CONCLUSION
The present dissertation has made an attempt to study the plays of Harold Pinter and Tom Stoppard in the light of a poetics of postmodernism. The focus has been to present postmodernism as a stance that implies a state of constant critique of all assumptions about reality, history, language, human subject and representation, and to explore the ways in which Pinter and Stoppard express these concerns despite their differences. Whereas Pinter's main concerns relate to issues such as power and the decentered subject, Stoppard treats theatrical representation, history and ethics in a typically postmodernist manner. However both have consistently refused to align themselves with any specific political or social agenda without compromising the issue of a critical engagement with reality.

The thesis has also revealed that postmodern drama has its roots in the Epic theatre of Brecht and the absurdist theatre of Beckett. Beckett's drama, especially, provides an apt commentary on the postmodern condition where man is stripped off completely of all anchors of meaning and purpose. In the theatre, the virtual obliteration of plot and character, a prominent feature in Beckett,
has influenced postmodern drama significantly. Characters with fragmented memories and dialogues informed by absences have found acceptance with the postmodern dramatists as Pinter. Postmodern drama, taking cue from Beckett, also opens up language and experience to plurality, dispersal and play, and suggests the acceptance of uncertainty in the face of contingent nature of knowledge. These parallels notwithstanding, postmodern drama cannot be equated entirely with Beckett’s absurdist theatre. This is noticeable, for example, in the way Pinter, despite his overwhelming indebtedness to Beckett, moves away from the typical absurdist mode in depicting characters who are more socially bounded and less metaphysically oriented than most of Beckett’s characters. Also, there is very little suggestion of Beckett’s theatrical symbolism as a statement on the general human condition in Pinter.

Stoppard, on the other hand, exhibits an inclination towards celebration and playfulness, completely abjuring the characteristically Beckettian graveyard humour. The overwhelming metaphysical anguish of Beckett gives way to a light-hearted
celebration of the immediate moment. This explains Stoppard’s adoption of a consistently comic mode of writing. In this sense Stoppard’s theatre offers itself as an example of post-absurdist drama which inscribes the absurdist condition of meaninglessness but offers a different response to this condition. Whereas Beckett’s final vision of man is tragic, Stoppard persistently stays away from the tragic mode. Again, unlike Beckett, Stoppard situates his characters in tangible contexts although these contexts are shown to be ridden by the condition of dispersal. Ros, Guil, Carr, Houseman, the characters of Arcadia and The Coast of Utopia, all represent aborted attempts of creating meaning from their immediate conditions, though this failure never results in an overriding metaphysical anguish as in case of Beckett.

Since the two dramatists have constantly engaged with postmodernist concerns, their works provide an impetus to explore the possibility of reformulating the poetics of postmodern drama in the light of the attempts made by critics discussed in the second chapter of this thesis. The significance of Pinter and Stoppard for a reformulation of a poetics of postmodern drama can be realized
from the fact that both represent an appropriation of the idea of double-codedness in theatre. This can be seen in the manner in which both Pinter and Stoppard employ the traditional theatrical framework, but move into a postmodern direction by subverting the representational status of theatre from within through a rigorous interrogation of its conventions. Pinter’s obsession with non-referential modes of language use, power, and cultural codes operating at multiple levels, is as effective a way to disrupt these conventions as Stoppard’s recourse to various devices as parody and radically shifting perspectives. It is pertinent to mention that Pinter comes very close to adopting Stoppard’s self-reflexive mode in some of his screenplays as *The Last Tycoon* (1977) and *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* (1981), both of which draw on the mechanics of filmmaking to underline the idea of reality as a subjective construct.

The paradoxical nature of postmodern drama is visible in its inevitable reliance on the category of character to suggest the notion of the dispersal of the human subject. Here again, a crucial difference with Beckett’s later plays is noteworthy where the actual
characters are replaced by certain incisive images, for example the two babbling lips in *Not I*. Despite their admission of Beckett’s influence, neither Pinter nor Stoppard resort to the theatrical strategies that dispense with the character altogether. Both inscribe the character but contest the assumptions of self-presence underlying its dramatic representation. Where Pinter tends to depict it as both the agent and effect of power, and also a potential site of resisting that power, Stoppard often inscribes it but hollows it out of all psychological essence. Stoppard, therefore, creates characters who are entirely subservient to the witty clash of opinions of which they are both agents and products.

The study has also revealed the value of both the playwrights for understanding how language may be seen to operate in postmodern drama. Here too, a simultaneous inscription and subversion of language which implies undercutting its status as a neutral medium of communication emerges as a prominent feature of their plays. While making extensive use of silences in a number of plays, Pinter still installs language as a prime medium by which he creates his drama. Using language to undercut its assumed
freedom from complicity with power is a provocative way of subverting it. The idea is bodied forth in rather explicit terms in *Mountain Language*. Although the indeterminacy of the linguistic sign is an obsession with Stoppard and finds powerful expression in plays like *Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth, After Magritte, Artist Descending a Staircase, Jumpers* and *Travesties*, there is an equally strong tendency in him to reinscribe the linguistic sign. Unlike Beckett who showed an ever-increasing tendency towards abjuring language, Stoppard celebrates the ineluctable condition of the linguistic sign. His treatment of ideas about perception, history and ethics offers a striking example of this.

Finally, it has to be said that owing to the daunting multiformity and heterogeneity of postmodern theory and practice, any attempt to formulate a poetics of postmodern drama needs to be self-consciously provisional. It is the future trends in theory and practice that will provide a vantage perspective on the contemporary dramatic practices, including that of Pinter and Stoppard, and enable us to evaluate them in the light of newer critical insights. These trends may also indicate how
postmodernism can outgrow the present state of impasse that many regard as its greatest demerit and move towards a direction where the problems of meaning and value can be approached with a newer orientation.