Chapter Two

The Door Opens
The protagonist in a characteristic Pinter play is a self-doubting man in a testing situation. Naturally what he invariably experiences is a total insecurity of life and being. This breeds in him a pervading anxiety over his valued possessions which is seen to hamper all his normal reactions to the demands of social life. The anxiety is manifest sometimes as vague and general, when the characters are afraid of many unknown things and sometimes in its concrete form as fear, when they anticipate a particular kind of threat. In both cases the anxiety leads on to other neurotic tendencies as aggressiveness, sexual variance, repression, withdrawal and a host of other behavioural abnormalities.

Anxiety has been identified as the principal trait in all the varied neurotic phenomena. Sometimes the anxiety reactions occur under a wide range of situations and mostly there is no objective threat sufficient to justify the level of apprehension. Neurotic anxiety is mainly discharged through an unconscious distortion of reality by means of one of the defence mechanisms. Calvin Hall says, that in certain individuals the mind resorts to defence mechanisms
instead of trying to master danger by adopting realistic problem-solving methods. He defines a defence mechanism as "the attempt on the part of the mind to alleviate anxiety by using methods that deny, falsify or distort reality and that impede the development of personality." As an unconscious reaction to their neurotic anxiety, the Pinter protagonists resort to defence mechanisms. Rose (The Room) and Stanley (The Birthday Party) hide away from all social contact, Gus (The Dumb Waiter) and Edward. (A Slight Ache) project their fears into fantasy figures and Albert (A Night Out) represses all his sexual feelings. All these are the workings of defence mechanisms. Rose expresses her desire to shun social contacts; Stanley is an extreme case of isolation who succeeds in detaching himself from all kinds of emotional involvement with the people around. Gus sees his organization punishing him through a criminal self-image, Ben. Edward projects his anxiety onto the Matchseller. In Albert, there is a continual repression of the sexual instinct, which grossly distorts his perception of reality.

Karen Horney distinguishes between anxiety and fear: "Fear is a reaction that is proportionate to the danger one has to face, where as anxiety is a disproportionate reaction to danger or even a reaction to imaginary danger." In a
neurotic, a situation which may induce fear in a normal person can become the source of great anxiety so that the person always suffers from mental agitation. The anxiety-inducing threat may be hidden and subjective. Since a neurotic has lost the faculty to see the situation as it really is, he rather perceives it through a distorted angle creating a reality of his own.

Danger and fear are intrinsically connected with the feeling of anxiety. Freud's views regarding this are noteworthy. He observes that anxiety results from a repression of impulses, mainly the impulse of sexuality and also from a fear of those impulses of which the discovery or pursuit would incur an external danger. Significantly Freud points out that anxiety is generated only in childhood; however that occurring later in life is based on reactions which have remained infantile. Interestingly enough, Horney's views on anxiety take into account not just the instincts but living conditions as well. She feels that infantile anxiety is a necessary factor but not a sufficient cause for the development of a neurosis. While Freud asserts that there is no doubt that persons whom we call neurotic remain infantile in their attitude towards danger and have not grown out of the childhood conditions for anxiety, she points out the important role external stimuli
from the environment play in manipulating infantile anxiety. Horney says,

"... if however living conditions are not of a kind to diminish anxiety, then not only may this persist but gradually increases and sets in motion all the processes which constitute a neurosis.

"Basic anxiety" characteristic of neurosis can exist even without any particular perceivable stimulus. But when it has a reason and an occasion we call that a "situation neurosis." Most of Pinter's protagonists are victims of situation neurosis. Davies in The Caretaker is an exception since he is suffering from a kind of more basic anxiety which can roughly be described as "a feeling of being small, insignificant, helpless, deserted, endangered in a world that is out to abuse, cheat, attack, humiliate, betray, envy." Attitudes of affection, of compliance, striving for success and superiority, tendency to withdraw from the world—all these are methods to obtain reassurance when faced with unmanageable anxiety. Seeking affection and striving for power are recurrent themes in Pinter. These can be seen as steps to alleviate anxiety. In fact it is their anxiety that bestows on Pinter's characters with their very private concerns, a general social significance as
representatives of a generation characterized by mental unrest, lack of personal integrity and mounting anguish in the face of existential concerns. The means by which they consciously or unconsciously try to overcome this irrational anxiety constitute their neurotic behaviour.

In the early plays the anxiety is concretized as a feeling of insecurity, which appears more specifically as a fear of losing a treasured possession. The anxiety of the characters, is given a kind of rational basis by introducing the "menace", which is an external threat apprehended by the protagonists. The menace could at any time knock at the door and enter to destroy the comfort and security afforded by the four walls. Pinter's presentation of the menace theme and the panic and fear associated with it effectively create an atmosphere of insecurity and unrest characteristic of modern times. But in Pinter's world the actual threat when it opens the door and enters appears so mild and incapable of any potential violence that by contrast the apprehension and fear of the protagonists would appear irrational and exaggerated. The cause of the anxiety for the protagonists is mainly the imminence of danger in the form of gentle visitors who for them become the agents of an inevitable catastrophe which throws them off balance and wreck their individual lives.
The image of the "room" and the theme of menace are deftly interwoven in the early plays. The room which shuts out the cold and dark world outside emerges as a powerful motif repeatedly employed by the playwright to depict the psychological state of its occupants. In its physical dimensions, being an enclosed space, it provides vital protection from the dangers outside. The awareness of the security of the room together with the growing fear of the threat breeds in the characters a kind of neurotic fear over losing it. The room image also operates at a deeper psychological level. The warmth and the comfort the characters seek in it against the menace of a cold, hostile world makes it a symbol of desirable security in the characters' minds. Martin Esslin says:

The room becomes an image of the small area of light and warmth that our consciousness, the fact that we exist, opens up in the vast area of nothingness from which we gradually emerge after birth and into which we sink again when we die.

It is thus not just a place of desirable security but a place where the psychological tensions of living in a hostile world can become non-existent.
The desire for the warmth and comfort of the room is to be related also to every human being’s desire to return to the womb. Pinter’s characters who cling on to the room have not outgrown this desire in the infantile consciousness to return to pre-natal security. Ronald Fairbairn in *Psychoanalytic studies of the Personality* remarks that birth constitutes not only an extremely unpleasant and painful experience but also one fraught with acute anxiety. The occasion of birth, which for the child is a forceful expulsion from the surroundings familiar to him, provides him his first experience of anxiety. This is perpetuated at a deep mental level and even in adults there is a residual desire to regain the warmth and comfort. Any kind of experience in which there is separation and anxiety over it would reactivate this desire so that for the individual the occasion assumes the emotional significance of the original birth trauma. Such an occasion therefore could become the cause of anxiety in every one, more so for psychologically unbalanced individuals. Otto Fenichel points out that in neurotics "the expectation of danger instead of precipitating a purposeful fear that might be used to avoid a traumatic state, precipitates a traumatic state." For Pinter’s characters at moments of individual crisis, the neurotic anxiety develops into a trauma which completely overpowers them. When forced to face a world of threat and
existential insecurity they pass through a second birth trauma reminiscent of the original one. But lacking the conviction and feeling of security arising from a strong sense of selfhood, which could effect a healthy release of tension, they fail to re-establish their lost mental stability. The room thus becomes, as Frederick Karl suggests, "an enclosure which folds anxiety into neurosis." Further, the room as a shelter, juxtaposed with a world of corrupting and destructive forces, provides an apt symbol for the uncertainty and suspense of life and of man's precarious position in life.

The anxiety that the characters experience is manifest mainly as a vague fear of an external threat, a fear of dispossession of the room and a craving for security. Menace, often cited as the most characteristic feature of Pinter's plays appears in the form of intrusion under mysterious circumstances into the private life of the protagonists. The walls of the room shut out the cold and darkness of the much feared hostile world. The door opens to let in the mystery and horror of the unknown. The expectation of the threat by the characters does not diminish its horror. In plays like The Room, The Birthday Party, The Dumb Waiter and A Slight Ache this opening of the door to let in the agents of menace is a significant aspect
of the dramatic situation, because here the entry of the menace shatters the apparent security and pushes the protagonist to an inevitable disaster. In the first three plays a closed room is the focal point of dramatic action. There is an apparent calmness but the apprehension of the menace outside, breeds anxiety in the characters.

In The Room, Rose makes evident her fear of the menace and feeling of insecurity. For her the room is a proud possession which she feels is far superior to the cold basement. Her repeated assertion of the superiority and comfort of the room as well as her long monologue itself are attempts to ward off growing panic and to obtain self-assurance. The presence of the menace is gradually built up through suggestions. Her fear is reflected in her observation of the outside.

Rose: Just now I looked out of the window. It was enough for me. There wasn't a soul about. Can you hear the wind? Her speech contains frequent references to the cold and darkness outside and she repeatedly tries to dissuade Bert from going out.

Rose: I don't know why you have to go out. Couldn't you run it down tomorrow? (9)
More than the safety of Bert, she is afraid of her own loneliness within the room. She fears that it is a situation which could make her vulnerable. In between she asserts,

Rose: We're quiet, we're all right. You're happy up here . . . And we're not bothered. And nobody bothers us. (9)

Her assertions clearly indicate her awareness and fear of someone who is certain to bother them.

An atmosphere of uncertainty and mystery is gradually built around her and the room. At one point she looks out through the window.

Rose: I wonder who that is

[pause]

No. I thought I saw someone.

[pause]

No. (10)

Subtle touches like this—a fearful observation, then a mystifying pause and then a wilful negation—abound in the play and contribute greatly to create an air of mystery and horror. Rose's awareness of her unknown neighbour in the basement brings to the audience the first suspicions of a
possible threat. She repeats several times that she does not know who lives down there. Her action of going to the window occasionally and looking out is indicative of her fear of someone outside.

The atmosphere of menace is strengthened during the course of the play through the ominous silence of Bert, through other characters like Mr. Kidd who recalls an uncertain past, Mr. and Mrs. Sands with a dubious mission and above all through the terrifying figure of the blind Negro who comes to reclaim Rose and to take her out of the room back to her home.

The behaviour of Rose after hearing about the man in the basement and his information that her room is vacant appears more disturbed as if she received an ominous premonition. Her interest in the man and her anxiety over a possible encounter are evident in her questions to the Sands. Though she pretends that she is not interested, she is deeply anxious to learn his message. Her assertion that she does not know him is only a pretence. She is fearfully aware of the prospect of the man visiting her when Bert is there and thus becoming a threat to her social security as Bert’s wife. The figure of the blind Negro is the culmination of Rose’s anxiety and fear. He too is the final touch of the playwright on the aspects of mystery and menace.
in the play. The Negro who is racially different and with an unknown relationship to Rose waits patiently for days down in the dark, damp and cold basement to see Rose alone and to ask her to return home. Finally his mission comes to a tragic end.

In a Pinter play there is always tension in the air, a feeling that something ominous is going to happen. In such an atmosphere even a casual remark like the one by Mr. Kidd that he had seen the rocking chair before is sufficient to render it mysterious. Mr. Kidd's occasional deafness is likewise a disturbing factor and the fact that he does not even know how many floors the building has makes it a rather peculiar place. Bert's mission in going out at night, over which Rose and Kidd feel anxious is also left suspended as a mystery. Small details like these, go a great way in creating the atmosphere of the play. Bert's long silence and the doubtful identity of the landlord also contribute to the eeriness. Mr. Sand's remark "It's darker in than out . . . ." is an apt description of the atmosphere of Pinter's plays in general.(19)

On a purely psychological reading of the text the basement and its occupant assume great significance. Mrs. Sands describes the basement.
Mrs. Sands: Anyway, we went through a kind of partition, then there was another partition, and we couldn’t see where we were going, well, it seemed to me it got darker the more we went, the further we went in, I thought we must have come to the wrong house. (23)

Rose’s awareness of the basement which has two partitions could well be a journey into the deeper levels of one’s own psyche – the subconscious and unconscious minds. It is from one of these levels, which is always in darkness and which Rose had visited a long time ago, that Riley, the figure from her past life, emerges. Riley who does not possess a definite identity could easily be seen as a visualized presence from Rose’s childhood or adolescent experiences. Her regression to her infantile consciousness might have been initiated by the pervading anxiety she experiences in the present. Riley is the representative of her regressed state of mind. Their relationship involves guilt; in all probability the guilt of a daughter over her unnatural love for the father.

Riley could also be the embodiment of Rose’s desire to flee from the fear and insecurity of the present to the security and comfort of a protected life in the past. But
in the process of confronting her desire she is overcome by Oedipal guilt which is symbolized by her blindness at the end. The fight between Bert and Riley is a conflict of the desires of her present and past. Riley's blindness which is passed on to her is a proof of the fact that he lives intensely in one of the deeper levels of her psyche. His trip to Rose's room from the basement signifies the surfacing of Rose's latent adolescent guilt. In this context it is noteworthy that many things about the apartment which comprises of the basement and Rose's room are mysterious; even Kidd the supposed owner does not know how many floors or rooms it has; it is always dark and Rose does not know where her room is. Riley has a supernatural presence, a ghost image. For Mr. and Mrs. Sands the occupant of the basement is only a voice and they are confused as to whether they were going up or coming down the stairs.

In *The Birthday Party*, Pinter's first full-length play the protagonist Stanley Webber is a withdrawn individual showing signs of depression in his apathetic mood and desire to stay away from others. He desperately seeks the security of his room in a sea-side boarding house. He would appear to be the victim of a persecution complex. The play gives a detailed account of his nervous breakdown.
Stanley knows very well how the menace is going to shape out in his life. Like Rose, he too apprehends danger to his security in the form of intruders. His anxiety is quite evident. As soon as he hears about the visitors, he walks up and down the room and asserts that they will not come. He seeks assurance by denying the possibility of the threat.

Stanley: I tell you they won't come. Why didn't they come last night, if they were coming?

..........................................................

They won't come .... Forget all about it.

It's a false alarm. A false alarm.(21)

Here he is speaking to himself. He is trying his best to control the escalating tension within him. At the same time, he is certain that he is being searched for and that the strangers are sure to come looking for him. A few moments later he speaks with a threatening premonition.

Stanley: They're coming today. They're coming in a van.

..........................................................

They've got a wheelbarrow in that van ....

And when the van stops, they wheel it out, and they wheel it up the gardenpath, and then they knock at the front door.

..........................................................
They're looking for someone, a certain person. (24)

Stanley seems to have realized the inevitability of the intrusion; he is like a cornered animal. His terror of the pursuers is pictured here. Stanley knows that the knock at the front door and the opening of the door would signal his doom. From the beginning, he is haunted by the image of these two men. He is visibly nervous and waits anxiously for the menace to appear in the form of the intruders. Apparently the menace is a retribution for something shady in his past.

It is Stanley's inordinate fear of the approaching threat that distorts all his responses to social life and initiates his neurotic breakdown. His anxiety is evident in his behaviour and his appearance—his unshaven face and careless way of dressing. He confesses that he did not sleep at all and he does not enjoy his food, whatever it be that Meg cooks specially for him. He finds his surroundings unpleasant, but his fear prevents him from seeking out a better place since he feels that security is his prime need. His effort to seek solace in his glorified self-image as a recognised pianist, soon after he voices his fears about the visitors, is an unconscious attempt to ward off his anxiety. Stanley's outburst at Meg for not clearing up the place
shows that he could be easily irritated and provoked. This is an indication of the basic anxiety in him.

There is a detailed presentation of Stanley's neurotic breakdown during the interrogation by Goldberg and McCann. The arrival of the visitors is for him a decline into a state of helplessness. From the stage of anxiety and anguish he passes into a crippling neurosis. A number of images in the play eloquently communicate the mental breakdown of Stanley. Prime among these is the game of the blindman's buff. The blindfolding of Stanley and McCann's act of making Stanley virtually blind by breaking his glasses increase the tempo of the approaching menace. Likewise, the drum becomes a device to indicate the mental state of Stanley. The frenzied drumbeat by a "possessed" Stanley at the end of Act One signifies the recession of his mind from the mental control possible to a civilized man. This parallelism is further evident during the game when it is finally destroyed as is Stanley. In Act Three, Meg speaks of the broken drum unaware of the corresponding damage done to its owner. Petey assures her: "You can always get another one", and very soon they have to find another lodger in place of Stanley.

The theme of menace is worked out terrifyingly in The Dumb Waiter where the victimizer is made the victim. The
play reveals the inner life of Ben and Gus, who are professional killers. It shows the intense neurotic conflict that tears apart the mind of Gus — the emotion of frustration and the desire to revolt and liberate the self on the one hand, and a sense of loyalty and guilt of betrayal on the other. In Gus, existential anxiety plays a major role in the disintegration of personality. He submits himself to the growing doubts and anxiety and becomes the victim, while Ben who is a perfect foil to him succeeds in maintaining stoic passivity.

Gus's anxiety originates mainly from his feeling of guilt. Self-doubt and a sense of purposelessness seriously hamper his efforts to adjust his mind to the callousness of a criminal. Ben remains calm and does not worry about the authority and morality of the killings; perhaps he realizes that a professional killer can never quit his job. Gus incessantly questions Ben and expresses dissatisfaction with the kind of life he is forced to lead. He thus exhibits a kind of existential neurosis, rare in a Pinter protagonist, though it is less poignant here than in the plays of Beckett. Gus is torn apart by two kinds of guilt feelings — the guilt of the numerous killings and the guilt of the inability to have complete loyalty. Ben could be considered a fantasy-creation of Gus's guilt-laden mind for in the end
Ben is to punish Gus for his disloyalty. In many aspects of behaviour Ben is a perfect contrast to Gus and the two together could easily be the two opposing facets of a single personality.

In *The Dumb Waiter*, Pinter moves out of the familiar household sphere to reveal the traces of humanity lurking in the underworld. It is a place where such qualities would never be tolerated. Gus finds himself totally unfit in the circumstances he is familiar with. The first picture shows his diffidence and anxiety in contrast to Ben's calmness. He is trying to tie his shoe laces, a long process which, as in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, is an indicator to the mind of the doer. The reports of accidents that Ben reads out, help to create the atmosphere of menace. Ben's urgency in persuading Gus to get ready enhances the feeling that something significant is going to happen. Gus alone shows signs of impatience and curiosity. He admits of not having a restful sleep, he visits the lavatory more than once. He complaints about many things in the room like the mattress, the flush tank, absence of windows and the empty cigar pack. He is inquisitive about everything, while Ben hardly seems to notice such things. This is the result of Gus's restlessness and anxiety over the mission they have to fulfil soon. His poor memory and splitting headache also point to his increasing nervousness.
Compared to The Room and The Birthday Party the perception of menace is stronger in The Dumb Waiter. The very setting, of the killers waiting in an unknown place in the dead of night for receiving orders to finish off their unknown victim, is terrifying. Strange events that occur add to the intensity of the atmosphere of menace. The envelope with twelve matches sliding under the door even as they were looking for matches, their mysterious criminal mission, the equally mysterious master who employs them and orders the killings, the strange workings of the dumb waiter which clatters down with demands of exotic food, the lavatory tank, which flushes at its own will - all these have their share in creating an irrational and terrifying world, a world where unknown controlling forces wait outside the room and one has to open the door armed.

Gus is mustering up courage to face the task ahead by self-assertion of their ability. As the play progresses he gets more frightened and he senses in Ben's apparent calmness the knowledge of something more. Even when he tries to occupy himself with other thoughts there is always at the back of his mind, the hope that "It won't be a long job, this one." He is impatient, tired of waiting and anxious about the procedure. He is also curious about who the victim of their job would be that night. He is
suspicious and nostalgic. He describes his lot and his dissatisfaction with it.

Gus: Still, I'll be glad when it's over tonight. I hope the bloke's not going to get excited tonight, or anything. I'm feeling a bit off. I've got a splitting headache. (59)

He is so anxious about the job that he wants to receive the order and to be over with it without delay.

Ben presents a contrast to Gus in many ways. Apparently, he is composed and calm; he never doubts, questions or complaints. But his unconscious usage of Gus's idiom to "put on the kettle" indicates his growing realization and anxiety over the sensitive mission in hand. He seems to have apprehension, if not a clear knowledge, that it would be his doubting partner's turn that night. After he answers the voice through the speaking tube he shows for the first time signs of alarm and nervousness. He sits on the bed staring, without answering Gus and "his head sinks on to his chest." (63) But he masters his feelings and never allows his anxiety or sensitivity to over power his rationality. He is quite satisfied with his job and considers himself a success. While Ben realizes that emotion and criticism should be kept out of their job, Gus's failure to do so costs him his life.
Even though the room image in its physical dimensions is not dominant in this play, life with a persistent fear of the deadly menace waiting just outside is still the focus. The fear-inducing atmosphere which can throw a sensitive person out of balance is pictured here. The anxieties of a professional killer present a corollary to the tension of living out one's life in the contemporary world where the strain of life is building up fast beyond levels of individual tolerance.

*A Slight Ache* has a setting similar to that of *The Room* with a couple and an unwelcome visitor and lends itself to a similar psychological interpretation. Here the intruder is a characterless phantom figure without any identity. He is more ghost-like than Riley and does not utter a word throughout the play though he is the centre of all attention and conversation. Many critics consider the play as a nightmare of rejection acted out in Edward's mind. The fantasy is provoked by the middle-aged husband's unsettling concern over his waning sexual prowess. Edward's preoccupation with his self is evident from the beginning. He fails to notice the plants in the garden, while they, the symbols of life and vitality, are to Flora a precious possession. Like Rose, Edward experiences a strong fear of intrusion of menace and dispossession. He feels that the
figure at the backgate has deprived him of his freedom. He laments the loss of his free conscience.

Edward: It used to give me great pleasure, to stroll along through the long grass, out through the backgate, pass into the lane. That pleasure is now denied me. It's my own house, isn't it? It's my own gate.

The abstract figure of the Matchseller, so meek and powerless, appears quite harmless. He is just like a dummy. But his potential power over Edward is so great that his mere presence at the back gate is sufficient to unnerve Edward and to destroy all his defences. He too, in the end, falls a pathetic victim to neurotic anxiety, which inhibits all his normal reactions and renders him a complete wreck.

He fears dispossession of Flora and his expulsion from the house. The Matchseller has robbed him of the security and comfort of his own house. There are many instances when this fear surfaces. His lack of interest and inability to enjoy the summer morning and the blossoms is a sharp contrast to Flora's carefree vivacity. Though he says that he will not spend the day worrying about the Matchseller that is exactly what he does throughout the day. He fails to distract his mind to any other thought. The wasp is a
miniature of the Matchseller; just as it intrudes to destroy the quiet of their breakfast table, the Matchseller intrudes to destroy the delicate harmony of their life. For a short while soon after destroying the wasp, Edward is relieved of his anxiety so that he could enjoy the beauty of the garden. But he continues to feel the Matchseller as a restraint. It is clear from Edward's knowledge of the Matchseller's habits that he has been observing him closely. He has been hiding even from Flora, and in the scullery he closely observes the Matchseller, while he pretends to be digging out notes.

In this play, it is the Matchseller who helps to create the atmosphere of mystery and menace. His very figure and his suspicious occupation arouse the feeling that something ominous and beyond rational interpretation will happen. His identity and purpose are left deliberately vague. It is his apparent purposelessness that irritates Edward the most. Edward is so overcome by his fear that he remains inside the house all the time. Flora observes that his eyes are bloodshot. In his long monologue to the Matchseller his attempt to pour out his anxiety and tension built up over a few days is clear. As the fear of losing his possessions provokes him to speak out, it is with the pride of ownership that he speaks of his canopy, his table and his wife. He
highlights the Matchseller's drawbacks which is again a kind of self-assurance for him. His eloquence itself is an indication of his anxiety as can be seen in many other characters of Pinter.

Like Riley in The Room, the Matchseller here could be viewed as a ghost from Edward's past. As in the case of Rose, a latent anxiety reemerges to destroy the harmony of the present, by making Edward painfully aware of the contrast. When his fear over his diminishing masculinity materializes as the impostor at the backgate he suspects his wife of plotting against him. The realization that the Matchseller has the potential to flare up Flora's youth further destroys his integrity. He senses the danger this poses to the security of his life and his fear that Flora might prefer the youthful Matchseller to him, grows. Once the Matchseller comes into the house he has the potential of overpowering Edward's defences since Edward does not have anything as reassuring in the present, than the memory of his lost youth. Hence he begins to experience the loss of a much desired security. As Edward's fear grows so does the diminutive figure of the Matchseller; from an old and weak man he enlarges, in fact blows up, to a frightening size. When Edward repeatedly asserts his lack of fear, it is only a cover to hide his fear.
Edward: You may think I was alarmed by the look of you. You would be quite mistaken. I was not alarmed by the look of you. I did not find you at all alarming. No, no. Nothing outside this room has ever alarmed me. (27)

His journey into the depth of his own mind does not rid him of his fear but makes him succumb to the neurosis by allowing the figure from his past to dominate the whole of his present personality.

In *A Slight Ache* also, the room image is used but here the room widens into the whole house; the menace in the form of the Matchseller is standing outside the gate. Here the menace does not intrude physically into the room as in the earlier plays; it is rather invited in through the open door. But its psychological effect undermines the integrity of the protagonist long before he decides to open the door. As Bernard Dukore says:

In *A Slight Ache* the menace is an external manifestation of internal, psychological disturbance . . . . Edward's and Flora's subjectivity determines their relationship with the visitor.
Man becoming a victim of his own fear and his desperate attempts to live with it can be seen in his early plays. In the later plays the intensity of the menace and its effect of mystery are weakened. Here too intruders come but they do not arouse fear and create a shattering effect on the personality of the protagonists.

However the concept of the room as a symbol of security continues in the next two plays—The Caretaker and Night School. The theme is also similar, possession of the room and fear of its dispossession in the characters. In the more realistic plays where there is less mystery and more explanations the room becomes the motivating factor for the whole action which centre round the characters' desire to get and hold possession of the room. The situation in The Caretaker is the familiar one of intrusion of menace even though it is not as explicit at the beginning as in the earlier plays. Here we see three persons—Aston, Mick and Davies—all suffering from psychological problems of one kind or another—engaged in a struggle for the living space which becomes a symbol of permanence, security and comfort.

Davies is a case study of ontological insecurity, that is, a basic insecurity of one's being and resulting anxiety. Like other Pinter protagonists he too fears intrusion and the destruction of his apparent security. The feeling of
insecurity springs from his awareness of his rootlessness. Hence he feels that he cannot establish himself as some one significant. He experiences anxiety at a deeper level than that generated by apprehension of an external threat. Throughout the play he is engaged in creating a false self-image. His monomaniacal concern of self-assertion could be considered as the compelling reaction-formation when gripped by the agony of the lack of a definite identity. He repeatedly asserts: "I've had dinner with the best," "I might have been on the road a few years, but you can take it from me I'm clean. I keep myself up." In his effort to project a superior image of himself he keeps on mentioning the power and position he had, and highlights his prejudices like sensitivity to the draught, his refusal to wear brown shoe laces with black shoes and his dislike of the Blacks which he considers an aspect of his racial superiority. He is ready to do anything for his narcissistic gratification and to salvage his self-esteem. But by insisting on his prejudices, which are rather instances of wishful thinking, he is forced to reject at every step Aston's hospitality which alone could have lifted him from his predicament of existing in an existential vacuum.

Davies shows traits of neurotic anxiety in his fear of dispossession and in his unusual dread of the objects in the
room. From his reactions to the small sounds within the room it is clear he is terribly afraid of something. As Aston points out he was making noises during his sleep; the troubled sleep indicates his anxiety and fear. He is suspicious about Aston’s and Mick’s intentions and he continually puts the blame of all his misfortunes on "they" who were hostile to him. He is all the time suspicious of the gas stove and watches Aston through the blanket in the morning (63). His conversation with Aston is a long pathetic attempt to project himself as a significant, worthwhile person. All the incidents that he narrates are an effort to save himself from being constantly underrated as he feels he is, by others. He resembles Beckett’s protagonists in his demeanour and rootlessness and in being a character without a convincing past. But unlike Beckett’s characters who are apparently complacent and happy he is caught in the agony of a suspended present, trying to figure out what he is and forever anxiously attempting to place himself in relation to society.

In The Caretaker the menace theme is not very threatening or immediate; here the actual menace for Davies is the conventions of social belonging which he lacks. The room becomes a potential symbol of security, a place which could afford Davies a certain degree of existential security
which he is desperately in need of. The prospect of going to Sidcup keeps his hopes alive, so does his assumption of a false identity. The insurance card, in all probability, is fake, but he takes pride in that. It is not merely a poor man's dream of riches and respectability, but also an evidence of his neurotic need for affection and power. He carefully evades Aston's questions about himself and his origins, a confrontation which could definitely be anxiety-enhancing. His stammering is yet another indication of his anxiety. He is visibly upset by Aston's remark about him as "stink". His effort to manipulate the knowledge of Aston's mental illness to effect his ouster from the room is an attempt to secure his sense of belonging, by permanently occupying the room.

In contrast to Davies, there is Aston who is not overpowered by any sort of self-interest. In his generosity, arising from his desire to establish a cordial human relationship of sympathy and understanding, he invites Davies to share his room. Whereas Davies' insecurity was ontological, Aston's is purely existential. This might be a legacy of his life in the lunatic asylum. Aston could be discerned as a character thoroughly shattered by his past experience, trying to re-establish his links with the world of normal people. It is significant that
Aston is forever engaged in setting right a plug in the toaster, the fixing of a loose connection, an action which symbolizes his approach to the world.

Mick, Aston's brother is a contrast to him in the matter of self-interest. Mick is doing and planning everything for themselves only. He perceives Davies as a menace and tries his best to hold sole possession of his brother and the room. Davies considers Mick as an intruder into his security. Hence in this play the nature of the intrusion binds all the three characters. The description of the lunatic asylum brings in an element of horror. There are many things that Davies fears, like the gas stove and the bucket which sounds the dripping water. These help to create a sense of tension and uncertainty. Again, at the close there is the climactic moment of uncertainty, a moment when Davies once again faces a bewildering nothingness when all his anxiety returns unresolved. He stutters in agitation about the uncertainty of his journey to Sidcup.

Walter of Night School is another character suffering from existential anxiety but to a much lesser degree. His anxiety arises from his realization of himself as an outcast from society. His desire to establish himself in relation to the social life around him and create a sense of belonging forces him to fight for possession of the room as
it is the only place where he could belong. But his extreme self-concern proves his ruin. He disregards the opportunity the tenant of the room provides for him to enter a life of social acceptability. For him, fresh from the confinement of prison life, his room is the only solace.

Walter: Ah, you know I've been thinking for months . . . you know that? . . . I'll lie on my bed . . . .

I'll see the curtains blowing by the window . . . . I'll have a good rest, eh?

He is unduly possessive about his room. The presence of the "lovely girl" in his room and his meeting with her evokes conflicting emotions in him. Bearing the guilt of criminality within him, he makes himself inadequate to the possibility of possessing both the girl and the room together. In real life too he is an insecure being, repeatedly a hunted criminal.

Walter: I'm not good enough. I get caught too many times. I'm not clever enough. (96)

This sense of insufficiency in private life and lack of social acceptance and belonging contribute to his pervading anxiety and defective responses. Therefore he clings on to his room which becomes more important to him than the prospect of having any relationship with Sally.
In characters like Albert of *A Night Out* the neurotic anxiety derives mainly from problems linked to sexuality. Albert's anxiety arising out of his Oedipal guilt and of his continuing dependence on his mother prevents him from mingling freely with others. His speech to the girl in Act Three is an instance of the familiar anxiety-relieving situations Pinter protagonists unconsciously resort to.\(^{(83)}\) The fear of the consequences of having hit his mother is responsible for this verbal outburst from an otherwise reticent Albert.

Max in *The Homecoming*, Disson in *a Tea Party* and James in *The Collection* are also victims of sexual anxiety. In the case of Max and Disson it is an anxiety-induced neurotic breakdown that they suffer when they confront the fear of sexual impotence and inability to please women.

In *The Basement* there is a return to the familiar theme of intrusion and dispossession of the room. Intrusion comes in the form of a welcome couple Jane and Stott. But gradually the visitors oust Law from his house. Like a typical Pinter protagonist Law is incapable even to raise a protest. As in *The Caretaker* the person who comes to seek refuge later tries to expel the occupant of the house. Davies fails but Stott succeeds. Jane is sexually attracted to Law and there is the possibility of a betrayal. The room
that changes its character as that of its occupants is a significant motif here. It is more than a dwelling space; it is the representa the emotion of its occupants. Even though Law is dispossessed of his room, Stott is the person who suffers anxiety. Perhaps it is triggered by his awareness of Jane's deception or of his diminished self-image in the context of masculinity that the betrayal implies.

The neurotic anxiety experienced by the protagonists of the later plays is perhaps less apparent. The conflict in them never becomes traumatic. Nevertheless they too suffer, being victims of a psychologically off-centered existence. Through the theme of menace Pinter may be trying to portray the insecurity and threat to life which has become a facet of everyday existence for the common man. The social aspect of the threat is privatized by the playwright through presenting it as a source of irrational anxiety for the protagonists. The threat is something intrinsically linked to their private life but their response to it is grossly exaggerated and the resulting anxiety becomes the most important aspect and causation factor of their neurosis.
Notes


5  Karen Horney 92.


10 Harold Pinter, The Room and The Dumb Waiter (London: Methuen, 1960) 7. All further references to this play are incorporated within the text.

11 Harold Pinter, The Room and The Dumb Waiter 39. All further references to this play are incorporated within the text.

12 Harold Pinter, The Slight Ache and Other Plays (London: Methuen, 1961) 15-16. All further references to this play are incorporated within the text.


14 Harold Pinter, The Caretaker (London: Methuen, 1960) 9. All further references to this play are incorporated within the text.

15 Harold Pinter, Night School in Tea Party and Other Plays (London: Methuen, 1967) 82. All further references to this play are incorporated within the text.