



Harold Pinter and The Theatre of the Absurd

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After the First World War, German Expressionism attempted to project inner realities and to objectify thought and feeling. Some of Brecht's plays are close to Absurd Drama, both in their clowning and their music-hall humour and the preoccupation with the problem of identity of the self and its fluidity.

But it would take a catastrophic world event to actually bring about the birth of the new movement:

World War II was the catalyst that finally brought the Theatre of the Absurd to life. The global nature of this conflict and the resulting trauma of living under threat of nuclear annihilation put into stark perspective the essential precariousness of human life. Suddenly, one did not need to be an abstract thinker in order to be able to reflect upon absurdity: the experience of absurdity became part of the average person's daily existence. During this period, a “prophet” of the absurd appeared. Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) rejected realism in the theatre, calling for a return to myth and magic and to the exposure of the deepest conflicts within the human mind. He demanded a theatre that would produce collective archetypes and create a modern mythology. It was no longer possible, he insisted, to keep using traditional art forms and standards that had

ceased being convincing and lost their validity. Although he would not live to see its development, The Theatre of the Absurd is precisely the new theatre that Artaud was dreaming of. It openly rebelled against conventional theatre. Whereas traditional theatre attempts to create a photographic representation of life as we see it, the Theatre of the Absurd aims to create a ritual-like, mythological, archetypal, allegorical vision, closely related to the world of dreams. The focal point of these dreams is often man's fundamental bewilderment and confusion, stemming from the fact that he has no answers to the basic existential questions: why we are alive, why we have to die, why there is injustice and suffering. It was, as Ionesco called it "anti-theatre". It was surreal, illogical, conflict-less and plot-less. The dialogue often seemed to be complete gibberish. And, not surprisingly, the public's first reaction to this new theatre was incomprehension and rejection.

At the same time, the Theatre of the Absurd also seems to have been a reaction to the disappearance of the religious dimension from contemporary life. The Absurd Theatre can be seen as an attempt to restore the importance of myth and ritual to our age, by making man aware of the ultimate realities of his condition, by instilling in him again the lost sense of cosmic wonder and primeval anguish. The Absurd Theatre hopes to achieve this by shocking man out of an existence that has become trite, mechanical and complacent. It is felt that there is mystical experience in confronting the limits of human condition.

As a result, absurd plays assumed a highly unusual, innovative form, directly aiming to startle the viewer, shaking him out of this comfortable, conventional life of everyday concerns. In the meaningless and Godless post-Second-World-War world, it was no longer possible to keep using such traditional art forms and standards that had ceased being convincing and lost their validity.

The Theatre of the Absurd is commonly associated with Existentialism, and the Existentialism was an influential philosophy in Paris during the rise of the Theatre of the Absurd; however, to call it Existentialist theatre is problematic for many reasons. It gained this association partly because it was named (by Esslin) after the concept of "absurdism" advocated by Albert Camus, a philosopher commonly called Existentialist though he frequently resisted that label. Absurdism is most accurately called Existentialist in the way Franz Kafka's work is labelled Existentialist: it embodies an aspect of the philosophy though the writer may not be a committed follower. As

Tom Stoppard said in an interview, "I must say I didn't know what the word 'existential' meant until it was applied to Rosencrantz. And even now existentialism is not a philosophy I find either attractive or plausible. But it's certainly true that the play can be interpreted in existential terms, as well as in other terms."¹

Many of the Absurdists were contemporaries with Jean-Paul Sartre, the philosophical spokesman for Existentialism in Paris, but few Absurdists actually committed to Sartre's own Existentialist philosophy, as expressed in *Being and Nothingness*, and many of the Absurdists had a complicated relationship with him. Sartre praised Genet's plays, stating that for Genet "Good is only an illusion. Evil is a Nothingness which arises upon the ruins of Good".²

Ionesco, however, hated Sartre bitterly. Ionesco accused Sartre of supporting Communism but ignoring the atrocities committed by Communists; he wrote *Rhinoceros* as a criticism of blind conformity, whether it be to Nazism or Communism; at the end of the play, one man remains on Earth resisting transformation into a rhinoceros. Sartre criticized *Rhinoceros* by questioning: "Why is there one man who resists? At least we could learn why, but no, we learn not even that. He resists because he is there".³ Sartre's criticism highlights a primary difference between the Theatre of the Absurd and Existentialism: The Theatre of the Absurd shows the failure of man without recommending a solution. In a 1966 interview, Claude Bonnefoy, comparing the Absurdists to Sartre and Camus, said to Ionesco, "It seems to me that Beckett, Adamov and yourself started out less from philosophical reflections or a return to classical sources, than from first-hand experience and a desire to find a new theatrical expression that would enable you to render this experience in all its acuteness and also its immediacy. If Sartre and Camus thought out these themes, you expressed them in a far more vital contemporary fashion". Ionesco replied, "I have the feeling that these writers – who are serious and important -- were talking about absurdity and death, but that they never really lived these themes that they did not feel them within themselves in an almost irrational, visceral way that all this was not deeply inscribed in their language. With them it was still rhetoric, eloquence. With Adamov and Beckett it really is a very naked reality that is conveyed through the apparent dislocation of language".⁴

Comparing the existentialists from the absurdists Martin Essalin in his book *The Theatre of the Absurd* writes, "A similar sense of the senselessness of life, of the inevitable devaluation of

ideals, purity, and purpose, is also the theme of much of the work of dramatists like Giraudoux, Anouilh, Salacrou, Sartre and Camus himself. Yet these writers differ from the dramatists of the Absurd in an important respect: they present their sense of the irrationality of the human condition in the form of highly lucid and logically constructed reasoning, while the Theatre of the Absurd strives to express its sense of the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought. The Theatre of the Absurd has renounced arguing *about* the absurdity of the human condition; it merely *presents* it in *being* – that is, in terms of concrete stage images.”⁵

One of the most important aspects of absurd drama was its distrust of language as a means of communication. Language had become a vehicle of conventionalised, stereotyped, meaningless exchanges. Conventionalised speech acts as a barrier between ourselves and what the world is really about. In order to come into direct contact with natural reality, it is necessary to discredit and discard the false crutches of conventionalised language. Objects are much more important than language in absurd theatre: what happens transcends what is being said about it. It is the hidden, implied meaning of words that assume primary importance in absurd theatre, over and above what is being actually said. The Theatre of the Absurd strove to communicate an undisclosed totality of perception - hence it had to go beyond language.

Absurd drama subverts logic. It relishes the unexpected and the logically impossible. According to Sigmund Freud, there is a feeling of freedom we can enjoy when we are able to abandon the straitjacket of logic. Rationalist thought, like language, only deals with the superficial aspects of things. Nonsense, on the other hand, opens up a glimpse of the infinite. In trying to burst the bounds of logic and language the absurd theatre is trying to shatter the enclosing walls of the human condition itself. Our individual identity is defined by language, having a name is the source of our separateness - the loss of logical language brings us towards a unity with living things. In being illogical, the absurd theatre is anti-rationalist: it negates rationalism because it feels that rationalist thought, like language, only deals with the superficial aspects of things. Nonsense, on the other hand, opens up a glimpse of the infinite. It offers intoxicating freedom brings one into contact with the essence of life and is a source of marvellous comedy.

There is no dramatic conflict in the absurd plays. Dramatic conflicts, clashes of personalities and powers belong to a world where a rigid, accepted hierarchy of values forms a permanent establishment. Such conflicts, however, lose their meaning in a situation where the establishment and outward reality have become meaningless. However frantically characters perform, this only underlines the fact that nothing happens to change their existence. Absurd dramas are lyrical statements, very much like music: they communicate an atmosphere, an experience of archetypal human situations. The Absurd Theatre is a theatre of situation, as against the more conventional theatre of sequential events. It presents a pattern of poetic images. In doing this, it uses visual elements, movement, and light. Unlike conventional theatre, where language rules supreme, in the Absurd Theatre language is only one of many components of its multidimensional poetic imagery.

The Theatre of the Absurd is totally lyrical theatre which uses abstract scenic effects, many of which have been taken over and modified from the popular theatre arts: mime, ballet, acrobatics, conjuring, music-hall clowning. Much of its inspiration comes from silent film and comedy, as well as the tradition of verbal nonsense in early sound film (Laurel and Hardy, W C Fields, the Marx Brothers). It emphasises the importance of objects and visual experience: the role of language is relatively secondary. It owes a debt to European pre-war surrealism: its literary influences include the work of Franz Kafka. The Theatre of the Absurd is aiming to create a ritual-like, mythological, archetypal, allegorical vision, closely related to the world of dreams.

At the time when the first absurd plays were being written and staged in Western Europe in the late 1940s and early 1950s, people in the East European countries suddenly found themselves thrown into a world where absurdity was an integral part of everyday living. Currently, they did not need to be an abstract thinker in order to be able to reflect upon absurdity: the experience of absurdity became part and parcel of everybody's existence.

Hitler's attempt to conquer Russia during the Second World War gave Russia a unique opportunity to extend its sphere of influence and at the same time to 'further the cause of [the Soviet brand of] socialism'. In the final years of the war, Stalin turned the war of the defeat of Nazism into the war of conquest of Central Europe and the war of the division of Europe. In pursuing Hitler's retreating troops, the Russian Army managed to enter the territory of the

Central European countries and remained there for a long time. The might of the Russian Army made it possible for Stalin to establish rigidly ideological pro-Soviet regimes, hermetically sealed from the rest of Europe. The Central European countries, whose pre-war political systems ranged from feudal monarchies (Rumania), semi-authoritarian states (Poland) to a parliamentary Western-type democracy (Czechoslovakia), were now subjected to a militant Sovietisation. The countries were forced to undergo a major traumatic political and economic transformation.

The Western Theatre of the Absurd highlighted man's fundamental bewilderment and confusion, stemming from the fact that man has no answers to the basic existential questions: why we are alive, why we have to die, why there is injustice and suffering. East European Soviet-type socialism proudly proclaimed that it had answers to all these questions and, moreover, that it was capable of eliminating suffering and setting all injustices right. To doubt this was subversive. Officially, it was sufficient to implement a grossly simplified formula of Marxism to all spheres of life and Paradise on Earth would ensue. It became clear very soon that this simplified formula offered even fewer real answers than various esoteric and complex Western philosophical systems and that its implementation by force brought enormous suffering.

From the beginning it was clear that the simplified idea was absurd: yet it was made to dominate all spheres of life. People were expected to shape their lives according to its dictates and to enjoy it. It was, and still is, an offence to be sceptical about Soviet-type socialism if you are a citizen of an East-European country. The sheer fact that the arbitrary formula of simplified Marxism was made to dominate the lives of millions of people, forcing them to behave against their own nature, brought the absurdity of the formula into sharp focus for these millions. Thus, the Soviet-type system managed to bring the experience of what was initially a matter of concern for only a small number of sensitive individuals in the West to whole nations in the East.

This is not to say that the absurdity of life as experienced in the East differs in any way from the absurdity of life as it is experienced in the West. In both parts of the world it stems from the ambiguity of man's position in the universe, from his fear of death and from his instinctive yearning for the Absolute. It is just that official East-European practices, based on a contempt for the fundamental existential questions and on a primitive and arrogant faith in the power of a

simplified idea, have created a reality which makes absurdity a primary and deeply-felt, intrinsic experience for anybody who comes in contact with that reality.

The rise of the Theatre of the Absurd in the East is connected with the period of relative relaxation of the East European regimes after Stalin's death. In the first decade after the communist take-over of power, it would have been impossible for anyone to write anything even distantly based on his experiences of life after the take-over without endangering his personal safety. The arts, as indeed all other spheres of life, were subject to rigid political control and reduced to serving blatant ideological and propagandistic aims. This was the period when feature films were made about happy workers in a steelworks, or about a village tractor driver who after falling in love with his tractor becomes a member of the communist party, etc. All the arts assumed rigidly conservative, to which a strong political bias was added. 20th -Century developments, in particular the inter-war experiments with structure and form in painting and poetry were outlawed as bourgeois decadence.

In the years after Stalin's death in 1953, the situation slowly improved. The year 1956 saw two major attempts at liberalisation within the Soviet Bloc: the Hungarian revolution was defeated, while the Polish autumn managed to introduce a measure of normalcy into the country which lasted for several years. Czechoslovakia did not see the first thaw until towards the end of the 1950s : genuine liberalisation did not start gaining momentum until 1962-63. Hence, it was only in the 1960s that the first absurdist plays could be written and staged in Eastern Europe. Even so, the Theatre of the Absurd remained limited to only two East European countries, those that were the most liberal at the time: Poland and Czechoslovakia. After the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, it became apparent that Russia would not tolerate a fuller liberalisation of the East European countries. Czechoslovakia was thrown into a harsh, neo-Stalinist mould, entering the time capsule of stagnating immobility, in which it has remained ever since. Since it had been primarily artists and intellectuals that were spearheading the liberalising reforms of the 1960s, the arts were now subjected to a vicious purge. Many well-known artists and intellectuals were turned into non-persons practically overnight : some left or were later forced to leave the country. All the Czechoslovak absurdist playwrights fell into the non-person category. It is perhaps quite convincing evidence of the social relevance of their plays that the establishment feared them so much it felt the need to outlaw them. Several of the banned authors have

continued writing, regardless of the fact that their plays cannot be staged in Czechoslovakia at present. They have been published and produced in the West.

The East European Absurd Theatre was undoubtedly inspired by Western absurd drama, yet it differed from it considerably in form, meaning and impact. Although East European authors and theatre producers were quite well acquainted with many West-European absurd plays from the mid to late 1950s onwards, nevertheless (with very few exceptions) these plays were not performed or even translated in Eastern Europe until the mid-1960s. The reasons for this were several :

First, West-European absurd drama was regarded by East-European officialdom as the epitome of West-European bourgeois capitalist decadence and, as a result, East European theatrical producers would be wary of trying to stage a condemned play - such an act would blight their career once and for all, ensuring that they would never work in theatre again. The western absurdist plays were regarded as nihilistic and anti-realistic, especially after Kenneth Tynan had attacked Ionesco as the apostle of anti-realism: this attack was frequently used by the East European officialdom for condemning Western absurd plays.

Secondly, after a decade or more of staple conservative realistic bias, there were fears among theatrical producers that the West European absurd plays might be regarded as far too avant-garde and esoteric by the general public.

Thirdly, there was an atmosphere of relative optimism in Eastern Europe in the late 1950s and the 1960s. It was felt that although life under Stalin's domination had been terrible, the bad times were now past after the dictator's death and full liberalisation was only a matter of time. The injustices and deficiencies of the East European systems were seen as due to human frailty rather than being a perennial metaphysical condition : it was felt that sincere and concerted human effort was in the long run going to be able to put all wrongs right. In a way, this was a continuation of the simplistic Stalinist faith in man's total power over his predicament. From this point of view, it was felt that most Western absurdist plays were too pessimistic, negative and destructive. It was argued (perhaps partially for official consumption) that the East European absurdist plays, unlike their Western counterparts, constituted constructive criticism.

The most famous, and most controversial, absurdist play is probably Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* where plot is eliminated, and a timeless, circular quality emerges as two lost creatures, usually played as tramps, spend their days waiting—but without any certainty of whom they are waiting for or of whether he, or it, will ever come. The characters of the play are strange caricatures who have difficulty communicating the simplest of concepts to one another as they bide their time awaiting the arrival of Godot. The language they use is often ludicrous, and following the cyclical pattern, the play seems to end in precisely the same condition it began, with no real change having occurred. In fact, it is sometimes referred to as “the play where nothing happens.” Its detractors count this a fatal flaw and often turn red in the face fomenting on its inadequacies. It is mere gibberish, they cry, eyes nearly bulging out of their head—a prank on the audience disguised as a play. The play's supporters, on the other hand, describe it as an accurate parable on the human condition in which “the more things change, the more they are the same.” Change, they argue, is only an illusion. In 1955, the famous character actor Robert Morley predicted that the success of *Waiting for Godot* meant “the end of theatre as we know it.” His generation may have gloomily accepted this prediction, but the younger generation embraced it. They were ready for something new—something that would move beyond the old stereotypes and reflect their increasingly complex understanding of existence.

The forms of theatre since they are determined by the laws of cultural change, should respond to the transient nature of man's condition in society. This response is found in the dramas of Samuel Beckett, Edward Albee, Eugene Ionesco, Harold Pinter, and others. These playwrights have been grouped together by Martin Esslin under the title of Theatre of the Absurd. Though Esslin, in the preface to the second edition to his book the *Theatre of The Absurd*, emphasizes, “... there is no such thing as a movement of absurd dramatists; the term is a working hypothesis; a device to make certain fundamental traits which seem to be present in the works of a number of dramatists accessible to discussion by tracing features they have in common.”⁶

Since the early works of Harold Pinter have features in common with the so-called Theatre of The Absurd, it is necessary for the purpose of this study to consider the distinguishing characteristics of this type of theatre. Esslin explains that Theatre of The Absurd creates a new and vital dramatic expression that corresponds to man's condition in his present society. Theatre

of The Absurd is an expression of its age. The basic beliefs and assumptions of the former ages have been shattered and man is left to a life that has lost all meaning.

Theatre of The Absurd is facing up to a deeper layer of absurdity-the absurdity of the human condition itself in a world where the decline of religious belief has deprived man of certainties. Where it is no longer possible to accept simple and complete systems of values and revelations of divine purpose, life must be faced in its ultimate, stark reality.⁷

In an essay on Kafka, Ionesco defines "absurd" as, " ... that which is devoid of purpose...cut off from his religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots; man is lost; all his actions become senseless,' absurd, useless."⁸ Esslin goes on to explain that the absurdists see the world as essentially mysterious and unintelligible, devoid of rational purpose and clearly deductible rules of conduct.¹⁸ As Pinter explains:

I do so hate the because of drama. Who are we to say that this happens because that happened, that one thing is the consequence of another? How do we know? What reason have we to suppose that life is so neat and tidy? The most we know for sure is that the things which have happened have happened in a certain order: any connections we think we see, or choose to make, are mere guesswork. Life is much more mysterious than plays make it out to be.⁹

Absurd drama is then, " ... the projection of an inner, psychological reality.....the fantasies, dreams, hallucinations, secret longings and fears of mankind."¹⁰ The absurd dramatist is communicating his, " ... most intimate and personal intuition of the human situation, his own sense of being, his individual vision of the world".¹¹ and is presenting,..... "the audience with a picture of a disintegrating world that has lost its unifying principle, its meaning and its purposean absurd world."¹² Theatre of the Absurd, though, is not concerned with debating or

arguing the absurdity of the human condition, it merely presents it in terms of stage images. This idea is further developed by Essalin as follows:

Theatre of The Absurd is not concerned with conveying information or presenting the problems or destinies of characters that exist outside the authors inner world, as it does not expound a thesis or debate ideological propositions, it is not concerned with the representation of events, the narration of the fate or adventures of characters, but instead with the presentation of one individual's basic situation. It is a theatre of situation as against a theatre of events in sequence, and, therefore, it uses a language or patterns of concrete images rather than argument and discursive speech. And since it is trying to present a sense of being, it can neither investigate nor solve problems of conduct or morals.¹³

The main action in Theatre of The Absurd communicates, “..... a pattern of poetic images,.....”¹⁴ which do not tell a story. The central image determines the form of the play. Thus, the formal pattern of each play expresses the basic conception of that play. Therefore, for this theatre to develop, it must provide new languages, techniques, and forms to convey its changing modes of thought. As Eugene Ionesco explains :

Every movement, every new generation of artists brings a new style; or tries to bring one because it realizes, obscurely or clearly, that a certain way of saying things is worn out and that a new way of saying them should be found, or that the old worn-out language, the old form should disappear, because it has become incapable of containing the new things which have to be said.¹⁵

Thus, Theatre of The Absurd discards both the "old worn-out language," and the "old form," in an attempt to formulate a new dramatic expression that better corresponds to man's condition in his present society. Theatre of The Absurd is, then, the effort to bring new forms to existing ideas.

As truth and reality are not absolute qualities, the harmonizing of new forms with new perceptions of reality is not necessarily amenable to the process of reasoning. Hence, the irrational in Ionesco's and Pinter's plays; the breakdown in communications and bizarre; and meaningless, repetitive actions of the characters in most of the absurd plays; explains that reality itself is faulty:

..... we prefer to subscribe to the view that there is shared common ground. I think there's a shared common ground all right, but it is more like quicksand. Because 'reality' is quite a strong, firm word, we tend to think, or to hope, that the state to which it refers is equally firm, settled and unequivocal. It doesn't seem to be.¹⁶

Thus, man finds himself in a frightening and illogical universe, in which the means of communication; language is questionable. Therefore, the play with its suppositions of having solutions to all problems of character motivation, plot and psychology of man's action, no longer works. Theatre of the Absurd has no solutions and does not attempt to find any. Theatre of the Absurd strives to portray its sense of the senselessness of the human situation: further it attempts to achieve a unity between its assumptions and the form in which they are expressed. Pinter joins form and content using language to present a picture of reality itself. As Katherine Buckman points out:

Though Pinter is distinctly a poetic rather than a problem-solving playwright, he is by his own proud admission in large part a traditionalist. Despite his lack of certain kinds of explicit information about his character and plot, in form

Pinter is not far from the well-made play of Ibsen as many of his fellow absurdists ;... .. and he is ultimately concerned with the shape both of words and of his entire dramatic world.¹⁷

Though a Pinter play may appear to be absurd, a careful examination of the form of the play will prove Pinter's concern with the needs a character voices as the reason behind the language used. The major body of Pinter's works can be seen in terms of thematic progression. The first stage of Pinter's works with *The Room* (1957), *The Birthday Party* (1958), and *The Dumb Waiter* (1960) presents the idea of an individual's fear without exploring the origin of menace. In the second stage including *A Slight Ache* (1961), *The Dwarfs* (1963), and *The Caretaker* (1960) Pinter begins to explore the cause of menace that develops from emotional needs. The third stage with *The Collection* (1962), *The Lover* (1963) and *The Homecoming* (1965) emphasizes movement and change, with Pinter exploring different psychological needs. The fourth stage with *Landscape* (1969), *Silence* (1969), *Old Times* (1971), *No Man's Land* (1975) and *Ashes to Ashes* (1996) is an extension of Pinter's vision and his main concern, present in his work since the beginning, the problem of self and sense of isolation of the human condition.

Throughout his drama we are confronted with a picture of contemporary man defeated by society around him as he fails to communicate with other men. The constant threat of disruption of the status quo, menace, is felt through his work. Although there is a change of emphasis in the tone and technique as Pinter progresses in his writing, there is no fundamental change in his vision. For example, in the early plays Pinter uses cabaret devices and blackouts to bewilder the audience or create a mood of menace. In the later plays he does not resort to such tactics; instead he uses memory and past recollections to produce the intrusion.

Drama arises when any person or persons in a play are consciously or unconsciously up against some antagonistic person or circumstance, or fortune. It is often more intense, when as in Oedipus, the audience is aware of the obstacle, and the person himself or persons on the stage are unaware

of it Drama arises thus, and continues when or till the person or persons are aware of the obstacle; it is sustained so long as we watch the reaction - physical, mental, or spiritual - of the person or persons to the opposing person, or the circumstances, or fortune. It relaxes as the reaction subsides and ceases when the reaction is complete. This reaction of a person to an obstacle is most arresting and 'intense when the obstacle takes the form of another human, will.... ..'¹⁸

In Pinter's plays thereaction -.physical, mental or spiritual - never ceases and is never complete. The audience is made aware of the obstacle throughout the play. The "obstacle" is Pinter's characters inability to communicate their basic fears or define their urgent needs in their relationships. In striving to form these relationships, the characters are negotiating not only the terms of their relationship but their very identities. The language they use does not attempt to define truth or reality; it is the way in which character is revealed. This use of language is the method by which Pinter's plays ultimately become dramas. The best form of "conflict" is that in which one human will is pitted, against itself, as it makes the drama even more "arresting and intense" and this is to be found in Pinter's plays.

Pinter's characters are struggling to achieve a sense of reality and self-image. Throughout the progression of his work, Pinter has become increasingly concerned with the question of time and its effects on states of mind. Pinter's awareness of the problems of time and reality and their combined function within the language used, as was revealed in many of his statements, is manifested in his characters' need to establish what Pinter called a "... common ground."¹⁹ To linger in the past is safer than living in the present which may, at any moment, deny the "... common ground." In 'striving to achieve the, "... common ground ... ' the characters constantly come "up against" their own inability to communicate. The characters' linguistic battles are the means by which their identities are created. His characters are ordinary people with ordinary problems that are never solved. Pinter explained his point of view in this following passage:

I am interested primarily in people; I want to present people to the audience, worthy of their interest primarily because they are, they exist, not because of any moral the author may draw from them.²⁰

Harold Pinter is one of the early practitioners of the Theatre of the Absurd. Absurd, which is one of the many different aspects of his works, functions as a means of getting into the reality that is Pinter's main concern. In spite of the fact that Harold Pinter was at first condemned by both the audiences and the critics for the nature of his plays combining bewildering characters and dialogues, he is one of the dramatists who dominated the second half of the twentieth century and who has been the most influential English playwright since Bernard Shaw. Pinter's *The Birthday Party* (1957), *The Caretaker* (1959), *The Homecoming* (1964), and *Old Times* (1970) gained the status of modern classics long before Pinter secured his own reputation as a great dramatist. The place of Pinter in British Drama was gradually but strongly secured after Absurd Drama was acknowledged as a distinct dramatic movement by critics in 1960, especially by Martin Esslin, in whose work the background and characteristics of absurd drama were demonstrated in a detailed analysis. Therefore, upon the introduction of such a new trend in the world of drama, both audiences and critics started to perceive the absurd dramatists' goals and to appreciate those works within their context of absurd qualities. Yet, since every new trend needs time to be digested, Pinter's plays faced quite contradictory reactions until they were accepted as classics of both Pinter and twentieth century drama.

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