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10. Ruby Cohn, 'The World of Harold Pinter' (1962), in *Harold Pinter: The Birthday Party, The Caretaker, and The Homecoming*, ed. M. Scott (London: Macmillan education, 1986), p. 25.
11. Pinter, *Party Time, Plays Four*, p. 290.
12. Pinter, *Various Voices*, p. 217.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 182.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 132.
15. See, for example, Michelene Wandor, *Carry on, Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics* (London: Routledge, 1986); and Lynne Segal, 'Look Back in Anger: Men in the 50s', in *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity*, ed. R. Chapman and J. Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1988).
16. Williams, *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*, pp. 368–9.
17. Pinter, *Various Voices*, pp. 212–13.
18. Martin Esslin, *Pinter: The Playwright*, 4th edn (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 80.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 160.
27. Martin Esslin, 'The Homecoming Reviewed', in *The Pinter Review*, ed. Francis Gillen and Steven H. Gale (Tampa, FL: University of Tampa Press, 1990), pp. 88–91.
28. Elizabeth Sakellariou, *Pinter's Female Portraits: A Study of Female Characters in the Plays of Harold Pinter* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 69.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 109.
31. Pinter, *Ashes to Ashes, Plays Four*, p. 395.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 396.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 428.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 406–7.
35. Michael Billington, *The Life and Work of Harold Pinter* (London: Faber, 1996), p. 374.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 377.
37. Pinter, *Various Voices*, p. 80.

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Yael Zarkhy-Levo

Pinter and the critics

To a great extent my public image is one that's been cultivated by the press. That's the Harold Pinter they choose to create.

(Interview with Stephen Moss, 4 September 1999, in *The Guardian*)

In this chapter I deal with a particular public image of Harold Pinter – that of Pinter as playwright. This image was first constructed by the press, and specifically by theatre reviewers, in the early phases of Pinter's writing career, and has since been further cultivated by the reviewers in the later phases of his career. Pinter, however, while well aware of the reviewers' construct of his dramatic work, does not appear to have remained passive in the face of it. Rather, he has chosen a unique response, seemingly collaborative at first, but ultimately trapping the critics in their own confined space.

In this overview of Pinter's career, presenting the 'Pinter' construct on the one hand, and the playwright's model(s) of response on the other, I have chosen to focus on three highlights: first, the consolidation of the construct throughout Pinter's process of acceptance by the critical community and his 'semi-collaborative' response; second, Pinter's unpredictable poetic move, manifested by his mid-career play *A Kind of Alaska*, and the reviewers' response in this case; and third, Pinter's late play *Ashes to Ashes*, the culmination of his overtly political plays and yet another mode of poetic response to the critics, together with the critical reaction it elicited. This chapter examines in particular the London productions of Pinter's plays, and consequently the reviews appearing in the London press.

The reviewers' conduct in the case of Pinter exemplifies the tactics of criticism in general. Elsewhere I have suggested that theatre reviewers can be perceived as institutional agents with regard to a new theatrical product.¹ Serving as mediators, endowed with institutional authority, one particular function of reviewers in the theatrical field entails providing an initial 'legitimation' for playwrights whose acceptance into the theatrical canon has not yet been determined. Throughout the reception process of a new playwright the reviewers seek to meet two major conditions: to find an affiliation for the new dramatist; and, once affiliation is achieved, to embark on a strategy of promotion. The strategy of promotion is designed to market the playwright's particular means of theatrical expression, resulting in the emergence of a dramatic construct as an integral part of the

reception of any new playwright, and as such is not unique to Pinter. However, the components and process of forming the construct differ in each case.

The process of Pinter's initial critical reception can be seen as comprising three major phases: the unfavourable responses to his first professionally produced play, *The Birthday Party*, in 1958; the altered critical perceptions that emerged between 1959 and 1964; and the third phase, from 1964 to 1965, that culminated in his admission into the theatrical canon.

Four major strategies² are employed by reviewers during the reception process of a new playwright. Use of the first strategy – comparison – can be perceived as legitimising a new play by comparing or affiliating it to already-established forms of drama. Whereas the critical means to affiliate consist in references to the past, the second strategy – forecasting – can be perceived as a critical marketing tactic that incorporates reference to the future.³ Use of the second strategy thus aims to achieve legitimisation of the playwright through presenting the new play as a promise of future dramatic achievement, possibly even as a potential paradigm.

With respect to the paradigm, the forecasting strategy is linked to a third strategy, employed in some cases – that of name-giving. The latter serves a constitutive function by supplying a reference point.⁴ The new and unfamiliar dramatic product is thus assigned a label by the critics that is perceived as referring to a set of given attributes. The fourth strategy – formation of a package of attributes – characterises the new dramatist's work. In the early stage of reception the reviewers devise an initial package, which is subsequently formulated into the playwright construct, comprising an aggregation of the traits recurring in the works that typify the dramatist in terms of influences and innovation. This construct is seen as the dramatist's trademark, serving the reviewers to further market the plays and the playwright. Formulation of the playwright construct is essential in facilitating the critics' function as mediators, which is to make the work accessible and locate the dramatist within the perceived overall theatrical tradition.

The first London production of a Pinter play, *The Birthday Party* (19 May 1958), was attacked and rejected by most reviewers to such an extent that the play was taken off after only a week's run.⁵ The reviews reflected the critics' difficulty in identifying its dramatic style or in associating this with any established dramatic model. In their attempt to locate the play, in terms of influences or affiliation, within the framework of British or European theatrical traditions, the reviewers compared it to Ibsen's plays on the one hand, and to those of Osborne, Beckett and Ionesco on the other.⁶ But Pinter's play, which at that stage did not fit any existing classification or meet the familiar and accepted theatrical criteria, was pronounced by the reviewers obscure, delirious, oblique, enigmatic and puzzling,⁷ and dismissed as a theatrical failure.

One influential drama critic, Harold Hobson of *The Sunday Times*, did voice his support of Pinter's theatrical talent, but his review was published too late to save the fate of the production.⁸ Hobson employed the same strategy of comparison as that of the other critics, but in order to prove an opposite contention. He compared Pinter to several dramatists whose first works had also received unfavourable, or even scandalised notices, such as Beckett, Shaw and Ibsen. Acknowledging himself to be alone in his conviction of Pinter's talent, Hobson presented the critical rejection of Pinter's first play as a sign of the dramatist's genius. He prophesied that, although such bad notices might influence the box office in the short term, Pinter's dramatic talent, as in the cases of his great predecessors, would eventually be recognised by the other critics. Hobson's means to promote Pinter's first play illustrate the use of two of the above-noted basic strategies employed by reviewers when encountering new dramatists: namely, comparison and forecasting.

In contrast to their reviews of Pinter's first play, the reception of the next two stage productions of Pinter's plays – the revue sketches *Trouble in the Works* and *The Black and White* (in *One to Another*, 15 July 1959) and the plays *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Room* (Hampstead Theatre Club, 21 January 1960, transferred to the Royal Court Theatre 8 March 1960) – reflected a shift in critical perception. The reviewers repeatedly pointed to a certain resemblance to established works or the influence of such works, especially Beckett's.⁹ This shift in perception of Pinter's plays was marked by yet another issue, that of his 'puzzling' dramatic style. Perceived previously as the major flaw of *The Birthday Party*, it now became attributed to his originality.¹⁰ The reviews following the production of *The Caretaker* (27 April 1960) addressed the issue of Pinter's 'puzzling' style in accordance with this altered perspective. The enigmatic style was now presented as this drama's main source of attraction.¹¹ Pinter was praised for his unique ability to 'create a world of his own, an entirely personal world, and he compels a desire in his public to penetrate it': 'effortlessly he produces atmosphere at once puzzling, dramatic, and charged with fascination'.¹² This second phase saw the beginning of the reviewers' marketing of Pinter to the public, presenting him as offering a unique and enigmatic theatrical style.¹³ What contributed to this gradual acceptance of his drama were the influences that the reviewers alleged they had traced in his plays to accepted theatrical models.¹⁴

The process of critical acceptance entails two oppositional tendencies: a presentation of the recognisable and an introduction of the original. Contradictory in nature, the two tendencies become reconciled during the phases of a playwright's acceptance. Pinter's drama, having become affiliated

with established theatrical models, thus became part of a historical sequence. Yet his theatrical language has been presented by the reviewers as decodable only up to a certain point. While seen as a chapter in the theatrical tradition, at the same time his enigmatic image seems to have been preserved by the reviewers in order to secure their presentation of his innovation.

The reviews of *The Caretaker* described the play as 'an unmistakable hit'.¹⁵ A few reviewers even went as far as presenting Pinter's dramatic work as a source of pride and a major contribution to the development of British drama,¹⁶ an ironic reversal of their initial rejection of the local talent. Many compared Pinter to Beckett and Ionesco, apparently suggesting that Pinter could be regarded as a British representative of the European avant-garde. This comparison might have contributed to Martin Esslin's decision to promote Pinter from the margins to the centre in the updated third edition of his book, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1980), presenting him as a major Absurd playwright. Esslin's promotion, in turn, contributed to Pinter's later establishment as a British absurdist.

Thus, the inexplicable quality of Pinter's dramas, used by the critics to justify their initial rejection, served subsequently as their means for marketing his work to the public, and eventually became his trademark. In line with their policy of arousing curiosity about Pinter's plays, the reviewers, apparently encouraged by the dramatist's own conduct,¹⁷ presented Pinter himself as an enigmatic figure.

Indeed, the dramatist employed a very intricate approach when speaking of his own work, simultaneously collaborating with and manipulating his addressees. One of the earliest press exposures – a talk delivered by the playwright at the Seventh National Student Drama Festival (Bristol, 1962), printed in the *Sunday Times* (4 March 1962) exemplifies this approach. Pinter did not supply explanations;¹⁸ rather, he presented the inexplicable quality of his works as rooted in his ideology and perception of life. Furthermore, he expressed his view of language, proposing to alter the norms by which language spoken on stage is judged. He called attention to the central role of dialogue in his plays, while providing, implicitly, an alternative to the epithet 'puzzling': namely, the term 'ambiguous', which suggests a more positive evaluation of the dialogue. He thus manipulated his addressees towards valuing the language spoken in his plays for its ambiguous quality, rather than perceiving it as deviant, and hence puzzling. Pinter's implicit proposal to change the contract between audience and playwright can be seen as an active step designed to influence and shape the reception of his own plays.

The influence of Pinter's self-description on subsequent reviews is apparent in the critical responses to the production of *The Lover* and *The Duffs* (18 September 1963). The reviews are loaded with the critics' cumulative

impressions of Pinter's previous plays on the one hand, and the dramatist's own views, as displayed in *The Sunday Times*, on the other.¹⁹ The shift that marks these reviews is reflected in the dominance of the issue of dialogue, which seems to have occupied most reviewers, presumably partially as a result of Pinter's particular attention to this subject when speaking of his own work.

It is significant that during the transitional period (especially 1959–61) new plays by Pinter were broadcast both on television and radio. Perceiving these years as constituting the turn in his career in Britain takes into account the favourable critical reception of his work outside Britain (in the United States, for example), for Pinter's international acclaim seems to have contributed to his critical acceptance in Britain. Moreover, the international and British prizes awarded to Pinter's work during the years of the second phase reflect the growing recognition of his unique contribution as a dramatist and screenwriter.²⁰

The reviews of the revival of *The Birthday Party* (18 June 1964), six years after its first London production, can be seen to mark the third phase of Pinter's critical reception. The reviews demonstrated the critics' general approval of the play, their reduced need to compare it to accepted theatrical models, and their particular praise of Pinter's 'gift for dialogue'.²¹ The reviewers were now ready to recognise Pinter's plays as an original contribution to British drama. This is further confirmed by their choice of the 'package of attributes', which served as a marketing strategy. At this point Pinter's drama was presented to the public under the label 'Pinteresque'.²² This label, which exemplifies the strategy of name-giving, can be perceived as the final version of the epithet 'puzzling', attached previously to Pinter's dramatic work. Its use marks Pinter's acceptance, in reflecting the reviewers' assumption that from now on Pinter's plays could be marketed under a 'Pinter' label, detached from the association with Beckett. This label seems to have functioned as a substitute for clarification of the 'incoherent' elements, thereby familiarising Pinter's unique style, the unfamiliarity of which had led to his initial rejection.²³

The reviews of Pinter's next play, *The Homecoming* (3 June 1965), indicate the completion of the process of the dramatist's admission into the theatrical canon. Although the critical reactions to the play were not wholly favourable, and the majority of the reviewers expressed reservations, they nonetheless recognised and acknowledged Pinter's dramatic talent.²⁴ The general tendency reflected a borrowing from the critical repertoire of previous reviews. The reviewers either chose to treat, in various combinations, the different 'Pinteresque' aspects of the play,²⁵ or made explicit references to the familiarity of those aspects and/or attributes that had been mentioned and commented on in earlier reviews.²⁶

The critics' choice to exploit the existing critical repertoire, rather than adding innovations, or altering their previous attitudes, indicates that their repertoire regarding this playwright was – for the time being – complete. By this point a critical consensus had emerged on the following issues: first, Pinter's association or affiliation with specific dramatic figures (especially Beckett); second, Pinter's place in the context of British drama and the European dramatic tradition; and third, the characteristics of his dramatic and directing style, which had been given a specific label (Pinteresque). By this stage a well-defined 'Pinter' construct had come into being, based on the augmented critical repertoire. Now stored for future use, this critical construct had evolved from the initial package of attributes allotted to Pinter in the early perceptions of his plays, in the phases leading up to his acceptance. The construct comprised attributes that were either stamped explicitly or associated implicitly with the label 'Pinteresque'. The reviewers' frequent use of this label reflected their implicit agreement regarding the distinctive attributes of his dramatic work.²⁷ Moreover, this construct implied the reviewers' recognition of the new dramatic norms that had come to be associated with Pinter's work. The term 'Pinteresque' thus functioned not only as shorthand for certain agreed-upon dramatic attributes, but also as a signifier of new dramatic norms, which both drew on and expanded the existing repertoire of theatrical modes. Although Pinter's work was still being perceived as enigmatic, its presentation was now descriptive in nature rather than suggesting 'abnormality'. Subsequently, Pinter's style was presented as a dramatic paradigm, serving the reviewers during their reception process of new playwrights.²⁸

The reviewers' active involvement with a playwright's career, however, does not terminate once the latter is admitted into the theatrical canon. In the later stages of such a career the reviewers seek to ensure the dramatist's position in the theatrical canon, thereby reconfirming and reinforcing their own authority within the theatrical field. The reviewers, reacting to the new plays, will tend to affirm the now established playwright's image as previously constructed. The playwright thus seems to acquire a critical existence that belongs to the critics who had created his or her construct.

In light of the above, any established playwright who goes on to write a play apparently incompatible with his/her previous works, seems to challenge the constructed image and consequently the particular critical criteria by which he or she had been judged.²⁹ Pinter's mid-career play *A Kind of Alaska* exemplifies this case.³⁰

A Kind of Alaska, produced in London in 1982,³¹ surprised the critics. The play depicts a woman, Deborah, who had fallen victim to the sleeping sickness (encephalitis lethargica). She is awakened twenty-nine years later by a

drug (L-Dopa) injected by the doctor who has taken care of her all these years, and is now married to her sister. The play centres on Deborah's awakening. Pinter acknowledges a specific literary source (Oliver Sacks's *Awakenings*, 1973),³² thereby supplying a context within which one can, or should, grasp the unusual situation depicted.

In light of the medical condition, that is, a woman who has been asleep throughout the years of her maturation, neither the dialogue nor the characters' motivation appears enigmatic, but rather evokes the audience's understanding and sympathy. Although Deborah's awakening into a different world and her realisation of her own physical transformation elicit questions relating to forms of adjustment and human interactions in general, the particular situation depicted in the play appears coherent rather than puzzling. In *A Kind of Alaska*, therefore, Pinter, having executed an unexpected move, seems to challenge the image that had been attached to his dramatic work by the critics during the process of his establishment. In this play, I would suggest, Pinter ventured to free himself from the confinement of the reviewers' construct.

The reviewers, it appears, endorsed the playwright's unexpected move. Most reviews were highly favourable. The critics' puzzled attitude towards Pinter's poetics, which had come to dictate their marketing strategy throughout the process of his acceptance, seemed to vanish utterly when they encountered *A Kind of Alaska*. It is as though, to their great relief, 'Pinter-land' had finally ceased to be obscure.³³ Following this production Pinter was presented as an engaged playwright whose play offers human concern; and no longer a playwright who portrays 'an entirely personal world'.³⁴ The majority of the reviewers referred to the literary source of the play, Sacks's highly popular book (based on medical phenomena) that had aroused a wide public interest.³⁵ Wardle, for instance, claimed that Pinter's new play 'shows him breaking into new ground. Most unusually for this author, the play comes with an explanatory programme note citing a literary source.'³⁶ Or as Morley commented: 'instead of harking back to past triumphs', *A Kind of Alaska* suggests 'that Pinter is in fact now moving forward into some altogether new direction. In the first place, and extremely unusually for him, the play is derived from a book, and a book of medical fact.'³⁷

Although the reviewers' attitude to Pinter's 'deviant' play reflected a critical eagerness to draw attention to the new and different image of the enigmatic playwright, it did not relate specifically to the theatrical components on which the new image was based. Caught by surprise by the nature of the play, the reviewers were at a loss: the previous Pinter construct was not compatible with the playwright's new work, yet they did not have a ready-made alternative. The reviewers thus embraced, simultaneously, a critical mode that

welcomed the abandonment of enigma while striving, in light of the play's seemingly anomalous nature, also to devise an emergency mode that would not endanger their authority with respect to the playwright's image. Consequently, they chose to highlight the reference to the literary source (Sacks) as the play's major 'anomalous' feature, suppressing, or rather avoiding, a direct consideration of the other, more radically different dramatic attributes.

Striking evidence for this claim can be found in the reviewers' selective treatment of the literary source. None, excluding Nightingale,³⁸ mentioned Sacks's particular case history of Rose R.,³⁹ which is most probably the one on which the play is based. None of the reviews, including Nightingale's, related to Pinter's specific choice to base his play on this particular case history rather than on another (Sacks's book consists of several cases, of both men and women). Moreover, the reviewers, while repeatedly acknowledging the literary source, neither mentioned nor discussed Pinter's changes to the source data. These changes are quite significant: unlike Deborah (the awakened woman in the play) who was sixteen years old when she fell victim to sleeping sickness, Rose was twenty-one years old. Whereas Deborah's awakening occurs after twenty-nine years when she is forty-five years old, Rose's awakening occurred after forty-three years when she was sixty-four. Furthermore, recalling the passive conduct of the princess in 'The Sleeping Beauty' fairy tale, Deborah's attempt to confront the implications of her situation, in Pinter's play, suggests an independent and autonomous female figure, which corresponds to a more contemporary view of women. Relating to Pinter's particular decision to base his play on Rose's case, as well as to his fictional or differing 'data', would have required from the reviewers a consideration of new issues (such as the possible influence of a feminist approach) that were 'foreign' to the established critical repertoire concerning Pinter's plays.⁴⁰

The policy of promotion adopted by the reviewers in the case of *Alaska* can thus be perceived as a defence tactic. Avoiding any direct treatment of the play's novelty, the reviewers employed modified applications of the two major strategies of comparison and forecasting. Comparing *Alaska* to Pinter's previous works, however, the reviewers related primarily to the absence of the familiar Pinteresque attributes. The use of this strategy served simultaneously as a retrospective affirmation of earlier critical assertions, and as a confirmation of the reviewers' continuing role as the authoritative force in determining the playwright's image. The reviewers' modification of the strategy of forecasting marked the new play by the established playwright as a turning point, thereby shifting dominance from the particularities of the play in question to the broader implications concerning future changes in the

playwright's poetics.⁴¹ To discern and proclaim a change in an established playwright's poetics can be viewed as assisting the reviewers to further enhance their marketing of that playwright, and so to reinforce his canonical position.

The reviewers' reaction to the play's revival, in 1985,⁴² further attests to the selective nature of their criticism.⁴³ From the reviews of the two productions, it appears that the reviewers – rather than extending their critical repertoire – adjusted the existing repertoire to meet their (then) current needs. Since their discourse was restricted to the existing repertoire, the critical means available to them were in fact incongruous with the emergent requirement: a direct critical consideration of the playwright's unpredicted poetic move. Consequently, the reviewers seem to have devised a form of modification that served to disguise their critical repertoire's restricted nature, while simultaneously ensuring their own authority. In other words, the reviewers – rather than opening up and enlarging their repertoire, or freeing the 'rebellious' playwright, as suggested by Almansi and Henderson⁴⁴ – actually reclaimed his unpredictable move as further corroboration of their own powers in the field.

Following *A Kind of Alaska*, Pinter, seemingly adhering to the reviewers' prophecy, moved 'forward into some altogether new direction'.⁴⁵ His revue sketch *Precisely* (18 December 1983) and especially his play *One for the Road* (13 March 1984), were regarded as his 'self-proclaimed debut as a political writer'.⁴⁶ Scholarly studies published through the 1990s suggested that Pinter's development as a playwright consists of two major and distinct phases: his early and mid-career phase (1958–82), and his later 'political' phase (1983–91).⁴⁷ Martin Esslin, a proponent of this view, refers to this distinction, claiming:

Whereas all his previous work was enigmatic, multilayered, relying on pauses, silences, and a subtext of far greater importance than what was actually being said, these later pieces operate unambiguously on the surface, even relying on voice-overs to make characters' thoughts crystal clear and proclaiming a message of blinding simplicity, a message which is a call to political action.⁴⁸

With regard to Pinter's later drama, the critical view, represented by Esslin's claim, seems to correspond with the playwright's own statements, such as those expressed in his interviews with Mel Gussow and with Nicholas Horn,⁴⁹ in which he acknowledges a change of objective towards a more explicit politics of commitment.⁵⁰ Esslin's comment exemplifies the critical perception as to the major difference between the two phases of Pinter's writing with respect to the nature of the represented domain and to the degree of explicitness. Whereas the early/mid-career phase is seen as representing the private–personal domain

NOTES

1. See Yael Zarchy-Levo, 'The Theatre Critic as a Cultural Agent: Esslin, Marowitz and Tynan', *Poetics*, 21 (1993), 525-43, and *The Theatrical Critic as Cultural Agent: Constructing Pinter, Orton and Stoppard as Absurdist Playwrights* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001).
 2. See detailed discussion of major critical strategies in Zarchy-Levo, *Constructing Pinter*, chapter 5.
 3. Discussing the agents' representation of the social world, Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups', *Theory and Society*, 14, 6 (1985), 723-44, analyses the strategies employed by the agents. He draws a link between the element of uncertainty, which derives from a degree of indeterminacy that is always included in the objects of the social world, and 'the cognitive "filling in" strategies that produce the meaning of the objects of the social world by going beyond the directly visible attributes by reference to the future or the past'. In political struggles, too, Bourdieu claims, references to the past and the future are employed as strategic means. 'The past is reconstructed in accordance with the needs of the present, and the future "with creative forecasting, is endlessly invoked, to determine, delimit and define the always open meaning of the present" (p. 728).
 4. Pierre Bourdieu, 'Mais qui a créé les créateurs?', *Questions de Sociologie* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1980), pp. 207-21, asserts that:

Words – the names of schools or groups, proper names – are so important only because they make things. These distinctive signs produce existence in a world in which the only way to be is to be different, to 'make one's name', either personally or as a group. The names of schools or groups ... are pseudo-concepts, practical classifying tools which create resemblance and differences by naming them; they are produced in the struggle for recognition by the artists themselves or their accredited critics and function as emblems which distinguish galleries, groups and artists and therefore the products they make or sell. (p. 289)
- Examining various forms of political power, Bourdieu ('Social Space', p. 729) refers to the power to name, claiming that 'one of the elementary forms of political power, in many archaic societies, consisted in the quasi-magical power to name and to make exist by virtue of naming.'
5. *The Birthday Party* was performed successfully on a tour of the provinces that preceded the first London production of the play. One should note, however, that none of the reviews following the London production of the play refers to the successful run of the play outside London. The possible explanations for the negative reactions of the London critics, as opposed to the favourable critical reaction out of London, are discussed by Randall Stevenson, 'Harold Pinter – Innovator?', in *Harold Pinter: You Never Heard Such Silence*, ed. Alan Bold (London: Vision Press, 1984), pp. 29-60, p. 55.
 6. See, for example, Shulman, 19 May 1958, in the *Evening Standard*; *The Times* (anonymous), 20 May 1958; and Trewin, 31 May 1958, in *The Illustrated London News*.
 7. See, for example, Darlington, 20 May 1958, *Daily Telegraph*: 'it turned out to be one of those plays in which an author wallows in symbols and reveals in obscurity', and in *The Times*, 20 May 1958: 'Mr Harold Pinter's effects are neither comic nor terrifying: they are never more than puzzling and after a little while we tend to give up the puzzle in despair.'
 8. Harold Hobson, 25 May 1958, in *The Sunday Times*. Note also the favourable critical views of the first London production of *The Birthday Party* that were published several months later in *Encore* magazine, in particular Irving Wardle's article, titled 'Comedy of Menace', published in the September-October 1958 issue of *Encore*, 28-33.
 9. See, for example, the review in *The Times* (16 November 1959), reacting to the revue sketches (*One to Another*): 'The evident interest in loneliness, difficulties of communication, and waiting for something to happen seemed to suggest a certain resemblance to Beckett.' In the reviews of *The Dumb Waiter*, see, for example, Walker, 9 March 1960, in the *Evening Star*, who refers to the characters in the play: 'You might, in fact, describe them as waiting upon Godot', or Gibbs, 9 March 1960, in the *Daily Telegraph*: '*The Dumb Waiter* ... recalled parts of *Waiting for Godot*, not so much because it consisted of a dialogue, between two men who, like Beckett's tramps, were large and small, but because the themes were also similar.'
 10. The 'baffling mixture' (see Wilson, 20 May 1958, in the *Daily Mail*) is perceived anew as a 'unique blend' and as 'a special brand', highly recommended (*Observer*, 24 January 1960). In reviews of the production of Pinter's first play reviewers said things such as 'Mr Harold Pinter's effects are neither comic nor terrifying: they are never more than puzzling' (see *The Times*, 20 May 1958). By contrast, only two years later Pinter is said to have an 'extraordinary gift for comic dialogue, and an ability to keep an audience at once puzzled and intent' (*Daily Telegraph*, 22 January 1960).
 11. Austin E. Quigley, *The Pinter Problem* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), dealing with the critical reactions to Pinter's work, points to the transformation that occurred in the critics' attitude, claiming: 'rather than being rejected because of that irksome obscurity, however, the plays are now frequently held to be successful because of that same element' (p. 11). Quigley's argument, however, differs from that presented here, because his intention is 'to account for the use of the inexplicit' in Pinter's work, rather than accounting for criticism's dynamics.
 12. Muller, 30 April 1960 in the *Daily Mail*. See also Gibbs (28 April 1960, in the *Daily Telegraph*), who claims: 'Mr Pinter is to be admired for having mastered so thoroughly the precarious art of mystifying an audience and entrancing them at the same time.'
 13. See Herman T. Schroll, *Harold Pinter: A Study of His Reputation (1958-1969)* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1971), who perceives the first production of *The Caretaker* (April 1960), as the one that 'probably marked the opening phase of the Pinter fashion' (p. 18).
 14. See for example Rossey (27 April 1960, in the *Guardian*) and Tynan (5 June 1960, in the *Observer*), who claims: 'The piece is full of those familiar overtones that seem to be inseparable from much of avant-garde drama.'
 15. See Rossey, 27 April 1960, in the *Guardian*.
 16. See for example Muller, 30 April 1960, in the *Daily Mail*: 'this is a play and a production which no one, who is concerned with the advance of the British drama, can afford to miss. This is theatre.'
 17. Throughout the early years of his career as a dramatist the playwright himself seemed to contribute to the 'enigmatic' image attributed to him. See for example

- the unsigned note enclosed in the programme brochure of the production of *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter*, at the Royal Court, 1960; several interviews (see especially the conversation with Richard Findlater *Twentieth Century*, February 1961), the interviews on the BBC with John Sherwood (BBC European Service, 3 March 1960) and with Kenneth Tynan in the series 'People Today' (28 October 1960), and the later interview with Laurence M. Bensky, ('The Art of the Theatre III: Harold Pinter: An Interview', *The Paris Review*, 10, fall 1966); and Pinter's famous reply (28 November 1967, in the *Daily Mail*) to the woman who asked him to explain his play *The Birthday Party*. The woman's letter and Pinter's reply are quoted in the lead-in paragraph of a later interview that Stephen Moss conducted with Pinter (4 September 1999, in the *Guardian*).
18. Pinter's unique mode of explanation is manifested in his letter to Peter Wood, director of the first production of *The Birthday Party*; see Harold Pinter (1958), 'On *The Birthday Party* 1', in *Various Voices: Prose, Poetry, Politics* (London: Faber, 1998), pp. 8-11.
19. The impact of the playwright's pronounced views is manifested in two ways. The first one is the reviewers' direct borrowing of Pinter's own 'vocabulary', in order to describe, or argue over, the meaning of his new plays. The second is the decision by other reviewers to describe the plays, or the style of direction, in words such as 'pinterisms', or 'pinteresquely' (see especially Darlington, 19 September 1963, in the *Daily Telegraph*).
20. The prizes awarded to Pinter include the following: *The Caretaker* received the *Evening Standard* Drama Award for the Best Play of 1960; on 1 July 1963, the film version of *The Caretaker* won one of the Silver Bears at the Berlin Film Festival; on 30 September 1963 the Joan Kemp-Welch production of *The Lover* won the Prix Italia for Television Drama at Naples; on 23 November 1963 the script and leading performances in *The Lover* received awards from the Guild of British Television Producers and Directors; on 2 March 1964 Pinter won the British Screenwriters' Guild award for his screenplay of *The Servant*.
21. See for example *The Times* (anonymous), 19 June 1964, and Darlington, 19 June 1964, in the *Daily Telegraph*.
22. See, for example, Levin, 19 June 1964, in the *Daily Mail*.
23. Schroll, *Harold Pinter*, p. 77, note 13, presents the critics' usage of the label 'Pinteresque' as an outcome of their inability to find a suitable label for the playwright's works. Although Schroll acknowledges that the use of this label occurred at the stage when Pinter was already accepted by the critical community, he disregards the connection between the use of this particular label and the playwright's critical acceptance. Furthermore, Schroll perceives the label as an obstruction to the playwright's career, rather than as a critical strategy that served this playwright's promotion.
24. See for example Levin, 4 June 1965, in the *Daily Mail*: 'by the end the conclusion grows that the home to which Mr Pinter has come is only the house which he left at the end of *The Caretaker*. And a playwright must always be moving on.' And also Shulman, 4 June 1965, in the *Evening Standard*: '*The Homecoming* undoubtedly works... But the nagging doubt remains that this is not drama but a confidence trick.'
25. See for example Shorter, 4 June 1965, in the *Daily Telegraph* and also Levin, 4 June 1965, in the *Daily Mail*. One interesting example is Hobson's review, 6 June 1965, in the *Sunday Times*, in which he deals with the ambiguity in the play, turning it around to prove 'that Mr Pinter tricks his audience into believing that he is writing a play about the homecoming of a son'. Hobson's claim, concerning Pinter's hidden intentions, appears in his early review of *The Birthday Party* (1958). In both reviews Hobson praises Pinter's dramatic talent, presenting the unfavourable critical reactions to the plays as reflecting the reviewers' shortcomings, rather than Pinter's.
26. For example see *The Times* (4 June 1965): 'Several familiar Pinter motives are involved in this', or, 'At this stage in the play Pinter shows all his old cunning in twisting clichés and formal phrases into unexpected freshness.' See also Trewin, 19 June 1965, in *The Illustrated London News*.
27. See especially Hope-Wallace, 19 September 1963, in the *Guardian*, and Shulman, 19 September 1963, in the *Evening Standard*, and the *Daily Telegraph* (19 September 1963).
28. This claim is corroborated by the reviews of the first production of Joe Orton's play *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* (1964), in which the reviewers pointed out 'Pinteresque' aspects in Orton's drama.
29. Although there may be cases when the playwright is unaware, or only partially aware, of the possible implications of writing a play that is incompatible with his dramatic construct, Pinter's responses in various interviews appear to reflect such awareness. See especially the interview with Harry Thompson for *New Theatre Magazine*, 2, 2, 1961, reprinted in *Pinter in the Theatre*, ed. Ian Smith (London: Nick Hern Books, 2005), pp. 43-9.
30. Pinter's earlier play *Betrayal*, performed at the National Theatre on 15 November 1978, can be seen as this playwright's first 'deviant' dramatic work. On the critics' optional modes of operation in the case of a deviant play, and their particular responses to *Betrayal*, see Zarhy-Levo, *The Making of Theatrical Reputations: Studies from the Modern London Theatre* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2008), pp. 176-80.
31. The play was directed by Peter Hall in a triple bill with *Family Voices* and *Victoria Station* at the National Theatre, Cottesloe, on 14 October 1982.
32. Oliver Sacks, *Awakenings* (London: Harper, 1973).
33. See Barber's comment (16 October 1982 in the *Daily Telegraph*): 'He was never less obscure than here, or more profoundly eloquent about the fragile joy of being alive.'
34. See Muller, 30 April 1960, in the *Daily Mail*.
35. The majority of the reviews include in their account of Pinter's *A Kind of Alaska* some mention of Oliver Sacks's book and the medical phenomena on which his case histories are based (see *Country Life*, 25 November 1982; Shulman, 15 October 1982, in the *Standard*; Cushman, 17 October 1982, in the *Observer*; Barber, 16 October 1982, in the *Daily Telegraph*; Covey, 15 October 1982, in the *Financial Times*).
36. 15 October 1982, in *The Times*.
37. 27 October 1982, in *Punch*.
38. *New Statesman*, 22 October 1982.
39. See Sacks, *Awakenings*, pp. 74-87 (note 32).
40. See for example an alternative critical treatment of this same play in studies such as Katherine H. Burkman, *The Arrival of Godot* (London: Associated University

- Presses, 1986), and Deborah's Homecoming in *A Kind of Alaska: An Afterword*, in *Pinter at Sixty*, ed. Katherine H. Burkman and John L. Kunder-Gibbs (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 193-9; Moonyoung C. Ham, 'Portrait of Deborah: *A Kind of Alaska*', in *Pinter at Sixty*, pp. 185-92; and Ann C. Hall, 'A Kind of Alaska: *Women in the Plays of O'Neill, Pinter and Shepard* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993), pp. 82-90. These four academic studies revolve around the centrality of the female figure, Deborah, and perceive Pinter's main interest in the play as lying in the process undergone by Deborah, through which she comes to recognise herself as a grown woman. For an in-depth discussion of these studies' treatment of the play as compared with the reviewers' responses, see Zarchy-Levo, 'Critical Modes and the Rebellious Playwright: Pinter's *Alaska* and Stoppard's *Arcadia*', *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 16, 1 (2001), 81-99.
41. The strategy of forecasting (as used by most reviewers when approaching *Alaska* as reflecting a major change in Pinter's poetics) is not employed in the cautious review appearing in *Country Life* (anonymous, 30 March 1985), which seems to solve the 'problem' of the 'anomalous' nature of *Alaska* by presenting the current Pinter enigma in other terms. This review suggests, 'on the face of it, this compassionate play has little in common with Pinter's previous work. It has never been easy to isolate the plays in which Pinter seems to be striking out in new directions. From those in which he simply offers variations on familiar themes and patterns.'
 42. Directed by Kenneth Ives in a triple bill, *Other Places*, this time with *One for the Road* and *Victoria Station*.
 43. See especially Billington's review of the 1985 production, entitled 'A New Map of Pinterland' (8 March 1985, in the *Arts Guardian*) and Wardle's review (8 March 1985, in *The Times*).
 44. See Guido Almansi and Simon Henderson, *Harold Pinter* (London and New York: Methuen, 1983), p. 101.
 45. See Morley, 27 October 1982, in *Punch*.
 46. See Wardle, 8 March 1985, in *The Times*.
 47. Pinter's overtly political plays comprise: *Precisely*, 18 December 1983; *One for the Road*, 13 March 1984; *Mountain Language*, 20 October 1988; *The New World Order*, 19 July 1991; *Party Time*, 31 October 1991. Note that the first productions of these plays were directed by the playwright himself.
 48. See Martin Esslin, 'Harold Pinter's Theatre of Cruelty', in *Pinter at Sixty*, ed. Burkman and Kunder-Gibbs, pp. 27-36 (p. 27). On Pinter's 'shift' to political drama see also the extensive discussion by Susan H. Merritt, *Pinter in Play* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), pp. 171-86.
 49. See Mel Gussow, *Conversations with Pinter* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1994), pp. 65-93; and Nicholas Hern, 'A Play and its Politics', Introduction to Harold Pinter's *One for the Road* (London: Methuen, 1994), pp. 7-23.
 50. Pinter's play *One for the Road* is acknowledged by the playwright himself as a move towards the explicit: 'The facts that *One for the Road* refers to are facts that I wish the audience to know about, to recognise. Whereas I didn't have the same objective at all in the early days' (Harold Pinter in interview with Nicholas Hern, *One for the Road*, p. 11, note 49).
 51. The play was first staged by the Royal Court Theatre at the Ambassadors Theatre, on 12 September 1996.
 52. Pinter, *Ashes to Ashes* (London: Faber, 1996), p. 12.
 53. Casey, 18 September 1996, in the *Daily Telegraph*; Tinker, 20 September 1996, in the *Daily Mail*; Spencer, 20 September 1996, in the *Daily Telegraph*.
 54. For an in-depth discussion of this play see Yael Zarchy-Levo, 'The Riddling Map' of Harold Pinter's *Ashes to Ashes*, *Journal of Theatre and Drama*, 4 (1998), 133-46. See also Michael Billington, *The Life and Work of Harold Pinter* (London: Faber, 1996), pp. 375-83, who concludes his discussion of the play by claiming: 'It is, at one and the same time, one of his most profoundly personal plays and one of his most deeply political' (p. 383).
 55. On Pinter's 'combat' against critical constraints through the different stages of his career see Zarchy-Levo, *The Making of Theatrical Reputations*, chapter 4.