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The Caretaker: A Study of Uncertainty
as a Dramatic Device

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Abstract

The Caretaker is an absurd play that depicts virtually the mirror image of modern life which Harold Pinter explores by applying the technique of uncertainty at latent as well as manifest levels. Human existence has fallen in the vicious circle of uncertainty with the decadence of spirituality, rationality, faith, unity and so on. The world is hostile for living where man has to make utmost struggle for existence. He is compelled to repeat the same activities which seem nonsensical. This aspect of life has been explored vividly through setting, characters, actions, plot, language in the play. In a nutshell, the play is the dramatization of the condition of modern man.

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1. Uncertainty as a Dramatic Device

Life has lost meaning and human existence has proved absurd in the modern world with the decadence of old values and norms. Human activities maintain no meaning and purpose. The condition of modern man is bitter, meaningless and absurd. Life lies amidst uncertainties in many respects: the world which is the only human abode is not friendly but gloomy; people are hostile to each other; they have lost their obvious root and identity; they lack mutual trust and communication, etc. There is confusion in every step of life. One is left in a destitute, desperate and helpless situation with no way out further. The course of life is quite mysterious. There is no progress. Such stagnation has contributed to the rise of great uncertainty in human life.

The purpose of this study is to elucidate the uncertainty which the playwright has successfully handled throughout the play. Uncertainty is a means for the playwright to present his attitude and motives toward life in the world. It is his way of expression and skeleton of the play. The playwright tries his best to reflect the condition of man in the world. Life has lost meaning. Values, rationality, logic, religion, etc. have become defunct in the world. Life is valueless, purposeless and unpredictable. Written in the postwar context when people bitterly thought that the entire world was on the verge of decadence, the play exploits successfully the themes of valuelessness, purposelessness, absurdism and uncertainty.

It is hypothesized that the playwright tactfully employs uncertainty to dramatize the condition of man in the world. Life has lost harmony, mutual trust and rationality. This has cast entire human existence in the circle of doubt and threat. Man has to do utmost struggle to find meaning and purpose in life which he is, unfortunately, unable to obtain. Pinter has, very vividly, drawn such bitter and tragic reality of life employing uncertainty at different levels.

The theme of uncertainty, futility and valuelessness is dealt by applying the ideas of Theatre of the Absurd. The Theatre of the Absurd assumes the world as a meaningless space. The pre-established values have ceased to provide meaning. So individuals should create meaning on their own. It also maintains that man is condemned to repeat the same activities which ultimately reveal life as absurd and meaningless.

The sense of absurdity and futility is explored from various aspects- characters, their activities, language, setting, plot and so on. The characters are often illusive. Their identity is not clearly mentioned. They get involve in the events which do not progress. They do not face any change in their lives. Their position remains as in the beginning. Absurd plays end at the point of beginning. They have circular plot. Language is not intended to convey any message. It lacks arguments and discursivity. The conversation is repetitive, incoherent and lacks logic and grammar. There is deliberate evasion of communication. The setting is bizarre—sometimes empty, sometimes dark and gloomy and sometimes confined in a narrow space. It is often unrealistic. Action is unmotivated and nonsensical.

The same action and dialogues are repeated again and again. And this repetition makes the play absurd. In nutshell, it reflects life as it is and makes the audience aware of absurdity of life.

The Caretaker is a play about two brothers—Mick and Aston and a tramp, Davies— in a room. A man wearing a leather jacket is revealed on a bed in a room which is full of miscellaneous objects. The man, Mick, sits looking out him until the banging of the door and muffled voices are heard. Then he leaves the room silently. His living is mysterious—giving generation to uncertainty. The two men, Aston and Davies come in. Davies unkemptness obviously helps to proclaim him to be a tramp. The mess of various objects—related as well as unrelated—signifies incoherence and purposelessness.

Davies has just been rescued from a café where he was working as a cleaner. His position is uncertain. Aston invites him to stay with him until he gets fixed somewhere else. But, as soon as Davies comes to know the weaker points about Aston, he plays the role so as to displace him and occupy his place. Mick, too, offers him a job but fires him immediately to be a tramp. He is ultimately deserted in indeterminate situation. There is no progress. The play traverses the period of fortnight but a tramp remains a tramp. Such stagnation in his position and in the entire play gives rise to great uncertainty.

The Caretaker, Pinter's second full-length stage play, brought him his first great success. The play in three acts with three characters deals basically with the struggle for a room of one's own. The play has received a wide readership for

Pinter since its publication in 1960. It has received wide critical acclaim from the scholars of different fields. The play is about fundamental human concern. The characters bear different nature of their own and reveal similar behavior. In a review of the play at the National Theatre in 1980, Benedict Nightingale made a mythical interpretation. He elaborates:

The tramp Davies is Dionysus or the wandering Jew, or may be the tempter in modern *Everyman* play, or conceivably Everyman himself, beset by a dark angel, perhaps Aston is the carpenter Christ, building his church in the form of the garden shed that so obsesses him. Or perhaps, at some profounder level, the play involves the Old Testament God and the New Testament God and suffering humanity.
... (qtd. in Hern, xxxii-xxxiii)

His interpretation is very convincing. Aston is a humble character who does not show double standard. Davies is a very cunning fellow with Dionysian qualities. Aston rescues him from the café where he was living under very shabby conditions. But, his Dionysian character tempts him to commit wrong—occupying Aston's place and displacing him. His suffering also indicates suffering humanity in modern age.

The play reflects human condition in a farcical way. The audiences cannot help without laughing when they are confronted with same actions and dialogues repeated again and again. The characters, though grown-up and mature people, lack grammar and logic in their speech which is also not less comical.

Highlighting this humorous aspect of the play, T.C. Worsely writes, “The comedy of *The Caretaker* is not a dispensable palliative. To discuss meaning without taking this into account is to distort the play as a whole and devalue its achievement” (147). The play depicts life in the world in a comical manner.

The Caretaker, being an absurd play, signals many things through actions, movement and gestures of the characters. The activities carried out by the characters are sufficient enough to conjecture the meaning of the play. The characters use less word but more activities. Critic John Russell Brown Comments on the play from the perspective of the movement. He opines, “*The Caretaker* is defined wholly by movement. It is these motivations that Pinter wants to explore and show in his play” (133). The characters indulge in meaningless repetitive actions which signify that life is absurd.

The play is, undoubtedly, about human condition. Davies has fallen in an existential state. He has no place to live in, no job to do and nobody to live with. He is vulnerable to existential crisis. Commenting on the existential facet of the play, Ruby Cohn remarks, “*The Caretaker* makes the most bitter commentary on the human condition instead of allowing an old man to die beaten. The system insists on tantalizing him with faint hope, thereby immeasurably increasing his final desperate anguish” (119). The play shows Davies in existential problem. He has life but no way out further. He is rescued but pushed to the street again. He can neither die nor live peacefully and happily. The play reflects this bitter reality

of life in the world. Highlighting the play's aesthetic value, Charles Marowitz marks it as “a national masterpiece” (163). The play is really beautiful.

Critic Martin Esslin observes the play from a very different perspective. For him, the play is an enactment of Freudian compulsion in a son to displace his father. He comments:

The Caretaker works most forcefully as a dream, a myth of the expulsion of father by sons. Aston can be seen to fill a filial responsibility for Davies: he collects the old man's bag from the café, he provides shoes for him, he brings him into his home, but finally decides that he must reject Davies in order to complete his own growth. (qtd. in Hern, xxxiii)

Aston is a father figure. He rescues Davies from the café, collects his bag, offers him shoes but, later on, Davies tries to displace him and occupy his position. Mick helps Davies in this matter.

Human situation in the world is quite disorganized. The play reflects this situation as it is. In this regard, the play holds mirror up to nature. But it does not follow the old convention of realistic plays. Considering it to be a realistic play but in a new mode, John Arden remarks, “Hitherto, plays we can call Realist have tended to follow Ibsen model: [. . .] But, Mr. Pinter doesn't work like this. . . .

Taken purely at its face value this play is a study of unexpected strength of family ties against an intruder” (117-18). The play draws real picture of life. It, however, does not follow Ibsenic convention of Realism. Had the play been written in Ibsen

model, the relation between Mick and Aston would have broken forever. Davies would have become successful to drive Aston out. But this does not happen.

The language of the play is often poetic. The characters use quite evasive language. They lack logicity and grammar. The linguistic aspect is vibrant in the play. Discussing on linguistic aspect of the play, Asutin Quigley writes:

The characters in *The Caretaker* are differentiated by diverse linguistic abilities as well as by a diversity of goals. As the play progresses, it becomes increasingly clear that the conflicting concerns of the characters are inextricably intertwined with verbal vulnerability and verbal power. The linguistic ability to create and sustain a social identity becomes a focus of thematic concern. . . .

(141)

Different characters use language for different purposes. Mick uses it as a weapon of domination over Davies whereas Davies uses language for evasion from ongoing subject matter. He takes help of language to divert from one point to another. The language is used for different purposes.

Life, in the modern world, is confronting a great existential crisis. The values, religion, scientific reasoning etc. have failed and life has fallen into an existential abyss. But the life becomes more absurd and futile when it is lived without the consciousness of absurdity. The play has great role in making the readers aware of absurd living. This research keeps therapeutic significance in this regard. It opens up a new arena in the field of critical study — Pinter's handling of

uncertainty in grand manner to explore the theme of absurdism. Though the play has been revisited from different perspectives but none of them has attempted to explore it from existential point of view. This research seeks to fill this critical gap—one more brick in critical study.

The dissertation is divided into four chapters—introduction, discussion on the Theatre of the Absurd, critical observation of the play and conclusion.

2. The Theatre of the Absurd

Background

The term Theatre of the Absurd was introduced by the theatre critic Martin Esslin. It assumes that the world is meaningless, meaning is a human construct and individual themselves must create significance not relying on institution and tradition to provide it. The movement of absurdism developed out of existentialism in its extreme.

Existentialism is a post-war philosophy of which the essence is that the universe is void, individuals are to face the emptiness of the universe and create meaning in life which, in fact, is not the essential meaning in itself. Before the World Wars, unity, certainty, morality, rationality, faith, Christianity and other virtues ruled the world. But, the atomic World War Second proved that human rationality no more worked. The old virtues all shattered into fragments. The thinkers began to conceive the world as fragmented. Anxiety, uncertainty and terror ruled the fragmented world. The people of the West, terrified by the nuclear holocaust during the war, began to think over the role of human rationality on the existence of human beings. The philosophers examined that the Western civilization was on the way of destruction and human existence was threatened. This twentieth century existentialist thinking was conceived long before by the thinkers like Fredrich Nietzsche, Soren Kierkegaard, Fyodor Dostoevsky and others in nineteenth century. The term existentialism was, however, used by Jean Paul Sartre.

As the old concepts of unity, certainty, objectivity and values failed, the world is filled with despair, anxiety, uncertainty and solitariness. People realized that the universe is hostile to them and they felt alienated from the world. They found the world, human efforts and existence all absurd and the world purely governed by chance and contingency. Existence without justification became the main proposition of the twentieth century world. Such utter feeling of alienation is expressed by Nietzschean phrase 'the death of God' which totally negates the role of transcendental God on the existence of human beings and world order.

The term existentialism has been defined in various ways by different philosophers. According to J.A. Cuddon, the term existence comes from Latin root, "ex" meaning "out" and "sistere" from stare meaning "to stand". Thus, existence means to stand out in the universe and existentialism means "pertaining to existence". Some philosophers link human existence with God and others do not. The term existentialism has been used to describe "a vision of the condition and existence of man, his place and function in the world, and his relationship or lack of it with God" (Cuddon 319). It is a "very intense and philosophically specialized form of quest for selfhood" (Ellman and Feidelson 803).

Existentialism is quest of the plight of human being in the universe. It is most probably the only dynamic philosophical movement to define and interpret the anxieties and uncertainties of human existence. The focus of existentialism is on being and subjectivity. Jean Paul Sartre, the proponent of the twentieth century atheistic existentialism, defines it in the following extract: "By existentialism we

mean a doctrine which makes human life possible and in addition, declares every truth and every action implies a human setting and a human subjectivity” (827).

Existentialism defines life vis a vis the actions one chooses to do.

The focus of existentialism lies in the realization of human subjectivity. It is primarily concerned with significance of human existence with extreme experience and existential angst. Sartre developed the existential philosophy to its farthest point. He describes existentialism as a means of facing the consequences of the world that is devoid of any absolute power like God. He adds:

It states that if God does not exist, there is at least one being in whom existence precedes essence, a being who exists before he can be defined by any concept, and that this being is man, or as Heidegger says, human reality. What is meant here by saying that existence precedes essence? It means that, first of all, man exists, turns up, appears on the scene and only afterwards, defines himself. (827-28)

Like most existentialists, Sartre also stresses upon the subjectivity of individual. As an atheist, he discards the existence of transcendental God who exists only in concept. For him, human subject exists first.

The theistic existentialists believe in religious mysticism. In their opinion, the anxiety of modern man can be entertained when one submits himself to the will of God without the intervention of Christian doctrine and ecclesiastical church. But, the atheistic existentialists repudiate the concept of God as an

ultimate shelter. For them human being is forlorn, free and supportless creature. “Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself” (Sartre 835). Man is condemned to choose and human existence is governed by his own choice. He is not controlled by any transcendental will. Nietzsche is the forerunner and major source for the atheistic existentialists.

Nietzsche is a sharp critic of religion, especially of Christianity. He called Christianity a “slave morality” and maintained that religion provides no truth because God is dead and Christianity has become the shelter of weak and disabled people. To think of God, for him, is to go against life, against will to power.

Furthermore, he writes:

The Christian conception of God — God as God of sick, God as a spider, God as spirit — is one of the most corrupt conceptions of the divine ever attained on earth. It may even represent the law — water mark in the descending development of divine types. God degenerated into the contradiction of life, instead of being its transfiguration and eternal yes! God as a declaration of war against life, against nature, against the will to live! (912)

Nietzsche regards God a human construct and a means of suppression and exploitation. For those who are powerful, God does not matter. But for those who are weaker, God is a shelter. Religion is a corrupt concept. It is a weapon to exploit the weaker section of society. Individuals are compelled to surrender before God when they are in some difficulty. Whether to be forgiven or punished

depends on God. Thus, the existence is subjected to God. For him, to believe on God is against life and humanity. It is to kill individuals' will power to live. Christianity, for him, is an inhumane doctrine and slavery institution.

Phenomenology and Ontology are the platform of existentialism. The phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger focused on the internal role and activities of individual in the production of emotion or belief rather than the external world. The doctrine of intentionality holds that everything depends upon the consciousness of an individual who perceives things other than himself as objects. Ontological distinction between the beings that live for themselves and the beings that live in themselves is essential for forming ideas of existentialism. The beings who exist for themselves have consciousness and freedom which they utilize for their full existence. On the other hand, the beings that live in themselves are not conscious of their existence and do not entertain any freedom, rather remain mere things or objects. For existentialists, the most important thing is the knowledge of absurd existence which awakens us to freedom and choice and, as a result, prevents us from being simply things.

Heidegger makes a distinction between beings and Being. The oblivion of Being (individual) into beings (group) has made us lost in unreal existence. To get back the lost Being, we should return back into the ground of metaphysics and find the root of existence. He held the belief that man should face the problem of Being, he has to determine his own existence, create his own possibilities, make choices and commitment. One cannot escape the historical context because he is

always bound by conditions inherited from the past. He sees human condition tied by temporal phenomena which is existential time.

Albert Camus, famous twentieth century dramatist, perceives the condition of modern man totally absurd and similar to that of Corinthian King Sisyphus. Sisyphus, who because of his disobedience to God and his passion for life suffered eternal torture heroically, is a martyr and teacher to all modern men. "This universe," he remarks in "henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile" (852). He reached the conclusion that the condition of man is absurd when he realized that the systems and values of past provided no reliable guidance for life or guaranteed any foundation of human values. When the absurd man, according to Camus, becomes aware of his futile living, he is naturally filled with anxiety and hopelessness yet he does not surrender himself to death. Rather he acknowledges the knowledge of absurdity of his existence as a reliable guidance to revolt against this absurdity. The only truth, for Camus, is that the world is absurd and unintelligible. But, suicide cannot be the solution to this discomfort of absurd condition. Thus, he believes in fraternity and humanity rather than nihilism. He explains the concept in these words:

Suicide is a repudiation. The absurd man can only drain everything to the bitter end, and deplete himself. The absurd is his extreme tension, which he maintains constantly by solitary effort, for he knows that in that consciousness and in that day-to-day revolt he gives proof of his only truth, which is defiance. (846)

Suicide is not an appropriate revolt against the injustice and absurd condition of man. Human being feels estranged and tries to deplete him. But, it is not the ultimate solution of his absurd condition and dreadful situation. Camus hates the destruction of the world and mankind. To get liberation from the anxiety of the absurd world, one may go the rules of God or he may submit himself in the hands of death. But either of these choices is ridiculous and bad for the absurd man. The significance of living of an absurd man depends on the maximum struggle against this absurdity. His philosophy is not pessimistic but optimistic and humanistic.

Camus developed absurdist philosophy in the extreme of existentialism. His is the revolt against absurdism. During the mass massacre and other physical destruction in the World War Second, the world lost the established values and human existence itself got threatened. As a result, human being felt estranged from the world and tried to rebel against the earlier values and order. His “The Myth of Sisyphus” is a classic of absurdist literature. According to him, modern man is in dreadful situation and he is living in total absurdity. His every effort is circuitously futile but he is condemned to choose repetitive steps. The Theatre of the Absurd which assumes the world, human existence and all human activities futile and meaningless was developed out of this absurdist existentialist metaphysics.

The Significance of the Theatre of the Absurd

Absurd means out of harmony in musical context. In common language, it means meaningless, ridiculous, pointless, incongruous, illogical and so on. The sense of the term as it is used in the Theatre of the Absurd or Camus uses it is,

however, different. The Theatre of the Absurd can be seen as the reflection of our own time and situation.

The term Theatre of the Absurd was, for the first time, coined by the theatre critic Martin Esslin while describing the plays of Samuel Beckett, an Irish playwright, pioneer of the Theatre of the Absurd, especially *Waiting for Godot*, and the plays by other playwrights written in 1950s and 1960s. However, the tradition of the absurd is very long which can be traced back to *mimus* of antiquity. In the mime play of antiquity, a character wants to sell his house and carries one brick about with him to show as a sample. Another such character wants to teach his donkey the art of going without food. Another character dreams that he stepped on a nail and hurt his foot. Thereupon, he puts a bandage round his foot. His friend asks him what has happened and he replies that he dreamed he stepped on a nail and hurt it. Then, his friend replies why he went to sleep in bare feet. But the origin of the Theatre of the Absurd is, basically, rooted in the avant-garde experiments in art of 1920s and 1930s. At the same time, it was undoubtedly influenced by the traumatic experience resulted from the horrors of the World War Second which showed the impermanence of any values and shook the ground of validity of any conventions. It assumes that the world is meaningless and human activities are futile and repetitive. Camus calmly puts a question why, since life has lost all the meaning, man should not seek escape in suicide. In his essay, he diagnoses the human situation in the world where reasoning, values, beliefs and morality have all shattered into fragments:

A world that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty, is a familiar world. But in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity. (qtd. in Esslin, 23)

Absurd is, therefore, used to signify the universe that can not be dealt with human reasoning. It denotes to the world where beliefs and faith, values, order and religiosity have fragmented. There is not any coherent purpose and all the actions are useless. Man feels himself estranged from the world. Eugene Ionesco defines the term as follows, “Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose. . . . Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless” (qtd. in Esslin, 23). Absurd is out of harmony. It lacks religiosity, root and identity.

Written in the new convention, the plays of absurd are often esoteric and outrageous. Influenced by the postwar grief and terror stricken mentality, they exhibit the disappearance of religious dimension from contemporary life. People of the West had lost their faith on Christianity as ecclesiastical churches could do nothing during war time. This sense of the loss of faith on God has also been revealed in *Endgame* in the following dialogue:

HAMM. Silence! In silence! Where are your manners? (Pause.) Off
we

go. (Attitudes of prayer. Silence. Abandoning his attitude,
discouraged.) Well?

CLOV. What a hope! And you? (Abandoning his attitude)

HAMM. Sweet damn all! (To Nagg) And you?

NAGG. Wait! (Pause. Abandoning his attitude) Nothing doing!

HAMM. The Bastard! He doesn't exist. (Beckett 842)

This sense of religious dryness in people has, in fact, developed since Nietzsche's time. The number of people for whom God is dead has increased tremendously. People regard God as a vulgar substitute of decaying religiosity. Yet, the Theatre of the Absurd paradoxically appears to be “a genuine religious quest in our age” (Esslin 400).

The Theatre of the Absurd fulfills the dual purpose and offers its audience with the two-fold absurdity. In one, it satirically criticizes the lives of people lived without knowledge of ultimate reality of life. Such superficial life lived without consciousness of reality is, in a sense, a mechanical life which the Theatre of the Absurd tries to reveal. Camus makes it clear when he describes:

In certain hours of lucidity, the mechanical aspect of their gestures, their senseless pantomime, makes stupid everything around them. A man speaking on the telephone behind a glass partition — one cannot hear him but observes his trivial gesturing. One asks oneself,

why is he alive? This malaise in front of man's own inhumanity, this incalculable let down when faced with the image of what we are, this 'nausea', as a contemporary writer calls it, also is the Absurd. (qtd. in Esslin 400-1)

In this sense, the Theatre of the Absurd can be taken as a social criticism.

Secondly, it confronts audience with different situations. Man is confronted with basic choices, the basic situation of his existence. Man seems puppet before time and, therefore, waiting and waiting, waiting between birth and death as in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*:

VLADIMIR. We will hang ourselves tomorrow. Unless Godot comes.

ESTRAGON. And if he comes?

VLADIMIR. We will be saved. (60)

It also offers audience with man trying to establish his position in society like in Pinter's plays. It reveals man caught in the inescapable dilemma and trying to break out into freedom but that strenuous effort, finally, leading to passivity — complete futility and ultimate death as in Arthur Adamov's plays. The Theatre of the Absurd is, thus, concerned with ultimate human condition and fundamental problems of life — isolation, uncertainty, frivolity, grotesqueness etc. It is intent on making its audience aware of man's precarious and mysterious position in the universe (Esslin 401-2).

The Theatre of the Absurd is distinct from realistic theatre in many respects. Written in the experimental convention, absurd plays have no story or plot to speak of whereas realistic plays have clearly constructed plot. Good plays have proper exposition, climax and denouement, so they have fully explained theme and offer a solution but absurd plays only problematize the issue leading it into uncertainty. Realistic plays hold mirror up to nature but absurd plays seem as if they are reflections of dreams and nightmares since they lack coherence. The realistic plays are subtle in manner and characterization but absurd plays are often without recognizable characters thrown into an abyss of dilemma. They lack objectively valid characters locked in conflict. The following excerpt clarifies it:

VLADIMIR. Are you Pozzo?

POZZO. Certainly I am Pozzo?

VLADIMIR. The same as yesterday?

POZZO. Yesterday?

VLADIMIR. We met yesterday. (Silence.) Do you not remember?

(Beckett 56)

So far as language is concerned, the Theatre of the Absurd is not concerned with conveying information through words. It is theatre of the situation so it uses language based on the patterns of concrete images. It lacks argumentative and discursive speech. To observe the Theatre of the Absurd from linguistic point of view, it has derived much from Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre. Epic Theatre is a departure from realistic theatre. It uses symbols and images more than words.

Stark, harsh lighting, blank stages, placards announcing changes of scenes, bands playing music onstage and long discomfoting pauses are frequently used. Brecht wanted the audience to analyze the play's thematic content rather than to sit idly and be merely entertained. He intended to arouse 'alienation effect' in the audience through images rather than through words and language. The absurdist plays use less words and more images. The setting is often unrealistic. The dialogues are often repeated and they are incoherent babblings with frequent pauses. Beckett applies the same in *Endgame* as follows:

HAMM. Me — (he yawns) — to play.

(He holds the handkerchief spread out before him.) Old snatcher.

Can there be misery — (he yawns) — loftier than mine? No
doubt. Formerly. But now?

(Pause.)

My father?

(Pause.)

My mother?

(Pause.)

My . . . dog?

(Pause.)

(No, all is a — (he yawns) — bsolute, (proudly) the bigger a man is
the fuller he is.

(Pause. Gloomily.)

And the emptier.

(He sniffs.)_

Clov.

(Pause.)

No, alone.

(Pause.)

What dreams! Those forests!

(Pause.)

Enough, it's time it ended, in the shelter too.

(Pause.)

[. . .]

(yawns.) (826)

The language does not flow naturally. It lacks argument as well. It does not convey any concrete message. Pauses and ellipsis make the language further illusive. The conversation seems fully absurd when Hamm yawns again and again.

It is not only language; the whole action is mysterious, unmotivated and nonsensical at first sight. Events occur but the action does not proceed. The same action is repeated frequently. Absurd plays have neither proper beginning nor ending. The final situation is mostly exactly the same as in the beginning. They have a circular plot. Actions are fragmented and incomprehensible and the spectators have to make sense out of them. "The total action of the play, instead of proceeding from point A to point B, as in other dramatic conventions, gradually

builds up the complex pattern of the poetic image that the play expresses” (Esslin 416). In *Waiting for Godot*, the following scene occurs repeatedly:

ESTRAGON. What do we do now?

VLADIMIR. I don't know.

ESTRAGON. Let's go.

VLADIMIR. We can't.

ESTRAGON. Why not?

VLADIMIR. We are waiting for Godot.

ESTRAGON. Ah! (Beckett 44 and elsewhere)

The Theatre of the Absurd, thus, confronts the audience with bitter reality of human life. It is concerned with a psychological reality expressed in poetic images. Eva Metman writes:

. . . man is shown not in 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 orientation. It creates a vacuum between the play and the audience so that the latter is compelled to experience something itself, be it a reawakening of the awareness. . . . (qtd. in Esslin 412-13)

The Theatre of the Absurd proceeds through poetic images. It neither exposes any intellectual problem nor provides any clear-cut solution. At the first glance, the plays seem farcical and provide a kind of relief to the audience but, at the same time, they are presenting bitter human reality in tragicomic situation. The Theatre

of the Absurd is essentially concerned with images that communicate to the audience the sense of perplexity and uncertainty. It deals with the ultimate human condition and communicates a metaphysical truth through a living experience. It presents the world as senseless and lacking a unifying principle. It expresses the anxiety and despair that spring out from consciousness that man is surrounded by darkness and he does not have any solid purpose in life. So, he is thrown in an irremediable exile of uncertainty and condemned to follow the readymade rules of conduct as Sisyphus rolling up a stone eternally to the top of a hill. It attempts to make man face the human condition as it really is. It works to free him from illusions and disappointment resulting from decaying values in the world and maladjustment of man in the system. The Theatre of the Absurd, in this sense, has therapeutic value.

3. Modern Man's Uncertainty in *The Caretaker*

Pinter in *The Caretaker* presents dramatically a number of concerns and anxieties endured by modern man in the twentieth century. For the purpose, he employs uncertainty as his technique. The theme of uncertainty and absurdism of modern age is pervasive throughout the play which can be observed from various angles- setting, characters, plot and structure, from various actions, dialogue, characters' attitude to religion, use of ellipsis, silence, pauses etc. This chapter probes into how Pinter uses uncertainty as his dramatic device to reflect modern life which is absurd.

Uncertainty here is a vehicle to expose futility, absurdity and meaninglessness of human life and human efforts. The play is an expression of experiences of man in transition. It gives a clear picture of disorganized human situation in the world. Pinter exposes the dichotomy created by fear, joy, human stupidity, doubt, ambition, anti-establishment etc. and insecurity resulted from these. Pinter, in this regard, is very near to the depth of human life. The play is highly suggestive of human existence that is preposterous and problematical. Pinter delves into human life, reaches at its core and presents its concrete picture — full of contraries and uncertainties. The play, in this sense, presents a slice of life. The play is about ceaseless struggle for secure/certain existence — the essence of human life — which Davies never obtains.

The setting of the play indicates lack of coherence, purposelessness and very miserable life. The play is set in the room of a large Victorian house. The

room is cluttered with miscellaneous objects — small cupboard, paint buckets, boxes containing nuts and screws, a step-ladder, planks of wood etc. which indicate that the room is a workshop/storeroom. At the same time, an iron bed, carpet, a wooden chair, a number of ornaments, a clothes horse, a blow-lamp, newspapers, a couple of suitcases etc. in the room suggest that it is a sitting-cum-bed room. It also consists of a shopping trolley, a fire place, a gas stove, a very old electric toaster, a kitchen sink etc. suggesting that it is a kitchen room. This bric-a-brac of so many objects in the same room creates a great ambiguity. The audiences/readers get puzzled when they are confronted with this mess. The objects are lying on the floor in a disorganized manner. When the related objects are grouped together in separate units, they show some purpose but all these objects are found lying haphazardly in the room and they lack coherence among them. There is a wooden chair. But, it is not placed properly rather it is lying on the floor. The carpet, in general sense, is to be spread on the floor but it is rolled. The electric toaster is out of order and the gas stove also doesn't work. Seeing this Davies asks Aston, “What do you do for a cup of tea?” and Aston's answer is “Nothing” (17). The sense of nothingness commences from the setting. A statue of the Buddha is there in the room. But, it has not been kept in proper place. It is on the gas stove. The house is a large Victorian house but the roof has got a hole and a bucket is hung to collect the leaking water. The bottom half of the window is covered by sack instead of beautiful curtain. It marks the decaying Victorianism. The setting alone is extremely suggestive of unthinkable uncertainty, absurdism

and meaninglessness. It is highly symbolic of pathetic situation of man in modern age.

The opening scene is pregnant with impending uncertainty in the play. A man alone in the room, sitting on the bed, looking slowly about the room at each object is open to multi-interpretation. Just to look at him, he is expressionless and depressed. There is no smile and brightness on his face:

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, expressionless, looking out front.

Silence for thirty seconds. (7)

The repeated silence enhances confusion. The audiences are confronted with what will happen next. How will the action proceed? Mick's depressed mood and slow movement indicate some serious problem he is going to face. The whole atmosphere is puzzling, mysterious and uncertain.

There are three characters in the play. Mick and Aston, the two brothers and Davies, an old tramp. Their origin and identity references are not provided sufficiently. They are, especially Davies, lost somewhere in an uncertain world. Their root is also not given. This is what an absurd play offers to the audience. This is the situation of man lost in supportless condition. The characters in *The*

Caretaker have no fixed identity. Pinter himself says that uncertainty is the key dramatic device in *The Caretaker*:

Given a man in a room, he will sooner or later receive a visitor
. There is no guarantee, however, that he will possess a visiting card, with detailed information as to his lost place of residence, last job, next job, number of dependents etc. nor for the comfort of all, an identity card, nor a label on his chest. The desire for verification is understandable but can not always be satisfied. There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. The thing is not necessarily either true or false it can be both true or false. . . . A character on the stage who can present no convincing argument or information as to his past experience, his present behavior or his aspirations, nor give a comprehensive analysis of his motives. . . . The more acute the experience the less articulate its expression (qtd. in Brown 95-6).

Pinter, thus, creates mystification with the absence of verification. The audiences have to assume something about the characters. It seems paradoxical —the world of an absurd play.

However, some subordinate information is given about the characters. Mick is the landlord of the house and he wants to “Make a flat out of it” by decorating it (40). He does not live there. He is “a tradesman” and has got his “own van” (49). He himself says that he has “plenty of things to worry about” and “plenty of other

interests” (74). Though he claims that he works in building, we don't know where he lives and what he really does. He lives “somewhere else” (46).

Aston is Mick's brother and in charge of the house. Long ago, he “used to have kind of hallucinations” and, therefore, he was taken to a psychiatric hospital where he was given an electric-shock treatment (54). He escaped while the treatment was going on. Now, he is a slow thinker because of that. He is a man without any dream to fulfill. As the in charge, he has to build a “shed out in the garden” because Mick wants to decorate the house. He says, “I've thought of going back and trying to find the man who did that to me” before building the shed (57). But, he never builds that shed.

Davies is an old tramp. Aston has just rescued him from a café where he worked as a cleaner. He says that he left his papers viz. official testimonials of his identity in Sidcup long ago. Now, he is “waiting for the weather to break” so that he can go to Sidcup and get them (16). He further says he needs a pair of shoes too which is “life and death” for him (13). He has been offered shelter by Aston. But, neither the weather breaks nor he gets a pair of good shoes. He holds an insurance card under the name of Bernard Jenkins which is not his. It makes him further mysterious person. Except this, nothing is known about him. He is a mysterious character whom Mick sometimes suspects to be his brother's “guest” and sometimes as brother's “friend” (46-7). Questioning him about his nationality, Mick asks him if he was “born and bred in the British Isles”. Davies cannot prove his nationality. Doubtful, he further inquires “You a foreigner?” (33). At other

time, Aston questions him for his real identity. This time too, he fails to reply Aston's question and begins to divert from the subject matter as if he has not understood Aston. Rather he begins to murmur. Aston repeats his question "You Welsh?" to confirm his identity (25). But,

Davies becomes nearly speechless when inquired about his identity. He has no solid answer. He himself is unknown about his own identity. He says his real name is Mac Davies but is holding an insurance card under the name of Bernard Jenkins which he claims is "assumed one" (25). There is identity crisis. Davies tries to evade when questioned about his origin. His murmuring testifies his uncertainty and identity crisis. He has no home, no family, no steady employment. He has no purpose in life and often says, "I don't dream. I never had a dream in my life" (23). He is a man without vision of life. He has only one worry — the worry of existence.

The Theatre of the Absurd does not stick to any convection of language. The language is often illogical. Pauses, ellipsis and silence are frequently used. The absurd plays are intended to expose the harsh reality of life. Straight forward and simple language cannot express such reality. Symbols and images are used. The language is often poetic. The language of *The Caretaker* also bears poetic quality:

DAVIES. What's that then, exactly, then?

ASTON. A jig saw? Well it comes from the same family as the fret saw. But, it's an appliance, you see. You have to fix on to a portable drill.

DAVIES. Ah, that's right. They are very handy.

ASTON. They are, yes.

DAVIES. What about a hack-saw?

ASTON. Well, I've got a hack-saw, as a matter of fact.

DAVIES. They're handy.

ASTON. Yes. . . . So's a keyhole saw. (25)

The characters let the language flow as it comes. The audience is not confronted with own language and pre-occupations. The language is exaggerated and heightened. The characters repeat the same words, phrases and often sentences. There is no refinement in the language. The same scenes appear repeatedly in the play. Such repetition makes the play absurd. *The Caretaker*, in this respect, meets the requirement of an absurd play. The repetition signifies gravity of subject matter and some extra emphasis. But the conversation does not take place over some serious subject. The repeated dialogue on very light topic makes the play absurd and farcical. Mick and Davies discuss over the bed which Davies slept in last night.

Very often, characters talk in an unnatural way. Language is used as a means of diversion. Such diversion seems illogical on the one hand and enhances ambiguity and uncertainty in the action on the other. Pinter exposes emptiness in

human being by creating such conversations. Aston proposes Davies the job of caretaker. But, Davies who has not done such job before uses evasive language. He is a jobless tramp looking for a job and a fixed place. But, when he is offered a job, he says “I never been a caretaker before” (42). He lacks self-confidence which indicates emptiness in modern man. Similarly, language does not flow naturally. The way they talk is very unnatural. Aston seems to proceed smoothly but Davies interrupts. Use of pauses makes the communication puzzling. Frequent ellipsis in Davies' speech indicates that he is trying to evade the subject matter. Language becomes a weapon for him. Davies hangs on emptiness.

The absurd plays are intended to expose the problems but not to offer solution. The interaction above does not pass any message. The interaction seems just a tea-cup babbling. Such voidness is pervasive throughout the play. *The Caretaker* holds mirror up to the existing world.

The Caretaker highlights emptiness of the world through images. The Theatre of the Absurd presents man as a purposeless being and alienated in his own world. The opening scene is full of visual image that is sufficient to communicate almost all of the play's meaning. When the audience holds the sight the Mick sitting alone in the room cluttered with disharmonious objects, it makes them aware that man is a lonely creature. When Aston and Davies enter the room, Aston hospitably offers him to “sit down” (7). But Davies, victimized by the emotionally dry world, cannot accept the generous offer by Aston instead gets irritated and says “I couldn't find a seat, not one. All them Greeks had it, Poles,

Blacks, the lot of them. And they had me working there... they had me working....”(8). The interlocution between them clearly speaks of domination. Davies is mistreated in the cafe. He is badly pinched by the manner of Blacks, Poles and Greeks. Who sits and who does not may seem a trivial and funny issue. But it creates clear dichotomy between dominator and dominated. Pinter creates binary images. The images revealing binary dichotomy such as inside/outside, security/insecurity, certainty/uncertainty, comedy/tragedy are frequently found in the play.

Lack of spirituality adds another step of uncertainty in the lives of characters in *The Caretaker*. For them, religion is no more a guiding and inspiring principle. Absurdism is an open system. It is an avant-garde form of art. It confronts people with bitter reality. The decaying religiosity and other values is the extreme reality of modern age. The characters do not believe in existence of God. Religion is no more a matter of morality for them.

Davies addresses monks as “bastard at the monastery” (13). For him religious persons are not important persons. Aston regards the statue of the Buddha a common object like other object. In a conversation with Davies, he says, “I quite like it. Picked it up in a ... shop”(17). He likes it because “it’s very well made”(18). Such conversation justifies decaying spirituality.

There is no any sense of respect toward the statue of Buddha. It bears no religiosity for them. Aston admits that he found it very well made and beautiful and bought it in the market. He bought it not with the sense of respect and

worshipping but for decorating. Buddha does not bear spiritual value for them. They are lost in the world of uncertainty. They cannot find proper meaning of it.

In another scene, Mick shows similar spiritual deadness. The statue of Buddha has been kept on gas stove, not in its proper place. When he gets angry with Davies, he “walks to the gas stove and picks up the Buddha.” In the fit of anger, “He hurls the Buddha against the gas stove. It breaks.” When the statue breaks, he remarks in satisfied tone, “THAT'S WHAT I WANT!” (74) He takes the event of breaking the idol of Buddha (God) lightly. He has no sense of respect or fear of God. God is dead for him. He has lost sense of mortality and it is the condition of extreme uncertainty. Otherwise, a man cannot do anything simply in the fit of ire.

The Caretaker is a plotless drama. It has disjunctive structure yet it is the reflection of disjunctive pattern of life which the characters have. Through this, it flashes the disjunctive modern life. Events occur but the situation does not progress. Pinter has written the play in experimental mode. So, we don't find convention of realistic plays. The play begins in a surprising atmosphere. In other words, it begins in uncertainty. It proceeds through banal communication, absurd activities and ends in surprise. The readers cannot determine exposition, climax and resolution in the play. Frequently occurring pauses, silence and ellipsis in the middle of dialogues make the happenings more mysterious. Mystery germinates uncertainty.

The Caretaker begins in uncertainty and ends in uncertainty. Mick, in the opening scene, sitting alone in the room in expressionless mood in pitch silence, seems engulfed by uncertainty. Aston seems repairing an old electric toaster in the beginning. He indulges in the same activity till the final situation. Had the play a linear development, Aston would get an electric shock, power cut or would be using the toaster for baking or some other remarkable event would provide a twist to the plot. Davies, a tramp in the beginning, comes across ups and downs in life but his situation is same as in the beginning. He is rescued from the café, provided shelter and the job of caretaker. But, to his bad luck, he is left in the desperate situation. He is always the tramp with no inspiration from the past and dream of future. It clarifies that human situation is absurd in the world.

Crisis of mutual trust is a burning tendency in the people in modern age. Pinter depicts this lively in the play. What will happen next cannot be speculated. Even the characters are not sure of their activities. The audiences grow doubtful of them. Plot serves as the major source of uncertainty. Aston, the in charge of the house gives the key to Davies and goes out. Davies, taking the advantage of his absence, opens the door and enters the room. He stands still. He waits for a few seconds, then goes to the door, opens it, looks out comes back and closes the door. He then goes quickly to Aston's bed. He brings a pair of shoes out and examines them. He continues searching in the room. While he is rummaging in the contents, Mick unexpectedly opens the door and comes in silently. He stands at the door and watches Davies. "What's he got all these papers for?" speaks Davies to

himself(28). But, to his surprise, Mick “seizes his arm” from behind and threatens him saying “what’s the game?”(29) Everything is guided by uncertainty. Davies becomes sure that Aston has gone out and nobody except him can come; Aston believes that nothing happens by giving the keys of the door to Davies. But Davies lacks this trust. He opens the door, goes in and locks the door from inside and begins to rummage things. He is sure that nobody is coming. But, Mick, the landlord, comes with another key. To his surprise, he finds an unknown person inside the room. He accuses Davies of intent daylight robbery. When an unknown hand seizes him, Davies screams with fear and surprise. Davies had not thought such things to happen. Things are guided by chance. At this stage, the plot returns back to the beginning point. The play covers the period of fortnight but the action does not proceed with the passage of time. The play makes a complete literary circle.

The characters involve in childish and absurd activities and take fun of them. Mick sometimes hurls a number of questions to Davies and, at other times, alternates between lengthy diatribes. Mick also plays with Davies' trousers. Davies' bag containing his belongings is left in the café. He wants to possess his bag. Aston collects the bag from there and tries to give it to him. But, Mick grabs it and a game of pig-in-the-middle follows between the trio. Finally Davies gets the bag with difficulty. But when he looks in the bag for his things, he finds that the bag is not his. Mick and Aston, the grown up people, indulge in such ludicrous activity. It signifies that people are involved in petty

activities. Such ridiculous game proves that they are petty people. They, in fact, represent modern people whose activities and efforts are all repetitive and absurd.

Davies, though a tramp, is not less than the two brothers. He is very cunning person. He says that his papers are in Sidcup. Now, he needs a pair of shoes to go down to Sidcup. He often asserts that he will journey to Sidcup as soon as the weather improves. Humble Aston offers him a perfectly decent pair of shoes. But, evasive Davies tactfully rejects Aston's offer by saying "Don't fit though" and "too pointed"(15).

Aston is easily deceived by Davies. His evasive nature is clearly seen. Aston takes Davies demand straight forwardly and offers him a pair of shoes. He is a humble person. But Davies rejects the shoes in one or another pretext. When Aston promises that he will look for another pair, Davies plays another trick by saying that he is "waiting for the weather to break"(16). His dishonesty is clearly revealed.

Davies' character is not trustworthy. No sooner he comes in close contact with Mick, he starts to conspire against Aston who rescued him from pathetic condition in the café. Davies instigates Mick against Aston. He blames Aston as "a funny bloke [...] not liking work"(49). Convinced by Davies, Mick offers the job of caretaker which Aston has been doing to Davies. Mick assures Davies saying "we'd come to a small financial agreement, mutually beneficial"(50). Davies easily manipulates Mick. Aston had, in fact, played the role of father. Had Aston not rescued him from the cafe, Davies would have been dead as he senses this

before. Davies was a lost person. His job in the cafe was not good. He also offers him a good job, “you could be . . . caretaker here [. . .]” (42). But, deceptive Davies fills Mick's ears against Aston. Aston is not a shirker but a slow thinker. He escaped from a hospital while under electric treatment. Aston is a humble man. Davies is deceptive, selfish fellow. Aston seems helpless. Davies forgets Aston's help and aligns with Mick. He happens to say, “He is not friend of mine” and “He has got no feelings!” (61-2) His onspiracy reaches at the climax when he says to Mick, “your brother's got his eyes on you” (67). He undercuts sibling relation between Mick and Aston.

But Davies' relation with Mick does not remain the same. His dream of doing away with Aston and occupying his position gets shattered. When Mick knows that Davies has never done the job of interior decorator, Mick doubts on him and says, “you are a bloody imposter, mate!” (72) Immediately, he kicks out Davies. He vomits his anger with very inhumane remarks like “You are violent, you are erratic. You are nothing else but a wild animal. [...] You are a barbarian”(73- 4). Davies, who conspired against Aston before, now, falls in the net of conspiracy. His position again becomes uncertain. Now, he is a man without shelter and job. Mick, first, tempts Davies to win his favor but when he finds Davies is no more useful to him or he cannot fulfill the dreams of turning the house into a flat by decorating it, he fires him from the job. Instead of showing sympathy, he terms Davies as barbarian, violet, erratic etc. He regards Davies worth half a crown. This is the general sense of selfishness found in modern man.

Thus, Davies is ushered to the street again. He becomes helpless before Mick.

Bewildered, he pleads to Mick to give him a chance:

DAVIES. But . . . but . . . look listen . . . listen here . . .

I mean. . . .

ASTON turns back to the window.

What am I going to do?

Pause.

What shall I do?

Pause

Where am I going to go?

Pause.

If you want me to go . . . I'll go. You just say a word.

Pause.

I'll tell you what though . . . them shoes . . . them shoes you give
me . . . they're working out all right . . . they're all right. May be
I could . . . get down. . . .

ASTON remains still, his back to him, at the window.

Listen . . . if I . . . got down . . . if I was to . . . get my papers . . .
would you . . . would you let . . . would you . . . if I got down . . .
and got my. . . .

Long silence (77-8).

Davies' pleading to be given another chance is almost unbearably tragic. He finds himself in the street again. He comes across ups and downs of life but his situation remains the same as in the beginning. He was a tramp without root, identity and job. And after so long the life traverses, he finds himself where he was. Helpless from all directions, he can not express his thoughts well. The pauses and the ellipses are the wounds of his heart. He can not speak well and begins to murmur. He is left in the desperate and void condition. Long silence makes his condition further uncertain. He can neither go anywhere nor stay there. Davies is abandoned in an absurd and uncertain condition. The limbo he falls into is the condition everyone faces in the modern world. The world is not friendly and receptive rather hostile. Everybody finds himself in void in this universe. One finds himself indeterminate of what to do. No one is sympathetic to any one.

The play is an enactment of grave subject matter in a funny and ridiculous way. It can be taken as a comedy of menace. The characters, claiming the same thing again and again but not bringing that into action are farcical. Aston never completes the job of fixing a plug in the toaster. Davies never takes a journey to Sidcup. Weather never improves for him. Ample instances of such comical elements are found in the play. However, it is a tragedy, rather than a pure comedy. Commenting on the play's comical aspect, Pinter writes, "The Caretaker is funny up to a point. Beyond that point it ceases to be funny, and it was because of that point that I wrote it" (qtd. in Esslin 250). *The Caretaker* is the dramatization of man's condition in the modern world.

The most fundamental aspect of the play is a struggle for existence. Davies is in existential crisis. A tramp with no family, home, job, officially sanctioned reference papers of identity etc. push him to the state of existential choice but finds no way out. Once Aston rescues him from inhumane situation in the cafe but it can not become ultimate relief for him. Again he is in insecure position. He is given the job, feels secured but he is fired from the job — insecurity. He never gets warm place to live. Another character, Aston, is also in the same state. Because he made hallucinations, he was taken to psychiatric hospital for treatment. Now he is a taciturn and a slow thinker due to electric shock under treatment. It is said in the play that his mother “ signed the form [. . .] giving them permission” for treatment (56). But mother remains illusive as she never appears throughout the play. Aston finds himself in existential crisis when Mick gives the job for caretaker that Aston has been carrying on to Davies. The play is a series of uncertainty from the beginning to the end.

Davies is an existential character. His shifting alliance from one to another is his survival tactics though it fails ultimately. As soon as he comes out of the cafe with Aston's assistance, he is eager to establish an intimate relation with him. He seems much obliged to him for his co-operation:

DAVIES. I was lucky you come in that caff. I might have been done
by that Scotch git. I been left for dead more than once.

Pause.

I noticed that there was someone was living in the house next door. (12)

But the relation developed through such patterns gets shadowed immediately when he comes to know that Aston is the in charge only, not the landlord of the house. Davies, at this point, feels that his position is not secure only because of his relation with Aston. Surprisingly, he shows a quite different behavior to Aston and begins to extend the tie of relation with Mick by applying ill measures. He tells lies about Aston. In the conversation with Mick, Davies says, “well . . . he's funny. . . . [. . .] Not liking work” (49). He gives an image of a shirker to Mick. When Davies finds Mick more doubtful of Aston, he says, “He is not friend of mine” (61) and he is “half off” (67). Davies shows his selfish nature. But, ultimately, he is driven to the street. His tactics fail. It indicates that human efforts are futile and life is absurd.

Mick is a very cunning fellow. With the intention of testing Davies after he was found spying in the house, he lays a trap for him. He tempts him to reveal his real character. For this, Mick becomes cold to his brother and turns his deaf ear to him. Davies, a tramp without family and without the knowledge of family bond, begins spying against Aston. He does not understand the sibling bond and Mick's trick on him. When Mick knows his real attitude and real image, he drives him out of the house. Davies' hope to be secured in a warm and receptive place is successfully tantalized by Mick. It is Pinter's very successful dramatic techniques.

Silence pervasive throughout the play makes the play further uncertain. The play opens with long silence. A character appears on the stage and passes through silence. The audiences are confronted with the ambiguity of what is going to happen. Although the play deals with serious subject matter in the latent level, it remains silent of these in the manifest level. The characters who are facing existential crisis are involved in petty activities and banal communication. They talk about a pair of shoes, groaning at night, drought in the room, weather, play with trousers, mock each other. They play a funny game of pig-in-the-middle. But, the mystery behind such seemingly ridiculous activities is silent. The playwright does not open the mystery clearly. The events justify that such activities are the outcomes of no way out and desperateness in them. It is the job of audience to find out the mystery lying behind these. The play finally ends in silence.

Nothing is spoken about Mick sitting alone in the room. He is in leather jacket. He sits on the bed. He looks up at the ceiling, stares at the bucket and remains silent for thirty seconds. After this long silence, “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” (1). Mick's behavior here seems doubtful. Where he goes is unknown. His silent outing from there signals as if he is escaping from there. At this stage, we have no clue to who he is. We have no idea that he is the owner of the house and the belongings there. The situation becomes very puzzling. But we come to know as flashback that he is the owner of the house. The landlord showing such skeptical manner is really mysterious.

The play covers the period of fortnight but nothing happens in the play. A number of events occur in the course of the play but the action does not progress. Mick seems very keen to redecorate the house and turn it into a flat. But, he never starts. Aston, time and again claims that he has to build a shed out in the garden but he also never does that. He seems busy in mending the old electric toaster throughout the play. Davies never gets a pair of shoes and weather never improves. He never journeys to Sidcup so his reference papers always remain mysterious. The characters cannot maintain good rapport among them. Once established relation breaks out rightly because of mutual doubt, jealousy and conspiracy. Everything remains in uncertainty. It is found throughout the play in latent and manifest level.

4. Conclusion

The Caretaker is a lively depiction of tragic human situation in the mechanized modern world. The world is uncertain in many respects. The predicament of old values, lack of humanity etc. has made the world hostile, rather than friendly. Mutual doubt, jealousy, lack of understanding have raised grave question in human relation. Because of such factors, human life seems quite disorganized. The whole universe and entire human existence have fallen into the abyss of uncertainty.

To depict engulfing uncertainty, Pinter constructs a mysterious dramatic network—bizarre setting, illusive characters, illogical and unnatural conversation, circular plot etc. Events occur but actions do not progress. Such elements lead the play to the cyclone of unpredictability. This confusion signifies the uncertainty of the world.

The bizarre setting of the play indicates that the world is no more receptive for living. It's gloomy atmosphere here and there in a silent world of the play indicates purposelessness and incoherence. Its ultimate message is human life is purposeless and existence is meaningless. The life of the characters who represent people in the modern world seems absurd because no action progresses and change takes place in their lives despite number of events. It is the indication of futility of human efforts in the world. The illogical and unnatural dialogues among characters clarify the state of incommunicado and lack of elemental content in the world.

The characters are illusive. Their actual identity and root is not obvious. Mick has been introduced as a tradesman working in building. But, what he exactly does and where he actually lives is not mentioned. Aston and Mick are said to be own brothers. But, their relation remains undefined because their parentage has not been mentioned. Introduced as a tramp, Davies remains so in his life despite his utmost struggle for secured existence. The characters seem quite interested to do something but ironically they can not begin anything. Davies can not establish himself in the world of security and certainty. Aston, time and again, talks about his planning to build a shed; Mick has got a grand planning of changing the house into a beautifully decorated flat; Davies plans to make a journey to Sidcup to produce his reference papers. But, the characters are in the state of inaction, their dreams never get materialized. They essentially characterize absurdity of life. It is the revelation of man swinging in dichotomies in life.

All such events reflect tragic human situation. The play depicts successfully the picture of human condition as Camus has done in “The Myth of Sisyphus”. Here, Davies is left in the void with no way out of what to do and where to go.

The play also reveals that modern people are not aware of old values and norms and so their condition has become uncertain. The play reveals uncertainty existing in all levels. Davies is an existential character who incessantly struggles for warm place and secured future. But, the irony is that he is never secure. The circle of pauses and silence mark human life void, without substantial content.

Summing up, the play is the depiction of problematic human situation in the world. It reveals that life is ultimately absurd. There is no fixity in life. Everything is uncertain.

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