

The Caretaker and the Dumb Waiter; Two Plays Study Guide

The Caretaker and the Dumb Waiter; Two Plays by Harold Pinter

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Plot Summary

The Caretaker

The play, "The Caretaker," opens with Aston bringing home to his apartment a homeless man named Davies. Aston had rescued Davies from a fist-fight with a former co-worker, which the elderly Davies was losing. Although Davies is an unemployed and homeless man, he displays bravado and brags about his abilities and good character. Aston, who is busying himself with repairing some items in the apartment, all but ignores the talkative stranger. The kind Aston invites Davies to stay until he can sort himself out. Two things are holding Davies back from seeking employment—he needs new shoes so he can walk to Sidcup and retrieve his documents and references; and, he needs a break in the weather so he can make the trip. Unfortunately, Davies is never able to realize both these requirements at the same time.

Mick catches Davies rummaging through Aston's belongings and accuses him of being a thief. Mick is the actual owner of the apartment building, which is operated by his older brother, Aston. After a tussle and some clarifications, Mick begins to negotiate with Davies on a room rental. When Aston returns, he brings Davies a pair of shoes which Davies finds inadequate for his purposes. Aston, perhaps feeling sympathy for the old man's lot, offers him the job of caretaker of the building. The very next day, Mick returns and ironically offers Davies the same position—that of caretaker. Even though Davies is honest for once and tells each brother that he'd never done that type of work before, they both seem to want him to stay around. Aston reveals to Davies that he had suffered from serious mental problems in the past.

Davies' attempts to play one brother against the other backfire. When Mick complains about Aston being lazy, Davies picks up the reins and elevates the rhetoric by calling Aston "nutty." In a quick turnabout, Mick resents Davies' characterization of his brother and zealously defends him. In the end, the two brothers who did not seem close throughout the episode are drawn closer by the interloper's interference. Rejected by Mick, Davies pleads with Aston to hire him as the caretaker. Aston ignores him and does not respond.

The Dumbwaiter

In the play, "The Dumbwaiter," Ben and Gus are two criminals who are awaiting instructions for their next assignment. They have loaded revolvers and make allusions to the nefarious business of assassination. Gus is the less intelligent of the two and is constantly prattling on about past assignments, their boss, Wilson, and about what job they will be given that evening. While Ben is cold and calculating about their past jobs, Gus displays remorse about their latest victim, a female. Ben, who is the leader of the two, tries to ignore the inane comments and questions of his partner. Throughout the majority of the play, Ben is reading the paper—mostly in an attempt to ignore Gus.



A dumbwaiter located between their two beds suddenly comes to life. It begins sending down a variety of food orders—for steak and pudding; for Greek dishes; and for Chinese dishes. Ben and Gus theorize that the apartment they are in must have been the kitchen of a restaurant at one time but offer no rationale as to why the system was suddenly reactivated at this time. The men, of course, have no means of making these orders but send up a plate full of some snacks they have on hand. The men are anxiously awaiting instructions for their next assignment from Wilson, but there is still no word. Ben notices a speaking tube hanging on the wall next to the dumbwaiter. He has several exchanges with someone up the hatch. Gus leaves the room for a short time then returns to find Ben with his revolver drawn and leveled at him. Ben had received the night's assignment.



The Caretaker, Act One

The Caretaker, Act One Summary

Twenty-nine-year-old Mick is in a cluttered room. He hears noises and soon the door opens and Aston and Davies appear. The room is in such disarray that it is difficult for Aston, who lives there, to find a chair for Davies. Earlier Aston had rescued Davies, who had been involved in a physical altercation with another man. While Davies is bragging about "having a go" at the guy, it is Aston's assessment that the other fellow was getting the best of Davies. Aston offers Davies paper and a tobacco to make a cigarette. Davies accepts only the tobacco for his pipe. His tin of tobacco had been stolen from him.

Although Davies is apparently a homeless man, he prides himself in the fact that he has always kept himself clean. He left the only wife he ever had after a week when he discovered she was soaking her dirty clothes in their vegetable pan. The fight that Aston saved Davies from stemmed from a disagreement with a fellow worker at a cafe. Davies had taken exception when the younger man had expected him to empty the waste bucket. Davies had been hired to clear off tables and sweep up—not take buckets out. When Aston saved him from the fistfight, Davies had left behind all his personal belongings. Aston promises to take him by the place so he can retrieve his belongings.

Aston is attempting to fix the plug wire on a toaster as Davies looks around the room and comments on the volume and value of the materials in the room. One item is a large statue of Buddha, which Aston had picked up in a store. Davies notices a pile of wooden planks which, Aston explains, he will be using to build a shed in the back. There is also a lawn mower in the room. Davies looks out the back window and sees a pond, which Aston explains contains no fish.

Aston tells Davies that he runs the old house and that some people live in other rooms of the building, including some East Indians, which Davies refers to as Blacks. Many other sections of the building are uninhabitable and in need of repair. Davies tells Aston about his experiences at the monastery. He had asked a monk for a pair of shoes—his were worn. The monk threw him out and told him to go on his way. Aston finds a new pair of shoes for Davies but they are ill-fitting and Davies cannot use them.

Aston invites Davies to stay with him until he can sort himself out. Davies mentions that he is anxious for the weather to clear so he can travel to Sidcup where a man there has been holding his identification papers for some fifteen years. Mac Davies is the name he goes by but his real name is Bernard Jenkins. In fact, he has an insurance card in his pocket that bears the name Jenkins. Aston gives Davies some money to tide him over. Aston positions a bucket to catch water leaking from the ceiling.

Davies stays the night and wakes up a little confused before he finally regains his bearings. Aston asks Davies if he was dreaming because he was jabbering; however,



Davies claims he never dreams. Aston asserts that he doesn't dream either. Davies suggests that perhaps the noise was made by the Blacks who live in another apartment.

Aston, who is still focused on the toaster repair job, departs to purchase a jig saw from a nearby store. Davies assumes Aston wants him to go with him, but instead Aston gives Davies a key to the front and back doors and tells him he can come and go as he pleases. Aston tells Davies that recently he had become engaged in a conversation with a woman at a cafe who suddenly asked to see his body. Davies claims the same thing happens to him quite often. Aston shows Davies how to turn on the heat. Davies asks for some money to buy a cup of tea. Aston reminds him that he had given him some money the evening before. Davies tells Aston he may visit a cafe near Wembley to apply for a job.

After Aston leaves, Davies noses around in Aston's belongings. He tries to open several cases and looks through some papers. Just then, Mick, who had silently entered, grabs him. Mick forces Davies to the floor, sits in a chair and watches him and says, "What's the game?"

The Caretaker, Act One Analysis

The diverse communication styles of Aston and Davies take center stage in Act One. The very talkative Davies is a homeless man who is befriended by Aston. The verbose Davies appears to be open and honest but there is a hint that he is telling some tall tales. While Davies expounds on his many problems, Aston all but ignores him. When Aston does respond, it is only in the most succinct manner. While Davies strives for dominance by flooding the air with hundreds of words, they fall ineffective on the ears of the detached Aston, who apparently places little value on what Davies has to say. More important than the content of Davies' long diatribes that adds nothing to the story, is the subtle power of Aston, who wins the struggle for the upper hand by disregarding it. Since Aston has taken in the homeless Davies and offers him a place to stay until he gets himself together, he is portrayed as a generous and kind man who has sympathy for someone down on his luck. Aston's generous nature is further confirmed when he gives Davies a set of keys to the apartment.

Pinter introduces a number of non-sequiturs into the story of "The Caretaker." These non-sequiturs serve several purposes, one of which is to toss them about in the story line as red herrings. Pinter no doubt had fun with these sub-plots that led no where but had set up his audience by sending them on wild goose chases. Secondly, the non-sequiturs relate to the larger, overall theme of communication break-downs that runs throughout the story.

There are several examples. Davies comments on the volume and value of Aston's belongings, raising speculation that Davies may be a thief. There are some mysteries about the building in which Aston lives—he doesn't own it but manages it. There are other unseen residents, but some sections are uninhabitable and in need of repair. Aston plans to build a shed in the back, the purpose of which he does not reveal. The



reader/audience does not know what Davies is saying when he was talking in his sleep. Perhaps something of importance was revealed to Aston that the audience does not yet know. Davies all but telegraphs that he is not trustworthy when he assumes that Aston would not leave him alone in the apartment—again the hint that Davies is a thief. Although many new and potentially intriguing sub-plots are presented, these threads serve only to showcase the chaotic setting and tenuous relationships and add nothing to the main storyline.

The character Mick is mentioned at the beginning of the scene but does not reappear until the conclusion of Act One. The reader is unsure at this point what connection Mick has to Aston and what Mick plans to do with the interloper, Davies. With the inclusion of a third character, Pinter may be priming his audience for more intense subsequent acts with deeper divisions and heightened tension between the characters. The notion that "two's company and three's a crowd" comes to mind.



The Caretaker, Act Two

The Caretaker, Act Two Summary

Mick learns that the intruder slept the night in Aston's apartment and that his name is Jenkins. Although Mick is restraining Davies, he engages in rather polite conversation. He tells Davies (aka Jenkins) that he looks just like his uncle's brother who loved eating all different sorts of nuts. The man carried a fiddle on his back like a papoose. He liked the girls and was thrown out of the Salvation Army. Eventually, the man married a Chinese woman and moved to Jamaica. Mick has a difficult time figuring out how the man became his uncle's brother. In fact, he has wondered if the man was actually his uncle and his uncle was really the brother.

Davies demands to know Mick's identity. Mick insists that he is the owner of the apartment building. Mick then tells Davies that he reminds him of his cousin and provides a very detailed account of his cousin's life. He repeatedly asks Davies if he slept in his apartment the night before, and if so, in what bed. When Davies becomes exasperated by being asked the same questions repeatedly, Mick asks if he slept well and if he had to get up during the night. Even though Davies answers all his questions, Mick, again and again, asks Davies his name, whether he slept in the apartment, what bed in slept in and how well he slept. Davies demands that Mick allow him to dress so he can leave for Sidcup.

Mick flicks the pants in Davies' face, who then calms down. Davies tells Mick that he was brought to the apartment by the man who lives there. Mick counters again with his claim that he is the owner of the room and that his mother lives there as well. He warns Davies to keep his hands off his mother. Davies asserts that he hadn't touched his mother, indeed hadn't even seen her. Although he initially calls him a robber, Mick begins to negotiate the cost of the room in case Davies wants to rent it or buy it out right. Mick basically gives Davies the choice between either renting or buying a room from him or being taken to the police station. Mick offers that his brother will decorate the apartment for him before he moves in.

Aston enters and places a bag on the bed and continues to work on the toaster. Mick reminds Aston that he offered to decorate the room before it is rented. Aston hands Davies the bag he left at the cafe after he had the fight. Mick snatches the bag but Davies demands it back. The three men fight over the bag until Aston finally asserts himself and gives it to Davies. After Mick leaves, Davies learns that Mick is Aston's brother and learns that Mick is indeed the owner of the building. Aston is planning to construct a shed in the back where he can do his work.

Aston acknowledges that the bag he brought Davies was not his. Someone had run off with Davies' bag so Aston purchased this one—which contains a few pieces of clothing—in its place. Davies likes a smoking jacket that he finds in the bag. Aston offers Davies the job as caretaker of the building. Aston plans to install a bell marked "caretaker",



which the residents can use to call him for repairs. Davies is reluctant, pointing out that he had not done that kind of work before and is afraid that someone else looking for him could sound the bell and capture him when he responds.

The next day Davies enters the apartment, which is in total darkness. With the electricity being out, Davies attempts to light a match but the match box falls on the floor. He tries to retrieve it but someone, in the pitch darkness, keeps moving it away from him. Davies is frightened and warns the person that he has a knife. The figure turns on a light to reveal his identity—it is Mick who explains he is doing some spring cleaning. Davies makes it clear that he will not harm Mick or anyone unless they push him too far. Mick confides in Davies that his brother, Aston, is a lazy worker. Mick tells Davies that he plans on taking over the running of the building and asks Davies if he'd like to be the caretaker. Davies stresses that he has never done that type of work before, although he is a capable man and spent time in the services in the colonies.

Mick is willing to take on Davies as caretaker but he wants to check his references. Davies explains that his papers, along with his references, are being kept for him in Sidcup. He plans to travel there as soon as the weather breaks so he can get his papers. After that, Mick will be able to check his references. Davies asks Mick to pick up a pair of shoes for him.

The next morning, Aston wakes Davies up, who complains about the window being open above his bed—the rain is coming in on his head. Aston responds that he can't sleep without the window open. The weather is so bad that Davies will not be able to travel to Sidcup. Aston suggests he sleep with his feet toward the window. Aston is going to pick up a saw bench and tells Davies he can close the window for the time being. There is a pile of boards outside which Aston plans to use to build his work shed. Davies reminds Aston that he was going to pick up a pair of shoes for him.

Aston tells Davies he can get a cup of tea right down the road. Aston explains that as a very young man he used to go to the cafe and converse with the people there. In fact, he talked too much and some of the people started spreading rumors about him when he talked of seeing things, hallucinations. He wound up in a mental ward. His mother gave written permission for the hospital to perform a lobotomy on him. After this procedure, he suffered from headaches and the inability to walk correctly for years. After this experience, Aston had decided not talk to people very much. He's thought of finding the man who performed the lobotomy on him but he first wants to build his shed.

The Caretaker, Act Two Analysis

Ambiguity marks the beginning of Act Two and lingers throughout. The question of the ownership of the apartment building emerges as an issue but the end, like many of Pinter's sub-plots, proves to have little import and is fundamentally irrelevant.

Although the reader/audience learns later in the act that Aston has mental problems, Mick, at first blush, appears to have some psychological issues as well. Mick asks the



same questions over and over even though Davies responds with the same answers. However, the reader must keep in mind that Pinter's dialog relies heavily on the drama of its subtext and underlying impact rather than its literal interpretation. As established in the Act One analysis, Pinter's use of nonsensical dialog is not without purpose. Contrary to the first exchanges between Davies and Aston, Mick's rambling rhetoric proves omnipotent. He reigns supreme in this encounter with Davies, since the establishment of dominance is more important than the substance of the words. The character, Mick, presents an ambiguous nature—at once a dark, menacing persona (Mick's unmerciful interrogation of Davies) and an amiable "bloke" (Mick's pleasant discourse about Davies renting a room). What drives the story is not words; rather, it is the relationships of the characters and their reactions and domination of or subordination to one another.

Pinter inserts a good measure of irony once all three characters have been established. While the brothers seem to be at odds with one another, they are in like mind when they both independently offer the unqualified Davies the job of caretaker. Although they both have problems with the visitor, there appears to be some intriguing fascination with Davies since they both want to keep him around. Davies' ambiguity is rooted in a fundamental instinct to survive. Davies keeps his cards close to his chest, which further confirms his duplicitous and self-centered nature. When Mick offers him the position of caretaker, he does not reveal that Aston had already made the same offer. The audience is led down the path that the brothers may have some undisclosed, perhaps odious, reason for hiring Davies; but in the end, this angle is yet another subplot that dies on the vine.

At the end of Act Two, the formerly cryptic Aston becomes very talkative, filling in Davies about his time in an insane asylum where he was administered a lobotomy. Aston seems to have revenge on his mind when he muses about finding the person who performed the procedure on him but, not surprisingly, this notion is never mentioned again.



The Caretaker, Act Three

The Caretaker, Act Three Summary

Two weeks later, Mick and Davies are in the apartment. Davies is wearing his smoking jacket, smoking his pipe and speculating about whether Aston has tarred over the leak in the roof—it's been raining but no water has been dripping into the bucket. He is complaining that Aston won't give him a knife to cut his bread. Mick points out that he has a knife but Davies counters that his knife is not an appropriate one with which to cut bread.

Mick and Davies discuss how uncommunicative Aston is. Davies finds it difficult to live in the same room as he. Mick muses about how he'd fix the apartment up like a penthouse where he and his brother could live. Davies takes offense that he was left out of the plans, though a fantasy, but Mick assures him that Aston would never go along with such renovations. Mick suggests that Davies approach Aston about fixing the place up. Davies complains that Aston won't even get him the clock he asked for. Davies is also disturbed that Aston wakes him up in the middle of the night complaining about the noises he makes in his sleep. He is so tired in the morning that he cannot take care of his affairs to finally get himself together.

Aston enters the room with a pair of shoes for Davies. They don't fit quite right, but Davies indicates that they may do until he can get a better fitting pair. Davies complains that the shoes are missing their laces. Aston finds some brown laces. Davies complains that the brown laces don't match the black shoes but takes them anyway. Davies may try to go to Sidcup to get his papers and references the next day since he's been offered a job. The weather may delay his trip.

Aston wakes Davies up in the middle of the night. Davies is making so much noise that Aston cannot sleep. Davies takes offense and a huge fight ensues. Davies pulls his knife and threatens Aston. He tells Aston that Mick had offered him the job of caretaker and that he is going to take it. Aston tells him that it's not working out between them and in fact Davies stinks. He tells Davies that he must leave. Davies tells Aston they should have kept him in the insane asylum and that Mick is watching him and his odd ways. He could very well be returned to the nut house. Davies, upset and angry, warns Aston that he will be sorry.

The next day Davies returns with Mick and complains about his treatment by Aston. He tells Mick that he should throw Aston out. Mick agrees to fix up the apartment but warns Davies that he better be good at interior decorating. Davies immediately professes his inexperience at interior decorating. Mick presses him, insisting that Davies told him he was a first-class interior designer. Finally, Davies asserts that Aston must have told him that because Aston is "nutty." Mick takes offense at Davies calling his brother nutty.



Mick then rails at Davies, telling him there's been nothing but trouble since he's been around. He accuses him of being a liar and a troublemaker as well as violent and erratic. Mick gives Davies a half-dollar to pay him for the caretaking work he'd done thus far. Mick becomes angered and smashes the Buddha up against the wall. He asserts that he's got many more things to worry about than the apartment—his brother can deal with it. Upon Aston's return, Davies tells him that he had just returned to get his pipe.

After Mick leaves, Davies tries to make amends with Aston and offers to become his caretaker. Davies suggests that they switch beds so that Aston can be near the window when he sleeps. Aston rejects the suggestion, asserting that he likes his own bed. Aston tells him that the bed he's been sleeping in is meant for his brother when he sleeps over. Davies offers to help Aston build his work shed, an offer which Aston also rejects. Davies asks Aston if he'll let him become the caretaker if he gets his papers. Aston does not respond.

The Caretaker, Act Three Analysis

That there is a duplicitous nature existing within both Mick and Davies emerges in Act Three. Although Mick seems to disparage his brother, when Davies asserts that Aston is a nut Mick takes offense. Pinter employs the use of relationship triangulation in which the imminent outcome will be odd man out. In the intensified triangle scenario that Pinter creates, it is obvious that only two will survive. When Mick fantasizes about decorating the apartment because his "lazy" brother Aston won't do the work, he ends his musing by indicating that any such renovation would be done for the benefit of he and his brother—leaving Davies out. The author brandishes the notion of strong ties of family—the old adage that blood is thicker than water. It begins to dawn on Davies that the brothers might be forcing him out.

At the conclusion of the play, Aston returns and Davies, who had been speaking very negatively about him, suddenly wants to make amends—Davies staying true to his paramount goal of self-survival. The stark difference between the characters is made obvious in the last scene. While Mick's changing opinions and attitudes seem tied to immaturity or emotional problems, the dynamic nature of Davies is calculated and purposeful—he wants to secure a place for himself. Aston who, according to his own words, has suffered mental problems in the past, appears to have accepted his fate and copes with life as well as he can.

While Aston has shown patience and compassion with his guest, Davies, he finally concludes that they are not compatible and that the current living arrangement will not work. However, Aston remains kind as witnessed by his purchase of a new pair of shoes for Davies. The shoes are symbolic of Aston's wishes for Davies to move on. Davies' wish to find a place where he can belong is illustrated by his perceived inability to move on—every pair of shoes he gets hold of are not quite right and the weather always delays his departure. His vacillation from one brother to another does not mark confused allegiances; rather, it points to his willingness to take the side of the brother that is willing to give him a home. Although he threw in with Mick, in the end he feels



abandoned by him and tries to get on Aston's good side again even though he himself constantly complained about the older brother. When the two men, Davies and Aston, are at odds, the once opinionated Mick silently leaves the room, indicating his inability to deal with confrontation, a trait rooted in his immaturity.

Generally speaking, the three men represent diverse human characteristics: Davies is calculating and self-centered; Aston is patient and compassionate; Mick is immature and indecisive. Although Davies is asked by both Aston and Mick to be the caretaker of the apartment building, Davies does not have the ability, and in the end is only concerned with taking care of himself. Aston, though damaged by life, rebounds with understanding and benevolence. He emerges as the most compelling character, one that represents the best in man under less than perfect circumstances.



The Dumbwaiter

The Dumbwaiter Summary

Two men, Ben and Gus, are in a basement apartment. There is a seemingly inactive dumb waiter between their beds. Off one side there is a door to the kitchen and to the other side a door to the bathroom. Ben is reading a newspaper on his bed. Gus, who has difficulty lacing up his shoes, keeps taking them off, finding a matchbox in one shoe and an empty cigarette pack in the other. As he exits the room to the bathroom, Ben glares after him apparently very annoyed by the machinations with his shoes. Ben hears Gus try to flush the toilet but it fails to flush.

When Gus re-enters the room, Ben tells him about a news article in the paper describing how an eighty-seven-year-old man could not cross the road so he crawled under a lorry and was immediately killed. Gus returns to the bathroom but the toilet still will not flush. Ben tells Gus to hurry and make some tea. Gus comments about the nice crockery that "he" gave them to use—black and white stripes. Gus tells Ben that he brought some biscuits to eat with his tea. Ben, still reading the newspaper, references another article in which it is reported that a child of eight killed a cat. Although it was reported that the eight-year-old, a girl, killed the cat, Ben suspicions that the real cat killer was her eleven-year-old brother, who reported the incident.

Gus wants to know the time of day but Ben tells him it doesn't really matter what time it is. Gus asks Ben if he ever noticed how long it takes for the lavatory tank to re-fill. Ben responds that the inner workings of the tank are broken. Gus said he wouldn't mind living in the apartment except for the fact that there is no window. Gus would rather have a place with a view since their job requires them to sleep all day and then go out at night. Ben reminds Gus that they don't work that often and that Gus needs some interests like he has—woodworking and building model ships. The toilet finally flushes.

Gus continues to complain about the apartment. It is not as nice and comfortable as some he had given them in the past. Ben, still reading, reminds Gus to make the tea. Gus finally gets a tea bag and begins to make the tea. He asks Ben why he stopped the car in the middle of the road in the morning. Ben responded that he thought Gus was asleep. Ben tells Gus that he stopped in the middle of the road because they had arrived early at their destination. Gus didn't think they had been early but Ben reminds Gus that it was he who had received the call and knew the details of the assignment. Gus asks if someone had to move out before they moved in—he thought his sheets smelled of someone else.

Ben and Gus are debating when and where they last saw the Birmingham soccer team play. Since they are in Birmingham, Gus would like to stay over and see a match, but Ben tells him the team is playing away. Gus has trouble grasping this fact and keeps insisting they could stay and see a match. Just then, an envelope slides in under the door. Gus opens the sealed envelope only to find twelve matches inside. Ben tells Gus



to see if he can spot the person who left the envelope. Gus grabs a revolver from under his pillow and opens the door. He returns the weapon back under his pillow and tells Ben that he saw no one. Ben tells Gus that the matches might come in handy since Gus is always running out of them.

The two get in quite an argument over whether one should say "light the gas" or "light the kettle" when preparing tea. Finally, Gus, acquiesces to Ben's use of the phrase "light the kettle" since Ben is the senior partner. Ben strikes one of the matches on the bottom of his shoe and it lights. He then proceeds to lights the stove. Gus then sits on Ben's bed and asks him if he knows "who it's going to be tonight?" (p. 100). Ben glares at Gus and does not answer, telling him to make the tea. After Gus leaves to make the tea, Ben picks up Gus's revolver and checks for ammunition.

Gus returns and tells Ben that the fire went out and that the stove is on a meter. Neither one of the men has any money, so Ben concludes that they will have to wait for Wilson. Gus points out that Wilson doesn't always come—sometimes he just sends a message. Ben reminds Gus that Wilson is a very busy man. Gus is musing about the last one—a girl. He is annoyed that Ben keeps ignoring him by reading and re-reading the paper. Ben gets angry with him and tells him to quit criticizing him. Gus' thoughts returns to the girl. She wasn't very good looking but she didn't seem to hold together very well—not as well as men do. Gus' words are unnerving Ben.

Gus is obsessed with the last one, the girl. He questions Ben as to whether there is someone who cleans up after they complete their job. Ben tells Gus that the organization is large and that there are several different departments. Just then, with a big clatter, the dumb waiter begins a descent down its wall panel. At first, the men don't know what is making the noise and grab their revolvers. They look inside the dumbwaiter panel and find an envelope. The note inside lists steak, chips and pudding. Ben guesses that the building used to be a cafe and that perhaps the apartment they are in was formerly the kitchen—the note seems to be a dinner order. The dumb waiter descends once again, delivering another food order.

Ben decides that they must send something back up. They pile their one tea bag, a small cake, some crisps—every snack item they had—onto one of the plates. They send the dumb waiter back up but forget to put the plate of food on it. Ben blames Gus for the confusion. The two men discuss what happens when they are not there to take the orders. Ben starts to get ready by donning his waistcoat and tie. He straps on his shoulder holster. Gus follows suit and finishes dressing. The dumbwaiter arrives again, this time with an order for Greek food. Gus places the plate of snacks in the dumb waiter and shouts up the dumbwaiter channel the description of the items they are sending up the hatch. Gus speculates about how anyone could make all the food that was ordered with the small stove in the apartment. The two are more than ready to go and anxiously await word from Wilson.

The dumbwaiter arrives again with an order for Chinese food. They notice that the tea bag they sent up was sent back. They decide to write a note that they cannot provide the food orders that are being requested. Ben begins to write a note when they notice a



speaking-tube on the side of the dumbwaiter. After some back and forth, Ben takes command of the tube. He speaks into the tube, telling those upstairs that they have sent up everything they had. He listens for a few moments. He apologizes into the tube after hearing that the food they sent was stale, spoiled and moldy. He ends his conversation by saying, "Yes certainly. Certainly. Right away" (p. 112). Ben hangs the speaker up and tells Gus to make a cup of tea—the voice from upstairs told him to make the tea. Gus protests that he wanted tea all day, reminding Ben that they cannot light the stove. Ben is worried about not being able to provide the tea. Gus is worried that he can't have a cup of tea himself.

Ben goes over the instructions for their assignment. He tells Gus when the knock comes on the door, he should stand behind it but not answer it. Annoyingly, Gus repeats every line of instruction right after Ben. After the bloke comes in he will see only Ben and not know that Gus is behind the door. Gus reminds Ben that he forgot the line of instruction telling him to draw his gun. Ben tells him that of course he must draw the gun. The bloke will know that the two of them have the drop on him. Gus asks what they do if it's a girl. Ben tells him nothing changes if it's a girl. Gus uses the bathroom again and again the lavatory doesn't flush.

The two men get into a heated debate about why they were sent matches since the stove doesn't work. Gus wants to know who is upstairs. Ben tells him repeatedly to shut up. Gus goes off to the lavatory again. The speaker tube on the dumbwaiter signals. Ben listens and answers in the affirmative several times. Gus returns as Ben levels his gun at him. He is stripped of his gun and jacket and vest as he stoops and looks up at Ben. Silence.

The Dumbwaiter Analysis

Many of the same elements used in "The Caretaker"—i.e., irony, relationship triangulation and impaired communication—are employed by Harold Pinter in his play, "The Dumbwaiter." Two men identified as Ben and Gus are in a tense situation, waiting in temporary quarters for instructions for their next assignment with an unknown purpose from a yet to be seen man named "Wilson." Both Ben and Gus are armed with loaded revolvers and there is conversation between them that points to their being involved in a nefarious business—perhaps assassination. Ben, who maintains a remoteness from the more verbose Gus, is the dominant character between the two and treats Gus in a condescending manner. Ben is annoyed by Gus's questions and unending prattle.

Once again, Pinter uses unique dialog and structure to establish the dominant personality between two characters rather than relying on the words they speak. Just as Aston maintains dominance by ignoring the meaningless rantings of Davies in "The Caretaker," the measured Ben captures the upper hand in the relationship by his commanding demeanor and refusal to respond to Gus's inane comments or questions or to take him seriously. Gus seems to show more trepidation about their "boss" and the assignment he will be giving them. Ben, who constantly has his nose in the newspaper,



which epitomizes his detachment toward Gus, is calm and unconcerned about their next job. Ben, in the face of Gus's criticism of Wilson, finds only good things to say about their boss and defends him against criticism from Gus.

Ben asserts that he is the "senior partner" between the two and, through the author's consistent dialog, comes off as the stronger and more intelligent character when compared to his rather dopey partner. Ben displays anxiety only when Gus continues to voice his remorse about former acts and concern about future ones. The two men have difficulty in communicating with each other. Gus rambles and repeats himself while the more stoic Ben tries to divert attention from Gus's concerns and inabilities by citing articles from the newspaper he seems to be fixated upon. He evidently prefers well-written news articles to conversing with the inarticulate Gus, whose stream of consciousness babble shows his naivete and is unnerving to the sedate and circumspect Ben. The more compassionate of the two, Gus, worries about the last person, a girl, who seemed to suffer inexorably.

The dumbwaiter represents the third character, Wilson. The dumbwaiter injects more tension into the plot, creates increased division between the two men and provides the third leg of the triangle. Pinter's use of comedy takes the focus off the darkness of the storyline thereby positioning the reader to be somewhat off-guard for the ironic and tragic conclusion. There are comic elements during the episodes involving the dumbwaiter, which keeps sending exotic food orders down to the apartment. In a silly move, the two men send up crackers and biscuits when orders for steak, Greek and Chinese food are requested. On the wall beside the dumbwaiter is a speaking tube, which becomes an integral part of the conclusion. Ben takes over the speaking tube and has unknown exchanges with someone upstairs. At this point, the story shifts from dark comedy to tragedy as Ben receives the final instructions for the evening's assignment.



Characters

Aston, The Caretaker

Aston is a reserved and kind man who befriends the homeless Davies, whom he rescues from a fist-fight with a former co-worker. Aston talks very little and seems to ignore the blustery Davies, who rambles on about his past and his problems. Aston lives in one of the apartments of a large apartment building that he runs but that is owned by his younger brother, Mick. Aston has sympathy for the down-on-his-luck Davies, and offers him a place to stay until he can sort his life out.

Aston had suffered from severe mental problems in the past and had, in fact, been institutionalized for a time, undergoing electric shock treatment during his stay. Aston had once trusted and talked freely with people. But when he told some acquaintances at a cafe that he was having hallucinations, it was then that he was placed in the mental ward. After that terrible experience, he learned to keep his thoughts to himself. Aston shows very little bitterness about his lot in life, keeping busy and doing the best he can under the circumstances. His goal is to construct a work shed in the back of the apartment building so he presumably can enhance his carpentry skills.

Aston tries to accommodate his elderly guest as much as possible, even buying him new shoes and offering him the position of caretaker for the building. In the end, however, he sees that he and Davies are not compatible and tells Davies that he must be on his way.

Ben, The Dumbwaiter

As the play opens, Ben and Gus are situated in a small run-down apartment. They are hired assassins and are awaiting instructions for that evening's job. Ben is obviously the leader of the criminal partnership. He comes across as much more self-assured and intelligent than his rather dense partner in crime. Ben is reading a newspaper while Gus is nervously awaiting word on their next "job." Ben keeps his nose in the paper during the majority of the play—he enjoys the articles and the distraction allows him to pay less attention to Gus, whose endless rambling is getting increasingly on his nerves. Ben shows no remorse when Gus agonizes over their last victim, a girl. The character Ben is presented as cold and calculating and in charge. Gus makes no attempt to assume any leadership role in the partnership and readily embraces a subservient position to his partner.

A seemingly inactive dumbwaiter in the temporary quarters where Ben and Gus await further instructions from their boss, Wilson, suddenly lurches to life. The two men begin receiving food orders from someone above. Even the circumspect Ben seems to be perplexed initially by this development. Since they, of course, have no food to cook or to send up on the dumbwaiter, they are unable to fill the orders that oddly keep coming.



Finally, Ben spots a speaking tube hanging on the wall beside the dumbwaiter. He commandeers the speaking device and has a few exchanges with an unknown person above.

A short while later after Gus returns from the lavatory, he finds Ben with revolver drawn and pointing at him. Ben had received that evening's instructions from the dumbwaiter and was preparing to fulfill his mission as the play concludes.

Davies, The Caretaker

Davies is the homeless old man who Aston rescues from a fight and brings back to his apartment. He allows him to stay until he gets himself straightened out. However, Davies really does not want to move on and tries to position himself to gain a permanent home with Aston.

Mick, The Caretaker

Mick is Aston's older brother and is the owner of the apartment building where Aston lives and works. Mick is immature and has a negative attitude toward his older brother, but in the end defends him against the interfering interloper, Davies.

Bernard Jenkins, The Caretaker

Mac Davies claims that his real name is Bernard Jenkins. He does not fully explain why he has two identities, but one can assume that he is trying to evade something from his past.

The Monk at the Luton Monastery, The Caretaker

Davies complains bitterly about a Monk he encountered at the Luton Monastery. He asked the Monk for a pair of shoes but was turned down and rudely sent away.

Mick's Uncle's Brother, The Caretaker

Mick tells Davies that he reminds him of his uncle's brother. Mick tells a long, rather comedic account of his uncle's brother who loved to eat nuts, wore a fiddle on his back like a papoose, loved the girls, was thrown out of the Salvation Army and ran away to Tahiti with a Chinese woman.

Gus, The Dumbwaiter

Gus is the less intelligent criminal in the partnership due of Ben and Gus. Throughout most of the play, Gus is worried about their next assignment and who their next target



for assassination will be. Tragically, his partner Ben gets the word from their boss that Gus is that evening's target.

Wilson, The Dumbwaiter

Wilson is the crime boss over Ben and Gus. Though he is never seen, he is an ominous presence in the play as it is he who will decide who will be assassinated that evening.

The Dumbwaiter, The Dumbwaiter

The Dumbwaiter, although a device, actually represents the character, Wilson, the crime boss who delivers the word to Ben via the dumbwaiter that he must assassinate his partner, Gus, that evening.



Objects/Places

Apartment Building, The Caretaker

Aston manages and lives in a large old apartment building which his brother, Mick, owns.

Sidcup, The Caretaker

Davies plans to travel to Sidcup where someone has been keeping his papers for the last fifteen years. He needs to get these papers which will prove his identity and provide him with employment references.

The Dumbwaiter

The dumbwaiter in the room where Ben and Gus await instructions for their next job, is controlled by their crime boss, Wilson. Ben receives word through the dumbwaiter that the target for assassination that evening is his partner, Gus.

Buddha, The Caretaker

Aston lives in a cramped and cluttered apartment. One item of note that he is particularly proud of is a large statue of Buddha. Unfortunately, in a rage, his guest Davies smashes the statue up against the wall.

Luton Monastery, The Caretaker

Davies complains about an encounter with a monk at the Luton Monastery. He had asked the monk for a free pair of shoes but was rebuffed.

Insane Asylum, The Caretaker

Aston reveals that he was confined to an insane asylum earlier in his life. While there, he underwent a lobotomy.

Wembley, The Caretaker

Davies heard about an opening at a cafe in Wembley and planned to apply for it. Unfortunately, he never finds the right shoes to wear and the weather never breaks enough for him to make the trip.



Birmingham, The Dumbwaiter

Birmingham is the town where Ben and Gus are staying while they await their next assignment from Wilson.

Basement Apartment, The Dumbwaiter

Ben and Gus await instructions from their boss in their temporary quarters in a run-down basement apartment in Birmingham.

Midlands, The Dumbwaiter

The city of Birmingham where Ben and Gus are temporarily staying is located in a region in Great Britain known as the Midlands.

Villa, The Dumbwaiter

Villa is the soccer team that Gus wants to go watch while he and Ben are in Birmingham. Ben informs him that the team is currently out of town.

The Dumbwaiter, The Dumbwaiter

The dumbwaiter in the room where Ben and Gus await instructions for their next job, is controlled by their crime boss, Wilson. Ben receives word through the dumbwaiter that the target for assassination that evening is his partner, Gus.



Themes

Relationship Triangulation

In both his plays, "The Caretaker" and "The Dumbwaiter," Playwright Harold Pinter focuses on the dynamics of troubled relationships, especially when impacted by the interjection of a third person. In "The Caretaker," the relationship is made stronger by the inclusion of a third person. In "The Dumbwaiter," the introduction of a third party ends the relationship forever.

In "The Caretaker," Aston and his younger brother, Mick, seem to be somewhat estranged even though they work together. Mick is the owner of a large, old apartment building and Aston manages the building's operation. There are very few scenes that include both brothers, and often when Aston appears, Mick seems to disappear from the scene. However, the arrangement between the two brothers has apparently been on-going for some time, and though the brothers aren't close, their business relationship is at least somewhat satisfactory.

The relationship is tested when the more compassionate brother, Aston, brings home an old homeless man, Davies. Davies is full of bluster and constantly brags about his abilities and complains about his past. Aston feels sorry for the down-on-his-luck Davies and offers him a place to stay until he can sort himself out. Davies is never quite able to do so and soon both Aston and Mick, independent of one another, offer the unqualified Davies the job of caretaker.

It is then that Davies tries to take advantage of the situation and plays one brother against the other. However, his efforts backfire. When Davies joins Mick in complaining about Aston, Mick does an about face and takes up for his brother with a vengeance. By inserting the ribald character, Davies, into the weak relationship between the brother, that relationship becomes stronger after which it is Davies who is forced out and the brothers who grow closer.

In "The Dumbwaiter," two hired assassins, Ben and Gus, are in a criminal partnership but are not personally close. In fact, Gus is consistently getting on Ben's nerves with his constant and inane chatter. Ben is the leader of the duo and maintains a condescending and derisive attitude toward Gus throughout the play. However, Ben has apparently learned to live with his annoying partner because, based on the dialog, the two have worked together for some time. However, when the dumbwaiter in their temporary quarters suddenly lurches into life, the relationship changes forever. To the amazement of the two killers, the dumbwaiter begins delivering messages from upstairs. As it turns out, Wilson, the duo's boss, is running the dumbwaiter and finally delivers a message that is the coup de grace for Gus. It is through the dumbwaiter, representing Wilson as the drama's third party, that Ben is delivered instructions that the assassination target for the evening's job is none other than Gus.



Communication Difficulties

Communication, or more appropriately lack thereof, is at the heart of both plays, "The Caretaker" and "The Dumbwaiter," by Harold Pinter. In "The Caretaker," Davies, the homeless man that Aston brings home, is blustery and verbose and talks nonstop about his outstanding abilities and complains loudly about the bad luck in his past. Aston, who busies himself with repair work, pays little heed to the man. In fact, he tunes him out and only responds in cryptic responses when absolutely necessary. Mick, Aston's brother, has a different communication style than his brother. When Mick catches the old bum, Davies, rummaging around in Aston's apartment, he pins him to the floor. Mick then goes on an inane rant—almost gibberish—about different people that Davies reminds him of. Mick asks the same questions to Davies over and over again: "What is your name?" "Did you sleep here overnight?" "How did you sleep?" Even though Davies responds with the same answers each time, Mick asks those same questions again. Davies understandably grows extremely perplexed at Mick's inability to grasp his simple answers. Pinter in large part, uses such inane exchanges to illustrate overall difficulties in the communication between people, especially that in close relationships. He also uses dialog style and construction, as opposed to specific words, to establish the dominance of characters.

Pinter follows suit with the same style of dialog in his play, "The Dumbwaiter." Two criminals, Ben and Gus, are waiting in temporary quarters for instructions from their boss. Ben, the leader of the two and obviously the more intelligent, has his nose stuck in a newspaper during the majority of the play. Gus talks non-stop and makes the same questions and comments repeatedly, much to the annoyance of Ben. Ben uses his newspaper as a means of ignoring and avoiding the mindless chatter of Gus. Often when Ben does speak, he does not address Gus' questions; rather, he relates a story he has read in the paper.

The other communication of importance in play is when the dumbwaiter, located in the room, comes to life and begins delivering messages, at first food orders, and then later instructions for Ben to kill Gus. As it turns out, Wilson was using the dumbwaiter as the communications vehicle in getting the odious message to Ben.

Isolation of the Individual

Harold Pinter focuses on the isolation of the individual in both plays, "The Caretaker" and "The Dumbwaiter." The personalities of the main characters in each play readily illustrate the difficulties that they must have encountered in their lives and provides an explanation to the audience as to just why they eventually found themselves isolated from others. Davies, the homeless man brought home by Aston in "The Caretaker" is self-centered and argumentative. He loudly complains about the injustice and bad luck he has been made to suffer in the past. For example, Davies left his wife of one week when he disapproved of her laundry habits. He alienated a monk in a monastery by his aggressive and demanding manner. He got into a fist-fight with a co-worker who asked



Davies to do something that he thought was beneath him. His duplicitous actions with Aston and Mick destroys his relationship with them.

Much of what Mick, Aston's brother, talks about seems to be meaningless. When coupling that factor with his somewhat menacing, dark presence, it is understandable that people would not want to be associated with him. Aston, who reveals he had suffered from mental problems in the past, had been lobotomized and does not speak often. His self-imposed isolation resulted from his distrust of people and difficult experiences at the mental ward.

In "The Dumbwaiter," Ben voraciously reads the newspaper during most of the play. He does so to escape the inane chatter of his partner, Gus. Gus talks constantly asking the same questions and making the same comments repeatedly. Ben can barely cope with his annoying partner. Gus's irritating prattle coupled with Ben's lack of patience results in the isolation of both characters



Style

Style

Point of View

Pinter chooses to confine the events of both plays to a single location: one-room, rundown apartments. In "The Caretaker," characters enter and exit at various times; in "The Dumbwaiter," the only two characters are always present. Both plays are inherently character-driven, and this severe focus provides a sort of "pressure-cooker" as Pinter allows tensions to simmer in the confined space.

In the play, "The Caretaker," the point of view of the story is presented through the main characters, Aston, Davies and Mick as well as by the unique dialogue of the playwright, Harold Pinter. Pinter uses the construction and sub-text of his dialog to establish the dominance or subordination of each character. Pinter's approach is powerful and effective. By the play's conclusion, what comes across to the audience is not the words of the characters, which in the main are not memorable, but rather the message that Pinter is relaying. Pinter's view that man suffers from his inability to communicate effectively with one another comes through loud and clear when Davies' verbal machinations lose him the home he thought he may have finally found.

In "The Dumbwaiter," two criminals, assassins in fact, Gus and Ben present two points of view. Gus is the character, similar to Davies, who talks incessantly but says nothing. His partner, the more intelligent and stoic Ben, can barely tolerate his partner, and in the end his boss, Wilson, is in sync with Ben. He delivers a message to Ben to eliminate Gus. What Pinter leaves the audience with is that an ineffective communication style like that of Gus is intolerable. Wilson's order to eliminate Gus is a metaphor for Pinter's disdain for inarticulate communication.

Setting

Both plays, "The Caretaker" and "The Dumbwaiter" by English playwright, Harold Pinter, take place in England. In "The Caretaker" the entire play takes place in the one-room apartment of the character, Aston. The apartment is described as cluttered and cramped and in need of some repair. Aston's apartment is located in a large old apartment building which is owned by Aston's younger brother, Mick. Although it is not shown, the dialog indicates that much of the building is in disrepair. Aston plans to build a work shed in the back yard which contains an empty pond.

The old homeless man, Davies, who Aston rescues from a fight and brings home, speaks of being thrown out of a monastery for his rude and demanding manner. He lost his last job at a cafe after getting into a fist-fight with a co-worker. Throughout the entire play, Davies voices his plans to travel to the city of Sidcup where an unidentified person



has been keeping his personal papers and references for fifteen years. Davies hears of an opening at a cafe in Wembley, England, which he would like to apply for.

In "The Dumbwaiter," the entire one-act play takes place in a crummy basement apartment. The two characters, Ben and Gus, are waiting in these temporary quarters for instructions from their boss. The apartment has no windows and the stove does not work. The apartment is located in Birmingham, England, which is located in a region known as the Midlands.

Language and Meaning

The impact of the dialog and its subtext has more import than do the actual words in both plays, "The Caretaker" and "The Dumbwaiter," by playwright, Harold Pinter. At first blush, much of the dialog seems inane and meaningless. However, it is Pinter's character development that has more significance than the dialog's content. The audience begins to focus on who is speaking rather than what they are saying. In the case of "The Caretaker," Davies, the homeless man brought home by Aston, is verbose and blustery. Aston, who is reserved and speaks cryptically and only when necessary, becomes the more powerful of the two characters by his stoicism and refusal to join in the absurd chatter of the old bum. By doing so, Aston emerges as the stronger, more admirable character.

A similar dialog structure exists in "The Dumbwaiter." Gus, who appears to be naïve and not very bright, talks incessantly. He annoys his more intelligent partner, Ben, by his endless chatter and repetitive comments. As in the case of Aston, Ben often does not respond to Gus's inanity and comes off as the more intelligent and dominant character. Pinter uses this dialog structure to underscore that an individual gains the most respect by limiting one's conversation to substance rather than volume.

In both plays, Pinter uses dramatic techniques that, while flat on the page of a book, undoubtedly come to life on stage and become important parts of the exchanges between the characters. The reader can envision the dramatic on-stage effects of Pinter's interjection of well-placed non-responses (silences), interruptions and pauses into the dialog.

Harold Pinter is an English playwright and both plays take place in England. Therefore, some words and phrases used would be more common to an English audience than to an American audience.

Structure

The play, "The Caretaker," has the traditional structure of the three-act play. The entire play takes place in the cramped, cluttered one-room apartment of the character, Aston. The play takes place over the course of perhaps a few weeks, and there are several time ellipses to move the story forward. These ellipses are indicated in the stage directions through lighting changes. Act One sets up the basic premise and introduces two main characters, Aston and Davies. Aston manages the large old apartment



building in which his apartment is located. He brings Davies to his apartment and allows him to stay until he straightens himself out. In Act Two, tension builds due to the introduction of the third character, Mick, the owner of the building who confronts Davies. Mick presents a darker, more menacing presence than his brother Aston. In Act Three, the relationship of the two brothers proves to be strengthened by the interference of the meddlesome interloper, Davies, who is forced to leave the home he thought he had found. Thus, a new dynamic is forged between the two brothers, while the outsider is exiled.

The second play, "The Dumbwaiter," is a one-act play. In contrast to "The Caretaker," this play takes place in real-time and does not feature any time ellipses. Pinter is able to succinctly tell the story of two criminals within the parameters of one act. The beginning of the play introduces the two men, Ben and Gus, who are awaiting instructions for their next assassination in a run-down basement apartment. Pinter slowly builds suspense by contrasting the anxious Gus with the cool and collected Ben. The drama builds as both men are troubled by an inactive dumbwaiter that suddenly comes to life. Pinter cleverly introduces the dumbwaiter as a third character, and as in "The Caretaker," this "third character" alters the nature of the relationship of the first two characters. The dumbwaiter in actuality is being operated by the crime boss, Wilson, who is never seen. Pinter uses an inanimate object to deliver the most climactic story event of the entire play and its surprise ending.

Quotes

"I took the lid off a saucepan, you know what was in it? A pile of her underclothing, unwashed. The pan for vegetables, it was. The vegetable pan. That's when I left her and I haven't seen her since." The Caretaker, Act One, p. 9

"I went round to this kitchen, see? Meal they give me! A bird, I tell you, a little bird, a little tiny bird, he could have ate it in under two minutes." The Caretaker, Act One, p. 14

"Anyway, we were just sitting there, having this bit of a conversation. . . then suddenly she put her hand over to mine . . . and she said, how would you like me to have a look at your body?" The Caretaker, Act One, p. 24

"What's the game?" The Caretaker, Act One, p. 29

"To be honest, I've never made out how he came to be my uncle's brother, I've often thought that maybe it was the other way round. I mean that my uncle was his brother and he was my uncle." The Caretaker, Act Two, p. 31

"Eh, you're not thinking of doing any violence on me, are you? You're not the violent sort, are you?" The Caretaker, Act Two, p. 46

"Not suitable? Well, I can tell you, there's someone here thinks I am suitable. And I'll tell you. I'm staying on here as caretaker!" The Caretaker, Act Three, p. 68

"If you want me to go. . .I'll go. You just say the word. I'll tell you what though. . .them shoes. . .them shoes you give me. . .they're working out all right. . .they're all right." The Caretaker, Act Three, p. 78

"I mean, you come into a place when it's dark, you come into a room you've never seen before, you sleep all day, you do your job, and then you go away in the night again. I like to get a look at the scenery. You never get the chance in this job." The Dumbwaiter, p. 90



"Honest, I can't remember a mess like that one. They don't seem to hold together like men, women. A looser texture, like." *The Dumbwaiter*, p. 103

"We send him up all we've got and he's not satisfied. No, honest, it's enough to make a cat laugh." *The Dumbwaiter*, p. 113

"What's the matter with you? You don't look too bright. I feel like an Alka-Seltzer myself." *The Dumbwaiter*, p. 114



Topics for Discussion

Who does Davies remind Mick of? What confusion does Mick have about his uncle and his uncle's brother? What was Pinter's purpose for including such inane rhetoric?

What keeps Davies from traveling to Sidcup to retrieve his identification and employment papers? Why does Davies keep asking people for a pair of shoes and why are the shoes that he gets never quite right?

How does Pinter focus on and illustrate communication difficulties between characters in both plays? What does Pinter achieve by interjecting meaningless dialog and non-sequiturs into the story-line?

What experiences have caused Aston to refrain from talking very much? What procedure was administered to Aston during his stay in the hospital?

Why did Aston finally feel that he and Davies were not compatible as roommates? What did Davies suggest as possible remedies and how did Aston react?

What kind of work did Ben and Gus do? Who was their boss and what message were they waiting to hear from him?

What reading material did Ben focus on in an effort to cope with Gus's inane and constant questions and comments? What stories did he relay to Gus from what he was reading? Why did Pinter include this device into the dialog in the storyline?

What happened when the dumbwaiter starting functioning during Ben and Gus's stay in the basement apartment? What messages were sent? Who was running the dumbwaiter?