Structure and Extra-Structural Elements: An Essay on *The Dumb Waiter*

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The Dumb Waiter, written in 1957, is certainly one of the funniest plays by Harold Pinter, but there are two scenes in the play in which the tension between the two characters becomes so acute that the laughing audience is utterly silenced: one is the scene where Ben nearly chokes Gus after their argument over English usage, and the other is the final tableau in which Gus confronts Ben who is aiming his gun at him. We may safely assume that these two scenes contain some element which is incompatible with the farcical nature of the rest of the play. This essay aims to clarify what this element is by examining what exactly happens at those crucial moments.

I

Let us begin by taking a close look at the puzzling world of Ben and Gus. One of its distinctive features can be seen even in the opening conversation of the two characters.

Ben. Kaw!
He picks up the paper.
What about this? Listen to this!
He refers to the paper.
A man of eighty-seven wanted to cross the road. But there was a lot of traffic, see? He couldn't see how he was going to squeeze through. So he crawled under a lorry.
Gus. He what?
Ben. He crawled under a lorry. A stationary lorry.
Gus. No?
Ben. The lorry started and ran over him.
Gus. Go on!
Ben. That's what it says here.
Gus. Get away.
Ben. It's enough to make you want to puke, isn't it?
Gus. Who advised him to do a thing like that?
Ben. A man of eighty-seven crawling under a lorry!
Gus. It's unbelievable.
Ben. It's down here in black and white.
Gus. Incredible.[1]

What we should pay attention to in this dialogue is Gus's responses to the news Ben reads aloud. Instead of inquiring why the man of eighty-seven crawled under a lorry, Gus asks his partner 'who advised him to do a thing like that'. Gus's basic assumption is that the old man would not do that unless he was told. He therefore thinks that as the old man did not crawl under the lorry of his own accord, he was not responsible for his thoughtless conduct. It is the person who advised him to do so that should take responsibility. Shortly after the above-quoted dialogue, Gus repeats the same kind of inference while they are talking about another article in the newspaper. When he is told that a girl of eight killed a cat, Gus infers that the cat was killed not by that girl but by her eleven-year-old brother, who 'viewed the incident from the toolshed'(116). Here again Gus looks for the person who is truly responsible for the cat killing. He does not believe, though the paper says so, that the girl killed the cat. Gus always considers that even when a person appears to have done a thing for him/herself, he/she is actually under someone else's control. Ben basically agrees with Gus's guess: 'I think you're right....What about that, eh? A kid of eleven killing a cat and blaming it on his little sister of eight! It's enough to - '(116). If Ben had finished the sentence completely, Gus might have asked him who advised the boy to do a thing like that. The two characters thus think that in their world one's conduct cannot be

entirely voluntary. It is determined by various external factors. Even if we may seem to act of our own free will, we are in fact more or less forced to do so by other factors, and therefore cannot take full responsibility for our actions. Free will in the strict sense of the word is denied to people living in the world of Ben and Gus.

Another feature can be found in one of the most comic scenes in the play, where Ben and Gus desperately try to satisfy the dumbwaiter's demands for food. Their playing at restaurant starts with Ben's decision about what to do with the dumbwaiter: 'We'd better send something up'(133). The reason why this line arouses laughter from the audience is that we generally assume that dishes ordered cannot be replaced with any other kind of food. No one will readily accept crisps and milk, when they have ordered a jam tart and soup of the day. If the gangsters do not want the person above to suspect that something is wrong with the kitchen downstairs, they must deliver the exact dishes requested. Ben's decision to send up what is at hand therefore sounds to us utterly unreasonable and laughable. To our surprise, however, as the orders from the dumbwaiter gradually become more and more odd, we notice that the person at the other end of the serving hatch shares a similar way of thinking with Ben and Gus. The dumbwaiter demands Macaroni Pastisio, Ormitha Macarounada, Bamboo Shoots, Water Chestnuts and so on. These dishes are so outlandish that the two gangsters as well as the audience cannot imagine what they are like. Since we have no idea what kind of food the orders refer to, the extraordinary requests here cease to designate concrete objects in reality. Cut off from their material referents in this way, the eccentric orders foreground their traits as signs. These demands for exotic dishes should thus be regarded as mere signs which do not point to any concrete food in the real world. Now we can see why Ben has made the seemingly unreasonable decision about the orders from the dumbwaiter. Since the demands are merely signs which lack referents, Ben and Gus have only to satisfy them in a symbolic way. Any food can fulfill such semiotic orders because, as Ferdinand de Saussure points out, the relations between signs and referents are arbitrary. It does not matter to them what kind of food they deliver. Referents in reality are placed in brackets here.

Concrete objects are left out of consideration again in the scene where Ben and Gus confirm the procedure of doing their job. Ben here takes great care that the instructions are stated accurately. He swiftly corrects Gus's misuse of a personal pronoun, and worries about whether he has not omitted any action in the process. Whereas he is thus attentive to every single word of the instructions, he is totally indifferent to the actual person they are to kill according to the very procedure.

Gus. What do we do if it's a girl?
Ben. We do the same.
Gus. Exactly the same?
Ben. Exactly. (144)

Ben does not think that it makes any difference whether the victim is a man or a woman. He will 'do exactly the same', whoever may be chosen as the target. He finds it unnecessary to care who the target will be, because the instructions can be indiscriminately applied to any person alive. The duty of the gangsters is only to follow faithfully the formula, regardless of the identity of the victim. What matters to them is not the actual target but the formal procedure. Here again concrete objects in reality become negligible.

The separation of signs and referents can be most clearly seen in the two characters' final reading of the newspaper toward the end of the play.

Ben. Kaw!
Pause.
Have you ever heard such a thing?
Gus(*dully*). Go on!
Ben. It's true.
Gus. Get away.
Ben. It's down here in black and white.
Gus(*very low*). Is that a fact?
Ben. Can you imagine it?
Gus. It's unbelievable.
Ben. It's enough to make you want to puke, isn't it?
Gus(*almost inaudible*). Incredible. (147)

Like the opening dialogue quoted above, Ben starts the conversation by drawing Gus's attention to the newspaper he is reading. Yet this time no concrete facts are mentioned. Ben only utters stock expressions, to which Gus responds almost mechanically. This dialogue reveals that when they were talking about the articles in the paper at the beginning of the play, they were in fact merely following a fixed pattern of discourse, filling in stories about actual incidents. In the above-quoted passage, we are shown the bare formula stripped of content, the formula which generates the gangsters' habitual conversations about the newspaper. Their dialogue therefore always has the same structure: Ben picks up an extraordinary incident, on which Gus makes a comment. This pattern is strictly preserved, even when Ben and Gus omit concrete facts as in the dialogue above.

These three instances show us that the two characters attach great importance to structure, which can be cut off from material objects. It is thus, we may suggest, a structuralist way of thinking that governs the farcical and perplexing world of Ben and Gus.

Pinter's characterization of Ben and Gus is well suited to this structuralist world of the play, for these gangsters themselves are depicted as signs stripped of contents. We are not given in this play the two characters' biographical data or their personal backgrounds, information which could lead us to perceive their uniqueness as individuals.[2] We therefore see them, to use Martin Esslin's phrase, rather as 'a well-worn and familiar device of the gangster film and the stage thriller'.[3] Ben, who 'combs his hair' and 'adjusts his jacket' even just before the job, fits in with the common image of the cool and dandy killer we often come across in movies. Elin Diamond rightly remarks that in portraying Ben and Gus, Pinter who 'knew a multitude of stereotypes [of gangsters]', 'could rely on his audience to recognize them'.[4] The two gangsters are depicted not as realistic individuals but as stereotyped characters of the theatre. Like stock characters such as the stage-Irishman, which repertory actors can play without any real rehearsal,[5] Ben and Gus are nothing more than the function that a great many actors, namely concrete referents, can fulfill. In representing the two characters of the play, Pinter thus emphasizes the fact of their being mere theatrical roles, which makes them appropriate inhabitants of a world where signs are cut off from referents.

Ben and Gus, who are themselves stock characters, enjoy assuming other kinds of stereotyped roles in the course of the play. It is easy to see that their farcical dialogues derive from the tradition of the English music halls. Peter Davison points out that the scene in which the two characters dispute whether it is correct to say 'light a kettle' has close affinity with the routines of Bud Flanagan and Chesney Allen.[6] To put it in a different way, Ben and Gus can easily switch from hired killers to typical music-hall comedians. Furthermore, even when they play the roles of comedians, their relationships within the comedy duo are not fixed.

Gus. ...Hello, what's this? (*Peering at it.*) 'The First Eleven.' Cricketers. You seen this, Ben?
Ben(*reading*). What?
Gus. The first eleven.
Ben. What?
Gus. There's a photo here of the first eleven.
Ben. What first eleven?
Gus(*studying the photo*). It doesn't say. (117)

Gus's last reply in this passage reveals that he knows nothing about the topic which he has originally brought up. Their conversation therefore ends awkwardly. The pattern is reversed in the following dialogue:

Gus. I wonder where the cook is. They must have had a few to cope with that. Maybe they had a few more gas stoves. Eh! Maybe there's another kitchen along the passage.
Ben. Of course there is! Do you know what it takes to make an Ormitha Macarounada?
Gus. No, what?
Ben. An Ormitha– ! Buck your ideas up, will you? (137)

This time Ben exposes his ignorance of the exotic food after pretending to know everything about it. He arouses laughter in the same manner Gus did in the previous passage. Ben here changes from a straight man to a clown.

Faced with perplexing incidents, Gus readily assumes the role of a detective and probes for causes behind effects. Gus the detective tries to deduce 'what one thing has to do with another' in the basement room, even if his inquiries irritate his senior partner.

Gus. Hey, Ben.
Ben. What?
Gus. What's going on here?
Pause.
Ben. What do you mean?
Gus. How can this be a cafe?
Ben. It used to be a cafe.
Gus. Have you seen the gas stove?
Ben. What about it?
Gus. It's only got three rings.
Ben. So what?
Gus. Well, you couldn't cook much on three rings, not for a busy place like this.
Ben(*irritably*). That's why the service is slow! (135)

Gus makes close observations of the flat and searches for clues as to how the puzzling situation must be understood. His behaviour here is not that of a gangster nor of a comedian, but of a Holmesian detective hunting for the truth.

Ben and Gus can thus behave like gangsters, comedians or detectives, depending on circumstances. Therefore what we see on the stage is, as Diamond remarks, 'that a gangster can behave like an amateur detective; that two gangsters' behaviour reminds us of a music-hall act; and that, conversely, two clown-like characters carry guns and work as assassins'.[7] Furthermore, Ben and Gus take the roles of restaurant workers, when the dumbwaiter clatters up and down. They choose out of these choices a temporary identity which is suitable to the given situation. Ben and Gus thus take part in the game of role-playing which is characteristic of Pinter's plays.[8] What takes place in this play is therefore that the role of gangster, depicted as a hollow sign lacking profundity, is incessantly interchanged with other cliched signs. To put it in a different way, the governing principle of the world of this play is that of a structuralist.

II

Ben, an organization man, is fully content with this structuralist world and the game of role-playing there. Unlike his partner, he never complains about the equipment of the flat, nor wants to 'see what it looks like outside' (117). It should be noted that Ben never goes out of the basement room during the play, while Gus frequently goes off to the toilet and the kitchen. Ben feels comfortable in the room. Yet this is not to say that Ben is completely isolated from the world outside the basement. On the contrary, thanks to the newspaper he is reading, Ben has better access to information about the outside world than his restless partner does. Whereas Gus tries to see directly 'what it looks like outside', Ben learns what is happening outside through verbal media. This contrast can be clearly seen in their different responses to strange incidents. When an envelope with matches is slipped in, it is Gus who picks it up and opens the door to catch anyone outside. On the other hand, as Steven Gale points out, only Ben can use the speaking-tube well enough to communicate successfully with the person upstairs.[9] Ben takes charge of verbal contacts with the outside, while Gus takes charge of the physical. Ben is thus depicted as a person endowed with the ability to use language more skillfully than his partner.

The proficiency in language is of great significance here, because language, a system of signs independent of referents, is the very epitome of the world of the play. Ben, who is more skillful in using language than Gus, is also better accustomed to the governing principle of the world. It is not by chance that the man who decides to send something up through the dumbwaiter is not Gus but Ben. Ben realizes well that the relations between signs and referents are arbitrary, whereas Gus's immediate reaction to his senior

partner's decision is 'Eh?'(133). Gus has some difficulty in following Ben's structuralist logic. Ben is, in effect, more familiar with the structural world view and therefore dominant over Gus. Ben's authority in this play is thus secured by his better knowledge of language and hence structure. Martin Esslin argues that in Pinter's plays '[t]he one who gets hold of the more elaborate or more accurate expression establishes dominance over his partner'.[10] Esslin's remark is true of the relationship between Ben and Gus as well. The one who has better command of language, the epitome of their world, gives commands to the opponent. Language here is closely related to the source of power.

Whereas Ben is well accustomed to the governing principle of their world, Gus feels uncomfortable in this basement room. Unlike Ben, he cannot readily accept the structuralist idea that concrete objects, compared with abstract structure, are merely of secondary importance. While Ben's concern with their job is limited to sticking faithfully to a fixed formal procedure, Gus is interested in the actual victims themselves, for he cannot entirely disregard concrete referents in the world. He is keen to know who the next target will be(128), and hopes that 'the bloke's not going to get excited'(137). This sensitive killer still remembers clearly how horrible the corpse of a female victim looked(130 - 31). None of these things interest Ben, who thinks that it makes no difference who the victim is. Let us look again at the conversation after they confirm their instructions.

Gus. What do we do if it's a girl?
Ben. We do the same.
Gus. Exactly the same?
Ben. Exactly.
Pause.
Gus. We don't do anything different?
Ben. We do exactly the same.
Gus. Oh.
Gus rises, and shivers. (144)

Being told that they need not do anything different even if the target is a girl, Gus is surprised a little and shivers. He is appalled at the thought that the formula for their job is to be put into practice without variation, regardless of the personal identity of the victim. Gus notices that theoretically any person alive can be chosen as their victim and can be killed in exactly the same manner. Here the victim is deprived of his/her own individuality and treated merely as an interchangeable element. In the world of Ben and Gus, people are thus reduced to mere materials with which the empty space of structure is to be filled. What makes Gus shiver is this ruthless function of structure, which turns even human beings into replaceable objects.[11]

Gus cannot feel at ease in the structuralist world where everything is regarded as basically interchangeable. He therefore looks for an irreplaceable thing, an element which is beyond the reach of the function of the structure. He hopes for a window through which to see what it looks like outside(117), as if to want to see what it looks like outside the formalistic structure he is now in. He desperately seeks for an extra-structural element in the basement room governed by the structuralist principle.

In trying to obtain an irreplaceable object, what Gus first does is to reevaluate the importance of referents which have been put in brackets. He intends to restore the uniqueness of concrete things. His peculiar attachment to tea is a good example.

Gus. ... The gas has gone out.
Ben. Well, what about it?
Gus. There's a meter.
Ben. I haven't got any money.
Gus. Nor have I.
.....
Ben. Well, you'll have to do without it [=tea], won't you?
Gus. Blimey.
Ben. You'll have a cup of tea afterwards. What's the matter with you?
Gus. I like to have one before. (128-29)

Although it is revealed that the gas stove in the kitchen is not available for the moment, Gus still persists in requesting a cup of tea. He cannot do without it when

he does a job. This is not because he is simply thirsty, for if it were so, he could drink water instead. To Gus, a cup of tea before the job is so important that nothing can substitute for it. He treats tea as something essential and irreplaceable. This is why Gus objects strongly to sending up his tea through the dumbwaiter, while he parts with his biscuits, chocolate and milk quite easily: 'We can't send the tea. That's all the tea we've got'(133). He is not opposed to sending his biscuits up, though they are also all the biscuits they have got. Gus thus attaches special importance to the tea in this play, and thereby aims to restore its uniqueness.

Yet Gus must finally give up making tea, because he is not given a shilling with which he can use the gas stove. Toward the end of the play, Gus goes out of the room to drink a glass of water. He has to substitute water for tea in the end. The cup of tea, which Gus has regarded as irreplaceable, after all turns out to be one of the interchangeable objects of the play. Gus here unwillingly admits that he has failed in re-establishing the uniqueness of referents. Whatever importance he may attach to them, no concrete objects in the basement room can escape the ruthless function of structure. In this world, even the smell of one's own body, which is thought to be unique to himself/herself, is not clearly distinguished from that of others: 'It could be my pong, I suppose. It's difficult to tell. I don't really know what I pong like, that's the trouble'(120). Referents, which are put in brackets in the structuralist world view, thus cannot be considered unique. An irreplaceable extra-structural element cannot be found among concrete objects.

Though his strategy to restore the singularity of real objects has thus failed, Gus discovers an extra-structural element where he little expected it. He comes across the irreplaceable when he is playing the meta-theatrical role-playing which we have seen before. It is not by having recourse to concrete referents, but by obeying strictly the governing principle of their world, that Gus finds what is beyond the reach of the function of the structure. He unexpectedly arrives at the point where the structural transformational rules do not hold.

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 it.
Ben. Light the kettle! It's common usage!
Gus. I think you've got it wrong.
Ben (*menacing*). What do you mean?
Gus. They say put on the kettle.
Ben (*taut*). Who says? (125)

The dispute about correct usage seems trivial and laughable at first. To our surprise, however, their dialogue quickly takes on a serious and menacing note.

Ben. ... Gus, I'm not trying to be unreasonable. I'm just trying to point out something to you.
Gus. Yes, but -
Ben. Who's the senior partner here, me or you?
Gus. You.
Ben. I'm only looking after your interests, Gus. You've got to learn, mate.
Gus. Yes, but I've never heard -
Ben (*vehemently*). Nobody says light the gas! What does the gas light?
Gus. What does the gas - ?
Ben (*grabbing him with two hands by the throat, at arm's length*). THE KETTLE, YOU FOOL!
Gus takes the hands from his throat.
Gus. All right, all right. (126)

Ben finally settles their argument by resorting to physical coercion. He nearly chokes his obstinate

partner who refuses to admit that it is correct to say 'light a kettle'. This excessively violent response to Gus's persistence reveals that they are not disinterestedly discussing here proper English usage like linguists. A more momentous issue is at stake when they argue over language.

In the scene preceding this argument, Gus perceives the power Ben can exercise over him. When an envelope of matches is slid under the door, Gus must do whatever his partner tells him to do.

Ben. Well, go on.
Gus. Go on where?
Ben. Open the door and see if you can catch anyone outside.
Gus. Who, me?
Ben. Go on!
Gus stares at him, puts the matches in his pocket, goes to his bed and bring a revolver from under the pillow. He goes to the door, opens it, looks out and shuts it.
Gus. No one. (124)

Gus is not allowed to refuse Ben's command here. He obeys his partner reluctantly, as he did when, shortly before this passage, he was ordered by Ben to pick up the envelope and open it. Although he feels, as his stare at Ben suggests, that his partner's order is unreasonable, he has no choice but to carry it out faithfully. Gus is utterly under Ben's control in this scene.

Gus, who is thus required to be obedient to his partner, may well feel envious of Ben, who is in a position to give commands. Being forced to satisfy a series of unreasonable demands, Gus becomes dissatisfied with his totally subordinate status in their relationship. Instead of being always ordered by Ben, he wants to give orders to his opponent at times. In other words, Gus is tired of the role-playing in which he is automatically supposed to take the role of a servant, while Ben always plays the part of a master. Gus wants Ben to obey the rules of their game of make-believe and switch their roles once in a while. He may think that just as the roles of music-hall comedians are interchangeable between them, so his role in the organization can be interchanged with Ben's. Gus is looking for an opportunity to require Ben to exchange their roles, when he hears his partner say 'light the kettle'.

Gus actually knows very well that 'to light a kettle' is a proper English expression, because he himself uses this phrase just before the dispute: 'I can light the kettle now'(125). Therefore, in this argument, Gus is not really interested in deciding linguistically which phrase is more appropriate. His disapproval of Ben's phrase here is highly strategical. Gus is aiming to force Ben to acknowledge in front of him that 'to light a kettle' is semantically incorrect. Gus thereby wants to show here that he knows English grammar better than Ben, and that he is able to correct the linguistic errors his senior partner occasionally makes. As we have seen before, Ben's authority over Gus is founded on his better knowledge of language. In their world, the one who uses language more skillfully and accurately can dominate the opponent. What Gus aims to do in the argument is therefore to undermine Ben's authority in their relationship. Pouncing on his partner's misuse of language, he claims that Ben, whose knowledge of language is so inaccurate as to make such a silly mistake, is not qualified as a senior partner. Gus attempts to reverse their hierarchical order in the organization by insisting on his better command of English. Pointing out the opponent's misusage, Gus is behaving like Ben's senior partner.

The stage directions accompanying the argument reveal to us that Ben immediately understands Gus's real intention when his utterance is corrected: Ben narrows his eyes to show his annoyance, and his voice becomes 'menacing' and 'taut' to defeat his rebellious partner. He realizes clearly that his authoritative status as senior partner is at stake here. Ben is well aware that Gus is aiming to challenge his authority in their relationship. Ben as well as Gus thus looks on their dispute over language, to use Martin Esslin's phrase, as 'a fight for dominance'.[12] Obviously, Gus's request to exchange their roles in the organization is totally unacceptable to Ben. He is therefore ready to adopt any measure available to reject it, which finally results in the most fierce confrontation between them in this play.

The two gangsters' fierce confrontation puts a stop to their role-playing in which every role is supposed to be exchangeable. Ben violently threatens Gus into giving up behaving like a senior partner, and it is revealed here that the mutual exchange of roles cannot be applied to the gangsters' hierarchical order in the organization. Gus is forced to admit that his role as a subordinate cannot be interchanged with Ben's as a senior. Unlike the relationship within the comedy duo, their working relationship is firmly fixed and irreversible. Gus thus runs into an irreplaceable element which he has been looking for, an element beyond the reach of the function of structure.

It should be noted here that what Ben has done in the dispute about usage is in effect to forbid Gus to make a critical analysis of language. When Ben says 'light a kettle', Gus must not stop to think how one can light a kettle. He must uncritically accept the expression. Ben says: 'If I say go and light the kettle I mean go and light the kettle'(125). He thus does not permit any analytic reference to the phrase 'light a kettle'. Austin Quigley remarks that in Pinter's plays where 'there is no given, precise relationship between words and things', disputes about language, lacking external arbitration, are very difficult to settle. Such disputes 'can only be settled by the imposition of authority by the dominant personality involved. If this authority is challenged by the other person, the characters...are left in a maddening impasse.'[13] A dispute about language can thus lead Ben and Gus to a dead end, and throw their world into disorder. In order to avoid this 'maddening impasse', Ben strictly forbids Gus to make a comment on language and does not hesitate to resort to violence. To put it the other way round, Gus's comment on language brings to light the brute force which maintains their world where everything appears interchangeable. This structuralist world, which seems to be purely formalistic, will in fact collapse unless self-reference is firmly interdicted by secular power.

As Gus finally withdraws the request to exchange the roles with Ben, the crisis of their relationship and hence of their structural world is avoided. Gus runs into an extra-structural element again, however, when he is chosen as the next target of their job at the end of the play. Gus, who has seen the limit of their role-playing in the linguistic argument, here witnesses the limit of theatrical representation itself.

In the final scene of the play, Gus the next victim confronts Ben aiming the revolver at him. Austin Quigley remarks that the two gangsters here encounter the limitation of their respective professional philosophies. Gus, whose modus vivendi is to ask questions whenever he is in doubt, can no longer find anyone credible to ask. Ben, who does immediately what he is told, hesitates to pull the trigger of his pistol. Quigley points out the acute dilemma faced by Ben here:

> [T]o save [his] friend, he must depart from [his] philosophy and go to query the orders he has received. Ironically, to save Gus, he must in fact become Gus and question his superiors, but to be Gus is to be staring down the wrong end of a revolver barrel.[14]

This time, Ben has to realize that his role as an executioner cannot be interchanged with Gus's as a victim. Here again, the two gangsters arrive at a point where they cannot continue their role-playing any more.

There is more to this final confrontation between the gangsters. Ben here deviates from 'the normal method to be employed', when he has second thoughts about pulling the trigger of his gun. He should have shot Gus automatically, the instant the victim was thrust into the room from the door. Now Ben has to decide himself whether he will kill his partner or lower his pistol. In either case, he is to do so of his own accord. Yet free will, as we have already seen, is foreign to the gangsters' structuralist world view, according to which seemingly voluntary actions are in fact determined by remote eternal factors. Ben thus encounters another extra-structural element when he keeps staring at his partner with the revolver in his hand.

When the pistol goes off, Gus is sure to die. He will have to take the role of a dead person, and will be excluded from their role-playing for good. The element

which can never be incorporated into a structure where everything is replaceable, would finally emerge on the stage at the shot of Ben's gun. Yet this conclusive moment cannot be straightforwardly shown on the stage, because this is to depict a dead person as one of the interchangeable roles of the game of make-believe. If the irrevocability of death is to be truthfully depicted, the actor must die actually in the theatre. Here we come to the point at which the distinction between real life and fictional representation cannot be made any longer. The finality of death cannot be dealt with by the ordinary method of theatrical representation. To use Martin Heidegger's words, the 'possibility of representing breaks down completely if the issue is one of representing that possibility-of-Being which makes up Dasein's coming to an end'. Pinter therefore has to stop the play just before Ben pulls the trigger. Theatrical representation has reached its limits in this final tableau.

The two scenes where the tension between Ben and Gus is heightened are, as we have so far seen, the crucial points at which the structuralist principle, upon which the whole world of the play is founded, does not hold any longer. By staging the critical moments when the structure falls into malfunction, these two scenes suggest the existence of such elements as cannot be incorporated into structure.

Notes

(1) Harold Pinter, *Plays: One.* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991) 114. Hereafter page references are given after quotations in the text.

(2) Katharine Worth argues that in reading Pinter's drama, we feel like 'looking back on [the characters'] past as well as guessing about their future with the kind of curiosity that would be wildly inappropriate to Estragon or Clov or Winnie.' As she herself admits, however, Pinter's early plays like *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter* are rather Beckettian, and Ben and Gus are closer to Vladimir and Estragon than to Pinter's other characters she discusses in her analysis. Katharine J. Worth, 'Pinter and the *Realist Tradition*', in *Harold Pinter: The Birthday Party, The Caretaker & The Homecoming,* Michael Scott ed. Casebook Series. (London: Macmillan, 1986) 30.

(3) Martin Esslin, *Pinter: The Playwright.* 5th ed. (London: Methuen, 1992) 60.

(4) Elin Diamond, 'The Parody Play', in *Critical Essays on Harold Pinter, Steven* H. Gale ed. (Boston: G.K.Hall & Co., 1990) 51.

(5) David Thompson discusses the connection between Pinter's experience as a repertory actor and his drama. David T. Thompson, *Pinter: The Player's Playwright.* (London: Macmillan, 1985) 6-35.

(6) Peter Davison, 'Contemporary Drama and Popular Dramatic Forms', in *Aspects of Drama and the Theatre,* R.N.Coe et al eds. (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1965) 173.

(7) Diamond, 'The Parody Plays', 52.

(8) I discussed this matter in 'When Harold Pinter's Drama Ceases to be Funny', in *Reading* 16 (1996) 91-97.

(9) Steven H. Gale, *Butter's Going Up: A Critical Analysis of Harold Pinter's Work.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1977) 61.

(10) Esslin, *Pinter: The Playwright,* 40.

(11) This ruthlessness is most vividly depicted in *The Hothouse,* which Pinter wrote a year after *The Dumb Waiter.* Here patients at the mental sanatorium are reduced to mere numbers, deprived of their names and personal identities.

(12) Esslin, *Pinter: The Playwright,* 65.

(13) Austin E. Quigley, *The Pinter Problem.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975) 63.

(14) Austin E. Quigley, '*The Dumb Waiter:* Undermining the Tacit Dimension', in *Modern Drama* 21 (1978) 6.