The Dumb Waiter
Keywords

- Comedy of Menace
- Absurdist drama
- Pinteresque
- Silent Violence
- Realism
- Dumb waiter
- Active Audience
Critics have been known to call him ‘Master of the Pause‘ or ‘Comedy of Menace‘ after his first few plays *The Room*, *The Birthday Party*, and *A Slight Ache*. *The Dumb Waiter* is included.

In his lifetime, he wrote 29 plays and 21 screenplays, and directed 27 theatre productions. He also received honorary degrees from 18 different universities.
Born October 10, 1930 in East London to Hyman and Frances Pinter, a working-class family.

In 1940 and 1941, he was evacuated from his home during “the Blitz,” the bombing of London.

Attended Hackney Downs grammar school 1944-1948. There he was inspired by his English teacher Joseph Brearly and was published in the school magazine at the age of 12.

Studied acting at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in 1948.
Early Years of Acting

- His debut as a professional actor was in 1951, in which he performed in Samuel Beckett’s “Waiting for Godot.”
- Toured Ireland and England with different acting companies under the stage name of David Baron, until 1959.
- On the side, he was married and yet known for living a frivolous lifestyle of betrayal and various affairs. He was also a very active political voice and very involved in Cricket.
Writing as a Career

- First poems were published in 1950 in a magazine entitled *Poetry London*.
- Began to dabble with playwriting in 1956, and his first one-act play *The Room* was produced in 1957, followed by *The Birthday Party* and *The Dumb Waiter*.
- By 1959, he had fully committed himself to the life of a playwright, while still acting more occasionally on the side.
Inspiration for the Absurd

- In 1953, Eisenhower was President and the two supposed “spies” – Julius Rosenberg and Ethel Rosenberg – were executed after an unfair trial. The Soviet Union and the tension of World War II inspired a question – What is reality?
- Realism, and exposing that there is no answer to what IS real, was Pinter’s desire.
Absurdist drama was somewhat coined by Pinter. It essentially is a form of theatre that surrounds that characters and their ability to perform senseless actions, and often the characters are brought down to simple archetypes.

It thriving during the 1950s, and although it is meant to portray something unrealistic, Pinter believed it to be real for it represented the every-day world, or at least his.
List of Plays

- The Room (1957)
- The Birthday Party (1957)
- The Dumb Waiter (1957)
- A Slight Ache (1958)
- The Hothouse (1958)
- The Caretaker (1959)
- A Night Out (1959)
- Night School (1960)
- The Dwarfs (1960)
- The Collection (1961)
- The Lover (1962)
- Tea Party (1964)
- The Homecoming (1964)
- The Basement (1966)
- Landscape (1967)
- Old Times (1970)
- Monologue (1972)
- No Man's Land (1974)
- Betrayal (1978)
- Family Voices (1980)
- Other Places (1982)
- Victoria Station (1982)
- One For The Road (1984)
- Mountain Language (1988)
- The New World Order (1991)
- Party Time (1991)
- Moonlight (1993)
- Ashes to Ashes (1996)
- Celebration (1999)
- Remembrance of Things Past (2000)
Awards and Honors

- Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE), 1966
- Shakespeare Prize (Hamburg), 1970
- European Prize for Literature (Vienna), 1973
- Pirandello Prize (Palermo), 1980
- Chilean Order of Merit, 1992
- The David Cohen Prize, 1995
- Honorary fellow of Queen Mary, University of London Laurence Olivier Special Award, 1996
- Sunday Times Award for Literary Excellence, 1997
- 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
- ST Dupont Golden Pen Award, 2001 for a Lifetime's Distinguished Service to Literature "Premio Fiesole ai Maestri del Cinema", Italy, 2001
- World Leaders Award (World Leaders: A Festival of Creative Genius, Toronto), 1991
- Hermann Kesten Medallion for outstanding commitment on behalf of persecuted and imprisoned writers, awarded by German PEN (Berlin), 2001
- Companion of Honour (CH) for services to Literature, 2002
- Diploma ad Honorem, Teatro Filodrammatici (Milan), 2004
- Evening Standard Awards, 50th Anniversary - Special Award, 2004
- Wilfred Owen Poetry Prize, 2005
- Franz Kafka Prize, 2005
- Nobel Prize in Literature, 2005
- Europe Theatre Prize, 2006
- Serbian Foundation Prize, 2006
- St. George Plaque of the City of Kragujevac, 2006
Comedy of Menace

- Coined from David Campton’s play *The Lunatic View: A Comedy of Menace*.
- The combination of comedy – something predictable with a conflict and a resolution – with “menace” – implying a threat or violence within the play.
- *The Dumb Waiter* successfully combines the two, creating a dark, violent comedy.
The Dumb Waiter

- First published by Eyre Methuen in 1960.
- First presented at the Hampstead Theatre Club on 21st January 1960 as a double-feature with *The Room*.
- Made into 2 made-for-TV movies, one in 1985 and another in 1987.
- There have been several adaptations since its opening, including its 50th anniversary in 2007.
Reviewed with mixed feelings – broke up the expectation of what theatre was.

Though he disliked it, Pinter’s work was given the title of “Pinteresque,” for his style was so specific.
One-Act play centering around two characters whose purpose is slowly revealed throughout the play.

There is a lot of grey area, so the audience has an experience of being involved with the two men.
Set Design

Harold Pinter's
THE DUMB WAITER

Simple door to kitchen

3 overhead lights serve as practicals (additional spill light near front doors)

Swing wall to kitchen

Walls should have a single angle to enforce that sense of confinement

Chair on side = 52 seats
**Characters**

- **Gus** –
  - Audience intended to sympathize with him, for he appears to know just as much as we, the audience, know.
  - Submissive to Ben
  - Slightly more sensitive to humanity
  - Bored with routine
  - Questions authority, but still submits and accepts
  - Lower-class
Ben –
- The leader/elder of the two
- Dominant and more violent, in both his actions and his silence
- Ashamed of his lower-class status
- Accepts all orders from Wilson
- Knows more than Gus
Characters

- Wilson –
  - Although he never appears in the play, he is the underlying controller of the situation at hand, the reason they are there to begin with.
  - Potentially the one behind the dumbwaiter and the notes.
  - May be paranoid of betrayal
Main Themes

- Unknowing
- Contrasting violence with domestic issues (Kettle, 2609)
- Silence
  - The absence of knowledge
  - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYVosbzeIJQ
Bibliography

- http://www.haroldpinter.org/
- http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0056217/bio
Questions?