The Caretaker

1. Identity card

Title: *The Caretaker*

Author: Harold Pinter

Date of publication: 1960

Genre: Drama / Theatre of the Absurd

Historical and Cultural Context: Written in post-war Britain, the play reflects the uncertainty and social tensions of the period. As a major work of the Theatre of the Absurd, it explores isolation, power, identity and the difficulties of communication through ambiguous dialogue and everyday situations.

2. Plot summary

In a nutshell: after rescuing an elderly homeless man named Davies from a fight, Aston offers him shelter in his cluttered house. Davies hopes to become the caretaker of the property, but tensions soon arise between him, Aston and Aston's brother Mick. As misunderstandings, manipulation and power struggles intensify, Davies is ultimately rejected and left alone once again.

Key Moments:

- ➜ Aston rescues Davies and offers him a place to stay.
- ➜ Davies hopes to become the caretaker.
- ➜ Mick repeatedly questions and intimidates Davies.
- ➜ Aston reveals his traumatic experience in a psychiatric hospital.
- ➜ Davies is asked to leave the house.

3. Main characters

Name	Role	Symbol
Davies	homeless man	insecurity, survival
Aston	owner of the house	kindness, isolation
Mick	Aston's brother	power, ambiguity

4. Major themes and links to the LLCER program

Première – Rencontres

How does the play illustrate this theme?

- ➜ The unexpected encounter between three strangers creates shifting relationships.
- ➜ Communication is marked by misunderstanding and mistrust.
- ➜ Human relationships constantly evolve through conflict and dependence.

Key examples

- ➜ Aston offering shelter to Davies.
- ➜ Davies' interactions with Mick.
- ➜ The breakdown of trust between the characters.

Terminale – Arts and debates of ideas

How does the play illustrate this theme?

- ➜ The play questions power, communication and social exclusion.
- ➜ Pinter challenges the audience through ambiguity and silence.
- ➜ Theatre becomes a way to explore the human condition.

Key examples

- ➜ Aston's monologue about the psychiatric hospital.
- ➜ Mick's manipulation of Davies.
- ➜ The final rejection of Davies.

5. Key quotes and key words

"You've got no responsibilities."

identity – isolation – communication – power – memory – ambiguity – belonging

6. Author's message

- ➜ Identity is fragile and often uncertain.
- ➜ Communication can create misunderstanding rather than understanding.
- ➜ Power constantly shifts in human relationships.
- ➜ Loneliness and exclusion are central aspects of the human condition.