



## EXPLORATION OF DERRIDEAN CONCEPT OF HOSPITALITY AND IDENTIFICATION OF HOSPITALITY WITH ULTERIOR MOTIVE IN *THE CARETAKER*

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### Abstract

This paper evaluates the idea of hospitality implied in *The Caretaker* written by Harold Pinter by keeping it in line with the concept of hospitality of Derrida. This particular paper investigates how the Derridean concept of hospitality is relevant to the theme of hospitality implied in *The Caretaker*. In addition, this study makes an attempt to identify hospitality shrouded with secret motive in *The Caretaker* revealing the unwritten connection between hospitality and personal motive. Again, the ulterior motive behind hospitality will be investigated through profound analysis of a philosophical doctrine named Psychological Egoism in this study. Besides, this study aims to explore both conditional and unconditional hospitality in *The Caretaker* in the light of Derrida and demonstrates how personal motive and need transgress the moral demand such as selflessness in case of hospitality. This article locates the universal fact in *The Caretaker* considering the concept of Derrida that a perfect hospitality depends on the precise balance of openness and closedness from a host who welcomes an unknown, unrelated person who are helpless or homeless as a guest at home. It also explores the presence of absolute hospitality demanded by Derrida within *The Caretaker* which seems impossible as a host loses his/her position to host a guest in the context of unconditional hospitality. Moreover, the aim of this research is to locate the host -guest relationship in terms of welcoming unexpected and unknown person as a guest by relating the theme of hospitality implied in *The Caretaker* to Derridean concept of hospitality which functions in personal level. Besides, the insights provided in this study will help us understand how hospitality is shown in our daily life while welcoming and being generous to a person who is not one's own rather unknown, unrelated and unexpected. Finally, this study will expose the artificiality of hospitality portrayed in *The Caretaker* which is realistic.

Keywords: Derridean Concept of Hospitality, Exploration, Identification, Hospitality, Ulterior Motive, *The Caretaker*.

### Introduction:

*The Caretaker* was a major success for Harold Pinter as it added an extra mileage to his literary

career. Esslin notes that *The Caretaker* is totally different from the other plays of Pinter as it is devoid of the presence of violence and mystery making it a

universal play (249). Implied theme carries much significance in the plays of Pinter and *The Caretaker* is not an exception also. This play implies a universal theme entitled hospitality. True hospitality is no less than a myth in today's world where people do hospitality rather satisfying their own interest than the interest of the others. Most of the people in the world turn hospitable keeping a distance with the guest and become hospitable for own sake without any feeling for others. Again, few people try to offer genuine hospitality but they stop being hospitable due to the impropriety of a certain guest. *The Caretaker* has reflected that very idea.

The late French philosopher Jacques Derrida in his *Of Hospitality* discusses the idea of hospitality as well as the host-guest relationship while welcoming the other. This other can be an unknown and unrelated person. Though the plot of *The Caretaker* is absurdist, it is still relevant for today's world. Reception of Davies by Mick in *The Caretaker* is the microcosm of how an unknown or unexpected person is commonly welcomed. Welcoming an other can happen in personal level where a home welcomes an unknown, unrelated guest (Gorman51). He explains conditional hospitality where "a master of the house, country or nation" welcomes a guest and imposes condition on the guest to maintain sovereignty as a host so that a guest is reminded of his/her obligation toward host ("Reynolds"). Again, Derrida proposes another kind of hospitality which is termed as unconditional hospitality where a guest is embraced by a host or a country with pure openness. However, Derrida captures a violent attitude from a guest in the context of unconditional hospitality.

What Derrida states regarding two kinds of hospitality in his book *Of Hospitality* is completely relevant to the theme of hospitality reflected in *The Caretaker*. This play has two significant characters named Mick and Aston. Aston who lives in the flat of his brother named Mick brings a stranger named Davies. Aston reflects the feature of the unconditional host stated by Derrida in *The Caretaker* bringing home a stranger named Davies who seems to be a migrant of Irish or Jewish origin. Davies is under an assumed name in *The Caretaker* and trying to have correct papers to fulfill the

condition to be Derrida stated guest. Aston who is a significant character in *The Caretaker* reflected the concept of absolute hospitality while allowing Davies to stay as a guest without any condition. Unfortunately, Davies validates the risk of unconditional hospitality explained by Derrida when he conspires against Aston who offers Davies shelter and other facilities without asking any return. On the other hand, Mick has treated Davies reflecting all the features of a host in the context of conditional hospitality and stops being hospitable to maintain his authority when he thinks it so as "the host exercises his or her sovereignty by selecting, filtering, choosing his or her guests or visitors" (kakoliris149).

The idea of hospitality with ulterior motive is discussed in the light of psychological egoism in *The Caretaker*. Hospitality shown both by Mick and Aston falls under the theory named *Psychological Egoism* which denies the possibility of altruistic action. This theory opines that everyone acts according to his/her own good. Thus, a voluntary work itself is marked by concealed personal motive. The similar idea has been reflected in *The Caretaker* where Mick behaves hospitable toward Davies so that Davies can look after his apartment as well as help him to modify it. On the other hand, Aston also becomes hospitable toward Davies to have a company in his alienated life where his family members are not such caring to him. Thus, this research will focus how the concept of Derrida and psychological egoism have contributed a crucial rule to understand different aspects of hospitality in *The Caretaker*.

**Concept of Conditional Hospitality in *The Caretaker*:** Prominent French theorist Jacques Derrida defined two certain types of hospitality that People as a social animal offer. One is conditional hospitality and another one is unconditional hospitality. Derrida distinguished between these two kinds of hospitality. According to Derrida, conditional hospitality refers to the hospitality that imposes restriction and obligation on guests. Mainly, conditional hospitality "reaffirms the roles of participants" (Dausner54). In a conditional guest-host relationship, a host asserts authoritative position as a host over a guest and wants a guest to

abide by the conditions he/she sets. Therefore, dominance of the host is a precondition in the context of conditional hospitality. The sense of control of the host is attached to conditional hospitality. Again, a guest's being within the terms set by a host marks the limit of conditional hospitality. According to Derrida, the traditional sense of hospitality which is known as conditional hospitality involves both the control and openness of the host as well as it demands the gratitude of the guest toward host. *The Caretaker*, one of the characters called Mick has upheld hospitality which is conditional. Mick offers conditional hospitality towards another important character named Davies, the unexpected and unknown guest. Mick justifies Derrida regarding what he has said about the features of conditional hospitality. Mick has kept up the position of dominance as a host in *The Caretaker* and maintains a distance between him and Davies in this play. Besides, Mick does not welcome him straightaway rather poses condition before allowing him as guest justifying the feature of conditional hospitality.

Mick examined Davies a lot at their first encounter before allowing Davies a guest. Mick had been totally different from his brother Aston in case of welcoming a stranger as guest. Mick had been the host here who has represented conditional hospitality by asking Davies multiple questions to assure the identity of Davies. Thus, the inquiry of the Mick in *The Caretaker* proves him a host who wants to have the control over the guest like a host in the context of conditional hospitality. Moreover, Mick set a pact for Davies which implied that he would be hospitable to Davies putting him within restriction. Again, Davies will be considered if he agrees to the job that Mick offers:

**Mick:** How you would like to stay on here, as caretaker? (Pinter80).

Eventually, the hospitality of Mick stops as Davies fails to show any sign of obligation and gratitude to Mick. One of the traits of conditional hospitality is to exercise control over guest. In the context of conditional hospitality, a host can decide whom he would welcome and exclude. Mick

followed abovementioned characteristics in *The Caretaker* and justified Derrida.

#### **Concept of Unconditional Hospitality in *The Caretaker*:**

Unconditional hospitality is a term that is coined by Jacques Derrida. It refers to a mild version of hospitality. This is the pure kind of hospitality that is offered without imposing any condition and restriction on a guest. In addition, this type of hospitality does not require any obligation and gratitude from a guest. Moreover, a host welcomes a guest without the sense of dominance in the context of unconditional hospitality. Derrida considered unconditional hospitality an opposite to conditional hospitality where a host offers hospitality without expecting any return from "absolute, unknown, anonymous other" (25).

In *The Caretaker*, Aston has represented unconditional hospitality when he brings a stranger named Davies who is without shelter and proper identity at his living place. Aston attempts to be hospitable to this stranger unconditionally. Unfortunately, Davies fails to respond as a proper guest by conspiring against Aston in this play. Derrida (1999) was assured of the risk involved in unconditional hospitality where a host cannot but take the "risk of the other coming and destroying the place, initiating a revolution, stealing everything and killing everyone" (qtd. in Dausner 55). Therefore, violence and risk are attached to unconditional hospitality in an implied manner. There is always a possibility in unconditional hospitality where a guest can turn against a host as the hospitality does not require any reciprocation and obligation in exchange. Thus, a host is always under threat while providing unconditional hospitality since it is difficult to know how a guest will respond. Thus, it is possible for a guest to cause harm to host in an environment without any restriction. Davies justifies the danger of unconditional hospitality who manipulates Aston who provides him shelter by complaining against him. Davies also conspires to depose Aston from his own home. Again, Davies exploited Aston using a bitter secret of Aston and marks the demerit of unconditional hospitality. Since Aston welcomes Davies without any condition that Davies would do

no harm to him, Aston pays the price ultimately for that:

**Aston:** I... I think it's time about you found somewhere else. I don't think we are hitting it off.

Jacques Derrida explains unconditional hospitality which refers to the hospitality which should be generous and would consider the interest of the guest even at the cost of the interest of the host. But, hospitality though seemed selfless and generous was mixed with personal interest in *The Caretaker*. The idea of hospitality with ulterior motive is closely related to the philosophical view entitled Psychological Egoism "simply claims that whatever a human being does, the ultimate aim is self-benefit" ("Philosophy Terms: Egoism"). Again, this concept proposes that people act for the benefit of others for their own sake, not for others' sake. One kind of psychological egoism is entitled 'Objective Egoism' which describes that "we are always pursuing certain objectives. Some say we always act for pleasure [even if it is altruistic]. Others argue that we always pursue whatever we think will bring us the most benefit" ("Philosophy Terms: Egoism"). Therefore, people may help others not for the concern of others rather for the concern, pleasure and benefit of the self. However, concern for the well-being of others based on private motive or self-interest "only appear altruistic at face value: they are best referred to as *quasi-altruistic*" (Wispelaere11). In act ii of this play, Mick offers Davies the job of being a caretaker. Apparently, it seems selfless but Mick's private interest works behind his proposal. Mick thinks about his own benefit before offering Davies the very job of caretaker:

**Mick:** He's supposed to be doing a little job for me (Pinter,).

Though, Aston shows pure hospitality at first to Davies, it was hospitality based on private motive and it is proved later on when he also offers Davies the job of caretaker to get a helping hand:

**Aston:** You could be.... caretaker here, if you liked (Pinter 65).

Thus, this dialogue proves that Mick is offering Davies the job as he feels Davies can work more efficiently and rapidly than his brother Aston to modify his present house into modern apartment. Again, Aston is presented as an alienated entity where Aston feels that Davies will accompany him in return. Therefore, his offer to Davies is based entirely on ulterior motive but it is not based on the interest of Davies. The offer here is not a pure altruistic act rather it can be termed as quasi-altruistic act. Even, the offer of Mick fits in the concept of psychological egoism/ objective egoism. In *The Caretaker*, both Mick and Aston employ ulterior motives with their hospitable behavior towards Davies. Moreover, each brother puts own concern before the concern of Davies and stops being altruistic seeing the collapse of their motives linked to Davies. Again, both the brothers find it morally right to help Davies to a certain extent as their interest will fail after that extent. Therefore, their hospitality is based on personal interest and they stop being hospitable seeing the futility of being hospitality.

#### Discussion:

The primary objective of this study was to locate conditional and unconditional hospitality proposed by Jacques Derrida himself in the play *The Caretaker* written by Harold Pinter. Besides, this study tried to explore the term self-interested altruism in *The Caretaker*. Derrida (2000) suggests that hospitality in traditional sense is only possible when a host maintains sovereignty while offering hospitality (p.55). This study also supported this idea as it located a controlling host called Mick in *The Caretaker*. Derrida (2002) proposes a kind of hospitality which is about welcoming a guest without any prior preparation and verification (p.360). Similarly, this research represented a host called Aston who received a guest without knowing much about the guest and without any previous invitation. However, Derrida addresses the possibility of misconduct caused by a guest in context of unconditional hospitality where a host loses sovereignty. (qtd. in Dausner,2018). *The Caretaker* represented the fulfillment of the assumption of Derrida since the recipient of unconditional hospitality in this play called Davies

seemed to be usurping the sovereignty of the host named Aston in a number of occasions. Davies complained regarding sleeping position while being allowed as a guest without any condition. Moreover, Davies conspired against the host who received him without imposing any strict condition. Thus, Davies seemed to be the master of the house where he took temporary shelter. For this reason, Derrida explains the sustainability of conditional hospitality represented by Mick in *The Caretaker* as hospitality never remains hospitality without conditions rather it becomes an aggressive war between the host and guest (qtd. in Dausner,2018). *The Caretaker* presented a character called Mick who manifested the awareness of Derrida regarding the risk attached to unconditional hospitality and remained a conditional host from beginning to end. Mick justified the concept of conditional hospitality in this play by offering him the job of caretaker. Again, Mick did not allow Davies directly as a guest rather tried to identify him as well as asked him to be a paying guest. Thus, the hospitality of Aston failed in *The Caretaker* as he could not keep up the sovereignty as a host whereas Mick kept up the status of sovereign host by verifying the identity of Davies in the beginning of their encounter. Moreover, Mick proved his authoritative position as a host when he stopped being hospitable smelling the conspiracy and fraudulence.

However, this particular research analyzed another important topic rooted in this play and it is hospitality with ulterior motive. This research explored that hospitality is not something that people do rather selflessly than they pretend to be altruistic for their personal pleasure and benefit. This research located two certain characters named Mick and Aston who offered hospitality to Davies to fulfill personal interest. They did not show altruism to Davies out of generous instinct rather both brothers were trying to fulfill their latent motives at the cost of Davies. Thus, this research identified the presence of psychological egoism deconstructing the hospitality of both Mick and Aston in *The Caretaker* who had personal motives behind their hospitality. Motive behind the hospitality of both Mick and Aston remained concealed "because such concealment is usually in their self-interest

("Psychological Egoism"). However, this research deconstructed the myth of genuine hospitality in *The Caretaker* by validating the hospitality with ulterior motive of both Mick and Aston.

### Conclusion

Thus, presence of both conditional and unconditional hospitality are detected in *The Caretaker* by Harold Pinter which are explained by Derrida, a reputed French theorist in his famous *Of Hospitality*. This study investigated not only the features of conditional and unconditional hospitality but also explored how host-guest relationship works under two types of hospitality in the light of *The Caretaker* Again, this study found out the harsh fact that there might have been the scope for unconditional and pure hospitality but hospitality in general sense survives within restriction, condition and obligation. Moreover, it traces the limit of relationship between a guest and host without which a host fails to keep his/her position as a host. According to Derrida, hospitality breaks into pieces if a host loses authority over the guest. Besides, it is assumed by Derrida that the concept of unconditional hospitality is impossible in this world though desired as there is possibility of a guest turning against a host, causing violence against a host, killing a host without imposition of conditions. A host cannot but require a certain amount of obligation from a guest to serve hospitality better. Research explored the materialization of the insinuation of Derrida in *The Caretaker* which represented a guest named Davies who turned against the host named Aston who helped Davies unconditionally without setting any restriction but Davies conspired against the person who offered help. In contrast, this research upheld the concept of conditional hospitality by analyzing the character Mick who offered hospitality keeping the distance to guest. However, this research also attempted to throw light on another significant issue implied in *The Caretaker*. This study scrutinized the bitter fact that pure hospitality is rare to be found in this world. This study identified pseudo hospitality represented both by Mick and Aston in *The Caretaker* where both of the characters were hospitable for their own sake not for the sake of Davies, the other. Again, this research tried to apply the theory called

psychological egoism in *The Caretaker* to assess the hospitality with ulterior motive reflected by both Mick and Aston. Moreover, this very concept of psychological egoism deconstructed the myth of pure hospitality being applied in *The Caretaker*. This paper through the analysis of the theme of hospitality embedded in *The Caretaker* in the light of Derrida urges the necessity of unconditional/pure hospitality in a time when well off people are busy with themselves forgetting the helpless people around them. Aston in *The Caretaker* by saving a stranger called Davies from a brawl and bring him in his home represented the idea of pure hospitality that Derrida proposes. To conclude, the theme of hospitality analyzed in this research is the microcosm of how hospitality towards unexpected, unknown, untimely guest runs in everyday life. For example, a person can try to help a distressed person or accommodate a homeless person in his own house. However, this benevolence will stop if it creates chaos in the life of that person who tries to be hospitable. The chaos may happen due to the negative attitude of the guest or the personal interest of the host may come before the hospitality. Again, this research found out the circumstances under which limitless hospitality narrows down to conditional hospitality. Finally, the insights provided in the paper exposes the discrepancy between generous hospitality and pseudo hospitality where personal motive determines hospitality which is also reflected in *The Caretaker*.

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