CHAPTER I

THE PINTERIAN DRAMA
It is a truth universally acknowledged that English drama has always been characterized by a dynamism that it is considered an important and inalienable part of English cultural history. Lien periods there have been but there has been no stasis. Periods of lull were followed by times which showed a renewed zeal and force. Each revival heralded a change in themes and styles. The skepticism contained in statements that with Shakespeare drama was dead and that he made it impossible for the posterity to write any dramatic literature was belied. It is true that the heights scaled by Shakespeare's dramatic art could not be reached by its successors. Nevertheless, plays came to be written all of which received public attention. As Russell Brown puts it:

We have in Britain, yet again, a new theatre. Wherever a play is performed in a new production there is, of course, renewal, but at certain times everything becomes more obviously new: it was so in Shakespeare's age, during the Restoration, at the end of the eighteenth century, and at the end of the nineteenth: and so, again, today.
The mid-century British drama is not only a renewal but marked by new styles of acting even, if less polished and less virtuoso, but stronger, more direct and individualistic, more related to behaviour outside the theatre. The new acting schools such as the Theatre Centre School, the East 15 School, the Royal Shakespeare Company came on the scene challenging the monopoly of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, of the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art and of the Central Schools. New styles of acting and new acting schools assisted by new stage designers have altered the stage so much that "there is a new sense of space, a new, efficient simplicity, and a new poetic solidity." In a word the mid-century witnessed a new breed of playwrights and plays and the journalists freely and generously invented terms to describe them. Brown epitomises the situation in the following words:

The new plays have been given all sorts of labels: "kitchen-sink drama" was one of the first; neo-realist; drama of non-communication; absurd drama; comedy of menace; dark comedy; drama of cruelty. But no cap has fitted for more than a year or two; none has been big enough for more than one or two heads; and often the caps seem more suitable
for the journalists who invent them than for the dramatists on whom they are thrust. Perhaps the first thing to say about the new dramatists is that they keep the critics on the run.³

Raymond Williams commenting on the mid-century English drama says that it is a period of "extreme confusion and eclecticism, made more so by a genuine burst of vitality and energy."⁴

The journalistic linkages of names and conferring labels on them and their works is in tune with the English habit of writing its literary history. Movements are announced and books written about them based on two or three works by young writers. It is only later that it is realised that it is not a movement and its members are clearly themselves with only a tenuous link between them. The 'thirties poets were attributed a common programme which proved to be not true later. The Movement poets were labelled as such but it was realised later they were all individualistic. In the same way the plays written in the fifties had little in common. What brings them together is their determination for experimentation and innovation. It is in their motives for writing plays and in their choice of subject matter rather than in any concentrated programme or
common achievement that the new dramatists are remarkable. When they started writing for the theatre they were young. After writing a few plays for Radio and Television they launched on Three Act plays. Pinter, Wesker, Osborne, Arden were in their twenties when their plays were produced first. This is in total contrast to established writers who turn to the theatre in the last years of their careers.

The mid-'fifties dramatists wrote sensational plays which were full of surprises and shocks and sometimes fantastic. N.F. Simpson's Resounding Twinkle, Pinter's The Room, Wesker's Four Seasons, Anne Jellicoe's The Knack and Edward Bond's Saved shocked the audiences with surprises, violences and obscenities. As Brown sums up, "homosexuality, nymphomania, prostitution and abortion, violent or casual deaths, disfigurement, and callow humor are all part of the new drama." 5

The mid-century English drama was described by their contemporaries as "pop" art for the reason that it chose popular, topical, vulgar and obvious subjects. Pinter's The Collection partly deals with fashions in clothes. Wesker's Chip's with Everything is about the service of conscripts in the Royal Air Force. Housing projects and bureaucratic ways are presented in his other play Their Very Own and Golden City. John Arden's plays Live Like Pigs,
Workhouse Donkey are about slum clearance and local government respectively. Other subjects such as street gangs, army workers are to be found in the plays of the period.

More important than the sensationalism and topicality of the drama, its writers were all associated with the theatre. Besides acting they have directed the plays. Pinter and Osborne began their careers as actors. It is this association with the theatre that made Pinter and Arden marry actresses. It is not only for the theatre that they wrote, they also worked for television, radio and films. In this respect they were like the Elizabethan dramatists. Marlowe, Jonson, Greene, Marston, Dekker, Heywood, Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher all started writing for the theatre in their twenties. Not only in their association of the theatre that the new dramatists were like the Elizabethans, in their sensationalism also they were like them. Compared to the violence, cruelty and shocking moral subjects, the violence and sex of these dramatists is of lesser degree. A comparison of Shakespeare's King Lear, Titus Andronicus, Marlowe's Edward II, the plays of Fletcher, Webster and Ford and the modern plays shows the later is no worse than the former.
From the foregoing it may be suggested that some of the appraisals of the new drama are partial and incomplete. Violence and sensationalism and topicality alone have been shown as distinct marks ignoring the fact they were all present in the Elizabethan drama. The weightiest argument, more serious than other charges, is that the new dramatists do not write from deeply considered moral, social, or political purpose. To substantiate the argument critics have cited the protagonists of Sartre, J.B.Priestley and T.S.Eliot whose characters debate the nature of existence or society. Further, critics have faulted the new dramatists for not providing a manifesto. In support they quote dramatists like Pinter who has said politics did not interest him. Being theatrical writers who knew that words change meaning according to how they are said, by whom, to whom, in what place, whether sitting or standing or running, spoken slowly or quickly they distrusted statements and definitions. The plays of Pinter, Wesker, Arden are so serious in their purpose that they will not attempt to express in any other medium than the complicated and sensitive one of the theatre. John Russell Brown puts it:

In their exploitation of theatrical possibilities they show every sign of intellectual and responsible involvement.... And their work is
closely attentive to the society in which they live. The plays reflect "pop culture," but are not part of it.... They all use pop elements in their plays, but criticize and evaluate them by dramatic presentation and context rather than by argument. They acknowledge the cruelty and dangers around them by showing and controlling cruelty and danger in their plays. Many of them have remarkably alert ears for contemporary speech, so that their characters, even in farcical or absurd situations, are received by their audiences as pictures of themselves ... one can see that in themes, characters, settings, real-life behaviour, dialogue, the new dramatists are obviously responding to the society in which they live ....

Osborne, Pinter and Wesker are the best examples. Of the three Pinter has been regarded as the most consistent because most of his plays have simple settings and reflect the state of mind of modern man. The picture that he evokes is the image of the absurd man. Needless to say he was inspired by Sartre, Camus, Kafka and Beckett. The form of his plays instantly relates to *Waiting for Godot*. Since Beckett has
been labelled absurdist playwright, inevitably Pinter was also called an absurd dramatist. As Martin Esslin puts it:

.... Like Beckett he is essentially concerned with communicating a 'sense of being', with producing patterns of poetic imagery, not in words so much as in the concrete, three-dimensional happenings that take place on the stage. Like Beckett, Pinter wants to communicate the mystery, the problematical nature, of man's situation in the world. However natural his dialogue, however naturalistic some of his situations may superficially appear, Pinter's plays are also basically images, almost allegories, of the human condition.7

An examination of the absurdist drama and criticism written on it lists a number of playwrights such as Beckett, Ionesco, Genet, Adamov, Miller, O'Neill, Brecht, Pirandello, Sartre, Camus and Pinter. It is important to note that though these playwrights have been identified as the absurdists and there is no difficulty in making comparision between the absurdists of now with the absurdists of the past; there has been the problem of defining the term
the absurd and absurdist drama. The discerning and the not so discerning have defined the subject matter and the style but none of the definitions seems to be an inclusive one. The confusion arising out of multiple perspectives offered on the absurd drama is summed up by William I. Oliver in the following words:

Few spectacles in the history of theatre have been more amusing than the current Babel raised upon the grounds of absurdist drama. The voices that cry out in many tongues issue from all walks of life (from expert and amateur, critic and playwright) and the appalling humour of it is that in all but a few instances — a very few instances — what they tell us is incomplete, opinionated, or downright balderdash. Clear and lucid thought on the subject of absurdist drama is indeed rare, and even then, as in the case of Esslin\textsuperscript{1} or Coe,\textsuperscript{2} it is marred by excessive sympathy or partisanship.\textsuperscript{8}

The metaphor of Babel used by Oliver appears to be appropriate in the context of criticism on the absurdist drama. It is not only that there is the competent and the
incompetent who defined the absurdist drama but also the failure to define its subject, absurdity. According to Oliver it is wrong to define the absurdist from the point of view of craftsmanship rather than the theme. Even Esslin has been found to be inadequate for the reason that he identifies the absurdity in the style rather than theme. As a corrective to the work of several playwrights it may be proper to discuss the thought of the plays, it being the philosophical statement on man and his condition. The central tenet of the absurd is derived from the reflections and enquiries of Albert Camus, Jean Paul Sartre. The twentieth century absurdist on their part derive their ideas from the nineteenth century existentialists beginning with the Danish philosopher Kierkegaard. Whatever the source and whatever the colours in the absurdist band the core of the philosophy and its use by the playwrights has been summarised by William Oliver:

The absurdist playwrights believe that our existence is absurd because we are born without asking to be born, we die without seeking death, we live between birth and death trapped within our body and our reason, unable to conceive of a time in which we were not, or a time in which we will not be — for
nothingness is very much like the concept of infinity: something we perceive only in so far as we cannot experience it. Thrust into life, armed with our senses, will and reason, we feel ourselves to be potent beings. Yet our senses give the lie to our thought and our thought defies our senses. We never perceive anything completely. We are permitted to entertain committedly only one perspective of any object, fact, or situation: our own. We labor to achieve distinction and permanence only to find that our assessments are perspectively incomplete and therefore never wholly effective. All of our creations are doomed to decay as we ourselves are doomed to death. We create in order to identify ourselves in some semblance of permanence, but our creations become autonomous facts the instant we have created them and do not identify us except in so far as we pretend what they do. Therefore, the more we strive for definition and permanent distinction, the more absurd we are. Yet, the only value we can affirm with certainty is a self-defeating complex that we do not understand: our life.
If we despair of definition, of ever achieving a sense of permanence, and we contemplate suicide, we are put in the absurd situation of sacrificing our only concrete value, life, for a dream of power and permanence that no man on this earth has ever experienced. On the other hand, if in despair we turn to religion or illusion of any sort we betray and deny our only means of perception: our reason. If, in a transport of ecstasy, be it mystical or sensuous, we feel at one with power and permanence ... we are forced to admit the illusionistic aspect of this transport and we must confess that our sense of power, permanence and definition is achieved at the sacrifice of our reason. If it is impossible for us to act with complete efficacy, to perceive with complete accuracy, to create anything definite and lasting that expresses exactly our intentions, we must also remember that it is impossible for us to cease acting as long as we live. This then is the condition of man that we of the twentieth century call "absurd." It is the same state of being that Aristotle labeled as "ignorance." It is this
complex of self-defeating paradoxes, this even check and balance of power and impotence, knowledge and ignorance, attunement and alienation that is the subject of the absurdist playwrights of all ages, no matter what form or style they may have chosen to express it.

From the above criticism it may be gathered that the concept of absurd is so inclusive that it can accommodate nearly every strand of existence. Man's condition now, in the past and in future can also be covered by it. All creative writing dealing with the nature of man when based on rationalistic approach in some measure shows man confronting absurdity. The postulates of the concept are so accurate and sound that they can distinguish dogmatic assertions and rational analysis of a nature of man. The concept of absurdity is one of the artistic expressions which helps to relate it to other artistic expressions. Styles may change but the substance of the absurdist drama will not as long as man is man. In this sense absurdist drama is as old as tragedy and farce.
In contrast to the absurdists of earlier times modern absurdists are so diverse in their styles and philosophical bases. If generalisation has to be made it may be in their resistance to the traditional separation of past and present. While the subject of farce and of tragedy, of the terrible or comic discovery of man's absurdity, ignorance and impotence, there is a difference in form. The essential difference is that farce arouses laughter and tragedy draws our tears. This point was made by Wylie Sypher in his essay "The Meanings of Comedy," (Comedy, ed. Wylie Sypher, New York, 1956). William Arrowsmith suggests that the absurdists of today mingle the qualities of farce and tragedy like Euripides, making audience laugh at that which hurt them most, making them weep at that which is most foolish in the earliest. ("The Criticism of Greek Tragedy" Tulane Drama Review, New Orleans, March, 1959).

The absurdist drama unlike some of its predecessors is intellectual, ideological, objective and cerebral. The plays are by their craft invite attention to intellectualism obvious in the plays and this is sought to be achieved in spite of the plot that their thought refuses to be system operated. Since the emphasis is on the philosophical the works are more presentational and less
realist. Therefore, the absurdist drama is thematic in its approach.

In this tendency the absurdist are one with the modern artists who strove for pure, in the words of Ortega, "De-humanised Art." The absurd playwrights like modern artists are concerned with creative works which are free from the traditional Neo-Aristotelian structures of imitation or representationalism. They want drama to proclaim that they do not show life but it is a work of art about life. In order to achieve their goals the absurdist have made use of symbols. The author's thoughts are not directly expressed or stated in symbolic action. The recourse of the symbolic action has been criticised as amounting to obscurantism. For absurdist defined their practice by suggesting that nothing should be facile. The rejection of the realistic drama by the founding fathers of absurd drama is an example of their dependence on, for an example of, dehumanised art.

The absurdist believed that the language used by them is pathetically limited and cannot communicate the dramatist's individualistic perspective of anything and everything. They were acutely aware of the gap between expression and apprehension. This problem was sought to be solved by the absurdist by forcing his language to nonsense.
This device employed by the absurdists added to the difficulty of understanding the plays.

Martin Esslin commenting on the expressionistic device in the absurd drama says that the absurdists have succeeded in achieving the alienation effect more completely than its inventor Brecht. The spectator reports an action that is symbolic, the sequence of which is determined ideologically rather than psychologically and representationally and hence it remains objective and analytical. Esslin’s claim has been contested by critics who have seen audience watching Waiting for Godot delightedly. The critics point out that the device of alienation effect was beautiful in Brecht’s plays but it is ineffective and incompatible with the absurd play. There are some who believed that the absurd is best represented in the traditional representational drama. It is to be noted that O’Neill, Sartre, Brecht, Camus in spite of their thoughts on human condition continue to write in the conventional representational thought.

Martin Esslin in his book The Theatre of the Absurd cautiously suggests that the Theatre of the Absurd is not born out of a collective effort, that it is not a part of any self-proclaimed or self-conscious school or movement. According to him it unifies and brings many playwrights under
the new experiment by their focus on central problems that affected their contemporaries, each of the playwrights considering himself as a lone outsider cut off from the mass and isolated in his private world. Collectively they reflected each of the transitions displaying a picture which combines age old beliefs overlaid by eighteenth century rationalism and mid-nineteenth century Marxism, pre-historic fanaticism and primitive tribal curse, religious faith and new faith in progress, nationalism, totalitarian policies.

Esslin further suggests that each of the playwrights belonging to the Theatre of the Absurd dealt with the theme of metaphysical anguish born out of the absurdity of human condition. Beckett, Adamov, Ionesco, Genet and other writers drew their philosophy from thinkers and writers like Albert Camus who defined the human situation as absurd. In *The Myth of Sisyphus* Camus defined human situation as a belief in:

A world that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty, is a familiar world. But in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light man feels a stranger. His is an irremedial exile, because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land.
to come. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity.  

Besides Camus's understanding of human situation, Ionesco defined the absurd as that "which is devoid of purpose.... Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless." Esslin emphasises the fact that this "sense of the senselessness of life, of the inevitable devaluation of ideals, purity, and purpose" is as much true of the absurdist dramatists as are of dramatists like Giraudoux, Anouilh, Salacrou, Sartre and Camus. Esslin however draws a distinction between the absurd dramatists and other dramatists in that the former pressed the sense of essentiality of the human condition in the form of highly logically constructed reason while the later "express its sense of the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought." Esslin cites the examples of Sartre and Camus as examples of those who wrote in the old convention with a new content but points out that their plays are less adequate as an expression of their philosophy. If brilliant and consistent characters serve Sartre, beautiful phrasing and brilliant argumentation help to find valid solutions. Dramatists of the theatre of the
absurd on the other hand sought to overcome the contradiction in taking recourse to rational devices to express the irrational and therefore "renounced arguing about the absurdity of the human condition; it merely presents it in being - that is in terms of concrete stage images.... It is this striving for an integration between the subject-matter and the form in which it is expressed that separates the Theatre of the Absurd from the Existentialist theatre."14

Just as the Theatre of the Absurd is different from the Existentialist theatre as shown above it is equally different from the 'poetic avant-garde' of French theatre. By dispensing with plot structure and consistent characters it has come closer to the poetic avant-garde but in the use of fantasy and dream it is one with the Theatre of the Absurd. Another important difference between the two is that the poetic avant-garde are lyrical and poetic where as a devaluation of language plays an important part in the absurd drama but what happens on the stage transcends, and often contradicts, the words spoken with other characters. Therefore, the Theatre of the Absurd like modern abstract painting or the new novel, in France, has come to be described as part of the anti-literary movement.
Whatever the individual perspectives and perceptions on human condition and the analyses of processes that lead into that condition certain basic ideas may be deduced from the writings of the dramatists of the absurd. From Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* (1883), to Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) and to many other philosophical works we may find speculations on human reality and dramatists derived their ideas for the presentation of characters and situations. Though Nietzsche and Camus provided immediate inspiration for the creative writer, the search for the meaning of life and existence began much earlier in the writings of Kierkegaard and other existentialist thinkers. The Theatre of the Absurd is the latest manifestation of a search for a centre which disappeared from the universe. The centre might be God or a set of values. For long through their writings the playwrights not only expressed the tragic sense of loss at the dis-appearance of ultimate certainty of things that also showed a genuine religious quest for the lost ultimate certainty of things. This took the form of satire in some writers who presented absurdity of lives lived unaware and unconscious of ultimate reality. Ionesco in *The Bald Soprano* and *The Chairs* Adamov in *La Parodie* expressed absurdity of human life.
There is another aspect to the preoccupation of the playwrights of the Theatre of the Absurd which shows the absurdity of human condition devoid of religious purpose. The playwrights have shown man facing stark realities of life — waiting between birth and death and man running away from death, man going higher and higher or going down towards death, man rebelling against death, man caught in illusions, man finding himself imprisoned when he tries to break out in freedom, man claiming a modest place for himself in the cold and darkness that envelops him — man lonely, in the vision of his subjectivity unable to reach his fellowmen. Anyway like the conventional theatre from the Greek tragedy to modern tragedy the Theatre of the Absurd addressed the problem of man's fate in the stream of things, the difference being that the former placed man against universally accepted metaphysical system, the latter placed him at the disposal of an individual's subjective process. Since there is difference in the subject matter there is bound to be difference in form, a form other than realistic.

It is in the linguistic level more than representing characters and events that the playwrights try to achieve a significance. In this attempt the theories of language and the theories of psychologists were of great help. The idea that the senses present a man with images and
the impressions cannot be conceptualized rationally, ordered in terms of language was suggested by Ludwig Klages. George Steiner in his articles suggested that much of reality begins outside language and many experiences belong to non-verbal languages. He even went to the extent of saying that language appears more and more as being in contradiction to reality. Ionesco and Artaud realised how difficult it is for people to understand in the context of specialisation of life. Esslin summarises the artist's dilemma in the following words: "... communication between human beings is so often shown in a state of breakdown in the Theatre of the Absurd. It is merely a satirical magnification of the existing state of affairs. Language has run riot in an age of mass communication. It must be reduced to its proper function - the expression of authentic content, rather than its concealment."15

What one can notice in the absurd play is that the action is mysterious, unmotivated and nonsensical. In them there are characters who remain incomprehensible. By their being mysterious and less than human characters they prevent us from identifying with them. If the epic theatre of Brecht tried to plant characters among the audience to break the illusion of a reality of the play the absurd theatre achieved the same by creating characters who by their silence,
gestures and brevity make the audience alert. It should not however be thought that the plays deserve to be discarded. The spectator has to put together disjoined words and broken language to evaluate what he hears. If some criticised the plays for this element some critics have found a positive value in this. They regard the technique of mystification or mysterious as having therapeutic value. One of the significant achievements of the Theatre of the Absurd is its philosophical and intellectual approach to a human situation. The nagging question that man faces whether there is purpose or meaning in life, and to the equally nagging question whether man does or does not need to commit suicide, or man should end or endure — the absurd drama provides a forum not necessarily an answer.

Pinter criticism of the last three decades confirms that the issues that are discussed continued to be the same since the first appraisals. Esslin’s *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1961) and Taylor’s *Anger and After* (1962) have received little modification since then. Both Esslin and Taylor did little to alter their statements decades after their first reports. Especially both have failed to make critical statements on Pinter’s language although Pinter’s peculiar use of language has been a major stumbling block for criticism of his work. The situation was aptly summarised by
a remark of W.J. Free that Pinter's criticism has not dealt with "unanswered questions."

Pinter criticism has addressed itself to Pinter's indebtedness to Kafka, Beckett, American gangster films and ended with conclusions that Pinter was a lesser Kafka, a poorer Beckett, a pale imitation of Ionesco and a less humorous N.F. Simpson. A decade later Pinter's work was identified with the work of Chekhov, James, Pirandello, Coward, Genet, O'Neill, Brecht without fitting him into the framework. Another approach to the Pinter's plays has been to look upon them as a set of symbols. The plays have been analysed as having a barrier on the label and so on. Such approaches are vulnerable to charges of extreme selectivity of evidence and cannot counter the predominant element of common place in the work. This controversy that the plays are other than symbolical has become institutionalised with Pinter stressing that he never began with abstract ideas in mind, and that the symbols in his work are unknown to him.

Another strand of Pinter's criticism is on inexplicitness and obscurity. It is ironical that this accusation of lack of explicitness threatening the viability of the plays in the theatre, are frequently held to be the very stuff which contributed to their success. This is reflected in such remarks as "the audience is puzzled and
therefore wishes to notice," and Pinter's technique is described by C. Marowitz as "maximum tension through minimum information." Criticism dealing with explicitness and obscurity continues to elude the solution and no resolution has been found. The writer himself was vexed with criticism directed towards obscure rhythms in his work. In his own words "that tired, grimm phrase: 'Failure of communication'"

Herald Pinter is a playwright who, unlike his contemporaries John Osborne, Arnold Wesker, John Arden who all had a very thin connection with theatre, stayed with the theatre ever since he had begun his career as an actor at twelve. His triple roles as actor, director and writer have given him such an authority on drama that it has become part of his self. Any displacement affected him deeply. Inheriting artistic instinct from one side of his family and religious skepticism from the other, this Jewish introvert gave up faith as a boy. The Hackney Downs of East End where he had lived as a boy fed him with rich communal life but the nationwide evacuation process during the Second World War uprooted him from it. His memories of evacuation, of loneliness, bewilderment, separation and loss continued to haunt him as is evident in all his works. As for the war it left behind a set of ineradicable memories, images, sense-impressions. As if to complement his strong sense of
life's drama and significance of each experience a Hackney Public Library, an intellectual treasure house, Hackney Downs Grammar School afforded him opportunities to discover his true potential, and woke him up to the power of drama. Not only did he start going to the theatre, he liked to act and played Macbeth's role. It was about this time that he introduced *The Brothers Karamasov* and *The Trial* to his class.

Another important political development that affected Pinter early in life was the violence caused by the resurgence of Fascism in the post-war East End. Pinter himself was involved in many encounters and verbal exchanges. Violence and menace were therefore part of the social landscape. The atmosphere of precariousness of existence and the terror lurking beneath all social relationships are to an extent transferred to the plays by Pinter. On the positive side, it was then that he learned to question existing credos, read widely and through acting and writing explored both the introvert and the extrovert sides of his nature. His refusal to enlist in the army leading to his appearing before military tribunals twice and paying fines shows Pinter as an extrovert with lucid ideas. This "conscientious objection was a landmark in his life for several reasons. It led to his first serious rupture with his parents. It gave him his first decisive experience of the conflict between
individual determination and social conformity. It also bred a lifelong suspicion of the Kafkaesque workings of bureaucracy."19 Billington summarises Pinter's teenage years in the following lines:

That obstinate nonconformity was to be stamped on Pinter's soul for life. In a sense, it was the culmination of all his experiences as a boy and as a teenager: the solitariness of his back-garden fantasies, the loneliness of evacuation, the early and decisive rejection of the Jewish religion, the creation of his own private literary pantheon, the sense of injustice at the post-war survival of Fascism. ... Everything marked Pinter out, from his earliest years, as an independent spirit.20

The Fascist threat in England and a sense of insecurity coupled with his penchant for acting drew Pinter to Ireland. In 1949, he wrote a prose poem "Kullus" containing the now familiar elements: a room, a space, a territorial battle, a triangular encounter between two men and a woman, a reversal of power. The play The Basement developed the theme and structure of "Kullus" — the Edenic solitude, the invitation to agents of destruction, the territorial displacement and psychological defeat. It is
amazing that at eighteen Pinter had such a clear and concrete vision of reality. In Ireland he also wrote poems while learning acting under McMaster and played Shakespearean characters Iago and Hamlet. Romantic Ireland with its great writers Yeats and Synge had a profound effect on Pinter. Patrick Hamilton’s play *Rope*, in which two undergraduates murder a contemporary and hide the body in an on-stage chest, and in which Pinter played the dominant role, became prototypes of Goldberg and McCann (*The Birthday Party*). The most rewarding Irish experience, however, was the discovery of a writer who was to become both a literary influence and a personal friend, Beckett.

Returning from Ireland Pinter moved to Palace Court, Bournemouth for roles and there met Vivien Merchant, his future actress-wife. Their marriage in 1956 shocked Pinter’s family for Merchant was non-Jewish and the marriage was registered on the Day of Atonement and the most solemn religious fast of the Jewish year. *The Room*, the first play, was often regarded as a projection of Pinter’s guilt caused by his marriage although the playwright denied it and claimed that Riley was a messenger, a potential saviour of Rose from imprisonment of the room and the restrictions of her life with Bert. *The Room*, in which private dreams are given a public form, made Pinter discover his true vocation and there
followed *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Birthday Party*. His refusal to alter the text, to give proper motivation for Stanley's actions, reveals his resolve to stand by what he had decided upon—the play to suggest resistance to authority. And when the play was staged it received catastrophic reviews, not to speak of six audience in the theatre. It was described as "puzzling surrealism" and "mad, wearying and inconsequential gabble." It is ironical that the film version became "a hand-grenade thrown into one's sitting room" for "million viewers and gained glowing reviews."

The gains recorded by *The Birthday Party* were repeated to *A Slight Ache* which was broadcast as a radio play in March '60. As a play about the male inadequacy turning into impotent violence, the regressive mother who threatens the ego-identity of her son and of the whore who challenges his masculinity, this play was not difficult or mysterious. Others which followed *The Birthday Party* were *The Hot House* and *A Night Out*. But the play that catapulted Pinter into international fame was *The Caretaker*. Performed in England in 1960 it was thereafter staged in every theatrical capital in the world. Though the playwright says that the play deals with "a particular situation concerning three particular people" it extends beyond it. As Billington puts it: "*The Caretaker* is an austere masterpiece: a universally
recognisable play about political manoeuvring, fraternal
love, spiritual isolation, language as a negotiating weapon
or a form of cover-up." Critics have pointed out the
dramatic language of the play but related it to the great
themes of modern drama, of Ibsen, Chekhov, Pirandello,
Williams and O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*. In brief it was
regarded as a contemporary classic.

The 'sixties saw Pinter not only writing plays but
also discussing his methods of writing them. The succession
of plays *Night School*, *The Collection*, *The Lover*, and *The
Homecoming* presented women as strong and are more easily able
than men to reconcile their sexual and social selves. The
female duality, fantasy and the desire to dominance are so
worked out to make them feminist plays. Sally's bifurcated
career in *Night School* as games mistress and nightclub hostess
and her clever cut witting of Willy and Solto are clear
indications of women's power. Stella's punishment of her
husband driving him to jealousy and sleepless nights in *The
Collection* is an instance of how women attempt to manipulate
their husband's subjugation. In contrast to the above *Tear Party*
shows masculine preoccupation with power but it also
dramatises that money and status affords no protection
against private dread. The play has also been read as a
satire on contemporary capitalism but the fact is that Pinter
is not an explicit Marxist. The barrenness of business ethic and the danger of denying class roots are part of the theme.

The late 'sixties for Pinter were marked by hectic activity for theatre, films, radio but also fears of domestic disharmony in the midst of plenty. Landscape and Silence written now showed changes from earlier methods. Exits and entrances are dispensed with and there are distilled poetic evocations of separation and solitude. There are no verbal exchanges but interrupted monologues. Landscape deals with a husband and a wife who are physically closer but emotionally farther. The exclusion of Vivien from the cast and the consequent feeling of betrayal are proof that the play was based on their private life.

With the arrival of new generation of dramatists in 1970s, and out of sympathy with their efforts, Pinter found himself in a crisis - one similar to Coleridge's - unable to write a play. The following extract from his speech delivered in 1970 on the occasion of receiving the prestigious German Shakespeare Prize shows failure of imagination:

I find it ironic that I have come here to receive this distinguished award as a writer and that at the moment I am writing nothing
and can write nothing. I don't know why. It's a very bad feeling, I know that, but I must say I want more than anything else to fill up a blank page again, to feel that strange thing happen, birth through fingertips. When you can't write you feel you've been banished from yourself.²²

In spite of the creative impotence he felt at the time he wrote *Old Times* under the impact of Proust and Joyce in which he shows the impact of past on the present. A delightful evocation of London is dug out from Pinter's memories of youthful days. Male insecurity, battle for possession, inviolable loneliness, are described in terms of Deeley, Kate and Anna. Many consider it Pinter's best play because of its elusiveness and mysteriousness and because the idea that runs through it is that linear time is an artificial construct and the past is created in response to the needs of the present and in order to shape the future.

*No Man's Land* conceived in a taxi and written during Pinter's preoccupation with screenplays for films shows how his creative imagination works. The four characters named after four famous cricketers remind us of other Pinter characters — Davies in *The Caretaker* and Anna and Deeley in *Old Times*. Spooner's attempt to penetrate
Hirst's mausoleum and save him from a kind of living death and his failure form the plot. All characters search for the past to protect themselves from the present. The play has been regarded as philosophical and poetic. In Billington's words:

Part of what makes *No Man's Land* so beautifully tantalising is its own sense of contradiction. Its bleakness and humour. Its lyricism and laughter. Its meditation on age, death, memory, time, art, and its often parodic tone and use of traditional effects.\(^3\)

Performed in 1975 the play was greeted with admiration and critics noted echoes of Eliot and Beckett. The play's huge success coincided with a great upheaval in Pinter's life: disintegration of marriage and the beginning of an affair with Antonia Fraser.

Whether or not his private life affected his work cannot be known with certainty, Pinter's Hackney life did penetrate his dramatic literature. It may reasonably be inferred therefore, that his break with Vivien Merchant and his long affair with Joan Bakewell and his marriage with Antonia Fraser are reflected in *The Betrayal*. The play presented in 1978 besides autobiographical interest provided the audience with a new technique - the scenes arranged in
reverse chronological order. In nine symmetrically arranged scenes are shown interlinked betrayals: marital, lovers', friends' and artists'. The betrayal is explored through a reverse replay of a seven-year-long affair between Jerry, a literary agent, and Emma, who is the wife of his best friend Robert, a publisher. Pinter shows everyone to be a betrayer and prepared to compromise. The play also shows that while men are spiritually annihilated, Emma survives deceit of men and adapts herself to changes.

The 'seventies and the 'eighties are important for Pinter, the political man. If in the earlier work he had expressed his suspicion of authority, in recent work his political ideas centred round nuclear war, the abuse of human rights, oppression of minorities, governmental cruelty. The plays One for the Road, Mountain Language, Party Time belong to this category. He would not be content with an anti-romantic belief like Auden's "art makes nothing happen" or "art is not life and is not a midwife to society" and found no justification for separating art from life. This is borne out by his work in the 'nineties which have a political subtext to his work. In the last few years Pinter has been critical of the British Tory government and the U.S. government for their roles in several parts of the world. He has always been forthright in his political views.
An interesting aspect of twentieth century literature is that the creative writer is often a theorist and a critic. Eliot prolifically wrote essays on the art of drama followed by Brecht and the Group Theatre dramatists. In total contrast to the above Pinter chose to say very little about his work. To theorise is to go against the experiences and the emotions that the plays might communicate. In an article (1962) he wrote:

I am not concerned with making general statements. I am not interested in theatre used simply as a means of self-expression on the part of people engaged in it. I find in so much group theatre, under the sweat and assault and noise, nothing but valueless generalisations, naive and quite untruthful. I can sum up none of my plays. I can describe none of them, except to say: That is what happened. That is what they say. That is what they did.²⁴

Obviously Pinter is unwilling to state anything about his plays but wants them to speak. He even discourages reading statements made by playwrights on their work:
If I were to state any moral precept it might be: Beware of the writer who puts forward his concern for you to embrace, who leaves you in no doubt as to his worthiness, his usefulness, his altruism, who declares that his heart is in the right place, and ensures that it can be seen, in full view, a pulsating mass where his characters ought to be. What is presented, so much of the time, as a body of active and positive thought, is in fact a body lost in a prison of empty definition and cliche.25

As far as he is concerned he does not claim anything for himself or for his plays. Even the label 'didactic' he has disapproved. However, this does not mean he is indifferent to the issues before society. He said:

I'm very conscious of what's happening in the world. I'm not by any means blind or deaf to the world around me ... No, no. Politicians just don't understand me. What, if you like, interests me, is the suffering for which they are responsible.26

It is true that the plays are not escapist with cheerful people breathing happy air and living contentedly. They show
man in his fear, joy, humour, stupidity, ambition, Pinter shows his generation gripped by an innumerable emotions and experiences. He has not compromised his art to suit his audiences. As Guido Almansi and Simon Henderson put it: "He [Pinter] has never compromised with the audience that comes to the theatre to be comforted, entertained, consoled, patronized, instrumented, preached at and enlightened."

About Pinter's methods Billington comments:

Pinter talks about his own methods: about the importance of starting with characters in a particular context, of not beginning with an abstract theory or allegorical meaning, of the impossibility of verifying the past, of the dangers of exhortation or prophecy. The most revealing section, however, concerns the delicate balance to be struck between allowing characters their own inner momentum and giving a play a strong overall structure. 'I think a double thing happens,' says Pinter. 'You arrange and you listen, following the clues you leave for yourself through the characters. And sometimes a balance is found, where image can freely engender image and where at the same time you are able to keep your sights on
the place where the characters are silent and in hiding. It is in the silence that they are most evident to me."

From the above account of mid-'fifties British drama, of philosophical currents that subserved the intellectual perspective on human situation, of Pinter's advent on the scene, of his understanding of dramatic art and practice, the Pinterian drama may be understood as an unique and distinctive experiment.
NOTES


2. Ibid., p.1.

3. Ibid., p.2.


5. Ibid., p.3.

6. Ibid., pp.8-9.

7. Ibid., p.66.


9. Ibid., pp.3-4.


12. Ibid., p.6.

13. Ibid., p.6.


15. Ibid., p.360.


