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# DISSERTATION

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HAROLD PINTER IN GERMAN:  
WHAT'S LOST IN TRANSLATION?

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## Abstract

This interdisciplinary dissertation compares Nobel laureate Harold Pinter's English plays and films with their German versions for the purpose of uncovering what is lost in the course of translation. In this scope, the author also provides creative new German renditions to help illustrate how the multi-faceted levels of meaning can be maintained in contrast to the earlier German translations, whereby a special focus is placed on humor.

The premise of this dissertation is that Pinter's work is less popular in German-speaking countries than in English-speaking ones for a series of reasons, in particular the loss of their original meaning and humor in connection with cultural mistranslation. The misunderstanding of Pinter in German-speaking countries may be an exemplary case in theater translation. Basic research will focus on his comedies of menace, including the plays and film versions of 1) *The Birthday Party*, 2) *The Dumb Waiter* and 3) *The Caretaker*. It was, for example, evident that *Der stumme Diener* would not be well received in Germany and had lost all its humor upon its premiere in Frankfurt, where "...it was played as a completely serious horror piece without a flicker of amusement."<sup>1</sup>

To begin with, Harold Pinter's broad-scoped oeuvre as a playwright will be depicted, accompanied by remarks on his style and his own commentaries on his work. This will be followed by an exploration of black comedy and British humor, as well as Jewish and Yiddish humor, in contrast to German comedy. Factors contributing to cultural differences in the understanding of humor may include the lack of a great tradition of classical German comedy and the specific political atmosphere in post WWII German-speaking countries. There will also be an examination of the theater of the absurd, including its influences on Pinter's work and style.

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor, p. 329.

A further chapter will briefly outline translation studies with emphasis on the *Skopos* theory, which is the dominant theory in translation studies at present. It postulates that a translation is dependent on the purpose for which it is rendered, meaning that it should be in keeping with the intended scope of use. The author's research ties into this in the form of literary translation, which is widely recognized as the art of recreating a work of literature in another linguistic and cultural context.

The comparative study of Harold Pinter's dramatic works shall contrast the English originals with the German translations of the above three plays, as well as corresponding film productions in English and German, where available. This will involve the comparison of selected German and English lines to demonstrate how the literary translation of the dialogue and idiomatic phrasing differ from the source text. The comparative studies of these dramatic works with their German translations will focus on the aspects of humor on stage and screen. Reviews and playbills will also be quoted to illustrate the reception of the above plays and enhance the multiple facets of this interdisciplinary study.

As my research on literary translation and the performing arts will also touch upon the non-verbal context, it will be supplemented with film versions of Pinter's play *The Birthday Party* (Dir. William Friedkin), *The Dumb Waiter* (Dir. Robert Altman), as well as *The Caretaker* (Dir. Clive Donner). *Der Hausmeister* (Dir. Dietmar Pflegerl) was staged and filmed in Austria, enabling further investigation into the German-language interpretation of Pinter's plays, including the stimulus-response system of dialogue on the stage. Altman's film was dubbed as *Der stumme Diener* in Germany, involving constrained translation, which renders the translation of films particularly complex.

In summary, this dissertation illustrates how the German translations of Harold Pinter's comedies of menace have lost certain aspects, in particular humor, to the detriment of their popularity in German-speaking countries.

## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Diese interdisziplinäre Dissertation vergleicht Nobelpreisträger Harold Pinters englischsprachige Bühnen- und Filmproduktionen mit ihren deutschen Versionen, um festzustellen, was im Zuge der Übersetzung verloren geht. In diesem Rahmen steuert die Autorin auch neue Übersetzungen bei, um aufzuzeigen, wie die mehrfachen Bedeutungsebenen im Vergleich zu den bereits existierenden deutschen Übersetzungen beibehalten werden könnten.

Die Prämisse dieser Dissertation ist, dass Pinters Werke in deutschsprachigen Ländern aus mehreren Gründen weniger populär sind als im englischsprachigen Raum, insbesondere wegen des Verlustes der ursprünglichen Bedeutung und des Humors im Zusammenhang mit kultureller Fehlübersetzung. Dass Pinter in deutschsprachigen Ländern oft falsch verstanden wird, könnte im Bereich der Theaterübersetzung exemplarisch sein. Die vorliegende Untersuchung basiert auf seinen Stücken und Filmversionen von 1) *The Birthday Party – Die Geburtstagsfeier*, 2) *The Dumb Waiter – Der stumme Diener*, und 3) *The Caretaker – Der Hausmeister*. Es war z.B. bereits bei der Premiere in Frankfurt evident, dass *Der stumme Diener* in Deutschland nicht gut rezipiert werden würde und seinen Humor verloren hatte: "...it was played as a completely serious horror piece without a flicker of amusement".<sup>2</sup>

Zu Beginn meiner Arbeit wird Harold Pinters breitgefächertes Lebenswerk als Dramatiker dargestellt, mit Analysen seines Stils und seiner eigenen Kommentare zu seiner Arbeit. Anschließend werden die schwarze Komödie und der britische Humor untersucht sowie der jüdische und jiddische Humor im Vergleich zum deutschen. Kulturelle Unterschiede im Verständnis des Humors sind u.a auf das Fehlen einer großen Tradition der klassischen deutschen Komödie und auf die politische Atmosphäre in den Ländern des ehemaligen Naziregimes zurückzuführen. Weiters wird das Theater des Absurden unter die Lupe genommen mit seinen Einflüssen auf Pinters Stil und Werke.

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<sup>2</sup> Taylor, p. 329.

Das nächste Kapitel widmet sich der Translationswissenschaft, mit besonderem Augenmerk auf der Skopos-Theorie, die zur Zeit in dem Fach dominiert. Diese Theorie postuliert, dass eine Übersetzung von ihrem Zweck abhängt, d.h. sie sollte in Übereinstimmung mit ihrer Verwendung entstehen. Die Forschung der Autorin ist auch im Bereich der literarischen Übersetzung verankert, die als die Kunst der Neuschaffung eines Werkes in einem anderen linguistischen und kulturellen Kontext verstanden wird.

Die wissenschaftliche Analyse von Harold Pinters dramatischen Werken erfolgt durch den Vergleich seiner englischsprachigen Stücke mit den deutschen Übersetzungen, sowie den dazugehörigen Filmproduktionen in Englisch und Deutsch, sofern diese erhältlich sind. Konkret werden ausgewählte englische und deutsche Ausschnitte verglichen, um aufzuzeigen, wie die literarische Übersetzung des Dialogs und die idiomatischen Formulierungen sich vom Quelltext unterscheiden. Die vergleichende Studie dieser dramatischen Werke mit ihren deutschen Übersetzungen legt besonderen Wert auf den Inhalt und Humor in den Bühnen- und Filmproduktionen. Wo immer möglich, zitiert die Autorin auch Theaterkritiken und Programmhefte, um die Rezeption zu veranschaulichen und die Vielfältigkeit dieser interdisziplinären Studie zu vertiefen.

Nachdem die nonverbale Ebene auch im Zuge der translationswissenschaftlichen Studie berührt wird, sind sowohl Filmversionen von Pinters Theaterstück *The Dumb Waiter* in der Regie von Robert Altman als auch *The Caretaker* in der Regie von Clive Donner Teil der Untersuchung. *Der Hausmeister* (Regie Dietmar Pflegerl) wurde in Österreich auf der Bühne aufgeführt und aufgezeichnet, wodurch eine vertiefende Studie der deutschsprachigen Interpretation dieses Pinter-Stücks ermöglicht wird, mitsamt dem Reiz-Reaktions-Modell des Bühnendialogs. Altmans Film wurde als *Der stumme Diener* in Deutschland synchronisiert; *constrained translation* macht Filmübersetzung zu einem besonders komplexen Vorgang, der hier näher untersucht wird.

Zusammenfassend zeigt diese Dissertation, dass bestimmte Facetten von Harold Pinters *Komödien der Bedrohung*, insbesondere der Humor, zum Nachteil seiner Rezeption im deutschsprachigen Raum in den Übersetzungen verloren gegangen sind.

## FOREWORD

In the fall of 2005, I was flying from Vienna via London to a conference on literary translation and censorship at Trinity College in Dublin. I had with me several pages of questions for Harold Pinter, who was the special guest of the Dublin Theater Festival on the occasion of his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday. It would be the perfect opportunity to interview Pinter on the lukewarm reception of his plays in German-speaking countries in contrast to his great popularity in the UK and North America, as well as his attitude towards the changes in the German versions of his films in comparison to the original English screenplays. I considered Harold Pinter the ideal subject for a thesis, for not only was he a brilliant playwright; he always portrayed the injustices in the world with blatant honesty, a real champion of human rights, something I had aspired to be all of my life!

Little did I know that Pinter, already weakened by cancer, was destined to have a terrible fall walking up a ramp at the Dublin Airport. His face was badly injured, requiring hospitalization and nine stitches, followed by an untimely return to London. A day or two later on October 13<sup>th</sup>, while I was having *panini* and a glass of chardonnay at the London airport, a newsflash came on the television above the counter, and I heard to my amazement and delight that Harold Pinter had just won the *Nobel Prize in Literature*. Of course the thrill that my favorite playwright had just been awarded the most coveted literary prize outweighed my chagrin that I would not stand a chance of getting an interview with him now. Nevertheless, I remained bound and determined to examine the German translations of his brilliant plays and films, as well as illuminating their reception in German-speaking countries.

This dissertation is the culmination of the project that originated as described above, and it endeavors to illustrate the comparatively poor reception of Pinter's plays in Germany (incl. the former East), Austria and Switzerland, as well as trying to uncover some of the possible reasons for it. Although many different factors have certainly played a role, including inadequate translations, Pinter's typical gallows humor and the lack of a well-established German tradition of black comedy (apart from German-Jewish comedy routines) probably contribute to the fact that his work is not as popular in German-speaking countries as in the English-speaking world.

## INTRODUCTION

This interdisciplinary dissertation will investigate the reception of Harold Pinter's plays and films in their original English versions in contrast with their German-language renditions in order to determine what has been lost in translation. In this connection, the author proposes to investigate the various factors that may play a role in the reception of Pinter's works in German translation, including the culturally distinct aspect of humor.

Research is primarily based on a very detailed reading of the English scripts of Pinter's plays in comparison with their various German translations and film adaptations. The author has availed herself of a wealth of secondary sources, including hundreds of theater reviews, as well as the extensive *Harold Pinter Archive* at the British Library in London. During her research sojourn in London, the author presented a paper on the translation of Harold Pinter's work at the *4<sup>th</sup> International Conference: Media for All* at Imperial College. Furthermore, a lengthy interview was conducted with Director Harry Burton, Pinter's close friend and long-time professional associate. In the course of the *International Pinter Abroad Conference* at the University of Maribor, the author also presented a paper, hence published as: *Harold Pinter's 'The Dumb Waiter' in German, in: Perspectives on Pinter, Elope, Vol. IX, 2012.*

For the purpose of researching the reception of Pinter's plays in Austria, extensive use has been made of the *Theadok* database at the Institute of Theater, Film and Media Studies, Univ. of Vienna. The *Theadok* archive of theater reviews (*Kritikienarchiv*) had fallen into disuse over the years, however, because there was no longer a working microfilm machine available for reading the critiques that were archived only on microfilm. With the help of the Institute's librarian, the author of this thesis was finally able to locate the last functioning microfilm reading machine in Vienna, thus helping to save the valuable and extensive archive of Austrian theater reviews.

The first chapter of this thesis will begin with Harold Pinter's biography, briefly looking into his childhood, social and familiar background. Pinter's plays often revolve around the abuse of power in some way, shape or form, which can be seen in

connection with his Jewish heritage. Pinter's acting and directing careers will then be elaborated, followed by his wide-scoped political engagement. An overview of Pinter's career as a writer will be undertaken next, including his major works as a playwright, his prose and poetry, as well as his screenplays. This section will be completed with a summary of the major prizes and awards Pinter won over the years.

The next section will offer a look into absurdist literature, starting with the theater of the absurd and focusing on Samuel Beckett, as an absurdist playwright, and his strong influence on Harold Pinter. This will be followed by a subchapter on considerations of humor and comedy, including black humor and dark comedy in the British vein, as well as Jewish and Yiddish humor, and German comedy or the lack thereof.

The following section will examine Harold Pinter's plays beginning with a brief description of his two periods of dramatic works, including metaphorical and political plays. Next the influence of Pinter's Jewish background on his writing will be examined, and this will be followed by an indepth exploration of his language and style. Finally a subchapter on Pinter's comedies of menace will be presented encompassing the earliest period of his dramatic oeuvre.

Chapter 2 on translation studies will begin with a brief investigation of the skopos theory of translation, which postulates that a translation is determined by its purpose. Next the translation of humor and the strategies involved in recreating a specific pun in the source text, or compensating for its loss, will be examined. The following subchapters will delve into the translation of dialogue and audiovisual translation, also involving specific parameters, which characterize these fields and require special translational strategies. The final section will summarize Harold Pinter's works in German translation, touching upon the various translators, who have rendered his plays into the German language.

Chapter 3 comprises an indepth study of Pinter's *The Birthday Party*, starting with a general plot outline and the production history of the play in English, including selected reviews. This will be followed with the production history and reception of *Die Geburtstagsfeier* in German translation, including critiques from the *Theadok archive* in Austria. A review will be done of the film production of *The Birthday*

*Party* based on the screenplay by Harold Pinter and directed by William Friedkin. General commentaries on the play will enable an overview of the work, while Pinter's commentaries will reveal his personal opinions. Next a detailed comparative literary study of Pinter's *The Birthday Party* with *Die Geburtstagsfeier* in both Willy Thiem's and Michael Walter's German translations will be undertaken, including creative new translations suggested by the author of this dissertation.

Chapter 4 involves a close investigation of Pinter's play *The Caretaker*, beginning with a summary of the story and proceeding with a production history and selected reviews of the English original along with an overview of the production history in German translation. Next the English film production of *The Caretaker*, based on Harold Pinter's screenplay and directed by Clive Donner, will be looked into briefly, followed by general commentaries and Pinter's own comments on the play. Then a comparative study will be done of Donner's London film production of *The Caretaker* with Dietmar Pfliegerl's Salzburg stage production of *Der Hausmeister* in Willy Thiem's German translation. This will encompass a comparison on the textual level with an eye to errors in translation, as well as a review of the two productions with a view to humor and differences in acting and direction, whereby the Salzburg production is a live recording, revealing where the audience responded with laughter.

Chapter 5 entails a detailed study of Pinter's play *The Dumb Waiter*, first providing a general outline of the plot and a brief production history and overview of the reception of the English original. The world premiere took place in 1959 in Frankfurt in German translation as *Der stumme Diener*, and the play's poor reception will be investigated in detail, accordingly. This will be followed by general commentaries, as well as Pinter's comments on the play. Next, the film production of *The Dumb Waiter* (Dir. Robert Altman) will be described, and an indepth contrastive study will be undertaken of the American film production with the German film version of *Der stumme Diener* as dubbed by Heinz Freitag. In this case, translation for the purpose of film synchronization will be at the center of focus.

Chapter 6 comprises a statistical analysis of the most popular 20<sup>th</sup> century English-language playwrights in Austria based on the *Theadok*<sup>3</sup> database of dramatic productions. The list of rankings in Austria is headed by the most popular Irish playwright Samuel Beckett at 126 productions in total, followed by American playwrights Tennessee Williams at 120 productions and Thornton Wilder at 96 productions. The most popular 20<sup>th</sup> century British playwright is J.B. Priestly with a total of 56 productions. Nobel laureate Harold Pinter's plays were staged in German translation in a total of 49 Austrian productions, ranking him at ninth place. Pinter's play *Die Geburtstagsfeier* was only staged once in Austria, not an indication of great popularity, whereas *Der stumme Diener* saw seven productions. *Der Hausmeister* was staged a total of twelve times making it Pinter's most popular play in Austria by a long shot.

To enhance the international perspective, Chapter 7 provides a short overview of the translation and varying reception of Pinter's works in French, Italian, Slovenian and the Czech language. This is supplemented with a summary of the international reactions to Pinter's death in 2008.

In the conclusion, a brief review of the findings will be presented for the purpose of illustrating why Harold Pinter's works are comparatively far more popular in English-speaking countries than they are in German translation, as well as the various possible reasons for his lack of similar popularity in German-speaking countries.

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<sup>3</sup> *Theadok*: <http://www.theadok.at/> This database of all the productions on Austrian stages from ca. 1945 – present has been created and administered by Prof. Dr. Brigitte Marschall in collaboration with the staff of the Institute of Theater, Film and Media Studies at the University of Vienna, Austria. (NOTE: No page numbers are available for reviews from the *Theadok Kritikenarchiv*.)

## 1 Harold Pinter's Background as a Writer

### 1.1 Harold Pinter's Biography

Harold Pinter was born as the son of a Jewish tailor in the poor East End of London.<sup>4</sup> Although Martin Esslin has claimed that Pinter's father's family had emigrated from Hungary, and were originally Sephardic Jews,<sup>5</sup> this is apparently not the case. According to Michael Billington, three of Pinter's grandparents came from Poland and one from present-day Ukraine, making them Ashkenazim of Eastern European descent.<sup>6</sup> They had emigrated from countries, where they were oppressed, subjected to regular pogroms and a general existential angst regarding their future, which eventually influenced Pinter's writing, as will become apparent in the in-depth studies of his works in the following chapters.

A very brief overview of Harold Pinter's biography needs to mention his first marriage to Vivian Merchant, a fellow actress whom he met when they both played in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, while on tour with Donald Wolfit's classical repertory company in 1953. Pinter and Merchant got married in 1956 and toured together extensively with repertory theater companies. In 1958 their son Daniel was born. Harold Pinter was to become estranged from his son after he and Vivian were divorced in 1980.<sup>7</sup>

Before his divorce, Pinter had met the well-known historian and writer, Antonia Fraser, and the two had fallen in love. After their divorces, Pinter and Fraser married and moved together in London with her children. Despite their differences, they were very happy together, as Fraser's book on her life with Pinter entitled *Must You Go?* testifies. A review of this book remarks upon their relationship:

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<sup>4</sup> Pinter's mother always insisted that Hackney was actually located in the north of the city according to Antonia Fraser in her biography of her husband Harold: *Fraser*, p. 92.

<sup>5</sup> Program Note by Martin Esslin for "*Der stumme Diener*" & "*Noch einen Letzten*," Landestheater Linz, Austria, 1989.

<sup>6</sup> *Billington*, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> *Gordon*, p. xlvii-xlviii

*"With certain couples, you see such difference sitting beside such longevity that you cannot fail to admire it, weighing to the credit of each that they are so fond of the otherness of the other. (...) It was perfectly embodied in the love story of Harold Pinter and Antonia Fraser: him the East London-born burly apostle of darkness; her an aristocratic summer-pudding of sweetness and joy."*<sup>8</sup>

Harold Pinter passed away in London in the presence of his wife Antonia Fraser at the age of 78 on December 24<sup>th</sup>, 2008 after a long fight against cancer.

### **1.1.1 Pinter's Childhood Years**

The existential threat to a child growing up in London's East End during World War II was substantial, as can be seen by the fact that Pinter was repeatedly evacuated to the countryside as a young boy, away from his family for long periods of time. Pinter wrote about revisiting the site of his childhood evacuation in Cornwall: *"The image from childhood is dark green, bottle green, black trunks, vast flowering bushes, along the drive, a prison of green, sudden curtains drawn on the sky.... The whole experience is well lost. It was desolate. But I was scarred by its beauty."*<sup>9</sup>

Presumably his parents and relatives also voiced a fear of annihilation, which most Jews understood would be the outcome, if Hitler won the war. While Pinter was at home in London at the age of thirteen, the family house was actually hit by a bomb in the Blitz.<sup>10</sup> Even after the war, violent groups of British fascists continued to terrorize the Jewish children on the streets in his neighborhood, beating them up and chasing after them regularly. Pinter has said that he had to learn to run very fast, and later to use his force of argument to get out of brutal clashes.<sup>11</sup> At a later visit to the district of his childhood with his new wife Antonia Fraser, Pinter still claimed that it was a terribly depressing place.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Financial Times book review: Antonia Fraser on her long and happy marriage to the Nobel laureate by Dominic Dromgoole, January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Fraser, p. 129.

<sup>10</sup> *New York Times*, 25 December 2008.

<sup>11</sup> Gordon, p. xlv.

Regarding his Jewish upbringing and beliefs, Pinter once stated in an interview with Mireia Aragay: "*I was never a religious Jew. The last religious subscription I made, the bar mitzvah, was when I was thirteen.... I've no religious beliefs whatsoever, but I'm still Jewish.*"<sup>13</sup>

The influence of Pinter's parents on his writing career should also be touched upon. One of the first mentions of Pinter's writing is the fact that his father 'nicked' a stack of notebooks from his place of work so that Harold would have somewhere to write his stories. Antonia Fraser also mentions that Harold's father was an 'extremely jolly' man, referring to his joking behind her back.<sup>14</sup> His father's Jewish wit presumably influenced Harold's sense of humor in his plays. Pinter also emphasized the respect for learning in his parents' home,<sup>15</sup> which certainly played a role in his love of good literature.

When Pinter was called up for mandatory military service as a young man, he refused and stood trial twice, escaping a prison sentence.<sup>16</sup> He was officially registered as a conscientious objector in 1948. In an interview in 1985 he stated that he was very troubled by the Cold War, as well as McCarthyism, and the deep hypocrisy of both. In 1948 the brutal occupation of Eastern Europe by the Soviet communists disturbed Pinter terribly, and he believed that everyone has the obligation to look at his or her own actions and question whether they are morally justified.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, Pinter asserted that if he had been old enough to fight against the Nazis in World War II, he would not have hesitated to do so.<sup>18</sup>

His close boyhood friends, Henry Woolf, Mick Goldstein, and Moische Wernick, were a culturally and intellectually interested Jewish group, with whom he debated literature and went to see films, including French cinema. These first friends were to remain Pinter's close friends for life. His official biographer, Michael Billington, calls

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<sup>12</sup> Fraser, p. 100.

<sup>13</sup> *Pinter 1998*, p. 69.

<sup>14</sup> Fraser, p. 88. Antonia Fraser also records what Harold Pinter's father jokingly said to her father (a politician) upon first meeting him: "*All politicians are villains, Lord Longford, take it from me.*" on p. 115.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p. 92.

<sup>16</sup> *Working with Pinter*, 4:40 min.

<sup>17</sup> Pinter in an interview with Nicholas Hern, May 1985, German transl. by Harry Ledig-Rowohlt.

<sup>18</sup> Gordon, p. xlvi.

this Pinter's "golden period," however Pinter emphasized that he felt morbid, depressed and alienated at this time of his life.<sup>19</sup>

Pinter was also personally encouraged and inspired by his English teacher in Hackney Downs Grammar School, Joseph Brearley (1909-1997), to whom he dedicated a poem upon the latter's demise. This poem begins: "*Dear Joe, I'd like to walk with you...*" and ends "*You're gone. I'm at your side....*"<sup>20</sup> It very clearly reflects young Pinter's close relationship with his teacher, who was obviously a mentor, as well as an intellectual inspiration, even organizing the attendance of theater productions for his students. Pinter also became a member of the Hackney Downs Literary and Debating Society, which is additional evidence of his keen interest in literature as a boy. At this time, he published his first essays in the Hackney Downs School Magazine.<sup>21</sup>

### 1.1.2 Pinter's Acting and Directing Career

In 1948 Harold Pinter won a scholarship to study acting at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, the most prestigious school of drama in England. He spent a year there, after which he left and then got his first job as an actor with the BBC radio in 1950. A year later Pinter enrolled in the Central School of Speech and Drama and soon began acting with Anew McMasters repertory theater company, which toured all over Ireland, playing the classics along with British comedies and murder mysteries. Later he became a member of Donald Wolfit's repertory company and toured all over England, playing a huge variety of roles.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Michael Billington on Harold Pinter's youth (film interview): Harold Pinter Website.

<sup>20</sup> Pinter 1998, p. 150.

<sup>21</sup> Gordon, p. xlv.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. xlvii.



*Illus. 1: Harold Pinter as David Baron*

Pinter's early acting career under the Jewish stage name of David Baron was characterized by a lack of sufficient funds and a highly stressful schedule, as he himself elaborates in the documentary film *Working with Pinter*: *"I was rehearsing one play in the morning, and playing another play at night in rep, and learning the lines of the next play in the afternoon, so how I managed to write 'The Room' (his first play), I have absolutely no idea."*<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, Pinter's involvement as an actor on stage clearly spurred the beginning of his career in writing for the stage, and his vast acting experience on stage and in film is one of the major factors, which made him such an excellent playwright.

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<sup>23</sup> *Working with Pinter*, 7:20 min.



*Illus. 2: Harold Pinter as Macbeth, 2<sup>nd</sup> from left*

In connection with Pinter's plays, which are examined in this thesis, a few productions he acted in will be briefly mentioned. The first of these is a production of *The Caretaker*, in which Pinter took over the role of Mick from Alan Bates during the latter's absence of four weeks, confirming that this role was one of his favorites. This production was directed by BBC's Donald McWhinnie, who had helped and encouraged Pinter early on in his career:

*The Caretaker*

*30 May 1960, Duchess Theatre, London*

Directed by Donald McWhinnie; Brian Currah - Designer; **Mick - Harold Pinter;**  
Davies - Donald Pleasence; Aston - Peter Woodthorpe

The following comment by Donald Pleasence reveals how Pinter came about to take over the role of Mick from Alan Bates, as well as illustrating how well Pinter acted the role, and threatening nature of his performance of *The Caretaker*, which may be considered a late comedy of menace:

*"Alan [Bates] ... went off to do 'Whistle Down the Wind' and somehow it came about that Harold said, 'I'll play it.' He was dying to, actually. He was very good. Of all the Micks I've played it with - about five - he was the most frightening.... By far the most*

*frightening. He used to terrify me every night.*"<sup>24</sup>



***Illus. 3: Donald Pleasence as Davies and Harold Pinter as Mick***

The following review of the above production was published in the *Guardian*, and also serves to show how Pinter himself envisioned the role of Mick in *The Caretaker*. The lucky audience had the rare opportunity to see a role enacted by the very playwright, who created it, embodying a concise and menacing interpretation of the character of Mick.

*"Mr. Pinter was an actor for eight years before turning to playwriting, and he acquits himself expertly. He has a fine presence. He broods, threatens, and with faultless timing forces us to endure to the limit those ominous silences that punctuate the action with the impact of explosions."*<sup>25</sup>

As he remarked in Harry Burton's documentary film, Pinter considered acting technique important, but viewed acting as an intuitive process, a road of discovery and exploration, which results in the excitement of the 'living theater.' Speaking to Burton, Pinter said: *"You as an actor yourself know that actors do things instinctively. They can't rationalize things...."*<sup>26</sup>

In the fall of 1984, Harold Pinter gave an enactment of scenes from six of his plays at the YMHA in New York City. This marked his return to acting after a long period of abstinence from the stage, accompanied by periodic depressions. According to

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<sup>24</sup> Billington, 1996, p. 129.

<sup>25</sup> *The Guardian*, June 1960.

Antonia Fraser, his mood was much improved after his return to the stage, although he wasn't satisfied with his Davies in *The Caretaker*: "*I was too ferocious. I didn't have the charm.*"<sup>27</sup>

Another excellent example of the playwright Pinter embodying a role he created onstage is the production of *The Birthday Party*, which premiered in London in June 1987. In this case, Harold Pinter played the role of Goldberg, the Jewish thug, who interrogates and takes away Stanley, the protagonist of the play. Richard Mayne wrote as follows in the Critic's Forum: "*One can't fault Harold Pinter as this menacing sort of 'Faulty Towers' figure.*"<sup>28</sup> The details of the production are:

### ***The Birthday Party***

*BBC2 Theatre Night, 21 June 1987*

Directed by Kenneth Ives (Bruce Macadie - Designer); **Goldberg - Harold Pinter**; Meg - Joan Plowright ; Stanley - Kenneth Cranham ; McCann - Colin Blakely ; Petey - Robert Lang ; Lulu - Julie Walters

In the Independent, critic Saskia Baron remarked on Pinter's Yiddish accent, which he used to play Goldberg, probably the most Jewish character in any of his plays. From this review, we can also deduce that Pinter's Jewish background had a great influence on his writing, and characterization of certain roles: "*Pinter, as the menacing Goldberg, wrapped his Yiddish accent around such lines as 'If you want to know the truth, Webber, you're beginning to get on my breasts' and 'Your bite is dead, only your pong is left' with a terrifying, chilly relish.*"<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *Working with Pinter*, 23:45 min.

<sup>27</sup> Fraser, p. 177.

<sup>28</sup> *Critics' Forum*, BBC Radio 3, 28 June 1987.

<sup>29</sup> Saskia Baron, *The Independent*, 22 June 1987.



*Illus. 4: Harold Pinter as Goldberg, far right*

In the *London Daily News*, Sue Summers provides a revealing quote by Harold Pinter, who claims that he really enjoyed playing the sinister role of Goldberg. In connection with the terror Pinter lived through in London as a Jewish child, in the face of the real fascist threat, one can well imagine that he might enjoy embodying a menacing character on stage himself, given the opportunity to reverse roles with his childhood experiences:

*"As one of a pair of sinister strangers who, for reasons never made clear, terrorise the innocent Stanley, Pinter reveals the talent for playing villains on which he capitalised in his repertory days. For some reason or other, he says, he is frequently asked to play gangsters in films: 'Really quite vicious gangsters, too. I don't know where people get this idea. Cutting people's heads off. Although I really do enjoy playing the sinister roles. I have a goodly amount of relish for Goldberg.'"*<sup>30</sup>

In an interview with Mel Gussow, Harold Pinter agrees that the roles of Goldberg in *The Birthday Party*, Mick in *The Caretaker* and Lenny in *The Homecoming* all reflect the character of a 'machinator' (sic) or manipulator. At the same time he admits that he always played sinister roles in repertory theater and enjoyed doing so.<sup>31</sup> This serves to give us an idea of the roles he identified closely with while creating them. At the same time, it would seem quite possible that Pinter personally experienced similar characters over the course of his childhood and life as an actor in the theater, inspiring him to put them into writing.

<sup>30</sup> *London Daily News*, 19 June, 1987.

<sup>31</sup> Gussow, p. 23.

In August of 2006, Pinter's made one of his last public appearances at the Edinburgh Book Festival to play Goldberg, McCann and Stanley in the famous interrogation scene from *The Birthday Party*. Although Pinter was already very frail due to the recurrence of his cancer of the esophagus, his enactment was full of force. Antonia Fraser also remarks that most of the audience seemed to know the scene, as they had studied *The Birthday Party* at school in England.<sup>32</sup> The fact that Pinter repeatedly came back to this play in his acting career would indicate the importance of its themes in his personal estimation.

Another one of the roles in his own play, *One for the Road*, which Pinter enacted on stage in Cheltenham, was Gila, that of the tortured woman prisoner in her interrogation scene. We have to assume that he chose this scene, because he considers it powerful, and apparently so did the audience, including a big guide dog, which became extremely agitated during this specific scene.<sup>33</sup>

Pinter's wife Antonia Fraser always felt that, as a director, he took the side of the actors, because he would identify with them. If there were differences, it was because of his perfectionism and his close attention to the text, rather than for reasons of aggression. Most actors seem to have liked Pinter as a director.<sup>34</sup> Pinter has said that he tremendously enjoyed working with actors in rehearsal, because they are extremely intelligent, responsible and informed.<sup>35</sup>

In the context of Pinter's political interests as a director, it must be noted that he was very pleased to be asked to direct Ronnie Harwood's play, *Taking Sides*, dealing with Wilhelm Furtwängler's collaboration with the Nazi regime. Pinter admired the way Harwood dealt with the theme of art and collaboration with the Nazis.<sup>36</sup>

Pinter directed several plays by Simon Gray, probably his best friend and favorite living playwright after the death of Samuel Beckett, as well as acting in them. In

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<sup>32</sup> Fraser p. 306.

<sup>33</sup> Fraser, p. 272.

<sup>34</sup> Fraser, p. 178.

<sup>35</sup> *Working with Pinter*, 17:05 min.

<sup>36</sup> Fraser, p. 212.

2004, when he was already ill with cancer, he consented to direct Grey's new play *The Old Masters*, which turned out to be the last play he directed in his career.<sup>37</sup>

### 1.1.2.1 Pinter's Acting Career in the Theater

This brief summary Pinter's acting career highlights the roles he acted in his own plays, including Mick in *The Caretaker* in 1960 and Goldberg in *The Birthday Party* in 1987:

- Toured Ireland with Anew McMaster repertory company (1951-52)
- Donald Wolfitt Company, King's Theatre, Hammersmith (1953-54)
- Repertory at Chesterfield, Whitby, Huddersfield, Colchester, Bournemouth, Torquay, Birmingham, Palmers Green, Worthing, Richmond (1953-59)
- **THE CARETAKER – role of Mick - Duchess Theatre London (1960)**
- THE HOMECOMING – role of Lenny - Watford Theatre (1969)
- OLD TIMES – role of Deeley - Los Angeles (1985)
- **THE BIRTHDAY PARTY – role of Goldberg - London (1987)**
- NO MAN'S LAND – role of Hirst - Almeida and Comedy Theatre (1992-3)
- THE HOTHOUSE – role of Roote - Chichester Festival Theatre, Comedy Theatre (1995)
- THE COLLECTION – role of Harry, Gate Theatre, Dublin (1997) & Donmar Warehouse (1998),
- ONE FOR THE ROAD – role of Nicolas, New Ambassadors Theatre, London (2001) and Lincoln Center Festival, New York, USA (2001),
- PRESS CONFERENCE, Royal National Theatre (2002)
- KRAPP'S LAST TAPE – Royal Court Theatre (2006)

### 1.1.2.2 Pinter's Acting Career and Roles in Cinema

Pinter took on fewer roles in the cinema than he did on stage. His depiction of Sir Thomas Bertram in *Mansfield Park* is one of the memorable roles he played of a torn character.

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<sup>37</sup> Fraser, p. 274.



*Illus. 5: Harold Pinter (top right) as Sir Thomas Bertram in Mansfield Park*

- THE SERVANT - Society Man (1964)
- ACCIDENT - Bell (1967)
- THE RISE AND RISE OF MICHAEL RIMMER - Steven Hench (1970)
- TURTLE DIARY - Man in Bookshop (1985)
- MOJO - Sam Ross (1997)
- MANSFIELD PARK - Sir Thomas Bertram (1998)
- THE TAILOR OF PANAMA - Uncle Benny (2000)

### 1.1.2.3 Television Films and Roles in Which Pinter Acted

In the scope of this dissertation, it is relevant to mention that Pinter enjoyed playing the role of Goldberg in his own play *The Birthday Party* in a London production in 1987.

- A NIGHT OUT - Seeley (1960)
- HUIS CLOS by Jean Paul Sartre - Garcia (1965)
- THE BASEMENT - Stott (1967)
- ROGUE MALE by Clive Donner - Lawyer (1976)
- LANGRISHE, GO DOWN - Shannon (1978)
- **THE BIRTHDAY PARTY by Harold Pinter - Goldberg (1987)**
- BREAKING THE CODE by Hugh Whitmore - John Smith (1997)

- CATASTROPHE by Samuel Beckett - Director (2000)
- WIT by Margaret Edson - Father (2000)

#### 1.1.2.4 Radio Broadcasts in Which Pinter Played a Role

- PLAYERS - Narrated by Harold Pinter with Edward de Souza FOCUS ON FOOTBALL POOLS and FOCUS ON LIBRARIES (1951)
- HENRY VIII - Abergevenny (1951)
- MR PUNCH PASSES - Narrator (1951)
- A NIGHT OUT - Seeley (1960)
- THE EXAMINATION - Reading (1962)
- TEA PARTY - Reading (1964)
- MONOLOGUE - Man (1975)
- ROUGH FOR RADIO by Samuel Beckett - Man (1976)
- BETRAYAL - Robert (1990)
- THE PROUST SCREENPLAY - The voice of the Screenplay (1995)
- I HAD TO GO SICK by Julian McLaren Ross - Reading (1998)
- MOONLIGHT - Andy (2000)
- A SLIGHT ACHE - Edward (2000)

#### 1.1.2.5 Plays Pinter Directed on Stage

- **Harold Pinter:** THE COLLECTION (together with Peter Hall) (1962)
- **Harold Pinter:** THE LOVER and THE DWARFS (1963)
- **Harold Pinter:** **THE BIRTHDAY PARTY (1964)**
- Robert Shaw: THE MAN IN THE GLASS BOOTH London (1967) & New York (1968)
- James Joyce: EXILES (1970)
- Simon Gray: BUTLEY (1971)
- John Hopkin: NEXT OF KIN (1974)
- Simon Gray: OTHERWISE ENGAGED London (1975) & New York (1977)
- William Archibald: THE INNOCENTS New York (1976)

- Noel Coward: BLITHE SPIRIT (1976)
- Simon Gray: THE REAR COLUMN (1978)
- Simon Gray: CLOSE OF PLAY (1979)
- **Harold Pinter:** THE HOTHOUSE (1980)
- Simon Gray: QUARTERMAINE'S TERMS (1981)
- Robert East: INCIDENT AT TULSE HILL (1981)
- Jean Giraudoux: THE TROJAN WAR WILL NOT TAKE PLACE (1983)
- Simon Gray: THE COMMON PURSUIT (1984)
- **Harold Pinter:** ONE FOR THE ROAD (1984)
- Tennessee Williams: SWEET BIRD OF YOUTH (1985)
- Donald Freed: CIRCE AND BRAVO (1986)
- **Harold Pinter:** A SLIGHT ACHE & THE LOVER (1987) in collaboration with Kevin Billington at Vienna's English Theatre
- Jane Stanton Hitchcock: VANILLA (1990)
- **Harold Pinter:** PARTY TIME and MOUNTAIN LANGUAGE (1991)
- **Harold Pinter:** THE NEW WORLD ORDER (1991)
- David Mamet's OLEANNA (1993)
- **Harold Pinter:** LANDSCAPE (1994)
- Ronald Harwood: TAKING SIDES (1995)
- Reginald Rose: TWELVE ANGRY MEN (1996)
- **Harold Pinter:** ASHES TO ASHES 1996
- Simon Gray: LIFE SUPPORT 1997
- **Harold Pinter:** ASHES TO ASHES in Italy (1997)
- **Harold Pinter:** ASHES TO ASHES in France (1998)
- Simon Gray: THE LATE MIDDLE CLASSES (1999)
- **Harold Pinter:** CELEBRATION and THE ROOM (2000)
- **Harold Pinter:** NO MAN'S LAND (2001)
- Simon Gray: THE OLD MASTERS (2004)

#### 1.1.2.6 Movies and Television Films Directed by Pinter

- Simon Gray: BUTLEY (1974)
- Simon Gray: THE REAR COLUMN (1980)

- **Harold Pinter:** THE HOTHOUSE (1982)
- **Harold Pinter:** MOUNTAIN LANGUAGE (1988)
- **Harold Pinter:** PARTY TIME (1992)
- **Harold Pinter:** LANDSCAPE (1995)
- **Harold Pinter:** ASHES TO ASHES Italy (1998).

### 1.1.3 Pinter's Political Engagement

Although Harold Pinter became a conscientious objector after World War II, due to his opposition to the Cold War politics, he could not necessarily have been called an outright pacifist, as he specifically stated to interviewers that if he had been of age during World War II, he would have gone to war to fight against the Nazis.<sup>38</sup>

Harold Pinter's early political engagement is confirmed by a conversation he had with Mel Gussow in 1988, when he was asked whether he has always written political plays, beginning with *The Birthday Party*, which was written in 1957. Pinter replies that this is true, and it would also include *The Dumb Waiter*. In turn, Gussow asks about the story of *The Birthday Party*, and Pinter says that it revolves around the destruction of an individual and his independent voice, clearly also with political associations.<sup>39</sup> As a member of the PEN Club and Amnesty International, Pinter was to become a champion of human rights.

At the time of the above interview in 1988, Pinter was functioning as, amongst others, the chairman of the Arts for Nicaragua Fund in England, which supported artists in that politically repressed country, even to the extent of shipping them paintbrushes, e.g. At the same time he was active in supporting politically suppressed writers in Turkey, and remarked that there were 30 writers in jail there at that moment. Harold Pinter went on a politically motivated trip to Turkey with Arthur Miller in 1985 to examine the state of human rights in that country, where several writers were being held in prison under abominable conditions, including torture.<sup>40</sup> Pinter said to the US

<sup>38</sup> Billington, pp. 21–24, 92, and 286.

<sup>39</sup> Gussow, p. 69.

<sup>40</sup> Orhan Pamuk, who became the Nobel Prize Laureate in 2006, acted as a guide for Pinter and Miller during their trip.

ambassador, who expressed doubt about this issue: "*The reality I've been referring to (... is) that of electric current on your genitals.*"<sup>41</sup> This disturbing confrontation with the US ambassador in Ankara regarding human rights left Pinter convinced that many of the statements made by the ruling powers were hypocritical.<sup>42</sup>

Pinter has remarked that it was the sad state of affairs in Turkey, where torture is commonly used in prisons, that directly prompted him to write *One for the Road*,<sup>43</sup> which is a clear protest against torture, violence and physical abuse, and lacks any of the humor previously found in his comedies of menace. Pinter has stated that he firmly believes that people need to know the truth about what is happening in the world.<sup>44</sup> His play *Mountain Language* is also based directly on his experiences in Turkey and refers to the oppression of the Kurds and their language by the Turkish government.<sup>45</sup> Perhaps this interest in language oppression also in some way reflected the Pinter family's loss of their Yiddish mother tongue upon emigration to England.

Pinter stated in an interview that in 1957, when he began writing dramatic works, the Nazi death camps were still an open wound that was impossible to ignore, whereas people find it easier to ignore the horrors around us in this day and age, because there are so many.<sup>46</sup> And in a conversation about this topic with his second wife, Antonia Fraser, Pinter remarked that if England had been occupied by the Nazis, he would have "taken to the Welsh hills and joined the resistance,"<sup>47</sup> while Fraser countered that he would have been killed first as a Jewish intellectual.

Pinter and Fraser were always staunch supporters of "*the right of Israel to exist, a point of view from which Harold never deviated, despite his criticisms, publicly expressed, which he thought to be his duty as a Jew....*"<sup>48</sup> In May 1978, he and Antonia travelled to Israel for the first time to attend the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations

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<sup>41</sup> *Istanbul Notes*, Turkey, June 18 2010.

<sup>42</sup> *All Voices*, Ankara, Turkey, 25 Dec. 2008.

<sup>43</sup> *Fraser*, p. 144. Fraser mentions that Pinter gets into an argument with two Turkish girls at a party in England on the topic of torture in Jan 1984.

<sup>44</sup> Pinter in an interview with Nicholas Hern, May 1985, German transl. by Harry Ledig-Rowohl.

<sup>45</sup> *Fraser*, p. 150. Fraser also notes that Pinter always connects oppression with the factor of language. *Mountain Language* was also performed in Kurdish in London on 22 June 1996, but the police wouldn't allow the production to finish on contrived grounds, also refusing to let the actors speak Kurdish!

<sup>46</sup> Pinter in an interview with Nicholas Hern, May 1985, German transl. by Harry Ledig-Rowohl.

<sup>47</sup> *Fraser*, p. 105.

of the young state. Harold was very happy to be there and liked the intelligence and seriousness of everyone they met, including Jerusalem's mayor, Teddy Kollek.<sup>49</sup>

Harold Pinter had pacifistic tendencies and was, for example, very much opposed to the American involvement in the Vietnam War. Pinter stated: "*I'm categorically anti the Americans in Vietnam. And I feel strongly in favour of Israel.*"<sup>50</sup>

Over the years, Pinter became more and more politically outspoken beginning in 1980, when he decided to donate the proceeds from the 50<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration in his honor at the National Theater to the Czech dissident and playwright Vaclav Havel.<sup>51</sup> Pinter became good friends with Havel and visited him several times in former Czechoslovakia, where he participated in political debates with another socialist friend, Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua. Despite Pinter's obvious engagement for his socialist friends, a standard German work on the theater, *Welttheater* (new edition 1985), derogatively states: "... *doch gab es in der Pinterschen Familie anscheinend keine sozialistische Tradition, oder wenn es sie gab, hat Pinter sie verdrängt.*"<sup>52</sup>

Harold Pinter was also a very close friend and staunch supporter of Salman Rushdie. Pinter and Fraser enabled Rushdie to be reunited with his own family in their private home in London during the period of greatest danger for him, due to the death sentence pronounced upon him by fanatic Islamists after publication of *The Satanic Verses*. Pinter and his wife were shocked to see this book being burnt even in England, and both recalled the Heinrich Heine quote with regard to the rise of the Nazis: "*Wherever books are burnt, men, also in the end are burned.*" (sic)<sup>53</sup> Pinter read Rushdie's lecture at the ICA in Pall Mall for him, because it was unthinkable for Rushdie to appear anywhere in person for years. This was, of course, also a dangerous situation for Pinter, and the security was extraordinary.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p. 94.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p. 95.

<sup>50</sup> *Vogue*, 1 Oct. 1964, p. 246.

<sup>51</sup> Gordon, p. lv.

<sup>52</sup> Rischbieter, p. 423.

<sup>53</sup> Fraser, p. 157.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 161. It should also be noted that Salman Rushdie's Japanese translator was murdered as a result of the Islamist death sentence.

Interestingly, Pinter was not always prepared to admit the political nature of some of his works, and denied any such connection in his earlier years. Later on in his writing career, when many of his plays were forthrightly political, without doubt, he found it much easier to speak about the political statements in his works, whether they were veiled or not. Pinter's openness about his political activism is clearly revealed in his Nobel Lecture, where he describes his attitude to telling the truth about what he sees in the world, as well as the difficult position in which he has thus found himself.

*"A writer's life is a highly vulnerable, almost naked activity. ... you are open to all the winds, some of them icy indeed. You are out on your own, out on a limb. You find no shelter, no protection - unless you lie - in which case of course you have constructed your own protection and, it could be argued, become a politician."<sup>55</sup>*

Although Pinter repeatedly made explicit political protests against violence, torture and war throughout his lifetime, and much of his work is based on social and political issues, he did not use this simply as a means of dramatic agitation. The stories he presents on stage all speak for themselves, without requiring any specific historical connections. Pinter's screenplay for *The Quiller Memorandum* is definitely based directly upon the history of the Nazis in Germany and the multitude of fascists, who were still to be found there after World War II.<sup>56</sup> And Pinter's wife, Antonia Fraser, is convinced that when Pinter read a biography of Nazi Albert Speer's life, he was motivated to write his play *Ashes to Ashes*, the last scene of which reminds one of Nazi soldiers selecting women and children at the train platforms on the way to the death camps.<sup>57</sup> Pinter claims that Rebecca, the character in this play who's forced to give up her baby, is: *"The artist who cannot avoid the world's pain."<sup>58</sup>* Thus Pinter's own *'Weltschmerz'* makes itself apparent through the suffering character of Rebecca in *Ashes to Ashes*.

Pinter's close friend and collaborator in the theater, Henry Woolf, revealingly stated in the film *Working with Pinter* that Jews had a tendency to live in their heads, since it was the only safe place to be. They might have had to pack their bags and run

<sup>55</sup> *Nobel Lecture*: 7 Dec. 2005, Stockholm, Sweden.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. *Quiller zwischen den Stühlen?* in: *Ringvorlesung München 2006*, pp. 68-78.

<sup>57</sup> Fraser, p. 214.

<sup>58</sup> Fraser, p. 216.

anytime. This also serves to explain Pinter's strong drive to write and express the existential fears he grew up with during and after World War II. Woolf goes on to say: "*Harold's interiors are reflections of that Jewish interior, shared by Kafka, by many Jewish writers.*"<sup>59</sup>

In the context of this dissertation, it should be mentioned that until Pinter began writing overtly political plays in the 1980s, German-speaking critics and scholars often overlooked the decidedly political nature of his writing. For example, Karl-Heinz Stoll, who published a book on Harold Pinter in 1977, writes: "*Bei Pinter ist von einer Auseinandersetzung mit politischen, sozialen oder sonstigen Ideen am wenigsten zu finden.*"<sup>60</sup> Although it is very difficult to understand exactly why Pinter's political relevance was not obvious, it may have to do with the fact that Pinter is a very subtle writer, and the early German translations by Willy Thiem are certainly lacking in subtlety.

In Pinter's Nobel Lecture, entitled *Art, Truth, and Politics*, which had to be taped on video due to his badly failing health in late 2005, he makes a very powerful plea for writers to remember their obligation to tell the truth about the world, exposing hypocrisy. He is convinced this is the only way to preserve the precarious dignity of mankind.

*"I believe that despite the enormous odds which exist, unflinching, unswerving, fierce intellectual determination, as citizens, to define the real truth of our lives and our societies is a crucial obligation which devolves upon us all. It is in fact mandatory. If such a determination is not embodied in our political vision we have no hope of restoring what is so nearly lost to us - the dignity of man."*<sup>61</sup>

Pinter's 'Jewish despair' was possibly the guiding force in his endless endeavors to work towards a better and more humane world. In an interview for *Newsnight*, Pinter neatly summed up his personal philosophy and outlook on life with the following

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<sup>59</sup> *Working with Pinter*, 43:20 min.

<sup>60</sup> Stoll, p. 229. In this chapter, Stoll is comparing Pinter with Osborne, Arden, Bond and Wesker.

<sup>61</sup> *Nobel Lecture*, 7 Dec. 2005, Stockholm, Sweden.

comment: "*Life is beautiful but the world is Hell!*"<sup>62</sup>

#### 1.1.4 Pinter's Oeuvre as a Writer

Harold Pinter has stated that encountering anti-Semitism while he was growing up in London was the fuse igniting the organic process, which led to him becoming a playwright.<sup>63</sup>

##### 1.1.4.1 Plays by Pinter

Over the course of a long career as a playwright, Harold Pinter arguably became England's most famous living dramatist. "*Sixteen million people watched one of (Pinter's) plays on television in a single night....*"<sup>64</sup> This gives us an idea of the magnitude of his impact on the English-speaking theater world, particularly in Great Britain, where his plays were regularly televised, but also in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Ireland, where they have likewise been broadcast on television and produced regularly in the theaters.

Pinter's first play, *The Room*, was written and first produced in 1957 upon the initiative of his very close friend and collaborator, Henry Woolf, at the Bristol Drama Department in a former squash court, a production which cost next to nothing and was also directed by Woolf.

In his book *Anger and After*, John Russell Taylor postulates that even Pinter had to wait till TV broadcasts helped his plays reach a real mass audience, before more or less conservative circles were convinced that they should actually take note of him.<sup>65</sup>

Pinter's first period of writing encompassing his 'comedies of menace,' includes his plays written from 1957 to approximately 1963, beginning with *The Room*. The three plays, which are examined in-depth in this dissertation, may be considered to belong

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<sup>62</sup> Fraser, p. 303.

<sup>64</sup> Brown, p. 32.

<sup>65</sup> Taylor, p. 13.

to this early period. Further elaborations on this period are found in Chapter 1.4.4 Comedies of Menace.

With his play *Tea Party* (written 1964 but not premiered until 1970), Pinter's second creative period began (ca. 1964-1982), which is often called that of his 'memory plays,' or his 'metaphorical period.' In them Pinter has dealt with themes related to memory and recollections, whether they be in connection with family life or less personal incidents, such as *A Kind of Alaska* (1982), which is based on neurologist Oliver Sacks' book *Awakenings* about the neurological phenomenon of comatose patients awakening after many years from a coma.

Pinter's third creative phase, usually called his 'political period,' began in 1983 with his plays *Precisely*, a sketch about political power plays and the absurdity of nuclear weapons, and *One for the Road* (1984), about the political suppression of the Kurds in Turkey. Most of the plays written in this period deal with the topic of human rights and oppression, and Pinter also became a champion of human rights as a political activist during this time. His last play entitled *Celebration*, written in 2000, is a kind of social satire, which is slightly reminiscent of his earlier comedies of menace. After Pinter's highly political plays, his last plays again took on a humorous twist, and according to Antonia Fraser, *Celebration* is: "*brilliantly and savagely funny, Swiftian, one might legitimately say, and I laughed a lot.*"<sup>66</sup>

Harold Pinter wrote a total of 32 plays for the theater during his lifetime, almost all of which have been staged in numerous different productions in the theatrical centers of the world, including London, New York and Paris. A selection of Pinter's most important works for the stage with dates and places of their premieres includes the following plays:

- *The Room*, Bristol, 1957.
- *The Birthday Party*, Cambridge, 1958.
- *The Dumb Waiter*, Frankfurt, 1959.
- *The Caretaker*, London, 1960.

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<sup>66</sup> Fraser, p. 235.

- *The Collection*, London, 1962.
- *The Homecoming*, London, 1965.
- *Landscape*, London, 1967.
- *Tea Party*, London, 1970.
- *Old Times*, London 1971.
- *No Man's Land*, London, 1975.
- *Betrayal*, London, 1978.
- *A Kind of Alaska*, London, 1982.
- *One for the Road*, London, 1984.
- *Mountain Language*, London, 1988.
- *Party Time*, London, 1991.
- *Ashes to Ashes*, London, 1996.
- *Celebration*, London, 2000.

#### 1.1.4.2 Prose and Poetry by Pinter

Harold Pinter was a dedicated writer of what he saw as the truth, regardless of the genre. He already began writing poetry as a boy, and this included love poems to the girls he fell in love with, yet we know that his parents condoned this precociousness. When their house was struck by a bomb in World War II, 13-year old Pinter ran in to rescue a poem he'd written to a girlfriend, as well as his cricket bat. His first poem was published by a journal called *Poetry London* at the age of twenty.<sup>67</sup>

Many of Pinter's poems are deeply moving, because they seem to come from a 'gut feeling' without any intellectual premeditation. This is common to many great writers,<sup>68</sup> and it would indicate the profound depth of Pinter's creative spring. As Pinter said of his writing process: "*Sometimes, in poems, I am only dimly conscious of the grounds of my activity, and the work proceeds to its own law and discipline, with me as a go-between, as it were. But as you say, if not conscious, so much the better.*"<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *New York Times*, 25 December 2008.

<sup>68</sup> *Andreasen*, p. 165.

<sup>69</sup> *Esslin*, 1973.

Pinter's later poems were strongly influenced by his fight against cancer and the grim reaper. Death features as a main character in many of them. It would seem obvious that writing poetry was one of Pinter's means of dealing with the unknown threat he was up against in his final years.

Many of his earlier poems also had a political touch, such as several of those published in Pinter's book *Various Voices*. Although his political activism was very conscious, it would be wrong to claim that the political nature of his poetry was always entirely premeditated. His strong feelings about the unjustness of many aspects of politics presumably surfaced in many ways, one of which was the genre of poetry. As Pinter said of himself: "*I'm an occasional poet.*"<sup>70</sup>

To illustrate the full power of Pinter's short, sometimes absurdist, poetry, his poem *After Lunch*, written after he was diagnosed with cancer, is quoted here:

***After Lunch***

**by Harold Pinter (2002)**

*"And after noon the well-dressed creatures come  
To sniff among the dead  
And have their lunch*

*And all the many well-dressed creatures pluck  
The swollen avocados from the dust  
And stir the minestrone with stray bones*

*And after lunch  
They loll and lounge about  
Decanting claret in convenient skulls"*<sup>71</sup>

Harold Pinter also wrote one novel entitled *The Dwarfs* in 1952-56, before he seriously began writing for the stage. This novel, which is written mostly in the form

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<sup>70</sup> Gussow, p. 59.

of dialogue, foreshadowing his work for the theater, was not published until 1990 in a slightly revised version. Another of his earlier works from 1954/55 was a radio sketch entitled *The Black and White*, which foreshadows his short and precise form of literary expression. In 1963 he wrote a short story entitled *Tea Party*, but later adapted it for television and the theater. However, in contrast to his other works for the stage, he remained convinced that *Tea Party* worked best as a short story.<sup>72</sup>

#### 1.1.4.3 Screenplays by Pinter

In a highly revealing interview published in *Time Out London*, Harold Pinter replies to a question about whether he was influenced by film as a young boy growing up in London in the 1940s: *"Oh yeah, it meant everything to me as a boy. Much more than the theatre. I hardly went to the theatre. The only theatre I ever saw was Shakespeare. (...) But film obsessed me from a very early age. I'm talking about the '40s, while war was still on..."*<sup>73</sup>

Pinter goes on to say that he only went to the theater, when his English master took the school class to see Shakespeare. He actually joined a film club as a schoolboy and went to see Buñuel, Carné and Cocteau, amongst others, falling in love with French cinema and the surrealists, although he also watched American thrillers.

When asked about his own work as a screenwriter, and whether all of his screenplays had been made into films according to his wishes, Pinter spoke candidly of the results of his work, clearly expressing mixed feelings and disappointment with some of films that ensued:

*'Well, I've been very fortunate that I've only worked with directors that I've respected. I have written about 25 scripts over the years, three of them were never made and another three fucked up. I took my name off one and with some reluctance left my name on another. The one I took my name off was "The Remains of the Day",*

<sup>71</sup> <http://www.haroldpinter.org/poetry/index.shtml#>

<sup>72</sup> Pinter 1978, p. 242.

<sup>73</sup> *London Time Out*: <http://www.timeout.com/film/features/show-feature/3852/>

*for which they took my script and rewrote it. But the truth is that the roughly 18 films that I've had made have not been touched. They've been filmed exactly as I wrote them. I'm not only talking about dialogue but structure as well. I've always been very amenable, to put it mildly, to discussions about structure. It's such a delicate business, the structure of film, isn't it?"<sup>74</sup>*

In contrast Pinter made an earlier remark in the year 2000 on the screenplays he wrote, in which he stated that out of a total of 24, two were never made, three were eventually rewritten and two had still not been filmed at that time. Seventeen (incl. four adaptations of his own plays for the stage) were filmed according to his screenplays. Pinter was convinced that it was unusual for a playwright to also have written so many screenplays, and felt that it was directly connected to his good understanding of how to adapt novels for film, which he took to be a particularly fascinating, as well as serious, craft.<sup>75</sup>

#### **1.1.4.4 Prizes and Awards Won by Pinter**

To exemplify the vast number of awards and prizes that Harold Pinter won over the course of his lifetime, a selection of the major prizes are listed below in the order of their bestowal:

- Commander of the Order of the British Empire (London) 1966;
- Shakespeare Prize (Hamburg) 1970;
- European Prize for Literature (Vienna) 1973;
- Pirandello Prize (Palermo) 1980;
- Chilean Order of Merit, (Chile) 1992;
- David Cohen British Literature Prize (London) 1995;
- Laurence Olivier Special Award (London) 1996;
- Molire d'Honneur, Paris in recognition of his life's work, (Paris) 1997;
- Sunday Times Award for Literary Excellence (London) 1997;

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Harold Pinter Homepage: <http://www.haroldpinter.org/films/index.shtml>

- BAFTA Fellowship 1997;
- Companion of Literature, RSL 1998;
- The Critics' Circle Award for Distinguished Service to the Arts 2000;
- Brianza Poetry Prize, Italy 2000;
- South Bank Show Award for Outstanding Achievement in the Arts, 2001;
- S.T. Dupont Golden Pen Award 2001 for a Lifetime's Distinguished Service to Literature; 'Premio Fiesole ai Maestri del Cinema', Italy, 2001;
- World Leaders Award, Toronto, Canada, 2001;
- Hermann Kesten Medallion for outstanding commitment on behalf of persecuted and imprisoned writers, awarded by German P.E.N., Berlin, 2001;
- Companion of Honour for Services to Literature, 2002;
- Diploma "ad Honorem", Teatro Filodrammatici, Milan, Italy 2004;
- Evening Standard Theatre Awards, 50th Anniversary - Special Award, 2004;
- Wilfred Owen Poetry Prize, 2005;
- Franz Kafka Prize, 2005 (Prague);
- **Nobel Prize for Literature, 2005;**
- European Theatre Prize, (Premio Europa per il Teatro) 2006;
- Legion d'Honneur, (Paris) 2007

Pinter was also awarded honorary degrees from various universities including the Universities of Reading 1970; Birmingham 1971; Glasgow 1974; East Anglia 1974; Stirling 1979; Brown (Rhode Island) 1982; Hull 1986; Sussex 1990; East London 1994; Sofia (Bulgaria) 1995; Bristol 1998; University of London 1999; University of Aristotle, Thessaloniki 2000; University of Florence, Italy, 2001; University of Turin, Italy, 2002 and National University of Ireland, Dublin 2004; University of Leeds 2007.

In the scope of this thesis, it is of interest that Harold Pinter had three major awards conferred to him in German-speaking countries, including the Shakespeare Prize awarded in Hamburg in 1970, the European Prize for Literature awarded in Vienna in 1973; and the Hermann Kesten Medallion for outstanding commitment on behalf of persecuted and imprisoned writers awarded in Berlin in 2001. This fact verifies that Pinter did not go unnoticed in Germany and Austria, however since his works were not very frequently staged in German-speaking countries, his recognition in the form

of prizes would almost seem to be a form of compensation for the sometimes less than warm reception by audiences and reviewers.

The final award Pinter received in January 2007, the French *Chevalier de Légion d'Honneur*, conferred upon him by Dominique de Villepin, was perhaps the most precious to Pinter, because Villepin expressly praised Pinter for his unerring stance on human rights, in addition to his great poetry: "*I have come here today, dear Harold Pinter, to pay tribute to you as a man who knows the importance of words: for words can change lives.*"<sup>76</sup>

In addition to this wealth of prestigious awards and honorary degrees, it should be mentioned that Pinter's plays are regularly used as material for public exams in schools in England, which duly enhanced his good reputation in the eyes of the younger generation.<sup>77</sup>

### 1.1.5 International Reactions to Pinter's Nobel Prize in Literature 2005

Without doubt, the most prestigious prize awarded to Harold Pinter was the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2005. The jury's decision states that Pinter: "*... in his plays uncovers the precipice under everyday prattle and forces entry into oppression's closed rooms.*"<sup>78</sup>

It can be taken for granted that the international reception of Harold Pinter's works took a turn for the better after he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2005, however some of the commentaries and articles<sup>79</sup> published on the occasion of the award were not particularly kindly in Germany, in great contrast to the exuberant praise he received in England:

***Während der Kontinent den neuen Literaturnobelpreisträger Harold Pinter eher***

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<sup>76</sup> Villepin: Speech at the ceremony for the award of the decoration of Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur, 17 Jan. 2007.

<sup>77</sup> Fraser, p. 198-198.

<sup>78</sup> *Nobelprize.org*

**mürrisch begrüßt, freut sich die britische Presse:**

"Der Nobelpreis für Literatur für unseren größten und griesgrämigsten Dramatiker ist ein Grund zum Feiern. Es ist ein Triumph für die britische Theaterkultur, die in den letzten Jahren ein wenig aus der Mode gekommen schien», so begrüßte der «Guardian» Harold Pinters Auszeichnung. Die «Times» gratulierte und zählte Pinters diverse Verdienste auf: «Eine wohlverdiente Ehrung für Großbritanniens größten Dramatiker des letzten halben Jahrhunderts, der sowohl für die Bühne als auch für die Leinwand geschrieben, 29 Theaterstücke produziert hat und auch als Schauspieler, Lyriker und Regisseur arbeitet. Doch ist er fast genauso bekannt für seine kompromisslosen politischen Überzeugungen. Er verzichtete dankend auf einen Ritterschlag von John Major, hat den Irakkrieg unverblümt kritisiert und nannte in dem Zusammenhang Tony Blair einen «verblendeten Idioten» und Präsident Bush einen «Massenmörder».<sup>80</sup>

The reactions to Pinter being awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature ranged between two extremes in German-speaking countries. Literary critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki agreed with the decision, calling it "*eine gute, eine richtige Entscheidung*."<sup>81</sup> Austrian literary critic, Sigrid Löffler, disagreed entirely calling Pinter '*démodé*' and stating that he was "*a bizarre choice that she would never have made*,"<sup>82</sup> while her colleague Denis Schreck made the nasty claim that the decision constituted "*eine Beleidigung der Weltliteratur*."<sup>83</sup>

In complete contrast, Pinter's friend Vaclav Havel, playwright and former president of the Czech Republic, stated that Pinter had absolutely earned this great honor, and congratulated him heartily via telegram.<sup>84</sup>

Elfriede Jelinek, the Austrian recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2004, was '*delighted*' to hear that Pinter had won the same prestigious award the year after she had, and stated: "*Noch ein Linker! Und ein wunderbarer Dramatiker dazu*."<sup>85</sup>

<sup>79</sup> **NOTE:** No page numbers are available for most articles, reviews and commentaries, incl. online sources and reviews from the *Theadok Kritikenarchiv* quoted in this thesis.

<sup>80</sup> *Theater Heute*, Vol. 11/2005, p. 70.

<sup>81</sup> *ORF Ö1 Artikel*, 26 December 2008.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

The enthusiasm in Great Britain was widespread, as to be expected, in great contrast to the various negative reactions on the continent. Although Pinter's dramatic works were considered to be in keeping with the times in English-speaking countries during his lifetime, German-language reviewers are often of a different opinion. The Mykenae Verlag in Germany has published a summary of unfavorable to unkind remarks by German critics upon the occasion of Pinter's having been awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, which serve to confirm the fact that Pinter was not particularly well-received or beloved in German-speaking countries:

*„Eine unbequeme, eine überraschende Wahl“ kommentierte die Berliner Morgenpost die Preisvergabe; zwar sei Pinter unbestritten einer der wichtigsten zeitgenössischen Dramatiker, habe aber mit „wüsten politischen Gedichten“ die Kritiker erzürnt, weswegen seine Wahl zum Literaturnobelpreisträger „massive Proteste“ nach sich ziehen dürfte. (...) Kritischere Töne schlägt Gerhard Stadelmaier in der FAZ an: „Wenn die Schwedische Akademie Harold Pinter für dessen Dramen zu dessen längst vergangener, also im besten Sinne unmoralischer Zeit im Jahr 2005 mit dem Literaturnobelpreis geehrt haben will, dann muss sie vor dem Pinter, wie er heute und seit gut zwanzig Jahren lebt und schreibt, derart die Augen verschlossen haben, dass es fast schon an Blindheit grenzt - oder an Ratlosigkeit“; denn wenn es inzwischen einen Autor gebe, der einem sein „Anliegen“ aufzudrängen versuche, sei dies Pinter.“<sup>86</sup>*

It can be concluded that despite Pinter's enormous, continuing popularity in English-speaking countries, his oeuvre is generally underestimated in German-speaking countries. Pinter's great civil courage in terms of his political engagement is not appreciated, either, as illustrated by the frequently negative commentaries of German-speaking reviewers. One Austrian critic even goes as far as to condemn the decision to award Pinter the Nobel Prize in Literature as "*an insult to world literature.*"<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> News.at News Networkworld Internetservice, 26 December 2008.

<sup>86</sup> Literaturnobelpreis für Harold Pinter, 31 October 2005, Myenau Verlag, Bensheim.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. ORF Ö1 Artikel, 26 December 2008.

## 1.2 Considerations of Absurdist Literature

*"It is always in a sense recalcitrant, this **world of the absurd**, in which it is the gaps between what can be said that the arbitrary action, the overwhelming preoccupation, pushes through, and in which language, across the gaps, takes the form of a comic nightmare."*<sup>88</sup>

- Raymond Williams

### 1.2.1 Origins of the Absurdist Genre: Horror and Humor

*"Absurdist humor, like that inspired by the Talmud, is rooted in paradox and irony."*<sup>89</sup>

- Joseph Telushkin

One of the first world-renowned representatives of the absurdist genre was Franz Kafka, whose works reflect his personal despair at life and lack of hope in making progress, as well as his ironic and sarcastic sense of black humor. Kafka's depressive nature and his unrequited love would seem to have given him the idea that he was eternally treading on the same spot on the treadmill of life, or lost in a labyrinth. Joseph Telushkin writes in his book entitled *Jewish Humor: "Aside from mocking the world's irrationalities, absurdist humor takes on human irrationalities."*<sup>90</sup> The nightmares depicted in Kafka's novels illustrate the recurring horrors and frustrations he experienced in real life and, at the same time, these can be understood as universal symbols of the futility of life or the lack of progress of mankind, in terms of the human condition. Pinter himself was certainly influenced by Kafka, as he read Kafka in his younger years.

Although Kafka was not a successful playwright, his novels have been adapted for the theater<sup>91</sup> and turned into brilliant films, showing the validity and full impact of his

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<sup>88</sup> Williams, p. 371.

<sup>89</sup> Telushkin, p. 55.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, p. 56.

<sup>91</sup> *The Trial*, adapted for the theater by André Gide and Jean-Louis Barrault, premiered at the Théâtre de Marigny in October 1947.

thought with the medium of motion pictures, such as *The Trial*,<sup>92</sup> screenplay by Harold Pinter, directed by David Jones in 1989 and based on the novel written by Kafka (cf. *The Trial*, dir. Orson Wells, 1962). Richard Combs remarks on the close connection between Kafka and Pinter in the *Guardian*:

„Harold Pinter, too, one might expect to identify very closely with the Kafka world view. Pinteresque, after all has entered the language to describe a literary mood, not far from the Kafkaesque. And for the opening scene of the new version of *The Trial*, directed by David Jones from Pinter's scrupulously faithful script, there is a dramatic blurring of their two worlds.“<sup>93</sup>

Recently the comical side of Kafka has been the focus of research, and scholars are discovering Kafka's works from a new angle, which incorporates both terror and humor at the same time: "*Komik verwendete Kafka als regelrechte Erzählstrategie, die es dem Leser ermöglicht, wieder ein wenig Distanz zum Text zu bekommen...*"<sup>94</sup> If one looks closely at his texts, Kafka uses a good deal of irony, sarcasm and humor. Reiner Stach claims that Kafka even uses verbal slapstick, which he may have caught onto from early silent movies. A new book on Kafka, entitled *Kafkas komische Seiten*, examines his use of humor, in great contrast to the general opinion that Kafka's works are nothing but depressing.

Another well-known absurdist writer was Lewis Carroll, who conjured up the image of a little girl lost in a dream world down a rabbit hole of nightmares. Imaginary creatures call for unlikely actions, and nothing really makes a lot of sense in *Alice in Wonderland*. Lewis Carroll would seem to have been influenced by the nonsensical children's nursery rhymes common in most countries in Europe, which presumably play a subconscious role in our use of language as adults.

Famous comedians, such as Charlie Chaplin, the Marx Brothers, Laurel and Hardy, and Buster Keaton, also produced several series of globally successful movies with many absurdist elements. The scene in Chaplin's *Goldrush*, where Charlie as the

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<sup>92</sup> *The Trial*, 1989.

<sup>93</sup> *The Guardian*, 15 July 1993.

Tramp relishes eating his shoes to still his hunger is certainly one of the most memorable absurdist moments in early film comedy. The Marx Brothers can also be heralded as masters of absurdist comedy, with film scenes, such as dozens of passengers cramming into a tiny stateroom on the ship in *A Night at the Opera*.<sup>95</sup>

Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* (premiere 1896) may have been one of the first plays written in an absurdist vein, depicting abuse of power and violence on stage, typical of the genre of 'theater of the absurd,' which developed beginning in the 1950s. Another was *Les mamelles de Tirésias* (premiere 1917) by Guillaume Apollinaire, a friend and sponsor of the cubist painters in Paris. His play deals with a woman, who has her breasts removed in order to become a man and emancipate women. These early plays must have influenced the Dadaist movement in Switzerland and Germany to some extent, however it can be considered unlikely that Harold Pinter would have known them.

However, we do know that Pinter was familiar with the books of Franz Kafka, and presumably also those by Lewis Carroll and the films of Charlie Chaplin and the Marx Brothers, which all would seem to have had a subconscious (or conscious in the case of Kafka) influence on Pinter's writing. The choice of themes in his work have been 'pigeonholed' as absurdist, such as questions of identity, hopelessness, understanding human motivation, abuse of power, and the breakdown of communication between human beings, etc. The above themes can also be seen in the light of World War II, which caused a certain disillusionment with life, as well as religion, and gave rise to an existentialist response.

### 1.2.2 Samuel Beckett as an Absurdist Playwright

Samuel Beckett became a major force on the stage of post-war England in the 1950s, when Harold Pinter was acting in the theater for a living and beginning to write his own first plays. Beckett, certainly influenced by James Joyce, whose close friend he was, as well as Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism and Franz Kafka's absurdist,

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<sup>94</sup> *Profil* No. 11, 12 March 2012.

<sup>95</sup> Dialogue by Jewish screenwriters George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind. Another Jewish screenwriter, S.J. Perleman, wrote much dialogue for the Marx Brothers, and therefore had an indirect influence on the Theater of the Absurd.

nightmarish tales, had read French literature at Trinity College in Dublin and moved to Paris to teach in 1928. His complete fluency in French after many years of chosen exile in France led him to write most of his plays in the French language, subsequently providing his own English translations of these works, which have somewhat different lines than the French originals, on occasion. Beckett himself claimed that he felt writing in French gave him the self-restraint he needed, yet his English versions were pared down even further, because he said they came too easily.<sup>96</sup>

During World War II, Samuel Beckett was active in the French Résistance in Paris until August 1942, when he was forced to leave the city and flee to the south of France, because several of his comrades in his Résistance group had been arrested.<sup>97</sup> It can be taken for granted that Beckett knew something of the atrocities being committed by the Nazi regime, and despite his attempt to combat injustice, must have felt a sense of helplessness in the face of the crimes against humanity, and the Jews in particular, during the course of the Shoah or Holocaust.

Many of the major themes of Beckett's plays would seem to be connected in one way or another to his experience of hopelessness and helplessness during World War II. These themes include the contradiction between words and action (evident in the Third Reich and the Vichy Regime) as exemplified in *Waiting for Godot* by Vladimir and Estragon's declarations of intent, which often remain unfulfilled even as the curtain falls at the end of the play.<sup>98</sup> The insignificance of the individual in face of the eternity of time (evident in Hitler's Final Solution or *Endlösung*), and exemplified by Ham's line in *Endgame* (*Fin de partie* in French; *Endspiel* in German):

*Clov (schauend): Du kriegst gleich Tomaten! Jemand! Da ist jemand!*

*Hamm ((hört auf zu gähnen): Na ja, **geh ihn ausrotten**. (Clov steigt von der Leiter.*

*Leise.) Jemand! (Mit bebender Stimme.) **Tu deine Pflicht!***<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Esslin 1980b, p. 39.

<sup>97</sup> Esslin 1980b, p. 36.

<sup>98</sup> Beckett 1971, p. 232.

<sup>99</sup> Adorno, p. 318.

In this dialogue, Hamm sounds uncannily like Hitler giving arbitrary orders to exterminate the Jews, and demanding that the soldiers do their duty in blind obedience.<sup>100</sup>

Another of Beckett's recurring themes is the futility of words and actions in time and space, as evident in the repetition of history (World War II closely following upon World War I), and mankind's apparent incapacity to learn from experience, as exemplified by Vladimir and Estragon's ceaseless waiting or Krapp's disinterest in his insights in tape recordings he made as a younger man in *'Krapp's Last Tape': Tape: (...) What I suddenly saw then was this, that the belief I had been going on all my life, namely... (Krapp switches off impatiently, winds tape forward, switches on again) (...)*<sup>101</sup>

On the other hand, hope in the form of belief in a higher power is also a theme in many of Beckett's plays, in particular Winnie's hope in the improvement of her predicament in *Happy Days*, as well as the mysterious figure of Godot, who may also be interpreted as the Messiah, who never comes, and Hamm's disillusionment with God in *Endgame*:

*Hamm: You'll finish him later. Let us pray to God.*

*(...)*

*Nagg: (clasping his hands, closing his eyes, in a gabble) Our Father which art...*

*(...)*

*Hamm: The bastard! He doesn't exist.*<sup>102</sup>

Hamm's statement that God doesn't exist would seem to have been one of the existential issues, which plagued Beckett after his experience of World War II, in addition to the general quest for meaning in life.

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<sup>100</sup> Interestingly, although Adorno quotes Beckett's lines exemplifying this Nazi jargon, he does not explicitly make a connection between that and Beckett's apparent intention to draw attention to the crimes of the Nazi regime.

<sup>101</sup> Beckett 1960, p. 21.

<sup>102</sup> Beckett 1978, p. 55.

Finally, Beckett was also preoccupied with the absurdity of self-introspection, the human condition, and mankind, in general. All of these major themes can be found in his works for the stage, the radio and television in varying forms, with the common conclusion that words are often futile. Nevertheless, Beckett remained obsessed with language, and his dramatic poetry reached great heights, at the apex of which he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1969.

### 1.2.3 Samuel Beckett's Influence on Harold Pinter

Harold Pinter and Samuel Beckett became very good friends over the course of their lives. Their friendship was so close that they not only regularly exchanged letters and visited each other, but also sent each other their new plays for comments. It can be said without doubt that Beckett's absurdist writing strongly influenced Pinter. Pinter was a great admirer of Beckett's work, and stated about his second play: *"I certainly think 'Endgame' is perfect."*<sup>103</sup>

In an interview with the BBC in 1960, Pinter said that he felt very taken by Beckett's and Kafka's writing, and that he identified with them.<sup>104</sup> The parallels between the themes in the work by the writers Pinter admired and his own writing are really quite remarkable. They all regularly touch upon existential angst, questions of identity, abuse of power, violence, and the absurdity of existence, as we know it, due to the hypocrisy of humankind. As J.L. Styan writes in *The Dark Comedy*: *"The correspondence between the fabulous province of Franz Kafka's mind and the nightmares of Beckett and Pinter grows more striking."*<sup>105</sup> Styan continues his comparison of the two famous playwrights:

*"As in Beckett, (Pinter's) character's actions can be surprising, his fortunes can change without warning, and the purpose of it all be hidden and mysterious. Seen by an outsider, this is startling and amusing, until he reflects."*<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Gussow, p. 61.

<sup>104</sup> BBC, 3 March 1960.

<sup>105</sup> Styan, p. 250.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, p. 246.

A revealing insight made by Antonia Fraser, wife of Harold Pinter and prize-winning author herself, about her husband's kindred spirits in writers is: "*the other half of Harold which is not Beckett is Hemingway.*"<sup>107</sup> It is my opinion that Pinter's brevity and sheer force of expression is quite similar to that of Ernest Hemmingway's, whom he immensely admired, and whose books he read aloud to his son in the evening. As a writer and journalist, Hemingway weighed each single word carefully just like Pinter does. We also know from Pinter's biographer, Michael Billington, that he read Dostoyevsky, Eliot, Lawrence and Woolf as a teenager.<sup>108</sup>

One of Fraser's witty anecdotes about Beckett and Pinter is a clear indication of their like-minded stance on politics and the state of the world, in general. Pinter said to Beckett in Paris after talking about politics for a while: "*I'm sorry, Sam, if I sound very gloomy.*" Beckett replied: "*Oh, you couldn't be more gloomy than I am, Harold.*"<sup>109</sup>

It appears that Pinter was influenced by Beckett's approach to existentialism, in that Pinter also refuses to reduce the differences in his characters to any set patterns or limitations. In many of his plays, Pinter's characters undergo frightening metamorphoses becoming the opposite of what they might seem in the beginning, such as Goldberg and McCann, who both belong to oppressed peoples (Jewish and Irish), turning into oppressors in the end of *The Birthday Party*. Stanley, the object of their oppression, has literally lost his voice, as well as his sight, similar to Davies the tramp in *The Caretaker*, who evokes memories of Vladimir and Estragon in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.<sup>110</sup>

Another striking similarity between Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* can be found in the misunderstanding in the final scenes of the two plays:

***Waiting for Godot:***<sup>111</sup>

*Estragon: Well? Shall we go?*

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<sup>107</sup> Fraser p. 18.

<sup>108</sup> *Guardian*, 25 December 2008.

<sup>109</sup> Fraser, p. 145.

<sup>110</sup> Raby, p. 42.

<sup>111</sup> Beckett 1971, p. 231.

*Vladimir: Pull on your trousers.*

*Estragon: What?*

*Vladimir: Pull on your trousers.*

*Estragon: You want me to pull off my trousers?*

*Vladimir: Pull on your trousers.*

*Estragon: (Realizing his trousers are down) True. (He pulls up his trousers.)*

*Vladimir: Well? Shall we go?*

*Estragon: Yes, let's go.*

*(They do not move.)*

*Curtain*

### ***The Dumb Waiter*<sup>112</sup>**

*Ben: He won't know you're there.*

*Gus: He won't know you're there.*

*Ben: He won't know **you're** there.*

*Gus: He won't know I'm there.*

*Ben: I take out my gun.*

*Gus: You take out your gun.*

*Ben: He stops in his tracks.*

*Gus: He stops in his tracks.*

*Ben: If he turns round –*

*Gus: If he turns round –*

*Ben: You're there.*

*Gus: I'm here. (Ben frowns and presses his forehead.) You've missed something out.*

*Ben: I know. What?*

*Gus: I haven't taken my gun out, according to you.*

*(...)*

The absurdist situation comedy in both of these scenes comes from a misunderstanding, which is heightened by repetitive dialogue. These comic routines, both intended to be played in a deadpan manner, are highly reminiscent of each other, as each of the scenes takes place at the end of the play and indicates that the two pairs

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<sup>112</sup> Pinter 1987, p. 159.

of "waiting" characters have not really resolved the misunderstandings they had at the beginning of the respective plays, despite the time that has passed. The futility of their common existence is called into question by their mutual lack of insight. Existentialist issues are at stake in both cases.

It is noteworthy that the final role enacted by Harold Pinter before he died was that of Krapp in Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* at the Royal Court Theatre in London in October 2006.<sup>113</sup> At this point in his life, Pinter was already fighting cancer and knew his days were numbered. Pinter's final adieu to the stage with this play indicates how highly Pinter honored Beckett as a playwright and friend.

### 1.3 Considerations of Humor and Comedy

*"There is a laughing anger, and we call it wit.*

*There is a laughing wisdom, and we call it humor."*<sup>114</sup>

- Oscar Blumenthal

Humor is hard to put your finger on, as one person may respond to a joke with laughter, whereas another might not 'get it' at all. Despite there being so many different forms of humor and comedy, they generally have something in common according to the cognition research published by Matthew Hurley et al. In their new book *"Inside Jokes,"* they postulate that humor is directly connected to the fact that our brains are constantly trying to predict the next situation we will be confronted with, so that we will be able react to it in a timely manner.<sup>115</sup> In order to do this, we make certain assumptions, however when it turns out that our assumptions were wrong, we often find the situation humorous. The humor in our reaction may help us to learn from our mistakes, as humor gives us a certain sense of reward for recognizing the error. Whoever laughs has discovered a discrepancy or a paradox.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Cf. *Guardian*. 16 October 2006.

<sup>114</sup> Eisen, p. 7.

<sup>115</sup> Hurley, p. 153.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid* p. 291.

In contrast, Sigmund Freud considered humor to be a vent for dispersing inner tension, whereby the unconscious was liberating itself from the pressure of the superego. In his book, “*The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*,”<sup>117</sup> he wrote that jokes enable us to satisfy our various personal drives; yet this does not fully cover all the different forms of humor, such as certain types of situation comedy.

It is considered irrefutable that cultural aspects play a role in a person’s understanding of humor. This is particularly obvious in the case of insider jokes, which only those belonging to a ‘privileged circle’ can comprehend. Such a privileged circle may also include a certain language, or the understanding of a certain culture.<sup>118</sup> The following subchapters provide a brief excursion into the cultural aspects of English comedy, as well as Jewish or Yiddish humor, in contrast to German forms of comedy.

### 1.3.1 Black Humor and Dark Comedy

The various forms of black humor, a term which was translated from the French *‘humour noir*,<sup>119</sup> as used by André Breton in his famous *Anthologie de l’humour noir* in 1940, are used to describe a specific type of satirical comedy, which often involves cynical or ironic remarks. Breton’s *Anthologie* comprised only five German-language authors (of whom Franz Kafka and Jakob van Hoddis were Jewish), amongst a total of 45 French, English and German-language writers. The comparatively small number of German-language writers included in this famous anthology may be taken as an indication of the lacking predominance of black humor in German-language literature.

Black humor typically touches upon taboo topics, which are twisted until they reveal their humorous aspects. Edgar Allan Poe’s short story *Hop-Frog*<sup>120</sup> may be quoted as an example of pitch black humor, which uses the full effect of irony in making fun of a king and his councilors, who are hung as apes at masquerade in revenge for their unkind behavior to their court jesters.

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<sup>117</sup> Freud, p. 123.

<sup>118</sup> Hurley, p. 154.

<sup>119</sup> André Breton: *Anthologie des Schwarzen Humors*

<sup>120</sup> Poe, p. 15-25

Samuel Beckett makes extensive use of black humor in his absurdist plays, which Pinter admits to having influenced his own work. In turn, Styan writes in his book entitled *The Dark Comedy* that Charlie Chaplin's comedies had an effect on Beckett's writing, resulting in a hereditary line of black comedy running back to the silent movies of the 1920s: "*Beckett, who admits to a debt to the vaudeville of Chaplin, forces an audience to laugh helplessly at suicide, mortality and despair...*"<sup>121</sup> Beckett uses laughter to veil the nightmares lurking in his plays, and his black humor reflects the despair of man in a life-and-death situation.

Gallows humor is a specific subcategory of black humor, which usually revolves around death or the threat of death, and has a rather macabre turn. It can often be seen in connection with traumatic situations, from which there seems to be no way of escaping death. It is somewhat like black comedy, yet differs in that the person affected usually initiates it. A good example of gallows humor can be found in the movie *The Life of Brian*, where criminals on crosses are happily singing: "*Always look on the bright side of life.*"<sup>122</sup> Gallows humor may offer a means for people to bring up topics, which might otherwise be difficult or impossible to speak about.

Dark comedy makes use of black humor and/or gallows humor for the purpose of the stage. The idea behind it is to lighten up serious topics for presentation to an audience in a humorous form. Often dark comedy mixes laughter and tears, offering a constantly changing flux of tension and comic relief. Sometimes dark comedy is also used for the purpose of delving into more vulgar topics, such as illness, violence, insanity, racism or sexuality, which may also give rise to a certain degree of discomfort and reflection in addition to laughter. An example of the latter is Beckett's play *Endgame*.

A rather good description of British humor, which focuses on dark comedy, was made by English author and director Tim Etchells, who mentions that he and his performance group Forced Entertainment usually try to combine the terrible things in life with humor. His shows switch back and forth in the blink of an eye between funny and tragic moments. The audience laughs, but at the next moment they feel

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<sup>121</sup> Styan, p. 219.

uncomfortable again.<sup>123</sup> Dry wit and black comedy are certainly the keys to British humor, as exemplified by Harold Pinter's plays.

In the context of black humor, Harold Pinter's comedies of menace are said to have given rise to a whole slew of dark comedies in the theater, beginning with those written by Joe Orton, David Mamet and Tom Stoppard. Francesca Coppa claims that while comedy of menace relies on an ignorance of what or where the menace comes from, black comedy gives away too much, voicing the unspeakable, as Joe Orton does in *Entertaining Mr Sloane*, for example.<sup>124</sup> In such dark comedies, the central jokes usually make those in the audience choke on their laughter, because they begin to identify with the victim, or at least begin to wonder about their sympathy for the aggressor, recognizing the consequences of power plays in relationships. This is certainly the case in Pinter's plays, most of which revolve around the abuse of power with all of the potentially tragic and humorous consequences.

### 1.3.2 Jewish and Yiddish Humor

One of the earliest forms of Jewish comedy beginning in the 12<sup>th</sup> century may be seen in the traditional medieval *Purimshpiel*, which is, in essence, a comical rendition of the Purim story on the occasion of the Jewish holiday.<sup>125</sup> Purim essentially celebrates the downfall of a tyrant, who wished to eradicate the Jewish people. The Scroll of Esther, which is read aloud on Purim, declares the holiday to be a day of joy, and the Feast of Lots is considered a time for merry-making and happiness. In Jewish schools and communities, Purim plays and carnivals are put on, often involving extensive rehearsals and comic effects.<sup>126</sup>

The typical Yiddish humor or the Eastern European *shtetl* is often referred to as "traditional" Jewish humor, as in "folk humor," which included a vast array of curses

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<sup>122</sup> *The Life of Brian*, Film by Monty Python; dir. by Terry Jones, UK, 1979.

<sup>123</sup> *Profil* No. 48, Vol 41, 29<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2010, p. 113.

<sup>124</sup> Raby, p. 51.

<sup>125</sup> Purim plays are popular both in Yiddish in the tradition of the Ashkenazim, as well as the Ladino in the tradition of the Sephardim: <http://www.jewishfolksongs.com/en/purim>

and proverbs and wise sayings that were passed along from generation to generation. Some might even go as far as to argue that the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud are the origin of Jewish humor.<sup>127</sup> Although that might be rather difficult to substantiate, Rabbi Joseph Telushkin makes a similar statement in his book entitled *Jewish Humor*:

*“Absurdist humor, like that inspired by the Talmud, is rooted in paradox and irony. Thus because Judaism believes that a perfect God created this world, it must make sense. Yet Jewish history, filled with anti-Semitic violence and other injustices, suggests that much that occurs in this world makes no sense at all.”*<sup>128</sup>

Traditional Yiddish humor is often described as 'laughing through tears' or 'laughing instead of crying,' however these descriptions are certainly too limited, even though they hold more than a grain of truth, if one recalls the historical legacy of pogroms throughout the history of the Jews in Eastern Europe. There may be a large number of jokes reflecting anti-Semitism, poverty and exile, however there is also a great deal of Jewish humor, which does not deal with the eternal travesties of the 'wandering Jew.' The traditional wisecracks are often very basic and universal, and still retain their humor today. This can also be seen in the tales and short stories, written in Yiddish by Sholem Aleichem and Isaac Bashevis Singer, which are rich in ironic wit. History has given cause for Jewish humor to be pessimistic about the present and near future, whereas the eternal optimism for the distant future and the refusal to give up hope for an eventual improvement of things fuels the comic reversal evident in so many Jewish jokes.

The therapeutic value of humor was apparently also subconsciously recognized during the Shoah, when the element of wit was often the only thread that Jewish prisoners in the death camps could hold on to.<sup>129</sup>

A further example of a famous Jewish writer, whose works often have an underlying humorous twist, is Franz Kafka. German-speaking scholars have traditionally viewed

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<sup>126</sup> Epstein, p. 47.

<sup>127</sup> Novak, p. xxxix.

<sup>128</sup> Novak, p. 55.

<sup>129</sup> This is well documented in a doctoral thesis written by Chaya Ostrower at the Tel Aviv University: Ostrower, 2000.

his work as being deadly serious and depressing with a tendency towards horror, ignoring or misunderstanding Kafka's black humor. Very recently, however, new scholarly publications in German have started to focus on the humorous aspects of his writing.<sup>130</sup> Reiner Stach writes that *Der Proceß* (sic) would have been a completely different work without humor: "*Kafka macht sich da manchmal geradezu lustig über seinen Helden.*"<sup>131</sup> **The entirely new focus on the comical side of Kafka supports one of the premises of this thesis that German-speaking readers and audiences do not always easily or immediately understand Jewish or Yiddish humor.**

Modern-day Jewish humor is more difficult to pinpoint. The Jewish Diaspora has changed and thinned out the original themes of "existential angst" and the fight for survival, and new topics and twists have been introduced by each society in which a Jewish population manages to establish itself. Anti-Semitism has slowly become a less central theme decades following World War II, to be replaced by jokes about assimilation or lack thereof in the new homeland. Clinging to old traditions sometimes became a prime target for satire, however many of the basic themes of Jewish humor remained.

Humor as an integral part of Jewish life is exemplified by the following quote by Lotus Weinstock: "*With all the Jewish comics in the world, how come Israel doesn't have a 'Laughing Wall'?*"<sup>132</sup>

Optimism has often been scarce in the long history of the Jewish people, and therefore humor was a remedy for renewing hope and providing comic relief amidst bleak prospects. One of the best explanations for the prevalence of humor in Jewish society has been summed up in a joke by Robin Williams: "*Comedy is acting out optimism.*"<sup>133</sup>

Many Jewish writers, such as Pinter, deal with eternal 'Jewish themes,' including existential angst, the unknown threat and questioning authority. This has sometimes led to a difficult relationship between the writers and the conservative members of

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<sup>130</sup> Cf. *Kafka's komische Seiten* by Astrid Dehe & Achim Engstler

<sup>131</sup> *Profil* No. 11, 12 March 2012, p. 116

<sup>132</sup> Partnow, p. 1.

Jewish communities, in as far as everyone does not always condone poking fun of Jewish characters or Jewish characteristics. Ultra-orthodox Jews might view some forms of modern-day Jewish humor as too harsh (e.g. Harold Pinter), too vulgar (e.g. Eric Wiener), too neurotic (e.g. Woody Allen) or too masochistic (e.g. Robin Williams).

However it cannot be denied that Jewish humor is very often self-critical, even going as far as being self-depreciating. This can also be said of Pinter's character Goldberg in *The Birthday Party*, who is portrayed as a Jewish thug without pity. Pinter played Goldberg himself (in a television production for the BBC in 1987), and he has said of the character of Goldberg: "*Every single character, even a bastard like Goldberg, I care for.*"<sup>134</sup> This would serve to indicate that Pinter's characterization of Goldberg is intended to be self-critical, ironical and witty, even though it might also be seen by some as self-depreciating. The Jewish folklorist Dan Ben-Amos muses that the validation for the thesis of Jewish masochism could be seen as generally accepted by Jewish intellectuals.<sup>135</sup>

The self-critical element of Jewish humor was indicated by Sigmund Freud at an early point in time. According to Theodor Reik in his book *Jewish Wit*,<sup>136</sup> Jewish humor came into being as a means of dealing with the general hostility the Jews were confronted with. Masochism or self-aggression with a comical twist also plays a prominent role in the Marx Brothers' comedies.

Sigmund Freud's theory on jokes in his book *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious* is based on the necessity of three people or parties for the purpose of telling a successful joke: the joke-teller, the audience and the person, who is the object or butt of the joke. Freud divides humor into three different types of categories, which might be labeled as joke, comedy and mimetic. He defined black humor as a kind of vent for the purpose of dealing with topics that are socially taboo. Freud sees joke telling as a dramatic form of entertaining an audience. The audience is expected to

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<sup>133</sup> Robin Williams, Brainy Quote.

<sup>134</sup> Bensky, Lawrence M., "*Harold Pinter*" *Writers at Work: The Paris Review*, Third Series, New York: Viking Press 1967.

<sup>135</sup> *Novak*, p. xli.

<sup>136</sup> Cf. *Jewish Wit* by Theodor Reik,

take sides against the victim of the joke by laughing at him or her. However if the audience sympathizes with the victim, instead, then the telling of the joke may have served the purpose of awakening the audience to an unjust set of circumstances.<sup>137</sup>

According to Sigmund Freud: "*Laughter is the conquest of the pleasure principle over our own vulnerability.*"<sup>138</sup>

In an article entitled *Humor*, published in 1927, Freud furthermore offered the following insight regarding gallows humor: "*The ego refuses to be distressed by the provocations of reality, to let itself be compelled to suffer. It insists that it cannot be affected by the traumas of the external world; it shows, in fact, that such traumas are no more than occasions for it to gain pleasure.*"<sup>139</sup>

Humor or joke telling is a highly important source of dramatic tension. The moment of uncertainty as to whom the audience will sympathize with, the aggressor (joke-teller) or the victim, is crucial for the forward motion of dramatic narrative. It will also reveal the type of people in the audience and their sympathies. Are they more prepared to side with the aggressor and laugh to their heart's delight, or do they choke on their laughter, because they actually sympathize with the victim, like Gus does in Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter*. The morbid, ironic humor, often used by Pinter is akin to gallows humor.

The element of 'laughter as the best medicine' is also an important aspect of humor. Some conservative fractions may claim that it is not permissible to write with a certain amount of black humor about the unsurpassed tragedy of the Shoah or Holocaust. However films, such as *Le Train de Vie* (Dir. Radu Mihaileanu, 1998), and *Inglourious Basterds* (Dir. Quentin Tarentino, 2009), can be seen to have proven otherwise. A new play by Silke Hassler and Peter Turrini entitled *Jedem das Seine*, as directed by Herbert Föttinger at the Theater in der Josefstadt in 2010, confirms that great care and sensitivity can make it possible to render unthinkable themes into

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<sup>137</sup> Freud (2002), p. 141.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, p. 89.

<sup>139</sup> Freud (1927).

tragicomic works without insulting the survivors.<sup>140</sup> Harold Pinter's black humor and self-critical irony falls into a similar category. He does not write blatantly insulting lines for Goldberg in *The Birthday Party*. The dark comedy between the lines gives the audience a chance for introspection, in general.

Finally, it is highly interesting to note that *The Big Book of Jewish Humor* has only been translated into one foreign language, and that is German: "...*Jewish humor is probably more popular in Germany than in any other European Country.*"<sup>141</sup>

This was reflected by the large number of German-Jewish and Austrian-Jewish stand-up comedians (*Kabarettisten*) before the Nazi regime, as well as the few who returned to Austria after the Shoah, such as Georg Kreisler and Gerhard Bronner. Comedian Robin Williams relates in his new HBO TV show: "*I was interviewed in Germany and the woman asked me why Germans don't have a sense of humor.*" He replied: "*It could be because you murdered all the funny people.*"<sup>142</sup> Many Jewish survivors and emigrants made their way to America, and the list of Jewish-American comedians is almost endless, including such famous names as Woody Allen, Jack Benny, Mel Brooks, Goldie Hawn and Joan Rivers.

In her book entitled *Contemporary Women Playwrights*, Wendy Wasserstein writes: "*The real reason for comedy is to hide the pain.*"<sup>143</sup> Her candid statement would confirm the function of laughter as medicine. Joan Rivers went even further, when she stated on BBC television. "*My routines come out of total unhappiness. My audiences are my group therapy.*"<sup>144</sup> The therapeutic effect of laughter is generally recognized by scholars, and there are even special programs, which provide clowns for childrens' and adults' hospital clinics, such as the CliniClowns in Austria.

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<sup>140</sup> In contrast to Turrini's play, the film based on it entitled *Vielleicht in einem anderen Leben* (dir. Elisabeth Scharang) hardly has any tragicomic moments, and takes a very different approach to the play.

<sup>141</sup> Novak, p. xiv

<sup>142</sup> Robin Williams' new HBO TV Special.

<sup>143</sup> Interview with Wendy Wasserstein in: *Betsko*, p. 420.

<sup>144</sup> Joan Rivers in an interview on BBC Television, Feb. 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1990.

Phyllis Diller has stated in the book *Women in Comedy*: "*Comedy is tragedy revisited or hostility. It is mock hostility, of course, or it would be ugly....*"<sup>145</sup> Here we have a further indication of how close together comedy and tragedy actually lie. In the same book, Robin Tyler is quoted as saying: "*I laugh that I may not weep.*"<sup>146</sup> These two statements are very similar in meaning, as they both define the fine line between comedy and tragedy. This is the very same fine line, which Harold Pinter walks in his 'comedies of menace.'

### 1.3.3 Classical German Comedy or the Lack Thereof

The common term for the German-language comedy was '*bürgerliches Lustspiel*,' which revolved around middle-class characters. However before the 18<sup>th</sup> century, *Lustspiele* were mostly confined to so-called "*Verwechslungsspiele*," magical shows or crude comedy, such as *Hanswurst*,<sup>147</sup> roughly comparable to Punch and Judy shows in England. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Minna von Barnhelm* was perhaps the first well-known German *Lustspiel*. In this same tradition followed Heinrich von Kleist's *Der zerbrochne Krug*,<sup>148</sup> which is nevertheless not regularly staged in the same humorous manner as William Shakespeare's comedies. The author of this thesis personally attended a production of *Der zerbrochne Krug* directed by Peter Stein and starring Klaus Maria Brandauer in the scope of Wiener Festwochen at the Theater an der Wien on 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 2009, and can testify to the fact that neither the directing nor the acting placed much effort on the humorous aspects of what is perhaps the most popular German *Lustspiel*. The general themes of the *Lustspiel* were also of a middle-class nature, and often dealt with economic trials and tribulations or other family affairs.

In Vienna, many of the *Lustspiele* staged at the city's largest theater, the Burgtheater, were written by Johann Nepomuk Nestroy or Ferdinand Raimund, and were of such

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<sup>145</sup> Martin, p. 123.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> In the "*Hanswurststreit*" in the 1730s, J.C. Gottsched and F.C. Neuber tried to ban Hanswurst from German-language stages for the purpose of improving the poor quality of German-language comedy.

<sup>148</sup> Kleist, 2003.

regional Austrian nature that they have mostly resisted translation into English<sup>149</sup> or French to this day, and are not regularly played on the great stages in Germany, either. Neither of the famous classical German-language playwrights, Goethe and Schiller, wrote comedies of an equal stature to those Shakespeare wrote centuries earlier, and thus it might be argued that classical comedy played a less important role in German-language theaters than it did in England in the famous tradition of the eternally popular comedies of Shakespeare and company.

A book about the German *Lustspiel* by Christian Neuhuber is entitled "*Das Lustspiel macht Ernst. Das Ernste in der deutschen Komödie auf dem Weg in die Moderne...*,"<sup>150</sup> which literally translates as "*The Lustspiel Is Serious: The Seriousness in German Comedy...*" Another book publication about German comedy by Helmut Arntzen has a strikingly similar title: "*Die ernste Komödie. Das deutsche Lustspiel von Lessing bis Kleist*,"<sup>151</sup> which literally translates as "*The Serious Comedy: The Germany Comedy from Lessing to Kleist*." These titles alone suffice to give us a good idea of the serious nature underlying the classic *Lustspiel*, which was apparently often intended as educational, an aspect that would seem to have undermined any serious attempt at humor.

Ludwig Wittgenstein gives us further insight into the significance of humor in the scope of the German perspective. "*Humor is not a mood but a way of looking at the world. So if it is correct to say that humor was stamped out in Nazi Germany, that does not mean that people were not in good spirits, or anything of that sort, but something much deeper and more important.*"<sup>152</sup>

Furthermore, as mentioned in *The Big Book of Jewish Humor*, Germany is not a country noted for its love of humor "*nor, if memory serves, for its love of Jews.*"<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> The author of this thesis did the English translation of the *Excerpt from the Last Testament of Johann Nestroy*, which exemplifies the latter's sense of humor to the end of his days, in *The Art of Life: Artificial Life* for the Expo 2000 in Hannover.

<sup>150</sup> Neuhuber, 2003.

<sup>151</sup> Arntzen, 1968.

<sup>152</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein: Brainy Quote.

<sup>153</sup> Novak, p. xiv.

In his play entitled *Princess Ironheart* (German original: *Prinzessin Eisenherz*), which is about the resistance in Austria – or lack thereof - during World War II, Austrian playwright Franzobel's resistance fighter says the following about humor in the Third Reich: "*Humor is the best weapon against the Nazis. The Third Reich is humorless – even though its rulers are a big joke.*"<sup>154</sup> This witty remark plays on the fact that the Nazis took themselves deadly seriously, although when we watch historical documentaries of Hitler and his bigwigs making speeches, they appear to be making absolute fools of themselves from our contemporary perspective.

Bertolt Brecht wrote in *Dialoge aus dem Messingknäuf*: "*Ein Theater, in dem man nicht lachen soll, ist ein Theater, über das man lachen soll.*"<sup>155</sup> In turn, Pinter commented on Brecht: "*I do admire Brecht more and more, including his poetry. I think he was a hell of a poet and a political mind of the greatest distinction.*"<sup>156</sup> Brecht's play *Im Dickicht der Städte* (*In the Jungle of Cities*, Engl. transl. 1927) focuses on the impossible task of understanding human motivation, as well as the difficulties of communication amongst human beings, thus foreshadowing some of Pinter's favorite themes.<sup>157</sup>

On the other hand, Christian Morgenstern's *Galgenlieder* (*Songs from the Gallows*), many of which were inspired by nonsensical English rhymes, are an early example of German black humor with an absurdist twist. However it must be remarked that they were not originally intended as works for the stage, and the earliest published English translation of his work dates from 1964,<sup>158</sup> which postdates Pinter's first 'absurdist' plays from 1957.

British playwright David Harrower also seems to feel that British humor differs significantly from the humor in Jewish-Austrian playwright Arthur Schnitzler's works. Harrower recently translated and adapted Schnitzler's *Liebelei* into English as *Sweet*

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<sup>154</sup> Franzobel, p. 19.

<sup>155</sup> Brecht 1963, p. 129.

<sup>156</sup> Gussow, p. 76.

<sup>157</sup> A famous production of Brecht's *In the Jungle of Cities* was staged by the Living Theater in New York in 1960.

<sup>158</sup> Morgenstern himself was also a renowned literary translator, who translated from the French and Norwegian, incl. dramas by Ibsen and Strindberg.

*Nothings*, and he commented in an interview with Austrian theater critic Karin Cerny that Schnitzler's complex humor is difficult to capture in English:

*"Es war schwierig, Schnitzlers komplexen Humor einzufangen. Die Figuren dürfen nicht zu melodramatisch klingen, dabei wollen alle dauernd sterben. Gleichzeitig sollte es aber auch nicht zu ironisch werden. Du kannst keine Farce aus diesem Stück machen, es muss eine existenzialistische Seite haben: Schnitzler muss tragisch und komisch zugleich sein. Es muss 'bittersweet' sein, wie wir Briten sagen."<sup>159</sup>*

Peter Turrini, one of Austria's most popular playwrights, who has proven himself a master of the tragicomedy, made the following darkly humorous observation about how tragedy cannot exist without a certain degree of comedy in an interview with journalist Eva Pfisterer:

*"Die Tragödie kommt ja niemals in purster Form einher. Es haftet ihr ja immer auch etwas Lächerliches an. (...) Ich bin vor vielen Jahren, als mir das Leben keine Freude mehr machte, in der Psychiatrie gelandet. (...) Ich schritt also umdüstert von Seelenschmerz, den Gang der Psychiatrie entlang, mit einem am Rücken zusammengebundenen Nachthemd und dem sichtbaren Paposchlitz. Es kam mir jemand entgegen, den ich vom ORF kannte, und wir taten beide so, als würden wir uns nicht in der Psychiatrie, sondern zu einer Besprechung in der Fernseh Abteilung treffen. Wir schritten also beide vor uns hin, mit dem sichtbaren Paposchlitz am Ende unserer Rücken und unterhielten uns über die Notwendigkeit besserer Fernsehspiele. Es gibt keine Tragödie, der nicht auch die Komödie innewohnt."<sup>160</sup>*

#### 1.4 Harold Pinter as a Playwright

*"I pay meticulous attention to the shape of things, from the shape of a sentence to the overall structure of the play."<sup>161</sup>*

– Harold Pinter

<sup>159</sup> " *Profil* No. 19, 10 May 2010.

<sup>160</sup> *Salon - Magazin zu den Salzburger Festspielen*, 2010, p. 12.

<sup>161</sup> Pinter 1998, p. 19.

### 1.4.1 Pinter's Metaphorical and Political Plays

Some Pinter scholars divide the playwright's oeuvre of dramatic works into two periods. His early plays, written from 1957 to 1978, can be called metaphorical, in that their plots and characters generally represent something greater, such as the threat of forced obedience being inflicted upon Stanley in *The Birthday Party*, which is countered by Pete in Pinter's favorite line: "Stan, don't let them tell you what to do."<sup>162</sup>

Pinter's later plays, written from approximately 1980 until 2002, can be considered political, because they openly deal with political issues in a more or less unconcealed manner. Pinter's final sketch, *The Press Conference*, is a blatantly political farce of a politician answering questions regarding his (or her) actions, which are breaches of human rights. Pinter played the leading role of the minister himself in the premiere of this sketch at the Royal National Theatre in London on February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2002. However, the author of this thesis saw a good production of *The Press Conference* in the scope of The Pinter Abroad Conference in Maribor by the Pinter Center for Research in Performance and Creating Writing, in which the leading role was credibly played as a female politician invoking memories of Margaret Thatcher.<sup>163</sup>

The above general categorization of Pinter's plays is adhered to by Pinter scholar Susan Hollis Merritt, however for the purpose of this thesis, a more precise categorization of his plays will be adhered to, as elaborated in *Chapter 1.1.4.1 Plays by Pinter*. This more detailed breakdown labels Pinter's first period from 1957-1963 as comedies of menace; followed by memory plays from 1964-1982; and culminating with his political plays from 1983-2000.

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<sup>162</sup> Pinter 1987, p. 96.

<sup>163</sup> The production was called *Pinter: In Other Rooms* staged by the Pinter Center for Research in Performance and Creative Writing at the University of London, in Narodni dom Maribor (Slovenia) on Sept. 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2011.

#### 1.4.2 The Influence of Pinter's Jewish Background on His Writing

As a writer, Harold Pinter may not have consciously dealt with Jewish themes, yet many of his plays do instinctively touch upon themes of Jewish relevance, due to the fact that Pinter grew up during World War II and was naturally confronted by anti-Semitism and existential angst throughout his early life. He came to learn of all of the atrocities of the Nazi regime by the time he was a teenager. Most of Pinter's plays deal with the theme of abuse of power in some way, shape or form, which can be seen in connection with his recognition of his own precarious existence as a Jew in the face of historic and current affairs in England and the Continent.

The influence of Yiddish humor on Pinter as a writer is already clear in his early novel *The Dwarfs*, which he wrote between 1952-1956, but did not publish until 1989 in a slightly revised version. In this work, which is Pinter's only novel, although it is mostly written in the form of a dialogue, the character of Pete cracks a typical Yiddish joke:

*“The Rabbi was in bed with his mistress, Pete said, when his landlady knocked on the door. He jumped under the bed, leaving his bowler hat between the woman's legs. In comes the landlady. Oy gevalt, she says. The Rabba est arangafelen! (...) Why can you speak Yiddish? Mark asked. Who's the Jew here, me or you?”*<sup>164</sup>

Furthermore, it is this typical type of self-critical Jewish humor, which Pinter seems to draw upon in many of his plays. The character of the Jewish thug master Goldberg in Pinter's *The Birthday Party* is one of Pinter's self-declared favorites, because his lines are full of subliminal humor. Not only has Pinter directed this play himself, but he also played the role of Goldberg with a good measure of humor and glee.

Pinter's play *The Birthday Party* focuses on the main character of Stanley, who is sought out by thugs and made to undergo a brutal interrogation, which breaks his mind and body before they lead him away to an uncertain destiny, similar to the Gestapo. Existential angst and fear of persecution are looming in the wings of the

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<sup>164</sup> Pinter 1990, p. 138-139.

stage and threaten to triumph. Pinter's Jewish humor comes to light especially in the lines of the Jewish character of Goldberg.

*The Dumb Waiter* revolves around two hit men, who are expected to blindly carry out their tyrannical boss's orders to murder an unknown person. Their blind obedience results in the absurd situation of the final scene, where the senior hit man is supposed to kill his junior partner and companion, a scenario reminiscent of Nazi Germany and the hypocrisy and atrocities of the Third Reich.

*The Caretaker* tells the story of Davies, a homeless tramp, who has lost his identity and has trouble dealing with worldly matters, somewhat similar to the survivors and displaced persons after the Holocaust or Shoah. On the other hand, Davies is also a racist and denigrates the Indians or blacks, who live next door, insinuating that they are dirty, when he himself is unwashed and wearing rags. This is also reminiscent of the hypocritical racial discrimination in the Nazi era. Aston, who takes in Davies, has been denounced by his supposed friends, incarcerated against his will and almost killed by a crazy doctor, which also evokes memories of Nazi Germany and euthanasia.

### 1.4.3 Pinter's Language and Style

Harold Pinter says a lot in a few words. His style employs an economy of words. The message that sounds between the lines is that of misunderstanding, miscommunication, self-irony and ominous threat. In a speech made by Pinter at the National Student Drama Festival in Bristol in 1962, he explained his use of language thus:

*"Language, under these conditions, is a highly ambiguous business. So often, below the word spoken, is the thing known and unspoken. (...) Between my lack of biographical data about (the characters) and the ambiguity of what they say lies a territory which is not only worthy of explorations but which it is compulsory to explore. (...) We're inexpressive, giving little away, unreliable, elusive, evasive,*

*obstructive, unwilling. But it's out of these attributes that a language arises. A language, I repeat, where under what is said, another thing is being said.*"<sup>165</sup>

Pinter is a careful writer, who puts a lot of thought into his work. Nothing is left to chance. Everything is part of the plan and leads to a concise writing, which never deviates from its purpose. Directors are therefore not inclined to delete any of his lines.

When working with actors at rehearsal in Harry Burton's documentary film *Working with Pinter*, the latter elaborated on the importance of each word in his dialogues, and how rehearsals needed to pay meticulous attention to the author's intentions: "*The least word wrong stands out...*"<sup>166</sup> When Burton asks Pinter whether the latter's script is influenced by the rehearsal stage, or whether he has rewritten dialogues, Pinter immediately answers in the negative. Pinter claims he has only done a major rewrite on one occasion in the case of *The Homecoming*, when he discovered that a highway had been renamed.<sup>167</sup> On the same subject Pinter's friend Henry Woolf stated that most of Pinter's plays are poems, and one cannot fool around with a poem or alter its words and rhythms.

Pinter himself has also commented on his writing for the screen in comparison with the stage, both of which require the same discipline, whereas he feels that the cinema can make do with less words, because of its other advantages:

*"I know that you can get around a hell of a lot more – there's no comparison there – but the disciplines are similar, for a writer, in that although you need, let's say, less words on the screen than you do on the stage, nevertheless – although I don't really believe this to be true – say that you needed twenty words for a particular scene on the stage, you can do with six for a similar scene on the screen. The point is that if you write eight for the screen, two words too many, you're overloading the thing, and*

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<sup>165</sup> Pinter 1987, p. 13-14.

<sup>166</sup> *Working with Pinter*, 1:40 min.

<sup>167</sup> *Working with Pinter*, 27:15 min. (Note the humor in the anecdote!)

*you're breaking your discipline: precisely the same discipline, the same economy, whatever the medium you're writing for.*<sup>168</sup>

One might say that Pinter's dialogues are very tight and controlled. Esslin writes that each syllable and their succession are predetermined. This results in a poetic form of 'linguistic ballet,' which Pinter uses to capture the repetitiveness of ordinary speech, as well as the element of discontinuation, evoking silence. Esslin also points out that Pinter's language is very much akin to naturalist dialogue, despite the fact that it tends to sound absurdist: *"Im wirklichen Leben wird ja auch in Anakoluthen und Ellipsen geredet. Pinters Menschen reden absurd, weil in der Wirklichkeit die meisten Dialoge aus Unsinn bestehen."*<sup>169</sup> The influence of James Joyce's stream of consciousness can also be seen in Pinter's work in this connection.

In the same vein, Pinter speaks of his economy of words. His writing is very carefully calculated, even though he also admits that much of it is not consciously planned ahead. But once he has brought something to the page, he evaluates it with an astute ear, listening to the weight of each word and determining its value in the whole of the work. In an interview with Mel Gussow, Pinter explains: *"... nothing I've written is 'aimless.' I think every sentence is a nugget. You should be able to hold it in your hand (...) and say (...) it's essential. (...) I try not to waste words."*<sup>170</sup>

Yet this does not mean that Pinter's dialogue is necessarily realistic. It is often a mocking cover for that which purports to be realistic expression. One might even describe his language as double-speak. We always need to listen to what is being said between the lines. Pinter says: *"The more acute the experience, the less articulate its expression."*<sup>171</sup>

Speaking of Pinter in the film *Working with Pinter*, his best friend Henry Woolf and collaborator said of Pinter's stagecraft that the latter must be given credit for recognizing the fact that *"...conversation between people - dialogue – is not for the*

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<sup>168</sup> *Isis*, Feb. 1964, p. 19.

<sup>169</sup> Esslin 1973, p. 34.

<sup>170</sup> Gussow, p. 59.

<sup>171</sup> *TheaterPro* online.

*exchange of information, unless it's very simple (...) it's most often to defend oneself (...) or to attack somebody else....*"<sup>172</sup>

In actual fact, the paradox of Pinter's dialogues is that they seem realistic, yet they are intricately woven works of art, quite in the manner of musical scores. The playwright himself has said of his writing: *"I am very concerned with the shape and consistency of mood in my plays. I cannot write anything, which appears to me to be loose and unfinished. I like a feeling of order in what I write."*<sup>173</sup>

Antonia Fraser relates a telling incident in this regard in her biography of Pinter. She describes how her husband Harold is very gloomy about the rehearsals of *No Man's Land* because actor "Sir Ralph Richardson can't seem to get the words in the right order."<sup>174</sup> Pinter believes that Sir Ralph is perfect for the role except for this problem, which could completely ruin the play in terms of rhythm and poetry.

Another case of a production, which highly distressed Pinter was when Roger Planchon ran together Pinter's *Family Voices* and *Celebrations*, instead of staging them separately, as intended. Pinter's wife writes in this connection: *"Nothing causes Harold more pain than unlawful interference with his text."*<sup>175</sup> Here we have an impression of how vital Pinter considered it that his plays be produced in keeping with his original structure and original intention.

Pinter had an ambivalent relationship to words. This involves the inherent power and weight of words, which makes it difficult to deal with them. He admits that the wealth of words tends to nauseate him, and that he feels he has to work through the mass of stale meaning to find the reality behind it all. In a speech Pinter made in 1962, he expresses it thus:

*"I have mixed feelings about words myself. Moving among them, sorting them out, watching them appear on the page, from this I derive a considerable pleasure. But at the same time I have another strong feeling about words which amounts to nothing*

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<sup>172</sup> *Working with Pinter*: 8:48 min.

<sup>173</sup> Taylor, p. 357.

<sup>174</sup> Fraser, p. 15.

*less than nausea. Such a weight of words confronts us, day in day out, words spoken in a context such as this, words written by me and by others, the bulk of it a stale dead terminology.... But if it is possible to confront this nausea, to follow it to its hilt and move through it, then it is possible to say that something has occurred, that something has even been achieved.*"<sup>176</sup>

Regarding the lack of (good) communication between people, Pinter sets his eye on the cause. His work underwrites the lack of understanding in the world. Words are often empty shells disguising a hidden meaning locked in them. What we hear is often deceiving. It serves as a decoy leading us away from the naked truth. Pinter says:

*"There are two silences. One when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed. This speech is speaking of a language locked beneath it. That is its continual reference. The speech we hear is an indication of that we don't hear. It is a necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, anguished or mocking smokescreen which keeps the other in its place. (...) One way of looking at speech is to say that it is a constant stratagem to cover nakedness."*<sup>177</sup>

Language would seem to blur the border between reality and fiction, making it impossible to discern the truth. Is Pinter looking to point out the fears and lack of certainty that confronts modern man? He describes his own ambivalent relationship with language and words, implying the precariousness of his work, very deftly as follows:

*"So language in art remains a highly ambiguous transaction, a quicksand, a trampoline, a frozen pool which might give way under you, the author, at any time."*<sup>178</sup>

The inherent doubt as to the true meaning of words plays a major role in Pinter's works. A final certainty about their meaning cannot be achieved. Words cannot be trusted. They are constantly playing with us, as we play with them. Use of language can denote power, and Pinter's characters are often reduced to speechlessness in the

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<sup>175</sup> Fraser p. 286.

<sup>176</sup> Pinter 1987, p. 13.

<sup>177</sup> Pinter 1987, p. 14-15.

finals scenes, symbolizing their loss of power, such as Stanley in *The Birthday Party* and Gus in *The Dumb Waiter*.

However, a great deal of skepticism of language is noticeable in Pinter's work. When an attempt is made to express something, it isn't clear whether the intention is fulfilled. A lurking doubt always remains.<sup>179</sup> On the other hand, the British audience often finds humor in the vulgarity of certain expressions used by Pinter, his comical repetitions and use of tautology, or the incorrect language usage by his lower class characters, such as Gus in *The Dumb Waiter*.<sup>180</sup>

One might say that Pinter deconstructs language and reconstructs it again for the purpose of the stage. This reconstruction involves many silences, hesitations and evasions, evoking the implied or the unspoken. As Peter Raby writes: "*It can also be a language of clipped precision, which can give the impression of certainty and clarity, but which also simultaneously contrives to obscure, and to threaten.*"<sup>181</sup>

In his book *Anger and After*, John Russell Taylor comments on the characteristics of Pinter's writing and the lack of trust in communication, in that his characters twist and turn in regular conversation, highly distrustful of any straight communication. And whenever they try to hold a normal conversation, they prove constitutionally incapable of doing so. Pinter has created his typical form of comedy from this confusion of a conversational incapability of his characters.<sup>182</sup> Pinter himself has said of this:

*"I feel that instead of any inability to communicate there is a deliberate evasion of communication. Communication itself between people is so frightening that rather than do that there is continual cross-talk, a continual talking about other things rather than what is at the root of their relationship."*<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Pinter 2006, p. 2.

<sup>179</sup> Cf. Brown, p. 15.

<sup>180</sup> Cf. Esslin, p. 32.

<sup>181</sup> Raby, p. 69.

<sup>182</sup> Cf. Taylor, p. 332.

<sup>183</sup> Esslin 1980b, p. 244.

According to Taylor, the tension inherent in Pinter's dialogues stems from the constant evasions of each character, who is trying to find out more than he or she gives away. Taylor also remarks that it is the writing technique of creating doubt, concerning each seemingly clear line of dialogue, with an equally unequivocal statement to the contrary, which is how Pinter achieves a distinct air of uncertainty. The situations in his plays always seem simple, and the language would usually appear to be a relatively accurate reproduction of common speech, making Pinter seem to be the most realistic dramatist of the 1960s.<sup>184</sup> This is, however, questionable, as Pinter did not intend to write purely realistic dialogues.

Yet it is not only the words and their meaning, which play a role, their sound and rhythm are equally important. The short, snappy exchanges of dialogue are interspersed with more reflective and eloquent passages, such as several of Goldberg's speeches in *The Birthday Party*. Pinter's carefully calculated use of language and speech patterns gives each of his characters a distinct rhythm and rhyme. A sensitive ear for the interplay of sound and rhythm regulates Pinter's writing. There is never a superfluous syllable. Even a non-English speaker will take note of the clear rhythmic speech patterns of his characters' dialogues.<sup>185</sup>

Esslin postulates that Pinter has a wider range of more subtle possibilities in structuring his dialogues in English than in German, because the English language is more clearly divided into regional dialects and social registers:

*"Pinters revolutionäre Neuerung besteht einerseits darin, daß er die Sondersprache gewisser bisher auf der Bühne vernachlässigter Schichten virtuos beherrscht und damit eine neue Region, die der untersten Schichten des Londoner Ostens, für das Theater erschlossen hat, daß er aber andererseits zu ersten Mal den Konflikt, der sich aus der Existenz dieser Sondersprachen ergibt, als einen dramatischen Konflikt auf der Bühne gestellt hat."*<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Cf. Taylor, pp. 325-326.

<sup>185</sup> Cf. Brown, p. 37.

<sup>186</sup> Esslin, p. 30.

Esslin's comment is correct in that Pinter certainly uses all the social nuances of the English language in writing his dialogues, yet the author of this thesis doubts that there are far less regional dialects in German.<sup>187</sup> The idea of differentiating between social registers was not new, and was used very successfully in G.B. Shaw's *Pygmalion*, yet Pinter's dialogue writing expertly takes advantage of the full range of opportunities.

In the beginning of the 1960s, before Pinter had become widely accepted in mainstream British theater, one or two were skeptical about his writing. They questioned his style and the legitimacy of his work. For example, in *British Drama*, Allardyce Nicoll claimed that Pinter went too far in denying the validity of language in the theater, as well as in life, in general. "*It has been said, rightly, that in Harold Pinter's plays we have 'the lowest common denominator of human speech'.*"<sup>188</sup>

Instead of allowing for Pinter's creative powers to manifest themselves in an autonomous manner, Nicoll postulated that Pinter's approach to writing was destructive to the dramatic genre, because he does not have any audience in mind while writing.<sup>189</sup> However, Nicoll was quickly disproved, as Pinter's fame took hold in the theater. The indication in Pinter's work that man has trouble communicating was apparent to Nicoll, but he seems to have missed the significance of this, and apparently tried to discredit Pinter's work on that account. Today we see Pinter's work as indicative of the lack of good communication in society, and it is accepted that his work by no means undermines the foundation of drama, as Nicoll claimed.

In complete contrast to the above, J.L. Styan, *The Dark Comedy* (1968) acknowledges Pinter's highly gifted way with words. Styan praises Pinter's precise language usage and his carefully crafted lines, recognizing that the author is always in full control of his work. Styan also emphasizes the hidden rhythm of Pinter's dialogue, his silences and the turn of his lines, each precisely calculated to create a certain mood.<sup>190</sup> He realizes that Pinter has been misunderstood in the past, and he captures the essence of

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<sup>187</sup> Cf. Franzobel's use of various German dialects in his play *Prinzessin Eisenherz*, translated into English by Renée v. Paschen.

<sup>188</sup> Nicoll, p. 335.

<sup>189</sup> Cf. Nicoll, p. 335.

<sup>190</sup> Cf. Styan, p. 245.

Pinter's creative force, when he describes the furtiveness and the irony of Pinter's subtextual communication, which is funneled to the audience as recipient of the message. Furthermore, he describes how Pinter uses language, in terms of idioms, repetition and colloquialisms, to carry his message and underline it in a manner, which spellbinds his audiences in the flow of his words, making for highly dramatic effects.

Pinter's wide range of English speech and language, which he uses in his plays, also serves to mark his character's differences in class and origin. This is particularly evident in Mick and Davies' differing speech patterns and vocabularies. Mick is relatively well educated and uses a myriad of words, which the tramp Davies, who is presumably from Wales, cannot quite place nor entirely fathom in *The Caretaker*. This naturally heightens the irony and provides plenty of comic relief in the play, making the situation appear hyperreal. Pinter himself has written: "... *I'd say that what goes on in my plays is realistic, but what I'm doing is not realism.*"<sup>191</sup>

In a treatise entitled *The Play's the Thing*, written by Pinter in October 1958, he states: "*There are no hard distinctions between what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily either true or false: it can be both true and false.*"<sup>192</sup> This remark serves to indicate the great margin of interpretation Pinter leaves to the audience in his works. In reality we chose to see things as we like, and opinions will always differ.

In *Anger and After*, John Russell Taylor compares Harold Pinter's writing with British dramatist Alun Owen, claiming that Pinter has the most astute ear for the English language as it can actually be heard (in England), demonstrating the highest skill in recreating that speech for the stage. This dialogue may sound naturalistic at first, yet on close scrutiny it is seen to be a subtle construction, each single line being carefully calculated.<sup>193</sup>

On the other hand, Pinter did not carefully plan the plots of his plays before writing; rather he began with a setting or a few lines in mind. Michael Billington, the

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<sup>191</sup> Pinter 1981a, p. 11.

<sup>192</sup> Baker, p. 7.

<sup>193</sup> Cf. Taylor, p. 230.

renowned Pinter scholar, has described Pinter's writing process as such: *"Even when writing a political play, he has no idea where it's taking him. (...) It was a journey into the unknown, as all his plays are."*<sup>194</sup>

Harold Pinter's attitude towards his playwriting definitely changed over the years, as he says himself. In an interview dating from 1988, he goes on to describe his feelings about his writing and being termed a minimalist:

*"I was always termed, what is the word, 'minimalist.' Maybe I am. Who knows? But I hope that to be minimal is to be precise and focused. I feel that what I've illuminated is quite broad – and deep – shadows stretching away."*<sup>195</sup>

Another important aspect of Pinter's writing is the fact that he didn't write, unless he had a sudden inspiration or image, which came to him.<sup>196</sup> Pinter also strongly believed that: *"his characters took on a life of their own which had to be respected."*<sup>197</sup>

Michael Billington has said that it is very difficult to interpret Pinter's ingenious theatrical works because: *"(Pinter's) plays themselves defy analysis. (...) There is a quality in (Pinter's) plays that is beyond rational explanation."*<sup>198</sup> It is the ambiguity of Pinter's lines, despite their precise wording, which makes any claim of perfect interpretation doubtful. This may sometimes have misled the German translators of his plays to make the mistake of trying to simplify his ambivalent dialogues to a certain extent.

Regarding his working method, Harold Pinter made a highly revealing comment in an early interview with Mel Gussow dating from 1971. He explains that he reads his dialogues aloud to himself. Then he walks through each of the character's roles, playing them so that he can see how they work on stage: *"I read the play aloud to myself, so I know if it's playable. I walk the characters through. I move them about. I*

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<sup>194</sup> <http://www.haroldpinter.org/downloads/index.shtml>

<sup>195</sup> Gussow, p. 75.

<sup>196</sup> Cf. *The Creative Brain* by Nancy Andreasen.

<sup>197</sup> Fraser, p. 127.

<sup>198</sup> <http://www.haroldpinter.org/downloads/index.shtml>

*play all the parts.*"<sup>199</sup>

This is the sign of a true man of the theater. From his own experience as an actor and director, he knows exactly what good dialogue depends on and can judge whether a scene will work well on stage by trying it out for himself. There can be no doubt that Pinter's works are so playable for this very reason. Playwright David Hare has commented on Pinter's lasting influence on the English language on the modern stage, and how it was much improved by his clean yet ambiguous writing:

*"Pinter did what Auden said a poet should do. He cleaned the gutters of the English language, so that it ever afterwards flowed more easily and more cleanly. We can also say that over his work and over his person hovers a sort of leonine, predatory spirit which is all the more powerful for being held under in a rigid discipline of form, or in a black suit.... The essence of his singular appeal is that you sit down to every play he writes in certain expectation of the unexpected. In sum, this tribute from one writer to another: you never know what the hell's coming next."*<sup>200</sup>

The crowning aspect of Pinter's dramatic works has been summed up well by John Russell Taylor with regard to Pinter's musical ear: *"If Pinter's plays are the most 'musical' of the new British drama, however, it follows that they are the most poetic, because what else is music in words but poetry."*<sup>201</sup> In his book *Anger and After* (1962), Taylor goes on to say that Pinter will turn out to be the greatest talent of all the new British dramatists.

This early prediction of Harold Pinter's most prominent position amongst modern British playwrights officially became a recognized fact in international terms, when he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2005 for his great dramatic works.

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<sup>199</sup> Gussow, p. 46.

<sup>200</sup> Hare, p. 21.

<sup>201</sup> Taylor, p. 358.

#### 1.4.4 Pinter's Comedies of Menace

*"I enjoy language. I enjoy that kind of... comic conflict."*<sup>202</sup>

- Harold Pinter

Pinter touched upon what may be considered the most important aspect of his writing in an early interview as quoted by Martin Esslin: *"Everything is funny; the greatest earnestness is funny; even tragedy is funny. And I think what I try to do in my plays is to get to this recognizable reality of the absurdity of what we do and how we behave and how we speak."*<sup>203</sup>

To further elaborate Pinter's use of language, Peter Hall, the director that has staged more of Harold Pinter's plays than anyone else, writes in his autobiography that with Pinter: *"... words are weapons that the characters use to discomfort or destroy each other; and in defence (sic) to conceal feelings."*<sup>204</sup> I would contend that this is a highly British usage of the English language, based on social norms that do not expect or condone the truth in conversation. Prim English etiquette dictates that a lady or gentleman should often refrain from expressing his or her true feelings, and children are likewise dissuaded from doing so. This pattern of avoidance has led to a regular system of evading the truth and not expressing one's real concerns or opinions. Such conversational patterns are highly visible in Pinter's dialogues, and they form the basis of his black humor, which is based on self-irony. In Pinter's works, the ironic position of the speaker is frequently that of superior authority, power or knowledge, meaning that irony is achieved at the cost of the character, to whom the remark was directed. The discrepancy between what is said and what is meant gives rise to humor.

Pinter's early plays were undoubtedly influenced by the resurgence of fascism in the East End of London after the end of World War II, giving rise to his deep political conscience concerning the abuse of power and the victimization of the weak, which

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<sup>202</sup> *Time Out London*: <http://www.timeout.com/film/features/show-feature/3852/>

<sup>203</sup> Esslin 1980b, p. 242.

<sup>204</sup> Gussow, p. 11.

dominate as the themes of his comedies of menace.<sup>205</sup>

*"In the three 'comedies of menace' that precede *The Caretaker* (*The Room*, *The Birthday Party*, and *The Dumb Waiter*), the world pictured in Pinter's plays is a place in which an a priori underlying terror of loneliness combines with a young Jew's knowledge of the atrocities of Adolph (sic) Hitler's Germany and Hackney alleys full of neo-Nazi thugs waiting to 'carve up' students on their way home from school, which creates a feeling of omnipresent menace."<sup>206</sup>*

Apart from the three above-mentioned plays, it can be argued that *The Hothouse* (written in the winter of 1958 but not premiered until April 1980 in London) and *The Caretaker* (written in 1959) might also be considered comedies of menace, in that several of the characters are existentially threatened, yet it is not always clear where the menace originates. In *The Caretaker*, Mick terrorizes Davies in the dark with a vacuum cleaner, while Davies is also menacing, when he threatens Mick and Aston with his knife.<sup>207</sup>

Pinter himself, when asked by Mel Gussow about the menace in his plays in an interview, explained: "...when I said I was tired of menace, I was using a word that I didn't coin. I never thought of menace myself. It was called 'comedy of menace' quite a long time ago. I never stuck categories on myself, or on any of us."<sup>208</sup> This gives us the impression that Pinter's use of menace wasn't the primary, premeditated point of his early plays. However, it would seem clear that by lightening up the threatening nature of several of his characters by the use of 'comic relief,' Pinter created what many critics considered remarkable enough to call it the new genre of 'comedy of menace.' The combination of sinister characters and witty, ironic dialogues filled with humor between the lines served to put Pinter on the map in British theater, and eventually led to the term "*Pinteresque*"<sup>209</sup> being coined to describe the sinister but comic twist to his plays.

<sup>205</sup> Cf. *Working with Pinter*, 41:27 min.

<sup>206</sup> Gale, p. 107.

<sup>207</sup> Cf. Burkmann, p. 86.

<sup>208</sup> Gussow, p. 24.

<sup>209</sup> Oxford English Dictionary defines *Pinteresque* as: "in the style of the characters, situations, etc., of the plays of Harold Pinter, 20th century English dramatist, marked esp. by halting dialogue, uncertainty of identity and air of menace."

In Pinter's later plays, humor remained of great importance. Matthew Harry Burton, who became a close friend of Pinter's, relates an anecdote on humor involving Simon Gray (another close friend of Pinter's), which confirms the continuing impact of Pinter's comedy:

*"(Simon Gray) was one of the greatest comic writers of all time,' Harold says. Then (Harold) tells a story: Before they'd ever met, Simon was being encouraged by a friend to see 'The Homecoming,' but resisting doing so in the belief that this Harold Pinter was likely to be hard work. Finally Simon went along and later told Harold he'd never laughed so much in all his life."<sup>210</sup>*

With regard to Pinter's sense of humor, he has admitted that he breaks out in laughter during writing at times. *"I laugh during the writing, sometimes."<sup>211</sup>* This implies that his fine feeling for humor is highly tuned to any comic relief during the process of writing, and he consciously employs comedy in his plays. If we can imagine him laughing at his own characters, then it is not far-fetched to assume he hopes his audiences will laugh at them, as well, despite all the serious, menacing or tragic aspects of his plays and screenplays. Shakespeare's employment of comic relief is well known, and it served an important purpose in his work. The same applies to the comic moments in Pinter's comedies of menace. He says of his writing: *"I think I can be quite funny now and again."<sup>212</sup>*

Pinter's style is altogether universal, as it is indicative of the hidden meaning of everyday speech. The true meaning often remains unsaid, cloaked in casual idioms, whereas his irony and the humor of repetition allow for a certain comic relief.

John Russell Taylor even mentions in *Anger and After* that he sees a connection between Sidney Perelman's early screenplays for the Marx Brothers<sup>213</sup> and the comic

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<sup>210</sup> Burton, p. 46.

<sup>211</sup> Gussow, p. 47.

<sup>212</sup> Gussow, pp. 55-56.

<sup>213</sup> Sidney Joseph Perelman wrote the screenplays for the Marx Brother's films *Monkey Business* (1931) and *Horse Feathers* (1932).

interludes in their films with the early plays of Harold Pinter. Taylor postulates that this type of transatlantic infusion also contributed to the 'Theater of the Absurd' in England as much as did Ionesco and Beckett. Taylor calls Pinter's style of humor "*wryly comic*."<sup>214</sup> Pinter seems to switch between two contrasting modes, the comic and the horrific or the known and the unknown. We break into laughter of relief and recognition, when we are confronted with something known, in contrast to the menace of the unknown. In most of Pinter's dialogues, at least in his early plays, one character is quicker or brighter, and the other slower, providing a musical counterpoint for the ear, as well as the storyline. The resulting tension is often resolved in a violent outbreak, whether it be verbal or physical.

In Pinter's early comedies of menace, certain characters, generally the underdogs, also seem to have another factor in common, rendering them powerless. In *The Room*, the black man is blind. In *The Birthday Party*, Stanley is rendered blind when his glasses are broken, and dumb by the time his will is broken at the end of the play. In *The Dumb Waiter*, both Ben and Gus are almost rendered speechless or dumb by the games their boss Wilson plays with them while they are waiting to do their job. And in *The Caretaker*, Davies is rendered powerless by his lack of verifiable identity, and Aston is rendered powerless by the electric shocks in the psychiatric ward.

Simultaneously alongside the comedy in Pinter's early plays, there is always an uncertainty and menace lurking in the background. This threat in the air, oftentimes invisible, was presumably (sub) consciously influenced by Pinter's childhood experience of World War II and the Nazi bombing of London. As briefly mentioned earlier on, Pinter was evacuated from London as a child, and he learned during his evacuation that a school friend's whole family had been killed in a bombing. As a Jew, Pinter also admitted to having personally experienced the very real threat of being chased and beaten up by fascists in Hackney London after WWII. This practically inescapable threat of violence is the red thread in Pinter's early plays, which all revolve around an unknown menace, lightened by comic interludes to make the deeper meaning more easily accessible. John Russell Taylor also sees Pinter's early plays as being influenced by Hitchcock, the 'master of controlled horror,' whose

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<sup>214</sup> Cf. Taylor, pp. 300-301.

effects are often achieved from producing a horrible reality from a seemingly irrelevant piece of comedy.<sup>215</sup>

Katherine Burkman, who sees the 'struggle for salvation' as the theme around which Harold Pinter's plays revolve, calls his work tragicomic, and sees Pinter laughing at the absurdness of his character's struggle, as well as sympathizing with their suffering.<sup>216</sup> On the other hand, Martin Esslin stresses the naturalistic form of Pinter's dialogues, which can be seen as realistic and at the same time have an element of a nightmare or fantasy dream world with poetical metaphors of the mind's inner life.<sup>217</sup> Esslin focuses on the extraordinary power of expression and great linguistic and dramatic talent Pinter employs to dream the dreams of humanity, which may have a cathartic effect on everyone.<sup>218</sup>

In an interview with Harold Pinter in 1979, Mel Gussow made an attempt to classify Pinter's early plays, calling the first three (*The Room*, *The Birthday Party* and *The Dumb Waiter*) comedies of menace, which deal mainly with lower-class people and wanton behavior. His next three plays (*A Slight Ache*, *The Hothouse* and *The Caretaker*), on the other hand, revolve around people, who are mostly of the middle-class, some of whom work in the arts. These three plays would seem to also deal with memory and the loss thereof, as well as loving relationships and the loss thereof. Pinter's reply was that he could not judge his own work.<sup>219</sup>

I would postulate that this categorization of Pinter's work is more difficult than it looks, as *The Caretaker* also has certain elements of a comedy of menace, without doubt. Mick is highly menacing towards Davies throughout most of the play, and Davies also behaves threateningly towards Aston as the play progresses. There are also several clear moments of comic relief, particularly the scene when Aston gives Davis a bag of clothes, and Mick takes it away, only to have the entire action repeated several times, in accordance with Pinter's explicit stage directions.

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<sup>215</sup> Cf. Taylor, p. 332.

<sup>216</sup> Cf. Burkman, p. 138.

<sup>217</sup> Cf. Esslin (1973), p. 35.

<sup>218</sup> Cf. Ibid. p. 37.

<sup>219</sup> Cf. Gussow, p. 49.

Taylor loosely defines Pinter's 'comedies of menace' as plays in which: *"The menace comes from outside, from the intruder whose arrival unsettles the warm, comfortable world bounded by four walls, and any intrusion can be menacing, because the element of uncertainty and unpredictability the intruder brings with him is in itself menacing."*<sup>220</sup> Although Taylor only counts *The Room*, *The Dumb Waiter*, *The Birthday Party* and *The Slight Ache* amongst the 'comedies of menace,' I would argue that *The Caretaker* also displays the elements of the above. Mick sees Davies, the tramp, as an intruder in his house. And Aston, Mick's brother, eventually also views Davies as an intrusive menace towards the end of the play, when Davies sides with Mick against Aston.<sup>221</sup>

Styan captures the mood on the comedy stage in England at the time with his following comment: *"In the sixties the comic dramatist leaves us alone and giddy in a spinning world: it is very funny, but quite terrifying."*<sup>222</sup> This is actually a very good summary of the black humor Pinter employs in his comedies of menace, in that his comic lines are very closely interwoven with threatening moments.

Pinter's own stance regarding comedy versus tragedy, and the fine line he walks with regard to his gallows humor, is very well illustrated by the following quote:

***"Everything is funny: the great earnestness is funny: even tragedy is funny. And I think what I try to do in my plays is to get this recognizable reality of the absurdity of what we do and how we behave and how we speak. The point about tragedy is that it is 'no longer funny.' It is funny and then it becomes no longer funny."***<sup>223</sup>

Harold Pinter also stated in 1969 that his writing moved on after the early 'comedies of menace,' and he felt that the element of menace no longer played a role after *The Homecoming*: *"I felt that after 'The Homecoming' ... I couldn't any longer stay in the room with this bunch of people who opened doors and came in and went out."*

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<sup>220</sup> Taylor, p. 326.

<sup>221</sup> *A Slight Ache* was commissioned by BBC in 1958 and broadcast in 1959. Pinter wrote *The Caretaker* in 1959, and both plays also belong to the same period, stylistically.

<sup>222</sup> Styan, p. 250.

<sup>223</sup> Burkmann, p. 36.

*'Landscape' and 'Silence' are in a very different form. There isn't any menace at all.*<sup>224</sup>

Pinter's plays of the 1980s have a major element of menace once again, but *Betrayal* is also very funny according to Pinter's wife, Antonia Fraser, although there is a lot of pain there too. She would know, because it was written while she and Pinter were both going through respective difficult divorces, before they were able to get married in a long and very happy union.<sup>225</sup>

Another of Pinter's later sketches, *Victoria Station*, written in 1982, again reflects his great capacity for humor. Pinter's wife, Antonia Fraser, records that when he read his new play to her and her daughter they howled with laughter.<sup>226</sup>

As Pinter's longtime friends David Hugh Jones and Henry Woolf would remind analytically inclined scholars and dramatic critics, Pinter was a "great comic writer."<sup>227</sup> And other comic playwrights, such as Simon Grey, Noel Coward and Joe Orton, seem to have instinctively understood Pinter's comic vein, as exemplified by their own plays.<sup>228</sup> Pinter's early writing makes use of the rhythmic retorts from the routines of stand-up comedians, such as the question: "Why did the chicken cross the road?"<sup>229</sup> in Stanley's interrogation scene in *The Birthday Party*. Repetition also plays a role in these routine comic exchanges, and the one above ends with Goldberg and McCann menacingly repeating: "Chicken? Egg? Which came first? Which came first? Which came first?"<sup>230</sup>

According to Williams, Pinter has used ordinary English language, a staccato rhythm and repetition to create a "deluded and dangerous comedy of ordinariness, evoking the oddness of routine and the menace in common life."<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Pinter 1969, cover page.

<sup>225</sup> Cf. Fraser, p. 86.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid, p. 133.

<sup>227</sup> Raby, p. 54.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid, p. 44.

<sup>229</sup> Pinter 1987, p. 61.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid, p. 62.

<sup>231</sup> Williams, p. 374.

In an interview with Harold Pinter in Barcelona, Mireia Aragay asked him about the purpose of all the humor in his plays in contrast to the violence or brutality. Pinter's comment illustrates that it is an essential part of his writing, although he apparently does not plan to write humorous plays, per se:

*"Humour is such a mysterious thing, I can't really answer the question. Humour is part of my own upbringing. I don't write what I call funny things, but some of them do make me laugh. I find myself laughing while I'm writing and I notice one or two people also laugh, occasionally."*<sup>232</sup>

In his book entitled *Theatre Language*, Brown illustrates how Pinter uses Meg and Petey's dialogue in *The Birthday Party* for the purpose of comic relief, by heightening the absurdity in their everyday exchanges:

*"The repetitions, the disproportions, the easy use of 'nice,' 'good' and 'bad' are all occasions for comedy. So are the movements underneath the dialogue as shown by these devices. But, more than this, the two characters are at work with sly, mocking, perhaps anguished, smokescreens. There is 'continual evasion;' even in attack, as little as possible is given away."*<sup>233</sup>

Sigmund Freud's theory of joke-telling can be used to illuminate Pinter's comedies of menace. The joke is on the victims in these plays, and the audience, initially at least, tends to laugh out loud at Stanley, Gus and Davies. However as *The Birthday Party*, *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Caretaker* progress, critics have remarked that the initial laughter tends to get stuck in the throats of those who first laughed at the victims in his plays. Most importantly, Pinter's comedies of menace are eye-openers in that they force the audience to become more acutely aware of power structures, dominance and subjugation.

In a conversation with Harold Pinter, Mel Gussow told him that Simon Gray had said he had always considered Pinter a very English writer, unlike the enigmatic European intellectuals, such as Beckett and Kafka. Like Dickens, Pinter can cause a panic of

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<sup>232</sup> Pinter 1998, p. 61.

laughter. Pinter replied to this as follows: "*I find what he says a great compliment. I also think it's accurate so far as I'm concerned. I feel English and I do believe the humor is English.*"<sup>234</sup>

The above statement establishes the fact that Pinter identified the humor in his writing with the English sense of humor or black comedy. This is presumably inevitable, because of the simple fact that he was raised and educated in England. Apart from his parents' Jewish influence at home, it was English society, which left its characteristic mark on Pinter's work.

With regard to William Shakespeare, Pinter goes on to remark that the Bard certainly dominated his life to some extent, and that he would never 'recover' from the influence. Pinter acted in several of Shakespeare's plays, and his famous comedies and tragedies certainly had an influence on Pinter's dramatic oeuvre.<sup>235</sup>

In Harry Burton's excellent documentary film entitled *Working with Pinter*, made in 2007 only one year before the latter's death, Pinter made the highly revealing comment upholding his own mode of humor: "*I think actually my plays are quite honestly much funnier than they are often seen to be or understood to be. I laugh anyway.*"<sup>236</sup> This key remark by Pinter serves to verify the fact that he usually approached writing for the stage from a humorous point of view, accenting the funny moments in order to contrast them with the tragic and gruesome elements of his plays.

At an early stage in Pinter's career,<sup>237</sup> Styan made the following comment, which clearly foresaw the important role of the comic element in Pinter's writing as a dramatist: "... *a more controlled playwright, Harold Pinter, has been digging over the territory newly claimed by the absurdists, and offers to be **the best comic talent in English since Shaw.***"<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Brown, p. 25.

<sup>234</sup> Gussow, p. 78.

<sup>235</sup> Gussow, p. 79.

<sup>236</sup> *Working with Pinter*, 39:05 min.

<sup>237</sup> The first edition of Styan's *The Dark Comedy* dates from 1962; the second edition from 1968.

<sup>238</sup> Styan, p. 244.

## 2 Translation Studies

Literary translation is an interpretive art,<sup>239</sup> in many ways similar to that of the musician, singer, actor or director. The translation of a work of literature or a film involves the interpretation and recreation of an existing work of art in another language and cultural context.

The currently prevailing theory in the field of translation studies is known as the *skopos* theory. It constitutes a functional approach, which postulates that any translation (as with any other action) is determined by its purpose. This means that the translator creates a translation with a specific audience or readership in mind. This normally proves to be the case, in my own experience as a literary translator, however sometimes agencies fail to properly communicate the true purpose of the translations commissioned by them. Ideally, the target audience (or readership) will play an important role in the genesis of any translation. Thus, it follows that the purpose of the translation effects the translator's interpretation, which is duly justified by its purpose.

*Skopos* theory is in contrast to the earlier theory of equivalence, which held that the highest degree of equivalence solely determined the best translation. This is now seen as an overly constrained position of the process of translation. Equivalence will thus not be used as the sole factor in the following comparative studies of Harold Pinter's source texts and the target texts or translations. The comparisons will take into consideration the purpose of the translations and the target audience and readership, for which the scripts were recreated in a new language.

The factors of coherence and fidelity also need to be borne in mind in translation studies. Coherence can be understood as facilitating comprehension in the framework of a *continuum*, while fidelity or accuracy involves faithfully upholding the relationship between the source text and target text. It is only this element in the *skopos* theory, which refers to a relationship between the source and the target texts.

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<sup>239</sup> Cf. Lazar Lederhendler in *Carte blanche*, Oct. 2010.

The comparative studies in this dissertation will of course always note whether these key factors are in keeping with the expectations.

The process of translation is also characterized by the skopos theory as the providing of information in a secondary form, in contrast to its primary form, under consideration of all the linguistic and cultural constraints ingrained in the target language. Translation can be seen as the process of cultural transfer in its best sense. Yet, when the skopos of the source text differs from that of the target text, the translation must be evaluated in accordance with its adequacy, or whether it sufficiently reflects the source text in the language and cultural context of the target text, while remaining true to the purpose of the translation. This latter case applies e.g. to film dubbing, where lip synchronization plays an important role, as described below.<sup>240</sup>

## 2.1 Translation of Humor

The senses of humor vary from culture to culture, as discussed according to the more or less differences between English humor, Jewish humor and German humor in the above chapter *1.3 Considerations of Humor and Comedy*. Thus it would follow that the translation of humor can be very difficult, especially when a certain joke is considered funny in one culture and not so in another. In fact, humor was often considered untranslatable.

The book *Staging and Performing Translation*, which deals with the translation of dramatic works in depth, mentions the fact that stand-up comedy routines are rarely satisfactorily translated.<sup>241</sup> And the same book also quotes Chekov, who claimed that Stanislavski seemed to have overlooked or ignored the humor in the translations of the former's plays.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Cf. Baker, Mona and Malmkjaer, Kirsten (eds.): *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, p. 236.

<sup>241</sup> Baines, p. 148.

<sup>242</sup> Baines p. 177.

On the other hand, however there are plenty of examples of good translations of comedies, such the excellent Shakespeare translations by Erich Fried,<sup>243</sup> an Austrian Jew, who was forced to emigrate to England. He is considered one of the few literary translators, who have succeeded in translating Shakespeare's linguistic puns into German.

As a literary translator of comedies for the stage, the author of this dissertation has the experience that various factors have to be taken into consideration when translating humor. There are several different modes of humor, which may occur, including plays on words or puns, sarcastic humor, irony, parody, etc.<sup>244</sup> Humor often involves dialects or sociolects, which sound funny, when used in the wrong context.<sup>245</sup> The translator is first confronted with the question as to whether the specific joke or humorous moment is culturally translatable, or whether it must be compensated for in another form or at another point in the text. Humor depends on implicit knowledge, which is often culturally confined. Certain cultures may allow specific groups to be targeted with humor, whereas other cultures may not condone the same, considering it taboo.<sup>246</sup>

Maria Tymoczko writes that a person's needs to belong to a specific "comical paradigm" to be capable of appreciating the inherent humor.<sup>247</sup> This would imply that ethical and political problems might ensue in the course of translation, which may even lead to censoring by publishers or other institutions.

In his book entitled *Experiences in Translation*, Umberto Eco mentions the difficulty of translating one term more or less literally into another language, which may result in undesired irony or implied sarcasm, as in the following:

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<sup>243</sup> Shakespeare (1970), übersetzt von Erich Fried.

<sup>244</sup> Cf. *Jedem das Seine* by Peter Turrini and Silke Hassler uses Yiddish phrases to create irony and parody as comic relief. The English translation *Each to His Own* by Renée von Paschen also uses Yiddish in its anglicized form for the same purpose.

<sup>245</sup> Cf. *Prinzessin Eisenherz* by Franzobel makes extensive use of various dialects to create humorous moments. The English translation *Princess Ironheart* by Renée von Paschen uses different pronunciations to create comic relief.

<sup>246</sup> Cf. Vandaele, Jeroen. p. 147.

<sup>247</sup> Cf. Tymoczko, p. 90.

*"Polite French people still address cab drivers as 'Monsieur,' while it would seem exaggerated to use 'Sir' in a similar circumstance in, say, New York. 'Sir' would have to be kept if in the original text [Monsieur] is intended to represent a very formal relationship, between two strangers, or between a subaltern and his superior, while [Sir] seems improper (or even ironical) in more intimate circumstances."*<sup>248</sup>

The famous American writer Richard Ford stated in a recent interview that he finds humor is often a victim of translation:

*"Mit Thomas Bernhard tat ich mir schwerer, vermutlich aufgrund der Übersetzung. Man hatter mir gesagt, Bernhard sei eine Art Humorist – ich musste mich jedoch sehr anstrengen, die komischen Spuren in seinen Romanen zu entdecken. Vor meiner Musil-Lektüre hatte man mich ebenfalls darauf aufmerksam gemacht, wie amüsanter der Autor von 'Man ohne Eigenschaften' sei. **Ich fürchte fast, Humor fällt oft der Übersetzung zum Opfer.**"*<sup>249</sup>

In the following comparative studies of Harold Pinter's plays in translation, it will be demonstrated how his humorous use of sociolects makes the translation of his plays more complicated, especially when the translator does not clearly recognize the humor of using a specific register in the source text.

Finally, descriptive translation, which may be an option in a scholarly context, is certainly not an option in a dramatic work for the stage. Therefore any good translation of a comedy must be inventive in order to be in keeping with the *skopos*, which is to recreate the humor in the lines.

## 2.2 Translation of Dialogue

Translation for the theater means negotiating multiple textual levels, including those, which are interlingual, intercultural, intersemiotic, intermedial, ideological, ethical, aesthetic and political.

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<sup>248</sup> Eco 2001, p. 18.

<sup>249</sup> *Profil* 27 Aug. 2012, p. 90.

The translation of dialogue for the performing arts involves further multifaceted aspects, such as varying patterns of dialogue, performance and interpretation by the actors, cultural differences between the original language and the language of translation, and adaptation by the director. In certain contexts, the issues of gender studies may also come into play.<sup>250</sup> As emphasized in the book *Staging and Performing Translation*, translation studies have often neglected the practical aspects of theater translation in the past.<sup>251</sup>

Specifically in the context of translating Harold Pinter's dialogues, Martin Esslin has pointed out the importance of maintaining a level of ambiguity, in particular. With regard to *Night School*, which Esslin directed as a radio play in Berlin, Pinter does not clarify whether the young man actually sleeps with the girl or not. In this case, the German translation implied that he did by switching from the formal address of 'Sie' to the informal address of 'du.' This eliminates all ambivalence, which Pinter does not do in the original English text.<sup>252</sup> Ambivalence in dialogue is one of the significant factors that figure in Pinter's plays, and it should not be neglected or overlooked in the translation of his works.

Most importantly, a good translation of dialogue will flow just as smoothly and sound just as genuine in the target language as in the source language. In order to ensure this, the author of this thesis (who has translated several plays for Thomas Sessler Verlag in Vienna),<sup>253</sup> finds it very helpful for the translator to speak the lines aloud while translating. This method enables the rhythm and rhyme of the playwright's speech patterns to be recreated as closely as possible in the target language. The typical speech patterns (incl. dialects) and sentence structures (incl. colloquial grammar) can thus be transferred into the new language in a process of cultural translation. A literal translation is generally impossible, as it would almost always appear awkward in the foreign language. George Wellwarth writes: "*No audience will*

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<sup>250</sup> Cf. *Translation and Gender – Die Klavierspielerin* – by Renée von Paschen

<sup>251</sup> Baines, p. 2-3

<sup>252</sup> Burkmann, p. 124.

<sup>253</sup> R.v. Paschen has translated several dramatic works by Austrian playwrights Peter Turrini, Franzobel, Ronald Rudoll and Daniel Pascal into English for Thomas Sessler Verlag, Vienna.

give its full attention to a play whose dialogue is stilted."<sup>254</sup> He recommends that "an excess of silibants in a sentence, or awkward constant clusters"<sup>255</sup> should be avoided in the translation of dialogue. In connection with the translation of plays into German, Venneberg gives the important advice that "the translation as a whole should not become longer than the original version."<sup>256</sup> She also writes about the importance of taking into consideration to existing relationships amongst the symbols, dialogue and action of the play.<sup>257</sup>

The goal in translating a play is to maintain the musicality and colorfulness of the original dialogue to the greatest extent possible. Zatlin states in her book *Theatrical translation and Film Adaptation: "Theatrical translation demands talent for finding creative answers to difficult problems."*<sup>258</sup> As a practitioner in the field of theater translation, Zatlin continues:

*"To recreate dialogue that flows well and that actors can handle with ease requires a linguistic sensitivity akin to the translation of poetry but is yet more demanding because of the need to maintain the desired rhythm for performance."*<sup>259</sup>

An ear for the poetry of spoken dialogue is definitely central in achieving the smooth translation of a play, ensuring that the actors can work well with their texts. Over and above that, as stated by Clifford Landers: *"The essential requirement is to retain the humor, suspense, satire, or any other preponderant effect of the play, however much it may entail textual modifications."*<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Wellwarth, p. 142.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid. p. 141.

<sup>256</sup> Venneberg, p. 123.

<sup>257</sup> C.f. Ibid. p. 125.

<sup>258</sup> Zatlin, p. 89.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid. p. 75.

<sup>260</sup> Landers, p. 105

### 2.3 Audiovisual Translation

Audiovisual translation involves the translation of a text or dialogue, which is spoken in connection with action, which is taking place on the screen, or in the case of surtitling, on the stage. Translation of dialogue in connection with a performance or documentary requires that the translator always pay close attention to coordinating the translation with the action, otherwise the translation will not make sense in context. This dramatic synchronicity is the first of three levels of synchronicity according to Robert Paquin, film translator and author of articles on audiovisual translation in *Translation Journal*.<sup>261</sup> The second level of synchronicity is semantic synchronicity, which is expected in a good translation of any kind, as this ensures the correct correspondence of meaning. And the third level of is phonetic synchronicity, which applies to film dubbing in particular, referring to the exact coordination of the dubbing actor's lines with the lip movements of the actor on screen, including any other sounds he or she utters, such as screams or grunts.

*"The guiding principle, therefore, is to match the text to the screen. There must be a close correspondence between the actor's interpretation and the translation. Indeed, while recording in the studio, dubbing actors always carefully listen to and watch the screen actors, trying to imitate them, and following them as closely as possible, just as the translator attempts to walk in the author's tracks. Likewise, the screen translator must watch attentively and take his or her cues from the actors on the screen."<sup>262</sup>*

The most difficult aspect of audiovisual translation is definitely the level of phonetic synchronicity. This requires the special annotation of the dialogue on a rhythm band and the special training and skills of the translator. It is generally more time consuming than the literary translation of a play, because the translator has to view the film while creating the translation, otherwise it would be impossible to ensure lip synchronicity.

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<sup>261</sup> Cf. *Translation Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 3, July 1998.

<sup>262</sup> *Translation Journal*. Vol. 5, No. 3, July 2001.

The intricate art of film dubbing is thus the most highly constrained form of literary translation. Add to this the frequent occurrence of humor or word puns in connection with a local cultural context, and the translator is often met with practically insurmountable obstacles. This is a highly time-consuming and tricky form of translation, which involves careful preparation of a rythmo band or lip-synch band for the dubbing actors. The high level of artistic skill required is reflected in the high status of translators, who prepare the dubbing scripts for films in France.

*"In France, at SACEM (Société des auteurs, compositeurs et éditeurs de musique), those who translate/adapt films and TV broadcasts for dubbing are called "dialoguistes," screenwriters. (...) We write dialogues for the screen, except the lines have already been spoken by the screen actors and we have to find a text that fits their lip movements and the length of the utterance, as well as their gestures, the situation, the character, and the setting, not to mention what they are actually saying."<sup>263</sup>*

In many other countries, which show a preference for film dubbing in contrast to subtitling, film translators are not as highly recognized and are often not even mentioned in the credits. In Austria, film directors often do not give proper credit to their translators, even though dubbing is apparently more popular in German-speaking countries than anywhere else in Europe:

*"Dubbing films has been and is still tradition and common practice in the German speaking area since subtitles are not accepted and used as much as in other European countries. According to a European study, Austria is the country with the highest rejection (more than 70 percent) with regard to using subtitles, followed by Italy, Spain and Germany."<sup>264</sup>*

Audiovisual translation has not been fully recognized for the art that it is, all of the constraints placed upon the translator into consideration. Due to the intricate nature of this type of translation, the author shall also be analyzing the German dubbed version of one of Harold Pinter's plays, *Der stumme Diener*, with a view to pointing out the

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<sup>263</sup> *Translation Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 3, July 1998.

<sup>264</sup> Dubbing (Filmmaking): Wikipedia.

special difficulties facing the translator and the required adaptation of Pinter's dialogue, as well as the effects on the humor in the play in *Chapter 5.7*.

## 2.4 Harold Pinter in German Translation

In general, the early German translations of Harold Pinter's plays by Willy H. Thiem do not sufficiently capture the rhyme and rhythm of Pinter's writing, nor do they do justice to his humor or his concise use of language. *Chapters 3, 4 and 5* of this dissertation will examine the translation and reception of Pinter's *The Birthday Party*, *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Caretaker* in detail, however a few general remarks are due on the quality of Thiem's early translation in comparison to Michael Walter's later, somewhat improved, German versions. In Martin Esslin's monograph on Pinter, the famous theater scholar and friend of Pinter's writes:

***"Es ist kennzeichnend für die Theatersituation in Deutschland, daß Pinter, dessen Werk dort ja nur durch die fast undurchdringliche Nebelwand einer danebengegangenen Übersetzung undeutlich und verzerrt wahrgenommen werden kann, immer wieder gespielt wird, inszeniert von Regisseuren, die oft kaum verstehen, worum es geht, von Schauspielern, die den Text, den sie sprechen, als puren Unsinn betrachten müssen."***<sup>265</sup>

Esslin's comments are central to the understanding of Pinter's reception in German-speaking countries. Esslin was an Austrian Jew, who was forced to flee the country to England at the onset of the Nazi era, and was therefore fully fluent in German, as well as English. He and his wife Renate also translated some of Pinter's early plays themselves, so that Esslin was in the very best position to judge the poor quality of Thiem's translations. Some of Thiem's early translations were later staged and published in new versions with the note: *"Neu durchgesehene Übersetzung."* Esslin postulates that it must have also been the haste in which Thiem's translations were done, which led to their lack of good quality, as Pinter's early plays were all

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<sup>265</sup> Esslin 1973, p. 147.

premiered in German very shortly after their world premieres in England, or in the case of *Der stumme Diener*, even prior to the English premiere.<sup>266</sup>

Regarding the translation of his plays, Harold Pinter himself commented in an exclusive interview with Harry Burton that: "*On the continent, for example, actually I've seen a couple of productions of my own plays in French and German, and one in Bulgaria that was memorable, in which I didn't recognize the plays at all. (...) So there's a great deal of distortion that goes on. (...) I've seen it happen three times... abroad. It's never really happened here (England).*"<sup>267</sup>

A similar fate seems to have befallen most of Pinter's early plays that were translated by Willy Thiem. Esslin also comments that when reading the critiques of the early productions, one wonders how it is possible that Pinter's plays could have been so completely misunderstood. Critic Joachim Kaiser even wrote about an early production of *Heimkehr* in the Kammerspiele in Munich: "*Darüber hinaus scheint es nahezu unmöglich (jedenfalls ist es bislang nicht gelungen), Pinters anspielungsreiche Kunstsprache und den potentiellen Cockney einigermaßen authentisch zu transponieren.*"<sup>268</sup> Of course there is some truth in the fact Pinter's plays had not yet been well translated, however Kaiser's allusions to 'potential Cockney' are certainly illusory. And the newer translations by Martin and Renate Esslin, Heinrich Ledig-Rowohlt and Michael Walter provide evidence that much higher-quality translations of Pinter's works can be made.

Unfortunately, it took many years before the Rowohlt Verlag in Germany was prepared to pay for new translations of the plays that Thiem had rendered into German. According to the production data listed by Rowohlt at the end of the new edition of Pinter's plays,<sup>269</sup> Thiem would seem to have translated almost all of Pinter's plays, including *The Basement*, until approximately 1968.

In the same year of 1968, Martin Esslin and his wife Renate began translating Pinter, and a new edition of his works appeared in their translations, including *Alte Zeiten*,

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> *Working with Pinter*: Interview with Pinter, 10:50 min.

<sup>268</sup> Esslin, p. 151.

*Landschaft* and *Schweigen*. It seems likely that Rowohlt asked Martin and Renate Esslin to translate Pinter, because Esslin had pointed out to the editor that Thiem's translations were poor. Nevertheless, many of Thiem's translations of Pinter's early plays continue to be staged until this day in German-speaking countries.

Since the premiere of *Die Geburtstagsfeier* in 1959 in Germany, Klaus Juncker had been Pinter's agent with Rowohlt Verlag. He also became a friend and took care of Pinter and Antonia Fraser when they arrived in Berlin in February 1976 to see the premiere of *No Man's Land* in the German language. At this time Pinter's plays had not yet been produced in East Germany, where he was apparently considered too bourgeois.<sup>270</sup> The resistance to Pinter in East Germany was not to change significantly until the Wall fell in 1989.

Heinrich Maria Ledig-Rowohlt apparently understood the need for more competent translations, as he began translating Pinter himself in 1981, starting with *Familienstimmen*, which premiered on stage at the Düsseldorfer Schauspielhaus under the direction of Peter Palitzsch on 2<sup>nd</sup> of July 1981. Ledig-Rowohlt continued translating Pinter's plays, including *Noch einen Letzten*, which had its premiere at the Staatstheater Stuttgart on 18<sup>th</sup> January 1986. His last translation of a play by Pinter was *Party Time*, which premiered at the Schauspielhaus Zürich on 5<sup>th</sup> December 1991.

The translations by Michael Walter date from approximately 1997, when his translation *Asche zu Asche* premiered at Theater Basel on 15<sup>th</sup> of March 1997. His new translation *Die Geburtstagsfeier* was first staged in Munich by Bayerisches Staatsschauspiel at the Residenztheater on 24<sup>th</sup> of January 1998 (dir. Gerd Heinz), and the new translation *Der Hausmeister* premiered on 9<sup>th</sup> of June 2001 at the Staatstheater Stuttgart under the direction of Erich Sidler. Walter's new translation of *Der stumme Diener* premiered at the Schauspielhaus Graz on 8<sup>th</sup> of December 2005 under the direction of Daniel Doujenis.

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<sup>269</sup> Pinter 2005a: pp. 437-445.

<sup>270</sup> Fraser, p. 51.

In summary, the Rowohlt Theaterverlag offers a total of 32 of Pinter's plays and sketches for performance in German translation at the present time. Of these plays, 5 are available in translations by Renate and Martin Esslin; 8 are still only available in old translations by Willy Thiem; 8 are available in new translations by Michael Walter; and 9 are available in translations by Heinrich Maria Ledig-Rowohlt. This comparison serves to illustrate that although the majority of Pinter's scripts are now available for production in good translations, 8 of his plays can still only be produced according to Thiem's old German translations. Michael Walter's new and improved translations of Harold Pinter's early plays will hopefully give these works a new chance in German-speaking countries, although it may be too late in some cases.

### 3 *The Birthday Party* by Harold Pinter

#### 3.1 A General Plot Outline of *The Birthday Party*

While chatty Meg, an aging English woman, gets breakfast for her reticent husband, Petey, their reclusive boarder comes downstairs for his tea. Stanley, an unkempt and surly character, has been boarding with them for months, but spends most of his time in bed, since he no longer has a job as piano player at the seaside resort. Stanley's comic story of his failed concert after performing in Lower Edmonton foreshadows his tragic fall in the course of the play. Meg flirts with Stanley, at the same time treating him like her child with shadows of the Oedipus dilemma, and tells him that two new men will be arriving to take room and board. Stanley becomes suspicious and foresees nothing good. An unexpected knock on the door turns out to be Meg's friend Lulu, who is only bringing a package for Meg. When Lulu leaves, the new boarders, Goldberg and McCann, arrive. They vaguely discuss their new job, while Stanley listens on, unnoticed. When Meg returns, she gives the package to Stanley, a tin drum, which is intended as his birthday present.

Goldberg and McCann argue about their job, whereas Stanley claims that it's not really his birthday. Nevertheless, Meg has invited them to attend Stanley's birthday party that evening, so Goldberg sends McCann out for some liquor. Goldberg increasingly attacks Stanley, indicating that he's serious about getting even for unclear reasons. Meg appears in a party dress and the drinking begins. After Lulu arrives, a nasty game of blind man's buff begins, during which McCann breaks Stanley's glasses. Pinter may also be touching upon the position of an artist, who McCann and Goldberg are trying to force back into the confines of a bourgeois life. Stanley tries to take advantage of Lulu during the blackout. The loss of innocence would seem to be a recurring theme during the play, also evoked by everyone's references to the previously "pure" state of their lives.

The next morning, we see Petey having breakfast again, as though nothing had happened. However Meg keeps asking him questions, which eventually reveal some

of what took place the night before. After they exit, Goldberg and McCann enter with Stanley, who looks completely disheveled and disoriented. They proceed to interrogate Stanley, whom they have made into their scapegoat, attributing all evil to him with such vehemence that he capitulates. While they lead him out the door to a car waiting to dispose of him, Petey calls: "*Stan, don't let them tell you what to do!*"<sup>271</sup> This can be considered the most important line of the play, as it indicates that the weak should not give in to overpowering pressure from anyone, maintaining their own authority, instead. But it is already too late. When Meg returns, Petey does not explain what has happened, keeping Meg in the dark as to the outcome.

Although Goldberg and McCann act like autocrats during the play, it is also important to mention that Goldberg is obviously a Jewish character, while McCann is Irish, thus they also symbolize two oppressed peoples in their dual roles of representation. Goldberg's Yiddishkeit is also marked in the scene, where he asks McCann to impart the breath of life unto him, like in the Jewish myth of the *Golem*.<sup>272</sup> On the whole, the plot of *The Birthday Party* may be summarized in one sentence as: two men come along unexpectedly to interrogate and take away a third one. This is highly reminiscent of the Nazi era with SS men deporting Jews without prior warning, which occurred in Europe during Pinter's childhood. A certain parallel may also be drawn to Kafka's *Trial*, an equally absurdist tale, in which the main character is also taken away for the purpose of getting rid of him.

### 3.2 Production History of *The Birthday Party* Including Reviews

*"I started writing plays in 1957, and in 1958 'The Birthday Party' opened at the Lyric, Hammersmith, was massacred by the critics (with the exception of Harold Hobson) and was taken off after eight performances."*<sup>273</sup>

- Harold Pinter

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<sup>271</sup> Pinter 1987, p. 96.

<sup>272</sup> Gelbin, C. S., *The Golem Returns – From German Romantic Literature to Global Jewish Culture, 1808–2008*, University of Michigan, 2011.

<sup>273</sup> Pinter 1998, p. 49.

The world premiere of *The Birthday Party* took place at the Arts Theater in Cambridge in April 1958, directed by Peter Wood and with the following cast below:

***The Birthday Party* – World Premiere - Arts Theatre, Cambridge,  
28 April 1958 - First presented by Michael Cordon and David Hall,  
transferred to the Lyric Opera House, Hammersmith**

Cast: Petey - Willoughby Gray; Meg - Beatrix Lehmann ; Stanley - Richard Pearson; Lulu - Wendy Hutchinson; Goldberg - John Slater; McCann - John Stratton; Director - Peter Wood; Designer - Hutchinson Scott; Scenery - E. Baggage & Co.

The first reviews were highly disappointing for Pinter, as they were not favorable. At the time, Pinter was desperately in need of money, because his son Daniel had just been born. However *The Birthday Party* did not bring in the required funds after opening in London either, and closed after only a week. Here is an excerpt from a rather negative review of the Cambridge production:

*"Mr. Harold Pinter's unnerving play The Birthday Party, which had its world premiere at the Arts on Monday, is certainly the best acted and best directed piece seen at that address for many months. Despite the excitement the play generates in performance, the quality of The Birthday Party seems debatable. (...) The Birthday Party is an accomplished example of the new genre. It is a skull-beneath-the-skin play, exposing the horrors and fears that lurk under the calm, dull surface of our everyday existence, behind the frenzied ceremonial drumming of the humdrum. The play's opening sticks to the first principle of Ionesco's dramaturgy: keep it flat."<sup>274</sup>*

When Pinter was asked in an interview in 1985 about the reception of his plays in 1958, and whether the political metaphors were recognized, Pinter replied that they were viewed as absurd nonsense.<sup>275</sup> This negative sweeping judgment was eventually overturned by the belated review written by famous critic Harold Hobson, who was the first to clearly recognize Pinter's undeniable qualities as a playwright. Hobson's review of the London production, entitled *The Screw Turns Again*, eventually saved

<sup>274</sup> Cf. *Cambridge Review*, April 1958.

<sup>275</sup> Pinter in an interview with Nicholas Hern, May 1985, German transl. by Harry Ledig-Rowohl.

the day for Pinter's play, even though it appeared a week after the play had already closed:

*"Now I am well aware that Mr Pinter's play received extremely bad notices last Tuesday morning. At the moment I write these it is uncertain even whether the play will still be in the bill by the time they appear, though it is probable it will soon be seen elsewhere. Deliberately, I am willing to risk whatever reputation I have as a judge of plays by saying that *The Birthday Party* is not a Fourth, not even a Second, but a First; and that Pinter, on the evidence of his work, possesses the most original, disturbing and arresting talent in theatrical London. (...) Peter Wood has directed the play with an absolute response to its most delicate nuances. It has six layers; every one of them is superb. Beatrix Lehmann is strangely funny and macabrely touching as the landlady. (...) Mr Pinter and *The Birthday Party*, despite their experiences last week, will be heard of again. Make a note of their names."*<sup>276</sup>

The first production of *The Birthday Party* was a financial disaster for Pinter, who was in dire straits, because he had a young wife, Vivian Merchant, and baby. In this critical situation, American producer Roger Stevens helped him out and lent him enough money to get through the tough times. Pinter himself never forgot Stevens' generosity, and later made a point of helping out young writers and artists in trouble.<sup>277</sup>

It is apparent from the various reviews that the original reactions to *The Birthday Party* varied greatly. Harold Pinter himself commented on this in a letter to the editor written in October 1958: *"The remarkable difference in reaction to *The Birthday Party* on the part of the London daily paper critics and the audiences in Oxford and Cambridge constitutes for me one of the most interesting features of the progress of the play."*<sup>278</sup> At another point, Pinter clarifies his above comment, remarking that the audiences in Oxford and Cambridge were much better than that in London: *"In*

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<sup>276</sup> *The Sunday Times*, London, May 1958.

<sup>277</sup> Cf. Fraser, p. 218,

<sup>278</sup> Pinter 1998, p. 13.

*Oxford and Cambridge with The Birthday Party... the audience was active and involved.*"<sup>279</sup>

### ***The Birthday Party***

#### **Tower Theatre, Canonbury, London, May 1959**

Cast: Meg - Margery Withers; Petey - Richard Beale; Stanley - Clyde Jones; Lulu - Brenda Plumley; Goldberg - Bernard Goldman; McCann - David Jones; Directed by Kay Gardner; Setting designed and painted by John Crisp

The above production was the first professional performance of a play of Pinter's in London. Later, Pinter himself directed the play in Birmingham, and it became a big success at the Tower Theatre in London in 1959. In 1960, millions of Brits were able to see a performance of the play on television, which presumably also contributed to its popularity. Esslin writes: "*For days one could hear people in busses and canteens eagerly discussing the play as a maddening but deeply disturbing experience.*"<sup>280</sup>

*The Birthday Party* was to become the first of Pinter's plays to receive a professional performance in the USA at the Actors Workshop in San Francisco on the 27<sup>th</sup> of July, 1960.<sup>281</sup>

### ***The Birthday Party***

#### **Royal Shakespeare Company, Aldwych Theatre, 18 June 1964**

Cast: Petey - Newton Blick; Meg - Doris Hare; Stanley - Bryan Pringle; Lulu - Janet Suzman; Goldberg - Brewster Mason; McCann - Patrick Magee; **Directed by Harold Pinter**; Designer - Ralph Koltai

***"Trial by Laughter by J.W. Lambert :***

*"(The audience's) response was measurable in terms of its laughter; of which three distinct varieties could be distinguished on the opening night. First, inevitable, the*

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<sup>279</sup> Pinter 1998, p. 15.

<sup>280</sup> Esslin 1908b, p. 244.

*Laughter of Sycophancy, to be endured everywhere from the Royal Court to Stratford East by way of the Whitehall and the Establishment; a sharp, brittle, patchy laughter, automatic reflex of fashion's yes-men. Second, the Laughter of Unease, produced by people of established tastes and tentative goodwill towards something strange. Feeling their defenses against themselves being undermined by palpable absurdity, they hopefully go along with their destroyer, and laugh with docile apprehension at the salutary of bizarre image of their own failings. Third, and of course rarest, the Laughter of Acceptance - the easy response of those for whom the dramatist and his players perfectly embody their own implicit assumptions about humanity. The measure of a dramatist's stature is the degree in which his work succeeds in transforming laughters of the second class into laughters of the third class; and perhaps even more important, the degree in which he turns out to have been prophetic, to have written plays which future generations will find easily acceptable and richly satisfying."*<sup>282</sup>



***Illus. 6: Meg - Doris Hare as Meg and Bryan Pringle as Stanley***

Perhaps one of the best reviews ever of *The Birthday Party* is that of the above production, which Pinter himself directed. This critique goes into great detail about the three different kinds of laughter in the audience, namely the "*laughter of sycophancy*," which indicates a groveling recognition of the action on stage; the "*laughter of unease*," which reflects the uncertainty in the audience; and the "*laughter*

<sup>281</sup> Gale, p. 183.

<sup>282</sup> *Sunday Times*, 21 June 1964.

*of acceptance,*" which acknowledges a degree of identification with the characters or situations on stage. Pinter's ability to inspire so much laughter in one production puts him on a pedestal with the best comedians of his age.

Harold Pinter has admitted in an interview with Mel Gussow that for this production he made a big cut in the third act of *The Birthday Party*, which he considered absolutely necessary: "*When I did it myself at the Aldwych in 1964, in rehearsal I made a pretty strong cut in act three. Coming back to it after six years I really felt that it needed it, that it was wrong in the first place.*"<sup>283</sup> This is a rare case in Pinter's work, as he claims not to have done anything like this with his other plays. Without knowing precisely what he cut, we may presume that it served to tighten the action and speed up the plot, increasing the mounting tension revolving around Stanley's downfall. This cut also presumably contributed to the great success of the production, which seems apparent according to the review quoted above.

### ***The Birthday Party***

**Master Playwright Festival – Pinter Fest 2003**

**New Theatre, Manitoba Theatre Centre, Winnipeg, Canada**

*The Birthday Party: "Even in his first full-length play, The Birthday Party, Harold Pinter's agile genius for digging into seemingly ordinary (but of course, not really) lives in a dilapidated boarding house in a 50's English seaside resort is exemplary. As is de rigueur for attending a Pinter play, one should be prepared for the almost hallucinatory shifts that he executes with such effortless expertise."*<sup>284</sup>

- Review by Barbara Stewa

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<sup>283</sup> Gussow, p. 45.

<sup>284</sup> *Manitoba Theatre Centre: Review by Barbara Stewa, 2003.*



*Illus. 7: Pinter Fest 2003, Canada*

In 2003, The Manitoba Theatre Centre in Canada held a *Pinter Fest* (sic), in the scope of which 12 of Pinter's plays were produced, including *The Dumb Waiter*, *The Caretaker* and *The Birthday Party*. As can be seen in the review above, the reception of the latter play was excellent, and Pinter's literary talent is afforded due respect.

### ***The Birthday Party***

**Birmingham Repertory Theatre, UK Tour, 2005**

**& Duchess Theatre, London**

Cast: Petey - Geoffrey Hutchings; Meg - Eileen Atkins

Stanley - Paul Ritter; Lulu - Sinead Matthews; Goldberg - Henry Goodman; McCann

- Finbar Lynch; Director - Lindsay Posner; Designer - Peter McKintosh; Lighting

Designer - Hartley T A Kemp; Sound Designer - John Leonard



**Illus. 8: Paul Ritter as Stanley and Finbar Lynch as McCann**

***"The Birthday Party: Duchess Theatre, London***

*"In 1958 Harold Pinter's play was famously savaged by the daily critics. Now it comes before us as a modern classic. And, watching Lindsay Posner's richly enjoyable West End revival, I started speculating about the cultural changes that had made a once baffling play so apparently accessible. (...) But one of the delights of Pinter's play is that you always discover something new in it. Finbar Lynch's dour, buttoned-up, very funny McCann, for instance, reminds us that the man is a recently unfrocked priest."*<sup>285</sup>

Michael Billington's above review of the production of *The Birthday Party* in the Duchess Theatre depicts the play as a "modern classic," which it has certainly become in England. Billington emphasizes the humor in the depiction of the character of McCann, a figure that incorporates both gallows humor and a good deal of menace.

***"The Birthday Party: Duchess Theatre, London***

*"Harold Pinter's The Birthday Party, new in 1958, has become, of all strange things, a classic. Strange, because even now it is so very unsettling. You think you know this set-up? You think you know these people? You don't. In how many different ways has Pinter dramatised this? Unknowable, unfathomable, unpossessable. (...) But the world of The Birthday Party is Kafka-on-Sea. Banal reality keeps tipping into the bizarre surreal and back again. The most comically ordinary situation becomes one*

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<sup>285</sup> *Guardian*, 26 April 2005.

*fraught with terror. Give Pinter two people in a room, and he gives you suspense, humour, recognition, pathos and terror.*"<sup>286</sup>

The final review of the same production, written by critic Alastair Macaulay reiterates that *The Birthday Party* has become a classic. He compares Pinter's world to Kafka's, reminding us that the adjective of Pinteresque is similar to that of Kafkaesque in its description of absurdist-existentialist elements. The review also emphasizes how a seemingly comical situation may quickly become horrifying in Pinter's play and touches upon Pinter's typical mix of humor and terror.

### **3.2.1 Production History & Reception of *Die Geburtstagsfeier* in German Translation**

Harold Pinter's introduction to the German-speaking world took place due to the help of Martin Esslin. As an Austrian Jew, Esslin was forced to flee Vienna at the onset of the Nazi era. He became head of the radio drama section 'National Theatre on the Air' of the BBC World Service for fourteen years from 1963-1977. He was also a central figure responsible for making Pinter popular in England. Esslin and his wife Renate eventually translated several of Pinter's other plays into German at a later period, and he was personally instrumental in bringing Pinter to Germany and Austria. *"Eine enge Freundschaft verbindet ihn (Esslin) mit Beckett und Pinter.*"<sup>287</sup>

The first premiere of a play by Pinter in Germany took place at the Staatstheater in Brunswick in 1959:

#### ***Die Geburtstagsfeier***

#### **German Premiere, Staatstheater, Brunswick, Germany, 10 December 1959**

Cast: Petey - Hans Medo ; Meg - Hella Kaiser ; Stanley - Jochen Schmidt ; Lulu - Andrea Grosske ; Goldberg - Fritz Luther ; McCann - Dieter Hufschmidt;  
Inszenierung - Helmut Geng; Bühnenbild - Wolf Gerlach; Kostüme - Heta Kerlé;

<sup>286</sup> *Financial Times*, 27 April 2005.

<sup>287</sup> Lange Nacht des Theater- und Hörspielmanns Martin Esslin, 5 January 2002: *Vom Glauben an das Leben* by Heike Tauch.

## Übersetzung – Willy Thiem

After seeing the production of this play in Hamburg, Pinter said publicly that he had "*discovered new things about his own play.*"<sup>288</sup> There is no mention of Pinter meeting his German translator (Willy Thiem) at that time. However Pinter continued his trip to Paris, where he got together with Eric Kahane, his French translator, who was a kindred spirit and became a lifelong friend.<sup>289</sup> Pinter also made the effort to read Kahane's French translation of *No Man's Land*,<sup>290</sup> which he presumably was not able to do with regard to the German translations of his works.



*Illus. 9: Paul Esser as Goldberg & Helmut Hildebrand as McCann*

### *Die Geburtstagsfeier*

**Berliner Festwochen, 4 October 1961**

Tribüne Berlin; Regie: Wolfgang Spier; Bild: Hans Thormann; Mit Maria Krasna, Eva-Maria Werth, Hugo Schrader, Paul-Albert Krumm, Paul Esser, Helmut Hildebrand

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> Fraser p. 18.

A German TV production of Pinter's stage play under the direction of Wolfgang Spier premiered on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1961. Willy Thiem did the translation, and the cast included Paul Esser as Goldberg, Helmut Hildebrand as McCann, Paul Albert Krumm as Stanley, Hugo Schrader as Petey, Maria Krasna as Meg and Almut Eggert as Lulu. This TV production presumably served to make Pinter better known in Germany to some extent, however due to Thiem's poor translation, it was not as successful as it might have been.<sup>291</sup>



*Illus. 10: Paul Albert Krumm as Stanley & Almut Eggert as Lulu*

***Die Geburtstagsfeier***

**Austrian Premiere, May 1963**

**Experiment - Theater im Palais Erzherzog Karl, Vienna**

Directed by Niels Kopf; Set by Jean Veenenbos; Übersetzt von Willy Thiem

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid, p. 56.

<sup>291</sup> <http://www.imdb.de/title/tt0457916/>

This is the only recorded Austrian production of *Die Geburtstagsfeier* in the Theadok database of the Institute for Theater, Film and Media Studies at the University of Vienna. The author has not found evidence of another professional production of the play in Austria since 1963, which speaks worlds of the play's lack of popularity in this country. The following highly negative review specifically notes the fact that the German translation is lacking:

***"Ein wahrhaft schwarzes Fest: Das Experiment spielt Harold Pinters  
'Geburtstagsfeier'***

*"Das Geschehen ist jedoch weder tragisch noch komisch. (...) Das Ganze ist spannungslos und uninteressant; nicht einmal psychologisch kann Pinter etwas Besonderes bieten. Irrsinniges Geschwätz, das ab und zu die realistischen Dialoge unterbricht, sowie einige müde Witze entlocken dem Zuschauer bestenfalls ein Lachen der Verzweiflung.... (...) Der Regisseur, Niels Kopf, konnte nichts retten, weil nichts zu retten war. (...) Auch der Übersetzung wäre noch eine Bearbeitung wohl bekommen. (...) Der heftige Beifall am Schluß galt nur den Schauspielern, sicherlich aber nicht dem Stück, das nicht einmal 'hausmeisterliche' Qualitäten aufweist."*<sup>292</sup>

The above review makes it clear that something was wrong with the interpretation and the translation of Pinter's play, as it is seen as neither tragic not comical, although both of these elements are definitely present in his comedies of menace. The critic attempts to blame Pinter's writing, yet the fact that he also criticizes the translation indicates that he realizes something major is lacking here.

***"Ein tödlich langweiliger Geburtstag:***

*"Die Geburtstagsfeier", in dem die Personen handeln und reden, als hätte der schwere englische Nebel ihre Gehirne umflort und auf ihr Innenleben schwerste depressive Wirkungen ausgeübt, die es ihnen nur noch ermöglichen, die allernötigsten Alltagsphrasen und konfuse Assoziationsketten von sich zu geben. (...) Dabei ist es schade, daß Pinter sich in dieser Irischen-Whiskey-Spiritistik verliert, denn er hat zweifellos die Fähigkeit, Dialoge zu schreiben und Situtionen zu schaffen...."*<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> *Kurier*, 7 May 1963.

Here we have another example of a very harsh critique of the same production of *Die Geburtstagsfeier*, which refers to the confused chains of association and the foggy-brained dialogues. Such descriptions of the play by no means adequately reflect Pinter's very precise style of writing, again leading us to presume that there must have been something seriously wrong with Willy Thiem's first translation of Pinter's play.

***Pinter's Geburtstagsfeier im großen Haus des Theaters Experiment: Wie auf einer Beerdigung***

*"Als Totenspende gießt Pinter seinen Spott auf die Generation der Väter, auf die verklärten Kindheitserinnerungen, auf Arbeit, Strebsamkeit und bescheidenen Alltag aus. Und was bietet er dafür? Nichts. Überhaupt nichts. Und schon gar kein verständliches Theater. (...) ... kann jeder Zuschauer denken, was er will. Nur nicht, daß er ein gutes Stück gesehen hat. Davon würde ich dringend abraten. denn seine Absichten hinter sarkastischem Nihilismus und einigen Blabla-Witzen zu verbergen, reicht als Methode für die Produktion eines Dramas nicht aus. (...) Niels Kopf hat sicher hart (und viel zu tierisch ernst) mit (den Schauspielern) gearbeitet, aber selbst nicht recht gewußt, was er mit dem realistischen projizierten Mythos anfangen soll."<sup>294</sup>*

The above scathing critique of Pinter's play would seem that reviewer G. Obzyna still sees the world through the eyes of fascism, and finds it necessary to defend the generation of the fathers, along with their zealous working ethics. It appears that Obzyna has completely misunderstood Pinter's social and political criticism, which would again point to major problems with the translation and interpretation of his play. The reviewer also refers to several bla-bla jokes, indicating that Pinter's black humor wasn't interpreted correctly either, nor did director Niels Kopf leave sufficient room for the comical twists in this comedy of menace.

To sum up, *Die Geburtstagsfeier* was a total flop in Austria, apparently because the translation and interpretation of the play did not adequately reflect Pinter's gifted writing. His play was received so badly that it was never performed again in Austria to the present day, although it has become immensely popular in the English-speaking

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<sup>293</sup> *Arbeiterzeitung*, 4 May 1963.

world.

### ***Die Geburtstagsfeier***

#### ***Theater im Zimmer, Hamburg, 25 September 1970***

Deutsch von Willy Thiem; Regie: Jochen Neuhaus; Mit Andreas von der Meden, Hannelore Moll, Lothar Grützner, Gerda Gmelin und Kurt Klopsch

*„Als der Sommer anfang, kam er selbst. In Hamburg nahm Harold Pinter – groß, elegant, dunkles Haar und dunkle Brillengläser – den Shakespeare-Preis der Stiftung F.V.S. entgegen. Jetzt während der Sommer langsam abdankt, werden in Hamburg gleich an zwei Theatern Stücke von Pinter aufpoliert. (...) Der Dialog der beiden Schauspieler ist von vielen Pausen durchlöchert. Aber Pinters Pausen sind nicht leer. Sie sind angefüllt mit Spannung, Nervosität, Angst und Unsicherheit. (Pinters Pausen sind die besten).“<sup>295</sup>*

In the above review, the critic immediately mentions the reason why Pinter was suddenly being performed all over Germany: He was just awarded the Shakespeare Preis in Hamburg. Renewed interest in Pinter's works was the immediate result. As this is merely a review of the final rehearsals, the reviewer has only noted his personal opinion, in addition to the fact that director Jochen Neuhaus is particularly interested in the political content of Pinter's dramas.

### ***"Pinter politisch?"***

*Trotz der gut ausgeleuchteten Bühne bleibt das Pinter-Spiel dunkel genug. (...) Der Premierenbeifall kam zögernd. Das Publikum saß da, als hätte es sich an einer harten Nuß die Zähne ausgebissen.“<sup>296</sup>*

The above critique by the same reviewer makes it clear that director Jochen Neuhaus' concept of focussing on the political aspects was not a success with the German-speaking audience. Of course there may be several reasons for the poor reception of this production, but apparently the audience neither understood nor sympathized with the director's political concept for the production. First of all, it should be emphasized that Willy

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<sup>294</sup> *Express*, 4 May 1963.

<sup>295</sup> *Hamburger Abendblatt*, 22 September 1970.

<sup>296</sup> *Hamburger Abendblatt*, 25 September 1970.

Thiem's early translation of *The Birthday Party* is somewhat unclear as to intention and tone. Moreover, the German-speaking audience probably didn't understand Pinter's humor very well either, because Willy Thiem doesn't always seem to have captured it in German, as will be demonstrated in detail in the comparative study of Pinter's original play and Thiem's translation. In any case, there is no mention of any humor whatsoever in either of the above reviews.

### *Die Geburtstagsfeier*

**Schiller-Theater-Werkstatt, Berlin, 19 December 1970**

Deutsch: Willy H. Thiem; Regie: Hans-Peter Kaufmann; Bild: Joana Gardescu

Mit Sonja Karzau, Kerstin de Ahna, Eduard Wandrey, Volker Brandt, Martin Hirthe

*„Wer an Pinter nicht vorbeiszeniert – und das tut der junge Regisseur Hans-Peter Kaufmann nicht – der findet Publikumsresonanz. Der Einbruch des Absurden in das triviale Ambiente ist einfach packend. (...) Kaufmann hat Pinters doppelbödiges Werk sehr akzeptabel auf die Bühne gebracht. Er lässt die Vereinnahmung des Individuums vordergründig wie selbstverständlich spielen, **er arbeitet** die Banaldialoge des alten Paares, **den trockenen Humor exakt heraus**. (...) Das Publikum artikulierte durch konzentrierten Applaus Einverständnis. Die Aufführung hat es vollauf verdient.“<sup>297</sup>*

In great contrast to the previous negative critique, this review of the same play in the same year is most favorable. The major difference in reception seems to be based on the fact that director Kaufmann has made a concerted effort with the actors to bring out Pinter's dry humor. The audience was pleased with the production, and so was the reviewer, leading us to assume that the humorous aspects of Pinter's plays can help to make or break a production. This striking difference in the reception of the same play in the same year in Germany would appear to be a focus on the comedy in Pinter's 'comedies of menace.'

*"Hans-Peter Kaufmann hat Pinters 'Geburtstagsfeier' inszeniert, die Bedrohlichkeit des Banalen wirkt nachhaltig, die naturalistische Einrichtung führt Pinters 'absurdes Theater' exemplarisch vor. (...) Sie zeigt, **mit all der Komik, die real vorhanden ist**, die Leere bestimmter Lebenshaltungen, die Absurdität des Alltags gerade weil Kaufmann sich*

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<sup>297</sup> *Telegraf*, 22 December 1970.

*bedeutungsvoller Mätzchen enthielt. Und in dieser Besetzung ist die Identifizierung der Vorgänge auf der Bühne mit einem Ausschnitt aus der Realität vollkommen möglich.*"<sup>298</sup>

Once again, the above reviewer underlines that the above production of *Die Geburtstagsfeier* emphasizes the comical moments in Pinter's drama. He reports that it is an exemplary staging of Pinter's 'absurdist drama,' which is in complete contrast to the reception of the previous production in Hamburg. Here we have additional evidence that humor makes all the difference in Pinter's plays.

### ***Die Geburtstagsfeier***

**Basler Theater, Switzerland, January 1971**

Directed by Hans Bauer; Stanley – Horst Christian Beckmann; McCann - Matthias Habich; Goldberg - Adolf Spalinger; Meg – Rosel Schäfer; Lulu - Renate Biehl; Petey- Kurt Fischer-Fehling

#### ***"Gastspiel der Basler Theaterproduktion in Bern:***

*“Das Bemerkenswerteste an Pinters Begabung besteht darin, wie er diese Anregungen aufgenommen, verarbeitet (hat) und... in eine spezifisch englische Wirklichkeit verpflanzte.... Das trifft vor allem auf die Sprache seiner Dialoge zu, der Friedrich Luft einmal „das moderne Hi-Fi-Gehör für Zwischentöne, für Dialektnuancen, für **sprachliche Komik**, für die Grausamkeit des Jargons, für die banale Poesie des Alltagsgewäschs“ nachgerühmt hat. „Auch er (nämlich Pinter) knetet den Jargon, er fingert mit so empfindlichen Händen an der Vulgärsprache herum, bis sie eine Poesie des Kommunen erreicht, die man bisher so nie hörte. Nun ist allerdings die Inszenierung Hans Bauers ohnehin nicht makellos.... Er legte, vor allem zu Beginn, vielleicht etwas zu viel Gewicht auf komödiantische Effekte, um der Gefahr falschen Tiefsinns zu entgehen, und er konnte darüber hinaus nicht alle Rollen so besetzen, dass ein stilreines Pinter-Konzert möglich geworden wäre. (...) Rosel Schäfer als so gütige wie dämmliche Meg unterhält aufs Beste, wenn sie ihre betuliche Betriebsamkeit entfaltet und die Hilflosigkeit immer wieder ins Grotteske kippen lässt: Da ist sie eine lebensnähere Schwester von Becketts Winnie (...). Doch kommt bei so viel tragikomischer Lustigkeit, die denn auch ausgiebig belacht wurde,*

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<sup>298</sup> Spandauer Volksblatt, 22 December 1970.

*die Tiefendimension der Figur etwas zu kurz. (...) Das Publikum dankte mit freundlichem, aber keineswegs enthusiastischem Beifall: Solche Stücke mag man hier nicht besonders.*<sup>299</sup>

This review of a guest appearance of the Basel theater production in Bern, written by Peter Meier, is particularly well researched. The critic has made the effort of reading star-reviewer Friedrich Luft's remarks on Harold Pinter, and is thus aware of Pinter's poetic heights and humorous language. It would however seem that this production of *The Birthday Party* may have fallen somewhat short of the expectations awakened by Luft's praise of Pinter. Apparently director Hans Bauer put too much emphasis on comic effects at the onset of the play, which might have upset the delicate balance of comedy and tragedy in Pinter's comedy of menace. This was also the stumbling block for Rosel Schäfer, who played Meg, according to Meier. The audience also seems to have been disturbed by the play, which is often the case with the reception of Pinter's works, however the applause was not enthusiastic, so one has to draw the conclusion that the performance that evening wasn't a great success.

### **Gastspiel der Basler Theaterproduktion im Schauspielhaus Zürich**

*“Rosel Schäfer hält ihre komische Begabung fest am Zügel, setzt den Humor sparsam ein, findet die Umschläge in die tiefere Unsal überzeugend; auch hier wird in kleinsten, feinsten Strichen exakt gestaltet. (...) Es gab Leute, die das Theater in der Pause verliessen, weil sie keinen Sinn erkannten in dem Ganzen. Die meisten harreten aber aus, gespannt, gebannt. Mehr als das: erschreckt, geängstigt, und das gerade weil der Autor sie so wenig lenkt in der Erklärung dieser Angst. (...) Leider passierte bei dieser ersten Gastspielaufführung ein Missgeschick, die Pause war falsch angegeben.... So aber entging einem einiges an diesem Stück, das nichts Entbehrliches enthält. Es ist auch unentbehrlich in unserem jetzigen Spielplan.”*<sup>300</sup>

In a second review of a guest appearance of the above production at the Schauspielhaus Zurich, the critic once again focuses on the humor, which the talented Rosel Schäfer achieved by dosing it lightly and carefully. Quite in contrast to the review of the same production in Bern, this critic concludes that the play does not

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<sup>299</sup> *Tages-Anzeiger Bern*, 23 Jan. 1971.

have anything superfluous, and that it is indispensable in that theater's repertoire. **This supports the thesis that the measured use of humor in Harold Pinter's plays is so crucial.** Such a crowning remark leads us to believe that this production of *The Birthday Party* was in keeping with Pinter's intentions in terms of humor.<sup>301</sup>

*Die Geburtstagsfeier* was also produced for German television under the direction of Jürgen Flimm in 1978. It starred Brigitte Mira as Meg, Josef Dahmen as Petey, Hans Christian Rudolf as Stanley, Ernst Jacobi as Goldberg, Dieter Laser as McCann and Brigitte Janner as Lulu.<sup>302</sup> No reviews or ratings are listed by the International Movie Database, so it must be assumed that this TV production was not particularly successful. The only writing credit listed is Harold Pinter, and no translator is credited.

#### ***Die Geburtstagsfeier* - Schaubühne, West Berlin, 8 February 1985**

Directed by Jürgen Kruse; Cast: Gunter Berger, Udo Samel, Tina Engel, Roland Schäfer und Christine Oesterlein

*"So sind Pinters zerfranste, wie blödsinnig dahergeredete Dialoge nicht unreal, nicht surreal, sind vielmehr – in der exakten Täuschung des Ohres – hyperreal. (...) Meg... umwerfend komisch, kalt komisch. Doch nach einer Weile nicht mehr. (...) Regie: Jürgen Kruse walzt hier behaglich detailversessen aus, was viel leichtfüßiger, mehr auf intelligent-respektlose Britenweise daherspringen sollte: Es gerät ihm manches so fett, als sei es eben doch ein Drama, zum Beispiel, von (Tennessee) Williams."*<sup>303</sup>

The above review gives us the impression that director Jürgen Kruse missed the right tone in terms of Pinter's humor. He would seem to have trodden too roughly with Pinter's fine British wit, twisting it into a rougher German version, or in the review's opinion, making it seem more like Tennessee Williams, implying a somewhat more direct and blatant dramatic style. Pinter's ambivalence and meaning between the lines

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<sup>300</sup> *Die Tat*, 25 Jan. 1971.

<sup>301</sup> This assumption may be made despite the fact that a major technical problem in connection with the intermission unfortunately induced part of the audience to leave the performance early.

<sup>302</sup> IMDb: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1552668/>

<sup>303</sup> *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 14 February 1985.

appears to have been lost. We get the impression that Kruse did not entirely understand the British and Yiddish humor, so typical and crucial in Pinter's dramas.

Another review of the same production of *Die Geburtstagsfeier* in Berlin does not leave a positive impression, either: "**Ein trauriger Vorfall: Aber je verheißungsvoller das Ensemble einen springenden Punkt ansteuert, desto größer ist die Enttäuschung, daß nichts dabei herauskommt.**"<sup>304</sup> The critic doesn't seem to understand the play at all, and actually claims that it has no tangible plot, no dramatic reality and no factual reality. This leads us to believe that the director also didn't understand Pinter's play, or tried to make it into something it was not intended to be. It should not be forgotten that Pinter's insisted his plays were to be produced in a realistic manner.

*"Jürgen Kruse, der Regie führt, gelingt es jedoch immer nur unzulänglich, Pinters englisch gemäßigte (heimliche, aber doch immer heitere) kafkaeske Rätselwelt neu zu beleben. (...) Pinters elegant munkelnde, oft deutlich komische Geheimnistuerei wird kaum je sinnvoll hörbar. Genuß bleibt aus – und Pinters magische Ängste auch. (...) Pinter – verspielt. Dabei wäre er doch, gerade heute, durchaus wieder zu entdecken. Der Beifall war ziemlich ratlos."*<sup>305</sup>

The above review of the same production, written by star critic Friedrich Luft, provides further evidence that director Kruse somehow seems to have missed the point and the tone of Pinter's play. Luft gives us to understand that he has seen a better production in the past, and draws parallels between this staging and Tennessee Williams, evoking cheap naturalism. Apparently Pinter's elegant and clearly comical ambiguities have not been properly conveyed, because the audience did not know what to make of the production, as noted by the reviewer.

Another review by Michael Stone of the same production of *Die Geburtstagsfeier* in Berlin goes even further to postulate: "*Vielleicht ist aber das Stück selber schuld, es muß ungeduldig auf das Ende warten.*"<sup>306</sup> Under the title "*Geburtstag ohne Sinn und Ende*"<sup>307</sup> the critic claims that Roland Schäfer as Stanley has not succeeded in making

<sup>304</sup> *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 14 February 1985.

<sup>305</sup> *Welt*, 8 February 1985.

<sup>306</sup> *Westfälische Rundschau*, 8 February 1985.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*

the threats against him seem plausible. He also reports that the audience coughed a lot, which he interprets as a sign of lack of attention. Apparently the production dragged its heels and didn't ever arrive at the intended goal.

Decades too late, a new translation of *The Birthday Party* was finally done by Michael Walter. *Die Geburtstagsfeier* had its premiere in the Bayrisches Staatsschauspiel / Residenztheater, Munich on the 24th of January 1998 under the direction of Gerd Heinz.

### ***Der Geburtstagsfeier***

**Schauspielhaus Köln – Spielstätte Schlosserei, Cologne, June 2009; Directed by Jürgen Kruse;** Set by Volker Hintermeier; Starring Albert Kitzl as Petey, Helga Uthmann as Meg, Lucas Gregorowicz as Stanley, Michael Weber as Goldberg, Jan-Peter Kampwirth as McCann, and Lucia Peraza Rios as Lulu; **In the new translation by Michael Walter**

It is rare that the same director chooses to stage the same play for a second time, but Jürgen Kruse has done this with *Der Geburtstagsfeier*. However, this time Kruse has used the new translation by Michael Walter, instead of the Willy Thiem's translation, which was the only one available 24 years ago in Berlin.

***"Ein Ort namens Schwindel: Jürgen Kruse flößt Harold Pinters 'Die Geburtstagsfeier' neues Leben ein: "... ein wunderbares, furchteinflößendes, Stpck, dem Kruse gewissermaßen seine Junfräulichkeit wiedergeschenkt hat. Die Gewohnheitsdialoge von Meg und Petey wirken weniger von Pinter als vielmehr wie von Lorient erdacht. (...) Aber Kruse behandelt Pinters Text mit der gleichen Hochachtung vorm geschriebenen Wort... Hier wird an jeder Silbe gefeilt, kalauernde Doppelbedeutungen freigelegt und Shakespeare-Zitate eingefügt. Diese Geburtstagsfeier ist ein dionysisches Sprachfest. (...) Das Publikum jubelte zu Recht."***<sup>308</sup>

**The above review reveals that Michael Walter's translation has made an obvious**

**difference resulting in the excellent reception of this play, in great contrast to its poor reception 24 years ago. It can be taken for granted that director Kruse's approach to Pinter's play will have ripened over the years, yet the four good reviews<sup>309</sup> of this new production, which emphasize the humor and precise work with the text, contrast starkly with the negative reviews of Kruse's first production many years ago, providing evidence that the new translation has also served to greatly improve the understanding and cultural transfer of Pinter's comedy of menace.**

***Die Geburtstagsfeier, Residenztheater, Munich, June 2010***

Regie: Thomas Langhoff, Bühne und Kostüme: Stefan Hageneier, Musik: Rudolf Gregor Knabl, Dramaturgie: Hans-Joachim Ruckhäberle. Mit: Cornelia Froboess, Nadine Germann, Robert Joseph Bartl, Robert Gallinowski, Dieter Mann, Helmut Stange.

The above production in Munich under the direction of Thomas Langhoff also enjoyed a good reception of Pinter's humorous dialogue, which reflects positively upon Michael Walter's new translation:

*"Helmut Stange und Cornelia Froboess als Petey und Meg sind ein hinreißendes Paar, wunderbar komisch in ihren sich verfehlenden Dialogen, und wenn sie am Ende, nachdem Stanley verschleppt wurde, beisammen sitzen und wechselseitig ihre Lügen bejahen, dann hat das trotz der Grausamkeit ihrer Flucht in die Verdrängung auch etwas traurig Anrührendes."<sup>310</sup>*

Dieter Mann also gave an interview on his debut in Munich, in which praised Pinter's precise scriptwriting and black humor, again presumably indicating the merits of Michael Walter's new translation:

*"Pinter ist ein unglaublich realistischer Autor mit Zügen ins Absurde. Er ist einem shr*

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<sup>308</sup> *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, 8 June 2009.

<sup>309</sup> The author refers to 3 more positive reviews on the same production in *Halterner Zeitung* (7-6-2009); *Nachtkritik* (6-6-2009); *WEKultur* (10-6-2009).

<sup>310</sup> *Nachtkritik*, 10 June 2010.

*harten Realismus verpflichtet und hat diesen merkwürdigen böartigen Humor. Auch emotionale Stellen sind bei ihm von hoher Präzision. (...) Man merkt, dass Pinter selbst Schauspieler war, weil er den Schauspielern vertraut und weiß, was er mit ihnen machen kann.*"<sup>311</sup>

The above interview gives us a good idea of the improved translation rendered by Michael Walter, since Dieter Mann specifically mentions Pinter's black humor, which often seemed to go unnoticed in the earlier critiques of *Die Geburtstagsfeier* in the translation by Willy Thiem.

To conclude the review of the reception of *Die Geburtstagsfeier*, it should also be noted that the German scholar Karl-Heinz Stoll analyzes all of Pinter's plays written until 1977 in detail, including *The Birthday Party*, in his book on Harold Pinter. In the course of his detailed study of *The Birthday Party*, there is only one single mention of humor, in connection with characters contradicting themselves, which creates a comical effect.<sup>312</sup> This is an astounding fact, considering that Stoll does adhere to the accepted designation of Pinter's "comedies of menace." On the whole, Stoll's almost complete lack of attention to the humorous aspect of Pinter's writing is most typical of Pinter's early reception in German-speaking countries.

### 3.2.2 Production History of *The Birthday Party* Screenplay and Film

Predating Pinter's screenplay of *The Birthday Party* were a television production by ITV directed by Joan Kemp-Welch, which premiered on 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 1960, as well as a successful BBC television production with Pinter playing the role of Goldberg in 1964. Much later, another television production of the same play was done by BBC under the direction of Kenneth Ives in 1987.

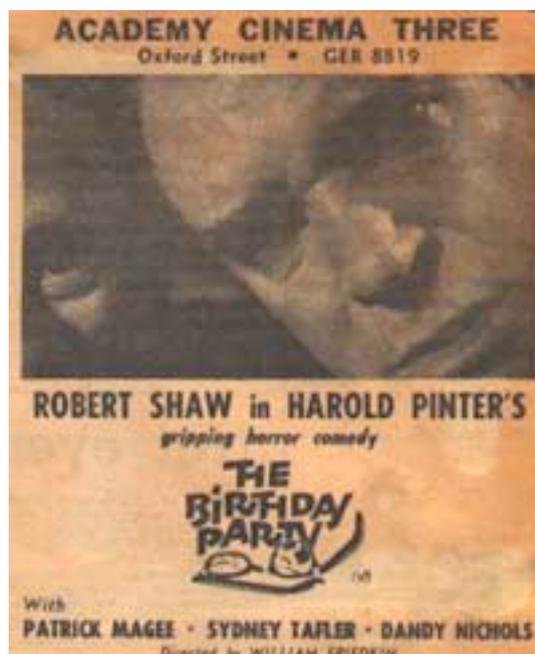
In 1968 a film version of *The Birthday Party* was produced by Max Rosenberg and Milton Subotsky for ABC Motion Pictures, based on the screenplay by Harold Pinter and directed by William Friedkin. Meg was played by Dandy Nichols; Stanley was

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<sup>311</sup> *Münchener Merkur*, 9 June 2010.

<sup>312</sup> Cf. Stoll, p. 19.

played by Robert Shaw; McCann by Patrick Magee; Goldberg by Sydney Tafler; Lulu by Helen Fraser; and Petey by Moultrie Kelsall.



***Illus. 11: Robert Shaw in The Birthday Party directed by William Friedkin***

Friedkin's film version of *The Birthday Party* was premiered in New York in December of 1968. As one of the first ABC distribution ventures, it was not a financial success. However, Steven Gale, the authority on Pinter's screenplays, writes: "... it was an excellent and faithful transfer of the play. The movie clearly traces the disintegration of a sensitive man's character as Stanley is exposed to the presence of menace."<sup>313</sup>

The opening shot captures Petey putting out deck chairs at the seaside spa, with the screeching of the seagulls in the background. Menacing sounds are repeatedly heard in the film, and they later go hand-in-hand with the menacing action.

Soon we see the interior of the boarding house, where it is apparent that Meg is not a good housekeeper. Instead, she focuses all her attention on Stanley, trying to turn him into her 'house pet.' Stanley resists and tries to avoid her attentions, just as he is attempting to escape from his presumed past as a small-time gangster. But two of his

former colleagues catch up with him and put him through the grinder, metaphorically as well as on screen.

Pinter lets the camera expose Stanley's fear in closeups, a feature that is hardly possible on stage and forms the contrast between the stage play and the screenplay. The scene where Stanley is interrogated by Goldberg and McCann seems very alarming due to the changing camera shots, and closeups intensify the violence of the fight.<sup>314</sup>

As previously mentioned in the chapter on Comedies of Menace, Pinter focuses on rendering his victims blind (or dumb). This is heightened in the film version of the *Birthday Party*, where the camera shows closeups of Stanley's glasses, especially when McCann breaks them, symbolically also breaking Stanley's will and making him powerless, as well as blind.

Stanley is also portrayed as a kind of 'peeping Tom' in the screenplay, when he observes the other characters surreptitiously. The game of blindman's buff, in turn, serves to emphasize Stanley's helplessness. Whereas McCann's game of tearing up strips of newspaper becomes more visible and menacing on film than it is on stage.

In a positive review of the film, critic Harold Clurman wrote: "*The Birthday Party is in effect a fantasia of fear and prosecution. Pinter's ear is so keen, his method so economic and so shrewdly stylized, balancing humdrum realistic notations with suggestions of unfathomable violence, that his play succeeds in being both funny and horrific.*"<sup>315</sup>

Pinter has also made some minor changes in the script. When Petey says to Meg that two men made inquiries "last night" in the play, it has become "this morning" in the screenplay. There are also a few small additions to the screen dialogue, such as the new scene when Meg shows Goldberg and McCann up to their room. And many of Lulu's humorous lines have also been cut in the screenplay.

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<sup>313</sup> Gale, p. 185.

<sup>314</sup> Because many of Pinter's screenplays have been published in book form (eg. *Five Screenplays*), we have evidence that Pinter gave specific directions for close-ups, etc.

<sup>315</sup> *Nation*, 6 January 1969.

Most revealingly, Steven Gale criticizes Pinter for cutting humorous lines from the screenplay: “Unfortunately, although nothing essential is removed, a lot of the humorous dialogue of the stage play is missing, and to a large extent the humor is essential to understanding the nature of the characters.”<sup>316</sup> One of Goldberg’s lines, which has been cut, is when he refers to his mother asking him to the table to eat: “... quick before it gets cold. And there on the table what would I see? The nicest piece of gefilte fish you could wish to find on a plate.”<sup>317</sup> This is a typical example of Yiddish humor, in that gefilte fish is normally served cold. The twofold changes in these lines would indicate that the Yiddish joke about food may have sometimes been lost on the audience, whenever the play was staged in a location without any significant Jewish populace.

Another film review of *The Birthday Party* was published in the *Evening Standard*. Significantly, the following review does not make any mention of humor, perhaps an indication that there could have been somewhat more comical moments in the film:

*"The Birthday Party is a study of domination that sows doubts, terrors, shuddering illuminations and terrifying apprehensions inside the four walls of a living-room in a seaside boarding-house where Stanley (Robert Shaw), the lodger, has taken refuge from some guilt, crime, treachery, in fact Some Thing, never named. The baiting scene is resonant with the menace that Pinter achieves by striking a note somewhere out of our hearing and then letting us listen to the reverberation."*<sup>318</sup>

Harold Pinter himself may have realized that he deleted a few too many humorous lines when he remarked to Michael Billington in an interview in 1996: "I like the adaptations that I have done apart from 'The Birthday Party,' which I did a long time ago, which didn't really work."<sup>319</sup>

Nevertheless, film expert Steven Gale concludes his study of this film on a positive note, remarking on Pinter’s talented screenwriting as follows:

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<sup>316</sup> Gale, p. 189.

<sup>317</sup> In the revised version of *The Birthday Party* reprinted in 1987, these lines have been changed by Pinter to read: “The nicest piece of rollmop and pickled cucumber you could wish to find on a plate.” Pinter 1987, p. 69.

<sup>318</sup> *Evening Standard*, 12 February 1970.

“... *The Birthday Party* serves as an excellent example of how Pinter uses cinematic techniques to bring his stage work to life on the screen. Incredibly funny and frightening, *'The Birthday Party'* is not sufficiently appreciated as a play or as a film. And, it is Pinter's script that gives the movie its power, not the technology of filmmaking.”<sup>320</sup>

To summarize, it can be said that Pinter's screenplay for *The Birthday Party* is an early example of his blossoming talent in screenwriting. In retrospect, however, the experience of adapting this play for the screen presumably reinforced Pinter's belief in his gift for comedy, since the play with all of its humorous dialogue was a more universal success than the film adaptation, from which many humorous lines had been deleted.

### 3.3 General Commentaries on *The Birthday Party*

*"Like all truly original and innovative works of art, (The Birthday Party) bewildered and disconcerted its audience...."*<sup>321</sup>

- Martin Esslin

Martin Esslin cleverly sums up the forceful essence of *The Birthday Party* in the quote above. However, opinions differed from this to quite a degree when the play premiered, as was illustrated in the previous *Chapter 3.2 Production History of The Birthday Party Including Reviews*. Esslin goes on to analyze Pinter's literary talent, focusing on his witty dialogue, sharp powers of observation and subtle speech rhythms:

*"It was clear that a major talent was at work: the brilliance and **wit of the dialogue**, the sharpness of its clinical observation of the quirks and idiocies of real speech, the subtle syncopation of its rhythms and the transition from its realism to wilder and*

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<sup>319</sup> Pinter 1998, pp. 51-52.

<sup>320</sup> Gale, p. 190.

<sup>321</sup> Pinter 1998, p. 11.

*wilder regions of surrealist free association clearly marked the author as a virtuoso of stage language. But what was he trying to say in the play?"*<sup>322</sup>

Michael Billington, Pinter's biographer, and a famous theater critic in his own right, has commented on *The Birthday Party*, postulating that this was when Pinter found his voice as dramatist, and also stating that the play used the devices of a rep thriller: "(Pinter) had produced a work that was comic, disturbing, strangely unresolved and deeply political in its plea for resistance to social conformity and inherited ideas."<sup>323</sup> Billington goes on to say that as a writer, Pinter was instinctively political.

Raymond Williams sees Pinter's play from another point of view, starting out with the concept of a naturalist comedy, which has developed into another genre of theater, implying that the comedy of menace is introduced on another level of consciousness. Although Williams' comment is illuminating, Pinter is not normally viewed as a naturalist playwright:

*"What then happens, in 'The Birthday Party,' is that the idiom of naturalist comedy – the deck-chair attendant, the landlady, the lodger, the tart, the Irishman, the Jew – is developed to the point where the irruption of another consciousness – a malignant universal bullying – is not, and had no need to be, an irruption into an everyday world: that acceptance has already been gained, by the conversion of ordinary life into this kind of theatre. The opportunity to show menace – an inarticulate menace – is then fully taken."*<sup>324</sup>

In his book, *Anger and After*, John Russel Taylor also remarks on the break in reality in Pinter's *The Birthday Party*. He postulates that because Stanley, Meg and her husband Petey are credible characters in a real world, the horror of Stanley's situation is intensified when the thugs intrude into his comfortable life to lead him off. The entrance of Goldberg and McCann finally serves to remove the play from everyday reality and elevate it to another sphere.<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> Pinter 1998, p. 12.

<sup>323</sup> *Guardian*, 25 December 2008.

<sup>324</sup> Williams, p. 372.

"... *The Birthday Party* is a comedy of menace, which tends to sacrifice credibility to the horrors of the subconscious. In a squalid seaside boarding-house, a very proletarian Everyman named Stanley has buried himself from the world, without work, and without washing himself. Unexpectedly a Jewish businessman named Goldberg and an unfrocked Irish priest named McCann, agents of our imperious society, come to claim him. (...) he is marched off in a bowler-hat as an animal to the slaughter, a man without identity."<sup>326</sup>

Styan also picks up on the comedy of menace, as a genre that forgoes reality for another level of consciousness. It is Stanley's transition from a jobless piano-player to a helpless victim without an identity, which is the underlying storyline of the play. His mysterious and terrifying transition forms the core of this powerful dramatic work.

### 3.4 Pinter's Comments on *The Birthday Party*

***" This play is a comedy because the whole state of affairs is absurd and inglorious. It is, however, as you know, a very serious piece of work. "***<sup>327</sup>

- *Harold Pinter*

In a letter to Peter Wood, the director of *The Birthday Party*, written prior to the rehearsals for its very first production in April 1958, Harold Pinter made the above highly illuminating statement about his play, leaving no doubt as to his comic intentions, despite the underlying serious nature of his themes.

Pinter also spoke very candidly about his sources of inspiration for *The Birthday Party* in a conversation with Mel Gussow in December 1988. In it he admitted that a certain lonely pianist he met on tour was the real person, who gave rise to the character of Stanley. And it was the recent experience of World War II and the Gestapo knocking on the doors of Jews in the Nazi regime, upon which the menacing threat of McCann and Goldberg was based. Pinter also adds that Petey says one of the

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<sup>325</sup> Cf. Taylor, p. 327.

<sup>326</sup> Styan, p. 247.

<sup>327</sup> Pinter 1998, p. 11.

most important lines he has ever written: "*Stan, don't let them tell you what to do.*"<sup>328</sup> Pinter claims to have lived that line all of his life,<sup>329</sup> which serves to establish the importance of *The Birthday Party* in his literary oeuvre.

*"It so happens that (The Birthday Party) was inspired by two things. I met this fellow in a seaside boarding-house when I was on tour as an actor. He lived in this attic and used to play the piano on the pier. He was a totally lonely man. (...) I thought, what would happen if two people knocked on his door? (...) The idea of the knock came from my knowledge of the Gestapo. I'll never forget: it was 1953 or 1954. The war had only been over less than ten years. It was very much on my mind."*<sup>330</sup>

In an interview with Nicholas Hern, Pinter stated that authoritarian forces humiliate the main character of *The Birthday Party*. Along with *The Hot House* and *The Dumb Waiter*, the former play is also about abuse of authority, and they all make avid use of metaphors.<sup>331</sup> Pinter has commented on *The Birthday Party* with regard to the fear, the omnipresent menace and the uncertainty, saying that they do not origin in "*extraordinary, sinister people, but from you and me; it is all a matter of circumstances.*"<sup>332</sup>

In Pinter's Nobel Lecture, entitled *Art, Truth and Politics*, aired *in absentia* on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2005 in Stockholm, he summed up the play in one sentence, which certainly covers the essence of this major work: "*In my play 'The Birthday Party' I think I allow a whole range of options to operate in a dense forest of possibility before finally focusing on an act of subjugation.*"<sup>333</sup> Once again, we see how Pinter was dealing with the abuse of power from the time of his earliest plays.

While discussing *The Birthday Party* in a conversation with Mel Gussow, Pinter referred back to the bafflement his play aroused, when it was first staged, in contrast to the good reviews a little later: "*In 1958, The Birthday Party was generally found to*

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<sup>328</sup> Pinter 1987, p. 96.

<sup>329</sup> Cf. Gussow, p. 71.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

<sup>331</sup> Cf. Pinter in an interview with Nicholas Hern, May 1985, German transl. by H.M. Ledig-Rowholt.

<sup>332</sup> Taylor, p. 327.

<sup>333</sup> Pinter 2006, p. 3.

*be incomprehensible. It's now been done around the world, and it's clearly comprehensible.*"<sup>334</sup>

In answer to a question about the villainous characters in his plays, Pinter indicates a certain sense of identification, which he feels with some of the characters he has created. This is underlined by the fact that Pinter actually played the role of Goldberg in a British television production in 1987, as well as on stage. *"I suppose that Goldberg and McCann in 'The Birthday Party' are regarded as an evil pair. But I'm very fond of them.*"<sup>335</sup> In an interview with Pinter, Mireia Aragay also remarks that he claimed he didn't love or hate any of the characters in *The Birthday Party* and *The Homecoming* more or less than the others.<sup>336</sup>

Concerning the character of Stanley, Pinter also made some revealing comments in his letter to Peter Wood prior to the premiere of *The Birthday Party*:

*"Stanley cannot perceive his only valid justification – which is, he is what he is – therefore he certainly can never be articulate about it. He knows only to attempt to justify himself, by pretence and by bluff, through fright. (...) Stanley is the king of his castle and loses his kingdom because he assessed it and himself inaccurately. We all have to be very careful. The boot is itching to squash and very efficient.*"<sup>337</sup>

The reference Pinter makes to *"The boot"* in the above is a British synonym for Nazis and fascists. Here he is evidently depicting Stanley's demise as a result of the totalitarian forces in the form of Goldberg and McCann in his play. This interpretation is clearly supported by a remark Pinter made about political power and oppression on the occasion of the Edinburgh Book Festival on 25<sup>th</sup> August 2006, after reading one of the interrogation scenes from *The Birthday Party*: *"... Goldberg and McCann represented the forces in society who wanted to snuff out dissent, to stifle Stanley's voice, to silence him...."*<sup>338</sup> With regard to the play's reception upon its premiere in 1958, Pinter continued: *"One thing [the critics] got wrong (...) was the whole history*

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<sup>334</sup> Gussow, p. 62

<sup>335</sup> Ibid, p. 20.

<sup>336</sup> Pinter 1998, p. 62.

<sup>337</sup> Pinter 1998, p. 10.

<sup>338</sup> *Scotsman*, 26 August 2006.

*of stifling, suffocating and destroying dissent. Not too long before, the Gestapo had represented order, discipline, family life, obligation — and anyone who disagreed with that was in trouble.*"<sup>339</sup>

To conclude this chapter on Pinter's views of *The Birthday Party*, I cite his following comment regarding the connection between comedy and tragedy, as well as the role absurdity plays:

*"The point about tragedy is that it is no longer funny. It is funny, and then it becomes no longer funny. (...) ... the fact that it is verging on the unknown leads us to the next step, which seems to occur in my plays. There is a kind of horror about, and I think that this horror and absurdity go together."*<sup>340</sup>

The links between comedy and tragedy, as well as absurdity and horror, are omnipresent in *The Birthday Party* and can be seen as the golden thread in Pinter's comedies of menace.

### **3.5 A Comparative Study of *The Birthday Party* with *Die Geburtstagsfeier* Translations by Willy H. Thiem and Michael Walter**

This chapter comprises a detailed literary comparison of Pinter's *The Birthday Party* with its two different German translations. For the purpose of this study, I have used the Rowohlt edition of Willy H. Thiem's translation published in 1970 in an anthology of Pinter's plays entitled *Fünf Theaterstücke: Niemandsland*. This early version of *Die Geburtstagsfeier* was later replaced by a new translation by Michael Walter published by Rowohlt in 2005 in Pinter's *Theaterstücke: Die Geburtstagsfeier, usw.*

I have used **bold script** to indicate obvious additions, changes or errors in the German translation in order to make them more readily identifiable. In addition, most

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<sup>339</sup> Ibid.

<sup>340</sup> Esslin 1980b, p. 242.

examples are followed by a suggestion for an alternate translation into the German by the author of this thesis. The following abbreviations are employed:

- BP: *The Birthday Party* (original English edition of *The Birthday Party* copyrighted in 1960 and published in Pinter – Plays One by Methuen in 1987)  
 GF: *Die Geburtstagsfeier* (translated by Willy Thiem, published by Rowohlt 1970)  
 GFw *Die Geburtstagsfeier* (translated by Michael Walter, published by Rowohlt in 2005)  
 RvP: Alternative German translations as suggested by Renée von Paschen

*BP p. 20*

*Meg: Is it good?*

*GF p. 53*

*Meg: **Steht** was Gutes **drin**?*

(too long and poor rhythm)

*GFw p. 10*

*Ist sie interessant?*

(changed meaning)

*RvP*

*Meg: Und? Gut?*

(maintains brevity and meaning)

*BP p. 20*

*"Meg: Is Stanley **up** yet?"*

*Petey: I don't know. Is he?*

*Meg: I don't know. I haven't seen him **down** yet.*

*Petey: Well then, he **can't** be **up**."*

*GF p. 54*

*"Meg: Ist Stanley schon auf?"*

*"Petey: Keine Ahnung. Ist er auf?"*

*Meg: Ich weiß nicht. **Ich habe ihn herunteren noch nicht gesehen.***

*Petey: Na, dann wird er noch nicht auf sein."*

(too long, repetition missing, poor rhythm, and poor pun on up and down!)

GfW p. 11

"Meg: Ist Stanley schon auf?

Petey: Weiß nicht. Ist er auf?

Meg: Weiß nicht. **Ich hab ihn hier unten noch nicht gesehen.**

Petey: Na, dann wird er kaum auf sein.

Rvp

Meg: Ist Stanley bereits **auf**?

Petey: Weiß nicht. Ist er auf?

Meg: Keine Ahnung. **Hab ihn noch nicht unten gesehen.**

Petey: Na, dann **kann** er nicht **auf** sein.

Pinter's pun on up and down in the above scene is an excellent example of his witty use of language.<sup>341</sup> Unfortunately the translations by Thiem and Walter do not quite adequately capture Pinter's humor in the German language.

BP p. 21

"Meg: Oh, what a shame. **I'd be sorry.** I'd much rather have a little boy."

Petey: A little girl's **all right.**"

GF p. 54

"Meg: Ach, wie schade. **Das wär mir nicht recht.** Ich hätte viel lieber einen kleinen Jungen.

Petey: Ein kleines Mädchen ist doch **ganz schön.**"

( too long, ambivalence lost, different meaning)

GfW p. 12

Petey: Ein kleines Mädchen ist **doch nicht schlecht.**

(changed meaning)

Rvp

Meg: Ach, schade. **Das tüt mir leid.** Ich hätte viel lieber einen kleinen Jungen.

Petey: Ein kleines Mädchen wäre **schon recht.**

BP p. 22

"Petey: It is.

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<sup>341</sup> Cf. Neumayr, pp. 33-34.

*Meg: I know it is."*

*GF p. 55*

*"Petey: **So** ist es.*

*Meg: Ich weiß, daß es **so** ist."*

(ambivalence lost, too long)

*GFw p. 14*

*Petey: Stimmt.*

*Meg: Ich weiß, dass das stimmt.*

(clumsy)

*Rvp*

*Petey: Ist es.*

*Meg: Ist es, ich weiß.*

*BP p. 23*

*"Petey: This is a **straight show**.*

*Meg: What do you mean?*

*Petey: No dancing or singing.*

*Meg: What do they do **then**?"*

*GF p. 56*

*"Petey: Es ist ein **Sprechstück**.*

*Meg: Was bedeutet das?*

*Petey: Ohne Tanzen und Singen.*

*Meg: Was machen sie **denn dann**?"*

(ambivalence lost, too long)

*GFw p. 141*

*Petey: Das ist ein **normales Stück**.*

*Meg: Was heißt das?*

*Petey: Da wird nicht getanzt und gesungen.*

*Meg: Was machen sie **denn dann**?"*

(joke is lost, clumsy)

*Rvp*

*Petey: Das ist ein **ernstes Stück**.*

*Meg: Was heißt das?*

*Petey: Ohne Tanz und Gesang.*

Meg: Was tun sie **dann**?

BP p. 25

"Stanley: **Day-dreaming**. All night long...."

GF p. 58

"Stanley: **Mit offenen Augen geträumt**. Die ganze Nacht..."

(pun lost, too long)

GFw p. 17

Stanley: **'n Tagtraum**. Die ganze Nacht...

BP p. 26

"Stanley: I **bloody well** didn't."

GF p. 58

"Stanley: Das habe ich **bei Gott** nicht erwartet."

(wrong tone, too long)

GFw p. 18

Stanley: Kannst du laut sagen.

(wrong tone)

RvP

Stanley: Da hast du **verdammt recht**.

BP p. 27

"Stanley: I **bet** it is."

GF p. 59

"Stanley: Darauf kannst du **Gift nehmen**."

(ambivalence lost, too long)

GFw p. 20

Stanley: Jede **Wette**.

BP p. 27

"Stanley: **Succulent**.

Meg: You shouldn't say that word."

GF p. 59

"Stanley: **Eine Gourmandise**.

*Meg: Das Wort solltest du nicht gebrauchen."*

(pun lost, ambivalence lost, too long)

*GFw p. 20*

*Stanley: Was, knackig - ?*

*Meg: So was sagt man nicht.*

*RvP*

*Stanley: **Saftiges Stück.***

*Meg: Das darfst du mir nicht sagen.*

*BP p. 28*

*"Stanley: Get out of it. **You succulent old washing bag.**"*

*GF p. 60*

*"Stanley: Hör endlich auf. **Du altes Gourmandisenweib.**"*

(pun lost, ambivalence lost)

*GFw p. 22*

*Stanley: Ach, erzähl mir doch nichts, **du knackige alte Wachtel.***

*Rvp*

*Stanley: Das gibt's nicht. **Du saftiges Stück Dreckwäsche.***

*BP p. 28*

*"Stanley: I can't drink this muck. Didn't anyone ever tell you to warm the pot, at least?"*

*Meg: That's good strong tea, that's all."*

(The rest of this dialogue has been cut from the English original! Willy Thiem's translation includes the cut lines, however Michael Walter's more recent translation does not.)

*GF p. 60*

*"Stanley: Ich kann dieses Gesöff nicht trinken. Hat dir noch nie jemand gesagt, daß man erst die Kanne wärmen muß?"*

*Meg: Mein Vater hätte es nicht geduldet, daß ich so beschimpft werde.*

*Stanley: Dein Vater? Wer kann den das schon gewesen sein?"*

*Meg: Er hätte dich angezeigt.*

*Stanley verschlafen: Glaubst du, ich wollte dich beleidigen, Meg? Als ob ich so was Schreckliches tun würde.*

*Meg: Du hast es aber."*

*BP p. 29*

*"Meg (shyly): Am I really **succulent**?"*

*GF p. 60*

*"Meg (schüchtern): Bin ich wirklich eine **Gourmandise**?"*

*(humor lost, too long)*

*GFw p. 22*

*Meg: Findest du mich wirklich **knackig**?*

*RvP*

*Meg: Bin ich wirklich ein **saftiges Stück**?*

*BP p. 32*

*"Stanley (to himself): I had a unique **touch**. Absolutely unique. They came up to me. They came up to me and **said they were grateful**. Champagne we had that night, **the lot**. (Pause)"*

*GF p. 64*

*"Stanley( zu sich selbst): Mein **Anschlag** war einmalig. Einfach einmalig. Alle sind nachher zu mir gekommen. **Sie sind gekommen und haben gesagt: wir danken Ihnen**. Wir haben an dem Abend Champagner getrunken, **es gab nur das Beste**. (Pause)"*

*(ambivalence lost, meaning changed, too long)*

*RvP*

*Stanley: Ich hab einmalig **gespielt**. Einfach einmalig. Nachher sind alle gekommen. Nachher sind alle zu mir gekommen, **um sich zu bedanken**. Wir haben Champagner getrunken, **mit allem drum und dran**. (Pause)*

*BP p. 34*

*"A sudden knock on the front door. **Lulu's voice: Ooh-ooh!**"*

*GF p. 65*

*"Es klopft plötzlich an der Haustür."*

**(Lulu's voice has been omitted from Thiem's translation)**

**GFW p. 30**

*Es klopft plötzlich an der Haustür. **Lulus Stimme: Hu-hu!***

(Michael Walter reinserts the line that Thiem omitted.)

*BP p. 35*

*"Voice: **I won't**... (Whispers.) Ta-ta, Mrs Boles."*

*GF p. 65-66*

*"Stimme: Keine Angst... (Flüstern) Tschüs, Mrs Boles."*

(ambivalence lost)

*Rvp*

*Stimme: **Ich werd nicht**... (Flüstern) Bis dann, Mrs Boles.*

*BP p. 35*

*"Lulu: **Well, you're not to, anyway.**"*

*GF p. 66*

*"Lulu: Streng verboten."*

(wrong tone, ambivalence lost)

*GFW p. 31*

*Lulu: Sie dürfen es aber nicht anfassen.*

(wrong tone, too long)

*Rvp*

*Lulu: **Sie dürfen jedenfalls nicht.***

*BP p. 36*

*"Lulu: You're a bit of a **washout**, aren't you?"*

*GF p. 67*

*"Lulu: Mit Ihnen ist **nicht viel anzufangen**, was?"*

(pun lost, too long, rhythm lost)

*GFW p. 34*

*Lulu: Sie sind ein **echter Blindgänger**, was?*

*RvP*

*Lulu: Sie sind eher ein **Nichtsnutz**, was?*

BP p. 39

"Goldberg: *You do it very well.*"

McCann: *Thank you, Nat.*

**(Goldberg's line deleted in English!)**

GF p. 69

"Goldberg: *Und du machst deine Sache sehr gut.*

McCann: *Danke, Nat.*

Goldberg: *Übrigens habe ich erst neulich mit jemandem über dich gesprochen. Ich hab sehr lobend von dir gesprochen.*

BP p. 39

"McCann: *That was very **good** of you Nat.*"

GF p. 69

"McCann: *Das war sehr **lieb** von dir, Nat.*"

(tone altered)

GFw p. 37

McCann: *Das war sehr **nett** von dir, Nat.*

BP p. 40

"Goldberg: *... All is dependent on the **attitude of our subject.***

GFt p. 70

"Goldberg: *... Alles hängt ab vom Verhalten unseres **Objekts.***

(change in meaning, wit lost)

GFw p. 38

Goldberg: *... Alles hängt vom Verhalten unserer **Zielperson** ab.*

Rvp

Goldberg: *... Alles hängt ab vom Verhalten des **Versuchsobjekts.***

(humor recreated)

BP p. 41

"Meg: *Yes, but he sleeps **with me.***"

GF p. 71

"Meg: *Ja, aber der schläft **bei mir drin.***"

(changed meaning, pun lost)

GfW p. 40

Meg: Ja, aber der schläft **bei mir**.

RvP

Meg: Ja, aber der schläft **mit mir**.

(pun restored)

BP p. 41

"Goldberg: Oh yes? Does he **work** here?"

Meg: He used to work. He used to be a pianist. In a **concert party** on the pier."

GF p 71

Goldberg: Ach ja? Ist er hier **tätig**?

Meg: Er war früher tätig. Er war Klavierspieler. Bei einer **Truppe** auf der Pier.

(changed meaning, ambivalence lost )

GfW p. 41

Goldberg:

Meg: Er hat früher mal gearbeitet. Als Klavierspieler. Bei der **Combo** auf dem Pier.

RvP

Goldberg: Ach ja? **Arbeitet** er hier?

Meg: Er hat früher gearbeitet. Als Pianist. In einem **Club** auf der Pier.

BP p. 42

"Meg: ... They were very grateful (Pause.) And then they all wanted to give him a **tip**.

And so he took the tip. And then he got on a fast train and he came down here."

GF p. 71

"Meg: ... Alle sagten zu ihm, wir danken Ihnen. (Pause.) Und dann wollten sie ihm alle einen **Wink** geben. Und er nahm den Wink an. Und er hat einen Schnellzug genommen und ist hierhergekommen."

(ambiguity lost, too long, false friend)

GfW p. 41

Meg: ... Und dann wollten ihm alle einen **Wink** geben. Und den hat er auch verstanden. Und dann ist er inen einen D-Zug gestiegen und hierher gekommen.

RvP

Meg: ... Sie waren sehr dankbar. (Pause.) Und dann wollten sie ihm alle ein **Trinkgeld** geben. Und er hat es angenommen. Und er ist mit dem Schnellzug hierher gefahren.

BP p. 42

"Goldberg: Well, of course, you must have one. (He stands.) We'll **have** a party, **eh?** What do you **say?**"

GF p. 72

"Goldberg: Aber natürlich müssen wir eine Geburtstagsfeier haben. (Er steht auf.) Wir **arrangieren** eine Geburtstagsfeier. Was sagen Sie dazu?"  
(too long, different tone, colloquialism lost)

GFw p. 42

Goldberg: ... Wir **organisieren** eine Party. Was meinen Sie?  
(poor rhythm and no rhyme)

RvP

Goldberg: Aber natürlich müssen Sie eine machen. (Steht auf.) Wir **machen** ein Fest, **nu?** Was sagen Sie **dazu?**  
(rhyme maintained, Yiddish character maintained)

BP p. 45

"Meg: (Stanley does not answer) Stan, they won't **wake you up**, I promise. I'll tell them they must be quiet."

GF p. 74

"Meg: (Stanley antwortet nicht) Stan, sie werden dich nicht **stören**, das verspreche ich dir. Ich werden ihnen sagen, sie müssen ruhig sein."  
(meaning changed, too long)

GFw p. 46

Meg: (...) Stan, Sie werden dich nicht **aufwecken**, das verspreche ich dir. Ich sage ihnen, dass sie leise sein müssen.  
(too long)

RvP:

Meg: (Stanley antwortet nicht) Stan, sie werden dich nicht **aufwecken**, das verspreche ich. Ich sag ihnen, sie müssen still sein.

## ACT TWO

BP P. 47

“McCann: I don't think **we've met.**”

GF p. 75

“McCann: Ich glaube, wir sind noch nicht **miteinander bekannt gemacht worden.**”

(too long, wrong tone)

GFw p. 48

McCann: Mir scheint, wir hatten noch nicht **das Vergnügen.**

(too long)

Rvp

McCann: Ich glaub, wir **kennen einander** noch nicht.

BP p. 47

“McCann: I'm glad to meet you, **sir.**”

GF p. 75

“McCann: Erfreut, Ihre Bekanntschaft zu machen.”

(omission, too long)

GFw p. 48

McCann: Freut mich, Ihre Bekanntschaft zu machen, **Sir.**

(too long!)

Rvp

McCann: Sehr erfreut, **mein Herr.**

BP p. 48

“Stanley: Oh really? **That's** unfortunate.”

GF p. 76

“Stanley: So? Schade.”

(too short, not talkative enough)

GFw p. 49

Stanley: Ach ja,? Wie bedauerlich.

Rvp

Stanley: Ach wirklich? **Wie** schade.

BP p. 49

“Stanley: You’ll find it very **bracing**.

McCann: Do you find it bracing?

Stanley: Me? No. **But you will.**”

GF p. 77

“Stanley: Sie werden es sehr **erholsam** finden.

McCann: Finden Sie es erholsam?

Stanley: Ich? Nein. Aber für Sie.”

(humor lost, ambiguity lost, meaning changed)

GFw p. 51

Stanley: Sie werden es ausgesprochen **erholsam** finden.

McCann: Finden Sie es erholsam?

Stanley: Ich? Nein. Aber sie werden **es erholsam** finden.

(humor lost, meaning wrong)

Rvp

Stanley: Sie werden es sehr **anspannend** finden.

McCann: Finden Sie es **anspannend**?

Stanley: Ich? Nein. **Aber Sie garantiert.**

(humor restored!)

BP p. 51

“Stanley: This is a **ridiculous** house to **pick on**. (He rises.)”

GF p. 78

“Stanley: Da haben Sie sich aber ein **komisches** Haus ausgesucht. (Steht auf.)”

(meaning changed, ambiguity lost, too long)

GFw p. 53

Stanley: Dafür haben Sie sich aber eine **seltsame** Adresse ausgesucht.

(ambiguity lost)

Rvp

Stanley: Da haben Sie sich ein **lächerliches** Haus **vorgenommen**.

(In this context, "to pick on" also indicates that Stanley feels harassed by their choice!)

BP p. 51

“McCann: That’s a **terrible** thing to say.”

GF p. 79

“McCann: Wie können Sie so was sagen?”

GFw p. 54

McCann: Wie können Sie so etwas sagen?

(omission, irony lost, meaning changed in both above translations!)

Rvp

McCann: Was für eine **furchtbare** Behauptung.

BP p. 52

“McCann: You’re in a **bad** state, **man**.”

GF p. 79

“McCann: Sie sind aber in einem **schlimmen** Zustand, **mein Lieber**.”

GFw p. 55

McCann: **Mann**, Ihr Zustand ist wirklich nicht der **allerbeste**.

(meaning changed, too long)

Rvp

McCann: Ihnen geht’s aber **schlecht**, **Mann**.

BP p. 53

“Goldberg: I was telling Mr Boles about my **old** mum.”

GF p. 80

“Goldberg: Ich hab Mr. Boles von meinem **lieben** Mütterchen erzählt.”

(meaning changed)

Gfw p. 56

Goldberg: Ich habe Mr. Boles von meiner **alten** Mutter erzählt.

BP p. 53

“Goldberg: ... She wasn’t a **Sunday school teacher** for nothing.”

GF p. 80

“Goldberg: ... Sie hat nicht umsonst **sonntags beim Kindergottesdienst mitgeholfen**.”

*(meaning changed, too long)*

*GFw p. 57*

*Goldberg: Sie hat nicht umsonst in der **Sonntagsschule** unterrichtet.*

*Rvp*

*Goldberg: Sie hat nicht umsonst die **Kinder in Religion** unterrichtet.*

*BP p. 54*

*“Stanley: Don’t **mess me about!**”*

*GF p. 81*

*“Stanley: **Mischen** Sie sich nicht ein!”*

*(meaning wrong!)*

*GFw p. 58*

*Stanley: **Verarschen** Sie mich nicht!*

*(wrong tone)*

*Rvp*

*Stanley: **Blödeln** Sie nicht mit mir herum!*

*(original meaning restored)*

*BP p. 54*

*“Goldberg: Is it a **good** game?”*

*GF p. 81*

*“Goldberg: Geht das Geschäft?”*

*(meaning changed)*

*GFw p. 59*

*Goldberg: **Läuft der Laden?***

*Rvp*

*Goldberg: **Läuft das Geschäft gut?***

*(original meaning restored)*

*BP p. 55*

*“Goldberg: Because I know what it is to wake up with the sun shining, to the sound of the **lawnmower**, all the little birds, the smell of the grass...*

GF p. 82

“Goldberg: Denn ich weiß, was es bedeutet, aufzuwachen, wenn die Sonne scheint, beim Geräusch der **Mähmaschine**,

(meaning changed)

GFw p. 59

Goldberg: Denn ich weiß, wie es ist, aufzuwachen bei Sonnenschein zum Geräusch des **Rasenmähers**...

BP p. 55

“Stanley: Let me – just make this clear. **You don’t bother me**. To me, you’re nothing but a **dirty** joke.”

GF p. 82

“Stanley: Lassen Sie mich – nur eines klarstellen. **Mir macht es nicht aus**. Für mich sind Sie nur ein **schlechter** Witz.”

(meaning wrong)

GFw p. 60

Stanley: Ich möchte – eines ganz klarstellen. **Mich stören Sie nicht**. Für mich sind Sie einfach nur ein **mieser** Witz.

Rvp

Stanley: Lassen Sie mich – eines klarstellen. **Sie stören mich nicht**. Für mich sind Sie nur ein **fauler** Witz.

(original meaning restored)

BP p. 56

“Goldberg: If you want to know the truth, Webber, you’re beginning to **get on my breasts**.”

GF p. 82

“Goldberg: Wenn ich Ihnen die Wahrheit sagen soll, Webber, Sie gehen mir allmählich **auf die Nerven**.”

(humor lost, meaning changed, tone wrong.)

GFw p. 61

Goldberg: Ehrlich gesagt, Webber. Sie gehen mir allmählich **auf den Geist**.

(humor lost, tone wrong)

Rvp

Goldberg: *Um die Wahrheit zu sagen, Webber, Sie gehen mir **auf den Sack**.*

(humor maintained, tone right)

BP p. 57

“Goldberg: *I’m telling you Webber. You’re a washout. Why are you getting on everybody’s **wick**? Why are you driving that old lady off her conk?*”

GFth p. 84

“Goldberg: *Ich sag dir, Webber, du bist eine Niete. Warum gehst du allen Leuten auf die **Nerven**? Warum bringst du **die Alte** ganz aus dem Häuschen?*”

(humor lost, meaning changed)

GFw p. 63

Goldberg: *Ich sag dir was, Webber. Du bist eine Niete. Warum gehst du allen auf den **Sack**? Warum machst du die **alte Dame** völlig **meschugge**?*

(less humorous)

Rvp

Goldberg: *Ich sag dir Webber, du bist eine Niete. Warum gehst du allen auf die **Eier**? Warum machst du die **alte Dame meschugge**?*

(Humor maintained!)

BP p. 57-58

“Goldberg: *Why do you treat that young lady like a leper? **She’s not the leper**, Webber!*

GF p. 84

“Goldberg: *Warum behandelst du die junge Dame wie eine Aussätzige? Sie ist **keine** Aussätzige, Webber!*

(humor lost, ambivalence lost, meaning changed)

GFw p. 63

Goldberg: *Warum behandelst du die junge Dame wie eine Aussätzige? Sie ist **keine** Aussätzige, Webber!*

(Humor lost, meaning changed)

Rvp

Goldberg: *Warum behandelst du die junge Dame wie eine Aussätzige? **Nicht sie ist die** Aussätzige, Webber!*

(humor maintained, meaning correct)

*BP p. 58*

*“Goldberg: You hurt me, Webber. You’re playing **a dirty game.**”*

*GF p. 84*

*“Goldberg: Du hast mich verletzt, Webber. Du spielst **kein ehrliches Spiel.**”*

(meaning changed)

*GFw p. 65*

*Goldberg: Du hast mir wehgetan, Webber. Du spielst ein **mieses Spiel.***

*Rvp*

*Goldberg: Du verletzt mich, Webber. Du machst **zweilichtige Geschäfte.***

(original meaning restored)

*BP p. 58*

*“Stanley: You’re on the wrong **horse.**”*

*GF p. 84*

*“Stanley: Da habt ihr den **Falschen.**”*

(omission, humor lost)

*GFw p. 64*

*Stanley: Ihr seid auf dem **falschen Dampfer.***

*Rvp*

*Stanley: Ihr setzt aufs falsche **Pferd.***

(humor maintained, original meaning restored)

*BP p. 58*

*“Stanley: **Fruit salts.**”*

*GF p. 84*

*“Stanley: **Pulver.**”*

(unspecific, bizarre humor lost)

*GFw p. 64*

*Stanley: **Magenpulver!***

*Rvp*

*Stanley: **Riechsalz.***

(bizarre humor maintained)

*BP p. 61*

*Goldberg: Who watered the **wicket** at Melbourne?*

***Goldberg: Wer hat an das Stadttor von Melbourne gepinkelt?***<sup>342</sup> (*Erste Übersetzung von Thiem*)

*(translation incorrect; complete misunderstanding)*

As noted by Martin Esslin, the earliest German translation of Pinter's play also included a major error in translation, which would indicate that Willy Thiem thought Pinter had merely listed a completely random list of questions for Goldberg to bombard Stanley with.<sup>343</sup> In reality, Pinter poses this specific question, because it directly relates to his great passion of cricket games.

*GF p. 87*

*Goldberg: Wer has das **Spielfeld** in Melbourne bewässert?*

*(Thiem: neu durchgesehene Übersetzung)*

*GFw p. 69*

*Goldberg: Wer hat das **Kricketfeld** in Melbourne gewässert?*

*Rvp*

*Goldberg: Wer hat das **Wicket** in Melbourne bewässert?*

*(original meaning restored)*

*BP p. 62*

*“Goldberg: Your bite is dead. Only your pong is left.*

*McCann: You betrayed our land.*

*Goldberg: You betrayed our **breed.**”*

*GF p. 87*

*“Goldberg: Du kannst nicht mehr beißen. Nur dein Gestank ist noch übrig.*

*McCann: Du hast unser Land verraten.*

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<sup>342</sup> *Explicator*, Vol. 52, 1994.

Goldberg: *Du verrätst unsere **Rasse**.*”

(politically incorrect, too long)

GFw p. 70

Goldberg: *Du hast keinen Biss mehr. Du stinkst schon.*

McCann: *Du hast unser Land verraten.*

Goldberg *Du verrätst unsere **Rasse**.*

(politically incorrect, rhythm lost)

Rvp

Goldberg: *Dein Biss ist schmerzlos. Nur dein Gestank bleibt übrig.*

McCann: *Du hast unser Land verraten.*

Goldberg: *Du hast unsere **Leute** verraten.*

(politically correct, rhythm recreated)

BP p. 64

“Goldberg: *Don’t be shy. (He slaps her **bottom**.)*

GF p. 89

“Goldberg: *Nicht so schüchtern. (Er gibt ihr einen Klaps.)*

(humorous gesture omitted!)

GFw p. 72

Goldberg: *Nur nicht schüchtern. (Er gibt ihr einen Klaps **auf den Hintern**.)*

BP p. 65

“Meg: *Well – it’s very, very nice **to be here tonight, in my house**, and I want to propose a toast to Stanley, because it’s his birthday, and he’s lived **here** for a long while now, and he’s my Stanley now.*”

GF p. 90

“Meg: *Ja, also – es ist sehr, sehr schön, daß wir **hier heute abend** zusammen sind, in meinem Hause, und ich möchte einen Trinkspruch auf Stanley ausbringen, weil heute sein Geburtstag ist, und er hat nun schon eine ganze Weile **bei uns** gewohnt, und er ist jetzt mein Stanley.*”

(humor lost, too long, meaning changed)

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<sup>343</sup>David Lister writes in *The Independent*, 17 Dec. 2005: “As Martin Esslin mentioned in his 1960s article *Pinter Translated*, a German translator, unfamiliar with cricket and its strict rules of etiquette, assumed that wicket must be the old English word for gate.”

Rvp

Meg: *Also – es ist wirklich sehr schön, **hier zu sein, in meinem Haus**, und ich möchte auf Stanley trinken, weil es sein Geburtstag ist, und er schon lange **hier** wohnt und jetzt mein Stanley ist.*

(original meaning and ambivalence restored)

BP p. 66

“Goldberg: ... *I’m sure you’ve never been a prouder man than you are today*

**Mazoltov!** *And may we only meet at **Simchahs!** ...*

GF p. 91

“Goldberg: ... *Ich bin sicher, du bist noch nie so stolz gewesen wie heute. **Maseltovf.***

*Auf daß wir nur bei **glücklichen Anlässen** zusammentreffen.”*

(humor lost, Yiddish omitted, meaning changed, too long)

GFw p. 77

Goldberg: ... *So stolz wie heute, da bin ich sicher, bist du noch nie gewesen.*

**Mazeltov!** *Auf dass wir immer nur bei **Simchas** zusammenfinden.*

(too long)

Rvp

Goldberg: ... *Ich bin sicher, du warst noch nie so stolz wie heute. **Mazeltov!** Auf dass wir uns nur bei **Simchas** treffen.*

BP p. 67

“Goldberg: *The Necessary and the Possible. It **went like a bomb**. Since then I always speak at weddings.”*

GF p. 92

“Goldberg: *Das Notwendige und das Mögliche. Es ging **wie geschmiert**. Seither spreche ich immer bei Hochzeiten.”*

(humor lost, meaning changed)

GFw p. 78

Goldberg: *Über das Notwendige und das Mögliche. Ein **Bombenerfolg**. Seither spreche ich immer bei Hochzeiten.”*

Rvp

Goldberg: *Das Notwendige und das Mögliche. Es schlug ein **wie eine Bombe**. Seitdem spreche ich immer bei Hochzeiten.*

BP p. 68

“Meg (to McCann): *Do you think I should?*”

Goldberg: *Lulu, you’re a big bouncy girl. Come and sit on my lap.*”

GF p. 91

“Meg (to McCann): *Ich weiß nicht, was ich soll?*”

Goldberg: *Lulu, du bist doch ein kräftiges Mädchen, rund wie ein Gummiball.*

*Komm, setz dich auf meinen Schoß.*”

(humor lost, meaning changed, addition, too long, alliteration lost)

GFw p. 79

Goldberg: *Lulu, du bist doch ein strammes Mädchen, drall wie ein Ball. Komm, setz dich auf meinen Schoß.*

Rvp

Meg: (to McCann) *Meinst du soll ich?*

Goldberg: *Lulu, du bist doch ein rundes gesundes Mädchen. Komm, setzt dich auf meinen Schoß.*

BP p. 69

“Goldberg (lifting his glass): **Gesundheit.**”

GF p. 93

“Goldberg (hebt sein Glas hoch): **Dein Wohl.**”

**(Yiddish omitted)**

GFw p. 80

Goldberg: (...) **Prost.**

Rvp

Goldberg: **Zei gesund.**

**(Yiddish restored)**

BP (Pinter's original version 1958)

Goldberg: (...) "quick before it gets cold." *And there on the table what would I see?*

*The nicest piece of gefilte fish you could wish to find on a plate.*

BP p. 69 (Edition 1987)

Goldberg: (...) "quick before it gets cold." (...) *The nicest piece of rollmop and pickled cucumber you could wish to find on a plate.*

GF Thiem p. 94

Goldberg: (...) "komm schnell, sonst wird es kalt!" (...) Der schönste **Rollmops mit saurer Gurke**, der je auf einem Teller zu sehen war.

GF Walter p. 63

Goldberg: (...) "mach schnell, bevor es kalt wird!" Und was stand auf dem Tisch? Der leckerste **Rollmops mit Essiggurke**, den man sich auf einem Teller nur wünschen kann.

Rvp (translation of Pinter's original line)

Goldberg: (...) Das schönste Stück **gefülte Fisch**, das man sich vorstellen kann.

This above lines are quoted to illustrate an example of Yiddish humor, which Pinter himself chose to change over the years. Pinter's joke in the original version of the play (published in 1958) is that gefilte fish is normally always served cold. Thiem's translation (Edition 1970) already uses a new translation, which compensates for the joke in the German language. Walter's translation uses the same solution. For the sake of completing the picture, the author of this thesis also provides a German translation of Pinter's earliest version, which maintains the original Yiddish humor.

BP p. 70

"Goldberg: Or **pop goes the weasel**."

GF p. 94

"Goldberg: Oder der **Plumpsack** geht um."

(humor lost, meaning changed)

GFw p. 82

Goldberg: Oder **hoppe, hoppe** Reiter mit dir gespielt.

BP p. 71

"Meg: (bending over him) Stanley, we're going to **play a game**. Oh, come on, don't be so **sulky**, Stan."

GF p. 95

"Meg: (beugt sich über ihn) Stanley, wir spielen **Blindekuh**. Ach, los, sei doch nicht so verstockt, Stan."

(meaning changed)

GFw p. 84

Meg: (...) Stanley, wir spielen jetzt was. Mach schon, sei kein Frosch, Stan.

Rvp

Meg: (beugt sich über ihn) Stanley, wir **spielen etwas**. Ach, komm, sei nicht so **trotzig**, Stan.

(meaning maintained, rhythm improved)

BP p. 75

"McCann finds the torch on the floor, shines it on the table and Stanley. Lulu is lying **spread-eagled** on the table, Stanley bent over her. Stanley, as soon as the torchlight hit him, begins to giggle."

GF p. 98

"McCann findet die Taschenlampe auf dem Boden und leuchtet auf den Tisch und auf Stanley. Lulu liegt **ausgebreitet** auf dem Tisch. Stanley beugt sich über sie. Stanley fängt an zu kichern, sobald er vom Lichtstrahl getroffen wird."

(meaning changed, violation omitted)

GFw p. 89

"McCann findet die Taschenlampe auf dem Boden und leuchtet damit den Tisch und Stanley an. Lulu liegt mit ausgestreckten Armen und **gespreizten Beinen** auf dem Tisch. Stanley beugt sich über sie. Als der Lichtstrahl Stanley trifft, fängt er an zu kichern."

### **ACT THREE**

BP p. 80

"Meg: Are you going to go for **a ride**?"

GF p. 102

"Meg: Fahren Sie damit ins Grüne?"

(ambivalence lost, changed meaning)

Rvp

Meg: Fahren Sie **eine Runde**?

BP p. 81

"Goldberg (sipping his tea): A good woman. A charming woman. My mother was the same. My wife was **identical**."

GF p. 102

“Goldberg (schlürft den Tee): Eine gute Frau. Eine charmante Frau. Meine Mutter war auch so. Mein Frau war **genauso**.”

(humor lost, ambivalence lost)

GFw p. 96

Goldberg: (...) Eine gute Frau. Eine reizende Frau. Meine Mutter war auch so. Mein Frau **haargenau**.

Rvp

Goldberg (schlürft den Tee): Eine gute Frau. Eine charmante Frau. Meine Mutter war auch so. Meine Frau war ihr **Ebenbild**.

BP p. 81

“Petey: What **came over him**?”

Goldberg (sharply): What came over him? Breakdown, Mr Boles. (...)”

GF p. 103

“Petey: Wie ist es bloß gekommen?”

Goldberg (scharf): Wie es gekommen ist? Zusammenbruch, Mr Boles.”

(meaning changed, ambivalence lost)

GFw p. 97

Petey: Was ist bloß **über ihn gekommen**?

Goldberg (scharf): Was über ihn gekommen ist? Ein Zusammenbruch, Mr Boles.

BP p. 84

“Goldberg: Sellotape? No, no, that’s all right, Mr Boles. It’ll keep him **quiet** for the time being, keep his mind off other things.”

GF p. 105

“Goldberg: Klebestreifen? Nein, nein, das geht schon so, Mr Boles. Dann ist er eine Weile **beschäftigt**, das hält ihn von anderen Dingen ab.”

(meaning incorrect, ambivalence lost!)

GFw p. 100

Goldberg: Klebeband? Nein, nein. lassen Sie mal, Mr Boles. Das hält ihn fürs Erste **ruhig**, lenkt ihn von anderen Dingen ab.

BP p. 85

“Goldberg (**earnestly**): You’ll have a crowded beach today... on a day like this. (...)”

GF Thiem p. 105

“Goldberg (**drängend**): Es wird heute voll sein am Strand... an einem Tag wie heute. (...)”

(meaning changed)

GF Walter p. 101

Goldberg (**ernsthaft**): Am Strand wird heute Hochbetrieb herrschen... an so einem Tag.

BP p. 85

“Petey: That’s all right. That’ll be all right. Mr Goldberg. **Don’t you worry** about that. I’ll be back.”

GF p. 106

“Petey: Das ist in Ordnung. Ist alles in Ordnung, Mr Goldberg. Machen Sie sich keine **Gedanken**. Ich komm bald wieder.”

(meaning changed, too long.)

GFw p. 102

Petey: Das ist schon in Ordnung. Das geht schon alles in Ordnung, Mr Goldberg. Seien Sie **unbesorgt**. Ich komme wieder.

BP p. 85

“Goldberg: Why do you do that all the time? It’s childish, it’s pointless. Its without a **solitary** point.”

GF p. 106

“Goldberg: Warum machst du das immer? Es ist kindisch, es ist sinnlos. Ohne jeden Sinn.”

(humor lost, too short)

GFw p. 102

Goldberg: Warum machst du das ständig? Das ist kindisch, das ist zwecklos. Das hat nicht den mindesten Zweck.

BP p. 86

“McCann (*rising swiftly and going behind Goldberg’s chair. Hissing.*) *Let’s finish and go. Let’s get it over and go. Get the thing done. Let’s finish the **bloody thing**. Let’s get the thing done and go!*”

GF p. 106

“McCann (*steht rash auf und geht hinter Goldbergs Sessel. Zischend.*) *Wir machen’s fertig, und dann gehen wir. Daß wir’s hinter uns haben, und dann gehen wir. Machen die Sache fertig. Machen Schluß mit der **verdammten Sache**. Machen die Sache fertig und gehen!*”

(meaning changed, too long)

GFw p. 103

McCann (...) *Komm, wir bringens's zu Ende und gehen. Bringen wir's hinter uns und gehen. Erledigen wir die Sache. Bringen wir die **verdammte Sache** zu Ende. Lass uns die Sache erledigen und gehen!*

Rvp

McCann (*steht schnell auf und geht hinter Goldbergs Sessel. Zischend.*) *Machen wir fertig und gehen wir. Bringen wir’s hinter uns und gehen wir. Beenden die **scheußliche Sache**. Fertig machen und verschwinden!*

BP p. 87-88

“Goldberg: (...) *That’s why I’ve reached my position, McCann. Because I’ve always been as fit as a fiddle. All my life I’ve said the same. Play up, play up, and **play the game**. Honour thy father and thy mother. All along the line. Follow the line, the line, McCann, and you can’t go wrong. (...) Top in all subjects. And for why? Because I’m telling you, I’m telling you, follow my line? **Follow my mental?** Learn by heart. Never write down a thing. And don’t go too near the water. (...) Keep an eye open for **low-lives**, for schnorrers and for layabouts. (...) I swore on **the good book**.*”

GF p. 107-108

“Goldberg: (...) *Darum habe ich auch meine Position erreicht, McCann. Ich bin immer auf dem Damm gewesen. Mein Leben lang habe ich das gleiche gesagt. Ran an den Ball, ran an den Ball und **spiel fair**. Ehre deinen Vater und deine Mutter. Auf der ganzen Linie. Immer die Linie halten, die Linie, McCann, und du wirst nicht fehlgehen. (...) In allen Fächern der erste. Und warum? Weil ich dir sage, ich sage dir, kannst du mir folgen? **Meinem Gedankengang folgen?** Auswendig lernen.*

*Niemals etwas aufschreiben. Nein. Und nicht zu nahe ans Wasser gehen. (...) Halte die Augen offen für **Vagabunden**, Schnorrer und Herumlungerer. (...) Ich schwor auf die **Heilige Schrift**.”*

(meaning changed, **Yiddish syntax lost**, humor lost, too long)

*GFw p. 104-105*

*Goldberg: (...) Darum habe ich es auch bis zu meiner Position gebracht, McCann.*

*Weil ich immer kerngesund war. Ich habe mein Leben lang dasselbe gesagt.*

***Mitspielen**, und die Spielregeln beachten. Ehre deinen Vater und deine Mutter. Auf der ganzen Linie. Immer der Linie folgen, McCann, der Linie, dann kann nichts schief gehen. (...) In allen Fächern spitze. **Und warum wohl?** Ich sage dir warum, ich sag's dir, kannst du mir folgen? Kannst du **meinem Gedankengang folgen?** (...) Hüte dich vor **Tagedieben**, vor Schnorrern und Nichtstuern. (...) Ich habe auf die **Heilige Schrift** geschworen.*

*Rvp*

*Goldberg: (...) Darum hab ich meine Position erreicht, McCann. Ich war immer*

*kerngesund. Mein Leben lang hab ich dasselbe gesagt. Ran an den Ball, ran an den*

*Ball und **mitspielen**. Ehre deinen Vater und deine Mutter. Auf der ganzen Linie.*

*Immer die Linie halten, die Linie, McCann, und du wirst nicht fehlgehen. (...) Der*

*Erste in jedem Fach. **Und für was?** Weil, ich sag's dir, ich sag's dir, bist du bei mir?*

*Kannst du mir folgen? Nichts aufschreiben und nicht zu nahe ans Wasser. (...) Hüte*

*dich vor **Gesindel**, Schnorrer und **Faulenzer**. (...) Ich schwor auf **das Alte Testament**.*

*(Yiddish syntax restored)*

*BP p. 89*

*“Goldberg: (...) Blow in my mouth (...) **One for the road**.*

*McCann (blows again in his mouth)*

*Goldberg (breaths deeply, **smiles**): Right!*

*(Enter Lulu)*

*GF p. 108*

*“Goldberg: (...) Puste mir in den Mund) (...) **Noch mal, als Zugabe**.*

*McCann (bläst noch einmal in den Mund)*

*Goldberg (atmet tief ein, schüttelt den Kopf und springt auf): Gut. Fertig.*

*(Lulu kommt **links** herein)*

*(humor lost, ambivalence lost, meaning changed)*

GFw p. 106

Goldberg: (...) *Blas mir in den Mund. (...) **Und noch einen für unterwegs.***

McCann (*bläst ihm nochmal in den Mund*)

Goldberg (*atmet tief und **lächelt***) *Sehr gut!*

(*Lulu kommt herein*)

Rvp

Goldberg: (...) *Puste mir in den Mund. (...) **Eine letzte Runde.***

McCann (*bläst noch einmal in den Mund*)

Goldberg (*atmet tief ein, **lächelt***): *Gut!*

(*Lulu kommt herein*)

BP p. 90

*“Lulu: I wouldn’t touch you.”*

GF p. 109

*“Lulu: Ich würde Sie **um nichts** anrühren.”*

GFw p. 108

*Lulu: Ich würde Sie nicht im Traum anfassen.*

(meaning changed, ambivalence lost, too long)

Rvp

*Lulu: Ich rühre Sie nicht an.*

(ambivalence restored)

BP p. 90

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

GF p. 110

*“Lulu: **Sie** haben mich nicht um meiner selbst willen geschätzt. **Sie** haben sich all diese Freiheiten nur herausgenommen, um Ihren Appetit zu stillen. Ach, Nat, warum hast **du** das getan?”*

GFw p. 108

*Lulu: Es ging **Ihnen** dabei gar nicht um mich. **Sie** haben sich diese Freiheiten nur herausgenommen, um Ihre Gier zu befriedigen. Oh, Nat, warum hast **du** das getan?*

(unnecessary switch from formal to familiar address)

Rvp

Lulu: **Du** hast mich nicht um meiner selbst willen geschätzt. **Du** hast dir all die Freiheiten nur genommen, um deinen Appetit zu stillen. Ach Nat, warum hast **du** das getan?"

BP p. 91

"Goldberg: He's only been **unfroked** six months."

GF p. 110

"Goldberg: Er ist erst vor sechs Monaten **aus der Kirche ausgestoßen** worden."

(meaning changed, too long, humor lost)

GFw p.

Goldberg: Er ist seines **Priesteramtes** erst seit sechs Monaten **enthoben**.

Rvp

Goldberg: Er wurde erst vor sechs Monaten des **Priesteramtes entkleidet**.

Pinter uses the verb unfroked instead of defroked, presumably because it is more humorous, so the author of this thesis suggests a similarly humorous translation.

BP p. 92

"McCann: We'll renew your **season ticket**."

GF Thiem p. 111 & GF Walter p. 111 (exactly the same translation, same page)

"McCann: Wir werden deine Monatskarte verlängern."

(meaning changed, humor lost)

Rvp

McCann: Wir werden dein **Abo** verlängern.

(original meaning restored)

BP p. 93

"Goldberg: Keep a **table reserved**."

GF p. 111

"Goldberg: Einen Tisch für dauernd reservieren."

GFw p. 112

Goldberg: Immer einen Tisch reserviert halten.

(too long, meaning unclear)

Rvp

Goldberg: Einen **Stammtisch einrichten**.

BP p. 93

“McCann: Take you for **constitutionals**.

Goldberg: Give you **hot tips**.”

GF p. 112

“McCann: Dich **spazieren führen**.

Goldberg: Die besten **Tips geben**.”

(humor lost, meaning changed)

GFw p. 112

McCann: **Verdauungsspaziergänge** mit dir unternehmen.

Goldberg: Dir **heiße Tipps** geben.

BP p. 93-94

“McCann: You’ll be a success.

Goldberg: You’ll be **integrated**.”

GF p. 112

“McCann: Du wirst Erfolg haben.

Goldberg: Du wirst mit **eingegliedert** werden.”

(too long, meaning changed)

GFw p. 113

McCann: Du wirst erfolgreich sein.

Goldberg: Du wirst **integriert** sein.

BP p. 96

Petey (broken) Stan, don't let them **tell you what to do!**

GF Thiem p. 114

Petey (gebroschen) Stan, laß dir nichts von ihnen sagen, was du machen sollst!

GF Walter p. 116

Petey (gebroschen) Stan, lass dir von denen nicht vorschreiben, was du tun sollst!

(too long)

*Rvp*

*Petey (gebrochen) Stan, lass dir von ihnen **nichts vorschreiben!***

Harold Pinter himself stated that he believes this is the most important line he ever wrote! This can be seen in connection with avoiding the abuse of power. In view of this important context, the author of this thesis believes that both German translations by Thiem and Walter are not smooth and concise enough. Their length makes them unwieldy. Therefore an alternative translation is suggested.

*BP p. 97*

*“Petey: I **bet** you were, too.”*

*GF p. 115*

*“Petey: Dann wirst du’s wohl gewesen sein.”*

(humor & irony lost, ambivalence lost)

*GFw p. 118*

*Petey: Ich **wette**, das warst du auch.*

*Rvp*

*Petey: Darauf würde ich **wetten**.*

In summary, the above comparative study illustrates that Willy Thiem made many errors in his translation of the first German-language version. His mistranslations were often detrimental to Pinter's humor and the ambivalence of meaning, and they do not find the right register. Thiem's and Walter's translations are also often longer than necessary, even adding phases not found in Pinter's source text. Thiem sometimes did not catch the Yiddish phrasing and terms in the play, meaning that Goldberg lacks a clear Yiddish characterization in Thiem's translation. The wit and irony in Pinter's play suffer from the former's clumsy translation.

Michael Walter's new translation improves upon Thiem's in many ways. In particular, many of Thiem's errors in translation and omissions have been corrected, and some of the missing humor in the lines has been restored, and his tone is closer to Pinter's. Walter's translations are often smoother than Thiems, but not always shorter, an aspect to which Walter could have paid closer attention.

The author of this thesis has suggested alternative translations in many cases, where Walter's translation is lacking in humor or ambiguity, or is too lengthy. There are also a few cases, where Walter does not recreate the Yiddish syntax or Yiddish humor of Pinter's source text. For such examples, I have also suggested new translations in an attempt to maintain the humorous ambivalence and dry wit, as well as the specific register/tone, of Pinter's original English dialogue.

## 4 *The Caretaker* by Harold Pinter

### 4.1 A General Plot Outline of *The Caretaker*

Aston, a young man with mental problems, brings home a tramp by the name of Davies to his flat. His abode is filled with junk, piled high everywhere. Aston invites Davies to stay overnight, nevertheless. He has just saved Davies from a fight in a nearby café. Davies accepts the invitation, and begins a tirade against the foreigners in the café. He claims that Davies is only his assumed name, while his real name is Jenkins. He then tells Aston about how he lost his possessions and tried to get some new shoes<sup>344</sup> in a cloister, where the priest rudely dismissed him. Finally he helps Aston clear an old bed from underneath a pile of junk, and lays down to sleep. Aston has been trying to repair an electrical appliance, however he claims the first thing he needs to do is build a shed in the garden.

The next day before Aston leaves, he tells Davies that he may stay and gives him the keys. As soon as he's left, Davies begins poking around in his belongings. Mick, Aston's brother, arrives unexpectedly and confronts Davies with questions about his identity, further establishing identity and belonging as two of the major themes in the play.<sup>345</sup> On the whole, Mick treats Davies with irony and quickly recognizes the latter's lack of human empathy. Mick claims that the house belongs to him, and that he's planning to renovate it. When Ashton returns with a bag for Davies, Mick refuses to let Davies have it. Eventually Mick leaves, and it turns out that the bag doesn't belong to Davis after all, but Aston has been kind enough to bring him some clothes. Davies refuses the shirt, but is pleased with the house jacket. Aston asks him whether he'd like to become the caretaker, but Davies isn't sure.

When Davies comes home to the flat, Mick has returned and tantalizes him again. Then Mick asks him about Aston, and Davies admits that he seems like a strange and troubled person, which angers Mick. Yet Mick also unexpectedly offers him the job

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<sup>344</sup> In the account of her life with Pinter, Antonia Fraser writes that she sees shades of Davies in *The Caretaker* when her husband is again on his eternal quest for a pair of good shoes. (*Fraser*, p. 143.)

<sup>345</sup> Pinter's themes of identity and belonging are not surprising, when one takes into regard that his grandparents were poor Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe.

of caretaker for the building. Davies has come to feel at home in the flat, however he complains about the draft from the window. In return, Aston tells him the long story of his internment in a mental asylum, where he was given electrical shock treatments against his will. His mother signed the release for the treatment, as he was a minor, a decision resulting in partial brain damage and Aston's lack of ability to get a grip on his life.

Davis takes an opportunity to complain to Mick about Aston. Mick tells him all about how he'd like to renovate his house, and leaves as soon as Aston returns. Aston has brought along some shoes for Davies, who doesn't show his appreciation, so Aston goes again. The next day Davies picks a fight with Aston and calling him a mental case and an idiot. Aston asks him to leave, but Davies threatens him with a knife. Although Davies refers to Mick's job offer, Aston tells him to leave again.

When Davies returns with Mick, Aston isn't home. As it turns out, Mick sticks up for his brother, when Davies begins complaining about Aston. Then Mick begins picking on Davies again, calling him a wild animal, and throws him a coin. Next he breaks Aston's Buddha statue on the floor. Mick leaves when Aston returns. Davies makes another attempt to reconcile himself with Aston, even offering him his help.

Eventually Davies has to realize that he's gone too far and jeopardized his invitation to stay. Esslin sees a similarity to the Biblical tale of the expulsion from the Garden of Eden,<sup>346</sup> however Pinter did not agree with such point-blank interpretations of his plays. The essence of this impressive dramatic work revolves around the abuse of power and the lack of human empathy, in addition to the themes of identity and belonging.

## 4.2 Production History of *The Caretaker* Including Reviews

### *The Caretaker* – World Premiere

**Arts Theatre Club at the Arts Theatre, London, 27 April 1960; transferred to the Duchess Theatre, London 30 May 1960**

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<sup>346</sup> Cf. Esslin 1973, p. 67.

Cast: Mick - Alan Bates; Aston - Peter Woodthorpe; Davies - Donald Pleasance;  
 Directed by Donald McWhinnie; Set and Lighting - Brian Currah



*Illus. 12: Donald Pleasance in The Caretaker, London 1960*

***"Through the Looking-Glass:***

*"Harold Pinter has been accused of a negative approach to the drama; he has been called obscure, not without reason, and tantalising (...). His latest play is not obscure in the least; it is excitingly original, and manages not only to be **exceptionally funny** but also to touch the heart."*<sup>347</sup>

In his above review of Pinter's play, critic Alan Pryce-Jones emphasizes that he finds *The Caretaker* to be especially humorous and touching, as well as original and not in the least obscure or negative, as some other reviewers may have claimed in the past.

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<sup>347</sup> *Observer*, April 1960.

***"Things Are Looking Up:***

*"Happily, Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker*, which J.W. Lambert highly praised on its production at the Arts, has now moved into the Duchess Theatre to reassure us. Witty, violent, written with an infallible ear for the rhythm of language, menacing and compassionate, *The Caretaker* is visibly the product of the same disturbing mind that produced *The Birthday Party*, which is now recognised to be one of the major plays of our time."<sup>348</sup>*

Star critic Harold Hobson, whose positive critique of *The Birthday Party* was instrumental in making Pinter popular, reiterates his appreciation of the playwright's wit and talented dialogue writing. He describes the menace and compassion as the two extremes that are visible in the play and concludes by calling *The Caretaker* one of the most important plays of the time.

The original production of *The Caretaker* above was transferred to the Duchess Theatre by May 1960, where it ran for a total of 444 nights and received the *Evening Standard Award* for the best play in 1960.

Pinter stated in an interview in 1979 that apart from *The Caretaker*, he feels that he was not very well received by the theater critics in the beginning. He says the critics might not appreciate a certain play, but when the author's following play is staged, they suddenly praise his earlier play and consider the new play to be deviating from the norm.<sup>349</sup> That comment presumably reflects his personal experience with the reviews of *The Birthday Party* in comparison to his later plays, including *The Caretaker*.

In view of Pinter's very difficult financial situation in the years leading up to *The Caretaker*, it is significant that only after the successful productions of this play in 1960 did he become well off by most standards.<sup>350</sup> Before that he had struggled with poverty, and the character of Davies looking for somewhere to live is reminiscent of Pinter's troubles in finding a home with his wife and young child, but little income, as

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<sup>348</sup> *Sunday Times*, 5 June 1960.

<sup>349</sup> Cf. Gussow, p. 62.

<sup>350</sup> Cf. Fraser, p. 6.

Pinter himself said to Vaclav Havel when visiting him for the first time in former Czechoslovakia on June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1989.<sup>351</sup>

John Russell Taylor proposes that Pinter's success as a playwright, as well as the success of *The Caretaker* as a play, were mainly due to the exposure via television broadcasts, in that both the critical as well as the commercial triumphs of the play made a mass audience familiar with Pinter's work and developed a climate, which enabled his later works to be very readily accepted. He mentions that in addition to broadcasting *The Birthday Party*, Associated-Rediffusion also commissioned three television plays from Pinter.<sup>352</sup>

***The Caretaker* - Lyceum Theatre, New York, October 1961**

Cast: Mick - Alan Bates ; Aston - Robert Shaw; Davies - Donald Pleasence; Director - Donald McWhinnie ; Setting - Brian Currah ; Supervision and Lighting - Paul Morrison ; Production Stage Manager - Fred Hebert

The British cast of this American production was brought together again in 1963 to act in the film *The Caretaker* based on Pinter's screenplay, which was shot in London. The film version was a great success, as was the production with Alan Bates, Robert Shaw and Donald Pleasence in New York.

***The Caretaker* - Mermaid Theatre, London, March 1972**

Cast: Mick - John Hurt; Aston - Jeremy Kemp; Davies - Leonard Rossiter; Directed by Christopher Morahan; Designer - Eileen Diss

*"The Mermaid has been going through a rough patch lately; but with this timely, beautifully cast revival of The Caretaker its star is back in the ascendant. The director, Christopher Morahan, has stripped the work of that semi-religious awe we tend to bring to Pinter nowadays and chosen to play it fast, light and funny. Yet at the same time he shows a sure grasp of the play's essential themes: the threat posed by territorial invasion, the intrusion of the balance of terror into private relationships*

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<sup>351</sup> Ibid, p. 166.

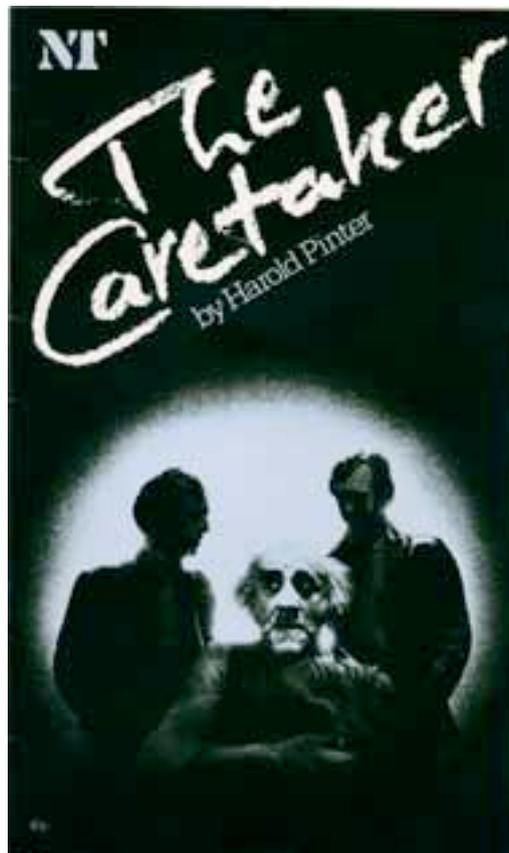
<sup>352</sup> Cf. Taylor, p. 218.

*and man's inability to seize a lifeline even when he's sinking fast.*"<sup>353</sup>

The above review by Pinter's biographer Michael Billington serves to illustrate the importance of the playwright's works in the repertoire of English theaters. Billington emphasizes Pinter's humor, as well as the fact that he dwells on existentialist themes in *The Caretaker*, such as territorial fights and man's ignorance of his own fallability.

***The Caretaker* - Lyttelton Theatre, London, November 1980**

**Cast:** Mick - Jonathan Pryce ; Aston - Kenneth Cranham ; Davies - Warren Mitchell;  
 Directed by Kenneth Ives; Settings - Eileen Diss; Costumes - Barbara Kidd ;  
 Lighting - Mick Hughes



***Illus. 13: Playbill for The Caretaker production in London, 1980***

*"As to Chekov, one goes back to this beautiful play not as much for startling new insights as to see how the characters have been getting along; and it is good to report*

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<sup>353</sup> *Guardian*, 3 March, 1972.

*that I have never seen them in better shape since their first appearance 20 years ago. (...) I find this a great enrichment of the play. It leaves the cruel comedy intact, and likewise the barrier of silence between the brothers; but it exposes Mick's motive, the mainspring of the whole action, as a labyrinthine approach to regaining the lost contact with Aston.*"<sup>354</sup>

The above critique published by Irving Wardle in *The Times* contests Pinter's work with Chekov's and draws a highly favorable comparison. The reviewer justly calls *The Caretaker* a "cruel comedy" and goes into detail about the difficult relationship between the brothers and their personal motives.

### ***The Caretaker - Lyttelton Theatre, London, May - June 1981***

Cast: Mick - Troy Foster; Aston -Oscar James; Davies - Norman Beaton; Directed by Kenneth Ives; Settings - Eileen Diss; Costumes - Lindy Hemming; Lighting - Mick Hughes

#### ***"Marvellous Pinter in Another Colour:***

*"The three actors who are performing The Caretaker at the Lyttelton are all black. This brings an altogether new flavour to a marvellous play. The humour seems more acid and the sadness becomes fierce. (...) There is no sentimentality in the performance. The questions are urgent. And their effect is piercing. The direction, by Kenneth Ives, is somewhat slow-paced but it is full of delectable comedy. And, as always when well done, the play remains a masterpiece.*"<sup>355</sup>

In the above review of *The Caretaker* by John Barber in *The Daily Telegraph*, the critic dwells on the new flavor introduced to Pinter's wonderful play by the all-black cast. Interestingly, Barber claims that the humor becomes more acid and the sadness more intense, indicating that Pinter's humor certainly undergoes different interpretations in accordance with the various casts and directors. The reviewer assures us that the comedy in the play did not suffer under this new interpretation.

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<sup>354</sup> *Times*, 12 November, 1980.

***The Caretaker* - Tour: Theatre Royal, Newcastle Upon Tyne, May 1991; Theatre Royal, Bath, June 1991; Comedy Theatre, London, June 1991**

Cast: Mick - Peter Howitt; Aston - Colin Firth; Davies - Donald Pleasence; **Directed by Harold Pinter**; Designer - Eileen Diss; Costumes - Dany Everett; Lighting - Mick Hughes; Sound - John A. Leonard

***"Taking Care of Death in Sidcup:***

*"If Harold Pinter's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday has been greeted with fulsome accolades, envious attacks and revivals galore, it is largely because of *The Caretaker*. Donald Pleasence (...) and the other tramps (...) have made the play a modern classic. But wait. Is that to overrate it? Well, let us first remember that, while it has driven academics into ecstasies of torturous interpretation, Pinter's own gloss has stayed simple. They have compared Davies with Dionysus, the Wandering Jew, the tempter in an *Everyman* play, or *Everyman* himself. But all Pinter has said is that this is a particular human situation, concerning three particular people. (...) What can we call so subtle, suggestive and fascinating a piece but a classic?"<sup>356</sup>*

This review by Benedict Nightingale would indicate the importance of *The Caretaker* in Pinter's oeuvre, which the critic calls a "modern classic. Nightingale goes on to illustrate the impact of this play by mentioning that it has undergone numerous detailed interpretations by various experts, although Pinter himself has not made such complicated claims. In the playwright's opinion, his play is about the human condition. And in the reviewer's opinion it must be called a classic.

***The Caretaker***

**English Touring Theatre, UK Tour, 2001**

Directed by Gari Jones ; Designed by Pamela McBain ; Sound Designed by Olly Fox; Lighting Designed by Ben Ormerod; Cast: Malcolm Storry as Davies; Julian Lewis-Jones as Aston; Lee Boardman as Mick

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<sup>355</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 27 May 1981.

Quote from *The Observer* on the playbill: "*The best British play of the last 40 years.*"<sup>357</sup>

**Tour Venues:** Malvern Festival Theatre , The Lowry, Salford Quays, The Oxford Playhouse , Theatre Royal, Bury St. Edmonds , Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry , New Wolsey Theatre, Ipswich, Greenwich Theatre, Blackpool Grand Theatre



*Illus. 14: Playbill of The Caretaker, UK Tour 2001*

*"Winning Version of a Masterpiece: Harold Pinter's masterwork receives a fine showing in this opening production of the current tour by English Touring Theatre (...) And memory is a key structure within Pinter's play, where a struggle for territorial rights lies at its heart. (...) Still there is room for a little more ageing. As the play runs in, all performances will deepen and change within Pinter's marvellous language structures."*<sup>358</sup>

<sup>356</sup> *Times*, 21 June, 1991.

<sup>357</sup> Quote from *The Observer* on the playbill.

<sup>358</sup> *Birmingham Post*, October 2001.

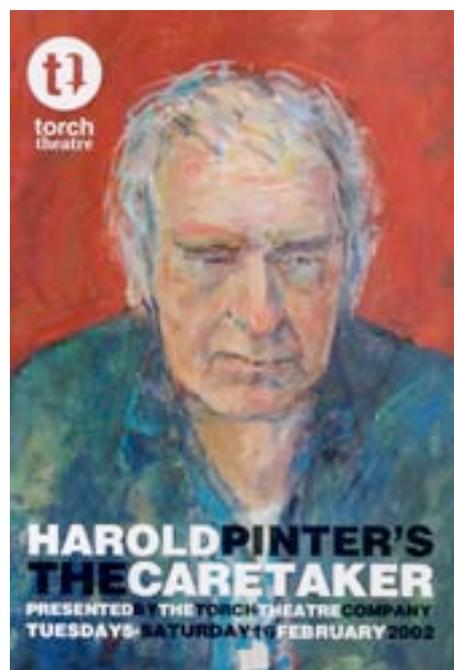
This is only the second of a series of British reviews of *The Caretaker* over the years, which mentions neither humor nor comedy. This review also notes that the performance still has room for improvement. That would perhaps indicate a lack of humor in the production. If that is the case, then it might be said that a lack of comic relief goes to the detriment of this play.

***The Caretaker***

***Torch Theatre Company, Milford Haven, Wales & Welsh Tour, 2002***

Cast:- Sean Kearney as Mick ; Keith Woodason as Aston; Owen Garmon as Davies ;  
Director - Dave Bond ; Set & Costume Designer - Sean Crowley ; Lighting Designer -  
Elanor Higgins

Tour Venues (Spring 2002):- Theatr Gwynedd, Bangor Theatr Ardudwy, Harlech  
Theatr Brycheiniog, Brecon; Aberystwyth Arts Centre ; Taliesin Arts Centre,  
Swansea; Theatr Hafren, Newtown ; The Theatre, Chipping, Norton ; The Sherman  
Theatre, Cardiff



***Illus. 15: Playbill for Torch Theater Production of The Caretaker, 2002***

*"Torch's Anniversary Triumph Sets Standard for Future: The Torch Theatre Company last week launched its 25th anniversary season with a marvellous production of Pinter's 'The Caretaker' - and has set itself a very high benchmark for*

*the next 25 years. It isn't often that an audience leaves a theatre - particularly a cash-strapped, provincial theatre - unable to conceive how a performance could be improved upon, but this was certainly the case last week. The audiences may not have been large - Pinter's undeserved reputation for being 'heavy going' no doubt putting a few people off - but they were unanimous in their praise for a production brimming with humour and menace.*"<sup>359</sup>

In the above review, the critic praises the triumphal anniversary production of Pinter's *The Caretaker*, adding that the Torch Theatre now has a really high benchmark for the future. The reviewer goes on to say that the audience could not imagine how the performance could have been any better and that the production was full of humor and menace, as is certainly fitting for Pinter's early plays.

In summary it can be said that the vast majority of English-language reviews of productions of *The Caretaker* favorably mention Pinter's sense of humor in the play, as well as stressing the menacing aspects of the action on stage. It is the hot and cold contrast of humor and menace, which makes the existential themes in Pinter's play so memorable.

#### **4.2.1 Production History & Reception of *Der Hausmeister* in German Translation**

Harold Pinter personally attended the German-language premiere of *Der Hausmeister*, which took place at the Düsseldorfer Schauspielhaus in 1960.

##### ***Der Hausmeister***

##### **Düsseldorfer Schauspielhaus, Düsseldorf, 29 October 1960**

Mick - Karl-Heinz Martell; Aston - Klaus Knuth; Davies - Otto Rouvel; Inszenierung - Friedhelm Ortman; Ausstattung - Werner Jührke; Deutsche Übersetzung - Willy H. Thiem

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<sup>359</sup> *Western Telegraph*, 13 Feb. 2002.

In a speech Pinter made in Bristol in 1962, he gave a lengthy description of the scandalous reception of the premiere of *Der Hausmeister* in Germany:

*"In Düsseldorf about two years ago I took, as is the Continental custom, a bow with a German cast of 'The Caretaker' at the end of the play on the first night. I was at once booed violently by what must have been the finest collection of boosers in the world. I thought they were using megaphones, but it was pure mouth. The cast was as dogged as the audience, however, and we took thirty-four curtain calls, all to boos. By the thirty-fourth there were only two people left in the house, still booing. I was strangely warmed by all this, and now, whenever I sense a tremor of the old apprehension or expectation, I remember Düsseldorf, and am cured."*<sup>360</sup>

Pinter's honest depiction of the reception of his play in Düsseldorf can presumably be taken for the truth, whereas Albert Schulze Vellinghausen is apparently exaggerating when he writes in *Theater Heute* that the applause and the booing were of equal force:

*"Wohingegen das Haus in Düsseldorf gegen Schluß hin rebellierte, Beifall und Buhrufe hielten sich die Waage."*<sup>361</sup>

Vellinghausen postulates that the play comprises dialogue and avoidance of dialogue. Its unresolved finish resounds with shock. He continues by commenting that it is no wonder that the audience didn't like it, although no new form of theater has ever been accepted enthusiastically. He concludes that the message of this play consists wholly in its form.<sup>362</sup>

In this connection, it is worth noting that Susan Hollis Merritt remarks in her essay entitled *Pinter and Politics* that in Germany "the initial popularity of Pinter's plays was partly due to an appreciation of their social relevance."<sup>363</sup> She proceeds to cite Esslin in *Theatre of the Absurd*, although he does not specifically make a claim of 'initial popularity,' so that it is difficult to ascertain exactly how this impression arose. On the other hand, Hollis Merritt does refer to Pinter's recollection of the chorus of

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<sup>360</sup> Pinter 1998, pp. 16-17.

<sup>361</sup> *Theater Heute*, Nr. 3, 1961.

<sup>362</sup> Esslin 1973, p. 148.

booing at the opening night in Düsseldorf.

***Der Hausmeister***

**Theater am Dom, Cologne, March 1961**

Cast: Mick - Alfred Feussner; Aston - Rolf Herkenrath; Davies - Arno Görke; Regie - Carlheinz Caspari; Bühne - André Thomkins; Klangobjekte - José Luis de Delàs; Technische Leitung - Walter Koch; Inspizienz - Heinz Büttner

Martin Esslin questions the merits of the German translation based on Albert Schulze Vellinghausen's critique in *Theater Heute* (1961):

*"Der Hausmeister ist ein mit größter Sorgfalt komponiertes Stück, das einem Beethovenschen Streichquartett viel eher ähnelt als einem Werk Stockhausens. Weder im Stummen Diener noch im Hausmeister endet das Stück mit einem akzentlosen Aufhören: in beiden Fällen geht es um Leben und Tod eines der Protagonisten. In beiden Stücken fällt der Vorhang in dem Augenblick, da die letzte Konsequenz konfrontiert wird. ... nicht um des Schocks willen, sondern, weil es dem Autor um die Herausarbeitung dieser Höhepunkt-Situation ging...."*<sup>364</sup>

In the above review, star critic Vellinghausen comments that Pinter's play has been very carefully composed and compares it to a quartett by Beethoven in contrast to a piece by Stockhausen. The review also touches upon Pinter's existentialist themes, however he does not mention the humor inherent in the play, probably indicating that Pinter's dry humor was not sufficiently developed in the scope of this production.

*Der Hausmeister* was also adapted as a radio play for the Hessischen Rundfunk in 1962. The director was Martin Walser and the translator is listed as Palma. In this production the names of the three brothers were changed to Arthur and Nicky, and Davis has become Duller. The roles were played by Horst Frank, Gustav Rothe and Günther Schramm.<sup>365</sup> It can be assumed that this radio production may have helped to increase Pinter's popularity in this region of Germany, however no critiques could be

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<sup>363</sup> Gordon, p. 131.

<sup>364</sup> Esslin, p. 33.

<sup>365</sup> *HÖRDATA*: Hörspieldatenbank.

found.

***Der Hausmeister - Theater am Kurfürstendamm, Berlin, 18 April 1962***

Cast: Ernst Ronecker, Gerd Baltus & Peter Lieck; Translation by Willy Thiem

***"Tartuffe von heute: Moderner Engländer im Theater am Kurfürstendamm: "Der Hausmeister"***

*"Der Hausmeister, bereits von 20 deutschen Bühnen vorgebucht (...) Leider wurde ihm die Zubereitung in der Volksbühne nicht gerecht. Harold Pinter ist der Jüngste in der tatkräftigen modernen Dramatikerschule Englands. Er kommt aus der Nachbarschaft Becketts und Kafkas. Trotzdem ist er kein Nachahmer. Er hat einen eigenen Ton. Er bewegt sich innerhalb der Spielregeln des absurden Theaters mit szenischer Phanantasie und jenem trockenen britischen Witz, der so schwer zu übertragen ist. (...) Natürlich, auch Pinter ist komisch. Aber es ist eine makabre Komik, die aus dunklen Quellen gespeist wird. Die scheinbar so banalen Dialoge sollen quälen. Aber die schwarzen Töne stehen hier beziehungslos im Raum. Hie Lustspiel – und dort absurdes Gleichnis. Keiner weiß, was es soll. (...) In Düsseldorf hat das Publikum bei diesem Pinter protestiert. Hier klatschte es fröhlich – weil es keinen Anlaß hatte, betroffen zu sein."*<sup>366</sup>

Critic Heinz Ritter, who was a well-known German linguist, specifically indicates in the above review that Pinter's dry British wit is very difficult to translate. He writes that Pinter is funny, but that his humor is macabre. However the black comedy doesn't seem to make sense to the audience, a fact that can most likely be seen in connection with Willy Thiem's inadequate translation. The members of the audience seem to have preferred this production to the German premiere in Dusseldorf, since they applauded afterwards in Berlin, apparently not seeing any reason for reflection.

***"Pinters Höhlen-Trio im Theater am Kurfürstendamm: "Der Hausmeister"***

*"Bei Pinter bleibt der Nonsens, der Unsinn der Schöpfung. Es geht alles weiter, es ist überhaupt nichts 'passiert'. (...) Wir rühmen den Schauspieler Ernst Ronnecker. Er allein 'trug' die Sache. Wäre er nicht gewesen, wäre das Stück von den Berlinern*

*ausgepfiffen worden wie von den Düsseldorfern im November 1960. Ronnecker bestand die Figur als Nervenkranker, Halbverrückter und als Charakterkomiker. (...) Doch ist es ja Mode geworden, das Mißlingen solcher Aufführungen den Schauspielern zuzuschreiben. Das ist ein Irrtum. Das Mißlingen liegt in der Verworrenheit der Autoren begründet.*<sup>367</sup>

Herbert Pfeiffer's critique of the production of "*Der Hausmeister*" at Theater am Kurfürstendamm is very harsh, and he clearly places the fault with Harold Pinter as author, whose work he does not seem to entirely grasp. It is interesting, however, that Pfeiffer's sole word of praise for this production is mentioned in connection with Ernst Ronnecker's performance as "*Charakterkomiker*" in the role of Davies, the tramp. This makes it apparent that a flicker of Pinter's humor even got through to a beligerant German critic, who is intent on comparing and tearing up a dramatic work he does not seem to sufficiently comprehend.

### ***Der Hausmeister***

#### **Burgtheater-Ensemble im Akademietheater, 4 April 1962**

Regie: Helmuth Matiasek; Ausstattung: Erich Konrad; Besetzung: Günther Haenel, Alexander Trojan & Peter Brogle; Übersetzung von Willy Thiem

The critiques of the above Austrian premiere of *Der Hausmeister* mentions Willy Thiem's poor translation as one of the major problems of the production. The reception varied greatly as recorded by the critics. The most highly qualified review, including a detailed critique of the poor translation, was written by Elisabeth Pablé:

#### ***"Publikum im elektrischen Spannungsfeld:***

***"Es ist zu erwarten, daß (Der Hausmeister) sich in kurzer Zeit einen so festen Platz in den Spielplänen wird erobert haben wie Becketts Godot, mit dem es manches gemeinsam hat, und über den es in manchem hinausreicht. (...) Pinters Einzigartigkeit und Bedeutsamkeit aber liegt darüber hinaus in seinem subtilen Sinn für die Sprachmöglichkeiten, die ihn zum Dichter machen. Uns, bei denen sich der einzelne nicht so wie in England schon durch seine Sprache klassifiziert,***

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<sup>366</sup> *Berliner Zeitung am Abend*, 19 March 1962.

*erschließen sich die unendlichen Feinheiten und Abstufungen der Sprechweise der Lower-Lower Class, wie Pinter sie uns im "Hausmeister" vorführt, nur zum Teil. Da mischen sich Slang und Rotwelsch zu komischen und tragischen Wirkungen und da erwächst aus dem sinnenhaften Geschwätz der Asozialen zarteste Poesie. Um all das in einer deutschen Übersetzung spürbar werden zu lassen, hätte es eines Nachdichters bedurft. Willy H. Thiem ist nicht einmal ein Handwerker. Er beherrscht weder das Cockney-Englisch<sup>368</sup> noch das Deutsch, das ihm entspräche, und so gerät das Stück auf eine falsche Stilebene.... Alle abgedroschenen Redewendungen und drastischen Flüche sind falsch, oft ein und dieselbe Wendung verschieden übertragen oder gar weggelassen: Thiem streicht überhaupt, wo es ihm paßt oder er sich nicht auskennt. Er nimmt es mit den Zeilen nicht genau, gebraucht unentwegt Anglizismen, bringt das Stück um so manche Pointe hintergründiger oder humorvoller Wendungen. Die Redeweise der drei Personen wird überhaupt nicht differenziert, Dialektanklänge in einer Art vergewaltigt, daß sie nicht einmal als deutscher Slang zu bezeichnen sind. Das Schlimmste aber sind die regelrechten, zahlreichen Fehler, die Thiem unterlaufen. So wird eine, eindeutig als Elektroschock erkennbare Behandlung mit "Operation" bezeichnet, obwohl sich im Urtext keinerlei Anhaltspunkt dafür findet; "mate", richtig "Gefährte, Kumpel", wird mit "Junge" übersetzt und dieser Junge dann mit "Sie" angesprochen; "bastard monk" heißt bei Thiem "blöder Mönch"; "smoking jacket", eine Hausjacke, wird "Smokingjacke" genannt; und noch als besonders krasses Beispiel: "Deep azure-blue carpet, unglazed blue and white curtains..." also ein "tief azurblauer Teppich, matte blaue und weiße Vorhänge" wird völlig falsch wiedergegeben mit: "Azur-blauer Teppich, blauweiße Vorhänge in Kunststoff, unlasiert. (...) ... nach dem Ende gingen etwa zwei Drittel des Publikums kopfschüttelnd ab, etwa ein Drittel applaudierte heftig und anhaltend, und etwa siebzig bis achtzig Begeisterte wollten noch nach ungezählten Verbeugungen der Darsteller (...) das Theater kaum verlassen. Harold Pinter hat in Wien gesiegt."<sup>369</sup>*

The above extremely well researched review is highly critical of Willy Thiem's

<sup>367</sup> *Berliner Morgenpost*, 20 April 1962.

<sup>368</sup> Cf. Mengel: *Drama und Kulturtransfer*, p. 18. Mengel quotes this line of Pablé's review incorrectly as: "Cogney-Englisch!"

inadequate translation, while at the same time reviewer Elisabeth Pablé clearly recognizes Pinter's great talent and huge potential. Pablé is fully aware of Pinter's linguistic virtuosity and, with the help of explicit examples of mistranslations, she proves that Thiems translation has done a terrible disservice to Pinter's play, ruining the poetry of his work. It is of great relevance that the audience was so divided in its reception, the majority not able to comprehend it, while a minority still recognized the great potential of *"Der Hausmeister."* Pablé obviously put a lot of work and thought into the above critique, and her review is perhaps one of the most highly detailed of a German-language Pinter production, particularly in terms of the long list of Thiem's incorrect interpretations, which have done a lot of harm to Pinter's play.

The next relevant review was written by Heinz Kindermann, who must be counted amongst the important Austrian theater historians, despite his dishonorable Nazi past. In his critic of the above production, he also notes that the German translation does not do justice to Pinter's dry English wit.

***"Tragikomödie des Aneinander-Vorbeigehens***

*"Harold Pinters Dreipersonenstück 'Der Hausmeister' gehört heute nicht nur zu den meistaufgeführten Repertoirestücken auf dem ganzen Kontinent, sondern auch zu den meistdiskutierten. (...) Dabei erachtet (Pinter) – wie Dürrenmatt und Ionesco – die Komik als "der Tragik absolut gleichberechtigt". Ja, im Hausmeister sei, so deutet Pinter sein kühnes Unterfangen selbst, "die gegebene Situation erst durch den jähen Wechsel der tragischen und komischen Momente, die den poetischen und dramatischen Grundrhythmus des Stücks bestimmen, allgemein zugänglich." (...) Diese von Willy H. Thiem übersetzte tragische Grotteske ist deutsch zu spielen sicherlich viel schwieriger als englisch: der trockene Humor kommt im englischen Sprachgefüge zweifellos schärfer zum Vorschein. Gleichwohl hat der junge, hochbegabte Regisseur Helmuth Matiasek auch aus der deutschen Version alles Zwielfichtige der tragikomischen Stimmungswerte herausgeholt.... (...) Das Publikum war zweigeteilt: ein kleinerer Teil war ratlos oder sogar ein wenig enttäuscht. Der überwiegende Teil aber blieb noch lange im Zuschauerraum, um den drei Darstellern*

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<sup>369</sup> *Kronen-Zeitung*, 6 April 1962.

*und dem ausgezeichneten Regisseur herzlichen Beifall zu klatschen.*<sup>370</sup>

The above review by Kindermann mentions Pinter's important place in European theater, and the fact that his work is being vividly discussed everywhere. The critique also emphasizes the importance of the alternation between comedy and tragedy in Pinter's play, and quotes the playwright himself on this very subject (unfortunately without mentioning the source). The reviewer furthermore describes the difficulty of translating dry English wit into German, however he states that director Matiasek did his best with the German translation. The reception in the audience appears to have slightly improved in contrast to the earlier performance previously reviewed by Elisabeth Pablé.

***"Mit doppeltem Boden: Helmuth Matiasek nahm sich dieses bedeutenden Stückes trotz seiner plumpen Verdeutschung (Willy H. Thiem) an, als ob es ein Original sei."***<sup>371</sup> This review of the same play, which appeared in *Die Furche*, also specifically mentions Willy Thiem's awkward attempt at translating Pinter's important work, which has presumably been detrimental to the production.

***"Dreipersonenstück Der Hausmeister: Harold Pinter kommt beim Wiener Publikum nicht an:***

*"Pinters Dreipersonenstück erzielte in England, aber auch am Broadway und in Paris große Erfolge. In Wien scheint es hingegen bedeutend schwerer zu fallen, für das Werk ein aufgeschlossenes Publikum zu finden. Der Beifall ist dürftig. In der Pause und beim Weggehen, wenn das Stück zu Ende ist, rufen sich die Theaterbesucher Bemerkungen zu, die für die sonst höflichen Wiener ungewöhnlich und für Pinter keinesfalls schmeichelhaft sind."*<sup>372</sup>

The above review published in the *Neue Front* provides us with a detailed description of the reception in the audience, which cannot be called positive. The critic writes that despite the fact that Pinter's play has been very well received in England, the USA and France, this is not at all the case in Vienna. There was only meager applause, and the

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<sup>370</sup> *Neue Österreichische Tageszeitung*, 8 April 1962.

<sup>371</sup> *Furche*, 14 April 1962.

<sup>372</sup> *Neue Front*, 14 April 1962.

audience apparently made unpleasant remarks about the play during and after the production.

Günther Nenning, who wrote the next review of the same production, provides us with a most unflattering view of this production of Pinter's play:

***"Schlechte Moderne: Pinters Der Hausmeister in Wien***

*"Das Publikum erfüllte nicht seine Pflicht (pfeifen, Eier und Tomaten werfen.) Aber wie konnte es das? – Jenes Wiener Publikum, dem die wirkliche, aufrüttelnde Moderne genau so mißfällt wie dieser moderne Schmarren, für den es mit dem respektvoll gemessenen Beifall des ahnungs- und hilflosen Banausentums dankte. (...) Aber ich weiß auch, daß dieses Volapük [i.e. constructed language] der zornigen jungen Männer, die in Wahrheit flennende alte Weiber sind, Brechreiz verursacht, dem man endlich nachgeben muß... keine dauerhafte Grundlage für das Theater, (es ist) einfach unerträglich geworden. (...) Dieses (Stück) war schlecht, langweilig, bloße Imitation sattsam bekannter Vorbilder – wenn auch gekonnte Imitation. Aber in jedem besseren Wiener Kaffeehaus sitzen ein paar Leute, die es genau so können."<sup>373</sup>*

Nenning's questionable attempt to destroy Pinter's reputation in Austria certainly does not speak favorably of the play in any way whatsoever. Quite the opposite, this critic knows no mercy and doesn't leave a hair unscathed on Pinter's head. Nenning is presumably objecting to the poor translation, when he writes about the constructed language (*Volapük*) of the 'Angry Young Men' in British theater of the time, however he unfortunately doesn't objectify his complaints.

***"Was wird hier gespielt?***

*"Selten noch in den letzten Jahren hat ein Stück so gegensätzliche Meinungen ausgelöst wie Harold Pinters Drei-Personen-Dreiakter 'Der Hausmeister'. Die Heftigkeit der Ablehnung hielt der Stärke des Jubels die Waage. In Wien, wo 'Der Hausmeister' nun am Akademietheater gelandet ist, reichten die Ansichten des Publikums und der Kritik von einem Extrem zum anderen. Vier Gruppen haben sich gebildet: eine findet das Stück herrlich und die Aufführung schlecht, eine tadelt das*

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<sup>373</sup> *Neue Zeit*, 18 April 1962.

*Stück und lobt seine Bühnenbewältigung, eine findet alles großartig, eine alles abscheulich. (...) Denn Pinter hat (Kafka, Ionesco, natürlich Beckett) ... zwar gelesen und aufgenommen, dann aber recht eigenständig verarbeitet, sehr viel nationalangelsächsische Züge in das Bühnenerbe seiner Vorgänger gezeichnet. (...) ... an diese Bühnennahmen kommt er nicht heran.*<sup>374</sup>

The above review provides us with a good overview of the various extremely divergent reactions to Pinter's play in the audience. On the one hand, there are a couple of groups of people, who seem to understand and sympathize with what Pinter is saying. And on the other hand, another group does not really understand him at all. This critic would seem to belong to the latter group, since he attests that Pinter does not attain the same status as Kafka, Ionesco and Beckett.

Another critic seems to have a much worse opinion: “... man verließ gähnend die Stätte des Meuchelmordes an allem, was Dramatik heißt....”<sup>375</sup> And a third reviewer considered the production a scandal, which he based on his particularly adept observation of the reactions in the audience: “Schon in der Pause stürzten einige Herren mit hochrotem Kopfaus dem Saal, wobei sie sich wiederholt an die Stirn tippten.”<sup>376</sup>

In the impression of Ewald Mengel, who has specialized in English drama, Thiem's translation shows: “große Defizite. Sie ist umständlich, steif, ohne Rhythmus, und verfehlt die Pinterschen Sprachregister.”<sup>377</sup> He goes on to enumerate several errors in Thiem's original translation, continuing his analysis with a suggested translation of his own.

### ***Der Hausmeister***

#### **Theater Flensburg, Germany, Herbst 1962**

In *Theater Heute*, Klaus Hoffmann writes about the production of *Der Hausmeister* in Flensburg: “... Davies, der eine gefährliche, bösartige Figur ist, war in dieser Version

<sup>374</sup> *Wochenpresse*, 14 April 1962.

<sup>375</sup> *Kleines Volksblatt*, 6 April 1962.

<sup>376</sup> *Neues Österreich*, 6 April 1962.

*ein zittriger Trottel, vor dem eigentlich niemand erschrak.*"<sup>378</sup>

Martin Esslin counters that Davies is neither a clearly dangerous figure, nor a poor idiot, but a subtly characterized, complicated figure, with weaknesses and aggressions, a highly contradictory person, which did not seem to be visible in this German production.<sup>379</sup>

### ***Der Hausmeister***

#### **Kellertheater an der Winkelwiese, Zurich, June 1964**

Directed by Maria von Ostfelden; Mick – Peter Esser; Aston – Heinz Bühlmann; Davies – Kurt Bigger; Stage Design -

*“... da Pinter der nihilistischen Attitüde müde und des Pessimismus überdrüssig ist, entwickelt er seine spezifische Art des Humors; ist der Beckettsche ‘schwarz’, so ist der Pintersche trocken und typisch englisch dazu... Pinters Aussenseiter sind keine Clowns mit metaphysischer Note, sie sind höchst irdisch und handgreiflich... (...) ... um so verblüffter war ich, daß ich mich beim ‘Hausmeister’ über die Massen unterhielt! Nicht so sehr des ‘**trockenen und typisch englischen Humors**’ willen, mit dem Pinter, wie mir scheint, doch ein wenig gar sparsam umgeht, wohl aber weil Frau von Ostfelden bewiesen hat, daß man aus einem ‘konkreten Nichts’ ein überaus konkretes und quicklebendes Etwas machen kann: eine höchst brillante Aufführung nämlich!”<sup>380</sup>*

The above review illustrates once again that Pinter’s ‘dry English wit’ plays an important role in the reception of his plays. Although *The Caretaker* is not necessarily counted amongst Pinter’s ‘comedies of menace’ in the narrower sense, the humorous twists do make for comic relief in an otherwise existential play. In this case the unnamed critic claims that s/he enjoyed the play very much, although s/he doesn’t attribute this to the use of humor, of which s/he writes Pinter could have used yet more. The reviewer is particularly taken with Maria von Ostfelden’s ‘abstract’ directing concept, which s/he finds contributed to a highly brilliant production. S/he

<sup>377</sup> Ringvorlesung: *Literatur im Kontext*, Universität Wien 2008/9, p. 19.

<sup>378</sup> *Theater Heute*, Nov. 1962.

<sup>379</sup> Cf. Esslin 1973, p. 150.

records that the audience applauded a lot, and there were flowers for all of the actors.

*“Der Dialog (...) ist komisch und voll Effekt, dabei platt an der Oberfläche und zuweilen unheimlich-grausig. (...) Feinste Nuancierungen, bis ins kleinste durchfeilt und durchgehalten, sowie eine glänzende Differenzierung der Personen verhelfen dem Stück, das vielleicht zuweilen durch die Länge der einzelnen Dialoge ermüdet, zu fast durchgängiger Bühnenwirksamkeit.”<sup>381</sup>*

This critique is an example of a student review in a student paper, whereby the reviewer even manages to spell Pinter’s first name incorrectly as “Harald.” Nevertheless, the unnamed critic recognizes that the dialogue is intended to be humorous, however s/he remarks that something makes the dialogues become tiresome. Once again, this may be an indication that the director or translator may have neglected some of the comic aspects, since a well-staged comedy should not be tiresome.

*“... ein durch und durch aussergewöhnliches Stück von einer Interessanz, die Stücken anderer Avantgardisten dieser Tage nicht selten abzugehen pflegt. Durch einen äusserst genauen, erstaunlich brillanten Dialog und durch die Brillanz, mit der Charaktere entstehen, erreicht es seltene Dichte und schliesslich auch hohe Spannung...”<sup>382</sup>*

The reviewer of the above critique seems to have clearly recognized Pinter’s incredible talent as a playwright, however he later only briefly remarks on the humor in the above production as the 'desparate hilarity' invoked by the dialogue. This can be seen as an indication that the production at least made an attempt to capture the comic moments in Pinter’s writing.

*“Die Fehlinszenierung Maria von Ostfeldens tut der angestrebten Wirkung des Stücks eindeutig Abbruch. (...) So hat sich der Zuschauer angesichts dieser unsinniger- und unsinnlicherweise ins Abstrakte transponierten Inszenierung – vom Optischen her in*

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<sup>380</sup> *Volksrecht*, 19 June 1964.

<sup>381</sup> *Zürcher Student*, June 1964.

<sup>382</sup> *Zürcher Woche*, 19 June 1964.

*keiner Weise unterstützt – auf die bloße Aussage zu beschränken, die in ihrer stets um dieselben Dinge kreisenden Geschwätzigkeit, ihrem englisch trockenen Humor und ihren absurden Bezügen eigenartig faszinierend zur Geltung kommt.*<sup>383</sup>

Here the review clearly criticizes the director's approach in staging Pinter's play with a totally abstract stage set. Pinter himself did not usually condone such attempts, since he firmly believed that his plays were rooted in reality and called for a realistic staging. Nevertheless, the director seems to have captured Pinter's dry English humor to some extent, as is well documented by the above critique.

*“Bei dem jüngeren Bruder, Aston, hat diese Suche sich verschlagen in den Wahnsinn, die Schizophrenie, beim älteren, Mick, erscheint sie als Spiel mit dem Wahnsinn, als Gaukelei und närrischer Humor.*<sup>384</sup>

The long review of *Der Hausmeister* in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* only mentions humor one single time in connection with Mick's comic routines. It would appear that the actor playing Mick was best able to live up to Pinter's intentions, incorporating some humor into his interpretation of the character. Apart from this, the reviewer notes that Pinter himself wished to have this play staged in a realistic manner and that all of the actors were well-experienced. However, the abstract approach does not seem to work very well.

*“Tatsächlich ist ja Harold Pinter eine gewichtige Figur unter den jungen Dramatikern – meines Wissens wurde er noch nie in Zürich gespielt. (...) Wie so oft jedenfalls kam mir der Text überlang vor, zerdehnt, faserig.*<sup>385</sup>

The final review of this first production of *The Caretaker* in Zürich gives us the impression that the critic is aware of Pinter's great talent as a playwright. However, the unnamed reviewer admits that the dialogue becomes overlong, dragged out and fuzzy. This would indicate that there must have been some sort of problem with the translation and or the staging, because Pinter's dialogues certainly do not have those

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<sup>383</sup> *Tages-Anzeiger*, June 1964.

<sup>384</sup> *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 18 June 1964.

<sup>385</sup> *Die Tat (Zürcher Spiegel)*, 24 June 1964.

effects in a good production of this play.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of February 1973 *Der Hausmeister* was broadcast in Germany in the form of a film made for television. August Everding wrote the screenplay based on Willy Thiem's translation of Pinter's play. The German star Heinz Rühmann played Davies, Gerd Baltus had the role of Aston and Michael Schwarzmaier was Mick. The film was produced by Jürgen Richter; Camera: Alois Nitsche; Set: Otto Stich; Costumes: Claudia Stich.<sup>386</sup> This TV production, featuring a well-known German star, presumably helped to increase the popularity of *Der Hausmeister* in German-speaking countries.

### ***Der Hausmeister***

#### **Theaterkeller im Ursulinenhof, Linz, 7 March 1975**

Director: Martin Truthmann; Cast: Davies – Hubert Mann; Aston - Thomas Kasten; Mick – Gerhard Brössner

The above premiere of *Der Hausmeister* in the capital of Upper Austria elicited a highly negative review, indicating that the critic considered Pinter's dialogue to be nonsensical. The reviewer already claims in his introduction that Pinter is only a 'cheap imitation' of Beckett and Ionesco:

*"Abklatsch von Beckett und Ionesco: Denn Harold Pinter (...) fabrizierte bis dahin nur Abklatsch von Samuel Beckett und Engene Ionesco. (...) Das Stück 'Der Hausmeister' ist schwach. (...) ... die allegorische Deckung mit Harold Pinters Gefasel fällt schwer."*<sup>387</sup>

### ***Der Hausmeister***

#### **Theater im Zimmer, Hamburg, October 1984**

Cast: Mick - Irmgard Rießen; Aston - Inge Maux; Davies - Gerda Gmelin; Inszenierung - Erika Gesell; Bühne - Christian Masuth; Beleuchtung - Sönke Junglaus, Stefan Breitenfeld

<sup>386</sup> iMDB: <http://www.imdb.de/title/tt0299812/>

<sup>387</sup> *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten*, 10 March 1975.



*Illus. 16: Irmgard Reifsen as Mick & Gerda Gmelin as Davies in Der Hausmeister*

This was almost certainly the first all-female production of Pinter's *Caretaker*, which was written for an all-male cast. A highly interesting twist by director Erika Gesell, who presumably wanted to make a feminist statement in the Germany of the early 1980s, where society was generally anything but pro-feminist in comparison to France, England or the USA at that time. In his inquiry to Pinter, his German agent, Klaus Juncker writes of the theater director and actress, who is to play the role of Davies: "*Gerda Gmelin is more or less as masculine as several former actors, and she is very crazy about this idea.*"<sup>388</sup>

Pinter's response to Juncker's request is brief but very positive, clearly indicating that he himself has absolutely no compunctions about women playing men's roles in his plays, and no misogynist tendencies whatsoever: "*I am perfectly for THE CARETAKER to be done by three women. Why not? Let me know how it goes.*"<sup>389</sup> Pinter is generally considered to have been a sort of cryptic feminist, who admired female strength and resilience, and there is no doubt that he loved women. Many of his plays illustrate the weakness of the male sex versus the strength of the female sex.<sup>390</sup>

<sup>388</sup> Letter from Klaus Juncker to Harold Pinter, 14 March 1983. Harold Pinter Archive 8880/6/7.

<sup>389</sup> Letter from Harold Pinter to Klaus Juncker, 21 March 1983, Harold Pinter Archive 8880/6/7.

<sup>390</sup> Cf. *Guardian*, 25 December 2008: Opinions differ on this aspect as mentioned by Billington.

The following critique states that a few very minor changes were made to Pinter's text to accommodate the 'second sex':

*"... da werden die Begriffe vernebelt, Davies spricht zwar über eine frühere Ehe, vermeidet es aber den Partner zu bezeichnen. Später ist man eindeutiger, man beläßt es bei der sprachlichen Fiktion, daß da Männer agieren, die Brüder bleiben Brüder, und von Davies sagt man "er" – der Hausmeister. (...) ... (Gerda Gmelin) wirkte weder maskulin noch feminin, sonder eher wie ein Kobold, manchmal witzig und verschmitzt, dann habgierig und böse, aber immer sehr einsam. Da scheint mir denn überhaupt die weibliche Sicht auf das Stück durzuschlagen: in den Inszenierungen mit Männern, die ich gesehen habe, wurde fast immer die Feindlichkeit, die Konkurrenz, der Kampf um den Platz betont, hier herrschte eher die Angst vor dem Alleinsein und auch die Resignation."<sup>391</sup>*

Reviewer Mechthild Lange writes in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* that the 'feminine perspective' is brought to light in this successful production, particularly noting the difference between an all-male performance she saw earlier, which emphasized hostility, competitiveness and the territorial dispute. Whereas it is the fear of being alone, along with a certain resignation, which are the major emotions in this all-female performance.

Brigitte Ehrich writes a similarly positive review, whereby she first quotes the director of the play followed by the theater director. Both of these women see great potential in the roles that Pinter originally created for male actors, another factor indicating the absolute universality of the themes and characters in his play *The Caretaker*:

*"Gisela Gesell: 'Es ist vielmehr der Stoff selber, der sich anbietet, auch von Frauen interpretiert zu werden.' (...) Gerda Gmelin: 'In diesem Stück ist alles drin – Komik, Empfindsamkeit, Stärke und Traurigkeit.'" Für sie gibt es kaum eine vergleichbare fabelhafte Rolle für eine Schauspielerin ihres Alters (sie wurde in diesem Jahr 65.)"*<sup>392</sup>

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<sup>391</sup> *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 23 October 1984.

In 1985 another adaptation of *The Caretaker* as a radio play was done into a Swiss-German dialect as translated and directed by Hans Hausmann under the title of *Dr Huuswart*. The producer was Schweizer Radio DRS and the name changes of the first German radio play adaptation were maintained. Arthur (Aston) was played by Buddy Elias, Duller (Davies) was played by Ruedi Walter, and Nicky (Mick) was played by Peter Brogle.<sup>393</sup> This is the only adaptation of a play by Pinter into a German dialect known to the author of this thesis. Unfortunately no critiques of this production could be located.

### ***Der Hausmeister - Volkstheater Vienna, 17 February 1996***

Aston - Klaus Haberl; Davies - Peter Uray; Mick - Günther Wiederschwinger;  
Inszenierung: Markus Kupferblum Bühne: Ludwig Reiter Kostüme: Ingrid  
Leibezeder; Übersetzung: Willy Thiem.

The first review of the above production, written by Tomas Gabler, is generally positive, yet it doesn't make any mention of comedy, although the playbill itself does quote Pinter reflecting on the comedy in *The Caretaker*: „*Die drei bleiben - ganz im Sinn Pinters - menschliche Abbilder: Absurde Wesen mit erfreulicher Liebe zur Wortdeutlichkeit.*“<sup>394</sup>

The second review written by Helmut Schneider of the *Salzburger Nachrichten* makes positive mention of the actors, but would seem to blame Pinter's play for lacking topicality and no longer meeting the audience's expectations since the 1960s. It seems that this reviewer is not familiar with the fact that Pinter's plays are still very well received in England, whereas they were not initially well received in German-speaking countries.

„*Markus Kupferblum inszeniert jetzt Pinters Erfolgsstück quasi wie einen modernen Klassiker. So richtig fesseln kann uns die Story freilich trotzdem nicht. (...) Es ist die Erwartung der Zuschauer, die sich seit den sechziger Jahren doch ziemlich verändert hat.*“<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> *Hamburger Abendblatt*, 25 September 1984.

<sup>393</sup> HÖRDAT Hörspieldatenbank.

<sup>394</sup> *Kronen Zeitung*, 18 February 1996.

<sup>395</sup> *Salzburger Nachrichten*, 18 February 1996.

The premiere of new translation of *Der Hausmeister* by Michael Walter took place on 9<sup>th</sup> of June 2001 at the Staatstheater Stuttgart under the direction of Erich Sidler. The following productions have all used Michael Walter's new translation.

***Der Hausmeister* – Theater an der Josefstadt, Vienna, 3 April 2003**

Directed by Alexander Wächter; Cast: Davies – Otto Schenk; Mick – Alexander Strömer; Aston – Martin Zauner; Translated by Michael Walter

The reviews of this production are not positive. Heinz Sichrovsky writes of endless babbling in *News*.<sup>396</sup> The critics in the *Falter* claim that the play was “*Spannend wie ein Schneckenrennen....*”<sup>397</sup> Whereas Caro Wiesauer reports in the *Kurier* that Vienna has a new “*Schlaftheater.*”<sup>398</sup> Altogether, it would seem that Michael Walter’s new translation of *The Caretaker* has not given rise to a better production of the play in Vienna than did Willy Thiem’s older translation.

A similar conclusion is reached by Ewald Mengel: “*In der Übersetzung von Thiem (und auch in der für den Rowohlt Verlag bearbeiteten Übersetzung von Walther (sic)), kann Pinter nicht ankommen....*”<sup>399</sup> In his critique of the translations, Mengel unfortunately does not give any examples from Walter's translation of *The Caretaker*.<sup>400</sup>

Mengel does, however, offer support for his claim that the translation makes a difference, by mentioning two successful productions of Pinter’s plays in Vienna: *Alte Zeiten* (translation by Renate and Martin Esslin) directed by Peter Hall, and *Betrogen* in the translation by Heinrich Maria Rowohlt and directed by Peter Wood. There can be no doubt that Martin Esslin, who was born and raised in Vienna but was forced to flee to England by the Nazis, was able to capture Pinter’s language well, along with his wife Renate. They same can be said of the translator Heinrich Maria Ledig-Rowohlt. These excellent translations were certainly instrumental in the good

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<sup>396</sup> *News*, 10 April 2003.

<sup>397</sup> *Falter*, 11 April 2003.

<sup>398</sup> *Kurier*, 5 April 2003.

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid*, p. 20.

<sup>400</sup> It is of note that someone, who has published on Pinter, would consistently misspell the translator’s name as Michael Walther, possibly indicating that Mengel was not particularly familiar with Walter’s

productions, but obviously the two famous English directors must have also played an important role. In this connection, Mengel mentions that the strict copyright protection of dramatic translations in German-speaking countries prohibits new translations of plays being made to replace earlier translations, which are often not the best of quality for commercial reasons.<sup>401</sup>

***Der Hausmeister* - Theaterkapelle, Berlin, 10 June 2010**

Davies - Sebastian Hülk; Aston – Torsten Spohn; Mick – David Emig; Directed by Christian Kuchenbuch; Translation by Michael Walter

*"Etwas weniger Effekthascherei hätte der Inszenierung gut getan. So taumelt sie, vor lauter Kraft kaum laufen könnend, arg nihilistisch dem Finale entgegen. Immerhin muss man der gesamten Truppe zugestehen, dass sie Figuren, die an den meisten anderen Häusern nur blässliche Klischees wären, mit Kraft und Witz ausstattet und damit ihren Teil beiträgt, die theaterkapelle zu einer echten Perle des Friedrichshains zu machen."<sup>402</sup>*

The above final review of a German production of *Der Hausmeister* in Berlin illustrates that the strength and humor of Pinter's play were recognized by the actors and director, however it would seem that too much gimmickry may have destroyed the overall effect of Pinter's masterwork. Yet the reviewer states that the production has contributed to the good reputation of the theater.

Altogether it can be said that the reception of Pinter's *Der Hausmeister* in German-speaking countries was not good at the onset, mostly due to Willy Thiem's inadequate German translation and the fact that the directors and actors were thus unable to understand Pinter's subtle humor. Over the course of the years, a new version of Thiem's translation replaced the old one, later to be replaced again with a new translation by Michael Walter. This new translation has certainly corrected many of the errors in Thiem's translations, nevertheless the last production of *Der Hausmeister* in Austria in 2003 was not well received. In contrast, the last reviewed production of

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new translations.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

<sup>402</sup> *Zitty Hauptstadtmagazin*, 9 June 2010.

Pinter's play in Berlin in 2010 was relatively well received, probably also due to the popularity of the film versions of *Der Hausmeister* in Germany.

#### 4.2.2 Production History & Reception of *The Caretaker* Screenplay and Film

In an interview with Kenneth Cavander before the release of film of *The Caretaker* Harold Pinter has admitted that he was highly reluctant to do a film based on his play, because he believed: "*I couldn't possibly get anything fresh from the subject.*"<sup>403</sup> He had already been involved with various productions of the play in England and the USA, and was apparently convinced his work could be best expressed on stage. However Clive Donner, the future director of the film, and several others managed to convince Pinter that it was well worth a shot on the screen. To quote Pinter:

*"They simply said, 'This is the idea, this is the work, these are the characters – how can it all be transposed into a film in keeping with what we have, what must be there.' We had long discussions about it, and I worked out a kind of draft.*"<sup>404</sup>

The draft screenplay of *The Caretaker* dates back to October 1962, and the manuscript is found in the Pinter Archives at the British Museum. On the script, Alan Bates is already listed as Mick, Donald Pleasance as Davies and Robert Shaw as Aston. These same actors actually do star in the motion picture production. Another version of the screenplay is dated June 1963, and it exhibits some fine-tuning in contrast to the original draft.<sup>405</sup> In a related context, Pinter had already stated in a conversation dating from 1961: "*I don't find television confining or restrictive, and it isn't limited to realism, necessarily.*"<sup>406</sup>

In an interview conducted in 1963, Pinter made a series of comments on the new film adaptation of *The Caretaker*. Regarding the idea for the film, he says that Donald Pleasance had a lot to do with it. Clive Donner agreed that the film could be made in a

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<sup>403</sup> McCrindle, p. 212.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid, p. 213.

<sup>405</sup> Cf. Gale, p. 430.

<sup>406</sup> Pinter 1981a, p. 11.

very low budget shot on location, with little work done to adapt it as a screenplay.<sup>407</sup> With regard to how he worked on this project with director Clive Donner, Pinter stated:

*"... Clive (Donner) and I did work intensively on the script when I really got excited about the idea. We saw it as a film, and we worked on it as a film. (...) There was an obvious overall pattern to the work, but we had to see it and work on it in terms of movement from one thing to another."*<sup>408</sup>

*The Caretaker* was released in February 1964, but it was first screened at the Berlin Film Festival on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 1963. In Berlin it was awarded with a Silver Bear at the Film Festival on 1<sup>st</sup> of July 1963. Later it also won the Edinburgh Festival certificate of Merit as the only British Film to do so. The film was also released under the different title of *The Guest* in the United States, presumably to avoid a mix-up with another film by the name of *The Caretakers* by Hal Bartlett. However when *The Guest* was broadcast on American television, several cuts had been made, particularly involving the outdoor scenes Pinter had added to the screenplay in contrast to the original dramatic work.<sup>409</sup>

The original financing of the film fell through, because the American international distribution organization withdrew at the last moment. In an interview, Pinter has described how he sat down in a pub with all those involved, and they dropped names for the purpose of fund-raising. In the course of this, they were offered 60,000 pounds more than they required and thus turned down. Pinter commented on this in retrospect: *"If anybody had come forward then, and offered the amount of money that would have made it possible for us to shoot the film in a studio, or in a more lavish way, I wouldn't have taken it."*<sup>410</sup>

Sufficient funds were raised collaboratively, involving such famous supporters as Richard Burton, Noel Coward, Peter Hall, Peter Sellers and Elizabeth Taylor. After the funding was secured, an old house was rented in a run-down area at the outskirts

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<sup>407</sup> Cf. McCrindle, p. 211.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid, p. 213.

<sup>409</sup> Cf. Gale, p. 114.

of London. *"The film was shot in five weeks at 31 Downs Road, a derelict house in Hackney, not far from Pinter's childhood home, and at 36 Dover Street, London."*<sup>411</sup>

The film was made during one of the coldest winters England had experienced in years, and all of the outdoor scenes show snow, intensifying the cold and threatening atmosphere of the underlying themes of miscommunication, betrayal and distrust.

Director Clive Donner has stated that Harold Pinter was present during most of the shooting, which Pinter confirms, adding that in his opinion, most other scriptwriters are probably not present to the extent that he was. Pinter also comments that practically the entire film was shot in a kneeling or crouched posture, due to the cramped space of the attic room on location.<sup>412</sup> Cameraman Nicolas Roeg, who later became famous for films such as *Fahrenheit 451*, was responsible for the fantastic cinematography, achieved despite having to work under exceedingly difficult conditions. Summing up his experience in making the film on such a low budget, Pinter remarked as follows: *"We all did it for nothing at all, no money, no conveniences, public conveniences, no facilities... and I think it's been worth doing."*<sup>413</sup>

The notable cast of the black-and-white movie included Donald Pleasence as Davies and Alan Bates as Mick, who both revamped the roles they had already play in the New York staging of the play, as well as Robert Shaw as a very convincing Aston. Pleasance is said to believe that he made his all-time best performance in this film.<sup>414</sup> In a film review in the *Sunday Times*, Dilys Powell writes:

*"It is a triangle plot: old tramp falls in with two incalculable young men, brothers, fancies himself siding with one against the other, over-reaches himself. Harold Pinter, both in his original play and in the screenplay, which with the minimum of alteration he has based on it, has devised a dazzling series of comic and sinister variations. (...) Mr Pinter offers no message, no moral: and there is no attempt to end on a sentimental image. Perhaps that is why the film is so catching; it looks deceptively*

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<sup>410</sup> McCrindle, pp. 216-217.

<sup>411</sup> Gale, p. 98.

<sup>412</sup> Cf. McCrindle, p. 217.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid, p. 222.

<sup>414</sup> Gale, p. 98.

*undramatic, as if the characters had been trapped unawares, behaving as they might behave in private, illogically, absurdly. In particular absurdly, for on the surface it is a very funny film: slyly funny ironically funny hilariously funny.*"<sup>415</sup>



***Illus. 17: Poster of *The Caretaker* directed by Clive Donner***

For the sake of supplementing the above British review with one from an American point of view, Stanley Kauffmann comments similarly, immediately touching upon Pinter's humor, in his review of *The Guest* (title of the American release): *"It is a fascinating, funny, eerie film, a work of murky evocations boiling out of grubby naturalistic minutiae. That is, of course, the Pinter method, but in this film we are seeing that method used at its best so far."*<sup>416</sup>

The above two reviews concur with each other, in that they both emphasize the humor underlying the action of Pinter's screenplay, which is typically spiced with absurd and menacing moments. Not only did Clive Donner's film version of *The Caretaker*

<sup>415</sup> *Sunday Times*, 1963: Film Review by Dilys Powell.

<sup>416</sup> Gale, p. 98.

receive a Golden Bear at the Film Festival in Berlin, but the reception of the movie was also excellent in Great Britain and the USA.

### 4.3 General Commentaries on *The Caretaker*

*"The Caretaker ist überdies, sowohl in der Differenziertheit und dem Rhythmus seiner Sprache, wie in der Ökonomie seines Aufbaus, ein Kunstwerk von hohem Rang."*<sup>417</sup>

- Martin Esslin

To begin with, it is important to note that the various English-language editions of *The Caretaker* are not entirely consistent. Steven Gale confirms this problem: *"In examining the stage version of 'The Caretaker,' I discovered that several different editions had been published – with little or no notation that any changes had been made."*<sup>418</sup> This thesis refers to the first Grover Press edition, which was published in New York in 1961, and is therefore as close as possible to Pinter's first script.

In the context of comedy, a highly revealing comment on *The Caretaker* is made by John Russell Brown in his book *The Theater Language* with regard to Pinter's wonderful use of humor and plays on words, which often result in multiple ambiguities and levels of interpretation:

*"In 'The Caretaker' there is a run of puns which, under a surface concern for incidental difficulties, expresses a constant fear of being killed or mutilated. The very title of the play is a pun: taking care of the house, and also, take care of an unwanted enemy; protection and liquidation. A further meaning might also be that of taking someone else's care on one's shoulders."*<sup>419</sup>

In his book entitled *Sharp Cut*, Steven Gale also remarks in detail on Pinter's brilliant use of comedy in *The Caretaker* and how it is related to Yiddish comedy, as well as slapstick routines, and Beckett's black humor: *"... the action in the drama is sometimes funny. An example of this is the obviously intended humor of Mick and*

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<sup>417</sup> Esslin 1973, p. 70.

<sup>418</sup> Gale, p. 113.

*Aston passing Davies's bag back and forth. It is the comic shtick of the English music hall and Yiddish comedy, like that done by Laurel and Hardy, Abbott and Costello, and the Three Stooges in movies, or even in Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot'."*<sup>420</sup>

In *Travels with Harold*, David Hugh Jones reflects insightfully on the best way to stage Pinter's *Caretaker*, and the tricky relationship between the tragic and comical elements:

*"The trap with Harold's work, for performers and audiences, is to approach it too earnestly or portentously. I have always tried to interpret his plays with as much humor and humanity as possible. There is always mischief lurking in the darkest corners. The world of The Caretaker is a bleak one, its characters damaged and lonely. But they are all going to survive. And in their dance to that end they show a frenetic vitality and a wry sense of the ridiculous that balance heartache and laughter. Funny, but not too funny."*<sup>421</sup>

When considering the character of Davies in this context, some of the comparisons that naturally come to mind are the existential tramp figure in Charlie Chaplin's movies, or Samuel Beckett's tramps, who are unclear about where they are headed in life. This would also apply to Davies, who seems lost and forlorn at the beginning of the play, trying to get a foothold in a lodging via his acquaintance, Aston, who has lent him a helping hand. In the end, Davies has come full circle by rejecting the helping hand and not being cooperative enough, and he is evicted from the safe haven back into the cold streets of bare survival.

Pinter's biographer, the famous critic Michael Billington, has cleverly described *The Caretaker* as "an austere masterpiece: a universally recognizable play about political maneuvering, fraternal love, spiritual isolation, language as a negotiating weapon or a form of cover-up."<sup>422</sup> Billington furthermore attributes the play "masterly technical skill and thunderstorm tension"<sup>423</sup> and he goes on to describe how the Pinter has

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<sup>419</sup> Brown, p. 44.

<sup>420</sup> Gale, p. 429.

<sup>421</sup> *Front & Center*, Fall 2003, pp. 147–48.

<sup>422</sup> *New York Times*, 25 December 2008.

<sup>423</sup> *Guardian*, 25 December 2008.

created a poetic masterpiece out of everyday speech, in which pipe dreams and power plays form survival strategies. Considering the great success of *The Caretaker*, it was certainly a turning point in the playwright's career in that it made him famous and brought him financial security.

A highly characteristic line, which clearly exemplifies Pinter's understanding of the ambivalence of language and human relations as one of the themes of *The Caretaker* is the following, spoken by Mick as he surmises that he cannot trust the tramp Davies, and that Davies might even be a danger to his brother Aston: “(...) *Ever since you come (sic) into this house, there's been nothing but trouble. Honest. I can take nothing you say at face value. Every word you speak is open to any number of different interpretations. Most of what you say is lies. You're nothing else but a wild animal, when you come down to it. You're a barbarian.*”<sup>424</sup>

On the other hand, Aston's character also seems somewhat disoriented at the beginning of the play. The invitation he extends to Davies, the tramp, is an attempt to reorient his life purpose. He is constantly tinkering with appliances, trying to fix things. As the play progresses, Aston becomes more determined in his use of language and the expression of his wishes. The battle of wills in *The Caretaker* revolves around whether Davies or Mick will triumph in winning over Aston for himself. Eventually it is Mick, who reasserts his role as 'his brother's keeper,' and Davies who loses the friends he might have had. Mick manipulates both Davies and Aston into terminating their mutual friendship. Interestingly, though, Mick does not evict Davies himself, but allows Aston to do so, giving Aston the feeling it is his own decision. In reality this is a premeditated psychological power play, however it is not necessarily ill intended. Mick presumably does see Davies as a threat to his brother's well being. According to John Arden, the play depicts the unexpected strength of family ties in the face of an intruder.<sup>425</sup>

Much has been said about Aston's Buddha statue, which is pristine and white, and may be seen as symbolizing purity and a clean state of mind or as a general symbol of belief. On the other hand Pinter claims he does not consciously make use of symbols,

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<sup>424</sup> Pinter 1961, p. 77.

so that the significance of the statue should not be overrated. In any case it may be seen as yet another absurd manifestation in Aston's room full of useless bric-a-brac, such as the unconnected gas stove and the broken appliances. However when Mick shatters the statue, we tend to see this as a statement of power and decision, which symbolizes Mick's demonstration of power over Davies and Aston. Although Aston expressed his liking for the statue, he does not confront Mick with what the latter has done. Furthermore, it is Mick's superior command of language, which he repeatedly uses for the purpose of intimidation.

In *The Dark Comedy*, J.L. Styan remarks on the characters in Pinter's play and how they contrast and interact with each other, resulting in an exciting plot with a high degree of uncertainty and unexpected twists in loyalties and friendships:

*"(Pinter) increasingly writes a vertical, rather than a horizontal, drama, engulfing his audience in the tensions of distrust between his characters. In 'The Caretaker,' the brothers Aston and Mick who entertain Davies in their house are quite opposite in temperament. Aston is introverted and gentle; Mick is extroverted and aggressive. But each has his own way of teasing the old man, of undermining his pride and confidence."*<sup>426</sup>

Esslin believes that Davies' lack of sophisticated vocabulary also puts him at a disadvantage in comparison to Mick, who repeatedly uses technical terms and jargon to put Davies at unease.<sup>427</sup> The use of language and register in Pinter's works underlines the power plays taking place in them.

Regarding Pinter's realistic use of language, *The Caretaker* underwent a humorous case of censorship. When the play was first staged at the Duchess Theater in the year of 1960, the expression "*piss off*" was prohibited by the Lord Chamberlain's censorship office. However Esslin claims that the offensive phrase was "*she does fuck-all*," which was to be replaced with "*bigger-all*." However Pinter objected, because of the fact that the two-syllable word would ruin the rhythm of his text. This

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<sup>425</sup> Gale, p. 110.

<sup>426</sup> Styan, p. 248.

<sup>427</sup> Cf. Esslin 1972, p. 47.

is a good example of his wonderful sense of the weight of words. Later when the film of *The Caretaker* was released, the British Board of Film Censors allowed it, finally granting Pinter his full right of poetic license.<sup>428</sup>

Perhaps one of the most moving commentaries on *The Caretaker* was made by Dominique de Villepin, Prime Minister of France, at the ceremony where he decorated Pinter with the *Chevalier de Légion d'Honneur* for his unerring political activism on human rights, as well as his literary oeuvre:

*"When I was 16, I read contemporary literature at the University of Nanterre. The first of my courses, which was also my first stroke of luck, was to spend a year studying your play 'The Caretaker.' It was shortly after May 1968, at a time when one could still believe that words can shape destiny. Since then, your works have been with me. Always."*<sup>429</sup>

Dominique de Villepin's highly personal remarks are a good indication of the power of expression found in all of Pinter's works, in terms of the human condition, in particular with reference to *The Caretaker*, and the international impact thereof.

#### 4.4 Pinter's Comments on *The Caretaker*

When responding to criticism in the *Sunday Times* that the audience laughed in reaction to *The Caretaker* as though it were just a farce, Pinter made most revealing comment on his play:

*"Certainly I laughed myself while writing 'The Caretaker' but not all the time, not 'indiscriminately.' An element of the absurd is, I think, one of the features of the play, but at the same time I did not intend it to be merely a laughable farce. If there hadn't been other issues at stake the play would not have been written. (...) But where the comic and the tragic (...) are closely interwoven, certain members of an audience will*

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<sup>428</sup> Cf. Gale, p. 430.

<sup>429</sup> Dominique Villepin: Speech by at the ceremony for the award of the decoration of *Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur*, 17 Jan. 2007.

*always give emphasis to the comic as opposed to the other, for by so doing they rationalize the other out of existence. (...) As far as I'm concerned, 'The Caretaker' is funny, up to a point. Beyond that point it ceases to be funny, and it was because of that point that I wrote it.'*<sup>430</sup>

Pinter has also said in an article in the *Village Voice* that *The Caretaker* is about love.<sup>431</sup> The author of this thesis sees this primarily in the sense of 'you are your brother's keeper.' The fraternal relationship between the two brothers is threatened by Davies' intrusion, to some extent. Mick, the elder brother and 'keeper' of Aston, the younger, mentally challenged brother, whom Mick keeps in a flat in the house he owns, eventually overcomes this threat to his family ties, and reasserts his relationship with Aston. Davies, the lonely tramp in search of a caring relationship, has lost the care offered by Aston. With regard to the ending of the play, which John Russell Taylor calls 'psychological realism,' Pinter describes how it came to be as follows:

*"At the end... there are two people alone in a room, and one of them must go in such a way as to produce a sense of complete separation and finality. I thought originally that the play must end with the violent death of one at the hands of the other. But then I realized, when I got to the point, that the characters as they had grown could never act in this way...."*<sup>432</sup>

In an interview with Kenneth Tynan, Harold Pinter has made it clear that he sees *The Caretaker* as a "...particular human situation, concerning three particular people."<sup>433</sup> Interestingly, Davies loses his important role as soon as he no longer satisfies Aston's need for companionship. However, as Mick has taken on the role of Aston's fraternal companion, it is not a traumatic situation for Aston.

Pinter's finely honed sense of irony and lack of patience with questions regarding the interpretation of his plays and the motivation behind his character's actions are illustrated well by the following letter dated November 1966 in response to questions about *The Caretaker*:

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<sup>430</sup> Esslin 1980b, pp. 249-250.

<sup>431</sup> Cf. Gale, p. 108.

*"I'm glad to know of the interest of Form 5A in THE CARETAKER. I will answer your questions quite frankly:*

*i) Davies' papers are at Sidcup because that's where they are. ii) His name is assumed because he assumed it. iii) The two brothers see little of each other because they rarely meet. iv) Aston fiddles with his plugs because he likes doing it. v) When he goes out to walk, he walks. vi) The monk swears at Davies because he doesn't like him. vii) Davies doesn't like coloured people. viii) He refuses to believe that he makes noises during the night. ix) The Buddha is a Buddha. x) The shed is a shed.*

*I assure you that these answers to your questions are not intended to be funny. My best wishes to you all.*"<sup>434</sup>

In a more expansive mood, on the other hand, Pinter has written that he takes people in a certain situation as a starting point for the inspiration and interpretation of his plays:

*"I start off with people, who come into a particular situation. I certainly don't write from any kind of abstract idea. And I wouldn't know a symbol if I saw one. I don't see that there's anything very strange about The Caretaker, for instance, and I can't quite understand why so many people regard it in the way they do. It seems to me a very straightforward and simple play.*"<sup>435</sup>

In terms of the developments in the world of theater, Pinter is convinced that *The Caretaker* wouldn't have been as successful a few years earlier. Furthermore, he recognizes that his play makes the former categories of comedy and tragedy obsolete, as he has literally invented a new genre of drama, which makes use of both in a new way, ultimately labeled 'comedy of menace' by some critics: *"The Caretaker wouldn't have been put on, and certainly wouldn't have run, before 1957. The old categories of comedy and tragedy and farce are irrelevant..."*<sup>436</sup> Pinter's insightful remark makes us realize just how innovative *The Caretaker* actually was as a new form of drama at the

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<sup>432</sup> Taylor, p. 336.

<sup>433</sup> Gale, p. 111.

<sup>434</sup> *Telegraph*. 21 July 2010.

<sup>435</sup> Pinter 1981a, p. 10.

<sup>436</sup> Pinter 1981a, p. 12.

time. Pinter had caught the wave of absurdist theater and was one of the first English playwrights to develop his own typical style, which ultimately went far beyond that genre.

#### **4.5 A Comparison of the Play *The Caretaker* with the Film - Screenplay by Harold Pinter**

In highly revealing interview with Pinter and Clive Donner about the new film of *The Caretaker*, Donner said the following about his work on the film, and the lack of necessity to rewrite Pinter's entire play: *"It seemed to me that within the situation (of the play), and within the relationship that developed between the characters, there was enough action, enough excitement seen through the eye of a film camera, without imposing conventional film action treatment."*<sup>437</sup>

Clearly it is possible to make good use of close-ups and framed scenes in a film, enabling a somewhat more intimate interpretation, whereas these techniques can hardly be applied in the theater, which is, however the more immediate and personal medium for producing a dramatic work. I believe the film has a more claustrophobic atmosphere than is possible on stage, simply because the film was shot in a tiny attic room crammed full of junk.

Particularly the menacing scenes of the disputes between Davies and Mick take on a very threatening nature, as some of these shots are close-ups or high-angle shots. A faint, final smile between Mick and Aston is also specially framed in the film, and this is significant, because it gives us the impression that Mick and Aston have renewed their fraternal bond and come out stronger than Davies, the intruder who threatened to undermine their relationship with each other. In the play, Pinter does give the same stage directions, yet it would seem very difficult to get the audience to focus on this moment to the same extent as in the film. Clive Donner believed that the complex psychological interplay of the characters was hampered by the actors' need to project

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<sup>437</sup> McCrindle, p. 213.

out into the audience of a theater. Pinter agreed that this aspect of acting could make the staging of his play difficult in that sense.<sup>438</sup>

By including several outdoors scenes, on the other hand, Pinter achieves a more naturalistic production with the film than any stage production can afford. The opening scene is outdoors on a street in a rundown area of London, and we can see the snow and sense the cold as Davies follows Aston home. A sense of desperation is created when we realize that Davies is a tramp and might freeze to death in the cold weather if he has to spend the night outdoors. In this context, Pinter has said:

*"What I'm very pleased about myself is that in the film, as opposed to the play, we see a real house and real snow outside, dirty snow and the streets. We don't see them very often but they're there... and these characters move in the context of a real world – as I believe they do. In the play, when people were confronted with just a set... they often assumed it was all taking place in limbo...."*<sup>439</sup>

A particularly naturalistic shot is that of the two brothers outdoors in the garden, when Aston looks over the boards he intends to use in building his shed. The silent moment at the edge of the pond serves to indicate their family bond and gives us a feeling of the surroundings of their dwelling place. Pinter commented as follows on this scene:

*"One of my favorite scenes in 'The Caretaker' was to take the brothers out into the garden. There was a little pond, which was referred to in the text of the play and I saw the two brothers, played by Robert Shaw and Alan Bates, standing and simply looking into the pond.... That's something which one can only achieve in the cinema."*<sup>440</sup>

Another reference to real life added to the film is Mick's recitation of the bus numbers, the schedule and the route to Sidcup, which is reminiscent of Pinter's early sketch *The Black and White*. This is an additional realistic touch, which is heightened by the comic scene in the film, when Mick offers to take Davies to Sidcup and only drives him in a circle, letting him out again where he began. This scene is symbolic

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<sup>438</sup> Cf. Ibid, p. 214.

<sup>439</sup> Gale, p. 101.

<sup>440</sup> Pinter 1998, p. 51.

for the ride Davies goes on when he becomes a guest in Aston's room. Katherine Burkmann also finds that the futile ride Mick takes Davies on serves to underline Pinter's gallows humor.<sup>441</sup> The tramp is incapable of establishing a lasting relationship with his benefactor and ends up exactly where he began – without a place to stay. Burkmann goes on to elaborate how much Pinter liked Donner's film version, because the latter focused so closely on Pinter's characters, as well as doing away with any unnecessary ambiguous moments.<sup>442</sup>

A further advantage of film over stage production is the opportunity to use the camera to achieve comic effects by means of close-ups or absurd angle shots, such as the shots of the men under the window dormers, where they have almost no space to move and look funny in the cramped quarters.

*"In addition the author uses the camera's focusing ability for comic effect, as when Davies, in the foreground, close-up, notes that there is 'a good bit of stuff' in the room, and the piled junk seen behind him almost seems to be closing in, or when the tramp asks, 'Is this in use at all?' while he and Aston unload the buried bed."<sup>443</sup>*

One of the main differences between the film and the dramatic work lies in the fact that the entire play takes place in one single room. All of the action is confined to this space, whereas the film version opens up to include street scenes, Mick's delivery van, the garden at the back of the house, as well as the staircase and the hallway. In contrast the scenes in the room show very confined quarters, which gives the film a better sense of space and allows for variation, so that the film does not appear wooden, as some filmed stage productions do. In this respect Pinter has commented that he believes the shooting on location did make a difference in the film, saying that it was tremendous for the actors to not have to shoot in a studio: *"It sounds rather strange, almost as if I'm asking for realism, which I'm not – but I think it did an awful*

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<sup>441</sup> Cf. Burkmann, p. 88. Burkman also writes on p. 161: "When I remarked to Mr. Donner in my interview with him that the 'van' scene in 'The Caretaker' seemed especially brutal, he suggested that the point of comedy is brutality and that Pinter had noted in the course of production on the film: 'If it's not funny, it's nothing.'"

<sup>442</sup> Ibid, p. 89.

<sup>443</sup> Gale, pp. 102-103.

*lot for the actors to go up real stairs, open real doors in a house which existed, with a dirty garden and a back wall.*"<sup>444</sup>

Pinter thought the limitations of the location gave a fresh aspect to his work, and he believed the actors felt the same way, coming up with a new approach that hadn't been used on stage.

*"In the play, when people were confronted with just a set, a room and a door, they often assumed it was all taking place in limbo, in a vacuum, and the world outside hardly existed, or had existed at some point, but was only half-remembered. Now one thing, which I think is triumphantly expressed in the film, is Clive's concentration on the characters when they're outside the room, outside the house.*"<sup>445</sup>

At the same time, the opening scene of the film already gives the audience a good idea of what to expect in the plot development. We see a tramp intent on following and conversing with a better-dressed man, who seems to know exactly where he's going. We also see a watchful man, who is intent on observing the first two men. A certain tension is established and we know the house will play a role in the storyline. Day and night scenes also help to underline the tension and further the plot in the film, enabling a more realistic passing of time and seasons.

The music and sound effects in the film are relatively minimalistic, but they serve the purpose well, enhancing the tension and the feeling of foreboding. Mick's quick movements and the fact that he often disappears off the edge of the frame, also make him seem threatening vis-à-vis Davies and elusive towards Aston. This adds to our creeping feeling of discomfort while we watch the film. However, our ambiguous attitude towards Mick is strengthened, when we see him climbing the stairs, which is generally seen as signaling the positive in film analysis. Yet he hides in an alcove at the top of the stairs to watch the flat, again making us feel ambivalent about him. The complexity of his character and his ever-changing role in the story, as well as his attitudes towards his brother and Davies, further enhance the tension in the plot. It's unclear whether the intruder in Aston's flat is Mick or Davies, as their status changes.

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<sup>444</sup> McCrindle, p. 217.

With reference to the movie in an article Pinter co-authored, entitled *Filming The Caretaker*, he stated:

*"... when you have two people... and one asks the other if he would like to be caretaker in this house, and the other bloke... who is work-shy, doesn't want in fact to say no, he doesn't want the job, but at the same time he wants to edge it round... there's an enormous amount of internal conflict within one of the characters and external conflict between them – and it's exciting cinema."<sup>446</sup>*

Eventually the storyline becomes circular, as Davies is expelled from the flat and the vicious circle of his life as a homeless man continues over again. This has come to be as a result of the inability of the three men to communicate well with each other. If Davies had been able and willing to communicate his gratitude to Aston, instead of placing his bet on Mick to support him, then Davies may have been able to stay on. But Mick has only baited him for the purpose of setting him up against Aston. Mick presumably feels threatened by the intruder in his brother's life. And Davies, in turn, seems to feel threatened as he watches the two brothers together in the garden from the window. After Mick has renewed his relationship with Aston, Aston no longer sees the need in keeping Davies for his companionship. Davies is no longer wanted, because he no longer serves a purpose, or satisfies a need.

Pinter himself has commented on the differences between the play and the film in the scene when the two brothers smile at each other, a moment which is written into the stage directions of the play, upon which one of them exits. This significant moment is somewhat different in the film, according to Pinter:

*"Now, on film, either you're going to hold both things, in other words, the two brother smiling, then one goes out. But it isn't the same as the stage; you don't get the complex thing which makes it so much of a moment on the stage. The distance, the separation cannot be the same. The balance, the timing, and the rhythm to this, the silent music,*

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<sup>445</sup> Ibid.

<sup>446</sup> Gale, p. 100.

*as it were, are determined in so many different ways. (...) The balance, the editing balance is crucial....* <sup>447</sup>

The absurd nature of Pinter's storyline is further heightened by Davies' attack on the foreigners in the café and all foreigners, in general, although, when Mick asks him where he's from, it seems he's probably a 'foreigner' from Wales, himself. Davies never admits his true identity, claiming that his real name is Jenkins, whereas Davies, a Scottish name, is only assumed. The audience gets the impression that he doesn't really know who he is, ever since he left his wife, whom he describes as an unclean woman, who left her dirty underclothes in the soup pot on the stove. This may well be a projection of Davies' own uncleanliness, which is apparent both in the film and in the majority of the stage productions. On the other hand, the chaotic stage set reflects Aston's cluttered state of mind, as well as the lacking sense of direction in Davies' life.

On the whole, Pinter seemed to be convinced with the high quality of *The Caretaker*, when he remarked about the actors' performances in an interview in 1963:

*"Surely with this film, all the actors would subscribe to what is being done. Because we weren't asking them merely to go on there and give their performances as such; we were asking to examine how you should give your performance in relation to producing a finished film."* <sup>448</sup>

To sum up the quality of the film version of *The Caretaker*, it can be said that Clive Donner has made a convincing film based on Harold Pinter's excellent screenplay. And Pinter's screenplay was definitely instrumental in the high quality of the film. Steven Gale supports this opinion as follows:

*"Donner's film 'Rouge Male,' in which Pinter appeared three years after 'The Caretaker' was filmed, is not nearly as good a motion picture as The Caretaker. This is early proof that it is Pinter's scripts that determine the quality of the product and that his directors do their best work from those scripts."* <sup>449</sup>

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<sup>447</sup> McCrindle, p. 219.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid, p. 220.

<sup>449</sup> Gale, p. 429.

It would appear that Pinter has focused on developing the existing element in the original dramatic work to create the screenplay for *The Caretaker*. He hasn't added any sub-plots or new characters; he merely augments the situations, which he already depicted in the stage play. This is in contrast to the way Pinter works in writing screenplays based on novels by other writers. In that case, he tends to only pick out certain scenes from the novels and develop them further, whereas much of the bulk of these works doesn't appear on the screen. This would seem natural, since novels aren't written for dramatic production, whereas plays are conceived for that very purpose. In essence, the stage play and the screenplay for *The Caretaker* are really very similar, as might be expected.

Pinter compared his play *The Caretaker* with the film based on the play in an interview in London in 1963:

*"You can say that the play has been 'opened out' in the sense that things I'd yearned to do, without knowing it, in writing for the stage, crystallized when I came to think about it as a film. Until then I didn't know that I wanted to do them, because I'd accepted the limitations of the stage. For instance, there's a scene in the garden of the house, which is very silent: two silent figures with a third looking on. I think in the film one has been able to hit the relationship of the brothers more clearly than in the play."<sup>450</sup>*

Pinter goes on to describe the scene between Aston, the elder brother, and Mick, the younger one, when Mick asks him if he'd like to be caretaker. In the film he finds this scene "*extraordinarily successful*,"<sup>451</sup> whereas he feels that it never really worked quite like that on stage. Director Clive Donner agrees that the film deals with this scene much more subtly and specifically, eventually uncovering more and more aspects of each character and thus enriching them.

After completion of the film, but prior to its release in 1963, Clive Donner remarked that he didn't believe his work was just an art house film, or had to be screened as

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<sup>450</sup> McCrindle, p. 214.

such, on the other hand he didn't plead for an ordinary general release either, because he was convinced that the film demanded a certain concentration, attention and effort that regular audiences would not bring. In his opinion the film deserved a position somewhere between a full general release and a limited art house release, which could be achieved if cinemas would agree to screen it in chosen locations.<sup>452</sup>

Pinter's final comment on the newly made film of *The Caretaker* in an interview in 1963 sums up his satisfaction with the film version, as well as emphasizing how important he felt the humor was in this work: "... *I think myself the work has been preserved in film, I think it's perfectly true to what I wrote, and I think it's funny.*"<sup>453</sup>

#### **4.6 A Comparative Study of *The Caretaker* (Donner) with *Der Hausmeister* (Pflegerl) and Thiem & Walter's Translations**

This comparative study will focus on the differences between *The Caretaker* (screenplay by Harold Pinter) as filmed by Clive Donner in 1963 in England and *Der Hausmeister* (translated by Willy Thiem) as staged by Dietmar Pflegerl in 1987 in the Landestheater Salzburg, Austria. Various basic aspects, including length, cuts or deletions and chronology will be briefly compared at the onset. This will be followed by an indepth contrastive study of verbal, paralinguistic (or vocal) and visual (or nonverbal) impressions, while focusing on humor, in particular. The atmospheres of each of the productions will also be briefly described with a view to revealing the differences.

The English production used for the purpose of this comparative study is the film version of *The Caretaker*: Screenplay by Harold Pinter based on his own play; Directed by Clive Donner; Starring Donald Pleasence as Davies, Alan Bates as Mick and Robert Shaw as Aston; Produced by Charles Kasher and Michael Birkett; English

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<sup>451</sup> Cf. Ibid, pp. 214-215.

<sup>452</sup> Cf. Ibid, p. 221.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid, p. 222.

Subtitles by Jane Luchford; Released in 1963, UK. This film production won a Silver Bear Extraordinary Jury Prize at the Berlin Film Festival in 1963, which significantly contributed to the popularity of *Der Hausmeister* in German-speaking countries.

The German-language version is a live recording of a stage production of *Der Hausmeister* by Harold Pinter in German translation by Willy Thiem; Directed by Dietmar Pfliegerl; Starring Karl Merkatz as Davies, Michael Gampe as Aston, and Daniel Reinhard as Mick; Stage Design by Peter Pongratz; Costumes by Elisabeth Blanke; Camera by Peter Fröhlich, Heinz Herzig & Peter Parth; Sound Design by Anton Rümmele; Staged at Kammerspiele des Landestheaters Salzburg; Produced by ORF Landesstudio Salzburg; 1987, Austria.

To begin with, Clive Donner's film version conveys the claustrophobic atmosphere of Aston's room as both a haven and a trap, in that the attic room, where most of the film was shot, is narrow and confining, as well as being stuffed full of clutter.

Unfortunately Dietmar Pfliegerl's production in Salzburg does not impart the same feeling of being trapped, which may be more difficult to achieve on a stage, but certainly not impossible. The piles of clutter are much smaller in Salzburg. Instead, Karl Merkatz uses the broad stage to pace about at will, and doesn't give the same impression of a trapped animal like Donald Pleasence does in Clive Donner's film production.

The English film production uses eerie minimalistic sound effects to underline the menacing atmosphere created by the action of the storyline, which are highly effective overall. The Salzburg theater production uses practically no sound effects apart from the sound of the rain, which is constantly falling outside the high windows that run across the backdrop of the stage.

This comparative study involves contrasting two very different productions, one of which is an English-language film version of *The Caretaker* and the other a German-language recording of a stage production of *Der Hausmeister*. It is obvious that not all the factors of these productions can be compared, because the first was produced for the screen, whereas the second was conceived for the stage. Therefore this contrastive study will focus mainly on the aspects of humor and comedy, the interpretation of

which would seem to be one of the major differences between English-language and German-language productions of Pinter's works.

The method used for this analysis will involve an examination of whether the humorous lines in the London film production of *The Caretaker* are also rendered humorously in the Salzburg stage production, and whether the audience reacts with laughter. Whenever relevant, this will also include the mention of mimics and gestures, as well as tone and register of voice. It will also make note of any comic interplay, or lack thereof, between the characters.

The sequences, which were added to the screenplay by Pinter, will not be included in this analysis, as there are no German dialogue lines to compare them with in the Salzburg stage production, otherwise the comparison would be biased. The differences between Pinter's original script for *The Caretaker* and his screenplay for the film will only be touched upon very briefly, when necessary, since they are manifold and not the subject of this study. Wherever the Salzburg production remains true to Pinter's text, no extra mention will be made. Only in cases where the productions differ, or humor is lacking, will a comparison be drawn.

The abbreviations and time codes used for the two versions are:

*CT: The Caretaker* Dir. Clive Donner (1963) (time code in chapters due to conversion)

*HM Salzburg: Der Hausmeister* Dir. Dietmar Pfegerl (1987) (time code in minutes)

*HM Thiem: Der Hausmeister* Transl. Willy H. Thiem (1976) (according to page no.)

*HM Walter: Der Hausmeister* Transl. Michael Walter (2005) (according to page no.)

To begin with, the Austrian production does not remain entirely true to Pinter's original text or Willy Thiem's translation. Aston's first line in the production was ad-libbed in Salzburg, and proves to be superfluous, as he immediately does what he says:

*HM Salzburg 00:45*

*Aston: Ich werde sofort das Licht anmachen, ja.*

Karl Merkatz also quite freely ad-libs his first monologue changing Pinter's words to the derogatory forms of "*Pollaken und Neger*" (HM 1:25) instead of "Polen, Schwarze." It is questionable whether this is necessary, and doubtful whether Pinter would have condoned these changes, since he did not write: 'Pollaks and niggers.'

CT 1/8:03

Davies: (...) ***I got to loosen myself up. You see what I mean?***

***(Donald Pleasence boxes in the air, as though he were loosening up before a boxing match.)***

HM Salzburg 2:12

Davies: (...) ***"Ich muss mir erst ein bisschen Luft machen. Sie verstehen schon was ich meine, ne?"***

HM Thiem p. 120

Davies: (...) ***zuerst muß ich mich mal entspannen, verstehen Sie?***

HM Walter p. 123

Davies: (...) ***zuallerst muss ich mich erst mal entspannen, verstehst du?***

In this case, Karl Merkatz's ad-libbed lines seem to come closer to Pinter's original meaning, and even manage to incorporate some of the humor Pinter intended, because the idea of an evil-smelling tramp "blowing off his" steam creates a comic twist, which is entirely lost in both Willy Thiem's and Michael Walter's translations. However the most humorous interpretation in the film is presented by Donald Pleasence, who actually boxes in the air to indicate that he is loosening up before a boxing match, which is a comical image for an aging tramp.

CT 8:17

Davies: (...) ***I tell you what, though, Ill have a bit of that tobacco for me pipe, if you like.***

HM Salzburg 2:30

Davies: (...) ***Du, aber ich mach Ihnen vielleicht einen anderen Vorschlag, ne?***

***Vielleicht kann ich ein bisschen Tabak nehmen für meine Pfeife. Wenn es Ihnen recht ist? (...)***

*HM Thiem p. 120*

*Davies: (...) Ich nehme ein bisschen Tabak für meine Pfeife, wenn's Ihnen recht ist.*

*HM Walter p. 123-124*

*Davies: (...) Ich hätte nichts gegen ein paar Krümmel für meine Pfeife, wenn du erlaubst.*



***Illus. 18: Karl Merkatz as Davies & Michael Gampe as Aston***

In this instance, Merkatz also manages to conjure up a more comical line than Thiem's translation, upon which the Salzburg production was based. His twitching and rotating hands are also amusing, as is his repetitive use of "ne?" inserted at the end of many of his lines. However, Walter's translation above is certainly also far better than Thiem's, which basically lacks any humorous twist. Donald Pleasence also brings in a similarly comical touch to Pinter's humorous lines.



*Illus. 19: The Caretaker with Donald Pleasence & Robert Shaw*

*CT 2/0:14*

*Davies: Anyway, I'm obliged to you, letting me, er... letting me have **a bit of a rest, like**, for a few minutes.*

*HM Salzburg 8:26*

*Davies: Ich bin Ihnen ja sehr verbunden, dass Sie mir **eine kleine Verschnaufpause** gönnen, ne?*

*HM Thiem p. 122*

*Davies: Jedenfalls bin ich Ihnen sehr verbunden, daß ich mich... daß ich mich so ein **bißchen ausruhen kann**... ein paar Minuten.*

*HM Walter p. 127*

*Davies: Na, jedenfalls, ich bin dir was schuldig, dass ich... dass ich mich hier ein **bisschen ausruhen darf**, so... für ein paar Minuten.*

Interestingly, Merkatz has also found a somewhat better translation for this line than Thiem and Walter, using the word “*Verschnaufpause*” in German, which is akin to “breather” in English. And it should also be noted that Walter chooses this opportunity to change from the formal German address of “*Sie*” to the familiar “*Du*,” which may either indicate a close friendship or a lack of respect, amongst others, in the German language.

*CT (Pinter 1961) p. 14-15*

*Davies: ... I'm worth a bite to eat, **en I?** (...) **What do you think I am, a wild animal?** (...) I've a good mind to report you to your mother superior.*

*CT (Film 1963) 2/4:10*

*Davies: ... I'm worth a bite to eat, aren't I? (...) What do you think I am, a wild animal? (...) I've a good mind to report you to your mother superior.*

*HM Salzburg 14:50*

*Davies: ... einen Bissen werd ich mir doch wohl noch verdient haben, ne? (...) OMISSION (...) Ich beklage mich noch bei eurer Äbtissin, hab ich gesagt.*

*HM Thiem p. 125*

*Davies: ... einen Bissen hab ich mir doch verdient, nicht? (...) Was glaubt ihr was ich bin, ein wildes Tier? (...) Ich beschwer mich noch bei eurer Äbtissin.*

*HM Walter p. 132*

*Davies: ... einen Bissen zu essen bin ich ja wohl noch wert, oder? (...) Für was haltet ihr mich, ein wildes Tier? (...) Ich hätte gut Lust, euch eurer Mutter Oberin zu melden.*



***Illus. 20: Karl Merkatz as Davies & Michael Gampe as Aston***

In the above case, we can compare five different versions of the same monologue. Pinter's original text, published in 1961, uses a colloquial form of "aren't I?", whereas Pleasence interestingly uses correct grammar in the film. Nevertheless, this remark certainly has a comical effect in English. In the Salzburg production Merkatz uses a very long version of Thiem's translation, which unfortunately leaves out Pinter's double entendre and is therefore somewhat less humorous. Walter's new translation of

the first line is much closer to the source text, and restores Pinter's full meaning. Later in the monologue, Merkatz omits one of Pinter's lines, which serves the purpose of showing how badly Davies felt he was being treated, and also has a humorous twist, because he was almost "foraging" for something to eat, just like a wild animal. Whether or not Dietmar Pfliegerl actually cut this line, it's a shame that it's missing in the Salzburg production.

*CT 2/6:15*

*Aston: I'll see what I can look out for you.*

*Davies: Thank you. Thank you. Good luck. (Tips his imaginary hat to Aston in appreciation.) I can't go on like this.*

*HM Salzburg 18:55*

*Aston: Ich werd sehen, ob ich welche finde.*

***Davies: Na ja, wollen wir's hoffen, ne?***

*HM Thiem p. 126*

*Aston: Ich werd sehen, ob ich was finde.*

***Davies: So geht's nicht weiter.***

*HM Walter p. 134*

*Aston: Ich schau mal, was ich für dich finden kann.*

***Davies: Viel Glück. Ich kann so nicht weiter.***

In the above instance, Merkatz' ad-libbed line evokes this first clear response of laughter in the audience at the Salzburg performance. Merkatz underlines Davies' lack of appreciation with this line, and it is in keeping with Pinter's depiction of Davies' character, although it does deviate from the source text. In the English film production in contrast, Pleasence uses gestics to curry favor with Aston, which is also in keeping with Davies' character.

*CT 2/6:52*

*Aston: You can sleep here if you like.*

*Davies: 'Ere? Well, I don't know about that. (pause in disbelief) How long for?*

*(...)*

*Davies: Here. Where? (turns around in disbelief and looks at the huge pile of junk behind him)*

*Aston: (pointing) There's a bed beneath all this.*

*Davies: Hey? (In disbelief. Turns around.) Oh, well, that's handy. (Ha, ha)*

*HM Salzburg 18:45*

*Aston: Sie können hier übernachten, wenn sie wollen.*

*Hier? ...das geht, du, hä? Für wie lange denn? (laughter from the audience!)*

*(...)*

*Davies: Wie, da?*

*Aston: (zeigt hin) Dahinter ist noch ein Bett.*

*Davies: Das ist aber praktisch, na?*

In the above dialogue exchange in Donner's film production, situation comedy is created by Pinter's screenplay, which calls for a huge pile of junk to be heaped on the second bed, hiding it from Davies' view. Aston's proposal that Davies might sleep there certainly appears to be absurdly comical from the cinematic point of view. Merkatz evokes another round of laughter from the theater audience by unexpectedly changing his dismissal of the invitation to spend the night into sudden acceptance, in keeping with Pinter's original dialogue. Whereas Pleasence, surprised by the proposal, initially feigns comical disbelief, which also immediately turns into acceptance.

*CT 2/8:00*

*Davies: (picks up the statue of Buddha.) What's this?*

*Aston (taking and studying it). That's a Buddha.*

*Davies: Get on! (incredulously)*

*HM Salzburg 21:10*

*Davies (nimmt die Buddha-Figur) Was ist das da, hä?*

*Aston: Ein Buddha.*

*Davies: Ein Buddha – was Sie nicht sagen.*

*Aston: (nimmt sie ihm vorsorglich ab)*

In the above exchange, Pleasence manages to evoke laughter from the viewer by screwing up his face incredulously at the Buddha in the London production. Whereas Merkatz gives the audience the impression he might drop the Buddha, which Aston

quickly takes from him. However this short scene doesn't really provoke an audible reaction in the audience at the Salzburg production.

*CT 2/8:57*

*Aston hands Davies a large old wine bottle in a basket to put aside.*

*Davies: (turns around and futilely tries to open it behind Aston's back) Hm.*

The above comical scene must have been written by Pinter especially for the screenplay, because it does not take place in the original play.

*CT (Pinter 1961) p. 18*

*Davies: (...) That's a **nice sheet**.*

*Aston: The blanket'll be a **bit dusty**.*

*Davies: Don't you worry about that.*

*CT (Donner 1963) 3/0:20*

*Aston: (picks up an old blanket and shakes it so that dust flies into Davies' face)*

*Davies: (watching, sneezes)*

*HM Salzburg 23:00*

*Davis: (häuft Sachen auf den Herd, die teilweise wieder herunterfallen)*

*Aston: (gibt Davies ein Leintuch) Hier.*

*Davies: Oh du, das ist aber ein sauberes Leintuch, hä!*

*Aston: Die Decke ist aber ein **bisschen schmutzig**.*

*Davies: Das macht nichts.*

Pinter apparently cut the dialogue from the above scene in the screenplay.

Nevertheless, there is plenty of situation comedy when the dust flies into Pleasence's face and he sneezes. In the case of the Salzburg production, Merkatz creates his own sitcom by heaping things on top of the stove, while they naturally begin tumbling down again. In the following line about the blanket, dusty has been substituted by dirty, which doesn't evoke any particular response from the audience.

In the next scene, when Aston asks Davies in the Salzburg production, "*Wie steht's mit Geld,*" this elicits a little laughter from the audience, because it is obviously a rhetorical question. After Aston gives him a few shillings, he stoops in a servile

manner to push Aston's suitcase under the latter's bed. Merkatz' manner of currying favor with Aston also provokes a few laughs. However, it becomes evident in the German production that Willy Thiem misunderstood one of Pinter's lines, which he did not really render correctly into German:

*CT (1961) p. 19*

*Davies: (...) You see, I got nothing for all that week's work I did last week. **That's the position, that's what it is.***

*CT 3/1:07*

*Davies: I got nothing for all that week's work I done last week. **That's the position, that's what it is.***

*HM Thiem p. 129*

*Davies: (...) Ich hab ja nichts für die Arbeit bekommen vorige Woche. **So stehn die Aktien, so stehn sie.***

*HM Walter p. 138*

*Davies: (...) Weißt du, ich hab keinen Pfifferling gekriegt für die ganze Woche Schufterei letzte Woche. **So ist die Lage, so sieht's aus.***

Thiem's translation uses a metaphor dealing with the stock market, which is not in keeping with Davies' social status, and does not reflect the original meaning of Pinter's line. This is duly corrected by Walter in his new translation to reflect Davies' low level of education. In addition, we can also see that Pinter changed Davies' original English line from the correct verb 'did' to the grammatically incorrect 'done' for the film version, which appeared two years later than the quoted book edition and is more in keeping with Davies' vernacular speech.

*CT Pinter (1961) p. 19*

*Davies: (...) They tell you who I am. You see! **I'm stuck without them.***

*CT Film (1963) 3/2:09*

*Davies: (...) They tell you who I am. **I'm lost without 'em.***

*HB Salzburg 24:05*

*Davies: **Sonst kann ich nicht beweisen, wer ich bin!***

*HM Thiem p. 129*

*Davies: Damit kann ich beweisen, wer ich bin. Versteht du. **Ohne sie bin ich verloren.***

*HM Walter p. 139*

*Davies: Sie sagen dir, wer ich bin. Verstehst du! **Ich sitze fest ohne sie.***

In the above scene, we have a curious example of Pinter changing his original play text from "*stuck without them*" in the play to "*lost without them*" in the film dating from 1963. Whereas Thiem uses "lost" in his early German translation, Walter later reverts to Pinter's original choice of "stuck" in his later translation dating from 2001.

The next scene also involves a small rewrite by Pinter in the case of the screenplay:

*CT (1961) p. 21*

*Davies: (**Puts the coat and trousers on the clothes horse.**) I see you got a bucket up here.*

*Aston: Leak.*

*CT Film 3/3:33*

*Davies: (**Opening his fly, but holding his pants up with his hand. Looks up.**) See you've got a bucket up there.*

*Aston: Leak.*

*Davies: Er... Where's the...? (Davies looks self-conscious).*

*Aston: What? Oh, yes. (Opens the door to show him the toilet in the hallway.)*

*HM Salzburg: 29:12*

*Davies: (**Zieht sich die Hose aus und hängt sie an die alte Leiter. Schaut hinauf zum Eimer, der vom Plafond hängt.**) Da hängt ein Eimer, hä?  
(**Gelächter aus dem Publikum**)*

*Aston: Es regnet durch.*

*HM Thiem p. 21*

*Davies: Ich sehe, da oben hängt ein Eimer.*

*Aston: Es regnet durch.*

*HM Walter p. 141*

*Davies: Da oben hängt ein Eimer.*

*Aston: Ein Leck.*

Here is another example of how the two different productions use different humorous means to create comedy. Pinter has rewritten the screenplay to enable Donald Pleasence to express a self-conscious moment. While taking off his pants for the night, Pleasence notices a bucket hanging from the ceiling. He appears to be wondering whether Aston might be using it as a chamber pot, creating a comical situation. Merkatz also gets a laugh from the audience for the same rhetorical question. We can also see how Walter has streamlined his translation, which is briefer in comparison to Thiem's earlier version.

*CT (1961) p. 23*

*Aston: You were making groans. You were jabbering.*

*Davies: Jabbering? Me?*

*Aston: Yes.*

*Davies: I don't jabber, man. Nobody ever told me that before.*

*CT film 3/6:05*

*Aston: You were making groans. You were jabbering.*

*Davies: Jabbering? I don't jabber, man. What would I be jabbering about. You got hold of the wrong bloke, mate.*

***Aston: Maybe it was the bed.***

***Davies: Nothing wrong with this bed.***

*HM Salzburg 33:10*

*Aston: Sie haben gestöhnt. Sie haben so undeutlich genuschelt.*

*Davies: Ich meine, worüber soll ich genuschelt haben, du hä? (**Gelächter aus dem Publikum**) Du das hat mir noch keiner gesagt, na.*

*HM Thiem p. 131*

*Aston: Sie haben gestöhnt. Sie haben so undeutlich genuschelt.*

*Davies: Genuschelt? Ich?*

*Aston: Ja.*

*Davies: Ich nuschle nicht, mein Lieber. Das hat mir noch niemand vorgeworfen.*

*HM Walter p. 143*

*Aston: Du hast gestöhnt. Und gebrabbelt.*

*Davies: Gebrabbelt? Ich?*

*Aston: Ja*

*Davies: Ich brabble nicht, Mann. Das hat mir noch keiner gesagt.*



***Illus. 21: Karl Merkatz as Davies & Michael Gampe as Aston***

In the above scene, we can see how Pinter initially creates a comical situation in the play text, which is further heightened in the film by Pleasence, in that the accusation also makes him angry. This can also be seen in connection with Pinter's minor rewrite. In the case of the Salzburg stage production, Merkatz evokes laughter from the audience by appearing insulted at the accusation. As the scene continues, the puns keep coming, both in Donner's film, as well as the Salzburg production. Pleasence begins to take on a menacing position towards Aston, whereas Merkatz is somewhat less aggressive.

*CT film 3/8:27*

*Aston: Where were you born?*

*Davies: I... Well, it's a bit hard, like, to set your mind back. Going back a few years, you lose a bit of track, like.*

*HM Salzburg: 38:30*

*Aston: Wo sind Sie denn geboren?*

*Davies: Da kann ich mir nicht mehr so genau erinnern. Das liegt ja schon eine Weile zurück. Ich meine, da verliert man ja die Spur, ne? (Gelächter im Publikum)*

Pinter offers plenty of opportunity for comic relief in the above scene, where Davies reveals that he is 'Welsh' (in English this word may also imply that he's a liar), but cannot remember where he was born, claiming that was too long ago. Both Pleasence

and Merkatz take full advantage of this humorous twist. The audience in Salzburg shows its appreciation with laughter.

*CT 3/9:14*

*Aston: Mm. (Aston goes to the door) Well, I'll be seeing you, then.*

*HM Salzburg 41:20*

*Aston: Also, ich seh dann noch.*

*HM Thiem p. 135*

*Aston: Mmnn. (Er geht zur Tür) Na, ich seh dann noch.*

*HM Walter p. 150*

*Aston: Hmmm. (Aston geht zur Tür) Also, bis später dann.*

In the above scene, we have another example of a mistranslation by Thiem, who may have thought that Aston was saying that he was going to look for something. In reality, this is a common expression used in taking leave, both in England and North America. Such a basic misunderstanding might illustrate Thiem's lacking knowledge of rudimentary English expressions, also making it seem unlikely that he had actually spent much time in any English-speaking country before becoming a literary translator, which wasn't an uncommon problem at the time, due to the Nazi era. In fact, this misunderstanding gives us a good idea of how many basic errors in translation may have been in Thiem's first translation of Pinter's play when they first premiered in Germany, before they were published.<sup>454</sup>



***Illus. 22: The Caretaker with Alan Bates & Donald Pleasence***

<sup>454</sup> It should be noted that this also might have been a typo, meaning that Thiem's translation should have read: "*Also, ich seh dich dann noch.*"

*CT 4/3:19*

*Davies: This ain't your room!*

*(Mick setzt sich auf Aston's Bett und spricht normal weiter.)*

*HM Salzburg 47:55*

*Davies: Was heißt Ihr Zimmer? Das ist sein Zimmer. (Davies kriecht weg von Mick.)*

*Mick: Wer? (Mick tritt Davies mehrmals brutal ins Hinterteil.)*

*Davies: Er, der hier wohnt.*

*HM Thiem p. 138*

*Davies: Das ist nicht Ihr Zimmer. Ich weiß nicht, wer Sie sind. Ich kenn Sie nicht.*

In the above scene, the Salzburg production deviates far from Pinter's original play script, as well as the screenplay for Donner's film. In the English film, after Davies claims that it's not Mick's room, Mick sits down on Aston's bed and continues speaking to Davies in his mocking tone in a rather civilized manner without using any physical violence. The same goes for the original dialogue in Pinter's play. In Dietmar Pflegerl's stage production in Salzburg, where Mick's costume is somewhat akin to that of a British punk, the director takes the liberty of introducing blatant violence, when Mick kicks the helpless Davies several times in the behind as he's crawling around on the floor. We know from Pinter's own statement that he did not condone blatant violence onstage or on the film screen,<sup>455</sup> thus we can be quite sure that this is not in keeping with the author's intention.

In my opinion, this sort of gratuitous violence certainly does not heighten the comical effects in Pinter's play.<sup>456</sup> The Salzburg audience does not laugh at this scene, which would indicate that the director miscalculated the effect of manipulating Pinter's play. Later on Mick painfully pinches Davies' nose, but this doesn't elicit any laughter from the Salzburg audience, either. Mick continues to have outbursts of violence in the Salzburg production, which isn't in keeping with Pinter's original script. In complete contrast, the English film production uses cramped positions, close-ups and high-angle shots to create an atmosphere of menace. For example, Clive Donner lets the

<sup>455</sup> Cf. Gale, p. 316: "Pinter has publicly disdained the use of such violence in the cinema. ... the author dismissed the kind of film violence for which directors such as *Quentin Tarantino* are known."

<sup>456</sup> On a historical note, Austrians also became notorious for their extreme violence in comparison to Germans during the Nazi era.

camera take a high-angle shot above Mick's head as he leans down over Davies, making the former's position look threatening.

Thus it is the Pinter's dry wit and meticulous screenplay, the outstanding camera work and the excellent directing, which create the menace in the English film, whereas the Austrian production more or less banks on blatant violence in several key scenes. This might be another reason why Pinter's plays and films would seem to be more popular in English-speaking countries than they are in German-speaking ones, as many productions of his plays seem to generally place more of a focus on violence and less on the humorous aspects of Pinter's works.

*CT 1/4/5:37*

*Mick: Keep your hands of my old mum.*

*Davies: I... I ain't. I...*

***(Mick is talking down on Davies from a menacing angle above him.)***

*HM Salzburg 51:40*

*Mick: Laß die Pfoten von meinem lieben alten Mütterchen.*

*Davies: Hören Sie... ich meine... ich wollte...*

***(Mick streichelt das Gesicht von Davies und gibt ihn dann eine Ohrfeige.)***



***Illus. 23: Daniel Reinhard as Mick & Karl Merkatz as Davies***

The above scene is another example of the contrasting interpretation of the two productions. Once again, the English production uses an angled camera position to show Mick talking down on Davies in a threatening position, whereas in the Salzburg production, Davies is first mockingly kind to Davies in then slaps him in the face, continuing his 'interrogation' in a brutal manner evocative of Gestapo methods.

*CT 2/1/1:58*

*Mick: I was telling my friend that you're **about to decorate them other rooms.***

*HM Salzburg (Thiem) 55:30*

*Mick: Ich habe meinem Freund hier grade erzählt, daß du **in allernächster Zeit anfangen wirst, die anderen Zimmer neu zu malen und zu tapezieren.***

*HM Walter p. 164*

*Mick: Ich hab meinem Freund gerade erzählt, dass du **demnächst mit der Renovierung der anderen Zimmer anfängst.***

In this scene, we have another example of Willy Thiem's very awkward translation. Instead of sticking to Pinter's simple dialogue, he uses a very long-winded form of descriptive translation, as though he weren't quite certain what Pinter really meant. In the Salzburg production, Mick has trouble in correctly enunciating the long and clumsy line, and it certainly doesn't sound anything at all like Pinter's concise writing. Walter corrects some of Thiem's errors, however he unfortunately changes the register of the line from the incorrect colloquial grammar to correct written grammar, which is not really in keeping with the character.

*CT 2/1/2:37*

*Davies: (to Mick) You thieving bastard! You thieving skate!*

*(Aston takes Davies' bag away from Mick and gives it to Davies. Mick immediately snatches the bag away from Davies and gives it back to Aston. The same happens three times in quick repetition, after which Mick finally gives Davies his bag.)*

*HM Salzburg 56:24*

*Davies: (to Mick) Du Saudieb... du Seeräuber... gib mir meine verdammte Tasche, ne....*

*(Aston takes Davies' bag away from Mick and gives it to Davies. Mick immediately snatches the bag away from Davies and gives it back to Aston. This same happens repeatedly, after which Mick finally gives Davies his bag.)*

This is one of the funniest moments of the English film production, which is a little reminiscent of a scene from a Marx Brothers' movie or a stand-up comedy routine. The same scene is also humorous in the Salzburg production, as the staging roughly sticks to Pinter's original dramatic script at this point, which offers an opportunity for comic relief. The Salzburg audience shows its appreciation with a short burst of laughter.

*CT 2/2/3:57*

*(Davies is cowering on the floor up against the wall brandishing his knife.)*

*(Mick is looming over Davies threatening him with a vacuum cleaner and a table lamp both pointing straight at him.)*

***Mick: I was just doing some spring-cleaning.***

*HM (Thiem) Salzburg 1:09:30*

*(Davies is kneeling to the right holding his knife.)*

*(Mick switches on a ceiling lamp standing center stage while holding a vacuum cleaner in position to vacuum the floor.)*

***Mick: Hab grade ein bisschen großreinegemacht.***

*HM Walter p. 175*

***Mick: Ich war nur gerade beim Frühjahrsputz.***

This scene appears truly menacing in Donner's film production, due to the great combination of eerie sound effects, good lighting with sufficient visibility, despite the near darkness at the beginning, and excellent cinematography, with the camera shooting from an angle behind and above Mick, so that the cinematic view shows Davies at full disadvantage. Mick shakes the box of matches to sound like an irritating rattle, and the vacuum cleaner is extremely loud in the English film.

In contrast, the Pfliegerl production does not manage to take full advantage of the fact that Pinter has set up a threatening situation. The sound effects are insufficient, the vacuum cleaner whistles instead of roaring. Mick does not give the impression that

he's seriously threatening Davies, and Davies does not really appear to be threatened. Thiem's translation of Mick's line may not have been fully appreciated by the Salzburg audience, as it is not a commonly used term in Austria; whereas Walter's new translation is more common usage.

*CT 2/2/5:36*

*Davies: Wh... What's in that sandwich, then?*

*Mick: Cheese.*

***Davies: That'll do me.***

*Mick: Take one.*

*HM Salzburg 1:13:37*

*Davies: Was ist denn da drinnen in dem Sandwich, hä?*

*Mick: Käse.*

***Davies: Gib schon her. Man soll ja nichts unkommen lassen, na?***

***(Davies snatches away a sandwich, but Mick doesn't respond.)***

*HM Thiem p. 150*

*Davies: (...) Was ist in dem Sandwich drin?*

*Mick: Käse.*

***Davies: Na schön.***

*Mick: Bitte.*

*HM Walter p. 178*

*Davies: Was ist auf dem Sandwich denn drauf?*

*Mick: Käse.*

***Davies: Hätte ich gern.***

*Mick: Nimm dir.*

This scene gives us an example of four different interpretations, the English film being closer to Pinter's intention. Pleasance's tone is careful and measured, because he's still very wary of Alan Bates, whereas Merkatz uses a far more demanding tone and ad-libs a new line, which is humorous, but unnecessarily long. Mick doesn't respond at all, which is perhaps not called for. Thiem has rendered Davies' first second line correctly, but Mick's response is out of character, being too polite. On the other hand, Walter uses a completely incorrect tone for Davies, allowing him to speak perfectly correctly in very polite German. Mick's reply is far more in character. This

comparison illustrates that Walter's new translation is not consistently better than Thiem's in all examples.

*CT 2/2/8:59*

*Mick: **You've been in the services.** You can tell by your stance.*

*(Pleasence looks down at his feet.)*

*HM (Thiem) Salzburg 1:17:45*

*Mick: **Gedient.** Ich seh's an Ihrer Haltung.*

*(Merkatz is standing hunched over in a servile position.)*

*HM Walter p. 182*

*Mick: **Gedient, bei der Armee.** Sieht man an deiner Haltung.*

Here we have another case of a curious misinterpretation. In Pinter's original script for the stage Mick clearly asks Davies whether he's served in the army. Strangely, it almost seems as if Merkatz and/or Pfliegerl has mistaken Thiem's translation to mean that Davies worked as a servant, because Merkatz takes on a hunched-over, servile position, which is rewarded by another round of laughter from the audience. In contrast, Walter has translated Pinter's meaning clearly, however the solution he comes up with involves descriptive translation and is thus not optimal.

*CT p. 54*

*(Aston... A slight grimace. ... takes a towel from the rail and waves it about. He puts it down, goes to Davies and wakes him.)*

*CT 2/3/2:30*

*(Aston opens the window and then goes to the door and rapidly opens and closes it, creating a draft, which brings fresh air into the room.)*

*(Camera next shoots Davies from his perspective hiding under his blanket looking through a hole where he sees Aston making the air circulate!)*

*(Aston goes towards Davies to wake him.)*

*HM Salzburg 1:20:45*

*(Aston... takes a towel from the bedrail and waves it about over Davies' head attempting to wake him up. Eventually Davies wakes.)*

*HM Thiem p. 154*

*(Aston... **Er verzieht das Gesicht. ... nimmt ein Handtuch von der Stange und wedelt damit herum.** Er legt das Handtuch hin, geht zu Davies und weckt ihn.)*

*HM Walter p. 184*

*(Aston... **Eine leichte Grimasse. ...nimmt ein Handtuch von der Bettstange und schwenkt es herum.** Er legt es zurück, geht zu Davies und weckt ihn.)*

Once again, this scene illustrates another misunderstanding in the case of the Salzburg production. Both Thiem and Walter seem to have understood Pinter's original intention in the play script, however Merkatz and/or Pfliegerl have chosen a different interpretation, which leads us to think they may have misunderstood the translation. Instead of creating a draft with the towel in the Salzburg production, Aston flicks the towel over Merkatz's head in an attempt to waken him. Merkatz' snoring provokes laughter in the audience. By referring to Donner's film production, however, we can be certain that Pinter's original intention was to bring fresh air into the smelly room.

Perhaps this also involves a cultural misunderstanding, in that Austrians would probably not intentionally create a draft, because they typically fear they will immediately catch a cold. In the English film, the brilliant camera shot of Davies from his own perspective hiding under the blanket watching Aston through a hole in the blanket is hilarious, and probably the trickiest shot of the whole production. Nicolas Roeg really deserved special mention for his outstanding cinematography!

*CT 2/3/3:56*

*Aston: Got to have a bit of air.*

*Davies: Listen, don't talk to me about air, boy. **I've lived all me life in the air!***

*HM Salzburg 1:22:28*

*Aston: Ich muß etwas frische Luft haben.*

*Davies: Hör mal Junge, du mußt mir nichts von frischer Luft erzählen, verstehst du.*

***Ich hab mein ganzes Leben an der Luft zugebracht, ne?***

In the London film production, Pleasence manages to give us a very funny rendition of the above line, which is truly comical, in keeping with Pinter's intentional pun.

Although Thiem's translation is correct, Merkatz 's tone is too harsh and commanding, so that this line does not have a humorous ring to it in the Salzburg stage production.

*CT 2/3/6:56*

*Aston: I thought people started being funny in that café... Factory.*

*HM 1:28:00*

*Aston: Ich dachte die Leute benehmen sich aufeinmal so komisch im Café. **Auf der Strasse**. In der Fabrik.*

The above comparison illustrates that a phrase has been falsely introduced into Aston's monologue at this point. Aston is telling the story of how he was denounced as a lunatic by some people he knew in a local café for his philosophical ramblings, and how his acquaintances began behaving strangely towards him in the café and at his workplace, and then had him admitted to an insane asylum, where he was given electrical shocks. The point is that his friends and acquaintances denounced him and behaved strangely towards him, not people he didn't know on the street. Either director Pfingerl misunderstood the monologue, or the actor Michael Gampe ad-libbed an inappropriate line. Neither Thiem nor Walter adds this line to published translations that are available to the author. However the Salzburg production may have used an older translation by Thiem, incorporating this error.

*CT 3/1/3:44*

*Mick: (...) It's junk! He couldn't sell it, either, he wouldn't get **tuppence** for it.*

*HM Thiem p. 160 & Salzburg 1:43:25*

*Mick: (...) Er könnte es auch niemals verkaufen, er würde nicht **zwei Pennies** dafür bekommen.*

*HM Walter p. 196*

*Mick: (...) Nicht mal verkaufen könnte er das, **keinen Pfennig** würde er dafür kriegen.*

In this scene we have another example of Thiem's clumsy German translation. He translates the idiomatic British saying: "wouldn't get tuppence for it" literally as "nicht zwei Pennies dafür bekommen." This sounds incredibly strange in German and is far

from idiomatic, although the English saying is. Walter easily found a much better idiomatic phrase for his translation above, which also maintains a bit of the humor.

*CT 3/1/5:26*

**Davies: *I can't wear'em without laces, can I?***

**Aston: *I just got the shoes.***

*Davies: Well, now, look, this just about puts the tin lid on it, don't it?*

*HM Salzburg 1:51:25*

**Aston: *Ich habe nur die Schuhe bekommen.***

**Davies: *Wie soll ich die Schuhe tragen wenn ich keine Schnürsenkel habe, du, ne?***

**Aston: *(antwortet nicht)***

**Davies: *(schnippt mit den Fingern) Du, das schlägt doch dem Fass den Boden aus, ne?***

*HM Thiem p. 163*

**Davies: *Ich kann sie nicht ohne Schnürsenkel tragen.***

**Aston: *Ich hab nur die Schuhe bekommen.***

*Daves: Na, das schlägt doch dem Faß den Boden aus, nicht wahr?*

In the above scene, we have an example of how one mixed up line can completely destroy the punchline of a joke. In Donner's film production, everything runs according to Pinter's screenplay, which closely follows the original play at this point. However, in the Salzburg production Aston answers before Merkatz baits him with the rhetorical question, so that Merkatz's punchline has no effect. Merkatz snaps his fingers when Aston mixes up his line, and his voice becomes angry, possibly indicating that he knows all too well that the joke has been ruined. His anger also has a negative effect on the next passage, which could otherwise have also been funny.

*CT 3/2/0:23*

**Aston: *If I give you a few bob, ... you can getz down to Sidcup.***

**Davies: *You build your shed first. A few bob. When I can pick up a steady wage 'ere.***

*HM Salzburg 1:58:15*

**Aston. (...) *Wenn ich Ihnen... ein paar Shilling gebe, kommen Sie damit nach Sidcup.***

*Davies: Bau erst mal deinen Schuppen. (Merkatz pushes Aston violently, so that he falls onto his bed.) Ein paar Shilling! Wo ich mir hier einen guten Lohn verdienen kann!*

This scene gives us another example of the increased use of violence in the Salzburg production in comparison to the London production. In Donner's film, Pleasence only threatens Shaw with a knife but doesn't actually inflict any violence upon him. In the Austrian production, the scene continues more violently, as Merkatz thrusts his knife at Aston, whereas Pleasence merely continues threatening Shaw with his knife without thrusting it at him. However, just when it looks like Merkatz might actually attack Aston, Merkatz bites his own hand and starts sniveling again. Pleasence does not play Davies as such a sniveller in this scene; he retains more self-confidence and plays the scene somewhat more subtly, in contrast.

*CT 3/2/5:53*

*Mick: You say you're **an interior decorator**. You'd better be a good one.*

*Davies: (frowns in confusion) A what?*

*Mick: (clearly enjoying the game he's playing) What d'you mean, "A What?" A decorator. An interior decorator.*

*HM Salzburg (Thiem) 2:03:15*

*Mick: Na, Sie haben doch gesagt, Sie sind **Tapezierer und Anstreicher**. und ich hoffe, Sie sind ein guter.*

*Davies: Ein guter was?*

*Mick: Was meinen Sie, ein guter was? Tapezierer und Anstreicher.*

*HM Walter p. 211*

*Mick: Na, du hast doch gesagt, du bist **Innenausstatter**. Ich hoffe für dich, du bist gut.*

*Davies: Ein was?*

*Mick: Wie meinst du das, ein was? Ein Ausstatter. Ein Innenausstatter.*

The above dialogue demonstrates another clear example of Thiem's incorrect translation. In the London film production, Pinter's intended pun takes full effect in English, and Alan Bates clearly enjoys baiting Donald Pleasence, who appears confused with a term he's never heard before in his own social circle. Willy Thiem's translation ruins the joke on Davies, because it is conceivable that he might once have

been a house painter, whereas it's absolutely out of the question that he is an interior decorator. The Salzburg stage production suffers duly under this mistranslation, and the humor and irony of the dialogue are completely lost. Michael Walter's new translation corrects Thiem's error and offers a much better version, which maintains the comical undertone.

*CT 3/2/6:23*

*Mick: (...) You're the only man I've spoken to about my dreams, my deepest wishes.*

*HM Salzburg 2:04:15*

*Mick: (...) Sie sind der einzige, dem ich von meinen Träumen erzählt habe, von meinen tiefsten Wünschen.*

The above line is part of Pinter's slyly humorous little speech for Mick to lead on Davies to his doom. In the English original, it is completely obvious that Pinter is leading on Davies. Alan Bates is clearly enjoying the moment, speaking the lines very civilly with a subtle smile on his lips. This enables Pinter's humor to take full effect. In the Salzburg production the actor playing Mick works up a rage and shouts at Davies uncivilly shaking his fist at him. This destroys the chance for humor in the scene, and all of Pinter's subtle undertones are lost.

*CT 3/2/9:27*

*Davies: (...) You do it. If that's what you want.*

*Mick: (Shouting) That's what I want! (Turns around, **picks up Aston's Buddha and throws it onto the floor.**)*

*HM Salzburg 2:07:15*

*Mick: (**Picks up Aston's Buddha and threatens to throw it AT DAVIES.**)*

*Davies: (...) machen Sie es... wenn Sie wollen.*

*Mick: (Shouting) Ich will es! (Turns and **throws the Buddha at the gas stove.**)*

*Davies: (**Covers his head thinking Mick is throwing the Buddha at him.**)*



***Illus. 24: Daniel Reinhard as Mick & Karl Merkatz as Davies***

In the above scene, we have another good example of the greater degree of violence in the Salzburg production. In the London film production, Bates does not physically threaten Pleasence at this point. He harmlessly vents his anger on Aston's Buddha, by flinging it to the ground. In the Salzburg production, Mick holds the Buddha figure in front of Merkatz, threatening to throw it at him, while Merkatz is covering on the bed. This is not in keeping with Pinter's intentions. In the Salzburg stage production, the scene continues in a more violent atmosphere than the London film production.

In conclusion, it can be said that Clive Donner's London film production is subtler and more finely nuanced than Dietmar Pflegerl's stage production in Salzburg, which tends more towards brutality. Willy H. Thiem's translation demonstrates significant weaknesses, in particular, there are a lot of mistranslations, which often diminish or spoil Pinter's humorous intentions. The humor is carefully dosed and very subtle in the London production, in keeping with Pinter's original play script. In his film script, he did cut certain scenes to shorten the length of the work, as well as adding a few selected outdoor scenes, but most of the humorous scenes have been maintained. In the Salzburg production directed by Pflegerl, the humor is less subtle and nuanced, in general. Wherever the punchline has been ruined by poor translation or other circumstances, the actors tend to make up for the lack of humor with loud voices. On the whole the Salzburg stage production shows a tendency towards increased

violence, in contrast with the London film production, which emphasizes the humorous moments in Pinter's work.

The additional comparison of Willy Thiem's early translation with Michael Walter's later translation serves well to illustrate the manifold errors in translation in the former rendition. Furthermore, it was possible to illustrate that somewhat less humor is lost in Walter's translation, in contrast to Thiem's translation, which draws a line through Pinter's humor all too often.

## 5 *The Dumb Waiter* by Harold Pinter

### 5.1 A General Plot Outline of *The Dumb Waiter*

Two hit men, Ben and Gus, are awaiting orders to kill in a bleak basement. Ben, the superior of the two, reads the newspaper while Gus tries to put on his shoes, finding a pack of cigarettes stuck in one of them, which is Pinter's signal for a comic routine. Ben quotes some newspaper articles on crimes, foreshadowing nothing good. Gus laments about their work and the poor outlook, metaphorically wishing there were a window in the basement. Then Ben orders Gus to make some tea.

While they are arguing about a soccer game they may or may not have seen together, an envelope is pushed under the door. Gus is ordered to open it and finds twelve matches. Neither of them can make any sense of this. Ben tells Gus to check for someone outdoors, but no one is there. They decide the matches might come in handy. Ben again orders Gus to "*light the kettle*"<sup>457</sup> and they get into an argument about whether the correct phrase is "*light the gas*" or not. Gus quotes his mother as an authority (an example of black humor when spoken by a hitman), but Ben decides the fight for himself with violent means. Gus eventually lights a match on his shoe sole and asks who their victim will be this time. Ben gets angry over all of Gus's questions and tells him to do his work and keep his mouth shut. When Gus goes to make the tea, Ben checks his gun for ammo.

Gus comes back and reports that the gas meter needs some coins. Ben claims their boss Wilson should have some, but he doesn't always show up. Gus recollects their last victim, a girl, and remembers that it was a huge mess, giving the audience the idea that he might even be capable of showing sympathy. But they are disturbed by a noise in the wall. They discover a dumb waiter, and Gus finds a message in it. There was once a café upstairs and it seems someone is sending down orders for food. Ben tells Gus to send up something, but between them they have very little food. So they send up everything they have in the dumb waiter, with Gus calling out what's coming. Ben says Gus shouldn't yell, but Gus responds that he's quite anxious about this job.

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<sup>457</sup> Pinter (1987), pp. 141-142.

More orders are sent down for Italian food, Greek food and other exotic dishes, but then they find a voice tube. Gus shouts into the tube that they haven't got any more food.

Next Ben gives Gus orders for their work. They have to corner their victim when he or she comes into the basement. They have another argument, and Gus asks why they have to play such games. Ben responds by hitting him, but another order arrives. They fight again and fall silent, as Ben resumes reading his newspaper. When Gus exits to get a glass of water, the speaking tube whistles. Ben listens to the orders and confirms that they're ready for their job. Ben calls Gus and points his gun at the door. To his surprise, Gus enters without his gun or his jacket, stooping. The two of them stare at each other in a long, unresolved silence. This may not be typical comedy material, but Pinter, the grand master of the comedy of menace, introduces plenty of humorous twists.

## **5.2 Production History & Reception of *The Dumb Waiter* Including Reviews**

### ***The Dumb Waiter* – English Language Premiere**

**First produced at the Hampstead Theatre Club on 21 January 1960 - transferred to the Royal Court Theatre on 8 March 1960 with *The Room***

Cast: Ben - Nicholas Selby; Gus - George Tovey; Directed by James Roose Evans; Designer - Michael Young

*The Dumb Waiter* had its English language premiere at the Hampstead Theatre Club on the 21<sup>st</sup> of January 1960 in a double bill and was then transferred to the Royal Court Theatre. An excerpt from the review reads:

#### ***"The Dumb Waiter and The Room:***

*"It is a rare excitement to welcome the strange and compelling talent of Harold Pinter into the West End. The first of these plays is a dialogue between two men hired to commit a murder. (...) The first thing to be said about both plays is that they are*

*extremely funny. The humour is not verbal; it is of that best kind which proceeds from character.*<sup>458</sup>

The critique of the premiere of *The Dumb Waiter*, in a double-bill production with *The Room* at the Hampstead Theater Club in London immediately emphasizes the exciting new talent of Pinter's and the great deal of humor inherent in the roles of his characters. The reviewer is also very taken with Pinter's astute reflection of violence in our society and the exact characterization of the roles. S/he continues to praise humorously brilliant acting and the poetry on stage.

***The Dumb Waiter (& other pieces)***

**Oxford Playhouse, Oxford, 2004**

Cast: Toby Jones & Jason Watkins; Director - Douglas Hodge; Set & Costume Designer - Miriam Buether; Lighting Designer - Johanna Town; Composer - Nick Bicât; Sound Designer - John Leonard



***Illus. 25: Toby Jones & Jason Watkins in The Dumb Waiter, Oxford 2004***

A later production of *The Dumb Waiter* and other pieces at the Oxford Playhouse in 2004 was similarly well received. Critic Victoria Roddam wrote in her review:

*"Bleakly hilarious, engaging and above all eminently watchable, I can only urge theatregoers both local and further afield to catch this masterful production before it moves to pastures new.*<sup>459</sup>

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<sup>458</sup> *The Dumb Waiter & The Room*, March 1960:  
[http://www.haroldpinter.org/plays/plays\\_dumbwaiter.shtml](http://www.haroldpinter.org/plays/plays_dumbwaiter.shtml)

The above critique also calls this production of *The Dumb Waiter* "breathtaking." The reviewer makes it clear that she enjoyed Pinter's dry humor, and considered the production to be a masterpiece.

***The Dumb Waiter* - Trafalgar Studios, London, 2007**

**Director: Harry Burton;** Gus: Lee Evans and Ben: Jason Isaacs. Set and costumes, Peter McKintosh; Lighting, Simon Mills; Sound, Matt McKenzie; Production stage manager, Dominic Fraser.

The above production, directed by Pinter's close friend and professional associate Matthew Harry Burton, received a series of rave reviews, including the following by Michael Billington, who gave it five stars:

Review by Michael Billington in *The Guardian*, Feb. 9<sup>th</sup>, 2007:

*"And the dumb waiter is no mere comic device, but a lift that descends from a vast height with the resonance of a guillotine. When it falls for the last time, we know a murder is about to take place. (...) But although the play is a metaphor for institutionalised terror, Burton's production gives full rein to Pinter's comedy. (...) It reminds us that Pinter knows exactly how to balance comedy and fear to imply that we are all in the grip of invisible, higher powers."<sup>459</sup>*

Star critic Billington reminds us that Pinter's play ends on a very serious note, despite all the humor. However, completely in keeping with Pinter's intentions, Director Burton lets comedy reign in the play, giving us a glimpse of the impeccable balance of comedy and terror in Pinter's work for the stage. Harry Burton worked very closely with Pinter over the years and was fully aware of the playwright's intentions, which he had ample opportunity to discuss with Pinter.

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<sup>459</sup> *BBC Oxford*, February 2004.

**"Short, sharp lesson from Pinter master: Trafalgar Studios**

*"But you get a real bang for your bucks here, with a wonderfully lean, darkly comic and suspenseful script and cracking performances from that most versatile of comedians, Lee Evans, paired with Jason Isaacs, best known as the sinister Malfoy pere in the Harry Potter films. (...) Harry Burton's production achieves **exactly the right mixture of menace and nervy comedy** with the help of a splendidly atmospheric set by Peter McKintosh... (...) Evans manages to be funny, contemptible and terrified all at the same time as Gus. (...) But he also makes you laugh out loud with his whining catalogue of personal grievances as he prepares to kill."<sup>461</sup>*

Critic Charles Spencer has obviously enjoyed the above production of *The Dumb Waiter*, which he praises as dark comedy without any superfluity. The smart performances by experienced comedians have added to the pleasure, in his opinion. And Harry Burton's directing allows for just the right combination humor and menace.

**"Menace and absurdity delivered with panache:**

*"But this **mostly funny**, absurd play ends with two further cruel twists that remind us that this is principally a play about humans: victim and oppressor, vulnerable and controlling."<sup>462</sup>*

In the above review of *The Dumb Waiter*, Alastair Macaulay remarks on the humor of Pinter's absurdist work for the stage, which ends with means twists recalling the themes of oppression, abuse of power, and human weakness.

*"Blithely and winningly dim, Gus is nevertheless meticulous. A clown in the best sense, Evans turns the putting on and lacing up of his shoes into a silent-comedy routine worthy of Harold Lloyd minus the glasses. The absurdly slow lift of his foot and the cross between his puzzlement and pragmatism -- he's very taken with the crockery which will help him make a good cup of tea -- become ever funnier as witnessed by Ben, a man of towering and terrifying impatience."<sup>463</sup>*

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<sup>460</sup> *Guardian*, 9 February 2007.

<sup>461</sup> *Telegraph*, 9 Feb. 2007

<sup>462</sup> *Financial Times*, 12 Feb. 2007

The above review by David Benedict illustrates how Gus's clowish routine of having trouble tying his shoelaces at the beginning of the Pinter's play already serves to set the humorous tone of the production. The critique emphasizes that the contrast between the menacing and comical characters of the two hitmen also helps to increase the comedy on stage.

*“How pleasing to discover this 1957 one-acter, a black comedy of suspense and menace, dove-tailed with a cat-and-mouse thriller in which the mouse never realises he is being hunted, has lost none of its potency. The play's abiding strangeness and capacity to induce mystified laughter lingers on, thanks to Harry Burton's beautifully nuanced production and even more to a mesmerising, definitive performance by Lee Evans in which comedy and pathos are entwined.... The suspense comes in disturbing flurries, entwined with absurdist comedy.”<sup>464</sup>*

In this review of the same Harry Burton's production of *The Dumb Waiter*, reviewer Nicholas de Jongh gives the play five stars and praises the careful nuances and the fascinating performance by actor Lee Evans, who managed to balance humor with pathos. The critic is convinced that Pinter's black comedy remains as potent as ever and continues to induce the laughter of mystification with its absurdist character.

***“The Dumb Waiter:***

*“Towards the end they prepare for the evening’s business in black suits and ties, like the robbers in Reservoir Dogs. But it’s as if Tarantino is collaborating with Tony Hancock, for the conversation glumly yet comically meanders, with Evans’s Gus complaining about the lack of sufficient blankets and a good cup of tea and Isaacs’s Ben wearily shutting him up.”<sup>465</sup>*

In the above review by Benedict Nightingale we have the fascinating example of a theater critic, who has presumably seen Robert Altman's film version of *The Dumb Waiter* with John Travolta and, either consciously or unconsciously, seems to be equating some of the scenes with those filmed by Quentin Tarantino, who directed

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<sup>463</sup> *Variety*, 22 Feb. 2007

<sup>464</sup> *Evening Standard*, 9 Feb. 2007

<sup>465</sup> *Sunday Times*, 12 Feb. 2007

also Travolta playing a hit man in *Pulp Fiction*.

***The Dumb Waiter***

**Minnesota Fringe, USA, 2009**

Directed by Paul von Stoetzel; Starring Ariel Pinkerton & Erik Hoover

On the playbill for the above production of *The Dumb Waiter* at the Minnesota Fringe Festival, Ron Hubbard writes the following commentary:

*"This troubling work by the late Nobel laureate, Harold Pinter, demonstrates how much he had in common with fellow master modernist Samuel Beckett. But there's always the threat that Pinter's existential ruminations will erupt into rage and violence. Actors Erik Hoover and Ariel Pinkerton play Pinter about as straight as you can, donning circa-1957 attire and English accents that betray their class differences. But, in this case, one of the hit men waiting on a job is a hit woman, which makes the male character's bullying even more discomfiting. The comedy is anxious, the duo's timing impeccably precise."<sup>466</sup>*

It is fascinating to see that the American viewpoint also immediately picks out the similarities between Pinter's and Beckett's plays. In the above production, it is obvious that one of the two 'hit persons' is played by a woman, a clever twist, which reminds us of the all-woman production of *Der Hausmeister* in Hamburg that Pinter happily agreed with. In the performance of *The Dumb Waiter*, the contrast between the 'weaker and stronger' sexes on stage would seem to have enhanced the hitman's bullying of his female partner. The comedy in the play has apparently been likewise enhanced.

*"Keeping crucial info from view is a Pinter hallmark, and here the famed playwright employs a dumb waiter at a seedy hotel to animate and mystify a tense, terse little tale about a couple of hit persons. Is the hand of God pulling the strings on the old-fashioned room-service device? And why do Ben (Erik Hoover) and Gus (Ariel Pinkerton) get so jumpy when the infernal thing springs to life? Anyone feeling a tad*

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<sup>466</sup> Minnesota Fringe: *The Dumb Waiter* Playbill by Ron Hubbard, Sept. 2009.

*guilty? A nice mix of menace and comedy coexists as these two veterans of small theater in the Twin Cities polish their pistols, crackle their way through Pinter's distinctive banter and wait for someone to come through that door.*"<sup>467</sup>

The final critique of Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* also remarks on the playwright's famous mixture of humor and terror in his work, which can be seen as a commentary on man at the mercy of the higher powers, although it was not consciously written by Pinter as such. Questions of responsibility and guilt and arise as the action progresses and the tension increases.

The preceding series of reviews of selected productions of *The Dumb Waiter* illustrates how the topicality of this play has not diminished whatsoever forty years after its premiere in 1960. Pinter's delicate balance of menace and comedy still continues to thrill audiences in Britain and America.

### **5.2.1 Production History & Reception of *Der stumme Diener* in German Translation**

It is of particular interest in the context of this thesis that *The Dumb Waiter* had its world premiere in German translation as *Der stumme Diener* in February 1959 at the Städtische Bühnen in Frankfurt under the direction of Anton Krilla. Not until a year later did it have its premiere in English at the Hampstead Theatre in London in 1960.

#### ***Der stumme Diener* - World Premiere**

##### **Kleines Haus, Frankfurt, Germany, 28 February 1959**

Cast: Ben - Rudolf H. Krieg; Gus - Werner Berndt; Inszenierung - Anton Krilla;  
Bühnenbild und Kostume - Ekkehard Grübler; Deutsch von - Willy H. Thiem

The famous German theater critic, Albert Schulze Vellinghausen, wrote the following about the first two productions of this play in Frankfurt and Bochum:

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<sup>467</sup> *Minnesota Star Tribune*, Sept. 2009

*"Pinters Diktion entstammt in ihrer Schärfe, ihrer Lakonik, ihrer zermürbenden Banalität der großen, großartig lebendigen Tradition des englischen Witzes – in einer Weise, daß sich da der Übertragung ins Deutsche kaum übersteigbare Hindernisse in den Weg stellen, die Stimmung wie auch das Tempo lähmend. Willy H. Thiem hat sie klüglich umschifft. Was nun fehlt, ist gleichwohl die brillante Trockenheit – der mörderisch kurze, britische Spirit. Das ist schade, denn es wirkt mißverständlich. Sowohl was die Wiedergabe wie was das Echo bei den Zuschauern betrifft. Die Inszenierung - so in Bochum (J.J. Heyse) wie, noch starker in Düsseldorf (Friedhelm Ortman) – drohte in Naturalismen zu rutschen."<sup>468</sup>*

In addition to the misunderstandings and omission of certain puns in Willy Thiem's translation, the problem was that the very dry British humor and the brevity of the wit was not well understood by the director. This would seem to have lamed the atmosphere, as well as the tempo. Vellinghausen observes that the production threatened to slide into a naturalistic mode.<sup>469</sup> Pinter's dialogues were apparently staged as anecdotal and tragic. In the Bochum production, Heinz-Theo Branding was considered too ample, whereas his partner, Stephan Orlac, was labeled stiff. The audience was supposedly amused nevertheless.<sup>470</sup>

### ***Der stumme Diener***

#### **Theater Bochum, 1959**

Cast: Heinz-Theo Branding & Stephan Orlac; Inszenierung H.J. Heyse; Übersetzung von Willy H. Thiem

In his book *Anger and After*, John Russell Taylor writes of the contrast between the understanding and reception of *The Dumb Waiter* in the English original in comparison with its reception in German at the world premiere in Frankfurt. This can be considered an important piece in the puzzle of Pinter's misinterpretation in the German language:

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<sup>468</sup> *Theater Heute*, No. 3, 1961.

<sup>469</sup> Cf. Von Paschen (2012), *Harold Pinter's 'The Dumb Waiter in German': What's Missing in Translation? in: Perspectives on Pinter: A European Cultural Capital Honours the Nobel Laureate*. (This article also includes an English translation of the above review by the author.)

<sup>470</sup> Pinter: Esslin, p. 148.

*"The Dumb Waiter is consistently funny almost all through (though a friend who saw its first production, in German at the Frankfurt Municipal Theater, assures me that then it was played as a completely serious horror piece without a flicker of amusement)."*<sup>471</sup>

In this context, we must recall that Germany and Austria were the perpetrators of World War II, so the widespread German attitude was that they had nothing left to laugh about. The aesthetic discourse was influenced by Theodor Adorno, who stated: *"Nach Auschwitz keine Lyrik"* (Kiedaisch 1995).<sup>472</sup>

### *Der stumme Diener*

**Austrian Premiere - 21 December 1962**

**Experiment - Kleine Bühne am Liechtenwerd, Vienna**

Directed by Fred Schaffer; Set by E. Plaene; Gottfried Blahovsky as Ben; Michel Gert as Gus

### *"Pinter-Einakter im Experiment: Warten auf den Tee*

*"Im 'Stummen Diener' kommt das 'Hausmeisterische' in Herrn Pinter stärker zum Vorschein. Da sind die gleichen Anzeichen eines spintisierenden Humors festzustellen, wie in des jungen englischen Autors Erfolgsstück, und auch die gleichen Ermüdungserscheinungen, die durch ständige Wiederholungen einer Situation eintreten. (...) Fred Schaffer, im absurden Theater (...) daheim wie der Fisch im Wasser, hätte auf Beschleunigung des Tempos mehr achten sollen. **Und manche selbstherrliche Verbesserung der Übersetzung Willy H. Thiems wäre durchaus am Platz gewesen.**"*<sup>473</sup>

Gertrud Obzyna's negative critique of the premiere of *Der stumme Diener* in Austria seems to illustrate that she didn't necessarily appreciate *Der Hausmeister* either. She labels his humor 'ruminating' and claims that his constant repetitions cause boredom to set in. At the end of the review, however, she gives us a good clue as to the

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<sup>471</sup> Taylor, p. 329.

<sup>472</sup> Kiedaisch (1995): *"After Auschwitz, there can be no more poetry"* (back translation by Renée von Paschen).

problem: she suggests that Director Fred Schaffer should have sped up the tempo and improved upon Willy Thiem's translation, indicating that it was insufficient.

***"Pinter und die Etymologie des Korbgebens:***

*"Es ist nicht anzunehmen, daß Pinter und Kollegen in der Geschichte der dramatischen Literatur einmal als Höhepunkt gewertet werden, dazu gehen sie mit den theatralischen Mitteln zu sparsam um und sind zu spezialisiert, ihre Werke haben eher etüdenhaften Charakter. (...) Gerade Pinters Stücke jedoch mögen ihrer poetischen Wirkung, die der Autor fast allein aus der abgegriffenen Begrifflichkeit der Sprache schöpft, im Deutschen stark beraubt sein, denn um nur ein Beispiel anzuführen, so enthält etwa 'To put it on' viel mehr an Bedeutungsmöglichkeiten als unser 'etwas anmachen'.<sup>1474</sup>*

The above review also serves to illustrate how poorly Pinter was received in Vienna, as the reviewer even criticizes Pinter's use of dramatic means and claims his play is more like a practical exercise. The critique goes on to postulate that Pinter's poetical effects arise from the use of repetitive phrases, which do not work well in German, and cites an example from Gus and Ben's argument about "lighting the kettle." The review points out that the German translation may not have such a manifold meaning as the English original, indicating that the translation is lacking to some extent.

***"Zum Glück unverbindlich: Premiere im Experiment mit zwei Einaktern von Harold Pinter***

*"Fred Schaffers Regie, der man trotz solch prinzipieller Bedenken eine anregende und – durch das permanente künstliche Unverständlich-Gemachte – auf Strecken sogar spannende Vorstellung verdankt, entschied sich offensichtlich für das Beckettische in Herrn Pinter. (...) ... das abendfüllende Raten von Rätseln, die vielleicht etwas, wahrscheinlich aber nichts bedeuten: das kann ein im gewissen Sinne amüsanter szenischer Zeit-Vertreib sein.<sup>1475</sup>*

In this review, Rudolf Klaus also mentions that the dialogue has become permanently

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<sup>473</sup> *Express*, 22 December 1962.

<sup>474</sup> *Arbeiter Zeitung*, 22 December 1962.

<sup>475</sup> *Neuer Kurier*, 22 December 1962.

and artificially incomprehensible in Pinter's play. This would again lead us to believe that Willy Thiem's first German translation was not at all in keeping with Pinter's clear intentions and his concise writing. The critic even dares to hypothesize that Pinter probably didn't intend to mean anything with all the mystery; nevertheless, he found the play amusing to a certain degree.

***"Lauter Geheimnistuerei ohne Hintergrund:***

*"Zur Avantgarde fehlt Pinter die Symbolkraft, er tut nur so. Das hier ist ein Sketch, in dem das meiste offen bleibt. Doch wir lassen es dabei bewenden, es berührt uns nicht. Unter der Regie von Fred Schaffer wird manches überdeutlich ausgesprochen, was man ins Diffuse rücken sollte."*<sup>476</sup>

Critic Karl Maria Grimme also classifies Pinter's play as a mere sketch, which doesn't add up to much. He writes that he is not moved by the play, in which a man is expected to murder his partner, indicating that something major must have gone wrong with this production. The fact that director Fred Schaffer made certain things clearer than necessary may have detracted from play's success.

***"Experiment am untauglichen Objekt***

*"Harold Pinter gehört zu jenen jungen englischen Dramatikern, die behaupten, die 'zornige Generation' abgelöst zu haben. Sie sind wirklich nicht zornig. Dazu sind sie zu versnobt und blasiert. Sie ärgern sich über die Welt wie ein feinsinniger Ästhet über ein Andenken aus Mariazell oder wie ein Wiener Feinschmecker über Schnitzel mit Tunke. Und wenn sie ihren Ekel lange genug hinausgejammert haben, resignieren sie müde: Die Welt ist zum Kotzen, aber jede Änderung wäre von Übel. (...) Michael Gert hat den Hauptteil daran, daß das Publikum trotz dem Text manchmal lachen kann."*<sup>477</sup>

Here we have yet another example of a negative critique, where the reviewer claims that Pinter and his generation of 'angry young men' are not really angry, but just whining about traditional values, such as Catholic reliquaries or Viennese schnitzel. The critic goes on to say that all the young English dramatist do is to tiredly resign in

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<sup>476</sup> *Neue Tageszeitung*, 22 December 1962.

the end, which couldn't be further from the truth, as Pinter never gave up his political and social critique right to the end of his life.

***"Bluff aus England: Zwei Einakter von Harold Pinter im Experiment:***

***"Wenn einer Stücke schreibt, die vor ihm schon ein anderer geschrieben hat, dann ist er entweder ein Narr oder ein Betrüger. Da Harold Pinters Werke recht gute Börsenkurse verzeichnen, nehme ich nicht an, daß er ein Narr ist. (...) ... Pinters 'Hausmeister' eigentlich nichts anderes ist, als ein schlechtpopularisierter Beckett, ein Beckett für Hausmeister, vulgär und ungekonnt zusammengestellt. Heute, da man diesen Avantgardisten dort aufführt, wo er seinem Typ, aber nicht nach seiner Qualität hingehört – nämlich auf einer Kellerbühne -, erkennt man so recht, was für eine Laus man sich da in den Pelz gesetzt hat. (...) ... sein 'Stummer Diener' ist von einem unbekanntem Dick-&-Doof-Autor aus Hollywood, und im übrigen nicht der Rede wert. (...) eine Poesie, die Beckett nicht das Wasser reichen kann, weil sie nämlich selbst total verwässert ist. (...) Und trotzdem war die Aufführung durch das Experiment verdienstvoll: Man wird sich nunmehr vielleicht doch hüten, Harold Pinter noch ein drittes Mal nach Wien kommen zu lassen."*<sup>478</sup>**

This final review of the premiere of *Der stumme Diener* in Vienna is perhaps the most negative of all, in that the reviewer even dares to insinuate that Pinter is a swindler and has copied Beckett's work! The fact of the matter is that Pinter and Beckett became good friends and actually read each other's works before they were performed. The critic also bashes "*Der Hausmeister*" calling it a vulgar and awkward version of Beckett. Then he equates Pinter with a louse, a slur that has unmistakable fascist undertones. The reviewer's audacity continues, as he claims that *Der stumme Diener* was written by an unknown "Laurel & Hardy" author from Hollywood. The critique closes by stating that the production of Pinter's plays will hopefully serve to ensure that Pinter is never again brought to Vienna. This review in the Viennese *Kronen Zeitung* represents a vicious attempt to trash Pinter's work as a dramatist.<sup>479</sup>

<sup>477</sup> *Volksstimme*, 23 December 1962.

<sup>478</sup> *Kronen Zeitung*, 25 December 1962.

<sup>479</sup> It is of interest in the scope of this dissertation to remark that the first critique of a play by Pinter in the *Kronen Zeitung* was written by Elisabeth Pablé, who published an excellent and very highly qualified positive review of *Der Hausmeister* on 6 April 1962. The above drastically negative review by W. Kudrnofsky is completely unqualified and possibly also represents his attempt to make E. Pablé's review look poorly in the course of a (personal) clash between theater critics writing for the

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of February 1963, *Der stumme Diener* was broadcast in the form of a 'Fernsehspiel' or film made for television under the direction of Wolf Vollmar on ARD TV. The teleplay was written by Hans Bachmüller based on the translation by Willy Thiem. Werner Schumacher played Ben and Ernst Jacobi played Gus.<sup>480</sup> There are no reviews or ratings available in the International Movie Database, which might indicate that it was not particularly popular.

### ***Der stumme Diener***

**Kleines Schauspielhaus, Berlin, April 1963**

Cast: Manfred Fischbeck & Rüdiger Tüchel; Directed by Rüdiger Tüchel

#### ***Grotesk-Humor: Einakter von Pinter und Tardieu im Kleinen Schauspielhaus***

***“Von Ionesco bis Beckett, von Mrozek bis Dürrenmatt: Humor ist in der modernen Dramatik vornehmlich Grotesk-Humor. Die Schrecken dieser Welt, satirisch zugespitzt ins dramatische Sinnbild gefaßt, werden lächerlich, der Mensch, die geschundene, haltlos durchs Dasein taumelnde Kreatur, lacht über sich selbst. (...) Auch Harold Pinter und Jean Tardieu, deren Einakter “Der stumme Diener” und “Der Schalter” gegenwärtig im Kleinen Schauspielhaus zu besichtigen sind, treiben mit Entsetzen Scherz. (...) Der Applaus rief die jungen Schauspieler, die da den Abend im Kleinen Schauspielhaus ganz allein so ansehnlich bestreiten, immer von neuem vor den Vorhang.”<sup>481</sup>***

The above production would seem to mark the turning point in the reception of *Der stumme Diener* in Germany. In total contrast to the extremely negative reception of Pinter's one-act play at its world premiere in Frankfurt in 1959, director Rüdiger Tüchel apparently understood the humor inherent in Pinter's writing. This 'absurdist humor' is also tangible for reviewer Günter Grack, who does well in noting the connection between Beckett and Pinter, as well as mentioning the fact that man is learning to laugh at himself with the help of modern drama.

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same paper.

<sup>480</sup> *Der stumme Diener*: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1703040/>

<sup>481</sup> *Tagesspiegel*, 6-4-1963.

***Der Stumme Diener*****Keller des Schauspielhauses Zürich, May 1985**

Directed by Gudrun Orsky; Ben – Peter Brogle; Gus - Jodoc Seidel

*“Wahrscheinlicher ist, dass wir es einmal mehr mit einer dieser unzulänglichen, unbefriedigenden Verpflanzungen eines in einem bestimmten Milieu, in einer bestimmten Sprachschicht angesiedelten Stücks zu tun haben. Vor über zehn Jahren hat Martin Esslin, ausgewiesener Kenner des modernen englischen Theaters, auf die “Nebelwände” hingewiesen, die Pinter vom deutschsprachigen Publikum trennen und die Schuld an dieser Verunklärung zum Beispiel den ungenügenden Übersetzungen Willy H. Thiems gegeben.*

*Genau von Thiem aber stammt die im Keller des Schauspielhauses gespielte Fassung des “Stummen Dieners”, und mag sie auch in einzelnen groben Entstellungen revidiert sein, so bleibt sie doch im Ganzen das, was sie seit ihrer deutschen Erstaufführung vor mehr als zweieinhalb Jahrzehnten gewesen ist: eine unpräzise, blasse, den Nuancen, den Wortspielen, dem trockenen Humor der Vorlage nicht gewachsene Imitation. (...)*

*Regisseurin Gudrun Orsky findet leider für die Dialogregie kein taugliches Konzept. Der Rhythmus stimmt nicht, das Stück schleppt, der Abend zieht sich dahin und erstickt schon vor der Hälfte in Langeweile.”<sup>482</sup>*

This review provides us with evidence of the highly important role that translation plays in the production of Pinter’s works. It is apparent that something major went wrong with this production, and critic Christoph Kuhn is justified in finding a correlation to Willy Thiem’s translation, which is often longer and clumsier than Pinter’s original dialogue, thus creating more difficult and lengthy lines for the actors to speak. This definitely interferes with the short and snappy rhythm of Pinter’s dialogues, which are often conceived like exchanges in comedy reviews. It is not hard to understand that lengthening the lines can destroy a dialogue, which lives from its brevity. (I illustrate how this has taken place in my comparative studies of Thiem’s

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<sup>482</sup> *Tages-Anzeiger*, 25-5-1985.

translations with Pinter's original plays.) There can be no doubt that the translation has effected this production, since the review explicitly mentions that the rhythm is off, and the play drags on and becomes boring. As critic Christoph Kuhn specifically mentions, the translation is imprecise and does not reflect the nuances or puns, which Pinter frequently employs. It is likely that the director made little attempt at any humorous interpretation of this play, which has been labeled a comedy of menace and does require a minimum of humor in any production.

Another review of the same production in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* states:

*“Pinters Text vermeidet jedoch alles Eindeutige, darin liegt seine bedrohliche Schärfe. Im ersten Teil der Aufführung, die Frau Orsky über dicke Fermaten sich (fast allzuschwer und bedeutungsvoll) langsam entwickeln lässt, gelingt dies vorzüglich. Wo die beiden Männer aber verängstigt in einen slapstickartigen Kampf mit einem Warenaufzug, eben dem “stummen Diener”, verwickelt werden, sackt das tödliche Spiel ins Harmlose, kippt der Gestus ins Parodistische.”<sup>483</sup>*

The above review mentions earlier on that Pinter uses a deceptive form of comedy, which allows fear and terror to flicker deadly seriously on stage. The critic seems to feel that this worked well, however he criticizes the production for slipping into slapstick towards the end of the play, in connection with the dumb waiter, itself. He says that this makes the play appear to be a parody, which tends towards the grotesque. This starkly contrasts with Pinter's intentions, as he has stated that his plays are intended to be staged in a realistic manner. Apparently Pinter's mode of humor works well, as long as the director remains true to it, but as soon as the actors use slapstick, the thread is lost and the concept threatens to collapse.

*„Sie behält dabei jene so heikle absurde Mitte ein, in welcher die befreiende Groteske und der lähmende Alptraum etwa gleich nahe sind – die Irritation des gelegentlich zwischen Heiterkeit und schweigender Ehrfurcht schwankenden Publikums bezeugte es am besten.... (...) Und sie beide ein Paar (Ben und Gus), das in seinem tragikomischen Gegen- und Miteinander dem Abend immer neue Spannung gibt, in*

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<sup>483</sup> *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 25-5-1985.

*den Spielen und Spielchen der Macht wie im gemeinsamen dienenden Ausgeliefertsein an eine anonyme höhere Macht, deren Deutungsmöglichkeit dieses gerade in seiner scheinbaren „Einfachheit“ so vieldeutige Stück als Gleichnis der fundamentalen Auseinandersetzungen unseres Jahrhunderts lesen lässt.*<sup>484</sup>

The third review of the production in the Zürcher Schauspielhaus indicates that the audience did react positively to Pinter's use of humor in *The Dumb Waiter*. Critic Martin Kraft notes that mood alternated between amusement and silent awe, which is in keeping with Pinter's intentions. Apparently the tragicomical action on stage also succeeded in convincing this reviewer of the importance of this play, due to its almost philosophical nature in raising questions regarding power plays and the higher powers, in the context of the 20th century.

*“In ihrer Inszenierung, die geschickt darauf angelegt ist, momentane Stimmungen durch Bewegung im Raum zu akzentuieren, was gelegentlich zu diskret boulevardesken Effekten führt, hat sich die Regisseurin Gudrun Orsky vor allem auf eine feinfühlig psychologische Differenzierung der beiden Figuren konzentriert.*<sup>485</sup>

The fourth review of the same production would lead us to believe that this staging was a successful rendering of Pinter's intentions. However, critic Sonja Augustin speaks of occasional boulevardesque effects, which are actually not in keeping with Pinter's intentions, but presumably akin to slapstick not found in Pinter's play. Yet this review does focus on the fact that director Gudrun Orsky concentrated on the fine psychological differences between Ben and Gus, certainly an indication that she understood the power plays between them, as well.

### ***Der stumme Diener***

**Deutsches Theater – Baracke, Berlin (Ost), März 1989**

Ben: Tobias Langhoff; Gus: Jan Josef Liefers

(No director was named in the above production.)

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<sup>484</sup> *Zürichsee-Zeitung*, 25-5-1985.

<sup>485</sup> *Neue Zürcher Nachrichten*, 25-5-1985.

Critic Ulrike Buchmann writes in her review of this late East German production that the two characters are used to blindly obeying orders and killing without question:

*“Gewöhnt auch seit langem aneinander und dennoch enerviert und beständig in geradezu komisch wirkendem Zwist um Belanglosigkeiten. (...) Pinter hat die Metaphernhaftigkeit gerade seiner frühen Dramen betont, hat sie politische Stücke genannt. So gesehen und auch dank der alles andere als introvertierten Darstellungshaltung der beiden Akteure erfahren wir hier wieder etwas über erschütternd simpel funktionierende Manipulationen, solche, denen Einschüchterung, Verdummung und Nichtachtung des Menschen zugrunde liegen.”<sup>486</sup>*

In this review it is evident that the East-German critic has recognized Pinter’s comic moments, however she doesn’t mention the humor in the play more than once. Buchmann also realizes that Pinter considers his plays political, which she does elaborate upon in detail, in contrast to the earlier lack of interest in the political aspects of Pinter’s writing in East Germany. Here the reviewer seems to understand that in his play Pinter is illustrating the manipulation, intimidation and disrespect of human beings.

***“Pinters Stücke sind sensible Reaktionen auf eine gesellschaftliche Umwelt, der die Sinngebung durch tragfähige menschliche Beziehungen verlorengegangen ist. In ihnen steckt der schwarze, bittere, böse englische Humor, aber auch die Trauer über die Deformierung des Persönlichen, über den Verlust an Ethik.... (...) Mitunter vertrauten sie zu sehr dem Heiter-Spaßigen der Situation – das Furchtbare, das hinter ihnen lauert, müßte sich noch spürbarer vermitteln. Dennoch - zu Recht gab es für die „Studio-Inszenierung 1“ sehr herzlichen Beifall.”<sup>487</sup>***

As again illustrated in the above review, by 1989 East Germany finally seemed to begin comprehending Pinter’s social and political critique in connection with his English black humor, which this reviewer felt was taken a bit too far. This is perhaps an indication that East German society had become somewhat more self-critical

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<sup>486</sup> *Nationalzeitung*, March 1989.

shortly before the Wall fell in the course of the Velvet Revolution. In any case, not only did critic Christoph Funke catch the socio-political significance of Pinter's message, but so did the audience at the time, which applauded very generously.

*“Heraus kommt also vor allem Situationskomik, während der „schwarze Humor“ schon weniger wirksamen Ausdruck findet, das Absurd-Geheimnisvolle jedoch ganz und gar unspürbar bleibt (...). Ich glaube, die beiden jugendlichen Darsteller hätten ihre unbezweifelbare, ersichtliche Begabung viel besser entfalten können, wenn sie mit einem Regisseur gearbeitet hätten, der einen Sinn für diese Art Dramatik hat, die uns mit dreißigjähriger Verspätung erreicht und deshalb besonders schwer für heutiges Denken und Empfinden zu erschließen ist.”<sup>488</sup>*

The third review of the above production in East Berlin is more critical of the mode of humor on stage, which reviewer Ernst Schumacher finds to be more akin to situation comedy than black humor, whereas he cannot perceive the ‘absurdist’ background of the play. This reviewer feels that a director may have helped the young actors to make better sense of Pinter's play, which the critic finds to be no longer topical, in stark contrast to the former positive critique by Christoph Funke.

### ***Der stumme Diener***

#### **Theaterkeller, Linzer Landestheater, Linz, May 1989**

Cast: Ben - Daniel Pascal; Gus - Reinhard Horras; Directed by Dagny Elisabeth Schüler; Stage Design by Brigitte Erdmann; Translation by Willy H. Thiem

In an interview with Pinter, published in the playbill of the production of *Der stumme Diener* in Linz in 1989, Nicholas Hern refers to the enormous sense of humor visible in Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* in comparison with *One for the Road*, and says that he's suddenly become deadly serious, and the clown has removed his makeup. Pinter agrees, saying that he felt the subject of torture is no joke, although he still maintains a capacity for humor.<sup>489</sup>

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<sup>487</sup> *Morgen*, March 1989.

<sup>488</sup> *Berliner Zeitung*, March 1989.

<sup>489</sup> Pinter in an interview with Nicolas Hern, May 1985.

***Der stummer Diener*****Claque, Baden, Switzerland, September 1991**

Cast: Ben – Siegfried Duhnke; Gus – Luc Spori; Directed by Michael Oberers

*“Einerseits sind Gus und Ben zwei Auftragskiller, die in einem Keller auf ihr Opfer warten, andererseits sind sie zwei Menschen in einem Raum, von der Aussenwelt abgeschnitten und aufeinander existentiell angewiesen. Und wie sie diese Situation mit Sprach- und Machtspielen, mit “Nummern” meistern, lässt sie wie Clowns wirken. In der Grundsituation wie in dem verbohrtten Auf-Worten-Penetrieren lassen vielmals Becketts Didi und Gogo aus “Warten auf Godot” grüssen. (...) ... einerseits also sorgt dieser “stumme Diener” für Dramatik, erlaubt komische und unheimliche Wendung und Steigerung der Grundsituation, andererseits ist es für mich gerade dieser dramaturgische Einfall, der überholt, veraltet wirkt.”<sup>490</sup>*

In the above review, Eva Halter-Arend first reminds us that *Der stumme Diener* was already produced by the Claque theater in Baden in 1969. This new production marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Claque, and it is interesting to know that the director honored Harold Pinter with a new performance of his play. Unfortunately the author was unable to find any review of the earlier production.

In the production in 1991, the reviewer claims that Ben and Gus perform like clowns using word plays and power plays, however she qualifies that statement by positively comparing them to Beckett’s Didi and Gogo in *Waiting for Godot*. Then she goes on to refer to the situational comedy afforded by the dumb waiter, itself, whereby she claims that this dramaturgical effect is obsolete. The review does not end on a positive note.

The following review was written by an unnamed critic, but it captures certain aspects of Pinter’s play well:

*“Menschen als Experimente der Kraft, die uns geschaffen hat und uns nun völlig allein lässt. Pinter’s “Stummer Diener” (...) umkreist die Irrealität der Realität (oder*

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<sup>490</sup> *Aargauer Tagblatt*, 21-9-1991.

*die Realität der Irrealität). (...) Das Publikum verlässt den Keller der Badener Claque denn auch wie benommen, gerädert, ausgelaugt. Und es dankt den beiden Schauspielern mit starkem Applaus für eine Wiedergabe von hoher Eindringlichkeit.*”<sup>491</sup>

Although Pinter himself claimed that the higher power he was writing about was only Wilson, the two hitmen’s boss, it is nevertheless possible to draw parallels between Wilson giving his subordinates instructions via the dumb waiter and a higher power directing us as human beings on earth. This is obviously what the reviewer is writing about here. It would seem that this directing concept found good reception with the critic, as well as the audience, which strongly applauded the production. The staging was highly convincing according to the reviewer, however it made clear the limits of surrealistic-absurdist theater. This final remark would indicate that something may have been missing, which further reviewers mention in their critiques.

**“Der stumme Diener hat nichts von seiner Aktualität eingebüsst: Pinter schildert an der beklemmenden Situation zweier Profi-Killer, die in einem geschlossenen Raum auf ihren nächsten Auftrag warten, die Absurdität des modernen fremdbestimmten Daseins in einer als bedrohlich empfundenen Welt. Die allerdings mit viel Sinn für abstruse Dialoge und Komik. (...) ... wobei die typische britische Trockenheit der Dialoge durch die Übersetzung leider etwas verlorengeht....**”<sup>492</sup>

In the above review of the same production in the Claque, critic Nick Manouk writes that Pinter’s play has not lost any of its topicality in over 30 years. He reflects on the nightmarish situation of the two characters trapped in a closed room, apparently waiting to bring doomsday upon someone. The reviewer emphasizes Pinter’s sense for abstruse dialogues and comedy. Later in on in the critique, he writes that the typical dry British wit has gotten partially lost in translation, which would concur with several previous reviews of *Der stumme Diener*, and serves to confirm the fact that Thiem's translation does not manage to entirely recreate Pinter’s original lines.

The following review by Roland Erne makes it clear that the comic relief in Michael

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<sup>491</sup> *Der Bund*, 1-10-1991.

Oberers' staging of the play doesn't create sufficient tension in the production in the Claque theater. The critic blames actor Siegfried Duhnke (playing Ben) for acting his role deadly seriously. That is certainly not in keeping with Pinter's intentions, and would make the play less accessible for the audience, as well as rendering Pinter's themes more difficult to digest.

*„Eigentlich stellt Pinter in seinem (...) Einakter zwei moderne Clowns auf die Bühne, die dem Image des eiskalten Berufskillers nachzuleben versuchen. (...) Davon ist in der Inszenierung von Michael Oberer nur insofern etwas zu spüren, als Gus (Luc Spori) und Ben (Siegfried Duhnke) zuweilen als Synchron-Pantomimen agieren, die ihre grotesken Ticks –Automaten gleich – immerfort wiederholen. Insgesamt aber fehlt der Aufführung der Claque jene hintergründige Komik, die Pinters Grundsituation spannend macht. Oberers Killer (vorab Ben) machen in verbissenem Ernst....“<sup>493</sup>*

Interestingly, Marbo Beck directed a production of *Der stumme Diener* with inmates at the Prison of Wien-Stockerau in 1996, but no review of this performance could be found. This represents an interesting pedagogical production of Pinter's socio-political play, which presumably would have pleased the playwright, although he may not have declared any pedagogical intentions with respect to this play.

### ***Der stumme Diener***

#### **Kleine Bühne des Theaters Basel, Switzerland, October 1997**

*Directed by Peter Keller; Ben – Christian Standke; Gus - Sebastien Jacobi;*

*Translation by Willy H. Thiem*

The above production was, in comparison to the previous production of *Ashes to Ashes* in the same theater, not successful, as described in the below review written by Joerg Jermann:

***“Das Appläuschen konnte seine Wässrigkeit denn auch nicht verbergen. (...) ‘Neu durchgesehene Fassung nach der Übersetzung von Willy H. Thiem tönt als Konzept***

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<sup>492</sup> *Aargauer Volksblatt*, 21-9-1991.

*reichlich verunsichert, und dementsprechend sah denn auch die Premiere aus.*<sup>494</sup>

Not surprisingly, this production did not find a good response in the audience, despite the fact that Willy Thiem apparently revised his translation of Pinter's play. This critique does not make any mention of humor whatsoever, so it is somewhat difficult to say whether the director's concept may have been mostly at fault for the failure of the production, as the next review would tend to indicate.

*“Ben (Christian Standtke) und Gus (Sebastien Jacobi) gehen ihre Figuren mit psycho-realistischem Ernst an: Das macht den Verlauf träge und die Konstellation blass. Die Disparatheit des Stücks wird nicht genutzt....”*<sup>495</sup>

In the above review, the unnamed critic would seem to agree with the former review, in that the staging doesn't sound successful. In particular, the critic claims that the actors took too serious an angle on their roles, which made the action slow and the constellation pale. That would certainly not be in keeping with Pinter's intention.

*“Treuherzig packt die Basler Bühne, die sich in der vergangenen Saison um die deutschsprachige Erstaufführung des jüngsten Pinter-Stückes ‘Asche zu Asche’ verdient gemacht hat, einen illusionistisch-symbolistisch-dekonstruktivistischen Babuschka-Pinter aus. Aber von den Schrecken und Scherzen am ‘äussersten Rand der Existenz’ (Pinter) ist im – durchaus variantenreichen und gekonnten – Spiel der Akteure, in ihren Slapstick-Versuchen und ihrer irritierenden schenkel-klopfenden Männerfreundschaft etwas wenig zu spüren.”*<sup>496</sup>

Critic Alexandra Kedves records a reaction, which is similar to that of the previous review. It would seem that the lame attempt at slapstick was clearly not fitting for this production, and the poor reception must have had something to do with this misinterpretation of Pinter's intentions.

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<sup>493</sup>Langenthaler Tagblatt, 24-9-1991.

<sup>494</sup>Basellandschaftliche Zeitung, 4-10-1997.

<sup>495</sup>Der Bund, 4-10-1997.

***Der Stumme Diener*****Theater der Stadt Aalen, Altes Rathaus, 23 February 2008**Directed by Ingmar Otto; Set by Ariane Scherpf; Starring Alexander Redwitz as Gus and André Würde as Ben; **Translated by Michael Walter*****"Killer schweigt nicht und schlittert ins eigene Verderben:****"In den 70 Minuten "Stummer Diener" darf allerdings niemand auf "Godot", auf tiefeschürfende oder pulsierende Dialoge warten. Was zu Ohren kommt, entpuppt sich, immer wieder von vieldeutigem Schweigen unterbrochen, als schlicht banal."*<sup>497</sup>

The above German production in Aalen would seem to be one of the first stagings of the new translation by Michael Walter. The reviewer does not seem to be very taken with the linguistic brilliance of the dialogues, labling them simply trivial. However he later praises the play for being duly disconcerting, on account of its theme. There is no mention of humor, whatsoever, in the critique, which presumably accounts for the review's lack of enthusiasm.

Another review by of the same production by Wolfgang Nussbaumer is equally unenthusiastic, and also explicitly mentions that the director has managed to drive all the black humor out of the dialogues:

***"Der nicht gekochte Tee wird kalt:****"Otto hat den banalen Dialogen gründlich jeden schwarzen Humor ausgetrieben, hat dem von draußen via Speiseaufzug – der stumme Diener – in die triste fensterlose Hinrichtungsstätte im Keller eines Hauses eindringenden Nonsens aller grotesken Züge beraubt. (...) Den „Komödien der Bedrohung“ ist deshalb dieser Einakter schon zugeordnet worden. Doch von Komödie keine Spur. Bierernst verrichten André Würde im Skinhead-Habitus und Alexander Redwitz als supernervöser Durchschnittsganove ihre Textarbeit. Nichts von der Kunst, gegen die Sinnlosigkeit eine realistische Position zu behaupten. Das ist per se „lächerlich“. Weshalb die großen absurden Dramen eben von dieser Mischung aus Melancholie und schwarzem Humor*

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<sup>496</sup> *Tagesspiegel*, 8-10-1997.<sup>497</sup> *Aalener Nachrichten*, 25 Feb 2008.

*durchzogen sind.*"<sup>498</sup>

The above review serves to make it very clear that Pinter's comedies of menace live from the humor in his lines. Director Ingmar Otto seems to have destroyed or ignored all the humorous moments, sadly resulting in an unnecessarily boring production.

***Der stumme Diener***

**Theater Fanferlüsich, Stadt Braunschweig, June 2008**

Director unknown; Ben: Carsten Schrödter; Gus: Christian Löchte

***"Die Angst der Killer beim Warten auf das Opfer:***

*"Die Gefühlslagen schwanken zwischen gespielter Heiterkeit und hintergründiger Beklemmung. Der Jüngere wird allmählich ungeduldig und nervt mit Nölerei und merklich wachsender Angst, die kulminiert, als aus dem Speiseaufzug mit Hilfe von Zetteln autoritäre Anweisungen kommen. Fast unterwürfig diensteifrig befolgen sie die Wünsche von oben und offenbaren dabei eine ganze Palette von charakterlichen Eigenschaften. Von verschlagen über offenherzig bis zu cholerischen Ausbrüchen. Bis die Dinge eine überraschende Wendung nehmen. Kräftiger Beifall für die brillante Darbietung eines insgesamt etwas verstaubten Stückes."*<sup>499</sup>

Critic Harald Hilpert emphasizes the changing mood of this production, which alternated between hilarity and anxiety, just as Pinter intended in his comedy of menace. The reviewer also notes the submissive obedience of the hitmen in following their orders until the unexpected end. The audience applauded for the brilliant performance of what the reviewer call a 'slightly dust-ridden play.'

Altogether it can be said that the first productions of *Der stumme Diener* suffered under Willy Thiem's insufficient translation, as illustrated according the numerous reviews. Neither Pinter's humor nor his political stance were properly understood at the onset. Michael Walter's new translation has helped to alleviate the poor reception to some extent, duly increasing the popularity of Pinter's play, which is staged regularly in German-speaking countries.

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<sup>498</sup> *Schwäbische Post*, 25 Feb 2008

### 5.2.2 Production History & Reception of *The Dumb Waiter* Film by Robert Altman

The very first television production of *The Dumb Waiter* was broadcast by Granada Television on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1961 starring Kenneth Warren and Roddy McMillan.<sup>500</sup> In 1964 BBC made a new television play of *The Dumb Waiter*.<sup>501</sup> In 1985 Kenneth Ives directed a film version of *The Dumb Waiter*, with Kenneth Cranham and Colin Blakely, specially made for television and first broadcast by BBC TV on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1985.<sup>502</sup>

Two years later, during his exile from mainstream Hollywood in the 1980s, Robert Altman directed a television feature film version of *The Dumb Waiter*, with John Travolta and Tom Conti, which was filmed in Canada and first broadcast in the United States of America on ABC TV on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1987 as the second part of Altman's series entitled *Basements*. Part one was Harold Pinter's first play *The Room*.

Director Robert Altman was an independent American filmmaker, born in Kansas City in 1925, who served as a bomber pilot in the Philippines in World War II. His first successful production was *M\*A\*S\*H\** (1971), a black anti-war comedy, based on his own experience during the war. *M\*A\*S\*H\** was nominated for six Academy Awards, and won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival. The famous TV series was based on it, however Altman did not receive any royalties for the hit series.

Altman was considered a non-conformist, who stuck to his own visions at all cost. His films often seem to have been influenced by certain works of art or styles of painting. The most successful films he made include *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* (1971), *Nashville* (1976), *Fool for Love* (1985), *Vincent and Theo* (1990), *The Player* (1992), *Short Cuts* (1993), and *Gosford Park* (2001). Robert Altman passed away in 2006 in Los Angeles.<sup>503</sup>

<sup>499</sup> *Braunschweiger Zeitung*, 26 June 2008.

<sup>500</sup> *This Is Theater: The Dumb Waiter*.

<sup>501</sup> Gordon, p. li.

<sup>502</sup> IMDb

<sup>503</sup> Britannica Concise Encyclopedia.

### Film Review of *The Dumb Waiter*

*"Based on the one-act play by Harold Pinter, Robert Altman's The Dumb Waiter is a short made-for-TV movie originally shown on ABC. This absurdist crime story doesn't follow a traditional plot, but it follows the work of two hitmen: Ben (John Travolta) and Gus (Tom Conti). They hang out in the basement of a deserted rooming house to await their next instructions on who to kill. Thinking the house has been abandoned, things get complicated when they receive information from sources coming from other floors. They bicker between themselves as their anxiety grows about the unknown victim."*<sup>504</sup>

It is important to note that Altman's *The Dumb Waiter* was listed under the genres of "crime comedy" and "comedy drama." The descriptions in the movie database are "talky" and "quirky,"<sup>505</sup> the latter once again making a clear reference to the fact that both Pinter, as well as Altman, intended this to be a work of humor.

In the trailer of *The Dumb Waiter*, the *New York Times* review calls Altman's movie: "subtle, evocative, multilayered, slyly humorous, ambitious, and off-beat. Tom Conti and John Travolta keep things fast and lively."<sup>506</sup>

According to Altman, Pinter was fine with Altman's version of *The Dumb Waiter*, except that he had wanted to have the hit men played with Cockney accents, which was a long shot with Tom Conti and John Travolta cast as them. Apparently that did not at all please Pinter, and it seems that there must have been disagreement between Altman and Pinter, because there are practically no published remarks made by Pinter on Altman's TV version, whereas all of Pinter's other screenplays have been analysed and commented on in detail. In his book *Altman on Altman*, the director describes Pinter's reaction to *The Dumb Waiter* as follows:

*"He was fine, except he hated my casting of Tom Conti, because he said they were supposed to be two Cockney guys. And I said I felt that Tom had this Scottish accent*

<sup>504</sup> *New York Times* movie review: *The Dumb Waiter*.

<sup>505</sup> *Allmovie* database.

<sup>506</sup> *The Dumb Waiter* (1987).

and that we should just let him use it. So that pissed Harold off."<sup>507</sup>

The interviewer then asks about John Travolta as a Cockney, and Altman responds: "He was great, John was really good."<sup>508</sup> Altman was obviously giving his subjective opinion here,<sup>509</sup> but Harold Pinter's reaction was definitely quite the opposite, as will be illustrated later.

In complete contrast, Michael Wilmington wrote in *Los Angeles Times*: "*The blithe deconstructionist of screenplays, (Robert Altman) stuck almost religiously to texts by David Rabe and Harold Pinter.*"<sup>510</sup>

Further evidence that Altman's claim was most likely incorrect is found in an interview given by Pinter for *Timeout London*, where he says that of the 25 filmscripts he has written, three were "fucked up."<sup>511</sup> He took his name off *The Remains of the Day*, and he was very unhappy with the explicit violence in Volker Schlöndorff's directing of *The Handmaid's Tale*, which leaves only one onother script that he considers "fucked up."<sup>512</sup>

The power of deduction allows us to conclude that Pinter was most likely speaking of *The Dumb Waiter*, directed by Robert Altman, as being 'fucked up.' It is a fact that Pinter left his name on *The Handmaid's Tale* "with some reluctance,"<sup>513</sup> and the rest of his screenplays are elaborated in detail in Steven Gale's book *Sharp Cut: Harold Pinter's Screenplays and the Artistic Process*. Only *The Dumb Waiter* receives no further mention whatsoever, and the credits in this movie read: "Written by Harold Pinter,"<sup>514</sup> instead of the usual 'Screenplay by Harold Pinter.'

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<sup>507</sup> Thompson, p. 141.

<sup>508</sup> Ibid.

<sup>509</sup> In *Sharp Cut*, Steven Gale lists the TV premiere of *The Dumb Waiter* as 12 May 1987, whereas Altman claims in *Altman on Altman* (p. 141) that it and *The Room* were broadcast on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve. This discrepancy presumably indicates that Altman's own memory didn't always serve him perfectly.

<sup>510</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, 11 November 1990.

<sup>511</sup> Pinter's full response is quoted in *Chapter 1.1.4.3 Screenplays by Pinter*.

<sup>512</sup> *Time Out London*, 2008.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid.

<sup>514</sup> *The Dumb Waiter*, Dir. Robert Altman, 1987.

In an earlier quote, Pinter states that three of his screenplays were 'rewritten' by others.<sup>515</sup> Once again, he does not specifically mention *The Dumb Waiter* as one of them, but most evidence would point towards this, as practically no sources are available referring to Pinter's work on *The Dumb Waiter* or his reaction to it. The author of this thesis attempted in vain to obtain a copy of Pinter's appearance on the *Good Morning America* show on ABC TV, in which Pinter presumably commented on Altman's film, which had just been broadcast on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1987. However it appears that the transcript of this show can no longer be located.<sup>516</sup>

Altman's movie introduces some entirely unexpected aspects. For example, Tom Conti goes into great detail in the role of Gus about how he loves the crockery, including the "red half-moons"<sup>517</sup> on the dishes provided by the hit men's boss. Conti may have thought this appropriate, because of Pinter's protests against the breaches of human rights in Turkey in 1985. However, in June 2011, the author conducted an interview in London with Harry Burton, a close friend of Pinter's and one of his favourite actors and directors, and asked him whether Pinter would have agree to that. Burton replied, "There's no way Harold would have condoned that. (...) Between the three of them [Altman, Conti and Travolta], they invented all sorts of things. And Harold wasn't prepared for that. He was incredibly shocked."<sup>518</sup>

As is often the case in the motion picture business, it would appear that a few scenes at the beginning of Quentin Tarantino's famous movie *Pulp Fiction* are partial quotes of Robert Altman's *The Dumb Waiter*.<sup>519</sup> John Travolta's role as hitman Vincent Vega in *Pulp Fiction*, repeatedly discussing certain terms with his partner, is very similar to that of his role as hitman Ben in *The Dumb Waiter*, especially when they banter about unimportant issues, such as the the meaning of the word 'pilot,' which evokes memories of the the discussion about lighting the 'pilot light' of the stove in Pinter's script and Altman's adaptation of *The Dumb Waiter*. The explanation of the term

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<sup>515</sup> haroldpinter.org: Films.

<sup>516</sup> Former ABC TV Director Harvey Dzodin was helpful in the futile search for this transcript.

<sup>517</sup> *The Dumb Waiter*, 6:07 min.

<sup>518</sup> Burton, personal interview conducted by R.v. Paschen on 28 June 2011.

<sup>519</sup> Cf. *Wicked Stage*, 19 Oct. 2009: "Then came Quentin Tarantino, whose dialogue is essentially a degraded, high-school version of Pinter's "comedy of menace," re-fitted with fresher pop references (and goosed along by literal threats of torture and rape). But a funny thing happened to the Theater of the Absurd once Quentin Tarantino and Lorne Michaels got their hands on it: it went meta, and lost its powers of critique."

‘pilot’ is followed by a lengthy discussion of the meaning of ‘foot massage’ and Travolta's foreshadowing remark in *Pulp Fiction*: "You play with matches, you get burnt."<sup>520</sup> This is reminiscent of the argument regarding the matches in Altman's *The Dumb Waiter*, in which Gus is told off by Ben (Travolta) to not play with matches: "(Slapping Gus's hand.) Don't waste them! Go on, go and light it."<sup>521</sup> It is even conceivable that Travolta's role as a hitman in *The Dumb Waiter* may have given Tarantino the idea of casting Travolta as a hitman in *Pulp Fiction*.

Another movie by the name of *In Bruges*,<sup>522</sup> a black comedy filmed in 2008 about two hitmen hiding out in Belgium after messing up a job, has a plot quite similar to *The Dumb Waiter*. *In Bruges* also shows how the two hitmen's attitudes to their work changes in view of the life and death situations they are confronted with.<sup>523</sup> It is quite possible that *The Dumb Waiter* may have consciously or unconsciously inspired Martin McDonagh to write the screenplay for *In Bruges*.

### 5.3 General Commentaries on *The Dumb Waiter*

The essence of *The Dumb Waiter* boils down to the ambiguous status of victim and perpetrator, which may prove to be interchangeable. Pinter constructs a storyline from which the audience initially concludes that both of the characters are hit men, thus both being the villains, however this assumption slowly crumbles during the play. Throughout the dialogue there is a game of subservience and dominance between Ben and Gus, which is spiked with menacing humor and culminates in Gus pulling the shorter straw. In terms of Freud's theory of joke telling, Gus begins sympathizing with the victims of Ben's humorous accounts from the newspaper, thereby refusing to be amused by Ben's jokes and acknowledge him as the authority, in an attempt to tip the balance.

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<sup>520</sup> *Pulp Fiction*, 10:05 min.

<sup>521</sup> Pinter 1987, p. 141.

<sup>522</sup> *In Bruges*: Film written and directed by Martin McDonagh; Starring Colin Farrell, Brendan Gleeson and Elizabeth Berrington; Produced by Blueprint Pictures, Film4 and Focus Features; (Colin Farrell won a Golden Globe Award for the film, and Martin McDonagh won a BAFTA Award for Best Original Screenplay.); Released in 2008, UK & USA.

<sup>523</sup> Another movie, which quotes Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* and its theme of impending death with absurdist twists, is *Synecdoche, New York* written and directed by Charlie Kaufmann, 2008.

The unexpected outcome of the play reflects the ambivalent nature of any victim, who is predisposed to becoming a perpetrator, as psychological studies indicate, as well as the uncertain status of the villain, who may quickly become the victim. The interchangeability of roles in society, in working relationships and in life, in general, could be seen as the overriding theme of this play. From the onset there is also an invisible threat or unknown menace, which is initially perceived to be either the thugs' boss or an unseen enemy. The audience is surprised to see that the threat actually comes from within the relationship or system, and not from outside. *The Dumb Waiter* is a black comedy of menace incorporating gallows humour as a form of comic relief.

Communication is the key to the conflict in the play or, perhaps, a lack of good communication. Ben picks a fight with Gus regarding the latter's language usage: "light the kettle" vs. "light the gas." This is actually a quarrel for domination, as well as a means for the two characters to avoid discussing the unknown threat posed to both of them. Violence and verbal abuse can be seen as a means of defense. Ben tries to subjugate Gus's attempts at questioning his authority, and only when Ben feels threatened does he resort to violence. Otherwise he's content to uphold the contention most authorities subscribe to, namely that he's looking after his subordinate and may be in possession of information that Gus doesn't have.

Gus would seem to be seeking the truth, which Ben is not willing to confront. Gus is more observant of his surroundings, perhaps because he feels more threatened by the general situation, as well as by Ben. Ben, however, is mainly concerned with maintaining the status quo, which is his authority over Gus. But Ben is not able to come up with any answers to their absurd predicament of receiving orders via the dumb waiter any better than Gus. The comedy lies in the absurd nature of their dilemma, which seeks resolution leading to ever more absurd attempts to fulfill these orders. And it is the impossibility of fulfilling these orders 'from above,' which eventually evokes the audience's sympathy for the predicament of the two hit men.

This struggle for the dominant position creates a good deal of dramatic tension throughout the play. The audience is left uncertain as to whether Ben can maintain his authority over Gus until the bitter end. However we recognize the symbiotic

dependence of the two con men upon each other,<sup>524</sup> and this mutual reliance leads us to think they will continue working as a team. Yet Gus refuses to remain entirely subordinate, so their working relationship crumbles and eventually topples with the aid of the unknown gangster boss.

The difference between Ben and Gus's attitudes towards authority is striking. Ben refuses to question any orders from above, adhering strictly to the rules of the game, which apparently include absolute obedience. Whereas Gus constantly questions the sense of things, including Ben's logic and authority over him. Ben also refuses to feel pity with the victims in the newspaper articles he's reading. This unsympathetic attitude foreshadows Ben's unrelenting position as the senior partner towards Gus. Yet the irony of the situation is that Ben can only remain in power, if he doesn't show pity for anyone and remains loyal to his boss.

At the same time, Ben's superior position is undermined by Gus's increasing identification with the victims of treachery, even arguing for the girl's innocence in the newspaper story about the killed cat. Gus will no longer laugh along with Ben's jokes, no longer acting as his ally. After Ben tells the story, he seems to feel this and looks around for his gun. In the end, Gus will find it pointing at himself. Joe Orton, who was a great fan of Pinter's, has been quoted as saying: "*Laughter is a serious business and comedy a weapon more dangerous than tragedy.*"<sup>525</sup> What began as comedy in Pinter's play has turned into a menace as power plays take grip. Martin Esslin also sees the element of comedy alongside the tragic absurdity, remarking that Pinter's humor is "*wildly comic*"<sup>526</sup> in this play. He also praises Pinter's use of language to characterize the two hit men in this play, in that each of the two thugs has his own vocabulary, syntax and manner of speech.<sup>527</sup>

The true irony of this con game is that if Ben does shoot Gus at the end of the play, then he is left without a subordinate and loses his own position of authority, perhaps even losing the entire power game. However if Ben should refuse to obey the orders from on high, then he will presumably be killed himself. His dilemma cannot be

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<sup>524</sup> Prentice, p. 13.

<sup>525</sup> Lahr, p. 160.

<sup>526</sup> Esslin 1980b, p. 239.

satisfactorily resolved. No justice can be found in a system, which demands blind obedience. This would also reflect Pinter's understanding of the Nazi regime and the Shoah or holocaust, which presumably influenced him to write this early play.

Furthermore, the influence of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, written in 1952 and translated by Beckett into English in 1954, on Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* is unmistakable. In Beckett's play it is two tramps, who are waiting for the passage of time. Whereas two hitmen are waiting dumbly in Pinter's play – to commit an assassination – or to be killed, only time will tell. The ambivalent ending of Pinter's comedy of menace is summarized well by Styan: "*At the curtain, Ben is told to kill the man who is about to come through the door. Amid our laughter, we are shocked to see that it is Gus, and the play ends abruptly.*"<sup>528</sup>

#### 5.4 Pinter's Comments on *The Dumb Waiter*

To uphold the underlying political nature of *The Dumb Waiter*, we can refer to a remark made by Pinter in 2007 in the scope of Harry Burton's documentary film *Working with Pinter* on his political stance: "*I've always been a political playwright. I haven't always written political plays, but I've always been a political person, and 'The Dumb Waiter' I consider to be a political play.*"<sup>529</sup>

In a revealing interview with Pinter about the violence reflected in his work, Pinter claims he sees it in connection with the conflict between dominant and subservient persons:

*"The world is a pretty violent place. (...) I think what you're talking about began in 'The Dumb Waiter,' which from my point of view is a relatively simple piece of work. The violence is really only an expression of the question of dominance and*

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<sup>527</sup> Cf. Esslin 1973, p. 50.

<sup>528</sup> Styan, p. 247.

<sup>529</sup> *Working with Pinter*, 45:45 min.

*subservience.... I wouldn't call this violence so much as a battle for positions, it's a very common, everyday thing.*"<sup>530</sup>

Interestingly, in an interview with Pinter in 1985, he mentions that critic Kenneth Tynan apparently did not quite appreciate the political metaphor intended in *The Dumb Waiter*, as the latter considered the play akin to T.S. Elliot's *Sweeney Agonistes*. Tynan only saw the formal structure of the play and did not recognize what it was actually about.<sup>531</sup>

While watching a rehearsal of *The Dumb Waiter* in preparation for a televised production in England, Pinter took note that it was obvious to the actors that the anonymous character giving the orders was a figure of authority. Gus attempts to question this authority and is about to be humiliated for it in the end. This may not have been clear to the German cast of the World Premiere in Frankfurt in 1959, however Pinter was also convinced that the political metaphor was completely clear to the cast and director involved in the production of the English premiere in 1960.<sup>532</sup>

### **5.5 A Comparative Study of *The Dumb Waiter* with Its German Translation by Willy Thiem, the Film by Robert Altmann and Its German Dubbed Version *Der stumme Diener***

While Harold Pinter's play begins in a basement room, Robert Altman's movie sets the scene by showing us how John Travolta and Tom Conti arrive on a snowy road at a house in the countryside and look for the right entrance to the dilapidated building. Everything Conti does as Gus is outdone by Travolta as Ben. We immediately get the impression that Ben is Gus's superior. When Gus claims a bed in a caged area of the basement, which is highly reminiscent of a prison, Ben walks in as soon as Gus has turned his back and takes the bed that Gus had wanted. When Gus notices, he merely shrugs his shoulders and accepts his fate in silence. The initial action in the first scene already foreshadows the entire storyline of the film.

<sup>530</sup> *Paris Review*, Third Series, 1967.

<sup>531</sup> Cf. Pinter in an Interview with Nicholas Hern, May 1985.

<sup>532</sup> Ibid. Cf.

Pinter does not give us this sort of information in the stage directions for his play. It begins somewhat more neutrally with Ben lying on a bed in the basement, while "*Gus is sitting on a bed, right, tying his shoelaces, with difficulty.*"<sup>533</sup> This is Pinter's signal for a comic routine, indicating that the character of Gus is a kind of helpless klutz.<sup>534</sup> Many English-speaking actors have availed themselves of this scene to provoke laughter in the audience, which is something the earlier German directors apparently did not catch onto. Willy Thiem's German translation of the stage directions is: "*Gus sitzt auf dem Bett rechts und schnürt sich umständlich die Schuhe zu.*"<sup>535</sup> Michael Walter's new German translation is similar: "*Gus sitzt auf dem Bett links und bindet sich umständlich die Schuhe.*"<sup>536</sup> Very strangely, Michael Walter has also made an error and mixed up Pinter's stage directions, exchanging right for left. Apart from that, these translations play down the situation, and would have been much clearer as: '*... hat Schwierigkeiten, die Schnürsenkel zu binden*' (translation by RvP).<sup>537</sup> Maybe such unmistakable directions would have led early German-language directors to begin the play with a somewhat clownish routine, such as the scene is acted in English-language productions, lightening the plot and making the play easier to digest on the whole.

For the purpose of this comparative study of five versions of Harold Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter*, I have listed the page numbers of the texts I quote from *Plays: One* and *Der stumme Diener* translated by Willy Thiem, published in 1981. Rowholt published the new translation of Michael Walter in 2005. The film versions I have used for this study are *The Dumb Waiter* by Robert Altman released in 1987 in the USA, and the German-synchronized translation, *Der stumme Diener*, also dating from 1987 and produced by Interopa Film for ZDF with Tobias Meister as Ben and Jürgen Thormann as Gus. The German translator and dubbing director was Heinz Freitag. All of the

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<sup>533</sup> Pinter 1987, p. 129.

<sup>534</sup> Cf. Dukore, p. 17. Dukore believes that Gus's comic routine also foreshadows a tragic ending, because it becomes apparent how incapable Gus is

<sup>535</sup> Pinter 1980a, p. 6.

<sup>536</sup> Pinter 2005b, new translation by Michael Walter, p. 3.

<sup>537</sup> Cf. Von Paschen (2012), *Harold Pinter's 'The Dumb Waiter' in German: What's Missing in Translation?* in: *Perspectives on Pinter: A European Cultural Capital Honours the Nobel Laureate*, (Tomaz Onic, ed.). This article also includes English back translations by the author.

these sources are fully documented in the bibliography and filmography sections of this dissertation.

The different versions of *The Dumb Waiter* will be abbreviated as follows:

*DW: The Dumb Waiter* – Play by Harold Pinter

*DW Altman: The Dumb Waiter* – Film by Robert Altman based on above play

*SD Thiem: Der stumme Diener* – Alte Übersetzung von Willy H. Thiem

*SD Walter: Der stumme Diener* – Neue Übersetzung von Michael Walter

*SD Altman: Der stumme Diener* – Film–Synchronübersetzung von Heinz Freitag

**DW p. 130**

*Gus: Who advised him to do a thing like that?*

**DW Altman 5:34**

*Gus: Who advised him to do a thing like that?*

**SD Thiem p. 7**

*Gus: Wer hat ihm denn dazu geraten?*

**SD Walter p. 4**

*Gus: Wer hat ihm das denn geraten?*

**SD Altman 8:47**

*Gus: Wer hat ihm denn den Rat gegeben **sowas zu machen?***

Gus' reply is too long in the German dubbed version. The snappy rhythm of the comic routine is lost. Apparently the translator of the German dubbing text was commissioned to make an entirely new version of *Der stumme Diener* for copyright reasons. In this case, however, there is no need for lipsynching, since Gus speaks the line with his back to the scene, so I would suggest the following shorter rendition:

*Gus: Wer hat ihm geraten **sowas zu tun?** (Translated by R.v. Paschen)*

**DW p. 130-131**

*Gus: (...) He's laid on some very nice crockery this time, I'll say that. It's sort of striped. There's a white stripe. (...) You know, sort of round the cup. Round the*

*rim. All the rest of it's black, you see. Then the saucer's black, except for right in the middle, where the cup goes, where it's white. (...) Yes I'm quite taken with the crockery.*

*Ben: What do you want plates for? You're not going to eat.*

**DW Altman 6:07**

*Gus: (...) He's laid on some very nice crockery this time, I'll say that. It's very nice. It's white, but it's got a black rim. (...) Right around, and like **red halfmoons** and black round the cup, you know like round the rim. And the saucer's got lines round where the cup goes. And it's the same with the plates, they've got the little **red moons** and the half black. (...) I'm very taken with the crockery.*

*Ben: What do you want plates for? You're not going to eat anything.*

**SD Thiem p. 8**

*Gus: (...) Er hat uns diesmal mit sehr schönem Geschirr versorgt, das muß ich sagen. Es ist sozusagen gestreift. Ein weißer Streifen. (...) Weißt du, so um die Tasse herum. Um den Rand rum. Alles andere ist schwarz. Die Untertasse ist schwarz, nur in der Mitte, wo man die Tasse raufstellt, da ist es weiß. (Ben liest) Und die Teller sind auch so, weißt du. Nur daß sie einen schwarzen Streifen haben – die Teller -, quer durch die Mitte. Ja, das Geschirr ist wirklich nach meinem Geschmack.*

*Ben: Wozu brauchst du Teller? Wo du sowieso nichts essen wirst.*

**SD Altman 9:26**

*Gus: (...) Es ist weiß, aber es hat einen schwarzen Streifen rund herum und sowas wie **rote Halbmonde**, und um die Tassen herum schwarz, um den Rand rum. Und die Untertassen haben rundum Streifen, wo die Tasse drauf kommt in der Mitte. Und ebenso haben die Teller solche kleinen **roten Monde** und sind zur Hälfte schwarz. (...) Weißt du, ja ich bin von dem Geschirr sehr angetan.*

*Ben: Wozu brauchst du denn Teller? Du ißt doch nichts?*



*Illus. 26: John Travolta as Ben and Tom Conti as Gus*

This represents a clear manipulation of Pinter's original script, which mentions nothing whatsoever about the nationality or religious affiliation of their boss Wilson, who commissions the thugs. Altman's movie sets the scene for the viewers by implying that the thug's boss is perhaps Turkish or in some way connected with the Islamic world. We must presume Altman knew that Harold Pinter had been politically active against violations of human rights in Turkey, including the torture and imprisonment of writers. However, Pinter wrote *The Dumb Waiter* in 1959, many years before he was to visit Turkey in protest with Arthur Miller in 1985. So although Altman presumably would have intended his manipulation of Pinter's text to be in keeping with the latter's political interests, we have to assume that Pinter himself would not have condoned this deliberate alteration of his text, which was usually something that made him upset.<sup>538</sup> On the other hand, the translator of the dubbing script and the dubbing actors also managed to create a perfectly lip-synched text for Gus's dubbing actor in this scene, so the German-speaking viewer cannot tell that Pinter's original text was manipulated by Altman in his film version. Ben's comic rejoinder represents an important aspect of Pinter's text, which doesn't leave out the opportunity for a humorous retort.

**DW p. 133**

*Ben: It's got a deficient ballcock, that's all. (...)*

Gus: *Go on! That didn't occur to me. (Gus wanders to his bed and presses the mattress.) I didn't have a very restful sleep today, did you? It's not much of a bed. I could have done with another blanket too.*

**DW Altman (CUT)**

**SD p. 10**

Ben: *Der Schwimmer ist defekt, das ist alles. (...)*

Gus: *Aber was! Darauf wär ich nicht gekommen. (Gus geht an sein Bett und drückt auf der Matratze herum.) Ich habe heute nicht sehr gut geschlafen, und du? Das Bett taugt nicht viel. Ich hätte noch eine Decke brauchen können.*

Martin Esslin points out that Pinter makes a very funny pun using the word 'ballcock' in this context, because it has sexual connotations, and he believes that some humor is lost here.<sup>539</sup> However the translator is severely confined in his options in translating this technical word. The other possibilities are *Kugelhahn* or *Schwimmerhahn*. Therefore *Schwimmer* is perhaps not a bad choice, in that it may seem funny to think of a swimmer in a toilet.<sup>540</sup> Robert Altman cuts the latter part of Gus' lines, because his film shows the two hitmen just arriving at the house at the beginning of the motion picture, and the storyline in the film would have suffered otherwise. The author suggests the following translation, which may better reflect Pinter's humor:

Ben: *Der Schwimmer ist hin, das ist alles. (Transl. R.v. Paschen)*

**DW p. 135**

Ben: *What the hell is it now?*

**DW Altman 13:47**

Ben: *What the hell is it now?*

**SD Thiem p. 12**

Ben: *Verdammt noch mal, was willst du jetzt?*

**SD Walter p. 8**

Ben: *Was ist den jetzt schon wieder?*

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<sup>538</sup> Fraser p. 286: "Nothing causes Harold more pain than unlawful interference with his text."

<sup>539</sup> Cf. Esslin 1973, p. 49.

<sup>540</sup> Another alternative might have been *Spülhahn*, which is faintly reminiscent of "Piephahn."

**SD Altman 16:40**

*Ben: Ja gut, was hast du denn jetzt?*

Although Gus is obviously getting on Ben's nerves, by pestering him with questions and apparently pointless running commentaries, the dubbing translator has Ben reply to Gus in friendly manner. This change in tone isn't in keeping with the power hierarchy, which Pinter has established in the play, and fails to increase the suspense we feel due to Gus's suspicions about why Ben stopped in the middle of the road, while he thought Gus was still asleep. In reality, Pinter is foreshadowing the further development of the play, when Gus recognizes that Ben may have already tried to get rid of him on the road, but didn't have the guts to do so. Michael Walter's new translation also misses the point. Perhaps the dubbing translator felt constrained by the fact that the scene uses an over-the-shoulder shot of Travolta's head, and the audience can see his lips move. As an alternative dubbing translation, which is lipsynched but still in keeping with the sense of annoyance in Pinter's original line, I would suggest:

Ben: **Zum Teufel**, was ist jetzt? (translated by R.v. Paschen)

**DW p. 136**

*Gus: (...) (He examines the bedclothes.) I thought these sheets didn't look too bright. I thought they **ponged** a bit. I was too tired to notice when I got in this morning. Eh, that's taking a bit of a liberty, isn't it? I don't want to share my bed-sheets. It told you things were going down the drain. I mean, we've always had clean sheets laid on up till now. I've noticed it. (...)*

*Ben: How do you know they weren't clean? You've spent the whole day in them, haven't you?*

*Gus: What, you mean it might be **my pong**? (He sniffs sheets.) (...)*

**SD Thiem p. 13**

*Gus: (...) (Mustert das Bettzeug.) Ich dachte, die Betttücher sind nicht ganz sauber. Ich merkte so'n **Aroma**. Ich war nur heute früh zu müde, als ich ins Bett ging. Das ist aber ein bißchen stark, was? Ich will nicht alte Betttücher haben. Ich meine, bis jetzt haben wir doch immer frisches Bettzeug gehabt. Ich hab's bemerkt. (...)*

*Ben: Wieso weißt du denn, daß die Tücher hier nicht frisch waren? Du hast doch den ganzen Tag drin gelegen?*

*Gus: Du meinst, es ist mein **eigener Mief**? (Riecht an den Betttüchern). (...)*

**DW Altman 18:25 (CUT)**

Robert Altman apparently cut the above lines from his movie, because it would have destroyed the logic of his screenplay. In his film, Ben and Gus arrive during the daytime and haven't yet spent a night in the basement. This dialogue excerpt serves to illustrate another example of Pinter's comic routine, which he sets up with Ben's question regarding who actually dirtied the sheets, turning the table on Gus, who has to admit he might be smelling his own body odour. In the German translation, Willy Thiem unfortunately chooses a less humorous approach, first using the term '*Aroma*,' and then substituting it with '*Mief*.' Pinter's original dialogue heightens the humour by repetitively using the comical word '*pong*,' which implies a bad smell that almost jumps out at you.

**DW p. 138**

*Gus: We've never done a job in Tottenham.*

*Ben: How do you know?*

*Gus: I'd remember Tottenham.*

*Ben: (...) **Don't make me laugh**, will you? (Ben turns back and reads.)*

**DW Altman 17:40**

*Gus: We've never done a job in Tottenham.*

*Ben: How do you know?*

*Gus: I'd remember Tottenham.*

*Ben: (...) Hah. **Don't make me laugh**, will you? You? (Ben laughs.)*

**SD Thiem p. 15**

*Gus: Wir haben noch nie was in Tottenham gemacht.*

*Ben: Woher weißt du das?*

*Gus: An Tottenham würde ich mich erinnern.*

*Ben: (...) **Mach dich nicht lächerlich**. (Ben dreht sich wieder zurück und liest.)*

**SD Walter p. 11**

*Ben: (...) **Dass ich nicht lache**. (Ben dreht sich wieder um und liest.)*

**SD Altman 20:25**

*Gus: Wir hatten bis jetzt noch nie einen Job in Tottenham*

*Ben: Wie willst du das wissen?*

*Gus: An Tottenham würde ich mich erinnern.*

*Ben: Oh Mann, **du bringst mich zum Lachen.** (Ben lacht.)*

Here we see an example of how Altmann endeavors to keep up the comic routine in his film, by letting Ben accuse Gus of making him laugh and actually laughing out loud to indicate that Gus has made a fool of himself. Neither Thiem's nor Walter's translations of the line in the play quite catch the humor in Pinter's original line, because it implies that Ben universally ridicules Gus without any comic undertone. In contrast, the dubbing translator comes up with a better version for Altmann's film, which is funnier and ironically foreshadows the laughter that ensues.

**DW p. 139**

*Ben: Pick it up!*

*(Gus slowly moves towards it, bends and picks it up.)*

**DW Altman 2/0:48**

*Ben: Pick it up!*

*(Gus approaches the letter slowly and with trepidation. Suddenly he snatches it up, as though it were about to run away like a weasel.)*

**SD Thiem p. 16**

*Ben: Heb's auf!*

*(Gus geht langsam näher, bückt sich und hebt den Umschlag auf.)*

**SD Altman 22:18**

*Ben: Heb's auf!*

*(Gus approaches the letter slowly and with trepidation. Suddenly he snatches it up, as though it were about to run away like a weasel.)*



*Illus. 27: Tom Conti as Gus*

Robert Altman definitely increases the comic relief with these directions for Tom Conti, who played Gus. As the audience, we cannot help laughing at his fearful and humorous behavior in the face of a simple envelope. Pinter's original script doesn't include such explicit stage directions, but Altman's film version would seem to be entirely in keeping with the former's intentions in his 'comedy of menace.'

**DW p. 140**

*Gus: (... He goes to the door, opens it, looks out and shuts it.) No one. (He replaces the revolver.)*

*Ben: What did you see? (...)*

*(Gus probes his ear with a match.)*

*Ben: (Slapping his hand.) Don't waste them! **Go on, go and light it.***

**DW Altman 2/2:47**

*Gus: (...)* ***(He pats down his hair before going to the door.)*** *(He goes to the door, opens it, looks outside and closes it again.)*

***Ben: (Cleaning his ear with a match.) Go on. (Not interested in what Gus may find outdoors.)***

*Ben: What did you see?*

*Gus: Nothing.*

*Ben: Must have been pretty quick.*

*Gus: (He tucks his revolver into his belt.) They'll come in handy anyway. (...)*

*(Gus probes his ear with a match.)*

*Ben: (Slapping his hand.) Don't waste them! Go on, light it.*

**SD Thiem p. 17**

*Gus: (...Er geht zur Tür, öffnet sie, blickt hinaus und schließt sie wieder.) Kein Mensch. (Er steckt den Revolver wieder unter das Kopfkissen.)*

*Ben: Was hast du gesehen? (...)*

*(Gus stochert mit einem Streichholz im Ohr.)*

*Ben: (Schlägt ihm auf die Hand.) Verschwende sie nicht! Los, zünde ihn an.*

**SD Altman 23:48**

*Gus: (...) (Er glättet sich die Haare bevor er zur Tür geht.) (Er geht zur Tür, schaut hinaus und schließt sie wieder.) Kein Mensch.*

*Ben: (Stochert mit einem Streichholz im Ohr herum.) Los, weiter. (Nicht daran interessiert, was Gus draussen findet.)*

*Ben: Was hast du gesehen?*

*Gus: Da war gar nichts.*

*Ben: Dann waren die aber schnell.*

*Gus: (Er steckt den Revolver in sein Hosenbund.) Die kommen ja wie gerufen.*

*(...)*

*(Gus stochert mit einem Streichholz im Ohr.)*

*Ben: (Schlägt ihm auf die Hand.) Verschwende sie nicht, Mann! Na los, anzünden.*



***Illus. 28: Tom Conti as Gus & John Travolta as Ben***

By adding the humorous directions for actor Tom Conti to pat down his hair before he attempts to shoot their boss, Robert Altman again heightens the comic relief and introduces ironic gallows humor at the sight of a frightened hitman, who is worried about his appearance before knocking off his victim. This gives the audience another opportunity to laugh at Gus, while Altman also shoots Travolta cleaning his ear with a match. Pinter originally intended this stage direction only for Gus several lines later in the scene, but Altman is thus able to emphasize the power play between the two hitmen. Ben takes liberties he does not allow Gus to have in the role of his inferior. Furthermore, Ben is completely disinterested regarding what Gus may find outdoors in Altman's movie. Altman thus foreshadows the fact that Ben already knows no one is out to harm him, and he is in total control of the situation. In contrast, Pinter doesn't give us any such stage directions, leaving us in the dark and letting the unknown menace heighten the suspense.

**DW p. 141**

*Ben: Go and light it.*

*Gus: Light what?*

*Ben: The kettle.*

*Gus: You mean the gas.*

*Ben: Who does?*

*Gus: You do.*

*Ben: (his eyes narrowing) What do you mean, I mean the gas?*

*Gus: Well, that's what you mean, don't you? The gas.*

*Ben: (powerfully) If I say go and light the kettle I mean go and light the kettle.*

*Gus: How can you light a kettle?*

*Ben: It's a figure of speech! Light the kettle. It's a figure of speech!*

*Gus: I've never heard of it...*

*(...)*

*Ben: Who's the senior partner here, me or you?*

**SD Thiem p. 18**

*Ben: Zünde ihn an.*

*Gus: Zünde was an?*

*Ben: Den Kessel.*

*Gus: Du meinst das Gas.*

*Ben: Wer meint das?*

*Gus: Du.*

*Ben: (streng blickend) Was soll das heißen, ich meine das Gas?*

*Gus: Na, das meinst du doch, nicht? Das Gas.*

*Ben: (kraftvoll) Wenn ich dir sage, zünde den Kessel an, dann meine ich, zünde den Kessel an.*

*Gus: Wer kann denn einen Kessel anzünden?*

*Ben: Es ist eine Redensart! Zünde den Kessel an. Es ist eine Redensart!*

*Gus: Hab ich noch nie gehört.*

(...)

*Gus: Wer ist hier der Dienstältere, ich oder du?*

In the above dialogue, Willy Thiem's original translation read: *Gus: Mach den Kessel an.*<sup>541</sup> This translation entirely missed the point of Pinter's brilliant word play, in that it's only funny, if Ben tells Gus to "light" the kettle. Someone must have pointed out this error in translation to Thiem,<sup>542</sup> because the newer version of his translation (published 1969) already incorporates the above corrections. In his book on Pinter, Esslin also points out that Thiem originally translated: *Gus: Wer ist hier der Ältere?*<sup>543</sup> Thiem also corrected this mistranslation into "*Dienstältere*," which robbed the line of its humor, in his "*neu durchgesehene Übersetzung*" or revised and corrected translation.

**DW p. 144**

*Gus: (at length) Who it's going to be. (Silence)*

*Ben: Are you feeling all right?*

**DW Altman 2/8:00**

*Gus: (Shaking his head, stuttering) Who it's going to be.*

*Ben: Are you feeling all right?*

**SD Thiem p. 20**

*Gus: (Endlich) Wer es sein wird. (Stille)*

*Ben: Bist du ganz bei Sinnen. (sic)*

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<sup>541</sup> Esslin (1973), p. 31.

<sup>542</sup> It is quite conceivable that Martin Esslin discussed this with Klaus Juncker at Rowohlt Verlag, as Esslin also translated Pinter for Rowohlt.

**SD Walter p. 17**

*Gus: (endlich) Wer eben dran ist. (Stille)*

*Ben: **Hast du sie noch alle?***

**SD Altman 28:45**

*Gus: (Schüttelt sein Kopf, stotternd) Wer es heute Abend sein wird.*

*Ben: **Sag mal, geht's dir noch gut?***

Thiem's and Walter's translations actually mean: 'Are you out of your mind or out of your senses?' The fact that these translators make a very similar misinterpretation leads the author of this dissertation to believe that Walter may have based some of his new translation on Thiem's old translation. Both of these are certainly somewhat extreme interpretations of Pinter's original line, whereas the dubbing translator Heinz Freitag managed to come up with a closer translation for Altman's film. Once again Altman's film version gives us a further indication of how disturbed Gus is about their upcoming hitjob, obvious by the fact that Gus is barely able to utter his question a second time.

**DW p. 145**

*Gus: (...) I wonder if the walls are sound-proof? (**He touches the wall** above his bed.)*

**DW Altman 10:40**

*Gus: (...) I wonder if the walls are sound-proof? (**He knocks on the metal cage** surrounding their beds.)*

**SD Thiem p. 22**

*Gus: (...) Ob die Wände schalldicht sind? (**Er berührt die Wand** über seinem Bett.)*

**SD Altman 31:27**

*Gus: (...) Ob die Wände schalldicht sind? Was meinst du? (**Er klopft auf das Metallgitter**, das um ihre Betten läuft.)*

Pinter's rhetorical question above is most humorous in Altman's film version, because Gus actually knocks on the metal cage surrounding their beds, indicating that the walls must be as holey as Swiss cheese, enabling everyone in the vicinity to hear

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<sup>543</sup> Ibid.

what's going on inside. This is an excellent example of how Altman is able to heighten the comic relief in his motion picture version of Pinter's play.

In the following example, Gus is recalling a particularly unpleasant hit job he did with Ben, getting rid of a girl, who apparently bled all over the place. The manner in which Gus describes the mess is a prime example of Pinter's gallows humour, but talking about it makes Gus have moral compunctions, and he falls apart. Ben is surprised at this and eventually shows a modicum of sympathy with Gus, rebuffing him in a relatively friendly manner, considering they are hit men.<sup>544</sup> The Pinteresque gallows humour expressed in the description of how the girl spread after having been shot was entirely missing in the original German translation. As quoted by Martin Esslin in the German publication of his book entitled *Pinter*, the line was completely misunderstood by Willy Thiem and translated as: “*Und was sie zusammengefaselt hat, was?*”<sup>545</sup>

**DW p. 146-147**

*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.*

*Ben: (pityingly) You mutt. Do you think we're the only branch of this organization? Have a bit of common. They got departments for everything.*

*Gus: What cleaners and all?*

*Ben: You birk!*

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<sup>544</sup> Cf. Von Paschen (2012), *Harold Pinter's 'The Dumb Waiter in German': What's Missing in Translation? in: Perspectives on Pinter: A European Cultural Capital Honours the Nobel Laureate.* (This article also includes English back translations by the author.)

<sup>545</sup> Esslin (1973), p. 48. “And she sure blabbered around, didn't she?” (Back translation into English by R. von Paschen).

**DW Altman 2/11:56**

*Gus: I was just thinking about that girl, that's all. (Gus sits on his bed.) She wasn't much to look at, but still, you know. It was a mess, eh? What a mess. Honestly don't remember a mess like that one. (Ben heaves a sigh of exasperation.) They don't seem to hold together as well as men, women. A looser texture, like. Didn't she spread, eh? She didn't half spread. I've been meaning to ask you.*

*(Ben sits up and looks him straight in the eye at very close quarters.)*

*Who clears up after we've gone? I'm curious about that, you know. Who does the clearing up? Maybe they don't clear up. Maybe they just leave them? You thought of that? How many jobs have we done? Blimey, I can't count them. (Ben coughs and begins crying, wiping his eyes.) Maybe they just leave them lying after we've gone.*

*Ben: (pityingly) You mutt. Do you think we're the only branch of this organization? Have a bit of common. They got departments for everything.*

*Gus: What cleaners and all?*

*Ben: You birk!*

**SD Thiem p. 23**

*Gus: Ich mußte bloß an das Mädchen denken, weiter nichts. (Er setzt sich auf sein Bett.) Sie war nicht hübsch, ich weiß, aber immerhin. Das war nicht appetitlich, was? Schön unappetitlich. Wirklich, ich weiß nicht, wann es je so unappetitlich war. Die hängen nicht so fest zusammen wie Männer, die Weiber. Weniger festes Gewebe, sozusagen. Die wurde zu Brei. Richtig zu Brei. Kehhh! Aber was ich dich fragen wollte.*

*(Ben setzt sich auf und kneift die Augen zu.)*

*Wer macht da sauber, wenn wir weg sind? Das möcht ich wissen. Wer räumt auf? Vielleicht wird gar nicht aufgeräumt. Vielleicht bleiben sie einfach liegen, was? Was meinst du? Wie oft haben wir's jetzt eigentlich schon gemacht? Meine Güte, ich kann's gar nicht mehr zählen. Angenommen, es wird gar nicht aufgeräumt, wenn wir weg sind.*

*Ben: (mitleidig) Du Idiot. Glaubst du, wir sind der einzige Zweig dieser Organisation? Hab doch etwas Verstand. Die haben Abteilungen für alles.*

Gus: Was, zum Aufräumen und Säubern machen?

Ben: **Sei nicht so naiv.**

**SD Walter p. 19**

Ben: (mitleidig) **Du Trottel.** Glaubst du, wir sind der einzige Zweig dieser Organisation? Streng doch mal dein bisschen Grips an. Die haben Abteilungen für alles.

Gus: Was, Leute zum aufräumen (sic) und so?

Ben: **Blödmann!**

**SD Altman 32:35**

Gus: Ich hab nur an das Mädchen denken müssen, weiter nichts. Sie war nicht unbedingt eine Schönheit, aber trotzdem. War das nicht eine Schweinerei. War eine Schweinerei. Ehrlich gesagt, ich wüsste nicht, wann es schon mal so eine Schweinerei gab. Weißt du, die halten offenbar nicht so fest zusammen wie Männer, die Weiber. Die werden ein weniger festes Gewebe haben als Männer, die Weiber. Die wurde zu Brei. Die wurde richtig zu Brei. Ich wollte dich noch etwas fragen.

**(Ben geht auf ihn zu und schaut ihn ganz nahe an.)**

Wer, wer macht sauber, wenn wir weg sind? Ben, ich möchte wirklich gern mal wissen wer sauber macht, wenn wir weg sind? Aber vielleicht, vielleicht macht gar keiner sauber. Man lässt sie vielleicht ganz einfach liegen. Hast du daran schon mal gedacht? Wie oft haben wir das schon gemacht. (hustet) Sag mal, wie oft haben wir das schon gemacht? **(weint)** Ich kann's nicht zählen. **(hustet, reibt sich die Augen und weint)** Vielleicht lässt man sie einfach liegen, wenn wir weg sind. **(verkutzt sich)**

Ben: **Du bist doch ein Idiot.** Denk doch mal nach, Mann. Glaubst du, wir sind die Einzigen in dieser Organisation? Die haben doch Abteilungen für alles.

Gus: Ja wirklich, Reinigungleute und das alles?

Ben: **Du bist ein Trottel.**



*Illus. 29: John Travolta as Ben & Tom Conti as Gus*

The author of this thesis suggests the following lipsynched translations as possible alternatives, which more closely reflect Pinter's vocabulary:

*Ben: Du Narr! / Du Blödel!*<sup>546</sup>

The above excerpt illustrates that Robert Altman has chosen to make Gus's empathy with the victim highly visible. In contrast, Harold Pinter does not actually make any stage directions indicating that Gus should fall apart or cry in this scene. Altman presumably wanted to take advantage of some revealing close-up shots, which enable us to see how intently John Travolta scrutinizes Tom Conti's face as he speaks of his gruesome memories and second thoughts about their work as hitmen, triggering Gus's breakdown. Pinter has also used this scene as another opportunity for real gallows humor, which is expressed in the description how the girl spread after she was shot. The translator of the German dubbing script culminates the scene with Ben insulting Gus somewhat blatantly, while Thiem's translation is more in keeping with Pinter's original terms of *'mutt'* and *'birk,'*<sup>547</sup> which are comparatively light-hearted, affectionate British slurs, perhaps even indicating that Ben might feel sorry for Gus in

<sup>546</sup> Von Paschen 2012, p. 84.

<sup>547</sup> Cf. Von Paschen (2012), *Harold Pinter's 'The Dumb Waiter in German': What's Missing in Translation? in: Perspectives on Pinter: A European Cultural Capital Honours the Nobel Laureate.* (This article also includes English back translations and suggestions for lip-synched German translations by the author.)

some way or another, particularly comical when uttered by a hitman, and perhaps even indicating that Ben might feel sorry for Gus in one way or another. Walter's translation is also too harsh for this context. However the constraint of lipsynching made it necessary to come up with a new insult, because it is uttered during a close-up of Travolta and Conti, and the result is less than optimal.

**DW p. 153**

*Gus: (...) (He takes his revolver out of its holster to check the ammunition.) We've never let him down though, have we? We've never let him down. I was thinking only the other day, Ben. We're reliable, aren't we? (...)*

**DW Altman 3/3:42**

*Gus: (...) (He takes his revolver and polishes it.) We've never let him down though, have we? We've never let him down. I was just thinking the other day, Ben, we're reli...*

***(Ben aims his pistol directly at Gus.)***

***(Gus notices Ben in shock.)***

*We're reliable, aren't we? (...)*

**SD Thiem p. 29-30**

*Gus: (...) (Nimmt den Revolver wieder aus dem Halfter, um das Magazin zu prüfen.) Wir haben ihn noch nie enttäuscht, nicht wahr? (...)*

**SD Altman 42:40**

*Gus: (...) (Nimmt den Revolver und poliert ihn.) Wir haben ihn noch nie enttäuscht, nicht wahr? Wir haben ihn noch nie enttäuscht. Ich hab grade neulich dran gedacht, wir sind zuverlässig....*

***(Ben zielt seine Pistole direct auf Gus.)***

***(Gus merkt es mit Schrecken.)***

*Wir sind doch sehr zuverlässig, nicht wahr? (...)*



*Illus. 30: John Travolta as Ben*

By introducing new action in the form of Ben's game of aiming his gun directly at Gus, Robert Altman heightens the threatening nature and the gallows humor of the power play in Harold Pinter's comedy of menace. Perhaps this is actually Ben's second attempt to do away with Gus, the first being when he stopped the car on the road on the way to the job. In the followup scene in Altman's movie, Ben points his gun at his own head and mimes his reaction as it goes off apparently killing himself. It is perhaps questionable whether this suicide parody is entirely in keeping with Ben's character according to Pinter's original play, or maybe this is just how Ben thinks he'll be punished, if he doesn't do the job. Altman's interpretation of Ben's character being vulnerable enough to possibly contemplate harming himself would certainly give a new twist to Pinter's macabre comedy.

**DW p. 154**

*Gus: (...) They've sent back the tea.*

*Ben: (anxious) What'd they do that for?*

*Gus: Maybe it isn't **tea-time**.*

**DW Altman 3/5:12**

*Gus: They sent back the tea.*

*Ben: What'd they do that for?*

*Gus: Maybe it's not **tea-time**. (Gus laughs at his own joke.)*

**SD p. 30**

*Gus: (...) Sie haben den Tee zurückgeschickt.*

*Ben: (besorgt) Warum denn?*

*Gus: Vielleicht ist jetzt nicht Tee-Zeit.*

**SD Walter p. 26**

*Gus: Vielleicht ist jetzt nicht Teestunde.*

**SD Altman 43:52**

*Gus: Den Tee haben sie zurückgeschickt.*

*Ben: Was? Warum denn das?*

*Gus: Vielleicht ist noch nicht Tea-time. (Gus lacht über seinen eigenen Witz.)*

The German-dubbed version of Altman's movie certainly chooses a more comic translation in this case, using the original English term of "tea-time," which heightens the comic relief of this pun and provides more opportunity for a good laugh at the situation comedy of the moment, in contrast to the increasing tension between the two hitmen.

In the following example, Gus notices that Ben has tired of the eternal game with the dumb waiter (in this case Wilson, the hit men's boss, rather than the powers on high). Both of them are fed up with the stress of waiting around to do their nasty hit job.

**DW p. 158**

*Gus: (...) What's the matter with you? You don't look too bright. I feel like an Alka-Seltzer myself.*

**DW Altman 3/9:55**

*Gus: (...) What's wrong with you? You don't look too bright. I could do with an Alka-Seltzer myself?*

**SD Thiem p. 33**

*Gus: (...) Was ist denn mit dir los? Du siehst nicht gerade munter aus. Ich könnte auch ein Sprudelwasser gebrauchen.*

**SD Walter p. 29**

*Gus: (...) Was ist denn mit dir los? Du siehst nicht gerade rosig aus. Ich könnte auch ein Alka-Seltzer brauchen.*

**SD Altman 48:24**

*Gus: Was ist denn mit dir los? Du siehst nicht gerade munter aus. Ach, ich komme mir wie ein Alka-Seltzer vor.*



***Illus. 31: Tom Conti as Gus & John Travolta as Ben***

The author of this thesis suggests the following translation:

*Gus: (...) Ich könnte auch ein Aspro-C gebrauchen.*<sup>548</sup>

This is actually a comical example of mistranslations by Thiem, Walter and Freitag. Thiem seems to have assumed that Alka-Seltzer is the brandname of a kind of mineral water, as ‘Selterswasser’ designates bottled water from a town in Germany. It is not clear, whether Walter understood the term correctly, because he left it as is, which is not really comprehensible to a German-speaking audience. On the other hand, Heinz Freitag’s translation for the German-dubbed version of Altman’s movie has simply opted for an incorrect literal translation of Pinter’s line. If Freitag had carefully listened to Tom Conti’s clear interpretation in Altman’s film, he might have realized that Gus wants to **take** an Alka-Seltzer (or aspirin) for his headache, instead of that he feels like he **is** an aspirin!

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<sup>548</sup> Von Paschen (2012), p. 85. (This article also includes English back translations.)

**DW p. 162-163**

*Gus: (...) (violently) Well, what's he playing all these games for? That's what I want to know. What's he doing it for?*

*Ben: What games?*

*(...)*

*(The box in the shaft comes down behind them. The noise is this time accompanied by a shrill whistle, as it falls. Gus rushes to the hatch and seizes the note.)*

*Gus: (reading) Scampi! (He crumples the note, picks up the tube, takes out the whistle, blows and speaks. WE'VE GOT NOTHING LEFT! NOTHING! DO YOU UNDERSTAND?)*

*(Ben seizes the tube and flings Gus away. He follows Gus and slaps him hard, backhanded, across the chest.)*

*Ben: Stop it! You maniac!*

*Gus: But you heard!*

*Ben: (savagely) That's enough! I'm warning you!*

*(Silence)*

*(Ben hangs up the tube. He goes to his bed and lies down. He picks up his paper and reads.)*

*(Silence)*

*(The box goes up.)*

*(They turn quickly, their eyes meet. Ben turns to his paper. Slowly Gus goes back to his bed, and sits.)*

*(Silence)*

*(The hatch falls back into place.)*

**DW Altman 3/15;58**

*Gus: (Notices that a piece of the puzzle is missing.) What's he playing all these games for?*

*Ben: What games?*

*(The dumb waiter begins descending, and Gus gets up to go over and check it, drawing his gun on the way.)*

Gus: (Picks up the note and reads) Scampi! (He crumples the note, **puts down his gun in the dumb waiter** and picks up the speaking tube and shouts.) **THERE'S NOTHING LEFT! DO YOU UNDERSTAND?**

Ben: (savagely) Stop it! Stop it you maniac, you! That's enough! I'm warning you! (**He sends Gus's gun up with the dumb waiter, which goes up before Gus can get it out. Gus stands helplessly gesticulating in front of the dumb waiter while it ascends with his gun.**)

(Cut to Ben nonchalantly reading the newspaper on the steps.)

Ben: Hah! Listen to this!

**(Shot of Gus closing the dumb waiter's hatch the same way a guillotine would fall.)**

**SD Thiem p. 37-38**

Gus: (...) (heftig) Was sollen diese Scherze? Das will ich wissen. Wozu?

Ben: Was für Scherze?

(...)

(Der Aufzug kommt hinter ihnen herunter. Zu dem Geräusch hört man diesmal einen schrillen Pfiff, während der Aufzug hinunterfällt. Gus eilt zum Aufzug, nimmt einen Zettel heraus und liest.)

Gus: Scampi! (Er zerknüllt den Zettel, nimmt das Sprechrohr in die Hand, zieht die Pfeife heraus, bläst hinein und spricht) **WIR HABEN NICHTS MEHR! GAR NICHTS! VERSTANDEN?**

Ben: Hör auf! Du Wahnsinniger!

Gus: Du hast doch aber gehört!

Ben: (wütend) Ich hab's satt! Ich warne dich!

(Stille)

(Ben hängt das Sprechrohr wieder an. Geht an sein Bett und legt sich hin. Er nimmt die Zeitung und liest.)

(Stille)

(Der Aufzug geht nach oben.)

(Sie drehen sich schnell um, und ihre Blicke begegnen sich. Ben wendet sich seiner Zeitung zu. Gus geht langsam zu seinem Bett und setzt sich hin.)

(Stille)

(Die Tür zum Aufzug fällt zu.)

**SD Altman 54:00**

Gus: (...) Warum spielt er diese Spielchen mit uns?

*Ben: Was denn für Spielchen?*

***Gus: (Merkt, dass ein Stück des Puzzles fehlt.) Ben.***

*(Der Aufzug kommt herunter. Während Gus hinübergeht, um nachzusehen, zieht er seine Pistole.)*

*Gus: (Nimmt den Zettel in die Hand und liest.) Scampi! (Er zerknüllt den Zettel, legt seine Pistole in den Aufzug und nimmt das Sprechrohr in die Hand.) WIR HABEN NICHTS MEHR! VERSTANDEN?*

*Ben: (wütend) Hör auf! Hör auf damit, du Idiot! Jetzt reicht's mir aber! Ich warne dich!*

***(Er schickt die Pistole von Gus hinauf mit dem Aufzug, der abfährt, bevor Gus seine Pistole herausnehmen kann. Gus steht hilflos gestikulierend vor dem Aufzug, während dieser mit seiner Pistole in die Höhe fährt.)***

*(Schnitt auf Ben, der gleichgültig seine Zeitung auf der Treppe liest.)*

*Ben: Hier. Hör dir das an!*

***(Schnitt auf Gus, der die Tür des Aufzugs schließt, als wäre sie eine Guillotine.)***

Altman makes use of the play on 'games' in Pinter's dialogue to give us a shot of Gus working on a puzzle. Gus's anger at the games Wilson and/or Ben are playing with him increases when he notices that a piece is missing from the puzzle, which Ben has actually deviously concealed from Gus in an earlier scene. The missing piece in the puzzle symbolizes the missing piece in the game that Wilson and/or Ben are playing with Gus, namely the game of misleading him and doing away with him. Pinter's original script does not use the symbolic prop of the missing puzzle piece, and in this scene Gus still retains his gun. In fact, Gus "*adjusts his jacket to diminish the bulge of the revolver*<sup>549</sup>" before his last exit preceding the final scene. Altman, however, uses an elegant and humorous solution of ridding Gus of his gun at an earlier stage in the play by letting him put down his gun in the dumb waiter by accident, in keeping with the character of a 'klutz.' This gives Ben the chance he's been waiting for to disarm his partner and punish him for his disobedience. We are led to think Ben may have received orders to do so 'from above.' This twist adds to the gallows humor on

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<sup>549</sup> Pinter 1987, p. 164.

account of the situational comedy, as well as foreshadowing the bitter end with the shot of the door to the dumb waiter closing like a guillotine.<sup>550</sup>

**DW p. 165**

*The door right opens sharply. BEN turns, his revolver leveled at the door.*

*GUS stumbles in. He is stripped of his jacket, waistcoat, tie, holster and revolver. He stops, body stooping, his arms at his sides. He raises his head and looks at BEN.*

*A long silence. They stare at each other.*

CURTAIN

**DW Altman 4/00:15**

*BEN turns, his revolver leveled at the door. **Menacing, accelerating music.** The door right opens sharply.*

*GUS stumbles in. He is stripped of his jacket, waistcoat, tie, holster and revolver. He stops, body stooping, his arms at his sides. **He coughs** and looks at BEN.*

*They stare at each other, **and GUS closes his eyes. BEN levels his revolver, and the camera pans to the dumb waiter, which begins ascending. A shot is heard in the off.***

*Next we see **BEN leaving alone in the car, and a red truck arriving with the following lettering on its side:***

**COMPLEAT (sic) CLEANING SERVICE**

**QUALITY CONTROLLED**

**"We've seen it all, we've cleaned it all"**

**"You dirty it, well (sic) clean it"**

**SD Thiem p. 39**

*Die rechte Tür wird heftig geöffnet. BEN dreht sich um und richtet den Revolver auf die Tür.*

*GUS stolpert herein. Er ist ohne Jackett, Weste, Krawatte, Halfter und Revolver. Er bleibt stehen, den Körper vorgebeugt, die Arme an den Seiten herunterhängend. Er hebt seinen Kopf und blickt auf Ben.*

*Lange Stille. Sie starren einander an.*

VORHANG

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<sup>550</sup> It is quite likely that these directions were actually written by Pinter in his adaptation for the

**DW Altman 56:55**

*BEN dreht sich um und richtet den Revolver auf die Tür. **Bedrohliche, beschleunigte Musik.** Die rechte Tür wird heftig geöffnet.*

*GUS stolpert herein. Er ist ohne Jackett, Weste, Krawatte, Halfter und Revolver. Er bleibt stehen, den Körper vorgebeugt, die Arme an den Seiten herunterhängend. Er **hustet** und blickt auf Ben.*

*Sie starren einander an, **und Gus macht die Augen zu. BEN zielt auf ihn, und die Kamera schwenkt zum Aufzug, der sich nach oben bewegt. Wir hören einen Schuss im Off.***

*Dann sehen wir, wie **BEN allein im Auto abfährt, während ein roter Bus mit folgender Aufschrift ankommt:***

**COMPLEAT (sic) CLEANING SERVICE**

**QUALITY CONTROLLED**

*"We've seen it all, we've cleaned it all"*

*"You dirty it, well (sic) clean it"*



***Illus. 32: Final Shot of *The Dumb Waiter* (Dir. Robert Altman)***

Altman's motion picture version of *The Dumb Waiter* does not have an open ending like Pinter's play does. Pinter leaves it up to his audience to imagine how everything ends, while Altman lets us hear a shot in the off, indicating that Ben really has shot his partner Gus. We are assured that this has truly happened by the fact that Ben leaves alone, and the cleaning service arrives to clean up the mess made by the dead body, which Gus himself has foreshadowed. Altman's only concession to comedy at

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screenplay.

the end of his movie is the comical misspelling of "*compleat*" along with the misspelt saying "*You dirty it, well (sic) clean it,*" instead of 'we'll clean it.' This gallows humor certainly implies a modicum of blame in the imperative, indicating that the hit man should actually be cleaning up his own mess.

In summary, it can be said that the somewhat literal translations of Pinter's dialogue in *The Dumb Waiter* have caused certain fine distinctions to be lost in the German versions of the play and the film, although they may be more or less correct in terms of general meaning. A greater degree of sensitivity to Pinter's gallows humour by the translators (and the directors) would probably have made *The Dumb Waiter* more accessible to German-speaking audiences, which apparently have some trouble understanding the subtle nuances of British wit.

## 6 Statistical Overview of Austrian Pinter Productions Compared to Other 20<sup>th</sup> Century English-Language Playwrights

For the purpose of providing a brief statistical summary of the German-language productions of Harold Pinter's plays in Austria, the *Theadok*<sup>551</sup> database created by the Institute of Theater, Film and Media Studies under the direction of Prof. Dr. Brigitte Marschall will serve as a comprehensive source. This database offers complete statistical material on all dramatic productions in Austria for a given period according to the author and title of the play.

First a summary of the ten most popular 20<sup>th</sup> century English-speaking playwrights in Austria will be made, beginning with Samuel Beckett at a total of 126 productions and including Harold Pinter in ninth place with a total of 49 Austrian productions in German translation. In Chapter 6.4.9 a complete listing of all of the productions of Pinter's plays in Austria will be given. Finally a breakdown will be provided of the Austrian productions of Harold Pinter's three plays that are analyzed in detail in this dissertation.

### 6.1 Austrian Productions of Popular 20<sup>th</sup> Century English-Language Playwrights in German Translation

In order to illustrate the reception of other English-speaking playwrights in Austria, I have drawn upon the Austrian *Theadok* database as a source. To make a fair comparison, I have included British and American playwrights of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, along with Irish-born playwright Samuel Beckett, in this chapter. I have excluded William Shakespeare, George Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde and all other earlier British and American playwrights from this comparison to focus solely on the reception of 20<sup>th</sup> century English-speaking playwrights in German translation post World War II.

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<sup>551</sup> *Theadok* database of the Institute of Theater, Film and Media Studies at the University of Vienna.

### 6.1.1 Samuel Beckett (1949-1982): 126 Productions

The most popular 20<sup>th</sup> century English-speaking author, produced in Austrian theaters after World War II, was Samuel Beckett with a total of 126 productions. The first play of his to be produced was *Endspiel*, which premiered in Vienna on 6<sup>th</sup> of March 1958. *Glückliche Tage* was staged a total of 15 times in German translation, and *Warten auf Godot* was produced 22 times in Austria. Of course it should be mentioned that Beckett was actually Irish-born, and most of his plays were premiered in the French language, before he translated them into English himself. As the most famous absurdist playwright, Beckett's popularity proves that the 'theater of the absurd' was well received in Austria, in general. *Waiting for Godot*, e.g., was translated into German in 1953 by Elmar Tophoven and published in a trilingual edition by Surkamp Verlag (German – French – English), which presumably also contributed to its popularity.

### 6.1.2 Tennessee Williams (1911-1983): 120 Productions

The second most popular English-speaking playwright in Austria is Tennessee Williams. His play have been produced a total of 120 times, making the American-born writer almost as popular as Beckett. His first play to be premiered was *Baby Doll* in Experiment – Kleine Bühne am Liechtenwerd in Vienna in April 1958. His play *Die Glasmenagerie* was produced a total of 34 times in German, which makes it the most popular English-language play to be produced in German translation in Austria. *Endstation Sehnsucht* was produced a total of 14 times in Austria and *Die Katze auf dem heißen Blechdach* was staged 9 times. *The Red Devil Battery Car* had its world premiere in Vienna's English Theater on January 18<sup>th</sup> 1976, which is a good indication of Tennessee Williams' continued popularity in Austria.

### 6.1.3 Thornton Wilder (1897-1985): 96 Productions

The third most popular is American playwrights is Thornton Wilder with a total of 96 productions in Austria, including an undocumented production of *Wir sind noch einmal davongekommen* in the Graumann Theater in Vienna in 1986, in which the author of this thesis played the role of Esmerelda. The first production of a play by Wilder in Austria was also *Wir sind noch einmal davongekommen* in March 1947 in Theater in der Josefstadt, and the same play was staged a total of 11 times in Austria, where it apparently hit the nerve of the Austrian sentiment after the catastrophe of World War II and the downfall of the Nazi era. Wilder's most popular play was *Unsere kleine Stadt*, which was staged a total of 24 times in Austria.

### 6.1.4 Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953): 80 Productions

The fourth most popular is American playwright Eugene O'Neill, whose works were staged a total of 80 times in Austria. The first documented production after World War II was *Jenseits des Horizonts* staged by ISB Theater in the Kosmostheater in Vienna in October 1950 under the direction of Ernst Roberts. *Eines langen Tages Reise in die Nacht* played a total of 11 times in Austria, along with *Trauer muß Elektra tragen*, which was also staged a total of 11 times. *Fast ein Poet* played 9 times in Austria, and *Ein Mond für die Beladenen* was produced a total of 8 times. Eugene O'Neill was so popular in Vienna that the Institute of Theater, Film and Media Studies (formerly Institut für Theaterwissenschaft) held a proseminar on Eugene O'Neill in 1983 taught by American visiting Professor William Green in 1983, in which the author of this thesis participated.

### 6.1.5 Arthur Miller (1915-2005): 78 Productions

The fifth most popular playwright was the Jewish-American author Arthur Miller, who was a close friend of Harold Pinter. They became champions of human rights and travelled together to Turkey in 1985 to protest against the torture and imprisonment of writers and the abuse of Kurdish and Armenian peoples by the

Turkish regime. Both Pinter and Miller were both declared friends of socialism, so it is perhaps not surprising that the first documented premiere of a play by Miller was *Alle meine Söhne* staged in the Sowjetisches Informationszentrum in Vienna under the auspices of the Soviet occupying powers in June 1952.<sup>552</sup> The same play went on to be produced a total of 11 times in Austria. *Blick von der Brücke* was also staged a total of 11 times. Miller's most popular play in Austria was *Der Tod des Handlungsreisenden*, which played 18 times, whereas *Hexenjagd* was staged a total of 15 times in Austria.

### 6.1.6 Neil Simon (1927 - ): 66 Productions

The sixth most popular English-language playwright in Austria is Jewish-American Neil Simon, whose works were staged a total of 66 times to date. His most popular play, *Sonny Boys*, was produced 11 times in Austria. A production at Theater in der Josefstadt was translated by Gerti Agoston and adapted by Gernot Friedel, however the earlier translator(s) are not listed in *Theadok*. Simon's *Ein seltsames Paar* was staged a total of 10 times under that title and once in a new translation by Michael Walter in 1997 under the title of *Ein ungleiches Paar*.

An interesting parallel in the scope of this thesis is that Michael Walter also translated several new versions of Harold Pinter's plays for Rowohlt Verlag to replace Willy Thiem's older translations (C.f. comparative analyses in Chapters 3.5, 4.6 and 5.5). Furthermore, a comparison can be drawn between Simon and Pinter, because Simon's humor also has a Jewish touch, which may not have been well recreated in the earlier translations of his plays.<sup>553</sup>

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<sup>552</sup> Miller's works were, however, banned by the Soviet Union in 1969, because he began campaigning to free that country's dissident writers. (C.f. *A Brief Chronology of Arthur Miller's Life and Works*)

<sup>553</sup> This could be the subject of further research in another context. Gina Krauss and Harry Meyen translated and adapted a production of *Ein seltsames Paar* in Innsbruck in 1981, as well as a Salzburg production in 1986, however the earlier translators are not listed in *Theadok*.

### 6.1.7 Edward Albee (1928 - ): 62 Productions

Edward Albee, another American writer, is the seventh most popular English-speaking playwright on Austrian stages. His plays have been produced a total of 62 times in Austria. *Wer hat Angst vor Virginia Woolf?* was premiered at Theater in der Josefstadt on 15<sup>th</sup> of April 1964 and was staged a total of 19 times in Austria, making it one of the most popular English-language plays in Austria. A later production at the Tiroler Landestheater in Innsbruck, which premiered on 10<sup>th</sup> of October 1998, was translated by Pinkas Braun, as was an earlier production in Ateliertheater am Naschmarkt in Vienna, which premiered on 28<sup>th</sup> October, 1981. The earlier translators are not listed in the *Theadok* database.<sup>554</sup> *Die Zoogeschichte* was staged 9 times altogether in German translation. The author of this dissertation saw the European premiere of *The Goat or Who Is Sylvia?* at the English Theatre in Vienna in 2003, a production further attesting Albee's popularity in Austria.

### 6.1.8 John Boynton Priestley (1894-1984): 56 Productions

John Boynton Priestley is the most popular British playwright in Austria with total of 56 productions. The first production of his play *Ein Inspektor kommt* was staged in October 1953 in Vienna at the Theater Courage. This has remained his most popular play in Austria, and it was staged a total of 20 times in Vienna, with 1985 being the last German-language production on record. *An Inspector Calls* premiered at the International Theater in Vienna in English language on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2012. The play is scheduled to run until 21<sup>st</sup> April 2012, which testifies to Priestley's continued popularity in Vienna.

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<sup>554</sup> Albee's attitude towards translators is an example of the opposite (unhelpful) extreme. An open letter of protest by his translator, Joan Sellent, describes Albee's disrespectful attitude towards literary translators: <http://es-es.facebook.com/ACETraductores/posts/391463097576706>

### 6.1.9 Harold Pinter (1930-2008): 49 Productions

German translations of Harold Pinter's plays were staged in Austrian productions a total of 49 times,<sup>555</sup> beginning with the premiere of *Der Hausmeister* at the Akademietheater in Vienna on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April 1962 under the direction of Helmuth Matiasek. As examined in detail in Chapter 6.4.9.3, *Der Hausmeister* was staged in twelve different productions, making it Pinter's most popular play in Austria by far.

*Der stumme Diener* was also produced in Austria a total of seven times beginning with the Austrian premiere at the Experiment – Kleine Bühne am Liechtenwerd in Vienna under the direction of Fred Schaffer in December 1962, which makes it Pinter's third most popular play in Austria. The six following productions are discussed in detail in the former Chapter 6.4.9.2.

Pinter's third most popular play in Austria is *Der Liebhaber*, which was staged a total of nine times, beginning with the premiere in Theater im Zentrum 107 in Innsbruck, Tyrol in January 1966 under the direction of Siegfried Wagner, who also designed the stage set. The total number of Austrian productions of *Der Liebhaber* was actually six, because the production at the Theater an der Wien in June 1972 was a guest production by the Thalia Theater from Hamburg under the direction of Dieter Giesing, and the same production was again staged on 17<sup>th</sup> of September 1973 in Theater am Kornmarkt in Vorarlberg under the direction of Dieter Giesing and then went on tour to Graz in November 1973.

The fourth most popular play by Pinter is *Die Heimkehr*, which was staged in a total of five Austrian productions. The premiere took place in January 1968 in the Stadttheater Klagenfurt in a guest production by the Slovenian National Theater (Ljubjana) under the direction of Zarko Petan, therefore it will not be counted in this list of Austrian productions. For the second time we see a guest production of Pinter from abroad in Austria, this time actually introducing a new play to the Austrian audience. The first Austrian production was staged at the Stadttheater in St. Pölten

under the direction of Erich Margo in December 1971, three years after the Slovenian premiere.

Pinter's popular play *Betrogen* premiered on 18<sup>th</sup> of January 1979 in the Stadttheater Klagenfurt under the direction of Alexander Hegarth. *Betrogen* played in Austria a total of four times. It was also staged in Salzburg in 1981; Bregenz in 1982; and Gmunden in 1990. Strangely enough, Pinter's famous play, of which the author of this thesis saw in a fantastic production in London in June 2011,<sup>556</sup> has never been produced in Vienna to date.

*Alte Zeiten* played a total of three times in Austria. The play was staged for the first time in the Akademietheater in Vienna under the auspices of famous English director Peter Hall on 20<sup>th</sup> June 1972.

*Noch einen Letzten* was also produced a total of three times in Austria beginning with a premiere in the Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst – Max Reinhardt Seminar in Vienna under the direction of Martin Gangula on 16<sup>th</sup> May 1988.

*Ein leichter Schmerz* was staged twice in Austria. The first production was on a double bill with *Der stumme Diener* in Experiment – Kleine Bühne am Liechtenwerd in Vienna under the direction of Fred Schaffer in December 1962.

*Niemandland* also saw two productions in Austria, however the first was a guest production by the Schauspielhaus Bochum under the direction of Peter Hall at the Theater am Kornmarkt in Bregenz on 6<sup>th</sup> October 1977, so it is cannot be counted as an Austrian production in the scope of this analysis.

Pinter's following plays have all been staged once in Austria to the present date:

- *Die Geburtstagsfeier*: May 1963, Vienna (further details in Chapter 6.4.9.1)

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<sup>555</sup> Note that several productions are listed twice in the *Theadok* database, so the double listings have been subtracted from the listings in *Theadok*.

<sup>556</sup> *Betrayal*, London, June 2011.

- *Das Treibhaus*: 26<sup>th</sup> January 1983; Akademietheater, Vienna; dir. Peter Wood (in a translation by Heinrich Ledig-Rowohlt)
- *Die Kollektion*: February 1969; Theater im Moulin Rouge, Vienna; dir. Osman Ragheb
- *Landschaft*: 8<sup>th</sup> April 1971; Theater im Konzerthauskeller, Vienna (produced by Theater in der Josefstadt); dir. Agnes Laurent
- *Monolog*: 9<sup>th</sup> January, 1982; Volkshochschule Ottakring, Vienna (produced by Theater im Werkraum); dir. Hilde Weinberger
- *Schweigen*: February 1976; Schloss Retzhof, Steiermark (produced by Theatergru Biwulf / Deutschlandsberg, Styria); dir. Alois Deutschmann

The grand total of the number of Pinter plays produced in German translation in Austria is 15 of the total of 32 plays he wrote, leaving a majority of 17 of his stage plays, which have never been produced in Austria! This also provides evidence of Pinter's lack of allround popularity in Austria.

Five of Pinter's plays were also produced in English in Austria, including:

- *A Slight Ache*
- *The Caretaker*
- *The Collection*
- *The Dumb Waiter*
- *The Lover*

However, since this thesis examines the reception of Pinter's plays in German translation, no further investigation of the English-language productions in Austria will be made here.

#### **6.1.9.1 One Production of Pinter's *Die Geburtstagsfeier***

According to the Theadok database only one single production of *Die Geburtstagsfeier* has ever been staged in Austria. This took place at the Experiment-Theater im Palais Erzherzog Karl in Vienna in May 1963. The production was

directed by Niels Kopf, and the stage set was designed by Jean Veenenbos. The fact that the play was staged in a relatively small experimental theater, and not at a major theater, would indicate that it wasn't considered mainstream theater at the time.

According to the critiques, the production was not successful at all with the result that the play has never been staged in Austria again (C.f. Chapter 3.2.1).

#### **6.1.9.2 Seven Productions of Pinter's *Der stumme Diener***

There have been a total of seven productions of *Der stumme Diener* in Austria to the present date. The Austrian premiere took place at the Experiment – Kleine Bühne am Liechtenwerd in Vienna in December 1962. The production was directed by Fred Schaffer, and the stage set was designed by E. Plaene.

The second production of *Der stumme Diener* took place in September 1969 at the Theater beim Getreidemarkt in Vienna, once again a small stage, and not a major theater. Franz Zoglauer directed the play; Wolfgang Müller-Karbach designed the stage set and Brigitte Thomasberger designed the costumes.

A third production of the same play was staged in the Studio of the Max-Reinhardt-Seminar, where it premiered on the 16<sup>th</sup> of May 1988 and closed after 3 nights on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May. Peter Spuhler directed the production and Wolfgang Müller-Karbach was again responsible for the stage set, presumably using the same or a similar design as he did in the previous production in 1969. Daniel White played the role of Gus and Wilhelm Ellers played Ben.

The fourth production of *Der stumme Diener* premiered in Linz on 10<sup>th</sup> of May 1989 at the Theaterkeller im Ursulinenhof, a stage belonging to the Landestheater Linz in Upper Austria. Dagny-Elisabeth Schüler directed the production, and Brigitte Erdmann designed the stage set. Daniel Pascal played the role of Ben and Reinhard Horras played the role of Gus. Daniel Pascal<sup>557</sup> has kindly provided the author of this thesis with a copy of the original playbill, which includes an excellent interview with

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<sup>557</sup> The author of this thesis has also translated Daniel Pascal's play entitled *Mazeltoy!* which is about the plight and flight of Jewish performing artists during the Nazi era.

Harold Pinter conducted by Nicols Hern in 1985. The play appeared on a double bill with *Noch einen Letzten (One for the Road)*, and the production focused on the political aspects of Pinter's plays and his work on promoting human rights and denouncing the use of torture.

A fifth production of *Der stumme Diener* in Austria premiered on 8<sup>th</sup> of December 2005 in the Probebühne of the Schauspielhaus Graz under the direction of Daniel Doujenis. Michael Walter's new translation was staged for the first time in Austria, and it seems likely that this production was also intended as a tribute to Pinter to commemorate his receipt of the Nobel Prize in Literature only two months earlier. Thomas Prazak played Ben and Oliver Rosskopf played Gus. The playbill mentions that *The Dumb Waiter* is Pinter's most frequently produced play on an international basis.<sup>558</sup>

A sixth production of *Der stumme Diener* premiered on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2008 at die Monopol in Innsbruck under the direction of Stefan Raab. The cast comprised Florian Eisner and Hanns Danner playing Ben and Gus.

The seventh and latest Austrian production of *Der stumme Diener* was staged by Theaterverein Hardplay Company at Theater-am-Lend in Lienz, East Tyrol from 24-29<sup>th</sup> of April 2012. The director was Felix Krauss and the cast included Tobias Kerschbaumer and Felix Krauss playing the roles of Ben and Gus.

### 6.1.9.3 Twelve Productions of Pinter's *Der Hausmeister*

*Der Hausmeister* was staged at 12 theaters in 12 different productions, making it Pinter's most popular play in Austria by far. The premiere of *Der Hausmeister* was at the Akademietheater in Vienna on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April 1962 under the direction of Helmuth Matiasek. Erich Konrad was responsible for the stage set.

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<sup>558</sup> Cf. Playbill: *Der stumme Diener*, 8 December 2005, Graz: The author of this thesis has not been able to confirm this claim with international data.

For the second time in April 1962, *Der Hausmeister* was staged at the Stadttheater Klagenfurt in Carinthia under the direction of Walter Nowotny. Karl Spurny was responsible for the stage set and Anny Arnold designed the costumes.

In October 1965, the play was produced by the Landestheater Salzburg at the Kammerspiele under the direction of Klaus Keßler. Marianne Frehner designed the stage set. Apparently this production must have left a lasting impression on the theater people in Salzburg, who chose to stage a new production of the play seventeen years later in 1982. The Kammerspiele Salzburg seems to be the only theater in Austria, which staged the same one of Pinter's plays a second time.

In January 1966, *Der Hausmeister* premiered at the Theater im Zentrum 107 in Innsbruck, Tyrol, under the direction of Siegrfried Wagner, who was also responsible for the stage set.

In October 1970, *Der Hausmeister* was produced by Theater für Vorarlberg at Theater am Kornmarkt in Bregenz under the direction of Manfred Schwarz. Karl Weingärtner designed the stage set.

On 19<sup>th</sup> of January 1971, the play was produced by the J. Landgraf KG Eurostudio (Titisee-Neustadt, Baden-Württemberg) and premiered at the Stadttheater in Klagenfurt under the direction of Kurt-Julius Schwarz.

In the same year, on 15<sup>th</sup> of May 1971, *Der Hausmeister*<sup>559</sup> was produced by the Landestheater Innsbruck and premiered at the Kammerspiele Innsbruck under the direction of Alfred Schleppnik. Hans Stock designed the stage set.

On 7<sup>th</sup> of March 1975, *Der Hausmeister* was produced by the Landestheater Linz and staged at the Ursulinenhof in Linz under the direction of Martin Truthmann. The set was designed by Brigitte Erdmann.

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<sup>559</sup> Contradictorily, *Theadok* lists the 'Sammeltitel' or collective title of this production of *Der Hausmeister* as *Der stumme Diener*, which is probably an error, as *Der Hausmeister* is a long play,

The production, which is analyzed in detail in Chapter 4.6 of this thesis, premiered on 11<sup>th</sup> September 1982 at the Kammerspiele Salzburg, produced by the Landestheater Salzburg under the direction of Dietmar Pfliegerl. Peter Pongratz was responsible for the costumes and Elisabeth Blanke for the costumes.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1991, a production of *Der Hausmeister* premiered in Theater beim Auersperg under the direction of Vilmos Desy,<sup>560</sup> who was also responsible for the stage set. The role of Mick was played by Gregor Seberg; Aston was played by Gerhard Rühmkopf, and Davies was played by Erwin Leder.

A further production of Pinter's same play in Austria premiered on 17<sup>th</sup> February 1996 at Theater Akzent in Vienna and was produced by Volkstheater in den Außenbezirken. Markus Kupferblum directed the play; Ludwig Reiter designed the stage set, and Ingrid Leibezeder designed the costumes.

The twelfth production of *Der Hausmeister* premiered on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2003 at Theater an der Josefstadt. The play was directed by Alexander Wächter. The cast was: Davies – Otto Schenk; Mick – Alexander Strömer; Aston – Martin Zauner. The translation by Michael Walter formed the basis of the production, but the reviews were not positive.

#### **6.1.10 Alan Ayckbourn (1939 - ): 42 Productions**

British comedian Alan Ayckbourn's plays have been staged a total of 42 times in Austria, with *Halbe Wahrheiten* leading the list at 9 productions. The premiere of *Halbe Wahrheiten* took place at the Akademietheater in Vienna under the direction of Theo Lingen on 29<sup>th</sup> December 1976. Other popular plays by Ayckbourn are *Die bessere Hälfte*, which was staged a total of 4 times, and *Schlafzimmergäste*, which

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with a production time of approx. 2 ½ hours, and would not normally be produced on a double bill with *Der stumme Diener*. There is no listing for a production of *Der stumme Diener* in 1971 in *Theadok*.  
<sup>560</sup> The author of this thesis directed Jean Anouilh's *Das Orchester* at Theater beim Auersperg in 1984 under the auspices of Vilmos Desy, and well recalls the high quality of the productions at his theater and his passionate support of good performances.

was also staged twice at Vienna's English Theatre under its original title of *Bedroom Farce*.

#### **6.1.11 Other Popular English-Speaking Playwrights of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in Austria**

The next most popular 20<sup>th</sup> century English-speaking playwright in Austria is Agatha Christie at a total of 42 productions, actually tying with Alan Ayckbourn at the tenth rank. Noel Coward follows at a total of 40 productions. Next comes Peter Shaffer at 39 productions, and Christopher Fry at 34 productions, followed by Edward Bond at 26 productions, John Osborne at 26 productions and Tom Stoppard at 21 productions. All other English-speaking playwrights have seen less than 20 productions in Austria, including Jewish comedian Woody Allen, whose plays have been staged 16 times; David Mamet, whose works have been produced 10 times, and Sam Shepard who has seen 10 productions in Austria to the present day.

## 7 Translation and Reception of Pinter's Plays in Other Languages and Countries

### 7.1 Translation and Reception of Pinter's Plays in France

In contrast to the initially poor reception of Pinter's plays in the German language, it is important to remark that the French translations of his plays were highly successful after an initial flop.

*The Caretaker* was not well received at its French language premiere in Paris as *Le Gardien* in the Théâtre de Lutèce in January 1961 under the direction of Jean Martin. Pinter himself remarked in a review with Mel Gussow: "*The Caretaker* was an awful flop in Paris. People said, 'what do you think happened?' I said they didn't like it and that's all there is to it. It was revived in Paris<sup>561</sup> last year and a tremendous success."<sup>562</sup>

Pinter's French translator, Erich Kahane, was definitely influential in ensuring the good reception of Pinter's plays in France. Kahane also translated many other British and American playwrights into French.

#### ***Le Gardien*, 1984**

France, Television Film, Directed by: Yves-André Hubert; Screenplay: Eric Kahane; with Jacques Dufilho as Davies, George Claisse as Aston and Alain Fourès as Mick

*"His biggest success came with the plays of Harold Pinter, and his facility with work that required delicate nuancing, as well as a facility to translate work of considerable literary difficulty, must be considered a principal factor in Pinter's great reputation and success with the public in France."<sup>563</sup>*

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<sup>561</sup> At the Théâtre Modern in 1969 in a French translation by Eric Kahane, directed by Jean-Laurent Cochet.

<sup>562</sup> Gussow, p. 21.

<sup>563</sup> *The Independent*, 2 November 1999.

In an interview with Harry Burton, Harold Pinter remarks on the changes to his text in a production of *The Birthday Party*, at which he was present in Paris:

*"I realized, because French is the only language I understand, apart from a little bit of English, so I could follow the text (...) I realized that they had made large cuts in the text. (...) After the show I said to the director (...) 'Why did you do that?' And he said, 'Ah, well, Mousieur Pinter, your plays are so imitated here in France and all over (...) The trouble is now this play sounds like you are imitating yourself, so I decided to cut this, that and the other.' (...). I said, 'No, no, that won't do.' So he had to restore the text."*<sup>564</sup>

This incident was apparently the result of the European concept of 'Directors' Theater,' where the director felt he had the right to make large cuts in the dialogue of Pinter's play at his own will. However Pinter was successful in having his text restored to the full length in this production.

Eventually, translator Erich Kahane became a close friend of Pinter's, and after Kahane's death in 1999, there was a noticeable slump in the production of Pinter's plays in France, until a big interview with Pinter was published in *Le Monde* in 2003.<sup>565</sup> To quote Antonia Fraser in her Pinter biography: *"Harold, whose works had been done early and done well in France – they continued to be extremely popular...."*<sup>566</sup>

In 2007 Pinter received the *Légion d'honneur*, France's highest civic award, from Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin, who praised Pinter exuberantly for his outstanding poetry, as well as his political activism, good reason for French intellectuals to admire him.

The reception of *The Dumb Waiter* (*Le Monte Plats*) in France seems to have been good, at least according to the review of a production in Paris at the Théâtre de la Boutonnière in 2008.

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<sup>564</sup> *Working with Pinter*: Interview with Pinter, 13:05 min.

<sup>565</sup> Fraser, p. 270.

<sup>566</sup> Fraser, p. 229.

***Le Monte Plats, Théâtre de la Boutonnière, Paris***

**Premiere on 31 January 2008**

Directed by Sophie Gazel; starring Yves Buchin as Ben and Pablo Contestabile as Gus; Lighting by Cédric Mérillon; Public relations and press by Tamara Saphir

Caroline Alexander first notes the high quality of the comedy in her review published in *Le dimanche*:

*"Deux excellents comédiens, un français Yves Buchin, un argentin, Pablo Contestabile se renvoient la balle dans ce jeu des hasards et de la mort sous la direction de Sophie Gazel. Ils font partie d'une compagnie franco-argentine, « Le Théâtre Organic » qui se produit alternativement à Buenos Aires et à Paris..."<sup>567</sup>*

The author of this thesis provides a translation from the French:

*"Two excellent comedians, Yves Buchin – a Frenchman, and Pablo Contestabile – an Argentinian, pass the ball in this game of risk and death under the direction of Sophie Gazel. They are members of a Franco-Argentine company, 'Le Théâtre Organic,' which alternatively stages productions in Buenos Aires and Paris..."<sup>568</sup>*

**Coup de Théâtre**

Nicole Boireau (editor) *RADAC* 1997: Regards sur *The Caretaker (Le Gardien)*

An ARTE television show by the name of *Métropolis* featured an interview with Roger Planchon, director of Harold Pinter's *Le Célébration*, which premiered at the Théâtre du Rond-Point on 30<sup>th</sup> of March 2005. Planchon states at the beginning of the interview that he is convinced Harold Pinter is one of the greatest writers of dialogue in the theater today. He goes on to say that Pinter is like a modern-day Aristophanes, portraying hypocritical violence and everyday fascism. Yet he finds Pinter is not pessimistic, due to his humoristic tone.<sup>569</sup>

<sup>567</sup> *Le dimanche*, 10 Feb. 2008.

<sup>568</sup> Translated from the French by Renée v. Paschen.

<sup>569</sup> Cf. Interview with Roger Planchon in *Métropolis*, ARTE, 2005, 16:30 min.

## 7.2 Translation and Reception of Pinter's Plays in the Czech Language

Not only was Pinter's French translator of Jewish background, but so was his Czech translator Frantisek Fröhlich (a survivor of Theresienstadt), so that it can be postulated that both of these translators may have had an inherent understanding of Pinter's typical gallows humor and were readily able to translate it into their own respective languages.<sup>570</sup>

In contrast, as a result of the Holocaust, practically none of the German literary translators of Jewish background had survived, and neither Pinter's early translator Willy Thiem, nor the first directors of German-language productions of his plays, were apparently able to fully recognize and recreate Pinter's black humor, which is so essential for the successful performance of his plays.

## 7.3 Translation and Reception of Pinter's Plays in Italian

It should be noted that *The Dumb Waiter* is listed specifically as a comedy, the plot of which "... *may not develop like a proper comedy but uses comic moments...*"<sup>571</sup> on the Italian Wikipedia page for *Il calapranzi*, and that it was originally translated as *Il cameriere muto* (lit. transl: the mute waiter) but later became publicly known as *Il calapranzi* (correct translation).

Harold Pinter was very popular in Italy, which is testified to by the fact that four awards were conferred upon him in that country between 1980 and 2004, including the Pirandello Prize (Palermo) 1980; Brianza Poetry Prize, Italy 2000; 'Premio Fiesole ai Maestri del Cinema', Italy, 2001; and the Diploma "ad Honorem", Teatro

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<sup>570</sup> Fraser, p. 169: Fraser describes Fröhlich as a very sympathetic man, who is alarmed when he hears a helicopter in the sky, and says everytime he hears loud noises, he thinks: "*Here they come again.*" He not only survived the Nazis in Theresienstadt, but also the Russian oppression in 1948, and the Prague Spring in 1968.

<sup>571</sup> *Il calapranzi* di Harold Pinter (it.wikipedia): "*Sebbene non si sviluppi propriamente come una commedia, ossia con l'utilizzo del momento comico...*" (English translation by R.v. Paschen).

Filodrammatici, Milan, Italy 2004.

Pinter's Italian translator Alessandra Serra was also "a close friend" according to Antonia Fraser in her Pinter biography.<sup>572</sup>

#### 7.4 Translation and Reception of Pinter's Plays in Slovenian

The reaction to the first production of *The Homecoming* in the Slovenian language in 1967, for example, was also marked by misunderstanding: "*Excellent performance, reliable directing and acting services of this young cast are the only excuse for putting this comedy on stage, without which the repertory of our institution would feel no loss in its artistic aspect.*"<sup>573</sup> The article continues in the vein that the critic Vidmar surprisingly continued to voice such groundless and mistaken opinions, not mentioning the important qualities of the script that were obvious in the performances, in spite of Janko Moder's inconsistent translation.

Tomaz Onic furthermore claims that research of the translation of Pinter's plays has confirmed that Slovenian translations have continued to be lacking in consistency and strategy. Specifically, he mentions that the critic Vurnik's opinion on *The Caretaker* in 1990 remained basically the same when compared with the critique of the first production in 1970.<sup>574</sup>

Nevertheless, Slovenia currently remains a significant center in the reception of Harold Pinter's plays, which is illustrated by the fact that an international conference was held under the title of *Pinter Abroad: Other Stages, Other Rooms*<sup>575</sup> in 2011 at the University of Maribor under the auspices of Tomaz Onic. In this connection, there was a guest performance of a number of Pinter's plays in English by the Pinter Centre for Research in Performance and Creative Writing at the University of London,

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<sup>572</sup> Fraser, p. 243.

<sup>573</sup> *From Not Funny Enough to the Nobel Prize: The Reception of Harold Pinter's Works Internationally and in Slovenia* by Tomaz Onic in: *Philologia*, Vol. 5, 2007, p. 114.

<sup>574</sup> *Ibid*, p. 115.

<sup>575</sup> The author of this dissertation presented a paper at the International Pinter Conference in Maribor: *Harold Pinter's The Dumb Waiter in German*, in: *Perspectives on Pinter: A European Cultural Capital Honours the Nobel Laureate*, ELOPE Vol. IX, University of Ljubljana, 2012.

including *Tea Party* and *Mountain Language*, which were well received in the scope of the conference, despite the limitations of a student performance.

### 7.5 International Reactions to Pinter's Death in 2008

In *Theater Heute*, the tribute to Pinter after his death on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December 2008 is a further indication that the mainstream German reception of Pinter seems to have taken a turn for the better to some degree, yet it still remains lukewarm on the fact that Pinter received the Nobel Prize in literature, calling him a classically awkward choice of candidate in a quandary, because he was honored at least 25 years too late:

***"Der Nobelpreis für ihn kam spät, aber nicht zu spät. Nun ist der Angry Old Man des britischen Theaters seinem Leiden erlegen:***

*"Als Harold Pinter im Dezember 2005 den Nobelpreis erhielt, war er keiner der üblichen Verdächtigen, eher ein klassischer Verlegenheitskandidat: Die Ehrung kam mindestens 25 Jahre zu spät, aber sie traf einen, der immer noch bekannt genug war, um allgemein akzeptiert zu werden."* <sup>576</sup>

In the *Kölnische Rundschau*, Hartmut Wilmes made the following somewhat kinder remarks upon Harold Pinter's demise, remarking on the Kafkaesque humor and atmosphere of anxiety in his plays. Strangely he also contends that Pinter had been repudiated for not loving the characters he created, an opinion, which seems to have been widespread only in German-speaking countries, in great contrast to Pinter's own positive comments on the characters in his plays (cf. Chapters 1.1.2; 3.4; 4.4; and 5.6).

*"Harold Pinter hat sein Publikum jahrzehntelang unterhalten, herausgefordert und verstört. Dass er zuletzt nicht mehr ganz „up to date“ war, wusste er.... (...) Fast allen (Stücken) ist gemeinsam, dass plötzlich die Bodenlosigkeit des Banalen spürbar wird und kafkaeske Komik in Beklemmung umschlägt. (...) Dem Dramatiker Harold Pinter warf man vor, dass er seine Figuren nicht liebe. (...) „Pinteresque“ nennt man mittlerweile diese Stücke voll rätselhafter Eindringlinge, undurchschaubarer*

*Machtkämpfe, trügerischer Identitäten und unaufklärbarer Rätsel.* <sup>577</sup>

In a complete turnabout away from the earlier stark rejection Pinter had received in communist East Germany, *Theater der Zeit* published an obituary written by Volker Hesse, who had last directed *One for the Road (Noch einen Letzten)* at the Maxim Gorky Theater in Berlin. Hesse praised Pinter for his political engagement and went on to elaborate on the complexity of his literary work. He stated that Pinter never simplified, leaving things puzzling and ambiguous. His earlier successes, including *The Caretaker (Der Hausmeister)*, were not only based on verbal communication, since the characters in his plays speak in a self-deceptive manner, lying and contradicting themselves:

*"Die Direktheit seines moralisch-politischen Engagements ließ ihn freilich nie seine künstlerische Komplexität verraten. Er war als Dramatiker nie platt und vereinfachend. Auch die Stücke, die stofflich mit seiner politischen Aktivität zu tun haben, sind rätselhaft, geheimnisvoll, sparen Entscheidendes aus. Wie in den frühen Erfolgsstücken – „Der Hausmeister“ oder „Die Heimkehr“ – ist der verbale Dialog nur eine Ebene der Kommunikation. Das Sprechen der Figuren besteht aus Selbsttäuschung, Lügen und Widersprüchen."* <sup>578</sup>

In complete contrast to most of the lukewarm German obituaries, an American tribute to the playwright, published in the *New York Times*, showers him with the greatest possible praise: *"Harold Pinter, the British playwright, whose gifts for finding the ominous in the everyday and the noise within silence made him the most influential and imitated dramatist of his generation, died on Wednesday."* <sup>579</sup> The authors state that Pinter was able to incorporate the ambiguity and anxiety of life in his works using *'hypnotic dialogue'* with the everpresent threat of violence in the air and the eternal struggle for power. The tribute also mentions that revivals of Pinter's plays had recently become increasingly frequent.

<sup>576</sup> *Theater Heute*, Vol. 2/2009, p. 61.

<sup>577</sup> *Kölnische Rundschau*, 26-12-2008.

<sup>578</sup> *Theater der Zeit*, Vol. 2/2009, p. 65.

<sup>579</sup> *New York Times*, 25 December 2008.

The British tribute to Pinter is likewise most generous in its tone and accords the playwright the highest honors: "... (*Harold Pinter*) was the most influential, provocative and poetic dramatist of his generation. (...) ... it is for his plays that he will be best remembered and for his ability to create dramatic poetry out of everyday speech. Among the dramatists of the last century, Beckett is his only serious rival in terms of theatrical influence.... (...)"<sup>580</sup> Critic Billington goes on to say that no other playwright of the same generation has proven as durable as Pinter. He is one of the rare species of writers that have made a lasting mark in shaping and influencing their medium.

A final, personal tribute for Harold Pinter upon his death also illustrates that his reception in Germany, Israel and China was revised and improved over the years, although he was initially received with a complete lack of misunderstanding and scorn, e.g. the scandalous premiere of *Der Hausmeister* in Germany in 1960. English actor David Bradley, who was starring in Pinter's *No Man's Land* in London's West End at the end of 2008, expressed his great appreciation of Pinter as follows:

*"I'm very honoured to have known him personally and professionally over the past 10 years. It's a huge loss. People from Germany, Israel and China would come backstage saying Harold Pinter was so important to them. He wrote about oppression and people taking terrible advantage and oppressing each other on a personal level. Although he did not write the plays in an overtly political way they stood the test of time because they have universal themes. They meant so much to people in different ways."*<sup>581</sup>

These highly personal words, stated by a friend and professional associate of Harold Pinter's, serve best to sum up Pinter's impact on people all over the world, including German-speaking countries. Pinter is remembered wherever he has heard for his plays, poems and films, which reveal oppression and the abuse of power in a poetical and moving manner.

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<sup>580</sup> *Guardian*, 25 December 2008.

<sup>581</sup> *Ibid.*

## 8 Final Remarks and Conclusion

As a university lecturer of literary translation, the author of this dissertation finds that a good translation can make or break a stage or screen production, exemplified in the detailed comparison of Harold Pinter's plays and films with their German renditions. If a dramatic translation does not succeed in cultural transfer, then even the works of a Nobel Prize laureate are destined to fail on stage. It is by no means sufficient for the story alone to be rendered into another language. The rhythm, lexical register and tone of the original dialogue are just as important as the humor and witty puns. If Pinter's intentions are not adequately transferred into the German language, then it is literally impossible for him to be understood properly on stage or on screen.

It would appear that Willy Thiem's early translations of *The Birthday Party*, *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Caretaker* do not adequately reflect Pinter's specific tone and carefully calculated use of language. Nor do they sufficiently render the humor and subtlety of Pinter's playwriting into the German language. Many of the early productions of these plays were not a great success, and Thiem's translations seem to have given rise to many misunderstandings in German-speaking countries, as I have demonstrated according to numerous reviews of theater productions. In keeping with my findings, it is not surprising that Willy Thiem's translations of the above three plays are no longer available from Rowohlt Verlag for stage production.

Taking into account Michael Walter's translations of the aforementioned plays, Pinter's reception in German-speaking countries improved somewhat, after Walter's translations began being produced on stage in 1997.<sup>582</sup> This could be attributed to Walter's more faithful translations, however the inconsistent reception would point towards other factors, such as the different cultural understanding of humor. The German translations of Pinter's other plays by Renate & Martin Esslin, as well as Heinrich M. Ledig-Rowohlt, were also better received than those by Willy Thiem.

Most importantly, humor comes into play in Pinter's comedies of menace. Pinter's

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<sup>582</sup> The first of Pinter's plays to be produced in Walter's translation was *Asche zu Asche* in 1997 at Theater Basel.

humor, like much Jewish humor, tends to be ironical and sometimes self-deprecating, such as the self-critical wit of the Jewish character of Goldberg in Pinter's *The Birthday Party*. The particular mode of gallows humor e.g. would not have been officially condoned by the Nazi regime, which insisted on depicting the German Reich and German people as invincible and tolerated no self-criticism. The cultural aspects of translation are particularly relevant in this respect.

The themes of Pinter's early plays should also be considered as factors influencing their reception in German-speaking countries. *The Birthday Party* climaxes with the nasty interrogation of Stanley, which is highly reminiscent of the German Gestapo, and results in Stanley being taken away a broken man. *The Dumb Waiter* revolves around two hit men and the orders they receive from their unseen boss Wilson, who expects them to fulfill their duty without questioning, similar to the SS commandos in the Nazi era. The end of the play culminates with Ben being told to shoot his long-time partner, Gus, illustrating the inherent danger of blind obedience. Finally, *The Caretaker* focuses on Davies, a tramp who is homeless and has lost his identity, disturbingly reminding us of displaced persons, such as hundreds of thousands of Jews during and after the Shoah or Holocaust. Furthermore, Davies is a racist, who goes on tirades against blacks and Indians. These are only some of the themes touched upon in the above plays, yet it would seem conceivable that German-speaking audiences might have had trouble responding to these themes, which reminded them of their collective guilt in late 1950s and early 1960s, just over a decade after the fall of the Nazi regime.<sup>583</sup>

In summary, it can be said that Pinter's *The Birthday Party* was not very successful as *Die Geburtstagsfeier* in any German-speaking country in connection with Willy Thiem's inadequate translation and the fact that William Friedkin's English film production of the play was apparently not dubbed into German or broadcast on German television. The first production of the play was so badly received in Austria that it has only been staged there one single time to date. In contrast, Michael Walter's later translation of the same play was more successfully produced on stages in

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<sup>583</sup> In contrast, e.g., *Andorra* by Max Frisch, written in German, premiered in Zürich on 2 November 1961 without having to be translated. Although *Andorra* deals with similar themes of blind obedience,

Germany, and the humor inherent seems to have been better appreciated, as illustrated according to the respective reviews.

*The Dumb Waiter*, which was a complete flop at its world premiere in German language, later became somewhat better known and more popular than *Die Geburtstagsfeier*. This is most probably due to Robert Altman's film production, which was successfully dubbed into German by Heinz Freitag as *Der stumme Diener*. Although this TV film did not become particularly popular in the English original, Pinter's themes in this work seem to have been quoted in other more famous movies, such as *Pulp Fiction* and *In Bruges*.

Despite the scandalous German-language premiere of *Der Hausmeister*, its more universally understandable humor and existentially relevant plot eventually made the play relatively popular in German-speaking countries. This was certainly also due to the highly successful English film production of *The Caretaker* by Clive Donner, which won a Silver Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival in 1963. Thus the mass media of film and television also played an important role in contributing to the popularity of Harold Pinter's plays and helped to counteract the losses they encountered in German translation.

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racism and hypocrisy, Max Frisch is not a Jewish writer, perhaps making him more acceptable to some audiences, in comparison to Harold Pinter.

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**Illus. 16:** Rehearsal photo of *Der Hausmeister*, Theater im Zimmer, Hamburg, photo credit Kujath, Hamburger Abendblatt, 25 Sept. 1984.

**Illus. 18, 20-21 & 23-24:** *Der Hausmeister*, Dir. Dietmar Pflegerl, Salzburg, 1987.

**Illus. 26-32:** *The Dumb Waiter*, Dir. Robert Altmann, USA, 1987.

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## 11 Filmography

*The Accident*: Screenplay by Harold Pinter based on the novel by Nicholas Mosley; Directed by Joseph Losey; Starring Dirk Bogard as Steven, Stanley Baker as Charley, Jacqueline Sassard as Anna, Michael York as William and Vivien Merchant as Rosalind; Produced by Joseph Losey and Norman Priggen; Released in 1976, USA.

*The Birthday Party*: Screenplay by Harold Pinter based on his own play; Directed by William Friedkin; Starring Robert Shaw as Stanley, Patrick Magee as McCann, Dandy Nichols as Meg Bowles, Moultrie Kelsall as Petey, Helen Fraser as Lulu and Sydney Tafler as Goldberg; Produced by Palomar Pictures / Continental; Released in 1968, UK.

*The Caretaker*: Screenplay by Harold Pinter based on his own play; Directed by Clive Donner; Starring Donald Pleasence as Davies, Alan Bates as Mick and Robert Shaw as Aston; Produced by Charles Kasher and Michael Birkett; Released in 1965, UK.

*The Collection*: Screenplay by Harold Pinter; Directed by Michael Apted; Starring Laurence Olivier as Harry, Helen Mirren as Stella, Alan Bates as James and Malcolm McDowell as Bill; Produced by Laurence Olivier; Released in 1976, UK.

*The Comfort of Strangers*: Screenplay by Harold Pinter; Directed by Paul Schrader; Starring Christopher Walken as Robert, Rupert Everett as Colin, Helen Mirren as Caroline and Natascha Richardson as Mary; Produced by Angelo Rizzoli; Released in 1990, Italy.

*The Dumb Waiter*: Written by Harold Pinter; Produced and Directed by Robert Altman; Starring John Travolta as Ben and Tom Conti as Gus; Released in 1987, USA.

*Fahrenheit 451*: Written by Jean-Louis Ricard & Francois Truffaut based on the novel by Ray Bradbury; Directed by Francois Truffaut; Starring Julie Christie & Oscar

Werner; Cinematography by Nicolas Roeg; Produced by Lewis M. Allen, Released in 1966, USA.

*The French Lieutenant's Woman*: Screenplay by Harold Pinter based on the novel by John Fowles; Directed by Karl Reisz; Starring Meryl Streep as Sarah/Anna and Jeremy Irons as Charles/Mike; Produced by Leon Clore and Geoffrey Helmann; Released in 1981, USA.

*The Go-Between*: Screenplay by Harold Pinter based on the novel by L.P. Hartley; Directed by Joseph Losey; Starring Alan Bates as Ted and Julie Christie as Marian; Produced by John Hayman and Norman Priggen; Released in 1971, UK.

*The Goldrush*: Film by Charles Chaplin; Written and directed by Charles Chaplin; Starring Charles Chaplin, Mack Swain and Tom Murray; 1925, USA.

*The Great Dictator*: Film by Charles Chaplin; Written and directed by Charles Chaplin; Starring Charles Chaplin, Paulette Goddard and Jack Oakie; 1949, USA,

*The Handmaid's Tale*: Screenplay by Harold Pinter based on the novel by Margaret Atwood; Directed by Volker Schlöndorff; Starring Fay Dunaway as Serena, Robert Duvall as Commander Fred, Miranda Richardson as Offred and Elizabeth McGovern as Moira; Produced by Daniel Wilson; Released in 1990, USA.

*Der Hausmeister*: Recording of a stage production of *The Caretaker* by Harold Pinter in German Translation by Willy Thiem; Directed by Dietmar Pflegerl; Starring Karl Merkatz as Davies, Michael Gampe as Aston, Daniel Reinhard as Mick; Stage Design by Peter Pongratz; Produced by Kammerspiele des Landestheaters Salzburg, 1987, Austria.

*In Bruges*: Film written and directed by Martin McDonagh; Starring Colin Farrell, Brendan Gleeson and Elizabeth Berrington; Produced by Blueprint Pictures, Film4 and Focus Features; (Colin Farrell won a Golden Globe Award for the film, and Martin McDonagh won a BAFTA Award for Best Original Screenplay.); Released in 2008, UK & USA.

*Inglourious Basterds*: Film by Quentin Tarantino; Directed by Quentin Tarantino; starring Brad Pitt, Diane Kruger, Eli Roth & Christopher Waltz (won an Oscar for best supporting actor); Produced by Universal Pictures & the Weinstein Company, 2009, USA.

*The Life of Brian*: Film by Monty Python: Directed by Terry Jones; Written by Graham Chapman et al.; Starring Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam and Eric Idle; Produced by HandMade Films and Monty Python, 1979, UK.

*Mansfield Park*: Film based on the novel by Jane Austen; screenplay by Patricia Rozema; Directed by Patricia Rozema; Starring Frances O'Connor, Jonny Lee Miller Alessandro Nivola and Harold Pinter, 1999, USA.

*A Night at the Opera*: Film by the Marx Brothers; Directed by Wam Wood; Screenplay by George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind; Starring Groucho Marx, Chico Marx and Harpo Marx; 1935, USA.

*Pulp Fiction*: Film by Quentin Tarantino (Collector's Edition); Directed by Quentin Tarantino; Starring John Travolta, Samuel L. Jackson, Uma Thurman, Harvey Keitel, Tim Roth and Amanda Plummer; Produced by Bob Weinstein, Harvey Weinstein & Richard N. Gladstein; Released in 1994, USA.

*The Quiller Memorandum*: Screenplay by Harold Pinter based on the novel by Adam Hall; Directed by Michael Anderson; Starring George Segal as Quiller, Alec Guinness as Pol, Max von Sydow as Oktober, George Sanders as Gibbs and Senta Berger as Inge; Produced by Ivan Foxwell; Released in 1966, UK.

*The Room*: Written by Harold Pinter; Produced and Directed by Robert Altman; Starring Annie Lennox as Rose; Made for ABC TV; released in 1987, USA.

*Der stumme Diener*: Written by Harold Pinter; Produced and Directed by Robert Altman; Starring John Travolta as Ben and Tom Conti as Gus; Deutsche Synchronversion mit Tobias Meister als Ben & Jürgen Thormann als Gus; Redaktion:

Peter Paul Huth; Buch & Dialogregie: Heinz Freitag; Interopa Film GmbH für ZDF, 1987, Germany.

*Synecdoche, New York*: Written and Directed by Charlie Kaufmann; Starring Philipp Seymor Hofmann, Samantha Morton & Michelle Williams; Océan Films, 2008, USA.

*Le Train de Vie*: Directed by Radu Mihaileanu, Produced by Belfilms, Canal+, Centre National de la Cinématographie (CNC); Starring Lionel Abelanski as Schlomo; Rufus as Mordechai, Clément Harrari as the Rabbi; Michael Muller as Yossi; Music by Goran Bregovic; Prix de la critique internationale in Venice, 1998, France.

*The Trial*: Screenplay by Harold Pinter based on the novel by Franz Kafka; Directed by David Jones; Starring: Kyle MacLachlan, Anthony Hopkins & Jason Robards with Harry Burton; 1993, UK.

*Vielleicht in einem anderen Leben*: Screenplay by Peter Turrini, Silke Hassler & Elisabeth Scharang; Directed by Elisabeth Scharang; Starring Ursula Strauss, Johannes Krisch, Orsolya Toth, Peter Vegh & Franziska Singer; Muic by Thomas Jarmer; Produced by Epo-Film, 2010, Austria.

*Working with Pinter*: Directed by Harry Burton; A Documentary Film with Harold Pinter, Henry Woolf, Harry Burton and various actors; edited by Martin Johnson & Colin Napthine; produced by Caroline Ross Pirie, Matahari Films, Robert Fox Limited for Channel 4, 2007, UK.

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- 1980 Royal Conservatory of Music, University of Toronto, Canada
- 1980-81 University of Music and Performing Arts, Vienna, Austria
- 1981 Music Summer School, University of Oxford, England
- 1982-86 University of Vienna, Austria (Theater Studies)
- 2007-08 Rosa Mayreder College, Vienna (Gender Studies) Master of Arts  
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Elfriede Jelinek Forschungszentrum, University of Vienna, 2009.
- 2009-12 University of Vienna (Theater, Film & Media Studies) Doc. cand.  
Thesis: *Harold Pinter in German - What's Lost in Translation?*
- Languages:** English, German, French & Italian
- 1984 Egyptian Embassy, Commercial Section, Vienna (English translator)
- 1984 Directed *Das Orchester* by Jean Anouilh at Theater beim Auersperg, Vienna
- 1985 Co-founded the Graumann Theater in Vienna, Austria  
*Wir sind nochmals davongekommen* by Thornton Wilder: Graumann Theater
- 1986 *Die Liebe der vier Obersten* by Peter Ustinov at Graumann Theater
- 1986-1987 United Nations (IAEA), Vienna, Austria
- 1988-1991 Birth of daughter - Maternity leave
- 1992-1995 Universität für Bodenkultur, Center for International Relations, Vienna
- 1995- now Member of the Association of Literary & Scientific Translators, Austria  
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- 1996-1998 Euro-Languages Academy, Vienna (Part-time Business English Teacher)
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- 1998- now Member of the Literary Translators' Association of Canada (LTAC)
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- 2002 Panel Speaker & Reading at FIT World Translators' Congress (Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs et Traductrices) in Vancouver, Canada
- 2003 Held Lecture & Reading for the International Ring Lectures at the Institute of Translation Studies, University of Innsbruck, Austria
- 2004 Featured Guest at Canada's Festival of Literary Translation *Side by Side* – reading & literary translation workshop at St. Thomas University, Fredericton, Canada
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- 2010 Guest lecture at the Center for Translation Studies (Vorlesung Berufskunde), University of Vienna, Austria
- 2010 Residency as Literary Translator and Author at the Greek House of Literature on the Isle of Paros, Greece
- June 2011 Lecture on film, translation & humor in Harold Pinter's work at the Media for All Conference, University of London & Imperial College, London, England
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