



Defamiliarizing Reality for Mental and Physical Subjection: Rereading Harold Pinter's *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter* as Political Comedies

Ahmed Abdulkhair Abulmagd Khaled¹

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Abstract

While Pinter's earliest plays have been recognized in the modernist history of theatre as comedies of menace and his later plays as political comedies, this article argues that his earliest plays are equally very liable to be interpreted as political comedies. Regardless of their absurdist dramatization of people's helpless exposure to external, unidentifiable threats, a common post-WWII characteristic feature of human experience, I claim that *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter* (both written 1957, staged 1960), two model examples of Pinter's earliest oeuvres, do not simply follow the aesthetic of absurdist theatre to express human futility. The audience's experience of viewing the theatrical performances of both plays in terms of discursive cyclicity or character normality is subverted into one of changeability, strangeness, and contradiction. To foreground the political implications of such revolutionary theatrical experience, Pinter's plays are examined in the light of his unique use of defamiliarization, relying not on Brecht's traditional techniques of singing, dancing, image-projecting, or captioning, but on a simple, dual technique of image destruction and creation. It consists of divesting characters of their normality and portraying them instead as individuals who identify only with unusual images of place, time, body, and consciousness. Using this special technique of defamiliarization, both plays are examined to reveal Pinter's central political theme of undermining reality for purposes of mental and physical subjections.

Keywords Defamiliarization · Comedy of menace · Political comedy · Subjection · Harold Pinter

✉ Ahmed Abdulkhair Abulmagd Khaled
ahmed_abdulkhair@azhar.edu.eg

¹ Faculty of Languages & Translation, Al-Azhar University, Nasr City, Cairo, Egypt

1 Introduction

A review of recent literature on Pinter reveals a renewed interest in analysing his work under the overlapping rubrics of politics, power relations, memory, and language as well as a new trend of approaching it using other, different perspectives such as gender, identity, class, culture, race, violence, and media. Lucy Jeffery (2020) attempts an analysis of Pinter's political poetry which critics/scholars often sidestep for its imprecision and unskillfulness when compared to his more intricate and well-structured drama. Resuming the intellectual thread of debates made by Basil Chiasson (2017) about the political nature of Pinter's work, Jeffery inspects the political resonances of some of these neglected poems with respect to the political incentives that allegedly ignited the Cold War, Gulf War, and Iraq War in addition to the subsequent claims made by antiwar activists against the integrity of the declared objectives of these wars. The poems include *Partners* (1985), *American Football* (1991), *Don't Look* (1995), and *God Bless America* (2003).

Chiasson (2020) taps on the element of memory as it manifests itself in Pinter's speeches on politics rather than his artistic oeuvre. Instead of examining the significance of memory as he uses it in his dramatic works performed on either the stage or the screen, Chiasson concentrates on discussing the role memory plays in Pinter's discourse as a political critic of postwar Europe. Chiasson examines Pinter's statements about the existence of certain kinds of political memory and the forms through which this memory is recollected.

Graham Saunders (2023) offers a reappraisal and new visions of Pinter's work in a way that deviates from previous, well-established reviews of specific key historical and contemporary productions of some of his screenplays since his death in 2008. The reappraisal includes discussing Pinter's position as "a political writer and political activist—from disassociation and neutrality on the subject until relatively late in his career when his drama sought to explicitly address questions of political dissent and torture by totalitarian regimes" (p. 1). Saunders also comments on Pinter's artistic reputation as a British writer of absurdist drama and the way the element of memory underlies his dramaturgy. Further, Saunders explores Pinter's attitudes towards and representations of the motifs of "gender" and "race" in his drama.

Besides the relationship between memory and Pinter's politics, other scholars and critics have concentrated their efforts on examining the relationship between gender and power. James A. Jarrett (2020) focuses his critiques on analysing Pinter's works that belong to the later period of his career, which he claims has received far less attention than the early or middle period. In this regard, Jarrett investigates *Sleuth* (2007), Pinter's final screenplay, which discusses the patriarchal attitudes of Tindle and Wyke to practise and maintain sexual, social, and masculine powers as well as psychological advantages over Maggie and even over one another using some intricate verbal and nonverbal tactics. In addition, Jarrett taps on the issues of identity, performance, and epistemology. Similarly, Ann C. Hall (2023) examines Pinter's screenplay and the Robert Losey film, *The*

Servant (1963), considering the gender question. Apart from reading the work in terms of the concepts of colonialism and homophobia, Hall calls in this article for a closer analysis of the character of Susan, Tony's fiancé, in order to highlight the work's criticism of not only colonial power but also patriarchal power. In the same vein, Alix Burbridge (2022) highlights how characters in Pinter's *Betrayal* manipulate language to instil dominant gendered roles and control the gender hierarchy in their relationships with others. Burbridge also exposes the weaknesses of both the male and female characters who think themselves invulnerable to the dynamics of power. The relationship between language and power is quite interestingly discussed by Guido Almansi and Simon Henderson (2021). They examine Pinter's work in the light of the post-modernist theories and applications of language, particularly his unique employment of language games and dialogic silences as smokescreens behind which characters hide their fear of sociocultural contact.

Arka Chattopadhyay (2021) and Farah Ali (2023) also revive the question of power relations by examining Pinter's *A Kind of Alaska* (1982) to expose the influence of the social structure of healthcare on feminine identity. Patient Deborah risks her own freedom by yielding to the healthcare worker, Doctor Hornby. Chattopadhyay views the relationship between Hornby and Deborah as channelled by a set of medical metaphors invested as a political critique of the doctor's authoritarian practices. Chattopadhyay thus draws our attention to the relevance of the question of power negotiated in Pinter's theatre to the human experience during pandemic times. Ali too highlights Pinter's critique of the authoritative power practised by the male doctor over the female patient. Using the dynamics of this medical encounter, Ali tracks Deborah's journey towards recuperation and uncovers the reasons of her social dissociation.

Farah Ali (2022) adds to her discussion of power relations in *The Caretaker* (1960) other issues of class and identity. To that end, she applies Homi Bhabha's postcolonial theory of ambivalence to the critical reading of Pinter's play. She examines the dynamics of the relationship that exists between Davies, the tramp, and the two brothers, Aston and Mick, with reference to the issues of class conflict and Britain's colonial past, showing how Davies attempts to control their attitudes and identities during his stay in and departure from the house. Their defensive encounter with hegemonic Davies results in a permanent transformation of their identities on the subconscious level.

Basil Chiasson and Catriona Fallow (2021) handle Pinter's theatre, ideology, and socio-cultural influence with fresh and different conceptions. With a declining zeal for reading Pinter as a postmodernist, absurdist writer, the advent of the third millennium has witnessed an accelerating attitude towards exploring the critical reception gained after the staging of Pinter's plays in different sociopolitical, geographical, and cultural contexts. This explains Chiasson and Fallow's inclusion in their works of interviews with directors and filmmakers involved in the global production of Pinter's drama today. Chiasson and Fallow participate in and develop these international critical explorations by reexamining some of the various stages, networks, and collaborations that shaped Pinter's career and were fashioned by its details. The stages explored include "the evolution of Pinter's career and the myriad of stages

that his work has appeared on” (p. 12). The networks are understood in terms of the “exchange of ideas, practices and influence, as well as systems of interconnected people, places or works” that continue to define his legacy as a dramatist and political activist. Collaborations fall within these networks and are “evident in the way his work engages with previous literary and theatrical movements and how, in turn, his works have been taken up and evolved by subsequent playwrights, practitioners and scholars”. These collaborations have bred Pinter’s reputation as a socio-cultural public figure with an influence on contemporary British playwrights’ dramaturgies.

Pim Verhulst (2021) studies Pinter’s evolving use of media, from radio and audio technologies to acoustic and visual media, in staging his plays throughout his early, mid-, and late careers. The plays studied include, respectively, *The Hothouse*; *A Night Out* and *Night School*; and *Landscape* and *Family Voices*. The aim of this study is to better understand Pinter’s theatrical practice and highlight the usually overlooked importance of the media tradition in it.

Inspired by the arising curiosity of recent Pinteresque scholars to excavate virgin spaces that lie within Pinter’s creative experimentation with theatrical convention, set design, language and theme, this article attempts to examine the political metaphorization of Pinter’s earlier plays branded as comedies of menace. The aim is to validate both the playwright’s own description of them as political metaphors and other scholars’ statements about the limitedness of the tradition of classifying his entire dramatic legacy into two or three content-based periods as will be demonstrated later. The investigation of how far such claims made by Pinter or his theatre reviewers are legitimate has not been textually and technically conducted. My textual and technical rereading of *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter* is an attempt to unearth the political meanings and practices his comedies of menace are replete with through exposing the operability of such practices of mental and physical subjections and demonstrating their effects on characters’ freedom of expression, behaviour, and beliefs.

The article consists of three major sections. First, it begins with a review of Pinter’s theatrical legacy, which falls mainly under the two categories of political comedy and comedy of menace. Then, the article presents a rationalization of how his earliest plays, in particular, surpass the limits of this traditional, theme-based categorization. Later, the article presents its theoretical framework and methodologies, including Brecht’s theory of Defamiliarization and Pinter’s unique, theatrical use of it in the context of his concept of hollow language. Finally, the article scrutinizes *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter* in the light of Pinter’s defamiliarizing technique of image creation and destruction which renders the two plays their political mood.

1.1 Pinter’s Political Theatre

British dramatist and noble-prize winner Harold Pinter vigorously endorsed freedom of expression and ideological diversity. A member of P.E.N. and Amnesty International, he conscientiously opposed national and international practices of coercive persuasion, censorship, and violence for political aims. Through his published political speeches, articles, and drama, he uttered his condemnation of individual

and state-sanctioned repressive policies. This motivation underlies, for example, his indictment of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's domestic and foreign policies which were "brutal and cynical. None of them has to do with democratic aspirations. All of them have to do with intensification and consolidation of state power" (Pinter 2013b, p. 190). Democracy, for Pinter, is a pretext for justifying super powerful nations' interference in other inferior nations' internal affairs. The central argument here is not the concept of democracy itself, but the means by which democracy is manipulated. Pinter proposes that language is used by manipulative authorities or governments as a pragmatic tool of evasiveness and hedging to achieve domestic and foreign interests or terminate oppositions threatening its structures everywhere.

In the context of using it for the pragmatic purposes of evasiveness and hedging, democracy for Pinter, thus, is a political toptext that masquerades the subtext of manipulation and suppression. People are manipulated and suppressed by power, violence, threats, and phoney claims. In Pinter's political theatre, specifically the latest pieces as will be elaborated later, he investigates the linguistic mechanism of these methods and their impact on the ideologies and bodies of subjects, as he declares to Mel Gussow in the *New York Times*: "I feel the question of how power is used and how violence is used, how you terrorize somebody, how you subjugate somebody, has always been alive in my work" (1994, p. 61). The questions of power, terrorization and subjugation are all political. His theatre addresses these practices, usually metaphorically and sometimes explicitly, and shows the struggle of individuals to escape them. This struggle typically defines his political plays. Responding to a claim made by Ramon Simo that "Brutality and violence are always present in [his] political plays", Pinter does not deny it and even adds: "They are violent. Violence has always been in my plays, from the very beginning. *The Room* ends with a sudden, totally gratuitous act of violence on the part of a man who kicks a negro to death" (2013b, p. 216). This statement is valuable in two ways. It substantiates the claim that Pinter's first play, *The Room*, is not devoid of political thought and that the themes of brutality and violence inspire the entirety of his drama and give it its political taste. So, we find in Pinter's earliest plays, *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter*, oppressive or hegemonic characters (Bert, Riley, Ben, Wilson) attempting to maintain existent reality and present it to other subservient, powerless characters (Rose, Ben) as being absolute and undebatable. The purpose is keeping the status quo as it already is and suppressing in subjects the instinctive drive to question its authenticity. The guiding principle Pinter metaphorically conveys is either to serve the dominant power or to receive a physical penalty. The kind of peace, justice, and welfare a subordinate person might thus find by allowing democracy to rule his/her life is acquired only with an absolute, submissive will to serve and dedicate one's life to meet the needs and adopt the strategies or roadmaps laid out by the so-called defenders of democracy alone.

By examining and contrasting Pinter's statements about his own ideas of politics and political theatre, a contradiction is noticed. He claims that he doesn't allow his "strong political views" to nurse his work (Merritt 1990, p. 175), nor does he hold any "placards" or "banners" (Pinter 1961, p. 175) while experimenting with drama. In the same manner, in "Writing for the Theatre", he denies being "a theorist", "an authoritative or reliable commentator on the dramatic

scene" (2013b, p. 28). Likewise, he tells Gussow that not "every work I have written is political", particularly "*Landscape or Old Times*" (1988, p. 17). Yet, we sense a contradiction when he himself describes his earlier plays as "political metaphors" that condemn the abuse of authority which implements physical and mental tortures to suppress subjects (Pinter and Nicholas 1985, p. 7). He also tells Gussow that "in the early days,..., [he] was a political playwright of a kind" and that the early plays concerned "themselves with social and political structures" (1994, p. 67). Mark Taylor-Batty addresses the possible reasons of this kind of contradiction by suggesting that "Pinter was not one to want to declare his political position and specify his class enemy as might an Osborne or a Wesker" (2014, p. 161). I agree with Taylor-Batty and add that Pinter's plays are intuitively anchored in political thoughts and practices because he was mainly interested in politics and its role in subjugating nations and individuals, a criterion which defines thoroughly the style and content of his dramatic project.

Pinter specifies the nature of his theatre by stating that it is "essentially exploratory" and "a critical act" (1994, p. 101). The audience go to the theatrical performances of his plays with certain convictions and leave with others, for it liberates their minds from the restraints of reality established by social, political, or religious structures. Theatre is not a medium he employs for mocking the pointlessness of human behaviour and discourse, a typical feature of absurdist theatre, "nothing could be more misleading" (Hall 2009, p. 160). He was interested in examining, evaluating, and condemning the post-WWII governmental pursuit of deterring oppositions and forming monotonous thought and ideological hierarchy. His political dramatic enterprises were not subjective or biased, neither did they embrace a reflective or absurdist style, mirroring or criticizing only social phenomena and human conduct. He preferred the interventionist style with its capacity of uncovering and altering reality for the purpose of subjecting the human mind to a dual process of reconsideration of the status quo and erection of change in what appears static or dogmatic. In his theatre, we usually encounter a physically and mentally oppressed character who is coercively driven by other oppressive characters to reconsider his/her evaluations of existing conditions. So, what makes Pinter's theatre political is not only its discussion of political themes but also its adoption of the interventionist style.

Political theatre is "interventionist" (Patterson 2003, p. 18), by way of making the audience intervene in the theatrical experience. In this type of theatre, the audience's interpretation of represented reality is altered and their perception of it is challenged. This perspective of the interventionism of political theatre and its ability to influence the audience is likewise championed by Augusto Boal (2008). He hints that political theatre wields the power of "transforming the spectator into observer, arousing his critical consciousness and capacity for action" (p. 80). By turning the audience from the status of being mere *viewers* into another of *estranged observers*, who can participate in the process of evaluating and judging the dramatic content presented onstage, the imagined fourth wall of theatre is destroyed. This basically politically theatrical practice, which will be further addressed theoretically in a later section, underlies even Pinter's earliest comedies of menace, not only the final pieces as argued by some critics.

1.2 Pinter's Comedy of Menace

The term “comedy of menace” was first deployed as a dramatic genre when David Campton used it as a subtitle in his 1958 play *The Lunatic View: A Comedy of Menace*. Yet, to Irving Wardle goes the credit of holding Pinter's earliest drama under the umbrella of the dramatic genre of comedy of menace. In his critical appraisal of Pinter's play *The Birthday Party*, Wardle describes, albeit very briefly, protagonist Stanley's “protected atmosphere” as infringed by “menacing intrusions” caused by Goldberg and Mccann, two “furies emerging from Stanley's night thoughts as physical characters” (1958, p. 40). Here, imagination is turned into reality, and peacefulness into menace. Stanley's unconscious dreams become consciously recognizable through Goldberg and Mccann. They shatter Stanley's sense of security and interrupt his chosen mood of social self-exile.

Francesca Coppa (2009) uses Freud's joke-theory as a background for approaching the comic element in Pinter's earliest comedies of menace. To Coppa, jokes resemble “theatrical events” in as much as they are intended for “pleasing or impressing an audience” (p. 43). She compares the public effect of performing comic plays to that produced by the humorous activity of telling jokes; both involve a recognizable three-way relationship between “the aggressor, the victim and the audience”. The aggressor is the joke teller, the victim is the object of the action of joke-telling, and the audience is the third impartial party who undergoes a “litmus test”. The audience's subsequential laughter indicates their alignment with the joke teller; their silence denotes their empathy with the victim. Based on this tripartite relationship, Coppa finds a structural synonymity between Freud's joke-theory and Pinter's earliest drama. Echoing the underlying structure of jokes, Pinter's earliest plays feature similar structures of “triangulated relationship” and thematic contents of “dominance and subjugation” (Coppa 2009, pp. 43, 44). Ben's selective and loud reading of stories in the newspaper in *The Dumb Waiter* is set by Coppa, for example, as a model of joke-structure highlighting comically people's “stupidity or cruelty” as flaws for which they deserve a punishment (p. 47). Coppa, however, undermines the importance of this content, describing it as “meaningless”, and lays instead extra emphasis on the “alliances and antagonisms” invoked among the members of this triangle structure.

Coppa (2009) and Richard A. Cave (2009) ally in their refusal of the inclination of interpreting Pinter's comedies of menace as belonging to the genre of black comedy, viewing the essence and dramatic mechanism of either genre as antithetical to the other (p. 51 & p. 136). Menace involves ignorance, vagueness, and fear of the unknown or the unfamiliar. In comedies of menace, there is always an unidentified, equivocal force causing an intricate state of disturbance, threats, or violence endured by other members of the social context of the play. The *force* in this case is an abstract, common condition of uncertainty aroused by a collapsed social, economic, or religious system. Black comedy, in contrast, tackles serious themes comically, but the struggling forces or the persons intensifying the dramatic tension are recognizable. The joke structure models found in *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter* are not “deliberately funny” or “blackly humorous” (Coppa 2009, pp. 44–45). Both plays do not prompt our laughter by means of having some characters face serious events

or conditions posed by other opponent characters, such as pain, loss, or death. We cannot get hold of any foe characters who oppose or set up conspiracies against the key characters who are represented as already submissive, including Rose and Gus. The unjustified and mysterious death cases, of both Riley and Gus, which conclude both plays do not call, however, for laughter. They instead invite our contemplation, doubt, and inquiry. The comic element which really makes the audience break into laughter lies in the ignorance they observe in characters who fail to identify themselves, surroundings, pasts, and roles. In addition, we don't spot in both dramas "baleful, naive, or inept characters" living in "a fantastic or nightmarish modern world" (Abrams and Geoffrey 2015, p. 2). This procedure would ruin the political nature of Pinter's theatre that involves "plays which deal with the real world, not with a manufactured or fantasy world" (Pinter 2013b, p. 216). Rose's visitors are not by nature physically threatening or terrifying, neither do they directly or indirectly threaten her life or Bert's by any means. They only crumble the way she understands herself, the world, history, and people, offering her a different reality than the one she believes in and uncovering for her the domination of two powers over her life, her husband Bert and her offstage father. As for *The Dumb Waiter*, although Ben is authoritative and aggressive towards Gus, the first poses no threats to his partner and is even helpless. Both indeed are victimized by an absent, yet dominant, manager who is already in control of their movements, memories, and verbalized thoughts.

Either perspective of considering the earliest plays as black comedies or comedies of menace is imprecise and debatable. It is a justified stand to judge the earliest plays as not belonging in the genre of black comedy for the reasons provided above, but the inclination of adopting a single, unarguable reading of the plays as comedies of menace is disputable, particularly as the characters are not menaced by a fear from an obscure power. They are rather threatened by the pervasive and inescapable ability of this power to change reality and channel their thoughts. Rose of *The Room* is exposed to threats both from inside and outside her cosyroom by the ability of Mr. Kidd, the Sands and Riley to change the reality of her abode, memory, and even her physical being. Likewise, Gus of *The Dumb Waiter* is intimidated within the basement by his partner Ben who watches the former's language, controls his movement, and surveys his thoughts, and outside it by a relentless superior. In both plays, the opponent powers are already recognized/known by the victims, so these powers subdue their victims not through the act of anonymizing their identities but via the adopted strategy of deconstructing the way these victims comprehend the reality of their bodies, settings, and possessions. The kind of menace sensed or experienced in political theatre is used conversely as a method of subjection by which the established system or order polarizes and enslaves its subjects. Another focal point concerning the real political nature of Pinter's comedies of menace is that their investment of such comic devices as "repetition", "repartee" and "physical farce" is not intended purely for provoking the audience's sheer laughter or pointlessly humorous comments (Coppa 2009, p. 45), otherwise these devices would ruin his main objective of alienating his audience's experience of the dramatic performance. Such devices reflect the restless minds of characters and their incongruous actions and prompt the audience's inquiries about what is real or phoney, what is certain or uncertain. The devices become metaphorical mediums through which Pinter

explores and uncovers theatrically the reality of characters' cyclicity of mental and physical anguishes.

Approached this way, Pinter's comedies of menace are not entertaining in as much as they are enlightening and transforming. Experiencing first-hand Rose's and Gus's feelings of fear of the future and anxiety about their current physio-psychological conditions does not tempt our laughter in as much as they change our contentions about established reality and negate the impossibility of observing our lives differently. It must be made clear here that I do not infer that Pinter's plays are devoid of entertaining elements on the comic level. The dramatist's famous 'Pinter Pause' was, he admits, inspired from Jack Benny's comic shows (*The Guardian* 2008), and the comic language and behaviour he employs are actually humorously comic. However, I believe the importance of the enlightening and transformative effect of theatre in general for Pinter exceeds the importance of its entertaining effect on the audience. It is relevant here to remember Pinter's own comment on the humorous element in his plays: "I don't write what I call funny things, but some of them do make me laugh. I find myself laughing while I'm writing and I notice one or two people also laugh, occasionally" (2013b, p. 218). There is a difference between the nature of something being inherently entertaining and the real purpose it is employed for. The purpose for which this kind of humorous language and action are employed is not mere entertainment. The humour in Pinter's drama, as he states, is both "terse and critical" (p. 218); its function is to make us see reality in another way, to defamiliarize it and uncover the discreet, manipulative powers guiding our lives. The occasional laughter of the audience during the performance is driven by a recognition of the "ugliness in our selves... our own worst characteristics" (p. 218). The performance induces our laughter at some moments, but not before it tempts our enthusiasm and critical faculties to ask questions and develop doubts about situations we cannot fully understand. Consider, for example, Rose's anxieties and posed questions about her room, the outside atmosphere, the condition of the basement, the identity of Riley, her own father, and even her real name, as well as Gus's doubts and enquiries about the identity of their absent boss, the café's owner, the voice communicating with them through the speaking tube, and the secret organization they work for. The jokes Pinter includes in his plays are thus used for political purposes. They help the dramatist expose human relationships that are imbedded in attitudes of dominance and subjugation.

1.3 Surpassing the Boundaries of Traditional, Content-based Classification of Pinter's Theatre

There has been a persisting critical tendency to classify Pinter's drama into comedies of menace and political comedies, as regards the techniques, themes, and context. Some critics and scholars added a third category: the memory play. Stephen Gregory, for example, divides Pinter's work into three categories (menace, memory, and politics), describing the second as "exploring the tricks and manipulations of memory...and of deceits" and the latter as investigating "the nastier aspects of political life" (1996, p. 326). Zarhy-Levo Yael has a slightly different

categorization of Pinter's aesthetic as falling into only two distinct phases: "his early and mid-career phase (1958–82), and his later political phase (1983–91)" (2009, p. 257), referring to the first as comedies of menace and the second as political comedies. Taylor-Batty (2014) maintains the classifying tradition but dwells extensively on a discussion of Pinter's later political drama. In the 1980s, Pinter's drama witnessed "a radical shift, a significant change of direction" (p. 151) to address political and ideological issues within more elaborately political contexts. The shift was mainly spurred by a visit he made to Turkey with Arthur Miller to support "dissident writers" (Billington 2009, p. 514). *One for the Road* (1984), *Mountain Language* (1988), and *Party Time* (1991) are thematically political and were coined for political reasons. Taylor-Batty claims they all "address the vulnerability of the weak in the face of unremitting state power" and their oppression "through the deliberate fragmentation of family structures" (2014, p. 151). Gussow poses the same claim by suggesting that they briefly discuss the issues of "political persecution and incarceration" (1994, p.54). *Mountain Language*, for example, dramatizes the persecution of Kurdish women who are forbidden from speaking their native language called Mountain Language while negotiating for the freedom of their imprisoned relatives. This action of suppressing people's language and limiting their freedom of expressing themselves and their needs is a political practice traceable, Pinter argues, in England too: "I believe it also reflects what's happening in England today—the suppression of ideas, speech and thought". To demonstrate this, he calls on the issue of "homosexuals" who are "singled out for censorship and repression" based on "Clause 28" which he describes as "quite a pervasive act, a law, which is very very dangerous indeed" (Gussow 1994, pp. 56, 57).

There are other Pinter scholars who had "difficulties 'placing' Pinter and his drama because he crosses the 'standard' boundaries delineated by such binary oppositions" (Merritt 1990, p. 130). Of these are Basil Chiasson, Richard A. Cave, Drew Milne, and even Taylor-Batty. Although their works include references to the critical tendency of the double or triple categorization of Pinter's plays, they indirectly refute it by expressing its limitedness and rationalize the liability of crossing the borderlines of distinction. In his introduction to *The Late Harold Pinter* (2017), Chiasson reminds the reading community of the axiomatic canon of chronologically dividing Pinter's career into three differently labelled, content-based stages:

The early dramas, globally referred to as 'comedies of menace'; a middle period usually characterized as invested in memory and the presence of the past in the present tense; and a later shift during the early 1980s, where Pinter's output becomes to a great extent overtly political (p. 1).

Chiasson's brief reminder of this distinction does by no means entail his own contention with it, for he immediately expresses his belief that such categorization falls short in capturing Pinter's "dynamic" and stylistic output (2017, p. 1). A relevantly similar standpoint can be traced back to his earlier essay "(Re)Thinking Harold Pinter's Comedy of Menace" (2009) where he also clearly argues for the possibility of evaluating the later political plays of Pinter in terms of the aesthetic of the comedy of menace (p. 31). In this essay, he blurs the dividing lines between the comedy of

menace and political comedy to impart a kind of disbelief in its validity. According to him, Pinter's "comedies of menace" depend on:

The staging of situations of intrusion, intermingling aggression or even violence with verbal and physical comedy, speech that is riddled with non-sequiturs; characters who incessantly pose questions;" "characters who refuse to answer other characters' questions; or, similarly, characters who suffer auditory lapses; . . . [and] characters having to negotiate the threat of change or, conversely, the threat of stasis. (2009, pp. 34-35)

Pinter's political comedies, similarly, feature scenes of "harassment and interrogation" (p. 44). Harassment is not of the body alone; it is of the mind too, an intellectual practice, and it is not an individual phenomenon but rather a collective one because of the common ideological and psychological impacts it entices within us. This idea is reaffirmed in Chiasson's 2017 book where he argues that Pinter's political theatre is "intellectually and morally prescriptive" (p. 31). It depicts the enforcement of a certain set of ideas and behaviours upon subservient characters by other ideologically oppressive characters and tries, as proclaimed by Austin Quigley, "to persuade a theatre audience that it should in general be against physical torture, murder and rape" (2001, p. 10).

Cave (2009) highlights the historicizing tendency of classifying Pinter's work into three periods by claiming that they fall into: "'comedies of menace'; 'the memory plays'; [and] 'Pinter and politics'" (p. 123). Yet, Cave undermines this traditional distinction for its shortsightedness to understand the full "complexities of Pinter's artistry" and proposes, without scrutiny, that Pinter's earliest plays are not "devoid of political insight" (pp. 123–124). Milne (2009) goes further by suggesting that Pinter's earliest comedies of menace are "more evidently political", though he admits that their "political specificity" is still an unanswered inquiry (p. 234). Taylor-Batty (2014) hints at the possibility of reading Pinter's earliest plays from political dimensions, maintaining that they nonetheless uphold political messages: "*The Room, The Dumb Waiter, The Birthday Party* and *The Hothouse* are clearly driven by questions about the relationship between the individual and power structures that would compromise and constrain the individual voice" (p. 161). In addition to suppressing free voices, Taylor-Batty claims, people's "conditioned behaviour" and readiness to become "a willing collaborator" are other political elements "manifest in his oeuvre from his earliest plays to his later political output" (p. 159). Pinter's plays that are held traditionally as belonging to the early, mid-, or later period have a meta-stylistic feature that renders them the flexibility to be approached by the specifics of menace, memory, or political drama. This feature involves the plays' dynamicity, stylism, and complexity that are produced by the playwright's combination of comic, realistic and expressionistic elements. Dialogue is rather comically repetitive. Settings are fairly realistic. Characters, incidents, and objects are defamiliarized. Therefore, either the dual or triple categorization of Pinter's work suffers the imperfections of impracticality and over-generalization.

In this connection, it is worthwhile to refer to some scholars' interpretations of Pinter's early plays as comedies of menace which have undervalued their motifs of power and subjugation, including Lance Norman, Taylor Batty, and Farah Ali.

Norman's argument, which largely re-echoes that of Bernard F. Dukore (1988) (p. 59), that the "action rises to the level of ambiguity in *The Dumb Waiter*" is based on the indetermination that concludes the play as regards whether "Gus [is] the victim for whom the hitmen were waiting" or not, and whether he returns dead or alive (2009, p. 173). I disagree with Norman, however, over Pinter's dramatic motif that propelled him to provide his play with an indefinite ending that has initiated ever since a wave of disputes within the critical canon. Whereas Norman considers Pinter's motif to be "mythical or ritualistic" for his representation of the cyclicity of their ambiguous presence and "maintaining an irresolvable status quo" (pp. 174, 175), I claim in this article that it is ideological and political. The conclusion is indeterminate only regarding Pinter's final decision of both characters' ultimate destiny, what might have befallen Gus afore and after his reemergence from the door and what immediate response Ben would fulfil. Pinter has gradually created within the reader/audience an image of both characters from the beginning so that any despair-prompted attempt by any of them to depart the kill zone or change the status quo of power relations within this space would be hopeless and punishable. Their final destiny is thus already predetermined by the superior powers residing beyond the play's context. This image renders both hitmen as futile and helpless subjects fulfilling a preset judgement. Ben's final posture in which he stands levelling his gun at seemingly dead Gus is not a mark of the former's being a "victor" (p. 175). If he is a real victor, then the final standoff between both partners would not be "long" as described by Pinter (2013a, p. 151), but only momentary. Both subjects are victims, including the living and the dead. Ben fails to violate the rules of combat and remains thoroughly compliant to administrative dictations, and Gus fails to flee or preserve his former physical condition or mental agency. Relatedly, Ben does not need to wait for Gus's final victimization so that he turns from "victor to a victim" as proclaimed by Norman (p. 176). Ben is already a victim. His victimization is ideological and behavioural, and it has been put into effect before we are even introduced to the action. It is Gus who is in a stage prior to utter subjugation and mendicide. The finale only marks that moment of complete transformation that quite naturally befalls Gus alone.

Taylor-Batty describes the relationship between Rose and her husband Ben "as presented in an almost stereotypical, comedic frame" of a "withering" wife and a "stoically silent husband", an image common in "mid-twentieth-century popular comedy genres" (2014, p. 18). Describing the nature of their bond as 'stereotypical,' and the two spouses themselves as "comedic stereotypes" (p. 23), fails to capture the essential implication of the power relation governing that bond. Rose is subservient to an uncaring, seemingly both deaf and dumb husband, and her chattering is a verbal expression of her doubtful mentality and compromised sense of safety. He speaks only when his power over "nattering" Rose is threatened by another authoritative rival claiming knowledge and possession of her identity and history. The frame that includes both spouses within its borders may superficially appear as comedic, but in depth it is hegemonic. The dialogues that involve the landlord Mr. Kidd and his tenant Rose is not "comic" as also claimed by Taylor-Batty (p. 18), it is likewise a subjugating, mind manipulating form of discourse used to establish his ownership of the room and shake the foundations of poor Rose's belief in herself

and her surroundings. If his testimonies related to the room and its contents are “unreliable” as believed by Taylor-Batty (p. 19), then why she later seeks confirmation from “dotty” Mr. Kidd when the Sands question his ownership of the house and that the room is vacant. His “unreliable testimonies” are not used as a signifier of his comic personality but rather as a method of establishing and consolidating Rose’s feelings of uncertainty and unsafety. Bert and Mr. Kidd’s roles as subjugators of Rose are not either intended by Pinter to address the genderist issue of “the re-assertion of male authority” over women as a kind of menace to their identity or position in society (p. 20), nor the socio-racial tensions “associated with [blacks’] emigration from Caribbean islands to British mainland contexts” as a menace to white Brits (p. 22). Rose is not a victim of a tripartite patriarchal and socio racial onslaught posed by Bert, Mr. Kidd, Mr. Sand, or black Riley who commands Rose to return to an indigenous homeland in the Caribbean. Rose is representative of all hegemonized and brainwashed people of both genders, females and males, and all races, including whites and blacks, since both genders and races join forces to subdue her into a different version of reality other than that she believed to be static and permanent, particularly if we take into consideration Mrs. Sands’s support of her husband during his subjugating assault on vulnerable Rose.

Taylor-Batty’s character description of Gus in *The Dumb Waiter* as “a little dim-witted and needs correcting or encouraging” and as “bumbling and inquisitive partner” (2014, pp. 31, 32) is worthy of a reconsideration. Gus’s instinctive attitude of posing too many questions is not a signifier of a kind of foolishness or stupidity. A foolish or stupid person who requires an intellectual revision or an attitudinal adjustment would not ask the type of questions that a more cunning person such as Ben fails, relinquishes, or evades answering them. Taylor-Batty hinges Gus’s inquisitive impulse on his supposedly clumsy nature, but never we succeed in capturing him initiating or developing an illogical argument. His queries about their futile waiting, unfamiliar setting, and lack of supplies are all logical and justified, as they are linked to his own existential being and ideological divergence, not simply his fear of a menacing present or an ambiguous future.

Although Farah Ali does not process Pinter’s early work critically, with an interest only in his mid- and later memory and political plays, respectively, her argument in *Eroding the Language of Freedom* (2018) about the dynamics of language, power, and identity that govern Pinter’s theatrical characterization is relative to the critical inquiry of Pinter’s early drama. What attracted my attention to her work is her interest in defining identity in terms of the discourse of power. Ali assumes that Pinter’s dramatic language, just like political discourse, is manipulated to create “individuals with blurred identities, if not obliterated ones” (p. 4). The impulse underlying this process is not cultural of the type we experience in racial studies, but political. However, I assume that such political practice of either blurring or obliteration depends on targeting not the identities of individuals but rather their memories, their own past. This entails that a person’s present consciousness of his/her personal and social status quo is transformed in a way that serves the obliterator’s objectives. Blurring or obliteration of memory is carried out in Pinter’s early drama in a way that parallels what happens in political discourse, regarding its dependence on linguistic devices such as repartee, repetition, negation, and evasion which form

the basics of the process of image creation and destruction that shall be expounded later. These techniques help hegemonic figures in *The Room* blur or obliterate Rose's memory, symbolically conveyed through inflicting her with blindness, so that she can't judge her present or reflect on her future. *The Dumb Waiter* similarly ends with acts of memory obliteration and physical disintegration, signified through Gus's final zombified return. Thrashing memory facilitates and prolongs the polarization of thought and domination of bodies.

1.4 The Metaphorization and Non-metaphorization of Pinter's Drama

Pinter's earlier and later dramas are thus overlappingly political, though the first are metaphorical while the second non-metaphorical. His comedies of menace and political comedies both tackle political issues, but they differ from each other as regards the degree of explicitness in exposing these issues dramatically. Consider, as a demonstration of this argument, Pinter's assertion to Gussow (1994) that "*One for the Road* and *Mountain Language* are more direct statements than other [early] plays" (p. 58), as well as the playwright's revelation to Nicholas Hern that *One for the Road* is "brutally real...a brutal series of facts", unlike his earlier plays which "were perhaps metaphors of state of affairs in various respects" that address "the abuse of authority" (1985, p. 8). *One for the Road* is not metaphorical as it dramatizes real political issues inspired from real historical contexts in "a specific and direct" way. It was prompted by the inhumane and illegal practices of forceful incarceration, "physical torture", "rape and murder" with which he came acquainted during his journey to Turkey (p. 12). *One for the Road* differs from the earlier work with respect to style and context but shares with them the same thematic content. Responding to Gussow's question about whether *The Birthday Party* has the same story as *One for the Road* or not, Pinter affirms that both dramatize "the destruction of an individual, the independent voice of an individual" (1994, p. 58). The process of destroying individuals involves subduing them physically and mentally by means of suppressing them from doing or saying what they want. There are other oppressively nonphysical (verbal) practices in operation in Pinter's earliest and latest drama mentioned in his essay "Writing for the Theatre", such as "warnings, sermons, admonitions, ideological exhortations, [and] moral judgements" (2013b, p. 30). These methods are used as tactics of persuasion, isolation, will-dispossession, memory-erosion, and truth-blurring. They create what Pinter describes as "a brilliant, even witty, highly successful act of hypnosis" (p. 261), or what Mambo Ghita Tann terms "zombification" (2012, p. 86). Zombifying a person means dominating his/her unconsciousness and making it in control of his/her conscious actions and thoughts in a way that complies with the directions or requests of the dominative, transforming power.

By far, some of the different menticiding and incarcerating practices that mark Pinter's later period are metaphorically present in his earlier plays. In this respect, *The Room* and *the Dumb Waiter* on the one hand and *Ashes to Ashes* on the other are comparable in certain regards. *The Room* echoes *Ashes to Ashes*, a later political play "about the images of Nazi Germany", in its depiction of "images of horror

and man's inhumanity to man" (Pinter 2013b, p. 221). Rose is incarcerated in her room, attends to Bert, endures interrogations by Bert and the Sands, and is even terrified by Bert's sheer violence as he murders Riley in cool blood, causing Rose to go blind. The room thus becomes for her what Pinter describes as a "detention camp" (p. 226), where she is horrified by violence, inflicted by blindness, and surrounded by death. This image of Rose resembles that of Rebecca in *Ashes to Ashes*. Pinter's character sketch of Rebecca as one "simply haunted by the world that she's been born into, by all the atrocities that have happened [and] become part of her own experience, although in my view she hasn't actually experienced them herself" largely applies to Rose too (p. 221). She is always haunted by the dangers residing outside the room which have become part of her consciousness of the real world, though we never see her experiencing what it is really like out there. Pinter's following description of Rebecca also reminds us of Rose:

A drowning woman, her hand reaching up through the waves, dropping down out of sight, reaching for others, but finding nobody there, either above or under the water, finding only shadows, reflections, floating; the woman a lost figure in a drowning landscape, a woman unable to escape the doom that seemed to belong only to others. (p. 256)

Both Rose and Rebecca are submissive, helpless subjects who cannot deter intruders, mind-manipulators, or physical oppressors in their quest to remain safe. Both women's conditions resonate those of Ben and Gus in *The Dumb Waiter*. They are isolated in a place they cannot depart without a managerial authorization, banned from questioning or complaining about their aimless isolation, and threatened by death in case of incomppliance. The images of characters in this place resemble those of incarcerated people in concentration camps, where a person must choose between oppression, madness, or surrender to death.

2 Pinter's Special Use of Defamiliarization

Pinter's treatment of dramatic elements (plot, settings, dialogue, and characterization) reflects an adoption of the general conceptual framework of Defamiliarization, as proposed by either German dramatist and critic Bertolt Brecht's theory of *Verfremdungseffekt* (commonly translated as *Alienation*, but more precisely as *Estrangement*) or by Russian formalist Viktor Sklovskij's theory of *Ostranenie* (meaning *defamiliarization* or *making strange*). Pinter's plot structures are not Aristotelian, but episodic. Although the settings in his plays are bland, they are used for unfamiliar purposes and evoke unusual meanings. The occasional interrogative style of dialogue and the careful choice of diction, which submerge theatrical language in modes of probability and uncertainty, promote scepticism in individuals' belief in social reality. It is truthful that his characters behave bizarrely and unexplainably, but with a plan to detach the audience emotionally so that they view the society as a hegemonic structure in which an ideological tussle between authoritarian topdogs and powerless underdogs takes place.

It should be noted, however, that the defamiliarization techniques Pinter employs in the dramatization of action, settings, dialogue, and characters are not linguistic or expressionistic as proposed by either Sklovskij or Brecht in the traditional sense. On the one hand, his dramatization of these elements is not performed using unfamiliar terms, but the *conceptual* images they create are unfamiliar and startling. On the other hand, Pinter's plays are not ideologically different from Brecht's in terms of the latter's engagement with political themes. The difference lies in the techniques used. Pinter does not destroy the illusory fourth wall, a frequent practice of Brechtian epic theatre, by interrupting the dramatic performance with songs, commenting on it through projected images, or summing up its political dialectic using captions. I propose that in Pinter's theatre this process of defamiliarization is only *conceptual*. "Conceptual Defamiliarization" is a term proposed by Ryan Gunderson to describe the process of shedding "light on the taken-for-granted by applying new concepts or giving a new meaning to old ones" (2020, p. 96). This revolutionary technique of approaching static images with new attitudes or from new angles is already at work in Pinter's drama. His plays acquire their political, defamiliarizing effect only by means of providing "fresh perspectives on problematic social and political practices that might otherwise be taken for granted or considered natural and inevitable" (Booker 1994, p. 19) and exposing "the contradictions in social reality and depict society as an ever-changing process, not a fixed state" (Bradley 2006, p. 4). Using the created fresh perspectives of social reality and the contradictions it evokes, Pinter's theatre transforms the audience's conceptual experience of the staged performance into one of bewilderment and curiosity, a process which initiates in them a new awareness of the self and society. Thus, what unites the dramaturgies of Brecht and Pinter are not the theatrical methods they use, rather it is their similar political thrust, the common drive for exposing the impact of such practices as persuasion, manipulation, power, and hegemony on subservient individuals. Both dramatists aim at alienating the audience emotionally so that they understand reality in a way different from that presented by dominant powers.

In Pinter's earliest theatre, characters, for example, are defamiliarized by deconstructing the conceptual stability, conformity, and conventionality with which we have come to understand their roles and interpret their inner qualities. With him, we do not encounter them as completely "unchanging and circumscribed entities but as contradictory, alterable beings, as products of social forces, implying that, if their circumstances were to change, then they too would change" (Patterson 2003, p. 18). What helps us to acquire this new image of characters is that they are not modelled in parallel with Aristotle's theory of catharsis, so that our empathy or emotions are not exhaustively aroused in a way that alienates our ability to reflect on the political implications of the dramatic action. The purpose of political theatre instead is the alienation of the content by encouraging the audience to "engage intellectually and ideologically with the political and philosophical issues of a play by the deliberate foregrounding of theatrical artifice" rather than "engaging empathetically with the subject material or the characters" (Wolfreys et al. 2006, pp. 38, 39). Part of Pinter's theatrical artifice is to make the audience view his characters from the fresh angles of a new reality, the reality of being subjects of physical oppression and ideological

transformation. Language plays a vital role in Pinter's theatrical practice of conceptual defamiliarization by its ability to create fresh images of his characters.

3 Defamiliarization and Hollow Language

Pinter's drama acquires its political, defamiliarizing effect from his distinctive use of language which, I reaffirm, does not resemble that of Sklovskij. Pinter considers that political language is capable of undermining reality by means of its "hollow" nature (2013b, p. 189). Whether his concept of the hollowness of language is interpreted figuratively (meaning flexible, elusive, or unreliable) or literally (meaning empty), both are useful within the process of changing people's conceptual images of objects and events for the purpose of controlling their behaviours, attitudes, and thoughts about existent reality. In this way, the flexibility of language can reshape public opinion and destabilize the reliability of opponents who base their arguments on conventional, rational thought. In this sense, as Pinter asserts, language becomes a "masquerade, a tapestry of lies,... and a stratagem to keep thought at bay" (2013b, pp. 198, 212). When our thoughts about reality, our conceptions of it, are trapped and remodelled by language, it becomes easy for a mastermind to exercise a systematically manipulative and authoritarian power.

Conversely, language is literally hollow simply because it is empty, i.e., absent or silent. Still, silence for Pinter is dialogically valuable. It is a means of articulating people's fear of communication, their strategy of cautious avoidance, or their enforced mental surrender to a hegemonic ideology. Silence thus is a written method of communicating uncommunication or subjection. Pinter differentiates between two types of dialogic silence: physical silence, "when no word is spoken", and implied silence, when "a torrent of language is being employed" to suppress "a language locked beneath it" (2013b, p. 32). He calls the implied silence enveloped by the torrential language a "smoke screen", a shield that discourages others' attempts at establishing communication.

Like political language, literary language is likewise hollow. In his Nobel Prize speech, Pinter compares it to "an ambiguous transaction, a quicksand, a trampoline, a frozen pool which might give way under you, the author, at any time" (2013b, p. 256). Characters in his drama use this feature of language, states director Peter Hall, as a weapon "to discomfort or destroy each other" by shaking each other's confidence in established reality (2000, p. 54). It is not a destruction of bodies alone, but of minds too, a process involving a political practice. Characters destroy each other mentally by those moments of silence or pauses in the dialogue that follow posed questions. A character for example poses a question but receives no answer from his addressee. Offering *The Homecoming* as an example, Pinter refers to this process in the following lines:

Most of the plays are engendered by a line, a word or an image. The given word is often shortly followed by the image. . . . The first line of *The Homecoming* is 'What have you done with the scissors?' Someone was obviously looking for a pair of scissors and was demanding their whereabouts of

someone else he suspected had probably stolen them. But I somehow knew that the person addressed didn't give a damn about the scissors or about the questioner either, for that matter. (2013b, pp. 254–255)

This practice that consists of a deliberate indifference to answering somebody's question is a technique entailing a systemized mental subjection, for it raises doubts about the presence of the object itself (scissors) or the existence of its owner. This image creates a kind of irony, since what is supposed to establish a means of communication between humans turns out to be a miscommunicating method. As thus, it is not a relationship of communication, but of manipulation.

In the same Noble prize speech, Pinter pinpoints another pragmatic use of hollow language apart from raising doubts in subjected people. To maintain power, he insists, "it is essential that people remain in ignorance, that they live in ignorance of the truth, even the truth of their own lives. What surrounds us therefore is a vast tapestry of lies, upon which we feed" (2013, p. 257). To grasp the significance of this statement which highlights a different unique usage of language, it is essential first to identify the reader with the Pinteresque dramatic convention of dividing his characters into factions or parties. They are usually split into two groups, one attempting to excavate reality and another adhering to conceal or deform it. Rose's raised questions about the people who live upstairs or in the basement reflect her ignorance of the space she dwells. When Riley meets her, we become puzzled by knowing she is ignorant even of her own past, her original name and parents. When Bert and Riley first meet, they seem to have former acquaintance. Although Rose and the audience are ignorant of this mysterious relationship and fail to recognize its background, we can safely assume it has been antagonistic as Bert immediately terminates Riley's life at sight. The same political practice of keeping people ignorant resonates in *The Dumb Waiter*. Ben and Gus are ignorant of the location of the basement room they occupy, its nature, owner, and components. They do not know how much time has passed since they first set foot in that place or when they are supposed to leave. As other offstage characters communicate with them through the serving hatch or from behind the door, Gus keeps questioning about the identities of these anonymous communicators. This practice entails a permanent condition of alertness, anxiety, and fear of what lies ahead, particularly when the detainee is locked up for days so that he becomes "physically exhausted, emotionally distraught and mentally confused" (Gudjonsson 2003, p. 24). The resultant feelings, physical conditions and mental states are similar to these experienced by people before undergoing an official investigation in a detention room or a concentration camp.

In *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter*, Pinter applies his own conception of the hollowness of language through a technical process of *image destruction and creation*. What provides the two plays with the formula of political theatre is not the injection of singing, dancing, exaggerated gestures, projected images, banners, signs, or captions into their textures as we experience in Brechtian epic theatre. Pinter rather adopts a simple use of language that destroys the conventional way with which we approach the image of a certain character, through negation or interrogation, and then creates a counter, unfamiliar image of the same character. Destroying an image and then creating another different one in its place is an act involving an ideological

and psychological transcendence, conversion, and reconstruction. The Pinteresque dual process of image destruction and creation is what produces the two plays' defamiliarizing style which affects our conventional identification of characters whom Pinter describes as "impossible to define" (2013b, p. 255). They can only be identified with the unusual images Pinter creates of place, time, body, and consciousness.

4 Image Destruction and Creation in *The Room*

In *The Room*, the room is a place where Rose's expressed convictions do not reflect the reality of her situation. She maintains that the world outside the room is deadly, describing it as "cold", "murder", "windy", "chilly", and "icy" (2013a, pp. 91, 94, 103), but meantime she draws an image of it as a "cosy" place (p. 95), immune against the outside dangers. By way of contrast, the remaining characters invite us to transcend Rose's preliminary, imprecise feelings about the condition of the room. Using a mixed style of monologue and dialogue underlined with negation, interrogation, and counter description, they gradually create within us a contrary image of the room as a location harassing its female inhabitant by instilling in her feelings of fear and uncertainty. Every visit she receives from Mr. Kidd (the landowner), the Sands (step-renters) and black Riley (the basement resident) entails a steady, two-fold process of destruction and creation. Every visit comprises a destruction of that solid conceptual image of the room as a sanctuary, where she feels "quite happy... all right... not bothered... and nobody bothers us" (p. 93), and generates instead an opposite image of it as a space that frightens, disillusiones, and disintegrates Rose physically and mentally. In this light, those people surrounding her are not what she thinks them to be, as caring family members or friendly visitors. They are metaphors of hegemonic powers who invade her private space, seize her feelings, and jeopardize her life. Consider, for example, the disputes between Mr. and Mrs. Sands (Clarissa and Toddy) over which is ubiquitously darker and colder, the room or its outside perimeter, and over the credibility of Clarissa's observance of a "star" prior to meeting Rose:

MRS SANDS. You must be cold.

MR SANDS. I'm not.

MRS SANDS. You must be.

.....

MRS SANDS. It's very dark out.

MR SANDS. No darker than in.

MRS SANDS. He's right there.

MR SANDS. It's darker in than out,

.....

MRS SANDS. I saw a star.

MR SANDS. You saw what?

MRS SANDS. Well, I think I did.

MR SANDS. You think you saw what?

MRS SANDS. A star.

MR SANDS. Where?
 MRS SANDS. In the sky.
 MR SANDS. When?
 MRS SANDS. As we were coming along.
 MR SANDS. Go home.
 MRS SANDS. What do you mean?
 MR SANDS. You didn't see a star.
 MRS SANDS. Why not?
 MR SANDS. Because I'm telling you. I'm telling you you didn't see a star.
 (pp. 101–103)

Presenting two conflicting voices arguing about a single issue is a linguistic technique of negation and affirmation, or destruction and creation. The aim of this argument is to change a third listener's preset judgements about the argued concept and indoctrinate him/her into another judgement of that concept which he/she once considered as evidently real. Such an argument thus turns into a process of brainwashing whose psychological impact is immediately reflected through Rose's dialogic pauses, which can be seen as a toptext involving the subtexts of silence, suspicion, and surrender.

Pinter resorts again to the technique of having two arguing voices denying a reality which a third party believes is nonnegotiable through the image of the basement. Although Clarissa's description of the basement as "damp" and "dark" conforms to normal criteria of such sublevel spaces (p. 106), Pinter defamiliarizes it by converting its image into a place of mysteries and astonishing revelations which relate to its condition, structure, and assemblers:

MRS. SANDS. 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 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. (p. 106)

Darkness is omnipresent and partitions divide its space; two criteria which double the audience's sense of obscurity. Its secret dweller, black Riley, is the dominant figure, though his stay is ephemeral. He, together with the Sands who run into him in this subterranean place by accident, cannot be recognized by visualization but through verbalization, with hearable voices being the only means of communication between both sides. This unique experience of communication results in an overwhelming disclosure about the possible vacancy of the room, which in turn surges Rose's feelings of fear and extreme doubt:

MRS. SANDS. This man, this voice really, I think he was behind the partition, said yes there was a room vacant.

.....

Pause.

ROSE. You won't find any rooms vacant in this house.

MR SANDS. The man in the basement said there was one. One room. Number seven he said.

Pause.

ROSE. That's this room. . . . This room is occupied. (pp. 106–107)

This verbal exchange is marked by its multilayered signification. While the conceptual binary opposition of dominance/acceptance is the governing norm of the reported Sands-Riley encounter, it is dominance/resistance in case of the Sands-Rose meeting. In the first case, Riley is in charge and whatever he claims is real the Sands take for granted and act accordingly. In the second case, the Sands manipulate what Riley has decided as real and attempt in turn to subdue Rose into adopting it. Rose's denial of the vacancy of Room No. 7 is a form of resistance, yet it is weak and temporary particularly as she immediately asks Mr. Kidd for confirmation: "How can this room be going?.... Is this room vacant?" (pp. 107–108). If the room is vacant, then implicitly Rose does not exist.

The room's door is another object that undergoes defamiliarization, especially by Pinter's representation of it as a self-contradictory image entailing both binary meanings of concreteness and hollowness. Its concreteness as an object designed to transit people physically from the external perimeter into the internal space of the room is countered by its newly acquired image as an intermediary, hollow space conduiting both life and death. Rose's three visitors, or rather offenders, (Mr. Kidd, the Sands, and Riley) use this in-between space impermissibly, since we never see her open the door for them. Mr. Kidd makes his first entrance into the room based not on Rose's allowance, for Pinter informs us he could not hear the invitation, but on his contention that the room is his personal domain:

A knock at the door. She stands.

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. I heard you.

MR KIDD. Eh?

ROSE. We heard you. (Pinter 2013a, p. 95)

Mr. Kidd's breaking into the room without permission from Rose resembles his interference to let Riley, the mysterious black man coming to dissuade her from

staying, into the room despite her renunciation of the idea. Rose is also harassed by intrusions and interferences from the outside world when she astoundingly finds the Sands on her door landing looking secretly for Mr. Kidd:

ROSE. Oh!

MR and MRS SANDS are disclosed on the landing.

MRS SANDS. So sorry. We didn't mean to be standing here, like. Didn't mean to give you a fright. (p. 100)

The door is thus unfunctional or useless. It is present and absent, tangible and hollow. In a way, it resembles Rose's consciousness. Both are submissive in terms of their vulnerability and helplessness against intruders. The door fails to repel their physical presence, and Rose fails to resist their mind-manipulating attempts to either take the room from her or take her from the room. The door as a two-way passage does not therefore result in a construction of communication between Rose and the outer world but rather a destruction of it.

The process of destroying the peaceful image of the room as a self-contained sanctuary and replacing it with the horrific one of it as an already-compromised space highlights Pinter's dramatic preoccupation with blurring the distinction between the concepts of life and death. The debate here turns to questioning the reality of life itself. Is Rose herself a symbol of life as her name may symbolically indicate, or a ghost roaming the world of humans? Is Riley another ghost with authority over Rose that allows him to summon her back to the world of the dead? Or is he the archetype image of the grim reaper coming to claim her life? When Bert, Rose's mate, finally assaults Riley, it remains uncertain whether Riley survives the kick or dies in consequence:

He takes the chair from the table and sits to the left of the NEGRO'S chair, close to it. He regards the NEGRO for some moments. Then with his foot he lifts the armchair up. The NEGRO falls on to the floor. He rises slowly.

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 (pp. 114–115)

The question turns from "is this person really alive?" to "is life itself real?". Pinter thus converts the conceptual image of life in a way that makes it deceptive, incomprehensible, and unstable. With two conflicting images of life, both inside and outside the room, the audience realizes that the threatening nature of the two adjacent spaces is not transitory, sudden, or recent but rather already prevalent and permanent. Death itself is not then portrayed as menacing. Menace stems more from the inability of Rose to recognize the presence of death and her incompetence to distinguish it from life. Providing the audience with such fresh

image of death, designated to uncover docile Rose's failure to identify reality, is ideologically a political practice. The political implication of this experience resides in its reflection of how deep in people's thoughts and beliefs a hegemonic power attempts to become penetrating and imposing that even the simplest, inborn concepts related to human existence are destabilized or debated by the way Pinter estranges the images of life and death.

The destruction-creation process also participates in defamiliarizing the element of time and its relation to character identification. Pinter portrays his characters as people whose pasts are ambiguous and whose present conditions are unreal. For example, the action begins and ends without settling down the questions of whether Mr. Kidd is really the landlord as believed by Rose or just a senior tenant; has a wife or not; his sister is dead or never had one; and is suffering amnesia and semi-deafness or just pretending to be so. To Rose, the answers to these questions come in the affirmative form. These affirmations which have become part of Rose's solid memory about Mr. Kidd he simply cracks on his first staged encounter with her. Accordingly, the past is different from what she has always thought of it. It is fragmentable, changeable, unstable, and even fake. The fakeness of Rose's past extends to influence her present as implied in Mr. Kidd's argument over his ownership of both the rocking chair and the bedroom:

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. This was my bedroom.

ROSE. This? When?

MR KIDD. When I lived here.

ROSE. I didn't know that.

MR KIDD. I will sit down for a few ticks. (*He sits in the armchair.*)

ROSE. Well, I never knew that.

MR KIDD. Was this chair here when you came?

ROSE. Yes.

MR KIDD. I can't recollect this one.

Pause. (pp. 96, 97)

The pause that concludes this dialogue is not arbitrary or purposeless. Penelope Prentice contends that such dialogic pauses are not "merely stops or formal stresses" (2000, p. lxi). They "are as much communication as language", "convey deep emotions", and are "an organic part of the action". In addition to using pauses as a linguistic layer of deep emotions of fear or hesitation, pauses also expose characters psychologically as they reflect, Pinter (1994) states, "what has just happened in the minds and guts of the characters. They spring out of the text. They are not formal conveniences or stresses but part of the body of the action" (p. 30). The Pinter-pause

that concludes the Kidd-Rose's verbal exchange is a psychological time-halt during which Rose's convictions about her room and its components change as regards the new reality revealed about them by Mr. Kidd. Chiasson (2009) refers to this use of pauses by commenting that they can "dismantle statements and entire conversations, rendering speech suggestive, ironic, suspect" (p. 33). Differently, the pause can also be read as a reflection of a time gap. This time gap is not of silence but of absence. In the quoted dialogue above, Mr. Kidd's inference that the existence of the rocking chair and bedroom precedes to the existence of Rose herself inside the room, a claim she doubts, upsets the audience's concrete visualization of her mere physical existence as a live person.

There are other characters whose presence also creates the image of a time-pause and entails the absence of human action and even life. The Sands function in a way that suggests not simply the lapse or end of time, by means of their names' symbolization of the hourglass or their disagreement about the duration of time they have spent since their arrival (Pinter 2013a, p. 103), but also the freezing of time and the consequential inexistence of incidents and people within its boundaries. The Sands' presence in the room for renting it suggests that Rose is either no longer a tenant or perhaps she has never been one. So, the period during which the room was occupied by Rose Mr. and Mrs. Sands imply it has never existed. Then, what for Rose appears as a pure reality they so easily and cunningly turn into a phantasy. The effect of this new discovery shakes our solid belief in Rose's existence as a human being and supports the converted image of her as a phantomized entity. The greater effect of this novel interpretation of human existence is that instead of defining time in terms of incidents or action, it is rather understood in terms of nothingness, stillness, and absence.

In addition to defamiliarizing the concepts of place and time, through the conceptual process of distortion-creation, and clarifying its role in identifying characters, the two associated elements of body and consciousness are also used in character identification by means of the same process. Pinter offers Rose's body the image of a space contested over by two rival powers, Riley and Bert. This physical battle involves a relative psychological one too. Rose finds herself both physically and psychologically sieged by Riley's attempt to dissuade her from staying in the room, through providing new identification of her identity and history, and meantime Bert's decisive action of ruthlessly assaulting Riley for daring to do so. The final long dialogue between Rose and Riley presents to us new facts about her identity and history:

RILEY. I have a message for you.

.....

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.

RILEY. To come home.

ROSE. Stop it. I can't take it. What do you want? What do you want?

RILEY. Come home, Sal.

Pause.

ROSE. What did you call me?

RILEY. Come home, Sal.

ROSE. Don't call me that. (2013a, p. 112)

.....

She touches his eyes, the back of his head and his temples with her hands.

If Rose's so-called father wants her back, then why she refuses to comply, and if her real name is Sal, why she appears shocked when Riley calls her by it. She either suffers an amnesia or attempts purposefully to suppress a past memory revived by this uninvited guest. This expository confrontation is performed through breathless, quick-paced, and short sentences to reflect the quickness with which her consciousness of her identity and history changes. This change has a physical manifestation. Through her gentle touching of "*his eyes, the back of his head and his temples*" (Pinter 2013a, p. 113), she non-verbally indicates her surrender to his haunting revelations about her identity and memory as well as his departure request. It is the ultimate sign of accepting the new consciousness he grants her.

The effect of this physio-psychological dominance practised by Riley over Rose is undermined by the more impactful counteraction found in Bert's violence unleashed against both her body and Riley's. Although the text contains no explicit references to Bert's infliction of violence on Rose (he never indeed raises a finger against her), violence over her body is inferred from the symbolic relationship between herself and Bert's van, particularly if we notice his gender-based use of the pronoun "her" to refer to his vehicle instead of "it". Both Rose and the van have together endured a history of abuse and manipulation: "I drove her down.... I drove her back.... I sped her.... she went with me.... I get hold of her. I go where I go. She took me there. She brought me back" (Pinter 2013a, p. 114). To this symbolic relationship we can attribute Mr. Kidd's remarks, in the presence of Rose, about the same van as "a very nice little van", "very smooth", having "a good gear-change", and easy to "manipulate" (pp. 96, 99). Bert's gendered description of the van does not indicate, as Taylor-Batty assumes, "a final, implacable masculine assertion of power" (p. 22). Pinter addresses the issue of power in its abstract, general signification. Bert's deadly assault on Riley, quoted above, also involves violence against Rose, as Pinter tells us that she immediately turns blind. Quickness also marks this second process of physio-psychological domination. No sooner is she persuaded, by Riley, of being someone else than she immediately experiences indirect, unsustainable violence by Bert to forfeit this new realization. Bert's brutal elimination of Riley is not driven by a racial attitude, a fear of a possible "sexual rival", or a reluctance to discover Rose's "personal history" (Taylor-Batty 2014, p. 22). Violence is practised in the context of Bert's search for abstract, supreme power and domination of subordinate Rose. The immediate transformation of Rose's consciousness, by means of either Riley's coercive persuasion or Bert's physical violence, and her helplessness to combat both have consequential disintegrating damage on her body as well. Therefore, her body can be compared to her mind; both are defenceless and changeable. Within

the heated contest between Bert and Riley we can observe Rose as vulnerable and choiceless. The success of either force to win the battle over her body and soul is something that exceeds her will. The act of remaining or leaving thus becomes compulsory over her body and disintegrating to it. Such is the new created image of human body which Pinter imposes over Rose and propagates to us all.

5 Image Destruction and Creation in *The Dumb Waiter*

In *The Dumb Waiter*, characters identify with the element of place in terms of isolation, inoperability, and ownership. Pinter locates the action in the basement room of a café, a kitchen, and estranges it by isolating its structure and occupants. The room is “sound-proof” (Pinter 2013a, p. 133) and poorly ventilated, with no outlets but for a door, leading to a passage, which remains always closed until the end. In *The Room*, Rose has a limited access, a sole window, to the scenery outside. The limitedness of options for Rose is relatively a privilege when compared to the total absence of escape exits (windows) overlooking the outside world in case of Gus and Ben in *The Dumb Waiter*. Although Gus views this place as “dump” and “the sooner [they]’re out of this place the better” (pp. 122, 140), he has no choice but to stay. Movement inside the room is an activity directed by the boss and keenly monitored by Ben. The boss’s directions are briefed by Gus: “you come into a place when it’s still dark, you come into a room you’ve never seen before, you sleep all day, you do your job, and then you go away in the night again” (p. 123). Gus’s movement to the lavatory or over his bed is monitored by Ben’s glaring eyes. Otherwise, Gus’s movement occurs in compliance with Ben’s instructions, especially within the limited space of the kitchen. Restriction of movement is also symbolically sensed from the image of keeping Gus and Ben always “on tap”, i.e. on high alert, waiting desperately “in case a call comes” (p. 123). As that call never comes, waiting vainly to do something becomes restrictive and isolative. The inevitability of staying in this restrictive setting changes the concept of mobility into one of disability and stillness. Pinter thus depicts the basement as an enclosed sphere of detention and invigilation. Unauthorized departure is unallowable, until the terms of the job are fulfilled. The image of an isolated kitchen echoes the image of its residing armed assassins, as isolated and trapped victims, not as victimizers as we might initially think of them, particularly because of the fact that their targeted victim never appears.

Central to Pinter’s plan of isolating this subterranean place and reverting its normal image is how he disconnects its communication systems. Waiting for a call from the head of the secret organization in a place unequipped with a telephone device is quite bizarre. The only available means of communication with the upper level of the restaurant are the installed devices of the dumb waiter and the two-way speaking tube. However, they are vain. The dumb waiter’s normal function is to carry down paper notes containing food orders and then quite logically to come back up with prepared food as requested. The functionality of this reciprocal process is suspended, for either deficiency of food ingredients or inappropriateness of kitchen equipment. This creates a state of inconsistency between what they are equipped with and what they have to offer, what they believe is real and what their bosses

depict as actually real. This disparity is both comical and humorous (Dukore 1976, pp. 19, 20). Although the dumb waiter's occasional, upward/downward, cluttering movement and the accompanying voice instructions passed down through the speaking tube *literally* connect the two levels of the café, up and down, both ironically expose an unrhythmical pattern of disconnection, miscommunication, and disagreement between Ben and Gus on the one hand and between the café's owner and his subordinate employees on the other.

Not only is the basement isolated but also its objects are inoperable, uncontrollable, or deficient. Gus's multiple attempts at making the "lavatory chain" flush end in failure (Pinter 2013a, pp. 119, 147), and its delayed autonomous flushing provokes the audience's laughter (pp. 123, 151). The chain might be suffering a response delay due to "a deficient ballcock" as Ben suggests (p. 122), and thus could very possibly be a symbol of the "arbitrariness and irrationality" governing the setting (Dukore 1988, p. 39). Unlike Taylor-Batty who judges the "odd behaviour" of the lavatory as bemusing, though equally terrifying, to both men (p. 32), I assume, conversely, that the awkward malfunctioning of the ballcock is theatrically intended not for raising absurd laughter, random humorous comments, or reckless fear but for erecting doubt in this equipment and questioning its worth. The chain is rather deliberately designed to respond only to the commands of the anonymous masters surveying their subjects from the outside sphere and controlling the lavatory's mechanism and availability for use. When they need matches, they do not receive it in time, but only when the café's owner decides (Pinter 2013a, p. 127). The kitchen is short on gas, tea and food, so they respond to requested meals by sending up Gus's own snacks (biscuits, chocolate, and half a pint of milk). The room thus loses both its external reality, as a kitchen, and even its newly conceived image, as an execution chamber. Drawing an image of Ben and Gus as in control of this place is therefore inaccurate. It is the place that confines their bodies, consumes their minds, and neutralizes their free will.

Estrangement of the basement room is also attached to the ambiguous reality of its ownership and management. The audience are invited to view the kitchen as always bound by constant changeability of ownership and swift transference of power through the following debate:

BEN. It probably used to be a café here, that's all. Upstairs. These places change hands very quickly.

GUS. A café?

BEN. Yes.

GUS. What, you mean this was the kitchen, down here?

BEN. Yes, they change hands overnight, these places. Go into liquidation. The people who run it, you know, they don't find it a going concern, they move out.

GUS. You mean the people who ran this place didn't find it a going concern and moved out?

BEN. Sure.

GUS. WELL, WHO'S GOT IT NOW?

Silence.

BEN. What do you mean, who's got it now?

GUS. Who's got it now? If they moved out, who moved in?

BEN. Well, that all depends – (p. 136)

There is thus a synchronized bond between *space* and *character* in terms of changeability. Ownership of the setting changes overnight, and in concomitance control over Ben and Gus changes too, from Wilson, the always-offstage mysterious boss who “doesn't even bother to put in an appearance” (p. 133), to the new unknown owner of the café. Wilson and the café's owner are archetypes of oppressive power. The assumed image of their pervasive powers, outside the café and in the upper level respectively, is conveyed to the audience through the frequent heated debates, such as the one quoted above, between Ben and Gus over the extent of domination with which each one of these offstage characters controls the setting and regulates activities inside it. Gus, for example, argues that “the whole house is” Wilson's (p. 133). Wilson's dominance exceeds that of the café's new owner, since Wilson is also in control of other adjacent spaces where other “branches” or “departments” operate under his command (p. 137).

Another aspect of Pinter's plan for creating unusual images of his characters is his creation of two conflicting consciousnesses in each one of them. To conceive the full meaning of this hypothesis, we ought to read their relationship in terms of a power hierarchy. As explained earlier, Ben and Gus suffer a symbolic incarceration by being censured from posing complaints or questions about their assassination missions and the identities of their targets and manager. Consider the following exchange:

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 me 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?

GUS. That's what I was wondering about.

BEN. What?

GUS. The job.

BEN. What job?

GUS (tentatively). I thought perhaps you might know something.

BEN looks at him.

I thought perhaps you – I mean – have you got any idea – who it's going to be tonight?

BEN. Who what's going to be?

They look at each other.

GUS (at length). Who it's going to be.

Silence. (p. 132)

Still, Ben and Gus differ regarding their reactions to these incarcerating practices, and their divergent reactions hint at the kind of consciousness that develops in each

accordingly. To foreground these different reactions, Pinter immerses their images in contradictions and ambiguities so that they become opposite extremes. Gus is humorously garrulous, but insightful, and funnily restless, but audacious. Ben appears serious, confident, decisive, and violent, but in depth he is weak for his fear of questioning or violating established rules. Such inter- and intra-contradictions obscure their true identities and preoccupations. These features relate only to their internal description, their psychological attitudes and motivations. Pinter's main interest is exposing his characters psychologically, not socially or culturally, which justifies his dramaturgical style of excluding any clues, explicit or implicit, to their social class or cultural background.

Gus has a double consciousness, a subjugate and a renegade. Despite Ben's careful monitoring of Gus's language and behaviour, the latter's rebellious self cannot be suppressed. The coercively mind-suppressing stipulations of the authority, the boss or the café's owner, is defied by Gus's implied declaration of discontent, evasion, and suspicion. We can detect these defiant attitudes through the many questions he poses about the identity of their boss, the number of branches in the organization, the location of the building, their profession, and targeted victims, in addition to his complaints about their discomfort, inability to satisfy either boss, bankruptcy, thirst, hunger, and boredom. Apart from describing the abnormal nature of their jobs as henchmen or cooks, such unrelenting questions and complaints are technically significant in another sense. Since Gus is quite aware that he is banned from posing questions and complaints, a rule he unconsciously violates, these questions and complaints neither address missing information nor invite action, for surely Ben has no answer and absolutely can't act independently without permission from the authority. They are rather used as a toptext for expressing Gus's doubt, anxiety, and mutiny.

Ben too is depicted as having a double consciousness, one as a censuring subjugator and another as a dumb subjugate. On the one hand, as he describes himself, he is the "senior partner" (Pinter 2013a, p. 130), in charge of implementing the general rules necessary for ensuring the success of their dual job. During this process, he develops "an attitude of great deference to authority figures while demanding subservience from those regarded as lower in status" (VandenBos 2015, p. 94). With a developed authoritative personality, the subjugating self, he terrorizes Gus verbally and physically whenever the latter raises critical queries about either mission, assassination or serving food. On the other hand, through Ben's blind observance of the authority's stipulations, he can be seen too as a subjugate who denies the kind of illumination and novel thought that these questions and complaints might be presenting. In other words, he refuses compliance to Gus's renegading consciousness. Ben's in-compliance takes the form of silence, sarcasm, or violent physical behaviour. Ben's recurrent silence, expressed through the Pinter-pauses, fails to mute Gus's voice, his critical thinking, and interrogative discourse. The same failure characterizes Ben's sarcastically devaluing and intimidating expressions, including "You maniac!" and "I'm warning you!" (Pinter 2013a, p. 149). Even Ben's various actions of physical aggression practised against Gus the latter turns into a motivating force and a provocation of agency. Superficially, the violent practices of throat-grabbing, shoulder-hitting, and chest-slapping bespeak Ben's suppression of Gus

(pp. 130, 138, 149), but implicitly they identify Ben's suppressed self too. There is no explicit act of violence practised against Ben's body in the course of the play. Violence defines his suppressed self by the perceived fact of being a link in a chain or hierarchical system of command that depends on violence for controlling subordinate employees. If Gus is physically oppressed by Ben, then it is quite rational to claim that Ben's offstage superiors in this assassination organization have practised/will practise violence against him in previous/future operations. Ben appears throughout the action as dogmatic and unchangeable, guided and modelled solely by the specifics of his job description. Gus, conversely, seems unbound by these specifics and even challenges Ben's practices. From these colliding consciousnesses of the two partners emerges the play's dialectic.

With such contradictory consciousnesses, their partnership cannot proceed. Gus's ultimate choice of physical mutiny, though futile, by leaving Ben and the basement is a moment signifying a sense of self-awareness and agency. For Gus, it is a substantial method of declaring his rejection of his image as an oppressed subordinate. This unpremeditated action may appear simple, but in depth it is loaded with a heavy psychological pressure, underlined with a legacy of fear and victimization, and entails a life-threatening violence. The quickness with which Gus moves out and then returns stumbling in, "stripped of his jacket, waistcoat, tie, holster and revolver" (Pinter 2013a, p. 151), symbolizes the brevity of intellectual and behavioural liberty in constrictive, violent contexts. Gus leaves with a state of agency and comes back with an enforced state of proxy agency.

6 Conclusion

The Room and *The Dumb Waiter* are not merely part of that paradigm of Pinter's so-called comedies of menace that erect sarcasm or laughter at man's fear of the unknown or ambiguous. Through their defamiliarizing representation of personal convictions and social reality as illusively trapping, Pinter's earliest drama assumes the status of political comedies that critically satirize and foreground the hegemonic persuasion, psychological manipulation, and physical oppression practised authoritatively over subservient people. Defamiliarization is carried out through a linguistic process of image destruction and recreation. Using this process, the conventional image of a certain character is destroyed—by means of negation, interrogation, or counter description—and then a different, unfamiliar image of the same character is created. The effective domains where negation, interrogation, or counter description are used to unfamiliarly identify a character include that character's own perception and conception of place, time, body, and self. The pragmatic purpose of this process is ideological and psychological transformation and dominance. Rose, Gus, and Ben are not what they themselves or the audience think they are, as in control of their locations, memories, bodies and selves. This claimed, seemingly undebatable reality is what Pinter deconstructs. The audience begin conceiving of Pinter's characters as rather oppressed subjects, victimized by hegemonic powers that exhortatively destabilize their collective consciousness. Pinter's characters are not familiar or unchangeable social stereotypes. They raise contradictions and ambiguity in

the audience who are invited to change their collective consciousness too so as to observe the susceptibility of these characters to psychological subjugation and physical restraint by another omnipresent supreme power, and, conversely, to realize the characters' incompetence of inducing change in their worlds and ineffectuality of issuing self-determined actions underlying a kind of agency.

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Ahmed Abdulkhair Abulmagd Khaled The author is a staff member at Department of English language and literature, Al Azhar University, Nasr City, Cairo, Egypt. With a PhD in English language and literature, obtained from the same department, he is majorly specialized in teaching English literature courses, particularly drama, both British and American. His research interests include, but not limited to, African American history, African American drama, Expressionist theatre, political drama, Black Feminism, Psychoanalytical Feminism, and more recently Puerto Rican American drama. The author has a published book entitled *Afrocentricity in Selected Plays by August Wilson* (ASIN: B09FC7TQ3R). Apart from his scholarly preoccupations, on the administrative level he is in charge of assessing the learning outputs of the department's enrolled students, a committee member in charge of invigilating the actual enactment of learning outputs methods, the head of the committee in charge of analysing students' Academic performance, a co-supervisor of an MA thesis and a PhD dissertation, and a member of the faculty's student admission committee.