"His Last Bow": Harold Pinter's Genre Disobedience in *Sleuth* (2007)

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With the notable exception of Shakespeare, writing for the stage rarely enjoys the opportunity for reinterpretation more than once in film. Yet this has happened twice so far to Anthony Schaffer's *Sleuth* (1970). Schaffer's play is a witty homage to the so-called 'golden age' of the interwar detective novel; like the popularity of its borrowed form, *Sleuth* not only enjoyed successful West End and Broadway runs, but in 1972 was adapted by Schaffer into a film. Its second cinematic incarnation came in 2007 in a screenplay by Harold Pinter and directed by Kenneth Branagh. Despite not having seen or read the original play or its film adaptation, it is not difficult to see the appeal of *Sleuth* to Pinter as it contains a number of recurring signature preoccupations that appear in plays of his own such as *The Collection* (1961), *The Basement* (1967) and *Betrayal* (1978). In an interview, included on its DVD release, Pinter explained that for him *Sleuth* was about a power struggle.

The struggle in question takes place between Andrew Wyke, a wealthy crime novelist and a young man, Milo Tindall, for possession of the former's wife. Wyke tricks his wife's lover into staging a robbery that culminates in Milo believing he is about to die at the hands of Wyke, who for the benefit of any subsequent police investigation, plays the role of a householder disturbing a burglary. However, Milo turns the tables, returning some days later disguised as a police inspector investigating the disappearance of Milo Tindall. In the 2007 film the struggle between the two men is played out in a manner that audiences familiar with Pinter's work for theatre would instantly recognize – an initial encounter conducted under a veneer of polite discourse concealing fierce animosity and rivalry. As in plays such as *The Collec-*

tion and *Betrayal*, where enmity is coupled with admiration, in Pinter's film version of *Sleuth*, Wyke's appreciation of his opponent grows after he in turn has been duped by Milo's disguise and performance as a police inspector.

In a long parallel career as a screenwriter for films such as *The Quiller Memorandum* (1966), *The Go-Between* (1971) and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1981), *Sleuth* was an unusual departure for Pinter in a number of ways: not only does it break from his established practice of adapting novels, but (with the exception of his unproduced screenplay of Shakespeare's *King Lear* in 2000), it also marked the first and last time that would see Pinter adapting the work of a contemporary dramatist. More significantly, it broke with a reputation that Pinter had gained for fidelity to the original text (Sinyard 1986: ix), where in *Sleuth* a wholesale *reappropriation* rather than adaptation of a work takes place, something Pinter had not attempted in a screenplay since Robin Maugham's novella, *The Servant* in 1963.

As a consequence, Pinter's *Sleuth* retains only the barest plot outline of Schaffer's play. Little of the original dialogue is retained – and in its place emerge Pinter's signature tone and dramatic style. In an interview, Pinter was quite clear that he had deliberately set out to produce a version that would be quite different from the earlier film and play: "It's a total transformation. I must say I think I've made it my own" (*Sleuth*: 2008). Here, in what would be his last significant writing project before his death in December 2008, it would not be an exaggeration to claim that *Sleuth* stands as Harold Pinter's last original work.

The Harold Pinter archive at the British Library contains notes and drafts on *Sleuth* that clearly reveal an iconoclastic approach at work. This replacement of one style for another is evident in a handwritten first draft in one early exchange between Wyke and Milo:

> Andrew
> Do you act under the name of Tindle?
> Milo
> Tindle, yes.

Wyke
Why haven't I ever heard of you?
Milo
You will, before long.
Wyke
Really?
Milo
In spades
Wyke
That sounds threatening
Milo.

Does it?

Another exchange in the same draft, subsequently deleted in the final script also shows Pinter's voice as dominant:

> A[ndrew] – You see. I planned all this from the word go. I've always longed to have an intimate chat with a hairdresser, particularly a hairdresser who is fucking my wife
> M[ilo] – But I'm not a hairdresser
> A – Yes you are (Pinter: 88880/2/103).

One of the other major differences that distinguishes Pinter's adaptation from Schaffer's play and subsequent film version is its attitude towards the 'golden age' of detective fiction. The phrase refers to the period between the First and Second World Wars and the enormous popularity of the 'whodunnit' or 'puzzle novel' by writers such as Margery Allingham, Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers. Here, murder is committed at weekend parties held in rambling country houses; in picture postcard rural villages or the closeted worlds of Oxbridge colleges, while those charged to solve the crime are amateur sleuths such as the aristocratic Lord Peter Wimsey, the elderly spinster Miss Marple, or the retired detective Hercule Poirot.

Sleuth is set in 1970, long after the golden age of the detective novel has passed, and although he dedicates the play to an array of fictional detectives including Philip Trent, Max Carrados and Gideon Fell, whom he describes as "omniscient eccentric gentlemen".[1] Schaf-

fer's main use for the classic detective novel is as a metaphor for England's inwardness, snobbery and undue reverence for the past. David I. Grossvogel has called Agatha's Christie's work "never more than nostalgia and illusion," (Grossvogel 1983: 254), while one of the main contentions in Colin Watson's study of the detective novel, *Snobbery with Violence*, published one year after *Sleuth* was staged, contends that the work of Christie and her contemporaries in the 1920s and 1930s reflected exclusively upper middle-class attitudes, mostly predicated on a snobbery focused against foreigners, the working classes and Bloomsbury modernism. Wyke detests the contemporary crime novel "where the police race around in cars and call the suspects chummy" (Schaffer: 15), but near the end of the play Milo savagely dismisses Wyke's assertion that the classical detective novel is "the normal recreation of noble minds" (Schaffer: 14):

> Take a look at yourself, Andrew, and ask yourself a few simple questions about your attachment to the English detective story…the only place you can inhabit is a dead world – a country house world where peers and colonels die in their studies; where butlers steal the port, and pert parlour maids cringe…It's a world of coldness and class hatred, and two dimensional characters who are not expected to communicate; it's a world where only the amateurs win, and where foreigners are automatically figures of fun…To put it shortly the detective story is the normal recreation of snobbish, out-dated, life-hating, ignoble minds. (Schaffer: 90)

It is also for his mockery of Wyke's beloved fictional detective, St. John Lord Merridew, and the values that he represents rather than the affair with his wife that ultimately leads to Milo's shooting at the end of the play (Schaffer: 92).

Yet Wyke is also aware that he is writing against the prevailing mood of the time. By the 1960s the classical detective novel had been superceded by the *thriller*. For example, the year *Sleuth* was produced on stage saw the publication of Ted Lewis's *Jack's Return Home*,[2] George V. Higgins's, *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* and Colin Watson's *The Killer*. Yet, Wyke still observes, "You know even in these days I still set my own work among the gentry. And a great number of people enjoy it, in spite of the Welfare State" (Schaffer: 14). It is of course the creation

of the post-war Welfare State and the consensus by successive governments to uphold its founding principles that, according to Wyke, has led to Britain's moral and political decline. On several occasions in the play, Harold Wilson's government (which was still in power when *Sleuth* premiered in February 1970), is bitterly referred to in relation to the devaluation of sterling and the imposition of high taxation rates on the wealthy (Schaffer: 24). Despite this, Wyke's fictional creation St. John Lord Merridew survives and is still, according to his author, "Known to millions all over the civilized world". Quoting directly from one of his own novels, Wyke describes his amateur detective as "An ambulatory tun of port with the face of Father Christmas…A classical scholar with a taste for good pipes and bad puns, but with a nose for smelling out evil, superior to anything, in the force" (Schaffer: 27).

Yet, lurking beneath this comforting fictional world, Schaffer also associates the classical detective novel with other less attractive features. As mentioned, at the end of the play Milo confronts Wyke about the insularity and snobbery operating within classic detective fiction, and we are also made aware of another unwelcome feature: its xenophobia. Wyke, unsurprisingly, shares this prejudice. Curiously, one of the first questions he asks Milo concerns his antecedents and ethnic origin. We are told that Milo's mother "was born in Hereford, a farmer's daughter", but his father is an Italian, who fled to Britain in the 1930s from Mussolini's Fascist dictatorship. On learning this, Wyke immediately asks if Milo is Jewish, which he affirms that he is on his mother's side. Despite seeming to respond sympathetically, calling Mussolini's persecution of the Jews a "Dreadful business, dreadful' - and despite assuring Milo that 'We're all liberals here. I have no prejudice against Jews, or even half Jews. Why some of my best friends are half Jews" (Schaffer: 16), soon afterwards Wyke requests that were Milo to marry his wife any issue from the union should be baptized into the Church of England (Schaffer: 17). Later, when Milo argues that by killing him Wyke's soul will be damned, Wyke cuttingly replies, "I didn't think Jews believed in hell" (Schaffer: 47).

These anti-Semitic sentiments are not so surprising, given Wyke's reverence for detective novelists such as G.K Chesterton and Dorothy L. Sayers, where the Jew, (and foreigners in general), either seem to occupy the centre of international crime rings, or else are depicted as grasping parvenus, or louche sexual predators. Later in the play when Milo is pleading for his life, he asks Wyke the reason why he wants to kill him: "I'm amazed you have to ask. But since you do, it's perfectly simple. I hate you because you are a culling spick. A wop – a not one of me" (Schaffer: 49-50). In an influential essay on detective fiction, George Grella comments that, "The offense of foreign birth or blood seems too trifling to be murdered for, but Englishmen in general distrust the foreigner" (Grella: 98). His example, taken from the American John Dickson Carr's novel *Death Turns the Tables* (1941), features the detective Dr Gideon Fell, on whom Wyke bases his creation St. John Lord Merridew. In the novel, we learn of the murder of Anthony Morrell, an Italian businessman. Grella argues that the reason for his death has partly come about because he represents a "symbol of lower class virility" (Grella: 97). In Schaffer's play, Milo Tindall, who has moved up the social ladder via his minor public school and now runs a successful travel agency[3] is the same embodiment of a classless sexual charisma that ultimately leads to his demise. It certainly lies at the root of Wyke's enmity towards his rival:

> I hate your smarmy, good looking Latin face and your easy manner. I'll bet you're easy in a ski lodge, and easy on a yacht, and easy on a beach. I'll bet a pound to a penny, that you wear a gold charm round your neck, and that your chest is hairy and in summer matted with sun oil…I hate you because you're a seducer of women and a king among marsh-mallow snakes. (Schaffer: 49-50)

By contrast, expression of such outright xenophobia is rare in Pinter's work, although it occasionally manifests itself in early plays. For example, in his first play *The Room* (1957), Mr Hudd, on finding Riley, a blind black man with his wife, simply exclaims "Lice!" (Pinter 1990: 110) before striking him. In *The Caretaker*, racial otherness is an off-stage threat to the vagrant Davies, who rails at his fellow workers at the café: "Poles, Greeks, Blacks…all them aliens" (Pinter 1990: 17),

while later he expresses concern at the possibility of having to share a toilet in Aston's house "with them Blacks" (Pinter 1990: 27). In Pinter's film version of *Sleuth*, Wyke's antisemitism is absent, yet the dislike of Milo being predicated on racial grounds is retained:

> A[ndrew] – Milo. What an interesting name. You're a foreigner I take it?
> M[ilo] – My father is Italian.
> A – Milo sounds Hungarian
> M – Does it?
> …
> A – You're sure your father isn't Hungarian?
> M – Well, he's kept it dead secret for years hasn't he?
> A – And your mother?
> M – English
> A – So, you're kind of half breed? (Pinter 2003a).

Pinter then deliberately confuses things further by Wyke revealing his own Dutch antecedents, which Milo exploits to similar ends in order to gain power:

> M – You speak Dutch yourself?
> W – Not a word
> M –Well, you're not much of Dutchman then are you? When it comes down to it I'm more of a Dutchman than you.
> A – I'm more of a Dutchman than you are a Hungarian. That's certainly true.
> M – ~~I'm not a Hungarian~~ (Pinter 2003b: 8880/2/103).

Characteristically, Pinter takes this preoccupation with ethnic origin to absurdly comic proportions, with Milo later telling Wyke that he is "Irish, Connemara. Spanish descent. By way of Uganda. My grandparents were slaves. My mother was a dark-eyed dusky beauty" (*Sleuth* 2008).

In her discussion of all three versions of *Sleuth*, Monika Pietrzak-Franger points out that in both the original play and the 1972 film, the battle between Wyke and Milo for dominance is determined by the former's "control over the medium of the detective novel" (Pietrzak-Franger: 184). Not surprisingly, it is Wyke who dominates at

first, but Milo quickly learns to become adept at subverting the literary rules by which Wyke plays. This he achieves by disguising himself as Inspector Doppler, and succeeds in confounding the cliché of police detectives' portrayal in novels as witless 'plodders' who are always destined to be traduced by their amateur (and frequently aristocratic) counterparts.

In Pinter's screenplay, little remains of this struggle for dominance being conducted through the rules of the detective novel. While the plan for Milo to steal the jewels is retained as well as his return in disguise as Inspector Black (in a change of name from the Inspector Doppler in Schaffer), the rules of combat between the two men are based more on differences in material status. Their opening exchange on meeting makes this clear:

> *He [Wyke] offers his hand. Milo takes it*
> Wyke
> You got the train to Charlebury, did you?
> Milo
> I drove
> Wyke
> Oh, you drove?
> Milo
> That's my car
> Andrew
> What, the little one?
> Milo
> Not the big one
> Andrew
> No. The big one's mine. What do you think of it?
> Milo
> Very handsome (Pinter 2003b).

Here we are in familiar Pinter territory, and in other work, most notably *The Collection*, a similar confrontation and ensuing rivalry takes place between James and a younger man, Bill, whom the former also suspects of having an affair with his wife. As in *Sleuth*, competi-

tion takes the form of gameplaying, bluff and a slowly growing admiration by the cuckolded James for his rival.

As mentioned, Pinter does not altogether abandon the emphasis Schaffer places on the detective novel: rather, he changes the genre that Wyke as a novelist works in to that of the *thriller*. In his early career as an actor, Pinter performed in Patrick Hamilton's play *Rope* (1929), a thriller that he much admired, describing it in a letter to his friend and fellow actor Barry Foster as a work of genius. In his biography on Pinter, Michael Billington sees its two murderous protagonists, Brandon and Granillo, as prototypes of Goldberg and McCann in *The Birthday Party* (1958) (1996: 43), while Robert Gordon points out that throughout his career the conventions of the Hollywood thriller appeared just as frequently in Pinter's work as the often-cited indebtedness to Kafka's fiction (Gordon: 2). Marvin Carlson in his book *Death Traps: The Postmodern Comedy Thriller* observes, "At the center of almost every thriller of the 1970s and 1980s is found a husband, a wife, and a male or female lover" (Carlson 1997: 44). Despite belonging to the tradition of the country house detective novel, even *Sleuth* in its first incarnation as a play incorporates the adulterous triangle from film noir thrillers such as *Double Indemnity* (1944) and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946), that leads to murder,

Yet Pinter's relationship to the thriller draws above all from its *affect* and it is this factor that crucially differentiates it from the detective novel. In his overview of the thriller genre, David Glover identifies its chief difference from the detective novel being a "direct impact upon the nervous systems of... readers [and] the way in which it persistently seeks to raise the stakes of the narrative, heightening or exaggerating the experience of events by transforming them into rising cause of danger, violence or shock" (Glover: 136-8). What makes Pinter's contribution to drama significant is that he takes the visceral threat of the thriller – the pursuit and murder of victims for instance, and manages to capture the same mounting sense of tension, not through any overt violence, but through seemingly mundane incidents or exchanges of dialogue between his characters: examples include Goldberg and McCann persuading Stanley to sit down in *The Birthday Party* (Pinter

1990: 40-1), the entrapment and drowning of a wasp inside a marmalade jar over the breakfast table in *A Slight Ache* (1959) (Pinter 1990: 155-8), or the battle for dominance between Lenny and Ruth in *The Homecoming* (1965) over a glass of water (Pinter 1991: 41-3). In the same vein, Pinter's theatre also follows the widely accepted understanding of the way thrillers are constructed in comparison to the detective novel. Robert W. Winks outlines this difference, even though he disagrees with the definition itself: "mystery fiction 'explains reality', (if through a glass darkly)" whereas thriller fiction "does not 'explain' but rather 'reports actions'" (Winks 1980: 9). David Glover also observes that the two genres frequently bleed into one another, such as in Agatha Christie's early novels *The Secret Adversary* (1922) and *The Seven Dials Mystery* (1929) (Glover:136).

In the 2007 film of *Sleuth*, Kenneth Branagh also spoke of how casting influenced the decision to make Wyke the author of thrillers instead of detective novels: "With Michael [Caine] he seemed [as Wyke] to be a character not probably writing country house murder mysteries, but would be writing more serial killer novels and Harold Pinter agreed with that, so we had great fun coming up with the book cover titles" (*Sleuth*: 2008). Branagh's reference to the novels comes from a scene in the film where the two men meet for the first time at Wyke's country house. Whereas in the 1972 film the walls are adorned with detective novel ephemera, including a framed photograph of Agatha Christie and a signpost for Baker Street, in Pinter's version Wyke draws Tindall's attention to his collection of novels residing beneath a framed publicity poster of the author, who is described as 'The Master of Menace.'[4]The poster also includes a list of titles from his novels whose names reflect something of the macabre and sensationalist nature of the thriller genre. The titles also show an impish Pinter referencing incidents and phrases that have appeared in some of his own plays: *Rat in a Trap*, *Blackout*, *The Obelisk*, *Dead Fish*, *Loser's Kiss*, *Blind Man's Bluff*[5], *A Midnight Dip*, *Black Snow*, *Steak Tartare*, *Dead of Night*, *The Cat's Whiskers*, *Double Scotch* and the forthcoming, *The Smiling Man*.[6]

In early drafts of the script, Pinter considered opening the film with a scene from one of the screen adaptations of Wyke's thrillers. For

example, in notes entitled 'Possible Opening' Pinter provides a short scene in which Wyke is watching an adaptation of one his thrillers on television:

> 2. TV screen.
> Man in empty nightclub. Dawn. Full ashtrays, empty bottles.
> Man- Are you there?
> 5. TV
> Man – I know you're there.
> Voice – (loudspeaker) I'm here all right.
> 10. TV
> Voice – what do you want?
> Man- I've come to talk.
> 19. TV
> Voice – walk onto the dancefloor and stand in the light (Pinter: ADD MS 88880/2/103)

In a later handwritten first draft, Wyke's presence as a viewer of his own work is made more explicit:

> 20. TV Screen
> Man in empty nightclub. Ashtrays, empty bottles
> Man? Riley?[7] Are you there?
> …
> 4. TV
> Man: - I know you're here
> Voice: I'm here all right
> (Loudspeaker) I'm right here.
> 6. TV Andrew watching
> Voice - What do you want?
> Man – I've come to talk (Pinter: ADD MS 88880/2/103).

Significantly, this first draft identifies Wyke as a writer of detective novels, but this is crossed out and replaced with "crime novel" in the first typewritten draft. Yet, Pinter never quite fully abandons the close connections to the detective genre in Schaffer's play – rather he subverts them. This technique can also be found in early plays such as *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Birthday Party*, where formulaic elements

from the thriller (two hired killers awaiting their next assignment; two men from the criminal underworld coming to reclaim a fugitive from their organization), become destabilized. This destabilization has been given the attribution 'Pinteresque', and it is not difficult to see why a popular form like the detective novel with its tightly circumscribed rules might appeal. This has been given as one of the main reasons for the popularity of classical detective fiction, which George Grella believes comes from the assumption of "a benevolent or knowable universe… [and always provides a plausible and rational explanation of even the most perplexing chain of events]," (Grella: 101). In contrast, David Glover sees "The world of the thriller… [as] one that that is radically uncertain" (138). From his early association with the Theatre of Absurd onwards, the literary and dramatic genres that have proved most useful to Pinter have also been amongst the most stable and reassuring for its audiences: the form and structure of the thriller, despite its inherent sense of threat is at the same time a reassuringly familiar one. However, by a process of unravelling and reassemblage, Pinter is able to make what already holds the promise of a gradually heightened sense of threat both strange and discomforting.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in *Sleuth*. A key line in Pinter's screenplay, and that subsequently became used in publicity for the film is Wyke's advice to Milo, "Obey the rules". Here, he is referring to the robbery that Milo carries out according to a strict set of instructions provided by Wyke: these follow a set pattern with which readers of crime and thriller fiction would be readily familiar. Pinter also obeys these rules, at least on the surface - retaining the robbery from Schaffer's play and keeping to Wyke's elaborate directives for staging the burglary. This also extends to Schaffer's own subversion of the rules governing the detective genre, which Pinter retains, when Milo disguises himself as a police inspector.

However, Pinter's subversions are also in evidence. A good example of this comes from the settings in Schaffer's play / film which both take place in Wyke's Norman Manor house, itself a familiar trapping of classic detective fiction. It is also a marker for Wyke's attitude towards England and Englishness based on demarcations of heritage, wealth,

class and race. In Pinter's screenplay, the façade of the grand country house is retained in the opening shots of the film and described in his original handwritten notes as "House Georgian; tall, silent, elegant" (Pinter, 88880/2/103). However, the interior is completely different. Instead of the minstrel's gallery and grandfather clock in Schaffer's play (Schaffer: 11), here the house is dominated by surveillance technology and contemporary paintings, sculptures and furniture by artists and designers including Gary Hume, Anthony Gormley and Ron Arad that reflect the tastes of Wyke's wife Maggie.

Much like the redesigned interior of Wyke's country home, Pinter's adaptation has excavated and removed much of the architecture that makes up the detective novel lore within Schaffer's play. Yet it is interesting to see that in early drafts of Pinter's script, elements from the genre still remain. A significant scene, later abandoned, prepares the audience for Milo's skills at disguise when he gives Wyke a video to watch. In it, Milo plays the part of St. John Lord Merridew. Despite it being a television adaptation of his own work, Wyke does not recognize that the actor playing Merridew is his rival:

> *Milo puts on video of Lord Merridew speech*
> A[ndrew] – Why are you showing me this? I've seen it.
> M[ilo] – What's the actor's name?
> A – How do I know? Jack Nicholson? Sean Connery? Marlon Brando? How would I know? I'm not interested in actors.
> M – Is that a fact?
> *Fast forward to end of video. It is of Merridew removing moustache, wig etc. He is in his dressing room. He looks at the camera. Smiles. It is Milo.*
> A – Jesus Christ!
> M – Good part
> A – You bastard. You're everywhere
> M – I cover the waterfront (Pinter 88880/2/103).[8]

While undoubtedly a good scene, it is not difficult to see why in the end Pinter rejected it: not only does it anticipate the revelation of Milo's disguise as Inspector Black, but it also contradicts the decision to make Wyke a writer of thrillers. By retaining the character of Merridew, the two genres of detective fiction and thriller would have

become entangled and confused. This bleeding of forms happens further on in another exchange, also subsequently deleted in the same handwritten first draft. Here, Wyke is talking to Milo disguised as Inspector Black:

> A – I no longer have a wife. She died quite recently last night.
> M – Oh dear. Suicide?
> A – She was having an affair with a paranoid schizophrenic hairdresser. He killed her in a fit of raging jealousy.
> M- Dear oh dear. Who was he jealous of?
> A – Me.
> M – How did he kill her?
> A – Oh the classic. Strangled with a scarf. I think he got it from one of my books…
> (Pinter, 88880/2/103).

Despite subsequently abandoning them, these allusions to the classic detective novel indicate Pinter's familiarity with the genre. Marvin Carlson observes that in 1955 "the mystery play, or thriller was one of the most common genres on the London stage" (Carlson 1993: 431), and in his study, *Pinter: The Player's Playwright*, David Thompson points out that, as a repertory actor during the 1950s, Pinter appeared in several Agatha Christie plays, both in adaptations of her novels and original works for the stage. Thompson argues that this engenders in Pinter an intimate knowledge of the detective genre that would later come to be sublimated into his own work. While Beatrix Hesse in her study of the detective stage play in the twentieth century only identifies Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* as fitting directly into this category (Hesse: 65), Thompson associates (not always entirely convincingly) a number of Pinter's other works as bearing an influence of the Agatha Christie plays he had appeared in as an actor with various repertory companies during the 1950s. Connections range from Gibbs's slaughter of the staff and inmates in *The Hothouse* (1958) being influenced by the stage adaptation of Christie's novel *Ten Little Niggers* (1939) to the use of blackouts that feature in many 1950s detective dramas that also occur in both *The Birthday Party* and *No Man's Land* (1975) (Thompson: 55-8).

More convincing are the connections Thompson draws between the interrogation of witnesses and the cross examination of suspects in Christie's play *Spider's Web* (1954), and Pinter's *The Birthday Party* and *The Caretaker* (Thompson: 38).[9] Allied to this is Christie's common device of using characters to give alternative accounts of identical incidents. Thompson observes that Pinter does this on several occasions in *Old Times* (1971) with Anna and Deeley's differing versions of seeing the film *Odd Man Out* (1947) at the cinema. Thompson points out that while contradictory narratives are usually resolved in traditional detective drama, often by the guilty party being discovered at the end, no such verification is ever forthcoming in Pinter's work (Thompson: 50-1). By the same token, in *The Birthday Party*, Thompson argues that the interrogation seems to be conducted without any intention of gaining either the facts or a confession from Stanley (1985: 50-1).

It is also true to say that several of Pinter's characters turn amateur detective. These include the aforementioned James in *The Collection*, who attempts to piece together the events that took place over the course of an evening at the Leeds hotel where his wife Stella and Bill were both staying, or *Night School* (1960) in which the ex-convict Walter attempts to discover the secret world that his fellow lodger Sally, apparently a teacher by day, inhabits each evening.

In conclusion, Pinter's *Sleuth* is neither an update or a remake of Schaffer's play / film, but a continuation of Marvin Carlson's principal argument in *Death Traps: The Postmodern Comedy Thriller* - namely, that since the early 1970s, British and American dramatists' responses towards crime and thriller genres have taken a turn towards postmodernism. According to Carlson, this has mainly concerned the manipulation of realism, of which he cites *Sleuth* as a key progenitor (Carlson 1997: 2). Specifically, he comments, "The playwright constantly seeks to surprise the audience about any and every aspect of the dramatic construction, and to this all-encompassing game, anything may be sacrificed, including most notably, the rules of the genre itself" (Carlson 1997: 15). Pinter's screenplay takes this disruption of realism together with the manipulation of detective drama / the thriller even further. With its contemporary look, such as the inclusion of works by artists

associated with the postmodernism of 1990s Britart,[10] this version of *Sleuth* seems even more in thrall to its preoccupation with surfaces, while the casting of Michael Caine and Jude Law also interweaves several ironic intertextual cinematic doublings that not only reference the 1972 film of *Sleuth*, but also their own careers as film actors.[11]

This article has also attempted to argue that, despite overt attempts to distance his version of *Sleuth* from the classic interwar detective novel, elsewhere traces have continued to haunt some of his work. Allied to this, both early critical and audience responses to his plays also encountered them in the same way as detective novels, with the critic / audience approaching the play on the alert for clues buried within the text or the performance that might solve the puzzles that the playwright had set for them. In an interview, Pinter described the process of writing as occupying a similar position, and it is worth noting how the language of the detective novel comes through: "I don't know what kind of characters my plays will have until they…well, until they *are*. I don't conceptualise in any way. Once I've got the clues, I follow them – that's my job, really, to follow the clues."[12] Here we find Pinter simultaneously both writer and detective, with the latter in close pursuit of the former in the hunt to decode meanings for the puzzles set for critics and audiences alike.

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[1] Anthony Schaffer, *Sleuth*, London: Marion Boyars, 1971, n.p. All subsequent references will incorporate page numbers from this source directly into the main body of the text.

[2] Lewis's novel was subsequently adapted into one of the most significant gangster thrillers in British cinema, *Get Carter* (1971). This also starred Michael Caine and was produced the year before his appearance in *Sleuth*.

[3] In Schaffer's 1972 film adaptation Milo is a hairdresser. Characteristically, in Pinter's screenplay, an ambiguity remains about Milo's profession. Despite explaining that he is an actor who drives a taxi when not in acting work, Wyke continues to harbour the belief that Milo is a hairdresser.

[4] The poster is also something of a Pinter in-joke. His early plays were famously described by the theatre critic Irving Wardle as 'comedies of menace', a term that is still used in Pinter criticism. The publisher, 'Baron Books' is also a reference to the stage name, David Baron, that Pinter took as an actor in the 1950s.

[5] The children's game, played to sinister effect in *The Birthday Party*.

[6] A reference perhaps to an incident in *The Caretaker* and Davies' discomfort at Aston's habit of silently watching and smiling when he thinks him asleep. Davies complains to Aston's brother Mick, 'he looks down at my bed, there's a smile on his face! What the hell's he smiling at?' (Pinter, 1988: 72).

[7] It is interesting to note that in this last major work Pinter returns to the name of a character who featured in his first play *The Room*.

[8] Pinter subsequently crossed out the following exchange that takes place after Milo has taken off his disguise:

> A – That's my character. I created him. He's based on me. You can't play me!
> M –Yes I can. (Pinter ADD MS 88880/2/103).

[9] David T. Thompson, *Pinter: The Player's Playwright*, p.38. Others who have adopted this view of Pinter's incorporation of the detective play into *The Birthday Party* coming from his repertory days as an actor include Billington 1973: 173-6 and Elsom 1976:107.

[10] In the film these works included Gary Hume's *Hounds of Hell* and Ron Arad's *Bad Tempered Chair*.

[11] For example, a complex triangularity exists with the casting of Jude Law as Tindall, who in 2004 starred in the remake of *Alfie,* taking over the eponymous role that Michael Caine originally played in 1966 film adaptation of Bill Naughton's novel

[12] Ian Smith, *Pinter in the Theatre*, London: Nick Hern, 2005, p.56.