

HAROLD PINTER

The Birthday Party

Unit-III

Harold Pinter: The Birthday Party

Harold Pinter: The New Drama

Harold Pinter is a contemporary of John Osborne. The fact is important since both the playwrights are products of the post-war period in England. The other contemporary writers of Europe may have shared some of the early mid twentieth century experiences with them, but I highlight their contemporariness for the fact that both the playwrights are British: and the location of their plays mostly England. Both belonged to a generation which attempted to revolt against the establishment, refused to conform to the accepted prevalent norms, and decorum considered civilized by upholding those who were failures since the environment was unsuited to them. The similarity in the two playwrights ends here. Their reactions may have been the same but their mode of expressing them was very different indeed. Osborne's characters are angry and abusive, those of Pinter recluses, who shun fighting and recede into whatever refuge they find. Jimmy Porter and Stanley Webber are the most representative characters of the two authors' in this sense.

John Osborne is an iconoclast, who destroys but fails to construct. Harold Pinter only observes, he denounces but does not moralize. The lack of commitment on the part of Harold Pinter, to specify the meaning of his plays and to deliver an indictment makes his work very different from the other contemporary writers. He does not make a formal statement of his belief in one thing or the other, prosecution is not his job, nor is it his vocation to solve the mysteries of life, he avoids delving into the metaphysical as well as jumping into the fray.

When 'The Birthday Party,' appeared in 1958, it was met with bewilderment; the hostility in the audience as well as the critics was largely because it lacked analysis and proof. In the technological age of logic and polemics, it was treason to offer no explicable reason for whatever happens and expect the reader/ audience to be satisfied with only what is implied. Michael Scott, makes an enlightening remark on Pinter's place in the contemporary Drama in his introduction to the Macmillan case Book Studies.

"It was precisely this vagueness to which literary London in 1958 took exception." A twin phenomenon of revolt against the dramatic conventions of writers such as Noel Coward and Terence Rattigan had been accepted. John Osborne, with 'Look Back In Anger' (1956) and Samuel Beckett with 'Waiting For Godot' (Produced in London in 1955) had drawn the boundaries of the new theatre and new dramatists were expected- by the critics at least- to be followers of one of the two styles. It was clear that Pinter's work was not in the vein of Osborne. His language was far too epileptic for that school and his plots far too obscure. He seemed, comparatively closer to Beckett and Eugene Ionesco, on the surface at least, and was hurriedly adjudged the English exponent of Martin Esslin's term 'the theatre of the absurd'. The differences between Beckett and Pinter, with whom he was readily compared came to the surface, when critics made observations about their subjects, Beckett's metaphysical concerns, involved with the dilemma of man's existence had no echo in the work of Pinter. Pinter's vision centred largely on man without reference to the spiritual mode.

The second most commonly accepted comparison was with Ionesco, Michael Scott reasons this comparison out as follows: "Menace, fear, the clutter of daily living, the concentration on trivial possessions, the focus on the banality of language were elements which seemed to form a common denominator between these two dramatists."

Ionesco's glory was short-lived and the absurdist movement was at a decline. Tynan, one of the best-known critics of drama at that time described Ionesco's theatre as "a dead end Art form, an interesting experiment but a cul-de-sac" in the progress of contemporary drama. He contended that Ionesco's drama was not the main road and that though he had offered an 'escape from realism', he had ushered us into a blind alley. ' Mr. Ionesco's theatre is pungent and exciting', Kenneth Tynan said, ' but remained a diversion'.

Ionesco defended himself, and the debate between the two, which came to be known as ' the London controversy', continued for many weeks.

Pinter continued to be clubbed with Ionesco, Beckett and Janet though some critics like Ruby Kohn and Richard Schechner had expressed serious concern about linking Pinter too closely with them in the nineteen sixties itself when Pinter had not yet even established his reputation as a playwright. The strict traditions of English literary criticism had no ' term' to negotiate a perfect placement for Pinter. Much of Pinter's early criticism, is, therefore, wanting, for lack of a traditional label to denote to Pinter: his stories are told; his characters described an effort made to reach the meaning and the moral but the keynote of Pinter remains unlocked. Pinter has himself in his essays, letters and Public addresses tried to present his viewpoint about his dramatic art, which is very different way from that of Beckett or Osborne.

For an acceptable and appropriate appraisal of Pinter as a playwright it is mandatory that Pinter's own view of his work as well as that of those who have read or watched his plays be taken into account. Nothing can substantiate or affirm, the author's views more than what he himself has said about the same. In a speech that Pinter made at the National Student drama Festival in Bristol in 1962, he made some very categorical statements. It would be worthwhile to know how he addressed the issue. The following extracts from the speech should be understood in the context of the two of his plays that had been produced so far, though relevant to all his later work also, but of particular relevance to "The Care-taker" and " The Birthday Party".

" I'm not a theorist. I'm not an authoritative or reliable commentator on the dramatic scene, the social scene, any scene, I write plays when I can manage it, and that's all. There are at least twenty-four possible aspects of any single statement. ...a categorical statement; I find will never stay where it is and be finite. It will be immediately subject to modification by the other twenty- three possibilities of it. No statement that I make, therefore, should be interpreted as final and definitive." and " We will all interpret a common experience quite differently, though we prefer to subscribe to the view that there is a shared common ground.... There is a shared common ground alright, but it's more like a quicksand."

That the reality is not permanent or unequivocal does not unsettle Pinter, it is to him no worse or better for that. As the reality is ever shifting, it is difficult to have a grip over it, hence the impossibility of the final resolution. This is what Pinter has to say.

" A play is not an essay, nor should the playwright under any exhortation damage the consistency of his characters by injecting a remedy or apology for their actions into the last act, simply because we have been brought up to expect, rain or sunshine, the last act resolution. To supply an explicit moral tag to an evolving and compulsive dramatic image seems to be facile, impertinent and dishonest, where this takes place it is not theatre but a crossword puzzle. The audience the paper. The play fills in the blanks. Everyone's happy.

According to Pinter himself; therefore, we should not only not look for a moral but should not await an ending, happy or otherwise in Pinter's plays.

Pinter does not mean to 'tell' his audience anything. He just wants them to share an experience with the characters in the play. Pinter does not believe in the writer's engagement with either morals or resolutions. He is agitated by what is expected of a playwright by the playgoer.

“They want a playwright to be a prophet. There is certainly a good deal of prophecy indulged in by play-wrights these days, in their plays and out of them, warnings, sermons, admonitions, ideological exhortations, moral judgements, defined problems with built-in solutions; all can camp under the banner of prophecy. The attitude behind this sort of thing may be summed up in the phrase, “I’m telling you.” The playwright instead of glibly stressing our empty preferences should hold up life as we live it. Pinter warns us of reposing our faith in writers who in the pursuit of establishing their worthiness are lost in the weight of their own words.

“What is presented, so much of the time, as a body of active and positive thought is in fact a body lost in the prism of empty definition and cliché”...

This kind of writer clearly trusts words absolutely. I have mixed feelings about words myself... such a weight of words written by me and by others, the bulk of it a stale dead terminology, ideas endlessly repeatedly and permuted become platitudinous, trite, meaningless.”

About his characters that people found ambiguous, Pinter advises them to look for clues not only in the language they spoke but also in what they didn’t say. It was not necessary for the characters to divulge every detail of their past or present. To Pinter much about the characters existed beyond the periphery of their mundane, biographical details.

“Language under these conditions is a highly ambiguous business. So often, below the word spoken, is the thing known and unknown. My character tell me so much and no more; with reference to their experience, their aspirations, their motives, their history. Between my lack of biographical data about them and their ambiguity.... lies a territory which is not only worthy of exploration, but which is compulsory to explore.... A language, I repeat, where under what is said, another thing is being said.”

The characters have according to Pinter, a momentum of their own, he would neither like to raise this, nor assign to them words which they could not speak on their own. He, as a writer would not like to impose himself on them, he would not like to impinge on their liberty, either by fixing them into calculated postures or by restricting what he calls their “elbowroom”. But, Pinter does keep a strict vigil on them, lest they grow uncontrolled or anarchic. As, a writer he claims “I pay meticulous attention to the shape of things, from the shape of a sentence to the overall structure of the play”. Pinter strikes a balance between listening to his characters and keeping a close watch on them where the characters are silent or in hiding. “It is in the silence; Pinter says about his characters “that they are most evident to me”.

To the oft repeated that his characters fail to communicate, Pinter reacts sharply. The silence of his characters has often been assailed for its evasiveness, but silence is, according to Pinter, more expressive than the words spoken.

“I think that we communicate only too well in our silence, in what is unsaid, and that what takes place is a continued evasion, desperate rearguard attempts to keep ourselves to ourselves. Communication is too alarming. To enter into someone else’s life is too frightening. To disclose to others the poverty within us is too fearsome a possibility”.

Even when a torrent of language is being employed in a speech, it, argues Pinter, hides what is not spoken lying locked beneath it. The suggestiveness of the silence is sometimes more keenly felt than the spoken word; Pinter’s precision in words to describe what words and silence mean to him is indicative of how deeply he felt the communicative ability of both.

“There are two silences. One when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed. This speech is speaking of a language locked beneath it... The speech we hear is an indication of that which we don’t hear. It is necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, anguished or mocking smoke screen that keeps the other in its place. When true silence falls we are still left with an echo but are nearer nakedness. One way of looking at speech is to say that it is a constant stratagem to cover nakedness.”

Important Events

Harold Pinter was born on 10th October 1930 at 19 Thistle ware Road in Hackney, North London. The name of his father was Jack, that of his mother Frances.

His first experience of war was, when in 1939 during the Second World War, he was evacuated to Caerhays, near Mevagissey, Cornwall.

His early days at Hackney Downs Grammar School are important for two reasons, one that he met an English teacher by the name of Joe Brearley, secondly that he played Mac Beth in an amateur school production which was reviewed in the News chronicle. This happened between the years 1944-1947, a most impressionable age for Pinter. He later joined the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in the autumn of 1948.

Two things emerge clearly from his early life, one that he was deeply interested in English as a language and drama as an art, the second that he had the power to resist. When Pinter was called up for National Service, he not only refused to enlist but also registered himself as a conscientious objector. This happened in the October of 1948. he was, consequently in 1949, not only produced before the military tribunal but also arrested and fined twice.

Subsequently he left the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts and devoted himself entirely to reading and writing. His career picked up with small roles on B.B.C Radio. In 1950, Pinter not only gave his first Professional performance in “Focus on Football Pools” but also published two of his poems in the August number of “Poetry” London.

Harold Pinter was for sometime fully pre-occupied with learning the art of speech. He attended two terms at the “Central School of speech and Drama from January to July 1951.

It was at this time that Pinter got the break that he needed in his career. He was engaged by Anew McMaster to play Shakespeare and other classical drama in Ireland for six months. Pinter remained busy, at this time, acting, writing and reading, making his foothold stronger in the Literary and Dramatic world. He embarked on his first novel “Dwarf”, switching dramatic companies at the same time. He changed his stage name to David Baron and married Vivien Merchant with whom he had acted in Bournemouth. This was on 14th September in 1956. From 1957, when Pinter’s ‘The Room’ was produced at Bristol University Drama Department, there was no looking back for him. Ever since this production, Pinter has been played, not only all over Europe but in the United States and Russia also. Pinter has not only acted but also directed and produced his own as well as plays written by other’s as well. Films based on his plays have been produced and he has been closely associated with production and acting on B.B.C, Radio as well as Television. Looking by it his versatility is astounding

Works by Harold Pinter

Since the entire collection of Pinter’s works including his Radio, T.V and Stage Plays is available in the four Play Collections published by Faber and Faber, a list of their publications would suffice to cover his works. The only play, which is not included, is “Celebrations” of the year 2002. His poetry and prose have been included in the publications.

Celebration and The Room (London: Faber & Faber, 2000)

Collected Screenplays1 (London: Faber & Faber, 2000)

Collected Screenplays2 (London: Faber & Faber, 2001)

Collected Screenplays3 (London: Faber & Faber, 2001)

The Dwarfs (London: Faber & Faber, 1990)

Plays One: The Birthday Party, The Room, The Dumb Waiter, A slight Head Ache, The Hothouse, A Night Out, The Black And White (short story), The Examination (London: Faber & Faber, 1991)

Plays Two: *The Caretaker, The Dwarfs, The Collection, The Lover, Night School, Trouble in the Works, The Black and White, Request Stop, Last To Go, Special Offer* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996)

Plays Three: *The Homecoming, Tea Party, The Basement, Landscape, Silence Night, That's your Trouble, That's All, Applicant, Interview, Dialogue for Three, Tea Party* (short story), *Old Times, No Man's Land* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997)

Plays Four: *Betrayal, Monologue, One For The Road, Mountain Language, Family Voices, A kind of Alaska, Victoria Station, Precisely, The New World Order, Party Time, Moonlight, Ashes to Ashes* (London: Faber & Faber, 1998)

Poems and Prose, 1949-1977 (London: Eyre Methuen, 1978).

The Proust Screenplay (London: Eyre Methuen, 1978).

The Trial (London: Faber & Faber, 1993)

Various Voices: Poetry, Prose and Politics 1948-1998 (London: Faber & Faber, 1998)

The Theme of Pinter's Early Plays

“The Caretaker” gave Pinter the breakthrough he needed in his career. With this play, Pinter started receiving the serious attention due to a playwright of his stature. Pinter was able to present his theme in a more discriminating manner and style. Batty finds a common theme running through all his plays. He says; “the Caretaker” was a refinement of the kinds of thematic concerns that had driven much of Pinter's writing to date. It offered a precise examination of the human impulse to dominate, to define areas of territory and the ability of an intruding figure to intercede in such things.”

All Pinter's early work, his plays “The Birthday Party”, “The Room” and “The Dumb Waiter”, as well as his prose works, “Kullus” and “The Examination” are all different manifestations of his obsession with the violating presence and an intruding force. Significantly in all these works, space and environment are the marks of identity. “The Birthday Party” like all Pinter's early plays is hinged upon this simple premise, involving negotiations for supremacy between occupants and invaders of territory. Goldberg and McCann are intruders on Meg's and Petey's territory since they have come to deprive them of Stanley, they are, also, intruders upon Stanley, since they have come to deprive him of his refuge.

Manipulation of space and violation of territory is characteristic of the struggle between the individual and society. The formidable forces of society to aggressively gain the private territory of the individual's isolation, he is permitted neither to shun nor to renounce the society.

Reception

When ‘The Birthday Party’ appeared in 1958, it met almost unanimous critical hostility. The reviewers were bewildered by the play when it was first shown in London. “What all this means only Mr. Pinter knows” (Manchester Guardian Review, 29/5/1958). Most of the veteran critics including Kenneth Tynan discussed the play. Tynan described it as a clever fragment grown dropsical with symbolic content, a piece.... full of those paranoid overtures that seem inseparable from much of the avant-garde drama. This observation was made in The Observer of 5/6/1960. Writing of Pinter, two years later, Tynan, however agreed that he had failed to recognize the quality and promise of Pinter's ‘The Birthday Party’.

Harold Hobson was the only one to run against the stream of adverse criticism; he recognized the dramatic force of Pinter, proclaiming, “Mr. Pinter, on the evidence of his work, possesses the most original, disturbing and arresting talent in theatrical London”.

Herber saw in the vagueness and unconformity of Pinter's plots, a quality which lent them a uniqueness. Pinter's success and charm lay in what people had dismissed as ambiguous. “One of the greatest merits of the play is the fact that no one can say what precisely it is about or give the address from which the intruding

Goldberg and McCann come, or say precisely why it is that Stanley is so frightened, concluding that it is exactly in the vagueness that it's spine chilling quality lies".

Support and praise came from other quarters too. Catherine Itzin and Simon Trussler who have been closely associated with Pinter as directors in the production of his play remember their first reaction to Pinter." Michael Godron sent me 'The Birthday Party' when it was first going to be done. I didn't know who Harold Pinter was but I liked the play immensely.

Peter Raby, traces the changes in the public's as well as the critic's response to Pinter. Starting with the response of the academia, Raby says," If Pinter was embraced warmly and relatively early by the academia, he has been treated a little more erratically by theatric critics. The Birthday Party foxed them in 1950s with the striking exception of Harold Hobson, who had the benefit of seeing 'The Room' in Bristol. The Birthday Party was a new kind of theatrical writing, posing challenges for the director, actors and the audience. Though audiences at Cambridge and Oxford, uninfluenced by any critical lead, responded positively. Over the years the reviewers response has adjusted, both to early Pinter and to Successive shifts and developments in his work.

'The Caretaker', recalls Batty received later in 1960s a much better reception. It was described as a riveting, uncompromising piece and heralded as a kind of masterpiece. He attributes the negative response earlier to The Birthday Party to the bewilderment with which it was universally greeted. The bewilderment was caused, partly, by its allegorical structure and enigmatic qualities. He records that The Birthday Party, Pinter's first significant inroad into the theatres of the London West ends, received a particular critical backing and was snubbed as a 'random dottiness'.

Summary and Critical comments

Act I

The play opens in the living room of a house, in a seaside town. The room is almost bare, sporting the least pretentious of looks. The room, which we see, has a table and chairs and is connected to the kitchen. There is a hatch in the Kitchen, which is used by Meg, the lady of the house not only to pass the things on but also to carry on the conversation. Two characters are introduced in the first scene, Petey the husband and Meg the wife. It is through the hatch that she talks to Petey when he enters the room and sits on the chair to read the paper that he has brought with him. The opening conversation between Meg and Petey about cornflakes, fried bread and the news in the paper follows a line of resolute banality between two people buried in unalterable routine. Having packed their minds, lest they give trouble, they are an amicable couple. The contrast between the dreadful food they eat and the solicitude with which it is served provides a kindly sort of comedy. Meg's questions like. 'Are you back?' and 'You got your paper?' show her willingness to talk. She has seen Petey come, she has seen him reading the paper, yet she poses these questions, knowing that they are not expected to be answered; the conversation is as much a part of routine as the cornflakes and bread. Petey's replies to Meg are usually to affirm and are a 'yes'; the cornflakes is nice; outside is nice. Meg's question whether Stanley was up is also irrelevant as she knows that Petey could not have seen him, since, he had just come: Meg wants to solicit Petey's attention, she wants him to praise the breakfast she has served and does not in turn hesitate in praising him for having read some nice bits from the paper the day before.

That she is more ignorant than Petey is clear from her surprise when Petey tells her that 'it gets light later in winter'; and she simply says, oh!

Her picking up of the socks to darn them further establishes the simplicity of the household we have entered as also with the simple chores of the couple. The opening scene illustrates some of the strategies employed by Pinter to establish the atmosphere he wishes to create. John Russell Brown ascribes it's success to the use of language and silence used by Pinter.

“The play starts with silence and the twice repeated question of Meg, who is far behind the stage is answered by Petey only in line 6”

Meg’s first three questions seem at first to repeat the same inquiry, but the slight changes of tone progressively reveal what lies hidden under the simple questions. Meg’s questions, statements and action all establish that she wishes to make Petey acknowledge her presence and his dependence.

Meg’s questions and statements reveal two things, her desire to continue the conversation and her desire for gratification. Meg’s curiosity about the name of the girl who has had a baby, her childish concern at her having a baby girl is amplified by her wishful; desire to have a little boy. Her conversation throughout helps to make her a genial comic figure. Meg and Petey have in the meantime spoken of Stanley, who it is established is somebody living with them and whom Meg is concerned about. Nigel Alexander’s observations about their domesticity are worth consideration.

“The opening sequence opens a gap between the aspirations of the characters and their behaviour that is maintained in increasingly painful fashion until the end of the play.... What it establishes is a domestic routine of almost killing boredom yet Meg’s enquiries about the cornflakes and her interest in the girl baby that the newspaper announces has been born to Lady Mary Splatt indicate great expectations that have somehow withstood the withering of age and the staling of custom. One of the reasons that she sounds like a silly old woman is that her vocabulary is still that of a bride enjoying providing breakfast for her husband and looking forward to the baby that she hopes will be a boy. Her unquenchable folly and Petey’s resigned acceptance of her good intentions have a quality of heroism, which survives even the laughter of the audience.

Petey mentions that two men had approached him on the beach, the previous night to ask whether they could be put up at their house for two days. To Meg’s question as to what he had told them, Petey’s simple answer is that he had said nothing and that they will be coming again to find out. The repetition of questions and their very short answers should be taken note of to understand how Pinter is trying to manipulate language to his purpose. Meg’s anxiety and avid desire for social approval are fully brought out in the conversation that follows:

Meg: Are they coming?

Petey: Well, they said they would

Meg: Had they heard about us, Petey?

Petey: They must have done.

Meg: Yes, they must have done. They must have heard this was a very good boarding house. It is. This house is on the list.

Whether or not, it is on the list, the desire of Meg for it to be so is manifest here. So is her fantasy of being a successful entrepreneur as a boarding house owner. It sounds all the more ironical when; we learn later that Stanley Webber is the only guest who is staying there.

‘The house is on the list’ has other connotations as well. Had the house been marked for something, nothing is, though, specified; the words ring a deep meaning later in the play.

Meg is ready to receive the visitors, she had got the room ready for the visitors” she says, which also, is unexpected since the Boarding house had never had any guests before and Meg had no inkling of them either. Her readiness for Goldberg and McCann also points to the house being destined for what comes later. Meg than says, that she was going to wake Stanley up- her words for him “ that boy” are indicative of what she feels for him. When Petey says that there was a show coming to the town, her immediate thoughts go to Stanley. Stanley could have been in it, if it was on the pier” is her reaction. Meg’s ignorance comes to light in her casual remarks in the course of her conversation, when Petey tells her that Stanley could have played no role in it, since it was a straight show where there is going to be no dancing or singing, she is completely bewildered. What kind of a show one could have without singing or dancing?

Meg had liked to hear Stanley play the Piano. Reminded of Stanley she makes up her mind to call him down. Petey's questions whether she had taken him a cup of tea and whether he had drunk it indicates that taking tea to Stanley and making him drink it, is almost a daily ritual for Meg.

Almost as common is the ritual of waking him up. The manner in which she calls him and the way she warns him are enough to establish that there is a deeper affection in Meg for Stanley than a landlady usually would have.

Petey. Did he drink it?

Meg: I made him. I stood there till he did. I am going to call him. Stan! Stanny! Stan! I'm coming up to fetch you if you don't come down! I'm coming up! I'm going to count three! One! Two! Three! I'm coming to get you.

When Meg ultimately reaches Stanley's room, she makes no allowance for any formalities. Shouts from Stanley and the wild laughter from Meg inform us that Meg would not hesitate in handling him physically. (She is panting and arranges her hair, when she gets back).

Petey is a quiet man who would not reproach his wife under any circumstances; he wishes Stanley a good morning, retaining his composure through out the conversation that follows. That Stanley is not the successful, disciplined and well-dressed run of the mill man is obvious the moment we see him. He is unshaven, in his pyjama jacket and wears glasses. It becomes increasingly difficult to judge, what Meg's feelings for Stanley are. She chides him for every small thing; he shows his impudence by answering her negatively all the time.

Meg: So he has come down at last, has he? He's come down at last for his breakfast. But he doesn't deserve any, does he Petey? Did you sleep well?

Stanley: I didn't sleep at all.

Meg: You did not sleep at all? Did you hear that Petey? Too tired to eat your breakfast, I suppose? Now you eat up those cornflakes like a good boy. Go on.

Meg admonishes him as if he were a kid, Stanley teases her as if she were a friend.

Meg: What are the cornflakes like, Stan?

Stanley: Horrible.

Meg is revolted. Petey had praised the same flakes just a while ago and even the advertisement said that they were refreshing.

When Stanley suggests that he go to the second course, Meg immediately reacts. It should be noted that when Meg disapproves of Stanley, she always refers to him in the third person, as 'he' even while she is talking to him.

The dialogue between Stanley and Meg has a very subtle humour, giving the play a quality, which grips you in spite of the fact that the situation as well as the characters are most average and unexciting.

Stanley: No breakfast. All night long I have been dreaming about this breakfast.

Meg: I thought you said you didn't sleep.

Stanley: Day dreaming. All night long.

He warns Meg that he would go down to one of those smart hotels on the front, for breakfast to which she immediately reacts by saying that he wouldn't get a better breakfast there.

Petey is non-committal in his opinion, be it food, weather or people. When Stanley asks him what was the weather like, he simply says that there was a good breeze blowing, refusing to call it either cold or warm. He speaks for Stanley when Meg refuses to give him breakfast and goes back to work, without having tea, without

a word of complaint. It is Stanley who complains about the sour milk, and blames Meg for sending Petey away without a cup of tea.

The conversation Between Stanley and Meg is good natured and warm: the retorts and accusations are witty and are never vitriolic or ill intentioned.

The scene where Stanley and Meg are alone, unveils only a part of their relationship, much remains hidden. Nigel Alexander sums up what to him could be only explained as a mixture of natural concern and Meg's sexual consciousness of him as a man.

“What is unusual is the use of this comedy to provide information which allows an audience to predict the relationship between Meg and Stanley before he appears even on the stage. The compound of maternal sexuality in which her frustrations find expression is clearly, dangerously unstable and liable to cause an explosion. Stanley's frenzied outburst has been predicted although its form will be unexpected”.

Stanley continues to slam Meg, She was a bad wife, it was disgraceful of her to give Petey sour milk and she didn't keep her place clean etc. He even taunts her about the boarding house she claims is so well known.

Stanley: Visitors! Do you know how many visitors you have had since I have been here?

Meg: How Many?

Stanley: One.

Meg: Who?

Stanley: Me! I'm your visitor.

The last sentence of the conversation spoken by Meg is important for her repetition of the house being 'on the list.' She reiterates the fact, which seems to have no meaning as such, but deeper implications can be derived from it in view of the later happenings.

Meg's attempts to draw Stanley's attention to her, to make him conscious of her as a woman are not laboured. They come naturally to her. When she objects to Stanley using the word "succulent" for the bread, she is trying at the same time to suggest her own physical properties as well as convey that she was beyond his reach. She was a married woman and Stanley had to be discreet in his use of words; yet her remark "you're 'bad' sound more amorous and suggestive.

The game of words in the lines that follow reveal closeness more clandestine than has been shown so far. Meg ruffles Stanley's hair as she passes, while Stanley throws her arm away. And yet Stanley immediately after snubbing her, Stanley utters these words, admitting his dependence on Meg. "I don't know what I'd do without you Meg. You don't deserve it though." later followed by, "Get out of it. You succulent old washing bag."

Meg: I'm not! And it isn't your place to tell me if I am!

Stanley: And it isn't your place to come into a man's bedroom and – wake him up.

The lines above suggest the manner in which, Stanley is being woken up by Meg. Meg's desire to be praised is not restricted to her housekeeping and cooking only. She would like to be wooed and pursued as a woman. She wants Stanley to tell her, more explicitly that he enjoyed his cup of tea, which she brought him in the morning, and also that she was desirable. Preferring to ignore Stanley's attempts to counter her, she proceeds to elicit a response from him. Notice the underlying meaning in the following conversation.

Meg: Stanny! Don't you like your cup of tea of the morning- the one I bring you.

(and later)

Meg:(shyly) Am I really succulent?

When Stanley says that he would rather have her than a cold in the nose, she prompts him to do that.

Meg: you're just saying that.

Stanley's growing impatience and Meg's growing sensuality culminate in the final outburst of Stanley's disgust with Meg.

After having complained of the sour milk, horrible flakes and bread that was succulent, he discards Meg's tea as horrible. It is obvious that he is finding Meg's overtures more and more tiring. He suddenly resumes the more formal role of a guest, reminding her that he was only a boarder.

Stanley:(violently) Look why don't you get this place cleared up! It's a pigsty. And another thing, what about my room? It needs sweeping. It needs papering. I need a new room.

Meg:(Sensual, stroking his arm) Oh! Stan, that's a lovely room. I've had some lovely afternoons there.

Stanley is described recoiling from her in disgust. He exits quickly but returns shortly with a cigarette. Meg, as you would have seen is untiring in her pursuit of Stanley, her behaviour bordering on erotic. Her asking for a cigarette and tickling the back of his neck leads Stanley into a growing anger. Stanley's despair at his situation is clear. The niggling between Stanley and Meg now shifts to what is helpful in the exposition of whatever we can bargain to know. That the guests whom Meg refers to have a sinister implication for Stanley becomes clear from the moment she announces the possibility of their arrival. The fact that Stanley has a fear of being found out, and hunted down is clear from his unwillingness to believe Meg. He even accuses her of "saying it on purpose" Stanley immediately becomes anxious to know, who they were, what were their names and when they had met Petey. That Stanley has an inkling of who they were is betrayed by his insistence on keeping them away from the house. His nerves have failed him completely by the time he asks "why didn't they come last night, if they were coming?" This can also be taken as a temporary relief in that they hadn't come and may not come at all.

Stanley even forgets that he had refused to drink the 'muck' that Meg had offered him. His nervous questions about the tea end with his more formal questions to Meg, whom he now addresses as Mrs Boles. Stanley is by now heading for a complete breakdown, he feels physically incapacitated and all his responses to Meg end up in grunts. He groans, his trunk falls forward and his head falls into his hands.

Meg tries to manage Stanley kindly but skilfully. She reminds him of the good Piano he used to play, urging him to play it again. She tries to humour him when he is dejected and in a forlorn mood.

Mark Batty argues that Stanley's fears are founded on some episode in his past life that holds him guilty. Whatever the past, Stanley is evasive of it. From the conversation between Meg and Stanley about his past, we learn, that he had once held a career as a pianist until an aborted concert. It is coincidental that this conversation, in which we hear of how Stanley had been 'carved up' and had refused to crawl down on his bended knees, comes so close to the revelation that two mysterious men are descending upon his safe haven?

For the reader the fascination of the play lies in being intrigued without being fully enlightened. While Stanley seems to be intrigued by the new visitors, we are equally intrigued by what could have troubled him. It is the business of the author, to reveal as much as he likes, it is the business of the critic to clarify and enhance the subtlety of the intrigue which puzzles us.

Meg's fear of Stanley going away lies in the speeches that she makes.

Meg: But you wouldn't have to go away if you got a job, would you? You could play the piano on the pier"

Playing the piano is the reference point of his past success and failure. Stanley's references to his career as a pianist dwindle both comically and pathetically, from giving concerts through the world to giving them all over the country to once giving a concert. Dramatically what matters is not which, if any of these statements is true but that Stanley makes them in this sequence. Later Meg, further undercuts his status as a pianist when, after saying, she enjoyed watching him play the piano, she repeats his story about the concert and (comically) gets the details wrong. She will undercut that status, still further by giving him a toy drum as a birthday gift.

Stanley's reverie of his success in the past could be taken either as tragic for it is now lost, or as wishful thinking for a glory, he had never experienced. Nigel Alexander finds a logical continuity in Stanley's frenzied outburst with Meg and his relationship with his own parents,

"His own relationship with his parents has been uneasy. As he says of his 'great success' — the concert at Lower Edmonton. My father nearly came down to hear me. Well I dropped him a card anyway. But I don't think he could make it, NO I lost the address that was it."

He certainly does not wish to recognize himself as the son and lover of Meg's desire. The furies, which seize him do not need localization. They have always been part of his history.

Stanley has no precise answers to, Meg's questions about his new job offers. He has no specific reply about the place and payment. "At Berlin, it is a fabulous salary and all found. Then to Constantinople, Zagreb, Vladivostok, it is world tour with flying visits to what's its name. What is the name is the question. Yes, he gave a concert, once, at Lower Edmonton. It was the night of his life, they had all turned up, it was a good concert, a successful concert and Stanley was the man of the nights with a singular touch. Stanley keeps Meg spell bound by the narration of the events. They all had Champaign that night, the whole lot of them. So far Stanley's ascension suggest a rise, moving as if towards a throne, but immediately after the coronation is the fall. Stanley talks as if he had been crowned the King of Artists and then made a target of a conspiracy. After the great splendour and adoration, which his father could not see, Stanley falters. Was it because the father did not turn up, was his father's absence of any consequence? Why did Stanley in the first place say that he had sent him a card when he had lost his address? Did he even have the address or had he lost contact with him much before the concert. These questions are never answered but the enjoyment of the play is not effected by the absence of such knowledge, it is in a way enhanced.

Stanley is now confiding in Meg. He wants to share how badly he had been treated by them. He was appointed to play in another concert, he does not now remember where it was. The space is now occupied by vagueness, nothing is concrete, nothing has a name. When he went to play, the hall was closed, the place was shuttered up. It did not even have a caretaker. They wanted to subjugate Stanley, they wanted to bring him under a yoke. He is bitter about the whole thing, he would settle his score with them if only he knew who they were. He can gather that information, he can take a tip, he tells Jack, but we are not told who that Jack is.

Stanley's abrasive words to Meg, 'You're just an old piece of rock cake.' and her cracking words of fear suggest a threat. Meg's entreating words "Don't you go away, Stan. You stay here, You'll be better off. You stay with your old Meg", are words of concern as well as fear for Stanley. Stanley however, stubbornly declares that he feared neither the visitors who were supposed to arrive, nor any enemies he had made in the past.

His joke about their 'coming today', with a wheel barrow to take somebody away is weird, it diverts our attention from the men who are coming to stay, to the men who were 'looking for' somebody in particular. The suspense persists though Stanley has tried to nullify Meg's fear.

It is when Meg is preparing to leave for her shopping that Lulu comes. Lulu is a next-door neighbour and a part of the extended family of Meg and Petey. We learn that she had bought something that was kept secret. All through Mrs. Boles and Lulu's conversation, Stanley sidles to the door, trying to listen to what they say.

The conversation between Lulu and Stanley after Meg's departure is casual but not easy. Lulu's comment that the room was stuffy is answered by Stanley absurdly when he says that he had disinfected it that very morning.

Stanley continues to cheat and baffle people with small little lies. He tells Lulu that he was at the sea at half past six in the morning before his breakfast and had walked right to the headland and back is a white lie. We know that Meg had woken him in the morning much after Petey had returned. Stanley knows that Lulu does not believe him and Lulu knows that Stanley was aware of it.

Lulu's closeness with the Boles household is established in her very first appearance in the play. She tells Stanley that he needed a shave and that he needed a change. She indirectly informs us that Stanley never goes out.

"Don't you ever go out?— I mean what do you do, just sit around the house all day long— hasn't Mrs Boles got enough to do without having you under her feet all day long?"

Stanley's replies are usually witty. He has a presence of mind as well as a turn of phrase. The second retort, after ' I ——in the room this very morning, I always stand on the table—when she sweeps the floor is followed by the 'where' and 'no-where game of words between him and Lulu.

After Lulu leaves, Stanley looks himself in the mirror. His action of looking at himself as well as of washing his face are proof of his being effected by what the others say of him. Though he would have us believe that he didn't care.

It is important that McCann and Goldberg arrive when Stanley is all alone at home. It is also important that he sidles behind the door and avoids them till it really becomes unavoidable. Goldberg and McCann enter through the back door. That Goldberg is the boss is established in the first instant. Goldberg carries a briefcase while McCann carries two suitcases. Stanley has by now sneaked out. Mystery and menace increase when McCann asks Goldberg if they were in the right house for he saw no number on the gate ' I wasn't looking for a number', says Goldberg, which signifies that he is looking for something else and had found it. Goldberg's command over McCann is visible in the first conversation they make. His command is a reflection of his confidence in himself, which gives him not only the ability to lead but to dominate as well. When he asks McCann to take a seat, McCann wants him to sit first.

It is obvious from Goldberg's speech that everything is being done at his behest. It is he who has brought McCann for a holiday as he puts it. He asks McCann to relax and even prescribes a method for it," The secret is breathing. Take my tip. It's a well-known fact. Breathe in, Breathe out, take a chance, let yourself go, what can you lose?"

Goldberg has sensed McCann's uneasiness and is trying to restore confidence in him. Uncle Barney is Goldberg's ideal, with his impeccable dress, a good house at Basingstoke and social respectability he is, no doubt, his mentor. He remembers nostalgically his visits to the sea-side resorts, Brighton, Canvey Islands, Rottingan where his uncle took him every second Friday of the month, " He was an all round man says Goldberg, and, finding his words insufficient to describe the enormity of the man, adds, " he was a Cosmopolitan"

McCann's mind is wandering elsewhere; uncertain and nervous he asks Goldberg if they were in the right house. Goldberg again points out McCann's nervousness and accuses him of not reposing the earlier faith in Goldberg. McCann admits his nervousness but says that his faith in Goldberg has not wavered.

It should be noted that McCann calls Goldberg Nat and that he does not take offence to what Goldberg says. He is more of a listener, Goldberg more of talker. Goldberg knows McCann's worth and makes no bones about it. He tells McCann that he knew that McCann would overcome his nervousness once he starts the job and complements him for his ability to carry out the jobs very well.

Three things emerge in this scene. The first, that Goldberg had a son " who used to carry a few coppers, for a newspaper, probably, to see how the M.C.C was getting on overseas". He himself never carried any money; he only carried a good name as per the advice of his grand uncle Barney. The second thing we learn about Goldberg is that he has a position. The enormity and power of his position are evident in McCann's exclamation, " And What a position! We also learn that the relationship between McCann and Goldberg is one of trust. Goldberg has done a lot for McCann and McCann has proved his trustworthiness that has been their past, of trust and dependence. McCann's for getting things done, Goldberg's for the security he can provide in his position. Goldberg is not only a man of position but a true Christian as well this is only acknowledged by McCann. " Though conscious of his position, he prefers not to be flattered for his personal virtues, so he poses.

The doubt lurking in the mind of McCann comes to the surface once again, with his question, This job- no listen, this job, is it going to be like anything we've ever done before?

They have been carrying out their nefarious activities. They are a team set out to do a job. Goldberg's formal attitude and address in the nature of their present occupation lends to the whole business a seemingly professional profile.

Goldberg talks of their business, pointing out its similarities and differences with the previous ones. The power, which is malignant and arbitrary, is not defined in terms of being political or religious. It remains undefined till the end. That they operate in the manner of the mafia is implied by Goldberg's reference to the 'attitude of the subject', 'assignment carried out' and 'mission accomplished' point to a larger power group working to coerce people into their fold and 'no excessive aggravation to you or myself refers to the violent and physical assault they may have to resort to.

It is Goldberg who continues to speak when Meg enters His politeness and good manners at once establish that he who has been brought up in the manner of conformity to social norms. After exchanging pleasantries with Meg, Goldberg asks Meg what her husband did. The question sounds unnecessary since Goldberg has met Petey earlier and asked him about the possibility of staying in their boarding house.

The play reverts to the comic atmosphere of the beginning for a while. The punning of words gives us what may be called English comedy at its best.

Meg; Very pleased to meet you

Goldberg: We are pleased to meet you too

Meg: That's very nice

Goldberg: You are right. How often do you meet someone it's pleasure to meet?

McCann : Never

Goldberg: But today it's different. How are you keeping Mrs Boles? Goldberg continues talking to Meg, asking her questions about the guest who resided with them and Meg continues to answer him enthusiastically. Meg's naivety and lack of grooming are painfully visible in her description of the events regarding the concert where Stanley had played the piano. She not only mixes up the sequence of events but even manages a tip for Stanley at the end of his lock-up in the hall. Meg retains her ability to amuse and be pleased with herself at the same time.

It is during the conversation that Meg mentions that it was Stanley's birthday and though, he hadn't mentioned it (which makes her presume that he'd forgotten about it) . She would have liked him to play the piano on that day for that reason, she tells them.

Goldberg asks if they were celebrating Stanley's birthday and when Meg replies that they weren't, he suggests that they celebrate it. As is his custom, he immediately takes command of the situation. " They will give him a party, that ' he was glad that they came on the day of his birthday' and 'McCann is the life and soul of any party' are pointers towards the aggressive and menacing pressure of the duo. Goldberg's words, ' What do you think of that McCann? There's a gentleman who lives here. He's got a birthday today and he has forgotten all about it. So we are going to remind him, we're going to give him a party lead towards the final catastrophe.

Meg's child like enthusiasm for the party, where she will wear her party dress and which will cheer Stanley up is jeered at by the two men, who call her a 'tulip'. Stanley enters after Meg has shown them their room. Stanley is anxious about who the men were and insists on knowing their names and business. It is evident that he is disturbed on hearing Goldberg's name but does not make his feelings known. Ignorant of the cause of Stanley's anxiety, Meg tries to comfort and pacify him. She gives him the parcel and tells him to open it since it contained his birthday present. When she sees Stanley bewildered, she tells him that she had got that boy's drum for him because he didn't have a piano. The change in Stanley's attitude towards Meg can be perceived

in his submissive act of taking out the drum and the sticks. He even kisses Meg on the cheek without making fuss. He has lost the strength to retaliate. Stanley's initial bafflement and apprehension ultimately ends with the certainty of his doom. Its finality is expressed by the changing rhythm of the beat, which turns, from regular to erratic and uncontrolled, becoming savage and possessed at the end. Stanley knows the tightness of the sinister grip that is approaching him.

ACT II

Act II comprises two important events, the interrogation and the birthday party.

The scene opens with McCann sitting at the table tearing a newspaper sheet into five equal strips. Stanley walks in and greets McCann. He straight away goes to the kitchen and is about to leave, after drinking water, when McCann stops him. McCann wants to know Stanley's name, which he says, is Webber. Stanley's first question, as expected is 'staying here long?' Whereas McCann's first concern is to establish Stanley's identity, Stanley's is to know what their business was. McCann's way of holding Stanley back may be seen as a prelude to the laying of the siege, which will come later. McCann conveys the position in which Stanley is, by his repetition of the phrase 'laid on' meaning that Stanley is in confinement. Stanley is not allowed to move out, though no physical force is used to obstruct his way, his movement is restricted by other means. Stanley joins McCann in whistling 'the mountains of Moore' and then they resume their conversation. Stanley's feeling that he had met McCann earlier and McCann's repeated denial of it, confirms that none of them is speaking the truth. We also come to know about Stanley's past. He was born in a charming town and lived away in a quiet corner, away from the main road. It was in Maiden land, where he used to visit the Fullers tea shop for tea, and a Boots library. Stanley tells McCann that he seems to connect him with the High Street but McCann categorically denies ever having visited any of these places.

Stanley's further talk with McCann tells us two things about him. He liked solitude and that he had set up a small private business, which had made him, abandon his home and come to this place. His love for quietness comes out first in his desire to be all by himself on his birthday, "I am going out to celebrate quietly, on my own." This is about his birthday. When he mentions his plans to return home, deliberating on the happiness of living in his own home, he compulsively recounts that he used to live very quietly. It must be understood that his staying indoors was not a new thing in his life. He did nothing at home and never stirred out. "I Played records, that's about all. Everything delivered to the door".

Stanley also refers to a small business as well as a private income he had. But Stanley will give it up, it had compelled him to come down there and kept him there longer than he expected. There was no place like home he repeats adding that one could never get used to someone else's house.

It is Stanley who speaks most of the time. He regrets having changed his life, he talks haltingly of his past and tells McCann that his present looks were deceptive. He had those lines on his face because he had been drinking. He continues to talk of his looks, how he looked in the past, telling McCann that though he looked very different now, he was essentially the same man.

Stanley wants to remove the doubts, from McCann's mind about him. "You wouldn't think, to look at me really—— I mean not really, that I was the bloke to — cause any trouble—would you?"

Stanley is trying to set at rest his own misgivings and anxiety by assuring McCann that he was not the bloke they should be looking for since he was not the type to create any trouble.

McCann's constant reminder to Stanley not to touch the strips of paper lends a mystery to them. McCann has been cutting the paper into equal strips not absent-mindedly but intently as if planning something numerically, leaving no room for errors.

Stanley continues his search into McCann and Goldberg's business simultaneously trying to put them on the wrong track. Why did they choose that house, 'that was not a boarding house at all' and that 'Meg was crazy, round the bend and mad', all show Stanley's utter dismay, his helplessness and failure in misguiding his hunters.

McCann's speech shows that he fully understands Stanley's mental condition, he tells him 'you are a lot depressed for your birthday', which Stanley denies immediately. Seeing that he is nervous he even asks Stanley if he would like to steady himself. Stanley's failure to control his nerves in the face of impending danger, is now visible in his hysterical entreaties to McCann, 'There's a lot you don't know. I think someone's leading you up the garden path.'

He is nervous about what they would do. McCann's objection to Stanley's holding his arm and his action of savagely pushing Stanley away, symbolize the weaker position of Stanley, the stronger one of McCann.

Stanley's last hopes to convince McCann are quashed by Goldberg's entry. Stanley has tried to woo, convince and plead to McCann but all his endeavours have failed. He tries to explain to McCann that all those years that he lived at Basing Stoke, he never stepped outside his house. He has already told McCann that he was not the sort of man who could be involved in any unlawful activity. Stanley's tone however, betrays that there is something more to it. How does, for example, Stanley know that McCann is acting at somebody's command? Why does McCann call him Sir, and why does Stanley object to it? Stanley tries to beguile McCann and as divert his attention. Stanley resumes his commanding tone the moment he realizes that his efforts to convince McCann had failed. "Has he told you anything? Do you know what you are here for?" is followed by, 'Tell me, you needn't be afraid of me.'

Stanley tries to cajole McCann in other ways. Where did he belong, he asks, taking a clue from his name and immediately proceeds to flatter him by praising the countryside of Ireland. He had many friends there, he respected the Irish for their love of truth and sense of humour. He has already alluded in the earlier part of the conversation to the fact that McCann looked an honest man, his repetition of this now, establishes his desperate need to somehow win McCann over. He even offers to take him to a pub for a drink of 'Draught Guinness.' One must not miss his passing reference to the wonderful police-me of Ireland.

Goldberg is when he enters talking with Meg and Petey about his mother. After a brief introduction with Stanley he goes back to his train of thoughts. He recalls his adolescent days, spent in a town, which had, we are told, a canal. He remembers his walks alongside the canal with a girl, a girl with a nightingale's voice and beautiful looks. The girl was pure, she was good. Goldberg makes a comparison between the young generation of those days and the young generation of the present times. Boys and girls those days were chaste whereas those of the present times took all kinds of liberties. Promiscuity was the order of the day, temperance and abstention of the days gone by. Goldberg remembers having left the girl with just a kiss on her cheek, he permitted himself no more. The girl would have no more, either, since she was pure and a Sunday School teacher, she was, too.

The kiss on the girl's cheek had given Goldberg such pure joy, that he later not only tipped his hat to the toddlers, but also helped a couple of stray dogs. Compassion and love come to you naturally when you are happy and elated. Goldberg also remembers the beauty of the falling sun behind the dog stadium and compares it with the urban picture of the sun falling behind the town hall in Carrigmecross. He recalls how his mother used to call him for food, the nicest piece of gefilte fish, she wanted her 'Simey' to eat it before it got cold. McCann's pointing out that his name, he thought was Nat does not ruffle Goldberg; he brushes McCann aside by a simple explanation that his mother called him so. Petey's response, as usual is simple, we all remember our childhood, he says. Goldberg's special interest in Stanley's childhood has led to fanciful speculations. Though the things mentioned are routine, hot water bottle and hot milk etc, they have been assigned deeper meaning by the critics.

Petey suddenly says that he will not be able to attend the party since it was his chess-night. Goldberg promises to save some drink for him and asks him to come back in time for the party, he asks him to beat his opponent and be done with the game.

Stanley and Goldberg are in the next scene left alone, McCann having gone to bring the bottles of drink.

Stanley is nastier to Goldberg than he was to McCann. He asks Goldberg to vacate the room since it was

already booked. Goldberg ignores him and proceeding to deliver another of his speeches, important for the symbolic meaning of the word ' birthday'. He tries to convey what birth means to him, enlarging upon its different meaning to different people. He found himself cheerful in the mornings when the birds chirped, the sun shone, the sound of the lawnmower, the church bells was welcome. The morning is for him another birth.

What Goldberg wishes to convey in his description of the men who don't get up in the morning, can be interpreted in many ways. Is he suggesting that Stanley does not want to wake up to reality, to be born or simply hinting at his own sunny view of birth against theirs, which is gloomy and morose? They complained that the mornings were not cheerful when you got up, your skin was crabby, you needed a shave, your eyes were full of muck, your nose was clogged up. Goldberg continues to describe other things, which are equally repelling. Men are at the time of the morning, like a corpse, waiting to be washed.

Is Stanley, too, a dirty corpse, waiting to be washed. Is he disparaging Stanley's unshaven, unkempt looks, hinting that he needed a over-hauling?

McCann's return with the bottles and Goldberg's undisturbed coolness, further infuriate Stanley. He tells them that the house was unlicensed for liquor and that he would not allow them to take advantage of Mr. And Mrs. Boles. He persists in his defence of himself, telling them that there was nothing for them in that house from any angle and that as for him they were just a dirty joke, they did not matter to him.

Stanley's defiance of them and his effort to gain an advantageous position are of no avail. Stanley is first politely asked to sit down, when he refuses, McCann and Goldberg become a little stern till he is finally coerced by McCann to sit. Their attitude is slowly turning more threatening, infecting the audience with Stanley's anxiety. A point of interest, in this novel method of character portrayal by Pinter is the concern it can generate for the non-hero protagonist, in spite of all his failings. We neither trust, nor adore Stanley and yet hate to see him harmed. We would like to see him sail through safely.

Stanley does not lie low in front of Goldberg and McCann. He dares them when they accost him and does not hesitate to spurn Goldberg's authority when Goldberg tries to dictate terms to him. Stanley tries all methods to deflate and exasperate them. But Goldberg and McCann are made of sterner stuff, they have come to do a job and use all possible tactics, soft and harsh to subdue Stanley.

Stanley's trial starts on the most chimerical grounds. He is accused of getting on everybody's wick; he is told that he had treated the young lady Lulu like a leper. An explanation is sought for his forcing Petey to go out to play chess and for driving the old lady that is Meg, up her cork.

Absurd questions, like where had he gone yesterday and the day before? What did he wear last week? And where did he keep his suits? are meant to break his bravura and weaken his hold on himself.

The comedy slowly turns into a sort of crime thriller. Why did Stanley leave their organisation? Goldberg's mention of the old mum and a personal hurt suggest that Goldberg could have known Stanley more closely or could even be a blood relation. But Stanley's replies suggest that he hardly cared. After a silly exchange of dialogue, meant to retain the absurd nature of the play. The dialogue comprised of very short sentences is in the nature of a chase, Stanley is being hunted and the words are being thrown as darts to injure and incapacitate him.

Stanley is accused of killing his wife, then of running away from the wedding itself. The first part of the conversation looks like a hide and seek game of words:

Goldberg: Where did you come from?

Stanley: Somewhere else

Goldberg: Why did you come here?

Stanley: My feet hurt

Goldberg: Why did you stay?

Stanley: I had a headache

Goldberg: Did you take anything for it?

Stanley: Yes

Goldberg: What?

Stanley: Fruit Salts

Goldberg: Enos or Andrews?

Stanley: En-AN—

Goldberg: Did you stir properly? Did they fuzz?

Stanley: Now-now, wait you

Goldberg: Did they fuzz? Did they fuzz or didn't they fuzz?

The entire process of interrogation closes with the verdict that Stanley had betrayed the organisation. The last question to establish that Stanley was their man is asked by Goldberg again, What could Stanley see without his glasses, and Stanley is at once caught, when his glasses are taken away by McCann.

There are other questions to evoke memories and establish the places where Stanley had links. Lyon's Corner house at Marble Arch is the place where Stanley had washed the last cup on Christmas before last and that his old mom was at the sanatorium.

Why did Stanley leave the girl he was going to marry in the lurch, why did he not turn up at the Church? Goldberg and Stanley try to pin Stanley down with their words. Stanley is targeted by words that have the anaesthetic deadliness of putting his will to sleep. They are meant to numb his sensory nerves, to drowse him, to deprive him of all power of resistance.

Why did Stanley change his name? And Stanley's answer is not supposed to humour them. He had changed his name because he had forgotten the other one, the reply is cheeky, his new name is Joe Soap he tells them whereupon Goldberg tells him that he stinks of sin.

The most crucial question asked is whether Stanley recognized 'the external force' qualifying the external force with 'responsible for you', 'suffering for you'. Stanley's breakdown, conscientiously worked out by Goldberg and McCann by bogging him down not only by absurd puzzling suppositions but also asking him for solutions to problems that are insolvable. The one about necessity and possibility is one such question menacing and mind-boggling, connected with it is the weird question whether number 846 was possible or necessary or both.

McCann is employed, not only to restrain and compel people to toe Goldberg's line but also to ratify Goldberg's judgement, not only to uphold his verdict but also to implement it. Goldberg's final proclamation of what he has been trying to affirm so far comes out in his words. 'Right! We are right! And you are wrong, Webber, all along the line. McCann seconds it in the fashion of a closing note, 'all along the line.'

The blame on Stanley becomes now more moral in nature; he is a mother defiler a contaminator of womankind and a lecher. He will have to pay for this. The questions that follow make Stanley more and more nervous till he becomes almost incoherent. The tirade of questions: Why don't you pay the rent? Why do you pick your nose and what's your trade? Culminate into quicker and more frenzied ones. They ask him questions about history, cricket and hearsays and end up with the proverbial enigma whether chicken came first or the egg.

Goldberg and McCann take advantage of Stanley's declining sensibility and nerves with exclamations of 'he doesn't understand! He doesn't understand! He was a traitor to the cloth (the one he uses for his pyjamas) and that he had verminated the sheet of his birth (pointing towards the sin of incest). Betrayal of the country, desertion or killing of wife, living sinfully with women are some of the charges for which Stanley should be punished. Stanley's helplessness signifies the helplessness of man, his utter loss, and dire need of support and a way out. They will stick a needle in his eye, they will sterilize him, they will annihilate him. They will make Stanley's race extinct by sterilizing him.

Stanley's sudden outburst when he kicks Goldberg in the stomach is followed by the scene, where Stanley is running with a chair on his head to protect himself with McCann chasing him. Goldberg is however cool as ever. It is only after they have been alerted by a loud drumbeat that they put their chairs down and things look normal when Meg arrives. Meg's immaturity continues to make her the butt of ridicule. She makes a fool of herself by asking McCann how she looked in her party dress. Her enthusiasm for the party also sounds disproportionate and out of place for her age. Goldberg's talk to Meg speaks of his culture; he praises her without any genuine feeling. He is equally polite to Petey and Lulu and is impolite even to Stanley only where it becomes necessary and unavoidable. Goldberg's tomfoolery in praising Meg reflects his lack of sincerity. Meg was, to begin with a tulip, now she is a gladioli. Meg's appetite for praise is amazing and Goldberg with his experience can see it at once.

Human love of play and willingness to be cheated by the self created illusions used by Goldberg to exploit Meg as well as Lulu in the party. He asks for all the lights to be switched off and McCann to light his torch for a dream like effect.

Goldberg has the power to mesmerize with his kindly words and a kindly voice that is often only a hoax. He can assure people and help them gain confidence. He persuades Meg to propose the toast and finding her shaky he asks her to say what came from her heart. He prevails upon her to express her real feelings when she looks at Stanley. Goldberg even manages the stage, before Meg begins her speech he asks McCann to shine the light not on Meg, but the birthday boy.

Meg's speech though simple in words tells us not only about her feelings for Stanley but also reveals herself as a woman. Since the speech has not been contemplated, 'the spontaneous overflow of feelings' is not only generous but genuine as well. She talks of her long association with Stanley. Her praise of him is candid, 'he is a good boy, although sometimes he is bad'. Her love of Stanley is undivided and she knows Stanley more than anybody else in the world, though Stanley does not believe it. She declares her unconditional love for him; she could do anything for him. Meg's breaking into sobs with the emotion of having Stanley there on his birthday, show how tender her feelings for him are.

She expresses her happiness that all good people (Goldberg and McCann) were there that night, which seems ironical in the light of what happens later.

Lulu's joining the party adds exuberance and puck to it. Stanley is made to sit while Goldberg makes another speech on the value of 'true feeling' in man's life. He regrets the passing away of an age when love, bonhomie and affection were expressed without shame or inhibition. He expresses his happiness at having heard Meg's toast to Stanley, which was rare in today's world for its sincerity and depth of feeling. He was glad to see love surviving, in some hidden corners and makes another speech about the things he valued in life. Goldberg believed in the quality of life not its size, says he. He believed in living life close to all the things that nature offers, enjoying the simple pleasures of man's work and labour. A good laugh, a day's fishing and a bit of gardening are some of the recreations he loved. He had even made a greenhouse with his own hands, with his own sweat and the strength of will power. Goldberg suddenly switches over to the other pleasures of life in the city. Co-incidental but deeply related to the plot of the play. Goldberg mentions the same places that Stanley had earlier mentioned to McCann. He had even asked him if he knew these places. Tea in Fullers and Boots Library are the two places that Stanley had mentioned. There mention by Goldberg raise doubts about Stanley's credentials, but things are left here, since Goldberg starts to talk of Meg's speech gain, the speech, which had touched his heart by its true sentiment.

Goldberg is overwhelmed by Meg's total devotion to Stanley and congratulates Stanley for the same. Lulu turns her attention to Goldberg, who she says, had made a wonderful speech. Meg is back to Stanley kissing and patronizing him.

While Lulu continues to compliment Goldberg on his oratory and asks him where he had learnt that art, Goldberg tells them that he had, for the first time spoken at the Ethical hall in Bayswater and the topic of his speech was 'The necessary and the possible'. The reader would recollect that Goldberg has asked Stanley,

earlier during his cross-examination the same question about 'Necessary and Possible'.

Lulu's paired herself with Goldberg, Goldberg has paired himself with her. Meg is seen drinking with McCann. What follows can best be described as a drunken revelry, short of an orgy by a hair's breadth. The overtures between Meg and McCann and Lulu and Goldberg continue at the same time. Lulu sits on Goldberg's lap after Goldberg has complimented her for being a bouncy girl. She could bounce up to the ceiling, Lulu had said, and she does bounce up to the ceiling indeed. That they are all in an inebriated state is obvious from their talk as well as the abandonment with which they behave; Lulu's physical proximity to Goldberg is suggested by Goldberg's remark, 'Mind how you go, you're cracking a rib'. Lulu is enraptured, she reciprocates Goldberg's compliment that there was a lot in her eyes with the same compliment. She expresses her happiness on Goldberg's having come out of the blue and within moments of her meeting him, surrenders herself to him, reposing all her faith in him.

To Lulu's questions whether he had a wife his answer is fabricated with the same skill as his earlier story about his mother. The version has changed slightly; instead of the canal, it is the park and the young girl he had kissed in the first episode is missing. He doesn't forget to mention the little boys and girls also making it clear that he made no distinction between them. Though his name is Nat, his wife used to call him 'Simey' too. She was also particular about serving the nicest food to him and urged him to eat it before it got cold. Lulu's question to Goldberg whether he knew her when she was a girl, also raises the question of identity crisis and conscious associations, searching for telepathy.

The loss of identity is a consequence of the loss of roots. Meg talks of her father, it is he who had given her that beautiful dress that she wore, he had also promised to take her to Ireland, but had ultimately gone by himself. Meg continues to talk of her father and Ireland, Lulu continues to give herself up to Goldberg.

The conversation between Meg and McCann now is fully turned to childhood memories. McCann had one night played with the boys, singing and dancing all night. The retreat into childhood is a refuge into the peace and comfort of the past, into the world of make belief. Half of the things, we hear, are either exaggerated or fully concocted.

Meg had a pink room, she recalls, with pink curtains and a pink carpet. She had musical boxes all over the room. Her father being a doctor, she never suffered any ailments. She had little brothers and sisters in other rooms, all different colours. Meg's world of magic is not yet complete. She even had a nanny who sang songs to her. It is apparent that they are all sozzled by now. Meg tells McCann that he has a lovely voice, when he is asked by Goldberg to give them a love song he starts singing about the death of Paddy. Immediately reminded by Goldberg that he was supposed to give them a love song, he starts to sing what looks like a folk song about the lovers. Paddy Reilly and Bally-James- Duff. A reference is made to the Garden of Eden in the beginning of the song.

It is after the song that Lulu suddenly declares that she would like to play a game. It is by consensus that they play the Blind man's bluff. It is decided that Meg will play 'blind' first of all when McCann expresses his ignorance of the game Lulu explains it to him. Goldberg is seen fondling Lulu in the course of the game and Meg touching McCann.

The next turn to be blind is that of McCann: the double game of Blind man's bluff and love between the characters continues to be played.

McCann's actions during Stanley's turn to play the blind man are of importance to the progress of the play. McCann not only breaks his glasses, but also places the drum in his way. Stanley walks into the drum and stumbles over with his foot caught in it. Stanley walks towards Meg and tries to strangle her. He then tries to vitiate Lulu. The utter confusion with the lights out and McCann's torch lost is appropriated by Stanley to settle his score with the women at least. He hates there self-indulging with men as well as with drinks. It is also an indication of Stanley's pent up frustration about Meg's indulgent attitude towards him.

Stanley is found bending over Lulu whom he has put on the table. When discovered in the light of the torch by McCann and Goldberg, he just giggles. As McCann and Goldberg converge upon him his giggles grow louder.

ACT III

The next morning, Petey enters, as usual, with a newspaper. Meg's question from the hatch shows that she was expecting Stanley and not Petey. On realizing that it is Petey and not Stanley, she immediately informs him that she had run out of cornflakes and had nothing else for breakfast. She pours out some tea for Petey also telling him that the two gentlemen had the last of the fry and that she was going out shopping to get him something nice. She complains of a splitting headache whereupon Petey tells her that she had slept like a log.

Meg's splitting headache and her having forgotten that the drum got broken in the party are mentioned to highlight the fact that, she was on the previous night, so sozzled that she did not notice it.

The content of Meg's speech later, which though chatty, is informative; reveals the danger to Stanley's position, though she herself does not realize the implication of what she had seen.

Meg, had in the morning, in her customary way, taken a cup of tea for Stanley but the door was opened by McCann instead of Stanley, who said that he had already made Stanley a cup of tea. She is surprised that they were up and talking for it was unusual for Stanley to be up so early. She finds it strange and the oddity of the situation makes her slightly uneasy. Did Stanley know them, may be he did, Stanley had many friends and it was therefore not surprising that he should have known Goldberg and McCann. She tries to understand the happenings of the morning when Goldberg and McCann had later come down for breakfast. Why had Stanley stayed back, she, however, satisfies herself by concluding that he must have gone back to sleep.

Meg's fears about the wheelbarrow are also laid to rest when Petey tells her that there was no wheelbarrow in the car parked outside their house and that the car belonged to Goldberg. Her fear of the wheelbarrow must be connected with Stanley teasing her earlier that a wheelbarrow was coming to take her away. Reassured, she is about to leave for shopping, when she hears the sound of a door being slammed upstairs and stops, thinking that Stanley was coming down, she immediately starts worrying about his breakfast, since she had no cornflakes left. Meg is surprised to see Goldberg. Goldberg's ironical comments bring out his opinion about Stanley's character as well as the firmness of his resolution. When Meg asks if Stanley was coming down, his reply is by implication a verdict on Stanley's fate.

Goldberg: Down? Of course he's coming down. On a lovely sunny day like this he shouldn't come down? He'll be up and about in next to no time.

Goldberg's comment that Stanley should not be down and his earlier remark that Stanley was different from him in build only, clearly show that Goldberg considered Stanley no better than himself.

Meg is charmed now by Goldberg's car. She leaves for shopping with slight uncertainty, worried about Stanley's breakfast.

Petey asks about Stanley's condition, which Goldberg does not specify as good or bad. He again makes one of his speeches about why he would not like to comment about Stanley's condition, he thought, his diagnosis shall not be authentic since he had no degrees. We learn from him that Stanley was being attended on, by Dermot, since he was suffering from a nervous breakdown.

To Petey's question as to what had caused that sudden nervous breakdown, Goldberg replies in a judicious manner, which he is adept at whereas sometimes it was slow, in other cases, the nervous breakdown came suddenly, he says. He meaningfully refers, to Stanley, as one of those people in whose case nervous breakdown was a foregone conclusion.

The happenings of the previous night have a mysterious and abstruse connotation for Petey. He found on reaching his house that all the lights were out which was strange. Stranger still was the fact that the lights come back the moment he put a shilling in the slot. Goldberg brushed aside the whole thing as simply a fuse.

Goldberg's discomfiture at Petey's having met Dermot, the previous night, is natural since he had not expected this. Petey gets growingly concerned about Stanley and says that he would have to call a doctor if Stanley did not recover by the afternoon. He is however, told by McCann that all care had been taken and that he needn't worry about Stanley.

That Stanley had been 'treated' by him, McCann reported 'till he stopped all that—— talking a while ago he was absolutely quiet now' casts a kind of morbidity in the atmosphere; things that were grotesque have now become totally gruesome.

It is also not disclosed who Dermot is, Petey has met him but no one else has, he remains a shadow of the demonic power, never discovered, never talked about.

The suitcases are ready and Goldberg is waiting for a signal from McCann. He asks him whether Stanley was ready and is told to go and see for himself. After a while McCann tells Goldberg that he had given back Stanley's glasses. Goldberg asks him whether Stanley was happy to get them back. Goldberg and McCann are able to deceive Petey, promising him that if Stanley does not recover they will take him to Monty.

Petey has not as yet fully realized their intentions. Goldberg wants him out of their way. Goldberg tells Petey that they would not be able to return for lunch and coaxes him to return to the beach.

Goldberg and McCann are left to themselves after Petey leaves. Goldberg is now in a more serious mood. That he is disturbed is visible, he not only scolds McCann for his habit of tearing the paper into strips but also for his habit of asking too many aggravating questions.

Goldberg's uneasiness, in the operation of the present 'thing', as he calls it, is confessed by him. He himself finds it unusual that he should feel 'knocked out', since it was uncommon for him to lose his composure.

Goldberg's conversation with McCann reveals them in a new light. McCann wants to know Goldberg's reality and picks on his name 'Simey', to find the truth. Goldberg warns him not to call him by that name and reacts violently to McCann's going up, Does the fact that he doesn't want any more pressure on Stanley mean that Goldberg is emotionally disturbed because he doesn't want Stanley to suffer?

His speech to McCann, is on his views on life, again and the principles he has lived by. He has, as he says, 'followed the line.' Goldberg talks of his parents time and again. Goldberg was a self made man, at school, he was top in all the subjects, he learnt everything by heart. More importantly he has kept himself fit as a fiddle. Goldberg recalls what his father told him before he died. His father, it may be noted, called him not Simey but Benny. His father taught him some precepts. 'Forgive and let live' was the first maxim. Going home to the wife the next. Goldberg's father said that he had lived his entire life in the service of others, he had asked Goldberg to do his duty and make no observations. He had also asked him to look after the lowlives. The custom of wishing 'good morning' to the neighbours is important too; the most important however, is keeping the family together. The family is the rock, the ore of one's life and should never be neglected. The dispersal of Goldberg's thoughts into the past trying to trace the lineage of his father, his father's father and finally the great-grand-granny show his loss of grip over his thoughts. Goldberg's thoughts sometimes run away with him, taking the reigns of his mind into their hands. He loses control over himself, failing to steer himself, but regains his control after a short silence. He repeats what he had said to begin his speech, that he had always been as fit as a fiddle. He expressly stresses the importance of his motto, 'work hard and play hard— and respect thy father and they mother.'

Goldberg's earlier repetition of 'because I believe that the world——', with his loosening grip over himself, records the change of his composure and mood, from 'vacant', to 'desperate', to 'lost.'

The situation is ironical since Goldberg, immediately after he had declared himself fit as a fiddle, sits, breathless and asks McCann to blow into his mouth to revive him.

It is when McCann kneels down to do this and Goldberg regains himself that Lulu enters. McCann shrewdly leaves them alone saying that he will give them, just five minutes.

Goldberg and Lulu are thereafter, left alone. They accuse each other, each one saying that they had been taken in by the other.' Lulu blames him for ravishing her innocence. She discloses that he had walked into her room at night, with his briefcase, with doubtful intentions. Goldberg tells her through his remarks that she was not innocent either. Pinter's use of words for repartee are at best seen in the conversation between Goldberg and Lulu:

Goldberg: A girl like you, at your age, at your time of health, and you don't take to games?

Lulu: You're very smart

Goldberg: Anyway, who says you don't take to them

Lulu; Do you think I'm like all other girls?

Goldberg: Are all the other girls like that too?

Lulu's accusation that Goldberg had used her are immediately refuted by Goldberg by his question 'who used who?' Lulu also tells him that a boy 'Eddie' was her first love, forgetting to say that he was the last one too. Her complaint, by its content in itself becomes comic and the words used to register it are hilarious indeed.

"You quenched your ugly thirst. You taught me things a girl shouldn't know before she's been married at least three times." Goldberg's calling her Schumulu and Lullalu shows an attitude of scorn. McCann's hunt of Lulu and his reminding us of their erst-while interrogation of Stanley. McCann's affliction of Lulu, his effort to pin her down seems all the more brutal in light of the fact that McCann has been unfrocked only six months ago. The implications of his being attached to the Church are important to understand Pinter's opinion of the Church and the Clergy. His dismissal of Lulu on the grounds that her sort, spend 'too much time in bed', is a part of the morality that everybody professes but nobody follows. He justifies Goldberg's behaviour since Lulu had herself wanted it.

McCann intercepts Lulu and begins to terrorize her with a downpour of questions, which, Lulu fails to understand in the beginning but realizing what is going on, she walks out.

Stanley is now dressed in a dark well-cut suit and white collar. He is clean-shaven and holds his broken glasses in his hand. Goldberg and McCann share their satisfaction at the change they have brought about in Stanley. He looks not only much better, but is 'A New man.'

The last scene shows Stanley, completely subdued. He shows no reaction to Goldberg and McCann's 'relish' in their victory of him. Their savage tomfoolery, and celebration of Stanley's crushed spirit brings out the demonic nature of their pursuit to the full. Their joy of their attack on Stanley is awfully frightening to the reader.

They tell Stanley that they were his saviours, his ailments being many, he was cockeyed, he was in a rut, he had gone from bad to worse. He looked anaemic, he looked rheumatic, he was myopic and epileptic. They had saved him from a worst fate by saving him from falling over the edge.

They had a method to recover him, a place for his convalescence and a change of climate. They would give him not only a new pair of glasses but season tickets and discount on inflammable goods. They will, in short, give him proper care and treatment. The advantages and perks they promise him are the perks generally associated with the life of a successful man. 'Club Bar' reserved table, a free pass. Care will be taken of his spiritual as well as physical health. They will provide him a skipping rope, and long walks; they will make him kneel on the kneeling days. Stanley will with all the necessities and accessories provided, be integrated in society. He will conform to the physical, socio-economical and religious pattern of society. He will be their pride.

They complete the de-orientation of Stanley by the failure of control over his body as well as his mind. This is indicated by his response to Goldberg's and McCann's last questions. Unable to speak, he only takes out incoherent sounds, he clenches and unclenches his hands till they start to tremble.

Stanley is by the end completely paralysed. He is now according to Goldberg and McCann fit to be taken away.

By the time Petey enters the house, Stanley has lost all his power of defence. He is now, for all purposes a dummy, a deaf and dumb dummy in the hands of Goldberg and McCann, who will cast him in their own mould.

Petey's protests are not heeded by them and there is a threat in Goldberg's words to Petey that if he tried to deter them he might be taken along with Stanley.

Petey does not have the strength to fight them but will not see Stanley succumb. His final words to Stanley are, "Stan, don't let them tell you what to do."

The end of the play has raised many questions and controversies. Meg does not know that Stanley had been taken away. She is not told by Petey either. Meg's joy of the last night's party sounds jarring in the all-pervading evil, which she is unconscious of.

Word Meanings and Important References

1.	Hatch	A small window like opening in the kitchen for service
2.	Darn	Mend, socks etc
3.	Succulent	Juicy, thick and fleshy
4.	Pigsty	Enclosure for pigs
5.	Carve up	Divide, crush
6.	Crawl down on bended knees	To admit defeat, to ask for forgiveness
7.	Piece of rock cake	Unmoved by anything
8.	Wheelbarrow	A single wheel cart used for carrying farm goods
9.	Bit of a washout	Pale, exhausted
10.	Reminiscent	Evocative, suggestive of the past
11.	Regular as clock work	Very regular in habits, following a routine
12.	Sidle through	Slither, slip, sneak
13.	Bright, Canway Islands, Rottingdan	Names of places in England
14.	Impeccable	Faultless, flawless
15.	Cosmopolitan	Free from National Prejudices
16.	Word of a gentleman	A respectable, honourable man's promise
17.	Copper	A metal used for currency
18.	Cool as a whistle	Imperturbable, one who doesn't get disturbed
19.	Recapitulate	Repeat, glorify, summarize
20.	Approximate	Estimate
21.	Excessive aggravation	Make worse, denoting an extreme form of offence, excessive suffering, provocation, more than one can bear.
22.	Lead up the garden path	Put on the wrong track, mislead
23.	Flabbergasted	Surprised, stunned, confounded
24.	Sunday School Teacher	Teacher teaching at Sunday school, a school for religious instruction of children of Christian families

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| 25. | Lawnmower | Mower, cutter for grass in the lawn |
| 26. | Isn't your cup of Tea | Doesn't suit your taste/ ability |
| 27. | Getting on everybody's wick | Exasperating others |
| 28. | Off her conk | Lost her balance |
| 29. | That's black and Tan fact | Instead of black and white McCann uses the Expression to convey that there is no white in his Dictionary, there is little difference in truth and falsehood. |
| 30. | You're a fake | Place for healing and recovery |
| 31. | Skeddadled | Ran away |
| 32. | Lechery leading you | Lewdness and lust leading you |
| 33. | Contaminate | To defile or corrupt women woman kind |
| 34. | Enough to scuttle a liner | Sink and destroy, a shop here referring to the effect of drinks |
| 35. | Propose the toast | Drink in someone's honour |
| 36. | Bonhomie | Easy good nature |
| 37. | Constitutional | Walk for health |
| 38. | Fenian Men | Irish men, also used for the Irish who rose in revolt against the English. |
| 39. | Blind Man's Bluff | A game in which one person's eyes are tied up with a cloth. |
| 40. | A foregone conclusion | Something which is evident before hand. |
| 41. | Knocked out | Unconscious or exhausted |
| 42. | Cockeyed | A squinting eye. |
| 43. | Re-oriented | Given a new personality, changed for good |
| 44. | Mensch | Person of integrity and humour |
| 45. | Belle of the Ball | The most sought after and admired woman in a dance. |
| 46. | Care-taker | One who takes care of the upkeep of lodging, school Buildings or any other institution. |
| 47. | Tulip | A flower |
| 48. | Erratic | Aberrant, abnormal, eccentric, inconsistent. |
| 49. | Dismay | Disconcerts, disappoint, dispirit. |
| 50. | Maiden-head | Virginity |
| 51. | Thriving Community | Prosperous group of people belonging to the same caste, city, region or religion. |
| 52. | Bracing | invigorating. |

Pinter's Concerns

When The Encore Publishing Company produced the first edition of "The Birthday Party" in 1959 it advertised it as 'not only pungently funny and disquietingly macabre but rich with concern about the state of our society. The last observation seems contrary to Pinter's own statement in the 1950s that he was not a committed writer, in the usual sense of the word, either religiously or politically.

The point that Pinter was trying to make is that he was not a didactic writer per se. His plays of 1980s and 1990s look like some active human right campaigns and his concern for the individual, paralysed by custom and society, in its dogmatic pursuit of aborting any body who preferred not to be an ally. Stanley in the Birthday Party is one such case. Pinter's earlier repudiation of his concern with social and political situation must be considered in conjunction with the fact that Pinter's plays were not dialectical and that his characters and the life they lived was more important to him than the indication of dogmas and precepts.

Pinter is neither a messenger nor a moralist. But he has his own concerns. Mark Betty sees Pinter's concerns as humanitarian concerns. Pinter is, he says, concerned with the relationship between the State and the individual and how the self-perpetuating concerns of the former often obscure and override the dignifying rights of the latter. He is interested in protesting against the hypocrisy and compliancy of those who wield power against those ill equipped to respond and is concerned dramatically to demonstrate how language is very often abused to mask political deviousness and over power and demonise the under dog. Thematically, these matters form the kernel of many of Pinter's Plays from both his early and later writings. Starting with "The Birthday Party" it is possible to trace these concerns and examine their significance in the whole of Pinter's "Oeuvre".

In "The Birthday Party", it is the unchecked authority represented in Goldberg and McCann, which represses individuality represented by Stanley. They not only sneer at him but also punish him for his independence of them, which to them, is no less sedition.

John Slokes examines Pinter's commitment in the in the light of his alertness to the times he lived in, to his relations, as a man to events of his, to the matters of class race, gender and sexuality. This John Sloes argues was achieved by Pinter not so much by overt political argument 'propaganda, as by formal innovation, by interventions and disruptions, the way in which the plays continually turn the object of social disquiet into matter of subjective concern.... The urban grid is revealed as the squared hoard of some mysterious power-playing game.'

Pinter is, in his 'Amoral Vacuum' concerned with the human condition as it is today. Whereas it is futile to look for a meaning in his plays, it is equally difficult to ignore the engaging experiences, the emotional experiences and the resulting intellectual response.

Pinter's art form does not allow for direct and overt didacticism, Pinter's plays express moments of existence, of human conduct and in that lies their strength, we take the message through he does not give one, at least explicitly.

Placing Pinter

The difficulties in placing Pinter, in any tradition, old or new arise because if we were to write a simple paragraph on the salient features of Pinter's plays, they would be such that a recognizable pattern, hitherto known to us will not be found in them, what emerges in Pinter for example in The Birthday Party by way of characterization and plot is fuzzy and vague in spite of the concrete, house, food, neighbourhood, newspaper and a job on the deck. Pinter places a group of symbolic unit in a logical expression; in this sense, he is parenthetical.

The post-war drama was highly restyled; the plays of Beckett, Harold and Brecht were stirring up debates about the function of drama in the post-war era. Mark Batty traces the different trends followed by the playwrights and tries to ascertain the position of Pinter. He says: "Pinter's earlier repudiation of any social framework to his writing ought to be considered in the context of the developments of the European stage in the middle of the century, in a time when Brecht's writings and touring were stirring up debates about the function of our post-war drama. Playwrights were increasingly expected to come down either on the side of the new dialectical, political drama that sought to dissect historical and sociological models, or on the side of the avant-garde, those who would conjure allegories of the human condition. The argument was most notably illustrated in Britain by series of open letters exchanged between the French 'absurdist' writer Eugene Ionesco and his harshest critic Kenneth Tynan in the pages of the Observer in 1958. Pinter felt comfortable in neither

camp. He could never simply be accused of having placed characters in metaphysical isolation and as Marc Silverstein points out, many of his early plays 'address themselves [...] to the vicissitudes of living within a specific cultural order rather than an incomprehensible universe'. Equally he was certainly not going to allow specific political interpretation to dilute and diminish the qualities of his own theatrically, which as we have seen relied upon the qualities of uncertainty and ambiguity to achieve its communication. In many ways this was not to change when he came to write his most potent protest plays in the 1980s and 1990s, and a lack of specificity in these will be seen to serve a similar purpose."

It is terms of how Pinter's plays operate rather than what they signify that the best criticism has developed. Peter Davison, John Russel Brown and Bernard Dukore, in particular, have asked how the plays work as drama. In an original approach and entertaining essay, first delivered as a lecture, Peter Davison sees a continuity in Pinter and Beckett from the English Music Hall tradition. Pinter's theatricality is based on the conventions of popular entertainment as much as Shakespeare's theatre was indebted to the popular traditions of medieval drama.

Pinter's work has been most easily understood by comic playwright and farceurs. Writers such as Noel Coward, Joe Orton and Simon Gray understood Pinter's dramatic project most immediately and instinctively. Similarly critics have tended to group Pinter with comic playwrights- witness Kenneth Tynan's famous assessment that the playwrights of his time fell into two categories: 'the hairy men- heated, embattled, socially committed playwrights, like John Osborne, John Arden, and Arnold Wesker' and 'the smooth men- cool, apolitical stylists, like Harold Pinter, the late Joe Orton, Christopher Hampton, Alan Ayckbourn, Simon Gray and Stoppard'.

Certainly Pinter's high-level comedic technique put him on par with the greatest comic writers. The early plays are often deliberately funny; many of the exchanges between the characters are structured with the strutting rhythm of polished comedy routines.

Petey: Didn't you take him up his cup of tea?

Meg: I always take him up his cup of tea. But that was a long time ago.

Petey: Did he drink it?

Meg: I made him I stood there till he did. I am going to call him. (she goes to the door) Stan! Stanny! (she listens) Stan! I'm coming up to fetch you! I am going to count three! One! Two! Three! I'm coming up to get you. (she exits and goes upstairs, In a moment, shouts from Stanley, wild laughter from Meg. Petey takes his plate to the hatch. Shouts. Laughter. Petey sits on the table. Silence. She returns) he's coming down. (She is panting and arranges her hair). I told him that if didn't hurry up he'd get no breakfast.

Bernard Dukore, meanwhile, in his first book on Pinter, preferred the term 'tragicomedy', from the tag 'comedy of menace' given by him. The search of such critical tags is fraught with danger, and Irving Wardle was soon to retract. It was too late the 'comedy of Menace' has become part of Pinter's critical heritage even though it is an aspect from which Pinter in his later plays has tried to escape, without invalidating the earlier work:

It was called "Comedy Of Menace" quite a long time ago. I never stuck categories on myself, or on any of us. But if I understand the word menace to mean as certain elements that I employed in the past in the shape of a particular play, then I don't think that it is worthy of much more exploration. After the 'Homecoming' I tried writing- odds and ends- and failed for sometime. ... No I am not at all interested in 'threatening behaviour' any more, although I don't think this makes plays like 'The Homecoming' and 'The Birthday Party' invalid. But you are always stuck. You're stuck as a writer.

At least Wardle's label in relation to these early plays did credit to the comic side of the drama.

Finding an echo in Pinter of Beckett, for his portrayal of human condition and of man's failure to make sense out of an erratic world that defies prediction. Martin Esslin named him as an author of "The Theatre of the

Absurd". He placed Pinter alongside Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco, who sought 'to make man aware of the ultimate realities of his condition, to shock him out of his existence that has become trite, mechanical, complacent and deprived of the dignity that comes of awareness. He viewed Pinter's characters as being: In the process of their essential adjustment to the world, at the point when they have to solve their basic problem- whether they will be able to confront or shall come to terms with their dilemma

Certainly, it is the individuals' confrontation with external forces, the conditions which they attempt to resist, that governs the dramatic energies of Pinter's early plays, and it is a measure of their worth as pieces of theatre that these confrontations successfully convey both existential and implicitly political suggestion. When Irving Wardle famously applied the term 'comedy of menace' to Pinter's works, it was to denote this double-edged capacity to disturb that Pinter had crafted, through the flippant application of dark humour to situations in which characters were forced to face an implacable destiny:

Destiny handled in this way- not as an austere exercise in classicism, but as an incurable disease which one forgets about most of the time and whose lethal reminders may take the form of a joke- is an apt dramatic motif for an age of conditioned behaviour in which orthodox man is a willing collaborator in his own destruction.

While Pinter refuses to specify the reasons why his characters take the sides they do, other writers influenced by Pinter have been more than happy to fill in the gaps. Pinter's comedy of menace can be seen to have inspired a generation of black comedy written by playwrights who were willing to provide the explanations Pinter omits. Black comedy can be seen as a kind of antithesis to the comedy of menace. Menace depends on ignorance; the terror of it stems from the vagueness of threat. We don't know what is happening and why, and the lack of information leads us to fear the worst: that the threat is somehow beyond articulation- literally unspeakable. Black Comedy, on the other hand, treats serious themes comically, without the 'respect' they deserve; it says too much, it says what should not be said.

Pinter is at his comic best when he entertains through characterization and story telling. But it is not pure comedy; his comedy is linked with vulnerability, struggle and threat to his characters. What is the certainty when the foundation of man's existence is in itself suspect? It is because of the uncertainty, the vulnerability and a threat at the door in Pinter's plays, that they are not strictly comic.

Pinter's own lectures, letters, and articles throw light on what he thought of his plays and how he intended to place them. From a letter written by Harold Pinter in 1958 to Peter Wood the director of "The Birthday Party" clues to the method followed by Pinter can be found. The letter written in the earlier part of his career is particularly relevant, since what Pinter says of the involvement of his characters and plots is uniquely his own. Pinter begins the letter with how he began to write the play.

"The first image of this play, the first thing that about a year ago was put on paper was a kitchen, Meg, Stanley, cornflakes and sour milk. There they were, they sat, they stood, they bent, they turned, they were incontrovertible, or perhaps I should say inconvertible. Not long before Goldberg and McCann turned up. They had come with a purpose, a job in hand- to take Stanley away. This they did, Meg unknowing, Peter helpless, and Stanley sucked in. Play over. That was the pure line and I couldn't get away from it. I had no idea at the time. What or why. The thing germinated and bred by itself. It proceeded according to its own logic. What did I do? I followed the indications, I kept a sharp eye on the clues I found myself dropping. The writing arranged itself with no trouble in the dramatic terms. The characters sounded in my ears- it was apparent to me what one would say and what would be the others response, at any given point. It was apparent to me what they would not, could not, ever, say, whatever one might wish. I interfered with them only on the technical level. My task was not to damage their consistency at any time- through any external notion of my own."

Pinter tries to make a point, often repeated by him in his later statements that his were not the well constructed, fore-thought plays with fore gone conclusions and destinies awarded by the author. His plays grew as the characters grew, they had their compelling basic natures and would develop and work according to their dictates. Pinter neither dictated them nor did they ever ask for dictations. Pinter: was only a sort of confidante

who knew what they were doing, and as a master weaver of stories, put them in a pattern which could spell a verbal as well as a visual message. Pinter says,

” When the thing was well cooked I began to form certain conclusions. The point is, however, that by the time the play was now its own world. It was determined by his own original engendering image. My conclusions were only useful in that they were informed by the growth of the work itself. I never held up the work in hand to another mirror- I related it to nothing outside itself. Certainly to no other work of literature or to any consideration of public approbation.”

Pinter knew that the audience would be looking, at the end of the play, for the customary unravelling of the plot, the denouncement and the final outcome. Pinter’s idea of drama however, does not provide such an end. Pinter believes that whatever happens on the stage will possess a potent dramatic image in itself, the very fact that people will be viewing will give an expression to the thing. Whatever is in the play will get across automatically. This is what Pinter says, “ The curtain goes up and down. Something has happened. Right? Cockeyed, brutish, absurd, with no comment. Where is the comment, the slant, the explanatory note? In the play. Everything to do with the play is in the play.”.

Pinter refers to the discussions, he apparently had with his Director Peter Wood. He says that it would be inappropriate to incorporate the words suggested by him in Stanley’s speech as it would be “ an inexcusable imposition and falsity on my part. Stanley cannot perceive his only valid justification— which is he is what he is— therefore he certainly can never be articulate about it. He knows only to attempt to justify himself by dream, by pretence and by bluff, through fright. If he had cottoned on to the fact that he need only admit to himself what he actually is and is not— than Goldberg and McCann would not have paid their visit, or if they had, the same course of events would have been by no means assured. Stanley would have been another man. The play would have been another play. A play with a ‘sensitive intellectual’ articulate hero in its centre, able to examine himself in any way clearly, would also have been another play. Stanley is the King of his castle and loses his kingdom because he assessed it and himself inaccurately.”

Goldberg and McCann stand for the authority and evil power vested in them. Stanley for failure, failure to confront them, failure to prove himself and disprove them.

Pinter explains his portrayal of Goldberg and McCann , Stanley and Petey as well as the Boles household: “ Goldberg and McCann? Dying, rotting, scabrous, the decayed spiders, the flower of our society. They know their way around. Our mentors. Our ancestry. Them. Fuck’ em.— Stanley can do nothing but make a noise . What else? What else has he discovered? He has been reduced to the fact that he is nothing but a gerk in the throat. But does this sound signify? It might very well. I think it does. He is trying to go further. He is on the edge of utterance. But it’s a long, impossible edge and utterance, were he to succeed in falling into it, might very well prove to be only one cataclysmic, profound fart. Nor for instance, could Petey in his last chat with Goldberg and McCann deliver the thought for today—apart from anything else, we are not dealing with an articulate household and there is no Chorus in his play. In other words, I am afraid I do not find myself disposed to add a programme note to this piece.

Pinter does not disclaim his responsibility for his characters and his play. He wrote it, he says, with “intent maliciously, purposefully, in command of growth” Pinter was not striving for lucidity by elaboration; the play itself spoke what it had to say. The conflict between the society and the individual is amply clear too. ‘ We have agreed; the hierarchy, the Establishment, the arbiters, the socio-religious monsters arrive to effect alteration and censure upon a member of the club who has discarded responsibility (that word again) towards himself and others. (What is your opinion by the way, of the act of suicide?) He does possess, however, for my money, a certain fibre—he fights for his life. It doesn’t last long this fight. His core being a quagmire of delusion, his mind a tenuous fusebox, he collapses under the weight of their accusation— an accusation compounded of the shitstained strictures of centuries of ‘ tradition’ . Though non-conformist he is neither hero nor exemplar of revolt. Nothing salutary for the audience to identify itself with. And yet, at the same time, I believe that a greater degree of identification will take place than might seem likely. A great deal it seems to me, will depend

on the actor. If he copes with Stanley's loss of himself successfully I believe a certain amount of poignancy will emanate."

Pinter vouches for Stanley's behaviour as natural to himself and proclaims that though 'The Birthday Party' was a comedy it was, yet, a very serious piece of work. "As for the practical question of the end of Act Two where's the difficulty? Stanley behaves strangely. Why? Because his alteration—diminution has set in, he is rendered offcock (not off cock), he has lost any adult comprehension and reverts to a childhood malice and mischief, as his first shelter. This is the beginning of his change, his fall. In the third Act we see the next phase. The play is a comedy because the whole state of affairs is absurd and inglorious. It is however, as you know, a very serious piece of work."

Harold Pinter emphasized the same points when he made a speech at the National Student Drama Festival in 1962, he had, he says, never started a play from any kind of abstract idea or theory. His characters, were never allegorical in the sense that he never burdened them to carry messages on morals, he did not fix them in any mould; he gave them enough freedom to grow and move as they would. Harold says that he "never envisaged my own characters as messengers of death, doom, heaven or the Milky Way or, in other words, as allegorical representations of any particular force, what ever that may mean. When a character cannot be comfortably defined or understood in terms of the familiar, the tendency is to perch him on a symbolic shelf, out of harm's way. Once there, he can be talked about but need not be lived with. In this way, it is easy to put up a pretty efficient smoke screen, on the part of the critics or the audience, against recognition, against an active and willing participation."

The theme of Protest and Subversion

Protest and subversion were by Pinter's own admission featured most commonly and significantly in his plays. Pinter had in a statement made on B.B.C in the programme "Omnibus" said that Protest and subversion had always held a significant place in his drama. He reiterated the same to Mel Gussow after two months of this programme in the year 1988.

"The Birthday Party" can be seen as a play of protest and subversion from many angles. Though at the face of it Goldberg and McCann are the subverter intruders, by implication Stanley is also one. Goldberg and McCann accuse him of depravity, violation and sabotaging the organization of which they were all members.

The protest in the play comes from Stanley, the chief character who is afflicted, oppressed and ultimately crushed by the oppressors. What these oppressors stand for is irrelevant, that is a wider issue, what we see in the play is not only an angry reaction by Stanley but also physical assault. Stanley kicks Goldberg in the stomach and exhausts his patience with his funny but evasive replies.

Batty assigns the cause of man's weak position to the uncertainty of his future and the ignorance of the external forces, social or otherwise. Though the play is critical of organizations and social structures that make virtues of submission and obedience that are seen as dehumanising forces yet it is patently not geared uniquely towards communicating such a message. Its chief theatrical device, the Machiavellian deus-ex-machina of the duo has other far-reaching, metaphoric resonance's that we also carry with us from any performance of the play. Its random intervention into the existence of Meg, Petey and Stanley might remind us of our own daily efforts to make sense of an erratic world that defies prediction. We might recognize in their panic our own endeavours to assert ourselves and secure confident identities in the face of exposing realities.

The individuals' confrontations with external forces, obliging him to accept conditions which he attempts to resist, governs the dramatic energies of Pinter's early plays, and it is a measure of their worth as pieces of theatre that these confrontations successfully convey both existential and implicitly political suggestion. When Irving Wardle famously applied the term 'comedy of menace' to Pinter's works, it was to denote this double-edged capacity to disturb that Pinter had crafted, through the flippant application of dark humour to situations in which characters were forced to face an implacable destiny.

Destiny handled in this way- not as an austere exercise in classicism, but as an incurable disease which one forgets about most of the time and whose lethal reminders may take the form of a joke- is an apt dramatic motif for an age of conditioned behaviour in which orthodox man is a willing collaborator in his own destruction.

Other writers like Michael Scott, discern in Pinter's plays, a deeper focus on the victim than the invader, though much of the time in the play "The Birthday Party" is taken up by Goldberg and McCann, filling the hours with their sinister presence and words, yet the welfare and safety of Stanley remains at the back of the reader's mind all through. The audience is silently protesting on behalf of Stanley. Michael sees the play as a study of Stanley's existence and his vulnerability.

The dislocation of the language as found in the Birthday Party complements the dislocation of the characters themselves. What is the foundation of Stanley's existence? Where within himself, within his society, his individual history can he find a defence against the attack? The specific nature of the attack does not matter. It is rather the vulnerability of the victim that is the focus.

Stanley the victim becomes the aggressor when it comes to Meg, who he is sure shall listen to him without protest. He can be openly rude with her hen agitated. Take the following as an example:

Look at her. You're just an old piece of rock cake, aren't you?) That's what you are, aren't you?

When there is no centre of stability, no foundation for one's existence, a victim can be an aggressor, an aggressor a victim, and words such as 'good' and 'evil' become meaningless. These divisions don't exist in Pinter's characters: "It's rather ridiculous to try to understand people in those kinds of terms. Evil people. What the hell does that mean? Or bad people. And who are you then if you say that, and what are you?"

The moral focus is unknown. What matters are the relationships, the interaction between individuals within 'a territorial struggle'.

Francesca Coppa's essay "The Sacred joke : comedy and politics in Pinter's early Plays", deals with three major issues. Friends joke theory in context of Pinter's plays, Pinter's political concerns and audiences response. Since none of Pinter's character wholly deserves to be absolved and sympathised with. With Pinter's assiduous attempts to convey just the contrary. It is not easy to bet about the response of the audience.

The third party, the audience, is forced to take sides in the conflict between the joke teller and the victim: to laugh is to ally oneself with the aggressor, to refuse to laugh is to ally oneself with the victim. Comedy thus functions as a sort of litmus test for the audience. Will they laugh or not laugh? With whom will they side?

Francesca Coppa finds in Friends joke theory a useful key to Pinter's early plays. He quotes Christopher Innes to substantiate his point. Innes, notes that Pinter's plays are ' variations on the subject of dominance, control, exploitation, subjugation and victimisation. They are models of power structures. So, too, do tendentious jokes model power structures; so, too, jokes illustrate dominance and subjugation. Jokes, like Pinter's plays create moments of theatrical and dramatic crisis, which reveal previously invisible alliances and antagonisms.

Language, Silence and Pause

One statement in this speech should suffice to understand Pinter's use of language "A character on the stage who can present no convincing argument or information as to his past experience, his present behaviour or his aspirations, nor give a comprehensive analysis of his motives is as legitimate and as worthy of attention as one who, can do all these things. The more acute the experience the less articulate its expression." Pinter shudders at the idea of using language that is stale and dead. He enumerates what makes a language acceptable to him, what use of words pleases him or distresses him. "I have mixed feelings about words myself. Moving among them, sorting them out, watching them appear on the page, from this I derive a considerable pleasure. But at the same time I have another strong feeling about words, which amounts to nothing less than nausea. Such a weight of words confronts us day in, day out, words spoken in a context such as this, words written by me and by others; the bulk of it a stale dead terminology, ideas endlessly repeated and permuted become platitudinous,

trite, meaningless. Given this nausea, it's very easy to be overcome by it and step back into paralysis. But if it is possible to confront this nausea, to follow it to its hilt, to move through it and out of it, then it is possible to say that something has occurred, that something has even been achieved."—————

Most of the time, we're inexpressive, giving little away, unreliable, elusive, evasive, obstructive, unwilling. But it's out of these attributes that a language arises. A language I repeat, where under what is said, another thing is being said.

The silence of the character sometimes conveys much more than the spoken word. It is when the characters are silent and in hiding that they are most evident to Pinter. He elaborates on this "There are two silences. One when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed. This speech is speaking of a language locked beneath it. That is its continual reference. The speech we hear is an indication of that which we don't hear. It is necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, anguished or mocking smoke screen that keeps the other in its place. When true silence falls we are still left with echo but are nearer nakedness.

"I think that we communicate only to well, in our silence, in what is unsaid, and that what takes place is a continual evasion, desperate rearguard attempts to keep ourselves to ourselves. Communication is too alarming. To enter into someone else's life is too frightening. To disclose to others the poverty within us is too fearsome a possibility."

Language and structure- dashes and pauses

Pinter makes his comedy successfully comic and menacing at the same time with a high-level comedic technique. His use of language, structured, and cut to size for the specific effect that he wishes to create has been acknowledged even by his bitter critics: questions such as "why did the Chicken cross the road?" and "Is the number 846 possible or necessary?" cast a spell of doom on Stanley's life at the same time retaining the comic façade of the play. The unanswerable questions that Goldberg-McCann pose to the beleaguered Stanley Webber make us laugh as well as worry by their unreasonableness and the intentions of the speakers that lie behind these questions.

Pinter also uses skilfully comic devices such as repetition. Meg repeatedly uses the word 'nice' in the opening scene of 'The Birthday Party'.

'Behind Pinter's comedy one can perceive something more serious, alarming and disturbing, yet not fully exposed in the words that have been used.' to quote from Francesco Coppa. Pinter's skilful use of comedy is not incidental or merely pleasurable but rather crucial: the comedy routines in the earlier plays are maps to the themes and meanings of the plays as a whole. In an early book on George Bernard Shaw, G.K. Chesterton noted that 'amid the blinding jewellery of a million jokes one could generally 'discover the grave, solemn and sacred joke for which the play was written'. Pinter's works also tend to have identifiable 'sacred jokes', which reproduce the larger play into microcosm: Pinter uses the tendentious joke structure on the micro level as well as the macro. We may not in the final event, find the larger work funny, but that does not mean that the play is not constructed like a joke. Rather, our failure to laugh may be an indication that we, the audience, have come to the side (or have been taught to side) with the victim over the victimiser.

Like Chekov, the dominant form of communication, is made, in Pinter through the absence of direct explanation. His implicit drama depends on the subtext rather than the surface meaning of the words. The subtext in Pinter is comprised of two layers, the hidden meaning behind the words and the meaning when the words are not spoken at all. Within the subtext, Michael Scott points out, "is the strategy of pause and silence which in Pinter's plays are as important as the tense dialogue or the comic repartee or the long monologue."

Russel Brown who has made a penetrating study of the main features of Pinter's language says: The silences and pauses are considered in relation to the spoken word in a manner demanded by anyone rightly interested in the plays as primarily artefacts for performance. His interest is in the spatial and visual dimension of the play as much as in its text.

A well known characteristic of Pinter's dramatic writing, and another perpetrator of menace, is the infamous 'Pinter pause'. Its most common incarnations are the simple indication pause, the more significant silence and the less obvious the three trail dots all slipped into scripts at appropriate moments. To Pinter's mind their presence is a matter of common sense and they are 'not formal conveniences or stresses but part of the body of the action'. He states that if actors play his scenes appropriately they will find that a pause- whatever the hell it is – is inevitable'. The writer has sought to dismiss the critical emphasis that has been placed upon these distinguishing features of his drama:

"The pause is a pause because of what has just happened in the minds and guts of the characters and a silence equally means that something has happened to create the impossibility of anyone speaking for a certain amount of time- until they can recover from whatever happened before that silence."

At face value, then, these pauses, short pauses, silences and trail dots are simply codes for actors and their directors, suggested pointers to the rhythm of each scene. They add weight to the scene and their very conspicuous presence in the script acts as a form of score, providing a suggested tempo at which each scene might be played.

It would be only just to consider what Pinter himself had to say about their meaning and significance:

"I've had two full-length plays produced in London. The first ran a week and the second ran a year. Of course, there are differences between the two plays. In 'The Birthday Party' I employed a certain amount of dashes in the text, between phrases. In The Caretaker I cut down the dashes and used dots instead. So that instead of, the text would read: 'Look, dash, who, dash, I, dash, dash, dash,' the text would read: 'Look, dot, dot, dot, who, dot, dot, dot, I, dot, dot, dot, dot.' So it's possible to deduce from this that dots are more popular than dashes and that's why 'The Caretaker' had a longer run than the Birthday party. The fact that in neither case could you hear the dots and dashes in performance is besides the point. You can't fool the critics for long. They can tell a dot from a dash a mile off, even if they can hear nothing."

Pinter's blackly humorous tales are told in words of love, domesticity, coquetry, solace, threat, external danger and internal fear, but much is also disclosed by the faltering in words and failure of speech, by the emitting of sounds like the uh-gug's and caahhs. Last but not the least, the feelings are expressed and equally forcefully in dots, dashes and silence.

What words say and beyond

Pinter not only uses words meticulously and with constant awareness of the 'other language' that can be locked underneath the spoken words, he also has a great sense of timing. His writing has tension and climax, and is continually dramatic. Words run ahead or lag behind the thoughts of his characters; they surprise, digress, tantalise and occasionally, seem to clinch the dramatic conflict.

Often, in Pinter the clearest falsehoods introduce, or are accompanied by, the most potent words, words which are found to reveal several levels of meaning or suggest a large wake of association. Petey's

Yes, he's....still asleep

Let him...sleep

Say's more than that Stanley, according to him, is in bed (which was the wording offered by Meg). As Petey had watched Stanley being escorted to the waiting Black car, dressed in Black, almost blind without his spectacles and quite silent. Moreover the audience has witnessed Stanley reduced to childlike cries, and then drawing 'a long breath which shudders down his body'. Just before Petey's entry he had crouched on a chair, shuddered, relaxed, dropped his head and became still'. After his 'Birthday' Stanley has regressed as if into the womb, in a foetal position, but quiet and still as if dead. Is Stanley indeed being 'put to sleep'? Or is Petey expressing his own fearful response in trying to let the sleeping lie? After this falsehood Petey is, certainly, silent, as Stanley was and, probably, still is: is Petey 'sleeping' too, intentionally.

The most difficult to describe is Pinter's manipulation of rhythms. Speeches run in one kind of phrasing, until some sub textual pressure lengthens, shortens or quickens the utterance and so, by sound alone, betrays the change of engagement. The last episode of *The Birthday Party* illustrates this:

(Meg comes past the window and enters by the back door. Petey studies the front page of the paper)

Meg (coming downstage): The car's gone.

Petey : Yes.

Meg : Have they gone?

Petey : Yes.

Meg : Won't they be in for lunch?

Petey : No.

Meg : Oh, what a shame. (she put her bag on the table,) It's hot out. (She hangs her coat on a hook) What are you doing?

Petey : Reading.

Meg : Is it good?

Petey : All right.

(She sits by the table)

Meg : Where's Stan?

(pause)

is Stan down yet, Petey?

Petey : No....he's ..

Meg : Is he still in bed?

Petey : Yes, he's....still asleep.

Meg : Still? He will be late for his breakfast.

Petey : Let himsleep.

Society and the individual

Goldberg / McCann and Stanley Webber in 'The Birthday Party'.

Each of Harold Pinter's [first] four plays ends in the virtual annihilation of an individual. 'The Birthday Party' also ends in the virtual annihilation of Stanley when he is taken from his refuge for special treatment. The hero becomes the victim of non-descript and unexpected villains who assault him in a telling and murderous idiom. Pinter's invective against the system that he tries to personify in the characters of Goldberg and McCann remains ill-defined and vague. Pinter's assertion of humanity becomes puzzling since the institutions that have structured human morality and welfare become, the immoral agents of the destruction of the individual.

The hero victim who is targeted is not without blame either; it is equally difficult to associate him with humanity. He does succeed to win our sympathy but fails to win our approval. Let us look at Pinter's portrayal of Stanley:

"Stanley, the man in question, is an obese, shambling, unpresentable creature who has moved into a dilapidated seaside boarding house where, as the only guest, he is able to lord over his adoring landlady and gain recognition as a concert pianist of superhuman accomplishment. But even in this protected atmosphere there are menacing intrusions: He cannot banish the memory of arriving to give a recital and finding the hall locked up; there are enemies. And when the enemies arrive- in the persons of a suspiciously fluent Jew and his Irish henchman- they seem as much, furies emerging from Stanley's night thoughts as physical characters. His downfall is swift. Scrubbed, shaved, hoisted out of his shapeless trousers and stuffed into a morning suit he is led away at

the end in a catatonic trance.”

It is difficult to articulate the tragic-comedy of his characters in the existing grammar of social relations. A socially recognizable situation in the play, of Stanley’s life at the boarding house and Goldberg’s / McCann’s holiday visit is recognizable, yet not realistic. What kind of a man is Goldberg? Goldberg is definitely not Nietzschean, he is ruthless, no doubt in the exercise of his power, but not for his personal pleasure or satisfaction, he is a crusader, who has come to Stanley who had deceived the organization to which they all belonged and had deserted it by fraud.

Stanley’s situation as a guilty persecuted figure is never worked on a human level nor is that of Goldberg- McCann, they stand out in our minds as theatre figures of a familiar style. Michael Scott sees Goldberg as a typical representation of institutionalised threat to the individuals’ freedom in the name of care and social responsibility. “We recognize here, on the naturalistic level, the complacent cliché’s and rhythms of a semi-educated Jewish dealer with a flair for ‘flannelling’. (‘What can you lose?’, and the raconteur’s use of *would*: ‘on Shabbus we’d go...’) Yet it is highly patterned, and the cumulative effect of Goldberg’s speeches (and they tend to dominate the play) is to parody a type of culture-patter: the sinister complacencies of the successful Head of Family and Business. So a highly individual language is used to expose the way elements in our language compel conformity. In Act II the function of Goldberg’s speeches is quite clear: the farcical paean about the joys of boyhood(I’d tip my hat to the toddlers...’) and the fit man’s cheerful walking to sunshine (‘ all the little birds, the smell of grass, Church bells, tomato juice...’) amount to a verbal limbering up for the verbal torture of Stanley; and the birthday celebration speeches, after the inquisition inflicted on the victim, are experienced as a black ritual. But by Act III Goldberg’s patterned loquacity becomes more arbitrary. In particular Goldberg’s speeches when left alone with McCann seem to have little function apart from ‘creating a scene’ and reinforcing the cultural bankruptcy of Goldberg through making him mouth a medley of slogans. We do not respond here to the violent parody of institutionalised caring. But the detail of the mumbo-jumbo is so far fetched (farcical) that it is only — through the image of the helpless victim and his reduction to gurgling speechlessness—that we connect this ritual with any pattern of felt persecution.”

Goldberg’s seduction of Lulu by engaging her emotionally is associated with what is unthinkingly permitted to a man of position in society, it also sounds ironical after Goldberg’s avowal of temperance and self-control. In the contrast between the Sunday school teacher whom he had let go ‘ just with a kiss’ and his present behaviour lies the dichotomy of his pretension and practice. Goldberg’s speech about the youth of his day with temperance as their hall-mark and the youth of today who were perverted and permissive sounds incongruous and jarring in the present system. “When I was a youngster, of a Friday, I used to go for a walk down the canal with a girl who lived down my road. A beautiful girl. What a voice that bird had! A nightingale, my word of honour. Good? Pure? She wasn’t a Sunday school teacher for nothing. Anyway, I’d leave her with a little kiss on the cheek — I never took liberties—we weren’t like the young men these days in those days. We knew the meaning of respect.” This speech he makes about his youth stands in sharp contrast to his dialogues with Meg and Lulu later on. Goldberg can be flirtatious as well as a rascal, depending on when and to whom he is speaking. “ Walk up the boulevard. Let’s have a look at you. What a carriage. What’s your opinion, McCann? Like a Countess, nothing less. Madam, now turn about and promenade to the kitchen. What deportment!”

Goldberg has a shrewd eye. He can get at the weakness of women, the moment he sets his eyes on them. He understands Meg’s love for Stanley and for simple pleasures, good clothes, a good party and a lot of adulation. Goldberg would satisfy all of them without raising in her mind a moment’s doubt. With Lulu it is different. He knows that Lulu, is more vulnerable than Meg, she is younger too. Moreover, Meg’s entire attention is absorbed by Stanley. Lulu is relatively more free with no encumbrances. Lulu is completely knocked down by Goldberg. “ He was a marvellous speaker,” she never knew she was going to meet him there, he had come out of the blue” Within minutes of her having met her she completely gives herself to him with complete trust. When she

meets Goldberg in the last Act, she expects him to be serious about her. She is pained by his casual behaviour and accuses Goldberg of having taken advantage of her. Goldberg's of-hand manner with Lulu, in this scene shows his capability to be relaxed in the most critical situations.

Goldberg: Who opened the briefcase, me or you? Lulu, schmulu, let bygones be bygones, do me a turn. Kiss and make up.

Lulu: I wouldn't touch you.

Goldberg: And today I am leaving.

Lulu: You are leaving?

Goldberg: Today.

Lulu: (*with growing anger*). You used me for a night. A passing fancy.

Goldberg: Who used who?

Lulu: You made use of me by cunning when my defences were down.

Goldberg: Who took them down?

Lulu: That's what you did. You quenched your ugly thirst. You taught me things girl shouldn't know before she has been married at least three times!

Goldberg: Now you are a jump ahead! What are you complaining about?

Enter McCann quickly.

Lulu: You didn't appreciate me for myself. You took all those liberties only to satisfy your appetite. Oh Nat, why did you do it?

Goldberg: You wanted me to do it, Lulula, so I did it.

Goldberg draws the blue print, commands and commissions; McCann carries it out. Perpetuators of evil, they have assigned different roles to themselves. Goldberg does not shed his civility and good manners; McCann is the one who does the dirty jobs for him. In the above scene with Lulu, it is McCann who gets her going. She is the only other person in the play, apart from Stanley who is subjected to interrogation by McCann, to keep her out of their way.

McCann: Your sort, you spend too much time in bed.

Lulu: What do you mean?

McCann: Have you got nothing to confess?

Lulu: What?

McCann (*savagely*): Confess!

Lulu: Confess what?

McCann: Down on your knees and confess!

Lulu: What does he mean?

Goldberg: Confess. What can you lose?

Lulu: What, to him?

Goldberg: He's only been unfrocked six months.

McCann: Kneel down woman and tell me the latest!

Lulu (*retreating to the back door*) I've seen everything that's happened. I know what's going on. I've got a pretty shrewd idea.

McCann (advancing): I've seen you hanging about the Rock of Cashel, profaning the soil with your goings on. Out of my sight!

Lulu: I'm going.

Goldberg is like almost all of Pinter's characters, a liar. So are McCann, Stanley and Lulu. It is difficult to count the lies they tell, they not only revert to them, they plan them for calculated ends and purposes. Stanley, McCann and Goldberg studied in the light of Guido Almansi's essay 'Pinter's Idiom of lies emerge as confirmed liars, perverted humanized animals who have no grain of truth left in them.

"But although the Pinterian hero is often as inarticulate as a pig, stumbling pathetically on every word, covering a pitifully narrow area of meaning with his utterances, blathering through his life he does not, like any honest animal seem to whine or grunt or giggle or grumble to give an outlet to his instincts, desires, passions of fears. He grunts in order to hide something else. Even when he grunts ('Oh, I see. Well, that's handy. Well, that's . . . I tell you what, I might do that. . . . just till I get myself sorted out'), his grunt is a lie. Pinter's characters are often abject, stupid, vile, and aggressive: but they are always intelligent enough in their capacity as conscientious and persistent liars, whether lying to others or to themselves, to hide the truth if they know truth's truthful abode. They are too cunning in their cowardice to be compared to noble animals. They are perverted in their actions and speech: hence human."

In short, to subscribe to G. Almansi, You can trust his characters neither when they are talking to others nor when they are talking to themselves would not be wrong. They do behave like beasts, he says. Their language articulates the three techniques of animals: fright, flight and mimetism. Stanley uses language either to attack, or to retreat or to disguise what he is. Goldberg uses it only to attack and hide. He solemnly makes statements about the worth of respect, love for the wife and family, reverence for parents and compassion for the destitute only to hide the fact, that he didn't in reality care about human values at all. He finds Pinter's statements about the danger of communication where he had said that communication was too alarming: disclosing oneself to others or forcing them to disclose themselves fearsome. Almansi regrets Pinter's approach since it led to neglect and disuse of words that denote the better nature of man.

He rejects Pinter's language because it is based on a policy of reciprocal misunderstanding and misinformation. It spurns sincerity; honesty, linguistic generosity and openness in favour of the diabolical game of hide and seek.

It is true of the language used by all the characters in 'The Birthday Party' except Petey. Their sojourns into the past are lies, lies and only lies. Stanley's success story as a pianist, Goldberg's as an orator a beloved son and husband and Meg's pink room in her father's house have been woven on the spot. None of the characters except Petey is trustworthy.

The presence of ambiguity in the language of the characters is not because of the indeterminacy of their thoughts or intentions; it is evasive and obstructive by intention, as a weapon of attack and exploitation. The rhythms of words are used to enhance the effect of ritual and litany. The cross-examination of Stanley Webber is held in the manner of a ritual with the speech that is completely dehumanised: resulting into an incoherence of the logic of the exercise. Matter has already been settled, the ritual serves only as a catalyst to the final catastrophe.

Poem

Harold Pinter's poem written in the style of a ballad and called "A view of the party" is a good addendum to the play. The poem was published in 1958 in "The poems and Prose of Harold Pinter (1949-1977)". The poem throws light on the events of the play, helping us to appreciate it in the light of Pinter's own perception.

A View Of The Party**i**

The thought that Goldberg was
A man she might have known
Never crossed Meg's words
That morning in the room.

The thought that Goldberg was
A man another knew
Never crossed her eyes
When, glad, she welcomed him.

The thought that Goldberg was
A man to dread and know
Jarred Stanley in the blood
When, still he heard his name.

While Petey knew, not then,
But later, when the light
Full upon their scene,
He looked into the room.

And by morning Petey saw
The light begin to dim
(That daylight full of sun)
Though nothing could be done

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Nat Goldberg who arrived
With a smile on every face,
Accompanied by McCann
Set a change upon the place.

The thought that Goldberg was
Sat in the centre of the room,
A man of weight and time,
To supervise the game.

The thought that was McCann
Walked in upon this feast,
A man of skin and bone,
With a green stain on his chest.

Allied in their theme,
They imposed upon the room
A dislocation and doom,

Though Meg saw nothing done.

The party they began,
To hail the birthday in,
Was generous and affable,
Though Stanley sat alone.

The toasts were said and sung
All spoke of other years,
Lulu, on Goldberg's breast,
Looked up into his eyes.

And Stanley- sat alone,
A man he might have known,
Triumphant on his hearth,
Which never was his own.

For Stanley had no home,
Only where Goldberg was,
And his Bloodhound McCann,
Did Stanley remember his name.

They played at Blind man's buff,
Blindfold the game was run,
McCann tracked Stanley down,
The darkness down and gone.

Found the game lost and won,
Meg, all memory gone,
Lulu's love night spent,
Petey impotent;

A man they never knew
In the centre of the room,
And Stanley's final eyes
Broken by McCann.

The first two stanzas tell us about Meg's complete ignorance of the men who were coming to her house, it never crossed her mind that Goldberg was a man whom "another knew". The word another stands for Stanley and the thrust is upon the fact that Meg never suspected that Stanley knew Goldberg.

Stanley's fear and apprehension at the very name of Goldberg are expressed in the third stanza. Goldberg is a man to dread and his name "Jarred Stanley in the blood".

Petey's complete ignorance of who the men were and his helplessness in saving Stanley from the content of stanzas four and five. Petey had seen the lights the house plunged in darkness when he came at night, the darkness spelled the fall of Stanley to doom..

Goldberg is described as a man of weight and time, holding all the authority, it is he who supervises the game, of "the Blind man's bluff" and the more intriguing game of Stanley's hunt. It is he who "sat in the corner of the

room and set a change upon the place". McCann is mentioned only as an accomplice; a man of skin and bone who carries out the job with Goldberg.

The most significant stanza, showing Goldberg and McCann as the "external force", is the crux of the play. McCann and Goldberg as an allied power of invasion dislocate the house and set doom upon it. But Meg has so far understood nothing.

The isolation of Stanley in the party that is organized to celebrate his birthday evokes strange feelings. Stanley is isolated, the Boles home is not his home, and the home he had has associations with Goldberg and McCann. It is McCann that tracks Stanley down during the game of the Blind man's Buff.

The scene of the party, where Meg has lost all the money and Lulu has spent a love night with Goldberg ends with Stanley being taken away by Goldberg and McCann. Stanley has also been deprived of his final eyes.

The poem suggests, though obliquely, connections between Stanley and the intruders, in the past. It also spells explicitly the nature of the doom that befalls Stanley. His utter loneliness and the lack of a sense of belonging are also referred to. Pinter has cleverly been able to describe the characters, of Meg, Lulu and Petey in very short references to them. The poem, at the end instils a feeling of fear, sorrow and helplessness in the reader's mind.

Excerpts selected from critical works on Harold Pinter.

Pinter's Place in Drama

"In Sir Peter Halls, recent Clark lectures at Cambridge, on the idea of the mask, he concluded by discussing the plays of Beckett and Pinter, in a series of reference points that stretched in terms of Dramatic writing from Aeschylus to Shakespeare and Mozart. There seems to be no incongruity only continuity.

Racial Prejudices in 'The Birthday Party'

It is only in *The Birthday Party*, Pinter's first full-length play (1957) that elements of music-hall cross-talk begin to appear. Pinter's two comic routiner's (funny man and stooge, ring master and crony) in the shape of a stage Jew and a stage Irishman provide much of the play's hilarity. And yet it is deeply troubling play; its one- set, three act form with strong curtains, which divide the action in to before, during, and after the party of the play's title, obscures the fact that it is an exceedingly complex piece of drama. It is "many plays to many men," as Trussler says, who chooses to see it as "oedipal tragic-farce" which is, "allegorically, a working out of revenge and an expiation of guilt, in which two exploited and spat upon races turn the tables on their persecutor" (*The Plays of Harold Pinter*, p.37). This leaves many questions unanswered, not the least of which is why Pinter should have made victim and victimizer so nearly identical. (Volker Strunk: *Harold Pinter, Towards a Poetics of his Plays*)

Intruders as projections of Stanley's mind

Perhaps a better way in the play is to suggest that its two visitors (with links to a sinister, unnamed "organization" which allows one to see it as metaphysical, criminal, political, religious or what have you) are projections of Stanley's unconscious; representatives of an externalised part of Stanley's psyche, and, simultaneously, characters in their own right, projections with a life of their own.

(Peter Raby – Introduction 'The Cambridge Companion to Harold Pinter')

Understanding Pinter

Pinter says of his characters:

"Between my lack of biographical data about them and the ambiguity about what they say there lies a territory which is not only worthy of exploration but which it is compulsory to explore. You and I, the characters which, grow on a page, most of the time we're inexpressive, giving little away, unreliable, elusive, evasive, obstructive, unwilling. But it's out of these attributes that a language arises. A language, I repeat, where, under hat is said, another, thing is being said."

Pinter's London

When Irving Wardle describes him as 'the poet of London transport, he recognised him rightly as some one on the move. But the routes are not equally available... And there are barriers to be crossed. Pinter's London is zoned and it is only permeable for those who have the right qualifications'. (Wardle, *Comedy of Menace*).

Sex in Pinter

The 1950's are supposedly dull period in the history of sexual mores and it is true that many of Pinter's would-be-genteel characters (Meg in *The Birthday Party*, for instance) have perfected a curiously respectable double-speak, which enables them to hint at sexual longings without actually having them... Sex in Pinter is invariably a double bind, a power-struggle and a mind-game in which there is no certain victor and no end in sight. (John Stokes. *Pinter and the 1950's*).

Pinter's new form of Theatre

I think the achievement of a Pinter production must be that the two plays meet. Because what stirs the audience is not the mask, not the control, but what is underneath it: that's what upsets them, that's what terrifies and moves them. In that sense Pinter's is a new form of theatre. It is very difficult to point to anybody else and say, 'That's the way he operates too'. Beckett of course, sometimes.

(Interview with Catherine Itzin and Simon Trussler)

Pinter's Jewish ness

The extremity of family affection- the family unit being something that holds and encloses and makes everything possible, and yet also destroys everything, I don't say that is something, which is special to the Jewish race, but it's something, which they seem to have an extreme instinct for. but we all do it. Again, though, they are not 'Jewish' plays; to say that the homecoming is about a Jewish family is already wrong. It isn't. And we went out of the way to make sure that they were not 'Jewish' actors.

(Interview with Catherine Itzin and Simon Trussler)

Pinter's Pessimism

But I think what is for me wonderful about Pinter is that in an unblinkingly hostile situation where everybody does go wrong in some way or the another, there are little moments of light and tenderness which are cherished. He is very pessimistic dramatist: but I don't really understand how anybody could honestly be writing in the 1960s and 1970s and be particularly sunny. People are always saying to me, 'Why don't you do happy plays, that are life-enhancing?' to which the answer is 'Well, why don't people write them?' But I find the great thing about him is that his tenderness and his compassion are not sentimental, but absolutely, unblinkingly accurate.

(Interview with Catherine Itzin and Simon Trussler)

Important Questions (Long Answers)

1. What are the difficulties of placing Pinter strictly into the realistic, naturalistic or absurdist tradition? What are the salient features of 'The Birthday Party' and to what tradition does the play conform? Discuss.
2. 'The strategy of pause and silence in Pinter's plays are as important as the tense dialogue or the comic repartee or the long monologue'. How far do you agree with this? Discuss with reference to 'The Birthday Party.'
3. "The dislocation of the language compliments the dislocation of the characters in 'The Birthday Party'. Do you agree? Justify your answer with examples from the play.
4. Pinter has stated that his art is neither didactic nor political, that his plays express elements of human conduct in which lie their strengths and weaknesses. Evaluate Pinter's 'The Birthday Party' in the light of the above remark.
5. 'The Birthday Party' ends with the total annihilation of Stanley. In what way is his annihilation symbolic? Is his struggle against Goldberg and McCann an allegory of the prevalent social and political conflicts?

6. Like Osborne Pinter 'Looks back in Anger', like Beckett Pinter 'Looks forward to nothing'. Pinter has created, however, his own distinctive and dramatic version of man versus the system. Discuss with reference to 'The Birthday Party.'
7. For all the realistic appearance of Pinter's characters, it is symbolism which extends their meaning to humanity'. How far are the characters in 'The Birthday Party' symbolic and what forces do they represent?
8. Quietness is a key word for Pinter. His most characteristic effect is one of violence exploding with alarming unexpectedness into an equally alarming quietness. When is this change perceived in 'The Birthday Party'? What dramatic effect is achieved by it?
9. How would you account for the hostility in the audience as well as critics towards 'The Birthday Party' on its first production. What were the variations which caused this reaction? Elucidate.
10. 'Stanley's situation as a persecuted and guilty figure is never worked out on the human level' How does Pinter elicit, in spite of this, a sympathetic response from the audience for Stanley? Discuss in light of Stanley's role in the play.
11. 'Goldberg's speeches in the play follow different patterns in different Acts. Their function varies according to the situation and characters they are addressed to ' Discuss Goldberg's speeches in the play, in light of the above remark.
12. Meg and Lulu, the two women in the play show Pinter's close observation of women. How far would you agree with the remark that though Pinter's portrayal of women is very sensitive, one always feels that it's a man looking at women, the feminine enigma remains?
13. Attempt a character sketch of Stanley, Meg, Goldberg.

Short Answer Questions

1. What are Pinter's main concerns in the play, 'The Birthday Party'? Does he mean to be didactic, what message, if any, is he able to put across to the reader?
2. Is virtue in women of much importance either to Pinter or his characters in the play? Discuss with reference to Meg and Lulu's character in the play.
3. Discuss McCann as the henchman of Goldberg.
4. Discuss the device of mystification of the past and change of names in the play.
5. What is the significance of the birthday party scene in the play? Why is Petey kept away from the scene?
6. Petey is the only character in 'The Birthday Party' without fantasies of the past or future. Attempt an evaluation of his character in the context of his role where he neither says nor does anything.
7. Attempt a critical analysis of Meg- Stanley relationship.
8. What in the last scene of the play suggests that Goldberg and McCann have triumphed? What changes in Stanley suggest his having been converted? Attempt to share your feelings at the end of the play.
9. What role does Lulu play in 'The Birthday Party'? What light does her character throw on Pinter's view of women?
10. Why does Meg give a toy drum to Stanley on his birthday? What does it signify; do you find any relationship between the drum and Stanley's past as a pianist?
11. Discuss 'The Birthday Party' as a 'comedy of menace.'
12. Attempt a character sketch of Petey, Lulu.

Important Passages for Reference to Context

Act One

Meg: Stan! Stanny! Stan! I'm coming up to fetch you if you don't come down! I'm coming up! I'm going to

count three! One! Two! Three! I'm coming to get you!

Stanley: I had a unique touch. Absolutely unique. They came up to me. They came up to me and said they were grateful. Champagne we had that night, the lot. My father nearly came down to hear me. Well, I dropped him a card anyway. But I don't think he could make it. No, I - I lost the address, that was it. Yes. Lower Edmonton. Then after that, you know what they did? They carved me up. Carved me up. It was all arranged, it was all worked out. My next concert somewhere else it was. In winter I went down there to play. Then, when I got there, the hall was closed; the place was shuttered up, not even a caretaker. They pulled a fast one. I'd like to know who was responsible for that. All right, Jack, I can take a tip. They want me to crawl down on my bended knees. Well I can take a tip... any day of the week.

Lulu. Do you want to have a look at your face? You could do with a shave do you know that? Don't you ever go out? I mean, what do you do, just sit around the house like this all day long? Hasn't Mrs Boles got enough to do without having you under her feet all day long? Hasn't Mrs Boles got enough to do without having you under her feet all day long?

Goldberg. When I was an apprentice yet, McCann, every second Friday of the month my Uncle Barney used to take me to the seaside, regular as clockwork. Brighton, Canvey Island, Rottingdan – Uncle Barney wasn't particular. After lunch on Shabbuss we'd go and sit in a couple of deck chairs – you know, the ones with canopies – we'd have a little paddle, we'd watch the tide coming in, going out, the sun coming down – golden days, believe me, McCann. Of course, he was an impeccable dresser. One of the old school. He had a house just outside Basingstoke at the time. Respected by the whole community. Culture? Don't talk to me about culture. He was an all-round man, what do you mean? He was a cosmopolitan.

Goldberg: Uncle Barney taught me that the word of a gentleman is enough. That's why; when I had to go away on business I never carried any money.

Goldberg: All is dependent on the attitude of our subject. At all events, McCann, I can assure you that the assignment will be carried out and the mission accomplished with no excessive aggravation to you or myself. Satisfied?

Act Two

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

Stanley: I have changed, but I'm still the same man that I always was. I mean, you wouldn't think, to look at me, really... I mean, not really, that I was the sort of bloke to – to cause any trouble, would you? Do you know what I mean?

Stanley: I know Ireland very well. I've many friends there. I love that country and I admire and trust its people. I trust them. They respect the truth and they have a sense of humour. I think their policemen are wonderful. I've been there. I've never seen such sunsets.

Goldberg: When I was a youngster, of a Friday, I used to go for a walk down the canal with a girl who lived down the road. A beautiful girl. What a voice that bird had! A nightingale, my word of honour. Good? Pure? She wasn't a Sunday school teacher for nothing. Anyway, I'd leave her with a little kiss on the cheek – I never took liberties – we weren't like the young men these days in those days. We knew the meaning of respect. So I'd give her a peck and I'd bowl back home.

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. I've heard them. Getting up in the morning, they say what is it? Your skin's crabby, you need a shave, your eyes are full of muck, your mouth is like a bog house, 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.

Goldberg: Say what you feel. What you honestly feel. It's Stanley's birthday. Your Stanley. Look at him. Look at him and it'll come.

Meg: Well – it's very, very nice to be here tonight, in my house, and I want to propose a toast to Stanley, because it's his birthday, and he's lived here for a long while now, and he's my Stanley now. And he's the only Stanley I know, and I know him better than all the world, although he doesn't think so. Well, I could cry because I'm so happy, having him here and not got away, on his birthday, and there isn't anything I wouldn't do for him, and all you good people here tonight.

Goldberg: Well, I want to say first that I've never been so touched to the heart as by the toast we've just heard. How often, in this day and age, do you come across real, true warmth? What's happened to the love, the bonhomie, the unashamed expression of affection of the day before yesterday, that our mums taught us in the nursery?

Goldberg: I believe in a good laugh, a day's fishing, a bit of gardening. I was very proud of my old greenhouse, made out of my own spit and faith. That's the sort of man I am. Not size but quality. A little Austin, tea in Fullers, a library book from Boots, and I'm satisfied. But just now, I say just now, the lady of the house said her piece and I for one am knocked over by the sentiments she expressed.

Goldberg: We've heard a lady extend the sum total of her devotion, in all its pride, plume and peacock, to a member of her own living race. Stanley my heartfelt congratulations.

Goldberg: I'd say hullo to the little boys, the little girls – I never made distinctions – and then back I'd go, back to my bungalow with the flat roof. "Simey," my wife used to shout, "quick, before it gets cold!" And there on the table what would I see? The nicest piece of rollmop and pickled cucumber you could wish to find on a plate.

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

Act Three

Goldberg. Sometimes it happens gradual – day by day it grows and grows and grows... day by day. And then other times it happens all at once. Poof! Like that! The nerves break. There's no guarantee how it's going to happen, but with certain people... it's a foregone conclusion.

Goldberg: All my life! I've said the same. Play up, play up, and play the game. Honour thy father and thy mother. All along the line. Follow the line, the line, McCann, and you can't go wrong. I'm self-made man? No! I sat where I was told to sit. I kept my eye on the ball. School? Don't talk to me about school. Top in all subjects. And for why? Because I'm telling you, I'm telling you, follow my line? Follow by mental? Learn by heart. Never write down a thing. And don't go too near the water.

Goldberg: Always bid good morning to the neighbours. Never, never forget your family, for they are the rock, the constitution and the core.

Goldberg: And that's why I've reached my position, McCann. Because I've always been as fit as a fiddle. My motto. Work hard and play hard. Not a day's illness.

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