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The Homecoming and The Cherry Orchard: Pinter's Inversion of Chekhov's Subtextual Method

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> [Subtext] . . . is the manifest, the inwardly felt expression
> of a human being in a part, which flows uninterruptedly be-
> tween the words of the text, giving them life and a basis
> for existing . . . It is the subtext that makes us say the
> words we do in a play.[1]
> — Constantin Stanislavsky

I. Introduction: The Subtext Problem in Chekhov and Pinter

The ever-present tension between literary criticism and performance analysis makes one wary about suggesting a cause and effect link between the work of a single dramatist and the development of a major acting method. And yet, it is impossible to separate the original concept of subtext, which emerged upon Stanislavsky's stage, from Anton Chekhov's revolutionary drama-turgy, which made startling demands upon that stage. Chekhov wanted specifically to narrow the gap between real life and stage life -- to do away with the worn-out well made play for-mula that permitted actors to declaim and gesticulate broadly, shouting incredible passions and externalizing larger-than-life desires. Chekhov's oblique dialogue had its most immediate im-pact upon the actor, who could no longer simply declaim if he or she hoped to convey the full content of his or her charac-ter's thought and feeling. Subtext was -- and still is -- an actor's tool, a method of close reading which permits the actor to uncover emotional motivations and aspects of character not explicitly stated in the text. As a critic's concept, subtext is too easily misunderstood, too often treated as a safety valve for interpretations not rooted directly in the text.

The danger of subtext as a critical tool has special rele-vance to the work of Harold Pinter, where it has received its most significant attention since Chekhov. It is usual to discuss

Pinter as a revolutionary dramatist in his own right. Thus, it is also usual, in analyzing subtext in his work, to lose sight of the concept's original meaning. An accurate analysis of the use of subtext in Pinter requires a comparison with Chekhov. When Chekhov wrote his four major plays at the turn of the twentieth century, he attempted to pass human interaction as it actually occurs through a theatrical medium more objective than that defined by the conventions of the nineteenth century. With a scientific yet compassionate eye for the details of human relationships, he took the focus away from the linear cause and effect progression of events, and centered it on unresolvable emotional interplay. As a result, he set in motion a new tradition of dramaturgical form: his particular use of subtext, fundamental to the new form, corresponds to the emotional interaction of unfulfillable loves and aspirations that he dramatizes. Pinter, perhaps more so than any other contemporary dramatist, has written out of the tradition Chekhov generated, furthering the drama of unfulfillable aspirations by writing a drama of emotional possession and dominance, and uncovering a new technique for the use of subtext to meet the special demands of this new kind of emotional interplay. Thus, as Andrew Kennedy claims, the emergence of subtext in Chekhov marked a significant development in "the falling apart of speech and action," and Pinter has taken the concept and pushed it "towards new and systematic subtleties, sometimes at the cost of mannerist obliqueness."[2] He has taken a concept that emerged with Chekhov's divorce of speech from passionate and direct action, and devised a new method

for its use -- a method comprising his own particular indirect correspondence between verbal contact and emotional interaction.

Stanislavsky's original definition of subtext is, by necessity, the ground upon which an analysis of the use of subtext by any playwright is built. The great director's notion, on its most fundamental level, is simply this: a character's emotional objectives -- what he or she wants from the other characters in each individual scene -- are discoverable in Chekhov only through a reading of the entire play. Although these objectives are not always explicitly stated, the actor must use the lines of the text to hint at them, because (as objectives) they form the motivational base for the statement of those lines. The series of emotional objectives thus embodies "a subtextual stream,"[3] an overall emotional drive, conscious or unconscious, against which the statements the character makes can be interpreted. As Kennedy explains simply and most precisely, subtext "is the interaction of text and context:"[4] it is the interaction of the spoken line with the objective that compels its utterance.

To understand Pinter's use of subtext, it is clearly necessary to get at the specific way in which he causes text and context to interact in his plays, and the way in which his method of interaction compares with Chekhov's manipulation of the same basic elements. A few critics, most notably John Russell Brown and Martin Esslin, have noted points of contact between Chekhov's and Pinter's use of language in the construction of dialogue. Brown makes some general observations: that Pinter and Chekhov both manipulate trivial details to focus attention on various

aspects of character and action, that they both intimately re-
late language and gesture, and that they are both adept at
"keeping several flows of consciousness alive in a single con-
versation."[5] His observations lead him to conclude that Stanis-
lavsky's techniques are applicable to acting Pinter,[6] but he
fails to weave these observations into a single, illuminating
thesis concerning the degree to which Pinter's dramaturgy is
rooted in Chekhov's. Esslin's analysis is, at least, more
coherent. Ultimately perceiving in Pinter something that Nils
Nilsson first saw in Chekhov -- that a statement's intonation
is often more significant than its semantic content[7] -- Esslin
emphasizes Pinter's manipulation of the emotional color, rather
than the discursive and logical content, of dialogue. He as-
serts that Pinter establishes a contradiction "between the
words that are spoken and the emotional and psychological _action_
that underlies them," whereas Chekhov establishes a contrast
"between what is being said and what lies behind it"[8] -- between,
presumably, what is _literally_ stated and what is actually felt
and thought. Esslin certainly seems to deal with the interaction
of text and context, because he needs, in his attempt to explain
the underlying action of any Pinter dialogue (to explain what
the characters are doing to each other through language), to pro-
vide a context of circumstances within which that dialogue occurs.
He contrives context -- stories -- for the sake of fitting Pin-
ter's elusive verbal exchanges into a framework that answers the
questions they raise; as a result, his contexts transcend the
limits of Pinter's world. The contextual component of text-

context interaction must be dealt with only as Pinter provides
it (or does not provide it, for that matter) within the text.
Because both Brown and Esslin fail to uncover a specific rela-
tionship between text and context (as it is defined by the text),
their analyses finally shed little light on Pinter's dramaturgy.

Fortunately, the work of Esslin and Brown has been surpassed
by that of Bernard Beckerman, who provides at least a foundation
for an understanding of text-context interaction by analyzing
the ways in which Chekhov and Pinter manipulate the foreground
and the background of stage action to create an impression of
"reality" for the audience. Beckerman explains that an audience
receives such an impression from both sources; the background of
stage action may carry strong "associational resonance" with
real life events, while the act of stage presentation itself
-- "the structure of the action scene by scene" -- engages at-
tention on a more "primal plane." In the latter case, the scene
by scene structures of character interaction "appear to us as
figures in the foreground set against the background of associ-
ation . . ."[9] Both Pinter and Chekhov create an image of reality
out of "the symbiosis between figure and ground" -- the fact
that, as a play progresses, "features of the early scenes become
absorbed into later groundwork:"

> . . . the ground of action is increasingly activated, vital-
> ized, made responsive to successive episodes. Later "figures
> of action" become more highly charged because there are more
> points where they can interact with the activated ground of
> association as they form these "figures of action" . . .[10]

Chekhov, Beckerman argues, manipulates a subtle interplay of
thought and feeling against a background of social decay which

contains circumstances that he makes quite explicit; the audience is forced to discriminate the subtle moment-to-moment shifts of energy from the background. Pinter, in contrast, confuses the ground of action: he "does little to establish the off-stage world of his plays," and he particularly obscures narrative background. He "seeks to separate the figure from the ground," forcing the audience "to attend to the motions and not the meanings."[11]

The interplay of ground and figures of action described by Beckerman revealingly parallels the interaction of context and text. The concept of "ground" corresponds to the notion of context. For Beckerman, a play's background -- he is not clear about this -- seems to include whatever information the playwright provides about location, setting, period, and social conditions, as well as whatever facts he establishes about character biography and the nature of the particular relationships of each character to the other characters. For Stanislavsky and his definition of subtext, context involves mainly the latter kind of information -- not, of course, in lump sum, but in the order in which it is revealed in the progress of the play as it is performed (the order in which the ground is "increasingly activated"). Knowledge of this order is essential to the actor. While discovering the sequence of his or her character's emotional objectives through a close reading of the entire play, the actor also gains knowledge of the state of his or her character's relationships at any point in the stage action.

While Beckerman's concept of background corresponds to the contextual component in the definition of subtext, so his "fig-

ures of action" correspond to the textual component. The text comprises the line-by-line structure of character interaction, the format within which "figures of action" are progressively presented to the audience. In stage presentation, the actor plays the text to reveal gradually the contextual character information he has grained from his or her reading of the entire play. Of course, in performance, the audience knows -- ideally -- only that contextual information which has been revealed up to the scene that it views at any given moment. Subtext operates at its strongest when gradually established contextual information is fundamental to an understanding of the on-stage action at any point. In these terms, interaction of text and context means that the action contained within a particular scene depends upon knowledge of the established contextual information for the emotions passing between characters within that scene to be understood fully.

Part of Chekhov's explicitness of background, as Beckerman would have it, is the explicitness with which he establishes his character relationships. In an illuminating discussion of Chekhov's dramatic structure, Harvey Pitcher explains that Chekhov reserves his first act for the careful construction and elaboration of his character's "emotional network."[12] By the middle of the second act, the audience knows who is in love with whom, and how any character who is an object of love is likely to respond to his or her pursuer. As a Chekhov play progresses, the foreground of action becomes less involved with the establishment of information concerning characters and their relationships. Memory

and exposition give way to increased character interaction --
especially interaction within particular relationships. The dia-
logue defining the interaction obliquely hints at the emotions
passing between characters: the emotions themselves are under-
stood in terms of the already established contextual information
concerning the nature of the relationship that the immediate
stage action involves.

Only because they are aware of this contextual information
can the audience and the characters experience the emotional
action of the dialogue. The dialogue screens the emotional in-
terplay: the verbal exchanges, often dealing on the literal
level with some issue which has no apparent bearing upon the
relationship, is understood to deal directly with the relation-
ship itself. Whatever is said on the surface, the emotions
motivating the lines have already been established within the
elaboration of background information. The emotions exchanged
within a particular scene might not be openly declared in the
lines of the text which make up the structure of interaction
defining that scene, but they are understood as the motivations
for what _is_ said in the lines. When Beckerman concludes, in his
analysis of Chekhov's figure-ground symbiosis, that an audience
must adjust its vision to a foreground of action taking place
against an apparent ground,[13] he thus provides a way into under-
standing Chekhov's particular manipulation of text and context.
As the audience must adjust its vision to the foreground of
stage presentation, so must it attend to the subtle shifts of
emotional energy within the interaction defined by the text --

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Reading List

Anton Chekhov: Ivanov
                 The Wood Demon
                 The Seagull
                 Uncle Vanya
                 The Three Sisters
                 The Cherry Orchard

Harold Pinter: The Room
                 The Birthday Party
                 The Dumb Waiter
                 A Slight Ache
                 The Caretaker
                 The Homecoming
                 Old Times
                 No Man's Land
                 Betrayal

Georg Buchner: Woyzeck

Henrik Ibsen: Hedda Gabler
                 The Wild Duck
                 A Doll's House
                 Ghosts

Samuel Beckett: Waiting for Godot
                 Endgame
                 Happy Days
                 Krapp's Last Tape

Eugene Ionesco: The Bald Soprano
                 The Chairs

Edward Albee: Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?
                 A Delicate Balance

shifts of energy capable of being perceived only against the established contextual information concerning the conditions of the relationship with which the scene is concerned.

In contrast to his conclusion about Chekhov, Beckerman's conclusion about Pinter -- that he seeks to separate the figure from the ground -- provides only a starting point for an understanding of Pinter's text-context interaction:

> The trouble is that we are not used to seeing motion without context. We become disoriented. We have to put the foreground into some relationship with a background. And this Pinter does not permit us . . . With Pinter, the foreground is clear; we do not have difficulty following the sequence of action. But how do we relate that action to a context? . . . We are not used to seeing the context through the self-contained action of a sealed world.[14]

By emphasizing that Pinter obscures the background of his plays, Beckerman echoes Richard Schechner's observation that Pinter's plays are "conceptually incomplete" -- that is, that "the framework around the plays, the 'conceptual world' out of which the plays emerge, is sparse, fragmented."[15] Questions about Pinter's contextual information, certainly, are always bound to be left unanswered. Characters seldom reveal, at any point in the action, what they want from each other. They make statements about their backgrounds in one scene, and refute these statements in the next. Focusing on Pinter's lack of available and verifiable factual data, Beckerman and Schechner merely point up the main problem with attempting to understand Pinter's use of subtext, a problem they do not even try to solve. Because character history and motivation are never clearly established, Pinter seems not to provide the audience with contextual information against which textual interaction can be perceived. But Pinter's context is

ultimately a context of <u>dramatic</u> information imparted by the

clear and straightforward presentation of emotional action --

a context of information about <u>how</u> characters interact with each

other. The statements that characters make about themselves and

their pasts, as well as about each other, are rooted directly

in the dynamics of character exchange. Facts of character and

character relationships simply cannot be established, because

whatever the characters say is said in the midst -- and as the

result -- of their attempt to gain a superior position within

the relationships with which their interactions deal.

Austin Quigley's assertion that Pinter's plays chart "the

progressive development of character relationships" -- within

which each character's self-concept is either corroborated or

challenged[16] -- is insightful. While in Chekhov the subtext

comprises an emotional action obliquely revealed within dialogue

between characters involved in relationships defined by verifi-

able and established conditions, in Pinter the subtext comprises

a submerged development of character identity itself. Pinter's

emotional action is, again, straightforward and easy to follow.

And yet, however much he confuses the exposition of character

data, thus seeming to separate figure from ground (in Beckerman's

terms), he cannot separate the text defining his straightforward

action at any point from the context established by the inter-

actions that have taken place up to that point. The subtext of

submerged character identity has its roots in the fact that, as

a Pinter play progresses, the audience gains knowledge of the spe-

cific ways in which each character deals with and responds to

each other character. What Pinter's characters say during their interactions cannot be taken as true because their obscuring of the truth is fundamental to how they define themselves in relation to each other. They confuse expository data differently with each interaction because they assert themselves differently relative to each individual with whom they interact. Each character's various assertions correspond to the contradictory terms of a confused self-concept: seen against his or her actions and responses within the changing circumstances of interaction, this gradually developed self-concept obliquely reveals the character's actual identity. Ultimately, Pinter inverts Chekhov's subtextual method: whereas Chekhov presents character relationships and implies the emotional action that takes place within them through an oblique text which gradually becomes rooted in established contextual information, Pinter packs his dialogue full of emotional action from the rising of the curtain, submerging the development of character definition and identity.

II. Dramatic Structure and Subtext in The Cherry Orchard and The Homecoming

No two plays better demonstrate Pinter's inversion of Chekhov's subtextual technique than The Homecoming -- the height of Pinter's work prior to his recent move into writing plays of memory -- and The Cherry Orchard -- Chekhov's final attempt to perfect his revolutionary dramaturgy. The specific structures of these plays, as seen in terms of the use of subtext as a mode of emotional interaction and character definition, especially reveal the degree to which Chekhov and Pinter's different subtextual

methods correspond to interests in different kinds of emotional
encounter. Chekhov, presenting characters who yearn for a
better life amidst a general longing for love, uses subtext to
explore how emotionally preoccupied individuals subtly relate
to each other, communicating and not communicating to varying
degrees on a level of feeling while taking around and over what
they want from each other on the level of immediate verbal con-
tact. Pinter, whose characters -- especially in The Homecoming
-- are caught up in a never-ending attempt to dominate each
other, uses subtext to hint at the identity of each individual
character as he or she makes his or her way up and down the
ladder of emotional possession, asserting the contradictory
terms of his or her self-concept along the way.

The way into a comparative subtextual analysis of the two
plays is, to be sure, through a comparative analysis of their
dramatic structures. In terms of text-context interaction,
dramatic structure is a matter of the order in which the play-
wright reveals his contextual information. It is the development
of context through a carefully ordered sequence of interactions
-- carefully ordered so that the interactions reveal contextual
information gradually and in a specific way, and so that any
interaction within the sequence maintains a particular relation-
ship to the contextual information already disclosed. In both
The Homecoming and The Cherry Orchard, overall structure is com-
prised of individual structural units defined by the occurrence
of particular interactions. The units, whose beginning and end
points are marked by entrances, exits, silences, blackouts, and

other such theatrical devices, are generated from one to the next by the emotional interplay contained within them. In Act One of The Cherry Orchard, Varya, Gaev, and Lyubov discuss the orchard and what it means to them; as Lyubov contemplates its beauty, Trofimov enters, turning her joy to sorrow as she is reminded of her drowned son. A new unit of interaction, focused on Trofimov and how he has changed, thus begins. In The Homecoming, Lenny shouts up the stairs at Ruth; Max enters and demands that Lenny tell him who has been making noise. Lenny changes the subject. The play's action moves forward as structural units turn over from a focus on Lenny and Ruth to a focus on Lenny and Max. In this way, overall dramatic structure is ultimately a product of content: basic units of character interaction are propelled forward by the interactions that take place within them.

Given the dependence of the generation of units within a structural sequence upon the context of a play's emotional interaction, the use of subtext involves the manipulation and placement of points of interaction whose full emotional implications can be perceived only through experience of the immediate interaction in combination with information gained from previous interactions. While the difference between a network of emotional yearning and a hierarchy of emotional dominance marks the difference between Chekhov and Pinter's subtextual methods in The Cherry Orchard and The Homecoming, there is an aspect common to both kinds of emotional interaction which acts as a major catalyst in the generation (as well as a focal point for the

organization) of structural units in both plays: disruption.
It is necessary to credit Pitcher with pointing out disruption
as a catalyst of emotional interaction in Chekhov's plays,[17] and
it may seem simplistic to claim that disruption is basic to the
world of Pinter's The Homecoming, but the aspect is so funda-
mental to the generation and organization of structural units
-- while so central to the content of emotional interplay --
that it cannot be overemphasized. It is especially significant
because it has a major effect upon dramatic structure as it re-
lates to subtext: it catalyzes character interplay often by
deepening the interaction of text and established context, caus-
ing the operation of subtext within relationships to become more
heavily concentrated as the pressure of disruption becomes greater.

In Chekhov, as Pitcher explains, four act construction is
built around "a framework of disruption," the working out of a
process of the irruption of outsiders -- in the case of The
Cherry Orchard, of the external pressure to sell the orchard --
into the lives of "those characters who belong permanently to
the play's setting and who form part of a well established way
of life."[18] In the formula Pitcher suggests for all of Chekhov's
major plays, the first act elaboration of the emotional network
is brought about by the "interaction of outsiders and residents."
An "undramatic" second act is characterized by an uneasy atmo-
sphere in which relations become strained. In the "dramatic"
third act, emotional crises peak. And an "anti-climactic" fourth
act contains departures from the established world which comple-
ment the first act arrivals -- arrivals which initially set the

process of outsider-resident disruption in motion.[19]

Pitcher's formula applies to The Cherry Orchard in a special way, revealing the dependence of the play's structure upon the emotional interplay that is its content, and highlighting the role of subtext within that structure. The homecoming in the first act does not, in and of itself, represent the irruption of outsiders into the lives of residents. But it does, while serving as the event around and through which the play's emotional network is established, cause external pressure to sell the orchard to affect the lives of the characters in the emotional network (and, thus, the nature of each relationship in which they are involved) in a very particular way. Thus, while the brooding discussions of the second act all in some way relate to the sale of the orchard, they also serve to intensify the conditions of each relationship within the network. Lopahin and Lyubov, for example, grow in their misunderstanding of each other: the more Lopahin insists that Lyubov lease the cherry orchard, the more Lyubov thinks about her past -- and her inability to part with the orchard, which holds a special place in that past. The party in the third act is fraught with anticipation and wonder about the sale, anticipation which reinforces and catalyzes the tension within particular relationships. Trofimov's indifference to the sale of the estate leads Lyubov to ask him to try to understand her inability to part with it. His inability to understand carries over to his failure to sympathize with Lyubov's love for the man in Paris, and the Lyubov-Trofimov relationship almost reaches a breaking point, as both characters lose their temper. Ultimate-

ly, all eyes focus on the inevitable sale of the orchard: each particular interaction is in some way affected by it, and the structural units containing the interactions are built around it. As structural units are propelled forward by the pressure of disruption within the context of emotional interplay, the subtext of submerged emotional action takes place to a greater and greater degree within each particular relationship. The pressure of the sale (and, of course, the sale itself) intensifies the emotional concerns within relationships: with emotional action catalyzed and contextual information revealed, characters can interact more and more obliquely. Thus, in the fourth act, Varya and Lopahin can hint at how they feel about each other while exchanging a few words about a lost article of clothing. The sale of the cherry orchard has made it so that Lopahin's offer of marriage must come either at that point or never; both characters know that, and interact without ever saying a word about it.

In a manner at least ostensibly similar to that in which Chekhov generates his structural units of interaction by the pressure to sell the orchard, Pinter builds the structural units of The Homecoming around the return home of Teddy -- and the impact of Ruth. J. D. Dawick has correctly shown that Pinter employs the blackout to punctuate the action of the play into five sections: "Home, Arrival, Confrontation, Acceptance, Takeover."[20] In the first section of the play, Pinter carefully constructs a world of men who constantly attempt to assert and reassert their dominance over each other. Commencing with the

power play interaction between Max and Lenny, each silence within the first section marks the initial entrance -- the introduction -- of a character belonging to this male world, and each new introduction inevitably causes a new power play interaction (taking into account the new character) to occur. Within the initial struggle for dominance -- the straightforward emotional action -- each character belonging to the world of the London home asserts, subtly or firmly, some element of his past or present that lends power to the attempt to assert some degree of dominance over the person with whom he interacts. Max recalls the days when he was feared throughout the West End. Joey talks about his boxing. Sam reminds Max and Lenny that he is the best driver in the firm. In the case of Lenny, assertion comes by way of sarcastic and mocking reactions to the assertions of others. With each assertion, each character puts forth an aspect of his self-concept that, he believes, makes him better in some way than the character with whom he speaks. As aspects of self-concept are initially asserted, the world of power struggle is constructed.

A hierarchy is not clearly established in the first section of The Homecoming, but it begins to take shape as the struggle to be at its top is activated. Teddy and Ruth's entrance, which marks the start of the second section, catalyzes the initial activation of the power struggle, moving the almost established hierarchical ladder towards inevitable rearrangement. The structural units containing each particular interaction following Teddy and Ruth's entrance are propelled forwards in such a way

that the characters within each interaction find themselves,
with each unit, at a new and different stage in the advancement
towards final arrangement of the emotional hierarchy.

While Teddy's return home is certainly central to the pro-
cess of disruption around which the structural units of The
Homecoming are built, the entrance of Ruth -- the female intru-
der into a male world -- is much more significant. Richard M.
Coe has explained that Pinter portrays the "relational base of
human communications" in the play -- in which characters are more
concerned with the "relational meaning" of a statement than with
the "truth value" of its information (its indication of how the
receiver should respond to the sender rather than the literal
message it conveys), and with the "exchange value" of objects
as "signifiers of power" rather than their "use-value" (their
meaning within the context of a relationship rather than their
independent functional value).[21] In a world in which the domin-
ance struggle is in constant motion, Ruth becomes an ultimate
signifier of power. Her presence forces the men in the play to
struggle to possess her, for possessing her means standing on
the highest rung of the hierarchical ladder. Just as the pressure
to sell the cherry orchard catalyzes the makings of emotional
crisis already existing within individual relationships in Chek-
hov's play, Ruth's entrance catalyzes the established day-to-day
struggle within the London home, compelling the men to assert
their dominance more furiously -- and, thus, to define more em-
phatically the contradictory terms of the individual self-concepts
behind their assertions. Max recalls a picture of domestic bliss

with Jessie and the boys, in which he is the ever so kind and
considerate husband and father: he thus contradicts an earlier
assertion that he patiently suffered through his marriage.
Lenny tells Ruth two stories in which he employs brutal violence
to assert himself, and then later he challenges Teddy to a
philosophical debate, proposing an argument about how the un-
known does not merit reverence. Joey takes Ruth out of Lenny's
arms, asserting without words a belief in his own physical power
and attractiveness. While Ruth's entrance with Teddy propels
the structural units of power play interaction towards a final
unit in which the emotional hierarchy will ultimately be rear-
ranged, the conflicting terms of the self-concept asserted by
each character, seen against the changing demands of interaction,
gradually clash and mesh into emerging identity.

Perhaps the most significant and instructive difference
between The Homecoming and The Cherry Orchard, in terms of both
the process of disruption and the effect of disruption upon
dramatic structure, is that the catalyzed emotional action of
The Homecoming ultimately focuses on its catalyst: the new as-
sertions of dominance brought about by Ruth's entrance all focus
on what place Ruth will ultimately have within the emotional
hierarchy by the end of the play. In contrast, the disruption
in The Cherry Orchard is less direct. When it enters into the
world of the play (with the sound of the axes at the end of
Lopahin's and Trofimov's dialogue in the fourth act), the char-
acters prevent it from pervading until they have departed from
that world. In keeping with the major events in Chekhov's last

four plays, the sale of the cherry orchard takes place off stage.
The focus of the play remains on individual relationships and
what happens within them in the midst of outer pressure; the
sale is important mainly in terms of how each character deals
with it within his or her relationships. In The Homecoming, the
process of disruption generates the interaction within structural
units towards the conclusion of a single action. Each character
identity, obliquely revealed through the emotional action com-
prised of these interactions, has its place within the final
emotional hierarchy -- the focus of the conclusion. Thus, as
Max sobs for affection from Ruth, the earlier assertions of
strength central to his self-concept combine with an immediate
picture of human weakness to display an identity within which
ultimate authority is a fantasy and desperate need for love a
reality. In The Cherry Orchard, the indirect external pressure
generates submerged emotional action in as many directions as
there are relationships, although each relationship is tied to
the emotional network, and is accounted for by the end of the
play during the general action of departure. In both plays,
however, the structural units of interaction are ordered around
a disruptive element -- with the operation of subtext heavily
concentrated within character interaction that focuses on a
working out of the process of disruption.

III. Subtextual Analysis

Moving from general analysis of structure to closer ana-
lysis of dramaturgy and subtext in the two plays, it is worth-
while to digress through an observation with which Beckerman

concludes his Pinter/Chekhov study:

> . . . both men . . . recognize and dramatize the failure of
> direct encounters. Character A makes a demand, Character B
> neither yields nor quite confronts the challenge. Anya in-
> vites a declaration of love, Trofimov talks of working for
> the future; Max insists on knowing who has been making noise
> in the night, Lenny responds by demanding that Max talk about
> the night when Lenny was conceived. For both writers, the
> dislocation between energy expended and resistance encoun-
> tered produces the strange effect of events skidding along
> . . .[22]

By observing a dislocation between demand and response, Becker-

man is writing about the breakdown in "normal" and expected

ordering of question and answer, of longing and reply -- about

the failure of Character B to respond directly to Character A

in a manner that at least deals with the issue presented and at

hand. Beckerman applies the notion of dislocation to both par-

ticular instances of interaction as well as central issues in

relationships: in the former case, Character B fails to answer

a question posed; in the latter case, Character B fails to con-

vey his or her ability or inability to provide Character A's

longed-for fulfillment.

Given the overuse of the notion of the failure of communica-

tion, this observation may not seem incredibly insightful. And

yet, when it is expanded beyond the realm of direct encounter and

longing (the realm of demand followed by resistance), and broadly

applied to include those cases of interaction in which Character

A does receive a response related to the issue at hand, but not

the response he or she expects, hopes, or wants to receive, the

notion becomes a basis for understanding the way character inter-

action in The Homecoming and The Cherry Orchard generates action

in general. That is, it sheds light on the condition, fundamental

to the way characters in both plays deal with each other, that
makes their interactions so susceptible to the process of dis-
ruption, allowing it to have the catalytic effect that it does.
Ultimately, the pervading dislocation in The Cherry Orchard and
The Homecoming is a dislocation between expectation and response
-- expectation in the sense of both hope and justifiable anti-
cipation. The general technique of denying Character A the re-
sponse he or she hopes or expects to receive (or the response
he or she thinks he or she has dictated or deserved by saying what
he or she has said) is common to differing methods of developing
context for the operation of subtext.[23] It provides Chekhov with
an active foundation for exposition and for the explicit establish-
ment of his character network; it provides Pinter with a focus
for variations within the initial dominance struggle within the
London home. Then, in the wake of disruption in both plays, it
provides a focus for the operation of subtext itself. As a re-
sult of the dislocation technique, events in both The Cherry
Orchard and The Homecoming do indeed "skid along," but with an
unusual sense of forward propulsion coming out of each skid, the
dislocation first containing and then releasing the energy that
propels interaction.

In The Cherry Orchard, dislocation occurs between a wide
range of expectations -- hopeful questions, reminders, etc. --
and an equally wide range of responses. Often it is quite
subtle, as in the first scene of the play, which illuminates
Chekhov's method for actively establishing contextual infor-
mation. The subtlety of dislocation in the scene stems from
the distance between the specific ways in which Lopahin and Dun-

yasha experience the same general feeling: both excitedly anti-
cipate the return of Lyubov, but experience the excitement in
manners so particular to their own selves that they fail to
share it.

The centerpiece of the scene is Lopahin's speech, in which
he successively chides himself for falling asleep while reading
a book (and therefore not making it to the station), recounts a
tender memory of Lyubov, claims that he is still a peasant al-
though he is rich, and then returns to chiding himself. By
placing a pause to mark the transitions between these four major
segments of Lopahin's thought, Chekhov does not merely mean to
provide the actor with hints of how to play Lopahin's thought
process. He also creates theatrical punctuation points at which
the audience may be made aware that Dunyasha is on stage while
Lopahin speaks, and that she does not respond -- because she is
listening intently for the sound of carriages -- either to Lopa-
hin's recollection of Lyubov or to his observation about himself.
The fact that she is herself excited, but does not meet up direct-
ly with his excitement, creates a tension between the two charac-
ters that permits the speech to transcend its role as an exposi-
tion piece (which it certainly is). Motivated by Lopahin's own
particular experience of anticipation, and made especially power-
ful because it is directed at a character who may or may not hear
parts of it (while experiencing, again, the general feeling that
is its source), the speech actively presents the play's initial
contextual information: it reveals a significant aspect of Lopa-
hin's character (his sense of having peasant blood although he has

worked hard to become rich), and it displays his fond feelings for Lyubov -- already placing his character into some relationship with her.

This interesting effect of tension in the midst of exposition continues throughout Chekhov's play, as the energy of dislocation propels interaction, and remains more or less consistently focused on those parts of the dialogue in which the purpose is the explicit establishment of character and character relationships. Thus, when Dunyasha says she "can't wait another minute" to tell Anya about Epihodov's proposal, Anya responds by asking, "What time is it . . . ":[24] the dislocation between Dunyasha's anxious remarks and Anya's uninvolved responses continues until Dunyasha switches the subject to Trofimov, Anya joyfully exclaims his name ("Petya" [p. 295]), and Chekhov employs a contrast between dislocation and sudden interest to establish Anya's relationship to Trofimov with one word. In an instance in which structural units are generated by dislocation, Varya welcomes Anya with a joyful embrace, matching the mood of Dunyasha and Anya in the preceding unit, and Anya responds with sorrowful memories of her trip, turning Varya's joy to sorrow, and providing contextual information -- about Charlotta, Lyubov, and Yasha -- on top of the energy generated by the change in mood that accompanies the turnover of units. Examples like these abound throughout the establishment of the character network. Dunyasha reminds Yasha that she is Fyodor's daughter; Yasha embraces her and calls her "a little peach" (p. 295). Lopahin insists on leasing the cherry orchard; Lyubov talks about her sins. In each

case, a logical expectation or hope is dashed as information about character and relationships is revealed. Exposition arises from dislocated, moving points of interaction.

In The Homecoming, the dislocation between expectation and response does not involve the same extensive range of hopeful questions and desires which fills out the development of character and character relationships in Chekhov. The dislocation in Pinter's play is more clearly that central to the failure of direct encounter as Beckerman defines it. While serving as a focal point for variations within the power struggle that pervades the carefully constructed world of the London home (the development of the context of how characters interact), the dislocation of direct encounter plays a special role in the early assertion of self-concept. Generally, as Character A becomes frustrated by Character B's failure to respond in a way that confirms Character A's asserted dominance, Character A is forced to put forth some superior term of his self-concept that characterizes himself as a better person than Character B. Character B's response to the asserted self-concept provides additional contextual information -- the information of Character B's basic method or strategy for dealing with Character A.

The dislocation of direct encounter pervades the atmosphere of The Homecoming from the moment Max enters and asks Lenny where the scissors are with the implication that Lenny is responsible for Max's not being able to find them: "What have you done with the scissors?"[25] When Max grows more and more insistent, Lenny calls him a "daft prat" (p. 7); when Max tries to assert authority

by ordering Lenny to give him a cigarette, Lenny simply remains

silent. The dislocation between Max's expectation to dominate

and Lenny's consistent undercutting of that expectation contrasts

strikingly with the dislocation between Lopahin's expectation to

share his excitement and Dunyasha's excited, but unrelated, re-

sponses at the beginning of The Cherry Orchard. The distance

between Max and Lenny is as clear as the emotional action it em-

bodies, and as direct as the assertion of self-concept that arises

from Max's need to feel some sense of superiority in the rela-

tionship:

> You think I wasn't a tearaway? I could have taken care of you,
> twice over. You asks your Uncle Sam what I was. But at the
> same time I always had a kind heart. Always (p. 8).

However much he lends power to his recollection of physical strength

by claiming that he was kind as well, Max cannot establish domin-

ance over Lenny. Lenny undercuts Max's assertion by continuing

to remain silent. When he does speak, he simply echoes his ear-

lier attitude by calling Max a "stupid sod" and telling him he

is "getting demented" (p. 9).

Pinter thus readies the world of the London home for the

catalytic effect of disruption by striking a tense balance within

the struggle for dominance. The dislocation of expectation and

response remains direct, although sometimes the assertion of

self-concept -- or the response displaying basic attitude -- is

subtle. When Sam explains why he is "the best chauffeur" (p. 13)

in the firm, Max asks him why he never got married, and accuses

him of "banging away" (p. 14) at the lady customers; Sam only

gradually asserts the notion that he was a better companion to

Max's wife than Max was. Max softly says "Christ" (p. 16).
Context and text begin to interact as Max's earlier stated dis-
pleasure with his wife come to bear upon understanding the full
implications of his response; the world of dominance struggle
is prepared for disruption, and for the catalytic effect of dis-
ruption upon the subtext of submerged identity.

Both Pinter and Chekhov masterfully intermingle the use of
dislocation for the development of context with its use for the
emerging operation of subtext itself. In The Cherry Orchard,
subtext within character relationships begins to operate clearly
early in the second act, while Chekhov is still establishing ex-
pository data; Dunyasha and Yasha interact obliquely before
Lyubov gives her speech about her past sins. At the end of the
second act, the scene between Anya and Trofimov provides a good
example of a dialogue in which subtext is operating to convey an
emotional action intensified by the pressure to sell the orchard.
It is the first dialogue focused on a single relationship as it
is affected by the pressure of the sale. In The Homecoming, the
first encounter between Ruth and Lenny provides a scene comparable
to the Anya-Trofimov exchange; in terms of subtext as it relates
to structure, it is the first scene in Pinter's play to contain
the subtext of emerging identity as it is influenced by the ir-
ruption of Ruth into the world of power play already constructed.

As all but Anya and Trofimov exit at the end of the second
act of The Cherry Orchard, Anya laughs and says:

> We can thank the tramp for a chance to be alone! He frightened
> Varya so (p. 316).

Anya's laugh recalls the joy with which she exclaimed Trofimov's

name in the first act, when her interest in him was initially
established. Anya is very much in love; although she never tells
Trofimov openly -- in this scene or elsewhere -- the context of
the scene includes the interest established in the first act, and
that piece of contextual information plays upon her simple declar-
ation that she is glad to be alone with him. Love is the emotion
that will motivate her lines and reactions throughout the scene.

Trofimov's initial response to Anya seems to deny her love
for him:

> Varya's afraid -- she's afraid that we might fall in love . . .
> She's so narrow minded, she can't understand that we're above
> falling in love. To free ourselves of all that's petty and ephem-
> eral, all that prevents us from being free and happy, that's the
> whole aim and meaning of our life (p. 316).

Trofimov juxtaposes the notion that he and Anya are above love
with the declaration that the purpose of their life is to become
free of the ephemeral and petty: he implies that the march toward
happiness includes becoming free of love, and that love itself is
trivial. But Trofimov's remark cannot be taken at face value,
especially when it is perceived against the very end of act one,
when -- "deeply moved" -- he watches Varya carry Anya off to bed,
and says gently:

> Oh, Anya! . . . my sunshine! My spring! (p. 306).

Just as Anya is in love with Trofimov, so Trofimov yearns for the
ability to allow himself to feel and to act on his love for Anya.
The interaction of the immediate text, in which he talks about an
abstract future happiness, interacts with the established context,
in which he has joyfully and movedly gazed after her, to create a
scene in which much of his abstract happiness is ultimately con-
ceived in terms of him and Anya together, and his yearning for

love subtextually motivates his declarations about the future.

Both Anya and Trofimov, then, establish their interest in each other in the first act with simple, moving statements of each other's name; now, when they are together, they cannot declare or identify their feelings for each other, but merely hint at them. The cherry orchard becomes the focus of an exchange which submerges their separately declared feelings, as well as intensifies the need to deal with them on some level, however submerged. Thus, Anya is enraptured with "how beautifully" (p. 316) Trofimov talks, even though the declarations to which she reacts seem to skirt any possibility that he will ever declare love for her. She cannot respond directly to his visions of happiness, and yet -- because she is in love with him -- she can respond to the way he presents them. Trofimov enchants her, and she attributes his influence over her to a change in her feeling about the orchard:

> What have you done to me, Petya? Why don't I love the cherry orchard like I used to? (p. 316).

On the surface, Anya is asking Trofimov why she no longer loves the orchard; subtextually, she is trying to convey to him that he has enormous power over her.

The cherry orchard means different things to Anya and Trofimov. For Anya, it provides memories of a happy childhood, in which "there wasn't any better place in all the world than our orchard" (p. 316). For Trofimov, it recalls a dark past of serf-owning from which Anya and her family must break. Trofimov assures Anya that there are other places on earth as beautiful as the orchard:

> The whole of Russia is our orchard. The earth is great and beautiful, and there are many wonderful places in it (pp. 316-317).

His use of "our" here hints at his subtextual yearning to be with Anya. While he conceives of an abstract happiness for all people, his notion of the beautiful world -- the immediate world waiting to be experienced -- includes a sharing of that world with her. It is extremely important to Trofimov that Anya understand his theorizing about the future, as well as his ideas about the orchard:

> TROFIMOV. You've got to understand that, Anya.
> ANYA. The house we live in hasn't really been ours for a long time. I'll leave it, I promise you.
> TROFIMOV. Yes, leave it, and throw away the keys. Be free as the wind.
> ANYA, in rapture: How beautifully you say things.
> TROFIMOV: You must believe me Anya, you must (p. 317).

Trofimov's desire that Anya understand his notions about the orchard and the estate is ultimately a desire, in the subtext, that she understand him: his ideas and notions are central to his concept of self. Certainly, however much Anya has broken with her childhood vision of the orchard, it cannot be easy for her to make a complete break with the orchard itself. The fact that she seems to, though, indicates the extent of what she is willing to do for Trofimov. When she says she will leave the estate, she is not excitedly reacting to Trofimov's ideas about future happiness, but to the fact that she is in love with him, and wants to do what makes him happy. Her promise to leave the estate is an oblique declaration of her love for him. When he responds to her promise by telling her to "be free as the wind" (p. 317), she does not follow up with any resolution that she will indeed be free, but rather reiterates her earlier observation about how beauti-

fully he says things. She is enraptured with him, not his ideas.

Trofimov goes on with his vision of happiness; Anya notices

that the moon is rising:

> TROFIMOV. . . . I have a premonition of happiness, Anya, I
> can sense it's coming . . .
> ANYA, pensively. The moon's coming up.
> EPIHODOV is heard playing the same melancholy tune on his
> guitar. The moon comes up. Somewhere near the poplars VARYA
> is looking for ANYA and calling.
> VARYA, off-stage. Anya! Where are you?
> TROFIMOV. Yes, the moon is rising. A pause. There it is --
> happiness -- it's coming nearer and nearer. Already, I can
> hear its footsteps . . . (p. 317)

Anya is extremely sensitive to her current experience of being

with Trofimov, and the rising moon enhances that experience.

Trofimov translates the rising moon into a symbol of the happi-

ness about which he has been speaking. And yet, because he has

already suggested that his conception of happiness includes Anya,

and because he pauses between noticing the moon and returning to

his vision of the future, something more than agreement about the

physical world is clearly happening between him and Anya in that

instant in which he repeats her observation. While the observa-

tions match on the surface, they also put Anya and Trofimov into

subtextual contact with each other. The moon that enhances Anya's

experience of being with Trofimov and the moon that symbolizes

Trofimov's conception of happiness, which includes Anya, merge in

the contact of subtextual yearnings. These two people, who are

capable of indicating their love when they are not with each other

through simple statement of the other's name, communicate their

interest here in their shared observation of the rising moon,

but communicate on a level so submerged that they are almost not

communicating at all. Their observation is simple, the only in-

stant in which they are clearly speaking about the same thing,
an oblique moment in a sea of talk about past and future that
covers over their yearning for each other, but deals with the
very issue -- the cherry orchard -- that catalyzes the presence
of that yearning as the motivation for their words.

The Anya-Trofimov scene is, of course, built upon the dis-
location of expectation and response: Anya does not receive an
open declaration of love, and Trofimov's ideas will never be
fully understood. What Anya and Trofimov ultimately share, sub-
textually, is the fact that they yearn, not a communicated under-
standing of each other's yearnings. The dislocation in their
textual interaction covers over the contact they make. In the
scene between Lenny and Ruth, dislocation is more clearly a
generator of subtextual operation, rather than a vehicle for it
-- it plays a greater role, that is, in causing subtext to occur;
it does not simply form the screen through which subtext can be
perceived. The difference is telling of a basic distinction be-
tween Pinter and Chekhov's dramaturgies: while Anya and Trofimov
discuss the orchard, working out the pressure of the disruptive
element as they hint at what they feel, Lenny must deal directly
with the disruptive element in his world. The undercutting of his
expectations during his interaction with Ruth causes him to assert
certain aspects of his self-concept, and his submerged identity
emerges through his assertions, and how they stand against his
actions.

At the start of the scene, Lenny plays the role of the host,
going through all the cordial motions that, ultimately, inform

Ruth that the house is <u>his</u> territory. It is not long before he
tries to assert control over her. While he is playing the role
of the host, she tells him that she does not want anything --
but he gives her a glass of water anyway. Then some talk about
Teddy and Ruth's trip to Europe ends abruptly as Lenny asks
Ruth if he can touch her:

> LENNY. Do you mind if I hold your hand?
> RUTH. Why?
> LENNY. Just a touch.
>   He <u>stands</u> <u>and</u> <u>goes</u> <u>to</u> <u>her</u>.
>   Just a tickle.
> RUTH. Why?
>   He <u>looks</u> <u>down</u> <u>at</u> <u>her</u>.
> LENNY. I'll tell you why (p. 30).

By asking Ruth if she will hold his hand, Lenny seems to assert,
very confidently, the notion that Ruth is attracted to him. He
has just met her, and he knows she is his brother's wife, yet he
seems to think that she is impressed enough with him to touch him
without establishing some sort of closeness. If she were to sub-
mit, Lenny would assert indirect dominance over his brother --
whose wife would admit significant attraction to a man she has
known less than ten minutes.

But Ruth undercuts Lenny's expectations. She asks him why
he wants to hold her hand; she asks him, in other words, for jus-
tification of his desire. What she receives from Lenny, in re-
response, is a long story about how he brutally beat up a woman
who made him "a certain proposal" one night "down by the docks"
(p. 30). He explains that he would have subscribed to the proposal
if the woman had not been "falling apart with the pox," and that
he would have killed her if he had felt like going "to all the
bother" (pp. 30-31). The story does not follow logically from

Ruth's questioning of Lenny's desire, but it follows emotionally
-- especially for a man who, at this point, strikes the pose of
believing that he need not justify the desire to hold any woman's
hand. By asking "why," Ruth challenges that pose of virility
(not to mention the notion that Lenny is master of the house's
terrain), which Lenny must assert in some way. He does so by
conceiving of himself as a man who often receives proposals and
submits to them "in the normal course of events," as a man who
does not let any woman force him submit to a proposal defined by
her terms, as a man easily capable of violence in situations in
which those terms are forced upon him, and as a man who finds
killing easy when he does not mind getting himself "into a state
of tension" (pp. 30-31). Sexually active and attractive, master
of the terms for his relationships, violent if necessary: Lenny
asserts all of these aspects from within his self-concept through
the story he tells, giving Ruth plenty of reasons "why" she should
hold his hand.

Ruth is not impressed by Lenny's assertions. She is not af-
fected by the implication that she could become like the woman
in Lenny's story if she does not hold his hand and submit to his
demands for their relationship; rather, she simply uncovers a
loophole in his story. As soon as he finishes, she says:

> RUTH. How did you know she was diseased?
> LENNY. How did I know?
>   Pause.
> I decided she was.
>   Silence (p. 31).

Lenny's response here sums up the central aspect of the self-
concept behind his story. In that he must decide the terms for

his relationships, he ultimately assumes the power to define the role the other person in the relationship will play: he assumes the power to define other people as well as himself.

Ruth will not let Lenny define her or the role she is to play. The silence that follows Lenny's summation of his self-concept marks a moment at which he and Ruth are at bay, a moment at which he must decide what to do next, since Ruth's response has not matched his expectations. He thus readies a new strategy for dominance, and then proceeds, building to a second story in which he explains his desire to be more sensitive:

> I mean, I am very sensitive to atmosphere, but I tend to get desensitized, if you know what I mean, when people make unreasonable demands on me (p. 32).

With his second story, Lenny reasserts the notion that he cannot tolerate submission to another person's terms for interaction. He contradicts the brutality central to his stories by claiming a capacity to do things that appeal "to something inside" (p. 32). The contradictory terms of his self-concept clash (he has supposedly struck an old woman but not given her "a workover" because he was "feeling jubilant" with his volunteer work [p. 33]). When he concludes his story, he does not give Ruth the chance to uncover another loophole. He moves directly from the clashing terms of the self-concept he has asserted to a direct challenge involving physical objects in the room, asking Ruth if he can take the ashtray out of her way. She lets him. Then he asks her about her glass:

> LENNY. And now perhaps I'll relieve you of your glass.
> RUTH. I haven't quite finished.
> LENNY. You've consumed quite enough, in my opinion.
> RUTH. No, I haven't.
> LENNY. Quite sufficient, in my own opinion (p. 33).

It seems odd at first that Lenny should be so insistent about getting the glass out of Ruth's hands. But the glass is a signifier of power in their relatioship, just as Ruth gradually becomes a signifier of power within the entire home. Ruth allows Lenny to move the ashtray because she is, as Lenny points out to her, not smoking at the moment and, therefore, has no immediate claim of possession on it. She does, however, have such a claim on the glass. She has not finished its contents, and to allow Lenny to take it from her before she has would be to allow him to define when that action of drinking, however insignificant, is to stop: it would be to allow him to gain possession of the glass (reasserting the notion that he is master of the house's territory) and, by extension, gain initial possession of her by defining one of her actions, however minor.

As the scene progresses, the glass begins to take on greater proportions. Lenny moves from demanding it to indicating that he will "take it" (p. 34) by force. Ruth counters by implying that she will exchange his act of possession by force with an act of sexual possession:

> RUTH. If you take the glass . . . I'll take you.
>   Pause.
> LENNY. How about me taking the glass without you taking me?
> RUTH. Why don't I just take you? (p. 34)

The subtext of submerged identity begins to show through the straightforward emotional action. Will Lenny, placed in a situation in which a woman is making what seems to be a proposal, as well as not meeting his demands for the conditions of the relationship, react as he does in his stories, according to the brutal, virile terms of the self-concept he has asserted? He pauses im-

mediately following Ruth's question; then comes his answer:

> LENNY. You're joking.
>   Pause.
> You're in love, anyway with another man. You've had a secret
> liaison with another man. His family didn't even know. Then
> you come here without a word of warning and start to make
> trouble (p. 34).

Lenny accuses Ruth of starting trouble, transferring the blame

for a challenge he actually started to her. His counterattack is

weak, clearly not that of a man who regularly beats up women down

by the docks. Ruth takes advantage of the weakness of his response,

advancing and lifting the glass towards him, telling him to sit

on her lap and to "take a long cool sip" (p. 34) from the glass:

> RUTH. Put your head back and open your mouth.
> LENNY. Take that glass away from me.
> RUTH. Lie on the floor. Go on. I'll pour it down your
>   throat.
> LENNY. What are you doing, making me some kind of propo-
>   sal? (p. 34)

That Lenny must ask at all whether or not Ruth is making a pro-

posal contradicts the self-concept he asserted earlier. He re-

mains "still" (p. 34) as she advances, and does not act. Indeed,

he does not move at all until she exits, at which point he simply

reiterates his question by shouting it up the stairs. Ruth puts

Lenny down to significant defeat in the struggle for dominance on

his own terrain -- the terrain on which he so strongly bouts with Max.

Whether she is actually interested in following up on her pro-

posal is not important; what is important is that she does make

it forcefully apparent as a proposal, successfully testing Lenny's

asserted self-concept of brutality and strength.

The initial context of the scene between Lenny and Ruth is

a context of dramatic information gained from having seen the

way Lenny has interacted with other characters in previous scenes.
It is already established, that is, that he is sarcastically de-
fiant of his father, generally mocking of his uncle, and coolly
untouched by his brother. In the initial interaction of text and
context, Lenny's character seems consistent; he deals with Ruth,
at first, as coolly as he does with Max, Sam, and Teddy. He
confirms, or corroborates, his seeming control in the self-concept
he asserts through his stories, adding brutality and sexual power
to his character traits. But then, at the end of the scene, he
contradicts his asserted self-concept: he does not have the power
to deal with her, and his reaction to her apparent proposal is
the reaction of a man who is sexually weak. As the immediate
text of his interaction with Ruth interacts with the context of
how he has dealt with Max, Sam, and Teddy, as well as how he has
initially asserted himself through his tales, his identity gradu-
ally emerges from the subtext: Lenny is defiant within the home,
where he is capable of maintaining a balance of power; he is
coolly accepting of Teddy's return, able to readjust to that
new element within the dominance struggle; he maintains a rich
fantasy of violence and brutal strength, which he probably de-
rives from his ability, at least, to maintain the balance of
power with Max; he is impotent when a woman advances upon him,
although he does not falter completely, reacting weakly, but not
in a way that humiliates himself, summoning whatever power he
can from his fantasy of brutality.

Pinter's final stage direction for The Homecoming -- "Lenny
stands, watching" -- places Lenny's gradually revealed identity

into the final arrangement of the play's power hierarchy. He is
not begging for love and/or sex, like Max; he is not receiving
motherly affection, like Joey. Recalling that instant in which
Ruth advanced upon him with the glass, he is still -- seemingly
detached from the final order, though certainly involved, since
he has played a major role in negotiating Ruth's "stay." During
his negotiations with her, he conceded every point of their
agreement, just as he could not act powerfully against her in
their first scene, and failed to respond when Joey took her away
from him. Lenny now stands by, his identity and its central
aspect -- his inability to rise above the role of a weakly in-
volved observer, to act on the torrent of words he lets out when
someone crosses him -- clearly revealed. He is unable to gain
control or possession of Ruth, the ultimate signifier of power,
and he looks on as she ironically becomes the superior figure
within the world of power struggle she has disrupted.

While in The Homecoming the element of disruption forces
submerged identity to the foreground, in The Cherry Orchard the
inevitable sale forces emotional action to become submerged be-
neath more guarded exchanges. In the ultimate example of disloca-
tion between expectation and response, Varya does not receive the
offer of marriage she -- and the audience -- has been made to
expect. The expectation is here so integral a part of the con-
text that the tension between context and immediate text, in
which Lopahin merely asks Varya about her plans for the future,
points up the penetrating sense of unfulfillment Varya experi-
ences throughout the scene. When Varya breaks out in tears,

submerged emotional action breaks through to a climax on the textual level, the level of _direct_ experience. The context of expectation overcomes the text, and the denial of expectation within the text, to vent a forceful, outright expression of emotional pain, which is submerged again with the entrance of Lyubov.

Both Chekhov and Pinter, through their differing subtextual methods, portray the human inability to uncover a fulfilling correspondence between verbal and emotional interplay. Chekhov sees the emotional goals individuals set for themselves, and writes dialogue rooted in the awareness that the path to such goals is usually blocked by the emotion being too great for the words. Pinter sees the individual's attempt to define and assert his or her concept of self, and writes dialogue based on the understanding that actual identity is revealed through the action words often embody, while words themselves fail to identify the depths of that identity. Pinter's subtextual method constitutes a major development within the tradition of dramaturgical form set in motion by Chekhov. Pinter takes Chekhov's foundation for the indirect correspondence between verbal and emotional interplay and inverts it, creating a drama which reflects the contemporary tendency to detach language from the traditional and "normal" frame of reference, and to employ it as a force for the assertion of selfish desires and needs.

Notes

[1] Constantin Stanislavsky, Building a Character, trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1971), p. 108.

[2] Andrew Kennedy, Six Dramatists in Search of a Language (Cambridge: Cambrige University Press, 1975), p. 21.

[3] Stanislavsky, p. 108.

[4] Kennedy, p. 20.

[5] John Russell Brown, "Dialogue in Pinter and Others," The Critical Quarterly 7 no. 3 (1965), 124-136.

[6] Brown, pp. 143-144.

[7] Nils Åke Nilsson, "Intonation and Rhythm in Chekhov's Plays," in Anton Cechov: 1860-1960, Some Essays, ed. T. Eekman (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1960), pp. 168-180; rpt. in Chekhov: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Robert Louis Jackson (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), p. 168.

[8] Martin Esslin, The Peopled Wound: The Work of Harold Pinter (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1970), pp. 211-212.

[9] Bernard Beckerman, "The Artifice of 'Reality' in Chekhov and Pinter," Modern Drama 21 (1978), 153-154.

[10] Beckerman, p. 156.

[11] Beckerman, pp. 157-158.

[12] Harvey Pitcher, The Chekhov Play: A New Interpretation (London: Chatto and Windew, 1973), pp. 15-16.

[13] Beckerman, p. 158.

[14] Beckerman, p. 158.

[15] Richard Schechner, "Puzzling Pinter," Tulane Drama Review 11 no. 2 (Winter 1966), 177.

[16] Austin E. Quigley, The Pinter Problem (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 54, 72. Quigley develops the concept of "the interrelational function": he asserts that Pinter's characters are involved in the negotiation of a "mutual reality," in which they settle on an "operative identity" -- a compromise between the ways in which they wish to be regarded and the ways in which others are willing to regard them. Although Quigley's emphasis on self-concept is insightful, he fails to deal with the pervasiveness of dominance within Pinter's world. Pinter's characters never settle for an "operative identity" for more than an instant; they continually attempt to assert the superiority of their self-concepts.

[17] Pitcher.

[18]Pitcher, p. 15.

[19]Pitcher, pp. 12-16.

[20]J. D. Dawick, "Punctuation and Patterning in The Homecoming," Modern Drama 14 (1971), 46.

[21]Richard M. Coe, "Logic, Paradox, and Pinter's Homecoming," Educational Theater Journal 27 (1975), 489-490.

[22]Beckerman, p. 159.

[23]Quigley, pp. 50-51, quotes linguist J. R. Firth: "whatever is said is a determining condition for what in any reasonable expectation may follow," and correctly asserts that, in Pinter, there is generally a refusal to meet the reasonable expectation determined by Character A's remarks.

[24]Anton Chekhov, The Cherry Orchard, in Six Plays of Chekhov, trans. Robert W. Corrigan (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1979), p. 295. All further citations to The Cherry Orchard refer to this edition and are noted in the text.

[25]Harold Pinter, The Homecoming (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1979), p. 8. All further citations to The Homecoming refer to this edition and are noted in the text.

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