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**Faculty of Arts and Philosophy**

**Menace in *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Room* by Harold Pinter**

**David Petráž**

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Jméno a příjmení: **David PETRÁŽ**  
Osobní číslo: **H08274**  
Studijní program: **B7310 Filologie**  
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### Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

Práce se zaměří na dramatické texty The Dumb Waiter a The Room od Harolda Pintera a na otázku hrozby. V úvodní části práce se autor s využitím relevantní sekundární literatury bude zabývat problematikou a specifiky absurdního dramatu, které ovlivnilo počátky tvorby Harolda Pintera, a rovněž zasadí vznik absurdního dramatu do společensko-kulturního kontextu. V hlavní části se student zaměří na výše zmíněné divadelní hry a pokusí se v nich vystopovat absurdní prvky a rovněž vymezí a analyzuje specifika těchto her - autor se například detailně zaměří na otázku hrozby, která proniká do uzavřeného prostoru. Na konci práce autor své závěry přehledně shrne.

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Vedoucí bakalářské práce:

**Mgr. Petra Smažilová**

Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

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prof. PhDr. Petr Vorel, CSc.

děkan

L.S.



Mgr. Šárka Bubíková, Ph.D.

vedoucí katedry

V Pardubicích dne 30. listopadu 2010

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Souhlasím s prezenčním zpřístupněním své práce v Univerzitní knihovně.

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## **Abstract**

The main subject of this paper is the analysis of two pieces of the Theatre of the Absurd, *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Room*, by Harold Pinter. In the initial part of this work, the Theatre of the Absurd and existentialism are contextualized and the specifics of the aforementioned plays are described. In the following part, the actual analysis of the pieces is conducted. The analysis focuses on the elements of absurdity and, above all, menace which create the fundamental part of these plays. Then, some of these elements from both the pieces are compared.

**Key words:** *The Dumb Waiter*; *The Room*; Theatre of the Absurd; Harold Pinter; comedies of menace; menace

## **Abstrakt**

Tato práce se zabývá analýzou dvou absurdních dramát, *Mechanický číšník* a *Pokoj*, od Harolda Pintera. V úvodní části je absurdní drama společně s existencialismem zasazeno do historicko-kulturního kontextu a specifika výše zmíněných her jsou popsána. Další části této práce zahrnují vlastní rozbor dramát. Hlavním předmětem této analýzy jsou absurdní prvky a především prvky hrozby, které jsou základním kamenem těchto kusů. Některé tyto elementy obou her jsou poté vzájemně porovnány.

**Klíčová slova:** *Mechanický číšník*; *Pokoj*; absurdní drama; Harold Pinter; komedie hrozby; hrozba

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# 1. Introduction

The main subject of this bachelor paper is the analysis of two plays written by Harold Pinter, a significant English existentialist playwright of the 20<sup>th</sup> century who belongs to a group of avant-garde dramatists called the Theatre of the Absurd. The Theatre of the Absurd, which is actually part of existentialism, plays an important role in the 20<sup>th</sup> century theatre. The absurd pieces being dealt with here are *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Room*. Both plays represent the beginnings of Pinter's dramatist career and his typical style of writing. The analysis focuses on the elements of absurdity and menace which create the very base of the plays. This is why Pinter's theatre pieces were called the 'comedies of menace' by critics.

This paper is divided into three parts. The first one gives a theoretical background to the analysis. Firstly it describes the term 'absurd' itself, more specifically its origins, dictionary meanings, and different interpretations by various experts in existentialism and the Absurd Theatre. Secondly, existentialism is looked at in detail; the philosophy of this movement and the role of absurdity are explained. After this, the Theatre of the Absurd is contextualized and the differences from existentialism itself are pointed out. Then, the standards and features of the plays of the Theatre of the Absurd are described; the absurd pieces are compared to the conventional plays. The most prominent authors of the Absurd Theatre are listed along with their best-known pieces. Thirdly, the first part includes a sub-chapter about Harold Pinter and his plays *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Room*. The beginnings of Pinter's playwright career are outlined and the aforementioned plays, which are considered to be typical examples of so called 'comedies of menace', are briefly introduced. The term 'comedies of menace' is consequently concentrated on and its origins, as well as definitions by various critics are provided. The second part of this work is the analysis of *The Dumb Waiter*; the third part contains the analysis of *The Room*. The elements of absurdity and above all menace are described; the reasons of why and how they evoke the menace feeling are pointed out. In the analysis of *The Dumb Waiter*, some analogies between this piece and *Waiting for Godot* are mentioned; this is because *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett is considered to be the pivotal and best-known piece of all the plays of the Theatre of the



Absurd. The analysis of *The Room* then includes a comparison of the ways of creating the menace atmosphere in *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Room*. At the end of the paper, the findings are summarized and the work is concluded.

## **2. The Theatre of the Absurd, Harold Pinter and his ‘comedies of menace’**

This initial part of the paper gives a theoretical background to the analysis of *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Room*, two plays by Harold Pinter. As these pieces are written in the style of the Theatre of the Absurd, the basic feature and notion of this type of writing is the term ‘absurd’ which must be firstly described and defined.

### **2.1. What is ‘absurd’**

Possible synonyms for ‘absurd’ which come to one’s mind are ‘illogical, senseless and ridiculous’. These are also the definitions which can be found in dictionaries. Martin Esslin in his book *The Theatre of the Absurd*, the most significant and complex work on the Theatre of the Absurd, describes that ‘absurd’ originally means ‘out of harmony’, in a musical context. (1973, 5) Esslin continues: “Hence its dictionary definition ‘out of harmony with reason or propriety, incongruous, unreasonable, illogical’.” (1973, 5) The definition given in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, in the article on absurdity by V. M. Martin, is similar. However, Martin also points out that this dictionary interpretation does not precisely apply for the authors of the Theatre of the Absurd and existentialism: “Whereas dictionaries define the absurd as that which is contrary to reason, as used by these writers it designates that which is without a reason.” (Absurdity, 48) V. M. Martin then adds his own definition of the term ‘absurd’: “The absurd is a situation, a thing, or an event that really is, but for which no explanation is possible. Because the affair is inexplicable, it offends reason; it is senseless, it is absurd.” (Absurdity, 48)

According to Martin, Søren Kierkegaard, a Danish Lutheran (1813-55), is the source for this kind of thought. Kierkegaard was an antagonist of the excessive rationalism of G. W. Hegel who taught that the mysteries of Christian faith can be comprehended by reason and grasped intellectually. Kierkegaard, however, disagreed with this idea. (Absurdity, 48) “To indicate that the Incarnation was beyond the understanding of human reason, Kierkegaard called it the absurd, meaning by that

something unintelligible and incomprehensible to reason.” (Martin, Absurdity, 48) In an atheistic context, this notion was later, in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, taken up by modern thinkers. These were especially existentialists, and among them the writers of the Theatre of the Absurd. (Martin, Absurdity, 48)

## **2.2. Existentialism, the Theatre of the Absurd**

V. M. Martin, in another of his articles in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* called ‘Existentialism’, describes the philosophy of this movement as follows: “The philosophy of existentialism, as the name itself implies, indicates a special concern with the problem of existence – not with each and every type of existence, but with human existence.” (Existentialism, 544) Existentialism is generally concerned with questions of purpose and meaning of life, freedom, and consequences of one’s acts. Some of the existentialists, for instance, work with the idea that a man is thrown into the world and let be. One then has to make decisions constantly throughout the life and wonders why he/she should even do it, because death is inevitable for everyone anyway, so the world and people’s deeds are in a way senseless and absurd. Two French writers and philosophers are considered to be the most significant existentialist authors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These are Jean-Paul Sartre (*The Wall*) and Albert Camus (*The Stranger*).

The authors of Theatre of the Absurd also belong among existentialists – that is to say, they do not form any self-proclaimed school or movement. “On the contrary, each of the writers in question is an individual who regards himself as a lone outsider, cut off and isolated in his private world,” explains Esslin (1973, 4) Martin Esslin was also the man to coin the term ‘The Theatre of the Absurd’. He made it a title of his book which was first published in 1962. (Crabb) By this, he set the authors of the Theatre of the Absurd apart from other existentialists. Although the absurd dramatists work with the same ideas as other existentialist writers, they differ a bit, which is also observed by Esslin in *The Theatre of the Absurd*. He explains that the authors such as Sartre and Camus present the irrationality of the human condition using highly lucid and logically constructed reasoning. This is not the sort of approach of the absurd playwrights. They,

on the contrary, express the senselessness of the human condition by the open abandonment of rational devices. (1973, 6) Esslin adds:

While Sartre or Camus express the new content in the old convention, the Theatre of the Absurd goes a step further in trying to achieve a unity between its basic presumptions and the form in which these are expressed. (1973, 6)

This means that the Theatre of the Absurd does not argue *about* the absurdity like other existentialists do, but it merely *presents* the absurdity of the human condition in being. (Esslin 1973, 6) Martin Esslin finishes the matter by saying that “it is this striving for an integration between the subject-matter and the form in which it is expressed that separates the Theatre of the Absurd from the Existentialist theatre.” (1973, 7) This is the general notion of the plays of the Absurd.

As for the specific features of the Theatre of the Absurd, generally, it can be said that the Theatre of the Absurd breaks the conventions of classic drama. That is why some of the authors preferred, as a label for their style of writing, terms such as ‘New Theatre’ or ‘Anti-Theatre’, as opposed to ‘The Theatre of the Absurd’. (Crabb) The plays usually have no extensive story; the traditional plot is discarded. Another characteristic feature is that the characters are described very little or are not described at all. The conversation between these characters usually lacks meaning and sense; their dialogues are very often incoherent. The playwrights of the Absurd simply imply that people are losing their ability to communicate meaningfully with others. Ronald Hayman, a British critic and dramatist who is the author of the analysis on the writing of Harold Pinter, explains the analogy of the absurd plays with conventional plays and real life:

Real-life conversations don’t proceed smoothly and logically from point to point. Conventional characters in conventional plays listen to each other intently and answer each other intelligently, but it’s only a tiny minority of people who do this in reality. (1)

Hayman adds that the pieces of the Theatre of the Absurd are so full of bad syntax and tautologies, repetitions and self-contradictions, that not only are the characters uninterested in listening; they are hardly interested in what they are saying themselves. (2)

The Absurd Theatre specialist Martin Esslin summarizes the standards of the Theatre of the Absurd as follows:

If a good play must have a cleverly constructed story, these have no story or plot to speak of; if a good play is judged by subtlety of characterization and motivation, these are often without recognizable characters and present the audience almost mechanical puppets; if a good play has to have a fully explained theme, which is neatly exposed and finally solved, these often have neither a beginning nor an end; [...] If a good play relies on witty repartee and pointed dialogue, these often consist of incoherent babblings. (1973, 3-4)

Although this avant-garde group of dramatists of the Absurd was breaking almost all the rules of conventional writing, they became very significant for the literature and culture of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Among these authors belong above all Samuel Beckett (*Waiting for Godot*), who was an Irish writer and dramatist writing in English and French, Harold Pinter whose plays *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Room* are analysed in the following chapters, Eugène Ionesco (*The Bald Soprano*), Edward Albee (*The Zoo Story*), Jean Genet (*The Balcony*), Tom Stoppard (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*), and last but not least a Czech playwright Václav Havel (*Audience*). Although each work listed above – and many others – is definitely significant for the world's literature, Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is considered to be the pivotal and best-known piece of all the plays of the Theatre of the Absurd. Nevertheless, by no means less prominent author is the main subject of this paper – Harold Pinter.

### **2.3. Harold Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Room* – 'comedies of menace'**

Harold Pinter was born in 1930. He was the son of a Jewish tailor in Hackney, East London. His writing career started when he was a teenager – he wrote poetry for little magazines. He was also an actor as he studied at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and the Central School of Speech and Drama. He began to write plays in 1957 and the start of his playwright career was quite interesting and unusual. Pinter mentioned his idea for a play to a friend who was working in the drama department of Bristol University. The friend liked the idea so much that he asked Pinter to write it. However, he added that if Pinter wanted the play to be performed by the university, the manuscript would have to be ready within a week. Pinter wrote him back and told him to forget

about it and then he – he himself does not know how he did that – sat down and wrote it in four days. (Esslin 1973, 231) This very first, spontaneously written piece is one of the two plays which are analysed in this paper – *The Room*. The other piece being dealt with here was also written in 1957. It is *The Dumb Waiter*. That is to say, these plays are examples of Pinter's early style of writing.

Both *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Room* take place in one room and feature very few characters. *The Dumb Waiter* presents only two people, professional assassins Ben and Gus, who are sent by their rather mysterious and never-much-spoken-of employer called Wilson to do another job – a murder. They spend their day, as it is usual, in a room, in this case a basement room, waiting for the victim to come. They never know who their prey is going to be. They are only told to assassinate him/her and leave, no questions asked.

*The Room* presents a married couple, Rose and Bert who live in a room in a large house. Rose is a tireless wife who looks after her husband constantly, feeding him and reassuring him, and also herself, that they are utterly satisfied in the room. Bert does not react and perhaps dumbly agrees. Then, there is the character of Mr. Kidd, an old confused man, who is said to be the landlord of the house. Other characters are two strangers, Mr. and Mrs. Sands, who come from outside, looking for a room to rent; and finally some man who is living in the basement.

The two plays have, however, one basic thing in common – both in *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Room* the basic elements are absurdity and, above all, menace which penetrates the room from outside. Martin Esslin described a typical Pinter's absurd situation as “the commonplace situation that is gradually invested with menace, dread and mystery.” (1973, 232) This is why Pinter's absurd plays earned the title ‘comedies of menace’. The term was coined by David Campton in 1957 and first applied to Pinter by Irving Wardle in 1958. (Esslin 1970, 51) Esslin characterizes the comedies of menace as “plays which can be very funny up to the point when the absurdity of the characters' predicament becomes frightening, horrifying, pathetic, tragic.” (1970, 51)

The main sources of menace in these plays are the unknown and uncertainty. Moreover, not only the characters are kept in the dark. As Richard Schechner, a professor at New York University and a drama theorist, says: “[...] in those plays where the questions are not answered, or where they are unanswerable, a gnawing anxiety

haunts both characters and audience.” (177) Moreover, as Bernard Dukore, an American university professor and theatre critic, points out: “Each piece of knowledge is a half-knowledge, each answer a springboard to new questions.” (44) In this kind of uncertainty, the characters are frightened of everything waiting outside the room, which Harold Pinter himself confirms – when he was asked by a critic what his characters in the room are afraid of, he replied that “obviously they are afraid of what is outside the room. Outside the room there is a world bearing upon them which is frightening. I am sure it is frightening to you and me as well.” (Esslin 1973, 232) As the characters of the comedies of menace are afraid of the outside world, they are isolating themselves from it. “They live in a closed, womb-like environment. They keep to themselves as if they are afraid to go outside their little world [...]” (Dukore 47) This can be observed in both plays which are the chief subject of this paper, especially in the character of Rose in *The Room* who tries to isolate herself absolutely in her room. This matter is dealt with in greater detail in chapter 3.1. of this paper. Generally, menace and absurdity in *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Room*, the typical comedies of menace, are described and analysed in the following chapters.

### **3. Absurd elements and menace in *The Dumb Waiter***

If absurd elements and menace are to be analysed, firstly their relationship must be defined. It must be stressed that absurdity and menace are not two matters very different from each other, but they are, to the contrary, very close.

The two comedies of menace which will be analysed in the following chapters, *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Room*, show the absurdity-menace relationship quite clearly. Some situations in these plays come to be so much absurd, and by Pinter very cleverly built up, that they produce a very specific feeling of danger. In other words, it can be said that menace atmosphere directly proceeds from the absurd elements in these plays. Here, menace *originates* in absurdity. Moreover, not only is this atmosphere menacing to the characters, but it is transferred to the audience who do not know whether to laugh at the incredibly absurd situations which the characters go through, or to be afraid of what comes next.

However, it must be said that the situations and objects which create the menace feeling in *The Dumb Waiter* would not be considered dangerous in real life at all. The menace elements in the play include everything situated outside the room the play takes place in (and it can be said that the room itself is included as well), the relationship of the two characters, and the dumb waiter, an ordinary tool for transporting dishes usually used in restaurants.

#### **3.1. Basement room and the outside**

In *The Dumb Waiter* the two characters, Ben and Gus, spend their day in one room – together and alone. The fact that the room is a basement room with no windows situated in an unknown derelict building gives somewhat negative unpleasant associations like darkness, loneliness and, above all, isolation. One of the two characters, Gus, himself comments on the strangeness of the places they are supposed to do their work in:



Gus: 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 need 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. (*Pause*) I like to get a look at the scenery. You never get the chance in this job. (Pinter 133-134)

Ben and Gus are waiting for their victim to come and this is all they can do. They are probably forbidden from leaving the room, nobody seems to be willing to give them further instructions, and nobody cares about them. They are alone and isolated. And this isolation is the first element of absurdity and, at the same time, the basic presumption for menace. The danger to Ben and Gus is represented by almost everything situated outside their room. At first the two assassins calmly wait in their restful quiet room for the right time to do their work. They calmly wait until they find out they are probably not alone in the 'deserted' building.

The fact that there should be other people in the building is unnaturally frightening for the two *killers*. Moreover, the presence of strange people around the basement room is firstly expressed by a very mysterious act. When Ben and Gus crave for a cup of tea which is their only ritual before performing the job, they find out they have run out of matches, so they cannot light the gas. Several minutes after, suddenly and swiftly an envelope is slipped under the door. And it is this simple unexpected situation that starts the menace feeling which accompanies Ben and Gus until the end of the play. "At first it had seemed that the room was a place for resting and safety. But when the matches are slipped underneath the door, Ben and Gus know that they are not alone in the house." (Hayman 17) One little envelope slipped under the door becomes greatly frightening for the two killers:

Gus: Ben, look here.

Ben: What?

Gus: Look.

(*Ben turns his head and sees an envelope. He stands.*)

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.

(*They stare at it.*)

Ben: Pick it up.

Gus: What do you mean?  
Ben: Pick it up! (Pinter 139)

The strangeness and mysteriousness of the situation is underlined by the fact that the envelope contains nothing but matches. There is practically no chance someone could hear Ben and Gus complaining about having run out of matches. So who knew they did not have any left and who slipped the envelope under the door? And who is it at all present in the building which should be empty and where an assassination with no witnesses should be committed? These pertinent questions concern Ben and Gus very much and they reluctantly, with revolvers in their hands, try to find out who the messenger is. Gus's fear of who it is behind the door is obvious:

Ben: It came under the door?  
Gus: Must have done.  
Ben: Well, go on.  
Gus: Go on where?  
Ben: Open the door and see if you can catch anyone outside.  
Gus: Who, me?  
Ben: Go on!  
(*Gus stares at him, [...] (Pinter 140)*)

Then, no one is reached behind the door, which intensifies the peril felt by the characters. There *is* someone besides Ben, Gus, and their victim in the building. Someone knows Ben and Gus are waiting in the basement.

The messenger might be a man hired by Ben and Gus's employer who is, by the way, another great source of menace situated outside the room. This character is, however, hardly ever mentioned and is not described at all. At first the employer is referred to simply as 'he', only in the second half of the play his name is revealed – 'he' is Wilson. Nevertheless, this is basically the only piece of information Pinter gives about him. One of the first mentions about the employer is this simple sentence of Gus's at the very beginning of the play: "What time is he getting in touch?" (Pinter 132) The *he* is a simple but really clever way of how to escalate the tension and the unknown which are closely related to menace.

The character of Wilson is, in a way, quite similar to Samuel Beckett's character of Godot from *Waiting for Godot*. Both Wilson and Godot are symbols for the unknown, for the uncertainty. Godot is waited for because he should be, most likely, a kind of salvation, although this is never directly stated. And also Ben and Gus wait all

day to be saved, saved from waiting in the isolated basement room. Wilson is supposed to give them further instructions, which always directly precedes the victim's arrival. However, unlike in *Waiting for Godot* where the characters wait for someone or something absolutely unknown called Godot, Ben and Gus wait for Wilson whom they seem to know. Yet, Wilson is so seldom and vaguely talked about that the feeling of mysteriousness is tremendous. There are not more than five references to Wilson throughout the play. They all reveal only little about Wilson himself, his relationship and approach to his employees, Ben and Gus, and his way of giving them exact instructions for their job:

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.

[...]

Gus: Half the time he doesn't even bother to put in an appearance, Wilson.

Ben: Why should he? He is a busy man.

Gus: (*thoughtfully*) I find him hard to talk to, Wilson. Do you know that, Ben?

[...]

Gus: There are a number of things I want to ask him. But I can never get round to it, when I see him. (Pinter 144-146)

As it can be seen in this passage, Ben justifies Wilson's behaviour, while Gus is unsure of him. Ben is always doing this; he never complains about Wilson and the organization they work for. Gus is, on the contrary, always wondering. And this difference between them negatively influences their relationship which is, as it has been mentioned, another element of danger in *The Dumb Waiter*.

### **3.2. Ben and Gus's relationship**

In this matter, another parallel between Samuel Beckett's characters of *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon, and Ben and Gus can be observed. Between Vladimir and Estragon, there is a considerable difference in their behaviour and interests. Vladimir is restless, standing all the time, while Estragon is idle, sitting and often dozing off throughout the play. Not only in their movement they differ; they also have dissimilar interests and they reason in a completely different way. While Vladimir reflects on religious and philosophical matters, Estragon's only concern is that of

getting food and shelter. Vladimir is, in a way, superior to Estragon, he is not so simple-minded as Estragon is. The superiority of one of the characters can also be found in *The Dumb Waiter*. Although Ben and Gus are obviously good friends, from the very beginning Ben gives the impression of the boss. Gus is the one who is supposed to make tea for both of them. Gus is the one who asks and wonders. And Ben is the one who tries to teach Gus and who has the last word. Ben's superiority is not only expressed by these simple means like making the tea, but also by purely language matters. When they, for example, argue about figures of speech, Ben, as the senior partner, will not admit Gus should be right:

Ben: Go and light it.  
Gus: Light what?  
Ben: The kettle.  
Gus: You mean the gas.  
Ben: Who does?  
Gus: You do.  
Ben: (*his eyes narrowing*): What do you mean, I mean the gas?  
Gus: Well, that's what you mean, don't you? The gas.  
Ben: (*powerfully*) If I say go and light the kettle I mean go and light the kettle.  
Gus: How can you light the kettle?  
Ben: It's a figure of speech! Light the kettle. It's a figure of speech!  
Gus: I've never heard it.  
Ben: Light the kettle! It's common usage! [...] Gus, I'm not trying to be unreasonable, I'm just trying to point out something to you.  
Gus: Yes, but –  
Ben: Who's the senior partner here, me or you?  
Gus: You.  
Ben: I'm only looking after your interests, Gus. You've got to learn, mate. (Pinter 141-142)

Although Ben is the senior partner, it is not said that he has more information about the employer and about the jobs than Gus. Nonetheless, in some situations Ben appears to know something more, something Gus should not know. Is Ben hiding something? Is he a kind of menace to Gus? Gus must ask himself these questions at times.

Ben and Gus know each other very well. Obviously, they have been working together for a long time. Nevertheless, something seems to be wrong with their relationship. They do not trust each other fully:

Gus: Why did you stop the car this morning, in the middle of that road?  
 Ben: (*lowering the paper*) I thought you were asleep.  
 Gus: I was, but I woke up when you stopped. You did stop, didn't you? [...] I thought perhaps you wanted to kip, but you were sitting up dead straight, like you were waiting for something.  
 Ben: I wasn't waiting for anything.  
 Gus: I must have fallen asleep again. What was all that about then? Why did you stop?  
 Ben: (*picking up the paper*) We were too early.  
 Gus: Early? (*He rises*) What do you mean? We got the call, didn't we, saying we were to start right away. We did. We shoved out on the dot. So how could we be too early?  
 Ben: (*quietly*) Who took the call, me or you?  
 Gus: You.  
 Ben: We were too early. (Pinter 135-136)

Gus is always asking questions. This would be, on the one hand, natural because he is learning from his senior partner. On the other hand, Gus does not ask in order to learn to do his job better. As it can be seen in the previous passage, Gus is not questioning only Ben's behaviour, but he also doubts their instructions. As Gus questions even their job, his constant enquiries drive Ben mad. Ben's behaviour and priorities are very much different from Gus's – Ben does not question their job at all and it even does not occur to him to ask questions. But this is not because he would know everything; he just does his job and there is no need for him to know any more information than he does. Bernard Dukore describes the difference between Ben and Gus in his essay *The Theatre of Harold Pinter* as follows: “*The Dumb Waiter* presents two people, one simply – dumbly – accepts, the other who suffers and questions. The latter must be stopped.” (50) Gus always wonders “What, why and when,” Ben does not care – he just has a job to do:

Gus: I've been wanting to ask you something.  
 [...]  
 Ben: What's the matter with you? You're always asking me questions. What's the matter with you?  
 Gus: Nothing.  
 Ben: You never used to ask so many damn questions. What's come over you?  
 Gus: No, I was just wondering.  
 Ben: Stop wondering! You've got a job to do. Why don't you just do it and shut up? (Pinter 143)

As Dukore says: “Ben has no identity other than his job, his function. His existence is determined by his function as a non-individualized cog in a larger machine. [...] Ben is a dumb waiter.” (51) To the contrary, Gus, as a constant doubter, is a representative of the audience who must also be curious about the answers.

As Gus is becoming more and more curious and doubtful about the job and the place they are in, their relationship comes to be extremely tense. Ben keeps expressing his disapproval of Gus's behaviour. He is becoming a menace to Gus. This peaks when another entrance to the isolated basement room is discovered.

### 3.3. The dumb waiter

As it has been said, Ben and Gus are afraid of anything that would come to them from the menacing outside world. Nevertheless, another frightening entrance to the basement room is found by the two assassins.

There is a loud clattering sound in the wall. Ben and Gus grab their revolvers and are going to face the threat from outside. They act as if their lives were at stake. However, only a dumb waiter is disclosed, just a simple serving hatch which has brought a piece of paper with an order. But it must be stressed that Ben and Gus do not see it as a harmless tool for transporting food and beverages as anyone else would do. They regard the discovery with fright and consider the dumb waiter a peril:

*He [Ben] throws his revolver on the bed and speaks with decision.*

Ben: We'd better send something up.

Gus: Eh?

Ben: We'd better send something up.

Gus: Oh! Yes. Yes. Maybe you're right. *(They are both relieved at the decision.)*

Ben: *(purposefully)* Quick! What have you got in that bag? (Pinter 149)

Ben and Gus's first confrontation with the dumb waiter brings a revolutionary fact which intensifies the menace atmosphere a lot – there really are other people in the building after all! Ben deduces that the building must be a café and the basement room used to be a kitchen. However, who it is above remains a spine-chilling mystery.

The assassins are scared of not sending anything up, so at first they both strive to follow the orders. Nevertheless, their attempts to do so are rather absurd. This first demand from above is for “Two braised steak and chips. Two sago puddings. Two teas without sugar.” Before they even try to think about following the order, the dumb waiter goes back up. Eventually, they collect everything they have in their bags: biscuits, chocolate, milk, a packet of tea, Eccles cake, and crisps. Unfortunately for

them, more and more exotic requests keep coming down the dumb waiter. The two killers are firmly decided not to disappoint the people above who should be, most likely, waiters, which is at the same time immensely illogical, for the play is said to take place in a *former* café.

When an order for Macaroni Pastitsio and Ormitha Macarounada (Greek dishes, as Ben points out) is brought down, Ben and Gus unhesitatingly pile up the ordinary snacks they found in their bags on the plate which returns up. Back down comes the tea. Here, again very simply, a very mysterious situation is created: their food is really needed upstairs, although it was sent instead of those foreign delicacies. Ben is not concerned – they obeyed, in a way, the orders. Gus is, however, becoming more and more anxious. He is the one who is trying to point out that it is quite absurd to be sending up dishes: “But what happens when we’re not here? What do they do then? All the menus coming down and nothing coming up. It might have been going like this for years.” (Pinter 151) Ben does not concern himself with this at all. He does what he is said to do. He does not think about whether it is weird to serve as a cook while he is waiting for somebody to kill, or not. As Gus starts to realize the absurdity of their situation, his anxiety and anger graduates. He needs answers which Ben is unable to give. Moreover, Ben does not even understand why Gus should be upset:

Gus: Who sent us the matches?  
Ben: What are you talking about?  
(*Gus stares down at him.*)  
Gus: (*thickly*) Who is it upstairs?  
Ben: What’s one thing to do with another?  
Gus: I asked you a question.  
Ben: Enough! (Pinter 161)

Consequently, Gus comes to an opinion that they are being tested by their employer, which Ben does not deny but does not elaborate either:

Gus: (*passionately, advancing*) What’s he doing this for? We’ve been through our tests, haven’t we? We got right through our test, years ago, didn’t we? We took them together, don’t you remember, didn’t we? We’ve proved ourselves before now, haven’t we? We’ve always done our job. What’s he doing all this for? What’s the idea? What’s he playing these games for? (Pinter 162)

A moment after, when Gus leaves for the bathroom to have a glass of water, Ben finally receives the instructions for their job through the speaking tube of the dumb waiter. The

victim has arrived. Ben calls Gus to come quickly and get ready. Gus is not coming back from the bathroom. He is not answering either. Suddenly, the door leading upstairs opens. Ben levels his revolver at the door to kill the victim. Gus stumbles in, stripped of his jacket, waistcoat, tie, holster, and revolver. There is a long silence. The two former partners stare at each other.

Throughout the play Gus was asking, questioning and doubting, while Ben was the loyal dumb waiter. The effusion of Gus's about them being tested was the last straw. He was not able to do his work anymore; he stopped to trust the employer; he went out of control. In *The Dumb Waiter*, Gus is the victim of the menacing world which is full of questions. On the one hand, it is never said Gus is killed. On the other hand, Ben follows orders precisely. He does not doubt.



## 4. Absurd elements and menace in *The Room*

As *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter* are Harold Pinter's first two plays, they have much in common. The common features of theirs, the absurd and menace elements in particular, will be compared in this chapter. The differences in expressing the absurdity and danger will also be pointed out.

The menace elements in *The Room* include the outside world compared to the safe and quiet room, generally the house in which the room is situated, the relationship between the two main characters, Rose and Bert Hudd, strange people from outside, and a man who is said to be the landlord of the house, Mr. Kidd.

### 4.1. The room vs. the outside and the basement

Like *The Dumb Waiter*, *The Room* takes place in one room only. However, it is not a basement room or any other room which would give negative associations. To the contrary, it is a cosy, comfortable room in a large, further non-specified house. Due to this fact, *The Room*, at the beginning, seems to be 'less menacing' than *The Dumb Waiter* – one can look out of the window, sit and rock in the rocking chair, make tea and drink it by the fireplace. Nevertheless, although this room is safe and does not give any sign of undesirable isolation, a peril awaits outside. The menace atmosphere in this play is again created simply but effectively. The outside danger is represented in a very natural way, mainly by bad weather which the characters, sometimes rather exaggeratedly, really fear:

Rose: Here you are. This'll keep the cold out.

*She places bacon and eggs on a plate, turns off the gas and takes the plate to the table.*

It's very cold out, I can tell you. It's murder.

[...]

Just now I looked out of the window. It was enough for me. [...] Can you hear the wind? (Pinter 101)

On the one hand, it is quite absurd that the characters should be afraid of common cold weather. On the other hand, this underlines Rose's warm relationship to the room. It is her beloved dwelling and she literally cannot even imagine not living in

it. Rose is just satisfied, although from time to time again exaggeratedly, with her place to live and she fears a change:

Rose: No, this room's all right for me. I mean, you know where you are. When it's cold, for instance.

[...]

If they ever ask you, Bert, I'm quite happy where I am. We are quiet, we're all right. You're happy up here.

[...]

And we're not bothered. And nobody bothers us. (Pinter 102-103)

As it can be seen in the previous passages, Pinter really succeeded in creating a noticeable contrast between the safe and cosy room, and the source of menace, the outside world, which strengthens the tension. Moreover, the outside is not the only danger Rose is tormented with throughout the play.

The second source of menace originates not outside, but in the house itself, more specifically in the basement. At the very beginning, right after Rose comments on the terrible weather, she also mentions another cause of her anxiety – the basement of the house:

Rose: Still, the room keeps warm. It's better than the basement anyway. I don't know how they live down there. It's asking for trouble.

[...]

I've never seen who it is. Who is it? Who lives down there? I'll have to ask.

[...]

But whoever it is, it can't be too cosy.

[...]

I wouldn't like to live in that basement. Did you see the walls? They were running. This is all right for me. (Pinter 101-102)

The room-basement relationship here is highly similar to the room-outside world one. Again, Pinter stresses the safeness of the room compared to the damp and dark basement. Like in *The Dumb Waiter*, the basement room here is presented as an unpleasant isolated place where no one would like to live. There is, however, another issue for Rose about the basement besides the aforementioned one. Rose is, unknown why, terribly curious about who is living down there and she constantly speculates:

Rose: I think it's changed hands since I was last there. I didn't see who moved in then. I mean the first time it was taken.

*Pause.*

Anyway, I think they've gone now.

*Pause.*

But I think someone has gone in now.

[...]

I wonder who has got it now. I've never seen them, or heard of them. But I think someone's down there. Whoever's got it can keep it. (Pinter 105)

In *The Room*, the basement is depicted even more negatively and ominously than in *The Dumb Waiter* because Rose is even afraid of going down there to see herself who is living there. The basement is a different world, which should stay isolated and should not be visited at all.

It is this obscurity about the basement, along with the outside world, that produces the menace. Rose considers the tenant(s) from basement a danger, even though she claims she has no idea who it is. She may be afraid of them (and of everyone else outside the room) because they might be interested in living in her beloved room, which would be a complete disaster for her. As it has been said, Rose would not change her room for anything. She would love to live quietly and not bothered, looking after her husband Bert who, however, does not seem to share her enthusiasm about their home and fear of the outside and the basement. He actually does not express himself at all, which makes their relationship somewhat peculiar. The relation becomes another element of absurdity and menace then.

#### **4.2. Rose and Bert's relationship**

Rose looks after Bert and this is her only occupation. She feeds him and makes him comfortable, and he does not react, letting Rose take care of him as if he was a baby. She talks to him and asks him questions, but he does not respond. Nevertheless, Rose apparently does not mind him being idle. She just goes on cooking and serving food, answering her questions herself:

*She places bacon and eggs on a plate, turns off the gas and takes the plate to the table.*

[...]

*Bert begins to eat.*

Rose: That's right. You eat that. You'll need it. You can feel it in here.

[...]

If you want to go out you might as well have something inside you. Because you'll feel it when you get out.

[...]

*She goes to the table and cuts a slice of bread.*

I'll have some cocoa on when you come back.

[...]

What about the rasher? Was it all right? It was a good one, I know, but not as good as the last lot I got in. (Pinter 101-102)

Furthermore, Rose constantly reassures herself Bert is content and comfortable: "I look after you, don't I, Bert?" (Pinter 105). There is no response though.

This silence of Bert's creates a specific tense atmosphere and it contributes to the menace that the audience must feel. The reasons for his silence, however, remain unanswered. One does not know whether Bert is going to say a word or not. One even cannot know whether Bert can speak at all! He himself may therefore be considered menacing – as he does not express himself, no one knows what he is going to do, what he might be up to.

Certain superiority, like in *The Dumb Waiter*, can be observed in Rose and Bert's relationship. Although it is not directly said that Rose should be superior to Bert, from the very beginning Bert gives the impression of a puppet. As he does not communicate and only sits and eats, he seems to be under Rose's absolute control. Rose and Bert's relationship and superiority are in a way extreme. This can be seen if Rose and Bert are individually compared to Ben and Gus from *The Dumb Waiter*. Ben is to some extent superior to Gus and Gus is to some extent controlled by him, while Rose is absolutely superior to Bert and Bert is absolutely under her control – puppet-like. Thus, Bert will not doubt his 'superior' as Gus does. Bert will not question his role as Gus does. Bert does not act in the way which became fatal for Gus. So Bert is probably not going to be the one to become the victim in this play.

The tireless and constant effort of Rose's to look after her husband is interrupted by a rather absurd arrival of another character, Mr. Kidd, who is considered by Rose to be the landlord of the house:

*A knock at the door. She [Rose] stands.*

Rose: Who is it?

*Pause.*

Hallo!

*Knock repeated.*

Come in then.

*Knock repeated.*

Who is it?

*Pause. The door opens and Mr. Kidd comes in.*  
Mr. Kidd: I knocked.  
Rose: We heard you.  
Mr. Kidd: Eh?  
Rose: We heard you.  
Mr. Kidd: Hallo, Mr. Hudd, how are you, all right? I've been looking at the pipes.  
Rose: Are they all right?  
Mr. Kidd: Eh? (Pinter 105-106)

Although Mr. Kidd addresses Bert Hudd right after his arrival, it is Rose who responds. The point here is that not only does Bert remain silent when Rose is asking him and talking to him, but he is also not able to communicate with other characters; and Rose even does not give Bert a chance to answer. She acts as if she were a dumb man's spokesperson. And neither Ben, who minds only his food and newspaper and does not concern himself with the fact that somebody new has come into the room, nor Mr. Kidd, who asked *Bert* the question, seem to mind.

#### **4.3. Mr. Kidd and other characters**

Mr. Kidd's odd and confused behaviour which can be seen in the passage about his arrival is very typical of him. He is a rather mysterious old man who talks nonsense almost all the time and does not properly react to lucid questions. Moreover, no specific information is provided about him by Pinter. Mr. Kidd, as it has been said, is the landlord of the house. At least Rose regards him to be. From his vague and incoherent talking and responses about his own past and family one gets a feeling of chilling uncertainty:

Mr. Kidd: [...] That was when my sister was alive. But I lost track a bit, after she died. She's been dead some time now, my sister. [...] She was a capable woman. Yes. Fine size of a woman too. I think she took after my mom. Yes, I think she took after my old mum, from what I can recollect. I think my mum was a Jewess. Yes, I wouldn't be surprised to learn that she was a Jewess. She didn't have many babies.  
Rose: What about your sister, Mr. Kidd?  
Mr. Kidd: What about her?  
Rose: Did she have any babies?  
Mr. Kidd: Yes, she had a resemblance to my old mum, I think. Taller, of course. (Pinter 109)

As soon as Mr. Kidd leaves, Rose comments on the tale about his sister and intensifies the mysterious and, to some extent, menacing atmosphere about him: “I don’t believe he had a sister, ever.” (Pinter 110)

It is known that Mr. Kidd has been living in the house as well; he has a bedroom there. Moreover, he claims to have lived in the room Rose and Bert now reside in – the best room in the house as he says. Mr. Kidd is, however, unable to tell when he lived there. “A good while back,” he tells Rose. He speaks as if he was hundreds of years old and he couldn’t remember his own past. Nevertheless, he appears to be recognizing some items in the room which have been brought *after* he moved away from the room. He has dim memories of events which might have not happened, people who might have not existed, and, in this case, items he might have not seen in his life:

Mr. Kidd: [...] Eh, have I seen that before?  
Rose: What?  
Mr. Kidd: That.  
Rose: I don’t know. Have you?  
Mr. Kidd: I seem to have some remembrance.  
Rose: It’s just an old rocking-chair.  
Mr. Kidd: Was it here when you came?  
Rose: No, I brought it myself.  
Mr. Kidd: I could swear blind I’ve seen that before.  
Rose: Perhaps you have.  
Mr. Kidd: What?  
Rose: I say, perhaps you have.  
Mr. Kidd: Yes, maybe I have.  
Rose: Take a seat, Mr. Kidd.  
Mr. Kidd: I wouldn’t take an oath on it though. (Pinter 106-107)

To the contrary, Mr. Kidd is unable to recollect items which had been in the room when he was living there. Nonetheless, considering his previous probably untrue babblings, it is highly unlikely he even ever lived in the room.

Due to Mr. Kidd’s vagueness and confusion even the house itself becomes an element of danger. Pinter himself gives almost no specific description of the place. The only piece of information provided is that it is “a room in a large house.” When Mr. Kidd is asked how many floors there are in ‘his’ house, even he himself is unable to give an answer:

Rose: How many floors you got in this house?  
Mr. Kidd: Floors. (*He laughs*) Ah, we had a good few of them in the old days.  
Rose: How many have you got now?

Mr. Kidd: Well, to tell you the truth, I don't count them now. (Pinter 108)

Mr. Kidd speaks about the floors of the house as if their number was changing over time! Moreover, when asked about *where* his bedroom is situated now, he is again very vague. He does not directly answer this clear question. Mr. Kidd's response "I was not in my bedroom. [...] I was up and about." (Pinter 107) is logically not satisfying. These two facts together give a somewhat metaphysical impression about the large house – it is unclear how big the house is, how many floors there are. One even cannot be sure whether the number of the floors has not changed because the landlord is unable to count them now as he used to.

As in *The Dumb Waiter* where the character of Wilson simply produces the menace by the fact that he is unknown, the character of Mr. Kidd in *The Room* functions likewise. Although Mr. Kidd is known as a person by other characters, he is obscure to them as he will not give any specific and truthful information about himself and 'his' house. He is cloaked in mist of mysteriousness. And this chilling feeling of the unknown and uncertainty makes Mr. Kidd another source of menace in *The Room*.

When Mr. Kidd leaves Rose, remains alone in the room (Bert has gone out into the dangerous weather to do a work with his van). The real fright of the outside world explodes at this moment. Rose is restless, going around the room, nervously picking things up and putting them down again; she warms her hands at the fireplace. Then, her attention is drawn by the door leading to the hostile world; she looks at the door, approaches it, opens it and discovers her worst nightmare – Mr. and Mrs. Sands – strange people coming from outside.

The door here, like in *The Dumb Waiter*, actually represents the peril from outside. When Rose is left alone in the room, she realizes that the door is in a way dangerous to her because it is the only entrance from the outside world. She is scared to open it because she knows that nothing good can come to her through it. Something which might endanger her and her quiet life in the room may be lurking out there. The door is the mediator between the menacing world and the safe room. In *The Dumb Waiter* the door-outside world relationship is similar but not the same – Ben and Gus *wait* for someone to come in through the door. As soon as they are done with the victim,

they are allowed to leave the basement room which they, or rather Gus, loathe. Martin Esslin in his work on Harold Pinter comments on the door-suspense matter as follows:

Rose in her room, looking at her door, was clearly a victim-to-be. Ben and Gus are looking at the door waiting for the victim to walk into the trap. This provides a very different element of suspense and a very different focus for the spectator's fears and hopes. (1970, 70)

Although Mr. and Mrs. Sands are only ordinary young people looking for the landlord, Rose considers them a menace. Nevertheless, she invites the two 'intruders' in and tries to act as if they were usual guests of hers. The first uncanny situation is brought by a misunderstanding about the landlord. While Rose tells the Sands that Mr. Kidd is the landlord Mr. and Mrs. Sands are confident that Mr. Kidd is not the name they have been told, that he is not the landlord of the house. This simple situation makes Mr. Kidd even more mysterious a person than he has been up until now. Not only was he vague and confused about his life, but now it is also not clear whether he is at all the landlord. One absolutely cannot be sure who this man really is then.

Moreover, the menace which is caused by this uncertainty is heightened by Mrs. Sand's rather frightening account of their visit to the basement. The mere fact that Mr. and Mrs. Sands *were* in the basement thrills Rose who immediately starts to be eager to learn who lives down there. Mrs. Sands describes the basement and her feelings about it as follows:

[...] Between you and me, I didn't like the look of it much, I mean the feel, we couldn't make much out, it smelt damp to me. 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. So I stopped. And Toddy [Mr. Sands] stopped. And then this voice said, this voice came – it said – well, it gave me a bit of a fright, I don't know about Tod, but someone asked if he could do anything for us. So Tod said we were looking for the landlord and this man said the landlord would be upstairs. Then Tod asked was there a room vacant. And this man, this voice really, I think he was behind the partition, said yes there was a room vacant. [...] (Pinter 117)

After this Rose gets even more and exaggeratedly curious about the inhabitant of the basement as if she might have an idea who it may be:

Rose: This man, what was he like, was he old?  
Mrs. Sands: We didn't see him.  
Rose: Was he old? (Pinter 118)



While Mrs. Sands is speaking about the room to let, Rose realizes the threat to her. She gets scared that *her* room could be said to be vacant. Therefore, she immediately starts convincing the Sands there is *no* room vacant in the house, making up that Mr. Kidd told her “he was full up.” Very simply, a sinister situation is created and the menace escalates:

Mrs. Sands: The man in the basement said there was one. One room. Number seven he said.

*Pause.*

Rose: That’s this room. (Pinter 118)

So Rose’s worst dread comes true. She is totally stricken with the fact she could be deprived of her beloved room. Martin Esslin describes the situation of Rose losing the room as follows: “To Rose the very idea that her room which she regards as hers should be talked about as being to let is tantamount to a death sentence.” (1970, 63) Mr. and Mrs. Sands leave panic-stricken Rose in the room and go to look for the landlord. However, they do not reach him. Mr. Kidd, if he could be still considered the landlord, reappears, wearily repeating he was waiting for everyone to leave. Rose must speak with him about her room being to let while he needs to speak to her about the man in the basement.

#### **4.4. The blind Negro**

Rose interrogates Mr. Kidd who is, by the way, even more confused and worn out than he was before. She is desperate to know why her room should be vacant; she is longing to hear that it is a mere rumour. But Mr. Kidd will neither confirm nor deny the information as he is not able to talk about anything else than the man in the basement because of whom he has had terrible past few days, as he says. As both Mr. Kidd and Rose want to talk about something else, their conversation lacks all meaning. Furthermore, Mr. Kidd, although directly asked, does not reveal whether he is the landlord or not:

Rose: Mr Kidd, what did they [the Sands] mean about this room?

Mr. Kidd: What room?

Rose: Is this room vacant?

Mr. Kidd: Vacant?  
Rose: They were looking for the landlord.  
Mr. Kidd: Who were?  
Rose: Listen, Mr. Kidd, you are the landlord, aren't you? There isn't any other landlord?  
Mr. Kidd: What? What's that got to do with it? I don't know what you're talking about. I've got to tell you, that's all. I've got to tell you. I've had a terrible week-end. You'll have to see him. I can't take it any more. You've got to see him. (Pinter 119)

According to Mr. Kidd, the man has been lying in the dark damp basement waiting the whole weekend to see Rose, when she is alone in the room. If Mr. Kidd were the landlord of the house, why would he, in his house, keep a man who maddens him? If Mr. Kidd were the real landlord, he would know all of his tenants and would not accommodate a stranger in his basement. Nevertheless, as Mr. Kidd does not provide any further information about himself, the question of his identity remains unanswered for the audience.

While Mr. Kidd begs Rose to see the inhabitant of the basement, Rose does not long to see the man at all. To the contrary, she is scared of meeting him, claiming she has no idea who he is, which seems to be, however, by no means certain:

Rose: Do you expect me to see someone I don't know? With my husband not here too?  
Mr. Kidd: But he knows you, Mrs. Hudd, he knows you.  
Rose: How could he, Mr. Kidd, when I don't know him?  
Mr. Kidd: You must know him.  
Rose: But I don't know anybody. We're quiet here. We've just moved into this district.  
Mr. Kidd: But he doesn't come from this district. Perhaps you knew him in another district.  
Rose: Mr. Kidd, do you think I go around knowing men in one district after another? What do you think I am?  
Mr. Kidd: I don't know what I think. (Pinter 120-121)

Mr. Kidd's last sentence in this passage is the overall peak of his confusion. He is ultimately exhausted of the man from the basement who is endlessly pleading him to be brought up to Rose. Mr. Kidd is therefore adamant that she must see the 'basement-man' and does not give Rose any other option. The man drives Mr. Kidd crazy and desperate. Moreover, it is obscure what the stranger is up to, what his business with Rose is:

Mr. Kidd: He hasn't given me any rest. Just lying there. In the black dark. Hour after hour. Why don't you leave me be, both of you? Mrs. Hudd, have a bit of pity. Please see him. Why don't you see him?  
[...]  
(*rising*) I don't know what'll happen if you don't see him.

Rose: I've told you I don't know this man!  
Mr. Kidd: I know what he'll do. I know what he'll do. If you don't see him now, there'll be nothing else for it, he'll come up on his own bat, when your husband's here, that's what he'll do. He'll come up when Mr. Hudd's here, when your husband's here.  
Rose: He'd never do that.  
Mr. Kidd: He would do that. That's exactly what he'll do. [...] (Pinter 121)

Mr. Kidd is obviously aware of what would happen if the man came and Mr. Hudd was at home. Even Rose now knows that "he'd never do that," although she claims she has no idea who he is. The stranger is a significant menace element due to the same simple mechanism Pinter uses even in *The Dumb Waiter* in the character of Wilson, and that is the sinister unknown. The audience is not given any description and any other information about the man who just lies in the basement. This directly creates the chilling feeling of uncertainty and danger.

Eventually, Mr. Kidd convinces Rose and she agrees that the man should come to see her. Mr. Kidd leaves to fetch the visitor and after a few moments a blind Negro enters. Rose finally sees who the inhabitant of the basement is, but she is not happy at all that she has him in her room; and she openly expresses that, telling him that she does not know him and that the sooner he gets out the better. While the Negro is very polite, she literally swears at him for disturbing her evening and her quiet, non-bothered life, humiliating him, not giving him a chance to respond. After this 'warm' welcome, he is asked about what he wants, and what he does is give his name which Rose uncannily considers a lie:

Rose: [...] Tell me what you want and get out.  
Riley: My name is Riley.  
Rose: I don't care if it's – What? That's not your name. That's not your name. You've got a grown-up woman in this room, do you hear? Or are you deaf too? You're not deaf too, are you? You're all deaf and dumb and blind, the lot of you. A bunch of cripples. (Pinter 122-123)

The fact that Rose is bewildered and surprised by the name Riley is rather queer. She is familiar with the name, that is obvious; but it is not said who the Riley she knows is supposed to be.

Consequently, the Negro discloses his mission – he has a message for Rose, which she regards with disbelief. The real shock for Rose comes when she learns who the message is from:

Rose: What message? Who have you got a message from? Who?  
Riley: Your father wants you to come home.  
*Pause*  
Rose: Home?  
Riley: Yes.  
Rose: Home? Go now. Come on. It's late. It's late. (Pinter 124)

Rose's father, who has not been mentioned at all in the play, wants her daughter, Rose, to come home; and Rose does not want to hear about that. So after all it is revealed the best room in the world is probably not Rose's real home! Her real home is somewhere at her father's; and it is totally unclear where it is, why she had left, and why she does not want to return. Riley is, however, quite persistent and continues convincing her, although it is obscure why *he* would love to have Rose going home. Moreover, Riley does not address her as Rose, which intensifies the mysteriousness and strangeness of the whole situation:

Riley: Come home, Sal.  
*Pause.*  
Rose: What did you call me?  
Riley: Come home, Sal.  
Rose: Don't call me that.  
Riley: Come, now.  
Rose: Don't call me that.  
Riley: So now you're here.  
Rose: Not Sal.  
Riley: Now I touch you.  
Rose: Don't touch me.  
Riley: Sal. (Pinter 124)

Again, Rose recognizes the name Sal. Although she does not want to be called that name, it might be her real name from the past which she seems not to recall. Gradually, Riley appears not to be delivering the message from the father, but from himself:

Riley: I want you to come home.  
Rose: No.  
Riley: With me. (Pinter 124-125)

It can be seen that Riley is someone very close to Rose; he might be even her father himself, although she does not recognize him – as if he was a person she had known ages ago but cannot remember him. However, as Riley is persuading Rose to come

home with him, she seems to be, becoming less and less resistant, gradually recalling something from her past:

Rose: I've been here.  
Riley: Yes.  
Rose: Long.  
Riley: Yes.  
Rose: The day is a hump. I never go out.  
Riley: No.  
Rose: I've been here.  
Riley: Come home now, Sal. (Pinter 125)

Only now she realizes her life in the room is not satisfactory, although she was utterly content with such a living. In the past, she might have lived her life somewhere at her 'real' home with her father. Bert might be a man who took her away and made her forget. She has been living here, in the room, hiding (or not remembering) her true origins until Riley came and made her recollect; and Rose resisted until the last moment. She knew there was someone in the basement and she did not want him/her to come up. She might have known the person was Riley who wanted her to remember and come home. This may be why she was so anxious about the basement; she did not want to leave the room at any price and she suspected there was someone to take her away. But now, when Riley made his way up, Rose becomes Sal; she becomes who she probably really is.

While Rose-Sal is realizing her true origins, the representative of her 'fake' life comes home – Bert returns from his van-ride. One would think Rose-Sal will be upset with him as she finally remembered. She is, to the contrary, very calm and she acts as if nothing unusual has happened. She is now not even scared that Bert can see Riley. Moreover, the strangeness and absurdity of the situation is escalated by a totally unexpected event – Bert speaks! The man who was thought to be dumb before now recounts extensively his ride in the terrible menacing icy weather. When Bert enters the room, neither Rose nor Riley is afraid of him, which is illogical. Moreover, Bert even does not regard the Negro for some time. Nevertheless, the first thing he does after entering the room is draw the curtains, as if he was planning to do something which should not be seen. The atmosphere is tense and full of unpleasant expectations of what Bert is up to. But he just excitedly narrates his van-adventure. Then, he calmly takes a

chair, not saying a word, sits next to the Negro and regards him for a while. After this, Bert lifts the armchair and Riley falls down to the ground. Riley tries to communicate with Bert for the first time, which brings about a brutal act of violence:

Riley: Mr. Hudd, your wife –

Bert: Lice!

*He strikes the Negro, knocking him down, and then kicks his head against the gas stove several times. The Negro lies still. Bert walks away.*

*Silence.*

*Rose stands clutching her eyes.*

Rose: Can't see. I can't see. I can't see.

*Blackout*

*Curtain. (Pinter 126)*

While Riley addresses Bert very politely, Bert's reaction is completely incomprehensible. The mysteriously violent act of Bert's against the defenceless blind Negro produces a very sinister feeling. The motive behind the assault is obscure. It is unknown whether Bert knows Riley or not because there is no dialogue between them. Riley addresses Bert by his surname, but this does not mean they know each other anyway. On the other hand, Bert might have known Riley as a person from his wife's past and did not want Rose to discover the truth. She looked after him and he was just satisfied for the whole time. So, after all, it seems the person who was under control was not Bert but Rose who was trapped by her new life, having forgotten the old, real one.

After Bert kills the blind man, Rose-Sal is suddenly afflicted with the blindness. This transferred blindness is a symbol of a connection between Rose-Sal and Riley. When Bert murdered Riley, the representative of Rose-Sal's past, he murdered part of *her* at the same time. Her past itself perished and she got lost in her new fake life; she is helpless and blind, trapped by Bert.

In *The Dumb Waiter*, as it has been said, it is Gus, who is the victim, being tirelessly doubtful. Rose in *The Room* is, to the contrary, exaggeratedly and unnaturally satisfied with her living throughout the play. Unfortunately for her, this is not a good remedy for not being the prey either. Despite Rose's enormous effort to be content and not bothered, the menace lurking outside (and in the basement) eventually breaks into the room and devours her; and her highly symbolic death could be considered deserved. She is hostile to all the characters she does not know, and even, from time to time, to

Mr. Kidd. Ironically, the only person she treats with love is her husband Bert who is probably responsible for her false life which is, in a way, full of suffering. Ruby Cohn, an American renowned theatre scholar, summarizes the victim-role of Rose's in his essay on the theatre of Harold Pinter as follows:

Although Riley is kicked unconscious by Bert, it is Rose-Sal who is Bert's ultimate prey. "A woman of sixty," garrulous and shuffling, she speaks disparagingly of foreigners, dwells on her physical comforts, is ungracious to the Sands, and hostile to Riley. At the last, she makes no attempt to defend Riley from Bert, but succumbs to her own blindness. (61)

Although Rose-Sal has realized her origins and now recognizes Riley, she is absolutely passive while Bert is attacking him. Like Cohn says, she does not even try to defend Riley who is most likely her father, which is bewildering. The reason of why she is suddenly so idle is a mystery. Rose-Sal goes blind and that is her punishment. She will blindly take care of her husband forever...

## 5. Conclusion

The aim of this bachelor paper was to find and closely analyse the elements of absurdity and menace in two plays of The Theatre of the Absurd by Harold Pinter, namely *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Room*. These two plays represent the beginnings of Pinter's playwright career. The atmosphere of danger creates the base of these pieces. Generally, there are several sources of menace which penetrates the room the play takes place in. In the end of each play, someone always becomes a victim of the menace. Therefore, these pieces are often called 'comedies of menace'.

Firstly, the relation between absurdity and menace in these plays was defined in the analysis. It must be said that the elements of absurdity are not a matter very different from the menace feeling which accompanies the characters throughout the plays. They are, to the contrary, very close to each other. The absurd situations themselves *produce* a specific atmosphere of danger.

Secondly, the analysis of *The Dumb Waiter* was conducted. It was found that the elements which produce the menace in this play are everything which is situated outside the room. Moreover, the mere fact that the characters of this play, two assassins Ben and Gus, spend the whole day in one room, a basement room with no windows, evokes the unpleasantness and, at the same time, absurdity of the situation. The two killers wait in the room for their victim to come and are literally frightened of everything which might come from the outside. Even the fact that there should be someone in the supposedly derelict building is a scary image.

Another character in this play is Wilson who is said to be Ben and Gus's employer; he is hardly ever spoken of though. Thanks to the unknown which surrounds Wilson, he becomes another source of menace. In this respect, the character of Wilson is similar to Godot from Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The mysterious employer is waited for by Ben and Gus so that they could gain the instructions from him and could be saved from the endless waiting for their victim.

The next thing which contributes to the menace feeling in *The Dumb Waiter* is the relationship between the two protagonists themselves. Again, like in *Waiting for Godot*, the two characters are not equal in their status. Ben is the senior partner who seems to be in charge, while Gus is the one who learns. As an apprentice he asks



questions and wonders. This, however, escalates and Gus starts to doubt their job and instructions, which Ben cannot bear. Ben just does his job and does not question, which is incomprehensible to Gus, as well as to the audience. The tension between the two assassins is gradually increasing and Ben is becoming a menace to Gus.

Another element of danger in this piece is the dumb waiter. Although it is only a harmless serving hatch which can be found in every usual restaurant, Ben and Gus consider it a real threat, because it implies that there are other people in the building. Requests for exotic dishes keep coming down the dumb waiter and Gus's questions come to be pertinent. Nevertheless, Ben dumbly repeats: "Do not ask questions and do your job which was given to you." The two professional killers answer to the exotic requests by sending up some tea, cake, crisps, etc. – just really ordinary things. This makes the whole situation so much absurd that it starts to be chilling for the audience – the uncanny menace atmosphere is escalated. Gus then starts to doubt even their employer and the purpose of their job, which is the last straw. Gus leaves for the bathroom to have a glass of water and Ben is informed that the victim has arrived. The door leading outside opens and it is Gus who stumbles in. Ben points the revolver at him. They stare at each other and Ben is going to kill his former partner who had doubts. Gus went out of control, which made him the victim of this play.

The last subject of the analysis was *The Room*. As in *The Dumb Waiter*, the menace in *The Room* is represented by quite common situations. What is different is that the room in which the play takes place is described as a perfect place to live. The outside world, and above all the weather, is, to the contrary, depicted as an immense danger, which would be considered absurd in the real world. This, on the other hand, underlines the contrast between the outside and the safe room which is inhabited by Rose and Bert Hudd, a married couple.

Then, there is a basement in the house; and again a distinct contrast between this damp dark place, which is another obvious source of danger, and the cosy room is made. Rose suspects there is someone living down there but she says she has no idea who it is; although she is terribly and exaggeratedly curious about that. The room is Rose's beloved place to live and she would not change it at any cost. All the time, she reassures her husband and herself that they are just fine in the room, utterly satisfied.

Bert himself and the relationship between the two protagonists are another of the elements of menace. When Bert is asked a question, he does not respond at all, indifferently sitting at the table, reading a paper, eating what is brought to him. As he would not say a word, one absolutely cannot be sure what he might be up to, which is quite frightening. As in *The Dumb Waiter*, there is certain superiority in this relationship – Bert seems to be under Rose’s absolute control.

When Mr. Kidd, a man who is said to be the landlord of the house, enters, it is clear he represents another source of menace. He is an old confused man, speaking vaguely about his life and family. His incoherent babbling produces a kind of uncertainty which is very close to menace and danger. Due to Mr. Kidd’s confusion, even the house itself comes to be a subject of menace. When asked, for example, about how many floors there are, he responds he does not count them anymore – as if the number was changing! Thanks to this, one gets a feeling of the supernatural, which contributes to the chilling atmosphere of danger. Mr. Kidd is a character similar to the one of Wilson from *The Dumb Waiter*, as he is full of mysteries and one absolutely cannot be sure who this man really is.

Then, there are two people coming directly from the outside, which is the most terrible nightmare of Rose’s. They are a young couple, Mr. and Mrs. Sands, looking for the landlord because they heard there was a room to let in the house. What is more, they heard it from a man in the basement and the mentioned room should be the one of Rose’s! That simply is the feeling of menace created here.

The last element of menace is the blind Negro who is actually the mysterious inhabitant of the damp basement. He desperately wants to see Rose so he convinces Mr. Kidd to bring him up. Mr. Kidd, who cannot stand the man anymore, waits until Rose is alone in her room and then keeps the promise and fetches the stranger. A blind Negro called Riley enters, saying he has a message for Rose – a message from her father who wants her to come home. So Rose is not at home in her beloved room after all! In the end, Riley does not seem to have brought the message from someone else, but from himself. So *he* is probably Rose’s father although she does not appear to recognize him! This situation of the absolute unknown is the final dose of uncertainty, which makes the menace reach its highest point. After a while, Rose starts to be remembering her true past and seems to want to come back home with Riley. At this moment, Bert, who

represents Rose's new fake life, returns. The spine-chilling tension is escalated – Bert speaks! Moreover, he does not regard Riley at all, as if he were not in the room. Then, Bert slowly comes to him, throws him down off the chair and kicks the blind man until he lies motionless. Riley's blindness is transferred onto Rose, which could be a symbol of the connection between the father and the daughter. Bert perhaps killed the man and by that he killed the real life of Rose's represented by Riley. Rose remains trapped in the fake life, being the obvious victim in this comedy of menace.

## 6. Resumé

Tato práce se zabývá analýzou dvou divadelních her, *Mechanický číšník* (*The Dumb Waiter*) a *Pokoj* (*The Room*), od Harolda Pintera. Tento anglický dramatik a básník je považován za jednoho z předních představitelů absurdního dramatu, které se v Evropě rozvíjelo především v 50. a 60. letech 20. století.

Autoři absurdních dramát jsou ve své podstatě existencialisté, netvoří žádný samostatný směr. Existencialistická díla, jak už samotný název napovídá, se zabývají otázkami lidské existence a života, přičemž prvek absurdity je zde jedním ze základních kamenů. Existencialisté totiž například pracují s myšlenkou, že člověk je vržen do světa bez možnosti jakéhokoli výběru. Během svého života potom musí činit rozhodnutí a hledá smysl toho všeho, protože smrt je nevyhnutelná a čeká na všechny bez rozdílu. Život potom postrádá jakýkoli smysl, je nelogický, absurdní.

Autoři absurdních dramát porušují všechna pravidla konvenčního dramatu a vyjadřují absurditu přímo formou hry na jevišti. To je také důvod, proč někteří z nich preferovali pojmenování typu „Nové divadlo“ či „Anti-divadlo“. Absurdní hry nemají rozsáhlejší příběh, ba ani tradiční zápletku. Postavy jsou velmi málo popsány a definovány, jejich konverzace postrádá rozum a souvislost a často se z nich stávají pouhá nesmyslná blábolení. Autoři absurdních dramát tímto upozorňují na fakt, že v reálném každodenním životě je situace obdobná. Běžná konverzace mezi lidmi taktéž neplyne jasně od bodu k bodu a tato rozprava potom v podstatě ztrácí smysl.

Absurdní drama se stalo důležitou součástí literatury a dramatu 20. století. Mezi nejvýznamnější autory této skupiny patří především Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, Eugène Ionesco, Edward Albee, Jean Genet, Tom Stoppard a v neposlední řadě český autor Václav Havel. Samuel Beckett je autorem hry *Čekání na Godota* (*Waiting for Godot*), která je považována za stěžejní a pravděpodobně nejznámější absurdní drama vůbec. To je jeden z důvodů, proč analýza hry *Mechanický číšník*, která je obsažena v této práci, porovnává určité aspekty právě se zmíněným kusem od Samuela Becketta.

Absurdní hry *Mechanický číšník* a *Pokoj*, jsou ukázkou Pinterovy rané divadelní tvorby. Základním kamenem a rysem těchto kusů je, mimo absurditu, atmosféra hrozby. Proto jsou tato díla někdy nazývána jako „komedie hrozby“. Obě tyto hry se odehrávají v jedné místnosti a hrozbou pro protagonisty je zpravidla vše, co se nachází mimo onu

místnost. Tato hrozba poté sílí a jistým způsobem proniká dovnitř, kde se některá postava stává její obětí. Dvě zmíněné hry jsou zde analyzovány právě z hlediska absurdity a hrozby. Je nicméně nutno zmínit důležitý fakt, který se týká vztahu prvků absurdity a hrozby. Absurdita a hrozba nejsou totiž v těchto hrách záležitostmi odlišnými, ale naopak sobě velice blízkými. Dalo by se říci, že hrozba je svým způsobem důsledkem absurdních situací, které ve hrách nastávají. Jinými slovy, hrozba se *rodí* přímo v absurditě – některé situace jsou zkrátka natolik absurdní, že produkují jistou atmosféru nebezpečí.

První hrou, která je zde analyzována, je *Mechanický číšník*. Tento kus představuje dvě postavy, Bena a Guse, dva profesionální zabijáky. Jejich práce spočívá zpravidla v tom, že přijedou na určité místo a čekají celý den v jedné místnosti na svou oběť. Poté jsou Ben a Gus informováni, že ona oběť dorazila, a vykonají to, v čem jsou nejlepší. Tato jednoaktová hra vyobrazuje právě jeden z takovýchto dní. Ben a Gus čekají v jakési suterénní místnosti, přičemž jsou doslova vyděšení ze všeho, co by k nim mohlo přijít z prostoru mimo tuto ‘jejich’ místnost. Dokonce pouhá myšlenka, že by v údajně opuštěné budově neměli být tito zabijáci sami, je nemyslitelně hroživá. Navíc už jen fakt, že jejich útočištěm je temný suterén bez oken, evokuje v divákovi pocit nepříjemnosti a nepohody, či dokonce jakéhosi nebezpečí.

Dalším elementem hrozby je zde Benův a Gusův zaměstnavatel Wilson, o kterém je ve hře jen několik málo nejasných zmínek. Wilson je ten, kdo by měl dát vrahům finální instrukce, nicméně váhavý způsob, jakým se o něm Ben a Gus vyjadřují, obklopuje Wilsona pocitem neznáma a nejistoty. A pocit neznáma a nejistoty nemá k pocitu hrozby vůbec daleko. Naopak. Postava Wilsona je svým způsobem podobná postavě Godota z dramatu *Čekání na Godota*. Stejně jako byl očekáván Godot, který s největší pravděpodobností představoval spásu, je očekáván Wilson, který má přinést, nebo alespoň jiným způsobem sdělit, instrukce, které zachrání Bena a Guse od čekání.

Dalším prvkem hrozby v *Mechanickém číšníkovi* je vztah mezi samotnými dvěma protagonisty. Stejně jako ve hře *Čekání na Godota* si zde obě postavy nejsou rovny. Ben je dominantní, protože je služebně starším zabijákem; Gus by se od něj měl učit. Gus se ptá a zajímá, což je koneckonců pro učedníka obvyklé. Postupem času ale toto dotazování vygraduje v pochybnosti. Gus začíná pochybovat o jejich práci a instrukcích, což Ben nemůže trpět. Ben se totiž nezajímá o nic jiného, než o svou

práci, která mu byla přidělena. Neptá se, a už vůbec nepochybuje. Napětí mezi nimi roste a Ben se postupně stává hrozbou pro svého partnera.

Toto napětí se ovšem ještě umocní, když je objeven další otvor do nebezpečného vnějšího světa – mechanický číšník. Ben a Gus považují tento prostý nástroj pro transport jídla za velikou hrozbu a dohadují se, jak vyřídit příchozí objednávku, ačkoli by s ní neměli mít cokoli společného, protože jsou nájemní vrazi, nikoli kuchaři. Postupem času ovšem přicházejí nové a nové objednávky na čím dál exotičtější pokrmy a Gusovy pochybnosti rostou, zatímco Ben vše slepě považuje za součást jejich práce. Oba se nakonec dohodnou, že objednávky je nutno vyřídit a mechanickým číšníkem pošlou nahoru ták s opravdu obyčejnými věcmi, které najdou ve svých taškách – čaj, dort, brambůrky atd. –, což celou situaci učiní natolik absurdní, že se pro diváka stane až mrazivou, což je navíc umocněno tím, že některé z věcí si neznámí lidé nahoře (pravděpodobně číšníci) nechají, zatímco ostatní pokrmy pošlou zpět dolů. Stále pochybující Gus přemýšlí, stejně tak jako musí přemýšlet divák, co by se s objednávkami stalo, kdyby v oné suterénní místnosti nebyli, nad čímž ovšem Ben přemýšlet nehodlá. Nejistota mladšího ze zabijáků poté finálně vygraduje. Gus začne pochybovat dokonce o jejich zaměstnavateli, což je poslední kapkou pro Bena. Rozrušený Gus odejde do koupelny, aby si dal sklenici vody a zatímco je pryč, Ben je informován, že oběť dorazila. Ben volá na Guse, aby se urychleně vrátil z koupelny a připravil se na akci. Nicméně jsou to dveře vedoucí ven, které se otevrou, a dovnitř nevklouptne nikdo jiný než Gus. Oba na sebe nevěřicně zírají. Ben na Guse míří revolverem a pravděpodobně ho odstraní jako každou jinou oběť, protože Ben nepochybuje... V této hře se tedy stává obětí nebezpečného světa plného otázek a hrozby Gus, který se postupně vymkl kontrole a začal pochybovat.

Druhým dílem, které je v této práci analyzováno, je *Pokoj*. Stejně jako v *Mechanickém číšníkovi* se děj odehrává v jedné místnosti a i zde je hrozba představována v podstatě běžnými situacemi. Nejohroživější věcí je opět venkovní svět, především špatné počasí a obecně vše cizí, co by zvenku do místnosti proniklo. Pokoj, ve kterém žijí protagonisté této hry, Rose a Bert Huddovi, je zde vykreslen jako bezchybné místo k bydlení, v kontrastu právě s okolním světem. Dalším zdrojem hrozby je suterén domu – temné provlhlé místo, kde by snad nikdo nemohl chtít bydlet. Rose nicméně tuší, že suterén je někým obydlen, a je velice, až přehnaně, zvědavá, kdo tímto

člověkem je. Rose se svým manželem žije ve svém dokonalém pokoji, který by za nic na světě nevyměnila. Také neustále ujišťuje svého manžela, ale i sebe, že jsou zde nadmíru spokojeni, nikoho neobtěžují a nikdo neobtěžuje je. Bert nicméně na její úvahy nereaguje. Pouze lhostejně sedí u stolu, čte si noviny a jí to, co mu Rose přinese pod nos; nedává najevo sebemenší zájem. Divák se poté diví, zda Bert vůbec někdy řekne alespoň jedno slovo, nebo zda vůbec mluvit *umí*. Tento fakt činí z Berta velkou neznámou a vztah mezi ním a Rose se tak stává dalším elementem hrozby v této hře.

Stejně jako v *Mechanickém číšníkově*, je i v *Pokoji* vidět jistá nadřazenost jedné z postav. A je jí samozřejmě Rose, která se neúnavně stará o svého manžela. A protože ten není schopný říct ani slovo, odpovídá si za něj Rose na otázky, které mu sama položí, nebo dokonce na otázky, které mu položí jiné postavy. Bert se jeví jako nevyzpytatelný muž a divák si nemůže být jistý, čeho by tento muž mohl být schopen. To umocňuje onu atmosféru hrozby, která je ve hře nastolena.

Dalším prvkem nebezpečí je údajný majitel domu, pan Kidd, který přijde navštívit Huddovi do jejich pokoje. Je to starý zmatený muž, který nejasně a nejistě vypráví o své rodině a své vlastní minulosti. Jeho zmatené vyprávění vytváří jakousi atmosféru nejistoty, která k pocitu nebezpečí a hrozby nemá daleko. Díky pomatenému panu Kiddovi se dokonce samotný dům stává zdrojem hrozby. Když je otázan, kolik podlaží tento dům vůbec má, není schopný podat přesnou informaci. Odpověď pana Kidda, že už ta podlaží nepočítá je velmi absurdní a v reálném světě nemyslitelná – jako kdyby se jejich počet neustále měnil! Díky této jednoduché odpovědi poté tento dům na diváka působí poněkud nadpřirozeně, což velmi přispívá k oné mrazivé atmosféře. Postava pana Kidda je v podstatě podobná charakteru Wilsona z *Mechanického číšníka*. Stejně jako Wilson je pan Kidd zahalen mlhou neznáma a nejistoty. Divák si potom absolutně nemůže být jist, co je pan Kidd vlastně zač.

Jak již bylo nastíněno, i ostatní postavy jsou Rose považovány za hrozbu. Přesněji řečeno postavy, které přicházejí z venkovního prostoru. Když pan Kidd odejde a Bert odjede ve své dodávce provést blíže nespecifikovanou práci, Rose zůstane v pokoji sama. A právě teď propuká její panický strach z okolního světa. Rose neklidně přechází po místnosti a nakonec se předmětem její pozornosti stanou dveře. Nástroj, který reprezentuje právě venkovní svět, resp. slouží jako prostředník mezi světem a bezpečnou místností. Když se Rose odváží ke dveřím přiblížit a otevřít je, nastane její

největší noční můra – za dveřmi jsou cizí lidé! Rose se snaží zůstat klidná a chovat se k návštěvníkům vřele, nicméně její obezřetnost je patrná. Hosté, mladý pár pán a paní Sandsovi, jsou pozváni dovnitř, kde se Rose dozvídá, že se poohlížíjí po volném pokoji. Sandsovi byli údajně informováni, že v tomto domě jeden takový pokoj je, tudíž se přišli poradit s majitelem domu. Fakt, že by měl být v domě jeden pokoj volný, Rose rozruší. Mohl by to totiž být právě její pokoj, za který by snad položila i život! A co víc, paní Sandsová prozradí, že informaci o volném pokoji jim sdělil jakýsi muž v suterénu, o kterého se Rose z neznámého důvodu tolik zajímala. Rose pohlíjí nejistota a strach a následuje to nejhorsí – zpráva, že oním volným pokojem je opravdu ten Rosin. Rose v panice posílá pana a paní Sandsovi pryč, snažíc se je přesvědčit, že dům je kompletně obsazen. Takto jednoduše je zde vytvořena zlověstná atmosféra hrozby.

Když mladý pár odejde, znovu se objeví pan Kidd, kterého se Rose snaží zpovídat, nicméně ten není schopen mluvit o ničem jiném, než o muži v suterénu, který mu už několik dní neuvěřitelně znepríjemňuje život. Bezmezně totiž touží mluvit s Rose. Ta nejdříve tvrdí, že za žádných okolností nebude mluvit s nějakým cizím mužem, kterého určitě nezná, zoufalý pan Kidd ji ale nakonec přesvědčí. Do místnosti vstoupí slepý černoš jménem Riley, který tvrdí, že jí přináší zprávu od jejího otce, který chce, aby se Rose vrátila domů. Nakonec to tedy vypadá, že Rosina milovaná místnost není ani jejím skutečným domovem! Postupem času se ovšem situace vyvine a nevypadá to, že by Riley přinášel zprávu od jejího otce, nicméně od sebe samotného, což naznačuje, že on je pravděpodobně Rosin otec. Ta ale nevypadá, že by ho poznávala. Tato podivná situace je poslední dávkou absolutní nejistoty přispívající k záhadné atmosféře této hry. Po chvíli ale Rose začne vypadat, jako by si vzpomínala na svou pravou minulost a identitu a jako by se chtěla vrátit domů se svým otcem, Rileyim.

V tento moment se ovšem vrátí Bert, představitel Rosina dost pravděpodobně falešného života. A podivná mrazivá atmosféra je umocněna – Bert mluví! Navíc si ani nevšimne starého slepce, jakoby vůbec nebyl v místnosti, a nadšeně mluví o své jízdě v dodávce. Po chvíli se ovšem přiblíží k židli, na které Riley sedí, a beze slova ho z ní strhne. Poté ho kope do hlavy, dokud slepec nehybně neleží na zemi. Rose se chytí za oči a křičí, že ztratila zrak... Přenesená slepota je pravděpodobně symbolem jakéhosi spojení mezi Rose a jejím otcem, kterým pravděpodobně Riley byl. Když Bert vykonal



tento šokující brutální násilný čin a ukopal bezbranného slepce k smrti, zřejmě tím zabil i Rosinu pravou minulost a její skutečný život. Rose takto zůstává uvězněná ve svém falešném životě, jehož strůjcem je právě Bert. To z Rose činí zřejmou oběť této hry.

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