Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences

Department of English Language and Literature

**A FREUDIAN READING OF HAROLD PINTER'S EARLY PLAYS:
NEUROTIC CHARACTERS IN *THE ROOM*, *THE BIRTHDAY PARTY*, AND
*THE CARETAKER***

Defne Arya GÜMÜŞLÜ

Master's Thesis

Ankara, 2023

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KABUL VE ONAY

Defne Arya GÜMÜŞLÜ tarafından hazırlanan "A Freudian Reading of Harold Pinter's Early Plays: Neurotic Characters in *The Room*, *The Birthday Party*, and *The Caretaker*" başlıklı bu çalışma, 16.01.2023 tarihinde yapılan savunma sınavı sonucunda başarılı bulunarak jürimiz tarafından Yüksek Lisans tezi olarak kabul edilmiştir.

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Defne Arya GÜMÜŞLÜ

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ÖZET

GÜMÜŞLÜ, Defne Arya. *Harold Pinter'ın Erken Dönem Oyunlarının Freudyen Açıdan İncelenmesi: Oda, Doğum Günü Partisi ve Kapıcı Oyunlarındaki Nevrotik Karakterler*, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ankara, 2023.

Savaş sonrası dönemi oyun yazarı Harold Pinter (1930-2008), İkinci Dünya Savaşı'nı takip eden dönemin travma ve acılarının etkilerini, nevrotik bozukluktan muzdarip karakterler sunarak erken dönem oyunlarında yansıtır. Pinter'ın karakterlerinin psikolojisini anlamak ve oyunlarının arkasında gizli kalmış anlamları çözümlemek için bu tez çalışmasında Sigmund Freud'un (1856-1939) nevroz hakkındaki görüşlerinden yararlanılmıştır. Bu tez, Freud'un nevroz hakkındaki görüşleri ışığında Pinter'ın Oda (1957), *Doğum Günü Partisi* (1957) ve *Kapıcı* (1959) oyunlarındaki karakterlerin endişe, devamlı korku hali, saldırgan davranışlar, yalnızlık, katatoni, obsesyon ve paranoya, başka bir deyişle nevrotik rahatsızlıkla başa çıktıklarını göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu rahatsızlığın başlıca nedeni, çözümlenmemiş Oidipus kompleksi ve ölüm dürtüsü gibi tatmin edilmemiş bilinçdışı arzuların yanı sıra toplumun bireyler üzerindeki kısıtlayıcı etkisidir; dolayısıyla, yukarıda bahsi geçen oyunlardaki karakterler çevreleriyle uyum sağlayamamaktadır. Bu tez için seçilen üç oyunda da Freudyen unsurlar ön plandadır. Tezin giriş bölümü, Freudyen psikanaliz ile İkinci Dünya Savaşı sonrası dönem ve savaşın Pinter üzerindeki travmatik etkisine odaklanmaktadır. Ardından, ilk bölümde bastırılmış ödipal arzu ve ölüm dürtüsünün Oda oyununda yer alan bireyler üzerindeki etkisi incelenmektedir. *Doğum Günü* Partisi'ni konu alan ikinci bölüm, bir adamın baba figürleri tarafından cezalandırılması üzerinden kastrasyon kaygısını analiz etmektedir. Son olarak, üçüncü bölümde, *Kapıcı* oyununda baba figüründen kurtulma arzusu, bir diğer deyişle baba katli incelenmektedir. Dolayısıyla bu tez, Pinter'ın erken dönem oyunlarındaki bireylerin, giderilmeyen Ödipal ve ölüm dürtülerinin yanı sıra toplumsal normların boğucu etkisinin yarattığı hoşnutsuzluk nedeniyle nevrozun pençesine düştüğü sonucuna varmaktadır. Özetlemek gerekirse, Freudyen psikanalitik bakış açısının yardımıyla, karakterlerin kaotik bilinçaltı dünyası kazılır ve hem dış dünyada hem de bilinçaltlarının derinliklerinde tehdit girdabına yakalandıkları açıklığa kavuşturulur.

Anahtar Sözcükler

Harold Pinter, *The Room*, *The Birthday Party*, The *Caretaker*, Sigmund Freud, Psikanaliz, Nevroz

ABSTRACT

GÜMÜŞLÜ, Defne Arya. *A Freudian Reading of Harold Pinter's Early Plays: Neurotic Characters in The Room, The Birthday Party, and The Caretaker*, Master's Thesis, Ankara, 2023.

As a post-war dramatist, Harold Pinter (1930-2008) reflects the effects of trauma and suffering of the period following the Second World War through his enigmatic early plays by presenting characters who seemingly fall victim to neurosis. To comprehend the psychology of Pinter's characters and demystify his plays, Sigmund Freud's views on neurosis are drawn onto in this study. In light of Freud's perspectives on neurosis, this thesis aims to illustrate that Pinter's characters in *The Room* (1957), *The Birthday Party* (1957), and *The Caretaker* (1959) suffer from apprehension, constant fear, aggressive behaviour, solitude, catatonia, obsessions, and paranoia, in other words, neurotic disturbance primarily due to their unfulfilled unconscious desires, that is the unresolved Oedipal urge and the death drive, as well as society's restrictive forces on individuals; thus, the characters in the abovementioned plays are unable to harmonise with their environment. All of the three plays which are selected for this thesis encompass the Freudian elements at their cores. The introduction part gives information about Freudian psychoanalysis and focalises on the period following the Second World War and its traumatic effect on Pinter. Then, the first chapter delves into the impact of the repressed Oedipal and death desires on individuals in *The Room.* The second chapter, which is about *The Birthday Party*, analyses castration anxiety through the punishment of a man by the father figures. Lastly, the third chapter examines the desire to get rid of the father figure, in other words, parricide, in *The Caretaker.* Therefore, this thesis concludes that the individuals in Pinter's early plays fall into the grip of neurosis due to unsatisfied Oedipal and death urges as well as discontent caused by the suffocating effect of social norms. To encapsulate, with the help of the Freudian psychoanalytical perspective, the chaotic unconscious world of the characters is excavated, and it is clarified that they are caught in the vortex of menace, which creeps both into the external world and the depths of their unconscious.

Keywords

Harold Pinter, *The Room*, *The Birthday Party*, *The Caretaker*, Sigmund Freud, Psychoanalysis, Neurosis

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INTRODUCTION

Harold Pinter's early plays, which were written following the Second World War, can be considered overwhelmingly enigmatic as the motivations, feelings, and actions of his characters are unreachable to the reader/audience; therefore, a strenuous effort is required to disclose the meaning behind these plays. In this vein, the aim of this thesis is to unfold the dark universe of the inscrutable minds of Harold Pinter's (1930-2008) characters in his early plays, namely, *The Room* (1957)*, The Birthday Party* (1957)*, and *The Caretaker* (1959) by using Sigmund Freud's (1856-1939) psychoanalytical perspective, precisely for comprehending the characters' fearful, withdrawn, aggressive, and obsessive conduct occurring due to the neurotic disorder. In the light of Freud's perspective, it is possible to assert that the characters who dwell in the Pinterian wasteland in the selected early plays are doomed to suffer from the neurotic disorder due to their unresolved Oedipus complex, castration anxiety, the repressed death drive, and the operations of society. While analysing Pinter's neurotic characters in his early plays, Freudian concepts, mainly the unconscious, the Oedipus complex, the castration fear, the death drive, and defence mechanisms, which remain the cornerstones of psychoanalysis, are employed in this thesis. Along with the Freudian psychoanalytical theory, the condition of the post-war period, which gravely affected Pinter and his playwrighting, is also touched upon.

Harold Pinter started his playwriting following the Second World War known as the post-war period, which is marked by the disappointment of individuals throughout Europe as the war shattered the lives of the people as well as destroyed societies, economies, and cities. The war, which lasted for six years, ended in 1945 with the victory of the Allies, namely Britain, France, Russia, and the U.S. over the alliance of Germany, Italy, and Japan known as the Axis Powers. By the end of the war, the dynamics of the world economy had altered which also gave way to political and social upheaval. The U.S., emerging as an economic power in the world, began to play a leading role; on the other hand, the European countries, especially Britain, struggled to keep themselves economically intact. Seeing the chance to have control over Western Europe, the U.S. started to support some of the European countries in their economic recovery, which is known today as the Marshall Plan. During that period,

"[e]ighteen European countries received about \$14 billion in Marshall aid between 1948 and 1951. Britain received the largest share of this support" (Fox 191-92). With that financial aid Europe for the reconstruction, the U.S.' aim was to prevent the influence of the Soviet Union over the Western part of Europe. To reconstruct their lands and relieve the pains of the brutal war, Western European countries had to cooperate and create an integrated economic system with the purpose of "[re-establishing] a functioning European economy free from many of the shackles of purely nationalist restraint" (Berle 203). As for the Soviet Union during that period, it had power and influence over Eastern Europe, developed itself in technology and weaponry that posed a threat to the U.S. Thus, the new political landscape of the world was dominated by the Cold War anxiety.

Meanwhile, in Britain, the feeling of insecurity aroused in British people as a result of their country's consequent fall from being a world power. By the end of the war, Britain appeared "[as] an enfeebled state in a world divided between two new superpowers, the USA and the Soviet Union" (Davies, "From Imperial to Post-Imperial Britain" 1). Britain did not even have enough resources and power to keep its colonies intact; for this reason, decolonisation became inevitable right after the war. In 1947, the decadent empire saw the loss of one of her most important colonies, India, gaining its independence. Along with that loss, Britain's attempt to regain power with the occupation of the Suez Canal, which provided a passage to her colonies, also failed with the withdrawal of Britain from the area. Following this failure, British politicians "… conceded that Britain lacked the military and economic power to stand on its own" (Davies, "Britain, Europe and Americanisation" 106). With the dissolution of the colonies, Britain lost its imperial status and its economic advantages. As a consequence, "Britain's international position had been dramatically changed, from the status of a creditor country to that of a debtor, that her international reserves had been heavily reduced" (Crick 39). With the financial aid of the U.S., the efforts for physical, social, and economic reconstruction were observed in Britain. The destructed cities ought to be renovated as "[i]t has been estimated that about one house in every five in the whole nation has been destroyed, or partly demolished or blasted by air attack" (Finer 498). Thus, the war-stricken cities needed to be planned with housing areas as well as zones attributed to manufacturing. In addition to the need for

physical reconstruction, the suffering economy was a problem to be dealt with as most of the remaining industries after the war were the ones that produced war materials while the other industries nearly ceased to exist. As Denis Gwynn claimed in his article that was written during the war-time, "[t]he air attacks have been deliberately concentrated upon the cities and the great centres of industry and shipping" (238) that prevented Britain from continuing its economic activities after the war as the means of manufacturing and trading were demolished by the German air force. The economic situation of the country in the aftermath of the war is epitomised by Addison:

> With industry geared to the needs of the armed forces, and imports severely restricted by the Battle of the Atlantic, domestic consumers were subject to a regime of austerity in which petrol, clothes and basic foodstuffs were rationed, and many other goods unobtainable or in short supply. About a quarter of the nation's stock of capital was destroyed, along with two-thirds of the pre-war export trade, and most of Britain's foreign investments. (7)

The destructed industries were not able to provide sufficient jobs to the masses in the days following the end of the war. Accordingly, as a result of that, unemployment and severe poverty stroke British society. The decline in the economy gave way to "the creation of a new peacetime social and political order" (Addison 4). During that period, the welfare state that provided social security, free health, and education services was established with the Labour Government. Furthermore, for the purpose of economic expansion, the government took hold of some industries, and created a system of mixed economic structure that led to the employment of more people. In effect, stability was achieved in terms of the economy. The rising of job opportunities in Britain gave way to a wave of immigration from the former British colonies, and Eastern parts of Europe in response to the economic growth and shortage of labour within the industries. As it is epitomised: "[the] production boom created acute labor shortages and rigidities in domestic labor markets. In response, private employers and governments across Western Europe aggressively recruited legions of foreign workers" (Messina 131). The wave of immigration inflamed the feelings of xenophobia and racism in British people. That tension concerning the immigrants may be said to have been reflected in Pinter's early plays since in those plays the fear of the outsider and the threat posed by the strangers and/or foreigners is observable. About the presence of menacing intruders in his early plays, Pinter states that "I don't

think it is all that surrealistic and curious because surely this thing, of people arriving at the door, has been happening in Europe in the last twenty years" (qtd. in Nicholson 100). For instance, in *The Birthday Party,* with the arrival of the Irish and Jewish characters, respectively McCann, and Goldberg, "a fear about the invasion of ethnic diversity is enacted" (Wandor 58). Obviously, in the play, the outsiders are responsible for destructing the life of Stanley, who dwells in the boarding house, by gaining control over him and eventually taking him away. From this perspective, McCann and Goldberg's changing Stanley's appearance, his way of talking, and eventually reducing him to a puppet, in a way, portray the era's fear of strangers and/or foreigners. A similar approach towards strangers is observable in Pinter's other early plays such as *The Room,* in which a black man coming from the outside poses a threat to the central character, and *The Caretaker* that has overtly hostile statements concerning foreigners, especially uttered by Davies the tramp.

The changes in British politics and economy ineluctably impacted the society and culture. The members of the society knew that Britain was no longer a central power in the world. Accordingly, British people reflected "evasive inwardness and nostalgia" (qtd. in Davies, "From Imperial to Post-Imperial Britain" 2). The uncertainty that prevailed in the lives of people after the war not only in Britain but also in Europe, brought distrust, loss of belief, disappointment with the governments, the purpose of the past war, and even towards the purpose of life. Within this context, it can be argued that British drama of the post-war period flourished under the influence of those major changes in that period. The chaotic atmosphere of the post-war was a suitable ground for new perspectives towards life to grow and find their place in literature. As it is explained, "[t]he decline of religious faith was masked until the end of the Second World War by the substitute religions of faith in progress, nationalism, and various totalitarian fallacies. All this was shattered by the war" (Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* 19), and gave way to people's questioning the meaning and purpose of their existence in a purposeless void.

From this chaotic state, "the absurd" as a philosophical concept emanated and gained a significant place in the field of literature, particularly in drama. The term "absurd," in a most simplistic way, may be defined as "irrational." In *The Blackwell Dictionary*

of Western Philosophy, the absurd is defined within the philosophical context as: "the meaninglessness of human existence that derives from its lack of ground or ultimate purpose" (Bunnin and Yu 6). In *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1961)*,* Martin Esslin the renowned critic who theorised about Absurd Drama, gave the definition of the "absurd" as follows: "out of harmony with reason or propriety; incongruous, unreasonable, illogical" (19). In the light of this definition, it might be said that the human beings' existence in the world is without a purpose and meaning. In *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), Albert Camus explains that,

> [a] world that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty, is a familiar world. But in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come. This divorce between man and his life [...] truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity. (13)

Those words of Camus manifest modern man's disharmonious stance in a world which does not offer a purpose to live for its inhabitants. Thus, man becomes imbued with estrangement and senselessness in that atmosphere. Furthermore, Camus claims that "[t]he absurd is born of confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world" (27). For Camus, "what is absurd is the confrontation of the irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart" (23). In other words, people's constant striving to find meaning in a meaningless universe is also what creates the absurd as "the world will never give us what we want" (Bennett 36).

The absurd as a philosophical concept impacts literature, especially the field of drama after the Second World War. Fundamentally, Absurd Drama delineates the bleak and absurd human condition "[by] proclaiming the irrationality and apparent meaninglessness of existence" (Wegener 151). These plays do not prioritise relating a story or action, rather, they indulge in the human condition. From this perspective, Pinter's early plays can be evaluated to a certain extent to constitute some elements of Absurd Drama which are especially ostensible in his plays with which this thesis is concerned, namely, *The Room, The Birthday Party,* and *The Caretaker.*

Some thematic and technical features of the absurd movement, which is pioneered by Samuel Beckett in Britain, can be possibly observed in Pinter's early plays. As regards the characteristics of Absurd Drama, the accentuation of ambiguity, monotony, and inactivity, the decadence of communication, lack of affection, fragmentation in character and language, obscurity in terms of plot and character, and corruption of faith can be foregrounded, as confirmed by Wong, "[t]he estrangement of man from language, his companions, his past, and his unforeseeable future contributes to what Martin Esslin terms 'The Theatre of the Absurd'" (3). Moreover, the plays of Absurd Drama are marked by minimal action and monotony. Essentially, the main action, for instance, of *The Room* is limited to the arrival of unexpected guests into the protagonist Rose's room alongside of the eventual brutality of Rose's husband towards the black man from the basement. Additionally, ambiguous endings come to the forefront in Absurd Drama as can be discerned in Pinter's early plays which do not offer a closure. To exemplify, in *The Birthday Party*'s closure, Stanley is taken away without any apparent reason.

From that standpoint, it can be argued that the absence of cause and effect is also integral to Absurd Drama. As explained by Esslin, Pinter's plays are marked by "the deliberate omission of an explanation or a motivation for the action" (*The Theatre of the Absurd* 230). Rejecting to give explanations about actions, characters, their backgrounds, and motivations, Pinter leaves gaps in his plays, which makes the characters different from the characters in earlier well-made plays. Abounded with uncertainties, the interrogation scene of Stanley in *The Birthday Party* can be taken up as an example since the reason behind the interrogation is not clear. Similarly, in *The Room,* the reason behind Rose's fear of the outside as well as the identity and the purpose of Riley are cloudy; and as for *The Caretaker,* the background of Davies, as well as the brothers' past are left unexplained. As can be seen, Pinter does not give explanations, embellish his plays with details, or provide resolutions as he thinks that a playwright should not offer solutions or impose his perspective.

In addition, the concoction of comic and tragic elements, which can be detected in Pinter's plays, is also one of the prominent characteristics of Absurd Drama. As underlined by Dukore, "Pinter's plays are frequently funny. They are also frequently

frightening" ("The Theatre of Harold Pinter" 43). In his early plays, trivial dialogues and monologues resulting from lack of communication, misunderstandings, repetitions, and confusion of memory produce the effect of comedy. To exemplify, the confusing dialogue that Rose and the landlord indulged in comprises irrelevant statements that create a comic effect while displaying the problem of humanity, the absence of connection between individuals, which is tragic. By the same token, Davies' miserable situation, his rejection by the brothers, and Aston's mental problems, his loneliness in *The Caretaker* can be taken up as examples of tragic elements. Along with the tragic elements in *The Caretaker*, the reader/audience cannot help but laugh and feel threatened concurrently when Davies is startled by a household appliance, a vacuum cleaner.

As for the characters in Absurd Drama, it is said that "[t]hey are characters who have no 'character'- that is, no consistency of personality. […] These creatures do not even have a sense of self. Their agony [...] is a futile search for essence, for some consistency of being" (Feynman 18). In line with this statement, these characters seem to be thrown into the world, roaming purposelessly isolated and alienated, even without the desire for communication. The characters of Absurd Drama "are no heroes or villains" (Hornby 641), rather they are simply ordinary characters who are engaged in a constant struggle in the midst of the unknown. Similar to other characters of Absurd Drama, the alienated characters of Pinter constantly make an effort to adjust themselves to an uncaring world although they eventually drown in uncertainties and loneliness. In other words, these characters keep rolling the rock up the hill futilely as Sisyphus did since "in a world devoid of meaning, time is burdensome, and so the characters of the absurd theatre invent ways to kill time" (Halloran 104). It is especially clear in the case of Aston in *The Caretaker* since his only aim in life seems to be to build a shed, yet he does not make any progress throughout the play. As a consequence of their relentless engagement with their existence, the characters in Absurd Drama crawl into their shells and evade closeness and communication.

In a world that is devoid of communication and affection, language loses its function as a meaningful tool to communicate. In a way, language in Absurd Drama corresponds to the irrationality and meaninglessness of life. Hence, silence, babblings,

senseless ravings, circular dialogues, and reiterations form the backbone of the language of Absurd Drama. Normally, language and dialogues can be said to be the essential parts of traditional dramatic works by means of them, action and characters are revealed. However, losing its function, language in Absurd Drama is degraded to a meaningless concept that does not "enhance further understanding of character or plot" (Wegener 155), it rather confounds the reader/audience. The illogical exchanges with repetitions between characters reduce the language to a cliché and reveal the void in their lives even more, which, for instance, can be observed in Rose's circular monologue in the opening of *The Room* since her ravings about the immaculacy of the room disclose her desolation. In *The Birthday Party,* for instance, as Goldberg gives incongruent details about his past, his identity becomes even more blurred as his name changes from Nat to Simey. In this vein, alienated from each other, it is not surprising that even the characters in Pinter's early plays cannot maintain decent conversations.

Alongside the aforementioned novelties related to Absurd Drama and present in Pinter's early plays, it is worth mentioning some innovations brought by the Angry Young Men and the Kitchen Sink movement since some features of these social realist movements also contributed to Pinter's early plays. The starting point of British post-war drama dates back to 1956 which was the date of John Osborne's revolutionary play, *Look Back in Anger*'s production. Osborne's play was about the protagonist's unmitigated rage generally directed towards society, especially the upper class, the inequalities, and the generation that started the war. Similar to Osborne, other post-war British playwrights shaped their plays in the light of their political views and under the influence of social realism that "captures humans with all of their virtues and vices; can emulate humans' natural (spoken) language, dialects, and accents; and stages the everyday, lived life, by allowing the audience to view through characters through a 'fourth wall'" (Bennett 30).

In line with the social realist theatre of the time, "[u]nemployment, poverty, prejudice, and mental illness" (Bernhard 186), as well as implicit xenophobic remarks and the fear of outsiders are seen as common themes in these protest plays of the post-war period. Similar to these plays, in *The Caretaker,* for instance, through Davies,

unemployment and his destituteness are ostensible. The play also touches upon the issue of mental illness by Aston' revealing his distorted memories of a mental institution. In addition, although subtle, the presence of power relations is shown in Pinter's early plays. These plays successfully convey power struggle and the individuals' silent resistance to authority as well as to society and its norms. For this reason, Pinter is depicted as "a cousin of the Angry Young Englishmen of his generation, for Pinter's anger, like theirs, is directed vitriolically against the System" (Cohn 55). In *The Birthday Party*, Stanley as well as Aston in *The Caretaker* are silenced and reduced to impotent bodies by the figures of authority. Stanley's persecutors are "[the] representatives of the two traditional religions of Western civilization, Judaism and Catholicism (Dukore, "The Theatre of Harold Pinter" 52); to put it explicitly they stand for "tradition and conformity" (52) while Aston's oppressors are medical doctors. From this perspective, Pinter's plays also "focus on the shifting and evolving power dynamics" (Wyllie and Rees 34) between individuals as well as individuals and the system.

Pinter's early plays bear some technical similarities with the social realistic theatre of the post-war period. In terms of setting, instead of the drawing-rooms of the upper-class, the living spaces of lower-class people, and working-class protagonists were at the heart of the Angry Young Men Movement and Kitchen Sink drama as illustrated in *The Room*, *The Birthday Party*, and *The Caretaker*. Pinter's early plays generally open in the claustrophobic rooms of lower-class people and take place in a realistic setting. Within these realistic interior spaces, the characters' mundane activities such as ironing, cleaning, and cooking are portrayed. The reader/audience witnesses the characters' daily chores, and their lives behind closed doors. For instance, *The Room* takes place in a room of a working-class couple. In the stage directions, a gas stove, a sink, and a bed are indicated so that the reader/audience observe the characters' ordinary life. Again, in *The Room*, Rose prepares food in the kitchen and serves it to her husband, Bert who eats and reads a magazine without acknowledging what his wife says. The same pattern can be observed in *The Birthday Party* in which Meg serves food and drinks to others, and in *The Caretaker,* Aston constantly screws and unscrews plugs to mend the toaster.

As it is mentioned before, the playwrights of the Angry Young Men and Kitchen Sink Drama portray "the realities of the poor East End" (Watson 281). Therefore, their focus is on the lower-class nonconformist characters who reject "the values of previous generations and British society of the time" (Wilkin 147). The derelict characters of the post-war period are also disillusioned and frustrated due to the past war; in a way, they are the antiheroes who cannot fit into their environment. In parallel with the Angry Young Man, Pinter's characters in his early plays have lower social and economic standing. Similar to the dissident characters who are the core of the Angry Young Man movement, Pinter's protagonists in his early plays are also nonconformists. For instance, Stanley Webber, in *The Birthday Party*, stands out as one of the most well-known nonconformist figures in Pinter's oeuvre as an estranged and disillusioned artist who does not conform to established social norms as a recluse who lives a parasitic existence in the old couple's house.

Representing the lower-class characters and portraying their lives, the social realist plays which belong to the Angry Young Man movement contain substandard working-class English. In a similar vein, Pinter's characters in his early plays speak in colloquial language, mainly in a Cockney accent. It is claimed that "Pinter has always had a fascination with everyday idioms [and] commonplace language" (Stokes 226). This fascination manifests itself in *The Caretaker* as Davies frequently speaks in substandard English. He utters the following statement upon Aston's rescuing him: "I was lucky you come into that caff. I might have been done by that Scotch git. I been left for dead more than once" (Pinter 10). The colloquial language can also be detected in *The Birthday Party*, for instance in Goldberg's blaming Stanley by saying that, "[y]ou left [your wife] in the pudding club" (44). The use of coarse language and swearwords are further drawn attention to both in the works of the Angry Young Man movement and in Pinter's early plays.

Despite constituting some features of Absurd Drama and the Angry Young Man movement, Pinter's early plays are labelled essentially under the name of "Comedy of Menace" since they manage to hold comic elements in tandem with the menacing ones while creating tension arising from ambiguity. Comedy of Menace can be regarded as "a comedy that frightens and causes pain" (Hinchliffe 38). While the

characters' inability to communicate, their illogical and sometimes disturbing speeches, and actions create a comic effect, the presence of an intruder or the probability of threat shatters the play's comic side and foregrounds menace. The menace that is spoken of "is usually unspecified or unexplained - therefore, more ominous" (Dukore, *Harold Pinter* 26). This unexplained menace does not usually have a logical base, which brings suspicion and even more terror to the reader/audience. For instance, in *The Dumb Waiter* (1957), the exotic and luxurious dish orders coming from upstairs are ludicrous and startling for the characters, Ben and Gus.

It can be put forward that affected by the traumas of the Second World War and the disillusionment of the post-war period, Harold Pinter shaped his early plays, "Comedy of Menace." In this vein, the life of the renowned playwright, although succinctly, should also be taken into consideration as it paved the way for his playwriting career. Pinter was born in 1930 as the son of a Jewish lower-middle-class family in the Hackney district in the East End of London, which was commonly inhabited by people who belonged to the working-class. Pieces from the playwright's personal life and social background that he belonged to could hardly be more evident in his first plays. The atmosphere of the very place that Pinter was born and grew up deeply affected him as "[t]he East End of London [...] of the nineteen-thirties was a political battlefield" (Esslin, *Pinter: A Study of His Plays* 32). In the East End, Pinter encountered violence and conflict for the first time. It was because the East End "[was] a symbol [...] of social questions, poverty and physical deterioration" (Kushner 79). But even more, that part of the city was marked by "ethnic pluralism and racial intolerance" (Kushner 79) since the East End projected the conflict and unrest within Europe in the pre-war period in itself. During the pre-war period, "[i]n Germany and Italy [...] fascist governments took hold, and their racial policies, favoured by English fascists, threatened Jews in England" (Dukore, *Harold Pinter* 13), especially the ones who resided in the East End. In that atmosphere, the Britain Union of Fascists (BUF) was formed in 1932. BUF can be seen "as Britain's experience of the European-wide disease of fascism and nazism" (Cullen 246). The party took an active part especially in the East End of London where they held meetings and were "noted for [...] street fighting with left-wingers and Jews" (Pelz 142). Therefore, it was unavoidable for

Pinter as a Jewish child not to encounter fascist attitudes in an atmosphere that fascism and anti-Semitism were on the rise.

Apart from the negative effects of the discrimination that he had to endure as a Jewish child, the outbreak of the Second World War profoundly impacted Pinter's life. During the Blitz, Pinter was one of the children who was forced to leave his family behind and evacuate London. As Mayall and Morrow suggest, "[e]vacuation commonly regarded as children's central and traumatic experience during the war" (72) as the children that were sent away lacked their familiar environment, the feeling of security, parental support, and proper education along with the fear of the unknown situation, and conflict that was created by the war. According to Michael Billington who wrote a comprehensive biographical work on Harold Pinter, "[Pinter's] prime memories of evacuation today are of loneliness, bewilderment, separation, and loss: themes that recur in all his works" (17). Pinter recounts the distressing effect of evacuation on himself as, "I think I was completely bewildered by the whole thing. I was very lonely and very uncomfortable. I was nine at the time, and I didn't know why I was there, where I'd come from, and what it was all about" ("Evacuees" 9). When Pinter came back to London, along with the feeling of the loss of security as a consequence of evacuation, he faced even more trauma with the air raids, and bombardments. In one of his interviews, he gave a glimpse of his childhood which was tormented by the war:

> When I was about 13, and back in London during the war, with my mother and father, we woke up one night. There was an air raid alarm. We opened the back door of the house where there was a little garden. It was entirely in flames, the whole garden, and all the gardens along. They had dropped incendiary bombs. So we had to evacuate the house immediately. (Pinter, *Conversations with Pinter* 106)

Those war traumas, conflicts, and fascism that Pinter encountered in the early period of his life may have led him to write plays that contain the existence of threats coming from the external world. As the playwright's childhood and youth took place in a menacing atmosphere where violence and fear prevailed, the effects of these can be observed in his early plays in which terror incessantly lurked in the background. Haunted by the terrors of the war, Pinter refused to do his military service; therefore, he was faced with prison penalty. In a *New Yorker* interview Pinter explains the reason

behind his decision on being a conscientious objector by stating, "I was aware of the suffering and of the horror of war, and by no means was I going to subscribe to keeping it going. I said no" (qtd. in Esslin, *Pinter: A Study of His Plays* 13). Being a conscientious objector "was a landmark in Pinter's life [...]. It gave him his first decisive experience of the conflict between individual determination and social conformity" (Billington 46). With that experience, Pinter ended up as a nonconformist, and as an outcast.

Harold Pinter's enthusiasm for drama and literature started in Hackney Grammar School with the influence of his English teacher, Joe Brearley; "[i]nspired by Brearley, Pinter shone at English, wrote for the school magazine, and discovered a gift for acting" (Billington 27) as his teacher gave him a role in a school play. For Pinter, Brearley opened up the gates of an intellectual world as a result of which, he wrote several poems and prose works during his youth. In the light of his teacher's impact, he went to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) to have an education in the field of acting; nonetheless, similar to the characters of his early plays, Pinter found it impossible to harmonise with this new environment; therefore, he chose to drop out. However, his choice to leave his education did not stop his zeal for literature and arts as at the age of twenty, his poems were published and his acting career started with his performance on the BBC radio in 1950 (Peacock 22). Gradually, Pinter appeared in more significant roles and decided to "[resume] his training as an actor at the Central School of Speech and Drama" (Esslin, *The Peopled Wound* 14). Undoubtfully, his considerable stage experience and his being familiar with the world of acting, paved the way for Pinter's being one of the most acclaimed playwrights in the field of British drama. As can be seen in his following statement, "my experience as an actor has influenced my plays -it must have- though it's impossible for me to put my finger on it exactly" (Pinter, "Writing for Myself" 7), he himself admitted that his career as an actor impacted his playwrighting career. Moreover, as Burkman claims Pinter's acting career further contributed to his drama that was dominated by the presence of threat: "[Pinter's] subsequent lonely existence as a traveling actor living in furnished rooms and seaside boarding houses, the endless jobs that the acting life imposed, all may have contributed to the sense of menace" (xvii).

In 1957, the playwright's first play, *The Room* was written and staged at the request of the Department of Drama in Bristol University as they desired to stage a one-act play for their opening. This play displays the falling apart of the beloved room, in other words, the false haven of an anxious woman with the intrusion of outsiders who have ambiguous intentions. *The Room* was followed by one of Pinter's most renowned plays, *The Birthday Party* (1957) which is filled with the tension of the unknown behind the characters' motivations and backgrounds. Taking place in the living room of a boarding house, the play portrays the tenant of the house who seems to be escaping from unexplained danger, and his subsequent suppression with the arrival of two mysterious men. After its first production, the play received harsh criticism mainly concerning its obscurity and unresolved suspense that resulted in the audience's confusion (Dukore, *Harold Pinter* 1). Not surprisingly, the ill-received play was cancelled a week after; however, a year later, the same play became so successful that after its production, "[f]or days one could hear people in buses and canteens eagerly discussing the play as a maddening but deeply disturbing experience" (Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* 239). Moreover, in 1960, *The Room* as well as *The Dumb Waiter* (1957), which takes place in a basement with two men who appear to be hitmen on a mysterious mission, were staged at the Royal Court Theatre and got a positive reaction from the audience. Pinter's career as a dramatist took a turn with his renowned play, *The Caretaker* (1959), which may be considered as "[h]is first major critical and popular success on the English stage" (Dukore, *Harold Pinter* 18). *The Caretaker* takes place in the shabby room of two brothers, and centres around the arrival of an old vagrant who yearns to stay in their house. The abovementioned early plays of Pinter share common grounds in terms of the theme of threat, claustrophobic settings, and disturbed characters. Therefore, owing to their similar features, they have been categorised under the name of "Comedy of Menace" as the reader/audience feels the impending menace that is lurking in the background and faces anxious characters striving to survive in that chaotic atmosphere.

An outstanding play that Harold Pinter wrote in his mid-career is *The Homecoming* (1965) which presents a family in which violence and hatred prevail. The family's mysterious background which is related to the criminal underworld and prostitution is unveiled with the arrival of the long-lost brother and his wife, the latter of whom

subsequently becomes the substitute for the dead mother of the family. *The Homecoming* is evaluated as "the end of Pinter's 'Comedy of Menace' period" (Ayres 43) since the play takes the reader/audience on a journey of reminiscences of the characters. It is worth mentioning that, starting from the mid-1960s, Pinter's early plays changed into memory plays that explore "the nature of the workings of memory and perception" (Mudasir 72). Mostly based on monologues of recollecting the past, in the memory plays of Pinter the past and present are entwined with a pattern that lacks linearity. Minimal action and lack of interaction between characters marked these plays that prioritise the constant state of confusion of the characters and the ambiguity concerning the reliability of their memories. *Landscape* (1967), *Silence* (1969), *Old Times* (1970), and *No Man's Land* (1974) can be considered prominent examples of memory plays that touch upon the issues of memory and the past. As Billington states, "*Silence* and *Landscape* represent a change of direction for Pinter" (348). To demonstrate, *Landscape* is based on a man's and a woman's reveries. Sitting in a kitchen together, the characters make separate utterances without even hearing each other. Similarly, *Silence* comprises three characters' fragmented memories which seem to have parallels with one another. As for the other memory play, *Old Times,* it opens in the house of a couple awaiting their visitor. The play is based on the characters' recounting their versions of the stories concerning their complex relationship. In *No Man's Land,* the imprisonment of an author in his own house by his servants, his isolated state, and his exchanges with his guest of seemingly invented reminiscences are presented. Noticeably, as opposed to his earlier plays, these memory plays do not openly entail the issues of dominance, violence, and threat. Instead, the basis of these plays is established on the unreliable utterances of characters and their memories which oscillate between the past and present in a non-linear way.

From the 1980s onwards, Pinter's plays changed into explicitly political ones. At this point, it should be noted that it is possible to find covert political connotations in Pinter's earlier plays, too. For instance, in *The Birthday Party,* the landlord Petey's lines to the protagonist who is forcibly taken away by two men are quite striking in this respect: "Stan, don't let them tell you what to do!" (Pinter 80). These lines, in a way, epitomise Pinter's own attitude towards authority as Mel Gussow underlines in

his interview with Pinter: "In a conversation in 1988, Harold Pinter said that he lived that line all his life" ("Introduction" 7). As mentioned before, later in his career Pinter's plays became more political. Among those plays, *One for the Road* (1984) and *Mountain Language* (1988) stand out. In the writing process of both plays, Pinter was influenced by the political situation and state oppression that took place in Turkey. As he states in his interview with Mel Gussow, "[*Mountain Language*] was inspired by my visit to Turkey with Arthur Miller, my experience with the Kurds, who [...] are not allowed to speak their own language" (*Conversations with Pinter* 56). In the same interview concerning the inspiration for his other acclaimed political play, *One for the Road,* Pinter makes the following comment:

> [T]here was one specific thing which did actually cause me to begin the play. I wrote it in an absolute fury one night after a party. I had met some young Turkish women. [...] I asked [them] what they thought about the systematic and widespread torture that existed in Turkish prisons and police stations. They said, 'Well, they're probably Communists,' meaning the people who are being tortured. I was more or less speechless, for a change. I actually left the room at that point, went back and wrote *One for the Road*. (*Conversations with Pinter* 72)

Put simply, taking place in an unspecified country, *One for the Road* deals with the torture of a family by government officials in a prison. Likewise, in *Mountain Language*, the setting of a prison is at the forefront and it is precisely about the prohibition of the prisoners' speaking their native language. The play aims to display the state's forbiddance of the language of minority people to silence them. As can be observed, in his political plays, Pinter scrutinises "the relationship between the state and the individual and how the self-perpetuating concerns of the former often obscure and override the dignifying rights of the latter" (Taylor-Batty, *Harold Pinter* 91). These plays expose the cruel authority of the ruling class and their use of violence on people in the form of torture, rape, and incarceration situated in prison along with soldiers, interrogators, and officers appearing as the operators of the state's oppression. In these plays, the government might be approached in the form of the institutionalised executor of torture terrorising individuals while ordinary people are the ones who stand as victims in the hands of such cruelty.

Pinter's later plays, *Moonlight* (1993)*, Ashes to Ashes* (1996), and *Celebration* (2000) "manifested characteristics of much of his earlier writing" (Taylor-Batty, *The Theatre*

of Harold Pinter 8) as they interweave power relations, recalling of memories, as well as politics. Written after the death of Pinter's mother, the idea behind *Moonlight,* according to Pinter's wife, Antonia Fraser, "[was] derived fundamentally from his mother's death" (230). In brief, the play contemplates death and isolation by presenting the members of a decaying family. As for *Ashes to Ashes,* the play touches on the Holocaust even though the stage directions specify that the setting is the room of a couple in the present time. Dealing with power relations, violence, politics, as well as memory, "*Ashes to Ashes* unit[es] the political and the Pinteresque" (Wyllie and Rees 54). Lastly, the last play in Pinter's career, *Celebration,* portrays wealthy customers in an elegant restaurant while engaged in conversations touching upon memory, lack of communication, and the power struggle between characters (Billington 697).

Pinter's elusive yet enthralling plays are categorised under the name of "Pinteresque," which is defined as follows: "Of, pertaining to, or characteristic of the British playwright Harold Pinter or his works. Marked especially by halting dialogue, uncertainty of identity, and an air of menace" (qtd. in Zarhy-Levo 161). Remarkably, with that term, Pinter becomes "the only British-born playwright apart from Shakespeare to have been assigned such an adjective to describe his work" (Wyllie and Rees 36). As the hallmarks of Pinter's plays, his mundane dialogues, distinctive pauses and his use of silence are conspicuous. About Pinter's use of silence, Peter Hall states, "It is an extreme crisis point. Often the character emerges from the silence with his attitude completely changed" (163), as can be detected in Stanley's case in *The Birthday Party*. Following the interrogation scene in the play, Stanley becomes utterly silent; in a way, he is transformed into a puppet. In addition to that, silence also emphasises the meaninglessness of the universe; thus, "to be silent would be to admit the existence of the void, the unknowable; so the characters continue to talk [t]o allay their fears" (Stein 430). That is the reason why some characters talk erratically and incessantly as "[t]hey need the attention and response of others as affirmation of their own existence" (Stein 430). Indeed, the nervous chatters of some characters: Rose in *The Room*; Meg in *The Birthday Party,* and Davies in *The Caretaker*, can also be seen as a form of silence which mask their fears, desires, and feelings. Furthermore, also known as "Pinter pause," Pinter's deliberate interruptions in his plays convey the

characters' hesitation, tension, as well as "a sense of despair and helplessness" (Wong 46). In this sense, Rose's unsettling pauses, which reflect her anxious and fearful state, in *The Room* can be taken as an example:

> Wait a minute.
> *Pause*.
> I wonder who that is.
> *Pause*.
> No. I thought I saw someone.
> *Pause.* (Pinter, *The Room* 88)

In this regard, Rose's paranoia and her fear of others are divulged through her pauses and hesitations in her speech. As it is underlined, "the unsaid in Pinter is as important as the said; and is frequently as eloquent" (Peter Hall 162). In a sense, Pinter's use of silence becomes a form of expression, which indicate the characters' mental state.

With his unique style, Harold Pinter had an unquestionable legacy as he shaped British drama with his plays. As a person who belonged to the generation that experienced the Second World War, Pinter faced the existence of terror from a very early age. In addition, his being a Jewish person in the racist atmosphere of the 1930s Britain contributed to his writings as he felt being othered throughout his childhood and youth. Such biographical details may have played a role in shaping his outlook on the world and ultimately impacted the creation process of his plays. Aside from the biographical details that shaped Pinter's writings, the socio-economic conditions of the post-war period in Britain in which he started his playwriting, impacted his early plays. Thus, given the traumas, menace, and fear that Pinter experienced as a young person and the harsh condition of the period during which Pinter wrote his early plays, Sigmund Freud's ideas on the depths of the human mind and psychology may be said to throw light on his enigmatic plays.

Even though some of his concepts are found highly controversial today, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) is still considered to be a significant thinker even in the 21st century thanks to his revolutionary perspective on the human psyche. Known as "one of the founders of modern psychiatry" (Calvin S. Hall 18), Freud had an undeniably profound impact on scientific and cultural history. As pointed out, "[t]he twentieth century has been called the Freudian century, and whatever the twenty-first century

chooses to believe about the workings of the human mind, it will be, on some level, indebted to Freud" (Thurschwell 1). He was engaged in an incessant search to understand the human mind and motivations behind individuals' behaviours. Furthermore, "[h]is close analysis of human behaviour and its relationship to underlying mental conflicts gave anthropology, history, literary theory, and dozens of other disciplines valuable tools for analysing human life and art" (Muckenhoupt 147-48). From this perspective, Freud's ground-breaking ideas on the human mind, the unconscious, the significance of primal instincts, and his method, psychoanalysis, not only impacted science and psychology but also culture and society. His ideas cast a light on the veiled inner worlds of humans, society, and moreover, even arts and literary texts are scrutinised in view of his theories.

Before the 20th century, psychological problems were believed to be stemmed from the damages of the nerves and referred to as nervous diseases (Lopez Pinero 1). In other words, those disorders were believed to have a biological origin such as the damages within the brain or the imbalance of the body. As a physician and neurologist, Freud started his career by initially studying the human nervous system. Initially, his focus was on the neurological and biological factors behind human behaviours. However, his views on mental illnesses underwent a change since he came to the realisation that the reason behind human behaviour that is considered out of the societal norms did not have a biological but rather psychological origin. These illnesses that are mainly referred to as neurotic disorders or neuroses were discovered to be related to the memories, traumas, and hidden ideas of the individuals. For him, the term neurosis was used to refer to such psychological problems.

Today known as anxiety disorder in contemporary psychology, neurosis, in other words, "non-neurological mental disorders" (Sletvold 460), is defined in the *APA Dictionary of Psychology* as

> any one of a variety of mental disorders characterized by significant anxiety or other distressing emotional symptoms, such as persistent and irrational fears, obsessive thoughts, compulsive acts, dissociative states, and somatic and depressive reactions. The symptoms do not involve gross personality disorganization, total lack of insight, or loss of contact with reality. ("Neurosis" 704-705)

More specifically, although neurotic individuals are in a distressing state with the symptoms of "excessive anxiety, hysterical symptoms, phobias, obsessional and compulsive symptoms, and depression" (Mitchell 318), they are still able to discern the real from the unreal and have a capacity to cope with the burdens of social life. The term, neurosis was first coined by the physician William Cullen in *Synopsis Nosologiae Methodicae* (1781) as "[p]reternatural affection of sense and motion, without idiopathic or primary pyrexia, and also without local disease" (66). In other words, Cullen saw neurosis as an abnormal disposition of an individual's perception and behaviour without the symptoms of a physical illness. In 1869, the American neurologist George Miller Beard "who first described neurasthenia as a clinical entity" (Gossop 8) related mental disorders of individuals to the deterioration within the nervous system and lack of some elements in the human body, mainly as a result of the exhaustion of the human mind. Defined as "nervous weakness" (Wilson 405), Beard introduced neurasthenia. For this reason, Beard is seen as "a pioneer in the study of neuroses, a forerunner of Freud and modern psychological medicine" (Rosenberg 245) since his studies led the way to understanding neurosis and its aetiology.

Concerning neurosis, Sigmund Freud indicates that it occurs "[as] a consequence of inhibition of the sexual function [that] manifest [itself] in phobias and anxiety attacks" ("Extracts from the Fliess Papers" 178). Thus, as it can be seen from Freud's earlier perspective that the feeling of sexual unsatisfaction causes neurosis. Drawing on his idea on the unsatisfied libido, Freud also underlines the importance of sexual traumas experienced at an early period of life as follows:

> [T]he development of the structure of neurosis involved, first, a sexual experience which is traumatic and premature. This would then be repressed and undergo a successful defence in which the experience would appear to disappear. Then, however, the repressed experience would return, due to the impact of a more recent traumatic experience. This resulted in the repressed experience overcoming the ego. (Noys 230)

From this perspective, the reminiscences of repressed sexual experiences become pathogenic and they show themselves in the form of psychological problems together with somatic symptoms. As can be seen in his earlier works, Freud's concerns were related specifically to sexuality. However, his ideas on neurosis underwent

modifications over time since he later made additions to his ideas concerning neurosis and pointed out that not only sexual traumas but also sexual impulses, fantasies, needs, experiences, as well as other primal instincts such as aggression have been later found to contribute to the formation of neurotic disorder. Among his theories regarding the prominence of sexuality, the Oedipus complex, which posits the incestuous feeling of a child towards his mother, has a significance for Freud since he believes the conflict that is created as a result of the Oedipus complex during infancy is related to the occurrence of neurotic disorder as he states, "[it is] the nuclear concept of the neuroses" (Freud, *Three Essays on Sexuality* 226). The child's incestuous desire towards the mother leads to rivalry with the father and even hatred towards him. However, fearing punishment, which comes as castration, "anxiety aroused [and] the boy finally gives up the idea of fulfilling his incestuous sexual wishes" (Quinodoz 63). However, a neurotic is not able to renounce his/her Oedipal desires, as Freud explicates, "[a neurotic person] has either failed to get free from the psycho-sexual conditions that prevailed in his childhood or he has returned to them. [...] Thus incestuous fixations of libido continue to play the principal part in his unconscious mental life" (Freud, *Totem and Taboo* 20), and under these circumstances, neurosis appears. However, the Oedipus complex is approached from a quite different perspective by Erich Fromm. He voices his ideas by stating that, "I do not think that this conflict is brought about essentially by the sexual rivalry, but that it results from the child's reaction to the pressure of parental authority, the child's fear of it and submission to it" (381). Interpreting the Oedipus complex from a social standpoint, Fromm suggests that the concept of authority represented by parents, and its effects on individuals rather than the sexual rivalry between the parent and the child are undeniably important in the case of neurosis. In his later studies, Freud also has similar ideas concerning society's position in precipitating psychological problems in individuals.

The primal instincts, namely, self-preservative and sexual instincts that are governed by the id are in an incessant search for fulfilment. Such instincts are also called drives and defined by Freud as, "a powerful tendency inherent in every living organism" (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 76). These primal instincts urge the ego of the individuals to bring pleasure by fulfilling their needs. As can be seen, "the human

organism is naturally predisposed to gain positive experiences of pleasure [and] also to escape or avoid pain and displeasure" (Barnhart 113); nevertheless, the ego cannot always meet the relentless needs of the instincts. As pointed out by Sletvold, "[t]he pathogenic conflict is thus between the ego-instincts and the sexual instincts" (468). The instincts' sole aim to reach pleasure is sometimes hindered by a defence mechanism called repression for the sake of the ego's protection; as a result, unwanted impulses are supressed; however, they continue to lurk behind within the unconscious. As an outcome of this repression, neurosis becomes inevitable. According to Freud, "repression converts an opportunity for pleasure into a source of unpleasure [and] all neurotic unpleasure is of this kind" (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 49). In brief, neurosis occurs as a result of the repression of the urge for pleasure. Therefore, as previously mentioned, neurosis might be approached as a form of self-defence and protection of the ego from tensions.

To the abovementioned self-preservative and sexual drives, Freud makes an addition and introduces the death drive, which is also known as the ego drive. The individual's "drive to return to the inanimate" (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 78) is the epitome of the term, the death drive. To explain this in other words, the aim of human life is to repeat the life cycle and to die; thus, the instincts of human beings naturally lead them to destruction rather than development. Being so, the death drive creates a contrast to the sexual drive, also known as the life drive. While the death drive entails the individual's destruction, the sexual drive appears to be the one that stands for survival and the continuation of the individual's being. As an instinct, the death drive is repressed and externalised as an urge for destruction, in other words, aggression towards others.

Furthermore, Freud also embraces the idea of the presence of external reasons for neurosis. According to him, society plays a predominant role as a determinant of repression of impulses and traumas within individuals. From this perspective, he begins to turn his attention more to the relationship between society and individuals. Mentioning the role of the external world, in other words, society's irrefutable contribution to the occurrence of neurotic disorder, Freud touches the society's moral strict codes towards sexuality. Sexual problems appear to be at the core of neurosis

and "[they are] clearly linked with sexual morality" that creates guilt within individuals, and consequently, prevents them from achieving and displaying their sexual desires. By doing this, civilisation "diminishes the value of love and sexuality as a source of happiness" (Quinodoz 238) as civilisation solely encourages the form of sexuality that contains heterosexuality and monogamy while categorising the rest as perversions. His late works also involve not only the sexual drive but also the outcome of the repression of the aggression aroused from the death drive. Seemingly, aggression clashes with the sustainability of society; to put it more explicitly, "civilization is threatened by aggressiveness and destructiveness" (Quinodoz 239), and on this score, the superego steps in with its internalised feeling of guilt aroused from the fear of being punished. This tension is responsible for the neurosis within the individuals. The social and moral norms of society force individuals to renunciate their urges such as sexuality and aggression for the sake of the safety that comes with communal living as might be seen functional in protecting human communities from the dangers of the world outside. As a result of the renunciation and sacrifices made for society, individuals are unable to achieve satisfaction and have to cope with the void of life, and this brings constant dissatisfaction. Asserted by Freud himself, "all the institutions of the universe are opposed to happiness; one is inclined to say that the intention that man should be 'happy' has no part in the plan of 'creation'" (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 17). Realising the impossibility of achieving gratification, individuals turn themselves away from the pleasure principle and aim to protect themselves from suffering; therefore, they mostly prefer "deliberate isolation [that] affords the most obvious protection against any suffering arising from interpersonal relations" (Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* 18). These individuals evade misery by restricting the urges of their drives to fit in whereas some others completely break their links with the real world to avoid unhappy feelings. Accordingly, in such an atmosphere, neurosis becomes inevitable in modern society since "people who cannot achieve happiness in the external world may take refuge in neurotic illness" (Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* 27). In fact, the individual and civilisation are in disharmony and out of this disharmony neurosis arises since "the neurotic escapes the conflict by taking refuge in illness" (Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* 325) to guard himself/herself.

In a neurotic person, neurosis shows its presence generally with the symptoms of "anxiousness, unrest, expectant anxiety, complete, rudimentary or supplementary anxiety attacks, locomotor vertigo, agoraphobia, [and] insomnia" (Freud, *Early Psycho-Analytic Publications* 268). Neurotic individuals are excessively sensitive, irritable, depressed, and constantly feel unwell owing to their anxious state. As stated, "[t]wo common physical symptoms of the neurotic are fatigue and irritability" (Weiss 37). What is more, they experience paraesthesia, problems in sleep; fainting occurs as a result of the impact of vertigo; and several unreasonable fears, in other words, phobias (Freud, *Early Psycho-Analytic Publications* 96) emerge as a consequence of the individuals' repression of their instinctual needs and their feeling of guilt. These repressed thoughts become latent within the unconscious and they may be "discharged in the form of physical symptoms" (Muckenhoupt 74). To put it differently, the repressed ideas or memories undergo a conversion and they appear as symptoms. As it is put forward in Freud's work, *Early Psycho-Analytic Publications*, over sensitiveness, exaggerating, the constant state of anxiety, anxiety attacks, problems in respiration, difficulty in sleeping, as well as phobias, such as agoraphobia (96-100) are among the symptoms that can be observed in neurotic individuals.

To cure and analyse psychological illnesses, mainly neurosis, and to explore the human mind, influenced by his colleague, Joseph Breuer, Freud developed the method of psychoanalysis that is mainly based on the patient's pouring his/her flow of thoughts through his/her ramblings, and unearthing his/her repressed desires, motives, and hidden memories that are ingrained in the unconscious. Through psychoanalysis, Freud aims to reach the roots of neurosis and unearth the hidden world of the unconscious of the individual as the repressed ideas are discharged, recollected, and appear on the conscious level. Thus, psychoanalysis "brings an end to the operative force of the idea which was not abreacted in the first instance, [allows] strangulated affect to find a way out through speech; and it subjects it to an associative correction by introducing it to the normal consciousness" (Freud, *Studies on Hysteria* 17). Once the patients recollect their traumatic memories and realise the hidden feelings in them, they in a way experience catharsis; that is the reason why psychoanalysis is also referred to as the cathartic method. Owing to the method of psychoanalysis, making sense of psychological problems as well as curing them become possible. This method

that was devised by Freud also offers a new perspective towards psychological illnesses. Moreover, it is noteworthy that psychoanalysis is not only a method to cure neurotic patients but for Freud it enables people to reach the unknown world of the human mind. Psychoanalysis can be seen as "a theory of reading first and foremost; it suggests that there are always more meanings to any statement than there appear to be at first glance" (Thurschwell 3). From this statement it can be understood that psychoanalysis is based on symbols, layers of meanings, and interpreting. Freud himself claims that, "[p]sychoanalysis [is] an art of interpretation to uncover resistances" (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 56).

As Harold Pinter "concentrates on the private, secluded microcosm of a human mind" (Zozaya Ariztia 53), the method of psychoanalysis can be used in this thesis for the purpose of interpreting and understanding the main characters' behaviours, ambiguous remarks, desires, and wishes to shed light on their psychological problems. Hence, in approaching Pinter's early plays, Sigmund Freud's views on neurosis, namely the importance of the drives, the sexual and destructive urges as well as civilisation's place in destroying the mental lives of the individuals are to be focused on.

CHAPTER I:

THE IMPACT OF REPRESSED DESIRES IN *THE ROOM*

"I think that we communicate only too well, in our silence, in what is unsaid, and that what takes place is a continual evasion, desperate rearguard attempts to keep ourselves to ourselves."
(Pinter, "Writing for the Theatre" xiii).

Evaluated by Martin Esslin as "a remarkable first play" (*Pinter: A Study of His Plays* 65), *The Room* was written in 1957 and marked the beginning of Pinter's legacy in British drama, as the director of the first production, Henry Woolf, stated: "It was a wonderful step forward for playwriting. [The audience] awoke from their polite cultural stupor into a real awareness that something new was happening, that English theatre was never going to be the same again" (234). As an intriguing play, which was written in the post-war period, *The Room* reflects the traumas of the catastrophic war and explores the derelict condition of modern human through ambiguous characters who are ostensibly disturbed and tormented by gnawing fears as well as repressed desires. Hence, the Freudian perspective on neurosis is employed in this chapter to unearth the depth of the characters' unconscious worlds. Accordingly, the aim of this chapter is to demonstrate the destructive impact of the war and the repressed unconscious desires on individuals in *The Room* to shed light on Pinter's enigmatic characters, namely Rose Hudd, Bert Hudd, and Mr Kidd.

With its setting of a cold winter day in an ordinary room, *The Room* invites the reader/audience to the menacing world of Pinter. Within that sullen atmosphere, the protagonist Rose Hudd and her husband, Bert Hudd, are introduced. The old couple's room, which gives its name to the title, accentuates the domestic ambience with the presence of a gas-fire, stove, sink, and a double-bed (Pinter, *The Room* 85). Rose Hudd, "a woman of sixty" (*The Room* 84), prepares and serves food for Bert Hudd, "a van-driver around the age of fifty" (*The Room* 84). The focal point of the scene is Rose's incessant and seemingly nervous chatter concerning the cold weather outside, the darkness and dampness of the basement in contrast to the warmness, brightness, and cosiness of their room. Rose carries on talking even though she does not get any reaction from her husband, who reads a magazine without acknowledging her presence.

Rose's talking to herself is interrupted by a knock on the door. A bewildered old man, Mr Kidd, who seems to be the landlord of the house, pays a visit to the couple's room "to see how things were going" (*The Room* 90). Rose forces Mr Kidd into a nonsensical conversation. Seeming to have a hearing problem as well as a failure of memory, Mr Kidd leaves Rose's insistent questions regarding the room, the basement, and the house unanswered. Upon Mr Kidd's departure, Bert soon leaves the room to drive his van. Subsequently, a young couple, Mr and Mrs Sands appear on the landing of Rose's room. Invited inside to recover from the cold weather, the Sands reveal that they are looking for the landlord as they have heard of a vacant room for rent in the house. Rose vigorously asks them questions about the outside and the basement as she learns that the Sands are coming from the basement with the purpose of finding the landlord, on whose name Rose and the couple have a disagreement. From the series of absurd conversations of the young couple, the threat soon arises with the Sands' shocking exposition concerning the vacant room and the man they saw in the basement. The Sands mention that the mysterious man dwelling in the basement gave the eerie information that the vacant room was number seven, which turns out to be Rose's own beloved room:

> MR SANDS. The man in the basement said there was one. One room. Number seven he said.
> *Pause*
> ROSE. That's this room. (*The Room* 102)

Shortly afterwards, the intruders depart upon having revealed the presence of a vacant room, and more importantly, the information concerning the man residing in the basement, which leave Rose petrified.

Menace intensifies even more with Mr Kidd's return in a frantic state, which leads to an agitated conversation in which both parties are unable to listen to each other. During this conversation, Mr Kidd reveals that a man in the basement has been waiting to see Rose; and to this end, he has been pressuring Mr Kidd. Claiming that he has been waiting for Bert's departure, Mr Kidd begs Rose to accept the man downstairs inside her room, "If you don't see him now [h]e'll come up when Mr Hudd's here, when your husband's here" (*The Room* 105). Despite her initial rejection, Rose eventually is forced to accept to see the man who turns out to be a blind and black

man named Riley. The blind man, who is continuously insulted by Rose, claims to have a message for her:

> RILEY. Your father wants you to come home.
> [...]
> Come home, Sal. (*The Room* 108)

The ambiguous message terrorises Rose and even paralyses her mind. At that point, Bert comes back, this time talking to Rose in an erratic manner about how he drove his van in a rough winter evening until he realises Riley's presence in the room. Upon seeing Riley, Bert attacks him violently by shouting "Lice!" (*The Room* 110), which leads to the climactic ending of the play with Rose's abrupt blindness and her crying: "Can't see. I can't see. I can't see" (*The Room* 110).

The Room was written at the request of Pinter's friend, Henry Woolf who reached out to Pinter and asked him to write a short play to be staged in the Department of Drama at the University of Bristol which is "the first (and then only) department of drama in the country" (Taylor-Batty 17). As Pinter also narrated this in an interview with Lawrence M. Bensky:

> A friend of mine called Henry Woolf was a student in the drama department at Bristol University … He had the opportunity to direct a play [...] and he knew I had an idea for a play, though I hadn't written any of it. [...] [H]e told me he had to have the play the next week to meet his schedule. I said this was ridiculous, he might get it in six months. And then I wrote it in four days. (19)

Although the first production was solely limited to a small audience, it is worth noting that it was a breakthrough not only in Pinter's playwrighting career but also for British drama.

The inspiration for *The Room* came from an image in Pinter's mind. Pinter himself narrated the memory related to that specific image in his interview with Mel Gussow:

> I was taken for some reason or other to be introduced to a man [...] and went into his room. He was a slender, middle-aged man in bare feet who was walking about the room. Very sociable and pleasant, and he was making bacon and eggs for an enormous man who was sitting at the table, who was totally silent. And he made his bacon and eggs, and cut bread, and poured tea and gave it to this fellow who was reading a comic. And in the meantime, he was talking to us - very, very quickly and lightly. We only had about five minutes but something like that remained. I told a friend I'd like to write a

play, there's some play here. And then it all happened. (*Conversations with Pinter* 25)

The image of that bizarre couple remained in Pinter's mind and it was projected onto *The Room* as he shared in "Writing for Myself": "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" (8). Reflected in the opening scene of the play, that memory gave life to the old couple, Rose and Bert.

Some critics claim that *The Room* is influenced by Pinter's own psychology and past. As Billington puts forward: "*The Room* is a highly personal work … [it] unconsciously reflects so many of Pinter's deepest preoccupations" (126-27), one of the most obvious ones is Pinter's fear of menace and violence. As a child who experienced the war and witnessed a period when the fascism was on the rise in Britain, Pinter was indisputably traumatised. Thus, it can be safely assumed that he projected his earlier traumas into *The Room* since "[a]s a young Jew living through the early days of World War II, he had gone to bed afraid that he might be awakened in the night by a knock at the door and that he and his parents would be taken forcibly from their home by unknown assailants, a picture vividly impressed on his mind by tales of Hitler's Germany" (Gale 18). That brief image in Pinter's mind reflects that the threat surrounding everyday life and coming from ordinary people was not alien to Pinter. In effect, his first play, *The Room* reflects the characters' desperate need for safety in an uncanny world in which they are forced to confront the menace.

Pinter's personal life and marriage are also echoed in his first play. Pinter wrote *The Room* by the time he was away from Hackney as a touring actor and a newly married man. Firstly, the setting and the characters of *The Room* are directly influenced by this situation since the play "[was] created at a time when the dramatist himself was lodging in such miserable digs as a poor actor" (Sakellaridou 9). Not surprisingly, *The Room* displays a working-class room with its destitute inhabitants. More to the point, Pinter's being away from his family and Hackney is echoed in the bitter loneliness of the characters of *The Room,* most visibly in Rose's desperate attempts at communication and her anxiety over Bert's leaving the room. In addition to these points, some critics point out Pinter's marriage's impact on the play. According to William Baker, "[*The Room*] reflects [Pinter's] own guilt concerning the

consequences of his marriage upon his parents" (41) since "[b]y marrying outside the Jewish faith, Pinter, who was very close to his mother and father, had also caused a certain perturbation (his words) within the family" (Billington 118). The break from his family and renunciation of Jewish customs might have induced a drastic change in his identity; thereby resulting in anxiety, which is reflected in Rose's unclear identity as well as Mr Kidd's inability to recollect the essential information concerning his own identity and past. More importantly, the play mirrors Pinter's "own break with the Thistlewaite Road of his upbringing where he largely spent his first 25 years" (Baker 41). His abandonment of Hackney reverberates the strong sense of estrangement observed in the protagonist Rose, and her obscure sorrow.

Despite being subtle, the condition of the 1950s known as "a period of instability" (Langhamer 343) is also observable in *The Room*. The setting and the characters of *The Room* realistically reflect the 1950s. The play gives a glimpse of post-war poverty caused by the damages done by the Second World War and the wave of immigration in the aftermath of it. Although there was an attempt at economic recovery after the war, "poverty was not eradicated in Britain during the 1950s" (Gazeley 185). Representing the period in which it was written, "*The Room* conveys a drab lower-class environment" (Hollis 29) by focalising a sombre room furnished with the humble belongings of an old couple who are engaged in duly domestic activities. In line with this domestic, lower-class setting, "[the] characters are often the derelicts of the Welfare State who are concerned with getting on" (Hollis 30). For instance, belonging to the working-class, Rose and Bert seem to be able to afford only a room in a house. Furthermore, Mr Kidd's repetition of "I've made ends meet" (*The Room* 93) is significant as it demonstrates his concern as well as the society's general apprehension about making one's living.

As mentioned above, post-war poverty is also thought to be caused by waves of immigration to Britain. The labour shortage due to the expansion of industries following the war paved the way for migration from the former British colonies and Eastern Bloc countries to Britain. Since immigrants "were recruited by British employers at a time of acute labour shortages" (Edward Royle 15), their arrival alarmed British people as they were anxious that the immigrants might cause further

unemployment. Moreover, it was thought that the foreigners "constituted a potential social problem, a threat to the supposed 'racial' and cultural homogeneity of British society" (Miles and Cleary 63). Therefore, immigrants were seen as threatening figures who posed danger to not only the economic but also the social well-being of the British. The apprehension towards immigrants is also reflected in *The Room*, with the appearance of "a blind Negro" (*The Room* 106), Riley, living in the basement of the house, as a menacing outsider. Ronald Knowles also explains that

> [f]ull employment in the 1950s led to increased West Indian immigration, which gave rise to overtly social and economic pressures in the big cities. There were several prevailing attitudes by whites toward blacks in the period, from toleration to extreme racism. *The Room,* in an oblique microcosm fashion, shared this milieu. As a blind black man, Riley embodies the foreign, the alien, and the bereft. (24)

Parallel to the rise of racism in the 1950s Britain, hatred towards foreigners is manifested through the violent murder scene of Riley, who is described as a Negro significantly "with an Irish surname" (Regal 10). Riley embodies racial and religious otherness as a black man with an Irish surname. As religious and cultural minorities, Irish people were also subjected to "widespread hostility" (Miles and Cleary 59) during the post-war period. Thus, it is not surprising that Riley evoked an intense hatred and fear in Rose, which evinces the attitude of the British people towards other races, religions, and cultures: "I don't want you up here. I don't know who you are. And the sooner you get out the better" (*The Room* 106). Seemingly, not only Rose but also Bert and Mr Kidd seem nervous when interacting with Riley, even though they reflect their fears in different ways. For instance, Bert directly uses violence towards Riley while Mr Kidd makes an effort to evade his presence. Billington also underlines that "Pinter is not obviously dealing with race relations, but he pins down with intuitive accuracy a localised prejudice that sees outsiders as inherently suspect" (121), which epitomises the characters' apprehensive attitude towards the other.

Notwithstanding the impact of Pinter's own life and the undeniable effects of the 1950s Britain on *The Room,* the play, similar to his other plays, principally tackles universal issues, mainly absurdity of life, lack of communication, alienation, uncertainty, and fear. The characters in *The Room* are indulged in their dull routines to ignore the absurdity of the abyss that they are in. To fill the void, Rose devotedly

prepares food for Bert, talks incessantly, repeatedly gazes out on the sinister external world beyond her window, and sits in her rocking chair, while Bert's reaction to the futility is his sheer silence. The couple's problematic relationship that is observed through Bert's silence and Rose's anxious attempts to communicate illustrates the decay of affection and connection between individuals. Alienation and isolation become even more ostensible as the play continues since not only Rose and Bert but also Mr Kidd and the Sands are incapable of communicating. As Pinter elaborates, "[t]o enter into someone else's life is too frightening" ("Writing for Theatre" xiii); it might be for this reason that his characters avoid each other. In such a world that is ruled by lack of communication, the intruders into Rose's house are deemed as nothing but threats. Therefore, strangers and the outside world awaken fearful thoughts in the characters. For instance, out of his extreme fear, Bert attacks the stranger in his room as soon as he sees him. Furthermore, seeing others as threats, the characters in *The Room* isolate themselves, and as a result, they do not get acknowledgement and affection from others. Eventually, they become senseless and alienated, not even remembering their roots, as seen in Mr Kidd's decayed memory and Rose's unclear identity. Within this atmosphere of uncertainty, fear becomes inescapable for Pinter's characters since the overwhelming feeling of ambiguity and insecurity are "intensified by the inadequacy to speak and by the silence" (Tanaka 254). To illustrate, Rose is terrified by the silence that pervades her life, while Mr Kidd is fearful of Riley's silence and his presence in the darkness. Additionally, for these characters, even their shelter, the room, does not offer safety as it is closely "related to the world beyond it, where unseen powers lurk or from which someone arrives to threaten the people inside" (Tanaka 249). Thus, it can be enunciated that the play focuses on characters who inhabit a world replete with uncertainty and insecurity. Therefore, the main action in *The Room* and these characters' lives become "[a] dynamic waiting in armed readiness for the enemy to appear" (Walker 2) while the characters' core aim is to preserve their condition in the false safety of the room.

With its enigmatic characters dwelling in an uncanny world, Pinter's play does not offer closure; instead, it perplexes the reader/audience. In the same vein, it is argued that "Pinter's first play, *The Room,* is [...] one of his most puzzling works" (Quigley 76) as it is open to numerous interpretations owing to its obscure characters.

Deliberately, "[w]ith *The Room,* Pinter had written a play that refuses to permit an audience an easy immediate connection with any of the characters" (Taylor-Batty 23). In line with this statement, Pinter utters: "[y]ou and I, the characters which grow on a page, most of the time we're inexpressive, giving little away, unreliable, elusive, evasive, obstructive, unwilling" ("Writing for Theatre" xii). These characteristics that Pinter underlines might indicate the presence of neurotic disorder in the characters examined in this chapter, namely Rose, Bert, and Mr Kidd. As explained, "[n]eurosis is a withdrawal into fantasy, which betokens an incapacity or unwillingness to deal with reality demands" (Bercovitch 614). Likewise, the characters in *The Room* are unable to deal with the unpleasant reality; therefore, they unconsciously escape from it by isolating themselves in silence and repressing their desires. To this extent, Sigmund Freud's views will be utilised to shed light on Pinter's mysterious characters in *The Room* who suffer from neurosis.

The neurotic disorder is blatantly exposed through the protagonist, Rose's conducts. Her dysfunctional relationship with her husband, Bert, is one of the first things that strikes attention in the play. In this marital relationship, Rose takes up a suffocative and overprotective mother role, which can be seen in the scene in which Rose prepares Bert before he goes out:

> ROSE. Here you are. Wrap it round. That's it. Don't go too fast, Bert, will you? I'll have some cocoa on when you get back. You won't be long. Wait a minute. Where's your overcoat? You'd better put on your overcoat. (*The Room* 94)

Within the pathological relationship of the couple, Bert is treated like an infant rather than an adult. In the opening scene, Rose serves him food, butters his bread, pours milk, and tea for her husband, demanding him to eat them: "Go on. Eat it up. It'll do you good" (*The Room* 85). Moreover, Rose dresses him in his jersey and muffler and reflects motherly concerns about his going out at night: "I don't know why you have to go out. Couldn't you run it down tomorrow?" (*The Room* 87). As can be seen, in this dysfunctional marital relationship, Rose's smothering mother role is indeed functional as it casts a veil over her long-repressed Oedipal desires. Lucina Paquet Gabbard explains that "[Rose's] relationship with Bert springs out of her oedipal fears. … Her fear of her own erotic feelings still lives and presses her into the role of mother

to her husband" (29). By putting herself in the place of the mother, Rose infantilises her husband, in a way, castrates him. As Rose may have a hidden desire for her father, she wishes to discard the husband and aims to become the mother herself.

Rose's unresolved Oedipal complex also causes an extreme fear concerning the outside world, which is exposed through her neurotic chatter especially about the weather and the room. Considered as "individuals' fear of leaving their homes or safe areas" (Doctor, Kahn, and Adamec ix), agoraphobia is suggested in Rose's opening sentences: "It's very cold out, I can tell you. It's murder" (*The Room* 85). The word choice, "murder," is especially quite noteworthy since it displays Rose's direct association of the outside world with violence and menace. In her remarks, Rose continuously draws a bleak picture of the outside world. For instance, in relation to the external world, Rose reiterates the words "cold," "dark," "wind," "ice," and "quiet," which suggest danger and uncertainty. Moreover, it is hinted that Rose does not go out: "Anyway, I haven't been out. I haven't been so well. I didn't feel up to it" (*The Room* 86), which makes her connection to the outside world solely limited to looking out of the window: "Just now I looked out of the window. It was enough for me" (*The Room* 85). Rose's agoraphobia may be the outcome of long-repressed desires, as Gabbard also underlines, "Rose's fear of the outside is a projection of her Oedipal fears" (20). Owing to her unresolved Oedipal desires, Rose is terrified by the possibility of punishment, in other words, fear of castration, the removal of her ovaries, that may come from the external world in the form of violence. That is the reason why Rose chooses the word "murder" in relation to the outside of her room. Because of her suggested Oedipal guilt, Rose expects punishment; and to evade that she confines herself within the walls of the room.

As Freud explains: "[o]ne can save oneself from an external danger by flight" (*New Introductory Lectures* 84). However, this avoidance is not enough to alleviate neurotic symptoms since "the ego is not entirely satisfied by simply avoiding something" (*Inhibition, Symptom, and Fear* 195). Therefore, "a temporal regression into infancy [and] in extreme cases right back into the womb" (Freud, *Inhibition, Symptom, and Fear* 195) becomes observable in neurotic individuals. In the same vein, Rose not only avoids the outside world but also regresses into an "intrauterine state" (Compton

401). In fear of the dangers lurking outside, Rose's room takes on the function of the womb that offers comfort, light, warmth, and safety. Correspondingly, as Freud underlines, "the house [is] a substitute for the womb – one's first dwelling place, probably still longed for, where one was safe and felt so comfortable" (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 36). Since the room is a symbol of the womb, its "doors and entrances become symbolic of genital opening" (*A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* 129), and the possibility of leaving the room reminds Rose of the first trauma, birth, and thus, separation anxiety. It can be asserted that "[a]s a womb, the room [is] Rose's nurturing mother from whom she fears separation" (Gabbard 18-19); hence she suffers from agoraphobia. To avoid distress and pain, Rose refrains from leaving the room, and she projects her inner fears onto the outside world. Therefore, she unconsciously flees from the outside world and its inhabitants into the womb/room.

In addition to her fear of the outside, Rose is also terrified by strangers, which shows itself at the beginning of the play. An overwhelming apprehension becomes obvious with her compulsion of looking out of the window repeatedly and her contemplating the possibility of encountering strangers startles her. Rose's following words, "And nobody bothers us" (*The Room* 87), and similar repeated statements such as, "But I don't know anybody. We're quiet here" (*The Room* 105) exhibit her fear of strangers. Strikingly, in her mind, the uncanny basement may possibly be inhabited by no one else but strangers, maybe even foreigners, "I don't know who lives down there now. [...] Maybe they're foreigners" (*The Room* 87). Rose's latent fear of strangers gradually becomes conspicuous, and it is externalised as aggression: "I don't want you up here. I don't know who you are. And the sooner you get out the better" (*The Room* 106). In the case of fear and hostility towards other people, projection, which is "a mechanism of defence in which thoughts and desires that have been suppressed internally are projected outwards" (Clarke 74), plays a crucial role. Individuals are apt to project their destructive drives onto others. As a result, "hatred and violence are disowned by the self" (Szollosy 436), and are transferred onto others. The most feared unconscious drives, for instance, aggression and violence, are concretised, and other people are seen as perilous enemies. As also confirmed by Paul Gordon, "the frustration inevitably built up in the psyche [...] released as aggression [...] against a

readily identifiable target group" (67). Thus, individuals expect violence from other people, and as a result, paranoia becomes inevitable. Likewise, in *The Room,* as the representation of the other, Riley is seen as a threatening figure who might bring destruction to Rose's life. However, as explained, "the danger is an internal instead of an external one" (Freud, *New Introductory Lectures* 84). Thus, the violence which is expected from the outside world and strangers ironically comes from within.

In her monologues, Rose repetitively externalises her abovementioned fears, which might stem from "an innate, instinctual tendency to repeat unpleasant experiences" (Gifford 632) or feelings. In Rose's case, this unconscious repetition in the form of reiterating her fears is done to appease her distressed state. As one repeats a disturbing idea, it becomes familiar to him/her, and consequently, it becomes less distressing as "[repetition] abreact[s] the intensity of the experience and make[s] [one] so to speak master of the situation" (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 55). Since Rose's fears veil her innate sexual and aggressive drives, their repetition releases her anxiety. In this light, it can be seen that "by means of her incessant talking [Rose] fights against being engulfed and overwhelmed" (Gabbard 26). Moreover, Rose's ceaseless verbalisation of her phobias not only emanates from her efforts of self-relieving but also underlines her uncertainty about her life. As corroborated by Quigley, "the very need to verbalize [...] raises the possibility of her doubts" (81). Her utterances, such as: "No, this room's all right for me. I mean, you know where you are. When it's cold, for instance" (*The Room* 86), mark her doubts. Moreover, the word "no" in her statement is significant as it gives away Rose's inner conflict. For Freud, "[t]he 'No' uttered by a patient after a repressed thought register[s] the existence of a repression and its severity; it acts, as it were, as a gauge of the repression's strength" (*Three Essays on Sexuality* 58). In Rose's abovementioned statement, it becomes clear that she is not content to be in the room, although she makes a relentless effort to make herself believe so. Her attempts of convincing herself continue in her dialogue with Mr Kidd: "Well, Mr Kidd, I must say this is a very nice room. It's a very comfortable room" (*The Room* 92). In contrast to her words, Rose thinks the opposite about her room, and with the purpose of hiding the ugly reality even from herself she constantly talks. From this perspective, Rose's nervous witter itself is a form of silence, "of one who is trying desperately but failing to say what she really wants to say" (Hollis 22). Rose's desperate screams of what is

unsaid lie behind a façade of garrulousness. As indicated by Sandor Ferenczi, "talkativeness proved to be a method of resistance. [The patients] discussed all conceivable immaterial matters superficially in order not to have to speak or reflect on a few important ones" (252). On that score, Rose's repetitive speeches function to conceal her unconscious fears and guilt. That is to say, it is a form of reality denial.

However, Rose's unconscious way of revealing her neurotic state is not limited to excessive talking. Her monologues are also accompanied by some repetitive actions, which can be referred to as "compulsive actions or ceremonial" (Freud, "Compulsive Actions and Religious Exercises" 3). As explained further by Freud, compulsive actions "[consist] little routines, add-ons, restrictions, arrangements, performed in connection with certain everyday actions" (3). In line with the explanation of compulsive actions, Rose's rocking in her rocking chair, especially in times of distress, can be seen as an obsessional action, a coping mechanism. The Sands' departure leaves Rose excruciatingly nervous, and to alleviate her fear, "[s]*he goes to the rocking chair, sits, rocks, stops, and sits still*" (*The Room* 102). As an object, a rocking chair is "traditionally associated with motherhood" (Gabbard 26); thus, it can be inferred that when Rose sits in her rocking chair, "[s]he tries to merge with her mother as a protection against her" (Gabbard 30). In addition to the rocking chair, as it is stated in the stage directions, Rose puts on a cardigan and shawl although she claims that the room is warm: "Still, the room keeps warm" (*The Room* 85). These items of clothing which are related to warmness and protection, "originally symbolize the mother" (Storr 49), and take on the role of a comforter when Rose faces fear. As defence mechanisms, repetitive actions, in other words, "obsessional rituals [are] ways of protecting the ego from the emergence of phantasies, thoughts, or sexual impulses" (Storr 111) in a veiled way. Hence, Rose's repeated actions of rocking in a chair and putting her shawl on give her a sense of protection and display her attempt to redeem herself from her Oedipal complex and her fears related to it.

Furthermore, in relation to Rose's being a neurotic individual, her extreme fear of the dark seems to play an essential role. The fear of darkness, which is also known as nyctophobia, "an intense fear of the dark" (Williams 10) whose "[m]anifestations [...] include not going out at night, increased anxiety as dusk approaches [...] and having

light available constantly" (Doctor, Kahn, and Adamec 4) are visible in the protagonist. The character's uneasiness evidently rises as the night draws near: "It'll be dark in a minute [...]. It gets dark now" (*The Room* 87). Her fear, however, is not only marked by discomfort. Rose also avoids going out, especially at night time: "I never go out at night. We stay in" (*The Room* 97).

With its sheer darkness, the basement might be seen as the representation of the id as Freud describes the id as "the dark, inaccessible part of our personality" (*New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* 73). The darkness of the basement reminds Rose of her repressed desires, and therefore, she fears facing these repressed urges buried in the darkness of the id. From this perspective, it is not surprising that the basement poses a danger in Rose's mind: "I don't know how they live down there. It's asking for trouble" (*The Room* 85), since in the basement, "[t]here resides forgotten and forbidden thoughts – particularly repressed erotic feelings for the father" (Gabbard 33). Moreover, in her speeches, Rose gives the reader/audience a glimpse that she indeed is familiar with the basement and once has been there: "I think [the basement's] changed hands since I was last there" (*The Room* 86). Yet, after a while, she reveals to the Sands that she has not been in the basement for a long while:

> MR SANDS. Haven't you ever been down there, Mrs Hudd?
> ROSE. Oh yes, once, a long time ago. (*The Room* 99)

Thus, as a dark place where Rose has not visited for a long time and has long been feared, the basement may stand for the id, where her repressed desires reside. As a result of repression, she turns their back to the needs of the id. That is why Rose refrains from going to the basement, the cradle for her repressed needs, even though she is curious about it.

A mysterious man, Riley, dwells within the darkness of the basement: "Just lying there. In the black dark. Hour after hour" (*The Room* 105). With his dark skin and blindness, Riley also embodies darkness, and with him, the darkness creeps into Rose's room towards the ending of the play. To put it differently, Riley comes from the basement as a representation of a repressed desire in the sphere of the id and penetrates Rose's psyche. In a way, a repressed thought becomes conscious. Although Pinter approaches Riley's character "as a messenger, a potential saviour who is trying

to release Rose from the imprisonment of the room and the restrictions of her life with Bert" (qtd. in Billington 118), from the Freudian perspective, he is the figure of the uncanny as "[t]he uncanny is what comes out of the darkness" (Nicholas Royle 108). The uncanny is also something familiar, as Clarke puts forward that, "[t]he uncanny is neither new nor alien, but something old and familiar which has become repressed in the mind" (76). In a similar vein, it is quite evident that Rose actually knows Riley. When she anxiously questions the Sands about the man in the basement, she persistently asks if the man is old:

> ROSE. This man, what was he like, was he old?
> MRS SANDS. We didn't see him.
> ROSE. Was he old?
> *Pause.* (*The Room* 102)

Noticeably, she suspects that the man in the basement is someone old. More to the point, in their confrontation, Riley and Rose seem to know each other as after Riley calls her "Sal," Rose does not at first reject this form of address but following a suspenseful pause, she merely says: "Don't call me that" (*The Room* 108). As the representation of the uncanny, Riley stands for the disturbing desires within the unconscious as Gabbard points out, "Riley is perceived as a repressed wish rising from Rose's subconscious to her conscious mind" (20). The uncanniness of the mysterious figure lurking in the dark mainly stems from his residing on the basement, which is the symbol of Rose's unconscious in which "ideas that are incompatible for the conscious mind are relegated, thereby escaping consciousness" (Quinodoz 24). Hence, Riley's coming into the room can be approached as "the disguised penetration of threatening id-cathexes into consciousness" (Hall 86). In other words, the repressed desire, possibly the representation of the repressed sexual drives of Rose, within the domain of the unconscious, comes to the surface as Freud states in "The Uncanny" (1919), "something that should have remained hidden [...] has come into the open" (164). Riley's presence threatens Rose's ego, terrifies, exacerbates, and thereafter annihilates Rose.

With Riley's appearance in the room, Rose's unresolved Oedipal complex solidifies as Riley seems to be a father figure for Rose:

> Your father wants you to come home

[...]
Come home, Sal.
[...]
I want you to come home. (*The Room* 109)

As Martin Esslin also confirms, "indeed, it seems that Riley is not only a messenger from Rose's -Sal's- father, but that he *is* her father" (*The Peopled Wound* 61). Rose's desire for the father figure is indicated in the stage directions as her anger converts into gentle touching, "*[s]he touches his eyes, the back of his head and his temples with her hands*" (*The Room* 109). Rose's touching her father figure may suggest her Oedipal desire, as Gabbard also puts it, "Rose has apparently repressed her erotic feelings for her father. [...] [S]he reveals affection when her insults melt into tender touching of his head and face" (29). Unlike Bert, the father provides affection by acknowledging her presence:

RILEY. Now I touch you.
[...]
I waited to see you. (*The Room* 108)

In the face of Riley's affection, Rose's reaction is extreme aggression, even to the extent of "sadistic verbal attack" (Lois G. Gordon 12), corresponding to her repressed death drive, another instinct that dwells within the sphere of the id. As Freud explains, "[the organism] must aspire to an old state, a primordial state from which it once departed, and to which via all the circuitous byways of developments it strives to return" (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 78). In other words, the death drive aims to return the organic body to the inorganic state. The ego controls the urges of the death instinct, which strives for self-destruction. However, these urges are still acted out in a veiled way. According to Freud, "a portion of the [death] drive was directed against the external world and then appeared as a drive that aimed at aggression and destruction" (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 71). Therefore, "the organism destroyed other things instead of itself" (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 71). Rose's death drive, also known as the instinct of destruction, presents itself in the form of excessive aggression and insults towards Riley: "You're all deaf and dumb and blind, the lot of you. A bunch of cripples" (*The Room* 107). Her unconscious desire for aggression is directed at the blind man.

Nevertheless, Rose's attitude drastically changes after Riley calls her "Sal." Although she initially rejects being called Sal, Rose's belligerence gradually gives way to docility and "[h]er control of her life is beginning to slip from her hands as the power of the repressed side of her character makes itself felt" (Quigley 102). Rose's mind, in a way, is annihilated as the play draws to a close; her nervous speeches are gradually reduced to brief words and sentences:

> RILEY. Sal.
> ROSE. I can't.
> RILEY. I want you to come home.
> ROSE. No.
> RILEY. With me.
> ROSE. I can't.
> RILEY. I waited to see you.
> ROSE. Yes.
> RILEY. Now I see you.
> ROSE. Yes. (*The Room* 108-109)

As Freud states, "if fear is too strong, it proves absolutely useless and paralyzes every action, even flight" (*A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* 334).

Eventually, Rose's excessive fear is replaced by a psychosomatic symptom, which is loss of sight. Her repressed desires are converted into physical symptoms, and she eventually sinks into darkness. As elucidated by Quinodoz, "conversion [...] results from the fact that emotion that has not been discharged exceeds the limits of what the patient can tolerate, in such a way that psychic energy is converted into somatic energy" (10). Significantly, blindness strikes Rose after encountering her unbearable Oedipal desire. Viewed from this aspect, Rose's sudden blindness might be the result of her Oedipal guilt: "[A]n unconscious need for punishment" (Freud, *New Introductory Lectures* 108). The blindness, therefore, stands for mutilation, in other words, castration. Because of her intensified guilt that is eventually concretised with the coming of Riley, Rose's mental misery is transformed into blindness. In a way, "[h]er guilt [...] is so great, she cannot witness the slaughter (the reality), and hence it is she who becomes blinded" (Lois G. Gordon 19). Through blindness, she is detached from reality. It is known that there are "cases [...] of people who are unable to see in spite of the fact that there is nothing wrong with their visual mechanisms. They are blind because they do not want to see. [...] The reason why they do not want to see is

that seeing is too painful for them" (Hall 56). In a way, "the neurotic suffering can be replaced by suffering of another kind" (Freud, *New Introductory Lectures* 108).

Neurosis is not only limited to the protagonist in *The Room*. Rose's husband, Bert, also displays neurotic conduct despite his limited actions and brief lines. However, Bert merits closer examination with his regression, complete inaction, grim muteness, and startling aggressiveness. Similar to Rose, Bert's neurosis arises due to his repressed drives, which erupt violently at the end of the play. As a neurotic individual, he represses these urges; moreover, he also regresses to an infantile stage with the desire to be alienated from the cruel realities of modern society. The world that Pinter creates in *The Room* is replete with menace, and the characters' extreme fear of this menace "may suggest the universal trauma of man in the universe" (Dukore 27), which is reinforced by the recent war. The war was responsible for the lost lives, bombardments, as well as economic problems; therefore, it dragged many people into traumatic neurosis, which "occur[s] [...] after frightening experiences" (Freud, "Psycho-Analysis and Traumatic Neuroses" 209) such as being exposed to "the effects of mortal danger" (210). Traumatised by the realities of the external world, Bert chooses to detach himself from it by taking refuge in regression.

Since society does not look favourably upon the externalisation of inner drives, individuals are doomed to dissatisfaction and discontent when they cannot express themselves. In a way, societal norms necessitate repression and for that reason, "people became neurotic because they could not endure the degree of privation that society imposed on them" (Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* 31). Physically and verbally withdrawn, Bert's taciturnity underscores a latent neurotic state, which is caused by repression. As explained, "[d]uring silence the ego endeavours to cover up unacceptable thoughts or feelings" (Zeligs 10); from this perspective, Bert's muteness indicates the presence of repression. Through silence, Bert evades the act of discharging his drives, which are bound to remain in the unconscious.

As can be seen, individuals' being in a constant struggle with their impulses might eventually create incompatibility with reality, in other words, neurosis, as can be seen in Bert's case. When one is overwhelmed by the demands of society, the defence mechanism, "[regression,] frees the ego from the excessive domination of rationality"

(Loewald 40), which is imposed on individuals by society. Thus, regression protects the individual from discontentment. In the play, Bert's apathy indicates the presence of regression. Due to his aggressive tendencies, Bert regresses, remains silent, and refuses connection with other members of society.

As another sign of his regression, Bert does not engage in any action and has a limited appearance until the climactic ending of the play. In the opening scene, "BERT *is at the table, wearing a cap, a magazine propped in front of him*" (*The Room* 85). Shortly afterwards, he is again mentioned briefly: "BERT *begins to eat*" (*The Room* 85). Even Mr Kidd's intrusion into the room does not seem to alert him as the only action he engages in during the dialogue between the landlord and Rose is yawning, stretching, and looking at his magazine (*The Room* 91). Until Bert prepares to go out, his presence is not further indicated in the stage directions: "BERT *pushes his chair back and rises* [...]. *He fixes his muffler, goes to the door and exits*" (*The Room* 94). Dwelling silently and sedentarily in the pseudo-womb, Bert is seized by complete inertia. To put it another way, Bert "enter[s] into a state of inaction that involves the denial of some aspect of existence" (Ganz 13). Since "a progression toward death is identical to a regression to the womb" (Moorjani 173), Bert's regression and inertia can be considered as the outpouring of the death drive, and it encompasses the wish to return to the inorganic state. As elucidated: "[m]odern man is living in a state of anxiety which at times is close to intolerable: non-being, a return to an earlier, tensionless state is therefore devoutly to be wished" (Riva 125). Hence, holding on to the protection of the room, Bert not only escapes the reality of the world outside but also goes back to the inorganic state, fulfilling the desire of the death drive.

Moreover, it can be anticipated that "[Bert's] anxiety over his separation from the womb-room" (Gabbard 25) underscores not only his wish to return to the inorganic state and his separation anxiety, but it also indicates his agoraphobic tendencies. From this perspective, Bert's reiteration of "I got back all right" (*The Room* 109-10) when he returns home displays his fear of the outside. Caused by the ego's attempt at self-protection, agoraphobia supposedly roots back to the infancy and intrinsically stems from "the absence of the dear nurse, the mother" (Freud, *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* 344) or the fear of losing her. Thus, Bert's going out is a traumatic

experience which results in the separation from the caregiver, in this case the maternal Rose, and, more importantly, leaving the room is the reminder of "the original anxiety at birth [...] represented a separation from the mother" (Freud, *New Introductory Lectures* 87). The danger of the mother figure's absence leads to unpleasure, and it evokes a state of helplessness as explained: "If a mother is absent or has withdrawn her love from her child, it is no longer sure of the satisfaction of its needs and is perhaps exposed to the most distressing feelings of tension" (Freud, *New Introductory Lectures* 87). Likewise, Riley's presence inflames Bert's anxiety. As he sees Riley, his fear of losing Rose, the mother figure, aggravates.

Regressing into the womb-like room, Bert avoids the reality and regresses to infancy as Lois G. Gordon states: "Bert, to be sure, is portrayed as a silly boy. He wears a ridiculous hat and reads a comic book. Virtually mute until the end, he is reduced to the level of a child, too infantile to speak" (13). Thus, for Bert, Rose is not a partner; instead, she is a mother substitute. Kern posits this as follows: "Rose's symbolic giving of milk, as a mother would breast-feed her baby becomes apparent" (93). Rose's relentless efforts to feed him resemble a mother's breastfeeding that gratifies the child's needs. Hence, Rose enables Bert's oral gratification by giving him nourishment. In addition to her providing Bert's oral needs, the feeding process of Bert is a way of Rose's showing affection, as explained: "The giving of food becomes associated with love and approval" (Hall 105). Therefore, in this dysfunctional marital relationship, Rose is the mother figure who fulfils Bert's needs. As a child substitute, Bert has an Oedipal attachment to Rose. Because of his Oedipal desire towards Rose, "Bert suffers from Oedipal guilts [and] [h]e defends himself against them by eliminating all sexual feeling from his relationship with his wife" (Gabbard 19).

Through displacement, which is described as "the process by which energy is transferred from one mental image to another" (Rycroft 39), Bert transfers his repressed sexual desire for his mother substitute to his van. When Bert returns to the room after his journey with his van, his absolute silence transforms into a frantic speech. As soon as he enters the room, he draws the curtains, leaving the room in darkness: "Enter BERT. *He stops at the door, then goes to the window and draws the curtains. It is dark. He comes to the centre of the room and regards the woman*" (*The

Room 109). With the so-long feared darkness' penetration into the room, Bert's unconscious mind comes to light, and his menacing silence takes the form of frantic and incoherent speech, demonstrating the burst of repressed sexuality and aggressiveness directed to his van:

> BERT. I drove her down, hard.
> …
> Then I drove her back, hard.
> …
> I sped her.
> *Pause*
> I caned her along. She was good. … She was good. She went with me. She don't mix it with me. I use my hand. Like that. I get hold of her. (*The Room* 100-101)

As can be seen, the inanimate object, the van, becomes a sexual object to which Bert is fixated. Obsessed with his van, Bert pours out his repressed sexual and sadistic desires onto it. Since "sadism is the outward manifestation of the death drive" (Grimwade 159), Bert's death instinct shows itself in the form of a desire for domination. His speech replete with sadistic implications also reverberates Bert's desire to display his power: "There was no cars. One there was. He wouldn't move. I bumped him. I got my road. I had all my way" (*The Room* 110). It is perceivable that along with sexual desire, the craving for destruction and aggressiveness erupt.

During this frantic speech, Bert takes notice of Riley's presence in the room. With the appearance of the father figure, Bert's utmost fear assumes a human shape, and his neurosis reaches a crescendo. Overwhelmed by the fear of losing the love of the mother, Bert brutally kills Riley: "*He strikes the* NEGRO, *knocking him down, and then kicks his head against the gas-stove several times*" (*The Room* 110). In the case of losing the love-object, intense aggression, which is veiled by silence, surfaces as losing the object simply means the loss of the object's love. Thus, the long-repressed death instinct "is diverted outwards as an instinct of destruction" (Freud, "An Outline of Psycho-Analysis" 150). From this vantage point, his cruelty against Riley is the manifestation of the death drive that is displaced into the form of excessive aggression towards another object. By destroying the Oedipal father, "Bert defends the original configuration of the room, restoring himself and Rose to their nested position: two

people, apparently safely alone in a room" (Prentice 48). In other words, Bert fulfils the Oedipal desire.

In addition to Rose and Bert, the landlord, Mr Kidd's neurotic demeanours are also conspicuous. With this character, unresolved Oedipal issues are further brought to the fore. Mr Kidd's fragmented conversation with Rose uncovers his hidden desire as his monologue concerning his sister teems with sexual connotations: "She was a capable woman. Yes. Fine size of a woman too" (*The Room* 93). "She always used to tell me how much she appreciated all the -little things- that I used to do for her" (*The Room* 93), and significantly he adds: "I was her senior. Yes, I was her senior. She had a lovely boudoir. A beautiful boudoir" (*The Room* 93), indicating his hidden incestuous desire even further by dreamily mentioning his sister's dressing room. Mr Kidd even underlines the resemblance between her sister and her mother: "She was a capable woman. Yes. Fine size of a woman too. Yes, I think she took after my mum" (*The Room* 93). The affinity between Mr Kidd's mother and his sister is noteworthy as they both appear as mother figures, who provide love and care; thus, they are his first love objects. As also highlighted by Daniel Morehead, "[b]ecause they are usually caretakers, the infant's blood relatives, especially his sister and mother, become the objects of sexual desire" (350), in other words, Oedipal desire. A child's Oedipal desire resolves over time and other objects rather than the mother become the subject for love. However, in Mr Kidd's case, this sexual urge towards the mother figures is repressed and his memories concerning them are drowned in the deep sphere of the id. On these grounds, it is not surprising that Mr Kidd unconsciously forgets about his past and refrains from answering questions about his sister or mother as he feels unconscious guilt related to them. For instance, when Rose asks about his sister, Mr Kidd refrains from answering her insistent questions:

> ROSE. What did she die of?
> MR KIDD. Who?
> ROSE. Your sister.
> *Pause.* (*The Room* 93)

Seeing that confrontation with his past may cause mental suffering, he takes refuge in oblivion, evasion, and an ostensible hearing problem.

Related to his repressed Oedipal desire, Mr Kidd obtrusively has memory problems. As can be seen in his dialogue with Rose, his mother's identity is floating about in Mr Kidd's mind: "I think my mum was a Jewess. Yes, I wouldn't be surprised to learn that she was a Jewess" (*The Room* 93). Strikingly, Mr Kidd has no recollection of his origins. Forgetting, in this sense, gives way to self-estrangement and alienation from the outside world and can be construed as a way to cope with repressed Oedipal urges. As the manifestation of parapraxis, a term that encompasses "involuntary gestures, slips of the tongue, acts of forgetting, negations or mistakes" (Quinodoz 23), failure of memory appears as a result of a defence mechanism. As explained, "[w]e defend ourselves from unwanted information by air-brushing it out of existence, rendering it inaccessible to our conscious mind" (Wilson ix). Hence, Mr Kidd's distorted memory indicates repression of a desire felt for the maternal figures and a defence mechanism against the pressures of the outside world. To be accepted by society and not be deprived of its love and protection, Mr Kidd represses his Oedipal desire, and the pressure resulting from this repression makes him neurotic.

Moreover, Mr Kidd's vague speeches imply his suffering from agoraphobia as he mentions his fear of going far from his house. Just as he comes in, he emphasises that he does not stay out long: "I went out. I came straight in again. Only to the corner, of course" (*The Room* 90). Similar to Rose, Mr Kidd associates the outside world with danger: "Those roads will be no joke. [...] It'll be dark soon too" (*The Room* 94). For Mr Kidd, the external world is beset with menace with its darkness and coldness; thus, it is important for him not to stay long outside. Mr Kidd also vocalises his own fears when he warns Bert: "You'll be going out soon then, Mr Hudd? Well, be careful how you go" (*The Room* 94). Seen from the Freudian aspect, agoraphobia has connection with the fear of castration, as Freud marks "[it is] a fear which, after all, must be connected in its origins with the fear of castration" (Freud, *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* 109). Due to his Oedipal desire, Mr Kidd unconsciously fears punishment, in other words, castration that might come from the outside world. Freud establishes a connection with agoraphobia and castration as such:

> The agoraphobic patient imposes a restriction to his ego so as to escape a certain instinctual danger–namely, the danger of giving way to his erotic desires. For if he did so the danger of being castrated, or some similar danger,

would once more be conjured up as it was in his childhood. I may cite as an instance the case of a young man who became agoraphobic because he was afraid of yielding to the solicitations of prostitutes and of contracting a syphilitic infection from them as a punishment (*Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* 127).

From this point of view, agoraphobia is a form of evasion both of the world outside and from one's own suppressed urges. The outside world harbours menace both in the forms of violence and sexual desire. Similarly, for Mr Kidd, the outside world abounds with sexual temptations as he remarks: "Plenty of women round the corner. Not here though" (*The Room* 90). Moreover, his tension concerning women may even demonstrate a fear of females, known as "gynophobia." As explained by Doctor, Kahn, and Adamec, this morbid fear occurs due to an unresolved Oedipus complex: "From a psychiatric point of view, [the gynophobics] may have an unresolved conflict with their own mothers and hence fear all women" (511). Mr Kidd's fear of the outside, from this perspective, displays his fear of women as well as his dissatisfaction with reality due to his repressed desires.

Mr Kidd's subsequent appearance after Bert's leaving the room illuminates his neurotic state further as "[he] returns in a state of considerable excitement" (*The Peopled Wound*, Esslin 64), with a conspicuous anxiety attack. Gripped by fear, Mr Kidd does not even hear Rose's anxious questions: "Look here, Mrs Hudd, I've got to speak to you. I came up specially [...]. As soon as I heard the van go I got ready to come and see you. I'm knocked out" (*The Room* 103). Disconcerted and threatened by the silence of the mysterious man in the basement, Mr Kidd remarks: "How do I know who he is? All I know is he won't say a word, he won't indulge in any conversation, just – has he gone? that and nothing else" (*The Room* 104). During this agitated speech, Mr Kidd mentions that his innocent request to play chess with the man in the basement is denied. Given the fact that games and fantasy are connected to one another, Mr Kidd's attempt to play chess can be seen as a form of "compensate[ion] for an unsatisfying reality" (Storr 102). By offering to play this game, Mr Kidd's aim might be to alleviate his anxiety. Moreover, chess can be seen as a re-enactment of war, surfacing the repressed death drive with the purpose of destructing the opponent. The game of chess also has Oedipal connotations in itself, as explained by Steven Fried, "the king may be equated with the father, the queen

with the mother and, in Oedipal terms, the objective of the game may be seen as that of 'killing the king'" (47). Hence, playing chess becomes an attempt for Mr Kidd to sublimate his unresolved Oedipal desire for his mother and his sister.

As mentioned before, in the characters' formation of neurosis, modern society, which "serve[s] the dual purpose of protecting human beings against nature and regulating their mutual relations" (Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* 34), plays a crucial role. To form a human community that offers protection, individuals sacrifice the gratification of their sexual and destructive desires, which creates dissatisfaction. Neurosis, from this aspect, arises from the characters' being out of harmony with the modern world. Therefore, the outside world fills Pinter's characters with dread as they are in a constant expectation of imminent threat from it. That is the reason why they stick to their false havens and have limited connection with the outside world along with its inhabitants: as explained, "[a]gainst the dreaded external world one can only defend oneself by some kind of turning away from it" (Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* 18). Commonly, the characters in *The Room* regress into enclosed spaces to avoid dissatisfaction. To illustrate, Rose and Bert's attempt to withdraw themselves to their rooms and their attachment to their false haven portray their purpose to escape from unhappiness and suffering. Nevertheless, the characters' havens are disturbed, and they are forced to face their fears when the outsiders, Sands and, more importantly, Riley appear. With these outsiders, the repressed desires return. Therefore, it can be said that the conflictual and detrimental relationship between the world outside of the room and the characters is at the root of their neurotic conduct.

In conclusion, Harold Pinter's first play, *The Room,* demonstrates neurotic characters who cannot fit into their environment. When approached from Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic perspective, the hidden mental states of the characters that inhabit Pinter's world of *The Room* are brought to light. Therefore, Rose, Bert, and Mr Kidd become less unreachable to the reader/audience as their motivations for their ambiguous actions can be understood in the light of Freudian psychoanalysis. The neurotic demeanours of these characters are discernible as Rose, Bert, and Mr Kidd have phobias, and they have anxious, withdrawn, and sometimes violent manners owing to their unresolved Oedipus complex and repressed death drive. Their

unresolved Oedipal desire is portrayed by Rose's obsession with the basement and her confrontation with the father figure, Riley; Bert's unhealthy relationship with his wife and his eventual killing of Riley to fulfil his Oedipal desire; and Mr Kidd's incestuous remarks about his sister and his rusty memories concerning his mother. On the other hand, their death drives are manifested as aggression towards the external world, as can be seen in Rose's verbal attacks and Bert's sadistic desire for his van and his assault on Riley. As a defence mechanism, these characters repress their desires coming from the id. Rose's incessant talking and her confinement to a mother role, Bert's descending into silence and the transference of his sadistic desires onto his van, and Mr Kidd's amnesia demonstrate the presence of repression in the characters. These characters repress their primal instincts, namely, Oedipal and death drive, to fit into society, which regulates the externalisation of these drives for the sake of communal life. However, repression of these drives causes dissatisfaction and, as a result, neurosis. In *The Room,* in addition to the characters' discontent with reality, their excessive fears, anxiety, constant guilt, memory loss, aggression, and even blindness erupt from this repression.

CHAPTER II:

THE WISH FOR REGRESSION AND THE FEAR OF CASTRATION IN
THE BIRTHDAY PARTY

> "Stan, don't let them tell you what to do!"
> (*The Birthday Party* 80)

Having been affected by the darkness of the Second World War and the sense of uncertainty encircling the post-war period, Pinter's first full-length play *The Birthday Party* (1957) lays emphasis on the omnipresence of menace, which may be perceived as a factor to drag the characters into unfathomable discontent. From this point of view, *The Birthday Party* portrays the decadent state of humanity. To gain an insight into Pinter's play, the characters' unconscious worlds, which designate their actions and shed light on their pasts, could be analysed in view of Sigmund Freud's concepts, such as the Oedipus complex, the castration anxiety, and the destructive desire. Thus, this chapter aims to offer a Freudian psychoanalytical reading of the main characters in *The Birthday Party*, namely Stanley Webber, Meg Boles, Nat/Simey/Benny Goldberg, and lastly Seamus/Dermot McCann.

Although Harold Pinter's, *The Birthday Party* (1957) "is today hailed as one of the most significant bastions of modern drama" (Deleon 28), its first production at the Arts Theatre and later at Lyric Hammersmith in 1958 received harsh criticism due to its ambiguity. One of the critics, W. A. Darlington, for instance, reviewed in *The Daily Telegraph* the first performance and noted that "[the play] turned out to be one of those plays in which an author wallows in symbols and revels in obscurity" (qtd. in Lloyd Evans 63). The other critics who saw the first performance correspondingly evaluated it as incomprehensible and tedious to watch, except for Harold Hobson, "the highly respected critic" (Naismith 1), who was fascinated by the severely criticised play. In *The Sunday Times,* Hobson defended *The Birthday Party* and praised its young playwright by stating: "*The Birthday Party* is absorbing. It is witty [...]. Mr. Pinter, on the evidence of this work, possesses the most original, disturbing, and arresting talent in theatrical London" (qtd. in Page 14). A short period after its catastrophic first production, *The Birthday Party*'s "brilliant success [...] at the Tower

Theatre" (Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* 238-239) London in 1959 led other critics to concur with Harold Hobson. Following that successful production, the play earned a long-standing reputation and continues to maintain its essential place in British drama.

The Birthday Party opens in the living room of a seaside boarding house where Meg Boles, "a woman in her sixties" (*The Birthday Party* 2), prepares and serves breakfast to her husband, Petey Boles, "a man in his sixties" (*The Birthday Party* 2), who reads a newspaper and hardly talks. The couple's relationship is dominated by the lack of communication as Meg's repetitious questions about the news and her prattling about their only lodger, Stanley Webber, are responded to by Petey's utter indifference and short answers. Meg decides to wake Stanley up, and for this purpose, she goes upstairs to his room. Amid shouts and laughter coming from upstairs, Stanley, "a man in his late thirties" (*The Birthday Party* 3), is brought down to have his breakfast, significantly in an unkempt state, "unshaven [and] in his pyjama jacket" (*The Birthday Party* 8). From the moment he comes down, Stanley grumbles about the breakfast and mocks Meg, who mothers him and treats him like a child. During their conversation, Meg announces that they are expecting visitors, who are shortly afterwards revealed to be Nat/Simey/Benny Goldberg and Seamus/Dermot McCann. They seem to be on a specific mission which is never specified. Upon learning the news, Stanley becomes profoundly disturbed and reveals his fearful unconscious state by launching into a tantalising memory concerning the destruction of his career as a pianist. This piece of memory torments Stanley and leaves him even more agitated; therefore, he tries to scare Meg by telling her about the imaginary men with a wheelbarrow, who would take someone away, and even ponders going away with the neighbouring girl, Lulu, yet he rapidly gives up the futile idea. To cheer up Stanley, Meg gives him a present, "a boy's drum" (*The Birthday Party* 30), claiming that it is his birthday, although Stanley insistently denies it. However, he finally gives in, takes the boy's drum, and starts beating it. Significantly, his rhythmic beating gradually becomes ferocious and erratic, leaving Meg shocked.

After the hysterical drum beating scene, Goldberg and McCann arrive at the boarding house, conversing about their ambiguous job as well as McCann's anxious state, until

Meg interrupts them. Charmed by Goldberg's amicable attitude, Meg engages in a conversation with him in which she divulges to Goldberg Stanley's identity and his conspicuous past as a concert pianist. Moreover, she announces that it is Stanley's birthday, which peculiarly draws Goldberg's attention since he immediately offers to throw a party for him. Goldberg's enthusiastic birthday plan is followed by the scene in which Stanley encounters the intruders who demand that he sit down. As soon as Stanley sits down, the intruders put him to cross-examination dominated by absurd questions and irrational accusations as he is found guilty of betraying an unnamed organisation, murdering his wife, being single, and even picking his nose. Even though Stanley futilely tries not to yield to Goldberg and McCann's verbal and physical attacks, the savage interrogation eventually leaves him utterly silent. Unable to talk and react, Stanley is helplessly drawn into his alleged birthday party, during most of which he remains inert until he is forced to play a game called the blind man's buff. On Stanley's turn to play, McCann snatches his glasses, breaks them, and puts the toy drum in his way, making him step into it and fall down. Blindfolded, Stanley stumbles on the drum, loses his balance, and directly approaches Meg in an attempt to strangle her. His violence is also directed at Lulu as he makes a move to rape her, which is eventually deterred by Goldberg and McCann. The morning following the party, contrary to his initial sloven appearance in pyjamas, Stanley is respectably dressed in a dark suit and white collar, yet he is unable to make comprehensible sounds. Defeated and annihilated, he is taken away from the boarding house to a man named Monty with the promise of being corrected and integrated into society.

The inspiration for *The Birthday Party* came from Pinter's experience in a derelict lodging house he had to stay as a touring actor. The memory of that house and its inhabitants, an old landlady and her only lodger, reverberates through *The Birthday Party* as Pinter explicates in an interview:

> It was sparked off from a very distinct situation in digs when I was on tour. In fact the other day a friend of mine gave me a letter I wrote to him in nineteen-fifty something, Christ knows when it was. This is what it says: 'I have filthy insane digs, a great bulging scrag of a woman with breasts rolling at her belly, an obscene household, cats, dogs, filth, tea strainers, mess, oh bullocks, talk, chat rubbish shit scratch dung poison, infantility, deficient order in the upper fretwork…' Now the thing about this is that was *The Birthday Party*- I was in those digs, and this woman was Meg in the play, and

there was a fellow staying there in Eastbourne, on the coast. The whole thing remained with me, and three years later I wrote the play. (*Harold Pinter: An Interview* 20)

The man who was staying in that woman's house was also memorable for Pinter as he gave life to the protagonist of the play, Stanley Webber. Similar to Stanley, the man who was staying in that house, was a desolate man who claimed to be an artist once as Pinter narrates: "I met this fellow in a seaside boarding-house. He lived in this attic and used to play the piano on the pier. He was a totally lonely man. That's all I knew about him, but his image remained with me for some years" (*Conversations with Pinter* 59). Moreover, Pinter discerned that the landlady and the man had a peculiar relationship, as he reminisced that the landlady "always tousled [...] [the man's] head and tickled him and goosed him and wouldn't leave him alone at all" (qtd. in Billington 131), which indeed parallels Meg's smothering attitude towards Stanley. Having those people in his mind, Pinter started writing his play by envisaging a knock on their door: "I thought, what would happen if two people knocked on [the lodger's] door" (Pinter, *Conversations with Pinter* 59) and accordingly, "[t]he writing arranged itself" (Pinter, "On *The Birthday Party* I" 20).

Although subtly, *The Birthday Party* embodies a few characteristics of social realist plays written in the 1950s by the young generation of playwrights known as "the angry young men, who triggered a dramatic movement, which was renowned for its realistic portrayal of the monotonous lives and daily chores of lower-class people as well as their nonconformist protagonists, "[the] working class heroes and heroines" (Smart 28), who criticised social and political institutions in an angry tone, reflecting the playwrights' own despair about the chaotic post-war atmosphere of Britain due to the Cold War, and prevailing unemployment, and poverty. Although Pinter was not considered within the Angry Young Man movement, *The Birthday Party* draws a parallel with these social realist plays of the period, putting aside the angry tone and bitter criticism. For instance, Pinter's play focalises working-class characters, as Petey is described as a deck-chair attendant who lives and runs a boarding house with his wife, Meg. Their sole tenant, Stanley, is unemployed and idly lives with the old couple. Furthermore, the lower middle-class domestic setting, which is core to the post-war plays, is foregrounded by the presence of a "[k]itchen hatch" (*The Birthday*

Party 3) which is observable from the living room of the boarding house. The service hatch is functional as by means of which the reader/audience is able to observe Meg's serving breakfast and tea to Petey and Stanley: "*She rises, takes his plate and exits into the kitchen. She then appears at the hatch with two pieces of fried bread on a plate*" (*The Birthday Party* 5). Thus, the kitchen hatch and Meg's serving food also "seem to suggest a connection with the British 'kitchen sink' school of working-class realistic drama" (Almansi and Henderson 35) which portrays ordinary characters doing their chores. The characters' mundane routines are further conveyed with Stanley's having his breakfast with fried bread and cornflakes in his pyjamas, Petey's reading the newspaper, and Meg's dusting the room.

Moreover, the disillusionment experienced in the post-war period is also manifested in *The Birthday Party* through Stanley's character, who mirrors the young generation of the time as he is seemingly frustrated, desperate, and unable to fit into society. The protagonist, from this perspective, "represented the dismay of many young Britons whose childhood and adolescence were scarred by the depression and the war" (Tynan 57). Without having hope for his future, Stanley shuts himself up in the old couple's boarding house as he marks, "[t]here's nowhere to go" (*The Birthday Party* 20). Nevertheless, his haven is to be threatened by the appearance of the sinister intruders whose ominous knock on the door of the boarding house initiated fear in the dwellers as this sense of unease and threat was commonly experienced in the aftermath of the Second World War due to the trauma of the past war, bombardments, and genocide. In his interview with Mel Gussow, Pinter acknowledges that *The Birthday Party* was influenced by the Second World War, especially the Holocaust as he noted, "[t]he idea of the knock came from my knowledge of the Gestapo. I'll never forget: it was 1953 or 1954. The war had only been over less than ten years. It was very much on my mind" (59). Thus, it can be anticipated that the traumas of the genocide are reverberated in *The Birthday Party* through Stanley's character who, according to some critics, is a Jewish character, as Ömer Şekerci also confirms: "Pinter creates Stanley as a helpless Jew" (256). From this perspective, the details concerning Stanley's character gain significance. For instance, Stanley's "pyjama jacket" (*The Birthday Party* 24) may allude to the striped uniforms of the imprisoned Jews in the concentration camps (Yelmiş). Moreover, Stanley's claim to be called "Joe Soap"

(*The Birthday Party* 60) might imply the Nazi atrocity of making soaps out of murdered bodies; as Grimes underlines, Stanley's use of this name "[evokes] one of the uses Nazis made of incinerated Jewish bodies" (42). Seen from this perspective, Stanley's hiding in the boarding house and his anxious expectation of threat which comes with a knock on the door is connected to his fear of being taken away and persecuted by the Gestapo, in this case, Goldberg and McCann. In Pinter's plays, the menace which penetrates the characters' haven and terrorises their safety is not bizarre, as Pinter explicates, "two people arrive out of nowhere, and I don't consider this an unnatural happening" (qtd. in Page 13). Thus, as can be plainly observed in Stanley's overwhelming fear concerning the intruders, *The Birthday Party* draws the picture of the uncanny external world teeming with danger and its battle-scarred individuals of the post-war period who are deeply traumatised by the lasting impact of the war.

In compliance with the Angry Young Man movement and Kitchen Sink drama, *The Birthday Party* not only portrays the reality of its period but impacted by Absurd Drama, it also illustrates the absurdity of the human condition in an irrational universe. Hence, it shares some technical and thematic characteristics of Absurd Drama. For example, the motivations, backgrounds, and identities of the characters are never specified as the reason behind Stanley's persecution and his removal from his haven remains a mystery; thus, "the chain of cause-and-effect [...] [is] broken" (Lacey 145). In a way, the playwright purposefully leaves the reader/audience in the dark. More to the point, the characters' obscure backgrounds due to their unreliable accounts concerning themselves adds to the elusiveness of the play even further. It is not clear, for instance, if Stanley was a concert pianist or whether he killed his wife. Such ambiguity is intensified with the unclear identities of the characters who claim to have different names. In his reminiscences, Goldberg's name constantly changes to Nat, Simey, and Benny, while McCann is interchangeably called Dermot and Seamus. Similar to the intruders, Stanley's real identity is also ambiguous as during the brutal interrogation scene he admits that he changes his name:

> GOLDBERG. Webber! Why did you change your name?
> STANLEY. I forgot the other one.
> GOLDBERG. What's your name now?

STANLEY. Joe Soap. (*The Birthday Party* 44)

As Burkman underscores *The Birthday Party* "reflects man's loss of his sense of self" (Burkman 20). Therefore, without a name, a clear past, or human connection, Stanley is alienated from himself, not even knowing his identity. In a similar vein with Absurd Drama, along with self-alienation, the characters also lose the harmony between themselves and the universe in which "everything is uncertain and relative" (Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* 237). For instance, estranged from the universe, Goldberg despairingly reflects on the encircling senselessness:

GOLDBERG. [...] Because I believe that the world… (Vacant.)…
Because I believe that the world…(Desperate.)… (*The Birthday Party* 72)

Essentially to cope with the purposelessness, they engage in repetitive activities which are empty in meaning; to exemplify, Meg devotes herself to serving food; Petey withdraws into reading newspapers and watching other people's chess games, and McCann tears up paper. Moreover, in a void, the characters retreat into their own shells, evading communication with others. Thus, the characters' interactions with one other take the shape of nothing but "verbal nonsense" (Deleon 9), merely used to fill up unpleasant silence:

MEG. Is it nice out?
PETEY. Very nice.
Pause.
MEG. Is Stanley up yet?
PETEY. I don't know. Is he? (*The Birthday Party* 4)

The decadence of communication is accentuated in the excerpt above as the couple's interaction is dominated by Petey's short and reluctant answers. The prevailing lack of communication makes the characters even more alienated, self-absorbed, lonely and miserable in the face of the cruel universe without any affection felt for one another. In a way, in *The Birthday Party,* Pinter draws a picture of a world in which communication is evaded, connection with others is found threatening, alienation prevails, and memories as well as identities are unreliable.

The menace prevailing *The Birthday Party* remains unexplained, which makes the play impenetrable to the reader/audience. As John Russell Brown acknowledges that "[Pinter's] dramas cannot be received without a continuous intimation of the

unconscious lives of the characters" (126). Hence, a closer examination of the characters' inner worlds demonstrates that they are evasive, anxious, and aggressive, which might point to the presence of a neurotic disorder occurring due to "[the] conflict between unconscious impulses and reality" (Frosh 105). Oscillating between the id's unacceptable urge to gratify the sexual and death drives and society's repressing these desires, the characters who inhabit the world of Pinter succumb to regression; hence, neurosis.

As a sullen character seized by regression and lassitude, the protagonist, Stanley Webber, patently portrays an image of a neurotic man as he is ostensibly reclusive and does not seem eager to leave his room. Enclosed spaces such as houses and rooms, viewed from the Freudian perspective, are construed as representations of the womb (Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* 129). From this perspective, Stanley's room bears a resemblance to a womb in which he regresses into an intrauterine stage. Thus, it is not a coincidence that Stanley is said to be fast asleep at the beginning of the play, "He must be asleep" (*The Birthday Party* 4). Freud perceives sleeping as a form of regression as well as withdrawal from reality as he notes, "from time to time we withdraw [...] into existence into the womb. At any rate, we arrange conditions for ourselves very like what they were then: warm, dark and free from stimuli" (*Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* 88-89). Within the walls of his room, which becomes a pseudo womb, Stanley fulfils the wish to return to the womb as he retreats to prenatal life by slumbering.

However, Stanley's existence in the pseudo womb soon is to cease as he is awakened and taken out of his room by Meg:

> MEG. Stan! Stanny! [...] I'm coming up to fetch you if you don't come down! I'm coming up! (*The Birthday Party* 7)

If sleeping is a regression to the womb, waking up is birth, as Freud also notes: "[e]very time we wake up in the morning it is like a new birth" (*Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* 88-89). In this regard, Stanley's stepping out of his womb-like room and coming to the living room in his pyjama jacket can be construed as his metaphorical birth. His birth is also alluded to when Stanley significantly declares to Lulu that he was at sea that morning: "I was in the sea at half past six" (*The Birthday*

Party 19). Even though he ostensibly lies to Lulu, Stanley's statement about his morning at sea is crucial since getting into the water may indicate birth as Freud also suggests, "[b]irth is almost regularly represented by some reference to water" (*A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* 126) due to the water's association with the "amniotic fluid" (Freud, *Moses and Monotheism* 12). Thus, Stanley's words signify his birth and herald his macabre birthday party. Moreover, Goldberg's analogy between waking up in the morning and birth is yet another reference to Stanley's metaphorical birth:

> GOLDBERG. […] What a thing to celebrate – birth! Like getting up in the morning. [...] Some people don't like the idea of getting up in the morning. Getting up in the morning, they say, what is it? Your skin is crabby, you need a shave, your eyes are full of muck, your mouth is like a boghouse, the palms of your hands are full of sweat, your feet stink, what are you but a corpse waiting to be washed? (*The Birthday Party* 39)

Goldberg draws a dismal picture of birth in his utterances, representing it as contrary to something to be celebrated. Drawing on Heidegger, whose influence on the Existentialists cannot be denied, birth is considered as "being thrown" (*geworfenheit)* (400) violently into the universe. Similarly, through Freud's lens, birth is an unpleasant experience since, with birth, the child is separated from the mother, who satisfies all his/her needs. On this basis, birth generates discontent, specifically separation anxiety, which is associated with the loss of care and affection. Freud explains as follows: "if [the child] loses the love of a person he depends on, he is no longer protected against various dangers; above all, he is exposed to the risk that [a] more powerful person will demonstrate his superiority by punishing him" (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 78). Freud's statements on separation anxiety may be helpful in explaining Stanley's anxious state after his symbolic birth, which creates fear of losing his mother substitute, that is Meg, and the security provided by her. Once his sense of security is shattered, Stanley is exposed to threats, which may explain his paranoia concerning other people, as can be seen in his hysterical rumination on unnamed people who, according to him, caused the downfall of his career as he reiterates: "you know what they did? They carved me up. Carved me up. It was all arranged, it was all worked out" (*The Birthday Party* 17). The repetition of the word "carve" is significant as in *The Oxford English Dictionary,* the word is both

defined as: "to cut" ("Carve") and "to castrate" ("Carve"), denoting his dread of castration, which is projected onto other people.

Stanley's metaphorical birth is proceeded by his infancy in which he is treated as a child by his mother substitute, Meg. She addresses him with diminutive names, such as "boy" (*The Birthday Party* 7) and "Stanny" (*The Birthday Party* 7). Moreover, like a mother, Meg smothers him with affection and nourishes him, notably with milk, which might both imply Meg's motherhood and Stanley's regression to an early stage of life. Similar to an infant, Stanley clings on to the security and care that he is being provided, and thus, he is seemingly reluctant to leave his life in the boarding house; in a way, he demonstrates agoraphobic tendencies. Stanley's agoraphobia is crystallised when he refuses Lulu's invitation to go out together:

> LULU *(rising).* Come out and get a bit of air. You depress me, looking like that.
> STANLEY. Air? Oh, I don't know about that. (*The Birthday Party* 20)

Stanley also remains unresponsive to Lulu's further questions about going out: "Don't you ever go out? (*He does not answer*)" (*The Birthday Party* 19). For an infant, being away from the mother figure is equated with discontent as the mother provides all of the infant's needs of nourishment, protection, and affection. With the fear of losing his/her mother, an infant may refuse to go out. In a similar vein, Freud suggests that an individual's agoraphobic tendency is caused by the desire to be with the mother figure; as he himself puts it in his analysis of the Little Hans' case, a boy who fears horses and going outside; hence, "[agoraphobia] could serve as a means of allowing [the child] to stay at home with his beloved mother. In this way, therefore, his affection for his mother triumphantly achieved its aim" (*Two Case Histories* 139). Freud's point is that one's agoraphobic inclination is related to the child's attachment to the mother and demonstrates the impact of the Oedipus complex in the case of agoraphobia. Given Freud's point, Stanley's anxiety about leaving the exaggerated affection and care of Meg can be perceived as the reason for his agoraphobia. By not going out, Stanley aims to preserve the mother substitute's security and love.

Stanley's attachment to his mother substitute, however, is unhealthy as their mother and son relationship entails Oedipal overtones. For instance, to wake him up, Meg

goes to Stanley's room, from which suggestive shouts and laughter come: "[Meg] *exits and goes upstairs. In a moment, shouts from* STANLEY, *wild laughter from* MEG. [...] *Shouts. Laughter*" (*The Birthday Party* 7). Significantly, after waking him up, Meg comes downstairs panting and arranging her hair (*The Birthday Party* 8), which implies the possible presence of sexuality between the two characters. Moreover, the movement of going up and down the stairs can also be considered noteworthy as Freud points out that "[l]adders, ascents, steps in relation to their mounting, are certainly symbols for sexual intercourse" (*A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* 130). From this aspect, Meg's going upstairs and breathlessly coming down indicates sexuality even further. Sexual connotations are also evinced when Meg talks about Stanley's room: "(*sensual, stroking his arm*). Oh, Stan, that's a lovely room. I've had some lovely afternoons in that room" (*The Birthday Party* 13). More to the point, Meg's desire to make physical contact with Stanley is visible as she strokes his arm, tickles him, and touches his hair: "*[s]he crosses behind him and tickles the back of his neck*" (*The Birthday Party* 13) and "*ruffles his hair as she passes*" (*The Birthday Party* 12). Her suggestive talks and her striving for physical contact demonstrate Meg's sexual affection, which is mingled with a motherly attachment towards Stanley. As for a male child, "his mother becomes his first love-object as a result of her feeding him and looking after him" (Freud, "Female Sexuality" 228). In a similar vein, as Stanley is nourished and taken care of by Meg, he is seemingly attached to her. Stanley's unwillingness to leave Meg's house, his attachment to the mother substitute, and the implications of coitus between the two characters may manifest an unresolved Oedipus complex in Stanley's case.

The Oedipus complex, "the nuclear complex of every neurosis" (Freud, *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* 48), can simply be defined as a child's erotic desire towards his mother; in other words, towards his first object of love. The Oedipus complex is considered an essential part of the psychosexual development of a child, and it is regarded "perfectly normal that a child should take his parents as the first objects of his love" (Freud, *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* 48). During the Oedipal phase, a male child feels sexual attraction towards his mother and therefore, he is prone to see his father as a rival and longs to take his place. Freud explains this in his own words: "[The boy] begins to desire his mother [...] and to hate his father [...] as a rival who

stands in the way of [his] wish" ("Contributions to the Psychology of Love I" 171). This hostility is also mingled with dread as the child is fearful of getting punished by his father due to his prohibited desire. Specifically, the child's unremitting fear is to be bereft of his genitals, which is referred to as castration anxiety that "involves unconscious feelings and fantasies associated with being deprived of the sex organs" (Doctor, Kahn, and Adamec 120). Simply put, castration means one's separation from his genitals; therefore, with the dread of losing his genitals, a child eventually renounces his Oedipal desire. However, in some individuals, the Oedipus complex is not resolved, and castration anxiety ensues, leading to the neurotic disorder. As Freud underlines, "[e]very new arrival on this planet is faced by the task of mastering the Oedipus complex; anyone who fails to do so falls victim to neurosis" (*Three Essays on Sexuality* 226).

Mirroring Freud's theory, *The Birthday Party* displays Stanley's unresolved Oedipus complex, and for some critics, he even resembles Sophocles' tragic hero, King Oedipus: "Stanley can be said to be a modern Oedipus" (Fischer 494). Similar to Sophocles' tragedy, *Oedipus Rex,* in which King Oedipus unknowingly killed his father and married his mother, Stanley replaces his father substitute, Petey, by becoming a lover in the eyes of his mother substitute; hence fulfilling his Oedipal wish. As Bennett also expresses, "Stanley (the surrogate son) replaces Petey (the 'father') for the mother's (Meg's) attention" (55). However, the gratification of Stanley's primal wish, as in Sophocles' tragedy, has catastrophic outcomes as it brings about his castration, which Stanley fearfully expects. According to Freud, the threat of castration comes from the father figure, who is "feared and hated, revered and envied" ("An Autobiographical Study" 68). Notably, the intruders, Goldberg and McCann, assume the castrator father role, which is made explicit even before their arrival as Meg prepares the room with the armchair specifically for her visitors: "I've got the room with the armchair all ready for visitors" (*The Birthday Party* 7). The armchair may foreshadow their roles as paternal figures as Gabbard also points out that an armchair appears as an overt "father symbol" (45). Thus, it is not surprising that Stanley's neurotic state becomes evident upon hearing about the coming of the father figures, which signals that his punishment is drawing near although he attempts to deny reality by reiterating: "They won't come. Someone's taking the Michael.

Forget all about it. It's a false alarm. A false alarm" (*The Birthday Party* 15). Nevertheless, Stanley's punishment for his inadmissible Oedipal desire is ineluctable, as Goldberg announces, "If we hadn't come today we'd have come tomorrow" (*The Birthday Party* 26).

Even prior to the interrogation scene, Stanley's punishment for his Oedipal sin begins with the paternal figures' effort to make him sit down. Almansi Guido and Simon Henderson see the tense argument about sitting down as a game to assert dominance, and they postulate that "each player tries to force its opponent to sit down so that the interrogating party can assert its physical dominance and establish itself as master of the game" (43). Stanley initially resists their attempt to assert power over him; nevertheless, he eventually yields and sits down: "*[Stanley] strolls casually to the chair at the table. They watch him. He stops whistling. Silence. He sits*" (*The Birthday Party* 41). By yielding to sit, Stanley is submitted to Goldberg and McCann's paternal authority and becomes "symbolically castrated by his party guests, since standing up is often associated with the affirmation of male sexuality" (Wong 23). Standing upright has connections with gaining force, as when an infant learns to stand upright and walk, he becomes able to examine his surroundings; put another way, he feels a sense of power as he is no longer dependent on the mother figure. As Norman N. Holland puts it, "[e]ach baby lives again the exhilaration our hominid ancestors must have felt when they stood up and looked far across the African savannas and realized that they alone surveyed all that land. Other creatures became beneath and lesser" (*The I and Being Human* 198). More importantly, an erect posture is directly associated with the image of a penis; as explicated, "[t]he phallus with its power to stand erect becomes identified with the boy's own recently acquired power to stand up" (Holland, *The Dynamics of Literary Response* 42). From this perspective, Stanley's inability to maintain his upright position can be perceived as not just losing power but also his masculinity. As Gabbard also underlines, "[t]o be forced to sit down becomes connected … with loss of manhood" (53); in other words, a metaphorical castration on Stanley's part.

Stanley's subservient position leads to the vicious interrogation during which Goldberg and McCann verbally and even physically assault him. Most strikingly,

during the interrogation, the father figures unequivocally accuse him of being a "Mother defiler!" (*The Birthday Party* 45) and address his Oedipal sin by explicitly referring to it as "lechery":

> GOLDBERG. Where is your lechery leading you?
> MCCANN: You'll pay for this. (*The Birthday Party* 45)

As can be seen, McCann's words signal a punishment for Stanley's lechery, which is later clarified as castration since Goldberg menacingly utters: "We can sterilise you" (*The Birthday Party* 46). The word "sterilise", in this regard, is noteworthy as it is defined in *The Oxford English Dictionary* as "[t]o deprive of fecundity; to render incapable of producing offspring" ("Sterilize"), that is indeed castration. In addition to the charges concerning his Oedipal sin, Stanley also faces severe yet absurd allegations which render him powerless. It is noted that interrogations which are meant to confuse the victim are not solely part of Pinter's imagination but can be encountered in history. According to Peacock,

> [t]he technique employed by Goldberg and McCann [...] has its origin in contemporary reality. It is in fact similar to 'brainwashing', a form of questioning that came to public attention during the postwar years and was associated particularly with the Chinese Communists [...] during the Korean War of 1951. The victim was usually [...] subjected to a barrage of apparently ludicrous questions, so that he or she became confused and disoriented. (66)

Thus, not only the harsh allegations of an Oedipal sin but also the irrational questions directed at Stanley can be perceived as psychological torture that gradually effaces his ability to express himself. It is for this reason that Stanley's only response to Goldberg and McCann's absurd question concerning the chicken and egg is a scream:

> GOLDBERG. Which came first?
> MCCANN. Chicken? Egg? Which came first?
> GOLDBERG and MCCANN. Which came first? Which came first? Which came first?
> STANLEY *screams*. (*The Birthday Party* 46)

Perplexed by the absurdity of the questions and crushed under the accusations and insults, Stanley is only able to shriek and utters his desperate last words, "Could I have my glasses back?" (*The Birthday Party* 47), which demonstrate his fragility in the face of paternal authority. Following these words, Stanley descends into complete muteness and loses his defiant attitude; in a way, "[he] is ritualistically killed by the

words" (Wray 419). Therefore, Stanley's excruciating scream and his last words not only emphasise his helplessness but also evinces his mental breakdown, which according to Norman N. Holland is "another castration symbol, namely, removing 'mental potency'" (*The Dynamics of Literary Response* 43).

In a state in which he is mentally broken, nearly paralysed, and unresponsive, Stanley is forced to play a game called the blind man's buff, "a children's game in which a blindfolded player has to touch another who is then blindfolded in turn" (Naismith 84). Significantly, when Stanley is blindfolded, McCann takes his glasses away and crushes them: "MCCANN *backs slowly across the stage to the left. He breaks STANLEY's glasses, snapping the frames*" (*The Birthday Party* 57). McCann's crushing of the object explicitly designed for seeing and Stanley's blindfolding may be construed as blinding; in other words, castration. Freud sees a close connection between loss of sight and castration, as he articulates, "blinding [is] a symbolic substitute for castration" (*An Outline of Psychoanalysis* 190), which can also be seen in King Oedipus' self-blinding for the punishment of his sin. Similarly, Stanley's vision is impaired by the intruders due to his Oedipal sin; thus, in his last appearance, "STANLEY *begins to clench and unclench his eyes*" (*The Birthday Party* 78), apparently unable to see for he has been symbolically castrated.

Along with Stanley's impaired sight, his ability to articulate his thoughts and feelings is also destroyed. During the blindman's buff, McCann not only takes Stanley's glasses away, but he also puts Meg's present, the toy drum, in his way to make him stumble; as it is stated in the stage direction, "MCCANN *picks up the drum and places it sideways in* STANLEY's *path*. STANLEY *walks into the drum and falls over with his foot caught in it*" (*The Birthday Party* 57). Stanley's savagely beating the drum before his encounter with the intruders may be seen as a defence mechanism called symbolisation, in which "the action/gesture came to stand for the words that could not be said" (Barry 59). Furthermore, Michael Y. Bennett also marks that the toy drum is a tool by which Stanley demonstrates his feelings; therefore, according to him, "when the toy drum breaks, Stanley breaks" (65). With the demolition of the drum, Stanley's defence mechanism is crushed; he is rendered voiceless and left with aphasia, "[a] problem in verbal communication [which] include[s] the inability to understand words

and/or the inability to produce cogent speech" (Barry 53). Therefore, mentally broken and utterly silenced, Stanley is only able to make incomprehensible sounds following his macabre birthday party: "STANLEY *concentrates, his mouth opens, he attempts to speak, fails and emits sounds from his throat. ... Uh-gug ... uh-gug ... eeehhh-gag ... (On the breath.) Caahh ... caahh....*" (*The Birthday Party* 78). In a way, Stanley's being robbed of the power of speech and his muteness is a form of mutilation, to put it bluntly, castration. Moreover, Stanley's accidentally breaking the toy drum may be a sign of his unconscious desire to put an end to his being regarded and treated by Meg as a child any longer. He may be wishing for his manhood to be acknowledged-not just by himself but also by others (Bozer 22).

After a series of punishments, including verbal attacks, 'blinding', and silencing, Stanley finds himself in the encompassing darkness of the stage: "BLACKOUT. *There is now no light at all through the window. The stage is in darkness*" (*The Birthday Party* 58). Darkness has an affiliation with the threatening world of the unconscious within which the repressed urges reside; in this respect, "[t]he id, … is the referent of blackness within the personality" (qtd. in Sullivan 64). Thus, as darkness descends, the repressed desires of the characters divulge, especially once the blind man's buff commences, which serves as a withdrawal to the unconscious world. It is known that "[g]ames [...] [bring] fantasy [...] [and] partake of the dream state" (Burghardt 379); thus, similar to a dream state, with the descent of darkness, Stanley's aggressive impulses, in other words, the death drive, surfaces.

As an urge, the death drive forces individuals toward the inorganic state as Freud epitomises, "[the death] instinct is at work in every living creature and it is striving to bring it to ruin and reduce life to its original condition of inanimate matter" ("Why War?" 211). Instinctually, individuals long for nonbeing, as explicated further, "we are craving something that begins to look like nothing less than death. It's the inertia that comes with the wish's fulfilment that we covet, the emptying out of energies that brings a serene calm" (Smith 4). Due to this desire for nonexistence, the urge for self-destruction emerges, which is, however, repressed and yet externalised as violence towards other objects rather than towards the subject itself as "[t]he organism preserves its own life [...] by destroying an extraneous one" (Freud, "Why War?" 211).

To recapitulate, the human tendency for destructive behaviour is directed both inwards towards one's self and outwards towards others. In a similar vein, once the stage falls into darkness during the blind man's buff, Stanley's long-repressed urge for destruction not only penetrates his consciousness but also it is externalised in his attempt to strangle Meg and rape Lulu: "*[Stanley] reaches [Meg] and stops. His hands move towards her and they reach her throat. He begins to strangle her*" (*The Birthday Party* 58). Stanley's malicious attempt at strangling and assaulting, to be more specific, the manifestation of his death instinct, is hindered by the father substitutes when "[Goldberg and McCann's] figures converge upon him" (*The Birthday Party* 60). Cornered by the father figures, Stanley completely submits to their authority.

As can be seen in Stanley's case, with the threat of castration, the child renounces his Oedipal and aggressive desires. Thus, the child's primal wish to take the father's place is replaced by the "identification with his father" (Freud, *The Ego and the Id* 32). In other words, the child no longer sees the father as a rival; instead, he internalises paternal authority. In his article, "Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex", Freud elucidates the abandonment of the Oedipal desire as follows: "the child's ego turns away from the Oedipus complex. The object-cathexes are given up and replaced by identifications" (176). Likewise, after his punishment by Goldberg and McCann, Stanley is forced to renounce his instinctual desires, and he starts to identify with his father substitutes who are described as "well-dressed boarders" (Prentice 23) as "in Pinter's 1964 production all three were dressed identically" (Dukore 37). Eventually at the end, similar to his paternal figures, Stanley appears in respectable clothes, to put it other words, "the uniform of the conservative English businessman" (Silverstein 47): "STANLEY [...] *is dressed in a dark well cut suit and white collar*" (*The Birthday Party* 75) and apparently, "*[h]e is clean-shaven*" (*The Birthday Party* 75), which creates a contrast with his initial "washout" appearance.

Additionally, with the identification process, "[t]he authority of the father [...] is introjected into the ego, and there it forms the nucleus of the super-ego, which takes over the severity of the father" (Freud, "Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex" 176). Thus, a mechanism that incessantly keeps the individual under scrutiny, to be more specific, the super-ego, is formed. The super-ego "develops out of the ego as a

consequence of the child's assimilation of his parents' standards regarding what is good and virtuous and what is bad and sinful" (Hall 31). In a similar vein, Stanley eventually seems to adopt the perspective of the paternal figures, Goldberg and McCann. With his banal speeches on morality, the significance of family, being industrious, and the need to follow the rules, Goldberg echoes modern society. His apprehended partner, McCann, also represents the inhibitive society as he is conceivably an unfrocked priest and a conformist who blindly follows the orders of the more stronger authority figure, Goldberg. Thus, in the eyes of Goldberg and McCann, as a man without a job, any responsibility, and any effort to instate himself in the human community, Stanley is a "plague" (*The Birthday Party* 46) who should be "sterilised" (*The Birthday Party* 46). Goldberg even firmly announces that Stanley is disdained by society: "No society would touch you. Not even a building society" (*The Birthday Party* 45). Moreover, Goldberg and McCann's embodiment of societal morals and values is echoed in the interrogation scene as they accuse Stanley, for instance, of not having a wife, not having faith, and being sinful:

> GOLDBERG. Why did you never get married?
> MCCANN. She was waiting at the porch.
> [...]
> GOLDBERG. You stink of sin.
> MCCANN. I can smell it.
> [...]
> GOLDBERG. [...] When did you last pray? (*The Birthday Party* 43)

Stanley internalises these severe accusations, and consequently becomes overwhelmed by guilt as the adoption of paternal authority not only leads to repression but also creates self-reproach. As Freud states, "[t]o renounce the drives is no longer enough, for the desire persists and cannot be concealed from the super-ego" (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 82). As a result, overwhelming guilt and "enduring inner unhappiness" (Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* 82) become inevitable. From this perspective, Goldberg and McCann embody Stanley's harsh super-ego, which, as Erich Fromm states, "serves to break the child's will and to drive it into submission" (382). Paralysed by the guilt inflicted upon him, Stanley relinquishes his desires and becomes utterly subservient. With the formation of his super-ego, Stanley is forcefully inserted into society in 'respectable' clothes yet entirely deprived of the ability to convey his unique ideas.

In his last appearance, Stanley is entirely inert, unable to see clearly, and utter a word; in a way, he has "turn[ed] into a corpse, a vegetable, or something else devoid of active nerve endings" (Carpenter 108). Hence, it can be considered that the play touches on Stanley's neurotic journey from his macabre birth to his silent annihilation. As beforementioned, Stanley is born once he is escorted out of his room by Meg. Following his Oedipal infancy period, Stanley's persecutors pronounce him dead during the interrogation by underscoring his lack of vigour and destitute situation:

> MCCANN. You're dead.
> GOLDBERG. You're dead. You can't live, you can't think, you can't love. You're dead. (*The Birthday Party* 46)

Thus, Stanley's birthday party, which proceeds the interrogation, is not a festive event that celebrates a new age; it is instead his wake, which seemingly marks his eventual reinstatement into society. After his funeral in disguise of a celebratory party, Stanley is removed from the house and escorted to an enigmatic man called Monty in Goldberg's "big car" (*The Birthday Party* 63), which according to Esslin, "represent[s] a hearse" (*Pinter: A Study of His Plays* 84). Therefore, Stanley's impending ride in a car similar to a vehicle that carries deceased individuals, his sheer muteness, and, significantly, his being in a dark suit, which may stand for a burial suit, can be construed as his symbolic death.

The other character who presents neurotic conduct is the landlady, Meg Boles, who, approached from the Freudian psychoanalytical perspective, has an unresolved Oedipus complex, known as the kernel of the neurotic disorder. According to Freud's controversial theory on female sexuality, which is chiefly based on "masculine parameters" (Irigaray 23), female children's realisation of having different genitalia from boys during the phallic stage initiates their Oedipal desire as Freud puts it, "in females it is their lack of a penis that forces them into their Oedipus complex" (*An Outline of Psycho-Analysis* 194); or in other words, Electra complex. Similar to a boy, a girl's first love object is her mother, the first caregiver. Nevertheless, once the girl grasps that she does not have a penis, she deems her mother accountable for her difference and feels intense hostility towards her. Thus, she gets attached to her father as he is the bearer of the organ. Freud explains that, "[t]he wish with which the girl turns to her father is no doubt originally the wish for the penis which her mother has

refused her and which she now expects from her father" (*New Introductory Lectures* 128). Once the father becomes the girl's love object, she sees her mother as a rival and desires to replace her by giving her father a child, as elucidated in the following: "the [girl] wishes to become a mother and take her mother's place. Thus, she identifies with her mother and makes advances to her father with hopes of receiving a child that would symbolise her possession of the father's penis" (Zepf, et al. 55). In time, the girl's desire to give her father a child turns solely into a wish for a baby, "[the wish for a penis] is replaced by the wish for a baby" (Freud, "On Transformations of Instinct as Exemplified in Anal Erotism" 129), and as a result, female Oedipal desire is resolved, and femininity is constructed.

The Birthday Party reflects Freud's contentious concept of female sexuality in Meg's unresolved Oedipus complex[1]. Although elusive, Meg's attachment towards her father is evinced in her scattered speech during the birthday party as she babbles her affection towards her father to McCann: "my father was a very big doctor. That's why I never had any complaints. I was cared for" (*The Birthday Party* 54). Meg's words may unveil "erotic fantasies toward her father" (Gordon 28). Furthermore, in light of Freud's views, it can be interpreted that as a childless woman, Meg unconsciously desires to have a baby and compensates for her need for a child with her lodger, Stanley, who becomes her son-substitute, as Hinchliffe also concurs: "Meg needs a son and that the lodger, Stanley, fulfils that role" (50). Meg's manifestation of her wish for a boy upon hearing the news of Lady Mary Splatt's having a baby girl is also noteworthy as she patently reveals her dissatisfaction with a new-born girl:

> PETEY. Someone's just had a baby.
> [...]
> MEG. What is it?
> PETEY. (*studying the paper*). Er–a girl.
> MEG. Not a boy?
> PETEY. No.
> MEG. Oh, what a shame. I'd be sorry. I'd much rather have a little boy. (*The Birthday Party* 5)

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[1] This term is known as the Electra complex in neo-Freudian psychology, as proposed by Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) in his *The Theory of Psychoanalysis* (1915).

Evidently, Meg pities the woman who bears a girl, even refers to having a baby girl as a "shame," and immediately declares that she would prefer a boy. Freud suggests that "[t]he difference in a mother's reaction to the birth of a son or a daughter shows that the factor of lack of a penis has not lost its strength. A mother is only brought unlimited satisfaction by her relation to a son" (*New Introductory Lectures* 133). Thus, Meg's strong preference for a boy might be related to a woman's desire to possess a penis, as it is thought that the feeling of a lack is brought to an end once the woman has a son. In a way, by having a boy, a woman symbolically becomes "the bearer of the organ" (Freud, *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis* 194). In a similar fashion, Meg might alleviate her wish to have a penis by having Stanley as her son substitute. Hence, Meg and Stanley's mother and son relationship is dysfunctional as Meg's "fondness for [Stanley] is marred by incestuous desires" (Sakellaridou 36).

For Meg, Stanley is not solely a son substitute, but he is also a lover, as is illustrated by her remark about spending a lovely time in Stanley's room (*The Birthday Party* 13) and her waking him up amid suggestive shouts and laughter (*The Birthday Party* 7). However, Stanley expresses his discomfort with their corrupt relationship by saying, "it isn't your place to come into a man's bedroom and–wake him up" (*The Birthday Party* 12). The three dots, which are referred to as "[t]he brief pause" (Kane 144) in Stanley's sentence, show the break in Stanley's speech and conveys his uneasiness about the inconvenience of the situation.

Meg's dysfunctional motherhood is further indicated with reference to the sour milk with which she attempts to nourish Stanley. As a product secreted through a mother's breast to nurture her child, milk "symbolize[s] fertility [as it is] associated with mother" (Heisley 91). However, in the play, Stanley is disgusted by the taste of the milk that his mother substitute serves him as he announces at the breakfast table that, "[t]he milk's off" (*The Birthday Party* 9). From this lens, the sour milk might display Meg's unnatural position as a mother, as Bennett also explains: "Meg's spoiled milk provides metaphorically unhealthy sustenance to Stanley" (67). Hence, the sour milk is associated with Meg's inability to fulfil the maternal role and may point out the unhealthy Oedipal relationship.

Moreover, in Meg's neurotic state, her excessive fear of separation, which arises due to "the feeling of the absence of a loved person" (Quinodoz, *The Taming of Solitude* 41) comes to the foreground. Meg's separation anxiety shows itself when Stanley projects his own fear of annihilation onto her by forebodingly saying that two men are coming in a van with their wheelbarrow to cart someone away:

> STANLEY. They're looking for someone.
> MEG. They're not.
> STANLEY. They're looking for someone. A certain person.
> MEG (hoarsely). No, they're not!
> STANLEY. Shall I tell you who they're looking for?
> MEG. No! (*The Birthday Party* 18)

Stanley's unsettling account concerning the menacing strangers, who pose a threat to him, generates in Meg a fear of losing the person she loves. Likewise, Esslin speculates that "Stanley might be frightening her with the prospect of his disappearance" (*Pinter: A Study of His Plays* 84). Traumatised by the thought of losing her love object, Meg unconsciously shelters herself in a defence mechanism called denial or disavowal, which is "the refusal to acknowledge the perception of a reality experienced as traumatic" (Quinodoz, *Reading Freud* 243). Therefore, she continuously denies Stanley's gruesome statements concerning the two men's coming by saying: "You're a liar! (*The Birthday Party* 18). Moreover, Meg's separation anxiety is also designated in her rumination to McCann about her father: "My father was going to take me to Ireland once. But then he went away by himself" (*The Birthday Party* 53). In her accounts, it becomes clear that as an infant, Meg is abandoned by her father and probably made an orphan as she declares that she has been taken care of by a doctor, whom she thinks is her father ("And my father was a very big doctor"), which further designates Meg's attempts at denying reality.

Moreover, Meg's turning a blind eye to the ugly reality can also be perceived in her being oblivious to Stanley's aggression towards her and his departure from the boarding house. In a sense, she evades reality by sheltering herself in ostensibly fabricated memories, as can be seen in her delusional statement of being the most beautiful woman at the birthday party:

> MEG. I was the belle of the ball.
> PETEY. Were you?

MEG. Oh yes. They all said I was.
PETEY. I bet you were, too
MEG. Oh, it's true. I was. (*The Birthday Party* 81).

Thus, it can be speculated that Meg's perception of reality is distorted due to her frustration with external reality. Freud sees that "a turning away from reality seems to be the essence of insanity" ("The Question of Lay Analysis" 204). As a delusional individual, Meg creates a dream-like world with the purpose of attaining unconscious desires by evading distressing external reality.

On the other, although portrayed as menacing persecutors and brutal father figures, Nat Goldberg and Dermot McCann are indeed "vulnerable characters" (Naismith 49) who are also subject to the neurotic disorder. The more powerful one of the pair, Goldberg is initially presented the picture as a vigorous and confident man who is "as fit as a fiddle" (*The Birthday Party* 72). Moreover, he boastfully claims that he has an authoritative position, "Well, I've got a position, I won't deny it" (*The Birthday Party* 23), which is achieved by adamantly abiding by the social rules as he declares, "All my life I've said the same. Play up, play up, and play up the game. Honour thy father and thy mother. All along the line. Follow the line, the line McCann, and you can't go wrong. What do you think? I'm a self-made man? No! I sat where I was told to sit" (*The Birthday Party* 71). Presenting an image contrary to Stanley's dissidence, Goldberg is a proud conformist who achieves to be a powerful man merely by following the rules. Prentice also agrees that "Goldberg capitulates to society's prescribed constricting rules to maintain [the] power he has" (34). It is worth pointing out that Goldberg submits himself to the rules of society, which are, according to psychoanalysts, introduced by paternal figures. As Fromm explains, "[t]he child does not meet society directly at first; it meets it through the medium of his parents" (381). Likewise, Goldberg's reminiscences demonstrate that he might introject the values of society through an imagined father figure, Uncle Barney:

GOLDBERG. My father said to me, Benny, Benny, he said, come here. He was dying. I knelt down. [...] Go home to your wife. I will, Dad. Keep an eye open for low-lives, for schnorrers and for layabouts. [...] I lost my life in the service of others, he said, I'm not ashamed. Do your duty and keep your observations. Always bid good morning to the neighbours. Never, never forget your family, for they are the rock, the constitution and the core! If you're ever in any difficulties Uncle Barney will see you in the clear. I knelt

down. [...] I swore on the good book. And I knew the word I had to remember—Respect! (*The Birthday Party* 72)

Goldberg blindly reiterates the last words of his supposed father, which mirror societal expectations concerning performing one's duties, showing politeness and respect, as well as carrying out familial obligations. As Sıla Şenlen Güvenç also underscores, "[s]uch utterances show that Goldberg is only parroting dominant social values. Thus, he is also a victim like […] Stanley" (382). Submitted to authority, individuals repress their instinctual drives and adopt the rigid norms of society. As a consequence of this repression, unpleasure and neurotic disorder emerge. By the same token, Goldberg seemingly introjects the prohibitive societal norms and represses his sexual and destructive urges. Therefore, his inner world and the world outside become incongruous; he is condemned to unhappiness and eventually falls victim to neurosis.

Goldberg's neurotic demeanour presents itself in his confusing yet embellished recollections of the past, which presumably serve as an "escape route from an intolerable present" (Wyllie and Rees 82). Thus, Goldberg's plunging into a blissful memory of Uncle Barney can be elaborated as a defence mechanism to evade external reality:

> GOLDBERG. [...] When I was an apprentice yet, McCann, every second Friday of the month my Uncle Barney used to take me to the seaside, regular as clockwork. [...] After lunch on Shabbus we'd go and sit in a couple of deck chairs. [...] we'd have a little paddle, we'd watch tide coming in, going out, the sun coming down-golden days, believe me, McCann (*Reminiscent*). (*The Birthday Party* 21)

Goldberg's nostalgic recollection of Uncle Barney conveys a longing for the past, an earlier phase of life. As explained, nostalgia is "the desire to return to a hidden home" (Daniels 379); in other words, a sentimentalised past which offers relief and protection. To put it more aptly, Goldberg's nostalgic recollections indicate an apparent desire to go back to a primordial state; hence, it can be seen as regression, "[a] defensive process by which the subject avoids anxiety" (Rycroft 153). Likewise, Goldberg mumbles the fragments of his memories concerning his father to find comfort when he feels overwhelmed in the last act. In addition to his regressive tendencies, Goldberg hides his anxious state with extended monologues which reiterate his clichés. Therefore, his excessive talking "may be an unconscious tactic to

uphold a self-deceptive posture. In saying too much, the overtalkers may simultaneously and paradoxically be saying too little" (Furst 43). In this regard, Goldberg's loquacity can be perceived as the ego's self-protective mechanism, reaction formation, "[a] defensive process by which an unacceptable impulse is mastered by exaggeration of the opposing tendency" (Rycroft 151-52). From this perspective, Goldberg's excessive talking, as well as his praising and adhering to the values and morals of society, point to the presence of reaction formation. As Calvin S. Hall explicates, "conformity is a reaction formation, and that behind the mask of conformity the person is really driven by rebellion and antagonism" (93). Therefore, it can be speculated that Goldberg's excessive talking exposes a profound silence that hides his neurotic state, which occurs due to the inhibition of impulses.

Goldberg's false appearance, however, is shattered towards the end of the play. The morning following the birthday party, his defence mechanisms are destroyed as he seemingly "suffers a breakdown" (Taylor-Batty 30). Thus, in the last act, Goldberg is no longer self-assured or vigorous; on the contrary, he is ruminative and unable to reiterate his clichés in a cheerful manner. He even confesses his gloomy state to McCann:

> GOLDBERG. I don't know why, but I feel knocked out. I feel a bit... It's uncommon for me. (*The Birthday Party* 70)

Openly articulating his mental exhaustion, Goldberg declares that he is in need of a breath of life from McCann: "All the same, give me a blow. (*Pause*). Blow in my mouth" (*The Birthday Party* 73). Moreover, Goldberg's self-assured full sentences and loquacity at the beginning of the play eventually yield to an apparent hesitancy:

> PETEY. [...] Is [Stanley] any better?
> GOLDBERG. (a little uncertainly). Oh…a little better, I think, a little better. Of course, I'm not qualified to say, Mr Boles. I mean, I haven't got the…the qualifications. The best thing would be if someone with the proper…mnn…qualifications…was to have a look at him. (*The Birthday Party* 65)

Seemingly distracted, Goldberg speaks with short pauses, which indeed creates a contrast with his confidence in the previous acts and gives away his vulnerability and low spirits.

Contrary to Goldberg's initial robust manners, Seamus/Dermot McCann, depicted as a "sinister, withdrawn Irishman" (Taylor 289), is apparently uneasy and sullen from his first appearance onwards. As soon as McCann enters the boarding house, his repetitious questions concerning their job indicate his disturbed and unease state:

> MCCANN. Is this it?
> GOLDBERG. This is it.
> MCCANN. Are you sure?
> GOLDBERG. Sure I'm sure.
> *Pause.*
> MCCANN. What now?
> GOLDBERG. [...] Sit back, McCann. Relax. What's the matter with you?
> (*The Birthday Party* 21)

McCann's uneasiness is also evinced in his tearing up newspapers into five equal pieces, which can be evaluated as an obsessional ritual, "an indirect expression of an instinctual impulse that the sufferer had repressed and which therefore could not be discharged in a straightforward manner" (Storr 84). Obsessional rituals can be construed as defence mechanisms to protect individuals from acting out their repressed desires. However, in some individuals, the residue of these instincts remains within the id and is discharged through obsessive actions. McCann's repetition of the obsessional act of tearing up paper signals his inner turmoil and demonstrates that through destructing an object, he outpours his repressed aggressive desire and discloses his possibly sadistic nature.

Moreover, similar to his partner, McCann becomes more apprehensive at the closing of the play, as Billington also points out, "even the psychopathic McCann is reduced to a wreck" (138). The change in McCann's behaviour can be evidently seen in his refusal to take orders from Goldberg:

> MCCANN. (*turning to look at* GOLDBERG, *grimly*). I'm not going up there again.
> GOLDBERG. Why not?
> MCCANN. I'm not going up there again. (*The Birthday Party* 67)

Noticeably, in an agitated state, McCann declares that he does not want to go back to Staley's room. Based on Meg's account, Goldberg and McCann may have stayed in Stanley's room after the party, as Meg announces that "Mr McCann opened the door. He said they were talking. [...] I don't know what they were talking about. I was

surprised" (*The Birthday Party* 62). Although it is never specified what has happened, his experience in the room was seemingly traumatic not only for Stanley but also for McCann. In a way, McCann's initial intimidating reticence turns into an ostensible neurotic state with the third act after the distressful night in Stanley's room. He becomes unable to convey complete sentences after the traumatic experience: "(*moving down*). [Stanley is] quiet now. He stopped all that … talking a while ago" (*The Birthday Party* 67) which indeed demonstrates McCann's his hesitation and apprehension even further.

It is worth mentioning that *The Birthday Party* delves into the role of the external dangers on an individual's ego; to put it succinctly, society's operations on individuals in the formation of the neurotic disorder. As Freud contends, "[human beings] strive for happiness; they want to become happy and remain so" (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 16). Nevertheless, their incessant search for happiness, the pleasure principle is opposed by the external reality, which is full of dangers and restrictions; thereby, "the pleasure principle [...] has been transformed under the influence of the external world into the more modest reality principle" (Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* 17). Therefore, individuals' goal for attaining pleasure is replaced by an evasion from unpleasure. With that purpose, they choose to be a part of a community to protect themselves from external dangers; however, adhering to social norms comes with a burden as the individuals are expected to renunciate their drives, which drag them into unhappiness and neurosis. As Lois G. Gordon recapitulates: "man is born with certain natural drives, and, as he grows up, he bears the burden of repressing what society then labels his illicit impulses" (29). Mirroring Gordon's words, Goldberg, for instance, represses these abovementioned drives and follows the instructions of his paternal figures to be a member of society. On the other hand, as opposed to Goldberg, Stanley refuses to be a part of the restrictive society; thus, he regresses to a womb-like vacuum and fulfils his Oedipal desire, not to mention death drive; however, he is eventually forced to become a member of society. Crushed under the pressure of the agents of society, in other words, the paternal figures, Stanley renunciates his sexual and aggressive impulses and is doomed to the unsatisfactory reality, which renders him annihilated. Hence, it can be postulated that "Stanley's

descent into madness [...] stems not only from the terror induced by McCann and Goldberg but from the world in which he lives" (Deer and Deer 29).

In conclusion, the characters who inhabit the gruesome world of *The Birthday Party* are in disharmony with the inhibiting external reality due to their unresolved Oedipal and/or destructive desires. The incongruity prevailing in the characters' lives in Pinter's play is explored with the help of the Freudian psychoanalytical approach, which throws light on the depths of the characters' inner worlds. From the Freudian angle, it becomes clear that the play chiefly focalises on the protagonist, Stanley's neurotic journey from his regression to intra-uterine life to his eventual annihilation by underlining his fulfilment of the Oedipal desire and its eventual punishment, castration. Moreover, other characters' neurotic states are also demonstrated as Meg suffers from an unresolved Oedipus complex due to the dysfunctional relationship with her son substitute; Goldberg represses his instinctual desires to become a part of society; McCann covers his destructive urges by obsessively tearing up papers. The characters in the play renunciate their Oedipal desire and death drives to be a part of society, which doom them to dissatisfaction, and eventually neurotic disorder; therefore, they are constantly anxious, regressive, and unhappy.

CHAPTER III

THE EXPULSION OF THE FATHER FIGURE IN *THE CARETAKER*

> "One day, however, the sons come together and
> united to overwhelm, kill, and devour their
> father, who had been their enemy."
> (Freud, An Autobiographical Study 68)

Harold Pinter's second full-length play, *The Caretaker* (1959) "marks the beginning of [his] public recognition" (Hinchliffe 87) and becomes one of his most prominent plays. Scrutinising two brothers' fraternal connection against an intruding father figure, *The Caretaker* is regarded as "a play about love" (Almansi and Henderson 57) and considered to bring an end to the period of Comedy of Menace. Similar to Pinter's other early plays, *The Caretaker* also stands out as confounding, with disturbed and uneasy characters whose minds are inaccessible to the reader/audience. In this vein, the aim of this chapter is to decipher the fears and desires residing in "the darkest and most impenetrable area of the psyche" (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 46), in other words, the unconscious of Mac Davies/Bernard Jenkins, Aston, and Mick in view of the Freudian perspective on the neurotic disturbance.

Opened at the Arts Theatre London, "a small 330 seater" (Billington 217), in 1960, the first performance made a tremendous impression on the audience, as the *Daily Herald* noted: "Tumultuous cheers. Twelve curtain calls. And then, when the lights went up, the whole audience rose to applaud the author who sat beaming in the circle" (qtd. in Billington 220). Not only the audience but also the critics were stunned by Pinter's play; for instance, Kenneth Tynan, who brutally criticised *The Birthday Party*, wrote in *The Observer* that "[w]ith *The Caretaker* Harold Pinter has begun to fulfil the promise that I signally failed to see in *The Birthday Party* two years ago" (203). Moreover, the critic, T.C. Worsley, who got to see the first performance underlined the play's success in the *Financial* Times by stating that "[w]ith his new play Mr Harold Pinter has moved up a step from extraordinary promise to extraordinary achievement. *The Caretaker* is both a wonderful piece of theatre, immensely funny, rich in observation, and below that level a disturbing and moving experience" (161). The critically acclaimed play received the *Evening Standard Award* for best play in the same year and was later adapted into a film. Considered a

milestone in Pinter's career, *The Caretaker* paved his way to becoming one of the most outstanding playwrights in British drama.

The Caretaker opens with "a man in his late twenties" (*The Caretaker* 5), Mick's silent gaze at the dilapidated room which teems with sacks, buckets, and boxes. Upon hearing voices coming outside the room, Mick departs; and his elder brother, Aston, "a man in his early thirties" (*The Caretaker* 5), enters with Davies, who is described as "an old man" (*The Caretaker* 5) with worn out clothes. The old man garrulously chatters about immigrants and his enigmatic papers left at Sidcup, which supposedly prove who he is. Davies' jabbering is mainly ignored by reticent Aston, who absorbs himself in poking plugs. As the old man babbles, it becomes evident that Aston is the one who rescued him from a fight in the café where Davies works as a cleaner. Aston shelters him in his room, offers him to stay, and gives him cigarettes, shoes, and money. The morning following Davies' arrival, Aston goes out, leaving the old man alone in the room after a minor conflict about Davies' making noise during his sleep. However, the old man's solitude in the room is disturbed by Mick, who brutally grabs him by the arm and causes him to fall. The act closes with Mick's menacing question to Davies, "What is the game?" (*The Caretaker* 29).

Terrified, Davies finds himself on the floor and immediately stumbles into a confusing interrogation conducted by Mick, who repetitively asks his name, the bed he sleeps in, and whether he sleeps well. Mick's sinister questions and monologues are interjected by Aston's arrival with Davies' bag, which is left at the café. Mick immediately seizes the bag and refuses to give it to Davies. Thus, the bag is passed around each character until Aston finally gives it to Davies. Straight after the menacing bag passing game, Mick departs, and Aston rattles about his dream of putting a shed in the garden. Moreover, to Davies' surprise, Aston offers the job of caretaker, which is met by the old man's apparent hesitancy and reluctance. The following scene begins with Davies' struggling in darkness and Mick's startling him with a vacuum cleaner, which terrifies the old man and makes him draw a knife to the younger brother. Seemingly lenient and friendly this time, Mick offers Davies a sandwich, confides his worries about Aston's lack of enthusiasm, and eventually says that he can be a caretaker provided he brings references. With that, Davies once again

utters his intention to go to Sidcup to fetch his documents even though the following day, he makes up excuses for not going, stating that he does not have proper shoes. As Davies chatters about his lack of suitable shoes, Aston haphazardly falls into a long monologue reflecting on his traumatic experience in a mental institution where he was given an electric shock treatment, which, according to him, silenced him and made him catatonic.

Two weeks after Aston's self-revealing monologue, Davies appears in the room with Mick. Davies expresses his annoyance about Aston's inability to communicate while Mick remains ostensibly indifferent to Davies' grumbling and enthusiastically prattles about his plans to renovate the house and turn it into a penthouse. During their conversation, Aston enters with a pair of shoes for Davies, which the old man half-heartedly takes. The following scene opens at night, upon Aston's disturbance of Davies' groaning during his sleep. Aston's waking him up outrages Davies, resulting him in calling Aston mentally ill, mocking his dreams of putting a shed in the garden, and even pulling a knife on him. Aston responds to Davies' hostile behaviour by asking him to leave. The morning after the dispute, Mick and Davies enter the room as the old man demands that Aston be expelled from the house. However, Davies' rude words about Aston enrage Mick, who starts blaming Davies for lying about being an interior decorator, ranting about Davies' being unreliable and uncivilised. Infuriated, Mick smashes Aston's beloved Buddha. Soon afterwards, Aston returns to the room, the brothers look at each other, and exchange a faint smile. Having lost Mick's support, Davies hopelessly tries to be close to Aston, pretending that he is interested in Aston's plugs and his plan for his shed; he praises Aston for his help and desperately insists on staying, which, however, is decisively rejected by Aston. The play closes with Davies' displacement from the room and his tragic pleading for shelter.

The humble flat at "373 Chiswick High Road" (Baker 52), where Pinter lived with his wife, Vivien Merchant, was an inspiration for *The Caretaker*. The owner of Pinter's house indisputably gave life to Mick's character as Pinter explains, "like Mick […] [he] had his own van and […] I hardly ever saw [him]" (qtd. in Baker 52). Moreover, similar to Mick, the owner had a taciturn brother who brought a destitute man to his

room. As Pinter reminisced, "[he] did bring a tramp back one night. I call him a tramp, but he was just a homeless old man remained in the house for nearly a month" (qtd. in Baker 53). However, what left a trace on Pinter was indeed a glimpse of the room in which the withdrawn man and his destitute guest were dwelling:

> The image that stayed with me for a long time was of the open door to this room with the two men standing in different parts of the room doing different things…the tramp rooting around in a bag and the other man looking out of the window and simply not speaking… A kind of moment frozen in time that left a very strong impression. (qtd. in Billington 197)

This image of two men's detachment from each other struck Pinter as peculiar and became immortalised in his eminent play.

Remarkably, "[t]rying to pin down the unconventional artistry of Harold Pinter, critics have linked him to movements as different as the Angry Young Men and the Theater of the Absurd" (Sterritt 56). Although Pinter adheres to neither of them, the tenuous effect of these dramatic movements can be detected in *The Caretaker*. By focalising on the lower-class, unheroic characters dwelling within a ragged room with a kitchen sink, a leaking ceiling, and cluttered objects, Pinter might be said to reflect some features of these dramatic movements adhered to his contemporaries. Well-known for their realistic representation of the working class, the young generation of playwrights of the 1950s Britain wrote plays which made harsh social and political commentary. Even though Pinter does not make political remarks in his early plays, "[he] shares with his social realist contemporaries commitments to what seem totally realistic situations, characters, and language" (Bernhard 185). To illustrate, similar to his contemporaries, Pinter presents a realistic working-class setting, to put more explicitly, a shabby and drafty room which is occupied by lower-class characters. For instance, one of the characters, Davies, with his "worn brown overcoat [and] shapeless trousers" (*The Caretaker* 7), is in desperate need of a sanctuary. In addition to Davies, described in "an old tweed overcoat, [...] thin shabby dark-blue pinstripe suit, [...] pullover and faded shirt and tie" (*The Caretaker* 7), Aston is also an underprivileged member of society who had worked in a factory before he was forcefully taken to a mental institution. Aston's younger brother, Mick, the owner of the house, also comes "from an under-privileged or working-class background, who acquire[s] material possessions and social mobility through [his] ability to recognise and to play the rules

of the system" (Hern xvii). The language of the lower-class characters is also echoed in *The Caretaker* with the use of "slang expressions, repetitions, grammatical errors, non sequiturs, pauses and silences" (Baker 56). Noticeably, Davies' speech teems with substandard English and colloquial terms: "That was after the guvnor give me the bullet" (*The Caretaker* 10), not to mention grammar mistakes: "He don't live here, do he?" (*The Caretaker* 40).

Additionally, *The Caretaker* gives a picture of the social and cultural atmosphere of the aftermath of the Second World War, as Peacock also posits, "Pinter's plays […] were rooted in contemporary British society, whose anxieties and tensions were to some extent reflected in the concerns and behavior of their characters" (76). Thus, as one of the most significant ramifications of the Second World War, post war immigration to Britain is reflected in the play. Due to the demand for labour following the war, foreigners, especially from the Commonwealth countries, came to Britain. However, the inflow of immigrants soon erupted racial prejudice, which is indeed evinced in Davies' abhorrence, fear, and suspicion concerning Aston's neighbours and the foreigners in the café, as in Davies' ravings: "All them blacks had it, Blacks, Greeks, Poles, the lot of them, that's what, doing me out of a seat, treating me like dirt" (*The Caretaker* 8). The undercurrent racism of the period is also mirrored in Mick's seeing Davies as a parasitic intruder as well as his questioning of Davies' ethnic identity:

> MICK. You a foreigner?
> DAVIES. No.
> MICK. Born and bred in the British Isles?
> DAVIES. I was! (*The Caretaker* 33)

Evidently, with a Welsh name, "Welsh, are you?" (*The Caretaker* 25), Davies is a foreigner in the eyes of Mick. In a way, Davies can be perceived as the embodiment of foreigners as he "parallels the fate suffered by Britain's new immigrants" (Woodroffe 505). Similar to them, the old man is invited to the house, offered a job, and later faced with hostility, which may imply immigrants' predicament in Britain. It is also worth mentioning that the play echoes the politics of the period. For instance, with his shabby and old clothes, Aston "could be cast in the role of the post-war Tory" (Woodroffe 506) which invited immigrants. Moreover, Britain's empty hope to re-

establish the empire creates a parallel with Aston's vain hope of building a shed in his squalid garden, which would never come true.

Furthermore, as a playwright who "[…] has repeatedly been named as Beckett's heir on the English stage" (Cohn 55), it is presumable that Pinter's *The Caretaker* conveys an insight into the individual's struggle within the existential void. Significantly, the play's main focus is on the rundown and cluttered room, which may stand for the chaotic universe inhabited by isolated and stranded characters who are not able to fit into society, nor communicate or reveal their authentic selves even if they desire to. For instance, yearning for communication, Aston brings Davies to his room; nevertheless, the two men cannot maintain a conversation:

> ASTON. I went into a pub the other day. Ordered a Guinness. They gave it to me in a thick mug. I sat down but I couldn't drink it. I can't drink Guinness from a thick mug. I only like it out of a thin glass. I had a few sips but I couldn't finish it.
> DAVIES (*with great feeling*). If only the weather would break! Then I'd be able to get down to Sidcup! (*The Caretaker* 19)

As can be discerned, Davies remains apathetic to Aston's prattling as he is immersed in his dream of going to Sidcup. More importantly, in the menacing world of Pinter, communication is not only absent but also alarming for characters; therefore, they remain reserved; refrain from disclosing themselves, which; for instance, can be observed in Davies' evasive answers concerning his background:

> ASTON. Welsh, are you?
> DAVIES. Eh?
> ASTON. You Welsh?
> *Pause.*
> DAVIES. Well, I been around, you know…what I mean…I been about….
> ASTON. Where were you born then?
> DAVIES. (*darkly)* What do you mean? (*The Caretaker* 25)

The fear of communication and lack of affection leave the characters self-oriented and completely isolated. As Billington expresses in *The Caretaker*, "[Pinter] leaves you with an abiding image of man's eternal aloneness" (216). More to the point, Davies' ominous pause in the excerpt above not only demonstrates his fear of communication but also insinuates his obscure background and problematised identity. Davies' accounts of himself, such as his story about his supposed wife who leaves dirty

underclothes in a saucepan, the monk in Luton, and his eating his dinner with the best of plates seem conflicting and unreliable. Mick also vents his frustration on Davies' unreliability, which indeed underlines the play's and the characters' perplexing nature: "Every word you speak is open to any number of different interpretations. Most of what you say is lies. You're violent, you're erratic, you're just completely unpredictable" (*The Caretaker* 73). Moreover, Mick's fragmented stories of the people he knows, his being a successful entrepreneur, and Aston's jabbering about his experience in a mental institution are not entirely reliable, as Pinter approves in his interview with Lawrence M. Bensky that, "it isn't necessary to conclude that everything Aston says about his experiences in the mental hospital is true" ("The Art of Theatre" 60). Along with the permeating unreliability, the characters' identities also remain in the dark as it is evident in Davies' case. When his name is asked, Davies claims that he goes by an assumed identity, Bernard Jenkins:

> DAVIES. […] I changed my name! Years ago. I been going around under an assumed name! That's not my real name.
> ASTON. What name you been going under?
> DAVIES. Jenkins. Bernard Jenkins. That's my name. That's the name I'm known, anyway. But it's not good me going on with that name. I got no rights. I got an insurance card here. Under the name of Jenkins. See? Bernard Jenkins. […] But I can't go along with these. That's not my real name, they'd find out, they'd have me in the nick.
> […]
> ASTON. What's your real name, then?
> DAVIES. Davies. Mac Davies. That was before I changed my name. (*The Caretaker* 20)

With the hope of proving who he is, Davies underlines his intention to go to Sidcup several times in the play; nevertheless, he finds absurd excuses for not going there, such as the bad weather and the lack of proper shoes. In a sense, Davies' character adds to the absurdity of *The Caretaker* with his dubious identity and lack of a consistent past. Without stable identities and communication, the enigmatic characters who inhabit Pinter's world are entirely isolated and purposeless; thus, they engage themselves in meaningless activities to cope with a senseless universe. To illustrate, Aston devotes himself to the dream of building a shed in the garden, even though he does not seem to make any progress. Likewise, Davies desires to go to Sidcup to get his papers to clarify his ambiguous identity, while Mick aspires to turn the derelict

building into a luxurious place. Nevertheless, the characters' dreams are unlikely to be fulfilled and are solely tools to cope with reality.

Albert Mordell emphasises that, "all characters in fiction who suffer are related to neurotics. The author occasionally deals with severe cases of neuroses, and the psychiatrists with mild ones" (120). Similarly, Pinter's "notoriously enigmatic play" (Potter 20), *The Caretaker,* focalises on neurotic characters, namely Mac Davies/Bernard Jenkins, Aston, and Mick, who are aggressive, fearful, isolated, agitated, and withdrawn. Therefore, as a play which concerns itself with the characters' psychological states, it can be safely assumed that *The Caretaker* can be to be read from the Freudian perspective, which offers a closer examination of the neurotic characters' inner worlds.

The vagrant old man, Mac Davies/Bernard Jenkins, appears as an overt paternal figure to the brothers as "[Aston and Mick] project their father images onto Davies, the caretaker" (Gabbard 106). Significantly, Mick perceives Davies as a father substitute and even declares that the old man awakens the memory of his 'uncle's brother,' in other words, his father: "You remind me of my uncle's brother" (*The Caretaker* 31). Davies is also viewed as a father figure by Aston. Viewed in this fashion, Aston's job offer to Davies gains significance since the word "caretaker," which is also the name of the play, is defined in *Oxford English Dictionary* as follows: "[o]ne who takes care of a thing, place, or person; one put in charge of anything" ("Caretaker"). Drawing on the definition of "caretaker," it is surmisable that Aston's wish to make Davies a caretaker is ascribable to his yearning for having a protective father figure; in other words, a caregiver who can provide affection. Freud also underlines the protective presence of a paternal figure as, according to him, a father is the one who "protect[s] and watche[s] over [the child] in his feeble and helpless state" (*New Introductory Lectures* 163).

Nevertheless, seen from the Freudian lens, the father also embodies a perilous image that may pose a threat to the child. As Freud points out, "[w]hile he is still a small child, a son already begin[s] to develop a special affection for his mother, whom he regards as belonging to him; he begins to feel his father as a rival who disputes his sole possession" (*Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* 207). As a caregiver, the

mother is indisputably a child's first love object; therefore, the child wishes to possess the mother and take the father's place. However, he is intimidated by the father's presence since "he is aware of the fact that the father stands in the way of his passion" (Frosh 91); therefore, he is doomed to feel hostility towards the father. The child is even filled with the desire to "kill his father and take away his wife" (*Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* 207). The enmity towards the father figure and a child's innate striving for parricide are echoed in *The Caretaker*, especially at the closing of the play, which evinces the annihilation of Davies, who is left without a sanctuary.

Indeed, Pinter originally intended to end the play with the brutal death of Davies in the hands of Aston and Mick, as he narrates in an interview with Harry Thompson in *New Theatre Magazine*: "I thought originally that the play must end with the violent death of one at the hands of the other. But then I realised, when I got to the point, that the characters as they had grown could never act in this way" ("Harold Pinter Replies" 48). The ending which was on Pinter's mind can be likened to "a parody of the Primal History Scene in Freud's *Totem and Taboo*" (Bloom 3). Freud's work, *Totem and Taboo,* focuses on the myth of "[the] violent and jealous father" (Freud, *Totem and Taboo* 141) who banishes his sons from the horde with the purpose of "keep[ing] all the females for himself" (Freud, *Totem and Taboo* 141). Against their father's cruelty, the brothers come together to overthrow their father's sovereignty; thus, they commit parricide. Parallel to the myth that Freud puts forward in *Totem and Taboo,* which precisely elaborates on the prehistoric men's killing of their father, Aston and Mick eventually get rid of the paternal figure, Davies.

It can also be asserted that the banished father presents a neurotic demeanour, especially with his conspicuous enmity towards strangers, as from his first appearance onwards, Davies grumbles about foreigners: "Ten minutes off for a tea-break in the middle of the night and I couldn't find a seat, not one. All them Greeks had it, Poles, Greeks, Blacks, the lot of them, all them aliens had it" (*The Caretaker* 8). Strangers, more specifically, immigrants come off as enemies who are held accountable for Davies' predicament as explicated by Rustin and Rustin, "Davies's world has been invaded by aliens, the unfamiliar and hated immigrant arrivals, linked in his mind to a picture of hordes of invading greedy rivals, who take up space and resources that he

believes should be his" (255). In a sense, the wretched old man presumes that he is mistreated and suffers in poor working conditions because of the ominous presence of immigrants as he grimly utters: "And they had me working there… they had me working… […] All them Blacks had it, Blacks, Greeks, Poles, the lot of them, that's what, doing me out of a seat, treating me like dirt" (*The Caretaker* 8). Moreover, the immigrants are also found blameworthy for Davies's groaning during his sleep. Thus, when he is confronted by Aston about the disturbing noise, Davies ludicrously declares immigrants guilty: "Maybe it were them Blacks making noises, coming up through the walls" (*The Caretaker* 23).

It appears that Davies' revulsion towards strangers is interwoven with dread, which can be referred to as fear of strangers or xenophobia: "The fear of unknown persons […]. The term refers to individuals as well as entire groups of people, such as those from another country" (Doctor, Kahn, and Adamec 464). The old man's excessive fear concerning strangers can be deduced from the obsessive questions he asks Aston concerning the neighbours:

> DAVIES. […] How many Blacks you got around here then?
> ASTON. What?
> DAVIES. You got any more Blacks around here? (*The Caretaker* 14)

His fear of foreigners and strangers is further manifested when he is offered the job of caretaker. Surrounded by fear of others, Davies remains irresolute to the offer as he is apprehended by the thought of encountering someone who would appear at the door. Hesitant, Davies replies to Aston's offer:

> DAVIES. Oh, I don't know about that.
> ASTON. Why not?
> DAVIES. Well, I mean, you don't know who might come up them front steps, do you? I got to be a bit careful.
> […]
> They might be there after my card, I mean look at it, here I am, I only got four stamps, on this card, here it is, look, four stamps, that's all I got, I ain't got anymore, that's all I got, they ring the bell called Caretaker, they'd have me in, that's what they'd do, I wouldn't stand a chance. Of course I got plenty of other cards lying about, but they don't know that, and I can't tell them, can I, because then they'd find out I was going under an assumed name. (*The Caretaker* 43-44)

Presumably paranoid, a term which is used "to describe persons who use projection as a defence" (Rycroft 124), Davies awaits a threat from an unseen 'them.' He is even worried about an imaginary knock on the door.

As can be observed, Davies' repugnance concerning strangers can be taken as a coping mechanism, projection, which is precisely explicated as "a means of attributing one's own unacceptable and disturbing thoughts and impulses to others" (Heller 68). In a certain sense, the old man finds his helplessness unbearable and projects it onto others. From this perspective, Davies' explicit hatred towards foreigners may manifest his self-loathing. Since, not unlike the foreigners he detests, Davies has an inferior position in society, as Wong also confirms: "Davies' fear of strangers [...] suggests that underneath his projected hubris and racist remarks, he is all the while painfully aware that he is more of an outcast than any foreigner" (34). Therefore, it can be assumed that Davies' underlying self-repugnance turns into a revulsion towards foreigners. In other words, his hatred is projected into the outside world; thus, the ego protects itself from the discontent that may have arisen due to self-loathing.

In the same vein, Davies also projects his unsettling inner drives, namely his death impulses, onto others, as explicated by Thurschwell: "Our own hostility gets turned around, projected onto the outside world as being directed towards us, rather than emerging from us" (100). Davies perceives others as perilous, even though he is the one who is violent and uncivilised as he not only verbally assaults Aston but also draws a knife on him. His aggressive conduct is mirrored in Mick's remark towards the end of the play: "You're violent, you're erratic […]. You're nothing else but a wild animal. You're a barbarian" (*The Caretaker* 73). Thus, the threat which he nervously awaits comes from within as he brings his own destruction by being arrogant and violent to his saviour, Aston.

According to Davies, beset with threatening strangers and inclement weather, the external world lacks warmth and safety. Therefore, similar to Pinter's other neurotic characters, Davies searches for a sanctuary, which may enable him to evade the dangers and responsibilities of the external world and "[d]espite its shabbiness, Mick's house is an island of safety and security" (Murphy 42). On this score, Davies' withdrawal to the brothers' shabby room can be perceived as a psychological

mechanism called regression which is delineated a "retreat to an earlier –infantile– phase of our sexual development" (Ackroyd 25). In Davies' case, he seeks withdrawal to the womb and "the dwelling-house [is] a substitute for the mother's womb, the first lodging, for which in all likelihood man still longs, and in which he was safe and felt at ease" (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 91). However, menace also lurks about Davies' newfound haven, that is the brothers' room. The pseudo shelter that Davies clings to is in disorder and unpleasantly cold. Moreover, for Davies, it is also beset with threatening objects, namely the gas stove and electric fire. Similar to the uncanny foreigners of the outside world, these objects "represent the unknown" (Sykes 71) and are unfamiliar to Davies; thus, they bear sinister overtones and stir panic in the old man even though they do not function properly. More importantly, the room is owned by the younger brother, Mick, who embodies the role a castrator as he is verbally and physically abusive to the old man. Thus, contrary to Davies' expectations, the room harbours menace and brings castration to Davies. The play ends with Davies' symbolic death and his eviction from the room.

The other protagonist, the reticent and withdrawn Aston, appears to suffer from the consequence of a traumatising experience in a mental institution. In his startling soliloquy at the end of Act Two, Aston divulges his traumatic past and clarifies how he fell into silence following his hospitalisation due to his seemingly neurotic state. According to Freud, "neurosis [is] the expression of a rebellion on the part of the id against the external world, of its unwillingness – or, if one prefers, its incapacity – to adapt itself to the exigencies of reality" ("Neurosis and Psychosis" 185). To put it more aptly, neurosis occurs due to an individual's inner world's being out of harmony with the external reality. Likewise, as can be seen in Aston's ruminations, he was incongruent with the external world before his treatment in the asylum. He claims that his confinement in the asylum was instigated by his jabbering as well as his having vivid visions, in other words, hallucinations, as he mumbles to Davies: "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 … all this … quiet … and … this clear sight … it was" (*The Caretaker* 55). Vigilantly, Aston immerses in his equivocal past and reminisces that his acquaintances from the café and the factory gave him away:

> ASTON. […] 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 same in the factory. Standing there, or in the breaks, I used to … talk about things. And these men, they used to listen, whenever I … had anything to say. It was all right. The trouble was, I used to have kind of hallucinations. […] Anyway, someone must have said something. I didn't know anything about it. And … some kind of lie must have got around. And this lie went round. I thought people started being funny. In that café. The factory. I couldn't understand it. Then one day they took me to a hospital, right outside London. (*The Caretaker* 54)

Owing to his distinct perception of the external world, Aston was construed as a menace to society; therefore, he was put in an asylum to be silenced, which creates a parallel to the Cold War period during which psychological applications were used to "silence dissenters and deviants within the paranoid system" (Piette 163). In a similar vein, the doctor in the mental institution lays stress on the necessity of Aston's reinstalment to society, as Aston recounts:

> [t]hen one day … this man … doctor, I suppose, … the head one … he was quite a man of … distinction […]. He said … but I can't … exactly remember … how he put it … he said, … we're going to do something to your brain. He said … if we don't, youl'll be in here for the rest of your life, but if we do, you stand a chance. You can go out, he said, and live like the others. (*The Caretaker* 55)

To comply with societal expectations, Aston is put through an excruciating treatment, which seemingly is electroshock therapy, also known as electroconvulsive therapy, "a controversial treatment in which a seizure is induced by passing a controlled, low-dose electric current" ("Electroconvulsive Therapy"). Aston gives an account of the treatment in his long monologue:

> They used to come round with these … I don't know what they were … they looked like big pincers, with wires on, the wires were attached to a little machine. It was electric. They used to hold the man down, and this chief … the chief doctor, used to fit the pincers, something like earphones, he used to fit them on either side of the man's skull. (*The Caretaker* 56)

However, Aston does not easily yield to the menacing figures; he makes an effort to resist by attempting to escape from his entrapment in the institution. Thus, Aston can be seen as "an active resister" (Billington 208) even though he eventually falls victim to authority. After his unsuccessful attempts to escape, he is put under electroshock treatment which eventually leaves his mind shattered. As Aston also sorrowfully

utters, he loses his inability to contemplate and express himself properly: "The trouble was … my thoughts … had become very slow … I couldn't think at all … I couldn't … get … my thoughts … together." (*The Caretaker* 57). As can also be conceived in his fragmented sentences, Aston's mental capacity is effaced, and he is reduced to an apathetic figure who is marred by an inability to express himself.

Aston's having been bereft of his mental potency can be enunciated as castration; in a sense, he becomes a "mental castrato" (Tynan 202). From this aspect, the doctors who put him through a brutal treatment also emerge as castrator father figures who, approached from the Freudian lens, punish the son due to his incongruity with society's expectations. Significantly, to Aston's shock, his mother approves the maiming process for his son, which makes Aston feel betrayed: "I knew I was a minor. I knew he couldn't do anything to me without getting permission. I knew he had to get permission from my mother. So I wrote to her and told her what they were trying to do. But she signed their form, you see, giving them permission" (*The Caretaker* 56). In this vein, his first love object, the mother, does not save him from the gruelling process; in a way, she also becomes a castrator, as accentuated by Esslin: "The doctors in the mental hospital where Aston was treated castrated him – to punish him for his Oedipal desires – with the consent and connivance of his mother" (*Pinter: A Study of His Plays* 110).

Replete with dysfunctional objects and clutter, "the room represents Aston's fragmented, lobotomized mind, which cannot fully function and lies beyond repair" (Feldstein 75). The dysfunctional objects, such as the broken toaster and the non-functioning electrical plug, further illustrate Aston's castrated mind; therefore, his working on the broken plug correlates with a defence mechanism, undoing which "is utilized in order to make something that has happened 'disappear'" (Valls 351). Hence, his ceaseless attempt to mend the plug can be seen as an attempt to make his traumatic experience vanish. Moreover, his mending plugs can also be taken as an obsession, which is "the product of often rather desperate defences against sexual and aggressive impulses" (Frosh 105). By occupying himself with the plugs, Aston finds a substitute for his unacceptable instincts. Gabbard associates his obsession with plugs with onanism (106). Put simply, Aston represses his fantasy of masturbation, which

is held "responsible for all neurotic disturbances" (*Two Case Histories* 202) by Freud. Seen as a sexual misdemeanour, masturbation is forbidden by paternal figures. Thus, not to get castigated for masturbating, Aston represses this urge and compulsively uses his hand by mending the plugs as a substitute for masturbation.

Moreover, Aston is deeply disturbed by Davies' groaning at night as he repetitively voices his annoyance: "Hey, stop it, will you? I can't sleep. […] You're making noises" (*The Caretaker* 66). Freud also observes the disturbance of sleep in the case of a little boy: "The earliest and most troublesome symptom was a disturbance of sleep. He was extraordinarily sensitive to noises at night and, once he was woken up, was unable to go to sleep again" (*Moses and Monotheism* 78). According to Freud, this neurotic disposition may occur due to the child's witnessing a primal scene, which is defined as "[a] sexual scene between the parents, seen or heard by the child" (Valls 241). As explicated, "[t]he child imagines that he watches or hears his parents in the act of love. […] He may think of sex in terms of strange noises he would hear at night" (Holland, *The Dynamics of Literary Response* 45). The noises make the child contemplate that the father is harming the mother, in other words, coitus is seen as an act of aggression. This, at the same time, evokes curiosity and sexual excitation in the child. Thus, despite being an obscure memory, the contemplation of coitus between the parents generates anxiety in the child. Thus, Aston is perturbed by the father figure's noises at night as it produces tension.

Although some critics contend that the younger brother, Mick, "does not seem to suffer from psychological problems" (Potter 22), he has a fear of castration, which can be seen at the root of his neurotic demeanour. To reiterate, since the child is destined "to direct his first sexual impulse towards his mother and his first hatred and his first murderous wish against his father" (*The Interpretation of Dreams* 262), he sees his father figure as a rival. The notion of a father also harbours menace as he appears as an enemy who may punish the child due to his Oedipal desire. This threat coming from the father generates anxiety, which is called the fear of castration. Mick's extreme fear of castration, in this case, unconsciously drives him to destroy Davies, who, according to him, poses a threat as a father substitute. In this vein, *The Caretaker* displays a child's hostility towards the paternal figure, not to mention his primal wish

to get rid of him. As mentioned before, Davies, the old intruder, appears as a paternal figure for Mick. Notably, Mick declares that he sees an uncanny resemblance between his "uncle's brother," in other words, his father, and Davies: "Your spitting image he was" (*The Caretaker* 31), which overtly displays Davies' abhorred paternal image.

Mick's suggested Oedipal desire is insinuated during the threatening interrogation scene as Mick advances towards Davies and stresses that he is not to touch his mother:

> MICK (*pointing to* DAVIES' *bed*). That's my bed.
> DAVIES. What about that, then?
> MICK. That's my mother's bed.
> DAVIES. Well she wasn't in it last night!
> MICK (*moving to him*). Now don't get perky, son, don't get perky. Keep your hands off my old mum.
> […]
> Don't get out of your depth, friend, don't start talking liberties with my old mother, let's have a bit of respect. (*The Caretaker* 35)

Mick's intimidating manner exhibits his rivalry and indicates that he sees Davies as a threat owing to his unconscious Oedipal desire for the mother. Considered in this light, the father figure has sinister connotations as he dreads punishment for his unsettling desire.

Terrified of castration, Mick castrates the father figure instead, as it is also underlined by Gabbard: "Mick will not let the old man dispossess and castrate him, he will dispossess and castrate the old man first" (109). Therefore, Mick is physically and verbally violent to the old man from their first encounter onwards: "MICK *swiftly forces him to the floor, with* DAVIES *struggling, grimacing, whimpering and staring.* MICK *holds his arm, puts his other hand to his lips, then puts his hand to* DAVIES' *lips.* DAVIES *quietens*" (*The Caretaker* 28-29), which indeed renders Davies defenceless. Moreover, he grabs Davies' trousers, "DAVIES *scrambles to the clothes horse and seizes his trousers.* MICK *turns swiftly and grabs them.* DAVIES *lunges for them.* MICK *holds out a hand warningly*" (*The Caretaker* 34). Mick also snatches Davies' only possession, the bag which is brought to the room by Aston:

> DAVIES *crosses back with the bag.*
> MICK *rises and snatches it.*
> MICK. What's this?
> DAVIES. Give us it, that's my bag!

MICK (*warding him off*). I've seen this bag before.
DAVIES. That's my bag!
MICK (*eluding him*). This bag's very familiar. (*The Caretaker* 38)

As Freud posits in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the bag stands for genitalia, "luggage often turns out to be an unmistakable symbol of the dreamer's own genitals" (358) in dreams. Considered in this light, Mick's snatching of Davies' bag can be read as the paternal figure's castration, as Gabbard also confirms: "Mick is castrating the old man and refusing to let the old man castrate him" (109). Furthermore, Mick teases him and calls him a wretch, which also makes the old man ineffective: "I think I'm coming to the conclusion that you're an old rogue. You're nothing but an old scoundrel" (*The Caretaker* 35). Additionally, Mick's use of "technical jargon" (Esslin, "Language and Silence" 151), mainly on finance, banking, and interior design, in his long and fragmented monologues can also be seen as verbal abuse, which disorients the intruder figure. According to Esslin, this use of technical jargon "emphasize[s] Mick's claim to superior education, intelligence […]. It is thus, equivalent to an act of aggression" (151). To exemplify, in the brutal interrogation scene, Mick's chattering about renting the room and elaborating on insurance by constantly using technical terms is followed by a pause, indicating Davies' confusion:

> […] I know an insurance firm in West Ham'll be pleased to handle the deal for you. No strings attached, open and above board, untarnished record; twenty per cent interest, fifty per cent deposit, down payments, back payments, family allowances, bonus schemes, remission of term for good behaviour, six months lease, yearly examination of the relevant archives, tea laid on, disposal of shares, benefit extension, compensation on cessation, comprehensive indemnity against Riot, Civil Commotion, Labour Disturbances, Storm, Tempest, Thunderbolt, Larceny or Cattle all subject to a daily check or double check. Of course we'd need a signed declaration from your personal medical attendant as assurance that you possess the requisite fitness to carry the can, won't we? Who do you bank with?
> *Pause.* (*The Caretaker* 36)

In a way, with his domineering attitude, extensive speech, not to mention his derogatory remarks, Mick intimidates Davies; causes him to be silent and impotent; therefore, Mick emasculates him.

Also, Mick's prominent aggressive disposition is reflected in his outward appearance. Since "[a]t the time the play was written the wearing of a leather jacket would have

connoted both an aggressive side to the male character" (Thompson 92), Mick's "leather jacket" (*The Caretaker* 7) gains importance and provides an insight into the character's inner world. In a way, the extreme aggression of Mick can also be elucidated as the result of the "innate cruelty" (Morgan 86) of the character. From this perspective, corresponding to his appearance, Mick assumes a castrator role in the play, which may concretise his repressed death impulse. To explain it more patently, his physical and verbal viciousness towards Davies is a manifestation of his repressed death instinct. Viewed from the Freudian point of view, the death instinct coexists with the life drive and drives the individual towards his/her destruction. However, this destructive instinct is externalised as aggression towards other objects. As Freud also contends, "a portion of the instinct is diverted towards the external world and comes to light as an instinct of aggressiveness and destructiveness" (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 119). In Mick's case, the repressed aggressive drive is conveyed as violence towards the old man who assumes the role of a father figure in the play.

As can be observed, the impact of the restrictive forces of society on individuals is also demonstrated in the play. To exemplify, Mick reverberates society with his sophisticated speeches teeming with technical terms on business, finance, and interior design and his claim to be a successful businessman. As it is also argued, "Mick represents the brutal forces of social conformism" (Morgan 86). As an embodiment of society, Mick assumes a judgemental role towards the destitute old man who does not have employment, accommodation or any paper to indicate who he is. Hence, Mick humiliates, assaults, and eventually excludes Davies from his sanctuary; in a way, the younger brother dooms Davies to annihilation. Hence, Davies becomes "a vagrant who has more or less fallen out of society" (Rustin and Rustin 240). The other ostracised member of the human community, Aston, is also deemed as the other due to his clear and distinct perception of the external world, which makes him deranged in the eyes of society. As a result of his difference and his excessive chatter, he is regarded as a deviant and forced to experience an agonising treatment, which eventually leaves him unable to think and express himself. As hitherto mentioned, neurosis increases "difficulties in [the neurotic's] relations with his environment and others" (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 108). By the same token, Pinter's destitute characters are neurotics who are the "victim[s] of society" (Burkman 79).

Ultimately, in *The Caretaker,* Harold Pinter, portrays forlorn characters who are incapable of coping with the demands of the external world. From this perspective, Davies, Aston, and Mick, who dwell in the gruelling Pinterian universe, are neurotics with an extreme fear of castration, aggression, and withdrawn manners precisely because of their repressed drives. The characters' neurotic demeanours can be overtly observed in Davies' desire to go back to the womb as well as his enmity towards the others; Aston's incongruity with the external world, and lastly Mick's aggressive outburst. Most importantly, the pivotal point of *The Caretaker* can be seen as castration anxiety and the removal of the father figure, which echoes the myth of the primal horde's murdering the father figure. Thus, the infantile desire of a child to get rid of the father figure is fulfilled with the complete annihilation of Davies.

CONCLUSION

Albeit perceived as controversial today, Sigmund Freud's unprecedented theories on the psyche open new paths for understanding the inner world of human nature. In his studies, Freud highlights the presence of the unconscious, one's inner world, within which the undesirable and latent urges, as he later specifies as sexual and death instincts, reside. Approached from the Freudian psychoanalytic perspective, an infant's innate desire towards the mother, which is referred to as the Oedipus complex, and the dread of getting punished by the father for this desire, in other words, the castration complex, lie at the core of neurotic demeanour. Furthermore, Freud's subsequent introduction of the urge for dissolution, the death instinct, which is manifested as aggression towards the external world, also assumes significance in Freudian theory. As Freud suggests, these urges are to remain covert in the unconscious, in other words, they are repressed. As a result of this repression, individuals are not able to externalise their drives freely; thus, a disharmony between instinctual forces and societal expectations occurs, which eventually induces neurosis in individuals.

Since Harold Pinter's characters remain enigmatic and inaccessible to the reader/audience due to their inscrutable identities, backgrounds, and motivations, Freudian psychoanalysis is applied in this thesis to throw light on the prevailing obscurity encircling their chaotic unconscious. Thus, studied from the Freudian angle, it becomes ostensible that the menacing unconscious urges, as well as the discord between society and individuals, loom over Pinter's early plays, also known as Comedies of Menace. Thus, the Pinterian universe, especially in *The Room, The Birthday Party,* and *The Caretaker*, which are analysed in this thesis, is inhabited by fearful and apprehended characters who succumb to neurosis due to their unresolved Oedipal desire, castration complex, and unrestrained death drive which render them aggressive and/or regressive.

As for his first play, *The Room,* Pinter focuses mainly on the dark realm of the unconscious, later referred to as the id by Freud. The play opens with the protagonist, Rose Hudd's monologues centred on the dark basement, which is later revealed to be inhabited by Riley, who assumes the role of Rose's father and requests her to come

"home", which silences the garrulous woman. The intriguing play draws to a close with Rose's unexpected blindness upon her catatonic and ominously silent husband, Bert Hudd's killing of the father figure. It is possible to deduce that as a black and blind man coming from the darkness of the enigmatic basement, Riley embodies the latent sexual and destructive desires which dwell in the id. Thus, Riley's impending visit to Rose's beloved room insinuates the long-repressed urges' penetrating the conscious, which consequently overwhelms Rose and renders her blind.

Following his first play, Pinter's second play, *The Birthday Party,* which scrutinises the withdrawal to infancy, the unresolved Oedipus complex, and the child's fear of castration, is examined in this thesis. The play commences with the main character, Stanley Webber's regression to a womb-like room and his metaphorical birth, which is construed as the first trauma of an individual. Moreover, Stanley's withdrawal and refusal to leave his sanctuary underline the presence of a threatening external world inhabited by the father/castrator figures. Assuming the role of an inhibitive society, particularly with their religions, namely Judaism and Christianity, the castrating paternal figures, who later appear as Goldberg and McCann, mentally and physically mutilate Stanley due to his Oedipal relationship with the mother substitute, Meg, not to mention other unidentifiable reasons. Hence, the play ends with the Oedipal child's eventual castration.

In *The Caretaker,* the myth of the primal father and parricide come to the forefront. Embodying the father figure, the rootless old man, Davies, is invited to Aston's room and even offered a job, which, however, does not please him. Thus, the old man devises a plan to overthrow the recluse Aston and take his place, which perturbs the younger brother, Mick, who is verbally and physically abusive towards him. The play ends with Davies' eventual eviction from the brothers' room, which indeed stands for his castration and implies his parricide.

Hence, in the selected plays of this thesis, the unresolved Oedipus complex, the fear of castration, the death drive, and society's restrictive and destructive impact on individuals can be said to have the utmost importance in creating neurosis. It can be asserted that the impact of the Oedipal desire is perceivable in the plays that this thesis is concerned. To elaborate, in *The Room*, the main character, Rose, is seemingly

apprehended and obsessed about the basement, which stands for her unconscious. Significantly, what comes from her repressed unconscious, in other words, the basement, is the father figure whose presence annihilates her. Moreover, the repressed Oedipal urge is further displayed in *The Room* with the landlord, Mr Kidd's repressed desire for his late mother and sister, which is underlined by his distorted memories concerning the maternal figures, not to mention his sexual connotations about his sister. The unresolved Oedipus complex is also at the core of *The Birthday Party.* With the corrupt relationship between Meg and Stanley, a son's fulfilment of the Oedipal desire and his eventual punishment in the form of castration is displayed. In addition, although it remains subtle compared to the other two plays, the Oedipus complex can also be noticed in *The Caretaker.* In the play, Aston assumes the image of a castrated son, presumably owing to his Oedipal desire for his mother, who approves of his son's excruciating castration by the father figures and renders him mutilated.

According to Freud, the child's Oedipus complex resolves through time with the fear of castration, which is a dominant terror in all human beings. The castration fear can be clarified as the child's fear of getting mutilated by the paternal figure for his unacceptable desire felt for the mother. Thus, the child renounces his desire and identifies with the father figure who represents societal norms. Ostensibly, the concept of the castration complex is predominant in the three plays analysed in this thesis. To illustrate, Rose and Mr Kidd's dread of the external world owing to their expectation of punishment for their repressed Oedipal desire in *The Room* tends to support the point. Moreover, the protagonist, Stanley's awaiting the impending castration and his eventual annihilation by the paternal figures supports the presence of the castration complex in *The Birthday Party*. As for *The Caretaker,* the ambivalent feeling felt for the father figure is reverberated in Mick's abusiveness towards the old man, Davies underscores the fear of castration. Due to his pervading fear of getting castrated by the father figure, the brothers, Aston and Mick, in a way, come together and castrate Davies.

The other unpalatable wish creeping into the unconscious is the desire for dissolution and destruction, in other words, the death drive, which is concretised in all three plays,

especially in the characters' yearning for a return to the primordial state by keeping themselves in the sphere of their womb-like rooms. In a sense, the characters' regression to an infantile state is connected to the death drive and, more aptly, the desire for non-existence. To elaborate, in *The Room*, Bert withdraws to his room and becomes a child figure in the eyes of his wife; in *The Birthday Party,* Stanley withdraws to a pseudo womb, and finally in *The Caretaker,* the reader/audience witnesses Davies' search for a womb-like atmosphere and also Aston's regression into the dilapidated room, a false sanctuary. Furthermore, the death urge is also externalised as violence towards other objects, which is overtly portrayed in Bert's violent eruption towards the blind man in *The Room*; Stanley's attempt to strangle Meg and rape the neighbouring girl in *The Birthday Party;* and finally, in Mick's verbal and physical abuse towards Davies in *The Caretaker.*

When one looks through the Freudian lens, it becomes conspicuous that the external world's, to put it succinctly, the society's restrictive and tantalising forces on individuals also bring about the characters' neurotic disposition. Individuals' innate urge to attain boundless pleasure is restricted by society, which protects humans against external dangers; however, that is at the expense of dissatisfaction due to the renunciation of sexual and death instincts. Hence, the individual's search for pleasure is abandoned and replaced by evasion from the unpleasure. Similarly, in Pinter's selected plays in this thesis, some characters repress their illicit desires and even assume the role of society, as can be blatantly seen in Goldberg and McCann's case in *The Birthday Party*. On the other hand, some other characters refuse to restrict their instinctual forces; thus, they evade the external world, which is evident in Stanley's withdrawal from society as a recluse in *The Birthday Party*; Aston's losing touch with others due to his delusions before his hospitalisation in *The Caretaker*.

Although there are numerous studies concerning Harold Pinter and his Comedy of Menace, this thesis offers an extensive Freudian psychoanalytical reading of the playwright's early plays, *The Room, The Birthday Party,* and *The Caretaker,* which specifically reflect Harold Pinter's own past, the traumatic effect of the Second World War, and the post-war period on individuals. Thus, this thesis may bring a new approach to the playwright's early plays, his enigmatic characters, and the post-war

condition with the help of the Freudian perspective. Thus, it is hoped that this thesis contributes to Pinter studies. To conclude, Sigmund Freud's views on the unexplored territories of the mind offer a journey into the characters' unconscious to unveil their inner selves in Harold Pinter's early plays. Thus, seen in the light of the Freudian psychoanalytical perspective, *The Room*, *The Birthday Party*, and *The Caretaker* manifest the dark and vicious force, that is*,* the repressed unconscious, within which unresolved Oedipal desire, conspicuous aggression and regressive urges reside. In addition to the menace of the unconscious, which creates inner tension in the characters, it also becomes clear that society is accountable for the formation of neurosis since it forces the repression of pleasure for its continuation. Hence, devoured by their repressed inner urges and the demands of society, the characters in these plays descend into neurotic disturbance. Ultimately, it is possible to state that the menace lurks both within and outside the characters in these plays.

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SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
İNGİLİZ DİLİ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI BAŞKANLIĞI'NA

Tarih: 14/02/2023

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