I have tried to be honest with you, although I suppose that you would really have been more interested in my not being honest. Some of these things happened, and some were dreams. They are all true, as I understood truth. They are all real, as I understood reality.

In *The Pumpkin Eater*, Pinter’s battleground shifts somewhat toward internal climes, consistent with a trend in his playwriting, already initiated in the intrapersonal frictions of *A Slight Ache* and *The Homecoming*, and extending throughout his subsequent work. Penelope Mortimer’s novel, on which the screenplay is based, describes the circumstances surrounding a woman’s emotional breakdown from her own point of view. Her final statement in the novel, quoted above, tallies with the volatile mood of the work, which consists in a collection of apparently unrelated, nonsequential, and noncreditable scenes. The narrator suffers a certifiable rupture from “reality.” We meet her thirteen years into her fourth marriage, with a brood of uncounted (uncountable?) children. Mainly through the device of psychoanalysis, we learn that her previous marriages had landed her in happy poverty, but that her present husband, Jake, has become a wealthy screenwriting sensation. The trappings of success have undone our narrator (who goes nameless in the novel), as Jake’s expanding circles of activity parallel a constricting pattern in her own. Her talents for homemaking, organizing, rallying, and reproducing go unheeded. Payrolled employees have rendered her obsolete, proliferating comforts have eroded her usefulness, and professional worries and attachments have apparently undermined Jake’s affection for her. She recedes further and further from the nurse-dominated world of her innumerable children and from
the clique-dominated world of her inaccessible husband, into her own world of doubting.

By nature and circumstance, our narrator remains chronically incapable of discerning the truth about her own situation and about those of the others in the story. She prevents us from discovering the facts as well. Neither of us can afford to trust the few conclusions she manages to make. "Things happen. I look. I'm miserable, or frightened, or angry. But up here, in my head, I do not know what it is that's happening. I can't believe what is happening... I believe it, but I don't believe in it. It's not really happening, I kept saying to myself. It's not really true" (pp. 186-87). And nowhere do we get the story; everywhere we get her story.

The spoils of ambiguity infest the novel at all levels. Time sequences jumble, collapse, and expand, leaving us uncertain of the order, relationship, and duration of events. We seldom know what caused what or how long it has been going on. Motives become impossible to determine, and even the narrator concludes that their divination is a waste of time. When she is confronted, after her abortion/hysterectomy, with the pregnancy of Jake's mistress, she capitulates. "How can you tell about anything? It's what you do that matters, the reason is just... nothing. The reason why Jake and Beth Conway went to bed together—whether it was good or bad, it couldn't matter less. Reasons don't have consequences, only actions. She's pregnant and I'm sterile... and who cares if it's justified or unjustified" (pp. 189-90).

According to the narrator's perspective, we are condemned to watching and guessing. Life around us promises no more accessibility than a still photograph, frozen forever in its fleeting mystery. The existences of others elude us: "I always found it hard to believe in the actuality of other people's lives" (p. 213). Our own pasts slip away: "I waited in the car for two hours till you came back. I remember it, but it's like remembering seeing a woman sitting in a car" (p. 187). Our selves disintegrate with them: "All this, and more, I saw myself perform in my children's memories, but although I knew at one time it was so, I could not recognize myself" (p. 214).

The narrator laments the predatory indifference of the infinite present that now envelops her in the absence of all other connections.

I seemed to be alone in the world... I had found, or had created, a neutrality between the past that I had lost and the future that I feared: an interminable hour which passed under my feet like the shadow of moving stairs, each stair recurring again and again, flattening to meet the next, a perfect circle of isolation captive between yesterday and tomorrow, between two illusions. Yesterday had never been. Tomorrow would never come. [P. 212]
She relinquishes her quest for the elusive—her desire for verification, her scrutiny of motive, her visits to the psychoanalyst (whose very nature persists in the attempt to explain the present through the past, and who, in the novel, makes an obvious figure of ridicule)—but she does so only to inhabit a magnified stasis, an absence of life. Mortimer's physical metaphor for this process, the newly constructed, vacant house, into which the narrator moves at this point, hurls the novel squarely into Pinter-land.

These themes and situations come tailor-made to Pinter. He provides the narrator with a name, Jo, and describes her situation in the cinematic language of fact. Previous studies that have wondered at the relevance of Mortimer's themes to Pinter's milieu seem to be confounded either by the novel or by the released film.2

Jack Clayton, who directed the film, misapprehended Pinter's reworking of the material, and ruined or cut some of its finest moments. He violated the script by retaining from the novel some of Jo's disorientation as an excuse for fancy camera work in the mode of grotesque subjective viewpoint. Consequently, he dislocated Pinter's re-routing of the signifiers of ambiguity, returning the blame to the narrator rather than attributing it to inescapable condition as Pinter had intended. Although their argument runs almost contrary to mine in this respect, and they attribute Clayton's mishandling of the script to his "cool camera technique," Baker and Tabachnick also sense the director's inappropriateness for this material. "Jack Clayton . . . contradicts . . . the point of the story by attempting to present what we see as in fact truth. Pinter's early fears about the 'bastardising' tendency of the film industry find partial justification when it comes to this film. The limitations of the writer working in a medium only partially under his power to control become clear here."3 Clayton corrupted the script in his cautiousness as well as in his boldness, by cutting and reordering it to alleviate Pinter's confused temporal scheme. Hopelessly out of synchronization with his material, Clayton finally invented a happy ending, disfiguring Pinter's finest contribution to the story, and rendering the entire film incongruously sentimental. Thus, in this discussion more than the others, I discount the filmed product and restrict my analysis exclusively to the screenplay text.

In Pinter's script (Clayton has altered this sequence to ensure a smoother "continuity") the early scenes comprise a temporal patchwork that juxtaposes Jo's past circumstances with her present condition. Here, in a fast-paced series of vignettes alternating the chaotic exuberance of the past with the antiseptic malaise of the present, Pinter delineates the horns of Jo's dilemma. We glimpse Jo alone, with tea laid for one, staring out the window. "Reflected in the window pane demolition
of buildings, tall skeletons of new constructions." Again, we note the indictment of perceptual modes implicit in Pinter's indication that Jo's view of things is a reflected one, manipulated and occluded by the windows of her own world. The subject of this reflection, a radical encroachment on the old by the new, keynotes the prevailing theme of Pinter's adaptation, and he will repeat the idea in various forms throughout the screenplay.

Jo drifts without interest through the signs of the absent: glinting automobiles, overturned scooters, pools of petrol, untouched mail, sounds of water running elsewhere, expensive furniture, dark corners of the garage. From this study of alienation, Pinter cuts immediately to the past.

Interior. Barn. Day. TEN YEARS EARLIER. A large room, sub-divided by numerous home-made partitions. It is sparsely furnished but crowded with children. Jo is at a table making pastry. Some of the children are playing on the floor with train sets and home-made constructions of roads and stations. The smallest girl apart, examining a doll's house. [P. 65]

The scene that transpires here depicts Jo's first encounter with Jake in a maelstrom of children's exigencies and domestic toil. Pinter traces the progress of their relationship in two contiguous thumbnail scenes, first with Jake's father and then with Jo's, seeking permission for their marriage. Both of these figures from the past have died or will die during the ambiguous present time of the story. From the scene with Jo's father, Pinter cuts to the following sequence.

Another angle: Jo stands, does not touch crockery.
Another angle: at window.
Glimpses of demolition through window.
Another angle: Jo
She turns away, clutching her arms, walks vaguely about the kitchen, her heels clicking on the tiled floor. An immaculate, gleaming modern kitchen, spotless, nothing out of place.
Another angle: Jo
As she moves, we see: new dishwasher, new refrigerator, new washing machine and spin dryer, new electric oven, racks of gleaming crockery, photograph on teak wood wall, a large photo pinned from a magazine of Mr Jake Armitage, Mrs Armitage and their CHILDREN. [P. 69]

The schism that Pinter focuses between the past and the present suggests, with distinct economy and force, an incipient clash between the forces of chaos and those of order. Through this striking montage, juxtaposing kitchen past and kitchen present, Jo's dilemma emerges.

Jo's marriage to Jake has necessitated a "shedding of the load," as
Jo’s father states it. The eldest of the brood are hustled off to boarding school, never actually to return to the clan. In Mortimer’s novel three children, two girls and a boy, suffer the expulsion. Pinter, however, amends the composition of this group to two boys, and, although the shed children never reappear in the novel, he incorporates two scenes that stress the consequent estrangement of these boys from Jo. They have grown into things apart, being alien from her, and their masculine sex underscores the insuperable distance between themselves and their mother. The male/female gulf mirrors the second active schism of the conflict, occurring primarily between Jake and Jo. In the two scenes with the oldest boys, only the most vacuous pleasantries are exchanged with Jo, and she acknowledges the two only vaguely.

PETE. Hullo, Mum.
JO. Hullo.
JACK. Hullo.
JO. Hullo.
Pause . . . .
JO. (to boys). What do you think of your sister?
JACK. Pretty good.
Pause.
JO. Are you . . . everything all right?
JACK. Fine.
Pause.
PETE. Yes. Fine.
Pause.
JO. Good. [Pp. 107–8]

Thus ends the first of the two scenes. The second merely elaborates the rupture, the irreversible hardening of child against parent. Even the compulsive production of beings from her own flesh provides Jo no respite from her increasing solitude and exclusion.

After a brief sequence of shots depicting the early days of Jo’s marriage to Jake (Pinter includes an original scene here that predicates a masterful episode, also of Pinter’s invention, at the conclusion of the script), Pinter develops her gradual suspicions of an affair between Jake and the movie-groupie house guest, Philpot. These scenes he lifts practically intact, in all their unrelenting obfuscation, from the novel. Jo can neither confirm nor assuage her fears.

JO. Do you like sitting between two women? Does that thrill you?
JAKE. Yes it does. It really does. What do you think I should do about it? What shall I do, go and see a psychiatrist about it?
He sits. Pause.
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JO. All right, what—
JAKE. Look. Listen.

Pause.

It was nothing, nothing. Don't you understand?
JO. What do you mean, it was nothing?

Pause.

What do you mean, nothing?
JAKE. What do you think I mean?
JO. What did you catch her for?
JAKE. I didn't catch her!
JO. She fainted.

JAKE. What does it matter if I caught her or not? I didn't catch her, it doesn't matter. Can't you understand? Who cares?
JO. I care.

JAKE. What about? What's it all about? [Pp. 78-79]

In the second of these scenes, Jo returns to this Philpot issue after she hears that Jake has involved himself in an affair with an actress, Beth Conway. This interrogation further confounds the facts of the alleged tryst, as Jake alternately confirms and denies identical accusations.

JO. Did you sleep with Philpot?
JAKE. Oh, Christ, it's years ago, it's gone—

JO. Did you?
JAKE. Yes, of course I did.
JO. You told me you hadn't.

JAKE. I lied. So what? What else did you expect me to do?
JO. Here? In the house?

JAKE. I don't remember. Yes.

JO. Often?

JAKE. As often as we could. What's the point? What the hell does it matter?

JO. What about all the others?

JAKE. What others?

JO. The others.

JAKE. There weren't any others.

JO. How many?

JAKE. Half a dozen. A dozen. I don't know. What does the number matter?

JO. When you were away, or when you were here?

JAKE. When I was away! Is that what you want me to say?

JO. If it's true.

JAKE. Then it was while I was away.

Pause.

You live in a dream world, do you know that? [Pp. 120-21]
The scene continues for another full page, eliciting and then withdrawing the answers Jo demands. Its basic substance derives from the novel, but Pinter has sharpened the dialogue to achieve characteristic economy and terseness.

The initial development of Philpot, an episode Pinter places five years past, is interspersed with scenes in the present time, tracing Jo's emotional breakdown in Harrod's and her subsequent submission to psychiatric treatment. This portion of the script includes some excellent examples of Pinter's consideration for the potentialities of actors and of a largely visual medium. Himself an experienced actor, Pinter possesses a highly developed ability to write dialogue that teems with actor's subtext. The following two examples of communication between characters, comparing Mortimer's dialogue with that of Pinter, exhibits his skill at erecting such smokescreens. In Mortimer's version the narrator overhears this snatch of dialogue between Jake and her physician following her collapse at Harrod's.

"Perhaps she ought to go away?" Jake said.
"Could you go with her?"
"I'm afraid not. I'm off to North Africa for a couple of weeks and I've got a hell of a lot to get through before then."
"Why not take her to North Africa?"
"She wouldn't want to go."
"Are you sure of that?"

"I've asked her. She hates going on location. You know, there's nothing for her to do, she just sits about and gets in the way—she feels she gets in the way." [Pp. 53-54]

Pinter seizes the innuendo present in this scene, particularly in Jake's hasty rephrasing in the last speech, and rewrites the dialogue to occur between Jake and Jo during a roughly similar, but unspecified, period of time.

**JAKE.** We've finished the script.
**Pause.**

**WE'RE GOING . . . TO MOROCCO FOR A COUPLE OF WEEKS.**
**JO.** Mmm-hmm.
**Pause.**
**JAKE.** WOULD YOU LIKE TO COME?
**Pause.**

I mean . . .
**JO.** Oh, I . . .
**Pause.**
**JAKE.** It'd mean living in tents and all that . . . but . . . if you felt like it . . .
**JO.** Couldn't just . . . sit in a tent . . .
In this lean exchange, Jake conveys, and Jo grasps, his unwillingness to have her along, and he exhibits undeniable, if unconfirmable, clarity of intention.

Pinter’s artful knack for insinuating raw objectives into processed verbal subterfuge appears also in a scene with the psychiatrist. In Mortimer’s work the narrator becomes outraged when she learns that her doctor is about to abandon her for an extended skiing vacation in the mountains. She plainly articulates her anger to the psychiatrist in a direct and lengthy diatribe (pp. 107–8). Pinter disguises Jo’s alarm at this situation and unleashes it on an oblique target.

**INGRAM.** Oh, I’m sorry, haven’t I told you? We’re off to Gstaad on Friday for a spot of skiing. It’s my great passion, I’m afraid.

**JO.** Skiing?

**INGRAM.** Oh, and cut down on liquids as much as you can. Can we make an appointment for the . . . 19th?

**JO.** Can’t make it. No . . . can’t make the 19th.

**INGRAM.** The 20th?

**JO.** Can’t make it.

**INGRAM.** Oh come now . . .

**JO.** What liquids?

**INGRAM.** Liquids.

**JO.** Yes, but what liquids? Listen, why are you going to Gstaad? Why don’t you go to Cortina? Why Gstaad? Why the hell don’t you go to Cortina? Or Kitzbuhel? [P. 91]

Although the reference to liquids appears in the novel, Mortimer never takes up the idea again. Pinter, however, capitalizes on its mysterious ring. In the next scene, at the hairdressers, Jo is besieged by a fellow customer who claims inexplicably to be “off liquids” when Jo inquires whether she would like some tea. (Clayton cuts this dialogue in order to serve them the tea anyway.) Pinter invents this scene from a letter that the narrator receives in the novel. The content of the letter is completely harmless, although Pinter’s scene contains a heavy dose of menace, and the narrator’s response to it introduces a poorly integrated “feminist unity” theme into the novel. Its author, an apparently lower-class housewife, describes her lower-class housewife predicament, and the narrator identifies with it. For Pinter, the incident contains capital visual promise, and he evolves an entire scene, set in the hairdressers, from it. The scene, in which the strange woman accosts Jo under the hairdryers, at first with cautious admiration and then with abrupt viciousness, is both savage and funny.
WOMAN. . . . I can see your grace and your sweetness just sitting here. What does your husband think of you, eh? Does he find you attractive? Eh, I've been wondering, do you think your husband would find me desirable? Eh?

JO. Look . . . I don't actually feel very . . .

WOMAN. I'd show him some tricks. I'd show him some tricks. Hah! You want to bet? . . . I'd show him a few things I bet you don't know. My love. My little darling. Anyone ever clawed your skin off? You see these claws? Ever had your skin clawed off?

An ASSISTANT comes to the women. She looks curiously at them both.

You going to give me two curls there this time? Over the ears, two curls, one either side, two lovely curls at each side, are you? Are you? [P. 93]

This scene and others, such as Jo's breakdown in Harrod's, demonstrate Pinter's flair for translating pages of narrative into a few spare, taut situational pictures. In Katherine Burkman's brief discussion of The Pumpkin Eater, she notes the banality of these surface milieux and contrasts them with the savage instincts they both conceal and reveal. "Once again the veneer of the sexual rituals of parties, shopping tours, and so on, works in counterpoint with primitive undercurrents, which erupt finally into a savage physical fight between husband and wife." 6 Pinter swiftly turns the narrator's vague mental landscapes into a reality, simultaneously too familiar and too strange, that we can neither claim nor reject. His apparent objectivity recreates Jo's affliction in us, as audience.

Pinter uses the camera to intensify our awareness of Jo's individual viewpoint, however, as well. When Jake arrives from North Africa, we experience the children's welcome for him first from an objective camera angle, and then we hear the identical dialogue repeated as the camera focuses Jo, alone in the "silent, empty" sitting room (pp. 93-94). We gain an immediate sensation of the disparities inherent in view, paralleling the major obstacles in the storyline. Although Pinter's script identifies the problems of verification with the human condition rather than with Jo's condition, she does represent the chief protagonist/victim of the theme in both versions. Either way, she remains incapable of discovering the facts of her situation, and she must make her choices, somehow, without them.

The pregnancy ritual insulates Jo on several levels against the need for choice; it provides a "natural" (and, for her, habitual) course of action, it promises two years of full-time occupation, and it actualizes the ever-evaporating bonds between herself and her family. Jo's sense of well-being derives exclusively from the ritual patterns of living that accompany child-rearing. Each pregnancy dispels the urgency of decision-making, temporarily; she keeps her routines intact. Her semi-conscious despair over Jake's impatience with her astronomical brood
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awakens in her a craving for security, and this craving translates invari­
ably and ironically into her desire for another child.

When Jo does manage to become pregnant in the “present-time” of
the story action, she must conceal her condition and gratification from
her husband. In the novel the narrator writes to Jake of her latest preg­
nancy from a desk by her father’s deathbed. The timing and pathetic
nature of the letter signal her anxiety over Jake’s response to the news of
her pregnancy. Partly to intensify her anxiety, and partly to exploit his
medium, Pinter discards the letter device and substitutes for it a scene
in which Jo’s mother unthinkingly betrays the secret to Jake in her
distress over her lost husband. Both novel and screenplay include
scenes depicting Jo in the attic, hiding among items of infant parapher­
nalia until prospective intruders pass. Ultimately, Jo’s desperation over
her dilemma, coupled with Jake’s urging, result in her decision to
undergo an abortion and simultaneous hysterectomy. Mortimer’s Jake
seduces the narrator into her decision by listing plans he entertains for
the two of them which the expected infant would spoil. Pinter’s Jake
persuades Jo with inarticulate platitudes.

I don’t want it. That’s why. (Pause.) I wanted us to change. Now we can’t
change. You see? It’s my fault. It’s because of me, I know that. But I thought
we could change . . . branch out . . . be free. (Pause.) Now there’s no
chance. (Pause.) We’re back where we were.

She goes to him, holds him.

I’m not blaming you, I’m blaming myself. It’s my fault, I know that. We
haven’t . . . lived together. But it’s just that I’ve suddenly realized . . . that
we could lead a more sensible life. It was possible. We haven’t lived. (Pause.)
We don’t need it. It’ll kill us. We could begin, you see, we could really begin
. . . I know it . . . you know, too . . . You know what I mean. I mean there
is a world, there is a world apart from birth, there’s a world apart from . . .
we don’t want any more . . . how can we have any more?

Silence.

I know the idea of abortion is repellent to you, I know that. It is to me, too.
You must admit I’ve never suggested it.

Silence.

It’s ghastly, the idea of abortion, I know that. Ghastly. (Silence.) I wouldn’t
dream of suggesting it. (Silence.) But after all, it would be perfectly legal.
you’ve just been treated for depression, I mean the Doctor said . . . there
wouldn’t be anything underhand about it. [Pp. 110-11]

Although Jake’s strongly implied threat to withdraw his love clearly
motivates Jo’s termination of her child-bearing capabilities, both ver­
sions of the story emphasize her authorship and ownership of the
choice. When her sole option for security acquires simultaneous conse­
quences of insecurity, Jo is trapped. Her realization that this pregnancy
significant differences exist between the two treatments of the story's main crisis. Mortimer's narrator learns of Jake's affair with Beth Conway by reading his mail while she is recovering in the hospital from her operation. Her desires for revenge against Jake and for an end to the liaison prompt her to divulge her information to Beth's husband. Pinter, however, invents a simpler and more ironic twist for this development. His adaptation puts Bob Conway in first possession of the news. While the narrator confronts Conway with her proof in a teashop, Conway confronts Jo with his story at the zoo. The caged animals provide a striking background for Conway's monstrous assault on Jo, as he springs the news of Jake's infidelity on her after two pages of maliciously sweet chit-chat and one unsuccessful sexual advance. Following his disclosure Conway harasses Jo with a derisive assessment of Jake's character and sexual performance. Most of the material for Pinter's dialogue here derives from the novel, but his relocation and restructuring of the scene lend it dynamic visualization while they enlarge the dimensions of Jo's calamity.

Jo, in both versions, next confronts Jake with her accusations, producing the earlier cited dialogue recalling Philpot. Jake frustrates all of her lines of inquiry, alternately admitting and denying identical allegations. At this point in Mortimer's story, the narrator fills three pages with introspection, elucidating her alienation and solitude. She complains, "I wanted to go home, but now my father was dead there was no home to go to, only a house where my mother mourned and thanked goodness that I had at last seen reason" (p. 173). Pinter spells out this thought in cinematic language: in the screenplay she does return home here to confront the permanent grief of her mother and her own lost rapport with the two 'shed' boys.

During her visit to her mother, Jo also encounters the expanding threat of the demolition crews, a restatement of the theme from the opening sequence of shots. Apparently, construction corporations are pressuring to develop the land of her father's garden, but her mother has made some weak stand against them. The heavy mood of hopelessness and helplessness that permeates this scene evokes recollections of Madam Ranevsky and her fated cherry orchard, and it introduces (or rather reintroduces) the theme that Pinter will develop into a resolution of the piece. Jo's world has become a single, sustained chord of remorse and attenuation.

Pinter combines two episodes from the novel to craft the stunning scene in which Jo learns of Beth Conway's pregnancy. In the novel Bob
Conway's phone call, announcing this news, interrupts an interview of the narrator by an insidious magazine reporter. After the narrator hears Conway's vicious message, she flees to Giles, a previous husband, and attempts to retrieve their relationship. Her effort, of course, fails, but in the course of her stay with him, she tells Giles the ominous story of a mystic Jamaican who visited her recently. The strange figure claimed to be the new King of Israel and asked, in a prolonged, bizarre pitch, for money to build a radio station in Jerusalem. The narrator employs the incident as a format for self-analysis, concluding:

He didn't seem like a maniac. I'm not saying he was sane. But neither was I. I'm not saying he even believed in himself, but neither did I. He got five shillings from me and I... I was comforted. I told you I don't know who I am or what I'm like, but I know there aren't any rules—perhaps the kind of person I am believes in Yahweh. Perhaps that Jamaican King of Judah and I need the same thing. [P. 194]

Pinter, however, elucidates a scene from this material and locates Conway's phone call in the middle of it. The Jamaican appears at the door when Jo is alone, drinking. He gains entry after his introduction of himself as "the new King of Israel, appointed by Yahweh, the Eternal Lord God. I have come to give you my blessing." Once inside he continues his mesmerizing spiel, promising Jo redemption and droning liturgical platitudes. The phone interrupts their conversation. Conway's poisonous diatribe, drawn mainly from the novel, inspires Pinter's final ironic twist in this scene. When Jo recognizes Conway's voice, and claims to be someone other than herself, Conway, knowing, asks her to convey the message of Beth's pregnancy to Jo.

**CONWAY'S VOICE.** Tell her my wife's going to have this kid in a public ward, and if there's any way of stopping her getting a whiff of gas I'll find it.

**JO.** She can't have it.

**CONWAY'S VOICE.** She's going to have it all right. She's going to wipe its bottom and stare at its ugly mug for the rest of her life. No more gay life for my little Beth. This kid's going to make her curse Jake Armitage until she's dead... I'm going to grind the slime out of her. I'm going to see her oozing in her own slime. Until she's dead. She's going to hate that kid almost as much as I will. I'm going to see that she bleeds to death in Jake Armitage's dirt.

**Another angle to include MAN.** JO puts the phone down. She turns, looks at the MAN. He smiles.

**MAN.** You will be blessed for this. [P. 127]

Although Mortimer exposes a villainy in Giles during the next sequence of episodes that repels the narrator and causes her to abandon him, Pinter keeps Giles's motives apparently pure, allowing Jo's effort at reclamation to fail of its own accord. Both writers have Jo leaving
Giles to attend the funeral of Jake’s father, but, in Mortimer’s version, Giles had attempted to hide his death from the narrator to prevent her leaving. The funeral scene, for both authors, buries another section of past and chronicles the widening rift between the protagonist and her husband. Mortimer follows it with rumors of Conway’s dissipation, and Pinter interjects a sinister scene between Jake and Conway, both drunk and ruined, in a bar. Jo, in both versions, retreats to the isolation and emptiness of the new house. She endures there, according to both stories, for an undefined period of time. Pinter describes her experience in a two-page sequence of shots (which Clayton discarded), the tone of which materializes in these first two directions.

Interior. Main room of the new house. . . . The rooms are empty except for isolated pieces of furniture. Jo pauses for a moment, then locks all the doors.


This vague period of vacuous solitude ends, according to novel and screenplay, in the convergence of Jake and the children on the new house. For Mortimer, Jake remains behind, purchasing goods, and the narrator observes him, at the end of the story, as he ascends the hill toward her. Pinter brings Jake and his chaos of groceries into the house with the mob of children, and he concludes the story with a remarkable idea (and one that is totally absent from the film): as Jo stands apart from the domestic bustle, Dinah, the eldest child, seems to have taken over control of the family. “Let me do it,” she says to Jake. “Put all the paper in the bin,” she orders the children.

Previously in this chapter, I referred to an earlier bit of dialogue that figures significantly in the final moments of the screenplay. The earlier scene, between Jo and Jake, includes the following exchange and business with beer cans.

Jake, with a grimace, opens can. It spurts over the wall, where we can already see the stains from previous moments of this kind.

Jake. Want one?

Jo. Yes, I’ll have one.

He hands her opened can. She takes it. Jake opens second can. It also spurts over wall.

Jake. Aaahh!

Jo. It’s all right, it’ll wipe off. . . . Do you want turnips or swedes?

Jake. Turnips or swedes?

Jo. Yes. Or both if you like.

He looks at her blankly.

Jake. (with sudden concentration). Turnips or swedes.

Wait a minute. Just a minute. Let me think about it. [Pp. 72–73]
The last moments of the screenplay echo this scene, except that the children have usurped Jo's words and place.

DINAH hands opener to JAKE.

DINAH. Here you are. Do you want cabbage or carrots?

JAKE opens beer can. It spurts. CHILDREN react noisily.

I'll wipe it.

CHILD FOUR. I'll do it. [P. 135]

The story ends as Jo accepts a can of beer from Jake. She has made a passive capitulation to the persistence of ambiguity and disorder in her world; she has outlived her passion to resolve them. The signs of fertility and ongoing life that invade the sterile and alien house—the spurting beer, the clamoring brood, the grocery bags—serve only to focus Jo's helpless attentuation. Like the house, the clean-scraped pumpkin shell, she suffers an estrangement from living and purpose. The house provides both a metaphor and an environment for Jo's condition; she represents and inhabits the pumpkin shell. The tide of children has ascended to supplant her.

Both the title and the conclusion of The Pumpkin Eater (1965) seem to indicate the familiar mechanism of Pinter's emblematic "room" as a factor in this adaptation. Clayton's modifications of the screenplay plainly subscribe to a traditional "Pinteresque" view of the room as a prospect for refuge. By omitting Pinter's lengthy articulations of the antiseptic qualities in Jo's present house, and by alleviating his intense juxtaposition of these qualities with the happy pandemonium of her past, the film implies that her final inhabitation of the new house represents a remedial seclusion. For Clayton the pumpkin shell is plausible as a device for keeping one's wife content, and he alters Pinter's sour ending in order to affirm this view. Despite some patterns typical of Pinter in Jo's inclinations against the alien and toward the insular, however, Pinter's treatment of the "room" syndrome in this work marks a divergence from his earlier writing, in which characters in The Room, The Dumb Waiter, The Birthday Party, and The Caretaker sought to escape the vicissitudes of life through homemaking rituals, or characters in The Servant competed to assert their authority through interior decoration. The pumpkin shell is not, here, a symbol of comfort, security, or triumph: it is identified principally with the evacuated infertility of Jo's womb. The pronounced affinity between "room" and "womb" in Pinter's early work renders this new attitude even more distinct and compelling. At best, Pinter's depiction of Jo's final enshacement in the new house reveals an ambivalence in his regard for the room's possibilities as a refuge. Where before the room was subjected
mainly to the threat of intrusion, it now exhibits qualities that render it almost uninhabitable.

Similar qualities become apparent in the settings and tensions of Pinter’s plays of this period. We have noted that in *The Homecoming* (1964) an architectural deletion serves to lament Jessie's absence and to proclaim a need to fill this vacancy. The design of this space operates to capture certain thematic ideas in the work, such as the simultaneous containment and erasure of the past by the present, the fracturing of old structures without recourse to new ones, the persistence of old forms despite assault and erosion, the sterile, alien nature of the present juxtaposed with the contrary implications of the almost obliterated past, and the urgent deprivation of something necessary for unity and completion of the situation. Although Jo’s estrangement from the past, as announced by her final dissociation from its accoutrements, seems more extreme, the themes of the screenplay resemble those of the play and they become accessible through a similar use of place. In both works the settings codify a tension between generations that suggests the passage of old, unified systems into modern ones that sustain the old in attenuated fragments, integrate according to pragmatics rather than to wholeness, and lack internal designation of the past or future. Except for the temporal allusions of the set, however, *The Homecoming* conforms to a linear time scheme. Pinter’s discovery of subjective, nonlinear structure as a device for exploring these themes occurs initially in his work for the film medium, and specifically in his adaptation of *The Pumpkin Eater*.

The antiseptic character of the room in *The Homecoming* (strikingly realized in the film of the play), which is inhabited exclusively by males, anticipates Pinter’s depiction of Jo’s pumpkin shell and defines his growing interest in the problem of effective seclusion. Previously, in *A Slight Ache* (1958), Pinter explored the dilemma of two characters whose apparent control over their milieu is so complete that they must invite (or possibly, since this play was originally written for radio broadcast and the third character is a nonspeaking role, invent) an intruder to generate vitality through opposition. Where Pinter’s earlier characters forged identities through the struggle with others, his characters of this period wrestle unavailingly against the elusiveness of themselves. The accompanying transition in his view of the room, from sanctuary to empty hull, becomes increasingly significant in his later plays, such as *Old Times* and *No Man’s Land*, where imagination must combat the monotony and sterility of this latter condition. Clayton’s option for a conventionally “Pinteresque” approach to this theme obscures this crucial development in Pinter’s attitude; the change, however, is conspicuous in the text of the screenplay.