

## Symbolism in Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker*, and Taha Salem's *Madina That Al-Jather Al-Takibi* A Comparative Study

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### Abstract

The twentieth century represents a new shift in the understanding of the circumstances which effect the state of man. New moralities, new values and new estimations were created. Two World Wars brought not only hardships and damages, but also an enlargement in the scope and perception of artists.

It is worth nothing that symbolism forms an indispensable part in the theatre of the Absurd.

Harold Pinter was an English playwright, screenwriter, actor, director, political, activist, and poet. He was among the most influential British playwrights of modern times, and in 2005 he was awarded the Noble Prize for literature. Pinter's plays must be read many times in order to realize the extent of the symbolism that he uses. In *The Caretaker* 1959; it is a three act play, he uses the symbols to reflect that the modern world is in a state of absurdity and mess, and man as a part of his world becomes a real reflection of this absurdity and mess in all its kinds. Modern man loses his belief and certainty in such things as love, charity, and understanding as Pinter argues that every man encounters violence in some way or other. All this is clearly represented by the three characters in *The Caretaker* especially Davies.

Taha Salem is another Iraqi playwright who was utilized or assimilated different event grade techniques to convey certain social aims. *Madina Taht Al-Jather Al-Takibi*. (A City Under A Cubic Root) is a play with some awareness of the Absurd drama. This awareness is mainly materialized in the overuse of symbolism which is one of the basic aspects of the theatre of the Absurd.

**Keywords:** Symbolism, Harold Pinter, Taha Salem.

### الخلاصة

يمثل القرن العشرين نقلة جديدة في فهم الظروف التي تؤثر على حالة الانسان فلقد انشأت اخلاقيات وقيم وتقديرات جديدة. فضلا على ان الحربين العالميتين لم تجلبا المعاناة والمصاعب والاضرار فقد، بل عملنا على توسيع نطاق وتصور الفنانين. كما ان الرمزية تشكل جزءاً لا غنى عنه في مسرح العبث.

كان هارولد بنتر كاتباً مسرحياً انجليزياً وكاتب سيناريو وممثل ومخرج وسياسي وناشط وشاعر. وكان من بين الكتاب المسرحيين البريطانيين الاكثر نفوذا في العصور الحديثة، وقد حصل على جائزة نوبل للآداب عام ٢٠٠٥. ان مسرحيات بنتر يجب ان تقرأ عدة مرات لإدراك قدر الرمزية التي يستخدمها.

في " الناظر " وهي مسرحية من ثلاثة فصول، يستخدم بنتر الرموز ليعكس أن العالم الحديث هو في حالة من العبث والفوضى، وان الانسان بوصفه جزءاً من عالمه يصبح انعكاساً حقيقياً لهذا العبث والفوضى في جميع اشكالها. كما ان الانسان المعاصر يفقد ايمانه ويقينه في بعض الامور كالحب والاحسان لذا يقول بنتر بأن كل رجل يواجه العنف بطريقة أو بأخرى. كل هذا يمثل بصورة واضحة في شخصيات مسرحية الناظر الثلاث وخصوصاً دايفيز.

طه سالم هو كاتب مسرحي عراقي آخر والذي استخدم واستوعب تقنيات حدث متنوعة للتعبير عن اهداف اجتماعية معينة. "مدينة تحت الجذر التكعيبي" هي مسرحية ذات بعض الوعي للدراما العبثية. ويتحقق هذا

الوعي بصورة رئيسية من خلال الاستخدام المفرط للرمزية والتي تعتبر واحدة من أهم مظاهر المسرح العبثي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الرمزية ، هارولد بنتر ، طه سالم.

## Introduction

Symbol is something that represents, states for, or suggests an idea, belief, action, or entity.<sup>1</sup> Symbolism is the practice or art of using an object or a word to represent an abstract idea. An action, person, place, word or object can all have a symbolic meaning. When an author wants to suggest a certain mood or emotion, he can also use symbolism to hint at it, rather than just blatantly saying it.<sup>2</sup>

Symbolism is often used by writers to enhance their writing. Symbolism can give a literary work more richness and can make the meaning of the work deeper.

Pinter who was a great admirer of Beckett creates his unique image of the condition of modern man who is shrouded with a terrible sense of sterility. Pinter, successfully, portrays life in the Twentieth Century with all its ambiguity, panic, and violence that shaped life after World War II. In an interview with Lawrence M. Bensky, Pinter says that "Everyone encounters violence in some way or other"<sup>3</sup>

Thus, Pinter in his plays presents a real embodiment of all the threatened humanity in modern age. And that is true in Pinter's all male plays namely, *The Caretaker*, *The Dumb Waiter*, *The Dwarfs* and *No Man's Land*. And this is an important factor to understand Pinter's theatre as Ruby Cohn indicates:

**Most crucial to an understanding of Pinter's theatre is the symbolism of his character. For all their initially realistic appearance, their cumulative impact embraces the whole of humanity.**<sup>4</sup>

*The Caretaker (1960)* is Pinter's second full length stage play, which brought him his first great public success. It was first performed at the Arts Theatre Club, on April 27, 1960. It is a play in three acts with three symbolic male characters. In other words the three characters: Mick, Aston and Davies " come to portray the human condition."<sup>5</sup> They are symbols or reflections of common problems in modern age. In other words problems or ideas such as the loss of security in such void, the immortal struggle for survival and identity assertion, the shadow of unfulfilled illusions, the aimlessness of life and the difficulty of communication are all presented by the three characters in the play.

Mick and Aston are two brothers, the younger is in his late twenties and the elder in early thirties. The struggle begins when Aston "has brought a visitor for the night"<sup>6</sup> to the room which he shares with his brother. Here as Austin E. Quigley puts it:

**A third person entering a binary relationship sets up a situation that demands not only new relationships with the new comer but also an adjustment of the relationship that holds between the original pairs.**<sup>7</sup>

So, Davies, the old tramp, represents the "outsider who threatens to disturb"<sup>8</sup> the habitual existence in the brothers' room. Thus the play begins when the two, Aston and Davies, enter the room, the subject of the fight. Davies who stands for "an everyman figure, looking for food and shelter at the last cost to himself,"<sup>9</sup> a homeless old man who, accidentally, finds himself in the world of two brothers which is "strangely different".<sup>10</sup> Aston is the one who saves Davies from being beaten up in a brawl in café, and offers him a "living-space in the quarters."<sup>11</sup> But Mick who is the violent one objects to Davies' presence when he first meets him. Hence, we have a sort of an ambiguous conflict involving the three characters in the play. Katherine H. Burkman says:

**The central conflict in the play actually occurs between the brothers, between whom Davies moves a catalyst; inadvertently collecting their dreams.<sup>12</sup>**

Thus Davies works as a motivation for their feelings, dreams, and of course, fears. So each one of the three represents a symbol of an unfulfilled dream, an illusion to keep the continuity of his life. Pinter's characters, John Lahar says, "simply want to survive from moment to moment."<sup>13</sup> Nothing is worth in such a loss in which man is deprived of all meanings of moral goodness and beauty. In other words, he loses his belief and certainty in such things like love, charity and understanding and hence the interest in gender with the vast spread of violence in which Pinter argues, "everyone encounter violence in some way or other".<sup>14</sup> That is to say dreams and illusions cannot save the three from the harsh loneliness and lack of understanding. In other words the three are overwhelmed by everlasting sense of isolation they are emotionally shut away in their fantasies. As Lois G. Gordon puts it:

**Pinter's three men are lonely. They fear the slightest intrusion into their precariously established room, and, in a sense, each is always a potential menace to the other.<sup>15</sup>**

They never feel safe even inside the room. Here they could be clear representatives of threatened humanity. They stand for man's condition in such a restless and alarming world, as leading a continuous search for security and peace. So even "the room, which should be his one fixed point, eludes"<sup>16</sup> man. Thus, each one shrouds himself in a destructive number of dreams and illusions that separate him, for a while, from the harsh reality. Thus each one builds his private world in his illusion in which there is no place for any one else who could disturb the false sense of mortal security. Actually, man loses the ability to understand or to communicate even with himself. That is the panicky condition of modern man in which there is no place for such things like understanding or even sharing and this could be one reason behind the physical absence of female figures in these plays. As Davies remarks:

**... I don't know what he was ... he wasn't looking at me, he wasn't talking to me, he don't care about me. He was talking to himself! That's all he worries about ...**

**I mean we don't have any conversation, you see? You cannot live in the same room with someone who ... don't have any conversation with you.**

*The Caretaker (Act III, pp. 59-60)*

Davies clearly becomes a real reflection of the decay of morality in such a mess. First, he enters the room as an old tramp who needs Aston's help. But, with the first chance of betrayal he is ready to "betray Aston"<sup>17</sup> for no clear reason except the lack of moral goodness.

**Mick: ... You're my brother's friend aren't you?**

**Davies: Well, I ... I wouldn't put it as far as that.**

**Mick: Don't you find him friendly, then?**

**Davies: Well, I wouldn't say we was all that friends. I mean he done me no harm, but I wouldn't say he was any particular friend of mine.**

*The Caretaker (Act II, p. 47)*

Here, Davies stands for the moral sterility in the modern age in which he is emptied of all kinds of morality and faithfulness. That is to say he is a real production of such a mess and harshness. Davies is homeless, rootless and jobless. He seeks refuge even if a temporary one. In other words Davies "begins to bite the hand that feeds him."<sup>18</sup>

So, here, Davies is a symbol of the idea of villainy in its abstract sense. He is the archetypal figure of villainy. Thus, in their contact they embody the relationship of a victim (Aston) and his victimizer (Davies). In other words the characters, here,

become mere symbols of moral decay in modern age. Thus, Davies "has lost not only his place in the world ... but also his identity"<sup>19</sup> and humanity. Actually, he is covered with ambiguity and he is a real reflection of his surroundings in which he proves to be a mere symbol beyond the concept of gender. One can say that the overwhelming sense of violence and cruelty as well as the hardships of his life reduce him into such a brutal person who is evacuated of any kind of human sense including gender.

The two brothers, Aston and Mick, ask Davies to be their caretaker. The two need someone to take care of them especially with the absence of female figures and authority. First Aston asks him, "You could be ... caretaker here, if you liked" (Act II, p.43) Then Mick does the same.

**Mick: ... You're just the man I been looking for.**

**Davies: What for?**

**Mick: Caretaker.**

*The Caretaker (Act II, P.51)*

Here the two brothers express their need for someone who takes care of them instead of the mother figure who is absent. In the other words the caretaker here suggests a sort of substitute for the mother figure regardless of the very idea of sex which is absent. Quite unexpectedly, the idea of sympathy and care usually associated with females is turned upside down. Moreover, the mother figure is another symbol of villainy. In other words Aston is betrayed twice. First, he was betrayed by his mother in the past when she refused to help him. Actually, she is the source of all his suffering now and in the past when she gave the permission to the doctors to subject Aston to a shock treatment. Of course, this affected his behavior and his brain. He can no longer think clearly or talk to people as he used to. All this resulted in his withdrawal from people into a world of his own. Thus, Aston used to live without any source of love even such natural love as the maternal love.

**Aston: I wrote to her and told her what they were trying to do. But she signed their form, ..., giving them permission.**

*The Caretaker (Act II PP.55-56)*

Thus, the mother does not give any help to her son as if she is stripped of all her natural kindness and emotions that both her gender and her social function as a mother impose on her. Actually, this suggests the sterility of love and life itself.

Davies, the supposed substitute mother figure, prove to be the other image of disloyalty as a caretaker or mother-like figure. He betrays Aston as his mother has done. Davies turns against the person who helped him, and offered him a place in his world. He threatens Aston to "put the picers" (Act II, p.67) on his head again. That is to say to repeat the same betrayal of the mother in the past. Thus, the same panic is repeated again by the person of Davies, the caretaker. Moreover, he sneers at Aston and his dream of building a shed. And he tells him that he becomes close to his brother Mick, that is to say he needs him no more. However, the mother figure and Davies are both reflections of villainy and cruelty in which the concept of gender is absent. That is to say no matter what gender is, cruelty and villainy are equally expected.

Being interested in nothing but his own good, Davies is a real reflection of the moral sterility in modern age in which love, kindness and moral values have been forsaken. And of course, man becomes emotionally sterile as his age sterile. And man lives in state of moral decay. That is clear in the reference to the decay of such moral values like marriage. When Mick declares that Davies reminds him of his "uncle brother" (p.31) and he adds "that this man, Davies' "spritting image" one day "married a chairman"<sup>20</sup> It is a clear reference to homosexuality in which there is a real

destruction of the concept of gender and all implied values. That is to say Davies' sexual identity is destroyed by Mick.

Moreover, the three characters, here, can be regarded as a real reflection of the unfulfilled dream. Simply, they are no more than containers or vessels for "all dreams of security, all the more open to the imagination because unfinished"<sup>21</sup> And with them one can see the image of man who "does not know where he is in society, time or space."<sup>22</sup> That is to say they represent something wider than the concept of gender, some universal concept. They stand for the unfulfilled dreams, like security and identity assertion as well as the need for emotional communication which is excluded in such a world.

Thus, Davies' dream to go to Sidcup to get his papers which expresses his:

**Wants to fix himself in the world of shifting and ambiguous identities in which people are judged by property such as Mick's apartment and Aston's shed, and of course he does not succeed.**<sup>23</sup>

Davies' dream remains unfulfilled. And the two brothers reject him. Thus, he faces the terrible reality of existence that is to say he discovers that no "identity awaits him there or anywhere else"<sup>24</sup> He fails in asserting his identity as well as his existence. This is the same with Aston and Mick. Each one of them has his unfulfilled dream. Aston, the "slow worker", (p.49) as Mick calls always wants to build a shed in the house, this is his unfulfilled dream. He keeps collecting "good wood" for this purpose but it is still unfinished dream. Mick also has his own dream. He wants to turn the house into a luxurious flat which may seem as another attempt to establish some identity. Lois G. Gordon says that Mick "thrives on unrealistic schemes of building new things."<sup>25</sup> That is to say, Mick's dream is also still unfinished. Actually, the three have their unfulfilled dreams through which they are trying break away from the exhausted world of frustration. But, all their dreams are doomed to be unfinished dreams in such a harsh reality.

Simply, they all try to assert their existence in this world. In some respect one can say that:

**the three characters in The Caretaker are all dispossessed, all in search of their identity papers in a materialistic world that each seeks to shape to his dream and in which each feels lost.**<sup>26</sup>

They all need care. They all feel lost in such a mess. Actually, the three characters are involved in a game, a children's game in which they act as children for whom reason, meaning, as well as gender are absent. Simply, they are all beyond any sense of gender. This is clear in the scene when they begin a fight over Davies' bag. In this scene:

**The men can relate to one another only in a structured situation like a children's game, with its unspoken rules.**<sup>27</sup>

That is to say the three men can be careless children who do not care for anything except their enjoyment. They become free and irresponsible men like children for whom gender does not make much difference. Simply, the characters become a neutral symbol of an absurd life, moral decay and sterility. Thus, woman as man, has lost her natural identity as a mother or beloved or even as a source of love, care and fertility. And each one doesn't represent his sex but man who is deprived of his humanity.

In this play, again there is the image of the room, but outside menace, simply a clash of personalities on the inside, and again there is one of the inhabitants displaced by another. Pinter used the motif of the room as a way of projecting in dramatic manner the theme of inaction and withdrawal.<sup>28</sup> Each one of the three characters

represents a symbol of an unfulfilled dream, an illusion to keep the continuity of his life. Man finds in dreams and illusions a good refuge from the harsh reality of his life. But, sometimes dreams and illusions prove to be useless, and thus lead to man's destruction. This is clear in the case of Davies. His dream of attaining power leads him to neglect many values which are essential constituents of human self. He denies his friendship with Aston in an attempt to satisfy Mick. He even tells Mick that Aston is mentally unbalanced. Actually, "dreams can and will be destroyed by reality."<sup>29</sup> The three characters are overwhelmed by an everlasting sense of isolation. They are emotionally shut away in their fantasies. As Gordon puts it, "Pinter's three men are lonely. They fear the slightest intrusion into their precariously established room, and, in a sense, each is always a potential menace to the other."<sup>30</sup> Aston is visionary whose hallucinations led to his downfall later in the play. His dream is not even centered primarily on fixing up the house he has charge of; he dreams rather of building a new shed in the garden. At the end of the second act, the spectators discover that Aston's dreams have been shattered before. Like Aston, Mick is a dreamer, but his dreams for the house differ from his brother's dreams. He is a man on the move, an owner of a van, a member of the building trade. While Aston dreams of his simple, clean shed, Mick dreams of a penthouse palace.<sup>31</sup> "I could turn this place into a penthouse ... be a palace." (Act III p.60) Pinter in this play, portrayed human beings as animals driven by their instincts, struggling for survival in a threatening jungle of humanity.

Towards the end of the play, Mick destroys the figure of the Buddha against the gas stove, which has implicitly become associated with Davies. Aston does not defend his protégé, but excludes him by directing a faint smile at his brother confirming their unity "They look at each other. Both are smiling faintly" (Act III, p.75). In spite of Davies's attempts to provoke disloyalty from one another of his brothers, their relationship remains intact and it is he who is ejected.<sup>32</sup> Buddha is a symbol of calm and serenity. When it is broken, the organization and order is also broken. The breaking of it is a symbol of man's everlasting struggle with the universe where human beings wish to order and structure everything, while the universe is constantly moving towards emptiness and chaos. The idea is reflected in the play's costume, the household was reasonably calm and ordered, the Buddha is broken and Davies is asked to leave, a disturbance to the harmony.

The central irony of the play lies in the character of Davies. Unable to accept refuge from the generous and sympathetic Aston, Davies instead plays the role of usurper, tries to dominate the situation, trusts the wrong brother, and ends up exactly where he began, out in the cold. Thus, *The Caretaker* is a portrayal of man's self-destructive nature.<sup>33</sup>

A number of different influences have found their way into Iraqi theatre. Among these has been the influences of the Absurd whose traces emerged in the Iraqi theatre in the 1960s. The emergence of the Absurd incited a sense of opposition to the actual nature of the Iraqi theatre which realistic and social.

Taha Salem is another playwright who has utilized or assimilated different avant-grade techniques to convey certain social aims. *Madina Taht Al-Jather Al-Takibi* (A City Under A Cobic Root) is a play with some awareness of the Absurd drama. Such awareness is brought about by the playwright's acquaintance with the translated Absurd drama. And this awareness is mainly materializes in the over-use of symbolism which is one of the basic aspects of the theatre of Absurd.

It is worthnothing that symbolism forms an indispensable part in the theatre of the Absurd. It establishes a basis for justifying the bizzare technique and the uncommon characterization. Symbolism almost exists in the theatre of the Absurd to

blur the sense of realism. It helps the play to trespass the realistic restrictions. It becomes obvious, then, that the Absurd play involves a group of images and metaphors which originally form the unity of the play. The meaning of these images and metaphors, however, is not evolve. So, "working with allegorico-expressionistic devices", William I. Oliver says,

**The absurdists demand of their audiences a skill of symbolic thought that they do not possess. In fact, if there is one major deficiency in our ability to perceive drama on the stage (as opposed to drama on the printed page) it is a lack of skill in interpreting symbolic action.**<sup>34</sup>

The symbolic nature of the Absurd play will create diversity in interpretations ... interpretations which aim at finding out the possible meanings in the symbol exposed in the play. The diversity due to the over-use of symbolism may also invoke a sense of obscurity over the theme of the play. The Absurd play turns, instead of telling a specific story, to expose a 'poetic pattern'. On this basis, John Gassner describes *Waiting for Godot* as a "prolonged and sustained metaphor about the nature of human life"..<sup>35</sup>

*Madina Taht Al-Jather Al-Takibi*, which strongly appeals for symbolism, does not show an obvious division of acts or scenes. It seems, instead, a one long act which consists of seven episodes. Each of these episodes is separated from the other by the word 'darkness' which marks a black out indicating the beginning of the new episode. Before the rise of the curtain, there is a prologue of nonsensical argument held by three Narrators to decide who will introduce the play to the audience. The play in a sense a morality play where the characters stand as symbol to certain ideas and forces to be found in the Arab world. In addition to the three narrators, the play includes seven more characters who personify letters and are known by numbers according to their coming out of a leather bag where they used to be. Thus, they are the First Letter, the Second Letter, the Third...etc. Each letter assumes a specific quality which distinguishes him from his fellows: the First Letter behaves as a symbol of resistance, particularly the Palestinian resistance; the Second and the Third sympathize with him but they are hesitant characters; the Fourth is a hypocrite and a disciple of the fifth who with the Fourth and the Sixth stand for forces of collusion with the enemy; the Sixth is clad in a zealous religious character; and the Seventh appears as a pious old man who guards a burial ground which stands for Palestine. Besides, one of the three Narrators takes part in the action and plays the role of the chorus in the Greek drama:

**The Crows multiplied... became in troops, crept from everywhere... during different times... greedy... satisfied with human flesh of woman, old men and children ... human flesh which the cowards present as gifts. The crows took the graves for houses, the plains and mounds for fields, the destroyed fence for stronghold. Their aim is to attack the province.**<sup>36</sup>

*Madina Taht Al-Jather Al-Takibi* is written, according to a note attached at the end of the play, after the setback of June 1967. So the play bears the effect of this scathing period in the Arab history. The play has a political subject-matter although this political sense has been conveyed through symbolic devices and symbolic characterization. The play deals with the futile discussion among seven letters who represent different Arab political thoughts. The Seventh Letter (the guard) tries to put the six other letters on the alert against impending attack of brutal crows which have occupied their burial ground. The Seventh Letter warns them to repair the destroyed fence of this burial ground where their tradition and ancestors lie. Mocking the warning of the Seventh Letter, the others, except the First, keep themselves busy with

amusing preoccupations to take off their minds from the actual and creeping danger of the crows. None of characters tries to stop this danger when it comes close to them. They all run away except the Fist who fights the crows and succeeds in setting the 'Palestinian flag' on the top of a hill.<sup>37</sup>

On the stage which resembles that of Beckett in its bareness and emptiness, a leather bag is set. Letters begin to get out of it gradually; each introduces himself and shows his relation to the one that follows. The seven-letters speak in a rhyming language. After they all appear they decide to start the play which the three Narrators fail to do so:

**Narrator Letter: All right, let's start friends.**

**Second Letter: Speech...**

**Third Letter: We shall present...**

**Fourth Letter: Dances... Mimes...**

**Fifth Letter: We shall act...**

**Sixth Letter: A play?**

**Seventh Letter: Perhaps.**

**First Letter: Perhaps, we shall recite an essay... expose logical theories...**

(p. 3)

Up to this point the play does not actually begin in spite of characters' make-believe to have started it. A continuation of the dialogue held between the letter-characters reveals another trace which is more or less Absurd in essence: it is the darkness, the complexity and the obscurity of life. The Second Letter states that they shall not present 'logical theories' as the First Letter says; they instead shall reveal: "successive pictures of the darkness and obscurity in life", (p. 3) this maxim is the pessimistic perspective upon which the Absurdists base their own beliefs. Life, to them; is devoid of happiness. But such a maxim is not maintained in the over-all pattern of Salem's play which shows at the end of the hope of the inevitable victory of the resistance represented by the First Letter. It contradicts the hopeful tone of the social aim the play is behind.<sup>38</sup>

The play, once more leaps into another maxim which is Absurd too:

**First Letter: We aim.**

**Fourth Letter: At liberating the actor from the convention...**

**The Third: Which we consider the foil to the creative mind and original imagination.**

**The Fifth: On this basis we believe that the realistic theatre is no more than an art which enslaves the one who works in it, then it forces him to imitate life; an imitation which is quite similar to the work of the photographer.**

However, apart from these Absurd traces which somehow found their way to Salem's work, the play is wholly dedicated to deal with Arab cause after the Setback. It symbolically treats and sheds some light on some Arab regimes which are considered responsible for the Setback. The play begins in a story-telling tone:

Narrator: Once upon a time

In the ancient and present time there was a unique creative creature ... a man

Creeps on the surface of a siding ember...

Since the time of flood... he has inhabited cities... burial grounds... throughout the time. (p.4)

This speech hints at the overwhelming sense of symbolism on which the play depends. However, this symbolism does not obscure the social message. There are

numerous references which through are intended to be symbolic, are overloaded with social significance. The Fourth Letter is busy with answering imaginary telephones:

Hello... yes ... buy (put down the receiver ... as if he hold another) Hello... yes, buy with any price (as if he puts it down and holds another) Hello... destroy all the houses ... yes, the mob's houses. I don't care what they do... let's establish, instead, modern tourist hotels... yes, immediately (as if he puts it down and holds another) yes... yes, our city will be an open city for tourists, so all the means of amusement and games should be available... the means which support the upper classes... sensible opinion... (as if he puts it down and holds another).

(pp.8-9)

The play, as indicated, seems to waver between the claims of novelty which it hardly absorbs and the common subject-matter it obviously treats. It attempts to balance these two sides, hoping more or less to make the symbolic form serve the social aim. As a result, it essentially does not go far away from the main current of the conventional drama in the Iraqi theatre. In this sense, the conflict of the play maintains the two usual sides: 'good' and 'bad' which are sharply separated from each other; 'good' is represented by all these characters who have the desire to build the burial ground, and 'bad' is represented by those who are in collusion with the enemy to destroy it. This two sides conflict rapidly moves towards a climax which simultaneously marks the ending of the play. The author creates the rising action by few words of symbolic nature. The tension is built up by the First who reveals that the tree of the burial ground has lost its leaves and fruits, which foreshadows the danger of the crows' attack.

**The First: (Terrified) The tree...**

**The Second: What's wrong with it?**

**The First: Look... without fruits...**

**The Second: Yes, something strange... without fruits.**

**The First: Without the ancestors...**

**The Third: Alas ... brothers, our holy tree is without fruits.**

**The First: Without ancestors. (p.14)**

The Narrator who appears at the end commenting on the incident of the play refers in a refrain to the bravery of the First-Letter who has raised the flag on the top of the hill:

Narrator: (point out to the flag) this is the beginning. The brave man is that who plunges a flag on the top. The brave man is that who plunges a flag on the top. (p.25)

The author as it seems, is aware of contradictions between his technique and subject-matter. He tries to put the two sides in line with each other. He, therefore, does not rely on complicating his symbols which remain pointers to illustrate the general pattern of the subject-matter. The play, therefore, does not divert much from the main current of the Iraqi drama. It is the form; the technique, the presentation that have changed, whereas the core of the play shows quite clearly the unavoidable influence of realism not only on Salem but on all others whom we discussed.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Wik/Symbol/https://www.en.wikipedia.org/

<sup>2</sup> Symbolism/Your Dictionary/www.Dictionary.com

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Baker and Tabachnich, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Ruby Cohn, "The World of Harold Pinter" in *Pinter: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Arthur Ganz, p. 80.

- <sup>5</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup> Harold Pinter, *The Caretaker* as cited in Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoods, 1961), p. 216. All the references to this play are from this edition, and will be parenthetically cited within the text.
- <sup>7</sup> Austin E. Quigley, *The Pinter Problem* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1975) p. 114.
- <sup>8</sup> Malcolm Bardbury and Christopher Bigsby ed., *Harold Pinter* (London: Methuen Co. Ltd., 1983), p. 51.
- <sup>9</sup> Clifford Leech, "Two Romantics: Arnold Wesker and Harold Pinter", in *Contemporary Theatre* ed., H.A. Smith (London Edward Arnold Ltd., 1960), p. 28.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 28.
- <sup>11</sup> Walter Kerr, *Harold Pinter* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 25.
- <sup>12</sup> Katherine Burkman, *The Dramatic World of Harold Pinter: Its Basis in Ritual* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1971), p. 82.
- <sup>13</sup> John Lahr, "Pinter and Chekhov: The Bond of Naturalism" in *Pinter: A Collection of Critical Essays* ed., Arthur Ganz., p. 70.
- <sup>14</sup> Quoted in Baker and Tabachnich, p. 79.
- <sup>15</sup> Lois G. Gordon, Strategies to Uncover Madness: *The Dramas of Harold Pinter* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1969), p. 43.
- <sup>16</sup> Baker and Tabachnich, p. 79.
- <sup>17</sup> Gordon, p. 46.
- <sup>18</sup> Baker and Tabachnich, p. 76.
- <sup>19</sup> Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, p. 216.
- <sup>20</sup> Bernard F. Dukore, *Where Lauther Stops: Pinter's Tragicomedy* (Missouri: The University of Missouri Press, 1976) p. 28
- <sup>21</sup> Baker and Tabachnich, p. 80.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 79.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 79.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 79.
- <sup>25</sup> Gordon, p. 41.
- <sup>26</sup> Burkman, p.41
- <sup>27</sup> Baker and Tabachnich, p. 87.
- <sup>28</sup> John Russell Taylor, *The Angry Theatre: New British Drama* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1962), p.336
- <sup>29</sup> Kershaw, p. 77.
- <sup>30</sup> Gordon, p. 43.
- <sup>31</sup> Burkman, *The Dramatic World of Harold Pinter*, p. 79.
- <sup>32</sup> D. Keith Peacock, *Harold Pinter and the New British Theatre* (Westport, CT: Green Wood Press\_1997), p. 78.
- <sup>33</sup> Burkman, *The Dramatic World of Harold Pinter*, p. 77.
- <sup>34</sup> Travis Bogard and William Oliver, *Modern Drama* (Oxford: The University Press, 1965), p. 10.
- <sup>35</sup> John Gassner, *Directions in Modern Theatre and Drama* (New York: Holt and Rinehart Inc., 1956), p. 219.
- <sup>36</sup> Taha Salem's *Madina Taht Al-Jather Al-Takibi* as cited in Sa'ad Fadhil Abbass, *Traces of the Absurd Theatre in Recent Iraqi Plays: A thesis*, College of Arts, University of Baghdad, 1977, p. 193. All the references to this play are from this edition and will be parenthetically edited within this text.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p.p,196-197.

### Conclusion

The world came to a state of chaos and disintegration after the second World War. The influence of these wars was vast and their impact reached all the level of human life. Moreover, the two world wars helped to establish new attitudes and modes in life through which people tried to cope with the painful realities of their modern age. So, the dramatists of the twentieth-century epitomized the sufferings of the modern age, suffering which have a universal application, each in his unique way.

The chief aim of the theatre of Absurd is not to present all negatives and depress the audience but to bring them closer to reality whatever it may be. It is more realistic as it tries to present the real state of human life. Pinter has recourse to nonverbal symbolic; nonverbal passages in his early plays often reveal symbolic meanings in the midst of seemingly realistic actions. Symbols are everywhere in *The Caretaker*. The three characters are symbols or reflections of common problems in modern age such as the loss of security in such void, the immortal struggle for survival and identity assertion, the shadow of unfulfilled illusions, isolation, and aimlessness of life and the difficulty of the communication.

A number of influences have found their way into Iraqi theatre. Among these has been the influence of the Absurd whose traces emerged in the Iraqi theatre in the 1960s.

Basically, the plays which have assimilated Absurd drama correspond implicitly with the indispensable realistic nature of the Iraqi theatre. So artistic devices like incoherent language, the posing of more than one topic at the same time, ambiguity due to the over-use of symbolism are some of the adopted aspects which are introduced and adapted in order to replace the formal conventional establishments. This is noticed, for example, in Taha Salem's *Madina Taht Al-Jather Al-Takibi*. The play structurally introduces an uncommon form which marks a departure from the traditional current of drama in Iraq, while the subject matter overwhelmingly reveals that the play is a morality play, basically committed to talk about a specific social aim: the setback of June 1967. The disintegrity in question of immediacy the play, consciously or unconsciously, obtains. Such immediacy in presenting as well as treating the theme of the play drives the play to reduce the role of the Absurd devices it has absorbed. So, the 'flag' in Salem's play, which is proclaimed to be specifically the 'Palestinian flag' simply puzzles out the message of the play and makes it less symbolic and less obscure – an obscurity which is sometimes intended to maintain the value of the symbols used in the play.

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