
A Paradigmatic Critique of Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker*

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Abstract

Harold Pinter lived and wrote his plays after the World War period. In this period scholars were associated with the portrayal of unrefined and crude factors of warfare which were, directly and indirectly, related to the people of that time. They also depicted how governments were exploiting common people in the name of safety and warfare. Despite the fact that Pinter's plays are not actually about warfare or the circumstance of Wars, his plays have the impressions of warfare in various shades. His plays display various levels of human existence. There is an exploration of mental, social, financial, human relationship, and the existential methodology of existence with ludicrousness in his plays. Pinter's relationship is with the real elements of human existence and activities. He denies the idea of realism in his plays and says that "If you press me for a definition. I would say that what goes on in my plays is realistic, but what I'm doing is not realism" (*The Essential Pinter*, 11). He always tried to depict concrete and particular idea in his plays through concrete characters. He never wrote his plays for any kind of abstract idea. He is associated with realism in the matter of approach of depiction to the crude and drastic realities of the time. He has represented the post-war British socio-political issues, sensibilities and psychological as well as mental states of the human mind.

Keywords- Naturalism, Realism, Warfare, Objectivity

Emile Zola is conspicuously recognized as the propagator and thinker of the naturalist school. It consciously advocates the need of the plays which should talk of the real things related to human life. He puts an incredible accentuation on the specific delineation of the real factors in a logical manner. He contends for a scientific methodology through the total objectivity of the writer. He

focuses on the idea that an author must not express his own thoughts or standpoint to meddle in his compositions. An author must notice, trace and analyse with a total common sense of separation determined to exhibit reality and it should be embraced as the superb apprehension of any composition.

Wimsatt and Brooks believe Naturalism is a kind of practice that is deeply oriented to socially attached ideas. For them “It show[s] a modern conscience for the plight of the working classes. It deal[s] with ordinary folk here and now, or with the kind of destiny and problems that most people experienced[s]” (460- 61). They not only gave their own opinion but also criticized the methods of naturalism propounded by Zola’s approach to literature in which it seems analogous to that of a newspaper correspondent.

Naturalism is an all-encompassing type of realism however it has some imperative contrasts from it. It is a very much perceived inclination that the development of realism honed later into the type of naturalism. It is also considered as new realism, mechanical average by certain literary critics. Basically, it is sharply opposite to the traditions of the old realism. If we observe things in the philosophical discourse, everything on this earth is based on natural causes and laws, not on spiritual or supernatural causes. The essential efforts of naturalism can be found in the endeavour to deliver a logically exact portrayal of life even at the cost of representing offensiveness, ugliness and disagreement. It is also viewed as a form of romanticism, sentimentalism, not an inward circle of realism. It represents the crude and rough objectives of depiction related to human existence and behaviour. In the plays which represent naturalist sensibilities, the realities of the world are introduced and presented in an unforgiving and abnormal way without leaving any space for the audience to think or envision over the presentation of the occasions. It denies the capacity of the audience to dream as well as the competence of comprehending the insightful discussions in the play among the characters. Nonetheless, naturalist dramatization centres on the common people and even from the most unperceived class.

Chekhov utilizes a realistic approach in his plays to draw out the real factors of the existing Russian society. But, the examination of Chekhov's plays shows that he has the

naturalistic approach at the degree of performance while Pinter has utilized the naturalist way to deal with British social structure and behaviour of common people.

Harold Pinter provides glimpses of contemporary society. He has good faith in the sensible depiction of the people from society, so his representations seem very near to the approach which was practised by naturalism. His association with this movement has been well expressed in his plays. Most of them often appear to be naturalistic in subject matter and diction. However, they also show an apparent challenge to break away from the conventions or set of laws of naturalism. And consequently, his characters speak an acquainted language in a strange manner. He shows his interest and concern for the local and the recognizable things and activities. Most of his characters have ordinary names, business and they wear normal clothes which define their naturalistic settings. However, with the help of such naturalistic framework, structures and settings, different kinds of acquainted things are revealed which are disturbingly unacquainted. Thus, his involvement with realism and naturalism is due to his delineation of characters and situations as it is most of the time found in reality. It can be traced that he had a great interest in the real speech of the real people with sensitization of emotional and intellectual involvement. The dialogues of the characters are of devastating naturalness although partially. He always keeps the limitations of society in his mind so he does representations in his plays. He does not try to preach or philosophize his audience rather he produces the true situation of human existence. It is very essential for naturalist theatre as opposed to verbal experiments. Naturalism stresses more physical actions and body language in place of the verbal upshot of realistic theatre.

In *The Caretaker*, Pinter has employed the techniques and framework of naturalist theatre. The play revolves around the presentation of the psychological idea of the mixture of authority, power, faithfulness, virtue, dishonesty and corruption. The play talks about an unknown tramp. He is another character of the play whose name is Davies. He is looking out for a place for himself. He seems struggling for a slight amount of brightness and heat in the immeasurable scary gloom. Eventually, he gets appointed as a caretaker by Aston and Mick. The place is almost deserted and peculiar. There was a room that seems to be used as a storehouse. These three characters of the play stand for the actual men of society with their aspirations and

problems of the world. Later in the play, each brother tries to show his ownership over the room and Davies additionally shows his fondness of possessing the room. Leech, the great critic on Pinter, examines accurately and minutely the character of these three estranged men who are separated with functionalities of the world. According to him,

There is Davies, a tramp, old, repellent, brutally selfish, in turn, cringing and boastful. There is Mick, who claims to own the room and whom we see silently in possession when the curtain first goes up. There is Aston, Mick's brother, who lets Davies share the room with him. (27)

Leech takes Davies as the ordinary human being who exists in nearly most of the places in this world. He further writes, "The tramp Davies is an Everyman figure, looking for good and shelter at the least cost to himself, finding himself in a world where two brothers, strangely different, equally strange, both claim possession" (29).

Davies while loitering and looking for an appropriate place comes across Aston who rescues him from combat in a restaurant and brings him to the place that seems to him very unusual and unique from the outside world. Aston and Mick hand over him the responsibility of the warden and embellish his role from the homeless person. Disregarding the benevolent nature, humanity and considerate actions of Aston and Mick, Davies appears very self-focused, egoistic, arrogant and pretentious even he abuses both of them. Moreover, he attempts to grab his place as the owner of the room and to achieve this he strives to form a clash between both brothers. The play is very sensible and realistic for its arrangement of the events and characters. Esslin approves the play as sensible play. He writes, "On one level *The Caretaker* is realistic play, almost a slice of life, but on another, deeper level it is a poetic image of the human condition itself: Man fighting for a place, for security, but at the same time deprived of it by the weakness of his own fallible, selfish nature" (67).

Pinter, willing to the naturalist approach, practised and employed the methodological aspects of the theatre in comparison to the verbal approach. The movements, actions and placing in plays speak lots of elucidations and various levels of meaning. The setting of events and stage instructions exactly present what he longs to correspond through his plays. It is sufficient to mark

his plays in the listing of realistic plays. He creates the setting of *The Caretaker*, in following words,

Aston wears an old tweed overcoat and under it a thin shabby dark-blue pinstripe suit, single-breasted, with a pullover and faded shirt and tie. Davies wears a worn brown overcoat, shapeless trousers, a waistcoat, vest, no shirt, and sandals. Aston puts the key in this pocket and closes the door. Davies looks about the room. (The Essential Pinter, 107)

David Thompson opines that the ambience of *The Caretaker* is a realistic one. Davies is produced in a way having realistic features. He is a homeless person. He talks of only himself. He tells unusual and diverse stories associated with his past life. He talks of his wife whom he left and consequently came on the road as a vagrant person. He asserts, "I might have been on the road a few years but you can take it from me I'm clean. I keep myself up. That is why I left my wife" (109). He gives the reason which compelled him to desert her. The reason was that she was very dirty and crude in her shape. He incessantly speaks in illogical and ridiculous mode. He introduces himself to Aston like an actual homeless person. He does not circumvent in taking shoes from Aston and even does not hesitate in criticizing the dimensions of them. He says that "They'd cripple me in a week. I mean these ones. I got on, they're no good but at least they're comfortable." (109)

Mick is an extrovert. He starts interrogating Davies. Davies asks him to be reminiscent of his uncle's brother. Mick's temperament and attitude become a complication for Davies because now he is in the company of such a person who is similarly garrulous. Mick makes an appointment and engages Davies caretaker to take care of the house. But in a while, no matter doing the process, Davies starts to complain towards Aston. But later it is seen that in spite of doing his duties, Davies starts complaining and abusing Aston. It shows the real face of humanity in a direct and indirect way. Davies says, "He wakes me up! He wakes me up in the middle of the night! Tell me I'm making noises! I tell you I've half a mind to give him a mouthful one of these days" (163). In addition to this, he creates animosity and disagreement between Mick and Aston. He says that "... your brother' ll all along, he's got the sense, not like you..." (171). He starts behaving uncouthly with both of the brothers. Consequently Mick leaves the place. Aston says that Davies makes too much clamour and asks him to disappear from the

place. Davies would eventually quit due to his personality and attitude. He fails to fulfil his responsibilities and succumbs to the futility of living. He also fails to complete the assignment assigned to him by both brothers, and as a result, he is fired from his new job and thrown out of the shelter. The play portrays the real essence of human life and the condition in which men struggle to achieve proper life coherence due to their own shortcomings and actions in this way. Pinter has attempted to depict life's harshness. Ruby Cohn expresses her sympathy for Davies. He writes that "Of all Pinter's [early] plays, *The Caretaker* makes most bitter commentary on the human condition; instead of allowing an old man to die beaten, the system insists on tantalising him with faint hope, thereby immeasurably increasing his final desperate anguish" (119).

Thus, it can be concluded that Pinter portrays characters and situations in a realistic and naturalistic manner. Contrary to popular belief, Bernard Dukore claims that the naturalistic aspect of his art has become less prominent as his work has progressed. He presents the characters as if they are genuine members of society. He also employs stage direction, delay, silence, and a variety of other methods to better portray the characters in his plays in a naturalistic manner. He also employs language as a weapon in this portrayal. Pinter, according to Andrew K. Kennedy, is a naturalist when it comes to the use of language and conversation. His characters speak in a basic but local language, which makes it difficult to understand his plays, but the use of a naturalist atmosphere makes it easier. For this, he breaks free from the constraints of his time in late-twentieth-century drama. The fundamental point that distinguishes him as a realist playwright is his battle against conventional dramatic art and limitations. Pinter is a naturalist only in terms of methodology and accurate representation of social observation. He is a realist in terms of theme and vision because his plays are not just observations, but they also point to rotten existing institutions that need to be demolished. His use of naturalism to portray the harsh realities of life allows him to gain a reputation as a serious playwright comparable to Chekhov.

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