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Revisiting Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker*: a Semiotic Study of the Dramatis Personae

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Abstract:

The present article sought to offer a semiotic analysis of Pinter's *The Caretaker*'s characters as signifiers in their own right. The article also aimed at studying the play's dramatis personae as loci of multi-coded expressions, with a focus on the various modes of signification associated with them. Using semiotics as an analytical method, the author explored the linguistic and paralinguistic features of the characters' discourses as signs in relation to the play's pivotal themes, their kinesic and body expressions as indexical signs, as well as their distinctive proxemic behavior(s) onstage. Some attention was also given to the characters' handling of stage props and the special meanings attached to them as replicators of character personality. The results of the discussion showed that using a semiotic approach to analyze *The Caretaker*'s characters can yield positive outcomes in terms of comprehensive analysis and interpretation of the characters as dynamic unities of interrelated sign-systems.

Keywords: Pinter, semiotics, dramatis personae, linguistic, kinesic, proxemic.

1. Introduction:

Ever since it premiered at the Arts Theatre in London in 1960, *The Caretaker* has been read and interpreted from a variety of critical perspectives, ranging from the biographical to the sociological, the psychological, the archetypal, the linguistic, the pragmatic, and the philosophical (namely existentialist philosophy). Regardless of the diversity of perspectives, many of Pinter's critics tend to agree that the play's characters are particularly complex, that the language they use is overwhelmingly ambiguous (replete with pauses and silences) and that the play's setting is remarkably austere (Turner, 2012). But complexity, ambiguity and austerity are fertile grounds for semiotic analysis, which is essentially concerned with the deciphering of the processes of meaning-production even in the most austere of situations. Being an "overarching approach", as Carlson (1989) described it, semiotics offers an inclusive methodological framework for the analysis of *The Caretaker*'s poly-functional and multifaceted signifiers. The foundational works of Peirce (1931-1958) and the contributions of Elam (1980), as well as Fischer-Lichte (1983) to theatre semiotics are quite informative for a systematic exploration of the capacious signifying potential of the characters' actions and the symbolic meanings attached to the few objects they own or grapple with. Peirce's concept of the indexical signs, Fischer-Lichte's typology of the theatrical signs associated with stage characters, and Elam's reflections on verbial modality, together constitute the theoretical framework of the semiotic analysis that shall unfold in the subsequent sections. But before expounding this theoretical framework, a word needs to be said on the critical reception of *The Caretaker* and the raison d'être for a semiotic study of the play's dramatis personae.

As stated above, *The Caretaker* has been studied from myriad perspectives by numerous critics and theatre commentators. The earliest reviews of *The Caretaker* revealed some kind of accord among critics and journalists on the play's instant success and its being the play that established Pinter's long-awaited reputation. Lambert (1960) wrote in *The Sunday Times* that the play was a 'wholly successful production'. Marowitz (1960) saw the play as substantiation of Beckett's dramatic art and described it as Pinter's 'masterpiece'; while Arden (1960) expressed his appreciation of Pinter's touch of realism and his admiration for the play's 'orchestration of observed life'.

Indeed, the decades following the 1960's up to the present time have known diverse studies of the play that went beyond thematic and symbolic interpretations (Newton, 1986). Among the studies that bear relation to this article's concern with linguistic and paralinguistic signs were those that approached the play from the perspective of literary pragmatics and discourse analysis. Examples of those studies included: 'Pinter's *The Caretaker*: A study in Conversational Analysis' by Gautam (1987) and *The Incommunicability of Language in Harold Pinter's The Caretaker* by Visti (2014) where the insights of discourse-analysis were exploited in both studies to explore the difficulty of communication and the alienating effects of language manipulation in Pinter's play. Similarly, Patki and Nawle (2015) used discourse analysis to explore Pinter's use of deixis in *The Caretaker* and to analyze 'the characters' conversational behavior' on the basis of their manipulation of deictic expressions as suggestive indexical signs. Recently, Vairavan (2018) has approached the play from a linguistic and psychoanalytical point of view by interpreting silences and pauses in the play as signs of 'psychosis or neurosis' that have profound socio-psychological implications.

Taken as a whole, the literature on *The Caretaker* shows that the play and its characters were approached from several perspectives but were not thoroughly or methodically studied from a semiotic point of view despite the increasing recognition among drama critics of the role semiotics can play in enriching the generic field of drama and film criticism. The main objective of this discussion is therefore to fill this gap and to present a study of *The Caretaker* that uses semiotics as theoretical method for the analysis of the characters' linguistic, paralinguistic, kinesic and proxemic actions as interactive sign-systems. The study will also attempt to prove the hypothesis that semiotics offers an integral and inclusive method for the analysis of the play's dramatis personae as signifiers. To this end, the author has isolated three questions that will be answered throughout the discussion: (1) what analytical tools does the semiotics of theatre offer for the inclusive analysis of characters? (2) To what extent can the analysis of the characters' actions as signs lead to a better understanding of *The Caretaker*'s dramatis personae? (3) What significance does the characters' relation to other stage signs have for a broad understanding of their personalities in association with the play's major themes? Answering these questions will not only consolidate the above-formulated hypothesis, but will also confirm the significance of this study as a modest contribution to the corpus of the critical works on *The Caretaker* and as an endeavor to increase the range of systematic applications of theatre semiotics to the analysis of the dramatis personae.

2. Methodological Framework:

The present article is fundamentally premised on the findings and insights of semioticians who wrote on the semiotics of theatre and drama. It uses semiotics both as a theoretical framework within which ideas are

structurally organized and as a method of analysis by means of which relevant ideas are expounded and illustrated. According to the *Cambridge Dictionary* (2018), Semiotics is defined as 'the study of signs and symbols, what they mean and how they are used'. It has its origins in the works of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand De Saussure (١٩٥٧) who coined the term *semiology* to refer to the study of language as a sign-system based on differential opposition (Innis, 1985), and the works of the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (١٩٥٨-١٩٣١) who coined the term *semiotics* to refer to the study of meaning-production, sign processes and communication (human and nonhuman). But despite their apparent similarity, the two terms are based on different concepts of the sign. While Saussure's concept of the sign is dyadic (relating the signifier to its signified), Peirce's concept is triadic (relating the sign to its object and its interpretant). 'A sign' explains Peirce 'stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity' (2.228). Besides, while Saussure's *semiology* is seen as particularly suitable for the study of language and how meaning is created through difference, Peirce's triadic semiotics is seen as a more interdisciplinary model that is suitable for the study of different systems of communication. It will therefore be used as a formative element in the theoretical framework used in this article. Actually, there have been disputatious polemics about whether semiotics is a discipline in its own right or an interdisciplinary field of inquiry, a theoretical method or a practical method of analysis, a theory or a meta-theoretical point of view reaching beyond the limits of sheer theorizing, and so on. The term 'semiotics' has various derivatives that show its interdisciplinary nature, including: cognitive semiotics, social semiotics, zoo-semiotics, generative semiotics, bio-semiotics, organizational semiotics, literary semiotics, semiotics of architecture, semiotics of music, *semiotics of theatre and drama*, etc.

Evidently, it is the last branch or category of semiotics that constitutes the core of the theoretical model we are proposing here. The following is an outline of the main analytical paradigms of this model.

The semiotic approach to *The Caretaker*'s dramatis personae is centered on the analysis of the play's characters' actions as signs. These signs are classed into four categories: the linguistic, the paralinguistic, the kinesic and the proxemic, all of which represent the focal elements of the topics of this discussion. As we mentioned in the introduction, the theoretical reflections of Peirce, Fischer-Lichte and Elam are particularly relevant to the analysis of the above-listed categories of signs. To begin with, Peirce's notion of the indexical sign (the index) is a central concept that shall be used to interpret the discourses of *The Caretaker*'s characters, their gestures and their movements in space. Peirce defines the index as a sign that: 'represents an object by virtue of its connection with it. It makes no difference whether the connection is natural, or artificial, or merely mental.' (Peirce, 8.368) It is noteworthy in this connection that all the above-mentioned types of signs in the field of drama are indexical, just like smoke is an index of fire and silence in dramatic discourse is an index of reflection, hesitation, worry, or reluctance to express an inner state of mind. Similarly, the actor's gestures and their movements in space, as well as their proximity in relation to one another are indexical of their attitudes and states of mind as shall be explained in the subsequent analyses.

Fischer-Lichte's semiotics of the dramatic characters also represents an important theoretical component in the proposed model for the interpretation and understanding of *The Caretaker*'s dramatis personae. In her book *The Semiotics of Theatre* (1983), she explains that in order for the process of performance to be accomplished, the actor has to act in a specific manner

(using verbal and nonverbal signs), has to have a specific appearance and has to act within a specific setting. These three modalities of signification correspond to three main divisions: the actor's actions as signs, the actor's appearances as signs, and the spatial as well as acoustic signs within which the actor's actions unfold onstage. The actor's actions are in turn classified into linguistic signs, paralinguistic signs, kinetic signs and proxemic signs. It is these types of signs that shall be subject to interpretation in this article since the actors' appearances (costume, makeup and hairstyle) are more properly accessible to analysis when considered in the context of actual staged realizations of the play and on the basis of actual instructions given by real stage directors. According to Fischer-Lichte (1983), linguistic signs are markers of the characters' personalities, states of mind, relationships to other characters, positions in the social hierarchy, and relationships to the external world; while paralinguistic signs are markers of the characters' attitudes, psychic states and discursive habits. Kinesic signs include gestural signs that are typically expressive of the characters' moods, psyches and emotional stances, and proxemic signs that are characteristically suggestive of the characters' relationships to one another and to the physical space around them.

In addition to the theoretical insights of Peirce and Fischer-Lichte, we shall make use of Keir Elam's concepts of *deontic* verbs (expressing commands) as well as John Austin's and John Searle's concepts of *assertives*, *commissives* and *directives* to interpret the characters' psyches, thoughts, beliefs, states of mind and attitudes in their dialogic exchanges onstage.

3. A Semiotic Analysis of *The Caretaker*'s Dramatis Personae:

In staged realization, the actor is usually the focus of attention of the audience. He/she is the main locus of signification and all other theatrical signs act as catalysts for the shaping of his/her personality and the production of meaning in relation to his/her activities. The main theatrical signs that shall be dealt with in relation to *The Caretaker*'s dramatis personae in this section are: the linguistic, paralinguistic, kinesic and proxemic signs.

As Veltrusky (1984) states 'The figure of the actor is the dynamic unity of an entire set of signs, the carrier of which may be the actor's body, voice, movement, but also various objects, from parts of the costume to the set.' This is faultlessly true of Pinter's *The Caretaker*. In fact, the discourses of the three characters of the play (Aston, Davies and Mick), their body movements, their costumes and the various objects they own or grapple with have represented the dynamic unity and the plurality of meaning in all staged realizations of the play. In his essay 'Body language in Pinter's plays' in *The Cambridge Companion to Harold Pinter,* Cave (2001) praises Pinter's artistry on account of the fact that his plays are centered on 'the revelatory capacities and poetic immediacy of body language'. It is also this plurality of meaning in connection to verbal and non-verbal language that has made *The Caretaker* accessible to a plethora of critical perspectives and has made it sometimes too complex for critics to be handled from a single point of view without forcibly making allusions to other meanings that lend themselves to other interpretive lenses. As Quigley (1975) remarks, the difficulty in Pinter's criticism stems from the fact that many critics have failed to recognize 'the inherent plurality of language functions' in the play (p. 40). He also says that once Pinter's critics realize that truth and reality are not absolute in his dramatic works but rather variables that are open

to continuous negotiation, his plays will cease to be torturously enigmatic (40). It is precisely this variability, poly-functionality and polysemy of the actor's actions as signs that shall be emphasized in the following section.

3.1. Linguistic signs as indicators of characters' personalities.

The linguistic sign in *The Caretaker*, as in other plays by Pinter, is typically plural, highly indexical and markedly performative. The valuable insights of Peirce (CP, 2.228) on the indexicality of signs as well as the profound ruminations of John Austin (1962) and John Searle (1969) on the performative functions of language will be of substantial help for the analysis of the expressive, secretive and ostensive aspects of linguistic signs in relation to the play's characters and the meanings associated with them. Some of the reflections of Keir Elam (1980) on deixis and their referential significance in dramatic discourse will also be used to throughout the forthcoming analyses.

For the purpose of reflective understanding and disclosure in terms of interpretation, we shall begin with the indexical and its performative effects, or to use Elam's word 'the executive power' of the linguistic sign, which is the focal mode of signification on the level of character-to-character communication in the play. From the very opening of the play (*The Caretaker*, p. 1), the information-bearing utterances of the characters seem to be highly suggestive of their personalities, their states of mind, their ontological ordeals, and the psychological strain that mutilates their speeches and cripples their communication. In any staged realization of the play, spectators would immediately notice the actors' reluctance to express themselves intelligibly, become instantly aware of their ontological anxieties as a result of being caught in a seemingly hostile environment, and directly notice the paucity or sterility of their words. This applies perfectly

to Aston, most obviously to Davies and less evidently to Mick.

Most of Aston's utterances, for instance, are delivered in the form of short questions like 'what?', 'Shoes?', 'Where?' (p. 5), 'Would they?' (p. 6), 'Sidcup?', 'Your what?' (p. 10); or short answers like 'Yes!', 'No.', 'Nothing.', 'I'm in charge.', 'They're neighbors.', 'Good.', and 'Get yourself sorted out…' (p. 5). Reticent and elliptical as it is, Aston's language is extremely revelatory of his reclusiveness, estranged self, disordered life, and mistrustful character. It shows that he has somehow lost confidence in the social milieu where he had been tortured and isolated as a result of talking 'too much'. In this Act of the play, Aston's discourse does not reveal much about his inner self and his true psychic distress. He simply asks questions, gives elliptical answers, or makes short reserved statements. When he interrogates Davies about the noise he has been making while asleep, his language becomes visibly perfunctory and restrained: 'You… er.…', 'Were you dreaming or something?', 'No, nor have I.', 'You were making noises.', 'You were.', 'You were jabbering.', 'I don't know', etc. Besides, his use of *directives* (utterances expressing commands as defined by Searle, 1969) or also *deontic modality*, (verbial phrases expressing commands as defined by Elam, 1980) is suggestive in at least two ways. On the one hand, it places him above his interlocutor in terms of social hierarchy to the point that the latter thinks he is the owner of the house; on the other hand, it shows his fervent desire to regain his social status after he has been dispossessed of all his social attributes.

In Act II, however, Aston's language becomes more straightforward and more indexical of his neurotic disorder, which was obviously caused by the brain operation he had undergone by those who wanted to silence him. Aston tells his interlocutor:

I used to go there quite a bit. Oh, years ago now. But I stopped. I used to like

that place. Spent quite a bit of time in there. That was before I went away. Just before. I think that … place had a lot to do with it. They were all … a good bit older than me. But they always used to listen. I thought … they understood what I said. I mean I used to talk to them. I talked too much. That was my mistake. (*The Caretaker*, 1960, p. 39)

It is only through this long speech that the audience comes to realize that it was his own community that engendered his mental disorder and caused his loss of control over the words. The perforated text in his speech and the fragments of sentences are signs of his fractured self, his trouble with logical expression, his dislocated reasoning and his splintered memory which seems to have been effaced as a result systematic torture. Martin Esslin (1980) explains that: 'Aston is the poet whom society crushes under the weight of its machinery of legal forms and bureaucracy. His hallucinations, his clear visions have been wiped from his brain.' (p. 251). This loss of control over the words and this failure to maintain a logical or rational flow of speech is also symptomatic of the disordered life of Davies.

As is the case with Aston, the linguistic sign is extremely suggestive in relation to Davies, but less performative in terms of its perlocutionary effects. Davies's disruptive and broken language is a sign of his failure to communicate, his deteriorated social condition, his fear of the external world, and his reluctance to reveal himself to his interlocutors. After having been attacked several times, having lost his job, having lost his identity papers, and having been cast into the streets, Davies no longer feels secure and the outside world for him becomes a source of fear, anxiety and potential violence. The frequency of ungrammatical, non-

referential, and dismembered utterances in his speech as in: 'I don't live here, do he?', 'I don't know why. I never done you no harm.' (Act II), 'them blacks', 'all them aliens had it', 'all them blacks had it', 'landing here … up the landing there', and 'Because, you know…I mean…fair's fair.' is an expressive discourse marker of his lower social status, his failure to express, and his paranoid fear of others. Davies is in a state of absolute fallenness, homelessness and non-relatedness vis-à-vis the outside world, a state that can be described as a condition of *angst*, to use Heidegger's term. *Angst* is word that is used to 'indicate general dread or anxiety, arising especially from the lack of purpose, concern, or meaning in the universe' (Blackburn, 1994, p. 15). This applies perfectly to Davies. He is in such a state of anxiety, fear, loss, and alienation that his words, storytelling, and *commissive speech acts* (utterances expressing promise and will as defined by Searle, 1969), mutilated as they are, become the only communicative means by which he hopes to regain his identity and relatedness to the world, a world that has grown too frightening to trust. When Pinter was asked about the characters' fear to communicate in his drama, his answer was: 'Communication is too alarming. To enter into someone else's life is too frightening. To disclose to others the poverty within us is too fearsome a possibility.'

Unlike Aston and Mick who use *directives* and *constatives* (utterances committing the speaker to the truth of the proposition asserted as used by Austin, 1962) in their speeches, Davies repeatedly uses *commissives*. Understood in this way, commissives are considered as indexical signs typically revealing his eagerness to evade ontological estrangement, and performative signs in the sense that they promise real action. His repeated exhortation about going to Sidcup has become a linguistic ritual that recurs cyclically in his speeches: 'If only the weather would break! Then I'd be

able to get down to Sidcup!', 'If only I could get down to Sidcup! I've been waiting for the weather to break', 'Oh, I got all that under way… that's… uh… that's…what I'll be doing', 'Give me and I'm going, I'm going to Sidcup!' (p. 22).

Similarly, his use of *expressives*, defined by Elam (1980) as: 'conventional acts such as thanking, greeting, congratulating, whose sincerity conditions include a particular psychological state' (p. 102), indicates his awareness of his lower social status as a tramp and his attempt to gain the sympathy of his interlocutors by means of *polite* words or utterances like: 'Don't you worry about that, mister', 'Thanks very much, the best of luck', 'Right, mister.', 'Eh, I was going to ask you, mister, what about this stove?', 'Eh, mister, just one thing …Thank you, mister. Listen', etc. But no matter how polite and respectful of felicity conditions Davies is/can be, the two brothers, tired of his ludicrous logorrhea, ultimately decide to let him down.

If Davies's verbal rituals, splintered utterances, deferred commissives and clumsy manipulations of language are linguistic sings/markers of his disordered state of mind and failure to communicate, Mick's linguistic signs are extremely evocative of his personality as someone who is typically obsessed with power, who manipulates language to assert and gain supremacy over his interlocutor(s) and who tells stories to make fun of others. Language for Mick is a powerful discursive tool he uses to prove his superiority and sublimate, in psychoanalytical terms, his failure to realize his ambitions. In his first encounter with Davies (p. 23), Mick displays his power by forcing the old tramp to the ground then keeps interrogating him in a very intimidating manner to the point that Davies stumbles, loses control of his words and fails to complete his utterances:

- MICK**.** Brought here? Who brought you here?

- DAVIES**.** Man who lives here … he.…*Pause.*
- MICK**.** Fibber.
- DAVIES**.** I was brought here, last night … met him in a caff … I was working … I got the bullet … I was working there … bloke saved me from a punch up, brought me here, brought me right here. *Pause.*
- MICK**.** I'm afraid you're a born fibber, en't you? You're speaking to the owner. This is my room. You're standing in my house.
- DAVIES**.** It's his … he seen me all right … he.… (*The Caretaker*, p. 23)

Mick also relies on the manipulative power of language to further frustrate his interlocutor by describing him as a 'fibber', 'an old scoundrel', 'an old robber' and 'an old barbarian'. Imbued with a profound sense of implicature, these expressions are intended to achieve certain perlocutionary effects such as humiliating the old tramp, moving him to anger, or forcing him to yield to the authority of his superior. Implicature is defined by Paul Grice as 'any meaning that is implied, i.e., conveyed indirectly or through hints, and understood implicitly without ever being explicitly stated' (Grundy, 2000, p. 73). In an article entitled 'Speech in Harold Pinter's The Caretaker', Clarke (1987) uses the pragmatic concept of 'implicature' to explain how Mick's ironical language, which violates the maxim of quality (developed by Grice as one of the constituents of the cooperative principle of conversation), serves to deliver indirect messages to the tramp telling him that he is an intruder and that he is not allowed to interfere in matters that do not concern him. Even the stories he uses or invents to compare Davies to other people he knows, as in 'you remind me of my uncle's brother', 'you've got a funny kind of resemblance to a

bloke I once knew' and 'you know, you remind me of a bloke I bumped into once', are explicitly ironical and are meant to ridicule the old tramp. Worth mentioning in this context is that the ironical and intimidating tone of Mick's utterances is further syncopated by his use of deontic modality in his conversations with Davies. Commands and warnings like 'Watch your step, sonny!', 'Don't push it too hard.', 'Don't overstep the mark, son.', 'Don't get too glib.', and 'Cut it!' are indexical signs of his authoritative nature and coercive habits.

Closely related to the indexicality of the linguistic sign in *The Caretaker* is also the characters' use of deixis or deictic expressions. Deixis are broadly defined as language markers that have the effect of pointing. Elam (1980) explains that: 'Deixis is immensely important to the drama…It has been suggested, indeed, that deixis is the most significant linguistic feature—both statistically and functionally—in the drama' (p. 17). Linguists classify deixis into several types, the most important of which for the dramatic world are personal deixis, such as 'I', 'you', 'we', 'they', 'me', 'him', 'them', etc.; spatio-temporal deixis, such as 'here', 'now', 'tonight', 'that place', 'that time', 'there', etc.; and demonstratives such as 'this', 'these', 'that' and 'those'. As linguistic signs, deixis are particularly important in the field of drama insofar as they serve to orient the listener's or interlocutor's attention to the person, the time or the place referred to. The temporal deictic 'now' used by the dramatis personae, for instance, serves to actualize the dramatic world, as it is always 'now' on the stage. Explaining dramatic deixis more accurately, Elam states:

> deictic reference presupposes the existence of a speaker referred to as 'I', a listener addressed as 'you', a physically present object indicated as 'this'. It resides in 'shifters' ('empty' signs) in so far as

> it does not, in itself, specify its object but simply points, ostensively, to the already-constituted contextual elements. (p. 86)

In *The Caretaker*, characters use deixis in different ways. Davies, for example, uses deictic expressions in ambiguous a misleading ways. His recurrent reference to backs and Greeks as 'them' instead of 'they' is particularly meaningful. He clearly does not want to grant them pronominal identities as subjects or agents. He uses the object form of the pronoun to convince himself and his interlocutor(s) that they are not in a position to act, and so they are of no importance to him. Similarly, his use of the object pronoun 'Me?' interrogatively, as in 'Jabbering? Me?', 'After me?', 'Me? I know that sort.', 'Me? You talking to me?', and 'Me? What do you mean?' shows his failure to communicate his habit of automatic denial, a habit that is often described in psychoanalysis as a systematic-defense mechanism. The same thing holds true for his evasive use of spatiotemporal deixis. Davies is always uncertain about space: even when Aston confidently tells him 'There's a café just along the road', he replies with marked uncertainty: 'There maybe mate'. His pointing to locations like 'that place', 'there', and 'this monastery' always lacks geographical details, which shows his disorientation in space, his loss of the sense of dwelling and his physical as well as moral disconnection from his social environment.

Aston and Mick, on the other hand, use personal deixis in a straightforward way. Aston refers to the people who used to listen to him and to those who tortured him as 'they' and maintains the regular 'I-you' deixis of normal dialogic exchange:

> 'They were all … a good bit older than me. But they always used to listen'; 'they took me to a hospital, right outside London. They … got me there'; 'they asked me questions, in there', etc. (p. 39). Similarly,

> Mick refers to people he knows as 'they' and maintains the normal 'I-you' deixis of dialogic communication, though the second person deictic 'you' he uses to address Davies is permeated with an overt sense of derision and disrespect. The difference between the two brothers, however, is most readily apparent in their disparate use of spatial deixis. Aston uses spatial deixis like 'there' and 'that place' to refer to the 'café just along the road' where he used to go and talk, where people 'always used to listen' to him. 'That place' was as sign of freedom for him, a social space into which he could speak and a space where his vision was clear: 'I used to get the feeling I could see things'. After the brain-torture he has been subjected to in the hospital, his use of the spatial deictic 'there' comes to be associated with incarceration, destruction, isolation and defamiliarization. His use of the demonstrative deictic 'that' in 'that shed' six times in the play is a discursive marker showing how eager he is to build a space of his own, a space where he can reconstruct his fractured self, where he can regain his sense of being, and perhaps where he can bury his secret sadness without having to disturb anybody with his stories.

Mick's use of spatial deixis, on the other hand, does not show any of the frustration it does with his brother. Mick uses the demonstrative deictic 'this' in 'this place' emphatically to remind his interlocutor (Davies) that he is the owner of the place and that he wants to decorate it, so that it becomes a relaxing 'penthouse'. On more than one occasion, Mick uses spatial deixis that are associated with his own action and that show him as an active agent rather than a passive receiver victimized by space as in the case of Aston and Davies: 'I'm thinking of taking over the running of this place' (p. 36), 'Look what I could do with this place' (p. 36), and 'I could

turn this place into a penthouse' (p. 42). When he talks to Davies about his house using the demonstrative phrase 'this house', he reveals his ambitions and his true relation to space, particularly his desire to expand: 'Anyone would think this house was all I got to worry about. I got plenty of other things I can worry about. I've got other things. I've got plenty of other interests. I've got my own business to build up, haven't I? I got to think about expanding … in all directions.' (p. 53). The play ends without any signs or indications suggesting that Mick will realize his ambitions.

In the above analyses, we have shown that linguistic signs in *The Caretaker* are discursive markers informing about the characters' ontological anxieties, disillusioned visions, tormented psyches, evasive manners, perforated memories, and uncertain ambitions. What makes these linguistic signs even more disjointed and sterile are the abundant pauses and hesitations they are replete with. Pauses and hesitations, however, are paralinguistic signs that orchestrate the unfolding of linguistic signs and add extra layers of meaning to them. In *The Caretaker*, pauses hesitations, and short silences occurring within speech are key features of the play's language and have a power-full impact on the characters and the audience alike. These signs shall be the subject matter of discussion in the following section.

3.2. Paralinguistic signs as indicators of characters' states of mind.

Paralinguistic signs, or suprasegmentals as some linguists like Key (1975) calls them, refer to all the vocalic features that accompany spoken language. Paralinguistic signs include: intonation, intensity, pauses, hesitation, pitch, rhythm, laughing, crying, shouting, sobbing, yelling, humming, and so on. Paralinguistic signs are superposed on speech and are necessary for conversations. Key describes them as follows:

> The paralinguistic suprasegmental features might be said to be an overlay on the linguistic (or language) suprasegmental features. When these are used in the Language system they indicate lexical and grammatical differences; when they are used in the paralanguage system they indicate emotional and attitudinal differences. (p. 52).

Paralinguistic signs are of extreme importance for the understanding of speakers' attitudes and their moods, particularly in the field of drama where the focus of the audience is not only on the words themselves, but also on the way they are uttered and the sounds or pauses that accompany them. In the dramatic world of Harold Pinter, paralinguistic signs such as pauses, written in the *didascalia* or shown in the text as three dots, and hesitations are quite frequent in his plays. In *The Caretaker*, for instance, the most notable paralinguistic signs that orchestrate the actors' dialogic exchanges are pauses and hesitations, bearing in mind that long silences that precede or follow speeches are not properly-speaking paralinguistic features (e.g. there may be long silences in pantomimes where actors are almost motionless and speechless). Lyons (1977) describes vocal qualities such as extent and the introduction of pauses as playing an important role in 'punctuating' speech, that is, in 'the marking of boundaries at the beginning and end of an utterance and at various points within the utterance to emphasize particular expressions, to segment the utterance to manageable information units', etc. (p. 65).

This is exactly the case in *The Caretaker* where the speeches of Aston and Davies, sated with pauses and hesitations as they are, not only punctuate their utterances and emphasize their expressions, but also accentuate their mental and psychic struggle with words to a large extent. These paralinguistic features have received the attention of many commentators

and drama critics (Davitz, 1964), but their consideration from a semiotic viewpoint is presumably more methodical given the ability of semiotics to describe and interpret the semiotic functions of the speaker's vocalic features in relation to his/her emotions, intentions, conversational skills, and so on. Hall (2001) who is a famous stage director of Pinter's plays, for instance, describes Pinter's pauses as a trademark of the playwright:

> Pinter's pauses have become, journalistically, his trademark, and it is easy to denigrate them, even to think that they are meaningless—to think the characters have nothing to say because they say nothing. This is never true. . . . [T]he unsaid in Pinter is as important as the said; and is frequently as eloquent. (pp. 147-48).

Pinter also describes the pause as follows: "The pause is a pause because of what has just happened in the minds and guts of the characters. They spring out of the text. They're not formal conveniences or stresses but part of the body of the action" (quoted in Gale, 1977, p. 273). As indexical signs *par excellence*, pauses and silences should be construed as part of the characters' actions, informing about their attitudes toward one another, their mental states, and their emotions.

In Aston's speeches, for instance, pauses and hesitations are clearly indexical of the ontological and psychological strain he lives in, the fragmented past that interferes with his present memory and cripples his speech, as well as the uncertain future that is seemingly dependent on whether or not he will be able to build his fateful shed. In staged realizations of the play, spectators would instantly notice the onset of pauses and dramatic tension they create, a tension that is mixed with a deep sense of mystery whenever the shed is mentioned. The shed for Aston is the only breathing outlet in a space that is tightly shrinking around him. We also

notice the association of the adverb of place 'outside' or 'out there' with the word 'shed' as an indication of a possible escape from a tormented and tormenting 'inside': 'Once I get that shed up outside…I'll be able to give a bit more thought to the flat, you see…When I get that shed up out there…I'll have a workshop, you see' (p. 28).

The same tension is felt in Aston's speech in Act II (p. 39) when he talks about the place where he used to talk and about his mental state when he left the hospital where he has undergone the electroshock torture.

> The trouble was, I used to have kind of hallucinations. They weren't hallucinations, they… I used to get the feeling I could see things … very clearly… everything … was so clear … everything used … everything used to get very quiet …everything got very quiet … all this … quiet … and … this clear sight … it was … but maybe I was wrong. ..So I did get out. I got out of the place … but I couldn't walk very well. I don't think my spine was damaged. That was perfectly all right. The trouble was … my thoughts … had become very slow … I couldn't think at all … I couldn't … get … my thoughts … together … uuuhh … I could … never quite get it … together. (*The Caretaker*, p. 39)

Pervaded with tension as they are, these pauses and hesitations testify, once more, to Aston's neurotic state of mind and his asymptotic relation to the social milieu that is growing more aggressive and, certainly, more repressive under the aegis of bourgeois capitalist values.

Such an asymptotic and skeptical relation to the environment, as intimated by pauses, is even more intense in Davies's speeches which contain the biggest number of pauses in the play. These pauses, together with the frequent hesitations accompanying them, are indexical signs

pointing to Davies's paranoid fear of others, his failure to communicate, his loss of the sense of relatedness to the social environment and his worries about not being able to get his identity papers back and regain his sense of belonging. When Aston asks him where he was born, the three-dot pauses and hesitations in his answer show his psychic turbulence and, as paralinguistic signs, they point to the fact that he is under the strain of a frustrating subtext which, while refusing to come out, exerts pressure on his speech and makes it alarmingly incoherent. This verbal evasiveness is a true iconic simulation, to use the language of drama critics, of real-life discursive hesitations where one is urged to deny belonging, so to speak, for fear of exclusion, underestimation or loss of some kind of support.

Carrying this logic of analysis a bit further, one may note that the best illustration of these paralinguistic features is through consideration of the pauses and hesitations encountered in Davies's speech in the final scene of Act III (p. 55). Here is an extract of this speech:

> 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 the 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. Maybe 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* (*The Caretaker*, p. 55)

Dots, pauses, hesitations and silences that are superposed on speech are the salient paralinguistic features of this extract. They show that Davies

has reached the uppermost state of crisis, has exhausted all possible means to gain the sympathy of his interlocutors, and has literally become inarticulate. The pauses and hesitations are indications of his terrified psyche and are themselves replete with terror, the terror of non-belonging, the terror of sadistic monologues, the terror of offensive others, and the terror of an unknown destiny. The repetition of the word 'but', signifier of contrast, opposition or perhaps deception, as well as the repetition of aborted conditional statements like 'if I got down' and 'If I was to' show that Davies is contested by latent forces preventing him from moving forward and external forces preventing him from crossing the boundaries into meaningful social existence and relatedness. It is these forces that paralyze him and impede his relief, a relief that will never see the light, as it depends entirely on an evasive 'if'. It is precisely this kind of verbal evasion that semiotics can adeptly account for. Thanks to its inclusiveness and scrupulous analysis of signifying details, semiotics can account for the smallest signifying detail, be it linguistic or non-linguistic, such as kinesic signs which will be the subject matter of analysis in the following section.

3.3. Kinesic signs as indicators of characters' psyches and attitudes.

Birdwhistell (1970) broadly defines Kinesics as the systematic study of the human body as a means of communication. It covers gestures, reflexes, changes in physiognomy, and body movement in relation to space and others. In theatre semiotics, kinesic signs include gestures, facial expressions and body movements within the stage space. Pavis (as cited in Elam, 1980, p. 72) calls kinesic signs 'corporeal deixis' by emphasizing the fact that all kinesic signs in the theatrical act are necessarily indexical signs: 'Just as gesture cannot be dissociated from the actor who produces it, it is always geared to the stage through innumerable corporeal deixis,

beginning with attitude, glance, or simple physical presence.' We have demonstrated earlier that linguistic and paralinguistic signs are typically indexical of the characters' personalities and attitudes through examination of the characters' speeches and pauses as they occur in the actual playtext. In staged realizations, more emphasis may be placed on other vocalic features, such as rhythm, pitch, tempo, and resonance. But since our focus is primarily the playtext, we have contented ourselves with brief allusions, wherever informative, to what might occur in actual performance.

In this section we shall continue to examine the playtext but with a special focus on the didascalia – generally defined as stage directions – where descriptions are given regarding the characters' kinesic activities, including their gestures (gestural signs) and proxemic movements (proxemic signs) onstage. As stated earlier, the actor's appearances (costumes and hairstyles) and the stage props they own or use shall be hinted at only occasionally and only to the extent that they help in shaping their dramatic character (a careful analysis of costume, make-up, and hairstyle will certainly be more fruitful and relevant when it is based on actual stage realizations of the play).

3.3.1. Gestural signs as subjective and intersubjective signifiers.

What gives momentum to *The Caretaker*'s gestural signs to produce powerful impacts on its successive audiences along decades is the predominance of silences and pauses we have commented on in the previous section. It is in silences and pauses, in moments of tension and crisis, that the gestural and proxemic activities of actors become more focal and more noticeable. When language withdraws or ceases to be the dominant mode of expression in the theatrical act, the audience's attention shifts to the actor's body movements and facial expressions (known as mimic signs). In

The Caretaker, gestural signs have subjective meanings that are revelatory of the characters themselves in so far as they reveal part of their psyches and personalities, and inter-subjective meanings that account for their relationship to one another in so far as they reveal part of the operating social hierarchy that organizes the relationship between those who possess and those who are almost or completely dispossessed.

The earliest meaningful gestural signs are those in Act I when Aston comes back home with a guest. As any guest who normally maintains a certain degree of compliance and tolerance, Davies does nothing of great significance that can change the course of action. His gestures show that he is entirely receptive in terms of character-character relationship. He simply obeys gentle requests by his host, whose gestures do not intimate any exhibition of superiority or power. Yet, what is noteworthy, in terms of kinesic signification, is that the characters' gestural signs are also markedly evocative of their attitudes and states of mind as has been explained above in the discussion of linguistic and paralinguistic signs. Aston's obsessive examination of stage props (emphasized more in Act I compared to the other acts of the play) not only reveals his neurotic state of mind and his alienation from a seemingly defamiliarized physical world, but also throws into relief his eagerness to make things functional again. Quite often, the didascalia shows him using tools or trying to repair non-functional appliances in an attempt to get them back to utility and regain through them a sense of [re]connection or reintegration into the world. Examples of such obsessive manipulation of stage objects include: '*ASTON goes back to his bed with the toaster and starts to unscrew the plug'* (p. 3)*, 'ASTON goes back to his bed and starts to fix the plug on the toaster*' (p. 3). *'picks up a screwdriver and plug from the bed and begins to poke the plug'* (p. 10), *'ASTON goes downstage right, collects the toaster and examines it'*

(p. 12), *'ASTON picks up the plug and examines it'* (p. 29), *'picks up a small plank and begins to sandpaper it'* (p. 38), etc. Although each of these stage props has a certain 'use value', i.e. a certain utility to use the terms of Baudrillard (1981) they acquire a 'symbolic exchange value' in the sense that they become significant less by what they are used for than by what symbolic meanings their use can impart to the user, including: the meaning of reconnection to the external world and the meaning of purposeful action. In the bourgeois capitalist society where he lives, individuals' statuses are measured by commodity ownership: the more they own, the upper they are in the social hierarchy. The type of commodity an individual owns is indexical of the social class s/he belongs to, and it is often the sign exchange value of the object that counts more. In *The Caretaker*, Mick owns a house and a number of objects, Aston seeks to finish the construction of a shed that will ultimately become his own, and Davies is almost completely dispossessed: even the bag he claims to own turns out to be bought by Aston. Davies is the most dispossessed, the most depersonalized, and the most pathetic in the play.

Davies' restless kinesic activities tend to be tragicomic as they elicit both laughter and the call for sympathy on the part of the reader/audience inasmuch as they replicate his suffering in an environment that is growing hostile, frightening, and discomforting for him. As stated previously, it is this state of fallenness and non-relatedness that has rendered the world unconventional to Davies. His hysterical inspection of stage props at the end of Act I shows how far the external world has become defamiliarized and how far his psyche has become disturbed as a result of feeling non-related to it: '*picks up a vase and looks into it, then picks up a box and shakes it', 'He opens the case', 'He shuts the case', 'He picks up another case and tries to open it', 'He puts it down and moves downstage', 'He*

picks up a sideboard drawer, rummages in the contents, then puts it down', etc. (pp. 17-18).

In addition to pointing to his existential anxiety (*angst*), Davies' remarkable restlessness is also reflected in his constant repetition of gestures and continuous change of body postures, as in: '*turns, shambles across the room', 'turns, shambles across the room'(p. 2),* '*rising, looking about' (p. 8), 'rising, pointing upstage right' (p. 8),* 'DAVIES *sits up abruptly' (p. 12), 'coming round' (p. 16), 'shifting, about to rise' (p. 21),* 'DAVIES *retreats' (p. 22),* 'DAVIES *enters, closes the door, and tries the light switch, on, off, on, off' (p. 31), 'He switches on and off' (p. 31), etc.* Here, one may note that in staged realizations of the play, Davies' gestural restlessness may be shown up further with lighting or musical effects, so that their impact and immediacy will be strongly felt by the audience. Another example where Davies' restless gestures may be syncopated by musical or sound effects is the scene where he is shown stumbling on the stage, standing up against the wall and holding a knife: '*He moves, stumbles, falls and cries out' (p. 31) and* 'DAVIES *flattens himself against right wall, knife in hand' (p. 32).*

While Davies' gestural signs are revelatory of his psychic disturbance and his failure to give sense to his life through meaningful communication with others, Mick's gestural activities, very much like his verbal discourse, typecast him as someone who is obsessed with power and who enjoys displaying the limited power he has by subduing inferior subjects like Davies. As mentioned earlier, Mick, at the end of Act I, is shown forcing Davies to the ground and humiliating him in a ruthless way: 'MICK *seizes his arm and forces it up his back*...MICK *swiftly forces him to the floor, with* DAVIES *struggling, grimacing, whimpering and staring*...MICK *holds out a warning finger*...MICK *presses him down with his foot and*

stands over him…MICK slowly goes to the chair, sits, and watches DAVIES, expressionless. Silence (p. 17). Indeed, the word 'expressionless' here could mean 'unreadable' or 'unresponsive', but it certainly carries within it the sense of sadism that permeates the act of standing over the body of an inferior subject.

In addition to revealing his obsession with power, Mick's gestural signs reflect his bullying and playful character as well as his indifference to other people's feelings no matter how irritated they might feel. In Act II, Mick continues to intimidate Davies and plays a series of games to provoke him and drive him to anger. He snatches his trousers and throws them on his face several times 'MICK *flicks the trousers in* DAVIES' *face several times' (p. 22)*. Then he snatches his bag several times as indicated here: *'*MICK *rises and snatches it' (p. 25), 'slipping it behind the gas stove' (p. 26), '*ASTON *gives it to* DAVIES. MICK *grabs it' (p. 26), '*DAVIES *takes it.* MICK *takes it.' (p. 26)*. Later on, Mick plays another trick by using an Electrolux vacuum cleaner to scare Davies who '*stumbles, falls and cries out*' then falls again '*breathlessly*' (p. 31). This playful character of Mick, as revealed by his gestures and convoluted word play, also obliquely show that he is in search of some sense of sort of elusive joy he has lost due to his failure to realize his ambitions and due to the delusions of grandeur he has of himself.

To put it in a nutshell, gestural signs in *The Caretaker* reflect the three characters' troubled psyches, their uncertainly and frustration in relation to their future plans, their inability to put order into their chaotic worlds, and their failure to negotiate their relationship to one another. This is also visibly reflected in their movements in space and their relations of proximity to one another as shall be demonstrated in the below subsection

on proxemic signs.

3.3.2. Proxemic signs and interpersonal distance.

Proxemics, as Edward Hall (1966) explains, is a term that is used to indicate 'the interrelated observations and theories of man's use of space as a specialized elaboration of culture' (p.1). People who belong to different social classes within a given cultural context have dissimilar approaches to space and diverse conceptions of how it may be used or inhabited. Hall differentiates between four kinds of distance in interpersonal communication: intimate, personal, public and social (p. 78). These four types of handling of space have meanings that inform about the relationships between the individuals involved in a given proxemic situation, their psyches and their states of mind. In the context of the present discussion, it is social distance that concerns us more. In *The Caretaker*, social distance varies according to the communicative context and the states of mind of the characters.

At the beginning of the play, for instance, the proxemic behaviors of Aston and Davies as well as their proxemic relations show a certain degree of social closeness despite the fact that their encounter was casual. Aston brings a chair and asks Davies to sit down. The latter sits on the chair and 'Aston sits on the bed' and both start to communicate at close proximity from each other. This reduction of social distance, which suggests a minimum of shared trust, is further reinforced through Davies' close following of Aston as he gets into and moves around the room: 'Davies, *following, shambling*' (p. 1), 'DAVIES *(following).* Yes, well say I had!' and 'DAVIES *follows him'* (p. 2). Indeed, social distance is almost reduced to a zero degree when they both put the ladder under the bed: '*They put the ladder under the bed'* (p. 9). However, as Aston finds out that Davies is being opportunist and he starts to blame him for making too much noise, proxemic relations

between the two characters takes a different turn. On two occasions, Aston is depicted in the didascalia as moving towards Davies and the latter as pointing the knife towards him. It is clear that their proxemic actions in this scene do not stand for closeness or social intimacy, but rather for tension and mutual revulsion. The increase of social distance reaches its peak at the end of the play when 'ASTON *moves to the window and stands with his back to* DAVIES' (p. 55), suggesting that the guest is no longer wanted in the house.

As far as Mick and Davies are concerned, proxemic relations convey certain messages of power to the latter and reflect the playfulness of the Mick vis-à-vis his interlocutor. At the beginning of the play, Mick is depicted as sitting at a distance from Davies and interrogating him. His sitting posture favors his authoritarian attitude and desire to intimidate the tramp. As action progresses and Mick understands that Davies is his brother's friend, he gets closer to him and offers him a sandwich. The proxemic distance between the two characters is reduced even further when Mick wrongly thinks that Davies is a home decorator, to the point that the latter gets close to him and shows his willingness to help: '*Bending*, *close to* MICK … we got ideas for this place, we could build it up, we could get it started. You see, I could decorate it out for you, I could give you a hand in doing it … between us' (p. 45). However, when Mick discovers that he has been mistaken and that Davies is being hypocritical with his brother, proxemic distance also takes another turn and becomes a sign of intimidation, rejection and mistrust as 'MICK *walks slowly round* DAVIES' *figure'* and *'circles him',* telling him that he is a strange man, that he has brought trouble to the house, that he is a liar, and that he is completely unpredictable.

As the play approaches its end, the proxemic distance between the two

brothers visibly decreases as they both sit in front of each other smiling, suggesting that the Davies has lost the game and that whatever he has said on Aston's account has not changed his brother's attitude toward him: 'ASTON *comes in. He closes the door, moves into the room and faces* MICK. *They look at each other. Both are smiling, faintly'*.

4. Conclusion:

In this discussion, we have studied the dramatis personae of Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker* from a semiotic point of view. The objective of the discussion was to redress the lack of a systematic semiotic study of the play's characters with a focus on their actions as signs that point toward their personalities, psyches, attitudes, and states of mind. We have used Peirce's concept of indexicality, Fischer-Lichte's typology of theatrical sign, Elam's concept of verbial modality, as well as Austin's and Searle's insights on the performativeness of the linguistic sign as a combined methodological and analytical framework. We have analyzed the character's activities as signs by isolating the linguistic, paralinguistic, kinesic and proxemic signs as focal areas of semiotic investigation, with occasional references to stage props as indexical and symbolic signs in relation to the play's characters and pivotal themes. Throughout the discussion, our central concern has been to avoid replicating the patterns of analyses adopted from other perspectives, notably the existentialist and the psychoanalytical. By conducting thorough analyses of the characters' verbal and non-verbal actions as signs, the discussion has shown that semiotics offers an inclusive framework for a critical investigation that interprets all characters' actions and body movements as multi-coded expressions delivering simultaneous messages to the audience. Such an investigation has enabled us to deal with various modes of theatrical expression as a totality through which the play's

characters are wholly, rather than partially, constructed and interpreted. The discussion has equally shown that semiotics is still a promising interpretive method and a vantage point on dramatic works as it works out meaning toward disclosure and concretization via close study of their dictions, formal features and non-verbal modes of expression.

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إعادة النظر في مسرحية الوصيّ لهارولد بنتر:
دراسة سيميائية للشخصيات الدرامية

خالد بسباس

كلية الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية والاجتماعية - جامعة الشارقة

الشارقة - الإمارات العربية المتحدة

ملخص البحث:

تمثل الشخصيات المسرحية في مجال الدراما الثري موضع أغلب العمليات الدلالية. ومن المؤكد أن مسرحية الوَصِيّ (The Caretaker) للكاتب هارولد بنتر لا تشكّل استثناء من هذه القاعدة. ومع ذلك وعلى الرغم من كثرة الدراسات التي قدمت تحاليل دقيقة لشخصيات هذه المسرحية قصد إلقاء الضوء على التعدد الدلالي لصفات الشخصيات ، فإنه لم تقدّم إلى حد الآن دراسة سيميائية منهجية في هذا المجال. وفضلا عن ذلك ، فإن ما جرت تسميته على أنه عصر ما بعد النظرية قد شهد في الفترة الأخيرة نوعًا من عدم الثقة في النظريات النقدية (حسب إيغلتون ، 2003) ، وذلك بسبب فقدانها للحداثة على مر السنين وبسبب الارتياب القائم تجاه السيميائية كمنهج نظري ونقدي يمكن أن يبني على نتائج النظريات النقدية ويستفيد من رؤاها القيّمة عوضا عن خيار تناول الأعمال الأدبية من زاوية لا تعتمد على النظرية. ولتدارك هذا النقص في الدراسات السيميائية في السجلّ النقدي للمسرحية ، جاء هذا البحث ليقدّم تحليلاً منهجيًا لشخصيات المسرحية كدلالات قائمة بذاتها وكمواضع تعبيرية متعددة الرموز ، مع التركيز على أنماط الدلالة المختلفة المرتبطة بها. وسيقوم الباحث بدراسة الخصائص اللغوية والشبه لغوية لخطابات الشخصيات الدرامية كدلالات مرتبطة بمواضيع المسرحية المحورية وتعابيرها الحركية والجسدية كمؤشرات دلالية ، بالإضافة إلى دراسة المسافات المكانية بين هذه الشخصيات ودلالاتها المتميزة على خشبة المسرح. كما سيولي الباحث بعض الاهتمام إلى تعامل الشخصيات مع الاكسسوارات الركحية ومعانيها الخاصة كناسخات لشخصية الممثل. وستوضح هذه المقالة في الغضون أن السيميائية ستضلّ تقدّم رؤى نظرية تطبيقية قيّمة في مجال النقد المسرحي على الرغم من الدعوات المتزايدة ولكن المتحفظة للتقليل من الاعتماد على النظريات في دراسة العمل الأدبي والدرامي.

الكلمات الدّالّة: بنتر، السيميائية، الشخصيات الدرامية، اللساني، الجسدي، المسافات المكانية بين الشخصيات.