal relationship eventually leads to 'the destruction of differences' between the brothers 'as the resemblance between […] [them] grows ever stronger until each presents a mirror image of the other'.[207] This mimetic conflict grows so intense that 'it is [only] by violence' – that is, 'by the expulsion of one of the brothers [,] that the crisis is resolved, and differentiation returns once again'.[208]

In *The Caretaker*, Mick and Aston most resemble each other in their respective relationships to the room. A Girardian reading of the fraternal dynamic scene in *The Caretaker* would, then, see Mick's eventual departure as akin to the 'expulsion of one of the brothers' in

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[205] Girard, *Things Hidden*, p. 142.
[206] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 54.
[207] Ibid., p. 52.
[208] Girard, *Things Hidden*, p.142.

the biblical narratives. Although Mick is not exactly 'expelled', his departure seems to amount to the same thing, for some sense of 'differentiation' is suggested to return after he concedes the house to Aston. As long as both brothers lay claim on the house, it is hard to differentiate between them, especially given their duplicate roles as employers, hosts, landlords. The elimination of one of the brothers, then, would guarantee the return of difference in the household.

If we were to interpret the ending, Mick's departure would be not so much victory or defeat as 'sacrifice' – a key term, of course, for Girard. Violence, according to Girard, can only be ended by the means of 'sacrifice' – that is, when members of one social group unanimously displace the violence that threatens them on to a 'sacrificial victim' chosen from 'outside'.[209] Girard, thus, regards the practice of 'sacrifice' in primitive societies as 'an instrument of prevention in the struggle against violence'.[210]

In the case of fraternal enmity, however, the mimetic character of violence, argues Girard, leads to a 'sacrificial crisis' which usually ends in fratricide, or 'expulsion', as we see in the biblical narratives. In other words, the sacrificed would be an internal, rather than an external victim – as Girard puts it: 'Neighbours who had previously discharged their mutual aggressions on a third party, joining together in the sacrifice of an "outside" victim, now turn to sacrificing one another'.[211]

An alternative but equally plausible reading of the play's ending, though, would argue that it is, in fact, Davies, not Mick, who gets to be 'sacrificed' – at least in a symbolic sense. In other words, Davies's expulsion by the brothers might be interpreted as illustrating Girard's 'hypothesis of substitution as the basis for the practice of sacrifice'[212] – 'The victim', Girard writes, '[…] [functions] as a substitute for all the members of the community, offered up by

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[209] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 8.
[210] Ibid., p. 19.
[211] Ibid., p. 48.
[212] Ibid., p.3.

the members themselves […] to protect the entire community from its own violence'.[213] One could argue, therefore, that Davies's expulsion enables the brothers to displace their aggression toward each other onto a 'surrogate victim'. Note how Davies is almost blamed for the enmity between the brothers – 'Ever since you come into this house', says Mick, 'there's been nothing but trouble'.[214] This clearly resonates with Girard's remark that 'in certain sacrifices [when] the victim becomes an object of such hostility one must believe that it and it alone has been held responsible for the entire mimetic crises'.[215]

Although Davies's expulsion might be thought to create some kind of reconciliation between the brothers, it is still necessary to ask the question: is there any guarantee that the ghost of the brothers' enmity will not return to haunt them? After all, is not the enemy, as Derrida would say, 'a shadow of an ageless ghost'?[216]

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[213] Ibid., p.8.

[214] *Caretaker*, p. 71.

[215] Girard, *Things Hidden*, p. 24.

[216] This quote is taken from Derrida's *The Politics of Friendship* (1994) where he tries to rethink the political beyond the old categories of the friend-enemy (of which fraternity is one variation). The whole book is guided by Derrida's sustained reflection on the ambivalent statement, famously attributed to Aristotle – 'Oh my friends, there is no friend.' Derrida is interested in this declaration in so far it deconstructs both notions of friendship and enmity: if there were no friends, he basically argues, there would be no enemies. In other words, Derrida tries to make us imagine what a politics without friendship or enmity would look like – a politics in which there are merely beings in relation to each other. Derrida's full quote reads: 'One would then have the time of a world without friends, the time of a world without enemies. […] And anyone who would say 'O my friends, there are no friends', and again, *or* again, 'O enemies, there is no enemy', would convince us, following a cool, directly logical analysis of his statements, that he does not yet have a friend, but already no longer has an enemy. […] This would be, perhaps, as if someone had lost the enemy, keeping him only in memory, *the shadow of an ageless ghost*'. See Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. by George Collins (London and New York: Verso, 1997 [1994]), p.76; my emphasis.

CHAPTER 3

Waiting: *The Dumb Waiter*

> [The] essence [of man] is to be the one who waits.
> — Martin Heidegger[1]

> They also serve who only stand and waite.
> — John Milton[2]

As its title suggests, *The Dumb Waiter* (1957) is, among other things, a play about waiting, presenting as it does two hired killers, Ben and Gus, who *wait* in a basement room for a mysterious 'call' that indicates the arrival of their next victim. Whilst waiting for the call, Ben and Gus are summoned to undertake another kind of waiting – namely, responding to the food orders mysteriously sent down to them via a 'dumb waiter'.[3] Ben and Gus are, then, involved in two kinds of waiting. There is, indeed, an abstract, deep-structural level to this double scene of waiting, which is to do with service, vocation, or even all calling. To clarify, the play, I argue, presents two kinds of service. The first kind is very obvious – namely, the humble task of serving food. The second kind, I shall argue, is the very act of waiting. In short, I see within the scene of labour the ghost of both ethical service and *respons*ibility, particularly signified by the figure of the 'dumb waiter'.

In this chapter, then, I will argue that Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* uses its double scene of waiting to provoke new ways of re-conceptualizing responsibility in both ethical and political terms. In particular, the chapter focuses on the tension between what I propose to call dutiful responsibility, enacted by Ben, and absolute or irresponsible responsibility, enacted by

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[1] Martin Heidegger, 'The Turn', in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. by William Lovit (New York and London: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 42.

[2] John Milton, Sonnet XIX ('When I Consider How My Light Was Spent'), in *The Poetical Works of John Milton*, ed. by Helen Darbishire, 2 Vols (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), II, p. 155.

[3] Pinter*, The Dumb Waiter*, in *Plays 1*, pp. 113-149 (p. 118, p. 120, and p. 142).

Gus.[4] This tension, I argue, remains unresolved, especially through the play's ending. And for

this reason, in particular, I propose to read the play as a parable of responsibility.

The chapter, then, will probe Pinter's parabolic dramatization of responsibility in terms

of 'waiting' by engaging with a range of interconnected theories and ideas, including: the figure

of the waiter as a model for inauthenticity, drawing on Jean-Paul Sartre; the notion of moral

responsibility, drawing on Immanuel Kant; and the notions of 'infinite responsibility' and the

'pure gift', drawing on Levinas and Derrida, respectively.

Bad Faith

> The waiter in the café plays with his condition in order to *realize* it.
>
> — Sartre[5]

Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter*, as is well-known, in many ways echoes Samuel Beckett's *Waiting*

for Godot (1949).[6] However, whilst, in *Waiting for Godot*, the act of waiting famously takes

place upon 'a country road' by 'a tree', in *The Dumb Waiter*, it takes place in what seems to

have once been the kitchen of a café:[7]

> BEN   It probably used to be a café here, that's all. Upstairs.
>
> […]

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[4] The distinction I make here between the two forms of responsibility enacted by Ben and Gus is inspired by Derrida's arguing that one can only be truly responsible in so far as one betrays the traditional order of moral or ethical duty: 'The absolutes of duty and of responsibility', he writes, 'presume that one denounce, refute, and transcend, at the same time, all duty, all responsibility, and every human law. […] Absolute duty', he adds, 'demands that one behaves in an irresponsible manner'. See Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. by David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995 [1992]), p. 66. I will say more on this paradoxical notion of responsibility later in this chapter.

[5] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*: *An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. by Hazel E. Barnes (London: Methuen, 1958), p. 59. Sartre is an obvious influence on Pinter, owing mainly to Pinter's experience rehearsing and performing the role of Garcin in Sartre's *In Camera*, broadcast as one of the first productions in the BBC's 'The Wednesday Play' series in 1964. Critics have noted structural and thematic similarities between Pinter's *Old Time* (1970) and Sartre's *In Camera* (1944) (also named *No Exit*). See Batty, *The Theatre of Harold Pinter*, p. 106; and Marc Silverstein, *Harold Pinter and the Language of Cultural Power* (Lewisburg Pa: Bucknell University Press; London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1993), p. 113.

[6] Billington, for example, reads *The Dumb Waiter* as 'a kind of *Godot* in Birmingham' (p. 89).

[7] Samuel Beckett*, Waiting for Godot*: *A Tragicomedy in Two Acts* (London: Faber and Faber, 1956 [1948-1949]), p.7.

GUS   What, you mean this was the kitchen, down here?[8]

By having his characters, two *hired* killers or gunmen, wait within what seems to have been a commercial kitchen, what they call a 'business', Pinter, I would argue, presents a very particular experience of waiting, at the heart of which are no less particular notions of both service and work.[9]

Important here is the discourse of employment informing Ben and Gus's dialogue:

BEN   You get your holidays, don't you?

GUS   Only a fortnight.[10]

What makes Pinter's waiting pair particularly distinct from Beckett's tramps is, then, the fact of their employment. Vladimir and Estragon, it seems to me, '*simply* wait'; they wait because, as Vladimir puts it, they have *literally* 'nothing to do'.[11] Ben and Gus, by contrast, seem to have their waiting grounded in their work. It is, quite simply, part of their job:

GUS   Yes, but we've got to be on tap though, haven't we? You can't move out

of the house in case a call comes.[12]

Ben and Gus appear, then, to some extent, as the hired alter egos of Beckett's waiting *clochards*. In short, waiting, as it is presented in *The Dumb Waiter*, appears to be not simply the nothing of inaction but also the something of labour.[13]

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[8] *Dumb Waiter*, p.132.
[9] Ibid., p. 135.
[10] Ibid., p. 118.
[11] *Waiting for Godot*, p. 38; my emphasis; *Dumb Waiter*, p. 74.
[12] *Dumb Waiter*, p. 118.
[13] I am aware of the play's Marxian subtext, which has been noted by several critics. Jonathan Shandell, for example, reads it as an exploration of the deep structure of class division: '[T]he play's most urgent variable of identity', he says, 'is class'. From Jonathan Shandell, 'The "Other" Within us: The Rubin Vase of Class in *The Dumb Waiter*', in *Harold Pinter's The Dumb Waiter*, ed. by Mary F. Brewer (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009), pp. 161-171 (p. 162). John Russell Taylors, on the other hand, groups all Pinter's early plays, including *The Dumb Waiter*, with other works of social realism instantly recognizable by their 'kitchen sink' settings. See John Russel Taylor, *Anger and After: A Guide to the New British Theatre*, 2nd edn (London: Methuen, 1969), pp. 323-359. In my thesis, I argue that what makes Pinter's kitchen-set play distinct from its 'kitchen sink' contemporaries is that it does not simply appear to reflect the socio-political reality of its time. Rather, it seems to take up the very question of the political (or ethico-politcal) as its primary concern.

It should be noted, though, that Pinter's 'basement room' is presented not just as a working space but also a living or existential one, as particularly hinted at by its being furnished with '*two beds*'. It should also be noted how, on occasion, Ben and Gus do come close to evoking Beckett's existential scene:

> GUS *ties his laces, rises, yawns and begins to walk slowly to the door, left. He stops, looks down, and shakes his foot.*
>
> BEN *lowers his paper and watches him.* GUS *kneels and unties his shoe-lace and slowly takes off the shoe. He looks inside it and brings out a flattened matchbox. He shakes it and examines it. Their eyes meet.* BEN *rattles his paper and reads.* GUS *puts the matchbox in his pocket and bends down to put on his shoe. He ties his lace, with difficulty.* BEN *lowers his paper and watches him.*[14]

Here, Ben and Gus do not simply 'wait' but also appear to enact or perform waiting. Key to this theatrical waiting is the sense that its *telos*, namely the enigmatic Wilson, 'doesn't always come'.[15] Like Godot, who 'didn't say for sure he'd come', Wilson, as Gus puts it, 'might not come. He might just send a message'.[16] In short, Ben and Gus appear to wait despite knowing that the object of their waiting may not arrive. What this scene of objectless waiting leaves us with, then, is the act of waiting as such – an act that, for some, characterizes existence itself – as Jean-Paul Sartre writes in *Being and Nothingness* (1943), 'Our life is a long waiting'.[17]

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[14] *Dumb Waiter*, p. 113.

[15] Ibid., p. 128.

[16] *Dumb Waiter*, p. 128.

[17] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*: *An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. by Hazel E. Barnes (London: Methuen, 1958 [1943]), p. 537. Sartre is an obvious influence on Pinter, owing mainly to Pinter's experience rehearsing and performing the role of Garcin in Sartre's *In Camera*, broadcast as one of the first productions in the BBC's 'The Wednesday Play' series in 1964. Critics have noted structural and thematic similarities between Pinter's *Old Time* (1970) and Sartre's *In Camera* (1944) (also named *No Exit*). See Taylor-Batty, *The Theatre of Harold Pinter*, p. 106; and Marc Silverstein, *Harold Pinter and the Language of Cultural Power* (Lewisburg Pa: Bucknell University Press; London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1993), p. 113.

In this section, then, I will turn my attention from the play's presentation of waiting as a form of labour to its being a mode of living, or, if you will, existence. Put differently, I argue that the scene of labour enacted in *The Dumb Waiter* is complicated by its being interlaced with what we might call the scene of the everyday. Note, for instance, how the opening of the play appears to combine work with domesticity: 'BEN *is lying on a bed, left, reading a paper. GUS is sitting on a bed, right, tying his shoelaces, with difficulty. Both are dressed in shirts, trousers and braces.*'[18] Whilst Ben and Gus both appear to be dressed as for work, the act of reading a newspaper in bed suggests something closer to the domestic. In other words, Ben and Gus seem to be not only working for 'the organization' which hires them to kill but also *living* within or under its regime. Significant in this respect is the totalitarian character of this 'organization': 'You mutt', Ben tells Gus, 'Do you think we're the only branch of this organization? Have a bit of common. *They* got departments *for everything*.'[19]

Of particular significance here is Ben's characterization of 'the organization' as a vast, anonymous 'they'. The 'organization' can, then, be thought of in terms of the totalitarian mode of 'everyday' existence which Martin Heidegger, in his *Being and Time* (1927), calls 'the they' (*Das Man*): 'The "they", which supplies the answer to the question of the "*who*" of everyday Da-sein', writes Heidegger, 'is the "*nobody*" to whom every Da-sein has always already surrendered itself'.[20] In other words, *Dasein* – Heidegger's term for human being – is always already immersed in the impersonal being of 'the they' which inconspicuously shapes all the choices of everyday life. As Heidegger continues:

> The 'they' is […] everywhere […], but in such a manner that it has always stolen
>
> away whenever Dasein presses for a decision. Yet because the 'they' presents

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[18] *Dumb Waiter*, p. 113.

[19] Ibid., p. 131; my emphasis.

[20] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), pp. 165-166.

every judgement and decision as its own, it deprives the particular Dasein of its answerability.[21]

Existence under the sway of 'the they', then, is a form of '*subjection*' to the 'dictatorship' of others – 'Everyone', he writes, 'is the other, and no one is himself.'[22] And it is particularly in everyday activities, such as 'utilizing public means of transport and in making use of information services [like] the newspaper', that Heidegger finds a manifestation of the 'averageness' of 'the they'.[23] He refers to this 'average' mode of existence as 'publicness':

> Publicness proximally controls every way in which the world and Da-sein get interpreted, and it is always right […] By publicness everything gets obscured, and what has thus been covered up gets passed off as something familiar and accessible to everyone.[24]

And this sense of 'publicness' is what I very much discern in *The Dumb Waiter*. Particularly relevant to this, I would suggest, is the way Ben and Gus seem to quibble over whether *'they* say put on the kettle' or 'light the kettle':

> GUS How can you light a kettle?
>
> BEN It's a figure of speech! […]
>
> GUS I've never heard of it.
>
> BEN Light the kettle! It's common usage!
>
> GUS I think you've got it wrong.
>
> […]
>
> GUS They say put on the kettle.
>
> BEN (*taut*)   Who says?

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[21] Ibid., p.165.
[22] Ibid., pp. 164-165.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., p.165.

They stare at each other, breathing hard.[25]

Significant here is how each character tries to justify his point by impersonalizing it. Gus, for example, seems to prefer the expression 'put on the kettle' simply because he believes an indefinite 'they' uses it. Ben, too, justifies the correctness of the expression 'light the kettle' on account of its being '*common* usage', which I take as a variant of 'the Heideggerian they'. Both men, that is, appear to measure and interpret things in terms of what 'others' regard as common sense or 'publicness'. Indeed, Ben's hanging question 'Who says?' serves as an allusion to the groundless or unfounded authority of 'the they' – 'The "who"', writes Heidegger, 'is not this one, not that one […] The "who" is the neuter, *the "they"* [*Das Man*]'.[26]

Still more important to the play's dramatization of 'publicness', I will argue, is the way Ben and Gus appear to spend a lot of time idly chatting, not only about the usage of everyday English but also about football, their job, and the news. This prosaic kind of chatter illustrates the average discourse of 'the they', what comes to be known in Heidegger's existential philosophy as 'idle talk' – 'Idle talk', he writes, 'signifies […] [and] constitutes the kind of Being of everyday Dasein's understanding and interpreting'.[27] Put differently, 'idle talk' is, for Heidegger, the means by which 'the they' articulates something without ever getting at the heart of the matter. As he explains:

> Idle talk is the possibility of understanding everything without previously making the thing one's own. […] Idle talk is something which anyone can rake up; it not only releases one from the task of genuinely understanding, but develops an undifferentiated kind of intelligibility, for which nothing is closed off any longer.[28]

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[25] *Dumb Waiter*, p. 125.
[26] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 164.
[27] Ibid., p. 211.
[28] Ibid., p. 213.

In short, 'idle talk' expresses a shared understanding of the world that makes communication possible; however, this shared understanding, for Heidegger, is nothing but a form of 'average intelligibility', which glosses over the deeper significance of things and 'levels down' any genuine inquiry into their meaning. The manner in which 'idle talk' becomes pervasive, according to Heidegger, is 'by *gossiping* and *passing the word along*'.[29]

This gossiping, he adds, 'is not confined to [the] vocal […], but even spreads to what we write, where it takes the form of "scribbling"'.[30] Important here is the newspaper which is often cited as an example of what Heidegger calls 'scribbling'; in his lecture course 'The Will to Power as Art' (1936-37), Heidegger quotes Nietzsche's claim that 'in our time it is merely by means of an echo that events acquire their "greatness" – the echo of the newspaper'.[31] And this particular echo, the echo of the newspaper, is very much to be heard or overheard within *The Dumb Waiter*. Note the apparent triviality of the news that Ben reads in the paper – for example: 'A man of eighty-seven crawling under a lorry!' or 'A child of eight killed a cat!'[32] What is remarkable here is how Ben and Gus appear enthralled by this 'scribbling' or public chit-chat and how it appears to distract them from any genuine form of communication:

> BEN A man of eight-seven wanted to cross the road. But there was a
>
> lot of traffic. […] He couldn't see how he was going to squeeze through.
>
> So he crawled under a lorry.
>
> GUS He what?
>
> BEN He crawled under a lorry? A stationary lorry.
>
> GUS No?
>
> BEN The lorry started and ran over him.

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[29] Ibid., p. 212.
[30] Ibid.
[31] This lecture course appeared later as part of the first volume of Heidegger's *Nietzsche* (1961). See Martin Heidegger, 'The Will to Power as Art', in *Nietzsche*, trans. by David Farrell Krell, 2 vols (HarperSanFrancisco: San Francisco, 1991 [1979]), I, pp. 37-91 (p. 47).
[32] *Dumb Waiter*, pp. 115- 114.

GUS   Go on!

BEN   That's what it says here.

GUS   Get away.

BEN   It's enough to make you want to puke, isn't it?

GUS   Who advised him to do a thing like that?

BEN   A man of eighty-seven crawling under a lorry!

GUS   It's unbelievable.

BEN   It's down here in black and white.

GUS   Incredible![33]

This scene does, though, for a moment, glance toward what Heidegger would see as authentic being. According to Heidegger, Dasein can only exist authentically by projecting itself constantly onto the horizon of its own death – hence Heidegger's famous term, 'Being-towards-death'. By crawling under the lorry, then, the man of eighty-seven, to some extent, I would argue, literalizes 'being-towards-death' and so the play does, for a moment, open a window onto this scene of authenticity. However, this *moment* of authenticity is exactly that and no more than that because, as Heidegger writes, idle talk renders death 'as a mishap which is constantly occurring – as a "case of death"'.[34] In this way, then, 'the they' self regards death as something 'public' or impersonal and thus, 'talks of it', Heidegger adds, 'in a "fugitive" manner […] as if to say, "One of these days one will die too, in the end; but right now it has nothing to do with us"'.[35] This is, to some extent, reflected in Gus's inane commentary – 'It's unbelievable', 'Incredible!', etc. Indeed, Ben's 'It's enough to make you want to puke' in the end veers away from the scene of death and toward Friedrich Nietzsche's metaphoric

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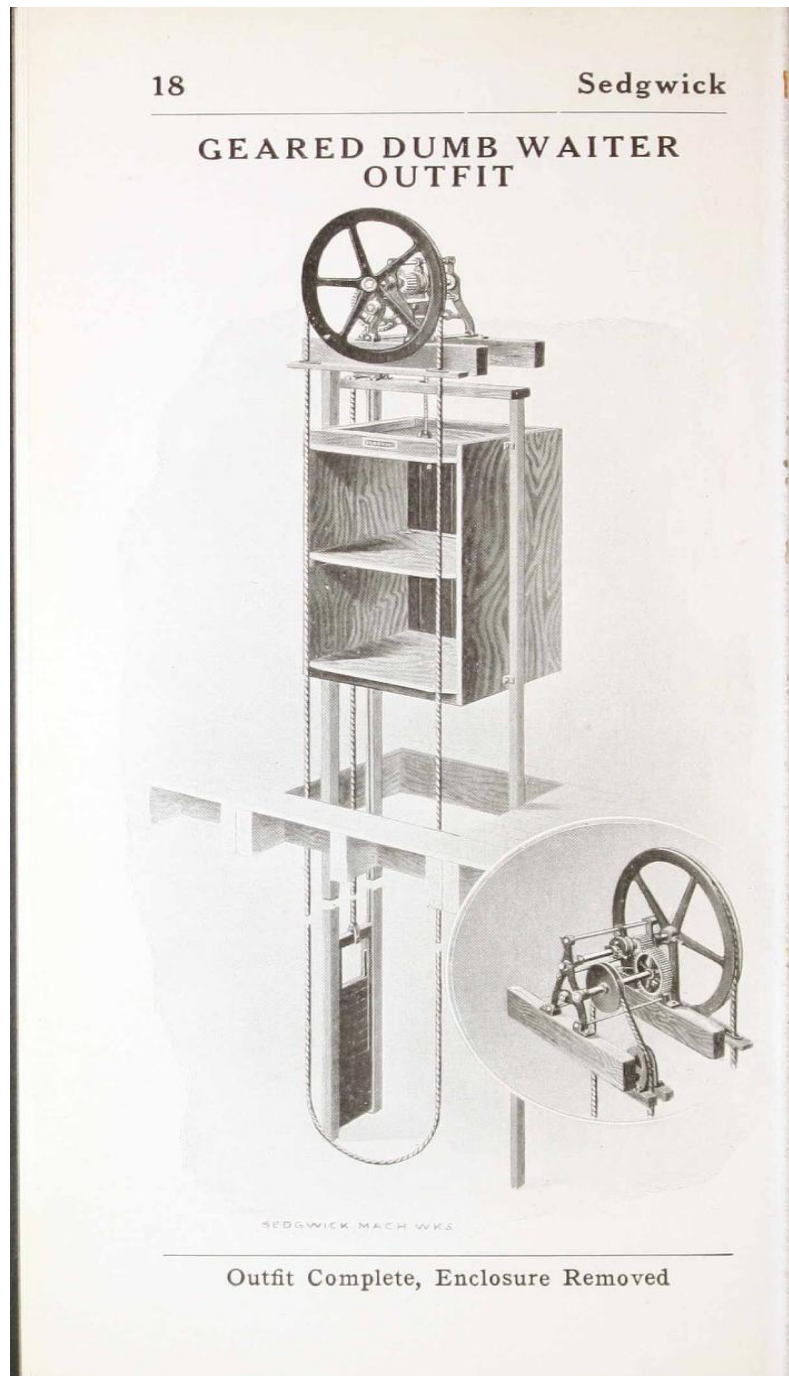[33] Ibid., p. 114.
[34] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 296.
[35] Ibid., p. 297.

disparagement of the newspapers and their readers – 'Just look at these superfluous ones! They vomit their gall and call it the newspaper'.[36]

Ben's newspaper, though, is not the only stage-prop in the play that serves to suggest inauthentic existence in Pinter's 'waiting room'. There is also, and still more significantly, the dumb-waiter itself, which appears as an instrument for transferring food from the basement kitchen to the café upstairs. Below is an illustration of a simple dumb-waiter made around 1923, which may indicate how the one in Pinter's play operates:[37]

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[36] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nietzsche: Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* trans. by Adrian Del Caro, ed. by Robert Pippin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006 [1891]), p. 35.

[37] *Sedgwick Dumb Waiters, Elevators* (New York: Sedgwick Machine Works, 1923), 2nd edn, Catalog O, p. 6 < https://archive.org/details/SedgwickHandPowerElevatorsAndDumbWaiters> [accessed 13 August 2016].

GEARED DUMB WAITER OUTFIT

18   Sedgwick

SEDGWICK MACH WKS.

Outfit Complete, Enclosure Removed

As its name suggests, the dumbness of the dumb-waiter (its silence, that is) seems to be one of

its most prized features. We should note that the original version of these silent machines was

a simple item of furniture, no more than a standing set of trays, as illustrated here:[38]

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[38] A 19th Century Georgian-Style Mahogany Dumbwaiter from <https://www.1stdibs.com/furniture/tables/side-tables/fine-19th-century-georgian-style-mahogany-dumbwaiter/id-f_1972393> [accessed 21 August 2017].

This original dumb-waiter was invented to replace over-garrulous servants, as is made clear by a 1732 article in *The Gentleman's Magazine*:

> *Tom Waitwell*, a *Footman*, complains, that he and his Brotherhood have had the Honour to wait on the *Quality* at Table; by which Kind of Service they became Wits, Beaus, and Politicians, adopted their Masters Jokes, copied their Manners, and knew all the Scandal of the Beau-Monde; but are now supplanted by a certain stupid Utensil call'd a *Dumb Waiter*.[39]

According to the aptly named Tom Waitwell, the dumb waiter replaces the talking waiter. And this was, of course, to some extent literally the case – the servant in 1732 England being

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[39] *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 2 (1732), p. 702.

superseded by a piece of furniture; but it is also, I would argue, *metaphorically* the case in that the modern waiter is, unlike Tom, expected to be silent. In other words, every modern waiter, it could be argued, is made in the image of the *dumb*-waiter.

It is no accident, then, that Sartre, writing in 1943, cites the waiter as the epitome of what he calls 'bad faith', a key concept in existentialist philosophy which refers to a condition of 'inauthenticity' and passive existence. Consider how 'dumb' and machine-like the Sartrean waiter is:

> Let us consider this waiter in the café. His movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid. He comes toward the patrons with a step a little too quick. He bends forward a little too eagerly; his voice, his eyes express an interest a little too solicitous for the order of the customer. Finally there he returns, trying to imitate in his walk the inflexible stiffness of some kind of *automation* […] All his behavior seems to us a game. He applies himself to chaining his movements as if they were mechanisms, the one regulating the other; his gestures and even his voice seem to be *mechanisms*.[40]

For Sartre, then, the waiter embodies inauthentic being, a mode of self-deceiving existence where human beings substitute their 'authentic' being as free-willing agents with the roles they are playing in their lives. Thus, they can be compared, Sartre would say, to the mechanical – or, indeed 'dumb' – waiter, who reduces himself to his waiter-being.

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[40] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 59; my emphasis. Sartre's view of human behaviour as a form of 'acting' makes us think of his existentialist philosophy as a kind of *mise-en-scène* of the self. Sartre's discourse on 'authenticity', then, is particularly significant for the theatre in that actors who present themselves as authentic and truthful, it can be argued, are particularly in 'bad faith' as they are nothing but an artificial construction that does not deceive the spectators. For more on the authenticity of the artist and actor, see Patrice Pavis, *The Routledge Dictionary of Performance and Contemporary Theatre*, trans. by Andrew Brown (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 18.

Something of the passivity of Sartre's 'dumb' waiter is, I argue, evoked by Ben and Gus who, by virtue of their waiting for 'the call', appear unable to act out of their free will. Rather, they seem to act *only* in response to 'the call'. In other words, despite their seeming activity, as suggested by the fact of their employment, Ben and Gus are very much *acted upon*. Relevant here, I suggest, is Ben and Gus's ceremonial recitation of their 'instructions', which recalls, to some extent, Sartre's account of the waiter:

> BEN (*wearily*)   Be quiet a minute. Let me give you your instructions.
>
> GUS   What for? We always do it the same way, don't we?
>
> BEN   Let me give you your instructions.
>
> > GUS *sighs and sits next to* BEN *on the bed. The instructions are stated and repeated automatically.*
> >
> > When we get the call, you go over and stand behind the door.
>
> GUS   Stand behind the door.
>
> BEN   If there's a knock on the door you don't answer it.
>
> GUS   If there's a knock on the door I don't answer it.
>
> BEN   But there won't be a knock on the door.
>
> GUS   So I won't answer it.
>
> BEN   When the bloke comes in –
>
> GUS   When the bloke comes in –
>
> BEN   Shut the door behind him.
>
> GUS   Shut the door behind him.
>
> BEN   Without divulging your presence.
>
> GUS   Without divulging your presence
>
> BEN   He'll see me and come towards me.
>
> GUS   He'll see you and come towards you.

    BEN He won't see you.

    GUS (*absently*) Eh?[41]

If we had to identify *one* of Ben and Gus as the 'dumb waiter', it would, I suggest, be Gus. Of the two, he is the one most bidden to be silent. Note, for example, how Ben chides him for asking 'so many damn questions'–

    BEN […] What's the matter with you? You're always asking me

      questions. What's the matter with you?

    […]

    GUS No, I was just wondering.

    BEN Stop wondering. You've got a job to do. Why don't you just do it and

    shut up.[42]

  Although Gus's silence might be taken as a mark of 'bad faith', or inauthentic being, there is a sense, I will argue, in which his silence is the mark of authenticity. Key here is the biblical figure of the 'Suffering Servant' in Isaiah 53, 'He [who] was oppressed, and […] was afflicted, yet […] *opened not his mouth*: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, as a sheep before shearers is *dumb*, so he openeth not his mouth' (Isaiah 53:7; my emphasis). Levinas, ideed, cites the Suffering Servant as an exemplification of the ethical subject, he who passively assumes responsibility for the other to the point of death and persecution: 'The ego', writes Levinas, 'is through and through, in its very position, responsibility or diacony, as in chapter 53 of Isaiah'.[43] The figure of the Suffering Servant is, I suggest, particularly evoked by Gus at the very end of the play when he appears silent even as he is revealed to be the chosen victim, the one to be killed.

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[41] *Dumb Waiter*, pp. 142-143.
[42] Ibid., p. 127; my emphasis.
[43] Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*, trans. by Nidra Poller, ed. by Richard A. Cohen (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003 [1972]), p. 33.

I will return to this moment at the very end of this chapter. In the following section, however, I will argue that the scene of waiting presented in Pinter's play dramatizes not only the subject's existential condition but also his radical relationality to the Other.

The Other

> I could conceive of another Abraham for myself […] who was prepared to satisfy the demand for a sacrifice immediately, *with the promptness of a waiter*.
> — Kafka[44]

It is no surprise, of course, to find dumbness an important motif in a Pinter play, especially given his famous 'silences'. In *The Dumb Waiter*, however, silence can be interpreted positively as coincident with the play's vision of waiting (that is to say waiting *on*) as a model of authentic being. Crucial to this vision is, I suggest, the Christian veneration for waiting at tables. Consider, for example, the parable of the returning master who rewards his watchful servants by waiting on them (Luke 12:37).[45] This reversal of roles is, of course, repeated by Jesus himself in the Last Supper when he assumes the role of waiter – 'For [who] is greater', he asks his disciples, 'he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? Is not he that sitteth at meat? *But I am among you as he that serveth*' (Luke 22:27; my emphasis). In the New Testament, the Greek word, most often, used to refer to the act of serving is *diakonia* – hence, the Christian concept, diacony, most famously in evidence when in Acts, the Apostles appoint seven deacons to '*serve tables*' (Acts 6:2-3; my emphasis).[46]

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[44] Franz Kafka, 'Abraham', in *Parables and Paradoxes* <http://zork.net/~patty/pattyland/kafka/parables/abraham.htm > [accessed 28 March 2015]; my emphasis.

[45] 'Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them'.

[46] *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* defines *diakonia*, in its basic usage, as '"waiting at table", "providing for physical sustenance", or "supervising meals"'. See *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. by Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), p. 154; 'Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore […] look ye out among you seven men […] whom we may appoint over this business' (Acts 6:2-3).

This vocation is, I suggest, most elaborately encrypted in *The Dumb Waiter* by means of the 'sealed' 'envelope' with '*twelve* matches' that is mysteriously sent to Ben and Gus 'under the door'.[47] Being dispatched in an envelope, the *twelve* matches, I propose, are suggestive of Jesus's twelve apostles, which literally means 'the sent ones'.[48] Moreover, being indispensable in a late 1950s kitchen, the matches, I suggest, are to be taken as a coded call to prepare food. This coded message seems to foreshadow the series of food orders that are yet to be sent down to Ben and Gus via the dumb-waiter. And it is particularly in this call to provide food that I see a cryptic allusion to the diacony.

The term 'diacony', in fact, plays a significant part in Levinas's account of the ethical subject as inescapably bound to the Other in a relation of 'infinite responsibility' – this he calls 'a fundamental *diacony* that constitutes the subjectivity of the subject'.[49] Levinas here draws on the Greek usage of the word '*diakonos*' meaning 'servant'; however, given the term's conspicuously Christian history, Levinas clearly invests his notion of ethical service with theological significance.[50] Hence, for instance, his declaration that, 'In my relation to the other, I hear the Word of God'.[51] And crucial to this relation of service, it seems, is, again, the act of providing food: 'To recognize the Other', writes Levinas, 'is to recognize a hunger. To recognize the Other is to give'.[52]

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[47] *Dumb Waiter*, p. 123; my emphasis.

[48] The link between the twelve matches in the envelope and Christ's apostles is noted by some Pinter critics: 'While on the subject of religious symbolism', writes Steven H. Gale, 'it should be pointed out that some critics have detected aspects of Christianity symbolized in the play'. Gale particularly refers to '[t]he attempt to link the twelve matches in the envelope to Christ's apostles, and the trinity of rings on the stove to the Christian tradition'. See Steven H. Gale, *Butter's Going Up: A Critical Analysis of Harold Pinter's Work* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1977), p. 60.

[49] Emmanuel Levinas, *Proper Names*, trans. by Michael B. Smith (London: The Athlone Press, 1996 [1976]), p. 74.

[50] Ibid., p. 178.

[51] Levinas, *Entre Nous, On Thinking-of-the-Othe*r, trans. by Michael B. Smith and Barbra Harshav (New York: Colombia University Press, 1998 [1991]), p. 110.

[52] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 75.

Giving, in Levinasian terms, though, does not so much denote compassion or charity as 'substitution'. Substitution, of course, is one of the most powerful concepts Levinas uses to denote how other-directed the human being actually is, or should be. The concept arises directly from his view of the subject as being held 'hostage' by the other, hostage in the sense that it cannot escape its responsibility for the other, a responsibility that should go so far as to give oneself to, and even for, the other. And what is, for us, so striking about this Levinasian vision is his talk of feeding the other – 'To give […]', he explains, 'is to take the bread out of one's own mouth, to nourish the hunger of another with one's own fasting'.[53]

Note in this connection how Ben and Gus send up *'all* [the food they]'ve got'.[54] Ben and Gus, that is, do not just give a surplus of their food; rather, they give till they have nothing. 'What about us?' cries Gus, '[…] I'm thirsty too. I'm starving […] I could do with a bit of sustenance myself'.[55] Ben and Gus's dilemma, it seems, is not simply being asked to serve food but rather to supply it from their own resources:

> BEN (*purposefully*)   Quick! What have you got in that bag?
>
> GUS   Not much.
>
> […]
>
> GUS *examines the contents of the bag and brings them out, one by one.*
>
> GUS   Biscuits. A bar of chocolate. Half a pint of milk.
>
> BEN   That all?
>
> GUS   Packet of tea.
>
> BEN   Good.
>
> GUS   We can't send the tea. That's all we've got.
>
> […]

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[53] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being, or, Beyond Essence*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (The Hague-Boston: Nijhoff, 1981 [1974]), p. 56.
[54] *Dumb Waiter*, p. 141; my emphasis.
[55] Ibid.

> BEN   What else is there?
>
> GUS (*reaching into bag*)   One Eccles cake.
>
> […]
>
> GUS   Can't I keep it?
>
> BEN   No, you can't. Get the plate.[56]

Gus's reluctance to give away his food is clear here. Note, for example, how he protests that they 'can't send the tea' because it is 'all the tea [they]'ve got', or how he asks Ben to allow him to keep the Eccles cake. It could be argued, then, that Gus does not so much *give* his food as *gives* it *up*. In other words, Gus is being called, it seems, to give to the point of wanting. And this, I would argue, almost literalizes what Levinas calls 'being *torn* from oneself for another in giving to the other the bread from one's mouth'.[57] To clarify, the Levinasian self gives without reserve; it gives, as Levinas puts it, 'despite oneself' and 'in interrupting the for-oneself'.[58] What is sacrificed, then, in the event of absolute giving is the very unity of the self that enables it to give – that is, its self-possession. And it is just such absolute giving that we glimpse, I argue, in *The Dumb Waiter*.

Significant in this scene of giving is the subordination of those who give to those who receive. Ben and Gus's subordination is particularly suggested by the vertical relation they have with those to whom they serve food – namely, whoever it is in the café upstairs from which the food orders are being sent down to the basement-kitchen. In view of the play's presentation of waiting as a form of 'substitution', I see within this hierarchical structure a symbolic scene of ethical obedience. In this sense, the elevated position of the café, I would argue, literalizes what Levinas calls 'the dimension of height in which the Other is placed'.[59]

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[56] Ibid., pp. 133-134.

[57] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being,* p. 79; my emphasis.

[58] Ibid., p. 56.

[59] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 86. The 'height' of the Other, here, is not to be conceived of in spatial terms. It is a metaphor Levinas uses to denote the radical inequality inherent in the self-Other relationship. As M. Jamie Ferreira explains: 'Several things are at stake for Levinas in using this metaphor of height. One is to affirm that

Put differently, giving to the Other, for Levinas, is not to give to an inferior or even an equal but, paradoxically, 'to give to the master, to the lord, to him whom one approaches as ''You''in a dimension of height'.[60] It is no surprise, then, that Levinas goes so far as to call this form of giving a 'subjection to the Other'.[61] And it is, in a sense, from this position of ethical subjection, I shall argue, that Ben and Gus give up their food.

Pertinent to this asymmetrical relation between those who give and those who receive is the non-reciprocity of the act of giving. Significantly, the dumb-waiter is *only* used to communicate demands from above – never to provide or give to those below. Note, for example, how Gus's suggestion – 'May be they can send us down a bob' – is completely ignored by Ben, as if the possibility that 'they' might 'send' or give anything were wholly unthinkable.[62] Ben responds, indeed, to Gus's suggestion by asking, 'What else is there?'– that is, in Gus's bag, to send upstairs.[63] There is a sense, then, in which, 'they', the café upstairs, can only receive or consume. And, indeed, I see in the hyperbolic demands of those above what Derrida calls, 'the absolute demand of the other, the inextinguishable appeal, the unquenchable thirst for the gift' which, for him, only 'beggars can signify'.[64]

In Pinter's play, however, the absolute demand of the other is, paradoxically, signified not by beggars but rather by diners, and indeed by diners whose demands become increasingly extravagant. Their orders begin with the relatively quotidian – 'Two braised steak and chips. Two sago puddings. Two teas without sugar'– but develop to 'high class' cuisine: first, 'Macaroni Pastitsio. Ormitha Macarounada' and, then, 'Bamboo Shoots, Water Chestnuts and

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my responsibility for the other subordinates me to the other. The demand is not made by an equal; rather than requesting me, the other "commands" me. In other words, it affirms that my responsibility for the other is not the result of my initiative – the other "commands" me; I do not choose to be commanded. Also at stake is that the notion of height precludes any idea of "pity" for the other'. See M. Jamie Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving: A Commentary on Kierkegaard's Works of Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 219.

[60] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 75.
[61] Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity,* p. 98.
[62] *Dumb Waiter*, p. 133.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Jacques Derrida, *Given time. I, Counterfeit Money*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992 [1991]), p. 137.

Chicken. One Char Siu and Beansprouts'.[65] Even after being told that 'there's no more food'

to give, they ask for 'Scampi'.[66] Still more striking is their complaining that the food they have

received is 'stale', 'melted', 'sour', and 'mouldy'.[67] Important in this connection is Gus's

protest against the ingratitude of the recipient(s) upstairs: 'We send him up all we've got and

he's not satisfied. No, honest, it's enough to make the cat laugh'.[68]

However, it is precisely this lack of appreciation, Levinas would say, that characterizes

real giving. As he writes in 'The Trace of the Other' (1963), 'A work conceived in its ultimate

nature requires a radical generosity of the same who in the work goes unto the Other. It then

requires an *ingratitude* of the other'.[69] Radical giving, for Levinas, designates a wholly

unreciprocated movement of the gift from the giver to the receiver. The absolute asymmetry of

the gift can only be guaranteed, according to Levinas, in so far as the gift is not reciprocated

by any kind of gratitude on the part of the receiver – 'Gratitude', he notes, 'would be in fact

the *return* of the movement to its origin'.[70] And it is particularly in the excessiveness of the

café requests that I see a demand to give without expectation of repayment.

For all its *de-haut-en-bas* imperiousness, the café above does, then, evoke the absolute

demand of Derrida's beggars. Note Gus's remark, 'May be they can send us down a bob' –

which I interpret not as hope of repayment but rather of reversed charity, for it is here the donor

who speculates on the possibility of a hand-out from the donee. In his reading of Marcel

Mauss's influential book, *The Gift* (1954), Derrida traces the origins of alms-giving to a

tradition in primitive societies in which the poor 'occupy the place of the dead man or the spirit,

the return of the ghost, that is, of an always imminent threat'.[71] The practice of alms-giving,

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[65] *Dumb Waiter*, p. 131, p. 36, p. 136, and p. 138.
[66] Ibid., p. 140; p. 146.
[67] Ibid., p. 140.
[68] Ibid., p. 141.
[69] Levinas, 'The Trace of the Other', trans. by Alphonso Lingis, in *Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy*, ed. by Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 345-359 (p. 349).
[70] Ibid.
[71] Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, p. 138.

then, has initially come to appease the gods or spirits of the dead. Hence, the obligatory status of its more developed form in later times. As Derrida puts it:

> A beggar always looks threatening, incriminating, accusatory, vindictive in the absolute of his very demand. This demand comes and comes back from the other. You must pay, in other words "give", so as to acquit yourself with regard to the spirit, the ghost, the god, or all that comes back. You must pay, you must indeed pay and pay well [*il faut* bien *payer*] so that it comes back without haunting you or so that it goes away, which amounts to the same thing. In any case, you must get in its good graces and make peace with it. Whence the institution of alms.[72]

That Derrida sees the beggar or poor as occupying 'the place of the dead man' is, of course, particularly significant for us, since, time and again, Ben and Gus talk about the café almost as if it were a ghost. Ben remarks that 'it probably *used* to be a café here', and from this Gus speculates whether 'this *was* the kitchen, down here' (my emphasis). Ben and Gus's use of the past tense makes clear the current dormancy of the café, especially given that it cannot be still operating without any cooks in the kitchen below. Having gone 'into liquidation', as Ben speculates, the café, it seems, is run by some inscrutable force, particularly alluded to by Gus's unanswered question – 'Who's got it now? If they [the previous owners] moved out, who moved in?'[73] Gus, again, gestures towards the spectral character of the restaurant when he declares – 'Yes, but what happens when we are not here? What do they do then? All these menus coming down and nothing going up. It might have been going on like this for years'.[74]

The relentless demands of the café appear, I suggest, to mirror the demand of the destitute which, in Derrida's words, 'comes and comes back from the other'. Although this

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[72] Ibid., p. 139.
[73] *Dumb Waiter*, p. 132.
[74] Ibid., p. 135.

demand is suggested to have been going on 'for years' before Ben and Gus's arrival, they are, it seems, obligated not only to answer it but also answer to it. It is no surprise, then, that Ben goes so far as to apologize to the ghost-guest(s) in the café for the poor quality of the food that he and Gus send up – note when he repeats, via the speaking-tube, 'Oh, I'm sorry to hear that'.[75] In acknowledging the inadequacy of his giving, Ben appears to deny himself any possibility of self-congratulation that might reward him for his giving.

The Law

Notwithstanding all that I have argued thus far, Ben's offering, for all its seeming gratuity, is still, I suggest, locked within an economy of debt. It is true that Ben does not seem to expect his offering to be met with gratitude; however, I find in the '*great deference*' with which he addresses those upstairs a profound sense of obligation.[76] The demands made by the mysterious café upstairs appear to be invested with some kind of legal or political authority. This is particularly exemplified, I suggest, in the very mannered way in which Ben, via the speaking-tube, addresses the café:

> BEN […] (*Speaking with great deference.*)   Good evening. I'm sorry
>
> to – bother you, but we just thought we'd better let you know that we
>
> haven't got anything left. We sent up all we had. There's no more food
>
> down here.
>
> *He brings the tube slowly to ear.*
>
> What?
>
> *To mouth.*
>
> What?

[75] Ibid., p. 140.
[76] Ibid., p. 139.

> *To ear. He listens. To mouth.*
>
> No, all we had we sent up.
>
> […]
>
> *To ear.*
>
> Yes. Yes.
>
> *To mouth.*
>
> Yes certainly. Certainly. Right away.[77]

Ben's 'service' here seems to be not so much an act of pure giving but rather a form of politeness as hinted at by his almost ceremonial language – 'Good evening. I'm sorry to – bother you'. This very mannered politeness, I argue, is similar to the kind of 'ritualized decorum' which Derrida sees 'in the very language of *duty*': 'A gesture "of friendship" or "of politeness"', he writes, 'would be neither friendly nor polite if it were purely and simply to obey a ritual rule. […] One must not be friendly or polite out of duty'.[78]

In other words, Ben does not give, it seems, in a spirit of sheer generosity. Rather, his giving seems to be moved by a sense of duty, which, again, ties his giving to an economy of debt: 'If you give because you must give', Derrida remarks, 'then you no longer give'.[79] In this case, it would be as though you were paying back a debt. Such obligated giving, for Derrida would not be regarded as a 'pure gift' – '[A] gift', he writes, 'must not be *bound*, in its purity, nor even *binding*, obligatory or obliging'.[80] In other words, in order for a gift to be 'pure' it should not be contaminated by any kind of self-interest, even if it is the fulfilling of a moral or religious duty. And the dutiful character of Ben's giving, I would argue, is particularly suggested by the discourse of propriety he uses. Note, for example, when he tells Gus, 'We'*d*

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[77] Ibid., pp. 139-140.
[78] Jacque Derrida, 'Passions: "An Oblique Offering", in *On the Name*, trans. by David Wood, John P. Leavey, and Ian McLeod, ed. by Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995 [1993]), pp. 3-31 (p. 7).
[79] Derrida, *Given Time*, p. 156.
[80] Ibid., p. 137; p. 140.

better send something up', or when he tells his interlocutor(s) upstairs, 'We just thought *we'd*

better let you know that we haven't got anything left'.[81] This way of speaking suggests a kind

of deontological reasoning which re-inscribes the gift into the realm of obligation – as Derrida

argues:

> The gift, if there is any, does not even belong to practical reason. […] It should
>
> remain a stranger to the law or to the "il faut" (you must, you have to) of this
>
> practical reason. It *should* surpass *duty* itself: duty beyond duty [*Il* devrait *passer*
>
> le devoir *mérne: devoir au-delà du devoir*].[82]

The pure gift, for Derrida, then, obeys no objective rule or law. It would be wrong to

say, though, that Derridean ethics rejects the concept of duty all together. In fact, duty, for

Derrida, is the very condition of ethicality, but only insofar it is divested of any legislative

frame of reference. Hence, his hyperbolic neologism, 'over-duty'.[83]

By proposing this neologism and indeed the aporetic formulation, duty 'without the

law', Derrida offers an alternative model of duty which counters, in particular, the Kantian

model of law-based duty.[84] '*Duty*', writes Kant, '*is the necessity of an action from respect for*

the law'.[85] For Kant, the law of morality is not, of course, socially or religiously determined;

rather, it is grounded *solely* in the rational faculty of the moral agent. To clarify: an action, for

Kant, is deemed moral as long as it proceeds 'immediately' from 'pure reason', which he

regards as the ground of 'universal law'. The 'rational being', that is, is regarded as free as long

as he obeys this law 'categorically', regardless of whatever circumstances or personal

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[81] *Dumb Waiter*, p. 133; my emphasis.

[82] Derrida, *Given Time*, p. 156.

[83] Derrida, *Aporias: Dying—Awaiting (One Another) at the 'Limits of Truth'*, trans. by Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University, 1993), p. 16.

[84] Derrida refers to his notion of 'over-duty', contra Kant, in *Aporias* (1993): 'In more recent texts ("Passions" and "Donner la mort"), I have pursued the necessary aporetic analysis of a duty as over-*duty* whose *hubris* and essential excess dictate transgressing not only the action that *conforms to duty* (*Pflichtmässig*) but also the action undertaken *out of the sense of duty* (*aus Pflicht*), that is, what Kant defines as the very condition of morality' (Ibid., p. 16).

[85] Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. and trans. by Allen W. Wood (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002 [1785]), p. 16.

inclinations may clash with it.[86] Hence, Kant's fundamental dictum: '*Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law*'.[87] Kant, of course, famously calls the unconditional and absolute law of rational morality, the 'categorical imperative'.[88]

And there is, I suggest, an evocation of this Kantian principle in *The Dumb Waiter*. The way, for instance, that Ben '*speaks with decision*', when he says 'we'd better send something up', suggests that his obedience to the café and its orders is far from unthinking, or 'dumb' in the sense of stupid; rather, this 'decision', if anything, indicates that he is acting out of *free will*. In other words, the fact that Ben *decides* to follow the café's commands suggests he does so only because they are in line with his own reasoning; note how his 'decision' is prefaced by a deep consideration of the order he receives: 'BEN *takes the note and reads it. He walks slowly to the hatch. GUS follows. BEN looks into the hatch but not up it. GUS puts his hand on BEN's shoulder. BEN throws it off* […] BEN *looks at the note. He throws his revolver on the bed and speaks with decision*'.[89] We are, I suggest, presented here with a very Kantian kind of obedience; that is to say, one which, paradoxically, proceeds from a profound sense of 'autonomy' whereby the subject, as Kant puts it, is 'obligated only to act in accord with his own will, which, however, in accordance with its natural end, is a universally legislative will'.[90] The legislative will, for Kant, though, does not simply legislate according to personal or subjective values; rather, it legislates vis-à-vis an ideal rational will, present objectively in all people. This Kantian autonomy expresses itself in the simple fact that 'every rational being […] must be able to regard himself as also giving universal laws with respect to any law

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[86] Ibid., p. 17; p. 56.
[87] Ibid., p. 37.
[88] 'The categorical imperative', Kant writes, 'would be that one which represented an action as objectively necessary for itself, without any reference to another end' (Ibid., p. 31).
[89] *Dumb Waiter*, pp. 132-133.
[90] Kant, *Groundwork*, p. 51; p. 50.

whatsoever to which he may be subject'.[91] My argument, then, is this: that although Ben seems to receive the order from above, he subjects it to the judgement of his own moral reason or conscience, and thus appears, in a sense, as the author of the law to which he is subject. We should here note that Ben's decision to obey the café's order is endorsed by Gus who declares, 'Yes, yes. Maybe you are right'. By here using, however casually, the language of ethics ('maybe you are *right'*), Gus provides, in caricaturistic miniature, a universal endorsement of Ben's decision. In short, Ben can here, for a moment, be almost read as an exemplary Kantian moral agent.

The moral agent, according to Kant, regards the law of reason with a feeling of 'respect (*Achtung*) for [the] higher vocation (*Bestimmung*)' of morality.[92] And there is something of this Kantian feeling of 'respect' to be glimpsed in Ben's reverent, yet apprehensive, attitude towards the commands mediated by the dumb-waiter, as suggested by the *'great deference'* with which he responds to these commands and when he '*flings* [Gus] *away in alarm'* as the latter *'leans on the hatch and swiftly looks it up'*.[93] This combination of '*deference*' and '*alarm*' is, I suggest, pure Kant:

> Now every man finds in his reason the idea of duty, and *trembles* on hearing its brazen voice, when inclinations arise in him, which tempt him to disobedience towards it. He is persuaded that, even though the latter all collectively conspire against it, *the majesty of the law*, which his own reason prescribes to him, must yet unhesitatingly outweigh them all, and that his will is therefore also capable of this.[94]

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[91] Ibid., p. 32.

[92] Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. by Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub, 2002 [1788]), p. 112.

[93] *Dumb Waiter*, p. 133.

[94] Kant, 'On a Recently Prominent Tone of Superiority in Philosophy', in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant: Theoretical Philosophy after 1781*, trans. by Gary Hatfield and others, ed. by David Walford and Ralf Meerbote (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 429-445 (p. 442); my emphasis.

Although Kant here locates the call of the moral law within one's own reason, he also refers to it as an independent force, or indeed 'voice'. I would argue, then, that the call of the dumb-waiter, for all its apparent exteriority, might be read as the internal 'voice' of reason, to which only the moral agent harkens. Particularly significant here is that it is only Ben, not Gus, who appears to hear the voice calling via the speaking-tube. In this connection, the spatial superiority of the café voice – being positioned 'upstairs' – may be read as a literalization of what Kant calls 'the majesty of the law'. The play, in a sense, then, presents us with a scene of moral vocation which enacts the way the Kantian agent – that is Ben – submits to 'the authority of his reason'.[95]

Ben can again be read in this way in his unwavering, and almost dogmatic, adherence to the disembodied commands of the 'dumb-waiter', an adherence which, I shall argue, exemplifies Kant's insistence that one should not merely act 'in conformity *with* duty' but '*from* duty'.[96] This famous Kantian distinction locates the 'moral content' of an action in the individual's 'pure respect for [the] practical law'.[97] In other words, an action, for all its outward lawfulness, would not be perfectly moral, according to Kant, if it were informed by 'a self-seeking aim' that happens to coincide with the law.[98] Kant summarizes the purely lawful disposition in the following question –

> What is it in me which brings it about that I can *sacrifice* the innermost allurements of my instincts, and all wishes that proceed from my nature, to a law which *promises* me *no* compensating advantage, and threatens no loss on its violation; a law, indeed, which I *respect the more intimately, the more strictly it ordains*, and the less it offers for doing so?[99]

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[95] Ibid., p. 442.
[96] Kant, *Groundwork*, p. 13; my emphasis.
[97] Ibid., p. 13; p. 16.
[98] Ibid., p. 13.
[99] Kant, 'On a Recently Prominent Tone', p. 442; my emphasis.

It is this kind of commitment to a law which commands without promising any reward or threatening any punishment that I see in Ben's obedience to the commands of the dumb-waiter. Note, for example, how when Gus tries to persuade him to keep the 'Eccles cake', since 'they' upstairs 'don't know we've got it', Ben dismissively responds, 'That's not the point'; the point, for Ben, it seems, is simply to obey the command of giving, even if he could get away without fulfilling it.[100] Note, too, what happens when 'he' upstairs orders a cup of tea while 'there's no gas' in the kitchen for lighting the kettle –

> GUS   There's no gas.
>
> BEN (*clapping hand to head*)   Now what do we do?
>
> GUS   What did he want us to light the kettle for?
>
> BEN   For tea. He wanted a cup of tea.
>
> GUS   He wanted a cup of tea! What about me? I've been wanting a
>
> cup of tea all night!
>
> BEN (*despairingly*)   What do we do now?
>
> GUS   What are we supposed to drink?
>
> BEN *sits on his bed, staring.*[101]

Here, Gus laments his inability to prepare a cup of tea for himself and does not seem bothered about not fulfilling the order. Ben, on the other hand, seems anguished at his failure to meet the command itself, regardless of any desire he might himself have for drinking tea. To put this in Kantian terms, Ben's attitude is perfectly dutiful in that, for him, it seems, it is the law itself 'and not the hoped-for effect [that] is the determining ground of the will' to obey.[102]

Ben, that is, appears to be both waiting, and *giving*, 'before the law'. However, it is precisely the juridical character of his giving that, I will argue, transfers the gift from the realm

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[100] *Dumb Waiter*, p. 134.
[101] Ibid., p. 141.
[102] Kant, *Groundwork*, p. 17.

of pure morality, or ethics, to that of politics. At this point, then, I will shift the focus of my

reading from the gift as such to the *law* that regulates its giving in the world of the play. In this

context, I would argue that the highly *technologized* work of the dumb-waiter – speaking-tube,

pulley system, etc – is suggestive of the machinery of the law.[103] To put this in Kantian terms,

I see in the impersonal authority of the dumb-waiter a figure for the rational law of the 'social

contract' which guarantees the possibility of public order. Most pertinent in this connection, I

will suggest, is the ambiguity as to the number of those operating the dumb-waiter – note that

they are referred to, initially, as 'they' and, latterly, as 'he'. I will interpret this conflation of

the plural into the singular as a strange echo of Kant's vision of the necessity of subsuming the

individual will under the public or general will:

> [T]he human being is an *animal which*, when it lives among others of its species,
>
> *has need of a master*. For he certainly misuses his freedom in regard to others
>
> of his kind; and although as a rational creature he wishes a law that sets limits
>
> to the freedom of all, his selfish animal inclination still misleads him into
>
> excepting himself from it where he may. Thus he needs a *master*, who breaks
>
> his stubborn will and necessitates him to obey a universally valid will with
>
> which everyone can be free.[104]

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[103] For more information about the machinery of dumb-waiters, see *Sedgwick Dumb Waiters, Elevators* (New York: Sedgwick Machine Works, 1923), 2nd edn, Catalog O, p. 6 <https://archive.org/details/SedgwickHandPowerElevatorsAndDumbWaiters> [accessed 13 August 2016].

[104] Kant, 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim', in *Kant's Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim*, ed. by Amélie Oksenberg Rorty and James Schmidt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009 [1784]), pp. 10- 23 (p. 15) <http://www.myilibrary.com?ID=231652> [accessed 13 September 2017]. In political philosophy, the 'general will', as it applies to individuals, is the motivation to do what is in the interests of the community as a whole, as opposed to what is in the interests of the individuals themselves. The term was made famous by 18th-century French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau: 'Each of us', he writes in *The Social Contract* (1750), 'puts in common his person and all his power under the supreme direction of the general will; and in return each member becomes an indivisible part of the whole'; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and The First and Second Discourses*, ed. by Susan Dunn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002 [1762]), p. 164.

[104] Kant, 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim', p. 15.

The 'master' Kant refers to here is none other than the sovereign law that guarantees *'the achievement of a civil society universally administering right'*.[105] And it is this Kantian figure of the 'master' that I see in the 'they'-become-'he' that sends commands via the dumb-waiter. The command to send up food, I will argue, signifies the necessity of relinquishing what is known in political philosophy as 'the state of nature', denoting the idea of a pre-political life without government, state or law. In this sense, Gus, I will suggest, most nearly exemplifies 'the state of nature', as hinted at by his obsession with eating, drinking, smoking and, indeed, going to the 'lavatory' three times.[106] Note how Gus's attitude to eating and drinking appears to be very different from Ben's:

> GUS   This is some place. No tea and no biscuits.
>
> BEN   Eating makes you lazy, mate. You're getting lazy, you know
>
> that? You don't want to get slack on your job.[107]

From Ben's perspective, Gus's concern with eating is marked by 'the selfish animal inclination', which, according to Kant, needs to be *forcefully* tamed by the rational will of the law.

Once again, then, Ben and Gus, appear to be subject to the rule of some kind of law. It is no accident that Ben's explanation, via the speaking-tube, that he does not have any more food to give is prefaced by the words 'I'm sorry'. This apology hangs over his subsequent explanation suggesting he is, in a sense, somehow responsible for the hunger of those upstairs – even culpable: 'I am sorry'. This sense of culpability suggests that what we are presented with here is not so much a scene of morality as one of law. In other words, the café becomes a kind of court before which Ben and Gus stand to acquit themselves of some kind of overdue

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[105] Ibid., p. 14.
[106] *Dumb Waiter*, p. 113, p. 114, and p. 148.
[107] Ibid., p. 136.

obligation. From this quasi-juridical perspective, then, Ben and Gus appear to be giving in response to some legal authority that *coerces* them to give.

The shadow of the court-room again falls across the scene of giving when Ben speaks to Gus '*accusingly*' upon discovering the latter's attempt to keep 'a packet of crisps' for himself and not send it upstairs:

> BEN (*Accusingly, holding up the crisps*)   Where did these come
>
> > from?
>
> GUS   Where did you find them?
>
> BEN (*hitting him on the shoulder*)   You're playing a dirty game, my
>
> > lad!
>
> GUS   I only eat those with beer!
>
> BEN   Well, where were you going to get the beer?
>
> GUS   I was saving them till I did.
>
> BEN   I'll remember this. Put everything on the plate.[108]

In this virtual trial, Gus, I would claim, seems to be found guilty of possessing crisps that do not belong to him: 'Where did these come from?', says Ben. In short, Gus, it seems, is less accused of not giving away his crisps than of not giving them *back*. In this sense, Gus is constructed as one who owes, a debtor summoned to pay back what he owes to his creditors.

Particularly significant here is that Ben appears to be not just subordinate to the dumb-waiter but also its co-legislator. Note that it is Ben, and not the dumb-waiter, who actually compels Gus to give away his food – especially as suggested by Ben's 'hitting' Gus on the shoulder and speaking to him 'accusingly'. Ben thus participates in the application of the law. And in this participation I see a kind of slapstick version of what Aristotle sees as the citizen's 'partnership' with the law – '[T]he state', writes Aristotle, 'is a community of citizens united

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[108] Ibid., p. 134.

by sharing in one form of government'.[109] In Aristotle's *Politics*, the 'common business of all'
citizens is 'the salvation of the community […] [which] is the state' so that '[t]he virtue of the
citizen', he continues, 'must therefore be relative to the constitution of which he is a
member'.[110] In other words, the 'good citizen', in Aristotelian terms, is one who actively
participates in the preservation of the constitution by which he is ruled. However, good
citizenry, for Aristotle, does not necessarily make a person virtuous. A man, in Aristotelian
thought, can be at once both a bad person and yet a perfectly good citizen. 'Hence it is evident',
as Aristotle puts it, 'that the good citizen need not of necessity possess the virtue which makes
a good man'.[111]

The distinction between citizenry and morality recurs in Kant's political theory. For
Kant, that is, public law is not concerned with the 'genuine morality' of the legal subject;
rather, it is concerned, as Kant writes, with how 'man is *forced* to be a good citizen even if not
a morally good person'.[112] Put differently, the intrinsic morality of the citizen is not a
precondition for the establishment of public law. In his 'First Supplement: Of the Guarantee
for Perpetual Peace' (1795), Kant's writes this:

> The problem of organizing a state, however hard it may seem, can be solved
> *even for a race of devils*, if only they are intelligent. The problem is: 'Given a
> multitude of rational beings requiring universal laws for their preservation, but
> each of whom is *secretly inclined* to exempt himself from them, to establish a
> constitution in such a way that, although their private intentions conflict, they

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[109] Aristotle, *Aristotle Politics*, trans. by Benjamin Jowett, ed. by John Berseth (New York: Dover Publications, 2000), Book III, p. 105.
[110] Ibid., p. 106.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, trans. by Zum Ewigen Frieden, ed. by Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill 1957 [1795]), pp. 30-31; my emphasis.

check each other, with the result that their public conduct is the same as if they

had no such intentions'.[113]

The 'race of devils' Kant refers to here are individuals 'secretly inclined to exempt themselves'

from the law which they wish to be applied to everyone else. Whilst it is true that the 'private

intentions' of these individuals would be deemed immoral, according to Kant's moral

philosophy, their 'public conduct' would be regarded as perfectly legal, simply for its outward

conformity to the law:

> A problem like this must be capable of solution; it *does not require* that we
>
> know how to attain *the moral improvement* of men but only that we should know
>
> the mechanism of nature in order to use it on men, organizing the conflict of the
>
> hostile intentions present in a people in such a way that they must *compel*
>
> themselves to submit to *coercive* laws.[114]

In other words, the use of coercion is intricately bound to the establishment of a juridical

condition whereby all individuals are united according to the 'general will' of the law or social

contract. Christine Korsgaard rephrases this coercive dimension of Kant's vision of the social

contract when she writes, 'So we have a right and, indeed, a duty to coerce others to enter into

political society with us'.[115]

Returning to *The Dumb Waiter*, I would argue, then, that Ben's forcing of Gus to give

away his crisps, knowing that the latter is (to echo Kant) 'secretly inclined' to keep them,

illustrates, in civic terms, the right to coerce individuals to join a civil society. Of particular

interest in this regard is Ben's referring to himself as a 'senior partner' in the 'organization',

which he and Gus serve.[116] I would interpret this partnership as a peculiarly haunting version

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[113] Ibid., pp. 30-31; my emphasis.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Christine M. Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 32.
[116] *Dumb Waiter*, p. 126.

of the social contract – note how Ben tells Gus, 'I'm only looking after your interests'.[117] We do not, of course, know whether or not the dumb-waiter and the café upstairs are run by the same organization which hires Ben and Gus to kill. However, the ending of the play, I argue, gestures towards this conclusion, especially when Ben receives the order to shoot Gus via the very same dumb-waiter that delivers the food orders. In this case, Ben appears to be entitled, at least according to the law of the 'organization', to use force against Gus who, by virtue of his employment, expresses his 'tacit consent' to obey its command.[118] In short, this is how the law, it seems, kills.

Law

> [T]he law […] has no essence. […] [It is] guarded by a doorkeeper who guards nothing.
>
> — Derrida[119]

In previous sections, I focused on Ben and Gus's roles as waiters or providers of food for the spectral café above. Now, however, I shift my attention to their original vocation as death-dealers or hired killers. Crucial here is that Ben and Gus do not kill out of personal motive; rather, they kill in response to a 'call'.

In this respect, Ben and Gus should not be taken as an ordinary pair of criminals. Indeed, note Ben's highly diligent attitude towards the call: 'Have you ever seen me idle? I'm never idle. I know how to occupy my time, to its best advantage. Then when a call comes, I'm ready'.[120] Note, again, how he rebukes Gus for not keeping his 'gun' clean in preparation for

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[117] Ibid.

[118] I borrow this phrase from John Locke's political writing – as he writes in his *Second Treatise of Government* (1690): 'And to this I say, that every man that hath any possession or enjoyment of any part of the dominions of any government doth hereby give his *tacit consent*, and is as far forth obliged to obedience to the laws of that government, during such enjoyment, as anyone under it […] and, in effect, it reaches as far as the very being of any one within the territories of that government' – see John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*, ed.by Thomas Peardon (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1952 [1689]), p. 68; my emphasis.

[119] Derrida, 'Before the Law', in *Acts of Literature*, ed. by Derek Attridge (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 206.

[120] *Dumb Waiter*, p. 118.

murder – 'Have you checked your gun? You haven't even checked your gun. It looks disgraceful, anyway. Why don't you ever polish it?'[121] Ben, it seems, finds great pride and honour in his murderous job, which makes it difficult to take him as a murderer in the ordinary sense. Rather, I would argue, Ben kills in conformity with the law of the organization, which makes of him, in a sense, what I would, paradoxically, call a law-abiding murderer.

The law of the 'organization' is, then, a deadly one, enforcing by means of the threat of extermination. But it is, paradoxically, this violence that renders, I argue, 'the organization' lawful. The intimate relation between law and violence is famously theorized by Walter Benjamin, who, in his 'Critique of Violence' (1921), echoing Hamlet, finds 'something rotten in the law'.[122] This rottenness, for Benjamin, is nothing but the fact that 'violence […] is the origin of law'.[123] In this regard, Benjamin argues that the law does not simply resort to justified violence as 'a means of legal ends' but is, at its heart, always already contaminated by violence.[124] This idea is further explicated in Derrida's 'The Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundation of Authority"' (1989-1990) where he particularly refers to Benjamin's connecting of law with violence through the figure of the 'death penalty', or the license to kill:

> Law is condemned, ruined, in ruins, ruinous, if we can risk a sentence of death on the subject of law, especially when it's a question of the death penalty. And it is in a passage on the death penalty that Benjamin speaks of what is 'rotten' in the law.[125]

For Benjamin, then, the law's right to kill represents the essence of the law. Any critique, then, of this legal form of violence, Derrida argues, would amount to a critique of the authority of

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[121] Ibid., p. 137.

[122] Walter Benjamin, 'Critique of Violence', in *Reflections*: *Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott, ed. by Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), pp. 277-300 (p. 286).

[123] Ibid., pp. 277-300.

[124] Ibid., p. 284.

[125] Jacques Derrida, 'The Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundation of Authority"', in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. by Drucilla Cornell and others (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 3-67 (p. 39).

the law *per se* – 'If the legal system', he writes, 'fully manifests itself in the possibility of the death penalty, to abolish the penalty is not to touch upon one *dispositif* among others, it is to disavow the very principle of law'.[126] In this connection, I see in the life-threatening command of the 'organization' in Pinter's play an echo of the law of the state, whose legitimacy depends on its right to terminate people's lives. The state's right to kill is, of course, what Michel Foucault refers to as 'thanatopolitics': 'Since the population', he writes, 'is nothing more than what the state takes care of for its own sake, of course, the state is entitled to slaughter it, if necessary. So the reverse of biopolitics is thanatopolitics'.[127] And there is something of the thanatopolitical, I would argue, in the logic of the 'organization' for which Ben and Gus kill.

Crucial here is the sense of guilt that Gus appears to experience with respect to one particular female victim:

> GUS I was just thinking about that girl, that's all. […] She wasn't much to look at, I know, but still. It was a mess though, wasn't it? What a mess. Honest, I can't remember a mess like that one. They don't seem to hold together like men, women. A looser texture […][128]

The inability to forget the 'mess' of the victim's violated body recalls to our mind the classic scene of guilt enacted by sleepwalking Lady Macbeth, who appears to be troubled by the vision of the King's murdered body – 'Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him' (IIII. iii. 1122).[129] Indeed, like Lady Macbeth who compulsively obsesses over wiping the 'damned spot' off her hands, Gus seems to worry over the cleaning of his crime scenes:

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[126] Ibid., p.42; Derrida here reiterates Benjamin's point that 'an attack on capital punishment assails, not legal measure, not laws, but law itself in its origin' – see Benjamin, 'Critique of Violence', p. 286.
[127] Michel Foucault, 'The Political Technology of Individuals', in *Power: Essential Works of Michel Foucault. 1954-1984*, trans. by Robert Hurley and others, ed. by James D. Faubion, 3 vols (London: Penguin, 2000), III, pp. 403-417 (p. 416).
[128] *Dumb Waiter*, pp. 130-131.
[129] William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, in *The Oxford Shakespeare*: *The Complete Works*, ed. by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, Compact edn (Oxford: Oxford Press, 1988), pp. 1101-1126 (p. 1122).

[B]ut I've been meaning to ask you […] Who clears up after we've gone? I'm curious about that. Who does the clearing up? Maybe they don't clear up? Maybe they just leave them there, eh? What do you think? How many jobs have we done? Blimey, I can't count them. What if they never clear anything up after we've gone.[130]

Gus's desire to wipe clean all traces of the murders he has committed in the name of the 'organization' signifies, I argue, a deep-laden sense of guilt that seems to raise questions about the inherent legitimacy or justice of these murders. This lack of justification recalls Benjamin's claim that 'violence crowned by fate, is the origin of law'.[131] For Benjamin, the death penalty is not, then, simply an act of retribution; rather, it constitutes the very foundation of the legal order:

In agreement with this is the fact that the death penalty in primitive legal systems is imposed even for such crimes as offenses against property, to which it seems quite out of 'proportion'. Its purpose is not to punish the infringement of law but to establish new law.[132]

Benjamin cites the violence incurred through capital punishment as an example of what he calls 'law-preserving violence' whose function is to maintain the law by repeating its violent origins.[133] And there is, I argue, an echo of this 'law-preserving violence' in *The Dumb Waiter* where any logic or reason for killing/execution seems long forgotten and all we have is its endless repetition. It seems, as it were, to be a form of fate.

This sense of seeming fate is particularly manifested in the unforeseeability of the call-to-kill, its timing, and, indeed, the victim. There is, in the play, a sense that everyone is potentially subject to the call – that is, killable before the call. No one seems to be exempt from

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[130] *Dumb Waiter*, p. 131.
[131] Benjamin, 'Critique of Violence', p. 286.
[132] Ibid., p. 286.
[133] Ibid., p. 300.

its lethal command, not even Gus who ultimately discovers himself to be the chosen victim of the call. Gus's fate, indeed, evokes, I suggest, that of 'the man from the country' in Kafka's parable 'Before the Law' (1915-19), who, after a long wait to the point of death before the open gate of the law, is told that the 'entrance was meant only for' him.[134] It is as if it were his fate.

The guise of fatefulness is, for Benjamin, crucial to maintaining the authority of the law; in order to remain unchallenged, the law, in Benjamin's view, has to appear as though it were 'imposed by fate'.[135] Derrida, though, critiques this sense or aura of fatefulness, arguing that 'the origin of authority, the foundation or ground, the position of the law can't by definition rest on anything but themselves, they are themselves a violence without ground'.[136] The law, that is, at its inception, is self-inscribed by a founding act of illegitimate violence repressed and naturalized by repeated acts of legal violence. This repression Derrida describes as 'a silence […] walled up in the violent structure of the founding act'.[137] And we find an echo of this silence in, of course, the '*dumb*-waiter', for dumb it most certainly is: '*There is a loud clatter and racket in the bulge of the wall between the beds, of something descending. They* [Ben and Gus] *grab their revolvers, jump up and face the walls. The noise comes to a stop. Silence*'.[138] The silence with which the dumb-waiter's descent is followed parallels, I suggest, the mystery and silence that surrounds the 'organization', making them appear as one and the same thing.

The repetition of the organization's annihilating calls, the last of which is delivered through the dumb-waiter, masks, I suggest, the silence over its origins, thus embodying what Derrida calls the 'iterability of the law':

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[134] Kafka, 'Before the Law', in *The Trial*, p. 216; 'Before the Law' was first published in Kafka's lifetime, first in the 1915 New Year's edition of the independent Jewish weekly *Selbstwehr*, then in 1919 as part of the collection *Ein Landarzt* (A Country Doctor). *The Trial*, however, was published posthumously in 1925.
[135] Derrida, 'The Force of Law', p. 293.
[136] Ibid., p. 14.
[137] Ibid.
[138] *Dumb Waiter*, p.131.

> Position is already iterability, a call for self-conserving repetition. Conservation in its turn refounds, so that it can conserve what it claims to found. Thus there can be no rigorous opposition between positioning and conservation, only what I call (and Benjamin does not name it) a *différantielle contamination* between the two.[139]

The 'iterability of the law', argues Derrida, collapses Benjamin's distinction between 'law-founding violence' and 'law-preserving violence'. For Derrida, the two are always contaminated by each other. In this connection, I would argue that the call-to-kill as mediated by the dumb-waiter (the call to kill Gus) is suggestive of the repressed call to violence which, as Derrida would say, will have founded the 'organization'. In short, violence is, to echo Derrida, the organization's 'mystical foundation'.[140]

Although mystical in foundation, the violence of the organization is profoundly technologized in appliance. Note how the order to kill Gus is issued through a 'speaking-tube' attached to the 'dumb-waiter'. Here, then, it is, itself, of course, an elaborate machine. The victims of the 'call' are, then, it seems, subject to a law-delivering machine, reminiscent of the execution 'machine' in Franz Kafka's 'In the Penal Colony'(1919), which inscribes its judgement on the body of the 'condemned man' as it torturously executes him.[141] What we might call the law of the dumb-waiter, operating mechanically as it does, is very obviously governed by a logic of iteration. It is of course, the iterability of the law that Derrida critiques in 'The Force of Law', where he makes a distinction between justice as 'fresh judgment' and

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[139] Derrida, 'The Force of Law', p. 38.

[140] Derrida here draws on what Montaigne and Pascal call 'the mystical foundation' of authority (Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 12). However, Derrida, demystifies the 'mystical' by interpreting it, as Gil Anidjar points out, as 'the lack of foundation'. See Gil Anidjar, 'A Note on Force of Law' in Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, ed. by Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 228-229 (p. 228).

[141] The quote from Kafka's story reads: 'The traveller had various questions at the tip of his tongue, but, seeing the man, he merely asked: ''Does he know his sentence?'' ''No,'' said the officer […] ''It would be pointless to tell him. It will be put to him physically'. See Franz Kafka, 'In the Penal Colony', in *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, trans. by Michael Hofmann (London: Penguin, 2007), pp. 154-55.

law as 'a system of regulated and coded prescriptions'.[142] Justice and law, for Derrida, then, do not amount to the same thing. They belong to two different orders: 'Law', he writes, 'is the element of calculation […] but justice is incalculable, it requires us to calculate with the incalculable'.[143] For Derrida the exercise of justice as law, common to the modern judicial system, relies on the mere application of pre-established and ready-made rules and regulations that render the judge, to some extent, what Derrida calls a 'calculating machine'.[144] This form of mechanical jurisprudence, Derrida argues delivers law but not justice. Pure justice, or justice without law, can only be achieved, or attempted, by judging every case in its absolute singularity – 'Each case is other', Derrida notes, 'each decision is different and requires an absolutely unique interpretation, which no existing, coded rule can or ought to guarantee absolutely'.[145]

In this context, the mechanical 'call' of the dumb-waiter might be considered legal but not just. Its affinity with the law lies not only in its mechanical operation but also in its authoritative character. Indeed, the necessity to obey the 'call' comes less from its inherent justice than the mere authority of its command. This explains Ben's silence with respect to Gus's implicit guilt over the injustice of their killings. For Ben, what makes these killings just is simply the fact that they were ordained by the 'call'. In this sense, Ben, it seems, is only concerned with what Derrida calls 'justice as law' which for him, 'is not justice' – 'Laws', he writes, 'are not just *as* laws. One does not obey them because they are just but because they have authority'.[146]

The call of the organization can, though, paradoxically, signify both command and agency, given the multiple meanings of the word 'call'. A call, that is, can denote not only an

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[142] Ibid., p. 22.
[143] Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 16.
[144] Ibid., p. 23.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Ibid., p. 12.

order but also a decision. I here have in mind the phrase 'it is your call' (originally US) in which the 'call', according to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, means 'a decision, a judgement; […] [or] a prediction'.[147] We might, then, interpret the 'call' for which Ben and Gus wait as a call to *decide*, to make a decision. If so, it is not only the dumb-waiter that represents the figure of the judge but also Ben, who eventually has to choose between condemning Gus to death or sparing his life. Although Ben seems to have already decided to kill Gus by virtue of pointing the gun at him, we can never be fully certain if he will ever pull the trigger.

*

> *The door right opens sharply*. BEN t*urns, his revolver levelled at the door.*
>
> GUS *stumbles in. He is stripped of his jacket, waistcoat, tie, holster and revolver.*
>
> *He stops, body stooping, his arms at his sides.*
>
> *He raises his head and looks at* BEN.
>
> *A long Silence.*
>
> *They stare at each other.*
>
> *Curtain.*[148]

This most powerful moment in the play dramatizes, I argue, what Derrida calls 'the ordeal of the undecidable' which, for him, is encountered in the event of 'free' decision-making. 'A decision that didn't go through the ordeal of the undecidable', he writes, 'would not be a free decision, it would only be the programmable application or unfolding of a calculable process'.[149] For Derrida, a real decision necessarily involves being torn between two equally

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[147] 'call, n.' *OED Online*. Oxford University Press <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/26410?rskey=tlCFkQ&result=1&isAdvanced=false>[accessed 20 August 2017].
[148] *Dumb Waiter*, p. 149.
[149] Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 24.

compelling claims which require the suspension of all pre-conceived systems of judgement that might affect the decision. Hence, Derrida's regarding 'the instant of decision' as 'a madness' or something akin to a Kierkegaardian 'leap of faith' beyond the common laws of rationality.[150] Ben, then, at the very end of the play might be said to be mad with the madness of decision.

Although the audience might, on the whole, assume that Ben is about to kill Gus, they can never be sure of this and, in this sense, the shooting of Gus undergoes an infinite suspension, suggestive of the ambivalence of 'the undecidable'. In other words, there is a profound sense of hesitation in Ben's suspended decision, which, to some extent, renders it a 'free decision'. However, it is precisely the ordeal of 'the undecidable', argues Derrida, that paradoxically renders the justice of the 'free decision' forever questionable. In other words, whatever decision Ben makes, even if it were sparing Gus's life, would not be, for Derrida, 'fully just' because the very question of justice is always already haunted by uncertainty; otherwise, it would simply lapse into the logic of the law or rule:

> That is why the ordeal of the undecidable […] is never past or passed, it is not a surmounted or sublated (*aufgehoben*) moment in the decision. The undecidable remains caught, lodged, at least as a ghost – but an essential ghost – in every decision, in every event of decision. Its ghostliness deconstructs from within any assurance of presence, any certitude or any supposed criteriology that would assure us of the justice of a decision.[151]

The 'ghost' of 'the undecidable', I would argue, haunts not only Ben's final decision, but also the very 'call' for which he and Gus continue to wait. In other words, the shadow of 'the undecidable' seems to fall across the 'organization' itself. As Gus puts it:

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[150] Ibid., p. 26.
[151] Ibid., pp. 24-25.

We've been through our tests, haven't we? We got right through our tests, years ago, didn't we? We took them together, don't you remember, didn't we? We've proved ourselves before now, haven't we? We've always done our job. What he doing all this for? What's the idea? What's he playing these games for?[152]

Doing one's 'job', it seems, does not 'prove' or justify oneself – or at least not in the eyes of 'the organization'. Significant here is the Godot-like figure, Wilson, whom Gus assumes to be 'playing […] games' with them. I take Wilson's promised arrival as a signifier for 'justice', which, for Derrida, 'has no horizon of expectation (regulative or messianic)';[153] in short, for Derrida, justice is an endlessly deferred promise that never arrives. The non-arrival of justice, though, does not signify its negation; rather, it guarantees justice a very particular kind of futurity, a futurity made in the image of the 'to-come' –

> [F]or this very reason, it *may* have an *avenir*, a 'to-come', which I rigorously distinguish from the future that can always reproduce the present. Justice remains, is yet, to come, *àvenir*, it has an [sic], it is *à venir*, the very dimension of events irreducibly to come. [154]

Cue, I suggest, the figure of Wilson, he who is hard, it seems, to know – Gus, we note, 'find[s] him hard to talk to'.[155] And what Gus wants to talk to Wilson about, it seems, touches, again, on the question of justice:

> GUS   There are a number of things I want to ask [Wilson]. But I can
>
> never get round to it, when I see him.
>
> *Pause*.
>
> I've been thinking about the last one.
>
> BEN   What last one?

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[152] *Dumb Waiter*, p. 146.
[153] Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 27.
[154] Ibid., p. 27.
[155] *Dumb Waiter*, p. 129.

GUS   That girl.[156]

Wilson, I argue, seems to represent a certain lacuna, or absence within the law of the organization, an absence that bears the trace of justice but never renders it a present, lest it gives up on itself as justice and re-*presents* itself as law.

To conclude, I would argue, that *The Dumb Waiter* portrays justice not as the opposite of the law but as its other. Hence, my reading of the final suspended moment of Ben's facing Gus as an eternal confrontation between the figure of law and its other, the figure of justice.

The Gift of Death:

> I am responsible for the Other without waiting for reciprocity, were I to *die* for it.
> — Levinas[157]

Although *The Dumb Waiter* does not seem to offer a clear formula of justice, it does gesture towards a particular notion of justice through the figure of 'the gift'. Earlier in this chapter, we saw how Ben and Gus give food to the diner-guest(s) upstairs; in this concluding section, however, I argue that their giving becomes, ultimately, a 'gift of death'. And I focus, in particular, on Gus's gesture of self-giving, as suggested by his final 'stumbl[ing] in' to face Ben's gun.

In his book *The Gift of Death* (1995), or *Donner la mort* (1992), Derrida conceives of death as a gift, drawing in particular on the idiomatic meaning of the French title, which literally denotes suicide as a gift of relief one gives to oneself out of despair. Derrida puns on this French idiom to develop his view of death as an ethical or sacrificial gift one gives to the other by the very act of dying or the apprehension of death. What, for Derrida, particularly makes this 'gift of death' an ethical gift is the fact that it is offered from a position of pure singularity or responsibility, realized only in death: '[O]nly death, or rather the apprehension of death',

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[156] Ibid., p. 130.
[157] Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, p. 98.

Derrida writes, 'can give this irreplaceability, and it is only on the basis of it that one can speak of a responsible subject'.[158]

Derrida's view of death as the condition of absolute responsibility clearly has its roots in the notion of 'non-relational' death, which, for Heidegger, is a manifestation of Dasein's singularity: '[D]eath', Heidegger writes 'reveals itself as that *possibility which is one's ownmost, which is non-relational, and which is not to be outstripped*'.[159]Although Derrida agrees with Heidegger's insistence on singularity, he reformulates this singularity as singular responsibility – responsibility, that is, to the other. And this responsibility, he argues, is most fully expressed in dying for the other – making that is, a gift of one's death.

The 'call' to die, that appears to confront Gus at the end of *The Dumb Waiter*, may, then, be read as an ethical call – a call summoning Gus to offer a version of the 'gift of death'. The significance of this radical gift, I argue, can be particularly understood in relation to the hyperbolic food orders sent down through the dumb-waiter. In other words, what begins by demanding that Gus give away all the food he has ends by asking him to give himself, to make a gift of his death. Of particular significance here, I would suggest, is that the action of the play takes place on a Friday, which I read as a coded reference to the Crucifixion.[160] More important in this connection is Gus's final defenceless and resigned appearance which, I would argue, evokes Jesus's broken countenance on the Cross. In short, one can discern the *shadow* of Christian 'election' in the 'call' which Gus awaits.

I want to be clear here that I, by no means, take this 'Christian election' *literally*. Instead, I would argue that the play evokes the *ethical* sense of this election, without necessarily focusing on its theological significance. I thus find in Gus's standing before Ben's gun a gesture

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[158] Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. by David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 51.

[159] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 294; having to die, here, is not just one feature of *Dasein* alongside others, such as 'idle talk'. Death is what *Dasein* must face if it is to come into an authentic relation to its own being and this existential 'anticipation' of death is therefore the condition for being able to understand the meaning of Being as such.

[160] *Dumb Waiter*, p. 121.

towards, or even identification with, all the suffering victims of history. His gift of death, I would argue, then, is infused, to some extent, with the ethical figurality of the Cross which both lays bare and takes upon itself the guilt of irresponsible humanity. As Terry Eagleton writes:

> The Incarnation is the place where both God and Man undergo a kind of kenosis or self-humbling, symbolized by the self-dispossession of Christ. Only through this tragic self-emptying can a new humanity hope to emerge. In its solidarity with the outcast and afflicted, the crucifixion is a critique of all hubristic humanism.[161]

And it is precisely this solidarity with the suffering and frail, as opposed to the strong and powerful, that I see in Gus's final 'stumbl[ing]' onto stage. Gus's 'gift of death' does not, then, denote an actual death; rather, it should be read as a metaphor for ethical waiting on the other which, for Levinas, is 'a responsibility with which one is never done […] even if the responsibility comes to nothing more at that time – as we powerlessly face the death of the other – than saying "here I am"'.[162]

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[161] Terry Eagleton, *Culture and the Death of God* (London: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 159.
[162] Levinas, *Entre Nous*, p. 169.

CHAPTER 4

Late Pinter: Theatre of Precarity

The late phase of Pinter's life, from around 1980 on, inaugurates a notable shift in the character of his theatre. Back in 1961, he had declared, 'I am not committed as a writer, in the usual sense of the term, either religiously or politically'; however, he does appear to be very much a committed writer by the 1980s when, as his wife, Antonia Fraser, puts it, 'politics began to feature increasingly in [his] life'.[1] Esslin, though, sees a political dimension in both the early and late plays and argues that the distinction between the two phases is aesthetic rather than thematic:

> What strikes me in Pinter's latest works is [...] that […] [the] 'mythical' element present in his previous works, which all, ultimately can be seen as metaphors, generalized visions of the world, has now become, as it were, secularized, taken from the general, metaphorical, and ultimately poetic plane to a level of the specific and particular, from the contemplative detached embodiment of general truths to short-term calls for action on a practical, almost immediately topical level. The material is still that of his first vision – the torturers, the executioners, the victims – but now they have lost the metaphorical dimension; they simply are what they are.[2]

For Esslin, then, the scenes of subjugation and domination that recur in Pinter's drama constitute a thematic continuity. Whilst the early plays incorporate these scenes figuratively, the late ones incorporate them *literally* – '[T]hey simply are what they are', Esslin writes. The scenes of torture and victimization in the late Pinter, that is, are often presented within a

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[1] Pinter, 'Writing for Myself', in *Pinter: Plays 2*, pp. vii-xi (p. x); Antonia Fraser, *Must You Go? My Life with Harold Pinter* (London: Phoenix, 2011), p. 173.
[2] Esslin, 'Theatre of Cruelty', in Burkman and Kundert-Gibbs, p. 35.

political structure of power that seems to signify nothing other than itself. And it is, argues Esslin, this literal dramatization of power that makes Pinter's late plays more recognisably political.

Pinter's late political work consists of three one-act plays – namely, *One for the Road* (1984), *Mountain Language* (1988), and *Party Time* (1991) – and three sketches – namely, *Precisely* (1983), *The New World Order* (1991) and *Press Conference* (2002). Each of these works, of course, has a distinct set of characters, plot, setting, etc; nevertheless, they resonate with one another, especially in their presentation or reference to scenes of torture, injury, and violence. Taylor-Batty emphasizes these 'thematic connections and reiterations' by citing a 2006 production by French director, Roger Planchon, staging a collage performance of Pinter's late works:

> Planchon's production effectively collated all of Pinter's overtly political plays and presented them in a way that allowed them to express their common themes: the duplicitous abuse of language for ideological ends, the application of psychological torture to render subjects obedient and the potential for unquestioning submissiveness to (or interpellation by) ideological discourses that we might all manifest.[3]

All of Pinter's late political plays seem to share a common concern with the nexus between the authentic experience of human suffering and the discursive manoeuvres of power that systematically blur that authenticity. And for this reason I shall propose to call his late theatre a 'theatre of precarity'.

It is a mode of theatre that corresponds with the political activism of Pinter's later years. Note, for example, the conversation that took place between him and the US ambassador in Ankara in 1985 about torture in Turkish prisons: 'He told me', Pinter remarks, 'that I didn't

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[3] Taylor-Batty, *The Theatre of Harold Pinter*, p. 173.

appreciate the realities of the situation […], the military reality, the diplomatic reality, the strategic reality, and so on. I said', Pinter continues, 'the reality I was referring to was that of electric current on your genitals'.[4] And it is with just such reality, I argue, that Pinter's late plays are concerned.

My exploration of these plays will focus chiefly on their ethical enquiry into the reality status of human vulnerability and pain within the political. I am particularly interested in Pinter's criticism of how the notion of self is used to re-define political violence (war, torture, etc.) as expedient, necessary, or even just. In this respect, I read Pinter's dramatization of political violence against anonymized 'others' as a critique of the very notion of sovereignty underpinning all the so-called 'legitimate' formations of power, including Western democracies. In order to do so, I draw on Derrida's notion of the 'rogue state' as well as Butler's thinking about 'precarity' and vulnerability.[5]

Rogues

> I wonder what the term democracy actually means. If you are a democracy and help people of other countries murder their own citizens, then what are you doing? What is that? What *is* that? […] We have many more beggars on the streets now than we've had in years […] I don't call that particularly democractic. The word democracy begins to stink.
>
> — Pinter[6]

Pinter's attack on democracy is often interpreted as a critique of the way democratic discourse uses language to manipulate throught. Albert W. Dzur, for example, draws attention to Pinter's

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[4] Pinter, 'Blowing up the Media', in *Various Voices,* revised edn, pp. 201-205, (p. 201).

[5] Derrida draws his peculiar use of this concept from Noam Chomsky who argues in his *Rogue State* (2000) that the US is the most 'roguish' of all the states; Derrida, though, develops this by insisting that *all* states, in their most legitimate sovereignty, are fundamentally 'roguish'. I will say more about this in the following section. Butler, on the other hand, proposes that political sovereignty maintains its inviolability by enhancing the 'precarity' of other populations and perceiving it as legitimate or even necessary. Her notion of 'precarity' foregrounds the discursive ways – what she calls the 'frames' – through which human life is differentially constructed as worthy of living. I will offer a full explanation of these terms later in this chapter.

[6] Pinter, 'Writing, Politics and *Ashes to Ashes*', in *Various Voices*, pp. 227-8.

interest in the moral corruption of Western democratic institutions which does not allow citizens' active participation in the democratic process:

> Pinter's critique expresses the personal moral stake he felt in the corrupted and manipulated *institutions* of modern democracy. For him, citizenship that is active not tacit, vocal not quiet, deliberate not presumptive, inquisitive not manipulated is a moral meaning-role for those who occupy it. […] Pinter's thesis is that lay participation is needed for democratic institutions to have a conscience.[7]

Likewise, Taylor-Batty finds in Pinter's late plays, particularly *Mountain Language* (1988) and *One for the Road* (1984), an insistence on how modern democracies invariably repress individual freedom:

> By placing his protest plays in environments that might so easily be modern Britain, Pinter suggests that repressive zeal is not the discourse solely of military and fascist dictatorships, but is in operation in the corridors of power of all Western democracies, those self-proclaimed pioneers of a just New World Order.[8]

Both these accounts foreground how modern democracy as critiqued and dramatized by Pinter fails to live up to its ideal of liberating the individual. However, Pinter's criticism of the fetishization of the individual by democracy is often bypassed. And it is particularly this fetishization, I argue, that Pinter is, in fact, denouncing. Note how, in his *Guardian* article, 'It Never Happened' (1996), he criticizes the individualist impulse within American politics:

> The US is without doubt the greatest show on the road. Brutal, indifferent, scornful and ruthless it may be, but it's also very smart. As a salesman it's out

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[7] Albert W. Dzur, *Punishment, Participatory Democracy, and the Jury* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 42-43.
[8] Mark Taylor-Batty, *Harold Pinter* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2001), p. 114.

on its own. And its most saleable commodity is *self-love*. It's a winner. The US

has actually educated itself to be in love with itself. Listen to President

Clinton – and before him, Bush and before him, Reagan and before him all the

others – say on television the words: '*The American People*' as in the sentence,

'*I* say to the *American People* it is time to pray and to defend the rights of the

American People and *I* ask the American People to trust their *President* in the

action *he* is about to take on behalf of the *American People*'. A nation weeps.[9]

It is not democracy *per se*, I argue, that Pinter is here criticizing; but rather, it is its absolute

identification with the individual ('I say', 'I ask', etc) to which he is calling attention.

An important point of reference here is Alexis de Tocqueville's prescient 1835 treatise,

Democracy in America, which argues that individualism is of democratic origin'. He defines

'individualism' under democracy as

> a calm and considered feeling which persuades each citizen to cut himself off
>
> from his fellows and to withdraw into the circle of his family and friends in such
>
> a way that he thus creates a small group of his own and willingly abandons
>
> society at large to its own devices.[10]

In other words, Tocqueville believes that the extreme privatization of life in democratic

societies can lead to absolute self-withdrawal and dissolution of all communal and social

bonds. Tocqueville particularly grounds individualism in the private pursuit of wealth as

promoted by capitalist democracy:

> As social equality spreads, a greater number of individuals are no longer rich or
>
> powerful enough to exercise great influence upon the fate of their fellows, but

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[9] Pinter, 'It Never Happened', *Various Voices*, revised edn, pp. 214-17 (pp. 214-215); my emphasis.

[10] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America, And Two Essays on America*, trans. by Gerald E. Bevan, 2 vols (London: Penguin, 2003 [1835]), II, p. 587. Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1835) explores the individualist pitfalls of liberal democracy, taking 19th century American society as a case in point. Tocqueville's prescient account continues to influence contemporary debates around the question of democracy.

have acquired or have preserved sufficient understanding and wealth to be able to satisfy their own needs. Such people owe nothing to anyone and, as it were, expect nothing from anyone. They are used to considering themselves in isolation and quite willingly imagine their destiny as entirely in their own hands.[11]

The danger, for Tocqueville, is that the democratic illusion of self-sufficiency would make the individual forget how dependent he *actually* is on other members of society, which, in effect, leads to self-absorption, or what Tocqueville's refers to as 'egoism'.[12]

What is, for Tocqueville, mostly significant about this egoism is that it leads in most cases to the individual's retirement from political activity. For Tocqueville democracy, for all its extreme partisanship on behalf of the individual, can perversely promote conformism and undermine the very idea of individuality. To clarify: the more egalitarian the system is, the more indistinguishable its subjects are likely to appear. In this context, every person's judgment is to be regarded as equal to one's own, and the sole basis of determining the legitimacy of public issues is by means of majority rule. Hence, what Tocqueville calls the 'tyranny of the majority'.[13] As a result of this majoritarian principle, democracy can have a levelling instinct by disregarding any divergent voice and making individuals submit to the authority of public opinion. In short, for Tocqueville democratic individualism, at length, destroys the spirit of individuality and supplants it with the hegemony of 'the people'.

Something of this conformist 'democracy' is, I argue, in Pinter's sights when he critiques the homogenizing expression 'the American people' often used within US political discourse:

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[11] Ibid., p. 589.
[12] Ibid., p. 588.
[13] Tocqueville, I, p. 292. Also see: 'When, therefore, I see the right and capacity to enact everything given to any authority whatsoever, whether it be people or king, democracy or aristocracy, whether exercised in a monarchy or a republic, I say: the seed of tyranny lies there' (Ibid., p. 294).

The words 'the American People' provide a truly voluptuous cushion of reassurance. You don't need to think. Just lie back on the cushion. The cushion may be suffocating your intelligence and your critical faculties but you don't know that. Nobody tells you. So the status quo remains where it is and Father Christmas remains American and America remains the Land of the Brave and the Home of the Free.[14]

The 'cushion' of reassurance with which the expression 'American People' provides Americans is the illusion of homogeneity, or what Pinter calls the 'commodity' of self-love. And it is precisely the egoistic impulse of 'the people' that makes Americans, according to Pinter, indifferent to the plight of all those who are *not* deemed to be 'The American People'. What democracy sells for Americans, as Pinter sees it, is a narcissism that turns the self-interested individual into a self-loving 'people'.

Of particular significance to Pinter's article is how it calls attention to the way American presidents, as elected by 'the people', invariably perpetuate the illusion of an indivisible sovereignty with which every American is presumed to identify. Pinter is concerned, that is, with how the idea of the sovereign individual often translates into the idea of popular sovereignty as represented by the 'democratically' elected president. In other words, Pinter draws attention to a new form of totalitarianism or despotism, albeit one that, paradoxically, emerges from the very individualist ideal of self-governance. Individual autonomy in late Pinter is not, then, simply compromised by the false and hypocritical rhetoric of democratic regimes – what Michael Billington calls the 'perversion of words like "freedom" and "democracy"'; rather, it is undermined by forces of hegemony harboured within the democratic principle itself.[15]

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[14] Pinter, 'It Never Happened', p. 215.

[15] Billington, *Harold Pinter*, p. 334.

One way of accounting for the corruption of modern democracy, as viewed by Pinter, is by drawing on Derrida's principle of democratic 'autoimmunity'. In *Rogues* (2005), Derrida describes 'autoimmunity' as the 'strange illogical logic by which a living being can spontaneously destroy, in an autonomous fashion, the very thing within it that is supposed to protect it against the other'.[16] Derrida here appropriates the biological term 'autoimmunity' to refer to a mechanism of self-defence or self-preservation that, paradoxically, leads to self-destruction. Derrida presents the concept of democracy as one example of the suicidal law of 'autoimmunity', which, for him, inherently governs any totalizing concept and undermines it from within: '[D]emocracy', he writes, 'protects itself and maintains itself precisely by limiting and threatening itself'.[17] The autoimmunity of democracy arises from democracy's dependence on the principles of absolute singularity, equality and freedom; the problem being that the principle of freedom is transformed by democracy into a regime that rules by the will of 'the people'. Therefore, the equality that is supposed to guarantee freedom for each individual collapses into the all-powerful monolith that is 'the people'. As Derrida puts it:

> [T]he hypothesis here is that of a taking of power or, rather, of a transferring of power (*kratos*) to a people (*demos*) who, in its electoral majority and following democratic procedures, would not have been able to avoid the destruction of democracy itself. Hence a certain suicide of democracy.[18]

Derrida's link between autoimmunity and democracy is grounded in the notion of sovereignty, which, for him, is deeply ingrained in the concept of democracy. The word 'democracy', etymologically, is made up of two intricately related concepts: namely, 'the people' (*demos*) and power (*cracy*) or (*kratos*). And every power, or regime, Derrida contends, necessarily entails a dream of freedom, or autonomy, that is, in effect, the dream of sovereignty:

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[16] Derrida, *Rogues*, p. 123.
[17] *Rogues*, p. 36.
[18] Ibid., p. 33.

> Freedom is essentially the faculty or power to do as one pleases, to decide, to choose, to determine *oneself*, to have self-determination, to be master, and first of all master of oneself (*autos*, *ipse*). […] There is no freedom without ipseity and, vice versa, no ipseity without freedom— and, thus, without a certain sovereignty.[19]

The power or freedom of 'the people', that is, expresses a notion of sovereignty grounded in an *ipseity* or an enduring self. The concept of democracy, then, always already posits a sovereign identity which extracts and exercises its power autotelically.

In short, for Derrida, the auto-immnual logic of democracy is that of sameness or self-identity which compromises the ideal of difference or singularity that democracy is supposed to protect. And in this sense the structure of democracy, for Derrida, is constitutively circular, underpinned by what he calls 'the return to self of the circle and the sphere, and thus the ipseity of the One, the *autos* of autonomy, symmetry, homogeneity, the same, the like, the semblable or the similar, and even, finally, God'.[20] Locating God within the idea of democracy is crucial to Derrida's account of 'the people' as an indivisible, self-positioning sovereignty, one made in the image of the divine Sovereign Himself. Derrida here has in mind the religious analogy Tocqueville employs to signify the theologico-political underpinnings of democracy – 'The people', Tocqueville writes, 'reign in the American political world like God over the universe'.[21]

Tocqueville's idea is particularly relevant to the 21st- century US-led 'war on terror' that seeks to impose American democracy on the whole universe. Significant here is the well-known slogan 'God bless America' reiterated by President George W. Bush in his political speeches against what he called 'the axis of evil'. According to this rhetoric, America's fight

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[19] Ibid., pp. 22-3.
[20] Ibid., p. 14.
[21] Tocqueville, I, p. 71.

against its enemies is supported by God. Pinter, though, foregrounds the danger of employing such theologico-political rhetoric. Consider his poem 'God Bless America' (2003) written in opposition to the American-led war against Iraq:

Here they go again,

The Yanks in their armoured parade

Chanting their ballads of joy

As they gallop across the big world

Praising America's God.

The gutters are clogged with the dead

The ones who couldn't join in

The others refusing to sing

The ones who are losing their voice

The ones who've forgotten the tune.

The riders have whips which cut.

Your head rolls onto the sand

Your head is a pool in the dirt

Your head is a stain in the dust

Your eyes have gone out and your nose

Sniffs only the pong of the dead

And all the dead air is alive

With the smell of America's God.[22]

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[22] Harold Pinter, 'God Bless America' (2003)
<http://www.haroldpinter.org/politics/god_bless_america.shtml>[accessed 10 December 2016].

Particularly striking here is the visceral imagery of domination that Pinter employs to criticize the expansion of American sovereignty across 'the big world'. His poem decries the theological rhetoric the US uses to impose and legitimize its absolute sovereignty on a planetary scale. The American soldier, invested, as it were, with the authority of 'America's God', appears as the 21st-century 'crusader', bent on the imperialistic mission of making the whole world into the image of 'his' God. In other words, Pinter criticizes the hegemonic and non-democratic ways 'liberal' America seeks to universalize its ideals of 'democracy' and 'freedom'.

In his Nobel-winning lecture in 2005, Pinter makes particular reference to the US bombing of Afghanistan and invasion of Iraq. Pinter blames these actions on a dogmatic and closed insistence on the universality of American and liberal values, and goes on to satirize the way American politicians so often claim to derive their authority from God:

> God is good. God is great. God is good. My God is good. Bin Laden's God is bad. His is a bad God. Saddam's God was bad, except he didn't have one. He was a barbarian. We are not barbarians. We don't chop people's heads off. We believe in freedom. So does God. I am not a barbarian. I am the democratically elected leader of a freedom-loving democracy. We are a compassionate society. We give compassionate electrocution and compassionate lethal injection. We are a great nation. I am not a dictator. He is. I am not a barbarian. He is. And he is. They all are. I possess moral authority. You see this fist? This is my moral authority. And don't you forget it.[23]

Notable in this mock 'democratic' address is, again, how the 'I' of the 'elected leader' collapses into the 'we' of the nation, signalling the totalizing identity of the Sovereign Individual of modern democracy. For Pinter, the actual individual metamorphoses into a universalized

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[23] Pinter, 'Art, Truth and Politics', Web; in this particular instance, Pinter pretends 'to volunteer for the job' of writing a speech for President Bush, mocking the exceptionalist American rhetoric the President uses to address his nation.

Individual. American democracy, he argues, supplants its promise of difference and plurality with a homogenizing universal.

Pinter, though, is interested not only in the paradoxes of liberal 'democracy' but also the way it believes it has the right – and, indeed, the might – to force itself on the world. Legitimacy, in this case, is measured by aligning 'moral authority' with power: 'I possess moral authority. You see this *fist*? This is my moral authority. And don't you forget it'.[24] The speech of the American President, as satirized by Pinter, thus reveals the paradoxically imperial nature of Western democracy. In this respect, he echoes Derrida's claim that:

> As always, these two principles, democracy and sovereignty, are at the same time, but also by turns, inseparable and in contradiction with one another. For democracy to be effective, for it to give rise to a system of law that can carry the day, which is to say, for it to give rise to an effective power, the *cracy* of the *dēmos*—of the world *dēmos* in this case—is required. What is required is thus a sovereignty, a force that is stronger than all the other forces in the world.[25]

Pinter's speech also echoes Carl Schmitt's friend-enemy distinction, a distinction that invariably underpins the 'great nation'. Enmity in the political theory of Schmitt is a precondition not only for sovereignty, but for the very possibility of the political itself: 'The political', he writes in *The Concept of the Political* (1976), 'is the most intense and extreme antagonism, and every concrete antagonism becomes that much more political the closer it approaches the most extreme point, that of the friend-enemy grouping'.[26] Politics, that is, for Schmitt, can never be possible without 'the ever present possibility of conflict' with an

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[24] Ibid.; my emphasis.
[25] *Rogues*, p. 100.
[26] Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of The Political*, trans. by George Schwab (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007), p. 2.

'adversary', who, presumably 'intends to negate his opponent's way of life and therefore must be repulsed or fought in order to preserve one's own form of existence'.[27]

The 'democratically elected leader' of Pinter's speech clearly posits a foe who has to be annihilated by virtue of his being deemed a 'barbarian' or 'dictator', and thus an existential threat to the 'freedom-loving' nation. I see, then, in the enemy featured in Pinter's speech an echo of the Schmittian figure of the enemy: he who, in Schmitt's words, 'is […] existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible'.[28]

What I find, though, still more significant in Pinter's depiction of the enemy is his roguishness. Being described as a 'barbarian' and 'dictator', the enemy is depicted as a barbaric outlaw transgressing the respected conventions of the 'civilized' political order. Depicting the enemy in such roguish terms, I would argue, recalls the familiar expression, 'rogue state', so often used by American politicians when denouncing their enemies. The term 'rogue state', in common political discourse, designates, of course, recalcitrant states that pose a threat to the security of other nations. In other words, these 'outlaw' states are deemed unacceptable in that they create a state of 'chaos' that undermines international 'order'. In the modern political context, 'lawful' democratic states, represented by the US and its allies, believe they are entitled to suspend international law by taking extreme punitive measures against what they deem to be a 'rogue state'. For Derrida, though, it is precisely this ability to 'accuse some "rogue state" of violating the law' that renders 'the Unites States and its allied states […] the first rogue of states' – '[T]he states', he writes, 'that are able or are in a state to make war on rogue states are themselves, in their most legitimate sovereignty, rogue states abusing their power'.[29]

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[27] Ibid., p. 32; p. 27.
[28] Ibid., p. 27.
[29] *Rogues*, p. 102.

Derrida here has in mind Schmitt's famous definition of the 'Sovereign' as 'he who decides on the exception'.[30] For Schmitt, the defining feature of sovereignty is the capacity to *decide* who is to be excluded from the rule (and/or protection) of the law. The logic of sovereignty dictates, then, that the state – to use a classic Agambenian argument – *exemplifies* the very 'state of exception' it *can* declare.[31] It may be argued, then, that every sovereign state is always already in a 'state of exception' by virtue of its being above the law. Hence Derrida's claim that 'there *are* […] only rogue states. Potentially or actually. The state is voyou, a rogue, roguish'.[32]

And this could not be clearer in Pinter's mock speech, where the American state is shown to mirror the 'roguishness' of its enemies, being itself manifestly dictatorial and barbaric. By resorting to measures that cannot be justified in legal terms, namely 'electrocution' and 'lethal injection', the American state is suggested to be abusing the power that enables it to be. Such illegal measures of torture and punishment are, though, posited as 'compassionate', taken only to ensure the survival of the 'nation' and its 'freedom-loving democracy'.

The unquestionable right of the state to take extreme punitive measures against its opponents, of course, is a common and recurrent theme in Pinter's political theatre. *One for The Road* (1984), for example, vividly dramatizes Agamben's 'state of exception', as a family of three are confined in some kind of a totalitarian prison and ruthlessly tortured. Nicolas, the high-ranking official interrogating the family, does not, however, seem to perceive the practices of his brutal regime as 'roguish', believing they are needed to 'keep the world clean for God'.[33] The state Nicolas serves, I argue, is a thanatopolitical space reminiscent of the Nazi death camp

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[30] Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology, Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. by George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005 [1932]), p. 5.
[31] In his *State of Exception* (2005), Agamben argues that the state of exception in the modern political context does not so much indicate a temporary state of emergency; rather, in his view, it becomes the general rule. As he writes, '[T]he state of exception tends increasingly to appear as the dominant paradigm of government in contemporary politics' – Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. by Kevin Atttel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 2.
[32] *Rogue*s, p. 102.
[33] Pinter, *One for the Road*, in *Pinter: Plays 4*, pp. 223-247 (p. 246).

that, for Agamben, represents 'the space that is opened when the state of exception begins to become the rule'.[34] 'Death. Death. Death', Nicolas says. 'As has been noted', he continues 'by the most respected authorities, it is beautiful. The purest, most harmonious thing there is'.[35]

In *One for the Road*, then, Pinter seems to suggest that the shadow of the death camp necessarily haunts the modern state. The latter, it seems, always has the potential to commit atrocities. This is clear in *Mountain Language* (1988) where 'the enemies of the State', stripped of their political rights are exposed to unimaginable forms of violence.[36] Crucial in this play, I would note, is that the space of 'exception' extends beyond the 'prison wall' where the 'mountain people' wait in a line to visit their imprisoned relatives. Note how 'the officer' conflates 'the law' and 'military decree':

> It is not permitted to speak your mountain language in this place. You cannot speak your language to your men. It is not permitted. Do you understand? You may not speak it. It is outlawed. You may only speak the language of the capital. That is the only language permitted in this place. You will be badly punished if you attempt to speak your mountain language in this place. *This is a military decree. It is the law*.[37]

The 'Ungrievable'

> To respond to the face, to understand its meaning, means to be awake to what is precarious in another life […] This cannot be an awakeness […] to my own life […] it has to be an understanding of the precariousness of the Other.
>
> — Butler[38]

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[34] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*: *Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998 [1995]), p. 96.
[35] *One for the Road*, p. 229.
[36] *Mountain Language*, in *Pinter: Plays 4*, pp. 251-267 (p. 255).
[37] Ibid., p. 255; my emphasis.
[38] Butler, *Precarious Life*, p. 134.

The late plays of Pinter do not, of course, refer to a political specific regime, at least not explicitly; nevertheless, they have, I argue, considerable relevance to recent political developments. I here have in mind the way these plays anticipate the particular 'state of exception' that is the US-run detention camp at Guantanamo. Note how, for Pinter, Guantanamo Bay seems to exemplify the permanence and normativity of 'the exception' in the modern state, as represented in this case not only by the US but indeed by all the 'international community':

> Look at Guantanamo Bay. Hundreds of people detained without charge for over three years, with no legal representation or due process, *technically detained forever*. This totally illegitimate structure is maintained in defiance of the Geneva Convention. It is not only tolerated but hardly thought about by what's called the 'international community'. This criminal outrage is being committed by a country, which declares itself to be 'the leader of the free world'.[39]

The practice of indefinite detainment at Guantanamo – 'technically […] for ever', as Pinter puts it – suggests the indefinite extension of the extra-legal power that the United States arrogates to itself, by virtue of which it can indefinitely suspend the legal rights of prisoners. Being indefinitely detained without legal trial, the prisoners at Guantanamo are simply reduced to 'bare life' – that is to say, what, for Agamben, is life in its purely biological form, stripped of any political entitlements. Note how Pinter seems to share this vision of 'bare life', as he remarks:

> They have been consigned to a no man's land from which indeed they may never return. At present many are on hunger strike, being force-fed, including British residents. No niceties in these force-feeding procedures. No sedative or

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[39] Pinter, 'Art, Truth and Politics', Web; my emphasis.

anaesthetic. Just a tube stuck up your nose and into your throat. You vomit

blood. This is torture.[40]

'Bare life', for Agamben, represents a generalizable condition that he believes

underwrites the very concept of the political.[41] For Pinter, its significance, though, particularly

pertains to the ethical. Note how he tries to appeal to the 'conscience' of his audience as he

refers to the predicament of the Guantanamo detainees: 'What has happened to our moral

sensibility? Did we ever have any? What do these words mean? Do they refer to a term very

rarely employed these days – conscience?'[42] Pinter's denunciation of 'our' insensitivity to the

fate of those held at Guantanamo has, then, serious ethical implications, rather than being

merely an Agambenian account of the mechanism of biopower. By foregrounding the indefinite

detention of untried prisoners without their being charged of any particular crime, Pinter

particularly objects to the construction of certain lives as being wholly unworthy of legal

representation. In short, his objection to the prisoners' exception from the law is an objection

to their exception from humanity.

In her book *Precarious Life*: *The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004), Butler

argues that the 'indefinite detention' of prisoners at Guantanamo without their undergoing fair

trial suggests that they are perceived as 'something less than human […] an equivocation of

the human, which forms the basis for some of the scepticism about the applicability of legal

entitlements and protections'.[43] And it is to this kind of differential dehumanization, I argue,

that Pinter seems to be calling attention. In other words, his protesting against the indifference

of the Western 'moral sensibility' to the degradation of certain populations gestures towards a

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[40] Ibid.
[41] Agamben claims that biopower and sovereignty are fundamentally integrated, to the extent that 'it can even be said that the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power'
(*Homo Sacer*, p. 11).
[42] Pinter, 'Art, Truth and Politics', Web.
[43] Butler, *Precarious Life*, p. 74.

very strategic use of the concept of 'the human'. In this respect, he seems to agree with Butler who writes:

> It is not just that some humans are treated as humans, and others are dehumanized; it is rather that dehumanization becomes the condition for the production of the human to the extent that a 'Western' civilization defines itself over and against a population understood as, by definition, illegitimate, if not dubiously human.[44]

For Pinter, the detainees' dubious humanity is not only manifested in their being deprived of legal entitlements but also in their absence from mainstream media: 'Do we', he asks, 'think about the inhabitants of Guantanamo Bay?' He continues, 'What does the media say about them? They pop up occasionally – a small item on page six'.[45] By marginalizing the experience of the untried prisoners at Guantanamo, Western media tacitly conveys the insignificance of their lives.

The way power regulates moral sensibility via the media is, indeed, a recurrent theme in late Pinter. In 'It Never Happened' (1996), for example, Pinter protests against the notable silence in mainstream media as to what he calls 'the crimes of the US throughout the world':

> Sometimes you look back into recent history and you ask: did all that really happen? […]
>
> The answer is yes. It has and it does. But you wouldn't know it.
>
> It never happened. Nothing ever happened. Even *while* it was happening it wasn't happening. It didn't matter. It was of no interest. The crimes of the US throughout the world have been systematic, constant, clinical, remorseless and fully documented but *nobody talks about them*. Nobody ever has.[46]

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[44] Ibid., p. 91.
[45] Pinter, 'Art, Truth and Politics', Web.
[46] Pinter, 'It Never Happened', pp. 215-6.

What Pinter here points up is how governments maintain power not just by concealing their atrocities from the media but also by so discounting the lives of those affected by these atrocities that their suffering and deaths simply become 'of no interest'.

Butler interprets the omission of certain lives from common frames of recognition, especially at times of war, as an indication that not all lives are equally counted as 'grievable' –'[G]rievability', she writes in *Frames of War*: *When is Life Grievable?* (2009) 'is a presupposition for the life that matters. […] Without grievability', she goes on, 'there is no life, or, rather, there is something living that is other than life'.[47] In other words, the life of someone dying without being mourned by other humans does not qualify as a life proper, one entitled to sustenance and preservation. It is a life, that is, for whom no one has any *responsibility* to care. But it is precisely these 'ungrieved' lives to which the late Pinter calls attention. Put differently, Pinter seems to call his audience to *face* their responsibility to those who are rendered 'faceless' by normative modes of representation – 'At least 100,000 Iraqis were killed by American bombs and missiles', he says. 'These people are of no moment. Their deaths don't exist. They are *blank*'.[48]

The facelessness of the victim is evoked by Pinter not only in his political writing and speeches but also in his late political plays. Consider, for example, the semi-concealed faces of the 'BLINDFOLDED' prisoner and the 'HOODED' one in *The New World Order* and *Mountain Language*, respectively, both of which evoke, I suggest, the facelessness of political victims.[49] In *Party Time* (1991), too, the same motif is evoked as an elegant party takes place during the military suppression of a revolting mob outside. Particularly pertinent is the final moment when 'a thinly dressed' man named Jimmy suddenly enters the room and 'everyone' in the party becomes mere 'silhouette[s]':

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[47] Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009), pp. 14-15.
[48] Pinter, 'Art, Truth and Politics', Web; my emphasis.
[49] *New World Order*, in *Pinter: Plays 4*, pp. 271-278 (p. 271); capitalized in the original; *Mountain Language,* p. 262; capitalized in the original.

The room lights go down.

The light from the door intensifies, burning into the room.

Everyone is still, in silhouette.

A man comes out of the light and stands in the doorway. He is thinly dressed.[50]

By shifting the lighting to Jimmy, instead of the party, Pinter seeks to make his audience face one who, until this moment, is 'a faceless' shadow, a criminal figure who is allowed no place within the on-stage 'party'.[51]

Particularly important here is the way Jimmy – or his ghost – seems to depict his life in prison as pure absence, as a lacuna in the continuum of the living:

Sometimes I hear things. Then it's quiet.

I had a name. It was Jimmy. People called me Jimmy. That was my name.

Sometimes I hear things. Then everything is quiet. When everything is quiet I hear my heart.

When the terrible noises come I don't hear anything. Don't hear don't breathe am blind.

Then everything is quiet. I hear a heartbeat. It is probably not my heartbeat. It is probably someone else's heartbeat.

What am I?

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[50] Harold Pinter, *Party Time,* in *Pinter: Plays 4*, pp. 281-314 (p. 313)
[51] At the end of the play Pinter employs a shift in stage discourse where a single voice addresses the audience as though from within a hermetically sealed dramatic locus beyond the locale of the rest of the play. Other late plays, such as *Ashes to Ashes* (1996), *Moonlight* (1993), and *Celebration* (2000), employ this dramatic device, often associated with death.

> Sometimes a door bangs, I hear voices, then it stops. Everything stops. Everything stops. It all closes. It closes down. It shuts. It all shuts. It shuts down. It shuts. I see nothing at any time any more. I sit sucking the dark.

> It's what I have. The dark is in my mouth and I suck it. It's the only thing I have. It's mine. It's my own. I suck it.[52]

Jimmy, it seems, endures a darkness that renders him invisible not only to the world but also himself. It is as though his existence is derealized and reduced to 'nothing' but 'sucking the dark'. He seems, indeed, to perceive his life as a life under erasure – 'I *don't* hear anything. *Don't* hear *don't* breathe am blind. […] It is probably *not* my heartbeat' (my emphasis). Jimmy's life cannot, then, be regarded a *life* in the fullest sense. Rather, it is more apt to describe it, drawing on Butler, as '"a life that will never have been lived", sustained by no regard, no testimony, and ungrieved when lost'.[53]

The 'ungrievablity' of Jimmy's life is particularly suggested when his sister, Dusty, is told, whenever she tries to inquire about her brother at the party, that 'nothing's happened' to him; it is as though Jimmy is denied even the entitlement of report or commentary.[54] Note how Dusty's rich and powerful husband, Terry, scolds her for raising Jimmy's case: 'I thought I had said that we don't discuss this question of what has happened to Jimmy, that it's not up for discussion, that it's not on anyone's agenda'.[55] Terry's refusal to talk about Jimmy's fate, I suggest, echoes Pinter's later speech in 'It Never Happened' where he criticizes the silence of the media with respect to 'ungrievable' lives. And what makes these lives 'ungrievable', Pinter seems to suggest, is that they are 'faceless'.

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[52] Ibid., pp. 313-4.
[53] Butler, *Frames of War*, p. 15.
[54] Pinter, *Party Time*, p. 284
[55] Ibid., p. 296.

The 'face of the other', is, of course, a fundamental concept in Levinas, who believes that the 'face-to-face' encounter with the other divests the self of its egoism and calls it to ethical 'responsibility'. We should note that the other, for Levinas, is not simply the other person. The Levinasian other is very particularly characterized by destitution, suffering and vulnerability – 'The Other', writes Levinas in *Time and the Other* (1947), 'is, for example, the weak, the poor, "the widow and the orphan", whereas I am the rich or the powerful'.[56] Here and again, in *Totality and Infinity* (1961), Levinas very deliberately draws on the biblical figures of 'the stranger, the widow, and the orphan' to represent the vulnerability of the other.[57] And it is to this vulnerable other that the Levinasian self is responsible. In other words, ethical responsibility, for Levinas, is grounded in the existential precariousness of the other. This sense of precariousness is, of course, especially communicated by the trope of the 'face' – but it is not a face that is ever to be simply 'seen'.[58] Rather, 'the face of the Other' is experienced more as an epiphany of an essential 'nudity', which Levinas interprets as exposure to death – '[T]he face […]', he writes, 'is like a being's exposure unto death; the without-defence, the nudity and the misery of the other'.[59]

In other words, what one apprehends in the 'face of the other' is pure mortality. This mortality is not, though, for Levinas, simply a matter of death but rather of my primordial desire to kill the other – 'The Other', Levinas writes, 'is the sole being I can wish to kill'.[60] This violent impulse comes from an ontological inclination for self-survival which the other always already challenges. To clarify, without the face of the other, the 'I' believes itself to be

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[56] Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other and Additional Essays*, trans. by Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987 [1947 and 1979]), p. 83.

[57] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 77. I see a connection between Levinas's interest in the biblical figures of the widow and the orphan and Pinter's concern for underprivileged 'single mothers with babies' in 90' Britain who, as he puts it in an interview in 1996, 'are treated with […] disregard by the state. The single mother', he continues, 'becomes a guilty person and welfare is taken away from her' (Pinter, 'Writing, Politics and *Ashes to Ashes*', in *Various Voices*, p. 228).

[58] Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, p. 86.

[59] Lévinas, 'Interview with François Poiré', in *Is it Righteous to Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. by Jill Robbins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 23-83 (p. 48).

[60] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 198.

sovereign in the world. The revelation of 'the face', as it were, negates this sense of sovereignty, which the 'I' tries to reassert by desiring, at least subliminally, to annihilate the other. At this point, though, 'the face' of the other, Levinas believes, communicates the ethical injunction against murder – the 'thou shall not kill'; and it is this injunction which my ethical responsibility to 'the life of the other':

> To expose myself to the vulnerability of the face is to put my ontological right to existence into question. In ethics, the other's right to exist has primacy over my own, a primacy epitomized in the ethical edict: you shall not kill, you shall not jeopardize the life of the other.[61]

Responsibility to 'the life of the other', I argue, appears as a major motif in late Pinter. This responsibility, though, he sees not as simply ethical but rather as ethico-political. Pinter, that is, draws our attention to how political power is so often characterized by failure to preserve 'the life of the other'.[62] In *One for The Road*, for example, we see this ethical failing alluded to when Nicolas, a representative of political power, seems to speak about 'the death of others' with relish:

> What about you? Do you love death? Not necessarily your own. Others'. *The death of others*. Do you love the death of others, or at any rate, do you love the death of others as much as *I* do?[63]

I find in Nicolas's sadistic question – '[D]o you love the death of others as much as *I* do?' – an echo of the primal desire to kill the other which, for Levinas, is aroused upon meeting 'the face'. For Levinas, of course, the death of the other is necessary for the survival of the self.

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[61] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas', interviewed by Richard Kearney, in *Face to Face with Levinas,* ed. by Richard A. Cohen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), pp. 13-33 (p. 24); Levinas here draws on the biblical commandment 'thou shall not kill' (Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17).

[62] Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, ed. by Mauro Bertani (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 241.

[63] Pinter, *One for the Road*, p.229; my emphasis.

And in this play, Pinter presents us with a form of politics modelled upon just such a self, or subject.

This subject is, of course, the subject of Western philosophy which, according to Levinas, is premised primarily on Spinoza's ontological principle of *conatus essendi* or 'right to existence' which effectively reduces the *human* being to a mere 'being' – 'A being', writes Levinas, 'is something that is attached to being, to its own being'.[64] Put differently, a human being exclusively shaped by the *conatus essendi* – reformulated later into what Heidegger famously calls Da-sein – will always fail to be responsible for the life of the other.[65] It will succumb, instead, Levinas believes, to the Darwinian principle of 'struggle for existence':

> That is Darwin's idea. The being of animals is a struggle for life. A struggle
> without ethics. It is a question of might. [...] That's Darwin's idea: the living
> being struggles for life. The aim of being is being itself.[66]

This struggle and the violence it entails are vividly depicted in the figure of Nicolas in *One for the Road*. Nicolas's exact office or rank is not revealed in the play; however, he is suggested to act as a sovereign figure, in both political and subjective terms – 'I run the place. God speaks through me'.[67] Invested, as it were, with the 'Word of God', Nicolas is effectively sovereign. Particularly significant here is how he seems to perceive his own 'being' to be mutually exclusive of the other's – as he asks Victor:

> Who would you prefer to *be*? You *or* me?
>
> *Pause*.

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[64] Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Paradox of Morality: an Interview with Emmanuel Levinas', interviewed by Tamra Wright and others, trans. by Andrew Benjamin and Tamra Wright, in *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, ed. by R. Bernasconi and D. Wood (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 168-80 (p. 172); Levinas here is drawing on Spinoza's line: 'Everything in so far as it is in itself endeavours to persist in its own being' – Benedictus de Spinoza, *Spinoza's Ethics and On the Correction of the Understanding*, trans. by Andrew Boyle (London: Dent, 1959 [1677]), Part III, Prop. VI, p. 91.

[65] Levinas writes that 'Heidegger says at the beginning of *Being and Time* that Dasein is a being who in his being is concerned for this being itself' ('The Paradox of Morality', p. 172).

[66] Ibid., p. 172.

[67] Pinter, *One for the Road*, p. 225.

> I'd go for me if I were you.[68]

By asking the prisoner/other to choose the *being* of the master/self, Nicolas attempts to cancel the other or reduce him to the same.

Still more important is how Nicolas's affirmation of self over and against the other appears to be deeply ingrained in the political world of the play. Witness his words to Victor:

> Ah God, let me confess, let me make a confession to you. I have never
>
> been more moved, in the whole of my life, as when – only the other day, last
>
> Friday, I believe – the man who runs this country announced to the country: We
>
> are all patriots, *we are as one*, we all share a common heritage. *Except you*,
>
> apparently.
>
> *Pause.*[69]

Notable here, of course, is the way sovereign power is represented in terms of totality or one-ness – 'We are *all* patriots, we are as *one*, we *all share a common heritage*'. Citizenship is here confined to those who belong to the order of the same, to those with whom one can 'feel a link' or 'a bond'. This includes most but not all – all, that is, '*Except you*, apparently'. In short, Pinter here, seems to criticize the totalizing inclination of the modern state, concerned as it so often is with the same, rather than with the other. And it is precisely to this other-negating politics that Levinas refers when he says – 'But politics left to itself bears a tyranny within itself'.[70]

The 'tyranny' of a politics without ethics – without responsibility to the other – is paradoxically hinted at when Nicolas presents his soldiers' vandalism of Victor's house as a form of responsibility:

> But you know what it's like – they have such *responsibilities* – and

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[68] Ibid., p. 232; my emphasis.
[69] Ibid.; my emphasis.
[70] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 300.

they feel them – they are *constantly present* – day and night – these *responsibilities*.[71]

The soldiers' 'responsibilities' take the form of force, directed towards the destruction, rather than the support, of the other. These 'responsibilities' extend, indeed, not only to the property of the other but also to his very own 'face':

> Do you think waving fingers in front of people's eyes is silly? […] But would you take the same view if it was my boot – or my penis? Why am I so obsessed with eyes? Am I obsessed with eyes? Possibly. Not my eyes. *Other people's eyes*. The eyes of people who are brought to me here. *They're so vulnerable*.[72]

Nicolas, I argue, is obsessed with people's eyes not simply for the sadistic pleasure of 'waving his fingers in front of' them; rather, his obsession, it seems, is more particularly with how people's eyes indicate their vulnerability. By contrasting the vulnerability of the detainees' 'eyes' with the potency of his 'penis', Nicolas gives hyperbolic expression to state power and its exercise of the tyranny of the same.

State power is most violently manifest when Victor's little boy, the most vulnerable character in the play, is suggested to be murdered by the authorities: 'Your son?' Nicolas tells Victor before releasing him, 'Oh, don't worry about him. He *was* a little prick'.[73] At work here, I suggest, is pure thanatopolitics – a politics that admits no responsibility to the other but instead simply insists on his vulnerability and death. Such thanatopolitics, we might add, is founded on the ontological principle of *conatus essendi*, by virtue of which the synthesized life of the body politic is dependent on the killing of others – 'Wars […]', writes Foucault in *The History*

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[71] Pinter, *One for the Road*, p. 228; my emphasis.
[72] Although Levinas usually speaks about the 'face', in general, as a figure for the ethical imperative 'Do not kill', he refers, at times, particularly to the 'eyes' of the other: '[T]he Other', he writes in 'Signature', 'manifests itself by the absolute resistance of its defenceless eyes. […] The infinite in the face', he continues, '[…] brings into question my freedom, which is discovered to be murderous and usurpatory' (*Difficult Freedom*, p. 294); Ibid., p. 224, my emphasis.
[73] Ibid., 247; my emphasis.

of Sexuality (1976), 'are waged on behalf of *the existence of everyone*; entire populations are mobilized for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of *life necessity*: massacres have become vital'.[74]

This, I argue, is mirrored in late Pinter where the ethico-political failing of the modern state is presented not as purely and simply the responsibility of an anonymous political power but rather as something in which the self-interested individual is wholly complicit. Note, for example, how Pinter seems to blur the distinction between the personal and the political to underline what he sees as the heteronomous nature of ethical responsibility, or what he refers to as 'conscience': that 'term [is] very rarely employed these days', as he says in his Nobel Lecture. 'Conscience', he goes on, 'has to do not only with our own acts but [also] with our shared responsibility in the acts of others'.[75] For Pinter, this 'shared responsibility', is not to be confused with a totalized community of autonomous individuals participating in an economy of reciprocal rights and duties. In such a circle of self-coinciding sociality, there will always be a degree of deafness and blindness to the other, to he who necessarily lives outside the circle of the same. And it is to such that Pinter seems to attribute the apathy of the 'liberal' individual towards the suffering of the other.

Pertinent here is Pinter's 1997 poem, 'Death (Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953)' which he quotes in his Nobel Lecture to awaken his audience to their complicity in the ethical bankruptcy of their governments. Again, in this poem, Pinter, I argue, seems to protest against the 'ungrievability' of certain lives that are stripped of their human significance and rendered no more than mere bodies. The speaker of the poem, it seems, is troubled by the vision of an unnamable 'dead body' that is 'abandoned' to death without being grieved. Note how the speaker seeks to humanize the 'dead body' and recover its lost dignity as he inquires –

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[74] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, I, p. 137.
[75] Pinter, 'Art, Truth and Politics', Web.

> Where was the body found?
>
> Who found the dead body?
>
> Was the dead body dead when found?
>
> How was the dead body found?[76]

Note also how the speaker tries to reconstruct the deceased's identity:

> Who was the dead body?
>
>
> Who was the father or daughter or brother
>
> Or uncle or sister or mother or son
>
> Of the dead and abandoned body?[77]

No answers are forthcoming. The body, it seems, has no place in the world of human relations. It is, in this sense, faceless, thus recalling to mind what Butler refers to as 'the media's evacuation of the human through the image' which, she writes, 'work[s] precisely through providing no image, no name, no narrative, so that there never was a life, and there never was a death'.[78]

Like Butler, Pinter's 'dead body', evokes the innumerable victims of wars and other catastrophes who are never encountered in their singularity, but only as death tolls, mere numbers. What I find particularly crucial in this poem, however, is not so much its criticism of the way the media effaces the suffering other; it is rather, the poem's concern with our 'shared responsibility' in this effacing – our complicity in the death of the other. Significant here, I argue, is how 'you', the reader of the poem, is suggested to be implicated in a primordial sense of obligation towards the 'dead body', as particularly indicated by the last series of questions –

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[76] Pinter, 'Death (Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953)', quoted in Billington, pp. 441-442.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Butler, *Precarious Life*, p. 146.

Did you wash the dead body

Did you close both its eyes

Did you bury the body

Did you leave it abandoned

Did you kiss the dead body[79]

In short, (whoever 'you' are) is accountable for 'the dead body'.

I find in Pinter's implication of the 'you' in the fate of the 'dead body' an echo of the Dostoyevskian line to which Levinas famously has recourse – 'Each of us is guilty before everyone for everyone, and I more than the others'.[80] According to this hyperbolic formula, the ethical self, for Levinas, is singularly responsible for the other's survival. In this connection, the reader of Pinter's poem, I argue, is not so much guilty of killing the other as of *abandoning* him to death – of *letting* him die, so to speak. Note the question, 'Was the body dead when abandoned?' which suggests the possibility of dying by virtue of abandonment.[81] Put differently, for Pinter's spectator, it is not ethically sufficient that one *literally* abstains from killing the other; rather, he seems to suggest that one is ethically obligated to being *alert* to prevent the death of the other by all means. Not to do so is to fall short of the commandment– 'thou shall not kill'. As Levinas puts it:

[T]he face is the other who asks me not to let him die alone, as if to do so were to become an accomplice in his death. Thus the face says to me: you shall not kill. In the relation to the face I am exposed as a usurper of the place of the other.[82]

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[79] Pinter, 'Death', quoted in Billington, pp. 441-442.

[80] Levinas draws on this line from Dostoyevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* (1880) in many of his interviews and writings to explain his non-reciprocal notion of ethical subjectivity. See, for example, Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 146. Billington attributes Pinter's 'portrait of the precariousness of existence' in his early plays, to many factors, chief among them 'his wide reading, which included Dostoevsky and Kafka' (p. 18).

[81] Pinter, 'Death', quoted in Billington, pp. 441-442.

[82] Levinas, 'Dialogue', in *Face to Face with Levinas*, p. 24.

Expressed in philosophical terms, the self, for Levinas, by persisting in its own existence, is never absolved of its primordial guilt of being 'a usurper' of the other's place in the world. The 'place of the other', for Levinas, is nothing less than the 'Da' that Heidegger's Da-sein occupies in his 'being-in-the-world': 'My place in being', asks Levinas, 'the *Da-* of my *Dasein* [the there of my being-there] – isn't it already usurpation, already violence with respect to the other?'[83] In short, for Levinas, the ethical 'self perceives itself as always already guilty for its very 'place in being', by virtue of which it already occupies someone else's place in existence. Levinas translates this ontological notion of 'usurpation' in material terms:

> My being-in-the-world or my 'place in the sun', my being at home, have these not also been the usurpation of spaces belonging to the other man whom I have already oppressed or starved, or driven out into a third world; are they not acts of repulsing, excluding, exiling, stripping, killing?[84]

Pinter's poem poses much the same rhetorical (non)-question, suggesting as it does that 'I', its reader, its 'you', or addressee, am, in Levinas's terms, 'an accomplice in [the] death' of the other.[85]

Framing the Frame

As its full title suggests, Pinter's poem 'Death (Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953)', which he originally wrote and published in 1997, the same year as his father's death, draws on a very particular piece of legislation. The Act declares that, in the case of death, 'it shall be a duty' of the deceased's family, or any witnesses of the death, to register it and provide, before the expiration of a specified period of time, all the particulars of the death.[86] Pinter, of course,

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[83] Levinas, 'Violence of the Face', in *Alterity and Transcendence*, pp. 169-182 (p. 179).

[84] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Ethics as First Philosophy', trans. by Sean Hand and Michael Temple, in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. by Sean Hand (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp. 75-87 (p. 82).

[85] Levinas, 'Dialogue', in *Face to Face with Levinas*, p. 24.

[86] For more on the UK legislation of registering births and deaths – Act 1953 – see <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Eliz2/1-2/20> [accessed 13 January 2017]

develops, enlarges or amplifies the wording of the Act by adding such 'higher' obligations as to 'wash', 'bury', 'kiss', and 'close the eyes' of the dead body. Pinter, thus, presents, if you will, what we might call a found poem and in so doing takes us from what seems to be a purely pragmatic management of death toward an ethico-political understanding of mourning and grief.

The poem draws our attention, that is, to the official, state-sanctioned codes by which death is normatively perceived. I here have in mind Butler's theory of the 'frame' which reflects on how affective responses to loss of human life are predetermined by norms of intelligibility and recognizability. To clarify: the 'issue of framing', for Butler, is in the first instance 'epistemological' – '[T]he frames through which we apprehend or, indeed, fail to apprehend the lives of others as lost or injured […]', she writes, 'are politically saturated. They are themselves', she adds, 'operations of power'.[87] For Butler, the capacity to respond to the death of the other with grief relies on the political structure which construes such death as grievable or not. Pinter, I argue, seems to echo Butler's understanding of the epistemological functioning of the frame. This is especially clear when, in his Nobel Lecture, he declares that the role of this 'writer' is to enable his readers to look beyond the 'mirror':

> When we look into a mirror we think the image that confronts us is accurate. But move a millimetre and the image changes. We are actually looking at a never-ending range of reflections. But sometimes a writer has to smash the mirror - for it is on the other side of that mirror that the truth stares at us.[88]

The 'truth' on the other side of the mirror to which Pinter is committed, I argue, lays bare the fact that power conceals the violence it inflicts upon other human beings. Moreover, this truth lays bare the frames of sensibility that render political violence justifiable. And without

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[87] Butler, *Frames of war*, p. 1.
[88] Pinter, 'Art, Truth and Politics', Web.

questioning the frames that *justify* violence 'we have no hope', argues Pinter, 'of restoring what is so nearly lost to us – the dignity of man'.[89]

To put this another way, Pinter seeks to foreground the perceptual mechanisms of power that allow *some* human beings to be more exposed to violence than others. Sanctioning such differential exposure to violence is, of course, at odds with the liberal avowal of the universal dignity of human life. However, the justification of violence by political regimes works against certain kinds of identifications and makes it impossible for their subjects to understand what the real human costs are of this violence. Pinter cites the 2003 invasion of Iraq as one example of the way in which the media frames our understanding of other people in such a way that justifies violence against them:

> The invasion was an arbitrary military action inspired by a series of lies upon lies and gross manipulation of the media and therefore of the public; an act intended to consolidate American military and economic control of the Middle East masquerading – as a last resort – all other justifications having failed to justify themselves – as liberation. A formidable assertion of military force responsible for the death and mutilation of thousands and thousands of innocent people.[90]

The responsibility to mourn the death of Iraqi people, Pinter seems to suggest, is undermined by the fiction of 'liberation' through which the invasion is represented in the media. The 'liberal' subject, in this case, has adopted a perceptual frame that represents the other as asking to be *violently* 'liberated'. Although Pinter describes the perceptual frame that 'surrounds us' as 'a vast tapestry of lies', he does not simply see hypocrisy as such. Rather, what Pinter sees

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[89] Ibid.
[90] Pinter, 'Art, Truth and Politics', Web.

is a process by which broad public support is *affectively* mobilized for policies that violate core legal ideals of liberal democracies on the basis of normative narratives of power.

Pinter's political writing is not, then, simply aimed at critiquing the discursive operations of power. Rather, it particularly addresses the way dominant evaluative schemes regulate people's *affective* response to violence. Put differently, Pinter seems to ground ethico-political responsibility and responsiveness in querying the frame through which political reality is constructed and represented. And it is precisely to this end, I suggest, that Pinter, again in 2005, compares and contrasts the photographs of two particular Iraqi boys:

> Early in the invasion [c. 2003] there was a photograph published on the front page of British newspapers of Tony Blair kissing the cheek of a little Iraqi boy. 'A grateful child,' said the caption. A few days later there was a story and photograph, on an inside page, of another four-year-old boy with no arms. His family had been blown up by a missile. He was the only survivor. 'When do I get my arms back?' he asked. The story was dropped.[91]

The discrepancy between the two photographs illustrates, I argue, the exclusionary process of framing where one particular narrative is made recognisable by moving other narratives outside the perceptual frame of recognition. Here, the visual frame, as represented by the approved, published photograph, conditions and simultaneously reflects the perceptual frame through which violence against the other is interpreted.

The frames of power, though, Pinter seems to argue, do not merely hide the 'truth' about the other; more significantly, they ensure, as Pinter states, 'that people remain in ignorance, that they live in ignorance of the truth, even the truth of their own lives'.[92] In this

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[91] Ibid., p. 439.
[92] Ibid., p. 433.

respect, Pinter seems to suggest that one can only seek the 'truth' by looking outside the frame, a point Butler also makes when she writes:

> To call the frame into question is to show that the frame never quite contained the scene it was meant to limn, that something was already outside, which made the very sense of the inside possible, recognisable. The frame never quite determined precisely what it is we see, think, recognize, and apprehend. Something exceeds the frame that troubles our sense of reality; in other words, something occurs that does not conform to our established understanding of things.[93]

Perceptual framing suggests, then, that what comes to be revealed to consciousness depends upon the unseen conditions of seeing – those forms of discourse and meaning, that is, through which certain groups are rendered *eligible* for justified violence.

But the question that needs to be asked here is this: is Pinter simply naïve in suggesting that anyone *can* actually break free from the perceptual frame of normative power?[94] In order to answer this, I will refer to Pinter's deployment of the stage as a frame of the frame or as a means of framing the framer. One particular exemplification of this double framing, I argue, is *Party Time* where Pinter presents his audience with a social gathering, a 'party', that reflects some of the ways in which we frame the world. By presenting the audience with a scene of their 'framed' reality, Pinter enables them to step outside the frame and *see* the terms that condition their seeing. In doing so, he gives the audience a double perspective with respect to the frame, enabling us to see the framer as well as the framed. Pinter's political theatre works, that is, against the supposed objectivity of theatrical realism by *staging* the mechanism of

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[93] Butler, *Frames of War*, p. 9

[94] '[I]deology', writes Louis *Althusser*, 'has no *outside*'. Louis Althusser, Fredric Jameson, and Ben Brewster, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: (Notes towards an Investigation)', in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. by Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), pp. 85–126 (p. 119) <www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qgh9v.9> [accessed 1 April 2017].

perception at work in the process of framing political reality. The effect of this double framing – the framing of 'the frame', as it were – serves to expose as false the supposed neutrality of the frame, thus enabling the play to contest the conditions of its own creation.[95] Butler argues that '[w]hat happens when a frame breaks with itself is that a taken-for-granted reality is called into question, exposing the orchestrating designs of the authority who sought to control the frame'.[96] For Butler, the frame is grounded, like any other construct or structure, in the logic of self-identity or presence; however, it is not, she implies, as self-present or impermeable as it *seems* to be – rather, it exists in a state of instability and contingency that is repressed or hidden to enable its constitution in the first place. And it is precisely by attending to those repressed conditions that the frame's 'break[ing] with itself' can be traced or revealed.

For Butler, we might then say, the frame is *always already* in a process of self-deconstruction, which, despite appearances to the contrary, gestures towards its own dissolution: the frame, she writes, 'is a sign that the norm functions precisely by way of managing the prospect of its undoing, an undoing that inheres in its doings'.[97] Pertinent here is Derrida's remark that the frame – or what, for him is, 'the parergon' – is '[n]either simply outside nor simply inside'.[98] It can be argued, then, that the frame functions as a haunted space that, as Butler puts it, 'troubles our sense of reality', rather than simply demarcates or contains it. And something of this troubling spectrality is to be seen in *Party Time* with the 'leak[ing]' of the off-stage violence into the onstage world of the party.[99]

Important in this connection is Dusty whom I view as a disruptive figure within the secure world of the 'party'. Neither belonging wholly inside nor outside, Dusty serves as a

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[95] The sense of double-framing that I see in Pinter's play, to some extent, reminds me of Brecht's famous distancing technique, what he calls 'the alienation effect'. For more on Brecht, see my introduction.

[96] Butler, *Frames of War*, p. 12.

[97] Ibid., p. 12.

[98] Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987 [1978]), p. 54.

[99] *Party Time*, p. 293.

remainder or a trace of the other that the party otherwise keeps 'outside' in order to sustain the illusion of its validity, morality and normality. Still more important, I suggest, is the ghostly figure of Jimmy, as invoked incessantly by his sister to remind us that there is always, as Butler puts it, 'something that exceeds the frame'. Jimmy's surrealistic appearance in the final scene breaks not only the frame of political reality staged by the party but also the frame of theatricality or performance, suggesting to the audience that what we are viewing is not simply an artistic construct but rather something akin to a real-life occurrence. Pinter's use here of shifting and haunted frames of representation serves to suggest that the frame is far from being fixed or absolute; rather, he seems to suggest that the frame is something permeable, allowing and even calling for its own subversion. In this respect, Pinter's dramatization of the haunted frame echoes Butler's phantasmal account of the frame:

> What is this spectre that gnaws at the norms of recognition, an intensified figure vacillating as its inside and its outside? As inside, it must be expelled to purify the norm; as outside, it threatens to undo the boundaries that limn the self. In either case, it figures the collapsibility of the norm.[100]

And it is, I argue, this collapsibility or self-dismantling of the frame that we see enacted in *Party Time*.

Central to this is the way in which the leisured world of the 'party' is set against the off-stage scene of military suppression. The on-stage scene of the 'party', I argue, recalls the socio-political frame with which the audience are presumed to identify. Crucial here is the moment in which the audience find themselves implicated in the 'party' through Gavin's address to his guests: 'Thank you all so much for coming here tonight. It's been really lovely to see you, quite smashing'.[101] It is not, though, just the on-stage guests who are 'here tonight'

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[100] Butler, *Frames of War*, p. 12.
[101] Pinter, *Party Time*, p. 313.

but also we, the audience; we, too, thus, become guests and therefore implicated in the framed world of the party.

The framed world of the 'party' is, though, not only constructed within the field of vision or visibility; just as important, it seems, is the role of the discourse of morality. Note how Melissa, one of the party-goers, foregrounds the moral superiority of their 'club': 'O*ur* club, *our* club – is a club which is activated, which is inspired by a moral sense, a moral awareness, a set of moral values which is – I have to say – unshakeable, rigorous, fundamental, constant'.[102] Entangled with this moral exceptionalism is the fact of death – note how Melissa announces, without any hint of grief, the death of 'all' her former friends, friends who belonged to clubs other than the party: 'All of them are now dead. Every friend I ever had. Or ever met. Is dead. They are all of them dead. Every single one of them. I have absolutely not one left. None are left. Nothing is left'.[103] Note, too, how Melissa justifies her indifference to the death of her friends, along with their clubs, on moral grounds:

> But the clubs died too and rightly so. I mean there is a distinction to be made. My friends went the way of all flesh and I don't regret their passing. They weren't my friends anyway. I couldn't stand half of them. But the clubs! The clubs died, the swimming and the tennis clubs died because they were based on ideas which had no moral foundation, no moral foundation whatsoever.[104]

Melissa appears to believe that 'the clubs' actually *needed* to 'die' and needed to die 'because' they were morally unworthy of staying alive.

In contrast, the moral superiority of Melissa's 'club' seems to ensure the very *liveability* of its members, with the relation of the members to the 'club' defined by its commitment to enhancing the biological or somatic conditions of their lives – 'I think it's saved my life. The

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[102] Ibid., p. 311.
[103] Ibid., p. 310.
[104] Ibid., p. 311.

swimming', declares Melissa.[105] It is no accident that the swimming involves life-saving or that even the club's artistic activities are described in terms of 'catering':

> You've got real catering. You've got catering on all levels. You've not only got very good catering in itself – you know, food, that kind of thing – and napkins – you know, all that, wonderful, first rate – but you've also got artistic catering – you actually have an atmosphere – in this club – which is catering artistically for its clientele.[106]

By expressing the play's socio-political order in terms of a social club that *caters* for 'its clientele', Pinter lays bare a very particular political conditioning of the right to life – as signified by the members' exclusive access to 'food' in the club. And the need to 'subscribe' to the club highlights the conditionality of its membership, which is restricted to those that can *afford* its services – 'You take your hand out of your pocket and you put your money down and you know what you're getting. […] Gold-plated service in all departments.'[107] This club, we might say, is a biopolitical club – a life club, if you will, or diet-and-power club. It is no accident the double-edged word 'regime' emerges:

> CHARLOTTE   God, your looks! No, seriously. You're still so
>
> handsome! How do you do it? What's your diet? What's your regime?
>
> What *is* your regime by the way? What do you do to keep yourself so …
>
> I don't know … so … oh, I don't know… so trim, so fit?
>
> FRED   I lead a clean life.[108]

To conclude, the play lays bare how 'life' can be made into a socio-economic privilege not given to all. Life, if you will, is here a party to which only some are invited. The world beyond the party may be threatening, or other, but this threat can and will be managed:

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[105] Ibid., p. 294.
[106] Ibid., p. 310.
[107] Ibid., p. 310.
[108] Ibid., p. 307.

Now I believe one or two of our guests encountered traffic problems on their way here tonight. I apologize for that, but I would like to assure you that all such problems and all related problems will be resolved very soon. […] In fact normal services will be resumed shortly. […] That's all we ask, that the service this country provides will run on normal, secure and legitimate paths and that the ordinary citizen be allowed to pursue his labours and his leisure in peace.[109]

The 'normal' and 'ordinary' citizen with which Pinter's audience are made to identify is exemplified by the 'guests' of the party. And the security and protection granted to these on-stage 'ordinary citizen[s]' contrasts sharply with the exposure to risk and injury endured by those who are kept off-stage. This off-stage world, we note, is policed by 'soldiers' who work not only to ensure the liveability of the party guests but also to threaten, if necessary, the lives of those who are not considered 'normal' or 'ordinary' citizens. Significant in this connection is the language of killing that Terry uses with respect to what he calls his wife's 'lot', a group of people who clearly do not belong to the party:

TERRY   Yes, you're all going to die together, you and all your lot.

DUSTY   How are you going to do it? Tell me.

TERRY   Easy. We've got dozens of options. We could suffocate
every single one of you at a given signal or we could shove a broomstick up each individual arse at another given signal or we could poison all the mother's milk in the world so that every baby would drop dead before it opened its perverted bloody mouth.[110]

This holocaustal fantasy of state violence mirrors, I suggest, Butler's notion of 'precarity' which denotes 'politically induced condition[s] of maximized vulnerability and exposure for

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[109] Ibid., p. 313.
[110] Ibid., p. 302.

populations exposed to arbitrary state violence and to other forms of aggression that are not enacted by states and against which states do not offer adequate protection'.[111]

In a 2013 interview in *R/evolutions*, Butler makes a distinction between 'precarity' and 'precariousness'. She argues that all life, by virtue of its embodiment, is characterized by an existential condition of 'precariousness' – '[P]recariousness', she states, 'is a general feature of embodied life, a dimension of our corporeality and sociality'.[112] In short, because we live we will also die. However, as Butler goes on to say, we will not all be mourned, since liveability and grievability are always enmeshed within contexts of power that determine whether a life is *recognized* as 'precarious' or not. As a result of this differential 'precariousness', some lives are apprehended as 'lose-able' and simply become susceptible to an *enhanced* experience of 'precariousness', what Butler describes as 'precarity' –'[P]recarity', she says, 'is a way that precariousness is amplified or made more acute under certain social policies'.[113]

Pinter's *Party Time*, I argue, gestures towards this 'induced' condition of 'precarity' that some lives endure as opposed to others. It is evident from Gavin's final address that the lives of the party guests are sufficiently 'precarious' as to need support and protection – note how he promises 'that the ordinary citizen be allowed to pursue his labours and his leisure in *peace*'.[114] This pursuit of 'peace', however, appears to require considerable violence – there are soldiers, we gather, 'on the streets'.[115] Crucial here is the kind of enforced peace one party-goer seeks:

> DOUGLAS   We want peace and we're going to get it. But we want

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[111] Butler, *Frames of War*, p. 26.
[112] Judith Butler, 'Exercising Freedom', interviewed by Eliza Kania, in *R/evolutions*,
 1 (2013), 32-41 (p. 33) <http://revjournal.org/wp-content/uploads/REV1/global_trends/02rev1_gt_butler.pdf>
[Accessed 3 April 2017].
[113] Butler, *Frames of War*, p. 1; Butler, 'Exercising Freedom', p. 33.
[114] *Party Time*, p. 313; my emphasis.
[115] Ibid., p. 286.

that peace to be cast iron. No leaks. No draughts. Cast iron. Tight as a

drum. That's the kind of peace we want and that's the kind of peace

we're going to get. A cast-iron peace.

He clenches his fist.

Like this.[116]

The paradox of wanting to obtain peace by force, what Douglas refers to as 'cast-iron peace',

reveals how 'precariousness' in the contexts of power is limited to some lives *at the expense*

of others. In contrast, an induced state of 'precarity' is endured by Dusty's imprisoned brother,

Jimmy, whose social death is the result of a violence that is presented as wholly unremarkable.

In fact, we do not know the exact reason for the 'precarity' to which Dusty's brother and 'all'

her 'lot' are condemned. It can be concluded, though, that the failure to apprehend these lives

in their precariousness is attributed to their being *cast* as a threat to the existence of the

'ordinary citizen'.

Useful Precarity

'Precarity' as a form of justified or, even, *necessary* violence is, of course, a constant theme in

Pinter's late political theatre. The victims of violence in Pinter's theatre may vary in the kind

of 'crimes' they are said to commit against the dominant political order, but what they have in

common is their being represented as a threat to the continued physical existence of that order.

Plays, such as '*Party Time*, *Celebration*, *Press Conference*, and the *New World Order* explore',

as Grimes puts it, 'how rhetorical justification exists on a social level and proceeds through

language deformation to sanction, and often sanctify, violent repression'.[117] In this section,

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[116] Ibid., p. 293.
[117] Grimes, pp. 101-102.

though, I am less interested in Pinter's unmasking of the euphemistic rhetoric of violence than in his laying bare of the political thought that gives rise to the use of such rhetoric.[118]

Political language or discourse, as presented in Pinter's late theatre, has often been recognized as a tool for shaping or misshaping political consciousness. I agree, of course, that Pinter is interested in manipulation of political consciousness; however, a reading that focuses chiefly on political rhetoric might suggest that Pinter presupposes that his audience is so naïve as to be easily duped. Instead, what Pinter seems to suggest, I argue, is that political language could not be so sedative if political *reality* were not constructed upon a *rationale* that makes this language so politically appealing.

The political reality underlying the violent policy of the regimes staged by Pinter is, I would argue, very much informed by a 'politics of fear'. The framework for this form of 'politics' is derived from Hobbes's theory of the state, famously signified by the image of 'the Leviathan'. Hobbes defines 'the Leviathan' as 'an artificial man; though of greater stature and strength than the natural, for whose protection and defence it was intended; and in which', he continues, 'the *sovereignty* is an artificial *soul*, […] giving life and motion to the whole body'.[119] Put simply, this unified or totalitarian figure represents, for Hobbes, the body politic as produced by men for the purpose of ensuring their security. 'The Leviathan functions, Hobbes adds, as 'a common power, to keep them in awe, and to direct their actions to the common benefit'.[120] What is crucial about Hobbes's vision of the state, then, is its being premised on a principle of *fear* or impending danger. Hobbes traces the source of this fear to the pre-political 'state of nature' where, as he writes, 'every man is enemy to every man'.[121] It

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[118] For more on the connection between 'euphemism' and power in the late Pinter, see Grimes, pp. 103-109.
[119] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. by J.C.A. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 7; italics in the original.
[120] Ibid., p. 114.
[121] Ibid., p. 84.

can be argued, then, that political tranquillity, in Hobbes's theory, is only achieved when men replace fear of each other with fear of the state.

And it is this very particular politics of fear that, I argue, seems to underlie the brutality of the regimes in Pinter's political theatre where, time and again, the capacity of these regimes to function appears conditioned by their capacity to terrify. This is especially the case in Pinter's sketch *Precisely* (1983). Here, two politicians coldly exchange a conversation about the *precise* death toll expected as a result of an act of state violence they are about to trigger in order to protect the 'security' of their 'citizens':

> STEPHEN   You see, what makes this whole business doubly
>
> disgusting is that the citizens of this country are behind us. They're ready
>
> to go with us on the twenty million basis. They're perfectly happy! And
>
> what are they faced with from these bastards? A deliberate attempt to
>
> subvert and undermine their *security*. And their *faith*.[122]

Striking here is the division between the lives considered worth saving (the citizens of this country) and those ('the bastards') who represent a threat not only to the 'security' of the 'citizens' but also to their 'faith'. By equating the 'security' of the 'citizens' with their 'faith', Stephen seems to echo Hobbes's image of the state as a 'leviathan', or what he also calls a 'mortal god'. The figure of the 'leviathan' is, of course, mentioned within the Old Testament, most famously in Chapter 41 of the Book of Job where God illustrates his power and love to Job by showing that it is only His power that is able to tame the terrible creature.[123]

Although Hobbes does not explicitly refer to the biblical origin of the 'Leviathan', it is very helpful to look closely at it. The overall message of the story of Job is, of course, that

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[122] Harold Pinter, *Precisely,* in *Harold Pinter: Plays 4*, pp. 215-220 (pp. 218-9); my emphasis.

[123] God's description of the leviathan is as follows: 'Who can open the doors of his face? His teeth are terrible round about. His scales are his pride, shut up together as with a close seal' (Job 41: 14-15). These biblical verses, joined with the Hebrew translation and research, have led to the conclusion that the leviathan was most likely an extinct, giant crocodile. See Andrew R Fausset, Entry for 'Leviathan', in *Fausset's Bible Dictionary* (1949) <http://www.studylight.org/dictionaries/fbd/l/leviathan.html> [Accessed 3 March 2017].

man must put his full faith in God even during the most difficult situations. Therefore, by using the biblical leviathan to represent the sovereign-state, Hobbes attributes a Godlike character to the state, a habit of mind that is, I suggest, reflected in the political talk of 'faith' in *Precisely*. Defending state-violence on religious grounds is, of course, a dominant motif in Pinter's political plays. What Pinter thus explores, I argue, is not so much pure theology as a political or secularized theology that transfers the sovereignty of God to the state. Note, for instance, how Nicolas, the figure of the sovereign, in *One for the Road*, believes that 'God speaks through' him, and adds, 'I'm referring to the Old Testament God, by the way, although I'm a long way from being Jewish'.[124]

Another important example of the use of theological language to expiate state-induced violence can be found in *Press Conference* (2002) where 'the Minster' justifies his government's policy of rape, torture, and murder by using New Testament discourse – 'Under our philosophy ……', he says, 'he that is lost is found.'[125] What, though, is different here is that theology is not only being used to justify violence but also evokes the tradition of theodicy – that is the justification or explanation of suffering by reference to God. Levinas refers to this tradition in 'Useless Suffering':

> This is pain henceforth meaningful, subordinated in one way or another to the metaphysical finality glimpsed by faith or belief in progress. Beliefs presupposed by theodicy! […] The evil that fills the earth would be explained by a 'grand design'; it would be destined to the atonement of a sin, or announce, to the ontologically limited consciousness, compensation or recompense at the end of time. These supra-sensible perspectives are invoked in order to divine,

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[124] Pinter, *One for the Road*, p. 225.
[125] Pinter, *Press Conference* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002). Page numbers are not provided in this book.

in a suffering that is essentially gratuitous and absurd, and apparently arbitrary,

a meaning and an order.[126]

As Levinas indicates, there is a long tradition in the West of attempting to redeem suffering and pain by representing it as a means to a spiritual end. This tradition, argues Levinas, persists even into the modern, secular era:

It [theodicy] has been, at least up to the trials of the twentieth century, a component of the self-consciousness of European humanity. It persisted in watered-down form at the core of atheist progressivism, which was confident of the efficacy of the Good that is immanent in being and destined to visible triumph by the simple play of the natural and historical laws of injustice, war, misery and illness.[127]

For Levinas, though, this tradition becomes impossiblized by the Holocaust:

[T]he Holocaust of the Jewish people under the reign of Hitler seems to me the paradigm of gratuitous human suffering, in which evil appears in its diabolical horror. […] The disproportion between suffering and every theodicy was shown at Auschwitz with a glaring, obvious clarity.[128]

Auschwitz is, also, I suggest, on the mind of Pinter, and once again marks the end of any sense of order or meaning in the world. I think, particularly, here of *Ashes to Ashes* (1996), a play that presents a mentally disturbed woman, named Rebecca, who seems to be haunted by visions of suffering that are evocative of the Holocaust; she narrates those visions to a man named Devlin, who plays the multiple roles of her husband and/or lover, therapist and torturer:

REBECCA   I walked out into the frozen city. Even the mud was

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[126] Lévinas, 'Useless Suffering', *Entre Nous*, pp. 91-101 (p. 96).
[127] Ibid., p. 96.
[128] Ibid., p. 97.

frozen. And the snow was a funny colour. It wasn't white. Well, it was white but there were other colours in it. It was as if there were veins running through it. And it wasn't smooth, as snow is, as snow should be. It was bumpy. And when I got to the railway station I saw the train. Other people were there.

Pause.

And my best friend, the man I had given my heart to, the man I knew was the man for me the moment we met, my dear, my most precious companion, I watched him walk down the platform and tear all the babies from the arms of their screaming mothers.

Silence.[129]

It is, of course, all too easy to discern an echo of Auschwitz in the image of the 'railway station' and the 'tear[ing]' of 'the babies from the arms of their screaming mothers'. However, by having a mentally deranged woman evoke these scenes, Pinter seems to suggest not only the non-communicability of suffering but also its sheer irrationality or meaninglessness.

Crucial in this connection is Devlin's insisting on interrogating Rebecca:

Now let me say this. A little while ago you made … shall we say … you made a somewhat oblique reference to your bloke … your lover? … and babies and mothers, et cetera. And platforms. I inferred from this that you were talking about some kind of atrocity. Now let me ask you this. What authority do you think you yourself possess which would give you the right to discuss such an atrocity?[130]

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[129] Harold Pinter, *Ashes to Ashes* in *Pinter: Plays 4*, pp. 395-433 (pp. 418-9); for more on the play's ethical engagement with the Holocaust, see Scolnicov, in Aragay and Monforte, pp. 42-58 and Taylor-Batty, in Ibid., pp. 59-75.
[130] Ibid., p. 413.

Pinter here presents us with a markedly 'sexuated' response to suffering – a cognitive-masculine response that counters the affective-feminine response of Rebecca.[131] Note how Devlin subjects Rebecca to a kind of Cartesian inquiry: 'I'm compelled to ask you questions. There are so many things I don't know. I know nothing … about any of this. Nothing. I'm in the dark. I need light'.[132] It is important to note that the masculine, or hyper-masculine, character of Devlin's interrogation entails not only a desire to master Rebecca's mind but also to conquer her body:

> DEVLIN *goes to her. He stands over her and looks down at her.*
>
> *He clenches his fist and holds it in front of her face. He puts his left hand behind her neck and grips it. He brings her head towards his fist. His fist touches her mouth.*[133]

Devlin's physical aggression is here highlighted by Rebecca's permeability, as suggested by her being not only sexually penetrated – 'So your legs were opening?'– but also psychically penetrated.[134] Note how she completely loses her sense of self as she identifies with one of the mothers in her visions who was forced to give away her baby:

> REBECCA   I took my baby and wrapped it in my shawl
>
> ECHO   my shawl
>
> REBECCA   And I made it into a bundle
>
> ECHO   a bundle
>
> […]
>
> REBECCA   But the baby cried out
>
> ECHO   cried out

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[131] I here have in mind Luce Irigaray's notion of 'sexuate difference' where she proposes that 'man and woman do not belong to one and the same subjectivity, that subjectivity itself is neither neutral nor universal' – Luce Irigaray, *Luce Irigaray: Key Writings* (London & NY: Continuum, 2004), p. xii.
[132] Pinter, *Ashes to Ashes*, p. 399.
[133] Ibid., p. 428.
[134] Ibid., p. 397

> REBECCA   And the man called me back
>
> ECHO   called me back
>
> REBECCA   And he said what do you have there
>
> ECHO   have there
>
> REBECCA   He stretched out his hand for the bundle
>
> ECHO   for the bundle
>
> REBECCA   And I gave him the bundle
>
> ECHO   the bundle
>
> REBECCA   And that's the last time I held the bundle
>
> ECHO   the bundle
>
> *Silence.*[135]

By narrating this haunting vision of infantile loss in the first person, Rebecca does not so much appear to bear witness to loss as to experience it.

In *Ashes to Ashes*, then, Pinter seems to explore feminine subjectivity as an alternative to the masculine subjectivity that so dominates the world he represents, the world of political reality. Moreover, what we can see in this feminine subjectivity is a vulnerability (or even, dare we say it, a precarity) that gestures towards the possibility of a genuinely ethical relationship to suffering.

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[135] Ibid., pp. 429-10.

CONCLUSION

Pinter and the 'Third'

> The third does not wait; it is there from the 'first' epiphany of the face in the face to face.
>
> — *Adieu*

During the last two decades of the twentieth century a 'turn', or perhaps more accurately a 'return', to ethics took place. The growing interest in ethics was mainly triggered by an increasing interest in the work of Levinas, who shifted the orientation of Western thought towards alterity and the possibility of ethics: 'Morality', he writes in 1961, 'is not a branch of philosophy, but first philosophy'.[1] Again, in 1982, in *Ethics and Infinity*, he writes, 'First philosophy is an ethics'.[2] What came to be known as the 'ethical turn' designates a renewal of interest in ethical issues that has gathered force within the humanities in general and literary studies in particular since the mid-to-late 1980s. Works such as, J. Hillis Miller's *The Ethics of Reading* (1987), Adam Zachary Newton's *Narrative Ethics* (1995), Robert Eaglestone's *Ethical Criticism: Reading After Levinas* (1997), Jill Robbins's *Altered Reading: Levinas and Literature* (1999), and Susana Onega's *Ethics and Trauma in Contemporary British Fiction* (2011), to name a few, all testify to the growing interest in the intersection between ethics and literature.

It is not until the late 2000s, though, that a turn to ethics became manifest in theatre studies, most notably, Nicholas Ridout's *Theatre and Ethics* (2009) and Helena Grehan's *Performance, Ethics and Spectatorship in a Global Age* (2009). Still more recent are two significant collections of essays that take up the representation of ethical issues in contemporary British theatre – namely *Ethical Speculations in Contemporary British Theatre* (2014), edited by Mireia Aragay and Eric Monforte, and *Of Precariousness:*

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[1] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 304.
[2] Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, p. 77.

Vulnerabilities, Responsibilities, Communities in 21st-Century British Drama and Theatre (2017), edited by Mireia Aragay and Martin Middeke. And it is particularly this turn towards ethics within drama studies, in general, and the contemporary British stage, in particular, that sets the context for my current investigation of Pinter's ethics. The present thesis, I claim, then, is the first to offer a comprehensive critical examination of the intersections between Pinter's political output – most notably his drama – and contemporary ethical thought.

Despite my ethical take on Pinter's political theatre, on its sense of the face-to-face encounter of self and other, I cannot conclude this thesis without addressing how the face-to-face encounter is complicated, interrupted, or mediated. To explain, while the encounter with the other in these works appears as concrete and individual, i.e. face-to-face, it is usually mediated through a formal structure of social or political reality, indicated, for example, by 'the organization' or the figure of the brother. In other words, there is, I argue, a double-structure to the ethical, as it is presented in Pinter, not only, that is, a one-to-one self-other scene but also a one-to-*many* scene, or (if you will) self-other*s* scene.

This brings us to the Levinasian question of the 'third' and its relation to the ethico-political problematic. In order to address this complication in Pinter, I will return to the foregrounding of totalitarianism as that which, I argue, seems to unite Pinter's and Levinas's conception of the political in modern history. I will, then, propose to read Levinas's conception of the ethical-in-the-political, or the ethico-political, as that which can fill the ethical *gap* which remains open in Pinter's political dramas. I will conclude by suggesting that Pinter's political vision, especially as seen in the early plays, introduces a sense of the 'third' not as a disruption or failing of the face-to-face ethical relation with the other but as a reminder that politics *always already* inhabits ethics.

The Ethico-Political

The critique of totalitarianism imbues all of Levinas's philosophical writing, especially his major philosophical work, *Totality and Infinity*. Levinas explains his critique of the philosophical notion of 'totality' via the horrors of National Socialism: 'My critique of totality', he says in an interview in 1982, 'has come in fact after a political experience that we have not yet forgotten'.[3] By thus aligning a philosophical concept with a political event, Levinas seems to call for reflection on the philosophical underpinnings of political violence. In other words, he seems to suggest that the death camps of the Holocaust were not simply an anomaly of Western history or civilization; rather, they were a manifestation of the way of thinking that dominated the West from Ancient Greece until modernity. Levinas particularly locates the complicity of Western philosophy with the political violence of Nazism in their shared orientation towards homogeneity, or what he calls 'totality'. In short, Levinas sees a link between philosophical 'totality' and political totalitarianism – as Simon Critchley writes:

> The notion of totality is identical to the notion of philosophy – it's an idea Levinas borrows from Franz Rosenzweig. In The *Star of Redemption*, Rosenzweig argues that philosophy, from Ionia and Jena, from Thales to Hegel, is premised on the reduction of multiplicity to totality. Philosophy is based on the sameness of thinking and being that yields the conceivability of the All, of totality.[4]

Although Levinas chiefly explores 'totality' from the perspective of metaphysics, he also sees it as an ontological paradigm for political totalitarianism – 'Political totalitarianism', he writes, 'rests on ontological totalitarianism'.[5] Levinas here draws on Heidegger's

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[3] Levinas, *Ethics and infinity*, pp. 78-79.
[4] Simon Critchley, *The Problem with Levinas*, ed. by Alexis Dianda (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 2 <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/lib/lancaster/detail.action?docID=2084466> [accessed 3 August 2017].
[5] Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, p. 206.

comprehensive study of ontology that neutralizes the relationship between beings on the basis of their common relation to Being – 'Western philosophy', writes Levinas, 'has most often been an ontology: a reduction of the other to the same by interposition of a middle and neutral term that ensures the comprehension of being'.[6] For Levinas, ontological totality translates into a form of political existence that compels individuals into a totalized order – be it of race, class, confession or the state. In this way, '[t]he meaning of individuals […]', writes Levinas, 'is derived from the totality'.[7] Totality, though, is not simply a static construct; rather, it is a mobile 'force' that seeks to dominate and swallow the other by virtue of its supposed universality. And this swallowing is, for Levinas, what gives rise to political violence. Hence, Levinas's conception of 'war' as 'the pure experience of pure being':

> The ontological event that takes form in this black light [i.e. the state of war] is a casting into movement of beings hitherto anchored in their identity, a mobilization of absolutes, by an objective order from which there is no escape.[8]

And this notion of being-as-war, for Levinas, is what informs the very mode of political thinking of which the Holocaust was a symptom.

To put this another way, Levinas sees the Holocaust as a reminder of the persistence of political violence generated by total(itarian) thinking in the West:

> [T]he European conscience is […] [a] bad conscience after [not only] thousands of years of glorious Reason, of the triumphant Reason of knowledge; but also after thousands of years of political—and bloody—fratricidal wars, of

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[6] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 43; Levinas's thought on alterity is often read as a counter-response to Heidegger's ontology which offered the philosophical rationale for National Socialism – as Levinas writes in *Existence and Existents* (1978): 'If at the beginning our reflections are in large measure inspired by the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, where we find the concept of ontology and of the relationship which man sustains with Being, they are also governed by a profound need to leave the climate of that philosophy, and by the conviction that we cannot leave it for a philosophy that would be pre-Heideggerian' – Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. by Alphonso Lingi (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), p. 19 <https://archive.org/details/emmanuel-levinas-existence-and-existents> [accessed 2 June 2017].

[7] Ibid., p. 22.

[8] Ibid.*,* p. 21.

imperialism in the guise of universality, of contempt for human beings and exploitation, including, in this century, two world wars, oppression, genocides, the Holocaust, terrorism, unemployment, the never-ending poverty of the Third World, [and] the ruthless doctrines of Fascism and National Socialism.[9]

Levinas here refers to another total(itarian) tendency within Western philosophy, namely the reverence for Reason. For Levinas, Reason is intricately tied to ontology in that the latter posits a unitary model for *understanding* the essence of beings. Reason, in this sense, is correlated with Being as a totalizing force that annihilates alterity. Traditional philosophical accounts of cognition, argues Levinas, renders alterity as a fixed, definable essence that can be re-*present-*ed to consciousness. Hence, the enclosure of the other within the totality of the same. And when such philosophical violence is transferred to politics, Levinas would argue, it produces the myriad forms of physical violence that characterizes modern Europe.

Crucial here is Levinas's talk of Europe's 'bad conscience after thousands of years of glorious Reason'. Levinas thus glances at the terrible darkness housed within the progressive ideals of the Enlightenment. In short, the barbarity of modern history, Levinas suggests, is not so much a perversion of the ideals of Western thought but rather the logical outcome of the rational and ontological nature of this thought. Ontological politics, indeed, is, for Levinas, the grounding rationale not only for war and genocide but also for the state. Ontology, in this sense, becomes an abstract system of impersonal rules which institutionalize the interpersonal relation between individuals in order to be able to govern them. Levinas, of course, realizes the practical necessity of ontological discourse for politics, saying: 'We can never completely escape from the language of ontology'.[10] However, he is convinced that this language runs the 'risk [of]

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[9] Levinas, *Entre Nous,* p. 191.

[10] Levinas, 'Ethics of the Infinite', in Richard Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers*: *The Phenomenological Heritage*: *Paul Ricoeur, Emmanuel Levinas, Herbert Marcuse, Stanislas Breton, Jacques Derrida* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 49-70 (p. 58).

causing us to misrecognize the face of the other man'.[11] And this misrecognition, he believes, is at the root of totalitarianism – 'A State', he writes, 'in which the interpersonal relation is impossible, in which it is directed *in advance* by the determinism proper to the State, is a totalitarian State'.[12]

That is not to say, though, that Levinas simply wants the ethical to supersede the political once and for all. Instead, he seeks to *return* the political to its ethical origins in the pre-conceptual face-to-face encounter. To clarify, I will draw on the Lacanian paradigm Eagleton uses in his reading of Levinas's co-implication of the ethical with the political. Eagleton proposes that that the political order, for Levinas, is grounded in the non-thematizable relation with the 'face' in much the same way as, for Lacan, the symbolic order is grounded in the pre-cognitive Real:

> The 'face', the sheer aching vulnerability of the other, comes before all moral and political discourse; and though it opens these issues up for us, they must never stray too far from their home in the face-to-face encounter. The symbolic order, in short, has its ground in the Real – for the ethical is Levinas's own version of this Lacanian conception.[13]

In other words, the ethical-Real is not only anterior to the political-symbolic but also serves as the founding imperative out of which all indicatives, norms, and rules emerge.

Levinas's grounding of the political in the ethical is not, though, I would argue, a simple privileging of the latter, for both terms in his theory appear as co-dependent. In fact, the ethical, according to Levinas, requires the political to organize the competing demands made upon the self by the *multiple* other, or faces, it encounters in everyday life. It is true that, for Levinas, the ethical encounter (i.e. face-to-face) is dualistic in so far it is primordial or pre-symbolic;

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[11] Levinas, 'Who Shall Not Prophesy?', trans. by Bettina Bergo, in *Is it Righteous to Be?,* pp. 219-227 (p. 223).
[12] Ibid., p. 167; my emphasis.
[13] Eagleton, *Trouble with Strangers*, pp. 228-229.

however, the ethical relation, Levinas argues, is never separated from a socio-political reality in which the other of the other, if you will, always already inhabits the face of the singular other. Hence, Levinas's concept of 'the Third' – 'The third party', he writes, 'looks at me in the eyes of the Other […] the epiphany of the face qua face opens humanity'.[14] In other words, the 'third party' represents, for Levinas, the transition from the ethical-Real, as it were, to the political-symbolic order of the law, courts, judgments, institutions, and so on – as he writes:

> In the measure that the face of the Other relates us with the third party, the metaphysical relation of the I with the Other moves into the form of the We, [and] aspires to a State, institutions, laws which are the source of universality.[15]

This transition, for Levinas, though, does not signify absolute departure or separation; rather, it represents the mutual contamination of the ethical and the political. Thus, politics, in Levinasian terms, is always already about *negotiation* between the Other and the Third, always already ethico-political – as Critchley puts it:

> Levinas's thinking does not result in an apoliticism or ethical quietism […] Rather, ethics leads back to politics, to the demand for a just polity. Indeed, I would go further and claim that ethics is ethical for the sake of politics, that is, for the sake of a more just society.[16]

In the following section, I will put Levinasian theories of the ethical and the political to the test of the three early plays by Pinter which have been the critical focus of the present thesis. Note that my reading, by no means, reduces the plays to a reflection of Levinas's ideas; rather, I propose that the plays put the ideas to the test of concrete dramatic encounters. My reading of Levinas, through Pinter, is particularly informed by the striking affinity I see between the dramatic scenes in Pinter and the dynamic imagery that Levinas deploys in his philosophical

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[14] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 213.
[15] Ibid., p. 300.
[16] Simon Critchley, Introduction, in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, ed. by Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 1-32 (pp. 24-5).

exposition – crucial here are the following tropes, or terms: hospitality, accusation, persecution, and substitution.

Hospitality

All three of 'my' early plays by Pinter dramatize the tension between the interpersonal and general, especially by presenting us with scenes of domestic encounters embedded within a formal structure of community or sociality. Here, that is, 'face-to-face' encounters seem to be politicized by an overarching and face*less* Other. To explore this complication, I will look at how Pinter's *The Birthday Party*, *The Caretaker*, and *The Dumb Waiter* enact face-to-face encounters problematized by the shadowy figure of the 'third'. I have chosen these particular plays because of the *triangular* structure of the conflict they dramatize. What these plays share in common, for all their thematic differences, I argue, is their exemplification of the entwinement between the personal and political for which Pinter is famed. As Austin Quigley notes,

> For the Pinter of these [early] plays, the local picture in all its simplicity and complexity precedes and succeeds any large one, and national political action, if it were to make sense at all, would have to be an extension of, and not a substitute for, the daily activity of people coping with self and others in the local spaces his characters inhabit. One of the most prominent of Pinter's early statements was the remark: 'Before you manage to adjust yourself to living alone in your room, you're not really terribly fit and equipped to go out to fight battles'.[17]

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[17] Austin Quigley, 'Pinter, Politics and Postmodernism (1)', in *The Cambridge Companion to Harold Pinter*, ed. by Peter Raby, 1st edn, pp. 7-27 (p. 10).

Some may regard Pinter's statement as a call for reading his plays existentially. And I do acknowledge the existential dimension in Pinter's work, bearing very much in mind his claim to be 'dealing with […] characters driven to the extreme edge of their living, where they are living pretty much alone, at their hearth, at their home hearth'.[18] The home is certainly central to Pinter, in particular, the room; however, Pinter's rooms, for all their claustrophobic interiority, open onto the outside world – unlike the room in Sartre's famous *huis-clos* drama, '*No Exit*' (1944). The inside and outside in Pinter, I shall argue, then, are not meant to be understood as discrete and separate, for they are intricately intertwined or co-implicated. Put differently, the question of existence as it appears in Pinter, it seems to me, is always already presented as a question of sociality.

Now I come to introduce the complex relation between the ethical and the political as it is dramatized by my three plays. I start by drawing on a number of close readings of *The Birthday Party* in relation to Levinas. This will be followed by two short readings of *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Caretaker* with a special focus on their dramatization of the conflicting relation between the other and (what we might call) the other others. Perhaps the key concept in the following discussion is the notion of hospitality, to which I will come presently.

The tension between interiority and exteriority, I propose, is nowhere better expressed than in *The Birthday Party*. This tension is interestingly dramatized through an extended scene of hospitality complicated by the foreboding presence of 'the organization', the mysterious body to which Goldberg and McCann refer and seem to embody. The 'organization' I read as a figure for 'the third'. To explain: there are two intersecting scenes of hospitality presented in the play: in the first, Stanley plays the part of the guest with the owners of the boarding house as hosts; in the second, Goldberg and McCann play the part of the guests with Stanley as host.

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[18] Esslin, *Pinter: A Study of His Plays*, p. 34.

In each of these scenes we are presented with a particular form of hospitality that has a striking resonance with Levinas's ethical philosophy.

Of particular relevance to this dual scene of hospitality is the motif of renting or tenancy which connotes a mode of dwelling based largely on lack of proper possession. However, Stanley does not simply play the part of a tenant since at times he behaves as if he were a member of the household, even its master. Note, for instance, when he tells Goldberg, 'I run the house'.[19] Put differently, I read Stanley's tenancy as suggestive of a particular mode of dwelling that is less grounded in economy or legality than in reception. Stanley's relationship to the house, that is, seems to literalize the law of hospitality that, as Derrida puts it, 'makes of the inhabitant a guest [*hôte*] received in his own home'.[20] In this sense, Stanley, I argue, appears less as a 'guest', pure and simple, than a guest-master.

Stanley, of course, is not the actual master or proprietor of the boarding house; however, there is a sense in which he acts as one. Consider, for example, how he identifies with the owners of the boarding house as he uses the collective pronoun 'we':

> STANLEY (*moving downstage*) I'm afraid there's been a mistake. *We*'re booked out. Your room is taken. Mrs Boles forgot to tell you. You'll have to find somewhere else.
>
> GOLDBERG Are you the manager here?
>
> STANLEY That's right.[21]

Stanley's language here suggests he seeks to protect not only his place in the house but also, and more importantly, his mastery of the house. In short, Stanley, it seems, does not simply consider the house as a place of residence; rather, he seems to regard it as a site of self-withdrawal and interiority, one that is particularly characterized by familiarity and intimacy.

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[19] *Birthday Party*, p. 38.
[20] Derrida, *Adieu*, p. 42.
[21] *Birthday Party*, p. 38; my emphasis.

This vision, or dream, is, though, dramatically contested by the second scene of hospitality involving Stanley, Goldberg and McCann, and, let us not forget, the 'organization'.

The home in *The Birthday Party* is, then, not simply a *fortified* site of sheltering or refuge. Instead, the boarding house serves as a figure for hospitality in two ways: first, in welcoming the self to its interiority and second, in exposing the self to the intrusion of the other. This double functioning of the home recalls Derrida's point that the house is structured in such a way that paradoxically allows for both self-enclosure and self-exposure:

> [I]n order to constitute the space of a habitable house and a home, you also need an opening, a door and windows, you have to give up a passage to the outside world [*l'etranger*]. There is no house or interior without a door or windows. The monad of home has to be hospitable in order to be *ipse*, itself at home, habitable at-home in the relation of the self to itself.[22]

Interiority, in this sense, appears less as an enclosing of the ego than a turning of the ego inside out. And it is particularly this sense of turning outwards that I see literalized in Goldberg and McCann's taking of Stanley away at the end of the play. As Goldberg remarks, Stanley's self-expropriation, I argue, is foreshadowed by Goldberg's suggestive remark: 'We'll bring him out of himself'.[23] Put in Levinasian terms, the two mysterious visitors, of whom we know so little, appear to represent the claim of the other who unsettles the ego and calls it into question.

In this connection, we should note how Stanley's egoistic enjoyment of his dwelling in the house appears to be disrupted by the visitors. Crucial here is the ending of Stanley's 'birthday party' where he seems to have completely lost his position as master, as the one who allegedly 'runs the house':

> STANLEY, *as soon as the torchlight hits him, begins to giggle.* GOLDBERG

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[22] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, p. 61.
[23] *Birthday Party*, p. 27.

> *and* MCCANN *move towards him. He backs, giggling, the torch on his face.*
>
> *They follow him upstage, left. He backs against the hatch, giggling. The torch*
>
> *draws closer. His giggle rises and grows as he flattens himself against the wall.*
>
> *Their figures converge upon him.*
>
> *Curtain.*[24]

One is reminded here of Levinas's striking conception of the subject as 'a stranger, *hunted down* even in [his] own home'.[25]

To explore this very particular 'hunting down', I will draw on two other related statements by Levinas – namely, 'the subject is a host' and '[the] subject is hostage'.[26] As we have seen, the subject, for Levinas, is a 'host' in so far it is receptive or responsive to the call of the other. This host-being of the subject, its responsiveness, as it were, is something that cannot be evaded, something that fixes the subject as *singularly* responsible for the other. Hence, Levinas's double figuration of the subject as 'host' and 'hostage'. And Stanley, I argue, appears to occupy this double position, especially in that *he* is the one being visited, the one besieged by the other, as it were.

This sense of siege is particularly suggested by the mock-trial scene where Stanley is bombarded with a torrent of nonsensical accusations from Goldberg and McCann that seem to serve no particular purpose, other than to amplify his sense of culpability. Note that the crimes of which Stanley is accused range from the personal to the political, many of which he could not have possibly committed. Stanley, it seems to me, is thus not so much judged as always already *condemned*. Here Stanley the host thus becomes Stanley the hostage, a hostage to Levinaisan responsibility – as Levinas writes:

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[24] Ibid., pp. 59-60.
[25] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 92; my emphasis
[26] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 299; *Otherwise than Being*, p. 112.

> Responsibility for another is not an accident that happens to a subject, but precedes essence in it […] I have not done anything and I have always been under accusation – persecuted […] a hostage. The word *I means here I am*, answering for everything and for everyone.[27]

The Levinasian subject, answering to 'everyone' and 'everything', endures a responsibility that *empirically* exceeds his capacity to respond. The responsibility for the other, as Levinas sees it, that is, extends beyond its origin in the face-to-face relation to include 'everyone'. Cue the problem of the political or what Levinas famously calls, 'the third':

> The third […] is of itself the limit of responsibility and the birth of the question: What do I have to do with justice? A question of conscience, of consciousness. Justice is necessary, that is, comparison, coexistence, contemporaneousness, assembling, order […] the intelligibility of a system.[28]

'The third', then, is what gives rise to the transition from ethics (understood as the non-totalizable relation to the singular other) to politics (understood as the relation to all the others that make up society). This transition is necessary in that it actualizes the ethical and renders it thematizable in juridical and political terms; nevertheless, it inevitably betrays the ethical in that it limits the 'incomparable' responsibility to the other by subjecting it to the requirements of equality and justice. As Levinas's writes: 'What, then, are the other and the third with respect to one another? *Birth of the question*. The first question in the interhuman is the *question of justice*'.[29]

To resume, the problem of justice, for Levinas, is coincident with the arrival of 'the third', the latter, though, is nevertheless, co-present in the face-to-face encounter with the other: 'In the proximity of the other', writes Levinas, 'all the others than the other obsess me, and

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[27] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 114.
[28] Ibid., p. 157.
[29] Levinas 'Peace and Proximity', in *Basic Philosophical Writing*, p. 168; my emphasis.

already this obsession cries out for justice'.[30] And it is this cry for 'justice' that I discern in McCann's exclamation in the middle of his and Goldberg's questioning of Stanley – 'I demand justice!'[31] I would argue, then, that the claim of the other, as represented by Goldberg and McCann, gestures towards that of all the other others who are absent, not only from the room but from the immediate context of the play. The sense of urgency suggested by the exclamation mark following McCann's demand for justice recalls Derrida's point that 'the third does not wait'; and 'it is there', he goes on to add, 'from the "first" epiphany of the face in the face to face'.[32] This epiphany may not, though, be a happy one – indeed, if *The Birthday Party* is to be our guide, it may be a very dark epiphany. Witness Stanley's eventual deportation to 'Monty' where he is promised to be 're-orientated', 'adjusted', and 'integrated' as Stanley's inscription into the symbolic order of the law, justice, and 'the third'.[33]

To conclude, *The Birthday Party*, explores, I suggest, the *birth* of the political subject – that is, the subject of the 'organization' and 'the third'. Put differently, what we see in the play is the inevitable risk of violence that results from the totalizing *domination* of 'the third', a domination that here *forces* the passage from the ethical to the political. This passage remains a 'question' in Levinas, or in Derrida's words – 'the birth of the *question as question*'; however, in *The Birthday Party* it is not so much a question as a command.[34] Hence, Petey's cry – 'Stan, don't let them tell you what to do!'[35]

The Dumb Waiter, I argue, is another play by Pinter that seems to interweave the ethical and political by enacting paradoxical scenes of hospitality and violence. The scene of hospitality is suggested by the act of serving food whilst that of violence is suggested by the order to kill

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[30] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 158.
[31] *Birthday Party*, p. 45.
[32] Derrida, *Adieu*, pp. 30-1.
[33] *Birthday Party*, pp. 68-80.
[34] Derrida, *Adieu*, p. 31.
[35] *Birthday Party*, p. 80.

decreed, it seems, by the notorious 'organization'. The two scenes, though, do not appear as separate or distinct, for the order to serve food culminates in the order to give death; the order to serve the other, that is, develops into the order to kill for the other. Throughout my analysis of the play in Chapter Three, I focused on the gift of death Gus is asked to embody by acquiescing to *be* the sacrificial lamb of the 'organization'. Here, though, I will take up the gift of death that Ben is asked to give by consenting to kill Gus for the 'organization'. Crucial to this paradoxical scene, I argue, is the final *pending* moment when Ben appears divided between his responsibility towards Gus, who stands face-to-face before him, and his responsibility towards the faceless 'organization' which demands that he kills. Standing defenselessly before Ben's pointed gun, Gus, I argue, is evocative of the Levinasian Other who pronounces through his very vulnerability the ethical appeal, 'Thou shall not kill'. This immediate encounter with the 'face', I argue, is overshadowed by the haunting presence of the 'organization', which dispenses impersonal orders through a machine, namely the dumb-waiter. I interpret the figure of the *dumb*-waiter as a metonym for the totalitarian state which, in Levinas's words, 'deforms the I and the other who have given rise to it, for it judges them', he says, 'according to universal rules, and thus as in absentia'.[36] The play, of course, does not provide a practical solution to the irreducible gap between the singular and universal, or political. Nevertheless, the play's suspended ending, I would argue, seems to critique the totalitarian idea of *pure* politics. I interpret the infinite suspension of Ben's decision, that is, as signifying the aporetic structure of the ethico-political which contests the belief that *only* political rationality (i.e. law, duty, judgement, etc) can answer political problems. By ending the play *inconclusively*, Pinter, I argue, then, seems to join Levinas in indicating how the political order of the state (i.e. the third) always already rests upon the irreducible ethical responsibility of the face-to-face.

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[36] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 300.

It is, though, in *The Caretaker* where the *limit* to the ethical proximity of the face-to-face is most apparent. The dyadic scene of hospitality enacted between Aston and the homeless Davies seems to be perverted by the arrival of a third party, namely Aston's younger brother, Mick. Mick's arrival is not, though, secondary, or belated, in that he is visible in the room right from the very start. It is just that Mick's sudden departure following Aston and Davies's arrival makes him *appear* as the one in shadow – or, in Levinasian terms, as the 'third', he who is *seemingly* absent from the face-to-face relation. And it is not long after the host-guest drama begins to unfold that this spectral 'third' begins to interrupt the ethical immediacy of the face-to-face with its claim for legality, conditions and rights. This is reflected, I argue, in the way that Mick's legalistic discourse introduces a conditional dimension to the hospitality shown by Aston to Davies. This brings us, I suggest, to the role of 'the third' in restricting the unconditional and absolute obligation towards the other. Put differently, *The Caretaker*, I argue, seems to think through the following three questions – each posed by Levinas in *Otherwise than Being* – 'What then are the other and the third for one another? What have they done to one another? Which passes before the other?'[37]

Crucial here is the *threat* that Davies poses in his trying to play the two brothers against one another:

> DAVIES (*Bending, close to* MICK) No, what you want to do, you want to speak to him [Aston], see? I got . . . I got that worked out. You want to tell him . . . that we got ideas for this place, we could build it up, we could get it started. You see, I could decorate it out for you, I could give you a hand in doing it . . . between us.[38]

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[37] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 157.
[38] *Caretaker*, p. 61.

As this moment makes clear, *The Caretaker* is, by no means, oblivious to the *risk* housed within the ethical encounter, a point to which Levinas later comes around: '[I]n alterity', he says, 'we can find an enemy'.[39] To conclude, *The Caretaker*'s enactment of the guest's betrayal of his host, I argue, seems to suggest that it is not only 'politics left to itself [that] bears a tyranny within itself', as Levinas famously says, but also *unguarded* ethics.[40]

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[39] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Ethics and Politics'(1982), interviewed by Shlomo Malka, trans. by Jonathan Romney, in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. by Seán Hand (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp. 289-297 (p. 294)

[40] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 300; the guest's betrayal of his host is a common motif in the western tradition of hospitality, of which the most famous example perhaps is the 'kiss of Judas': 'Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?' (Luke 22:48). For more on the treachery of the guest, see James A. W. Heffernan, *Hospitality and Treachery in Western Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

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