

REPRESENTATION OF MARRIAGE  
IN SELECTED HAROLD PINTER PLAYS

By

Agnes Dwina Herdiasti

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Henry Bial, Chairperson

---

Iris Smith Fischer, Committee Member

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John Gronbeck-Tedesco, Committee Member

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Date Defended

The Thesis Committee for Agnes Dwina Herdiasti certifies  
That this is the approved Version of the following thesis:

REPRESENTATION OF MARRIAGE  
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Committee:

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Henry Bial, Chairperson

---

Iris Smith Fischer, Committee Member

---

John Gronbeck-Tedesco, Committee Member

---

Date approved

ABSTRACT  
Agnes Dwina Herdiasti, M.A.  
Department of Theatre and Film, June 2007  
University of Kansas

This thesis explores the institution of marriage as it is depicted in six plays by Harold Pinter. The married couples in Pinter's plays struggle to maintain the balance between normalcy – the socially accepted behaviors expected of married individuals – and the sexual infidelity that they commit. Pinter creates a pattern in the marital lives of his characters, in which triangular relationships seem to be inescapable and each husband and wife seems to be engaged in an agreement that allows the extramarital relationship to happen while at the same time maintaining the marriage. *The Lover, The Homecoming, The Collection, Old Times, Betrayal, and Ashes to Ashes* share this issue. The first part explores the ideas of home or domesticity and the cycle of resentment in marriage, and the second part discusses sexual infidelity and triangular relationships in marriage. As the study concludes, marriage in Harold Pinter's plays represents the triumph of domestic order that supports patriarchal power while simultaneously confining or disciplining female desire. As a result, the wives in Pinter's plays find that their desires may only be satisfied through infidelity. This infidelity subverts the domestic order, calling into question patriarchal notions of truth and love. Yet, as Pinter's works demonstrate, infidelity can unsettle patriarchy, but not overthrow it.

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This thesis is dedicated to husbands, wives, and lovers.

## Table of Contents

I.	Acceptance Page .....	ii
II.	Abstract .....	iii
III.	Acknowledgements .....	iv
IV.	Table of Contents .....	v
V.	Chapter One: Introduction .....	1
VI.	Chapter Two: Domestic Drama .....	5
VII.	Chapter Three: Sex Acts .....	45
VIII.	Chapter Four: Conclusion .....	76
IX.	Bibliography .....	79

## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

#### Narrative

The married couples in Pinter's plays struggle to maintain the balance between normalcy – the socially accepted behaviors expected of married individuals, and the sexual infidelity that they commit. Pinter creates a pattern in the marital lives of his characters, in which triangular relationships seem to be inescapable and each husband and wife seems to be engaged in an agreement that allows the extramarital relationship to happen while at the same time maintaining the marriage. *The Lover*, *The Homecoming*, *The Collection*, *Old Times*, *Betrayal*, and *Ashes to Ashes* share this issue.

Pinter's plays also put forward the theme of the struggles of the married couples to build a system of "mutual understanding" and make the system work within the bigger system of paternalistic marriage structure. The husbands in these marriages not only fit the traditional roles of a husband, i.e., make a good living for the family, they also, in one way or another, allow their wives to have lovers. They present themselves as men of sophistication who understand and care for their wives' needs. This "understanding" can be understood as one of the ways by which they are committed to their duties to provide welfare for their wives. They do not let their

emotions win over logic, setting aside their jealousy and hurt pride, so far as the wives also do their wifely duties and provide for the husbands with no less attention. What seems to matter more to the husbands is maintaining the marriage as a structure, as part of their social identity. The patriarchal home in Pinter's plays puts the husbands superior to the wives. The domestic confinement often leads the wife to release her desires through infidelity.

Paolo Caponi, in his book *Adultery in the High Canon: Forms of Infidelity in Joyce, Beckett and Pinter*, addresses this theme specifically, focusing on European literature, more specifically in the works of the three writers.

The concept of adultery is, in its very essence, a double-edged weapon because it separates and conjugates – it evokes, on the one hand, an idea of deviation, transgression and erring while on the other it reinstates, albeit “illicitly”, certain paradigms sanctioned in the other, “real” world. Like the contemporary conception of gender, the status of the adulterer cannot be defined *per se*, but it must be necessarily deduced by comparison, rooted as it is on a difference with respect to what we consider as the norm or simply as the other side of the moon. Adultery is inherently subversive, transversal, asocial, apolitical. (Caponi 17)

In Pinter's works such as *The Collection*, *The Lover*, and *Betrayal*, it is the wives' infidelity that is put into focus, and the triangular relationship of husband-wife-lover often multiplies itself or shifts into different triangles, i.e., wife-husband-husband's best friend, wife-lover-lover's wife, wife-husband-lover-lover's lover. The wives are active agents who commit infidelity, different from the portrayal of innocent-victim wives in many literatures, and the husbands are in a way also playing a role of partners of this act of infidelity. In all of the plays, however, the system is

inescapable. The infidelity is only a momentary escape from the confinement of marriage.

Marriage in Harold Pinter's plays represents the triumph of domestic order that supports patriarchal power while simultaneously confining or disciplining female desire. As a result, the wives in Pinter's plays find that their desires may only be satisfied through infidelity. This infidelity subverts the domestic order, calling into question patriarchal notions of truth and love. Yet, as Pinter's works demonstrate, infidelity can unsettle patriarchy, but not overthrow it.

## **Method**

My research will be primarily library-based. I will analyze six of Pinter's plays that deal with marriage and infidelity, namely *The Homecoming*, *Ashes to Ashes*, *Old Times*, *The Collection*, *The Lover*, and *Betrayal*. I will consult, compare and contrast criticisms and reviews of Harold Pinter's works and productions of his works. Some of the critics, such as Elizabeth Sakellaridou and Victor L. Cahn, paid special attention to gender relationship and Pinter's female characters, which I think will be especially important to refer to because of the topic I am researching. I will look at how the female characters, the wives, develop their own system within the bigger paternalistic system that they cannot escape, and make their male counterparts comply to this system. I will also use interviews with Pinter to understand how he himself viewed his works and how he viewed the way critics perceived them. Although it is pretty well known that Pinter is a reluctant commentator on his own



works, it does not mean we cannot benefit from his comments. I will also refer to essays written by Pinter, and reports on the playwright's social/political activities as references for his perspectives and attitudes toward different kinds of issues, his concerns, and idealisms.

### **Schema**

The study of representations of marriage in Pinter's plays will consist of two parts. The first part will explore the ideas of home or domesticity and the cycle of resentment in marriage, and the second part will discuss sexual infidelity and triangular relationships in marriage. Although all of the six plays I will analyze in this study involve both the ideas of home and infidelity, each part will only include three plays in the analysis to make it more manageable.

Chapter II analyzes the ideas of home, patriarchy and power, and domestic confinement found in *The Homecoming*, *Ashes to Ashes*, and *Old Times*, respectively. Chapter III studies the acts in relation to the idea of truth and love in *The Collection*, *The Lover*, and *Betrayal*. The three plays clearly put triangular relationships at their center, with the focus on the wives' sexual infidelity rather than the husbands'.

## CHAPTER II

### Domestic Drama

This chapter focuses on how patriarchy confines female desire through domestic order to maintain its power. It is divided into three parts: first, the ideas of order and cleanliness found in *The Homecoming*; second, patriarchy and power in *Ashes to Ashes*; and third, domestic confinement in *Old Times*.

#### **“Keeping it clean” in *The Homecoming***

*The Homecoming* was first published by Methuen & Co. in 1964. The play was first produced by The Royal Shakespeare Company at the Aldwych Theatre on June 3, 1965, directed by Peter Hall. The cast included Vivien Merchant (then Mrs. Pinter) in the role of Ruth and Ian Holm as Lenny. Then on January 5, 1967 it was presented by the company and Alexander H. Cohen at the Music Box Theatre, New York, with the original casts, except for the role of Teddy.

In *The Homecoming* a married couple, Teddy and Ruth, come to London to visit Teddy’s father and brothers for the first time after six years. Teddy, who is a professor in philosophy in an American university, wishes to build a good relationship again with his estranged family members. His seemingly simple “good will” turns out to be an absurd quest when he meets resistance from his brutish patriarch father, Max and his older brother, Lenny. Teddy’s conviction that every phenomenon is explainable is stirred when each member of the dysfunctional family

demonstrates that they cannot, and will not, be “civilized” according to Teddy’s standard. Max stays a proud useless figure, and Lenny leads his life as a pimp with absolute detachment from virtues.

The second degree of resistance that Teddy has to endure comes from his wife, Ruth. The trip to London becomes a one way journey for her when at the end, she refuses to leave with Teddy to go back to the United States. She refuses the values that he wants her to hold by turning herself into a whore – the opposite of the beautiful picture of a wife. She gives up her body to the other men in the house and promises to provide the home they have longed to have, in return for some control she will have over them.

*The Homecoming* opens with a scene that presents a family already devoid of “ideals.” There are four men in the house: Max, an elderly father, his brother Sam, two sons, Lenny and Joey, and no woman. This fact sets up very early on the theme of the play: the hunger of these men for a woman’s touch and a home that have been absent ever since the death of Jessie, Max’s wife, years back. The consequences of living under the mother-less situation are revealed one by one, starting from Lenny’s refusal to respect Max in a conventional father-and-son relationship. Max does not present himself to Lenny as an ideal father figure. Every attempt that he makes to make sure that he is this ideal father meets resistance from Lenny. This situation shows how Lacanian “symbolic father” in patriarchy remains an ideology, which Max tries hard to attain in his own home but cannot. Silverstein states:

As a subject position, the ‘symbolic father’ is an ideological representation, an ‘identity’ articulated through the cultural codes and master tropes of

patriarchy, the privileged signifying position in which patriarchal ideology locates what Roland Barthes terms ‘the hallucinatory attributes of the Father: power, fascination, instituting authority, terror, power to castrate’ (77).

Max in *The Homecoming* is hallucinatory, thinking that he has all of those attributes, but this desire is frustrated by Lenny. He blames his dead wife, Jessie, for this situation. Using Lacanian theories, Silverstein describes further how Lenny’s failure to take Max’s word seriously can be explained by the way the ideas of paternalistic “father” and “mother” work and what can happen when the process is disrupted, in this case, by Jessie’s “misbehavior.”

For Lacan, “father” and “mother” are signifying spaces, symbolic positions that function as linguistic categories, drawing their meaning from the play of difference that defines their relationship within the closed signifying system formed by the family. The mother’s recognition of the father’s word promotes the elaboration of difference within the family. Recognizing the father’s discursive power, the mother proclaims her own inadequacy – her “lack” thus defines his “potency,” as his “potency” constitutes both her necessary “lack” and her desire for the plenitude that will complete it. (88-89)

It is indicated from the conversations between the characters, that Jessie, while she was living, broke the rule of recognizing Max as an ideal “father.” She practiced extramarital relationships, sending a message that she did not “lack” so that he could provide. Jessie’s independence from Max and disassociation from the patriarchal picture of a perfect family thus deny his “potency.” This affected how her sons respond to and treat their father. Max has never been the ideal father because, using this scenario, he has been dysfunctional from the start. He did not have a capacity to prove his power, to make Jessie agree that he was the providing figure, and he does not have it now in the eyes of his sons. Max never stops blaming his wife, and

subsequently women, for what has gone wrong in the way Lenny treats him. Women, to him, always pose danger of causing defilement in the “perfect picture,” and so is the presence of Ruth later on in the picture.

Another factor that the family lacks after Jessie’s death is a feminine figure who can take care of the household matters – somebody to work in the domestic area, for which none of the men are “good enough.” Or, using the Lacanian scenario above, this is the realm that men wish to “lack” so that women can complete. It is obvious that within patriarchy, these assignments are designed by the dominant group, men, and “naturally” women’s existence depends on their men. Since the real mother is absent, while the need for “mother” is always there, this situation remains strained for the men in the family. Neither one of them wants to be associated with the weaker sex.

JOEY. Feel a bit hungry.

SAM. Me, too.

MAX. Who do you think I am, your mother? Eh? Honest. Honest. They walk in here every time of the day and night like bloody animals. Go and find yourself a mother.

(Pinter 32)

As Max is a man who always strives to make sure the patriarchal picture works, he is the one who fears most of the defilement of the picture if the rest of the family demand him to play the role of “mother.” Sam, who seems to be the least aggressive, thus less manly of the men (Max calls him maggot and says that “this man didn’t even fight in the bloody war!”) is assigned the domestic works. Max smells resentment coming from Sam because of this assignment. He tries to shut out the

sounds of the clanking pots in the kitchen that Sam makes while he is preparing food for the family.

MAX. You resent making my breakfast, that's what it is, isn't it? That's why you bang round the kitchen like that, scraping the frying pan, scraping all the leavings into the bin, scraping all the plates, scraping all the tea out of the teapot... that's why you do that, every single stinking morning. (Pinter 55)

If resentment is the feeling of having been treated unfairly, the act of scraping the dirt from pans and plates can be read as an act of “voicing” that something is not right and needs to be made right (cleaned). It may mean that Sam, being a man himself, is resentful of this “womanly” job he has been forced to do. But there is another layer of what his scraping action might mean. If everybody in the household should function properly, Sam (and possibly Jesse before that) seems to do so, and they know that Max does not. Max just pretends and forces everyone to believe that he functions properly as the head of the family who provides for them financially and otherwise. This is where the resentment comes from. There is an indication that in this house built upon the ideas of patriarchy, it is the dominant “father” who is “rightful” to be heard, while “mother” should remain silent. The “mother” must get used to repressing her desire to be heard. Her words should not matter, and thus, the kitchen noise is her means to release the resentment over the injustice done by the figure taking advantage of the system. Max's constant mockery of Sam's unmanly mannerisms reflects his constant struggle to shield his impotency. Jessie did not find sexual pleasure in him, but found it in other men. The fact that he is sexually incapable is another “mess” that he wants to sweep under the rug by shouting at other

men's incapacities. He is under the illusion that he resembles the "symbolic father" who has control over what can and cannot be seen from his patriarchal family picture, and over what should and should not be heard in his home.

The introduction of Ruth in the picture stirs the world of the men in the family. Max feels threatened by her mere presence when they are first introduced by his son Teddy, who has been away from home for a while. The all-men house is now having an "intruder" who reminds Max of Jesse. To him, women are always likely to defile the "ideal" picture, meaning revealing his own failures as a human being.

MAX. Who asked you to bring tarts into this house?

TEDDY. Tarts?

MAX. Who asked you to bring dirty tarts into this house?

TEDDY. Listen, don't be silly –

...

MAX. We've had a smelly rubber in my house all night. We've had a stinking pox-ridden slut in my house in my house all night (77).

Max's fear of "defilement" of his home is intense as he uses the words *tarts*, *smelly rubber*, *stinking pox-ridden slut*, all to refer to Ruth, who represents women who threatens to stir his illusion of authority. He demands a home "clean" from any threats, especially from a woman – the "supposedly inferior" party. Women's grudges and dissatisfaction directed to the dominant figure have the potential to weaken and disassociate him from the "symbolic father." Prior to Ruth's presence, Lenny has constantly posed such a threat. He refuses to identify Max with the "symbolic father," and thus he does not act as a "good," obedient son to him. He also makes a living by becoming a pimp, associating himself with defilement. From the way he treats Max, the defilement he has existed in is something that for him is even more respectable

than Max's pathetic false pride. "Why don't you shut up, you daft prat?" says Lenny matter-of-factly to Max early in the play, already demeaning the value of this father. This statement implies that all the loud rants and aggressive verbal attacks that this old man makes mean nothing at all and could as well be disregarded – "cleaned" from the air. Nevertheless, Lenny does not share the same kind of defilement with Ruth. Lenny's "misdemeanor" to Max, eventually can be traced back to Jessie's failure to acknowledge Max as the "father," thus smearing dirt over his home. Ruth, like Jessie, is only one of those "dirty tarts," whom Max so eagerly wants to remove because he knows that women – the "supposedly" weaker sex – are likely to show he is not even stronger than them.

Despite Max's fears, Ruth nevertheless comes with a promise of providing a "clean" home for the men – a deal that Max especially cannot resist. Like Jessie and Sam, she resents the patriarchal system. But, unlike them, she remains in control of the situation and manages to keep the surface "clean," just like the men want it to be. She prepares food without complaints and allows herself to be their "whore." In return, she gets what she is allowed to want in the unbreakable patriarchal system: to make those men in constant pressure of satisfying her different kinds of needs in order to get her service. There exists a cycle of "give and take," which comes out of resentment going back and forth between Ruth and the men, while each of them maintains the home, the system, as "clean." The contract is made clear from the beginning. The men now can have a woman they have been longing for to care for the house and provide for their needs, with no clanking noises from the kitchen anymore,



and, in return, they have to function as “men” by working extra hard to provide for her needs.

Teddy positions himself very clearly as the watchful eye of life phenomena and the other men in his family as the objects under his microscope. He claims to have critical awareness of others’ behaviors as well as his own responses as living beings in the environment. He wants to believe that he has the capacity to control the future with his knowledge of human behavioral patterns, which makes him a superior human being to those without this ability. Commenting on that specific passage, Elizabeth Sakellaridou says:

The fallacy of Teddy’s syllogism is that he starts with the assumption of emotional and intellectual balance (operating *in* things and *on* things) and ends up with what he calls ‘intellectual equilibrium’ – a reductionist space which eliminates the subjective and emotional aspects and leads to a dangerous condition which critic Rolf Fjelde diagnosed as ‘the pathology of Teddy’s detachment (112).

In addition to this, Teddy eliminates the fact that his ability to operate *on* things is made possible by the grace of others’ inability to do so and the fact that he has never really been *in* things like “common” people who mostly cannot help being *in* things. His constant objectivity is made possible by another factor outside himself, which keeps him from being subjective. He eliminates the fact that Ruth has taken care of the “mess” in their household so that he can be in that “intellectual equilibrium,” putting aside her own life ambition and being denied her desires. This is the source of Ruth’s resentment of Teddy.

Up to the point where the play starts, when Teddy brings her to visit his estranged family, Ruth has devoted her life to serve Teddy’s needs. Their marriage

and family are more about completing his picture, and not so much hers. Teddy is the center of the house where everything or any member of the family should revolve around. He is the leader and decision maker, whereas Ruth and their children are his followers, literally and otherwise. She left England and her dream to become a nurse for him. She has always been an attribute in his life – a wife, a mother to his sons, an assistant to his professorship, and an obedient companion. From the beginning of their marriage, she has been silenced and denied her desire. From her reluctant responses, we can see that she has been brought to London by Teddy against her will – another sacrifice that she makes for him, or in other words, another denial of her existence. She has to enter another area foreign to her: to be an in-law to his father and brothers. This seems to be a turning point for Ruth – the point where she decides not to take Teddy's orders anymore. She decides to shatter Teddy's conviction that everything should go according to his design.

Ruth's strategy, if we can call it such, is to remain calm on the surface, while attacking Teddy and the other men in the intellectual level. She appears delicate, the way the men in the house want her to be, while she is actually the one who is in control of the situation. She does not seem to be affected emotionally by any of the men's remarks and treatment of her. Although she allows herself to be debased at one time and deified at others as those men wish, she does not give them any sense that they have achieved what they want to achieve by objectifying her. According to Sakellaridou,

Ruth's discourse represents her more fully as a character than her actions because her behaviour is subject to environmental constraints, which she has

accepted as inevitable for her own survival. On the contrary, her speech is always unconditioned by external influence. Whatever she has to say will come out as genuine self-expression and it is never falsified by male interference. (109)

From the beginning, Ruth has been playing a delicate game with Teddy, the patriarch-philosopher, setting the rules and aiming at winning. She refuses to take his orders. As gentle as they may sound, they are still orders that demand completion.

RUTH. Can I sit down?

TEDDY. Of course.

RUTH. I'm tired.

*Pause.*

TEDDY. Then sit down.

*She does not move.*

(Pinter 36)

The simple dialogue above shows that Ruth is the one who brings up the topic of sitting and controls Teddy's responses, and then rejects the simple act of sitting down on the chair. Although it is too early in the scene to judge her motivation, that simple act of rejection presents uneasiness and tension because there must be a reason why she does not simply sit down if she is tired and wants to sit down. In fact, it is only the beginning of a pattern of reactions that comes out of the resentment she has had toward Teddy. Her homecoming to Teddy's family is a turning point for Ruth as she breaks the line of commands she has always followed before.

Teddy, like Max, also demands a "clean" home, which includes recognition of him as a dominant figure above his wife. He demands her "necessary lack" (Silverstein 88) so that he can fulfill it. If Max has never been able to function

properly as the “man” of the family, Teddy shows a great deal of capacity to provide for his family.

TEDDY. Go to bed. I'll show you the room.

RUTH. No, I don't want to.

TEDDY. You'll be perfectly all right up there without me. Really you will. I mean, I won't be long. Look, it's just up there. It's the first door on the landing. The bathroom's right next door. You... need some rest, you know.

(38)

Teddy's effort can be easily seen as a caring gesture of a man to his wife, but Ruth's constant refusal to give in to the comfort he has been offering signifies a tension in this seemingly normal conversation. Teddy offering comfort to Ruth is not a simple matter for her. She has been living under his shadow to fit within his picture. His offers of comfort are a politics of provision for her to stay in the structure he designs. When Ruth tells Max that she was a different woman when she met Teddy – a fact that Teddy denies, “No you weren't. You were the same” (66) – she wants to point out that the marriage has changed her into someone that fits his ideal picture. Teddy further clarifies this.

TEDDY. She's a great help to me over there. She's a wonderful wife and mother. She's a very popular woman. She's got lots of friends. It's a great life, at the University... you know... it's a very good life. We've got a lovely house... we've got all... we've got everything we want. It's a very stimulating environment.

*Pause.*

My department... is highly successful.

*Pause.*

We've got three boys, you know.

(66)

What they have together – their beautiful house, their children, his good career – are parts of this design. At this point her life, she decides to make a radical change in their marital life. She does so not by getting herself out of his picture, but by smearing the picture with her “dirt,” while promising to keep a “clean” house for other men. She wants to make sure that she can become a constant pain in Teddy’s life, a threat to his conviction that he is the man who knows, who operates *in* and *on* things with sharp objectivity. The moment Teddy is ready to leave the house and expecting Ruth to go with him, she takes Lenny’s hand and dances with him. When Lenny kisses her, she kisses him back. Joey, Teddy’s youngest brother comments on this action and takes further steps.

JOEY. Christ, she’s wide open.

*Pause.*

She’s a tart.

*Pause.*

Old Lenny’s got a tart in here.

*Joey goes to them. He takes Ruth’s arm. He smiles at Lenny. He sits with Ruth on the sofa, embraces and kisses her. He looks up at Lenny.*

Just up my street.

*He leans her back until she lies beneath him. He kisses her. He looks up at Teddy and Max.*

(74-5)

Without a woman with “lacks” who will confirm his superiority, one will always wonder if he can remain in balance. Teddy leaves the house alone, and like us who witness this action, is uncertain of his future. What is he going to tell his sons about their mother, who is going to take care of the sons and provide their daily needs, who is going to take care of their beautiful house, how is he going to carry on with his job without Ruth assisting him – will all of those affect his objective judgment as a

scientist? “Don’t become a stranger,” says Ruth to him at the end. This statement confuses the nature of their relationship, putting it always in strain of not being able to be defined, to be tamed under his theories. His “intellectual equilibrium” he has always been proud of is in jeopardy because Ruth, one the pillars to support it, is gone. Suddenly Teddy is faced with the reality of the mess before his eyes, and now, nobody else but him is available to clean it up.

The idea of maintaining purity or cleanliness in the patriarchal home can also be found in the Pinter’s earlier play, *The Lover* (1962). Richard, the husband, like Teddy, allows his wife, Sarah, to have another man in her life as long as she functions as a dutiful wife in the marriage. But toward the end, Richard is increasingly annoyed and sending messages to Sarah that things start to fall apart with this arrangement. He mocks Sarah after she tells him that her lover was not in a “good shape” that day.

RICHARD. I thought the whole point of being a lover is that one didn’t [have off days]. I mean if I, for instance, were called upon to fulfil the function of a lover and felt disposed, shall we say, to accept the job, well, I’d as soon give it up as be found incapable of executing its proper and consistent obligation. (186)

Richard is suggesting cleaning up the mess: the sexual affair between Sarah and the lover should end because it has started to affect the marriage. Sarah starts to get sloppy, i.e., forgetting to change shoes and not having dinner ready for Richard. Richard, eventually, cannot help admitting that he is a social being bound by social norms. To him, an extramarital relationship should remain an “extra” – done outside the home. It should not interfere in the main, intended picture – the marriage. Although he tries to control his language, he cannot hide his resentment when he

starts reading irregularities in his home. The regularity, or the ideal, supposedly to be kept clean is now contaminated. Contamination that threatens the foundation of marriage will be discussed in Chapter Three.

### **Patriarchy and Power in *Ashes to Ashes***

Harold Pinter has been active in anti-war and political movements since early in his career, but his activities got more intense in the 90's. He has several publications about his political aspirations, such as *Various Voices: Prose, Poetry, Politics 1948-1998* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998); a book exposing NATO aggressions called *Degraded Capability: The Media and The Kosovo Crisis*, edited by Philip Hammond and Edward S. Herman (London: Pluto Press, 1999) for which Pinter wrote the foreword, and many political speeches. In [HaroldPinter.org](http://HaroldPinter.org) in the politics link, we can find a list of Pinter's participation in activities dealing with the world's political issues. He delivered many speeches, among others are on the Iraq war, NATO and the Gulf War, Serbia and Kosovo, and Turkey and the Kurds and has participated in a number of campaigns against violence. He is known for being bluntly outspoken to voice his concerns and aspiration – what he believes should not be silenced amid atrocities of those in power.

In his speech when awarded the Wilfred Owen Award, Pinter made a very strong criticism to the American as well as the British governments pertaining the war on Iraq, saying, “We have brought torture, cluster bombs, depleted uranium, innumerable acts of random murder, misery, and degradation to the Iraqi people and

call it ‘bringing freedom and democracy to the Middle East’ (2005).” He despises governments that rely on the point of the gun to maintain their power – the *masculine* power that seeks to silence resistance from the *feminine* “Other.” This fascist atrocity and how resentment is generated as a reaction to it are expressed in *Ashes to Ashes*, a play published in 1996. In 2005, following Pinter’s achievement as a Nobel Prize winner in literature, *Ashes to Ashes* was republished as part of a collection called *Death etc.*, a volume that contains some of his more recent political speeches, poems, and sketches. *Mountain Language*, *The New World Order*, and *One for the Road* are short sketches which present militaristic figures dealing with common people whom they consider deviants. The characters of Des and Lionel as well as Nicholas represent political figures who claim they should do whatever it takes in the name of democracy.

*Ashes to Ashes*, the only longer short piece in this collection, pulls the political-versus-ethical issues into a domestic drama of a husband and a wife tied in emotionally intense but cryptic dialogues between the two characters who in many ways represent the masculine power who is trying to silence the feminine other. Here Pinter goes back and forth from Devlin, the husband, to Rebecca, the wife, to show the struggles that these two characters are going through to get their standpoints across to each other in a series of approach and avoidance, which ends without any sense of closure. The wife remains stuck in her ambivalent love/hate sentiment toward her husband, and the husband remains the lover/dictator on whom her life depends.



In *The Homecoming*, Teddy is the patriarch in a disguise of intellectualism – different from his father and brothers only on the surface. It is the very essence of his conviction that he is a philosopher who holds the key to life and tends to objectify his surroundings that has put him as a dominant figure, the “symbolic father,” whose existence depends on the “lacks” of others.

TEDDY. You wouldn't understand my works. You wouldn't have the faintest idea of what they were about. You wouldn't appreciate the points of reference. You're way behind. All of you. There's no point in my sending you my works. You'd be lost. It's nothing to do with the question of intelligence. It's a way of being able to look at the world. It's a question of how far you can operate on things and not in things. I mean it's a question of your capacity to ally the two, to relate the two, to balance the two. To see, to be able to *see!* I'm the one who can see. That's why I write my critical works. Might do you good... have a look at them... see how certain people can view... things... how certain people can maintain... intellectual equilibrium. Intellectual equilibrium. You're just objects. You just... move about. I can observe it. I can see what you do. It's the same as I do. But you're lost in it. You won't get me being... I won't be lost in it.

(77-8)

Devlin is different from Teddy in the way that he is feared. Teddy has a calculated manner and he tends to be persuasive. He sometimes demeans people with his “know-all” attitude, but what comes from it is anything but fear. To him power means knowledge of human behaviors – capacity to “operate on and in things.” Teddy treats his wife fairly well, even showing affection to her, although we can also read this as his way to have control over his wife. Devlin, on the other hand, represents more masculine power. He is rigid, has a very strong sense of duty, far from being affectionate to his wife. “Fuck the best man. That's always been my motto,” says Devlin describing his attitude to life. He does not take into consideration whether

what he does is ethically right or not; what matters to him is getting the job done as he's been told to do so. Rebecca says, "How odd to be called darling," after Devlin calls her so, which may indicate that the word has never belonged to his identity or been part of his vocabulary. This can be seen from the way he uses the word "darling" as part of his interrogational techniques to get to what he wants (to get the image of Rebecca's lover) and how Rebecca reacts upon the use of the term.

DEVLIN. So what's the question? Are you prepared to drown in your own gravy? Are you prepared to die for your country? Look. What do you say, sweetheart? Why don't we go out and drive into town and take in a movie?

REBECCA. That's funny, somewhere in a dream... a long time ago... I heard someone calling me sweetheart. (107)

We can see the contrast between the cold, uncompromising conviction about duty that Devlin is so much into and his sudden offer of comfort by use of the endearing term *sweetheart*. Rebecca's response may mean that she used to want Devlin to have that warm quality, to be more soft and romantic. But she probably gave up the dream long ago realizing that Devlin has never been that way. He generates fear in her, in the way that she never speaks openly to him about what she thinks and feels, fearing the consequences if she does. In the play, the dialogues between this husband and wife are partly in an interrogational style – the way a police officer interrogating a suspect. The authority figure Devlin treats Rebecca as a suspect, in his quest to find out about his wife's lover. Most likely this is the way he interrogates his other suspects. Rebecca, used to be repressed, seems to speak in a cryptic language, never answering him in a direct manner because of this fear.

Rebecca's inability to speak her mind to Devlin could have been conditioned by the nature of her relationship with him. She has been used to keep things for herself and developed a resentment built from this pattern. There are at least a couple of layers of Rebecca's resentment over Devlin. She resents what Devlin does or has done. So, in this case, this relates to his occupation or duty. The second layer, still related to the first, is the situation she has been put into as a consequence of what Devlin does. This is similar to the situations faced by Ruth and Kate, in which they have to fit within their husbands' pictures. Considering Pinter's inclination to political activities and active condemnation of political "buttering-up" done by politicians by the time *Ashes to Ashes* was written, it is most likely that Devlin was created to represent the official figure – the law, which gives punishments to those who do not abide by it. Lacan in *The Good and the Beautiful*, as quoted by Eleanor Kaufman in her essay "Why the Family is Beautiful," says

To exercise control over one's goods, as everyone knows, entails a certain disorder that reveals its true nature, i.e., to exercise control over one's goods is to have the right to deprive others of them... For this function of the good engenders, of course, a dialectic. I mean that the power to deprive others is a very solid link from which will emerge as such. (229)

The "good" in its operation often neglects ethical considerations. Devlin represents the "good" while Rebecca represents the conscience – the repressed one. However, when confronted by Devlin about her "authority" to talk about atrocities, Rebecca cannot do anything but cower.

REBECCA. I have no such authority. Nothing has ever happened to me. Nothing has ever happened to any of my friends. I have never suffered. Nor have my friends.

Rebecca does not allow herself to go beyond the safe boundary because she is well aware there is nothing she can do to change the situation, both pertaining to her marriage and her husband's job. And thus her resentment is a cycle which starts and ends in itself – some kind of guilty feeling for not being able to embrace the “good” without questions. In his essay relating Pinter's works to the subject of law, Marc Silverstein analyzes the sound of the police siren that agitates Rebecca. It reminds her of the law she believes she should follow and respect, yet she cannot help hating it.

Not simply the siren, but the law for which it metonymically stands, functions as Rebecca's *objet petite à*, Lacan's term for the object that promises (but fails to deliver) the plenitude freeing us from the lack. Since we often think that the law and desire as locked in conflict, we cannot help asking how law has come to occupy the privileged position of object of desire for Rebecca, a question to which the existential pun in Devlin's response provides an answer: “You'll never be without police siren.” Devlin's words suggest the inextricable relation between subjectivity and the law by emphasizing that the recognition and validation of being depend upon a kind of policing; that accession to subjectivity produces our subjection to law; that we only appear as social subjects through simultaneously becoming objects of surveillance, discipline, and punishment. (Kane 31-2)

Devlin's response to Rebecca's erratic behavior with regard to the siren is disturbing as it is comforting in so far as Rebecca embraces the values of authority. Devlin uses the analogy of the hairdresser to describe both this figure and himself, to lead Rebecca to give up to his authority.

DEVLIN. Shall we talk more intimately? Let's talk about more intimate things, let's talk about something more personal, about something within your own immediate experience. I mean, for example, when the hairdresser takes your head in his hands and starts to wash your hair very gently and to massage your scalp, when he does that, when your eyes are closed and he does that, he has your entire trust, doesn't he?

It's not just your head which is in his hands, is it, it's your spiritual... welfare. (103-4)

The hands image comes to represent power as they are capable of providing for its subject "head," giving it comfort that it seeks to find, but those "hands" are also capable of doing harm to the "head," which is lower in position and therefore not in advantageous position to fight back if anything happens. Devlin wants to convince her that she will finally feel free after telling the truth but he cannot help presenting the flip side of telling the truth, especially an unwanted one: to be harmed.

Yet, we cannot disregard the fact that Rebecca brings up the topic of the police siren also as a call for attention to Devlin – a very intense need to be protected by the hands that fear her. "Don't you want to know why? Well, I'm going to tell you anyway. If I can't tell you who can I tell? Well, I'll tell you anyway" (100). Rebecca is caught in an inescapable situation where she has nowhere to turn but to the same person she is trying to turn away from. She keeps being ambivalent about her feeling to Devlin/the lover, emphasizing the love/hate nature of her relationship with him. She describes the lover with such admiration and affection as if trying to say to Devlin how much she wishes she could simply love and depend on him for the rest of her life, but she can't. She used to put a high hope on him and dream of a nice life with him, but the dream has been smashed when she found the violent side of this man.

REBECCA. And my best friend, the man I had given my heart to, the man I knew was the man for me the moment we met, my dear, my most precious companion, I watched him walk down the platform and tear all the babies from the arms of their screaming mothers. (108)

Rebecca also uses the story in the comedy film she watched to indirectly communicate her disappointment over the unfulfilled “promise.” According to her, there is an unfunny story behind what other people consider funny. She identifies herself with the female character in the movie, who, all funny things aside, is a victim of an unfortunate situation. Similar to Rebecca, she also falls in love with a man who “made her smile” and “told her jokes,” but the next scene of the movie starts to show the comedy/tragedy of what this woman finds in her relationship with the man in the next level. She says, “And then in the next scene he took her on an expedition to the desert, in a caravan. She’d never lived in a desert before, you see. She had to learn how to do it” (111). It is very likely that Rebecca voices her resentment for being put in the similar situation that the woman in the movie experiences. The hardship of a woman who follows the man she loves to a totally strange environment often escapes people’s attention. This is a similar pattern we also find in *The Homecoming* and *Old Times*.

Devlin, on the other hand, aware that his authority is being questioned by Rebecca (even though she does that indirectly), grows irritated and develops a defensive attitude. At the beginning, the couple seems to communicate in two different languages: Devlin with his demand for precision and concreteness, and Rebecca with her abstract, dreamlike statements. However, there are a few instances in which Devlin seems to get dragged into Rebecca’s world and start to use abstraction to defend his position. In their conversation about the pen, Rebecca’s

statement, “This pen, this perfectly innocent pen,” suddenly rings an alarm in Devlin’s mind in alarm as to him the morally/ethically loaded word “innocence” is always used by many to go against people in authority like him. To him calling somebody innocent is stripping off facts and history about the subject, because those “innocent” are often at fault of going against the system and rules.

*Ashes to Ashes* opens with the couple already in the middle of their conversation about Rebecca’s lover, with Devlin trying to press Rebecca to give him a “shape” and “concrete image” of the lover to him. The stage direction says that the time of the day is early evening in the summer, and it takes place in the couple’s living room, in their house in the country. As Pinter did not provide any written background information about what may have lead the couple to the discussion of the lover, the setting of time gives a clue to it. A logical scenario can be drawn from it. Early evening is the time when people normally have their dinner. In a common patriarchal home, the wife prepares the food for the family. It is the time where people go home from work, and we can assume that is what happens with Devlin as well. He goes home from work, but finds that Rebecca has not prepared dinner for him as she probably usually does. Then their conversation starts from there, most likely Devlin asking what might have gone wrong with Rebecca, why she is acting out of ordinary. Questions which relate to anything “out of ordinary” may include if Rebecca has another man in her life, which she then confessed, possibly under Devlin’s pressure. But it does not necessarily mean that we can take her confession

literally – that she has a lover, because some instances in the text refer the lover is no other than Devlin himself.

Why Rebecca chose that particular evening to go “on strike” by not doing her “duty” as a wife and finally spell out her resentment to Devlin is never explicitly explained. However, reasons such as age, the age of their marriage and the fact that they don’t have any children are worth considering. Rebecca is in her forties, and it is possible that she is menopausal. Her repeated reference to losing her baby may signify that she wants to have a baby but for some reason she couldn’t, and now that she is menopausal having a baby is even more unlikely. It is possible that Devlin’s job contributes to their not having a child, which creates Rebecca’s resentment. Devlin/the lover tears “all the babies from the arms of their screaming mothers.” This infanticide image appears several times in Rebecca’s statements, meaning that this experience (although she may not have experienced literal infanticide) has been affecting her emotionally, and she blames Devlin for this. This is a crucial moment for Rebecca to reconsider their marriage.

Devlin, like Teddy in *The Homecoming*, also adopts the politics of provision to Rebecca in his attempt to make her stay in the picture. As the other patriarchal husbands, he is the one who decides what should and what should not be in that picture and directs his wife to see it the way he does.

DEVLIN. Now look, let’s start again. We live here. You don’t live... in Dorset... or *anywhere else*. You live here with me. This is our house. You have a very nice sister. She lives close to you. She has two lovely kids. You’re their aunt. You like that.

*Pause*



You have a wonderful garden. You love your garden. You created it all by yourself. You have truly green fingers. You also have beautiful fingers. (112)

Devlin is trying to direct Rebecca's perception, to make her feel positive about their marriage, by reminding her of the positive aspects of it. He wants the beautiful picture to replace all the negative sentiment that Rebecca has had.

In *The Homecoming*, Ruth decides to make a sexual agreement with the men. Her decision can be seen as a terminal act of resentment over modern patriarchy, which finds its representation in the figure of Teddy. Unlike his father, Max, Teddy is a highly educated man and presents himself as a man of sophistication with his calm, calculated demeanor and philosophical speech. The "dysfunctional" family presented in the first scene serves as a backdrop against which the coming of Teddy, a professor in philosophy from an American university, seems to be a promise to bring back humanity to the house. His civilized character is sharply in contrast with the other men in the house who operate in a more animalistic level. However, Teddy is denied of this platform of being a hero who puts things back in order, not only by his brothers and father, but also his wife.

Marc Silverstein in his book *Harold Pinter and the Language of Cultural Power* dedicates a chapter to the discussions of Pinter's *The Homecoming*. As stated in the chapter title, he believes that the play presents an argument that patriarchy as a structure "was not affected" by the pressures and the struggles of the less dominant groups. At the play's ending, Ruth, the woman in the play, wins the deal over the men of the family, but this winning, Silverstein and some other critics argue, is

problematic. Elin Diamond, as quoted in Quigley, says that “to say Ruth has won is to ignore the ambiguities that resonate in the last moment of the play” (77).

We can read the contract scene between Ruth and the men as an act done in the patriarchal framework where one can only win if one identifies himself or herself with the dominant figure. Irigaray, in Silverstein, states that “[the] situation of specific oppression is perhaps what can allow women today to elaborate a ‘critique of the political economy’ inasmuch as they are in a position external to the laws of exchange, even though they are included in them as ‘commodities’ (78)” This is what Ruth seems to be doing in that ambiguous scene. By mixing up wife and whore images, offering her body and domestic service in return of privilege to control, she poses a threat to patriarchy. However, as we can also see, neither Ruth nor the men in the family are free individuals within the system. The system exerts more pressures as time goes by, especially from the groups disadvantaged by it. Nevertheless, the patriarchal system does not seem to change at all. Patriarchy and its system stand still. It is the individuals within it that have to struggle to find ways to withstand the situation without ever being able to get out of it. This condition is portrayed in *The Homecoming*, where at the end, it is all about trade – a contract – both parties have to comply because the system “has to” sustain. Nobody can really get all what he or she really wants, because they are bound by the contract. As Silverstein points out, “the structure wasn’t affected.”

Similar to Ruth, Rebecca finally refuses to conform to the patriarchal ideology. Although she does not go to the extreme that Ruth does, she rebels by not

following Devlin's order as she used to out of resentment that has been built up since they got married. Both her and Ruth's actions can be seen as an act of desperation because the system has allowed them no space within which to aspire. So what has Ruth achieved at the end of *The Homecoming* and Rebecca in *Ashes to Ashes* if it is not victory because no real victory is possible in the system? For Ruth, the control she finally exerts from the men does not give her freedom if freedom means "the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint (*Oxford American Dictionaries*)," because she is restrained by the deal she has made. She does not have a total control over her body and what she wants to do with her life. She has agreed to provide "home" for the men, which includes her body to be touched and used, fulfilling their different needs and becoming a wife, mother, and whore for them. What she possibly gets at its best is her being a constant threat to the men and the system. By setting rules that those men have to comply, she does not let them at peace at all, putting them always in stress of providing material needs for her. She makes sure she is not the only one victimized by the system; those men also fall victim.

In *Ashes to Ashes*, Rebecca's "victory" is represented by her final act of putting herself physically and figuratively motionless upon Devlin's order at the end of the play. Realizing that she cannot really escape from the system, she lives in it with apathy. She resembles death – a "body with rigor mortis" she referred to previously, suggesting that Devlin's words will not affect her anymore because she is

“dead” anyway. Her silence, motionlessness, and withdrawal from “commonsense” are all her way to demean the patriarchal power.

### **Domestic Confinement in *Old Times***

*Old Times* was first published by Eyre Methuen Ltd. in 1971 and was produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company in London on June 1, 1971. Among regular names in Pinter’s production were Peter Hall as director and Vivien Merchant who played Anna.

The play opens with a married couple, Deeley and Kate, having a conversation about Anna. Anna was Kate’s only friend when both of them still lived in London. She is coming to visit Kate after ten years. Deeley is curious to know about her and the reason of her visit, whereas Kate seems to have only partial recollection of her. Deeley is anxious because he does not know what to expect from welcoming Anna to his house because nobody has ever really come for his wife after years of marriage. When Anna really arrives, she reminds Kate of everything she has left behind since she got married – freedom and liveliness. Deeley feels threatened by this fact, fearing that Anna will choose to leave him to reclaim her freedom. The play revolves around the battle between Deeley and Anna to win Kate. Kate, who has done nothing but fit in Deeley’s picture, is now left with the following options: staying in a marriage that has robbed her of her life energy yet she has got used to, or leaving it for the freedom that has become foreign to her.

The sense of desperation felt by Rebecca in *Ashes to Ashes* is anticipated in this much earlier work of Pinter, since *Old Times* also positions marriage as an area filled with endless contested values. Marriage becomes a wife's prison in both of these plays. If husband and wife were travelers, their marriage means an agreement on where they are heading and what they are going to do when they get there, because they cannot go to two different places at the same time. Once the destination has been decided, they go according to the plan, adjusting their needs within to fit the plan. In patriarchy, however, it comes "naturally" that the husband's picture or plan is the one to be followed by default. His choices come first, i.e., what he does for a living, where they are going to settle down. The wife and her needs come to fit into the picture. She wants the objects that the husband wants. She directs her objectives in the direction of the husband's – a desire described by Rene Girard, as quoted in Savran, as "imitative desire", which explains "a triangular configuration in which a subject desires an object not spontaneously but in imitation of a third party, a mediator whose desire for the same object has given it value in the eyes of the subject" (41).

What makes the marriage and the direction they are taking problematic in some of Pinter's plays seems to be the wife's resentment over the initially agreed design after some period of time, and the sense of confinement. Ruth and Teddy in *The Homecoming* are both in their thirties; Kate and Deeley in *Old Times* and Rebecca and Devlin in *Ashes to Ashes* are all in their early forties. Ruth and Teddy have been married for six years with two children; Kate and Deeley, for about twenty

years with no children; and there is no information about how long Rebecca and Devlin have been married, but probably they have for quite some time, because the issue of their not having a baby seems to have bothered Rebecca profoundly. In *The Homecoming*, what was initially considered a partnership between Ruth and Teddy turns into a prison to Ruth's desires. After a long period of conforming to her husband's family picture, she finally finds it suffocating. What she has agreed to do in their marriage suddenly looks like sacrifice on her part, because it means denying her own needs and desires. She has done enough to be in keeping with Teddy's plan. At this particular point, she no longer desires what the third party desires. The "imitative desire" does not apply to her anymore, as her desire now, if it is to be called desire at all, is not to go to the direction that Teddy has designed for them. There are no references that show that the wives have their own careers. Ruth in *The Homecoming* assists her husband Teddy in the university; as far as that we cannot say she is independent from her husband. Teddy is a university professor in philosophy. In *Ashes to Ashes*, Rebecca does not have any career either, while Devlin, her husband, works in an academic setting, probably also a professor. There is a pattern in the activities that these wives do. They clearly do domestic work, like cooking for their husbands and taking care of the house, creating a comfortable living space – a "home" for the family. In *Ashes to Ashes*, Rebecca does some gardening, sometimes watches a movie, and visits her sister in her spare time. Although she seems to be the one who has more options to do compared to the other two wives, her circumstances are nothing better. In one particular part, she identifies herself with a female character

in a comedy film who has to adjust herself with difficulty to live in a desert upon following her husband. “Other people laughed,” says Rebecca about the movie, “It was funny.” But she does not consider a wife’s hardship and predicament as funny at all because that is what she has been going through in her marriage.

Anna, Kate’s “friend,” is a metaphor of Kate’s long forgotten self, who has been repressed from the moment Kate entered marital life with Deeley. Contrasts of Kate’s present life and her past (when she still lived with Anna) are obvious from their recollections. They all are things that Kate left behind to fit in Deeley’s picture. She was stripped of her desires, and what is now left in her is a timid, dreamy woman who barely has a sense of self. She has no friends (Anna is her only friend), whereas Anna has hundreds of them. She is now living in a quiet place near the sea as opposed to the busy London where she still led a single life. Anna says, “How wise you were to choose this part of the world, and how sensible and courageous of you both to stay permanently in such silence,” to which Deeley responds, “My work takes me away quite often, of course. But Kate stays here” (15). Anna suggests that it requires a special kind of commitment to live in such an unusual place, but she almost means it as an irony, and it is indirectly confirmed by Deeley’s answer. Deeley does not really feel the impact of living in “such silence” because he travels a lot. Kate has to live the consequences of staying home, often alone, going through the same activities day by day. Her mobility is limited to the house and around the quiet beach (“There aren’t many people. It’s a long beach.”) Anna’s accounts of Kate’s past life reminds her (as well as warns Deeley) of what she has lost.

Queuing all night, the rain, do you remember? my goodness, the Albert Hall, Covent Garden, what did we eat? to look back, half the night, to do things we loved, we were young then of course, what stamina, and to work in the morning, and to a concert, or to the opera, or the ballet, that night, you haven't forgotten? and then riding on top of the bus down Kensington High Street, and the bus conductors, and then dashing for the matches for the gasfire and then I suppose scrambled eggs, or did we? who cooked? both giggling and chattering, both huddling to the heat, then bed and sleeping, and all the hustle and bustle in the morning, rushing for the bus again for work, lunch time in Green Park, exchanging all our news, with our very own sandwiches, innocent girls, innocent secretaries, and then the night to come, and goodness knows what excitement in store, I mean the sheer expectation of it all, the looking-forwardness of it all, and so poor, but to be poor and young, and a girl, in London then... and the cafes we found, almost private ones, weren't they? where artists and writers and sometimes actors collected, and others with dancers, we sat hardly breathing with our coffee, heads bent, so as not to be seen, so as not to disturb, so as not to distract, and listened and listened to all those words, all those cafes and all those people, creative undoubtedly, and does it still exist I wonder? do you know? can you tell me? (13-4)

There was no sense of permanence in Kate/Anna's life in London then, but it was exactly that which made them full of life, bouncing from place to place. It is the essence of living on the edge like bohemians that kept them going, associating themselves with creativity and excitement. They did work in the morning as many people do, but when nighttime came, they were immersed in whatever colors life had got to offer, surrounded by similarly lively and creative people. Kate left all of those behind when she got married: friends – to be in company of lively and creative people, and mobility – to be moving from one place to another, as she wished. Being a wife, she associates herself with the ideas of femininity and domesticity, the “lack” and “weaker” in the head, so that she fits in the patriarchal marriage. It is suggested in a passage that Kate struggled with some difficulty to adjust herself to the idea of domesticity she had not been familiar with before she got married. She seems uneasy,



somewhat embarrassed, talking about this domestic work she has been doing since then to Anna. This is confirmed by Anna, reminding her of what mattered more than domestic work when they still lived together.

KATE. Yes, I quite like those kinds of things, doing it.

ANNA. What kind of things?

KATE. Oh, you know, that sort of thing.

*Pause*

DEELEY. Do you mean cooking?

KATE. All that thing.

ANNA. We weren't terribly elaborate in cooking, didn't have the time, but every so often dished up an incredibly enormous stew, guzzled the lot, and then more often than not sat up half the night reading Yeats.

*Pause*

*(To herself.)* Yes. Every so often. More often than not. (17-8)

When Anna tells him how dreamy and oblivious Kate was about days of the week,

Deeley further confirms this "lack," ignoring Kate's objection.

DEELEY. You mean she literally didn't know what day it was?

ANNA. No.

KATE. Yes I did. It was Saturday.

*Pause*

DEELEY. What month are we in?

ANNA. September.

*pause*

DEELEY. We're forcing her to think. We must see you more often. You're a healthy influence. (21)

It is suggested there that this particular quality that Kate lacks is both confusing as well as enticing to Deeley, as he desires that quality in Kate. She does not seem to be an active agent who has command of what she wants to do in her life. She is more like an image that Deeley projects than a living being. Whether or not she has made

the choice, the marriage she has been in has divorced her from the energy and mobility she used to have.

This intellectual feature that Kate has never becomes Deeley's discourse of her.

When Kate/Anna uses a special term which he finds confusing (because he has never thought of it to be part of his wife's discourse), he tries to overcome his awkwardness by pulling her back to domesticity, demeaning her existence. This meets resistance from Kate, in the way she refuses to take Deeley's lead in the conversation.

DEELEY. Don't you find England damp, returning?

ANNA. Rather beguilingly so.

DEELEY. Rather beguilingly so? (*To himself.*) What the hell does she mean by that?

*Pause*

Well, any time your husband finds himself in this direction my little wife will be only too glad to put the old pot on the old gas stove and dish him up something luscious if not voluptuous. No trouble.

*Pause*

I suppose his business interests kept him from making the trip. What's his name? Gian Carlo or Per Paulo?

KATE. (*To Anna.*) Do you have marble floors? (37)

Perhaps Deeley feels intimidated by the fact that the woman (Kate/Anna) knows a word he does not. What motivates him to offer his "little wife" to serve another man (Anna's husband) may also come from this inferiority of not being able to converse on a par with Anna. By bringing up Anna's husband in the conversation, he feels some sort of support from another man, and also, at the same time, he tries to take the lead in the conversation with topics he knows he masters. Shown is his desire to remain in control in the eyes of Kate/Anna, demanding constantly a confirmation.

Entering the marriage, Kate becomes an object of Deeley's desire, whose affection and adoration directed to her make her less than a full human being. Similar to Teddy's politics of provision in *The Homecoming* (in the way that the husband (re)emphasizes and points out what the wife is supposed to see, feel, and think), here Deeley also strips off his wife's stand for herself. However, different from *The Homecoming*, Deeley uses the third person, Anna, to further objectify his wife in their voyeuristic conversations on Kate, even in Kate's presence. Silverstein quotes a passage from Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* that describes the situation in which becoming aware of being "looked-at" weakens the self.

Someone is looking at me! What does this mean? It means that I am suddenly affected in my being and that essential modifications appear in my structure... Beyond any knowledge which I can have, I am this self which another knows. And this self which I am – this I am in a world which the Other has made alien to me... my own look... is stripped of its transcendence by the very fact that it is a *look-looked-at*... In looking... I measure my power. But if the Other... sees me, then my look loses its power... Thus being-seen constitutes me as a defenseless being... I am in danger. (Silverstein 112-3)

By his gaze, Deeley also projects his desired images of Kate to her – in a way, like Teddy of *The Homecoming*, deifying his wife, making her a constant object of his desire. The following is when Deeley describes a mysterious goddess-like figure, which might have been Kate herself. This comes after Kate's argument with Anna concerning Kate's objection to be made an object ("I said you talk about me as if I *am* dead. Now.")

DEELEY. Myself I was a student then, juggling with my future, wondering should I bejassus saddle myself with a slip of girl not long out of her swaddling clothes whose only claim to virtue was silence but who lacked any sense of fixedness, any sense of decisiveness, but

was compliant only to the shifting winds, with which she went, but not *the* winds, and certainly not my winds, such as they are, but I suppose winds that only she understood, and that of course with no understanding whatsoever, at least as I understand the word, at least that's the way I figured it. A classic female figure, I said to myself, or is it a classic female posture, one way or the other long outworn.

*Pause*

That's the position as I saw it then. I mean, that is my categorical pronouncement as I saw it then. Twenty years ago. (31-2)

Kate's objection to being treated as if she were dead coincides with Deeley's description of this deified figure he saw twenty years back (about the time they got married). It is implied there that Deeley's state of mind, twenty years ago – the way he perceived Kate. He was “nothing” then – just a student who was still working on his future. He allowed himself to see only some qualities that Kate possessed – those that fit his beautiful picture. He fell in love with this goddess-like figure – and this illusion is what he has been wanting to see in Kate: the beauty of the inaccessible.

A question remains, what qualities Kate saw in Deeley that had led to the decision to marry him. As much as *Old Times* talks about the return of old desires, it is also a play about Deeley. Not only Kate, but also Deeley is an object of desire. Whose desire? Clearly Kate's, although we can also pull it out wider to include all women's desire to find an ideal man. So, here, it is not only Kate helplessly trying to fit in his picture, but Deeley also struggles to fit in hers, to be the man of her life. We get clues of what kind of man Deeley was when he met Kate. Her constant company with artists, writers and other creative people seems to precondition her choice of a man. Most likely Deeley was that kind of man, because, as Anna suggests, Kate

would not had been reckless in this faculty. Kate was extremely careful in choosing a man to be her husband.

ANNA. And I knew that Katey would always wait not just for the first emergence of ripple but for the ripples to pervade and pervade the surface, for of course as you know ripples on the surface indicate a shimmering in depth down through every particle of water down to the river bed, but even when she felt that happen, when she was assured it was happening, she still might not jump. But in this case she did jump and I knew therefore she had fallen in love truly and was glad.  
... And later when I found out the kind of man you were I was doubly delighted because I knew Katey had always been interested in the arts.  
(32-3)

It is implied that it was Deeley's depth that Kate couldn't have resisted, even when she was not sure of the marriage itself. He was then the man of creativity (arts) and, most likely, sensitivity. He was the "home" Kate wanted to be in – perhaps a longing after having lived a bohemian life for a while. Even though she had freedom, almost unlimitedly, by living single, she did not want to pass the opportunity of finding the right man. This is confirmed by Anna's statement earlier in the play when she comments on the place where Kate and Deeley live.

ANNA. No one who lived here would want to go far. I would not want to go far, I would be afraid of going far, lest when I returned the house would be gone. (15)

What may have happened in their twenty years of marriage that makes Kate contemplate of calling it quit is never specified. Some of few obvious reasons may include Deeley's job that often keeps him away and Kate's apparent boredom and loneliness. In some points in their conversations, Kate expresses her want to go out of the house, which can also be read as her desire to leave Deeley and the marriage. But

she has never done that, and perhaps never will, for the consequences are too difficult to measure, as Anna warns her when she wants to go to the park.

ANNA.           The park is dirty at night, all sorts of horrible people, men hiding behind trees and women with terrible voices, they scream at you as you go past, and people come out suddenly from behind trees and bushes and there are shadows everywhere and there are policemen, and you'll have a horrible walk, and you'll see all the traffic and the noise of the traffic and you'll see all the hotels, and you know you hate looking through all those swing doors, you hate it, to see all that, all those people in the lights in the lobbies all talking and moving... and all the chandeliers...

*Pause*

You'll only want to come home if you go out. You'll want to run home... and into your room... (39-40)

Jocelyn A. Hollander in her article "Vulnerability and Dangerousness: The Construction of Gender through Conversation about Violence," argues that "widely shared conceptions of gender associate femininity with vulnerability and masculinity with dangerousness... these ideas are pervasive, widely shared, and constructed through interaction: through routine patterns of behavior and communication that replicate and reinforce existing ideas about gender" (84). Although the danger that Anna means in the passage may not necessarily mean physical danger, it still relates to conditions far from comfort. Therefore, it is not surprising that Deeley, to Kate, remains a home for her, even though she has to kill her desires, because she is used to thinking that there is always danger out there. She is forty-ish and what a woman of that age will have to go through if she decides to live alone are parts of the reasons she would rather stay in the marriage. After twenty years, she has got used to the kind

of dependence she has on Deeley, financially or otherwise. She has been living in the image of Deeley's "little wife" for much too long to be able to break it.

Deeley, on the other hand, realizing that his wife has been unhappy in their marriage, gets troubled because it reminds him of his own failure. The movie *Odd Man Out* that Deeley and Anna repeatedly refer to serves as a metaphor of how Deeley has been struggling not to be "crossed out" man in Kate's life. Again, he invites the image of Anna's husband in the conversation as a reflection of his own distressed state of mind of not being able to understand and be understood. He is scared of the possibilities of him having to take care of himself if Kate leaves him.

DEELEY. What worries me is the thought of your husband rumbling about alone in his enormous villa living hand to mouth on a few hardboiled eggs and unable to speak a damn word of English. (63)

After hearing Deeley's defensive rants, which also show his vulnerability, Kate is ready to accept him again. His being vulnerable brings back the Deeley she once knew, and it was this quality that made her fall in love with him in the first place.

Drawing the ideas from Sartre's "look-looked-at" and Lacan's concept of the "disjuncture between the eye and the gaze," Silverstein argues that

[*Old Times*] reveals an instability inscribed within the very structure of the gaze – an instability that seemingly allows women to occupy a space (or, more to the point, to disperse themselves across a number of spaces) outside the field of the gaze. I say "seemingly" because, like *The Homecoming*, *Old Times* concludes with a tableau that threatens to undo everything we have just witnessed, a tableau confronting us with a form of power that, phoenix-like, can arise at the very site of its defeat. (108-9)

Kate's last monologue suggests that she has let the Anna in her die, all for Deeley. "She wanted to comfort it [Deeley's "very sensitive, vulnerable" face], in the way only a woman can" (66). The death of Anna means castration of desires, in this case the wife's, so that the marriage can go on. Deeley, realizing that Kate pays the price with her happiness, sobs quietly. Perhaps he feels relieved because after all he is not the "odd man out," as Anna has been, at the end. But this feeling will forever be tainted by guilt and shame because she has denied her own happiness for him. As Kate says, "we knew men who were brutish, crass (67)" who fail Kate's expectation, and Deeley, was chosen in the first place because he was "so unlike the others." Nevertheless, he also fails her. In a silence movement almost at the end of the play, just before the final tableau, Deeley comes toward Kate, sits by her side, and then "lies across her lap." We know from some interviews, that Pinter sometimes uses Catholic references in the conversation, and the tableau may remind us of the Pieta. Deeley, somewhat similar to Jesus, has been in some kind of a trial to prove that he *is* the one chosen, and now he is "dead" on the lap on Kate/Mary, the woman deified for the glory of the man. Kate is the "home" Deeley needs to establish for him. His job takes him away very often, and that is probably part of the reason why he chose such a silent place to live permanently. He needs a sanctuary, a peaceful place, after his tiring, long journeys. Kate is part of the idea of his "home," like Mary is to Jesus.

*Old Times*, as Pinter himself would agree, is dealing with romantic love. But unlike the happily-ever-after love stories, all the beauty lies somewhere else, or even lay in the past, although the couple can still retrieve it from their memories. *Old*



*Times* points out that there the beautiful picture has something swept under the rug to keep it beautiful. Marriage is an institution that disciplines female desire and creates unhappiness, especially for the wife. The next chapter will focus on how this confinement leads wives to commit infidelity as a means of escape, though temporarily.

## CHAPTER III

### Sex Acts

In the plays discussed in previous chapter, domestic life and the patriarchal home are confining the women, resulting in their unhappiness and resentment. In the three plays discussed in this chapter, women attempt to escape the confinement of marriage by infidelity. When a wife has a sexual affair, the patriarchal foundations of truth/honesty and love/romance are challenged. Infidelity is a momentary escape for a wife, and ultimately, although infidelity can trouble patriarchy, it cannot overthrow it.

The chapter is divided into three main discussions: first, sex secrets and lies in marriage found in *The Collection*; second, the romance of the other in *The Lover*; and, third, reassertion of patriarchy in *Betrayal*.

#### **Secrets and Lies in *The Collection***

*The Collection* is the oldest play among the six plays discussed in this thesis. It was first published in 1961 and first produced on May 11, 1961. *The Collection* starts with a telephone conversation between Harry and an unknown voice. This sets up the theme of the play, which tells about the business of knowing and not knowing in a relationship. The figure in the telephone booth is only dimly defined, whereas Harry's character can be seen in full on the stage, indicating two areas of darkness or shadiness of secrecy and visibility or fact. There are four characters in the play: Stella, James (Stella's husband), Bill (presumably Stella's lover), and Harry (Bill's

lover/partner). James suspects Stella of having an affair with a stranger named Bill when she was on a business trip in Leeds. He is then determined to find out the truth about Stella's infidelity by trying to get a hold of Bill. He pays him a visit and confronts Bill with interrogational questions which relate to what might have happened between Stella and him in Leeds. Bill denies everything until James corners him, and he cannot fight back. He comes up with a story that may satisfy James's curiosity for the moment so that he will leave him alone. But things are not tied up that simple when Harry, jealous and curious, seeks to know the truth about James's visit, and James still cannot be content with the information he has got from Bill. He confronts Stella with similar questions to get her confession. She confesses, but James finds some discrepancies between Stella's version of the affair and Bill's. James goes back to Bill to ask him once again about the truth.

The issue of sexual infidelity of a wife in Pinter's plays is often characterized by the husband's investigation to find the "truth" about it. *The Collection*, as in *Ashes to Ashes*, revolves around this kind of investigation. The husbands in both of the plays treat the wives as suspects of possible guilt. They position themselves as superior figures who can "pardon" if the wives have committed adultery. Devlin in *Ashes to Ashes* asks Rebecca to imagine himself as a priest for her to confess her "sins." Quite often the wives respond to the "truth-seeking" quest of their husbands with great obscurity, threatening the fulfillment of the men's wish for victory. Stella "admits" to James that she has had an affair, but he doubts the truth in what she has said as he embarks on his own investigation.

Comparing Pinter with Pirandello in treating the truth, Victor L. Cahn says that both “seem to view human nature and knowledge as innately unknowable” (32). In their works, they deal with the human drive to investigate and yet the truth often appears to be what is only sufficiently proven. However, in Pinter’s work, Cahn further argues, there is another dimension of truth that:

Truth can be revealed, but characters often withhold or ignore it to gain a psychological edge that changes perception and becomes a weapon in the struggle for power. In *The Collection*, specifically, even if the events were stated with assurance, such a revelation would neither resolve conflicts within all four characters nor permit them to reach emotional equilibrium (32).

Revealing and withholding the truth can be an effective means to winning a power game over the truth seeker. “We are weakened by the desperation to know,” Cahn states (32). When one demands others to be honest, he is likely to fall prey to his own unfulfilled wish. The party from whom honesty is sought can easily gain strength from this imbalanced relationship.

Guido Almansy in his article “Harold Pinter’s Idiom of Lies” talks about how the playwright himself uses this imbalanced structure of audience as a truth seeker and what is presented on the stage.

Pinter has systematically forced his characters to use a perverse, deviant language to conceal or ignore the truth. ... He has never stooped to use the degraded language of honesty, sincerity, or innocence which has contaminated the theatre for so long (Bloom 89).

Pinter often denies the audience’s expectations by refusing to clarify ambiguities. He develops an antagonistic relationship with the audience by playing with this act of

revealing and withholding the truth. In an interview with Gussow, Pinter comments on audiences who do not comprehend his works.

I have very mixed feelings about audiences. I love some of them. Unfortunately, I did develop as an actor a hostility toward audiences. It may sound childish, but I tend to regard the audience as my enemy. In other words, they're guilty until they're proved innocent. What is required is simply an act of concentration and they so rarely seem disposed to give it. (Gussow 42-3)

Although he utterly denies when asked if he purposefully wrote with intentions to keep secrets from the audience, he obviously refuses to write in a different approach just to make peace with the audience. "There's no other way I can approach it," he claimed (43). He somehow enjoys being in the position of testing the audiences' patience and capacity to contemplate what they witness, and having nothing to lose if they do not understand because it is they who do not understand in the first place.

Almasy suggests a special way of reading Pinter's works, which according to him, are inherently "dishonest" in the first place.

With Pinter, expression is no longer the specular reflection of an emotion nor the *word* of a *thing*: the mirror is slanted, and the expression therefore does not reflect the opposite emotion but the adjacent one, so that each sound and image is systematically distorted. ... Pinter's world is plausible and understandable in so far as everyone attempts not to be understood (Bloom 91).

I would argue, however, that such a mathematical calculation to read Pinter's work is still unstable to be used as a fixed formula. To what angle is the mirror slanted? The answer seems to remain out of reach if accuracy is what we are after. "An act of concentration" that Pinter wants his audiences to have cannot arrive at one reading only, although we can arrive at proximities. Of course, this can be problematic for those who are directly involved in a production of his work because they have to

ground their analysis to the specifics. It is for the audiences that Pinter stubbornly seems to wish to remain ambiguous, even to those who maintain good “concentration.”

Pinter is playful in the way he weaves quests for truth done by the characters in this play. Who holds the truth is powerful because he or she can control the “truth” for the truth seeker. The telephone conversation between Harry (appears on the stage set in full figure) and the man in a dimly lit phone booth (which we later learn to be James) presents the idea of who knows and who does not. James, standing in the dark space where both Harry and the audience cannot clearly see, holds the control. He knows what he wants, but neither Harry nor the audience knows it. Both Harry and the audience are therefore in a weaker position because of lacking information – a fact that James can play with for his benefit. In the following scene between James and Stella in their bedroom, James’s position is weak because Stella knows something he does not and is dying to know: her infidelity. Stella can also play with the “truth,” revealing what she wants to reveal while concealing something else. This knowing-and-not-knowing affair goes on throughout the entire play, determining who is in control and who is not. In a scene when James confronts Bill about his affair with his wife, Bill decides to tell the “truth” after James threatens and attacks him.

BILL.            Oh well. I’m only telling you because I’m utterly bored... The truth... is that it never happened... what you said, anyway. I didn’t know she was married. She never told me. Never said a word. But nothing of that... happened, I can assure you.  
... Anyway, we just kissed a bit, only a few minutes...  
The rest didn’t happen. I mean, I wouldn’t do that sort of thing. ... I mean, I’ve no idea why she should make up all that. Pure fantasy.

Really rather naughty of her. Rather alarming. (*Pause.*) Do you know her well? (136)

Although James seems to be in control with his aggressive attempt to uncover the truth, it is actually Bill who controls the situation. He says that he tells the “truth” because he is bored, not because of James’s pressure. He further plays with his privileged position of the one whose valuable information is sought by teasingly says that Stella has fantasized their affair. Saying “really rather naughty of her. Rather alarming” is in itself “rather naughty” of him, for what kind of a stranger would give such a comment to another man’s wife. “Do you know her well?” is a mockery directed against James the truth seeker. Bill may mean to say that Stella has made up the story of their affair, and it is a shame that James has been fooled; or he may mean to say that it is pitiful that James has been fooled along the way because he does not know the fact about her sexuality after years of marriage.

At the end of the play, James remains the weakest of the four characters because he gets ridiculed for his quest for the truth. The audience may share this position with their natural curiosity to know about the truth, yet has no control whatsoever over it. The truth about Stella’s sexuality will always remain blurry. As an object of gaze, this woman leads the beholders into a dimly lit area where she holds the key to the truth and never gives it up.

Pinter’s stand with regard to truth seems to be similar to that of Stella in *The Collection* when she has to deal with James’ curiosity to find the truth about her sexual infidelity. Using a Freudian analysis, Silverstein argues that her attitude

toward truth is demeaning and terrifying for the truth seeking James. Her “narcissistic” self-containment is proved independent of any values James tries to make her see. She does not have any sense of obligation to follow them:

What authority, however, can the husband exercise over the narcissistic woman? if the adulterous woman terrifies because she reveals the indifference between wife and whore, the narcissistic woman terrifies because she appears irremediably other, situated in an inaccessible elsewhere, exceeding the reach of patriarchal power. ... while the narcissistic woman apparently possesses her own identity, the patriarchal husband *needs* the wife to provide him with his “identity.” James could regain his “identity” by reclaiming an adulterous wife, but, having refused to be claimed, the narcissistic woman cannot be *reclaimed* (62-3).

Such an attitude is also found in other wives in Pinter’s plays. Ruth in *The Homecoming* also refuses to give Teddy his “identity.” Similarly, Rebecca in *Ashes to Ashes* never discloses truth in the way that Devlin wants. The physical identity of the lover he wishes to get from her remains fractured. This is an emphasis that Pinter seems to convey about the fate of the “truth-seekers” such as James, Teddy, and Devlin. It is not a coincidence that Pinter created Teddy and Devlin as university professors. Their drive for knowledge is what puts them high in the hierarchy (and they are aware of this). It is exactly this drive that Pinter seems to mock because they are denied the knowledge, and thus their superior identity. Teddy and Devlin are among the least sympathetic male characters in his plays because of this superiority. Rebecca and Ruth, although not “narcissistic” in Stella’s sense, are at the end self-contained and undisturbed by any attempt their husbands make to restore their identity.



The business of searching for the truth and disclosing or withholding it is an endless and often painful game played by the characters who deal with the issue of infidelity in Pinter's works. There is no exact answer to the questions whether it happened or not, whether they have told the truth or not: imagination blends into reality. This is in line with Pinter's attitude toward fact that happened or did not happen in the past. In an interview he states, "The fact is it's terribly difficult to define at anytime. . . . You know that old Catholic thing, the sin in the head? So much is imagined and that imagining is as true as real (Gussow 17)." Sometimes what actually happened in the past does not really matter because a person tends to remember it partially, or even only some elements of it he or she imagines to have happened. When an event is strongly imagined, it appears as if it were a reality. And thus, when the truth seeker questions the person suspect of withholding it, his own imagining comes into play and affects the "reality."

Honesty often loses its virtue in marital relationships in Pinter's plays. The truth-seeking quest often ends up unrewarding for the seekers if it is meant to regain "identity" (Silverstein 63). The power that a truth seeker is aiming at is often not justified because many other factors work against it. Those from whom the truth is sought are often reluctant or even resistant to be put on a hot seat. This is often the fate met by the husbands in Pinter's plays who seek to justify their power by scrutinizing the wives' infidelity. The husbands cannot find the kind of consolation that they are looking for by demanding clarity and sincerity. Sometimes a marriage is "saved" by obscurity of reality or by "not knowing." According to Almansi:

Sincerity, honesty, linguistic generosity, openness, are diabolical inventions that must be shunned because they create chaos. Survival is based on a policy of reciprocal misunderstanding and misinformation. If we were to choose a straightforward approach, we would be at the mercy of others, or of language itself; or even worse: of ourselves, that part of ourselves we do everything to ignore—and this drive towards self-ignorance is the one intellectual enterprise in which we excel (91).

In *The Collection*, the marriage survives by mercy of revealing/hiding the “truth.” In his second visit to Bill to seek for the truth, James is locked in the absurdity of his quest when Bill says, “I’ve apologized, she’s apologized. Honestly, what more can you want?” (51). Bill offers some short explanation to James about Stella’s sexuality, which in fact, further expands the inaccessibility of the truth.

BILL.            Every woman is bound to have an outburst of... wild sensuality at one time or another. That’s the way I look at it, anyway. It’s part of their nature. Even though it may be the kind of sensuality of which you yourself have never been the fortunate recipient. What? (*He laughs.*) That is a husband’s fate, I suppose. Mind you, I think it’s the system that’s at fault, not you. Perhaps she’ll never need to do it again, who knows. (151).

Again, this statement is a mockery directed toward those who desire to reveal the truth. Bill is as if saying that James will probably not be able to handle the truth anyway, so why does he not content himself with what he has got. James is threatened because of the potential that Stella’s infidelity may happen again, and it is beyond his power to keep it from happening.

Harry’s character, the oldest of the four characters, warns both James and Bill about the danger of seeking the truth and telling it: getting hurt. He tends to Bill whose hand has been cut by a knife tossed at him by James – a risk he has to deal

with for playing around with truth. His statement, directed to James (and curious audiences), works in double layers: physically and figuratively:

HARRY. Only a little nip, isn't it? It's his own fault for not ducking. I must have told him dozens of time, you know, that if someone throws a knife at you the silliest you can do is to catch it. You're bound to hurt yourself, unless it's made of rubber. The safest thing to do is to duck (153).

This statement is also a key to other Pinter's plays that put infidelity in its center. Honesty or truthfulness is a tricky thing in a relationship because it can cause an emotional injury. "The safest thing to do is to duck" means do whatever it takes to avoid conflict or it is best not to know. Harry's statement seems to be directed more to James than Bill. Suspecting his wife's infidelity and then demanding her and Bill to tell him the truth will eventually lead to his own deprivation. James cannot handle the truth as proven in the final scene when he comes to his wife, desperately repeating the same question he must have asked before.

JAMES. You didn't do anything, did you?  
*Pause.*  
He wasn't in your room. You just talked about it, in the lounge.  
*Pause.*  
That's the truth, isn't it?  
*Pause.*  
You just sat and talked about what you would do if you went to your room. That's what you did.  
*Pause.*  
Didn't you?  
*Pause.*  
That's the truth... isn't it? (157)

The “truth” that James wants to believe is that the infidelity never happened, although it is obvious that he himself is not sure if that is actually the case. Stella’s reaction, which is “neither confirming nor denying. Her face is friendly, sympathetic,” is as if saying, “Why bother to know what really happened. What matters is now” (157).

### **The Romance of the Other in *The Lover***

*The Lover* was first published by Methuen & Co. in 1963. It was premiered at the Arts Theatre, on September 18, 1963. This first production was directed by Harold Pinter himself.

*The Lover* tells about a married couple, Sarah and Richard who try to refresh their relationship by making a mutual arrangement. Sarah maintains her role as a dutiful wife in presence of her husband, while she can entertain her sexual desire by having a lover when Richard is not home. Both of them try to keep everything in balance with their marriage and the extramarital affairs. However as time passes by, Richard becomes increasingly jealous and annoyed by the fact that the presence of the lover has started to interfere in his marriage. He starts to pay attention to little details of irregularities that happen in his household as a result of Sarah’s infidelity and wants her to end the affair to be his wife again. *The Lover* explores what seems to be a sexual ritual game between the married couple – a system they create to renew and sustain the bond of marriage – by consciously presenting “the lover” in their relationship and constantly changing roles like playing with the idea of positive and negative poles to keep them attracted with each other.

*The Lover* opens with a regular picture of a married couple in their regular morning activity. The set suggests a living room and a bedroom, and the kitchen occupies the right side of the stage. The kitchen, a crucial part of the set, represents the area that the wife, Sarah, occupies in her domestic role. This area will remain as a reminder of the domesticity issue later on. The stage direction says “the furnishings are tasteful, comfortable,” which may also be an extension of Sarah’s “job” as a homemaker, besides telling that she has a good taste, a desirable quality to be sought in a woman, as this pattern occurs in many Pinter’s plays. She makes “home” possible for the husband, Richard. “Sarah is emptying and dusting ashtrays in the living-room” is a simple action stated in the stage direction that gives a common portrayal of a wife doing household work, cleaning up the “mess” from the patriarchal home. “She wears a crisp, demure dress,” indicates the simplicity yet pleasantness of an “ideal” wife. This “perfect” picture is soon disrupted by Richard’s first line, “Is your lover coming today?” This starts a short, casual exchange between the couple about the lover, establishing his position in Richard and Sarah’s marriage.

In *The Lover*, Pinter uses his technique of blending the old with the new. The treatment of adultery is very casual, put against the backdrop of a regular picture of a marriage. The division of roles between the husband and the lover in the marriage is what sustains it. This theme, how casually the married couple welcomes the third party in it, might be shocking for Western audiences with a long-held Christian tradition that emphasizes “body-denying morality” (Verene 59). In contrast, marriage is a union of two people loving and respecting each other, and sexual pleasure is

acknowledged and supported by both as necessary and may be sought in other parties as long as it does not reduce the quality of the love and respect between the married couple. Sarah does her job as a traditional wife in the morning. Then, while Richard is at work she spends her time with her lover the whole afternoon before functioning again as a good wife to Richard when he gets home. Similarly, Richard also has a sexual affair in between his working hours with another woman whom he insists on calling a whore. This is the pattern and agreement in Richard and Sarah's marriage: they maintain regularity of what is considered to be normal in a married life – both try to function as “normal” husband and wife to each other, meaning in the presence of each other – while breaking the impoverishing nature of routine by having extramarital relationships. Their idea of a healthy marriage is acknowledgement and accommodation of each other's needs, some kind of a “psychological welfare,” apart from what they share together.

Sarah and Richard are united in a marriage for qualities they find in each other. They claim to love each other and put that on top of the sexual pleasure they find in others. Richard keeps stressing that he finds “grace, wit, imagination, and elegance”—all of the desirable qualities to be found – in one woman, Sarah. He is proud to have a woman that many other men desire.

RICHARD. Great pride, to walk with you as my wife on my arm. To see you smile, laugh, walk, talk, bend, be still. To hear your command of contemporary phraseology, your delicate use of the very latest idiomatic expression, so subtly employed. Yes. To feel the envy of others, their attempts to gain favour with you, by fair means or foul, your austere grace confounding them. And to know you are my wife. It's a source of a profound satisfaction to me. (187)

Alan Soble in *The Philosophy of Sex and Love* challenges such traditional ideas of monogamy by citing philosopher Rene Descartes's assertion that:

Although we see many persons of the opposite sex, yet we do not desire many at one time... But when we observe something in one of them which is more attractive than anything we observe at that moment in others, this determines our soul to feel towards that one alone all the inclination which nature gives it to pursue the good which it represents as the greatest we could possess. (Soble 166)

This statement has been widely criticized over time as delusional. Soble says that "we can and do desire more than one at a time, unless we understand Descartes's 'at one time' narrowly and literally," which means he believes that "the exclusivity of love" does not depend on "the exclusivity of sexuality" as Descartes seemed to suggest (167). However, Richard in *The Lover* is under such delusion in what he believes to be pure love for his wife and total lust for other women. Although Sarah doesn't say what she finds in Richard that has drawn them together, she seems to be in the same boat as Richard in this regard when she says, "But it's you I love" (166). He must have been able to provide for her at different levels: economically and possibly also psychologically. Soble further argues:

Rather than the exclusivity of love depending on the exclusivity of sexuality, the relationship, if any exists, might be the other way around: the exclusivity of love makes the sexual impulse exclusive. The roving sexual eye of nondiscriminating sexual desire can be made to focus on one object by personal love. "Instinct tends to amplify indefinitely the number of objects which satisfy it," writes the Spanish philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset (1883 – 1955), "whereas love tends toward exclusivism." Hence "nothing immunizes a male against other sexual attractions so well as amorous enthusiasm for a certain woman." This optimism about the power of love to make exclusive a sexual drive that is not by its own nature exclusive has been, through the ages, applauded, but has also been the brunt of cynical realism. (168)

The play does not indicate when Sarah and Richard started to feel that they could not make their sexual drive exclusive to their spouses, although both claim their exclusive love to each other despite sex with others. The promise of faithfulness as a condition of morality is slightly altered in their marriage: they can be sexually unfaithful as long as their love remains exclusive, or, in other words, sexual infidelity is only a carnal desire that should not be elevated to the same level as the sanctity of love. At best, the sexual games with other parties outside the marriage are means for the married couple to sustain the marriage, because, as Sarah and Richard seem to believe, their other needs are well taken care of elsewhere. They want to renew their romantic feeling toward each other, which should appear no less after time, because the debasement and the mess of dissatisfaction, if any, are channeled outside their relationship.

The romantic ideology of the trustworthiness of the feelings of exclusivity and constancy creates expectations that a marriage grounded in romantic love and passion will be satisfying. But hard reality – the attenuation or death of sexual passion between the spouses; the daily presentation of the physical, moral, and personality defects of each spouse to the other; the eventual recognition of differences between their domestic habits – intrudes, and exclusivity and constancy, which initially felt natural and spontaneous, become strenuous tasks that require a strong will to carry out. (Soble 171)

Richard and Sarah try with their “strong will” to resist the “death of sexual passion” by performing sexual ritual that involves their constant changing of personalities.

This novelty, they hope, will rejuvenate their passion for one another.

In another Pinter’s play *Old Times*, Anna makes an important comment about Kate’s life as Deeley’s wife. Anna, a free spirited woman, thinks how lonely it is to lead a life like Kate’s because her husband is often away for work, leaving her in such



an isolated place. Deeley seems ignorant about the possibility that Kate may have been unhappy in their marriage. Her sexual and spiritual welfare is often taken for granted. Kate's situation is similar to Rebecca's in *Ashes to Ashes*. Her husband, Devlin, is a dominant figure in the relationship. He cares little about her emotional needs. Richard, on the other hand, is very much aware that Sarah has other needs he cannot provide for while he is not around her. In both *Old Times* and *Ashes to Ashes*, wives are unhappy and lack a passion and vitality that Sarah possesses.

Although the reason why Sarah and Richard take lovers is never verbally expressed, it is hinted by the same routine they go through day by day. Sarah does what she is "supposed" to do as a traditional wife, providing a welcoming and comfortable home for Richard, while Richard works outside the home as a "normal" husband. There is a known pattern, regularity and stagnancy, in what they do. The lover functions in their marriage as a balancing mechanism – at least, that is what they aim at doing to sustain the marriage. Sarah and Richard remain very emotionally attached to one another. Their insistence is in line with Irving Singer's idea of a "companionate love." According to Soble, "Far from precluding passionate love, [a couple's] companionate love will make them more thoroughly dependent on one another. That alone can *increase* their marital passion" (173). It is their "companionate love" that allows some degree of sexual freedom because they care for each other's welfare. The purpose of this arrangement is to maximize both partners' happiness. In Singer's Freudian view, an unsatisfactory sex life can cause

neurosis. Releasing sexual energy outside the marriage may therefore be necessary to preserve one's emotional and psychological well-being.

Experience teaches us that for most people there is a limit beyond which their constitution cannot comply with the demand of civilization. All who wish to be more noble-minded than their constitution allows fall victims to neurosis; they would have been more healthy if it could have been possible for them to be less good. (Verene 149)

While keeping themselves "healthy," Sarah and Richard keep checking on each other if the arrangement they both made is still working. No matter how liberating this attitude toward sexuality is, they are also social beings who cannot help making contact with their community and being influenced by its norms to some degree. From time to time they are under stress for having to balance the external and the internal – keeping the irregularity out of the main picture. As they may be aware, the arrangement is a fragile one.

SARAH. And you're happy aren't you? You're not in any way jealous?  
RICHARD. No.  
SARAH. Good. Because I think things are beautifully balanced, Richard.  
(173)

Nevertheless, imbalance in the arrangement is inevitable as things start to develop between them and their lovers, more than they expect them to. Sarah starts to get sloppy, i.e., forgetting to change shoes and not having the dinner ready for Richard. Richard is the one who shows a sign of discontent because the arrangement is not well carried out. He cannot hide his jealousy when Sarah tells him that her lover's body "emanates love," something that reminds him of what he now lacks as a husband after years of marriage. Richard, eventually, cannot help admitting that he is

a social being bound to norms of what is proper and not proper. Although he tries to control his language, he cannot hide his resentment when he starts noticing irregularities in his household. The regularity – the ideal picture – that was supposed to be kept clean is now contaminated.

Richard is nonetheless a patriarchal figure, not much different from many other men in society. His doubt of the adultery arrangement with Sarah is hinted early in the play when he asks her whether she is going to go out with her lover or stay in. Although he respects Sarah's wish to spend the afternoon with her lover in his house, Richard seems to want otherwise. His growing resentment goes along with his claim of control over his household; he wants to have control over what goes on in his own house. He begins to feel unhappy about irregularities. He pays attention to little details as when the Venetian blinds have not been put up properly after Sarah and her lover put them down to create some darkness.

RICHARD. I see you had the Venetian blinds down.

SARAH. We did, yes.

RICHARD. The light was terribly strong.

SARAH. It was. Awfully strong.

RICHARD. The trouble with the room is that it catches the sun so directly, when it's shining. You didn't move to another room?

SARAH. No. We stayed here.

RICHARD. Must have been blinding.

SARAH. It was. That's why we put the blinds down.

*Pause.*

RICHARD. The thing is it gets awfully hot in here with the blinds down.

(164)

Richard's repeated mention of heat clearly suggests his irritation. It is a camouflage to hide his actual concern: if he were to be bluntly honest about his feeling, he would

not have approved of the arrangement of infidelity. There is always a possibility to mix up the regularity of marriage with the extramarital relationship. Also, there is always an open possibility that subjectivity comes into the objective mind – the mind that seeks for balance. As the play shows, Sarah’s routine in the domestic area starts to get interrupted because her mind is occupied with the thought of the lover.

Richard’s objectivity is also affected a great deal by his jealousy.

In the first section, the idea of a patriarchal home was discussed, and here again, the husband in *The Lover* finally expresses his resentment when his wife taints his home with her sexual infidelity. Richard is not as sophisticated as Teddy of *The Homecoming* in hiding his true emotion in responding to the woman’s sexual affairs with other men. His own sexual affairs with the other woman is, according to him, not comparable to Sarah’s because it is done outside their home, literally and metaphorically. He wants to keep it outside the picture so that his marriage remains as it is supposed to be. In other words, despite everything that happens out there, he wishes for regularities in his home – having a normal life with his wife. The discussion of the blinds between Richard and Sarah is followed by one about an inconclusive meeting that Richard had, and Sarah asking him whether he minds a cold supper. Richard asks a question: “Does it ever occur to you that while you’re spending the afternoon being unfaithful to me I’m sitting at a desk going through balance sheets and graphs?” (165) He seems to say that he has been trying hard to keep their marriage in balance with Sarah’s infidelity. This also means that his objectivity cannot hold anymore. He cannot pretend to play cool as Teddy does in

*The Homecoming*; he is a jealous husband who desires to possess his wife as her only owner.

*The Lover* has been interpreted by many as a sex ritual, a foreplay, which is performed by the couple before they have sexual intercourse. Later in the play we find that Richard turns out to be Sarah's lover, Max dressed in a different outfit. Then, he turns into several different men with different traits: the rapist, the hero, and the sentimental family man. He calls Sarah by different names: Dolores when he turns her into a prostitute and Mary, a housewife type. Richard's whore/mistress has traits that suggest she is no other than Sarah herself. When Max tells Sarah that he feels guilty toward his wife, it is the same as Richard telling his mistress about Sarah. This whole action can be interpreted as a ritual sex game that the couple play to rejuvenate their love.

So, in this play, Pinter does not actually step out of the boundary of what is considered acceptable in a married life because the couple do not actually commit adultery with others. His characters prove to be incapable to separate themselves from social values as they seemed to be doing at the beginning. Richard is a middle class, educated man who tries to think and act outside the box. He respects his wife and wishes to make her happy by allowing her some sexual freedom. In this respect, he is like Teddy in *The Homecoming* who appears calm, emotionally detached, and in control of the situation. He works on the balance in any situation, but unlike Teddy, who wouldn't let others beat him emotionally, Richard shows his vulnerability to Sarah. When he finds the African drum that Sarah and her lover usually use in their

love game, he reminds her that its noise may be heard by their neighbors. He helplessly reminds Sarah of her wifely duties after the freedom he has granted her. When he finds that she hasn't prepared anything for his dinner, he starts to attack her, showing his more selfish, yet honest, side.

RICHARD. You hardly expect me to embark on dinner after a day spent sifting matters of high finance in the City.  
*She laughs.*  
One could even suggest you were falling down on your wifely duties.  
....  
Of course, your failure to have dinner on the table is quite consistent with the life you've been leading for some time, isn't it? (188)

Richard's cynical comments might be driven by his adherence to social values, but not as much as by his jealousy, the feeling of not having and not being had by Sarah. He, like James in *The Collection* and Robert in *Betrayal*, is a man who is split between the (learned) desire to make his wife happy by letting her blossom and the more basic need to possess and control her. Elizabeth Sakellaridou comments on the association of women with flowers to suggest their sexuality in Pinter's plays.

In Pinter's dramatic work women are quite frequently connected with gardens and flowers. Such images reflect the typical male tendency to distance women and romanticize over their existence. In *A Slight Ache* Flora's world is a blossoming, suffocating garden, to which she is also associated by name. Sarah in *The Lover* talks about showing her garden to her lover. (111)

In *The Lover*, Sarah finds out that, if she has an affair with her own husband, she may get a momentary satisfaction, while she will still get up in the morning with her husband next to her. In *Betrayal*, which will be discussed next, Emma learns that

even if she breaks all the rules – and brings pain to her husband – she can only disturb patriarchy; she cannot overthrow it.

### **Reassertion of Patriarchy in *Betrayal***

*Betrayal* was first published and produced in 1978. It sets forth a triangular relationship of Robert, Emma, and Jerry. Emma is Robert's wife and Jerry is his best man on his wedding day. Jerry, who is married, falls in love instantly with the bride and they start their secret relationship. They meet every now and then, and even buy a flat together. On a vacation trip with Emma years after, Robert accidentally reads Jerry's letter to Emma and learns about the affair. He calmly confronts Emma and gets her confession. This confrontation does not end Emma's relationship with Jerry. They keep seeing each other for years after Robert discovered about the affair. Robert also maintains his friendship with Jerry, doing activities together as if nothing ever happened. Jerry is unaware that Robert knows about his relationship with Emma. After a while, the affair goes cold and they end it. They meet again a couple of years after in a casual meeting in a restaurant. She tells Jerry that the night before, she had decided to tell Robert about her past affair with Jerry because they were divorcing. Jerry, feeling betrayed by Emma, comes to see Robert to try to straighten things up with him. He gets even more frustrated when he learns that Robert has known it for a long time.

Pinter's *Betrayal* "betrays" not only the conventional forward-moving structure, but also the flashback structure itself because three scenes in the flashback

are forward-moving. This seems to support what goes on in the play – that the play does put forward the classic issue of a love triangle, which naturally involves betrayal of normative values, but the sides of the triangle are mutable rather than fixed. The cycle of betrayal seems endless. As one pattern of betrayal is revealed, it is to be disrupted by another, which is forming itself. Austin E. Quigley states that Pinter is among innovators who seek for “novelty” by marrying the “conventionality” with the “unconventionality.”

The innovators need attention, and they need converts, so they must initially overstate their case both for what they are doing and against what audiences are used to. It remains for subsequent dramatists to see beyond the polemics that introduced innovation and to look for further ways of combining, as well as contrasting, *old and new* in the theatre. (Quigley 222)

In *Betrayal*, this combination of conventionality and unconventionality is echoed in the relationship between the characters. All married individuals in the play seek novelty outside their marriages. There exist in the relationships divisions between family or “home” and the “extras.” As also happens in *The Lover*, in *Betrayal* lovers meet in daytime as nighttime is assumed as family time. The system goes on for as long as the individuals involved in it can stay in balance – which in the end seems impossible.

As the play starts, it looks as if the betrayal structure is clear: Emma has an affair with Jerry, betraying her husband, Robert. But as the story unfolds, the structure of betrayal becomes more complex. It is not simply a story of Emma betraying Robert by having a relationship with Jerry, or Jerry betraying Robert, his best friend, but also Emma betraying Jerry by telling Robert about their relationship,



and Robert betraying Jerry by not letting him know that he has known about the affair for quite a while. Robert himself also has an affair with another woman, and so does Jerry's wife, Judith. And the triangulations are further complicated by another betrayal: Robert betrays Emma by committing more to his friendship with Jerry than to his with her, telling her that he loves Jerry more than he loves her. No relationship is safe and stable. It seems that each of the characters is endlessly looking for something new, something truer, a true beauty out there that is essentially unattainable but kept being searched for.

For Pinter, we live somewhere between the poles of objectivity and subjectivity, and we repeatedly find ourselves in worlds that threaten to slide towards one or the other. Consequently, we tend to alternate between, on the one hand, a comforting attempt that somewhere out there, just beyond our current reach, lie ultimate truths and explanations, and, on the other, an intermittent awareness that a dizzying variety of possible truths and explanations seems to be available. It is the predominance of the former assumption, this expectation that certainty will ultimately be accessible, that Pinter finds most worrying. (Quigley 224)

As the essence of having an extramarital relationship is a search for novelty, it tends to be an endless quest and not to be constrained in just one relationship, no matter how fresh it feels to be at the beginning. The search for certainty in the "new" relationship is against the essence of newness. Jerry and Emma start their love affair by Jerry's promises of novelty. He boasts to her that what he feels for her "has never happened before." But as time goes, they become more familiar with each other, and thus the pattern repeats itself. Emma's effort to create a "home" in their relationship kills the novelty as it brings in the elements of stability and predictability that she and Jerry first were trying to avoid. Each of them cannot have more than one home

(marriage) at the same time. The romance and heated passion of sexual infidelity end when it becomes regularity. It denies what they sought for in the first place.

There seems to be a rule according to which the two areas of marriage and sexual affair are found to be uncontaminated with one another. The socially accepted (monogamous, heterosexual) marriage carries with it convention and moral values. Faithfulness is part of the Judeo-Christian convention. “In this framework the roles of man-as-provider and woman-as-breeder are established as economic enactments of the spiritual doctrine of sex-as-procreation” (Verene 203). The system of marriage cannot escape from the regularity and predictability that may lead the subjects involved to start looking for new passions and irregularities to keep them from boredom or stagnancy. This is when some people get involved in extramarital relationships. Jerry and Emma try their chance for happiness by their new, irregular, sexual exploration outside their marriages. But as attachment between them grows, they start to treat each other as their possessions, not just as “extras.” They tread the same pattern they have in their marriages and start to feel trapped in this regularity.

The first scene of the play, which chronologically serves as the conclusion of the story, informs us that Jerry and Emma ended their relationship two years earlier. Jerry returned to his family, but Emma is separated from Robert. She says that Robert has cheated on her, probably also at some point while she was cheating on him. Emma is said to have had another affair with a writer whom both Robert and Jerry know, while she was still married, but apparently after she had ended her relationship with Jerry. Both Emma and Jerry seem exhausted to have had to go through the

circular pattern of novelty/regularity over and over again. They are looking for something fresh besides what they have regularly, but novelty will always be betrayed once regularity is formed.

Emma meets with Jerry again for the first time after their breakup as lovers. In the conversation, it is very obvious that Emma does indicate that she wants to let go what they shared in the past. Jerry, on the other hand, seems to hold back and reluctant to express himself openly. He builds a wall around him every time Emma tries to talk about them. At least four times in the dialogue, Emma brings up the romance they once had, and in each of them Jerry holds himself back.

EMMA. I thought of you the other day.

JERRY. Good God. Why?

...

EMMA. Do you know how long is it since we met?

JERRY. Well, I came to that private view, when was it - ?

EMMA. No, I don't mean that.

JERRY. Oh you mean alone?

(160-1)

Jerry's reluctance to take part in the emotionally loaded subject that Emma brought up reflects what his effort to guard himself against the "forbidden passion." He clings to what he believes should be held true above sexual and emotional feelings he might have toward Emma: family and friendship (with Robert). When Jerry asks Emma about Robert, he seems to want to warn both Emma and himself that they should not indulge themselves in desire. Emma wants to keep spouses out of the picture when she and Jerry are together, but Jerry always brings them in.

EMMA. How's Sam?

JERRY. You mean Judith?

EMMA. Do I?

JERRY.        You remember the form. I ask about your husband, you ask  
                  about my wife.

(161)

Jerry's awareness to include Robert and Judith in his conversation with Emma is a reminder, perhaps more to himself, that the stake is too high for them to lose their families and marriages despite what he may still feel for Emma. It is obvious that he tries hard to suppress his emotion throughout the conversation that is mainly about their memories, although at one point he cannot contain himself anymore.

JERRY.        Yes, everyone was there that day, standing around, your  
                  huaband, my wife, all the kids, I remember.

EMMA.        What day?

JERRY.        When I threw [your daughter] up. It was in your kitchen.

EMMA.        It was in your kitchen.

*Silence*

JERRY.        Darling.

EMMA.        Don't say that.

*Pause*

It all...

JERRY.        Seems a long time ago.

EMMA.        Does it?

JERRY.        Same again?

*He takes the glasses, goes to the bar. She sits still. He returns, with the drinks, sits.*

(166-7)

Jerry's emotional outburst in the dialogue above, although short, shows us his repressed desire. Like James in *The Collection*, Jerry is vulnerable because his two most urgent needs – to let go his passion and to uphold family values – seem to be in irreconcilable conflict. Like James, he is sometimes naïve about the truth; he tends to see the “facts” he wants to see. He does not know that Robert has known about his

affair with Emma for years. Similarly, he assumes his wife, Judith, is ignorant about this affair – something that Robert finds hard to believe. Out of insecurity, Jerry also refuses to admit that Judith might also have had an affair.

As in the cases of all husbands in the other plays discussed in this thesis, Jerry's (and Robert's) vulnerability in the face of losing "home" is what makes him play a tough game as a way to shield against his own fear. Robert plays the role of "father" or protector to Emma when she is vulnerable, and similarly, Jerry seems to want to play a strong paternalistic figure when he himself is emotionally unsecured. He does not want to appear weak in front of Emma when she asks him if he is jealous of Casey – the man Emma is currently seeing.

JERRY. I couldn't be jealous of Casey. I'm his agent. I advised him about his divorce. I read all his first drafts. I persuaded your husband to publish his first novel. I escort him to Oxford to speak at the union. He's my... he's my boy.

...

I couldn't be jealous of Casey. Anyway it's not as if we're having an affair now, is it? We haven't seen each other for years. Really, I'm very happy if you're happy.

(170)

Jerry tries hard to submerge his sense of loss by putting Casey inferior to him. By making him his "son," Jerry gets a temporary (false) pride that can save him from appearing vulnerable at the moment.

Emma's sexuality, which seems to keep blossoming even after her separation from both Robert and Jerry, may have put these men in fear of losing their "home." Robert is very much aware of this fact, and therefore is better grounded when things start to fall apart with his marriage. Pinter uses the analogy of playing squash to

describe the states these men are in, in relation to their wives' sexuality. Robert says to Jerry, "I'm not good at all. I'm just fitter than you" (207). He may mean to say that no men are really good in dealing with female passion, which threatens the system – some can only be better or "fitter" than others. However, men are in general vulnerable to female sexuality – a point that Robert and Jerry make when they discuss the difference between boy babies and girl babies.

ROBERT. They say boy babies cry more than girl babies.  
JERRY. Do they?  
ROBERT. You didn't find it to be the case?  
JERRY. Uh... yes, I think we did. Did you?  
ROBERT. Yes. What do you make of it? Why do you think that is?  
JERRY. Well, I suppose... boys are more anxious.  
ROBERT. Boy babies?  
JERRY. Yes.  
ROBERT. What the hell are they anxious about... at their age? Do you think?  
JERRY. Well... facing the world, I suppose, leaving the womb, all that.  
ROBERT. But what about girl babies? They leave the womb too.  
JERRY. That's true. It's also true that nobody talks much about girl babies leaving the womb. Do they?

(202-3)

The two men in the play seem to reach a consensus that women are naturally emotionally self-sufficient, as opposed to men who are constantly in fear of losing the comfort and security that can only be provided by women. Men want to maintain the patriarchal system for this purpose, but this need is threatened by the fact that women also have desires that they also want to express.

Gardens or flowers have been a metaphor for female active sexuality in Pinter's plays. In plays like *The Collection*, *The Lover*, *Betrayal*, and *The Homecoming* it has become the source of the husbands' predicaments. Emma, like

Stella, Sarah, and Ruth, is active sexually and her husband struggles with difficulty to accommodate her needs. Similar to the case in *The Lover*, the man knows that his wife needs something more than marriage. Robert allows this to happen for reasons as various as making Emma happy and not wanting to appear needy and vulnerable. Using Freud's ideas of sex instinct, what differentiates Emma from the wives in the other Pinter plays discussed in the first section of this thesis is that she does not seem to be inhibited by any sign of the neuroticism characteristically found in sexually repressed women. Emma, along with Stella and Sarah are relatively healthy compared to Kate in *Old Times* and Rebecca in *Ashes to Ashes* who share between them a sense of lacking energy, utter unhappiness, and a pattern of withdrawal in their responses toward their surroundings. This partly owes to the fact that Stella, Sarah, and Emma, in contrast with Rebecca and Kate, find an escape from the confinement of marriage in infidelity.

Not much has been said about the sexuality of Pinter's male characters compared to that of the women's, except that the men seem to have a bond among themselves and tend to push aside the women when they are involved in triangular relationships. There is a homosexual undertone in *The Collection* in which the triangle of the husband-wife-lover shifts into husband-lover-lover's lover (male) triangle at the end. Although homosexuality is never (explicitly) hinted in *Betrayal*, Robert tells his wife, Emma, that he loves Jerry, Emma's lover, more than he loves her. His reason is that he knows Jerry before he met Emma. Even when they appear to be rivals in love, there seems to be a kind of solidarity between the men when they

have to deal with a woman's desires. It is as if they rely on each other as the same kind when women and their sexuality threaten their status quo.

On the one hand, patriarchy demands that women recognize masculine authority by becoming wives so that they may become mothers, reproducing the dominant culture both physically and ideologically... On the other hand, patriarchal ideology insistently constructs women as whores, sexually transgressive beings who refuse either to acknowledge the imperatives of masculine desire or recognize the "natural" legitimacy of masculine power. Patriarchal culture needs to maintain a sharp distinction between these categories, for the wife's slide into a whore would undermine the status of the family as a site for the reproduction of both the dominant ideology and the dominant economy of power relations. (Silverstein 50)

The threat of the woman who exposes her sexuality, in the case of Emma, eventually brings together Robert and Jerry in a masculine bond between the two, surpassing even their rivalry. As in the analogy of the "boy babies," the two men's bond comes as a result of their mutual acceptance of their own vulnerability. For all their skill at manipulation, they cannot do much to contain or domesticate female passion. They frequently exclude Emma from their activities, stressing the boundary that they will not allow her to cross, because to them she has a system to survive when stability starts to crumble. Robert and Jerry's reunion can be read as an act of desperation of men in fear of losing "home." They "rely" on each other's experience, like when they play squash, a game to show their "emotional fitness," not to women who do not belong to the game in the first place, but to each other. Emma is not confined in the marriage, even exercises her sexual freedom by having an affair. She is put aside by both men because she is a constant threat to the system, and will possibly remain so.



## CHAPTER IV

### Conclusion

Marriage is often taken for granted. As Kate in *Old Times* says, “Everyone’s married.” And it still means a paternalistic monogamous structure with certain roles to be played by a husband and a wife, where he builds the structure and she creates a home. With man as the main decision maker in the marriage, as found in the three plays discussed in Chapter II, marriage turns into a prison to female desires. It controls and disciplines them so that they fit into the patriarchal picture. The wives in *The Homecoming*, *Ashes to Ashes*, and *Old Times* lose their command of their lives and give up their dreams and desires as they enter their marriages. The husbands, as the dominant figures in these marriages, are often agents who want to make sure that the patriarchal picture stays “clean” and “pure” from the defilement of female sexuality.

The repression causes the wives in the plays to resent the roles that the system has assigned them because they have to suppress their desires to fit in the intended picture. In *The Homecoming*, Ruth finally revolts by becoming a prostitute, defiling her husband’s ideal picture. The theme is repeated in *Ashes to Ashes*, in which the wife’s final action of “not doing” signifies a refusal to be touched by the orders of the dominant figure. In *Old Times*, Kate is revisited by her old passions that she has left behind since she married Deeley.

The domestic confinement in patriarchal marriage is “broken” by wives’ infidelity, as presented in the plays discussed in Chapter III. Infidelity seems to be a way out for the wives to avoid confinement, and to some degree, the husbands allow some room for this to happen. From the perspective of the wives, their sexual affairs with their lovers are also a way for them to sustain the marriage. As “traditional” wives, they take care of the household, doing the routine of domestic work on a daily basis. The husbands in Pinter plays also require of the wives an intellectual capacity, a wit, to go with their own. While the husbands desire their wives to possess these qualities, they are utilized to support the husbands’ interests as respectable men. Thus, the men desire to claim their wives’ properties as their own. The witty wives, on the other hand, demand their needs to be fulfilled as well. The domestic realm and stability offered by the marriages are too limiting for their needs including their sexuality being recognized.

Infidelity in marriage then calls into question the notion of truth and love. In *The Collection*, the marriage is sustained after James is unable to prove if Stella has betrayed him. James, the truth-seeker husband, is ridiculed because he wants to know more than he can handle. His wife and her presumed lover are capable of creating “truths” to save themselves from trouble. On the other hand, James’ partial knowledge of the “truth” of Stella’s infidelity leaves room for doubts, which can save his marriage. In other words, marriage is survived through concealing/revealing the truth as it is necessary. In *The Lover*, the wife imagines an affair with her own husband to create an escape from routine. Together Sarah and Richard create a ritual

of love to refresh their relationship, emphasizing the need of involving the Other in it. In *Betrayal* the male bond between the husband and the wife's lover finally develops, putting aside the wife in the triangular relationship. This male bond reasserts patriarchy because as the wife exercises her sexual freedom by having a lover outside the marriage, at the end she cannot escape the punishment for breaking the rule.

As much as Pinter condemns masculine arrogance and domination (in the way he treats Teddy and Devlin), he often speaks more sympathetically through his "weaker" male characters of men's desire to control the women's sexuality. In *Old Times* Deeley the husband helplessly lies on the lap of the unhappy wife, Kate. The image that may remind us of the Biblical scene of Jesus' dead body in his mother's embrace, welcoming him back to her womb, is as ambiguous as it is simple. The woman is put on a pedestal to compensate for their unhappiness because of the denial of their sexuality in a patriarchal society. Ruth in *The Homecoming* and Kate in *Old Times* are also somewhat deified by the male gaze because when their feet are off the ground their sexuality will remain veiled. The man as shown in Deeley's character cannot let the woman blossom sexually, and he, at his best can only lament on his incapacity to make her happy. Even when the woman is allowed to explore her sexual freedom, as in *The Collection*, *The Lover*, and *Betrayal*, true independence remains elusive. Though sexual infidelity promises to subvert the patriarchy, the existing social structure cannot be so easily overthrown. Thus marriage, in these Pinter plays, is inevitably a reassertion of patriarchy.

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