HAROLD PINTER AND THE THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

by

NORAH E. A. BOBROW

B.A., University of Toronto, 1962

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

In the Department
of

English

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

April, 1964
ABSTRACT

As delineated in the Introduction, the central direction of this thesis is that of determining the nature and purpose of Harold Pinter's drama, of tracing his relationship to contemporary drama and dramatists in general, and the theatre of the Absurd in particular.

Contrary to the popular belief that the concept of the Absurd suddenly burst upon the literary scene within the last decade, the emphasis of the first chapter lies on the evolutionary process of its development. The idea of the Absurd, or better, an intuition of the concept of the Absurd can be discovered in the philosophic, literary, and theatrical expression of the western world since the end of the last century. These manifestations of the Absurd did not reach the mind of the multitude until it began to express itself through the medium of the theatre. Even then, however, it remained somewhat esoteric in its appeal and reception. Harold Pinter enters the scene of the Absurd, not as an innovator but as a playwright with an exceptional sense of theatre. He does not attempt to redefine its basic ideas, the concept itself is already somewhat diffuse in meaning; his, is an expression of an intense and concentrated image of the absurd. He forged a new weapon with which to impress the Absurd on the consciousness of the popular mind.
Pinter's variation of the Absurd thus differs from the continental expression of Beckett and Ionesco in emphasis and manner of expression, not in idea. Its area of concentration is not on the human condition, but on the abject apparition of the individual imprisoned in existence and society. Unlike Beckett's his queries are not of a metaphysical nature. Pinter probes into the masked reality of everyday life. What he exposes is the presence of a menace which threatens, intimidates and destroys the individual, yet remains unidentified.

Toward the expression of this conception of man's predicament, Pinter has conceived of a dramatic metaphor which is best described as 'latent grotesque' in effect. Thus the grotesque dominates the idea of his drama and is the very essence of his theatrical form. The theatre which can now be identified with Pinter's name is a drama of anxiety which progresses from the comic grotesque to the terrifying grotesque. Laughter which resolves itself in fear is the new instrument with which an awareness of the Absurd is impressed upon the audience.
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the Head of my Department or by his representative. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.
...Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not 'Pataphysics, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gifts of prophecy and know all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not 'Pataphysics, I am nothing....

'Pataphysics shall never disappear: there will be supersession of prophecies, of tongues, of science, nay, of reality. For our knowledge and our extra-lucidity are but partial in both senses of the word. Only 'Pataphysics can achieve all, even that which it cannot achieve. It alone is perfection.

The above conveys one lucid image the meaning of which is that there is no meaning. It speaks with the irrational, contradictory, paradoxical, absurd—precisely the elements of the world which it parodies. In a 'pataphysically conceived universe everything is of equal value because there is no value, neither scientific, nor moral, nor aesthetic. The conscious exaggeration of the science of 'Pataphysics is designed to caricature those who view the world in purely idealistic or phenomenological terms.

Despite the extremity of the 'pataphysical doctrine, it is an off-shoot of a major intellectual revolution in western thought; a revolution which has finally manifested itself in the most popular of art forms, the drama. Its identity is the Theatre of the Absurd.

The principle which defines the conception and growth of the Absurd is very simple, and in the temper of the time almost self-evident.

Life is, of course, absurd, and it is ludicrous to take it seriously. Only the comic is serious.
The tragic and the comic, the two faces of life and of the drama, have discovered one identity in the Absurd. The process of this transformation, however, is not as 'of course' as it here seems. Until this level of awareness was reached, many paths had led art to by-ways of expression and ideas. The Theatre of the Absurd can hardly be accused of staging an unexpected coup de theatre; nor can it yet enthrone itself on the theatre world. The phenomenon of its development, what is more, of its acceptance, took place amid various and contradictory theatrical movements and philosophical speculations. Many of these reflected, perhaps subconsciously, some aspects of what was later formulated in the Absurd.

Art has always been a witness to the era in which it was rooted, whether in a direct reflection of or in reaction to it. Of greatest value is the testimony which the dramatic art gives of its parent century; for drama by its very nature is not merely the product of an isolated, private moment of creation. This is only its conception. Maturity is reached when the audience accepts it as part of their experience. To pass beyond the surface reality of momentary entertainment, it must achieve further depth by reverberating as an echo in the consciousness of the spectators. The theatre is a moment of life in a particular age. Should it also be a moment of humanity, it will transcend the boundaries of the time which inspired it.
The pulsation of our own century can be detected in the dynamic change of the traditional and the continuous break-up of new forms of expression. Drama especially proved to be a living organism generated by the problems of our century. For the twentieth century dramatist, the dissolution of established forms of order which directed human existence is the central problem. All religious, social or political systems of value had proven invalid, or at best ephemeral. In the realm of metaphysics the existence of one omnipotent, omniscient cause, responsible for humanity, was rejected by most. Without the cause there could be no greater 'end' for being, and existence itself was felt to be pointless. But it was not only the decline of religious beliefs which had deprived man of certainties. Science itself began to speak in contradictions and paradoxes, becoming for the layman illogical in its logicality.

Microphysics suggested that certain forms of energy shared simultaneously the contradictory properties of waves and of particles; quantum physics gave it to be understood that the "logically" impossible could and did happen; atomic physics produced evidence which implied that effects need have no necessary cause and that phenomena might create themselves out of nothing; while Einstein at one blow appeared to invalidate both Euclid and the rational conceptions of time and space.3

The artistic reaction to the deposition of 'the tyranny of rationalism' was an outburst of forms which tried to redefine the nature of reality and find new orders to replace the old. The figure which wielded the widest influence in a variety
of contradictory dramatic forms is Pirandello. The effects of his art, above all, his renunciation of naive realism are as notable as those of Strindberg in psychological drama. He prepared the way for the bitter, grotesque theatre of Ionesco and Beckett as well as the poetic creations of Lorca and Genet. What binds these opposites to him is their desire and effort to oppose the narrow scheme of the rationalism that prevailed at the time. The result was at first a somewhat confusing and chaotic picture of modern drama. Anarchy, compounded of revolt against the conformity and banality of bourgeois life and ideals, of a purely theatrical rebellion against the hampering forms of realism and naturalism in the drama, resulted in the emergence of symbolism, dadaism, expressionism and surrealism. The nature of surrealism, for example, was characterized by absolute rebellion, sabotage on principle, the humour and cult of the absurd. It defined itself in its primary intent as the incessant examination of all values. Finally out of the absence of real direction there emerged the renunciation of all direction and prescribed conventions manifested in the drama of the Absurd.

Today's theatre, as analysed by Durrenmatt, can thus be divided into two parts. On the one hand it is a museum which holds on to the traditional values of old forms and precepts; on the other hand it is a field of great experiment in which almost every play presents new problems of style to the dramatist. More than at any other time, contemporary art
is composed of experiments. There is no longer the single entity of 'form', but only forms. Drama is the medium best provided to catch emergent social realities, since it is a visual and multi-dimensional complex which ties meanings more clearly to what is being enacted in society itself. A quick survey of the dramatic scene of the twentieth century will reveal the diverse efforts of dramatists to contend with the problems of the particular time—social, political or dramatic. Out of these efforts arises the emergent reality of the Absurd, and the drama which reflects it.

G.B. Shaw was an illusionist who believed in the drama as an active force or vehicle of reform. The stage was for him a podium for the conflict of ideas in the fight for social justice. To combat stale conventions, prejudices and obsolete traditions, he created a drama of relentless satire and derision. Particularly characteristic is his manner of destroying accepted realities with a logic carried ad absurdum, and replacing these with a socialist dogma as tenacious as the conventions destroyed. It followed almost naturally from this that he should with the same gesture undermine the traditional belief in the illusionistic quality of drama—for example, the Don Juan intermezzo in Man and Superman and the Epilogue of St. Joan. In fact, in the theatre world of today, he stands more as an innovator in stage technique and master of English satiric comedy than as the propagandist and reformist he had appointed himself to be.
Contemporaneously, the psychological theatre turned from all external diagnosis of man's dilemma and focused on the psyche in an attempt to discover a system by which human behaviour could be explained. The tormented heroes of Montherlant populated the stage in France. In the U.S.A., Eugene O'Neill passed from a period of social criticism to the critic of humanity in general. In *The Emperor Jones*, he probed for the motivation of guilt. The general metaphysics and treatment of the guilt problem were reminiscent of classical renditions of the theme, evident also in his attempt to redefine classical tragedy in a modern setting—*Mourning Becomes Electra*. The tone of his work is marked by a deep pessimism in the power of man to combat the forces which compel him towards his fate. Man is portrayed as the victim of his environment subject to the forces of blood and race within him, or to uncontrollable elements in his subconscious.

A return to a religious orientation to the chaos of the world was made by Paul Claudel in France and T.S. Eliot in England. Initially strindbergian in his pessimism, Claudel proclaimed the order of an orthodox Catholicity with the dedication of a mystic. In a deeply symbolic dramaturgy, he insisted that without God no social order can satisfy man. The appeal was made universal in *Le Soulier de Satin*. With flashbacks, a mixture of dream, realistic, grotesque and intensely serious scenes, he dramatized the unity of the Immanent and the Transcendent in a cosmos of Christian life.
In England, T.S. Eliot's development of a religious solution was closely allied to the resurgence of the old forms of verse and choric drama. *Murder in the Cathedral*, a martyr drama, as well as his later dramas of social criticism, *The Family Reunion*, *The Cocktail Party*—all set out to dramatize a religious mystery which reunites the contemporary man with religious problems and a Christian life.

The futility of all these efforts, however, became painfully conscious to the dramatists in their anxiety for the human condition. Even the idealism of a Giraudoux, whose sophisticated poetic fantasies had substituted the world of illusion for reality with graceful irony, was defeated. A darker and more despairing note began to insinuate itself into the efforts to redefine the human condition by creating some sort of order or adjustment to reality. In *Electra*—the setting is classical; the disillusionment, contemporary.

Aegisthus. I do believe in the gods. Or rather, I believe I believe in the gods. But I believe in them not as great caretakers and great watchmen, but as great abstractions. Between space and time, always oscillating between gravitation and emptiness, there are the great indifferences. Those are the gods....

The 'great indifferences'—in concept at least, it is the same perception of a metaphysical absence which engenders Beckett's dramatic vision.

In *The Madwoman of Chaillot* the bilious, bitter irony cannot overshadow an essentially tragic undertone. In this it is much closer related to the tragi-comic where
serves only to emphasize deep scepticism. Man is not in harmony with the universe, and the distance which lies between a world paralysed in a state of cold materialism and the realm of ideas and humanism, is insurmountable. It is a bizarre world—a motif which is common to Giraudoux and the new dramatists. But, here, it is expressed with a mellifluous flow of poetry sentiment, not with all the grotesque force which language, form, and dramatic method can yield, nor with the precise logicality of a Camus or a Sartre.

Countess. Good (she puts the bones in the basket and starts for the stairs). Well, let's go on to more important things. Four o'clock. My poor cats must be starved. What a bore for them if humanity had to be saved every afternoon. They don't think much of it as it is.

The philosophic and dramatic thinkers of the Absurd acknowledge the work of Kafka and Dostoievsky to be basic in their thought. These novelists' artistic interpretation of the emotional and external experience of man was the point of departure for the Existentialists and Absurdists alike. Dostoievsky gave a large impulse to the drama of fear. The inner furies which drive his characters forged the image of the persecuted man which reverberates in modern literature. L'homme traque emerged as a phenomenon peculiar to and characteristic of our age. He is possessed by demons, tortured by fears and frustrations in a search for an absolute value and for God.

These inner demonic forces were projected by Kafka to a demonic reality outside man which threatens, confines and
overpowers him. In Kafka, estrangement does not occur within the individual self, but is due to the nature of the world and the absence of a satisfactory coordination between the two. The incomprehensibility of any reality outside man's inner consciousness weighs upon his characters, possessing them with a fear which arises out of their insecurity. Kafka's contribution to the Absurd lies in his quality of an inimitable witness to human helplessness before bureaucratic impersonality expressed in the form of latent grotesque narratives. It is with this Kafkaesque aspect of the Absurd, both in form and idea, that Harold Pinter can be identified.

Common to their thought is the persecuted individual who feels unable to rise against his inner fears as well as the threats from outside. This fear of man when confronted with the reality of his existence is closely allied to a feeling of his inadequacy in organizing his experience. It is man's inability to master existence, the anxiety and concern which accompany his constant efforts to cope with experience and his failure to find some sort of orientation to existence which forms the core of Pinter's variation of the Absurd. Pinter expresses this in a dramatic form which adapts the 'latent grotesque' to the stage and drama with the greatest effectiveness. However, Pinter's adaptation of the Kafkaesque absurd has little in common with existentialist thought, although the term itself first appeared in Kierkegaard. The difference in usage is indicative of the very free use of the term 'absurd', both in philosophic thought and in criticism of literature. It becomes necessary,
then, to examine the roots of the Absurd in existentialism, to suggest how the use of the term embraces a variety of philosophic concepts which are almost contradictory in parts; and to indicate how, in spite of this, there has emerged a dramatic movement which has found a common identity under the Absurd.

Man entangled in the spider web of existence is the image on which existentialist thought is built. The Absurd in the thought of Kierkegaard and Chestov was prompted by the awareness of the ungraspable and irrational cleavage between man and God. This awareness had positive consequences in these thinkers, for it led to a tremendous cry of hope. Awareness of the absurdity of this existence assured them all the more of a supernatural reality?

Three or four attitudes were popularized and codified by the existentialists and have been embraced by most of the avant-garde dramatists today. The school of Sartre sums up certain attitudes that continue in certain respects to prevail today. Among these attitudes are:

i) Absurdity is the underlying fabric of man's existence. Man in his moments of honesty and lucidity is aware that his life has no absolute meaning, that he must live as in a void. Non-existence constantly threatens him.

ii) Man may become bogged down in his physical being, attached to a pattern, a fixed idea of good, a conception of himself which denies his humanity. He
ceases to change, to become, is turned into a thing. The over-abundance of things is nauseating, for it limits his freedom.

iii) Just as man and his values may congeal through habit, thus may language become dead and inoperative, paralyzing our thoughts. With such an instrument, no communication is possible. Each man is a solitude.

iv) There is no human nature. Man is only what he makes of himself; therefore there is no such thing as a fixed character in the usual sense. Man is an existent in a situation.

Il y a entre les aspirations de l'homme et la réalité tangible un écart immense, terrifiant. L'absurde n'est que le résultat de cette confrontation entre l'appel humain et le silence déraisonnable du monde.

Within literature the existentialist hero's hopeless discovery is that the world is absurd and man the one and only value. He must accept the responsibility of giving the world a meaning that comes from himself alone. The inner torment of the Dostoievsksian character is resolved as the existentialist hero takes upon himself both the good and bad, and with this gesture attains a heretofore non-existent freedom.

Camus, although early identified with the school of Sartre, departs from their preoccupation with political, social and religious implications of this philosophy. For Camus the absurd lies in the disparity between man's rational demands and the irrationality of the world.
Man's absurd plight is for Camus neither comic nor tragi-comic, but worthy of the most poignant tragedy. These tragic elements of the absurd are symbolized in the figure of Sisyphus as he turns toward the lower world from which he will push again to the summit.

I see that man going back down with a heavy yet measured step toward the torment of which he will never know the end. That hour, like a breathing space which returns as surely as his suffering, that is the hour of consciousness. If this myth is tragic, that is because its hero is conscious. Where would his torture be, indeed, if at every step the hope of succeeding upheld him? The workman of today works every day of his life at the same tasks, and this fate is no less absurd. But it is tragic only at the rare moments when it becomes conscious.

This symbol is transferred to the stage in Caligula. His awareness of the human predicament in the face of death, of the limitations of human existence, initiates the tragic movement of his fate.

Caligula. Je me suis senti tout d'un coup un besoin d'impossible. Les choses telles qu'elles sont, ne me semblent pas satisfaisantes. J'ai donc besoin de la lune, ou du bonheur, ou de l'immortalité, de quelque chose qui soit dement peut-être, mais qui ne soit pas de ce monde.

The ultimate truth, "les hommes meurent, et ils ne sont pas heureux", signifies his final understanding of the Absurd. Having discovered the irrationality of this world, Caligula proceeds to create the only possible rational order by systematically carrying this irrationality to the utmost limits. An iconoclast, he proceeds to lay bare the lies, false traditions, and hypocritical conventions of the world, in a series
of grotesques, pantomime and clownesque scenes. Murder is juxtaposed with the innocence and sincerity of his purpose, and incongruous as this is, truth arises out of the conflict. His justification—"Qui oserait me condamner dans ce monde sans juge ou personne n'est innocent." Camus' theatrical exposition of the Absurd, however, in no way varies in emphasis from the philosophic tract. It is the ideas which are dramatically presented, not the essence of the Absurd. That is, he has not considered the implication which the Absurd could have for dramatic expression and form. He adopts the conventional classical form for tragedy.

Caligula est probablement, de toutes les pièces modernes, celle qui répond le plus exactement au canon de la tragédie tels qu'on les trouve définis dans 'Les Origines': cultes dionisiens du vouloir-vivre et de la liberté, passion d'être, pureté jusqu'à l'obsession totalitaire par la découverte du mal.

The dramatic action follows a logical progression of the argument. The figures are there to illustrate and test certain principles upon whose opposition and conflict the play is built. He employs the classical technique in dialogue, and in this overlooks how very little the construction of debate, or speech and contra-speech in the style of Ibsen complies with the dialectic of paradox of the Absurd. Since about 1935, theatre in France and England had thus been turning more and more to the problems of man's condition without rejecting traditional attitudes towards plot, character, theme
and language. The major playwrights, O'Neill, Claudel, Sartre, Camus, Eliot, O'Casey, dealt with serious and even metaphysical problems but did not wander too far afield from the realistic conceptions of theatre, although now and then, symbol and thought overshadow character and plot.

Elements of the absurd were found in much drama and philosophic thought throughout this century, but until it actually manifested itself in a dramatic form unique to and reflective of its content, the absurd had no meaning or identity as a movement in the theatre. The "absurd", although very loosely and inconsistently used in philosophy and literature (embracing such diverse thinkers as Kierkegaard, Dostoievsky, Kafka, Sartre, and Camus), acquired a precise and well-defined identity only in its association with a theatre which embodied the essence of its thought. The common identity thus shared by Beckett, Ionesco, and Pinter is not their ideas but their attempt and experiments toward expressing the absurd in dramatic form as well as content. Thus, while Sartre and Camus' message can be abstracted from their plays, this is not possible in the Drama of the Absurd, since it is not words alone, but the whole form of a play which strives towards an awareness and expression of the Absurd.

The new drama abounds in absurdities, mannered situations, grotesque forms and characters, and anti-theatrical
mechanisms. Through these strange means each of Aristotle's six "parts" of serious drama is receiving new definition: plot, character, thought, language, music, and visual effects or spectacle, each has been radically reformed. Psychological perceptivity about motive, as in the drama of O'Neill or Montherlant, undercut any stagey claim to heroic grandeur. There is a redrafting of our use of character which is devoted to undermining or declassifying the hero, but only because humanity has declassified itself. It is thus in new dramatic terms that the Absurd seeks to define the essence of reality.

Having rejected the conventional theatre of ideas, psychology, or philosophy, the new drama constitutes a rediscovery of the fundamental models of theatre, a return in some respects to primitive theatre, and a return to man, rather than society as the centre of the dramatic universe. The essence of theatre, Ionesco theorizes, is enlargement. To go beyond that 'twilight land' that is neither life nor theatre, the dramatist must exaggerate, push the characters and stories (and in his own drama, the settings) beyond the bounds of the true or the likely in order to arrive at something that is truer than life itself - the amplified and theatrical image which strikes deep below the surface of reality. It is a new way of depicting the new selves, the new animating conflicts which the drastic social upheavals
of our time sponsor.

In a world, where the only Cause is nothingness; the only End, the void; where existence is meaningless; the only order, chaos; and the overwhelming emotion, futility and fear of life; the only form which can express this directly is one in which every dramatic moment transcends mere representational reality. Every word, gesture, setting, movement, in short, the whole dramatic action must symbolize the new reality. In its form, the new drama becomes a direct parody of this world; thus the state of suspension and timelessness in our drama today. The new theatre proposes to communicate the bewildering paradox of man's life and the complete absurdity of the mechanization of being in its comic and tragic aspects.

In close tonal decisions the comic wins out over the tragic vision of man. The tragic itself has been redefined, even invalidated. The downfall of the tragic hero was conventionally based on the flaw in individual man. There cannot be any faith in this any longer; for, compared to the general flaw of mankind, it becomes minor and is confuted by a collective guilt. Tragedy must be based on a respect for human beings, for human personality. The awareness of the Absurd cannot permit this. For, these values and attributes of humanity have proven to be false fronts, deliberate deceptions; and in an industrial and mechanized society the individuality of man exists only as a rarity, almost a freak. Mankind, having
dropped the atom bomb, and holding over our heads devastating weapons, has reduced our sensibility to intellection so that all we can do now is laugh. Comedy alone is suitable to us. In Nietzsche's phrase - 'the comic is the artistic release from the nausea of the absurd'.

In the midst of a world such as ours, this release can best be achieved by comedy because tragedy, the strictest genre in art, presupposes a formed world. The comic, as distinct from the traditional form of comedy, in so far as it is not just satire of a particular society as in Moliere or Shaw, supposes an unformed world, a world being made and turned upside down, a world full of grotesque uncertainties and contradictions. The abdication of the tragic is prompted by a disinclination to make the confident, terminal assertions and affirmations of tragedies.

But although the fatigue of insoluble and innumerable suffering has made us immune to a deep response to tragedy, the tragic is still possible even if pure tragedy is not. The tragic can be achieved out of the comic. The new drama retains the suffering, but without heroes and without resonant affirmations. At the beginning of the century already, J.M. Synge, following in the practice of Yeats' attachment to old poetic forms, gave an impetus to a renaissance of the farce as found in the old theatrical forms of France. This genre then wound its way through the century in the form of tragic farce, and has lastly found new expression in the drama of Sartre and
Beckett in France, and Harold Pinter in England. Thus, in *Waiting for Godot*, Samuel Beckett gives Gogo and Didi, who wait for Godot, Chaplinesque peculiarities; while Gus and Ben, who are intimidated by a menacing force in Pinter's *Dumb Waiter*, resemble Laurel and Hardy figures. Harlequin has once more invaded the stage only to reveal the condition of contemporary man in his grotesque-tragic futility.
CHAPTER IX

Samuel Beckett has been acknowledged by Pinter as a major influence on his work, an influence which is obvious on many surface levels. The differences are so great on the deeper dramatic levels, however, that the critic who marks Pinter's work as imitative can rightfully be termed superficial himself. It is true that the two worlds of Beckett and Pinter are based upon a lucid and almost painful awareness of life's emptiness and uncertainty, but as far as the dramatic concept of the individual dramatist is concerned the similarity ends here.

Both dramatists, apparently convinced that there is no system to give direction to the life of the individual, depict a universe that is hostile to man. In Beckett, the hostility is a negative one, a hostility of absence, a lack of response to man's needs, a vacuum where man would have hoped for some significant entity. Man cries or shouts his despair into darkness or the Void. It is the same ambivalent questioning and doubt which Paer Lagerkvist's Barabbas uttered on the Cross: "When he felt death approaching, that which he had always been afraid of, he said out into the darkness, as though he were speaking to it: 'to
thee I deliver up my soul.¹ It is the theme of human isolation and 'acedia' in the face of an impenetrable void with a tragi-comic awareness that "all existence for man turned away from the eternal is but a vase mime under the mask of the absurd."²

Pinter's hostility is more menacing, for it is not an absence but a presence; and where Beckett's 'bums' could wait and hope, Pinter's tramps and individuals are threatened, confronted and attacked. Beckett's vision is recessive, elegiac, with that plaintive humanity of the "margin beyond even the twilight of the Gods".³ Pinter's is one of violence, futile resistance, and terror before a menace which strikes with purpose. In Pinter, the hostility seems to take on concrete form. It appears as an imminent reality which rises out of the darkness beyond the individual to threaten and engulf him.

Pinter's variation of the Absurd divorces him from the continental dramatists of the Absurd. There is no premeditated philosophical pattern in his dramatic thought; and in this, he is much more the dramatist of situation than his more intellectual colleagues Beckett and Ionesco. He depicts a narrow particular situation; and it is out of the ensuing dramatic conflict that Pinter's concept of the absurd emerges, a concept which is thereby closer allied to a dramatic idea than a philosophic one. Instead of the highly intellectual level of Beckett and Ionesco's drama, Pinter's
theatre has given the drama of the absurd a wider appeal. One might even say that he adapted the Absurd for the English stage and taste. Forms and themes popular to English taste - the music hall, vaudeville, the suspense or mystery plays always in vogue are fused to produce an original interpretation of the Absurd.

It follows from this that while the significance of Pinter's drama lies in its theatrical import, the value of Beckett's plays as theatre is overshadowed by their value as metaphysical speculation and philosophic document. For Beckett the stage extends his most compelling obsession, already expressed in his novels, - his need to record a "Pascalian horror of the infinite emptiness". Waiting for Godot could thus be interpreted to express the illusion of existence; Endgame the illusion of meaning; Happy Days, the illusion of communication. Beckett appears to have a passionate dedication to the expression of the philosophical implications of the Absurd. His dramatic metaphor shows the abyss, the infinite emptiness of a world without a God or the frustrating uncertainty of his absence. In this, his drama is not dominated so much by a dramatic situation as by a philosophic thought (although, in reality, the two cannot be separated in the form of his expression).

The statement of his theatre is of an ontological nature.
Vladimir: Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries ... but habit is a great deadener. 

The nature of Being is explored in its essence; the space-time continuum is annihilated and all is razed down to one level of reality.

Pozzo: One day he went dumb, one day I went blind. One day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams one instant, then it's night once more.

The old concepts are replaced by the newly recognized eternal continuum of Waiting - itself part of "that double-headed monster of damnation and salvation - Time."

It has been noted that to retreat from the theological in the new drama does not imply a retreat from the religious. In the drama of the Absurd the possibility of a religious quality arises precisely because of its direct confrontation of and serious involvement in the ultimate questions of the human condition.

Hamm: Clove, we're not beginning to ... to ...
Clove: Mean something! You and I, mean something - ah, that's a good one!

In this sense Beckett's view of life is basically a religious
one. His characters portray the search, even if futile, for some meaning beyond the trivial life of everyday existence; some purpose beyond the physical needs of a specific time and place.

Vladimir: What are we doing here, That is the question. And we are blessed in this, that we happen to know the answer. Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come.9

In the context of the play of course, this is tragically ironic. The painful recognition of the Absurd and the ensuing struggle to find a meaning in the pointless tedium of life without meaning and direction reflects a profoundly religious and philosophic attitude in the dramatist. Pinter does not probe into questions of a metaphysical nature. He is not a writer but a playwright and his medium is not idea but theatre.

I start off with people who come into a particular situation. I certainly don't write from any abstract idea. And I wouldn't know a symbol if I saw one .... But if you don't want to give some particular message to the world explicitly and directly, you just carry on writing, and you're quite content.10

ii. It is the nature of their questions which distinguishes the respective problems of the two dramatists. Not the nature of Being but the true identity of 'being', of the 'self', is central to Pinter's thought. Pinter also is aware of the underlying absurdity in life; but he is not so preoccupied with the awareness of boredom and suffering as he
is with the image of man confronted with a complete disintegration of the meaningful form with which he masks futility, reality and his true identity. The Dwarfs contains in germ many of the leading ideas behind Pinter's dramatic vision.

Len: The point is, who are you? Not why or how, not even what. I can see what, perhaps, clearly enough. But who are you? It's no use saying you know who you are just because you tell me you can fit your particular key into a particular slot which will only receive your particular key because that's not foolproof and certainly not conclusive. Occasionally I believe I perceive a little of what you are but that's pure accident. Pure accident on both our parts, the perceived and the perceiver. It's nothing like an accident, its deliberate, its a joint pretence. We depend on these accidents, on these contrived accidents, to continue.11

Pinter's is a savage commentary on man in relation to himself and other men. And the analysis of this relation reveals the confusion, uncertainties, insufficiencies of human existence.

Len: What you are, or appear to be to me, or appear to be to you, changes so quickly, so horrifyingly, I certainly can't keep up with it and I'm damn sure you can't either. But who you are I can't even begin to recognize, and sometimes I recognize it so wholly, so forcibly, I can't look, and how can I be certain of what I see? You have no number. Where am I to look, where am I to look, what is there to locate, so as to have some surety, to have some rest from this whole bloody racket? You're the sum of so many reflections. How many reflections? Whose reflections? Is that what you consist of?12
All interest is focused on individual humanity not humanity at large. Beckett's is essentially a metaphysical problem of man, existence, and the Absolute. Pinter confronts his individuals with a physical reality outside them. He investigates the moment when each man's fear of security is penetrated by an external and strange reality. What he thereby exposes are the insecurities, the uncertainties, the eternal change to which man is subject - even in his relation to physical objects.

Len: The rooms we live in ... open and shut. Pause. Can't you see? They change shape at their own will. I wouldn't grumble if only they would keep to some consistency. But they don't. And I can't tell the limits, the boundaries, which I've been led to believe are natural. I'm all for the natural behaviour of rooms, doors, staircases, the lot. But I can't rely on them.\textsuperscript{13}

Material reality, however, does not remain a major question with Pinter as it is in Ionesco's theatre. In the latter the absurdity of the paraphenalia of objects in man's life is largely the basis for a grotesque portrayal of man dispossessed by objects. In surrealistic terms, furniture begins to multiply in \textit{The New Tenant}; chairs are the audience for the message which is to save mankind (left to a deaf mute to transmit) in \textit{The Chairs}. In contrast the insecurities of Pinter's characters stem from an invasion not of objects but of the strange and unexpected "something" which they fear may enter into their lives from outside.
The composite dramatic image of his plays reveals the domination of the individual by an imposed systematic menace. The room is a recurring motif for the dramatic manifestation of this aspect of Pinter's thought. Poetically, it is the image which represents the world of his security of his pseudo-reality, the fortress which shrouds man from the mystery of all that is outside it. On a still deeper level it is that part of man which is apparent to the world - his external trappings. The situation becomes dramatic when something or somebody invades the privacy of the room and thereby that of the individual's personality.

Two people in a room - I'm dealing a great deal of time with the image of two people in a room. The curtain goes up on the stage, and I see it as a very potent question; What is going to happen to these two people in a room? Is someone going to open the door and come in?

Loneliness is the result when Beckett strips his characters to the essence of humanity, to the level on which physical needs overpower any desire for a human relationship and the individual is divorced from all but his physical 'self'. In Pinter, when the defensive apparatus of the individual is pierced by a form of attack from the outside, the resulting terror is of something undefined. In Pinter's own words "Obviously they are scared of what is outside the room. Outside the room there is a world bearing upon them which is frightening. I am sure it is frightening to you and me as well." Though undefined it is not
non-existent. Nor will the hypothesis that it is all in the minds of the characters hold in this drama.

In the Room, the menace which finally overcomes Rose is precipitated first by the entrance of two total strangers Mr. and Mrs. Sands, then by the arrival of the blind negro, finally by the entrance of her husband. The Sands couple unwittingly introduce uncertainties into the heretofore unquestioned existence of Rose. At first the factors which are put into doubt are minor details.

Mr. Sands: (looking at the room) It's a fair size, all right.
Mrs. Sands: Why don't you sit down, Mrs. -
Rose: Hudd. No thanks
Mr. Sands: What did you say?
Rose: When?
Mr. Sands: What did you say the name was?
Rose: Hudd.
Mr. Sands: That's it. You're the wife of the bloke you mentioned then?
Mrs. Sands: No, she isn't. That was Mr. Kidd.
Mr. Sands: Was it? I thought it was Hudd.
Mrs. Sands: No, it was Kidd. Wasn't it, Mrs. Hudd?
Rose: That's right. The landlord.
Mr. Sands: No, not the landlord. The other man.
Rose: Well, that's his name. He's the landlord.
Mrs. Sands: Who?
Rose: Mr. Kidd.

Pause.
Mr. Sands: Is he?
Mrs. Sands: Maybe there are two landlords. 16

Endless repetition of questions related or similar in context create a growing state of confusion. This persistence of interrogation and the insistent tone with which it is executed slowly become increasingly hostile.
Rose: Well, I think you'll find Mr. Kidd about somewhere. He's not long gone to make his tea.
Mr. Sands: He lives here, does he?
Rose: Of course he lives here.
Mr. Sands: And you say he's the landlord, is he?
Rose: Of course he is.
Mr. Sands: Well, say I wanted to get hold of him, where would I find him?
Rose: Well - I'm not sure.
Mr. Sands: He lives here, does he?
Rose: Yes, but I don't know -
Mr. Sands: You don't know exactly where he hangs out?
Rose: No, not exactly.
Mr. Sands: But he does live here, doesn't he? 17

The seed of doubt has been sown so that when they finally do leave and Mr. Kidd arrives, Rose voices the very same questions.

Rose: Listen Mr. Kidd, you are the landlord, 18 aren't you? There isn't any other landlord?

With the same gesture that her knowledge or information was questioned Rose's security is challenged in the matter of the vacant room. The Sands couple insinuated that it was number 7, her room, which an unidentified person declared vacant. At this her concern becomes more agitated.

Rose: Mr. Kidd, what did they mean about this room?
Mr. Kidd: What room?
Rose: Is this room vacant?
Mr. Kidd: Vacant? 19

With the introduction of the second external force to interrupt her day her reaction takes a definite turn to a defensive position.
Rose: Do you expect me to see someone I don't know? With my husband not here too?
Mr. Kidd: But he knows you, Mrs. Hudd, he knows you.
Rose: How could he, Mr. Kidd, when I don't know him?
Mr. Kidd: You must know him.
Rose: But I don't know anybody. We're quiet here. We've just moved into this district.
Mr. Kidd: But he doesn't come from this district. Perhaps you knew him in another district.
Rose: Mr. Kidd, do you think I go around knowing men in one district after another. What do you think I am? 20

The negro's entrance transforms her queries into insistent aggressiveness. She does this, in a defensive effort; until in near frenzy she becomes more and more violent for reasons inexplicable to us.

What are you looking at? You're blind, aren't you? So what are you looking at? What do you think you've got here, a little girl? I can keep up with you. I'm one ahead of people like you. Tell me what you want and get out.

Riley: My name is Riley.
Rose: I don't care if it's - What? That's not your name. That's not your name. You've got a grown-up woman in this room, do you hear? Or are you deaf too? You're not deaf too, are you? You're all deaf and dumb and blind, the lot of you. A bunch of cripples. 21

The last reference, though ambiguous, remains unexplained; for the import of the dialogue lies, not in the meaning of what is said, but in the reaction of Rose as, slowly, all her resources leave her and her personality is completely exhausted.

Riley: I have a message for you.
Rose: You've got what? How could you have a message for me, Mister Riley, when I don't know you and nobody knows I'm here and I don't know anybody anyway. You think I'm an easy touch, don't you? Well, why don't you give it up as a bad job? Get off out of it. I've had enough of this. You're not only a nut, you're a blind nut and you can get out the way you came.

Pause.

What message? Who have you got a message from? Who?

Riley: Your father wants you to come home.

Pause.

Riley: Yes.

Rose: Home? Go now. Come on. It's late. It's late.22

What are we to make of Rose's gradual disintegration, her violent protests, the unexpected signs of real humanity and tenderness as she "touches his (blind negro's) eyes, the back of his head and his temples with her hands," the frenzied account of Bert battling the dark with his van, his sudden burst of excitement and vitality, ludicrous since it is over a mechanised vehicle, the physical violence of the killing and Rose's loss of her sight?

The mental image created is obviously symbolic but in very isolated symbols irreconcilable to a consistent symbolic pattern. One can hypothesize that Rose's physical blindness points to an inner or spiritual blindness in her battle for the room, material possessions, etc. Riley has been interpreted as an emissary of a supernatural reality or death although there is little suggestion of it. He does
seem to represent something in her past. There is a
nostalgic reaction to his use of the name Sal from which
the question of her identity arises. Riley has also been
identified as a threat from the outside world against which
Bert protects Ruth and his home, his security. In reality,
the threat moves in with Bert’s entrance. The unpredicta-
bility of his final action is the real cause of terror
greater than the fear of Riley’s unknown identity. What
further characterises Bert as a real menace is the unpre-
meditated, unemotional, but deliberate act of the violent
murder of Riley after which he simply walks away. It is en-
gaging to set out the pattern of the action in terms of
cause and effect or possible motivations. These specula-
tions though interesting are not relevant to an understand-
ing of Pinter’s drama.

A parallel movement takes place in A Slight Ache.
The disintegration of personality is initiated in a similar
pattern. The individual feels challenged, assumes a de-
fensive position in an opposition to an undefined menace.
The external force which opposes its presence to Edward’s
life assumes the form of the beggarly matchseller. He
stands forebodingly at the gate of the bourgeois home of
Flora and Edward. The process of questioning this time, however,
is initiated in the mind of Edward himself. He personally
appoints himself as the chosen target of the impending threat.
This is especially so since Flora’s matter-of-fact reaction
to the same situation is a foil to his own as she comes upon him watching the matchseller through the scullery window.

Edward: Christ blast it.
Flora: You're frightened of him.
Edward: I'm not.
Flora: You're frightened of a poor old man. Why?
Edward: I am not.
Flora: He's a poor, harmless old man.
Edward: Ahah my eyes. ²³

Rationally, he determines that the matchseller's presence is not what it seems.

Edward: It's quite absurd of course. I really can't tolerate something so ... absurd, right on my doorstep. I shall not tolerate it. He's sold nothing all morning. No one passed .... Pause I haven't wasted my time. I've hit, in fact, upon the truth. He's not a matchseller at all. ²⁴

The threat is felt intuitively but what is it which Edward feels the need to defend - all that which signifies for him the essence of his existence - his possessions, comfort, isolation, security.

Edward: (to himself) It used to give me great pleasure, to stroll along through the long grass, out through the back gate, into the lane. That pleasure is now denied me. It's my own house isn't it. ²⁵

This portrayal of the reduction and disintegration of man is a recurrent theme in the Absurd dramatists, it is their appointed task. Beckett brings despair and futility
on to the stage, as he strips his characters to their essence. Ionesco on the other hand, emphasizes the comic in the transformation of character to the inhuman. Pinter's concentration is on the terror, the fear which lies behind this process of déhumanization.

Thus the slow break-up of Edward's own personality is unwittingly initiated by him as he probes into the matchseller's identity. The presence of the phantom figure works as a catalyst for questions which reveal Edward's personal existence and drive him towards non-entity. He is confronted with the questions of what he is; who he is, and wherein the essence of an existence, which he has taken for granted lies. He lays bare the elements of his own identity, and, as he reveals what he is, the insignificance of that identity is impressed upon him. He talks and talks with increasing hostility, and finally talks himself out of existence.

Edward: God damn it, I'm entitled to know something about you! You're in my blasted house, on my territory, drinking my wine, eating my duck! Now you've had your fill you sit like a lump, a mouldering heap. In my room. My den. I can rem....

Thereupon the slow disintegration of his personality begins. His continual talk gives the impression that he had to keep talking in order to prove his existence. He empties himself of all personal essence, that is, all that distinguish-
es him as an individual - his memories, desires, frustrations, etc.

... when I tell you how well I remember this room, how well I remember this den. (Muttering). Ha, Yesterday now, it was clear, clearly defined, so clearly.

(Pause)
My desk was polished, and my cabinet.

(Pause)
I was polished. (Nostalgic) I could stand on the hill and look through my telescope at the sea. And follow the path of the three-masted schooner, feeling fit, well aware of my sinews, their suppleness, my arms lifted holding the telescope, steady, easily, no trembling, my aim was perfect; I could pour hot water down the spoon-hole, yes, easily, no difficulty, my grasp firm, my command established, my life was accounted for ... after my long struggling against all kinds of usurpers, disreputables, lists, literally lists of people anxious to do me down, and my reputation down.27

He grows weaker and weaker before the amorphous figure whose presence is still inexplicable. The train of thought becomes disconnected and repetitious. His disintegration is marked by disintegrating dialogue and thought processes.

Edward: You want to examine the garden? It must be very bright in the moonlight. (becoming weaker). I should like to join you ... explain ... show you ... the garden ... explain ... the plants ... where I run ... my track ... in training ... I was number one sprinter at Howells ... when a stripling ... no more than a stripling ... licked ... men twice my strength ... when a stripling ... like yourself.

(Pause)
(Flatly) The pool must be glistening. In the moonlight. And the lawn. I remember it well. The cliff. The sea. The three-masted schooner. 28

This last poetic flight is followed by his metamorphosis into
the shadowy figure, the phantom presence before him. The threat whether real or not has been realized.

What is the nature of the grotesque world in which one human being can be changed into another? It speaks of a world where human nature is not constant; where the metamorphosis into another being signifies that man's identity, his personal essence, is of no import; where the appropriation of human personality by a stronger personality, the stealing of man's identity is a form of rape, but not unnatural in the character of this world. Herein lies another central theme of the Absurd - the anonymity of humanity.

As is evident from the above example this theme is organic to Pinter's theatre and lies at the core of the dramatic movement and conflict. In Beckett and Innesco it is indicated only in externals, in the surface of the drama. So, in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon are differentiated only on very superficial levels - the one examines, smells, fiddles with his hat, the other with his shoe. Vladimir has "stinking breath", Estragon "stinking feet", while their words echo and reiterate each other. Man's position in this world is shown to be purely accidental. Pozzo, the master, remarks on his relationship to his wretched slave "Remark that I might just as well have been in his shoes and he in mine. If chance had not willed otherwise. To each
one his due." In the face of suffering humanity, all are equal and interchangeable

Estragon: (feebly) Help me.
Vladimir: It hurts?
Estragon: (angrily) Hurts. He wants to know if it hurts.
Vladimir: (angrily) No one ever suffers but you. I don't count. I'd like to hear what you'd say if you had what I have.
Estragon: It hurts?
Vladimir: (angrily) Hurts. He wants to know if it hurts. 29

The same theme is externalized into concrete images by Ionesco in Jack or the Submission. The anonymity of humanity is represented by the names of the characters. All of Jack's family bear the name 'Jack' or some derivative of it, while Roberta's parents are "Robert Father" and "Robert Mother". There is no room for individuality here where hypocrisy and shallowness of character are the forces which precipitate the degeneration of the non-conformist Jack. All men have become anonymities in this world where one word might be substituted for another and where one name will do as well as the next.

iii. To protect man from the absence of real identity and a colourless existence, there are the screens that hide the absurd. These are the deliberate false fronts which individuals create to render a meaning to their existence, to shield them from the world, or secure them in their own limited environment. They are personal illusions which are somehow revered by the characters with a nostalgia untenable.
in the disciplinary tone with which the characters conduct themselves otherwise. The dramatic movement proceeds in the gradual disruption, or violent tearing off of these screens which hide the absurd, but are themselves absurd. Thus in The Room, Rose has her past and the name "Sal"; Stanley, his music in The Birthday Party; Edward, his knowledge in A Slight Ache; and Davies clings to his identity card in The Caretaker. When these elements in their lives are touched upon and challenged, they become simply further manifestations of their insecurities.

In A Night Out such a false front is presented by the girl who picks up Albert in Act III, Scene 11. Her affected gentility, her efforts to disguise her identity and situation protect her from facing up to the sordid existence which she leads.

Albert pulls at the lace of his other shoe. The lace breaks. He swears shortly under his breath. Girl: (sharply) Do you mind not saying words like that.
Albert: I didn't ....
Girl: I heard you curse.
Albert: My lace broke.
Girl: That's no excuse.
Albert: What did I say?
Girl: I'm sorry, I can't bear that sort of thing. It's just ... not in my personality.
Albert: I'm sorry.
Girl: It's quite alright. It's just ... something in my nature. I've got to think of my daughter too you know.

The daughter also is a pretence. A screen for her type of existence, an attempt to hold onto respectability. It is
Albert, the intruder into her privacy and room, who tears down her pretences and illusions, gives a twist to her identity and breaks her shield of defence in violence.

(He suddenly sees the photograph on the mantelpiece, puts the clock down and takes it. The girl half rises and gasps, watching him. He looks at the photo curiously.) Uhhh? .... Your daughter? .... This a photo of your daughter? ... Uuuh? (He breaks the frame and takes out the photo).

Girl: (rushes at him). Leave that!
Albert: (dropping the frame and holding the photo): Is it? (The girl grabs at it. Albert clutches her wrist.) (He holds her at arm's length).

Girl: Leave that (Writhing.) What? Don't -- It's mine!
Albert: (turns the photo over and reads back): 'Class Three Classical, Third Prize, Bronze Medal, Twickenham Competition, nineteen thirty-three' (He stares at her. The girl stands, shivering and whimpering.) You liar. That's you.

Girl: It's not!
Albert: That's not your daughter. It's you! You're just a fake, you're just all lies! 31

The drama of the human condition thus lies in the uncertainty of each man's relationship to others and yet his incapacity to remain alone with himself. This moment in which the false masks are torn away and precepts destroyed is innumerable in its resonance in the drama of our century.

The Caretaker also expresses with great subtlety this aspect of Pinter's thought and renders a complex integration of his major themes. It is the vision of man in a perpetual series of rebounds in which he is constantly thrown back into his solitude. Davies, a tramp, is a picture of displaced humanity much in the manner of the 'bums' in Waiting for
Godot. The figure, however, is not as openly symbolic of man's universal dilemma as are Vladimir and Estragon. The latter represent man as a sufferer who does not belong and who cannot ultimately be taken seriously because there is no-one to witness his suffering.

Estragon: Do you think God sees me?
Vladimir: You must close your eyes.
Estragon: (stopping, brandishing his fists, at the top of his voice) God have pity on me.
Vladimir: (vexed). And me?
Estragon: On me. Pity. On me.

Around the figure of Davies, however, there is the subtle dialectic between a personal responsibility for his fate and that of society which has moulded his deplorable nature. Instead of a fixed or known status, symbolised by dress or title, Davies is forced to assume a multiplicity of roles in life. He is constantly asked to prove himself in a succession of new situations, and as an individual looses a coherent sense of the self. He grows more vulnerable with each impending attack from the outside world, becomes suspicious and hostile, unaware of the cleavage in his own nature between reflex and essence.

Every fibre of Davies' body speaks of the insecurity of a man who has been driven back to a most pathetic position on the scale of humanity. Exposed to innumerable aggressions from the external world, he has finally retreated into a position where defence is an instinctive and
natural reflex. He has been transformed into a defensive mechanism whose every reaction is to ward off blows and divert aggression, or pitiful efforts to assert a personal status.

Davies: Ten minutes off for tea-break in the middle of the night in that place and I couldn't find a seat, not one. All them Greeks had it, Poles, Greeks, Blacks, the lot of them, all them aliens had it. ... All them Blacks had it, Blacks Greeks, Poles, the lot of them, that's what's doing me out of a seat, treating me like dirt. When he came at me tonight I told him.... When he came at me tonight, I told him, didn't I? You heard me tell him, didn't you.

Aston: I saw him have a go at you.

Davies: Go at me? You wouldn't grumble. The filthy skate, an old man like me, I've had dinner with the best. 33

Personal dignity is a shallow, empty but forceful assertion of the meagre position and rights which he still holds. However, low it is, its defence is executed with the violent animosity of an animal.

Davies: Comes up to me, parks a bucket of rubbish at me to take it out the back. It's not my job to take out the bucket. They got a boy there for taking out the bucket. I wasn't engaged to take out buckets. My job's cleaning the floor, clearing up the tables, doing a bit of washing-up, nothing to do with taking out buckets.

... Yes, Well say I had. Even if I had, Even if I was supposed to take out the bucket, who was this git, to come up and give me orders? We got the same standing. He's not my boss. He's nothing superior to me.... I might have been on the road but nobodys got more rights than I have. Let's have a bit of fair play, I said. 34
His violent reaction is ludicrous but comically pathetic. Even his threat is qualified. "One night I'll get him. When I find myself around that direction."

The rest of the play, his relationship to the two brothers, his oscillation between defensive and aggressive positions in an effort to assert his identity and human rights is a masterly portrayal of the frailty of human nature. Characteristic of an underdog Davies attempts to cling to the only thing which will render him solace in his displacement and loss of human dignity—his place in the glorious white race.

Davies: I thought there must be someone living there.
Aston: Family of Indians live there.
Davies: Blacks?
Aston: I don't see much of them.
Davies: Blacks, Eh? 35

When accused of making noises in his sleep:

Davies: There's nothing unfamiliar about me with beds. I slept in beds. I don't make noises just because I sleep in a bed. I slept in plenty of beds. (Pause) I tell you what, maybe it were them Blacks.
(Pause).
Aston: What?
Davies: Them noises.
Aston: What Blacks?
Davies: Them you got. Next door. Maybe it were them Blacks making noises, coming up through the walls. 36

As Estragon and Vladimir in Godot are tortured by their shoe, or hat and represent discomforted humanity, whose life and ease depends on the trivalities of life, so Davies' malaise
results from the tyranny of commodities—lack of shoes (too small or too tight, not black when they are brown etc.), identity cards, beds etc. Pinter's emphasis lies on the harassed victim of a bureaucratic society, a greater absurdity when added to the already perceived absurd in the essence of humanity itself.

Davies: Jenkins. Bernard Jenkins. That's my name. That's the name I'm known, anyway. But it's no good me going on with that name anyway. I got no rights. I got an insurance card here. (he takes a card from the pocket) Under the name of Jenkins, See? Bernard Jenkins. Look. It's got four stamps on it. Four of them. But I can't go along with these. That's not my real name, they'd find out, they'd have me in the nick, Four stamps. I haven't paid out pennies, I've paid out pounds. I've paid out pounds not pennies. There's been other stamps, plenty but they haven't put them on, the nigs, I never had enough time to go into it.

Davies need not question or probe into the true nature of his existence or individual essence. As far as society is concerned, and he himself is assured of this, he is nothing but a name, any name, and a stamp on a card. The essence of social man is locked up in the files of the innumerable departments of the social structure. Does this, however, leave some optimistic light, of hopefulness for individual man, since after all it is the system which is responsible for the deplorable condition of man? Such a statement of assurance and self-delusion is denied the spectator of Pinter's drama.
Humanity is shown as corrupt and demoralized, responding with malice to any human gesture of warmth or kindness. There is no effort made to call forth sympathy for Davies' condition, in fact all normal reaction to his characterization is totally negative. And it cannot be otherwise from the tone which Pinter intended.

Davies: It's getting so freezing in here I have to keep my trousers on to go to bed. I never done that before in my life. But that's what I got to do here. Just because you won't put in any bleeding heating. I've had just about enough with you mucking me about. I've seen better days than you have, man. Nobody ever got me inside one of them places, anyway. I'm a sane man....

HAAAAHH. You better think again. You want me to do all the dirty work all up and down the stairs, just so I can sleep in this lousy filthy, hole every night? Not me, boy. Not for you boy. You don't know what you're doing half the time. You're up the creek. You're half off. You can tell it by looking at you. Who ever saw you slip me a few bob? Treating me like a bloody animal. I never been inside a nuthouse.

Yet even at this lowest point of degeneration, there is a personal sense of degree and differentiation with which Davies evaluates himself—there are still some insults left which have not been thrown at him. And in this final degradation which he receives from the mouth of Aston, a 'nut', Davies does emerge as a pathetic figure. Herein lies the dramatic skill of Pinter, for it is a question of nuance in dialogue and characterization.
Aston: You stink.
Davies: What...
Aston: You've been stinking the place out.
Davies: Christ. You say that to me....
Aston: You call me that. You call me stinking.
Davies: Get your stuff.
Aston: You ain't ... you ain't got the right...
Davies: Leave that alone, that's mine.

(Davies takes the bag and presses the contents down) All right.... I been offered a job here.... You ... wait (he puts on his smoking jacket) ... you wait ... your brother ... he'll sort you out ... you call me that.
Aston: You call me that ... no one's ever called me that ....

Harassed from outside, he is now persecuted by Mick who manipulates him for his personal pleasure. At first Davies grows over-confident, tries to get all he can, becomes more and more demanding and even thinks of ejecting his original benefactor, then he is made increasingly uncertain of his position and relationship to Mick.

Mick: Yes. I could tell him to go. I mean, I'm the landlord. On the other hand, he's the sitting tenant. Giving him notice, you see, what it is, it's a technical matter, that's what it is. It depends how you regard this room. I mean it depends whether you regard this room as furnished or unfurnished. See what I mean?
Davies: I tell you he should go back where he came from.
Mick: (turning to look at him). Came from?
Davies: Yes.
Mick: Where did he come from?
Davies: Well ... he ... he ...
Mick: You get a bit out of your depth sometimes, don't you?40

The structure of the play is circular. At the end, Davies need only walk out the door, close it behind him, and the
process of displacement and estrangement will be completed. The final scene speaks of the total hopelessness of his situation, beset by the eternal questions of the process of human dependance on material existence,—a process which demands unrelentingly the compromise of the individual 'self' to the needs of his physicality.

Davies: But ... But ... listen ... listen here ... I mean ... (Aston turns back to the window). What am I going to do? (Pause) What shall I do? (Pause) Where am I going to go? (Pause) If you want me to go ... I'll go. You just say the word. (Pause) I'll tell you what though ... them shoes ... them shoes you give me ... they're working out all right ... they're all right. Maybe I could ... get down ... (Aston remains still his back to the window). Listen ... if I ... got ... down ... if I was to ... get my papers ... would you ... would you let ... would you ... if I got down ... and got my (Long silence) 41

Curtain.
iv. Like ancient Greek tragedy and the mediaeval mystery plays, the theatre of the Absurd is intent on making its audience aware of man's precarious and mysterious position in the universe. Death and the overwhelmingly calm and stolid acceptance of it by the ordinary run of mortals is the constant theme which renders a unity to Ionesco's drama. Man faced with the reality of metaphysical void and eternal emptiness dominates Beckett's theatre. Both dramatize the irrationality which this implies in their statement of the Absurd.

Instead of a theatre whose non-rationality is supposed to be a statement of the Absurd, Pinter has contrived a drama of anxiety. In a curious inversion of the original, religious function of the theatre (i.e. the confrontation of man with the spheres of myth and religious reality) his drama depicts the confrontation of man with an unknown and malicious unreality.

Aston: I used to go there quite a bit. Oh, years ago now. But I stopped. I used to like that place. Spent quite a bit of time there. That was before I went away. Just before. I think that place had a lot to do with it. They were all ... a good bit older than me. But they always used to listen. I thought they understood what I said. I mean I used to talk to them. I talked too much. That was my mistake. The same in the factory. Standing there, or in the breaks, I used to ... talk about things. And these men, they used to listen, whenever I ... had anything to say. It was all right. The trouble was, I used to have kind of hallucinations. They weren't hallucinations, they ... I used to get the feeling I could see things ... very
clearly ... everything ... was so clear ... everything used ... everything used to get very quiet ... everything got very quiet ... all this ... quiet ... and ... this clear sight ... it was ... but maybe I was wrong. 42

Like Kafka's protagonists, Pinter's are searching for salvation from the social incoherence around them. The attempt to bring some moment of lucidity to their condition is followed by the inevitable movement of the weighty oppressions whereby the parental forces of some order or organization (be it unknown or identifiable with society) squeeze the life and initiative from the over-sensitive.

Aston: Then one day they took me to a hospital, right outside London. They ... got me there. I didn't want to go. Anyway ... I tried to get out, quite a few times. But ... it wasn't very easy. They asked me questions, in there. Got me in and asked me all sorts of questions. Well, I told them ... when they wanted to know what my thoughts were. Hmmmmmm. Then one day ... this man ... doctor, I suppose ... the head one ... he was quite a man of distinction ... although I wasn't so sure about that .... He said ... he just said that, you see. You've got ... this thing. That's your complaint. And we've decided, he said, that in your interests there's only one course we can take. He said ... but I can't ... exactly remember ... how he put it ... he said, we're going to do something to your brain. He said ... if we don't, you'll be in here for the rest of your life, but if we do, you stand a chance. You can go out, he said, and live like the others. 43

A similar process is described by Stanley in The Birthday Party.

Stanley: I had a unique touch. Absolutely unique. They came up to me. They came up to me and said they were grateful...
Then after that, you know what they did? They carved me up. Carved me up. It was all arranged, it was all worked out. My next concert somewhere else it was. In winter. I went down there to play. Then, when I got there, the hall was closed, the place was shuttered up, not even a caretaker. They'd locked it up. A fast one. They pulled a fast one. I'd like to know who was responsible for that. (Bitterly) All right, Jack, I can take a trip. They want me to crawl down on my bended knees. Well I can take a tip ... any day of the week ...”

The problem is that of escape in order to preserve individual identity. For, although the motivations of the force that threatens are unknown, its objective is plainly the reduction or dehumanization of the individual who, in probing into reality, comes dangerously close to some sort of lucidity or understanding of his human condition. Stanley escapes, but only temporarily. A terrifying intuition informs the victim of his fate. The humour with which Stanley unwittingly depicts, the condition which will befall his very self turns into a macabre irony as the dramatic movement unfolds the reality of that jest.

Stanley: Meg, Do you know what?
Meg: What?
Stanley: Have you heard the latest?
Meg: No.
Stanley: They're coming today.
Meg: Who?
Stanley: They're coming in a van.
Meg: Who?
Stanley: And do you know what they've got in that van?
Meg: What?
Stanley: They've got a wheelbarrow in that van.
Meg: (breathlessly) They haven't.
Stanley: Oh yes they have.
Meg: You're a liar.
Stanley: (advancing upon her). A big wheelbarrow.
And when the van stops they wheel it out, and they wheel it up the garden path, and then they knock at the front door.

Meg: They don't.
Stanley: They're looking for someone.
Meg: They're not.
Stanley: They're looking for someone. A certain person.

The narrative vantage point is that of the hounded victim. However inconsequential the protagonist's efforts, the central conflict of the drama is the fight against non-entity or non-being which follows the intuitive perception of danger. There is the effort by each to stave off his fate with futile hostility. Rose, Edward, Aston, react in a revolt which, in Camus' words, is a tribute that man pays to his dignity in a campaign in which he is defeated in advance.

In *The Birthday Party* physical violence is the only retaliation in the power of Stanley to the interrogations of Goldberg and McCann. These take on the form of a grotesque trial of prosecutors and defendant.

McCann: Why did you leave the organization?
Goldberg: What would your old man say, Webber?
McCann: Why did you betray us? ....
Goldberg: Why did you change your name?
Stanley: I forgot the other one.
Goldberg: What's your name now?
Stanley: Joan Soap.
Goldberg: You stink of sin.
McCann: I can smell it.
Goldberg: Do you recognize an external force?
Stanley: What?
Goldberg: Do you recognize an external force?, responsible for you, suffering for you?
Stanley: It's late.
McCann: What about the Albegensinist heresy?
Goldberg: Who watered the wicket in Melbourne?

....
Speak up Webber, why did the chicken cross the road? ....
McCann: Who are you Webber?
Goldberg: What makes you think you exist?
McCann: You're dead.
Goldberg: You're dead. You can't live, you can't think you can't love. You're dead. You're a plague gone bad. There's no juice in you. You're nothing but a bad odour.

(Silence. They stand over him. He is crouched in the chair. He looks up slowly and kicks Goldberg in the stomach).\[46\]

The nature of this questioning gives the interesting impression of a synthesis of all the questions ever put to mankind - political philosophic, inquisitionary, scientific, even that of nonsense-verse. The complete dehumanization which results from the process of interrogation during the macabre festivity of his birthday reduces Stanley to the stature of a grinning moron. While Aston in *the Caretaker* after "his corrective operation," loses his original desire to probe into reality, to communicate with society,

The trouble was ... my thoughts ... had become very slow ... I couldn't think at all ... I couldn't ... get ... my thoughts ... together ... uuhh ... I could never quite ... get it ... together... The thing is, I should have been dead. I should have died, Anyway, I feel much better now. But I don't talk to people now. I steer clear of places like that cafe. I never go into them now. I don't talk to anyone ... like that. \[47\]

Stanley is deprived of all ability to communicate, to formulate even the simplest thought of reaction. The visual presentation of his imbecility and its monstrous cause effects actual physical shock in the audience.
McCann finds the torch on the floor, shines it on the table and Stanley. Lulu is lying spread-eagled on the table, Stanley bent over her. Stanley, as soon as the torth-light hits him, begins to giggle. Goldberg and McCann move towards him. He backs, giggling, the torch on his face. They follow him upstage left. He backs against the hatch, giggling. The torch draws closer. His giggling rises and grows as he flattens himself against the wall. Their figures converge upon him.

Curtain.48

The last phase has begun. His protests are stilled, and he is ready to be moulded according to the dictates of the force which has vanquished him. The implication is that he will be driven back into coherence with society, if only at a very superficial and detached level. As the last ritualistic rites are chanted over him, Stanley is dressed in "striped trousers, black jacket, and white collar. He carries a bowler hat in one hand and his broken glasses in the other. He is clean-shaven.

McCann: That's it.
Goldberg: We'll make a man of you.
McCann: And a woman.
Goldberg: You'll be reorientated.
McCann: You'll be rich.
Goldberg: You'll be adjusted.
McCann: You'll be our pride and joy.
Goldberg: You'll be a mensch.
McCann: You'll be a success.
Goldberg: You'll be integrated.
McCann: You'll give orders.
Goldberg: You'll make decisions.
McCann: You'll be a magnate.
Goldberg: A statesman.
McCann: You'll own yachts.
Goldberg: Animals.
McCann: Animals. 49

What then is the true nature of the men-
ace? This remains undefined in Pinter's dramatic vision. For, although in plays like *The Birthday Party* or *The Dumb Waiter* it betrays definite characteristics of a real organization outside man to which he is subjected; in *A Slight Ache* and the figure of Davies in *The Caretaker*, the terrifying force, or menace easily yields to the interpretation of internal or purely subjective reality; while in *The Room* it is a most mysterious and ambivalent apparition. Dramatically its identification is of little import. The threatening presence performs the same function which Godot has in Beckett's drama where it is completely irrelevant who Godot is, whether he will appear or not. What is being dramatised is simply the state of waiting—humanity's eternal state. Likewise, the menace is important only in so far as it reveals man's state of anxiety. Humanity has always endured and lived in a state of anxiety. Periodically the cause of this anxiety is a concrete reality—totalitarian oppression or religious, moral or conventional, the Bible or the atom bomb. Were it not for these, there are enough inner fears to replace them, ghosts, insecurities, maladjustments which would be instrumental in producing the same kind of anxiety.

It is the reaction of the individual to a world in which no event is predictable, where man lives at the mercy of a capricious menace, the withdrawal into himself, his defensive measures and reflexes, which is the core of this drama of anxiety. Pinter's characters are enmeshed in the
vast and incomprehensible structure of society and human relationships, conditioned in all their reflexes, and downtrodden in the smallest deviation from an established pattern and order. The overall dramatic image is that of man, harassed until he becomes almost animal in his distrustful cringing, or a mere defensive mechanism, ludicrous in its futility. The stupidity and self deception of man is everywhere apparent in Pinter's theatre, and it is questionable whether the menace exists because of or in spite of man's insufficiency. What is certain, however, is that it acts as a unifying principle to which all men are subject, intuitively felt by those who are victims of it, unrelenting even to the executioners of its will. Yvan Goll, in 1920, conceived of a new function of the theatre; namely, that it must not be just a means to make the bourgeois comfortable, it must frighten him.

The simplest means is the grotesque, but without inciting to laughter. The monotony and stupidity of human beings are so enormous that they can be adequately represented only by enormities. Let the new drama be an enormity.50

Pinter's conception of the absurd pursues this very purpose; and it is with an excellent dramatic sense that content, form, language, and the stage presence are directed toward the unique effect of terrifying the audience into awareness.
CHAPTER III

Jean Vannier in an excellent article entitled "A Theatre of Language", analyses the effects which the new conception of existence had on the language of the dramatic works of the absurdists.

These authors treat language which till now was only a means, as though it had become an object capable of exhausting by itself the entire substance of the theatre. Their originality this time no longer lies in their choice of a new language, but in their setting up a new dramaturgy of human relations at the level of language itself.

In traditional theatre human relations are never verbal relations but psychological relations which language only translates. The Pirandellian theme of man's failure to express his meaning had already undermined this practice. For the drama of the absurd, language receives still a further personality. With the concept of the absence of meaning in existence, the words themselves are shown to take absolute control since their connotation can no longer give any direction to man.

In Ionesco's drama for example, the language itself is instrumental in representing the disintegration of society and meaning. The nonsense, banality, exaggeration,
illogicality, and distortion of the dialogue are organic to the thought which his drama conveys. One word suggests another because of the sound, regardless of meaning, and we become aware of the absurd physical presence of the word, rather than of the reality which it represents. In The Chairs, the distortion of memories, reality etc. is depicted in the following linguistic techniques.

Old Man: And then we arrived and we laughed till we cried to see the funny man arrive with his hat all awry... it was so funny when he fell flat on his face, he had such a fat tummy... he arrived with a case full of rice, the rice on the ground, all awry... we laughed till we cried—and we cried and cried ... funny fat tummy, rice on a wry face, flat on his rice, case full of face... and we laughed till we cried ... funny hat flat on his fat face, all awry...

Old Woman: (laughing) ... arrived on his rice, face all awry, and we cried when we arrivee, case, face, funny, fat, rice...

Both together: And then we arri. Ah. ... arri ... arri ... Ah. ... Ah .... ri ... ri ... rice ... awry fat hat awry .... fat tummy funny ... rice arrived awry ....

Old Woman: So that was your famous old Paris.

Old Man: Parasite lost.²

Words are in this manner held up to us as spectacle. Their meaning lies in a pattern now, not in the individual connotation of the word. In Waiting for Godot, the dialogue of Vladimir and Estragon itself becomes an exercise of futility; meaningless cliches signify meaningless existence. The ability to communicate is not disputed, but it seems pointless; and the only use for words is to pass away the time on this earth.
Vladimir: (sententious) To every man his little cross. (he sighs) Till he dies. (afterthought) and is forgotten.
Estragon: In the meantime let us try and converse very calmly, since we are incapable of keeping silent.
Vladimir: You're right, we're inexhaustible.
Estragon: It's so we won't think.
Vladimir: We have that excuse.
Estragon: It's so we won't hear.
Vladimir: We have our reasons.
Estragon: All the dead voices.
Vladimir: They make a noise like wings.
Estragon: like leaves
Vladimir: like sand.
Estragon: Like leaves.
(SILENCE)
Vladimir: They all speak at once.
Estragon: Each one to itself.
(Silence)
Vladimir: Rather they whisper.
Estragon: They rustle.
Vladimir: They murmur.
Estragon: They rustle.
(Silence)
Vladimir: What do they say?
Estragon: They talk about their lives.
Vladimir: To have lived is not enough for them.
Estragon: It is not sufficient.
(Silence)
Vladimir: They make a noise like feathers.
Estragon: Like leaves.
Vladimir: Like ashes.
Estragon: Like leaves.
(Long Silence)
Vladimir: Say something.
Estragon: I'm trying.
(Long Silence)
Vladimir: (in anguish) Say anything at all.

The use of stychomythia here suggests a lack of communication as each man follows his own train of thoughts almost oblivious to what the other is saying. The brevity of line, and frequent use of silence contribute to the feeling of isolation and absurdity. Repeated pauses isolate the words just as the characters are isolated, and intimate that the final and
inevitable answer will be silence, while repetitions and refrains underline the tedium of the world, its interminable futility.

iia) The language of Harold Pinter's drama takes full advantage of such innovations in linguistic techniques, and simultaneously adapts traditional language patterns to a unique expression. The surface of the dialogue is perfectly coherent. Its realism and duplication of the natural intonations of speech, especially that of the lower class, is the most striking characteristic of the dramatic movement of his plays. Yet this fluidity of dialogue is at first deceiving; the hybrid form of traditionalism and avant-gardism are shaped quite rigorously to the particular theatrical image of his plays. Pinter is not preoccupied with the question of language as such but with the forms which will produce the most potent emotional and dramatic images towards the central effect of his drama. All is concentrated on the development of a cumulative intensity towards an emotional climax which is never resolved. The result is that the dramatic image and the dialogue proceed in a counterpoint manner, the one with cumulating rhythmic complexity, the other in a horizontal monotone.

The conflicts between sounds and silences on the stage are the uneasy rhythms of fear and uncertainties within the characters. In *The Caretaker*, Davies' insecurity is marked
by an agitatingly repetitious dialogue.

Davies: This is your house then, is it?
        (Pause)
Aston: I'm in charge.
Davies: You the landlord are you?
        (PAUSE)
Aston: What?
Davies: I noticed there was someone was living in
        the house next door.
Aston: ... Yes.
Davies: I thought there must be someone living there.
Aston: Family of Indians live there.
        (PAUSE)
Davies: ... I noticed there was someone was living
        in the house next door.
Aston: What.
Davies: (jesting) ... I noticed ....
Aston: Yes. There's people living all along the road.

While Beckett's language suggests much more than it says, language in Pinter is used to disguise meanings, and the implication is that of deliberate evasion on the part of the characters. There is here, not the inability to communicate, but the deliberate refusal to do so. In the dramatic world of Pinter, language is one of the many defensive cloaks behind which each character hides--it is another absurd screen of existence, a further defensive mechanism with which each character protects himself.

Davies: Them bastards at the monastery let me down
        again. ... 
Aston: You've got to have a good pair of shoes.
Davies: Shoes? It's life and death to me. I had to
        go all the way to Luton in these.
Aston: What happened when you got there then?
        (PAUSE) ... 
Davies: You know what that bastard monk said to me?
        (Pause)
How many more Blacks you got around here then?
Aston: You got any more Blacks around here then?

And in The Room:

Rose: What about your sister Mr. Kidd?
Mr. Kidd: What about her?
Rose: Did she have any babies?
Mr. Kidd: Yes, she had a resemblance to my old mum, I think. Taller of course.
Rose: When did she die then, your sister?
Mr. Kidd: Yes, that's right, it was after she died that I must have stopped counting. She used to keep things in very good trim. And I gave her a helping hand. She was very grateful, right until the last. She always used to tell me how much she appreciated all the little things—that I used to do for her. Then she copped it. I was her senior....
Rose: What did she die of?
Mr. Kidd: Who?
Rose: Your sister.
PAUSE
Mr. Kidd: I've made ends meet.
Rose: You full at the moment, Mr. Kidd?
Mr. Kidd: Packed out.
Rose: All sorts, I suppose?
Mr. Kidd: Oh yes, I make ends meet.

They are all masters of partial communication, and each character is absorbed in himself. Statement and unexpected counterstatement endlessly revolve around a central core of mounting tension which never achieves resolution. The most familiar and innocuous language does not clear away uncertainties, but makes them more uncertain yet not less real, immediate and threatening. And much in the manner of Kafka's stylistic practice, perfectly realistic dialogue is used to create an atmosphere of unreality.

iiia) Pinter's language proceeds in continuous paradox; firstly, between the concrete, naturalistic, visual image of the
stage and the power of words to translate unknown horrors; then, between the apparent comedy, farce, and the seriousness which is built up in spite of it. But the comic mask in his drama wears a degenerate smile. In the electrolux scene of The Caretaker, Mick indulges in a perverse and terrifying humour, kinetic in its suggestion of violence. It expresses in high farce the very thing that the whole play wishes to express in its serious movement. Davies enters into the dark room and tries the light switch on and off, on, off.

Who's in here.

(PAUSE)
I got a knife here. I'm ready. Come on then, who are you?

(he moves, stumbles, falls and cries out.)

(SILENCE)

(A faint whimper from Davies. He gets up.)
All right.

(He stands. Heavy breathing. Suddenly the electrolux starts to hum. A figure moves with along the floor after Davies, who skips, dives away from it and falls, breathlessly.)

Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah. Get away-y-y-y-y.

(The electrolux stops. The figure jumps on Aston's bed.)

I'm ready for you. I'm ... I'm ... I'm here. The figure takes out the electrolux plug from the light socket and fits the bulb. The light goes on. Davies flattens himself against right wall, knife in hand. Mick stands on the bed, holding the plug."

This explosion of unbearable tensions breaks out in tragic laughter. It is an extreme, painful manifestation of the helplessness of man. This is the grotesque. Pinter's control of tone exhibits a real ability to manipulate the true art of the grotesque which aims in its effect at a re-
solution of tragic fear and tragic laughter.

The rhythm of the dialogue is deliberately contrived for the dramatic image of terror. While in Beckett the rhythm proceeds in short phrases at the end of which there is a definite completion of an effect, (suggestive of the stopping of a heart beat and its revival as the characters renew their efforts to convince themselves of existence) in Pinter the contrapuntal development of pauses and dialogue, silences, etc. cumulate into one heightening effect of anxiety. The climax is rooted in a kind of metaphysical shock in an awareness of an ungraspable, unknowable reality and of the isolation of the individual confronted with an incomprehensible power.

Yet this dark mystery is clothed in the words of every-day speech, and the essential content of the farce is language. The pattern of life is parodied and emptied of meaning and without this man is shown an elemental creature of farce.

Mick: You're stinking the place out .... You don't belong in a nice place like this .... Three hundred and fifty a year exclusive. No argument. I mean if that sort of money is in your range don't be afraid to say so. Here you are. Furniture and fittings, I'll take four hundred or the nearest offer .... On the other hand if you prefer to approach it in the long-term way I know an insurance firm in West Ham'll be pleased to handle the deal for you. No strings attached, open and above board, untarnished record; twenty per cent
interest; fifty per cent deposit; down payments, back-payments, family allowances, bonus schemes, remission of term for good behaviour, six months lease, yearly examination of the relevant archives, tea laid on, disposal of shares, benefit extension compensation on cessation, comprehensive indemnity against Riot, Civil Commotion, Labour Disturbances, Storm, Tempest, Thunderbolt, Larceny or Cattle all subject to a daily check and double check. Of course we'd need a signed declaration from your personal medical attendant as assurance that you possess the requisite fitness to carry the can, won't we?

Farce is the ritual of life emptied of meaning. It speaks with the nonsense rhymes of the circus and music hall jingles. When this is wed by Pinter to a content which in itself is serious, he manages to convey to the spectator a sensation of high drama, of a tragic fatality wedded to laughter which hides beneath the exuberance of a dark form of slapstick.

In The Birthday Party Stanley's disintegration into a state of docile imbecility is accompanied by the macabre music hall exchange of Goldberg and McCann.

Goldberg: He's right you've gone from bad to worse.
McCann: Worse than worse.
Goldberg: You need a long convalescence.
McCann: A change of air.
Goldberg: Somewhere over the rainbow.
McCann: Where angels fear to tread.
Goldberg: Exactly.
McCann: You're in a rut.
Goldberg: You look anaemic.
McCann: Rheumatic.
Goldberg: Myoptic ...
McCann: You're a dead duck.
Goldberg: But we can save you.
McCann: From a worse fate.
Goldberg: True .... From now on we'll be the hub of your wheel.
McCann: We'll renew your seasons ticket.
Goldberg: We'll take tuppence off your morning tea.
McCann: We'll give you a discount on all inflammable goods.

....

Goldberg: What do you think: Eh, boy?
McCann: What's your opinion, sir? Of this prospect, sir? 8

(Stanley begins to clench and unclench his eyes)

The essential technique here is the ironic contradiction of the deed by the attitude of the doer or executioners. The conflicting tones result in a grotesque evocation of tragi-comic terror. In this manner, it is the unique synthesis of language techniques with which Pinter achieves a continuity or material fluidity towards an impression, a metaphor of disintegration and menace.
The same theatrical skill with which language and dramatic action were juxtaposed is applied by Pinter to the physical presence of his plays and the stage. The Theatre of the Absurd in general has a more free and flexible stage than the drama sixty years ago. The theatrical experimentation of Piscator, Brecht, Pirandello had exposed the stage instrument to the audience so as to fully exploit its potential and its intrinsic qualities. There are traces of this same type of dramatic self-consciousness in the theatre of Ionesco and to a lesser extent in Beckett. However, the absurdists have not bogged themselves down in exploring new uses of the stage, although they have revitalized older and even non-theatrical forms, and exploited the peripheral theatre arts of fair, circus and music hall. They have properly addressed themselves to new visions of life. As has already been suggested, Pinter's vision is not as important as the dramatic presentation of this vision, for it is in his acute theatrical sense that he surpasses in effectiveness the drama of Beckett. Both dialogue and the visible space on the stage are taken into account by Pinter's talent for conflict and suspense.

The stage is a multidimensional medium which allows the simultaneous use of visual elements, movement, light and language. It is therefore particularly suited to the communication of complexities which consist of the contra-
puntal interaction of all these elements. Herbert Blau of the Actors' Workshop in San Francisco writes, "the stage is by nature existential, since it entertains the art of crisis. There should be between it and the play some dialectical exchange, each testing the others limits." This exchange in Pinter is not in the form of a dialectic but a paradoxical interaction.

As in his use of language, a paradox is enacted on the several levels of setting, tone, and action. The triple polemic of these levels creates the impression of opacity, threat and terror, and simultaneously is the source of the perfect naturalness with which the strange is introduced. In a Pinter play the action and setting are never in harmony with each other. As in Kafka's grotesque narratives, each detail is realistically documented only to produce a greater immediacy and reality to the growing unreality of the menace.

As already indicated, the point of departure is usually a room appointed with the greatest economy and precision of suggestivity. Thus in The Room and The Birthday Party the setting is totally stripped to bare essentials.


The Dumb Waiter: A basement room. Two beds, flat against the back wall. A serving hatch, closed, between the beds. A door to the kitchen and lavatory left. A door to a passage, right.

The locale of Pinter's drama, like the world of Kafka, is always the enclosed space, a world without scenery or ocean, Even the infinite emptiness and space of Beckett's settings suggests some degree of freedom. Here it is nauseatingly oppressive and the physical enclosure gives an impression of severe mental torment.

It is not suggestive, as is Beckett's of a dramatic action at the most bare and elemental level of humanity. It speaks of the commonplace, the trite and the trivia of human existence. When menacing forces from outside begin to move in upon this circumscribed image of human existence, the dramatic conflict begins. The decor affects a claustrophobia in which human and inhuman tensions are intensified and heightened until in the end it becomes a concrete representative of fear. Pinter's theatre returns in this to some basic elements of suspense—a stage, two people, a door—a poetic expression of an undefined fear and expectation.

A dark, mysterious, and foreboding force invades the comfortable bourgeois setting of *A Slight Ache* on the longest
day of the year, amid japonica, convolvulus and honeysuckle. Pinter thus practises a highly selective type of realism in a constant oscillation between the natural and the extraordinary, the terrifying and the everyday, the absurd and the logical, a method which permits the evocation of what is beyond the realm of words and pure representation. Pinter defines this in his own words, "I'm convinced that what happens in my plays could happen anywhere, at any time, in any place, although the events may seem unfamiliar at first glance, if you press me for a definition, I'd say that what goes on in my plays is realistic, but what I'm doing is not realism." 13

The effect of such a realistic stage which bears a familiar relationship to the audience is to draw the audience easily to it by the apparent familiarity both of setting and event. The consequent estrangement or movement away from this familiarity, repels us when the nameless horror appears. The stage image thus emerges both simple and complex. As in The Caretaker, it is both explicit and ambivalent and the ambivalence is reflected from the setting to the relationship of the characters in an action which is played out against this backdrop. Here there is the mutual interaction between the stage and the dramatic content which builds up the dominant dramatic effect.
Scene: A room. A window in the back wall, the bottom half covered by a sack. An iron bed along the left wall. Above it a small cupboard, paint buckets, boxes containing nuts, screws etc. More boxes, vases, by the side of the bed. A door, up right. To the right of the window a mound: a kitchen sink, a step-ladder, a coal bucket, a lawn mower, a shopping trolley, boxes, side-board drawers. Under this mound an iron bed. In front of it a gas stove. On the gas stove a statue of Buddha. Down right, a fireplace. Around it a couple of suitcases, a rolled carpet, a blow lamp, a wooden chair on its side, boxes, a number of ornaments, a clothes horse, a few short planks of wood, a small electric fire and a very old electric toaster. Below this a pile of old newspapers. Under Aston's bed by the left wall is an electrolux, which is not seen till used. A bucket hangs from the ceiling.14

This cluttered and chaotic set contributes to the feeling of heaviness and oppression, it sets the tone for an atmosphere which presses down on the individuals and eventually ejects Davies from the room. The décor suggests a world in which objects come to tyrannize the characters with their eternally necessary presence; and like the external world, bear hard upon him.
i. It has already been pointed out that Pinter's drama is not predominantly literary in quality; that all is directed towards one central dramatic effect with the greatest concentration and economy of theatrical and dramatic devices. There are no peripheral characters, no side incidents which divert the eye from the central movement. Suggestivity, not statement, is the manner of his communication; and it is in this that he approximates the poetic method.

Like poetry, Pinter's dramatic form reveals indirectly rather than directly. His drama progresses not through a predetermined subject and plot but through an increasingly intense and revealing series of emotional states - what Ionesco calls 'the essence of pure theatre'. Because his plays are not expositions of intellectual concepts in the manner of naturalistic thesis plays or Shavian dialogue, little of the central meaning of his plays is actually depicted formally. What is not shown, not expressed, not explained, is of greater relevance to the dominant idea in his plays than the actual visual representation of the dramatic conflict.

The direct appeal is made to the emotions by means of images, rhythm and tone colour. Hence, the dramatist's like
the poet's meaning, while immediately apprehended by the affective faculties is not always obvious to the intellect. This forces the audience to make a creative effort of their own, to deal with the experience in a personal way. They must make the effort at interpretation and integration of the paradoxes with which Pinter works to find the point where suggestivity meets intelligibility.

Because the play proceeds not by intellectual concepts but in a succession of poetic images, its success or failure rests wholly on its power of evocation. The degree to which it communicates the undertone of poetry and the grotesque tragi-comic terror, in turn, depends on the quality and power of the dramatic images evoked. Thus, we must 'feel' the essential meaning of Pinter's drama whereas we 'perceive' intellectually the significance of the conflict and plot in the conventional drama. It is a theatre of situation, not event or story, where the action is intent not on conveying a narrative or a philosophy but a complex dramatic metaphor. It dramatizes the human condition as it exists on the several levels of setting, dialogue, movement and form not solely on that of language.

In order to comprehend the basic dramatic situation and the issues involved, however, the audience must condition itself to react as it would to a poem. It must accept the form, not merely the words, as embodying the underlying
emotions and must concede to a structure composed of a
pattern of poetic images not the conventional beginning,
middle, and end of a plot line.

The dramatic metaphor works on the same principle as
the poetic metaphor. This is to say that it is composed of
several images. For purposes of further exposition one can
divide these arbitrarily into the visual, verbal, emotional
and mental images. As can be seen from this, they work on
different levels but are mutually interactive in creating
one dominant effect which is the metaphor.

ia) The opening scene or primary situation in a play can
rightly be described as the first image of the image clus-
ter which makes up the metaphor in that play. The setting
prepares the tone and atmosphere of the visual image, while
the opening dialogue corresponds to the verbal image. These
provide the plane on which the play is expected to develop.
In conventional drama these expectations are not disappointed.
The plot pursues a linear sequence of action towards a mental
and emotional image which is in harmony with the visual
and verbal images given at the outset. Thus the situation
which initiates the play is generally composed as such, i.e.,
it has a significant relationship to the central meaning of
the play for it is out of these images that the emotional
and mental images are moulded. Traditionally, the emotional
and intellectual import grows out of the first impression and
expands this consistently into the prevailing meaning of the
dramatic metaphor, as situation upon situation cumulates in
the manner in which images cumulate in a room.

Bernard Shaw, for example, opens his plays in the
Ibsenite manner. The visual and verbal images depict char-
acters confronting each other in a conflicting situation. The
verbal debate which ensues immediately, suggests the direction
which the play will follow and the plot is developed along
lines parallel to the opening scene. In Man and Superman
the opening dialogue reveals the precise nature of the con-
flict. Tanner has been appointed guardian to Ann Whitefield,
to the horror both of himself and Roebuck Ramsden (a
reformer gone stale with his aging ideas).

Tanner: It's all my own doing: that's the horrible
irony of it. He told me one day that you
were to be Ann's guardian; and like a fool I
began arguing with him about the folly of
leaving a young woman under the control of
an old man with obsolete ideas. .... I said
the proper thing was to combine the experience of
an old hand with the vitality of a young one.
Hang me if he didn't take me at my word and
alter his will--

Octavius: This is not fair Jack. She is an orphan.
And you ought to stand by her.

Tanner: Stand by her. What danger is she in? She
has the law on her side; she has popular
sentiment on her side; she has plenty of
money and no conscience. All she wants with
me is to load up her moral responsibilities on
me and do as she likes at the expense of my
character. I can't control her and she can
compromise me as much as she likes. I might as
well be her husband.
In the conventional dramatic pattern of linear plot, conflict, heightened action, climax etc., the play continues to show just that, namely, how Ann compromises Tanner until he finally does become her husband. The tone does not change from the initial comic one at the beginning, and the scenes vary in no way from the first one.

The primary situation in T.S. Eliot's *The Cocktail Party* follows essentially the same pattern. The primary scene establishes the verbal and visual image as that of a drawing room comedy of high sophistication. In Edward's exchange with Harcourt-Reilly or the Unidentified Guest, the mental image, the complication is introduced. From the already very meaningful opening we begin to move steadily into the lives of the central characters and the conflict in a synthesis of psychodrama, martyr mystery, and mystery play. The psycho-therapy of Harcourt-Reilly brings the figures to an awareness of their condition, their mediocrity and strangeness or separation to which they can reconcile themselves only through a Christian life. This is the emotional image which brings about the resolution of all complications. As unexpected as certain actions, for instance Celia's decision to go into the jungle, are to the audience they are not inconsistent with the world created in the opening scene; for, we always remain on this level of high sophistication. Structurally also, the last scene parallels the first; a circular form which indicates the endless existence of similar
situations and the repetition of identical solutions.

In O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* the opening situation is of primary importance to the central meaning of the play since the visual image of the setting prevails throughout as a canvas upon which the fortunes and misfortunes of the Boyle family are traced. We never depart from the realism in which the opening note casts us. The representation is a typical moment in the life of the Boyle family and with one glance we see what it signifies, nor are the complications which develop irreconcilable to such a life. The conflict and the resolution are in the end all related directly to the situation which commenced the dramatic action.

The given situation in John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* is likewise definitive for the rest of the play in that it prepares for the larger significance of the play. This, more so even than the preceding examples because all the images are introduced at once to produce the dominant effect with full force. The visual image depicts three people in a dull realistic setting, seemingly bored with the surroundings and each other. This is echoed in the verbal image created by their opening dialogue.

Jimmy: Why do I do this every Sunday? Even the book reviews seem to be the same as last week's. Different books, same reviews. Have you finished that one yet?
Cliff: Not yet.
Jimmy: I've just read three whole columns on the English novel. Half of it's in French. Do the Sunday papers make you feel ignorant?
Cliff: Not 'arf.
Jimmy: I said do the papers make you feel you're not so brilliant after all?
Alison: Oh— I haven't read them yet.
Jimmy: I didn't ask you that. I said.--
Cliff: Leave the poor girlie alone. She's busy.
Jimmy: Well, she can talk, can't she? You can talk can't you? You can express an opinion. Or does the White Woman's Burden make it impossible to think?
Alison: I'm sorry. I wasn't listening properly.
Jimmy: You bet you weren't listening. Old Porter talks and everyone turns over and goes to sleep. And Mrs. Porter gets them all going with the first yawn. 2

The emotional image suggested by this motionless, colourless atmosphere is complete apathy. The mental image is hinted at with Jimmy's continuous efforts to break out of this situation and the conflict foreshadowed by his misdirected outburst of energy. The metaphor of an angry generation, and the futility of that anger is thus established at the very beginning and the play proceeds not in a development of this metaphor but in an emphasis and intensification of its significance and force.

All this points to the fact that in conventional drama some implication as to the direction and the central meaning of the play can be derived from the initial situation given at its outset. The dramatic movement pursues a linear sequence of action without a change in atmosphere and although the scenes vary there is rarely a shift in perspective. This
is to be expected from a drama which explores psychological, or philosophical depths, unfolds motivations or explanations of a situation, or seeks the forces which clarify the reality of a given situation.

ib) A dramaturgy such as Pinter's which ignores motivations, concentrates not on the exposition of a narrative or a plot line but on an emotional state, must mould new forms of expression. The linear or horizontal pattern of dramatic movement is far too analytical and logical for the presentation of a predominantly emotional dramatic metaphor.

With the absence of any intellectual debate, a narrative plot, and the representation of a constant state of tension Pinter sets his theatre radically apart from the "play of ideas" and recalls symbolist drama. The intellectual content is there, but does not take a logical and discursive form of expression—unsuitable for treating a reality which in itself is emotionally experienced. The theatre cannot be a place for telling merely a story, but must unfold a situation—a state. His plays are made up of a series of states of consciousness or of situations which are intensified and densified towards one central effect. The essence of his plays must be grasped by intuition and total emotional response as against an analytical rational reaction. To the sequence of events linked together by the relation of cause and effect Pinter opposes the accumulation of a series of
tensions both emotional and intellectual, which are never resolved in the end but carried away by the audience for later resolution.

The 'grotesque' in its connotation within the visual arts is the concept which best describes the form of Pinter's drama of anxiety. To establish the precise nature of this form it will prove enlightening to make an analogy with Hieronymus Bosch's 'The Garden of Delights!'

In the left panel of the triptych the eye is first directed towards the figure of God conducting the holy ceremony of marriage of Adam and Eve. The immediate impression of this Old Testament scene is that of a conventional religious motif popular in the art of the time. All expectations are thus directed to a religious theme. As the eye is led from this first image, however, it is confronted with fantastic aberrations of nature; bizarre forms populate the central paradisal panel, and monstrous freaks of nature the right, infernal panel. All expectations have been deceived as the grotesque forms and images move toward a completely different expression, alien to the religious suggestion of the first impression. The first image of the paradisal trio still has central significance to the whole meaning of the picture, but it is redefined in its relation to the whole and cast in an ironic light. Our initial response to it is translated into a tragi-comic reaction to the chaotic and
horrific images that follow. To draw the analogy now. In the drama of Pinter an identical process ensues after the first image is created by the primary situation. Image is followed by counter-image, they conflict, and in this contradiction create a totally unsuspected metaphor. It is a metaphor which reaches beyond the expectations of the audience.

The grotesque form in drama is far more complex than in the visual arts because of the added dimensions of dialogue movement and event. However, the principle is the same. The metaphor is developed in lines different to those suggested by the primary image or situation, and in this is a striking contrast to the form of conventional drama as above expounded. The form itself is the embodiment of the underlying emotion of the drama and a "latent grotesque" effect.

Thus in The Room the given situation is composed of a visual image of pure realism, echoed by a realistic verbal image which introduces a comic tone. All the implications point towards a possible social satire as Rose makes futile efforts to converse with her husband in a monologue of at least fifteen minute duration to the complete oblivion of Bert. Beyond this immediate visual communication the scene suggests nothing of the real nature of the play or its central effect. Mr. Kidd's entrance adds a comic note to the situation but still gives little indication as to the direction of the play. The appearance itself of Mr. and Mrs. Sands
does not at first affect a change, so that there is absolutely no preparation of what is to follow. Gradually an element of unease insinuates itself into the now almost unnaturally simple and realistic dialogue. This is the beginning of the emotional image which is characterized by the increasing tension in the atmosphere although on the surface the action continues its naturalistic and innocuous course. A succession of little stanzatic argumentations or disputes about the most innocent remarks, the weather, confusion of names etc. initiate a suspicion of the reality represented by the seemingly naturalistic scene. The constant repetition and questioning about the simplest and most trivial of realities undermines the general reality of the situation.

Rose: What's it like out?
Mrs. Sands: It's very dark out.
Mr. Sands: No darker than in.
Mrs. Sands: He's right there.
Mr. Sands: It's darker in than out, for my money.

Mrs. Sands: Now I come to think of it, I saw a star.
Mr. Sands: You saw what?
Mrs. Sands: Well, I think I did.
Mr. Sands: You think you saw what?
Mrs. Sands: A star.
Mr. Sands: Where?
Mrs. Sands: In the sky.
Mr. Sands: When?
Mrs. Sands: As we were coming along.
Mr. Sands: Go home.
Mrs. Sands: What do you mean?
Mr. Sands: You didn't see a star.
Mrs. Sands: Why not?
Mr. Sands: Because I'm telling you. I'm telling you you didn't see a star.

(PAUSE)

When we learn of the strange figure which mysteriously informed
the Sands couple of the vacancy, furthermore, that it is Rose's room which was declared vacant, the open suspense completes the tension of the emotional image. The sense of a dark mystery and foreboding premonition is verified as a simple, unidentified pronoun is introduced into the situation.

Mr. Kidd: I've got to tell you that's all. I've got to tell you. I've had a terrible week-end. You'll have to see him. I can't take it any more. You've got to see him.

(FAUSE)

Rose: Who? 4

From here onward the intellectual response parallels the emotional movement as we too ask 'who'? and persist in the same query at the end of the play. The desperation of Rose's defensive measures is matched by our desperation to penetrate the enigma which her half-responses and too violent negations create. Although the realism of the dialogue persists, the phantom reality now takes complete control since it is here that the central meaning of the dramatic action is obviously situated and toward which it had been progressing. While the mental image is replete with unexplained symbols, this very ambiguity directs the attention back to the primary situation or images and redefines this in a completely new light. The metaphor of terror and anxiety which emerges in the end seems all the more horrific and grotesque since it arose from an innocent and colourless
situation; just as Bert's violence in the end is darkly contrasted to his complete silence at the beginning; a silence which unknown to us was charged with such pent-up energies and malicious passion.

Pinter's departure from a very realistic situation and the strangeness which is then revealed suggests that there are unknown mysterious elements working around us, mocking and threatening us, but unrecognized by us. The plays follow an ascending line into this unreality; beginning with something resembling life or reality, and ending, after grotesque development of one kind or another, in absolute bafflement and terror.

In all his plays there is a shift in the dramatic pattern in the growing incongruity between the realistic point of departure, and the unravelling of a completely unsuspected counter-situation. The verbal and visual images in A Slight Ache are equally deceptive suggesting perhaps a Molièresque comic satire on marriage or the pedant. The turn which it does take is Kafkaesque in its macabre metamorphosis. The opening scene of the play represents nothing more than a comic rendition of an afternoon in the life of a middle-class couple, whose only form of excitement is the imprisonment of a wasp in a jar of marmarlake and the consequent execution of this wasp by scalding. They take particular relish in the exotic sounds of 'convulvulus', 'japonica' and honeysuckle until once more a mysterious pronoun intrudes.
Edward: Ah, it's a good day. I feel it in my bones. In my muscles. I think I'll stretch my legs in a minute. Down to the pool. My God, Look at that flowering shrub over there. Clematis. What a wonderful ... (he stops suddenly).

Flora: What?
(PAUSE)
Edward, what is it?
(Pause)
Edward ...

Edward: (thickly) He's there.
Flora: Who?
Edward: (low murmuring). Blast and damn it, he's there; he's there at the back gate.

At this point the play shifts perspective radically. There is a change in atmosphere with the entrance of the amorphous figure of the matchseller and Edward's disturbing reaction to it. The mental image created thereby encourages us to reach beyond the immediately visual one, and while the verbal image progresses on its initial naturalistic level, the emotional increases in suspense and tension as the whole metaphor is lifted above the realism of the framework or structure of the play. The situation thus attains significance in Pinter's drama only at the point where the counter-image is introduced, and the turn in the movement progresses in an interplay or counterpoint of all four images towards a macabre and grotesque metaphor.

The nature of this dramatic form is peculiarly appropriate to Pinter's vision of the absurd. The unpredictability of the dramatic movement in this 'grotesque' structure of his plays, echoes the absurd concept of the unpredictability
and uncertainty of life; while the many unexpected turns which it takes are particularly suitable to the metaphor of a menace which strikes in so aberrant a manner.

When one contrasts Harold Pinter's theatre to Beckett's, it becomes evident that the form which the respective dramatists adopt and develop is dictated by the images which they have chosen to be most expressive of the absurdity in life. While in Pinter we have seen the inconstancy and unpredictability of the world represented in form and image, creating thereby a metaphor of terror, in Beckett's drama we remain always in a somewhat static world, fairly constant in the hopeless state which it depicts. It is unified and without levels of significance because life has no significance. The verbal, visual, emotional and mental images are given at the very beginning in Waiting for Godot.

Estragon sitting on a low mound is trying to take off his boot. He pulls at it with bold hands, panting. He gives up, exhausted, rests, tries again. As before.

Enter Vladimir.

Estragon: Nothing to be done.
Vladimir: (advancing with short stiff strides, legs wide apart) I'm beginning to come round to that opinion. All my life I've tried to put it from me saying, Vladimir be reasonable, you haven't yet tried everything. And I resumed the struggle. (He broods, musing on the struggle. Turning to Estragon). So there you are again. 6

After a short dialogue, the situation becomes quite clear. The place is the human place, the action the human predica-
ment, the tramps, humanity. Throughout the rest of the play there is very little change of this basic dilemma represented from the outset, nor is there a change in the atmosphere, it is only intensified by the eternal recurrence of the same pattern without meaning or direction. Because nothing really novel can happen we do not alter perspectives. The primary situation remains the all-pervading situation of the play. It is immediately indicative of the movement, tone, and direction of the play. From the beginning then, life is shown to be a bizarre play with the void, while Vladimir and Estragon embody the state of waiting. Their predicament is static and on the verge of disintegration. This is what Beckett depicts in a form likewise static and on the verge of disintegration. They do not live, they suffer existence—this is the expression of the absurd by a structure which might be described as circular with the stress on similitude, monotony, and endless repetition.

Pinter's is theatrically the more effective form of the two. A basic element of theatre is suspense as to what will happen next. Pinter displays in all his plays an acute sense for all qualities of nuance which further this effect, and in this appears to the English love for mystery and detective drama. There is a slight deception here since he caters to this taste only to affect an awareness of his concept of the absurd in the audience. But since the end of all drama is awareness of one form or another in the audience,
either by a correspondence and analogy to the play or by
direct method of transference beyond the stage what con-
ventionally takes place on the stage, the means are justified
if effect is achieved.

The idea of building to a moment of shock and terror
from an essentially comic situation is exemplified in The
Dumb Waiter. Gus and Ben are Laurel and Hardy type figures
who indulge in pure farce—much in the manner of Vladimir and
Estragon. The opening scene however, has no deeper overtones
of significance but remains comic both in action and dia-
logue.

In a basement room:
Ben is lying on a bed, left, reading a paper.
Gus is sitting on a bed, right, tying his shoelaces,
with difficulty. Both are dressed in shorts, trousers
and braces.
(Silence)
Gus ties his laces, rises, yawns and begins to
walk slowly to the door, left. He stops, looks down
and shakes his foot.
Ben lowers his paper and watches him. Gus kneels
and unties his shoelace and slowly takes off his
shoe. He looks inside it and brings out a flattened
matchbox. He shakes it and examines it. Their eyes
meet, Ben rattles his paper and reads. Gus puts
the matchbox in his pocket and bends down to put on
his shoe. He ties his lace with difficulty.
Ben lowers his paper and watches him. Gus walks
to the door, left, stops, shakes the other foot. He
kneels, unties his shoelace, and slowly takes off
his shoe. He looks inside it and brings out a
flattened cigarette packet. He shakes it and ex-
amines it. Their eyes meet. Ben rattles his paper
and reads.

Ben: Kaw! ... (refers to the paper)
A man of eighty seven wanted to cross the road.
But there was a lot of traffic, see? He couldn't
see how he was going to squeeze through. So he crawled
under a lorry.
Gus: He what?
Ben: He crawled under a lorry. A stationary lorry.
Gus: No!
Ben: The lorry started and ran over it.
Gus: Go on!
Ben: That's what it says here...
Gud: It's unbelievable.
Ben: It's down here in black and white.
Gus: Incredible.

The ritual is completed as Gus goes off to pull the lavatory chain, "the lavatory does not flush." The atmosphere begins to become increasingly dense as the absurdity of their situation is revealed through Gus' repeated but hesitant questioning,

Gus: I wouldn't mind to have a window ....
Ben: What do you want a window for?
Gus: Well, I like to have a bit of a view, Ben. It whiles away the time. I mean you come into a place while it's still dark, you come into a room you've never seen before, you sleep all day, you do your job, and then you go away into the night again ... Don't you ever get a bit fed up?
Ben: Fed up? What with?
Gus: He doesn't seem to bother much about our comforts these days.

The unidentified pronoun has appeared, and it is slowly impressed upon the audience that there is something irregular about Gus' constant probing into his situation and questioning of his position.

Ben: What's the matter with you always asking me so many questions. You never used to ask me so many questions. What's come over you?
What's come over you?
Gus: No, I was just wondering.
Ben: Stop wondering. You got a job to do. why don't you just do it and shut up?
 ........
Gus: He might not come. He might just send a message. He doesn't always come.
... I find him hard to talk to, Wilson.
... Do you know that Ben?
... There are a number of things I want to ask him. But I can never get round to it when I see him. I've been thinking about the last one. .... who cleans up after us?

Ben: (pityingly) You mutt. Do you think we're the only branch of this organization? Have a bit of common. They got departments for everything.

As the questions become more pressing, anxiety increases in Gus and by extension in the audience who are even more ignorant of events than Ben. The activity of the dumb waiter frustrates all logicality even further. The tension of the emotional image is augmented with Gus' growing agitation. Anxious to explain to himself the irregularity of their present procedure, to quieten his own fears, he works himself into a frenzy, and like the victims in Pinter's other plays ascends to a violence in defence of himself.

Gus: Why did he send us matches if he knew there was no gas?
Ben: Who?
Gus: Who sent us those matches?
Ben: What are you talking about?
(Gus stares at him).
Gus: (thickly) Who is it upstairs?
Ben: (nervously) What's one thing to do with another?
Gus: (with growing agitation). I asked you before. Who moved in? I asked you. You said the people who had it before moved out. Well, who moved in?
Ben: (hunched) Shut up.
Gus: I told you didn't I?
Ben: (standing) Shut up.
Gus: (feverishly) I told you before who owned this place didn't I, I told you.
(Ben hit him on the shoulder)
(Violently) Well, what's he playing all the games for? That's what I want to know. What's he doing it for?

What games?

Gus: (passionately advancing). What's he doing it for? We've been through our tests, haven't we? We got right through our tests years ago, didn't we? We took them together, don't you remember, didn't we? We've proved ourselves before now, haven't we? We've always done our job. What's he doing all this for? What's the idea? What's he playing these games for?

(The box in the shaft comes down behind them. The noise is this time accompanied by a shrill whistle, as it falls. Gus rushes to the hatch and seizes the note.)

(reading) Scampi!

(He crumples the note, picks up the tube, takes out the whistle blows and speaks).

WE'VE GOT NOTHING LEFT! NOTHING! DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

(Ben seizes the tube and flings Gus away. He follows Gus and slaps him hard, backhand across the chest.)

This scene speaks of the perfect co-ordination of speech and language rhythms with the rhythms of stage activity; all concentrated toward the effect of anxiety. It is all the more complex because the cause or motivation is unknown to the audience, and only intuitively perceived by Gus. In a circular structure the newspaper ritual is repeated. But whereas in Godot, the formula signifying man trapped in the vacuum of waiting punctuates the play with little change in meaning, only in intensity; in Pinter, it reveals the dynamic process which has propelled the play from its farcical opening to its macabre climax as the ritual is repeated with no meaning or reference to reality.

Ben: (Ben throws his paper down)
Kaw!

(He picks up the paper and looks at it).
Listen to this.

(PAUSE)
What about that, eh?
(Pause)
Kaw!
(Pause)
Have you ever heard such a thing?

Gus: (dully) go on!
Ben: It's true.
Gus: Get away.
Ben: It's down here in black and white.
Gus: (very low) Is that a fact?
Ben: Can you imagine it?
Gus: It's unbelievable.
Ben: It's enough to make you want to puke, isn't it?
Gus: (almost inaudible), Incredible.

The pure farce has broadened out in a cumulation of intense emotional images. The radical change in perspective, atmosphere and direction of the play forges a completely unexpected mental image, as a slow recognition of the monstrous situation evolves before the audience. There is a determination here to scale down most routine expectations. Finally, the dramatic effect emerges from this incongruity between appearance and reality; expectation and outcome, first impression and final metaphor.
CONCLUSION

Rationalism and Naturalism is not necessarily identical with truth. The unreal or the grotesque is frequently more indicative of truth. Bernard Shaw had expressed it in this manner—that on the stage, reality is the greatest joke, in fact, it has been this since the time of Aristophanes. In this sense comedy is one of the greatest tools of opposition in the theatre.

Much of the Absurd dramatists' theatre is the source of a farcical universe parallel to reality, so much so that the comic is the instrument of perception in the Absurd. To assert this perception in the minds of the spectators Pinter uses the additional method of terror. It is almost a maxim that nothing is deadlier than ridicule; there is still a deadlier weapon and that is fear. In creating the grotesque as a structural device he strips it of all its playful aspects to concentrate on its horrifying qualities. It is a humour that has lost its humour in the identity of terror.

Chaplinesque figures and characters reminiscent of the grand guignol populate the absurd stage in their power to symbolize unaccommodated man. There identity as symbol is more obvious and apparent in Beckett and Ionesco. Even the characters
of Pinter—Aston, Davies, Stanley, Edward,—though more individualized echo these characteristics when confronted with the incomprehensible terror of their existence. Behind the facades of human reality there is only fear. The real terror of Pinter's absurd is the futility rising out of the strife and silence of people trying and failing to know and act, or failing in their action. In Ionesco, the grotesque is explicit. In Pinter, it is latent, and its power of increment is concentrated on the purpose of creating an awareness of the absurd in society and life in the audience.

Awareness can be achieved on various levels in the drama. It is not essential that the protagonist of a play become aware in order for the audience to do so. In fact the drama works mainly by suggestion and implication. In the drama of the Absurd especially, the characters' ignorance becomes the moment of lucidity for the audience. As the stage comes to signify and to embody the world of the spectator, and as the spectator is drawn into the stage action with his own emotions, the play starts acquiring a more essential depth. From symbol, the character in the drama changes into a symbiotic organism fastening upon the reality of the spectator.

In Pinter's drama recognition of the absurdity of existence must be enacted outside, beyond the stage limits, not directly on it. The process of our awareness can, of
course be enacted in a parallel movement of audience to play i.e. from the movement of recognition on the stage the spectator draws an analogy to his own life as in Godot or Endgame. To say however, that drama works only on this level of parallelism or analogy, as in the parable or exemplum, is to ignore more subtle and often ungraspable levels of action and reaction which are peculiar to the dramatic medium.

Mordecai Gorelic in "The Theatre of Sad Amusement" makes a sweeping statement which demands the absolute likeness of drama to life: "Absurdist Plays contain no living characters or recognizable dilemmas. They do not clarify life but instead offer senseless speeches and cryptic frustrations." On the purely surface level of the dramatic action of the Theatre of the Absurd this is indisputably true. The characters live in a world at one removed from our own because they are either too exaggerated to be accepted as realistic representations, or what happens to them is so impressively and fantastically given that we cannot imagine ourselves in such circumstances. Are we to conclude from this however, that they are totally removed from life, or does it not in fact stimulate the spectator into a search for similarity and comparison, for some relevance to his own experience?

The very fact that we cannot accept them as individuals or the total situation as a particularly realistic
representation of life, forces us to see them as embodiments of something beyond their own identity or situation. This, in the same way that Chaplin and Harlequin were symbols of greater humanity, or that mythological figures can be representatives of very real human truths. Likewise, Pinter, as a dramatist of the Absurd, suggests obliquely, rather than directly, truths about the human condition and man's role in an oppressive universe. Despite the opaque character of his plots Pinter's drama, as demonstrated above, deals with very real and living characters in a situation which is equally realistic up to a point. It is at this point that the movement toward the unreal begins, and parallel to this, the movement of terror which effects an emotional shock in the audience. The end of this drama of anxiety is the belief that the audience must be jolted into an awareness of the absurd.

In this complex and subtle manner, Pinter's drama itself is only a point of departure for the audience. The intellectual process stimulated by his theatre lies completely outside it, as do any possible solutions or personal readjustments to the human condition. It is enough that,

Universal decay is negated by scientific or artistic creation, even if, in the latter we are shown the image of decadence or the reality of the wasteland; to become aware of it is already to go beyond it.
NOTES

Note to Introduction


Notes to Chapter One

2. Ibid., p. 29.

Notes to Chapter Two

6. Ibid., p. 57.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., p. 97.
15. Ibid.
17. Ibid., p. 108.
18. Ibid., p. 113.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid., p. 114.
22. Ibid., p. 118.
23. Pinter, A Slight Ache, op. cit., p. 18.
24. Ibid., p. 19.
25. Ibid., p. 15.
26. Ibid., p. 35.
27. Ibid., p. 35.
28. Ibid., p. 39.
31. Ibid., p. 84.
34. Ibid., p. 9.
35. Ibid., p. 13.
36. Ibid., p. 23.
37. Ibid., p. 20.
38. Ibid., p. 67.
39. Ibid., p. 69.
40. Ibid., p. 71.
41. Ibid., p. 78.
42. Ibid., p. 54.
43. Ibid., p. 55.
44. Pinter, The Birthday Party, p. 23.
45. Ibid., p. 24.
46. Ibid., p. 52-55.
47. Ibid., p. 57.
48. Ibid., p. 68.
49. Ibid., p. 88.

Notes to Chapter Three.

5. Pinter, *The Room*, p. 103.
6. Ibid., p. 45.
7. Ibid., pp. 35-36.

Notes to Chapter Four
4. Ibid., 113.
8. Ibid., p. 127-128.
9. Ibid., p. 137.
10. Ibid., p. 156.

Notes to Conclusion
Franzen, Erich. Formen Des Modernen Dramas; (Munchen: C.H.Beck, 1961. von der illusionsbuehne zum Antitheater,


BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE PRIMARY WORKS OF HAROLD PINTER

Pinter, Harold.

