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HAROLD PINTER: READING STRATEGIES WITH REFERENCE TO THE BIRTHDAY PARTY, THE HOMECOMING AND ONE FOR THE ROAD

By

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IN MEMORIAM

PETER ANDRÉ NEL

I declare that the dissertation, Harold Pinter: Reading Strategies with reference to The Birthday Party, The Homecoming and One for the Road, for the degree Master of Arts at the University of the North hereby submitted, has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university; that it is my own work in design and in execution and that all material contained therein has been duly acknowledged.

Signed: 

Date: ...*22 August 1989*...

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Combrink (1979, p.1 - 2) writes:

The question as to whether a further study of the Pinter oeuvre is justifiable calls for consideration in responsible fashion ...

What finally emerges from the survey of twenty years' intensive critical activity is the fact that critical response to his work is as ambiguous and unsettled as ever.

Each reading of a work by Harold Pinter presents the reader with interpretative problems and each subsequent reading does not necessarily lead to greater clarity. Almansi and Henderson (1983, p.13 - 16) mention three problem areas related to the interpretation of Pinter's oeuvre:

The first avenue [of approach to afford a 'better understanding of the modern dramatic text'], the traditional cul-de-sac of compulsory avant-gardisme and stylistic progress, presumes that, since modernism has been such a great leap forward over

naturalism, all successive movements should follow the same athletic model, in order to keep abreast of each innovation but with Pinter there is nothing particularly exciting to learn in terms of dramatic innovations or scenic experiments

The second cul-de-sac is the critic's habitual search for a meaning and a message ... With Pinter ... you get nothing except the few truisms we all knew before we started.

The third cul-de-sac is the search for motivations, for psychological or psychoanalytic causes, for some kind of intellectual or emotional rationale that could help us explain why these strange beings, the Pinterian heroes, behave as they do.

Almansi and Henderson conclude that the latter approach is 'doomed to fail with the characters in Pinter's plays, who remain haunted by an uncertain identity, endowed with an ever-shifting memory, burdened with a past that behaves like a movable feast' (p.17) - approaching a semblance of reality, in other words. What Pinter is saying is that we all have skeletons rattling in the cupboards of our collective sub-conscious and that human frailty (moral and physical) results in tension and is open to dramatic enquiry.

Almansi and Henderson accept - as many other prominent critics do - the theory postulated by critics of the reception aesthetics school that, with the loss of the author as the highest authority of his work, the reader has stepped into the breach and, although the reader is not considered the ultimate authority, it is nevertheless accepted that a text exists because of the reader and not despite the reader, a theory which does not conflict with the hypotheses proposed in this dissertation.

Notwithstanding the obstacles and objections mentioned by Almansi and Henderson, the aim of this dissertation is to attempt to show how it may be possible for Pinter's work to 'reveal' itself to the individual, informed reader. The constraints that have long shackled a reader to artificial rules of reading have been disposed of for eternity. J. Hillis Miller writes about 'the nostalgia for old "certainties," the exhilaration of insights coming from newer strategies of interpretation ...' (1980, p.613).

This does not imply that the reader's interpretation may be undisciplined and laissez-faire (although one could conceivably arrive at a zero interpretation point - the aporia of the text - which may sometimes even be necessary).

The school of thought which has allowed the reader this freedom is, of course, deconstruction, a philosophical 'movement' which has been embraced by critics such as Jacques Derrida, J. Hillis Miller and Paul de Man, and which has earned its exponents the approbation of critics such as Vincent B. Leitch, who writes:

At the moment it is an open question whether deconstruction will ultimately become just a granular supplement to a long list of rich ingredients or a new recipe for an altogether different day. There seems ... [little] chance that deconstructive critics will politely clam up or bury themselves like common East coast sand fleas (1980, p.607).

CHAPTER 1

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CHAPTER 2

CRITICAL METHOD AND DECONSTRUCTION THEORIES

Pinter's works cannot be forced into structures - not even as far as genre is concerned, for it may be argued that his poems are plays, his plays poems. Any fixed designation is arbitrary and, in this dissertation, for practical reasons only. This particular phenomenon is encountered mainly due to Pinter's use of language, which is characterised as being highly functional and disruptive. In everyday speech, incoherence is generally regarded as a form of non-communication. Non sequiturs normally degenerate into nonsense, where-as in Pinter's work non sequiturs develop into a phenomenon we may term non-sense, but which contribute to the meaning¹ we wish to impose. Interrupted speech usually disrupts communication. Yet Pinter's characters employ these devices to communicate '... fear, bafflement, irritation, a general sense of impotence, feelings of helplessness, a seething resentment, an acrid hostility' (Almansi and Henderson, 1983, p.21). Hinchliffe (1967, p.152) for instance, commenting on The Homecoming, writes: '... language is still a form of non-communication'.

Martin Esslin considers the following:

Equally dramatic is the way Pinter uses language as a vehicle and instrument of dramatic action. Words become weapons in the mouths of Pinter's characters. The one who gets hold of the more elaborate or more accurate expression establishes dominance over his partner; the victim of aggression can be swamped by language which becomes too thick and fast, or is too nonsensical to be comprehended: this happens above all to Stanley in The Birthday Party, who is subjected to a process of brainwashing through a torrent of incomprehensible questions and assertions fired at him by the two terrorists (1978, p.53).

From Pinter's involvement with speech or words, or the telling absence of speech or words, i.e. silence with a purpose, it may be concluded that speech act theory would be the ideal vehicle for exploring the intricacies of Pinterian drama. As Bernard writes: 'Nonverbal passages in Pinter's plays often reveal symbolic meanings in the midst of seemingly realistic actions' (1965, p.186). Literary works are, after all, imitations of speech acts (Eagleton, 1983, p.118). Our acceptance of this theory depends, however, on the following statement by Eagleton:

Literature may appear to be describing the world, and sometimes actually does so, but its real

function is performative: it uses language within certain conventions in order to bring about certain effects in a reader (p.118).

Now, Almansi and Henderson (1983, p.21) have said that Pinter has the clear intention of creating bafflement and fear, and, knowing the writer's intention, the application of speech act theory seems to be acceptable. But Eagleton (1983, p.119) points out that speech act theory seems to rely on '... the old "intending subject" of phenomenology in order to anchor itself ...'. Eagleton again refers to the importance of the reader and the 'reinterpretation' of the work by many different readers:

The work itself cannot 'foresee' its own future history of interpretations, cannot control and delimit these readings as we can do, or try to do, in face-to-face conversation. Its 'anonymity' is part of its very structure, not just an unfortunate accident which befalls it; and in this sense to be an 'author' - the 'origin' of one's own meanings, with 'authority' over them - is a myth (p.119).

Furthermore, speech act theory is, essentially, a method and its exponents believe in fixed 'meanings', a concept which has been sufficiently discredited to warrant restricting further investigation for the purposes of

this dissertation.

In the light of Eagleton's opinion, it is difficult to come to terms with speech act theory as explained by Susan van Zyl:

Firstly, there is the important role of the author who is assumed to have written the work carefully and at leisure, correcting any errors. And secondly, one adds to this the checking roles of editor and publisher contributing to the emergence of what is naturally assumed to be the intended, definitive version of the message. Writer and reader, therefore, enter into a specific sort of communicative contract: the writer offers an especially worthwhile product, guaranteed as it were by his extra care, while the reader in turn pledges to give to that product his correspondingly careful attention (in Ryan & Van Zyl, 1982, p.120).²

Speech act theory, therefore, 'deifies' the author and the reader and implies that the success or strength or power of a literary work lies in the particular relationship which exists between an author and a reader - as well as in the 'intended, definitive version of the message', which, one feels, is known to only a select group of cognoscenti.

On the other hand, Geoffrey Hartman, Harold Bloom, Paul De Man and J. Hillis Miller also have a dual 'deity' - the 'sacred text' and the 'divine author':

De Man refuses the endless interpretive activity celebrated by Derrida, shifting such disruptive power away from the interpretive activity itself and assigning it to the powers of literary language. As a result, literary texts emerge as the most awesome and wonderful creations. Reading and interpretation become puny belated attempts at harnessing the inherent deconstructive energies of great texts. The openness and play of interpretation wither so that the sacred text and the divine author may endure and prevail (Leitch, 1983, p.95).

Spanos, again, as Leitch interprets him, mentions the 'temporal' nature of the text and 'stresses the processes and performances of reading and interpretation' (p.79). He recognizes that, whereas the author or the text traditionally became the focus of critical activity (regarding the 'craft of the author or the structure of the text') the emphasis has shifted to the role of the reader. In the long history of literary criticism it is evident that, at first, the author took centre stage. Later the text itself became the final authority on itself. At present, the pendulum

seems to have reached its zenith with the reader assuming the final responsibility for 'interpretation' of the text. This activity - reading - brings with it its own problems:

For a destructive reader the experience of the text is fraught with both positive possibilities and potential dangers because any encounter with a text may destroy reified formations and present beliefs. They may also result in outright misunderstandings. Significantly, reading texts is always risky adventure (Leitch, p79).

The critical action has thus shifted to the reader.

A THEORY OF READING AND THE READER

From a structuralist point of view the ideal reader is that reader who has assimilated all the 'codes which would render [the text] exhaustively intelligible' (Eagleton, 1983, p.121). The reader, the 'ideal' reader that is, exists in terms of a text; he becomes a 'function of the text'. This reader would have a total comprehension of the text, in fact would glean the essence of the text from the text itself as well as from those codes pertinent to it. The ideal reader would be 'stateless, classless, ungendered, free of ethnic characteristics and without limiting cultural

assumptions'. Stanley Fish adds to Eagleton's concept of the ideal reader by arguing that it is the 'informed reader' who:

1.) is a competent speaker of the language out of which the text is built-up.

2.) is in full possession of the "semantic knowledge that a mature ... listener brings to his task of comprehension." This includes the knowledge (that is, the experience, both as a producer [my emphasis] and a comprehender) of lexical sets, collocation probabilities, idioms, professional and other dialects, etc.

3.) has literary competence (1970, p.145).

The reader's relationship with the text may be deduced if one considers that structuralism functions with binary opposites recognised and imposed by the reader to arrive at a fixed meaning of a text. Deconstruction criticises this assumption and demonstrates that it is precisely because of the inherent opposites and differences that a text unravels, that the ~~meaning~~ of a text is undermined and that the ~~meaning~~ has to be deferred. The text, having no mastery over itself after its production, turns upon itself and subverts its own meaning:

The tactic of deconstructive criticism, that is to

say, is to show how texts come to embarrass their own ruling systems of logic; and deconstruction shows this by fastening on the 'symptomatic' points, the aporia or impasses of meaning, where texts get into trouble, come unstuck, offer to contradict themselves (Eagleton, 1983, p.134).

Clearly then, in terms of what has been said thus far, a text does not necessarily have any meaning other than that imposed on it by the reader - a meaning which may be actively sought by the reader.

Also, as Culler points out (1981, p.48), to 'make the goal of literary studies knowledge of the meaning of each individual literary work involves the futile attempt to impose a particular standard and a single goal upon the activity of reading'.

The reader is locked in a struggle with the father-author in an Oedipal relationship. Consequently, the reader seeks to subvert the ~~meaning~~ he perceives to be intended by the author, and he imposes his own ~~meaning~~ or interpretation of meaning on a text. This results in the phenomenon of the text not possessing any fixed meaning and any interpretation which the reader imposes on it (albeit unconsciously) is, of necessity, suspect and extremely mutable. Furthermore, it should be recognised that the reader might also be the creator

of the work and in this regard the work (a poem, a novel, a drama etc.) may be considered to result from other works. Bloom (1980, p.18 - 19) comments on the Oedipal relationship between the author and his precursor:

[Poems] are necessarily about other poems; a poem is a response to a poem, as a poet is a response to a poet, or a person to his parent ... Only a poet challenges a poet as a poet, and so only a poet makes a poet. To the poet-in-a-poet, a poem is always the other man, the precursor, and so a poem is always a person, always the father of one's Second Birth. To live, the poet must misinterpret the father, by the crucial act of misprision, which is the re-writing of the father.

(It will be noted that I regard the reader as reader/author/text and that the reader is therefore always engaged in an Oedipal struggle with his precursor - be it either the author or the text).

Umberto Eco (1979, p.4) writes that a text 'calls for the cooperation of its own reader' and 'wants this reader to make a series of interpretive choices which even though not infinite are, however, more than one'. The reader assumes a dynamically generative role in the production of the text. This does not imply that the

reader may introduce spurious elements to the text. The reader is still bound by certain conventions:

He may not ignore the conventions implicit in the text i.e. he may not perceive the word 'red' as a reference to 'blue' unless an indication of this is given in the text. A text may take the form of a specific pattern, a 'structure' which delimits the interpretive possibilities. An interpretation of all the elements contained in a text should be substantiated; the interpretation should agree - objectively - in all respects with the text (Britz in Cloete et al, 1985, p.138 - 139, my translation).

During this process of imposing his will on the text, the reader is himself influenced by the text and this influence he carries with him in any subsequent reading of the text or any other text. Hambidge (1984, p.74) postulates that the gap or distance between text (object) and reader (subject) disappears. She continues (p.75):

While the conventional reader believes in a 'metalanguage', the practice of deconstruction demonstrates that not only does the reader influence the text, but the text in turn influences the reader. The reader decodes the text - but is

in turn encoded by the text to such an extent that he 'contaminates' a subsequent text with a previous one (my translation).

The reader enforces his will on a text as he is part of a particular interpretive community. This community consists of a group of like-minded critics who have adopted an interpretive strategy, usually consistent with the ideologies and critical goals of the community. Fish (1980, p.166) writes: '... what is noticed is what has been made noticeable, not by a clear and undistorting glass, but by an interpretive strategy'.

Riffaterre (1983, p.24 - 25) writes that:

... the contribution of formal analysis to the explanation of the literary phenomenon is essentially that it can clearly show that phenomenon to lie in the relation between text and reader, and not between text and author, or text and reality. Consequently, and contrary to the traditional manner of approaching a text from the outside, an explanation should be modelled on the normal way a message is perceived by its receiver. It should go from the inside out'.

THE TEXT; INTERTEXTUALITY; DIFFÉRENCE/DIFFÉRANCE

The immediate problem one faces in a discussion about text is that text and reading are inextricably entwined, as Culler (1983, p.74) indicates:

To discuss an experience of reading one must adduce a reader and a text. For every story of reading there must be something for the reader to encounter, to be surprised by, to learn from. Interpretation is always interpretation of something ... even though [that something] can be regarded as the product of prior interpretations.

Culler (p75) continues with this line-of-thought when he expresses his opinion that: 'Theories of reading demonstrate the impossibility of establishing well-grounded distinctions between ... text and reader'.

In a headnote to an essay by Barthes, Robert Young (1981, p.32) writes that the text is:

[T]he phenomenal surface of the literary work; it is the fabric of the words which make up the work and which are arranged in such a way as to impose a meaning which is stable and as far as possible unique the text partakes of the spiritual glory of the work, of which it is the prosaic but

necessary servant the text is, in the work,
what secures the guarantee of the written object
...

To Genette, the text is:

[T]hat Moebius strip in which the inner and outer
sides, the side of writing and the side of reading,
ceaselessly turn and cross over, in which writing
is constantly read, in which reading is constantly
written and inscribed (1982, p.70).

Kristeva's definition of the text complements Genette's
statement:

... the text is defined as a trans-linguistic
apparatus that redistributes the order of language
by relating communicative speech, which aims to
inform directly, to different kinds of anterior or
synchronic utterances. The text is therefore a
productivity and this means: first, that its
relationship to the language in which it is
situated is redistributive (destructive-
constructive), and hence can be better approached
through logical categories rather than linguistic
ones; and second, that it is a permutation of
texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given
text, several utterances, taken from other texts,

intersect and neutralize one another (1980, p.36).

Consideration should also be given to the conventional theory of the text as artefact. The artefact - or text - is thus seen as those inscriptions made, for example, on pieces of paper. But this presents a problem. Is the text not that which resides in the mind of the reader? And is carried for eternity in the mind of the reader? And which undergoes embellishment and changes with time, and trauma, and impressions? Jan Mukarovsky, a Prague structuralist, argues in Theories of Literature in the Twentieth Century (1979, p.31), that only one artefact can be produced (for example, a particular Pinter drama), but many aesthetic objects may be created in the minds of the readers of the same drama i.e. each reading may create a new aesthetic object.³

Text therefore becomes a relative concept. What is certain is that it is not dependent, for its production, on paper, or on any other medium for that matter. As Young has stated, the text 'secures the guarantee of the written object' implying that the text is not necessarily a physical entity. The text is not closed, sealed, final, static. Instead, it is part of an endless network of texts, dynamically interacting with other texts (but mark, not the phenomenon we term 'intertextuality'), and constantly deferring any final meaning. Edward Said writes (in Harari, 1979, p.163):

It is not only that any text, if it is not immediately destroyed, is a network of colliding forces, but also that a text in being a text is a being in the world; it addresses anyone who reads ...

A text, that is, a specific text, cannot be fully grasped by its readers, cannot be fully pinned down to reveal its fullness as it exists only in the minds of its readers. Its articulation in voiced words, or inscriptions of any kind, or gestures, reduces the text for in searching for meaning we tend to simplify to the point of annihilation. The full dynamic power of a text may be appreciated if one considers that not only does a reader define a Pinter text, but a Pinter text may, in turn, define a Pinter reader. Eagleton remarks:

The reader, in other words, [is] just a function of the text itself: to give an exhaustive description of the text [is] really the same thing as to give a complete account of the kind of reader it would require to understand it (1983, p.121).

Consider the qualities or characteristics of that particular reader. As a postulate, one may speculate that the Pinter reader would be an informed reader in terms of modern drama, of British origin, possibly even experimental to a degree. The typical Pinter reader

might be Jewish, from the East End of London, and so on. It is equally true that none of these characteristics may describe the Pinter-reader, but it cannot be denied that it is a very specific person who may be termed to be a 'Pinter-reader'. To continue, therefore, the text becomes open-ended; the text is open-ended. The very suggestion that an author or a text may be 'done to death' as it is put in the vernacular, then becomes inane, to say the least.

The text also defers its meaning because it is already removed from its origin, i.e. it is a representation of a thought expressed by an individual. It would be closer to the origin if the listener/reader could hear the words expressed by the original exponent of a thought. It would be even closer if the reader/listener were the author/creator/thinker of the text. In the act of reading a text, meaning is lost, or changed. Jonathan Culler(1983, p.100) writes:

Speech is seen in direct contact with meaning: words issue from the speaker as the spontaneous and nearly transparent signs of his present thought, which the attendant listener hopes to grasp. Writing, on the other hand, consists of physical marks that are divorced from the thought that produced them. It ... functions in the absence of a speaker, gives uncertain access to a thought, and

can even appear as wholly anonymous, cut off from any speaker or author. Writing thus seems to be not only a technical device for representing speech but a distortion of speech.

The work itself represents what Barthes calls a 'writerly' (scriptible) text (in S/Z) and here I wish to point out that although I use the terms 'work' and 'text' more or less interchangeably, Barthes accords specific definitions to each of these concepts. He writes, for example, that 'the work is concrete, occupying a portion of book-space' (in Harari, p.74) and it 'closes itself on a signified'. Sturrock (1986, p.71) explains that:

Works on the other hand, and that means all the literature we have experience of, are lisible, or 'readable'. We do not rewrite those, we simply read them ...

Barthes comments that the author of a work is regarded as the 'father and owner of his work; literary research therefore learns to respect the manuscript and the author's declared intentions' (in Harari, p.78) and he continues by pointing out that society itself enforces the legal ownership of the work.

The text, on the other hand, 'can cut across a work,

several works' writes Barthes (p.75) and 'can be read without the father's guarantee' (p.78). In interpreting S/Z,⁴ Barthes, writes Eagleton (1983), reflects that the

most intriguing texts for criticism are not those which are read, but those which are 'writable' (scriptible) - texts which encourage the critic to carve them up, transpose them into different discourses, produce his or her semi-arbitrary play of meaning athwart the work itself (p.137).

Jonathan Culler sees Umberto Eco's differentiation between 'open' and 'closed' works as the '[s]triking confirmation of the easy shift between freedom and constraint ... which require readers to write the text through their reading' (1983, p.70). Umberto Eco (1984, p.8) prefers thus to refer to texts as either 'open' or 'closed':

Those texts that obsessively aim at arousing a precise response on the part of more or less precise empirical readers ... are in fact open to 'aberrant' decoding. A text so immoderately 'open' to every possible interpretation will be called a closed one.

By contrast, Eco refers to the 'open' text in the following manner:

You cannot use the text as you want, but only as the text wants you to use it. An open text, however 'open' it be, cannot afford whatever interpretation (p.9).

Denis Donoghue writes about the 'graphireader' as opposed to the 'epireader'. The graphireader is not confined in his interpretations by ingrained rules whereas the epireader may read a text only within the barriers and parameters of already defined conventions:

'Epireaders' (from epos, "voice") recall the silent author as a voice which speaks the text they are reading; 'graphireaders' (from graphos, "writing") have no contact at all with the author of the text because the words which constitute it are seen as being themselves the originating source of meaning and not (as in the case of epireading) transcriptions of an antecedent and authorial reading by structuralists and deconstructionists (in Ruthven, 1985, p.55).

The text induces the reader to act pro-actively or creatively and, to a degree, the text is forced to assume a nihilistic philosophy; but in the act of becoming text (or a work, permanent in some form or another, in some medium which we term permanent) the text subverts its own dogma of nihilism. Robert Young

(1981, p.37) writes:

But once a text is conceived as production (and no longer as product), 'signification' is no longer an adequate concept. As soon as the text is conceived as a polysemic space where the paths of several possible meanings intersect, it is necessary to cast off the monological, legal status of signification, and to pluralise it.

In The Prison-House of Language (1974), Jameson mentions the special position occupied by Jacques Derrida in Structuralism (p.173) and he, too, comments on the deferred meaning of a text:

This means, for one thing, that there is always a gap between a text and meaning, that commentaries or interpretations are generated out of an ontological lack with the text itself. But it also implies that a text can have no ultimate meaning, and that the process of interpretation, of unfolding the successive layers of the signified, each of which is then in its own turn transformed into a new signifier or signifying system in its own right, is properly an infinite one (p.176).

As the 'guru' of French deconstruction theories, Jacques Derrida deserves special mention.

Derrida posits that there is no outside text (1984, p.158). His statement 'Il n'y a pas de hors-texte' has been widely misinterpreted and mistranslated as 'There is nothing outside the text'. Christopher Norris (1982, p.41) is one such critic who has opted for the latter translation. Patently, there is a difference in the concepts. Norris interprets Derrida's supposition as a confining element and leads to the danger of accepting the text as the full and final authority of and over itself; the text is complete and autonomous. Derrida's intention, I believe, was to point to what he calls the 'supplement'. The supplement, according to Leitch, is a two-edged sword. In Deconstructive Criticism, (1983) Leitch explains the concept of Derridean supplementarity:

Many writers and philosophers throughout our history posit or employ the opposition 'nature/culture.' According to the traditional account, archaic man, living in an innocent and blissful state of nature, comes upon a danger or insufficiency of one sort or another, bringing about a need or desire for community. In the evolution of man from nature into society, the latter stage of existence is pictured as an addition to the original happy state of nature. Culture, then, functions as a supplement in two ways: it adds on and it substitutes. At the same

time it is potentially both detrimental and beneficial (p.170).

Leitch continues (p.171) to elaborate on such opposites as 'health/disease, purity/contamination, good/evil, object/representation ... speech/writing' and he contends that, in each pair, the second 'entity comes as a supplement to the first'. 'Traditionally,' he concludes, 'the first term in each opposition constitutes the privileged or better state or entity'.

Derrida stresses the opposition between writing and speech. Text, he contends, is writing, and is defined in terms of its supplement. The Pinter text is supplemented by all the other Pinter texts and all Pinter texts are supplemented by that which defines the Pinter reader - cynicism, anxiety, paranoia and so on. The autonomous, unsupplemented text, therefore, does not exist.

In Glas, Derrida juxtaposes two texts: one by Hegel, a believer in the metaphysical, and one by Genet, who is in opposition to such a belief (Culler, p.136). By so doing, Derrida illustrates the supplementary nature of each text. The two texts seem to have little in common, but by grafting the one text on the other 'the exploration of relations and connections between columns brings about reversals, an exchange of properties, not a

deconstruction of oppositions but nevertheless a deconstructive effect' (Culler, p.136 - 137).

In respect of Pinter, it could be said that the understanding of Pinter no longer depends on what is said in The Birthday Party, for example, but what is said by critics and their critics. We have now moved beyond the artefact and we analyse and inspect the aesthetic object to have more revealed to us about it and the artefact - and in true Hegelian fashion, a new artefact is brought forth.

Another important consideration to note about text is that it possesses no structure. Joan Hambidge (1984, p.76) is very definite about this point when she writes:

The text, after all, does not have a structure - but the reader enforces a structure (or structures) when reading a text. Should the text "have" a structure or form, one would be able to approach the text only once. The very fact that texts are discussed and analysed repeatedly - with divergent results - subverts this theory (my translation).

The text, to Kristeva, 'is therefore a productivity ...' (1980, p.36). Hambidge (p.51) concurs that as intertextuality and sémanalyse (which she interprets as a questioning of meaning and the principles on which it

functions) are processes, and part of processes, so text is a process. In other words, we should no longer consider the phenomenon text but rather the phenomenon called textuality. Likewise, we should rather consider structuralisation, rather than structure - because of différence/différance and supplementarity.

INTERTEXTUALITY

It is characteristic of modern literary criticism to disagree on almost any and every issue. In this respect intertextuality is no exception. Various writers and various critics have widely divergent views about this phenomenon:

The concept, however, has been generally misunderstood. It has nothing to do with matters of influence of one writer upon another, or with the sources of a literary work; it does involve the components of a textual system such as the novel, for instance. It is defined in La Révolution du Langue Poétique as the transposition of one or more systems of signs into another, accompanied by a new articulation of the enunciative and denotative position ... (Kristeva, 1980, p.15).

Hambidge (1986, p.35 - 43) takes issue with the postulate that intertextuality denotes the 'influences

of texts on other texts'. She refers to Van Boheemen who, she writes, considers that intertextuality seems to concern literary influence. Van Boheemen also infers that one could conclude that there is nothing new under the sun and that one has to do here with ideas that are nothing other than the ideas (or theories) postulated by T.S. Eliot more than sixty years ago. (This contrasts sharply with Kristeva's idea that the text is a productivity, implying newness, originality). Hambidge puts it bluntly: '... on the other hand, her suggestion that it deals with literary influences and Eliot's theories is a radical misconception' (p.36).

It becomes apparent that Kristeva and Hambidge object to the facile interpretation of intertextuality as practised by some critics; for example, Salomi Louw supports the suggestion by Van Coller that:

... the meaning of texts is found in differences and correspondences with other texts. Texts derive from other texts and should be examined within a textual domain. Intertextuality is thus the concept that a text has been irrevocably influenced by other texts (Louw, 1987, p.21, my translation).

Quite clearly, this is not what Kristeva (or Derrida for that matter) means. To say that texts 'derive from other texts' is an over-simplification. To Kristeva

intertextuality is a generic concept, and she considers that a text is '... a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another' (Kristeva, p.36). It could be interpreted that one text could be superimposed on the other and that where the two correspond the former text becomes hidden - but it is not gone. The later text exists as a recognisably different text at those points where it does not intersect with the first text. This indicates that a text could have a past - most assuredly - but also a future, an element of intertextuality which some students and critics often seem to lose sight of. Riffaterre suggests:

... we must include in the definition of literary phenomenon the concept of time lag: the poem is not only the object of progressive and retroactive readings of its text, it is a system whose complexes are capable of extensible (but always verbal and always controlled) reference (1978, p.138).

In seeking an interpretation of the text, the reader never arrives at an absolute answer. Each reading reveals a new facet, hitherto not perceived or hitherto not comprehended. The text undergoes changes. It is written within a particular semantic frame which, even

as it is being generated, is already subjected to change i.e. the text contributes to the whole corpus of ~~meaning~~, and this contribution may expand or delimit the meaning of a word, a phrase, a sentence or a sign. The text contributes therefore to its own generation - and subversion. The author of a text does not change with regard to that particular text at the instant of generating the text (this presumes that he changes at a later stage, albeit an instant later). But the reader undergoes a series of mental changes in the period between his having first set eyes on the text and on any subsequent perusal. The meaning of the text is deferred, postponed, because the text and the reader maintain a particularly fluid relationship. Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels write:

For deconstruction, an author can never succeed in determining the meaning of a text; every text participates in a code that necessarily eludes authorial control (1987, p.50).

Almansi and Henderson (1983, p.59) write of Pinter's The Homecoming that:

[It] is a magnet that attracts new interpretations which serve to dismember the text. The original text does not exist any longer, buried as it is under the multiple readings that have submerged it.

DIFFÉRENCE/DIFFÉRANCE

The final, definite meaning of the text cannot be accurately pinned down for a number of reasons, but perhaps the most succinctly defined reason could be found in the term coined by Derrida - différence/différance.

Leitch explains the term différence/différance (the one encompasses and embraces the other to form a single concept, a single idea) as follows:

To begin with, Derrida's neologism différance captures three significations: (1) 'to differ' - to be unlike or dissimilar in nature, quality, or form; (2) 'differre' (Latin) - to scatter, disperse; and (3) 'to defer' - to delay, postpone. The first two significations mark out spatial distinctions, while the third makes references to differences in temporality. In French, the 'a' in différance passes unheard; the word registers as différence. This undetected difference shows up only in writing (1983, p.41).

Norris confirms the idea that the meaning of a text is delayed:

Language can fulfil the condition of self-present

meaning only if it offers a total and immediate access to the thoughts that occasioned the utterance. But this is an impossible requirement it has to be admitted that language must always fail to achieve expressive self-presence, and must always partake of the indicative character which marks ... the suspension of meaning (1982, p.46).

Différence has the sense, too, of 'difference'. It is within the set of differences that meaning lies. Eagleton (1983, p.132) says that the concept 'man' only exists because man denies or rejects ('ceaselessly shutting out') that he may be the 'other' viz. woman. Woman is 'an other' of what man is not. But to give meaning to himself, man needs this other even as he denies it. It is in the contradictions that a text approaches meaning. The closer the reader comes to the meaning of the text the more apt he is to find the meaning receding from him and the more apt he is to find the meaning of the text 'degenerating' into the opposite of what he may have expected. The text itself therefore subverts its meaning for it consists of signs which in themselves have no meaning but rather, to gain meaning, must rely on the presence of other signs which in turn have no absolute meaning. Every new 'interpretation' of a text reveals its incompleteness.

Ryan considers that:

[the] result of this declaration of incompleteness is that every text permanently defers representation, and presents itself, as something essentially incomplete, or as an indication that meaning has been deferred rather than presented (in Ryan and Van Zyl, 1982, p.103).

Jonathan Culler (1981, p48) feels that the multiplicity of interpretation which accounts for the continued study of literature should be encouraged, or at least not be seen as an 'obstacle to knowledge'.

THE AUTHOR

The author of a work is better described in terms of the relationship between the author and the product generated than by giving a general description of that set of physical, mental and intellectual attributes which might constitute our preconception of what an author should look like, what he should think, or what he should write. The author, writes Michel Foucault, is 'outside [the text] and antecedes it' (in Harari, p.141).

Gérard Genette suggests that a writer is someone who does not use writing as a vehicle for expression only,

or a means of imparting thoughts, but is rather someone for whom writing represents the 'very locus of his thoughts' (1982, p.73). This concept excludes the casual or incidental writer and would, by implication exclude those 'writings' of an author with which Foucault seems to have difficulties:

At this point, however, a problem arises: 'What is a work? What is this curious unity which we designate as a work? Of what elements is it composed? Is it not what an author has written?' Difficulties appear immediately. If an individual were not an author, could we say that what he wrote, said, left behind in his papers, or what has been collected of his remarks, could be called a 'work'? When Sade was not considered an author, what was the status of his papers? Were they simply rolls of paper onto which he ceaselessly uncoiled his fantasies during his imprisonment?

Even when an individual has been accepted as an author, we must still ask whether everything he wrote, said, or left behind is part of his work. The problem is both theoretical and technical. When undertaking the publication of Nietzsche's works, for example, where should one stop? Surely everything must be published, but what is 'everything'? Everything that Nietzsche himself

published, certainly. And what about the rough drafts of his works? Obviously. The plans for his aphorisms? Yes. The deleted passages and the notes at the bottom of the page? Yes. What if, within a workbook filled with aphorisms, one finds a reference, the notation of a meeting or of an address, or a laundry list: is it a work, or not? Why not? And so on, ad infinitum ...' (in Harari, p.144).

Within the bounds of Barthes' idea of the écrivain, the producer of a Text, and the écrivain, the producer of a Work (Sturrock, 1986, p.69), Foucault's problems disappear as it seems that that part of an author's work which is not a mere aside, or just another footnote or a 'laundry list' could be considered the writer's work proper. How (or if) the 'laundry list' informs his work as a whole assumes relevance within the context of a writer's textual works only if the laundry list becomes an instrument to focus the writer's thoughts or to convey his ideas. Studying a writer's laundry list may lead to some biographical detail which may be of sufficient importance to have bearing on the writer's works but, more often than not, this would not be the case. It remains, however, a text, 'an other' text and by its existence, or even its presence (the one does not necessarily include the other), it designates that which we regard as a literary text. In this regard Genette

(p.69) reminds critics 'to regard every work or every part of a literary work initially as a text ...'.

Riffaterre (1983, p.4-5) considers only two possibilities with regard to the author in relation to the text i.e. 'either he will be represented in the text, or he will not'. In the first instance, the author inserts himself into the text by using, for example, the first person narrative. In the second instance, the reader reads the author (and himself) into the text. This author Riffaterre terms the 'rationalized author' who, he warns, should not be confused with the 'historical author, the living writer' as, should we add to the former in terms of the latter, we risk destroying the text. Riffaterre thus considers the author a 'by-product' of the text.

While still reflecting on the persona of the author, it is interesting to note the importance that the name of the author assumes. The writer's name lends a degree of absolute authority to a text. The writer's name indicates a certain set of signs to a reader in that a reader comes to expect - or predict - a certain 'type' of work from a writer. The work is therefore already imbued with a degree of meaning imposed by the expectation aroused in the reader by the author's name. Michel Foucault states (in Harari, p.147) that an author's name performs a '... classificatory function'.

He continues:

It would seem that the author's name, unlike other proper names, does not pass from the interior of a discourse to the real and exterior individual who produced it; instead, the name seems always to be present, marking off the edges of the text, revealing, or at least characterizing, its mode of being. The author's name manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and indicates the status of this discourse within a society and a culture.

Trussler (1973, p.18) underpins Foucault's viewpoint when he writes:

None of Pinter's plays could be by anybody else, though a lot of other people's plays could pardonably be mistaken for jottings Pinter might have dispatched in the direction of the wastepaper basket.

The name 'Pinter' arouses a certain expectancy in readers, even those who dislike his works for very varied reasons. It would not be too remote to expect a Pinter-reader to want to be puzzled, disconcerted, uneasy. The Pinter-reader understands that he has to obtain clues to any exposition of the dramas from a

number of sources, that he may have to draw on some sub-conscious impulses which do not always seem very logical. Of course, the author runs the risk of losing his audience if he deviates from his consistency. John Russell Brown (1968, p.127) remarks that 'as if he were crying wolf, Pinter runs the risk that the audience, expecting to be puzzled, ceases to be truly puzzled; still more, that the expectant audience ceases to be menaced'.

The 'classificatory function' embodied in the name of an author can be readily noted in the dissension which arises each time a 'new' text by, say, Shakespeare is discovered. Critics are not simply satisfied with the idea that some researcher has 'found' a work to be definitely - written by Shakespeare. Myriads of tests are performed to prove, or disprove, the origin of a work. Modern technology has played a role in trying to settle contentious issues with the introduction of the computer. An example of the furore that might arise can be found in the following:

The claim that a long-lost (sic!)⁵ play by Shakespeare has been rediscovered came under the pitiless scrutiny of science ... and failed. It isn't by the Bard.

... Mr Eric Sams, a musicologist ... has spent

several years in an attempt to prove that [Edmund] 'Ironside' is an early work by an apprentice Shakespeare, newly arrived in London and yet to show the full flowering of his genius.

Unhappily for Mr Sam's theory, another specialist in Elizabethan drama was able to disprove it in less than a week, using a technique for the computer analysis of text.

'Ironside' is much more likely to be by Robert Greene, a dramatist whose career overlapped with Shakespeare's ...

On the basis of ... statistical tests, Greene is 890-million-million-million times more likely to be the author of 'Ironside' than Shakespeare. (The Star, p.6, 18 January 1986).

Why then are the critics so tenacious in trying to prove the identity of the writer? Not only for academic reasons, but because the writer's name carries with it the weight of authority. Although a substantial part of a text may emanate from the thoughts of another writer, it is the writer who has achieved the most with his version of a text who is eventually recognised - like Shakespeare and the adapted versions of his plays which he, himself, adapted from other known works.

The author creates the possibilities in a text for future discourse. Consider the theory of deconstruction. Although we now recognise certain champions of this theory (De Man, Derrida and so on) we know that the ideas contained within this theory are not 'new'. These concepts have been in existence since the time of the classical Greeks. However, it is only fairly recently (in the sense that 1850 is recent) that recognition has been given to the science we call 'deconstruction'. The classical Greeks, drawing on the past, paved the way for future discourse. And the modern deconstructionists, drawing on their predecessors, have in turn revealed the possibilities of discourse to come. Howard Felperin (1985, p.105) writes:

The search for the founder or originator of the discourse of deconstruction, flagrantly post-modernist and avant-garde as it is, would discover, upon examination of its major texts, a number of earlier candidates already nominated as worthy of the honour. The short-list of nominees might well have to stretch back behind the deconstructors of the present to include those relatively recent inquisitors of language who underwrite their work - such acknowledged precursors as Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Freud - or even well behind them Gorgias and the pre-Socratics ...

(In a footnote, Felperin considers the fifth century treatise 'On Not Being, or On Nature' by Gorgias as 'hard-core' deconstruction!).

FREUD AND PSYCHOANALYTICAL CRITICISM

Psychoanalytical criticism is a useful adjunct to deconstruction as it informs the work of an author as reader and as creator. In the chapter on One for the Road, the psychoanalytical interpretation is performed from a Freudian point of view as opposed to the numerous other streams of psychoanalytical criticism such as archetypal criticism, post-Freudian criticism, structural psychoanalysis.

As One for the Road is seen as a dream, one has to take cognisance of Freud's theory of dreams and especially of the importance of the symbols in dreams. In reading Pinter, one is also aware of a sense of incompleteness, of something being missing. Freud mentions: 'Another very important point is that the dream-imagination never depicts things completely, but only in outline and even so only in the roughest fashion' (1970, p.116).

This may be one of the reasons why, firstly, Pinter gives the reader the skeleton of a work to interpret or, secondly, why the reader interprets a work in a particular way.

Freud is also important for his interpretation of the Oedipal figure in literature. Once again, the text as the progeny of another text may be seen in conflict with its precursor. On the other hand, the reader as writer is in opposition to the original author of a text. Within the text, too, we find conflicts between the characters, oppositions which function in terms of the Oedipal myth and the castration complex (Freud considers that these two phenomena are related to each other - 1970, p.434) although Elizabeth Wright objects to this, writing that there are shortcomings in 'treating literary figures as if they had complexes of their own' (1984, p.47). Nevertheless, should a literary figure possess certain characteristics the critic is bound to comment on them and indicate the relation of the neurosis of the character to the rest of the work. Psychoanalytical readings of a work contribute to the 'openness' of texts and the 'différance/différence' of meaning. Wright comes to the conclusion that there are specific characteristics common to dreams and to art which contribute to the shifting of interpretation:

Boundaries shift with contextual placings of the visual material of the dream or of any symbolic medium, including what we call art: the rivalry of interpretations both within subjects (conscious versus unconscious) and between subjects (teller versus hearer) remains a common characteristic of

dream and art ... (1984, p.26).

ENDNOTES

1. ~~Meaning~~ is placed sous rature ('under erasure') throughout this dissertation. In other words, it is crossed out yet still there, still in place, to represent its evanescent nature; as Belsey remarks: 'Meanings are not fixed or given, but are released in the process of reading ...' (1980, p.20).

2. This 'contract' (sic!) is, of course, a figment of conjecture. Not all texts are written and intended for a reading public nor do all readers give 'careful attention' to the texts they are reading.

3. It is interesting to speculate on what happens when a drama is produced. It may be considered that the drama (the artefact) is read by the producer who forms an impression in his mind (the aesthetic object) of the drama. He then sets about creating a new - one could say an original - artefact (the production itself) which is in turn seen by an audience who then form individual opinions of the drama as they perceive it (thus creating aesthetic objects).

4. Barthes's S/Z is an aesthetic object born of the reading of the artefact viz. Balzac's Sarrasine. In

simple terms, one might say that one artefact could produce many aesthetic objects (vide Mukarovsky in Fokkema and Kunne-Ibsch, 1979, p.31).

5. The play in question should therefore have been 'lost' between the years 1908 and the present as Brooke edited an edition of the so-called Shakespeare apocrypha in 1908 and the play was contained in that volume of plays.

CHAPTER 2

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CHAPTER 3

THE BIRTHDAY PARTY

It is perhaps an indictment of the fickle nature of literary criticism that Pinter's The Birthday Party was received with some enthusiasm when it was produced at Oxford and Cambridge, but, in an interview with Laurence M. Bensky, Pinter said that when it returned to London 'it was completely massacred by the critics - absolutely slaughtered' (in Kazin, 1968, p.355). The play was a box-office disaster, taking only two hundred and sixty pounds.

Since then, however, critics have examined and dissected the play and have found traces of Kafka's The Trial in it (Esslin, 1982, p.91) and, in terms of the 'feeling' of the play, it is compared to Shakespeare's The Tempest (Evans, 1977, p.176), reflecting the critical acclaim it has since garnered.

Esslin (1982, p.86 - 88) suggests that The Birthday Party can be interpreted on a number of levels, but he stresses that

the different levels of approach will be seen merely as different aspects of the same, immensely complex, immensely relevant, and immensely true

poetic metaphor for the basic human situation, an existential archetype embodied in a play like The Birthday Party (p.90).

An exegesis of the play is possible if one approaches the text as an extended allegory i.e. if one sees the play as being endowed with its own symbolic universality. This approach is indicated by Esslin and is reinforced by David T. Thompson, who writes that:

What he [Pinter] has avoided is the insistent use of exposition to pin down the facts about the character and incident which leave the audience in no doubt as to the theme or, simply, the storyline (1985, p.40).

Esslin and Thompson are in a quandary; the play may be approached on 'different levels,' leading to different interpretations, and the playwright has conspired - with his ideal, imagined reader - to make any interpretation even more difficult by the artifice of avoiding exposition of the facts about the characters and the incidents. To contribute to the multiplicity of interpretations, Pinter presents us with a poem which may be about the play.

It is inevitable for the reader to take into consideration the poem A View of the Party when

analyzing The Birthday Party. (This poem was written in 1958, a year after the play). Of course, this exercise becomes relevant when Kristeva's definition of intertextuality (that it is the intersection of 'systems' or genres - in this case poetry and drama) is taken into account.

In the poem, Meg is depicted as the ignorant, misguided, foolish creature she represents in the play. That Goldberg might be a composite figure of men she may have known is suggested in the first stanza, but her imbecilic mind cannot shape itself to the reality of Goldberg. Meg is as alienated in her ignorance as Stanley and Petey are in their knowledge: Stanley with the thought that 'Goldberg was / A man to dread and know' and Petey, when later 'He looked into the room' (Pinter, 1980, p.32). Petey's knowledge becomes sharper and clearer when morning comes, and paradoxically, in the daylight, 'The light begin[s] to dim'. And although the adage says that knowledge is power, Petey realises that 'nothing could be done'.

In the second series of verses, Nat Goldberg is brought into focus, but obliquely so. As in the play, he is presented as a man 'With a smile on every face' (p.33), in other words, a Janus-like prevaricator. With McCann, the Irishman, in tow, they bring about a change in the atmosphere in the boarding-house. Goldberg, in the

second verse, imposes his authority: he is there 'in the centre of the room, / A man of weight and time, / To supervise the game' (p.33). Goldberg is the arch-manipulator, not only of people but also of time. He allocates time as he sees fit and in this way he represents Time with its scythe, sowing life and reaping death. Time's essence, the mortality of man, is represented by 'A man of skin and bone', in the form of McCann, the muscle-man of the play. And still Meg, who is not attuned to the nuances of life, does not sense the 'dislocation and doom' imposed on the boarding-house by the two men. In the fifth verse, Stanley's alienation is adumbrated by 'Though Stanley sat alone'. The only person who seems divorced from the pervasive menace is Lulu, the hedonist. She, for one, finds Goldberg physically attractive, and, perhaps, she recognises that he could satisfy the urges in her, without the complications of entering into a protracted relationship. Stanley remains isolated from the frivolity of life surrounding him, having to tolerate a 'man he might have known', Goldberg, ruling the roost so to speak, in a home he would like to call his own - but cannot because it does not belong to him nor can he deny Goldberg's imposed authority.

Stanley is so disembodied and without authority that it is only in the presence of Goldberg and his henchman that he recalls his name (p.34). A game of blind man's

buff parallels Stanley's search for his identity. When McCann finds Stanley he eliminates the security of literal and figurative obscurity which Stanley has welcomed in his flight from the organisation. The equivocation 'Found the game lost and won' (p.34) echoes the witches in Macbeth and stresses that the game has no real winners, nor clear-cut losers. Everybody wins - sometimes, and everybody loses - sometimes. The verse also recalls Petey's inability to act, because he was the original catalyst for inviting the two men into the house. In contrast to Petey's impotence, we have Lulu's 'lovenight'. Meg still exists in ignorance, 'all memory gone'. The final stanza has Goldberg, the ringmaster, directing the game. The poem ends on a sombre note, invoking an image of death: 'And Stanley's final eyes / Broken by McCann' (p.34). That Stanley's eyes are 'broken' suggests that he is as good as dead and that McCann is the assassin.

However, whether this reading has arrived at any sense of ~~meaning~~ is a moot point. It has already been suggested that such a reading might be possible. The actions and words of the characters are read and understood - within the limits of how and if the reader 'completes' the text.

On the other hand, the reading (aesthetic object) of The Birthday Party (the artefact) opens itself to a wider

range of interpretive possibilities. For example, in The Birthday Party, the perceived tension seems to lie in the reason for Stanley's removal by the two men, Goldberg and McCann. Dukore points out, however, that by not fully resolving this question Pinter 'indicates that the specific reason for his removal is unimportant. The dramatic point is that they take him, in contrast to his going of his own volition' (in Scott, 1986, p.107). This statement is acceptable, but it is the very lack of reason that leads to the subversion of meaning in the play. The characters remain so nebulous that the reason for Stanley's 'arrest' remains an enigma - no matter what our interpretation of the play.

In considering the text of the play, our initial strategy is to suppress (as far as we as readers are able to) our knowledge of the poem. The poem will, in any case, have a subliminal influence on our reading of the drama but instead of examining the play to elicit evidence of the intertextual exchange (which of necessity takes place) between the play and the poem, we examine the play to look for other hidden codes of ~~meaning~~. The poem might become a 'crutch' on which we might lean should we arrive at the aporia of ~~meaning~~ in the text.

The opening scene introduces Petey and Meg. Petey is in the process of reading a newspaper (which becomes a

powerful symbol of destruction later in the play) while Meg fusses with the breakfast. She is immediately characterized as a 'homebody-nobody'. The relationship between Meg and Petey in their marriage is reduced to banality by Meg's trite and superfluous questions. It is obvious that she doesn't pay much attention to Petey's answers and it is equally obvious that the years of marriage have blunted Petey's sensitivity to such irritations. Petey, it seems, is a methodical man, a man who plods through his newspaper until he has read all the news. This activity might take a few days, though. In his job, he is a conscientious worker, getting up early to stack some chairs. The purpose of the opening lines, then, seems to be to create an atmosphere of domesticity, an ambience of security and warmth in the deadening routine. Nigel Alexander writes:

What is established is a domestic routine of almost killing boredom. Yet Meg's enquiries about the cornflakes, and her interest in the girl baby that the newspaper announces has been born to Lady Mary Splatt, indicate great expectations that have somehow withstood the withering of age and the staling of custom. One of the reasons why she sounds like a silly old woman is that her vocabulary is still that of a bride enjoying providing breakfast for her husband and looking

forward to the baby she hopes will be a boy
(in Scott, 1986, p.100 - 101).

The text already exudes clues that it wants to ally itself with mundane reality. An intimation that this cosiness might change is given when Petey tells Meg that two men had approached him to enquire about the possibility of boarding with them for a 'couple of nights' (Pinter, 1976, p.22). At this stage there is no real sense of menace in terms of terror, but only a sense of menace in terms of the fact that a slight disruption in the daily routine may occur because Stanley has been assimilated by the family already and two more people would cause some change to the interaction between the members of the existing group, in other words a change in the condition of the organism, the -'family' - is about to take place. The Pinter-reader senses that an imminent change in the status of a group usually signals a prelude to terror.

Meg and Petey both welcome the idea of more guests as they would earn more money. It also confirms the status Meg yearns for - that their house is on the list (p.22). The list represents recognition of the service which the two homeowners deliver.

In a childishly coquettish way, Meg ensures that Stanley gets up. Petey regards this frolicking sardonically:

MEG: He's coming down. (She is panting and arranges her hair.) I told him if he didn't hurry up he'd get no breakfast.

PETEY: That did it, eh?

Meg knows that she doesn't mean it when she says that Stanley would not be given any breakfast and Petey knows it too.

Stanley enters, unshaven, wearing his pyjama jacket (p.24). Our first acquaintance with Stanley does not impress us but we, as Pinter-readers, are assured. We do not expect nor want prosaic occurrences. We have been provided with a description of a musician (p.23) and the 'ordinary' reader would expect someone who has dignity, perhaps even dressed in a stylish dressing-gown but here we are presented with a man who is in an unkempt state. The greeting between Stanley and Petey is terse - and this perhaps indicates why Petey does not act to prevent Stanley's abduction later in the play. Petey might be resentful of Stanley's presence because of Meg's gushing over him.

Meg mothers Stanley, addressing him in the third person, as one would a baby:

MEG: So he's come down at last, has he? He's come

down at last for his breakfast. But he doesn't deserve any, does he, Petey? [Petey doesn't deign to reply]. (STANLEY stares at the cornflakes.) Did you sleep well?

STANLEY: I didn't sleep at all. [Petulantly].

MEG: You didn't sleep at all? Did you hear that, Petey? [As if he were deaf]. Too tired to eat your breakfast, I suppose? Now you eat up those cornflakes like a good boy. Go on (p.24).

Like Meg, Stanley also would like to know what it is like outside, but her concern is with whether it is light or dark, whereas Stanley wants to know whether it is warm or cold. Not that it matters much, as Stanley goes outside most infrequently. However, a bond is established between Stanley and Meg, a bond which is to be broken. As the play develops we see that on the one level it functions in terms of the Oedipal myth. As the precursor (by centuries) of The Birthday Party, the protagonist in Oedipus Rex brings calamity to the people under his dominion. Stanley, too, brings discomfort with his presence in the home; by contrast he does not consummate his relationship with Meg who is Jocasta (although Jocasta hangs herself literally, Meg does so by her words). Esslin (in Scott, p.177) writes:

In The Birthday Party the son figure is brutally torn from a near-incestuous relationship with a loving mother - and the chief agent of this traumatic experience, Goldberg, has much in common with the father figure of Max [in The Homecoming].

The charade continues between Stanley and Meg. Stanley finds fault with the food and Meg tries to placate him. When Meg playfully refuses to bring Stanley his second course, Stanley threatens to patronise one of the 'smart hotels on the front' (Pinter, 1976, p.25). This prompts Meg to act quickly, and she produces the 'fried bread'. Stanley's inertia is evident when Petey has to get up and fetch the plate from the hatch (p.25).

Meg's slovenly nature, and a further link between her and Stanley, is established when Stanley accuses her of not making Petey a cup of tea, and of 'Giving him sour milk instead' (p.26). Stanley projects his own inertia and slothfulness onto Meg. His unkempt appearance is also linked to the unkempt condition of the house which is alluded to by Stanley:

MEG: You won't find many better wives than me, I can tell you. I keep a very nice house and I keep it clean.

STANLEY: Whoo! (p.26).

Later in the play Stanley says the place needs clearing up and that 'It's a pigsty' (p.29). He also mentions that his room needs sweeping, something one would expect from a paying guest - perhaps - but not from someone who is obviously sponging on the goodwill of his hosts.

Stanley's treatment of Meg strikes one as reprehensible. It is especially when Petey is out of earshot that he passes caustic remarks about her and the food she prepares. He is revealed as an ingrate, not satisfied with the efforts others go to to improve his quality of life. Ironically, when he has greatest cause for complaint he retreats into silence. When Meg's overtures become too overt, Stanley is not averse to repelling her physically (p.28). In the exchanges between Meg and Stanley, we become aware of a discharge of sexual energy. This thought is already present when Meg rushes up the stairs to awaken Stanley. This is followed by Stanley using the word 'succulent' teasingly, apparently conveying a private code of sexuality (p.27). Stanley turns the word into a weapon, or as Combrink puts it '... he uses what she regards as an implicit compliment as a bludgeoning instrument' (1979, p.266), a recurrent theme in Pinter's work (for example, Ruth, in The Homecoming, also uses her sexuality to subdue her prey).

Meg cannot seem to comprehend being rejected by Stanley.

Time after time she tries to ingratiate herself with him and he repeatedly, and embarrassingly, rejects her. To a certain degree, Stanley alienates himself from the community - the realistic community of the play and the real community of the audience - by displaying such an unsympathetic attitude towards Meg. Who would therefore blame her if she, too, does not act, finally, to save him?

It is when Meg mentions the two gentlemen (Pinter, 1976, p.30) that apprehension enters Stanley's voice and demeanour. His interest in them is not merely incidental or casual. He is very deliberate in his questioning of Meg concerning the two gentlemen. Our suspicions about Stanley - in that we do not sympathise with him - are confirmed. As if sensing the latent fear in Stanley, Meg takes the opportunity to dust the table which he has prevented her from doing (p.28). When he orders her harshly to come to him she refuses. Here Stanley backs down - for the first time, it seems, in his relationship with Meg.

Stanley's wish to escape from reality is outlined when he tells Meg that he is about to leave on a world tour (p.32), to play the piano in Berlin, Constantinople, Zagreb and Vladivostock. His wish is illustrative of his pathetic lies when he traps himself in his exchange with Meg:

MEG (sitting at the table): Have you played the piano in those places before?

STANLEY: Played the piano? I've played the piano all over the world. All over the country. (Pause). I once gave a concert.

MEG: A concert?

STANLEY (reflectively): Yes. It was a good one, too. They were all there that night. Every single one of them. It was a great success. Yes. A concert. [Then, anti-climactically] At Lower Edmonton (p.32).

Stanley's conversation with her regresses from the general and the exotic to the particular and mundane, from concerts 'all over the world', in places such as Zagreb, to a concert - a single concert - in Lower Edmonton. He trips over his own thoughts, saying that he had sent his father an invitation to the concert and then he says he had lost the address. This is after he has said: 'My father nearly came down to hear me' (p.33). As he talks, his paranoia becomes more and more evident. The critics ('they') were not impressed with his performance. 'They carved me up. Carved me up. It was all arranged, all worked out' (p.33), he says, as if there was some conspiracy against him. Here, we seem to

recognise the playwright's own experience with the critics and the play itself ('massacred slaughtered'). Inevitably one might reflect on the biographical correspondences between Stanley and Pinter, and whether Stanley might represent the playwright himself. Meg is the mothering, stifling reader/critic, the deadliest affliction that can strike any writer. Petey represents the uninformed public, the onlooker who doesn't act. And so forth. As more and more sub-texts manifest themselves, the text's openness becomes increasingly evident and increasingly multiple. The text, as the product of the reader/author, is its own precursor by being present in the author's mind before its production on a concrete medium (in this case, paper).

Bloom writes of the ephebe (1980, p.13) and explains that the ephebe is the 'new poet' who brings immortality to the precursor and so creates a god. Once this process has begun, the ephebe starts moving away from the precursor, 'a primary revision that imputes error to the father'. In the author's mind, therefore, changes to the original text take place and a newness is created. But before the new creation was the daimon (Bloom, 1980, p.19), the 'voice that cannot die because already it has survived death - the dead poet lives in one (Bloom's emphasis).

To continue with The Birthday Party, Stanley poignantly tells Meg that when he arrived at the hall for his second concert, the hall was 'shuttered up, not even a caretaker. They'd locked it up'. Our sympathies for this poor, demented, persecuted fool are aroused - momentarily, because he shatters our feelings for him when he turns to Meg and calls her, scathingly, 'an old piece of rock cake' (p.33).

Notwithstanding his treatment of her, Meg does not want Stanley to leave because she will lose the object of her motherly affection, an affection she cannot lavish on the self-sufficient Petey.

In an effort to sublimate his own fears, Stanley frightens Meg with his prophetic reference to two men coming in a van with a wheelbarrow in the back of it. The dialogue creates a sense of impending danger, a sense of something ineffably sinister.

Esslin writes about this exchange between Meg and Stanley:

Yet there can be little doubt that the van with the wheelbarrow in it, with which Stanley frightens Meg, is a hearse with a coffin. Stanley does not specify who it is that will be taken away in the

wheelbarrow. It might be Meg, and Meg's reaction might therefore be her fear of her own death; but Stanley might also be frightening her with the prospect of his disappearance. In the light of later events in the play it becomes clear that, above all, Stanley's game to frighten Meg is merely a projection of his fear that someone will come to take him away. Goldberg's black car at the end would then also represent a hearse, while Stanley's correct dress, his speechlessness, and his blindness would be an image of him laid out, and lying in state, as a corpse (Esslin, 1982, p.88).

A knock on the door serves to increase the tension, until we learn that it is Lulu. She has brought 'it' with her; 'it' we learn later is a toy drum, a pathetic, incongruous gift Meg has bought for Stanley to use, instead of the piano which she would like to provide him with. She realizes that if she could provide him with some musical instrument she would be able to keep him. Significantly, too, when Stanley steps on the drum (Pinter, 1976, p.73) and breaks it, it signals the end of any control which Meg might have had over him.

It is in the presentation of the drum as a gift that Thompson (1985) sees evidence of Pinter's realism. He writes:

The scene at the end of Act I, in particular, may be studied in relation to realistic drama ... The realistic level arises naturally out of the already-established relationship between the maternal, softhearted but intellectually barren Meg and her surrogate son, Stanley The offering and acceptance of the amusing but humiliating gift is presented with the desultory stop-and-start rhythms of everyday conversation (p.79).

Lulu, representing a liberated lifestyle, offers Stanley a chance to escape the tedium of his existence. She asks him to go out with her, for a walk, but he refuses. Dukore writes:

This attempt to make someone go where he does not wish to go becomes a leitmotif. Meg suggests that Stanley go shopping with her; he refuses. Lulu urges him to go outside for a walk; he refuses. At the end he is forced to leave the house, not merely his room - a non-comic departure this time (in Scott, 1986, p.107).

Lulu cannot countenance Stanley's indolence, and she leaves with the words: 'You're a bit of a washout, aren't you?' (p.36).

Goldberg and McCann enter, surreptitiously, unannounced.

There is no startling knock or any other obtrusive signal to prepare the reader for their entrance. They use the backdoor, obviously to indicate that their business is not completely overt. The relationship between the two men is immediately apparent: Goldberg is the spokesman and McCann is the one who has to do the work. In a stage direction we read:

.... Enter, by the back door, GOLDBERG and MCCANN. MCCANN carries two suitcases, GOLDBERG a briefcase (p.36).

From this moment in the play, the reader's interest no longer lies only with the protagonist, Stanley, and his identity, nor with his future (a future which will trouble us later in the play). Instead, the reader is given to searching for clues about the identities of the two men and their link with Stanley. Although one may readily assume that the two intruders are assassins, it could be argued that they are orderlies who have come to fetch Stanley for confinement in some institution. The text, in other words, deconstructs and becomes plural; a 'writerly' text, in Barthes's terms.

It is interesting to note, at this stage, differences as well as the correspondences between the two assassins in The Birthday Party, Goldberg and McCann, and the two 'hitmen' in The Dumb Waiter, Gus and Ben.

The most striking difference is, of course, that the reader can be in no doubt that Gus and Ben are murderers by vocation. They constantly refer to doing a 'job' (p.134, p.135, p.138, p.143 etc.) and the instrument of violence, a revolver, is displayed overtly (p.144, p.145). Goldberg and McCann work for a mysterious organisation with Monty as their controller, while Ben and Gus are directed by a man called 'Wilson' (p.144). Mainly, though, the difference resides in the fact that in The Birthday Party the victim (or patient) is selected by the organisation and the two men set about tracing and abducting him, presumably to murder him, or at least to eliminate him, depending on one's interpretation of who the men are.

In The Dumb Waiter, one of the assassins does not know the identity of the intended victim (ironically it turns out to be himself) until the recognition scene (or anagnorisis) which occurs as the play ends. Together with the recognition scene, peripeteia (the reversal of fortune) takes place and the drama's impact is strengthened. In The Birthday Party, the protagonist enters the state of recognition and lapses into incoherence and thus excludes the audience and the readers from knowing what recognition has taken place as well as the nature of the recognition achieved. Stanley, at least, has a chance to escape his ordeal - but like Hamlet (who also did not grab the opportunity

to kill Claudius) he does not take it. Gus, however, has no chance whatsoever. When the order comes for his execution, he is trapped - already buried, so to speak, in a basement room. Like Stanley, Gus is stripped of his identity, he is '... stripped of his jacket, waistcoat, tie, holster and revolver' (p.165), the accoutrements which sustain his existence. The force of the menace in the two plays is equally strong but of a different type. In The Birthday Party the menace is directed at a person outside the group of assassins.

In The Dumb Waiter the menace is turned inward, so to speak. The menace destroys itself by having the group exterminate one of its own members; seemingly, the text subverts its intention of remaining enigmatic as the reader is able to conclude the play with reasonable certainty - Ben will kill Gus. In The Birthday Party, Stanley is led away, so the menace remains.

From a rational point of view, Stanley may have some sympathy aroused for him, but Gus is beyond the pale. He is an assassin himself and should have expected the treatment he eventually receives. Taken to its logical conclusion, the organism - the organisation for which the murderers work - will destroy itself and society will be a better place for this. Or will it? Are these assassins only confined to the extermination of their own breed, or do they also accept contracts on the lives

of people who are only remotely connected to 'crimes' against society? These men, therefore, carry with them the seeds of the destruction or the salvation of society - depending upon one's perspective.

To return to The Birthday Party, Stanley, who has been watching the two men, now takes the opportunity to slip out of the house. Again his alienation is evident. He does not want to leave the house in Meg's company or Lulu's, yet he doesn't hesitate at slinking off on his own. Like Conrad's protagonist in Lord Jim, Stanley heads for obscurity rather than face important issues immediately.

Goldberg tells McCann to sit down (p.37). McCann asks Goldberg whether he, too, intends sitting down. Goldberg suggests that they both should be seated. This scene contrasts with the later scene where Stanley is told to sit down (p.55 - 57) in that McCann does not want to sit down in deference to Goldberg. When Stanley refuses to sit down he shows his contempt for the two men. He soon realizes, however, that although he may be able to fool McCann, he is psychologically Goldberg's minor. As his bravado fades, so the first real signs of a flaw in his personality become evident.

In many respects, realism concerns the search for and the assumption of a fixed identity, although the

assumptions about this identity and the acceptance of an identity might be extremely mutable. In his reminiscences about the past, Goldberg wants to assume a respectability of some kind. He needs a facade to present to the world, although he has McCann's unequivocal admiration. As so often happens, Goldberg has to refer to a member of his family for the respectability he craves for himself, but which is beyond his reach. Kilfoil writes:

Goldberg remembers how he himself used to buy the newspaper to check the M.C.C. results: by implication he allies himself with those gentlemanly qualities traditionally associated with cricket - fair play and decency. The implications of his words are incongruous considering his probable line of work and the way in which he treats Lulu and Stanley. He fails to convince the audience of the identity he tries to establish through his references to the past (Kilfoil, 1985, p.33).

Kilfoil also writes:

Goldberg seems to need to justify his existence and create a meaningful world and persona for himself by drawing on a real or imagined past. His reminiscences create a sentimental and nostalgic

image of the innocence and security of childhood. A closer examination shows the absurd element of Goldberg's memories. Innocence is not recaptured: time is lost and the past is meaningless. The pseudo-reality of his memories places him even more inescapably in the ineluctible (sic!) present (p.33).

Combrink (1979, p.278) finds the atmosphere in this scene charged with 'surreal horror' which is 'heightened immeasurably by Goldberg's totally evasive and yet utterly committing reply' to McCann's timorous concern about the 'job'. McCann, the man who in Goldberg's words is 'all over the place' (Pinter, 1976, p.38) before he does a 'job' and when he is in the process of executing his duty, he is 'as cool as a whistle' (p.38). This is the man who seems to be concerned about the nature of the job when all he has to face is a myopic, failed pianist and a few of his odd acquaintances.

When Meg enters, Goldberg addresses her as 'Mrs Boles' (p.40). Although the tone of his voice is questioning, we are in no doubt that he knows her. This reveals that he and McCann have been observing the house and its inhabitants. Meg tries to maintain a false status (status in terms of what the boarding-house represents to her) by suggesting that the previous week would have been more suitable for her to provide accommodation for

the two men (p.41) but Goldberg soon destroys her illusions by asking about the number of guests she had. Inexorably he extracts information concerning the identity of her only guest from her. Meg's paraphrase of Stanley's account earlier of his career as a pianist is hilarious, as she gets the details twisted and wrong, damaging Stanley's status as a pianist more and more, but not realising that she is doing so. Her concern is for her own status and she thinks that by allying herself with Stanley she will be able to bask in reflected greatness.

Now Meg introduces the birthday theme, a spur-of-the-moment idea which strikes her. She wants to give Stanley the drum but she needs a reason to do so. In her simple-minded way she has to rationalise the gift. Goldberg suggests that they should have a party to celebrate the occasion. Meg, at first, denies that she has thought of a party but realising that there is some merit to the idea and that she will get the credit for having arranged the party, she says: 'I wanted to have a party. But you must have people for a party' (p.43).

Goldberg allows Meg her illusions as in this way he will be able to control the proceedings. Earlier (p.38) he mentioned that everywhere McCann went the atmosphere was funereal. Now (p.43) he says that 'McCann's the life and soul of any party'. Ironically, McCann will not be

the 'life and soul' of Stanley's pseudo birthday party.

Throughout the episode, Goldberg is very suave, and Meg is much taken with him, but the reader remains constantly aware of the lurking menace, especially as McCann remains non-committal. The reader has come to realise that behind such silences and non-communicative neutrality as that displayed by McCann the greatest danger lies latent. The Pinter-reader is aware that in Pinter's dramas, the crisis never descends swiftly and with a shock. Instead, it becomes an inexorable force which pushes itself into one's consciousness, with the stifling feeling that the victim's fate is unavoidable.

As Meg takes the two men upstairs to their rooms, Stanley enters. Meg returns and Stanley is very inquisitive about the identities of the men. Meg can't quite remember their names and she hesitates when she names Goldberg:

MEG: Gold-something.

STANLEY: Goldsomething?

MEG: Yes. Gold....

STANLEY: Yes?

MEG: Goldberg.

STANLEY: Goldberg? (p.45).

Although it is not immediately apparent that Stanley knows Goldberg, his actions seem to indicate that he does. He becomes almost catatonic and it is only when Meg mentions that it is his birthday (which he denies) that he snaps out of his motionless condition. However, his ennui has given way to anxiety, and when Meg gives him his gift, the drum, Stanley - briefly - wants to break out of the role he has to play in the game. But as Combrink implies (1979, p.280) it is only in accepting his true role that Stanley can achieve any identity, and as has been observed, it may lead to his destruction, much like Oedipus; as Harsh maintains: '... the discovery of the identity of Oedipus constitutes and coincides with his reversal of fortune' (1979, p.112). Stanley has to find the meaning of his existence, even if such a discovery might lead to his destruction. Likewise, the reader has to (albeit sub-consciously) attempt to find meaning in a text, although this may lead to a closing of the text and so render any further reading activity futile. (This attempt - to find the 'meaning' - we are well aware is futile yet compulsive and the text as well as its interpretation remain infinitely open).

ACT II

McCann tears a sheet of newspaper into five equal strips. He has to keep busy, involved in matters that

do not require too much thinking. His jealous guarding of the strips of paper is indicative of his own single-mindedness. He repeatedly warns Stanley to 'mind' the strips of paper (Pinter, 1976, p.49, p.50) and that his cigarette was 'near that paper' (p.50).

From the first encounter with each other, McCann and Stanley seem to resent each other. McCann wants to prevent Stanley from leaving the house. Stanley and McCann become involved in stilted conversation, with McCann trying to achieve some rapport with his prey and Stanley trying to put some distance - physically and psychologically - between the two of them. He tells McCann that he has thought of leaving, of going back home (p.50). The informed reader may infer from what he says that he has assumed an identity incompatible with the lifestyle he wishes for himself. Stanley wants the security which may be found in alienation. He does not truly want to return home but he wants to escape this mysterious organisation which is hounding him. Home, to Stanley, is not the fixed abode which it represents to the average individual. To Stanley, home is contingent on the coldness and austerity of relationships because it is only by maintaining a distance between himself and his hosts that he can preserve his anonymity and, paradoxically, start searching for a new identity. Identity is important to Stanley:

STANLEY: but what I mean is, the way people look at me you'd think I was a different person. I suppose I have changed, but I'm still the same man that I always was ... (p.50).

Stanley makes a gauche attempt at ingratiating himself with McCann (p.52), but he does not succeed.

Goldberg enters in the company of Petey. He is introduced to Stanley and we learn that Goldberg has fond memories of his mother. His Oedipal complex is evident as the words he uses when speaking about his mother are almost exactly the same as those he uses when he later speaks about his wife (cf. p.53 and p.69). To show how conventional and without malice he is, Goldberg tells the men about his almost platonic relationship with a girl, about his friendly attitude to the toddlers in the park and that he would 'give a helping hand to a couple of stray dogs ...' (p.53). One wonders in what way Goldberg assisted the stray dogs and it is not difficult nor illogical to assume that he may have had them exterminated. This, Goldberg says, 'came natural'. The link between Stanley and the stray dogs is thus established. The dogs have no homes and must fend for themselves in a hostile world - like Stanley. Goldberg, as the dog-catcher, which the reader infers, poses a palpable threat to Stanley. He may usurp Stanley's freedom and he may deliver him to the exterminators.

Up to this point, Goldberg has revealed a nature which borders on the genteel. His diction seems artificial, though, and a less flattering side to his character is glimpsed when he compares waking up in the morning to being born. He cannot sustain the imagery, however, and it degenerates into a realistic description of a man emerging from his sleep:

GOLDBERG: What a thing to celebrate - birth! Like getting up in the morning. Marvellous! Some people don't like the idea of getting up in the morning [This may be an oblique reference to Stanley who evidently possesses an aversion to getting up in the morning]. I've heard them. Getting up in the morning, they say, what is it? Your skin's crabby, you need a shave, your eyes are full of muck, your mouth is like a boghouse, the palms of your hand are full of sweat, your nose is clogged up, your feet stink, what are you but a corpse waiting to be washed? ... (p.55).

This description further unsettles Stanley and he suggests that the two men leave. In a vignette which recalls Goldberg and McCann's argument about who should sit down first (p.37), Stanley tricks McCann into sitting down. What is significant is that McCann does not want to sit down as a mark of the respect he has for Goldberg. Stanley, on the other hand, wants to impose

some sort of authority (which he does not explicitly nor implicitly possess) over the two men. The informed reader understands that this charade is acted out by both sides for the same reason - the display of authority. McCann threatens to become violent, which does not seem to move Stanley, but when Goldberg addresses Stanley, directly and firmly, Stanley complies, although he still does so with a show of bravado, whistling The Mountains of Mourne,¹ which Goldberg had whistled earlier. Goldberg, once he has achieved this 'victory', immediately attacks, because he senses that Stanley's precarious defenses are crumbling. In the interrogation scene which follows, the verbal onslaught is a prelude to the implied physical violence. The questions do not seem to be connected and sound inconsequential but they serve both to give the reader clues to Stanley's past and to disorientate Stanley himself. Truth and fiction merge in an existentialist parody of reality. The main fact which emerges is that Stanley once belonged to an organisation and he has now left it, which in itself is a betrayal of the organisation. The thought that Stanley may have betrayed an organisation is reinforced when McCann says: 'You're a traitor to the cloth' (p.61) and: 'You betrayed our land' and 'Right, Judas' (p.62). Goldberg also says: 'You betray our breed' (p.62). Another important clue is that Stanley has apparently changed his name (p.60) because he 'forgot the other one'.

The first sign of actual physical violence comes from Stanley. He kicks Goldberg in the stomach. The reader senses that Stanley has no other strategy left and that he is at the end of his tether. The reader, too, is becoming emotionally drained and needs some sort of action or display to understand that Stanley is only a human being and not an unblemished sacrificial lamb. McCann is instantly prepared to attack Stanley but he is restrained by Goldberg from doing so.

The confrontation is ended when Meg comes marching down the stairs, bringing the drum with her. This introduces the party itself.

Goldberg, chameleon-like, adopts Meg's mindless frivolity and panders to her need for approval. He says that he 'used to be in the business' (p.63) and he inveigles Meg to parade in front of them to show her dress which her father had given her. The dress is quite obviously not new, but it must be the first time in years that Meg has been the centre of attraction. Goldberg realises this and debunks the image created (of Meg as a fashion model) by at first saying 'Walk up the boulevard' (p.64) bringing to mind the romantic imagery of Paris, the centre of the fashion industry. This image is immediately destroyed when he says: 'Madam, now turn about and promenade to the kitchen' (p.64). Reality imposes itself, to reveal Goldberg's sadistic

nature. He allows Meg her illusions, but they turn out to be traps which he has set for her. He wants to remain in control and, like an angler with a fish, he allows her (and Stanley, and McCann) only as much freedom as he wants to allow. He instructs Stanley to pour the drinks, and without comment, Stanley apparently does so. (This is inferred from the dialogue as there is no stage direction about who pours the drinks). Goldberg tells Meg to propose a toast to Stanley and orders McCann to shine a torch on Stanley. Stanley - although he has all the attention focused on him - has withdrawn, in psychological terms, from the events about him. The imposition of reality has forced Stanley to seek refuge in the abstract realm of alienation. He has retreated, finally, into the silence of incoherence. Dislodged from his assumed identity, Stanley realises that he can no longer oppose Goldberg.

Meg's maudlin, motherly speech is full of irony. She proposes a speech to Stanley's birthday (which it is not); she says that she knows him 'better than all the world' (p.65) which she does not; and that she is grateful that he has not gone away, completely unaware of the perilous danger he faces.

When Goldberg and McCann now tell Stanley to sit down, he complies, a further indication of his apathetic disposition. Goldberg launches into a speech ostensibly

about Meg's speech but on closer examination the thoughts expressed by Goldberg are as shallow as those expressed by Meg. His eloquence merely serves to hide the deficiencies in his feelings. Goldberg, too, on one level, tries to become part of the group, but on another level he sets himself apart by emphasizing his Jewishness, and by associating Meg with Stanley: 'We've heard a lady extend the sum total of her devotion to a member of her own living race' (p.66). Meg and Stanley are lumped together in Goldberg's view, and so too is McCann. Goldberg orders him to switch the lights on and off, symbolizing the power he has over McCann.

At the party, Lulu and Goldberg become acquainted and the sexual energy aroused between the two of them is immediately obvious:

LULU (to GOLDBERG): You're empty. Let me fill you up.

GOLDBERG: It's a pleasure.

....

GOLDBERG: Lulu, you're a big bouncy girl. Come and sit on my lap.

....

LULU: I'll bounce up to the ceiling (p.68).

Lulu's wish to 'bounce up to the ceiling', is, according to Freud (1987, p.188 - 189) evident of her sexual awareness of Goldberg. Freud is almost apologetic when he writes: 'Do not take it to heart if dreams of flying [Lulu's wish to bounce high in the air], so familiar and often so delightful, have to be interpreted as dreams of general sexual excitement ...' (p.188).

The exchanges in the conversations between the parties seem to be interchangeable, with McCann or Meg seeming to answer Goldberg's inquiry:

MEG (to MCCANN): Sit down on this stool.

LULU sits on GOLDBERG'S lap.

MCCANN: This?

GOLDBERG: Comfortable?

LULU: Yes thanks.

MCCANN (sitting): It's comfortable (Pinter, 1976, p.68).

The realistic mode of writing Pinter employs to denote

the hubbub of conversation at parties is evident. Snatches of dialogue are picked up, made coherent by the listener and then snatches of other conversations intrude to achieve another meaning altogether. Often, this is the stuff of which comedies are made, but often, too, this unintentional eavesdropping can lead to anxiety, guilt or remorse because the eavesdropper might become aware of a secret which he would rather not have heard, much like the moral quandary experienced by a priest who, while listening to the confessions of his congregation, hears about a crime which has been committed.

Meg wants to dance and she invites Stanley. Stanley does not answer her. This does not signify that he has rejected her, because rejection would mean activity and attachment. Stanley is detached from reality and, therefore, he can only comply robot-like with orders. Meg dances on her own and returns to McCann, sensing that she is not able to penetrate Stanley's silence.

In the play, there are, every so often, allusions to incidents and places where the characters might have met each other in the past. Goldberg again alludes to earlier days, and in an Oedipal type of reminiscence he refers to his wife who used to make a dish of roll-mop and pickled cucumber (p.69). This links his wife to his mother in an earlier recollection of the past (p.53).

On his walks, he would greet the 'little boys, the little girls ...' (p.69). Lulu asks whether he had known her when she was 'a little girl'. Goldberg says that he might have played piggy-back with her and Lulu adds that she has 'always liked older men. They can soothe you' (p.70). There is thus an oblique suggestion that Goldberg may have had a perverse attachment to children and that, perhaps, Lulu had been a victim of his paedophilia. In fact, Lulu says: 'You're the dead image of the first man I ever loved' and Goldberg answers: 'It goes without saying' (p.71).

Meanwhile, Meg has regressed into a fantasy of what she wished her childhood had been like, although she presents her fantasy as fact:

MEG: My little room was pink. I had a pink carpet and pink curtains [traditionally the colour for girls], and I had musical boxes all over the room. And they played me to sleep. And my father was a very big doctor. That's why I never had any complaints. I was cared for, and I had little sisters and brothers in other rooms, all different colours (p.70).

McCann also recalls earlier, and happier, days. His recollections are about Ireland, giving him a definite and fixed identity in contrast to Meg's romanticised

fabrications of her childhood and to Stanley's denial of his past.

McCann is called upon to sing a song and this leads to Meg calling for a game. McCann would like to play hide and seek, but it is Lulu who suggests the old party standard, blind man's buff. The significance of Lulu's suggestion only becomes apparent after Stanley has been destroyed, psychologically, in the game when McCann breaks his glasses, rendering him blind, not only figuratively but also literally. The reading of the play as a modern Oedipus Rex becomes more and more justified, therefore. Lulu also plays a direct role in Stanley's demise. (Petey is implicated by absenting himself from the party and by inviting the two men to the house). Everybody in Stanley's community is culpable for his fate; nobody can deny responsibility for what transpires. The Pinter-reader then realises that he is as culpable for the victimisation which takes place in the community, as Meg and Petey are in the play. The play starts interacting with its exteriority, opening itself to its surrounds beyond itself.

Goldberg, true to his character, assumes a supervisory role and directs the players. Meg is blindfolded and she touches McCann. McCann gravitates, inexorably, towards Stanley and touches him. Stanley is blindfolded and now McCann starts acting more directly against him.

He breaks Stanley's glasses and in a fit of peevishness, he places the gift, the drum, in Stanley's path. Stanley steps on the drum, and with the drum on his foot, he moves towards Meg and completes the circle. But he does not simply touch her. Instead he vents his anger on her, the anger which he has towards society. He grabs her by the throat and starts to strangle her. The lights go out and in the confusion Stanley releases Meg and moves towards Lulu. When the lights go on again, Stanley is standing bent over Lulu where she lies spread-eagled on a table. The connotations of this scene are highly sexual but the significance is that Stanley is finally and completely impotent and has lapsed into incoherence. This is the signal for the two men, Goldberg and McCann, to take him into their control. From this point onwards the reader can be in no doubt that nothing can be done to save Stanley from the men. The reader rises to the bait, so to speak, and is satisfied that all the expectations anticipated - expectations of fear, anxiety, a sense of terror - will be realised. The Pinter-reader is enthralled by the sense that the classic resolution of the drama cannot be resolved by having good conquer evil as there is no identifiable good, and the evil in the drama has as function the removal of an irritant to bourgeois society.

ACT III

Act III opens as a duplication of the first act; Meg wants to know whether it is Stanley who is reading the newspaper and Petey answers her. Act I has created a certain expectation in the reader - that it should be Stanley who answers Meg's inquiry. When Petey answers, the reader becomes aware of the changes which have occurred. In Act I Meg had some food to give to her husband and to her guests, but in Act III the food stock is depleted. The house is as bare as Stanley's identity for, although he may presume an identity at the beginning of the play, in the end he is stripped of everything. He leaves with nothing, not even the language to be able to communicate coherently:

STANLEY: Uh-gug ... uh-gug ... eeehhh-gag ... (On the breath.) Caahh ... caahh (p.94).

Other changes have also taken place. Earlier (p.26) Meg is tardy in giving Petey some tea, for which Stanley chides her. The reader also gets the impression that Petey is not particularly interested in having tea. In Act III, Meg can offer Petey tea only and he accepts, as if he would like to assuage her feelings. Meg suffers from a hang-over, however, and it is doubtful that she notices Petey's refusal. Petey, it seems, is sensitive to those needs which Meg herself cannot express.

The broken drum is a symbol of the decay which has set in - decay in the sense that the crisis has passed for the characters, although Stanley has to face an unknown and frightening threat - but this he seems to have accepted by retreating into incoherence; decay, too, in the revelation of Petey's impotence. Throughout the play there is the sense that Petey is morally strong. Goldberg initially also thinks Petey will resist their taking Stanley away and he tries to get Petey out of the way (p.85) by suggesting that the beach will be crowded and someone should look after the ticket-sales and tend to the deck-chairs. The reader anticipates Petey's intervention, which eventually comes, but the reader is unprepared for Petey's feeble resistance (p.95 - 96) and the only advice he can give Stanley is: 'Stan, don't let them tell you what to do' (p.96). When Petey orders the men to leave Stanley alone (p.95), Goldberg turns on him and says: 'Why don't you come with us, Mr Boles?' (p.95). Petey detects the menace in Goldberg's voice and realises that the invitation may turn into an order, in which case he will have to comply.

Amid the highly charged sexual innuendo emanating from Lulu and Goldberg (p.90), the reader is confronted with the impotence of powerlessness, an impotence which reaches deep into the psyche of every reader. The loss of former values is underscored ('Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his

friends' - St. John 15:13 - and so on). Pinter, thus, attacks society with its bourgeois notions and points to the vulnerability of such tenuous values. In true atavistic style, Petey wants to protect Stanley because: 'He's my guest' (p.95). Pinter subjects 'the full regalia of cherished values, memories, and traditions which are exposed to an equally dyspeptic scrutiny' (Nelson in Brown, 1968, p.157) in the same way as in The Homecoming.

With his bluff called, Petey retreats into his own pathetic bourgeois world. He hopes to shield Meg from the immediate trauma of Stanley's departure. When Meg inquires whether Stanley is still in bed, Petey doesn't inform her of the turn that events have taken.

Carrying the symbol of the destruction of middle-class values even further, Petey opens his newspaper and the shreds of paper drop out, an immediate reminder of the first meeting between Stanley and McCann (Act II). The strips of paper symbolize the disparate nature of life and, from a Freudian point of view, they are symbols of women. Freud makes the point that 'Materials, too, are symbols for women ... wood, paper, and objects made of them, like tables and books (1987, p.189). One may then interpret the strips of paper to mean that they reveal McCann's latent aggression towards women, an aggression which he has to control at the beginning of the play.

McCann would put Stanley into the same category as women for he also regards him as a weakling. He has sublimated his aggression by tearing a page from the newspaper into strips which he has left in the newspaper for Meg and Petey to find! His animal cunning and intelligence have prompted him to leave some warning behind, to remind them that they would have to face him if they should consider betraying him and Goldberg. Thompson writes '... in a subtly symbolic way the shredded pieces of paper highlight McCann's clinical thoroughness as a wielder of destruction ... ' (1985, p.83).

The play ends with Meg's interpretation of the party, which has been ostensibly in Stanley's honour, and her comment that she 'was the belle of the ball' (Pinter, 1976, p.97). It is telling though that she did not miss Petey at the party:

MEG: Wasn't it a lovely party last night?

PETEY: I wasn't there.

MEG: Weren't you?

PETEY: I came afterwards.

MEG: Oh (p.97).

Petey's presence, it is implied, would eventually not have made any difference to the result of the two men's mission. Meg, in turn, plays her role faithfully. While the carnage (in terms of mental stress and anguish) is taking place around her she blithely and moronically recalls the party - with her usual embellishments:

MEG: ...

It was a lovely party. I haven't laughed so much in years. We had dancing and singing. And games. You should have been there.

...

I was the belle of the ball (p.97).

In a sense, Stanley is not the central figure in the play; instead we find that Petey - more in his absence and his inaction - exerts a decisive influence on events - as does his companion, Meg, in her foolish perception of reality.

Irving Wardle maintains that 'the play demonstrates that a man who has withdrawn to protect his illusions is not going to be helped by being propelled into the outer world' (in Scott, 1986, p.111).

Essentially this interpretation may be correct but Stanley does not 'withdraw' from the world; he goes into hiding. Furthermore, Stanley conserves certain events in the past (his brief, unsuccessful career as a pianist for instance) in his mind because his physical retreat from the world denies him a future which, in a cosmological sense, has become extremely limited. Nor is Stanley propelled into the 'outside world'. He is dragged, like flaccid meat, like a carcass, away from his haven. Not unwillingly, though. The word 'unwillingly' would indicate a certain dynamism, an inherent potential for changing the situation; instead it is in a state of extraordinary apathy that Stanley leaves the scene.

Esslin (1982, p.85 - 90) writes that the play may be interpreted on three levels: the play 'can be understood as a complex poetic image A complex pattern of association and allusion is assembled to express a complex emotional state; what the poet tries to communicate by such an image is, ultimately, the totality of his own existential anxiety' (p.85); or it can 'be seen as an image of man's fear of being driven out from his warm place of refuge on earth ... [and] emerge as a morality about the process of death itself ...' (p.87); or it 'might also be seen as an image, a metaphor for the process of growing up, of expulsion from the warm, cosy world of childhood' (p.88).

Underneath the images of life and existence lies the inevitable culmination of human existence - death. In other words, the traces or evidence of life must lead to death. Having extracted this thought as having bearing on the meaning of the text, we sense our intuitive discomfort and we examine the text ~~once more~~ and discover how the text subverts its own ~~meaning~~. The aporia of the text becomes clearer as the informed reader finds his interpretive options diverging innumerable. Petey and Meg, for instance, might symbolize the continuation of life. There can be no death. The two characters assume added importance when we realise that they represent the human race - something akin to Adam and Eve in a bourgeois Eden. But we know, too, that the human race carries with it the seeds of its own destruction. The meaning of the text is postponed so that we are caught up in a circle which leads from life to death to life ...

The circle has to end in life to comply with the latent and implicit philosophy of the playwright as well as of the reader 'encoded' in the text. Pinter invokes the nihil so prevalent amongst existentialist writers. His rhetoric has to conclude with the pessimistic thought that life is a ceaseless, useless struggle and that all man's works are transient and evanescent. He then subverts his 'cause' by impressing a 'structure' on his thoughts - this structure being a publication called The

Birthday Party. Where a vacuum once existed (the absence of The Birthday Party) the writer has demonstrated a belief in the future by having a work published.

CHAPTER 3

ENDNOTES

1. The ditty, The Mountains of Mourne, concerns the story of a young man from Ireland who sets off to London to seek riches. He is over-awed at the modern sights e.g. a traffic officer who stops the traffic 'with one wave of his hand', but he longs to return to his native land which links McCann with the other Irish tune in the drama, Bally-James-Duff, a song about the appeal to a young man to return to Ireland.

CHAPTER 3

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CHAPTER 4

THE HOMECOMING

The Homecoming concerns alliances, pacts, integration and defection within the bonds of a, seemingly, conventional family. The play is given a predatory ambience by the strained relationships between the characters who are not committed at all to the welfare of any of the other characters.

The Homecoming (first presented in June 1965) deals, broadly speaking, with the bonds which exist within a family. Superficially the play seems to deal with the conventional view of a suburban family, a view which is soon dispelled by the words and the actions of the characters. Kilfoil writes:

The audience presumably has a conventional, preconceived perspective on family life and relationships, but characters in the play pay lip service only to this point of view. [...]. These conventional contributions are minimal in the play and, on the whole, audience [or reader] expectations are subverted (1986, p.82, my emphasis).

The play also concerns, from a psychoanalytical point of

view, the Oedipal anger of siblings towards their father and towards each other. Freud makes some observations that are relevant to The Homecoming. He writes (Vol. 1, 1987, p.240 - 241):

A small child does not necessarily love his brothers and his sisters; often he obviously does not. There is no doubt that he hates them as competitors, and it is a familiar fact that this attitude persists for long years, till maturity is reached or even later, without interruption.

Concerning the relationship between the father and the son, Freud writes:

In the son's eyes his father embodies every unwillingly tolerated social restraint; his father prevents him from exercising his will, from early sexual pleasure and, where there is common property in the family [my emphasis], from enjoying it.

Irving Wardle (in Scott, 1986, p.169) feels the play should be 'understood in territorial terms or not at all'. To Wardle, the family represents a herd of predators in which each member occupies a certain position in the pecking order. Using the analogy of the herd, Wardle then describes Max as 'the old bull' (p.169) and the play as 'a ritualised tournament in which the

two instincts of sexual desire and territorial aspiration fight it out under the scrutiny of an emasculated observer [Teddy] on the sidelines' (p.171). Combrink (1979, p.342) agrees with this:

The play is a much more nakedly aggressive battle for supremacy within a social context than any other Pinter play. The characters are concerned with establishing themselves and reinforcing their positions , although they are constantly shown up as being vulnerable to the onslaughts from without.

Although it deals with the abstract moral questions ¹ of whether a family may usurp a husband's claim to his wife and whether a husband should allow such an occurrence, The Homecoming also contains some of Pinter's most realistic scenes. As Esslin points out:

It is my conviction that The Homecoming, while being a poetic image of a basic human situation, can also stand up to the most meticulous examination as a piece of realistic theatre, and that, indeed, its achievement is the perfect fusion of extreme realism with the quality of an archetypal dream image of wish fulfilment (in Scott, 1986, p.172).

ACT I

Within a few lines of the play's opening, elements of filial conflict are revealed when Max, the father, hunts for a pair of scissors to cut something from a newspaper. Lenny, his son, says to him: 'Why don't you shut up, you daft prat?' (Pinter, 1980, p.7). Kennedy writes:

During the opening dialogue Lenny reads the facing section of a newspaper while Max asks for scissors and a cigarette. Although Max wants them, what underlies his requests is a demand for acknowledgement and attention. Lenny's indifference to his reminiscences, questions, insults and threats indicates that the exchange is commonplace (in Scott, 1986, p.190).

Kennedy also expounds the thought that Lenny's behaviour stems from his feeling of superiority and his dominance in the family. Throughout the dialogue, Kennedy writes 'they struggle for power - demanding recognition of status and self' (p.190). Later in the play clues are given as to why Lenny should act in this manner towards his father.

Max seeks to establish an identity for himself, but his efforts are constantly denigrated by Lenny who,

throughout the play, displays a calculated viciousness. Like Goldberg in The Birthday Party Lenny is the manipulator of the rules and the actions in the play and is the leader of the revolt against the 'old bull', Max.

Within the first few pages of the play we learn, too, that Jessie, Max's wife, was friendly with at least two other men - MacGregor (Pinter, 1980,p.8) and Sam (p.16) - and we learn later that she had a sexual relationship with at least one (MacGregor) of them (p.78). Max still retains a barely concealed hostility towards her:

Mind you, she wasn't a bad woman. Even though it made me sick just to look at her rotten stinking face, she wasn't such a bad bitch ... (p.9).

This is not to say that Jessie was not a prostitute (for we have sufficient evidence of that) but Max feels a sense of betrayal because it was his best friend who had the love affair with his wife. Sam, Max's brother, does not share Max's fond feeling for MacGregor, calling him 'a lousy stinking rotten loudmouth. A bastard uncouth sodding runt ...' (p.18). It is he who reveals that MacGregor had 'had' Jessie in the back of his taxi (p.79). Quite obviously, Sam is jealous of MacGregor's conquest. On the other hand, Max despises Sam for being effeminate, saying that 'You'd bend over for half a dollar on Blackfriars Bridge' (p.48). Max is macho

enough not to regard Sam, who is a homosexual, as a threat.² Yet, the suspicion lingers that Sam may have been one of Jessie's lovers and that one of the sons - Teddy, Lenny or Joey - may have resulted from this liaison.

In his conversation with Sam, Max mentions that 'As soon as you stop paying your way here, I mean when you're too old to pay your way, you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to give you the boot' (p.19). This remark comes at a time when Max is levelling seemingly ineffectual invective at Sam, and yet it is made so deliberately that the threat to Sam is very real. Max's statement is portentous of the idea that Ruth will have to earn her keep and when she grows too old to pay her way, she will be ejected from the household and forced down the ladder of prostitution. Max changes his line of attack when Sam asserts himself by reminding Max that the house belongs to all of them; instead of suggesting that he will kick Sam out of the house, Max then suggests - with a sense of longing - that he (Max) had been his father's favourite son:

MAX: ...

Pause.

Our father! I remember him. Don't worry. You kid yourself. He used to come over to me and look down

at me ... (p.19).

With the atmosphere now charged with the tension between the two older generation brothers, the lights black out and light up on Teddy and Ruth. Teddy is pleased that his key worked in the door - in some ways a reassurance that he is still a welcome part of the family. When Ruth mentions that she thought that nobody was in, Teddy replies that they were all asleep (p.20). Teddy is in control of the situation and Ruth, momentarily, seems to be unsure of herself, asking Teddy whether she may sit down. When Teddy concurs Ruth, in a scene reminiscent of Stanley in The Birthday Party, refuses. Her rebellious nature asserts itself, and she sarcastically tells Teddy that his room couldn't have moved when he says that he wants to check whether it is still there. Teddy is playing a social game, making small-talk to put Ruth at ease, but she refuses to participate in the game mainly because she senses that Teddy is 'talking for himself and projecting his own fears onto her' (Wardle in Scott, 1986, p.170). From this point onwards, we read that Ruth slips more and more out of Teddy's control and asserts her own will. She tells Teddy that she is tired (Pinter, 1980, p.20) but when he asks her later 'Are you tired?' (p.22) she replies 'No'. He offers her something to drink (p.21) which she also refuses. For an instant it seems as if Ruth wants to return to her children: 'I think ... the

children ... might be missing us' (p.22) but the moment passes and her next action is to go out into the night, into the street. Teddy wants to go to bed but Ruth walks out, symbolising her return to her former 'profession'.

The meeting between Lenny and Teddy is restrained, not much emotion being displayed by either of the two men. Considering that his brother is on a visit from America, Lenny is quite dispassionate when he asks Teddy whether he is staying the night (p.26). One would expect him to suggest that Teddy should stay longer. Soon after Teddy has left the scene, Ruth enters. Lenny does not act in the least surprised, almost as if he is accustomed to strange, unknown ladies coming into the house at midnight. Later in the play we learn that Lenny has rooms and flats in the city (p.72) which he lets, presumably, to prostitutes. The conviction that Lenny is a pimp emerges more and more from the play and might account for his calm reaction to Ruth.³ Yet even when she mentions that she is married to Teddy (p.28, p.29) Lenny doesn't seem to take any notice of the fact. His main concern is with the clock that keeps him awake. We also get an inkling of his equivocation when he tells Ruth that:

... So all things being equal ... this question of me saying it was the clock that woke me up, well,

that could easily prove something of a false hypothesis (p.28).

Wardle (in Scott, 1986, p.170) writes about Lenny's propensity to prevaricate:

Any reassurance from that mouth is bound to be untrue! And his behaviour inside the house literally illustrates the ethological comparison between proprietary and intrusive behaviour.

Soon after meeting Ruth, Lenny wants to hold her hand. He wishes to make it clear to her that he is the true head of the household, like a feudal lord, with everybody else under his command. In a barely veiled threat he tells Ruth about his confrontation with a prostitute and how he assaulted her. Ruth leads him on by questioning him and by not making any remarks. It is as if Lenny is testing her reactions, because he tells her next of his public-minded attempt at clearing some snow. He was exhilarated at his public service and offered to assist an elderly lady to move an 'iron mangle' (Pinter, 1980, p.32). However, the effort was so great that he was afraid he would rupture himself, so he turned on her and assaulted her, too (p.33). It is evident, therefore, that Lenny can only relate to women in terms of violence and sadism. It has been suggested that Lenny acts in this way because he believes that his

mother abandoned him when he was young or that she had been a prostitute herself (Esslin, 1982, p.145; and Esslin in Scott, 1986, p.176).

It follows, logically, from Lenny's disturbed and disturbing attitude to women that the interpretation can be made that The Homecoming represents a slant on the Oedipal myth. Esslin writes (in Scott, p.176):

From the sons' point of view therefore, The Homecoming is a dream image of the fulfillment of all Oedipal wishes, the sexual conquest of the mother, the utter humiliation of the father. From the father's point of view the play is the terrifying nightmare of the sons' revenge.⁴

The confrontation between Ruth and Lenny (and the informed reader inadvertently thinks of that other Lenny in Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men) is significant in the strength displayed by Ruth. In a sense, Lenny forces the glass of water on her (Pinter, 1980, p.29). Now he wants to take it back, but Ruth firmly refuses to relinquish the glass:

LENNY: ... And now perhaps I'll relieve you of your glass.

RUTH: I haven't quite finished yet.

LENNY: You've consumed quite enough, in my opinion.

RUTH: No, I haven't.

LENNY: Quite sufficient, in my opinion.

RUTH: Not in mine, Leonard (p.33).

Once again, Pinter introduces a pivotal scene in which Ruth scores doubly with her remark. Firstly, she makes it clear to Lenny that she will not be intimidated in any way. She belongs to herself and to nobody else. The choices in her life are made by her and nobody can choose for her. Secondly, Ruth calls Lenny by the name always used by his mother (p.33). Ruth's identification with the departed Jessie becomes stronger by the moment. Lenny's objection also causes the reader to reflect on the influence exerted on the characters by the absent Jessie.

The scene with the glass of water becomes more sexual when Ruth says:

If you take the glass ... I'll take you.

Lenny feels threatened by her words. He is accustomed

to playing the aggressive role and is unsettled by Ruth's predatory style. After all, he and Joey had forced two girls to leave their escorts and then raped them (p.66 - 68). Ruth is inverting this relationship. She will 'take' him - and she means it. By inverting this relationship, Ruth subverts whatever values Lenny still attaches - more by dint of instinct than of breeding - to the role of women.

The glass of water is not only a symbol of life, it also assumes significance as a symbol of the archetypal mother. The glass of water takes the place of a fountain of water of which Chetwynd writes:

[Water] is also the symbol of the mysterious realm of the feminine - the unconscious and womanhood (Chetwynd, 1984, p.182).

Lenny wants to take the water away from Ruth i.e. he wants to separate her from the water, to 'rescue' her forcibly, if necessary. Freud (Vol.7, 1987, p.241) states that:

A man rescuing a woman from the water in a dream means that he makes her a mother, which ... amounts to making her his own mother.

The process of identification between Ruth and Jessie is

thus complete.

Ruth offers a drink of water to Lenny, quite obviously offering him life itself, as it were. By giving him life, Lenny's gratitude can only be expressed in one way - by 'wishing to have by his mother a son who is like himself ... ' (p.240). Freud writes:

All his instincts, those of tenderness, gratitude, lustfulness, defiance and independence, find satisfaction in the single wish to be his own father (p.240, Freud's emphasis).

It is no wonder, then, that Lenny feels aggressive towards Max. Max stands between him and his mother (or the mother figure, Ruth).

Finally, the encounter ends when Ruth drains the glass and leaves for bed, leaving Lenny asking impotently: 'What was that supposed to be? Some kind of proposal?' (Pinter, 1980, p.35).

Max comes downstairs to see what the shouting is about and Lenny deliberately omits mentioning that Teddy and Ruth are in the house. He is still smarting at the fact that Ruth has outwitted him and he resents Max's intrusion at this moment. Esslin (1982, p.146) finds it mysterious that Lenny makes no mention of the visitors,

but Lenny's pent-up aggression could well lead to his not wanting to divulge this knowledge to his father. In fact, Lenny displays his anger by suggesting to his father to 'pop off' (Pinter, 1980, p.35), slang for dying.

Lenny's inquiry into his conception is intended to brutalise what should be an act of love. He also wishes to display his opposition to Max and to the relationship between his parents. Esslin (1982, p.158) comments that Lenny

... sees the mother as a sexual object. When he interrogates his father about the moment of his own conception, the act of sexual intercourse that gave him life, he is above all thinking of his own mother in that erotic context. And his violent hatred of his father is clearly also motivated by the suffering it causes him to imagine his mother in his father's embraces - in other words in [this] particular scene Lenny is a Hamlet figure.

Lenny is not sure whether he is welcome in the house - whether he conforms to his father's expectations or whether he is 'the last thing you [Max and Jessie] had in mind?' (Pinter, 1980, p.36). He continues to present physical love in animal terms by saying that people 'often ruminate, sometimes singly, sometimes in groups,

about the true facts of that particular night ...' (p.36). The word 'ruminate' is often associated with cows chewing the cud and an image is evoked of people clustering together like herds of cattle to discuss - mindlessly - their genesis. Linking this genesis and the biblical one, Lenny suggests that people are conceived in the 'image of those two people at it' [Pinter's emphasis] (p.36). In his attempt to sound completely at ease, Lenny trips over his imagery and reveals the tension in him: '... but as we happen to be passing the time of day here tonight I thought I'd pop it to you' (p.36).

Max becomes incensed at Lenny's impertinence and spits at him - an action which causes Lenny to comment laconically: 'Now look what you've done. I'll have to Hoover that in the morning, you know' (p.37).

As morning dawns, Joey is exercising and his lack of physical prowess is unimpressive. In a stage direction we learn that he 'is doing some slow limbering-up exercises' and he 'shadowboxes, heavily' (p.37). Even the action of combing his hair seems ponderous: 'He stops, combs his hair, carefully' (p.37). Joey shares the distinction with Sam of being one of the most insipid, or 'ineffectual' as Kilfoil puts it (p.92), characters of the play. Yet, in the family gang, he will go on to defeat the intellectual Teddy.

Max becomes frustrated at not being able to entice Joey to attend a soccer match with him and he therefore vents his spleen on Sam, who is merely doing what he is supposed to - the dishes. Max accuses Sam of harbouring some resentment towards him, an accusation which Sam does not deny. Yet it is very evident that in this instance it is Max who bears some resentment towards Sam, calling him a 'wet wick' (p.39), a 'tit' (p.40) and later, a 'lazy idle bugger of a brother' (p.47). Max, himself, does not occupy a solely male role, as we learn in his words: 'I gave birth to three grown men! All on my own bat' (p.40). This, read with his '- don't talk to me about the pain of childbirth - I suffered the pain, I've still got the pangs - when I give a little cough my back collapses' (p.47) (and ironically Max uses these words to prove his masculinity) causes Kilfoil to write:

Max's role in the family is ambivalent: he plays the woman's role and does the family cooking. His terminology in referring to the other men in the family also defies conventional male-female boundaries; for example, he often refers to them as bitches (1986, p.87).

Max vacillates between admiration and disdain for Jessie. At times he is proud of the fact that she was

the mother of his sons - she taught them 'all the morality they know ... Every single bit of moral code they live by - was taught to them by their mother' (Pinter, 1980, p.46). He says that she had a heart of gold - which immediately evokes the old adage of a whore with a heart of gold; that she was 'the backbone of this family' (p.46). Yet he also says 'it made me sick just to look at her rotten stinking face, she wasn't such a bad bitch' (p.9) and 'a slutbitch of a wife' (p.47).

Teddy and Ruth enter quietly and almost unobtrusively. The tentative nature of Teddy's greeting reflects his uncertainty. He obviously does not know how they will be received. His misgivings are well-founded as Max turns to Sam and Joey, asking whether they had known that Teddy (notice how Ruth is excluded initially from Max's observations) was there. When Max does take cognisance of Ruth, his animal instincts cause him to recognise her as a prostitute:

MAX: Who asked you to bring tarts here?

TEDDY: Tarts?

MAX: Who asked you to bring dirty tarts into this house?

...

MAX: We've had a smelly scrubber in my house all night. We've had a stinking pox-ridden slut in my house all night [an 'offence' for which Lenny had beaten a prostitute on the docks one evening (p.30 - 31) on the mere presumption that she was infected!] (p.41).

Max then makes the much-commented on remark: 'I've never had a whore under this roof before. Ever since your mother died. My word of honour' (p.42). Esslin (*in* Scott, 1986, p.173) writes:

... Max's indignant outburst when he first meets Ruth and immediately assumes that she is a tart has a double meaning ... [It] might mean that Teddy's mother had [Esslin's italics] been a whore.

Kilfoil (1986, p.84) points out that: '... it is the proverbial Freudian slip, as he [Max] sub-consciously projects his real opinion of his wife on to his daughter-in-law...', and Combrink writes: 'The ambiguous qualification ... immediately raises the question of Jessie's real character again' (1979, p.355).

Yet, on a purely physical level, such argumentation may be rebutted by the knowledge that Jessie is dead and

that Max would be prone to finding sexual release by making use of one of Lenny's string of girls. This he may have done - but not in the house itself. However, with the awkward and unstable morality which pervades the play, we cannot be sure of Max's remarks. Had he visited prostitutes? Had he 'entertained' them in the house? These questions are raised because he poses the rhetorical question: 'Has Lenny ever had a whore here?' (Pinter, 1980, p.42). The answer is: Quite possibly, as, after all, he is a pimp.

Max assaults Joey and Sam - the only people he can dominate physically without fear of retaliation. With his frustrations assuaged for the moment, Max turns to Ruth and seems to calm down. He asks her whether she has any children and her answer - that she has three - is immediately met with the question put to Teddy: 'All yours, Ted' (p.43). The violence abates but the implication of the question remains: Max is convinced that Ruth is a whore at heart.

The scene ends on what Combrink terms 'a fawning tone and yet its unmistakable menace is a bitterly ironic comment on the father-son relationship' (1979, p.356) and one is left with the impression that Max is already scheming to extract the most personal gain from the situation.

ACT II

A warm glow of camaraderie infuses the opening sequence of the next act. The sight of the family together recalls other moments in the family's history and Max becomes quite nostalgic. He remembers how he had cared for his sons and his wife, how he had treated her, tenderly. Combrink writes:

The reminiscence is ludicrously unlikely, but the nostalgic quality is strong enough to give it the ring of truth, so that the relativity of truth is seen to operate again and come into play effectively (1979, p.358).

It is this 'relativity of truth' that has become the hallmark of realistic drama. Existentialism, as opposed to, say, Calvinism, holds that truth is contingent whereas Calvinism avers that truth is eternal and immutable (De Klerk et al, 1972, p.176).

It is Ruth's question: 'What happened to the group of butchers?' (Pinter, 1980, p.47) that brings Max back to reality. Her question has spoiled the mood, and Max pounces on Sam. Now all he can recall about the family are the bad moments, the moments filled with pain and hardship. But Max is given to such hyperbole that we can hardly believe him when he says that he had to

maintain two families (p.47) or:

My mother was bedridden, my brothers were all invalids. I had to earn money for the leading psychiatrists. I had to read books! I had to study the disease, so that I could cope with an emergency at every stage (p.47).

And then his mind follows a logical pattern. He first speaks about his 'crippled family' then he progresses to his 'three bastard sons' and then he refers to his 'slutbitch of a wife' (p.47). It could be construed, therefore, that Teddy, Lenny and Joey were all born out of wedlock. Having accepted such a premise, it then becomes possible that, perhaps, Max is not the father of any of the boys - and they, perhaps, sense it. This might be why Max oscillates between his apparent tenderness at times for Jessie's memory and at other times he seems to bear her an inordinately large grudge. It would also explain Max's frustration because, once again, much of his authority would depend on his bonds with his children. The suspicion that the sons might not be Max's own is reinforced when he insists that Teddy is his 'own flesh and blood', his 'first born' (p.49). The only person in the play then who seems to be of Max's own family is Sam.

Sam leaves but in his departure he shakes Ruth's hand,

denoting the respect he has acquired for her. Sam, therefore, in his own way is coming to see Ruth as a replacement for Jessie.

Reference is made to Teddy and Ruth's wedding; that they had married in Britain and that they had had no reception. This allows Max to start idealizing the type of wedding he would have paid for. But he immediately subverts his good intentions by saying that it would have been a 'white wedding' (p.48), a ceremony traditionally reserved for virgin brides - and Ruth, patently, cannot have been a virgin, especially if we consider that she used to be 'a model for the body ... [a] photographic model for the body' (p.57), a euphemism for a prostitute. Ruth also mentions that she was 'different' (p.50) when she met Teddy. It becomes evident that Teddy may have experienced some misgivings about Ruth's acceptance by the family. She says:

I'm sure Teddy's very happy ... to know that you're pleased with me.

Pause.

I think he wondered whether you would be pleased with me (p.49).

Teddy denies that she is any different. This denial is

a glib, almost mechanical response to Ruth's confession. But Max's affable response - 'Who cares? Listen, live in the present ... Who can afford to live in the past?' (p.50) - shows that nobody is fooled. Teddy senses this and stammers:

She's a great help to me over there. She's a wonderful wife and mother. She's a very popular woman. She's got lots of friends. [And then he changes the subject]. It's a great life, at the University ... you know ... it's a very good life. We've got a lovely house ... we've got it all ... we've got everything we want. It's a very stimulating environment.

Pause.

My department ... is highly successful.

Pause.

We've got three boys, you know (p.50).

Teddy tries desperately to draw Ruth away from her past and relies on the maternal instinct which she should nurture, but Teddy forgets that she had been a whore, someone capable of distancing herself from the present. Teddy tries once more by mentioning that the boys 'love

her' (p.51). Ruth passes no comment on these remarks and keeps coldly quiet. Her comment on life in America signals her intense frustration with the suburban, bourgeois life she has to lead:

It's all rock. And sand. It stretches ... so far ... everywhere you look. And there's lots of insects there.

Pause.

And there's lots of insects there.

Lenny wants to draw Teddy into an argument by posing pseudo-philosophical questions. Teddy remains aloof. Then Lenny, in the same vein, refers to a table:

... Take a table, take it. All right, I say, take it, take a table, but once you've taken it, what you going to do with it? Once you've got hold of it, where you going to take it? (p.52).

It is obvious that Lenny's remarks contain a smattering of sexual innuendo with the table in question, possibly referring to Ruth, and when Max responds by saying that it could be sold, Lenny suggests that it would not fetch a good price. Lenny is further amused by Joey's suggestion that it could be chopped up for firewood.

Ruth, though, understands Lenny's amusement and extends the innuendo by being openly sexual, perhaps recalling the way she used the word 'take' and its connotations earlier (p.34), and she continues with this thought:

Don't be too sure though. You've forgotten something. Look at me. I ... move my leg. That's all it is. But I wear ... underwear ... which moves with me ... it captures your attention. Perhaps you misinterpret. The action is simple. It's a leg ... moving. My lips move. Why don't you restrict ... your observations to that? Perhaps the fact that they move is more significant ... than the words which come through them. You must bear that ... possibility ... in mind (p.53).

Almansi and Henderson say of Ruth in this passage that:

She continues the ... combined assault of linguistic and sexual power ... when she shatters the metaphysical discussion about the meaning of the word 'table' ... with a pincer attack - playing on the word leg and the thing leg, on the word lips and on the thing lips, through which the words come to life; forcing signifier and signified to collaborate in order to ensure total victory over her male onlookers ... (1983, p.65).

Nowhere in any of Pinter's works is there a passage so loaded with eroticism as this one is. The breathless quality of Ruth's pauses suggests that she is seducing Lenny. Her reference to the underwear which moves with her is undeniably erotic in its suggestiveness, while her reference to her lips could obviously be interpreted as innuendo for her sexual parts.⁵ Esslin (1982, p.148) comments:

The association of ideas in Ruth's mind seems to be: if a table, philosophically speaking, is more than just a table, if there is another plane of reality behind its appearance, this to her is analogous to the contrast between the outward appearance of a woman, and what is beneath the appearance: the underwear, the flesh, the sex.

Ruth's attention is focused exclusively on Lenny and her words flow from her in a primordial pant of desire. Her frustrated sexual desire is transferred to her attitude to America and her opinion that it is 'all rock' and 'sand' and that there are 'lots of insects there' (Pinter, 1980, p.53). These words denote the essential incompatibility between Ruth and Teddy according to Almansi and Henderson (1983, p.60):

Teddy cannot impose his utopian vision of America on Ruth because what is for him an ivory tower, a

shrine of sanitation ('It's so clean there'), is for her a place of sterility, a barren wasteland ('It's all rock. And sand' ...).

Silence follows, suggesting that each person is contemplating the significance of what has just transpired. Max tells Joey that it is time to go to the gymnasium and Lenny accompanies the two of them, leaving Teddy with Ruth. Teddy now realises that Ruth is in the process of cutting her ties with him and her sons and, although he attempts nonchalance, his suggestion that they cut the visit short (Pinter, 1980, p.54) reveals that he realises that they should leave immediately if he wants to save his marriage. Ruth, too, has gained some insight when she says to Teddy, in reference to his family, 'You don't like them as much as you thought you did?' (p.54).

Again, when the situation becomes uncomfortable, Teddy changes the subject, trying to keep Ruth's mind focused on America. He considers America to be 'clean' (p.54) whereas - although he denies it initially - he finds England and the amenities 'like a urinal. A filthy urinal!' (p.55). He tells Ruth that she could help him with his lectures - something he would 'love' and for which he would be 'grateful' (p.55). This, it seems, is as emotional he can get concerning Ruth's possible defection.

Ruth's non sequitur (as far as Teddy is concerned) allies her with Lenny. She says: '... if I'd been a nurse in the Italian campaign I would have been there [Venice] before' (p.55) which recalls Lenny's: 'You know, I've always had a feeling that if I'd been a soldier in the last war - say in the Italian campaign - I'd probably have found myself in Venice' (p.30).

Immediately when Teddy leaves the scene Lenny appears. Obviously he has decided not to go to the gymnasium and may even have been eavesdropping on the conversation between Ruth and Teddy.

Ruth tells Lenny about her experiences as a 'model for the body' (p.57) and when Teddy comes in with the cases which he has packed, Lenny insists on dancing with Ruth. He prevails although Teddy is in a hurry to leave - just as he was years before when he and Ruth got married in secret. The opportunity to escape eludes him this time, however, because, as Ruth and Lenny embrace, Max and Joey return. Even Joey the boxer, the obtuse member of the family, can now see Ruth for what she is:

Christ, she's wide open.

Pause.

She's a tart.

Pause.

Old Lenny's got a tart in here (p.58 - 59).

He, too, embraces Ruth and she acquiesces without complaint - and Teddy is unmoved! Kilfoil comments that 'Teddy's behaviour is horrifyingly cold-blooded, as he stands unmoved by the action around him' (1986, p.88). The question arises as to why it is expected that Teddy should act at all. If, as Kilfoil puts it, 'the audience's expectations of conventional behaviour are being subverted' (p.88) then the question is raised: What is 'conventional' behaviour? No answer can be forthcoming as suburbia teems with unconventional families (as has been demonstrated in the movie Blue Velvet, for example). It is at this stage in the drama that the audience would start considering the facts about the family being portrayed and that the decision would be arrived at that Teddy's 'cold-blooded' attitude is conventional within the context of his family. They are with equal cold-bloodedness appropriating his wife for their own financial ends. Teddy is no different. If the roles had been reversed (his and Lenny's, for instance), he would have done the same.

Max is in a hurry to get rid of Teddy and refers to Teddy as if he is already without a spouse (p.59). His

speech becomes almost incoherent as he refers to Ruth alternately as being a woman 'beneath' Teddy's status (p.59) and then as a 'woman of quality' (p.60).

At this point in the play Ruth embraces the new-found power she has discovered and she says: 'I'd like something to eat. (To LENNY.) I'd like a drink' (p.60). She orders Joey to turn the record off and tells him that she wants something to eat. Joey replies that he can't cook but that Max is the cook. When Lenny brings her her whisky she complains about the glass and he has to pour the liquor into a tumbler. From this point Ruth 'uses her sexuality as a means of fulfilment and as a weapon to bludgeon the others into submission' (Combrink, 1979, p.364). Seeing that she now has the family at her beck and call, Ruth turns on Teddy who has been observing her antics in silence. She wants to goad him into some sort of emotional response and she does strike a tender spot when she asks him whether his family has read any of his critical works (p.61). Teddy reacts vehemently and in his reaction we find his basic, ideological stance towards life and towards his family:

You wouldn't understand my works. You wouldn't have the faintest ides of what they were about. You wouldn't appreciate the points of reference. You're way behind. All of you. There's no point in my sending you my works. You'd be lost. It's

nothing to do with the question of intelligence. It's a way of being able to look at the world. It's a question of how far you can operate on things and not in things. I mean it's a question of your capacity to ally the two, to relate the two, to balance the two. To see, to be able to see! I'm the one who can see. That's why I can write my critical works. Might do you good ... have a look at them ... see how certain people can maintain ... intellectual equilibrium. Intellectual equilibrium. You're just objects. You just ... move about. I can observe it. I can see what you do. It's the same as I do. But you're lost in it. You won't get me being ... I won't be lost in it (Pinter, 1980, p.61 - 62).

Teddy makes the point that his family (including Ruth) would not understand his works. It is not that they lack the intelligence but its because they lack perspective. They are not dispassionate enough; they should 'operate on things and not in things' (p.61), implying that he has this particular ability (which he proves by not becoming emotional about Ruth, for instance). The crux of his opinion is that an 'intellectual equilibrium' should be maintained, something which Kilfoil calls 'horrifyingly cold-blooded' and which, also, 'distances him emotionally from his family' (1986, p.88). However, in my opinion,

Teddy is forced to maintain this position as he has wanted to put physical distance between him and his family for the purposes of self-preservation, self-esteem and the chance to break out of the vicious family circle which will perhaps condemn him to a life in a council house, forever looking for the chance to live parasitically on others. Teddy recognises that he is the same as they are: 'I can see what you do. It's the same as I do' but he maintains control over his circumstances while they are 'lost in it', and he refuses to be, denoting his shift away from the paralysis in which the rest of the family find themselves.

Time passes and still Teddy does not leave. Sam asks Teddy whether he has ever taken to MacGregor, a question which is loaded with Sam's own convictions and emotions. Later in the play Sam's resentment of MacGregor is clarified (p.78) but here it is as if he is trying to find the moral support so that he, too, can break the cloying, destructive bonds of the family. Teddy's reply comes as a disappointment to Sam as is evidenced by the uncomfortable pause which follows his 'Yes. I liked him. Why?' (p.62). Sam does not reply to this direct question but chooses to tell Teddy that he has always been his favourite (p.62) - as well as the deceased Joey's (p.63). To Sam, Joey's affection automatically brought about his own. He, at least, tries to convince

Teddy to stay, in contrast to Lenny, who mockingly says to Teddy: 'Still here, Ted? You'll be late for your first seminar' (p.63).

In the confrontation which follows between Lenny and Teddy about a cheese-roll which Teddy had eaten, the reader inevitably is reminded of Goldilocks and the three bears:

LENNY: ...

Where's my cheese-roll?

Pause.

Someone's taken my cheese-roll. I left it there
...

TEDDY: I took your cheese-roll, Lenny (p.63).

Lenny's concern about his cheese-roll degenerates into farce when he describes, meticulously, how he prepared the roll for his own enjoyment, but the fact that he is appropriating Teddy's wife does not cause him any anguish at all.

In this scene Teddy openly confronts Lenny, challenging him:

LENNY: I'm waiting for you to apologize.

TEDDY: But I took it deliberately, Lenny (p.63).

This is Lenny's cue and he rambles on about Teddy's vindictiveness and how this surprises him as he would have expected something else because of the influence which America should have had on Teddy. He contrasts Teddy's affluent lifestyle with their own in Britain, where they enjoy a 'closer life' (p.65). He says that they expect 'a bit of generosity of mind, a bit of liberality of spirit' from him but he implies that they don't get it. At Lenny's question: 'Is that what you've given us?' (p.65), Teddy answers curtly: 'Yes'.

The confrontation ends when Joey comes downstairs and tells Lenny that he 'didn't get all the way' (p.66) with Ruth. Joey, perhaps, also needs the violence of rape to be able to function sexually, considering his and Lenny's escapade with two girls 'over a bombed site' (p.67) when they chased their escorts away and then proceeded to rape them - an incident which Lenny finds an amusing recollection because one of the girls had insisted on 'contraceptive protection' but Joey had insisted 'never mind about the contraceptive protection' (p.68). Now, with the pliant consent of Ruth, Joey is unable to 'go the whole hog' (p.66).

Teddy's laconic comment to Lenny's accusation that Ruth is a 'tease' (p.66) is that: 'Perhaps he [Joey] hasn't got the right touch' (p66) indicating that he has come to terms with the situation. When Max and Sam enter Lenny immediately informs them that Ruth is a 'tease' and that she had had 'Joey on a string' (p.68). Even Teddy joins in by saying: 'He had her up there for two hours and he didn't go the whole hog' (p.68) an image which is in keeping with Max's 'She'll make us all animals' (p.68). The significance of Teddy's words is that he has, firstly, accepted that Ruth has defected as I have already pointed out, but, secondly, he still identifies with the family by using the same terminology as Lenny and Joey ('going the whole hog'). In fact, his words contain an element of scorn for his inept, impotent brother and scorn for each other is what this family seems to have in abundance.

Joey becomes incensed at the idea that Teddy 'gets the gravy' (p.69). Evidently he has appropriated Ruth for himself and his threat 'I'll kill the next man who says he gets the gravy' bodes ill for the enterprise which the family proposes to embark upon.

Max's proposal is to keep Ruth, 'to have a woman in the house' (p.69), which Teddy lamely counters by saying: 'She's not well, and we've got to get home to the children' (p.69). Max, who has never seen his

grandchildren, ignores him by saying that he is used to 'looking after people who are not so well' (p.69). Sam also tries to thwart Max's plans, but fails. When Max mentions that Ruth could have more children Teddy informs him that she 'doesn't want any more' (p.70) to which Max answers scathingly: 'What do you know about what she wants, eh, Ted?' (p.70), thereby categorising Teddy with Joey, implying that he 'is as impotent, as incompetent, as inept, at satisfying Ruth's whims and sexual needs.

Lenny is the first to voice a seemingly legitimate complaint. How were they going to finance the 'extra mouth to feed' (p.70)? Again Max has a ready answer: 'We'll pass the hat around' (p.70) which finds general approval, except with Teddy: 'I'm not putting anything in the kitty' (p.71) and he earns Max's scorn: 'You lousy stinkpig [still staying with the imagery of the pigs]. Your mother would drop dead if she heard you take that attitude' (p.71).

Lenny, the entrepreneur, has other ideas though. He suggests that Ruth should accompany him to Greek Street, an area where prostitutes ply their trade. It is a field of enterprise where Lenny feels at home. In the house, within the family, he tries to assert his power but one cannot say unequivocally that he is the head of the household - yet. Max still occupies a respected,

though tenuous, position as the titular head of the family. Lenny is not even the eldest son; but, beyond the confines of the family, Lenny is the 'boss'. By inveigling the family into putting Ruth 'on the game' (p.72) Lenny would be usurping Max's role as controller of the household. He would regulate the hours ('I can limit the hours' - p.72) Ruth would then be occupied and he could arrange for the type of men who would visit her ('I've got a very distinguished clientele ... ' - p.73).

Joey's spirited 'I don't want to share her with a lot of yobs!' (p.73) is so terribly ironic: he aids and abets Ruth's desertion of Teddy, but he refuses to share her. Max threatens Joey that she will be returned to America if he does not alter his opinion. He tells Joey that 'It's tricky enough as it is, without you shoving your oar in' (p.73), an incongruous, phallic image as Joey has not yet, literally-speaking, done so. Max's further concern is that Ruth's 'teasing' might become a 'habit' (p.73) which would be detrimental to business.

Lenny enters into his professional role as a pimp by suggesting to Teddy that he could distribute business cards in America, thereby earning a commission on any clients who visit Ruth. Teddy, Lenny says, 'could be our representative in the States' (p.74).

The question about Ruth's professional name arises.

Lenny proposes 'Gillian' (p.74) which seems to be approved. The name derives from 'Julia', the feminine form of 'Julius' meaning 'youthful' (Andersen, 1977, p.183). Nicholson comments:

The forms Julian and Gillian, with countless nicknames, were very widespread in Britain from the 12th to the 15th centuries ... Gillian became so popular in the 17th century that it was debased to mean 'wench, flirt' ... (1985, p.56).

Ironically, the name Ruth, one reads in Nicholson, which comes from the Hebrew, means 'companionship, friendship, beautiful dream' and was the 'loyal and constant daughter-in-law of Naomi' (Nicholson, p.85 - my emphasis). Like the biblical Ruth who was constant to Naomi in character, Ruth in The Homecoming is constant in character type to her mother-in-law, Jessie. In effect, by becoming Gillian, Ruth would become Ruthless, and it is in this spirit that she bargains with Max and Lenny. It is this point - the Ruthlessness of Ruth - that illustrates the subversion of the family (in general and specific terms) most clearly. Ruth simultaneously undermines the structure represented by the bourgeois Teddy/Ruth marriage, and the structure represented by the Max/Jessie alliance.

Ruth comes down and Teddy is the first to tell her (or

is it to warn her?) that she has been invited to stay but that she will have to 'pull [her] weight a little' (Pinter, 1980, p.75). In what Combrink (1979, p.364) calls the 'proviso scene' (because of its intertextual reminiscence of Congreve's The Way of the World)

... she bargains coolly and effectively to establish the best possible terms, thus controlling her social milieu to her entire satisfaction.

Ruth approaches the whole affair as if it were a business. She uses terms like 'capital investment', 'inventory', 'agreement and conditions of employment', and 'contract' (p.77). Max and Lenny, though, not only want Ruth to be a prostitute, but they also require her to cook, scrub and make the beds (p.77 - 78). This jolts Sam into saying: 'MacGregor had Jessie in the back of my cab as I drove them along' (p.78). The association with Jessie has become so strong that one can no longer be in any doubt that Jessie was indeed the whore-mother of the family. This, then, is the role that Ruth would have to play, but it is doubtful that she would accept such conditions, although she says: 'Yes, it sounds like an attractive idea' (p.78) but she refuses to clinch the contract with a handshake.

Sam collapses and Max's only concern is that the body be removed. Teddy decides to leave but nobody offers to

take him to the airport. Instead, Max advises him on how he might find a taxi or that he could 'take the tube from Piccadilly Circus' (p.79) and then take a taxi. Max gives Teddy a photograph of himself to show his grandchildren. Teddy leaves without embracing Ruth. Her words to him are 'Don't become a stranger' (p.80), but when Teddy closes the door behind him, it is clear that he will as there is no necessity for him to return. We should bear in mind, though, that Teddy cannot become a stranger; he is a stranger in this family.

The drama could conceivably end here, but Pinter chooses to reveal what the post-Teddy family looks like and thus points to the open-ended nature of the play. Max prowls backwards and forwards. 'I'm too old, I suppose. She thinks I'm an old man', (p.80) he says pathetically. Like Sam, Max begins to collapse with the realisation that - unlike with Jessie - he would not have Ruth. If he wanted her favours, he would have to negotiate with Lenny, and, furthermore, he would have to pay.

The play ends with Sam lying on the floor, Joey on his knees with his head in Ruth's lap, Max kneeling, his face turned towards Ruth, begging for a kiss, and Lenny, withdrawn, ominously watching the pathetic tableau of pitiful creatures who are now finally under his control.

To conclude this reading of The Homecoming, we should

bear in mind what Almansi and Henderson suggest:

A great play, such as The Homecoming, is strong enough to take upon itself all sorts of interpretations, even the most ludicrous. A plurality of readings has to be encouraged (my emphasis), so as to test the play's resistance. Not all interpretations have the same credibility, but, theoretically, they all have the same epistemological standing (save for those which have no evidential grounding in the text). Two readings can even be quite contradictory and still have equal merit (1983, p.67).

The meaning of the play - in terms of what it wants to say to us - remains obscure and although the reader's interest is focused on Ruth as the curtain falls, the future concerning Teddy and the children also nags at the edges of the graphireader's (in Donoghue's terms) consciousness. It is this conflict that participates in the deferral of the meaning of the play. The 'plurality of readings' contributes to such postponement as the reader produces - what Eco calls - an 'open' text. Within the play itself we find the distinction between Ruth and the deceased Jessie becoming less defined. Ruth becomes the mother-whore. Likewise, Teddy, as a figure becomes the cuckolded Max.

In The Homecoming, the reader experiences anxiety because reality and illusion merge, mingle and disperse. It seems all too easy for suburban values to be undermined and discarded, until the reader is shell-shocked into a dumb submissiveness - like Teddy, the Ph.D husband who meekly accepts his wife's desertion.

The text itself is constructed around binary oppositions which contribute to the deferment of any meaning. The reader might consider the following oppositions:

filial love - filial hate

parental love - parental hate

fidelity - infidelity

presence - absence

alienation - integration

heterosexuality - homosexuality

reality - illusion

The way in which the reader perceives, decodes and encodes these oppositions will determine the ~~meaning~~ he might attach to the text. For example, a reader might regard the presence of the couple (Ruth and Teddy) and the absence of the sons (who are in America) as contributing to the eventual disintegration of the marriage. The sons could have been a cohesive force if they had been present, but their absence plays an important role by removing this cohesiveness.

In the play, the integration of Ruth runs concurrently with the alienation of Teddy. As Ruth is accepted into the family so it is made clear to Teddy that he is dispensable.

One might also delve deeper into other binary oppositions to dissect the text even further; for example, Teddy is representative of the abstract, of knowledge in the abstract, the alien, whereas Ruth represents the quest for material things and of carnal knowledge, an ally.

Whatever oppositions the reader might reveal - or construct - further, it is evident that the reader subverts the authority of the text as well as the 'implied' authority of the author. The binary oppositions might be openly and deliberately there in the text, or they might be arcane and have to be dredged from the sub-conscious workings of the reader's mind. This would then imply and demand a plurality of readings of the text, the text which Barthes would term 'writerly' as opposed to 'readerly'.

The dramatic tension in the play also contributes to the multivalence of its meaning. Anxiety is created in the reader when he can no longer perceive the difference between, for example, Lenny's fictional fiction (the play itself is the fiction and within the play Lenny

creates more fiction with his tales - if they are tales - about the violence he has done to women) and the 'real' fiction such as the fact that Teddy and Ruth are married, or that Lenny is evidently a pimp.

Furthermore, the drama as genre lends itself more to the possibility of producing a meta-text than either poetry or the novel. Drama is 'real' and takes place - usually - in what is known as 'real time' (although, obviously, this convention, as far as the passage of time between one scene and the next is concerned is often broken for practical purposes). But the actions of the characters seem real; the actors seem real; the reality created seems real. Drama interacts with an audience who become caught up in the maelstrom of emotions and events developing right before their eyes. Pinter uses this accessibility to create a range of emotions in the audience. Lenny's familiarity with Ruth is disconcerting; Joey's infatuation borders on the perverse for who is taking advantage of whom and why? So the questions continue and the answers the readers/audience may arrive at are always tinged with uncertainty. But these answers remain a necessary 'supplement' of the drama as the answers themselves contribute to uncertainty and anxiety and the deferment of ~~meaning~~. In this fashion, paradoxically, the reader becomes author/creator of the text - and by deferring the ~~meaning~~ of the text, the reader subverts his own

intentions viz. to create a full and complete structure which is The Homecoming with all its sub-conscious, subliminal marginalia so that no further explication is necessary.

ENDNOTES

1. Hollis (1970, p.110) remarks on the question of the morality of the play and concludes that the characters are 'no more concerned with moral issues than a dog is self-conscious about his relationship with a fire hydrant'. Combrink (1979, p.338 - 339) points out that a number of divergent views exist concerning the morality of the play. She does not pass any direct comment on the morality of the play but twice she refers to the play as being at the 'furthest end of the comic spectrum' (p.338) or that 'it tends to slip off the furthest end of the comic spectrum' (p.342) and thus indicts it for not containing any of the 'harmony and redemption' (p.340) found in Congreve's The Way of the World.

2. Sam's homosexuality accounts for his almost reserved or distanced position in the play. He cannot bring himself to be excited about prostitutes and his obvious affection for Jessie may be because he had been her only confidant in a society where she had been regarded with scorn. Sam's effeminate nature is more than just hinted at by Max. Max's epithet 'a wet wick' (Pinter, 1980, p.39) is suggestive of a flaccid penis. But Max gets even closer to the truth when he calls him a 'lazy

bugger' (p.47) - a 'bugger' is defined by the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (1968, p.231) as: '2. One who commits buggery; a sodomite' - and when he says: 'Anyone could have you at the same time. You'd bend over for half a dollar on Blackfriars Bridge' (Pinter, 1980, p.48).

3. Lenny's purpose is to make money from acting as a sex salesman, a 'sex-for-pleasure-only' salesman. Freud comments on this in the following way:

... the abandonment of the reproductive function is the common feature of all perversions. We actually describe a sexual activity as perverse if it has given up the aim of reproduction and pursues the attainment of pleasure as an aim independent of it. (Vol. 1, 1987, p.358).

Freud goes on to state that these perversions have their origins in infancy as 'if a child has a sexual life at all it is bound to be of a perverse kind' (p.358). Furthermore, the sadistic (or tendency towards sadism) phase and the anal phase coincide (p.369). These phases lie between the suckling age and the age of three. It seems, therefore, that should the child be traumatised during this phase, then either the child's libido development would be arrested or regression might take place in adulthood. If, for instance, Jessie had left

the house at this stage and if Lenny had to share her with other men - for the mother becomes the child's love-object (p.372) - then Lenny would have built up an enormous anger directed at his mother and, by transference, at all other women.

4. Both Max and Teddy are the father figures; Max the biological father and Teddy the intellectual father. Ruth and Jessie have prostitution in common as well as the fact that they have both given birth to three sons. Kilfoil suggests that the 'series of parallels is an important structural element' (1986, p.91) in the play:

Max has three sons; Teddy has three sons. Max's wife was unfaithful; Teddy's wife appears to have no objection to betraying her husband, either with his own family or with strangers (p.91).

5. Freud writes:

The female genitals are symbolically represented by all such objects as share their characteristic of enclosing a hollow space which can take something into itself ...; among parts of the body, the mouth (as a substitute for the genital orifice); ... (Vol. 1, 1987, p.189 - 191).

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CHAPTER 5

ONE FOR THE ROAD

In One for the Road (Pinter, 1984), Pinter presents the reader with a naturalistic slice of life. He uncovers a tranche of existence (much in the same way as the director of the film Blue Velvet (1987), David Lynch, uses his camera to cut subcutaneously into suburban life) that increases the unsettled and uneasy feeling in the reader - for in One for the Road the reader is confronted by the lurking menace of authority in its many disguises.

The meaning of the text is deferred because the characters talk past each other, not only because they do not want to address each other directly but also because they do not seem to be able to. The characters themselves become victims of their own fears; they are locked into what Nietzsche termed their 'prison-houses' of language.

In the 'conventional' drama, the reader would - at least after a reading of the text - recognise or perceive the problem, would follow the events and decisions leading to the resolution of the problem, and a catharsis would be effected, whether or not the resolution complies with the reader's expectation of what is satisfactory. In

One for the Road, Pinter manipulates the reader in the sense that the meaning becomes arbitrary. In fact, not only is the meaning of the text arbitrary, but the origin of the meaning is also arbitrary. The quasi-resolution of the text leaves the reader faced with a number of choices. The reader can exercise his authority as reader over the origin and over the progression of the text, because, very obviously not everything that has been said or done in the period from the beginning of the drama to its end is divulged. The same can be said concerning the ending of the drama, bearing in mind that we are talking about the 'Pinter-reader' and that the text itself is an 'open' text (according to Umberto Eco) and that the text 'cannot afford whatever interpretation' (Eco, 1984, p.9).

The title of the drama on a very direct level refers plainly to the colloquial last drink (and arguably the most dangerous) before the closing of a public house or before friends part at the end of a convivial evening. This is where the irony is at once apparent. The drama is loaded with menace and terror, and with joviality - except it is the forced and threatening kind displayed by Nicolas: 'Hello! Good morning. How are you? ... ' (Pinter, 1984, p.7); 'You may have noticed I am the chatty type ... ' (p.8); 'I've heard so much about you. I'm terribly pleased to meet you ...' (p.9). But each seemingly friendly approach brings with it a threatening

undertone, as if Nicolas feels compelled to launch a parting shot, 'one for the road' as it were.

Nicolas seems to derive some vicarious thrill from death (p.11)¹ and it could be construed that by having Nicky, Victor's son, eliminated, Nicolas is having the last say in the episode. To him, drink and death are representative of pleasure, and human life is debased to the same level as a glass of liquor. This idea is reinforced in the episode where Nicolas questions Nicky and Nicolas does not drink any liquor whereas when he speaks to Victor or to Gila he always imbibes something.

The principal character in the drama, Nicolas, is involved, chiefly, in a type of monologue. On a psychological level he keeps Victor off-balance. Whether he has been trained in interrogation techniques or whether this is part of his personality (or both) is an aspect which the reader may want to explore and resolve. He succeeds in disorienting Gila as she at first says that she met her husband in a room (p.19) and later she says that she met him in the street (p.20). By being inconsistent in her replies, Gila supplies Nicolas with a reason for continuing the torture to which she and her husband are subjected.

Pinter participates in the disorientation process by presenting the drama as if the action takes place

linearly - the first scene takes place in the morning (Victor and Nicolas), the next (Nicky and Nicolas) takes place in the afternoon, the next (Gila and Nicolas) at night, and the last scene takes place at night as well (Victor and Nicolas). The suggestion is that all the action - in the drama as it is presented - takes place in a single day. It is only by investigating the text for evidence that one is able to deduce that more than one day has expired in the period from the first scene to the last. The most obvious indication is that in the first scene, Victor's clothes are torn and in the last scene he is dressed neatly. Nicolas also indicates that they have had more than one 'discussion'.

Nicolas presents the reader with an apparent conglomerate of personality disorders. The reader readily gleans from the drama that Nicolas is a menacing figure, but the reader is baffled when it comes to categorizing him in terms of a psychological type. The reader might, at first, regard Nicolas simply as a psychopath, or as Krech et al (1969, p.778) put it, he may be displaying an antisocial reaction. Concerning the psychopath, they have this to say:

The individual behaves impulsively to obtain immediate gratification of his needs. He seems unable to anticipate the consequences of his actions and so fails to learn from experience, to

plan ahead, or to follow long-range goals. He acts before he thinks. Similarly, he is insensitive to the needs of others. Unable to tolerate frustration, he lives from moment to moment, his actions appearing erratic, irresponsible, and unpredictable.

His intelligence is unimpaired. He is often charming and articulate, glibly using words, flattery, fabrication to manipulate situations to his own ends ... He is usually isolated because of his incapacity to form lasting relationships.

[He] seems to suffer from a failure to have developed moral standards or conscience ... In line with this make-up, he seems to have surprisingly little guilt or anxiety (p.778).

Nicolas displays all these personality disorders. His first words seem to indicate a need to establish a friendly relationship with Victor, but he immediately proceeds to attack. His actions and words throughout the drama are consistently erratic, with violent changes in his mood manifesting themselves in his words.

On the other hand, it could be argued that Nicolas displays typical schizophrenic reactions:

Hebephrenic Type In this type of schizophrenic disorder, the individual seems to regress to childish levels of behavior. He may giggle incessantly; in fact, everything may seem funny or foolish to him (Morgan and King, 1971, p.426).

Nicolas laughs when he tells Victor that his mother had thought that he was mad (Pinter, 1984, p.7). Normally, this sort of comment made by someone else might have the opposite effect, rather than to induce laughter. By waving his fingers in front of Victor's eyes (and later he repeats the action with Gila), Nicolas displays childish behaviour, but the action is replete with menace.

Then, too, Nicolas may suffer from a paranoid reaction, that is, he may have delusions of grandeur and of persecution (Krech et al, 1969, p.776). He repeatedly suggests that he is the chosen mouthpiece for God, 'the Old Testament God' (Pinter, 1984, p.8) he says. He also says: 'Everyone else knows the voice of God speaks through me' (p.9). To stress his importance, he tells Victor that the president had singled him out to speak to at a reception. And what was this momentous piece of information which the president wanted to impart? That 'honesty is the best policy'! (p.12).

Morgan and King (1971, p.389) write that 'if the Oedipal

situation is not resolved by the child, the adult may end up with a weak conscience and distorted relations with his friends and with members of the opposite sex'.

When Nicolas mentions that his mother had thought him mad, his words are charged with anger, although he says the words matter-of-factly. Nicolas, in his repressed state of aggression towards his mother, displays an intense dislike of women. This becomes apparent only when one examines the evidence closely. Nicolas intimates that he may have been involved - sexually - with Gila: 'She is beginning to fall in love with me. On the brink ... of doing so' (Pinter, 1984, p.12 - 13). But what he has said previously gives the lie to his words:

Your wife and I had a very nice chat but I couldn't help noticing she didn't look her best. She's probably menstruating. Women do that. (p.12).

If he had had intercourse with her, surely he would have known whether Gila was menstruating? He therefore displays his ignorance of any physical contact with her. It seems, though, as if it bothers him somewhat that the other men - presumably under his command - have raped her. He regards them as his 'rivals' (p.13) but he takes a perverse pleasure in knowing that she has been

abused by the men on a number of occasions. His pleasure seems to be derived from reminding his victim of the humiliation which she has suffered (p.21) by referring to it and by questioning her on the number of times she may have been raped. Nicolas displays his sexual impotence when he waves his fingers in front of Gila's eyes (p.21) which recalls the incident with Victor (p.7) where he also waved his fingers in front of his captive's face. His fingers represent the phallus with, perhaps, his little finger representing his male sex in a flaccid state and his big finger representing the tumescent state. By acting in this fashion, Nicolas demonstrates his bisexual nature with a bias towards homosexuality.

Some evidence may be found concerning Nicolas' preference for men, the most obvious being that he has not been involved with Gila on a physical level. His words, when he addresses Victor, are full of innuendo (p.9): 'Would you like to know me better?' Bearing in mind that in Biblical terms, to 'know' somebody is to have sexual relations with that person, the reference seems to assume the level of an invitation. His terminology (p.14) also indicates his unconscious bias to his own gender: 'Despair, old fruit, is a cancer'. The term 'fruit' (or 'fruitcake') has come to denote a homosexual in 'gay' terminology. In his last words to Nicky, he says : 'They don't like you either, my

darling' (p.17) in a menacing yet mincing manner.

Nicolas' preoccupation with death in sexual terms also reveals his personality. In fact, Nicolas seems so infatuated with death that his interest borders on necrophilia:

Death. Death. Death. Death. As has been noted by the most respected authorities, it is beautiful. The purest, most harmonious thing there is. Sexual intercourse is nothing compared to it (p.11).

Nicolas readily makes the connection between death and sex - but he is quick to point out that the death he prefers is 'Not necessarily your own. Others. The death of others' (p.11).

What also emerges from the play is Nicolas' megalomania. He holds sway over the lives of those in his power and they are reminded of it constantly. We deduce that Nicolas possesses some type of vested authority, an authority which seems unchallengeable, viz. the authority of a hero. In his study of psychopaths, Alan Harrington (1973) argues that psychopaths are the heroes of our time; we see them all around us:

The hero of our age is - the psychopath. Free from responsibility, free from guilt, free from anxiety,

he pursues his interests without compunction, manipulating others to reach his goals. Corporation president, statesman, educator, physician; his calling is irrelevant: his features are everywhere the same ... (Glenn in Harrington, p.30).

The danger, Harrington feels, is that the 'distinction blurs between present-day psychopathic patterns ... and equivalent behaviour, which may be put to use in good causes ...' (p.198 - 199).

The roles played by the members of the family in One for the Road in the process of being victimised cannot be ignored, however. Since approximately 1948, the concept that a victim may be playing an active part in the process of his being victimised has been researched and documented. Von Hentig writes:

Scholars have begun to see the victim not necessarily as a passive object, as the neuter or innocent point of impact of crime in society, but as eventually playing an active role or possibly contributing in different measure to his/her victimization (1948, p.xiii).

Carolus (1989) also discusses this issue and he also suggests that 'the victim may have contributed, directly

or indirectly, towards his own victimization' (p.84). Modern man, tending to remain uninvolved, removed, or dispassionate, even to the point of witnessing a crime being committed and doing nothing to prevent it is illustrative of this theory. Harrington refers to a rapist who attacked a woman in an alley in Boston. She broke free of the man and called for assistance but she was rebuffed by the words spoken by a man dressed in a business suit. Nobody, on that busy morning in Boston, came to her assistance (1973, p.108 - 109).

To return then to the hypothesis stated earlier (that the meaning of the text is arbitrary) the reader may impose a particular angle of perception on the text. Taking this as a point of departure, the reader may argue that the author has presented his reader with a dream. Hambidge (1984, p.128) proposes that a text may be read on various levels and, particularly pertinent to this dissertation, as a 'Freudian dream' or as a 'psychological document of a schizophrenic'.

What underscores this hypothesis is the idea that a dream is by nature a naturalistic representation of life, for while experiencing the dream the dreamer is convinced of the reality imposed on him. It is only when the dreamer awakes and the logic of the Ego becomes involved that the erstwhile dreamer becomes aware of the absurdity of his dream and of his anxiety while involved

in the process of dreaming. Arthur Ashworth has commented that:

The realist situation is twisted strangely askew by these people [Pinter's characters] from the world beyond realism, the world of the subconscious, of the dream, sometimes of the nightmare (1962, p154).

Another piece of evidence supporting the idea that this might be a dream, is implicit in the 'structure' of the play. A dream does not evolve in a linear fashion, nor does it contain (necessarily) all the codes required for its interpretation. To discover the link between members of a family, one has to investigate the casual remarks made by the 'actors' in the dream. In a dream, then, there is little use for the Unities as any one or all of them may be subverted. In One for the Road, the unity of time is not self-evident, and the reader has to decide whether the action takes place within a twenty-four hour period, or whether the action takes place over a protracted period of time. I am of the opinion that the period of time exceeds twenty-four hours but, in a dream, time can be compressed or elongated. In drama, the malleability of time leads to what André P. Brink calls 'the effective unmasking of a world without boundaries or certainties' (1974, p.103, my translation). This in turn defers the meaning or

interpretation we would wish to impose on the text, and by postponing our final response we allow any interpretation we would like to make to be subverted by ourselves.

Seen then as a dream, the text's central figure, Nicolas, represents the dreamer-author. The dreamer can therefore be analyzed in terms of his dreams, and again we should bear in mind that we are imposing an arbitrary meaning on the dream; the dream itself being an eruption from the sub-conscious mind of that which was interpreted consciously but nevertheless subjectively. Nor is it necessarily only Nicolas who is representative of the dreamer: in psychoanalytical terms this is not possible as all the figures in a dream are representative of the dreamer's subconscious and therefore indicate facets of the dreamer's personality and perceptions. Victor might represent the dreamer, or Gila might, or even Nicky, or the soldiers. Given then that Nicolas represents the dreamer, what can we recover from the dream One for the Road?

The names of the characters are significant in themselves. Nicolas means 'the people's victory' derived from the Greek goddess, Nike, the winged goddess of victory. An ironical note creeps into the name if one considers that a 'healthy legend was developed, including extensive biographies that recount miracles of

saving girls from prostitution, boys from death, just men from the gallows ...' (Nicholson, 1985, p.210). It is also common knowledge that as the patron saint of children, Nicolas should act as Nicky's protector. On the other hand, Nicolas might represent the very antithesis of the saint, and to tie in with the pantheistic theme introduced by the word 'Goat' (Pinter, 1984, p.12), Nicolas might represent 'Old Nick', the devil incarnate, bent on the destruction of mankind.

The name 'Victor' means 'the victor' (Andersen, 1977, p.217) while 'Gila' is a Hebrew name which means 'joy' (Nicholson, 1985, p.46). Again, the two names are ironic when the whole drama is considered, because Victor does not win (he, in fact, becomes a victim) and Gila experiences no joy. 'Nicky', as the diminutive of Nicolas, may represent what Nicolas would like to be - unspoiled, unsullied by complexes and phobias, his alter ego in fact.

Central to this dream is what Freud terms the 'disguised Oedipus dream' (Freud, 1970, p.433). Nicolas has an obsession with eyes (Pinter, 1984, p.7, p.13, p.14). Freud writes (1970, p.433 - 434) that the 'blinding in the legend of Oedipus, as well as elsewhere, stands for castration'. Blinding the victim is implied by Nicolas when he suggests that the eyes are 'so vulnerable' (Pinter, 1984, p.7). Getting closer to the castration

theme, Nicolas says:

Despair, old fruit, is a cancer. It should be castrated. Indeed I've often found that that works. Chop the balls off and despair goes out the window. You're left with a happy man. Or a happy woman ... (p.14).

This fixation on castration reveals the dreamer's Oedipal complex. This is first indicated when Nicolas says that his mother had thought him mad (p.7) which suggests that in some way his mother had rejected him in his youth. The fact that Nicolas can only allude to having sexual relations with Gila, and not have the capability of doing so, reinforces the Oedipal theme. In Gila, he recognizes his mother and knowing that her attraction for him is incestuous, he 'castrates' himself so to speak by his abstinence. In his pretended affectionate gestures and words towards Victor, Nicolas conceals his strong attraction to Gila.²

In the dream, Nicolas refers to his personal relationship with the head of the state, thus identifying himself with authority (p.12). He transcends this earthly authority by identifying himself with God (p.9). To a degree this puts in him opposition to his own father, an opposition which supports the Oedipal complex. By suggesting that Gila represents the

dreamer's mother, it follows that Victor must be symbolical of his father. At once it is as if certain pieces seem to fall into place. Nicolas threatens Victor with blindness (p.7) and he then demonstrates his power over Victor (p.8) by making him stand up and sit down, thus humiliating him. In telling Victor of the vandalizing of his home (p.10), and of the 'boys' having urinated on the rugs, Nicolas shows his contempt for his father. In terms of dream theory, this indicates a disorder of the bladder which in turn leads to an erotic stimulus (Freud, 1970, p.438).

When Nicolas addresses Nicky, he is in fact addressing the young, seven-year old Nicolas. Nicky loves both his parents (Pinter, 1984, p.15), while the older Nicolas has an aversion to them. Nicky likes aeroplanes 'because they go so fast. Through the air ...' (p.15). According to Freud (1970, p.429), the idea of flying recalls childish romps. The innocent Nicolas, therefore, was thrilled by games such as cowboys and Indians (p.14). Later in the dream Nicky demonstrates his opposition to authority by spitting at the soldiers and by attacking them (p.16).

In the encounter with Gila, the incoherence in the dream becomes more pronounced as Gila becomes confused about the place where she had met Victor. As soon as Gila mentions that she had met Victor in her 'father's room'

(p.19), Nicolas becomes deranged. This could only be attributable to the fact that he had been reminded that Gila was his father's wife. He therefore projects his aggression onto her. By questioning her about the other men, he seeks to compensate for his own impotence and for his desire for her. As with Victor, so too with Gila does he hold up his fingers to threaten. Significantly, this encounter shows that Nicolas had known Gila's father (and family?) previously, and some old, family feuds may still be stirring in Nicolas' demented mind.

In the final encounter in the dream-play, Nicolas is solicitous about Victor's health and learns that Victor's tongue has been hurt. This has not removed Victor's power of speech completely, but it has become seriously impaired. Nicolas also offers Victor a drink, for the first time in the play, so as to 'put lead in your pencil' (p.23). He tells Victor that his wife would be returned to him 'if she feels up to it' (p.24). The idea that the son returns the wife to the father after she has been used is implicit in Nicolas' words. The dream ends with the older Nicolas having rid himself of his burden - and possible future threat - Nicky. In a wider context, the death of Nicky is the salvation of all the other characters. By killing Nicky, all the other actors are released and they may proceed then to search for another 'play' (to echo Pirandello).

In the process of revealing meaning, the text enforces an effect on the reader. Pinter makes the reader aware of the betrayal in relationships (as in The Homecoming). Nicolas pretends to be friendly by putting his arm around Victor's shoulders - but Victor dare not trust him. The conclusion of the play demonstrates this more aptly when Nicolas tells Victor that he may go, although he is warned that from time to time the interrogation might occur again, and that his wife would be joining him in a week's time. But he blights Victor's short-lived optimism by inferring that Nicky has been murdered. Pinter, in other words, confirms what the reader does not want to know, that, as Macbeth puts it (Act 5, Scene 5) life is full of sound and fury but it all comes to nothing. T.S Eliot, in his poem The Hollow Men (1985, p.86) writes:

This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.

The reader cannot help but identify with the idea that life is an unbearable, nonsensical, irrational nightmare. And it is by clinging tenaciously to this idea that the reader, paradoxically, finds meaning in life and in its incomprehensible manifestations - even if such manifestations are terror inspiring and inspired.

To elicit meaning from the text, the reader has to identify with the text i.e. become involved with the text. In this identification process, the reader identifies with the characters in the text; either with all the characters or with some of them or with a single character. If the reader should identify with all the characters, then the permutation of meanings becomes impossibly great. Not that by identifying with only one character means that the meaning of a text becomes simplistic or defined, but, at least the concept of a text having any meaning at all (albeit imposed) becomes manageable.

By identifying with Nicolas in One for the Road, the reader does not admit to identification with his personality disorders, but the reader does admit to recognizing these disorders. By identifying with the idea that the whole play is a nasty dream, the reader admits to the concept that a dream denotes a psychological release for the dreamer and that much is said about the nature of the dreamer and of his life.

In accordance with viewing life as an unbearable nightmare, the reader may wish to repress the realities posited by the play and this allows the reader to interpret the play as a dream and, as a dream is already an interpretation of what has occurred in the conscious state but is physiologically one step removed, the

reader incorporates and interprets what is already an exercise in subliminal manifestation.³

The aporia is reached when the reader has to decide on the representational model - is the play a dream or is it a reflection of fictional reality dealt with on a realistic level? The point is that whichever strategy is chosen by the reader dictates the ~~meaning~~ deduced which is elastic, pliable, contingent.

ENDNOTES

1. Norman Mailer, too, has made this observation. In his novel, An American Dream (1965, p.15) the protagonist, Stephen Rojack, thinks:

Murder, after all, has exhilaration within it. I do not mean it is a state to entertain ... but there is something manly about containing your rage, it is so difficult, it is like carrying a two-hundred-pound safe up a cast-iron hill. The exhilaration comes I suppose from possessing such strength. Besides, murder offers the promise of vast relief. It is never unsexual (my emphasis).

Murder, Rojack muses, is 'like a symphony in your head' (p.15 - 16).

2. Freud (1970, p.434) documents the dream of a man who had a liaison with a married lady and by being friendly towards her husband he was in fact concealing a wish to murder him.

3. Krech et al (1969) report that dreaming occurs at a stage in sleep when the electroencephalograph of a sleeper resembles that of a waking person (p.58). They

term this state paradoxical sleep for this reason because it appears that in this state the sleeper is harder to wake up than at any other stage. Also, rapid eye movement (REM) takes place, signifying that the subject is experiencing a dream. Krech et al also mention that 'forgetting' may occur (p.764 - p765) and this may account for inconsistencies in a dream or when a subject recounts a dream.

CHAPTER 5

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CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The literary issues touched on in this dissertation intended to point to a form of eclecticism, eclecticism brought on by the futile - yet eternal - pressure to find ~~meaning~~ in a text, by attempting to explain, by means of a literary theoretical background, some of the phenomena (sociological, psychological, sexual) which may occur and which may have bearing on an interpretation of the text.

The danger is, however, that the impression may be created that texts may be reduced to simplistic, subjective interpretations. This would be contrary to the intention of this research. The choice of Pinter - considered to be a 'difficult' playwright - was not a haphazard selection. Pinter's critical standing has changed greatly since the first production of The Birthday Party and he is much more widely read these days, almost, one would venture to suggest, mundanely so. But ideological perspectives have changed and whereas Pinter was considered to be an 'absurd' dramatist (by Esslin, for example), the general trend is to regard him more as a realist dramatist. Nevertheless, the expectation of the reader is such as to want Pinter's drama to be inaccessible or impossible

to unravel.

But, the previous paragraph does not imply that there are clear, sharply delineated differences between 'easy' texts and 'difficult' texts. One merely has to research the background to well-known nursery rhymes to come to realise that there is no such thing as a simple, easily explained text. A text is steeped in the tradition of its language, its genre - and the totality of its creator (originally the author, later, the reader). But knowing a great deal about the genesis of a text does not necessarily lead to better understanding, nor would it imply that the text has greater literary value. Arnold Hinchliffe writes:

The fact that The Bald Prima Donna was written from a copy of the Assimil method of learning English is interesting history and illuminates the play, but it does not automatically confer value on the play, which still has to satisfy an audience as a play - not as an experiment in adaptation (1967, p.31 - 32).

It is the violence done to it by the reader that gives the text its 'structure' and other parameters related to a need for meaning.

On the other hand, it should be clear that no text is

too arcane for interpretation by an informed reader.¹ It is barely conceivable that someone with a very slim grasp of English would attempt a reading - let alone an interpretation - of Milton's Lycidas. Yet, should such an unlikely circumstance arise, that reader would focus his complete psyche on the text and misread, even to the n-th degree.

The theory of deconstruction has brought with it the ability of the critic to assume the station of reader and, involved in the creative process of a work, author. No longer can it be thought that whatever a critic writes has no influence on a text, as the critic is in effect contributing to the original work. It may be assumed that the critic's products would have a 'ripple effect' on the works reviewed, especially if that critic has a wide readership.

As far as the readership of a particular author is concerned, reference has been made to the type of reader who may want to read Pinter's works. The distinction may also be made on the grounds of genre. There may be some readers who would not want to read Pinter's poems but who would, perhaps, read only his dramas. One thinks immediately of the play, The Birthday Party, and the poem, A View of the Party. Conversely, there are those readers who would read anything written by Pinter, presumably even his laundry lists. The typical Pinter

reader would become aware of certain stock figures that thread through The Birthday Party, The Homecoming, and One for the Road. Surely it is not impossible to recognise Goldberg, Lenny and Nicolas as all being the same figure? To see them as arch-manipulators? And to deduce that the playwright himself - the manipulator of texts for actors - is recognisably a conglomerate of Goldberg/Lenny/Nicolas? And so the author encodes himself in the text - and eventually the reader becomes part of the very same work.

Victims, also, abound in Pinter's work. The difficulty is to identify them, and to distinguish between victims and mere bystanders who act as catalysts. In The Birthday Party, we readily accept that Stanley is the victim (and to a lesser degree, Ruth - because she loses the object of her sometimes incestuous maternal love). Petey is the bystander who aids the intruders by not acting. In The Homecoming, the lines become blurred. Teddy loses his wife to his rapacious family. But, the real victims are absent - the sons who are in America, while Teddy is the not-so-innocent bystander. In One for the Road, the members of the family are the victims. And the bystanders? I would suggest that we, the audience or readers, are the helpless bystanders. We will not -and cannot - intrude to change the course of the drama, although we know that it will end in inevitable loss. We are always enjoined to prudence as

any overt intrusion would lead to the destruction of a work and not to its subversion - which is, inevitably and ineluctably, the goal of reading.

CHAPTER 6

ENDNOTES

1. Refer to Chapter 2 of this dissertation for Fish's concept of the informed reader.

CHAPTER 6

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SUMMARY

Of the many problems that face the reader of modern texts and the modern reader of texts, the problems of reading contingency and interpretive strategy are perhaps the most vexing. Do readers look for meaning in the text? Should they?

In Chapter 1, two issues are raised: i) the importance of Harold Pinter; and, ii) the importance of the reader.

Chapter 2 considers the critical method used and deconstruction theories about the reader, the text and the author. Deconstruction theories concerning intertextuality, différence/différance, the aporia of the text are discussed. The reader's relationship with and towards the text is also considered and it is argued that the reader is as much a function of the text as the text is of the reader. Evanescent meaning, it is argued, is imposed upon the text by the reader. Consideration is also given to the author and it is suggested that here as well the reader is the 'author/-ity' of the text as he participates in the writing process. Jacques Derrida, the spiritual leader of deconstruction, is mentioned briefly.

In Chapter 3, Harold Pinter's The Birthday Party reveals itself to be an exceptional play which can function on a

number of levels. The plurality of readings and interpretations (as with all Pinter's plays) is stressed and an awareness is achieved of the 'writerly' nature of the play.

Chapter 4 examines The Homecoming, a sexually torrid play. Critics have found the play disgusting and bordering on pornography in its treatment of a suburban family. The disintegration of the family is a central theme of the play and the subversion of the role of the mother, represented by Ruth and Jessie in the play, adds to the feeling of devastation engendered in the reader.

Pinter's last published play (at the writing of this dissertation as a later play - Mountain Language - has since been published) is examined in Chapter 5. One for the Road is particularly susceptible to a 'readerly' interpretation. The approach suggested is to regard the play as a Freudian dream.

The conclusion is arrived at that Pinter's plays are not meant to be easy to understand, nor that reading strategies make it any easier to understand the modern text. On the other hand, particular readers will expect to find particular ~~meaning~~ in a Pinter text; they have encoded, and have been encoded by, the text.

OPSOMMING

Van die menigte probleme wat die leser van die moderne teks en die moderne leser van tekste konfronteer, is die probleem van leesgebeurlikheid en interpretasie-strategie miskien die mees kwellende. Soek lesers na betekenis in die teks? Behoort hulle daarna te soek?

In Hoofstuk 1 word twee sake aangeroer: i) Harold Pinter se belangrikheid; en ii) die belangrikheid van die leser.

In Hoofstuk 2 beskou die ondersoeker die kritiese metode wat gebruik word, asook dekonstruksieteorieë omtrent die leser, die teks en die outeur. Hy bespreek dekonstruksieteorieë aangaande intertekstualiteit, différence/différance, en die aporia van die teks. Die leser se verhouding met en tot die teks word ook bespreek en daar word aangevoer dat die leser net so 'n funksie van die teks is as wat die teks van die leser is. Vlietende betekenis - so voer die ondersoeker aan - word op die teks afgedwing deur die leser. Hy skenk ook oorweging aan die outeur en gee ook te kenne dat die leser die 'outeur/outeuriteit' is van die teks deur mee te doen aan die skryfproses. Jacques Derrida, die geestelike leier van die dekonstruksieteorie, word kortliks genoem.

In Hoofstuk 3, word Harold Pinter se The Birthday Party onthul as 'n buitengewone drama wat op vele vlakke kan funksioneer. Die meervoudigheid van lesings en interpretasies (soos met al Pinter se dramas) word beklemtoon en 'n gewaarwording van die 'skrywerlikheid' van die drama word bereik.

Hoofstuk 4 betrag The Homecoming, 'n seksueel versengende drama. Kritici het al die drama walglik gevind, en grensend aan pornografie met betrekking tot die behandeling van 'n voorstedelike gesin. Die disintegrasie van die gesin is 'n hooftema en die ondermyning van die rol van die moeder-figuur, soos deur Ruth en Jessie voorgestel in die drama, dra by tot die gevoel van vernietiging wat in die leser opgewek word.

Pinter se laaste gepubliseerde drama (met die skrywe van hierdie dissertasie) word in Hoofstuk 5 bespreek. One for the Road is veral ontvanklik vir 'n 'leserlike' interpretasie. Die benadering wat voorgestel word, is om die drama as 'n droom te beskou.

Die ondersoeker kom tot die gevolgtrekking dat Pinter se dramas nie veronderstel is om maklik te wees om te verstaan nie, nog minder dat leesstrategieë dit makliker maak om die moderne teks te verstaan. Daarenteen sal spesifieke lesers verwag om besondere betekenis in 'n teks te vind; hulle enkodeer die teks en word self deur

die teks geënkodeer.