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INTRODUCTION

The concept of woman as mother-whore underlies many great works of literature. This concept is found from Aristophanes' Lysistrata to Shakespeare's Hamlet, from Chekhov's Three Sisters to Joyce's Dubliners to Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? As Martin Esslin notes, "The image itself -- the female as mother and as whore, split asunder into two contrasting characters or coexisting in the same person-- is, indeed, one of the basic archetypes of all literature."[1] This concept will be shown to be particularly present in the drama of Harold Pinter.

In terms of general emphasis, the first Pinter plays to be dealt with examine the role of the mother. The role of the whore is explored in the second set of plays. The character of Ruth in The Homecoming reveals a synthesis of these two roles. Before embarking on a lengthy analysis of the plays, however, the concept of the mother-whore must be clearly defined.

This term stems from the bivalent nature of the archetype of the Great Mother, which can be found throughout myth and literature. Essentially, it is the division of the woman into two roles: that of mother and that of whore. The first reflects the maternal side of the woman, while the second represents the sexual aspect of the woman. The development of the separation of these roles can be seen when one

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[1]Martin Esslin, The Peopled Wound: The Work of Harold Pinter (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1970), p. 142.

inspects both the anthropology and the psychology of women. The former aspect is studied both by Helen Diner in Mothers and Amazons: The First Feminine History of Culture, and by Erich Neumann in The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype. They both look into the evolution of women by studying the archetype of the Great Mother. In pursuing this end, Diner concentrates in searching history for "a general social stage of matriarchy",[2] while Neumann concludes that most women are related to this archetype by the fact that they all pass through a two-stage evolution. These two stages are called by him, the elementary and the transformative. In a similar vein, Esther Harding, a well known Jungian, elaborates a tri-stage development of women in The Way of all Women. Her categories reflect her psychological base. These are the naive, the sophisticated, and the conscious. An explanation of these two systems will reveal the characteristics of the woman as she assumes the role of mother and whore, and will demonstrate how and why this split occurs.

According to the Neumann scheme, a woman in the elementary stage is married (legally, or in her own eyes) to a man (or any male figure, including such possibilities as her father, brother, grandfather), and sees herself as a projection of that man, almost an extension of him. She lives vicariously through him and her sole job is to keep him happy. Neumann elaborates:

> Those women in whom the elementary character is dominant are related only collectively to their mate; they have no individual relation to him and experience only an archetypal situation in him. In a patriarchate, for example, the woman sees man as the archetypal father who begets children, who

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[2]Helen Diner, Mothers and Amazons: The First Feminine History of Culture (New York: Doubleday, 1973), p. xi.

> provides security -- preferably also in the economic sense -- for herself and her brood, and lends her a social persona position in the community.[3]

Thus, she derives her entire worth through him. As mentioned above, part of this system is to bear children. This duty, although a reflection of patriarchal domination, gives her the feeling that she has accomplished something. She tries to hold the children to herself, and at first she is successful because they are so dependent on her. Later, they will try to break away from her, but because she has grown so close to them, she cannot allow them to leave her. As Neumann explains:

> As elementary character we designate the aspect of the Feminine that as the Great Round, the Great Container, tends to hold fast to everything that springs from it and to surround it like an eternal substance. Everything born of it belongs to it and remains subject to it; and even if the individual becomes independent, the Archetypal Feminine relativizes the independence into a nonessential variant of her own perpetual being.[4]

Thus, the woman feeds on the child's dependence on her. In fact, "To nourish and protect, to keep warm and hold fast -- these are the functions in which the elementary character of the feminine operates in relation to the child."[5]

In art and literature, the woman in this stage is symbolized as being a vessel, for she can contain the child before and after birth by virtue of its dependence on her. Therefore things pertaining to

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[3]Erich Neumann, The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype, trans. by Ralph Manheim (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 36.

[4]Ibid., p. 25.

[5]Ibid., p. 32.

vessels or containers are related to women, i.e., rooms, caves and enclosures.[6] In this way gates and doors can be said to be "... the entrance to the womb of the maternal vessel."[7] And a woman's breasts which bring forth nourishment can be symbolized by a glass or a goblet.[8]

The transformative stage sees the woman as having borne a child, but being able to disassociate herself from the child. She is able to forge ahead, to experience life, and to eventually understand herself as she rises above and differentiates herself from the child (and her role as child-protector). The child in turn is able to function as a separate human being and thus, has successfully freed him or her self from the early maternal dependence. The wife is also able to freely relate to her husband in a fulfilling and meaningful way.

Esther Harding's tri-step development corresponds to Neumann's, but is based more in psychology. She begins by explaining the Genesis story: "It is a myth which represents woman as an unconscious part of man, wholly secondary to him, without any living spirit or soul of her own."[9] In this, the naive stage, the woman is wholly occupied with pleasing the mate; she does not have a chance, to voice or act out any needs she might have. In the second stage, the sophisticated, she is

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[6]Rooms do indeed have a particular importance in Harold Pinter's plays.

[7]Neumann, The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype, p. 46.

[8]This is especially significant in The Homecoming.

[9]Mary Esther Harding, The Way of all Women: A Psychological Interpretation (New York: Longmans, Green, 1939), p. 2.

more aware of herself and her ability to manipulate her mate, and uses this knowledge to her advantage:

> In the third stage, [the conscious] both the natural impulses and the dominance of ego-power are superseded by a newly recognized value or object which the woman accepts as of greater worth and significance than either the biological urge or the impulse to acquire personal power and satisfaction.[10]

The above two theories explain the natural tendencies and evolution of the woman in the role of mother (the maternal instinct). But what of the other side of the woman? According to Cirlot, "Mother-symbols are characterized by an interesting ambivalence: the mother sometimes appears as the image of nature, and vice-versa; but the Terrible Mother is a figure signifying death."[11] As Simone de Beauvoir explains:

> The saintly mother has for correlative the cruel stepmother, the angelic young girl has the perverse virgin: thus it will be said sometimes that Mother equals Life, sometimes that Mother equals Death, that every virgin is pure spirit or flesh dedicated to the devil.[12]

Cirlot continues, "... the Terrible Mother is the counterpart of the Pieta, representing not only death but also the cruel side of nature -- its indifference towards human suffering."[13] Thus, the woman has the ability to destroy as well as to bring forth life. Ann Jellicoe, in

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[10]Harding, The Way of all Women: A Psychological Interpretation, p. 25.

[11]J. E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, trans. by Jack Sage (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 218.

[12]Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, trans. and ed. H. M. Parshley (New York: Knopf, 1965), pp. 238-239.

[13]Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 218.

The Sport of My Mad Mother, gives testimony to this ambivalent nature of woman. Thus, the cruel side of the Great Mother, the ability to nullify life, is not necessarily accomplished by physical means alone. Simone de Beauvoir declares:

> She incarnates all moral values, from good to evil, and their opposites; she is the substance of action and whatever is an obstacle to it, she is man's grasp on the world and his frustration; as such she is the source and origin of all man's reflection on his existence and of whatever expression he is able to give to it; and yet she works to divert him from himself, to make him sink down in silence and death. She is servant and companion, but he expects her also to be his audience and critic and to confirm him in his sense of being; but she opposes him with her indifference, even with her mockery and laughter.[14]

Thus, the Terrible Mother can indirectly manipulate the men around her through her behaviour and attitude towards them. This ability is very evident in mythology, where the woman takes on the role of a fertility goddess.

Here, woman was worshipped for her inherent ability to bring forth life into the world. This phenomenon granted her respect and awe from the people around her, who existed by virtue of her reproductive power. Thus, woman had a certain amount of control over others. The goddess' powers of fertility link her with the elements of the universe, the animal and plant life, the changing of the seasons, the rotation of the very earth itself. Man, who wishes to be in harmony with these often threatening elements, must prove himself to be in harmony with the woman who controls these elements. Thus, he must show his adoration of her in various ways. In classical times, man

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[14] de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, p. 185.

worshipped the fertility goddess by a "... frenzied and orgiastic ritual".[15] He had to cater to her moods.

These moods and motivations are influenced by the woman's awareness of her double role of being at once a mother and a whore. This is not unusual, as Neumann explains:

> It is an essential feature of the primordial archetype that it combines positive and negative attributes and groups of attributes. This union of opposites in the primordial archetype, its ambivalence, is characteristic of the original situation of the unconscious, which consciousness has not yet dissected into its antitheses. Early man experienced this paradoxical simultaneity of good and evil, friendly and terrible, in the godhead as a unity; while as consciousness developed, the good goddess and the bad goddess, for example, usually came to be worshiped as different beings.[16]

Consequently, there has arisen from ancient times the bivalent archetype of the mother-whore. It still exists today in the unconscious and conscious mind of male and female alike.

In fact, most women do sense the tensions and pressures which fluctuate within themselves when and if they attempt to adapt themselves (simultaneously) to these various roles. Women also incorporate into these feelings the sexual undertones, which, in one way or another, do penetrate their personalities. They are aware that they can channel their sexual needs legally through the conventions of marriage. In this respect they fulfill their role as the procreator of the species, and allow themselves to subliimate their sexual needs into an established pattern of behaviour. Yet even in this situation problems may arise;

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[15] G. M. Kirkwood, A Short Guide to Classical Mythology (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1959), p. 64.

[16] Neumann, The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype, p. 12.

this can be seen when the woman realizes that her sexual and individual needs are not really being satisfied by her role as a mother. In this case, the other aspect of her nature may arise to dominate her personality. It might be seen that this newly arisen and dominant aspect is, in fact, the true nature of the woman who has, up until that moment, allowed it to be only a latent tendency. She has expressed this tendency by various means of sublimation; child-rearing, home decorating, functioning as a stereotypic wife rather than as an individual. This she has done to keep her husband. Barbara Warren elucidates:

> In trying to fulfill the artistic, romantic ideal, a woman gives up the reality of her own identity and creates for herself an inner void -- her own gray world of "living death" -- for she does not exist outside the man's image of her, or his worship of her. She is defined only by his poetic descriptions of her, by the images that he projects onto her.[17]

Helene Deutsch explains that in this respect "... masochism and passivity are essential elements of her psychology".[18] The woman who sees that she cannot have what she wants unless she acquieses to her husband's point of view becomes passive. To give up what she wants for her husband is masochistic. When the woman realizes her situation, her reaction is often expressed in destructive ways. Thus, she becomes the true Terrible Mother towards her husband and her children. Her sexual life also suffers:

> Here the ego ideal repudiates all sexual freedom, even the freedom to imagine. The inner perception of the sexual drive is condemned with a harsh "You are a whore!" and every stirring

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[17] Barbara Warren, The Feminine Image in Literature (Rochelle Park, New Jersey: Hayden Book Company, 1973), p. 9.

[18] Helene Deutsch, The Psychology of Women: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation (New York: Grune and Stratton, 1944), p. 241.

> assumes the form of the masochistic, humiliating admission, "I am a whore." Marriage becomes an ... obsessional acting out of prostitution accompanied by the severest conflicts and feelings of guilt.[19]

As far as the children are concerned, she can turn their relationship with her into an obsession in which she refuses to give any leeway. She becomes overprotective, allowing them no freedom. This undoubtedly creates problems for the children, who eventually must try to break away from their dependency on the mother. Much negative feeling is aroused, over and above the normal that is necessary for the initial break away. Thus, in order for the children to be independent, they must have been allowed a proper break away from the mother. This break away is dependent on the relationship the mother has to the father.

The relationship between man and wife is sometimes based on a union of opposites. Both Harding and Neumann explain the union of opposites in a couple by saying that a man is attracted to a woman inasmuch as her soul image reflects the needs of that man. Thus, a man relates to a woman through his "... personal as well as archetypal experience of the Feminine."[20] In fact the man loves the woman for what he lacks or needs in himself. She must complete and complement him. As Simone de Beauvoir says:

> The husband wants to find himself in his wife, the lover in his mistress, in the form of a stone image; he is seeking in her the myth of his virility, of his sovereignty, of his immediate reality.[21]

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[19]Deutsch, The Psychology of Women: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation, p. 259.

[20]Neumann, The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype, p. 33.

[21]de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, p. 677.

The woman must abide by these rules and comply. This extends to sexual favours as well. "Too often, in fact, the married woman is performing a pleasureless duty in order to gratify the man who supports her -- and this could well be classified as an act of prostitution."[22] On the other hand, if the woman has reached a level of 'sophisticated' consciousness, she might be able to manipulate her husband:

> Then, if her ego comes to consciousness, she makes a discovery, namely, that this seeming indifference makes her more desirable from the man's point of view; and she begins to use it as a definite trick, of which she is at least partly aware, to attract the man's attention and gifts.[23]

But if the woman is able to transcend to the level of consciousness, then she may be able to come to a realization of her inner needs, thus being better prepared to guide her life as an individual. Yet a woman, whether she be single, married and/or a mother, must still adjust herself to the conditions around her. She must retain her image as a woman, while being an individual as well as a wife and/or mother. She is influenced by those around her and it is through her interaction with these people that she can judge her success. Thus, her total personality is shaped by how she looks at herself and by how people look at her. "Woman is determined not by her hormones or by mysterious instincts, but by the manner in which her body and her relation to the world are modified through the action of others than herself."[24] In

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[22]Vern L. Bullough, The History of Prostitution (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1964), p. 2.

[23]Harding, The Way of all Women: A Psychological Interpretation, p. 11.

[24]de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, p. 682.

drama, where a series of events is visualized so that the audience will pay special attention to certain facts of life, women have been portrayed in various limited roles. These can be seen as relating to the archetype of the mother-whore and this is especially so of the drama of Harold Pinter.

The mother-figure, symbolized by the confines of the womb-room, can be seen in the early plays as either a real mother in A Night Out, or a substitute mother, as in The Room, The Birthday Party, Night School, or a Slight Ache. The mother-figure is present, even in plays where the characters are solely men, such as in The Dumb Waiter, The Caretaker, and The Dwarfs. In The Dumb Waiter, during the kettle conversation between Gus and Ben, Gus makes mention of his mother as an authority figure when he says, "I bet my mother used to say it."[25] In The Caretaker, Mick is obsessed with his mother's bed, while Aston is still trying to figure out why his mother allowed the doctors to administer either shock therapy or a lobotomy to him. In the same way, Len, in The Dwarfs, tries to mother both Mark and Pete. He sees himself as "the charlady", comments on new clothes, and offers food. Thus, Pinter provides a picture of the various attributes of the mother in his early drama. A Slight Ache serves as a transitional play between the mother group and the following series.

Pinter's next set of plays deals with married couples or couples living together in a semblance of marriage. In The Collection, The Tea Party, The Basement and The Lover, Pinter explores the pressures of

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[25]Harold Pinter, The Room and The Dumb Waiter (London: Methuen: 1973), p. 48.

marriage and the means whereby different couples work out their unique solutions to the problematic images the institution of marriage presents. In doing this, Pinter delineates the relationship a woman has to herself and to others, as woman, wife, and sometime mother. The emphasis throughout is on the sexual function of the woman, who is seen playing the role of the whore in a number of ways.

The Homecoming deals with the synthesis of the role of the mother and the role of the whore. Here Pinter shows the total ambiguity of Ruth as she vacillates from model-whore to mother of her own family to mother and whore for her husband's family. It is the culmination of his investigation of this theme. Evidence of it can still be found in his subsequent works, Landscape, Silence, Night, Old Times, and his latest play, No Man's Land, but it is no longer a major theme.

Thus, the product of Pinter's creative effort can be divided into three groupings. It will be shown that the development of the theme of the mother-whore is a major aspect of Pinter's work. Consequently, this thesis represents a full study of Pinter, the style, and the methods, all of which are reflected in his use of the theme of the mother-whore.

CHAPTER I

THE MOTHER GROUP

The first group of plays to be dealt with can be called the Mother Group. A predominant characteristic of this Group is the use of the womb-room, which alludes to the hold that the mother (real, imagined or substitute) exercises over family members. These family members are dominated to such an extent that they cannot function without the mother, or in any place but the home. The womb-room consequently symbolizes safe territory for its inhabitants. All life outside the room is menacing, and should be avoided. Unfortunately, this is not always possible; one must either leave the home to attend to the needs of everyday life, or someone manages to penetrate the family circle. Once this happens the pattern is interrupted. The residents are threatened: they are faced with the demand to adjust to new circumstances. The result of this confrontation should be change, but this is not always the case; witness the behaviour of Albert in the television play A Night Out (1960).

Albert Stokes, a mild-mannered clerk in the firm of Hislop, King and Martindale, lives at home with his mother. One Friday night he is forced to do something which he has never done before: he must go to an office party. The play opens with Albert trying to explain to his mum why he must attend this party and upset their weekly card game. It immediately becomes apparent that his mother is totally dependent on

Albert since her husband died. This manifests itself in her nagging behaviour towards him, treating him as if he were a young boy and not a mature man. She is completely possessive. The fact that Albert must leave represents a vital threat to her life as she has mapped it out. Her job has been to keep the house clean and to feed and clothe Albert. His job is to keep close to her. She has never allowed him to mature to the extent of being able to separate from her.

The home pattern is classically Oedipal. Albert has always fostered sexual feelings for his dominating mother, who has never allowed him to socialize with other women. She has subtly demanded that Albert take the place of her dead husband. Since there is a moral taboo on incest, this demand has been sublimated, submerged, sanctified, and transformed into the well-established tradition of the loving son taking care of the aging mother, who has early in life lost her beloved husband and breadwinner. Thus, it is not surprising that Albert's mother feigns ignorance when Albert informs her of his intention to go out that evening. Their dialogue is a masterpiece of cross purpose and <u>non sequiturs</u> which reveal the psychological position of each individual. Albert is intent on dressing for the party, and his mother avoids all reference to the possibility of his desertion:

> Albert: My tie. The striped one, the blue one.
> Mother: The bulb's gone in Grandma's room.[1]

Albert is quite aware that his mother knows exactly where his tie is, as it is her job to know where everything is. He knows she is

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[1]Harold Pinter, <u>A Slight Ache And Other Plays</u> (London: Methuen, 1973), p. 43. All parenthetical references to the play are taken from this edition.

stalling, trying to stop him from going, but he will not succumb to this blackmail. Once she realizes that she cannot stop him, she starts to lecture him on girls. She wonders out loud if he is, "... leading a clean life?" (p. 47). In doing so, Mrs. Stokes intimates that she wonders about his sexual life, the corollary being, if he is not spending the night with his mum, he must be spending it with another woman, the new object of his love and attention.[2] The seat of their conflict is obviously sexual. She is speaking from her fear of loss of control over Albert. If this should occur, she would lose all sense of purpose in life. She therefore constantly reminds him of his obligations to her and his dead father. This technique is finally successful, as he promises he will not be late.

Once free of his mother and the house, it is not long before Albert is reminded of his situation. As he comes upon his friends, they have just discussed his failure as a soccer player. This veiled threat to his virility is subtly compounded by his mates' knowledge that he is a momma's boy. Albert's reaction to their questions about his mum demonstrates his guilt complex. He does not understand why anyone would want to know how his mum was unless they suspected everything was not on the up and up. Despite this initial breakdown in the conversation, and Albert's feigning of a headache, they decide to go to the party.

At the party Albert tries to be sociable, but it is clear that he is not a lady's man, nor does he have the social graces. It is

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[2]The name Mrs. Stokes suggests her role at home is "keeping the home fires burning".

hard for him to function outside of his regular routines. He sits very quietly in a corner and lets the party pass over him. He is there out of obligation to the firm and nothing else. That Albert is the victim of a tasteless plot is unfortunate. This plot is cooked up by his soccer enemy Gidney, who challenges the girls to go over and intimidate Albert. When they begin to question him about his mother, he knows he is headed for trouble, and escapes to the bar. But this retreat is not successful, as they follow him. In a further evasion attempt he is obstructed by a toast to the man who is leaving the firm. It is at this time that the guest of honour firmly places his hand on Eileen (one of the office girls). Since Albert is standing close by, he is blamed for the misconduct. Again Gidney leaps at the chance of persecuting him, and pursues the incident until Albert is forced to leave the room. Albert tries to remain calm as Gidney hurls insult after insult at him until he is almost at the boiling point. Then when Gidney accuses Albert of being a mother's boy, Albert reacts violently. All the tension of his repressed feelings is let loose in one punch. For not only is he victimized at home by his mother, he is also victimized, unjustly, in the presence of all the office girls. His mother's shadow has pursued him. This pressure is too much for him and he flees.

On returning home, his mother, who has been waiting up for him, greets him with abuse and suspicion due to his dishevelled appearance. She immediately assumes Albert has been, "... mucking about with girls" (p. 71). This, of course, is not true; he has not been loyal to his mum. Her verbal abuse is an unending tirade of jealousies for his life outside the house, for his lack of attention to the home front, for his

non-acknowledgement of the care she takes of him, for his inability to recognize all the sacrifices she makes for him and finally, for not recognizing the things that she has kept hidden from him! Albert reacts with the same violence that we witnessed at the party. The stage directions are ambiguous; perhaps he attacks her with a clock. It is the only way to alleviate his pent up feelings of hatred toward the mother with whom he is obsessed.

The last act finds Albert trying to escape the whole evening by being with a whore. Unable to cope with his mother's domination and the accompanying sexual conflict, he tries at the least to fulfill himself sexually with a whore. But the whore proves to be just as domineering and overbearing as his mother. As soon as they enter her salon, she begins to boss him around. Their conversation centers around her "daughter", who is attending a select boarding school, and her former occupation as a continuity girl. Albert explains that he is an "assistant film director". He feels this gives him status and makes him appear more of a lady's man, especially as he picks up on the attitude the whore has about her former life. Apparently, she is under the impression that continuity girls sleep around a lot and therefore Albert must be experienced. As she continues to badger Albert about his cigarette ashes, his shoes, where he stands, and what he does in the room, he gets progressively more upset. Although the girl has no idea what has transpired that evening at the party or with his mother, the audience notices the veiled threat when Albert inquires about the clock on the mantlepiece. When she finally insults him by saying he looks "childish" (another reminder of his relationship with his mother),

"even retarded", he lets his cigarette fall to the ground and begins to take out on her the abuse and frustrations of a lifetime:

> Albert [seizing the clock from the mantlepiece]: DON'T MUCK ME ABOUT!
>
> She freezes with terror.
>
> See this? One crack with this ... just one crack ... [Viciously.] Who do you think you are? You talk too much, you know that. You never stop talking. Just because you're a woman you think you can get away with it. [Bending over her.] You've made a mistake, this time. You've picked the wrong man.
>
> He begins to grow in stature and excitement, passing the clock from hand to hand.
>
> You're all the same, you see, you're all the same, you're just a dead weight round my neck. What makes you think ... [He begins to move about the room, at one point half crouching, at another standing upright, as if exercising his body.] ... What makes you think you can ... tell me ... yes ... It's the same as this business about the light in Grandma's room. Always something. Always something. [To her.] My ash? I'll put it where I like! You see this clock? Watch your step. Just watch your step (pp. 82-83).

The whore has become at once his mother and all women. All women talk too much, nag too much, have too much for him to do: "Always something. Always something". He can never escape the tyranny of the overpowering all-encompassing mother. Albert's violence turns to psychological warfare when he discovers that the picture of the whore's daughter is none other than a picture of herself. It is all a fantasy that she has a daughter. The whore's preoccupation with perpetuating this fantasy ("My daughter. My little girl. My little baby girl" [p. 84]), suggests her own need to be a mother figure. That she is both mother and daughter to herself at one and the same time, indicates her own confusion. It is also significant that in the script, the whore is designated "girl", although she is presumably old enough to

have a child in boarding school. Perhaps Pinter is reinforcing the whore's immaturity already evinced by the mother-daughter fantasy. Once Albert has destroyed this fantasy he has conquered his first woman, and begins to order her around and abuse her. Having achieved this triumphant status he leaves. But as he has not, after all, "mucked about with girls", he is able to return home with a clear conscience.

Albert's mother, who is patiently waiting for him, characteristically forgives him all his trespasses and allows him back into the home. She immediately plans a diversion from the bad memory of the time when Albert raised his hand to his mum. They will go away on vacation, like a couple with marital problems who think a change of scenery will improve their relationship. And thus, Albert remains in the same situation in which we found him. For despite the fact that he was able to release his aggressions on the bossy whore, he cannot and will not do the same to his mother. He will not recognize his need to break away from her and start an independent life. The mother has successfully been able to keep him to herself and thus emerges as the most powerful character of the play.

Albert is not able to escape his mother nor is he able to carry out healthy heterosexual relations. When he seeks a woman it is one who has not been able to grow up herself. She is still the child in the picture, or a mother in her fantasies, and thus does not have an independent life either.[3]

Albert, in his obsession with his oedipal love for his mother,

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[3]Simon Trussler, The Plays of Harold Pinter: An Assessment (London: Victor Gollancz, 1973), p. 71.

has not been able to deal with women normally. Therefore he goes from one extreme to another, from his mother to a whore who turns out to be very much like his mother. As Esslin explains:

> Albert hates both aspects of the feminine principle: the sexual demand of the prostitute, i.e. woman as a challenge to his sexual potency, and the mother's claim to dominance over him as head of her family, as a person entitled to his respect, gratitude, and servitude.[4]

Thus, Albert is tied forever to his mum and their life in the house, despite the fact that he despises both.

Yet Pinter does not limit himself to portraying solely mothers as central figures in his plays. Mothers can take on many disguises; as Albert has said, "You're all the same, ... you're all the same." Pinter's first play, The Room (1960) presents a mother substitute. Hayman explains:

> Rose isn't a mother, but she's the prototype of all Pinter's chattering, fussing, nagging mother-figures; women never stop to listen, but they also never stop asking implicitly for the good-will of the husband or son or nephew or lodger.[5]

This can be seen in Rose Hudd, wife and "mother" to Bert Hudd, who lives in her room. Here she is safe from the dangers of the outside world, although she is still haunted by her fears. In the first page of the play, Pinter exposes this personality. She is conducting a monologue in which she explains that it is cold outside, "It's murder."[6] To

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[4]Martin Esslin, The Peopled Wound: The Work of Harold Pinter (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1970), p. 94.

[5]Ronald Hayman, Harold Pinter, World Dramatists (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1973), p. 19.

[6]Harold Pinter, The Room and The Dumb Waiter (London: Methuen, 1973), p. 7. All parenthetical references to the play are taken from this edition.

counteract the external threat, she keeps herself busy by tending to every need her husband has. (Bert reciprocates with silence). It is obvious that Rose's treatment of him is more that of a mother to a son than a wife to a husband. Her two main preoccupations, taking care of her husband/son, and staying indoors, especially away from the basement, are disclosed. All Rose's fears of the outside world center on the basement, where the walls "were running" (p. 8) with dampness.[7]

To escape these threats, Rose becomes, ".... completely devoted, completely absorbed in looking after the man."[8] She has created a warm environment for them both, and tries to control who comes in and goes out of it. She decides whether Bert should go out or stay in, whether he should sit by the fire and read the newspaper, and whether he should wear a jersey or not.[9] He is the son she never had, and she must keep him close to her in her warm room.

Rose tries to control not only Bert, but any man who steps into her room. This can be seen in her encounter with Mr. Kidd (i.e. a junior, or a son), the landlord. She begins by trying to emasculate Kidd in the presence of her husband. She asks him if he has a woman to help him with the janitorial work. Mr. Kidd answers pointedly, "I haven't got any woman". Rose counters by challenging, "I thought you had one when we first came" (p. 12). Mr. Kidd avoids this charge by

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[7]The dampness and running walls of the basement might represent a sexual sensation to her, which would simply compound Rose's fears of the outside world and life in general, as she is sexually repressed.

[8]Esslin, The Peopled Wound: The Work of Harold Pinter, p. 57.

[9]Hayman, Harold Pinter, p. 20.

changing the subject to furniture, and by noting that her room used to be his bedroom. In fact, Mr. Kidd is constantly changing the subject, from how well Bert "manipulates" his van,[10] to the house in general, referring especially to the dampness of the basement. He does this in order to try to control the conversation, for he knows of the fear Rose feels for the basement.

Suddenly Mr. Kidd admits (as much to himself as to Rose) that he has "lost track" of the house since his sister died. This could suggest that the relationship between sister and brother was incestuous. His reference to her appreciation of the " -- little things --" (p. 15) that he used to do for her is very similar to the language of two lovers. This suspicion is further strengthened by his fond recollections of her boudoir. Had there indeed been something sexual between them? Mr. Kidd further compares his sister to his "old mum" (p. 15), intimating an oedipal dimension. (There is never any mention of the father). Yet Mr. Kidd's inability or refusal to explain the cause of his sister's death leads Rose to doubt whether Mr. Kidd "... had a sister, ever" (p. 16).

Once Mr. Kidd exits, Rose turns to Bert and sees him off to work. As soon as Bert leaves, Rose tries to settle down to her regular routines, but is plagued by an uneasiness well expressed in the stage directions:

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[10]It is interesting to note that the word manipulate means "to operate with the hands, to use the hands" and comes from the Latin manipulus, meaning a handful. Perhaps Pinter purposely chooses this odd verb to describe Bert's driving ability in order to hint that Bert achieves sexual release through masturbation.

> ... She stands, watching the door, then turns slowly to the table, picks up the magazine, and puts it down. She stands and listens, goes to the fire, bends, lights the fire and warms her hands. She stands and looks about the room. She looks at the window and listens, goes quickly to the window, stops and straightens the curtain. She comes to the centre of the room, and looks towards the door. She goes to the bed, puts on a shawl, goes to the sink, takes a bin from under the sink, goes to the door and opens it. (pp. 16-17)

This uneasiness is further manifested by the intrusion of the Sands, a couple who are under the impression that there is a flat for rent in the building. They have dropped by to take a look at it and speak to the landlord.[11] This news is a total surprise to poor Rose, who becomes very nervous. In expressing her fear, she tries to emasculate the husband, Toddy (as she has tried with Kidd), seeking to fall back on familiar patterns that she has built up over a lifetime. She is doubly upset when she discovers that it is her room that is apparently for rent. The fact that this information came from someone in the basement triples her fears. To counteract this invasion she plays the rightful owner of the room. Here Rose acts the married woman to the hilt. She explains that her husband, who drives a van, is at work. She is very loyal to her husband, and resents Mr. Sands' innuendos that she knows Mr. Kidd in a way other than as a tenant should. The seed of despair has been planted, and once they leave, her troubled mind begins to wonder. It is not long before Mr. Kidd arrives to clear up the mystery of whether her room is vacant or not.

Their conversation is at cross purposes; Mr. Kidd wants to tell

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[11] The Sands may be understood as Rose and Bert thirty years ago. See Lois G. Gordon, Stratagems to Uncover Nakedness: The Dramas of Harold Pinter (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1970), p. 15.

Rose that someone in the basement wants to see her, and she wants to verify that her room is not vacant. When they finally begin to merge two monologues into a conversation, Rose resents Mr. Kidd's accusations that she might know men from other districts, one of whom wants to visit her. "What do you think I am?" (p. 27) she answers guiltily. One feels this is a reference to her being some kind of whore, either now or in the past. To bolster her moral standing, Rose states her loyalty to her husband. This prevents her from receiving any male visitor when her husband is out, and she cannot very well receive such a visitor when Bert is in. Because Mr. Kidd is so insistent, she finally consents to see this man. Rose must verify who it is, and confront her dread and fear of the basement.

As soon as Riley enters, Rose begins to threaten and emasculate him. She is suspicious of him because he comes from the basement, the seat of all her fears. Naturally, she is afraid of any changes she might be forced to undergo because of his presence. Just as Albert has proclaimed his hatred of all women due to their emasculating and overbearing dominance, so Rose takes out her aggressions on the blind Riley. She hates all men: "You're all deaf and dumb and blind, the lot of you. A bunch of cripples." Rose continues:

> They say I know you. That's an insult, for a start. Because I can tell you, I wouldn't know you to spit on, not from a mile off.
>
> Pause.
>
> Oh, these customers. They come in here and stink the place out. After a handout. I know all about it (p. 29).

This reference to "customers" leaves us with a sneaking suspicion that maybe Mr. Kidd was right about Rose after all. Despite all her verbal

abuse, Riley remains calm. He has a message from her father; he wants her to come home. This powerful notice gives Riley the upper hand. When Rose continues to try and dominate Riley, her conditioned reaction to any male, he cripples her with a cryptic use of her family nickname, Sal. In a rhythmic dialogue that moves from one character to the other, Riley invokes Sal's name five times. Riley continues, "I want you to come home" (p. 30), intimating that he is Rose's father. Rose is finally lulled into a confession. The name Sal has succeeded in breaking down all of Rose's barriers as she begins to admit that, "The day is a hump. I never go out" (p. 31). This suggests that she is less than happy with Bert and would prefer to return to her father. She is more than ready to submit to Riley's last request, "Come home now, Sal" (p. 31) when Bert enters after a particularly potent ride in his van. He is flushed with the exertion of the drive. His language is obviously sexual when he describes his trip:

> I caned her along. She was good. Then I got back. I could see the road all right. There was no cars. One there was. He wouldn't move. I bumped him. I got my road. I had all my way. There again and back. They shoved out of it. I kept on the straight. There was no mixing it. Not with her. She was good. She went with me. She don't mix it with me. I use my hand. Like that. I get hold of her. I go where I go. She took me there. She brought me back. (p. 32)

Here Pinter clearly exposes Bert's sublimation of his sexual energies into "manipulating" his van. Bert possesses the van, he does not relate to it. In the height of his sexual fulfillment, Bert proves Rose is his without a doubt by brutally murdering Riley, before Riley barely has a chance to say anything.[12] Suddenly Rose clutches her eyes and

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[12]Suggesting perhaps that Bert feared Rose's desertion, and did not want to give Riley a chance to explain himself.

declares her blindness as the play comes to an abrupt halt.[13]

Rose Hudd has not been able to reconcile her married life with her life as a child. She has never come to terms with the incestuous impulses she had for her father, or the jealousy she had for her mother. Whether Riley is her father is of no consequence because he represents her father to her. When Bert moves to "defend" Rose against the "intruder", he is acting for the first time like her husband, by trying to claim what is "rightfully" his property.[14] This suggests that despite the apparent authority Rose has over Bert, he is able to assert his "rights" and claim his woman:

> Yet in so doing, he acts out a part of Rose's deepest wishes and ambivalence: He attacks the primal figure for her. Rose may emasculate men in games, but when she is drawn into life and fantasy becomes deed, she cannot tolerate the reality that has been created. Her guilt -- not only from re-experiencing her buried feelings toward her father but also from acknowledging her everyday castration of males -- is so great, she cannot witness the slaughter (the reality), and hence it is she who becomes blind.[15]

Rose becomes blind because she is forced to recognize her latent sexual feelings for her father. She also cannot witness the "mythic struggle" for possession of her by both her father and her husband.[16] She has spent her whole adult life being the mother (and sexual partner) to her husband/son Bert while at the same time searching for her father. Yet

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[13]Kidd's relationship with his sister/mum foreshadows Rose's oedipal episode.

[14]Trussler, The Plays of Harold Pinter: An Assessment, p. 45.

[15]Gordon, Stratagems to Uncover Nakedness: The Dramas of Harold Pinter, p. 19.

[16]Trussler, The Plays of Harold Pinter: An Assessment, p. 33.

when given the opportunity to return home, Bert robs her of her last chance to confront and perhaps solve that situation. Rose's blindness is touched off by this realization.

Meg, in The Birthday Party (1958), is an extension of the type of mothering portrayed by Rose in The Room. The main difference between them is that Meg displaces her feelings of mothering on a substitute son rather than on her husband. Although she does treat Petey, her husband, like a child, by preparing his cornflakes and making sure he eats them, Meg is able to release most of her maternal feelings on Stanley. In fact, at the opening of the play it is thought that Stanley is their son. Meg states her preference for "little boys" when Petey reads out a birth announcement from the paper:

> Meg. What is it?
> Petey. (studying the paper). Er -- a girl.
> Meg. Not a boy?
> Petey. No.
> Meg. Oh, what a shame. I'd be sorry. I'd much rather have a little boy.
> Petey. A little girl's all right.
> Meg. I'd much rather have a little boy.[17]

Indeed she does have a little boy, even though he is only a boarder in their seaside rooming house. It is her responsibility to get the boy up in the morning, to serve him his tea in bed, and to force him downstairs to eat a good breakfast. As she says:

> ... I'm going to call him. (She goes to the door). Stan! Stanny! (She listens). Stan! I'm coming up to fetch you if you don't come down! I'm coming up! I'm going to count three! One! Two! Three! I'm coming to get you! (She exits and goes upstairs. In a moment,

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[17] Harold Pinter, The Birthday Party (London: Methuen, 1971), p. 11. All parenthetical references to the play are taken from this edition.

> shouts from STANLEY, wild laughter from MEG. PETEY takes his plate to the hatch. Shouts. Laughter. PETEY sits at the table. Silence. She returns). He's coming down. (She is panting and arranges her hair). I told him if he didn't hurry up he'd get no breakfast.
> Petey. That did it, eh? (pp. 13-14)

As can be seen, Meg treats Stanley as if he were her son. There is a family-like atmosphere which is evident in the numerical threat and the use of the affectionate diminuitive Stanny. And it is the denial of food from the mother-figure that finally forces Stanley to get up.

The bond between Stanny and Meg is soon revealed to be a mutual love/hate relationship in which each is acting out a part, one as a mother, the other as a son. Meg fulfills all the aspects of the nurturing woman, and Stanley receives all the attention willingly. Yet there is a distinct undertone of repressed sexuality in their conversation. This is also demonstrative of their power struggle, for while they are both attempting to suppress their sexual thoughts and oedipal needs for each other, they are at the same time sparring for dominance. Indeed, Stanley threatens to move to a "smart" hotel unless he receives a better breakfast from Meg. To further insult her, Stanley turns the conversation to Meg's duties as a wife and housekeeper. Just to keep her on her toes, he says she does not keep a clean house, nor does she take care of her husband. This is a cardinal insult, as Meg is a loyal wife and happy housekeeper. Under such pressure, Meg gives in and serves him a hot breakfast. Pressing forth his advantage, Stan shocks Meg with what she interprets as a sexual reference: he exclaims that the fried bread is "succulent". Meg warns him that he should not say that word in front of a married woman. Stanley answers, "Well, if I can't say it to a married woman who can I say it to?" (p. 17). Meg's

only response is to tell Stanley that he is "bad". Despite this insult, their dependency is supreme. Stanley casually admits it: "I don't know what I'd do without you" (p. 18).

Meg concentrates on serving the tea until Stanley teasingly accuses her of being a "succulent old washing bag" (p. 18). Meg accepts this double-edged insult/flattery with an equally ambiguous answer, "I am not! And it isn't your place to tell me if I am!" (p. 18). Whether there has been an actual sexual relation between them is left a mystery, but certainly Meg has "... had some lovely afternoons in that room" (p. 19). Yet Stanley recoils in disgust at the mere mention of them. What kind of man is Stanley? In fact, little detail is given about Stanley or his background, except that he once gave a concert to which his father did not come.[18] His past is vague; we are only given short clues about it. What we do see clearly is his role as the son of Meg, who is not above asking him in a motherly fashion if he has paid a visit to the bathroom that day!

This serene family scene is soon to be broken by two men who invade the room of Stanley and Meg. Stanley displays fear and guilt when Meg mentions that they are coming. He displaces these feelings by insisting that they are coming for her.[19] This is rather ominous foreshadowing, for they are, in fact, going to take Stanley away.

Just before the arrival of the two men, Stanley is given a chance to prove his manhood and escape from the clutches of his 'mother'. The

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[18]Hayman, Harold Pinter, p. 31.

[19]Esslin, The Peopled Wound: The Work of Harold Pinter, p. 83.

neighbour, Lulu, arrives, and he asks her to go away with him. When he is questioned about particulars, he is unable to supply them. It is impossible for him to have a relationship with a woman who is not a mother-figure. He is a washout, both physically and mentally. He has channelled all his sexual feelings toward Meg. Although these feelings about his 'mother' arouse intense guilt, he is so locked into the pattern that he cannot break away from it.[20]

When the two men, McCann and Goldberg, arrive, they waste no time in getting information from Meg about Stanley. It becomes obvious that they have come to get him for something he has done in the past. They know he has been hiding, and now that they have successfully located him they must complete their job. Meg projects her mother image when she discusses Stanley. At the same time the sexual undertone surfaces, to such an extent that Meg makes sure to verify that her husband sleeps with her in case McCann and Goldberg would think otherwise. (Her guilt is obvious). When Meg reveals that it is Stanley's birthday, they plan a party for him, as she says he is down in the dumps. Both McCann and Goldberg promise to "rescue" Stanley from this situation.

Stanley is very paranoid about the men, and Meg has to reassure him that their routine will not be interrupted. He will still get his tea in the morning, and they will leave soon. To divert Stanley, she gives him his birthday present, a toy drum. This is the kind of present one would give a little boy, and Stanley faithfully acts out this role. But while beating the drum, he rouses himself to an intense

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[20] Ibid., p. 84.

sexual pitch which expresses at once his love and hostility towards the giver, a woman he can and should outgrow, but who exercises such a powerful hold on him that he cannot be freed from it.[21]

The meeting of the two men and Stanley is inevitable. Stanley displays all the paranoia of a hunted man. First he tries to pump McCann for information. McCann's loyalty to the firm and to Goldberg, however, is untouchable. Then he tries to insult Meg. McCann resents Stanley's accusations of Meg's craziness. McCann is about to become rough with Stanley when they are interrupted by Goldberg. Goldberg takes a different tack. He comes across as anybody's benevolent grandfather praising his childhood, his mom and birthday parties in general in order to break Stanley down. Yet Goldberg is also unable to free himself of the mother dependency. His references to the past refer to the cleanliness, the virginity, of the nursery. This conversation succeeds in tearing Stanley down. He is unable to hear such talk, perhaps because it conjures up memories of his mother, memories to which he was never able to adjust, let alone understand. Stanley's reaction is to bully the two men out of their rooms and the boarding house. He is the son defending the parents against an intruder. This much he can try to do. Yet, he knows that they have come for him, and that Meg and Petey are extraneous to the issue.

McCann and Goldberg's verbal attack of Stanley brings out all his guilt. All the things that he has been afraid of, all the things that have kept him holed up in that boarding house, everything he tried

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[21] Ibid., p. 76.

to forget, especially about his wife (?) and his mother, finally surfaces. There is much reference to sex as McCann and Goldberg hurl out such abuses as: "You contaminate womankind", "Mother defiler!", "You verminate the sheet of your birth" (p. 51), suggesting that Stanley has done 'something' to his mother. He has never been able to adjust to the sexual feelings he had for his mother, and deals with them by forcing her into a sanatorium. In Meg, he has found a mother substitute who is only too glad to play the double role of mother and untouchable sex object for him.[22]

This is clearly seen at Stanley's birthday party. To begin with, Meg wears a dress her father gave her. That she should still have such a dress shows that she has not come to terms with her attachment to her father. Meg's speech in honour of Stanley is a classic example of mother/son dependency:

> Well -- it's very, very nice to be here tonight, in my house, and I want to propose a toast to Stanley, because it's his birthday, and he's lived here for a long while now, and he's my Stanley now. And I think he's a good boy, although sometimes he's bad. (An appreciative laugh from Goldberg). And he's the only Stanley I know, and I know him better than all the world, although he doesn't think so. ("Hear -- hear" from Goldberg). Well, I could cry because I'm so happy, having him here and not gone away, on his birthday, and there isn't anything I wouldn't do for him, and all you good people here tonight .... (She sobs). (p. 55)

Here she takes possession of Stanley once and for all, claiming him as her son, although, of course, she did not have anything to do with his birth. She is vicariously celebrating this event, in an attempt to

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[22] Unbeknownst to Stanley, Meg is involved with the image of her own father and the oedipal dimension it presents, as it is seen that she wears a dress her father gave her to the birthday party. Again, the daughter role, with its overtones of incest, is invoked by Pinter in the character of Meg.

fasten between them a non-existent umbilical cord. She treats him as a bad little son and as a good little son, and claims to know him better than anyone. This is certainly true, since she knows how dependent he is on her. She hopes that he will not go away, and that he will spend the rest of his life with her, so that they may celebrate many birthdays together. Her summation demonstrates the fact that she will do anything and everything to keep 'her' Stanley happy and dependent.

Goldberg, in his answer to her speech, uncovers his own mother dependency, "... What's happened to the love, the bonhomie, the unashamed expression of affection of the day before yesterday, that our mums taught us in the nursery?" (p. 56). McCann says that they are gone with the wind, but Goldberg answers that up until this moment he would have thought that that was true. Yet Meg's speech has changed his opinion by demonstrating her overbearing love for Stanley. Goldberg remembers when someone felt that for him. Because he never conquered this dependency he replies, "... But just now, I say just now, the lady of the house said her piece and I for one am knocked over by the sentiments she expressed. Lucky is the man who's at the receiving end, that's what I say. (Pause)" (p. 56). The pause represents his chance to think over what he has just said. He recalls his own dependency, adjusts to the fact that Stanley has never overcome his seeking a mother-figure wherever he has gone, and plans an appropriate strategy.

The party continues with the drinks being served. The toast to Stanley which has just taken place represents an exchange of liquids which sees the pairing off of two couples for sex play; Meg kisses Stanley. Lulu's empty glass is filled by Goldberg, and McCann finally

takes over Meg's glass. Pinter has created a complicated arrangement of interdependency in the intertwining of these characters. Meg is the mother and 'lover' of her 'son' Stanley. At the same time she looks to McCann as a father-figure. She is wearing the dress her father gave her, and she is trying to seduce McCann. Goldberg plays the part of Lulu's father/lover. Lulu, a big bouncy girl, spends much time on her 'father's' lap. Goldberg reveals to her that he was married, but that his wife is dead. In discussing his wife and their life, he describes certain routines which are similar to the ones he talked about concerning his mother. This forces us to merge the mother and the wife, which he has obviously (consciously or unconsciously) done. He is now seducing his daughter in the person of Lulu, "Maybe I played piggy-back with you" (p. 60). Lulu is not blind to this, for she says, "I've always liked older men. They can soothe you" (p. 60) or "You're the dead image of the first man I ever loved" (p. 61). While Goldberg is stealing Lulu from Stanley and McCann is taking Meg, Stanley is just an observer. With the introduction of blind man's buff, Stanley takes revenge on the loss of both his mother and his one chance for a real relationship with a girl (Lulu).[23] In the dark, he attempts to strangle Meg, and when the lights go up, Lulu is lying spread-eagled on the table. Stanley has tried to revenge his impotence by physically attacking the 'mother', Meg, and then by sexually attacking the

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[23]This is another example of Pinter's preoccupation with the symbolic relationship of blindness to incest, reminiscent of Rose in The Room.

available 'whore', Lulu.[24] Because of this trauma, Stanley is reduced to uncontrollable giggles. McCann and Goldberg converge on him and bring the scene to an end.

The next morning, Meg carries on as usual, falling back on the breakfast routine. All is not the same. Stanley has suffered a nervous breakdown: pressured by McCann and Goldberg he has also been forced to come to terms with his oedipal obsession by confronting his 'mother', Meg, with an unsuccessful rape attempt on her whorish side as portrayed by Lulu. Whereas Rose goes blind when confronted with her oedipal dilemma, Stanley goes crazy. Consequently, he will soon be carried away in a big black car to be 'taken care' of by Monty, the doctor of the organization. Meg is not informed of this, and it is interesting to note that Petey tries to defend Stanley, offering to take care of him. It seems that Petey wants to preserve their routines as much as Meg does. Perhaps he is afraid that if Stanley leaves, Meg will shift all her mothering to him. At any rate, he is unsuccessful in keeping Stanley for Meg.

A brief scene exposes the temporary breakdown of Goldberg, who is also suffering from the scene he has witnessed. Although he was sexually successful with Lulu, this victory is not without guilt. He is plagued by memories of his wife and mother, so much so, that it is impossible for him to venture an opinion of the world. He is half out of this world when he asks McCann to blow the breath of life back into him. Once Goldberg is revived, he is ready to face the world anew. Stanley is brought down and interrogated once more. He is told that he

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[24]Katherine H. Burkman, The Dramatic World of Harold Pinter: Its Basis in Ritual (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1971), p. 33.

will be re-oriented, and is subsequently removed from the boarding house and his 'mum'. When Meg returns from her shopping, she acts as if nothing has happened. Petey does not challenge this. She explains how she was "the belle of the ball," (p. 87) although her pause suggests that she is not sure if she was or not. She now focuses all her attention on Petey, who is left alone to bear the brunt of Meg's mothering.

In Night School (1960), Pinter's first radio play, the role of the mother is split between two aunts, Annie and Milly. The role of the whore is played by their lodger, Sally. The two aunts vie for dominance throughout the play, but it is evident that, "Milly is the dominant one, Annie the one who is dominated but does all the work, and derives some satisfaction from ritual protests against her subordination."[25] Sally says she is a school teacher who attends evening classes. It is soon revealed that she is a hostess at a night club, as well as a part time call girl who is not above going away on weekends with customers.

When Walter comes home from a nine months' stay in prison, his aunts greet him with open arms. They have performed all their motherly duties faithfully; the house is clean for his homecoming, and there are plenty of cakes for him to eat. There is a mutual interest in catching up on all the months of separation, and they dote on his every word. He too is fond and considerate of them, perhaps more than other 'sons' have hitherto been in Pinter plays. Nonetheless, there is the ever-present sexual undertone which surfaces at tea with the ambiguous

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[25] Trussler, The Plays of Harold Pinter: An Assessment, p. 92.

offering of the jam tarts:

ANNIE. I bet you never had a tart in prison, Wally.
WALTER. No, I couldn't lay my hands on one.[26]

He might be able to at the present moment, however, for his aunts tell him that they have rented his room to a young woman whom they think to be a school teacher, but who is in fact a call girl at a local club. The aunts are ignorant of Sally's night-time occupation (perhaps Wally does not have to suffer under the same illusion), and since they needed someone they could mother, they do not question Sally. The aunts are overjoyed with her company. Sally also saves them money by paying for the room. And she is neat, terribly clean and highly dependable. Sally has even taken it upon herself to decorate the room with frills and a coverlet.

Walter feels that his position in the family is being challenged. He has lost possession of his room, and his aunts have replaced him with a girl. His irritation surfaces when his aunts reproach him for his inability to succeed in his 'trade':

WALTER: I can't believe it. I come home after nine months in a dungeon.
ANNIE: The money's been a great help.
WALTER: Have I ever left you short of money?
MILLY: Yes!
WALTER: Well ... not through my own fault. I've always done my best.
MILLY: And where's it got you?
WALTER: What's this, you reproaching me? (p. 87)

To get back at them, Walter informs his aunts that they are being taken "for a ride" (p. 90) because they are not charging enough. As this

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[26]Harold Pinter, Tea Party and other plays (London: Methuen, 1970), p. 84. All parenthetical references to the play are taken from this edition.

line of attack proves useless, Walter decides to meet the woman who is living in his room. He employes the pretext of looking for his "case" to gain entrance into the room.

This meeting is very casual (on the surface). Despite the veneer of cordiality, Walter manages to get across the fact that Sally is sleeping in his bed, in his room, and that she has replaced him in the eyes of his aunts. Sally responds by telling Walter how much his aunts dote on him and care for him. Sally is rather taken aback when Walter asks her if she teaches ballet. She answers, "I don't dance" (p. 92). The pause which appears after her statement suggests otherwise, but this is not revealed until later.

The much talked about landlord, Solto, comes to tea. After he gets through the pleasantries with Walter, he speaks glowingly of his experiences in opening up the northern territory of Australia. Then he explains his views on marriage, which conform with the attitude of men who see marriage as a trap. He goes on to complain about his tax problems. When Annie (who seems interested in him, as she keeps harping on the subject of marriage) advises him that a wife would help him with his tax forms, Solto answers, "That's what I'm afraid of" (p. 95). One wonders what he has to hide? His sexual experiences are also brought into light: "The lady who first seduced me, in Australia -- she kicked her own husband out and gave me his room" (p. 95). It is interesting to note that it was the married woman who seduced the

single man, and not vice versa.[27] Since Milly and Annie are not particularly interested in the sexual exploits of Solto, they immediately change the topic by asking Solto if he will lend money to Walter. Solto refuses, but Walter still has a favour to ask of him. Would he locate the girl in the photo that he has found in his room? Solto, aroused by the photo, promises to do so.

Later that day, Walter confronts Sally in 'their' room. She offers to share the room with him. Since she is out most of the day and nights, he may use it while she is gone. But Walter has other plans. He wants to have an affair with her. His aunts also have plans for the couple: they hope the two will get married. Walter begins his project by trying to impress Sally with lies about previous experiences as a gunman, an archeologist, and a married man. She soon sees through his act. Since she is around men all the time, she can read them well. She senses his sexual needs and repressions when he says that he has never been in his room with a girl before. She tells him that he seems uncomfortable with her. When the tables turn and he questions her, she is non-committal. She says she leads a quiet life and likes to stay in her room. She has no social life. With this admission, Walter sees his chance to ask her out. Her response is less than enthusiastic. He begins to lose patience with her attitude. Consequently, he tries to control her by forcing her to obey his commands, much as Albert does

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[27] Solto's seducer is an example of a woman who is able to pursue an improved sexual situation. It is a foreshadowing of Flora in A Slight Ache. It is also interesting to note that the exchange was in terms of a room; the new sexual partner usurps the territory of the old. Again, it is similar to Edward's loss of his position in his house to the matchseller.

with the whore he meets:

WALTER. Cross your legs.
Pause.
Uncross them.
Pause.
Stand up.
Pause.
Turn round.
Pause.
Stop.
Pause.
Sit down.
Pause.
Cross your legs.
Pause.
Uncross your legs.
Silence. (pp. 105-106)

His commands to cross and uncross her legs are of a definite sexual nature.[28]

Pinter follows up this encounter by showing Sally in her role as nightclub hostess, where she must obey the commands of her boss Tully, an old friend of Solto. Tully introduces Sally to Solto. In their conversation, Sally wonders how Solto was able to ask for her specifically. Solto explains about the photo, revealing Walter's name in the process. Although she makes no outward reaction, one feels she has already decided to change lodgings.

As soon as Walter is told by Solto that he could not locate the girl, his aunts reveal to him the fact that she has left. Annie and

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[28]Compare the sexuality of the relationship of Disson and his secretary in the desk scene in Tea Party.

Milly are unable to find a wife for their Walter, and Walter is left with a room empty of his needs. Thus, once more the 'son' rests under the influence of the substitute 'mother' (in this case two aunts who ostensibly play one person), and is unable to carry through a relationship with a woman other than his 'mother'. An older, more experienced man successfully seduces the 'girl' he wants, leaving him at home with his aunts.[29] He has left a prison only to return to the prison-like enclosure of his 'mother' and their house. He cannot break out of this symbolic prison in which he is controlled by his aunts and the memory of his unsuccessful wooing of Sally.

There are no women characters in The Caretaker (1960); only the memory of certain women is invoked. Nonetheless, the memory of these women serves to affect the characters, and is therefore an important element of the play. The mother of Mick and Aston seems to conform to the pattern of the other Pinter mothers hitherto discussed, although there is not much mention of her duties as housekeeper and giver of food. There is, however, much reference to the oedipal connection of the sons to their mother, which links her very clearly with the other Pinter mothers. The whore-like side of women (again completely separate from the mother image), is portrayed by Davies' wife and by a woman who propositions Aston. In both cases, as has been seen before, the men are incapable of accepting this sexual relationship. The memories of these incidents will be examined here in detail.

The Caretaker begins with the development of a curious ménage a

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[29] This is analogous to Stanley's inability to seduce Meg and Lulu, who are subsequently won by McCann and Goldberg.

trois in which the two brothers, Mick and Aston, take in a man whom they ostensibly say will be the caretaker for the house in which Aston lives and Mick owns. It soon becomes evident that there is a power struggle going on. The caretaker, Davies, plays one brother off against the other in an attempt to secure his position in Aston's room, the only livable section of the house.

In Act Two there is much reference to Mick and Aston's mother. When Mick is questioning Davies about which bed he slept in the night before, he reveals, "That's my bed."[30] Mick also says that it was "... my mother's bed" (p. 35). This seems to suggest incest on Mick's part, and a sexual threat to Mick's mother on Davies' part. Certainly Davies is immediately insulted by this veiled accusation, and his quick reply reflects this: "Well she wasn't in it last night!" (p. 35). Davies feels he must instantly clear himself of any supposed sexual act that could have taken place. Despite Davies' answer, Mick feels he must demonstrate the sacredness of her position. He warns Davies, "Keep your hands off my old mum .... Don't get out of your depth, friend, don't start taking liberties with my old mother, let's have a bit of respect" (p. 35). Mick feels that Davies should give her the respect that she deserves. After all, she is Mick's mum, and should receive all the proper status that is due a mother. That Mick slept in his mother's bed intimates an oedipal dimension which prompts Mick to feel guilty about his mum. From this stems his gruelling interrogation of Davies who has also slept in her bed. Mick does not want to

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[30]Harold Pinter, The Caretaker (London: Methuen, 1968), p. 35. All parenthetical references to the play are taken from this edition.

share the memory of his mum with Davies. Therefore he double checks: "Never seen my mother before either, I suppose?" (p. 35). The thought that Davies might have violated his mum's bed urges Mick to continue: "I think I'm coming to the conclusion that you're an old rogue. You're nothing but an old scoundrel" (p. 35). He persists in hurling insults at Davies until he adjusts to what has just happened.[31] Since the subject of the memory of his mother and the concomitant oedipal dimension is such a touchy one, Mick veers away from it by centering on his power base, the fact that he owns this building, and if Davies wants to stay, he must pay rent.

Yet another aspect of Mick and Aston's mother is revealed in a confessional conversation between Aston and Davies. Aston explains his life to Davies in a morbid monologue of despair and loneliness. Aston was always the outsider, the exuberant conversationalist with no one to listen to him. He was never able to get his point across, nor were his opinions considered worth listening to. He was upsetting his peers at work and at the pub so much that they had him locked up in a mental institution. When the doctors threatened him with either shock treatment or a lobotomy (it is never made clear which), he did not feel menaced, as he was sure his mother would never sign the papers granting permission. His mother, however, did sign the papers, consigning Aston to a life of uncertainty. Why his mother did this remains a mystery no amount of conjecture can change. Esslin suggests that, "... The doctors in the mental hospital where Aston was treated castrated him --

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[31]Perhaps this alludes to a guilt transference. Mick could be insulting himself for his oedipal feelings.

to punish him for his oedipal desires -- with the consent and connivance of his mother."[32] Since Mick seems to suffer from an oedipal complex as well, this seems a plausible reason. Yet Aston does not seem openly aware of this oedipal dimension; his mother can do no wrong. He projects his revenge on someone from work whom he is sure complained about him. As with Mick, his mother is above reproach.

Aston has had other out of the way experiences with women. These reveal the sexual or whore side of the woman, and are completely separate from his mother. Aston tells Davies the story of the time when he was sitting in a cafe, minding his own business, when a lady struck up a conversation with him. Being polite and friendly, he engaged in a discussion with her. But it was soon interrupted by the most blatant proposition. Aston explains, "...Then suddenly she put her hand over to mine ... and she said, how would you like me to have a look at your body?" (p. 25). Aston was shocked by this bold offer, became frightened, and quickly withdrew. After all, he lost his brains (or according to Esslin, his testicles) because he was too open, yet here is someone propositioning him in broad daylight. The sexual openness is too real for him. It disorients him. Since he has already been punished by his mother for his oedipal desires, he is incapable of accepting or understanding an aggressive sexual proposition. Davies is similarly incapacitated. A week or so after they had been married, he discovered a pile of his wife's unwashed underclothing lying in the saucepan used for cooking vegetables. He too could not completely accept the

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[32] Esslin, The Peopled Wound: The Work of Harold Pinter, p. 112.

sexuality of his wife, represented here by her "tainted" underwear. Davies had a related aversion to "dirt" and to sex, and he leaves his wife as soon as she displays any bad habits. He obviously could not adjust to a "normal" heterosexual relationship.

Thus, all three men have had unusual contacts which leave them suspicious of the opposite sex. Above all, both Aston and Mick are still ruled by the memory of a powerful mother, which prevents them from establishing any healthy heterosexual relationship. Davies is also incapable of this, as can be seen in the brief episode with his wife. Consequently, they are trying to put order into their lives by other means; Davies says he will go to Sidcup in order to obtain his papers so that he can qualify for the position of caretaker, Aston says he will build a shed, which he is incapable of doing, and Mick says he will turn the house from a shabby place into a palace, which is also an impossibility. Eventually, Davies is turned out of the house when he loses his position with both brothers, who are left with the memory of their mother and with the fantasy that they will fix up the house.

The Dumb Waiter (1960), is another play in which Pinter invokes the memory of a mother. In this case, it is the memory of her authority on things to do with the home, specifically the kitchen, that is used to try and solve an argument.

Gus and Ben, hired henchmen, are sitting in a room awaiting instructions for their next job. As a team, Gus plays the part of the servant, while Ben is his master. Gus has become disenchanted with the job. He begins to question everything he does, the organization which he works for, his boss, even the victims. Nothing is right for

him: there is no gas for the stove, the toilet does not flush, the sheets are not clean, they are never allowed to go out. The list goes on and on. Despite the fact that he has been doing this for years, their last job, the murder of a young girl, proved too much for him. The way she "spread" after they murdered her, forced him to re-evaluate his whole life.[33] It is interesting to note that the murder of a girl triggered Gus into a fresh awareness of just what he was doing with his life. Consequently, he became a maladjusted worker. It is because of this mood that his boss is involved in verbal and semantic squabbles with him. Ben is trying to maintain his authority over Gus, while Gus is questioning the whole set up, the moral issue of killing someone, what happens after they leave, and who gets their room for them.

One of their main confrontations is the dispute over the kettle used for their tea (a pre-murder ritual). Ben tells Gus to "light the kettle," and Gus says that he can light the stove but not the kettle. It becomes a pitched battle for control and dominance. In trying to verify who is right, Gus says that his mother probably said "put on the kettle." The reference to a mother is a direct challenge to Ben, for mothers represent the ultimate authority figure on kettles. Gus uses the mother image to aid him in his revolt against Ben. Ben, who is very upset by this reference, strips Gus of the position he gains by demanding to know when Gus has seen his mother last. This immediately begins to deflate Gus, who can hardly answer the question before he is

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[33]Harold Pinter, The Room and The Dumb Waiter (London: Methuen, 1973), p. 53. All parenthetical references to the play are taken from this edition.

again interrupted by Ben: "Well, what are you talking about your mother for?" (p. 48). Ben has successfully squelched Gus's small rebellion when he takes the mother image away from Gus. To finalize his authority, Ben asserts his control by recalling to Gus that he, Ben, is the senior partner. The play continues to elaborate on Gus's questions about the job as it becomes increasingly obvious that Gus is to be the victim in this room. This is the punishment for his re-evaluated conscience.[34]

Len, in The Dwarfs (1960), a play originally written for radio, suffers a re-evaluation of consciousness when he passes from his attempted role of substitute mother to his friends, through madness, to the chance of individuality. The character of Len, at the beginning of the play, is reminiscent of Pinter's mother substitute figures. Although the play itself centers around Len's search for identity, his relationship with his two mates suggests that he tries to act as a substitute mother to Mark and Pete. This role is one of the stabilizing elements in his life. The sooner he loses contact with it, the quicker he drifts into insanity.

Esslin says that the play shows the "... identity crisis that marks the transition from adolescence to maturity."[35] Pinter explains that, "It's a play about betrayal and distrust."[36] Both are accurate.

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[34]James R. Hollis, Harold Pinter: The Poetics of Silence (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971), p. 50.

[35]Esslin, The Peopled Wound: The Work of Harold Pinter, p. 123.

[36]Gordon, Stratagems to Uncover Nakedness: The Dramas of Harold Pinter, p. 51.

Len is learning to be himself rather than a substitute mother to others. This involves rejecting his role as substitute mother to Mark and Pete. His method of breaking away from this stereotype is to turn one friend against another. Len uses the tension between Mark and Pete in order that he might have a better chance to relate to them separately.

Len is characterized by the now familiar aspects of the mother. He makes and serves the tea to Pete (although he cannot supply good milk). He worries about Mark's hunger when he returns: "Ten to one he'll be hungry."[37] Later he offers them both beigels. The others are accustomed to his duty of supplying food for them. Witness Mark's request: "I thought you might give me some bread and honey" (p. 99). Len also notices that Mark's place is dirty, and when Pete accuses him of being a neglectful "gentleman's gentleman," Len answers in an ambivalent way typical of Pinter's substitute mother figures: "Well, if I'm his gentleman's gentleman, I should have been looking after the place for him" (p. 93). He even plays the mother to the imaginary dwarfs when he says that they have gone on a picnic and left him to clean up. He refers to himself as "a bloody charlady" (p. 106). As substitute mother he comments on Mark's new suit:

> MARK: What do you think of the cloth?
> LEN: The cloth? /He examines it, gasps and whistles through his teeth. At a great pace./ What a piece of cloth. What a piece of cloth. What a piece of cloth. What a piece of cloth.
> MARK: You like the cloth?
> LEN: WHAT A PIECE OF CLOTH!

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[37]Harold Pinter, A Slight Ache And Other Plays (London: Methuen, 1973), p. 94. All parenthetical references to the play are taken from this edition.

MARK: What do you think of the cut?
LEN: What do I think of the cut? The cut? The cut? What cut! What a cut! I've never seen such a cut! [Pause.] [He sits and groans.] (pp. 97-98)

Pinter even draws an analogy between Len and Eve (the original ambiguous mother-figure) when he has Len say, "This is a funny-looking apple" (p. 103), and later when he accuses Mark of being "... a snake in my house" (p. 107).

Pinter elaborates Len's preoccupation with sex when he shows Len interrogating Pete:

LEN: Where did you get those shoes?
PETE: What?
LEN: Those shoes. How long have you had them?
PETE: What's the matter with them?
LEN: Have you been wearing them all night? (p. 95)

Len must find out what Pete has been doing during the evening, while he himself explains, "As far as I'm concerned the only thing you can do in the night is eat" (p. 94). Len must remain the chaste mother-figure, who sublimates sexuality by eating. Pete, on the other hand, is capable of sexual activity. Therefore Len demands of Pete, "What are you doing with your hand?" (p. 95). Pete answers, "[coolly]: What do you think I'm doing with it? Eh? What do you think?" (p. 95). Len in his role as substitute mother could not possibly answer anything else but, "I don't know" (p. 95). Len is suspicious of all sexual activity. Every incident must be verified for him, in order to make sure that no one is doing anything naughty.

Both Pete and Mark resent the advice that Len gives them, and thus reject it. This forces Len to create new friends, the dwarfs. It is the struggle he has with the dwarfs that helps Len to adjust to

himself and his new role as an individual man. This is seen in the last speech where he is saying a fond farewell to the imaginary dwarfs and replacing them with the more natural environment of a calm, clear, clean, exterior in which a single flower is blooming.

The rites of the summer solstice, June 21st, provide the efflorescent setting of A Slight Ache (1959), originally written for radio. It is Pinter's first deviation from the mother image, for, although there is a woman, Flora, who plays the role of the mother to her husband, Edward, the undertones of sexuality are starting to surface with greater intensity than we have seen before. Edward, like other Pinter husbands and sons, is reserved. He is an academician who spends most of his time at home writing papers on the Belgian Congo or on philosophy. Their tranquil life together is soon to be interrupted by an intruder, a matchseller, who has parked himself on the edge of their property and has not moved for months. Edward feels threatened by the existence of such a person, and tries to discover both why he is there and who he is.

The couple is introduced to the reader at their breakfast table on the patio. Flora, true to her name, is talking about the flowers and plants in the garden. Their names are distinctly sexual: honeysuckle, convolvulus, and clematis. Flora seems to be well acquainted with them, while Edward does not recognize one from the other. He says, "I don't see why I should be expected to distinguish between these plants. It's not my job."[38] There seems to be a tug of war

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[38]Harold Pinter, A Slight Ache And Other Plays (London: Methuen, 1973), p. 10. All parenthetical references to the play are taken from this edition.

going on, which ostensibly centers on knowing the garden, but in fact supposes different lifestyles entirely.

Flora says the weather is beautiful, while Edward says it's treacherous. Flora says wasps bite, and Edward says they sting. The introduction of the wasp is a chance for Edward to prove his masculinity. He might not be able to tell the difference between flowers, but he is able to kill a wasp. He victoriously corners the wasp in a jam pot, hoping it will suffocate. No sooner has he accomplished this than his wife/mother Flora is aware of some problem in his eyes. Edward complains that he has a slight ache in them, as if he had not slept. When Flora asks him whether he has slept or not, the sexual rift between the couple becomes obvious, especially as he says that he slept the whole night uninterruptedly, as he always does. This conversation is disrupted by the fact that the wasp has started to crawl out of the hole in the jam pot. After asking Flora's permission to kill the wasp, he proceeds to scald it to death with the tea water. Having accomplished this feat, Edward feels invigorated, and suddenly exclaims that it is a beautiful day.

This resurgence of energy is shortlived, for Edward spies the matchseller standing at the edge of his property. Edward's puzzled reaction reflects his gut fear of the mysterious matchseller, for in Edward's eyes there is no logical explanation for the matchseller's existence. Flora immediately sees that Edward is threatened. She tries to calm him down by admitting that she has nodded to the matchseller; he seems harmless enough to her. But Edward cannot accept this; his morning has already been ruined. The rest of his day is spent in

the scullery spying on the matchseller. When Flora discovers him spying, she demands to know why he is there. He explains that he is looking for some notes. According to Flora, it is not his habit to keep notes there. The matchseller has forced Edward to upset his work patterns and normal behaviour. When Flora pesters Edward for a better reason for him being in the scullery, he reacts violently. For the first time in their relationship he commands her to leave him alone. Until that moment, apparently, she has been the powerful figure in the relationship, and has controlled all the moves. This is the first time Edward has spoken to her in such a tone. Since she cannot accept these terms, she tries to intimidate Edward by mocking him in a child's voice, "Oh, Weddie, Beddie-Weddie ...." (p. 18). This could mean that Edward still wets his bed, or that he did so as a child (something his mother would know about rather than his wife), or is so immature as to be equated with a bed-wetter. It could also have a sexual connotation, referring to a stunted or unsuccessful sexual encounter of theirs. To further upset him, she comments on his eyes, which are steadily getting worse. Finally, she verbalizes what she has been thinking for some time: "You're frightened of him" (p. 18).

Avoiding this thrust at his virility, Edward continues to fuss over his eyes, trying to elicit sympathy from Flora. When he realizes that she will not give it to him, he challenges the matchseller to come forth and reveal himself. He tells his wife to invite the matchseller to their house.[39] Flora, however, suggests that they could get the

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[39]It is a matter of control that the matchseller come to him rather than he, Edward, go to the matchseller.

authorities, the police or the vicar, to handle the disturbance. She has her doubts about Edward's ability to take care of it himself. But Edward refuses to take heed. It has become a test of his manhood. He must get rid of the matchseller. Flora is suspicious of the outcome of the meeting between Edward and the matchseller. She tries to warn him, "... Edward are you sure it's wise to bother about all this?" (p. 21). But Edward refuses her advice, and orders her to get the matchseller.

Now that they finally confront each other, the battle for control is on. Edward begins subtly by acting the gentleman. First he offers the matchseller a drink, then he tries to draw him into a conversation. Finally, Edward invites him to sit down. But as it becomes evident that the matchseller refuses to talk, drink, or sit, Edward's frustration mounts. His monologue becomes a wandering confession of sexual guilt. He alludes to the fact that his wife is the daughter of the squire, who no longer resides in the area.[40] Although Edward praises his wife, granting her many virtues, he is vague about their love. He explains in a roundabout way that she was "the best of the bunch", (p. 23) and she has been loyal to him through thick and thin. In fact, he admits that a good woman is an asset to a man. She can see him through all his problems. In other words, she can mother him.

From mothering, he moves to sexuality, where he seems to want to imply sexual freedom with his cryptic reference to, "... freedom of

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[40]It is significant to note that Edward stresses the fact that Flora's father is no longer living in the vicinity. Perhaps Edward sees him as a threat to his relationship with his "mother", and is glad of his absence.

movement. Even in the depth of winter I wear next to nothing" (p. 25). Despite this "freedom", he claims to sleep through the night, which suggests he has no sexual activity whatsoever. He is clearly in a quandary about his virility. Even in business he was not 'man' enough to cheat his customers without feeling guilty. Edward wants to know if the matchseller is cheating his customers by selling them boxes that are half-full. Edward even goes so far as to advise the matchseller that his business will not improve unless he changes his location on the road. Since Edward is unable to get a rise out of him, even though he has accused him of faulty business practices, he resorts to commands:[41]

> ... Go into the corner then. Into the corner. Go on. Get into the shade of the corner. Back. Backward.
>
> [Pause.]
>
> Get back!
>
> [Pause.] (p. 26)

Edward here clearly begins to unfold his uneasiness concerning the matchseller. Although Edward says that the matchseller does not alarm him, it is most evident by his behaviour that he does. Edward informs the matchseller that he finds him disgusting, thus trying to build up his own ego by degrading that of the matchseller. When he compares the matchseller to his wife, he has discovered a link of disgustingness that hints at sexuality, which he refuses to pursue, other than as a philosophical problem, "... In appearance you differ but not

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[41] In this respect, Edward is like other Pinter characters, such as Albert and Walter, who must turn to violence or insults to achieve power in a situation.

in essence" (p. 27). Edward sees his wife as a sexual entity. He sees the matchseller in a similar light. Edward's condition is here symbolized by his failing eyes. Like Rose in The Room, who goes blind because of her incestuous yearnings for her father, and like Stanley in The Birthday Party, who goes crazy during a game of blind man's buff because he acts out his oedipal feelings for his "mother" Meg, Edward's failing sight reflects a similar sexual preoccupation with Flora.[42] There seems to be a consistency in the use of eyes as a symbol for sexual problems. Usually the problem is of an incestuous nature reminiscent of Oedipus Rex. Like Oedipus, the characters suffer from incestuous feelings for a parent or a parent-figure. When these are exposed, the characters either go blind, suffer from eye trouble, or go crazy. In this manner, they each suffer a symbolic castration.[43] In Edward's case, he is punishing himself for his incestuous feelings for Flora. The punishment is symbolized by his failing eyes, and can be interpreted as a loss of virility. As he loses his mother-figure, and as the matchseller encroaches upon his wife, Edward's eyes get progressively worse. In this weak state, Edward is menaced both by Flora and by the matchseller. This fact is so threatening to him, he does not have the courage to follow up on it. In fact, he gives up the conversation entirely.

Totally unsuccessful in his efforts to communicate with the matchseller, Edward gets his wife to rescue him. Flora takes Edward out to the garden, and questions him as to his rapport with the

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[42]This can also be seen in Disson in The Tea Party.

[43]Marie Bonaparte, The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psycho-Analytic Interpretation (New York: Humanities Press, 1971), p. 470.

matchseller. Of course Edward does not want to admit that he has not made any progress. He equivocates to protect himself in her eyes. Flora is still trying to protect Edward by offering to tell the gentleman to leave. Edward refuses. In his fear, he accuses her of not being able to understand the situation: "No, you're a woman, you know nothing" (p. 29). When she offers to question the matchseller, Edward is so challenged that again he becomes violent. To match this violence Flora retorts:

> You're much too heavy-handed, in every way. You should trust your wife more, Edward. You should trust her judgment, and have a greater insight into her capabilities. A woman ... a woman will often succeed, you know, where a man must invariably fail. (p. 30)

Having said this, she proceeds to her encounter with the matchseller.

Her method of approach is more open, understanding, and motherly. In fact, she sees in the matchseller a new man whom she can mother.[44] She also attachs to him a fresh opportunity for sex, which has been frustrated these many years by her husband. She relates a story to the matchseller about how she lost her virginity in a savage rape, explaining that although she put up a battle, it was not enough to fend off her attacker. In the end, she had to succumb to his wishes. The matchseller reminds her of the rapist.[45] When she sees that he is perspiring, she offers to wipe him: "It is a woman's job, isn't it? And I'm the only woman on hand" (p. 31). This close touch leads her to ask him about his sexual life. She explains that for some people

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[44] John Russell Taylor, Harold Pinter (Harlow: Longman, 1969), p. 12.

[45] Esslin, The Peopled Wound: The Work of Harold Pinter, p. 89.

sex is "vital". She wants to know if he agrees. She decides he does agree and will prove a fitting sexual partner for her, as long as he is cleaned up and bathed. She takes it upon herself to name him Barnabus, which signifies the summer solstice and the fertility of summer. As Burkman explains:

> The day of Saint Barnabus, June eleventh in the old-style calendar, was the day of the summer solstice, and Barnaby-bright is the name for the longest day and the shortest night of the year. Flora merely recognizes her new god as the incarnation of summer itself, the advent of which is considered to take place at its height.[46]

To prepare him, she will give him, "... a good whacking great bath. And I'll buy you pretty little things that will suit you. And little toys to play with" (p. 33). She will treat him like a son, but he will nonetheless have to satisfy her sexually.[47]

Edward tries to interrupt this little scene. Flora refuses to allow him into the room. She says that Barnabus is ill. Edward knows he is not, and suspects that something has gone on that he should know about. Again Edward becomes violent, calling Flora "a lying slut" and ordering her back to her "trough" (p. 33). He is obviously sensitive about their lack of sexual life when he says these things. Flora is an animal that needs sex and is not above propositioning men to fulfill her needs. Edward's sexuality has openly been challenged, and he realizes he must prove himself.

However, Edward is totally unsuccessful in his attempt at

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[46]Katherine Burkman, The Dramatic World of Harold Pinter: Its Basis in Ritual, p. 60.

[47]Hollis, Harold Pinter: The Poetics of Silence, p. 61.

unseating Barnabus from his new position. The rest of the play is a display of his downfall. As Edward gets weaker, his eyes get worse, while Barnabus gets younger and more virile. Edward tells Barnabus he should make himself at home, but then retracts this, and accuses Barnabus of trespassing on his territory, of invading his property. Consequently, Edward grasps for bits of his virile past; he recalls that he has ordered his wife to polish all the furniture, that he has killed the wasp, and that once he was able to walk in and take command in his home. As his virility is drained, he falls to the ground. The past creeps up on him and he is unable to deal with it. In a last desperate attempt to verify what is happening to him, he asks the matchseller who he is. By then, Flora has entered and is about to take Barnabus out to 'their' garden. Just before they leave, she hands the tray to Edward. And thus, the 'harmless' matchseller has usurped Edward of his home and his wife.

Flora emerges as the mother-figure to both Edward and Barnabus. Edward, who is impotent, has been replaced by the sexually virile Barnabus, of whom he was so frightened. Barnabus represents to Flora many opportunities for sexual satisfaction as well as a chance to act the mother to him. As Hollis says, "Barnabus provides her the opportunity to live out her fantasies as mistress and mother."[48] He is her escape from an impotent husband and an unsatisfied sexual and married life. From A Slight Ache on, Pinter concentrates more on married life, or couples living together in a semblance of marriage. His focus now

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[48]Hollis, Harold Pinter: The Poetics of Silence, p. 61.

switches from the mother image to the whore image. In this respect, A Slight Ache serves as a transition between the mother group and the whore group, for Flora represents equally the mother side and the sexual side of a woman.

CHAPTER II

THE WHORE GROUP

In this second group of plays, Pinter centers his attention on the woman in her role as wife and mistress, and stresses the sexual and whorish side of her nature. This aspect is exposed through confrontations with other characters, and takes place in more varied settings than we have hitherto seen, both inside and outside the womb-room. The Collection is a good example of the plays that fall within this grouping.

The Collection (a television play first presented in 1961) takes place in two homes and a telephone booth, but the action centers on a supposed sexual flirtation that took place in Leeds at a fashion show. This incident involves Stella (married to James) and Bill (lover of Harry). Their affair is only insinuated, never verified. In fact, whether or not Stella and Bill had sex is not the true issue; rather, Pinter concentrates on the interaction of the two couples as they try to unwind the story. Here Pinter examines a married woman whose primary role is that of whore. The central tension of the play lies in Stella's continuous shifting of roles from innocent wife to coquettish whore.[1] Stella is the center of attention in the play. The

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[1]Walter Kerr, Harold Pinter, Columbia Essays on Modern Writers, 27 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 32.

action revolves around her, although her reality is somewhat oblique, in that she is talked about more than she talks. Thus, Esslin is mistaken in his belief that the play speaks of a male world in which the woman has no control.[2] Stella is the impetus for the action; 'the story' hinges on her. This can be seen in an examination of the play.

The play opens with an exposition of the tension in the homosexual couple. Harry's jealousy is revealed when he answers a phone call for Bill. The late hour and the cryptic comment, "Tell him I'll be in touch", further aggravate Harry.[3] Similarly, tension between Stella and James is revealed in an early morning conversation. Only Stella will go to the shop they run. James, trying to avoid a discussion altogether, stubbornly refuses to clarify whether or not he will be at home all day. He is neglecting business responsibilities to get away from her. Thus, both couples are quarrelling. It remains to find out why.

The play shifts to Harry and Bill. Bill is questioning Harry about his party, and asks what time he got in. He explains that he has fixed the faulty stairwell, offers food, and generally acts the part of the female in their relationship. Harry has no time for pleasantries. He immediately confronts Bill about the telephone call, and wants to know if Bill has met anyone who may eventually replace him. Bill denies this, but when the unknown caller phones again, Bill leaves the

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[2]Martin Esslin, The Peopled Wound: The Work of Harold Pinter (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1970), p. 137.

[3]Harold Pinter, The Collection and The Lover (London: Methuen, 1973), p. 9. All parenthetical references to the play are taken from this edition.

house to avoid speaking in the presence of Harry. Bill is afraid of something, and prefers to elude an encounter. The dreaded confrontation, however, comes that same evening. This is the beginning of a series of confrontations in which the characters propose to each other, Pirandello style, differing versions of 'The Story'. "All parties are sparring ... each makes the other into the image he has of them."[4]

The meeting between Bill and James exemplifies this. The tone of the discussion is set when Bill labels James an intruder. James is indeed interrupting his life. Bill's position with Harry is unstable; he does not want to jeopardize it further. Consequently, Bill is rather insulting to James, who professes a homosexual interest in him by commenting on his good looks. Bill spurns these compliments, awaiting the real reason for James' presence. James finally gets to the point, accusing Bill of having an affair with his wife. Bill (alluding to his homosexuality), explains, "I ... just don't do such things. Not in my book" (p. 19). Yet Bill ambiguously states he will be standing for Parliament "next season" to serve as Minister for Home Affairs. This refers to his role as the female in his relationship with Harry, and could also imply his need to seek a heterosexual 'affair' with Stella.[5] This spurs James to say, "When you treat my wife like a whore, then I think I'm entitled to know what you've got to say about it" (p. 19). Bill denies knowing Stella at all. Despite this disclaimer, James draws a pretty picture of their seduction and romance,

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[4]Kerr, Harold Pinter, p. 29.

[5]Esslin, The Peopled Wound: The Work of Harold Pinter, p. 135.

blaming Bill for the transgression; Bill blames Stella. James feels that as Bill knew Stella was married, he had no right "to do that (?)" (p. 20). Bill answers that Stella knew she was married, but still /felt/ it necessary ..." (p. 20). This does not deter James, and Bill becomes rather frustrated with the whole charade. He mockingly wonders if James wants to bring the issue to court.

James, calling Bill a "wag", begins to assume the position of power in their confrontation. Standing over him after Bill has tripped, James forces Bill to tell the truth. Bill relates that he and Stella took the elevator together. Before they knew it, they were in each other's arms, kissing. Then she went to her room, and he to his. That was it. In fact, Bill was rather overwhelmed by Stella, as he was not used to women. He stresses again that he did not do anything else, as he finds encounters with women meaningless. He blames Stella for attacking him in the elevator, and for spinning a false conclusion to the incident. Suddenly, after denying all, Bill ambiguously admits to "lying" on her bed while she took a phone call from James.

The audience is left in a quandary. Is any version of the story true? The only truism thus far revealed is that both couples' relationships are in question. Harry is worried about Bill's supposed affair with a woman. He becomes overly upset when Bill forgets how sensitive he is to the sound of church bells.[6] He sees Bill's lapse of memory as a threat to their relationship. This scene is juxtaposed by an argument between Stella and James. Their marriage is

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[6]This sensitivity may suggest that Harry feels guilty about his homosexual relationship with Bill.

called into question on the petty issue of whether or not they have olives in the house. The argument starts when Stella wants a biscuit. James accuses her of wanting to get fat. She denies this: "It's not one of my aims" (p. 27). James counters, "What is your aim? [Pause.] I'd like an olive" (p. 27). Stella says they do not have any. James flies into a rage. When Stella says that she did not know he liked them, James unwittingly reveals his real argument: "... You've simply never been interested enough in olives to ask whether I liked them or not" (p. 27).[7] He means to say that she has not been interested enough in <u>him</u> to ask him his preferences. Both arguments show the insecurities of all parties concerned. These insecurities have been heightened by the underlying sexual innuendoes brought about by the Leeds incident.

The arguments continue when Harry tells Bill that a chap called on him the day before. When Bill denies this, Harry asserts that he does not like strangers in his house. Bill skirts the issue by going upstairs to dress, but will not be able to avoid a confrontation of all three men for long. Meanwhile, James informs Stella that he is going to see Bill, and admits that he likes him. He even claims it was educational for him to meet the kind of man with whom his wife would have affair.[8] Yet to downgrade Bill's masculinity (an allusion to his homosexual leanings), James relates Bill's accusation that Stella led him on. Stella denies this, implying that Bill was the aggressor. Stella

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[7]Later, James tells Bill that he does not like olives. The olives are simply an excuse to start an argument with Stella.

[8]James R. Hollis, <u>Harold Pinter: The Poetics of Silence</u> (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971), p. 73.

is more puzzled by James' sudden interest in Bill than by anything else. One feels that she may have begun the affair to test her husband. Yet, instead of coming to his senses about their slipping relationship, James seems to have become homosexually interested in a man who may have had an affair with his wife!

Stella is now jealous of James' relationship with Bill. It is time for her to meet with Harry, who is equally jealous of the burgeoning 'love affair' between James and Bill. Harry now feels he must win Bill back from both Stella and James. His tactic is to defame Bill's character. He reveals that he found Bill in a slum and helped him along in his career. Harry also maintains that James is bothering Bill, "with some fantastic story" (p. 36). Stella apologizes for her husband, and claims he has made up the whole story. This absolves her of any responsibility for the episode, freeing Bill to Harry. Harry asks Stella whether she trusts James, as he wonders whether or not he can trust Bill. Stella says she trusts him, but feels he is overworked. Harry suggests she take James on a vacation to renew their marriage vows. In this way Harry can consolidate his relationship with Bill.

Meanwhile, Bill and James have another meeting in which both vie for position. Bill tells James that Stella was just having a meaningless fling. He feels that the marital bond between Stella and James is strong enough to survive this "outburst of ... wild sensuality" (p. 39) which in his opinion all women succumb to at one time or another. Bill also implies that he is finished with such affairs, thus informing James that he is not interested in him. James reacts by challenging Bill to a duel with cheese knives. When Bill tries to avoid this mock

heroic stunt, James flings the knife at him, injuring him slightly. At this point, Harry enters to protect Bill and face his rival. Harry immediately informs them that he has met with Stella, claiming that she has admitted making up the whole story.[9] When Harry asks Bill to confirm his story, Bill agrees that Stella must have made it up, despite having previously agreed with James' version of the story. The reason for the multiplicity of versions, according to Harry, is that Bill is a "slum" personality who says things simply to amuse himself, in this case agreeing to having had the affair. Before James leaves, however, Bill blurts out another version, declaring that he and Stella never had an affair, never even touched. All they did was talk about it! Confused, James leaves for a final confrontation with Stella.

When James returns to Stella to confirm Bill's story, she is silent, "neither confirming nor denying" (p. 45) (Pirandello style). It appears that she will never tell him the truth; Stella can use the incident as a weapon to keep James on his toes. It is on this basis that their marriage rests. Hollis notes Stella's power over James by stating, "If James can recover Stella, he can recover his virile image of himself."[10] Returning to a silent Stella, James is forever bound to prove himself to her. Stella, contrary to Esslin's evaluation, emerges as the most powerful figure in the play. Her role as whore or supposed whore, is central to the conflict between Harry and Bill,

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[9]This contradicts Stella's statement that James made up the story.

[10]Hollis, Harold Pinter: The Poetics of Silence, p. 76.

James and Bill, James and Harry, and James and Stella.[11] Her supposed affair with Bill determines the convolutions in the relationships of the three men, who struggle to maintain the status quo, while Stella sits at home and calmly plays with the kitten.

The Collection is reminiscent of Pirandello's It Is So (If You Think So). The elite of a small Italian town becomes involved in solving the mystery of the relationship between Signora Frola, Signor Ponza, and Signora Ponza. Many plausible but conflicting explanations are posited, by the townspeople, Signora Frola, and Signor Ponza. The truth, as in The Collection, is illusive. When Signora Ponza (the center of the mystery) finally 'takes the stand', instead of solving the problem, she adds to it by saying:

> ... The truth? Simply this: I am the daughter of Signora Frola ...
> ...
> ... and the second wife of Signor Ponza ...
> ...
> ... and, for myself, I am nobody!
> The Prefect. No, no, madam, for yourself you must be either one or the other!
> Signora Ponza. No! I am she whom you believe me to be.[12]

Thomas Bishop comments, "... the truth is relative to the individual interpretation of it."[13] Similarly, Stella is at the center of the supposed affair in The Collection, yet she never reveals the truth to

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[11] Stella's role as whore is first elucidated by James. See p. 19 of The Collection.

[12] Eric Bentley, ed., Naked Masks: Five Plays by Luigi Pirandello (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1952), p. 138.

[13] Thomas Bishop, Pirandello and the French Theatre (New York: New York University Press, 1960), p. 16.

any of the participants. In fact, James and Stella's marriage is based on these terms. This makes her the pivotal person in the relationship and in the play.

Another type of marriage is explored in Tea Party (1965) a play originally written for television. Disson (owner of one of England's largest bathroom fixture businesses) has hired a new secretary, Wendy, who functions as the whore in the play. Disson is about to marry Diana (an upper class lady). Disson has a difficult time accommodating the two women in his life, his wife/mother, and his whore/secretary. As Esslin explains:

> Disson's breakdown is the result of the tension between his desire for social status and respectability, represented by his second wife, Diana, a cool upper-class lady, and his sensuality, which manifests itself in his lusting after "the swelling body" -- as it is repeatedly referred to in the story -- of his secretary, Wendy; ...[14]

This conflict is manifested in Disson's gradual loss of sight, the symbolism of which has been discussed in the previous chapter.

Tea Party is a television play. Much of the action is transmitted through different shots, focuses, and camera angles. Most of the play is seen through the eyes of Disson, and much is exaggerated or cut off completely, due to his impaired vision. This is obvious from the opening scene, in which Disson interviews a new secretary. Wendy's credentials are in order, but she seems fidgety, as she crosses and uncrosses her legs constantly.[15] This act of crossing and uncrossing

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[14]Esslin, The Peopled Wound: The Work of Harold Pinter, p. 166.

[15]This is similar to the behaviour of Sally and Wally in Night School, and to the whore and Albert in A Night Out.

her legs indicates a sexual confusion. She has good cause for this type of behaviour as her last employer, "... never stopped touching me, ..."[16] Disson displays an almost immediate sexual interest in her when he wants to know where she was "touched", for he interprets her leg-crossing as a seductive ploy.[17] But before Wendy has a chance to answer this leading question, Disson displays compassion for what must have been a very awkward position for her. He dismisses the issue and hires her. As soon as Wendy gets the job, he tells her that he is getting married, "... Yes, this is quite a good week for me, what with one thing and another" (p. 12). Here he displays his need to divide the wifely from the sexual. He has acquired both at the same time, and put each in their proper place.[18]

Diana,[19] the bride to be, is introduced by her brother Willy in glowing terms; she has all the grace and wit that a lady of leisure should have. She can play the piano, swim, and do needlework. She was the apple of her father's eye. Willy's deep commitment to his sister emerges during his speech at the wedding reception. Instead of praising Disson, he continues to heap virtues on his sister. Disson

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[16]Harold Pinter, Tea Party and other plays (London: Methuen, 1976), p. 11. All parenthetical references to the play are taken from this edition.

[17]In this regard, see Simon Trussler, The Plays of Harold Pinter: An Assessment (London: Victor Gollancz, 1973), p. 141.

[18]Esslin, The Peopled Wound: The Work of Harold Pinter, p. 167.

[19]Diana as the patroness of birth exemplifies a strong maternal figure. Edward Tripp, Crowell's Handbook of Classical Mythology (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1970), p. 200.

immediately realizes that he must keep Willy happy if Diana is to be happy, and offers him a post in his office, a post which Willy gladly accepts.

A brief shot of Diana and Disson on their honeymoon exposes Disson's self-consciousness with his new wife. Disson needs constant reassurance that he is making Diana happy. "Disson feels himself not only socially but also sexually inadequate when he is with his wife; her social superiority deprives him of his manhood, for virility to him equals dominance."[20] This feeling of inadequacy is reinforced at the breakfast table shortly after the honeymoon. Disson declares that Diana looks radiant, and asks if she has ever been happy with any other man. She avows her love for him. Yet, he needs her to reassure him of this fact. He is not sure of his own assets, or if his ethics and morals are enough to keep her happy.

We hear more of his philosophy of life when he inaugurates Willy into the business. Disson explains,

> ... In my view, living is a matter of active and willing participation. So is work.
> ... To understand the meaning of the term dependence is to understand that one's powers are limited and that to live with others is not only sensible but the only way work can be done and dignity achieved.
> ... Everything has a function. (p. 19)

It is Disson's simply work ethic of forthrightness and honesty that has enchanted Diana. The couple both understand this work ethic. Since Willy also agrees wholeheartedly with this lecture on cooperation, he asks Disson to employ Diana as his secretary, ostensibly so that she

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[20]Esslin, The Peopled Wound: The Work of Harold Pinter, p. 170.

will be closer to Disson. Disson cannot understand why Diana would want to work. She is married and well taken care of, and has her wifely duties to attend to. Disson nonetheless agrees with the suggestion, perhaps as a concession to Diana to insure her brother's happiness. Yet Disson promptly begins to display fears about this decision. He is shown working with Wendy, but at the same time, he keeps a close surveillance on the door that leads to Willy's office.

Disson is also keeping a watch on his twin sons, by his first marriage, John and Tom, and their relationship with his wife. Diana questions them as to how they are adjusting to their new life. They say they are having no trouble. When Disson comes upon them in the course of their conversation, he shows his suspicions by not returning their smiles and glaring in a paranoid manner from one to the other. This incident signals the deterioration of Disson,[21] and is further reflected in his growing need to attack his secretary, of whom he becomes more aware. This awareness stems from his growing sexual attraction to her. A good example of this is the dictation scene. Wendy sits crossing and uncrossing her legs, trying to take dictation while she is obviously uncomfortable. She is under close scrutiny from Disson, who suggests that the desk might be more agreeable. Once hiked up in full view of Disson, she continues reading where she left off, "There should be no difficulty in meeting your requirements" (p. 23). Is this meant to be a signal for Disson?

Perhaps it is, for in the next scene Disson's eyesight sharply

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[21]Trussler, The Plays of Harold Pinter: An Assessment, p. 137.

deteriorates. He is guilty about his sexual feelings for Wendy. While playing a perfect game of ping pong, he is suddenly crippled by a vision of two balls, and loses a vital rally. He is so concerned about this hallucination that he goes to see his close friend Disley. The eye doctor tells him that his vision is perfect. Disson cannot seem to explain to Disley that his sight, although technically perfect, is at times unreliable. Disley can find no scientific reason for Disson's condition.

Yet this indescribable condition affects Disson's everyday life; he becomes more and more irritable, especially on the subject of his secretary. While both Diana and Willy praise Wendy, Disson begins to degrade her. He displays such hostility towards her that it becomes noticeable to Willy and Diana. Disson obviously feels guilty about his sexual feelings for Wendy. He cannot escape his work world even once for an afternoon's enjoyment with his wife because she is working. Disson resents this. Still, he agrees wholeheartedly with Diana when she says that she is better off working for Disson than for a stranger, since he does not want Diana to fall prey to the "touching" incidents that Wendy experienced with her former employer. Diana feels, however, that they would not want to touch her in the same way. She infers that Wendy would be easier prey for the men in the prevailing system of office sexual politics.

Disson becomes increasingly more alarmed by the close relationship of Diana and Willy, which he witnesses every day and turns to Wendy for solicitude. But Disson is not comfortable with this situation either, as is shown when he snaps at Wendy like an angry lover for

her tardiness. At the same time, he is pleased by the care she has taken to dress up for him.

However, Disson is punished for such familiarities when he is cutting wood with his boys. He is so upset, that his eyes fail him again, and he practically saws off Tom's fingers. Instead of confronting the problem, he leans increasingly towards Wendy for compensation and comfort, which aggravates the situation and compounds the tension. To counterbalance this, Wendy undertakes Disson's therapy; Wendy starts to put her scarf around his eyes. This vicarious contact with Wendy helps Disson feel better. His temporary blindness gives him a chance to reach out and touch her, fulfilling his inner need of contact with her. Just when he is about to fulfil this dream of close union with Wendy, she is called away to Willy. Disson instantly becomes suspicious of this new liaison. He sits by the door, trying to hear what goes on in the next room. When his wife walks out of the room, practically tripping over the 'spy', he is dumbfounded by his guilt. His paranoid reaction is reflected in the violent threat he flings at his wife, "Don't speak to me like that. How dare you speak to me like that? I'll knock your teeth out."[22] (p. 33). He cannot accept the fact that the three are friendly.

All members of the office become suspicious of each other. A cloud of gloom and repressed violence hangs over the office. This is reflected in the mock football game which takes place between Wendy and Disson. Disson displays his impotence by not rising to the

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[22]This is similar to Edward's violent behaviour in A Slight Ache.

occasion of a tackle, despite Wendy's urging.[23] Having failed this test, Disson tries desperately to put Wendy in her proper context: she is his secretary, a good worker who is satisfied with her working conditions. She must stay, despite his uneasiness about her sexuality.

The homefront continues to deteriorate. Disson and Diana's first anniversary finds them trying to convince themselves that they are suited to each other. While Disson sings the praises of Diana, Diana is saying how nice it would be to get away to Spain. This is juxtaposed by a fast shot of Disson at work with his secretary. Wendy has correctly spelled the difficult names of certain clients, when his eyes (and the screen) go blank. Disson is aghast at the situation, while Wendy thinks he is simply playing one of his naughty "touching" games. Disson hurries back to Disley's office for an eye examination that turns into a probing interrogation in which Disley fleshes out the problem of the brother-in-law. He plagues Disson with questions about Willy that Disson is unable to answer.

Disson in turn questions Willy about his life at Sunderley with his sister. Disson seems to suspect incest when he accuses Willy and Diana of playing at being brother and sister. Willy denies this accusation vehemently. At the same time Diana accuses Disson of drinking too much. Disson finds her accusation preposterous, and goes on to explain that he used to drink far more, before he became a successful business man. Willy uses this moment of weakness (Disson's flashback to his inglorious past) by playing up the life at Sunderley,

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[23] Trussler, The Plays of Harold Pinter: An Assessment, p. 142.

a life Disson never had, nor ever will have. This issue of class is a touchy one, serving to separate the couple. The validity of their marriage promptly comes into question. Nonetheless, Diana reiterates her love of Disson, "I admired you. You were so positive .... You were kind .... I found you admirable in your clarity of mind, your surety of purpose, your will, the strength your achievements had given you --" (p. 41). When Willy sees that his sister, despite all his machinations, is set on this man, he takes Disson aside to question him. Willy wants to know if Disson is sane or not. But before Willy has a chance to utter any more prying questions, Disson promotes him to the status of full partner, hoping in this way to secure his claim to Diana.

A new alliance is being sealed at this time between Diana and Wendy. Diana is interested in hearing all the details of Wendy's "touching" experience. She asks Wendy to lunch in order to find out about her former office. Disson discovers this new alliance with much disappointment. He is very suspicious of the relationship between Diana, the maternal influence who is good with the boys, and Wendy, his sexual secretary. Again this tension is reflected in a poor ping pong game because of his failing eyes.

To obscure this mounting tension, Disson turns anew to Wendy and her scarf therapy. The scarf, however, no longer does any good. In his anger, he insults her, "This chiffon stinks" (p. 45). Despite this rudeness, Wendy still likes Disson. She is aroused by the sight of him wearing her scarf in the dark. In fact, he is only allowed to touch her if he is wearing the scarf. They have turned this therapy into a regular ritual which allows them to express their repressed

sexual interest in each other. This 'session' is interrupted by Disley, who arrives to put a surgical bandage on Disson's aching eyes. Willy also drops in to check up on Disson just before the tea party.

The last part of the play centers on the tea party, held to honour the first wedding anniversary of Disson and Diana. It is made up of quick, short shots as seen through the eyes of Disson. He is totally paranoid both about the event itself, and all the people in it. The atmosphere of the tea party is clouded by the fact that one of the main participants is not well enough to take part in the proceedings. Through Disson's eyes we see all the participants walk and talk around him, never to him. Only Wendy, in her solid admiration for Disson, offers him a cup of tea. The conversation is banal and tedious. Disson is simply an onlooker who overhears that both Willy and Wendy will go to Spain with his wife. Through the eyes of Disson it seems that the sexual innuendos of all the relationships are coming to life. He sees Willy carressing first Wendy's face then Diana's face. The shock of this duplicity causes him to fall to the floor. He has lost both Wendy and Diana.[24] No one is successful in trying to budge him from the floor. He is in an immovable catatonic stupor.

Disson cannot bear to see both his wife and his secretary submitting to the touch of his brother-in-law. Disson's inability to cope with the double image, the mother, Diana, and the whore, Wendy, finally forces him into a state of momentary blindness. He is trapped between the horror he feels about the incestuous relationship of Willy and

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[24] Trussler, The Plays of Harold Pinter: An Assessment, p. 141.

and Diana, and his guilt about the sexual feelings he has for Wendy. Also troubling is the loss of Diana's mother image. Now Disson is forced to look at Diana in a sexual way, a role he has previously attributed to Wendy. When it is shown that Willy favours Wendy as well as his sister, Disson's reaction is to go blind. This blindness is similar to Edward's in A Slight Ache. As Edward gradually loses his virility, his sight weakens. Disson has suffered a similar fate. Every time he tried to make an overt pass at Wendy, he experienced a visual setback. When Disson sees Willy making successful sexual overtures to his wife and Wendy, he succumbs completely.

Competition for a woman is also central to The Basement, a very short television play first presented in 1967. In this play Pinter experiments with a menage a trois in which the woman, Jane, dominates. Two men, Stott and Law, vie for her favours as they simultaneously contest for possession of Law's room.[25] Jane is ambivalent; she goes first with one, then with the other. To both of them, she is at times alluring and at times innocent. Her motherly role is limited to serving food in a distinctly mechanical fashion. Her main role is that of temptress to either Stott or Law. The play demonstrates their struggle to gain her rewards. It consists of a sequence of short vignettes on which the camera plays. Attention will be paid to the most significant of these encounters.

Stott, an old friend of Law, suddenly appears at his doorstep soaking wet. Law immediately invites Stott in and rushes to get his

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[25]Esslin, The Peopled Wound: The Work of Harold Pinter, p. 172.

best towel for him. They have not seen each other since the school days. Law is very anxious to impress the upper class Stott. Stott seems little concerned with these amenities, but does have a friend outside who would like to come in. Law permits this of course, and rushes to her aid as well. Jane stays steadfastly by Stott, even using his wet towel, although Law has many dry ones. Stott and Jane promptly retire for the evening. While Law sits in another part of the room, reading his Persian love manual, Stott and Jane make love in Law's bed.

There is direct evidence of rivalry for the girl. It begins when in his jealousy, Law hints to Jane that she is too young and immature for his friend. He claims to have knowledge of Stott which she does not have, and tries to use this to upset her. Law even boasts about Stott's wealth to her, implying she is a fortune hunter. Jane seems little affected by these innuendos, and it is later revealed by Stott that she too comes from a wealthy family. Pinter's camera darts from scene to scene, pointing out the competition in their everyday lives together. In one vignette, Law and Jane arrive at the mouth of a cave and cross the body of Stott with their shadows.[26] This clearly demonstrates a foreshadowing of their blooming relationship, which is later confirmed when Jane and Stott are in bed. Even though they have just made love, Jane turns and smiles at Law. Meanwhile the homeless Stott is trying to usurp Law's room. Stott comments unfavourably on the pictures, and forces Law to take them down. For his part, Law tries to convince

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[26]There is an underlying sexual connotation to this womb-cave.

Stott that Jane is "lacking in maturity."[27] Stott does not respond to Law's advice.

Law is undecided about Jane's advances. When they are on the beach, and she caresses him, Law resists her attacks. He is very unsure whether he will be able to successfully steal the girlfriend of his old school idol.[28] Although this would be a definite coup, Law is not sure he can pull it off. He feels guilty about even wanting to. When the three visit Stott and Law's old drinking haunt, Stott explains how happy he is to be with his old friend, and a new friend who likes Law so much. But Stott also discloses his knowledge of what is going on between Law and Jane when they discuss their cricket styles. Law says that Stott was unbeatable, while Stott says that Law was "deceptive." Law laughingly claims that his style is still the same. Stott cuts through with a biting comment, "Not any longer" (p. 68), warning Law that he is aware of what Law is doing.

From that point on, there are a series of contests in which the men try to prove their virility in order to win Jane and/or the room. First there is the race on the field, in which Law is the only contestant. Law cannot understand why Stott would not run. Perhaps Stott feels that he does not have to compete with Law for Jane, as he would

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[27]Harold Pinter, Tea Party and other plays (London: Methuen, 1970), p. 66. All parenthetical references to the play are taken from this edition.

[28]See Esslin, The Peopled Wound: The Work of Harold Pinter, p. 175.

rather have the room.[29] Law, on the other hand, in a conversation with Stott, tries to gently push Stott out of the apartment. He says, basically, three is a crowd. Law, true to his name, has the authority of the Church and the City Council on his side. Stott[30] does not recognize institutions at all. Jane, now much closer to Law, commences to insist that Law oust Stott from his room. Unbeknownst to Jane, Law unexpectedly reveals to Stott what Jane wanted him to do. Jane has no true loyalties. Law perceives her as loose and whorish. She does not fit into their team.

As a result of this three-way conflict, Stott suddenly falls gravely ill. Jane sees her chance to get the apartment and Law, but Law remains loyal to Stott. Law, unlike Jane, does not want to worry about what to do with a body until Stott is actually dead. Stott does not die, but he does get more and more frustrated at the m nage a trois. This can be seen in the violent confrontations that occur when Stott starts pitching marbles at Law. He eventually tosses one that crashes into Law's head, knocking him to the ground. The confrontation continues with a broken bottle duel. Pinter has cleverly countered this scene with shots of Jane performing her wifely duties making coffee; while the duel is in progress, the woman is keeping busy. The result of this encounter sees Stott in possession of the room, and Law in

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[29]Ronald Hayman, Harold Pinter, World Dramatists (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1973), p. 115.

[30]Stott's name implies that he is castrated, as the word "stot" is a northern English and Scottish term for a steer or young castrated ox (The New Century Dictionary, p. 1856). This is interesting since it is he who loses the room.

possession of Jane.[31] Stott and Law have effectively reversed roles. The last scene shows Law and Jane out in the rain, waiting to enter the room. Stott comes to the door, and with a mixture of surprise and pleasure, invites Law in. The play ends where it has begun.

Again a woman is central to the tension of the play. Jane, in her role as whore flitting from Stott to Law, serves to separate the two friends. She creates the atmosphere whereby their real needs are exposed; one needs a woman, the other needs a room. This function makes her the focal character of the play. Jane is the instigator who brings out the rivalry of the two men. Yet true to Pinter fashion, it is the room that is the object of desire. Significantly, it is the woman (as whore) who creates the conditions that lead to the contest to acquire it.

The woman as whore has a prominent role in The Lover, a television play first presented in 1963. In this play Pinter explores a new facet of sexual relations in a married couple. The opening scene discloses what to the audience may be the peculiar lifestyle of Richard and Sarah. Before leaving for work, Richard calmly inquires whether Sarah's lover will be coming that day. When she declares equally calmly that he will, Richard explains that he will be home at six in order not to disturb them. On his return from work, Richard asks about her afternoon. Their conversation is trifling and banal. They speak about the weather, the position of the blinds and, in the same even-keeled tone, about Sarah's lover. The most startling part of this

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[31] This exchange in terms of a room, is similar to Solto's experience in Australia explained in the previous chapter.

conversation is the absence of tension between Richard and Sarah, on a topic which would leave most couples breathless with rage. A small hint of their fantasies comes to the surface when Sarah tells Richard that they had the blinds down. Richard then says the light was terribly strong, as if he had been there. Richard talks about his day, and asks about supper. Suddenly he startles Sarah by asking her if she ever thinks of him when her lover is there. Since he has never before asked her such a question, she becomes alarmed. Yet she matter of factly admits that she does think of him: "It makes it all the more piquant."[32] Even when she is with her lover, she never truly forgets her husband, as it is him she really loves.

Another clue to their secret life is exposed when Richard notices that Sarah is wearing a pair of very high-heeled shoes. As soon as he points them out to her, she quickly removes them and hides them in a cupboard. This reference to her lover and their afternoon prompts Sarah to ask Richard about his afternoon, which he apparently spent with his lover as well. Sarah calls Richard's lover his "mistress". Richard categorically denies having a mistress, but admits to having a whore: "Yes. Just a common or garden slut. Not worth talking about. Handy between trains, nothing more" (p. 55). To Sarah this relationship sounds "sterile", but Richard feels his whore satisfies him very well. He does not balk when questioned about her. As he puts it, "... Frankness at all costs. Essential to a healthy marriage" (p. 56).

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[32]Harold Pinter, The Collection and The Lover (London: Methuen, 1973), p. 53. All parenthetical references to the play are taken from this edition.

Since Sarah agrees with him on this, she begins an analysis of Richard's lover. Sarah cannot believe that he has "just" a whore, rather than a mistress with more depth and more wit. But Richard shows his true needs when he says that a whore is anything you want her to be, and that is the beauty of it all. "... She's simply a whore, a functionary who either pleases or displeases" (p. 56). This attitude to women disturbs Sarah, but Richard defends himself:

> Why? I wasn't looking for your double, was I? I wasn't looking for a woman I could respect, as you, whom I could admire and love, as I do you. Was I? All I wanted was ... how shall I put it ... someone who could express and engender lust with all lust's cunning. Nothing more. (p. 57)

Richard, like Disson, has had to divide his sexual needs from his married life in order to fully satisfy himself.[33] For the virtues in life, he has his wife; to satisfy his lusts, he takes a whore. To complete his argument, he explains that the reason he has a whore, is because his wife has a lover. As long as it is above board, truthful and open, it is healthy for them both.

Their conversation induces Sarah to wonder whether Richard and his lover ever think of her when they are together. When he explains that they do, "... play it for our titillation, whenever desired," (p. 58) she says that it does not give her pleasure to know this. Richard corrects her by telling her that it is his pleasure that counts, not hers: Sarah's pleasures are taken care of by her lover in their afternoon meetings. Richard begins to suspect that Sarah wants to gain vicarious pleasure from his encounters, rather than enjoy her own.

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[33] Esslin, The Peopled Wound: The Work of Harold Pinter, p. 141.

He is alarmed by her questions. But Sarah is quite right in pointing out that it was he who started the questions in the first place. Richard becomes slightly paranoid when he wonders if Sarah thinks he is jealous. He is bolstered by her positive answer, "Darling. I know you'd never stoop to that" (p. 59). Indeed, she convinces herself that she is better off with her lover than Richard is with his. Richard is equivocal on this point. He wants her to understand that they are both fulfilling their needs in individual ways.

Sarah continues to praise her lover, saying that he is highly sensuous, loving, and also has a sense of humour. He even respects Richard. Richard, on the other hand, sees only the limitations of the relationship: never being able to go out together, always bound to a teatime ritual. Despite these drawbacks, Sarah and Richard agree that their life in the country is truly idyllic. It offers them, and their lovers, a happy, balanced life.

The following day, Max, Sarah's lover, is finally introduced. To the audience's surprise, her lover is her husband Richard dressed in a different costume. They quickly begin to act out various erotic fantasies, which have become stylized rituals. After a brief interlude, the couple is seen at tea. Suddenly, Max asks Sarah about her husband, where he is, what he does, what he is like. Sarah explains that the two men are different: "You've got very little in common" (p. 68). She too needs the separation of the two personalities represented by Richard, her husband, and Max, her lover. Her lover praises Richard for his ability to put up with this whole arrangement for so many years. Sarah says that her husband never minded the situation. She is shocked

when Max admits that he does mind, and that their relationship must stop. Sarah stresses again that her husband does not mind. Max admits that it is not because of her husband, but because of his wife, that they must stop seeing each other. Max does not want to "... deceive her any longer" (p. 69). Sarah counters that his wife already knows about them. Max denies this, explaining that his wife thinks he is with a "spare time whore" (p. 69) rather than a mistress. Sarah assumes the position of Max's wife: "She doesn't mind, she wouldn't mind -- she's happy, she's happy" (p. 70).

Max returns to Sarah's husband: "... How does he bear it? Doesn't he smell me when he comes back in the evening? .... He must be mad" (p. 70). Sarah once more reassures Max that her husband doesn't mind. She is startled when he tells her, "Perhaps I should ... have a word with him", (p. 70) prompting Sarah to accuse Max of being drunk.[34] Yet he persists in wanting to meet Richard: "Perhaps I should do that. After all, he's a man, like me. We're both men. You're just a bloody woman" (p. 71). Sarah is deeply insulted by this accusation but she also fears Max's uncharacteristic need to meet Richard. The breakdown of their lover's ritual seems imminent. Her fear of this comes out in the stage directions: "She slams the table" as she desperately pleads, "Stop it! What's the matter with you? What's happened to you? (Quietly.) Please, please, stop it. What are you doing, playing a game?" (p. 71). Max's answer implies that he no longer wants to maintain the game, despite Sarah's encouragement: "Don't you? You do. Oh, you do. You do. Usually I like them" (p. 71). Sarah tries to

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[34]Compare Diana's accusation of Disson in Tea Party.

keep the games going, because she needs to uphold the illusion of the two men in her life.

But Max complains, "I've played my last game," (p. 71) and states that his children in boarding school will soon be home. Max is having a fit of conscience. Sarah refuses to give in to such atypical behaviour, and proceeds to the 'whispering' portion of the afternoon ritual. Max, however, is not 'in the mood', and starts to insult her, saying she is too bony. Sarah moves to defend herself, "But I'm fat! Look at me. I'm plump anyway. You always told me I was plump" (p. 72). She seeks to fulfil Max's fantasy of a large, fertile woman, as this is central to Max's concept of the feminine sexual principle. Max retorts, "You were plump once. You're not plump any more ... You're not plump enough. You're nowhere near plump enough. You know what I like. I like enormous women. Like bullocks with udders. Vast great uddered bullocks ... I mean voluminous great uddered feminine bullocks. Once, years ago, you vaguely resembled one ... But Now, quite honestly, compared to my ideal ..." (p. 72). Here Max unmasks his real sentiments, his "ideal", as he describes the archetypal mother-figure, fertile, large hipped, large breasted, "voluminous", engulfing, a veritable Venus of Willendorf. His whore must meet the standards of this classic fertility symbol. If she cannot fulfil this fantasy, she is no good to him, "just skin and bones". In Sarah, Richard, as Max, sees all women, his mother (from the perspective of the suckling child), his "spare-time whore", his mistress, perhaps even Sarah as a mother to their children ("Once, years ago, you vaguely resembled one"). But as those days of swollen breasts and distended

body are gone, Sarah no longer represents this cherished ideal.[35] The stage directions indicate their alienation: "They stare at each other" (p. 73). These new disclosures have left the beaten track of their afternoon ritual, straining their relationship. As Sarah cannot accept Max's rejection, she laughs it off as a joke. When Max leaves, he explains in all seriousness, "It's no joke" (p. 73).

The last scene of the play brings all the games to a climax. Richard returns from work and complains about his "terribly fatiguing" day. Sarah has also had a bad day, and complains of a headache. Her lover had an offday too. These are all signs that the initial rift which Max created by challenging 'their afternoons', has had a physical and emotional effect on the participants. To cheer Sarah up, Richard compliments her:

> Yes, I find you very beautiful. I have great pride in being seen with you. When we're out to dinner, or at the theatre .... 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. (p. 75)

By complimenting Sarah in this way, it becomes evident that Richard's image of his wife is that of a show piece. He has a possession which only he can enjoy to the full. Others may look and be envious, but they cannot touch.

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[35] Witness again Pinter's preoccupation with the mother-son incestuous relationship, which Richard gratifies in his role as Max with his "part-time whore."

Sarah gives voice to the anxiety created during the afternoon when she inquires, "How's your whore? ... Fatter or thinner?" (p. 76). Richard explains contentedly, "She gets thinner every day" (p. 76). Sarah betrays confusion. She knows that she has just argued with Richard (as Max) because she, in her role as whore-mistress, was too thin. Now Richard states that, contrary to her expectations, he is fond of thin ladies. The breakdown of their games, the confusion of roles, is gradually being exposed.

The pedestal image which Richard has of Sarah is immediately deflated when she announces that supper is not cooked. Richard accuses her of defaulting on her wifely duties due to the time spent with her lover. He resents this distraction from her proper sphere of activity. He states that during a traffic jam on the way home from work, he has decided that Sarah's love affair, her "... life of depravity ... of illegitimate lust" (p. 77) must end. Richard lays the blame for the affair entirely on Sarah, although he has, by common agreement, been doing the same thing. Sarah tries to placate Richard with an offer of cold ham. But he refuses to be waylaid from the topic. Richard forbids Sarah to entertain her lover in <u>his</u> house ever again. Sarah continues to offer Richard food (the motherly role). Richard offers her a drink. His (feigned?) ignorance of what she drinks prompts her to remind him that they have been married for ten years. He reiterates his demand that she must stop using his house as a love nest. She explodes, "What about your own bloody whore?" (p. 79). Richard explains that he has paid her off because she was too bony. This contradicts his earlier statements that he is fond of thin ladies. Indeed, he now

Max. Sam! come here!

Max comes back into the room.

Sam enters with a cloth.

Sam. What?
Max. What are you doing in there?
Sam. Washing up.
Max. What else?
Sam. Getting rid of your leavings.
Max. Putting them in the bin, eh?
Sam. Right in.
Max. What point you trying to prove?
Sam. No point.
Max. Oh yes, you are. 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. I know. (pp. 38-39)

Max resents Sam's role as substitute cook. He draws attention to this by complaining about the scraping. Max hates to listen to the sound which he feels is the voice of resentment. His repetition of the word "scraping" voices his own frustrations, for her feels that Sam is purposely annoying him.

In the others' eyes, Max lacks the true maternal instincts. His realization of this causes him to be insecure. Joey uncovers this when he comes in and tells Max he is hungry. Max immediately interprets this statement as a direct request for food from him. He blows up and says to Joey, "Who do you think I am, your mother? Eh? Honest. They walk in here every time of the day and night like bloody animals. Go and find yourself a mother"[10] (p. 16). As much as Max assumes the role of mother, in his inability to succeed in it, he comes to hate it.

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[10]This is exactly what Joey and Lenny do, in the person of Ruth.

Despite this apparent failure, Max's conversations continually remind the audience, and himself, of his valiant attempt to be the mother-figure. Thus in talking about his father he says:

> ... Well, I'll tell you one thing. I respected my father not only as a man but as a number one butcher! And to prove it I followed him into the shop. I learned to carve a carcass at his knee. I commemorated his name in blood. I gave birth to three grown men! All on my own bat. What have you done? (pp. 39-40)

Here Max switches rapidly from death to life, and from being a dutiful son to being a fruitful mother ("... I gave birth to three grown men!"). While not literally the mother of his children, Max's monologue renders him, in fantasy, the 'true' parent of the boys. And, like other Pinter mother substitute figures, he must keep his sons at home and dependent on him. Hence Max feels free to inflict guilt on those around him who have not fulfilled themselves as fully as he.

Another interesting aspect of Max's claim is that he refers to the babies as three grown men. This could be interpreted as meaning that under Max's mothering the men have blossomed forth with full sexual powers. Thus, Max has given birth to those who can bring new life onto the earth. Yet when Lenny tries to ask his father about the night that his parents "got him", Max refuses to answer him outside of saying, "You'll drown in your own blood" (p. 36). That is, the blood of birth will drown him because of the primal interest he displays in the sexual life of his parents. Perhaps Lenny suspects that Max is not his father, and wants to verify his lineage.

Lenny's sudden interest in his parents' sexual life reflects his general preoccupation with sex. Yet at the same time, in true Pinter fashion, he voices consistent respect for his mother. When Ruth calls

him "Leonard" in an attempt to control his movements, he immediately retorts she should not call him that because, "That's the name my mother gave me" (p. 33). The fact that she uses it, of course, demonstrates the considerable power she has already gained over Lenny.

The tremendous effect Jessie's death had on the family is displayed when Teddy explains about the main room to Ruth:

> What do you think of the room? Big, isn't it? It's a big house. I mean, it's a fine room, don't you think? Actually there was a wall, across there ... with a door. We knocked it down ... years ago ... to make an open living area. The structure wasn't affected, you see. My mother was dead. (p. 21)

Obviously Max's statement that Jessie was the backbone of the family is correct in the eyes of the sons as well. When she died, "... the structure of the family was profoundly affected."[11] The missing wall reflects the vacancy of the absent mother. In fact, altering the house is a direct manifestation of their feelings of grief and despair, as the controller of the womb-room is gone.

The emotions which are strong enough to cause an alteration in the house appear again as violent attempts to rid the characters of inner conflicts or sexual frustrations. Thus, Max is constantly baiting the others into fights in order to sublimate his sexual needs. His allusions to his former life as a butcher have distinct undertones of underworld connections; he is capable of butchering any carcass. This could also have been a way of venting his frustrations if he knew or suspected that Jessie was a whore. It was Max's escape from dealing

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[11] James R. Hollis, Harold Pinter: The Poetics of Silence (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971), p. 98.

with the dualism of the mother-whore. Joey, who is studying to be a professional fighter at night while working in demolition during the day, is supposedly a successful lady's man, although the only 'proof' of this is his claim of raping a woman. Lenny, who was too young for military service to vent his sexual aggressiveness through the organized violence of war, is a pimp who is also capable of beating up women, as he explains to Ruth. Sam appears passive and secretive, as it is intimated that he has evidence of the cuckolding of Max. Things happen to him; he does not initiate them. Teddy is an intellectual, and like Sam, passive in mind and body. Like Sam, he does not fit into this house of violence, and has tried to escape this atmosphere by going to America. It should be observed that Sam tells Teddy he was Jessie's favourite. This implies that Teddy may have been the one most affected by the dualism of Jessie. His choice of Ruth as wife would confirm this. Ruth is able to satisfy this need of Teddy's, for as will be seen, Ruth soon supplements her role as mother and becomes a part-time whore.

Ruth is not someone we get to know through the conversations of others, as we get to know Jessie. She is very much alive. Ruth is a "... quintessential Pinter woman, one who thinks with her body and manages better that way than most men do with their brains."[12] Her sexuality is her most prominent characteristic, the first thing the audience/reader feels about her.

On arrival, finding everyone gone to bed, Teddy is excited to

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[12]John Russell Taylor, Anger And After: A Guide to the New British Drama, p. 355.

be home, but Ruth is worried about their children in America, and about meeting her in-laws. Teddy, sensing her nervousness, tries to comfort her, to no avail. Having just come in, Ruth already wants to leave. She recognizes a role change in Teddy as soon as he is home. She fears a role change in herself and thus does not want to go to bed. There is seemingly little love between them. Teddy thinks it better to go right to bed, in order to rise early and meet his father. It, ..."Wouldn't be quite right if he found us in bed, I think. [He chuckles.] Have to be up before six, come down, say hullo" (p. 23). That would be the proper thing to do.[13] Teddy's concern with his father finding them in bed seems lewd and ridiculous, but will soon be proven correct. Nonetheless, Ruth decides to go for a walk. The tension this creates is immediately communicated in the conversation that follows:

Ruth. I just feel like some air.
Teddy. But I'm going to bed.
Ruth. That's all right.
Teddy. But what am I going to do?

Pause.

The last thing I want is a breath of air. Why do you want a breath of air?
Ruth. I just do.
Teddy. But it's late.
Ruth. I won't go far. I'll come back.

Pause.

Teddy. I'll wait up for you.
Ruth. Why?
Teddy. I'm not going to bed without you.
Ruth. Can I have the key? (p. 24)

It is evident that Ruth is a powerful woman, in control of the situation.

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[13]It is apparent that Teddy is afraid to display his sexuality in front of his father.

She is able to do what she wants despite, or in spite of, Teddy's wishes. Teddy tolerates this situation because of his sexual need for her: he won't go to bed without her.

When Ruth returns from her walk, she encounters Lenny, who offers her a drink. She asks for water. He speaks with her freely, as if it is not unusual for him to meet strange women in his house during the late night hours. He begins to tell her that he was too young to be in the war, when suddenly he is overcome by her sexuality:

> Lenny. ... Do you mind if I hold your hand?
> Ruth. Why?
> Lenny. Just a touch.
>
> He stands and goes to her.
>
> Just a tickle.
>
> Ruth. Why? (p. 30)

Ruth has already ensnared him; "... she knows intuitively the rules of the tribe, and how to manipulate"[14] the members of the family better than Teddy himself.

Although Ruth has tried to fulfil herself as wife to Teddy and as mother to their three boys, she has been dissatisfied with this role. She has, in fact, been sublimating her inner desires for a more complete, varied, sex life. These desires will now be realized. Ruth herself openly admits to Teddy's family that she was "different" before she married Teddy. She was a 'model', a common euphemism for a prostitute. But at this time, she is still to be regarded at a distance, and Lenny senses this. Thus, when Lenny asks for the glass of water back, she says,

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[14] John Russell Taylor, Anger And After: A Guide to the New British Drama, p. 355.

Ruth. If you take the glass ... I'll take you.

Pause.

Lenny. How about me taking the glass without you taking me?
Ruth. Why don't I just take you?

Pause.

Lenny. You're joking. (p. 34)

Lenny declines her offer, but Ruth tempts him to drink from her glass, as if in this way she can magically gain control over him.[15] Lenny refuses. Ruth orders him to lie down so that she can pour the water down his throat. Again Lenny refuses. Ruth finishes the water and walks away. Lenny wants to know if she is making a proposal, but receives no answer.[16] Lenny is flustered by the fact that Ruth did not respond to his pimp jargon and stories of violence. Instead, she countered with logical questions asked in a perfectly rational manner, without a trace of fear or surprise. Her knowledge of his language, the ritual of exchanging liquids, and Ruth's use of Lenny's proper name, indicate the ways in which Ruth will enter into and eventually gain control of Teddy's family.

Ruth and Teddy come down for breakfast the next morning. Chuckling, Teddy says they overslept. They have done exactly what he said they should not do. Max immediately confirms Teddy's fears, saying

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[15] This echoes Circe, who transformed Odysseus' men into hogs after they drank one of her potions.

[16] This proposal has been linked to the original Ruth asking Boaz to lie with her, thus making his people her people. See Hugh Nelson, "The Homecoming: Kith and Kin", printed in John Russell Brown, ed., Modern British Dramatists, Twentieth Century Views (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp. 155-156.

that Teddy has brought a whore into the house, a "dirty tart", "a smelly scrubber", "a stinking pox-ridden slut" (p. 41). Max shouts,

> I haven't seen the bitch for six years, he comes home without a word, he brings a filthy scrubber off the street, he shacks up in my house! (p. 42)

Max does not want to hear that Teddy and Ruth are married. But it is not wholly his fault, for Teddy did not introduce her at the beginning, saying instead, "We overslept." Max cannot believe that his son, the Doctor of Philosophy, would come home from America with a whore. It is only through the violent actions in the ensuing scuffle between Max, Joey, and Sam, that Max adjusts himself to this case of mistaken identity. Brown explains Pinter's use of action rather than words: "... He [Pinter] does not introduce stage business because he has a situation he cannot handle precisely, but because it has developed beyond words: it needs concentration, surprise, strong rhythm, noise, instinctiveness, physical relief and activity, metaphorical reverberations."[17] Thus, only through the fight is Max able to adjust to the fact that his son is married (having a grown man's sexual life), and that Ruth is his wife (even though she may very well be a whore).

The first question that Max asks Ruth is whether she is a mother (the basic function of a woman). When Ruth answers that she has three children, Max is immediately satisfied. Yet, he still has to verify that the children are all legally Teddy's. (This projects his own fear that his sons are not his sons). His reaction to this news is to treat Teddy like a child:

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[17] John Russell Brown, "Dialogue in Pinter and Others," p. 237.

Max. All yours, Ted?

Pause.

Teddy, why don't we have a nice cuddle and kiss, eh? Like the old days? What about a nice cuddle and kiss, eh?.

Teddy. Come on, then.

Pause.

Max. You want to kiss your old father? Want a cuddle with your old father?

Teddy. Come on, then.

Teddy moves a step towards him.

Come on.

Pause.

Max. You still love your old Dad, eh?

They face each other.

Teddy. Come on, Dad. I'm ready for the cuddle.

Max begins to chuckle, gurgling.
He turns to the family and addresses them.

Max. He still loves his father! (pp. 43-44)

Max seems to be questioning whether Teddy can retain his love for his father, while loving his wife at the same time. This assumption becomes clearer when it is known that Teddy was Jessie's favourite. In classical oedipal fashion, Max saw Teddy as a competitor for the love of Jessie. He consequently entertained latent feelings of hatred for Teddy, who might or might not have been aware of them. Perhaps Teddy was aware of them, and chose to separate himself from this hostile environment by going to America. Yet just before Teddy left, he married Ruth, whose role was to be his wife, as well as to replace Jessie. That Teddy chose Ruth (who had been a 'model') to replace his mother image, reflects Teddy's subconscious grappling with the mother-whore figure of

Jessie, who served as female role model. In Ruth he has a whore image who, through the birth of three sons like his mother, turns into a mother image. The mother image becomes dominant, while the whore image remains latent. The filial love Teddy had for his father is never stressed until Max needs to verify it. Thus, Max has a hard time adjusting to the fact that Teddy still loves him. Apparently, in his jealousy, Max was not able to love Teddy. Now, Max forgives Teddy, and ~~it is~~ on a note of filial devotion for the ambiguous father-mother figure that the first act ends. Max must elicit his kiss; the substitute mother begs for the concrete recognition of love from the son.

The second act opens with the family having coffee. Ruth compliments Max on his lunch, like one housewife to another. Max is overjoyed with the compliment and explains, "... Well, I put my heart and soul into it, I can tell you" (p. 45). He compliments her on her coffee, and says that she must be a very good cook, which Teddy confirms. Max is still in his role as the substitute Jessie, and becomes nostalgic thinking of how it would be if Jessie could be with her grandchildren. Suddenly, there is a turn in his conversation, and Jessie becomes an hysterical woman in her rush to fuss over her grandchildren. (This sudden shift in mood is either a hint as to how Jessie treated her sons, or as to how Max perceived her). Max constantly returns to the fact that Ruth is the mother of sons. Says Max, "All boys? Isn't that funny, eh? You've got three, I've got three. You've got three nephews, Joey" (p. 50). Yet there is a noticeable change in Ruth's reference to these children. When she first arrived, she thought about the children, and wanted to leave right away. But now, when someone suggests that the

children may be missing their mother, it is Teddy who answers. It is as if Ruth has already forgotten them.

In a way, Ruth has already been accepted into this family to which she is more akin than her own family in America. Her latent sexual side is beginning to come out more strongly. This can be seen in the discussion between Ruth, Lenny, Joey, and Teddy on philosophy. They are trying to discuss the philosophical speculation of being or non-being (is a chair a chair?). Ruth explains that this is not so important:

> ... You've forgotten something. Look at me. I ... move my leg. That's all it is. But I wear ... underwear ... which moves with me ... it ... captures your attention. Perhaps you misinterpret. The action is simple. It's a leg ... moving. My lips move. Why don't you restrict ... your observations to that? Perhaps the fact that they move is more significant ... than the words which come through them. You must bear that ... possibility ... in mind. (pp. 52-53)

Ruth's reaction to the philosophical discussion expresses her real self. She chooses not to deal with abstract or metaphysical thinking, as evinced by Max's boys, but chooses to base her understanding on reality and her own being. Therefore, while the others are afloat in a philosophical world of "ideas", Ruth is down on earth, asking people to relate through her body. She does not question these movements; they are simply natural to her. This explains Ruth's sexual inferences and her emphasis on physical movement, which is not to say that she is devoid of mental activity. On the contrary, she is definitely in control of her environment, and well aware of her powers. She first uses her brains to assess the situation, then translates these observations into the language of the body, which she knows will attract the men around her. And while they are mesmerized by her body, she quickly effects a clear control

over everyone. Her powerful control demonstrates an intuitive intelligence quite different from the book learning or philosophy presented by Teddy. It is through the exertion of elemental sexual forces that Ruth is accepted by, and then dominates, her new family.

In this sense, Ruth's speech is the climax of the play; the undertone of sexuality is fully revealed. It is a confrontation between two worlds: the mind, Teddy, and the body, Ruth. Teddy tries to assert his superiority over the others by talking philosophy.[18] Yet he is quickly tripped up when Lenny asks him metaphysical questions which Teddy lamely declines to answer because they are "outside his province." Thus, Teddy is revealed as an impotent philosopher on shaky grounds with his wife who, "... substitutes her intense physical presence, her concrete reality and reduces all philosophy to idle and irrelevant speculation."[19] This illuminates Pinter's theory of language: "... It is not the word, "table" that matters, but the way you take the table, how you act on it and how it acts on you, what it does to you."[20] Language works similarly in the Pinter world, for it is not what you say that matters so much as how you say, or for that matter, do not say it. Speech is a superficial mask allowing the undercurrents to be seen; pauses and silences act as gaping openings to this undertow. It is often here that the character reveals his/her real thoughts on an issue,

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[18] See Bernard F. Dukore, "A Woman's Place," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 52 (Oct. 1966), p. 239.

[19] Hollis, Harold Pinter: The Poetics of Silence, p. 102.

[20] Martin Esslin, The Peopled Wound: The Work of Harold Pinter (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1970), p. 229.

and consequently it is here that Ruth focuses on sexuality. Thus, when Teddy suddenly suggests to her that they leave for America, she does not want to go, contradicting her earlier wish to return right away. Teddy wants to live in "clean" America, Ruth in "dirty" England:

> Teddy. ... It's so clean there.
> Ruth. Clean.
> Teddy. Yes.
> Ruth. Is it dirty here?
> Teddy. No, of course not. But it's cleaner there.
> ...
> Ruth. You find it dirty here?
> Teddy. I didn't say I found it dirty here.
>
> Pause.
>
> I didn't say that.
>
> Pause.
>
> ... You know what it's like? It's like a urinal. A filthy urinal! (pp. 54-55)

The pause suggests their ever-widening gap, like the ocean that will soon separate them. England and his family represent an animalistic sexuality which Teddy cannot tolerate; it is a filthy urinal balanced by clean, clean America. But Ruth finds America full of insects, dry, and dusty (sexually barren). England and Teddy's family are more to her liking.

Indeed, as both Nelson and Taylor have said, it seems to be more her homecoming than Teddy's. Teddy urges her to leave, yet does not have the control over her to force the issue. He realizes that Ruth will not leave, the minute she begins to dance with Lenny. When Ruth and Lenny begin to kiss, Teddy does not move to change the situation. He is totally passive. Max enters into this scene as if it were normal and says that the next time Teddy comes he should warn Max that he is

married. Max explains to Teddy that he understands that, "... You were ashamed. You thought I'd be annoyed because you married a woman beneath you. You should have known me better. I'm broadminded. I'm a broad-minded man". Then speaking about Ruth he says, "Mind you, she's a lovely girl. A beautiful woman. And a mother too. A mother of three. You've made a happy woman out of her. It's something to be proud of. I mean, we're talking about a woman of quality. We're talking about a woman of feeling" (pp. 59-60). The inference is that <u>because</u> she gave birth to three sons, like Jessie, and fulfilled the function of the mother, she is indeed a woman of quality. Max compliments her for this achievement.

Yet later that same evening, when Max notices that Ruth is absent from the group, he says, "Where's the whore? Still in bed? She'll make us all animals" (p. 68). Max saw Jessie in that role, and now sees Ruth in the same role. When it is discovered that although Joey had her upstairs in a room for nearly two hours, she did not let him "go the whole hog",[21] Max is worried that Joey was not able to demonstrate his virility. His assumption that they actually did make love (or tried to) stems from his own need to do the same. Joey's supposed impotency reflects back on Max, who is losing his dominant role.

When Max suggests that they keep Ruth because they need a woman around the house, Teddy rushes to assure them that this is impossible because they are lawfully married (only he can sleep with her). She

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[21]This is again reminiscent of Ruth as a Circe figure. Max calls her "a charming woman" (p. 49). All three boys repeat the fact that Joey did not "go the whole hog". Max shouts, "She'll make us all animals". None of them, however, prove capable of breaking her spell.

must return to America to take care of her children. Max says that if Ruth is so concerned about children (the mother instinct), she can have more right here! When Teddy says that she does not want any more, Max stuns him by saying, "What do you know about what she wants, eh, Ted?" (p. 70). Max has perceived the fact that Teddy cannot satisfy Ruth, but Teddy brushes off the insult by finding security in the fact that they are married.

This is of no significance to Max, and they begin to discuss where the money will come from to support her, as it has almost been decided that she will stay, despite the fact that she is not there to speak for herself. Suddenly, Lenny hits upon the idea that Ruth can earn her own money, "on her back", as a prostitute. It is quickly decided that she will not work like that all day because she will still have to satisfy the 'needs' of her new family. They even go so far as to ask Teddy to be their 'overseas connection'.

When Ruth finally enters, she is told by Teddy that she has been invited to stay "as a kind of guest" (p. 75), and that he can manage without her in America. Max appeals to her sympathies by saying that they need a woman in the house, and that she is exactly the right kind of woman. For they have found the mother-whore image in Ruth:

> Max. ... Since poor Jessie died, eh, Sam? we haven't had a woman in the house. Not one. Inside this house. And I'll tell you why. Because their mother's image was so dear any other woman would have ... tarnished it. But you ... Ruth ... you're not only lovely and beautiful, but you're kin. You're kith. You belong here. (p. 75)

She takes this as a compliment (for she knows that it is true), and when they tell her that they want her to be a whore as well, she accepts this without a flicker of the eye. She even begins to arrange things in a

very business-like manner, suggesting a three-room apartment and a clothes allowance. She also accepts the fact that she would be the mother image and housekeeper for the family. Her role as mother need not interfere with her work as a whore; she can be both at the same time. Ruth is in total agreement:

> Ruth. Well, it might prove a workable arrangement.
> Lenny. I think so.
> Max. And you'd have the whole of your daytime free, of course. You could do a bit of cooking here if you wanted to.
> Lenny. Make the beds.
> Max. Scrub the place out a bit.
> Teddy. Keep everyone happy.
> ...
> Ruth. Yes, it sounds a very attractive idea. (pp. 77-78)

In the middle of this agreement, Sam confirms what he has hinted at throughout the play, namely, that "MacGregor had Jessie in the back of my cab as I drove them along" (p. 78). The exertion of revealing this long kept secret causes him to have a stroke, but it is the perfect impetus for Ruth to agree with her family's proposition. She will follow in the footsteps of Jessie, but in an open and above board manner. Judging from the lack of excitement of the family, they had been expecting no other kind of answer from her.

Ruth has now become an official member of the family, and as she says good-bye to Teddy, whom she now refers to as Eddie, she says, "Don't become a stranger" (p. 80). She has already erased his name from her consciousness. The play ends in a discussion between Max and Lenny in which they try to convince themselves that Ruth has actually agreed to the arrangement. When it dawns on them that she has, Max tries to explain to her that he is not impotent, and that she must sleep with him as well. She does not react to this positively or negatively, she just sits and strokes Joey's head. Her physical placement, center stage, in

Jessie's chair, suggests her role as surrogate Jessie, as well as the dominance which she will retain over the family. And thus, the play ends.

Ruth and Jessie have been contrasted throughout the play in order to show that the one is the alter ego of the other. Ruth, in her final role as part-time whore (and part-time mother), demonstrates the whorish aspects and sexual needs which Jessie (according to Max's evaluation and Sam's comment) felt or expressed openly (which is never made clear) when she was alive. Although both Jessie and Ruth are mothers (both have three sons), Ruth is the side of Jessie which sought the complete gratification of the sexual needs rather than the maternal instincts. Ruth will satisfy both these roles with the help of her new family (and her old profession) as she replaces Jessie.

In analyzing the characters of Jessie and Ruth, one finds that Pinter uses the device of leakage (in reference to Max's relationship to Jessie and Jessie's relationship to the boys), whereby bits of past incidents and thoughts are revealed at seemingly meaningless times. Yet these facts build up in a logical manner to show that a woman, in the eyes of a man, is seem primarily in the role of a mother (Jessie and her three sons, Ruth and her three sons). This is the conventional outlook. The unconventional outlook sees the sexual role of the woman, not in terms of the sexual fulfilment or satisfaction of the woman, but rather in its animal-like function to procreate the species. The sexual role of a wife is not seen as a function of the needs of the individual woman. If recognized at all, it is seen only as the needs of a whore. Hence, money figures prominently in the negotiations with Ruth. In Ruth, Max and his boys combine the mother-whore image into

one. Jessie was a slutbitch, and yet a mother who was the backbone of the family. Similarly, Max is quite willing to have Ruth as resident whore, as long as she keeps house as well. "The maternal aspect, it must be emphasized, is present not instead of but in addition to the sexual aspect."[22]

"Ruth is clearly the nexus of The Homecoming. She is wife, mother, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, whore, and eternal feminine ... the world navel and vortex of all beginnings."[23] Wielding this power, Ruth rises to dominance in the male house that lacked a woman. Indeed, "When confronted by a woman, they [the men] are powerless; they succumb to heart attacks, impotence, or childlike dependence."[24] This confrontation is made through language. As soon as Ruth cuts through the linguistic rituals of Sam, Max, Lenny, and Joey, she assumes leadership of the clan. This begins when Ruth makes a proposal to Lenny, instead of vice-versa; it continues throughout the play, culminating in Ruth's amendments to the final proposal that Max and Lenny make to her. When Ruth agrees to her double role of mother-whore in the family, she becomes secure in her possession of the household, successfully completes her task of control, and insures the fulfilment of her own sexual needs.

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[22]Dukore, "A Woman's Place," p. 239.

[23]Hollis, Harold Pinter: The Poetics of Silence, p. 106.

[24]Ibid., p. 107.

CONCLUSION

I have traced in Pinter's work a progression from the mother-figure, to the whore-figure, to an ultimate synthesis of the two. In A Night Out, the first play dealt with, Mrs. Stokes is seen to control her son Albert to such an extent that he has no life beyond his duties to her. Attending an office party is Albert's first social activity outside the home. An unpleasant incident with sexual overtones causes Albert to return to his overprotective and suspicious mother. In an attempt to escape his closed home pattern, Albert seeks out a whore. This proves as equally unsettling as his home environment, for the whore turns out to be as domineering as his mother, and provokes from Albert a similar violent reaction. He returns home a defeated man. In The Room, Rose mothers her husband Bert, while fostering an obsession with the overbearing image of her father. Rose is unable to balance strong oedipal feelings for her father with her marital duties to a neglectful Bert. Her dilemma results in her blindness. The Birthday Party is about another defeated man, Stanley, who has left his real family to become the fantasy son-lover of a substitute mother-figure. Meg mothers Stanley, but often hints at a sexual relationship which a neighbour, Lulu, who symbolizes the whore-figure in the play, is able to provide, though not for Stanley. Stanley is eventually overcome by the guilt created by his incestuous longings for his 'mother', and by the realization of his impotence with Lulu. Night School is an example of the

division of the roles of the mother and the whore. The mother role, in this case, is shared by two aunts who protect and take care of their nephew Walter. Their new tenant Sally, a school teacher who takes night courses, plays the role of the whore who tantalizes Walter. But the inexperienced Walter is not strong enough to respond quickly to his feelings, and, like Stanley, he loses the girl to an older man. He remains a prisoner of the mother-figure.

The mother-figure, though not visible on the stage, is evident in The Dumb Waiter, The Caretaker and perhaps in The Dwarfs as well. In The Dumb Waiter, Gus cites his mother as an authority figure beyond reproach to counter an argument about the tea kettle with Ben. The Caretaker concerns two brothers who are still very much involved with the memory of their mother. Mick is oedipally obsessed with the sexual side of his mother; he harps on the bed that was his mother's (and his), and warns Davies to respect her memory. Aston, his brother, still suffers from the feeling of betrayal brought on by his mother when she signed papers granting doctors the right to submit him to shock therapy, and possibly to a lobotomy as well. The two sons will never escape the tyranny of her memory. In The Dwarfs, Len tries to mother Pete and Mark, causing them to reject him. He then creates imaginary new friends, the dwarfs, to keep him company and see him through his identity crisis.

A Slight Ache provides a transition from plays that are predominantly about the mother to plays that are predominantly about the whore. Flora does mother her husband, but is tired of this role. She seeks a renewal of her sexual aspect in a liaison with a large-eyed

old/young matchseller, who eventually usurps her husband's place. She has no trouble dismissing her weak-eyed husband for a new and fulfilling life.

The second set of plays is characterized by the presentation of women as whores in various marital or quasi-marital couplings. The Collection centers on Stella, an ambiguous figure who may be either whore or dutiful wife of James. In the multiplicity of versions of what has occurred, it is never made clear whether or not Stella has had an affair with Bill, Harry's lover. Because this issue is never truly resolved, Stella gains a quiet power over James. The Tea Party is an example of the initial separation of mother and whore. Disson has a wife, Diana, and a secretary, Wendy, who functions as a whore in his imagination. Although Disson insists on a separation of the feminine personality, these images are shattered at the office tea party. Disson is blinded by the sight of his brother-in-law making advances to both his wife and his secretary. The Basement offers a new twist to the whore theme. Two men, Stott and Law, battle for one woman, who may or may not be more important to them than possession of the womb-room they are also fighting for. In any case, Jane is the trade off; whoever gets the room forfeits the woman. In The Lover (a transitional play like A Slight Ache), Sarah approaches the role of Ruth in The Homecoming in that she is a wife to her husband by night, and his "lovely whore" by day. Yet Richard seems to have tired of the erotic afternoon rituals. He states that he wants to return to a "normal" relationship where 'Max' and 'Dolores' are no longer required to satisfy the sexual needs of the couple. Sarah is distinctly threatened by this outburst, but the

issue is resolved at the end of the play. Pinter depicts Richard and Sarah embarking, as nameless lovers, on an old/new sexual fantasy at an atypical hour of the day.

The Homecoming appears to be Pinter's culminating word on the subject of the mother-whore. In this play Teddy's family fights for possession of his wife Ruth. Ruth agrees to act the mother, taking the place of the dead Jessie. She agrees, as well, to work a few nights of the week "on her back", while sexually satisfying the men of her new home. Ruth thus, becomes the first Pinter woman to solidify all the aspects of the mother-whore into a single being. All the previous examples of mothers and whores unite in Ruth, who emerges as the most powerful Pinter woman. She is in total control of her situation, and is thus the apotheosis of Pinter's use of the mother-whore theme. As Kerr explains, "... no woman is essentially wife or essentially whore, she is potentially either or both at once; ... Personality is not something given; it is fluid."[1] Ruth is able to flow from one role to the other. She is not fixed at a particular level, but can adjust herself to what she thinks is the proper mood and role. She knows that, "... husbands do indeed dream of their wives as prostitutes, wives of their husbands as suave lovers or brutal rapists."[2] Ruth understands that, "Categories and traditional roles contain no man, unless he lets himself be contained by them, choosing to conform to a pattern that

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[1]Walter Kerr, Harold Pinter (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 32.

[2]Martin Esslin, The Peopled Wound: The Work of Harold Pinter (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1970), pp. 248-249.

does not actually express his potency."[3] Ruth can and does act out all roles to contain her men. Aware of the son's Oedipal desire for the mother, Ruth is able to control both Lenny and Joey, as well as Max, her new 'husband'.

The Oedipal theme crops up repeatedly in sons' or substitute sons' relations with their mothers or substitute mothers, but the guilt that is aroused by their incestuous feelings causes an intense emotional turmoil, which renders Pinter's male characters incapable of coping with the ambiguity of the mother-figure. As Hollis explains:

> What the collective man of The Homecoming [and I venture to add most Pinter men] is trying to do is to unite with the source, the source which is often personified in erotic and maternal imagery.[4]

The source that Pinter men are looking for is the (security of the) womb itself. In the post-natal environment, the womb is partially symbolized by the womb-room, and partially by the mother-whore figures so typical of Harold Pinter's plays. It is often here, in the womb-room, that the search for the source takes place, a search that involves the "collective man" confronting the ambiguous mother-figure. In this confrontation two things are happening simultaneously. Not only is the man coming to grips with his own sexuality, he is also trying to cope with the reality of the sexual life of the mother-figure. Dealing successfully with these two issues is central to the process of individuation, and is a rite of passage to manhood. An inability to contend with these crises causes

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[3] Kerr, Harold Pinter, p. 33.

[4] James R. Hollis, Harold Pinter: The Poetics of Silence (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971), p. 109.

men to assume a position of expecting women to play the ambiguous mother-whore role, and to provide the womb-room environment. Some of Pinter's women are trapped by these demands. Ruth, however, is able to take advantage of these roles and control her environment. Pinter thus, explores man coping with the conflicting images of the mother-whore figure. The "erotic and maternal imagery" assumes its true importance when one uses the mother-whore theme as a guideline to analyze the plays. Pinter, then, has placed himself in the provocative position of investigating women at the multifaceted center of their essence, describing all aspects of the mother and the whore, and integrating the two as mother-whore.

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