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Blindsight: The Interplay of Sight, Blindness, and Infantilization in Pinter's Plays

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Harold Pinter's characters cannot see very well. This trend can be found in virtually every one of his plays, encompassing a wide range of characters who are blind, suddenly claim they cannot see, break their glasses, or even hold intense and suspicious proclamations of perfect sight. These visual defects are often complicated by their association with infantilized characters who display child-like characteristics despite being grown adults. In this essay, I will track the different ways vision and blindness show up in Pinter's plays, specifically in The Homecoming, The Caretaker, The Room, and The Birthday Party, and how characters in these plays experience a visual distortion of reality. By grounding Pinter's work in traditional literary contexts, I plan to showcase how Pinter's work adds nuance to established portrayals and narratives of sight, leading to a perspective that sight can be unreliable and dangerous.

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Introduction: Adam and Eve, The Enlightened Prisoner, and Oedipus Rex

Harold Pinter's characters cannot see very well. This trend can be found in virtually every one of his plays, encompassing a wide range of characters who are blind, suddenly claim they cannot see, break their glasses, or even hold intense and suspicious proclamations of perfect sight. These visual defects are often complicated by their association with infantilized characters who display child-like characteristics despite being grown adults. In order to accurately assess this phenomenon found in Pinter's plays, I will ground Pinter's work in traditional literary contexts and track the different ways vision and blindness show up in these characters and plays, specifically in *The Homecoming*, *The Caretaker*, *The Room*, and *The Birthday Party*. As such, I hope to understand and extrapolate how Pinter's repetition and fascination with sight relates to accessing knowledge and infantilization. In addition, I plan to showcase how Pinter's work adds nuance to traditional portrayals and narratives of sight, reflecting a perspective that sight can be unreliable and dangerous.

Pinter is not the first person to explore this complex relationship between truth, sight, and blindness through storytelling. In fact, these themes can be found in some of the oldest existing texts. In the Bible, knowledge and sight have a paradoxical and conditional relationship. While God is an all-knowing, all-powerful, all-seeing entity, this power does not extend to the everyday human. For Adam and Eve, knowledge is not power but a burden, causing banishment from their eternal bliss. Original sin was bestowed upon humankind only after the pair ate from the Tree of Knowledge and saw each other naked—only after gaining a conscious understanding of the world. As a result, God forced His children to leave their home, the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve betrayed God and lost the innocence attached to their ignorance; their inadvertent pursuit of knowledge was disobedience to a God who wanted to keep them contained–safe. The

message is clear: seeking knowledge and seeing the world clearly will bring pain. In a way, this ability to see the truth of the world and lose this sense of "innocence" becomes an archetypal transition to adulthood, leaving a home cared for by the Father to exist in the brutality of the land.

This is not the only story where we understand the burden of true sight and knowledge. In Plato's famous allegory of the cave, enlightenment burns. When the prisoner sees a world filled with light for the first time after spending her whole life stuck in a cave mistaking shadow for reality, she is blinded—until she adjusts. When she returns to her fellow prisoners and tries to free them from their ignorance in the dark, she can no longer see their world, and the prisoners become fearful of the outside. They turn against her and become violent to stay in their comfortable interpretation of reality. While enlightenment is freedom from living in the shadows, it is also a grueling and lonely endeavor that subverts sight. For Plato, the ability to see does not always translate to being able to see truth and reality—such as the prisoners' sight being focused only onto shadows— and to be granted the ability to see the world for how it truly shows up, in all its good and bad, can be isolating, dangerous, and blinding.

From these narratives, a new one emerges—that a revelation about the world or the self can be so jarring and debilitating as to render the witness blind. In the allegory of the cave, the released prisoner's blindness was not a choice but rather a consequence of the sun's glare, of being granted enlightenment. In *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles, however, physical blindness is a conscious choice; it is Oedipus' reaction to realizing the truth, becoming cognizant of the harshness of reality and the lies of his youth. In Laszlo Versényi's article "Oedipus: Tragedy of Self-Knowledge," Versényi states that the "subject of Oedipus Rex is not so much divine prophecy as human search: the quest and discovery, the knowledge and ignorance of Oedipus. The play is a tragedy not of divine fate but of human knowing" (Versényi 24). Oedipus had been metaphorically blind to the truth of his origin, not knowing his past or future. It is only once he gains the truth, stumbling upon his mother/wife's dead body just after finding out he was his father's murderer, that this metaphorical blindness and ignorance becomes physical and literal.

Oedipus puts out his own eyes in light of the harsh reality; shock, devastation, and truth overwhelm him. For Versényi, this follows a sensible pattern: "It is appropriate that Oedipus' self-mutilation takes the form of self-blinding, a self-blinding made necessary by too much sight, a blindness that is to shield him from unendurable vision. Sight-blindness, light-darkness, insight-erring, knowledge-ignorance—it is the tension of these opposites that is the theme of the play, and the breaking of this tension is the breakdown, the downfall of Oedipus" (24-25). Sight did not help Opedius see the resemblances in his parents or provide clarity. Being able to physically see did not expose him to the reality of his circumstances; instead, it hindered his search. By blinding himself, he both succumbs to his fate and refuses to acknowledge the situation. It is a reaction, a coping mechanism, to having the truth be thrust upon him. As a result, he can never unknow or forget his reality; ironically, he can see clearly now.

Interestingly, similar to the biblical story of Adam and Eve's banishment and Plato's allegory of the cave, Oedipus' journey mimics this transition from adolescence to adulthood, from ignorance and innocence to acknowledgment of reality, through this emergence of blinding truth. Versényi asks "Who is Oedipus?" And he answers with: "…he is a guiltless criminal who committed, innocently, incest and patricide; a child who should not have been born, a man who should have died in infancy" (Versényi 21). Oedipus has been stuck in this perpetual state of infancy with his future stunted by his past. Sophocles places Oedipus in this purgatorial state: mentally and metaphorically a child, physically a man. Unknown to Oedipus, he has been prolonging the inevitable, outrunning his fate and living in this fantasy, living in the shadows. Sophocles does not let him move on and continue in this state but rather forces him to confront reality to reach adulthood: "Sophocles does not merely present men on the stage; he lets them grow into men, become men, before our eyes…This self-transformation of man into the essential is the essence of tragedy" (Versényi 30). As a result, Oedipus's story is one of transformation, transitioning into adulthood and out of his child-like unawareness, blinding himself once the tragedy of adulthood is unveiled.

Harold Pinter takes on these themes in his work using his own style. Similar to the way Versényi explains Sophocles' ability to focus on the tension of opposites in *Oedipus Rex*, Alice Rayner, in her article "Harold Pinter: Narrative and Presence," supports the notion that Pinter's allure comes from his ability to present "the action of his plays in a way that emphasizes the differences between fiction and experience;

between that which is written and that which is enacted; that which is made and that which creates; that which is understood and that which happen" (Rayner 488). In other words, Pinter experiments with reality through his plays by writing about real-life scenarios and complicating the narratives. One way he does this is with vision by distorting his characters' perception, whether by creating characters that overestimate their ability to see or by blinding them. In this way, his work resembles Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. While Rayner offers a similar assessment, comparing how Pinter's plays deal with the "desire to know, the desire for coherence in narrative" with what she calls "the specter of Oedipus," she stops there (Rayner 483). I propose that Pinter's plays move beyond "the specter of Oedipus," beyond the Bible or Plato. Pinter uses people's conventional understandings of sight and blindness against them, leading them on a route they think they know only to disrupt and unsettle. He uses sight and blindness to talk about adulthood, the obstructions of reality, and the ways in which physical sight is unreliable, not always correlating to being able to see the truth.

Sight in *The Homecoming* and *The Caretaker*: A Barrier

In Harold Pinter's plays, trust is not inherent. Like most people in real-life conversations, what characters explicitly say often does not align with the situation presented. Examining Pinter's plays involves unveiling these implicit interactions by analyzing how the characters act, what they choose not to say, and the silences in between. Even then, the truth is not always easily accessible. As explained by Simon O. Lesser in his article "Reflections on Pinter's 'The Birthday Party,'" Pinter chooses his language carefully and intentionally, leaving "everything vague and fluid. Situations never assume a definite shape; either their outlines are left hazy and obscure or we are given two flatly contradictory versions of something and never told which one (if either) is correct" (Lesser 36). As a result, when characters proclaim they can see, especially overemphasizing this ability, it is suspicious. For Pinter, saying you can see is not the same as actually seeing reality or the truth. In fact, it could actually point to a metaphorical blindness—believing in an overinflated sense of sight can leave you vulnerable and blind to the reality of your circumstances. It can make you willing to ignore truths to fit your world view. In Pinter's *The Homecoming*, the line between physical sight and metaphorical blindness blurs and merges through the dialogue and actions of the family members, specifically Teddy's monologue.

In *The Homecoming,* a family reunion unfolds. When Teddy visits his home in North London after living in America for six years, he introduces his wife, Ruth, to his working-class family for the first time, a family with roots in masculine and physical jobs involving the body— butchers, boxers, etc. As a philosophy professor who left his home to live in America, Teddy is all mind, while his family is all body. Teddy spends time in his familial home where his brother, Lenny, undermines and teases him about his occupation and the men in his family openly touch his wife (and she lets them). But once his father mentions that he's never read any of Teddy's philosophical works, Teddy has, what for him is, an emotional outburst:

> TEDDY. You wouldn't understand my works. You wouldn't have the faintest idea of what they were about…It's a way of being able to look at the world. It's a question of how far you can operate on things and not in things… To see, to be able to see! I'm the one who can see. That's why I can write my critical works. Might do you good . . . have a look at them . . . see how certain people can view . . . things . . . how certain people can maintain . . . intellectual equilibrium. Intellectual equilibrium. You're just objects. You just . . . move about. I can observe it. I can see what you do. It's the same as I do. But you're lost in it. You won't get me being . . . I won't be lost in it. (Pinter 77-78).

According to Teddy, he is "different" from the men in his family and, in his mind, better-sighted. His work requires a certain sight that he assumes his family, perhaps even Ruth, cannot access. For Teddy, "it's a way of being able to look at the world," and only he can see and do it. As stated in the quote, his family are just objects, and he is the viewer of these objects. His visual distance from the world allows him to see their behavior clearly while they are lost in their everyday actions. Essentially, he sees himself as the enlightened prisoner in Plato's world, leaving the cave, his familial home in North London, to see the light in America only to return to the shadows and be shunned and ridiculed. But how much can Teddy really see of his world and

reality? Not much.

While Teddy spends ample time trying to convince his family he can see, his interactions with Ruth expose a greater truth. Despite having this gift, he cannot see Ruth, his wife, for who she is. In his book *Integral Drama: Culture, Consciousness and Identity*, William S. Haney II notes how Teddy is "estranged from his own subjectivity [which] undermines his facility for intersubjective interactions with others, even someone as intimate as his own wife. When he interrupts her account to his family of their life in America, instead of presenting a true portrait of her, he gives his own stereotypical rendition based on his intellectual preconceptions about the role of a wife and mother" (Haney 117). Even when Ruth reluctantly distances herself from his version, claiming that she was different before she met Teddy, he responds, "No, you weren't. You were the same" (Pinter 66), refusing to see any version of her that does not fit into his world view. Eventually, Ruth undermines his image of her by engaging in sexual behavior with his family and choosing to stay with his brothers and father rather than return to her children and her life in America, a life Teddy claimed was "very good" with a "lovely house…everything we want" and "a very stimulating environment." But all Ruth can remember there are the insects (Pinter 66, 69). To an extent, Teddy's "sight" blinds him. This remarkable ability to see, to think he can see, is a barrier. He cannot see his crumbling marriage or meet his wife's needs.

Another interpretation is that his need for his family's approval blinds him. When Ruth meets his father, she exposes this need: "I'm sure Teddy's very happy . . . to know that you're pleased with me. *Pause.* I think he wondered whether you would be pleased with me" (Pinter 65). Ruth is not concerned with her stance and placement in the family, seemingly secure in her identity, but rather knows that Teddy is still yearning for approval from his father through her as he cannot get it in other ways. As previously discussed, it is only once his father unveils his ignorance of Teddy's work that Teddy rushes in to defend and uplift himself with this sight narrative, almost like a coping mechanism. When Teddy returns home, he is no longer an esteemed Ph.D. professor but a version of his child self. His monologue resembles an outburst from a child who was not seen or heard and must make up their own reality to feel established and superior.

Nevertheless, Teddy is more like his family than he thought. They are two sides of the same coin. While Teddy is rooted in his mind, having an intellectual ability to see, his family, particularly his father, Max, also claims the gift of sight, although it is rooted in a bodily form. At the start of Act 1, Max claims he has a gift with horses: "But I was always able to tell a good filly by one particular trick. I'd look her in the eye. You see? I'd stand in front of her and look her straight in the eye, it was a kind of hypnotism, and by the look deep down in her eye I could tell whether she was a stayer or not. It was a gift. I had a gift" (Pinter 26). This ability to see and determine character is strengthened by the body, looking directly into the eyes—not an intellectual, out-of-body sight that Teddy presupposes he has. In addition, this gift is not limited to horses but also humans. Max and the rest of the family are always looking at Ruth as if assessing if she, like the horses, is a stayer. And they determined, with her help, that she was. In the end, Teddy may have gained some favor with his family by "giving away" Ruth to them, but this self proclaimed sight does not help him keep his wife, and he leaves alone.

Similarly, Aston's character in Pinter's *The Caretaker* did not benefit from sight. *The Caretaker* tells the story of two "brothers," Aston and Mick, living in and taking care of a rundown apartment. The play starts with Aston bringing Davies, an old tramp, into the place and letting him stay in his room. Throughout the play, Aston reveals to Davies how he could once see things during his time as a very young man in the factory:

> The trouble was, I used to have kind of hallucinations. They weren't hallucinations, they . . . I used to get the feeling I could see things . . very clearly . . . everything . . . was so clear . . . everything used . . . everything used to get very quiet . . . everything got very quiet . . . all this . . . quiet . . . and . . . this clear sight . . . it was . . . but maybe I was wrong (Pinter 63-64).

The play suggests that, unlike Teddy in *The Homecoming*, Aston has an actual ability to see the hardships and truth of reality. Most likely, this is referencing how Aston was able to see the unfair working conditions in the factory, the ones hidden and so ingrained into society that most adults ignore or put up with for a steady income.

Like Adam and Eve, however, Aston's knowledge and sight are punished by a higher power:

> ASTON. …Anyway, someone must have said something…they took me to a hospital… [the doctor] told me I had something…And he showed me a pile of papers and he said that I'd got something, some complaint…he said, we're going to do something to your brain. He said . . . if we don't, you'll be in here for the rest of your life, but if we do, you stand a chance…Well, I wasn't a fool. I knew I was a minor. I knew he couldn't do anything to me without getting permission. I knew he had to get permission from my mother. . . anyway, he did it… The trouble was . . . I couldn't think at all . . . I could . . . never quite get it . . . together…I couldn't hear what people were saying. I couldn't look to the right or the left, I had to look straight in front of me, because if I turned my head round . . . I couldn't keep . . . upright…The thing is, I should have been dead. I should have died. Anyway, I feel much better now. But I don't talk to people now. I steer clear of places like that café. I never go into them now. I don't talk to anyone . . . like that (Pinter 64-66).

Aston's ability to see was a problem for the people in power, so he was silenced. These hallucinations and pieces of sight mentioned earlier could be referencing the unfair working conditions or corruption that ran rampant in these result-driven corporations. As a young man first entering the work force, the inner workings of these abusive environments can be jarring and dissonant, a clear line of injustice that needs correction. To a seasoned veteran, the mechanisms are so ingrained and commonplace that it all blends as most adults tend to ignore and endure for steady income, or even safety. By pretending not to see corruption, people protect themselves, and the system presupposes complacency and apathy to keep running. When Aston breaks the mold by potentially seeing the corruption and the cruelty, acknowledging and speaking about it to coworkers, the power of sight loses its potency; it is a condemnation and burden that requires punishment, a physical silencing. Describing something akin to a lobotomy, Aston was betrayed and exposed not only by the people around him, but also his mother (whether this was voluntary or coerced is unclear). After the experiment, he had to "look straight ahead." He had to be "straightened" or assimilated into this traditional version of sight. It was a surgery to force conformity. True sight—to be a witness—is dangerous. While Aston was not physically blinded like other Pinter characters, his mind was tampered with and altered. Even now, he doubts himself and what he saw, protecting himself by calling them hallucinations or believing he was wrong.

Aston's ability and the adverse reactions to his sight have led him to a life of solitude where he yearns, like Teddy, to be accepted and seen. Teddy and Aston seem stuck in the past due to their childhood traumas. While Teddy intellectualizes his feelings to deal with his own familial trauma, Aston seeks approval in other places, such as his loyalty to Mick and extended friendship with Davies (which does not get fulfilled). Like Adam and Eve, Aston was punished by a higher power for knowing and seeing things others wished to conceal and like the enlightened prisoner, Aston was threatened by people in the shadows who have become accustomed to their darkness and are scared of change. Through Teddy, Pinter explores how sight is unreliable. Through Aston, Pinter exposes the burden of the observer and the ones who witness the true cruelty of the world.

Blindness in *The Room* and *The Birthday Party*: A Transformation

While Pinter uses a character's sight to convey the dangers of this ability, he also uses sight's counterpart: blindness. While both *The Room* and *The Birthday Party* have themes of blindness and sight distortion, physical blindness is most present in *The Room*. Rose, an older woman, is visited by a blind, black man named Riley, who has been looking for her for a while. The entirety of the play takes place in one room, with the outside represented by people who enter the room. Rose is sitting in a rocking chair when Riley enters. She is immediately aggressive and defensive, yet simultaneously nervous as she starts to ramble: "What do you want? You force your way up here. You disturb my evening. You come in and sit down here. What do you want?" (Pinter 122). Despite Rose being in her own room, her domain, her behavior is erratic, contrasted against Riley's calm demeanor and curt, straightforward sentences: "My name is Riley…This is a large room…I want to see you…I have a message for you" (Pinter 122-124). Her erratic and defensive behavior is suspicious as

Riley is not overtly threatening; if anything, he is more vulnerable than Rose. Yet, she seems scared, suggesting that there is a shared history between them that is making her anxious.

Riley's presence makes Rose uncomfortable, and she seeks information from him by trying to intimidate him. She insults him and calls out his ailments: "You're a blind man. An old, poor blind man. Aren't you? Can't see a dickeybird" (Pinter 123). However, he is unfazed. Riley's blindness is not a hindrance at first as he behaves as someone with sight, which Rose notices when Riley seems to look about the room; she demands: "What are you looking at? You're blind, aren't you? So what are you looking at?" (Pinter 122). Despite being blind, Riley can see many things such as the space of the room ("This is a large room") and Rose herself ("I want to see you") (Pinter 123). His blindness is an afterthought, suggesting there is more to seeing than just physical sight, an idea that Rose, in her isolation, resists.

Interestingly, one of Rose's defenses is to emphasize her age: "What do you think you've got here, a little girl? I can keep up with you. I'm one ahead of people like you… You've got a grown-up woman in this room, do you hear?" (Pinter 122). While she is in fact a grown woman, her need to amplify and emphasize this seemingly obvious truth suggests an undertone of insecurity. While everyone can see she is a grown woman, internally, she may feel small in Riley's presence, reverting to a childhood state of mind of being underestimated and manipulated. Riley's blindness extracts this disposition from Rose as her physical signs of aging cannot deflect from her internal childish state. The obvious becomes muddled in his gaze, and he can see beyond the front she is putting up.

It is not until Riley explains the message he is here to deliver that Rose's front breaks down: "Your father wants you to come home" (Pinter 124). After Riley invokes Rose's father and calls her (apparently) by her real name, Sal, the tone of the conversation changes, the long, rambling questions and threats transforming into a sharp, clipped, back-and-forth dialogue. While it is not clear whether Riley is himself Rose's father or simply a messenger from Rose's father, there is a new intimacy that emerges between Riley and Rose:

> RILEY. I want you to come home.
> ROSE. No.
> RILEY. With me.
> ROSE. I can't.
> RILEY. I waited to see you.
> ROSE. Yes.
> RILEY. Now I see you.
> …
> RILEY. Come home now, Sal.
> *She touches his eyes, the back of his head and his temples with her hands.* (Pinter 124- 125).

There is longing, yearning, and touching as Riley finally sees Rose in her genuine form ("Now I see you."), no longer having to look through the fragile and protective front she has put up. As Rose touches Riley's eyes, she goes home for a moment. By touching his eyes, the emotional connection between them becomes physical; touch is also a blind person's way of seeing. And in fact, Riley's blindness seems to "transfer" to Rose. The play ends with Rose's "husband," Bert, coming back into the room and beating Riley to death while Rose clutches her eyes and proclaims that she "can't see! I can't see. I can't see" (Pinter 126). This exclamation reverberates throughout the whole play and is purposely left up to interpretation. Rose did not say she was blind but that she could not see this very violent and traumatic act. This is reminiscent of a child covering their eyes out of instinct and lacking object permanence—if she cannot see it, it is not happening. It may also be a safety tactic to let Bert know that she cannot see this act and thus will not become a witness against him, a way to avoid Aston's fate.

In another sense, *The Room* becomes an Oedipus story. According to Elif Derya Şenduran in her article "The Dualism of Inside and Outside and the Truth in Harold Pinter's *The Room*," Rose's sudden lack of sight "has the association that Rose, who stays at home all the time, will see the outside, the inside, and the truth more clearly like Oedipus due to her blindness because her senses will renew her prejudices against the backlash of forced upon rules for the ubaltern" (Şenduran 1101). For a moment, Rose believes she can go

home and indulge in this experience, until Bert's entrance breaks that haze and brings back the harsh reality of her situation—Rose is stuck in this room. Struck by the traumatic truth, as Oedipus was, Rose "blinds" herself. Despite being a grown woman, her child-like behavior in this moment indicates a determination to live in ignorance, and a cruel reminder of the adult reality that she has been avoiding.

The Room is not the only Pinter play with these themes. While *The Birthday Party* does not feature literal blindness, a kind of blindness presents itself through Stanley's broken glasses, and this theme is juxtaposed with Lulu's sight. In this play, the interplay of sight and blindness affects the two infantilized characters: Stanley and Lulu. As explained in Ian Almond's article "Absorbed into the Other: A Neoplatonic Reading of '*The Birthday Party*,'" Stanley's depiction in the play is not representative of traditional adulthood:

> His lethargic and seemingly aimless lifestyle, his aversion to fresh air, his propensity to fictionalize his past, his unkempt state and erratic mood swings (joking with Meg one moment, deep fits of depression the next) all mark him immediately as someone distinct from Petey and Lulu—someone who neither participates in society nor contributes to it (Almond 181).

This classification as "someone who neither participates in society nor contributes to it" describes a perpetual child-like state in a society that commodifies labor and profits off individuals working. Stanley's resistance to growing up is exacerbated through the maternal and sexual interactions with Meg as they simultaneously flirt while Meg makes sure he wakes up on time and gifts him, a man in his thirties, a toy drum for his "birthday."

Despite being younger than Stanley, Lulu seems older and more reasonable—responsible for bringing the parcel to the house and not giving into Stanley's fantasies and his sudden desire to take her away to "nowhere" (Pinter 35-36). She even goes as far as to criticize Stanley for his looks and behavior, telling him he looks terrible and calling him out for not helping around the house (Pinter 35-36). She knows the standards for behaving appropriately and can openly criticize Stanley when he is not adhering to the model. This makes Lulu's sexualized infantilization very clear in the later scenes, especially since it comes from her multiple interactions with Goldberg. During Stanley's birthday party, Goldberg reduces her to a child using sexualized language and behavior, calling this grown woman a "big bouncy girl" and demanding her to "sit on [his] lap" which she does (Pinter 68). He sexualizes father-daughter terminology to tease her further: "Were you a nice little girl… Maybe I played piggy-back with you" (Pinter 70). To an extent, Lulu indulges in this treatment, letting Goldberg know she has "always liked older men" and how "they can soothe" (Pinter 70).

It is not until after the party that Lulu realizes what she has done by fraternizing with Goldberg. Disgusted, she questions herself and calls out his behavior: "What would my father say, if he knew?...You made use of me by cunning when my defenses were down… You didn't appreciate me for myself. You took all those liberties only to satisfy your appetite. Oh Nat, why did you do it?" (Pinter 89-90). Unlike other characters, Lulu stands up for herself. However, this is not the only way Lulu differentiates herself from other characters. Pinter also grants her the ability to see. Goldberg first hints at her sight during the party when he informs her that there is "a lot in her eyes," to which she replies, "…in yours too" (Pinter 68). While this may have just been a flirting line used by Goldberg to disarm her, for a moment, this mutual acknowledgment of "a lot in the eyes" places her and Goldberg on the same level. However, this sight does not save her from Goldberg's mistreatment.

It is not until after the party that Lulu proves she has "a lot in the eyes" by being able to see behind Goldberg and McCann's façade and manipulativeness: "I've seen everything that's happened. I know what's going on. I've got a pretty shrewd idea" (Pinter 91). This scares McCann as he screams at her to get "out of [his] sight," and she leaves (Pinter 91). While we underestimate her for most of the play, Lulu is one of the only characters who stands up to Goldberg and McCann after they mistreat her. However, some scholars disagree with this claim, believing Lulu to be just a naive, dumb girl. Although Lulu does have an innocence and naivety attached to her, when Simon Lesser claims Lulu "is not interested in, and probably not capable of understanding, anything which is even slightly abstract," he is downplaying her ability to see and leave a dangerous situation (Lesser 38). At the very least, she has a heightened sense of sight compared to Stanley.

Unlike Lulu, who does not need glasses and has this distinguished capacity for seeing, Stanley's

glasses are his crutch. Stanley's attachment to his glasses seems to physically symbolize his child-like state. Throughout the play, Stanley can be seen wearing, cleaning, or fussing with his glasses. Not only do Stanley's glasses give him sight, but they are also an integral part of his character as it is often one of the first things people notice about him. Even Lulu asks him if he has to wear those glasses, and he simply responds with a "Yes" (Pinter 36). When Goldberg and McCann notoriously ask him what he can see without his glasses, he says, "Anything" (Pinter 59). A change in Stanley's appearance, particularly one involving his glasses, tends to be a bad omen. When Stanley takes off his glasses to clean his face, Goldberg and McCann make their first entrance into the play, causing Stanley to put on his glasses and slip out of the room (Pinter 36-37). In addition, when Goldberg and McCann invade Stanley's haven, one of the first things they target is Stanley's sight, his glasses. During their interrogation, Goldberg orders McCann to remove Stanley's glasses causing Stanley to stumble (Pinter 59). It is not the only time Stanley's sight is in danger. Goldberg and McCann take it further at Stanley's "birthday party." The pair force him to play Blind Man's Buff, in which a person goes around blindfolded, trying to touch someone to transfer the blindness. After McCann touches Stanley's glasses, Stanley becomes "it," and McCann breaks his glasses (Pinter 73). McCann transfers this blindness both in the game and in life, oddly in a similar way to Rose when she touches Riley's eyes and then cannot see.

Just as Stanley's glasses are broken, so is his will. At the end of the play, Stanley has been completely changed under Goldberg and McCann's care—he is washed up, clean-shaven, in a suit, and most importantly, without his glasses (Pinter 91). While breaking his glasses can be seen as an intimidation tactic to make Stanley vulnerable and easier to overwhelm, it also serves to metaphorically indoctrinate him, specifically about the adult world—Stanley has lost one way of perceiving life and had it replaced with another. This becomes explicit towards the end of the play. Goldberg and McCann create a "new man," and tell Stanley they plan to buy him new glasses, a new way of looking at the world: "It goes without saying. Between you and me, Stan, it's about time you had a new pair of glasses…You can't see straight… It's true. You've been cockeyed for years" (Pinter 92). In this way, Stanley's final state resembles Aston's fate when he was younger—shipped away, unable to gather his words and thoughts, and systemically indoctrinated. By the end, Stanley has been transformed into a man, forced into conformity and blinded by Goldberg and McCann and their cruel introduction to an adulthood that Stanley has been avoiding.

Conclusion: Blind/Sight

After analyzing how sight and blindness are used thematically in all four plays, I noticed that Pinter tends to question and test the bounds of our sight and its reliability, using blindness as a way to convey the extreme ways reality and truth can overwhelm the everyday person. By having this be a characteristic of his more child-like characters, Pinter could also be using issues of sight and blindness to represent a refusal to move out of the past and the ways we can resist witnessing the cruel realities of adulthood. Through using and subverting conventional notions of sight, Pinter portrays the way our reliance on sight is obsolete and limited, making us vulnerable to intimidation and tricks in the light. However, this is not a one size fits all. Harold Pinter's experimentations with sight and blindness are pervasive across his work. While I only focus on *The Homecoming*, *The Caretaker*, *The Room*, and *The Birthday Party*, these are not the only plays that feature characters experiencing this visual distortion with reality and fantasy. Pinter's expertise lies in being able to present what seems like an everyday situation, seemingly bare and empty, only for it to hold a universe of meaning and subplot. There is always more to unveil and reveal—always more to see.

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