Chapter – III

ABSURD PLAYS

Harold Pinter began to publish poetry before he was twenty. He later became a professional actor and produced plays. He took a cue from Beckett and wrote plays in the absurdist tradition. He published his poem *A View of the Party* dealing with a simple party given by Goldberg and McCann in the room of Meg and Petey. Ironically the party ends in despair as the two – Goldberg and McCann – ill-treat Stanley and ignore the appeals of Meg and Petey to treat Stanley well. The poem ends on a sad note:

> Found the game lost and won,
> Meg, all memory gone,
> Lulu’s love night spent,
> Petey impotent; …
> And Stanley’s final eyes
> Broken by McCann.

Here a note of absurdity suggests that a party that is supposed to provide with cheers and laughter would make them gloomy and melancholic. At a later date, Pinter developed the poem into a play *The Birthday Party*. In a letter to Peter Wood, he writes:

> The play is a comedy because the whole state of affairs is absurd and inglorious. It is, however, as you know a very serious piece of work.

Pinter’s *The Birthday Party* appeared in 1958 with its London production. Although it is his first full-length play it never became a commercial success. It
was Harold Hobson who wrote a review entitled “The Screw Turns Again,” that appeared in *The Sunday Times* rescuing its critical reputation and enabling it to become “a classic” of the modern stage and one of the frequently produced of Pinter’s plays. Even Irving Wardle reviewed the play in *Encore* which won the sympathies of the theatre goers. According to Wardle,

> A theme does emerge, closely resembling that of the Iceman Cometh: the play demonstrates that a man who has withdrawn to protect his illusion is not going to be helped by being propelled into the outer world.⁶

Though the review is rather ambiguous the production acquired vitality as it ran continuously for two years.

*The Birthday Party* is about Stanley Webber, an out of work pianist, in a seaside boarding house and he is mysteriously threatened and taken over by two sinister strangers, an Irishman and a Jew, who present him with a Kafkaesque indictment of unexplained crimes. The plot runs into three acts and each act is tautly knit with the other act. Act I opens with breakfast at the Boles’ – Meg and Petey. They live in a rundown boarding house at a sea-side resort. Petey is apparently a desk-chair attendant. When the play opens Petey sits at the breakfast table with a newspaper while Meg prattles on with her suffocating mixture of motherly attentiveness and self-praise. They have only one guest, Stanley, who “is unshaven, in his pyjama jacket and wears glasses.”⁷ Like any absurd play the opening starts with nonessentials that were read from the newspaper. Petey reads out inconsequential news items like Lady Mary Splatt has had a baby, a girl. There are references to the persons whom they do not know at all. From their conversation it is clear that Meg
needs a son and that the lodger Stanley fulfills that role as well as that of a young lover. According to Bill Naismith, the scene of action of the play is

Probably on the south coast, not too far from London. Basingstoke and Maidenhead, southern towns, are evoked; and so is London – in both Goldberg and Stanley's reminiscences.

Petey announces the possible arrival of two new guests, Goldberg and McCann, and Meg goes up to waken Stanley. He is alarmed and unbelieving when told that two guests are coming. He pretends, with ironic cruelty, that they are coming to cart Meg away in a wheelbarrow. Lulu, a young girl would like Stanley to go out with her for a picnic but the latter never cares for her advances. Meg tells the two strangers about Stanley's birthday. Goldberg immediately suggests that they should arrange a birthday party in honour of Stanley. The two intruders settle down in the room allotted for them. Stanley returns and asks Meg many questions about the intruders. But she is unable to quench the curiosity of Stanley as she tells him that she knows nothing about the two men. She asks him to open the parcel lying on the sideboard. On opening it Stanley finds a boy's drum which, according to Meg, has been brought as the birthday present for him. Act I ends with Stanley who begins the drum beating with the drumsticks at first gently and rhythmically and then loudly and almost savagely as if he were in a rage under the influence of some demon.

Act II opens with a dialogue between Stanley and McCann who discuss the birthday party to be held at night. Stanley is uninterested in the proposed birthday party as he feels some impending danger from the two intruders. After a while there is a conversation between Stanley and Goldberg. This is most central to the play as
the two intruders gruel the young bearded Stanley by asking him all sorts of perplexing questions about his past. The birthday party begins through which Goldberg and McCann torture Stanley psychologically. This torture results in Stanley attempting to strangle Meg and Goldberg assaults Lulu sexually. From the conversation between Stanley and the two intruders we perceive a sense of mystery as the former ask the latter embarrassing questions:

MCCANN. Why did you leave the organization? ... Why did you betray us?

GOLDBERG. You hurt me, Webber. You are playing a dirty game.... Where did you come from?

STANLEY. Somewhere else. (48)

The aforesaid lines do not project any clear picture. One is curious to know from which place the two intruders have come. Secondly we do not know why they ask embarrassing questions. Thirdly, the word ‘betrayal’ connotes the earlier intimacy between Stanley and the two intruders. The expression ‘a dirty game’ reflects the checkmating behaviour of both the parties. The most puzzling of the expressions is the answer given by ‘Somewhere else’ leads us to an unknown destination. Philosophically speaking, one doesn’t know one’s own place of coming and going. Thus this conversation acquires ontological significance.

Secondly the two intruders would try to inflict pain on Stanley. They stand over him but Stanley kicks Goldberg in the stomach. McCann seizes a chair and lifts it above Stanley’s head. Stanley seizes a chair and covers his head with it. Instead of tormenting the two intruders Stanley attempts to strangle Meg and makes
a sexual assault on Lulu. This evokes black humour which is a tenet of a black comedy.

The scene of action of Act III is the same boarding house, morning, paralleling the first scene of the play, after the birthday party. The conversation between Meg and Petey draws our attention to the important differences revealing the aftermath of the party. Meg draws the attention of her husband towards the broken drum. Petey who was not present at the party and had returned from the club late in the night, had formed some vulgar idea that Stanley was being subjected to some kind of torture. Meg tells her husband that she would go out to buy a few things from the market for their breakfast. After a while both see a black car parked outside their building. Petey tells his wife that the car must be Goldberg’s. She asks her husband whether there is a wheelbarrow in the car. This really surprises Petey why Goldberg should have a wheelbarrow. Goldberg suddenly comes down from upstairs. When Meg stirs out to market, Goldberg tells Petey that Stanley is unwell and that only a qualified doctor can exactly decide his mental condition. He also says that the birthday celebration proved too much for Stanley and caused a nervous breakdown. McCann also joins and tells Petey about the horrible condition of Stanley. In the meanwhile Lulu comes downstairs after having spent the night, regretting her participation in unnamed sexual activities with Goldberg. Lulu leaves, and McCann brings in Stanley, with his broken glasses. “How are you Stan?” asks Goldberg, and then they begin to woo Stanley, promising to take care of him through a series of clichés and ultimately to make him “a new man”:

GOLDBERG. We’ll watch over you.

MCCANN. Advise you.
GOLDBERG. Give you proper care and treatment.

MCCANN. Let you use the club bar.

MCCANN. The ointment.

GOLDBERG. The hot poultice.

MCCANN. The fingerstall.

GOLDBERG. The abdomen belt.

MCCANN. The ear plugs.

GOLDBERG. The baby powder.

MCCANN. The back scratcher.

GOLDBERG. The spare tyre.

MCCANN. The stomach pump.

GOLDBERG. The oxygen tent. (82-83)

Overpowered by their rhetorical prowess, Stanley appears catatonic and does not respond. "Still the same old Stan. Come with us. Come on, boy," (85) says Goldberg. They begin to lead him out of the house toward the car waiting to take him to Monty. Petey confronts them and asks them why and where they are leading Stanley. The body language exhibited by Stanley provokes humour, sympathy, and genuine concern for him. Petey wants the intruders not to take Stanley but Goldberg and McCann take Stanley with them while Petey vacantly stares at the departing figures. The two strangers tell him that they would like to take Stanley to Monty, an asylum. The play ends with the comments of Meg after she returns from the market.

It was a lovely party. I have laughed so much for years. We had dancing and singing. And games. You should have been there. (87)
The Birthday Party has been described as a Comedy of Menace. In the words of Martin Esslin,

It is a typical example of the ‘Theatre of the Absurd.’ It includes such features as the fluidity and ambiguity of time, place, and identity and the disintegration of language.9

The play has a tautly knit structure. In Act I, Stanley, the lodger restricts movements to himself even though Meg stirs him. With the arrival of two strangers the action arouses suspense and it gains increasing importance. Soon the two strangers create a sense of frustration in the mind of Stanley. The drum beating at the end of Act I prepares the ground for violence in Act II. In fact, Act II is an extension of menace, nagging, bullying, and buffeting of Stanley by the two strangers. In the ritual of the birthday party the surface reality falls away. As in any party there is abnormal behaviour which is a good theatrical excuse for the playwright to allow a free outlet of the violence of his characters. A volley of questions leads to an exchange of blows. Words in the end do not convey truth. Violence appears to be the only truth in Pinter’s theatre. Shouting, games, singing, and frightening pervade the whole of Act II.

After considerable violence, the play leads to calm in Act III. The playwright purposefully keeps the final torture of Stanley a secret leaving us to wonder how Goldberg and McCann have produced the new Stanley. Stanley returns to the oblivion from which he had sprung, leaving no trace on the family of Petey and Meg except the possibility of memories as false as Meg’s view of Stanley’s concert and the party. The play ends with the leading of Stanley to an asylum which serves as ritual sacrifice to the play. Thus, the play has a well-knit structure. Act I
concerns itself with the arrival of Goldberg and McCann and Stanley's evident fear of them. Act II deals with the breakdown of Stanley and the birthday party and Act III shows Goldberg and McCann and their removal of Stanley despite Petey's meager efforts to protect him. All this takes place in a play world that is clearly defined as real in a naturalistic sense. In other words,

The first act sounds an off-beat note of madness; in the second the note has risen to a sort of delirium; and the third act studiously refrains from the slightest hint of what the other two may have been about.10

The art of characterization in *The Birthday Party* has drawn considerable critical acclaim. One sees a skillful pattern in his art. The play begins with a pair of characters – Meg and Petey – whose placidity is disrupted by the entrance of strangers. The audience sees the psychic stability of Stanley, the protagonist breaking down as his fears, jealousies, hatreds, and loneliness emerge from the commonplace conversation. According to Billington,

The lonely lodger, the ravenous landlady, the quiescent husband: these figures, eventually to become Stanley, Meg, and Petey, sound like figures in a Donald McGill seaside postcard.11

Stanley takes refuge in a boarding house in a seaside town. With the arrival of Goldberg and McCann a state of alarm has reached. The dramatist presents these characters with a view to "Provoking the desired emotional reaction and a minimum of real human psychology."12

Stanley Webber, an erstwhile piano player in his 30s, is the substitute child for the childless mother, Meg. He also fulfils the role of a young lover. He is
A palpably Jewish name, incidentally – is a man who shores up his precarious sense of self through fantasy, bluff, violence and his own manipulative form of power-play. His treatment of Meg initially is rough, playful, teasing, ... but once she makes the fateful, mood-changing revelation – I’ve got to get things ready for the two gentlemen’ – he’s as dangerous as a cornered animal.¹³

He was apparently a great concert pianist. But he was stopped in his career by them. He says:

I had a unique touch. Absolutely unique. My father nearly came down to hear me. Well, I dropped him a card anyway. But I don’t think he could make it. No, I – I lost the address, that was it. (Pause) ... They carved me up. Carved me up. It was all arranged, it was all worked out. My next concert. Somewhere else it was.... the hall was closed, the place was shuttered up, not even a caretaker. They want me to crawl down on my bended knees. Well I can take a tip ... any day of the week. (He replaces his glasses, then looks at MEG). (23)

But the fact is unverifiable. After this failure he has regressed from adulthood to the status of a babe in arms. There is a significant hint here about how he got alienated from his father who could not attend the concert because he lost the address. Hence the frantic attempt to create the lost family. The enjoyment of this squalid idyll is shattered soon. The safety of his room is threatened by the prospect of intruders, Goldberg and McCann, who arrive purportedly on his birthday and who appear to have come looking for him, turn him apparently-innocuous birthday party organized by Meg into a nightmare.
Stanley’s life easily reflects the life of disillusionment that pervaded during the Post Second World War period. Apart from the philosophical confession, lack of communication in this modern Waste Land, it is characterized by fears and insecurities occasioned by the spread of violence in various facets of the world.

Meg is the most emotional character who is vibrant and who sustains youthful spirit. She is deeply attached to Stanley. She takes pleasure in carrying his morning cup of tea up to his room. This is her role as a mistress to the young lodger there. She gets worried when she knows that he is late for breakfast. She ruffles his hair at breakfast just to show how much she loves him. She fondles his arm when he is reading newspaper. She tells him that she has had very enjoyable afternoons with him in the room which he describes as dirty and not worth living. The prerogative speech which she makes on the birthday shows beyond any doubt, that she is emotionally involved with him. When Stanley tells her that he may have to leave the place to accept a job elsewhere she expresses her reaction thus:

Don’t you go away again, Stan. You stay here. You’ll be better off.
You stay with your old Meg. (23)

Meg provides some comic relief to the audience. She is vain about her efficiency as a housewife and cook as she thinks that her cornflakes and fried bread are very nice. She has her own high estimate of her boarding house which according to her is on the approved list. Moreover, she is vain about her appearance as she puts on a special dress for the birthday party and feels flattered when Goldberg compares her to a tulip and when he admires her appearance and deportment. Towards the end of the play she amuses us when she tells her husband that she was “belle of the ball” (87) at last night’s party.
A unique feature about Meg is her close involvement with all the other characters in the play and her inability to understand what is going on. Paradoxically she is in close proximity with other characters in the play but she is thoroughly isolated from other individuals as she has not at all understood them.

Petey’s role is minimal in the play though he serves as a contrast to his garrulous wife. He doesn’t complain about the breakfast which Meg serves to him. He tunes with his wife and replies that the cornflakes are indeed nice. During the birthday party he dissociates himself by telling them that he has to go to his club to play chess. When he returns from the club he notices darkness everywhere and finds that in Stanley’s room something untoward is going on. He asks Goldberg next morning how Stanley is doing. He is told that Stanley has suffered a nervous breakdown. He feels genuinely concerned about Stanley’s condition and gets relieved when Goldberg promises to take Stanley to a doctor. He is interested in gardening particularly in growing peas in his kitchen garden. When he goes into the garden for a few minutes Stanley is subjected by his persecutors to another troublesome exercise. Petey returns from his garden and finds that the two men take away Stanley with them. He tries to stop them from doing so but Goldberg says that Stanley needs special treatment and that they will take him to Monty for that purpose. In a state of helplessness he utters a word of encouragement to Stanley and appeals to the two strangers not to harm Stanley.

The playwright has a specific purpose as he employs the system of parallels and contrasts to make his play powerful. In the placid domain, characters like Meg, Petey, and Stanley remain. A contrast to this, there are characters like Goldberg and McCann. Stanley is in a state of bliss. But the divine will is against this. A word
about his state of bliss. In the very opening of the play it is revealed that he takes refuge in a lodge run by Meg and Petey. By profession he is a pianist who uses to play the piano on the pier with a group of musicians but now he is out of work for some time. He tells Meg that he may like to take up his job of a pianist in the big cities of the world. In his solo concert in lower Edmonton his performance won acclaim throughout the country. He is ready to give second concert that has not materialized because of some trouble mongers. But he is quite at home in the lodge maintained by the old couple.

Though Stanley appears to be secluded and at the same time complacent in the presence of Meg all is not well with him. His reaction to the birthday present given to him by Meg is an instance for this. Moreover, he is not very enthusiastic when Meg proposes his birthday party. When he receives a boy’s drum as a birthday present he at first beats it with the drumstick slowly and rhythmically and then suddenly begins to beat it in a wild and uncontrollable manner. In fact, Meg is dismayed by his sadistic behaviour.

Stanley is totally indifferent to the very idea of the birthday party. He wants to go out of the house as he apprehends some danger from the two intruders. He tells McCann that he had always led a quiet and peaceful life. He slowly asks the intruders about the purpose of their visit. The two men hurl volleys of questions on him. Stanley smells that the two men are his enemies or the agents of his enemies. The interrogation of the intruders adds mystery to the play. One doesn’t see any connection between one question and another but it shows that Stanley has committed some crime and that he is haunted by a sense of guilt. For example,
MCCANN. Why did you leave the organization? ... Why did you betray us?

GOLDBERG. What have you done with your wife? .... Why did you kill your wife? ... Why did you never get married? ...

Webber! Why did you change your name? ... Do you recognise an external force?

MCCANN. You contaminate womankind. (48-50)

All these questions show not only Stanley’s sense of guilt but also the existential plight which he may be experiencing. Naturally existential philosophers question why good persons like Stanley suffer at the hands of the evil doers like Goldberg and McCann. So they went to the extent of stating that God is dead. (Read Nietzsche’s treatise on Existentialism)

Other characters in the play have a low estimate of Stanley. Lulu calls him ‘a wash out’ and the same term is used by Goldberg. But the playwright calls him a free man.

He is not answerable to anybody and he does no body any harm. By opting out of traditional responsibilities he is exercising his freedom.14

It is interesting to apply a psychoanalytic study of the mind of Stanley. His behaviour during the climax of the birthday party – he attacks Meg and appears to assault Lulu – gives rise to a variety of interesting psychoanalytical interpretations of his psyche. In fact, he gives a full expression of his psyche with his fear of the father (Goldberg is clearly a father figure) the love/hate resentment of the mother (Meg) and the love/hate resentment of adult sexuality (manifest in Lulu). Pinter has
said that Stanley has lost adult comprehension and reverses to the childhood malice and mischief, as his first shelter. This is not to deny the force of the subconscious and the deep rooted psychological motives which are beyond Stanley's control.

Goldberg and McCann are the two intruders who deliberately inflict pain on Stanley. They are a dramatic duo who operates in tandem. One is a Jew and the other is an Irishman and they constantly draw our attention to their racial characteristics. They "Represent not only the West's most autocratic religions, but its two most persecuted races."\(^{15}\) The playwright is critical of these two characters. As he comments mercilessly thus:

\begin{quote}
Dying, rotting, scabrous, the decade spiders, the flower of our society. They know their way around. Our mentors. Our ancestry. Them. Fuck 'em.\(^{16}\)
\end{quote}

It appears Pinter regards them as evil payers. In the play they are fully realized characters. They seem to be acting on behalf of the dark forces of social orthodoxy.

In the beginning Goldberg is relaxed and is full of confidence. But McCann is nervous, uncertain and introverted. They are not sure about their visit to boarding house. Somehow they bring an aura of suspense and menace. Their behaviour, their speech and their prejudices go everything to their social background.

Goldberg is a Jew who professes traditional Jewish values and principles. He is a blend of an ethnic and communal consciousness and a secular and almost cosmopolitan in his outlook. He employs certain Jewish terms and phrases that reveal his hypocrisy. He encourages his friend McCann not to grow nervous when they arrive at Meg's boarding house. He tells him that the secret of relaxation lies in deep breathing. Barney his uncle, helped him by taking him several times to seaside
resorts. He feels that he is supposed to execute his job in a flawless fashion. He explains to McCann that his job is now different from the earlier work. He doesn’t hesitate to suggest to Meg to arrange for Stanley’s birthday. He then pays a compliment to Meg by comparing her to a tulip. He always speaks of his mother who used to address him Simey and used to give him hot food when he returned from his walk.

Goldberg is known for his eloquence and presence of mind. He says that a birthday is a great occasion which must be properly celebrated. A birthday is like getting up in the morning which is an exhilarating experience. He also thinks that morning gives a man an exquisite meaning. He tutors McCann in such a way that the latter tries to bully Stanley properly. The interrogation by the two acquires considerable significance. In fact, the dialogue given to Goldberg represents the lively dialogue of Pinter and it is said that Pinter’s plays live on their dialogue. Among the questions which Goldberg asks are the following:

What’s your name now?
You stink of sin.
Do you recognize an external force?
When did you last pray?
Is the number 846 possible or necessary?
Wrong! Why do you think the number 846 is necessarily possible?

(p.50)

According to John Russell Brown, “Pinter has been original to some extent and his plays are sustained by dialogue.”
Goldberg recovers his vitality and self confidence when he speaks to Lulu whose appetite he satisfies. From Lulu’s talk it is clear that he has seduced her during the night. He ridicules Lulu’s scruples and mocks at her by saying that she herself is responsible for what has happened. According to him, she took the initiative and as such she has learnt some more techniques of love making from him. When McCann asks Lulu to confess her latest sins to him, Goldberg endorses McCann’s proposal and says, “Confess. What can we lose?” (81) This single statement shows how unscrupulous he can be in handling the girls.

McCann is nervous since his appearance at the boarding house. He expresses his doubt whether he has reached the right place at all. Even Goldberg says that McCann is always nervous and excited before doing a job though he becomes as cool as a whistle when he actually does the job. McCann himself confesses

I don’t know, Nat. I’m just all right once I know what I’m doing.

When I know what I’m doing, I’m all right. (29)

McCann acknowledges his gratitude to Goldberg as he received a lot of help from him. He is anxious to know the very purpose of their visit to the boarding house. But he follows the advice of Goldberg meticulously. Sometimes he exhibits his vacant eyes and tears a sheet of newspaper into five equal strips. He mocks at Lulu and asks her to kneel down and confess her sins. He expresses his menacing attitude towards her by saying that she is no better than a prostitute as she spoils the soil with her activities. Symbolically, McCann personifies Stanley’s inner consciousness and Stanley’s hidden feeling of guilt. Like Goldberg he symbolizes retribution. He represents the evil society which takes revenge upon others.
Thus, Pinter's art of characterization has a set pattern. There is a placid character who is disrupted by the entrance of a stranger and fear, hatred, menace, emerge towards the end. This is applicable even to *The Caretaker* where a wheedling, garrulous old tramp comes to live with two neurotic brothers, one of whom underwent electro shock therapy as a mental patient. The tramp's attempts to establish himself in the household upset the precarious balance of the brothers' lives and they end up evicting him. Similarly in *The Homecoming* there is a focus on the return to his London home of a University Professor who brings his wife to meet his brothers and father. The woman's presence exposes a tangle of rage and confused sexuality in this all male household.

It is the element of dialogue that has made Pinter a significant playwright. According to critics the originality of the play derives from its language and from the fact that the action operates on more than one level. Both the language and the action are in stark contrast to the surface naturalism and ordinariness of the conventional stage setting, the sea-side boarding house. Characters in the play use language for the purpose of self-defence or domination which points to their essential insecurity and isolation.

Pinter knows how to use the language keeping in mind the characters and the situations. His musical sense which gives to his dialogue a light suppleness is an important factor in keeping the attention of the audience. For example, by varying rhythms and by repetitions he can mix speech about bus routes a growing forcefulness to which the audience can hardly fail to respond. In a conversation that is apparently concerned solely with minor details particularly in providing with breakfast to Stanley suggests unexpressed anxiety in the minds of the audience.
Towards the end of the play, the conversation between Meg and Petey also suggests some unexpressed anxiety in Meg.

MEG. The car has gone.
PETEY. Yes.
MEG. Have they gone?
PETEY. Yes.
MEG. Won’t they be in for lunch?
PETEY. No
MEG. What a shame? It is hot out. (86)

These rhythmic lines would dwell upon the anxiety of Meg. John Russell Brown aptly comments that ‘Pinter makes use of simpler strategies like the use of silence.’ He says that The Birthday Party starts with silence. The audience will wait for Petey to speak. But Pinter breaks the silence with words from an unseen source, so gathering a further curiosity. After ‘Is that you, Petey?’ A pause repeats the exploitation of theatrical vacuum and still further develops the audience’s desire for it to be filled. Pinter doesn’t let go of this tension until line six with Petey’s ‘Yes, it is me,’ and then Meg appears on the stage. He is not merely withholding information, for the repetitions of words have been carefully judged. This is indeed a basic devise that Pinter employs.’ He further says that

In the opening of the play Petey’s questions, statements and action all establish that she is called the tune; she wishes to make him acknowledge her presence and his dependence.\(^{18}\)

The pause marks silent interplay of conscious and unconscious motivations. His use of ‘pause’ is like a period, a comma, a semicolon. It is punctuation that
actors and directors would be well-advised to follow. It adds to an emotional understanding, what is really going on which is always the job of the actor in any given script. Anyone who ignores pauses doesn’t know what exactly should go on. Pinter seemed to have given the following piece of advice to his actors.

Follow the pauses. Do them. Don’t add more pauses. Don’t be an idiot. If you feel uncomfortable during the pauses that the whole damn point.19

The following is an example from The Birthday Party.

_She exits, left._ STANLEY stands. _He then goes to the mirror and looks in it. He goes into the kitchen, takes off his glasses and begins to wash his face. A pause._ Enter, by the backdoor, GOLDBERG and MCCANN. MCCANN carries two suitcases, GOLDBERG a briefcase. _They halt inside the door, then walk downstage._ STANLEY, _wiping his face glimpses their backs through the hatch._ GOLDBERG and MCCANN _look round the room._ STANLEY _slips on his glasses, sidles through the kitchen door and out of the back door._

MCCANN. _Is this it?_ GOLDBERG. _This is it?_ MCCANN. _Are you sure?_ GOLDBERG. _Sure I’m sure._ (26-27)

The point to be remembered here is that all is not well with Stanley. So he halts for a while. This easily makes the way for the two intruders to make their operations.
Pinter creates atmosphere by the theatrical nature of words: rhythms and quantity. When the visitors interrogate the lodger what they see is contradictory or illogical, but how they say it, and Stanley’s inarticulateness or silence, have theatrical meaning. They accuse him of killing his wife and not marrying, of not paying rent and of contaminating womankind, of picking his nose and of being a traitor to the cloth. Stanley hardly has an opportunity to get a word in edge ways. Clearly the scene’s effectiveness is unrelated to causal logic.

Three characters are speaking in this interrogation episode, but the rhythmic structure is a single sequence. The horror of this remarkable scene, and its impact on the audience, is achieved by the deliberate antithesis of verbal non-sequitur against the remorselessly mounting insistence of the verbal rhythm.20

Here language is used theatrically not referentially, as it is in the duo’s final scene with Stanley where the stage direction says, ‘they begin to woo him, gently and with relish.’ (Act I 92) In these speeches two voices speak with one rhythm.

Pinter is unique in the use of trivial and mundane details like parties, toast, films, telephone, that adds Chekhovian quality to his dialogue. He doesn’t like to show the elements of urban life, but he shows day-to-day realities in the little rooms we live in. In the very opening of the play there are trivial details regarding the news that appeared in The Times. Meg asks her husband what he is reading.

MEG. What are you reading?

PETEY. Someone has just had a baby.

MEG. Oh! They haven’t! Who?

PETEY. Some girl.
MEG. Who, Petey, who?

PETEY. I don't think you would know her.

MEG. What's her name?

PETEY. Lady Mary Splatt.

MEG. I don't know her.

PETEY. No. (11)

Here the dialogue seems to be trivial but meaningful. The point that is to be insisted upon is that elderly persons waste their time in knowing the gender of a baby. A trivial detail represents the couple's strong tasteless life. John Russell Brown says:

Pinter's use of mundane detail adds the quality of Chekhov's writing to Pinter. In stage dialogue triviality can thus impress character intimately and subtly and can express unconscious reactions, especially in situations which obviously call for words of greater import.²¹

Pinter's most obvious devices for invoking the right attention for his plays are menace and muddle. Stanley tells Meg a story of men coming with a van containing a wheelbarrow and knocking on her door and then, immediately, Lulu knocks on the door. This use of muddle makes the audience very inquisitive about what exactly has happened. They are perplexed with Lulu who has called on Stanley. Sometimes, the repeated facts about people and places are clearly contradictory. At other times the places and names are left vague: Who is Monty—if he is anybody—to whom Stanley is taken at the end of the play? Or a doubt is thrown on an apparently simple fact by a confusion in related facts. The intruders admonish Petey and take the crestfallen Stanley to an asylum. The audience is
puzzled and therefore they would like to know whether Stanley will be taken to a psychiatrist at all.

The trivial is especially revelatory when it is odd and when it seems like a funny mistake or even a conscious joke. As a neo-realist Pinter is fond of odd turns of conversation, odd habits of speech, and odd mistakes. The playwright fastens on a pun or a trivial phrase with a suggestive connotation and then builds it into a joke.

McCann sings (in a full voice)

Oh! The Garden of Eden has vanished, they say,

But I know the lie of it still. (61)

This is immediately followed by a piece of dialogue with the repetition and developing innuendo of ‘I always ‘old with ‘avin ‘it’:

MEG (raising). I want to play a game.

GOLDBERG. A game?

LULU. What game?

MEG. Any game.

LULU (jumping up). Yes, let us play a game.

GOLDBERG. What game?

MCCANN (who had sung of Eden). Hide and Seek.

LULU. Blind man’s buff.

MEG. Yes.

GOLDBERG. You want to play blind man’s buff?

LULU AND MEG. Yes! (61)

Goldberg acts here as a kind of stooge in the musical hall, a feed: “What game ... You want to play blind man’s buff?” He gives the line so that others can bounce of
it. This effect is given an unusual interest in that Goldberg proves himself to be the most powerful mysterious and literally large person on the stage: The leading music hall performers may be the puppets of his feed.

Pinter has taken recourse to using repetition, suggestion, and pun. In *The Birthday Party* Meg asks if Stanley has enjoyed the fried bread she has given him and is really asking another question:

MEG. Was it nice?

STANLEY. What.

MEG. The Fried bread

STANLEY. Succulent.

MEG. You shouldn’t say that word.

STANLEY. What word?

MEG. That word you said.

STANLEY. What, succulent – ?

MEG. Don’t say it!

STANLEY. What is the matter with it?

MEG. You shouldn’t say that word to a married woman. (17)

Here the mistake of a word is the basic joke and it is also an error that reveals.

Like Samuel Beckett, Pinter uses jokes in the trivial phrases of dialogue. In the opening of Act II the conversation between Stanley and McCann provokes laughter with their trivial matter of their names.

STANLEY. Someone out there?

MCCANN. I don’t think we have met.

STANLEY. No, we haven’t.
MCCANN. My name is McCann.

STANLEY. Staying here long.

MCCANN. Not long. What’s your name? (37)

Stanley knows that the two intruders have reached the lodge. He pretends as if he doesn’t know them at all. Still he offers to converse with McCann. Immediately McCann pretends as though they were strangers. He introduces himself as McCann. Stanley knows full well that McCann has arrived just now. But still he asks him whether he has been staying there long. Immediately McCann replies that he has not been staying there long. Instead he asks for the name of the former. Here one is provoked to laughter as each one lays stress on trivial details and indifferent answers.

Pinter not only writes dialogue that presents both conscious and unconscious thoughts behind the words but he is also skillful at keeping several flows of consciousness alive in a single conversation and making them apparent to the audience. Stanislavski calls it the sub-text beneath the words of a play. According to him,

Sub-text implies the consciousness beneath the words of the text, giving them life and a basis for existing a web of innumerable, varied inner patterns, all sorts figments of the imagination, inner movements, objects of attention, smaller and greater truths and a belief in them, adaptations, adjustments and other similar elements. The sub-text usually makes us say the words we do in a play.22

This concept helps an actor to recognize the importance of presenting the apparent trivialities of the dialogue with an inward or subconscious accuracy. Even Pinter
made the following comment on multiple and conflicting sub-text in understanding his dialogue.

The speech we hear is an indication of that we don’t hear. It is a necessary avoidance, a violent, sly,anguished or mocking smoke screen which keeps the other in its place.23

Stanley is a man of many words. He can readily describe his day dreams of a reception with a champagne or of a youth spent in a ‘quiet, thriving community,’ and he can insult his landlady accurately. But when Pinter wishes to show Stanley’s deeper, inarticulate feelings at the end of Act I, he gives him action rather than speech.

He hangs the drum around his neck, taps it gently with the sticks, then marches around the table, beating it regularly. MEG, pleased, watches him. Still beating it regularly, he begins to go round the table a second time. Half-way round the beat becomes erratic, uncontrolled. MEG expresses dismay. He arrives at her chair, banging the drum, his face and the drumbeat now savage and possessed. (36)

This is very much a contemporary dramatic device. In a more conventional play the dramatist often seems to abdicate to his actors for the climax of a scene, as in the stage direction at the end of Act II of John Osborne’s Look back in Anger.

*She slaps his face savagely. An expression of horror and disbelief floods his face. But it drains away, and all that is left is pain. His hand goes up to his head, and a muffled cry of despair escapes him.*
Helena tears his hand away, and kisses him passionately, drawing him down beside her.\textsuperscript{24}

Here there is no drum to give size to the incident or extend the time of its duration. The actor must try to catch the proper expression of horror and disbelief and then let it drain away to leave only pain; and he must catch the attention of the audience with this merely facial play.

Another instance may be quoted of Meg’s first actions in relation to Stanley. She invites him, as she would to a child, to come down to breakfast. She runs to his room, rousing him, while he shouts and she laughs wildly. Finally Stanley enters – not a boy, but a spectacled, groggy man in his 30s, disheveled, unshaven and wearing his pyjama jacket. Underlying these activities the sub-text is that someone makes Stanley do what he doesn’t want to do – a comic foreshadowing of a non-comic resolution. Furthermore, Stanley’s comic dissatisfaction with his reward, breakfast, hints at a more disturbing dissatisfaction to come. This attempt to make someone go where he doesn’t wish to go becomes a typical idea that pervades the play. Meg suggests that Stanley go shopping with her but he refuses. Lulu urges him to go outside for a walk but he refuses. At the end he is forced to leave the house, not merely his room – an unpleasant departure this time. Goldberg and McCann say they will take him to Monty but do not explain who Monty is or what he represents. That Pinter doesn’t have them do so indicates that the specific reason for his removal is unimportant. The dramatic point is that they take him, in contrast to his going of his own volition. His removal,

The theatrical climax of this leit-motif, resembles a symphonic finale of musical theme, not a discursive explanation of a literary theme.\textsuperscript{25}
For Pinter gesture is a precise and powerful expression, not a way, passing the whole play over to the actor; it is a language which he tries to make precise. Sometimes he links gestures with dialogue so that they make a more subtle impression. The point can be so fine that a gesture has to be repeated frequently or sustained for a long time. McCann sits down twice to tear sheets of newspapers into equal strips. The first time he does so the audience may see only an intriguing piece of business but McCann subsequently rebukes Stanley for touching the strips and in Act III his fearful concentration in tearing more newspaper communicates itself to Goldberg and its effect is to bring upon McCann a revealing angry rebuke. McCann has been concentrating his attention. This expresses a need to escape from consciousness of fears. Similar situation can be seen in Waiting for Godot where Vladimir fiddles with his hat, at first inexplicably. But with his repetition this becomes an expression of the uncertainty of his attempt to live by conscious effort. Similarly Estragon's repeated struggles with his boots show in the end of Waiting for Godot how he becomes individually responsible through pain. These gestures are no larger than ordinary behaviour but are slightly odd. They need explanation and the audience is encouraged to consider them like puzzles until the slow exposition of the play reveals the inner need that explains and gives power to them.

The greatness of Pinter lies in his use of gestures which acquire eloquence as words. He is of the opinion that a character is what he is by virtue of his unknown desires and needs as well. In other words he feels that human nature can reflect the unspoken and the unspeakable with more clarity of form and continuance of the pressure than dialogue of statement or the indirect dialogue of apparent insignificance. Osborne directs Alison to stand mutely ironing while Jim shows off
his aggressive nature. Pinter achieves this through the interplay of his words and actions. The crude device of the drum is exceptional.

The originality of Pinter lies in his style the aim of which is to reveal the varying consciousness of his characters; to understand all he writes and assess his achievement. Even the interest of a play’s action is dependent on the half hidden nature of the characters’ moment by moment involvement. In spite of exciting situations that are not always developed the main effect is to give a developing knowledge of the characters. In his plays any slight change of situation serves to effect a change in the audiences’ awareness, to make half perceived revelations click into a place. His dialogue is contrived so that when radically new situation is at last presented the audience has already sensed the subtle and slow developing moments which make it inevitable.

Pinter’s dialogue is characterized by a questioning game which features both domineering and a reluctant speaker. Here the second player is usually rendered mute by the hostile questioning of the first and the questioning itself is often shared out between two or more interrogators viz. Goldberg and McCann, Meg and Petey. This is the game of questioning to gain ascendancy and

It employs what might be called the rhetorical mode of interrogation. The rules are similar to those laid down by questions and commands, a game that was once very popular in the 17th century. But which has since become obsolete. The aim is for one or more persons to address a series of absurd questions and commands to an opponent, the loser being the partner who is eventually most flummoxed. The rhetorical mode typically involves a staged climax of interrogation
which is often preceded by an elaborate ritual of standing up and being made to sit down. The hostilities in fact open before the interrogation begins as each player tries to force his opponent to sit down so that the interrogating party can assert its physical dominance and establish itself as a matter of the game. In Act II of The Birthday Party there is a tense exchange between Stanley and his interrogators about who is going to sit down. Stanley is reduced to a gibbering wreck by the combined inquisitioning of Goldberg and McCann.

The naming of the play has drawn some attention of the critics. True to its title The Birthday Party contains a birthday party – for Stanley who insists it is not his birthday. Birthday not only means the anniversary of one’s birth, it also means the day of one’s birth, and in The Birthday Party the celebration of the former helps to create the latter. The intruders turn Stanley into what McCann calls ‘a new man.’ At their hands he is reborn, made into a different kind of person on a birthday that becomes a birth-day.

The play is also called a black comedy because of its menace. When Stanley hears of two visitors he apprehensively questions Meg about them, paces the room, insists they will not come. Pinter doesn’t explain why he is nervous. What matters is that he is nervous. When Goldberg and McCann arrive Stanley peeks at them through the kitchen serving hatch and sneaks out through the rear door. Mystery and menace increase when McCann asks Goldberg if they are in the right house for he saw no number on the gate. Goldberg says “I wasn’t looking for a number” (28). They intensify when Goldberg questions Meg about her lodger and upon learning it is lodger’s birthday, decides thoughtfully that a party should celebrate the event. So they say “We’ll give him a party” (32). No reason is offered. What matters is that
Goldberg's decision is deliberative and that he immediately assumes command of the household. After he and McCann go to their rooms Stanley questions Meg about the new comers. Upon hearing that one is named Goldberg he responds slowly sitting at the table. When she asks if he knows them he doesn't reply - then or later. What the play shows is that their presence and Goldberg's name disturb him.

Even in Act II where the actual party culminates sinister atmosphere pervades. Seemingly to amuse himself McCann tears a sheet of newspaper into vertical strips and then when Stanley isn't allowed to touch the paper we become awestruck. This scene with McCann is full of hidden menace, with odd little touches like having each of them whistle alternate snatches of a tune while the other speaks. The whistling continuous through several lines of dialogue. When Stanley tries to leave, McCann forces him to stay, without actually using any violence, but indicating that he will if necessary. Stanley's guilt and anxiety are cleverly sketched in creating some doubt in our minds whether Goldberg and McCann are intrinsically dangerous to him. He makes a pathetic effort, first of all to convince McCann that he isn't the man they are looking for and then, when that fails, to make a friend of him. He also tries to get rid of Goldberg by pretending to be the manager of the boarding house and saying they don't have a room for him. Next appears the horrible bullying of Stanley by the two intruders.

One sees Kafkaesque sequences in this absurdist play. Goldberg and McCann pronounce that Stanley is dead. Critics give much importance to the circumstances that lead to the metaphorical death of Stanley. A few examples of verbal assault are
MCCANN. You betrayed the organization. ...

GOLDBERG. When did you last wash up a cup? (48-49)

One is a Jew and another is a Catholic and as such they have undervalued the sheer punch effects of dialogue, as in Goldberg's thumping, hissing speech on whether the No.846 is necessarily possible or only necessarily necessary. Here Goldberg backed by McCann is to goad Stanley's dormant sense of responsibility toward others: 'his old mum' and perhaps 'a fiancé' he left in the lurch; 'an external force' he must acknowledge; the fellow members of his 'trade,' his 'society,' and his 'breed'; all the people in the Sartrean sense of hell which is life outside. After provoking his guilt to the point that he finally screams, the menacers consider their preliminary task of killing the old Stanley done. Goldberg tells him "You're dead. You can't live, you can't think, you can't love. You're dead ... You're nothing but an odour!" (52)

The play lives on suspense. Act I develops the play's chief suspense builder: the secret why Goldberg has come. Artifice showing to the extent of parody, Pinter rigs an improbable moment of privacy in the Boles' living room for McCann to question his boss about the job at hand. Goldberg's long reply "the main issue is a singular issue ... Certain elements, however, might well approximate in points of procedure to some of your other activities" (30) etc. is a classic example of the deliberately frustrating say nothing dodge. In Act II, one sees conflict in its climax through an adeptly contrived pattern of rising action. Stanley confronts the stooge McCann, and then the 'top banana' Goldberg, then both of the conspirators, until at last, Meg and Lulu arrive for their own selfish reasons. The ensuing climax cleverly combines a discovery – of the secret about Goldberg's presence and a reversal – of
Stanley's fortunes. According to Charles A. Carpenter, "The play is virtually over except for a few explanations of what happened and why." Act III consists largely of people telling each other just that. The left over falling action merely creates enough stage movement to group and regroup the characters conveniently.

The play can be interpreted as the presentation of an alienated individual in modern society. The idea of some crime or misdeed in the past coming to haunt the present is very old in drama. An element of retribution or justice, even revenge lies behind the action. We don't know for certain what Stanley has done, and he puts up what resistance he can against the two intruders who demand justice. It is clear that Goldberg and McCann have come to get Stanley for some reason and the play invites us to consider what he has done to deserve this assault. The sheer range of accusation levelled at Stanley during the interrogation in Act II, from the particular to the absurd, widens the issue. Instead of the tragic figure confronted by his mistake Stanley seems more of a persecuted victim, and as such he relates to "Another theme of modern literature which concerns the individual and society, and the individual's sense of guilt."28

One can bring about Joseph K. the protagonist of Kafka's *The Trial* where the protagonist was arrested without having done anything wrong. Joseph K. also confesses before an examining magistrate:

There is no doubt that behind all the utterances of this court, and therefore behind my arrest and examination, there stands a great organization ... and the purpose of this great organization is to arrest innocent persons and start proceedings against them.29
Similarly Stanley who faces a sort of an arrest on his birthday by the two intruders represents the establishment. This only shows that the individual has become increasingly alienated and distanced from the centres of power. Arthur Miller too comments on the power that has operated against the individual in the modern world. Surprisingly in *The Birthday Party* the individual is crushed below the weight of social expectations rather than specific tyranny. Like Willy Loman who cannot live up to the American dream of material success, Stanley is never fully aware of what he has done wrong.

A few critics have considered *The Birthday Party* as metaphor. In a letter to his director, Pinter writes:

> We have agreed; the hierarchy, the Establishment, the arbiters, the socio-religious monsters arrive to effect alteration and censure upon a member of the club who has discarded responsibility ... towards himself and others.\(^\text{30}\)

This only shows the allegorical dimension which serves partly the purpose of a metaphor. Goldberg and McCann represent Judaeo-Christian tradition that demands conformity towards family, state, and church. This doesn’t seem to go well with Stanley. He has done the following for his suffering. He appears to be lazy, unkempt, and self-indulgent. Moreover he has the indeterminate nature of the past. We never learn what he might have actually done to attract the attention of Goldberg and McCann. There are some tantalizing connections which operate like poetic imagery linking Stanley and Goldberg. For instance, Goldberg talks of his uncle Barney who had a house just outside Basingstoke. Later when Stanley pleads to McCann, he says “I’ve explained to you, damn you, that all those years I lived in
Basingstoke I never stepped outside the door” (42). Similarly we cannot miss the connection between this.

STANLEY. Ever been anywhere near Maidenhead?
MCCANN. No.
STANLEY. There's a Fuller's tea shop. I used to have my tea there.
MCCANN. I don't know it.
STANLEY. And a Boots Library. I seem to connect you with the High Street. (39)

After sometime, Goldberg refers to ‘A little Austin, tea in Fullers, a library book from Boots, and I'm satisfied’ (56). These cross references serve a purpose as they implicitly connect Stanley with Goldberg and McCann in the past.

But not precisely so. The effect is surreal. It contributes to how Goldberg and McCann may be regarded imaginatively as figments of Stanley's subconscious guilt as well as stage people.\(^{31}\)

Goldberg makes it explicitly clear about his inevitable arrival. This obtains even in Pinter's poem *A View of the Party* which makes a direct comment on this.

The thought that Goldberg was
A man to dread and know
Jarred Stanley in the blood,
When, still, he heard his name...
For Stanley had no home.
Only where Goldberg was.
This suggests quite strongly that Goldberg is part of Stanley's consciousness and even conscience. He plays the role of Ariel, a character in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* who is regarded as a part of Prospero's consciousness.

PROSPERO. Come with a thought. I thank thee, Ariel; come.

*Enter Ariel.*

ARIEL. Thy thoughts I cleave too. What's thy pleasure? 

Goldberg is a fictional stage character, realized by an actor — a real presence in the room — but he is also symbolic. In the words of Katherine Worth,

Pinter brilliantly conveys the suggestion that the inquisitors are unreal beings, a projection of Stanley's obscure dread, without quite destroying the possibility of their being taken as real; this is what makes them so alarming.

Certainly their interrogation of Stanley in Act II and their reconstruction of him in Act III show them to be the agents of an establishment but their own inner fears are also exposed and this keeps them in the realm of naturalism.

Certain unanswered questions concerning the background of the characters boggle the readers. For example, Stanley experiences feelings of guilt when he hears about the arrival of two visitors. It seems clear that he has run away from something and has sought refuge with Meg and Petey. In his room he does nothing but exists. The one clear fact about his past would seem to be that he once played the piano. Meg has seen him doing so. He even talks of it himself. But it is not clear why he has given up his vocation as a pianist. As a responsible artist in society he has discarded his responsibility towards himself and others. As he has opted out, society may take revenge upon him.
There are many doubts regarding the issue of identity of Stanley in the play. ‘Who we are?’ and ‘Do we wish to be known by others?’ remain unanswered in the play. Pinter wrote

A character on the stage who can present no convincing argument or information as to his past experience, his present behaviour or his aspirations, nor give a comprehensive analysis of his motives, is as legitimate and as worthy of attention as one who, alarmingly, can do all these things. The more acute the experience the less articulate its expression.\(^{34}\)

The aforesaid lines can convincingly be applied to \textit{The Birthday Party}. For instance, at the end of the play Meg insists that she was the belle of the ball.

\textbf{MEG.} Oh, it’s true. I was.

\textit{Pause}

I know I was. (87)

The audience knows full well that her utterances do not accord with what we have actually seen. It is true to her but not true to the audience. Similarly Stanley relates the story of his successful piano concert – to himself (stage direction) – but Meg is listening. The story is not very detailed but Meg while recounting it to Goldberg submits an incorrect version.

\textbf{MEG (falteringly).} In … a big hall. His father gave him champagne.

But then they locked the place up and he couldn’t get up. The caretaker had gone home. So he had to wait until the morning he could get out. (32)
Here Meg misrepresents the details of Stanley. In fact Stanley says that his father didn’t attend the concert. The confusion is further compounded because we have no way of knowing whether Stanley was telling the truth in the first place. Even in the text the following lines illustrate this.

> We are faced with the immense difficulty, if not the impossibility, of verifying the past. I don’t mean merely years ago, but yesterday, this morning.\(^{35}\)

Goldberg’s identity is really confusing. He constantly refers to his past as a time of golden days (What days, what a life), solid and reliable family support (I had a wife. What a wife) complete happiness and success. He further says “and that is why I have reached my position, McCann. Because I have always been as fit as a fiddle. My motto. Work hard and play hard. Not a day’s illness.” But his confidence doesn’t last long. Towards the end of Act III in a mood of desperation he says “I don’t know why, but I feel knocked out. I feel a bit ... it’s uncommon for me” (76). The past is made more confusing by Goldberg’s array of names – McCann calls him Nat, but in the past called Simey and also Benny.

With regard to McCann similar puzzle can be seen. He is referred to as Seamus and Dermot. He is riddled with fanatical prejudices. He becomes sentimental when drunk. He has only been unfrocked six months. He exudes menace but is also insecure. According to Goldberg,

> McCann, what are you so nervous about? Pull yourself together.

> Everywhere you go these days it’s like a funeral. (28)

Similar confusion obtains in the case of Lulu, a girl of little depth. She is drawn to Goldberg partly by her undisclosed past.
Do you think you knew when I was a little girl? (59)

She says,

You’re the dead image of the first man I ever loved. (61)

Stanley is the most central to the play but he is not permitted to be himself, whatever and whoever he is. Goldberg and McCann effectively destroy his identity and transform him into the visual representative of respectable society – ‘dressed in a dark well-cut suit and white collar’ (81). In appearance he is completely altered and he has become dehumanized because he has lost the definitive mark of identity, the power of human speech.

To sum up, we may say that The Birthday Party is Pinter’s full-length play, though with certain ambiguities, concerns itself with the theme of alienation and absurdity in life. This Ionesco’s technique of radical estrangement recurs overtly in Pinter’s next play The Caretaker.

The Caretaker like The Birthday Party, deals with the theme of absurdity and also alienation. This is certainly an extension of The Birthday Party. Pinter himself wrote

I went into a room and saw one person standing up and one person sitting down, and a few weeks later I wrote The Room. I went into another room and saw two people sitting down, and a few years later I wrote The Birthday Party. I looked through a door into a third room, and saw two people standing up and I wrote The Caretaker.

The Caretaker launched Pinter as one of the most powerful voices in contemporary theatre. It is the story of three men. Mick is the proprietor of a shabby house in the countryside. Aston, his brother, a mild-mannered handyman, is
always busy with something but never accomplishes anything. Finally there is Davies, a homeless tramp, some kind of a hobo rescued by Aston who allows him to stay with him in the derelict house and after a while, asks him if he wants a job of a caretaker. Davies is very reluctant and finds petty excuses to postpone the decision of becoming the caretaker. The drama evolves in a series of confrontations among these three characters as they try to establish relationships with one another. The result of these confrontations is the expulsion of Davies, the old man. The play also explores

Pinter's recurring themes -- an isolated character, an unexpected 'intruder,' a power struggle that threatens to turn violent. Words are a negotiating tool, a weapon or a cover-up. At times the audience is not certain what to think or whom to believe.38

The Caretaker is a perfectly straightforward play, but the treatment of it is only near-conventional. John Arden describes this Pinter method as one of writing with the corners never quite joined up: the inconsistencies are there, but never absolutely contradictory. He makes an observation:

Taken purely at its face value this play is a study of the unexpected strength of family ties against an intruder. That in itself is a subject deep enough to carry many layers of meaning without our having to superimpose any extra scheme of symbols ... It also tells us a great deal that is uncomfortable about the workings of the English mind today.39

John Russell Taylor offers the following meaning of the play. Mick tries to get through to his brother, interest him in something. Davies is the first man who
has shown some interest on Aston since Aston left the mental home and Mick is jealously aroused, wants to get rid of him. Mick realizes he can only do so if Aston voluntarily rejects Davies. So he leads Davies into believing he will hire him as caretaker when the house is redecorated. Davies falls into the trap by trying to play off one brother against the other, by rejecting his real friend, Aston, for Mick, even going so far as telling Mick his brother is mad. Mick now rejects Davies, who tries to become reconciled with Aston, but it is too late. Aston has now determined to build his shed, and there is no place in his life for Davies, who has to leave towards the end of the play.40

The scene of action of Act I is West London in an upstairs room of a derelict house. The room is crammed with miscellaneous objects like

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.... To the right of the window, a mound: a kitchen sink, a step-ladder, a coal bucket, a lawn-mower, a shopping trolley, boxes, sideboard drawers.41

For Wilson Knight, “The room is a meaningless jumble, yet, looked at closely, the junk in the room is not without significance.”42 There is a gas stove nearby where a statue of the Buddha is placed. Mick, Aston’s brother calls this junk. Mick, a man in his late twenties, is sitting on a bed silently looking at the objects around him. When he hears muffled voices and a door bang downstairs, he makes a hasty exit. He is not to be seen again until the very end of the act. Two men – Aston and Davies – enter the room. Aston, a man in his early 30s,
Wears an old tweed overcoat, and under it a thin shabby dark-blue pinstripe suit, single breasted, with a pullover and faded shirt and tie appears. It is clear that Aston rescued Davies from a fight in the café where he had been working as an odd job man. We soon learn that Davies has been sacked for making a commotion in the café. Aston is in-charge of the house but lives in this one room. He welcomes Davies by offering him tobacco, a pair of shoes, a bed for the night and even some money. He plans to clear the garden and build a shed. Davies says that he is waiting for the weather to improve so that he can rush to Sidcup and reclaim his papers which he needs to conform who he is. Surprisingly the name of Sidcup makes the readers inquisitive as the place is primarily known for its parishes. Davies is extremely voluble, vocative, and opinionated. In the morning Aston tells Davies that he was making noises in his sleep which Davies stoutly denies. When Aston prepares to go out to buy a saw Davies rushes to leave with him but is invited to stay and given a key. Davies says that he will try to get a job in a café in Wembley later in the day. When Aston leaves Davies carefully examines the objects in the room. Mick reappears silently and attacks the tramp and throws him to the floor.

In Act II, Davies is still on the floor with Mick watching him. Mick baffles and frightens Davies with a series of searching questions and elaborate monologues, in which he claims that Davies reminds him of various people in his past. He says that the house is his and even offers to let it out for Davies for a reasonable rent. Aston returns with a bag he has bought to replace it with the one Davies has left at
the café. Mick grabs it, but when Aston shows that he wants Davies to have it Mick leaves the room. Aston says that he is supposed to be decorating the landing and making a flat out of it for his brother, who is in the building trade. He offers Davies the job of a caretaker. Davies is hesitant – weary in case this involves actual work.

In course of time Davies enters the room in darkness as the light switch has failed. Suddenly a vacuum cleaner starts to hum and in the dark it is used by Mick to terrify Davies. Mick then adopts a friendly manner, offers Davies a sandwich, and confides that he is worried about his brother’s inactivity. He also offers Davies the job of a caretaker. Davies is confused about the owner of the room, but is deceived by Mick, who asks him for references. Davies says that he can get them from Sidcup.

Aston wakes Davies in the morning so that he can go to Sidcup. Davies starts complaining about the draught from the window and the bad weather, which he makes an excuse for not going out. Then Aston delivers a long speech in which he tells of his experience of being forced to undergo electric shock treatment in a mental hospital.

The most impressive part of the play is the monologue by Aston in which he tells how he was treated with electro-shocks when he was a kid. After the treatment he has avoided talking to people and intends to build his shed in the garden.

In Act III, Davies complaints to Mick that Aston has been ignoring him and also has denied him a bread knife and a clock. Mick does not pay heed to this complaint and he imagines what penthouse he could make of the place for himself.
and his brother. Davies wants Mick to intervene between him and Aston and suggest that he is the person to help in the matters of decoration. Soon the door bangs downstairs announcing the return of Aston. Mick immediately leaves the room. Davies unwillingly accepts a pair of shoes that Aston has brought for him.

At night Davies groans in his sleep. He is woken up by Aston for he can’t sleep during the groaning. Davies reacts furiously and turns viciously against Aston, threatening him with the return to the hospital, which he calls a ‘nuthouse.’ Aston responds quietly, saying that he wants Davies to leave the house because ‘I don’t think we are hitting it off.’ Davies leaves, believing that Mick will help him. When Davies returns with Mick he argues for the eviction of Aston. Mick says that this would be a possibility if Davies proves to be as good an interior decorator as he claims. When Davies admits that he isn’t, Mick pretends surprise and disappointment. He smashes the figure of Buddha and dismisses Davies with half-crown for his caretaking. Aston returns and faces Mick when both smile faintly. Mick leaves and Davies tries desperately to win back Aston’s favour. Aston doesn’t respond positively, but says simply, ‘you make too much noise.’ The play ends with Davies’ pathetic reference to the papers at Sidcup.

The play looks apparently about two brothers who deliberately confined their dreams in Davies, either because they ironically believe such a confidence will be safe or because they know it will be betrayed. Davies cannot resist playing off one brother against the other, until they unite and throw him out. This is a serious theme with rich comedy in it. The audience at the time of production laughed at the entire events of the play and called it “a Whitehall farce.” But Pinter answered convincingly:
An element of the absurd is, I think, one of the features of the play, but at the same time I did not intend it to be merely a laughable farce. If there hadn’t been other issues at stake the play would not have been written. Audience reaction can’t be regulated ... but where the comic and tragic are closely interwoven, certain members of an audience will always give emphasis to the comic as opposed to the other, for by so doing they rationalize the other out of existence.  

The point is that the play is funny up to a point. Beyond that point it ceases to be funny and because of that the playwright must have commissioned the play. Aston has his pathetic dream of building a hut in the garden and the awful history of his treatment in a lunatic asylum. Mick has an equally pathetic dream of turning his dilapidated slum into a luxury flat. Davies has his dream of papers in Sidcup. Although the two brothers rarely speak they seem to communicate without words. Each protects the other in his own way. Davies who is in need of a refuge cannot behave as a caretaker and his failure to do so is a kind of hubris. In spite of his worthlessness he draws our sympathy at the end of the play.

The dialogue in the play explores the changing relationships of Aston and Davies and Mick and Davies. Each dialogue is carried out within these relationships but the virtual underlying and determining relationship is that between the brothers Aston and Mick. The most poignant fact is that they are virtually incapable of verbal communication. However, it is their relationship that provides much of the subtext that operates in the dialogues of Acts II and III. Most of Act I provides a vivid demonstration of the character of Davies the tramp. Although Mick cannot be
said to be directly relevant to the actual dialogue of Act I, his presence on stage at the beginning of the play imposes a subconscious note in the mind of the audience.

Mick’s relationship with Davies in Acts II and III has Aston as the subtextual motive. Frequently he is, although absent from the stage, the subject of the dialogue between Mick and Davies. But it is the reality of the relationship between the brothers that motivates Mick’s shifting verbal strategies. Mick is both assessing Davies, planning how to get rid of him, but always seeking as much information as he can about his brother – which shows the extent of his concern. Davies is never able to see through Mick’s thought processes and remains wholly ignorant of his strategies. Consequently he is deluded into a very false sense that his future security rests more with Mick than with Aston. Act III shows the increase in Davies’ alienation from Aston, his growing viciousness and aggression and the fulfillment of Mick’s intention that all this will lead to the tramps expulsion – not by him directly, but by Aston.

The play follows the naturalistic rules of time, place, and action. Everything takes place in one room very clearly described and placed. Working class urban North London in the late 1950s is the place. Three characters are the soul matter for attention and the action follows the consequences of Davies being introduced to the room. Numerous critics have said that much of the action of The Caretaker is dominated by the characters’ struggle for power over one another and Michael Billington rightly feels that ‘Power is the theme: dominate or be dominated.’

The play is very well structured and attention is always held at each moment of action by the relationships on stage. There is an inevitability about the
progression and each Act ends on a moment of high theatrical tension. Laurence Kitchin remarks thus:

Harold Pinter’s ability to construct in depth is even greater, his range of vernacular dialogue wider than Wesker’s, the social comments less explicit. Pinter began by using shock tactics derived from Kafka, Ionesco, and Hemingway to activate wittily observed behaviour. Supporters unhelpfully stressed the gimmicks, detractors the resultant obscurity. But Pinter has been relegating violence to its proper place, half-stage; whereas The Room, in his first play, exhibited the beating of a blind Negro, Aston in The Caretaker describes a ghastly experience calmly, in one long speech. Not photographic, since the diction is exuberantly pepped up, The Caretaker is a naturalistic all the same. Its action, a conflict of illusions, is a Gorky material worked over by Chekhov.47

The naturalistic detail of the setting is complemented by the stage business of the characters which is usually connected with the objects in the room. For example, during the first scene Aston says very little indeed compared to Davies but he is constantly engaged, slowly in physical action. This stage business can be accommodated on the stage in the following manner. Aston looks for a chair and places it for Davies to sit on. He sits on the bed and begins to role himself a cigarette, which he then lights. He offers tobacco to Davies who fills his pipe. He crosses the room to collect an electric toaster, returns to his bed, and he starts to unscrew the plug. He then crosses to the plug box to get another plug which he starts to fix to the toaster. He then searches under his bed for a pair of shoes which
he offers to the tramp and continues attending to the toaster. He rises to lift the sack at the window so that Davies can see the back garden. With Davies’ help he shifts some of the objects in order to bring out a spare bed. He finds a sheet and a pillow and puts them on the bed. He then begins to roll another cigarette. He shoots out five shillings and offers them to Davies and starts again to poke the plug with a screwdriver. All this business, seemingly inconsequential, is dramatically significant. It helps to present Aston’s character and heightens the focus and the concentration on Davies.

*The Caretaker* strikingly gives realistic details of what obtain in the contemporary society. The setting of an attic room filled with a vast amount of clutter, all easily identifiable, has to be taken as a place where somebody lives. It is far away from the elegant country house setting. The physical details of the room are used in the most natural way up until Mick hurls the Buddha statue against the gas stove. Aston is busy in mending a plug and a toaster. A bed is prepared for Davies. There is a considerable discussion relating to the one window and whether it should be open or not. There hangs a bucket from the ceiling that collects actual drips. Mick uses the Electrolux to frighten Davies. Even Davies’ clothing – his trousers, his jacket and shoes and the all purpose bag for his belongings – is realistically described. How each character makes use of very ordinary object is described by the dramatist. For instance, the handing over of a door key shows the extent of Aston’s goodwill and Mick deceives Davies into a false sense of security by the device of a cheese sandwich. The cumulative effect of focusing on the details of the room is to heighten the importance of the room itself, which becomes the object of Davies’ ambition and his downfall.
There is a continuous motif of place names and local landmarks which keep the characters in a very real world. This is 1950s urban London, which is always being evoked in a legion of references: the North Circular, the Great West Road, Sidcup, Acton, and so on. The environment reaches a level close to celebration in Mick's marvelous prose poem.

You know, believe it or not, you've got a funny kind of resemblance to a bloke I once knew in Shoreditch. Actually he lived in Aldgate. I was staying with a cousin in Camden Town. This chap, he used to have a pitch in Finsbury Park, just by the bus depot. When I got to know him I found out he was brought up in Putney. (30)

Both Aston and Davies give realistic details of the life outside the room in terms of places visited. Aston refers to visiting a pub and a kind of shop which sells second hand tools and avoiding a particular café. Davies' life is entirely made up of visits from one place to another – a monastery in Luton, a convenience in Shepherd's Bush, a café in Wembley. The universal significance of their experience is made more telling by the actuality of where they live.

The environment of a specific room in a definite locality provides a realistic setting for an exploration of characters who are each granted an intense psychological realism mainly through the medium of language. Gregorz Sinko sees the room as:

Outside the normal laws of living, characterized by what he terms a particular kind of inability. Nothing will ever get done – and this sense of inability makes the murder of Aston by Davies impossible. This surrealistic nightmare is sustained by a wealth of naturalistic
detail and the dialogue blends into a harmonious whole the two sides that failed to fuse successfully in The Birthday Party.\textsuperscript{48}

Traditionally when playwrights in the English theatres have staged the poor, or characters from the working class, it has been either patronizingly or with a political agenda. That neither of these directions interests Pinter is shown immediately with the entrance of Aston and Davies. There is no exposition, setting up themes or contrived dramatic conflicts, simply an invitation. The characters are introduced in a totally realistic manner with the stage business of finding a chair complementing the realism of Davies’ unfinished sentences. Thereafter, throughout the play Davies’ language has a vivid authenticity which grips our attention and keeps the dramatic focus entirely on the three people on the stage.

The play is fraught with a lot of humour but moves into a more sombre key. Comedy surrounds Davies the tramp, in his appearance and his language — but there is also a comic dimension to the linguistic strategies of Mick. Virtually no comedy relates to the introverted Aston. Davies doesn’t try to be funny most of the times. At the end of Act I he is caught literary with no trousers and chased around the room in this condition at the start of the second Act. Other physical and visual comedy occurs when he tries on the shoes and the smoking jacket. He is offered a pair of shoes by Aston and as he tries them on his praise for their quality is eloquent — so eloquent in fact that it leads quite unconsciously to a very good joke.

DAVIES. Not a bad pair of shoes. (He trudges round the room.)

They’re strong alright. Yes. Not a bad shape of shoe. This leather’s hardy, en’t? Very hardy. Some bloke tried to flog me some suede the other day. I wouldn’t wear them. Can’t
beat leather, for wear. Suede goes off, it creases, it stains for life in five minutes. You can’t beat leather. Yes. Good shoe this.

ASTON. Good.

DAVIES waggles his feet.

DAVIES. Don’t fit though. (13)

The performance involved in trying on a smoking jacket a wholly inappropriate comment for a tramp – is ripe for a comedy.

Though Davies is always in an earnest mood much comedy can be found in his passionate self-regard. He has no understanding of other people and this leads to comic responses when he doesn’t follow exactly what is being said. Told by the others that the rooms in the house are ‘out of commission,’ he replies, ‘Get away,’ given the suggestion that his groaning in the night was due to an unfamiliar bed, he replies ‘There is nothing unfamiliar about me with beds. I slept in beds.’ When Mick pretends to confide in him about Aston, Davies has no idea that the joke is on him.

Similar comic element is found in Mick’s mischief towards Davies. Mick’s interest is to get Davies evicted from the room. On the stage the character is supposed to be physically aggressive and vocally abrasive. But this merely highlights the disturbing shifts when he changes into a supposedly friendly ally. Mick is engaged in a protracted game of baiting Davies and he is mostly putting on a performance. At times this is funny and his set piece of monologues are very witty. These speeches have been compared to patter of radio comedians. There is no need
to make the comparison, though, they have their own distinctive style and structure. They are brilliant improvisations intended to confuse Davies, but they should always entertain the audience with their comic invention.

The play is not devoid of tragic element. The ending of the play carries an emotional impact that has tragic intensity. All three characters in the play are to an extent, alienated from society in general and this casts a bleak vision on the life of the time. Quite in keeping with the modern tragedy where the common man faces psychological pressures and social oppressions this play also deals with the human sufferings. The play depicts characters who are deeply affected by factors beyond their control. In their different ways, they are all surviving with a degree of courage in the face of circumstances which are oppressive.

Davies is responsible for his dejection at the end of the play. He has been offered security by Aston, but out of ignorance, selfishness and latent aggression, he loses the opportunity and is cast out. He is a survivor and though living on the absolute fringe of society and fearful of all authority he shows determination and spirit. He just might make it to Sidcup for his papers, if weather permits. His courage has helped him in the past. He says,

Don't know as these shoes'll be much good. It's a hard road, I been down there before. Coming the other way, like. ... but I got here, I kept going, all along. (63-64)

He exhibits his aggression towards Aston. His final pleading is poignant in the extreme.

DAVIES. But ... but ... look ... listen ... listen here ... I mean....

Where am I going to go? (75)
The sheer emptiness of Davies' future possibilities has a tragic dimension. The nameless and faceless authorities that frighten Davies and keep him on the move appear to have damaged Aston. Davies' narrative description of the forced electric shock treatment in hospital is a gruesome account of an official assault on a helpless individual. Aston has been dumped to look after himself. He attempts to do this with immense dignity but without the help from any other organisation. He has become a recluse and is as much cut off from society as Davies. Even Mick is a disturbed individual. Obsessed and worried about his brother he expresses his frustration and violence against Davies and eventually against the statue of Buddha. All three are lonely and isolated. They are unable to communicate effectively however much they try. This lasting impression of the play serves as a sad comment on the urban society in England.

Davies is an old man who, after years of living on the street, combines every anti-social characteristic imaginable. He is incapable of holding down a job or of forming a meaningful relationship with others. He possesses something of a life force, a defiant energy. This is evident from his verbal energy, his long speeches and in his physical reaction to any assault on him. As the character of Davies unfolds we can see that the key to his days is survival. Part of his make up after years of living alone involves fantasy and confusion, but his survival depends on fulfilling basic, physical needs, that is, a good pair of shoes, a shirt, and even a piece of soap. His life is filled with minutiae – a cup of tea, the offer of a bite to eat, loosening up before taking a seat. By living in the open his life is limited to the geography of his world.
Davies sometimes provides with his comic vein. His defiant claims that ‘I have had dinner with the best’ (7) and ‘I keep myself up’ (7) are really preposterous. As is his claim ‘nobody has got more rights than I have,’ (8) his egotism gets him into trouble. Aston has saved him from a fight caused by his refusal to empty a bucket of rubbish in the café where he was working: ‘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.’ (7-8) His feeling of superiority to any foreigner – Poles, Greeks, Blacks and others – are really comical. He deeply resents any suggestion of fault on his part and his outrage is comic both in terms of its expression and its defiance. For example in his recounting of the monks refusal to offer him free shoes at the Luton monastery, or challenging Aston when told about his jabbering in his sleep. He says, “there is 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.” (31) According to Boulton

The tramp Davies is the archetypal symbol of life as a journey. It is not introduced with the formality of Beckett in *Waiting for Godot* where one is always aware of its presence; rather the symbol is unobtrusively established by Davies’ frequent references to his journeying. He also feels that Davies’ journey has no real purpose; it is not only a journey along an uncertain road, but one that is also friendless and terrifying.

This is a typical absurdist play. Usually an absurdist play deals with the theme of loss of belief in God and also with the belief that man’s life is regarded as purposeless and meaningless. It very distinctly delineates the existential dilemma of
the three characters and their lack of positive identity. It is not known why Aston has brought Davies into the house. Likewise the motives of Mick are not explained. Davies is a remarkable example of confused and uncertain identity. He cannot acknowledge where he was born. He appears to have no family and he has nowhere to live and has no definite future. The repeated mention of his papers in Sidcup merely emphasizes his real predicament. He is constantly defined in terms of possessions and objects which expose the limits of his existence: a good pair of shoes, a warm shirt, a knife to cut his bread and a clock.

Aston is associated with objects which draw attention to the narrow limits of his life. His room is full of stuff collected for some uncertain future purpose and he goes shopping for more things. He occupies his time fiddling with plugs and a toaster but nothing gets mended. And if Davies has Sidcup as a possible salvation, and Aston has his garden shed as a future starting point. Similarly Mick has his own fantasy. The absurdity lies in the failure of the characters to relate successfully about themselves thereby revealing their isolated and disconnected lives.

With regard to the characterization one may say that there is a lack of clear detail about the motivation of these characters. A character may offer brief hints or talk at great length about their past but their statements are open to question and doubt. For example, Mick’s complaint about Davies might equally apply to him – ‘I can take nothing you say at face value. Every word you speak is open to any number of different interpretations. Most of what you say is lies.’ This leads to difficulties for an actor who wishes to build for himself or needs to know that cause. Wilson Knight lays stress on the conflict in the play in relation to the characters in the play. He says:
The two brothers Aston and Mick are intelligent young men of some education, but one has been in a mental home and the other appears to be a mere candidate. They, especially Aston, and their general situation and prospects together with their extraordinary room, appear to be peculiarly static: they are getting, and are likely to get, nowhere. In contrast the tramp is dynamic; and it is natural that the mentally paralyzed Aston should welcome him to his home of meaningless jumble. The disreputable Davies is baffled by the lumber, is afraid of the stove, and finds draughts from the broken window more disturbing than the open roads. Two worlds, those of a vigorous outsider and those of a derelict civilization, conflict.\textsuperscript{50}

Mac Davies is presented humourously in the beginning and sombre and disturbing in the end. He is

A classic comic creation, and his uneasy relationship with the enigmatic Aston and Mick is a landmark in the twentieth-century drama.\textsuperscript{51}

The tragic dimension lies in his rejection to reverberate during his long and hopeless pleading to be allowed back into the room by Aston. It seems that his future will be a continuation as a street beggar, a social reject with old years threatening his survival. He has lost a possible chance of security.

Mick is mysterious and his motives are less obvious. But one notices some logic in his behaviour throughout the play. He has genuine concern for his brother and he exhibits his jealousy for Davies. In the opening of the play he silently looks about the room, expressionless for thirty seconds. Naturally his image is established
in the mind of the audience. He leaves the room as soon as he hears the arrival of
Aston and Davies. His actions can be interpreted from a psychological point of
view. His brother has had mental treatment and he is a changed man. Mick is
worried about him. And he has established Aston in the house with a view to
rehabilitating him. Aston has the job of decorating the place but doesn’t do any
decorating as he simply collects bits and pieces which fill the room. Aston brings
Davies into the room and Mick doesn’t like this at all. He has the power to throw
Davies out but that would alienate him from Aston so he acts to make Davies
unpopular with Aston. While confusing and deceiving Davies in Act II and Act III
he constantly asks questions about Aston which indicate his genuine concern for
him.

Working class characters on the English stage have been staged for comedy.
Mick is bright and intelligent and this is evident from his verbal flexibility and
invention. He behaves erratically and he is deeply conscious of his mental history of
his brother. Though he is overtly frustrated there isn’t any suggestion of his mental
disturbance. With Davies he is generally putting on a performance which he can do
with ease but when confronted by Aston the depth of his relationship renders him
inarticulate. Through the stage directions the playwright conveys a fundamental
fraternal love between him and Aston. For example,

ASTON Comes in. He closes the door, moves into the room and
faces MICK. They look at each other. Both are smiling,
faintly.

MICK (beginning to speak to ASTON). Look … uh …

He stops, goes to the door and exits. (73)
These lines connote the fundamental love between Mick and Aston.

Aston offers a comprehensive account of his past. He describes his experience of electric shock treatment in such graphic detail as to make it sound more like torture than therapy. His story is delivered hesitantly throughout the play. His habit of talking a lot to older men is unique. He remembers having moments of clear and insight, a kind of hallucination. He earnestly believes that this condition brought about his removal to a hospital where he was examined and with the written permission of his mother, given electric shock treatment. As Aston describes the experience it appears that, as a much younger and stronger man, he fought against the medical but was overpowered.

Aston's treatment towards Davies is exceptional. Possibly he recognizes someone worse off than himself and gains some comfort from another possession. His gestures of hospitality are all together magnanimous and his forbearance in the company of an unpleasant roommate is quite amazing. His speech is most reticent and odd.

The play has achieved distinction for its language. Not only does Pinter make the ungrammatical and hesitant speech of Davies dramatically vivid, but also shows how people use language for personal advantage. At least one can see two aspects of the language in this play. They are the actual idiom and style of speech of the working class characters and the purpose to which language is applied. Throughout the play one can see 'the lack of communication' among the characters. Davies has the greatest difficulty in understanding what is being said to him and is frustrated by his own linguistic inadequacy. The importance of language in the play
is underlined by the final stage direction – long silence. Curtain. – which shows that there is nothing left to be said between them.

Pinter deviates from the traditional idea that stage characters should be articulate and should converse with consideration and understanding of each other. What he presents is a revealing awareness of how people, especially less educated people, actually speak. What might appear to be an absurd sequence of non-sequiturs can be, in reality, a psychologically accurate depiction of mental processes. This can be illustrated from the following dialogue.

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. I used to know a bootmaker in Acton. He was a good mate to me.

Pause.

You know what that bastard monk said to me?

Pause.

How many more Blacks you got around here then?

ASTON. What?

DAVIES. You got any more Blacks around here?

ASTON (holding out the shoes). See if these are any good. (11-12)

Here the lines are about Davies. The subject is shoes. Davies is in need of some better shoes than the sandals he is wearing. He has mentioned being let down by a
monastery in Luton which was reputed to provide shoes. Aston is trying to follow the story point by point but Davies' mind jumps from shoes to a bootmaker in Acton, then back to the monks in Luton, then further back to the black neighbours that have been mentioned before. Aston concentrates on the shoes all the time. The sequence is entirely realistic on a psychological level: Aston trying to be helpful, and Davies partly keeping up with the story but also showing his confusion about his new surroundings.

Davies' personality is reflected in his language. It is his inability or refusal to answer any direct question – from either Aston or Mick that is revealed here. For example, 'Would you like to sleep here?' (14) 'How long's he had them?' (19) 'You Welsh? Where were you born then?' (23) This is natural to him after a lifetime of evasive self-defence. His constant repetition, failure to complete sentences and evasiveness become stylized to a high degree. At times this can be both funny and desperately poignant when the audience can see the problem that he is confronted with. For instance, when offered the job of a caretaker, the opportunity is there for security, a bed, warmth and relative comfort. But, and it is a big but for Davies, it might involve work. It takes him sometime to actually mention the dreaded world – jobs. The sequence of dialogue is far removed from conventional stage conversation but it is entirely realistic and true to the characters. The following dialogue may be taken by way of an illustration of this point.

ASTON. How do you feel about being one, then?

DAVIES. Well, I reckon ... Well, I'd have to know ... you know....

ASTON. What sort of....

DAVIES. Yes, what sort of ... you know....
Pause.

ASTON. Well, I mean....

DAVIES. I mean, I'd have to ... I'd have to.... (40)

Towards the end of the play, Davies says to Mick that Aston has been ignoring him and not talking to him but it is clear that whenever Aston has tried to start a conversation it is Davies who fails to respond. This can be seen on (12-13), when he shows the statue of Buddha and also on (15) when Aston mentions his preference for drinking Guinness out of a thin glass. On each occasion Davies shows no interest in developing the subject. On one level, for those readers or listeners who are used to a sequential dialogue, these breakdowns in logical progression might seem odd – in particular, they can make Aston appear odd – but in fact they reflect a real personal situation, where Davies is incapable of responding in a friendly or helpful way.

The relationship between Mick and Davies shows Mick to be the dominant figure. He starts terrifying the tramp with a combination of physical and verbal assault. The following is an example for this.

MICK. What's your name?

DAVIES (shifting, about to rise). Now look here!

MICK. What?

DAVIES. Jenkins!

MICK. Jen ... kins.

DAVIES makes a sudden move to rise. A violent bellow from MICK sends him back.

(A shout.) Sleep here last night?
DAVIES. Yes....

MICK (continuing at great pace). How'd you sleep? (30-31)

Mick is genuinely angry at the intrusion of Davies, and he has an underlying motive of removing him, but he is also interested in how Aston is progressing. His questions are therefore double-edged. He knows full well that Aston brought Davies to the room, but he wants to know why.

DAVIES. I was brought here!

Pause.

MICK. Pardon?

DAVIES. I was brought here! I was brought here!

MICK. Brought here? Who brought you here?

DAVIES. Man who lives here ... he....

Pause.

MICK. Fibber. (32)

He could evict Davies at any time but that might risk alienating his brother, so he deceives the tramp into a false sense of security. Davies never has any idea of the feeling that exists between brothers and he has no perception of how Mick is manipulating him. In the following dialogue the two are far apart. Mick is self-conscious about his brother's past illness and sensitive to the term funny (meaning strange), but he keeps control and changes a tack. Davies doesn't notice.

DAVIES. Well ... he's a funny bloke, your brother.

MICK. What?

DAVIES. I was saying, he's ... he's a bit of funny bloke, your brother.
MICK stares at him.

MICK. Funny? Why?

DAVIES. Well ... he’s funny....

MICK. What’s funny about him?

_Pause._

DAVIES. Not liking work.

MICK. What’s funny about that?

DAVIES. Nothing.

_Pause._

MICK. I don’t call it funny.

DAVIES. Nor me.

MICK. You don’t what to start getting hypercritical.

DAVIES. No, no, I wasn’t that, I wasn’t ... I was only saying....

MICK. Don’t get to glib.

DAVIES. Look, all I meant was—

MICK. Cut it! _Briskly_ Look! I got a proposition to make to you.

(47-48)

All three characters in the play are given long set speeches or monologues. These reflect intimately on the speaker, but never progress into a conversation.

They make different demands on the actors because of their different form but Mick’s are the most stylized and surreal.52

At the beginning of Act II, Mick bamboozles Davies with three brilliant improvisations. They are, ‘You remind me of my uncle’s brother’ (29) ‘You know, believe it or not, you’ve got a funny kind of resemblance to a bloke I once knew in
Shoreditch' (30) and ‘You’re stinking the place out.’ (33) Each speech follows a similar structure and ends with a question directed at Davies pertaining to the immediate situation. They establish as the dominating force in the room. Although Mick involves Davies in the speeches they are essentially jazz like improvisations on various themes drawn from Mick’s imagination.

If Mick’s monologues or imaginative set pieces, the longer speeches of Davies tend to be emotional outpourings revolving around a single word or idea their dramatic force comes from the driving rhythm and the intensity of the feeling of speaker. The repetition of a single word at the centre of Davies’ speeches is often their key note, as can be seen reference to the following: buckets (p.5), rights (p.6), soap (p.12), shoes (p.15), stamps (p.25), shirts (p.64), names and cards (p.68), clock (p.99), and beds (pp.121-122). In every case the item is made a matter of extreme personal importance, so Davies is always really talking about himself and rarely do his passionate declarations develop into a dialogue of significance.

Playwrights like Terrance Rattigan saw the play as an allegory about the god of the Old Testament, the god of the New Testament and humanity. But Pinter replied that the play was about a caretaker and two brothers. It marks the end of violence and triumph of violence that has been modified progressively from The Room onward. The observation made by Esslin is very interesting.

In The Caretaker violence becomes the practical jokes played by Mick on Davies. Authentic critics feel that Pinter combines in this play social commentary with absurd theatre. They see Aston and Mick as exemplars of the ‘do it yourself,’ mid twentieth century species of western man seeking security in expertise.
Unlike the earlier plays, *The Caretaker* achieves significance as violence doesn’t resolve. He has developed the play in such a way that he dispensed with cabaret turns, black outs and screams in the dark and laid stress on a human situation. In his own words, “I do see this play as merely a particular human situation, concerning three particular people, and not, incidentally, symbols.” For Cohn, there is perhaps a pun contained in the title: “the caretaker is twisted into a taker on the care, for care is the human destiny.”

Many critics compared *The Caretaker* to Samuel Beckett’s play *Waiting for Godot*, in which two tramps wait for a man they know only as Godot to arrive and give meaning and purpose to their lives. Certainly in this play we seem to be in Godot country, we are in the Beckett climate, but not the Beckett fog where everything means something else. For instance, in *The Caretaker*, the two tramps do not discuss cosmic matters but

They merely fight about who shall sleep in which bed, or they make plans, or they grumble; and the play’s interest comes directly from the way in which they do these things. At its best it is the very essence of naturalistic drama.

Charles Marowitz, who also pointed out the resemblance to Beckett’s work, remarked that such a resemblance takes nothing away from Pinter: ‘The mark of Beckett on Pinter is dominantly stylistic; as for the subject matter, it may have a Beckettian tang to it, but the recipe is original.’

Though, in recent years, some complaints about the play have been voiced, *The Caretaker* continues to be considered a classic of modern drama by most critics. Kitty Mrosovsky compared the play to *Waiting for Godot*, but not favorably: ‘It has
dated in a way that the earlier *Waiting for Godot* (1955) has not . . . Not that the tramps nowadays are any fewer, nor the derelict attics with their buckets to catch the drips. But the patina of social comment can almost be peeled off the play’s core, leaving utmost a wry proposition about the purgatory of sharing a bedroom with your neighbor.’ In spite of such criticism as his, *The Caretaker* continues to inspire numerous revivals as well as much critical attention.

Thus, the play *The Caretaker* is about three individuals and about the idea of a room as a temporary sanctuary from the outside world. But it is also a play about the domestic nature of power and about the shifting of alliances we form as part of our survival tactic. The language is very powerful connoting the unconscious and the conscious motivations of the characters. It also runs like

A highly domestic play about the unyielding strength of fraternal ties when confronted by an intruder and also a political play in that its basic image of life is one of ceaseless struggle.57

Pinter’s next play *The Homecoming* runs on the similar lines “as a series of bouts in a battle that is mainly verbal but which occasionally becomes physical violence.”58

With its theatrical vitality *The Homecoming*59 appeared in 1965. It deals with a series of bouts in a battle that is mainly verbal but it occasionally becomes physical violence. Each member of the family looks to his own advantage, using weapons like virility, intelligence, and even authority. There are the characters of Sam and Teddy who have questionable kinds of virtues, to be fitted in. The word ‘virtue’ is to be used most circumspectly in this play. Max, a retired butcher (aged 70) lives with his brother Sam (aged 63) and two of his sons — Lenny (aged early
thirties) and Joey (aged middle twenties). They are visited by Max's eldest son Teddy (aged middle thirties) and his wife Ruth (aged early thirties).

The scene of action is an old house in North London. In one of the rooms, there is a window, R., besides odd tables, and chairs. Two large arm chairs, a large sofa, L. Against R wall a large side board, the upper half of which contains a mirror. U. L. a radiogram. At the very opening we see Lenny who is

\textit{Sitting on the sofa with a newspaper, a pencil in his hands. He wears a dark suit. He makes occasional marks on the back page.}^{60}

Max enters looking for a pair of scissors and he recalls how he and his friend MacGregor used to make a big impression in the West End of London as hard men. He recalls his days on the racecourse when he used to have a gift for recognizing the best horses. Lenny changes the subject and discusses Max's poor cooking. Sam enters in his chauffer's uniform. He has driven a wealthy American to Heathrow Airport and receives a box of cigars from him. He claims to be the most popular of the firm's chauffeurs. Max responds by asking him why he never got married. Sam says there is still time and recalls how he used to escort Jessie, Max's wife, in the old days when Max was busy. In the meanwhile, Joey enters. He has been training as a boxer in the gym. He and Sam say that they are hungry expecting Max to provide dinner. Max reacts furiously thus:

\begin{quote}
I'll tell you what you've got to do. What you've got to do is you've got to learn defend yourself, and you've got to learn how to attack. That's your only trouble as a boxer. You don't know how to defend yourself, and you don't know how to attack. (25)
\end{quote}
Sam reminds Max that he was trusted in the past while escorting Jessie – something Max would never have allowed MacGregor (now dead) to do. Max threatens Sam with eviction when he stops working.

In the next scene, the lights come up as it is night. Teddy and Ruth “both well dressed in light summer suits and light raincoats” (27) stand at the threshold of the room with suitcases. Teddy has brought his wife to meet his family. They have come from America where Teddy is a professor of philosophy. Teddy is anxious not to wake the sleeping family. He encourages Ruth to go to bed, saying that she needs some rest. Teddy is left standing alone when Lenny enters from his downstairs room. Lenny complains of not being able to sleep. Teddy goes to bed when Lenny lights a cigarette and sits, waiting. Ruth returns and Lenny begins to question her. She explains that she is Teddy’s wife and that they are on a visit to Europe and have been to Italy. Lenny engages in a series of speeches designed to impress Ruth, including two long stories where he describes his violent assault on women who have been unreasonable to him. Finally he approaches Ruth and attempts to remove her glass of water. Ruth is unmoved by any of Lenny’s tactics and reverses the proceedings by saying, ‘if you take the glass ... I’ll take you’ (42). Lenny is unnerved and he accuses her off making some kind of proposal. She leaves him and goes upstairs. Max is wakened by Lenny’s shouting and comes downstairs asking what the matter is. Lenny refuses to answer him and when Max persists, he demands to know the details of his own conception. Max spits at him and leaves.

In another scene Joey is seen shadow boxing in front of a mirror. Max enters complaining that he has been driven out of the kitchen by the noise of Sam washing up the breakfast dishes. He calls Sam into the room and accuses him of being
resentful. Teddy and Ruth come downstairs wearing dressing gowns. When Max sees them for the first time, he accuses Teddy of bringing a whore into the house and demands that Joey check them out. Joey calls him an old man. Max hits Joey with all his might and begins to collapse with the effort. He then hits Sam with his stick when Sam comes to him. Getting to his feet, Max asks Ruth how many children she has, and turning to Teddy, he asks for a cuddle and kiss. Teddy faces him and responds thus: “Come on, Dad. I’m ready for the cuddle.” (52) Act I ends with the words of Max that Teddy is still in love with his father. According to Arnold Hinchliffe,

It should be noted that this emotionalism (sentimental declaration of greetings between Max and Teddy) is as ironic and savage as anything else in the play. Teddy is, in fact offering to punch his father if he does come for that kiss and cuddle.61

In Act II Max, Teddy, Lenny and Sam are at a café for lunch. Max reminisces about his wife Jessie; “that woman was the backbone to this family. I mean, I was busy working twenty fours a day in the shop, ... but I left a woman at a home with a will of iron, a heart of gold and a mind” (54). He is then assailed by Sam’s not going to work, and bemoans how much he has had to work to bring up his family. He regrets not having been to Teddy’s wedding and expresses his delight at the success of the married couple. Lenny begins to question Teddy on matters of philosophy, but Teddy refuses to be drawn towards it. Ruth diverts the attention to herself and her physical presence. She says that she was born nearby, but left for America, which she describes as ‘all-rock. And sand.’
After the exit of Max, Lenny and Joey, Teddy is left alone with Ruth. He is anxious to return to America but she shows no enthusiasm. Teddy leaves to pack. Lenny enters and sits by Ruth. She tells him of her past when she was a photographic model for the body. Teddy returns with the suitcases expecting to leave with Ruth, but Lenny puts on record of slow jazz and asks her for a dance.

Soon Max and Joey return and see Lenny kissing Ruth and Teddy standing by with Ruth’s coat. Joey takes Ruth from Lenny and sits with her on the sofa and embraces her. Max notices that Teddy is ready to leave and wishes him well. Ruth suddenly pushes Joey away, stands up and demands something to eat from Joey and something to drink from Lenny. Lenny pours drinks all-round. Ruth asks Teddy if the family have read his critical works and he replies that they wouldn’t understand them because the family lacks intellectual equilibrium.

In the next scene Teddy is with Sam who confides that he was always his favourite, and all his mother’s favourite, of all the sons. Lenny enters, goes to the sideboard and discovers that a cheese role that he has made has disappeared. Teddy tells him that he has eaten it. This provokes a lengthy accusation from Lenny that Teddy has lead the family down by withdrawing to America and becoming a bit sulky. Joey comes downstairs and Lenny asks him how he has got on with Ruth. Joey says that he did not get all the way. Lenny tells Teddy that his wife is a tease and a big bore. Max and Sam enter and hear what has been going on between Joey and Ruth. Max suggests that the family asks Ruth to stay with them and each could contribute to her upkeep. Lenny argues that it would be less expensive if he set her up as a prostitute: Teddy could act as their representative in America, supplying clients. When Ruth comes downstairs Teddy puts the family proposition to her. She
makes stringent demands as to the conditions she would expect if she were to agree to the offer, which Max and Lenny accept. Sam steps forward and declares thus:

MacGregor had Jessie in the back of my cab as I drove them along.

He croaks and collapses.

He lies still. (86)

The family is unconcerned about this collapse. Teddy takes his leave. Ruth sits and relaxes. Joey kneels before her and puts his head in her lap. Max falls on his knees by the side of her chair and Lenny stands watching. The play ends with an ambiguous note.

The structure of *The Homecoming* primarily is based on the return of Teddy with his wife. The rhythm of the play is created by the totality of the structure. The structural devices like climax, tempo, coherent language, etc., are employed by the playwright. The rhythm in the play is determined by the way Ruth speaks and moves. The play has a linear structure as one event leads to another over a two day time span. A series of dialogues moves towards an emotional climax in a very focused speech by lighting background. The first sequence introduces the family one by one. Lenny is first on stage, quietly checking the runners for the day's horse racing in the paper. He is interrupted by Max who disturbs him with reminiscences of his success with horses and establishes the niggling banter that is the norm in this household. Lenny damns Max cooking and the dialogue between Max and Lenny becomes vicious.

LENNY. What did you say?

MAX. I said shove off out of it, that's what I said.
LENNY. You’ll go before me, Dad, if you talk to me in that tone of voice.

MAX. Will I, you bitch? (19)

Here Max fumes at the arrival of Sam. He has been threatened by Lenny and he comfortably turns his anger on the weaker one, Sam.

MAX. It’s funny you never got married, isn’t it? A man with all your gifts.

Pause.

Isn’t it? A man like you. (22)

Then Joey comes in asking for food. This riles Max even further, as the cumulative demands on him are allied to mockery – ‘what the boy wants, Dad, is your own special brand of cooking, Dad. That is what the boys look forward to.’ Max anger and frustration reach zenith in a speech expressing undisguised hatred for his own father. Suddenly a black out follows. Then the family are introduced, as are the two figures Jessie and MacGregor, and the mood of the house is established. The progress of the scene is structured by the sequence of entrances in the most natural manner – both Sam and Joey have returned home from work.

The high emotions that obtain in the first sequence suddenly end when the lights come up and Teddy and Ruth stand silently looking around the room. The mood suddenly changes, the dialogue reflects an emotionally estranged couple and radical intrusion into the house. The linear structure continues with Lenny’s reaction to their arrival. He encourages Teddy to go to bed so that he might confront Ruth. In their blatantly sexual confrontation Lenny is knocked out his stride to the extent that he begins shouting, ‘what was that meant to be? Some kind of proposal?’
The shouting brings Max down and he receives the full force of Lenny’s venom. The sequence ends with the impassioned speech of Lenny.

The next movement begins with Joey shadow boxing. Then the progress follows a psychologically coherent line involving the increasing anger of Max. Driven out of the kitchen by the noise of Sam washing up, he is then rejected by Joe who won’t go with him to the football match. He takes his frustration out on Sam and then explores on seeing Teddy and Ruth. Suddenly the act moves to the grotesque face-to-face challenge of Teddy – ‘Come on dad. I am ready for the cuddle’ and Max’s response ‘he still loves his father!’ In Act II the play takes a surreal dimension. The movement of the Act which opens with the celebratory family feast shows Ruth becoming absorbed into the family group in a sexual rite. Her initiation is witnessed by Teddy who either withdraws or is excluded from the tribe. On the level of ritual he may be regarded as the scapegoat who has to be sacrificed for the future good of the family. Ruth becomes both victim and victor. As a woman she takes her place as the necessary symbol of fertility. She also becomes the wish fulfillment of all the sexual dreams and desires of the men. As Roger Michell, the director of this play at Royal National Theatre in 1997, observes,

I am approaching this play in a totally naturalistic way ... I see it as an entirely naturalistic, behavioural account of what happens in a particular house over two days.62

Thus, in this play each scene is connected to other scenes thereby providing a structural thread and concentrated symmetry.

A close reading of the play reveals to us that the play progresses from a realistic introduction to the domestic setting and the family group to a conclusion
which involves a stage picture of Ruth in a tableau surrounded by Joey (with his head in her lap), Max (kneeling) and Lenny (watching). This is both surreal and poetic. A disturbing shift occurs as the audience is taken over by what is happening on the stage and is held in hypnotic awe. The events are frightful as well as daring. An aged father verbally abuses the son and brother; spits at one son and physical assaults another. A brother attempts to seduce his brother’s wife on first meeting her. A daughter-in-law is greeted by her father as ‘a stinking pox-ridden slut.’ A husband proposes to his wife that she sets up as a prostitute and lives with his family in order to serve them as well. She agrees to the offer. This seems incredible and obscene. However the final image of the seated woman, relaxed and centre stage, surrounded by a group of needy men is very powerful and offers many possible interpretations particularly rousing suspense in the mind of the audience. The play presents archetypes of family relationship with such vivid intensity that an audience is made to react beyond the purely rational level. We cannot simply conclude ‘this wouldn’t happen.’ The play does happen and we become involved with the characters. Thus, we are forced to respond.

The play concerns itself with a family and a very particular family. All the characters in the play belong to one family. The family unit in the play has taken a central role as it reflects the essential human condition. Here one is reminded of Agamemnon who is killed by Clytemnestra because he sacrificed the daughter. Medea kills her children because she has been betrayed by her children. Oedipus kills his father and marries his mother thereby establishing the benchmark for what is absolutely a taboo in family relationships. In Shakespeare’s *King Lear* the nature of good and evil is explored through the experience of two families, fathers and
children, sons and daughters. In this play we notice the archetypal relationships with ruthless objectivity devoid of any moral agenda.

The reviewers of this play dismissed it as an ugly, brutal, fowl mouthed bunch living in a slum. Other reviewers appreciated the brilliance of the writing but they are unhappy with the content. They called it horrible and repellant, but it is extremely funny and deeply unnerving. A close study of the play reveals that 'this is a very lovely family ... they are very warm people really.' When Max begins to insult and threaten either Lenny or Sam our attention is naturally drawn to the immediate relationship being portrayed on stage. The background to the family does emerge in great detail as the play proceeds with the picture of the routine and relationships within the family. Really the animosity that is displayed throughout the play hides much of what is normal. It is clear that the family lives in a well regulated household which is nothing like a slum. It has always been the family home, once lived in by Max and Sam's parents. Max was a butcher – a trade that insists on cleanliness – and it is likely that the house reflects this. There are clean sheets in the guestroom if needed; the dishes are washed. It is not a poor home; Lenny drives an Alpha Romeo. If he wears old clothes it is for the same comfort. The men rise early and work. Max does the cooking. A very distinguishing feature is the absence of a woman in the house, and the furnishing probably reflects this. Indeed the size of room has been determined by the death of the mother. Teddy explains to Ruth thus:

TEDDY. What do you think of the room? Big, isn't it? It is a big house. I mean, it is a fine room, don't you think? Actually there was a wall, across there ... with a door. We knocked it
down ... years ago ... to make an open living area. The structure was not affected, you see. My mother was dead. Here one becomes inquisitive about the details like why he was knocked down? With the loss of a family member, why the need for more space? This suggests how dominant Jessie’s presence was when she was alive. The domestic atmosphere after her death was probably too claustrophobic for the men.

The members of the family interact closely among themselves. The male culture is emphasized by the passing references to sport: to horse racing (‘What don’t you think of Second Wind for the three-thirty?’ (17) is a genuine enquiry from Lenny to Max), to football (‘I am going to see a game of football this afternoon. You want to come?’ (46) Max asks Joey), and to Joey’s boxing. Max goes to the gym with Joey. We also learn that Lenny has been cruising for women with Joey.

A word about Ruth and her family. Ruth is more than a match for all the men in the play. We may conclude that she decides to stay in this home on her own free will. She says that Lenny and Max agree to her demands. All her speeches and actions in Act II indicate her rejections of her American home and her willingness to engage sexually with Joey and Lenny. There is nothing to stop her returning to America with Teddy, so why does she choose to stay. She is an enigmatic woman. She easily becomes the centre of attention in all the scenes she appears. As a dramatic character she takes on an increasingly symbolic status, embodying various male perceptions of woman, seen variously as a wife, a mother, a sister, a daughter, and a whore. These roles are united in the final stunning image of her, seated and relaxed, in control of the family and the room. So she is both a psychologically
realized personality and a symbol of a poetic vision – a representative of woman and a dream image of male wish fulfillment.

Ruth is primarily the wife brought back to England by her husband to visit his family, and thus may be regarded as the conventional Pinter intruder, whose arrival disturbs the inhabitants of the room and creates the action of the play. She is a non-Jewish wife who has attracted her husband away from the Jewish family. This family is not definitely Jewish despite the idiom and rhythm of the language. Nevertheless this marriage certainly has upset the family because they were excluded from it and Teddy has left the family home. So Ruth becomes a means whereby the family can get back at the eldest son for his betrayal. She is central to the ‘game’ that is intended to belittle Teddy. However, Ruth has her own agenda, which is quite straightforward – she prefers to what the family has to offer to what America and Teddy have to offer.

Teddy appears anxious that Ruth be at ease and not nervous but it is Teddy who is anxious and Ruth who seems perfectly at home. Her question, ‘Do you want to stay?’ (29) indicates her intuition that this is not a good place for them both to be. Her decision to go for a walk alone is very telling. It shows her independence and it also indicates that she knows her way about as she says later ‘I was born quite near here.’ It soon emerges that she has absolutely no regard for her life in America. Whenever Teddy tries to impress the family with a success she says nothing. Teddy makes the following comment on Ruth’s adjustment.

She’s a great help to me over there. She’s a wonderful wife and mother. She’s a very popular woman. She’s got a lot of friends. It’s a great life, at the University ... you know ... it’s a very good life.
We've got a lovely house ... we've got all ... we've got everything we want. It's a very stimulating environment. (58)

These lines express the desperate mood of Teddy. He tries to convince Ruth as much as the family.

It is clear that Ruth exhibits her self-confidence and the sexual confidence in response to Lenny's violent and threatening speeches. She reacts in a cool fashion to Max's filthy assault on her when he first sees her in the morning after her arrival. Her reaction, according Bill Naismith,

Might be contrasted with that of Cressida when she too is thrown into the lion's den – the camp of the Greek generals in Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida.64

The difference is that Cressida quickly takes up with Diomedes, whom she twice calls guardian. Ruth doesn't need a guardian. She is able to look after herself simply by exercising her sexuality. When she draws attention to herself and away from Lenny's attempt to humiliate Teddy over the subject of philosophy she is very explicit. She says,

Look at me. I ... move my leg. That's all it is. But I wear ... underwear ... which moves with me ... it ... captures your attention.

(60-61)

This remark captures Joey's attention but literally scares Max and Lenny out of the room.
Ruth is comfortable in the room and knows that she is wanted and even needed. As soon as she decides to exert her presence she is effortlessly in command.

RUTH. I'd like something to eat. (To LENNY.) I'd like a drink.

Did you get any drink?

LENNY. We've got drink.

RUTH. I'd like one, please.

LENNY. What drink?

RUTH. Whisky.

LENNY. I've got it.

*Pause.*

RUTH. Well, get it.

LENNY goes to the sideboard, takes out bottle and glasses. JOEY moves toward her.

RUTH. Put the record off.

*He looks at her, turns, puts the record off.*

I want something to eat. (68)

Some critics have referred to the characters in the play as behaving just like animals. Here the main idea is that the play is not suitable for civilized human beings. But human beings are animals although cerebral animals and most distinctively they are the animals who talk. This aspect is very well presented in Shakespeare's *King Lear* where Goneril and Regan, the evil daughters of Lear, are shown to move further and further away from civilized behaviour and are increasingly associated with animal imagery. Dramatic representation of people as
animals is generally pejorative and unflattering, implying that animals are, by definition, sub-human. In Ben Jonson's *Volpone* characters are comically associated with animals because of their overriding and aggressive greed, their parasitic qualities. Pinter in this play is unrestrained in its recognition of irrational instinct as being a part of the human condition. People are not entirely subject to the laws of decency, civilization, and good manners, and are not always in control of their emotions.

*The Homecoming* looks like a human jungle and there is something deeply animalistic about the people's reactions to each other and the way they treat each other. Here one is reminded of Peter Hall's statement. According to him, "There is a pressure of emotion and an ugliness of motif which I think a new note in his work." Hall equates animalistic with the jungle and links the two with an experience which is ugly. Even Steven Grant claims that 'this is a play about how families feed off themselves in a cannibalistic ritual.' (Time Out) One notices the fundamental animal instincts that are expressed in the play. The instinct for survival, the aspiration to dominate the pack, the fear and resentment of outsiders, the mindless and instinctive drive to kill (as a fox in a hen house kills everything in sight, not just what it needs for food); the animal instinct for indiscriminate sexual mating is also relevant.

The aggressive behaviour of the characters in the play accords with the animal behaviour. Max was a butcher, and he and MacGregor clearly revelled in being 'two of the worst hated men in the West End,' which easily suggests a background of violence. Much of Max's language is violently aggressive. This violence is continued in the family through Joey being a fighter and more
disturbingly, in Lenny’s fantasies of violence against women – ‘so I just gave her another belt in the nose and a couple of turns of the boot and sort of left at that’ (39) and ‘I just gave her a short arm jab to the belly’ (41).

The conflict of generations, Max against his sons, is very primitive. The leader of the family grows old and is threatened by the younger members of the pack. He is ferocious in defence of his position. Lenny, Teddy, and Joey no longer fear him. Ruth and Teddy are outsiders whose threat is greeted by outright attack. Both the male responses to Ruth on the sexual front, and her own sexual allurement, consciously and provocatively directed at the men, are basically instinctive.

Max fills the play with animal imagery. He claims to have had an instinctive understanding of animals and he says “I always had the smell of a good horse. I could smell him” (18). His profession involved chopping animals, carving carcasses. He worked as a butcher all his life using the chopper and the slab. Lenny accuses him of bringing this animal interest into the house. He says, ‘You are a dog cook. Honest. You think you are cooking for lot of dogs’ (19). But Max has already claimed, ‘they walk in here every time of the day and night like bloody animals’ (24). Lenny, Teddy, Sam, and Jessie are all referred to by Max as ‘bitch.’ Sam is also an ‘old grub,’ and ‘a maggot.’ MacGregor is ‘runt.’ Finally Max claims of Ruth that she will make us all animals, a comment which carries an unconscious irony, given the way they have behaved.

Critics have branded _The Homecoming_ as a comedy of bad manners. The characters in the play have been shown to behave as a result of some definite event in the past. So we may jump to the conclusion that this is a dark comedy. Two examples of misguided nature may be quoted here. One assumed that Ruth has been
seriously ill and is suffering from a profound mental disorder. This distorted all her scenes because she is usually in control. One may also notice the conflict of generations between the sons and the father. In fact the characters are not trying to be funny but there are some good jokes, very witty speeches and potentially humorous situations. How far these are recognized may depend on one's sense of humour. It has been claimed that there is a hideous side to Pinter's humour in this play and the comedy is grotesque. It is possible to see the play as a modern comedy of bad manners.

There is a degree of wit in most of the verbal abuse that is exchanged in the play and humour in our recognition of the exposure of home truths. Obscenity can be the most natural form of expression, even in domestic settings. Invariably it is used for emphasis. Max even turns it on himself, without thinking when Lenny tells him to shut up.

MAX. Listen! I'll chop your spine off, you talk to me like that! You understand? Talking to your lousy, filthy father like that.

(17)

Sam lacks the venom of Max, but there is a laugh to be gained from the juxtaposition of statements when he describes MacGregor. 'He was lousy, stinking, rotten loud mouth. A bastard uncouth sodding runt. Mind you, he was a good friend of yours.' There is also humour in Max's declaration when Sam comes in and at first ignores him, talking only to Lenny.

MAX. I'm here, too, you know.

SAM looks at him.

MAX. I said I am here, too, I'm sitting here. (20)
Lenny says many things that are set up for a laugh in the theatre such as his reference to Joey when he is challenging Teddy about his subject.

LENNY. Well, for instance, take a table.

*Philosophically speaking. What is it?*

TEDDY. A table.

LENNY. Ah. You mean it is nothing else but a table. Well, some people would envy your certainty, wouldn’t they, Joey? (60)

The likelihood is that Joey would double take in response to his name, not having a clue what Lenny is talking about. And when Ruth is beginning to confide in Lenny on an intimate level, his answers are wonderfully evasive. When she says that she has been a model she gives away his reply thus: ‘No ... I was a model for the body. A photographic model for the body,’ (65) his further reply of ‘I indoor work?’ is another deliberate evasion than an audience should find amusing.

Critics like Symon Trussler see Pinter who has reduced the refinement of his own dramatic clichés into pornographic. He finds the events of the play improbable. He says,

*The Homecoming* is a modishly intellectualized melodrama, its violence modulated by its vagueness, its emotional stereotyping disguised by carefully planted oddities of juxtaposition and expression. To suspend disbelief in this play is to call a temporary halt to one’s humanity ... For the characters can feel nothing, other than an occasional shock of surprise or disgust: and even these shocks are subject to a law of rapidly diminishing returns.66
Harold Hobson is worried about the complete absence from the play of any moral comment. He observes thus:

We have no idea what Pinter thinks about Ruth or Teddy, or what value their existence has. They have no relation to life outside themselves. They live: their universe lives: but not the universe. If they have a connection with it we are not shown what it is.67

Pinter primarily concerns himself with urban living presenting a consistent vision of competitiveness, loneliness, and isolation in a threatening world. Like the other early plays The Homecoming also deals with the characters from the working class, or lower middle class, who make not the slightest claim to heroic or noble status, the complaint is voiced that they have ‘grubby souls’ and are not worthy of serious consideration. This is to judge the plays by standards that no longer apply. John Lahr says,

The gorgeousness of The Homecoming rests with its elusive, hard truth. Pinter is wrestling with his own sense of spiritual dislocation and finding mirrors for ours.68

With regard to characterization we may say that Max is visible throughout the play with his ferocious verbal aggression. His violent fury derives entirely from the fact of his growing old. He is at a stage in life where the past is as much torment as a comfort because it highlights his present deficiencies. He hates growing old and the key to his character is resentment. He resents the memory of Jessie because she has died and left him to run the house. He resents Sam because Sam hasn’t lived and Max now has to cook for him. Most of all he resents his sons, because there in the process of replacing him and they are an ever present reminder of what he has
lost. Lenny is smart and independent, Joey is virile and goes training to box, while Max is consigned to the kitchen. His bitterness erupts whenever he is reminded of his own decline, mostly in vicious verbal assaults but also physically – he punches Joey ‘with all his might’ when Joey calls him an old man, exposing his fear of impotence. His furious reaction on seeing Teddy and Ruth for the first time is the result of complex emotions. Teddy is his eldest son who holds an immeasurable attachment. However, Teddy has abandoned his family for six years, thereby causing an immeasurable disappointment. He has also brought a woman into the house, which nobody has done before. The shock of seeing the two is compounded in Max’s mind by the instinct that he has somehow been set up and that the others know of the arrival, so adding to his humiliation.

MAX. Did you know he was here?

Pause.

I asked you if you knew he was here.

JOEY. No.

MAX. Then who knew.

Pause.

Who knew?

Pause.

I didn’t know.

TEDDY. I was going to come down Dad, I was going to ... be here, when you came down.

Pause.

How are you?

Pause.
Uh ... look, I'd ... like you to meet ...

MAX. How long you been in this house?

TEDDY. All night.

MAX. All night? I'm a laughing stock. How did you get in?

TEDDY. I had my key.

MAX whistles and laughs. (48-49)

Stuck in the house all day, Max is obsessed with reviving the past when he believes he was impressive. But the memories are always double-edged. He boasts about his gift with horses - 'you only read their names in the papers. But I have stroked their names, I have held them, I have calmed them down before a big race. I was the one they used to call for' (18). But he was never actually employed on the race course. He was a fearful figure when seen with MacGregor - 'we were two of the worst hated men in the West of London' (16) - but MacGregor turns out to have had an affair with Jessie, Max's wife. He entered into negotiations with a top class group of butchers with continental connections, but they turned out to be criminals; he has sentimental memories of the happy family when the boys were young, but now the family are a torment to him. In spite of these disappointments and frustrations of becoming old, Max remains a formidable figure because of his mental virility and verbal energy.

Lenny is the most provocative character in the play, initiating the direction of the dialogue in most of his scenes. His motives remain inscrutable. He never explains them, and we can only hypothesize from what he says and does. Even his occupation remains uncertain. There can be no doubt about Max and the butcher's shop or Sam and his cards or Joey in demolition. They talk about their jobs and
nobody questions what they say. Lenny admits that he has an occupation and eventually claims to have a number of flats in the area of Greek Street, by which it is suggested that he is running a brothel house.

Lenny generally reacts to rather than creates a situation. He reacts to Max at the beginning of the play, to Sam when he enters, and then to the arrival of Teddy and Ruth. Firstly he encourages Teddy to go to bed and then waits for the return of Ruth from her walk. One sees a conflict here. Lenny’s two long monologues fail to impress Ruth in anyway. Much speculation has been prompted by Lenny’s concern when she calls him ‘Leonard’:

LENNY. Don’t call me that, please.

RUTH. Why not?

LENNY. That is the name my mother gave me. (41)

This only shows Lenny’s resentment towards his mother. His treatment of Ruth is a complex development. He is hostile and manipulative throughout the play. He is a bundle of suppressed violence and he has a degree of independence. He is a force in the house where he survives through his brilliant facility with language, which he uses with great skill.

Sam is depicted as a conscience of the family, the sweat-old uncle who does his best to keep the peace and finally blurts out his guilty secret only to stop what the family are doing to Ruth. He may be the weakest and the most sexless, but he knows how to survive and when he can he is quite prepared to irritate and annoy particularly Max. It is the second nature in this family to exploit weakness in the others, but in the niggling banter Sam only goes so far. He is shrewd enough to know the limits. If the older generation is under constant threat from the younger,
then the two older members – Max and Sam – can also be a constant challenge to each other.

Sam has the greatest weapon in the armory of one-upmanship. He knows that Max was cuckolded by MacGregor. Max may well know this, but does he know that Sam knows? Obviously the ground is too dangerous for Sam to dare to exploit openly, but he can regularly bring up the subject of Jessie for his private mischief. It never fails to rile Max. When he is alone with Teddy his motives might be shifty, though he pretends to be a caring confident. He is trying to see how far he can go with the MacGregor history. He is fishing for a companion in his family line up and possibly niggling at Teddy because he stopped writing to him. His shocking outburst about Jessie and MacGregor, which comes out of the blue and knocks him out, is indicative of Sam. He doesn’t want the family situation to change as being proposed.

Teddy suffers a large amount of criticism from Lenny throughout the play. Ruth, his wife becomes an embarrassment to him. Questions are asked about who the real outsider is in the play. Teddy proposes to Ruth that she stays and pays her way while he returns to the arid world of American academy. Though he holds a doctorate in philosophy he reacts to the family as a detached person. He is fully aware of how Lenny and eventually Ruth try to expose his pretentions, but he refuses to be imitated. When Lenny asks him ‘do you detect a certain logical incoherence in the central affirmations of Christian theism?’ (59) Teddy knows what Lenny is doing – bluntly, he takes the piss. Nobody who could frame such a question and put it in this domestic context could be doing anything else. Teddy won’t rise to the challenge – ‘that question doesn’t fall within my province’ (59) is
his direct reply. When Lenny persists, he gets nowhere. Teddy merely states, ‘I am afraid I am the wrong person to ask’ (60). He is equally dismissive when Lenny accuses him, at great length, of letting the side down:

LENNY. And so when you at length return to us, we do expect a bit of grace, a bit of je ne sais quoi, a bit of generosity of mind, a bit of liberality of spirit, to reassure us. We do expect that. But do we get it? Have we got it? Is that what you have given us?

Pause.

TEDDY. Yes. (73)

When Teddy first arrives in the house he is overtly nervous. He projects this anxiety on Ruth but she is indifferent.

TEDDY. You do not have to go to bed. I am not saying you have to. I mean, you can stay up with me. Perhaps I will make a cup of tea or something. The only thing is we don’t to make too much noise, we don’t want to wake any one up.

RUTH. I am not making any noise.

TEDDY. I know you are not. (31)

Teddy feels that he is rather ashamed of his marriage with Ruth. When Ruth leaves the house for a walk he half turns from the window, stands, suddenly chews his knuckles. He has been gone for six years which must have deeply offended the family. On Lenny’s entrance the silence underlies the fact.

LENNY walks into the room from U. L. He stands ... he watches

TEDDY. TEDDY turns and sees him.
Silence.

TEDDY. Hullow, Lenny.

LENNY. Hullow, Teddy.

Pause.

TEDDY. I didn’t hear you come down the stairs.

LENNY. I didn’t.

Pause. (33)

Teddy is a typical Pinter character whose emotional life is kept hidden. He is no longer able to give expression to it. In the later stages of the play he refuses to help his wife. He tries to articulate his superiority to the rest of the family in his lengthy speech where he argues that he can maintain intellectual equilibrium. He appears two-dimensional as a personality in comparison with the other characters in the play. Ruth has clearly recognized this aspect of the campus intellectual who won’t live in the real world. In America Teddy relegated her to bring a great help to me over there — helping with his lectures, looking after the family, being a faculty wife in a surrounding that is, above all else clean. She trip: him up on that:

TEDDY. It is so clean there.

RUTH. Clean.

TEDDY. Yes.

RUTH. Is it dirty here?

TEDDY. No, of course not. But it is cleaner there. (62-63)

Teddy wants to keep his hands clean. He keeps clear off any fight and makes a dignified exit.
Ruth is the most central to the play as she becomes a touchstone by which we can assess all the men in the play. She is regarded by the men in all the variety of roles that a woman can fulfill. She is also a character and a personality in her own right, and a complex, enigmatic figure whose motives are uncertain. She commands attention on the stage by the force of her physically presence. She is sexy and also the men find her physically attractive. Max calls her a lovely girl and a beautiful woman. A quality of stillness and self-containment surrounds Ruth, in marked contrast to the passionate emotionalism of the men.

At first we see her at night standing with Teddy at the threshold of the room. The family are asleep.

RUTH. Can I sit down.

TEDDY. Of course.

RUTH. I am tired.

Pause.

TEDDY. Then sit down.

She does not move. (28)

In fact she remains standing for sometime at the threshold which makes her entry into the room the more expressive. This is the area, the space, the household that is going to change her life and her entry into it a heightened event. When Teddy finally goes to have a look upstairs, ‘Ruth stands, then slowly walks across the room.’ The instruction ‘slowly develops the stylized presentation of Ruth – it emphasizes the attention that is put on her. Eventually ‘Ruth sits’ and from this static position on stage she is able, physically to dominate Teddy because the person who is most still on stage generally commands the most attention.
Even in Act II Ruth sits in the midst of the family and from this unmoving position she holds attention whenever she speaks, up to the point when she devastates the male group by drawing attention to her sexuality – ‘Look at me. I ... move my leg. That's all it is. But I wear ... underwear ... which moves with me’ (60-61). Here the simplest of physical movements can have a tremendous effect in the theatre. The speech focuses all attention on Ruth, but the movements add significantly to the force of her parents. Thus, Ruth occupies a dominant position in the play.

Joey has none of the brilliance, fluency or cunning of the others. His physical strength is evident in his job as a labourer and his ambition as a boxer. He can be readily accepted as the son of Jessie. He is different from Max, Lenny, Teddy, and Sam. He is treated almost with affection by the family as he offers no threat to anyone. He is bowled over by Ruth, utterly captivated by her. Clearly he has lived without a mother from an early age and he lies peacefully in Ruth's lap.

We find stylized naturalistic idiom in this play. This involves abusive and obscene language and also monologues that have different impacts and purposes. There are a few cryptic exchanges and also juxtaposition of speech patterns among various characters in the play. A variety of linguistic structures is underpinned by two basic criteria: the social background of the characters which determines the kind of English they speak; and the theatrical dimension, whereby everything that is said happens in a public arena. It is overheard by an audience who are held captive in a space, and who are focused on the action on the stage and performance of the actors.

As the play is set in working class London one naturally finds the speech patterns as cockney. The characters may speak a cockney accent, but the writing
makes no insistence on the emphasis. It is more subtle and stylized. For instance, in
the beginning Max says, ‘I used to knock about with a man called MacGregor,’ and
then to Lenny ‘shove off out of it.’ The expressions ‘knock about with’ and ‘shove
off’ are idiomatic, colloquial, and unsophisticated – associated more with working
class speech. However the accent employed to pronounce the words ‘about’ and
‘out’ can determine the degree of naturalism that is going to be used in the
production of the play. A cockney would pronounce these words ‘abaht’ and ‘aht,’
with a lengthened ‘a’ and without sounding the ‘t,’ but it is possible to exaggerate the
cockney in performance would be to detract from the poetic realism that the play
achieves in Act II.

One notices a natural and colloquial rhythm in Max’s speech.

MAX. He talks to me about horses.

Pause.

I used to live on the course. One of the loves of my life. Epsom? I knew it like the back of my hand. I was one of the
best known faces down at the paddock. What a marvelous open-air life. (17)

This is a typical London speech that can easily be appreciated by the London audiences. It is the richness of the language and the personalized aggression that adds intensity to the dialogue. Sometimes the characters in the play speak to each other in an uncomplicated and straightforward manner, as when Lenny asks Max for a racing tip or when Max tells Joey that he prefers the kitchen to the living room. But we also find a humiliating use of language. In the very opening of the play one finds an aggressive use of language.
MAX. Do you hear what I am saying? I am talking to you! Where is the scissors?

LENNY (looking up, quietly). Why don’t you shut up, you daft prat?

*MAX lifts his stick and points it at him.*

MAX. Don’t you talk to me like that. I am warning you. (15)

Max leads the family by using aggressive language with utmost grossness. He pounces upon Lenny thus:

MAX. Mind you, she wasn’t such a bad woman. Even though it made me sick just to look at her rotten stinking face, she wasn’t such a bad bitch. I gave her the best bleeding years of my life, anyway.

LENNY. Plug it, will you, you stupid sod, I am trying to read the paper.

MAX. Listen! I will chop your spine off, you talk to me like that! You understand? Talking to your lousy, filthy father like that!

LENNY. You know what, you are getting demented.

*Pause.*

What do you think of second wind for the three thirty? (17)

Here Max’s abuse is clear but Lenny’s aggression is equally powerful but it is much more controlled.

Lenny and Max are both adept at using personal names ironically to insult other members of the family. Whenever Max calls Sam directly by his name it is usually in connection with some accompanying attack. Lenny’s reputation of Dad
can easily niggle Max (What the boy's want, Dad, is your own special brand of cooking, Dad). Towards the end of the play, when Max and Lenny are deliberating the future of Ruth, it is really Teddy whom they are both trying to target and this fact is underlined by their repeated references to him personally ('What do you think, Teddy?' ... 'Eh? Teddy, you are the best judge' ... 'Listen, Teddy, you could help us' ... 'No, what I mean, Teddy....'). Similarly there is an irony, intentionally aimed at Teddy, in Max mock concern regarding Ruth –

Lenny, do you mind if I make a little comment? It is not meant to be critical. But I think you are concentrating too much on the economic considerations. There are other considerations. There are the human considerations. (79)

Ruth tends to disrupt all the normal speech patterns of the men every time she opens her mouth. With her different rhythm she disturbs Teddy. She easily undermines him with her deadpan replies. For instance,

TEDDY. Are you cold?

RUTH. No.

TEDDY. I'll make something to drink, if you like. Something hot.

RUTH. No, I don't want anything. (29)

Ruth completely devastates Teddy when she decides to go for a stroll, for a breath of air, because she indicates the extent of her independence.

TEDDY. But what am I going to do?

_Pause._

The last thing I want is a breath of air. Why do you want a breath of air?
RUTH. I just do. (32)

These brief, undeveloped answers make Ruth the more enigmatic and the more powerful of the two on stage. She employs a similar tactic when she returns from her walk and is confronted by the waiting Lenny. In their remarkable scene (35-42) Ruth reverses the balance of power by destroying Lenny's verbal rhythm. She wrongly puts him immediately with her first words.

LENNY. Good evening.

RUTH. Morning, I think.

LENNY. You're right there. (35)

Lenny is full of confidence to begin with, ignoring Ruth's claims to being Teddy's wife, and bombarding her with his dexterity and invention. But her one line responses leave him floundering – 'how did you know she was diseased?' and 'it is not in my way' rendering his set piece monologues quite ineffectual. Whenever the men try to overwhelm Ruth with speech, she undercuts them with her own more telling and disturbing responses.

When Ruth speaks in front of the family she draws attention to her presence by using a different style of delivery, often breaking up her speech with pauses.

RUTH. I was ...

MAX. What?

Pause.

What she say?

They all look at her.

RUTH. I was ... different ... when I met Teddy ... first. (58)
These pauses are also present in her speech which draws attention away from the philosophy debate and when she describes the country house where she is used to do her modeling. The effect of this stylization in the theatre is to take the play on to a different level of realism – a more poetic realism. Thus, Ruth with her use of language is able to control others easily.

*The Homecoming* offers a moral lesson at least in a veiled manner. Critics see in the invitation to Teddy fraught with some serious content. Stuart Hall suggested the importance of Teddy's long speech as the philosophical centre of the play.

Teddy has a Ph.D. in philosophy and the family constantly harps on its pleasure as having a doctor in the house. Teddy seems to be philosophical in the contemptible sense of the world. Lenny's speeches are not simply anecdotes. He seems to be obsessed with order and clarity. He says that he wants the true facts about his conception. Lenny speculates on so many things and argues like a philosopher. He says,

I mean there are lots of things which tick in the night, don't you find that? All sorts of objects, which, in the day, you wouldn't call anything else but commonplace. They give you no trouble, but in the night any given one of a number of them is liable to start letting out a bit of tick. Whereas you look at these objects in the day and they're just commonplace. They are quiet as mice during the day time. So ... all things being equal ... this question of me saying it was the clock that woke me up, well, that could very easily prove something of a false hypothesis. (36)
Teddy's philosophy seems to be incredibly academic and narrow. His rejection of logical incoherence in the central affirmations of Christian theism as outside his province is reasonable.

To conclude we may say that *The Homecoming* succinctly discusses the role of absurdity in human life. The characters relate anecdotes briskly with a near irrelevance at times. The dialogue is trivial but it connotes serious thought content. Thus, the three early plays – *The Birthday Party*, *The Caretaker*, and *The Homecoming* – are characteristically absurdist plays of Pinter connoting the enigmatic nature of human life.
Notes


   Subsequent page references to this edition appear in the text.


   (May) *The Birthday Party* returns to the same theatre where it opened exactly 50
   years ago.


   Faber, 2000. 57.


    Faber, 1996. 76.


    Faber, 1996. 78.


27. Carpenter, Charles A. “What Have I seen the Scum or the Essence? ‘Symbolic Fall Out in Pinter’s The Birthday Party,’” (?) 104-105.


30. Quoted in Naismith, Harold *Pinter*. Faber Critical Guides 41.

31. Naismith, Harold *Pinter*. Faber Critical Guides 42.


34. Pinter, Harold. On the Royal Court Theatre’s Production of *The Room* and *The Dumbwaiter*, 1960.

35. Pinter, *Various Voices* 17.


41. Pinter, *The Caretaker* 4.


43. Pinter, *The Caretaker* 5.


60. Pinter, *The Homecoming*. Harold Pinter: Plays 3 15.


63. Pinter, *The Homecoming* 29.

64. Naismith, *Harold Pinter* 144.


