

Gothic Spaces in Pinter's *The Room* and *The Birthday Party*

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Abstract

One obvious preoccupation both Theatre of the Absurd and Gothic Studies share is their responsiveness to the inner workings of the human mind; another is that both exhibit tendencies of repressed emotions and individual experiences by capturing social dysfunctions. These psychoanalytical underpinnings are the defining traits of both gothic fiction and absurdist literature. Using qualitative research methods and close textual analysis, this article unfolds the painful social layers of Harold Pinter's plays. The repressed fears, deep-seated anxieties, and behavioral imbalances resulting from a claustrophobic atmosphere, often a room or a damp chamber, texture their world. To do this, a close textual reading approach is adopted. The theoretical grid for the article is Freud's theory of Uncanny and his concept of Unhomely. Also, the plays have been approached through Vidler's (1992) idea of Architectural Uncanny. Although the amount of scholarship available is fertile, no exhaustive study of Pinter's plays has been conducted from this perspective. The study is unique in that Pinter's works have not been previously analyzed through the critical lens of gothic theories. The article's main argument is that the motifs, tropes, and trappings that are scattered throughout the body of Pinter's dramatic works evoke a strong image of a dark Gothic world characterized by excessive anxiety and frustration. The article explores the effect of the uncanny produced through such psychological and social derangement and, from the gothic perspective, examines how Pinter's dramaturgy conjures up the

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terrifying psyches of the characters. The gothic analysis shows how the characters in an absurdist play take defensive positions and strategies against the social world. The article further interlinks gothic terror psyches and fears to highlight the ensuing sense of displacement characters feel in the light of the theory of uncanny and homely. This article analyzes three early plays of Pinter: *The Room*, *The Birthday Party*, and *The Caretaker*. Gothicity in Pinter's plays emerges as a strong impulse, a driving force through which Pinter puts across the social invasion, oppression, injustice, and individual freedom.

Keywords: Pinter, Anxiety, Gothic, Theatre of the Absurd, Space

Introduction

Harold Pinter has intrigued critics over decades, and the available critical scholarship on his plays testifies to his stature as a great playwright. Pinter's works can be divided between the metaphorical plays of his early period (1957- 1978) and the political drama of his later works (1980-1996). His plays have stirred critics to a wide variety of interpretations, and they have been approached from different theoretical and thematic perspectives, primarily from the Theatre of the Absurd perspective. While his earlier work has been discussed through multiple angles, these works have yet to be approached from a gothic perspective. This article contends that in portraying the absurdity of human existence, Pinter enters the Gothic domain by weaving important gothic features into many of his plays. This article first attempts to relate dramatic images and landscapes in Pinter's earlier works to gothic theories. The paper is particularly written from the theoretical perspectives of Walpole's and Redcliff's theories of horror and terror and Freud's concept of *unheimlich*. I intend to build my contention on the linkage of Pinter's work to Gothicism, which was overlooked by scholarly precursors who had not examined the correlation between Pinter's absurdism and the Gothic.

Taking as its object of study the earlier works of Pinter both in terms of theme and atmosphere, this article explores the innovative concept of connection between absurdism and the Gothic. The paper is an interdisciplinary exploration of staple gothic images with a particular focus on the motif of the double and the role of abject and sinister elements in

these plays. Pinter's works offer a gothic space where the boundaries between objective and subjective events are blurred or removed. The blurring of boundaries creates the feeling of uncanny among the characters. Not only this, but the motif of the gothic double is skillfully employed as the characters are constantly pretending to be the owners of the houses they are living in as tenants, or the actual house members feel alienated in their own homes. This connects absurdism with gothic as both the streams evoke uncanny and a sense of hopelessness. Freud's theory of the uncanny can be applied as the writer comments on the social and domestic spheres of his characters.

This article examines how Pinter calls attention to gothic spaces and the discourse of the uncanny. The uncanny struggle for identity looms large within the lonely, isolated, haunted, or shared spaces that his plays and characters inhabit. Living rooms become suffocating chambers for the characters, and their own existence becomes the source of mental and physical torture. By drawing attention to these plays, this paper aims to bring a new focus to his works and establish their relevance to the gothic world. An attentiveness to the concept of gothic as an analytical approach will also allow the readers new ways to understand how the text implies engagement with his gothic impulses. The words and even his sentences also suspend the meaning and produce a sense of suspense. The gothic focuses readers' attention on Pinter's minute details, such as vague gestures, impulsive movements, and peculiar setting of the place_ the experiences readers are too often likely to miss. Even the haphazard movement of his plays and convoluted narrative, like a sinister being, suggest the gothic world. Not able to detect what might unfold next in Pinter's plays, readers remain perplexed and anxious, a feeling that gives a gothic rendering to his plays.

Methodology

This qualitative research employs close textual reading to analyze Pinter's play from the Gothic perspective. Close textual analysis allows for a detailed examination of different text elements. It reaches a deeper understanding of the themes and tropes Pinter has employed to underpin deep-seated fears and anxieties of a troubled psyche. The theoretical

framework for the article is Freud's theory of Uncanny and his concept of Unhomely. Also, the plays have been approached through Vidler's (1992) concept of Architectural Uncanny. Although the amount of scholarship available is certainly not exhaustive, a study of Pinter's plays has not been conducted from this perspective.

Analysis and Discussion

The repressed fears, deep-seated anxieties, and behavioral imbalances resulting from the claustrophobic atmosphere texture Pinter's world. These deep-seated fears can be traced back to Pinter's own painful childhood memories. A critic has well recorded that "Early interviews given by Pinter draw a bleak picture of living conditions in his childhood and suggest a world of filthy canals, decaying housing, and factories belching smoke." (p. 5 introduction York notes). Pinter himself sketches his childhood house in his plays: "I lived in a brick house . . . run-down Victorian houses, and a soap factory with a terrible smell . . . And near a filthy canal as well . . . with an enormous dirty chimney" (Esslin, 1976, p. 11). A similar leaky room and soap factory can be found in his play *The Caretaker*. All these indicate that he had memories of unpleasant abodes, acute smells, and abject and uncanny houses. The same unease of unresolved trauma is reflected in his characters, who are shown in a very uncomfortable state. The houses shown in his plays are mostly stuffy, claustrophobic, dark, and mysterious. The inhabitants almost lose their sense of smell while staying in a stuffy and filthy house for so long.

The continuous unease that can be felt while reading an absurdist work is the same one feels while reading a gothic text. One's existential quest can be evaluated from a gothic perspective, as both have attributes of irrationality, gloominess, and uncanny. This article explores the Gothic's involvement with the Theatre of the Absurd concerning Pinter's works by spotting these situations. His characters are defined by a fluid, uncertain identity, reminiscent of the Gothic novel's preference for doubles and continuous state of confusion.

By revealing anew and establishing this kinship of gothic and absurdism, an important critical angle has been approached to read Pinter. An analysis

of Pinter's plays through the lens of gothic theory may help reveal gothic resonances that have been thus far largely overlooked. Torture, violence, sexual relationships, and how they are interwoven into absurd existence are all running themes in Pinter's plays. The ambivalence and mystery that surround these plays find their ultimate manifestation through gothic mode. The strain of violence in his plays continues with a sinister intensity in the non-social behavior of his characters. The four elements of the traditional gothic that I read in Pinter are the use of setting, fear of the unknown, the confused state of characters, and the blurring of boundaries. These are not isolated strands and separated from each other; these characteristics flow into each other, and this fluidity gives a unique texture to Pinter's plays. The gothic setting gives way to the fear of the unknown. His plays are frequently haunted by haunting voices and bizarre, tormented, anxious figures that mostly appear in traditional Gothic narrative and give a distinctively gothic experience.

In Pinter's world, the traditional setting of the gothic castles, dungeons, graveyards, and ravines recoils into a single room; the very room becomes the deeper recess of the mental spaces of his characters. Like spaces, characters are not what they appear to be; their identity lines blur. In some cases, their intentions are unclear; in fact, they seem confused, as with Absurdism and Gothicism.

In all three plays under discussion, a mysterious room has been used as a central point. The characters either own, disown, try to grab ownership, or struggle to push away the actual owners of the house. The Pinterian physical spaces become increasingly and explicitly ghostly. Pinter's ghostly and gothic pre-occupations pervade his early texts, and nowhere are these more evident than in the plays where he focuses on claustrophobic spaces. His unusual focus on basements, rooms, corridors, barren flats, and back doors gives a gothic texture to his works. This unusual stress on the spaces is the Gothic effect. The description of buildings suggests a clear connection with the Gothic manor. Even if the characters are shown to be comfortable in their assigned spaces, there is always a perceptual fear, terror, and horror. The constant apprehensive gaze of the other does not let the inhabitants be at ease in gothic spaces.

The concept of a gothic space further leads to the implicit danger of the unknown in *The Birthday Party*, *The Room*, and *The Caretaker*. The menacing interrogative atmosphere in these plays suggests Pinter's use of gothic tropes. The fear of impending danger further hints at the ideas of insecurity of the individual and impending danger, which he openly discusses as domestic problems. Pinterian space is insecure, and these gothic spaces convey this lack of security to characters who feel threatened and insecure in their homes.

In his works, the characters constantly struggle with this insecurity and uncertainty. The inside setting of the room is terrifying, and the characters are afraid to go out. "If you want to go out, you might as well have something inside you . . . there wasn't a soul about it. Can you hear the wind?" (Pinter, 1991, p.85). There is this constant talk of "someone" gone inside, "someone" listening to us, someone else has gone in now . . . did you ever see the walls? They were running" (p. 86), and "Those walls would have finished you off. I don't know who lives there now" (p. 87). These constant and recurrent references to someone, something, an unknown or unfamiliar figure lend to the text a mysterious feel. Such expressions and suspense normally find their way into a staple gothic text. It is either the presence of someone or their absence that makes the room's inhabitants terrified. As Rose Says in *The Room*:

"It's quiet...there is no one about? She stands looking.

Wait a minute.

Pause

I wonder who that is.

Pause

"No. I thought I saw someone." (p. 88)

Rose says: "what are you looking at? You're blind, aren't you? So, what are you looking at?" (p. 106)

Contrary to her fear of an unknown figure, it is her deep desire to see someone outside her claustrophobic environment. Her mental state plays a dual part; her fears highlight the sinister and suspense-laden environment, while her desire to see a human being companion comments on her psychological condition. She feels lonely and tries to have contact with the

outside world. In this fundamental confusion and ambivalence, the Negro, an unknown visitor of Rose, is not only feared but desired too. She wants to be alone but also wishes to have a social attachment. This implies her continuous struggle between the known and unknown, her mental state and external factors. This is called gothic ambivalence, which generates a sense of fear and suspense.) Paradoxically, as an offstage presence, the 'third' is essentially present in his plays, the intruder, be it a physical manifestation of their fears or some seething presence. This presence is overseen and remains there permanently. This omnipresence lends his plays an intense gothic texture and the ever-present dread that the figures signify.

In another instance, it is shown that she fears the basement, but she cannot escape talking about it frequently. This excessive interest in knowing about the happenings of the basement further leads the readers to a gothic ambiance where the presence of someone strange in the basement is felt. The uncanny presence of someone rather strange in the basement further builds an atmosphere of ambivalence and fear. She takes unusual interest when Mrs. Sands gives details of the damp basement. "It was very dark in the hall...it seemed to me it got darker the more we went...then this voice said, this voice came-it said-well, it gave me a bit of a fright...he was very polite, but we never saw him."(Pinter, 1988, p. 95)

The ambiance and tone of all these plays are similar to the setting in gothic writings. Pinter's first play, *The Room*, contained several features that can be linked to the gothic setting. The play is set in a characteristically gothic locale of a single small room; the characters are warm and secure within but threatened by cold and death from without. When the play begins, we see a rocking chair in the middle of the room. This chair is placed in the middle of both *The Birthday Party* and *The Room*. The setting of *The Room* goes: "A table and chairs, center. A rocking chair, left center." (Pinter, 1989, p.85)

Similarly, *The Birthday Party* starts with silence, which is broken through an unknown source who asks, "Is that you, Petey?" (Pinter, 1998, P. 05). The silence is broken but broken through the words of an unknown source, gathering further curiosity. The progress of the play is an illusion of progression, and intentional repetition produces curiosity among readers.

Either the characters are excessively repetitive or attempt not to be understood. This sets the play's tone and evokes curiosity and suspense in the readers, the two main characteristics of the gothic world. John Russel Brown aptly notices in his essay "Words and Silence" That in Pinter's plays, "audience and readers do not know everything...the plays offer an opportunity very likely those fleeting and uncertain opportunities that are offered by life...like his characters, he seems to evade, to obscure intentionally, to blaze false trails" (Brown, 1986, p. 90)

Other than this omnipresent silence, the effect of gothic darkness and mystery is created when Meg says:" but sometimes you go out in the morning and it dark" (Pinter, 1998, P. 4). Then the recurrent line in the play "this house is on the list (p. 11) makes it reverberate with horror and fear. This house is special; it is on some list as if someone were watching it. It has a seething presence that reminds the readers of the first line of the gothic text *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, which begins with "124 was spiteful" (Morrison, 2004, p. 5). Similar overtones can be felt in the plays under discussion. "And then there is a sudden knock at the door" (p. 18), which fills everyone with terror. The characters try to keep the front door shut as if they fear something or someone. LULU asks Stanley, "Why don't you open the door? It's all stuffy in here" (p. 19), and again, instead of opening the front door, she opens the back door. And the house has no number. Terror inheres in the statement about the house.

Mccann says, "How do we know this is the right house?"

Goldberg: "What makes you think it's the wrong house?"

Mccann: "I didn't see a number on the gate. (p. 22)

The third play, *The Caretaker*, also starts with suspense and the fear of the unknown. Stephen (1960) has commented that "to interpret *The Caretaker* as social criticism is to ignore the greater part of what it sets out to do. It has an element of social criticism, but this is overshadowed by its other thematic concerns, such as communication, loneliness, dreams and illusion, identity and menace" (p. 69). At the opening of the play, "A door bangs. Muffled voices are heard. Mick turns his head. He stands, moves silently to the door, goes out, and closes the door quietly...voices are heard again. They draw nearer and stop" (Pinter, 1998, p. 5). At another place, the

“sound of a key in the room's door. Davies enters, closes the door, and tries the light switch, on, off, on, off” (p. 42). This flickering of light reminds the readers of the Gothic castle.

There is this constant fear that someone is outside or inside the house. Davies expresses this fear in these words: “Someone was walking on the roof the other night” (p. 56). Fear is linked to the concept of stare or gothic gaze. Davies says, “I wake up in the morning, and he is smiling at me! I can see him, you see, I can see him . . . he looks down at my bed . . . what the hell is he smiling at? He does not know I can see him; he thinks I’m asleep, but I get my eye on him all the time” (p. 61). In another instance, Davies says, “Your brother’s got his eye on you” (p. 65). He repeats it in another instance, too. The fear of an outsider’s invasion and the idea of being stared at by a strange gaze point to an uncanny atmosphere where fear and uncertainty predominate. Talking about his mental state, Aston says, “I used to have kind of hallucinations. They weren’t hallucinations. . . I used to get the feeling I could see things . . . very clearly . . . everything . . . was so clear . . . everything used . . . everything used to get so quiet” (p. 53)

Davies is unwilling to leave the place but feels that Mick and his lack of communication. He says, “We don’t have any conversation, you see? You can’t live in the same room with someone who . . . who don’t have any conversation with you “(p. 58). This lack of communication isolates them further, and when alone, they become the gothic archetypal characters surrounded by fear and threat.

Gradually, the feeling of discomfort that starts from an external source creeps further to the psychological level and reaches the inner recesses of their minds. It is commonly noted that an unspecified and unexplained menace grows ominous as the narrative progresses. Not only is the environment suggestive of a gothic ambiance, but the characters find themselves in a confused state almost every time they try to build social contact.

Pinter employs symbols laden with gothic overtones to convey the disturbed psychological states. The chair is a visual reminder of a sinister

environment in a staple gothic setting where a character is usually shown sitting on such a rocking chair, or the chair is shown rocking without any occupant. This chair embodies the absence, isolation, and loneliness of the sole characters of the play. Pinter uses it as a theatrical metaphor for anxiety and disturbed mental states. Whenever Rose, the central character of *The Room*, is shown stressed or endangered, she immediately sits on this chair and rocks herself.

Their living spaces also become symbolic of their mental states. The claustrophobic places suggest the inside of their minds. The stuffy room and the stinky, leaky places are the architectural manifestations of their mental state. Interior of their rooms is the gothic double of the interior of their minds. The places they live in generate the feeling of uncanny. Defining uncanny, E. Jentsch (1919) says: “. . . the essential factor in the production of the feeling of uncanniness is intellectual uncertainty; so that the uncanny would always be that in which one does not know where one is, as it were” (p.1). He takes it further and states, “The German word *unheimlich* is obviously the opposite of *heimlich*, *heimisch*, meaning “familiar,” “native,” “belonging to the home”; and we are tempted to conclude that what is “uncanny” is frightening precisely because it is not known and familiar. (p. 2)

In gothic plot, architectural designs or places have a pivotal role. Most of the characters in gothic tales are entrapped in a single room or chamber. These settlements evoke “the violence and menace of Gothic castle and forest” (Botting, 1996, p. 2). Pinter reconstructs mysterious, gloom-ridden, dim rooms or basements on a similar pattern, characteristic of classic gothic fiction. The connecting link between the notion of absurdity in Camus’ existential philosophy stems from the common fact that both of them deal with ambiguity and excessiveness. In Pinter’s world, his characters feel intense horror and cannot overcome constant confrontation with the absurdity of the universe. This leads to a lack of satisfaction among these characters. What is specific to the Gothic novel and contemporary neo-Gothic drama is precisely this undermining of the closed, domestic space of family habits through the intrusion from outside, of the unexpected, the strange, and the unfamiliar (Pavel, 2018, p. 133).

In his plays, the characters are shown to be perpetually confused about their surroundings and their self-assessment. This ambivalence lends his works to gothic texture. There are many ways to connect these three plays thematically, yet one of the more evident tropes is each character's relationship to their spaces. The characters seem to be in constant rupture and inner fragmentation in their houses. In both cases, of course, the "uncanny" is not a property of the space itself, nor can it be provoked by any particular spatial conformation; it is, in its aesthetic dimension, a representation of a mental state of projection that precisely elides the boundaries of the real and the unreal to provoke a disturbing ambiguity, a slippage between waking and dreaming (Vidler, 1992, p.11).

In *The Room*, Rose finds the room warm, but in another moment, she wraps the shawl around her. In another instance, Rose thinks that her room is secure, but the intruders' menace disturbs her for various reasons. She gets upset when she learns that some visitors are coming to occupy the room. "How can this room be going by? It's occupied" (Pinter, 1991, p. 103). At another place, she says, "I get these creeps come in, smelling up my room. (p. 107) She feels secure that her room is better than the basement and that if she contrasts it with the cold outside, she feels secure in her room. "This room is all right for me. I mean, you know where you are. When it's cold, for instance" (p. 86). At another point, she says, "Bert, I am quite happy where I am. We're quiet, we're all right" (p. 87), and that "This is a good room. . . . you can move, you can come home at night" (p. 89). Mrs. Sands also says that "you know, this is a room you can sit down and feel cozy in" (p. 96). John Russell Taylor describes this "classic situation": "the room, representing the warmth in the cold, light in the darkness, a small safe area of the known amid the vast unknown; and the outsider who menaces the secure, peaceful existence of those inside" (Pinter, 1988, p.7).

But characters have entrapped themselves in their comfortable space. Their rooms are not merely incidental landscapes; these tend to serve a latent psychological reality. Rose says, "We keep ourselves to ourselves. I never interfere. I mean, why should I? We have got our room. We don't bother anyone else. That's the way it should be." (p. 99) Rose is shown to be anxious and uncomfortable in this very room. Her anxiety is well reflected

when she is shown to take “the chair back to the table, picks up the magazine, looks at it, and puts it down. She goes to the rocking chair, sits, rocks, stops and sits still” (p. 102).

The housemates do not claim the home. In *The Birthday Party*, Stanley says, “You never get used to living in someone else’s house. Don’t you agree?” (p. 34). Although Stanley is uncomfortable in the house and says that he does not own a place that doesn’t belong to him, he isn’t willing to have any other visitors. He tells Goldberg, “There’s nothing here for you, from any angle, so why don’t you just go, without any more fuss?” (p. 39).

In *The Caretaker*, even the inmates do not claim their homes as theirs. The tramp comes and starts living with Mick and Aston. Mick, the house owner, asks Davies,

“How do you like my room?”

Davies. Your room?

Mick. Yes.

Davies. This isn’t your room. I don’t know who you are. I ain’t never seen you before.” (p. 30).

Mick gets insecure and keeps asking Davies whether he plans to settle down in his house. He again says, “You are knocking at the door when no one’s at home . . . you come busting into a private house, laying your hands on anything” (p. 36).

In the last scene of the first Act, Davies is seen strolling comfortably in the room; Mick's sudden outburst of violence smashes the haven of the room. The familiar room immediately turns into a foreign place for Davies, who has repeatedly been reminded that he does not belong there. This highlights the presence of an evil outside world. This behavior reinforces the theme that human beings are forced to stay lonely; the more they try to communicate to escape this feeling, the more its certainty is assured, typically in an absurdist manner. Loneliness and purposelessness become an inevitable condition of life, a theme common in absurdist and gothic writing.

In *The Caretaker*, the setting is again a single room, and once more, it is made clear that at least a degree of security exists within the room and that outside, in the endlessly rainy weather, there is little chance for survival. *This play* matures the themes and techniques that Pinter first used in *The Room* and developed over his next few plays.

The uncanny feeling in Pinter's world does not end here. The use of gothic theories helps construct an effective sense of both Gothic terror and Gothic horror in Pinter's plays. Terror and horror are the essential elements of Gothicism. Radcliffe (1823), an acclaimed eighteenth-century Gothic novelist, distinguishes terror from horror, declaring, "Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes and nearly annihilates them" (p.109). Terror is strictly defined as the gloomy, the magnificent, and the obscure that excite the imagination to reach the sublime.

On the other hand, horror is an immediate and distinct presence that creates a forceful yet transient impression. (p.13). Terror is associated with a psychological sense of suspense triggered by uncertainty, obscurity, and distance, while a physical sense of instantaneity, distinctness, and corporality achieves horror. In previous passages, both horror, in terms of the environment, and terror, in terms of their internal insecurities and fears, have been laid bare through textual analysis.

Commenting on Ionesco's absurd world, Pavel (2018) states that "in the case of Ionesco's drama, what is symptomatic is the Gothic-melodramatic ambivalence of the state of the sublime, combining the psycho-physical transfiguration, catharsis, the state of enlightened astonishment, and the inclination for terror and disaster" (Pavel, 2018, p. 141). Like Ionesco, Pinter combines terror with horror in his plays. In Pinter's creation and arrangement, horror often serves as the frightening inception of an unusual event that is followed by a tension-filled process of terror, creating a perfect gothic ambiance for the readers. The introduction of horror, then terror, arouses the reader's curiosity about the further development of the play.

Dukore (1988) says, "While menace may take the shape of particular characters, it is usually unspecified or unexplained- therefore, more

ominous” (1988, p. 26). All three plays have many aspects in common; the most prominent one is the characters’ confused state of mind, and it is this structure of ambiguity that connects absurdism to Gothicism, as the characters in gothic works also seem to be confused and uncanny. Virtually all of Pinter’s characters are sometimes uncertain who or what they are; their identity is compromised, incomplete, or entrapped. Living in constant confusion about their identity has pushed some of Pinter’s characters to be aggressive, violent, suspicious, and indecisive. This creates a feeling of terror within their mental state, and their resultant actions create a feeling of horror in the spectators. Their responses can never be accurately predicted. Not only this, in Pinter’s (1989) view of modern existence, his plays portray a situation where existence in itself becomes terrifying, a particularly Gothic experience.

When the atmosphere becomes too uncanny, an individual’s identity becomes blurred, and this feeling of estrangement, that movement from familiar to unfamiliar, makes their surroundings “abject” for them. This connects absurdist ambiguity with gothic ambivalence wherein the boundaries are blurred, and there is no clear-cut distinction of surroundings. The setting is the blank space of an interrogation room that further underscores the ambiguity of the cause of their imprisonment, as well as the contrast of the actual physical display of torture that is kept off stage. Such a state of mental agony of his characters is conveyed through wrong choices of words, non-response from the listeners, unnecessary delays in a continuous speech or unnaturally long dialogues in times of distress, unusual pauses, and abrupt endings of their sentences.

Nowhere is this ghostly ambiguity, confusion, and related anxiety more crucial than the spacial and psychological blurring of boundaries of the text. The spatial boundaries tend to collapse and interpenetrate. Pinter comments on his plays that “the play is a comedy because the whole state of affairs is absurd and inglorious. It is, however, as you know, a very serious piece of work” (Pinter, 1988, p. 15). The above statement blurs the boundaries between comic and serious writing. This makes his works absurd and gothic simultaneously, as gothic is all about this complexity, ambivalence, and blurring of boundaries. Pinter is skillful in evoking atmosphere and

manipulating the emotional response of his audience through events and situations. His plays are built around the characters rather than events, and there always remains a danger that the play might turn out to be a random rambling, but actually, these menacing details, the details of the environment, and the suspense make his plays intriguing and engaging. The readers do not know why the characters live where they live, why other characters visit them, or why the inmates of the house first invite the visitors and then get insecure about them. Their unsettling life gives an uncanny feel to the readers. Events are contrary to what they appear to be. For example, in *The Caretaker*, Davies has dual names; one brother owns the house but does not live in it, while the brother who lives in the house is not its owner. Aston first brings Davies into his house and later tries to get rid of him. This sense of insecurity further leads to fear and danger.

Pinter conveys a domestic reality to audiences, a style of drama that focuses on ambiguous anxieties, often metaphoric and existential, that always lurk beneath the surface of deceptively stable, actually suffocating settings like bedrooms, living rooms, personal chambers, or basement rooms. His effort to provide insight into the minds of his characters signifies a growing awareness of the absurdity of location and circumstances. These characters find that the boundaries are perpetually diffused, always capable of being invaded. Thus, as both characters assert their growing sense of disillusionment over their circumstances, the boundaries of their secure space become increasingly fragmented. Pinter's preoccupations with confined spaces and intruders, dominance and subservience, is often traced back to his first play, *The Room*. It is Pinter's genius to achieve such a symbolic resonance simultaneously, and he maintains an eerily naturalistic surface.

Pinter's characters fail to claim their territorial rights. In his second play, *The Birthday Party*, Stanley takes on the role of the proprietor, the only boarder of the house, who has been there for a year. He is pinned to the house, afraid to go out, always feeling that intruders from outside are a threat to his existence. He is unaware of the fact that he is actually a victim of his own demons. He is not living a comfortable life. Goldberg asks a series of insane questions to Stanley: "Why did you kill your wife? Why

did you never get married? Why do you pick your nose?" (p. 76). The situation finally leaves him screaming as he kicks Goldberg in the stomach. Stanley becomes understandably so anxious at the thought of visiting strangers that their presence in the house disturbs his solitude, which is apparent, and it ultimately undermines his dominance over other's property. The complication arises when he refuses to welcome the new intruders into the house where he is living as one. He realizes the futility of his efforts and the absurdity of wanting to remain dominant in the house. His behavior is a complex allegorical statement about the need to establish territorial rights over an area that does not belong to them. This insecurity actually makes him anxious and even aggressive.

Extending the theme of intrusion and invasion, Pinter explores the redemptive intruder vision, for the men view each other as a menace, as intruders in their lives; their suspicion and distrust are represented using gothic mode. Unlike *The Birthday Party*, the intruder figure is invited into Aston's room right from the beginning of *The Caretaker*. Davies who isn't related to the home he is living in, remains a dominant family member in the house. When Aston confronts him, he confuses his dialogues to a ludicrous length to vent his frustrations. His absurdly disjointed long speech and his piles of details on details become meaningless, just as his existence in that house. "When his characters attempt to explain themselves, they fail to clarify. The more details they employ, the less convincing they become" (Dukore, 1988, p. 11). This is their anxiety, their frustration, and a source of constant horror and fear for them: fear of Davies that men will come back for him and will take him, fear of the mental hospital, and the fear of the violent Mick. Each character is fearful of a seething presence. This gives gothic overtones to these plays. Mick fears his future; Davies fears the same. Aston is traumatized by his hospital days. The irony is that if the characters struggle to escape this fear and terror, the other characters constantly pull them back to this state of terror. Like Mick reminds Aston: "They can put the pincers on your head again, man! They can have them on again! Any time" (Pinter, 1996, p. 48).

Conclusion

The close textual analysis shows that Pinter appropriates gothic trappings in his works. His use of narrow, claustrophobic settings, fear of the unknown, confused state of characters' minds, and the blurring of boundaries resulting in the prevalence of violence in his works manifest a gothic spirit and connect the Gothic aesthetics to absurdism. Silence, solitude, and dark, uncertain, menacing spaces are actually elements that produce existential anxiety from which human beings cannot detach themselves. This links the absurd world with the gothic world in Pinter's plays. The connection is explored significantly in the fragmented and haunted textual universe of Pinter's plays, where limitlessness, meaninglessness, and death in life are presented as symptoms of a lack of communication, blurring of the concept of self and the other, and comfort of personal space.

Hence, the hybrid of absurdism and Gothicism refers to the new dramatic theme developed to express fear and anxiety.

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