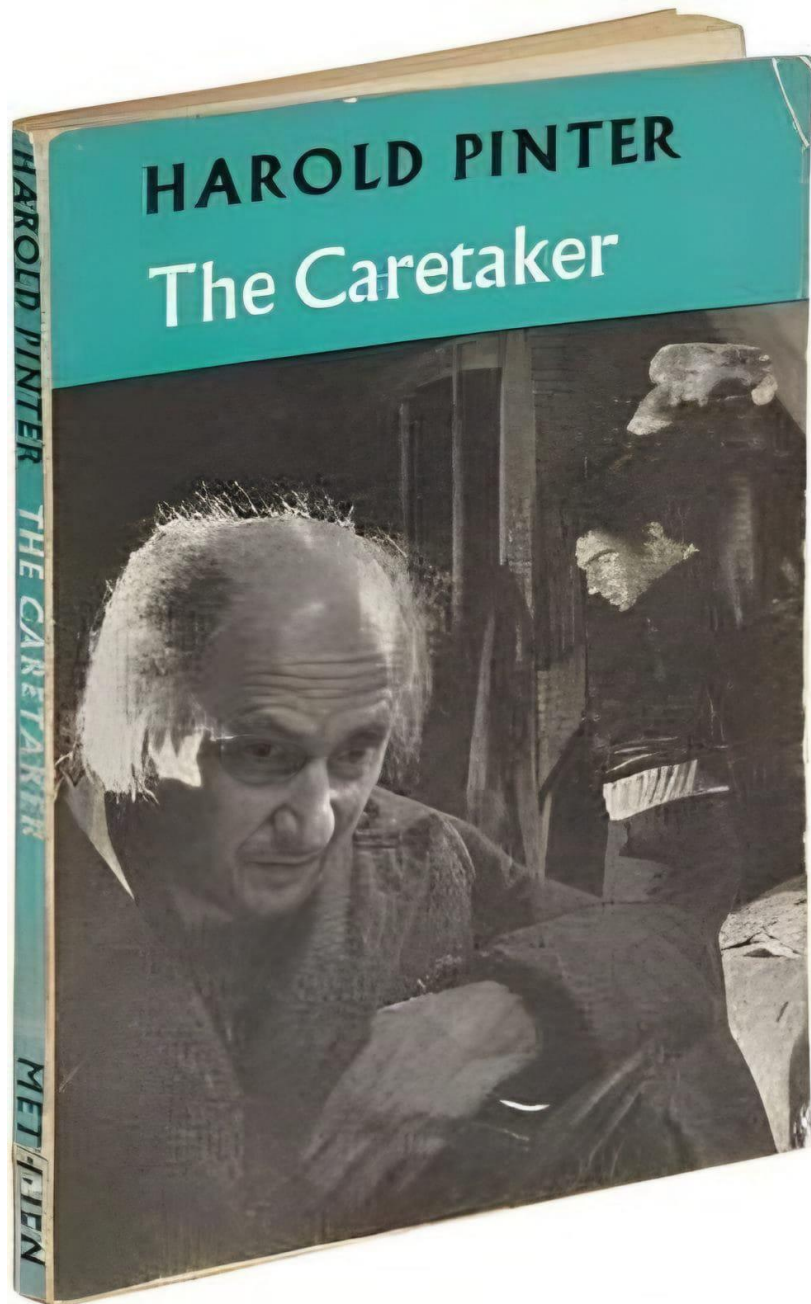


The Caretaker
Harold Pinter



Introduction

The Caretaker was the first of Pinter's plays to bring him artistic and commercial success as well as national recognition. Opening on April 27, 1960, at the Arts Theatre in London, The Caretaker was an immediate hit with audiences as well as critics, receiving mostly favorable reviews. In addition, The Caretaker received the Evening Standard Award for best play of 1960. In the many years since its first production, the play has continued to be the recipient of critical praise. It has been adapted for television as well as film and has seen numerous revivals all over the world, including at least one production with an all-female cast.

The real-world origins of the play lie in Pinter's acquaintance with two brothers who lived together, one of whom brought an old tramp to the house for a brief stay. At the time, Pinter himself had very little money and so identified somewhat with the tramp, with whom he occasionally spoke. Artistically, The Caretaker is

clearly influenced in both style and subject matter by Samuel Beckett's 1955 classic *Waiting for Godot*, in which two tramps wait endlessly for someone they know only as Godot to come and give meaning and purpose to their lives.

Through the story of the two brothers and the tramp, *The Caretaker* deals with the distance between reality and fantasy, family relationships, and the struggle for power. It also touches on the subjects of mental illness and the plight of the indigent. Pinter uses elements of both comedy and tragedy to create a play that elicits complex reactions in the audience. The complexity of the play, Pinter's masterful use of dialogue, and the depth and perception shown in Pinter's themes all contribute to *The Caretaker*'s consideration as a modern masterpiece.

The Caretaker Summary

Act I opens in a room full of assorted objects, clearly best described as junk. These include an iron bed, paint buckets, numerous boxes, a toaster, a statue of Buddha, a kitchen sink, and a gas stove. A bucket for catching drips hangs from the ceiling. Mick, a man in his twenties, sits alone on the bed, slowly looking around the room, focusing on each object in turn. When the bang of a door is heard, followed by the sound of muffled voices, Mick leaves the room.

Aston, in his thirties, and Davies, an old tramp, enter the room. Aston tells Davies to sit and offers him a cigarette. Davies reveals that he has just been fired from his restaurant job for refusing to do work he considers beneath him.

Plot Summary

Act I

Act I opens in a room full of assorted objects, clearly best described as junk. These include an iron bed, paint buckets, numerous boxes, a toaster, a statue of Buddha, a kitchen sink, and a gas stove. A bucket for catching drips hangs from the ceiling. Mick, a man in his twenties, sits alone on the bed, slowly looking around the room, focusing on each object in turn. When the bang of a door is heard, followed by the sound of muffled voices, Mick leaves the room.

Aston, in his thirties, and Davies, an old tramp, enter the room. Aston tells Davies to sit and offers him a cigarette. Davies reveals that he has just been fired from his restaurant job for refusing to do work he considers beneath him. Aston begins working on fixing the toaster while Davies complains about "Poles, Greeks, Blacks, the lot of them," then mentions that he left the bag with his possessions in the restaurant. Davies questions Aston about the house, about how many rooms there are, about Aston's position. Aston replies that he is "in charge" of the house and that he is working on building a shed. Davies asks Aston about spare shoes, but when Aston finds some for him, Davies complains that they don't fit.

Aston gives Davies money and offers to let him stay in the room until he gets "sorted out." Davies says that he plans to go to Sidcup, "if only the weather would break," to get his papers, which he says "prove who I am." Davies finally goes to bed while Aston continues to work on the toaster. The lights fade out, indicating night, then come up again, showing that morning has arrived. Aston tells Davies he was making noises in his sleep, and Davies insists that it could not have been him, that it was probably "them Blacks." Aston says he is going to leave for a while, then surprises Davies by saying that he can stay alone in the room.

When Aston leaves, Davies immediately begins looking through the objects in the room. Mick comes in and is unnoticed by Davies until Mick seizes Davies's arm, forcing him down on the floor. Mick then lets go of Davies, sits down, and asks the old man, "What's the game?"

Act II

Act II opens a few seconds later. Mick starts questioning Davies in a hostile fashion, repeating many of the same questions over and over again. This confuses and frightens the tramp. Davies tells Mick that he was brought to the room by "the man who lives here," but Mick informs Davies that he is in fact the owner of the house and that unless Davies wants to rent the room, Mick can take him to the police. Aston then enters with a

bag, which he says belongs to Davies, but Mick grabs the bag and keeps it from the tramp. Mick finally lets Davies have the bag, then leaves the room. Aston tells Davies that Mick is his brother and that he himself is supposed to be decorating the house and plans to build a shed where he can do woodworking.

Aston asks Davies if he would like to stay on as caretaker, but Davies seems reluctant. The lights fade to blackout, then come up again dimly. Davies enters the room, but is unable to get the light on and stumbles about in the darkness. Suddenly Mick, already in the room, begins vacuuming, frightening Davies with the noise. Mick then takes the vacuum plug out of the socket and replaces the light bulb. Davies and Mick talk, and Mick tells Davies that he is impressed by him and that the two just “got off on the wrong foot.”

Mick offers Davies a sandwich and, as the two eat together, Mick tells Davies that Aston’s trouble is that he doesn’t like work. Mick then offers Davies a job as caretaker, and Davies again seems reluctant to accept the position. Finally, however, he agrees. When Mick asks for references, however, Davies claims that his papers are all in Sidcup but that he will go there soon. The lights fade, then come back up, indicating another morning. Aston wakes Davies up, reminding Davies that he had planned to go to Sidcup that day. Davies says he wants to go out for tea. Aston tells him of a cafe nearby, then begins a long monologue, as the lights in the room fade so that only Aston can be seen clearly. Aston tells of how he used to talk to people in that cafe but that he talked too much. He began having hallucinations and was taken to a hospital, where a doctor proposed electroshock therapy.

Aston says that he was a minor at the time, so he knew the doctors could not perform electroshock without his mother’s permission. Aston wrote his mother, asking her not to agree to the treatment, but she gave the doctors permission anyway. Aston tried to escape but was caught, and though he physically fought the doctors, he was forced to receive treatment. Ever since, his thoughts have been slow, and he tries to avoid talking to people. He speaks of wanting to find the man who “did that to me,” but first, he tells Davies, he wants to build the shed in the garden.

Act III

Act III begins two weeks later. Mick and Davies are together in the room, and Davies is complaining about Aston, who, he says, will not give him a knife for his bread and refuses to keep the Blacks next door from coming into the house and using the lavatory. Davies says that he and Mick could “get this place going,” and Mick offers a series of decorating ideas, using the words and images common in house and garden magazines — which seem like ludicrous fantasies for the house he owns.

Mick says that the house would be a palace, and that he and his brother would live in it. Davies asks what would happen to him. Mick ignores his question, and Davies continues to complain about Aston — he will not give Davies a clock, and he wakes Davies up in the night. Mick then leaves, and Aston enters. He has another pair of shoes for Davies, but Davies complains that these shoes also don’t fit. Davies then tells Aston that a man has offered him a job. He needs to go to Sidcup but the weather is bad. The lights go out, and a dim light through the window reveals that Davies and Aston are both in bed. Aston switches on the light and wakes Davies, complaining that the tramp is making noises in his sleep. Davies begins insulting Aston, saying that he is not surprised that Aston was put in a mental institution. Davies complains about Aston’s treatment of him, and tells Aston that he could be taken back to the hospital and given electroshock treatments again. Aston tells Davies that he needs to find another place to live. Davies tells Aston that Mick will “sort you out,” that Davies has been offered a job. Davies then leaves.

The lights go out, then back up. It is early evening. Mick and Davies enter the room, Davies complaining about Aston to Mick, who first listens somewhat sympathetically, then tells Davies he can stay if he is as good an interior decorator as he says he is. When Davies denies being a professional decorator, Mick accuses him of falsely presenting himself. Davies says that Aston must have told Mick that Davies is a decoration. When Davies tells Mick that Aston is “nutty,” he goes too far, and Mick begins insulting Davies, calling him a barbarian. Mick then picks up the Buddha and hurls it against the stove, breaking it. Aston comes in. Mick leaves, and Davies begins desperately pleading with Aston, attempting to work out a compromise so that he can stay in the room. Aston says that Davies must leave. Davies continues to beg Aston to let him stay, but

Aston turns to the window, ignoring Davies. Finally, the two stand, silent for a moment, Aston still facing the window. The curtain falls.

Origins and contexts of the play

Pinter's own comment on the source of three of his major plays is frequently quoted by critics :

I went into a room and saw one person standing up and one person sitting down, and few weeks later I wrote *The Room*. I went into another room and saw two people sitting down, and a few years later I wrote *The Birthday Party*. I looked through a door into a third room and saw two people standing up and I wrote *The Caretaker*.^[3]

According to his official authorised biographer, Michael Billington, Pinter "talked in detail about the play's origins" in images from his own personal experience and observations for the first time with him (in the mid 1990s), when Pinter told Billington that he wrote the play while he and his first wife Vivien Merchant "were living [...] in this first-floor flat in Chiswick: a very clean couple of rooms with a bath and kitchen. There was a chap who owned the house: a builder, in fact, like Mick who had his own van and whom I hardly ever saw. The only image of him was of this swift mover up and down the stairs and of his van going . . . Vroom . . . as he arrived and departed. His brother lived in the house. He was a handyman . . . he managed rather more successfully than Aston, but he was very introverted, very secretive, had been in a mental home some years before and had had some kind of electrical shock treatment . . . ECT, I think . . . Anyway, he did bring a tramp back one night. I call him a tramp, but he was just a homeless old man who stayed three or four weeks." [...] Mick, as he says, was the most purely invented character of the three. For the tramp [Davies], however, he had a certain fellow feeling. [...] "It [the Pinters' life in Chiswick] was a very threadbare existence . . . very . . . I was totally out of work. So I was very close to this old derelict's world, in a way."(Harold Pinter 114–17).

For earlier critics, like Martin Esslin, *The Caretaker* suggests aspects of the Theatre of the Absurd, described by Esslin in his eponymous book coining that term first published in 1961; according to Esslin, absurdist drama by writers such as Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco, Jean Genet, and Edward Albee, and others was prominent in the late 1950s and early 1960s as a reaction to chaos witnessed in World War Two and the state of the world after the war.[citation needed]

Billington observes that "The idea that [Davies] can affirm his identity and recover his papers by journeying to Sidcup is perhaps the greatest delusion of all, although one with its source in reality"; as "Pinter's old Hackney friend Morris Wernick recalls, 'It is undoubtedly true that Harold, with a writer's ear, picked up words and phrases from each of us. He also picked up locales. The Sidcup in *The Caretaker* comes from the fact that the Royal Artillery HQ was there when I was a National Serviceman and its almost mythical quality as the fount of all permission and record was a source.' To English ears," Billington continues, "Sidcup has faintly comic overtones of suburban respectability. For Davies it is a Kentish Eldorado: the place that can solve all the problems about his unresolved identity and uncertain past, present and future" (122).

About directing a production of *The Caretaker* at the Roundabout Theatre Company in 2003, David Jones observed:

The trap with Harold's work, for performers and audiences, is to approach it too earnestly or portentously. I have always tried to interpret his plays with as much humor and humanity as possible. There is always mischief lurking in the darkest corners. The world of *The Caretaker* is a bleak one, its characters damaged and lonely. But they are all going to survive. And in their dance to that end they show a frenetic vitality and a wry sense of the ridiculous that balance heartache and laughter. Funny, but not too funny. As Pinter wrote, back in 1960 : "As far as I am concerned *The Caretaker* IS funny, up to a point. Beyond that point, it ceases to be funny, and it is because of that point that I wrote it."^[4]^[5]

Setting

"The action of the play takes place in a house in west London."^[6]

Characters

Mick, a man in his late twenties

Aston, a man in his early thirties

Davies, an old man

Synopsis

This three-act play involves interactions between a mentally-challenged man, Aston; a tramp, Davies, whom Aston brings home to his attic room,; and Aston's younger brother (Mick), who appears responsible for the house.

Act I

A night in winter

[Scene 1]

Aston has invited Davies, a homeless man, into his apartment after rescuing him from a bar fight (7–9).

Davies comments on the apartment and criticizes the fact that it is cluttered and badly kept. Aston attempts to find him a pair of shoes for Davies but Davies rejects all the offers. Once he turns down a pair that doesn't fit well enough and another that has the wrong color laces. Early on, Davies reveals to Aston that his real name is not "Bernard Jenkins", his "assumed name", but really "Mac Davies" (19–20, 25). He claims that his papers validifying this fact are in Sidcup and that he must and will return there to retrieve them just as soon as he has a good pair of shoes. Aston and Davies discuss where he will sleep and the problem of the "bucket" attached to the ceiling to catch dripping rain water from the leaky roof (20–21) and Davies "gets into bed" while "ASTON sits, poking his [electrical] plug (21). [Scene 2]

The LIGHTS FADE OUT. Darkness.

LIGHTS UP. Morning. (21) As Aston dresses for the day, Davies awakes with a start, and Aston informs Davies that he was kept up all night by Davies muttering in his sleep. Davies denies that he made any noise and blames the racket on the neighbors, revealing his fear of foreigners: "I tell you what, maybe it were them Blacks" (23). Aston informs Davies that he is going out but invites him to stay if he likes, indicating that he trusts him (23–24), something unexpected by Davies; for, as soon as Aston does leave the room (27), Davies begins rummaging through Aston's "stuff" (27–28) but he is interrupted when Mick, Aston's brother, unexpectedly arrives, "moves upstage, silently," "slides across the room" and then suddenly "seizes Davies' "arm and forces it up his back," in response to which "DAVIES screams," and they engage in a minutely choreographed struggle, which Mick wins (28–29), ending Act One with the "Curtain" line, "What's the game?" (29). Act II

[Scene 1]

A few seconds later

Mick demands to know Davies' name, which the latter gives as "Jenkins" (30), interrogates him about how well he slept the night before (30), wonders whether or not Davies is actually "a foreigner"—to which Davies retorts that he "was" indeed (in Mick's phrase) "Born and bred in the British Isles" (33)—going on to accuse Davies of being "an old robber [...] an old skate" who is "stinking the place out" (35), and spinning a verbal web full of banking jargon designed to confuse Davies, while stating, hyperbolically, that his brother Aston is "a number one decorator" (36), either an outright lie or self-deceptive wishful thinking on his part. Just as Mick reaches the climactic line of his diatribe geared to put the old tramp off balance—"Who do you bank with?" (36), Aston enters with a "bag" ostensibly for Davies, and the brothers debate how to fix the leaking roof and Davies interrupts to inject the more practical question: "What do you do . . . when that bucket's full?" (37) and Aston simply says, "Empty it" (37). The three battle over the "bag" that Aston has brought Davies, one of the most comic and often-cited Beckettian routines in the play (38–39). After Mick leaves, and Davies recognises him to be "a real joker, that lad" (40), they discuss Mick's work in "the building trade" and Davies ultimately discloses that the bag they have fought over and that he was so determined to hold on to "ain't my bag" at all (41). Aston offers Davies the job of Caretaker, (42–43), leading to Davies' various assorted animadversions about the dangers that he faces for "going under an assumed name" and possibly being found out by anyone who might "ring the bell called Caretaker" (44). [Scene 2]

THE LIGHTS FADE TO BLACKOUT.

THEN UP TO DIM LIGHT THROUGH THE WINDOW.

A door bangs.

Sound of a key in the door of the room.

DAVIES enters, closes the door, and tries the light switch, on, off, on, off.

It appears to Davies that "the damn light's gone now," but, it becomes clear that Mick has sneaked back into the room in the dark and removed the bulb; he starts up "the electrolux" and scares Davies almost witless before claiming "I was just doing some spring cleaning" and returning the bulb to its socket (45). After a discussion with Davies about the place being his "responsibility" and his ambitions to fix it up, Mick also offers Davies the job of "caretaker" (46–50), but pushes his luck with Mick when he observes negative things about Aston, like the idea that he "doesn't like work" or is "a bit of a funny bloke" for "Not liking work" (Davies' camouflage of what he really is referring to), leading Mick to observe that Davies is "getting hypocritical" and "too glib" (50), and they turn to the absurd details of "a small financial agreement" relating to Davies' possibly doing "a bit of caretaking" or "looking after the place" for Mick (51), and then back to the inevitable call for "references" and the perpetually-necessary trip to Sidcup to get Davies' identity "papers" (51–52).

[Scene 3]

Morning

Davies wakes up and complains to Aston about how badly he slept. He blames various aspects of the apartment's set up. Aston suggests adjustments but Davies proves to be callous and inflexible. Aston tells the story of how he was checked into a mental hospital and given electric shock therapy, but when he tried to escape from the hospital he was shocked while standing, leaving him with permanent brain damage; he ends by saying, "I've often thought of going back and trying to find the man who did that to me. But I want to do something first. I want to build that shed out in the garden" (54–57). Critics regard Aston's monologue, the longest of the play, as the "climax" of the plot.[5] In dramaturgical terms, what follows is part of the plot's "falling action".

Act III

[Scene 1]

Two weeks later [...]Afternoon.

Davies and Mick discuss the apartment. Mick relates "(ruminatively)" in great detail what he would do to redecorate it (60). When asked who "would live there," Mick's response "My brother and me" leads Davies to complain about Aston's inability to be social and just about every other aspect of Aston's behaviour (61–63). Though initially invited to be a "caretaker," first by Aston and then by Mick, he begins to ingratiate himself with Mick, who acts as if he were an unwitting accomplice in Davies' eventual conspiracy to take over and fix up the apartment without Aston's involvement (64) an outright betrayal of the brother who actually took him in and attempted to find his "belongings"; but just then Aston enters and gives Davies yet another pair of shoes which he grudgingly accepts, speaking of "going down to Sidcup" in order "to get" his "papers" again (65–66).

[Scene 2]

That night

Davies brings up his plan when talking to Aston, whom he insults by throwing back in his face the details of his treatment in the mental institution (66–67), leading Aston, in a vast understatement, to respond: "I . . . I think it's about time you found somewhere else. I don't think we're hitting it off" (68). When finally threatened by Davies pointing a knife at him, Aston tells Davies to leave: "Get your stuff" (69). Davies, outraged, claims that Mick will take his side and kick Aston out instead and leaves in a fury, concluding (mistakenly): "Now I know who I can trust" (69).

[Scene 3]

Later

Davies reenters with Mick explaining the fight that occurred earlier and complaining still more bitterly about Mick's brother, Aston (70–71). Eventually, Mick takes Aston's side, beginning with the observation "You get a bit out of your depth sometimes, don't you?" (71). Mick forces Davies to disclose that his "real name" is Davies and his "assumed name" is "Jenkins" and, after Davies calls Aston "nutty", Mick appears to take offense at what he terms Davies' "impertinent thing to say," concludes, "I'm compelled to pay you off for your caretaking work. Here's half a dollar," and stresses his need to turn back to his own "business" affairs (74). When Aston comes back into the apartment, the brothers face each other, "They look at each other. Both are smiling, faintly" (75). Using the excuse of having returned for his "pipe" (given to him earlier through the generosity of Aston), Davies turns to beg Aston to let him stay (75–77). But Aston rebuffs each of Davies' rationalisations of his past complaints (75–76). The play ends with a "Long silence" as Aston, who "remains still, his back to him [Davies], at the window, apparently unrelenting as he gazes at his garden and makes no response at all to Davies' futile plea, which is sprinkled with many dots (". . .") of elliptical hesitations (77–78).

Analysis of the characters

Aston

When he was younger he was given electric shock therapy that leaves him permanently brain damaged. His efforts to appease the ever-complaining Davies may be seen as an attempt to reach out to others. He desperately seeks a connection in the wrong place and with the wrong people. His main obstacle is his inability to communicate. He is misunderstood by his closest relative, his brother, and thus is completely isolated in his existence. His good-natured attitude makes him vulnerable to exploitation. His dialogue is sparse and often a direct response to something Mick or Davies has said. Aston has dreams of building a shed. The shed to him may represent all the things his life lacks: accomplishment and structure. The shed represents hope for the future.

Davies

Davies manufactures the story of his life, lying or sidestepping some details to avoid telling the whole truth about himself. He adjusts aspects of the story of his life according to the people he is trying to impress, influence, or manipulate. As Billington points out, "When Mick suggests that Davies might have been in the services — and even the colonies, Davies retorts: 'I was over there. I was one of the first over there.' He defines himself according to momentary imperatives and other people's suggestions" (122).

Mick

At times violent and ill-tempered, Mick is ambitious. He talks above Davies' ability to comprehend him. His increasing dissatisfaction with Davies leads to a rapprochement with his brother, Aston; though he appears to have distanced himself from Aston prior to the opening of the play, by the end, they exchange a few words and a faint smile. Early in the play, when he first encounters him, Mick attacks Davies, taking him for an intruder in his brother Aston's abode: an attic room of a run-down house which Mick looks after and in which he enables his brother to live. At first, he is aggressive toward Davies. Later, it may be that by suggesting that Davies could be "caretaker" of both his house and his brother, Mick is attempting to shift responsibility from himself onto Davies, who hardly seems a viable candidate for such tasks. The disparities between the loftiness of Mick's "dreams" and needs for immediate results and the mundane realities of Davies's neediness and shifty non-committal nature creates much of the absurdity of the play.[citation needed]

Style

Further information: Characteristics of Harold Pinter's work

The language and plot of *The Caretaker* blends Realism with the Theatre of the Absurd. In the Theatre of the Absurd language is devalued.

The play has often been compared to *Waiting for Godot*, by Samuel Beckett, and other absurdist plays because of its apparent lack of plot and action.

The fluidity of the characters is explained by Ronald Knowles as follows: "Language, character, and being are here aspects of each other made manifest in speech and silence. Character is no longer the clearly perceived entity underlying clarity of articulation the objectification of a social and moral entelechy but something amorphous and contingent (41). Language

See also: Characteristics of Harold Pinter's work#"Two silences" and Characteristics of Harold Pinter's work#The "Pinter pause"

One of the keys to understanding Pinter's language is not to rely on the words a character says but to look for the meaning behind the text. The *Caretaker* is filled with long rants and non-sequiturs, the language is either choppy dialogue full of interruptions or long speeches that are a vocalized train of thought. Although, the text is presented in a casual way there is always a message behind its simplicity. Pinter is often concerned with "communication itself, or rather the deliberate evasion of communication" (Knowles 43).

The play's staccato language and rhythms are musically balanced through strategically placed pauses. Pinter toys with silence, where it is used in the play and what emphasis it places on the words when they are at last spoken.

Mode of drama: Tragicomedy

The *Caretaker* is a drama of mixed modes; both tragic and comic, it is a tragicomedy.[4][5] Elements of comedy appear in the monologues of Davies and Mick, and the characters' interactions at times even approach farce.[5] For instance, the first scene of Act Two, which critics have compared to the hat and shoe sequences in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*,[citation needed] is particularly farcical:

ASTON offers the bag to DAVIES.

MICK grabs it.

ASTON takes it.

MICK grabs it.

DAVIES reaches for it.

ASTON takes it.

MICK reaches for it.

ASTON gives it to DAVIES.

MICK grabs it. Pause. (39)

Davies' confusion, repetitions, and attempts to deceive both brothers and to play each one off against the other are also farcical. Davies has pretended to be someone else and using an assumed name, "Bernard Jenkins". But, in response to separate inquiries by Aston and Mick, it appears that Davies' real name is not really "Bernard Jenkins" but that it is "Mac Davies" (as Pinter designates him "Davies" throughout) and that he is actually Welsh and not English, a fact that he is attempting to conceal throughout the play and that motivates him to "get down to Sidcup", the past location of a British Army Records Office, to get his identity "papers" (13–16).

The elements of tragedy occur in Aston's climactic monologue about his shock treatments in "that place" and at the end of the play, though the ending is still somewhat ambiguous: at the very end, it appears that the brothers are turning Davies, an old homeless man, out of what may be his last chance for shelter, mainly because of his (and their) inability to adjust socially to one another, or their respective "anti-social" qualities. [citation needed]

Interpretation

In his 1960 book review of *The Caretaker*, fellow English playwright John Arden writes: "Taken purely at its face value this play is a study of the unexpected strength of family ties against an intruder."^[7] As Arden states, family relationships are one of the main thematic concerns of the play.

Another prevalent theme is the characters' inability to communicate productively with one another.^[citation needed] The play depends more on dialogue than on action; however, though there are fleeting moments in which each of them does seem to reach some understanding with the other, more often, they avoid communicating with one another as a result of their own psychological insecurities and self-concerns.^[citation needed]

The theme of isolation appears to result from the characters' inability to communicate with one another, and the characters' own insularity seems to exacerbate their difficulty communicating with others.^[citation needed]

As the characters also engage in deceiving one another and themselves, deception and self-deception are motifs, and certain deceptive phrases and self-deceptive strategies recur as refrains throughout the dialogue. Davies uses an assumed name and has convinced himself that he is really going to resolve his problems relating to his lack of identity papers, even though he appears too lazy to take any such responsibility for his own actions and blames his inaction on everyone but himself. Aston believes that his dream of building a shed will eventually reach fruition, despite his mental disability. Mick believes that his ambitions for a successful career outweigh his responsibility to care for his mentally-damaged brother. In the end however all three men are deceiving themselves. Their lives may continue on beyond the end of the play just as they are at the beginning and throughout it. The deceit and isolation in the play lead to a world where time, place, identity, and language are ambiguous and fluid.^[citation needed]

Another prevalent theme, linking the play to Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, is that of paralysis. The three characters in the play have dreams and wishes, but seem to be incapable of realising them: Aston wants to build a shed, but goes out every day for walks, and takes no action to start the undertaking; Mick wants to redecorate the house and maybe even live there himself, but fails to take action to make it happen; and Davies wants to go to Sidcup and reaffirm his identity to get a job, but is "waiting for the weather to break