

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