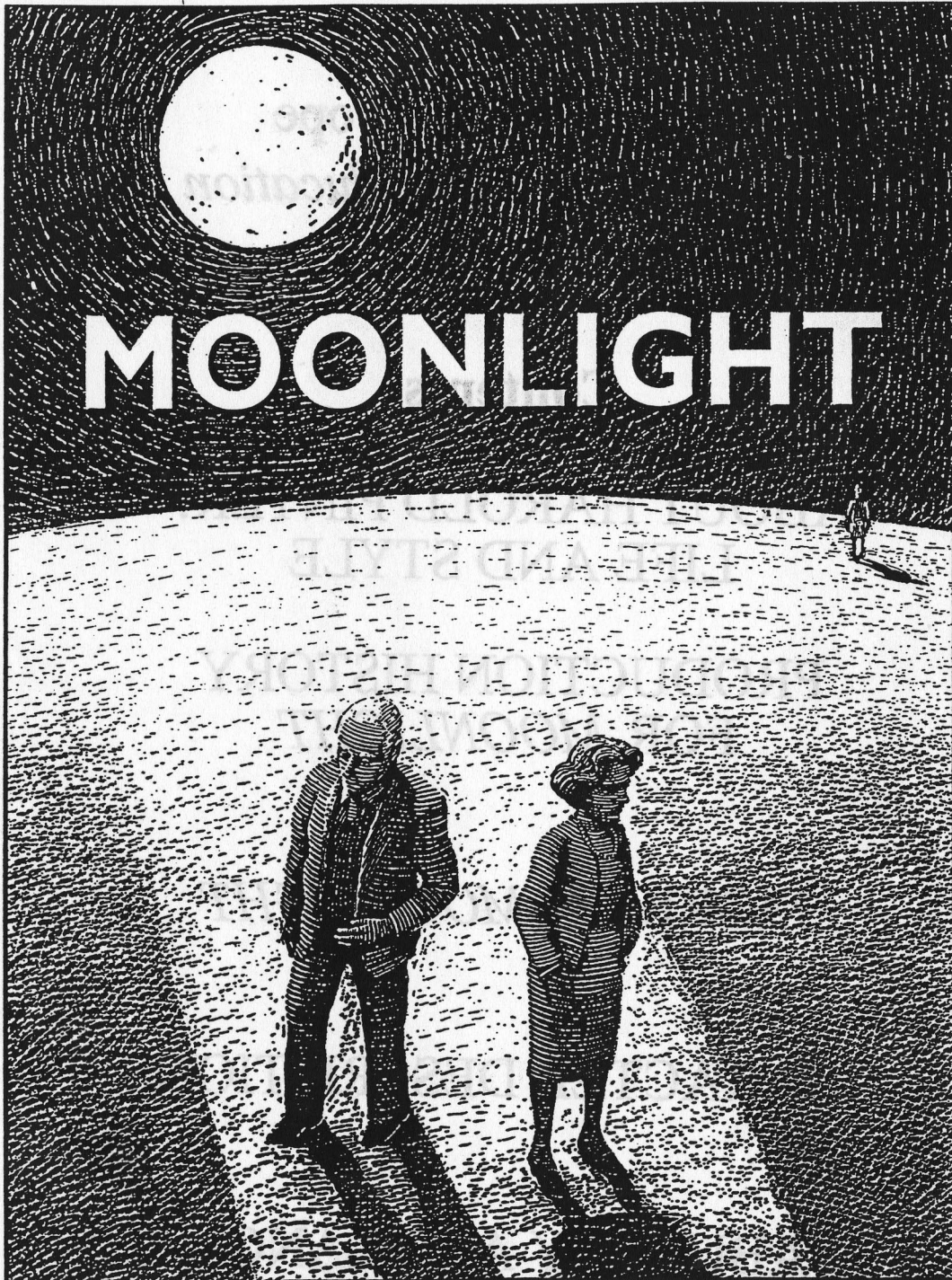


Roundabout Theatre Company



**NYNEX Family Series
Study Guide**

MOONLIGHT

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ABOUT HAROLD PINTER: LIFE AND STYLE

Life

Harold Pinter was born in 1930 and grew up in the East End of London. His family immigrated to England from Portugal early in the century and changed their family name from La Pinta to Pinter. Harold Pinter started writing poetry while still a youngster. His favorite subjects as a teenager were playing cricket (the British form of baseball), writing poetry and girls.

During World War II, when Pinter was only nine years old, he was sent out of London with hundreds of other children, in a unified effort to protect these youngsters from the constant bombings to which the great city was being subjected. Pinter was, and still remains, very close to his family and so this year long separation was very painful for him. Luckily, his whole family survived the war and was reunited when Pinter was ten.

After graduating from his local grammar school Pinter decided to pursue a career in the theatre and enrolled in the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA). Unable to fit in to the regimen at this esteemed school of dramatic arts, Pinter did not complete his studies at RADA. After dropping out, Pinter registered at the Central School of Speech and Drama. But this institution did not suit Pinter's needs any better than had RADA.

Undaunted, Pinter decided to learn his craft by working as an actor in a theatrical touring company headed by veteran actor/manager Anew McMaster. Pinter toured with the McMaster troupe for two or three years. Traveling all over Ireland, Pinter performed in a rich selection of great classic plays, in a company structured similarly to a 19th

century acting troupe. In this way Harold Pinter found the training and experience necessary for him to refine his own very personal and distinct vision of the craft of playwriting.

At various times in his career Pinter acted under the name David Baron. It was a name that he would occasionally assume even in his playwriting years. Perhaps this alternate identity was an echo in real life of the dramatic device he so often uses in his plays; in a Pinter play a character might be who he seems to be at the moment or the very different person he appears to be the next. The changing of character names, as well as the forgetting of names, is a strong element in Pinter's most recent play, *MOONLIGHT*.

Pinter continued to write during his years as an actor but did not begin to write plays until 1957. His early works for the stage include *THE ROOM*, *THE BIRTHDAY PARTY* and *THE DUMBWAITER*. When first introduced Pinter's plays were unusual and remain unique reflections of his singular dramatic imagination. His innovative approach to dramatic writing includes his style and the venues for which he chooses to write.

Pinter has written for radio, television and film as well as for the stage. (*A SLIGHT ACHE* [1959] and *A NIGHT OUT* [1960] for radio, *TEA PARTY* [1965] and *THE BASEMENT* [1967] for television, *THE PUMPKIN EATER* [1964], *ACCIDENT* [1965] and *THE QUILLER MEMORANDUM* [1966] for film.) Early on he also began adapting his own work from one medium to another. (His first West End stage hit *THE CARETAKER* [1960] was made into a film in 1962 and the radio play *A SLIGHT ACHE* transformed into a stage play in 1961.) By creating plays for so many

different dramatic outlets Pinter developed a wider audience for his style of writing.

Pinter's first major play, *THE BIRTHDAY PARTY*, was a tremendous failure when it ran in London for only six performances in 1958. Pinter, however was still being invited to write for other mediums, including radio and television. While greater stage success did follow quickly, in 1960 with *THE CARETAKER*, Pinter continued to work in as many mediums as possible. Pinter's radio and television plays entered his audience's homes allowing them to become familiar with his dramatic voice without great effort. In a way these dramas provided the audience with a "study guide" to his style, just as you are reading this study guide now.

Style

It is hard, if not impossible, to define Harold Pinter's dramatic style. Perhaps the most useful approach is to provide some information on who and what may have influenced his way of writing, what some of his plays are like. It is up to the individual audience member to find his or her own way of appreciation a Pinter play.

Influences:

As a young writer Harold Pinter acknowledged that his dramatic vision was shaped by the writing of Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett and also by American gangster movies. There are quite a few other authors and dramatic pieces that Pinter has included in this list at various times, but these three influences can be seen as a central representative group.

We all remember our favorite Hollywood gangster movies, films with Humphrey Bogart, James Cagney, Edward G. Robinson and George Raft. Produced in the 30's and 40's, these films followed a standard formula; they focused on urban gangsters or bullies who invade a peaceful world. The thugs threaten that world or someone in that world with destruction and then they are forced to retreat as law and order are reinstated. More contemporary gangster films might include *THE STORY OF BONNIE AND CLYDE*, *SCARFACE*, *CARLITO'S WAY* and even certain cops and robbers television series.

The influence of the gangster movie on the writing of Harold Pinter is clear. Almost all of his plays contain an element of menace, a character or characters who function as "gangsters", threatening another character with some sort of physical or psychological harm. In his earlier plays the threat of harm was very often physical; in the later plays Pinter has turned towards the threat of psychological damage. In almost all the plays the harm is ultimately controlled and eliminated. As a matter of fact Pinter's plays are sometimes called "comedies of menace" because despite the presence of fear, there is a sense of control and the dialogue of the characters is very often ridiculous or funny.

It is impossible to discuss the way in which Pinter characters talk without mentioning the way in which this playwright uses pauses. Pinter has become famous for his use of silence between his character's responses to one another. While the dialogue in a Pinter play seems to make sense at any given moment sometimes the subject moves around so that finally it is hard to tell when anyone is speaking the truth or just making up an entertaining story. When a Pinter character waits a long time before responding to another character's speech it

may be because Pinter wants the characters to be able to consider carefully what their next response might be. Will it be the truth or a fiction? And/or it could be that Pinter is giving the audience a moment to consider whether or not they will believe what has just been said and what might be coming right around the corner?

Franz Kafka (1883-1924) wrote novels and short stories (most published after his death) in which the reality of character and reader is seriously threatened by disorder, dislocation in time and space, and a general sense of unreality. Characters are burdened by guilt and fear around events that they may or may not have caused, but out of which they cannot escape, make sense of or possibly even survive.

Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) wrote novels, plays and films. He is considered one of the greatest playwrights of all time. Often described as examples of the "theatre of the absurd", Beckett's plays are dominated by a sense of doom, reality is fragile, characters have no control over their lives and their relationships are usually based on need and rarely on choice. Friends grow weary of one another but must stay together to keep from going mad or being destroyed, enemies remain together because apart they would lose their reason to live. Just as the influence of the gangster movie on Pinter's plays is clear, so are the influences of Kafka and Beckett.

Description of a Pinter play:

Here's a very short description of a model Pinter play. On the stage we see an enclosed space; very often it is a room of some sort. All of the dramatic action will take place in this space. The fictional worlds created by Kafka and Beckett are similarly and tightly

controlled by their internal sense of logic, a logic that often does not relate to the outside world but strictly controls the characters.

A Pinter character exists within this closed space and then another character is invited in or simply decides to invade that space. These characters engage in a sort of duel of words, a competition of language and idea. Then another character (or characters) enter the space as a menace, a threat. The balance of power shifts as the "menace" causes the original character, or characters, to become concerned with their ability to defend their physical or psychological existence. Then the menace is removed or subdued and the original duel of words continues.

As mentioned earlier, it is often difficult to decide when the characters in a Pinter play are telling the truth or telling a lie. It is difficult to decide if the action is happening for the first time or has been happening over and over again for some time and will continue into the future. While the world of the characters seems to be real it could also be make believe. It is hard to tell if characters are friends or enemies, if they like or dislike each other. It is also hard to tell who is in control and who is being controlled.

Pinter shares many of these literary mannerisms with Kafka, Beckett and even with more contemporary playwrights like Edward Bond, Tom Stoppard and David Storey. And just as these writers depend heavily on the use of humor in their works, so does Pinter. While a first description of a play by Pinter may seem grim, the reality is quite the opposite. Pinter plays are usually filled with sly jokes, surprisingly funny interchanges and comic moments.

How to approach a Pinter play:

When you see a play by Pinter it is good to enter with a willingness to listen carefully, watch critically, laugh, remember information and finally make up your own mind concerning what the play is really about and who the characters really are. Pinter provides his audience with all the parts for making several different kinds of plays in one script.

After seeing a play by Harold Pinter you may be surprised to find yourself creating small "Pinter" plays of your own out of a conversation overheard from another table in a restaurant, from interactions witnessed on the subway or street, or from confusing conversations you experience yourself.

Whether or not you enjoy a play by Pinter while you are sitting in the theatre, it is a rare theatre goer who is not deeply affected by a Pinter theatre experience. It is the lasting impression that he makes on his audience that puts Pinter into the world class of living dramatists. It will be interesting to discuss his affect on you after you have seen the Roundabout's production of his new play, *MOONLIGHT*.

PRODUCTION HISTORY FOR MOONLIGHT

Harold Pinter has been writing for the stage, screen and radio since 1957. He achieved his first great success in 1960 with his play *THE CARETAKER*. Today he is considered one of the greatest living playwrights in the world. But *MOONLIGHT* is the first full length play Pinter has produced since 1978, when *BETRAYAL* played in London and New York to glowing reviews.

Pinter states that the first notes he made for the play that was to become *MOONLIGHT* date back to 1977. These notes were made on a number of yellow pads that Pinter kept despite the fact that for twenty-six years, he didn't understand what the notes were to become. *MOONLIGHT* emerged as a play in Pinter's imagination during a revival production of his play *NO MAN'S LAND* in which Pinter played the part of Hirst. During the performances of *NO MAN'S LAND* Pinter found himself rethinking the words he had written so many years before. There was one particular speech delivered by Hirst about death and remembering those who are now gone that struck him in a new way. It was from this experience that *MOONLIGHT* was created.

The play was first produced at a small theatre in Islington, a neighborhood in London, called the Almeida, in September of 1993. It transferred to the Comedy Theatre, near the Haymarket (London's equivalent of Broadway,) soon after. Pinter received rave reviews for both productions. John Lahr, the theatre critic for *THE NEW YORKER* magazine hailed *MOONLIGHT* as a "big, brave play, as dramatically compact and as emotionally searing as anything Pinter has written." Critics in London were in almost universal agreement; Pinter had created another masterpiece.

Critics have emphasized the fact that *MOONLIGHT* is Pinter's first full length play since *BETRAYAL* in 1978. This emphasis has made it seem as if Pinter stopped writing for almost fifteen years. This is very far from the truth. Deeply involved in human rights issues all over the globe, Pinter has written several short dramas based on his response to political events. He has written articles and essays, to say nothing of the many screenplays

produced during this period. There is no question that *MOONLIGHT* is a dramatic milestone, and a welcome event for the theatre world, but it is not the product of a playwright whose typewriter has been idle.

Harold Pinter chose to delay the American premiere of *MOONLIGHT* so that it could be the inaugural play in the Laura Pels Theatre at the Roundabout. We regard this choice on the part of Pinter as a tremendous compliment and a vote of support for the Roundabout. We are proud to open our new stage with this brilliant new play.

MORE ON MOONLIGHT

Harold Pinter is often asked what his plays are about. The complicated speeches, the changing of character's names and the differing descriptions of the past, inspire audience members and artists alike to ask the playwright what he meant when he wrote a particular play or scene. Pinter is known for answering these questions quite directly and simply by saying that he doesn't know.

This response could be interpreted as flippant but perhaps it is better read as honest and correct. It is impossible for any artist to know entirely what his or her art will convey to an audience. The artist can have an intention, a hope of what will emerge from a work, but the complete effect cannot ever be known.

MOONLIGHT was inspired by Pinter's experience as an actor performing in his play *NO MAN'S LAND*. By revisiting this work, a work he himself created, Pinter discovered something in it he had never known was there. The playwright became his own audience and in so doing found a message that he as the playwright had missed. You,

the audience, are the final judge of what the play means for you. The only challenge necessary to meet is that of giving the experience a chance to affect you and then offering the artist the benefit of the doubt about the message.

Having established this as a foundation for further discussion, it is still interesting to know something of what Pinter has said about his play. For instance, what does Bridget have to do with the rest of her family? Is Andy really dying? Do Andy and Bel have any grandchildren? Why won't the sons visit their sick father?

Pinter feels that Bridget most probably is a ghost, except in the one scene where she appears with her brothers. This scene is a flashback to the days of their adolescence. Pinter doesn't know why, but in his imagining of these characters the brothers grew into adulthood, while Bridget did not progress beyond the age of sixteen. Pinter guesses that this is the age at which she must have died. It is also possible that her death is in some way connected to the grandchildren that Andy and Bel speak of but do not actually have. Neither of their sons has any children.

Whether or not Andy is dying remains a question to be answered by the audience. Pinter believes that this is the twilight of Andy's life. Andy was a civil servant, a blustering man who must have been hard on his family. The exact nature of the problems that led to the estrangement between parents and sons is unclear. It is clear, however, that the sons will never respond to their parent's requests for a visit and this breaks Andy's and Bel's hearts.

Pinter also is fairly certain that neither of the sons is actually physically ill. While one son never gets out of bed, and therefore must

be quite disturbed, he is not dying. The names that the sons bandy about are not real; they are made up. Most of the stories they tell are fantasies as well. Pinter is unsure as to what the significance may be of their pretending to run a Chinese laundry.

Unlike many of Pinter's earlier plays *MOONLIGHT* does not take place in one enclosed space. Nevertheless, the three spaces delineated on the stage still present the audience with locations in which Pinter's characters are trapped. The locations are placed very close together and yet they must be extremely far apart. The space occupied by Bridget is a ghostly place, bathed in moonlight, a place of memory and longing. It is a place that Bridget can never leave. The two sons are equally trapped in their small room. We are not sure why they can't or won't visit their parents, nor do we understand why they are unable to move forward with their lives. But it is clear that they are confined to the small space provided by their room. Perhaps the confinement of Andy and Bel is the most practical. We are given to understand that this elderly couple is waiting for an ending. There is nothing else for them to do, nowhere to go to avoid the inevitable. They must stay put and wait.

It is also usual for a Pinter play to contain some element of threat to a world otherwise calm and set in a certain order. In earlier Pinter plays this threat has taken the form of physical menace and/or psychological harm. At first glance it might be difficult to locate the threat faced by the characters in *MOONLIGHT*. But after consideration it is clear that the threat is the greatest threat that we all face, the threat of impending death. In his other plays Pinter has been able to structure the action so that the menace, whatever it has been, retreats in the end, leaving the characters much as they were at

the beginning of the action. In *MOONLIGHT* Pinter has created a situation in which the menace is present from the start to the conclusion of the play.

John Peter, theatre critic for the London Sunday Times, wrote in December of 1993, that in *MOONLIGHT*, "People are no longer seeking admittance, craving security or protecting their strongholds. This is a play about departure, about barely holding on, about letting go." This observation points to another difference between *MOONLIGHT* and previous plays by Pinter. In the past Pinter characters have been all about fighting for control over their lives, their space, even their reality when and wherever it is threatened. Despite the sadness built into *MOONLIGHT* it is the warmest and most touching of Pinter's plays to date.

Last, but not least, to be found in *MOONLIGHT*, is Pinter's sharp and bright sense of humor. While the play is undeniably about different kinds of death, the conversations, fantastical and real are full of outrageous jokes which in turn inspire great fits of laughter. You must interpret this as you will, but it may be seen as Pinter's way of saying that we all have to go sometime, some way, some how. There will be suffering along the way and serious things to say, but we can try to laugh a bit along the way.

CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

Andy - a man in his 50's. Andy has spent his life working as a civil servant of some sort. We get the impression that Andy was not a warm father or husband. He may have loved his children but they did not feel loved. He may have loved his wife, Bel, but she has not felt loved either. He is in bed for

the entire play chatting with Bel, exchanging hurtful reminders of painful historical events, infidelities, lost opportunities and unforgiving children. It seems that Andy is waiting to die.

Bel - a woman of 50. Bel was probably born into a social class higher than Andy's. She is a calm and somewhat cool woman, able to verbally hurt Andy as deeply as he can hurt her. According to Andy, both he and Bel were unfaithful to each other with the same woman, their friend Maria. Bel neither confirms, nor denies, his statement. We see Bel's greatest vulnerability when she calls her sons and asks them to come and see their sick father.

Bridget - a girl of 16. Bridget appears only as a ghostlike creature in the present. It is probable that she is dead and that her death caused a major schism in the family. We do not know the circumstances of her death. We do not know the full nature of her position to others in her family. And we do not know her exact connection to the grandchildren Andy and Bel do not have but speak of so longingly. We can suppose, however, that she has been very central to all of these issues. Bridget herself, mentions that she believes that she is all her parents have left.

Fred - a man of 27. The younger son of Andy and Bel, Fred, just as his father, never gets out of bed. It is not probable, however, that he is dying. It is likely that his spirit is quite ill and that may account for his treating himself like an invalid.

Jake - the older brother, a man of 28. Jake lives with Fred. Although Jake is more physically active than Fred he also seems to be trapped in the apartment that makes up their world. Jake and Fred spend most of their time playing word games, weaving the

stories of their boyhoods into strange fantastical fairytales. Many of the references they make to their father are snide and sarcastic, leading us to believe that family life had been quite disappointing.

Ralph - a man in his 50's. Ralph was an old friend to Andy and Bel. A soccer coach, Ralph is down to earth and yet somewhat disconnected from the things that happen in his own life. He has observations about the world that seem very sharp and at the same time irrelevant to what is actually happening.

Maria - a woman of 50. Married to Ralph, Maria was a close friend of Andy's and Bel's many years ago. According to Andy, Maria had separate affairs with both Andy and Bel. It seems from Maria's recollections that she was quite smitten with them both. Andy's statement could be correct. Maria and Ralph come to visit Andy and Bel after many years of drifting apart. Maria's memories include Bridget and the grandchildren Andy and Bel so sorely miss.

VOCABULARY AND LANGUAGE

Enjoy looking these words up! Some of them will be great fun to use to confuse, amaze and impress your friends.

ineptitude

derision

nonplused

voracious

lascivious

libidinous

donkey's years

pigswill

blasphemy

gluttony

buggery

approbation

motley crew

codicil

krugerrands

pesetas

Bognor Regis

mountebank

osmosis

paraphernalia

vacuous

puerile

physiotherapist

winding sheet

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tautologous

scabrous

incumbent

pedantic