

The Frightful Logic of Power and Obligation: Possible Worlds in Harold
Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter*, *The Birthday Party* and *One for the Road*

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| <p>Harold Pinterin varhaistuotantokauden näytelmiä on perinteisesti kuvailtu englanninkielisellä adjektiivilla <i>pinteresque</i> (<i>pintermäinen</i>), jolla tarkoitetaan hänen näytelmilleen tyypillistä uhkaavaa ilmapiiriä sekä kielellisiä tehokeinoja, kuten runsasta taukojen käyttöä. Näytelmät myös usein luokiteltiin osaksi 1950-luvun absurdin teatterin tyylisuuntaa. Pinterin myöhäistuotantokauden näytelmät puolestaan on typistetyt muotonsa vuoksi tulkittu suoranaisten poliittisiksi. Niiden valossa on myös tarkasteltu uudestaan Pinterin aiempien teoksien poliittisuutta.</p> <p>Pintermäisyyttä ei kuitenkaan ole syytä rajata vain kirjailijan varhaistuotantokauden teoksiin, vaan se on ominaispiirre, joka kantaa läpi kirjailijan koko tuotannon. Tämän Pro Gradu -tutkielman tavoitteena on osoittaa, että tarkasteltaessa Pinterin teoksia mahdollisten maailmojen teoreettisen viitekehyksen kautta, huomataan, että Pinter on käyttänyt samankaltaisia tehokeinoja ja käsitellyt samoja teemoja läpi koko uransa. Pinter haluaa kerta toisensa jälkeen osoittaa, kuinka tuntematon, ulkopuolinen valta pakottaa ihmiset aiheuttamaan väkivaltaa toisille ihmisille ilman selkeää, tunnistettavaa syytä. Tuo ulkopuolinen valta on niin voimakas, että se pystyy jopa taivuttamaan logiikan sääntöjä oman tahtonsa mukaisiksi.</p> <p>Tutkielmassa analysoidaan kolmea Harold Pinterin teosta mahdollisten maailmojen teorian tarjoamien metodien avulla. Tutkimuksen aineistona ovat seuraavat näytelmät: Mykkä tarjoilija (1957), Syntymäpäiväjuhlat (1957) ja Kerta kiellon päälle (1984). Kaksi ensimmäistä näytelmää edustavat Pinterin varhaistuotantokauden arvostetuimpia teoksia, kun taas Kerta kiellon kuuluu Pinterin myöhäistuotantokauden tutkituimpiin teoksiin.</p> <p>Mahdollisten maailmojen teoria perustuu löyhästi filosofi Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnizin ajatteluun. Kirjallisuustieteessä teoriaa on kehittänyt erityisesti Marie-Laure Ryan, jonka keskeisin näkemys on, että kirjallinen teksti on oman todellisuutensa luova järjestelmä. Fiktiivisen teoksen todellisuusjärjestelmä yleensä poikkeaa omasta maailmastamme, mutta teoksen maailma on sen hahmoille yhtä aito kuin oma maailmamme meille on. Teoksen hahmoilla on myös omat vaihtoehdot osamaailmansa, kuten tiedon maailma, toiveiden maailma ja pakon maailma. Tarinan juonen nähdään kulkevan eteenpäin, kun hahmot reagoivat osamaailmoissaan ilmeneviin puutteisiin tai ristiriitoihin.</p> <p>Pinterin hahmojen osamaailmoissa on runsaasti puutteita ja ristiriitoja, jotka aiheuttavat lukijassa hämmennystä. Toisin kuin yleisö odottaisi, teoksien hahmot, kuten Mykän tarjoilijan Ben ja Gus tai Syntymäpäiväjuhlien Stanley eivät kuitenkaan täydennä puutteita tai poista ristiriitoja. He tyytyvät olemaan ulkoisten voimien ohjailtavina, jolloin juonta kuljettavat eteenpäin pääsääntöisesti vain satunnaiset tapahtumat. Ainoat aktiiviset osallistujat ovat kiduttajia, jotka pakon maailmansa ohjaamina käyttävät väkivaltaa murtaakseen uhrien tahdon. Uhrien syyllisyyttä tai viattomuutta emme pysty arvioimaan, vaan heidän tarinansa ovat yleismaailmallisen avoimia. Kiduttajien pakon maailmaa ohjaavat tunnistamattomat ulkoiset valtarakenteet, jotka muovaavat omat, julmat logiikan sääntönsä. tarinat ovat juoneltaan ja rakenteiltaan niin samanlaisia, että Kerta kiellon päälle voidaan lukea transponointina Syntymäpäiväjuhlista. Vaikka absurdin teatterin tehokeinot on jätetty pois, Kerta kiellon päälle kertoo saman tarinan ja viestii samaa teemaa yleismaailmallisemmassa ympäristössä.</p> | | | |
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Introduction

GOLDBERG: “Wrong! It’s only necessarily necessary. We admit possibility only after we grant necessity. It is possible because but by no means necessary through possibility. The possibility can only be assumed after the proof of necessity” (Pinter 1957 (1):44).

The feigned complexity of whether the number 846 is possible or necessary as attested by Goldberg, the lead interrogator in Harold Pinter’s *The Birthday Party*, is an encapsulating example of three strands of Pinter studies. First of all, the incoherent, illogical and meaningless argument about the ontology of a random number epitomizes a genre of drama that Pinter has traditionally been strongly associated with, namely the Theater of the Absurd, a term coined by Martin Esslin to describe plays that depict the incomprehensibility of the modern world (Esslin 1960, 5). Second, when read in the context of the harsh interrogation that Goldberg and his associate inflict on the protagonist Stanley Webber, the words exemplify the political connotations of how society silences dissidents (Visser 1996: 336), an established reading of Pinter’s works popularized since the 1980’s when comparative studies of his early and late period plays became popular. Finally, and most importantly for this study, Goldberg’s locution also alludes to the philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716), whose theory of possible worlds and their possibility, impossibility and necessity, has been loosely adapted to the study of narrative worlds in the post-modern era (Ryan 2012).

When a single line of dialogue produces such diverse analyses, it is only to be expected that audiences, performers and critics alike have been bewildered and found it difficult to construct a cohesive meaning from Pinter’s unique style (Esslin 1981: 1). The exaggeration and overuse of ordinary features of conversation makes audiences

uncomfortable (Schnebly, 1994: 99-100). The pauses, enigmas and menace that marked his style even gave birth to a new adjective, pinteresque (Inan 2005: 35). Unlike some of his contemporary absurdist playwrights, Pinter himself famously refused to publicly disclose anything that might be considered an interpretation (Hevesi 2011: 59). “Truth in drama is forever elusive. You never quite find it but the search for it is compulsive”, he stated in his 2005 Nobel Lecture (Pinter 2005: 2). The search has indeed proved to be compulsive as witnessed by the variety of analyses his key works, *The Dumb Waiter* (1957), *The Birthday Party* (1957), and *One for the Road* (1984), have inspired.

Before reviewing the existing research on these plays, a note on why these three have been chosen as material for this thesis. *The Dumb Waiter* is perhaps the quintessential Comedy of Menace among Pinter’s writing, an infusion of humor and ominousness that climaxes with an ending that would conventionally be described as open, i.e. the curtain falls just as Ben raises his gun. While critics have devised numerous rationalizations for the ending, a study of the conflicting internal worlds of Ben and Gus as the driving force of the plot and their meaning has not been carried out. Another play from the same era, *The Birthday Party*, has become one of the plays that define the whole genre of Theater of the Absurd with its gloomy plot twist, perplexing dialogue and political innuendos. While it has been read and interpreted more than any other Pinter play, the digressions from logic that Pinter uses to create a unique and intriguing world have not been fully analyzed. Finally, *One for the Road* represents a different Pinter. Released almost 30 years after the other two, it differs stylistically but not necessarily thematically from Pinter’s early works. While comparative analyses of *One for the Road* and Pinter’s early works have revealed the thematic similarities, a study from the perspective of the possible worlds within the play and how they differ from Pinter’s early works is lacking. A study from the perspective of possible worlds would help us

understand the surprising ways Pinter constructs plot and meaning in both early and later works and help explain why his works inspire such diverse interpretations.

The earliest interpretations of Pinter's works are best represented by Martin Esslin, a renowned Pinter critic and the author's long-time friend, who originally proposed abandoning the study of language of the absurd plays all together as the confusing and disorienting dialogue only illustrated the impossibility of human communication in the world (Esslin 1960: 12). What mattered was an analysis of the action or, as in the case of *The Birthday Party*, the mood to reveal true statements on the human condition (1981: 2). Esslin saw the Theater of the Absurd as a rebirth of allegory and symbolism, the display of abstract concepts on the stage (1960: 15). He offered three possible metaphoric interpretations of *The Birthday Party*: the restrictions that society poses on an artist's work, the fear of going out into the world from the comfort of your home and the process of growing up (1970: 82-87). "A play like *The Birthday Party* can only be understood as a complex poetic image" (1970: 80), he claimed and his interpretations can be seen as attempts to vocalize this image. On his assessment of *The Caretaker* (1960) as a play about altruism, Karwowski aligns himself with Esslin, noting that "a re-interpretation of his early plays in political terms is contradicted by the plays themselves" (Karwowski, 2003: 296).

Others saw in Pinter's early works and in the birth of the pinteresque style the the triumph of non-communication, the breaking of traditional constructs of irony, and the abandonment of classic drama narrative. Through an analysis of repetition in the dialogue, Schnebly indicates the failed conversational attempts that highlight the characters' refusal to participate in sharing information with their conversational partners (Schnebly 1994: 111). Morrison shows how *The Birthday Party* reverses irony: unlike in classical drama, it is not the characters who are unaware of the bleak turn of events, but rather the audience.

Originally eased to comfort by Pinter's use of humor, the shock value of the collapsing state of affairs brings the spectators closer to theme of the *The Birthday Party* and *The Dumb Waiter*: death (Morrison 1969: 391). While Esslin took for granted that the end of *The Dumb Waiter* signifies that Gus will be next victim of the assassins (Esslin 1960: 202), others strongly disagreed. The ambiguity of stage instructions in the final scene of *The Dumb Waiter* leads Buck to conclude that the play forces us to embrace ambiguity, the meaningless quest to find meaning in a world where language is ambiguous (Buck 1997: 47). Carpenter appears to agree with Buck's analysis but not with the conclusion, stating that relationships between cause and effect are not clear-cut (Carpenter 1973: 284). He argues however, that the play is just a mock-melodramatic farce where no profound meaning can be discovered (1973: 280). The displacement of cause and effect has also been read as the force that undermines the tacit agreement of organizational structure between the two hitmen to demonstrate how incomplete information is in any given situation (Quigley 1978: 4–5, 7). Van Laan criticizes both Carpenter and Quigley and especially Esslin for what he calls "filling in" meaning, i.e. constructing a meaningful narrative by inserting information that is not in the text itself (Van Laan 1981: 497–498), an endeavor that the characters of the play themselves engage in. In Van Laan's analysis, Pinter is experimenting with drama, "examining the process by which meaningful events are made" instead of trying to create meaningful events, thus "prompting us to review our assumptions of reality" (1981: 499-500).

However, much like Pinter himself has become more outspoken about politics (Karwowski, 2003: 291), most contemporary criticism has pivoted towards an insistence of reading Pinter's works as a criticism of the prevailing political and social conditions. Visser discusses how the language in the torture scene of *The Birthday Party* is not used for its semantic meaning but for what Visser calls dramatic meaning, where the objective

behind the words overrides meaning of the words (Visser 1996: 332). The disturbing and disorienting questions that Goldberg assaults Stanley with are not a sign of ineffective communication, but extremely effective communication. The conclusion that emerges from an analysis of dramatic meaning is that *The Birthday Party* "[is] certainly not about failure of communication. ...And just as successfully as these two gangsters by their use of torture silence the dissenting voice in their society, *The Birthday Party*, together with many other Pinter plays speaks out loudly against such forms of torture in ours" (1996: 340).

The political readings were also motivated by the stylistic changes that Pinter made in his late period plays, including *One for the Road*. Gone were the pinteresque elements that characterized his early plays. Pinter was no longer writing absurd drama, but used a direct, minimalist and pithy form of expression to articulate the use and abuse of the language of political power (Inan 2005: 34). Critics like Visser examined the similarities between *One for the Road* and *The Birthday Party* and concluded that Pinter was expressing the silencing of dissident thought (Visser 1996: 336). The plays depicted the struggle of an individual against a political superstructure (Inan 2005: 41). Pinter had lifted the curtain on the poetics of terror, a simultaneous celebration and agitation over contemporary issues such as democracy and nationalism (2005: 55), or in the case of *The Birthday Party* "the suppression of local differences in favour of a centralised official culture" (2005: 52). Silverstein claims the suppression in *The Birthday Party* is rather a cultural one, an assimilation of otherness into a uniform culture as represented by the fact that the assimilated mouthpieces McCann and Goldberg themselves come from the cultural fringes, Irish Catholic and Jewish respectively (Silverstein 1991: 424). The word mouthpiece is especially important, as Silverstein posits that Goldberg, McCann and Nicolas in *One for the Road* are subjects with power, while the actual power lies in the

system, a system that can just as easily take the power away from its mouthpieces and therefore leaves the subjects inherently in doubt about their own position (1991: 438–439). Visser, Inan and Silverstein are thus all in accord that a thematic continuum of political suppression subsists in Pinter’s works and that the continuum can be revealed through a comparative analysis of his early plays against his later plays.

While Harold Pinter’s plays have been investigated, scrutinized and dissected from a multitude of perspectives, all of the preceding analyses rely on the same axiom of assuming that Pinter’s writing is either imitating, criticizing or satirizing reality. These analyses are based on the presupposition that the worlds projected by the plays are similar if not identical to our actual world, albeit with their own quirks and oddities, which are typically attributed to the pinteresque style and as such, left out of serious analysis. However, a textual analysis of the plays does not support this axiom. As the foundation for understanding Pinter and the pinteresque, we need to project ourselves onto the worlds of the plays instead of simply projecting the plays onto our actual world – like we would do when reading or watching the plays themselves.

To achieve this recentering of perspective we must turn to possible worlds theory, which has already been proposed as an alternative to an absurdist or political reading for unravelling the enigmas within Pinter’s plays and in helping us understand the relationship of Pinter’s fictional worlds to the actual world we live in. Possible worlds theory is a “general label for a set of modal and referential concepts developed in logic and borrowed by other disciplines to describe diverse issues” (Ronen 1994:5). The theory is founded on the idea that reality is composed of countless possible worlds, the sum of all imaginable worlds as opposed to the purely physical world we live in (Ryan 2012). As an example, scientists have proven to the point of exhaustion that our planet is warming and the warming is a result of human activity. However, millions of people believe

otherwise and are imagining a possible world that is either not warming or is warming as a result of some external force. The central element to the system of possible worlds is the actual world (henceforth AW) we live and breathe in, to which the alternative possible worlds (APW's), i.e. those imagined are subordinate (Ryan 2012). The typical classification between fiction and non-fiction would claim that fiction describes events in APW's and non-fiction describes events in AW's. However, this simple classification limits our study of the possible worlds generated by a literary text: the dreams, beliefs, obligations, wishes etc. of the characters. Therefore, possible worlds theory places the APW projected by the text – known as the textual actual world (TAW) as a new center that is surrounded by countless textual alternative possible worlds (TAPW's) (Ryan 1991 (1): 554). “If only the inhabitants of the actual world can say “I am real”, and speak the truth absolutely, fictional characters can nevertheless say “I am real”, and speak the truth for their own world,” Ryan summarizes (Ryan 1991 (2): 24). The claim that possible worlds theory then proposes is that when we are reading or watching a work of fiction, we recenter our minds to that TAW and discover the TAPW's that it projects. “While it may be objectively the case that only one world exists independently of the human mind, we can through certain mental acts depart from this world, select another world as actual, and create through further mental acts a network of alternative possible worlds around the new center” (Ryan 1991 (1): 554).

For an APW to be possible, however, it needs to be linked to the AW. In her seminal work in adapting the possible worlds theory to define a semantic typology of fiction, Ryan establishes these links by introducing the concept of accessibility relations as a tool for assessing the viability of an APW (Ryan 1991 (2): 31). One might intuitively assume that in fiction “anything goes”, but that proposition becomes rather superficial as it would mean that there are no impossible worlds and there's no point in studying what

makes a world possible (Ryan 1991 (1): 553). She uses the theater of the absurd as an example of literary genres (along with surrealist poems and postmodernist fiction) that liberates itself from what she calls the principle of non-contradiction (a world cannot be true and false at the same time) and in doing so, call for a wider range of accessibility relations in order to escape labeling these fictional worlds as simply impossible when compared with our actual world (1991 (2): 32). Rather than purely stating that a text is fictional, accessibility relations help us determine what makes the text fictional.

Ryan's lists nine different accessibility relations against which we can compare the possibility of a TAW against the AW:

- A. *Identity of properties* (A/properties): TAW is accessible from AW if the objects common to TAW and AW have the same properties.
- B. *Identity of inventory* (B/same inventory): TAW is accessible from AW if TAW and AW are furnished by the same objects.
- C. *Compatibility of inventory* (C/expanded inventory): TAW is accessible from AW if TAW's inventory includes all the members of AW, as well as some native members.
- D. *Chronological compatibility* (D/chronology): TAW is accessible from AW if it takes no temporal relocation for a member of AW to contemplate the entire history of TAW. (This condition means that TAW is not older than AW, i.e. that it's present is not posterior in absolute time to AW's present. We can contemplate facts of the past from the viewpoint of the present, but since the future holds no facts, only projections, it takes a relocation beyond the time of their occurrence to regard as facts events located in the future).
- E. *Physical compatibility* (E/natural laws): TAW is accessible from AW if they share the same natural laws.
- F. *Taxonomic compatibility* (F/taxonomy): TAW is accessible from AW if both worlds contain the same species, and the species are characterized by the same properties. Within F, it may be useful to distinguish a narrower version F' stipulating that TAW must contain not only the same inventory of natural species, but also the same types of manufactured objects as found in the AW up to the present.

- G. *Logical compatibility* (G/logic): TAW is accessible from AW if both worlds respect the principles of non-contradiction and of the excluded middle.
- H. *Analytical compatibility* (H/analytical): TAW is accessible from AW if they share analytical truths, i.e. if objects designated by the same words have the same essential properties.
- I. *Linguistic compatibility* (I/linguistic): TAW is accessible from AW if the language in which TAW is described can be understood in AW (Ryan 1991 (1): 32-3).

Besides understanding the relationships between TAW's and the AW, possible worlds theory also provides a framework for analyzing the TAPW's and their conflicts as the force that drives plot forwards. A narrative generates many TAPW's in the mind of the reader (potential outcomes of the story), but typically only one of them is realized in the narrative itself (Ryan 2012). Possible worlds theory accepts that characters of a fictional text are entities that possess all the mental capabilities of a real person and as a result, they also have their own internal possible worlds. The internal worlds can be classified as the K (knowledge, belief and ignorance) world, the O (obligations, systems of commitments and prohibitions defined by social rules and moral principles) world, the W (wishes, as defined by good, bad and neutral) world and the F (fantasies, dreams, hallucinations) world (Ryan 1991: 114–119). The theory then proposes that plot is actually a result of actions that characters undertake as this system of worlds fluctuates. Plot moves forward when either the characters' internal worlds conflict (for example what a character wants to do (W world) vs what a character feels obliged to do (O world)) or their internal worlds conflict with the internal worlds of another character (a protagonist's W world vs an antagonist's W world) (Ryan 2012) and the characters act to resolve those conflicts.

A third concept proposed by possible worlds theory that is beneficial to the study of Pinter is transfictionality, “the migration of elements such as characters, plot structures,

or setting from one fictional text to another” (Ryan 2012). Doležel has proposed three different categories for studying the relationships between different fictional worlds: expansion, displacement and transposition, where the plot of a story is shifted to a different historical or geographical setting (Doležel 1998: 207). As critics have claimed that *One for the Road* can be seen as a rewrite of *The Birthday Party*, it is interesting to compare the TAW’s that the plays project from a transpositional point-of-view.

The power of possible worlds theory in understanding the Theater of the Absurd has already been demonstrated by Vassilopoulou. She has applied Ryan’s accessibility relations framework to indicate how the TAW’s in Eugene Ionesco’s (1909-1994) plays diverge from the AW and discovered that especially G/logic, F/taxonomy and E/natural laws are relaxed. (Vassilopoulou 2008: 173). In the same study, Vassilopoulou examined how the private worlds (i.e. TAPW’s) of characters create conflict (2008: 171-173) and drive – or as in the example she uses; Pinter’s *Old Times* (1970) – fail to drive the plot forwards as the characters do nothing to resolve the conflicts that their colliding knowledge worlds result in. To Vassilopoulou, this failure of the characters to act on the conflicts is a key characteristic of absurd drama (2008:174).

Possible worlds theory has also been employed to analyze Pinter’s works from the point of view of what is missing from the stage – the characters. Hevesi claims that in Pinter’s memory plays – *Old Times*, *A Kind of Alaska* (1982), *A Slight Ache* (1961) – the characters are stuck in the past, stuck contemplating ersatz possible worlds (shifting fragments of possible worlds instead of fully realized ones) instead of being psychologically present in the here and now (Hevesi 2011: 64). As a result, he poignantly titles Pinter’s drama as Theater of Absence – a genre where the past and the characters’ varying and often conflicting recollections of it are entangled to the extent that they surpass the importance of the present, their ersatz TAPW’s overtaking the TAW. A

weakness in Hevesi's analysis is that scarcely any textual examples are given and as a result, he could be accused of falling prey to the fallacy of "filling in" meaning as proposed by Van Laan earlier.

As evidenced by Vassilopoulou's and Hevesi's studies, our understanding of Harold Pinter's plays can be enhanced using the tools that possible worlds theory provides. It is therefore surprising to find out that further research has not been carried out. The purpose of this thesis is to build on especially Vassilopoulou's study, analyzing accessibility relations and internal conflicting worlds in *The Dumb Waiter*, *The Birthday Party* and *One for the Road*. My research questions include: How do the possible worlds actualized in Harold Pinter's plays contribute to his infamous pinteresque style? What are the similarities and differences between the Textual Actual Worlds and the Textual Alternative Possible Worlds projected by the plays? Is there are relationship between the TAW's of different plays? How do the TAW's differ from the AW we live in? How do the conflicting TAPW's – especially the internal worlds of the characters – steer the plots of the plays towards their crescendos? Are there some common characteristics in the three plays that have caused critics to be in such disagreement regarding their meanings? What is the significance of Pinter's use of possible worlds in the three plays?

In order to answer these questions, I will carry out an analysis of the accessibility relations and characters' conflicting worlds of the three plays one by one. First, the conflicts of the internal worlds of the characters and how they propel the plots will be reviewed. Secondly, to understand how and why the plays' TAW's and the AW differ from each other, a study of accessibility relations worlds is required. Such a study is important in understanding what makes *The Birthday Party* and the *The Dumb Waiter* traditionally pinteresque. Finally, the relationships of the TAW's of the plays will be investigated in order to determine how Pinter uses transfictionality to create a thematic

continuum between his earlier works and *One for the Road*, while recognizing that stylistically the plays are dissimilar.

The results of this study will indicate that a reassessment of what we mean by the term pinteresque is required. Perhaps it no longer should stand for use of punctuation and pauses or a certain kind of menacing atmosphere, but rather a unique textual actual world that ties his works together. In this textual actual world, the same accessibility relationships are broken and conflicts between the characters' internal worlds collide and are resolved or not resolved in similar manners. This thesis proposes that the two main similarities between the plays – and thus the definition of pinteresque – are the projections of numerous possible worlds to confuse and disorient the reader and the protagonists' inability to resolve to the plot tensions caused by conflicts in their internal worlds. An analysis of the three plays using the methods of possible worlds theory reveals that throughout his career, Pinter has been showing how unidentified powers force people to fulfill their obligations by suppressing the victims' wishes and thoughts with their own frightful logic.

Act One: The Dumb Waiter

Traditionally, critics have labelled the *The Dumb Waiter* as one of the best examples of a Comedy of Menace, where light-hearted banter slowly escalates into tension through exterior forces (an envelope shoved from under the door, the dumb waiter sending down meal orders) that ultimately becomes the narrative of the play (Batty 2001: 15–16). In Batty's analysis the dumb waiter "seems to serve as a tool of some higher organization" that reveals the reliability of the assassins, with Ben passing and Gus failing the test, which then leads to Gus being the next target (2001:17–18). However, he claims

that the play is as much “pointless, ambitionless waiting” and “our own daily efforts to make sense of a world of an erratic world that defies prediction” as it about unquestionable organizational control of individuals (2001:18). On the other hand, Esslin, whose analysis predates Batty but also claims that Gus is the next victim, sees the dumb waiter as a representation of the subconscious motivations of the characters (Esslin 1970: 72). His analysis is very Marxist claiming that the play shows “no more and no less than process of alienation to which men are subjected in a highly organized industrial society, which denies the individual. . . . any real understanding of its working, and the frustration this engenders, the violence into which the frustration is bound to erupt” (1970: 73).

Notwithstanding Ben grabbing Gus by the collar of shirt, the play of course never really erupts into violence. It is even unclear whether Gus really is the next intended victim. A second line of criticism has emerged reminding us that the play in fact ends before Ben shoots or refuses to shoot Gus (Van Laan 1981: 495). “Any interpretation that bases its argument on the presumption that Gus is subsequently murdered is thus engaging in interesting but irrelevant speculation. The play is already over” (Quigley 1978:1). Some have even gone as far as pointing out that both Ben and Gus might be waiting for a third person to enter, as the stage directions are vague (Buck 1997: 47). According to Van Laan we shouldn’t “fill in what the dramatist has supposedly neglected to record except through implication” (1981:495). Instead, we should see *The Dumb Waiter* as a play that asks us as members of the audience “to review our assumptions about reality, to ask whether events themselves actually exist independently of our consciousness, our supposed response to them, or whether, on the contrary, our consciousness, instead of merely interpreting events, does not in fact also create them” (1981: 500).

While both lines of criticism are not without merit, neither of them is able to examine how the narrative in *The Dumb Waiter* is constructed. By refusing to “fill in”

any meaning, Van Laan and Buck are restricting their analysis to the words on the paper instead of the worlds that are projected by the words. In many ways, this analysis goes against the way we read fiction, as it is the use of imagination to paint a mental image of what is written in the text and to fill in what is not written based on the literary world's closeness or distance to our actual world that makes reading interesting. In many ways, "filling in" is thus a natural process that any reader will experience, consciously or subconsciously. In claiming that the waiting is pointless and that external powers (whether they be social, organizational, or even "supernatural" (Esslin 1970:71)) are pulling our strings, the line of criticism represented by Batty fails to see what is actually happening within the characters of the play – the actual source of narrative progression in *The Dumb Waiter*. By claiming that what is shown on stage is "a complex existential situation" (Esslin 1970: 73), Esslin touches upon an interesting analysis but lands short by claiming that these are merely simple people battling with an incomprehensible social situation (1970:73). As an analysis using the tools of possible worlds theory will show, Ben and Gus are not simple people. It is Pinter's manipulation of typical narrative constructs and the world he creates that makes it seem as if the the characters are not behaving rationally. To understand how this manipulation works, we must analyze the characters' inner worlds, the dynamics of plot and the accessibility relations projected by *The Dumb Waiter*. Such an analysis will reveal, that Pinter is showing us the struggle of the modern human: a continuous battle to resolve the conflicts and gaps of our internal worlds, while ultimately the powers that force us to act are hidden from us.

From the outset of the play, Gus repeatedly questions what is going on outside of the basement room they are in. "GUS: What time is he getting in touch?" (116), "GUS: What town are we in?" (121), "It's Friday today isn't it?" (121). Ben is either unwilling or incapable of answering these questions, so Gus's thirst for information is rarely

satisfied. It becomes apparent that Gus knows little about the outside world or the organization that employs them. With the expectation that there is more to the world than just the basement, it is apparent that Gus's Knowledge world (K) comprises just a small corner of the Textual Reference World (TRW, the full world projected by the play). His K world is incomplete. Typically, in narratives that begin with a partial K world the plot of the narrative is a progression towards a more complete K world, such as finding out who the murderer is in a detective novel, or the protagonist's quest to discover who they are in a bildungsroman. Like Gus with his frequent questions, characters perform actions in an attempt to gain knowledge and the actions advance the plot. One would therefore expect the *The Dumb Waiter* to be a play about fulfilling the need to complete the K world with a clearer situational analysis. Instead the play proceeds to make things more complex by incorporating additional disturbing and confusing elements to increase the internal confusion of Ben, Gus and the audience. As *The Dumb Waiter* is a play, the reader does not receive any additional information beyond the stage directions compared with the characters. Unlike in the *The Birthday Party*, where the characters appear to be a step ahead of the audience, in *The Dumb Waiter*, we the readers are in fact sharing the same dark basement room trying to rationalize our way out of it.

But *The Dumb Waiter* has another character who feels very lax about completing his Knowledge world. With regard to the organization they work for, Ben as the senior partner does have a more complete K world. But the extent of his knowledge is debatable; either he is a) unwilling to reveal what he knows or b) as much in the dark as Gus. The beginning of the play strongly projects a) with Ben's constant evasions and vague answers as to why he pulled the car over earlier: "I thought you were asleep" (119), "I wasn't waiting for anything", "We were too early" (120) and the infamous Pinter pause that follows Gus asking "Too early for what?" However, as the play progresses the hierarchy

between the characters diminishes. Once the dumb waiter starts operating, Ben is as unaware of what is happening as Gus, which would seem to support conclusion b). What is perhaps more important is that Ben seems fairly content with an incomplete K world.

BEN: You know what your trouble is?

GUS: What?

BEN: You haven't got any interests.

GUS: I've got interests?

BEN: What? Tell me one of your interests.

Pause.

GUS: I've got interests.

BEN: Look at me. What have I got?

GUS: I don't know. What?

BEN: I've got my woodwork. I've got my model boats. Have you ever seen me idle? I'm never idle. I know how to occupy my time, to its best advantage. Then when a call comes, I'm ready (118).

Ben's internal worlds appear to be in equilibrium. He appears to have few wishes beyond getting to do his woodwork (Wish world). He is happy knowing that he does not not know everything and doesn't ask questions which might spell trouble (Knowledge world). When called to work, he is ready to comply (Obligation world). Pinter has chosen two characters whose internal worlds are in many ways polar opposite to one another. The effect is to make the drama more dynamic and unpredictable by projecting more alternative paths for the narrative to take. Is the narration going to reveal why Ben appears to be hiding something? Are we going to find the answer to Gus's enquiries about the organization? If both of the characters of the play were as inquisitive as Gus, then the play's narrative would be only about finding out what's happening outside, i.e. completing the K world. If both of the characters were as casual as Ben, the only way for the narrative to progress would be through an external happening that would create an imbalance in the character's internal worlds.

Whereas Gus is trying to complete his K world and gain knowledge about the outside world with questions, Ben is in reality attempting to achieve the same goal by reading a newspaper. “*Ben is lying on a bed, left, reading a newspaper.*” (113) is the first reference made to either of the characters in the stage directions. The following conversation highlights Ben’s thirst for knowledge.

BEN (slamming his paper down): Kaw!

GUS: What’s that?

BEN: A child of eight killed a cat!

GUS: Get away.

BEN: It’s a fact. What about that, eh? A child of eight killing a cat!

GUS: How did he do it?

BEN: It was a girl.

GUS: How did she do it?

BEN: She –

He picks up the paper and studies it.

BEN: It doesn’t say.

GUS: Why not?

BEN: Wait a minute. It just says – Her brother, aged eleven, viewed the incident from a toolshed.

GUS: Go on!

BEN: That’s bloody ridiculous.

Pause.

GUS: I bet he did it.

BEN: Who?

GUS: The brother.

BEN: I think you’re right.

Pause.

(Slamming down the paper). What about that, eh? A kid of eleven killing a cat and blaming it on his little sister of eight! It’s enough to –

He breaks off in disgust and seizes the paper (115–116).

The intensity with which Ben reads tells us that he is probably not just killing time but he is in his own way trying to fill the incomplete K world. He is slamming and seizing, breaking off in disgust, physically reacting to the words on paper. Such extreme reactions are not merely signs of disgust at the content, but indicate an inner struggle for greater comprehension of what is happening in the world. Ben's thirst for information is buried deeper than Gus's, acting on a more subliminal level. The conversation also highlights another important distinction between the characters. Gus's innate response to the new information is to question it "Get away" and he is also quick to speculate about the real identity of the killer "I bet he did it". As the information comes from a credible and authoritative source, Ben trusts what he reads and is originally in awe of it. Van Laan claims that their disapproval of the news article is an example of Ben and Gus filling in meaning: "dissatisfied with the event given by the paper, which evidently does not conform to their notions about eight-year-old girls, they rework the data into a new event of their own making" (Van Laan 1981: 296). However, in light of the fact that Ben doesn't show any dissatisfaction until Gus does, another valid explanation for the dialogue can be presented in the context of possible worlds: it seems that Gus's Obligation world specifies questioning authority as allowed, whereas Ben's O world specifies it as prohibited. Pinter is showing us the personal differences between the characters' moral beliefs. Gus is more of a rebel whereas Ben is conservative. The difference is reinforced several times, for example in Ben's response to one of Gus's many questions: "BEN: Stop wondering. You've got a job to do. Why don't you just do it and shut up?" (127). While at this early stage of the play the diverging O worlds do not advance the plot, as the characters soon move on to discussing something else instead of acting to bring their conflicting O worlds into an equilibrium, they foreshadow the ultimate conflict brought about by the dumb waiter.

To further increase the mystery and confusion brought about by the characters' failure to act to bring the diverging O worlds back to equilibrium, the characters also exhibit behavior that goes against the logic of our Actual World. This illogical behavior is exhibited when Ben and Gus discuss a football match that both of them possibly attended.

GUS: I saw the Villa get beat in a cup-tie once. Who was it against now? White shirts. It was one-all at half-time. I'll never forget it. Their opponents won by a penalty. Talk about drama. Yes, it was a disputed penalty. Disputed. They got beat two-one, anyway, because of it. You were there yourself.

BEN: Not me.

GUS: Yes, you were there. Don't you remember that disputed penalty?

BEN: No.

GUS: He went down just inside the area. They said he was just acting. I didn't think the other bloke touched him myself. But the referee had the ball on the spot.

BEN: Didn't touch him! What are you talking about? He laid him out flat.

GUS: Not the Villa. The Villa don't play that sort of game (121-122).

At first, Ben firmly denies attending the game but once conversation moves on to discussing a contested penalty, he suddenly remembers the situation as if it were yesterday. What is most surprising though is Gus's reaction to Ben's sudden outburst. He doesn't gloat the fact that he was right. This contradictory state-of-affairs of attending and not attending the game at the same time implies a relaxation of the accessibility relation G/logic (according to which the Textual Actual World is comparative to our Actual World if it follows the same laws of logic), as it is not possible for an individual to be in two places at the same time. Either the Textual Actual World is very different from our Actual World (in that it is possible for a person to be in two places at the same time) or as is more likely, Pinter is using the relaxation of G/logic to project several alternative possible worlds to make the play more mysterious: a) Ben attended the game

but lied about it, b) Ben attended the game but forgot about it until the detail about the penalty c) Ben did not attend the game and lied about his opinion regarding the penalty d) Ben did not attend the game but saw it on TV (though football was not regularly broadcast until the 1960's). Which of these possible worlds complies with the Textual Reference World (or what actually happened in the past) has little narrative significance as the conversation between the characters soon moves on to another topic. Pinter is leaving us with another unsolved enigma. He is showing us that reality consists of several possible worlds, not all which we will ever know, understand or remember. While at this stage the projection of possible worlds does not further the plot, the same method of lifting the accessibility relation G/logic will be used to an even more staggering affect later on.

The logical fallacy is not resolved, as a narrative happening extends the Textual Actual World and creates a new gap in the K world of the characters and the audience. The discussion about football ends, when an envelope is pushed into the room from under the door signaling for the first time that something is happening beyond the basement. The envelope contains matches, which should come in handy as Gus has been unable to light the gas stove for boiling tea as he has been out of matches. Again, the characters' reaction is interesting. First, they try to check if there's anyone behind the door, a rational action to complete their K world with information pertaining to who left the envelope. Afterwards, they have this conversation:

GUS: We'll, they'll come in handy.

BEN: Yes.

GUS: Won't they.

BEN: Yes, you're always running out, aren't you.

GUS: All the time.

BEN: We'll they'll come in handy then.

GUS: Yes.

BEN: Won't they.

GUS: Yes, I could do with them. I could do with them too.

BEN: You could, eh?

GUS: Yes.

BEN: Why?

GUS: We haven't got any.

BEN: Well you've got some now, haven't you? (125).

The conversation is meaningless, repetitious and evasive. Instead of addressing the interesting questions of who left the matches and how did the person leaving the matches know that matches were exactly the thing they needed, they ramble on about the necessity and handiness of the matches to the extent that it reads like a deliberate attempt to avoid both discussing the matter at hand and entering an uncomfortable silence. A silence that would force them to contemplate the identity of the sender and play up the new gap in their K world. While the pushing of the envelope indicates a gap in the characters' K world, Ben and Gus fail to meaningfully act to fill that gap. As interesting as the envelope is, it has little narrative significance beyond creating tension. Introducing a narrative happening – an unpredictable event that changes the course of the plot (Ryan 1991: 129) – and then having the characters fail to do anything about it is a violation of traditional storytelling typical to the Theater of the Absurd (Vassilopoulou 2008: 174). By breaking the patterns of traditional storytelling, it distances the reader from the drama. While *The Dumb Waiter* is in many ways a realistic play (in that there no supernatural elements), we are reminded that it is fiction nonetheless.

Before moving on to the narrative happenings that actually do further the plot of the drama, it is imperative to understand the characters' W (wish) worlds as they diverge from the typical and in the case of Gus, offer a potential path to analyzing the narrative. According to Ryan, the W world is a description of the actions and states that the characters see as good or bad related to their individual choices (as opposed to the O world, that relates to external influences) (Ryan 1991: 117-188). While Ben and Gus's

profession is never overtly disclosed in the play (amusingly, only once is a word directly related to their profession mentioned in the play and that occurs in a totally mismatched context: in one of the orders sent down to the basement via the dumb waiter: “Bamboo Shoots”), the majority of readers will agree that they are professional assassins as they are armed, refer to past jobs and are waiting for someone to enter the basement and the preparatory procedures they take all imply that their task is to eliminate or least seriously scare whoever enters. In our actual world, very few people share their profession. Beyond perhaps the state institutions with a monopoly on the use of lethal force, such as the police or the military, few of us would consider killing another person an acceptable action to perform and of course it is not socially or legally acceptable so such an action would collide with our Obligation world as well. However, killing another human being for money does not conflict with Ben’s and Gus’s W worlds, although it appears that Gus’s W world is not quite in balance. He appears to question their actions, for example when reminiscing about their previous job:

GUS: I was just thinking about that girl, that’s all.

GUS sits on his bed.

She wasn’t much to look at, I know, but still. It was a mess, though, wasn’t it? What a mess. Honest, I can’t remember a mess like that one. They don’t seem to hold together like men, women. A looser texture, like. Didn’t she spread, eh? She didn’t half spread. Kaw! But I’ve been meaning to ask you.

BEN sits up and clenches his eyes.

Who clears up after we’ve gone? I’m curious about that. Who does the clearing up? Maybe they don’t clear up. Maybe they just leave them there, eh? What do you think? How many jobs have we done? Blimey, I can’t count them. What if they never clear anything up after we’ve gone (130-131).

While there’s no direct outspoken remorse in Gus’s recollection, there are implications of him seeking approval from Ben as Gus asks simple affirmative questions in order to

build rapport. By not giving any stage directions on how Gus locutes his memories, Pinter lets the text project alternative possible worlds. If we believe that all the questions that he keeps asking throughout the play not only signify his desire to complete his K world but also indicate that Gus's W world is shifting and that is the root cause of why he ends up staring into Ben's revolver at the end of play, we can read the words remorsefully. However, the humorous word choices "Didn't she spread, eh?" "Blimey, I can't count them" coupled with the fact that beyond talking and trying to build rapport with Ben, Gus does not act to correct the possible imbalance in the W world, the text itself allows for an opposite reading: this could be just a cold-blooded killer having a laugh at the expense of his last victim. The complexity of the textual actual world Ben and Gus inhabit and the lack of details and resolve leave us wondering – we wish to see the plot resolved and Pinter is well aware of this.

The narrative happening that ultimately results in enough imbalance in the internal worlds of the characters that they are forced to act is of course the dumb waiter, a service shaft coupled with a speaking tube along which orders are sent down to the basement. The orders slowly increase in complexity, from "Two braised steak and sugar. Two sage puddings. Two teas without sugar" (130) to "Macaroni Pastitsio. Ormitha Macarounada" (136) and "One Bamboo Shoots, Water Chestnuts and Chicken. One Char Siu and Beansprouts" (138). Ben quickly tries to rationalize to fill in the gap in his K world (i.e. where do the orders come from and who is sending them) "BEN (*quickly*): No. It's not funny. It probably used to be a café here, that's all. Upstairs. These places change hands very quickly" (132). While this answer might satisfy the incomplete K world, it does not tell us why they start sending dishes up. Ben and Gus do not work for the café and by Ben's own admittance, it probably isn't a café anymore. Whereas before (when the envelope was pushed under the door) logic would have dictated that the characters would

should have acted to resolve where it came from, now that performing an action does not make logical sense, they of course act on the happening by starting to fill in the orders. Again the accessibility relation G/logic is lifted, to humorous effect. The reason for acting is indicated by Ben's distress "Quick before it goes up" (136) and "BEN *anxious*: "What did they do that [sent back the tea] for?" (138). The dumb waiter has temporarily shifted Ben's O world into disarray as they have suddenly received a command from an authority they must comply with. Ever the faithful servant, Ben does everything in his powers – which mostly consists of giving Gus orders – to fulfill the task coming from above and to restore balance to the O world.

As can be expected based on the differences between characters seen before, Gus's reaction to the dumb waiter is different. His K world is not fully completed with the simple explanation of a café:

"GUS: Yes, but what happens when we are not down here. What do they do then? All these menus coming down and nothing going up. It might have been going on like this for years.

BEN brushes his jacket.

What happens when we go?

BEN puts on his jacket.

They can't do much business (135).

By this point, the reader should not be surprised that these questions are never answered by Ben or the play in general. A number of textual alternative possible worlds are again projected: perhaps this was a café, perhaps not. Perhaps it was still in operation the day before the play takes place, perhaps someone is just toying with Ben and Gus. While ultimately Gus's need to satisfy the misaligned O world prevails (he complies by sending up all of the snacks he has packed), there is more struggle than in Ben's internal worlds, as his W world is placed in opposition to the O world. Gus is hungry and does not want to give his last food items to an unknown recipient for no apparent reward. Thus, to even

stronger effect, Pinter is emphasizing humanity's extreme sense of servitude. Following and complying blindly with orders in order to balance our O world even exceeds satisfying the personal nourishment needs of the W world and the need to know why we are doing what we are doing of the K World.

The *Dumb Waiter* is play that embraces speculation. Pinter has written a play that projects a vast number of textual alternative possible worlds, and ultimately the reader is left with more loose ends than in the beginning of the play. The characters' Wish worlds, Obligation worlds and Knowledge worlds lead the viewer along traditional narrative paths. However, the potential conflicts and storylines that the internal worlds project are ultimately not explored and/or resolved, as Ben and Gus stop and move on to something else when the reader expects them to act. This is the essence of pinteresque: creating expectations in the audience with the use of traditional narrative formulas and then breaking them by not leading the reader along a cohesive path to an unequivocal solution. Pinter projects numerous alternative possible worlds and leaves them unexplored. He sets his characters' internal possible worlds in disparity and refuses to rectify them. He is projecting a realistic textual actual world while stretching the laws of logic. As numerous textual examples have shown, the play is constructed to confuse: plenty of interesting directions for the narrative to progress towards are raised, however few if any are resolved. The audience is not given any information that the characters do not have, in fact the audience knows less than Ben does about what has happened and what will happen. All of this drama occurs in a tightly constricted environment with only two characters. Pinter is showing the complexity of the modern world where endless opportunities result in almost as many missed opportunities, moral choices are not aligned to traditional good/evil axis but along a continuum, organizational hierarchies are opposed to personal relations and the source of ultimate power to control human destinies

remains hidden. In this world there are few simple answers, but at the heart of this complexity is the individual struggle (shared among the reader and the characters) to maintain balance between our internal worlds especially when our Obligation world appears to overpower our Knowledge and Wish worlds. In maintaining that balance, we might succeed or fail. Might pull the trigger or not.

Now that we've seen how possible worlds theory can help us understand how Pinter has constructed a play that has the audience sharing the same struggle between internal worlds as the characters of the play and has the characters failing to resolve the conflicts in a way the audience would expect, it's time to see how the possible worlds in *The Birthday Party* challenge the audience's preconceptions.

Act Two: The Birthday Party

As is typical for Pinter's plays, *The Birthday Party* has inspired a multitude of opposing criticism with the main debate stemming from the question to what extent is *The Birthday Party* a political play. When it first came out, the play was universally bashed by critics (Batty 2001:12). Later, the complexities of the narrative led Esslin to conclude that *The Birthday Party* depicts the overwhelmed and disillusioned modern man. "A complex pattern of association and allusion is assembled to express a complex emotional state; what the poet tries to communicate by such an image is, ultimately, the totality of his own existential anxiety" (Esslin 1970:81). Seemingly careful to avoid a political reading, Esslin proposed no less than three alternative interpretations for the play: 1) the society reclaiming an artist back to existence, 2) an image of man's fear of leaving his warm refuge and 3) a metaphor for growing up (1970: 82-86). A more down-to-earth analysis was proposed by Pinter's biographer Michael Billington, who notes that

the play draws inspiration from the pop culture of the 1950's: the characters stem from period drama and cinema, the three act structure is very traditional and even the infamous interrogation scene echoes a popular fast paced quiz show, but "invests them with political resonance" (Billington 1996: 76-77). Batty appears to agree with Billington that a political undertone is present by stating that as opposed to his earlier plays, Pinter was "making any potentially political commentary more oblique" (Batty 2001: 15). As opposed to "political resonance" or "oblique commentary", Visser (1996), Inan (2005) and Silverstein (1991) all proposed a purely political reading of the play.

Irrespective of whether our reading of the play supports a political or an apolitical stance, it is essential to understand how Pinter has constructed a narrative that gives birth to such opposing criticisms. Toolan sheds some light on this with his speech move schematic analysis of the play's interrogation scene, which shows how Goldberg and McCann "do not trouble themselves with normal standards of rationality" (Toolan 2000: 195) in keeping Stanley silent. According to Toolan: "Pinter is acutely aware of how existence and identity are underwritten by the creation and maintenance of a speaking presence, and aware also that the pause, extending into silence, can amount to the un-answering rendered by the non-person" and as a result, claims that the play depicts a typical police-state interrogation (2000: 196). In her analysis of the dramatic language of cruelty so plentiful in the play, Laughlin makes an interesting observation regarding the gap between the characters' worlds and actions and the audiences' expectations of the characters' behavior: "This indeterminacy works to engage the spectator in supplying the missing information, in building up the plays' [*El Desatino's* & *The Birthday Party's*] mysterious and often threatening worlds, and perhaps even in experience for him or herself the frustration, fear, and cruelty resulting from this verbal violence" (Laughlin 1986: 16).

Using the methods that possible worlds theory provides, it is possible to extend these two studies further. An analysis of which accessibility relations – the determinants that help us to evaluate how much the Textual Actual World resembles our Actual World – are stretched, will indicate the confusing logic of the character's of the play. On the other hand, an analysis of the movement and conflicts of the characters' internal Knowledge (K), Wish (W) and Obligation (O) worlds helps us understand the extent to which Pinter follows traditional narrative norms and the extent to which he violates them. By analyzing how the play departs from our expectations of realism, the credibility of the characters' accounts of the past and the movement of the characters' internal worlds, we can better understand how Pinter is leading the reader on by projecting a vast number of possible worlds, and letting them experience the oppression and verbal torture so prominent in the play. Ultimately it seems that by making it impossible for the reader to discern the truth about the events preceding the play, Pinter is telling us to reassess the way we abuse facts of the past by broadcasting our own agenda and interpretations.

With a serene setting and seemingly harmless characters, the opening of *The Birthday Party* lures the reader into a sense of security that is soon proven false. Set in a boarding house on the English seaside, the play projects a Textual Actual World that most readers will perceive as peaceful, idyllic and quaint, far far away from the dark basement room of the *The Dumb Waiter*. Such a picturesque location is typically not associated with the violence that soon erupts. The opening conversation matches the serene setting: a mundane, slightly amusing discussion between Meg and Petey, the elderly couple running the boarding house, regarding breakfast and the day's newspaper. While the reader does not gain much information about their lives, it would seem that their internal worlds are happily in equilibrium: their Obligation, Wish and Knowledge worlds do not offer much room for movement. It would be hard to see Meg's and Petey's internal worlds

moving enough to result in actions that would create a plot, but their balanced lifestyle does act as a contrasting backdrop to Stanley – the pianist who has been living as the sole guest at the boarding house for a while. Meg’s attraction towards Stanley (a conflict between the O and W worlds, staying true to her husband vs. sexual desire) is made clear with her stage directions and suggestive wordings:

“MEG (*shyly*). Am I really succulent?

STANLEY. Oh you are. I’d rather have you than a cold in the nose any day.

MEG. You are just saying that.

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 in that room.

He recoils from her hand in disgust, stands and exits quickly by the door on the left (13).

Meg’s last sentence is especially interesting, as it obviously an attempt to build a gap in Stanley’s (and in the audience’s) Knowledge world in hopes that he would pursue filling it. This nascent love triangle, however, comes to an abrupt end, as Stanley does not act to fulfill the gap it. The reason behind this is that Meg’s Wish world is also in opposition to Stanley’s Wish world: he does not appear to have any interest in pleasing the whims of an older woman. Thus the whole attraction can be attributed more towards the creation of a light-hearted, comic setting rather than towards the creation of any narratively significant meaning. Pinter is toying with the audience’s expectations of genre, suggesting that we might be watching a pastoral comedy in order to make the impact of what ultimately happens in the play even more disturbing.

While Stanley’s internal worlds are initially in equilibrium, the balance is at best fragile, as the reader becomes aware that Stanley knows more than he reveals. The

narrative happening which ultimately disrupts Stanley's K world and moves the plot forwards is the appearance of Goldberg and McCann. Although their identities are initially unknown, a simple mention that others might be joining them is enough for Stanley to grow wary.

MEG. Without your old Meg. I've got to get things in for the two gentleman.

A pause. STANLEY slowly raises his head. He speaks without turning.

STANLEY. What two gentlemen?

...

STANLEY. Who are they?

MEG. I don't know.

STANLEY. Didn't they tell you their names?

MEG. No.

STANLEY (*pacing the room*). Here? They wanted to come here?

...

STANLEY (*decisively*). They won't come.

MEG. Why not?

STANLEY. (*quickly*). I tell you they won't come. Why didn't they come last night, if they were coming?

MEG. Perhaps they couldn't find the place in the dark. It's not easy to find in the dark.

STANLEY. They won't come. Someone's taking the Michael. Forget all about it.

It's a false alarm. A false alarm (13-15).

The pause, the pacing and the denial all imply that the gap in Stanley's knowledge world is clearly bothering him. For him, finding the identity of the visitors seems to be paramount. His interest in the visitors also creates a gap in the K world of the audience: why is Stanley so obsessed with the visitors? What is he so afraid of that he would even suggest running away with Lulu? Unlike in the *The Dumb Waiter*, where the reader usually possesses an almost equal amount of information about the world outside the basement as the characters, in *The Birthday Party* Stanley clearly knows something that

we (and Meg) don't. The audience is distanced from him. In terms of narrative and possible worlds, this reversed irony (a character knowing more than the audience) is extremely powerful as it allows the reader to project a vast number of possible worlds to explain Stanley's behavior while creating the expectation that revealing the secrets of Stanley's past will be main plot of the story. One only needs to look at the number of possible interpretations Esslin proposed as evidence for the power of creating a reversed disparity between the K world of the character and the reader.

By leaving the relationship between the history of the Textual Actual World (the past events as stated by the characters) and the history of the Textual Reference World (the events that have actually happened) open, Pinter manages to make the gap between Stanley's and the reader's K worlds even more profound. Stanley's version of the past is the history that the Textual Actual World projects and the history may or may not be identical to the history of the Textual Reference World, i.e. the events as they occurred in the fictional history of the world in which the text takes place. In this sense, Stanley is an unreliable narrator. There is no way for us to verify the truth value of Stanley's statements to know whether he really was a pianist and whether his account of his final concert is true.

STANLEY (*to himself*). I had a unique touch. Absolutely unique. They came up to me. They came up to me and they were grateful. Champagne we had that night, the lot. (*Pause.*) 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. (*Pause.*) 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 to play. Then, when I got there, the hall was closed, the place was shuttered up, not even a caretaker. They'd locked it up. (*Takes off his glasses and wipes them on his pyjama jacket.*) A fast one. They pulled a fast one. I'd like to know who was responsible for that.

(Bitterly.) 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 (16-17).

The sense of hesitancy in the pauses and the repetition makes it seem like Stanley is trying to convince himself that this is what happened as much as he is convincing Meg. Was Stanley really a pianist? If so, why would a successful pianist be suddenly expelled from playing? Is this the reason he chose to retire to a secluded boarding house? Was he forced to run away? Based on his fears and his recollection of the past, the reader knows that something has happened in the Textual Reference World. However, based on the irrational fears and gaps left in the stories of the narrator of the Textual Actual World (Stanley) the validity of his account is questionable. The complicated relationship between the TAW and the TRW makes the reading experience disorienting. Stanley is the victim in the play, but we do not find out the crime for which he is being punished. The discrepancy between TAW and TRW is also highlighted in the name of the play: while the characters are celebrating Stanley's birthday it appears unlikely that today is actually his birthday. Pinter is conjuring up numerous possible worlds in the mind of the reader, but the narrative refuses to verify any of these possible worlds eventually leaving the story open for as many interpretations as there are readers. It appears as if he is commenting on the irrelevance of truth. We are as distanced from the truth of our Actual World as the characters of the TAW are from the TRW, because facts matter little as people will interpret them to suit whatever their preconceived purposes are. How little the actual facts of the Textual Reference World matter as opposed to the Textual Actual World that the characters project is also illustrated several times in the dialogue of the play.

STANLEY: Tch, tch, tch, tch.

MEG (*defensively*): What do you mean?

STANLEY: You are a bad wife.

MEG: I'm not. Who said I am?

STANLEY: Not to make your husband a cup of tea. Terrible.

MEG: He knows I'm not a bad wife.

STANLEY: Giving him sour milk instead.

MEG: It wasn't sour.

STANLEY: Disgraceful (10).

Had the milk been sour, one would have expected Pete to comment on the fact as well. Whether the milk was sour or not is less relevant than Stanley's extreme reaction to it. Stanley is using the same methods that the thugs Goldberg and McCann later apply on him. Drawing irrational, exaggerated conclusions (being a bad wife), making false accusations (Meg actually did make Pete tea) and not listening to answers. As is typical for the Theatre of the Absurd, the conversation is dissonant, pointless even. There doesn't appear to be any rational reason for his behavior besides the apparent enjoyment Stanley gets from teasing Meg and asserting his intellectual superiority over her. From a narrative perspective, the conversation foreshadows the interrogation scene that soon follows.

The arrival of Goldberg and McCann changes the perspective of the play and sets the internal worlds of the characters in conflict. Their arrival qualifies as a narrative happening, as it manages to fully change the course of the play. Using Ryan's terminology, where S1 refers to the original state of the narrative, S2 refers to what would have happened without the interrupting happening and S3 refers to the end result due to the happening (Ryan 1991: 129) the dynamics of the plot could be summarized as follows:

S1: Stanley is living comfortably in the boarding house

S2: Stanley continues living at the boarding house (or possibly runs away with Lulu)

S3: Stanley is abused and imprisoned.

The gap in Stanley's Knowledge world (the identity of the new visitors) is soon filled in Act 2 as we find out that Goldberg and McCann were indeed here for Stanley. This leaves

Stanley's Wish world unsatisfied, as he would prefer to escape. To Stanley, S2 would be the desired state. His desire to escape is naturally in full opposition to the Obligation worlds of Goldberg and McCann, who prevent him from leaving and ominously insist that he join the birthday party celebrations in order for them to be able to reach S3. From here on, the conflict between Stanley's desire to be free and Goldberg's and McCann's desire to prevent his escape acts as the driving force of the narrative. While the reader may not be fully aware of the interrogators' purposes until the end of the play, we do realize a fork in the plot that could progress in (at least) two different directions – either Stanley wins or the thugs win. Or to put in other words, either S2 or S3 occurs. Compared with *The Dumb Waiter*, where the characters often fail to act to balance their internal worlds, in *The Birthday Party*, Goldberg and McCann are extremely effective in not only disrupting the expected path of the narrative but also in achieving their goal.

As a result, while Pinter is using admittedly quite a traditional narrative construction, the pinteresque twist is having the characters with internal worlds further apart from the audience's internal worlds winning. Goldberg's and McCann's actual profession or background is not revealed, it is apparent that they appear on the scene to do a job, which McCann (not unlike Gus in *The Dumb Waiter*) feels slightly disconcerted about "GOLDBERG: Why is it that before you do a job you are all over the place, and when you are doing a job you're as cool as a whistle" (22). As it turns out their job is to assault and capture Stanley to take him back to Monty. Again Pinter is using characters with Obligation worlds that supersede the typical Wish world. We can only guess what Monty and the organization behind Goldberg and McCann represents (a part of the Textual Reference World not accessible via the Textual Actual World), but it is clear that for Goldberg and McCann, assaulting and persecuting their victim is fine as long as it helps them fulfill their Obligation world. Pinter's use of irony is especially poignant when

McCann states to Goldberg: “You’ve always been a true Christian” (23). Not only is Goldberg probably not a Christian (his name and his use of Yiddish and Hebrew words such as Mazoltov, Simchahs and mensch would imply that he is Jewish), his violent behavior is certainly far from what most people identify as Christian. What makes Goldberg and McCann “the bad guys” in the play is their rigorous desire to fulfill their Obligation world, even when the cost is severe damage to another human being. And having the bad guys take over the play and in the end comfortably reach their goal is the reason why the play feels so pinteresque.

One of the reasons why Goldberg and McCann are so efficient in their interrogation is their abuse of logic in order to confuse Stanley.

GOLDBERG. What have you done with your wife?

MCCANN. He’s killed his wife!

GOLDBERG. Why did you kill your wife?

STANLEY (*sitting, his back to the audience*). What wife?

MCCANN. How did he kill her?

GOLDBERG. How did you kill her?

MCCANN. You throttled her.

GOLDBERG. With arsenic.

MCCANN. There’s your man!

GOLDBERG. Where’s your old mum?

STANLEY. In the sanatorium.

MCCANN. Yes!

GOLDBERG. Why did you never get married?

MCCANN. She was waiting at the porch.

GOLDBERG. You skedaddled from the wedding (13).

While at the beginning of the play, the secrets that Stanley keeps distanced him from the audience, at this moment we feel the same confusion that he does. Goldberg and McCann are behaving as if both of these sentences were true: a) Stanley killed his wife b) Stanley

never got married. Logic would dictate that the sentences cannot both be true at the same time, since in order to have a wife, one must first get married. The Textual Actual World is thus in contradiction with our Actual World, which makes the relationship between the worlds more distant. While the relaxation of accessibility relation G/Logic (which determines whether the TAW respects the same laws of logic than our AW) typically makes a fictional world seem distant and/or weird, I would claim that here the confusion it creates allows the reader to experience the same confusion that Stanley is experiencing. The effect occurs also when Goldberg refers to himself both as “Nat” (51) and “Simey” (53), as neither the reader nor the other characters of the play can even be certain of what his name is. By manipulating the logic and forcing the reader out of his/her comfort zone, Pinter seems to reiterating that reality, facts and even logic itself can and will be bent in order to reach a predetermined goal.

To the same effect, Pinter has also incorporated plenty of references to obscure historical events into the lines of Goldberg and McCann:

MCCANN. What about the Albigensienist Heresy?

GOLDBERG. Who watered the wicket in Melbourne?

MCCANN. What about the Blessed Oliver Plunkett? (45).

The incorporation of a 13th Century military campaign, a cricket reference from 1954 (Edelman 1994: 177) and a 17th Century Irish saint reflects that the Textual Actual World shares the same history as our Actual World. By showing that the worlds are reachable from one another, Pinter is creating intimacy between the world of the reader and the world of the play. However, the effect of choosing seemingly random historical events and characters is disorienting. We recognize that there might be actual answers to the questions that Goldberg and McCann question, but we are unable to answer them. As such, by giving the TAW and AW a common history, Pinter is brilliantly succeeding in putting the reader in the same position as Stanley.

As has been shown, *The Birthday Party* is in many ways a more conventional play than the *The Dumb Waiter*, but it is still at least as pinteresque. What starts off as a period comedy, suddenly turns into brutal drama. True to its Theatre of the Absurd label, there is very little actual plot for a three act play: the initial state (Stanley's cozy existence in the boarding house) is broken by the arrival of the Goldberg and McCann who manage to achieve their goal. The narrative is a traditional struggle between the Wish world of one character and the Obligation worlds of two other characters, where the Obligation world ends up winning. But there is plenty happening in the background that we do not find out, mostly Stanley's past and the thugs' motives. The Textual Actual World projects many possible versions of its own history, none of which are fully validated, as we are not presented with an objective history of the Textual Reference World. Our perception of why things are happening the way they are happening in the Textual Actual World is extremely limited and open to many interpretations. What Pinter seems to want us to experience is the feeling of sitting down and being overwhelmed – much like Stanley. To achieve that sensation, the play even has to bend logic, as if any less drastic measure would make the play too easy to follow. More than anything else, *The Birthday Party* is a play that challenges preconceptions by projecting so many possible worlds. Pinter is luring us to reading the play through any lenses that we choose, to take our preconceived notions of what is bad in the world and to project them as the motivation for Goldberg's and McCann's behavior. That is why there are numerous references to religion, political power and artistry, enough to support any analysis. And as we project our axioms into a reading of the play, we are falling prey to the same abuse of facts as the characters of the play themselves.

Act Three: One for the Road

Now that we've seen how two of Pinter's early plays confuse and disorient audiences by projecting a multitude of Textual Alternative Possible Worlds while ultimately exploring only a few, it's interesting to apply the same possible worlds theory to *One for the Road*, a strikingly different kind of play. Usually labelled as belonging to the political era in Pinter's works, *One for the Road* – released around a quarter of a century after *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Birthday Party* – represents a dramatic stylistic shift from Pinter's early plays. “Whereas all his previous work was enigmatic, multilayered, relying on pauses, silences and subtexts of far greater importance than what was actually being said, these later pieces operate unambiguously on the surface” (Esslin, 1993: 27). Most absurdist and humorous elements are gone and all that remains is a minimalistic and pithy play that contains four short, bleak scenes of torture between Nicolas (the torturer) and a family consisting of Victor (the father), Gila (the mother) and Nicky (the child). *One for the Road* is a sharp attack on the audience's senses characterized by an avoidance of the ambiguities present in his early works. The play takes place in a single, non-descript room offering very little description of the setting. Rather than being complex personalities, the characters appear to be filling in the roles of a torturer and his victims. A background to the story is implied, but not in any great detail. The plot is concise and most events that would take the plot further happen offstage and are only distantly referred to. There isn't even much dialogue as most of the time it is Nicolas alone who is doing the talking. Pinter had completed a drastic change of genre from Theatre of the Absurd/Comedy of Menace to post-modern drama that coincided with the author becoming more politically active and outspoken (Chiasson 2013: 80).

The critical response to the play and the change of genre has been unanimous in reading *One for the Road* as one of the epitomes of Pinter's political writing – a loss of

hope, even a cry of despair – and as such an extension of the themes discussed in his early works. Despite the stylistic differences, several critics (Visser 1996, Batty 2001, Inan 2005, Begley 2005), have linked *One for the Road* thematically to *The Birthday Party* and *The Dumb Waiter* suggesting that Pinter was exploring the same suppression of dissident thought in all three works: “it is clear that the anger and indignation that informed the writing of *One for the Road*, *Mountain Language* and *Party Time* was responsible in part for plays such as *The Dumb Waiter*, *The Birthday Party* and *The Hothouse*” (Batty 2001: 90). Begley claims that *One for Road* presents upscale versions of the torturers of his early plays and “extends Pinter’s previous treatments of criminality, adding a new branch to an evolving genealogy of thugs. The plutocrats, socialites, and functionaries of the later plays are affluent relations of the gangsters and sociopaths, in *The Birthday Party*, *The Dumb Waiter* and *Homecoming*” (Begley 2005: 162). Chiasson sought to establish the somewhat contested aesthetic legitimacy of the work with an analysis of the economy of affect, showing how *One for the Road* and other period plays “stage political realities in a manner that can produce new and different thoughts, feelings and emotions and therefore new worlds for spectators who are disposed to give themselves to the performance and indeed to “understand” Pinter’s drama as so much more than a representation of political counterparts that exist outside the theatre” (Chiasson, 2013: 83). Chiasson’s mention of new worlds is interesting as according to possible worlds theory, the projection of a Textual Actual World as the core for the story is what distinguishes fiction from non-fiction (which discusses the Actual World), and as such at least partly refutes the claim that Pinter had “become a political pamphleteer” (Esslin 1993: 27).

In the context of a thematic connection between *One for the Road* and *The Birthday Party*, the phenomenon of transfictionality, or “the migration of elements such

as characters, plot structures, or setting from one fictional text to another” (Ryan 2012), becomes relevant in understanding how the two plays – with their wildly different textual actual worlds – are connected. Doležel (1998) has proposed three categorizations of transfictionality, of which expansion and transposition are relevant in the context of *One for the Road* and *The Birthday Party*. An expansion “extends the scope of the protoworld by filling its gaps, constructing a prehistory or posthistory, and so on” (Doležel 1998: 207). Transposition refers to a relation between the texts where the plot of a text is taken to a different historic or geographical setting. The question then becomes whether or not *One for the Road* is a sequel to *The Birthday Party* or a rewrite of the plot in a new style or is the connection between the plays purely a result of the imagination of the critics? Can the concept of pinteresque be extended to include a play that is stylistically so different to what we traditionally regard as pinteresque? To answer these questions, we need to see how the plot and the movement of the characters’ internal words between the two plays correspond using the tools that possible worlds theory provides. Such an analysis will indicate that *One for the Road* can definitely be read as a transposition of *The Birthday Party* as long as we disregard the anomalies external to the plot.

One for the Road wastes no time in establishing the extreme hierarchy between the characters and the opposing alignment of the characters’ internal worlds. The in media res beginning is even highlighted by the third sentence that Nicolas tells to Victor: “Let’s not beat about the bush” (Pinter 1998: 223), which already establishes his control of the situation. As Victor is brought into the room, we are immediately alerted to his dreadful situation by the stage directions: “*VICTOR walks in, slowly. His clothes are torn. He is bruised*” (223). This suggests that something has happened in the Textual Reference World that is not immediately accessible via the Textual Actual World, creating a gap in the Knowledge world of the reader, which the story soon progresses to fulfill, as the

physical torture he has been through is heavily implied. The fact that Nicolas is not surprised by Victor's poor state of affairs and is not concerned about his health shows us that it is his desire to see Victor in that suppressed situation. Nicolas goes on to a lengthy, at first seemingly random monologue about his fingers and other peoples eyes to further establish his own supremacy before stating his mission:

You may have noticed I'm the chatty type. You probably think I'm part of a predictable, formal, long-established pattern; i.e. I chat away, friendly, insouciant, I open the batting, as it were, in a light-hearted, even carefree manner, while another waits in the wings, silent, introspective, coiled like a puma. No, no. It's not quite like that. I run the place. God speaks through me. I'm referring to the Old Testament God, by the way, although I'm a long way from being Jewish. Everyone respects me here. Including you, I take it? I think that is the correct stance (224–225).

His locution is eloquent and precise and his choice of words is far from the humorous cockney dialect of Ben and Gus or the crude style of Goldberg and McCann. And while Goldberg and McCann originally hide their true colors, Nicolas makes it clear that both his Wish world and Obligation world demand the utter destruction of Victor (and later, his family). He exhibits none of the conflicts between wishes and obligations that especially Gus and to an extent McCann display. Instead, his monologue is an action to achieve the goal set by both of those worlds. Not only is he filling in the obligations he as an interrogator has to whatever organization he works for, he simultaneously appears to enjoy his work as well, leading us to conclude that his Wish world is satisfied by this torture. And naturally the goal of breaking Victor down is in opposition to the internal worlds of Victor – though in a surprising way.

In Victor's situation, there is a conflict between his Obligation and Wish worlds. While we might assume that Victor's Obligation world would lead him to try to escape

and save his family, his Wish world leads him to another direction. He has a simple request for Nicolas:

VICTOR: Kill me.

NICOLAS: What?

VICTOR: Kill me (232).

The gravity of his situation is so far beyond all hope, that he no longer even dreams of freedom. Victor's words are an attempted action towards resolving his Wish world. Much like in *The Birthday Party* when the torture Stanley faces finally breaks him down and leads to his attempt to rape Lulu (Pinter 1991(1):59), in *One for the Road* Pinter is again illustrating how oppression brings out the worst in us. It causes the extreme negatives of the characters' Wish worlds (sexual desires and suicide) to prevail over Obligation worlds (social and family order). Nicolas however does not grant Victor his wish, but continues to suggest even more horrible ways of torturing him: "Despair, old fruit, is a cancer. It should be castrated. Indeed, I've often found that that works. Chop the balls off and despair goes out the window," (233). It takes imagination to produce a threat that sounds even worse than the death a victim would already embrace. Nicolas needs to achieve this in order align Victor's Wish world back into a more constructive position, to make him think that there is a fate worse than death. In this sense, Nicolas's performance is much more careful than the brute force wielded by Goldberg and McCann.

While there may be differences in the methods that the interrogators apply, their goals appear to be similar. We would assume that torture either is used to gain information from the victim – to fill the gaps in the Knowledge world of the torturer with information that the victim knows – or for the sadistic pleasure of torturing someone, satisfying a perverse Wish world. While we do not approve of the method of obtaining information, torture is a logical action to resolve an incomplete K world. However, in *One for the Road* and *The Birthday Party*, the interrogations are not aimed at gaining information nor are

they used purely for pleasure. This becomes clear when Nicolas interrogates Nicky and Gila, as his questions are mundane and serpentine:

NICOLAS: When did you meet your husband?

GILA: When I was eighteen.

NICOLAS: Why?

GILA: Why?

NICOLAS: Why?

GILA: I just met him.

NICOLAS: Why?

GILA: I didn't plan it?

NICOLAS: Why not? (237–238).

The goal of the conversation is not to gain new information. The only goal is the total psychological annihilation of any opposition in the victim, exactly as in *The Birthday Party*, where Goldberg and McCann ultimately carry Stanley away in a vegetative state. Likewise, in both plays, the torturers are the only characters who perform any actions that take the plot further even when their methods of furthering the plot are morally unacceptable from the reader's point of view. We might also conclude that the Textual Actual World of the play is departing from our Actual World with Nicolas's abuse of logic. He is not asking "Why?" to receive a logical explanation, as his questions have no logical answer. The accessibility relation G/logic that would determine that TAW follows the same laws of logic as AW is stretched. And again, the effect is to confuse the victim of the torture, to send Gila looking for answers to questions that do not have an answer. The goal is also to teach obedience: whatever Nicolas asks, Gila must answer, no matter how impossible the answer might be. The stretching of rules of logic comes from the same toolbox that Goldberg and McCann are using and again highlights the similarities between the plays.

Whereas the goals and tools of the torturers are the same in both plays, the plot of *One for the Road* originates in a reversed situation to that of *The Birthday Party*. Using

Ryan's terminology, where S1 is the original state of the narrative, S2 is the state that would follow without any interception and S3 is the state that results from the interception of narrative happenings (Ryan 1991: 129), we could devise the plot as follows:

S1: Victor is held captive in a prison.

S2: Victor remains imprisoned.

S3: Victor is told that he can go.

What is curious is that the expected state (S2) is technically worse than the outcome of the story, since the original state (S1) is so poor. However, when we take into account that Victor's son Nicky was possibly killed and his wife Gila raped and still held captive, the final state is only nominally better, and only for Victor. For the family as a whole, the situation has become even worse. Another curious observation is that we do not find out why exactly is Nicolas telling Victor that he is free to leave. The happening that has caused the story to move towards S3 instead S2 happens offstage. The only thing revealed in the play itself is that Victor's tongue has been cut off, possibly indicating that without a proper ability to speak, he should be harmless and therefore free to go. While the original state of the plot is different from *The Birthday Party* and its untroubled, carefree beginning, the way the plot progresses towards a negative outcome is very similar. The final state is worse than the expected state in both plays, though in *One for the Road* all of the states are very close to each other. Combine the similarity between the states with the fact that the happening that moves the plot further occurs outside of the text itself, and it becomes no wonder that some critics have regarded the play as more of a pamphlet than a narrative. But when we look at the play through through the different states, we see that there is a change, even if it is hidden from view. In the end that change is similar in both plays: the torturers gain the upper hand over their victims.

Not only is the progression of plot very similar in the two plays, we can also discover identical glints of hope in the endings of all three plays. In *The Birthday Party*,

Pete shouts at Stanley: "Stan, don't let them tell you what to do," (80) a sign that there is still someone left to oppose the force behind Goldberg and McCann. *The Dumb Waiter* ends with Ben's gun out, but before he makes any hostile attempt towards Gus. In much the same way, *One for the Road* ends with some hope left:

VICTOR *mutters*.

NICOLAS: What?

VICTOR *mutters*.

NICOLAS: What?

VICTOR: My son.

NICOLAS: Your son? Oh, don't worry about him. He was a little prick.

VICTOR *straightens and stares and Nicolas*.

Silence.

Blackout (247).

This final act of unwillingness to accept what he is told is the only resistance that Victor displays in the whole play. Straightening and staring might not sound like much, but they indicate that miraculously some willpower has been restored to Victor through the whole ordeal. As the play ends before we know what his next move would be, we can only note the change in his Wish world from wanting to die to standing up and staring his oppressor straight in the eyes. And of course, in a very pinteresque fashion, the play ends before any ultimate answers regarding Victor's future given.

Another pinteresque element in the play is its projection of numerous alternative possible worlds. With the play so minimalist and concise, the audience is again in the same situation as in the *The Birthday Party*, where the characters' Knowledge world is more complete than the audience's. We do not know much about the world outside the prison and the interrogation room, but the characters do. And the main gap in the audience's K world is of course what Victor and his family have done to deserve the fate that has fallen on them. Nicolas hints that the crime is purely ideological:

NICOLAS: Are you prepared to defame, to debase, the memory of your father? Your father fought for his country. I knew him. I revered him. Everyone did. He believed in God. He didn't *think*, like you shitbags. He *lived* (240).

Dissident thinking as opposed to strict patriotism and religious fervor appears to be the crime, but Nicolas doesn't elaborate further. The message that Pinter is saying is clearly that the crime does not matter, only the nature of it. In the society of the Textual Actual World, thinking is enough to land a person behind bars. The text projects numerous Textual Alternative Possible Worlds where any kind of thinking would be considered punishable. Much like in *The Birthday Party*, where the reason for Stanley's torture was never made public and so critics were free to make any interpretations for it, Pinter again does not disclose what the thinking crime was. Ironically, only the victims themselves can know what they've actually been thinking and this knowledge remains unattainable to even the harshest torturer and the most curious audience member.

Another way for Pinter to make the story more universal is to leave out the location of the room and the prison complex where the play takes place. In much the same way as in *The Dumb Waiter*, the Textual Actual World presented to us is extremely limited, a single room, only this time we do not even know where the room geographically is. Whereas *The Birthday Party* and *The Dumb Waiter* were both quintessentially English, the events of *One for the Road* could happen anywhere, anytime and for any reason (or no reason at all). Making the Textual Actual World more geographically and temporarily vague both distances and draws the TAW closer to our Actual World. The Englishness of the earlier plays certainly tied them to the Actual World, making them appear realistic but the abstraction of the TAW of *One for the Road* releases the play from the presentation of a single TAW and gives it more imaginative power. We could imagine the story taking place in almost alternative possible world, from the apartment next door to a space ship

on Mars. This is the core of the more overtly political Pinter: he no longer simultaneously confuses and entertains the audience with absurdities, instead he provokes the audience to a response by making the universality of terror plain to see.

As has been shown, *One for the Road* can clearly be read as a transposition of *The Birthday Party*. While the state of the narrative departs from an opposing point of origin, the plot runs its course in an identical manner. The fate that Victor and Stanley face is ultimately the same, the loss of voice, a shuffling of their identity. The internal worlds that cause the torturers to act operate identically between Goldberg and Nicolas: they are both driven by their Obligation worlds that tell them to follow the orders from above and crush their victims. The torturers are really the only ones that are performing any actions that further the plot, they are the characters driven by the goal of completing the tasks set by the Obligation worlds. The audience's Knowledge world is also kept incomplete in the same way in both plays: there is no justification to the torture and we do not know what possible crimes the victims have committed. Thus the true power that the torturers are obeying remains hidden, we only see the disturbed logic that the power wields. It is harder to see *One for the Road* as a sequel or prequel in that the characters are different and the world of the earlier play is not referenced. Pinter has taken the plot of one of his early successful works, taken out all of the elements irrelevant to the plot and focused purely on displaying scenes of verbal torture. The pinteresque elements such as the projection of numerous unexplored possible worlds, the stretches of conversational logic and the prevailing of the torturer and the unknown external force that obliges them to act are still there. What has changed though is the Textual Actual World and perhaps by association our Actual World. Audiences are no longer surprised or shocked by absurd, non-linear conversations or the inaction of characters. Pinter has wanted to present to the audience his dire view of the world we live in. A world where thousands of people face

torture daily. And the effective way to tell that story is to strip the narrative down, show only the terror and present the same old story as taking place anywhere in the world.

Conclusion

As we have seen in this thesis, the tools of possible worlds theory can be fruitful in analyzing and understanding the plays of Harold Pinter. In *The Dumb Waiter* we saw how the projection of possible worlds confuses the audience and continually works against their presumptions by having the characters fail at acting logically to resolve all of the conflicts that arise from their internal worlds. The play becomes an illustration of the complexity of the modern world, where humans struggle to meaningfully resolve relevant conflicts as they are influenced by unknown outside forces. In *The Birthday Party*, the possible worlds projected by the text relate mainly to what has happened even before the play has begun: what is the meaning of the events unfolding onstage? By not giving us a verified account of the past, Pinter mystifies events and shows how easily we tend to jump into conclusions and distort the truth and tell our own account. We are forced to project our thinking and to “fill-in” meaning as the playwright has cleverly hidden it from us. In *One for the Road* we experience the lack of meaning in an even more powerful way as there’s no context given to what is shown on stage. The search for an ultimate truth is futile and the play is written for the audience to project their own rationalizations on the universal Textual Alternative World.

Common to all three of the Textual Alternative Worlds is their vagueness regarding the past and the outside world. While *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Birthday Party* take place in recognizably English settings, the TAW’s of the plays appear to be very different to our Actual Worlds. There are powerful organizations of which we know little beyond their proficiency in and casual attitude towards inflicting violence on others. We

know as little about the past of the characters and can only speculate why they are now facing such violence. While the setting of *One for the Road* is not explicitly stated, the same abuse of organizational power and blank pages regarding the history of the characters are present. Pinter is showing that there are powerful, invisible forces operating on human lives and that there is no logic to how the forces can pick their victims.

In all of the three plays, Pinter appears to be playing with his audience by using the conflicts in the internal worlds of characters in surprising ways. We are used to a narrative pattern where once a conflict arises from one of the internal worlds of a character (be it Knowledge, Obligation or Wish), the characters will then act to resolve that conflict in order to bring their internal worlds back into equilibrium. The actions that the characters undertake form the plot. However, in these three plays, the characters often fail to do anything to bring their system back into equilibrium. Especially *The Dumb Waiter* is in many ways a play about missed opportunities and about Textual Alternative Possible Worlds that could become the Textual Actual World but never do. The characters of the three plays – at least the protagonists – are not the force that drives the plot. The plot is furthered by narrative happenings (such as the dumb waiter) or the antagonists, who are successful in their actions, which are usually carried out to fulfil their Obligation worlds. Ben and Gus follow the dumb waiter's orders without questioning. Goldberg and McCann torture Stanley to madness because they've been told to do so and Nicolas appears to be on a God-given errand to destroy Victor and his family. The fact that in none of the plays do we find out who the antagonists are obliged to adds to the menace and disorientation and is one of the reasons why the plays have inspired so many theories regarding what Pinter is warning us against. We can project any kind of corrupting force to the power position.

Pinter also enjoys confusing his audience by having the Textual Actual Worlds of his plays depart from the laws of logic we are used to in our Actual World. In *The Birthday Party* and *One for the Road* the relaxation of accessibility relation G/logic is used to place the audience in the same position as the tortured characters. It is not enough to show that the torturers have the power to take hold of dissidents, because the audience could always rationalize a reason for the dissidents to face the torture. We are tempted to project our own logic and reasons for the events that we see. By having the victims face interrogators who are demanding answers to questions that logically do not have an answer Pinter is showing that there is no purpose to the interrogations beyond the utter destruction of the victims. Pinter is showing that the power of the interrogator is so ultimate that they even get to define their own logic. The interrogators' worlds work outside of the boundaries of rationality – except in achieving the goal that they have set: breaking their victim. The only logic that works is the logic of power, which does not require rationalizations or reasons to support it.

All in all, this thesis argues for a reassessment of what is traditionally referred to as pinteresque. The term should not only be attributed to the menacing atmosphere and absurd dialogue of the early plays as critics in the past have done. Instead, the meaning should be extended to include his late plays, of which at least *One for the Road* is similar enough thematically and in its projection of possible worlds to *The Birthday Party* to be classified as a transposition of the same plot into a new setting and new characters. All three of Pinter's works show the random nature of power to destroy human lives. The power operates with a frightening logic for which it is accountable to no one but the power itself – the subjects of that power blindly obey it to a frightening extent. Pinter keeps the specific nature of that power secret on purpose to allow us to project whatever evil we see in the world into that power position, allowing for a multitude of different

interpretations and also allowing us to see the universality of the problem. It seems that Pinter agrees with the age-old saying that power corrupts, even to an extreme extent. And this is the pinteresque element that is visible in Pinter's works throughout his whole career that possible worlds theory allows us to see: an unidentified, universal power strong enough to suppress wishes and desires for knowledge and to force us to fulfil our obligations.

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