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Harold Pinter's the Caretaker as a Postmodern Drama

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Introduction:

Postmodernism as applied to literature and other arts, the term is notoriously ambiguous, implying either that modernism has been superseded or that it has continued into a new phase. Post modernism may be seen as a continuation of modernism's alienated mood and disorienting techniques and at the same time as an abandonment of its determined quest for artistic coherence in a fragmented world: in very crude terms, where a modernist artist or writer would try to wrest a meaning from the world through myth, symbol, or formal complexity, the post modernist greets the absurd or meaningless confusion of contemporary existence".¹

Hear, Davies is brought in by Aston, a purposeless man in his early thirties. Aston offers Davies the job of caretaker. Davies thinks he can criticize Aston to Mick, Aston's younger brother, and believes these tactics will win Mick confidence. Davies disowns Aston as a friend, and while Mick outlines to him plans for improvement in the flat. Davies goes too far when he calls Aston "nutty" and Mick turns on him, accuses him of falsely pretending to be an interior decorator, turns him out and plays him off with half a crown. Mick leaves and Aston comes in; Davies tries to win his heart but Aston is unresponsive. The tramp has nowhere to go.

The Caretaker (1960) by Harold Pinter is a master specimen of the Theatre of the Absurd. Harold Pinter is one of the masters of the Theater of the Absurd, which is the literary product of existentialism of Sartre, Camus, Kafka and Kierkegaard. The Theater of the Absurd necessarily takes a negative view of human life. It believes that man is no more capable of heroism. He is no more supreme product and master being of the God. He is cut off from the divine power and also from the past. Man is set adrift aimlessly and purpose in life cannot be found at all. Adding to the sorrow, human life is futility of human action and therefore, man is a Sisyphus, who cannot roll the stone of life on the mountain. Salvation of God cannot be found in this world. Man is condemned to fateful act of endless waiting. Besides the breakdowns of communication loss of identify, loneliness, alienation has become the integral part of life. Hence, human life has become essentially tragic. Inevitability of death sound as the only ironical solution to the human problems. There is a desire for eternal escape into the world of illusion, dream and fantasy. Post-Modern life has become hopeless and meaningless, nothing much really happen in human life, hence according to the Absurd philosophy; it is all meaningless and absurd.

A feature of innovative Post-modern drama is its refusal to present the audience with a coherent plot that makes sense of action. The Caretaker follows the same pattern. At the beginning of the play we come across Mick who we later learn is Aston's younger brother and who is sitting on the bed, as soon as he hears voices he gets up and leaves. We are given no information about such behavior of Mick.

Mick is alone in the room sitting on the bed. He wears a leather Jacket. *Silence*. He slowly looks about the room looking at each object in turn he looks up at the ceiling, and stares at the bucket. Ceasing, he sits quite still, expressions, looking out front. *Silence for thirty seconds*. A door bangs. Muffled voices are heard Mick turns his head. He stands, moves silently to the door, goes out, and closes the door quietly.²

If one takes an absurdist view of the play associating Pinter with such dramatists as Becket and Ionesco, there will be no explanation for such happenings. Mick's leaving before Aston's arrival indicates something about their relationship. The organizing of the story in the dialogues, but which are not so effective which lack communication.

The play, *The Caretaker* also presents breakdown of communication. More than loss of communication there is fear for communication haunted to the integral part of the life of all characters. Each characters Davies, Mick and Aston have no desire to communicate frankly and sincerely for the fear of getting expose. Secretive language becomes the only language for them. So search for language assumes a different dimension in the Pinter's play. This fear for communication also causes the breakdown of relationship. In the world pictured in his plays there is an underlying terror of loneliness which creates a feeling of menace. Characters try to communicate with one another, but the communication is inefficient and a circular effect is created as the lack of communication intensifies the menace, which in turn further weakens the ability to communicate. There is also a need for verification, determining what is true and what is false, the distinction between appearance and reality. The lack of verification therefore destroys communication and the absence of communication prohibits verification.

Conclusion:

Like Samuel Becket, Eugene Ionesco and Edward Albee, Harold Pinter also focuses on absurdity and presents the predicament of the human race. He expressed man in his fear, joy, humor, stupidity, ambition. He is concerned with the human condition as it is today, of all Pinter's plays; *The Caretaker* makes most bitter commentary on the human condition.

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