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**Englishness & Identity in Pinter's Plays; *The Birthday Party* (1958) and *the Caretaker* (1960)**

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British Literature**

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## ***DEDICATION***

*To my mother and father for their patience and sacrifice*

*To my sisters and brothers for their love and support*

*To my friends and colleagues for their support*

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## Abstract

This dissertation is an attempt to explore Pinter's Englishness and Identity use in two of his major plays; *the Birthday Party* (1958) and *the Caretaker* (1960), with relating some of the behaviors and the actions of the characters with the British society in the twentieth century. The research seek to give a sociological definition of the two concepts and illuminating the relationship between them, mentioning both terms as major characteristics of The Theatre of The Absurd. In addition to introducing readers to the ways which are exposed in the two plays. The work is accomplished by using Qualitative research depending on; Books Articles and Essays. Moreover Pinter presented his protagonist with an anonymous identity and a specific social class; the characters are misleading those around them about their true identity or they accept the English identity imposed on them by others. The work reveals that Pinter use of the issue of Englishness and Identity is extremely noticeable in his two magnificent plays; *the Birthday Party and the Caretaker*, and that certainly goes back to his inner psychology and indeed to his origins as a Jewish writer with an English identity. The dissertation concludes that Englishness is considered as a huge response to different national identities within Britain. On the other hand Identity is related to the understandings that people hold about 'who they are' and what is meaningful to them. The terms mentioned above are inter-related as a result, Englishness is an Identity.

Keywords: Englishness, Identity, Harold Pinter, Theatre of the Absurd, *the Birthday Party* (1958), *the Caretaker* (1960).

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**GENERAL**

**INTRODUCTION**

## General introduction

One of the most brilliant playwrights, Harold Pinter tends to portray and treat various themes within his plays, most commonly, identity, menace, violence, language, and Englishness. *The Birthday Party* revolves around the protagonist Stanley who is threatened by the appearance of two intruders McCann and Goldberg whereas the scope of this research is about the characters identities and origins. The play shows the ambiguity of Stanley's identity, beside the reflection of the names of the character; every character in the play had non English name however they are English, and the matter that made Pinter's play amazingly expressive. *The Caretaker* also is one of the most significant plays written by Pinter that explored the issue of identity and Englishness in clear way; the protagonist Davies is brought by Aston to the room, offered a job as a caretaker, although his identity is unrevealed and ambiguous to the audience, his behavior towards the two brothers and the neighbors express the state of the British society at that period of time. Reading the two plays, I found myself very ambitious to discover the mysteries of Pinter's plays and collect some new interpretations that may serve my own research. This research is concerned with the issue of identity and Englishness and how the two are expressed by the characters with in the plays of Pinter, precisely two plays will be analyzed as case studies, *The Birthday Party* (1958) and *The Caretaker* (1960). This research is certainly highly important in understanding Pinter's own views presented through his plays.

This research aims at:

Answering the different questions that might be asked on the portraying of the two themes Englishness and Identity in Pinter's *the Birthday Party* (1958) and *the Caretaker* (1960).

Some sub questions I would like to answer it throughout this research:

- What is Englishness?
- What is Identity
- What is the relationship between Englishness and Identity?
- How is Englishness and Identity exposed in Pinter's *The Birthday Party* and *The Caretaker*?
- What is the relationship between *The Theatre of The Absurd* and both Englishness and Identity?

Englishness and Identity issues are noticeable in Harold Pinter plays especially in *The Birthday Party* and *The Caretaker*. The own objective is to more clarify the two plays and produce a valuable work in order to encourage further studies. To complete the research and finish it, this work is divided into three chapters:

Firstly, chapter one will provide a sociological explanation of the two terms “Englishness” and “Identity”, in addition to simplifying Englishness as an identity, and exploring these main concepts as major themes of *The Theatre of The Absurd*.

Chapter two will be a literature review on Harold Pinter and his most prominent works; *the Birthday party* (1958) and *the Caretaker* (1960) besides discussing one of the major movements of the era; the *Theatre of the Absurd*, the chapter end up with a brief summary of the two plays.

Chapter three explores the theme of both Englishness and Identity in Pinter's *The Birthday Party* (1958) and *The Caretaker* (1960).

The research ends up with the general conclusion that it will sum up all the ideas analyzed in the three chapters into one brief result for the whole research.

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **Englishness & Identity**

## **1-1 Introduction**

Englishness and Identity became one of the remarkable issues in the twentieth century drama; the effects of The Second World War caused deep complications on human mentality, Britain became a total chaos after years of power and glory, the concern of what is meant to be English and what is national identity are examined by many sociologists. Literature played a significant role in depicting real life. Dramatists has always tackled the issues of Englishness and Identity in their works, Harold Pinter, for instance, as dramatist has unconsciously revealed his identity in his plays; in being a Jewish person who grew up during Hitler's time, that remarkably influenced his personality in many ways. This chapter provides a sociological explanation of the two terms "Englishness" and "Identity", in addition to simplifying Englishness as an identity, and exploring these main concepts as major themes of The Theatre of The Absurd.

## **1-2 Englishness**

Englishness is one of the most interesting issues that draw the attention of the sociologist, it is considered to be a response to different national identities within Britain. The English society have always been reluctant to provide their own definition of "Englishness" this matter goes back to the fact that they have been the largest and the most powerful state in the British Isles for over a thousand years.

The Indian sociologist Krishan Kumar (born 1942) in his book *The Making of English National Identity* (2003) explores the issue of Englishness and what it means to be English, he examines the rise of English nationalism and issues of race and ethnicity from earliest times to the present day. He argues that the long history of the English as an imperial people has, as with other imperial people like the Russians and Austrians, developed a sense of missionary

nationalism which in the interests of unity and empire has necessitated the repression of ordinary expressions of nationalism. The question is; what is national identity and who the English really are? Here there is a passage in which Professor Kumar introduced this problematic:

But it must be remembered that no Englishman ...call himself a Briton without a sneaking sense of the ludicrous, or hears himself referred to as a Britisher without squirming. How should an Englishman utter the words Great Britain with the glow of emotion that goes for him with England? His sovereign may be Her Britannic Majesty to outsiders, but to him is Queen of England; he talks the English language; he has been taught English history as one continuous tale from Alfred to his own day; he has heard the word of an Englishman and aspires to be an English gentleman; and he knows that England expects every man to do his duty...In the word England, and not in Britain all these things are implicit. (Kumar, p3)

Krishan Kumar in his book *The Making of English National Identity* (2003) suggests that within the union there would be nothing wrong, indeed it would help avoid extremism, if a genuine English national consciousness or patriotism were no longer suppressed. The old Tories suppressed it in the interests of conciliating the other nations - imperialism served for all instead. Most of the English left suppressed it by identifying English nationalism with imperialism, and by praising or pardoning almost any nationalism but their own. Suppression is not good for national consciousness just as it is not good for sex. It can be good or bad, mutually exultant or selfishly destructive.

Kumar makes careful distinctions between modes of perception that are often confused (national consciousness and nationalism, Englishness and Britishness, identity and identities). When he emerges from the objectivity of the library, however, he begins to share the subjectivity of some modern friends, including Tom Nairn and Dave McCrone, and this is my one major difference with his book. Rather than their theoretic demonstrations that the United Kingdom has had its day, he might have noticed that the successful leaders of the Scottish National party, unlike its academic fellow-travellers, are now almost as shy of the word

independence as Blair is of socialism. We are bound together by common practices of active citizenship, not just legal citizenship and identity.

Kumar concludes:

If nations are still the substance of the world, if England too at last needs to see itself as a nation among other nations, it can by example still show the world that nationalism need not mean only narrowness and intolerance. English nationalism, that enigmatic and elusive thing, so long conspicuous by its absence, might, newborn, show what a truly civic nationalism can look like.(p376)

### **1-3 Identity**

Many historians argue about the individual histories of the four nations of these islands; England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland are each shaped by the others, for them “Englishness” is not a thing in itself but a reactive relationship. Kumar sees the problem of identifying the English identity as not so much one of defining a content of self-conceived differences, as all nations do but of trying to see how much any (changing) content of Englishness depends on reactions to, and directly goes against it, the strong identities of the other nations in the British Isles.

Sociologists define the term identity as a multifaceted concept, and can be approached in a number of ways. Broadly speaking, identity relates to the understandings people hold about 'who they are' and what is meaningful to them. These understandings are formed in relation to certain attributes that hold priority over other sources of meaning. Some of the main sources of identity include gender, sexual orientation, nationality, or ethnicity and social class. There are two types of identity often spoken of by sociologists which are social identity and self-identity or (personal identity). These forms of identity are analytically distinct, but are closely related to one another.

#### **a- Social Identity**

Social Identity refers to the characteristics that are attributed to an individual by others. Social identities can include student, mother, Anglican, homeless, doctor, Asian, married and so forth. Many individuals have social identities comprising more than one attribute. A person could simultaneously be a mother, a doctor and a Christian. Multiple social identities reflect the many dimensions of people's lives. Social identities therefore involve a collective dimension. They mark ways that individuals are the same as others. Shared identities predicated on a set of common goals, values, or experiences can form an important base for social movements.

### **b- Self-identity**

Self-identity (personal identity) refers to the process of self-development through which we formulate a unique sense of ourselves and our relationship to the world around us. Self-identity is said to be a set of values, ideas, philosophy's and beliefs about one's self (Leflot et al, 2010) that consist of factors such as educational performance, gender roles and sexuality, racial identity and many others. Normally, self-identity symbolizes the answer to "who am I" (Myer, 2009).

Self-identity is made up of one's self-schemas. Furthermore, self-identities work together with self-esteem, self-knowledge and social self to make up the self. Self-esteem refers to the link between one's self and self-schemas to constitute one's overall self-worth (Fleming & Courtney, 1984).

Self-identity can include the past, present and future selves. Future represents a person idea of what they might become, what they would like to become, or what they are afraid of becoming. These diverse selves match up with one's wishes, fears, principles, aim, objective, and threats for their present selves. Possible selves may act as motivation for future behavior and also provide an evaluative and interpretive framework for the present view of self that is

used when one self-evaluates, contributing to one's self esteem (Markus & Nurius, p9). The insight which individuals have about their past or future selves is associated with the insight of their current self.

The temporal self-appraisal theory (Wilson & Rose, p25) argues that people have a tendency to preserve a positive evaluation of the present self by isolating their self-identity from their negative selves and paying more concentration to their positive selves. Furthermore, people have tendencies to assume the past self, less favorably (Ross & Wilson, 96) e.g., I'm more beautiful than I used to be and the future self-more positively e.g., I will be richer than I am now (Wilson et al, p53)

The notion of self-identity draws heavily on the work of symbolic integrationists. It is the individual's constant negotiation with the outside world that helps to create and shape his or her sense of self. The process of interaction between self and society helps to link an individual's personal and public worlds. Worldviews about the self in relation to others differs across and within cultures (Swann et al, 56). In Western cultures, an individualistic and independent approach is used where society places exacting significance on becoming independent and to express one's own attributes (Markus & Kitayama, p152). Relationships, memberships, groups for instance tend to be secondary to the self.

Another aspect is Self-assessment. Self-assessment of one's self-identity also includes social comparisons. The social comparison theory states that people endeavor to precisely identify themselves and therefore make use of social comparisons to exactly describe the self during the self-evaluative process (Preckel & Brull, p62). Within these social comparisons, one will find upward (e.g., positive) and downward (e.g. Negative) comparisons that can either enhance or threaten our self-identity (Meyers, 2p89). In such circumstance where we feel threatened, it is not rare to make justification for why we are not performing to meeting

up to standard to the same degree as others, thereby protecting our self-identity. In Asian cultures, an interdependent observation of the self is more common and these cultures often practice identity fusion more regularly (Swann et al, 77).

Interpersonal connections are more vital than one's individual accomplishments, as individuals experience a sense of oneness with the group. Previous studies have shown that this identity fusion can have positive and negative consequences. The positive impact that identity fusion can have on individuals is that they feel that their way of life is significant. On the other hand, such strong interdependence can attract to disastrous event if care is not taken. (Swann et al, p33)

#### **1-4 Englishness as an Identity**

At the beginning of the 20th century, the British Empire was very secure in its position as the dominant world power that it seemed undefeatable; despite this apparent security, many British citizens had doubts about the justice of that power. The introduction of mass-production, consumption, and attendant technologies (such as electricity, mass-transport and so forth) resulted in a basic shift in what comprised British identity. The main issue is what is mean to be English and how is the English identity is shaped?

Britain became different in many ways; some embraced this “brave new world” while others advocated a return to the pastoral tradition. In other words, while there has always been opposition to the projects of Empire, dissent was growing inside and outside England’s borders in the 20th century. The failure of Empire combined with the economic and physical destruction of WWII caused chaos on traditional notions “Englishness.” The literature of the postwar period reflects this confusion group anger as a generation of English youth did not have the economic, social, and cultural opportunities available to their parents, because the

Empire had smashed. Indeed, England has yet to fully recover from the collapse of Empire. Further, the arrival of immigrants from the colonies has and is radically changing British identity.

After the union of England with Scotland and Wales (1707) and Northern Ireland (1921) the definition of identity became different in The United Kingdom, many observers predict the fragmentation of Great Britain: in the face of the emerging identity and nationalist assertions, it is feared that the British also turn away from "Britishness" to celebrate and glorify a new form of identity nationalism called "Englishness". Thus English nationalism, in its original version, as it emerged in the seventeenth century, is filled with the spirit of freedom that results from the struggle against civil and religious authoritarianism.

For Hans Kohn, nationalist theorist and author of *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study In Its Origins and Background* (1961); it is the Calvinist ideal that places the individual at the center of the development of pre-industrial society which, *mutatis mutandis*, Explains the form that British socialism will take at the beginning of the 19th century, with the emergence of new middle classes.

The quintessential idea of the English Gentleman has two aspects. The first is the notion that he stands for all that is good. He is modest, forgiving, kind, honest and not given to displays of emotion. He represents trustworthiness and integrity. The second aspect is that he takes for granted his superiority. Others, especially those of other nations, and to some extent those who doesn't belong to the same class, quite simply cannot match these standards. They are, in their different ethnic ways, supposed to be automatically inferior.

Moreover, the sense of complexity is made clear by debates on Britishness, and hyphenated Britishness. The very concept of being British' can be a form of denial, of not

being truly English, even if born and raised within the British culture. The problems of labeling are made clear in the proposals for hyphenated identity, aping the problems of the United States. To replace the impossible terms 'Asian' or 'Pakistani' (England is nowhere near those places) with 'Asian British' is to invite others to be 'English British', as well as accepting a distancing of the Welsh, Irish and Scots. For all the worship of the flag and the promotion of nationalism, for instance, the 'Americanization' tended to accentuate the differences between groups. The confederate flag remains a potent symbol and at any hint of trouble groups like the Japanese or Arabs are quickly made to feel vulnerable and the assertion of civil liberties also leads to a controversial demand for reparations for the distant past. The issues of identity are made clear in the concept of being British. The confidence placed in the Union Jack, an all-embracing idea that could include diversity since it related to a concept that pre-dates minor nationalism. The notion of 'Britishness' is, however, eroded more by its marginalizing by those who deny their own sense of belonging in order to give themselves a smaller, more confined, identity.

### **1-5 Englishness and Identity in the Theatre of the Absurd**

Among the many genres of literature, dramatic art proved to be more promising in providing answers to the issue of Englishness and Identity. Influenced by the many characteristics of the time, dramatic art has lent itself to varied orientations to satisfy the requirement of the time. Among the many orientations in contemporary drama, a new orientation is developing in which man is shown not in a world into which the divine or demonic powers are projected but alone with them. This new form of drama forces the audience out of its familiar positioning. It creates vacuum between the play and the audience, so that the latter is compelled to experience something itself.

The Theatre of the Absurd had a major impact on both themes Englishness and Identity, it touch the inner side of the British society, their feelings and thinking and their relationship, it is one of the greater movements that engages a large range of subjects and concerns that touch upon multiple aspects of human experience, Englishness and Identity are the most significant ones, this theatre has the characteristics of departing from realistic characters, settings, and already accepted traditions, being assigned upon the multi-dimensional and chaotic characteristics, having been set in a way in which time, place, and identity are ambiguous and fluid which analyze, try to provide the framework, pave the way for the existential arguments, and demonstrate man's attempt in his enquiry for his self and identity which has proved to be the great existential obsession of man at the postmodern era.

Furthermore, Pinter has created characters who are psychologically threatened by death and at the exposure of social or higher system identity purification. Pinter by creating a menacing atmosphere mainly through his characterization and their speeches at a macro level implicitly, he describes the inner side of the humans at that period. This atmosphere of menace of self and identity in its different forms and beliefs as one of the dominant themes running through the majority of Pinter's plays has directly been rooted from the influence of Beckett's theatre and can be detected in other writers of this theater trend. On this line, Pinter has created characters who are psychologically threatened to death and at the exposure of social or higher system identity purification.

The Theatre of the Absurd has delicately staged and illustrated multiple themes in its texts and performances, specifically, after the second world war, as a major figure Harold Pinter through the lenses of the theatre and the comedy of menace have tried to depict and highlight postmodern characteristics.

To modernists, the British society had come to the point of chaos and absolute disorder, people who have lost all their hope and belief in a metaphysical, try to legitimate their existence, fake their identities based on their fabricated values; hence, People get involved either in an endless game like that of Beckett's *Endgame* or fall in the reverie of the game of waiting like that of *Waiting for Godot*, take refuge in the seclusion like Stanley in the *Birthday Party*, or end up everlasting wondering under an assumed name like Davies in *the Caretaker*. In their own idiosyncratic styles, they have touched upon the existential problems of the modern man who has been driven to the corner, dislocated, alienated, disillusioned, and left with an unclear view of his self and being. The Theatre of the Absurd remains the most significant movement which tackled the issue of Englishness and identity in the twentieth century in a very central manner, those themes were handled in many dramatist works especially those of Pinter.

## **1-6 Conclusion**

The two concepts “Englishness” and “Identity” are considered to be the major themes of the Absurdist drama. The Theater of the Absurd has exposed the mental issues of man after the Second World War. In the realm of theater, Harold Pinter, is seen as a major proponent of this one, he illustrated the theme of self and identity, as one of the greatest obsessions of modern man. Through this chapter, we could have a concise and precise overview about what is Englishness and Identity according to sociologist, and how Englishness is considered a complicated identity, besides clarifying that the Theatre of the Absurd depicted it as major themes of the period.

# **CHAPTER TWO**

**Pinter's the Birthday Party & the  
Caretaker**

## **2-1 Introduction**

The Theatre of the Absurd is one of the most significant movements of the twentieth century. This latter is not a formal school of writers but a term given by Ionesco, its major spokesman, to certain playwrights of the mid-twentieth century whose techniques tolerate marked similarity and who share a common theme. These authors include Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Harold Pinter, and Edward Albee. A theme shared by all is the basic problem of man's inability to communicate with his fellow man. Harold Pinter is considered one of the most talented dramatists of the era and a major figure of the Theatre of the Absurd, his plays depicted the reality of the British society within the difference ethnic groups, he portrayed his absurdist vision throughout his works. This chapter will be a literature review on the Theatre of the Absurd, Harold Pinter and his most prominent works; *the Birthday party* (1958) and *the Caretaker* (1960), the chapter end up with a brief summary of the two plays.

## **2-2 The Theatre of the Absurd**

Great Britain witnessed a radical change after the first and the second world wars, many writers started to write about the harsh condition of world wars and its effects on people's mentality. The emergence of The Theatre of The Absurd was one of the important movements which had flourished in the literary world; the name was used to identify a body of plays written primarily in France from the mid-1940s through the 1950s. These works usually employ illogical situations, unconventional dialogue, and minimal plots to express the apparent absurdity of human existence.

French thinkers such as Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre used the term "Absurd" in the 1940s in recognition of their inability to find any rational explanation for human life. The term describes what dramatists understood as the fundamentally meaningless situation of

humans in a confusing, hostile, and uncaring world. Esslin argues that Theatre of the Absurd expresses the sense of the meaninglessness of human condition and it abandons the rational devices of discursive thought. Edward Albee defines the Theatre of the Absurd in a very precise manner. The latter defines it as follows

The Theatre of Absurd is an absorption-in-art of certain existentialist and post-existentialist philosophical concepts having to do, in the main, with man's attempts to make sense to himself out of his senseless position in a world which makes no sense-which makes no sense because the moral. The religious, political, and social structure man has erected to 'illusion' himself have collapsed" (Albee, p 172)

The Theatre of the Absurd shows language as a very unreliable and insufficient tool of communication. By ridiculing conventionalized and stereotyped speech patterns, the theatre of the Absurd tries to make people aware of the possibility of going beyond everyday speech conventions and communicating more authentically. Conventionalized speech acts as a barrier between us and the world outside. Within the world of the Absurd, each individual identity is defined by language; having a name is the source of our differences, the loss of logical language brings us towards a unity with living things. In the Theatre of the Absurd language, as an agent of logical world, encloses the true self, which belongs to the world of infinite. The language of this theatre is based on everyday conversation; it is full of misunderstanding and lack of communication between the characters.

The Theatre of the Absurd gives real evidence of the meaninglessness of existence from people's real lives, it expose the absurdity of human conditions which came as consequences of World War II. This last portrays man's life, the hope, the fear and the external side of his world. Dramatists of the era focus their attention on their texts to expose problematic situations, instead of giving direct solutions to them. Furthermore the Theatre of the Absurd is deeply influenced by the Christian humanism, the Second World War gave special attention

to the precariousness of human life, it is meaninglessness and arbitrariness in other words the mid-twentieth century had lost its meaning and had come to an end to make sense.

The Theatre of the Absurd is characterized by several features which are used to express tragic themes with a comic form. The features include firstly anti-character; which mean when the characters are created with curious and grotesque personalities on the stages from the beginning to the end. Within the theatre it seems that the author specializes in shaping the characters with the sense of absurdity and tries to dig out their hopelessness to life and society, especially protagonist, has special personalities and nature. They sometimes talk to themselves continually or repeatedly. And most of the time their words and sentences are interrupted or disordered. There are not any regular rules to follow in their words.

The second feature is anti-language; in the Theater of the Absurd, language has no fixed or settled form and regularities. The protagonists usually speak or talk in disorder. What the character has said sometimes is not the words that his partner has asked or wanted to get. Sometimes a character asks his partner something, but the partner says another thing that is irrelevant to what they are talking about. That is to say, language has no regularity to infer or obey. What they have said cannot be understood by the audience.

The third one is anti-drama; traditional drama vary from the absurd drama in many sides, Traditional dramas and the Theater of the Absurd become popular in different times and the latter's emergence has its own special social background. They have their own representative playwrights respectively beside the Theatre of the Absurd has some unique characteristics, and all these characteristics hide beneath the surface of the absurd dramas. In traditional dramas, plot is clear and the contents are easy to grasp for common people. The

main characters often are endowed with particular and typical behavior and personalities. So when you read or appreciate the drama, you will soon pick him or her up among the crowd.

Lastly anti-plot; Traditional dramas and the Theater of the Absurd have different plots. The difference is that the plot of the Theater of the Absurd is fractured and scattered. Generally speaking, traditional dramas are arranged in time, place or logical order. You can find the regular patterns and orders from time, place or logic in the theaters. Sometimes we can easily guess what the protagonist would do according to their words and sense. And sometimes the author will give us some hints to deduce the plot. Therefore, it is not difficult for us to read and enjoy the traditional dramas. What's more, sometimes you can guess the end of the drama. On the contrary, the Theater of the Absurd is surprising or obscure, and most of the time it has no end or results.

### **2-3 Harold Pinter**

Harold Pinter is one of the prominent dramatists of the twentieth century in the British theatre; he is also a poet, actor, director and screen writer. The only son of a working class Jewish tailor in the east end of London, Pinter was born at Hackney on October 10, 1930. His family had immigrated to Britain from Portugal. Pinter was evacuated to the country in 1939 when war was broke out between Great Britain and Germany to the feared effects of German bombing, he first evacuated to castle at Cornwall and then to somewhere nearer and he returned home in 1944, later he recalled "separation made a great impact on me "He was educated at Hackney Downs Grammar school and left it in 1947 but not before one of his teachers Joseph Brealy had inspired a fierce love of drama on him.

At that time knowledge of Latin language was required of candidates wishing to enter most British universities, and Pinter had no Latin. Instead, he managed to obtain a grant to study at RADA, the world famous Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London, although he had acted at school, he had seen little professional theatre, and appears to have known very little about it, his decision to act may have seemed even more ill-advised when he found himself unhappy at RADA and he faced a nervous breakdown, and for sometimes at least continued to draw his grant, and he keeps his parents ignorant of what had happened.

Pinter was one of the famous dramatists of the Theatre of the Absurd whose style was highly personal. Pinter explores themes such as Englishness and Identity. He began writing plays with *The Room* in (1957) and wrote some best-known plays such as *The Birthday Party* (1958), *The Caretaker* (1960) He was also famous for his “comedies of menace” in his early works than he moved to social issues in the middle of his career, ending his writing profession with political issues. Pinter was frequently associated with the movement titled the Theatre of the Absurd. He was influenced by Kafka and Hemmingway and another Nobel Prize winner, Samuel Beckett, as a practitioner of the theatre of the absurd, it was not until after four years of acting in provincial repertory theatre under the pseudonym David Baron that Pinter began his playwriting career.

In Robert Gordon’s book, *Harold Pinter: The theatre of power* (1951), he proposes that Harold Pinter’s plays are concerned with four primary and recurrent notions throughout this playwright career. Pinter shifts focus on core structural element or calls upon different thematic motifs, yet his mental concern remain reasonably consistent. Pinter was very clever in using comedy of menace within his plays, the audience are made to laugh but they were surprised by an ominous actions that make them frightening about whether it is reality or not.

Pinter used the comedy of menace in his early plays specially, when menace was a major theme and a fact within the society as a result to the World War II, he then writes plays where the audience laugh observing the character's dialogue, and the repetition but they get surprised after by a frightening atmosphere spread out in the setting where the insecurity raises to the edge point.

Pinter's characters are all British in origin, but the anguish they suffer from and the sense of insecurity inherent in their living. The characters have something unusually central about them; and meaningless talks, communication gaps, recurrent fits of violence and cruelty underscore the image of world which has lost his relevance. The central core of his inspiration of his plays in the realization of the loss of identity and certitude that is so real. Pinter's plays deal entirely with personal contact, but he deals with it impersonally, his interest is psychological.

#### **2-4 Summary of *the Birthday Party***

*The Birthday Party* is Pinter's first full-length play, and one of the best comedies of menace written in 1958. The play revolves around the protagonist Stanley who is a resident in Mr and Mrs Boles in their seaside boarding house, the couple protects Stanley and tries to make him comfortable and specially Meg but the peaceful atmosphere is disturbed by unexpected guests Goldberg and McCann, the agents of unknown forces who have come to claim Stanley. The two men confront Stanley and they seem to know each other and have a shared past, one important aspect in the play is that Stanley fears them and expects something, the two men take advantages of Stanley's birthday party to draw a plan to attack Stanley and eventually they succeeded. Afterwards Stanley seems to fake a nervous breakdown due to the

pressure imposed on him when he starts giggling in a loud voice, he was not aware that inside the blind buff's game, obviously there is another game.

The use of language is really important in this play in understanding the sense of insecurity and to reflect the tension that is being created. Language is used in this play as a weapon to disturb Stanley, Goldberg and McCann carry on their plans and they use their language against Stanley, they complicate things for him when they accuse him and ask him illogical questions turn by turn, consequently Stanley, the powerless figure in this play lose his ability to speak and became tired in the end of act three. There are various themes within the play, namely, violence, language, nostalgia, identity but the major theme is menace.

Act one: Meg and Petey engaging in a conversation while eating, Meg asks him many questions, he politely replies her, and then he informs her about two men about coming to stay at the house. This news is unwelcomed by Stanley who appears fearful, and treats Meg violently answer rudely while she attempts to be closer to him, after that Meg leaves and Lulu enters, they chat for a little while, Lulu criticizes him for his ugly appearances and she refuses to accompany him for a walk outside, Lulu leaves and the two men enter.

Goldberg asks Meg after Stanley, and Meg tells him that it is his birthday. Goldberg so suggests preparing a party for this occasion and Meg appreciates the idea; Meg gives Stanley his present and tells him that one of the two men is called Goldberg and Stanley become upset and surprised to hear so.

Act two: later, McCann meets Stanley and they greet each other, McCann congratulates Stanley for his birthday but Stanley tells him that he wants to celebrates alone, Stanley talks

about his past and repeats that he has met McCann before, Stanley expresses her love and respect to the Irish people when he asks McCann about their plan for staying in the boarding house. McCann does not tell him. Goldberg and Petey arrive; Petey introduces them to each other before he exists. Goldberg and McCann interrogate Stanley about his past and accuse him of betraying the organization, killing his wife, Stanley answers then he lose his control over himself and he hits Goldberg in the stomach, McCann and Stanley threaten each other with chairs until Meg arrives dressed for the party. The party begins; Lulu and Goldberg stay alone very intimate and closer to each other. Meg and McCann talk about the past while Stanley is setting alone, the two men exploit Stanley's turn in the blind buff game to break his glasses and force him to the floor.

Act three: in the morning, Meg leaves to shop and Petey asks Goldberg about Stanley. Goldberg then explains that Stanley suffered a nervous breakdown and he needs treatment and that is why they intend to take him to Monty. Petey seems to know what the two men think of, Petey tells Goldberg that he is responsible for Stanley's health that is why he should take him to see a doctor but Goldberg refuses that, after Lulu enters, she insults Goldberg for having exploiting her and use her when she is weak, Goldberg besides denies and blames her for everything. At the end, the two men take Stanley with them after he became a tongue-tired as a result to the pressure imposed on him, Petey advises him to not let them rule him and he hides the fact that Stanley is not up here when Meg asks him, he replies that he still asleep.

## **2-5 Summary of *the Caretaker***

*The Caretaker* (1960) is one of the significant works of Harold Pinter. The play is divided into three acts. The action takes place in a single room over the course of two weeks. Pinter has created a tense, dramatic situation in which three working-class men confront each

other. While the room of *The Caretaker* is inhabited by Aston (described briefly as “in his early thirties”), it actually belongs to Mick (“in his late twenties”). Immediately before the start of the action, Aston meets a tramp (‘an old man’) by the name of Davies in a nearby café. Aston has saved Davies from a fight and he now offers to give him a bed for the night.

The *Caretaker* may appear at first to be very realistic but more detailed exploration reveals a tightly structured, very rhythmic and stylized use of language. Pinter was breaking with previous conventions in placing working class characters, and their way of speaking, on stage. The characters often speak nonsense and platitudes, rarely able to actually communicate their life experience or needs. They frequently misunderstand each other, don’t listen or answer questions and are unable to build meaningful relationships. Pinter is famous for his pauses, and these help the audience explore the limits of language in expressing the human condition – what is not said is often more important than what is said. Language is just one of the ways that meaning is expressed in *The Caretaker*, with the characters’ gestures, silences, spatial relationships and the stage picture as important, if not more so, than what the characters say. This breaks with the tradition of literary theatre that came before – where words were the dominant way to transmit meaning to an audience.

Act one: The play opens with mimed action as Mick is seen looking carefully around the room. The place is filled with miscellaneous objects: paint bucket, planks of wood, nuts, screws, and boxes. There is even a Buddha sitting incongruously in a gas stove. Upon hearing the noise of somebody approaching, Mick quickly goes out. Aston and Davies enter the room. Davies is angry about how he has been treated in the café and declares his hatred for ‘Poles, Greeks, and Blacks’. He tells Aston that he needs a new pair of shoes as he would go to Sidcup to pick up his papers. He reveals that he has been passing himself off under the false

name of Bernard Jenkins but now wants to establish 'his real identity'. He claims that his real name is 'Mac Davies'. Davies takes off his trousers and gets into bed. Aston sits on his own bed mending a plug.

The next morning Aston is the first to get up. He immediately shakes Davies awake, complaining bitterly that he has been unable to sleep because Davies has been making noises in his sleep. Aston prepares to leave, but first gives Davies a door-key. Once Aston has gone out, Davies locks the door and begins investigating the objects in the room. As he does so, Mick silently enters, pocketing his own keys. He watches Davies for a while and throws him viciously to the floor. Mick checks Davies's trousers under the blankets. The act finishes with Mick Davies, 'What's the game?'

Act two: Davies is still in the floor, with Mick seated watching him. Davies tries to explain to Mick that his name is Jenkins that he wants his trousers back as he needs to go to Sidcup to retrieve his papers. He adamantly claims that he is not an intruder, having been invited to stay in the room. Mick engages in an erratic interrogation of Davies, during which he insists that he is the owner of the house. Aston arrives with Davies's bag, which he had left in the café. A frantic game of piggy-in-the-middle ensues, during which the two brothers take delight in denying Davies's bag. Finally Davies manages to get hold of it and retreats to his bed. Mick leaves the room. Aston tells Davies that the room does indeed belong to Mick. He adds that he is meant to decorating the upper part of the house, once he has finished the shed (to be used as workshop) that ha is building in the garden. Aston offers Davies a job as a caretaker. While Davies is worried about how he is to cope with callers, he is obviously pleased with the offer.

In a half-light Davies can vaguely be seen entering the room. He drops his matches and make a sudden start as realises he is not alone. The terrifyingly loud noise of a machine can be heard. After a few seconds the sound stops, the light go on, and Mick can be seen standing on Aston's bed, holding the electric plug of a carpet cleaner. Mick is friendly and confides to Davies that Aston is lazy and refuses to work. Mick offers Davies the job of caretaker, on condition that he can provide satisfactory character references. It is morning and Aston can be seen dressing. He wakes Davies, reminding him for his plan to go to Sidcup. Aston gets ready to go out, when mention of a nearby café reminds him to the time he had spent there prior to being admitted to a psychiatric hospital. In a long monologue, he chillingly describes his experience in hospital, where he was given electric shock treatment against his will. This has left him slow-thinking and plagued with headaches .he wishes the person responsible for his treatment, but first he resolves to finish the garden shed.

Act three: Mick is lying on the floor, while Davies sitting comfortably, is complaining about Aston, with whom he is unable to have a decent conversation. Mick describes his plans for converting the house into an expensive penthouse apartment, with Davies's help. Davies tries to dissociate himself from Aston and seeks allegiance with Mick. Aston returns with a pair of shoes for Davies, who ungratefully complains they are without laces and therefore of no use to him. He grudgingly accepts a pair of brown laces instead of black ones, but just the same he says he cannot go to Sidcup.

Aston wakes up in the middle of the night, unable to sleep because of Davies's groaning. He wakes Davies up, and the tramp furiously turns on him, claiming that he and Mick are now allies. He threatens Aston that he will have him readmitted to the psychiatric hospital. Having pulled out a knife, he threatens to attack Aston, but the latter stands his

ground unflinchingly. Buoyed up his newly established alliance with Mick, Davies accuses Aston of wasting his time in the building what he describes as 'a stinking shed'. Aston grows angry and begins packing Davies's things into his bag. Davies leaves, saying he is going to find Mick, who will deal with Aston.

Next morning Mick and Davies can be seen retuning to an empty room. Initially Mick is friendly, but when Davies starts talking unsympathetically about Aston's electric shocks treatment he grows angry. He tells Davies to leave, and in a fit of anger he throws the Buddha to the floor, where it shatters into tiny pieces. He says he is tired of looking after the house and making plans to renovate it, and he now intends allowing Aston to do exactly what he wants with it. Aston returns, the two brothers exchange faint smiles, and Mick leaves without saying a word. Recognizing that Mick has now rejected him, Davies tries to ingratiate himself with Aston once again. He begs Aston to be allowed to stay in the room. The play ends with; Davies standing silent and forlorn, and Aston, having turned his back on him, refusing to talk.

## **2-6 Conclusion**

To conclude, this chapter provides us with a whole image about the famous dramatist Harold Pinter and the theatre of the absurd, moreover a review about his two major plays the *Birthday Party* (1958) and *the Caretaker* (1960). Pinter as a well-known playwright presented his works in a very unique way, which paves the way for the critics to shed the light on his own drama and drive them to develop their scope of study on his own works.

# **CHAPTER THREE**

**Englishness & Identity in the Birthday  
Party & the Caretaker**

### **3-1 Introduction**

Pinter's two plays *the Birthday Party* and *the Caretaker* are considered as one of the major dramatic works which handled the themes of Englishness and Identity in a very pointed manner. Pinter proves in the two plays the *Birthday Party* and the *Caretaker* that the security is almost fictional, calling the menacing force down upon itself; the universe that Pinter describes will not permit a confident "I am who I am."

The comedies of menace demonstrate that every attempt at achieving a secure sense of self is destroyed, and they are thus a necessary preface to Pinter's later work. These two plays, written within a period of two years and clearly related in theme and form, make up the first major unit of Pinter's work, and the foundation on which the rest is built. His following plays accept as basic expectations the existence of the menace and the impossibility of finding security in a sense of who one is. This chapter explores the theme of both Englishness and Identity in Pinter's *The Birthday Party* (1958) and *The Caretaker* (1960) with taking various illustrations from both of the plays to better justify the two themes.

### 3-2 Englishness in *the Birthday Party*

Harold Pinter, a Jewish writer indicates some of his background in his absurdist plays in a very witty manner. His major work the *Birthday Party*, explores one of the debatable issues; Englishness. The characters of the play are somehow connected to each other although they belong to different nationalities. The characters McCann and Goldberg enter the play unexplained, and are important figures before they even appear physically on the stage. The other characters discussing and reacting to them reveals much about their own selves as well as the presences of McCann and Goldberg. Meg uses these figures initially to subtly threaten Stanley, and as a form of self-gratification.

"This house is on the list." (pg.30).

STANLEY But who are they?

MEG You'll see when they come.

STANLEY (decisively) they won't come

MEG why not?

STANLEY (quickly) I tell you they won't come. Why didn't they come last night, if they were coming.

In this passage Stanley's fear appears when he refuses the idea of unexpected guest coming to the house, he feels insecure and unconsciously tries to convince Meg that the two men aren't coming.

The Jewish figure; Goldberg in Pinter's the Birthday Party represent an unreal and nostalgic Englishness and a fixed Jewishness, Goldberg acts as if Stanley's grotesque 'birthday party' is not unlike an Anglo-Jewish family Simchah: " Stanley my heart felt congratulations. I wish you, on behalf of us all a happy birthday. I 'm sure you have never been a prouder man than you are today" (p40)

According to this passage the two terms, Englishness and Jewishness are tightly related in Pinter's plays, Goldberg's underlying menace goes deeply to his sentimentality, and Anglo-Jewish insiders know that the expression "may we only meet at Simchahs" is rather ominous, as it is routinely said at funerals.

During the action of the play Goldberg's blatant self-contradictions concerning his upbringing expose both his Englishness and Jewishness as specious fabrication, a refusal to come to terms with the past. As Goldberg describes them, these cross-cultural identities are no longer opposites but a reflection to each other. Their equally one-sided vision of a perfect community ultimately threatens to over-whelm Stanley's sense of self, which partially explains his break down in the final scenes of the play. In *the Birthday Party*, Goldberg, in the first two acts of his play, seems to be so sure of his past. If his speeches are examined closely they reveal themselves to be a series of clichés.

GOLDBERG Pure? She wasn't a Sunday school teacher for nothing. Anyway, I'd leave her with a little kiss on the cheek - I never took liberties - we weren't like the young men these days in those clays. We knew the meaning of respect . . . Humming away I'd be, past the children's playground. I'd tip my hat to the toddlers; I'd give a helping hand to a couple of stray dogs, everything came natural. (pg. 53)

Goldberg, having a typically Jewish name is presented, as a business-orientated, fast talking family man. McCann with a typical Irish name is represented as having a repressed Irish upbringing. From the beginning, Goldberg is self-confident, and McCann his servant, requiring constant assurance about the future.

In this respect the characters seem to exploit their differences. McCann exploits Goldberg's self-confidence, while Goldberg exploits McCann's desire for assurance and to be

the servant. The latter explains how the relation between both Irish and British people is, and confirms the strong relationship between the two and the acceptances of the both nationalities to be one; Englishness.

During the birthday party, Goldberg is discussing his past and mentions "tea in Fuller's" and "library books from Boots." This is interesting in two respects because it either gives the pair authority or suggests a shared past, shared by McCann, Goldberg and Stanley. The idea of a shared past brings in further thoughts about the origins of McCann and Goldberg. The two characters Goldberg and McCann are well collaborated in the play at the beginning, Goldberg discusses with McCann the fact that they are working on a "job".

GOLDBERG You know what I said when this job came up. I mean naturally they approached me to take care of it. And you know who I asked for?

(pg. 39)

One of the mysteries of the play is how McCann and Goldberg know things that happen on stage while they are off it. As with all Pinter mysteries, they remain unexplained, suggesting that we can't: possibly come to an understanding of human characters by examining them for a couple of hours onstage. It is also important to note that everything that happens in a Pinter's play doesn't necessarily happen on stage. Like the real world, all what really matter the country is kept in secret and the government knows all what is happening behind it back.

During the action of the play, Goldberg and McCann seems to have considerable power' over the other characters (Stanley), but in reality, they have no power of their own at all and are not in control. In creating these characters Pinter reveals himself as a humanist who is

very concerned about the fate of humanity, showing us that language is betraying us and placing absurd roles on people.

*The Birthday Party* (1957) is one of Pinter's greatest works which explore the matter of Englishness in noticeable way; the characters are all English however some of them belong to different origins, they act like English people but deep down they remain faithful to their origins.

### **3-3 Englishness in *the Caretaker***

*The Caretaker* was written and performed at the very beginning of the swinging sixties. England was between the old and the new; a process of what appeared to be democratization had begun with the Second World War when the English social classes had been obliged to mix and seemingly to break down certain barriers. It was the beginning of the Welfare State and a turning point of social standards.

Englishness is one of the essential themes of Pinter's dramatic works, the three characters of the play seem to have a complicated relationship, this relationship between the two brothers Mick and Aston, and Davies is that of the relationship between the upper and the lower class in England. The impossibility of the connection between Davies and the two brothers is associated with the British upper-classes. The play in a way describes the new emerging classes, despite of a superficial empowerment of the working class at the period; the English patriarchal model is still in place.

An outright wall faced by the intruder Davies is a wall of silence and disinterest on the part of Aston whose attitude may be seen as that of high moral ground combined with a highly developed sense of preservation instinct; the Welfare State is to be implemented but on

condition that those giving the hand-outs are not inconvenienced with the smell and noise of the lower classes. The character of Mick presents the wall of rather that of imperialistic playful realism, hypocritically assuming equality, then turning to force when the lower orders require it.

In the play Davies has been taken in apparently to share the treasures of the room but he has also been subjects to centuries of breaking in, this attitude represents Davies social class. He considered being a complementary aspect of anthropological Englishness which might be summed up as fear of the upper-classes people. During the action of the play the issue of Englishness is expressed by the characters; the innate superiority of the upper-classes has put the working-class always under its control.

In the play Davies has no longer a place to go to, he is hysterical with the fear of not saying or doing the right thing, being looked down upon by his superiors or being put down by his inferiors. This fear appears to be at the root of all Davies's actions which seems to be the crash through which he as character represent Pinter's views. Davies should be defending his living space, his place in the new society when Aston invites him into the room; however Davies very aggressive Englishness appears certainly as a bodily reaction when he thinks of sitting down or taking a seat:

“All them Greeks had it, Poles, Greeks, Blacks, the lot of them, all them aliens had it.” (p.6)

Davies worry is such that he tells Aston that before taking a seat in the room he must “loosen himself up”. He makes a poor show of doing this no doubt also due to English reserves about making a display of him. From the first act to the last, fear will dictate Davies's reactions which oscillate between trying to add value to his image in the eyes of the image in

the eyes of the upper-classes people and complaining domination to his superiors. During Davies conversations with Aston, he tries to explore a bond of Englishness as far as values are concerned, assuming that they are both above the Greeks, Poles and Blacks; trapped by Aston in going further, Davies also complains of the Scottish and Irish when he said: “Scotch git[s] and Irish Hooligan[s]”. (p.8)

This last is related with Aston question: “Welsh, are you?” Davies is particularly obsessed by and fantasizes about Blacks who turn out to be Indians. The Blacks neighbors live behind and his fear of the unknown will lead Davies to the wild imaginings:

“Blacks coming up from next door, and using the lavatory. I told him, it was all dirty in there, all the banisters were dirty, they were black, all the lavatory was black.”(p.12)

Davies’s plan of turning Mick against his brother Aston and his thinking that he will bond with Mick because he understand better his pragmatic materialism better than Aston. The irony of Davies and Mick’s relationship is explored when Davies tries to explain why he prefers Mick to his brother: Mick suggests it is because he himself is more “straightforward”.

Davies is so far from understanding the nature of Mick’s cunning in waiting for Aston’s realization of the hopelessness of trying to help him that at the end of the play he accepts Mick’s release of him. In the play Davies has got an insurance card with four stamps on it. However he is still the loser; in winter he “wears a worn brown overcoat shapeless trouser, a waist coat, vest, no shirt and sandals”; he claims to have known better times and at least had a temporary job in a “caff” but the way in which he speaks of his boss as the “*guvnor*” has a class connotation and shows that little has changed.

### **3-4 Identity in *the Birthday Party***

The issue of identity is considered as one of the dominant themes in Pinter's *the Birthday Party*; the ambiguity of Stanley's identity is obvious in the play. The very name is suggestive; Stanley's strong rejection of attendance in his own birthday party peaks the events of the play. *The Birthday Party* reflects the theme of identity more than any other play the protagonist is hidden under a false name, terrifying of two men one is from Jewish origins and the other is an Irish man.

The characters of the play appear to be comfortably settled in a secure little world of their own. The common thread is the opening sense or illusion of security, which is defined in the play as a function of the protagonist's sense of identity, his knowing of who he is. The psychological consciousness of Goldberg and the absolute abandon of Stanley derive one to conclude that he may have already been weakened and reduced impotent by his life as a childlike, sheltered man locked into a dependent relationship with an imaginary mother figure, his landlady.

The play proves the point that Stanley Webber has merely taken advantage of a suitable environment that seems to provide support for his sense of self. As a boarder in a rundown seaside guest house, Stanley can escape from the shocks and threats of the outside world and maintain a definition of himself (as a talented and demanding musician) that awes his foolish landlady and gives him the confidence to use his sense of identity to confuse her:

S T A N L E Y , (*quietly*). Who do you think you're talking to?

M E G (*uncertainly*). What? . . .

S T A N L E Y . I want to ask you something, ( M E G *figets nervously*. *She does not go to him.*)  
Come on. (*Pause.*)

A l l right. I can ask it from here just as well. (*Deliberately.*) Tell me, Mrs. Boles, when you address yourself to me, do you ever ask yourself who exactly you are talking to? Eh?s (p. 22)

Stanley's first impulse on come across the invading Goldberg and McCann is to insist that he is not who he appears to be, as if that would make him safe from their attack:

You know what? To look at me, I bet you wouldn't think

I'd led such a quiet life. The lines on my face, eh? . . . but what I mean is, the way some people look at me you'd think I was a different person. (p. 43)

On the appearance of Goldberg and McCann, Stanley's instability state of sense of identity tests itself when he tries to terrify Meg with the possibility that she may be taken away by the visitors [who carry a wheel barrow in their van for the purpose revealing the fact that Stanley tries to escape from the world that hangs upon him] in the form of Goldberg and McCann who try to defeat the fake sense of identity. During the action of the play the protagonist is powerless to fight his own devastation because Goldberg and McCann, who confront him with his weaknesses and affectedness, are personifications of his cruel integrity, confronting him for his crimes and failure in life.

In *The Birthday Party* the very name (Stanley) as mentioned is suggestive; the danger of revealing the truth in the party is about to happen. Birth, the indication of a new life, a new identity and self, here, turns out to be a new form of reappearance. Stanley's strong denial of attendance in his own birthday party climaxes the drama as if he knew it would result in his unwilling end. If he knew, then why should he have attended the party? As it seems, the key point to the question lies in the emergence of menace, predictable, and unpredictable in nature threatening every aspect of man's existence.

In *the Birthday party*, Stanley's real entrapment, his biggest mental menace and obsession is his own sense of self and identity hovering over his existence. Stanley, the protagonist, and other minor characters of the play in their own behavior and way of living are in a constant power struggle to find their identities.

Goldberg and McCann appear as the absolute contrary of the protagonist, well-ordered and businesslike where Stanley is lazy and self-indulgent, they are extremely polite and outgoing where he is rude and solitary. In the play, minor characters are suitable to break into the nonsense of their self and background; in fact each of them seems to travel under at least two first names, and even they have trouble keeping track of themselves. In fact they have no certain identity. At the center of the play is their interrogation of Stanley, six pages of rapid-fire questions that range so widely that the only possible "crime" to which they can all apply is Stanley's entire life. There is a central theme to the questioning, though:

GOLDBERG. Webber, what were you doing yesterday? . . .

And the day before. What did you do the day before  
that? . . . Who does he think he is?

M C C A N N . Who do you think you are? . . .

GOLDBERG. Webber, you're a fake. . . . Why did you change  
your name?

S T A N L E Y . I forgot the other one.

GOLDBERG. What's your name now?

S T A N L E Y . Joe Soap. . . .

GOLDBERG. We're right and you're wrong, Webber, all  
along the line. . . .

M C C A N N . Who are you, Webber?

GOLDBERG. What makes you think you exist? (pp. 50-5)

Stanley's name was forgotten, reduced to Joe Soap, and faced with the ultimate question, he has no answer, and thus no more assurance that he does exist. After one brief line a moment later, Stanley doesn't speak again in the entire play; though the birthday party and his parting are yet to come, his sense of who he is, or even that he is someone has been destroyed is always being questioned in his mind.

Goldberg and McCann try to defeat the fake sense of Stanley's identity (being a musician). Stanley's accusation of every crime including racial, national and personal from picking his nose to killing his wife and his being bombarded by a host of questions by the intruders and his being unable to justify, provides the audience with two different assumptions; of either he is absolutely the convict for the accusations or an absolute selfless person who does not have a tiny hint of awareness of his own self or identity.

McCann: You betrayed our land.

Goldberg: You betrayed our breed. [...]

Goldberg: You're dead. You can't live, you can't think, you can't live. You're dead. You're a plague gone bad. There's no juice in you. You're nothing but an odour! (*The Birthday Party* p. 155)

### **3-5 Identity in *the Caretaker***

The Caretaker is considered one of Pinter's significant plays, that explores the theme of identity in a very explicit way, the character of the protagonist Davies is extremely lost and unstable; the whole universe has turned hostile to him leaving him with nowhere to go, nothing to prove his being and identity, and even no feeling of easiness in his mind regarding himself and the world. The only way for him is the fake stories and never proven rights to

protect himself temporarily from the chaotically flooding of threats on the way of his life and identity. His rights, twisted claims, and loud thinking are all on the line of presenting the audience the dynamic adaptation principle of the protagonist character.

The protagonist in disturbance state of life and identity rouses the feelings of the audience and among this confusion the audience dynamically adapts, challenges, and modifies his own view of identity. This view is expressed in this dialogue:

Davies: (with great feeling). If only the weather would break! Then I'd be able to get down to Sidcup!

Aston: Sidcup?

Davies: The weather's so blasted bloody awful, how can I get down to Sidcup in these shoes?

Aston: Why do you want to go to Sidcup?

Davies: I got my papers there. (*The Caretaker, 17*)

The protagonist according to this passage, he has changed his name to forge a temporary identity for himself, but this new identity in a sense exposes him more to danger as may one day one person on behalf of an organization may come and catch him:

Davies: You see, what it is, you see, I changed my name! Years ago. I have been ?. going around under an assumed name! That's not my real name.

Aston: What name you been going under?

Davies: Jenkins. Bernard Jenkins. That's my name. That's the name I'm known, anyway. But it's no good going on with that name. I got no rights (*The Caretaker, 18*)

In this passage the protagonist is lost and unstable, he had changed his name several times because he had no identity and he doesn't belong to a particular society or family.

The disorder state of Davies and other characters' attention regarding their sense of their selves and identities, in the end and the long term, restores order and stability to the mind of the audience. In Pinter's the *Caretaker*, the case of the existence of a totalitarian system which tries to adjust and tailor the people in the society to which the characters react differently depending on the type and intensity of the threat that they are sensing from the outside. Davies always ends up as the usual vagrant, alienated, dispossessed, and alone; Aston is left half forged; therefore, is not considered as a qualified person suitable for a normal social life and has succumbed to his brother for help and shelter. Davies is always searching for a place. Apparently, he succeeds in obtaining it. Aston gives him money, shoes, a different bed, and also the complete possession of room, yet he is not satisfied with what he gets. He tries to be imposing over the brothers as if it is his right to do so.

"Davies: who would live there?"

*Mick: I would. My brother and me*

Pause Davies: What about me?" (Hern, 1982: 71)

He tries to place himself above Aston in the family circle:" I never was inside a nut house!" (Hern, 1982:77)

In this passage the character of Davies can never know whether he is in space or time. He remains bullied by the present and can never flee to the past or the future. For him society remains elusive which he cannot come to terms. The workings of all institutions in the form of the monastery at Luton that denies him a new pair of shoes or the economic system as a whole remain essentially unknown to him. He seeks in vain to assert a basic sense of identity by attempting to force others to acknowledge his humanity.

"Look here, I said to him, I got my rights. I told him that. I might have been on the road, but nobody's got more rights than I have" (Hern, 1982: 17)

In this passage the character of Davies has a serious problem about his identity. His identity papers and the adoption of a false name suggest acute self-alienation. His "pipedream" corresponding to Aston's shed is going to Sidcup to collect his identity papers, after the weather cleans up. Davies reacts sensitively to the question about his past. He wants, above all, to belong, to be part of the society that rejects him. Aston's efforts to bring back identity and self-respect to Davies are obvious through offering him a job as a caretaker also ends in no practical fruits:

Aston: You could be ...caretaker here, if you liked.

Davies: What?

Aston: You could ...look after the place, if you liked. You know, the stairs and the landing, the front steps, keep an eye on it. Polish the bells. [...]

Aston: You see, what we could do, we could ...I could fit a bell at the bottom, outside the front door, with "caretaker" on it. And you could answer any queries. (*The Caretaker*, 41)

In this passage the character of Davies wants to prove its existence, the protagonist wants to be part of the society, he wants to have a job and work just like any other citizen.

### **3-6 Conclusion**

To conclude, Pinter tends to examine the issues of Englishness and Identity in Pinter's *the Birthday Party* and *the Caretaker*, this last chapter reveals how it was difficult for the Jewish and other identities to adopt with the British culture and the English standards. The two plays have started with the assumption that no one can have a secure sense of who he is and how he fits into society, and have shown how that central uncertainty controls our lives.

Identity is certainly lost in both of the plays; every character is searching of his self and being. Pinter's works are all famous of making the audience always in questioning of the identity of the protagonist. *The Birthday Party* and *The Caretaker* among others, show the desperate and hopeless attempts of character without an existence sense of identity to define their place in the British society.

# GENERAL CONCLUSION

## **General conclusion**

The atmosphere of menace of Englishness and identity in its different forms are the dominant themes in the majority of Pinter's dramatic works it has directly been rooted from the influence of Beckett's theatre; The Theater of The Absurd. When we investigate the themes of the Theater of the Absurd, we can find that it mirrors the dissimilation of the society.

The Theater of the Absurd is a mirror that reflected the western world after World War two and Pinter's plays are the depiction of that period. Harold Pinter presents his plays in a misleadingly realistic sayings and agreement; his plays went to unmask the absurdity of the human condition and the conventional theatre. Pinter as Jewish writer was able to depict his psychologist issues throughout his play.

After discussing one of the major plays of Harold Pinter *the Birthday Party* (1958) and *the Caretaker* (1960), the research contains a whole image about the early dramatic works of Pinter, a Jewish writer who presented magnificent plays with pointing views.

The issue of Englishness and Identity is mainly expressed by Pinter in his early works in the *Birthday Party* the identity of the protagonist Stanley Webber is unknown and his

Englishness is shown throughout the action of the play, and in *the Caretaker*, the protagonist Davies is homeless and his identity is anonymous.

Throughout the two plays, the work shed the light on many themes namely, the theme of Englishness and identity, the unique state and dialogues of the characters in Pinter's two plays, their alienation, their inappropriate communication all are representing a certain issues happened in the British society.

The dominant concern of Pinter's characters in his early plays, is the need for survival, which is why subservience is being the price for survival for these character, it is the loss of their dignity and identity. Pinter stated always that the world in his plays is totally the same as it is the world outside. His characters are depicting the real world.

To conclude, through examining some of the dominant aspects in the two case studies, it is easier to guess that both of Stanley and Davies's identities are anonymous, hidden under fake names. All the characters are English, but at the same time they belong to different origins which somehow affected their Englishness.

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