

**Oblique Menace: Power and Animalization in Harold Pinter's  
*The Birthday Party, The Hothouse, and The Caretaker***

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**Abstract**

Harold Pinter's plays are often thought as "Comedies of Menace." As Mr. Pinter suggests in some of his speeches, in the banal everyday life or the mundane conversation, there are devious threats hidden which can lead man to an absurd existential predicaments. The oblique force, like the weasel staring its prey, always waits for the best proper moment to devour its meat. Especially in the three of Pinter's plays, *The Birthday Party, The Hothouse, and The Caretaker*, audiences can be aware of how man being stealthily animalized, electrocuted, or castrated by the ominous power. In this paper, I will discuss Jacques Derrida's views of deconstruction of man and animals and Kalpana R. Seshadri's ideas about the relationship among power, beast, and dehumanization as an insightful access to study what is proper to man and to what extent the power can dominate human beings.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze how the unobtrusive or unspoken menace (the dehumanized metaphorical demons) turns people into alienated animals under performative. The whole paper is divided into four sections. The first section focuses on Derrida's concepts toward the relationship between man and animals. Humanistic-centered approach tends to separate man and animals as different species, but Derrida tries to deconstruct man's self-justified positions. In the second section, I try to integrate Derrida's and Seshadri's approach to reexamine how man with power and knowledge become sovereign beasts, playing the dominating games to humans. In Section Three, the emphasis is on the protagonists in Pinter's three plays mentioned above about how they become the stiffened, choked or the being slaughtered lamb. The last section is the conclusion, revealing the threatening horror and the existential absurdity generated by those "weasels under the cocktail cabinet," as Pinter mentioned.

Keywords: menace, animalization, political beasts, Derrida, Seshadri