THE KAFKAESQUE THEME OF MENACE IN HAROLD PINTER'S PLAYS

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ABSTRACT

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Harold Pinter is deeply intrigued by Franz Kafka's fiction. Both writers' works are imbued with ambiguity or mystery, and the feelings of disintegration, evasiveness, and domination. The atmosphere of menace and terror permeate their works. Kafka's fiction is characterized by the existence of an invisible guilt, a prevailing sense of ambivalence and the impossibility to obtain knowledge from the omnipotent sources. The mainspring of menace in Pinter is usually the outside forces, which are latent and invisible. In Pinter's violent dramatic world, the individuals are subjected to an unreasonable treatment of torture, imprisonment and dehumanization. His recurrent theme of torture is in fact traceable to Kafka's themes of punishment and execution. The characters can find comfort neither in their physical surroundings nor in an understanding relationship with others, and finally they are driven into a state of disintegration of self-image. Man's predicament is reflected in a layered manner, embarking on his relationship with the outside world, and then moving towards his inner anguish about the self. This study focuses on the common aspects of the two literary figures in terms of the concept of menace. The sense of menace is reflected

in certain human feelings like fear, insecurity and hopelessness. Menace may appear in a number of ways including physical, psychological and mental ways. However, the characters, in both Kafka's and Pinter's works, make use of some defense mechanisms to cope with menace. Evasiveness and inaction are efficient in situations where the dominant character exerts his power by means of the information obtained through questioning the victim. Pinter's characters also remain silent to protect themselves from the torture and violence exerted by the mechanism. The characters also question the system to gain insight to its true nature. Lastly, the individuals seek relief in self-delusion and denial of reality as the reality itself is essentially ruthless. All these coping strategies, however, prove fruitless in the end, and both Kafka's and Pinter's characters become a victim of unspecified menace.

Key Words: Menace, Ambiguity, Mystery, Terror, Imprisonment, Power, Threat.

ÖZ

HAROLD PINTER'IN OYUNLARINDA
KAFKA'NIN BUNALTICI TEHDİT TEMASI

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Harold Pinter, Franz Kafka'nın kurgusundan derin bir biçimde etkilenmiştir. Her iki yazarın yapıtları da belirsizlik veya bilinmeyenin yanısıra parçalanma, baştan savma, ve hükmetme duygularıyla doludur. Bir tehdit ve dehşet ortamı iki yazarın eserlerine de nufüz etmiştir. Kafka'nın romanının özelliği, kestirilemeyen bir suçun, hakim olan bir kararsızlık duygusunun varoluşu ve sınırsız gücü olan kaynaklardan bilgi edinmenin imkansız olmasıdır. Pinter'da tehdidin arkasındaki esas neden genellikle dışarda gizli olarak varolan ve belirti göstermeyen güçlerdir. Pinter'in şiddet dolu dünyasında, bireyler nedensiz olarak işkence görmekte, hapsedilmekte, ve insanlık dışı uygulamalara maruz kalmaktadırlar. Pinter'ın yinelenen işkence temasının kökeni, aslında Kafka'nın ceza ve idam temalarına dayandırılabilir. Karakterler ne fiziksel çevrelerinde ne de başkalarıyla olan ilişkilerinde huzur bulabilmektedirler, ve son olarak bu karakterler benlik duygularının parçalanması durumuna sürüklenmektedirler. Bireyin yaşadığı zor durum, onun dış dünya ile olan

ilişkisiyle başlayıp ardından da kendi benliğiyle ilgili ruhsal ıstıraplarına yönelerek, kademeli bir şekilde ele alınmaktadır. Bu çalışma iki edebi kişinin tehdit kavramı açısından ortak yönlerine odaklanmaktadır. Bu tehdit hissi, korku, emniyetsizlik ve umutsuzluk gibi belirli insan duygularında yansıtılmaktadır. Tehdit, fiziksel, psikolojik ve zihinsel yollar olmak üzere birçok şekilde ortaya çıkabilir. Ancak, hem Kafka hem de Pinter'daki karakterler tehditle başa çıkmak için bazı savunma mekanizmaları kullanmaktadırlar. Kaçamak ve eylemsizlik baskın karakterin, kurbanını sorgulama yoluyla edindigi bilgiler yardımıyla güç kullandığı durumlarda etkilidir. Pinter'ın karakterleri aynı zamanda kendilerini mekanizma tarafından uygulanan işkence ve şiddete karşı korumak için sessiz kalmaktadırlar. Karakterler aynı zamanda sistemin gerçek doğasını anlayabilmek için onu sorgulamaktadırlar. Son olarak da, bireyler, kendi kendini aldatma ve gerçeğin inkar edilmesi yollarıyla bir avuntu aramaktadırlar çünkü gerçeğin kendisi özünde acımasızdır. Ancak tüm bu savunma mekanizmaları sonunda başarısız olmaktadır, ve hem Kafka'nın hem de Pinter'ın karakterleri belirsiz tehdidin bir kurbanı olmaktadırlar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tehdit, Belirsizlik, Bilinmeyen, Dehşet, Hapsetme, Güç, Gözdağı.

To my family

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Pinter and His Work

The British playwright Harold Pinter's (1930- …) work has been regarded as a great achievement due to his distinctive dramatic style, and his meticulous attention to exploration of human predicament in his drama. His plays are imbued with the feelings of disintegration, evasiveness, and domination as manifested both in his language and themes. He is predominantly concerned with the struggle for power both within a human being, and between an individual and a powerful mechanism or another dominant person. He has also been intrigued by the question of existence as the individual is often doomed to an inner turmoil, hence loses a sense of self.

Pinter's plays have been studied very often; however, many attempts to put them under any category have failed due to their idiosyncratic nature. Austin Quigley draws the conclusion about Pinter's plays that it is "very difficult to argue that the plays as a group exemplify the large general truths of any existing theory about the nature of society, personality, culture, spirituality" (7). In fact, this quality of his drama makes it difficult to analyze due to an absence of theoretical ground with which critics would feel more comfortable. The presentation of a realist setting as well as a naturalistic dialogue has caused Pinter to be associated with social realism of the Realist Drama; nevertheless, his drama does not aim at an overt social criticism. In fact, he himself regards his plays as "realistic" even though they do not display any "realism" (Pinter *Plays Two*, IX).

Ambiguity and evasiveness to communicate are extant in the early plays of Pinter, which is a quality that identifies his theatre with that of the Absurd. A parallel has often been drawn between his dramatic expression and that of the

absurdists as their main concern is to discern the common human lot, which is delineated as a prevailing lack of meaning, and hence lacking a purpose for life. According to Martin Esslin, "the Theatre of the Absurd strives to express its sense of the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought" (Esslin *Theatre*, 24). Absurdity is also manifest in "what happens on the stage, [which] transcends, and often contradicts, the words spoken by the characters" (Esslin *Theatre*, 26).

His one-act play, *The Room* (1957), reflects his chief themes, particularly the one characterized by "the commonplace situation that is gradually invested with menace, dread, and mystery; the deliberate omission of an explanation or a motivation for the action" (Esslin *Theatre*, 235). In a similar way, his first full-length play, *The Birthday Party* (1958), entails the elements of mystery and terror, situating the main character in a house outside of which he expects the emergence of menace. *The Caretaker* (1960), his second full-length play, includes the element of the absurd without the mystery and violence of the earlier plays. The play is rendered funny to an extent beneath which lies the tragedy. His one-act plays are titled "Comedies of Menace", a term which has become emblematic of Pinter's recurring theme and style. The label is paradoxical in nature as it integrates comical and terrorizing elements simultaneously. Although Pinter's early drama is typified as an expression of the feelings of fear, ambiguity, and restlessness, it also embodies the element of absurdity. The tragic is often rendered comic by the use of farcical, rhythmic and repetitive language. The initial comedy of a Pinter play often culminates in somber matters:

> Such comic passages also help create an atmosphere of menace, mystery, evasion, and matters deliberately concealed. Frequently Pinter's plays begin comically but turn to physical, psychological, or potential violence – sometimes, in varying sequences, to all three. (Dukore, 24)

Pinter himself acknowledges the relation between the absurd and the comic: "An element of the absurd is, I think, one of the features of [*The Caretaker*], but at the same time I did not intend it to be merely a laughable farce" (Esslin *Theatre*,

247). So, in his earlier plays, the sense of menace is in the mysterious setting or the bitterness behind the laughter.

The fusion of humor and tragedy is recognizable in Pinter's plays. The playwright makes use of the comedy not to arouse laughter but to provide insight to his characters' inner world. Thus, it is not just a coincidence that the individuals' most fearful and compelling experiences are often accompanied with an element of comedy, behind which they find a shelter to conceal their anxiety and real feelings. In fact, Pinter himself admits that "more often than not the speech only *seems* to be funny – the man in question is actually fighting a battle for his life" (Bensky, 63). Therefore, what appears to be funny is not indeed funny, which becomes obvious as Pinter's subject matter grows more and more somber. Esslin suggests that Pinter's plays "can be very funny up to a point the point when the absurdity of the characters' predicament becomes frightening, horrifying, pathetic, tragic" (*Theatre* 51).

While in Pinter's earlier plays the characters seem to be entrapped in a room, the later plays depict more recognizable social settings. Moreover, the later plays like *A Night Out* (1960), *The Caretaker* (1960), *The Homecoming* (1965) and *No Man's Land* (1975) differ from their predecessors because of their less ambiguous nature. In fact, according to Bernard F. Dukore, these plays are:

> less enigmatic, mysterious, or unrealistic than Pinter's earlier work. No character suddenly and unexpectedly goes blind. Though interrogation is disturbing, it is not irrational or self-contradictory. No character leaves through one door and returns through another, and unseen forces do not demand exotic food. (47-8)

However realistic they are, Pinter's more recent plays still tend to embody the element of mystery to some extent. Therefore, the playwright does not alter his preference for a certain degree of obscurity in his plays.

In Pinter's drama, the emphasis is put on dialogue rather than action; therefore, the plot does not follow a straight line. In fact, the action is not progressive; instead, it seems repetitive and circular. The plays keep going with the characters' diverse moments of victory, disillusionment, fear, and fulfillment. Austin Quigley argues that these opposing feelings make Pinter

plots multi-linear because of the "elements of progress, regress and circularity constantly leading towards and beyond moments of insight, agreement, harmony and union, that, no matter how fondly anticipated or remembered, refuse to stay firmly in place" (22). The use of multi-linear plot with a digressing structure provides a basis for employing dialogue as the source of expression. Pinter's use of "contractually oriented social interaction" between different characters reflects "complex nature of social exchange" (Quigley, 22). Thus, speech for interaction is emphasized over action in Pinter's realm.

Pinter's use of language is closely related to his belief that truth is unverifiable. In line with the awareness of a slippery ground for reality, the playwright presents the everyday speech in its bare form. Martin Esslin states that "Pinter's clinically accurate ear for the absurdity of ordinary speech enables him to transcribe everyday conversation in all its repetitiveness, incoherence and lack of logic and grammar" (*Theatre* 243). He argues that "*non sequiturs* in small talk" occur because of "the delayed-action effect" when a character tends to be less quick-witted than the other, as a result of which failure to listen leads to misunderstanding (*Theatre* 243). Nonetheless, Pinter does not accept the idea of the characters' lack of communication; instead, he employs "a deliberate evasion of communication", "continual cross-talk" and "a continual talking about other things" since the interpersonal communication is extremely tormenting, and menacing (Esslin *Theatre*, 244). Furthermore, the recurrent sub-textual use of such dramatic devices as silences and pauses not only serves this purpose of evasiveness to communicate but also entails the presence of an unstated meaning beneath the surface level of the spoken words. In fact, a great deal can be learned when characters keep reticent in the course of the dialogue. The speech often tends to elude the reality; therefore, silence can hint at characters' revulsions, need for domination as well as their genuine motives. These devices can also be effectually utilized as a strategy by the characters to deprive others of some information so that they can hold the power.

Pinter constructs the lives of his characters in everyday situation. Esslin maintains that "Pinter, essentially, remains on the firm ground of everyday reality" (*Theatre* 36). His concern is to shed light to the plight of contemporary

man within his ordinary setting and occupations. His characters do not seem to be occupied with too high ambitions; in fact, theirs is merely a struggle for their own lives. He opts for ordinariness in his portrayal of characters to the extent that his most striking characters often turn out to be tramps and abject people without a shelter or an occupation.

Pinter sets up his plays in a room, where frequently two characters appear to be trapped in their sense of intimidation. Martin Esslin maintains that "The room … is one of the recurring motifs of Pinter's work" (*Theatre* 235). For instance, in the one-act play, *The Room*, the room inhabited by an old couple serves as a refuge for them in a sinister world. According to Esslin, in this play, there is "a return to some of the basic elements of drama – the suspense created by the elementary ingredients of pure, preliterary theatre: a stage, two people, a door; the poetic image of an undefined fear and expectation" (*Theatre* 235). Similarly, in *The Dumb Waiter*, a basement room without windows and with a door opening to a mysterious outside creates this sense of tension as the two hired assassins are waiting for their orders.

This undefined menace emanating through a room gives way to the themes of ambiguity or mystery prevalent in the majority of Pinter's works. Neither the identity of his characters is wholly manifest nor are the ulterior motives beneath their actions revealed candidly. Everything that has happened embodies ambivalence, abandoning the individual in a world dominated by an utter sense of sinister. Possessed by this baleful feeling, human beings remain highly vulnerable to any threat that may originate from outside. This repeated sense of awe within a Pinter character brings forth another central theme of his: the struggle for power. According to Prentice, this urge in the dominant/subservient relationship, is also a dramatic and technical tool, which appears in diverse forms such as word games and violent physical exercises, in which the characters are involved in a battle for control (*Pinter* 20). In his set of Memory Plays, too, Pinter deals with the themes of manipulation and subjugation in the attempts of characters to exploit a make-believe memory. Each character presents his/her own subjective and distorted version of the past, striving to evade reality and their genuine selves, so as to dominate the other.

The state of tyranny and desperation accompanies this theme of dominant-subservient relationship. Pinter's dramatic world has predominantly been a violent one like a police state in which the individuals are subjected to an unreasonable treatment of torture, imprisonment and dehumanization. In fact, Pinter acknowledges his obsession with violence as it is "really only an expression of the question of dominance and subservience, which is possibly a repeated theme in [his] plays" (Bensky, 61). After all, this expression of terror in everyday life gives his plays a political touch, especially in those plays, he calls "more recent *overtly* political plays", like *One For the Road* (1984), *Mountain Language* (1988) and *Party Time* (1991) (Aragay, 90). Austin Quigley argues that these three plays encompass large political mechanisms presented offstage, which are "radically indifferent to individual suffering" (20). Therefore, in its essence, Pinter's drama is an expression of exploitation, victimization and power assertion.

There is much more to Pinter's absurd drama than the mere satirical use of the language. His dreadful subject matter as well as the prevailing atmosphere of idiosyncrasy contributes to his reputation as a writer of menace. The atmosphere of menace and terror, in fact, permeates the theatre of Pinter. Nothing is explicitly spelled out; neither the characters nor their motives are expounded. The mainspring of menace in Pinter is usually the outside forces, which are latent; they remain invisible till the last moment to promote the sense of suspense. Pinter's individuals are often enclosed in a room, delineating the borders between inside and outside, where the man's terror is uncovered. On the other hand, another form of menace is extant within the individuals on account of their inner conflicts since their desires for a contact with others and the inability to achieve this contact are both horrifying. The human urge for love and respect is a potent gateway to menace if this urge is not gratified. After all, menace can emerge not only on an interpersonal level but also on a much more individual level where man is entirely preoccupied with his personal problem of existence. He longs for the fulfillment of his sense of identification when it seems to be threatened.

Ambivalence accompanies menace in the villain/victim intercourse as the dominant character may at times become the object of violence while the victim takes possession of power. Thus, there may not be a clear definition between a victim and a victor. The quest for domination induces violence, in the forms of verbal or physical attacks, as the characters strive to gain and preserve power over others. As a result, the prevailing inequality between the individuals leads to an "inevitable self-destruction of relationships" (Prentice *Pinter*, 21). In this struggle, characters can find comfort neither in their physical surroundings nor in an understanding relationship with others. They are driven into a state of lack of self-esteem due to an overwhelming desire for respect. The individual's insatiable need to gain respect is not fulfilled, stimulating her/his self-questioning, which culminates in a sense of disintegration of self-image. In fact, Pinter's themes dwell upon man's predicament in a layered manner, embarking on his relationship with the outside world, then moving towards his inner anguish about the self.

Pinter's primary concern, especially in his one-act plays, is very much to do with the expressive role of the Theatre of the Absurd pertaining to human condition. Dukore draws a parallel between the world of Pinter and that of the absurdists by emphasizing the malevolent and absurd element:

> Because events and actions are unexplained, and apparently illogical or unmotivated, the world seems capricious or malevolent. One can rely upon nothing. What is apparently secure is not secure. A haven does not protect. A weapon vanishes without warning. Linguistic absurdity may suggest the absurdity of the human condition. Fear of a menace may suggest the universal trauma of man in the universe. (25)

1.2. Pinter and Kafka

Pinter's obsession with ambiguity and deliberate evasion to provide every detail in his work is reminiscent of another acclaimed literary figure of the twentieth century, Franz Kafka (1883-1924), whose influence upon his drama has been acknowledged by Pinter himself. Kafka and Pinter's discernment of the

world as well as the reflections of this pessimistic attitude towards life characterize both figures' literary achievements. In fact, Martin Esslin attributes Kafka's impact on Pinter to their engagement in the question of existence: "Pinter, who acknowledges the influence of Kafka and Beckett, is, like these two writers, preoccupied with man at the limits of his being" (*Theatre* 261). Like Kafka, Pinter is praised for shedding light to the plight of modern man. Their affinities can be traced back to their identical background as outcasts in the community they lived. Franz Kafka was born into a Jewish family of middle class in Prague. His background as a Jew and German-speaker put him into a state of isolation as he belonged to nowhere, and possessed nothing to hold on to other than literature. Similarly, Pinter was raised in a hostile atmosphere of conflict during the World War II, obliged to change places so as to survive, which was his first encounter with the first-hand experience of violence. Condemned as a Jew and taken for a communist, his acquaintance with violence did not come to an end after the war (Prentice *Ethic*, *xxxvi*) In effect, their identical backgrounds as Jewish outcasts is fundamentally embodied in their works as the alienation of man.

Pinter is intrigued by Kafka in certain aspects, including his themes, characterization, literary style, and recurrent use of certain images. Raymond Armstrong maintains that the influence of Kafka on Pinter is much more concrete and vivid than what the critics have attempted to reflect as "a reciprocal atmosphere of nightmarish uncertainty" (38). Armstrong provides several parallels that can be drawn between the two writers. Pinter has come under the influence of the great novelist first in terms of his subject matter and thematic features. For Pinter, Kafka's *The Trial* draws on a potentially universal human plight (117). That is why Pinter's literary concern is so much in accord with his predecessor. Armstrong's in-depth analysis has thrown light on another thematic resemblance of the two writers – the concern with father/son relationship, which is characterized by a revolt on the side of the latter. In Kafka's novels as well as short stories, a strong father figure is often noticeable. Kafka's bitter and paradoxical relationship with his father can be claimed to have culminated in his devotion to the states of ambiguity and obtuseness in his work. Speirs argues

that "Uncertainty on this crucial point is one likely source of the ambiguity, ambivalence and contradictoriness which pervade his fiction" (11). Pinter's plays like *Homecoming*, *Family Voices* and *Moonlight* also depict this power struggle within a family; or the father's presence, even though not directly involved in action, overpowers the protagonist's life in plays such as *The Birthday Party*, and *One For the Road* (Armstrong, 103). Furthermore, this struggle can be expanded outside the limited family environment as the individuals encounter violence on a larger context. Pinter's recurrent theme of torture is also traceable to the sadistic mode of punishment and execution in *The Trial* (45).

Apart from the patriarchal threat, the protagonists of both Kafka and Pinter often experience an intimidated relationship with women since they fail to establish a healthy contact with their opposite sex. The motherly figures like the landlady in *The Trial* are also extant in Pinter's plays: Meg in *The Birthday Party* and Flora in *A Slight Ache* act as substitute mothers (Armstrong, 94). These maternal characters are actually threatening on the part of the protagonist as they are far from understanding him and providing the help the protagonist needs. What is akin in both Kafka and Pinter's technique is a "binary pattern of Beckettian 'pseudocouple'" apparent in the K.'s executioners Franz and Willem as well as Pinter's couples Goldberg-McCann in *The Birthday Party*, Ben-Gus in *The Dumb Waiter*, and the two brothers, Aston and Mick, in *The Caretaker* (Armstrong, 140).

Franz Kafka had a first-hand experience of menace as he led an unsettled life. His writing practice became an arduous engagement for him, and he resolved not to publish some of his work. On the other hand, he found nothing more worthy than this creative process. Therefore, his life-long struggles with this threatening experience of writing found an expression in the lives of his characters that have conflicts with ominous powers, the originators of the menace. Stanley Corngold draws a parallel between the writer and his protagonist Joseph K. in terms of their strife with the law, in its two different senses:

> Kafka's thirtieth year, like Joseph K.'s, stood in a steadily disintegrating relation to the law (of writing) at the same time that the law required a fuller and fuller devotion. Kafka protested that his own powers were as such too fragile … Literature, like the court, is the grim ministry requiring the sacrifice not only of sexual love but of everything else that might be called lived experience – a sacrifice that Kafka certainly had not yet made. (241)

The most vivid characteristics of his fiction, which reflect the menacing atmosphere, are composed of the existence of an invisible guilt, a prevailing sense of ambivalence and the impossibility to obtain knowledge from the omnipotent sources. The writer's personal background constitutes an invaluable source for him to explore most of these themes. To illustrate, Kafka's recurring theme of guilt can be traced to his relation to writing, to his sense of being trapped in this productive period. Ronald Speirs construes this state of his as inspirational:

> … creative states of mind which would come and go without his appearing to have any control over them, either presenting him vivid images or 'inner figures' which he longed to 'hunt' through the nights (his favoured time for writing) or withdrawing again for long periods, leaving him with feelings of emptiness, 'nothingness' and thoughts of suicide. (3-4)

Language is the chief means to express ambivalence in Kafka's work since the specific use of language can lead to an ambiguous perception of meaning; Speirs maintains that "Kafka exploited this potential in language so as to preserve the aura of the mysterious and 'uncanny' around the things emerging from his strange inner world" (19). This characteristic of his language is in effect reminiscent of Pinter's deliberate omissions in language to create mystification in a similar way. Language is capable of originating the menacing atmosphere in both writers' fictional worlds.

Despite the unrelenting gravity of his writing and subject matter, Kafka utilizes black humor simultaneously, in a manner that also characterizes Pinter's tradition. Just like Pinter's "Comedies of Menace", even the most solemn matters are dealt with in a humorous manner and culminate in a catastrophe in Kafka's works. His distinguished literary style gives way to the introduction of the word "Kafkaesque" just as "Pinteresque" has become emblematic for Pinter's plays.

The term "Kafkaesque" has been combined as a close reference to Franz Kafka's works, and has come to denote a sense of absurd, intricate or menacing state or quality as well as a desperate condition of petty man in relation with bureaucratic forces. The term is a reflection of Kafka's ominous world, where the contemporary man inhabits. In this respect, according to Frederick R. Karl, the word "is connected with Kafka as a representative man of the century [because he] lacks unity, or integrity; he divides and subdivides" (757). For the human beings who have disintegrating and shattering experiences in a hostile and rootless world, the adjective can easily be internalized. Becoming an expressive adjective of our era, it replaces and nullifies its previously representative counterparts such as *fate*, *destiny* or *circumstance*, and *happenstance* (Karl, 757). Man's desperate sense of imprisonment and loss of faith in living can be associated with the element of Kafkaesque. Karl argues that "If we view life as somehow overpowering and trapping us, as in some way undermining our will to live as we wish, as strengthening the forces that wait malevolently for human endeavor to falter, then we enter Kafka's world of the Kafkaesque" (758-9). Therefore, Kafkaesque is linked to Kafka's involvement with the question of menace in his work.

In a world besieged by menace, turmoil of violence and isolation, as well as a state of hopelessness, surround the modern man, which has long become the primary concern of the Theatre of the Absurd. Even though it has been conceived as a philosophical movement whose practical outgrowth can be viewed in drama, its earlier trends can be traced to Kafka as a spokesman of the disillusioned individual in such a ruthless world where conformist values are accepted. Martin Esslin underscores the influence of Kafka on the Theatre of the Absurd, stating that "Kafka's short stories and unfinished novels are essentially meticulously exact descriptions of nightmares and obsessions – the anxieties and guilt feelings of a sensitive human being lost in a world of convention and routine" (*Theatre* 354). This characteristic is what makes Kafka a writer of menace. According to Esslin, Eugene Ionesco's essay on Kafka depicts him as a writer whose concerns are in line with those of the absurdists:

> This theme of man lost in a labyrinth, without a guiding thread, is basic … in Kafka's work. Yet if man no longer has a guiding thread, it is because he no longer wants to have one. Hence his feeling of guilt, of anxiety, of the absurdity of history. (*Theatre* 355)

Kafka's novels cast light to the plight of man whose existence has become a burden upon his shoulders, by delving into the exasperation of the individual in an apathetic and mechanical world. Esslin goes so further as to claim that the theatrical version of *The Trial* pioneered the convention of the Absurd in the world of drama by preceding its more recent counterparts: "*The Trial* was the first play that fully represented the Theatre of the Absurd in its mid-twentieth-century form … [since it] united the traditions of clowning, the poetry of nonsense, and the literature of dream and allegory" (*Theatre* 356). In this respect, Kafka's literary trend has anticipated the elements of Absurd drama. His anguish about the conflict between man and a predatory system that overwhelms its subordinates has particularly intrigued his follower, Harold Pinter.

1.3. The Aim of the Study

This study aims to cast light into the converging aspects of the two literary figures – Kafka and Pinter – in terms of the concept of menace. An in-depth analysis of the understanding of menace by Pinter, as embodied in Kafka's fiction, will be provided. The concept of menace goes hand in hand with certain human feelings like fear, insecurity and hopelessness. These human attributes are typical Pinter subjects elaborated in his plays.

Menace refers to an intrigue and sinister feeling as experienced by characters whose identities are endangered due to this overwhelming sense. When victimized by menace the individuals feel haunted by a sharp sense of awe since everything surrounding them seems to have an unspecified motive to overpower their being. Certainty does not exist in their lives, be it a mutual understanding with other individuals, an omnipotent mechanism, or a matter within the people's own minds. Therefore, different types of menace that potentially threaten a human being will be the chief subject of the analysis in

this paper. How characters interact with each other and with a larger system will be discussed in the chapters allotted to each topic. In addition, the inner turmoil that is a culmination of this interaction will be expounded with reference to the individuals' sense of identity.

Not only the senses that are extant in the concept of menace but also the ways in which it can come into life will be analyzed in this study. Menace may appear in a number of ways including physical, psychological and mental ways. Physical menace may materialize in the form of another entity, like an individual or organization, as well as in their behavior and attitudes. Menace also has a psychological aspect because of the characters' interaction with others whose motives are conceived as the source of this intimidating feeling. Mental aspect of menace may come into existence in one's mind, where the sense of self is defined; the failure to do so is the ultimate level this threatening feeling can reach. Nonetheless, the question of how menace can be discerned by the victim still remains unanswered. What makes the menacing entity so daunting is, in fact, its unidentifiable nature; it is never easy to detect the source as it emerges in a veiled form, often as a violent sound behind closed doors, or a person whose identity cannot be readily discerned.

This study also intends to discuss how Harold Pinter was profoundly influenced by his predecessor, Franz Kafka, in terms of his treatment of the theme of menace. In Kafka's work, Pinter found the existence of an unspecified menace as a universal predicament of mankind, which overpowers the individual and renders him completely helpless. The study will, therefore, focus upon the following plays by Pinter: *The Birthday Party*, *The Dumb Waiter*, *The Caretaker*, *A Slight Ache*, *One For the Road*, and *Mountain Language*, and references to Kafka's work will entail *The Trial*. When in brackets, the works will be referred to as *Birthday*, *Dumb*, *Caretaker*, *Slight*, *Road*, *Mountain* and *Trial* respectively. The reason for choosing these plays is the ambiguous characteristic of the source of menace in them.

CHAPTER 2

MENACE OF THE OMINOUS SYSTEM

Franz Kafka's work is primarily concerned with a human predicament of existence which characterizes the life of his protagonist as well as the modern man. Foulkes asserts that "the mood of despair and frustration […] seems to press so heavily on the world of the author's fiction" (15). In fact, Kafka likens the human condition to a "train smash which has taken place in a long tunnel" in which there is a perceptible light neither at the beginning nor at the end. (Foulkes, 30) Man cannot possibly flee from this abyss in any realm of his life, and is stuck in it till his demise, which is the only way out of this tormenting world for him: "in the Kafkaian tunnel […] healthy people thrive on illusion and the wounded resign themselves to death" (Foulkes, 42). As this metaphor suggests, Kafka's fictional world is a place of suffering and pain where worldly pleasures are mere illusions: "The delights of the world were after all nothing more than the kaleidoscopic play of man's tortured senses, and any real pleasure would be out of the question against such a backcloth of suffering" (Foulkes, 30). Therefore, human beings are compelled to opt for either suffering this plight or ultimately retreating from their lives.

This sense of entrapment within an endless tunnel in Kafka's world is indeed the mainspring of his recurrent theme of menace. Man's acquaintance with this overpowering feeling emanates from his sense of there being a lack of meaning in life. Neil Alan explains this deficiency by employing Sartre's interpretation of Kafka's work: "the 'meaning' of the acts of Kafka's characters persistently eludes them" because "the acts on principle have a meaning which is their *true meaning*", and that is beyond the understanding of the characters (120). Sartre assigns the characters' sense of meaninglessness and lack of motives in their acts to their failure to grasp the reality which is hidden beneath their circumstances.

Man's contact with the bureaucratic forces and their respective officials is a potential gateway to his entrapment in many of Kafka's works, especially in *The Trial*. The characters are severely restricted in terms of personal freedom, which seem to prevail all their lives. Foulkes points out the existence of this antagonistic characteristic in Kafka's fictional work: "In story after story, […] we find scenes of imprisonment, hostile bureaucracy, […] officials conducting their business in bed, [and] walls which hinder and obstruct" (72). Kafka's concept of imprisonment in *The Trial* revolves around the protagonist who is arrested by unknown powers, condemned and tried by a peculiar court, which is paradoxically called "free". "Sartre […] writes that 'one of the meanings' of *The Trial* is that of 'the characteristic in human reality of being perpetually *in court*. To be free is to *have one's freedom perpetually on trial*" (Alan, 120) whereas liberty is supposed to confirm one's freedom against all attempts of the hostile world.

The primary struggle of Kafka characters is characterized by the desire to unbind themselves, and get out of this prison world; however, the inability to do so is due to the sense of menace which permeates their existence. In Kafka's work, the theme of menace is embodied in the recurring use of certain images like a prison, a room, a cage, and a cell. Foulkes maintains that "Kafka employs the picture of a cell, a cage, a prison-like room, a dark tunnel, or some other walled-in area, in order to portray the human situation" (86). Kafka's metaphor of a tunnel shows his preoccupation with the limited human existence which is delineated by bars and cages alienating him from the world. Foulkes depicts the threat the imprisoned man experiences as follows:

> The prisoner's attitude to his imprisonment depends on his attitude to life. He is free to leave the cage, but may kill himself in the leap towards the world. He may press his head against the wall of his limits, despairing at the reality of his condition. Or else, with some measure of resignation, he may sit in the cell waiting for the deliverance which he hopes death will bring. (90)

In this respect, man's condition is irremediable since not only an escape from it is almost impossible, but also he possesses no other way of rescue than his own death. Hayman points to the "paradoxical combination of freedom and

confinement" in Kafka's world, according to which even a free man cannot virtually verify his freedom (184).

Images that imply imprisonment are rife in *The Trial*, where "the cage appears not merely as an underlying idea, but as a concrete and indispensable part of the narrative" (Foulkes, 90). The room is often depicted as a spatial metaphor for the protagonist's arrest, as Joseph K. experiences his situation mostly within the borders of walls that hinder him from contact with the outside world and impel him to live his suffering on his own. The protagonist is isolated from the world by these walls because "the room transcends its literal picture of isolation and is used to convey a more general feeling of alienation from the world" (Foulkes, 86). When Joseph K. is informed of his arrest in his own room, which has become his prison from that day on, not only his bedroom but also his office becomes a prison cell for him. Similarly, the high walls in the Advocate's room obstruct his contact with the outside world where Advocate's maid Leni exists. "To see this small dark square, these towering insurpassable walls, this room with no exit […] is to see Kafka's own concept of the human situation" (Foulkes, 84). Kafka's concept of menace is reflected in his preoccupation with the idea of confinement as man's universal predicament.

Pinter similarly makes use of the image of a room, which can be conceived in diverse forms like a cell, a prison room, a refuge, or a trap. What all these locations have in common is their capacity to bring in the sense of menace. In some cases, the room functions as a refuge soon to be broken into by an intruding outsider who is the very source of the unnamed menace. However, in others, it is the room itself where the menace originates once it is overtaken by more powerful agents. In Pinter, like Kafka, the image of the room is closely linked to the idea of menace. Esslin states that for Pinter the outside world is frightening, and, hence, menacing for the individual:

> Pinter's people are in a room, and they are frightened, scared. What are they scared of? 'Obviously, they are scared of what is outside the room. Outside the room is a world bearing upon them, which is frightening … [and] which is inexplicable and frightening, curious and alarming'. (*Pinter*, 35)

In Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter*, the sense of menace is projected through "the room-door-suspense syndrome" (Esslin *Pinter*, 70). The two hired assassins, Ben and Gus, occupy a basement room as they await their orders. The image of the room without windows reflects their sense of terror simply because they lack certainty regarding their condition both within and outside the room. The room is "enclosed by a dark, mysterious world outside" (Esslin *Pinter*, 69). As hired gunmen, they feel imprisoned as their range of acts and chances of living are circumscribed into a single room by the organization from which they receive their orders.

In *The Birthday Party*, the protagonist, Stanley Webber, spends most of his time inside a boarding house, outside of which is full of mysteries and terror. Once he is within this enclosed area and his place of shelter, he feels free from outside menace; however, his sense of security is soon broken into with the arrival of two unknown intruders. Stanley Webber's sense of terror is symbolized by "the room, the safe haven, menaced by an intrusion from the cold outside world" (Esslin *Pinter*, 75-6).

Pinter has introduced the theme of menace in a more compact form in another early play, *The Room*, where the characters are entrapped in a room. The room, as a supposedly safe enclosed space, soon turns out to be unsafe. Rose, the main character, is in an illusion that "This room's alright for [her] … And nobody bothers [them]" (8-9). However, she will be frustrated by the visit of a couple who will insist that her room is for rent; and finally she will be shocked by the visit of a frightening stranger who will shatter her sense of security completely. This play already displays Pinter's preoccupation with the sense of menace emanating from the inside of the four walls.

Consequently, the theme of imprisonment, which is common in both writers' works, is an embodiment of the notion of how menace turns up in the characters' lives. Both Kafka and Pinter employ the images of an enclosed area, a room, so as to articulate the sense of fear and terror.

2.1. Menace from an unspecified mechanism and unspecified crime

The two writers define menace in a similar manner: it is unspecified and invisible in nature. It does not appear in a concrete or identifiable form, such as a familiar individual, or group of individuals. The mainspring of this overwhelming feeling is an ominous mechanism; however, it is also ambivalent in terms of its function and integral structure. The all-powerful system remains anonymous throughout the proceedings of the court in *The Trial*; Alan asserts that it is elusive, transcendental and inaccessible in nature: "Despite its apparent omnipresence (at least in the novels), the nature of the power haunting Kafka's texts is notoriously elusive, particularly when it seems to be founded in a transcendental anonymity, a theological absence, or an infinite ontological regress" (147). Therefore, "the origin of the network of power, and its constituent inaccessibility" as well as "the essence of the law" are fundamentally unidentifiable and difficult to define in Kafka's work (147). The ambiguity of the source of power mainly depends on the anonymity, omnipresence, and mysterious proceedings of the ominous mechanism as well as the existence of an indeterminate offence committed by the protagonists.

Kafka's *The Trial* is characterized by a prevailing sense of ambiguity and mystery in terms of the nature of the court that arrests and condemns Joseph K. with the charge of an invisible guilt. The questions in the mind of the reader remain unanswered even at the closing of the novel; this suggests that the author's concern is not to gratify his readers with concrete solution to the puzzles, but rather to underscore the sense of mystery in his work, which is in fact the definition of Kafkaesque concept of menace. Franz Kuna explicates how Kafka readers are puzzled by his work:

> When reading *The Trial* readers are normally puzzled by three questions: 'Who arrests K.?', 'Why is he arrested?' and 'What is the nature of this arrest?' It is little consolation to them to be told that K. himself does not appear to know, or that the absence of any narrative comment may suggest that knowing the answers may be as unimportant. (111)

In fact, what matters in Kafka's fiction is not the answers to these questions, but the function to which such unresolved questions serve. As Kuna states, "Kafka

is content, for his part, to leave the essence of the 'Law' fairly indeterminate" since his concern is not what the Law is, but how man is overpowered within his interaction with it (119).

The human beings' relation to the bureaucratic forces is depicted as a potential human predicament by Kafka. Kafka evades explanations and revelations so as to reflect this predicament and withholds significant information which is often blurred with trivial details. "Such revelations are characteristically obscured in Kafka by trivia which are given equal stress, so that the narrative presents a monotonous, unemphatic surface – this is Kafka's "psychoanalytic" imagination of the hidden struggle between depth and surface" (Greenberg, 200). In fact, what goes on in Kafka's fiction are banal everyday occurrences on the surface level; yet, they become less and less realistic and rational as the narrative goes deeper. Foulkes explains "the author's strange treatment of everyday reality":

> The empirical world known to the reader seems to have lost its comforting familiarity. Landmarks of normal life, the inn, the bank, churches, school, and apartment buildings, are present in most of the stories, and sometimes … we can read for some pages before being gripped by a feeling of uncanniness. Intimate as we may be, however, with separate features of the world of the fiction, the total impression is unreal, often illogical, sometimes even fantastic and absurd. (57)

This moving away from the comfortable reality of mundane affairs of everyday life can be regarded as another inclination towards something sinister and minatory in the victim's life. As the narrative begins to entail unreal and fantastic elements, the protagonist's sense of absurdity and menace is increased.

This ambiguous source of intrusion into Joseph K.'s routine life culminates in a sense of threat and fear on the part of the protagonist chiefly because he cannot identify his accusers. Joseph K., on the morning of his arrest, rings the bell for Anna to bring him his breakfast; instead of Anna, however, his room is intruded into by a stranger whose identity cannot be known even when Joseph K. directly asks: " 'Who are you?' asked K., half raising himself in bed. But the man ignored the question, as though his appearance needed no explanation" (*Trial*, 7). In effect, K.'s posture reflects his sense of physical threat, as if he is raised to defend himself. Franz Kuna defines this movement as

a "snake-like movement leading to a posture which expresses at once threat and fear" (114):

> Joseph K. is both shaken by the intrusion and ready to defend himself, as if unconscious guilt and the knowledge that he has the right and the means to defend himself were equally powerful causes of his abrupt movement. The posture is symbolic of Joseph K.'s subsequent behaviour. He will partly threaten his strange intruders and partly submit to their persistent demands, hoping to beat them on their own ground. (114)

The court is a mysterious place, where no response to K.'s inquiries is available. The identity of the authority remains unrevealed, which K. keeps questioning either articulately or inwardly: "Who could these men be? What were they talking about? What authority could they represent?" (*Trial*, 10). K. also directs his questions to the Inspector, from whom he expects to receive more satisfactory responses compared to those he receives from the warders; however, his demands are still unfulfilled: "the real question is, who accuses me? What authority is conducting these proceedings? Are you officers of the Law? […] I demand a clear answer to these questions" (*Trial*, 18). However deeply he strives to delve into the system, the Inspector's answers make his intimidating situation clearer: "I can't even confirm that you are charged with an offence, or rather I don't know whether you are. You are under arrest, certainly, more than that I do not know" (*Trial*, 18). Not only the victim but also the agents of the law remain utterly ignorant of the court's mysterious proceedings.

The victim feels imprisoned in this threatening atmosphere after his cryptic arrest. Even though this sense of imprisonment follows him everywhere, he experiences it the most profoundly during his visit to the Law-Court offices, which are located in the attic of a tenement building; his consciousness of the waiting-room is reminiscent of the Kafkaian tunnel with little or no light, which depicts the human situation:

> It was a long passage, a lobby communicating by roughly hewn doors with the different offices on the floor. Although there was no window to admit light, it was not entirely dark, for some of the offices were not properly boarded off from the passage but had an open frontage of wooden rails, reaching, however, to the roof, through which a little light penetrated (*Trial,* 73)

The individuals are hopelessly made to wait there to no end, as in the picture of the tunnel. Joseph K.'s sense of entrapment becomes more perceptible during "a slight feeling of faintness" that inflicts him while he is in the narrow corridor of the Law-Court offices. As if in a prison cell, he feels sick once he is in this alienating location. When the girl who has taken care of him suggests sending him to the sick-room, the man standing nearby gives the reason for K.'s dizziness: "the gentleman's faintness is due to the atmosphere here, and the best thing to do – and what he would like best – is not to take him to the sick-room at all, but out of these offices altogether" (*Trial*, 79). Indeed, K. himself admits that his dizziness is because of the office air, and his only desire is to get out of this place (*Trial*, 79-80). K. feels the oppressiveness of the court as he gets closer to it; he desperately longs for an opportunity that would set him free.

The inimical organization which is never accessible to the petty individual holds its power not only through its ambiguity but also by means of its omnipresent nature. The menace of this remote mechanism seems to be everywhere and in every realm of the individual's life. It is impossible to avoid this threatening system: "In *The Trial* Joseph K. can never escape the court. He encounters its representatives in his room, on the street, at work, in the cathedral – everywhere" (Greenberg , 118). The mechanism of the court conducts its proceedings in very unusual settings and times. For instance, Joseph K. is arrested in his own bedroom when he has just woken up; his interrogation is conducted in the next bedroom, which in fact belongs to another lodger. His first inquiry would take place on a Sunday morning – at no specified time, and the courtroom turns out to be located in "a house in an outlying suburban street where he had never been before" (*Trial*, 39). More strangely, the warders about whom he has complained to the judge during his trial are whipped in a lumber room at his bank. Moreover, when he is designated to accompany the Italian client of the bank to the cathedral, the priest seems to be familiar with him and his case. Therefore, his boarding house, his bank, and diverse sections of the city and the cathedral are all involved in his affairs to some degree. This fact adds to the sense of menace the mechanism creates:

> If the proceedings had all been made to take place in a courtroom, the danger would have appeared to be circumscribed; as it is he can find a new threat at any moment, in any corner, behind any door … Its ubiquity implies that every area of his competence as a man is being challenged. (Hayman, 188)

The threat is not only delineated by the court itself, but also is it marked by everything that K. has happened to approach. K. finds a touch of danger in everything that surrounds him; it is almost impossible for him to get out of this vortex he is sucked into by the court because the Law and he are inseparable from each other. The reason for this is explained with an easy yet irrational account of its function provided by the warder, Willem. He states that an attraction exists between the Law and guilt, and K. hopes to find out where the Interrogation Chamber is with this theory of attraction in his mind:

> Finally, however, he climbed the first stairs and his mind played in retrospect with the saying of the warder Willem that an attraction existed between the Law and guilt, from which it should really follow that the Interrogation Chamber must lie in the particular flight of stairs which K. happened to choose. (*Trial*, 43)

The ubiquitous nature of the court is verified when K. accidentally finds the place where he is supposed to go. It is very paradoxical that the court exists everywhere simultaneously; yet, it is still elusive and unrecognizable:

> If the Law is elusive, it is not because its origin stands at an infinite ontological remove, but rather because it is everywhere, even – and especially – where it is least expected; 'if the Law remains unrecognizable, this is not because it is hidden by its transcendence, but simply because it is always denuded of interiority: it is always in the office next door, or behind the door' (Alan, 165)

Once present in any location that is associated with the court, K. feels uncomfortable and breathless since the court seems to be everywhere, surrounding him: "So many people seem to be connected with the Court!" (*Trial*, 150). The painter, Titorelli, whom K. goes to seek help about his case, also admits that "everything belongs to the Court" (*Trial*, 167). The omnipresent court escalates his sense of imprisonment, which culminates in a prevailing existence of menace. The menace is ongoing, yet intangible throughout the novel; it "cannot … come to be presented as an object. It is imminent to every phenomenon in the novel, discussed at length, but neither presented nor presentable as such" (Alan, 48).

The practice of law is also ambivalent. The fact that K.'s guilt is assumed and not specified, and he has never been informed of the nature of his offence contributes to the vague characteristics of the ominous system. Alan asserts that "the presumption of guilt and the ignorance of the charge on the part of the accused are perhaps the most immediately apparent" (155). The accused himself cannot identify what his guilt is: "though I am accused of something, I cannot recall the slightest offence that might be charged against me" (*Trial*, 18). During his case, however, neither the warders nor the judges attempt to relieve his worries as to the existence of his offence. The warders cannot even verify that he is charged with an offence (*Trial*, 18). Kuna rationalizes this lack of verification in terms of K.'s supposed 'guilt':

> Is Joseph K. then guilty? Concrete evidence of anything that usefully be called 'guilt' is offered neither by Joseph K. nor his prosecutors. But as we shall see later, a particular human predicament, inviting the interference of some impersonal powers, is being evoked, and vaguely hinted at, by the ambiguous metaphor of 'guilt'. (112)

The ambiguous guilt inflicted upon K. can be regarded as a sign of powerfulness of the mechanism since the protagonist is overwhelmed by this sense of guilt, and cannot take any action to deal efficiently with his accusers. The lack of evidence for an offence implies that "some impersonal powers" attempt to interfere in K.'s life. Everything pertaining to the court and its proceedings is uncertain, and how the verdict is reached is also obscure:

> The context associates the Law with the authority that is accusing K., but if he is guilty, the guilt seems to consist partly in his inability to find out what law he is alleged to have violated. Guilt feelings are fomented by uncertainty and this is how the proceedings develop into a verdict. (*Trial*, 192)

Joseph K.'s ignorance of what the law, and the way he is found guilty is a source of menace partly because he is deprived of a means to defend himself against this insensible law. Eventually, he is compelled to suffer the consequences of the verdict that would bring his inevitable end.

Like Kafka's, Pinter's work includes much ambiguity and mystery. In Pinter's plays, "[t]he dialogue and the characters are real, but the over-all effect is one of mystery, of uncertainty, of poetic ambiguity" (Esslin *Pinter*, 37). Pinter's world exhibits his own sense of the universal reality as he "sees world

as mysterious, multi-faceted and unfathomable" (Esslin *Pinter*, 52), which constitutes his idea of menace. Coppa states that "the threat is somehow beyond articulation – literally unspeakable" (52). This intangible nature of menace is manifest in the existence of a nameless authority with veiled motives in Pinter's plays. His characters fail to comprehend the potential terror in their world, which decreases their capacity for survival in such a world.

What the two writers' works have in common is "the element of uncertainty about the motivation of the characters, their background, their very identity" (Esslin *Pinter*, 37). In *The Birthday Party*, the protagonist, Stanley, lacks a past through which his identity and real character can be depicted. Moreover, the two intruders into his life provide very little information about themselves; it is implied that they have known Stanley, and Stanley has known them although the nature of this acquaintance is not specified. Pinter presents his situations in a single room, and considers this condition very typical of everyday life, where people are only able to know each other as far as this confrontation affords. Pinter acknowledges this in an interview: "The world is full of surprises. A door can open at any moment and someone will come in. We'd love to know who it is, we'd love to know exactly what he has on his mind and why he comes in, but how often do we know what someone has on his mind or who this somebody is?" (Esslin *Pinter*, 38).

When Stanley is informed of the unexpected arrival of two gentlemen by Meg, his housekeeper, he is driven into a state of panic because his attempts to identify the identity and the motives of the men are fruitless:

> STANLEY. Who are they?
> MEG. I don't know.
> STANLEY. Did he [Petey] tell you their names?
> MEG. No.
> STANLEY (*pacing the room*). Here? They wanted to come here?
> MEG. Yes, they did. (*She takes the curlers out of her hair.*)
> STANLEY. Why?
> MEG. This house is on the list.
> STANLEY. But who are they? (14)

Here "the two emissaries of a mysterious and brutal organization" are the potential source of menace for Stanley entirely because they remain unknown to their victim (Esslin *Pinter*, 76). Neither their motives nor which organization

they work for are known. In this respect, Stanley's predicament becomes parallel to that of Joseph K., whose capacity to unravel the mystery about his arrest is also limited. Prentice states that "much critical response promotes the view that Stanley, like Joseph K. of Kafka's *The Trial*, is an unwitting victim of a mysterious organization, which Goldberg and McCann, like the Inspectors represent" (*Ethic* 26).

Pinter presents an element of suspense in order to create a threatening atmosphere in *The Birthday Party*. The inexplicit details and pieces of information add to this sense of the sinister in the play. Stanley gives a piece of perplexing information about his pursuers: "They're coming in a van. … Do you know what they've got in that van? … They've got a wheelbarrow in that van. … They're looking for someone. A certain person" (*Birthday*, 18). Just like the revelations made about the weird nature of K.'s court, Stanley's information about the two agents help create a sense of tension and fear. "Ambiguity generates fear and terror" (Prentice *Ethic*, 40). Moreover, Meg's conversation with a "voice" through the letter box about something that is not named heightens the feeling of suspense. However, this unnamed something turns out to be a bulky parcel that contains a birthday present for Stanley from Meg. "Indeed, the indeterminacy of the characters, the ambiguity of events, heightens the dramatic tension" (Esslin *Pinter*, 43). However ordinary these details may seem, they add to the mysterious atmosphere of the play.

The ambiguity about Goldberg's and McCann's motives and the nature of their occupation prevails throughout the play. Although it is clear that they act as representatives of some higher powers who remain behind the curtains, the nature of the task assigned to them by the organization cannot be defined easily:

> MCCANN. This job …, is it going to be like anything we've ever done before?
> …
> GOLDBERG. The main issue is a singular issue and quite distinct from your previous work. Certain elements, however, might well approximate in points of procedure to some of your other activities. All is dependent on the attitude of our subject. At all events, McCann, I can assure you that the assignment will be carried out and the mission

> accomplished with no excessive aggravation to you or myself. (*Birthday*, 23-4)

Why do the two sinister characters turn up in the lodging house where Stanley lives? What makes Stanley's situation unique? What do the "job", "assignment" and "mission" exactly refer to? These questions remain unanswered. Like the court's dealings with Joseph K., Stanley is treated in a weird and unfathomable manner. Furthermore, Stanley's oppressors also aim to unfailingly fulfill the secret mission. In one way or other, it is made clear from the outset that Stanley is doomed to failure in any counterattack he should attempt to make. Similarly, K. is informed by the judges' painter that there are three ways of acquittal, none of which guarantees a genuine one.

In Stanley's case, the final annihilation of the protagonist is foreshadowed by Goldberg's celebrations of victory; nevertheless, the victim's offence is not specified, like that of Joseph K.. During the cross-examination, Stanley is accused of a great number of crimes:

> MCCANN. Why did you leave the organization?
> […]
> MCCANN. You betrayed the organization.
> […]
> MCCANN. He's killed his wife!
> […]
> MCCANN. You throttled her.
> GOLDBERG. With arsenic.
> […]
> MCCANN. Where's your old mum?
> STANLEY. In the sanatorium.
> […]
> GOLDBERG. Why did you never get married?
> MCCANN. She was waiting at the porch.
> GOLDBERG. You skeddadled from the wedding.
> […]
> GOLDBERG. You stink of sin. (*Birthday*, 42-3)

However, none of these accusations are verified or punishable. A kind of guilty conscience is aroused in the accused. Therefore, both Kafka and Pinter seem to be preoccupied with the protagonists' sense of guilt. Esslin points to the affinities between the two works: "Both in treatment and subject matter *The Birthday Party* shows affinities with another masterpiece which is also a metaphor of an existential crisis of a similar nature: Kafka's *The Trial*, where, after all, the hero also suffers from unaccountable guilt feelings" (*Pinter* 87).

That Stanley is previously engaged in an unresolved affair with the large mechanism is hinted at; nonetheless, the nature of this involvement is not manifest. He complains about an unspecified "they" who have spoilt his professional welfare and career as a pianist:

> They carved me up. Carved me up. It was all arranged, it was all worked out. My next concert. Somewhere else it was. In winter. I went down there to play. Then, when I got there, the hall was closed, the place was shuttered up, not even a caretaker. They'd locked it up. … I'd like to know who was responsible for that. … They wanted me to crawl down on my bended knees. (*Birthday*, 17)

What could a mere pianist have done to a power or people he does not know about, and why they want him to crawl on his knees are not explained.

There is a constant change of names on the part of the mysterious agents. McCann and Goldberg keep using a number of names, so that they cannot be truly identified by their victim. "The desire for verification is understandable but cannot always be satisfied. There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false" (Esslin *Pinter*, 40). Goldberg is called Nat by his friends, and Simey by his family; his father, however, called him Benny. Goldberg calls McCann Dermot; then Petey, Meg's husband starts calling McCann by the same name. So, their real names cannot be verified.

Names signify not only unidentifiable individuals but also invisible off-stage characters in *The Birthday Party*. The ominous system is represented by someone called Monty, who remains a latent source of menace; Stanley is supposed to be taken to him for his complete treatment:

> GOLDBERG. It's all taken care of. We'll give him a bit of time to settle down, and then I'll take him to Monty.
> PETEY. You're going to take him to a doctor?
> GOLDBERG (*staring at him*). Sure. Monty. (*Birthday*, 68)

Monty is apparently not a doctor, but an accepted figure of authority; yet, the questions of who he really is, and what he is going to do with Stanley are unanswerable.

Another Pinter work where a mysterious organization is at work is *The Dumb Waiter*, which depicts the predicament of the two assassins, Ben and Gus, who are employed by a larger mechanism, and who know almost nothing about

the nature of the organization they work for. "The ultimate Who, What and Why remain […] mysterious, unknown, and possibly unknowable" (Prentice *Ethic*, 16). The two gunmen's operation is simply to act according to the instructions given by the authority to break their victim, Stanley, down in body and soul. The two men are just like puppets in the hands of the system, and have to accomplish their task without questioning the task or the rationale behind the task. Their ignorance is mainly due to the one-way communication between them and their employer; they themselves cannot initiate a contact with the organization, and there is no way of communicating with it unless the authority figures get in touch with these petty employees:

> GUS. What time is he getting in touch?
> BEN *reads*.
> What time is he getting in touch?
> BEN. What's the matter with you? It could be anytime. Any time. (*Dumb*, 116)

The time of contact is not specified by the organization; similarly, the court officials fail to inform K. of the exact time of his first interrogation. On the other hand, the mysterious organization/court officials feel free to interrupt the lives of powerless individuals at their whim. Therefore, in Pinter's world, ambiguity is the most threatening source of menace:

> The real menace which lies behind the struggles for expression and communication, behind the closed doors which might swing open to reveal a frightening intruder, behind the sinister gunmen and terrorists, behind the violence, the menace behind all these menacing images is the opaqueness, the uncertainty and precariousness of the human condition itself. (Esslin *Pinter*, 51-2)

In both Pinter's and Kafka's works, the sense of menace is created by a kind of intrusion into the worlds of the victims, in a room where the individuals seek shelter from the frightening outside world. "[H]owever much it is expected, the entrance, when it comes, is unexpected and almost always unwelcome" (Esslin *Pinter*, 40). In *The Dumb Waiter*, the sense of tension is aroused with the unwelcome arrival of an envelope that contains about a dozen of matches as it seems to come out of nowhere:

> BEN. What's that?
> GUS. I don't know.
> BEN. Where did it come from?
> GUS. Under the door.

BEN. Well, what is it?
GUS. I don't know. (*Dumb*, 123)

The image of a door giving a sense of threat is often employed by Pinter. The element of mystery contributes to this sense as the matches are pushed into the room under the door with no one being outside.

Mysterious occurrences haunt *The Dumb Waiter*. Like Kafka's dreamlike fiction, in Pinter, "the dreamlike, nightmarish quality of the plays as a whole" and "[t]heir very realism is part of their menace" (Esslin *Pinter*, 53). The unexpected appearance of the dumb waiter is unaccountable in the bleak and uninhabited house:

> *There is a loud clatter and racket in the bulge of wall between the beds, of something descending. They grab their revolvers, jump up and face the wall. The noise comes to a stop. Silence. They look at each other.* BEN *gestures sharply towards the wall.* GUS *approaches the wall slowly. He bangs it with his revolver. It is hollow. … He finds a rim. He lifts the panel. Disclosed is a serving-hatch, a 'dumb waiter'. A wide box is held by pulleys.* GUS *peers into the box. He brings out a piece of paper.* (*Dumb*, 131)

Even though it is made clear that the place was formerly used as a café, the characters cannot understand who is operating the dumb waiter. The opening where the dumb waiter descends is in effect "another opening, out into the dark, menacing, outside world" (Esslin *Pinter*, 70).

The use of names for invisible off-stage characters in this play has the same threatening effect as in *The Birthday Party*. The invisible Wilson is in authority in *The Dumb Waiter*:

> BEN. You'll have to wait.
> GUS. What for?
> BEN. For Wilson.
> GUS. He might not come. He might just send a message. He doesn't always come. (*Dumb*, 128)

However, he sends messages on pieces of paper for some food orders. Wilson, just like the High Magistrates in *The Trial*, does not make an appearance very often; his unavailability makes him a perfect authority figure with mysterious power. Even when he happens to talk, it happens through the speaking tube, which is not audible by Gus or the audience; only Ben can hear him as the senior member in the organization:

BEN. It whistles up there if you blow. Then they know you want to speak. Blow.

GUS *blows. Silence.*

GUS (*tube at mouth*). I can't hear a thing.

BEN. Now you speak! Speak into it!

GUS *looks at* BEN*, then speaks into it.*

GUS. The larder's bare!

BEN. Give me that!

He grabs the tube and puts it to his mouth.

(*Speaking with great deference.*) Good evening. I'm sorry to – bother you, but we just thought we'd better let you know that we haven't got anything left. We sent up all we had. There's no more food down here.

He brings the tube slowly to his ear.

What?

…

The Eccles cake was stale.

He listens. To GUS.

The chocolate was melted. (*Dumb*, 140)

Obviously, Gus is reduced to the inferior state of Joseph K. when he is deprived of his means to reach the central mechanism. He also admits that he "find[s] [Wilson] hard to talk to" partly because he is unreachable, and even when he can be reached, he is not very responsive according to Gus's account of Wilson: "There are a number of things I want to ask him. But I can never get round to it, when I see him" (*Dumb*, 129-130). It is also implied that such an encounter with this inaccessible figure is almost impossible. The same indeterminate menace inflicts both Kafka and Pinter's characters. They cannot identify who their manipulators are in the powerful nameless organization.

2.2. Abuse of Authority: Discipline with violence and punishment

The sense of ambiguity is a precursor for the decadent proceeding of the omnipotent system, which abuses human beings who remain helpless and powerless with its unfathomable purpose. The helpless individual is impelled to succumb to a ruthless form of violence exerted by the mechanism. The theme of physical and verbal violence as well as the theme of persecution penetrates Kafka's novels and Pinter's plays. Sokel puts forth that there is "punishment and annihilation" in *The Trial* (56). The system punishes the individual exploiting

several means of punitive devices in order to compel the victim to conform to its power. In *The Trial*, Joseph K.'s ultimate conformation to the court's authority is ensured with the use of both physical and verbal modes of violence. "[T]he court exercises power over his [Joseph K.'s] life and that of others. It does so in many, varied ways. It exercises physical power" (Speirs, 87).

In Kafka's work, these punitive devices are mainly characterized by the exercise of torture, which takes place in the unseen interior of the system. "Kafka knew that in the civilized modern world violence was banished to concealed rooms in police stations and prisons, and to colonial settings far from Europe" (Speirs, 88). This mode of violence is what happens to K.'s warders in *The Trial*. The two warders, Franz and Willem, who have been accused by K. of stealing his clothes, are whipped as a punishment since "the punishment is as just as it is inevitable" (*Trial*, 95). The whipping occurs in such an inhuman manner that the tortured individuals are reduced into the state of an object or an animal:

> Then the shriek rose from Franz's throat, single and irrevocable, it did not seem to come from a human being but from such tortured instrument, the whole corridor rang with it, the whole building must hear it. […] but even then Franz did not escape his punishment, the birch-rod found him where he was lying, its point swished up and down regularly as he writhed on the floor. (*Trial*, 98)

The warder's groans are that of a beast's while he is being whipped, and his body language is reminiscent of an animal; he "convulsively claw[s] at the floor with his hands" (*Trial*, 98). The fact that this act of torture is exercised in the lumber room of K.'s bank indicates the decayed nature of the court. "An unsettling implication of *The Trial* is that in a twentieth century city, and a "modern" society, […] torture is still being carried out, no longer as a public spectacle, but in a hidden corridor or a deserted patch of wasteland" (Alan, 160). Not only the nature of the court but also its proceedings and grounds remain ambiguous.

Kafka's concept of barbarous punishment is also reflected in the end of his protagonist. One year after his arrest, Joseph K. is taken by two warders to his execution, an exercise that manifests the court's corruptibility since its victims can be sent to their demise without committing any apparent crime. Alan

draws an analogy between Kafka's notion of violence of the system and Foucault's theory of punishment in *Discipline and Punish*, which reflects "the peculiarity of the punitive systems that haunt Kafka's work" (149). According to Foucault, the system of punishment includes "the perceived arbitrariness of judgments and the inhumanity of torture and execution" (Alan, 151). In this respect, there is an affinity between the form of punishment K.'s warders are exposed to and the fatal end K. himself is doomed to; in both events there are torture and execution, and the elements of reason and humanity are missing. Like the warders, who are forced to undress, K. is pushed into a state of nakedness, which brings out his animal self during his execution. The whipper's command, "you're to take off your clothes" also foreshadows K.'s final nakedness and sensitivity to violence (*Trial*, 96). K. is deprived of his protecting covers by being striped off his clothes. He becomes vulnerable like an animal in this uncovered state: "one of them came up to K. and removed his coat, his waistcoat, and finally his shirt. K. shivered involuntarily, whereupon the man gave him a light, reassuring pat on the back" (*Trial*, 249). The forms of discipline in *The Trial* are so cruel and ruthless that the individual who is subjected to this violence is far from being a human being. He is just like an animal, in K.'s words, "Like a dog!" while he is finally being sent to death (*Trial*, 251). A parallel can be drawn between the judges of the court and the whipper since both of them exert their power by torturing and annihilating their victims. "The minatory judges do not even dispense a justice based on victorious might but quite simply harry their prey to death. Their duty is to hunt and destroy, as the whipper's duty is to whip" (Greenberg, 139).

The victim of this punitive system becomes submissive as his mind as well as his body is controlled by the authority. In this system, there is "an economy of punishment" which will "regulate the minds of its subjects" (Alan, 151). This economy of punishment serves to two ends: First, the individual is tormented bodily so that this act can make the second end easier, which is the mental control of the individual. That is why Joseph K. is overwhelmed by the court's desire to put an end to his life, and he loses his energy and uprightness to struggle with the system: K. "suddenly realized the futility of resistance. There

would be nothing heroic in it were he to resist, to make difficulties for his companions, to snatch at the last appearance of life in the exertion of struggle" (*Trial*, 247). Just as the warders are reminded that their punishment is inevitable, K. is made aware that his death is inescapable, and gives up struggle. Foucault attributes the paradigm of justice to "a legal system devoted to exercising control over the criminal mind, 'judging something other than crimes, namely, the "soul" of the criminal'" (Alan, 148).

There is more to the act of violence in *The Trial*; it can also be reflected in another level, which is mental or verbal. According to Robertson, Kafka's works reflect man's mental as well as physical subjugation to the dictates of powerful institutions: "His work contains a deeply felt, sensitively rendered analysis of institutions, […] showing how they oppress bodies and minds of their inmates" (67-8). The contradictions are prevailing in the acts of the court, yet the individuals, like Joseph K. himself, are made to regard them all as natural. K. is criticized by the Examining Magistrate for being late for his interrogation even though he is not informed of the exact time of the meeting: "'but I am no longer obliged to hear you now […] yet I shall make a exception for once on this occasion. But such a delay must not occur again. And now step forward.'" (*Trial*, 47-8). The court is full of paradoxes; however, it asserts its control over the people despite the controversies in its nature. Joseph K. is mentally rendered guilty although his offence is never specified. There is a hierarchical structure in the court, which abuses the weaker individuals. Walser points to the use of certain adjectives to emphasize this inequality between the system and the man: "The adjectives 'small' and 'large,' 'low' and 'high,' are deployed against each other in an exaggeratedly contrasting manner in order to express both the greatness of the authorities themselves and the gulf between them and the K.s" (32). The authoritative systems first impose the idea of their greatness as well as a sense of inferiority into the minds of their subjects, and then victimize their bodies in a ruthless exercise of violence.

"In *The Trial* violence, like sexuality, is repeatedly associated with dirt or disorder" (Speirs, 81). Everything that is in connection with the court is depicted as filthy and violent. The intrusion of the court officials physically

pollutes the boarding house, especially the room which belongs to Fraulein Bürstner. Therefore, when she arrives at the boarding house, K. wants to apologize to her for the disorder the court warders have caused in her room in the morning by messing up with her photographs. According to Speirs, this physical filth is connected to the moral and emotional tumult the court causes:

> What makes K. feel so strongly implicated in the 'disordering' of the room caused by the intrusion of the court is clearly not the minor disturbance of the photographs but the implied, metonymic touching of Fraulein Bürstner and the feeling of moral or emotional pollution he associates with it. (81)

The court violates not only the lives of its victims but also the area surrounding them and other people. Similarly, the lumber room of the bank, where the warders are whipped is littered: "Bundles of useless old papers and empty earthenware ink-bottles lay in a tumbled heap behind the threshold" (*Trial*, 94). The unreasonable violence exerted over the people in the room is reflected in the physical disorder of the room itself.

The decadent nature of the court is embodied in the environment where it is located. Whenever Joseph K. encounters this organization, what it brings into his life is dirt and disorder. "The farcicalness of the court, its lack of true legality, its corruption and dirtiness are revealed to K. in the first chapter and then over and over again" (Greenberg, 135). In his visit to the interrogation chamber of the court, K. sees the old law books covered in dust: "[h]ow dirty everything is here!" (60). "[T]he element in which Kafka's bureaucrats live is dirt" (Greenberg, 65). The books that belong to the Examining Magistrate reflect the corruptness and filth of the bureaucracy within the court:

> They were old dog's-eared volumes, the cover of one was almost completely split down the middle, the two halves were held together by mere threads. […] He opened the first of them and found an indecent picture. A man and a woman were sitting naked on a sofa, the obscene intention of the draughts-man was evident enough (60-1)

The books are supposed to be law books, but they are pornographic novels. The second book K. examines is a novel titled "How Grete was Plagued by her Husband Hans" (61). The outer layer covered with dust manifests a more indecent interior layer of the books, hence the institution itself. K. later asserts

that “the inside of this legal system was just as loathsome as its external aspect” (*Trial*, 77).

Violence is also associated with sexuality, which reflects another debauched exercise of the court in relation with its subjects. “The body’s potential for violence is closely linked, […] in Kafka, to sexuality” (Robertson, 53). The washer-woman is sexually abused by the court officials, including the Examining Magistrate. The law student K. sees in the empty interrogation chamber, kisses the woman, and then carries her to the Examining Magistrate, and “[i]n this action K. saw confirmed the tyranny which the student exercised over the woman” (*Trial*, 66). In fact, all actions of the court authorities entail violence either physically, sexually, or verbally.

Just like in Kafka’s works, in Pinter’s works, there is also a system that punishes and tortures petty individuals who attempt to question its authority. The mechanism is essentially unquestionable, and demands absolute obedience from its inmates. “Violence ensues when a character attempts to maintain rather than gain dominance in Pinter’s work” (Prentice *Life*, 21). The individuals who refuse to confirm to its authority are either disciplined with a ruthless form of torture or executed if they remain defiant. Therefore, Pinter plays often end in violence performed in diverse forms; they “begin comically but turn to physical, psychological, or potential violence” (Dukore, 26).

Pinter, like Kafka, is primarily concerned with the notion of power in his plays. Therefore, Knowles states that Pinter has been named “Foucauldian *avant la lettre*” because “The French sociologist and philosopher Michel Foucault, […] was particularly concerned with power in society”, and in a similar way, “Pinter’s writings have always shown a consistent concern with direct and indirect forms of power – physical, social, and oral” (*Understanding*, 190). In his overtly political later works, the unreasonable treatment of the human beings by the system is more manifest since the conflict is between the larger mechanism and the individual who remains an outcast within the system. Pinter’s concerns in his recent work “shift focus away from the individual level of struggle to the forces empowered to institute murder, torture, or nuclear war” (Prentice *Life*, 22).

In *One For the Road*, the dominant theme is power. Victor and Gila, together with their son, Nicky, are taken prisoners by the authoritarian forces, in the person of Nicholas. Pinter is preoccupied with depicting the plight of people who are exposed to torture, rape, and murder. As observed in the Kafkaian concept of violence, the individuals who are tortured are reduced to a state of an animal, which is reflected in their nakedness. First, Victor, the husband is pictured in his ripped clothes: "VICTOR *walks in, slowly. His clothes are torn. He is bruised*" (*Road*, 373). Ill-treated and humiliated, his wife, Gila also turns up in the same appearance: "GILA *standing. Her clothes are torn. She is bruised*" (*Road*, 386). "Torture is more clearly violent in Nicholas's scene with Gila, who has been badly bruised" (Dukore, 131). She is not only beaten severely but also abused sexually. Just like the court attendant's wife in the hands of the court in *The Trial*, she is treated like a sexual object in the hands of the soldiers who rape her several times. Nicholas, the cruel interrogator, treats Victor like a plaything: "You are no interest to me. I might even let you out of here, in due course. But I should think you might entertain us all a little more before you go" (*Road*, 392). The dominant character exploits his position as a representative of the mechanism, and considers it his right to abuse the powerless individuals. "*One For the Road* represents […] the abuse of authority" and "dramatizes for the first time in Pinter's work people without choice or defense against such abuse" (Prentice *Life*, 28). Gila and her husband are unable to defy the law of the more powerful system.

The characters who are in authority desire to display their power in the expense of others' annihilation. Like Kafka's figure of authority, Nicolas takes sadistic pleasure in the abuse of other people; the idea of death appeals to him: "I love death. … Do you love death? Not necessarily your own. Others! The death of others. Do you love the death of others as much as I do?" (*Road*, 378). Moreover, the authority is reflected as an agent of exploitation that puts others into an irretrievable position, such as death: "Death. Death. Death. Death. As has been noted by the most respected authorities, it is beautiful. The purest, most harmonious thing there is. Sexual intercourse is nothing compared to it" (*Road*,

379). Nicolas seems to take pleasure in the death of others when the son, Nicky, is murdered:

> You can leave. We'll meet again, I hope. I trust we will always remain friends. Go out. Enjoy life. Be good. Love your wife. She'll be joining you in about a week, by the way. If she feels up to it. Yes. I feel we've both benefited from our discussions.
> VICTOR *mutters.*
> What?
> VICTOR *mutters.*
> What?
> VICTOR
> My son.
> NICOLAS
> Your son? Oh, don't worry about him. He was a little prick.
> VICTOR *straightens and stares at* NICOLAS.
> *Silence.* (*Road*, 395)

Victor is set free in the end; however, he is deprived of his reason to live. Even though he is tormented in the most ruthless way possible with the death of his son, he is ironically advised to enjoy life. Victor's final silence indicates his helplessness and irrevocable fate.

One For the Road and *Mountain Language* are characterized as Pinter's most expressive plays in terms of the theme of violence. Prentice calls the former "his most violent portrayal of the abuse of authority in hierarchical relationships until *Mountain Language*, the play which relentlessly pursues his concern with torture" (*Life*, 28). The latter also depicts the relentless use of torture in order to control people. *Mountain Language* reflects the menace people experience because not only some prisoners but also their relatives are sucked into a vortex of suffering. A nameless old woman is treated in an ill manner when she comes to see his son who has been taken a prisoner:

> YOUNG WOMAN
> She's been bitten.
> OFFICER
> Who?
> *Pause.*
> Who? Who's been bitten?
> YOUNG WOMAN
> She has. She has a torn hand. Look. Her hand has been bitten. This is blood. (*Mountain*, 13)

In this play, the authority exercises torture in the same way as the Kafka's whipper; the torturer is anonymous in both; in both cases, the victims are

helpless. In fact, both *Mountain Language* and *One For the Road* "remain Pinter's starkest, most horrifyingly incisive attacks against torture" (Prentice *Life*, 29).

Like the mental abuse of the people in *The Trial*, the powerful agents of the system in Pinter's plays have a desire to control individuals' minds. In *One For the Road*, for instance, Nicolas, a conformist patriot, is highly critical of people who do not share the same conformist ideas with him: "Every one else knows the voice of God speaks through me. You're not a religious man, I take it? […] You don't believe in a guiding light? […] So … morally … you flounder in wet shit. You know … like when you've eaten a rancid omelette" (*Road*, 376-7). Nicolas is fond of controlling people's way of thinking by means of highly accepted doctrines, perhaps in the form of religion. He also makes use of abusive language against the people he regards as outcasts because they are not conformist like him. Knowles puts forth that "the corruption of his mind is in the corruption of his language" (*Understanding*, 191). In fact, Nicolas's intellectual activities are deficient and decadent like K.'s judges who read indecent novels, and are perhaps ignorant of real law books; the judges mishandle books; Nicolas destroys them: "I hear you have a lovely house. Lots of books. Someone told me some of my boys kicked it around a bit. Pissed on the rugs, that sort of thing" (*Road*, 377). His victim, Victor, is mostly speechless as he does not possess the means to defend himself. "The logic of totalitarianism always seeks to suppress speech – by book-burning, torture, murder, or exile – because speech is itself symbolic of freedom" (Knowles *Understanding*, 194). Therefore, the characters' being dominated verbally is the symbolical obstruction of their mental activities.

In both Kafka and Pinter, the authority is unquestionable, and remains a potential threat to the individual's freedom of mental expression. In this respect, not only the people outside the system but also the agents who work for the larger mechanism are victimized. Knowles asserts that *One For the Road* "is concerned with the power of the torturer over the tortured […] The pathological power to corrupt the mind is made manifest, and the torturer himself is always the first victim" (*Understanding*, 190). Nicolas himself is a victim of the

mechanism since he is not liberated to think or act on his own. However, the mechanism mostly victimizes the people who do not comply with the greater ideology; thus, Victor, is viewed as a faulty rebel: "The trouble about you, although I grant your merits, is that you're on a losing wicket, while I can't put a foot wrong. Do you take my point? […] We are all patriots, we are as one, we all share a common heritage. Except you, apparently" (*Road*, 381). Thinking is indeed forbidden to the individuals; if they attempt to think, they are considered guilty. Nicolas, in his one-way conversation with Gila, states that fighting unquestioningly for one's country is a merit, thus praises her father for his desirable characteristics:

> Are you prepared to defame, to debase, the memory of your father? Your father fought for his country. I knew him. I revered him. Everyone did. He believed in God. He didn't *think*, like you shitbags. He *lived*. […] He was iron and gold. He would die, he would die, he would die for his country, for his God. And he did die, he died, he died, for his God. You turd. To spawn such a daughter. What a fate. Oh, poor, perturbed spirit, to be haunted forever by such scum and spittle. (*Road*, 389)

Apparently, one can only survive by leading a conformist life, without questioning the authority. This kind of verbal violence overpowers the characters whose whole existence, minds as well as bodies, is harmed.

In *Mountain Language*, the destruction of language is equally a means of controlling people mentally. This type of verbal menace is, in fact, Kafkaesque in that Kafka also views the destruction of language as man's own ruin; Armstrong quotes Kafka's own remark on this issue: "Swearing destroys man's greatest invention – language. It is an insult to the soul and a murderous offence against grace" (128). Armstrong also draws a parallel between Kafka's view of language and that of Pinter in *Mountain Language*:

> The destruction of language is of course the central theme of *Mountain Language*, and indeed Pinter's portrayal of the linguistic vandals in that play may perhaps owe something to these comments by Kafka. The use of foul and abusive language on the part of those who seek to suppress the mountain dialect is certainly a very powerful and effective metaphor for the barbarity of their activities. (128)

The military officers use a rude, sarcastic and abusive language towards the mountain people who are forbidden to speak their own native language. The sergeant's pejorative language reflects the corruption of the authoritative forces:

"Your husbands, your sons, your fathers, these men you have been waiting to see, are shithouses" (*Mountain*, 21). His language as well as his mind is corrupt; yet, he forbids the people to use their mountain language regarding it as being dead:

> You are mountain people. […] Your language is dead. It is forbidden. It is not permitted to speak your mountain language in this place. You cannot speak your language to your men. It is not permitted. Do you understand? You may not speak it. It is outlawed. You may only speak the language of the capital. That is the only language permitted in this place. You will be badly punished if you attempt to speak your mountain language in this place. This is a military decree. It is the law. Your language is forbidden. It is dead. No one is allowed to speak your language. Your language no longer exists. (*Mountain*, 21)

Their inability to speak in the language they are brought up means a limitation to their thinking.

Violence through censoring the language accompanies physical violence. The individuals who are deprived of their right to speak their mother tongue are forced to silence:

> *The* PRISONER *and the* WOMAN *speak in a strong rural accent. Silence*.
>
> ELDERLY WOMAN
>
> I have bread –
>
> *The* GUARD *jabs her with a stick.*
>
> GUARD
>
> Forbidden. Language forbidden.
>
> *She looks at him. He jabs her.*
>
> It's forbidden. (*To* PRISONER) Tell her to speak the language of the capital. (*Mountain*, 27)

When people's language is destroyed, their identities are threatened because the freedom of speech is necessary for their wholeness as individuals. Inhibiting their language is indeed a way of controlling people; the authority exploits it for its own purposes. In the last act, the rules are altered without giving a reason, and the elderly woman and her son are allowed to communicate in their own language; the prisoner wishes to interact with her inarticulate mother, but it is in vain:

> Mother, I'm speaking to you. You see? We can speak. You can speak to me in our own language.
>
> *She is still.*
>
> You can speak.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> Mother. Can you hear me? I'm speaking to you in our own language.

Pause.
[…]
Mother?
She does not respond. She sits still.
The PRISONER*'s trembling grows. He falls from the chair on to his knees, begins to gasp and shake violently.* (*Mountain*, 45-47)

The moment the old woman is permitted to speak to her son, she can no longer speak; she is silenced, and the language loses its communicative function. Rather than facilitating people's interaction, it becomes a means of subjugating them.

Several analogies exist between Kafka's concept of menace in terms of man's being disciplined with violence and Pinter's notion of punishment. Both Kafka and Pinter's characters are put into an irretrievable state in which they are punished severely. Violence is exercised in many diverse forms, such as physical, mental or verbal; however, all of them culminate in the destruction of the individual. Minatory forces exert power over the individual with the use of a relentless form of torture, by either bringing them to their fatal end or depriving them of their desire to live. Another mode of menace is to carry out mental and linguistic limitations on the victim who ultimately becomes speechless or motionless. Whatever the means of violence is, the outcome is the annihilation of the individuals.

2.3. Power inequality: Information vs. Ignorance; Insight vs. Blindness

In the battle for dominance between the dominant and the subservient parties, information, especially one pertaining to the opponent's identity, becomes a weapon. The person whose identity is laid open, hence sensitive to attack, is victimized because he/she has no information concerning who the enemy is. The inimical system possesses the power to obtain information. It is reluctant to reveal anything that may cast light on the uncertainties it has brought into the victim's life. Francesca Coppa points out the relation between the lack of information and menace: "Menace depends on ignorance; the terror of it stems from the vagueness of the threat" (52). Therefore, the power

inequality between the individual and the powerful mechanism is inevitable mainly because the dominant holds the power through information and insight it can gain while the subservient is subjugated due to his/her ignorance and blindness.

Kafka is concerned with a power struggle in *The Trial*, characterized in the protagonist's helplessness in finding out the truth about the court. The nature of power in Kafka is mostly intellectual rather than physical. Beck claims that "Kafka's picture of the battle K. wages against the unknown court in *The Trial* seems to be a distillate of the various specific instances of 'man against the powers' " (155). In Kafka's work, the bureaucratic forces tend to abuse the individuals by being inaccessible, silent, and reluctant to reveal information. In Joseph K.'s case, he has no knowledge of the charges against him or of the evidence; thus, his guilt is presupposed. Moreover, he does not know his accusers, and he is equally unaware of the law. Alan suggests that "[t]he law is a seemingly undecipherable text" (154). K. is a victim simply because he lacks knowledge about his own plight. The court is powerful due to its undecipherable nature, and its efficiency in withholding information from its victim. Even though K. expects further calls from the court, he receives nothing. When he pays a visit to the interrogation chamber for the second time without being invited, he is surprised that there is no meeting (*Trial*, 58). He is just led to the empty interrogation room by the washing woman. The emptiness of the room represents the absence of interaction between the court and K.; K. receives nothing from it except silence.

The struggle for power in *The Trial* is like a game, in which both the individual and the system display their own strategies so as to defeat each other. K. tries "to provoke, with all the cunning manoeuvres of a game of chess, the invisible powers to reveal themselves" (Kuna, 108). He makes a long speech in front of the Examining Magistrate blaming the court for its secretiveness and inconsistencies; however, the Examining Magistrate does not bother to respond to K.'s provoking attacks, and keeps his silence. K. regards this as a sign of court official's power: "When K. stopped at this point and glanced at the silent Examining Magistrate, he thought he could see him catching someone's eye in

the audience, as if giving a sign" (*Trial*, 53). Even though the sign is vague, K. views it as an instruction to evoke either applause or hissing in the audience. Being highly suspicious by now, K. assigns some secret power to the court that also controls some "hired agents" with the use of mere signs. "[P]ower and its ill affects are omnipresent" in the court (Robertson, 91).

"In Kafka's work, power is polymorphous and all-pervasive" (Alan, 147), and it "produces knowledge" (161). Absence of information means the absence of power. Therefore, K. is powerless till the end because "the proceedings were not only kept secret from the general public, but from the accused as well" (*Trial*, 124). In this respect, the authority's interaction with the man is characterized by silence, and this word recurs in K.' narration of his case. When K. asks for explanations regarding his arrest, the Inspector occupies himself comparing the length of his fingers; the warders, who have been rubbing their knees, are also completely indifferent to his querries: "It was as silent as in some abandoned office" (*Trial*, 30). K. leaves the interrogation chamber "amid universal silence, the silence of complete stupefaction" (*Trial*, 57). The officials of the court "speak only to say that they cannot speak, that they do not know, and that they cannot tell […] the breakdown in communication of meaning takes place even more brutally" (Kavanagh, 87). As K. moves further within the court's hierarchical order, he becomes more and more confused.

The inaccessibility of the authority makes it difficult for the accused to struggle with the court, and impedes him from being officially recognized and from defending himself in front of a listening judge. Robertson asserts that "Kafka repeatedly evokes the situation in which a source of authority is, or has become, inaccessibly remote" (105). Titorelli, the painter of the court, also admits that "the highest court […] is quite inaccessible to you, to me, and to all of us" (*Trial*, 175). Joseph K. himself has already realized this fact when he sees a painting of an Examining Magistrate in the advocate's room, and cannot conceal his disappointment at the man's lower rank. "The higher officials keep themselves well hidden" (*Trial*, 120). Even when he is dying, K.'s mind is preoccupied with the unanswered questions: "Where was the Judge whom he had never seen? Where was the High Court, to which he had never penetrated?"

(*Trial*, 250-1). Man's inability to reach the source of bureaucracy has been Kafka's concern for so long that "[i]n his portrayal of bureaucracy, Kafka captures another characteristics of modern institutions: the invisibility of their rulers" (Robertson, 87).

K. struggles for insight in order to gain power. "The struggle for clarity of perception is a recurring theme in Kafka's work" (Alan, 28). K. is deprived of any means to fight with the authority. In the sinister atmosphere o the court, his attention is always distracted although he tries to concentrate on his trial. He becomes thoroughly confused in the court: "K. remembered that he had not noticed the Inspector and warders leaving, the Inspector had usurped his attention so that he did not recognize the three clerks, and the clerks in turn had made him oblivious of the Inspector" (23). In fact, K. is blinded by the court; he fails to follow its proceedings and is unable to reach the high officials. Blindfold, he is defeated in this battle for power.

A similar kind of dominant and subservient relationship is all-pervasive in Pinter's work. As the characters' urge to gain knowledge is ungratified, they are doomed to an absolute failure in this battle for dominance. Coppa asserts that Pinter's plays are "variations on the subjects of dominance, control, exploitation, subjugation and victimization. They are models of power structures" (44). Pinter's characters struggle to find truth, but this "quest for truth […] is quickly deflected to self-preservation, which they rarely achieve" (Prentice *Ethic*, 27). As in Kafka's work, the characters struggle against some indefinite forces who withhold information to subjugate and overpower their victims.

The Birthday Party is predominantly characterized by the struggle for power, especially the one originating from the lack of information. In this play, "the power-subservience theme has more a sense of […] bureaucratic emphasis" and "some sort of corporate threat" (Knowles *Birthday*, 29). Just like Joseph K., Stanley suffers from a lack of information, particularly about the one that would shed light to the identity of his tormentors. Knowing is power for both the aggressor and the victim; therefore, a reciprocal practice of questioning goes on between Stanley and McCann in an attempt to possess power:

MCCANN. Where are you going?
STANLEY. I want to go out.
MCCANN. Why don't you stay here?
STANLEY *moves away, to the right of the table.*
STANLEY. So you're down here on holiday?
MCCANN. A short one. (STANLEY *picks up a strip of paper.* MCCANN *moves in.*)
Mind that.
STANLEY. What is it?
MCCANN. Mind it. Leave it.
STANLEY. I've got a feeling we've met before.
MCCANN. No, we haven't. (*Birthday*, 33)

Apparently, both Stanley and McCann thrive to conceal the truth from each other. McCann's first attempt to control Stanley is to prevent him from leaving. "The first really explicit act of terror contained in the play, this action serves to substantialize the hint of menace" (Gale, 49). Stanley launches a counterattack; he tries to figure out their motives, which he hopes to find in McCann's papers; however, when McCann garbs the papers back, the power changes hands once more. Stanley's attempt to prove a familiarity with McCann is also quickly aborted.

The two characters often attack each other with counter-questioning rather than fulfilling the opponent's need for information:

STANLEY. You're here on a short stay?
MCCANN. That's right.
STANLEY. You'll find it very bracing.
MCCANN. Do you find it bracing? (33)

The conversation loses its function since the replies are not adequate, and the questions are repeated, like Stanley's recurrent query: "Why are you down here?" (35). McCann's answer is nothing more explanatory than the short and trivial phrase: "A short holiday" (35). He keeps being vague throughout the conversation, which increases Stanley's sense of threat. As the protagonist is doomed to a state of ignorance, all he can do to protect himself is an attempt to distort the truth about himself. Stanley has no desire to reveal much to his opponents, yet they seem to know almost everything about him, yet. When McCann states that he looks depressed for a man on his birthday, Stanley lies: "it isn't my birthday. […] It's not till next month" (35). Despite his protests, however, they organize a birthday party for him together with his landlady. Stanley falls helplessly under their control.

Stanley's plight is reminiscent of that of Joseph K.'s since they are both subjected to interrogation due to groundless accusations. K. is called to the interrogation chamber; however, he is never given any chance to defend himself. Similarly, Stanley Webber, is interrogated by Goldberg with so many accusations of which he cannot make any sense.

> GOLDBERG. Webber, what were you doing yesterday?
> STANLEY. Yesterday?
> GOLDBERG. And the day before. What did you do the day before that?
> STANLEY. What do you mean?
> GOLDBERG. Why are you wasting everybody's time, Webber? Why are you getting in everybody's way?
> STANLEY. Me? What are you –
> GOLDBERG. I'm telling you, Webber. You're a washout. Why are you getting on everybody's wick? Why are driving that old lady off her conk? (*Birthday*, 41)

Stanley is gradually overwhelmed by these questions, which are weapons in the hands of his intruders. The questioning technique involves inconsequential and fast-moving accusations to strip the victim off his protecting covers, and to gain insight into every aspect of his life. The questioning becomes threatening for Stanley. "The progression of Stanley's inquisition is a study in psychological warfare in which the subject is assaulted from all sides at once, with varying periods of aggression and restraint" (Gale, 48). In this sort of cross-examination, Goldberg and McCann are the inquisitors:

> GOLDBERG. When did you last wash up a cup?
> STANLEY. The Christmas before last.
> GOLDBERG. Where?
> STANLEY. Lyons Corner House.
> GOLDBERG. Which one?
> STANLEY. Marble Arch.
> GOLDBERG. Where was your wife?
> STANLEY. In –
> GOLDBERG. Answer.
> STANLEY (*turning, crouching*). What wife?
> GOLDBERG. What have you done with your wife?
> MCCANN. He's killed his wife.
> GOLDBERG. Why did you kill your wife?
> STANLEY (*sitting, his back to the audience*). What wife?
> MCCANN. How did he kill her?
> GOLDBERG. How did you kill her? (*Birthday*, 43)

The dominant now imposes his own version of the reality; the victim's conception of what has really happened is unimportant. Once more, the victim is

put into a state of ignorance. He cannot verify even his own past, and is impelled to accept the one that is recreated for him by the dominant. His response to his accusers is complete silence:

> GOLDBERG. You stuff yourself with dry toast.
> MCCANN. You contaminate womankind.
> GOLDBERG. Why don't you pay the rent?
> MCCANN. Mother defiler!
> […]
> GOLDBERG. What is your trade?
> STANLEY. I play the piano.
> GOLDBERG. How many fingers do you use?
> STANLEY. No hands! (*Birthday*, 45)

This rush of questions and blames make Stanley inarticulate. Finally, his responses become inconsistent and illogical. He becomes the defeated in this battle since his tormentors constantly deny him a sense of reality, and block his chances of attaining information that would empower him.

The theme of blindness is closely associated with the urge for gaining insight in *The Birthday Party*. The submissive character is abandoned into an irretrievable state of blindness, both in its literal and figurative senses. Literally, Stanley Webber's sight is blocked by his oppressors; he physically loses his capability to fight them. Goldberg and McCann first punish him by removing his glasses as a physical way of keeping him under control:

> GOLDBERG. What can you see without your glasses?
> STANLEY. Nothing.
> GOLDBERG. Take off his glasses.
> MCCANN *snatches his glasses and as* STANLEY *rises, reaching for them, takes his chair downstage centre, below the table,* STANLEY *stumbling as he follows.* STANLEY *clutches the chair and stays bent over it.* (*Birthday*, 43)

When his glasses are taken off, he is barely a healthy individual, and almost a handicapped person. He can hardly walk, let alone the ability to counterattack his opponents. Then, they give Stanley's glasses back to him; yet, they keep him blindfold since "[t]he frames are bust" (68). So, he is not glad to get his glasses back. Petey, the owner of the boarding house, offers to mend the cracked frames with Sellotape; however, Goldberg assures him not to do so: "Sellotape? No, no, that's all right, Mr Boles. It'll keep him quiet for the time being, keep his mind off other things" (68). Goldberg does not want Stanley to regain his sight, so he

does not let Petey repair his glasses, without which Stanley has to struggle to see.

Goldberg and McCann plan a game, Blind man's buff, with Stanley by switching off the lights and shining a torch on Stanley. He becomes the blind man and his eyes are covered. Everywhere is left dark, but Stanley's face. Under the spotlight, Stanley's sight is blurred. Now he is blinded both literally and figuratively. The others involved in the game are supposed to see everything, but only Stanley's view is unclear. Symbolically, in the course of the game, McCann "touches Stanley's glasses" and he takes them off so as to tie the scarf around his eyes: "STANLEY *stands blindfold*. MCCANN *backs slowly across the stage to the left*. *He breaks* STANLEY'*s glasses, snapping the frames*" (57). During this game, the cracked glasses are completely broken, and now it becomes impossible to mend them. Game-playing, as in *The Trial*, is a form of victimization. According to Prentice, "Stanley has been reduced to a broken, possibly blind, gibbering shell of his former self" (*Ethic* 24). Apart from his potential for seeing, he is deprived of his potential for gaining an insight into his own irretrievable situation, and deprived of keeping himself whole as an individual.

The predicament of the man when overpowered by an impervious system is thus reflected in a similar manner by both Kafka and Pinter. Their characters are inevitably involved in a power struggle so as to preserve their identity and chances of living. According to Prentice, "in Pinter's work asserting dominance over another remains the primary means characters not only establish identity but survive in a world where to allow oneself to assume a subservient position, for even a moment, can result in annihilation – physical, psychological, or both" (*Ethic*, 28).

CHAPTER 3

MENACE WITHIN AN INDIVIDUAL

Kafka's and Pinter's characters not only struggle against the sinister outside forces but also wage a battle within their deeper selves. There is more to the concept of menace than the mere physical aspect; psychological menace is characterized by a need for love on the part of the weaker character that is left unrequited due to a lack of understanding and friendship from others. Failure in relationships also poses a threat to the characters' sense of identity. "Characters battle for position on the implicit assumption that maintaining or gaining an advantage is required to gain the love and respect of others and to preserve one's own sense of self-worth, superiority and, ultimately, identity" (Prentice *Ethic*, 9). A sense of exclusion and loneliness thus leads to a loss of sense of self and ultimately a failure of existence.

3.1. Psychological menace due to the futility of relationship with others

In Kafka's and Pinter's works, menace within an individual can emerge in an interpersonal contact, and emanates from the failure of a mutual interaction and understanding between individuals. The theme of menace is closely related to the themes of isolation, destitution and insensitiveness in Kafka's novels and short stories, and Pinter's plays. The victims in their works suffer from their unsatisfied human need for love and respect, and a failure of a healthy contact with others.

This unfulfilled need becomes a further source of menace in *The Trial* for Joseph K. Emrich touches upon the impossibility of a loving relationship between Joseph K. and the people around him: "there exists no bridge between him and someone with whom he could be on intimate terms; and the two cannot open their hearts to one another, mutual 'knowledge' cannot be passed on from

one to the other, love cannot spring into being" (Emrich, 36). The protagonist is utterly alone in his struggle with the court however much he seeks the support of others. Thus, his loneliness aggravates his sense of menace. Joseph K. appears to be obsessed with the idea of being agreeable to people by shaking hands with them. However, he is crippled in his attempt to comply with the Inspector as the Inspector turns down shaking hands with him. The powerful system threatens him not only by exerting violence but also by rejecting recognition of him as an individual. Frustrated in an attempt of contact, he longs for a union with another person, Frau Grubach. He is happy when his landlady agrees with him that his arrest is not significant: "I am very glad we are in agreement. But now you must give me your hand on it, an agreement such as this must be confirmed with a handshake" (*Trial*, 27). At the same time his inner talk expresses his apprehensions: "Will she take my hand? The Inspector wouldn't do it" (*Trial*, 28). To his disappointment, the woman forgets to take his hand in the course of her talk. Consequently, his hopes to gain the real understanding of his landlady wither away.

The people around K. do not seem to understand his suffering, and any attempt for contact by the victim is often undermined. The ambiguous power of the court menaces K. not only physically but also psychologically since his capability to establish a healthy contact with the outside world is also subsided. K. could attain a more healthy relationship with others "if he were already in and at the same time *above* the court, and did not remain entangled in the mysterious powers of life. He succumbs to these unknown and uncontrollable powers" (Emrich, 36). As long as his life is dictated by the court, it is almost impossible for K. to interact with other people. After his dismaying confrontation with his landlady, K. seeks the support of another lodger, Fräulein Bürstner. He also strives to get the sympathy and understanding of this woman upon his arrest; he cannot go to sleep before Fräulein Bürstner arrives at the boarding house at night when he can have the opportunity "to have a few words with her" (*Trial*, 30). However, her delayed arrival drives him restless, and he begins pacing up and down in the hall "as if that would make Fräulein Bürstner come all the sooner" (*Trial*, 30). When she fails to appear, he feels "exasperated

that her being so late should further disturb and derange the end of such a day" (*Trial*, 30).

Fräulein Bürstner finally arrives; yet, this does not gratify K.'s thirst for understanding since she remains detached from his predicament, which proves another source of stress for him. Although his willingness compels her to listen to what he has to say in this inconvenient hour, she does not display a genuine interest in the bizarre happenings of the day. K. feels that he owes her an apology as her room has been "thrown into some slight confusion" partly because of his own fault, and he adds, "The actual manner in which it [has] happened isn't worth mentioning" (*Trial*, 32). He assures her that the disturbance he has caused is not significant, to which she seems indifferent and says: "I don't want to pry into secrets; if you insist that it is uninteresting, I shall not argue the point. You have begged my pardon and I herewith freely grant it, particularly as I can find no trace of disturbance" (*Trial*, 32). Even though this statement ends the conversation, he insists on revealing more details about his legal problem. When he longs for her sympathy and confirmation of his innocence, however, she responds in a detached manner: "I don't want to commit myself, at a moment's notice, to a verdict with so many possible implications, besides, I don't really know you" (*Trial*, 33). Refusing to agree with him, she denies the existence of a close relationship between herself and K., which leaves him in a state of loneliness. Joseph K.'s "pathetic search for human solidarity" culminates in an utter sense of loneliness (Robertson, 84).

Finally, when the verbal or emotional approach fails, he ardently pursues a physical interaction with the woman: K. "seized her, and kissed her first on the lips, then all over the face, like some thirsty animal lapping greedily at a spring of long-sought fresh water" (*Trial*, 37). He is interrupted by a noise from the Captain's room. Goodman asserts that *"[t]his interruption, the nature of this and similar interrupted loves in the story, is identical in meaning with the persecution by the Court*" (154). After his futile attempts to communication, Fräulein Bürstner demands that they bring their interaction to a complete end, appointing a friend as a messenger to inform K. that a contact between her and K. would be useless. His animal-like approach is proof for his thirst for human

contact even on a carnal level. The futility of relationships with the others becomes a potential source of threat for both his psychological and emotional well-being.

K. feels deserted and utterly lonely in the course of his trial without no one to rely upon or to interact with. Even when he is taken to his execution by the two emissaries of the Court, he has a craving for human support; he desires to get in touch with a distant dream-like figure in the darkness:

> With a flicker as of a light going up, the casements of a window there suddenly flew open; a human figure, faint and insubstantial at that distance and that height, leaned abruptly far forward and stretched both arms still farther. Who was it? A friend? A good man? Someone who sympathized? Someone who wanted to help? Was it one person only? Or were they all there? Was help at hand? (*Trial*, 250)

Perhaps the human figure has been his own imagination, and a product of his longing since it has been "faint" and "insubstantial". He even hopes sympathy and "help" from a multitude of people. However, no one comes to rescue him.

Like Kafka, Pinter is also concerned with the psychological menace that emanates from a failure of interpersonal relationships. Pinter's characters crave for love and esteem, which has become the basis for power struggles among them. Prentice maintains that "[i]t is the desire for love and respect that ignites and fuels the struggle for power *over* others, a conflict waged to gain a position which seemingly might win another's esteem" (*Ethic xviii*). Unlike his earlier plays where his characters struggle against an ominous mechanism, his later works dwell upon a craving on an individual level where the characters desire to dominate each other so as to gratify their emotional needs. This unfathomable urge within a character becomes a weapon that destroys relationships, and upset the emotional balance of the individual. "Whereas Pinter's early plays express the existence of menace, then, his later dramas are psychological portrayals of individuals trying to create viable relationships with one another in attempts to fulfill the emotional needs which produce a threat to their welfare" (Gale, 19). The lack of love, the need for human support and the terror of loneliness of Pinter's characters bear several resemblances to the psychological aspect of the Kafkaesque menace.

Pinter's *The Caretaker* portrays the two brothers' battle for a union that has been hanging on a thread since the arrival of an old tramp called Davies. This is a play about frustrated feelings and destitution of love. On the one hand, the two brothers strive to preserve the brotherly love which has been upset when a stranger interrupts into their peaceful routine existence. On the other hand, Davies, the tramp, who inadvertently enters into their life, is himself an abject individual with a desperate longing for emotional support. It is clear from the outset that he has been deprived of a healthy social relationship throughout his life. Davies is grateful when Aston pulls him out of the brawl at the café he works: "If you hadn't come out and stopped that Scotch git I'd be inside the hospital now" (*Caretaker*, 10). Perhaps this is the first time in his life he has been treated like a human being. Once he met a monk, and asked him for a pair of shoes from the monk's collection of shoes for the poor; but the monk refused him, and treated him like an animal when he goes and sees him in search of some pairs of shoes; refusing to give him one pair among his collection of shoes for the poor. "I'm an old man, you can't talk to me like that," he tells the monk (*Caretaker*, 15). The monk even humiliates Davies by mistreating him and letting him eat some left-over food; he feels really disappointed when he is denied a right for a new pair of shoes and is reduced to an inferior state by the monk. It is obvious that he has a strong desire to be respected. "Davies has a long history of seeking attachments, a place where he can "belong" " (Gale, 84). However, his need for love and attachment has usually been undermined, and he has to live without a right for human emotions and human respect, which puts him into an irretrievable situation.

There is a constant change in the equilibrium of relationships in the play where the three men form and reform relationships of two. Gale asserts that "each is trying to establish an attachment with one of the others. Simultaneously each is trying to protect that relationship from an outside interference, the third member, which threatens to destroy it by forming a new pairing" (83). The emotional closeness between Davies and Aston goes on till the arrival of the other brother, Mick. Davies and Mick are frightened in case there is a potential threat to their mutual emotional welfare. Each longs for love; Davies is in

constant need of attachment; Mick's fear of losing his brother's love, which is reflected in his restless and violent behavior: "MICK *swiftly forces* [DAVIES] *to the floor, with* DAVIES, *struggling, grimacing, whimpering and staring*" (*Caretaker,* 29). Apparently, Mick wants to get rid of the old man, who starts to stay with them; he also tries to dominate Davies by emphasizing the idea of his own possessions: "How do you like my room?" (*Caretaker*, 31); "How did you like my bed?"; "That's my bed" (*Caretaker*, 33). Mick's use of the possessive "my" reflects his fears of the stranger. Furthermore, he seeks ways of overpowering the old tramp by putting him into an inferior position: "You're an old robber, there's no getting away from it. You're an old skate. You don't belong in a nice place like this. You're an old barbarian" (*Caretaker*, 35). Mick plays the role of the dominant, depriving the subservient Davies of the chance of finding a secure place to live in, and the chance of fulfilling his emotional needs. "Identity, when equated with rank as the basis for relationship, destroys relationship as soon as it is challenged" (Prentice *Ethic*, 90).

Mick's superior position becomes precarious as he is reduced to the state of an outcast when his brother takes sides with the old man. Gale suggests that Mick could avoid his brother's taking the tramp's side if he removed the menace both physically and psychologically (Gale *Cambridge*, 93). However, Mick fails to send Davies away from his house, which means the threat is not entirely eliminated. This becomes more evident in the alliance between Aston and Davies when Aston brings Davies's bag from where he previously worked; but Mick does not allow Davies to get his bag. As in many of Pinter's plays, the battle for dominance becomes a tug of war. The game with the bag starts as "MICK *rises and snatches it*" and then, "ASTON *picks up the bag*":

> ASTON *offers the bag to* DAVIES.
> MICK *grabs it*. DAVIES *reaches for it*.
> ASTON *takes it*. MICK *reaches for it*.
> ASTON *gives it to* DAVIES. MICK *grabs it*.
> *Pause.*
> ASTON *takes it*. DAVIES *takes it*. MICK *takes it*. DAVIES *reaches for it*. ASTON *takes it*.
> *Pause.*
> ASTON *gives it to* MICK. MICK *gives it to* DAVIES. DAVIES *grasps it to him*. (*Caretaker*, 38-39)

The game is a significant indicator of the changing balance of relationships in the play. Davies gets his bag with the help of Aston. Defeated, Mick makes his way for outside. In the second round he loses his domineering position. When an invisible barrier is set between him and the others, he feels isolated, and fears exclusion.

Aston offers the tramp the position of a caretaker, which would secure Davies's place in the house (42). Disturbed by being excluded in the attachment, Mick exerts physical violence upon the old man; he enters the room where Davies is in complete darkness and silence so that Davies is blinded to the danger awaiting him as he is completely unaware of Mick's sinister approach; Mick also has a drill in his hand, which hints at the threat:

> Come on. Who's this? Who's this got my box?
> *Pause.*
> Who's in here!
> *Pause.*
> I got a knife here. I'm ready. Come on then, who are you?
> *He moves, stumbles, falls and cries out.*
> *Silence.*
> *A faint whimper from* DAVIES. *He gets up.*
> All right!
> *He stands. Heavy breathing.*
> *Suddenly the electrolux starts to hum. A figure moves with it, guiding it. The nozzle moves along the floor after* DAVIES, *who skips, dives away from it and falls, breathlessly.* (45)

Obviously, Mick is striving to destroy the threatening character that comes between him and his brother. He is frightened of losing Aston's companionship when a third party is introduced into their relationship.

As Mick cannot remove the threat, he makes use of another strategy to gain acceptance in this alliance. Not desiring to be the outsider, the third party, he tries to fulfill his psychological need by establishing himself firmly in the union. "When Pinter talks about love he means a psychological *need* for acceptance or affection or emotional attachment" (Gale, 82). Changing tactics to ensure his position in this new arrangement, he offers one of his sandwiches to Davies so as to establish an emotional attachment:

> MICK. Like a sandwich?
> DAVIES. What?
> MICK (taking a sandwich from his pocket.) Have one of these.
> DAVIES. Don't you pull anything.

> MICK. No, you're still not understanding me. I can't help being interested in any friend of my brother's. I mean, you're my brother's friend, aren't you?
> DAVIES. Well, I … I wouldn't put it as far as that.
> MICK. Don't you find him friendly, then?
> DAVIES. Well, I wouldn't say we was all that friends. I mean, he done me no harm, but I wouldn't say he was any particular friend of mine. What's in that sandwich, then? (47)

Underneath Mick's acknowledgement that he is fond of his brother's friends lies the idea that he is reluctant to share his brother with some one else, or to be expelled from the group his brother forms. Davies is wary of Mick's friendly gesture, but he takes the sandwich offered to him as a beginning of an alliance. Moreover, his assertion that he does not have any emotional attachment to Aston relieves Mick. So, after this exchange the balance of relationship changes at the expense of the other brother, Aston. Mick even complains to Davies about his brother's sluggishness, and asks for his advice (48). Finally, he proposes the old man to be a caretaker, an offer which has already been made by Aston. The position as a caretaker does signify a status as a trustworthy associate to the brothers; thus, each desires not to be excluded, and be the senior partner in this company.

All three characters need emotional attachment, and its absence becomes a source of menace to them. According to Prentice, "*The Caretaker* becomes a play about human connection, about friendship, loneliness, isolation, and distantly, about love" (*Ethic*, 86). Aston is now the one who is in need of human contact as the other two seem to establish a partnership without his participation. Davies poses a threat to his relationship with his brother. Gale puts forward that "Davies does become a menace to Aston's current mode of existence" and "would displace him in the security of the flat and in his relationship with his brother" (89). Davies's aspirations to replace him are apparent in his desire to share the flat with Mick: "You and me, we could get this place going" (*Caretaker*, 60). However, a change of alliance occurs as Mick does not allow him to invade the place, and replace his brother. Davies is left, this time, out of the circle since Mick does not include him in his dreams about turning the flat into a place like a palace:

> DAVIES. Who would live there?

MICK. I would. My brother and me.

Pause.

DAVIES. What about me?

MICK (quietly). All these junk here, it's no good to anyone. (61)

The old tramp is once more isolated from human contact; his place in the flat and role as a member is endangered. Disillusioned, Davies makes use of other strategies in order to regain his security, and offers Mick some help for decorating the house: "I got that worked out. You want to tell him … that we got ideas for this place, we could build it up, we could get it started. You see, I could decorate it out for you, I could give you a hand in doing it … between us" (63). Furthermore, he threatens Aston since he knows his frailty of mental state; he claims that he can be taken to an asylum as before: "They had you inside one of them places before, they can have you inside again. Your brother's got his eye on you!" (67). He is now playing the brothers off against each other. He even ventures to drive Aston away from his own room:

ASTON. I … I think it's about time you found somewhere else I don't think we're hitting it off.

DAVIES. Find somewhere else?

ASTON. Yes.

DAVIES. Me? You talking to me? Not me, man! You!

ASTON. What?

DAVIES. You! You better find somewhere else!

ASTON. I live here. You don't.

DAVIES. Don't I? Well, I live here. I been offered a job here. (68)

They keep counterattacking each other with the same weapon of ownership; the loser will be expelled from the room. Aston, the original resident of the flat, is faced with a threat. Aston's "need for human contact has led him to disillusionment" (Gale, 89).

The battle waged for love between the characters culminates in the expulsion of Davies. Despite all his protests, he has become the outsider in the flat shared by the brothers; he fails to gain the acceptance of both parties. Mick is frustrated that Davies has lied to him about his job as an interior decorator, stating, "Ever since you come into this house there's been nothing but trouble" (*Caretaker*, 73). The most striking sign of the alliance of two brothers appear when they smile at the end: "ASTON *comes in. he closes the door, moves into the room, and faces* MICK. *They look at each other. Both are smiling, faintly*" (*Caretaker*, 75). Defeated in this battle, Davies is compelled to leave the place

which temporarily offered him physical and emotional security. Prentice suggests that "it is a mutual failure to make human contact" since both the tramp and the brothers are far from understanding each other's quest for emotional bonds (*Ethic* 95). Finally, Davies is, once more, sent out into the menacing and indifferent world.

Pinter explores the theme of menace within an individual due to the need for love in another play, *A Slight Ache*, too. In this play, "Pinter uses the subject of emotional needs […] and menace obviously develops from these needs" (Gale, 21). Like Joseph K., a married couple, Flora and Edward, are stricken by this emotional deprivation firstly because they fail to establish a healthy relationship, and secondly because their union is threatened by an outsider, the match-seller, who is standing outside their back gate.

Pinter's characters, seeing the futility of social interaction, purposefully evade communication. In Pinter's plays there is "a deliberate evasion of communication" as it is extremely threatening (Esslin *Pinter*, 244). The couple, in *The Slight Ache*, keep talking about trivial matters during breakfast on a Saturday morning; the subjects they talk about are nothing more important than the sort of flora in the garden, and whether a wasp "bite"s or "sting"s:

> FLORA. It'll fly away. It'll bite.
> EDWARD. If you don't stop saying that word I shall leave this table.
> FLORA. But wasps do bite.
> EDWARD. They don't bite. They sting. It's snakes … that bite.
> FLORA. What about horseflies?
> [*Pause*.]
> EDWARD [*to himself*]: Horseflies suck.
> [*Pause*.] (*Slight,* 173)

The trivial small talk and the pauses are a sign of the couple's evasion of communication.

Almansi claims that in Pinter's plays, "communication between human beings is difficult and often dangerous; that family ties are loose and often harmful; that social connections are untrustworthy and often deadly; [… and] that man is alone in this miserable world" (15). Flora is frustrated as her husband fails to listens to her and to meet her emotional needs. Their connection as a family is not strong enough. Thus, she seeks contact with another human being, the match-seller:

> FLORA. Do you find him interesting, Edward?
> EDWARD [*casually*]: Interesting? No. No, I … don't find him interesting.
> FLORA. He's a very nice old man, really.
> EDWARD. You've spoken to him?
> FLORA. No. No, I haven't spoken to him. I've nodded. (*Slight,* 175)

Edward is uneasy about the stranger that poses a threat to his union with his wife and to his place in the household. "Edward is desperate to maintain the relationship and, with that, his place in the house" (Cahn, 15). On the other hand, Flora appears to be interested in the man, and nodded to him as an initial attempt at interaction; in her eyes, "[h]e's a poor, harmless old man" (*Slight,* 178), so not a threat. However, the match-seller is going to be a threat for Edward's relationship with his wife.

Edward longs to get to know the threat better, and asks his wife to summon the old man into his study. However, "Edward has missed his chance […] to form a human connection with another through ordinary empathy" (Prentice *Ethic*, 70). He strikes up a one-way conversation with the old man on various topics such as Edward's respectable position in the neighbourhood, the topics he dwells upon in his essays, and the village where they live. He also inquires about the match-seller's business, wondering why he has chosen such a remote part of the village to sell his matches. However, all he gets from the stranger is complete silence, which escalates his sense of terror. His questions remain unanswered: "Why do you stand outside my back gate, from dawn till dusk, why do you pretend to sell matches, why …?" (*Slight,* 187). The man's deadening silence makes him out of breath and restless: "[*Muttering*.] I must get some air. I must get a breath of air" (*Slight,* 187). From this point on, his disintegration begins; "with great weariness" (188), he asks his wife to take him out into the garden. In fact, what terrifies him is the possibility to lose all that belongs to him, including his wife. Thus, he emphasizes the idea that he owns everything in this house just to relieve his revulsions: "Look at our trees […] Our own trees" (*Slight,* 188). Reluctant to encounter this threat again, he lets Flora go to his study where he has left the match-seller, and find out all about the stranger.

Flora is in need of human contact since her relation with her husband is frustrating. According to Prentice, menace in this play, as in *The Caretaker*, "is a threat to emotional well-being which grows out of the fact that the characters involved are placed in circumstances in which their psychological needs are not met by those around them" (*Ethic* 120). Destitute in her psychological well-being, and hence determined to unravel the mystery of the old match-seller, Flora draws closer to him because "in contrast to Edward, a figure of lifelessness, the match-seller, though dark and dirty, nonetheless embodies a renewal of love and life for Flora" (Cahn, 19). Hoping to push him into a conversation, she alludes to some intimate matters: "Between ourselves, were you ever a poacher? I had an encounter with a poacher once. It was a ghastly rape, the brute. High up on a hillside cattle track" (*Slight,* 191). Then, she asks, "Tell me, have you a woman? Do you like woman? Do you ever … think about woman? [*Pause*.]" (*Slight,* 191). Even the subject of a woman cannot draw the match-seller into the conversation, so she tries physical closeness to attain a contact with the man: "I say, you are perspiring, aren't you? Shall I mop your brow? With my chiffon? Is it the heat? Or the closeness?" (*Slight,* 191). Her need for love is manifest as she asks him to talk about love: "Tell me all about love. Speak to me of love" (*Slight,* 192). His reticence, however, triggers her for further attempts at making contact with him; she tickles him; throws her arms round him; gives him the name, Barnabas. She wants to believe that the man was after her:

> It's me you were waiting for, wasn't it? You've been standing waiting for me. You've seen me in the woods, picking daisies, in my apron, my pretty daisy apron, and you came and stood, poor creature, at my gate, till death us do part. Poor Barnabas. I'm going to put you to bed. I'm going to put you to bed and watch over you. But first you must have a good whacking great bath. And I'll buy you pretty little things that will suit you. And little toys to play with. (*Slight*, 193)

Obviously, she is trying to make up for the emotional poverty within herself by assigning to the old man a role of the lover or a child. Contrary to her previous sexual designs on him, she now views the man as a little baby she can look after, play with, and fulfill her deficient love life.

In the play, the fear for loneliness and isolation prevail. Edward has become the underdog as he cannot help losing everything he possesses gradually to this undecipherable stranger. First, his wife takes sides with the man, and then he feels that he is seeing his house slipping through his fingers; thus, he obsessively makes use of the possessive "my": You're in my blasted house, on my territory, drinking my wine, eating my duck! […] In my room. My den" (*Slight,* 195). Edward is slowly disintegrating as the match-seller is simultaneously coming into life. Edward is being inflicted with the situation the match-seller previously has had. They are now beginning to change their roles as the dominant and the subservient. Edward's talk with the other man in the end reflects this change of status; his wife accepts the match-seller as her new companion, and establishes a strong bond with him. Edward finds the other man in tears, and sympathizes with him:

> You're weeping. You're shaking with grief. […] For my plight. I've been wrong.
> [*Pause*.]
> [*Briskly*.] Come, come, stop it. Be a man. Blow your nose for goodness sake. Pull yourself together. (*Slight*, 198)

Although Edward claims that the old man is "weeping" and "shaking with grief", he realizes that the other man is distressed about Edward's plight rather than his own. In a state of illusion, he wants to see the match-seller "blow [his] nose" as if the man is crying for himself. However, it is Edward who is in anony:

> *He sneezes*.
> Ah.
> *He rises. Sneeze*.
> Ah. Fever. Excuse me.
> *He blows his nose*.
> I've caught a cold. A germ. In my eyes. It was this morning. In my eyes. My eyes.
> *Pause. He falls to the floor*.
> […]
> You're laughing. Your face. Your body. [*Overwhelming nausea and horror.*] […]
> You look younger. You look extraordinarily … youthful. (*Slight*, 198-9)

At the beginning of the talk, it is the match-seller who is in despair; however, Edward realizes all of a sudden that he is deluded, and finds himself in great desolation, sneezing and falling apart. Now, he does not even have a shelter. On

the other hand, the old man improves both psychically and psychologically. He gets healthier and younger as his needs for love and esteem are gratified. Finally, Edward is reduced to the status of an outsider since Flora talks to the match-seller about their house as if it belonged to the man: "I want to show you my garden, your garden. […] I've put your canopy for you. You can lunch in the garden, by the pool. I've polished the whole house for you" (*Slight,* 199-200). Most despairing of all is the denouement of the play when "[*s*]*he crosses to* EDWARD *with the tray of matches, and puts it in his hands*" (*Slight,* 200). The outsider replaces the husband entirely, having him abandon his life and all he possesses. Cahn asserts that "Edward's failure reflects loss of place and identity" (20). Without love, he has become a nonentity, and he feels as if he has been abandoned by the whole world.

These characters struggle to be respected and loved even when they have power. Both the subservient and the dominant are inflicted with menace as the roles in the relationship keep changing. The psychological menace characterized by a lack of love is very destructive: "That limited love, balanced almost equally by a lack of love, becomes a destructive force resulting in estrangement from the self, others, and, thus, is destructive of relationship and community" (Prentice *Ethic*, xxiii). When the characters encounter a threat that would thwart their communication with others, they dread loneliness and expulsion from human companionship. This threatening experience becomes irretrievable as it is situated deep within a human being.

3.2. Menace of Identity: Loss of Sense of Self

What is also a common concern in Kafka's and Pinter's work is the menace in the problems of identity. Menace of identity, which culminates in a sense of disintegration, is actually an outcome of other forms of menace mentioned before. As soon as the individual is confronted with an omnipotent system, his/her sense of individuality and self-esteem begin to shatter. This is manifest most effectively in the individual's self-definition, which is now

controlled by the dictating forces. The victim begins to see himself/herself through the eyes of the other, hence loses his/her authentic sense of self and self-confidence. The victim is also involved in an exercise of self-torture and self-accusation.

The circumstances that are inflicted upon the protagonist of *The Trial* make it difficult for him to voice his existence. "K. is meek and unable to assert himself" (Beck, 164). Upon his arrest, he strives to be accepted by the Court as a blameless individual; he searches for his identity papers to present to the Court's officials. He even thinks of taking his bicycle license to the warders, which intensifies the idea of tragedy in a comic way. K. thinks that his identity papers, and the warrant papers for his arrest are important to prove who he is: "Here are my papers, now show me yours, and first of all your warrant for arresting me" (*Trial*, 12). His demand annoys the warders, and they simply ignore his wish. Yet, K. insists on showing his papers: "Here are my identification papers" (*Trial*, 12). However, the warder does not care about them as they are as unimportant for the court as K. himself: "What are your papers to us?" (*Trial*, 12). In fact, these documents mean a lot to K. as they are "[*l*]*egitimationspapiere*, papers which would attest his legitimacy and justify his existence" (Greenberg, 120). K. fails to assert his identity with his papers even before the "low-ranking" court officials.

K.'s gradual disintegration takes place after his arrest since he begins to view himself through the eyes of the others. He loses his capacity for self-definition since the Court has created a completely different identity for him. The gaze of others has become so dreadful that he wishes to evade them. The people watching him from the opposite window anger him: "Here's a fine crowd of spectators! […] Go away" (*Trial*, 20). Within the eye of the people, he has gained an inferior and guilty position. The Court regards him as someone with a lower status than he thinks of himself. In his interrogation, the Examining Magistrate asks him if he is a house-painter, which humiliates him, and he replies boastingly: "I'm the junior manager of a large bank" (*Trial*, 48). An outburst of laughter comes up among the spectators in the interrogation

chamber, which undermines him further. According to Robertson, "Joseph K. is far less important than he is in his own eyes" (45).

K.'s sense of self changes after his interaction with the court; his former self-esteem disappears gradually as the Court and the people connected to it treat him as a petty and insignificant man. Before he gets more and more engaged with this abusive institution, he has had a great deal of self-respect due to his higher status in the boarding house and in the bank. So, when he first comes to court, he supposes that everyone takes him for a judge; as he passes through the lobby of the court rooms, he mistakenly thinks that he is "received with such honour as on that occasion" since everyone stands up (*Trial*, 192). However, the commercial traveller, another client of the Advocate who defends K., admits that "it was the Attendant we stood up for" (*Trial*, 192). He now realizes that he has been reduced to a status even lower than that of a worker of the Court whom he looks down on. Not satisfied by this response, K. asks the commercial traveller how people regarded his arrest as they must consider him to be "somewhat high and mighty" (*Trial*, 192). However, the other man disclaims this: "people got quite a different impression" (*Trial*, 192). According to him, K.'s case is as ordinary as everyone's. The commercial traveller's assertion destroys his sense of self-esteem. Consequently, his identity, represented by his name, has become a burden upon his shoulders because every one seems to know his name, which becomes an epithet for guilt; in the Cathedral the priest happens to know his name, and K. thinks, "what a burden it had recently become to him" (*Trial*, 231). As the victim of the Court, K. is even alienated from his own name and begins to view it as a burden which he desires to get rid of. This condition of K. in effect reflects Kafka's own view of "existence as a trap, or a cage, rather than a playground for the free exercise of the human will" (Kuna, 89). Joseph K.'s identity as the guilty one has to accompany him till his death just like his name, which is attached to him from his birth to the very last day of his life.

K. is involved in an exercise of self-judgment and self-accusation. In line with the authoritarian system, he identifies himself as a victim. K.'s identity is reconstructed by his accusers. According to Speirs, "his relationship to the court

goes beyond reflection to one of near identity" (81). In the end he submits to the Court's authority by accepting its power. He is made by the warders to wear his best suit to confront the Inspector. Dressed in a black suit, which is a symbol of conformity, he is now ready to assume the role of the victim. Furthermore, he is glad that the warders have forgotten to let him have a bath. Obviously, he sees himself from the point of view of his accusers – he is dirty, needing a bath before being accepted by a court official, hence he is guilty.

K. is also made to stand in front of the Inspector, who is sitting behind a desk; his standing position epitomizes his role as a victim. During his talk with Fräulein Bürstner in her room, he makes a dress rehearsal of the interrogation session that takes place in the same room in the morning. He brings the little table in the middle of the room, and sits behind it: "You must picture to yourself exactly where the various people are […] I am the Inspector, over there on the chest two warders are sitting […] Oh, I've forgotten about myself, […] I'm standing here in front of the table" (*Trial*, 35). Reenacting the events of the day, he sits in the place of the Inspector, and symbolically, he judges himself from behind the desk just as a figure of authority. According to Greenberg, "he needs to examine himself and judge himself, rather than defend himself blindly against the examination and judgment of the court" (*Trial*, 128). The court imposes the guilt on him. As a result, he develops a guilty conscious to identify himself with.

Many analogies can be drawn between Kafka's and Pinter's concepts of sense of identity. Their characters' existence is delineated by the forces which endanger their survival. Like those of Kafka's, Pinter's characters "often struggle to preserve identity and, by extension, to survive, engage in a conflict that becomes a life-and-death battle" (Prentice *Ethic*, xxiii). In Pinter, there is an urge for exerting one's existence, as well. In this respect, Pinter, like the existentialists, disengages himself from the rational devices of characterization, and is concerned with an existential anguish and the idea that "existence precedes essence". Walter Kerr, who talks about Pinter's existential technique, suggests that Pinter involves us in a Kafkaesque world of anxiety for existence (Burkman *Dramatic*, 7).

Pinter's characters experience a menace based on a problem of identity as they often fail to preserve their sense of self, which is gradually defined by outside powers. "Identity in *The Birthday Party*, and much of Pinter's work, grounded in outward position, remains relative to other people who grant or withdraw approval" (Prentice *Ethic*, 34). In *The Birthday Party*, Stanley Webber is trapped in his past identity in which he looks for security, a way out of his present distracted sense of self. He keeps mentioning his former career as a successful pianist, just as Joseph K. does with his superior position in the bank. He finds comfort in his past identity, and recollects: "I've played the piano all over the world. All over the country" (*Birthday*, 16). However, what he can only do is to miss his old days as he is reduced to a lower status now. According to his recollections of the past, he was an important figure as a pianist, but one day, the place where people come to listen to him play the piano was closed down by some unknown powers. From that day on, he has become someone without a purpose in life, and his status as a musician in the society has been lowered. As a result, he loses his self-confidence; he does not believe in his own capabilities any longer. Meg asks him when he is going to play the piano again, and he replies, "I can't, can I?" (*Birthday*, 15). He is aware of the fact that everything is very different now: "the way some people look at me you'd think I was a different person. I suppose I've changed, but I'm still the same man that I always was" (*Birthday*, 34). Consequently, he is involved in anguish for his self; he searches for a way to assert his identity, hence, asks Meg, "Tell me, Mrs Boles, when you address yourself to me, do you ever ask yourself who exactly you are talking to?" (*Birthday*, 15). He has a strong desire to be accepted as a worthy individual, a wish others fail to fulfill.

The others' "gaze and actions become a mirror in which Stanley sees reflected his "essence"" (Silverstein, 29). To his dismay, however, he sees a different self from his expectations within this mirror. His sense of identity is deconstructed by the menacing forces, particularly when he is reduced into a state of insignificance. Therefore, he desires to be someone other than himself in the eyes of the people. For this purpose, he lies to Lulu about his day, saying that he has been at the beach in order to appear as if he was busy, and not

someone sitting at home all day long. Disbelieving him, Lulu reproaches Stanley, and offers him a mirror to enable him a more clear understanding of himself:

> Do you want to have a look at your face? […] You could do with a shave, do you know that? […] Don't you ever go out? (*He does not answer.*) I mean, what do you do, just sit around the house like this all day long? (*Pause.*) Hasn't Mrs Boles got enough to do without having you under her feet all day long? (*Birthday*, 19)

His newly-found identity does not make him happy; his self-image does begin to shatter as he loses his self-confidence. He does not view himself as the old successful pianist any more. His disillusionment in himself is so big that he looks in the mirror once more when Lulu leaves. He washes his face immediately as if he is trying to wipe his reconstructed image off. However, when he slips on his glasses, Stanley sees what he in reality is: anything but the victim the two strangers come for. He realizes that Goldberg and McCann are the emissaries of an ominous system. Thus, like Joseph K., a sense of guilt is imposed upon Stanley, who has become a victim of this mental menace.

Martin Esslin puts forward that "the problems of identity" is one of the most significant problems Pinter characters deal with, particularly in *The Birthday Party* (*Pinter*, 38). An awareness of menace is aroused when the two strangers come to fetch Stanley, whose manners change considerably due to a sense of terror, and he becomes more and more illogical just like a child. Regressing into the consciousness of a child, Stanley fails to play the boy's drum Meg gives him as a birthday present. He is driven deranged and hysterical by the interference of the two emissaries into his routine life: "Halfway round the beat becomes erratic, uncontrolled. MEG expresses dismay. He arrives at her chair, banging the drum, his face and the drumbeat now savage and possessed" (*Birthday*, 30). Disintegrated, he loses his previous sense of self as he plays the drum as if he were a child although what he plays is not even a piano. His agreement with playing this simpler instrument hints at his acceptance of his new deformed identity which is constructed as soon as he is departed from his musical profession, hence from receiving people's respect. Moreover, in the hands of the mysterious organization, he has become nothing. Both Goldberg

and McCann undermine his identity by questioning: “Who does he think he is?”; “Who do you think you are?” (*Birthday*, 42). Consequently, he complies with their motives of deconstructing his self-image the moment he sees himself as helpless as a little boy, or a nonentity.

Finally, Stanley Webber begins to shatter; he loses his self-confidence. He is no longer a whole individual; as the questioning of the two men overtakes his capacity to respond them all, he starts to suffer from several disorders which indicate his disintegration as an individual:

> GOLDBERG. Why did you come here?
> STANLEY. My feet hurt!
> GOLDBERG. Why did you stay?
> STANLEY. I had a headache!
> GOLDBERG. Did you take anything for it?
> STANLEY. Yes.
> GOLDBERG. What?
> STANLEY. Fruit salts!
> GOLDBERG. Enos or Andrews?
> STANLEY. En – An – (*Birthday*, 42)

His mental state leads to a physical breakdown. In the end, he begins to stutter, not being able to assert himself properly. He becomes illogical and hesitant. Finally, he breaks up entirely, and “screams” (*Birthday*, 46). Furthermore, Stanley’s drum is broken during the turmoil of his birthday party, and symbolically his musical identity, with which he finds comfort, is destroyed.

Stanley’s existential anguish is reflected in his deep crave for a change of name, and finding security in a new identity other than his own. Although we cannot know for sure whether Stanley has already changed his name or not, it is hinted at in the two men’s accusations that he has adopted an assumed name, and he acknowledges that he has forgotten his real name. William suggests that in this play the sense of identity is shadowy and enigmatic since “[n]ames are confused, identities shuffled” (20). As the original name gives him a sense of failure, Stanley desires to assign to himself another name, as if his essence would also change when he is named differently. Goldberg considers this a sin:

> GOLDBERG. Webber! Why did you change your name?
> STANLEY. I forgot the other one.
> GOLDBERG. What’s your name now?
> STANLEY. Joe Soap.
> GOLDBERG. You stink of sin. (*Birthday*, 44)

He fails to assign a healthy self-definition to himself; so he is left without a sense of self. This menace damages his integrity as an individual, which renders him completely helpless in the face of the threatening powers.

Another Pinter play that embodies the existential aspect of Kafkaesque menace is *The Caretaker*, where the tramp called Davies wages a battle for his existence within his mundane activities. Esslin informs that the play renders "[m]an's existential fear, not as an abstraction, not as a surreal phantasmagoria, but as something real, ordinary and acceptable as an everyday occurrence" (*Pinter*, 36). This anguish permeates Davies's whole life, including even his search for a shelter, a pair of shoes, and a secure occupation. Davies is grateful to Aston, who let him have a rest in his room after he rescues him from the bad treatment of his former employers: "I'm obliged to you, letting me … letting me have a bit of a rest, like … for a few minutes" (*Caretaker*, 10-11). Since he lacks a secure place to live in, he is very much concerned with weather conditions: "Yes, well, you'd be well out of the draught there. […] You'd be well out of it. It's different when you're kipping out. […] Nothing but the wind" (*Caretaker*, 11). He can easily see Aston's advantageous position owing to his possession of a safe room; however, Davies has to cope with difficult weather conditions without a shelter. He in fact begins to see his acquaintance with Aston a big opportunity for him to get a place to live; thus, he keeps asking, "This your house then, is it?" (*Caretaker*, 13). His another concern is to find a pair of shoes because his own shoes are very old: "I'll tell you what, mate, you haven't got a spare pair of shoes? […] Shoes? It's life and death to me. I had to go all the way to Luton in these" (*Caretaker*, 13, 14). He is also in need of a job with which he can survive; Aston wants to send him away, but he refuses to go, claiming he has been offered a job by Mick: "I'm staying on here as caretaker! Get it! Your brother, he's told me, see, he's told me the job is mine. Mine! So that's where I am. I'm going to be his caretaker" (*Caretaker*, 68). Davies, just like other victims of this menace, is frightened of the view of others who discern him as an inferior being, and ultimately as nothing.

People's view of Davies as dirt poses a threat to his sense of individuality. Therefore, he is so much obsessed with the idea of filth

throughout the play since an implicit connection exists between him and everything dirty according to his suppressors. At the very outset, he complains about the people who are "treating [him] like dirt" (*Caretaker*, 8). When his former employer asks him to do some dirty work, he gets resentful as his real job involves cleaning, rather than dealing with rubbish:

> Comes up to me, parks a bucket of rubbish at me tells me to take it out the back. It's not my job to take out the, bucket! They got a boy there for taking out the bucket. I wasn't engaged to take out buckets. My job's cleaning the floor, clearing up the tables, doing a bit of washing-up, nothing to do with taking out buckets! (*Caretaker*, 9)

Infuriated, Davies painstakingly tries to free himself from an association with filth. To this end, he gets divorced fortnight after his wedding merely because his wife has left a pile of her underclothes in a pan for vegetables: "I might have been on the road a few years but you can take it from me I'm clean. I keep myself up. That's why I left my wife" (*Caretaker*, 9). He is in fact upset with being stigmatized on the basis of his inferiority and dirtiness.

He has little tolerance for disorder and filthiness, and he is afraid of being associated with these; he even believes that black people are dirty, and avoids them:

> DAVIES. I mean you don't share the toilet with them. Blacks, do you?
> ASTON. They live next door.
> DAVIES. They don't come in? (*Caretaker*, 18)

He has a longing to prove his own cleanliness because people have always treated him as a person deserving humiliation. What he craves for is to reject this label of inferiority stuck to him; he underscores his obsession with cleanliness: "[A friend of mine] [a]lways slipped me a bit of soap, any time I went in there. Very good soap. They have to have the best soap. I was never without a piece of soap" (*Caretaker*, 13-4). He desires to change people's perception of him, and be associated with something white like a soap rather than black like the people living next door.

Through others' perception, Davies's sense of self-image is redefined. "Thematically, the struggle for dominance dramatizes the frailty of an identity based solely on outward roles and relative position" (Prentice *Ethic*, 33). Just like Joseph K. and Stanley Webber, he begins to see himself through the eyes of others. He tries to disown others' perception of his identity, and asserts: "The

filthy skate an old man like me, I've had dinner with the best" (*Caretaker*, 9). He sees those "best" as more superior than him; hence, being closer to them is an honour to him. In his newly-found shelter Mick, too, degrades him:

> MICK. Listen, son. Listen, sonny. You stink.
> DAVIES. You ain't got no right to –
> MICK. You're stinking the place out. You're an old robber, there's no getting away from it. You're an old skate. You don't belong in a nice place like this. You're an old barbarian. Honest. (*Caretaker*, 35)

In Mick's eyes Davies is involved in robbery, and contaminates the place. Moreover, Mick tries to reshape the old tramp's identity to control him; he compares Davies to some people he knows: "You remind me of my uncle's brother […] I think there was a bit of the Red Indian in him" (*Caretaker*, 31). Davies resents being compared to people of different races. Mick also associates Davies with another man he is acquainted with: "You know, believe or not, you've got a funny kind of resemblance to a bloke I once knew in Shoreditch. […] Dead spit of you he was" (*Caretaker*, 32). Between these two different lives, Davies's own life story is ignored; he is nothing more than a shadowy reflection of others. He can be only defined in terms of other people. These stories aim at undermining Davies's already unstable existence. Not only Mick but also the monk whom he visits in search of a pair of shoes views him as nasty. He goes a long way to see the monk when he hears that he gives away shoes, but the monk treats him as if he was a dog; Davies protests: "I said, what do you think I am, a dog? Nothing better than a dog. What do you think I am, a wild animal?" (*Caretaker*, 15). He is not an individual in the eyes of people. Therefore, the menace inherent in his sense of existence is insurmountable.

Davies pretends to be someone else, concealing his real identity under an assumed name, Bernard Jenkins. His dissatisfaction with his present identity is apparent in his change of name. Thus, his existence has been hanging by a thread either under an alias or without documents which prove who he is:

> ASTON. Why do you want to get down to Sidcup?
> DAVIES. I got my papers there!
> […]
> ASTON. What are they doing at Sidcup?
> DAVIES. A man I know has got them. I left them with him. You see? They prove who I am! I can't move without them papers. They tell you who I am. You see! I'm stuck without them.

ASTON. Why's that?
DAVIES. You see, what it is, you see, 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.
[…]
ASTON. What is your real name, then?
DAVIES. Davies. Mac Davies. That was before I changed my name. (*Caretaker*, 20-1)

Davies experiences the existential being-as-object, not as-subject; thus, he longs to become a subject adopting a pseudonym. Literally, he does not have his own identity papers, which epitomizes his failure of self-definition. Even his place of birth is ambiguous, which underlines his already rootless identity:

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 been?
ASTON. Where were you born then?
DAVIES. I was … uh … oh, it's a bit hard, like, to set your mind back … see what I mean ... going back …. a good way … lose a bit of track, like … you know. … (*Caretaker*, 26)

His forgetfulness shows his desire to avoid the menace of identity. He is so uncomfortable with his past identity.

3.3. Failure of Existence: Literal and Figurative Death

The problem of identity is the most threatening of all types of menace both in Kafka and Pinter as the protagonists lose the only remaining ground to base their lives on. When the characters are deprived of a healthy individuality, they experience either a literal or figurative death. They ultimately give in to the dictates of the larger mechanism.

The protagonist of *The Trial* has a self-destructive urge when he meets the menacing outside world. K.'s pull towards surrender and death is stronger than his pull towards resistance: "Joseph K. exhibits tendencies towards surrender and suicide which form the powerful subterranean drift that counteracts his ever conscious intention and action and pulls him ever further

along toward destruction" (Sokel, 58). In the first day of his arrest, the warders "had sent him to his room and left him alone there, where he had abundant opportunities to take his life" (14-5). The idea of suicide seems natural to bring this suffering to an end.

Joseph K. has had many excruciating experiences with the court, which leads to his death wish. Thus, K. is ready to confront his executioners, and this is because of "his resentment and frustration at the horrors of existence" (Foulkes, 161). One year after his arrest, on the evening before his thirty-first birthday, K. is waiting to fulfill his death wish: "K. was sitting also dressed in black in an arm-chair near the door, […] looking as if he were expecting guests" (*Trial*, 245). When his anticipated guests, the court officials, turn up, he is not hesitant to join them; K. and the two men unite for one common mission: "K. walked rigidly between them, the three of them were interlocked in a unity which would have brought all three down together had one of them been knocked over" (*Trial*, 246). K.'s readiness is because of his consent to his role as a victim. "Having consistently declined to take action against the agents of the court, K. in the end assumes fully the role of victim with which he had already identified himself implicitly" (80). The court's representatives and K. become one with each other, symbolically assenting to his state as a victim and the inevitable punishment. Resolved not to take any counter action, he walks in harmony with his executioners; "the regular correspondence between his steps and the steps of the other two [has] confirmed his thought" of concession. He is now resolute that the only thing he can do is to yield to the mortal dictates of the court.

K. is finally impelled to succumb to the suicidal despair which is introduced to his life with his experience with the court. "The protagonist in Kafka's dream stories is not confronted with a choice he must intellectually consider; his whole *being* is caught in a situation in which it is impossible for him to *live*" (Greenberg, 112). In the end, K. is deprived of an independent sense of self; his point of view of himself matches entirely with that of the destructive authority. Thus, he seems peaceful and happy even in the face of death: "I am grateful for the fact that these half-dumb, stupid creatures have been sent to accompany me on this journey, and that I have been left to say to myself all that

is needed" (*Trial*, 248). Not only for his accusers but also for K. himself, his downfall is necessary. That is why he has completely "submitted himself to the guidance of his escort" as he makes for his fatal destination, "[i]n complete harmony" with his executioners (*Trial*, 248).

His refusal to defy authority is tantamount to his acceptance of guilt. K. loses his sense of identity as well as his reason for living as a result of his interaction with the destructive powers. K.'s death encompasses "the hunger for a lasting meaning" and "a true spiritual striving", which man seeks to gratify himself throughout his life; a failure to do so means the man's real as well as symbolic death (Greenberg, 18). His symbolic death has already occurred; K. is no longer a human being with life giving energy. Therefore, what he wishes is to have his life to end literally, as well. On the way to his execution, he is willing to remove any obstacle that may hinder his aim; he refuses to stop when he sees a policeman, pulling his companions with him to go on:

> The two gentlemen halted, the policeman seemed to be already opening his mouth, but K. forcibly pulled his companions forward. He kept looking round cautiously to see if the policeman was following; as soon as he had put a corner between himself and the policeman he started to run, and his two companions, scant of breath as they were, had to run beside him. (*Trial*, 248-9)

Now, it is not his executioners who lead the way, but Joseph K., who rushes towards his end.

Foulkes explains the connection between the themes of imprisonment and death in Kafka's work: "human life is a life in a cell, and the only way out is that brought by death" (83). He is, in fact, aware of this, and his fervor is mainly because of seeking a way out. The two agents of the court who are designated to kill K. act less promptly than K. himself to accomplish the task:

> Once more the odious ceremonial of courtesy began, the first handed the knife across K. to the second, who handed it across K. back again to the first. K. now perceived clearly that he was supposed to seize the knife himself, as it travelled from hand to hand above him, and plunge it into his own breast. (250)

The court has already deaden his authentic sense of identity and will for existence; so he agrees to the role of his own executioner.

Kafka paints a bleak picture of his protagonist's death with the use of a theatre-image. As if everything is preordained, characters helplessly act out their

roles; Joseph K., in his black costume, awaits his final act where he will be slain by "[t]enth-rate old actors" (*Trial*, 245) or "tenors" (246). Perhaps the metaphorical use of the theatre serves to speak for the helplessness of the character whose deeds are premeditated by the stage director/court, and whose fatal end is predestined. K. is not oblivious of his inevitable death, and willingly takes part in this drama:

> 'Tenth-rate old actors they send for me,' said K. to himself, glancing round again to confirm the impression. 'They want to finish me off cheaply.' He turned abruptly towards the men and asked: 'What theatre are you playing at?' 'Theatre?' said one, the corners of his mouth twitching as he looked for advice to the other, who acted as if he were a dumb man struggling to overcome an unnatural disability. 'They're not prepared to answer questions,' said K. to himself and went to fetch his hat. (*Trial*, 245-6)

His executioners, like K. himself, are actors in this theatre of the court, all participating in a dumb show. The men's part does not involve answering questions; they are only to act in accordance with the court's directions. K. is to perform his role of a victim. Ready to act, he wears his stage costume and his hat, and sets off for his final journey. He acts in complete harmony with his fellow actors under the shadow of the grand court; the company of these theatrical figures makes him happy on his last journey: "I am grateful for the fact that these half-dumb, stupid creatures have been sent to accompany me on this journey" (*Trial*, 248). K.'s life is a scenario written by the court, and he has no contribution in it except for playing his own part in the finale. Therefore, the image of a theatre makes it plain for the victim that there is no way out except his death.

Like Kafka's Joseph K., Pinter characters often end in a metaphorical death at the end of their everlasting struggle with the menacing organizations. Pinter, like his antecedent, adopts a predominantly pessimistic attitude towards his characters' ends. Almost none of his protagonists manage to get out of the menace oppressing them, most being submitted to an ambiguous end. Whatever the type of menace is – physical or psychological, the characters become failures in existence. In *The Dumb Waiter*, the grossly sensed terror concludes with an implication of the murder of the questioning character, Gus. Similarly, in *One For the Road*, there is a corporeal death, the murder of the son, Nicky, as part of

a derogatory process of physical and mental torment of the protagonist, Victor. Mountain Language presents the death of language, the death of communication, which also brings the unavoidable end of mountain people who are finally rendered speechless, just like being dead. Menace is psychological in *A Slight Ache*, where the previously dominant Edward is threatened by a sense of emotional exclusion; yet his end is similar to the other characters in Pinter's plays since his final replacement by the match-seller suggests his metaphorical death. The tramp in *The Caretaker* experiences the same kind of existential annihilation when he is finally rejected by the two brothers. *The Birthday Party* is the most expressive play in terms of portraying the existential anguish of the protagonist in relation to his sense of a failed identity.

Stanley Webber's catastrophe in *The Birthday Party* resonates strongly with Joseph K.'s final breakdown of identity. Both protagonists' failure of being coincides with their birthdays, which may signify that they are reborn into an identity different from their original identities. It is also an ironic birth because the menace brings both characters' existence to an end. Stanley's birthday party is ironically arranged by his oppressors, McCann and Goldberg, who say: "There's a gentleman living here. He's got a birthday today, and he's forgotten all about it. So we're going to remind him. We're going to give him a party" (*Birthday*, 27). Obviously, the victim's birthday is more significant for his tormentors than for himself, which reveals the real meaning of rebirth, or death. Stanley will never be the same person any more as he is going to be turned into someone whose sense of self is reconstructed by the organization. Goldberg's motives to reduce Stanley into being "a corpse" are manifest in his description of his victim's birth:

> What a thing to celebrate – birth! Like getting up in the morning. […] Your skin's 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 nose is clogged up, your feet stink, what are you but a corpse waiting to be washed? (*Birthday*, 39)

Goldberg's definition of birth and his metaphor of a corpse are combined to reflect Stanley's situation; he is celebrating not only being born but also dying. That is why he experiences a violent breakdown just after his birthday; he has

become invisible, and he is almost dead. Goldberg explains his existential collapse: "The birthday celebration was too much for him. […] What came over him? Breakdown, Mr Boles. Pure and simple. Nervous breakdown" (*Birthday*, 65). His birthday has in fact given an impetus to his end. Petey Boles is also perplexed at the haste in which his disintegration takes place: "But what brought it so suddenly?" (*Birthday*, 65). Upon this question, Goldberg replies: "with certain people … it's a foregone conclusion" (*Birthday*, 66). For him, Stanley's fatality is not unusual as he knows that he is doomed to this end by the large mechanism, and it is impossible for him to flee his end.

In the eyes of the organization, Stanley is nothing more than a dead man; his figurative death is announced by Goldberg and McCann:

> MCCANN. Who are you, Webber?
> GOLDBERG. What makes you think you exist?
> MCCANN. You're dead.
> GOLDBERG. You're dead. You can't live, you can't think, you can't love. You're dead. You're a plague gone bad. There's no juice in you. You're nothing but an odour! (*Birthday*, 46)

Stanley does not exist in their view; his symbolical death occurs as he is left without "juice", essence, or without the capacity to think or love. He is also inarticulate and motionless at the end as if he perished: "*They begin to woo him, gently and with relish. […]* STANLEY *shows no reaction. He remains, with no movement, where he sits*" (76). He has become unresponsive, just like a dead person; he does not move, either. He has become what the menacing organization wants him to be; Goldberg acknowledges that they will be in control of the rest of his life: "From now on, we'll be the hub of your wheel" (*Birthday*, 76); they will be at the centre of his life; his every movement will be led by them. As a result of his being left without a centre, hence a purpose for living, Stanley begins to fall apart:

> STANLEY'*s hands clutching his glasses begin to tremble.* […] STANLEY *concentrates, his mouth opens, he attempts to speak, fails and emits sounds from his throat.* […] *He concentrates. His head lowers, his chin draws into his chest, he crouches.* […] STANLEY'*s body shudders, relaxes, his head drops, he becomes still again, stooped.* (*Birthday*, 78)

He cannot command his body; he loses track of his hands and his head; losing his physical abilities indicates his gradual death, and his loss of identity.

McCann and Goldberg begin a new tactic to confuse and break down Stanley. They alternate promises, "We'll watch over you […] Advice you […] Give you proper care and treatment" (*Birthday*, 76), with downgrading, "You've gone from bad to worse […] You're on the verge […] You're a dead duck" (*Birthday*, 76). They also tell him that he will be reformed by them, "you'll be re-orientated […] You'll be adjusted […] You'll be integrated" (*Birthday*, 77-8). The fast bombardment of these messages renders Stanley totally inarticulate:

> STANLEY *concentrates, his mouth open, he attempts to speak, fails and emits sound from his throat.*
> STANLEY. Uh-gug … uh-gug … eeehhh-gag … (*On the breath.*) Caahh … caahh. …. (*Birthday*, 78)

Esslin contents that Stanley "is in a state of catatonic trance, unable to speak, without any human reaaction" (*Pinter* 79). His failure of self-definition means his figurative death. Unlike Joseph K.'s, his real death is not suggested; however, it is revealed to Petey that "He needs special treatment", and for this purpose, he will be taken to Monty, the invisible leader of the organization (79). Being taken to Monty is a potential destructive end for Stanley; he no longer exists.

The theatre-image, which pictures a gloomy picture of Joseph K.'s death also exists in *The Birthday Party*. Stanley's drama opens its curtains with the arrival of Goldberg and McCann, who assume the role of a stage-director. Goldberg is very authoritative, and keeps giving orders unceasingly, and telling people what to do, like a stage-director. The birthday party is a play where they all act their own parts with perfection. First Meg, and then Goldberg gives a speech, at the end of which "Lulu and Meg applaud" (50). Goldberg instructs McCann to switch on and turn off the stage lights according to the mood: "Turn out the light, McCann, while we drink the toast" (50). He shouts "Lights!" as if this is the part of the role he has to act out. Therefore, Stanley's plight is uncontrollable since it is to happen as a requisite of the scenario; he has no means to reverse his inevitable end. Similarly, just like K., Stanley is accompanied by two agents of the mechanism on his way to death; he is also dressed in a dark suit, led by McCann, who is reminiscent of the warders that take K.'s arms: "*He ushers in* STANLEY, *who is dressed in a dark well-cut suit*

and white collar. He holds his broken glasses in his hands. He is clean-shaved. MCCANN *follows and closes the door*" (75). K. and Stanley are equally submissive on their last journey, permitting their tormentors to lead the way for them. "STANLEY *stares blankly at the floor*" (75).

The theatre metaphor appears in the last chapter of *The Trial* and at the end of *The Birthday Party*; the two protagonists are sent to their deaths accompanied by two actor-like men. This image suggests that man's situation is absurd, and, in fact, nothing more than a play where the characters assume the role of dumb actors as they become more and more reticent and docile.

CHAPTER 4

MAN'S DEFENSE MECHANISMS TO COPE WITH MENACE

The characters, in both Kafka's and Pinter's works, make use of some defense mechanisms to cope with menace. Even though the individual suffers profoundly in the hands of the threatening system, he still employs a number of mechanisms to regain his sense of integration. Characters question the system in their own ways to gain insight to its nature. Evasiveness and inaction are helpful in situations where the dominant character exerts his/her power by means of the information obtained through questioning the victim. As information becomes a forceful weapon, each party strives to conceal his/her identity to possess the power; thus, silence becomes an effective defensive mechanism for this purpose. However, this methods may sometimes prove fruitless and the individuals find a salvation in self-delusion and denial of reality as the reality itself is essentially ruthless.

4.1. Insight and Questioning the System

Joseph K.'s confrontation with the court costs him a lot of time and energy; he has to follow some strategies in order to maintain his existence when endangered by the omnipotent court. As the court has a paradoxical nature its members are left in the dark about their own cases, including that of Joseph K. However, K. appears to be aware of the corruptness in which the court carries out its proceedings. This consciousness leads him to develop his own tactics to deal with the forces victimizing him. He strives for an insight that will enable him to fight against the court. For this purpose, he attempts at questioning the system even though such attempts usually prove ineffective.

In his first encounter with the court in the interrogation chamber, K. responds to his plight with self-confidence, and rationalizes about the exact

nature of the system accusing him, and even challenges the judge by speaking "sharply": "He has spoken sharply, more sharply than he had intended, but with every justification" (*Trial*, 49). The initial messages he gives to his judges are self-assurance and defiance, which are reflected in his provocative speech. When the Examining Magistrate mistakes him for an interior decorator, he answers with contempt: "This question of yours, Herr Examining Magistrate, about my being a house-painter […] is typical of the whole character of this trial that is being foisted on me" (*Trial*, 49). He implies that the court has full of mistakes, and that he can discern them. Filled with self-praise, he even expects applause from the observers in the court room: "His words should have merited applause of some kind, yet all was still" (*Trial*, 49). What he gets is silence both from the audience and the judge. As a result, his over-confidence begins gradually to fade away.

In the rest of his speech at the court, K. seems to be questioning the meaninglessness of his arrest, and the shallow nature of the court. K. goes on challenging the judge by underscoring the uselessness of the law recorded in his note-book:

> 'That won't help you much,' K. continued; 'your very note-book, Herr Examining Magistrate, confirms what I say.' Emboldened by the mere sound of his own cool words in that strange assembly, K. simply snatched the note-book from the Examining Magistrate and held it up with the tips of his fingers, as if it might soil his hands, by one of the middle pages, so that the closely written, blotted, yellow-edged leaves hung down on either side. 'These are the Examining Magistrate's records,' he said, letting it fall on the table again. 'You can continue reading again at your ease, Herr Examining Magistrate, I really don't fear this ledger of yours though it is a closed book to me, for I would not touch it except with my finger-tips and cannot even take it in my hand.' (*Trial*, 50)

K.'s daring protests against the law making a judgment on him are signs of rebellion and distrust at the court. According to K., most of the procedures of the court are so rotten that he opts to keep away from it by holding the judges's note-book only with his finger-tips and rejecting a full contact with it. He further humiliates the judge and the law by expressing his fearlessness. He interprets the Examining Magistrate's reaction as "a sign of deep humiliation" when the latter

takes up the note-book and resumes reading it (*Trial*, 50). In this respect, K.'s courage at the face of the accusations is noteworthy.

Joseph K. assumes a role of a representative of public as he makes his speech not only for his own sake but also for the benefit of others for whom he will set an example. He asserts that his case is "only a single instance and as such of no great importance" and that "it is representative of a misguided policy which is being directed against many other people as well" (*Trial*, 51). He wages his battle against the court so as to unveil its true nature, and to shed a light on others' conception of it: "All I desire is the public ventilation of a public grievance. Listen to me. Some ten days ago I was arrested, in a manner that seems ridiculous even to myself, though it is immaterial at the moment" (*Trial*, 51). He sees his arrest ludicrous and meaningless, and seeks to gain further perception of it. K. keeps emphasizing that the court is a degenerate organization by describing it as a judicial hierarchy in which "innocent persons are accused of guilt, and senseless proceedings are put in motion against them" (*Trial*, 54-5).

Due to his thirst for insight, he needs to pry deeper into the organization when he manages to establish a contact with it. In his conversation with the Advocate, K. expects to find him more questioning than he really is: "To begin with, he had hardly cross-questioned him at all. And there were so many questions to put. To ask questions was surely the main thing" (*Trial*, 126-7). For him, such questions are significant as a way of understanding the court in depth. He is not far from attaining a real understanding of his accusers: "K. must have discovered from experience that the very lowest grade of the court organization was by no means perfect and contained venal and corrupt elements" (*Trial*, 130). K. is bribed by the lower warders of the court, hence he can associate them with such "corrupt and venal elements" (*Trial*, 130). To deal with his case, he prefers unusual ways and tactics which are far from the court's orders. The court wants the accused to hand in his case totally to the advocates without ever interfering with it; K.'s resolution to withdraw his case from the Advocate and to deal with it personally is an unyielding behavior: "The Court would encounter for once an accused man who knew how to stick up for his rights" (*Trial*, 141).

Eventually, Kafka's protagonist refuses to succumb entirely to the power of the court, and employs the defensive device of questioning the system so as to assert himself better.

In Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter*, Gus, bears a resemblance to Joseph K. in that both men challenge the system that they are associated with. Gus and Ben are duty bound to kill a number of people in the guidance of the organization; however, it is only Gus who keeps expressing serious misgivings about their murderous acts. His end is similar to Joseph K.'s; both are sent to their death. Laan claims that according to many critics, this occurs "because [Gus] has begun to ask too many questions rather than, like Ben, continuing blindly to obey the orders of the organization employing them" (118). Gus is aware of a self-deficiency in choosing his own acts, so he resorts to some defensive mechanisms in order to regain his self-esteem.

Gus's need for an insight is apparent at the very outset of the play when he keeps asking questions incessantly, which disturbs Ben:

> GUS. What time is he getting in touch?
> BEN *reads.*
> What time is he getting in touch?
> BEN. What's the matter with you? It could be any time. Any time.
> GUS (*moves to the foot of* BEN*'s bed*). Well, I was going to ask you something.
> BEN. What?
> GUS. Have you noticed the time that tank takes to fill. (*Dumb*, 115-6)

Gus wonders when Wilson, the order-giver, will get in touch with them, which is actually unquestionable since their communication with the authority is unilateral. He also asks about the condition of the room they are in so that he can make sense of their situation:

> GUS *wanders downstage, looks out front, then all about the room.*
> I wouldn't like to live in this dump. I wouldn't mind if you had a window, you could see what it looked like outside.
> BEN. What do you want a window for?
> GUS. Well, I like to have a bit of a view, Ben. It whiles away the time.
> *He walks about the room.*
> I mean, you come into a place when it's still dark, you come into a room you've never seen before, you sleep all day, you do your job, and then you go away in the night again.
> *Pause*.

> I like to get a look at the scenery. You never get the chance in this job. (*Dumb*, 117-8)

Gus desperately looks for a better understanding of his own situation; however, they are left in the dark as to the nature of their job and the place where this secret task takes place.

Although Gus is always complaining about their situation, Ben remains content. The partners differ in their sense of satisfaction with their occupation:

> BEN. How often do we do a job? Once a week? What are you complaining about?
> GUS. Yes, but we've got to be on tap though, haven't we? You can't move out of the house in case a call comes.
> […]
> GUS. Don't you ever get a bit fed up?
> BEN. Fed up? What with?
> *Silence*. (*Dumb*, 118)

As a pliant agent, Ben is always prepared to accomplish the task given whereas Gus gets sick of it most of the time.

Gus's questioning never ceases, particularly when he realizes that the organization begins to care less and less for them; Gus strives to learn the reason for this. He is not happy about the place: "It's worse than the last one. Remember that last place we were in? Last time, where was it? At least there was a wireless there. No, honest. He doesn't seem to bother much about our comfort these days" (*Dumb*, 119). However, Ben is fed up with these questions, and tries to prevent them: "When are you going to stop jabbering?" (*Dumb*, 119). Gus also notices another change in the authority: that they have "always had clean sheets laid on up till now" (*Dumb*, 120), and they do not have any now. Ben never occupies his mind with such incidents. To his dismay, Gus delves more and more into his senior partner's behavior as well as that of the mechanism. The whole conversation between them is based on this kind of questioning. Gus harbours suspicions about the ill-intentions of the organization by now; he tries to understand where Ben stands in this business. He asks some simple questions, too, even though he would know the answer: "What town are we in? I've forgotten" and "Eh, it's Friday today, isn't it? It'll be Saturday tomorrow" (*Dumb*, 121). Although he gets no answers to his questions, he goes on asking some more hoping to relieve his anxiety.

Ben opts merely to ignore his companion's quarries, or pretends not to understand his meaning in the questions:

> GUS. That's what I was wondering about.
> BEN. What?
> GUS. The job.
> BEN. What job?
> GUS (*tentatively*). I thought perhaps you might know something.
> BEN *looks at him.*
> I thought perhaps you – I mean – have you got any idea – who it's going to be tonight?
> BEN. Who what's going to be?
> *They look at each other.*
> GUS (*at length*). Who it's going to be?
> Silence. (*Dumb*, 128)

They are not supposed to know anything about their job and their victims; yet, Gus wonders who is going to be the next victim, perhaps sensing his own end. Gus's position is dangerous particularly because he refuses to accept the established order, and to perform the predetermined mission given by the organization. He attempts to change the usual order and the procedures of the job; although they normally have their tea afterwards, he insists they have their coffee before the task is completed: "I like to have one before. […] I hope he's got a shilling, anyway, if he comes. He's entitled to have. After all, it's his place, he could have seen there was enough gas for a cup of tea" (*Dumb*, 128). Ben asks, "What's the matter with you?", which implies the change in his friend, who is no longer devoted to the rules. In their customary performance of the job, they are allowed to have tea after the mission is completed, but Gus wants to alter this, and have his tea before fulfilling the task. He further criticizes the authoritarian figure, Wilson, for not arranging the setting properly for their comfort.

In his attempt to grasp everything around him, Gus also tries to make sense of his partner's actions, which makes Ben annoyed.

> BEN *garbs the paper, which he reads.*
> (*Rising, looking down at* BEN). How many times have you read that paper?
> BEN *slams the paper down and rises.*
> BEN (*angrily*). What do you mean?
> GUS. I was just wondering how many times you'd –
> BEN. What are you doing, criticizing me?
> GUS. No, I was just –

> BEN. You'll get a swipe round your earhole if you don't watch your step. (*Dumb*, 130)

Gus's quarries become more and more irritating for Ben. These questions in fact hint at Gus's distrust of the organization. He tries to pry deeper into the mysterious system:

> Who clears up after we've gone? I'm curious about that. Who does the clearing up? Maybe they don't clear up. Maybe they just leave them there, eh? What do you think? How many jobs have we done? Blimey, I can't count them. What if they never clear anything up after we've gone? (*Dumb*, 131)

Gus is also suspicious that something sinister goes on when he understands that the place cannot be a café: "How can this be a café? […] Have you seen the gas stove? […] It's only got three rings. […] Well, you couldn't cook much on three rings, not for a busy place like this" (*Dumb*, 135). Everything happening is beyond his understanding, and renders him uncomfortable with his situation. That is why he asks so many questions to relieve himself of this sense of dread.

Gus's sense of foreboding increases when Ben's final instructions deviate from the previous ones:

> GUS. You've missed something out.
> BEN. I know. What?
> GUS. I haven't taken my gun out, according to you.
> BEN. You take your gun out –
> […]
> GUS. You've never missed that out before, you know that? (*Dumb*, 14)

His last question foreshadows the final scene where Ben shoots him. Questioning the system, their relationship, his own situation, the task itself all through the plan does not save Gus from becoming a victim of menace.

In *The Birthday Party*, Stanley tries to defend himself against the unknown organization by questioning it, just as Gus does. When he learns that two men are going to stay with them in the boarding house, he becomes suspicious, and asks Meg several questions: "What two gentlemen? […] Who are they? […] Didn't [Petey] tell you their names? […] But who are they?" (*Birthday*, 14). He senses that there is something sinister behind their arrival: "Why didn't they come last night? […] But why here? Why not somewhere else?" (*Birthday*, 28). When he meets McCann, he asks, "Staying here long?" to

be able to understand their purpose better (*Birthday*, 31). He asks several times who they are; however, his questions are unanswered just like those of Gus.

Stanley needs to work out the mystery of the two strangers; he asks McCann, "Has [your boss] told you anything? Do you know what you're here for? Tell me. You needn't be frightened of me. Or hasn't he told you?" (*Birthday*, 36). He tires to persuade the men to tell the truth about their unexpected visit: "Look. You look an honest man. You're being made a fool of, that's all. You understand? Where do you come from?" (*Birthday*, 36). He takes a friendly attitude toward McCann in order to beguile him, but the man does not seem to be affected.

When Stanley meets Goldberg, he still believes he can tell them to go away: "Why don't you just go, without any more fuss?" (*Birthday*, 39). Gradually, the two men start interrogating Stanley. This happens so unexpectedly that his questions now become more anxious and repetitive:

> GOLDBERG. Webber, what were you doing yesterday?
> STANLEY. Yesterday?
> GOLDBERG. […] What did you do the day before yesterday?
> STANLEY. What do you mean?
> GOLDBERG. […] Why are you getting in everybody's way?
> STANLEY. Me? What are you –
> […]
> GOLDBERG. Why do you behave so badly, Webber? […]
> STANLEY. Me?
> GOLDBERG. Why do you treat that young lady like a leper? […]
> STANLEY. What the – (*Birthday*, 41-2)

Stanley had the upper hand with his questions for a while. Now he himself becomes the object of ruthless questioning. Overwhelmed by an exhaustive number of questions, he is silenced in the end. This strategy used by Pinterian characters for gaining insight into menace is doomed to failure once more in Stanley's case.

The strategy of questioning involves a desire for salvation from menace both in Kafka and Pinter. Their characters crave for a better understanding of their plight; however, they are neither illuminated nor rescued from their irretrievable situation. Even though their questions aim at clarifying the ambiguous plans of their manipulators, they fail. Thus, this defense mechanism

employed by the victims proves fruitless when they are opposed by the unfathomable power of the mechanism.

4.2. Silence, Inaction and Evasiveness

Silence is one of the strategies Kafka's and Pinter's characters use when they attempt to protect themselves from the menacing powers. Their sense of identity is subjected to a change in the hands of the system, so they try to make themselves as invisible as possible to minimize the damage. Various organizations in both Kafka's and Pinter's plays torment their subjects both physically and mentally; on the other hand, the victims desire to reduce their exposure to such violence by keeping reticent and refusing to counteract. Thus, inaction and evasiveness are effective in situations where the characters lack other means of struggle, and find the sense of security they seek in their silence.

In *The Trial* Joseph K. uses a furtive language as a strategy in his everlasting struggle with the court. Kafka's use of language bears some resemblances to that of the absurdists in the use of an evasive language. There is often a longing for clarity of meaning on the part of the characters who wish to understand each other more clearly. In Kafka, there is "a focus upon dialogue, with its attendant strategies, imprecisions, and elements of indeterminacy" (Alan, 35). In this respect, Kafka is like a dramatist who is engaged in a predilection for gaps and breaks in the conversations of his characters:

> Conversation, for them [Kafka's characters], is a constant struggle to understand and be understood: it involves a frustrating attempt to realize clarity of expression, to enumerate all the possible senses of a given statement, and is often supplemented by efforts to modulate body language … and understand the gestures of others. (Alan, 36)

Although this sense of ambiguity worsens K.'s own plight, what he desires to do is to respond to the court in the same way; by maintaining his silence he wants to seem more mysterious, hence less vulnerable to the threat of the system.

When Joseph K. is accused of being late for his first interrogation despite not being informed of an exact time for the appointment, he "made up his mind

to observe rather than speak, consequently he offered no defence of his alleged lateness in arriving and merely said: 'Whether I am late or not, I am here now.'" (*Trial*, 47). His response is one of defiance and a veiled protest against the court's inconsistencies. He also seems to be concerned with proving his self-importance with this answer. He is, in fact, momentarily successful in his crave for power, which he attains, when the audience is aroused by his statement as "[a] burst of applause followed" (*Trial*, 47). He preserves his self-worth in front of the court, by avoiding excusing himself.

K.'s silence is frequently accompanied by his refusal to act. He avoids taking action against his trial. Most of the time, he is irresolute. He makes up his mind, but then he acts to the contrary; for instance, while going to the interrogation chamber for his first interrogation, initially he decides to hurry up, but later on he slows down until he arrives there late. His uncle comes to the bank to help him, and sees his lack of concern about the arrest. He asks, "What's this I hear, Joseph?" (*Trial*, 103). Yet, K. remains inarticulate and motionless for the time being:

> K. said nothing, he knew what was coming, but being suddenly released from the strain of exacting work, he signed himself for the moment to a pleasant sense of indolence and gazed out through the window at the opposite side of the street, of which only a small triangular section could be seen from where he was sitting, a slice of empty house-wall between two shop-windows. (*Trial*, 103)

He lacks the anxiety of someone who has already learned that he is arrested, and lets himself become indolent, and busies his mind idly gazing out of the window. Then, his uncle blames him for his passiveness: " 'You sit there staring out of the window!' cried his uncle, flinging up his arms. 'For God's sake, Joseph, answer me. Is it true? Can it be true?' " (*Trial*, 103). His response is again far from being revealing: "I don't know in the least what you mean." (*Trial*, 103). The following phase of their conversation also indicates K.'s evasive attitude towards his own case, and his uncle's annoyance at this: " 'And you sit there coolly with a criminal case hanging round your neck?' cried his uncle, his voice growing louder and louder. 'The cooler I am, the better in the end,' said K." (*Trial*, 105). Then, he asserts, "it's no use getting excited, it's as useless on your part as it would be on mine" (*Trial*, 108). His uncle is willing to

take him to an advocate for a consultation, but K. becomes reluctant, and tries to delay the visit: "It was not very flattering to be driven to a poor man's lawyer as a petitioner" (*Trial*, 109). When he cannot avoid the visit, he spoils the consultation by leaving the advocate's room in the middle of the discussion to meet the advocate's maid. All his inertia shows his lack of making any progress in the proceedings with the court. That is why the events accompanying his case appear to have a static feature; everything seems to move slowly as he keeps procrastinating both in speech and action in the course of his trial.

Silence and evasion often permeate Pinter's plays, "once labeled 'comedies of menace', are chiefly comedies of elusion, avoidance, withdrawal, mendacity and guile. Because his language is a language of escapist manoeuvring, which studiously avoids the commitment of a conflict or confrontation" (Almansi, 19). His language usually consists of silences and pauses in the dialogs in which his characters aim to evade the fear of confronting a stranger or a danger:

> The Pinterian hero, especially in the early plays, is often as inarticulate as a pig, stumbling pathetically over every second word, covering a pitifully narrow area of meaning with his utterances, blathering through his life. Yet he does not seem to whine and grunt or giggle or grumble to give an outlet to his instincts, desires, passions or fears. He grunts in order to hide something else. Even when he grunts […], his grunt is a strategic move, or a lie. (Almansi, 19-20)

Pinter's characters are often strategists seeking ways of elusion to make up for their weaknesses, or to hide the truth from others. Therefore, this becomes a commonly-used defense mechanism by Pinter's characters, facing an inevitable menace.

In *One For the Road*, the victim's silence is constant is spite of all the attempts of his tormentor to provoke him to speak or react. Tortured and bruised, Victor is brought into a room where he is exposed to Nicolas's verbal violence. Their conversation is one-sided and dominated by Nicolas; Victor keeps silent:

> NICOLAS
> Tell me something …
> *Silence*.
> What a good-looking-woman your wife is. You're a very lucky man.
> Tell me … one For the Road, I think …

He pours whisky.
You do respect me, I take it?
He stands in front of VICTOR *and looks down at him*. VICTOR *looks up*.
I would be right in assuming that?
Silence.
VICTOR
(*Quietly*) I don't know you. (*Road*, 375)

Nicolas aims to compel Victor to get infuriated by talking about his wife are not fulfilled since Victor keeps silent, refusing to talk to him about his wife. When Nicolas wants to know if he respects him or not, Victor's short response is a sign of contempt since he defies the other's need for respect. Victor persists in keeping silent and claims that he does not know Nicolas well. This is the only way Victor can cope with Nicolas's interrogation.

Victor's relatively fewer words are far from reflecting anything about his fears, hence it becomes an effective strategy. He is further challenged by his oppressor when Nicolas asks, "Is your son all right?" (*Road*, 377). His question is another attempt to foster Victor's rage, and to underscore his helplessness; however, Victor just says, "I don't know" (*Road*, 377). Although Nicolas repeats his question, Victor's response does not change. He uses either a few or no words in order to avoid revealing his anxiety and terror to his opponent. When Nicolas asks if they are friends, there is no reaction but a "*pause*". The questioning moves to another intriguing topic, death; Nicolas asks, "I love death. What about you?", to which Victor responds merely with a pause. (*Road*, 378). His unresponsive attitude aggravates Nicolas's anger, and he becomes more obnoxious:

NICOLAS
Taking about sexual intercourse …
He laughs wildly, stops.
Does she … fuck? Or does she …? Or does she … like … you know … what? What does she like? I'm talking about your wife. Your *wife*.
Pause.
You know the old joke? Does she fuck?
Heavily, in another voice:
Does she fuck!
He laughs.
[…]
Pause. (*Road,* 379)

Even this intimate talk about his wife cannot move Victor, and he remains inert. His persistent lack of speech is more of a protest than a sign of helplessness. Victor possesses no means of defense apart from suppressing speech.

In Pinter's plays what characters say is not often what they mean: "The speech we hear is an indication of that we don't hear. It's a necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, anguished or mocking smokescreen which keeps the other in its place. […] One way of looking at speech is to say it is a constant stratagem to cover nakedness" (Pinter, 14-5). Victor gives up his silence in the end. To end Nicolas's interminable torture, he asks Nicolas to kill him:

VICTOR
Kill me.
NICOLAS
What?
VICTOR
Kill me. (*Road*, 381)

His death wish is another way of defiance because rather than yielding to the inhuman treatment of the organization, he prefers to die.

Towards the end Victor's voice gets almost inaudible, and he becomes more inarticulate. As a last attempt, he inquires about his son. Nicolas's response implies that the boy is killed because of his being a "prick" (*Road*, 395). Victor's final silence carries the pain for his dead child. Even though this defense mechanism is helpful in the beginning, it proves inefficient when the more powerful party employs a greater blow.

In *Mountain Language*, Pinter's concern is also reflecting the individual's use of silence as a defense mechanism. The language in this play loses its function completely, and it becomes a means of torture rather than a way of communication. The elderly woman whose son is imprisoned by the authorities wants to see him in prison; however, she is cruelly treated by the officers. She becomes inarticulate; even when they ask her whether she has any complaints, and what has happened to her hand, she does not respond:

GUARD
He walks over to ELDERLY WOMAN.
What's happened to your hand? Has someone bitten your hand?
The WOMAN *slowly lifts her hand. He peers at it.*
Who did this? Who bit you?
[…]

Which one?
Pause.
Which one?
Pause. (*Mountain*, 13,15)

Her refusal to speak is a way of protecting herself. Her silence also reflects her intimidation; so she tries to avoid being subjected to further exercise of torture.

When the old woman is allowed to talk to her son, the only language she can speak is the mountain language, which is forbidden by the authorities:

The PRISONER *and the* WOMAN *speak in a strong rural accent*.
Silence.
ELDERLY WOMAN
I have bread –
The GUARD *jabs her with a stick*.
GUARD
Forbidden. Language forbidden.
She looks at him. He jabs her.
PRISONER
She can't speak it.
Silence.
She doesn't speak it.
Silence.
ELDERLY WOMAN
I have apples –
The GUARD *jabs her and shouts*. (*Mountain*, 27, 29)

The old woman's reaction is geared to the guard's cruel behaviour, which makes her realize that she needs to be silent.

The role of silence at the end of the play becomes the ultimate way of avoiding menace. The authorities declare that the mountain language is no longer forbidden, and the elderly woman can speak it to communicate with her son; however, her son, "[*t*]*he* PRISONER *has blood on his face. He sits trembling. The* WOMAN *is still*" (*Mountain*, 43). The prisoner is excited about the news, and tells his mother that they can speak in their own language:

PRISONER
Mother, you can speak.
Pause.
Mother, I'm speaking to you. You see? We can speak. You can speak to me in our own language.
She is still.
You can speak.
Pause.
[…]
It's our language.
Pause.
Can't you hear me? Do you hear me?

She does not respond. (*Mountain*, 45)

Thus, she refuses to speak. For the woman the language becomes functionless, and it becomes a barrier rather than a means for communication. It is safer not to use the language. "As a dramatist Pinter explores such inadequacies of words, the presuppositions of speech and the barriers to comprehension" (Brown, 24).

Kafka's and Pinter's characters are reluctant to confront the threatening forces, and they all seek to find comfort in their own silence and inaction, which help them in situations where their revelations can be used as weapons by their manipulators. They are often involved in a deliberate inertia so as to procrastinate a confrontation with menace.

4.3. Denial of reality and self-delusion

The protagonist in *The Trial* not only questions the system but also attempts to get the thoughts of self-accusation out of his mind in order to preserve his sense of self. Denial of the reality is another strategy he utilizes because the reality itself is too severe for him to endure. What he can merely do is to deny the reality and tell a lot of lies about his situation. By doing so, he tries to relieve himself of the pressure that the events of his arrest put on him. He is deeply involved in a process of self-delusion to evade the reality about his arrest. "Joseph K.'s breakdown is a psychologically subtle and long-drawn-out process, involving denial of his problem" (Robertson, 84). His inclination towards a life of delusion and evasion is a defense mechanism for K. to cope with menace.

Joseph K. often tries to rationalize about his failure to act in the process of his trial in order to relieve himself from the responsibility of this failure. Greenberg explains the relationship between Kafka's concept of denial of reality and his characters' justifying their failures: "Man darkens and obscures his knowledge that he is under judgment for his every act and failure to act, by elaborating 'reason' (Motivationen) to account for himself and his life" (115). He deludes himself into thinking that his arrest could have been avoided. He

claims that it is in fact of little significance to him, and he could have dealt with it in a more efficient way if it did not come in a moment when he was unprepared:

> [I]f I had behaved sensibly, nothing further would have happened, all this would have been nipped in the bud. But one is so unprepared. In the Bank, for instance, I am always prepared, nothing of that kind could possibly happen to me there, I have my own attendant, the general telephone and the office telephone stand before me on my desk, people keep coming in to see me, clients and clerks, and above all, my mind is always on my work and so kept on the alert; it would be an actual pleasure to me if a situation like that cropped up in the Bank. (*Trial*, 27)

K. attributes his failure in this event to his unpreparedness. He claims that if he were in the office rather than in his bedroom, he could immediately have got out of this situation. These thoughts, however, reflect his attempts to make up excuses to cover the thought of his helplessness. This is just another lie he is compelled to believe for gaining relief.

All his opinions about the court are actually various ways of self-evasion. On the morning of his arrest, K. thinks that the strange events are only jokes his colleagues have arranged for his birthday: "[O]ne could certainly regard the whole thing as a joke, a rude joke which his colleagues in the Bank had concocted for some unknown reason, perhaps because this was his thirtieth birthday" (*Trial*, 10). Even when he understands that everything is real, he is deluded. During his first interrogation, K. mistakenly believes that he dominates the meeting, and his audience agrees with what he says: "At once there was silence, so completely did K. already dominate the meeting. The audience no longer shouted confusedly as at the beginning, they did not even applaud, they seemed already convinced or on the verge of being convinced" (*Trial*, 54). However, their attention is distracted by the shriek coming from a washer-woman bothered by a man down the hall. Contrary to what he believes, it is not K. who dominates the hall, but a washer-woman. The audience become distracted: "A little circle had formed round them, the gallery spectators near by seemed to be delighted that the seriousness which K. had introduced into the proceedings should be dispelled in this manner" (*Trial*, 55). K.'s attempts to regain his dominance are also undermined:

> K.'s first impulse was to rush across the room, he naturally imagined that everybody would be anxious to have order restored and the offending couple at least ejected from the meeting, but the first rows of the audience remained quite impassive, no one stirred and no one would let him through. On the contrary they actually obstructed him […] it seemed to him as if his freedom were being threatened, as if he were being arrested in earnest […] (*Trial*, 55-6)

To his dismay, K. cannot take over control; he cannot reach the interrupting couple and restore the order. As his way is barred by the people, he feels as if he was really imprisoned. This sense of threat also makes him realize his misinterpretation of his effect on the audience: "Had he been mistaken in these people? Had he over-estimated the effectiveness of his speech?" (*Trial*, 56). The awareness of his situation makes him very disappointed.

K. also tries to evade being frightened of the court. He attempts to seem calm and fearless as his life becomes more and more entangled with the court. Although he denies it, he is startled when he hears the warder shouting, "The Inspector wants you" (*Trial*, 15). In fact, this confrontation frightens him, but he makes up an excuse for his intimidation:

> Then a shout came from the next room which made him start so violently that his teeth rattled against the glass. […] It was merely the tone of it that startled him, a curt, military bark with which he would never have credited the warder Franz. The command itself was actually welcome to him. (*Trial*, 15)

His self-delusion leads him to believe that he is not afraid of the court, but it is only the manner in which the warder call out that makes him startled. He pretends to be defiant when the court officers inform him that he is free to go to work; he replies sarcastically, "I thought I was under arrest?" (*Trial*, 21). This question mistakenly encourages him to speculate about his assumed freedom:

> K. asked the question with a certain defiance, for though his offer to shake hands had been ignored, he felt more and more independent of all these people, especially now that the Inspector had risen to his feet. He was playing with them. He considered the idea of running after them to the front door as they left and challenging them to take him prisoner. (*Trial*, 21)

He deludes himself into thinking that he is powerful enough to play with his opponents, and to challenge them into a battle with him. He further suggests that "being arrested isn't so very bad" (*Trial*, 21); this is another way of rationalization of his situation, and a way of gaining self-respect.

Joseph K. is deluded in the idea of his own importance and power to cope with the court. He feels as if he is confident, but he is nothing more than a petty individual in front of the court. His high position in the bank leads him to think of himself as significant for the court as for his colleagues. He thinks he can easily be excused for being late to work due to his arrest since he holds a high position: " He felt fit and confident, he would miss his work in the Bank that morning, it was true, but that would be easily overlooked, considering the comparatively high post he held there" (*Trial*, 14). He insists on the idea of his independence from the court: "Wasn't he still free enough to flout the authority of this Court once and for all, at least as far as it concerned him? Could he not trust himself to this trifling extent?" (*Trial*, 66). He wants to ignore the authority, and set himself free. He also pretends that he does not care about his case, but in reality he cannot get rid of the thought of it. What he desires to believe is far from the reality about his situation; he regards his arrest as of no importance, and estimates that it will soon be annulled: "I fancy that it has probably been dropped already or will soon be dropped, through the laziness or the forgetfulness or it may be even through the fears of those who are responsible for it" (*Trial*, 63). From his point of view, someone else is responsible for what has happened to him rather than himself, and in this respect, he assumes that the court will soon find out its mistake and set him free. However, all his self-delusion is nothing more than a mere defense mechanism that would only bring relief for a short while.

In Pinter's plays, too, the characters employ some strategies of delusion so as to protect themselves from menace. Laughter is used as a way of evasion from the dread of the outside world and/or strangers. According to Esslin, "much of the laughter that accompanies his plays up to that point where they cease to be funny, is already the laughter of precaution against panic, the whistling in the dark of people who are trying to protect themselves against menace, the horror, which lies at the core of the action they are witnessing" (Pinter *Theatre*, 51). What lies beneath the ludicrous actions of the characters is their need for security and relief.

A Slight Ache revolves around the denial of a situation, which is introduced into the protagonist's life with the existence of a match-seller. Edward not only avoids the reality of the match-seller's growing power, but he also tries to project his own failure and weaknesses onto the match-seller, as a defense mechanism. He tries to convince himself that the stranger is harmless: "I didn't say he wasn't harmless. Of course he's harmless. How could he be other than harmless?" (*Slight*, 176). He also claims that he is not frightened by the presence of the man: "You may think I was alarmed by the look of you. You would be quite mistaken, I wasn't alarmed by the look of you. I did not find you at all alarming. No, no. Nothing outside this room has ever alarmed me" (*Slight*, 187). He is engaged in a self-deceit by underestimating his enemy:

> Frightened of him? Of *him*? Have you seen him?
> [*Pause*.]
> He's like jelly. A great bullockfat of jelly. […] He's almost stone deaf … almost … not quite. He's very nearly dead on his feet. Why should he frighten me? (*Slight*, 189)

He rejects the thought of him as a potential threat to his existence. However, Edward's wife insists, "You're frightened of him" (*Slight*, 178) despite all his protests. "Edward […] is conscious of the uncertainty that lies beyond the walls of his house, and his boasts unintentionally reveal that he sees the matchseller as a fearsome invader. Furthermore, instead of communicating self-confidence, the repeated denial of 'alarm' has the opposite effect of implying fear" (Cahn, 16).

Another strategy he makes use of is to ignore the man altogether; he makes himself busy with his personal work, an essay on time and space, but his wife claims she is not aware that he is working on such a project. This suggests that it is merely an occupation he takes up in order to avoid engaging himself with the man outside their gate too much. According to Cahn, this essay is a way of "seeking escape to less immediate questions" because he fails to deal with his own plight (14). That he writes "theological and philosophical essays" (*Slight*, 183) also underlines his need for proving his self-importance. He wants to believe that what he does is praise-worthy, and quite different from what the match-seller does; he has a strong desire to triumph over the man.

Edward would like to see the stranger as an impotent and powerless individual, so he keeps emphasizing the man's lack of sight. On the other hand, he overlooks his own eye problem. Flora notices the problem in his eyes, which he refuses to admit:

> FLORA: Have you got something in your eyes?
> EDWARD: No. Why do you ask?
> FLORA: You keep clenching them, blinking them.
> EDWARD: I have a slight ache in them.
> FLORA: Oh, dear.
> EDWARD: Yes, a slight ache. As if I hadn't slept. (*Slight*, 172)

He attributes the ache in his eyes to his sleeplessness, and keeps making excuses for this problem. He boasts that he has "excellent" sight (*Slight*, 198); he tries to explain his ailment by blaming it on something in "the airs" or "the change of air, the currents obtaining in the space between [him] and [his] object" which he has difficulty viewing (*Slight*, 198). The problem with his eyes is "a manifestation of psychological pain and emotional vulnerability" (Cahn, 12). He is obsessed with the match-seller's blindness; however, it is his own blindness that he projects onto the other: "He can't see straight. I think as a matter of fact he wears a glass eye" (*Slight*, 189). He asks the man, "Do forgive me peering but is that a glass eye you're wearing?" (*Slight*, 185). Even though he often refers to the old man's blindness, Edward's own emotional blindness prevents him from seeing the truth that the match-seller is replacing him. Prentice regards his evasion ironical:

> The horrible truth Edward wishes to avoid provides the great irony: that Edward is precisely in the matchseller's place in the end. Blind to himself, Edward remains sealed into the skin of his own persona, unconsciously at one with his mask which he fails to perceive is not his best, deepest, or entire self" (*Ethic* 69)

Edward is deluded about the match-seller. During their one-way conversation, only Edward talks, and the old man is quiet. However, the man's silence is a sign of power; he rejects giving himself away, which makes Edward powerless. "Edward's undoing begins in his evasion and deliberate lies about himself and the other" (Prentice *Ethic*, 88-9). According to Edward, the man's silence indicates that the match-seller is "withdrawn": He's a little … reticent. Somewhat withdrawn. It's understandable. I should be the same, perhaps, in his place. Though, of course, I could not possibly find myself in his place" (*Slight*,

188). Later on, when Edward is about to lose his status, he cannot stand the old man feeling sorry for him. Being in an inferior state is unthinkable to Edward: "You're weeping. You're shaking with grief. For me. I can't believe it. For my plight" (*Slight*, 197). He also transfers his own delusion to his wife; he claims that she is "deluded," about the old man being a harmless "old man, weak in the head" (*Slight*, 189). Edward thinks that the man has some secret motives to wait in front of their back gate, but his wife does not agree with him.

Edward projects his own failure in sexuality onto the match-seller by calling him a bullock: "A great bullockfat of jelly" (*Slight*, 189). Prentice suggests that he wants to see the man as impotent by "conveying negative connotations of 'bullock' as castrated bull or a steer" whereas his wife admires him by "attaching to the Matchseller the more positive connotations of a bullock as a young bull" (*Ethic* 69). In contrast to her husband's view, she considers the old man a "bullock let loose" (*Slight*, 177), suggestive of a virile man. Perhaps, she seeks the masculine attributes in this man since she cannot fulfill her sexual need in her relationship with her husband. Her sexual attachment to the man is already discernible in her strategies of temptation such as talking to him about women and sex, and recalling her memories about her rape by a poacher while she was on a ride on a hillside track. Obviously, it is Edward who is disturbed about the potential of the match-seller as a threat to his relationship with his wife; she already accepts the man into the liaison without her husband's consent. Flora's reiterated accusation, "You're frightened of a poor old man," (*Slight*, 178) suggests that Edward himself is also old and harmless; this is another thought he desires to avoid. Flora desires someone other than her husband. The reason for this, according to Cahn, is that "in contrast to Edward, a figure of lifelessness, the matchseller, though dark and dirty, nonetheless embodies a renewal of love and life for Flora" (19). Edward deceives himself believing that he is luckier than the man since he has a woman to stick by him: "Oh, I understand you met my *wife*? Charming woman, don't you think? Plenty of grit there, too. Stood by me through thick and thin, that woman. In season and out of season. […] Let me advise you. Get a good woman to stick by you" (*Slight*, 184). Ironically, his wife is about to replace him with the old man.

In pursuit of a fruitless attempt to uncover the intruder's identity, Edward becomes confused about himself. "Edward's dogged quest to discover the truth about the Matchseller conflicts with his aversion to the truth about himself" (Prentice *Ethic*, 72). He wishes to find out the real identity of the man: "I've hit, in fact, upon the truth. He's not a matchseller at all. The bastard isn't a matchseller at all. Curious I never realized that before. He's an impostor" (*Slight*, 179). Edward avoids questioning his own identity; instead, he keeps asking the other man, "Who are you?". He never asks, "Who am I?" either to himself or to the others. Edward persists on the idea that the match-seller is far from being a man: "Come, come stop it. Be a man. Blow your nose for goodness sake. Pull yourself together" (*Slight*, 198). However, in the end, he is the one who fails to be a man. Edward dreads facing his real self with all his weaknesses and inadequacies, and this continuous aversion serves as a defense mechanism to preserve his self-esteem. However much he struggles against the truth, Edward is confronted with his ultimate loss of place and sense of identity in the end.

In *The Caretaker*, the characters are threatened by a sense of exclusion, especially Mick and Davies struggle to gain dominance over each other and to maintain their place in the house. For this purpose, they use similar strategies, each trying to create an identity for himself other than his own self.

Davies tries to assume a more worthy identity as a defense mechanism. Remembering his past when he was a more respectable man gives him a sense of confidence: "I've eaten my dinner off the best plates. But I'm not young any more. I remember the days I was as handy as any of them. They didn't take liberties with me" (*Caretaker*, 9). Now he is reluctant to accept that as a tramp he is not respected at all. He is involved in a fight with someone in the café he works, and he mentions his upbringing to emphasize his being a person "with the right ideas": "[W]here I was brought up we had some idea how to talk to old people with the proper respect, we was brought up with the right ideas" (*Caretaker*, 10). The man whom he works together with wants him to take the rubbish out, which he turns down. He is angry with him for giving orders to him; he does not regard himself inferior to the other man: "I was supposed to

take out the bucket, who was this git to come up and give me orders? We got the same standing. He's not my boss. He's nothing superior to me" (*Caretaker*, 9-10). The sense of inferiority becomes a threat for him, so he wishes to attain more self-assurance by adopting an assumed identity.

Davies is an abject individual with nowhere to live and no job. He tries to conceal his present helplessness from Aston when Aston asks him about his plans:

> ASTON. Where you going to go?
> DAVIES. Oh, I got one or two things in mind. I'm waiting for the weather to break. (*Caretaker*, 16)

He uses "the weather" as an excuse for not doing at the moment. As soon as he is offered a place in Aston's room, however, he accepts the offer at once, claiming that he will "be fixed up … pretty soon now" (*Caretaker*, 16). He still pretends that he has already applied for a job.

Davies also procrastinates about his visit to Sidcup where he would get his identity papers. He again makes excuses for failing to go there. The first reason he makes up for his delay is the absence of proper shoes: "Shoes? It's life and death to me. I had to go all the way to Luton in these" (*Caretaker*, 14). Even though he has had the opportunity to get a new pair of shoes from the monastery, he refuses to take them as they "don't look the right size" and he "[c]an't wear shoes that don't fit" (*Caretaker*, 14). When Aston gives him another pair of shoes, he is still not satisfied with them, and turns them down because of their poor condition: "The weather's so blasted bloody awful, how can I get down to Sidcup in these shoes?" (*Caretaker*, 20). He keeps making more excuses about not going: "If only I could get down to Sidcup! I've been waiting for the weather to break" (*Caretaker*, 21). As soon as he is offered the position of a caretaker by Mick, he delays his plans of going to Sidcup because it "[d]oesn't look much of a day" (*Caretaker*, 52), and "The weather's dead against it" (*Caretaker*, 65)

To prove his self-esteem Davies needs to be loved by women, and has an illusion that they have been attracted to him many times before. When Aston recollects his own conversation with a woman in a café, Davies makes out that he also had the same experience, which implies that he craves for such attention:

> ASTON. […] Anyway, we were just sitting there, having this bit of a conversation … then suddenly she put her hand over to mine … and she said, how would you like me to have a look at your body?
> […]
> DAVIES. They've said the same thing to me.
> ASTON. Have they?
> DAVIES. Women? There's many a time they've come up to me and asked me more or less the same question. (*Caretaker*, 25)

He seems to be lying about his relationship with women; he is in need of human respect in order to deal with the mental anguish he feels about his existence and his identity.

Mick is also engaged in asserting his authority in front of Davies, who becomes a threat for him in the house. In the very beginning of their confrontation, he appears to be self-assured, and asks, "What's the game?" (*Caretaker*, 29). As the owner of the house, he tries to dominate the old tramp with this provocative question. This implies that Mick feels confident, and he is not alarmed by the sight of a stranger. Later, Mick is afraid of the old man as a threat for his relationship with his brother, but he refuses to openly regard him as a menace. Realizing Davies' potential for violence, Mick asks him: "Eh, you're not thinking of doing any violence on me, are you? You're not the violent sort, are you?" (*Caretaker*, 46). He worries about his own security.

Mick takes the role of an interrogator in order to dominate the old man. He also wants to learn who this stranger really is:

> MICK. What's your name?
> DAVIES. I don't know you. I don't know who you are.
> *Pause*.
> MICK. Eh?
> DAVIES. Jenkins.
> MICK. Jenkins?
> DAVIES. Yes.
> MICK. Jen … kins.
> *Pause*.
> You sleep here last night?
> DAVIES. Yes.
> MICK. Sleep well?
> DAVIES. Yes.
> […]
> MICK. What did you say your name was? (*Caretaker*, 30)

Mick is suspicious about Davies's real identity. He is aware of Davies's strategy of denial of reality as he himself uses the same tactic, and wants to unveil his lies about Davies' identity.

The threat of possible menace forces Mick to take action against the intruder. He tries to convince the old man that everything belongs to him: "How do you like my room?" (*Caretaker*, 31). Then, he asks, "How do you like my bed? […] That's my bed" (*Caretaker*, 33). He is proud of his house: "I'm responsible for the upkeep of the premises, en' I? Can't help being house-proud" (*Caretaker*, 46). Since Mick is frightened of Davies, he attempts to attack him in the darkness with a drill; however, when the lights go on he makes a ridiculous excuse for his violent behavior: "I was just doing some spring cleaning" (*Caretaker*, 45), instead of admitting his fear. He pretends to show Davies over-hospitality to appease him: "We got to think of your comfort, en't we? Don't want the dust to get up your nose" (*Caretaker*, 46). This is another strategy to pretend he is self-confident as the landlord.

To counterattack Mick's attempts to assert himself, Davies tries to appear more important than he really is. He hides behind a different personality to defend his identity. In Pinter's plays, the characters are often liars:

> In order to contribute to […] studies in obfuscation, the characters must lie. They are often abject, stupid, vile, aggressive; but they are capable enough as conscientious and persistent liars, whether lying to others or to themselves, to hide the truth, or because they no longer know truth's truthful abode. (Almansi, 20)

Davies tells a series of lies about his former occupation, which Mick pretends to believe not to aggravate Davies' hostility:

> DAVIES. I am a capable sort of man. I mean to say, I've had plenty offers in my time, you know, there's no getting away from that.
> MICK. Well, I could see before, when you took out that knife, that you wouldn't let anyone mess you about.
> DAVIES. No one messes me about, man.
> MICK. I mean, you've been in the services, haven't you?
> DAVIES. The what?
> MICK. You been in the services. You can tell by your stance.
> DAVIES. Oh … yes. Spent half my life there, man. Overseas … like … serving … I was.
> MICK. In the colonies, weren't you?
> DAVIES. I was over there. I was one of the first over there. (*Caretaker*, 50-1)

Davies is involved in self-delusion to fulfill his need for respect, and retorts to his past to gain his self-worth. This is the only way for him to defend himself against the crises of identity. However, Mick is no longer deceived with Davies' imaginary identity, and accuses Davies of lying to him about his profession: "Now come on, why did you tell me all this dirt about you being an interior decorator?" (*Caretaker*, 73). Even though Davies strives hard to promote his sense of self, he fails to do so when his lies are uncovered, and he faces the reality of his helplessness.

To sum up, these characters in both Kafka and Pinter inevitably find themselves within a sense of entrapment; even though they struggle hard in order to get out of this turmoil of an uncertain life, they cannot manage to do it. Sometimes they opt to fight against the system by questioning it; however, their queries often remain unanswered. At other times, they attempt to escape from their real experiences by finding comfort in a world of illusion. In this process, they mislead both themselves and others as to their real selves and situations:

> Pinter places the microscope on the private level of human relationship to show once again the inevitable destruction that occurs when self-knowledge is absent, consciousness, unawakened, and characters are driven by a need to supplant any inner identity with an exterior label constructed of illusion. (Prentice *Ethic*, 95)

Even though each character employs his/her own way of coping with menace, all the methods they use prove inefficient since individuals cannot easily survive through this vortex.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This study has aimed at analyzing the Kafkaesque concept of menace in the plays of Harold Pinter. Kafka's notion of menace means a sense of imprisonment which infiltrates human existence. The entrapment of the characters in a prison-like enclosed area, which is often a room, epitomizes this imprisonment. Menace can emanate from outside of the room with the intrusion of some unknown powers. In general, the terror exists in relation to a remote mechanism primarily because it does not have an identifiable or concrete form. Man's failure to comprehend the potential for terror of outside world lessens his chances of survival against all odds.

The mysterious and indiscernible court governs Joseph K.'s life and his mind throughout the novel. Why Joseph K. is arrested and by which organization he is accused are equally unanswerable questions in his case. This mechanism is ambiguous not only due to its anonymity but also due to its practice of the law. The authority is unreachable and indifferent to K.'s predicament. Pinter's characters are also engulfed by sinister people and/or mechanisms. In some cases, the menace suddenly bursts into the room. In *The Birthday Party*, Stanley is victimized by the menacing members of an unknown system, who arrive out of the blue. In other cases, the menace is already in the room. Gus in *The Dumb Waiter*, does not know who he is supposed to kill as a hired gunman; but it turns out that he is the victim, and his partner, who is already in the room, is his killer.

Kafka's concept of menace is associated with the violence of the ambiguous power of the court. "The court is described as despotic, corrupt and filthy; its procedure not based on reason or justice" (Fromm, 254). Just like the court, the cryptic mechanisms in *One For the Road* and *Mountain Language* execute punishment and torture so as to discipline their subjects. In these plays, there are diverse forms of menace, such as physical, mental or verbal. The

systems wield power over human beings through inhuman methods of discipline and punishment.

Obtaining power has so much to do with obtaining information in both Kafka and Pinter. The court is not only inexpressive but also unavailable to the individual, which renders it even more powerful. Even the tiny acts of the individual are related to the court. The court, by piercing into K.'s life, destroys him. In *The Birthday Party*, too, the powerful party is capable of asserting its dominance by interrogating Stanley so as to gain insight into every tiny aspect of his life. Interrogation is a regular method of torture to break down the defense mechanisms of the victims. The characters become physically exhausted with this ordeal.

Both Kafka's and Pinter's characters are psychologically shattered after the vicious treatment they are exposed to. What makes their mental state more vulnerable is that the are very lonely people. They vainly yearn for the warmth, love and respect of others. In Pinter, the relationships keep shifting, too. In *The Caretaker*, there is constant change of alliance among the three characters. In *A Slight Ache* a traumatic change of roles occurs between the two males.

The effects of menace are more permanent when it occurs within the characters' deeper selves. The characters' identities become the ultimate target when they are exposed to menace in diverse forms. Joseph K.'s sense of self is stamped out as he comes to identify himself with the powerful Court. Likewise, Pinter's characters are at a loss when their identities are undermined. In a desperate attempt to assert themselves, they create a world of illusion.

Once characters are sucked into the vortex of menace, it is difficult for them to get out of it; they end up in defeat feeling an existential anguish, in which they are no longer alive either literally or metaphorically. The challenge of the menacing systems deprives them of their energy and desire for life.

Despite their relatively negligible power, the characters do not give up struggle at once. They do their best to challenge and overcome the vile systems. For this purpose, they question the system in pursuit of some insight. They also find solace in their silence, or in evasion of the reality.

However, all their coping strategies prove fruitless in the end. Joseph K. is finally overwhelmed by the court despite all his attempts. He tries to make fun of his arrest. In the interrogation chamber, he is engaged in self-delusion of his assumed power. He challenges the court by refusing an advocate, and by thinking he can defend himself. These strategies make no difference in the final verdict of the court; his end is inevitable, and he cannot escape being executed.

Pinter's characters also fail in their attempts to cope with menace. In *The Birthday Party*, Stanley Webber remains helpless from the outset of the play, when he tries to make the two strangers leave the boarding house he lives in. His failure in this first attempt leads to a series of further defeats. His other tactics of questioning and evasion fail, and he is taken away by his pursuers to some greater authority, already symbolically a dead man. Gus, in *The Dumb Waiter*, is the character who asks the most questions to figure out the system and his situation. His tactic of questioning does not help him to get an insight into what is awaiting him, his murder.

In *One For the Road*, Victor chooses another strategy, silence, to defy the system which torments him and his family. His deliberate avoidance of speech makes his tormentors disillusioned, and even frustrated. Unfortunately, he also ends up in failure with his son killed, his wife and himself becoming physical and psychological wrecks. The Old Woman and her son in *Mountain Language* adopt muteness as a defense mechanism against the system whose inhuman exercise of power initially outlaws the use of their mountain language. In the end, they are allowed to speak in their mother tongue; nevertheless, the woman persistently withholds her speech. The loss of the means of communication epitomizes her metaphorical death. The death of language means the end of the character.

Edward's strategy, in *A Slight Ache*, differs from others' coping tactics since he finds an easy escape into a world of delusion. He tries hard to make himself believe that he will not be replaced by the other man. As soon as the other man replaces him, Edward is a broken individual, having to leave his house and his status. In *The Caretaker* Davies lies to preserve his sense of

identity, and deludes himself of his importance. Yet, his ultimate exclusion from the bond of the two brothers indicates his failure in this existential battle.

The existence of a court does not warrant the existence of justice in *The Trial*. Although the authorities of the court claim that they dispense justice, and there is no escape from the justice, the inconsistencies within the system suggest the court's corrupt nature. The accused, Joseph K., is never allowed to learn his offence and defend himself in accordance with it. The court is in fact full of irrational practices like the arrest of the protagonist in his bedroom, his being paradoxically set free afterwards, its officials' being whipped in the lumber room of the bank, and farcical behaviours of the people during K.'s interrogation. K.'s being executed by the two actor-like figures in the end is even less professional due to the place, the time of the day and the manner in which the task is accomplished. The mystery behind his execution also implies his being a victim of a miscarriage of justice.

In Pinter's plays, there are some references to administrative systems; Stanley Webber has to succumb to its dictates for doing wrong things in his past. Even though the mysterious mechanism is supposed to be a defender of justice, accusations put on Stanley, as well as, his being mistreated in the hands of the two representatives of the system may suggest quite the opposite. Although the characters' plight is justified, the ambiguity extant in Pinter's plays renders the invisible mechanisms unjust. Gus is placed in a baffling position. No justice is done to him by the organization he works for. In *One For the Road* and *Mountain Language*, the authoritative systems are even characterized by inequity and persecution. The individuals have no rights to express or defend themselves. It may, therefore, justifiably reclaimed that Pinter is deeply intrigued by Kafkaesque concept of injustice, materialized in his figures of authority and enigmatic constitutions. The unjust system and its persecutors find their counterparts in Pinter's plays of ambiguity, violence, loneliness and loss of identity, all caused by an unidentifiable menace in their world, and these lonely characters, with their destroyed identities and with no support, trying to survive but failing in a hostile world bring both Kafka and Pinter close to the realm of The Theatre of the Absurd.

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