THE BIRTHDAY PARTY 1979

# Pinter marred by miscasting

WILL the plays of Harold Pinter still be produced in 50 years' time? Or will the children of the 21st century wonder what all the fuss was about?

Whatever the answer, it is possible that they will be interpreted quite differently since Pinter's work always demands a great deal from directors and actors.

Eric Yardley's production of **The Birthday Party** at Hampton Court Theatre this week is, I would imagine, a far cry from the original conception, lacking both the humour and the sinister undercurrents Pinter intended.

This is partly due to the fact that Mr. Yardley cast three young men in roles that are obviously intended (two of them at least) for older actors.

Stanley, the pathetic lodger at a seedy seaside boarding house, is played by Stephen Pratt with the intensity of a student Hamlet. The men who come to take Stanley away for reasons best known to Pinter, Goldberg and McCann, are played by equally youthful recruits to Teddington Theatre Club, Stephen Bentley and Keith Holmes, both of whom have done excellent work with Mr. Yardley's Youth Action Theatre.

How can he expect Stephen Bentley to have any credibility as an ageing Jewish persecutor when he looks more like an unusually young maitre d'hôtel?

The miscasting is all the more glaring viewed alongside the actors playing Petey (Bob Freeman), Meg (Gill Mason) and Lulu (Jean Brown), whose maturity and experience is invaluable to such a play.

Mr. Yardley's protégés are undoubtedly talented and assets everyone to TTC, but it seems highly indulgent to cast them in roles to which they are clearly unsuited.