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### Beyond the mainstage

Fallow, Catriona

*Published in:*  
Harold Pinter

Published: 11/02/2021

*Document Version*  
Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication on the UWS Academic Portal](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Fallow, C. (2021). Beyond the mainstage: Harold Pinter at the Royal Shakespeare Company. In B. Chiasson, & C. Fallow (Eds.), *Harold Pinter: Stages, Networks, Collaborations* (pp. 121-138). Bloomsbury Academic. <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/harold-pinter-9781350133624/>

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## Beyond the Mainstage:

### Harold Pinter at the Royal Shakespeare Company

Catriona Fallow

In a letter to the Royal Shakespeare Company's (RSC) Chairman, Sir Fordham Flower, dated 17 June 1966, Harold Pinter expressed both his gratitude and regret that he was unable to accept a position to serve on the company's Board of Governors (Pinter 1966). In restating his fondness for the RSC and admiration for the company's founding Artistic Director, Peter Hall, Pinter was careful to explain that to take up such a position, and to honour the role by giving it the time and commitment it would require, would be to risk both the time and scope to do what the world had come to know him for best: writing (*ibid.*). This articulation of what Pinter considered to be his chief occupation, tempered by an implicit grasp of the rigours of theatrical administration, speaks to the competing imperatives that drove Pinter, creatively and professionally, during his multifaceted, polymathic career as not only a writer for stage, screen and radio but also a director, actor and advocate. That Pinter was even offered the role of governor at this stage of his career is testament to his growing significance in Britain's theatrical landscape during the 1960s and, specifically, his work with the RSC during the company's first decade.

This letter, and the offer that precipitated it, came at time when the RSC was still consolidating its identity, practices and structure as a company, and while Pinter's career and status were accelerating rapidly. By 1966, the RSC had already staged three major Pinter works in its London venue, the Aldwych: *The Collection* (1961) in 1962, co-directed by Pinter and Hall, *The Birthday Party* (1958) in 1964, directed by Pinter, and Hall's world

premiere of *The Homecoming* in 1965 which would become a landmark production, going on to garner numerous accolades in the UK, on Broadway and, later, as a film in 1973. The company then went on to premiere three other Pinter plays on stage: *Landscape and Silence* in 1969 and *Old Times* in 1971.<sup>1</sup> While *Old Times* was in production at the Aldwych, Pinter directed his third RSC production, *Exiles* (1919) by James Joyce. Over nine years, the RSC was responsible for what are still considered to be some of the most significant examples of Pinter's work for the stage as both a writer and a director.

What is less documented and discussed are the small, fleeting instances of Pinter's work for the RSC that took place not on the company's main London stage but as part of their smaller, short-lived initiatives that sought to engage new audiences, particularly those beyond London and Stratford-upon-Avon. These lesser-known productions of Pinter's work at the RSC offer a new perspective on Pinter's collaboration with one of Britain's leading theatrical institutions and an opportunity to reflect on the versatility of Pinter's writing in contrasting contexts during this crucial decade for British theatre. They also serve to emphasise the plurality and significance of the different working practices employed by the RSC early in its history and to underscore the role of new work by contemporary writers like Pinter to the company's emerging identity and practice.

This chapter reappraises the current discourses on Pinter's relationship with the RSC, and Hall specifically, in order to situate the different imperatives that underpinned both mainstage and community-focused engagement initiatives where Pinter's work appeared. Reflecting on how Pinter's own formative experiences of regional touring as an actor shaped the dramaturgy and portability of his plays, this chapter goes on to consider two key examples of small-scale stagings of Pinter's work at the RSC: Actors Commando's *How to Stop Worrying and Love the Theatre* in 1966 (performed live and as part of a televised BBC broadcast) and Theatregoround's regional touring production of *The Dumb Waiter* (1959) in

1967. By focusing on Actors Commando and Theatregoround's shared imperative to engage audiences in ways that went beyond the RSC's primary repertoire in Stratford and London, this chapter concludes by considering the role these productions had in shaping public perceptions of the accessibility of Pinter's work, while simultaneously consolidating and validating the writer's canonical status.

### Mainstage success: Pinter and Hall

Pinter and Hall's professional collaboration and friendship is a key part of any account of either practitioners' career and forms the cornerstone of the majority of current studies of Pinter's work with the RSC. Despite his initial interest, Hall was unavailable to direct the first productions of *The Birthday Party* in 1958 and *The Caretaker* in 1960 before assuming his role at the RSC. He would, however, go on to direct every major stage premiere of Pinter's work for the next two decades.<sup>2</sup> Both men referred to the significance of one another's work numerous times throughout their careers, with Pinter reportedly describing Hall as 'the director of my dreams' and Hall confirming that 'I've never worked with any dramatist in my life where I knew so instinctively what he was driving at and what it was he wanted. [...] I found a great deal from him as a writer and I think he found a great deal from me as a director' (Billington 1996: 149, 140). Critics and scholars have similarly continued to emphasise the centrality and symbiosis of this creative partnership to both men's work and careers.<sup>3</sup>

In terms of the impact the pair's working relationship had on the company, one thing that is repeatedly articulated in both Pinter and RSC scholarship is how Pinter's presence helped to realise one of Hall's key ambitions: if the company's remit was to interrogate anew Shakespeare's plays and ways of staging them, Hall believed that it must also pursue a rigorous engagement with the work of contemporary dramatists. This commitment to new

work was also vital to attracting the best actors, both new and established, to work with the company long-term, actors who, as Flower observed, ‘will not these days accept long-term contracts for solely Shakespearean work’ (1964). According to former RSC Literary Manager Colin Chambers, for Hall, securing actors long-term was ‘the prerequisite for creating a vibrant theatre of reanimated Shakespeare and vital new and modern plays presented in an invigorating symbiosis’ (2004: 12–13). In his history of the company, Chambers goes on to suggest that Pinter ‘defined the importance of the writer at the early RSC through his partnership with Hall and his own involvement with the company as a director as well as a playwright’, describing his plays as ‘iconic of RSC new writing’ (133). The work of contemporary dramatists like Pinter was therefore fundamental to shaping the company’s early identity. However, the decision of a self-declared Shakespearean company to also stage new plays was not without controversy.

The most ubiquitous and widely cited example of the contested position of new work at the RSC during the mid-1960s is the context surrounding the company’s productions of *The Birthday Party* in 1964 and *The Homecoming* the following year. Now commonly known as the ‘Dirty Plays’ scandal, it followed a season of new works at the Aldwych that included Pinter’s *The Birthday Party* and which theatre impresario and RSC Governor Emile Littler publicly denounced as a ‘programme of dirt plays’ (qtd. in Norman 1964).<sup>4</sup> Littler’s disavowal of the company’s London season sparked heated debate both internally within the RSC and from mainstream commentators and members of the public. Though Pinter and his play were no stranger to critical scrutiny thanks to the early negative responses to *The Birthday Party*’s brief run at the Lyric Hammersmith, London in 1958, the dirty plays controversy was different in that it centred less on the supposed intellectualism and inaccessibility of Pinter’s, as well as other writers’, work and instead critiqued the work on moral grounds. As one of a number of letters sent by concerned members of the public to

Flower following Littler's statement to the press bemoaned, 'modern plays seem always to dwell on the sordid side of life and unpleasant people', concluding that 'dirt, for dirt's sake is neither clever nor avant garde' (Strauss: 1964). The debate, then, had less to do with any single work and more with what the collective presence of such work represented in the context of a newly subsidised Shakespearean company with the Queen as its patron.

This shaped perceptions of the suitability of future new works, including Pinter's next play, *The Homecoming*. As Mark Taylor-Batty notes:

When *The Homecoming* arrived in their mail, the [RSC] board members would have viewed it in the context of this history of subversive material and the reputation they sought for the still young company. They disapproved of the play and voiced their objection at seeing it enter the repertoire at the Aldwych. Hall listened to their concerns and went ahead regardless. (2005: 43)

However, it was not just the RSC Board who were ambivalent or resistant to Pinter's latest play. In his memoir, *Making an Exhibition of Myself*, Hall recalls his colleagues' initial responses: 'Peter Brook thought the play too small for the large spaces of the Aldwych. So did John Barton. Michel St Denis felt that it was not poetic enough. Clifford Williams and Trevor Nunn were less specific, but neither said anything to stop the strong tide of objection' (2000: 200). Pinter, too, had concerns about the suitability of his work for the Aldwych stage. In his discussion of directing Pinter, Hall recounts how the writer was 'worried initially by the largeness of the stage. Would it have sufficient claustrophobia, sufficient tension? The "open living area" came from responding to the strengths of the wide stage. So the Aldwych, in some sense, provided the image of *The Homecoming*' (2001: 151). The subsequent widespread success of this production, then, offers a clear example of how writing for the RSC's mainstage presented unique challenges and opportunities for Pinter and which, in turn, shaped the play.<sup>5</sup>

Brook's objection and Pinter's initial hesitation concerning the size of the Aldwych, however, also serve to underscore the suitability of Pinter's works for smaller scale

productions and, in the context of a newly established and still underfunded repertory company like the RSC, the attendant financial benefits. With a cast of just six in *The Homecoming*, four in *The Collection*, two in *Landscape*, three in *Silence* and three in *Old Times*, and all set in single-location interior spaces, Pinter's best-known works with the company presented both artistic and practical advantages. As Jamie Andrews observes,

Not only did Pinter add to the lustre of Hall's ambitions for the RSC to stage challenging new work, but his small casts were also financially attractive to the company's management in comparison to major Shakespeare revivals. As Hall admitted in a letter [...] 'Plays like *The Homecoming* are, in fact, a great help to us. They do not cost as much to do, they relieve our company on some nights, as they have small casts, and their modern interest is such that they boost our general Box Office take.' (2012: 171)

But the suitability of Pinter's work for RSC's stages, its role in shaping and realising the company's core principles and ideologies and its potential audience appeal were not limited to the Aldwych stage during the 1960s. While widely publicised media battles about the validity of certain new works at the RSC raged in the mainstream press at the same time as *The Homecoming* continued to garner critical acclaim, a different strand of RSC programming was beginning to emerge away from the company's mainstages. In the following sections, I move away from the dominant narratives and examples of Pinter's affiliation with the RSC in order to offer a more complete picture of the range of contexts in which his work appeared – and to what purpose – during the 1960s.

### Juxtaposing Pinter: *How to Stop Worrying and Love the Theatre* (1966)

Organised and implemented by director and writer Michael Kustow in 1965, Actors Commando – as it was provisionally named before being rebranded as Theaterground – initially comprised a group of four Stratford-based RSC actors. Though short-lived, the very name suggests a force on the move with direct, perhaps even insurgent action—a 'commando' being a soldier specially trained to carry out raids. In this case, however, rather

than ‘parachuting in’ to conflict, these RSC company members sought to intervene directly in audiences’ local milieux in order to ‘overcome the socially divisive protocols of theatre-going’ by touring ‘a thirty-minute programme of excerpts from Shakespeare and other writing’ to ‘local halls and workers’ canteens, followed by a talk with the audience afterwards’ (Chambers: 41–42).

As the initiative grew following these initial performances, its ideological ambitions became even more explicit. In the summer of 1965 an article for the RSC’s members’ magazine, *Flourish* (of which Kustow was the founding editor), insisted that in order to reach new audiences,

[t]heatre publicity in the ‘quality’ Press is not enough; it does not reach the people we want to meet. In this situation the first move must come from the theatre-people themselves. This entire project is based on the wager that by going out and offering themselves and their work, theatre-people can help to cross the barriers that exist. (1965)

Based on his earlier experiences with Théâtre National Populaire in France, where the emphasis was on ‘getting the best social mix in an audience, not necessarily the biggest crowd’, for Kustow, mobility was key to offering audiences ‘a taste’ of theatre (qtd. in Lawson 1975: 80). The imperative, then, fell on the organisation to be mobile – rather than its audiences – in order to provide access to those who perhaps would not normally encounter the company’s work. However, in the case of Actors Commando, and later Theatregoround, the emphasis was initially not placed on a specific show but on the *idea* of theatregoing itself.

Later, in the autumn of 1965, Kustow developed the concept further by creating *Theatregoround*, a touring production in which six RSC actors – Michelle Dotrice, Gabrielle Hamilton, Paul Hardwick, Davyd Harries, Michael Jayston and Richard Moore – offered audiences what Kustow described as ‘a misguided, lunatic and yet rather worthwhile attempt to tell the history of the theatre in an hour and half’ (81). This pilot programme, dubbed *How to Stop Worrying and Love the Theatre*, consisted of a condensed selection of material from

Sophocles, Aristophanes, Shakespeare, Molière, Victorian melodrama and Pinter. Initially performed in a number of London boroughs, John Wyver describes how at the time the initiative was ‘sufficiently novel for the idea to be taken up by the BBC for a programme in its *Sunday Night* strand of arts features’ (2019: 57).

Wyver offers an overview of the fifty-minute long programme broadcast on 20 February 1966, noting that the footage was shot ‘primarily with electronic cameras by a mobile outside broadcast unit at Rutherford School, Paddington’ (57). Following an introduction from the host, René Cutforth, commentary from Hall and insights into a rehearsal session with Kustow and the actors, the programme presents a selection of performance extracts, including a scene from *The Birthday Party*. The scene is played on a small, hexagonal, slightly raised stage with a free-standing curtain rail behind with the curtains drawn open to reveal production paraphernalia, such as lighting equipment. Three actors enter the playing area from the back of the space, dressed in non-descript dark trousers and long-sleeved sweaters. These don’t appear to be costumes *per se* but rather ‘everyday clothes’ (58). The only essential item of costuming is a pair of glasses, worn by actor Davyd Harries as Stanley who perches upon a small stool facing out towards an unseen audience, flanked by the other two performers, Richard Moore as Goldberg and Michael Jayston as McCann. The scene begins with Goldberg demanding: ‘take off his [Stanley’s] glasses’ (Pinter 1996: 43).

During the interrogation that ensues, the camera cuts sharply between the actors’ faces, capturing the mocking disdain of Moore’s Goldberg, the ominous sneering of Jayston’s McCann and the darting eyes and sweaty brow of Harries’s Stanley. These cuts both complement and intensify the pace of Pinter’s already rapid-fire dialogue at this moment in the play. But for the interplay of emotion across the actors’ faces and the occasional darting head movements of Stanley as he looks between his interrogators, all three remain almost

entirely still for the majority of the scene. This interpretation contrasts with the stage directions in Pinter's original script. There is no '*turning, crouched*' from Stanley as he puzzles, '[w]hat wife?' (ibid.). In the RSC's production he remains seated, facing out towards the audience (or to camera for the viewers at home). When Goldberg asks a second time, '[w]hy did you kill your wife?', Stanley is not '*sitting, his back to the audience*' (ibid.) but instead only slightly turning his head, eyes wide with surprise. The BBC's recording of the production, particularly the frequent close-ups of Harries's face, leaves no question as to Stanley's increasing distress or confusion and also little potential for ambiguity regarding the power dynamics between the three men. McCann's ensuing exclamation, '[t]here's your man!' (ibid.), provokes laughter from an audience which sounds live but remains unseen onscreen during this extract. The tension continues to be amplified by the rapidly changing camera angles and the breakneck pace of the dialogue.

When Goldberg, seeming to lose patience, demands, '[s]peak up Webber. Why did the chicken cross the road?', Moore's face abruptly appears in shot, close to Harries's as the camera zooms in to a tight close-up on both, sweat visibly shining on Harries's contorted face as he struggles to utter: '[h]e wanted to—he wanted to—he wanted to...' (Pinter 1996: 45). McCann's interjections are heard off-screen while the camera remains tightly focused on Goldberg and Stanley until, at last, Stanley screams, the camera zooming out again to a wide shot of the trio. Shooting from stage left, next to McCann, the camera captures Goldberg standing up straight while Stanley buries his head in his hands. Goldberg looks across to McCann and intones the scene's final line, 'He doesn't know' (46).

While impossible to speculate about general audiences' responses to this work, in either its live or broadcast iterations, Kustow's own account of the piece goes some way towards describing how the framing and splicing together of these performance extracts was key to enabling audiences to engage with this material:

from melodrama [specifically *Under the Gaslight* (1867) by Augustin Daly] we leapt into Pinter and *The Birthday Party*. The audience, all turned on by melodrama, could see, all of a sudden, the very wholesome base of melodrama in Pinter himself. They took *The Birthday Party* without thinking what a hifalutin, philosophical, complex statement it was, and instead saw these two guys working over this poor guy with his spectacles. (qtd. in Lawson 1975: 81)

The scene's minimalism coupled with the camera's framing of the scene and subtle changes to blocking and stage directions certainly support this reading. The close scrutiny of the actors' faces, the paucity of any traditional, naturalistic theatrical scenography or costuming to connote character or context and no apparent details on who the characters actually are serves to focus the attention on the 'working over' of one man by two others. For Kustow, it is the scene's juxtaposition with melodrama that enables audiences to better connect to the simplicity of the scene and thereby understand Pinter's writing as just one example or fragment of theatrical practice in dialogue with other, older theatrical forms.

This one-off broadcast, however, is unlikely to have been many British viewers' first encounter with *The Birthday Party*, or other examples of Pinter's work, on the small screen. On 22 March 1960, for example, *The Birthday Party* was broadcast in full by the commercial ITV company Associated-Rediffusion, directed by Joan Kemp-Welch, and, according to Andrews, reached 'an estimated 11 million people, and was enthusiastically received by the critics' (161). Moreover, as Jonathan Bignell and William Davies argue, television's role in shaping Pinter's career trajectory and cultivating 'widespread recognition of his distinctive "brand"' was essential and meant that 'his representation of ordinary people and everyday speech was, despite the artifice with which Pinter turned these domestic stories into "menace", an aspect of a cultural current that sought to connect with mass audiences and engage with contemporary experience' (2020: 6). While it may be tempting, then, to agree with Kustow's suggestion that juxtaposing Pinter with melodrama enabled the audience to better comprehend the play, Britons' familiarity with Pinter – and *The Birthday Party* specifically – on the small screen must also be accounted for.

What Kustow's emphasis on the benefits of juxtaposing Pinter with earlier theatrical forms does usefully direct attention to are Pinter's earliest professional engagements in theatre as an actor appearing primarily in touring repertory companies. Performing as part of Anew McMaster's company in Ireland from September 1951 until early 1953, followed by three months under contract with Donald Wolfitt's company at the King's Theatre Hammersmith in London, Pinter continued to appear in regional repertory theatres across the UK until 1957 (performing under the name David Baron).<sup>6</sup> During this time, he was exposed to a wide-ranging repertoire and a variety of theatrical genres from comedy and tragedy, to drawing room comedies and thrillers. As William Baker notes, '[a]ll the while, Pinter was learning stage techniques which reappear in his subsequent work', offering the example of Mary Hayley Bell's *The Uninvited Guest* (1953), in which Pinter appeared in April 1955 and which, 'contains a key interrogation scene [where] [a]n escaped mental patient performed by Pinter has his back to the audience. He is fiercely questioned by the other characters', thereby linking this to the scene in Pinter's *The Birthday Party* (2008: 35). Writing on the influence of these early experiences of repertory more broadly on Pinter's practice, Michael Billington has described how the 'grinding system [was] hardly conducive to psychological probing or intellectual agonising; which is why Pinter, however meticulous a director, has always been suspicious of too much theorising (1996: 50). Kustow's pairing of Pinter with melodrama as an aesthetic experiment and his attention to the effect of such a juxtaposition offers another, richer way to understand how Pinter eschewed conceptual or 'hifalutin' theorising in his own work and how his own acting experiences on the road informed his writing for the stage.

It is now widely agreed amongst Pinter scholars that there is a 'close connection between Pinter's writing and acting' (Gussow 2001: 257). To explore this connection further, I turn now to another example of Pinter's work 'on the move' for the RSC – a full-length

production of *The Dumb Waiter* – that both echoes and evolves the ideas, aesthetics and ambitions initiated in *How to Stop Worrying and Love the Theatre*.

### Portable Pinter: *The Dumb Waiter* (1967)

Kustow's initial vision for the RSC's mobile unit was officially 're-devised, re-staffed and re-titled' (Kemp 1968) as Theatregoround on 1 November 1966 following an anonymous donation of £10,000.<sup>7</sup> Now under the directorship of Terry Hands, who had joined the company in July that year, Theatregoround operated primarily out of a red double decker bus, touring Britain with a portable stage, mobile exhibition and box office. Its work was similarly motivated by a desire to reach out to regional, non-theatre-going audiences and students. Rather than offering a 'taste' of live theatre via limited performances or one-off broadcasts like *How to Stop Worrying and Love the Theatre*, this incarnation of Theatregoround attempted to amplify and sustain any potential impact, both during and after the performances, by working more closely with schools and education centres, offering programmes based around core texts that were available in conjunction with packages of documentation for teachers to use in schools.

What remained constant through this work was the imperative to democratise and diversify the company's audience or, as Hands describes, 'to build the audience of tomorrow, not just to please the audience of today [Hall] wanted Theatregoround to reach out to that new audience, to go anywhere and everywhere' (qtd. in Rutter 2012: 205). This objective was explicit in Theatregoround's marketing, with early publicity flyers proclaiming:

[t]heatres tend to cater for a very small section of society. But the theatre audience does not have to be a select few. Class barriers, high prices, inconvenience, a feeling that it is only for the educated these are some of the obstacles that keep people away from the theatre. But theatres could be opened to a wider audience, become much more a part of daily life. This is what Theatregoround is trying to achieve. ('Theatregoround' Publicity Flyer)

Clearly reasserting the sentiments of Actors Commando's early publicity (and perhaps downplaying any related commercial imperatives to swell audience numbers), statements such as this read almost as a call to arms and could be usefully understood in the context of the rhetoric of the New Left that had begun to proliferate in Britain from the mid-1950s onwards. For example, in the first issue of the *New Left Review*, published in February 1960, cultural theorist Stuart Hall claimed, '[w]e have to go into towns and cities, universities and technical colleges, youth clubs and Trade Union branches and – as [William] Morris said – make socialists there' (1960: 2). In the case of Theatreground, rather than trying to overtly politicise their audiences by aligning with a particular position, the 'politics' at work here is arguably in the desire to simply create audiences; to assemble a group of people who hitherto had not experienced this kind of work and – at its most utopian – to erode the very class barriers that theatre perpetuates.

These ambitions resonated strongly with the aims and working practices of other Fringe organisations of the late 1960s and early 1970s. By taking performance out of conventional, purpose-built theatre spaces, groups such as Portable Theatre, Agitprop Street Players (later renamed Red Ladder in 1971), Brighton Combination, Joint Stock, Foco Novo and the Women's Street Theatre group sought to engage their audiences in the public sphere, thereby – it was hoped – democratising access to theatre and amplifying any latent or overt political messages within their work. Though never discussed explicitly in relation to these other Fringe organisations, Theatreground's operations can be understood as a precursor to these better known, autonomous small-scale touring operations. From the perspective of recalibrating understandings of Pinter at the RSC, it is significant that his work appeared in this more overtly politicised strand of the company's practice, thereby connecting this early work to the broader historical narratives concerned with the politicisation of theatre in the UK.

A politicised interpretation of Theatregoround's ambitions for their work, however, is complicated by its position within the wider structures of the RSC itself. Typically, the rise of alternative, Fringe theatre is thought to represent an overthrow of the largely naturalistic, building-based, capitalist theatre practices of major theatrical organisations like the RSC and the West End. Here, the 'alternative' Theatregoround posed was in opposition to its own progenitor, the wider company. Theatregoround audiences, therefore, were at once encouraged to perceive theatrical works and the practice of theatregoing in general as accessible to all, while the RSC itself concurrently continued to represent the theatrical establishment, catering primarily and consistently for audiences in London and Stratford-upon-Avon. In that sense, the RSC was at once responsible for the creation and consolidation of canonical mainstage productions while at the time stripping away the supposed barriers to audiences' access to such material. This disjuncture mirrors the tension Kustow invokes between high-intellectualism and accessible storytelling, situations and conventions in Pinter's plays and is particularly striking in the context of the RSC, a company that is, as discussed above, regarded as instrumental in the establishment, acceleration and maintenance of Pinter's career. On the one hand, Pinter is placed within the pantheon of great writers who have shaped Western theatre – Sophocles, Aristophanes, Molière and Shakespeare – to the effect of valorising his status and cultural capital. On the other hand, initiatives like Theatregoround work to destabilise this notion, to demystify Pinter's plays and make intelligible the supposed 'wholesomeness' of the work.

There are indications that, as with Kustow's perception of *How to Stop Worrying and Love the Theatre*, Theatregoround's framing and treatment of the texts they put on stage did have the capacity to subvert popular perceptions of both Shakespeare – still the company's primary focus – and the work of contemporary writers like Pinter. Following three visits by

Theatregoround to the North Havering College of Further Education, one attendee, Howard Gilbert, observed,

The Royal Shakespeare Company's Theatregoround came three times within the week to Havering, and upwards of eight hundred people, young, old, and middle-aged, took part in the presentations. [...] In some strange way these 'bare board' presentations seem to stir people more than the most slick and polished of performances. One student said to me afterwards: 'With a company like that, who wouldn't go to see Shakespeare?' Another comment upon the same lines was: 'I didn't like those Pinter plays when they were broadcast, and I very nearly stayed away, but I'm glad I came'. By the same token, it seems to me that Shakespeare is toppled from his artificial, scholastic pedestal and Pinter from the aura of preciousness which is partly his popular image, both to be set upon real platforms as chroniclers of human stories. (1967)

Gilbert's claims resonate strongly with Kustow's earlier observation concerning the stripping away of the 'hifalutin philosophy' of Pinter's *The Birthday Party* and the company's juxtaposition of the play with melodrama. Gilbert's attention to the efficacy of the 'bare board' presentation style of Theatregoround versus the 'slick and polished' performances possible on the company's mainstages captures a sense of how the material conditions under which this mobile, touring work was produced significantly impacted both the aesthetics and reception of the work, in this case enabling audiences to comprehend, enjoy and perhaps learn from these productions.

The 'bare board' presentation Gilbert refers to is certainly evident in the archival documentation of Theatregoround's 1967 tour of the Midlands that included Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter*, directed by David Jones. Like Hall, Jones was a key figure in cultivating the company's repertoire beyond Shakespeare and a long-term collaborator of Pinter's, particularly for television and film. He would go on to direct, for example, Pinter's screenplay adaptation of Aidan Higgins's novel *Langrishe, Go Down* (1966) for BBC2 in 1978, the film version of *Betrayal* (1983) and Pinter's film adaptation of Franz Kafka's *The Trial* (1992). In 1985 Jones would direct Pinter himself as Deeley in *Old Times* (assuming the role from Michael Gambon for an American tour).<sup>8</sup>

Prior to these well-known examples of the pair's collaboration, however, was Theatregoround's *Dumb Waiter* starring Hugh Sullivan as Gus and Richard Moore as Ben. The season as a whole was, as appears to be typical for Theatregoround, ambitious in its range and pedagogy. It offered a mixture of classical and contemporary texts alongside devised work, condensed versions of Shakespeare by RSC director John Barton and instructive demonstrations from RSC directors and actors discussing their craft. These included, for example: sessions on 'The Actor/Director' and 'The Actor at Work' alongside plays such as *The Knack* (1962) by Ann Jellicoe; *The Hollow Crown*, an anthology of the kings and queens of England, devised by Barton which premiered at the Aldwych in 1965 before touring nationally until 1979; *The Proposal* (1890) by Anton Chekhov, directed by Hands; *Pleasure and Repentance*, devised and directed by Hands; and Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood* (1954), also directed by Hands. Further refining the broad theatrical and historical scope of *How to Stop Worrying and Love the Theatre*, this programme offered a microcosm of the RSC's own wider programme and practices specifically.

Based on the selection of production images held in the RSC's archives, Jones's production of *The Dumb Waiter* bears a resemblance to the broadcast of *How to Stop Worrying and Love the Theatre*.<sup>9</sup> At the back of a small, heptagonal and raked wooden stage are three wooden flats with the eponymous dumb waiter in the centre. The venue itself (not credited on the images) is visible behind the stage. Two beds with metal frames on either side of the dumb waiter are the only other visible scenery. Collectively, these images evoke the same stripped-back, no-frills approach of the broadcast fragment of *The Birthday Party*; there is no attempt to disguise the utilitarian staging or the venue in question to make it appear like a conventional theatre space. The material conditions of its production are, if anything, central to its aesthetic and make Theatregoround's commitment to producing theatre at a low-cost manifestly present.

If *The Homecoming* was able to adapt to and embrace the wide, expansive stage of the Aldwych, in this example Pinter's *Dumb Waiter* appears as if tailor made for both the material circumstances and remit of Theatreground. Set in a basement room, each aspect of Pinter's opening stage directions has been observed. Despite the small stage, there is a door stage right and what appears to be a recessed anti-room stage left, likely intended to provide the off-stage locations of the bathroom and kitchen which are integral features of the playscript and action. The positioning of the beds, though not 'flat against the back wall' as Pinter's script indicates, follow the guidance noted in the 1961 Samuel French Acting edition used for this production, which 'follows a production in which the smallness of the stage determined the positions of the two beds'.<sup>10</sup>

Returning to the idea of the relative 'smallness' of Pinter's plays and the simultaneous artistic and pragmatic advantages they afford, we might consider these material economies of scale in relation to what Taylor-Batty has described as Pinter's 'efficient ideas':

The communicability of Pinter's 'efficient ideas' is immediate, in that he strives to convey human experience directly, without excessive symbolism and without overly manipulating his discoveries to make any direct statements. Having found a manner in which he can articulate certain aspects of human interaction, he allows his artistic discoveries to resonate in each of us as subtle recognition, not tacit knowledge. (2001: 125)

What the examples explored in this chapter suggest is a particular cohesion between the artistic 'efficiency' or directness of Pinter's practice with the stripped-back staging conditions of these lesser-known small-scale productions. While Pinter's writing has the potential to communicate complex, intangible human experiences on a variety of stages and across multiple media, it is rarely considered in the context of small, fleeting or seemingly less auspicious production conditions. By focusing on these examples that took place early in Pinter's career and during the RSC's first decade, both writer and institution can be reappraised in terms of their work beyond the mainstage; work that was initiated by other key collaborators, in different, temporary

spaces and aligned with more overtly politicalised ambitions for engaging audiences in the practices and artistry of the company and its featured writers.

## Conclusion

There are conflicting records of how many performances of *The Dumb Waiter* appeared in this Midlands season and another small-scale London season. According to the RSC's online performance database, there are three recorded instances of the play at the start of the Midlands' tour.<sup>11</sup> However, a document entitled 'Data Concerning Theatreground: The Period from June 22<sup>nd</sup> 1966 until September 30<sup>th</sup> 1970' notes five performances of *The Dumb Waiter* in Croydon, Romford, Stanmore as part of a London Season and 12 performances during the Midlands Season at Nuneaton, Worcester, Rugby, Manley in Arden, Ashby-de-la-Zouch' (Ormand 1970). Whatever the case, neither this production nor the fleeting live and televised appearances of initiatives like *How to Stop Worrying and Love the Theatre* can compete with the production runs and subsequent tours of Pinter's works on the RSC's mainstages in terms of status or visibility. Nor do they need to. In accounting for these instances of Pinter in production at the RSC I do not wish to suggest an equivalency between the mainstage and these itinerant productions. I want, rather, to emphasise their striking differences in order to underscore the flexibility of Pinter's writing, its potential to adapt to different performance conditions and economies, and in the process to serve different company imperatives: in this case, attracting new audiences to the RSC but also to theatregoing in general. Looking beyond the mainstage successes of Pinter's work at the RSC and his collaboration with Hall, then, offers a more representative image of the range of his work undertaken by the company, a deeper understanding of the multiple contexts and platforms for new work at the RSC's inception and an explicit commitment to making these works accessible to a wider audience. By focusing on *How to Stop Worrying and Love the*

*Theatre* and Theatreground's *Dumb Waiter* the complex position of Pinter at the RSC emerges; his association with the company gave rise to both award-winning mainstage productions that represent Britain's theatrical establishment *and* minimal, stripped back, mobile stagings that actively sought to challenge the kind of wisdom that can work to enshrine and rarefy the work of writers like Pinter.

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<sup>1</sup> While the RSC's productions of *Silence* and *Old Times* represented the works' first appearance in any medium, *Landscape* officially premiered on the BBC's Radio Third Programme in 1968 prior to receiving its stage debut alongside *Silence* in 1969.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to his productions for the RSC, following his appointment as Artistic Director of the National Theatre in 1973, Hall directed *No Man's Land* (1975), *Betrayal* (1978), and the triple-bill *Other Places*, which included *Family Voices*, *Victoria Station* and *A Kind of Alaska* (1982).

<sup>3</sup> For Hall's own accounts see *Making and Exhibition of Myself* (particularly Chapter Eleven, pp. 195-202), 'Directing the Plays of Harold Pinter' (2001) and 'Directing Pinter: Interview by Catherine Itzin and Simon Trussler' (1974).

<sup>4</sup> Alongside Pinter's *The Birthday Party*, the season included Peter Wiess's *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton Under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade* (or *Marat/Sade*) (1964), David Rudkin's *Afore Night Come* (1962) and Roger Vitrac's Dadaist work *Victor* (1928).

<sup>5</sup> At the 1967 Tony Awards, for example, the Broadway Transfer of the RSC's production of *The Homecoming* won the awards for Best Supporting Actor (Ian Holm as Lenny) and Best Dramatic Actor (Paul Rogers as Max), Best Director (Peter Hall) and Best Play. The same year, it also won New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Play.

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<sup>6</sup> For detailed accounts of Pinter's acting engagements and touring locations between 1953-57, see William Baker's chapter 'Ireland, Precarious Existence and Marriage' (2008) or David T. Thompson's *Pinter – The Player's Playwright* (1985).

<sup>7</sup> According to Chambers, this anonymous donation was made in April 1966 specifically for Theatreground, with Hall 'advocating its activities to Stratford's educational authorities' (2004: 42).

<sup>8</sup> For Jones's own account of working with Pinter and directing his work, see 'Staging Pauses and Silences' in *Viva Pinter: Harold Pinter's Spirit of Resistance* (2009).

<sup>9</sup> Images for this production were taken by Reg Wilson and are currently held in the Reg Wilson Photographic Collection, 1962-1997 at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Library and Archives (RL5/2/1165).

<sup>10</sup> The Samuel French Acting edition appears as part of the Prompt Book for this production, held in the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Library and Archives, Stratford-upon-Avon (RSC/SM/1/1967/DUW1).

<sup>11</sup> According to records on the RSC's online Performance Database, *The Dumb Waiter* was the feature show on the 19 May at Lordswood Boys' Technical School, Birmingham, the 22 May at Henley in Arden High School, Warwickshire and the 25 May at the Ashby-de-la-Zouch Festival, Leicestershire (see <[http://collections.shakespeare.org.uk/search/rsc-performances/view\\_as/grid/search/-17](http://collections.shakespeare.org.uk/search/rsc-performances/view_as/grid/search/-17)> [accessed 19 June 2020]).