



Harold Pinter: *The Dumb Waiter*
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Pun of "Dumb Waiter": who's waiting, who's dumb?

Postmodernism

- Antiform: parataxis, disjunctive, open
 - Will Ben shoot Gus or not?
- Anti-narrative: small personal histories, lack of verifiability
 - Gus and Ben: Who are they?
- Anti-thesis: no one unifying theme
- Sense of absence: missing author, missing text, missing reader
- Intertextuality: sense of play among different texts, narratives, & forms.
- "partial objects": process is not completion, fetish
 - Notes from the dumb waiter
- Dispersal: fragmentation of everything
- Silence / exhaustion: what is not said is often most important
- Anti-interpretive: against interpretation, misreading
- Readerly: reader constructs meaning, not the text.
 - We construct Ben and Gus.
- Metonymy: part for the whole
 - Guns & tests (2620)
- Polymorphous, androgynous: multi-forms, no dominant aesthetic.

Some Context

- Pinter's Biography
- Existentialism
 - Heidegger's authenticity
 - Sartre: Being and Nothingness
- Post-WWII: Realities & Fears
 - Hiroshima, 1945
 - Cold War and Bomb Shelters
- 1953: Beckett, Waiting for Godot
- 1956: Change in British Theater
 - Osborne's Look Back in Anger
- Theatre of the Absurd



Sartre: Existence precedes essence.

The Human Situation

- **Facticity:**
 - We are not the source of our existence, but find ourselves thrown into a world we don't control and didn't choose. (2611)
 - Death demonstrates this more than anything.
- **Anxiety:**
 - Faced with the lack of any external source of value and determination, we face the responsibility of choosing our own nature and values. (2604, 2606-2607, 2610)
 - In doing so, we must face the awesome responsibility of choosing human nature and values for all people in our free choices.
- **Despair:**
 - In seeing the contrast between the world into which we are thrown and cannot control and the absolute freedom we have to create ourselves, we must despair of any hope of external value or determination and restrict ourselves to what is under our own control. (2613)
 - We will never succeed in fully revealing the meaning of the world, never fulfill our desire to impress our meaning on the world.

The Dumb Waiter

- Existential Anxiety
 - Threats from inside & outside (2607, 2608)
 - restricted, nonfunctional world (2601, 2602)
 - Inexplicable explanations (2605)
- Uncertainty or opaqueness (2604)
 - Missing / confusing information (2603, 2617)
- Unverifiability of the past or present (2616, 2620)



Three Basic Existential Structures

- Affectivity: the past filters how things matter to us through our moods. (2612)
- Telling: things are made manifest in the present through our use of language to articulate the meaning of our situation.
 - Pinter: words are “weapons of dominance & subservience.” (2609)
 - Pinter: “There are two silences—one when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed.” (2603, 2618-2619)
 - Pinter: “Communication is too alarming.” (2621)
- Understanding: the horizon of the future shapes the way things show up for us because the projects that define our choices extend into the indefinite future, running ultimately up against death, the final horizon. (2622)

Sartre: *Being and Nothingness*

- “Non-being” reveals “discontinuities” in causality, the holes in it.
 - Sartre’s example of Pierre.
 - Without discontinuity (like Pierre not showing up) the universe would be rigidly deterministic—every action caused by an earlier event. All reflex, all effect.
- Such absences are simply spaces where free action is possible.
 - Both life’s “beings” and “nothingnesses” become motives for human action.
- Past simply has facticity: things did happen.
- We each choose the meaning of the facticity.
 - We can choose to let a fact be an insurmountable obstacle, or we can choose to make it art or a motive for scientific study or the subject of a series of experiments...
- We are responsible for our choices & their consequences.
 - Death is the most radical (and absurd) choice of all.