(1) TRENDS IN MODERN DRAMA:

The new dramatists — John Osborne, Arnold Wesker, Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter take their work very seriously. Their attitude in the plays is not a romantic philanthropy, but the attitude of realism. They display a search for an identity through the themes of their plays. The British theatre has a number of plays which have raised this unique but a burning problem of crisis of an identity in the contemporary period. Their main aim is to expose these themes under labels such as kitchen sink, menacing plays or absurdism etc. However, through these different labels the British theatre is experiencing the Renaissance spirit once again under the regime of queen Elizabeth second.

The modern age may easily be termed as the Renaissance as far as the drama is concerned. English drama has now
reached a new dignity; it has gained back its lost glory. It is no longer a mere source of entertainment for the few; it has now deeply entrenched itself in the life of the common man. It is now intimately related to life.

In the recent English dramas — in the plays of Osborne, John Arden, Arnold Wesker and Harold Pinter, a new area of life has been presented — the area of the young, the poor and the crushed. Attempts are being made by some to create a new imaginative world. These playwrights always make their audience use their minds. They accept life as it is and try to present its deeper aspects on the stage. Thus when they portray the working class or the lower-middle class they seek to enter the very spirit of that class. In their efforts to be true to their times, they present on the stage the confusion, the boredom, the language, the languor and the indecision of the age or the crisis of identity in the modern human beings.

**Existentialism**

Existentialism, which characterizes man's situation in the universe by denying it all personal significance seeing in it
only absurdity, is a unique movement in the English dramas and has been searching its own place in the plays of Osborne, Arnold Wesker and Harold Pinter. Harold Pinter whose main aim is to expose the oblique and murky position of the contemporary world in which a human being is threatened, is handled with a dashing spirit. Samuel Beckett is another dramatist who seems to have tone of the concerns of existentialism.

Albert Camus' writings display a spiritual attitude that was born of the sharp contradictions within him between the awareness of earthly life and the gripping consciousness of the reality of death. Camus represented the philosophical movement called existentialism, which characterizes man's situation in the universe by denying it all. He finds absurdity in the world. For him an affirmation of the absurdity of the human condition is no sterile negativism. This view of things is supplemented in him by a powerful appeal to the will of an individual which incites one to revolt against the absurdity for an identity. This revolt creates a value.
Absurdism

"I hate this narrow world in which we are reduced to gazing up at God" is the sole meaning of Absurdism.

But Jean Paul Sartre has insisted that he and Camus use the word "Absurd" differently; but the difference in usage appears to be slight. In the history of French theatre, Sartre and Camus are clubbed together. Both of them subscribe to the belief that 'acts' alone is important. Again both of them believe that violence is a characteristic of our age; hence, in the plays both isolation and violence are introduced as principal themes. In order to claim a separate and unique identity the absurdists adopted very startling and embarrassing means of writing dramas. Ionesco, one of the pioneers of this movement is criticized for his absurd dramas on the ground that he has no message to give. Ionesco does not accept.

No, I am not a postman. I am a writer.¹

He says that his aim is to present the progressed theme of men for fragmented hero. A well-known critic of the modern dramas, J. L. Stayan remarks:

¹
The playwrights of the twentieth century from Ibsen to the absurdists have undertaken a desperate search for new forms and new conventions in the hope of reaching the fragmented modern audience.²

It is desirable to know the function of Absurd theatre. Albert Camus says that Absurd theatre does not agree, it just represents man as stranger. To quote him:

A world that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty, is a familiar world. But in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity.³

Here it is necessary to note the meaning of the word 'Absurd'. The term 'Absurd', in the musical context, means out of harmony. That is the dictionary meaning as well: Out of harmony with reason or propriety; incongruous, unreasonable, illogical. In an essay on Kafka, Ionesco defines the word absurd thus:
Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose... cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless.\(^4\)

This sense of metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of the human condition is, broadly speaking, the theme of the plays of Beckett, Adamov, Ionesco, Genet and Harold Pinter.

The theatre of the Absurd is thus part of the 'anti-literary' movement of our time, which has found its expression in abstract painting, with its rejection of 'literary' elements in pictures; or in the 'new novel' in France, with its reliance on the description of objects and rejection of empathy and anthropomorphism. While most plays in the traditional convention are primarily concerned to tell a story or elucidate an intellectual problem, and can thus be seen as a narrative or discursive form of communication, the plays of the Theatre of Absurd primarily intend to convey a poetic image or a complex pattern of poetic images. Moreover, the new dramatists are chiefly concerned with expressing a sense of wonder of incomprehension, and at times, of despair, at the
lack of cohesion and meaning that they find in the world.

Martin Esslin says:

But quite obviously, they have no faith in the existence of so rational and well-ordered a universe.5

The theatre of the absurd can actually coincide with the highest degree of realism, for the real conversational of human beings is in fact absurd and non-sensible. In a world, says Martin Esslin that has become absurd:

The theatre of the absurd is the most realistic comment as the most accurate reproduction of reality.6

Martin Esslin further observes:

The realism of these plays is a psychological and inner realism; they explore the human subconscious in depth rather than trying to describe the outward appearance of human existence. Nor is it quite correct that these plays, deeply pessimistic as they are, are nothing but an expression of utter despair. It is true that basically the theatre of absurd attacks the comfortable certainties of religious or political orthodox. It aims to shock its audience out of complacency, to bring it face to face with the harsh facts of the human situation as these writers see it... the shedding of easy solutions of comforting illusions, may be painful,
but it leaves behind it a sense of freedom and relief. And that is why in the last resort, the theatre of the Absurd does not provoke tears of despair but the laughter of liberation.\textsuperscript{7}

The theatre of the Absurd has become a catch phase, much used and much abused during the forties and fifties. But there is no organised movement, no school of artists which claim that label for themselves. A good many playwrights, who have been classed under this label, deny\textsuperscript{7} indignantly. Because each of the playwrights concerned seeks to express no more and no less than his own personal vision of the world.

A drama of absurd is different from the well-made play. A well-made play seems to have a beginning, a middle and a neatly tied up ending. An absurd play does not observe this principle. It often starts at an arbitrary point and ends just as arbitrarily. Despite this fact, an absurd drama has a fascination of its own. It is often said that this fascination has been merely a “success de scandale”, that people flocked to see Beckett’s \textit{Waiting for Godot} or Ionesco’s \textit{Bald Primadonna} merely for astonishment. But when we probe
deeper, we find that absurd plays have in fact, their own convention. Beckett’s play *Godot* has no plot to speak of; it does not tell a story nor does it offer any solution to the problem posed in the play. Yet, it has its own definite pattern constructed on the ground of recurrence. This pattern or design expresses his vision of the world. In short, the Theatre of the Absurd must be understood as a kind of intellectual short hand for a complex pattern of similarities in approach, method, and convention of shared philosophical and artistic premises, whether conscious or subconscious.

(2) THE SOCIOLOGICAL, ECONOMICAL & POLITICAL BACKGROUND:

For ten years and more after the end of the Second World War, British theatre worked quietly. With little argument and no fuss, its scattered forces were reassembled and work was put in hand to restore the production lines that had been in action, before hostilities began.

At its best the rehabilitated theatre was intriguingly temperamental and, less frequently, thoughtful. But by
common consent, all its business was carried on without noise or passion, as if prolonged convalescence had to take its agreeable course in order to ensure full recovery from the shock and rigours of the war. Seldom were present day issues posed on the stage, and few signs could be seen in the theatre of the far-reaching and totally unprecedented changes that were taking place in thought, feeling, and society throughout the world.

This composure was first shaken by Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Within ten years, John Osborne, Harold Pinter, and Arnold Wesker had all had successes in the West-End of London. John Osborne and Harold Pinter had worked as actors in the early 1950s. The changes in national outlook was significant. After first World War people wanted to go back to the good old days' of security and stability, the days of the thirties seemed so – insecure that they looked forward to the future with great expectations.

But affluence had its areas of darkness. The nation spends millions of Pounds on mass consumption of gadgets and entertainments, but it could not afford to build a single new hospital or prison during 1950-60. Two thirds of the
hospitals still in use had been built in the nineteenth century. About fourteen percent of the total population of Great Britain was in poverty. The neglected classes of old age pensioners and the sick were left behind in the race for affluence; there was not even any complete minimum wage policy. And affluence, moreover, brought in disquieting social problems. One of the fruits of the welfare state was steep rise in crime, particularly among teen-agers. The Christian Economic and Social Research Foundation detected a sharp increase, during 1956-60, in drunkenness. Criminologists indicated possible links between a fast changing society of this kind and alarming increase in Juvenile offenders, illegitimacy, prostitution and drug taking. Traditional values were being discarded by the youth and an uneasy quiet for new values strained the postwar community structure. A fairly sizable section of the population felt either completely left out or partially crippled by insurmountable difficulties. It was the image of a nation with high proportion of young people struggling to adjust itself to an expending economy and an outdated socio-moral convention. Even those who enjoyed material prosperity could not feel a sense of
communal belongingness, and were aware of their loneliness in the mass society.

This paradoxical situation – affluence enjoyed by a section of the community and a large human area left uncured for – was bound to have its impact on the drama. This dissatisfaction over the gap between the expected and the existing provided the initial inspiration of what is known as the ‘New-drama’. A child of the post war conditions, it aspired to visualise, at least at the first stage, the new society’s tension areas and paradoxes, its myths and frustrations. Michael Billington observes:

In contemporary drama so often we have a villain society and the hero the individual.8

The Room and The Birthday Party of Harold Pinter are quite obviously concerned with the tension between individual need and the pressures of social conformity. And Pinter’s career proceeds, he increasingly sees private life as a form of power politics full of invasion, retreats, subjugations and deceptions, conversely, when he later comes to deal quite overtly with the machinery of the state, he describes it in
terms of individual power and powerlessness. To put it simply, marriage for Pinter is a highly political state, just as the relationship between torturer and victim often acquires a degree of marital intimacy. There is no moral tags etc. Mr. Michael Billington comments:

There is no explicit moral tag; but Pinter clearly implies that the male bourgeois ideal of control and order is based on the flimsiest moral foundations.  

Harold Pinter has, at times, been accused of being totally a political. He himself has, occasionally, seemed to have wanted to create such an impression. When during the period of the Macmillan government's first negotiations about Britain's entry into the common Market, Encounter asked a variety of public figures to give their views about the problem, Pinter's reply was the shortest of all:

I have no interest in the matter and do not care what happens.  

Yet, on closer scrutiny one will find that neither in his attitude as a citizen, nor in his work as a playwright, is Pinter so utterly devoid of political content or commitment as some of his detractors tend to maintain.
And indeed, behind the highly private world of his plays, there also lurk what, are after all, the basic political problems: the use and abuse of power, the fight for living space, cruelty, terror, only very superficial observers could overlook this social, this political side of the playwright. Nor, if one looks at Harold Pinter's background, could these basic preoccupations appear as anything but inevitable. The East-End of London where Pinter grew up as a child of the nineteen thirties was a political battlefield. A large Jewish population, mainly refugees from the great Russian pogroms of 1905, but swelled by newer arrivals after the first world war and, later, the victims of Hitler, was battling for a foothold and livelihood among cockneys, Chinese, Negroes and Irish. It was in the streets of the East End that Mosley's Fascists clashed with left-wing Jewish militants. And after the end of the Second World War, these tensions did not die down.

Pinter in one of his interviews says of his encountering the violence in his personal life:

I'm categorically anti the Americans in Vietnam. And I feel strongly in favour of Israel. he said to an interviewer in April 1968. 

14
Everyone; says Pinter, 'encounters violence in some way or other. I did encounter it in quite an extra me form after the war, in the East End... I got into quite a few fights down there... The best way was to talk to them, you know, sort of "Are you all right? 'Yes, I'm all right'. 'Well, that's all right then, isn't it?'... there was a good deal of violence there, in those days.  

The characters in Pinter's plays are raised as metaphors of the fact that life itself consists of a succession of such questions which cannot, or will not be capable of an answer. Pinter says in an interview:

My characters tell me so much and no more, with reference to their experience, their aspirations, their motives, their history. Between my lack of biographical data about them and the ambiguity of what they say there lies a territory which is not only worthy of exploration but which it is compulsory to explore. You and I, the characters which grow on a page, most of the time we're inexpressive, giving little away, unreliable, elusive, evasive, obstructive, unwilling. But it's out of their attributes that a language arises. A language...Where under what is said, another thing is being said.  

He further explains that his characters do their job honestly without shirking away from the contemporary period:
I'd like to make it quite clear at the same time that I don't regard my own characters as uncontrolled, or anarchic, they're not. The function of selection and arrangement is mine, I do all the donkeywork, infact, and I think I can say that I pay a meticulous attention to the shape of things, from the shape of a sentence to the overall structure of the play... where the characters are silent and in hiding. It is in the silence that they are most evident to me."

It is found that the theatre is a place where one cannot only discover the language of social protest, but also learn to contemplate the grandeur of human activities and the futility of human efforts. The facts of the period find their way into plays and its dreams and illusions radiate from them. Changes in the economic structure of society, introduction of new modes and styles in the industrial habits of a country are followed by a sort of re-shuffling in the behaviour pattern of groups, re-alignment of sections of interest and appearance of new forces. New ideas gain currency, areas of human relationship is reviewed, and social priorities re-adjusted.

Pinter is the most original theatre talent of the new group. His characters are very much British, his dialogue has the
uncanny ring of real speech, and yet his insistent probing of psychological reality and his evocation of the vague fear and cruelty of modern existence bring him close to the attitude of continental existentialists. However, the post war British drama, has been considerably influenced by the drama of the other side of the Atlantic. Most of the British playwrights attempt to interpret contemporary British reality in a bewildered and rather pessimistic manner, grouping their way through a confused territory, uncertain of their vision, unsteady in their approach.

(3) PINTER'S PESSIMISM:

Harold Pinter is pessimist. He has, unlike Samuel Beckett, lost hope in the modern era. There is a desperation in easy animosity and irritation in his characters. Pinter repeatedly confesses that he deals with the real characters and not symbols of any kind. Thus, Pinter's characters may be seen in double perspective, as individuals and as images of the human predicament. His characters are defeated individuals who are also images of alienation. They are real individuals
who struggle against the hidden menace in society. They are also images of the isolated individuals placed in a hostile environment.

The pervading atmosphere of menace in Pinter is an intimation of the hostile universe in which an individual finds himself trapped. The characters Stanley, Aston, and Davies are victims of hostile forces which drive men into the state of isolation. In Pinter's universe, man does not face a void but encounters hostile forces which use him as a tool and try to dehumanise him. Also there is an oppressive sense of evil, but it is not exactly located. The menace is not interpreted in social, ethical or religious terms. It is shown to be all-pervasive but unidentifiable. Pinter has given a dramatic form to modern man's sense of insecurity and fear in an incomprehensible universe. The menace is Pinter's way of dramatizing the meaningless casual violence of the modern world and the hidden forces which enact violence on modern man.

The Birthday Party, The Caretaker and The Home-coming are the representative plays of the characters; characters who are either rejected by the society or who keep themselves aloof.
They find it difficult to establish rapport with others; they deliberately avoid being drawn into relationships. They feel threatened by menacing forces, often unidentifiable and emanating from a hostile universe. There is a deep rift between their real self and their inflated self-image.

Stanley in The Birthday Party keeps himself in self-imposed isolation. He finds a refuge from the society and reality in the boarding house run by Meg and Petey. Meg and Petey form the solid bourgeois background against which Stanley stands out in contrast as an isolated character. The dissolution of identity is brought to its completion at the end of the party.

In The Caretaker Aston and Davies are unfit to the society, Aston’s cluttered-up room is a metaphor of his confused state of mind. He is in a state of Lobotomy. In the words of William Baker and Stephen Ely Tabachnick:

> Pinter touches the raw nerve of fear in this monologue, revealing society’s depredations against the individual.\(^{15}\)

Davies regards society as a hostile force which treats him like dirt. He has a paranoic hatred of foreigners and blames them for his own ill-treatment at society’s hands. He is incapable of
maintaining interpersonal relationships because of an unfortunate tendency to antagonize others. He also addresses the inimical forces which are hostile to him as "them". Davies has a serious problem of his identity. The loss of identity papers and assuming false name is his tacit manner of survival.

Pinter's The Home-coming is another example of defeated character. Teddy, whose intellectual claims estrange him from his family finds himself in a strong mental conflicts. The traditional bond between fathers and sons, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters are all broken. In this context Austin E. Quigley's observation is worth noting:

The whole family structure seems based less on mutual sharing than on mutual exploitation.16

Teddy's final estrangement stands out in his leave-taking. Banalities devoid of any genuine feeling are exchanged in a superficial manner. Deprivation, discomfiture and cuckoldry have been featured regularly in satiric comedy. But it arouses only derision. They are implied values in Pinter's plays, such as indignation at social pressures on individuals, criticism of
the aggression and exploitation of weak individuals by others, and the need for concern and sympathy in human relationships. In this lies the lasting achievement of Pinter.

(4) PINTER'S ASSOCIATION WITH THE THEATRE OF DREAMS AND FANTASY:

In the theatre of the Dreams there is nothing to drink but raw alcohol, for civilization is repudiated and the stimulus must grow ever stronger; the images being comparatively primitive and therefore undifferentiated, allow little variety of response. Raw alcohol is stimulating but it does not train the Palate. In the "estranged" theatre of the existentialists, a sparse and austere intellectual control was exerted by those who had known extreme violence, and had learnt discipline and responsibility in secret; the Theatre of the Dreams is a reaction against this. As Gertude Stein puts:

> It is said that any great crisis may take a decade before its effects are registered in imaginative literature.¹⁷

After a stunning blow, time is needed to regain memory and a sense of identity. The Second World War, which Camus and
Sartre recorded directly, in about a decade, took imaginative form. What emerged was not, the horrors of battle, or war atrocities; it was the image of the Delinquent, the young criminal, the child from the wild gangs that roamed Italy and Germany; all that is represented in the career of Genet, “Martyr” of the new theatre. The image of prison house, directly presented by Satire in NO EXIT, Men Without Shadows, or by Beckett, Pinter, and Gibert, it is an interior Prison.

Theatre of the dream might be dated from 1953, when Beckett’s Waiting for Godot appeared in French, and established an image and a theme. It takes its form from the play-within-play. Beckett allows the audience a wide variety of interpretations; interpretations of Lucky and Pozzo have ranged from Id to Super Ego. The same freedom is not offered in any of his subsequent plays. The heroes become more and more derelict, more and more isolated.

Harold Pinter works at a far deeper imaginative level. The trap, the cage is the setting for The Room, The Dumb Waiter and The Birthday Party. Unfocussed feelings of menace, the emergence of irrational guilt, fear and rage, mark a society in
which the individual is unable to feel much true responsibility, and therefore little genuine guilt; these fears are the fruits of impotence and frustration.

Like the characters of the French theatre, Pinter's are blind or paralysed or inarticulate; the murderers, tramps and demented in Beckett and Pinter live in an ominous timeless moment. Responsibility is reduced to anxiety, conscience to fear, lit by the weak blaze of undirected rage.

In the theatre of dreams the end remains, open because there is no body to bury. The characters float, like space travelers, in a sort of weightless imbalance. A void or gap, which begins at the level of the speech, surrounds each characters. In Pinter, this does not merely signify a lack of context beyond and a pile of rubbish within, but a sinister degree of mystification.

In The Birthday Party, the two killers who penetrate to Stan's squalid seaside refuge break him down by a preposterous series of questions and insults, after getting him to obey the first simple command – to sit down. The bullying begins with
such queries as “what were you doing yesterday?” “Do you recognize an external force?”

The Caretaker, Pinter’s most successful play, presents much clearer roles; the blustering cringing Davies and the cool technician Mick, have stumbling mood and strange dreams. Unreal bargains and threats and demands are necessary for the Caretaker’s marginal hold on existence. Mac Bradbrook puts this viewpoint effectively:

Pinter’s imaginative strength lies in the precision, and control of the rhythms that guide the inarticulate speech of his characters; the effect is a poetic one, though it is not in the traditional sense poetry... The audience at Pinter’s plays are involved in an exciting but mysterious action, and are left with an unresolved or unconcluded puzzle.18

(5) PINTER AND REALISM:

Harold Pinter is the product of a post war generation that has attempted to reject the evils of the twentieth century and present a new outlook of society. That is not to say that Pinter is consciously didactic; obviously he is not. Rather, he expresses the experience of man in transition, not in terms of
the angry young man in frustration or revolt, nor of the vaccuity of man faced with metaphysical absurdity, but in his fear, joy, humour, stupidity, ambition. He is concerned with the human condition as it is today. We should not ask what his plays 'mean' but rather see them as theatrical experiences engaging and provoking an emotional and intellectual response from his audience. He admits:

I am not concerned with making general statements. I am not interested in theatre used simply as a means of self-expression on the part of people engaged in it. I find in so much group theatre, under the sweat and assault and noise, nothing but valueless generalisations, naïve and quite untruthful. I can sum up none of my plays. I can describe none of them, except to say: That is what happened. That is what they say. That is what they did. 19

Dramatic criticism has often become obsessed with defining the meaning of plays but for playwrights such as Pinter the meaning is the play itself. To theorise the subject of the drama is for him to go against the experiences and the emotions he wishes to communicate. The plays communicate feelings, emotions, experiences which the playwright sees and
which he then mediates for our perception as an audience. He himself has once said that he is not a prophet; nor is he a theorist but a playwright and that “A Play has to speak for itself”. Harold Hobson, the influential critic of the Sunday Times, had run against the stream of adverse criticism of Harold Pinter in 1958, proclaiming:

That Mr. Pinter; on the evidence of this work (The Birthday Party) possesses the most original, disturbing and arresting talent in theatrical London.20

His language was far too elliptic, his plots too obscure. He was, therefore, seen, in comparison with Samuel Beckett (whose works he had read) and Eugene Ionesco (whose works he had not read), as the English exponent of what Martin Esslin termed 'the theatre of the absurd'.

Such a categorization was acceptable for a time, but comparison between Pinter and Beckett began to show that they seemed to be different from each other. In Pinter, the intensity of the metaphysical theme was not as apparent as in Beckett's work. Man, for Beckett, was being contemplated in relation to a void. In plays such as Waiting for Godot and
Endgame metaphysical concerns seemed to be involved with the dilemma of man's existence.

Pinter's vision, however, centered largely on man without reference to the spiritual void. Menace, fear, the clutter of daily living, the concentration on trivial possessions, the focus on the banality of language are elements which seemed to form a common denominator. Pinter argued that his art is neither didactic nor political. In this respect his plays are the theatrical experiences provoking audience response, but in doing this they are naturally fulfilling a social and some would say a political role. Denial of a political role implies one. His art form does not have to be overtly didactic or moralistic since such elements are implicit within the dramatic experience the works provide. Through the complexity of his theatrical forms his plays express moments of existence catching life as it passes. To talk of his theatricality as the focus of his achievement is not to deny his drama's social function but is rather to assert it. His plays express elements of human conduct and in that expression lie their strengths or their weakness as we accept or reject them.
PINTER'S CONCERN FOR IDENTITY:

Each of Harold Pinter's first four plays ends in the virtual annihilation of an individual. In Pinter's first play, The Room, after a blind Negro is kicked into inertness, the heroine, Rose, is suddenly stricken with blindness. In The Dumbwaiter, the curtain falls as Gus and his prospective murderer stare at each other. Stanley Webber, the hero of The Birthday Party, is taken from his refuge for 'special treatment'. In The Caretaker, the final curtain falls on an old man's fragmentary and unheeded pleas to remain in his refuge.

As Pinter focuses more sharply on the wriggle for existence, each of his successive hero-victims seems more vulnerable than the last. A villain assaults a victim in a telling and murderous idiom. Although Pinter's first two plays are in one act, and the second two in three acts, each successive drama seems to begin closer to its own end, highlighting the final throes of the hero-victims. Ruby Cohn remarks:

But who are they - these nondescript villains and victims, acting out their dramas in dilapidated rooms? Victims emerge from a vague past to go to their ineluctable destruction. Villains are messengers from mysterious
Pinter is often called Beckett’s spiritual son. Pinter’s anger is directed vitriolically against the establishments, as well as against the systems. He dehumanises the characters with bitter negative forms. The religion and society are depicted as the immoral agents that destroy the individual like Beckett. Pinter looks forward to nothing (not even Godot). He has created his own distinctive and dramatic version of Man v/s the System.

In Pinter’s plays the house is reduced to the room. His rooms are stuffy, non-specific cubes whose atmosphere grows steadily more stale and more tense. But by the end of each play, they become sealed containers, virtual coffins. Within each room, the props seem to be realistically functional and only in retrospect do they acquire symbolic significance. In Pinter’s The Caretaker, the old man keeps trying on different shoes that might enable him to get on the road to Sidcup, where he claims to have left his identity papers. The misfit of each shoes has a symbolic significance that the journey to Sidcup cannot be made and as a
consequence the identity of Davies, the tramp is unexposed.
Meaning—there-by the past overshadows the present. Ruby Cohn Observes:

Pinter's defenceless victims are a middle-aged wife, a man who asks too many questions, an ex-pianist, a broken old man. Ruthlessly robbed of any distinction, they come to portray the human condition. And Pinter's Villains, initially as unprepossessing as the victims, gradually reveal their insidious significance through some of the most skilful dialogue on the English stage today. For it is language that betrays the villains—more pat, more cliché-ridden, with more brute power than that of their victims.22

Even hostile critics have commented on the brilliance of Pinter's dialogue and it is in the lines of his villains that he achieves precise dramatic timing and economical manipulation of commonplaces. Representatives of the system, Pinter's villains give direct expression to its dogmas. In the plays of Osborne and Beckett, which also implicitly attack the system, the oppressive forces are presented through the words of their victims.

In the plays of Beckett, it is always optimistically looked forwarded, while in Pinter's plays, it is pessimistically the end
forever which is further mystified through the disappearance of the characters. This shrouded mystery enhances the dramatic technique and brilliance of the dramatist Pinter is today. Katharine J. Worth points out:

He uses false voices, phoney performances as a writer like O'Neill uses masks. And for a similar purpose, to convey the terrible sense of non-identity and disconnectedness that almost all his characters, like O'Neill's suffer from. It's what Eliot's characters suffer from too. This is the ground where he and Pinter meet. But where Eliot mostly relies on imagery to communicate this nightmare, Pinter can act it out. His marvelous ear for idiom and his gift for mimicry allow him to suggest rather than state that all the world's a stage, all people characters endlessly, strutting in parts they have created for themselves.23

There is no future for the characters created by Harold Pinter. In play after play the curtain comes down on a terrible state of stasis in which the only possible development for the individuals concerned is, at best, continued stagnation, at worst, putrefaction. This is not a matter of accident. The characters frequently refer to the future. Some of them may even be presumed to have an 'existence' to look forward to
once the play is over. Yet the future which they imagine is quite clearly beyond their grasp. Their visions are perpetually betrayed by their actions – and their actions, as the audience come to realise, are conditioned by their history. This steady elimination of the future by the slow revelation of old times is the most distinctive mark of Pinter's dramatic technique. Its most interesting aspect is the way in which he subtly corrupts his audience into abandoning all hope for the characters. The menacing atmosphere of the plays is a product of the way in which the spectator is left prey to the pity and terror naturally associated with an unexpected visit to the inhabitants of inferno.

The dehumanisation of characters is carried out by well answered plot. As Nigel Alexander says:

A Pinter plot is created not by intricate intrigue but by the manipulation of the past and present.\textsuperscript{24}

In \textit{The Caretaker}, it is clearly demonstrated and all the characters believe in some kind of miracle which is going to happen to them and change their dreary present existence. Mick, Aston and Davies make their prophesies, the only
hinderance is their past track-record. The audience are supposed to believe their future dreams come true. Their future, because of their tardy progress, dilly-dallying tactics, is bleak and blank.

To understand Pinter's plays, his techniques, his ideas, his psychology are of great help.

In this regard Guido Almansi and Simon Henderson make the following valid point:

To search for psychological plausibility, behavioural congruity, confession eloquence or epistemological clarification in his plays is, most of the time, a vain enterprise. Equally vain seems to us the quest for social realism, psychoanalytic symbolism, anthropological allegorism or ideological commitment — as vain as a Marxist analysis of how rich people behave in a novel by P. G. Wodehouse.25

(7) HYPOTHESIS:

Over industrialization and the Second World War have dehumanized men and made them commodities. Industrialization promotes migration from place to place. Thus a man becomes rootless. Industrialization also
promotes rationalism and mitigates the faith in destiny. Thus man becomes isolated from his own emotion. In the work places of production, man is isolated from the product. This explains his loss of identity and the problem of alienation. Pinter aims to present man's predicament. He is aware of the loss of his character's identity. That is why he deals with the pertinent problem of identity. His characters explore that reality. My hypothesis is that Pinter's characters struggle to explore their identity but they fail due to one or the other reasons in the end. I shall use the tools of analysis and comparison to substantiate my hypothesis.
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3. ...Brustein, P.31-32.


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10. 'In search of Harold Pinter', by Kathleen Tynan in the *Evening Standard*, London, 16\textsuperscript{th} April 1968.

11. 'In search of Harold Pinter', by Kathleen Tynan in the *Evening Standard*, London, 16\textsuperscript{th} April 1968.


13. Pinter, Speech to the Seventh National Student Drama Festival in Bristol, *Sunday Times*, London, 4\textsuperscript{th} March, 1962.

14. Pinter, Speech to the Seventh National Student Drama Festival in Bristol, *Sunday Times*, London, 4\textsuperscript{th} March, 1962.


17. Gertude Stein made this observation about the effects of the first world war, in a paper she once gave at Oxford.


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