speculation, but for now it is enough to emphasize that I read these scenes as more of a critique of the nature of textual representation than the critique of a speculating audience.It suggests that the very fact some critics understand the play as a murder and some critics do not precludes any unitary interpretation as legitimate.While the newspaper's characterization of the cat's death may seem to be a more likely scenario than Gus's gender bias, to label Gus's position false is to continue "filling in." Just because Gus is biased and a newspaper that is never proven to be inaccurate is traditionally understood to be true does not mean Gus is wrong. Since the event that both Gus and the newspaper try to explain is kept firmly out of the audience's view, both interpretations are just representations of an exterior action. Either is a possible explanation for the dead cat. The play offers interpretations, not authentic answers. Ben and Gus are given the choice of recognizing that the text possesses an independent veracity that represents obscurely and fails to lead to satisfaction, or engage in the satisfying act of interpretation, molding the text till it fits their desires. Unsurprisingly, they choose the latter. By privileging their own satisfaction, Ben and Gus take authenticity out of the equation (or perhaps they become the personal arbitrators of authenticity), and in so doing demonstrate that the newspaper scene is a conflict of representational systems. The signs are accepted on their own merit without regard to the likelihood of signifier bonding to referent. I would like to think that I am not so totally humorless and logicless as not to recognize the silliness of Ben and Gus privileging their "filling in" over the "filling in" of the newspaper, and that Van Laan's insight that this "filling in" parodies a strand of criticism that would develop around the play is an apt one.This self-awareness equips Pinter's play to call attention to the "filling in" / exactitude fulcrum over which so much drama seems to balance. Perhaps The Dumb Waiter, and the critical conflicts which surround it, can help illustrate how neither alternative adequately illustrates Pinter's play and its proliferating meanings. Lance Norman, Michigan State University Notes 1 Viewed in its ritual context some contemporary drama has overcome this difficulty by ending the play with it beginning again. See Eugene Ionesco's The Lesson (1958) and Arrabal's The Architect and Emperor of Assyria (1969) for representativeexamples. Arrabal's play successfully emphasizes the ephemeral nature of ritual roles as the play begins again (concludes?) with the Architect having become the Emperor, and the Emperor the Architect. 2 Susan Hollis Merritt addresses Van Laan's critical strategy, and provides in-depth analysis of the debate between Van Laan, Austin Quigley, and Charles Carpenter in Modern Drama, on what she calls "critically 'inescapable' certainties" (see chapter 4 of Pinter in Play).Without a complete explanation for why a man crawled under a lorry, the story of the man getting run- over, which begins the play, becomes "unbelievable" and "incredible" if not incomprehensible to the two hitmen. Yet, if anything is incomprehensible to the theatrical audience, it is the very fact that the seemingly fact-based newspaper story is incomprehensible to Ben and Gus.After moving to another story, Ben and Gus find textual representation even more unsatisfactory. Just because words are printed on a page does not mean the printed words represent an authentic action that has occurred exterior to the room. The newspaper does not represent transparently. Rather than revealing absolute truths and representing an objective unmediated view of the world, the newspaper's textual signifiers require human mediation. Ben and Gus must grapple with and interpret the text to be satisfied with how and what the text represents: BEN: It's a fact. What about that, eh? A child of eight killing a cat! GUS: How did he do it? BEN: It was a

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girl. GUS:. How did she do it? BEN: She – He picks up paper and studies it. It doesn't say. GUS: Why not? BEN: Wait a minute. It just says –– Her brother, aged eleven, viewed the incident from the toolshed. GUS: Go on! BEN: That's bloody ridiculous. Pause. GUS: I bet he did it. BEN: Who? GUS: The brother. BEN: I think you're right. Pause. (Slamming down the paper.) What about that, eh? A kid of eleven killing a cat and blaming it on his little sister of eight! (116) For Ben and Gus, both stories have intrinsic gaps –– questions that remain unanswered. These gaps in textual representation suggest that no matter how precise a text, there is always room for more precision. It is not enough to know that an old man crawls under a lorry and is run over, it must be known "who advised him to do a thing like that" (114)?Van Laan sees filling in as a relatively new phenomena: "commentators are engaging in a process that has become widespread in the discussion of drama since the advent of Beckett" (118), and he goes on to argue that Pinter's play "deviates so strikingly from the traditional [dramatic] model that his relationship to us becomes a central element of the drama" (122). This recognition of the divergence between Pinter's drama and traditional drama revolves around the audience's trust in the playwright. In traditional drama, the audience trusts the playwright, and, thus the play unfolds without the audience being forced to take the playwright into the equation. Rhetorically, when Van Laan needs to understand Pinter in terms of exactitude –– or, more precisely, when he wants to emphasize the exactitude of the play's ambiguous ending – – the play is understood as a text. When he outlines the insubstantial relationship between Pinter's play and the audience, then the play is described in terms of performance by using such terms as "spectator response" (122).In a clear example of disciplining those who "fill in," Shaw describes as "unbearable" the way that "people in all directions have assumed, for no other reason than that she [Eliza Doolittle] became the heroine of a romance, that she must have married the hero of it" (282). Shaw believes he has written a play –– he has created a text––that represents an exact and precise meaning. In the aftermath of the play's performance, Shaw sees how audiences have filled in the play by imagining a marriage between Eliza and Higgins. Shaw returns to the text since the audience has deformed the play. He must create a postscript as paratext in an effort to make the imprecise text more exact. Much like Van Laan, Shaw tries to imagine a text so precise its meaning becomes transparent –– a text protected from interpretive ambiguity.6 With this being said, I agree that critical efforts to "fill in" associated with The Dumb Waiter are different from Shaw's recognition of and attempt to protect his play from an audience's imaginative construction.It would be one thing if the compulsion to "fill in" was restricted to Pinter and other so–called absurdist playwrights, but Van Laan's claims are far too modest. This is a phenomena that stretches at least as far back as modern drama itself.4 In his exuberance for The Dumb Waiter, Van Laan sees Pinter's play as too much of a radical departure from its dramatic antecedents. For example, in just one well known and decidedly non– absurdist example of "filling in," G. B. Shaw includes a prose epilogue to the published form of Pygmalion: 5 This sequel to the play describes what will happen next to the characters.However, such an interpretation is again forced to confront language that fails to represent precisely, for even if Gus does not have his gun, Ben's instructions outline that Gus is behind the door and that a "bloke comes in" (143).Understanding the concluding tableau precisely seems to require the understanding that so much of the language that leads up to the tableau fails to represent precisely. Ben and Gus's need to fulfill orders exactly, and the

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way such a compulsion leads them further and further down a dangerous path, is analogous to the critical compulsion to focus on the exact manner the concluding tableau represents. Ben and Gus take turns embracing both critical activities, and believing that both offer meaning and satisfaction. I am not insisting that every critic must engage in both activities since such a balance would be difficult if not impossible to maintain. Reflecting on his efforts to fulfill the textual representations delivered by the dumb waiter, Gus wonders: "Why did you send him up all that stuff?The precise dictates of textual representation cannot be performed and "filling in" cannot disguise this fact. Efforts to "fill in" merely outline the unacceptable nature of "filling in," and establish the very concept of textual representational exactitude as illusory.8 Since Ben and Gus have been unable to understand precise textual representation as anything but illusory -- since they must "fill in" perceived gaps in the papers, and since the written requests of the dumb waiter must remain hopelessly out of reach, the hitmen turn to the vocal utterance.The Dumb Waiter does not reach its almost violent tableau because Ben and Gus "fill in," but on the contrary, the tableau emerges as the culmination of a quite opposite effect. The play concludes with Ben and Gus exhibiting a Shavian compulsion to read texts precisely. Like Shaw's efforts to give Pygmalion a precise meaning, Ben and Gus wish to believe that texts have one exact meaning. In addition to parodying "filling in," the hitmen and The Dumb Waiter as a play confront the inherent difficulty in understanding texts determinately.However, if we read thenewspaper scene as a parody of critical "filling in," there is another critical strand that is parodied later in the play. As the dumb waiter delivers its written food orders to Ben and Gus, the hitmen must confront the impossibility of fulfilling the desire for textual exactitude. Their "real world" actions are doomed to perpetually fall short of the requests outlined in the notes delivered via the dumb waiter.Van Laan outlines an idealized dramatic dichotomy to The Dumb Waiter: text is exact and fosters meaning, while the performative utterance .perpetuates a self-referential ambiguity.3

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