

The Silence of Abraham's God : Harold Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* Revisited

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## 沈黙したアブラハムの神 — ハロルド・ピンターの『給仕エレベーター』

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## Synopsis

This essay explores a politico-religious meaning of silence in Harold Pinter's play *The Dumb Waiter*. The play has an apparent structural similarity with the Biblical episode of Abraham's sacrifice of his son. The silence of the authoritative power dominates throughout the play. Curiously, however, it ends in the tragic death of Gus, rather than in his liberation. In this sense, the play can rather be seen as a dramatic parallel to Bob Dylan's 'Highway 61 Revisited', a parody of Abraham's parable. In the post-WWII age, after holocausts and gruesome political cruelties, God in the Bible was replaced by an arbitrary, silent power which drove human existence into chaos and absurdity. Instead of imposing the pangs of conscience, the new authoritative presence commanded murders and human depravities relentlessly, yet with unfeeling silence. Absurdity in silence is more than tragic. This is the situation which Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* represents metaphorically.

## 要 旨

本論文は英国の劇作家ハロルド・ピンターの『給仕エレベーター』(*The Dumb Waiter*)における「沈黙」がもつ政治的・宗教的意義について研究したものである。この劇は旧約聖書におけるアブラハムの挿話と相関性を持っている。しかし、登場人物の一人ガスがもう一方のベンによって最終的に生け贄にされてしまう点でむしろパロディーに近い悲劇となっている。その点でボブ・ディランの「ハイウェイ61再訪」('Highway 61 Revisited')に登場する神に近い。ホロコーストを含めた第2次世界大戦の悲劇的歴史の後に訪れる神の沈黙の引喩でもある。「不条理」な沈黙がピンターの『給仕エレベーター』を支配している。

God said, 'you can do what you want, Abe, but  
The next time you see me comin', you'd better run'.  
'Well', Abe said, 'where you want this killin' done?'  
God said, 'do it on Highway 61'.  
Bob Dylan, 'Highway 61 Revisited'.<sup>1</sup>

Enough questions, enough reasoning.... Silence, yes,  
but what silence! For it is all very fine to keep silence,  
but one has also to consider the kind of silence one  
keeps.

Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*.<sup>2</sup>

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## I

I should like to start this essay on Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* with a comparison of two different representations of Abraham. One is Kierkegaard's Abraham as an icon of existentialism, and the other is Bob Dylan's Abraham as a ruffian on the highway. Kierkegaard acclaims Abraham as a noble hero in *Fear and Trembling* (1843). God placed Abraham in a series of physical and spiritual trials which culminated in the sacrifice of his only son, the object of his whole love and future expectation. Abraham faithfully obeyed even this last, most ruthless and unreasonable command without challenging or questioning God's hidden, inscrutable design. For Kierkegaard, Abraham was a 'man of resignation' who reconciled his existence with the universe of infinity by virtue of his stoic renunciation of all earthly desires and anxieties: 'he did not doubt, he did not look in anguish to left or right, he did not challenge heaven with his prayers, he knew it was God the Almighty that tried him'.<sup>3</sup> A sacrifice of his only son was not too hard, when he believed in God 'on the strength of the absurd', in the goodness of God, whose supreme power transcends human intelligence. Abraham's faith and obedience were duly rewarded by God's blessing. He heard the voice of an angel just at the moment of striking a knife at Isaac: 'Do not raise your hand against the boy.... Now I know you are a godfearing man' (*Genesis*, 22: 12).

This Biblical parable ceased to work in the mid-twentieth century. Abraham's God became a merciless commander of crimes and murders. This is what Bob Dylan describes in 'Highway 61 Revisted' (1965). Abraham is expected to commit a homicide on the highway, just like a bandit. Obedience and faith in God's incomprehensible authority has given way to disbelief, arbitrariness, and intimidation. The land of Moriah is replaced by Highway 61, a locale of human depravities where delinquents and outcasts all expunge their inner suffering and hatred by committing brutal violence. No one can believe any longer that it is God the Almighty who commands their actions. The authorities in the modern age have no divine virtues: they are simply hard-hearted in demanding the sacrifice of conscience with neither beneficent purpose nor reward. And he only watches bloodsheds with stony silence.

Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* (1957) is a dramatic representation of this degeneration of Abraham's God, with serious political implications. Its structural similarity with Abraham's sacrifice is apparent

enough, if not so explicit as Bob Dylan's song, to elucidate some important themes of the play. The two thugs, Ben and Gus, are brought by their mysterious employer to face series of trials in a basement room. An invisible overseer upstairs starts ordering meals, drinks, and whatever they have not downstairs, by operating a kitchen lift, 'the dumb waiter'. Just like Abraham, Ben tries his best to comply with such ridiculous demands from the invisible authorities. Gus, however, remains unable to comprehend all this nonsense; and so he keeps questioning, complaining, and defying the authorities. The play is a comic tragedy which, after all the farce, ends in the death of disobedient Gus. With a brilliant stage trick, Pinter surprises us by throwing Gus unexpectedly into the basement as a long-awaited-for victim, and then Ben's finishing act is suspended in the midst of total confusion and silence. There is not a voice of blessing to intervene his shooting. We are thereby left in a state of perpetual questioning whether Ben in fact pulls the trigger or not. The play, of course, cannot be a moral lesson. The Dumb Waiter is not Abraham's God; he is the underworld authority, identical with Bob Dylan's God on Highway 61, who controls human fates through his arbitrary and destructive power. This paper examines the politico-eschatological implications of silence in Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter*. The play represents a tragic situation of the post-WWII period created by the silence of God on Highway 61.

## II

As a playwright of Jewish background, Pinter is more sensitive than any other, to the cruel consequences of the Second World War. He must have felt what the death of Abraham's God implies politically and religiously in the post-WWII context. It was the monstrous atrocities of the last two great wars, unprecedented in human history, that killed Abraham's God and ruined the Kierkegaardian existential faith. People witnessed numerous human lives being sacrificed brutally to the causes which the authorities of each country extolled as just and absolute. Massacres and destruction were carried on ruthlessly through combats, air raids, holocausts and atomic bombs, and not a voice of an angel was to be heard when millions of human beings were bleeding in the fields, writhing under rabbles, and dying in gas chambers. After the war, people were left dumbfounded among the carcass of moral and religious orders. They felt the absurdity of human existence. This absurdity differs from what

Kierkegaard meant by 'the strength of the absurd'. No one could trust oneself to God's incomprehensible transcendence any longer. Absurdity reverts to its original meaning, and modern human existence has irretrievably gone 'out of tune' with the long-established social and spiritual orders. For Jewish people, the absurdity of human existence meant the death of Abraham's God. Their unspeakable agonies are expressed through the mouth of a visionary in Elie Wiesel's play *A Black Canopy, A Black Sky*:

But this time, no angel of the Lord will interfere to forbid the spilling of our blood. No God will come out of this sacrifice.... I know, I know... it's all over: it's all lost. The Merciful One has divorced himself from His people, from His world.<sup>4</sup>

The apocalyptic vision represents a tragedy in the real context of human history. Nietzsche's nihilism proclaimed the death of God, but it contradicted itself by hoping for the emergence of Superman. The WWII completely shattered this last remaining optimism of nihilism and left human existence helplessly to the control of the unknown, unpredictable, malignant power.

This post-WWII absurdity is precisely the dominant theme of what Martin Esslin named 'the Theatre of the Absurd'. The rational world was demolished by the war. In a universe stripped of illusions and light, man feels himself as a stranger, 'an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the promised land to come'.<sup>5</sup> A man and his life were divorced. Sartre and Camus, preceded by Kafka, were engaged with representations of the existential dilemma of the modern age, and such playwrights as Beckett, Brecht, and Ionesco have given a dramatic form to the senselessness of the post-war human society. Pinter is located at the heart of this new literary tradition. Pinter himself admits the considerable influence of Beckett and Kafka upon his works.<sup>6</sup> And *The Dumb Waiter* presents the absurdity of modern humanity alienated from social and religious harmony and put under the control of an unknown power.<sup>7</sup> Certainly, eschatological implications are not explicit in the play. A critic denies the seriousness of absurdity in the play and defines it as 'a comedy of menace', a mock-melodramatic farce.<sup>8</sup> The important point, however, is the absence of God itself: by replacing Abraham's God with the arbitrary gangster authorities, the play reveals the horrible reality of absurd human existence in the post-WWII society.

With the decease of Abraham's God, intense, unfeeling silence began to shroud the whole universe, with its dark shadow cast over the world of literature, too. There are two types of silence prevailing in the post-war literature: the silence of God, and the silence of human language. The continual non-appearance and silence of Godot in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* — a monumental piece of the Theatre of the Absurd — represents the first type of silence, the same kind of absolute silence which dominates Wiesel's play when Abraham's God divorced Himself from the Universe. And this silence leads to the secondary silence, the negation of normal human communications, when the old, established social and religious system collapses with the death of God. Extreme fear and agony in the new state of helpless solitude remains unarticulated; there is no appropriate language of expression. George Steiner eloquently shows that the retreat from the word is an increasing tendency of modern literature, especially after the violence of the last war struck all mankind speechless.<sup>9</sup> Deconstructionists' obsessive interest in the unspoken or the unspeakable originates largely in this sense of modern human absurdity.<sup>10</sup> With the death of Logos, we have lost the traditional order of language and the authoritative mode of communication. The Theatre of the Absurd stands in the dark, heavy silence.<sup>11</sup>

*The Dumb Waiter* plays these two kinds of silence as its key notes. The replacement of Abraham's God by God on Highway 61 propagates political meanings of the silence. The play presents a mysterious situation suspended in a timeless space, in which characters repeat meaningless unanswered questions, fragmented speeches, and paralysed silences. The 'dumb waiter', a clever device placed at the centre of the play, disturbs and upsets Ben and Gus in the basement with its perplexing written messages. Apparently, the lift is sent down from upstairs by the gang boss, but he keeps his silence until the last minute. Ben narrowly keeps in touch with him and remains better informed of their work and duties. Gus, on the other hand, is completely cut off from any information about his missions and the organisation. The dead silence of the powerful authorities makes him increasingly anxious and uneasy; it causes his restlessness, doubts, incessant questions and irritated distrust of the authorities.

Pinter is certainly well known for his recurrent and effective use of 'pause', 'silence', or 'dots'. This idiosyncrasy probably reflects his fascination with the ineffable 'mystery' of life.<sup>12</sup> As Esslin and Quigley put it, silence is a 'Pinteresque language', which continues to pose a problem to the audience.<sup>13</sup> In his drama, the

normal human communications are disturbed or dissolved. Silence of this sort is neither a failure of communication nor a failure of language. As Pinter clearly expressed in 1962, he is concerned with the serious discrepancy between what is said and what remains unspoken or unspeakable. Silence is a mode of speech tactfully employed as 'a violent, sly, anguished or mocking smoke screen' to cover 'naked' feelings within.<sup>14</sup> Pinter and his critics are interested almost exclusively in this rather deconstructive type of silence. '[W]e communicate only too well', Pinter admits, 'in our silence, in what is unsaid': it is 'a continual evasion, desperate rearguard attempts to keep ourselves to ourselves'.<sup>15</sup>

We have to remember, however, that the language of human silence results from the sense of insecurity in a state of absurdity and perhaps of nothingness. The conversation between Ben and Gus in *The Dumb Waiter* is interspersed with silence, and its real cause is their tense anxiety about their absurd situation. Their silence tacitly reveals their unspeakable existential dilemma, the inexpressible anxiety about what their next job will be and when it will be ordered by their unknown employer outside. Gus is anxious from the beginning of the play in the silence-dominated room. While Ben is reading the newspaper quietly, he ties and unties his shoe straps restlessly. Ben opens his mouth to tell Gus about trifling incidents in the newspaper and Gus gives him replies, but they do not mean to converse such matters. Their minds are occupied with their next job. Their dialogue is nothing like those in Shakespearean plays which contain rich resonance and profound implications: it ceases to function as a means of normal communication; it becomes a shield to hide their inner fear and anxiety. For this setting, Pinter may well have been inspired by Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, in which Vladimir and Estragon have nothing to do but continue their conversation, while waiting for Godot.<sup>16</sup> There is a vital difference between them, however. The characters in Pinter's play do not really care what they speak about, whereas Beckett's play allows the characters at least to hold a communication. Gus, in particular, is too heavily self-occupied to listen to Ben. It does not matter to Gus whether someone was run over by a lorry or whether a girl of eight killed a cat. Instead, he keeps complaining about the terrible lavatory, the viewless basement, and the lack of holidays. All these questions and attacks mean nothing after all, and so they are dropped as unanswered fragments. Gus's words conceal silence within; he wants to know who it is that controls his life. It is a silence caused by his existential question, a

silence impregnated with his fierce identity crisis. It is a silence that remains unrelieved until the frighteningly abrupt ending of the play.

When Gus finally stops equivocation, he faces the obstinate silence of Ben.

Ben. You never used to ask me so many damn questions. What's come over you?

Gus. No, I was just wondering.

Ben. Stop wondering. You've got a job to do. Why don't you just do it and shut up?

Gus. That's what I was wondering about.

Ben. What?

Gus. The job.

Ben. What job?

Gus. (*tentatively*). I thought perhaps you might know something. *Ben looks at him* I thought perhaps you – I mean – have you got any idea – who it's going to be tonight?

Ben. Who what's going to be?

*They look at each other.*

Gus. (at length). Who it's going to be.

*Silence*

Ben. Are you feeling all right?

Deliberately or not, Ben refuses to answer Gus's most desperate and ultimate question. And this silence corresponds to the sheer silence of the authorities. It alienates Gus from truths, and consequently renders him uneasy and discontent. Critics, such as Quigley and Hollis, justly point out the importance of the language of the unspoken as an integral part in Pinter's drama, but they do not go further to provide a satisfactory explanation as to why a 'dumb waiter' is necessary.<sup>17</sup> The enigmatic, unintelligible language which the dumb waiter employs only perplexes both Ben and Gus and further confuses their identities. It is this state of discommunication that creates the 'absurdity' of their own existence. The politically repressive power of this silence matches that of the strategic silence adopted by 'no-comment' politicians and party leaders, which resulted in the creation of mystery, uncertainty, passivity and relinquishment.<sup>18</sup> The 'dumb waiter' is not merely a periphrasis of a kitchen lift: it functions as a kind of *deus ex machina* which controls the fate of the two, but without a benevolent intention or a happy solution.

Gus's absurdity is the more critical, simply because of his inferior position. Ben obtains an access to the authorities, whilst Gus always has to depend on him for detailed information. In order to solve his dilemma, Gus even tries to subvert the hierarchy of power through a linguistic argument. He insists that

Ben's usage of 'Light the kettle' is incorrect. This is a kind of 'language game' as defined by Wittgenstein, but this game is a process not to learn, but to gain the power and dominance over the other. Gus's challenge, however, has no effect, so long as Ben keeps his silence on their job and authorities, thereby increasing Gus's feeling of the absurdity of his own existence. Deidre Burton sees the 'child-adult' relationship in the power struggle between Ben and Gus,<sup>19</sup> but the real point is that Gus is left uninformed and therefore alienated from the authorities of the gang society. Ben's silence is ambiguous: even the audience are tempted to doubt that he truly has no information. Ben's evasive attitude increases Gus's terror and weakens his trust both of Ben and of his authorities.

It is only too natural that Gus is thrown into a panic when the 'dumb waiter' clatters down within the bulge of a wall with a written order for impossible stuffs, such as braised steak, chips, sago puddings and hot tea, which they have no means to provide. Gus, slow to understand, has to rely on Ben for interpretations. It is obvious to Ben that the place used to be a café. He also seems to vaguely apprehend — and yet does not tell Gus — that it might be Wilson that moves around upstairs and puts them to trials as part of a job; he not only complies with these absurd demands as obediently and politely as possible, but also puts on a tie, saying to Gus, 'Get dressed, will you? It'll be any minute now'. Gus, on the other hand, cannot cope with this absurdity. He keeps asking who has got the café now and why he has to sacrifice all his precious food. Ben still avoids communicating his apprehension clearly, because he fears that the authority is overhearing upstairs or perhaps because revealing the truth is an absolute taboo in the underworld society. Ben's equivocation resembles what Derrida terms as the 'negative theology', which avoids a direct reference to the hyper-essentiality of God.<sup>20</sup> In fact, Derrida admits a similarity between negative theology and a form of esoteric society, including underworld gangs, which demands silence on an important secret.<sup>21</sup>

Whilst Gus challenges and blasphemies the dumb waiter, Ben addresses with a polite language through a speaking-tube and eventually gains the privilege to have a direct communication with the authorities. He is satisfied to learn that 'light the kettle' is a correct usage, namely, that the boss, overhearing their dialogue from the beginning, authorises Ben's superiority to Gus. Gus, on the other hand, is driven almost to the verge of insanity by Ben's obstinate silence. He cannot hold his faith in the authoritative

power like Ben. Nor does he accept the 'absurdity' of his situation or the controlling power which outstrips his understanding. In the end, however, Gus is condemned to a capital punishment, stripped of his clothes and a gun and thrown in front of Ben's revolver. Gus and Ben stare at each other in silence, insinuating various emotions, such as confusion, uncertainty, and anger.<sup>22</sup> The absolute silence of the authorities menacingly governs the language of the unspeakable exchanged between them.

### III

The fearful silence of the invisible ruler is a recurrent motif in Pinter's plays. Davies in *The Caretaker*, for an example, is dismayed and terrorised by Aston and Mick, supposedly brothers, who have taken him in as a caretaker, but continue to impose ludicrous jobs and absurd questions on him. Davies loses control over his situation, because he remains uncertain about who they are and what he is supposed to do. The enigmatic language of the authorities mercilessly drives him into voiceless slavery. In *The Room*, written in the same year with *The Dumb Waiter*, silence takes an equally oppressive form. Rose, the tenant of Room 7 in a big house, is curious about a tenant in the basement, but remains puzzled by the surrounding silence. With her mind obsessed solely with the mysterious presence, she keeps talking to his husband Bert: 'Who is it? Who lives down there? I'll have to ask. I mean, you might as well know, Bert' (*Pinter*, 1: 86). Just like Gus, the lack of information makes Rose more anxious about the invisible presence beneath — if not above — her room. Her first conversation with Mr. Kidd, whom she believes to be the landlord, is filled with silence. Instead of asking him a question which truly concerns her, she enquires about Kidd's private matters, to which Kidd more strangely avoids giving answers.

Rose. What about your sister, Mr Kidd?

Mr Kidd. What about her?

Rose. Dis she have any babies?

Mr Kidd. Yes, she had a resemblance to my old mum, I think. Taller, of course.

.....

Rose. What did she die of?

Mr Kidd. Who?

Rose Your sister.

*Pause*

(1: 93)

We soon learn that Kidd's silence is caused by his preoccupation with the black man in the basement. As

in the conversation of Ben and Gus, silence in their dialogue is caused by their fear and anxiety about the unidentified presence. Rose is terrified to learn that Kidd is not a landlord, whilst Kidd, without revealing his true identity, complains that he himself has been threatened by the speechless black man, who says 'nothing else' but that he needs to see Rose (104). Rose's horror increases further and turns blind when the man, Riley, finally breaks into her room, calling her Sal. Now it is the audience's turn to be terrified by the silence of the author about who Rose really is. Silence thus evokes insecurity, irritation, and distrust, and even creates the absurdity of the audience's position.

Absurdity is always created in a confined space in Pinter's plays. A room with a door is his idiosyncratic stage setting. An invisible stranger (or strangers) controls the situation with threatening silence and drives a person into a state of absurdity without little physical violence. As succinctly expressed by Spooner in *No Man's Land*, Pinter's characters are all confined in 'A locked door. A house of silence and strangers' (4: 121). Perhaps Spooner himself is a ghost of Gus resurrected to take his revenge on the oppressor (Hirst), reminding us of Gus's absurdity in silence: 'The voice unheard. A listener. The command from an upper floor' (130). Confinement cuts off people from the external world; they have no means to know what is happening outside, what it is that besieges them outside the walls, and what will come through the door. No reliable information comes into their hands. Their solitary existence is annihilated by the surrounding silence, for they are forgotten by the mundane world which would normally define their social identity, making certain social and historical links, such as their homeland and liaisons. And the audience is never informed of their true identities: we never know who Rose really is and who operates 'the dumb waiter'. Absurdity in silence is experienced in an extreme form by the narrator of Beckett's novel *The Unnamable*, who keeps muttering nonsense in a prison-like cell, deprived of any means to gain an immediate knowledge of who he really is, where he is, and what human society is. 'Questions' and 'reasonings' are useless, he says, insofar as he has no information to base his argument upon; his monologue is 'silent' insofar as it means nothing real. Gus and Rose are both similarly shut up in dark silence, and their monologues embrace a trembling fear of the silence stretching out to infinity in space. They no longer hear the 'eternal Silence' of truths which Wordsworth heard or the 'Elected Silence' of God which delighted Hopkins in the pasture.<sup>23</sup> In Pinter,

silence is not linked to peacefulness; it is a silence of non-being, of the evil power which creates human absurdity. A feeble human soul is tortured to death by the dominance of its absolute silence.

The political implications of 'a house of silence and strangers' becomes more obvious in his later works, such as *One for the Road* and *Mountain Language*. In an interview on his 1984 play *One for the Road*, Pinter admitted that the political metaphor in *The Dumb Waiter* becomes clear in *One for the Road*, which is 'more specific and direct' in presenting the brutal practice of torture by the authorities.<sup>24</sup> Pinter was concerned with the repression by the authoritative power upon the weak, such as the USSR's tyranny on East Europe and the McCarthyism on Asia. *One for the Road* was written with fuming indignation at the Turkish authorities, which had been holding political criminals, including members of the Turkish Peace Association, in prisons 'incommunicado' for 45 days under martial law.<sup>25</sup> The seriousness of the situation forbade him from playing 'any more jokes' or 'any more games' in the new play.<sup>26</sup> Nicholas, his wife and son, are all kept in custody and interrogated individually by Victor, a cold-blooded officer. As they are being held *incommunicado*, they have to depend on Victor for each other's whereabouts and information. It is not Victor's threat that tortures them, but his equivocal language and obscene questions: they frighten and torment them. They are kept silent in absurdity, alienated from the outer world and from all correct information, with no hope for the intervening voice, divine or human, to save their lives. Absurdity in silence goes to the extreme in *Mountain Language*, in which women prisoners are banned by the authorities from speaking their mountain language. They have been kept waiting for eight hours to meet their families, and yet when the officers turn up, they are ordered to give up their means of communication. The God on Highway 61 has now reveals itself explicitly in the play as the cruel political authorities who literally *silence* human languages.

These later plays clearly illustrate what lies as figurative in *The Dumb Waiter*. Gus is persecuted by absurd orders in a cell which isolates him totally from the outer society and from the access to absolute truths. Verbose and impatient, he falls as a victim to the abusive authorities, whilst Ben survives as an obedient, loyal subject. Gus cannot be Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*, who equally continues talking nonsense and questioning the authoritative presence, but remains innocent and unimpaired in his hope for future. There is no optimism left in Pinter's modern

play. Because of this absurd existence, Gus can be considered as a mock-hero of tragedy. If we look at his situation from a different viewpoint, Gus's reaction to the absurdity of his situation is only natural and honest, whereas it is Ben's obedience to the authorities that is absurd. Gus cannot believe in his invisible authorities 'on the strength of the absurd'; he cannot sacrifice his body and soul to the unknown God and to his inscrutable design.

#### IV

In *The Death of Tragedy*, George Steiner criticises *Waiting for Godot* for being 'a metaphysical *guigol*' which consists of merely a tedious plot and crippled characters.<sup>27</sup> The Theatre of the Absurd appears in his eye as a sign of the death of tragedy, that is, the death of God, because 'tragedy is that form of art which requires the intolerable burden of God's presence'. In the post-WWII age, after holocausts and unspeakable political cruelties, tragedy is 'now dead because His shadow no longer falls upon us as it fell on Agamemnon or Macbeth or Athaliae'.<sup>28</sup> This statement is only half true; absurdity created by the absence of God has produced a new situation of human tragedy. God in the Bible is certainly dead, but an arbitrary, political power has taken the sovereign seat as the God on Highway 61 and has started driving human existence into chaos and absurdity. Instead of imposing the pangs of conscience, the new God continues commanding murders and human depravities relentlessly, yet with unfeeling silence. This is the situation which Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* represents metaphorically. Despite the facetious tone of the play, the absurdity of Gus's situation is tragically enough and suggests the possibility of producing tragedies in the post-war age. Even Shakespearean tragedies could be given new meanings and new productions under the influence of the Theatre of the Absurd.<sup>29</sup> Absurdity in silence is more than tragic. There is no room for victims to question or reason on the universe. Nor are they allowed to go insane like King Lear. Their existence is everlastingly annihilated by the sinister silence of God on Highway 61.

#### 注

1) Bob Dylan, *Lyrics, 1962-1985* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1987) 202. I am indebted to Alastair Hannay for drawing my attention to this brilliant parody of the Biblical episode in Introduction to his translation of Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling: Dialectical*

- Lyric by Johannes de Silentio*, trans. Alastair Hannay (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985) 7.
- 2) Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable* in *The Beckett Trilogy: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (London: Pan Books, 1979) 283.
- 3) Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 55.
- 4) Elie Wiesel, *A Black Canopy, A Black Sky* in Irving Abrahamson (ed.) *Against Silence in The Voice and Vision of Elie Wiesel*, 3vols. (New York: Holocaust Library, 1985) 3: 26.
- 5) Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (a revised and updated edition) (1961; London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1966) 5.
- 6) Lawrence m. Bensky, 'Harold Pinter: An Interview', in *Pinter: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Arthur Ganz (Englewood, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972) 22.
- 7) See Esslin, *Theatre*, 239.
- 8) Charles A. Carpenter, 'The Absurdity of Dread: Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter*', *Modern Drama* 16 (1973) 279-80.
- 9) George Steiner, *Language and Silence: Essays 1958-1966* (1967; London: Faber and Faber, 1985), especially chapters 'Silence and the Poet', pp.55-74, and 'the Hollow Miracle', pp.117-32.
- 10) See for example, essays collected by Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (eds.) in *Language of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1989), which includes essays by Derrida and Kermode.
- 11) For the significance of silence(s) in modern plays, see Leslie Kane's brilliant study, *The Language of Silence: On the Unspoken and the Unspeakable in Modern Drama* (London: Associated U.P., 1984). Her chapter on Pinter is full of suggestions on this essay, but she fails to clarify the political and eschatological implications in *The Dumb Waiter*.
- 12) Quoted in Kane, *The Language of Silence*, 132.
- 13) Austin E. Quigley, *The Pinter Problem* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1975) 11-15, 26. Martin Esslin, 'Language and Silence' in Arthur Ganz (ed.), *Pinter: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972) 34.
- 14) Harold Pinter, 'Writing for the Theatre: A Speech made by Harold Pinter at the National Student Drama Festival in Bristol in 1962', prefixed as Introduction to *Harold Pinter: Plays One* (1976; London: Faber and Faber, 1991) xiii. Hereafter quotations from Pinter's plays are all from *Harold Pinter*, 4vols (1976, 1978, 1981; London: Faber and Faber, 1991, 1993) with volume and page numbers in brackets.
- 15) Pinter, 'Writing', xiii.
- 16) For a clear echo of Beckett's play in *The Dumb Waiter*, see 128.
- 17) Quigley, 11-30. James R. Hollis, *Harold Pinter: The Dumb Waiter: The Poetics of Silence* (London: Feffer and Simons, 1970) 44-50. Kane, *The Language of Silence*.
- 18) For sociological and political significance of strategic silence, see Adam Jaworski, *The Power of Silence: Social and Pragmatic Perspectives* (London: SAGE Publications, 1993) 106.

- 19) Deirdre Burton, *Dialogue and Discourse: A Sociolinguistic Approach to Modern Drama Dialogue and Naturally Occurring Conversation* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980) 70-71.
- 20) Jacques Derrida, 'How to Avoid Speaking: Daniels', in Budick and Iser (eds.), *Language of the Unsayable*, 4.
- 21) Derrida, 'How to Avoid Speaking', 18.
- 22) Austin Gugley offers a detailed examination of the silence of Ben and Gus at the ending in 'The Dumb Waiter: Undermining the Tacit Dimension', *Modern Drama*, 21 (1978) 1-11.
- 23) William Wordsworth, 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality', 158; Gerald Manley Hopkins, 'The Habit of Perfection', 1.
- 24) Harold Pinter, *One for the Road: With Production Photos by Ivan Kyncl and An Interview on the Play and its Politics* (London: Methuen, 1985) 7-8.
- 25) Pinter, *One for the Road*, 8.
- 26) Mel Gassow, *Conversations with Pinter* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1994) 82.
- 27) George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961) 350.
- 28) Steiner, *Death*, 353.
- 29) Arnold P. Hinchliffe notes that Beckett's *Endgame* became an influential source for Peter Brooke's *King Lear*, *The Absurd* (London: Methuen, 1969) 9.

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