

Introduction: Harold Pinter's transmedial histories

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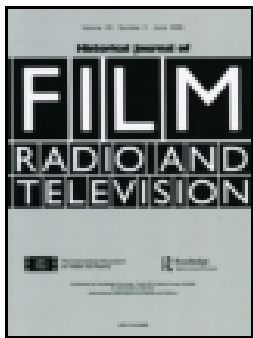
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INTRODUCTION: HAROLD PINTER'S TRANSMEDIAL HISTORIES

Jonathan Bignell and William Davies

This article introduces the special issue by exploring the transmediality of Harold Pinter's work. By examining Pinter's texts across television, radio and cinema, as well as theatre, this article argues that both Pinter's formal experimentation and development as a cultural figure are intimately connected to his consistent practice of working across a variety of media.

This special issue of the *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* was put in train in 2018, the tenth anniversary of the death of Harold Pinter, whose drama output spanned theatre, film, television and radio, and who also wrote poetry, prose and political essays. The special issue is one of the fruits of a collaborative research project, 'Pinter Histories and Legacies: The Impact of Harold Pinter's Work on the Development of British Stage and Screen', which ran from 2017–20 and was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council of England.¹ Among the various activities that the project undertook was to create a database that documents every professional production of Pinter's plays in the UK, as well as Pinter's output on television, radio and film.² This public database underpins and sits alongside more expected kinds of academic output like conferences and publications, and a two-month season of screenings by the British Film Institute in the anniversary year at its South Bank cinemas in London.³ Work by BFI to investigate archival holdings of film and television material for the season also facilitated the launch of a new DVD boxed set of Pinter's television work for the BBC.⁴ At the Harold Pinter Theatre in London's West End a year-long season of new theatre productions opened in 2018, featuring a host of stars.⁵ To document and analyse Pinter's work across media required a partnership between specialists at the

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Universities of Leeds and Birmingham, focusing on his theatre output, and a team at Reading on his film, radio and television work who are responsible for this issue of *HJFRTV*.

The project entailed documenting and evaluating a large and diverse body of data relating to people, texts, institutions and media, across a long span of time, and assessing how these entities and agents affected and were affected by wider historical contexts and cultural networks. Methodologically, this has meant tracing historiographic connections between media, across chronologies, between Pinter's life and his work, and identifying intertextual relationships between works either by Pinter or by numerous other creative figures. It is a challenging project of comparative historiography that is best approached from a *histoire croisée* perspective,⁶ identifying and analysing processes of interchange, simultaneity and convergence, invention and re-invention, thus problematizing the activity of constructing relationships and flows. The methodological advantage of *histoire croisée* is the capacity to link different types of knowledge and sources to produce a complex understanding, and one of the usual English translations of the term, 'entangled history', draws attention to the attractions and also the problems of such research.

Pinter's activity across different media of expression makes his work a productive focus for *HJFRTV*, and this opening article makes a case for its transmediality, focusing especially on his television work and connecting its development and formal experimentation with his work in radio and cinema as well as theatre. Transmediality as a critical concept denotes the tracing of transfers of the same trope, narrative or motif from one medium to another.⁷ Pinter's work has been a part of the canon of world theatre since the 1960s, his films contributed to the unique nature of British cinema, and he is often cited as one of the most significant British writers of the post-war period. His plays include classics such as *The Caretaker*,⁸ and he scripted films based on his own work including *Betrayal*⁹ and novel adaptations including *The French Lieutenant's Woman*.¹⁰ His career involved significant collaborations with renowned actors and directors, and his contribution to literature and the world stage was recognised by a number of awards including the Companion of Honour in 2002, the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2005 and The Légion d'Honneur in 2007. His significance is demonstrated by the acquisition of his papers by the British Library in 1993,¹¹ collected in the Pinter Archive, which, along with papers held at the BBC Written Archives Centre, British Film Institute and Film Finance, for example, offers a wealth of material for tracing the histories of his activity in the literary and media fields.

Theatre into broadcasting

In the late 1950s Pinter was pursuing a moderately successful career as an actor, and it was while he was performing in a touring production of the comedy *Doctor in the House*¹² that he wrote his second full-length play *The Birthday Party*.¹³ However, the play's London reviews were very poor and it took several years for Pinter to achieve a reputation in mainstream theatre. Earlier in the decade, Pinter had also pursued radio acting roles, writing a series of letters to BBC Drama Department staff including Donald McWhinnie (a later champion of Pinter's),

Frank Hauser, John Arlott, David Manderson and Terence Tiller, inquiring about interviews for acting or reading parts following the suggestion of R. D. Smith, a BBC radio producer.¹⁴ But he received either rejections or apologetic notes asking him to try at a later date; replies that addressed him as 'Miss' (John Arlott) or spelt his surname 'Puiter' (Frank Hauser) must have been particularly dispiriting. In one audition report, Pinter was dubbed 'Herbert Pinta', and the correction from 'Pinta' to 'Pinter' was only made in pen on the typed rejection letter from Shirley Newham in the Features Department.¹⁵ It would take a few years for him to make his name.

Despite this inglorious start, Pinter was by the 1960s a regular voice on the radio, particularly as a poetry reader, for arts documentaries and, as his career developed, for interviews and commentaries on contemporary culture.¹⁶ By 1959, BBC Drama had commissioned his first broadcast play *A Slight Ache* for its high-brow Third Programme radio service and ITV television was in the vanguard of establishing the canonical status that Pinter would go on to have. An early version of *A Slight Ache*, titled *Something in Common*, was rejected, though McWhinnie identified Pinter as a playwright deserving of BBC patronage and encouraged support be given to the young playwright.¹⁷ Rewritten on commission, *A Slight Ache* was reviewed by both the radio and television BBC departments. The work was identified as suited best for radio, though the television drama reviewer Oliver Marlow Wilkinson encouraged the BBC to commission Pinter for a television play.¹⁸ *A Slight Ache* was subsequently adapted for staging at the Arts Theatre in London in 1961. Pinter's affinity for radio writing was confirmed by his use of the medium's aesthetic possibilities in the play, what his biographer Michael Billington calls the 'ambiguous possibilities of radio', exemplified by the named but silent match seller character.¹⁹ By the end of his career, Pinter had produced upwards of thirty scripts for radio, ranging from original texts commissioned by the BBC to adaptations of his stage, television and prose works. Although we might think of Pinter primarily as a theatre writer, broadcasting was crucial to his early career and continued to be so. *The Birthday Party*, for example, was first staged in the UK in 1958 and was adapted for BBC radio in 1970, 1978, 1982 and 2002. For the 1970 production, Pinter collaborated with the producer Charles Lefeaux, adapting to radio the visual elements of the play, achieved in part by the creation of a narrator for the radio version.²⁰ Pinter scripted his own adaptation of the play for cinema in 1975, and for BBC television in 1987 when he also appeared in it as an actor. Radio and TV shaped Pinter's reputation as much or more than the stage plays because more people encountered his work in those media. In tandem, as Ann C. Hall shows in her article on the writer's use of sound, Pinter's work across media allowed him to develop a nuanced appreciation of the aesthetic and affective possibilities of the acoustic, spatial and expressive capacities of radio, television and film.

At least since the late 1950s, Pinter's plays were recognized as socially engaged drama. The New Left writers of the theatre magazine *Encore* such as Irving Wardle²¹ drew attention to the entrapment of his characters spatially and existentially, seeing this as a recognition of contemporary circumstances and the self-deceiving passivity that such material conditions produced. Pinter's language

was seen as degraded and constraining, thus equally reflective of modernity, yet his idiomatic turns of phrase were capable of revealing flashes of comic resistance. His work contributed to a British theatre culture strongly influenced by continental European writing, alternative to the apparently more staid British tradition embodied by Terence Rattigan's or John Whiting's plays, and the major London productions just preceding *The Birthday Party* included Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*²² in 1955 and Eugene Ionesco's *The Lesson* and *The Bald Prima Donna* in 1956,²³ each written by authors based in Paris. The other key comparator is John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*,²⁴ first performed in 1956, which became the paradigm for gritty, 'kitchen sink' drama that featured young, frustrated and entrapped characters in down-at-heel domestic settings. The implicit model of influence was that Pinter absorbed existential features of contemporary culture and replayed them to his audiences, a familiar trope that was also used by other playwrights of the time,²⁵ especially Beckett with whom Pinter was often compared. Pinter and Beckett later became great friends after being introduced to one another by the French director Roger Blin, and they corresponded regularly, with Pinter sending Beckett scripts of new works.

Pinter and Beckett's aesthetic and professional overlaps did not end with theatre. Like Beckett, Pinter's ever-increasing familiarity with radio technology meant that his mid- and late-career work for radio often made use of the technology itself, the work drawing attention to the medium of its transmission in texts like *Landscape* (1968), a transmedial work first conceived for the stage that was rewritten with specific attention to radio's aesthetic possibilities, as demonstrated in Lucy Jeffery's article for this issue.²⁶ Pinter claimed in an interview that it was Beckett's *All That Fall* (1957) which revealed to him 'a certain uniqueness about radio', one that revolved around the interplay of sound, silence and the imagination, an encounter which likely informed his writing of *A Slight Ache*.²⁷ The BBC was also a persistent presence in Pinter and Beckett's relationship, especially through lifelong working friendships with BBC figures such as Barbara Bray, who shepherded Pinter's early works and offered critical feedback and encouragement throughout his career, and Martin Esslin, discussed further below. Both Bray and Esslin enjoyed social as well as professional relationships with Pinter and Beckett, sometimes together. Esslin also directed Pinter in broadcasts of Beckett's work for radio and adaptations of his prose.²⁸

Though his radio career began with BBC Drama, television adaptations of Pinter's writing appeared on the commercial ITV channel, rather than BBC TV, until 1965. Val Gielgud, brother of the actor John Gielgud, was Head of Drama at the BBC from 1934 to 1963. He believed that broadcasting should present the classics every few years, and that new, experimental or foreign drama, like contemporary 'Absurd' drama by Pinter or Beckett, should be offered on BBC radio, rather than television, by the minority Third Programme. At lunch with his successor, Martin Esslin, Gielgud admitted, 'I hate Brecht, I hate Beckett, I hate Pinter. ... That's why I've appointed you to deal with these people'.²⁹ Esslin was a supporter of Pinter's work, and his papers include files of correspondence with Pinter, copies of his work and recordings of its radio and television broadcasts.³⁰ One justification for the BBC's role as the premier national broadcaster with a guaranteed income from the

licence fee that all households with a TV set were required to pay, and to some extent an excuse for the BBC's poor audience ratings, mentioned below, was that the BBC provided patronage for drama writers, supplied difficult and experimental dramatic work for a small but socially powerful niche audience, and protected the national heritage of theatrical excellence. Esslin and his generation supported Pinter's work, and Esslin published a monograph that used Pinter and Beckett as paradigmatic examples of a new kind of drama.³¹ This network, built around contemporary European playwrights, was an enabling matrix in Pinter's early career.

The companies holding ITV franchises had to demonstrate their success at fulfilling their public service remit in order to have their lucrative contracts renewed. Despite its primary remit to make money for its shareholders, requiring ITV companies to maximise audiences with popular programmes, the channel had the same legal duty as the BBC to cater to a range of different audiences, and to offer a range of types of programme that would provide news, current affairs, religious programmes, documentary and serious drama as well as entertainment. The Pilkington Report, a Government inquiry into ITV's performance over its first five years of existence, critiqued ITV in 1962 for the downmarket programming that it used to attract large audiences for its advertisers.³² The channel relied on imported American thrillers and Westerns, genres with plenty of action and fast-moving storylines, as well as British-made programmes in popular genres, like hospital drama, variety (vaudeville) spectacles and game shows.³³ Making serious drama and programmes about the arts was a means to counter these criticisms, enabling ITV to assert the channel's cultural credentials in competition with the BBC. Broadcasting cutting-edge contemporary drama was also a way for individual ITV franchise-holders to compete with each other on programme quality, and Pinter was among the dramatists that ITV tried to secure.³⁴ Associated-Rediffusion (A-R), the ITV company that broadcast to the London TV region and contributed to the ITV network, was the first to make a Pinter drama. As Billington's biography tells, A-R's producer Peter Willes read *The Birthday Party* and invited Pinter to meet him, greeting him with the words: 'How dare you?' When Pinter looked puzzled by this remark, Willes explained: 'I've read your bloody play and I haven't had a wink of sleep for four nights'.³⁵ The play is set in the living room of a boarding-house in a small English seaside resort. Two unexpected visitors, Goldberg and McCann, come to the house and terrorize a long-term resident, Stanley, for whom an impromptu birthday party is held and a young woman, Lulu, is assaulted during a party game when all the lights go out. At the end of the play, for reasons that remain obscure, Goldberg and McCann take Stanley away. The play's dialogue appears demotic and desultory, but hints at powerful and violent emotions that threaten to break through its banal surface.

Joan Kemp-Welch directed the play, broadcast on national ITV on 22 March 1960 in the regular series *Play of the Week*. Far more people got to hear about Pinter on ITV television than saw his work at the theatre or heard it on BBC radio, in part because of its promotion: A-R took out an advertisement in the listings magazine *TV Times* featuring a large photograph in Expressionist style of a bespectacled man (Stanley) whose head is encircled by the large shadows of out-reaching hands, as if to trap him in a dark room.³⁶ Beneath the image the

advertisement quoted reviews of the theatre production in upmarket newspapers, including Harold Hobson's in *The Sunday Times* that described Pinter as 'the most original, disturbing, and arresting talent in theatrical London'.³⁷ Using theatre authors and adapting theatre texts provided readily available television material that had already been proven in either subsidized theatre, London's West End or touring repertory. This rationale underlay the television broadcast of both 'classics' from the British theatre canon (by Shakespeare, George Bernard Shaw or Oscar Wilde, for example) and also 'middlebrow' plays like murder mysteries. It was only later in the 1960s that the BBC forged a successful relationship with Pinter for screen versions of his plays, which appeared on the minority channel BBC2. For ITV to beat BBC TV partly through screening Pinter's work was politically advantageous for the commercial network. In 1961 the *Television Playhouse* series showed both Pinter's *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter*, made by the ITV franchise holder for northern England, Granada. In the same year Kemp-Welch directed Pinter's *The Collection* for A-R. When she directed A-R's production of his play *The Lover* in 1963, Kemp-Welch's staging won the Prix Italia international prize for television drama. The BBC Head of Drama, the recently appointed Sydney Newman, sent a note to Kemp-Welch calling her 'a marvellous director' and playfully asking 'Do you want to join us?'.³⁸ Pinter's *A Night Out* was screened by another ITV company, ABC, for *Armchair Theatre* in 1964, while Rediffusion produced an adaptation of *The Caretaker* in 1965, by which time Pinter's work had become relatively familiar to ITV's national audience.

The interchange between theatre and television broke open the boundaries between high and popular culture as well as media of production.³⁹ The commercial ABC TV company, an ITV franchise holder now perhaps best known for the camp spy-adventure series *The Avengers* (1961–9), also made the arts series *Tempo* which profiled Pinter in 1965. *The Present Stage*, a series that used a theatre workshop format to explore how significant dramas of the period might be staged and to explain what they might mean, devoted two episodes to *The Caretaker* on ITV in 1966. It was broadcast on Sunday afternoons as an informal education programme, and its creator, John Kershaw, commented: 'I am hoping that this series will make modern drama interesting to people who perhaps never get the chance to go to the theatre'.⁴⁰ BBC1 included an actors' workshop on the second act of *The Birthday Party*, led by Hugh Morrison, in a similar Sunday morning slot in 1969 for its series *In Rehearsal*. The Pinteresque may not have been 'popular' in the sense that it was universally approved, since Pinter himself was regarded as a controversial figure and his plays were considered 'difficult'. However, there was widespread recognition of his distinctive 'brand', and his representation of ordinary people and everyday speech was, despite the artifice with which Pinter turned these domestic stories into 'menace', an aspect of a cultural current that sought to connect with mass audiences and engage with contemporary experience.

Pinter across media

Transmediality was foregrounded when the BBC undertook to celebrate Pinter's work in different media, and the transformative possibilities of adapting his drama

for TV, in *The Tea Party* (1965). The play was adapted from Pinter's own short story and directed by Charles Jarrott, in the BBC anthology *The Largest Theatre in the World*. Ten nations in the European Broadcasting Union each screened their own version of Pinter's script.⁴¹ The protagonist, Disson (Leo McKern), is anxious that his second wife is being seduced by his brother-in-law, that he is losing contact with his sons and succumbing to a sexual attraction for his secretary (played by Pinter's wife, Vivien Merchant). Disson's gradual mental deterioration is paralleled by failing eyesight that leads to him bandaging his eyes and collapsing. The drama uses optical point of view to align the viewer with Disson, for example when in a table tennis match Disson's ball suddenly becomes two balls as his eyes fail him. Pinter told the *Paris Review*, '*Tea Party*, which I did for television, is actually a film, cinematic. I wrote it like that'.⁴² A mobile camera at floor level tracks Merchant's footsteps, and contrasts Disson's huge office with a long, narrow corridor featuring displays of his company's porcelain lavatories. Pinter was testing the affordances of television technologies and conventions, in dialogue with the technologies and conventions of cinema and theatre for rendering relationships between psychology and spatial perception.

The BBC also created a transmedial 1967 triple bill of Pinter plays for the *Theatre 625* series on BBC2. The first was *A Slight Ache*, detailed above. *A Night Out* had been broadcast on BBC radio in 1960 and also screened that year by ITV in its *Armchair Theatre* (1956–74) anthology series of one-off plays, directed by Phillip Saville,⁴³ with Pinter himself acting one of the lead roles, before being directed by Christopher Morahan for television. The third play in the triple bill was *The Basement*, an original drama directed by Charles Jarrott, with Pinter playing one of the three protagonists. BBC TV was coming rather late to the party, but by the mid-1960s Pinter was among a group of major new theatre writers that the BBC was keen to showcase on television, though this was not because his dramas attracted particularly appreciative audiences. The BBC Audience Research Report on *A Slight Ache* had an Appreciation Index (a percentage score recording viewers' approval or dislike of programmes) of 43 in contrast to *Theatre 625*'s average of 66.⁴⁴ Similarly, Reports on the *Theatre 625* trilogy gave the plays Appreciation Indices of 43, 54 and 39 respectively. The feedback recorded from viewers often described Pinter's plays as puzzling and sometimes annoying, though a minority regarded them as absorbing despite being challenging.⁴⁵

Pinter featured often on BBC2 arts programmes like *Late Night Line-Up* (1964–72) and *Arena* (1975–) talking about his own work and commenting on culture and politics. Dramatic writing and arts comment were combined in the unusual format of *Pinter People*, five animated sketches first created in 1969 which were also compiled for BBC2 in 1970 by the Canadian filmmaker Gerard Potterton. An interview with Pinter at home was interspersed with footage of people interacting in London's cafés, pubs and the riverbank, and Pinter's sketches *The Last to Go*, *Trouble in the Works*, *The Black and White*, *Request Stop* and *The Applicant* were voiced by actors including Merchant and Pinter himself. Such comic shorts were also performed on television variety shows in the 1960s and 1970s. Pinter became a well-known and controversial media figure, exemplified by the Channel 4 screening of his Nobel Prize acceptance speech *Art, Truth & Politics* in

2005.⁴⁶ He had previously written the anti-nuclear sketch 'Precisely', screened by *Newsnight* (BBC2, 15 December 1983), had argued for the political nature of his plays, detailing the powerlessness of the individual, in BBC1's *Omnibus* profile (1988), and explicitly opposed the Balkan conflict in *Counterblast* (1999) and the Iraq war in *Hardtalk* (2004). Pinter's later interest in television as a medium for political activity is documented in this special issue in Ian Greaves' edited interview with the *Arena* production team who collaborated with the writer for its *Harold Pinter* profile (2002). Augmented by Greaves' commentary, this contribution demonstrates Pinter's awareness of television's centrality to cultural life and the specific dynamics of the documentary genre.

Television borrows from other arts at the same time as it establishes its own properties and what is proper to it.⁴⁷ The unquestioned acceptance of the concept of Public Service Broadcasting among broadcasters, and the creative workers who interacted with them, meant that television producers took for granted that there were contemporary dramatic works that ought to be made available by being televised.⁴⁸ The medial identity of television closely followed that of radio as a centre-periphery form of broadcasting, with a division between the professional elites who managed the service versus the audience receiving it. The rise of radio in Britain in the 1930s and then television in the 1950s created what Paddy Scannell describes as a 'new kind of public', on whose behalf 'the broadcasters asserted a right of access to a wide range of political, cultural, sporting, religious, ceremonial and entertainment resources which, perforce, had hitherto been accessible only to small, self-selecting, and more or less privileged publics'.⁴⁹ Broadcasters made judgements of taste and quality that led to the creation of informal networks linking television producers with dramatists, producers, directors and venues.

Pinter's access to broadcast distribution of his work was a precondition for finding a public and establishing a reputation, both nationally and internationally.⁵⁰ Although the Third Programme had tiny audiences ever since its launch in 1946, it had a disproportionately important role in British culture because of its support for contemporary writers like Pinter.⁵¹ As well as adapting stage plays and broadcasting readings of print literature, the Third Programme's producers commissioned new work and sought out emerging talent, and Pinter began to achieve inclusion in an elite culture with international reach.⁵² He became associated with networks of publishers, radio and television producers and theatre directors in a similar way to his friend Beckett, and a key means of acquiring international reach of a similar level was his relationship with Barney Rosset,⁵³ the New York publisher behind Grove Press and the journal *Evergreen Review* which distributed avant-garde drama scripts and fiction by Beckett, Pinter and other European writers in the USA. In the UK, publishers like Methuen, Faber and Penguin brought out paperback editions of dramas thought to be landmarks of British theatre, and Samuel French published acting scripts.⁵⁴ Television and radio productions were part of a larger history of Pinter's popularization through plays that were easily obtainable, had made a public impact through reviews in newspapers and were available for production by amateur theatre groups.

Accessibility is also crucial to an author's international reputation, a process which relies on national structures of culture making. Taking the specific example of Polish radio and television history for this special issue, Łukasz Borowiec traces how adaptations of Pinter's work in Poland map onto the nation's broader political and cultural upheavals during the second half of the twentieth century, revealing too the economic and institutional networks through which the arts in Poland functioned. Due to inconsistent translations and publications of Anglophone writing in Poland, television and radio offered the most direct access for the Polish public to Pinter's work, and the processes of production and dissemination during the period Borowiec describes show the degree to which cultural production and cultural access depend on and express political circumstances.

Pinter's experience of theatre and interest in the medium's relationship to television led to dramas for television that thematised and deconstructed theatricality.⁵⁵ In *The Basement*, for example, a love triangle with one female and two male characters who compete with and seduce each other, the setting of a basement flat changes without warning from one shot another, by innovative use of filmed sequences of both interior and exterior spaces inserted into the main action. Although the play takes place in a set constructed in the television studio, and camera moves are in themselves self-effacing, the unannounced oddities of spatial representation make it impossible that what the viewer sees is like a relay of a theatre performance. The project was structured like a cinema film, with the kind of 'opening-out' that, at the time, was regarded as a property of cinema rather than either television or television adaptation of theatre. Such a formal style contrasted with contemporaneous dramas, which were shot as-if live in the studio in long tranches of dialogue.⁵⁶ That format conduced to spatio-temporal continuity, as in theatre. *The Basement* uncannily refuses this, and is a wry meditation on how theatre and television are different as well as similar. In Pinter's *Landscape*, written for radio in 1968 and broadcast on television in 1983, then revived for BBC2's *Performance* strand in 1995 with Pinter directing, the two characters' verbal interactions are foregrounded by the absence of any physical movement, but neither can the expression by the man and woman be called dialogue since they seem oblivious to each other. The repudiation of theatricality that is entailed in the quest for medium specificity opens the way for work that self-consciously deconstructs links between media.

Pinter's dramatic output is frequently periodized thematically, and the television screenings of his work in the 1960s are relatively contemporaneous with their theatre premieres, or are of plays written specially for the television medium. So, they exhibit a relatively consistent identity as 'comedies of menace', expressing the dynamics of interpersonal power relations within the restricted space of domestic rooms by means of elliptical language and pauses in conversation that conduce to feelings of tension and threat. Pinter's plays of the 1970s onwards, while retaining some of this characteristic 'Pinteresque' verbal sparring or non-communication, have been called 'memory plays' in that they concern the relationship between a past and the present, and the impact of the former on the latter. In Pinter's radio work too, the early *A Slight Ache* focuses on the power dynamic of Edward, Flor and the silent match seller, while 1968s *Landscape* features Beth and Duff who

reminisce about a romantic past without directly interacting with one another. Across Pinter's output, many of the plays feature two male characters and one female, and centre on the struggle of characters for self-realisation in the context of sexual competition and betrayal.⁵⁷ However, as Pinter's reputation grew and his dramas were repeated and remade in various contexts through the 1970s and into the 2000s, these shifts in theme and form become much less clear. In 1991, for the BBC's *Performance* series that revived theatre dramas shot in the TV studio, Simon Curtis directed *Old Times*, returning to a mode of production that had waned three decades earlier, with a play first broadcast in 1975. The *Arena: Harold Pinter* four-hour documentary and retrospective for BBC Four in 2002 includes Pinter performing in his own play *One for the Road*, the premiere of his new play *Celebration*, and numerous extracts from previous broadcasts of his drama. *Arena* presented revivals of plays from across his career, including in 2002 his first play *The Room* of 1956. The canonization of Pinter also meant a confusion of chronologies and of his work's implicit teleological development.

The television studio as a production space shifted in significance in the mid-1960s, and became associated pejoratively with the linguistic, verbal emphasis of scripted performance rather than with physical action in exterior space.⁵⁸ This shift lent increasing prominence to social realist dramas shot on location, most obviously in the BBC's *Wednesday Play* series (1964–70) and subsequent drama strands like *Play for Today* (1970–84).⁵⁹ Pinter's work did not appear in these contexts, but instead in schedule slots that befitted plays that exploited the intimacy of the studio and showcased acted performance. It was TV drama that Raymond Williams described as 'the ultimate realisation of the original naturalist convention: the drama of the small enclosed room, in which a few characters lived out their private experience of an unseen public world'.⁶⁰ Pinter's plays thus looked relatively conventional, potentially coming in for criticism from forward-looking commentators like W. Stephen Gilbert, who critiqued BBC television drama for being 'entrenched in the tradition of naturalism'.⁶¹ Their apparent conventionalism, on the other hand, made Pinter's plays more accessible to audiences, so that they sat between formally experimental work and the comfortingly familiar series and serial forms that viewers said in audience feedback that they enjoyed.⁶² Pinter's work shared its tropes with popular television drama, exemplified by a 1970 review of a new series of the BBC sitcom *Steptoe and Son* (1962–5, 1970–4) which Raymond Williams placed in 'a very old pattern in the drama of the last 100 years. This is the pattern of men trapped in rooms, working out the general experience of being cheated and frustrated, on the most immediately available target: the others inside the cage'.⁶³ He was evidently thinking of Pinter's work as the point of comparison.

The leading voice defending linguistically complex studio production technique as a medium-specific approach was the director Don Taylor: 'True television drama has a quite different aesthetic from film-making. It tolerates, in fact it relishes imaginative, argumentative and even poetic writing in a way the film camera does not'.⁶⁴ For Taylor, television excelled at dialogue, performed in settings built for the play in the studio. The result would be an imaginative fictional world in which all of the aesthetic elements of the drama could be harmonious and

controlled, in 'long, developing scenes, where the actors can work without interference from the director's camera'; and television drama would be 'a writers' and actors' medium'.⁶⁵ Directors like Christopher Morahan had an affinity with Pinter's plays, and in addition to the work mentioned above Morahan made *Monologue* for BBC2 (1973), in which a man reflects on a failed love affair, addressing his monologue to an empty chair. He directed *Old Times* (1975) for BBC2, and made *The Dwarfs* in 2002 for Channel 4, another transmedial work based on a draft novel that Pinter had written over the 1952–6 period, then adapted for radio (1960) and for the stage (1963). Kenneth Ives made a new version of *The Caretaker* for BBC1 in 1981, *A Kind of Alaska* for Central (ITV, 1984), and directed *Landscape* (1983) and both *The Dumb Waiter* and *One for the Road* in 1985 for BBC2. Ives also directed a version of *The Birthday Party* for BBC2's *Theatre Night* in 1987, with Pinter as Nat Goldberg. Pinter himself directed his own work *The Hothouse* for BBC2 (1982), and *Mountain Language* in 1988 with a large cast of celebrated actors from the National Theatre's stage production that year. Pinter also directed *Party Time* for Channel 4's arts series *Without Walls*. Julian Amyes directed *No Man's Land* for Granada (ITV), screened in 1978, which adapted Peter Hall's National Theatre production, and for its star vehicle *Lawrence Olivier Presents*, Michael Apted directed *The Collection* for ITV in 1976. The close relationship between television producers and theatre producers, venues, directors and stars, evident since the 1930s, was reflected in these transfers.

Pinter in British cinema

Likewise, Pinter's long career as a screenwriter was tied to the trends and tastes of British (and sometimes American) film making. It is also one of the least well-studied areas of Pinter's work beyond the stage.⁶⁶ From an early age, Pinter was interested in film; in an interview at the National Film Theatre in 1996, he recalled that in his schooldays he knew 'much more about cinema than theatre'.⁶⁷ Through a film club in Hackney which hired 16 mm prints for one-off screenings, he encountered 'Russian cinema, the French surrealist cinema and German cinema' as well as 'American black and white thrillers and the British war films'.⁶⁸ As a screenwriter, Pinter wrote twenty-six screenplays, all adaptations. He primarily favoured short stories and novels, adapting nineteen over five decades including F. Scott Fitzgerald's unfinished *The Last Tycoon* (1974), Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1987) and Kafka's *The Trial* (1989), and the yet-to-be-filmed *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1972), the development of which Pinter described as 'the best working year' of his life.⁶⁹ From the stage, he adapted seven plays, including Simon Gray's *Butley* in 1974, which he also directed, and in 2000 he wrote an adaptation of *King Lear* that has yet to be filmed. Pinter's last film was a remake of Anthony Shaffer's play, *Sleuth*, first adapted for film by Joseph Mankiewicz in 1972.⁷⁰

Pinter also adapted his own works for film, attracting directors from the UK and US. With financial backing from supportive industry people including Richard Burton, Elizabeth Taylor, Peter Hall and Noël Coward, Clive Donner directed *The Caretaker* in 1964. In 1968, William Friedkin took on *The Birthday Party*. Peter Hall's support for Pinter led to him directing *The Homecoming* in 1973, and *Betrayal*

(1983) was directed by David Jones, with whom Pinter also worked on the BBC film *Langrishe, Go Down* (1978) and the film version of *The Trial*. As in television and radio, Pinter developed lasting working relationships with directors and actors. His adaptation of Robert Maugham's 1948 novella *The Servant* in 1963 starred Dirk Bogarde with Joseph Losey as director, and the three were reunited in 1968 for Pinter's adaptation of Nicholas Mosley's *Accident* (1965), and Pinter and Losey again for *The Go-Between* (1971). These films were significant for Losey, marking the high-point of his career as part of the British film avant-garde, and for Bogarde who was at the time attempting to shed the leading-man persona he had developed under contract with the Rank Organisation, particularly through the comedic *Doctor* film franchise. *The Servant* appeared in the same year as Bogarde's last *Doctor* film, *Doctor in Distress*, marking his transition from box-office acclaim to recognition through high-profile awards, a process started by *Victim* in 1961. Bogarde won the BAFTA for Best Actor in a Leading Role for *The Servant*. Meanwhile, *Doctor in Distress* was one of the biggest box office successes of 1963, and a survey of film in 1963 made special note of his 'staying power'; he had appeared 'in the list of favourite [actors] every year since 1953'.⁷¹

Pinter's knowledge and appreciation of film grew in part through the relationships he cultivated with figures in the film industry. His correspondence with Ted Gilling, known for his contributions to *Sight and Sound*, for example, shows an engaged dialogue over the minutiae of film. Gilling was particularly enthused about Pinter's adaptation of *The Last Tycoon*,⁷² and praised Pinter's adaption of *Butley*, noting that the film perspective Pinter adopted as director gave greater nuance to Alan Bates' performance than on the stage. Gilling was also adamant that Pinter should have given more energy to publishing his Proust screenplay, a sentiment also conveyed by Pinter's fellow screenwriter Christopher Hampton who commended Pinter for his adaptation of the gargantuan novel.⁷³

As an actor, Pinter made cameos in four films for which he wrote the screenplays – *The Caretaker* (1960); *The Servant* (1964); *Accident* (1967); and *Turtle Diary* (1985) – and played Barry Shannon in his BBC film adaptation of *Langrishe, Go Down* (1978). He also appeared in the political spoof *The Rise and Rise of Michael Rimmer* (1970) as Steven Hench, in Clive Donner's *Rogue Male* (1976) in the role of Saul Abrahams, the Jewish lawyer and friend of Peter O'Toole's Sir Richard Hunter, as the criminal Sam Ross in *Mojo* (1997), Sir Thomas Bertram in *Mansfield Park* (1999) and Uncle Benny in *The Tailor of Panama* (2001). Though infrequent, Pinter's more substantial film roles make use of his experience as a performer on stage and in television. As Richard Hewett shows in the present issue, Pinter combines controlled and precise physical acting with an awareness of the necessities of shot-to-shot continuity on single-camera productions. In comparing and documenting Pinter's work in front of the camera for film and television, Hewett demonstrates how Pinter adapted his performance techniques to the technical requirements of different production contexts.

What is striking in Pinter's catalogue of screenplay credits is the matter of genre, and two close studies of Pinter's film writing in this special issue intervene in the relative lack of scholarship devoted to Pinter's screen work. Jonathan Bignell's and Laurel Forster's articles reveal how Pinter was keenly

sensitive to the shape and boundaries of the spy film genre as both an economic and cultural force. Bignell explores Pinter's adaptation of Elleston Trevor's novel *The Berlin Memorandum* (1965)⁷⁴ into *The Quiller Memorandum* (1966), while Forster looks to Pinter's 1989 adaptation of Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* (1948). Pinter's comfort with the spy genre is easy to see. It is reliant on knowledge and the passing of information, the said and the unsaid, the implied and the concealed. Power relations can be established by a look or a gesture; life and death rest on a single word or nod. Bignell and Forster reveal two key aspects of Pinter's screenwriting career: the cultural cachet of his name as a screenwriter, and his abilities as a reader and adaptor of texts. Pinter chose his screenwriting projects based on interest and suitability, considering the work carefully. As Isabelle Roblin writes, Pinter enjoyed a 'somewhat privileged position' as a scriptwriter because 'he did not depend on screenwriting for a living',⁷⁵ though he commanded increasingly high fees for his work.⁷⁶ As in his other work, Pinter developed a strong-willed working method for adaption, in the firm belief that he was 'producing art, not the mere skeleton for technological exploitation',⁷⁷ that his screenplays are 'acts of the imagination', not just transcriptions of the text.⁷⁸ Pinter's decision in 2000 to publish his screenplay adaptations with Faber reveals that, as Roblin observes, he saw them as 'an integral and worthy part of his own work as an author'.⁷⁹ Critical analysis of his film work is nascent, and the case studies examined in this special issue show the potentiality of studying Pinter as a significant figure in film making.

Analysing Pinter's career across radio, TV plays and films is an opportunity to trace connections across and between media, and assess how ideas, people and aesthetic forms are incorporated, shared, transformed or repudiated. This article has introduced the special issue with a brief account of some of those entangled histories, to suggest that such work is an opportunity for a deconstructive understanding of medium specificity via attention to transmediality. It demonstrates that respect needs to be paid to the contingent specificity of historical events, because of the long duration of Pinter's career and its changing character, and also to how we make research connections. These two factors limit the potentially unbounded and entangling connectedness that transmediality implies.

Notes

1. The Pinter Histories & Legacies project home page is <https://pinterlegacies.com>
2. The database website link will be posted on the project's home page once it is publicly available.
3. The BFI Pinter season ran from July and August 2018 and included films scripted by Pinter, film and TV adaptations of his theatre plays and his original TV dramas.
4. BFI *Pinter at the BBC*, five DVD set, 2019: *Tea Party* (Charles Jarrott, 1965), *A Slight Ache* (Christopher Morahan, 1967), *A Night Out* (Christopher Morahan, 1967), *The Basement* (Charles Jarrott, 1967), *Monologue* (Christopher Morahan, 1972), *Old Times* (Christopher Morahan, 1975), *The Hothouse* (Harold Pinter, 1982), *Landscape* (Kenneth Ives, 1983), *The Birthday Party* (Kenneth Ives, 1987),

- Mountain Language* (Harold Pinter, 1988), *Writers in Conversation: Harold Pinter* (ICA 1985), *Pinter People* (Gerard Potterton 1969), *Face to Face: Harold Pinter* (1997), *Harold Pinter, The Guardian Interview* (National Film Theatre, 1991).
5. 'Pinter at the Pinter', the complete season of Harold Pinter's one-act plays, ran from September 2018 to February 2019 at the Harold Pinter Theatre, London. pinteratthepinter.com
 6. Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, 'Beyond Comparison: *Histoire Croisée* and the Challenge of Reflexivity', *History and Theory* 45, no. 1 (February 2006): 30–50.
 7. Irina Rajewsky, 'Intermediality, Intertextuality and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality', *History and Theory of the Arts, Literature and Technologies* 6 (2005): 43–64.
 8. Harold Pinter, *The Caretaker* (London: Methuen, 1960).
 9. *Betrayal*, sc. Harold Pinter from his play (1978) d. David Jones, Horizon Pictures, 1983, 95 min.
 10. *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, sc. Harold Pinter, from the novel by John Fowles, d. Karel Reisz, Juniper Films, 1981, 123 min.
 11. The Pinter Archive comprises 60 boxes of Harold Pinter's literary papers deposited on loan to The British Library in 1993 and 20 further boxes deposited between 1994 and 2005. A searchable index of the Archive is accessible at: <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/db837348-a698-3b39-8787-4e427d5e4931>
 12. Samantha Ellis, 'The Birthday Party, London 1958', *The Guardian*, April 2, 2003, 4, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2003/apr/02/theatre.samanthaellis>. The play *Doctor in the House* was adapted from the eponymous comic novel by Richard Gordon (1952), based on his experiences as a young trainee doctor in London.
 13. Harold Pinter, *The Birthday Party* (London: Methuen, 1963).
 14. Letters from Harold Pinter to BBC staff, 13 July 1955, in BBC Written Archives Centre (WAC) RCONT1 Harold Pinter Artists File 1, 1950–62. See also Michael Billington, *Harold Pinter* (London: Faber & Faber, 2007), 30–31.
 15. Letter from Shirley Newham, for Douglas Cleverdon, to Harold Pinter, 17 February 1951, BBC WAC RCONT1 Harold Pinter Artists File 1, 1950–62. Richard Hewett gives a full account in this issue of Pinter's early attempts to join the BBC acting roster.
 16. Notable poetry readings include Pinter's collaborations with Roy Fuller in his poetry documentaries 'The Thirties in Britain', broadcast 26 October 1965, and 'Traces of a Fire', on the poetry of Thomas Hardy, broadcast 10 January 1966, both on BBC Third Programme. BBC WAC RCONT12 Harold Pinter Artists File 2, 1963–67.
 17. Donald McWhinnie to Assistant Head of Drama (Sound), 8 July 1958, BBC WAC RCONT1 Harold Pinter Scriptwriter File 1, 1957–62.
 18. Oliver Marlow Wilkinson, Television Drama Report, *A Slight Ache*, 10 August 1959, BBC WAC T48 Harold Pinter TV Scriptwriter, 1958–1990.
 19. Michael Billington, *Harold Pinter* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), 166.

20. Letters from Charles Lefeaux to Harold Pinter, 13 November 1969 and 15 December 1969, BBC WAC RCONT12 Harold Pinter Scriptwriter File 3, 1968–1972.
21. Irving Wardle, 'Pinter, Comedy of Menace', *Encore* 5 (September–October 1958): 28–33.
22. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (London: Faber, 1956).
23. Eugene Ionesco, *The Lesson, The Bald Prima Donna, Jacques, or Obedience* (London: Calder, 1958).
24. John Osborne, *Look Back in Anger* (London: Faber, 1957).
25. Dan Rebellato, *1956 and All That: The Making of Modern British Drama* (London: Routledge, 1999).
26. Martin Esslin encouraged Pinter to adapt the play for radio as early as January 1968. Letter from Martin Esslin to Harold Pinter, 11 January 1968, BBC WAC RCONT12 Harold Pinter Scriptwriter File 3, 1968–1972.
27. 'Talking of Theatre', a joint interview with Donald McWhinnie, with Carl Wildman, 7 March 1961, BBC transcript, pp. 9–10, qtd. in Ronald Knowles, 'Pinter and twentieth-century drama', in *The Cambridge Companion to Harold Pinter*, ed. Peter Raby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 77.
28. Esslin directed Pinter in the radio adaptation of the prose work *Lessness*, broadcast 7 May 1971 on BBC Radio 3, and in the part of Animator in *Rough for Radio II*, broadcast 13 April 1976 on BBC Radio 3.
29. Hugh Chignell, 'British Radio Drama and the Avant-garde in the 1950s', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 37, no. 4 (2016): 653
30. Papers of Martin Esslin, Keble College, Oxford: AD65/HP Papers relating to Harold Pinter; AD65 ME1/1 Correspondence 1960–1984.
31. Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961).
32. Hugh Pilkington, *Report of the Committee on Broadcasting* (London: HMSO, 1962).
33. Catherine Johnson and Rob Turnock, 'Introduction: approaching the histories of ITV', in *ITV Cultures: Independent Television Over Fifty Years*, ed. Catherine Johnson and Rob Turnock, (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2005), 1–12.
34. Carl Gardner and John Wyver. The Single Play: From Reithian Reverence to Cost-accounting and Censorship. *Screen* 24, nos. 4–5 (1983): 114–124.
35. Ellis, 'The Birthday Party, London 1958', 4.
36. *TV Times* (London edition), 22 March 1960, 60.
37. Harold Hobson, 'The Screw Turns Again', *Sunday Times*, May 25, 1958, 11.
38. Newman to Kemp-Welch, 29 March 1963, Scrapbook 1, Joan Kemp-Welch Papers, BFI Library, quoted in Amanda Wrigley, 'The Lover (Associated-Rediffusion for ITV, 1963): "tough stuff, well acted and cleverly directed"', <https://pinterlegacies.com/2018/05/30/the-lover-associated-rediffusion-for-itv-1963-tough-stuff-well-acted-and-cleverly-directed> (accessed April 2, 2020).
39. Jonathan Bignell, 'Television and the popular: viewing from the British perspective', *Journal of Literary Theory* 4, no.2 (2010): 181–198.
40. Anon., 'And now – how to enjoy plays', *TV Times* (London edition), April 16, 1966. 7.
41. Countries invited to participate alongside Britain comprised Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain,

- Switzerland, Sweden and West Germany. See Charles Fox, 'The Largest Theatre in the World presents *Tea Party*', *Radio Times*, 18 March 1965, 47.
42. Lawrence M. Bensky, 'Harold Pinter: An Interview', *The Paris Review*, Fall 1966, 13–37. See also the booklet notes by Billy Smart accompanying the *Pinter at the BBC* DVD set.
 43. The 1960 *A Night Out* was broadcast to an estimated 6,386,000 households, making it the most popular programme of that week. See Billy Smart, 'Harold Pinter at ITV', <https://pinterlegacies.com/2019/03/20/harold-pinter-at-itv/> (accessed April 2, 2020).
 44. Audience Research Report, *A Slight Ache*, 28 February 1967, BBC WAC T5/1937/1 Harold Pinter *A Slight Ache*, 1967.
 45. Audience Research files for *A Slight Ache* (1959), *The Dwarfs* (1960), *The Caretaker*, *Tea Party* (1965), *Night School* (1966), *A Night Out* (1967), *A Slight Ache* (1967) and *The Basement* (1967) in BBC WAC file Harold Pinter Audience Research.
 46. The production of the televised Nobel speech is described by its producer, John Wyver of Illuminations Media, at <https://www.illuminationsmedia.co.uk/making-harold-pinters-art-truth-politics>
 47. Sarah Cardwell, 'Television amongst Friends: Medium, Art, Media', *Critical Studies in Television* 9, no. 3 (2014): 6–21.
 48. Anthony Smith, 'Television as a public service medium', in *Television: An International History*, ed. Anthony Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 38–54.
 49. Paddy Scannell, 'Public Service Broadcasting: The History of a Concept', *Understanding Television*, eds. Andrew Goodwin and Gary Whannel (London: Routledge, 1990), 16.
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 51. H. Carpenter, *The Envy of the World: Fifty Years of the BBC Third Programme and Radio 3* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1997).
 52. Kate Whitehead, *The Third Programme, A Literary History* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 16.
 53. Grove Press Records, Syracuse University, NY, for example correspondence and business files, boxes 564–570.
 54. See William Baker and John C. Ross, *Harold Pinter: A Bibliographical History* (New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 2005).
 55. Jonathan Bignell, 'Performing the Identity of the Medium: Adaptation and Television Historiography', *Adaptation* 12, no. 2 (2019): 154.
 56. See L. Cooke, 'Style, Technology and Innovation in British Television Drama', *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 2, no. 1 (2005): 82–99.
 57. Mark Taylor-Batty, '"Operating on Life, Not in It": Gender and Relationships in the Plays of Harold Pinter', *British Literature in Transition, 1960–1980: Flower Power*, ed. K. McLoughlin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 337–351.
 58. Madeleine Macmurrough-Kavanagh and Stephen Lacey. "Who Framed Theatre?: The 'Moment of Change' in British Television Drama." *New Theatre Quarterly* 15 (1999): 58–74.

59. Jonathan Bignell, 'The spaces of the Wednesday Play (BBC TV 1964–1970): production, technology and style', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 34, no. 3 (2014): 369–389.
60. Raymond Williams, *Television, Technology and Cultural Form* (London: Fontana, 1990), 56.
61. W. S. Gilbert, (1980), 'The television play: outside the consensus', *Screen Education* 35 (1980): 43.
62. Billy Smart, 'The BBC Television Audience Research Reports, 1957–1979: Recorded Opinions and Invisible Expectations', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 34, no. 3 (2014): 452–462.
63. Raymond Williams, 'Galton and Simpson's "Steptoe and Son"', in *Raymond Williams on Television: Selected Writings*, ed. Alan O'Connor (London: Routledge, 1989), 125 (first published in *The Listener*, 17 December 1970).
64. Don Taylor, 'Pure Imagination, Poetry's Lyricism, Titian's Colours: Whatever Happened to the Single Play on British TV?' *New Statesman*. March 6, 1998, 38.
65. Ibid.
66. The only full-length study of Pinter and film remains Stephen H. Gale's *Sharp Cut: Harold Pinter's Screenplays and the Artistic Process*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003).
67. Harold Pinter, 'Harold Pinter and Michael Billington in Conversation at the National Film Theatre' (1996), *Various Voices* (London: Faber & Faber, 2005), 65.
68. Ibid.
69. Harold Pinter, 'On the Screenplay of *A la recherche du temps perdu*' (1978), *Various Voices*, 45.
70. In Mankiewicz's version, Michael Caine was in the role of Milo opposite Laurence Olivier as Andrew. Pinter's remake put Caine in the role of Andrew, with Jude Law as Milo and Kenneth Branagh directing.
71. 'Most Popular Films Of 1963', *Times*, 3 January 1964, 4. *The Times Digital Archive*, <http://tinyurl.gale.com/tinyurl/CVGNT6> (accessed December 11, 2019).
72. Letter from Ted Gilling to Harold Pinter, 17 April 1974, Harold Pinter Collection, British Library, Add MS 88880/6/2/159.
73. Letter from Christopher Hampton to Harold Pinter, 24 July 1974, Harold Pinter Collection, British Library, Add MS 88880/6/2/163.
74. Published under the pseudonym Adam Hall.
75. Isabelle Roblin, 'The Visible/Invisible Screenwriter: The Strange Case of Harold Pinter', *Adaptation* 7, no. 2, August 2014, 180–190. <https://doi.org/10.1093/adaptation/apu006> (accessed December 8, 2019).
76. See Jonathan Bignell's essay in the present issue for examples of fees he took in the sixties.
77. Stephen H. Gale, *Sharp Cut*, 217.
78. Qtd. in Gale, *Sharp Cut*, 237.
79. Roblin, 'The Strange Case of Harold Pinter'.

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