

**World War II and After – Responses of Three British Dramatists – Samuel Beckett,
Harold Pinter and John Osborne**

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Abstract

The post-World War II era was a time of disintegration in every sphere of life. The two World Wars shattered the Western myth of a rational and humane evolution of the world based on principles of equality, growth and co-operation. Feelings of shock, disillusionment and helplessness replaced the earlier sentiments. The destruction brought about by World War II affected the personal, social and political life of millions of people all over Europe. The consequences of two consecutive wars created a sense of severe depression within the British society also. As a result the loss of faith in human existence drained all hopes for a good life and psychologically caused a prevalent sense of fragmentation and instability. The two World Wars destabilized the balance of life for the British society both physically and spiritually due mass destruction leaving a crippled society.

The immensely chaotic environment of the times led to the development of such plays that would reflect the impact of the trauma the World Wars brought about upon the English society. Writers such as Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter became associated with *the Theatre of the Absurd*, while John Osborne came to be known as the voice of the *Angry Young Men* movement. Samuel Beckett's plays showed the grave metaphysical crisis human beings experienced psychologically due to the bleak state of human existence by basing the plays on absurdist elements. Thus, the characters in Beckett's plays all deal with a broken psyche and reveal their inner struggles caused by a loss of identity and existential trauma. Harold Pinter's plays too fall in the category of the *Theatre of the Absurd*, where the language of the plays reveals the characters' suppressed emotions resulting from a world of cruelty and malice. Pinter's well-known use of pauses and silences highlights the mystery of the characters as well as the lack of communication that makes the characters misinterpret one another's words and actions.

John Osborne sheds light upon the condition of the British society that had suffered a loss of prestige after World War II and the coming of the American age that was transforming the traditional beliefs of the English society. Osborne also emphasised upon the discrimination that the class-structure had brought about to the working-classes and their tone of frustration. Therefore, his plays became linked to the emergence of the *Angry Young Men* movement, which expressed the anger and rage felt by the younger generation of the British society.

This dissertation attempts to look into the various issues relating to the social, economic and metaphysical life in 1950s England, explored by the three dramatists Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter and John Osborne. Their choice of themes such as the absurdist and existential issues and the prevailing socio-economic discontentment, as well as the structure, tone and language of the plays effectively comment on these concerns. The plays *Waiting for Godot*, *The Caretaker* and *Look Back in Anger* capture the different moods and anxieties of the post World War II era.

Chapter 1

Introduction

World War II destroyed the rational and moral foundations of human society which in turn produced a prevalent sense of utter meaninglessness and instability of human existence. In my thesis I would like to consider the varying impacts of the atmosphere of the times, in terms of metaphysical, political and socio-cultural dimensions, on three English dramatists of the 1950s. I have chosen to work on the time period after the Second World War, where the writers, the products of their time, reacted in their own individual ways to the havoc brought about by the war. The three primary texts that I will be looking at are: *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett, *The Caretaker* by Harold Pinter and *Look Back in Anger* by John Osborne. My focus of analysis will be the absurdist and existential issues and the prevailing socio-economic discontentment reflected in the dramatists' choice of themes, as well as the structure, tone and language of the dramatic texts.

The first half of the 20th century was full of disturbing and unsettling events as the end of the First World War in 1918 generated an intense sense of crisis in the minds of the English society. This feeling of utter chaos became twofold due to the coming of the Great Depression at the later period of the 1920s and early period of the 1930s when the entire world faced a great collapse in the economy. The end of WWI also brought about the rise of fascism and the start of the Spanish Civil War; these events along with other conflicts all over the globe continued on into a major conflict in Europe, and the beginning of the Second World War in 1939. Therefore, most of the writings that came out during this period of crisis in the 1920s and the 1930s were

based on themes that reflected the gloom, death, loss, despair, cynical, and depressing circumstances that were prevailing in the times. T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* published in 1922, reflected the disjointed, fragmented human consciousness of the times, the sense of civilization on the edge of disintegration. The modernist awareness of irrelevance of old certainties of life due to ideas of Darwin, Marx, Freud, had removed the traditional supports of society, religion and culture. It moved the literary focus from external realism to fragmented internal realities.

WWII also saw the end of an age of highly intellectual and creative enthusiasm as the human psyche became disenchanted and isolated, the times showed no promise of a new phase for writers. There was no emergence of new playwrights or novelists during the Second World War. Most drama was either of a patriotic nature or of sheer escapism.

WWII has been the most destructive war in history. Fifty million people died, vast numbers migrated, cities, bridges, railway systems, roads, farmlands, livestock were destroyed. In the face of such destruction writers were bound to reflect the metaphysical as well as the economic, social and political aspects of this nightmarish situation. Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter and John Osborne were all well-known dramatists and contemporaries in the 1950s, writing their best dramas in the period after WWII. But while contemporaries, each followed their own individual interests and visions; writing drama uniquely their own. Beckett focused on the spiritual and metaphysical impact of large-scale destruction and chaos. Pinter chose to explore the issues of social alienation and isolation of modern man, while Osborne reflected the disillusionment and cynicism prevalent in England in the after-math of the war.

Samuel Beckett is one of the leading dramatists of post-war English theatre. His plays *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* reflected through their very stage presence the disoriented

fragmented human beings seeking some meaning in an absurd, meaningless environment. He is associated with the *Theatre of the Absurd*, an important European development in the field of dramatic evolution, an avant-garde drama rising out of the mindless destruction. In 1930s and 40s, English drama was dominated by commercial plays, remote from everyday life and its problems, with characters belonging to high society. English drama had become a form of light-hearted entertainment for a small audience. But in the 1950s, there was a revival of English theatre with new kinds of drama like the *Theatre of the Absurd* and *Kitchen Sink Drama*.

World War II with its accompanying distresses created a prevalent sense of complete insignificance and irrationality of humanity's existence. This sense of instability can be noticed to have been elaborately portrayed in the dramas written by the writers of the Theatre of the Absurd. This was a theatre movement seen to take place in the mid-20th century; it started as a reaction to the constraints' set by the highly structured form of reality that was acceptable prior to the breakdown of human psychology due to World War II. The Theatre of the Absurd was inspired by ideas of *Existentialism, Surrealism and Dadaism* and European writers like Jean Genet, Arthur Adamov, Edward Albee, Fernando Arrabal and Max Frisch all were leading representatives. Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Eugene Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano* are said to be the most renowned representations of this movement. The playwrights associated with the theatre of the absurd wanted to express a fragmented human psyche in its state of confusion, isolation, and utter despair, in accordance with the notion that objective reality is merely an imagined, limited concept while the internal reality is much more important for human beings. Therefore, they experimented with a new form of writing that would suit the consciousness of those times, which would exclude the traditional devices of the drama such as meaningful dialogue, logical plot development, and intelligible characters. In a way they reflected the

modern consciousness of a fragmented and subjective reality. They replaced the conventional style of the drama that had a very rational setting with a more disoriented form of writing where the dialogues seemed meaningless and confusing, situations were unclear, there was no logical plot development and everything was in a state of mechanical repetition. The Theatre of the Absurd had an experiential quality that involved the viewers in the stage experience. Moreover, in these Absurdist plays human beings were shown to be as foolish or clown-like characters who tended to obey the instructions given to them by a dominating being. They highlighted the helplessness and desperate survival strategies adopted by individuals in order to survive. In Martin Esslin's *Theatre of the Absurd*, he says "Theatre of the Absurd strives to express its sense of senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought."¹

The Theatre of the Absurd has behind it the existential and absurdist philosophies that gained prominence in the 1940s. Existentialism as a philosophical movement prospered in the 1940s and 1950s in Europe. The philosophers Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche from the 19th century have been accepted as the originators of Existentialism, which is both a literary and philosophical phenomenon. This philosophy gained fame through the post-war literary and philosophical writings of Jean-Paul Sartre along with his collaborators such as Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus etc. However, from among the prime 20th century philosophers who have been labelled as existentialists, Martin Heidegger and Albert Camus have rejected the identification with Sartre's Existentialism. This philosophy greatly attracted literary writers in

1 Esslin, Martin. "The Theatre of the Absurd." US: *The Tulane Drama Review* (1960): 3-15. Print.

Europe especially in Paris, such as Jean Genet, Andre Gide, Andre Malraux, and the expat Samuel Beckett along with the Norwegian Knut Hamsun and the Romanian Eugene Ionesco.

The philosophical underpinning of the Theatre of the Absurd is provided by the existential philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre and absurdist philosophy of Albert Camus. Sartre called his philosophy a “philosophy of existence” and saw it as a humanistic philosophy. It showed human beings simply existing in a universe that lacked any overarching meaning or purpose. He emphasized the importance of choice in shaping human life. His famous works *Being and Nothingness* [1943], *Existentialism and Humanism* [1946] and *Critique of Dialectical Reason* [1960] highlighted the irrational nature of man’s existence but also upheld the freedom of choice and dignity of human beings to shape their own existence. He stressed the centrality of human choice for creating all values. In spite of using terms like abandonment, anguish and despair, in spite of recognizing despair counteracting freedom at realization of certain unchangeable conditions of existence, existentialist philosophy validates an authentic existence based on responsible and conscious choices.

Albert Camus’ idea of Absurdity, suicide and defiance also contributed to the dramatists’ sense of a meaningless and irrational universe. Albert Camus, in his books *The Myth of Sisyphus* [1942] and *The Rebel* [1951] talks of the absurdity of the human situation which defied logical explanation or divine consideration. The World Wars had shattered all faith in an evolutionary human nature and society. There was a sense of dislocation and disillusionment; the universe had become ‘schizophrenic’, ‘out of harmony’ and ‘devoid of purpose’. There were no answers to the many intellectual and spiritual questions asked by a disoriented humanity. For Camus, the absurdist paradox lay in knowing that there was no meaning and purpose in life, and yet demanding answers. For him, the most important question was that of suicide, of gaining victory

over an indifferent and senseless scheme of things through sheer defiance. This idea of metaphysical and existential absurdity and anguish has also been discussed in their writings by Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus as well as Franz Kafka; only their stance on metaphysical anguish was addressed in a more formal way, with rational and defined arguments that can be placed within traditional forms. However, absurdist theatre seeks to convey this existential and absurdist dilemma of mankind through its very form. Beckett said, commenting on James Joyce's novel *Finnegan's Wake* "Here form is content, content form."² This applies to the Absurdist theatre, which is a drama of situation, rather than of action. Hence, an absurd play indicates the irrationality of existence by presenting it on the stage through the use of illogical, repetitive structuring, disoriented characters and meaningless conversations that are used to express the senselessness found in life. The stage settings and fragmented characterization and plot highlight the incoherence underlying human existence. Thus, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* becomes a visual image of incoherence and anxiety.

Every writer is influenced by his social, political and cultural environment. Their texts are not only literary works but show within themselves reflections of the social and cultural institutions and can be also seen as historical documents. The New Historicist approach stresses on the connections between literature and its historical context, not just as setting but as culturally governed attitudes. The New Historicism is a literary theory that was established in the 1980s by the works of Stephen Greenblatt. The New Historicism as a theory is associated with *critical theory* and was used by academics from the 1980s onwards into the 1990s as well. *Critical theory* is a school of thought that stresses on the critique of society as well as culture by

2 Lernout, Geert. "Vico's Method and Its Relation to Joyce's." *Finnegans Wake: Fifty Years*. No ed. Vol. 23. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990. 54. Print.

applying knowledge from the social sciences and the humanities. *Critical theory* was formed as a school of thought chiefly by five theoreticians of the Frankfurt School; Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, and Erich Fromm, Max Horkheimer in 1937 first defined the term critical theory in his essay *Traditional and Critical Theory* where he mentions critical theory as a social theory oriented toward critiquing and changing society as a whole. The New Historicism Theory came about as a response to the text-only approach that had been followed by New Critics.

New Historicists recognise the significance of literary texts, at the same time they study literary texts in accordance to history. New Historicism cannot be called as a recent development as this theory was used by many critics starting from the 1920s through the 1950s, focusing on the historical contexts of literary texts. New Historicists try to comprehend a text by understanding the societal backdrop as well as academic history through literature. The concepts of the New Historicism can be further understood while looking into Harold Aram Veesper's anthology of essays *The New Historicism* published in 1989. In his work, Veesper points out some important assumptions that can be found in discourses dealing with New Historicism;

These include the ideas:

that every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices; that every act of unmasking, critique, and opposition uses the tools it condemns and risks falling prey to the practice it exposes; that literary and non-literary "texts" circulate inseparably; that no discourse, imaginative or archival, gives access to unchanging truths nor expresses inalterable human nature; finally, as emerges powerfully in this volume, that a critical

method and a language adequate to describe culture under capitalism participate in the economy they describe.” [Pg. 11]

These ideas by Veeseer highlights certain presumptions that are to be found in texts by New Historicist critics where it shows that literary and non-literary texts are all understood to be works of history as well as literature. Based on this, it can be seen that New Historicism varies from historical criticism that was prevalent in the 1930s and 1940s as it was influenced by theories of the 1970s such as post-structuralism and reader-response theory. The New Historicists believe that the facts of the past are not easily found out in an objective manner. History refers not just to the setting of a story, but to the conscious reflection of socio-cultural beliefs. Their predecessors accepted history as the setting in which a work of literature was based and the social science as historical material. This has contributed to New Historicists accepting literary and historical documentation as being one and the same. One of the philosophers who has been noted to have significantly influenced many New Historicists is the French philosopher as well as historian Michele Foucault. Foucault inspired historicists as well as new cultural historicists to re-evaluate the limit of historical analysis by linking together unrelated occurrences from history. Foucault, similar to the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche rejected the concept of history to be progressive; in his view historical phenomenon takes place as a result of various societal, political and economic influences. Foucault viewed history in relation to power just like Karl Marx did; however he believed power to be the driving force needed to create the future unlike Marx who described power to be an oppressive device. However, there are other historicists who have influenced new historicism as well, such as the British critic Raymond Williams who inspired Stephen Greenblatt, while the German Marxist critic Walter Benjamin greatly affected Brook Thomas.

In the lights of these ideas, it is interesting to see how a dramatist like Harold Pinter creates the complex character of the homeless tramp in *The Caretaker*. The persecution of the Jews was an undeniably horrifying aspect of WWII under Hitler's leadership. Their dislocation, their search for shelter and acceptance seems to lie under the figure of the pathetically opportunist Davis, and Pinter's Jewish heritage seems linked to this empathy. England was also facing immigration issues, as many homeless Europeans, as well as opportunity-seeking migrants from the colonies, sought a new life in England.

The period after WWII produced much social dissensions and frictions in England. On one hand there was relief of the ending of the war, but Britain was in a bad economic shape, on the verge of bankruptcy. Much government support was needed to regenerate important institutions. WWII had a significant effect on the personal, social as well as political life of the British people. In 1945 Britain, although a member of the victorious Western alliance was faced with the task of political, economic, social and psychological reconstruction. Internationally it had lost its political domination because of the emergence of USA and USSR as superpowers and the coming of the atomic age. It had also started losing its hold on colonised areas in Asia and Africa because of the independence struggles. Internally, in the economic field, much government support was needed to give new life to important institutions as the war had caused many military expenses. The newly elected Labour government in 1945 nationalised banks, industries, railroads and continued with the austerity measures introduced during the war. The Labour government had expanded the provisions of the Welfare State, providing housing, education and employment opportunities, free universal medical care, sickness and employment benefits. This led ultimately to the post-war economic boom and recovery.

But there were also much social tensions and frictions in the English society. There was a growing sense of anger and isolation because of class conflicts, a perceived failure of the Welfare State, a sense of disillusionment and cynicism, especially in the younger generation, not only in England, but all over Europe.

Another interesting development was regarding the position of women. Many working class women had taken on financial responsibilities when men were away to the war and that made them more independent. Even when the men returned from war, injured in many cases, the women were reluctant to retreat to subordinate positions. Family life was thus also impacted as a consequence of Britain's involvement in the war, as well as a more relaxed approach to moral and sexual matters.

WWII significantly impacted every field of society including the arts, where the new environment created by the war became a major influence in arts, literature, media, theatre, education, law as well as politics. Although most forms of theatrical performances did not do very well during the war period due to the public's fear of air raids, yet there were many theatres that tried to keep the light of hope alive in people's hearts through various plays. This was a form of rebellion undertaken by the theatres in order to express their dissatisfaction with the state of affairs prevailing in the society due to Britain's participation in the War.

This sense of rebellion also became reflected in the post-war period, as the movement known as the "angry young men" began in England as a result of the stress put upon the young generation of men and women. The play *Look Back in Anger* by John Osborne became one of the most influential plays of the times, where the character of Jimmy embodies the passion and resentment of the working-class. The play also highlights the contrasting views of two

generations. The older generation had a sense of nostalgia while the new generation was dissatisfied and wanted to take initiative to bring about a better life based on more equal relations between the different classes and better economic opportunities.

Thus, it is interesting to see how the three dramatists, Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter and John Osborne responded individually to the destructive phenomenon of the Second World War. Beckett was an avant-garde novelist, playwright, theatre director, and poet. Born in 1906 and raised in Ireland; he studied at Trinity College in Dublin. During the Second World War he served as a member of the French Resistance, after the end of the war he started to write plays. He is known to be one of the most influential writers of the 20th century. His most famous work *Waiting for Godot* is said to be one of the best examples of the absurdist plays. Having lived in France for a great deal of his life he wrote in both English and French. Though Irish by birth and English by education, he is considered to be part of the French avant-garde and wrote most of his plays in French, including *Waiting for Godot*, which he later himself translated into English. One of the features of Beckett's writing is that it reveals the harsher side of reality, in a tragi-comic manner. His vision is essentially pessimistic. His works are mostly seen to be characterised by black humour where the storyline is dealt with in a very humorous or satirical manner, showing the incomprehensible aspects of life. Martin Esslin named Beckett as being one of the important writers for his so-called *Theatre of the Absurd*. Beckett is also known to have been significantly inspired by the Irish writer James Joyce whom he had met in Paris. Since Beckett's writings inspired the writers succeeding him; he has been termed as one of the fathers of the Postmodernist movement as he is seen to be one of the last Modernists. The English version of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* was first performed in a London theatre in 1955 whereas the original version in French was performed three years earlier. In 1969, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in

Literature “for his writing, which in new forms for the novel and drama in the destitution of modern man acquires its elevation.”³ In this context, *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett came to be seen as a game-changer in the history of English Theatre, which was followed by other successful additions to absurdist drama such as *Endgame*.

Although Beckett wrote a limited number of plays, *Waiting for Godot* like his other plays represented the fundamental qualities and signs of existentialist doubts and anxieties to express his dark outlook of the human condition. Several ideas and methods that are presented in Beckett’s plays are also evident in Harold Pinter’s dramas. Pinter's plays suggests an unexpected threat or menace that frightens the central character who feels insecure and is in need of safety. The threat that is represented in the plays are often the dreading of non-existence, emptiness and death that appears as the enclosing gloom lurking to gain entrance into the sheltered refuge of a home in order to overcome the protagonist.

Harold Pinter who began to write plays in the later period of his career is also an eminent British playwright and scriptwriter who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2005. Born in 1930, the son of a Jewish tailor and growing up in a lower middle-class district of London he had direct experience of the WWII trauma which had a great impact on his psyche. After acquiring his education at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art for some time, Pinter started practicing as an actor in regional theatres during the 1950s where he used the stage name David Baron. Among the absurdist playwrights, Pinter is best known for his talent for using highly irrational and subjective language, pauses and silences, brief conversations and the use of understatement to convey characters' thoughts and feelings. Pinter’s plays are typically focussed

³"The Nobel Prize in Literature 1969". Nobel Prize.org. Nobel Media AB 2014. Web. 4 Aug 2014.

on a few people situated in a tight-spaced room planning for societal or sexual dominance. He shares with Beckett an absurdist vision of man's isolation, but reflects it in recognisable social environments.

In 1960, Pinter's play *The Caretaker* projected a strange realm full of unspecified dangers through a unique form of discourse. Since then, Pinter has been known for inspiring later generations of dramatists. His plays are still popular today giving the modern viewers a chance to observe the unique, bizarre and threatening mood of his plays tend to create. His earlier plays are dominated by themes of human isolation and alienation in urban environments and also deal with power dynamics. His later plays reveal a more political orientation. Pinter's plays have been given different labels like 'drama of anxiety', 'existentialist', 'absurdist', etc. They also have the characteristics of the "Comedy of Menace" as the characters and situation appear to be somehow menacing and incomprehensible; with the dramas conveying a depressing, dreadful, and pointless scenario of existence. Thus, Pinter's plays makes the audiences feel disorientated, uneasy, anxious, thrilled as well as disturbed, all at the same time as that is exactly what Pinter wants his audience to experience. The expression "comedy of menace" was coined by the twentieth century English writer and theatre critic John Irving Wardle who borrowed the term from David Campton's play, *The Lunatic View: A Comedy of Menace* and used it to describe certain playwrights and their works. Wardle described Pinter's dramatic works as being "Comedies of Menace," because Pinter's plays are based on incoherent discussions that appear to be illogical and do not give any form of explanation for the audience as they hardly offer any information upon the characters' backgrounds. Furthermore, the audience cannot come to any understanding whether the characters have legitimacy to what they are saying.

John Osborne was another contemporary writer of Beckett and Pinter writing in 1950s. John Osborne and Harold Pinter were both part of the *Angry Young Men* movement of disenchanted young writers and thinkers protesting against political totalitarianism and social inequalities. They joined demonstrations against Nuclear Disarmament. Osborne especially captured the spirit of the age, the anger, rebelliousness and rejection, as well as the complex issue of nationalism that is represented very forcefully in the play *Look Back in Anger*. Born in 1929 London, the son of an artist and a barmaid, John James Osborne received his education at Belmont College in Devon by using the insurance money that he received from the death of his father in 1941. However, Osborne did not like it and was asked to leave after an incident where he hit the headmaster. Later on, for a short period of time he was involved with journalism from where he soon moved to acting in theatre. Subsequently he became actor-manager and took to writing dramas. Over time, John Osborne came to be regarded as an important British playwright as well as producer who wrote the ground-breaking drama *Look Back in Anger* characteristic of in the new movement known as the “Angry Young Men.”

The drama of the angry young men was based on the contemporary society, and was quite naturalistic. However, John Osborne has been viewed to be the British playwright who retrieved English drama from the well-made plays that illustrated only the life of the upper-classes to dramas that portrayed a more realistic modern-day life. Hence, the play *Look Back in Anger* started a new form of drama known as “kitchen-sink drama. There was some debate as to whether it was Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* or Osborne’s *Look back in Anger* that was the truly representative English play of th1950s.

It is a play that shows the effect of the times on the writer as John Osborne also wrote this play in a period of transition and reaction. The 'Angries' as this group of rebellious young writers

were also called disillusioned by the traditional English society at that point of time, though later the writers' became more divergent in their views and the label lost its relevance. It is therefore seen to reflect a very specific phase in English society. Osborne was seen to be immature by his critics and ridiculed but the play is seen to express the feelings of frustration and exclusion of working-class groups, their dissatisfaction with the status quo.

With regard to the explosive 'anger' in *Look Back in Anger*, it is interesting to consider Antonin Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty* that resembled *the Theatre of the Absurd* in its shock value. *The Theatre of Cruelty* proposed a form of drama where the viewers would be stricken by the total audio visual impact of the drama, so as to wake them up from an unresponsive sleep, leading to a more instinctive reaction than the usual intellectual one. This concept of the theatre was formulated by the French theorist Antonin Artaud who was also an actor, director and a poet. Antonin Artaud's idea of the Theatre of Cruelty was highly influenced by the movements of Surrealism as well as Symbolism which can be seen reflected in his collected essays *The Theatre and its Double* [1936].

The two world wars had brought about a sense of the insignificance of human existence, in Artaud's view this new and unstable society had created an invisible form of pressure placing restrictions and suppressing human freedom to create bottled up individuals. He wanted to have a theatre that would unleash unconscious responses in the audience, increase their sense of danger and violence and bring about a release of primal instincts within the theatre space, so that they would be cleansed of all such suppressed instincts and emotions. This cathartic effect was to be brought about by a radically new way of performance. His conviction was that the actual purpose of the theatre was to bring about a new form of liberty to society by having every person release the energy residing within them. To do this Artaud's plan was to remove distance between the

actors and the viewers; furthermore he wanted to add oral chanting, shouting, visual effects through stage-props, as well as bringing in puppets onto the stage. While this new concept did not get the acknowledgment that the new and innovative theatre needed for it to become widely accepted, nonetheless a play called *Les Cenci* [1935] by Antonin Artaud was produced to demonstrate his concepts.

Artaud's theories of *the Theatre of Cruelty* had a significant effect on avant-garde theatre of the 20th century; influenced well-known playwrights of that period such as Arthur Adamov, Jean Genet, Jacques Audiberti to name a few. It seems that the period of the 20th century after the two wars along with its traumatising and insecure condition provided the best setting for this style of drama, hence making it much more acceptable for the playwrights to accommodate this concept into their writing. As a result, many aspects from *the Theatre of Cruelty* can be found in the dramas of the 20th century dramatists, one being in John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* where the language in the play is shockingly rude, cruel and offensive.

I will thus examine the plays *Waiting for Godot*, *The Caretaker* and *Look Back in Anger* in the light of these frameworks. The three dramatists, in their own ways, gave their responses to life in England in the post-wars environment. Beckett, Pinter and Osborne's plays provide important perspectives on different aspects of human existence.

Chapter 2

Hope and Despair: Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*

Samuel Beckett is one of the most significant personalities among the modernist as well as Absurdist writers of the mid-twentieth century. His ground breaking work in *Waiting for Godot* which appeared at the *Theatre de Babylone* in 1953, in Paris, is considered as one of the masterpieces that came out of the "Theatre of the Absurd." It was this play *Waiting for Godot* that brought about a new beginning to the literary world, as this entirely new form of drama captivated its audience with unusual and mind-boggling dramatic elements. In the words of Beckett's scholar Ruby Cohn, in the article *Identity Loss in 'Imperceptible Mutabilities'* "After 'Godot', plots could be minimal; exposition expendable; characters contradictory; settings unlocalized, and dialogue unpredictable. Blatant farce could jostle tragedy."⁴ But above all, it was the alternation of hope and despair that gave the play its distinctive quality.

Beckett, though an English writer and dramatist, is considered to be a part of *the Parisian New Theatre* or *Theatre of the Absurd*, a phenomenon associated with mainly European playwrights of mid-twentieth century, when Paris became a junction for experimental writers, bold directors and producers and intelligent and receptive audience. This allowed a new, experimental kind of theatre to emerge, staged in small, off Boulevard theatres to selected audiences. The critics felt that these sorts of plays were highly obscure while some became infuriated as they thought these plays were meant to be some form of intricate deception. But the

⁴ Quoted from Bruckner, D. J. R. "Identity loss in 'Imperceptible Mutabilities'." *The New York Times guide to the Arts of the 20th Century*. Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2002. Print.

acceptance of unconventional plays started taking place after the production of *En attendant Godot* in Paris in 1953, which became an immediate success. Like his other works, *Waiting for Godot* also took some time before it was finally accepted by Roger Blin, the influential Parisian director who also played the role of Pozzo. The play established Beckett as a master innovator who had broken away from the naturalist traditions dominating the English stage in the inter-war years, when British theatre was largely conservative, escapist and commercial, full of melodramatic social comedies of Noel Coward and Terence Rattigan, and patriotic plays written largely for recruitment purposes. They provided a diversion from the depressing political and economic realities of the 1930s-1940s.

Luigi Pirandello, the Italian dramatist was an important influence on modern-European drama. During the inter-war period [1918-1938], a new style for play performances emerged. His self-reflexive dramas such as *Six Characters in Search of an Author* and *Henry IV* challenged the conventional concepts of narrative and character representation. His plays were popular in French theatres and had a widespread impact over other writers as well. Over time, even some playwrights from the *New Parisian Theatre* started to incorporate Pirandello's revolutionary form of writing using characters who had no sense of identity or understanding of their conditions. Jean-Paul Sartre the famous philosopher and writer at first was not accustomed to the self-critical trend prevalent in the French theatres as well as in the New Theatre that had been offered by the contemporary playwrights of the age, Arthur Adamov, Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco and Jean Genet. Sartre said that these dramatists turned the method into the dominant theme of their works, using the very absence of story-lines and characters and turning them into the central topic of the dramas. Hence, by creating characters without personalities and placing them inside a story that is devoid of any plot, the playwrights established an absurd environment where

actions took place randomly. Through this, the playwrights following the self-critical style of writing established a new form of theatre technique known as writing at *degree zero*. According to Roland Barthes, the structuralist critic of the mid-twentieth century, writing that is based on the *degree zero* theory lacks any kind of writing style that is often the primary element that differentiates a literary piece from non-literary works. By writing at 'zero degree,' the need for referring to traditions, meanings, norms, etc. for making the audience understand a particular situation is not required. Through the use of the 'zero degree' method, the language present in the dramas attains a sort of clarity; allowing the situations and concepts themselves to create an image of the setting without any requirements of commentary. Hence, the 'zero degree' of theatre paves the way for characters that do not have any sense of identity and are simply described to be existing.

The 'zero degree' concept is very similar to Martin Esslin's formulation of the category of *Theatre of the Absurd* where he talks of dramatists highlighting the irrationality of human beings as only living for the sake of existence by the use of illustrations and minimal language. It was through Martin Esslin's framework of the absurdist theatre that the dramatists of the 1950s such as Beckett, Ionesco, Adamov, Genet among others, could be understood for their similarities, as these writers all had one thing in common, i.e. their views on the absurd. All these writers had their own sets of beliefs about existential dilemmas but were linked together by metaphysical concerns. Pirandello's 'tragic farces' are often seen to be the forerunners of Theatre of the Absurd.

Keeping the 'zero degree' approach as an aesthetic framework, it can be seen why Samuel Beckett among the aforementioned dramatists from the 1950s clearly stands out as a talented playwright. It is because Beckett's plays come the closest to attaining the insight of

theatre being at *degree zero*; as the play creates a world where nothing exists. Defeating a century of literary naturalism, it set the trend for metaphorical theatre where the stage triggered the imagination. Tom Stoppard, a younger contemporary of Beckett, said of *Waiting for Godot* "At the time when *Godot* was first done, it liberated something, for anyone writing plays. It redefined the minima of theatrical validity."⁵ [Pg. 17] His bleak style, his dramatic minimalism highlights the spiritual crisis and existential anguish of a universe where all human and spiritual bonds have given way to a broken and fragmented world. There is a breakdown in communication, conversations are fragmented, meaningless and repetitive, within the plot-line of the play no logical movement is being maintained, no sequence of a beginning or an end; everything is just as it is – existing. The plot-line of *Waiting for Godot* is circular and repetitive in nature as the structural pattern presented in Act I is very much similar to Act II with few variations, and no specific conclusion or resolution is offered in the play. This emphasizes the stagnant nature of existence. In the beginning, Estragon and Vladimir are seen conversing alone, then Pozzo and Lucky arrive, after conversing they leave and the messenger boy arrives and once he has finished talking to the two tramps he leaves and again the two tramps enter. This repetition of events is very different from the conventional play which follows a linear development where there is an exposition, complication, climax, denouement and resolution. In *Waiting for Godot*, no background information is given about the setting of the play other than the fact that it takes place on a lonely country road with a single tree that sprouts very few leaves. There is no significant change in the two acts as the setting, characters, and time remain the same with the acts starting early in the morning and ending when the moon has risen. This is

⁵Hammond, B. S. "Beckett and Pinter- Towards a grammar of the absurd." *Journal of Beckett Studies* (1979).Web.

a characteristic of plays of the *Theatre of the Absurd*, where the circular plot structure suggests that if the play had any more acts, they would all have proceeded in the same manner since the setting, time, characters and actions all get repeated. This repetition is also reflected in the characters, as they fail to realise that their very act of waiting is an option that they choose to accept as a necessary activity of their lives. Just like the play has a stagnant characteristic, the characters too fail to take initiative for bringing about any changes through physical activities. Hence, their undecided nature on the stage is a representation of the play having an unmoving, repetitive and seemingly endless cyclical plot.

This brings to mind the apprehension of the world as a meaningless, absurd place triggered by the destruction and havoc of the World Wars. Before WWI, Europe had been dominated by pride in its achievements and confidence in the future progress, of a more rational, humane and democratic life. But this entire confidence was destroyed when modern technology and modern concepts of naturalism joined together to slaughter millions of people in a brutal, inhuman way. The World Wars generated a sense of spiritual ‘crisis’ and Western civilisation seemed on the verge of disintegration. *The Theatre of the Absurd* was linked to the demoralised and disillusioned response to these wars. In Esslin’s discussion in the “Theatre of the Absurd,” Samuel Beckett has been referred to as the father of this particular type of drama. Martin Esslin says, “The Theatre of the Absurd shows the world as an incomprehensible place.” [Pg. 5] due to the fact that the absurdist dramatists were writing from a sense of metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of the human condition.

Dramatists of *the Theatre of the Absurd* have similar qualities when it comes to plot structure, unfamiliar characterization, nonsensical speech, nightmarish environment and a tragic-comic approach. Nevertheless, the writers of the post-war era all have their own ideological

beliefs and do not belong to any particular category of writing, each dramatist must be evaluated based on their individual contributions to the literary world. Consequently, when talking about Beckett one has to keep in mind that although he is one of the major writers of *the Theatre of the Absurd*, at the same time he is unlike the other playwrights of absurd theatre as well as the contemporary writers who lived during the post-war era.

Therefore Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is to be accepted as a play that was written as an intensely felt personal reaction to the surrounding conditions prevalent during those times. The play asks deep and pressing questions about the state of human civilisation and human nature due to the fact that it was written in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Hence, the play has symbolic elements in regards to existential philosophy as the first dialogue suggests the dire situation of the post-war existential crisis;

“Estragon [*giving up again*]. Nothing to be done.”[Beckett.pg 1]

Beckett's concentration on the purpose of human life and how to live it in a fulfilling manner are based on personal as well as contemporary concerns and attitudes. *Waiting for Godot* reflects on existence as well as death by a writer who was a witness to the atrocities of the war; thus the play contains psychological as well as philosophical issues dealt within an existential framework. The very set of the play, in its starkness, with its disoriented tramps, becomes a compelling image of a shell-shocked humanity trying to pick up the pieces of an existence destroyed on all fronts. This type of framework appeared in many of the post-war writers such as Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, where notions of death, gloom, nothingness and crises of human existence were metaphorically demonstrated.

At first, Beckett wrote the play in French, *En attendant Godot* (1953) and translated it himself in English as *Waiting for Godot*. The original French production took place on the 5th of January in 1953 and the first English production in London in 1955. It received varied responses – from being seen as sheer nonsense to a representation of life itself. It received the award for the Most Controversial Play of the Year in 1955, the only year such an award was given. But it also started a “Godotmania” that subsequently gripped England and the theatrical world. As a play, *Waiting for Godot* signalled the end of conventional theatre. Its bare stage, incoherent characters and lack of plot and movement corresponded to the absurdist vision of the playwright. In the play, the two characters Vladimir and Estragon pass the time while waiting for someone called Godot. They meet two other characters Lucky and Pozzo who seem equally lost in the incomprehensible world.

The type of characters present on the absurd stage satirise the stereotypical characters and plots of ‘well-made plays.’ Beckett believed that the absurdity of modern existence couldn’t be communicated rationally. Therefore, he exposed the meaninglessness and pointlessness that human life offered by presenting characters whose lack of ability to communicate causes them to lose all hopes in life. All of this was done through an absurd tragi-comic perspective. Characters are not shown in any historical, social or cultural context but in basic situations of trauma and anxiety, as isolated, static and confused individuals. They speak, but to themselves it seems.

Waiting for Godot as a result consists of elements that confuse the audience by its peculiar setting, with the characters’ mechanical, puppet-like qualities and disjointed dialogue. Their conversations include elements of nonsense, foolishness, meaninglessness, ridicule. The subject matter remains mysterious throughout the play, with the characters’ fragmented personalities making them appear as if they are entities with no form of inspiration for existing.

The conversations do not seem to lead to any meaningful conclusion. Additionally, the characters seem to voice rambling, gibberish views in repetitive patterns, reinforcing their tragic state of confusion and monotony of existence. The occurrences clearly signify that in the play nothing is really happening “twice” in the two acts; the only transformation that is clearly noticed in the second act is that of the tree which has some leaves now. This has also been commented on by Vivian Mercier, the Irish literary critic who states, that Beckett “has achieved a theoretical impossibility – a play in which nothing happens, that yet keeps audiences glued to their seats. What's more, since the second act is a subtly different reprise of the first, he has written a play in which nothing happens, twice.”⁶ Mercier’s summation of the play’s plot makes absolute sense as the same action, or lack of action is repeated in both the acts.

But what is clear is the focus on the individual, their individual reality. The whole stage becomes an external symbol of the characters’ subjective reality – the nightmarish situation has trapped the characters so that they cannot move out of it on their own. They need Godot to propel them into action. The characters presented within the play are not conventional, no one knows where they come from or what other things they do in their lives apart from the constant ludicrous dialogues they try to bring up for time pass. Vladimir and Estragon are pathetic, bewildered characters, recalling fragments of an earlier existence, but unsure of their own memories, whether personal or religious. They are epitomes of anxiety, isolation and personal traumas caught between life and death. Their uncertainty, their indefinite wait for a mysterious Godot becomes emblematic of the whole existential crisis. The other set of characters Pozzo and Lucky both have a carnival-like touch to their names and just like their names they also acts like

⁶ Marcus, Paul. "Laughing your way through life." How to laugh your way through life a psychoanalyst's advice. London: Karnac Books, 2013. Print.

clowns who roam around only to stop when they find themselves in the company of other individuals. All of the characters have a comic effect due to their silly activities, which they indulge in while trying to exist.

The tragi-comic dimensions of words, thoughts and actions are highlighted with every formulated sentence or attempted action. The only thing Vladimir and Estragon do know for sure is that they are waiting for the person with all the answers, i.e. Godot. There is no real situation that is even given to the characters, all they know is that they exist and want to understand the purpose for their existence. But they cannot even express their anxieties coherently to each other. The fragmented dialogues are used by Beckett to make a statement of its own, showing that there is an immense communication gap contributing to the isolated anguish that the characters experience in their existence. No other absurd writer makes it possible to express so many thought provoking ideas through such minimum use of language. Pozzo and Lucky also contribute to the absurd environment of the play, Pozzo the master, blames Lucky, his slave of making his life miserable. Vladimir's anger at Pozzo for his ill-treatment of Lucky soon turns into anger against Lucky for torturing his master! Beckett shows a world devoid of sense and logic. This is graphically reflected in Lucky's 'logorrea' or long speech in Act I that shows the breakdown of sense and meaning.

The play provides an experiential complexity, the audience is uncertain whether they are to laugh or feel pity for these lost souls. Moreover, the characters of Vladimir and Estragon are seen to pass their time in a completely pointless manner, almost as if they are trying to cheat their own existence. Godot is clearly a being that they have never met before and there is no absolute certainty of his arrival, yet they are curious to meet this mysterious individual, who they tell each other will be able to solve all of their issues. So, their never-ending waiting is

apparently absurd which the two characters Vladimir [Didi] and Estragon [Gogo] are both aware of but they still continue to wait.

The identity of Godot is one of the central debates about the play. It is open to many interpretations. Beckett was a reclusive writer who did not give interviews and was reluctant to offer any commentary on his plays. He wanted the text to speak for itself. That is why the play is open to much interpretation. Godot is a mysterious character as throughout the play he never makes his appearance, no one knows what kind of a person Godot is and there is no description given for one to visualise him. He simply doesn't seem to exist in the framework of the play, yet the whole play is based on his arrival; this creates a sense of omniscience to his being. It may even give him the attributes of being a Divine entity for which the tramps feel that it is worth waiting for. Beckett himself said that if he knew who Godot was he would have said so. Much debate has centred on the identity of Godot, who may be simply an indifferent power. The irony of man waiting for a saviour, who does not appear, and may be indifferent to man's need and dilemmas, is at the root of existential anxiety. However focus in the play is not on the identity of Godot, but on the act and significance of waiting. It enables identification with Vladimir and Estragon, who are otherwise incomprehensible, clown-like figures. As human beings, we all wait for something or somebody.

In the play *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett presents the idea of existence being based on contradictory traits through his absurd characters; with characters paired up having a trait that opposes the other. Vladimir is identified as the intelligent one in opposition to Estragon's impracticalities, Pozzo turns blind while Lucky doesn't, Vladimir and Estragon wait in contrast to Pozzo and Lucky who are always on the move, etc. This gives the impression that Beckett wanted his audience to try and figure out why each of the characters have unique qualities only

specific to each one of them. As a result, the characters present in *Waiting for Godot* are identified and understood as unusual beings, starting with the character of Godot who is the main focus for the two tramps' wait.

Another trait of the play that strikes as being odd is the fact that there is no presence or mention of any female characters within the play. This reinforces the idea of the play as not having any beginning, as female characters can be identified with motherhood and birth, hence is related with beginning of human life. Other characters that are present in the play are all male characters with fragmented personalities, such as Estragon who is one of the two protagonists of the play and is also referred by the nick name "Gogo." He is a person with a very bad memory because in the play he is constantly portrayed as one who keeps forgetting everything, which makes him rely on Vladimir. The play depicts Estragon as a figure without brains, therefore is dependent on his friend Vladimir for intelligence. Estragon always seems to be on the edge and wants to leave Vladimir, yet at the same time he never lets go of Vladimir as he feels that he cannot live without Vladimir's help. He is also the one who suggests to Vladimir that they should kill themselves by hanging from the tree as a way to pass time since their life is so stagnant.

The other protagonist Vladimir has been shown as the one with the philosophical ideas as he has intelligence unlike Estragon who has been portrayed as a mindless body. Also called by the name "Didi" in the play, Vladimir has some memories of past events, still he appears to be in a state of confusion as to whether his memories are real or not. This is the reason for which Vladimir is dependent on Estragon to makes him clarify whether his memories are real or not. It is Vladimir who gives the idea to Estragon that they should wait for the Godot whose coming is impending all through the play. Both the characters Estragon and Vladimir are understood to

have been associates for a very long period of time; however they constantly seem to question themselves as to who they are. They think that they have no purpose for living and try to acknowledge the fact that their meaningless lives should come to an end, which they even attempt by trying to hang themselves. In Act II, we see that they can't commit suicide by hanging themselves because the tree branch breaks so they keep on waiting for their final annihilation in an irritated manner but convince themselves that if Godot come all will be well.

“... [Estragon *draws Vladimir towards the tree.*

They stand motionless before it. Silence.]

Estragon. Why don't we hang ourselves?

Vladimir. With what?

Estragon. You haven't got a bit of rope?

Vladimir. No.

Estragon: Then we can't.

Estragon. Wait, there's my belt.

Vladimir: It's too short....

Vladimir. Show all the same [Estragon *loosens the cord that holds up his trousers*

which, much too big for him, fall about his ankles. They look at the cord.] It

might do in a pinch. But is it strong enough?

Estragon. We'll soon see. Here.

[They each take an end of the cord and pull. It breaks. They almost fall.]

Vladimir: Not worth a curse.

[*Silence*]

Estragon: You say we have to come back tomorrow?

Vladimir: Yes.

Estragon: Then we can bring a good bit of rope.

Vladimir: Yes.

[*Silence*]

Estragon. Didi.

Vladimir. Yes.

Estragon. I can't go on like this.

Vladimir: That's what you think.

Estragon: If we parted? That might be better for us.

Vladimir. We'll hang ourselves tomorrow. [*Pause.*]

Unless Godot comes.

Estragon. And if he comes?

Vladimir. We'll be saved...." [Act II]

This conversation shows that despite Godot's non-arrival, Vladimir and Estragon choose to keep on waiting, in the hope that Godot may just appear at one point of their waiting. That forlorn hope is the only stabilising factor in an otherwise shattered existence. Many do take into

consideration that the idea of waiting for a saviour can be read as a religious allegory, corresponding to the Christian doctrine. To many, the fact that Beckett chose the name 'Godot,' which has the word God in the name, is indicative of religious connotations. There are several places in the drama where religious associations can be implied through the characters' dialogues because Vladimir does state that they'll be saved if Godot arrives. Since, both the characters Vladimir and Estragon represent all of humanity; the Christian concept of waiting for a saviour to receive salvation is possible. Even the Biblical story of the two thieves who were crucified alongside Jesus Christ can be represented in the two tramps who consider committing suicide by hanging themselves from the only noticeable stage prop, i.e. the tree. The notion that the tramps try to hang themselves on a tree can be understood as a reference to the crucifixion, though Beckett represented it in a more satirical manner. According to Beckett, he did not give Godot any divine attributes, as seen in Mohammad Reza Ghanbari's study, "A Comparative Study of the Notion of Waiting for a Savior in Religion and in *Waiting for Godot*" where he says;

“...Beckett in his interview said that, at the time of writing the play, by Godot he did not mean God, Christ, or anybody else. It is said that he thought of calling the play “En Attendant” without the name of Godot in order to deflect the attention of the readers and spectators away from this non-character onto the act of waiting. Man is expected to be hopeful and patient in times of crisis and convince himself that there are still better days to come as it was promised.

Postponing the meeting by Godot denotes that his arrival or reappearance will put an end to the hope for a better future (because man is a never-satisfied creature), so the best way is to let man wait and be hopeful....” [Pg. 736]

Thus, Beckett's play should be perceived as a work based on existential philosophy where everything depends on the individual who has the perseverance to go on even if all odds are against him. Despair and hope are the complimentary forces defining existence. Hence, even if no one gives the tramps any instructions to wait, yet they keep on waiting to get some understanding of what they are meant to do. As they say;

“Vladimir: Let's wait and see what he says.

Estragon: Who?

Vladimir: Godot.

Estragon: Good idea.

Vladimir: Let's wait till we know exactly how we stand....” [Act I]

Although their waiting may go on forever, the tramps still hold on to hope that someday they may just get what they have been searching for all along. However, all this waiting does weigh on them greatly because their endless waiting causes boredom, which in turn breaks down routine or the habitual way of doing things as understood by Albert Camus. Camus, the absurdist writer explained that boredom causes people to become more concerned with their identity and question where they come from. Vladimir and Estragon while waiting become extremely bored, which in consequence makes them question their life in the universe. The idea of boredom causing a person to ponder deeply into life's issues is similar to that of meditation where stillness gives the meditator a chance to contemplate with clarity.

In a way, Beckett confronts man with areas of myth and religious reality. In ancient Greek drama, man is made to examine his relationship with God, to become aware of his position in life. However, unlike Greek drama, this exploration in *Waiting for Godot* is not

against any generally accepted cosmic order of events. Modern man's emphasis on rational and scientific thinking has deprived him of the comforting presence of myths and religious sustenance. Existential writers such as Camus expressed that attempting to answer such rhetorical questions of existence can lead the individual to the edge of madness. The two tramps in the play are constantly questioning their purpose in the world which are left unanswered; questions such as the identity of Godot, their reason for being, or who is responsible for their suffering. There is a suggestion of Godot being indifferent to the suffering of humans. These questions being asked in the play are never given any answers; Martin Heidegger, the German existentialist philosopher articulated that there is no hope for human beings to understand their reason for existence in this world. This can somehow be understood when observing the tramps' inspection of the hats in a comic, music-hall routine way that signifies human beings hopeless search for meaning in the universe.

Additionally, Jean-Paul Sartre, stated that human beings require rational bases to live, however they are unable to attain such a state, and so human existence is a pointless passion. This is the reason behind Vladimir and Estragon constantly trying to set order into their lives by waiting for a Godot who never shows up. Here, Beckett also attempts conveying the idea that constantly thinking about impossible questions while waiting creates a sense of anxiety, discomfort, and idleness, thus eats away inside the individual's spirit destroying them from within. During their waiting, the two tramps both contemplate suicide; however they are left without the drive to go through with their plans due to their anxious state. Hence, anxiety contributes to Vladimir and Estragon's state of being inactive, since both of the tramps know that there are various options they can choose from. Their hesitation to make a choice results in their inactivity, as seen at the end of the play when they choose to leave – but they remain motionless;

“Vladimir: Well? Shall we go?

Estragon: Yes, let’s go.

[*They do not move.*]” [Act II]

The two other major characters opposite Gogo and Didi are Pozzo and Lucky who are described as travellers. Pozzo is shown to be the master over Lucky, travelling for the purpose of selling Lucky; he takes a break to chat with the two tramps for a little company. Pozzo too like Estragon has trouble recollecting those he had previously encountered. In the play there is a significant transformation of Pozzo's character from Act I to Act II because in Act II his position of being the arrogant master over Lucky changes due to his blindness. In contrast to the first act, he is portrayed as the one in need of the two tramps’ help because his world has completely changed being blind. The concept of blindness placed upon Pozzo in the play symbolises the change brought about due to time’s passing. Lucky is the slave of Pozzo who carries his master's baggage and is shown to be a slave or a dog tied to its owner by a leash because that is exactly his position in the drama; he has a rope around his neck that is tied to Pozzo who pulls on it every time Lucky makes any mistakes. Although Lucky becomes mute in the second act, he rarely talks in the first act; except for a long, startling nonsensical monologue which Beckett highlights to show the complete breakdown of logic and rationality in his picture of the absurdist universe.

Finally, there is the character of the unidentified boy who serves the never-appearing Godot in carrying out messages from Godot to the two tramps Vladimir and Estragon. There is mention of the boy having a brother in the play; however he doesn’t appear in the play like

Godot. Also, the boy seems to suffer from memory loss, not remembering having met Vladimir or Estragon as seen in Act II of the play:

“[... *Enter Boy. He halts. Silence.*]

Boy. Mister... [Vladimir *turns.*] Mr Albert...

Vladimir. Off we go again. [*Pause.*] Do you not recognise me?

Boy. No Sir.

Vladimir. It wasn't you came yesterday.

Boy. No Sir....”

The role of the unnamed boy remains the same from the first act to the second as he is seen conveying information of Godot's arrival; he is shown in both the acts to be giving the same news to the two tramps, i.e. Godot would be able to make it on that night but would surely be coming the next day. This cycle of waiting seems to go on even after the play comes to an end as there is no traditional conclusion at the end of the play. The discussions among characters still does not bring about any meaning, hence the complications of human life does not get solved and stays the same, purposeless and in vain.

Thus, in the play *Waiting for Godot*, the reason for human existence is unexplainable because to understand it, one has to know where to look and whom to question. The character of Godot symbolises the fact that existence has been established by someone who is mysterious and incomprehensible as Godot never comes yet he is constantly on the two tramps' minds, and the two tramps represent all of human kind. Therefore, the play represents the emotions and perspectives of human beings faced with the realisation of existential crisis, humanity does not

seem to understand the meaning behind their living and has to tolerate the hardships that comes with existing. This leads to man's hopeless attempt at applying sense to existence by making up purposes and patterns as a means to divert him from reality's ultimate state of being vague and futile. The reason for this is given in the play, which suggests that in order to exist – a human being has to rely on the possibilities offered by life. And to get any opportunity, one has to wait; so an individual's existence gets bound by time. However, time in the drama has been described as meaningless, consequently human existence also becomes meaningless. As a result, when humanity becomes aware of the human condition as being worthless they lose hope for living, thus becoming dependent on cosmic powers for obtaining guidance. This seeking of direction from a divine source in the play shows that human beings attain a sense of spiritual contentment by placing their faith in a supreme power i.e. God. At the same time, God's presence creates a sense of desperation as well, as man's plea for meaning is always responded to by silence, which makes *Waiting for Godot* point out the human condition as utterly tragic.

Although the play has humorous traits due to its characters speaking silly dialogues and doing comic actions, yet the play is not a comedy as the characters are all in a tragic and confused state of mind. The actions and words of the characters entertain but then bewilderment and disorientation expressed in their fragmented conversations stress the horror of their situation in a tragic-comic way. Their desperate want for a Godot who may or may not come is emblematic of the tragicomedy of human lives. This dominating presence of hopelessness and chaos that is highlighted in the realm of *Waiting for Godot* is a clear signification of the lack of order present in human life. This has been demonstrated by the disordered chronology of the play, with the storyline taking off in the middle without any introduction to the play's background or characters.

Although Beckett's dramas include various comic features, the plays are not visualized as comedies for mindless entertainment. Unlike the *Comedy of Manners* where the manners and habits of a social class or of multiple classes are satirized, Beckett's subject is based on a more fundamental issue, questioning man as a rational being and his isolated existence in time. Comic elements like characters' clown-like qualities or cross-talking about irrational ideas contribute to the play's farcical quality. The characters in *Waiting for Godot* bear a strong resemblance to clowns and since they are the ones who represent mankind, Beckett suggest that human beings are fundamentally absurd creatures. In Beckett's view of humanity, the traditional circus clowns represented certain characteristics of the ordinary man. Just as mans' imperfections cause him to commit irrational behaviour which in turn makes him appear ridiculous, the same can also be observed in the actions of a clown. Beckett had come across many tramps and wanderers when he was on his nomadic journey across Europe in the 1930s, and these translated into many of his characters. As the clown makes a fool of himself when he tries to turn his ambitions of performing acrobatics or playing a practical joke into reality, his failure to achieve his aspiration causes him to look absurd. Thus, a clown can be considered to be a tragicomic individual because his effort to accomplish an objective and then failing can be understood as parodies of tragic actions, while simultaneously his absurdity makes him appear comic. Beckett referred to his play *Waiting for Godot* as a tragic-comedy, with Vladimir and Estragon having common characteristics with clowns. And similar to clowns, they appear more like performers than characters. Vladimir and Estragon's behaviour is distinctly clownish, for instance their struggle with the hats and boots, the trousers falling down and their overall failure to execute any plans they make. Beckett took the tragicomic suffering embodied in circus clowns to represent the dilemma of human beings who cannot achieve what they aim for.

Hence, *Waiting for Godot* can be seen to be a mixture of a farce, melodrama, music-hall act, tragedy and other forms of theatrical entertainment, a typical feature of the *Theatre of the Absurd*. By completely rejecting traditional forms of theatre, Beckett plays were able to address the claustrophobic reality of life in the twentieth century. Beckett mocks the audience's expectations to become enlightened by a story that is complete and has a message from the playwright. Mocking the audience is a tradition that comes from the customs of music-hall and circus clowns which highly interested Samuel Beckett. *Waiting for Godot* deals with the bleak nature of society that existed in the 1950s, a time when isolation and emptiness was significantly obvious in the depopulation of the countryside as illustrated in the play by the lonely countryside road. The representation of the countryside as a vast stage setting with fragmented and obscure characters performing senselessly on it did not look like a dark absurd fantasy, rather like an exaggerated version of Western reality. This representation and the dramatist's vision behind it shocked the audiences. Robert Morley, the famous character actor of the 1950s English stage commented "I have been brooding in my bath for the last hour and have come to the conclusion that the success of *Waiting for Godot* means the end of theatre as we know it."⁷

In a way, *Waiting for Godot* became an unconventional, non-literary theatre because of its approach to language. Literary theatre is dominated by dialogue. But Beckett showed the inability of words and dialogues to convey the internal states of his characters. Language is only one of the medium of expression – the stage-setting, the gestures and body language all become part of the theatrical language and experience. Beckett wrote in French to keep his language functional and stark. Use of English would have led to literary and cultural associations in his

7 Cornwell, Neil. "Samuel Beckett's Vessels, Voices, and Shades of the Absurd." *The Absurd in Literature*. No ed. Vol. 1. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2006. 226. Print.

mind being shown in the language. The fragmented conversations hint at the many pressures operating on the characters' mind and also point out the isolation of the characters as they cannot explain their traumas.

Beckett never wanted his plays to simply express the bleakness and dreadfulness that existence offers because his real interest was to illustrate the continuous ways humans try to survive through anguish and the remarkably stubborn strength human beings have to keep on going. The words and acts with which Beckett's characters rebel against the gloom may appear pointless or utterly tragic; yet they manage to stay alive nonetheless. While the characters and actions on stage depict graphically the isolation and disorientation of human beings, the play ends on a note of maybe self-deluding, but nevertheless, human assertion.

In the play, time has been expressed as a concept that serves no meaning, resulting in an unclear sequence of proceedings where the characters appear to go through similar actions with little or no change. For instance, the duration to the waiting of the two tramps has not been made known and whether their waiting will go on further has not been explained either. Although the passage of time has been clearly identified by the appearance of the new leaves on the branches of the tree or through the shifting to nightfall from daytime, yet the characters express a sense of stagnancy by claiming that they do not remember the occurrences or meetings that occurred the previous day. This gives the impression that everything gets erased every time the day passes and everything gets into a state of reset all over again. Time has been highlighted as a notion that impacts life randomly in the most brutal way. Just like Pozzo and Lucky becoming blind and mute from physically normal beings in the progression of just one day. One of the questions that Pozzo asks after meeting Vladimir and Estragon in Act II is "What is the time?" which Vladimir by inspecting the condition of the sky, answers by two arbitrary comments; "Seven o'clock ...

eight o' clock ...". This suggests the fact that no one in the play seems to have any concrete understanding of time. To characters such as Pozzo, time is a vague idea, to him every day is the same, as he states in Act II that the blind men have no understanding of time in Act II in response to Vladimir's query of how he became blind all of a sudden;

“Vladimir. And it came on you all of a sudden?

Pozzo: Quite wonderful!

Vladimir: I'm asking you if it came on you all of a sudden.

Pozzo. I woke up one fine day as blind as Fortune. [*Pause.*]

Sometimes I wonder if I'm not still asleep.

Vladimir. And when was that?

Pozzo. I don't know.

Vladimir. But no later than yesterday...

Pozzo: [*Violently*]. Don't question me! The blind have no notion of time.

The things of time are hidden from them too..."

By understanding Pozzo's blindness from a metaphorical perspective, the play expresses the idea that the world is in a state of blindness due to chaos, corruption, hatred, pain and anxiety; humanity has achieved a state of blindness. Pozzo's blind state suggests that the passage of time withers the human condition. Therefore, Pozzo and Lucky's sudden, senseless transformation reflects the notion that times' effect on human existence is irrational because as time passes, the extent of human beings' change is inconceivable. So, accepting human existence is also absurd as time cannot be rationalised.

Waiting for Godot also highlights the self-deluding quality in human beings. Through meaningless conduct of Vladimir, Estragon, Pozzo and Lucky such as quarrelling, waiting, discussing and even considering suicide, the characters show that human beings try to prevent themselves from perceiving the harsh reality of their inescapable circumstances. While these characters attempt to deceive themselves from accepting the fact that they are waiting for someone who may never show up, their actions create a highly ironic, tragic-comic environment. Human beings attempt to distract themselves by performing insignificant activities, as they do not want to confirm to themselves that they are leading meaningless lives. If life makes no sense, then the only other option for humanity to continue living in this absurd world is by committing nonsensical activities or perishing. By waiting for Godot, Vladimir and Estragon appear to give meaning to their pointless lives. But ironically Godot as an elusive, mysterious saviour had many different connotations; at a metaphorical level, the play represents universal human existence, anxiously waiting for deliverance. The Christian and religious associations cannot be separated from Godot. At the same time, when Beckett wrote the play, for many countries with oppressive regimes, Godot had associations with liberty and freedom.

Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, in an isolated and bizarre setting is a reflection of the world that has been transformed due to the effect of the two World Wars, which has led to complete disintegration of humanity. The bare stage, the two disoriented and dazed characters become stark reminders of the nightmarish bombed out war zones, where the human victims bravely struggle to patch up the shattered fragments of their life. The play emphasises the thought that human beings have become estranged from one another due to the gap of communication. No one is able to convey what they are feeling to one another; the dialogues remain incomplete. Hence, the little use of language in Beckett's plays signifies that even though the use

of language does not lead to a rational communication, but by talking constantly humans desperately try to get connected. Also humans have lost their sense of identity in a chaotic world and this has created a sense of loneliness but the characters have a constant longing for company. Although, the two tramps desperately try to have a meaningful conversation, they still fail to produce the communication that would lead to some form of resolution. This is a clear representation of modern society, where human beings cannot clearly communicate with each other. While, Vladimir and Estragon endlessly wait for the arrival of Godot, the two other characters Pozzo and Lucky travel through the world pointlessly, which suggests that neither inaction nor action is productive. Thus Beckett, in *Waiting for Godot* truly captures the essence of man's anguished and helpless condition in the post-World Wars landscape, alternating between hope and despair.

Chapter 3

Anxiety and Rootlessness: Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker*.

Harold Pinter the well-known British writer, poet, playwright, screenwriter and political activist is particularly famous for the use of ironic elements to place his characters in an ambivalent environment. He was awarded the Noble Prize for Literature in 2005 by the Swedish Academy, where an excerpt from the academy's quotation found in *The International Harold Pinter Society* website states:

“Harold Pinter is generally seen as the foremost representative of British drama in the second half of the 20th century. That he occupies a position as a modern classic is illustrated by his name entering the language as an adjective used to describe a particular atmosphere and environment in drama: ‘Pinteresque’. ... Pinter restored theatre to its basic elements: an enclosed space and unpredictable dialogue, where people are at the mercy of each other and pretence crumbles. With a minimum of plot, drama emerges from the power struggle and hide-and-seek of interlocation. Pinter's drama was first perceived as a variation of absurd theatre, but has later more aptly been characterised as ‘comedy of menace,’ a genre where the writer allows us to eavesdrop on the play of domination and submission hidden in the most mundane of conversations. In a typical Pinter play we meet people defending themselves against intrusion or their own impulses by entrenching themselves in a reduced and controlled existence.”

This detailed comment suggests that Pinter who though partly influenced by Samuel Beckett had his own unique approach to the predicament of human existence. This is clearly

distinct in his plays in the silences and pauses that are significant to his dramas only, which have led to the adjective 'Pinteresque' to be included in the Oxford Dictionary. His plays are characterised by small plot structures, long dialogues, sometimes with a comic twist, between the minimum numbers of characters. Hence, Pinter's plays fall in the category of both comedy and tragedy, thus exemplifying the 'comedy of menace'. Although Pinter's plays are regarded as being absurdist dramas, he presents the issues related to human existence in a much more opaque manner than Beckett; by the use of ordinary settings such as an apartment or a room which somehow acquires threatening associations. Issues of identify, homelessness, anxiety are an integral part of his plays, especially in *The Caretaker*, which also has an interesting representation of power dynamics.

In his youth before World War II began, growing up in East London's lower middle-class environment, Pinter faced countless occasions of anti-Semitic behaviour in London, which had a deep impact on his psyche as well as his theatrical works. According to a statement made by the author and blogger of *The Jewish Daily Forward*, Joshua Cohen;

“Pinter is too much of a Modern to define himself as a Jew and he has downplayed his Judaism many times in conversation, and has consciously ignored it in his characterisations. However, his Jewish heritage and his past experiences with anti-Semitism have given his work a style that sets it apart from most English-language contemporaries, and certainly from the stultifying ranks of recent British dramatists.”

Thus his Jewish heritage caused him to identify with the trauma inflicted upon the Jews during the Second World War. Their victimisation and extermination in Europe created an immense sense of fear and persecution in them. This led to the creation of characters facing

identity-crisis and dislocation in Pinter's plays, especially *The Caretaker*. Although Pinter never directly referred to his Jewish origins as an inspiration for his plays, yet his experiences of anti-Semitism contributed to his unique vision as a writer. It is a fact that until well into the 1960s, he used the stage name, David Baron, though he never considered himself a 'Jewish' writer. It is hinted that he himself faced a kind of identity crisis. During World War II, Pinter witnessed the bombing of London by the Germans; at a point he had to leave London for three years to escape the bombardment. This personal experience of war and devastation left a lasting impression on Pinter's psychology. Returning to London, refusing to do compulsory military service he tried to establish himself as a poet, an actor and a playwright. But he was quite unsuccessful in conventional terms, his first play *The Birthday Party* [1958] closed within a week after receiving brutal criticism. However, among the critics was one, Harold Hobson who wrote for *The Sunday Times of London*, who called Pinter "the most original, disturbing and arresting talent in theatrical London."⁸ This suggests that despite the negative response that Pinter received due to his unique writing style, he was nonetheless seen as a revolutionary writer of his times.

Pinter got to taste his first success in 1960 with his modernist play *The Caretaker*. The drama is about two brothers, where the elder brother Aston brings home a tramp to give him a place to stay. This homeless man however then enters into an ambiguous and strange power-struggle with the two brothers. A critic for *The New York Times* described *The Caretaker* as showing "a world of perplexing menace", Pinter's writing for the stage and screen is distinct for its captivating clarity. The play takes place in a realistic, domestic situation; however within a short period of time the truth about the situation is involuntarily put into question by their actions

⁸ Erskine, Thomas L. "The Birthday Party." Video versions film adaptations of plays on video. US: Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2000. Print.

and dialogues. At first, this form of drama was hard for the audience and critics to accept as they felt that it was in conflict with their own realities of existence. His plays are especially overwhelming due to the fact that Pinter refrained from explaining what his plays actually meant.

The Caretaker premiered at the Arts Theatre Club in London's in 1960 and remains as one of Pinter's most renowned and most watched plays. It interrogates the audiences' view of existence and their perception of it by breaking down supposed ideas and notions of reality. Pinter was influenced by the philosophical re-evaluation of the human condition that was prevalent in 1940's and 1950's existentialist environment. The play reiterated the modernist notion that there are no absolute truths or realities. As Pinter says in the book, *Art, Truth and Politics*; "...There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily true or false; a thing can be both true and false...".⁹ Pinter's concern in his plays is with what exists as strange and obscure to humanity. His theatre questions the reality and practicality of language and demonstrates the truth of fact being fiction through the exploration of the uncertainty of human existence. The traditional attitudes towards theatre and the conventions of realist drama are disturbed by Pinter by deconstructing the suppositions and standards of the audience and giving them an experience that is bewildering and frightening to many. He questions society's systems, institutions and human relations because throughout *The Caretaker*, audience is hardly given any chance to be at ease. This disturbance is established from the beginning of the play when the character of Mick is unknown to the audience, yet he is described to be sitting on the bed and appears to stare at the

⁹ Pinter, Harold. John Wyver, and Michael Kuston. *Art, Truth & Politics*. UK: Route, 2006. Print.

audience in complete silence for a couple of seconds before silently leaving the scene. This suggests that Pinter has totally rejected the audience's presence.

Pinter's *The Caretaker*, is a three-act play where the psychological condition created by authority, loyalty, virtue, and dishonesty is represented through the characters of the two brothers and the tramp. Pinter's plays have elements of realistic, non-realistic and epic theatre, and he depends on all means of communication – language, silences, gestures, actions – to convey his full meaning. His closest alliance is seen to be with the *Theatre of the Absurd*, this is manifested in the tragi-comic nightmarish situation, the fragmented language and the unexplained, menacing quality of interaction between the three characters. The structure and the language in *The Caretaker* mixes 'realism' with elements of *the Theatre of the Absurd*, which uses language in a way that increases the audience's awareness of the language itself being inadequate to bringing people together. Fragmented speech, repetitive dialogues and indirect writing style are all used to highlight the mental fragmentation of individuals, lost in their own private, inner worlds. The style of the play has frequently been compared to Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and other absurdist plays due to its minimum plot and action.

Pinter acknowledged Beckett's influence on his vision of existence. But the two dramatists have their own individual approach to showing the absurd aspect of existence. An American journalist and the chief theatre critic of *The New York Times*, Ben Brantley wrote;

“Pinter creates worlds at once profoundly comic and tragic, in which meaning is never fixed, memory lies and people are inevitably betrayed not just by one another but also by their own minds; while Beckett set most of his plays in poetic realms of sterility and devastation —

the “Lear”-like blasted heath of *Waiting for Godot*, — Pinter firmly places cosmic anxiety in the everyday world.”¹⁰

Pinter’s drama is set in an identifiable physical location, suitable for him to show the complex dynamics of human interaction and isolation.

Pinter's writing style exposes the brutality of life through a tragi-comic approach in order to make it bearable for the audience to absorb the ideas illustrated through the portrayal of the two brothers and the tramp. Unlike Beckett, Pinter's plays depict the anxiety of the modern man living in an ordinary world; thus his characters use mundane language to express their thoughts and feelings for the audience to have a better connection to the characters. Pinter's use of familiar settings makes the audience feel as if they are also a part of his scripts, as Ben Brantley wrote in *The New York Times*;

“To try conversation in the immediate aftermath of a Pinter play is not, you discover, a good idea. You find yourself crippled by an odd feeling that Pinter has written not only your dialogue but also that of the people you are talking to. ‘Why did he say that?’ you think. “And then again, ‘Why did I say that?’ A crippling self-consciousness stretches the silences between sentences, and some ineffable metronome seems to be dictating the rhythms of speech.”¹¹

Brantley suggests that once a Pinter play is experienced, the audience too become a part of the dramatic action. This sensation is possible for Pinter's plays because the line between reality

10 McNamee, Dardis. "Ultimately Pinter-esque: The Sound of Silence." *The Vienna Review*, 1 Feb. 2009. Web. 5 Aug. 2014.

11 Brantley, Ben. "Appraisal: Fear and Miscommunication in Pinterland." *The New York Times*, 14 Oct. 2005. Web.

and drama starts to fade due to its strong resemblance to everyday human activities. This adds to the experiential quality of the theatrical experience.

The fact that Pinter's characters make such interesting conversation was just as fascinating to him as it is to the audience because the complexity of much of the communication that takes place between characters, is not by what is not said as much as what is. As Pinter once wrote "The speech we hear is an indication of that which we don't hear. It is a necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, and anguished or mocking smokescreen which keeps the other in its true place...., a constant stratagem to cover nakedness."¹² In an interview with Harold Pinter, Kirsty Wark on *Newsnight Review* broadcast on 23 June 2006 observed that Pinter has "always been very dismissive when people have talked about languages and silences and situations as being 'Pinteresque', She asked him, "Will you finally acknowledge there is such a thing as a 'Pinteresque' moment?" to which he replied "No, I've no idea what it means. Never have. I really don't. ...” Wark says “I can detect where a thing is 'Kafkaesque' or 'Chekhovian,' but with respect to the "Pinteresque..." “Pinter says, "I can't define what it is myself. You use the term 'menace' and so on. I have no explanation of any of that really. What I write is what I write." So, despite Pinter being renowned for having developed the 'Pinteresque' pauses, he did not view these characteristics of his writing in any special way and felt that it was just another way of expressing his thoughts through his own writing style.

However, it cannot be denied that the ‘pauses’ and ‘silences’ are typically associated with his drama and the term “Pinteresque,” which means an awkward silence implying some form of hidden threat, has entered the common language and become a part of regular vocabulary. The

¹² McNamee, Dardis. "Ultimately Pinter-esque: The Sound of Silence." *The Vienna Review*, 1 Feb. 2009. Web.

Online Oxford Dictionary of 2006 states "... Pinter's plays are typically characterised by implications of threat and strong feeling produced through colloquial language, apparent triviality, and long pauses." Actors and directors often find these 'pauses and silences' to be intimidating elements while performing the plays and they have generated much discussion and debate. Though, Pinter himself recommended to actors to omit the 'pauses and silences' if they didn't make sense, his long-time friend and director Sir Peter Hall said "A pause in Pinter is as important as a line. They are all there for a reason. Three dots is a hesitation, a pause is a fairly mundane crisis, and a silence is some sort of crisis."¹³

Pinter himself commented on the use of pauses and silences in his works.¹⁴ He said; "There are two silences. One when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed. ..." ¹⁵ In *The Caretaker* there are 149 pauses. In Act 1, the preliminary conversation between Aston and Davies is punctuated by many pauses, even a 'slight pause' which indicate a considered and careful exchange, a withholding of certain facts. At the beginning of Act III the conversation between Mick and Davies is punctuated by many pauses. On Davies' part they seem to be his usual complaints, but he is also assessing Mick's response to his complaints about Aston. He is wary of Mick's unpredictable responses and actions, so seems to be voicing aloud his own thoughts. Mick seems to lead him on. When Aston

¹³ Bite, Vishwanath. "Harold Pinter's Homecoming: The Return To Roots." *The Critrion An International Journal in English* 4.3 (2013): 3. Web.

¹⁴ as outlined in his speech to the National Student Drama Festival in Bristol in 1962, included in his published version of the speech titled *Writing for the Theatre*

¹⁵ Kane, Leslie. "Pinter." *The Language of Silence: On the Unspoken and the Unspeakable in Modern Drama*. US: Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1984. Print.

enters with a pair of boots for Davies, the irony of the two men almost conspiring against Aston, really acts anti-climatically.

Pinter's 'silences' are part of communicative process as visualized by him. The silences are meaningful because what is spoken is used to rule and mislead. They contribute to the atmosphere of distrust and secrecy typical in Pinter. The play begins with Mick's silent expressionless presence. His quiet exit indicates a desire to escape any contact. When we see him with Aston and Davies, he is very boisterous and authoritative, but his silent presence indicates the unknowable aspect of human beings.

Thus his use of language and the threatening, menacing quality of his play came to be the defining features of his theatre for he created a world that reflects on the harsh truth of life, where the characters seem trapped in mental prisons created by harsh external conditions. Twentieth century English playwright and critic Sheridan Morley views, *The Caretaker* as a landmark in English drama as he wrote in *the International Herald Tribune* in 2000;

“It is even arguable now that the modern British theatre began not with John Osborne in 1956, but with Pinter four years later. Osborne always looked back toward a lost world of prewar certainties. What separates Pinter from his contemporaries is precisely the lack of a past. The three men in *The Caretaker* have, although they deny it frequently, come from nowhere and are going back there soon.”

The characters in *The Caretaker* in fact do not allow the audience to know where they have come from and where they are headed. The play takes off at a random moment in time of the lives of the three men as a part of the absurdist dimension of the play. There is no past or

future for these three characters, almost as if they are residing in a state of limbo, which is very reflective of the condition of the society in England during the period of Pinter's writing.

The New Historicist critic Greenblatt talks of "cultural poetics;" as he believes that one's culture informs both texts and critics. Since, society is elaborately interlinked, so are critics and texts – to each other as well as with the culture in which they live and in which text are made. It is interesting to apply a New Historicist approach to understanding the connection between literary texts and socio-political and cultural contexts. Pinter with his awareness of post-war traumas of dislocation and rootlessness chose to express the experiences of human beings through defeat, rebellion, the emptiness that human beings face due to metaphysical absurdity. He expressed human beings through emotions such as anxiety, pleasure, humour, foolishness, desire, pain, etc. His plays are concerned with the human condition where theatrical experiences pursue and evoke emotional and intellectual responses from the audience. *The Caretaker* portrays the issues related to communication, jealousy, power politics and psychological disorders which can be understood as having a deeper understanding through the characteristics of New Historicism and its applications in the concept of power, language, identity, and culture; all of which have been given considerable significance by Pinter. Due to the large-scale destruction and victimisation because of the World Wars, people became dislocated, loss of identity took place and a state of confusion took over; all of which is represented in the characters of the play, especially that of the homeless tramp Davies who is first given shelter and then thrown out of it.

The principal concern in the play *The Caretaker* is to portray human relationships within limited situations, as the characters, haunted by their past, want to find some kind of shelter from menacing external conditions. As a result the characters are obsessive, they do not want to listen

or understand other people, yet want to be listened to and be accepted. The characters in *The Caretaker* should be accepted as being shaped by their past history. Beginning with Aston, he was given electric shock therapy when he was younger, which made him permanently brain damaged. His efforts to satisfy Davies' constant complaining can be observed as an effort to reach out to people in society. However, the tragedy of Aston's situation is that he ends up seeking connections with the wrong people, in wrong places. Pinter represents the entire issue of communication through Aston as his main problem in life is his inability to communicate. His inability to convey his thoughts and feelings leads him to be misunderstood by his family members, including his brother Mick, which in turns causes him to be isolated in his existence. Another human trait that Pinter highlights through Aston's character is the presence of naïve people in society because its Aston's well-mannered attitude that makes him vulnerable to being exploited by the harsh reality of life. In the play he can be seen to be always talking about building a shed, one of his chief goals in life. Pinter represents the shed as being all the things that is lacking in Aston's life, such as achievements, organisation and a sort of hope for the future.

In contrast, Mick's personality can be seen as unstable as he is sometimes aggressive and bad-tempered, while at other time his ambitious and manipulative nature appears in a comical manner. One of the factors that contribute to Mick reconciling with his brother Aston at the end even if he had distanced himself from Aston earlier due to his mental condition, is because of the dissatisfying presence of Davies. The differences between the loftiness of Mick's "dreams" and needs for immediate results and the mundane realities of Davies' neediness and shifty non-committal nature creates much of the absurdity of the play.

Much of the debate around the play focuses on the figure of the tramp Davies. Davies is a character who fabricates his own life story by lying and putting off certain information to avoid telling the whole truth about himself. Davies represents deceitful and ungrateful people in society as he tries to adjust features of his life in accordance to the people he attempts to manipulate or influence for his own advantage. It is a question of survival by any means. His character and attitude contributes the most to the tragi-comic aspect of the play. For a man in his supplicant position, his complaints, fussiness, laziness and aggressiveness are quite amazing. Right from the beginning, we see him making excuses, putting on airs, saying one thing but doing the other, as accepting tobacco and money from Aston after first rejecting it. His air of being unfairly victimised, his self-righteous defensiveness, his opportunistic desire to ally himself with the stronger and more authoritative of the two brothers, his shock when both brothers want him to go, his desperate appeals to them and finally his broken statements encapsulate the tragic dilemma of the homeless wanderer, trying with any means to secure a foothold for himself. The last image of the play leaves the audience, who laughed at his absurd posturings, quite uncomfortable.

Pinter's absurdist vision has an individual as well as a social dimension. Unlike Beckett's works, Pinter does not deal much with metaphysical questions as he analyses the veiled reality of everyday life. He reveals the presence of a menace which threatens, terrorises and destroys the individual, yet cannot be identified. This element is the grotesque quality of his plays, which rules over his dramas and is the very essence of his theatrical form. His theatre is a drama of anxiety which develops from the comic grotesque to the terrifying grotesque where laughter resolves itself in fear, to create an awareness of the absurd. The structure in the absurd plays provides emphasis on the absurdity of man's position in the universe, where he is imprisoned in

mental and social chains. *The Caretaker* presents the failure of human communication by a series of rambling and apparently incoherent dialogues, characteristic of the absurdist playwrights. Pinter was tired of logical discourses pointing out the absurdity of the universe; he produced plays to demonstrate convincingly using his own particular techniques, that the universe is indeed absurd. His play *The Caretaker* shows absurdity of the human condition by showing man being forced to become conventional in a world of the ordinary, where actions do not offer meaning. This absurdity is the outcome of human individuality's annihilation as well as due to the failure of communication.

Every play in *the Theatre of the Absurd* tradition reflects upon the confusion and disorientation that modern man faces. They express amusement at the confusion and distress that exists in modern society. According to Martin Esslin, *The Caretaker* has characteristics of *the Theatre of the Absurd* where comic and tragic elements combine to create a disturbing effect. The tragi-comic dimensions of the play can be also linked to the label of 'comedy of menace' associated with Pinter's drama. John Irving Wardle coined this term to refer to the irrational actions on the stage – their pointlessness is itself vaguely threatening.

It can be clearly noticed that the elements of comedy as well as tragedy are interlinked in *The Caretaker*. A comedy creates humour through unexpected actions, disagreements and anti-climatic expectations. This is also the case with *The Caretaker* as there are elements of humour at the beginning of the play, however as the play develops the tone changes to a more tragic one. In the play, the characters of Davies and Mick have comic elements in their personalities, not Aston as he is described as being reserved and introverted. The actions of Davies and Mick are comical mostly for their monologues; whereas the comedy that is associated with Davies is unintentional because through the characterisation of Davies, Pinter

establishes a visual comic element. This can be seen at the beginning of Act II when Davies is chased around the room with no trousers on or when the three men play 'grab' with Davies' bag; moreover Davies' speaking style tends to be comical as he seems to be so self-centred that he often repeats his ideas to enforce his position on a situation. When the comic qualities of the play begins to fade near the end of the play, the atmosphere in the drama can be noticed to transform to a more serious one where the characters seem to be concerned with their own existence. It is pathetic to see the tramp Davies' shift of alliance between the two brothers in order to secure his own position, but the aggressive and threatening overtones of his action only highlights his struggle for survival. Pinter said in a letter published during the play's original run in *The Sunday Times of London*, "As far as I am concerned '*The Caretaker*' is funny up to a point. Beyond that it ceases to be funny, and it was because of that point that I wrote it."¹⁶ This 'point' is the awareness of the tragic isolation and rejection of the homeless tramp by the two brothers, who seem to be mysteriously joined together in playing a cat-and-mouse game with him.

The issue of isolation and alienation has metaphysical, political and social ramifications. Along with issues pertaining to identity and power-play in the story, the theme of isolation gives an existential dimension to the play. H.B. Patil says in his article "The Theme of Isolation in Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker*."

"The human being in modern life has become victim of frustration, loneliness, loss of communication and isolation. Harold Pinter, the British playwright reflects exactly this state of human being in his play *The Caretaker*.... Harold Pinter's works present directly or indirectly the influences of pre-war and post-war incidents. The sense of

16 Isherwood, Charles. "Pinteresque Hospitality." *The New York Times*, 6 May 2012. Web.

rootlessness[sic], loneliness and isolation can be seen in his characters. The audiences are made to laugh but at the same time they are threatened by violent action that destroys the central character....” [Patil. 1]

In the play *The Caretaker*, the characters are incapable of communicating in an efficient manner with one another. It can be noticed that the drama relies more on dialogue than on action. There are a few instances when the characters seem to be achieving some form of understanding with one another. Yet, most of the time in the play, the three characters are described as avoiding and evading conversations with each another due to their own psychological anxiety and lack of self-confidence. The characters' failure of communication indicates alienation; while the characters' own narrow-mindedness also intensifies their complex reluctance to make conversation. Deception and self-deception are also significant patterns that result in their overall state of isolation. There are many deceiving expressions and self-deceptive strategies used by the characters that can be noticed to reappear throughout the characters' dialogues in the play as ways of avoiding conversation from taking place. Such examples include the character of the tramp, i.e. Davies, who uses a made-up name to convince others as well as himself to justify his conviction that he will be able to resolve his identity crisis by having an alias. He never manages to go to Sidcup to retrieve his identity papers and displays characteristics of a lethargic person unwilling to take any responsibility for his actions. He blames his inactivity on many other factors, which is a contributing factor for his lonely state that he attains at the end of the play.

In Aston's case, he has become isolated due to society's treatment of his psychologically disabled state. In the play, Aston reveals how his trusting nature and sharing his views on life and society led to his mother and brother [Mick] allowing him to be given electric shock treatment in order to mould him into the way that society would deem fit. He seems an

introverted, naive person who has set his own goals like building a shed in order to make his life meaningful. He does not seem capable of surviving in the real world with aggressive, opportunistic people, represented by Davies. Mick's character faces isolation due to his aggressive and harsh personality as he is seen to be only interested in achieving a successful career and keeps away from his responsibility of taking care of his mentally-unstable brother. His selfish nature prevents him from making emotional bonds with his brother as well as others in society, which leaves him in a state of detachment from human connections. His sadistic playfulness with Davies shows the roughness in his nature. By the end of the play the brothers display a bond of togetherness in turning the homeless tramp out, but there is no real understanding or communication between them. Ronald Knowles sees the apparent bond between the brothers seen at the end to be deceptive.¹⁷ Mick knew all along that Davies was a shameless scrounger, he wanted Aston also to realise that he had been naïve and too trusting to bring the tramp home. The theme of isolation presented in the play creates a realm where time, location, identity, and language appear to be flowing in a vague manner. Pinter does not give any symbolic message in the story as the characters are readily identifiable as local people in ordinary circumstances. However, the play is not conventional because the characters seem incomplete, doubtful, unstable and do not seem to have an absolute grasp on their own existence. Thus, in *The Caretaker*, Pinter raises important existential, social and political issues. His characters enact a tragi-comic exchange that both amuses and disturbs.

17 Hammond, Brean. "Understanding Harold Pinter by Ronald Knowles." *The Review of English Studies* Vol 48, Issue 191(Aug, 1997): 422-423. Web.

The theme of power dynamics, of control seems to provide New Historicist critics insight into the shifting power relations in Europe. Eugene Ionesco, who wrote his absurdist drama *Rhinoceros* in 1960, talked of the 'power madness' of countries with reference to events of the World War II. Similarly, *The Caretaker* presents the idea of domination, which can be supported by the fact that Pinter described his dramatic writing as an analysis of 'the powerful and the powerless'.¹⁸ The theme of power relations is an ancient one, nevertheless in *The Caretaker*, Pinter looks at this notion to expose the nature of human relations through the three characters Aston, Mick and Davies.

The play projects that human relations are based on a constant psychic need for power, however the power relations are dynamic and unpredictable. *The Caretaker* portrays the struggle for power between two brothers who have become distant over time and a tramp that one of the brothers bring into their house to live with them, who later starts to take over their lives. Davies can be seen to be constantly trying to gain alliance with the two brothers to gain power. This continuous struggle for power is present from the beginning of the play till the very end. The power struggle starts right from the moment when Aston brings Davies into the house as he points out that everything in the room belongs to him, hence he is in control. Aston gets to choose the bed in which Davies should sleep also that the window should not be closed. This makes Davies think that since Aston owns everything, the room and house must belong to him and as a result Davies tries to behave politely with him. However, after meeting Mick at the end of Act I, Davies realises Mick superiority as Davies gets physically defeated by Mick. This makes him accept that Mick is powerful but at the same time it can be understood that Mick's

18 Quoted from Gale, Steven H. *Harold Pinter: Critical Approaches*. No ed. Vol. 1. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1986. (126). Print.

controlling behaviour with Davies is also proof that he is also struggling to assert his power. Davies is symbolic of the lower working-class over whom the power struggle is carried out on as he falls between the two power holders, i.e. the two brothers. This is similar to the nations fighting during the World Wars where some minor countries fell victim to the threat of cross-fire.

This idea of Mick being the powerful one is reinforced in the second half of Act II when Davies learns that Aston is psychologically weak and realises that Mick has power when it comes to his brother as he also owns the house in which Davies is staying; hence again he is seen trying to form a good relationship with Mick. In Act III, thinking that since he is on good terms with Mick who is the more powerful brother, the owner of the house and as Aston is no longer of any use to him, Davies tries to break his relationship with Aston by fighting with him regarding the bed in which Aston has asked Davies to sleep. However, later on when Davies in a conversation with Mick speaks disrespectfully of Aston's mental illness, Mick becomes mad at Davies' insults of his brother. Once Davies loses Mick's alliance, he is then seen to be desperately trying to gain the friendship of Aston once again, which results in failure at the end of the play. Although Davies getting expelled from living in the house seems rational, his position in the lives of the two brothers and his refusal to live in the way that Aston requests him to do does not make sense. Davies' greed and non-stop wanting for more is shocking because a person in his position, i.e. homeless, is supposed to feel grateful for the kindness and hospitality that Aston shows towards him rather than being all greedy and bossy. Thus, through the character of Davies, Pinter highlights one of the major instincts of human beings, i.e. their constant attempt to gain power. In the vision of Harold Pinter, the relationship between human beings is based on the endless struggle for dominance. So, Pinter's play *The Caretaker* shows

that it is the desire for more power that eventually leads human beings to complete failure as perceived from Davies' situation.

It is interesting to link up Davies' character and predicament with issues of dislocation, racism and hostility to immigrants associated with life in general and in London in particular. His identity becomes an important issue for him as well as the others. An important contemporary issue that Pinter raises in the play is the issue of racism, which manifests itself in Davies' character as he is described to be a very racist and arrogant person. Racist remarks turns up several times from Davies, who especially speaks against the "Blacks." Initially Aston had saved Davies from a fight in a café that he had gotten himself into. Right from the very beginning of the play when Aston offers Davies a chair to sit on; from Davies' response, his grotesque and racist personality can be recognised as seen in Act I of *The Caretaker*;

"Davies: Ten minutes off for a tea-break in the middle of the night in that place and I couldn't find a seat, not one. All them Greeks, had it, Poles, Greeks, Blacks, the lot of them, all them aliens had it." [Pinter.6]

This racist remark shows the audience the darker and uglier side of the British working class living in England after the end of the World Wars. The notion of racism becoming a dominant issue in England is interestingly analysed in Graham Woodroffe's article "Taking Care of the "Coloureds": The Political Metaphor of Harold Pinter's" *The Caretaker*." Here he says;

"It is clear that by the 1950s many of the problems of insertion experienced by Jewish settlers in Britain had attenuated as the ghetto dispersed. The racial hatred directed against the large number of Jews who had arrived in Britain between 1880 and 1914 and in the years leading up to World War II was, in the late 1950s, directed at the "coloured"

immigrants arriving from the former colonies. The problems these new immigrants faced, and the prejudice they encountered were, as many social historians have pointed out, very similar to those previously experienced by Jewish immigrants...."[Woodroffe. 503]¹⁹

This entire historical context led to the discrimination of the Jews and other immigrants by the British and this sort of working class mentality is represented through Davies as he appears to be a person who does not consider what he says when it comes to other peoples' situation. Davies' expression of calling every other nationality other than his own as alien displays his biased psychology. His racist comments are ironical as Davies himself is a homeless person, almost like an outcast in society, yet he seems to enjoy and feel that he is above those who do not belong to the English society by scrutinizing and belittling immigrant members of the same society, Davies appears to feel a sense of racial superiority by allying himself with those in power. Pinter hints at an instinctive defence mechanism adopted by the tramp Davies who is unable to confirm his own identity, has lived on charity or by scrounging around, is insecure, but aggressive. He has a heightened sense of persecution, self-pity and evasiveness.

It seems that every time Davies gets accused of doing something wrong he reacts with racist comments, almost as if to show that the presence of immigrants from other countries is to be blamed for all that is wrong in Davies' life, in other words – the English society. As when he makes noises at night and Aston asks him why he did make such noises, Davies in reply tells him that these nasty noises must have been made by the “Blacks” who are the neighbours. This can be seen in Act I of the play;

19 Woodroffe, Graham. "Taking Care of the" Coloureds": The Political Metaphor of Harold Pinter's" The Caretaker"." Theatre Journal (1988): 498-508. Web.

“Aston: Were you dreaming or something?”

Davies: Dreaming?

Aston: Yes.

Davies: I don't dream. I've never dreamt. ...

Aston: You were making noises.

Davies: Who was?

Aston: You were. ...

Aston: Maybe it was the bed.

Davies: Nothing wrong with the bed. ...

I tell you what, maybe it were them Blacks. ...

Aston: What Blacks?

Davies: Them you got. Next door. Maybe it were them Blacks making noises, coming up through the walls.” [Pinter. 20-21

Typical of Davies' evasive personality, he always points the finger at someone else for his actions; whether it's through racial discrimination or to hide facts about himself, it doesn't matter because as long as he can save his own skin he will do what is necessary. In the play, every time a question arises regarding his identity, he doesn't want to talk about it; he doesn't even say where his origins are. He gives very little information about his past life, most of which is false, so it is of no use to the audience to understanding his origins. Although Davies does mention that

he had once lived under the wrong name of Bernard Jenkins, it does not provide any helpful information. The issue of identity takes on a strange political as well as social aspect. Ironically, Davies is very evasive about himself, implying that he has seen much better days in the past and is now fallen on hard times.

His behaviour is quiet demanding for his situation. Again one can think of the thousands of Jews displaced during the World Wars atrocities, and their desperate attempts to find refuges for themselves. Pinter's racial affiliation gives a particular significance to the situation of the tramp Davies and the two brothers seeking to consolidate their position against the intruder. Pinter presents the entire play as an illustration of the situation of the people living in the post-war period, as stated by Graham Woodroffe in his article; "Metaphors suggesting the anxiety about the flow of immigrants into the country also accumulate in the play. Not only in the room full of junk but the roof is leaking. ..." [Woodroffe. 504] The entire setting of the room, with its accumulated junk, suggests that the environment in which the characters are living in are symbolic of the situation unfolding in the room. Unwelcome elements are intruding in the room, and Davies becomes another such intruder into the closed space. His words to Aston at the end of the play;

'What am I going to do/

Pause

What shall I do?

Pause

Where am I going to go?'

reiterate the anxiety, fear and despair of the homeless wanderer, seeking to find a safe space for himself.

In 2005, Pinter was honoured with the Nobel Prize for Literature and in the following year, the European Theatre Prize. The Noble Prize selection committee referred to Pinter as a writer "who, in his plays, uncovers the precipice under everyday prattle and forces entry into oppression's closed rooms." The Noble Prize committee described him as a playwright capable of highlighting crucial issues of the time through the characters everyday arguments and mundane activities which is indeed a sign of pure talent as found in *The Caretaker*. The fact that Pinter being an anti-war activist was awarded the Noble prize was understood to be a political statement.

Chapter 4

Anger: The Defining Characteristic of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*

“*Look Back in Anger* was first performed in Britain at the Royal Court Theatre on 8th May, 1956, and immediately became the outstanding dramatic success of a decade. ... the ‘posh papers’, seized on the play as a peg for yet more of the pseudo-sociology that has characterised the period... and found in its hero a symbol of his whole generation, or at the very least of a ‘movement’ of some kind inside it. The phrase ‘angry young men’ was coined with direct reference to this play, and since had a truly remarkable success.”²⁰

John Osborne created a sensation with his play *Look Back in Anger* in 1956. It is a play that shows the effect of the times on the writer as he wrote this play as a reaction to his surrounding socio-political conditions. The play *Look Back in Anger* is a significant reaction to the occurrences that was going on in Britain and shows how John Osborne as a British citizen reacted to the transitional phase of his nation. The play has been considered to be one of the most significant plays in modern British theatre due to its expression of the frustration and discontentment of the English youth through the explosive anger of the main character Jimmy Porter.

The play staged by the Royal Court Theatre opened at Sloan Square in central London and was received by mixed reviews from English theatre critics, which helped to build its

²⁰ Dyson, A. E. "*Look Back in Anger*." *Critical Quarterly* 1.4 (1959): 318-326. Web.

reputation. A comment by the critic Kenneth Tynan, who really ensured the success of the play, sums it up;

“... Jimmy Porter is the completest young pup in our literature since Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. *Look Back in Anger* presents post-war youth as it really is, with special emphasis on the non-U intelligentsia who live in bed-sitters and divide the Sunday papers into two groups, 'posh' and 'wet'. To have done this at all would be a signal achievement; to have done it in a first play is a minor miracle. All the qualities are there, qualities one had despaired of ever seeing on the stage - the drift towards anarchy, the instinctive leftishness, the automatic rejection of 'official' attitudes, the surrealist sense of humour... the casual promiscuity, the sense of lacking a crusade worth fighting for and, underlying all these, the determination that no one who does shall go unmourned. ...”²¹

Kenneth Tynan saw it as one of the first ever wholly original play of a new generation.

The play became the first distinguished illustration of *Kitchen Sink drama* and the central character of the play, Jimmy Porter became the classic example of the *Angry Young Man* movement. John Osborne has been viewed to be the British playwright who rescued English drama from the well-made plays typical of Terence Rattigan and Noel Coward in the 1930s – 1940s. These illustrated only the life of the upper-classes, whereas the play *Look Back in Anger* started a new form of drama known as *Kitchen-Sink Drama*, a style of theatre that looked into the emotion and drama behind every day domestic life of the British, especially the working-class living in the post-war era. The concept of the *Kitchen-Sink Drama* gave a new form to theatrical practises in British theatre. The focus of most British theatre before the production of *Look Back*

²¹ Tynan, Kenneth. “The Voice of the Young” *The Observer*, Sunday 13 May 1956. Web.

in Anger was quite different. Theatre was also being given stiff competition by music-hall variety programmes and the coming of cinema and radio plays. The commercial plays were mostly based on refined subject matters of interest to upper classes; whereas, Osborne's play portrayed the real emotions that the working class felt as a consequence of their living conditions. The reason for this kind of theatre to be termed 'Kitchen-Sink' was due to the concentration on the internal domestic lives of ordinary people. In Osborne's play the notion of the kitchen literally became a part of the stage setting. The cramped, one-room flat of the Porters in the English Midlands is connected to the frustrated and claustrophobic lives of such people. This drama applied a new style of social realism to depict domestic lives of the working-class to explore social and political issues. The writers were seen to want to change the existing conditions and were initially seen to reject authority and be radical in their views.

John Osborne was a part of the discontented group called the *Angry Young Men*. The term *Angry Young Men* is associated with an entire generation of artists and working class young men in post-World War II British society. This movement centred around the British playwrights, novelists as well as the frustrated youth of the post-war period who strongly opposed the social customs and organisations that were prevalent during the 1950s. A group of young writers and artists like John Osborne, Harold Pinter, etc. personified the anger, dissatisfaction, and disappointment with the British socio-political and cultural life that many working class families experienced during that period. This sense of rage that was a prevalent characteristic of the *Angry Young Men* movement has been effectively shown in the innovative work *Look Back in Anger* by John Osborne.

Osborne and this group of writers like John Wain, Alan Sillitoe and John Braine were young and passionate about many causes and earned the label of being immature and anarchic,

but nevertheless captured an important phase of English socio-political evolution in the 1950s. *Look Back in Anger* was seen as an explosion of adolescent fury and misery, but was very expressive of the sentiments of the age. It gave a voice and stage-space to the working-classes. In real life, Osborne was a rebel with a strong personality. In his family he had an everlasting conflict with parents and had a strong sense of resentment against the apathy and decay of all institutions like the monarchy, church, welfare state. All this came together in *Look Back in Anger*.

Osborne wanted his plays to project the raw emotions felt by human beings in their surrounding conditions. In the play, Jimmy Porter constantly desires a more real and complete life, which in turn makes him compare his burning desire of some meaningful action and commitment to the emptiness and lethargic attitude of the other characters around him. He tries to justify his hollow and restless feelings by criticising the floppy writing in the newspapers as to him they do not describe the actual scenario of the British society. He then turns his angry gaze to those around him and close to him, Alison, Helena, and Cliff. Osborne's argument in the play for a real life is one in which men are allowed to feel a full range of emotions. The most real of these emotions is anger and Jimmy believes that this anger is his way of truly living. This idea was unique in British theatre during the play's original run. Osborne argued in essays and criticisms that, until his play, British theatre had subsumed the emotions of characters rendering them less realistic. Jimmy's passionate though unfocused desire for a real life is Osborne's attempt to restore raw emotion to the theatre. Jimmy's anger is directed towards those close to him such as Alison and Cliff as he believes that they fail to be passionate individuals that can demonstrate strong emotions. As Jimmy exclaims in Act I;

“Nobody can be bothered. No one can raise themselves out of their delicious sloth. You two will drive me round the bend soon – I know it, as sure as I’m sitting here. I know you’re going to drive me mad. Oh heavens, how I long for a little ordinary human enthusiasm. Just enthusiasm – that’s all. I want to hear a warm, thrilling voice cry out Hallelujah! (*He bangs his breast theatrically.*) Hallelujah! I’m alive... (*He looks from one to the other.*) Oh, brother, it’s such a long time since I was with anyone who got enthusiastic about anything.”²² [Osborne.15]

His anger is also aimed at the British society that has disappointed him by not carrying out its assurance of a prospective future, despite his being an educated individual. He is also angry because those who arrogantly take for granted their places in the social-power structure do not deserve the position they are given, as is the case with Alison’s brother Nigel.

The social background of the play *Look Back in Anger* was provided by the period of decline of the British Empire. By the 1950's, the two World Wars had destroyed the British economy leading to the rise of the United States as the new world military and political power, which meant that England was starting to decline in influence internationally. During this period, the British Empire had already started losing many valuable colonies. Internally England was implementing policies of a welfare state introduced by both Labour and Conservative governments. The welfare state is a concept of government in which the state assists and advances the economic and social well-being of its citizens. The welfare state is based on the values of equal opportunity, fair distribution of wealth, and national duty for those unable to help themselves with the provisions to lead a well-balanced life. It was set up alongside the National

²² Osborne, John. “*Look Back in Anger.*” London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1957. Print.

Health Service soon after the end of the World Wars, which led to a revolution in care services; it included housing, unemployment benefits, secondary education which would be freely available to all children. The welfare state system was based on the report produced by Lord Beveridge in 1942 called *Social Insurance and Allied Services*, which pointed out the fact that the welfare state would provide social care for the individual from 'cradle to grave.' The report stated: "The aim of the Plan for Social Security is to abolish want by ensuring that every citizen willing to serve according to his powers has at all times an income sufficient to meet his responsibilities. ..." [Pleuger. 1]

The Labour Government came to power in 1945 as the British people wanted a change from the Conservative Party. The Labour Government started action on the plans presented in the Beveridge report, making provisions in areas of medical care, secondary education, housing, leisure and unemployment.

However, the hopes of the British society linked to the establishment of the welfare state during the 1950s had slowly started to crumble, as the years that followed the Labour government's activities saw the collective plan for a better English society starting to weaken. Although, the 1950s has been described to be a time of significant growth in economy, which led to financial success for the working classes as well as the middle-classes; nonetheless this was not the case for everyone living in the English public sphere because of unequal wealth distribution and a widening social gap between the middle-classes and the working-classes. As a result, the young generation of the working-classes who had been educated due to the 1944 Education Act started to realise that their ambitions of having a brighter future in society was being undermined due to the presence of social hierarchy. Therefore, the unified psychology of the younger generation of the post-war working-class Britons showed a collective resentment that voiced its opinion

against the social norms present in 1950s British society. As the British economy was slowly emerging from the issues that the World Wars had created, the society's affluence brought about an increase in consumer behaviour. The British youth became accustomed to a modern lifestyle with values that contradicted the pre-existing moral and social values of traditional British culture. This was particularly true for the older generations who had faced the struggles that the Second World War and the post-war era had created. Thus, the youth of the 1950s was seen as being only interested in its own gains while lacking in any kind of nationalist feelings. This lack of patriotism that the British youth expressed was viewed by the traditional English society as having been influenced by American culture and increasing Americanisation.

These different aspects of English society are related to the anger vented out by Jimmy from the beginning of the play. The reasons for his destructive anger are never clearly mentioned, but from Jimmy's comments and responses many different reasons can be interpreted. Anger is the pre-dominant emotion of the play. The play is central to understanding the British life in the twentieth century and has been marked as a significant work of English literature. The play appeared in a time of crucial transition from Britain's Victorian past into the modern twentieth century. Anger became a symbol of the rebellion against the political and social institutions of British culture. Jimmy Porter has been created by Osborne to represent the entire British culture that remained sentimental about the past glory of their nation. Hence, Jimmy is seen to be nostalgic about the worthy causes that had motivated the previous generation, as he says in Act I of the play; "Nobody thinks, nobody cares. No beliefs, no convictions and no enthusiasm." He says this while mocking the situation that the British nation had come to due to America's rise on the world stage. As Jimmy points out

“I must be getting sentimental. But I must say it’s pretty dreary living in the American age – unless you’re an American of course. Perhaps all our children will be Americans. That’s a thought isn’t it? (*He gives Cliff a kick, and shouts at him.*) I said that’s a thought!” [Osborne.17]

Jimmy's repressed feelings of rage and anger is expressed towards a world that has become lethargic and uninteresting unlike it had been in the past. The anger that Jimmy expresses is devastating for those close to him, therefore the psychological violence present in the play received a lot of criticism. He was seen as a case fit for psychoanalytic analysis.

Jimmy was one of the first anti-heroes in modern drama as he possessed all the negative qualities contrary to the conventional protagonist of a play. He is rough in words and manners, and his angry comments dominate much of the stage action. He seems full of bitterness and his comments to his wife are of the cruellest, sadistic nature. Jimmy can be understood to be both a hero and a villain as his unrestrained expression of frustration is a very honest revelation of a society that had once stood tall but fell to a lower state. This concept of an anti-hero has also been discussed by the Welsh novelist and critic of the 20th century Raymond Williams;

“*Look Back in Anger* is the beginning of a revolt against orthodox middle-class drama... what passes for realistic drama is in fact telling lies; it is not about real people in real situations, but about conventional characters (superficial and flattering) in conventional situations (theatrical and unreal)... For the great number of the critics Jimmy Porter is

regarded as the first non-middle class, provincial, anti-establishment anti-hero in modern British drama.”²³

It can be observed from the beginning of the play that he cleverly ridicules established organisations and well-reputed concepts of decency present in British culture despite the nation being in a state of decline. While he has been viewed to have negative traits, the ways in which he releases his rage about his perspectives is very destructive to those who surround his life. When Osborne created the character of Jimmy Porter who fought back against social formulations that were degrading the quality of the English life, both Osborne and Jimmy became popular figures that portrayed the temperament of the post-war period. The anger that is pictured in *Look Back in Anger* is known to have been taken from Osborne’s own past experiences as the attack on the middle class lifestyle is the representation of his mother-in-law whom Osborne highly disliked.

Jimmy, a university graduate living in a one-room apartment with his young wife Alison, is the son of a working-class family, who has acquired education provided by the state, yet he finds himself in an unprivileged position. He is unable to achieve anything and firmly believes status and power are still firmly in the grasp of the middle-classes like Alison’s brother Nigel. Jimmy and his anger dominate the play. A common view about Osborne’s plays is that they all revolve around a single strong character, who voices Osborne’s own sense of frustration. Here too, it is Jimmy, his views, his anger that dominates the stage proceedings. Jimmy's character has an extremely complex psychology as he dominates the play by the power of his anger and use of verbally abusive language. He unleashes his abuse on what he calls the “Establishment,” i.e.

²³ Tecİmer, Emİne. "The Analysis Of The Theme Of Anger In John Osborne’s Plays: Look Back In Anger, Inadmissible Evidence, Watch It Come Down. (2005). Web.

those who were born to a privileged lifestyle; this is the reason why he seems to be against going to “church” as well because he claims that the church is a part of the Establishment just like everyone else who is in his life. Jimmy always appears to be on edge, almost as if he is in a constant state of paranoia as he can be seen to be mentally assaulting his wife in the meanest way possible. The reason behind his actions is because he attempts to force her to give a real response to his rude behaviour, something that would go against her class and aristocratic up-bringing. Jimmy accuses Alison of not being real enough as she has not suffered real pain and humiliation. Accordingly, since Jimmy holds a job as a street-vendor who sells candies at his stall with Cliff, he is dissatisfied with his occupation because he feels that his education far surpasses the position that has been given by society. Thus, he vents out all of his built-up dissatisfaction and frustration with society onto his wife Alison as she comes from an upper-class family and their middle-class friend Cliff.

Jimmy feels that he needs a more energetic life, one that is full of passion and unlike the lethargic existence that he is surrounded by. In Jimmy’s perception, he views the world around him to be in a state of slumber and so he expresses anger in an attempt to wake up the people in his life from their idleness. As Jimmy says;

“God, how I hate Sundays! It’s always so depressing, always the same. We never seem to get any further, do we? Always the same ritual. Reading the papers, drinking tea, ironing. A few more hours, and another week gone. Our youth is slipping away. ...” [Osborne. 12]

This sluggish quality can be best understood by observing Alison and Cliff’s unusual relationship as despite the two characters being physically and emotionally affectionate with

each other; it is a non-sexual, sympathetic relationship. This is also the reason behind Jimmy never questioning Alison and Cliff's affectionate bond; it's because he knows of their lack of vigour to have an actual intimate relationship.

Alison becomes the target of his feelings of rage and frustration because of their different social status. She embodies all that is wrong with the unequal social system. The social conflict gets highlighted in his behaviour with Alison. His violent, uncontrolled verbal attacks on her contrast to her restrained and non-responsive attitude and is one of the shocking, new elements seen on the stage. Alison Porter has been married to him for three years. While Jimmy comes from the working-class, Alison's family background is from the upper-class of British society. Her father is a retired colonel who worked in the British colonial Service; hence she had a well-off upbringing. She has a brother named Nigel who had attended Sandhurst and is also a member of parliament. Her marriage to Jimmy is explained by Alison to her friend Helena to be in many ways an act of rebellion against the highly 'proper', conventional principles of the upper-class. Nonetheless, her upper-class heritage has made her very subdued and passive, and as Jimmy sees it, endowed her with an incomplete emotional commitment and this is what enrages Jimmy. For instance when Helena takes control by telling Alison to leave Jimmy; Alison goes along with Helena's ideas and does in fact leave her husband to live with her parents despite Jimmy asking her to not leave him. She has no idea how to deal with a highly –complexed character like Jimmy.

The destructive anger that Jimmy expresses in the play is always directed towards Alison due to her upper-class status. Though she stays with Jimmy throughout the play despite his constant taunting of her passive personality, she shows Jimmy that she has had enough of him and takes matters into her own hands by leaving him for her upper-class family. In the play,

Alison is shown to be pregnant with Jimmy's child, which she finds hard to tell Jimmy about; therefore she opens up to Cliff with whom she finds it easy to share her thoughts. Her silence in the face of his brutal anger is indicative of the strong internal pressure faced by her

Jimmy's working-class friend Cliff is very close to Alison. He also lives with the couple in their cramped attic apartment. Cliff is rather caring of Alison as they appear to have an unusual physically loving relationship all through the play, however this friendship is platonic. He is her sounding-board and quite protective of her. She shares her feelings with him rather than Jimmy, whose unpredictable behaviour makes her hesitate. Cliff comes from Wales, thus Jimmy often reminds him that he is average and not well-learned enough to consider himself a part of the upper-class. Though Jimmy cruelly insults Cliff for his educational background, he does genuinely like him. Cliff believes that his working-class background makes Jimmy keep him as a friend.

Jimmy's relationship with Alison has aspects of both class-war and sex-war. Osborne also touches upon his views about women as being bloodsuckers through Jimmy's character. This can be clearly understood by observing Alison's best friend Helena Charles, the character who changes the course of the play by getting Alison to leave her husband Jimmy. Since Osborne wrote the play as a means of attacking the class-conflict in English society, he placed both of the female characters in the play in upper-class category. Hence, just like Alison, Helena too comes from an upper class family, which results in Jimmy's hatred towards her. It is apparent from his comments about her to Alison when he hears she will be visiting them that he dislikes her very much. In the play Helena having come to the local theatre to perform in a play comes over to the Porters' to meet Alison and ends up living in their apartment. Osborne shows that although at first when Helena gets in touch with Alison's father to take Alison home, she seems

to really care for Alison's well-being; however, when Alison goes over to her parents place after leaving Jimmy, Helena betrays Alison as she has an affair with Jimmy and also replaces Alison in the household. In Scene I of Act III, Helena is seen to be living with Jimmy and Cliff and has the same position as Alison did when the play had started; "Several months later. A Sunday evening. Alison's personal belongings, such as her make-up things on the dressing table, for example, have been replaced by Helen's." This setting suggests that it is similar to the way the play starts when Alison was in Helena's place. Osborne depiction of female characters can be seen to be in a completely negative light and the play was very controversial in regards to the treatment of women. Jimmy is aggressive, cruel, rude and violent; he takes out his rage most of the time towards women through both verbal and physical actions as evident from his treatment of Alison, her mother and her best friend. He also talks critically of his own mother who he feels did not care enough for his father after he returned from the Spanish War.

Jimmy's anger towards the upper-classes manifests itself against every member of Alison's family, starting with her father Colonel Redfern, who plays an important factor in the play's plot-line. Redfern is the representative of Britain's imperial past and symbolises the decline of and longing for the glories of the British Empire. He was a military officer who worked in colonised India for several years before returning to England. Redfern is a representative of Britain's sovereignty over the world and this is the topic that enrages Jimmy, the fact that England once being a great empire has been reduced to a mere satellite that has started to follow in the footsteps of a new emerging super-power. In a way Jimmy wants to blame Colonel Redfern for the deterioration of Britain as he embodies the British dominance that once existed but has diminished. Redfern feels nostalgic of the past and is symbolic of the denial that is seen in the psyche of the modern British people as the British culture along with the rest

of the world has started to copy the American ways of life. This new generation is represented by Jimmy, thus Redfern also sees the deterioration of England's glory through this new generation lacking in patriotism and blames the younger Britons such as Jimmy for lacking any sense of respect or tradition. Colonel Redfern's view of Jimmy also suggests that he has his own opinions over Alison's marriage to Jimmy as he does not approve of Alison's relationship with Jimmy due to his aggressive personality as well as class status.

Jimmy's anger seems to show him to be confused, self-pitying, sadistic and very disenchanted. He seems quite directionless, his comments and long speeches show his inability to cope with the socio-economic environment in which he lives. Jimmy has been conceived as a spokesman of the disillusioned and frustrated post-war youth, as one who feels society has not given him his due, and so is resentful against everything. He is embittered by personal and social experiences. At the same time, the explosive anger he displays can be connected to the total assault on the audience, as thought of by Antonin Artaud in his *Theatre of Cruelty* in the late 1930s. This theatre anticipated that the viewers would be stricken by the sounds and motion of the drama, leading to a more instinctive reaction than the usual intellectual one. The explosive anger of Jimmy literally assaults the reader and spectator with its bitterness, cynicism and outright rudeness, primarily in his cruel, rude and offensive language towards his wife Alison. The play is set in a realistic tradition, but the focus is on emotions simmering below the surface, which explode in the face of the audience in a violent and shocking manner.

It would seem that the period of the 20th century after the two wars, with its traumatising and insecure condition provided the best setting for this style of drama. As a result, many aspects from *the Theatre of Cruelty* can be found in the dramas of the 20th century dramatists, one being in John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* where the language in the play is notably rude, cruel and

offensive. Artaud's idea was that this kind of assault through word, gesture, music, sound, effects and stage-props would have a therapeutic effect on the audience and help them to express their own repressed anger and frustration. This seems quite relevant because this display of naked, ranting anger shocked critics and audiences alike, but it is also what connected with the audience. This gave them an outlet to express their frustration with the entire British system. There is no evidence to suggest that Osborne knew of Artaud's theories. He was a typically home-grown British writer. But it is interesting to see connections between different dramatic practises.

The play attracted a lot of attention from the audience as well as critics. There were those who viewed the play in a negative light and did not like Osborne's creation of a very realist world that breaks the boundaries of conventional theatre and reflects on the socio-political situation of the surrounding. Nonetheless even these critics could not hold back on the fact that *Look Back in Anger* was indeed a remarkable piece of writing and acknowledged that the play written in only a month's time marked a new voice on the British stage.

English playwright and screenwriter Howard Brenton, wrote in the Independent newspaper in 1994, "When somebody breaks the mould so comprehensively it's difficult to describe what it feels like".²⁴ Also the British dramatist Sir Arnold Wesker writing for the same newspaper talked of Osborne's play as having "opened the doors of theatres for all the succeeding generations of writers".

Hence all of the anger that Jimmy lashes out is because of his deeply felt sense of being utterly helpless; this idea of being angry because of sheer helplessness is described in the play to

²⁴ Penman, Danny. "Death Brings Tributes for 'angry' Osborne." *The Independent*. Independent Digital News and Media, 27 Dec. 1994. Web.

be a result of his unfortunate childhood experience. In the play Jimmy talks of his childhood, a time when he had lost his father after watching him suffer for a year from the wounds that he had received due to fighting for democracy in the Spanish Civil War. As he says in Act II, Scene I of the play;

"You see, I learnt at an early age what it was to be angry - angry and helpless. And I can never forget it. I knew more about – love...betrayal... and death, when I was ten years old than you will probably ever know in your life."²⁵⁶ [Osborne. 58]

This sense of helplessness, betrayal and anger are all mixed up in him. It is an unfocused anger against many things and he seems to have no definite vision of a solution to these problems, but the anger defines him.

The prevalent theme of male anger that can be found throughout the play has been viewed by many as idealizing male rage and unkindness towards women. Jimmy has uncharitable views against most women. For instance, in Act I Scene I of the play Jimmy points out how Alison like all women are always so disturbing due to their clumsy behavior;

“Have you ever noticed how noisy women are? (*Crosses below chairs to L.C*) Have you? The way they kick the floor about, simply walking over it? Or have you watched them sitting at their dressing tables, dropping their weapons and banging down their bits of boxes and brushes and lipstick? ...” [Osborne. 24]

Moreover, Jimmy appears to be constantly taunting Alison for her emotional weakness, a trait that is specific to women; he appears to be very vulgar and rude to Alison’s friend Helena as

25 Osborne, John. “*Look Back in Anger.*” London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1957. Print.

well. Jimmy's actions are especially harsh towards women in the sense that in comparison to Jimmy's remarks about Alison's father, he seems to be highly impolite when talking about Alison's mother. As seen in Act II Scene I of the play;

“I knew that, to protect her innocent young, she wouldn't hesitate to cheat, lie, bully and blackmail. Threatened with me, a young man without money, background or even looks, she'd bellow like a rhinoceros in labour – enough to make very male rhino for miles turn white, and pledge himself to celibacy. ...” [Osborne. 52]

This exclamation from Jimmy signifies that his violent remarks towards Alison's mother is a form of deep psychological repression that manifests itself in the form of anger. Yet, there is a higher meaning to his constant verbal attacks because it appears that his hatred of Alison's mother is also due to her not accepting his inferior class status. Therefore, it seems that Jimmy also suffers from an inferiority complex

This idea of mocking at the feminine qualities by Jimmy in the play is understood as an attempt at returning a vision of true masculinity into a society that has become increasingly feminised. This cultural femininity is loathed by Jimmy as he believes that it shows passivity and lack of concern towards those who are underprivileged. As a result, women symbolise this sort of sentiment to Jimmy, leading to his animalistic anger as a form of revenge against the women he encounters.

Though the play is set in a realist tradition, yet it is modern in its tone, its open ending and circular structure which rules out the possibility of much change being possible. The use of symbolism – the ironing board, the church bells, the bears and squirrels game – shows the imaginative complexity of John Osborne.

John Osborne's plays are generally seen as pleas for justice and freedom for the individual, represented as a victim of his society. The character of Jimmy Porter captures within himself all the pent up rage and disillusionment faced by the post-war youth of his generation in the 1950s. That is why though the *Angry Young Men* movement had a topical relevance at that time, the play upholds the rebellious rejection of the youth against all unfair and disillusioning aspects of society. This gives it a broader and universal relevance.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

It is interesting to see how the three contemporaries, Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter and John Osborne constructed their responses to a common occurrence, the Second World War. According to their individual visions and personal priorities, they wrote drama that reflected a wide range of concerns, from metaphysical anxiety and helplessness of shell-shocked individuals, to outsiders' desire for social integration to class tensions between the working-class and middle-classes.

In my paper, I have taken the two renowned absurdist playwrights of the post-war era, Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter, followed by the social and political dramatist John Osborne.

With the incorporation of aesthetics of 'existentialism', 'realism', into the dramatic framework, many new movements came about in British drama in the post-World War II period. The writers of this period tried to tackle the social and ethical issues present in their surroundings through their plays. For British dramatists, writing 'realistically' implied representing the new post-war life; the utterly changed social and metaphysical contexts, the realignment of social classes, the emergence of new 'subjects' such as women and the non-British, i.e. the migrant population and the shifting of the populace towards a mass-consumerist economy.

The writers felt that they had to explain the new historical reality and the position of the individual in the new post-war order by representing an accurate portrait of human beings in a changing society. This is the reason why many dramas after the World Wars had an experimental

quality. These plays depicted the individual living in a fragmented world, which resulted in the disjunction of individual consciousness and the problems that came about due to the disruption of human communication.

New kinds of drama like *The Kitchen Sink Drama*, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, *The Theatre of Cruelty* and *The Theatre of the Angry Young Men* were completely different from the previous plays and opposed the old forms that had dominated the English stage. These plays illustrated man's isolation in a cruel world, his sense of alienation from other human beings, the frustration and rage that he felt towards the contemporary conditions of the world and a society that had become disorganised. Critics of this period considered the playwrights as reflecting leftist ideologists due to the expressions of rebellion and questioning that were displayed within their dramas. There was also a sense of nostalgia for the old order that had existed in the pre-war period.

Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* was a remarkable representation of the post-World War II existentialist human dilemma in a minimalist and absurdist form of drama. Beckett's play broke conventions of naturalist drama in terms of themes, character, language, form and stage-setting. The stage itself became an externalization of the characters' internal, nightmarish world. Inspired by Beckett, Pinter came to be known as Beckett's main disciple. However, though Pinter was greatly influenced by Beckett, nonetheless his plays have their own unique characteristics in terms of his use of sets and language. His use of minimalism in dialogues combined with violent dramatic actions where silence is the key element holding the audiences' attention as seen in *The Caretaker*, highlights the impossibility of communication. The characters in Pinter's plays are seen to exist in a bizarre world where a sense of emptiness consumes their lives; such distinct expressions are associated with him by the well-known adjective – 'Pinteresque'. Although Pinter

can also be seen to be associated with the absurdist theatre in his representation of existential uncertainty and anxiety, the New Historicist approach gives another dimension to his play – the trauma of the Jewish community in the context of their persecution in the Second World War

Beckett and Pinter showed characters living in an indifferent or hostile universe and their lives seemed lacking in meaning and purpose. As writers, they show a modernist impersonality, revealing no direct link between their characters and themselves. This is in contrast to the approach taken by John Osborne. His socially critical theatre, specifically *Look Back in Anger* spoke of the young generation's disillusionment with the establishment, and the protagonist, Jimmy Porter was seen as the face of John Osborne himself. This rebellious anger was connected to the movement of the *Angry Young Men*. Osborne's play provoked the audience to consider the prevailing sense of social alienation in the rising lower middle-class and the growing class-tensions, their fear of victimisation and rejection, identity crisis, etc. In Osborne, it is easy to find a link between Jimmy Porter and John Osborne – both are *Angry Young Men*.

John Osborne admired Beckett's work and both Jimmy Porter and Beckett's tramps are illustrated to be waiting-longing for something to make sense of their existence. Lyn Gardner in *The Guardian's Theatre Blog* feels that both plays are 'about waiting, and the agony of hope endlessly deferred.'²⁶ [Pg. 3] Both are associated with different theatre movements – *The Theatre of the Absurd* and *Theatre of the Angry Young Men*. *Theatre of the Absurd* is seen to be a European phenomenon, while *Angry Young Men* movement was typically English. But both express existential anxieties and claustrophobia.

26 Billington, Michael. "Worth the Wait: Why *Look Back in Anger* Is the Equal of *Godot*." *Theguardian.com*. Guardian News and Media, 7 Feb. 2012. Web.

Although Pinter and Osborne were younger than Beckett, they all shared the basic issues of anxiety in a world destabilised by war. They had similar perspectives of the world as they had witnessed the world at war during their youth. Hence all of the three writers had the knowledge of the horror and devastation that humans were capable of by inflicting pain upon one another. Therefore, their plays draw upon the harsh realities of human cruelty brought about by a world that seems irrational to man's existence in the universe and how individuals after having knowledge of this paradoxical existence behave due to a disoriented psyche.

All three of the playwrights show the breakdown of communication, individuals trapped in their own subjective worlds. They differ in their usage of language – in Beckett, it is literal, in Pinter, the sub-textual connotations are important, while in Osborne the use of jargon and contemporary English became means of expressing the explosive anger that the *Angry Young Men* movement represented. Pinter and Beckett's plays contributed much to modern theatre in their use of language and staging. The focus is more on the language than plot, on the absurdity and futility of communication. Pinter uses pauses and silences, Beckett focuses more on repetition. In Pinter characters and setting are realistic, language is opaque. Absurdity lies in both characters and language. In Beckett, the audience is left to wonder what sort of a world it is in which these characters are living. No explanation of background are given, conversations are repeated every few minutes.

Samuel Beckett's 'silences' and Harold Pinter's 'pauses' have received various interpretations over the years from both audiences and critics. The fact that by incorporating a style where the characters say and do nothing creates a sense of mystery, which the theatre audience try to decipher.

Beckett's silences makes the readers and audiences feel as if they are being drawn into a void, which is Beckett's technique to express the existential crisis that the individuals in the play are experiencing. Sometimes the characters' silences in Beckett's plays seem to make no sense to the audience, thus resulting in a comic effect. The use of silences in his plays brought in a whole new way of dramatisation that did not exist prior to the 1950s. The play's representation of the insufficiency of language was one of the key elements of the *Theatre of the Absurd* that defined Beckett's dramas. With the fragmented dialogues, a repetitive plot that does not answer the characters' questions, *Waiting for Godot* created a sense of absurdity and unresolved mystery that attracted the post-war audience. The nightmarish quality of the play also presented a new stage setting that stimulated their imagination.

The silences in Beckett's play help the audience to understand the communication gap and the inner conflicts and anxieties pressurising the characters due to an existence that provides no meaning or purpose for humanity. The pauses and silences of Harold Pinter's plays as seen in *The Caretaker* highlights the misunderstandings and issues that are created due to lack of communication. Pinter uses domestic stage settings of rundown apartments but gives an unconventional twist to the actions and dialogues performed by the characters. His play reveals the unbelievable power of language upon the human psyche as the pauses disclose a hidden menace that the characters of the play experience. They also express the characters' struggles to get into positions of power as observed in the characters of *The Caretaker*, where they all aim at being in power and control over their given situation. Pinter's pauses also imply the failure of language and the communication gap that is created due to it.

On the other hand, comparing Beckett and Osborne's plays show that they both mould their characters in different ways in order to represent the psychology of their generation. Unlike

Beckett who depicts an abstract, decontextualised world to reflect on the suffering and anxiety that was brought about by the World Wars, Osborn illustrates the English society in a very concrete and cruel light. In *Waiting for Godot*, characters are represented as irrational and fragmented, whereas in *Look Back in Anger* the characters have definite emotional attributes, as Alice is passive, submissive and soft-hearted, while Cliff appears to have a balanced sense of emotion and Jimmy displays an explosive personality with severe frustration and anger issues. Osborne uses an ordinary scene to present his play – a flat in London – while Beckett uses an empty, isolated landscape with a tree that has no leaves. But, both have similarities in representation, as both the plays *Look Back in Anger* and *Waiting for Godot* have only one setting throughout the entire play. This shows the stagnancy of human existence, where life seems fixed in an unprogressive path.

The endings of the plays are all inconclusive. *Waiting for Godot* shows the play to be static throughout with the characters stuck in repetitive situations. Just like the beginning where the two tramps are shown to be waiting on the lonely road for Godot; also at the end despite having met Pozzo and Lucky, they still come back to their original position, i.e. of waiting. Beckett shows that human beings always try to go on living by making themselves feel hopeful in order to survive. In *Look back in Anger*, the play ends with Jimmy and Alison reunited even after the pain that Alison suffers of losing a child, which shows the possible transformation of human beings through experience and time. But keeping the nature of their relationship in mind, the ending seems romanticised and idealistic. They seem to be deceiving themselves that they can work out their relationship positively. Thus there is a note of self-deception in the endings of both plays. In fact, all three plays end on a note of uncertainty and doubt about the future.

Pinter's tramp Davies' last words highlight the horror of his homeless existence and his uncertainty about his future.

The various dimensions of the two World Wars and its aftermath in the English socio-cultural and socio-political conditions are thus well captured by the three dramatists, Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter and John Osborne. Both Pinter and Beckett belong to the same absurdist tradition no matter how much their styles differ. If in *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett's characters wait for a Godot who seems indifferent to their trauma, in *The Caretaker* Pinter highlights the homeless tramps' absurdly desperate attempts to create a sense of belonging for himself. The images are of anchorless individuals struggling against undefined forces. Their impact has been reflected in much modern theatre. Osborne's anger as a political expression of rejection was a short-lived phenomenon and was seen to be topical and limited to mid 20th English drama. However these playwrights, through their plays *Waiting for Godot*, *The Caretaker* and *Look Back in Anger* have contributed permanently to creating iconic British drama.

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