Chapter - II

THE EMERGENCE OF PINTER

Harold Pinter was born in Hackney in East London to East European Ashkenaji Jews who settled in England in the first years of the last century. One may wonder how the Hackney born Pinter rises to the level of winning Nobel Prize. Some of the Jews who were ostracized by Hitler took refuge in East London and Hackney always received bad press and bad habitation, loath life. But it has its own majesty of producing Hackney Empire, a London theatre situated in Mare Street by hosting such great artists as Marie Lloyd, Charlie Chaplin, and Stan Laurel. In course of time the theatre had high-profile productions of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. Though he was the son of a tailor, he enjoyed a contented and comfortable working-class upbringing in Hackney, interrupted only by his being evacuated as a child during the war.

Even Pinter’s schooling period at the Hackney Downs Grammar School in London has something to do with the kind of dramatist he became later. What is remarkable about Pinter’s reading as a boy and young man is that while at school he developed an extracurricular inclination towards modernist literature in his choices of Dostoevsky, Rimbaud, Eliot, and Joyce. Though he faced economic insecurity it gave the opportunity to observe the low life of Hackney which provides him with capital material for his plays. In the words of Anon,

The place (Hackney) was a working class area – some big, rundown Victorian houses, and soap factories with a terrible smell, and a lot of railway yards. And shops. It had a lot of shops. But down the road a bit from our house there was a river, the Lea River, which is a
tributary of the Thames, and if you go up the river two miles you find yourself in a marsh. And near a filthy canal as well. There is a terrible factory of some kind, with an enormous dirty chimney, that shoves things down in this canal.¹

The school won an excellent reputation with alumni including Steven Berkoff, writer, director, and actor, John Bloom, 60s tycoon, Eric Bristow, World champion Darts player, Cyril Domb, a physicist. Joseph Brearley, an English teacher taught English to the young Pinter with inspiration ‘never without a sense of theatre and rarely without an idea of fun.’ Harold Pinter and his friend Henry Woolf were taught to love the English language through rehearsal and performance in poetry and Joe’s play productions. The influence of this teacher on Pinter was so deep that he wrote a comprehensive introduction to a book on Joseph Brearley by G.L. Watkins.²

At school Pinter particularly read the works of Frantz Kafka and Earnest Hemingway. The portrayal of an enigmatic reality in which the individual is seen as lonely, perplexed and threatened characterizes Kafka’s work. Even guilt feeling is one of the major themes of Kafka’s work. Hemingway’s work catches the post-war mood of disillusion of the lost generation of the American society. Naturally Pinter’s early artistic visions were steeped in Kafka and Hemingway. It was in this mixed realignment of subjectivity that the young writer’s mind took root. He tried his hand at poetry first, starting around the age of thirteen, and much of his juvenilia show traces of the influence of Dylan Thomas. In 1950 he had two poems published under the pseudonym Harold Pinta in Poetry London magazine and continued to do so throughout his career. Around the same time, he began writing prose. The biographical The Queen of all the Fairies, which remains unpublished, the short
stories ‘Kullus,’ ‘Latest Report from the Stock Exchange,’ ‘The Black and White,’ and ‘The Examination’ all appeared between 1949 and 1955. In these earliest works, some of the themes and concerns that were later to colour Pinter’s plays first became manifest. The figure of Kullus, for example, was an invention that he developed to consider the human impulse towards dominance, psychological gameplay and territorial gain. The character appeared in three early pieces of writing: ‘Kullus’ (1949), the poem ‘The Task’ (1954), and ‘The Examination’ (1955) and all demonstrate a fascination with the violating presence of an intruding personality. In all three pieces, Kullus slowly takes control of a room into which he is invited by an unnamed narrating voice. Besides writing poetry and prose, Pinter participated in Macbeth, a school production. He even exhibited his histrionic talents as he played the roles of Romeo and Macbeth in a school production in 1947 and 48, while still a student at the Grammar School in productions directed by his English tutor, mentor and friend Joseph Brearley. Later he joined Royal Academy of Dramatic Art where he tried to whet his interest in drama. Soon he was called up for national service where he registered his name as a ‘conscientious objector’. He was fined by magistrate for having refused to do his national service. So he was brought before a military tribunal and twice arrested and fined. In his own words,

I could have gone prison – I took my toothbrush to the trials – but it so happened that the magistrate was slightly sympathetic, so I was fined instead, 30 pounds in all. Perhaps I will be called up again in the next war but I won’t go.3

For a short spell he lived at home and evinced interest in reading and writing. Soon he won some stipend and studied for a short time at the Central School of Speech
and Drama. During this period he had an opportunity of making a six month tour playing Shakespeare and other classic drama in Ireland from 1951-1952. In 1953 he joined Donald Wolfit's company at the King's Theatre in Hammersmith in the final spring season of its sixteen-year existence, this time playing smaller roles in a similar diet of Shakespeare and other classical dramas. He even read the works of Beckett, Adamov, and Ionesco at this time. When asked directly in 1960 if he had been influenced by Beckett, Pinter replied: "Of course I was. You've got to be influenced by someone." Therefore one can say that his love of Beckett must have had some effect on his own writing.

It was during this period that he wrote his only novel *The Dwarfs*, later to be adopted for radio and then stage. Though it was compiled between 1952 and 1956, it was not published until 1990. The key character of Virginia innocently causes a rift between two close friends, Pete and Mark, by casually informing Mark of Pete's true opinion on him. Their mutual friend Len exhibits schizophrenic tendencies and speaks of a group of helpful but domineering dwarfs living beside him in his flat and yard. His obsession with decay and his mental and physical disorders parallel the entropy within friendship, and the novel deals with the modes of often inauthentic behaviour that interfere in the management of relationships. This examination of the dilemmas that arise in maintaining meaningful contact with others, including the need to trust in the authenticity of what people project of themselves, was to inform a great deal of Pinter's subsequent output.

Pinter spent about four years of his career in Provincial Repertory Theatre under the pseudonym David Baron and wrote plays for the stage. Thus, his playwriting career began modestly in 1957. *The Room* (1957) was primarily written
for Bristol University's Drama department where it was successfully produced. A new production of *The Room* entered for the *Sunday Times*’ Student Competition and won special appreciation by Harold Hobson. The play concerns itself with Rose Hudd who is visited by a young couple Mr. and Mrs. Sands who are looking for a flat. Riley, a blind black man, purportedly waiting in the basement suddenly arrives upstairs to Rose Hudd’s room and delivers a mysterious message to him. The play ends in violence after Rose’s husband Bert returns.

*The Dumb Waiter*, which Pinter wrote in the same year, is a small masterpiece of semi-farcical absurdism, with strong echoes of *Waiting for Godot*: (the characters will be waiting for Wilson, but he might not come. He might just send a message). Brief, bleak and funny, it deals with two conscientious hit men, Ben and Gus, a domineering senior partner and his over-curious backup, waiting in the basement of a Birmingham house to carry out a contract killing. They are employed by a mysterious organization to murder an unknown victim. Gus, the underling (along with the audience) wants to know exactly what is going on, which merely imitates his tight-mouthed superior Ben. Suddenly an envelope slides under the door and a dumb waiter repeatedly clatters down, but neither contains a clue about the specifics of their mission. In a bizarre comic sequence, the machine sends down increasingly esoteric orders for food, which they have no way to fill. After the two go through a ritual of preparation for the killing and the nervous assistant goes into the bathroom (on the left), the boss learns through the dumb waiter’s speaking tube that their target will arrive shortly and he readies his gun. The door on the right opens; the assistant stumbles in, body stooping, stripped of his jacket and revolver. ‘A long silence. They stare at each other.’ As in *The Room* the finale implies an impending death, but this one remains completely indeterminate. These two plays
have strong similarities to Pinter’s third, but first full-length play, *The Birthday Party* that was performed by Bristol University Drama Department in 1957 and produced in 1958 in the West End. Though the play did not receive good reviews, it brought him the title ‘the master of the comedy of menace.’

Pinter’s *The Birthday Party* concerns itself with the plight of Stanley Webber, an erstwhile piano player in his 30s, a disheveled, directionless, unemployed young tenant who lives in a rundown boarding house, run by Meg and Petey Boles, in an English seaside town, ‘probably on the south coast, not too far from London.’ He is sought out by the two sinister strangers, Goldberg and McCann, a professional couple on a ‘job,’ which we learn is to admonish him for some past infraction and return him to whatever fold he has abandoned. They book a room in the house, and, once they have an opportunity, confront Stanley and interrogate him. This cross-examination is then adjourned until after a surprise birthday party arranged for Stanley (though he denies it is his birthday) by Meg, his overly affectionate and dim-witted landlady. The party becomes the site of further torment for Stanley as he is obliged to participate in a game of blind man’s buff, and he takes advantage of a power failure to assault Meg and her neighbour Lulu. He is not seen again until later Act III, following a night in Goldberg and McCann’s hands, and re-enters compliant, mute and neatly dressed to be led out to Goldberg’s car and taken away from his indolent haven. ‘Don’t let them tell you what to do!’

Meg’s ineffectual husband Petey advises Stanley as he is led out of the house. Bamber Gascoigne, commenting on the three plays said thus:
What Pinter was experimenting with in *The Room*, *The Dumb Waiter*, and *The Birthday Party* was a hybrid form that was to refer as ‘distilled naturalism’. They also present the conflicting tensions between space and identity, and invading presences and ideals. In 1960, Pinter clarified that the drama he constructed in his first works is to be found in the uncertainties of the characters over how to interpret and respond to events and circumstances, and offered a clearly political reading of that predicament:

This old woman is living in a room which, she is convinced, is the best in the house, and she refuses to know anything about the basement downstairs. She says it’s damp and nasty, and the world outside is cold and icy, and that in her warm and comfortable room her security is complete. But, of course, it isn’t; an intruder comes to upset the balance of everything, in other words points to the delusion on which she is basing her life. I think the same thing applies in *The Birthday Party*. Again this man is hidden away in a seaside boarding house … then two people arrive out of nowhere, and I don’t consider this an unnatural happening. I don’t think that it is all that surrealistic and curious because surely this thing, of people arriving at the door, has been happening in Europe in the last twenty years.

Pinter, then, was conscious of having folded specific social and political realities into the fabric of plays he defended as having no direct political message. He wanted clearly to generalize an expression of threat, and to avoid identifying victims and prosecutors as categorisable in contemporary historic groups. In *The*
Hothouse, which he drafted for radio in 1958 but abandoned until 1980, Pinter locates the patriarchal hierarchy explicitly in the state. The play set in a sanatorium but one, where the patients, all of whom are "specially recommended by the Ministry," have their names replaced by numbers, are kept under lock and key and at a distance from their families, and where facilities include sound-proofed 'interview' rooms and electronic torture equipment. This 'care home' might well be the kind of place to which Goldberg and McCann are instructed to deliver Stanley. Prior to their departure with their acquiescent victim in The Birthday Party, they promise him that he is to be 're-oriented,' 'adjusted,' and 'integrated' (77-78) in a manner that matches the vocabulary used to describe the ambitions of the institution in The Hothouse, where the 'patients' are deemed 'peopled in need of help' and are given assistance to 'regain confidence in themselves, confidence in others, confidence in ... the world' (197). In both cases, such promises are thinly veiled euphemisms.

Later Pinter's two dramatic sketches The Black and White and Trouble in the Works appeared in the revue One to Another, which opened at the Lyric Hammersmith on 15 July, 1954. The Black and White is derived from his 1954 prose-piece and performed at the Lyric Hammersmith by Beryl Reid and Sheila Hancock, in which the two old women compare notes over a bowl of soup in another all-night café. Michael Billington says,

These two female derelicts attempt to keep loneliness at bay by swapping inconsequential banalities about bread, soup, bus routes, menacing strangers and officious coppers.
For these two women, shelter is afforded by cafes like this and by all-night buses, the timetables of which provide their chief topic of conversation. It's a bleak existence but the women find some comfort in their companionship, and from the activity that surrounds them: 'you can see what goes on from this top table,' says one, and the other agrees that 'there's always a bit of life.' The main reason why homeless people so often make their way to the nation is not only for the concentration of wealth and opportunity, but also for the constant buzz of human activity which acts as both a comfort and a distraction. *Trouble in the Works* derives its humour from the recitation of bizarre words and is similar to what one might normally expect from a revue sketch.

Pinter's *A Slight Ache*, his first Radio-play, was written for the BBC Third Programme broadcast in 1959. Although Pinter himself did not begin his career as a radio dramatist, undoubtedly he received much-needed encouragement and financial support from the medium during probably the most difficult period in his career as a dramatist. Aesthetically he was also introduced to a discipline that made demands on the writer and offered formal possibilities that were quite different from those Pinter had hitherto experienced in the live theatre. Martin Esslin has observed that radio drama is 'a continuum of sound; and only when that continuum is firmly established and clearly structured will the sudden gap in it become emotionally valid and make its point.' He therefore views the radio play as "essentially a matter of carefully timed pauses, rhythm and pace."10 This potential was immediately realized in Pinter's radio play *A Slight Ache*. In it Pinter fully exploited the audience's 'blindness' and confounds its expectation that, as in a normal radio play, a character will assert its presence by means of sound. In this radio play Edward gradually
becomes blind as it becomes more and more apparent that he does not recognize his own limitations or understand his wife. Through this play

Pinter wants to come out from the territorial aggression characteristic of his Comedies of menace, which by then had become for him a 'cliché' and a 'trap.'

Pinter's next venture was to script a collection of revue sketches that were presented at the Lyric Hammersmith and the Apollo theatre in 1959. In March 1960, his *A Night Out* was broadcast on the BBC Third Programme, followed a month later by a televised version on *Armchair Theatre*. It topped the ratings in its week of broadcast, earning Pinter a national audience of millions and laying the foundation to his becoming a household name.

In July 1960, *The Times* described Pinter's "meteoric rise from our least understood avant-garde writer to, virtually, our most popular young playwright." The play that was to seal his reputation was *The Caretaker*. The play examines the failure of a potential friendship between the simple, trusting Aston – a kindly gentleman with a history of mental illness – and the homeless Davies, whom Aston first saves from being roughed up and then puts up in his cramped, junk-cluttered room. But Aston's brother Mick feels difficulty in communicating with his brother, appears to be angry with this intrusion, and virtually terrorizes Davies. However, Davies is eventually invited to take up the position of a caretaker, but his selfish and inconsiderate behaviour towards Aston leads to his dismissal from the house. An attempt to gain the support of Mick fails and the play ends with Davies appealing to Aston to be allowed to stay, an appeal that looks to fail.
Soon appeared plays like *A Night Out* (1961) *A Slight Ache* (1961), *The Collection* (1962), *The Dwarfs* (1963), *The Lover* (1963), *The Homecoming* (1965), and *The Tea Party* (1965) which represent Pinter’s ongoing experimentation with the dramatic possibilities inherent in his standpoint that the desire for verification is understandable but cannot always be satisfied. Of these *The Homecoming* with its story of an estranged son who brings his wife home to meet his family won many awards like Tony Award, The White Bread Anglo-American Theatre Award, and The New York Drama Critics Circle Award. The play is often considered to represent the fecundity of Pinter’s art during his early period. The play focuses on the return to his London home of Teddy, a university professor of philosophy who brings his wife Ruth to meet his brothers and father. With the new woman on the scene, it all plays out in a struggle for domination. The play has many events which are dubious, mysterious and inexplicable. For instance, Does Teddy really teach in America? Do he and his wife really have three sons? Have they honestly been to Venice on holiday? And if any of the above is true, why do they arrive unannounced in the middle of the night after nine years of silence to see a father who has not been told of the marriage of the grandchildren in a house seething with frustration? At the end of the play, Teddy, the homecomer leaves again without taking Ruth, but whether it is a humiliation or an escape is, like everything else, uncertain. Who are the losers, who are the winners? Pinter does not spell it out, but leaves it to the readers’ imagination.

Next appeared Pinter’s two short one-act plays *Landscape* (1967) and *Silence* (1968) when he was in the late sixties. They offered the first signs of a purgation of a style that was recognizably ‘Pinter,’ through experimentation with lyrical forms of expression and dramatic representation. They also seemed to be the
results of an author's exercises in theatrical style and are uncharacteristic of most of his output before or since in the manner in which the form of disconnected dialogue acts as a scaffold to the plays' themes. They proved to Pinter there was a rich seam to be mined in how characters relate to the past, and in the relationship with remembered and actual experience. Of particular fascination for him as an author was the phenomenon of how memory, by its very nature, is an act of the present, and cannot therefore be a verifiable record of the past. This interests in how 'the past is not the past' and how one's 'previous parts are alive and present.' Later Pinter wrote screenplays like Accident (1967), The Go-Between (1969), and Langrishe, Go Down (1970).

*Old Times* (1971) is another powerful play that signalled a new phase in Pinter's creativity, one that was to be informed by a strengthening in his interest in the experience of how the past invades and informs the present moment, and a concentration on the nature of intimate emotional relationships. Anna, the character in the play articulates the principle as part of her tactical manoeuvring: "There are some things one remembers even though they may never have happened but as I recall them so they take place." Mark Batty in his book *About Pinter: the Playwright and the Work* aptly remarks:

> With *Old Times*, Pinter demonstrated how the past and memory are exploitable as tools for gaining advantage, and added them to the arsenal of verbal equipment that his catalogue of characters had at their disposal when confronting one another.14

*Monologue* (1973) is another play that recalls the situation of the end of the novel *The Dwarfs* and the disillusion of the friendship of two men following their
sexual liaisons with the same woman. Pinter’s next full-length play *No Man’s Land* (1975), turned a reliance on the past as a site of self-definition into a burden for the key character of Hirst, a formerly renowned poet. The past is invoked as part of the game-playing, and captured in an atrophied state in the photograph album that Hirst yields. The play charts the human failure to connect, and the betrayals and compromises that are inherent in human bonds.

Pinter’s *Betrayal* (1978) concerns, at face value, a very traditional theme for drama: a love triangle involving an affair between a publisher’s wife and his best friend, a literary agent. The story is told in reverse, opening after the end of the affair and closing to the passionate declaration of love that instigated the liaison. Following *Betrayal*, Pinter seemed creatively to concentrate on the dissolution of the potentially protective family unit in three plays that were to be performed together under the collective title *Other Places: Victoria Station, Family Voices, and A Kind of Alaska* (all 1982). While *Family Voices* more overtly expresses the tensions between belonging to one family group and pursuing an individual agenda towards a personal definition of family, *A Kind of Alaska* is also set within a family structure, but this time one that is fractured as a result of the illness encephalitis lethargica. It inspired the critics of the cage histories. Critics feel that most of the plays — *Landscape, Silence, Night, Old Times, No Man’s Land, The Proust Screenplay, Betrayal, Family Voices, and A Kind of Alaska* — that Pinter wrote from the late sixties through the early eighties are ‘memory plays’ and they skillfully dramatize complex ambiguities, comic vagaries, and quicksand-like characteristics of ‘memory.’ They heavily draw upon some features of his memory dramaturgy in their focus on the past in the present and other tonal differences.
From 1984 to 2000, Pinter wrote overtly political plays, after three-year period of creative blankness in the early 1980s following his marriage to Lady Antonia Fraser and the death of Vivien Merchant. His plays tended to become shorter and more overtly political, serving as critiques of oppression, torture, and other abuses of human rights, linked by the apparent invulnerability of power. After writing the brief dramatic sketch Precisely (1983), a dialogue between two bureaucrats exposing the absurd power politics of mutual nuclear annihilation and deterrence, he wrote his first full-length overtly-political one-act play, One for the Road (1984). In a 1985 interview called ‘A Play and Its Politics,’ conducted by Nicholas Hern, published in the Grove Press edition of One for the Road, Pinter states that his earlier plays presented ‘metaphors’ for power and powerlessness whereas the later ones present literal ‘realities’ of power and its abuse.

Pinter also wrote the political satire Party Time, first as a play for the stage (1991), and then revised and adapted it as a television screenplay (1994). From 1992 to 1999, reflecting both personal and political concerns, he wrote Moonlight (1993) and Ashes to Ashes (1996), full-length plays with domestic settings relating to death and dying and (in the latter case) to such atrocities as the Holocaust. In this period, after the deaths of first his mother and then his father, again merging the personal and the political, he wrote the poems “Death” (1997) (which he read in his 2005 Nobel Lecture) and “The Disappeared” (1998). In 2000 he brought out his play Celebration and other plays like A Slight Ache, Remembrance of Things Past. In July and August of 2001, a Harold Pinter festival celebrating his work was held at Lincoln Centre in New York City. In October 2001, as a part of a weeklong Harold Pinter homage at the World Leaders Festival in
Toronto he presented a dramatic reading of *Celebration*. He revived his earlier play *The Caretaker* during this period.

Several of Pinter’s plays were originally written for British Radio or TV. Besides being a dramatist, from the 1970s he has directed a number of stage plays and American Film Theatre Production of Butler. He became an Associate Director of National Theatre after Hall was nominated as the successor of Laurence Olivier. He already won considerable encomiums with his awards including The Berlin Film Festival Silver Bear in 1963, BAFTA Awards in 1965 and in 1971, The Hamburg Shakespeare Prize in 1970, the Cannes Film Festival Palme d’Or (Golden Palm) in 1971, and the Commonwealth Award in 1981.

Pinter’s marital life also helped in moulding his career in theatre. He was married to Vivian Merchant, an actress whom he met on tour. In fact his wife appeared in many of Pinter’s works most notably *The Homecoming* on stage in 1965 and on screen in 1973. The marriage was rather turbulent and began disintegrating in the mid 1960s. For seven years he was engaged to Joan Bakewell who appeared in his play *Betrayal*. Between 1975 and 1980, he lived with Lady Antonia Fraser, wife of Sir Hugh Fraser. In 1975 Merchant filed for a divorce. The Fraser’s divorce became final in 1977 and the Pinter’s in 1980. Pinter married Antonia Fraser in 1980. Unable to overcome her bitterness and grief at the loss of her husband, Vivian Merchant died of acute alcoholism in 1983. According to Billington,

> Pinter did everything possible to support her until her death and regretted that he became estranged from their son Daniel, after their separation and Pinter’s marriage to Antonia Fraser.\(^{15}\)
Pinter stated publicly that he was very happy in his second marriage and enjoyed family life which included his six adult stepchildren and over twice as many grandchildren.

Harold Pinter strongly felt that he would retire from writing plays to dedicate himself to his political activism and writing poetry. In his own words,

I think I have written 29 plays. I think it is enough for me. I think I have found other forms now. My energies are going in different directions – over the last few years I have made a number of political speeches at various locations and ceremonies. ... I am using a lot of energy more specifically about political states of affairs, which I think are very very worrying as things stand.16

One notices a remarkable change in Pinter’s career as he relishes the idea of returning to the stage by putting his literary career on the back burner. He liked the idea of attacking vehemently political oppression and nuclear disarmament. He participated in a programme in Ankara where he spoke on behalf of the imprisoned Turkish writers. He was thrown out of the US Embassy in Ankara with Arthur Miller – ‘a voluntary exile and it was one of the proudest moments in his life’. He also opposed vehemently the American domination throughout the world. He joined the international committee to defend Slobodan Milosevi and appealed for a fair trial at the freedom of Slobodan Milosevi. The themes of oppression and his championing of liberty are the major themes that appear in his plays.

Over the past two decades, Pinter in his speeches, interviews, and literary reading focused increasingly on political issues. He protested the NATO bombing of Serbia, the Gulf War and the bombing of Iraq, the ill-treatment of US prisoners,
censorship, the US role in Latin America, and the Turkish government's mistreatment of the Kurds. He even said that his earlier plays deal with the politics of power and the dynamics of oppression. In his own words,

The interrogation scene from *The Birthday Party* he wanted to say that Goldberg and McCann represented the forces in society who wanted to snuff out descent, to stifle Stanley's voice, to silence him.\(^{17}\)

Pinter has created cloistered type of characters in his early plays whereas the characters in the later plays are well educated and have the means to communicate, but they still choose not to do so. In an interview he says:

A character on stage who can present no convincing argument or information as to his past experience, his present behaviour or his aspirations, to give a comprehensive analysis of his motives, is as legitimate and as worthy of attention as one who alarmingly, can do all these things.\(^{18}\)

Pinter's characters are motivated, either through the text or through a consistently maintained subtexts. They, in play after play find themselves having to adjust, in fairly radical ways, to circumstances that require them or force them to change what they are and who they have been. Their ability to effect or resist such change varies from case to case, as do the benefits and liabilities involved in their attempts to adopt to changing circumstances. It is in this context that communication problems regularly occur, but these are usually manifestations of equally important issues to do with commitment, continuity, and control. In another interview he says:

Character in drama consists of a sequence of impressions communicated from the actor to the audience. A character becomes
interesting and dramatically significant when the sequence of his actions gives the impression of being inconsistent or contradictory and we, the audience, are forced to restore unity by perceiving the cause of the inconsistency.\(^\text{19}\)

Harold Pinter feels that the dramatic language constitutes an integral part of his concept of drama. He himself has said that he is not conscious of any particular influence on his writing except Samuel Beckett. He added that if this is discernible it is due to his general administration for the texture of his dialogue rather than his allusive intension. The dialogues' triviality first claim attention: parties, toasts, films, and the telephone. He doesn't sweep the dust of the little rooms we live in and make them and the action fine or more meaningful. Sometimes he is modestly trivial like Chekhov and gives the allusive or representational importance of small details. Michael Billington rightly observes: "Pinter's plays are rooted in English life and phraseology and they deal with larger universal concerns also."\(^\text{20}\)

Pinter employs silences and pauses that throw light on the conscious and unconscious motivations of the characters. Richard A. Blake says,

The dialogue-less opening scene is an imaginative use of Pinter's trademark device of silence and the 'party's over' setting completes a past-present cycle.\(^\text{21}\)

This cyclic theory of time has entailed circles or circularity since the time of Aristotle. This technique of using silences and pauses reflects the unique nature of Pinter's use of language and also the innate psyche of the characters.

Many critics regard him as the predominant figure of 'the theatre of the absurd,' and his works have been approached in the light of the theories and
doctrines of the avant-garde literature. Etheridge believes that Pinter has artistically employed "tactics derived from Kafka, Hemingway, and Ionesco." Even Martin Esslin, in his classification of the absurdist writers in his book, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, considers Pinter as "one of the most promising exponents of the Theatre of the Absurd ... in the English speaking world" and examines his works in the light of the absurdist conventions, which are as old as literature and cover all human conditions, leaving their earlier foot-prints in mythology and the myth of human existence.

Harold Pinter who started his career as an absurd dramatist seems to be on the funny side of the absurd. His comedy does not go so far as to reach the state of mere laughable farce but it is double-edged: one side of which tickles and the other side cuts painfully into the bones.

Though Pinter is known for his variety and versatility and prolific output, the present study considers only seven of his representative plays – *The Birthday Party, The Caretaker, The Homecoming, No Man's Land, A Kind of Alaska, Ashes to Ashes,* and *Celebration* – which overtly connote the three phases in his literary canon.

The early phase of Pinter reveals markedly the features of an absurd playwright commenting on the absurdities in human life particularly in his plays *The Birthday Party, The Caretaker,* and *The Homecoming.* The middle phase throws light explicitly on the memories of the past in plays such as *No Man's Land* and *A Kind of Alaska.* The plays – *Ashes to Ashes* and *Celebration* – that appeared in the third phase reveal his deep felt convictions as a 'gospeller' and political activist openly spreading his message throughout the world.
Notes


