

Mixed feelings about words:" Language, politics and the ethics of inter-subjectivity in The Dumb Waiter
Mary F. Brewer To be means to communicate dialogically. When the dialogue is finished, all is finished.

Therefore, the dialogue, in essence, cannot and must not come to an end. 1 M.M. Bakhtin 1.
Introduction In his article, "Anti-Ritual, Critical Domestication and Representational Precision in Pinter's
The Dumb Waiter," Lance Norman argues that the critical tendency to "complete" Pinter's play is actually
encouraged by The Dumb Waiter's structure and action: on a meta-theatrical level, the play foregrounds
and critiques the way we read dramatic narratives. Norman's essay is in part a response to Thomas Van
Laan's assertion that critics of the play have frequently engaged in a process of "filling in what the
dramatist has neglected to record" (494-95). Building upon Van Laan, R.A. Buck identifies how
traditionalist critical discussions of the "The Dumb Waiter fail to emphasize the power of the linguistic
ambiguity in the last lines of the play" (45), thereby distorting its meaning. Norman, in contrast, suggests
that there is something built into the structure of Pinter's dramatic narrative that necessitates an
engagement with the ambiguity of language; that is, The Dumb Waiter compels the reader/spectator to
reflect critically on the ambiguous nature of language and communication, which, in a sense, disallows
the "neglect" of which Buck speaks. What I find intriguing about Norman's essay is how it reveals the
play as being partly about what narrative discourse is and gestures toward the psycho-social processes
by which meanings are created through inter-subjectiv