

# ***Violence, Fear, and Desire in The Plays of Harold Pinter***

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## **Abstract**

Harold Pinter is a great British playwright. In many of his plays, the characters can find security neither in their surroundings nor in an understanding relationship with others, and finally they are driven into a state of isolation and loss. The basic interest of this paper is to investigate the thematic development in Pinter's early plays, from *The Room* to *The Lover*. The change is from menace to fear and then to desire, which requires different uses of violence.

Violence emerges with the arrival of an unexpected visitor at the door, and by the end of the play, someone has defeated the other. Pinter builds up in *The Room* an atmosphere of ambiguity and insecurity. He compares between the cruelty and coldness of the outside world to the warmth and comfort of the room which Rose considers as her safe heaven.

In *The Dumb Waiter*, the audience enjoy the comedy that is embodied in violence. Gus's character reinforces our desire to look for the truth, confront our fear and injustice, and to assert our individual character.

The matchseller's motives in *A Slight Ache* torments Edward and arouse his fears and nervousness. The matchseller is a threat to his existence. Finally, Flora presents herself to the matchseller, leaving her husband broken and lonely in vast emptiness.

***Keywords: Menace, Security, Invader, Death, confusion***

*The Lover* portrays unfaithful couples who are not really unfaithful.

## **Harold Pinter: Introduction**

Harold Pinter was born on October 10, 1930 in Hackney, the only child of a Jewish family. He was then raised and educated in that filthy suburb of the East End of London which was a safe refuge for the Jewish people at that time.<sup>1</sup>

The poverty that Pinter's family suffered, the outbreak of the Second World War and the miserable period of the Depression had a great impact on Pinter's character. Therefore, the vision of the essentially menacing world and man's insecure existence haunted his

mind and characterized his work:

**The world is a pretty violent place, it's as simple as that, so any violence in the plays comes out quite naturally. It seems to me an essential and inevitable factor.<sup>2</sup>**

Pinter's dramatic career could be divided into two periods. The first started in 1949 when he joined the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. During that period, he worked as an actor and a director<sup>3</sup>. He also wrote poetry, some of which was published in a literary London magazine in 1950. The plays: *The Room*, *The Dumb Waiter*, and *The Homecoming* belong to the second period.

Pinter was influenced by Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce, Arthur Miller and Samuel Beckett. Of these, Beckett had made the greatest impression on him. The importance of Pinter as a writer lies in the depth of his insight. His main concern is man and his purposeless position in the world<sup>4</sup>. His plays are mysterious and ambiguous. He raises various questions, but they are not meant to be answered. However, there are many explanations to these questions. By such a way, he seeks to heighten the play's dramatic action. Pinter believes that writing is a private activity. He once stated:

**Firstly and finally, and all along the line, you write because there's something you want to write, have to write. For yourself. I'm convinced that what happens in my plays could happen anywhere, at any time, in any place, although the events may seem unfamiliar at first glance. If you press me for a definition I'd say that what goes on in my plays is realistic, but what I'm doing is not realism.<sup>5</sup>**

Pinter is interested in themes like fear, restlessness, and threat. "His characters", Bert O. States writes, "behave like little authors, or inventors of fiction, in their own rite (or game)"<sup>6</sup>. They are desperate to overcome their fears, and to maintain peaceful daily routine against the threat of suspicion and truth. The characters express their fear in meaningless and indirect actions. Pinter's use of repetitious dialogue express his belief in their constant failure to accept reality.

The room is almost a central and recurrent theme in Pinter's plays. It is also the title of his first distinguished play. The room, being dwelled safely by some persons when suddenly the whole security of the room is shattered by the coming of a strange intruder.<sup>7</sup>

### **Pinter the playwright**

Pinter's name has always been associated with the term comedy of menace. This term refers to a play in which a sense of danger and threat accompanying the audience's laughter. It was first

used by the British dramatist David Campton (1924- 2006) in the sub-title of his play *Lunatic View* ( 1957), a year later this term was applied to the early plays of Harold Pinter in a drama magazine article written by Irving Warble (1929) . Warble praised Pinter's admixture of comedy and menace and described it as "an apt dramatic motif for an age of conditional behavior in which orthodox man is a willing collaborator in his own destruction"<sup>8</sup>.

Critics agree with Warble who links Pinter's menace plays to the post war social climate and milieu. He considers his work as a mirror that reflects the dilemma of his age. Martin Esslin approves Warble's opinion as he wrote once:

**Pinter's early dramatic work is concerned with fear, ambiguity, and violence,as well as the elements of absurdity. Therefore, most of his plays begin comically but turn to physical, or psychological or potential violence\_ sometimes, in varying sequences, to all three.**<sup>9</sup>

Pinter insisted that, "Menace is everywhere. There is plenty of menace in this very room, at this very moment, you know. You can't avoid it; you can't get a way from it"<sup>10</sup> .His characters do not "revolt against a hostile abstract world. Instead, they look for shelter, be it physically defined, as a room.For example, on the negotiation for a psychological safe place"<sup>11</sup>. They always desire to fulfill their emotional needs. The fulfillment of these needs is contemplated by the relationship they develop with each other. Menace arises when their balanced relationship is violated especially when the weaker is dominated and manipulated by the stronger one. The struggle for power and authority is endless, the characters will always be victims in this harsh world. Furthermore, the threat of violence and the expectation of death lurks beneath Pinter's clever use of silence.

The use of violence and fear is an essential feature of Pinter's style of writing. He managed to evolve and develop his thoughts concerning this particular use from play to play. The theatrical violence can be recognized on many levels, ranging from the most obvious forms to the most refined ones. It can be a physical power which causes pain or death. It can be an intense, sometimes destructive emotional feeling. Moreover, violence may even be realized intricately as an aggressive passion, as well as any case that is conflictive.

Pinter's plays fall into a number of thematic categories, as when examined in their chronological order. This thematic development includes three groups: the first one includes; *The Room (1957)*, *The Dumb Waiter (1957)*, *The Birthday Party (1957)*, and *The Hothouse*

(1958). These plays are best described as menace plays. Physical violence is vividly notable as an extreme form of aggression so as to abuse or murder. These plays portray fatal external power threatening man's life. S. H. Gale thinks that "the threat to a person's security by unknown outside powers and the disintegration of his individuality under the onslaught of the attacking force"<sup>12</sup>. Ray Orley also comments on the common theme in Pinter's early play "The central character tries to escape from metaphysical menace of the outside world by holding up in some seemingly safe burrow"<sup>13</sup>. Thus, the struggle becomes an escapable factor in the situation, and violence a central part of the outcome. *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter* lend itself best to this particular analysis.

In the second prominent category the theme of fear emerges in plays such as: *A Slight Ache* (1954), *A Night Out* (1959), *Night School* (1961), and *The Caretaker* (1960). These plays are presented with more flexibility and subtleness. *A Slight Ache* is to be analyzed here.

Some of Pinter's work can be grouped into a third thematic category which concentrates on sensual desires. Sexual violence encompasses verbal as well as gestural forms. In fact, sex is used as a mean to evoke violence. *The Lover* (1963), *Tea Party* (1963), *The Basement* (1967), *The Homecoming* (1964) and *Betrayal* (1978) belong to this thematic group. Pinter questions the character's fidelity within the marriage institution. *The Lover* is the best representation of these works.

### ***The Room***

*The Room* is Pinter's first one act play. It was written in 1957. The play is Pinter's introduction to the themes of menace and violence that will develop in later works. The idea of the play came to the playwright's mind when he went into a room on one of his tours:

**I went into a room one day and saw a couple of people in it. This stuck with me for some time afterwards, and I felt that the only way I could give it expression and get it off my mind was dramatically. I started off with this picture of the two people and let them carry on from there.**<sup>14</sup>

John Russell Taylor remarks that the play is a great piece for an author who writes a dramatic work for the first time. He admits that he did not expect him to succeed:

**The situations involved are always very simple and basic; the language which the characters use is an almost uncannily accurate reproduction of everyday speech... And yet in these**

**ordinary surroundings lurk mysterious terrors and uncertainties, the whole external world of everyday realities is thrown into question. Can we ever know the truth about anybody or anything? Is there any absolute truth to be known.**<sup>15</sup>

The play yields an allegory of man's anxiety and fear in a merciless world. Pinter sets menace by setting his play in a small cozy room. Moreover, the play concentrates on the question of how a warm room, later becomes a living hell. The room that Bert and Rose inhabit is located in a boarding house and surrounded by a cold, hostile environment. Pinter contrasts between the seemingly safe room and the outside dark world. Rose is a sixty- year old doddering woman who seeks to create her own kingdom of security and happiness. She strives to make fences around her kingdom, so as to prevent any unwelcomed disturbances. She feels safe in her room and does not venture to go outside to see the surroundings. Rose hates to acknowledge or to cope with the mysterious "outside". Her nervousness and timidity is emphasized by her passive isolation. In addition, she passionately devotes her life to look after and please her husband who does not show any sentimental reaction. She is a victim and a hostage in this world because of her lack of knowledge of her environment. When the play begins, Pinter does not present Rose in a menacing hostage situation but by the play's end it becomes clear to the audience that she is a victim of both; the world and her fearful controlling husband.

While Bert sits at the table eating and reading his newspaper, Rose hovers about him. She advises him as she feeds him that, "It's very cold out; I can tell you. It's murder... Still, the room keeps warm. It's better than the basement, anyway"<sup>16</sup>(1, p.103). Her mind shifts back and forth as a circle of advances and retreats. She thinks that she is secure in her room and on the same time feels afraid of the stranger in the basement: "This is a good room. You've got a chance in a place like this...I wonder who has got it now. I've never seen them or heard of them. But I think someone's down there".(1,p.105)

Rose wraps herself with a shawl and sits on her rocking chair which symbolizes her doubts and confusion. She is afraid of being found in her relatively safe cocoon and tries hard to bury her true identity. She simply drops the curtain when she suspects someone is outside:

**I'm quite happy where I'm. We're quite. We're all right... and we're not bothered. And nobody bothers us.(1,p.103)**

Rose's weak control of her environment will constantly be broken when this "nobody" shows up knocking on her door. The room is

definitely more than a place for living. In fact, she considers it as the mother's womb, by which one is protected and unafraid. She prefers to hide herself in the womb- room and hates to be born into the outside icy world. Thus, when the room is symbolically portrayed as a womb, the stranger's physical intrusion becomes a violent aggressive act as he threatens the security of the one inside the womb.

The door connects between Rose's shell and the outside world. The audience see the door as a symbol of liberation and of imprisonment. Hence, it becomes the central point of excitement and suspense. Rose believes that every single knock is an alarm to something fearful, and every opening of the door is an outsider whose menace and darkness is countless.

Mr Kidd is the first one who visits Rose's room. He is the landlord of the house. Although it seems to be a harmless visit but their conversation includes the terrifying inescapable reality of death. Rose is very concerned about how Mr Kidd's sister died, "What did she die of?" "when did she die?", Mr Kidd merely says "I've made ends meet"(1,p.109), to suggest that Rose's end is coming soon.

The second visitors are the sands who make an alarming entrance. They begin to shake Rose's surety and stability about the people in the house and the place. They tell her that they confronted a man in the dark, gloomy basement whom they could not see but hear his voice that room number seven, was in fact vacant. Bert and Rose dwell in that room, "that's this room"(1,p.103) Rose answered. She is menaced by these people who think they can take over her realm and remarks that, "This room is occupied" (1,p.113). The Sands continue to defy Rose's beliefs, and interpolate the truth about the ownership of the room. Her realm is on the verge of destruction. So she, "goes to the rocking- chair, sits, rocks, sits, stops and sits still"(1,p.118).

A few seconds later, Mr Kidd knocks sharply on the door and bursts in. The violence of his intrusion mirrors Rose's frightfulness and lack of control over her own door. The sudden intrusion prepare the audience for a final disastrous one of the negro. The landlord describes the unwelcomed guest who wants to see Rose in the utmost horrifying words:

**I've had a terrible weekend. You'll have to see him...He is downstairs now. He hasn't given me any rest. Just lying there. In the black dark. Hour after hour. Why don't you leave me be, both of you? Mrs Hudd, have a bit of pity. Please see him. ( 1,p.121).**

The negro whose name is Riley, has waited in a damp and dark basement for the past few days. The coldness of the basement resembles his cruel intentions as he wanted to see Rose when alone

and weak so as to attack her. Riley seems to be acting as the agent of death in pursuing Rose to her final reckoning. He wants her to leave the womb-room and starts quoting her father's words, "come home, Sal" (1, p. 124).

The violent negro's intrusion into the Hudd's home delineates the implacable and cold obtrusiveness of death in the course of man's existence. Riley has sought the opportunity to extract Rose from her so-called realm. Suddenly, Bert comes home and knocks the negro down, kicking his head against the gas-stove several times, thereby affirming violence. Bert hopes to oust the invader and dispel menace from the room. Bert's violence is revealed throughout the play. At the beginning of the play Bert is kept silent and says nothing so as to control and manipulate Rose's goodness, yet, when he sees Riley at his room, he uses his vicious power. His silence is after all a mark of hatred and cruelty. James R. Hollis notes that:

**Bert's reticence is superficially humorous to the audience, but it is horrifying to Rose. His silence is the silence of someone who has nothing to say while her loquacity is the silence of one who is trying desperately but failing to say what she really wants to say. She really wants to say that she is afraid of the cold, of the night, and of the tenebrific forces that may lurk in the basement. She is asking Bert to respond to her needs, to bring her warmth, to accept her hesitant overtures of love. But Bert is silent.**<sup>17</sup>

Although Riley, the dangerous invader has been defeated by Bert, his task has nevertheless been accomplished. Rose "stands clutching her eyes. Can't see. I can't see" (1, p. 126), her physical pain symbolizes her inevitable death and the vulnerability of human existence under the powers of threat which destroy any solitary and innocent dream of security.

### ***The Dumb Waiter***

*The Dumb Waiter* is the second one act play by Harold Pinter. The play was considered the best of his early plays. The language of the play is characterized by Pinter's excessive use of pauses and silences. These two terms are simply a part of his creed as a craftsman and a revelation of his own vision and reaction to the world.

The play was inspired by Samuel Beckett's *Waiting For Godot* (1953). Pinter draws his plot and theme from this play, but his treatment is original and has all the stylistic features that he developed in later works. In addition to that, Pinter took the silence of the characters to a whole new level. Beckett's silences hint at dullness, isolation, and ultimate death. His characters always wait in hopelessness. Whereas, Pinter's silences expose ominousness and

violence. His characters real natures and motivations emerge in their silence as they wait for violence to prevail. According to Esslin, violence, fear, and torture both physical and verbal preoccupies in Pinter's early plays. Pinter defines violence in terms of inter-personal relationship:

**I think what you are talking about [violence] began in *The Dumb Waiter*, which forms my point of view is a relatively simple piece of work. The violence is really only an expression of the question of dominance and subservience, which is possibly a repeated theme in my plays.**<sup>18</sup>

In the simplest terms, *The Dumb Waiter* presents the story of two professional killers. Ben and Gus, as they wait in a cold, windowless basement room for their next mission. They work for a mysterious organization which sends them from time to time on assignments of violence and murder. In Lucina Gabbard Book *The Dream Structure of Pinter's Plays*, she argues that the title of the play is highly symbolic. It has different interpretations which work together to reflect the main theme of fear, threat, and violence which runs throughout the play<sup>19</sup>. The victim- aggressors role in Pinter's plays suggest that his themes are associated with his Jewish heritage and the social oppression he experienced in his youth. Generally, the themes are ultimately related. Bernard Dukore describes Pinter's writing as a, "picture of contemporary man beaten down by the social forces around him, based on man's failure to communicate with other men".<sup>20</sup>

Ben and Gus wait for something. Ben obediently waits the organization's orders and prefers to do so quietly; while Gus who waits for someone to give orders, is dumbly unaware of his own impending death. The play also symbolizes the lack of communication between Ben and Gus, as they speak at one another rather than to one another. Their life is extremely manipulated by their boss, Wilson as he controls them enormously.

From the very beginning, tension between the characters is evident because they fear and do not trust each other. They are capable of the same anxieties, insecurity, and the same feeling of guilt. As a matter of fact, tension provides the play with its serious and comic tone. Ben is more careful and precise at what he does. He silently carries out his job without asking questions. Moreover, he gets angry at his partner's casual actions and speech. The more Gus nags about the job, the more violent Ben becomes. Thus, the atmosphere of the play is filled with suspense and fear, especially because of the unknown identity of the victim.



The characters wait in boredom. Ben reads his newspaper, while Gus, the more inquisitive keeps on talking about boring and mundane stories.

He

says:

**GUS. What time is he getting in touch?**

**BEN. Reads. What's time is he getting in touch?**

**BEN. What's the matter with you? It could be any time. Any time.**

**GUS. .. Well, I was going to ask you something.**

**BEN. What?**

**GUS. Have you noticed the time that tank takes to fill?**

**BEN. What tank?(1, p.133)**

Pinter draws the attention of the audience on simple details to suggest that what is more important is about to come. Gus and Ben's words reveal their unwillingness to broach the most crucial matters at hand. The nature of Gus's speech and character exposes his inability to confess what he really wants to say. He is a skillful hitman who feels quite unskilled. Boulton Rightly thought that "the language is appropriate to characters whose sense of security extends no further than the length of a few words"<sup>21</sup>. The audience sympathize with Gus, the junior companion- in- crime to Ben. Gus is somehow childish, annoying the latter with many questions and trivial complaints. Ben tries to deal with Gus's vulnerability and insecurity:

**BEN. You know what your trouble is?**

**GUS. What?**

**BEN. You haven't got any interests.**

**GUS. I've got interests.**

**BEN. Look at me. What have I got?**

**GUS. I don't know. What?**

**BEN. I've got my woodwork. I've got my model boats. Have you ever seen me idle? I'm never idle. I know how to occupy my time, to its best advantage. Then when a call comes. I'm ready.**

**GUS. Don't you ever get fed up?**

**BEN. Fed up? What with? [silence] (1,p.134)**

The conversation of the two characters ends in silence, because neither Gus nor Ben can confront their personal fears and problems. But Ben is quite adjusted. He refuses to enter into a significant discussion with Gus. His silences and actions are tainted with a defensive violence and dominance. Gus, on the other hand, does not have recourse to hobbies; he has only recourse to silence.

Gus disturbs Ben with questions about the leader of the

criminal organization who guides their destiny. He believes that, "He doesn't seem to bother much about our comfort these days"(1,p.137). later, "When's he going to get in touch"(1,p.138). Ben does not pay attention to Gus. Suddenly, an envelope slides under the door containing twelve matches. Nothing is written on the envelope. Ben thinks that someone dropped the envelope and run away but to Gus the mystery of the event only increases his curiosity to seek answers to his questions and his unexplainable feeling of foreboding. At first it had appeared that the room, as in *The Room*, was a safe place for living and resting. But when the envelope is slid underneath the door, Ben and Gus become afraid because they know that there is someone else in the house. The two characters grab their revolvers in panic as the basement room becomes darker.

The discourse between Ben and Gus moves forewords and backwards. Gus is determined to ask Ben questions about what they will be expected to do. He mummurs "I thought perhaps you-I mean- have you got any idea who it's going to be tonight?"(1,p.141). He again asks about Wilson, the mysterious master of the organization. Ben becomes very angry, he grabs Gus by his throat and shouts "light the kettle"(1,p.142). But Gus never gives up that easily. This violent assault sheds light on Ben's insistence to control his partner. His attack on Gus, is an attempt to decrease him to dumbness, symptoms of oppressive force that eradicates dissent.

In the midst of their conversation, fear strikes again. A dumbwaiter clatters to their level and scares them by its loud noise and sudden appearance. In the dumbwaiter there is a piece of paper which contains food demands. While they read the paper, the dumbwaiter clatters up and Gus screams, "give us a chance! They're in a hurry, aren't they?"(1,p.148). Ben thinks that: the house must have been a café and the basement room is the former kitchen; but Gus senses that intrusion incident increase fear. The dumbwaiter returns with more requests which serve as a comic relief. Gus is eager to tell those upstairs that, "we can't do it"(1,p.145). The tension of fulfilling the demands seems to get to Gus first, and he recalls why they are in the dirty room in the first place. He wishes the job to end "the sooner we're out of this place the better"(1,p.153). Gus nervously shouts through the speaking tub, "the larder's bare"(1,p.155). His feeling of loneliness and anxiety is intensified. His hostility is subjected to those in power especially on those currently upstairs. But Ben speaks through the tube with more control of the situation; he seems to be the only one who has the ability to communicate with those who live outside the room. At last,

Ben remarks that time is getting on. The killing plan has been perfectly made; all they need is someone to kill. Gus realizes:

**You've missed something out before, you know that?**

**BEN. When he sees you behind him-**

**GUS. Me behind him**

**BEN. And me in front of him\_**

**GUS. And you in front of him\_**

**BEN. He'll feel uncertain\_**

**GUS. Uneasy.**

**BEN. He won't know what to do.**

**GUS. So what will he do?**

**BEN. He'll look at me and he'll look at you.**

**GUS. We won't say a word.....**

**BEN. Nobody says a word. (1,p.160)**

Their face to face conversation shows the audience the features of the victim and how silence will take over the stage. Gus is puzzled by the dark chain of events, the connection of their mission with the commands coming from upstairs:

**GUS (Thickly). Who is it upstairs?**

**BEN (Nervously). What's one thing to do with another?**

**GUS. I asked you a question.**

**BEN. Enough!**

**GUS (With growing agitation). I asked you before. Who moved in? I asked you. You said the people who had it before moved out. Well, who moved in?**

**BEN (hunched). Shut up.**

**GUS. I told you, didn't I?**

**BEN (standing). Shut up. (1,p.161)**

Unlike Ben, Gus relates the events all together because he seeks the answers to his questions. The irony is that Gus has been trying to show Ben the connection between the circumstances and the implied meaning of his questions. Gus senses his ultimate death and the betrayal of his partner and that he was the center of the organization's filthy game. He forgets that in the criminal organization, one is easily killed and replaced by another. The lack of communication between the characters stresses the fact that Ben has already known that Gus is the victim and only waited for the order to kill.

The play ends when Gus opens the door stripped of his coat, tie, and gun. The two characters stare at each other in silence.

### ***A Slight Ache***

*A Slight Ache* started its life on the radio. It was broadcast on 1954, and staged eighteen months later at the Arts theatre. Pinter abandons

the single room and sets the action of the play in different rooms of the same house. Moreover, the dramatic silence is explored differently; the silence of the man in confront of his nagging wife and the speechlessness defeat of Gus is replaced by the matchseller's silence which destructively dispossess Edward of both his wife and house. The external menace is now replaced by an internal one. Fears and needs of an individual rise from essential human deficiencies which are the basic source of menace to man's security.

Pinter presents characters of high social rank. Edward is described as an academic man engaged in scholarly pursuits. He is a refugee in the world of books, maps, and essays. However, his ignorance is revealed throughout the play. He is unable to name the flowers in his garden and to know where the Gobi desert is?. While Rose derives a false safety from the comfort of her room, Edward similarly attempts to build his own realm by burying himself in a distant and irrelevant place, thereby keeping himself from "frost and floods". But in both cases, the security is a mere delusion; and the inherent weaknesses are to be enlarged and magnified.

While Edward and Flora sit chatting in the garden, Edward is annoyed by the wasp. He tries to get rid of it and finally squashes it on the marmalade plate. Flora states, "what a horrible death"(1,p.172), but Edward disapproves, he says "on the contrary", rather fancying that kind of death. The audience find the vicious act as both comic and sinister. Edward lists the killing of the little insect among his great achievements, which in turn, exposes the emptiness of his work. It also serves as an image of his own death, especially when he tells Flora that he has a 'slight ache' in his eyes. Cahn claims that his ache is "a manifestation of his psychological pain and emotional vulnerability"<sup>22</sup>. Edward is filled with satisfaction as he practices his masculine power over the weak creature.

Edward fails to give his wife the sexual fulfillment she seeks, Flora starts to project on the matchseller her needs for a vital love affair. She seems to be fascinated by his enormous sexual power:

**FLORA: Good Lord, what's that? Is that a bullock let loose? No. It's the matchseller! My goodness, you can see him...through the hedge. He looks bigger. Have you been watching him? He looks...like a bullock. [ pause] Edward? [pause].(1,p.177)**

Flora admires the matchseller's power by "attaching to him the more positive connotations of a bullock as a young man",<sup>23</sup> whereas Edward wants to belittle him by "conveying negative connotations of 'bullock' as castrated bull"<sup>24</sup>. Moreover, she cherishes her past ravishment as a memory of sexual satisfaction which she acquired

during her younger days. She addresses the matchseller:

**Do you know, I've got a feeling I've seen you before, somewhere. Long before the flood. You were much younger. Yes, I'm really sure of it. Between ourselves, were you ever a poacher? I had an encounter with a poacher once. It was a ghastly rape, the brute...**(1,p.191)

The frustration of her marriage is the main reason for her yearning to make the matchseller her Barnabas, the Son of Consolation. The clash in the husband- wife relationship is laid bare. Flora puts her arms around the matchseller and says, "I'm going to keep you, you dreadful chap, and call you Barnabas? Isn't it dark Barnabas? Your eyes...you're great big eyes" (1,p.192). She finds the fulfillment of her emotional needs in the dark eyes of the matchseller, something which she has not been able to find in the aching eyes of Edward.

Accordingly, Edward who hides from his true self, looks for the opportunity to through the matchseller out of his life. So, he invites the latter so as to deal with him as a master deals with his disciple, as a man deals with a wasp. He wishes to see him as an impotent individual. In fact, Edward denies the effect of the matchseller's growing power, but he also attempts to project his own weaknesses and failure onto the matchseller. He tries to convince himself that this intruder is harmless, "of course he's harmless. How could he be other than harmless?" (1,p.176). He does not think of him as a potential threat. However, Edward's life insists that Edward is frightened of him despite all of his protests. Cahn believes that:

**Edward is conscious of the uncertainty that lies beyond the walls of his house, and his boats unintentionally reveal that he sees the matchseller as a fearsome invader. Furthermore, instead of communicating self- confidence, the repeated denial of alarm has the opposite effect of implying fear.**<sup>25</sup>

Edward starts to explain his high position to the guest. He writes philosophical and theological essays and does some practical investigation. The matchseller is silent. Furthermore, Edward tells the visitor how he was once in a low position. With drive and a good woman by his side, he succeeded in building a wealthy realm. Edward keeps on bragging while the matchseller remains silent. At last, Edward desperately remarks:

**Forgive me for saying so, but I had decided that you had the comprehension of a bullock. I was mistaken. You understand me perfectly well... You may think I was alarmed by the look of you. You would be quite mistaken. I was not alarmed by the look of you. I did not find you at all alarming. No, no. Nothing outside**

**this room has ever alarmed me. You disgust me, quite forcibly, if you want to know the truth.(1,p.187)**

The matchseller's silence throughout the interrogation provokes Edward's fears and anxieties. He is paranoid by matchseller's invasion and his intrigues to overthrow Edward from his realm. The scene reminds the audience of Rose's dialogue while Bert sat silently at the table:

**Make yourself at home. Strip to your buff. Do as you would in your own house.[ pause]**

**Did you say something? [ pause]**

**Anything? [pause].**

Edward cannot bear the silence he faces. It is so disconcerting to him because it is the silence that throws the burden of conversation back upon his shoulders. Edward's perplexed situation before the matchseller's silence is ironically compounded to the reality that he is the source of that silence. The visitor changes the shapes of his eyes:

**In fact every time I have seen you,you have looked quite different to the time before. [pause] Even now you look different.very different.[pause]Admitted that sometimes I viewed you through dark glasses,yes, and sometimes through light glasses, and on other occasions bare eyed.(1,p.197)**

Thus, Edward drains himself out in utter vulnerabilities and exhaustion.He loses total control of himself and his domain. His monologues are,actually dialogues between himself and himself.He questions himself over and over again.Yet, he finds the answers as destructive. He asks the matchseller, "who are you"(1,p.199), however the latter's silence emerges from Edward's poor condition.

The play ends shockingly.Flora returns calling her lover Barnabas. She shows him her and his garden, as she carelessly hands Edward the tray of matches and leaves with Barnabas.Flora's re-entrance enrich the play with irony. The husband is reduced to carry the matches as the real imposter. The matchseller on the other hand replaces the role of the husband. Edward's eye problem suggest his inability to see things around him as they really are. His slight ache equals the decline of his vitality and his inability the world he lives in.

### ***The Lover***

***The Lover*** is a 1963 television play. It tackles man and woman betrayal with a new dimension.The husband and wife play the roles of lover and whore. It is clear that married life for the couple has

deteriorated into emptiness and new stimulus is set to replace the stale and trivial relationship. Richard and Sarah believe that their physical desires can not be satisfied solely in marriage. So, they agree on playing a game of seduction and adultery. The husband adopts the role of the lover and the wife adopts the role of the whore. The game provide the couple with a chance to enkindle love and sense of adventure before they become like Edward and Flora. But their main problem is to learn how to live without playing the game.

Richard is about to leave for work,when he asks Sarah, “Is your lover coming today?”<sup>26</sup>(1,p.165). He wishes her a pleasant evening with her lover. When Richard returns home,they talk pleasantly about the lover’s visit:

**RICHARD. Does it ever occur to you that while you’re spending the afternoon being unfaithful to me I’m sitting at my desk going through balance sheets and graghs.**

**SARAH. How could I forget you?**

**RICHARD.Quite easily, I should think.**

**SARAH.But I’m in your house.**

**RICHARD.With another.**

**SARAH.But it’s you I love.**

**RICHARD. I beg your pardon?**

**SARAH. But it’s you I love.(1, p.166)**

Richard reminds Sarah to stay within the rules of the game and change the high-heel shoes,she wore for her lover.The couple congratulate their civilized arrangements. Moreover, he explains that love in marriage should be devoid of sex. He finds sensibility and respectfulness with a wife and pure lust with a whore. As a result, they indulge themselves in “sadistic fantasies... in order to achieve sexual potency.”<sup>27</sup>

There is a big gap between the idealized roles they perform and the realization of their sexual desires. Bamber Gascoigne thinks that the couple are unable to “reconcile their respectable idea of marriage with the violent ritual of their sexual passion and their resolution is to keep sex in a separate compartment”<sup>28</sup>. The rigid morality of middle class society is obvious in its designation of role which fail to realize man and specifically woman’s needs and capacities .The woman is only treated as mere accessory to the husband and should do her domestic duties without complaining.

Richard continues to look for details about the other’s lover endangering the security they have worked out.Questions make them act nervously. Richard starts to wonder what would happen if the four of them got together for tea in the house. Sarah pleas him to

leave things balanced. Finally, Max, her lover, enters; it is Richard wearing a suede jacket and no tie. They play several other games and make love. Max unsettles Sarah by asking questions about Richard. He shouts suddenly, "It's got to stop. I can't go on" (1,p.183). Sarah is disturbed, but Max-Richard does not want to fool his wife anymore. He says that he prefers, "enormous women...voluminous great unddered feminine bullocks"(1,p.184).

Richard returns home asking about Sarah's lover:  
**RICHARD.Lover come?She does not reply. Sarah.**

**SARAH.What? Sorry. I was thinking of something.**

**RICHARD.Did your lover come?**

**SARAH. Oh yes. He came.**

**RICHARD.In good shape?**

**SARAH.I have a headache actually.**

**RICHARD.Wasn't he in good shape?Pause (1,p.186)**

Richard is in a complete control of the game. His language resembles the language of the business world in which the arena of social intercourse is bound by certain rules. Richard tells Sarah that he likes thin woman, and makes her bewildered because she thought the contrary. The game is over Richard insists. He forbids her from entertaining her lover in the living room. Moreover, he says that he has left his wife because she was too bony:

**SARAH. But you liked...you said you liked...Richard...but you love me...**

**RICHARD. Of course.**

**SARAH. Yes...you love me...you don't mind him...you understand him...don't you?...I mean, you know better than I do...darling...all's well...all's well...the evenings... and the afternoons...do you see?(1,p.192)**

Her frantic confusion is obvious in the pauses in her speech. She wants to keep her lover because she can satisfy her needs and desires as a woman, something unlawful to her as a wife. The play culminates with Richard whispering, "you lovely whore"(1,p.196).

Richard feels that they may lose their true identities. Thus, the two roles end up by mingling into one. Sarah manages to adapt the old game to a new situation in order to save their marriage, now Richard's role of lover dominates his marital life. However, as Alrene Sykes concludes:

**...it is not a reassuring ending... From one point of view, Sarah has just managed to save from destruction "the game" which means so much to her, just managed to divert Richard from smashing their fantasy to pieces. What however of tomorrow or**



**the day after? What will happen to their relationship if the fantasy does break down.<sup>29</sup>**

### **Conclusion**

Pinter's characters are seen as prisoners in a vortex of uncertainties and ambiguities which diminish them into a state of helplessness and dehumanization. Their existence is meaningless. The safe room does not provide protection, the past present vague reality, and the future is uncertain. Moreover, their gloomy present promises nothing. Hence their tragedy is inevitable.

The plays discussed in this paper explore Pinter's fascination with the themes of violence, fear, and desire. The characters consciousness of the room as personal property is perfectly drawn in *The Room*. To Rose, the room signifies a world of security whereas the outside world signifies menace and aggression. Pinter tries to introduce an image of death for a contemporary setting. Riley who threatens Rose's safety becomes inconsistent with the roles played by other characters. Ray Orelly thinks:

**Despite the physical presence, he remains grossly unreal; he is almost an oracle, never speaking more than ten words at a time, making a deus-ex-machina entrance at the end of the play; he strains the audience's credulity to its limit<sup>30</sup>.**

In *The Dumb Waiter*, Gus's curious and observant character about the nature of his job and his environment leads to his own death. Ben allows himself to be the executioner of Gus which is something normal in the criminal world.

Violence is centered around the sight image in *A Slight Ache*. It becomes a symbol of Edward's psychological insufficiency. His fear isolate him in a delusional world as he tries to convince himself that he will not be replaced the matchseller. However, at the end of the play, he is left broken and forced to leave his house. The playwright well-integrates violence into the imagery and the imagery to the theme.

In regards to *The Lover*, Sarah and Richard are both victims and victors of their sexual desires. Their game reflect the game of life. The couple irresistibly seek to expel one another from life.

### **NOTES**

<sup>1</sup>Guido Almansi and Simon Henderson, *Harold Pinter*. (London: Methuen Company LTD: 1983), 10.

<sup>2</sup>Lawrence M. Bensky, "Pinter: Violence is Natural" (New York Times, 1 January 1967), 7.

<sup>3</sup>Almansi and Henderson, 10.

- <sup>4</sup> C. Hugh Hollman, *A Handbook to Literature*, (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing Company, 1985), 3.
- <sup>5</sup> Harold Pinter, *Complete Works:Two* (New York: Random House, Inc, 1977),4.
- <sup>6</sup> Marry Brewer,ed.*Harold Pinter's The Dumb Waiter*(Netherlands: Rodopi B.V.2009), 3.
- <sup>7</sup> Almansi and Henderson, 51.
- <sup>8</sup> Martin Esslin, *Pinter: The Playwright* (London:Pergamon Press, 1967), 24.
- <sup>9</sup> B.F.Dukore, *Harold Pinter* (London and Hong Kong: Macmillian,1998), 87.
- <sup>10</sup> Marry Brewer, ed., 10.
- <sup>11</sup> R.M.Olivera, *The Politics of Memory in Harold Pinter's Ashes toAshes*, (Universidul Federal, 1999), 54.
- <sup>12</sup> S.H.Gale, *Butter's Going Up*( Durham: Duke University Press, 1977), 38.
- <sup>13</sup> Ray Orley, "*Pinter and Menace*" Drama Critique, 2 (1968), 126.
- <sup>14</sup> James R. Hollis, *Harold Pinter: The Poetics of Silence* ( New York: Illinois University Press, 21.
- <sup>15</sup> John Russell Taylor, "*A Room and Some Views [The Technique ofCasting Doubt]*",*Critical Essays on Harold Pinter*, ed. Steven H.Gale (Boston: G.K. Hall& Co., 1990), 270.
- <sup>16</sup> Harold Pinter, *Pinter's Plays :One*,( Great Britain: Cox &Wyman Ltd,1976), p.103. All Further references to this work will appear in the text.
- <sup>17</sup> James R.Hollis, 22.
- <sup>18</sup> Bensky, 7.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> S.H.Gale, 17.
- <sup>21</sup> James R.Hollis, 14.
- <sup>22</sup> Cahn Victor, *Gender and Power in the Plays Of Harold Pinter*( London: Macmillan, 1994), 16.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>24</sup> Penelope Prentice, *The Pinter Ethic: The Erotic Aesthetic* ( New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1994), 69.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup> Harold Pinter, 165.
- <sup>27</sup> Alrene Sykes, *Harold Pinter*( NY: Humanities Press,1970), 109.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>29</sup> Ray Orley, 129.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid.

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**العنف ، الخوف ، و الرغبة في مسرحيات هارولد بنتر  
سها بحر فياض  
الخلاصة**

هارولد بنتر هو كاتب بريطاني عظيم ، فقد قدم في العديد من مسرحياته شخصيات لا تجد الامان في محيطها الذي تعيش فيه ولا في علاقتهم مع الآخرين ، و أخيرا فهم ينجر فون الى حالة من العزلة والضياع.

هذا البحث يبين التطور الموضوعي لمسرحيات بنتر من مسرحية الغرفة الي مسرحية العشيق . من الخطر الى الخوف ومن ثم الى الرغبة ، فأن هذه الموضوعات تتطلب أوجه مختلفة للعنف . يظهر العنف مع وصول زائر يقف عند الباب ، اذ مع نهاية المسرحية شخص ما يهزم الاخر . يخلق بنتر في مسرحية **العرفة** جو من الغموض و عدم الطمأنينة، فهو يقارن بين قساوة وبرودة العالم الخارجي مع الراحة والدفء في الغرفة التي تعتبرها روز جنتها الامنة . يستمتع الحضور في مسرحية **النادل الصامت** بالكوميديا التي يضمنها الكاتب في العنف . عززت شخصية غاس فينا الرغبة في البحث عن الحقيقة ، مواجهة الخوف و الظلم ، و تأكيد شخصيتنا الفردية.

دوافع بائع الثقاب في مسرحية **الالم الطفيف** تعذب ادورد و تثير مخاوفه و اعصابه ، فهو تهديد لوجوده . تقدم فلورا نفسها الى بائع الثقاب تاركا زوجها وحيدا و محطما في الفراغ الواسع . مسرحية **العشيق** تصور زوجين غير مخلصين لبعضهم البعض ولكنهم في الحقيقة ليسوا كذلك بالفعل .

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