ABSTRACT

This dissertation studies social dislocation in the selected plays of Harold Pinter, in terms of its significance for initiating various subcultural processes, which pluralize social reality. The need for the present study arose because of the dynamic nature of Pinter criticism, which has generated a variety of approaches to the study of his drama. Pinter has often been compared to Beckett and Kafka. However, his plays cannot be appreciated in terms of a single perspective, because of their multidimensional structure, which simultaneously embodies diverse dramatic elements. The Absurd and the realistic elements co-exist in Pinter's plays. This dramatic ambivalence of the plays provokes the search for newer approaches to the plays. The present approach to Pinter's plays creates an additional space for the criticism of his plays and also generates the possibility of yielding observations which can contribute to an empirical study of 'lived' subcultures. Thus, the study has an interdisciplinary relevance. The chief motivation for this sociological study of Pinter's plays comes from his first authorized biography by Michael Billington, *The Life and Work of Harold Pinter,* which traces the playwright's personal and social involvements as shaping his dramatic work. Billington's book has reversed the notion of Pinter's plays as being socially detached and therefore, this study purports to carry on the line of Billington's argument, though with a different emphasis. The dissertation has been organized into seven chapters.

Chapter One is introductory in nature and discusses some prominent features of Pinter's plays. The chapter also places the present study in the historical context of Pinter criticism. Social dislocation in the plays of Pinter can be studied through a subcultural framework. The discussion in the chapter justifies the selection of twelve plays, on the ground that the plays selected are representative of Pinterian drama and are amenable to the sociological approach being followed in this dissertation. Pinter's plays usually involve micro-level social settings, which can be enlarged to construct a larger social system.

Chapter two aims at developing an analytic framework for the discussion of the plays. A literary text needs to be liberated from the bondage of theoretical interpretation, because a creative writer does not write to prove or refute a particular theory. Therefore, the chapter argues, the plays will be studied for their on sake and not to apply a particular literary/ sociological theory. The term 'dislocation' has been used in the dissertation in a variety of senses. It captures the postmodernist social condition, as reflected in the plays of Pinter. The homogeneity of contemporary pluralistic societies is disrupted by a number of subcultural processes which segment the society into several social spheres, each operating as a miniature autonomous system within the larger society. The chapter evolves a broader definition of subculture than its restricted use in the early criminological accounts of deviant subcultures. The discussion of

subculture derives ideas mainly from Dick Hebdige's book *Subculture: The Meaning Of Style,* which considers subcultural groups in terms of their foregrounded style. However, Hebdige argues, style in subculture is appropriated by the mainstream culture and therefore, it is not possible to maintain 'spectacular' subcultures in the contemporary context of cultural diffusion. The emphasis on the definition of subculture, as discussed in this chapter, has been on the pluralization of society, due to the presence of different group boundaries.

Chapter three analyzes *The Room, The Caretaker* and *No Man's Land,* which involve an attempt at upward mobility by the characters. Social mobility has been chosen as a context for subcultural readings of the plays for several reasons. Mobility of social actors necessitates a displacement from their existing position, both physically as well as symbolically. While rising upward, social actors bring about a new culture. *The Room* dramatizes the act of social mobility through an architectural semiotics, which evokes a multiethnic pluralistic social context. The attack on the blind Negro suggests social conflicts among different social groups in a multicultural society. Cultural deformity, represented by Riley's blindness, is continued through Rose, which negates the idea of cultural purity in pluralistic societies. *The Caretaker* dramatizes the futile attempt of a tramp Davies to relocate himself in the house of two brothers, Aston and Mick. Davies and Mick represent the two opposite poles of social spectrum, whereas Aston forms an intermediate stage between the two

extremes. Davies' prejudice against the foreigners indicates the marginalization of natives due to rapid economic changes. The last play discussed in this chapter, *No Man's Land* creates an explicit subcultural context for dramatizing social dislocation, in terms of disruption of the process of mobility. Like Davies, Spooner fails to achieve social mobility. While it is due to lack of required vocational skills that Davies fails to find a job in the Aston-Mick household, in *No Man's Land,* Spooner, despite being a talented poet, is denied recognition by Hirst, because of the latter's jealousy and monopolistic attitude. The plays discussed in this chapter point to rigid social boundaries.

Chapter four discusses the use of official procedures as a source of subcultural life in the context of *The Dumb Waiter, Hothouse* and *Mountain Language.* In these plays, the social life of individuals is monitored by official/organizational modalities. In *The Dumb Waiter,* two hired killers Ben and Gus are confined in a basement, waiting for instructions from their bosses. The tempo of the play is increased by the introduction of the dumb waiter, a serving device. The play reveals that organizational procedures lead to a complete disruption of perception of reality. The next play, *The Hothouse,* is set in a mental asylum. The hospital like institution is meant to be a rehabilitation centre for people who need some training in adjustment to social life. However, the intended purpose of the institution is dislocated by the corruption and

sexual abuse of patients. The reality in the asylum is strictly controlled by official procedures like submitting periodic reports. The use of technology in the form of various tests of the nervous system is intended for controlling the inmates, whether staff or patients. *Mountain Language* dramatizes the most explicit use of official procedures in the context of a prison. The visitors are not allowed to speak their language, which has been officially banned. The ban on language signifies the use of official rules to define various social groups as deviants and profane. The three plays analyzed in this chapter foreground the power of organizational methods and official modalities in redefining the social identities of individuals.

Chapter five deals with *A Slight Ache, The Lover* and *The Homecoming*, which dramatize a subtle disruption of the established social order and through their actions, signify the emergence of an alternative social system. In *A Slight Ache*, the hegemony of the established culture, represented by Edward, is challenged by a silent matchseller, who represents a subcultural force. Flora's subcultural tendencies are activated by the presence of the matchseller. At the end of the play, she exchanges her husband for the matchseller, not because the latter is more masculine, but because she needs liberation from her culturally imposed role as wife. The play dramatizes the obscure logic of the appeal of subcultures, which are dormant in social actors, till they

meet an appropriate context and outlet. *The Lover* continues the appeal of subcultural life through the game of adultery played by a married couple, Richard and Sarah. The game of adultery becomes repetitive and loses its novelty and therefore, Richard expresses his desire to abandon the game. In the end, the two different roles played by Richard and Sarah merge with each other, suggesting weak defining boundaries between the dominant culture and subcultures. *The Homecoming* has a complex culture-subculture dynamics, because the play inverts the very binary, subjugating culture to subculture. In accommodating Ruth, though as a sponsored prostitute, and rejecting Teddy, the play alters the definition of deviance, because what is deviant becomes normal within the context of the family. The plays discussed in this chapter depict the emergence of a new social system, either by rejecting the old or by arriving at a new configuration between the old and the new.

Chapter Six focusses on the *The Birthday Party*, *A Night Out* and *One for the Road*, in terms of the dialectic between micro and macro categories. The arrival of Goldberg and McCann in the boarding house foregrounds the conflict between a micro category, represented by Stanley and a macro category, represented by Goldberg and McCann. Their taking Stanley away with them signifies the incorporation of a smaller category into a larger one. *A Night Out* dramatizes the subsumption of identity in the context of domestic life. Albert represents a new emerging

category in the play, whereas his dominating mother represents the force of tradition. Albert's disobedient behaviour towards his mother constitutes his resistance to the dominant culture. However, in the end, Albert is reunited with his mother, which signifies his incorporation into the dominant culture. The last play of this chapter, *One for the Road*, dramatizes the dialectic of categories in a political context. Victor represents an individual who does not relate to the majority and therefore, initiates a new category. He is defined as a deviant, by state power and is sought to be punished. In the end, he is incorporated into the majority ideology, which is suggested by his drinking together with Nicolas. The play posits the social redefinition of individuals, with a view to disallowing the emergence of subcultures and maintaining cultural hegemony. It is interesting to observe the pattern of the process of incorporation of categories in all the three plays, which involves a strategic use of force and enticement.

Chapter seven concludes the study, which highlights the failure of subcultural rhetoric in Pinter's plays, because of the similarities of subcultures to the larger culture. In Pinter's plays, subcultural membership does not liberate the individual from control and oppression. Pinter's plays depict dislocation as an intermediate stage in the process of restoring the hegemony of the established social order. Social dislocation in Pinter's plays does not lead to the formation of distinct subcultures, because of

lack of new themes. The study, apart from adding a perspective on Pinter's plays, highlights the untenability of subcultural identities in modern dynamic societies. The plays critique the concept of subculture as an analytic category, by foregrounding the weak boundaries between culture and subcultures.