PINTER'S STRANGERS

by

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This thesis concerns itself with the study of a single recurring character in Pinter's work whom I define as the stranger. The thesis asserts that Pinter's use of the stranger figure, in its many varied forms, is the central motif of each of his major works. Pinter employs the stranger as a character to epitomize much larger fears than can normally be attributed to one person alone: fear of strangers, intrusion, the past, the future, loneliness, estrangement, death. Thus, Pinter uses such fears to catalyse the dramatic actions of his plays.

The study includes all of Pinter's major plays from The Room through No Man's Land, and progresses chronologically, tracing Pinter's developing sophistication in the use of this motif.

The thesis consists of an introduction, in which I define the term stranger as used in this study; five chapter divisions, based on the progression of major variations in Pinter's exploration of this motif; and a conclusion, which points out the cyclical nature of Pinter's work from The Room through No Man's Land. The conclusion also summarizes the over-all trends of Pinter's work,
from his early dependance on physicality, through his intellectual period, to the almost entirely psychological final phase.

The five chapters explore Pinter's work play by play, following the progress of his use of the stranger. After his initial, rather overt use of this motif, Pinter quickly moves into more subtle and complex handling of this figure, splitting the stranger into two characters, creating confusion over "Who is the stranger?", switching the role of stranger from one character to another through the course of the play, discovering estrangement as an inevitability of the human condition, and returning at last (with all the preceding nuances incorporated) to the stranger as a single character.

At its skeletal minimum, the argument of the thesis is that Pinter has based all of his major dramatic works on essentially the same dramatic action. It is the variations and disguises he has given the formula, the inventions, discoveries, and machinations of this single motif with which this thesis is concerned.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. STRANGER AS MESSENGER</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i) THE ROOM</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) THE DUMB WAITER</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iii) THE BIRTHDAY PARTY</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iv) A SLIGHT ACHE</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. STRANGER AS FAILED USURPER</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i) THE CARETAKER</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. STRANGER SEX</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i) THE COLLECTION</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) THE LOVER</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iii) THE HOMECOMING</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. ESTRANGEMENT</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i) LANDSCAPE</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) SILENCE</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. STRANGER AS REVENANT</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i) OLD TIMES</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) NO MAN'S LAND</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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INTRODUCTION

I always find myself wondering what is going to happen to these people? Is someone going to open the door and come in?

Pinter in an early B.B.C. interview.¹

Pinter's curiosity about 'what will happen if someone comes in' has provided him with a focal character around which almost all of his dramatic works are built.

Pinter has opened the doors to his many rooms in play after play, ruthlessly exposing his security-obsessed, indoor characters to the world of their own fears. The character(s) inside Pinter's rooms repeatedly function as host (complaisant, benign, gracious, curious, hostile, terrified, terrorizing) to another character who is regarded as a stranger.

The stranger is primarily defined not by inherent qualities of his own, but by his relationship to and interaction

¹. Arlene Sykes, Harold Pinter (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1970) p. 3.
with the central characters of the play. Thus, it is not dramatic personality, but relationship and, ultimately, dramatic functions that define the category, "stranger".

Pinter's work displays an almost obsessive fascination with how we define people - known and unknown - as stranger, alien, outsider, or friend, and, once defined, how we interact with one another. Speculation is endless as to the etiology of this fascination. Certainly the experience of having been a nine-year-old Jewish boy in 1939 must not be discounted. Pinter was evacuated several times - uprooted from his London home by an invisible enemy. More pertinent, however, are not the causes, but the results.

Pinter has focused again and again on the subject of intrusion. In simplified terms, he employs a recurring pattern which is as follows: A character or group of characters inhabit a place which is known to them and in which they feel secure. This place (which I call the inside) may be defined by a room, a house, or the character's own mind. Drama occurs when security is threatened by the arrival of an outsider (whom I call the stranger) or the recognition of an outsider (stranger) within the group. The action of each of the plays is precipitated by such an arrival or recognition. The results, though varied, generally entail a revelation of, or to, the inside characters. Pinter repeatedly employs the stranger as a catalyst of recognition and reversal.
For the purposes of this study, I have divided the definition of the stranger into two major categories: 1. An individual with whom one has no personal acquaintance; a newcomer, a person with whom we are unacquainted. The functional term here is "unknown". The inside characters are in a state of ignorance; they do not know the identity, origins, motivations, intentions or powers of the stranger. The stranger comes to represent the unknown and the fear of the unknown and is therefore a threat to the stability, security - even the identity - of the insider. The stranger's function in the drama is to open the door to that fear, thereby catalysing recognition, reversal, or both. 2. A person who is not a member of a family, group, community, or the like and is therefore regarded as an outsider. Here the functional term is "otherness". This definition is considerably more complex, especially as it frequently involves a conscious choice by an insider to exclude another character and thus render him a stranger. The development of this situation often involves a progressive re-arrangement of the group, whereby someone is expelled, or discovered to no longer fit the goals, needs or ideals of the group. The result, once again, is recognition, reversal or both.

This thesis proposes to explore Pinter's use of a central figure who falls into one or both of the above definitions of stranger. It will trace the development of this character and his influence upon the drama through Pinter's most successful works. 2

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2. The figure of the stranger does not appear in all of Pinter's plays, but he does appear, and surely this is no coincidence, in all of his most successful plays.
The study progresses chronologically, as does Pinter's developing sophistication in the use of this idea. The manner in which Pinter proceeds from play to play, working his way through the concepts of intrusion and estrangement, seems almost consciously systematic. Once struck with the idea, he toys with and tests it to exhaustion. His examination of the stranger goes beyond the realm of character alone. The stranger becomes the embodiment of a number of concepts: intrusion, the unknown, fear of the unknown, and most complex of all, the known but denied. Pinter explores not only the stranger and the estranged, but estrangement as a theme.
I  The Stranger as Messenger

Pinter's first play, The Room, is an extremely intuitive work which was written in only four days. In studying The Room, one has the feeling of perusing a rough draft or a previously unpublished work found in an author's bottom drawer. There cannot have been much time in four days' writing for the assiduously planned mystification of character which typifies Pinter's later works. A number of character types who become recognizable as they recur throughout Pinter's work begin their fictional existences here. The brutal, infantile, impotent, woman-dominated males, such as Stanley and Petey of The Birthday Party, Edward of A Slight Ache, Max and Teddy of The Homecoming and Duff of Landscape, begin with the silent, brooding Bert. The dominating, whore-wife-mother figures, consummately portrayed in Ruth of The Homecoming, also seen in Meg of The Birthday Party, Stella of The Collection, Flora of A Slight Ache and Sarah of The Lover, begin with the nattering whore-mother, Rose. And last, but not least, there is Riley, the rather crude prototype of what becomes the most complex of Pinter's recurring figures - the stranger.

The British, and Londoners in particular, have a great fascination for extraordinary murder cases. Their daily tabloids are consumed with every detail of the murder and especially of the murderer. This fascination has supplied the source for an extremely

popular genre of plays and films. One of the fundamentals of this type of drama is that it is not spies, secret agents, narcotics dealers and the likes who become involved in a web of intrigue and suspense, but ordinary people. The kind of people whose houses we frequent everyday. In this type of theatre ordinary locations, daily routines, patterns of speech, etc. take on mysterious overtones. That which is ordinary frequently becomes threatening. One of the recurring figures in this style is the mysterious lodger - the man who seems to have no past and whose every action arouses suspicion and fear. The Room is clearly indebted to this dramatic style and at first glance appears to be just one more of these suspense mysteries. Pinter carefully entices his audience with what seems to be a simple mystery: who is the mystery-stranger and what does he want? First, Pinter establishes the basement as a frightening, ominous place. Next, he informs us of a mysterious stranger lurking there and that the stranger wishes to see Rose. Pinter adds a slightly new twist, however, and we find that the mystery presented here is considerably more complex.

Pinter does not write the obligatory climax scene in which the mystery visitor is at last exposed and his true identity, along with motives and all remaining pertinent data, revealed. He does not follow up on the clues he has laid. Instead, Pinter intensifies and expands the mystery. Our questions multiply exponentially in the final moments of the play. Pinter poses a whole series of new questions which we are left to ponder on our own.
The play is dependent on Rose's isolation and her obsessive fear of the loss of her isolated security. Her perpetual references to warmth, safety, inside, coziness, identify her as the turtle in the shell. Drama occurs only if this reclusive security she has established for herself is threatened, thus — Riley.

Riley's presence in the house is disquieting to all who come into contact with him. Mr. and Mrs. Sands in their search for the landlord encounter a voice in the dark, damp basement.

MRS. SANDS. ...And this voice said, this voice came — it said — well, it gave me a bit of a fright, I don't know about Tod, but someone asked if he could do anything for us. (...) And this man, this voice really, I think he was behind the partition, said yes there was a room vacant.2

MR. KIDD. ...I've got to tell you, that's all. I've got to tell you. I've had a terrible week-end. You'll have to see him. (...) He's been waiting to see you. He wants to see you. I can't get rid of him.3

The mere mention of a man in the basement sends Rose into shrieking denials of knowing anybody. Certainly Riley is unknown and alien to the Sands and Mr. Kidd. Rose's disclaimers of knowing

2. Harold Pinter, PLAYS:ONE, The Birthday Party, The Room, The Dumb Waiter, A Slight Ache, A Night Out (London: Cox and Wyman Ltd., 1976), p. 117. Throughout this paper I employ the following notation, (...) to indicate editorial ellipsis as opposed to ... which indicates Pinter's own pauses.

3. Pinter, p. 119.
this man, however, arouse increasing suspicion. She begins by claiming not to know the man in the basement and quickly works her way to claiming not to know anybody.

ROSE. Do you expect me to see someone I don't even know? With my husband not here too?
MR. KIDD. But he knows you, Mrs. Hudd, he knows you.
ROSE. How could he, Mr. Kidd, when I don't know him?
MR. KIDD. You must know him.
ROSE. But I don't know anybody. We're quiet here. We've just moved in the district. 4

Kidd responds with the simple and the obvious, "Perhaps you knew him in another district." 5 Whether Rose secretly expects Riley's arrival can only be a matter of speculation, but the intensity of her fear is undeniable. Through the adamance of her denials, Pinter reveals that which Rose most hoped to conceal. The denials imply a past she wants to escape. Somewhere in this background lie the reasons for Rose's trepidation; possibly, somewhere in Rose's background lies Riley.

The fact that Riley appears only briefly and rather late in the play does not alter the fact that the play is constructed around him and the expectation of his coming. Before any arrivals or departures, Rose, in describing the secure warmth of her room, focuses by comparison on the damp, cold, unpleasant basement. What

4. Pinter, pp. 120-121.
5. Pinter, p. 121.
Pinter offers as aimless chatter in Rose's opening monologue is in retrospect laden with an intuitive -- or perhaps remembered -- loathing of the basement.

ROSE. That's right. You eat that. You'll need it. You can feel it in here. Still, the room keeps warm. It's better than the basement, anyway.

She butters the bread.
I don't know how they live down there. It's asking for trouble. Go on. Eat it up. It'll do you good. (...) I've never seen who it is. Who is it? Who lives down there? I'll have to ask. I mean, you might as well know, Bert. But whoever it is, it can't be too cosy.

Pause.
I think it's changed hands since I was last there. (...) I think someone else has gone in now. I wouldn't like to live in that basement. Do you ever see the walls? They were running. This is all right for me. Go on Bert. Have a bit more bread.6

Rose's references to the basement are transformed from meaningless babble to thought provoking obsession with the first mention of a man waiting there.

By focusing attention on Rose's intense isolation and consequent need for arrivals of any kind, Pinter excites our anticipation for the arrival of Riley before the subject has even been broached. It is eminently clear within a very few moments of the play's opening that Bert never responds to Rose's prattle

6. Pinter, p. 101-103.
and it doesn't take us long to wish that someone would. We are forced, like Rose, to seek counter-point from the 'outside'. Pinter teases us with a stage situation that virtually demands that he open that door, yet he cannot resist one last tease with Rose at the window.

ROSE. It's quiet. Be coming on for dark.
   There's no one about.
   She stands looking.
   Wait a minute.
   Pause.
   I wonder who that is.
   Pause.
   No. I thought I saw someone.\footnote{Pinter, p. 104.}

Pinter at last sends relief with a knock on the door and the gently comic entrance of the elderly Mr. Kidd. (Surely Pinter puns in naming this senile old landlord.) The slightly deaf Mr. Kidd becomes increasingly aimless and confused during his visit to Rose and Bert.

The general air of confusion, as illustrated by Mr. Kidd, is a recurring tactic used throughout the play to enhance the air of mystery with which Pinter wishes to surround Riley's eventual arrival. Pinter creates confusion on both the comic and later on the serious level, serving to produce laughter, to startle, and to undermine both character and audience security. Pinter employs confusion throughout the play so as to allow the audience no more
security than he has allowed Rose. Diametrically opposed to the traditional structuring and uses of exposition, Pinter places his audience in the ironic position of becoming increasingly unclear as the play progresses. The more we hear from and about Pinter's characters, the less able we are to define them.

Confusion begins on the comic level with Kidd's slight deafness: he cannot hear when he is being invited into the room and he confuses Rose's question (naive enough in itself to stimulate a number of queries about Rose) of how many floors he has in the house.

ROSE. How many floors you got in this house?
MR. KIDD. Floors. (He laughs.) Ah, we had a good few of them in the old days.8

Kidd's laughing response, in which he has obviously confused the word 'floors' for 'whores', is frequently noted as a fine sample of Pinter's early humor, but the full implication of the joke seems to be continually overlooked. Kidd's confusion functions on more than the comic level alone; his references to having 'a good few women in the old days', 'plenty of women around the corner', and his sister's 'beautiful boudoir', imply not only that the house is in a red light district, but that it may have been a brothel.

Confusion is furthered by the unexpected arrival of the Sands, who immediately launch into a series of barely disguised

8. Pinter, p. 108.
vaudeville routines. These routines are ostensibly comic and insignificant, but upon closer scrutiny one sees that they function as further contributions to the play's general sense of bewilderment. The Sands are confused over the names and identities of Mr. Hudd and Mr. Kidd, over whether it is darker inside or outside, over whether Mrs. Sands did or did not see a star, over where the landlord lives, over whether they are going up or coming down. Finally, these confusions become increasingly less comic and more pertinent as Mr. Sands announces that the man in the basement has told him Room No. 7 is vacant.

MR. SANDS. The man in the basement said there was one. One room. Number seven he said.
Pause.
ROSE. That's this room.
MR. SANDS. We'd better go and get hold of the landlord.
MRS. SANDS. (rising) Well, thank you for the warm-up, Mrs. Hudd, I feel better now.
ROSE. This room is occupied.9

In announcing that the room is vacant, Riley virtually denies the existence of Rose. The Sands, Mr. Kidd, and Rose are united in having their lives affected by the strange man in the basement, who evokes responses ranging from trepidation to panic. Kidd, desperate to be rid of Riley, finally suggests the man might come up on his own bat, possibly even when Mr. Hudd is home. It is as a result of this threat that Rose first abandons her claim not to know the man, and allows him to 'come-up'. More frightening than the so-called stranger is the possibility of him coming when Bert is home.

9. Pinter, p. 118.
Riley's entrance, after the immense build-up given him, is beautifully simple. Gone are the games of knocking and not hearing the invitation to enter, or, of opening one's door to the startling discovery of two strangers on your landing. Here Pinter dramatizes with the undercut. The entrance is simple and silent.

After a few moments the door opens. Enter a blind Negro. He closes the door behind him, walks further, and feels with a stick till he reaches the armchair. He stops.

Rose's continually reiterated assertion not to know Riley crumbles with increasing rapidity from the moment of his entrance. Though no one has mentioned that Riley is black and blind, Rose registers no surprise over these facts. Her reaction upon his entrance is not one of surprise, or even trepidation, but of contemptuous anger. She directs him into the armchair with the assured experience of someone familiar with the blind. Pinter, who has earlier made a gargantuan business out of the simple action of sitting down, allows Riley to do so immediately, simply, familiarly.

The familiarity with which Riley treats Rose causes us to question not only who is Riley, but who is Rose? Riley functions as a mystery stranger for the audience, Kidd, and the Sands. In the case of Rose, he functions as a stranger of a different ilk. Rose wishes to regard Riley as an outsider; she clearly wishes not to recognize him or that which he represents, but denial in this case

10. Pinter, p. 122.
is not possible. Rose is not allowed to escape from whatever bond it is that she and Riley have in common.

The play's pivot is the arrival of this man who proves to be a very intimate and influential stranger. We know that he is powerful, but we don't know how or why. The source of his power remains undefined. His power is expressed in the chaotic responses of Rose and Bert. Rose's self-fear and Bert's self-loathing are revealed as a result of his presence. And this is Riley's true importance: not who he is, but the effects of his coming. The play purposely does not tell us who Riley is. Who people really are is a question which Pinter continually refuses to answer - his implication is that no one can.

Pinter imbues Riley with considerable mystical, even allegorical power. Everything about him implies an otherworldliness. His blackness and the Irish name Riley emphasize that he is an outsider, though not as Rose would like us to believe, unknown. His ability to affect everyone around him while saying very little and doing apparently nothing, imbues him with a larger than life quality. He appears to have come from nowhere, and to have no bounds of time upon him. The first mention of him describes him as 'a voice in the darkness'. He is blind, yet claims to see.

RILEY. I waited to see you.
ROSE. Yes.
RILEY. Now I see you.
ROSE. Yes.11

11. Pinter, p. 125.
He certainly sees through human subterfuge, and easily finds his way to Rose, who has recently moved and insists that nobody knows where she is. He claims to bring a message from her father.\textsuperscript{12}

ROSE. (...) What message? Who have you got a message from?
RILEY. Your father wants you to come home.
Pause.
ROSE. Home?
RILEY. Yes.
ROSE. Home? Go now. Come on. It's late.
It's late.
RILEY. To come home.\textsuperscript{13}

The manner in which Riley uses 'home' and 'father' and the panicked reaction they illicit from Rose implies something beyond the ordinary. Of what father does Riley speak? If Riley is allegorical, more than just a man, then who is he? Is he Fate? Is he Death? The aura of mysticism which Riley brings with him is carried through in the play's final moments in which his blindness is inexplicably transferred to Rose.

Though Rose rejects, insults and rails at Riley, he is soft-spoken, calm and gentle. Though she attempts to imbue him with attributes of force, trickery and all means of unacceptable behavior, he exerts his power without any show of physical force.

\textsuperscript{12} One is reminded that the use of blind characters as messengers, particularly as seers, is a time honoured theatrical tradition originating with Teiresias of \textit{Oedipus Rex}.

\textsuperscript{13} Pinter, \textit{PLAYS:ONE}, p. 124.
What finally breaks Rose's railing, aloofness and resistance, is Riley's calling her 'Sal', an intimacy, a familiarity, which Rose cannot apparently deny.

RILEY. Come home, Sal.
Pause.
ROSE. What did you call me?
RILEY. Come home, Sal.
ROSE. Don't call me that.
RILEY. Come, now.
ROSE. Don't call me that.
RILEY. So now you're here.
ROSE. Not Sal.
RILEY. Now I touch you.
ROSE. Don't touch me.
RILEY. Sal.
ROSE. I can't.
RILEY. I want you to come home.
ROSE. No.
RILEY. With me.
ROSE. I can't.
RILEY. I waited to see you.
ROSE. Yes.
RILEY. Now I see you.
ROSE. Yes.
RILEY. Sal.
ROSE. Not that.
RILEY. So, now.
Pause
So, now.
ROSE. I've been here.
RILEY. Yes.
ROSE. Long.
RILEY. Yes.
ROSE. The day is a hump. I never go out.
RILEY. No.
ROSE. I've been here.
RILEY. Come home now, Sal.
She touches his eyes, the back of his head and his temples with her hands.
Enter Bert. 14

14. Pinter, pp. 124-125.
The interpretation of Riley as a messenger of death is too obvious to be ignored. That Rose has indeed been called home, that she does not really belong in this room, is dramatically realized in her physical acceptance of Riley. With this acceptance, Rose's conflict between her desire for isolated security and her innate curiosity about the world around her comes to a momentary resolution; she attains peace. This peace is fleeting, however, as the brutish Bert, in his kicking of Riley, severs their connection and guarantees Rose's isolation.

BERT. Lice!

He strikes the NEGRO, knocking him down, and then kicks his head against the gas-stove several times. The NEGRO lies still. BERT walks away.

ROSE stands clutching her eyes.

ROSE. Can't see. I can't see. I can't see.  

Rose's isolation is final and permanent.

Whether by plan, intuition, or accident, The Dumb Waiter is ironically situated in a basement. Following directly on the heels of The Room, the space is instantly ominous. The air of mysterious humour which pervades Pinter's work is more immediately, and more economically created in The Dumb Waiter than anywhere else.

Gus ties his laces, rises, yawns and begins to walk slowly to the door, left. He stops, looks down, and shakes his foot. BEN lowers his paper and watches him. GUS kneels and unties his shoe lace and slowly takes off

15. Pinter, p. 126.
the shoe. He looks inside it and brings out
a flattened matchbox. He shakes it and
examines it. Their eyes meet. BEN rattles
his paper and reads. GUS puts the matchbox
in his pocket and bends down to put on his
shoe. He ties his lace, with difficulty.
BEN lowers his paper and watches him. GUS
walks to the door, left, stops, and shakes
the other foot. He kneels, unties his
shoe-lace, and slowly takes off the shoe. He
looks inside it and brings out a flattened
cigarette packet. He shakes it and examines
it. Their eyes meet. BEN rattles his paper
and reads.¹⁶

... and so on.

This opening mime amuses with its, and apparently Gus',

extreme simplicity. Gus' actions are not in themselves particularly
extraordinary; however, Pinter imbues them with an aura of the
extraordinary. Gus' shoe tying and inexplicable discoveries of
flattened matchbox and cigarette packet, under the watchful eye of
Ben, become increasingly engrossing and incomprehensible through
repetition and silence. The peculiarity of Gus' action is enhanced
by the carefully laid, twice repeated direction, 'their eyes meet'.

As with The Room, Pinter employs tactics reminiscent of Hitchcock.

Ordinary places, people and incidents assume mysterious overtones.

Through the intensity of Gus' action and the ominous silence with
which Ben observes him, a more serious mystery than that of the
matchbox and cigarette packet is implied. That there are obvious
questions left unspoken between the friends sets an air of
uneasiness which dominates the action of the play.

¹⁶. Pinter, p. 121.
The mime opening works like a fine-focus lens, instantly zeroing in on the central issue of the play. The issue is Gus' anxiety over the myriad questions about his own life to which he cannot find answers.

GUS. There are a number of things I want to ask him. But I can never get round to it, when I see him.17

Similar to The Room, this opening mime poses a series of questions which we hope the play will answer. Once again however, at the play's close, the audience is faced with more and much larger questions.

It is gradually revealed that Gus and Ben are in a sort of waiting room; only one in a chain of many rooms where they have waited for a message and the arrival of a stranger whom it is their job to kill. Like Rose, their concerns centre on the expectation of a door opening and the arrival of a stranger. Pinter plays with Gus, Ben, and his audience, delighting in building-up expectations which will be proved incorrect. In the end it is not a stranger, but Gus, who is thrust through the door.

In functional terms, there are three strangers in the play. Stranger number one is the victim-stranger who is expected,
and is to be killed. He is unknown, but might be an enemy of Wilson, from whom Gus and Ben take their orders. Stranger number two is the author of the messages which arrive via the dumb waiter. He is unknown, but might be Wilson, or the agent of Wilson. Stranger number three is Gus, who is known, but is forced into the position of stranger; the stranger who might be the enemy of Wilson and must be killed.

The stranger around whom the structure of the play is built is the stranger number two - the note writer at the end of the dumb waiter. He is in an apparent position of knowledge and power, and soon controls the action of the play. As Pinter heightened the importance of Riley's arrival with the element of suspense, he heightens the arrival of this stranger with the element of surprise. Our attention is directed toward the expectation of an arrival through the door. Packets of matches mysteriously appear under it, and Gus and Ben engage in a lengthy discussion of what exactly must be done when it is finally opened. In the midst of Gus' reflections on who cleans up, and how much mess the last one made, the dumb waiter shockingly intrudes.

There is a loud clatter and racket in the bulge of wall between the beds, of something descending. They grab their revolvers, jump up and face the wall. (...) Disclosed is a serving hatch, a 'dumb waiter'. A wide box is held by pulleys. GUS peers into the box. He brings out a piece of paper.
BEN. What is it?
GUS. You have a look.
BEN. Read it.
GUS. (reading). Two braised steak and chips.
Two sago puddings. Two teas without sugar.18

The stranger sends messages which at first request, later demand, a variety of gastronomical curiosities. As these demands become more and more outlandish, Gus and Ben are thrown into an increasing frenzy over their inability to comply with them. All previous concern — football matches, violence in the streets, the lack of gas, and Wilson — are abandoned, forgotten in the attempt to fulfill demands which emanate from a completely unknown source. It is only Gus who wants to know. "WELL, WHO'S GOT IT (the upstairs) NOW?" 19

Ben is satisfied simply to follow instructions, anyone's instructions, with the aid of whatever superficial explanations he might require. Even when talking directly to the voice at the end of the tube, it does not occur to Ben to inquire to whom he is speaking. The dumb waiter, the voice, the messages, all are

18. Pinter, p. 147.

19. Pinter, p. 148. One is reminded of The Room. "ROSE. I don't know who lives down there (the basement) now." (Pinter, p. 103.) Pinter constantly reinforces the simple, but disturbing reality that, as a society, we no longer tend to be acquainted with our neighbors and are thus virtually surrounded by strangers.
accepted by Ben as a complete and unquestionable authority. Once again, Pinter hints at, but does not clarify the origin of the orders. He stimulates our imagination with hints and clues which he does not resolve. The fact that no one ever knows for sure who gives these orders is of immeasurable importance. Surely a part of the authority of this unseen figure is the very idea of the authority of the unknown. The limits of the authority and power of this messenger are unknown; Ben therefore accepts them as unlimited.

Ben and Gus, expecting a stranger whom they will murder, are plagued by an unexpected stranger incarnated in the dumb waiter. A stranger who, like Riley, brings, or in this case sends, messages. A stranger who, like Riley, may in fact be more familiar than they, or the audience, are ever allowed to ascertain. A stranger who, like Riley, without violence or force, catalyzes violence and a major change in the relationship between Gus and Ben. Pinter leaves the situation teetering on the precipice, not revealing the exact form in which this change will manifest itself.

The relationship between the stranger and the changes which occur is considerably more direct in The Dumb Waiter than in The Room. Bert takes it upon himself to violently attack Riley and apparently cause Rose's blindness; Ben, however, takes nothing upon himself, but simply follows the orders of the stranger.
There is a difficult technical moment at the end of *The Dumb Waiter* which seriously strains suspension of disbelief. One may find oneself trying to calculate how Gus can possibly have arrived at the passage-way entrance from the loo. Is there a trap door or a disappearing wall in the loo through which Gus is kidnapped, stripped of gun, jacket and gun-belt, hustled round some secret basement passage and thrust through the open door upon his partner, gun loaded and ready? Gus might just as easily have returned from the loo, without his gun, to an identically waiting Ben. That Pinter has chosen to have Gus enter through the doorway which has been established as the victim's entrance demands certain considerations.

Pinter transforms the situation from one in which a hit man is instructed to shoot a stranger to one in which he finds himself facing a partner and friend. One recalls Ben's earlier confusion whilst giving instructions.

BEN. When the bloke comes in -
GUS. When the bloke comes in -
BEN. Shut the door behind him.
GUS. Shut the door behind him.
BEN. Without divulging your presence.
GUS. Without divulging my presence.
BEN. He'll see me and come towards me.
GUS. He'll see you and come towards you.
BEN. He won't see you.
GUS. (absently). Eh?
BEN. He won't see you.
GUS. He won't see me.
BEN. But he'll see me.
GUS. He'll see you.
BEN. He won't know you're there.
GUS. He won't know you're there.
BEN. He won't know you're there.
GUS. He won't know I'm there.
BEN. I take out my gun.
GUS. You take out your gun.
BEN. He stops in his tracks.
GUS. He stops in his tracks.
BEN. If he turns round -
GUS. If he turns round -
BEN. You're there.
GUS. I'm here.

BEN frowns and presses his forehead.
You've missed something out.
BEN. I know. What?
GUS. I haven't taken my gun out, according to you.20

It is as if Ben unconsciously (or consciously!) foresees the
impending reality of today's hit. Pinter creates the possibility of
both alternatives; Ben does/does not have foreknowledge of Gus'
becoming the victim. We are reminded of Ben's silent observation of
Gus and of Gus' questions about Ben's having stopped the car
enroute. Yet, Ben calls to Gus upon receiving new instructions from
the dumb waiter tube, and his hesitating stare when Gus stumbles
through the door, do not imply any foreknowledge. Through the use
of this mysterious, powerful stranger at the end of the dumb waiter,
Pinter designs a play which successfully confuses both the
characters on stage and his audience. What he undermines is
security: the security of our belief that we know who we are, why we
exist, and who those with whom we live (interact) really are.

The Dumb Waiter, despite all its existential frustration
and confusion, "WE'VE GOT NOTHING LEFT! NOTHING"21 is an

20. Pinter, p. 159.
immensely comic play until its final, effective shock ending. Pinter is above all else a great technician of the stage, orchestrating theatrical moments for their own sake. His priority as a playwright is the creation of these moments, not philosophy. Occasionally, the two magically mix and the result is a theatrically stated insight of ourselves. Pinter achieves this sort of a moment with the conclusion of The Dumb Waiter, in which he jars us anew with the unhappy reality that we are not in control of our own lives.

The Dumb Waiter is highly reminiscent, in mood, tone, and central action, of Beckett's Waiting for Godot. Whether The Dumb Waiter is consciously derivative or whether the parallels are accidental, there can be no question that both are concerned with the apparently unavoidable human condition of not understanding the purpose of our existence. Regardless of the activities in which we engage, there is an unescapable sense of suspension in which we await revelation.

In both plays, two men of long standing friendship engage in the action of waiting. Not only do they wait, but they await a

21. Pinter, p. 162.
stranger. A stranger whom they endow with being in command. A stranger whom they imagine has the answers to their questions.

The two mysterious strangers of these plays are both god-like in that they hold complete power over the characters, and yet are never seen. In both plays, every action the characters make is motivated by what they believe the stranger wants of them. It is the stranger, not themselves, who controls their lives.

In The Dumb Waiter, the stranger is considerably more theatrical and less philosophical. His power is direct, present, and beyond question. We do not for a moment doubt the existence of this stranger as we do that of Godot. There is no escaping from the demanding, omnipotent stranger of this play. Fate descends on Gus and Ben just as surely as the dumb waiter descends between their beds.

A possible pattern begins to emerge. Are the strangers of The Room and The Dumb Waiter messengers of Fate?

No less fatalistic and even more security shattering is Pinter's next play, The Birthday Party. Having worked his way through the experiments of The Room, built around the tension of the expectation of arrival, and The Dumb Waiter, built around a stranger who is never seen, Pinter proceeds to expand the experiment.
In *The Dumb Waiter*, Pinter first begins to diversify his use of the stranger figure: both the voice at the end of the dumb waiter and Gus perform as strangers. In *The Birthday Party*, Pinter extends this trend as he splits the stranger figure into two characters. For the first time, the strangers have distinctive, observable personality traits. Whereas, we are never allowed to actually see the stranger in *The Dumb Waiter*, and to see Riley of *The Room* for only a brief time, we are allowed to observe the behavior of Goldberg and McCann in a variety of situations. They interact with Stanley, for whom they bring the message; with Stanley's friends (surrogate family) Meg, Petey and Lulu; and perhaps most revealing of all, with each other.

Goldberg and McCann maintain their mysteriousness, not because the author refuses to give any information about them, but because the information given is of no assistance. Everything we learn about Goldberg and McCann serves to confuse. They are bizarre anomalies both as individuals and in their association with each other. On the one hand, they appear to represent the establishment (McCann as Irish priest, Goldberg as family-conscious Jew) but it is an underdog establishment (Irish and Jew). While they exalt the values of property, family, respect, and tradition, they perform as thugs: McCann has been defrocked, Goldberg molests and seduces Lulu. Goldberg has at least three choices for a first name, Simey (which McCann is not allowed to call him), Nat, and Benny. The hierarchy of the relationship between them tells us that Goldberg is
in charge: Goldberg drives the car, finds the location, gives the instructions and, when assigned to the job, requests McCann. None of this information, however, truly assists in defining them. They remain the agents of Monty, about whom we know absolutely nothing, and their motives remain as mysterious as those of Riley and Wilson. The skeletal structure of the first two plays remains: the central characters are threatened by a mysterious intruder.

In The Birthday Party, Pinter extends the prototypes of Rose and Bert in Meg and Petey. Stanley functions as a younger, equally infantile, brutal and impotent version of Bert/Petey. Meg, it seems, fulfills all his needs of women - mother and whore. The seaside house, Meg, and Petey seem to fulfill Stanley's meagre needs. Here he can re-write his past history without the interference of anyone else's memory. Stanley relishes the seclusion and anonymity of his situation and the three of them function happily as a surrogate family. In Stanley's eyes, the arrival of any outsider to this cozy group (even Lulu) is suspiciously regarded.

Stanley, as sequestered as Rose, seems to share the foreboding of this earlier character. Like Rose, Stanley lives in seclusion, not so much from the desire of tranquility as from an unstated fear of 'the outside', particularly a fear of the arrival of someone from a past he prefers to exclude. Stanley's agitation
over Meg's announcement that two gentlemen are coming signals his fear.

STANLEY. I don't believe it.
MEG. It's true.
STANLEY. (moving to her). You're saying it on purpose.
MEG. Petey told me this morning.
STANLEY. (grinding his cigarette). When was this?
MEG. Last night.
STANLEY. Who are they?
MEG. I don't know.
STANLEY. Didn't he tell you their names?
MEG. No.
STANLEY. (pacing the room). Here? They wanted to come here?'
MEG. Yes, they did. (She takes the curlers out of her hair.)
STANLEY. Why?
MEG. This house is on the list.
STANLEY. But who are they?
MEG. You'll see when they come.
STANLEY. (decisively). They won't come.
MEG. Why not?
STANLEY. (quickly). I tell you they won't come. Why didn't they come last night, if they were coming?
MEG. Perhaps they couldn't find the place in the dark. It's not an easy place to find in the dark.
STANLEY. They won't come. Someone's taking the Michael. Forget all about it. It's a false alarm. A false alarm. (He sits at the table).
Where's my tea?

Here, and elsewhere, Stanley gives conflicting information as to whether he does or does not know the men who are coming. Pinter

22. Pinter, pp. 30-31.
teases his audience with this out-of-proportion reaction which functions to reveal that Stanley has a reason to fear intrusion, but not to reveal what those reasons are. A few pages later, when Meg mentions the name 'Goldberg', Pinter implies, but does not confirm, a past association between Stanley and the unknown gentleman. Upon hearing the name Goldberg, Stanley attacks the toy drum, beating it 'savagely as if possessed'. With this action, Pinter avoids stating that Stanley actually knows Goldberg or even the name Goldberg. Pinter is far too elusive to trap himself or his characters into such definitive corners. The savage possession which overtakes Stanley and his drumming may well be intuitive, or entirely mystically induced. What is of vital importance here is not the cause of Stanley's possession (since it can be only speculatively ascertained), but its extremely careful placement directly on the heels of Meg revealing Goldberg's name. Pinter arranges these events in such a way as to imply a connection which he chooses not to verify. Once again, he builds mysteriousness into the situation through ominous ambiguity.

Pinter employs a tactic already noted in The Dumb Waiter in which Stanley unwittingly outlines his own fate. Stanley teases Meg in an ostensibly isolated comic bit about two men in a van with a wheelbarrow.

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

As Stanley teases Meg, Pinter teases Stanley and his audience. The grim irony is that it is his own, not Meg's fate, which Stanley adumbrates.

The first knock on the door is not the knock of the men in the van, but the knock of a much more innocent guest — Lulu. Stanley's obsession with the destruction of his security from outside forces is introduced with her arrival. Even Lulu is a challenge to the social structure of Stanley's surrogate family and his seclusion. Suspicious of all outsiders, Stanley 'sidles' to the door and listens in on Meg and Lulu's whispered conversation.

23. Pinter, p. 34.
In functional terms, Lulu is a character who stands between stranger and friend. She is from the outside, but she is a recognized friend of the surrogate mother, Meg. Through Lulu, Pinter reveals that Stanley reacts to all outsiders in a similar way, with hostility, suspicion and uncooperativeness.

Lulu's threat is extremely subtle and femininely expressed; her function, however, is essentially the same as that of Goldberg and McCann.

LULU. (rising.) Come out and get a bit of air. You depress me looking like that. 24

A few pages later, Goldberg makes Lulu's offer a promise.

GOLDBERG. We'll bring him out of himself. 25

The basic difference in approach to 'bring Stanley out of himself' is that Lulu takes the job upon herself (presumably out of a personal motivation) while Goldberg and McCann have been sent (presumably by Monty) to do the 'job'.

24. Pinter, p. 36.
25. Pinter, p. 43.
Lulu's character functions to reveal Stanley's rejection of offers to come out of himself. She represents Stanley's last chance to reform by choice. She attempts to entreat him to clean himself up, wash his face, shave, get out. Her offers of a picnic, a walk with her in the fresh air, and cheese sandwiches are all gracelessly declined.

It is immediately following this refusal to help himself that Goldberg and McCann arrive. The strangers acquire a curious, almost mystical power as a result of their unusual arrival. This arrival, its timing, method, and purpose intimate the supernatural. They have neither a name nor an address, yet Goldberg assures McCann that this is the right place. Later, Goldberg has to query Meg regarding the identity of her tenant.

GOLDBERG. Of course, And your guest? is he a man?
MEG. A man?
GOLDBERG. Or a woman?
MEG. No. A man.
GOLDBERG. Been here long?
MEG. He's been here about a year now.
GOLDBERG. Oh yes, a resident. What's his name?
MEG. Stanley Webber.
GOLDBERG. Oh yes? 26

Once again, it is impossible for us to determine any solid factual information regarding a previous association between Stanley and the

26. Pinter, p. 41.
new arrivals. Only innuendo suggests that Goldberg and McCann ever knew Stanley Webber by this, or any other name. In the end, we know little more of Goldberg and McCann than we do of Riley, or the voice at the end of the dumb waiter. Goldberg and McCann manage to maintain their stranger status throughout.

The intrusion of Goldberg/McCann upon Stanley has a considerably sharper edge to it than the intrusion of the stranger in the two previous plays. The source of authority for the power of Riley and the dumb waiter is unknown. Goldberg and McCann, however, have the obvious authority of being thugs. They are not totally incapable of sophistication in tactics, however, as they flatter their way past the simple-minded Meg and virtually take over the running of her house, insisting that there be a party for Stanley tonight.

Stanley does attempt, however feebly, to protect himself and the surrogate family from these intruders. Summoning his bravado, Stanley announces to McCann that this is the wrong house, that this isn't even a boarding house. A few pages later, he tells Goldberg that the house is full and they will have to move on. In both instances, Goldberg and McCann respond with references to Stanley's birthday - a birthday which Stanley denies. Clearly, the birthday is quite special and unique. Goldberg's congratulations are unnervingly chilling.
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, they say, what is it? Your skin's crabby, you need a shave, your eyes are full of muck, your mouth is like a boghouse, the palms of your hands are full of sweat, your nose is clogged up, your feet stink, what are you but a corpse waiting to be washed? Whenever I hear that point of view I feel cheerful. Because I know what it is to wake up with the sun shining, to the sound of the lawnmower, all the little birds, the smell of the grass, church bells, tomato juice—

STANLEY. Get out. 27

Stanley, who will be their victim, is the only one who is aware of their threat. Goldberg and McCann proceed to interrogate Stanley, playing a switchback pattern (common to authority figures) where one plays the heavy while the other plays a friend. The pattern functions to direct its victim into the hands of the perceived friend, who thus attains the original purpose. They play on whatever precarious stability Stanley has, tossing him back and forth like a beachball, intimidating with threats, lectures on morality and accusations of Stanley's immorality.

GOLDBERG. Where was your wife?
STANLEY. In -
GOLDBERG. Answer.
STANLEY. (turning, crouched). What wife?
GOLDBERG. What have you done with your wife?
MCCANN. He's killed his wife.

27. Pinter, p. 55.
GOLDBERG. Why did you kill your wife?
STANLEY. (sitting, his back to the audience). What wife?

GOLDBERG. Why did you never get married?
MCCANN. She was waiting at the porch.
GOLDBERG. You skeddadled from the wedding.
MCCANN. You left her in the lurch. 28

They interrogate him with impossible questions.

GOLDBERG. Is the number 846 possible or necessary?
STANLEY. Neither.
GOLDBERG. Wrong! Is the number 846 possible or necessary?
STANLEY. Both
GOLDBERG. Wrong! It's necessary but not possible.
STANLEY. Both.
GOLDBERG. Wrong! 29

... and so on.

Goldberg and McCann's tactics grind Stanley down, stripping him of his identity, rendering him helplessly disoriented and incapable of defence. The action which they effect upon Stanley is visually amplified in McCann's apparently aimless shredding of newspapers. Goldberg and McCann's motives remain a mystery; their brutal methods, however, and their determination to bring Stanley out of himself are perfectly clear.

28. Pinter, pp. 59-60.
29. Pinter, p. 30.
Not only is the function of the stranger diversified in this play, but also the reaction to the stranger within the group. The physical location of the play has enlarged, going from a single room to a house. Similarly, the group whom the stranger visits is enlarged and Pinter explores variation of response to the intruders.

Meg remains oblivious, imagining their teasing to be flattery, thinking it all a game and she was the 'belle of the ball'. Lulu too is taken in, recognizing their insidious evil only after it is too late. Petey, the only other male of the play, absents himself from interaction with the new tenants. Only as they are escorting Stanley to Monty's does he briefly, feebly, question their interference. He is quickly silenced, however, by their invitation to come along. Petey recognizes that the authority of these strangers, and the stranger, Monty, whom they represent, is not to be questioned. Both Goldberg and McCann are capable of and willing to play the role of chum -- so long as their authority remains unquestioned. Meg who never questions is never threatened. Lulu and Petey, upon questioning it, are immediately put into their place. The actions and reactions of Goldberg/McCann indicate a pattern which does not tolerate the questioning of authority. Their actions indicate that it was this, perhaps, that was Stanley's crime.
All three plays suggest a powerful off-stage presence who apparently composes the messages delivered by Riley, the dumb waiter, and Goldberg and McCann. The presence of such omniscient presences gives each of these plays metaphorical and allegorical resonances. In each, it seems inevitable that these messengers will be delivered, and that change will occur.

GOLDBERG. If we hadn't come today we'd have come tomorrow.30

Fate descends on Rose, Gus and Stanley, as a result of the arrivals of Riley, the dumb waiter, and Goldberg/McCann. These arrivals are ostensibly unexpected. The characters maintain the pretense of innocent surprise over these arrivals, while the audience senses their inevitability. Pinter nags his characters and his audience with the arrival of strangers, unexpected and yet inevitable, who will completely disarrange the precarious order of our lives.

Pinter intensifies the mystical quality of these experiences by refusing to draw direct lines between his strangers and the changes evoked. By innuendo, Pinter forces us to make the connections. Is it Riley, or Bert, or the combination of Bert, Riley and Rose, who causes Roses's blindness? In The Dumb Waiter -

30. Pinter, p. 42.
we are left with the stunning tableau of Ben with his gun levelled at the literally stripped Gus. Is the stranger at the end of the dumb waiter verifiably responsible for this situation? In *The Birthday Party*, Stanley is transformed from being a washout to a babbling cripple, dependent on Goldberg and McCann for everything. We intuitively grasp that Goldberg and McCann, and ultimately Monty, are somehow responsible for this overwhelming debilitation; yet Pinter carefully withholds the particulars of just how it came about. The scene in which Stanley breaks is literally played in the dark.

In each of these three plays, Pinter makes it impossible to definitively ascribe a direct casual link between the stranger and the changes effected, but that the strangers' function in the drama as the precipitating events of these changes is by now a distinct recurring pattern.

The next play, *A Slight Ache*, echoes most of the devices, subjects and themes of the first three. Again, there is a stranger, more overtly identifiable as unknown than any of the previous strangers. The matchseller is, almost despite better judgement, invited into the home of Edward and Flora.

A number of changes appear with *A Slight Ache*. Perhaps the most important of them is Pinter's diminished use of shock and graphic violence. His taste for violence begins to function more
and more on psychological levels. A second important difference is the change in social status of the characters. The drama and trauma of characters who cannot control their own lives, moves from its lower class setting into the home of a highly educated, economically successful couple. It is too easy to imagine that these strangers and the people upon whom they intrude come only from the gutter class. Pinter is not going to let his audience off the hook so easily; he begins to directly challenge the middle class who, by now, form that audience. 

A Slight Ache was first produced as a radio drama and Pinter's creation of the stranger figure is affected by this, as he uses the medium to his advantage to contribute to the amorphous nature of the stranger. As a character, the matchseller manages to be less definable even than the voice at the end of the dumb waiter, for that stranger at least gives orders. Creating a stranger who never speaks, Pinter teases his radio audience with the possibility that the matchseller is a figment of Edward and Flora's joint imagination. In stage production where the matchseller appears as a living figure, it is imperative that this uncertainty as to his reality be maintained. As an audience, we are entirely dependent on

31. This parallels Pinter's own change of class from Hackney-born Jewish student actor to eminent playwright with a home in Hampstead.
Edward and Flora's visions of the matchseller. In this way, the stranger once again functions to reveal the central characters.

Pinter splits the stranger function in an extremely humorous way. There are in fact two strangers, two intruders, in A Slight Ache. The first is successfully eliminated while the second successfully eliminates. Surely the wasp intruding upon Flora and Edward's breakfast table is conscious self-parody.

The scene with the wasp functions, not only as a successful comic bit on its own, but also as an ironic amplification of Edward's reactions to intruders. The wasp serves virtually the same function as does the later stranger, the matchseller: both pierce Edward's external shell of sophistication and gentility exposing his trivial meanness.

EDWARD. Cover the marmalade.
FLORA. What?
EDWARD. Cover the pot. There's a wasp. (He puts the paper down on the table.) Don't move. Keep still. What are you doing?
FLORA. Covering the pot.
EDWARD. Don't move. Leave it. Keep still.
Pause.
Give me the 'Telegraph'.
FLORA. Don't hit it. It'll bite.
EDWARD. Bite? What do you mean bite? Keep still.
(Pause)
It's landing.
FLORA. It's going in the pot.
EDWARD. Give me the lid.
FLORA. It's in.
EDWARD. Give me the lid.
FLORA. I'll do it.
EDWARD. Give it to me! Now...
   Slowly....
FLORA. What are you doing?
EDWARD. Be quiet. Slowly......
carefully...on...the...pot!
   Ha-ha-ha. Very good. 32

   ...

EDWARD. Ah, yes. Tilt the pot.
   Tilt. Aah...down here...right
down...blinding him...that's
   ...it.
FLORA. Is it?
EDWARD. Lift the lid. All right,
       I will. There he is! Dead
       What a monster. (He squashes
       it on a plate.)
FLORA. What an awful experience.
EDWARD. What a beautiful day it is.
       Beautiful.33

The situation is macabre, at once humorous and grotesque.
The influence of Hitchcock continues to express itself as Pinter's
sense of irony matures and he seeks out droll methods of revealing
the brutish mentality of Bert in a higher class character.

The wasp, however comic, is actually more of an intruder
than the matchseller. Though his danger potential may be minimal,

32. Pinter, p. 171.
33. Pinter, p. 174.
he is certainly disruptive, and it is not out of place for Edward and Flora to be frightened by this insect buzzing round their marmalade. The matchseller, on the other hand, does nothing to intrude. He is blind, mute, possibly deaf and void of any assertive action - he doesn't even try to sell his matches. It is Edward who insists on inviting him in, because to Edward the mere presence of this unknown entity is an intrusion. Edward becomes infuriated and obsessed, incapable of concentrating on anything but who this man is.

EDWARD. I want to speak to that man. I want to have a word with him. Pause. It's quite absurd, of course. I really can't tolerate something so ... absurd, right on my doorstep. I shall not tolerate it. He's sold nothing all morning. No one passed. Yes. A monk passed. A non-smoker.

I haven't wasted my time. I've hit, in fact, upon the truth. He's not a matchseller at all. The bastard isn't a matchseller at all. Curious I never realized that before. He's an imposter. I watched him very closely.

What a farce. No, there is something very false about that man. I intend to get to the bottom of it. I'll soon get rid of him. He can go and ply his trade somewhere else. Instead of standing like a bullock...a bullock, outside my back gate...

34. pp. 178-179.
The matchseller has a quality of other-worldliness reminiscent of Riley. Both are blind and function as seers. He seems to have arrived from nowhere. They never see him arrive or depart, they never see him sell any matches, their back road leads to nothing but a monastery, and even the priests use a short-cut to the village. He is ageless, nameless, faceless and thus has the capacity to be all things to all people. Due to his totally amorphous nature, the matchseller functions as a blank character upon whom Edward and Flora can project whatever images, memories, or powers they choose. He is not who he is, but a reflection of themselves. To the brutal, egotistic and insecure Edward, the matchseller represents male challenge and evokes anger, frustration and fear. Edward pours out his destructive energies toward the matchseller and in return is destroyed. Flora, as sensual mother, pours out affection and romantic fantasies and imagines that she receives love in return. The matchseller exerts no personal power; it is Edward who endows him with power. When Edward cannot assign an identity to the matchseller, he is reduced to endowing him with his own characteristics. Thus, the matchseller usurps Edward as Edward would usurp, taking over his home and most prized possession—his wife.

The matchseller does not cause but intensifies Edward's uncertainty and insecurity and his apparent inability to organize and to cope. Edward's eyeache exists before he instructs Flora to invite the matchseller in. (It begins amidst his attempts to kill the wasp.) As Edward probes but can find nothing, as he reveals
himself before the matchseller, that ache increases, eventually taking over and debilitating him. Edward grovels helplessly:

EDWARD. ...(with great, final effort-- 
a whisper) Who are you?35

The more energy Edward invests in discovering who the matchseller is (what his anxieties are), the more anxious and incapacitated he becomes.

A theme of man's - particularly modern man's - inability to discover the direct cause of his anxieties begins to emerge.

The action of each of these first four plays, at their most basic level, forms a distinct recurring pattern. In each, Pinter creates an opening situation in which the characters calmly proceed with the business of well-established daily routines. In each case we sense a touch of uneasiness in the apparent placidity of these routines. In each play there is at least one character who exhibits some 'slight ache' (Rose's fear of isolation, Gus' confusion and desire to understand, Stanley's desire to escape into anonymity and oblivion). In each case, the arrival of a stranger precipitates the ache becoming profound.

I employ the word precipitates to re-emphasize that the strangers do not perform actions which directly cause the demise of the protagonists. Pinter is more complicated than that. The fact

35. Pinter, p. 199.
that Pinter so fastidiously avoids direct causal relation must not be overlooked.

Like the other strangers, the matchseller delivers a message. More accurately, his presence catalyses the delivery of a message which comes from within. That is, in A Slight Ache the message does not originate from an external force but with Edward and Flora themselves. It serves to reveal unknown or denied parts of themselves.

This stranger, who does not bring a message but reflects one, presents some frightening possibilities. The presence of the matchseller, like that of Riley, the dumb waiter, and Goldberg/McCann, has an air of inevitability. The fact that he does not actively do anything, emphasizes that Edward's usurpation and Flora's performing the role of sensual mother are inevitable. If his coming is inevitable and his message is a reflective one, then the stranger is a figure of Fate. In retrospect, it is not difficult to find reasons for Rose, Gus and Stanley to have been delivered the messages they receive. Perhaps the fates of Rose, Gus and Stanley were not completely out of their control as earlier suggested, but unknowingly in their control. Perhaps they are, in some way, responsible for the character of the guests who arrive in their lives. Is it a true change of situation that these strangers catalyse, or are they merely the instruments which play out the final phase of an already determined path? The implication is that Pinter's protagonists are not necessarily the victims of these visitors alone, but of themselves.
II  The Stranger as Failed Usurper

Justly, *The Caretaker* is recognized as a landmark in Pinter's work. The play was written in 1959, a peak year for Pinter's writings both in proliferation and quality. With *The Caretaker*, Pinter displays his talent for theatricality with a new subtlety and density. The play entails a considerable maturation in character type and development, in action tactics, and in theme and ideas. The exploration of threat to one's security becomes more theatrically sophisticated and more exciting as Pinter turns toward vacuum cleaners and tote bags as weapons. Actions and ideas are worked out more slowly, quietly, and much more thoroughly than in the earlier plays. The play, as rich in image and metaphor as the stage is cluttered with junk, is unquestionably the most dense of the early works. The characters take on a new complexity. In terms of supplying his characters with past histories, previously Pinter has skillfully employed absence of detail and occasional dis-associated nuances to provide impressionistic backgrounds. With this play, Pinter begins to flesh out the pasts of his characters, allowing them to reveal specific and lengthy details of past events. With these past histories comes a sudden increase in our quantity of clues as to the motivations of both inside and outside characters.

Amidst all these changes in Pinter's overall style, there remains the connecting thread of the stranger. As the stranger becomes less allegorical and more realistic, so do the plays. Even
if Riley was an intuitive invention by a young playwright, by the
time of composing The Caretaker Pinter is fully in control of the
stranger as a device. Pinter begins to play with the structure of
stranger-insider encounters, enticing, teasing our intuitive and
intellectual sensibilities.

In The Caretaker, whose key phrase might well be "What's
the game?",¹ Pinter presents the opening tableau of a man wearing
a leather jacket sitting silently in a junk filled room.

Silence
He slowly looks about the room looking
at each object in turn. He looks up at
the ceiling, and stares at the bucket.
Ceasing, he sits quite still, expression­
less, looking out front.
Silence for thirty seconds.
A door bangs. Muffled voices are heard.
Mick turns his head. He stands, moves
silently to the door, goes out, and closes
the door quietly.
Silence.²

Like Gus' mime, this short, tight dramatic moment
instantly arouses our curiosity. Unlike Gus' mime, it is entirely
devoid of humour or entertainment in itself. This mime has value
only in connection to the play it introduces, but in that context,
its value is considerable. Mick is planted in the room specifically
to arouse our suspicions and speculations.

¹. Harold Pinter, PLAYS: TWO, The Caretaker, The Collection,
The Lover, Night School, The Dwarfs (London: Cox & Wyman Ltd.,
². Pinter, p. 16.
Whether one is familiar with or a newcomer to Pinter's work, Mick has all the earmarks of an ominous stranger. His behaviour suggests that he is not familiar with, and does not belong in, this room. Upon hearing footsteps, he quickly slips away. All the audience is allowed to know about this character is that he does not wish to be seen. Pinter contrives to confuse for an excellent reason. Curiosity about Mick and the secret of his earlier presence in the room holds the audience through a dangerously slow-moving, expository first act. We are held with the memory of this mysterious character and the unspoken promise of his re-appearance.

Meanwhile, Pinter seizes the opportunity to surreptitiously introduce his real stranger - Davies. Davies is a stranger both in the sense of being a newcomer, previously unknown, unaccustomed to the brother's habits, and in the sense that he is not a member of their group. Aston invites him home and he is offered a chance to become a member of the group, but he mistakenly aligns himself with the wrong brother and is subsequently expelled.

The strangers of the first four plays have always, through one means or another, been endowed with immense power. They have all been ominous, seemingly omniscient and imbued with mystic and symbolic qualities. We do not know what (if any) secrets Riley knows about Rose/Sal, nor how she goes blind; why Wilson (or whoever) has decided to turn Ben against Gus, nor how he manages to get Gus from the loo to the victim's entrance; how Goldberg and McCann have located the seaside house where Stanley
lives, nor how he becomes the babbling moron of the third act; why
the matchseller has chosen Edward and Flora's back gate, nor how he
liquefies Edward. With *The Caretaker*, this sort of symbolic
mysticism ends. What happens between Mick, Aston and Davies occurs
on psychologically real levels. Davies is not the agent of some
larger undefined force; he has no message to deliver. Davies is a
stranger who needs the hospitality of Aston and Mick. It is now the
stranger who trembles in the fear of the outside, of expulsion. For
the first time, it is the stranger whom we find grovelling at the
play's close.

In order to provide the increased realism in action and
outcome of *The Caretaker*, Pinter develops more complex characters
than ever before. Mick, complete with leather jacket and his own
van (an apparent object of power in Pinter's writings), exhibits a
menacing and brutal nature which reminds us of several characters
from the early works. Pinter plays a trick on us with Mick for (a)
he is not the stranger we at first assume him to be, and (b)
ultimately, it is not brutality, but brotherly concern which rules
Mick.

If Aston has any ancestor in the Pinter canon, it could
only by Stanley; Aston as a possible version of the Stanley who
emerged from 'treatments' at Monty's. Basically, however, Aston is
a new character for Pinter. Simple though he may seem, the more
closely we observe him the more complex he becomes. It is in fact
Aston who is Davies' possible salvation; Aston who extends true
friendship to Davies. Davies' mistake is that of aligning himself with Mick, the surrogate friend, and only apparently the stronger brother. It must be noted that it is not Mick, but Aston who expels Davies. Mick takes action only following Aston's decision that Davies 'stinks' and had best 'find somewhere else'.

Davies too, is essentially a new character. He is complex and full of paradox, at once pathetic and disgusting. Unlike the previous strangers, he reveals himself completely. Unlike the previous strangers he is powerless. His attempts to threaten are simultaneously miserable and absurd.

The stranger as a character and as a device undergoes considerable expansion in *The Caretaker*. The outcome of the first four plays find a common denominator in the destruction of the inside characters. In *The Caretaker*, it is the newcomer who is destroyed. The outcome for the inside characters is one of unification.

As the character of the stranger and the results of his presence expand and develop, so do the theatrical tactics which surround him. The arrival of the stranger has persistently moved forward from *The Room* to *The Caretaker*. Davies arrives in the first moments of the play. All previous strangers have been invited into a clearly established relationship/situation. The relationship between Aston and Mick, however, is defined throughout the work. Like the earlier strangers, Davies has been invited, but unlike
them, once inside the room he does not, despite numerous attempts, take command of the space. Where Riley, the dumb waiter, Goldberg and McCann, and the matchseller have exhibited power, Davies exhibits weakness. With each of the strangers, there has been considerable difficulty in assigning distinct identity; while this has served to heighten the ominous mysteriousness and power quotient of the earlier strangers, with Davies it functions to weaken.

ASTON. Where were you born?
DAVIES. I was...uh...oh, it's a bit hard like, to set your mind back...see what I mean...going back...a good way...lose a bit of track, like...you know....

DAVIES. I got plenty of references. All I got to do is go down to Sidcup tommorow. I got all the references I want down there.
MICK. Where's that?
DAVIES. Sidcup. He ain't only got my references down there, he got all my papers down there. I know the place like the back of my hand. I'm going down there anyway, see what I mean, I got to get down there, or I'm done.
MICK. So we can always get hold of these references if we want them.
DAVIES. I'll be down there any day, I tell you. I was going down today, but I'm waiting for the weather to break.
MICK. Ah.

This is the first time Pinter has introduced a stranger who requires pieces of paper to prove who he is. As the stranger, Davies' needs, motives, and methods are extremely unlike those of

3. Pinter, p. 34.
4. Pinter, p. 60.
the strangers of the preceding plays, yet his purpose in the overall structure of the play's action remains the same. His presence causes the characters to reveal themselves, not as they would to each other, but as to a stranger. His arrival and subsequent expulsion functions to strengthen the bond between brothers.

Pinter toys with Davies (and his audience) through the character of Mick. From Davies' point of view, Mick must be perceived as an intruder. Just as Davies has found himself a nice warm, dry spot, an unknown man slips into the room, forces him to the floor and demands, "What's the game?" As the audience, we know only two things about Mick— that he has been here before and that he has a key. We do not yet know how he fits into the world of this play. Davies, however, knows nothing and is threatened, mystified and intruded upon. Pinter has managed to diversify the stranger function in a new way. The true stranger, Davies, is intruded upon by Mick who plays stranger games.

In the overall scheme of things, Davies must be seen as the true stranger and Mick only as a surrogate stranger. Mick reveals in the opening of Act II that this is his room, his bed, and that Davies has been befriended by his brother. The identification of Aston and Mick as brothers does not deter Pinter from allowing Mick to continue to employ many of the tactics previously used by the stranger figures. Throughout, Mick plays a game of cat and mouse with Davies, drawing him out, then slapping him back down.

5. Pinter, p. 38.
Mick engages Aston in this game during the tote bag sequence and, for a moment, the two become reminiscent of Goldberg/McCann. Mick also interrogates Davies in a Goldberg/McCann style.

MICK. What's your name?
DAVIES. (shifting, about to rise). Now look here!
MICK. What?
DAVIES. Jenkins!
MICK. Jen...kins.
DAVIES makes a sudden move to rise.
A violent bellow from MICK sends his back.
(A shout.) Sleep here last night?
DAVIES. Yes...
MICK. (continuing at great pace.) How'd you sleep?
DAVIES. I slept --
MICK. Sleep well?
DAVIES. Now look --
MICK. What bed?
DAVIES. That --
MICK. Not the other?
DAVIES. No!
MICK. Choosy.
Pause
(Quietly) Choosy.
Pause
(Again amiable.) What sort of sleep did you have in that bed?
DAVIES. (banging on floor). All right!6

... and so on.

Unlike the earlier plays, in The Caretaker the stranger is on the begging end of the stick. This time it is he who is mystified. Though he intrudes, he is also intruded upon. His

6. Pinter, pp. 41-42
function in the plot, however, remains similar to the earlier strangers, for it is through Davies that Aston and Mick reveal themselves. It is through Davies that the relationship between Aston and Mick undergoes change.

Each of the strangers, including Davies, have inflicted or have been implicated in the infliction of physical pain or disablement. The turnabout with Davies is that this infliction does not affect others but himself. In trying to play the game of intrusion so successfully played by his predecessors, Davies suffers derision and defeat. Davies catalyses an openly positive change of situation for Aston and Mick. The brothers enhance their friendship (kinship) and understanding of one another in the expulsion of Davies.

ASTON comes in. He closes the door, moves into the room and faces MICK. They look at each other. Both are smiling, faintly. 

This final moment is the first time in the play that the brothers actually relate to one another without using Davies as a sort of conduit. Each know who he is, his place, and that of Davies. They are at peace, a peace which seems to require a third party in order to be attained. It is as if the brothers cannot relate directly, but only through the taunting of a third party.

7. Pinter, p. 84.
The tribe is united; the intruder expelled. Unification is the object of the game; a game which cannot be played with the stranger, but which needs the stranger to be played.

ASTON. No. I like sleeping in this bed.
DAVIES. But you don't understand my meaning!
ASTON. Anyway, that one's my brother's bed. It's the only bed I can sleep in.
DAVIES. But your brother's gone! He's gone!
Pause
ASTON. No. I couldn't change beds!8

The ancient Arab proverb is once again proved true. 'Myself against my brother; my brother and I against my cousin; my cousin and I against the world'.
It was not until 3 years later in 1962 that Pinter wrote his next successful script, *The Collection*. He did write two television scripts, *Night School* and *The Dwarfs*, in the interim. Though neither were popular with critics or public, they figure importantly in the progression of Pinter's work. *The Dwarfs*, in particular, the most autobiographical of Pinter's work, reveals certain of his obsessions.

LEN. The rooms we live in ... open and shut.
Pause
Can't you see? They change shape at their own will.

Pinter's obsessions with rooms, the shapes they take on, their security and ultimate lack of security, all are revealed in these three short sentences.

Since it is rather difficult, if not impossible, to change the shape of stage rooms (though Pinter does seem to manage it in *The Homecoming*), Pinter's rearrangement of space becomes dependent

on character. The character who changes the shape of rooms, in fact the shape of lives, in the Pinter play is the stranger.

The Lover and The Collection were originally written for television. In both, however, Pinter continues to explore the use of stranger figures and to develop the idea of the stranger as a thematic concept.

The major focus in both plays is sex, in particular, stranger-sex. The Collection is based upon the mutual fantasy of Stella and Bill who enjoy sitting over a drink discussing what they might have done if they had gone upstairs. They do not live out, but only toy with the fantasy of stranger sex. In The Lover, this form of fantasy takes on another variation; Sarah and Richard stimulate their sex lives by pretending to be strangers.

In The Collection, Pinter's use of the stranger figure takes another step away from allegory toward realism. The social strata of Pinter characters first began to change with A Slight Ache. By the The Collection, the status of both protagonists and strangers has changed. Pinter increases the psychological rather than the physical terror the strangers evoke, as they progress from thugs, pub bums, or matchesellers to the stratum of respectable, educated society. Thus it is fitting that in The Collection the stranger does not come from the amorphous, awesome outside, but from inside. This is an extremely important development in the idea of
how one defines who is a stranger. It is with The Collection that
the existence of strangers from within the family unit is first
recognized. Another development in the use of the stranger as
a dramatic tactic is the transference of the stranger function from
James at the beginning of the play to Stella at its close.

A game which Pinter begins in The Caretaker of 'who is the
real stranger?' is promulgated and developed, becoming the focal
point of The Collection. The mood of the game is considerably less
serious here than in The Caretaker, allowing Pinter to concentrate
less on depth of character and more on the 'roles' which each
character plays.

Pinter begins by parodying himself with a caricature of
the stranger figure, first introducing James only as the 'voice'.

The telephone box is lit in a half
light. A figure can be dimly observed
inside it, with his back to the audience.
The rest of the stage is dark. In the
house the telephone is ringing. It is
late at night.
Night light in house fades up. Street
fades up. HARRY approaches the house,
opens the front door and goes in. He
switches on a light in the hall, goes
into the living-room, walks to the tele­
phone and lifts it.
HARRY. Hullo.

2. Pinter initially explores this possibility in The Caretaker
with Mick, but it is not until The Collection that he allows the
characters to recognize this disturbing possibility.
VOICE. Is that you Bill?
HARRY. No. He's in bed. Who's this?
VOICE. In bed?
HARRY. Who is this?
VOICE. What's he doing in bed?\(^3\)

Pinter pinpoints the recurring question of his plays "Who is this?". The voice in the dark is a throw-back to Pinter's earlier mystery-thriller techniques of the unknown man in the ordinary yet vaguely disturbing situation. His use of such techniques is considerably more sophisticated and, in this brief opening exchange between HARRY and VOICE, Pinter manages to intimidate Harry, while intriguing and amusing his audience. Once again, Pinter plays with the delicate balance of familiarity and strangeness, as this completely unknown person casually suggests that Harry wake up Bill at four o'clock in the morning.

VOICE. Well, give him a nudge.
       Tell him I want a word with him.
       (pause).
HARRY. Who is this?
VOICE. Go and wake him up, there's
       a good boy.\(^4\)

Still unidentified, the caller rings off with a promise of future contact which is simultaneously casual and threatening.

\[^3\] Pinter, p. 121.

\[^4\] Pinter, p. 121.
VOICE. Tell him I'll be in touch.  

James' patronizing familiarity (so necessary since he doesn't really have any true stranger power) is his first tactic of intimidation. Though James seems to be in control he is just as much in the dark as are Bill and Harry. It is gradually revealed that he knows even less than Bill and thus cannot wield power over him. For a time, however, James uses the little knowledge he has (Bill's name and address) to considerable advantage. James is shrewd enough not to identify himself or his motive, (a recurring device of the strangers of the previous plays) and his intuition for not doing so is distinctly correct. As soon as James loses the screen of opaqueness which keeps Bill from identifying him, he loses his position as stranger and thus his power, becoming no more than a frustrated, somewhat bullying husband. James is thus revealed to be no more than a 'temporary' stranger, a character who only plays at being a stranger when the real stranger of this play is his own wife.

As stranger, James employs tactics similar to those of Goldberg and McCann. He intimates, demands, is unknowable, yet knows or appears to know Bill. While maintaining the subterfuge of the most amiable social intentions, he exerts controlled pressure on Bill. None of these tactics, however, work. James is unable to resolve the riddle of his wife's fidelity. The games of "button,

5. Pinter, p. 121.
button, who's got the button" or "what happened last week at Leeds",
initiated by James, are his eventual demise. He already doubts his
wife enough to have to seek verification of her story. What his
search provides, however, is verification of the unhappy reality
that Stella has become a stranger.

Stella, as a stranger, employs the tactic of silence
earlier observed in the matchseller. Much like the strangers of
previous plays, her success is not due so much to specific actions
as to knowledge. She holds power and maintains the position of
stranger to her husband through the knowledge of what did occur in
Leeds.

With Stella and The Collection, the role of stranger
becomes more difficult to define. Pinter again emphasizes that it
is the relationship between people, not the inherent qualities of
any individual, which characterizes someone as a stranger. The
definition is subject then to the inconsistency of any human
relationship. Thus, it is possible that the matchseller, once given
a name and a new 'role' by Flora, is no longer a stranger, but a
lover, and thus it is that James can play at being the stranger (can
even be a stranger to Bill for a limited amount of time) while the
real stranger in his life, his wife Stella, quietly sits at home.

Where the strangers of each of the preceding plays have
been overtly recognizable (to one degree or another) as aliens, in
The Collection this is not so. With Stella, Pinter introduces the
possibility that those whom we consider to be 'known' may become or be revealed as strangers. Beginning with The Caretaker and reaching realization with The Collection, Pinter no longer allows his strangers to be recognized by such overt signals as arrival from external and ominous places. That we are utterly surrounded by strangers becomes an increasingly prominent thematic thrust as Pinter's work progresses.

What is it that defines one man as stranger and another as known? By what criteria do we claim to know one another? How is it that a man once known can again become a stranger? These are the questions to which Pinter turns his attention in The Collection and the following plays.

Pinter's next play, The Lover, is one of the most positive and truly comic of all his works. Once again, the play is structured around the stranger; in this case, the fantasy stranger.

The play is centered around the needs of Sarah and Richard to re-invent each other as lovers in order to maintain their sexual excitation. It is not love or sex outside their own relationship which Sarah and Richard crave, but a very particular fantasy - stranger sex. The central focus is not, as it first seems, the lover, but the stranger.

That Pinter chooses this of all possible fantasies for Richard and Sarah illuminates his fascination with the stranger,
perhaps even more poignantly than those plays in which 'real' 
strangers appear. If the task at hand is to compose a light-hearted 
sex comedy, the variety of fantasies from which to choose is 
enormous. However, Pinter again centers upon the stranger, 
revealing conscious or sub-conscious obsession. If there are no 
strangers, we simply have to invent them, and so Richard, Sarah and 
Mr. Pinter do.

As usual, Pinter's point of attack is immediate. He 
composes a brief mime which we instantly recognize as the familiar 
morning routine of the happy domestic couple. This image is 
delightfully topped with Richard's amiable opening remark:

RICHARD. (amiably). Is your 
lover coming today?

The exceedingly pleasant, witty dialogue which follows is clearly 
designed for the self-titillation of Richard and Sarah as well as 
that of the audience. By the time of Richard's departure, we are 
desperate that he leave, allowing the lover to arrive.

Pinter once again employs the tactic of creating an 
expectation which he proceeds to disappoint rather than to fulfill. 
The scene fades up not on the promised afternoon of debauchery, but 
on the husband's return from the office. Pinter does not completely 
disappoint us, however; during the coquettish dialogue which follows

6. Pinter, p. 161.
we discover that not only does Sarah have a lover, but Richard keeps a whore.

Pinter continues to tantalize with the promise of a lover, using Sarah's preparation (she changes into a sleek black dress and high-heeled shoes) as a suspense-building device. As the clock chimes three, and both Sarah and the audience impatiently await the arrival of the lover, Pinter coyly delivers not the lover, but the milk. The milkman, classically fantasized as the lover of housewives everywhere, is suitably persistent about his sales, particularly of cream, emphasizing that some lovely lady down the way has just had three jars. The nuances are enough to momentarily raise our hopes that the lover has at last arrived, but we are again disappointed and the milkman is sent away. Each of these tactics, Sarah's change of dress, the arrival of the milkman, and the dialogue about her lover and his whore, serve (a) to build suspense for the arrival and (b) to create an expectation which Pinter will shatter. There is another knock on the door and at last the lover arrives. But the lover is the husband. But the lover must not be the husband, he must not admit to any part of the husband. He must perform, above and beyond all else, as a stranger. Sarah calls him Max.

Richard and Sarah embark upon a variety of scenarios in which they are strangers and which function as sexual foreplay. The games are clearly of long standing; they switch from role to role with the expertise of actors well trained in the recognition of
improvisation signals. It soon becomes apparent that it is not Max with whom Sarah seeks afternoon pleasure, but any stranger. The name is employed, not for the purposes of identity, but for the purposes of anti-identity: that is, not-Richard. Richard plays a series of strangers who seek sexual pleasure with Dolores, Mary, or, in other words, not-Sarah.

Today's games introduce an unaccustomed stress as Max begins to question the continuing accommodation of his lover's husband. His rather ludicrous inquiries are an immense disturbance to Sarah, who accuses him of "doing your best to ruin the whole afternoon."\(^7\) Despite her annoyance, non-Richard persists and announces that he has played his last game.

The scene changes and Richard (the husband) re-appears wearing his 'sober suit' to a Sarah who wears a 'sober dress'. He blithely announces his decision that Sarah's afternoons must end.

RICHARD...In the traffic jam on the bridge just now, you see, I came to a decision.
Pause
SARAH. Oh? What?
RICHARD. That it has to stop.

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\(^7\) Pinter, p. 182.
SARAH. What?
RICHARD. Your debauchery.

Pause.
Your life of depravity, your path of illegitimate lust.
SARAH. Really?
RICHARD. Yes, I've come to an irrevocable decision on that point.

To Sarah, who openly recognizes both roles, Richard's insistence, his entire approach to the radical alteration he orders, is a source of great confusion and frustration. Though she literally begs him to desist, he will not. Richard persists until Sarah, in a burst of angry desperation, turns on him.

SARAH. You stupid...! (She looks at him cooly.) Do you think he's the only one who comes! Do you? Do you think he's the only one I entertain? Mmmmm? Don't be silly. I have other visitors, other visitors, all the time, I receive all the time. Other afternoons, all the time. When neither of you know, neither of you. I give them strawberries in season. With cream. Strangers, total strangers.

Through Sarah, Pinter explores a new angle on relationships between strangers and ourselves. Sarah

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8. Pinter, p. 189.
cannot face life with Richard without the stranger. What terrifies her is not the stranger, but the idea of the dreariness of a life in which there are none.

The battle of needs which follows her outburst is a complex merging of the roles of husband and lover in which it is re-emphasized that the stranger is the only lover to whom Sarah will respond. Richard tries to break out of this role, but Sarah will not allow it. Try though Richard will, he cannot win without reverting to the role of the stranger.

RICHARD. Got a light?
   Pause
   Got a light?
   She retreats towards the table
   eventually ending behind it.
   Come on, don't be a spoilsport.
   Your husband won't mind, if you give me a light. You look a little pale. Why are you so pale? A lovely girl like you SARAH. Don't, don't say that!
   RICHARD. You're trapped. We're alone, I've locked up.
   SARAH. You mustn't do this, you mustn't do it, you mustn't!
   RICHARD. He won't mind.
   He begins to move slowly closer to the table.
   No one else knows.
   Pause.
   No one else can hear us. No one knows we're here.
   Pause.
   Come on. Give us a light.
Pause.
You can't get out, darling. You're trapped.
They face each other from opposite ends of the table.
She suddenly giggles. Silence.

SARAH. I'm trapped.

Pinter combines the roles of stranger and familiar in one body. He has implied throughout his work, and most clearly in this play, that these two roles (though at first apparently dichotomous) exist simultaneously in all of us.

The stranger (or role of the stranger) continues to function as it has in the other plays: to startle, to threaten, to reveal. Most important, in this particular play, the role of stranger provides an opportunity for Richard and Sarah to express their repressed selves. In their games of stranger sex, Richard and Sarah can participate in the debauchery which their other selves (their elegant, sober selves) cannot enjoy.

The Homecoming is a culmination of Pinter's work to this point. Techniques, characters, themes, and structure mature simultaneously in this tightly woven, complex play. The play is a dexterous commingling of violence, humour, sexuality, philosophy and pathos. The situation, the development of events and their final outcome is utterly chimerical, yet, at the same instant, fully

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realistic, even believable. Pinter's use of the stranger as a device, by now finely honed and disciplined, is again the focal point of the structure of this highly sophisticated domestic drama.

The prototypes, Rose and Bert, are once again present. Max is the obvious Bert, impotent, brutal and infantile; he is revealed never to have overcome the domination of his deceased whore-wife, Jessie. The presence of the whore-mother role is somewhat more complexly handled. In the first part of the play (before Ruth's arrival), this role is foisted alternately upon Max and Sam. Ruth in the end accepts this role, thus restoring balance (such as it is) to the family. Ruth is a staggeringly complex character; a composite of Rose, Flora, Stella and Sarah, she dominates all five men of the play. Ruth also performs the dramatic function of the Riley prototypes.

The irony of the play's title, which at first apparently relates to Teddy and is only later revealed as a reference to Ruth, is indicative of the tone of the whole. Everything about the play is topsy-turvy. That which we might expect is consistently incorrect.

Pinter lays the foundation for the play's delicate and complex reversal, establishing the family as a strong, exclusive tribal unit. The family unit, so often a core in Pinter's plays, is more clearly delineated and heavily emphasized in The Homecoming than in any of his previous works. Max is the longest living member
of the tribe and has saturated it with his fears, prejudices and perversions. Family is everything to Max and he never lets anyone forget how much he has sacrificed for their sake.

MAX. (...) I worked as a butcher all my life, using the chopper and the slab, the slab, you know what I mean, the chopper and the slab! To keep my family in luxury. Two families! My mother was bedridden, my brothers were all invalids...

He even goes so far as to claim to have borne the children.

MAX. (...) don't talk to me about the pain of childbirth -- I suffered the pain, I've still got the pangs -- ...

The family will, as long as Max has an ounce of energy left, repay Max for his sacrifices. The family, however, is complicated by the frustration of incompletion; it desperately lacks a female presence. This frustration is a focal point of the family's action, in which the men continually attempt to take the female role upon themselves, or to force it upon one another.

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12. Pinter, p. 47.
MAX. Who do you think I am, your mother? Eh? Honest. They walk in here every time of the day and night like bloody animals. Go and find yourself a mother.


MAX. (To Sam) What do you want, you bitch?

The family's propensity to rail at itself leads to the use of a full range of insults from 'bugger', 'bastard' and 'stupid sod' to 'maggot' and 'paralyzed prat', but the most frequently repeated terms of derision are those of 'slut', 'bitch' and 'tit'. The language of all the men is riddled with female derogatory terms as they seek to force each other to compensate for the missing but hated female. The physical setting of the play amplifies the situation of the family: the absence of a female figure has literally left a hole in the wall.

As Pinter enlarges his concern from a single character to a family, he enlarges the location of the action from a room to a house. Regardless of the level of desperation, the family's exclusivity would never allow them to look outside the realm of the tribe for a solution.

13. Pinter, p. 16.
14. Pinter, p. 16.
MAX. When you find the right girl, Sam, let your family know, don't forget we'll give you a number one send-off, I promise you. You can bring her to live here, she can keep us all happy. We'd take it in turns to give her a walk around the park.15

The family is inclusive and exclusive. All needs must be fulfilled within its framework. It is unthinkable that any outsider should be allowed to enter its domain. The ever-raging conflict between inside and outside, insiders and outsiders, is once again of major importance. That the eventual solution comes from the stranger is Pinter's irony.

After having clearly established this family, its exclusivity, and its need, Pinter introduces two new and unexpected presences — Teddy and Ruth. Arrivals, possibly one of the single most important activities in drama per se, have been given immense attention by Pinter. Though the arrivals of his strangers have generally been quite subdued, this had not detracted from their

15. Pinter, p. 15.
16. Pinter, p. 49.
dramatic impact. Pinter has given us plays which have been based upon expectation of arrival, shock arrivals, false arrivals, and disguised arrivals. In The Homecoming, the entire first act is consumed with arrivals. Ruth and Teddy's arrival dominates this act, not only in terms of importance and power, but also in terms of stage action and stage time. Ruth and Teddy arrive four separate times, each with a separate purpose.

The first of these is a quiet, almost secretive arrival to the empty living room - the family sleeps upstairs. Teddy is immediately identified with the family and the home.

TEDDY. Well, the key worked.
Pause.
They haven't changed the lock.\(^\text{17}\)

\[\ldots\]  

TEDDY. I was born here, do you realize that?\(^\text{18}\)

This arrival, unheralded by letter, cable, phone call or even doorbell, and taking place in the dead of night, is quietly spooky. Ruth is at first a trepidacious stranger. Though she asks to sit down, and though Teddy invites her to do so (ironically pointing out his father's chair), Ruth does not sit but remains still and quiet. It is only when she is left alone that Ruth moves into the room and

\[\ldots\]

\(^{17}\) Pinter, pp. 19-20.

\(^{18}\) Pinter, p. 22.
sits. Teddy returns from checking out his old room in a boyish, nostalgic mood. Ruth unexpectedly intrudes on his nostalgia asking: "Do you want to stay"? 19 Like Max, Ruth is an intuitive animal and senses something about this room which beckons so strongly that she must deny it immediately or not at all. As Teddy wants to stay, Ruth takes over the keys and, from that moment, this home becomes more Ruth's than it was ever Teddy's. She exits into the night streets of London, her old stomping grounds, and Pinter emphasizes that Ruth has indeed come home.

The second in this series of arrivals now occurs; all the aspects of homecoming, however, are absent. Lenny, up pacing on a sleepless night, walks into the living room to find a brother who has been absent for six years standing there. They converse as if they had had tea together that afternoon.

TEDDY. Hullo, Lenny.
LENNY. Hullo, Teddy.
  Pause.
TEDDY. I didn't hear you come down the stairs.
LENNY. I didn't.
  Pause.
I sleep down here now. Next door. I've got a kind of study, workroom cum bedroom next door now, you see.

19. Pinter, p. 22.
TEDDY. Oh. Did I ... wake you?
LENNY. No. I just had an early night tonight. You know how it is. Can't sleep. Keep waking up.

The scene is exquisitely cool. Lenny by no means refuses to welcome Teddy; there is simply no recognition of the fact that Teddy has been away for six years. Lenny's casual insouciance functions as another signal that this is not Teddy's homecoming.

The third arrival is the meeting of Lenny and Ruth. A meeting in which Lenny attempts to affect similar tactics of indifference. The initial casualness of their meeting quickly dissipates, however, as this stranger coolly corrects or contradicts almost everything Lenny says. Lenny's next approach is to appeal to Ruth for advice. He reveals a sense of disturbance over something which he cannot identify — a tick in the night. Lenny also has intuitive abilities and has been woken up by something he cannot identify as Ruth arrives at the house. Having been unable to arouse sympathy or advice, Lenny continues to reveal himself to Ruth. He senses danger and attempts to gain power with stories of dominance and physical abuse towards women. Ruth remains utterly unimpressed and, once again, it is the inside character who becomes confused and reveals himself.

20. Pinter, p. 25.
Where we might reasonably expect any woman to be frightened and repulsed by Lenny's stories of women bashing, Ruth calmly listens and proceeds to call Lenny's sexual bluff.

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

... ...

**RUTH.** Have a sip. Go on. Have a sip from my glass.

He is still.

Sit on my lap. Take a long cool sip.

She pats her lap. Pause.

She stands, moves to him with her glass.

Put your head back and open your mouth.²¹

Their battle for status and power ends in the total routing of Lenny, whom Ruth casually calls Leonard. A name which only his mother calls him, a name which reduces him to a child. Ruth walks out on the conquered Lenny, who can only question:

**LENNY.** What are you doing, making me some kind of proposal?

She laughs shortly, drains the glass.

**RUTH.** Oh, I was thirsty.

She smiles at him, puts the glass down, goes into the hall and up the stairs.

He follows into the hall and shouts up the stairs.

**LENNY.** What was that supposed to be? Some kind of proposal?²²

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²¹ Pinter, p. 34.

²² Pinter, p. 34-35.
Lenny, who is accustomed to dominating, finds that none of his tactics of intimidation have worked against Ruth. It is Ruth who intimidates and mystifies. She dominates now and will dominate in their future relations.

Having lost his battle with Ruth, Lenny attempts to reinforce his power in the family by withholding the information of Ruth and Teddy's arrival from Max. He distracts Max's attention from the question at hand by posing the forbidden question:

LENNY. I'll tell you what, Dad, since you're in the mood for a bit of ... chat, I'll ask you a question. It's a question I've been meaning to ask you for some time. That night...you know...the night you got me...that night with Mum, what was it like? Eh? When I was just a glint in your eye. What was it like? What was the background to it? I mean, I want to know the real facts about my background. I mean, for instance, is it a fact that you had me in mind all the time, or is it a fact that I was the last thing you had in mind.  

Only after Ruth and Teddy have spent the night in the house does their real homecoming occur. Despite the fact that they have already arrived three times, morning finds them descending the stairs to a father, a brother, and an uncle, all of whom are unaware of their presence.

TEDDY smiles.

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23. Pinter, p. 36.
TEDDY. Hullo...Dad...We overslept.

Pause.
What's for breakfast?
Silence.
TEDDY chuckles.
Huh, we overslept.
MAX turns to SAM.
MAX. Did you know he was here?
SAM. No.
MAX turns to JOEY.
MAX. Did you know he was here?
Pause.
I asked you if you knew he was here.
JOEY. No.
MAX. Then who knew?
Pause.
Who knew?
Pause.
I didn't know.
TEDDY. I was going to come down, Dad, I was going to...be here, when you came down.
Pause.
How are you?
Pause.
Uh...look, I'd...like you to meet...
MAX. How long have you been in this house?
TEDDY. All night.
MAX. All night? I'm a laughing-stock. How did you get in?
TEDDY. I had my key.24

The new king (in this case queen) cycle is clearly evidenced in this exchange. Max's point of concern at this instant is not that they are in the house, but 'who knew?'. Max must assume, until Teddy's revelation of his key, that someone else has admitted Teddy and the whore. This is a direct threat to Max's control, an insinuation of usurpation. His inevitable usurpation does not come from within but

24. Pinter, pp. 40-41.
without the house and it is the usurper to whom Max next turns his attention.

MAX. Who's this?
TEDDY. I was just going to introduce you.
MAX. Who asked you to bring tarts in here?
TEDDY. Tarts?
MAX. Who asked you to bring dirty tarts into this house?
TEDDY. Listen, don't be silly —
MAX. You been here all night?
TEDDY. Yes, we arrived from Venice.
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.
TEDDY. Stop it! What are you talking about?
MAX. I haven't seen the bitch for six years, he comes home without a word, he brings a filthy scrubber off the street, he shacks up in my house!
TEDDY. She's my wife! We're married!
Pause.
MAX. I've never had a whore under this roof before. Ever since your mother died. My word of honour. (To JOEY) Have you ever had a whore here? Has Lenny ever had a whore here? They come back from America they bring the slopbucket with them. They bring the bedpan with them. (To TEDDY.) Take that disease away from me. Get her away from me.
TEDDY. She's my wife.
MAX. (to JOEY). Chuck them out. 25

Max's reaction to the intrusion is an immediate and violent attempt to protect his position in the home. Meagre though Max's power may be, he recognizes that the presence of this woman will strip him even of that.

25. Pinter, pp. 41-42.
Max's offensive tirade erupting on the apparently demure Ruth verifies the talent he claims for knowing a good filly. What at first seem unjustifiable maledictions are in the long run not so far wrong; Max does recognize a 'flithy scrubber off the street' when he sees one. Max's instinct and his experience warn him of this stranger who will in the end, like Jessie, dominate him and his home.

Joey refuses Max's command to 'chuck them out', responding, "You're an old man. (To Teddy). He's an old man." Max is reduced to the use of his fists and his stick, leaving all three men, Joey, Sam and himself on the floor. Joey and Sam, in refusing to ally themselves with Max, assist in the acceptance of Ruth. Shunned by the family, Max has no recourse but to acknowledge her.

MAX. You a mother?
RUTH. Yes.
MAX. How many you got?
RUTH. Three.
    He turns to TEDDY.
MAX. All yours Ted?
    Pause.
You want to kiss your old father?
Want a cuddle with your old father?
TEDDY. Come on then.
    TEDDY moves a step towards him.
Come on.
    Pause.

26. Pinter, p. 42.
MAX. You still love your old Dad, eh?
    They face each other.
TEDDY. Come on, Dad, I'm ready for the cuddle.
    MAX begins to chuckle, gurgling.
    He turns to the family and addresses them.
MAX. He still loves his father!
    Curtain

Teddy and his whore have arrived.

In the first act, we see the intrusion of the stranger; in the second, her elevation to the role of new queen. This process begins inconspicuously with what seems an innocent remark.

MAX. I've got the feeling you're a first-rate cook.
RUTH. I'm not bad.
MAX. No. I've got the feeling you're a number one cook. Am I right, Teddy?
TEDDY. Yes, she's a very good cook.28

Much like Riley, the matchseller and Stella, Ruth needs to exert little to no effort in order to gain control. She fully comprehends her desirability to these men and uses this desirability in a calm, calculating manner.

27. Pinter, pp. 43-44.
28. Pinter, p. 45.
She alternately plays the roles of demure wife, mother, homemaker, and sex object. She teases the men with promises of each of these feminine capacities, but verifies none of them.

The dichotomy between the sterile, intellectual, Teddy, and the sensual animal, Ruth, is stimulated by the return to this house. Ruth begins to become a stranger to Teddy long before she makes a stranger of him. Their estrangement begins as soon as they arrive, when Teddy wants to stay, Ruth wants to leave; as Ruth becomes more and more comfortable with the family, Teddy becomes increasingly uncomfortable and desirous to leave.

Teddy is embarrassed by his boorish family and finds his home reminds him of a 'filthy urinal'. The urinal it seems is quite acceptable to Ruth. She is completely familiar and comfortable with this particular area of London, having previously lived only a few blocks away. While Teddy loathes the filth of these streets, she loathes the sterility and barrenness of America.

Teddy begs Ruth to return with him, offering the children, swimming pools, campus life, and trips to Venice as bait. Ruth replies with a bizarre sense of logic which parallels Lenny's way of thinking.

TEDDY. You liked Venice, didn't you? It was lovely, wasn't it? You had a good week. I mean...I took you there. I can speak Italian.
RUTH. But if I'd been a nurse in the Italian campaign, I would have been there before.

The untenable morality and behavior of this family finds its match, in fact, is excelled, by that of Ruth. Ruth is by no means the demure professorial wife Teddy would like to have brought home, but an intelligent and experienced whore.

Throughout the second act, the men jostle for battle stances from which they will fight over her. There will be no battle, however; Ruth's decisions are already made. Ruth is offered and accepts the challenge to be all things to all men. She becomes their queen bee, performing the two major historical roles of all womankind - mother and whore.

Ruth's take-over of the family is not complete until Teddy too has undergone reversal. The play's close neatly antithesizes its opening. Ruth, the stranger, is accepted as kith and kin, while Teddy, the blood-relation, is expelled as the stranger. And it is the new queen bee who finalizes Teddy's expulsion, clarifying his new position with suggestive foresight.

29. Pinter, p. 55.
RUTH. Eddie
    TEDDY turns.
    Pause.
    Don't become a stranger.
    TEDDY goes, shuts the front door.30

The underlying brutality of Ruth and her intuitive kinship with this
dreadful family is fully realized. Ruth is truly at home sitting
"relaxed in her chair"31 with Max, Lenny, and Joey surrounding
her.

With The Homecoming, Pinter stretches the characters of
whore-mother, impotent, brutal male and stranger to their furthest
extremities; overlapping, interweaving and transforming these
characters and their accompanying functions in the drama. In The
Caretaker, Pinter complicates the role of the stranger by splitting
it between Davies and Mick: in The Collection, he brings the
stranger into the immediate family circle; in The Lover, he allows
the roles of stranger and familiar to inhabit the same body and
experiments with the merging of these roles; in The Homecoming, with
the characters Teddy and Ruth, Pinter incorporates all of these
experiments. Not only does the role of stranger transfer from Ruth

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30. Pinter, p. 80.
31. Pinter, P. 80.
to Teddy, but the stranger, Ruth, usurps power, taking over the household and expelling the new stranger. That Teddy must be expelled indicates a primitive tribal need of the family for a stranger of some kind. The group is defined as much by what or whom they exclude as by what or whom they include.

The concept of the stranger who transforms the lives of others, himself, the room to which he arrives, has surely reached full blossom in *The Homecoming*. For where, after the complexities expressed here, can Pinter possibly go?
After a silence of three years, PINTER wrote two very differently structured plays - Landscape and Silence. Their difference lies not in theme but in style. These two plays overtly ignore all the basic principles of stage action, exposition, development, character interaction, climax and denouement. This is not to say that these plays do not contain the above, in one form or another, but that Pinter has virtually re-structured the familiar forms in which we observe these crucial elements of drama.

Pinter begins a new phase of writing with these mature, compassionate and poetic plays. Through the format is highly structured and apparently anti-realistic, in these plays the characters oddly become more real. Despite the lack of dramatic realism, Landscape and Silence more accurately reflect certain recurring qualities of the experience of living than the earlier plays. Having always presented the bizarre in life, characters who are black and blind, silent and shapeless, mental incompetents who collect things and people in need of repair, and families who engage their sister-in-law as live-in whore, Pinter makes an unexpected foray into the utterly ordinary. No longer do strangers lurk in basements, waiting to deliver messages, or arrive at seaside houses, leaving with one of the tenants as their baggage. In these plays, the alien is he who is most intimate and apparently most well-known.
With Landscape and Silence, the concept of the stranger reaches its most terrifying as it becomes a full-bodied theme: that of estrangement itself. Pinter's strangers, who have gradually moved closer and closer to the family unit, no longer come from the outside at all; Pinter confronts us with the reality that we live with strangers, estranged from one another, perhaps even from ourselves.

Estrangement, a much more introspective treatment of the whole concept of stranger, is a theme of maturity, entailing the disillusions, the sorrows, the helplessness of men and women in relationship with one another. Both Beth and Duff cry out with a need to be fulfilled, yet each are so involved in their private worlds that they cannot reach one another. The play's metaphors, equaling the maturity of their theme, are greatly simplified from the days of birthday parties and beating drums. Pinter now turns to the simplicity and permanency of nature. And here, his expression of loneliness, due to estrangement, is painfully exacting. What is most terrifying about the loneliness which Pinter presents is that it is not the result of physical seclusion or isolation. Pinter's subject here is peopled loneliness.

Beth, in love only with her memory of a man on the beach, is utterly estranged from the present Duff. Though Pinter in a letter to the director of Landscape's first production identifies
the man on the beach as Duff, we cannot ascertain that identity from the play alone. The audience is suitably placed in the same mind space as Beth, who no longer connects the man on the beach and the violent Duff who wants to bang her on the floor.

So great is their estrangement that Beth simply does not recognize Duff in his present form. Though Duff tries to break through, to speak to her, it is impossible. Beth denies Duff any present existence. Like Rose, Beth barricades herself in, seeking her security in isolation; unlike Rose, walls are no longer necessary. Beth excludes Duff, makes herself a stranger to him, simply with her mind. Pinter's sorry insinuation is that it is not walls, but our very natures, which cause our isolation.

In Landscape, Pinter pursues the idea that locale is a matter of mental state. The location in which one's body resides is temporal and unimportant: what is of importance is the imaginative space in which one's psyche resides. The stage setting of this play has no pertinence for its characters; they reside in landscapes of their imagination. The fact that the script calls for a set design at all is only the residue of a theatrical tradition which Pinter does not fully shed until Silence.

With *Silence*, Pinter explodes the room once and for all. He actualizes his long standing contention that walls are merely the product of our imaginations. We are reminded of Len in *The Dwarfs*.

The rooms we live in ... open and shut. Can't you see? They change shape at their own will.²

In both *Landscape* and *Silence*, Pinter transcends the barriers of time and space as we normally perceive them. In these plays, Pinter merges all time, all space into one. The idea is not unique: to have managed to express it on stage is quite a different matter.

This theme of estrangement becomes more frightening in the perspective of the simultaneity of all time and space, for such a concept precludes the fantasy that the situation could change. *Landscape* at least offers remembered happiness. Beth and Duff each have a moment in their lives to which they can cling. Rumsey, Ellen, and Bates are in a constant state of anxiety, searching for a time, or a place, or a person, with whom they can be whole. Their loneliness, the constant alienation they all suffer, is recognized by Rumsey.

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Sometimes I see people. They walk towards me, no, not so, walk in my direction, but never reaching me turning left, or disappearing, and then reappearing, to disappear into the wood.

So many ways to lose sight of them, then to recapture sight of them. They are sharp at first sight...then smudged...then lost...then glimpsed again...then gone.3

Pinter presents a terrifying vision of the human condition. The insinuation is that no one ever reaches anyone else: that we only tantalize each other with that possibility; that we are never anything but alone.

In these two plays there are no strangers of the kind we have observed from The Room through to The Homecoming. There is, instead, nothing but strangers. Pinter seems to imply that estrangement from one another is not a possibility but a fact, an inescapable, inevitable reality of life.

With *Old Times*, Pinter returns to a more traditional playwriting style, providing a stage space which resembles a room, providing story, exposition, development, climax, etc. Pinter incorporates the conceptual leaps *Landscape* and *Silence* make in perception of time and space. Just as in retrospect *A Slight Ache*, *The Collection* and *The Lover* seem to have been exercise plays, valuable on their own, but most valuable as experiments which lead to *The Homecoming*, so *Landscape* and *Silence* in retrospect seem to be stepping stones to *Old Times*.

The location of *Old Times* is clearly shown to exist only in the imagination; there are no longer any walls, any rooms. Rooms, walls, distance in time, space, and especially memories, are all products of our imaginations. This dissolution of physical barriers is theatrically realized by the presence of Anna, who is on stage throughout. Anna is forever present, there is no longer the possibility of arrival or departure. Anna simply is. Arrival and departure exist only in terms of acceptance or rejection, in this case, the acceptance or rejection by Kate.

Once again, Pinter employs an intimate stranger as the focal point of his drama. Though Anna has shared the intimacies of Kate's room, her friends, gestures, interests, even her underwear and by implication her bed, Kate cannot, or will not, recall the color of Anna's hair, her size, or whether or not she is a
vegetarian. At this point in the play, the audience is forced to consider Anna a stranger. Deeley claims not to know her, Kate not to remember her. The early action, as in previous Pinter formulae, centers around the expected arrival of this friend-stranger.

Anna, like Riley, Goldberg/McCann, and Ruth/Teddy, is a link to the past. She stimulates an evening of memory and nostalgia in which Kate and Deely's pasts (as they recall them) are revealed. The memory lane down which Anna drags Deeley and Kate provides Pinter with the opportunity to delve into the thinking of his characters more deeply than ever before. Through the comparing and contrasting of memories, we are allowed glimpses into not only what but how each of the characters think. The recollection of the same incidents by each of them sheds light not on the incidents but on themselves. What actually happened is singularly unimportant. Our past can only be that which we recall it to be, and as such is subject to our desires and moods.

ANNA. There are some things one remembers even though they may not have happened. There are things to remember which may never have happened but as I recall them so they take place.

DEELEY. What? 4

It is this mercurical capacity of memory in which Anna invests her hopes. Anna's method of reaching Kate is to recall happy memories of a shared youth (real or imagined). She hopes that such

recollections will revive their friendship and that she will thus regain a place in Kate's heart. The play becomes a matter of who can make whom believe whose memories.

For Deeley, Anna is a very dangerous intruder, as Kate indulges in a kind of callous exclusivity which never includes more than one friend at a time.

DEELEY: Did you think of her as your best friend?
KATE: She was my only friend.
DEELEY: Your best and only.
KATE: My one and only. 5

This exclusivity is apparently so appealing that the very identities of Deeley and Anna are dependent on being included.

In the battle to win Kate, both Anna and Deeley claim to have seen Odd Man Out with her. Deeley boldly claims that it brought them together, that, in fact, Robert Newton (a complete stranger) brought them together, and that only Robert Newton could tear them apart - an illusion which will be destroyed before the evening is out.

As the stories of their bohemian pasts in London are told, not only memories, but the characters themselves begin to overlap and interweave, eventually becoming indistinguishable. Anna, at first seen only as Anna, becomes Anna playing Kate, becomes Kate, becomes Deeley.

5. Pinter, p. 9.
DEELEY. On the way to the party I took her into a cafe, bought her a cup of coffee, beards with faces. She thought she was you, said little, so little. Maybe she was you. Maybe it was you, having coffee with me, saying little, so little.6

Anna, previously expelled for unknown reasons, metaphorically killed by Kate, was replaced by Deeley, who took over her bed. Anna is not the only recipient of Kate's metaphorical killings. Kate describes having done the same one day to Deeley. The only difference between these events was that where Anna did not resist, Deeley did, suggesting "a wedding instead, and a change of environment. Slight pause. Neither mattered."7

The importance of Odd Man Out is not how wonderful it was, who starred in it, nor who saw it with Kate, but that it titles a deadly serious game in which they are presently engaged. The consequence of becoming the odd man out is the loss of Kate's affection and metaphorical death.

What Anna's visit reveals is that Deeley is no more important to Kate than Anna. No different, no more alive. Neither of them can possibly win. Just as Kate metaphorically killed Anna with the dirt from her window box, she did the same to Deeley with their wedding.

6. Pinter, p. 69
7. Pinter, p. 73.
KATE. When I brought him into the room your body of course was gone. What a relief it was to have a different body in my room, a male body behaving quite differently doing all those things they do and which they think are good, like sitting with one leg over the arm of an armchair. We had a choice of two beds. Your bed or my bed. To lie in, or on. To grind noses together, in or on. He liked your bed, and thought he was different in it because he was a man. But one night I said let me do something, a little thing, a little trick. He lay there in your bed. He looked up at me with great expectation. He was gratified. He thought I profited from his teaching. He thought I was going to be sexually forthcoming, but I was about to take a long promised initiative. I dug about in the window box, where you had planted our pretty pansies, scooped, filled the bowl, and plastered his face with dirt. He resisted...with force. He would not let me dirty his face, or smudge it, he wouldn't let me. He suggested a wedding instead, and a change of environment.

Slight pause.
Neither mattered.

Pause.

He asked me once, at about that time, who had slept in that bed before him.
I told him no one. No one at all.8

And were someone to ask her now 'who sleeps in the other bed?', her answer would again be 'No one. No one at all.' Though Anna once again takes over the 'other bed', supposedly winning Kate and expelling Deeley, who now becomes the stranger, it is not really Anna or Deeley who is the stranger, but Kate. Neither Anna or Deeley have ever known Kate. She has always been, is now, and will remain a stranger to them both.

8. Pinter, pp. 72-73.
With No Man's Land Pinter incorporates the conceptual and technical advances made in Landscape, Silence, and Old Times. As with Old Times, Pinter allows the action to ostensibly take place in Hirst's sitting-room; it should be clear, however, that the physical room is of drastically reduced importance.

The locales of Pinter's plays make an important progress from single rooms, to houses, to landscapes, to landscapes of the mind, to no man's land; a progression clearly evidenced in his titles. The importance of this movement in the character of the work is that Pinter effectively removes the walls behind which we might hide. The whole concept of inside/outside, so fundamental to Pinter's structure, particularly in regard to the arrival of strangers, undergoes considerable transformation until the concept of outside is recognized as a state of mind, not physicality. Pinter removes the possibility of closing doors on these persistent intruders who people his plays. Regardless of the external location the set designer builds for production purposes, the action of this play must be perceived to occur in no man's land.

No man's land is traditionally known as that stretch of territory between two warring factions, belonging to no one, a potential danger to all. As it separates, it also unites, for it is a territory in which no man can meet another without daring death. In this it is equal to all. In this play, Pinter depicts the world as a continuous series of no man's lands and strangers. Each of the four characters relates a no man's land occurrence, in which
they revealed themselves to a stranger and after which their life has never been quite the same. The action of this play brings Hirst to the final no man's land, "which never moves, which never changes, which never grows older, but which remains forever icy and silent."¹

Spooner functions as the stranger in this no man's land and as a guide to Hirst in helping him identify and accept it. Although many of Pinter's strangers guide their hosts to self-revelation or to a drastic change of situation, they rarely reveal this intention. Spooner, however, constantly offers his services as a friend who will guide Hirst on a journey.

Spooner at first appears to be a simple stranger: a chance acquaintance on the Heath whom Hirst has inexplicably invited home. Later, he is revealed to be an old and rather intimate friend. Spooner describes himself in a number of unusual ways (an observer of life, fixed, concrete, a relevant witness, a free man), all of which emphasize that he somehow stands outside the normal concerns and impotencies of life. Again, this vitally important concept of inside/outside intrudes. But the idea of what or whom is inside or outside has taken a metaphysical leap, for what it seems that Spooner is outside of is life itself. For this reason I call Spooner a revenant, from the French revenir: one who returns after a long absence, especially from the dead, a ghost.

¹ Harold Pinter, No Man's Land (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1975) p. 95.
Whether we perceive Spooner to be returned from the dead, or simply an old Oxford chum turned bum returned after a very long absence, he performs in the drama as a grim reaper figure who has come to befriend Hirst in the 'last lap'. Pinter is far too clever and elusive either to state that Hirst is dying or that Spooner is his archangel of death, but examination of characters, language, and the manner in which incidents have been arranged strongly imply such an interpretation.

The play is saturated with allusions to death. Weatherby as an old friend is at first not recognized at all; once remembered, Hirst recollects him amidst a dinner-party group whom he thinks are all dead.

HIRST. (...) What a bunch. What a night, as I recall. All dead now, of course.2

Pinter has Hirst add that Weatherby hasn't changed a bit, but looks as fit now as he did then. Such pleasantries are part of a common mythology we all feed one another, and are apt for the meeting of two old friends. One must remember, however, that the interim of which they speak has been almost forty years. As has always been his style, Pinter presents conflicting information and allows his audience to draw their own conclusions.

2. Pinter, p. 69.
Hirst claims his wife and all his friends have 'gone', living on only in his memory and photo album. Hirst's tenderness towards the faces in his photo album furthers the inferences woven throughout this play of living ghosts.

HIRST. I might even show you my photograph album. You might even see a face in it which might remind you of your own, of what you once were. You might see faces of others, in shadow, or cheeks of others, turning, or jaws, or backs of necks, or eyes, dark under hats, which might remind you of others, whom once you knew, whom you thought long dead, but from whom you will still receive a sidelong glance, if you can face the good ghost. Allow the love of the good ghost.3

Characteristic of Pinter's use of nuance, in the first scene between Hirst and Spooner the conversation refers continually but obliquely to death and salvation. Hirst is very reticent throughout. It is Spooner who discourses on the days of highwaymen, picnics on the lawn, a shared memory of the bucolic life, the salvation of the English language, the sustenance and preservation of art and virtue, Hirst's wife of hazel hue, and a Hungarian emigre who Spooner met at the very pub they earlier graced, and who changed Spooner's life. Spooner's remarks prod Hirst until, in a state of staggering drunkenness he throws his empty glass (ineffectually) at Spooner, and finally babbles:

HIRST. No
Pause.
No man's land...does not move...or change...
or grow old...remains...forever...icy...silent.4

3. Pinter, p. 79.
4. Pinter, p. 34.
It is important to note that it is not Spooner but Hirst who first describes no man's land. Once again, the stranger performs as the catalyst of a message which does not come from an external, but an internal force. No man's land is not Spooner's idea, but Hirst's.

Once again, Pinter's stranger does not require force to catalyze the journey upon which Hirst embarks. It is, once again, the host who resorts to tactics of violence. Spooner's weapons are his serenity, the strength of being fixed, concrete, and his knowledge.

SPOONER. I have known this before. The exit through the door, by way of the belly and floor.⁵

The next scene introduces Foster and Briggs who control Hirst's physical world, and further develops Spooner's identity as a revenant. Foster who attempts (but never attains) a bold face of calm and control, jokingly introduces Spooner to Briggs as "Mr. Friend". This hostile sarcasm meant to intimidate Spooner and force him to identify himself by name is completely ineffective, as are all of Foster and Briggs' tactics against this stranger-friend. Briggs participates in the attempt to lower Spooner's status, claiming to have seen him collect beer mugs at the Bull's Head Tavern. Spooner does not deny or discount this claim, but allows Foster and Briggs to argue themselves into strengthening his position:

⁵ Pinter, p. 34.
BRIGGS. He's a bloody friend of everyone then.  

Spooner functions in the play as a guide to Hirst in a journey which must be perceived, at least in the metaphorical sense, as the coming of death - a journey which Spooner repeatedly claims to have already taken. His coming precipitates Hirst's dream. Spooner claims to be in the dream, and it is he to whom Hirst turns for help when he falls after recounting the dream.

Foster attempts to ward off Spooner, intuitively understanding that he is a threat, without ever understanding why.

SPOONER. It was I drowning in your dream.
HIRST falls to the floor. They all go to him.
FOSTER turns to SPOONER.
FOSTER. Bugger off.
BRIGGS pulls HIRST up. HIRST wards him off.
HIRST. Unhand me.
He stands erect. SPOONER moves to him.
SPOONER. He has grandchildren. As have I. As I have. We both have fathered. We are of an age. I know his wants. Let me take his arm. Respect our age. Come, I'll seat you.
He takes HIRST's arm and leads him to a chair.
There's no pity in these people.
FOSTER. Christ
SPOONER. I am your true friend. That is why your dream...was so distressing.

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6. Pinter, p. 38. In such a lyrical and poetic play, it is difficult to accept Briggs recollection of Spooner on a literal level. One is reminded that Spooner's offer to aid Hirst is 'carte blanche'. As evidenced in the final scene of the play; he will do whatever he may have to in order to befriend Hirst on this journey. There is an insinuation here that he may have befriended the landlord of the Bull's Head Tavern in like manner. Spooner re-introduces this character in his final appeal to Hirst, during which he offers private readings in the upstairs of a particular public house, "where the landlord - who happens to be a friend of mine - would I know be overjoyed to entertain you,..." (Pinter, p. 90.)
You saw me drowning in your dream. But have no fear, I am not drowned.

This brief exchange among the four men contains Foster's impotence as defender, Hirst's rejection of Briggs and Foster as aids, his acceptance of the stranger, Spooner, in their place, and Spooner's amazing claim of salvation. Foster's frustrated, sarcastic response to the whole of it is:

FOSTER. Christ.

Though all of the plays enjoy free use of the most colorful gutter language, Pinter's use of religious profanity is rare. Pinter uses Foster's sarcasm to emphasize that Spooner performs, for Hirst, as a figure of salvation.

The play has an exquisite duality with its apparent bleak existentialism in the description of no man's land, which is contrasted by the serenity and peace of Spooner, who seems to have passed beyond this state. Whether no man's land is a metaphor for the death of creativity in an artist (mind) or for the ceasing of life functions (body), Spooner quietly but continuously asserts that there is not only survival, but serenity, somewhere on the other side.

The second act of the play constitutes Hirst's second acceptance of Spooner, this time as Weatherby, and the acceptance of a new state of being, defined by Spooner as no man's land. Spooner

7. Pinter, pp. 47-48
8. Pinter p. 48.
continues to function as a guide—an old friend who, having taken
this path before, will lead the way.

The first scene of the Act between Spooner and Briggs
provides an enlightening departure from Spooner's powerful serenity.
In the first Act, we know this man as Spooner; in the second, we
know him as Weatherby. Although his function in relation to Hirst
does not alter, his approach is considerably less mystical in the
second act. This first scene functions as a scene of transformation
from Spooner to Weatherby and to shed further light on Spooner's
state of being. Though Spooner maintains some of his
other-worldliness (he does not require food, he drinks but does not
become drunk, his presence causes Briggs inexplicably to reveal
himself), he temporarily loses that first act quality of being a
free man. He momentarily loses his sense of identity and purpose,
and doesn't even seem to remember Hirst.

SPOONER. The boss...is a poet himself?
BRIGGS. Don't be silly. He's more than that,
isn't he? He's an essayist and critic as well.
He's a man of letters.
SPOONER. I thought his face was familiar.9

His sense of remembering this all having happened before becomes
vague and confused. He keeps reminding himself as though to try to
get a handle on the present.

SPOONER. I have known this before. Morning.
   A locked door. A house of silence and strangers.

SPOONER. I have known this before. The door
unlocked. The entrance of a stranger. The
offer of alms. The shark in the harbour.

SPOONER. I have known this before. The voice unheard. A listener. The command from an upper floor.10

During this scene, Spooner too is stuck in some sort of no man's land. Without Hirst, Spooner loses his raison d'être and becomes lost himself. With Hirst's arrival, Spooner's purpose, identity, and powers as guide are renewed.

The relation between Spooner and Hirst is reminiscent of that of Death and Everyman.11 Hirst confesses, becomes angry over Spooner's observations of his past behaviour, briefly attempts rejections, and finally accepts the reality which Spooner signals. Spooner acts throughout as a calm, dignified and knowledgeable guide. He is not surprised by Hirst's confession, having prior knowledge not only of its content, but of much which Hirst does not choose to confess. Spooner is unalarmed by Hirst's outrage and hopeless attempt at rejection.

HIRST. This is outrageous! Who are you? What are you doing in my house? He goes to the door and calls. Denson! A whisky and soda! He walks about the room You are clearly a lout. The Charles Weatherby I knew was a gentleman. I see a figure reduced...12

10. Pinter, pp. 59,60,68 respectively.


12. Pinter, No Man's Land, p. 78.
Again, Spooner's tactics are those of serenity and silence. He allows Hirst to vent his anger freely, and waits for Hirst to argue himself around to the decision to be kind and to offer to show Spooner his photo album.

Even at the height of his anger, Hirst does not turn to Briggs or Foster for assistance or a change of subject, but to Spooner. He does not ask that Spooner be escorted out or accept any of Foster or Briggs' offers to do so. It is in fact Briggs whom he threatens with dismissal. He also refuses to leave with Foster on his routine morning walk across the Heath. Spooner gradually assumes responsibility not only for Hirst's spiritual needs, but his physical needs as well. Foster and Briggs, for all intents and purposes, have been dismissed.

Hirst rejects going for his walk and his normal routine of the day, claiming he must come to a decision.

HIRST. Today I shall come to a conclusion.
There are certain matters...which today
I must resolve.
SPOONER. I'll help you.13

Spooner is quietly firm regarding his association to Hirst. This assertion of Spooner's is carefully placed in its connection not to help Hirst with the daily physical things but with his need to come to resolution.

13. Pinter, p. 86.
Spooner's later appeals to Hirst to perform as companion, protector, and professional agent must not be seen as grovelling requests, but as an eloquent and compassionate expression of an offer which Spooner knows Hirst has no choice but to accept. Hirst has already had his dream of death, and Spooner clearly states his offer, to be Hirst's protector at that time.

SPOONER. (...) I will accept death's challenge on your behalf. I shall meet it, for your sake, boldly, whether it be in the field or in the bedchamber. I am your Chevalier. I had rather bury myself in a tomb of honour than permit your dignity to be sullied by domestic enemy or foreign foe. I am yours to command.  

As Spooner at last concludes his 'carte blanche' offer to Hirst, the answer comes back:

HIRST. Let us change the subject.  
    Pause.  
    For the last time.  
    Pause.  
    What have I said?  

Hirst has indeed accepted that which Spooner brings, and, in his acceptance, comes the birth of a new state of being.

HIRST. But I hear the sound of birds.  
    Don't hear them? Sounds I never heard before. I hear them as they must have sounded then, when I was young, although I never heard them then, although they sounded about us then.

14. Pinter, p. 89.  
15. Pinter, p. 91.
Pause.
Yes. It is true. I am walking towards a lake. Someone is following me, through the trees. I loose him easily. I see a body in the water, floating. I am excited. I look closer and I see I was mistaken. There is nothing in the water. I say to myself, I saw a body, drowning. But I am mistaken. There is nothing there.

Silence.
SPOONER. No. You are in no man's land. Which never moves, which never changes, which never grows older, but which remains forever, icy and silent.

Silence.
HIRST. I'll drink to that.
He drinks.16

16. Pinter, p. 95.
Pinter derives the primary tension in his work by dealing with one of the most basic and primitive of human instincts - fear. In the early work he deals with fear of the unknown and of death. He then proceeds to explore fear of rejection, fear of loneliness, and, in No Man's Land, returns once again to the most primitive and consuming of all fears - fear of death. His topic over the years alters very little; it is his treatment of this topic which provides variation.

One way in which to categorize the work studied in this thesis is to describe a basic arc in Pinter's work, which is at first primarily physical, then intellectual, and finally psychological. Obviously each of the plays contains all three of these aspects, but there is a gradual movement in terms of how Pinter expresses his concerns, and in terms of what aspects of an incident or series of incidents he focuses upon. Although intellectual and psychological both refer to the workings of the mind and may at first seem inseparable, for my purposes I would define the intellect as the conscious workings of the mind, and psychological as the deeper, more subconscious part of the mind, concerned with feeling and emotion. This gradual movement is also indicated by the set designs of the plays and by their titles which (as previously mentioned) go from physical realism to metal abstraction to an amalgamation of the two.
This arc is particularly clear in terms of the outcomes of the plays. In the first phase (The Room - A Slight Ache), there is generally a drastic change in the physical state of being of the central character. Pinter deals overtly with fear of death - the end of physical being. The theatrical presentation of this idea is strongly visual and physical. These first four plays are all highly concerned with brutality (again physical) and, despite the mystical and supernatural nuances which run throughout the plays, they remain earthbound.

In the next phase of his work (The Caretaker - The Homecoming), tactics and outcomes become more dependent on the intellect. Pinter's concern with brutality remains, but the brutality is primarily verbal, not physical. Words become the most effective tools of power and the outcomes that befall characters are expulsion, exposure, or both. These outcomes are no longer realized through the physical demolition of the character. This phase is the most social of the three as Pinter deals with the group's need for a stranger in order to solidify the group. Pinter puts greater intellectual demands upon himself, his characters and his audience.

The final phase (Landscape - No Man's Land) goes one step deeper, exploring not just the intellect, but the profounder psychological drives and needs of the characters. Pinter deals with many of the same subjects (fear of death, fear of rejection, loneliness) but he now focuses less on external results and more on

1. The only exception is The Dumb Waiter, in which the action builds to the precipice of drastic physical change.
internal motivations and responses. One might contrast the rather superficial, intellectual love games played by Sarah and Richard in *The Lover*, with the deadly serious ones of Kate, Anna, and Deeley in *Old Times*. Where, in the early plays, he deals with death as a physical finality, in *No Man's Land* he explores a much more complex and psychological type of death - the death of creativity, the death of desire to go on, while the physical body still lives.

Throughout this cycle, the one character Pinter continuously employs is the stranger. He functions as the center post of Pinter's plots and as the bearer of his themes, personifying at various times the unknown, fate, the rejected, the rejector (new king) and death.

The strangers of the first three plays all overtly perform as messengers. They have something to tell to the central character(s) and their delivery of this message dominates the play. Riley's stated purpose is to deliver a message, the stranger in *The Dumb Waiter* sends messages (in fact demands) via the dumb waiter, and Goldberg/McCann are the agents, thus messengers, of Monty. I include the matchseller in this messenger group of strangers, for though he does not overtly deliver a message, Pinter employs the matchseller in a delightfully ironic way, endowing the character with many of the external trappings of a messenger (mysterious arrival, blindness, Edward's obsession with him). The irony of course is that there is no message. (There are no answers - should you meet Wilson or Monty he is deaf, dumb and blind.)
These four strangers have a number of features in common besides the messenger function. All of them are overtly mysterious; they arrive in inexplicable ways and possess unexplained powers. As to their pasts, and their reasons for appearing to these characters at this particular time, Pinter gives either contradictory information, or none at all. The inside characters consistently endow these strangers with immense knowledge and consequently a kind of omnipotence. This omnipotence is supported by the mysterious and allegorical qualities with which Pinter endows them, and by the fatalistic overtones which accompany their visits. The mere arrival of the strangers consistently induces some degree of panic in the inside characters. The messages they bring, imply or catalyse, terrorize the inside characters, whose attempts to escape or repel the messengers are futile. Though Pinter provides only hints as to how or why, he carefully implies a bond between the strangers and the characters they visit. There is always the sense that the messengers come from the inside characters' pasts. The combination of Pinter's ambiguity over the exact origin of the strangers and the obvious but undefined power they hold over the inside characters allows the strangers to function as personifications of fate.

Ultimately, Rose, Gus, Stanley and Edward all recognize in the person of the stranger their own death. Fortunately, even at this early stage in his career, Pinter is complicated enough not to simply kill off his characters. Rose, who is prevented from accompanying Riley, goes blind; Gus is left facing the barrel of a revolver; Stanley and Edward become blinded, babbling morons.
Pinter provides symbolic scenes of destruction which metaphorize death.

Despite the metaphorical and allegorical aspects of these plays, despite Pinter's attempt to elevate them to the realm of metaphysics (that is, to deal with the ultimate nature of existence, reality, experience), they remain earthbound. They are consumed with physical violence, the outcome of each being the physical destruction of a character. The weapons employed are guns, fists and feet. Even in the case of Edward, where no weapons are used, Edward perpetually threatens physical violence and, in the end, is physically destroyed. These first four plays, though frequently reaching into other realms (intellectual, psychological, metaphorical, allegorical), remain very physical.

The next four plays, The Caretaker through The Homecoming, constitute a grouping in which the intellect defines and controls the arena in which battles are fought. Pinter abandons the mysterious, allegorical and fatalistic qualities of the earlier plays in favour of increased realism. The work is still strongly physical, but it is much less dependent on this aspect in terms of both tactics and outcomes. These are 'mind game' plays. The tools of power employed are dependent on the intellect. The brutality of the early plays is still present, but the brutality now works on a character's mind more than his body.

In The Caretaker and The Collection, such apparently innocent objects as vacuum cleaners, tote bags, and cheese knives
function as weapons. The Lover is based entirely on an intellectual game, and in The Homecoming, though sticks and fists emerge again, they are used in a facetious manner. The real power battles are played on intellectual levels. Words become the most effective weapons in this phase of Pinter's work.

In these plays we can no longer identify the stranger simply by his being a newcomer. Pinter begins to look at the definition of stranger from a variety of points of view, and to deal with the flux in relationships which reveals different characters to be the stranger at different points in time.

This phase of the work is more socially oriented than the other two. Pinter's focus shifts toward the group and how it is threatened or strengthened by the stranger. Where in the first phase he explores fear of strangers, in this phase he explores the need for strangers. Aston and Mick need the stranger in order to play a game which results in expulsion of the stranger and a strengthening of their bond as brothers. Stella and Sarah require stranger sex (at least in fantasy) in order to remain content. In The Homecoming, Pinter combines both of these games and adds a new twist. A sexual contract is arranged between Teddy's family and the stranger Ruth, at which point a new stranger must be made. The group is redefined in its expulsion of Teddy. In this phase of the work, Pinter deals with the making of strangers through conscious choice - a very intellectual game.
Following The Homecoming, Pinter moves into a deeper, more psychological phase. The plays almost completely shed physicality; in Landscape, Silence and Old Times, none of the characters ever physically touch each other, and the room itself disappears. Space, time, memory, all aspects which we normally perceive to determine reality, become subjective rather than objective.

The function of the stranger evolves in that there is no longer a particular arrival and particular stranger around whom the plot revolves, but a vision of reality in which everyone is a stranger. The fear Pinter now focuses upon is that of loneliness. Fear no longer derives from a situation in which one character threatens another, but from the terrifying vision of a world which offers nothing but peopled loneliness. Everyone is estranged from everyone else. The characters of Old Times cannot even establish an agreed upon memory of their pasts; those who have thought themselves friends and even lovers discover themselves mistaken. In this bleak period of Pinter's writing everyone is apparently the odd man out.

This depressive vision of the world is somewhat mellowed in No Man's Land. A sliver of light cracks the bleakness in the person of Spooner - the stranger who turns out to be an old friend. This is the first time in all of Pinter's plays that this figure functions as both stranger and friend. Though he has danced around this possibility in a number of the earlier plays (Riley, Richard, Ruth, Anna) he has never been as successful with it as he is here.
As Spooner says, he is kindness itself (certainly he must not seem so to Hirst, who experiences anxiety and hostility before finally accepting Spooner as his guide), but what Spooner offers, in the long run, is the love of a good ghost. Pinter's vision of the relationship between one man and another has acquired an extremely matured sense of compassion. The world is no longer filled with strangers, but with old friends. While the stranger figure has previously personified threat and fear, in this play he functions as a guide in accepting and overcoming fear.

With *No Man's Land*, Pinter re-introduces the physicality of the room and of characters touching one another. The psychological basis of the play is so strongly entrenched that it is not threatened by the re-introduction of the trappings of realism.

*No Man's Land* is remarkably similar to the early messenger plays. Structurally *No Man's Land* and *The Room* are almost identical. Though many of the plays have strong similarities, the parallels of construction between *The Room* and *No Man's Land* are remarkable; further they are the only two of the canon with this identical structure. The outline is basically as follows: A character (Spooner/Riley) who at first appears to be a stranger but is later revealed to be a revenant bears a message to another character (Hirst/Rose). This character is mysterious, has a quality of other-worldliness and, although threatening, is exceedingly gentle. An intermediary character (Foster/Briggs, Bert), whose only
way of coping with the world is violence, unsuccessfully attempts to protect Hirst/Rose from all contact with this messenger. The intermediaries are completely unsuccessful as protectors; the message is delivered, and the message is death.

This ambitious topic seems to overwhelm Pinter in his first attempt, and *The Room* suffers from vagueness and a confused mixture of realism and allegory. *No Man's Land* is an infinitely sophisticated re-working of an idea which seems to have plagued Pinter since the composition of his first play. Pinter claims to consider each of his plays "a different kind of failure" and thus attempts in each new play to solve the failures of previous attempts. *No Man's Land*, it seems, finally succeeds where *The Room* failed. Perhaps with *No Man's Land* - just as the character Hirst, for the first time, is able to accept and cope with the terrifying message the stranger brings - perhaps in *No Man's Land* Pinter has at last come to terms with whatever fear has driven him to write twenty years of stranger plays. The remarkable similarity between *No Man's Land* and his first play suggests the completion of a cycle in Pinter's work, for with *No Man's Land* he returns to his initial theme, message, and motif. Curiously enough, with his next play he leaves all these behind. *Betrayal* is the first of Pinter's major plays not to deal with the stranger as a central figure.

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