



## “Opening Out”: Harold Pinter’s *The Caretaker* from Stage to Screen

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# EPI-REVEL

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## "Opening Out": Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker* from Stage to Screen

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It is usual, when a stage drama is adapted for the screen, to open it up by adding new scenes that take place outside the confined set required for most plays. This is usually done to avoid the wooden effect that is typical of plays which are filmed exactly as performed on stage, in part because dramas rely so heavily on words whereas motion pictures are essentially a visual medium. Harold Pinter's film adaptation of his own play *The Caretaker* is an example of how this transformation is accomplished and how such an effort can reinforce the original meaning of the work, even though that meaning is expressed in a new format.

First screened at the Berlin Film Festival on June 27, 1963, *The Caretaker* was released publicly in February, 1964. In the United States, the film appeared under the title *The Guest* (perhaps to avoid its being confused with Hal Bartlett's *The Caretakers*, which had been released in 1963). Pinter's second film, it was the first from a screenplay based on the adaptation of one of his own stage plays. *The Caretaker* won critical acclaim, being awarded the Berlin Film Festival Silver Bear (in 1963) for "Clive Donner's balanced direction of Harold Pinter's remarkable script and the ensemble performances of three fine actors" and the Edinburgh Festival Certificate of Merit (1963 — the only British film so honored).

This black and white film, with a running time of 105 minutes, is notable for its distinguished crew and cast. Directed by Donner, photographed by Nicholas Roeg, and edited by Fergus McDonnell, it features the New York stage cast of Donald Pleasence, whose superb acting beautifully brings Davies to life, Robert Shaw as Aston in a performance nearly equalling Pleasence's, and Alan Bates as Mick, the film is an excellent cinematic translation of the play (Pleasence and Bates were reprising their roles in the original stage version). Donner's direction is virtually flawless.

Stanley Kauffmann's review of the movie emphasizes the effect of exchanging a stage for the screen:

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 [...]. One feels that, at last, the work has been fully revealed [...] the smallest subtleties of expression can buttress his naturalistic mode, where magnified presence can lend greater implications to silences and hints and physical objects, where the skillful placement and shifting of the audience by camera movement and angle can underscore his intent to draw us into confined areas, literally and figuratively. (Kauffmann, 213)

Penelope Gilliat comments on Davies' defensive use of language in the movie, stating that the old man is "haunted by suspicions of malevolence, but he has no one to ask about them; so when he is talked to he often says 'What?' not because he hasn't heard, but as a hopeless way of gaining time and puzzling out how much ground he has just lost" (Gilliat, 24).

These notes are reinforced by Pinter in "Filming *The Caretaker*," an article that he cowrote with his director. Pinter sees the situation as cinematic:

It seemed to me, that when you have two people standing on the stairs and one asks the other if he would like to be caretaker in this house, and the other bloke, you know, 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 [...]. Now it seems to me there's an enormous amount of internal conflict within one of the characters and external conflict between them — and it's exciting cinema. (Pinter and Donner, 19)

The author is in agreement about the work's being "fully revealed," and he acknowledges the superiority of the film in conveying the bond between Aston and Mick as well:

You can say the play had been 'opened out' [...] that things [...] crystallized when I came to think about it as a film. Until then I didn't know that I wanted to do them

[films] 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.

Pinter is also of the opinion that the mechanics of film making, such things as close-ups and focusing techniques, are responsible for a cinematic version that is more intimate than the play at the same time that they allow him to establish the relationships between the characters more clearly. In the screenplay, it is obvious that the screenwriter exults in the possibilities that the film medium provides for him to go beyond his own original text. For example, as Arnold P. Hinchliffe implies, the significance of the final glance between the two brothers, Aston and Mick, at the end of the drama when the intruding tramp, Davies, is rejected is more emphatic (especially the hint of triumph on Mick's part) than it is on stage because of the camera's focusing ability — in the play there is only a slight indication of Mick's underlying emotional reaction (Hinchliffe, 175, n. 16). In the play, the stage directions read: "*Aston comes in. He closes the door, moves into the room and faces Mick. They look at each other. Both are smiling faintly*" (Pinter, *The Caretaker*, 75). On stage there is only a slight implication of collusion; there is nothing to direct the audience's attention specifically to the men's faces, so the quick look that passes between them easily might be missed by the viewers. On the screen the expressions are carefully framed. Since this glance epitomizes the brothers' relationship, it is easy to see why Pinter feels that in the movie the essence of the work is captured "more clearly than in the play."

An illustration of what Pinter says is found in the film when Mick hears Aston coming and leaves the room to cross the landing and go into the empty room across the hall; when Aston comes upstairs he pauses on the landing and looks at the door as though he knows that Mick is in there — there is a cut to Mick, seen from the back, as he leans against the door, listening to Aston standing on the landing — cut back to Aston, who then goes into the room with Davies. This movement and relative positioning emphasizes the related interactions between the characters in a way not easily duplicated on stage.<sup>1</sup>

The opening out is enhanced by the naturalistic capabilities of a cinematic medium, too. Says Pinter:

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, 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 are outside the room. ("Filming 'The Caretaker'", 23)

In other words, that "there is a world outside"<sup>2</sup> is important to the meaning of the work, and this world is better indicated in the film than in the stage version. Ultimately, it must be remembered that Pinter thinks of his characters as being "real." While Davies may represent the existential Chaplin-esque/Beckettian tramp on the road of life, he is also a *real* tramp who probably does literally "stink the place out" and who becomes characterized by variations on the tramp's "Thank you, mister" every time he is given something, be it money, cigarettes, or clothing. Aston's acquaintance with the names of tools and their functions and Mick's knowledgeable recital of bus numbers and his tracing the highway route to Sidcup (added in the film) link them to the real world.

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<sup>1</sup> The film script has not been published; references to the film are based on a shot-by-shot analysis of the film.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from a BBC *New Comment* transcript in Hinchliffe, p. 99.

The opening out also reflects the dissimilarities in the two media with which Pinter is working. While the inclusion of outside scenes in the film sacrifices some of the emotional intensity evoked by the sense of confinement of the stage version, Pinter has been able to concentrate on other devices to achieve a like effect on film. The closed in, claustrophobic sense of the stage set is replicated by shooting through piles of junk, by compressing Aston and Davies on the beds in close-ups and tight two-shots of the men crushed against the walls under the downpressing shapes of the dormers.

There are other instances which reinforce the meaning gleaned from this episode: Mick's sudden attack on Davies is more startling as he appears in the frame without warning; the younger brother picks up the old man in his van to take him down to Sidcup to recover the papers which the tramp claims will establish his identity, then he only drives around a traffic circle and lets his passenger out, showing Mick's unwillingness to be *obviously* responsible for his rival's removal and simultaneously drawing attention to the ritualistic circularity of action and conversation that fills the drama — this scene also functions (as the curtain does on stage) to break the tension generated by Aston's hospital speech at the end of Act II. And finally, shots of Mick's sometimes furtive activities, moving from one room to another and watching through partly open doors when Aston comes home, plus the older brother's realization that this is being done, help make the relationship between the brothers more comprehensible (the fishpond scene, introduced in the movie, implies that they may be working together).

Because some of the action now takes place outside the room, dialogue must be added, cut, or rearranged in order to accommodate the differences in setting. Partially, too, the dialogue alterations (e.g., the removal of some lines from Aston's hospital monologue) are necessary because of the kind of flow of action demanded by film. As a matter of fact, the screenwriter seems more willing to substitute pure action for words in some cases, as when Aston worldlessly places the ladder under the bed or when he shakes the blanket — making Davies sneeze — without the preceding comment that it might be dusty which was included in the stage version. In addition, the scenarist uses the camera's focusing ability for comic effect, as when Davies, close-up in the foreground, 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. All in all, while the transference to film has weakened some aspects of the theatrical version of *The Caretaker*, it has strengthened many others so that Pinter has managed to retain the essence of his play on the screen.

In choosing a play, his own *The Caretaker*, to transform onto film for his second attempt at screenwriting, Pinter faced a different set of problems than he had in adapting *The Servant* to the screen. Many of the visual images were already incorporated in the stage play script, and the drama was the right length for a feature film. However, stage drama depends much more heavily on dialogue than does film, and, indeed, stage plays tend to become wooden when presented on film exactly because of the importance and preponderance of words. Ordinarily, either the filmed play is relatively static, with long takes of characters delivering dialogue, or the dialogue is delivered in a series of short takes that is unsatisfactory because this chops up the spoken lines and the camera seems to jump around. Added to this is the fact that drama takes place in a confined space, both literally and figuratively. Sets tend to be indoors, and there are often not many scene changes. In Pinter's stage version of *The Caretaker*, for instance, everything takes place in a single room. A stage play is also an excellent vehicle for presenting intellectual and psychological themes due to the predominance of words and the nature of the set. In contrast, film can more easily produce emotional reactions in the audience due to the immediate impact of the visual images that do not, cannot, first be filtered through the observer's mind as words can.

According to the proponents of one critical theory, the opening shot, certainly the opening segment, of a film should contain the essence of what that film is about, that is, the initial sequence should contain the essence of the film visually symbolized. As I have demonstrated elsewhere, the beginning of the movie version of *The Caretaker* provides an excellent example of how the author's opening out of his own work provides for an insight into the meaning being expressed and an understanding of the techniques utilized to express that meaning.<sup>3</sup>

In terms of meaning, Pinter's early plays shared a thematic cluster that parallels the effects created through the movie's opening and to which the meaning of the original version *The Caretaker* (which premiered on the stage on April 27, 1960) is clearly related. Typically, someone is in a room when an intruder arrives. Since the intruder figure implicitly contains an element of menace, the room's inhabitant must verify whether the intruder is a friend or a foe. To do this, communication must be established, but the room's inhabitant is fearful of revealing a point of personal vulnerability through the communication. As a consequence, communication is inhibited, increasing the need for verification, the lack of which magnifies the existence of the menace and requires further communication for verification purposes. This circularity feeds on itself and creates an impossible situation for the inhabitant.<sup>4</sup>

In speaking about the stage version of *The Caretaker*, Pinter told Charles Marowitz that the play is "about love." From *The Room* through *The Homecoming*, what Pinter calls "love" really amounts to an individual psychological need that must be fulfilled for the emotional well-being of the organism. In psychological jargon this need is categorized as a primary appetite (something that is necessary for homeostatic balance — and a drive is that state within an organism which directs behavior toward a goal of creating or maintaining that balance).

The controlling image in Pinter's early dramas is of people in a room — a room with a door, and outside that door something is snuffling about, trying to get in. In order to assuage the feeling of menace, for verification of whether what is outside the door is truly a menace, characters try to communicate with one another. Communication, though, is inefficient, in part because the inhabitant of the room does not want to reveal any potential weakness through the communication with whatever is on the other side of the door. A circular effect is created as the lack of communication intensifies the menace and the resultant increased need for verification, which in turn weakens the ability to communicate.

This is a description of a Beckettian world too, yet it is a recognizable world. People are existing on the edge to the extent that they will accept any possibility that is offered to fulfill their individual psychological needs. This is clearly expressed in Davies' fears, in the inadequacy of his verbal attacks on minorities such as blacks (in which group he includes East Indians), the Irish hooligan, and the Scotch git (is Davies a Scotch name?) of whom he is so afraid that he is incapable of expressing himself articulately. He is likewise left speechless when Mick asks him if he is a foreigner. His broken phrases mirror his shattered sense of identity which cannot be established because his papers don't exist. He is in a state of desperation that pushes him to an existential acceptance of an any-port-in-a-storm mentality. Such content is suitable for a stage production because the cluttered, dark room full of isolated items reflects the minds of the characters and their psychological states. The single set also intensifies the confined nature of their situation. Even though both Mick and Aston's occasional excursions outside demonstrate that the room does not exist as a closed system, for

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<sup>3</sup> See my "Film and Drama: The Opening Sequence of the Filmed Version of Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker* (*The Guest*)" in *Harold Pinter: A Casebook*, ed. by Lois Gordon (New York: Garland, 1990), pp. 119–28.

<sup>4</sup> See *Butter's Going Up* for an extended discussion of the mechanics involved in this thematic cluster and its application throughout Pinter's canon.

Davies it represents a sanctuary cut off from the world and he does not want to leave it. One of the screenwriter's challenges in adapting the work for the screen was to bring in the outside without diminishing the sense of confinement.

Pinter accomplishes this in several scenes. Opening out the script has advantages beyond showing that there is a world outside Aston's room. The shot of Mick and Aston in the back garden makes the shed real, not merely a figment of Aston's desires, and it shows that progress is being made. Aston is talking about building the shed, and so on (although there is no dialogue, the men are together, in much the same physical relationship that Aston and Davies were in earlier, and Aston touches the wood that he will use in making the shed) — and Davies, watching through the window, obviously sees a threat in their togetherness.

The final meaning of the play has been simply expressed by Pinter. Terence Rattigan claims that, "When I saw *The Caretaker* I told Pinter that I knew what it meant. 'It's about the God of the Old Testament, the God of the New, and Humanity, isn't it?' Pinter said blankly, 'No, Terry, it's about a caretaker and two brothers.'" <sup>5</sup> This statement becomes meaningful when joined with Pinter's assertion in Charles Marowitz's "Theatre Abroad" article in the *Village Voice* that the play is "about love." When "love" is equated with "need," a certain pattern falls into place. This is as close as the author has come to supplying a definition of what in his subsequent dramas became his major thematic element, and it provides an understandable basis for his character's actions. Love in a Pinter play differs from the conventional definition of love. When Pinter talks about love he means a psychological *need* for acceptance or affection or emotional attachment. What he is trying to say in *The Caretaker* becomes clear when one realizes that Davies, Aston, and Mick all need to satisfy a primary appetite for acceptance, affection, or emotional attachment, and the acts of all three are designed to fulfill their needs.

What Pinter's statement about love means in terms of the action of the play is that all three of the characters have individual needs for attachment of some kind and that everything that they do is aimed either at creating such a relationship or maintaining one which already exists. Aston turns to a stranger in hopes that he can establish a relationship that will not end in his being betrayed. He is a character whose need for human contact led him to disillusionment, since his overtures to others have been rejected because of their unusual nature, yet he keeps trying to establish a relationship with someone and in the end the union between him and his brother is stronger for his efforts. In the long run, though, Aston's role is basically that of an object over which his brother and his new-found "friend" battle. Davies tries to form alliances with both Aston and Mick, but fails. In the final analysis it must be admitted that Davies remains an enigmatic, chameleon-like, existential figure who tries to fulfill his own needs for companionship and easy security by changing to fit the requirements needed to fulfill the needs of others so that they will form an alliance with him (there are traces of Davies in both Stella in *The Collection* and Ruth in *The Homecoming* in this respect). He allows those around him to play out their own fantasies because he is so indefinite, taking on the shape that they need. The irony is that his changeability and lack of selectivity ultimately cost him what he most desires. Mick, who displays his acuity during his games with Davies when he tricks the old man into contradicting himself, is aware of the tramp's changeable nature, and this allows him to manipulate the old man. He recognizes Davies as a threat to the union between himself and his brother and strives to displace the tramp so as to keep his own position secure. Mick's strategy in expelling the tramp indicates that his protective stance regarding Aston derives from fraternal affection rather than merely from a sense of duty. It is clear that Mick recognizes Davies as an opponent from the very beginning, and it is also clear that he would have little trouble driving the intruder out with physical force. His immediate reaction to the

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Hinchliffe, p. 8.

presence of a guest in his brother's room is an attack which completely overpowers its victim. Still, he does not try to force a withdrawal. Instead, he initiates a plan of attack whereby Aston will himself eventually reject the old man voluntarily and therefore will not turn against his brother for having banished his friend and so that banishment will not in itself make the tramp more appealing. Mick understands, as the song in *The Fantastics* suggests, that children are most likely to put beans in their ears when they are told not to do so.

If Mick were simply being protective, he would have removed the threat to his relationship with Aston instantly and permanently by force and the implication of future violence or even legal recourse, but he undertakes the slower, more devious procedure because his brother's feelings are important to him. He wants to be sure that his actions do not cost him the relationship that he has with his brother, a relationship that is emphasized by the fact that they always refer to each other as "brother," never by name. The motivation, then, is fraternal affection, and they must unite in overthrowing a potential usuper. This will bring them closer together, a psychological ploy that governments sometimes exercise.

Finally, as mentioned above, when Mick leaves the stage for the last time, having defeated Davies, the two brothers smile faintly at each other. Clifford Leech sees this smile as a token that things are again as they should be — the family tie has been reunited and there is hope for the future: "They are brothers, and [...] they are together for a moment, in silence [...] as they smile [...] there is understanding and affection" (Leech, 29). Director Peter Hall has pointed out the importance of specific actions in Pinter's plays.<sup>6</sup> If the author calls for an action, it is not merely a piece of "business," but something which has a direct bearing on the meaning of the drama. The called-for smile, then, is meant to be significant. This last glance between the two brothers helps emphasize the theme of need, for it signifies their dependence upon each other, thereby placing their actions and motives in perspective. They have proven to each other their affection, and Mick's going out indicates a realization that the situation is now secure. He can rely on his brother to expel Davies, and thus, his presence is no longer necessary. In this first play by Pinter in which he deals with the dynamics of the family unit, "the two brothers jointly seem to symbolize [...] family compatibility," according to Ruby Cohn (Cohn, 67), and "a study of the unexpected strength of family ties against an intruder [...] the workings of the English mind today," in John Arden's words (Arden, 29–30). Boulton finds that "despite their lack of communication there is a bond of sympathetic understanding between them; they are the unified centre of the play's action" (Boulton, 132). Whereas some critics claim that the glance suggests a conspiracy of or at least collusion between the brothers against Davies, it actually signifies their recognition that the ties between them have been reestablished. They have not acted in union to entrap and torment the derelict; they have found that their relationship with one another is valuable and that it can withstand considerable outside pressures that threaten it, whether those pressures are in the form of electrical shock treatment or an intruding tramp.

As is typical with most of Pinter's scripts, the plot of *The Caretaker* is simple.<sup>7</sup> In fact, Pleasence, who created the role of Davies in the original production and then gave up a part in George Stevens' *The Greatest Story Ever Told* in order to reprise the part in the film version, has comically reduced the plot to a six-word summary: "boy meets tramp, boy loses tramp."<sup>8</sup> As is also typically true with Pinter's dramas, a minimal plot provides few clues but this does not mean that it contains a simple meaning — instead, a number of possible alternatives come

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<sup>6</sup> See Irving Wardle, "A Director's Approach," in *A Casebook on Harold Pinter's The Homecoming*, ed. by John Lahr (New York: Grove, 1971), pp. 9–25.

<sup>7</sup> See *Butter's Going Up*, pp. 81–95. Because I have assumed that the reader of this study will be familiar with Pinter's drama, I have relegated little space to the discussion of the stage version. In addition, I have dealt with the meanings of and techniques in the play in *Butter's Going Up*.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Henry Popkin, *Modern British Drama* (New York: Grove Press, 1969), p. 24.

into play. In *The Caretaker* two brothers, one a former mental patient (Aston), and an old tramp (Davies) become locked in a battle of wills when the recuperating brother rescues the tramp from an unpleasant situation and invites him into his room, which is in a house owned by the younger brother (Mick). The drama evolves in a series of confrontations between these three characters as they try to establish relationships between one another. The result of these confrontations is the expulsion of the old man.

In interpreting the play the items to be considered include: the questions of identity and verification clustering around Davies; Aston's attempted reorientation, as well as his suggested Christ-figure qualities and his role in the society-versus-artist confrontation; and the problem of communication and interaction between individuals. The last element is probably the most important in determining the ultimate meaning of the play, for the actions of the three characters make sense when one realizes that each is trying to establish an attachment with one of the others. Simultaneously, each is trying to protect that relationship from an outside interference, the third member, which threatens to destroy it by forming a new pairing. Pinter himself has said a great deal about the meaning of this particular play, though one feels at times that he is like the Davies who replies to Mick's query, "Are you Welsh?" by saying "Well, I been around you know." In answering the criticism by Leonard Russell in the London *Sunday Times* that the audience laughed at *The Caretaker* as if it were a farce, Pinter wrote:

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 [...] 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. (Pinter, "Letter to the Editor")

This sounds like Pinter's definition of tragedy:

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. The point about tragedy is that it is *no longer funny*. It is funny, and then it becomes no longer funny.<sup>9</sup>

What happens at that point is the play, but the author recognizes a certain self-direction imposed by the drama itself:

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>10</sup>

As developed in the drama, it is clear that neither Aston nor Davies is of a homicidal nature. It is evident why one of the people did have to go, though. In the relationship between the two brothers the intrusion of an outsider could weaken their bond and their power to help one another might be diminished as a consequence. Aston is dependent on Mick to provide a sanctuary where no one will bother him and where he can work things out in peace. Mick is his brother's keeper, his caretaker. Aston may feel some insecurity in his relationship with Mick, however. After all, people whom he had trusted had failed him before and it is taking him a long time to regain his confidence, even in his brother. To understand Aston's reluctance to accept any situation as secure, one need only remember the friends who had turned him in, and the mother who had signed the consent papers. Nevertheless, he does

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<sup>9</sup> Pinter, in an interview with Hallam Tennyson on the BBC General Overseas Service broadcast on August 7, 1960.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in John Russell Taylor, *Anger and After: A Guide to New British Drama* (London: Methuen, 1969, rev. ed.); rpt. in America as *The Angry Theatre* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1969, rev. ed.), p. 336.

desire human companionship, so when Davies follows him home, he is willing to take a chance and the circumstances for the play are set. When Aston recognizes what kind of person Davies is (he complains that Davies is “stinking the place out” (Pinter, *The Caretaker*, 69) as his brother claimed earlier), he realizes that the tramp lacks any redeeming qualities and may endanger his own association with his brother as well.

One of the interesting phenomena of Pinter scholarship is the lack of consideration of how the dramatist’s stage plays differ from his film version of the same works. One of the differences between how Pinter approaches adapting someone else’s work to the screen and how he approaches adapting his own stage plays is that when he uses another author’s writing as the basis for his screenplay he picks out the thematic elements that most appeal to him and emphasizes them. Thus, while he may well be being true to his source, that truth may be established in much the same way that he creates realistic dialogue.

From the beginning of his career, critics have commented that he has a tape-recorder ear and that he accurately reproduces realistic sounding dialogue on stage. The key, though, is that he picks out certain quintessential elements and amplifies them.<sup>11</sup> Real language literally reproduced on stage does not sound as real as Pinter’s artificial dialogue; in a sense he has created a suprealistic dialogue that captures and expresses the essence of normal speech. In his cinematic adaptations of novels his intent is likewise to focus on those components that comprise the essence of the work as opposed to his trying to faithfully reproduce the novel on film detail by detail. In treating his own works, while he may exercise the opportunity afforded by the medium of film to open them out, to reinforce with cinematic techniques and devices what was already there, basically he relies on what is there and does not try to focus on certain elements in order to express the essence of the drama. Therefore, the meaning of the film version of *The Caretaker* is the same as the meaning of the stage version of the play. As a matter of fact, the film does confirm, emphasize, and further elucidate the meaning gleaned from the drama. This raises an interesting critical question, to wit, is the information gathered from this extraneous source (the film) valid in interpreting the play? Or, are the film and the play separate, though related, entities that perforce must stand on their own? In examining the play in retrospect, after having viewed the film, are elements introduced that are foreign to the original? And, if this the case, how does a critic know this?

The details and refinements of the plot and themes that constitute the movie proper will be dealt with in much the same way. For instance, in the theatrical version the stage directions suggest that Davis is following his host like a scared, lost dog when they first enter the room at the beginning of the play: “Aston and Davies enter, Aston first, Davies following, shambling, breathing heavily” (Pinter, *The Caretaker*, 7). In the film, which shows the two men walking down the street on their way to the room, this comparison is certainly indicated by Davies’ shuffling back and forth after Aston. The most interesting thing about the opening sequence of the film version of *The Caretaker*, then, is that in adding it Pinter not only symbolically captures and conveys the essence of his stage play, but in doing so he demonstrates that he understands how film functions and that he can control this medium as surely as he controls the dramatic medium.

Possibly an early indication of Pinter’s use of art objects as metaphors (despite his contention that he does not use symbols) might be seen in the introduction in the play of the mysterious and conspicuous figure of Buddha that Mick smashes (much as society crushes Aston). This is the statue of a sensitive man; yet the statue in the play appears to have no significance other than its mere existence. Like the stove, it has no connection, it is absurd — unless it represents the uselessness of religion and/or the meaninglessness of symbols. At the same time, the film is filled with containers (the bucket hanging from ceiling) which exclude rather

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<sup>11</sup> See discussions of this technique in *Butter’s Going Up*, pp. 256–275, and in Martin Esslin’s *Pinter: A Study of His Plays*, pp. 210–241. (New York: Norton, 1976, expanded edition, pp. 242–245).

than include, and the Buddha, like Davies, does not belong in the dark, compressed, junky world that Aston inhabits; bright, light, and pearly white, the statue is in the background in many shots. Thus emphasized, it may be seen as representing Aston's past, when he saw what others could not.

Mick gets so emotional at the end of the movie that he goes too far and breaks the object ("Look, ummm," he says, as he stands in the doorway about to leave, the hesitation indicating that he feels badly about his action, though he never completes his apology), but breaking it also demonstrates that Aston can/has broken from his past — the possibility of the break having been implied by his bringing Davies home in the first place. There is also an indication that he can move on in his life, since the Buddha, having been smashed into smithereens, cannot be brought back and Aston will not go back either. The irony is that Aston's initial enlightenment about what the world should be like ideally has been replaced by a pragmatic enlightenment about how to survive in the real world. The destruction of the statue thereby takes on the suggestion of a signal between the two brothers, a physical representation of Mick's statement that the Davies affair is closed. Aston's lack of reaction seems to be a concurrence. What each man does is aimed at fulfilling his own personal needs.

One of the unexpected complications in examining a literary text can be trying to determine what is the authoritative text. Various editions may differ, either because of changes or deletions made by the publishers, or because of alterations made by the author.<sup>12</sup> Filmmaking exhibits this problem, too, for there are often several different cuts produced before the final version is decided upon. This practice may be analogous to out-of-town tryouts in live theater, but the cuts remain fixed as concrete products while the tryouts are transitory. Complicating the problem that the existence of divers cuts of the same movie can create for someone who wants to analyze the film is the situation that occurs when a film is censored (and both censored and uncensored versions are distributed), when different versions are released for, say, the European market and the American market, or when the movie is edited to be shown on television. An analysis of *The Guest* involves this last case. It is difficult enough to compare a film with its dramatic original to assess what changes might have been made in transferring the play to the screen and why the alterations were made (and whether they are effective). It is even more difficult when the theatrical release differs from the telecast version. When *The Guest* was shown nationally in the United States on the Turner Broadcasting System (Channel 17), a number of cuts had been made, presumably though not necessarily to fit the film into a time slot of given length (complete with commercial breaks). Davies' walking about the streets and slouching in an alley doorway after Aston has thrown him out of the room is a poignant and telling moment — but it is one of the sequences that is deleted from the television version. It is amusing that some of the deletions made for the television presentation were among the segments specifically added to open up the production, Mick's driving Davies around the circle being one of the most obvious excisions to end up on the editor's cutting room floor.

For someone interested in the process through which Pinter transformed his play into a film, the Pinter Archives at the British Library hold a treasure-trove of scripts and notes from which insights can be drawn. This is an especially valuable resource, since the screenplay version of *The Caretaker* has never been published, and offers opportunities to expand on points made in this paper. In any case, it is clear that examining the opening up of the play brings a better understanding of the original work.

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<sup>12</sup> 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. Due to a complicated printing history, pagination and the text itself varies slightly from edition to edition. The extensive nature of Pinter's revisions and their effect on the meaning of the text are outlined in *Butter's Going Up*, pp. 258–63.

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