Eroding the Language of Freedom: Identity Predicament in Selected Works of Harold Pinter

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Abstract

In a world brimming with upheavals our individual identities are threatened with annihilation, every social eruption carries seeds of change. The word change is pregnant with both positive and negative possibilities, one hand, it allows human beings a chance of tremendous progress or on the other, it constrains human progress. Harold Pinter, once described as the ‘a master of Uncertainty’, ¹ provided valid situations and formulas in his dramas in which the identities of his characters are deployed in two different categories: (i) those who stick to their identities to the extent of destroying the Other, thus creating oppressors out of themselves, and (ii) those who desperately fight to preserve their different identities in the face of the shifting landmarks created by the oppressors.

Therefore my study is an attempt to develop a new conceptualisation of the term ‘identity’, to see how it has been employed in seven selected works of Harold Pinter. My thesis is not concerned with following the evolution of Harold Pinter dramas as much as the representation of his characters and the fluctuation of their identities in the face of the totalitarian powers. The hegemonising policies of these powers come in different shapes in public or private spheres, therefore the treatment of identity in my thesis takes different categories, and each category is approached with relevant set of theories to cut to the bone of Pinter’s philosophy of the individual as an independent and free human being in this world.

The hegemonic powers do not emerge out of the vacuum, they stealthily encroach on governing systems progressively be they democratic or undemocratic. They create small incisions in our moral code, a ‘slow morphing of our social landmarks’,² that results in a brainwashing process with different techniques and targets that are set against any individual who shows symptoms of non-conformity. My thesis highlights such processes, and examines those individuals who accept to be brainwashed as well as those who do so under duress in light of the suggested theories. Although draconic measure in Pinter dramas include everybody, a subaltern feminist theme is running in parallel with the theme of subduing the identity of the Other by focusing on the position of women in his dramas.

¹ Brigitte Gauthier (ed.) Viva Pinter; Harold Pinter’s Spirit of Resistance, (Bern, Peter Lang, 2009), p.4
² Ibid., p.13.
By following different representations of characters in different circumstances, my thesis is an attempt to add another layer to the concept of identity as seen from my own experiences and as represented in Pinter dramas. It does not offer solutions or alternatives as much as representing situations in which the concept of identity is at stake. Words such as power, violence, and hegemony are part and parcel of this process. Moreover, by spotting the weaknesses in any given system or social model, I’m diagnosing the inadequacies that need to be negotiated, or addressed in order to protect our identities as free individuals who are not in need of more restrictions to regulate our lives as much as we need to break away from them to establish ourselves with only one identity: humanity.
**Introduction**

**The Question of Identity in Harold Pinter’s Drama**

‘I do have a strong sense that we are all being betrayed, all the time, in fact by the power, people who run our lives, who run the life of the society in which we live.’

A closer look at characters in Pinter’s plays reveals the historical, political and social issues that had left their mark on him. In every play tackled in this thesis, there are historical, social, or political references present in the lines uttered by the characters. It is exactly by spotting these situations that this thesis is investigating the evolvement of their identities.

The central theme of his work is also one of the dominant themes of the 20th century, and I believe it is still an on-going process in our own moment, half way through the second decade of the twenty-first century. It is the struggle for identity of the individual human subject, who is forced to exist in a fragmented, unfathomable world; always looking for self-validation, often jockeying for dominance and isolated moments of individual power and social agency. Virtually all of Pinter’s characters are at times uncertain of who or what they are; their identity is either compromised, incomplete or they exist in situations in which others seek to impinge upon it, or take it away altogether. Living in such a state of uncertainty in relation to identity politics has pushed some of Pinter’s characters to be aggressive, suspicious, to regard both their familiars and strangers with trepidation, to become overprotective of their possessions, territory, and space, seeing control of such material objects and social realities as a means to assert sovereignty. As Victor L. Cahn claims: ‘These possessions may range from the trivial (the cheese roll in *The Homecoming* or the knife in *The Collection*) to the extravagant (Deeley’s home in *Old Times*)’. In short, ‘[Pinter’s] whole work [can be seen as] a veritable rehab tool in Human Values’.

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3 *Viva Pinter: Harold Pinter’s Spirit of Resistance*, ed. by, Brigitte Gauthier (Bern: Peter Lang, Switzerland,2009), p.3.
One of the most important ‘human values’, in my opinion, is individual identity and freedom. When the atmosphere brims with uncertainty, as is the case in most Pinter plays, an individual’s identity becomes surrounded by danger. The threat can range from annihilation, fragmentation, or destruction to what appears on the surface to be less intrusive and destructive, but which is, in reality the worst of all: reconstruction and remoulding according to a certain prevailing hegemony, orthodoxy or rule.

Locating Pinter in his historical context can be illuminating in trying to ascertain and understand why this should be the case: concern over this issue grew bigger and bigger after the Second World War. The atrocities committed within that period, as military actions that brought about its end, and the psychological pressures that ensued cast a long shadow of horror over the late twentieth century—and, most chillingly, the shadow had a human form. Pinter used different characters as agents to diagnose the identity predicament in his plays. This study is therefore an attempt to spot situations in which the identities of characters are being manipulated by the oppressive systems that dominate the modern world—in order to be moulded (or re-moulded) according to their standards. My study also investigates the multiple reasons that prevent characters from finding and enacting their identities as ‘normal’ human beings in society (or rather ‘abnormal’ freedom fighters who escape the normative teloi of fixed identity types within hegemonically defined and policed social structures).

My dissertation seeks to interrogate the ways in which Pinter presented this ‘normalisation’ in order to comment on the politics of identity in Europe between 1957 and 2000. Since society is constituted of men and women, and there exists—even within wider attempts to control, discipline and punish all in society—a distinctly skewed gender political playing field, a materialist feminist theme will also run through the following chapters to enable a closer look at the details of male and female relationships in society, as well as providing a point of departure towards the larger scale structures in which ‘oppression’ is a crucial word.

Although early in his career, while talking to drama students in Bristol University in 1962, Pinter said that he was not a theorist or an authoritative commentator on the dramatic or social scene, after more than four decades as a playwright he changed his

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4 Gauthier calls Pinter ‘master of Uncertainty,’ p.4.
5 I use the term ‘normalisation’ deliberately, and evoke its political ramifications in the post-Prague spring world of Eastern European oppression—although as will be seen in my dissertation, I do not at all think that it is only failed communist states of supposedly tyrannical regimes that conduct this sort of violence upon their subject citizens.
tune in his Nobel Prize speech in 2005.\textsuperscript{6} Over the course of his career, and as an increasingly politicised citizen of a country that he began to see as violent, oppressive, arrogant and duplicitous, Pinter came to the realisation that the writer sometimes ‘has to smash the mirror’\textsuperscript{7} and reach to the truth (whatever that stands for) that lies behind it. However, although he assigned the playwright this mission of reaching for ‘the truth’, he himself was not sure if there was, is or ever can be any fixed meaning for it. His works therefore rely heavily on the use of language with such minimalist precision as not to convey any specific meaning, because he always enjoyed throwing something at the audience in order to let them decide; as Lia Williams, who played Suki in \textit{Celebration}, besides many other Pinter plays, says, ‘Sod the audience, let them think what they need to think, whatever that maybe it’s fine’.\textsuperscript{8}

In and through deciding to say ‘sod the audience’, Pinter, as Mary Riddell suggests, has dissected ordinary life so as to reflect his view on the various levels and types of violence that seep through individual relations. Yet the relentless intellectual rigour with which Pinter pursues this task is much more than ‘[the sort of] dissection of ordinary lives [that] made him the first prophet of the reality show’.\textsuperscript{9} Whilst his writing has the accuracy of un-prepared, un-rehearsed ‘fly-on-the-wall’ exchanges, his intellectual project is so sophisticated that it goes even further than individual relationships and exchanges to a full and frank condemnation of the rotten relationships that warp society. Pinter does not show us one man ‘getting one over’ on another man; he portrays mankind as the destroyer of mankind.\textsuperscript{10}

This moral philosophy through the logic of the anti-exemplum, or the gentle turn of a conventional situation without the expected payoff, needed a particular genre of writing, and Pinter’s focus on depicting the ordinary details of our daily life opened doors for him to comment on the politics and the powers of certain situations in our life, as he dealt with such politics and powers as games. Pinter, like his audience, plays the game in his plays without knowing how this game is going to end. Commenting on \textit{Celebration}, Pinter said: ‘This is a voyage of discovery for me as much as it is for you, I

\textsuperscript{7} The Nobel Prize Speech in 2005.
\textsuperscript{8} Mark Taylor-Batty, \textit{About Pinter: The Playwright & the Work} (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), p.205.
\textsuperscript{10} Gauthier, p.5.
don’t know what the bloody hell it is’\textsuperscript{11} Not knowing what the play is going to be or what the characters are up to allowed Pinter a wide space to explore how far the human evil/violence could reach; to leave open the possibility for any deceit, trickery, manipulation or control—and it was Pinter’s tradition ever since he started writing. When Michael Billington asked him in an interview if he knew where Ruth in \textit{The Homecoming} was heading to, Pinter replied: ‘I really didn’t know what was going to happen, where she, or the play, was going’\textsuperscript{12}

Nonetheless, the relations of power, with which Pinter is fascinated, emerge gradually from the play itself and even though most of his plays are concerned with familial relations, the fist of power, and the desire to shape and control identity, always makes a strong presence. Mary Luckhurst believes that ‘[e]ven in the plays which do not directly represent torture and interrogation, Pinter is persistently intrigued by the role of cruelty and power in familial and erotic relationships’\textsuperscript{13}

Torture, violence, sexual relationships, and the ways in which they are interwoven into a tapestry of oppression are all running themes in Pinter plays, underlying what might seem quite ordinary aspects of life for many people.

Nevertheless, Pinter’s works uncover and shine a spotlight on these forms of human interaction by bringing them forth from the shadows and laying them bare in both the social and political arena.

Pinter manipulates many aspects of life to highlight the human abuse in them. For that purpose he depends mainly on a small number of repeatedly present tools: language, memory, gender, and his famous silence—that comes mostly at the end of his plays—as tools to speak to the nature and deployment of power in relation to identity politics.

Iona Heath, commenting on Pinter’s Nobel Prize win, says:

\begin{quote}
However, for me, the politics arise inevitably from the plays. All his plays are about the struggle for power, usually within closer relationships and often inarticulate, and about the extent to which the abuse of power is dependent on the deliberate manipulation and perversion of memory and on the systematic silencing of victims. Just the same issue pervade contemporary
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{11}{Batty, \textit{About Pinter}, p.202.}
\footnotetext{12}{Michael Billington, ‘I’ve Written 29 Damn Plays. Isn’t That Enough?’, \textit{The Guardian} \url{http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2006/mar/14/theatre.stage}. [Accessed 9 February 2015].}
\end{footnotes}
politics and he has both the courage and the integrity to make the connections.  

Whilst the focus here is on ‘power’ it is impossible to separate this issue from identity—for in all of Pinter’s plays the identity that one assumes, or has constructed for one is the main factor in deciding one’s fate at the hands of those who have constructed for themselves a position and identity of power. Thus it may be seen in Heath’s statement that there are several factors that Pinter manipulates cleverly in his plays to approach torture and oppression differently.

First comes the language of his plays. As I demonstrate in what follows, Pinter uses language in such a way that the absence of things highlight their importance. In other words, Pinter believes that there is always another meaning hiding behind the uttered words in his dialogues, and it is this meaning that determines the individual’s identity in totalitarian regimes or others. Crucial to a full understanding of Pinter’s writing method is thus the fact that in Pinter plays there is nothing whatsoever called fixed meaning—because Pinter never believed in ‘right’ perceptions on which any given meaning rests. Such a normative approach would only give those regimes he sought to criticise more space to manipulate their rules and to mould individuals’ identities according to the requirements of the situation as they see it. Nevertheless, although Pinter distrusted words, he never lost his faith in the power of language to render the truth, despite its fluid, ambiguous and manipulable substance. I would therefore agree with Mark Silverstein, who stated that Pinter did not suggest the failure of language in its stated purpose of defining the truth of the world, but rather he believed that language is detached from being, and that it is not in the nature of language to yield the knowledge or the truth of an experience as long as anything that exists within language is disconnected from existence. Commenting on this issue in ‘Writing for the Theatre’, Pinter said:

I think there’s a shared common ground all right, but that it’s more like a quicksand. Because ‘reality’, is quite a strong firm word we tend to think, or to hope, that the state to which it

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refers is equally firm, settled and unequivocal. It doesn’t seem to be, and in my opinion, it’s no better or worse for that.\textsuperscript{16}

Thus language and truth for Pinter are both contentious concepts that can be manipulated by anybody, from a small child to the agent of a superpower, to serve their own interests. This very manipulation of an already fluid concept, such as truth, has been depicted in more than one Pinter play to reflect the workings of power in hegemonic and/or totalitarian systems. As language is moulded and manipulated in the service of such ends, it creates individuals with blurred identities, if not obliterated ones. Silverstein explains how Pinter highlights the process of subject formation through linguistic clichés that signify legitimisation of a master culture or what is more generally known as ideology:

What Pinter’s dialogue effects by its complex use of the cliché is a kind of linguistic alienation device distancing the reader or audience from and allowing us to interrogate the ideological discourses and ‘context of signification’, through which the master culture legitimises itself. Althusser often makes the point that ideology never announces itself as ideology, but operates through presenting the cultural as the natural, the constructed as the essential, ‘the context of signification’, as the given and that which is beyond question.\textsuperscript{17}

The ideologies that attempt to construct our world through the construction of words are the same ones that try to manipulate our memory, and this is exactly why Gauthier believes that Pinter shows us ‘Real Man’ and not ‘Romantic Man’; she believes that a Pinter character ‘possesses within himself all the mechanisms which can lead him from domestic felony to crimes against humanity’.\textsuperscript{18} Another factor that Pinter highlights through his fascination with the way that we idealise the past to beguile our unhappy present, as suggested by Billington, is memory.\textsuperscript{19} Nonetheless, I believe that Pinter treats memory in more detail than is implied by Billington’s rather simplistic sentence. On one level, Pinter treats memory as a tool in a battle for positions, as in \textit{Old Times} (1971); on another level, memory is an Edenic past for those incapable of

\textsuperscript{17}Silverstein, p.23-33.
\textsuperscript{18}Gauthier, p.10.
\textsuperscript{19}Michael Billington, ‘I’ve Written 29 Damn Plays’. In a comment on his memory Pinter once said: ‘I think I really look back into a kind of fog most of the time, and things loom out of the fog. Some things I have to force myself to remember. I bring them back by an act of will. It appals me that I’ve actually forgotten things, which at the time meant a great deal to me’. See Charles Haugland, ‘Memory and Structure: The Middle Plays of Harold Pinter’ http://www.huntingtontheatre.org/articles/Betrayal/Memory-and-Structure-The-Middle-Plays-of-Harold-pinter/ [Accessed 18 January, 2016].
reconstructing their own present, as in *A Kind of Alaska* (1982). Memory is also an alarm to awaken our conscience towards the atrocities of the world, whether in the past or in the present, as in *Ashes to Ashes* (1996), and so on. Central to these facts is the notion that we create our identities in relation to how we position ourselves relative to both memories of our own lived experience, and also wider sets of cultural memories. In each of the examples from plays that I have given, memory is treated as an instrument to create and/or fight for a well-defined identity; it is deployed by manipulated individuals in the different frameworks and contexts of the plays.

Nonetheless, the most important aspect of memory in Pinter’s plays, I believe, is how to verify our individual memories and keep them alive as much as possible, although he was sceptical of such a possibility (because we tend to forget even our yesterdays when each new tomorrow comes). But despite this, the past is important because of the knowledge it hides that enables us also to interpret the present. This is evident when Pinter talks about the immense difficulty of verifying the past in detail:

> If one can speak of the difficulty of knowing what in fact took place yesterday, one can, I think, treat the present in the same way. What’s happening now? We don’t know until tomorrow or in six months’ time, and we won’t know then, we’ll have forgotten, or our imagination will have attributed quite false characteristics to today. A moment is sucked away and distorted, often even at the time of its birth. We will all interpret a common experience quite differently, though we prefer to subscribe to the view that there’s a shared common ground, a known ground.  

Lydia Prexl, I believe, summarised Pinter’s fascination and interest in memory in a few sentences:

> Pinter’s memory plays portray the past’s influence on the present and reveal reality as a mere (re-)construction based on assumptions. Our presumed knowledge of the past and even of the present moment is an illusion grounded on deceptive quicksand.

Such a statement has profound implications for the construction of identity as a function of memorial recollection and reflection. Not only is our memory based on

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21 Ibid.
delusional assumptions or uncertain events, but also, we are so focused on our present that is also reconstructed and built on that delusional past and uncertainty of events, therefore, we tend not to look back and see what atrocities, misconceptions, or false knowledge are actually there.

This is a very important aspect of Pinter’s plays with regards to the memory of the individual—because in the process of forgetting and misremembering of certain events in the plays he touches on the relationship between the totalitarian regimes and individual identity. The key point is that a delusional vision of our past and present (a vision created through normative hegemonies of culture and politics) prepares a fertile ground for the totalitarian regimes who take control over the already slippery landmarks of our memories so as to blur the boundaries of our individual identities and set up systems to control individuals. And these systems are so pervasive and so strong that within them, the same person cannot enact their own agency and change man-made rules.22 In a letter to The Guardian on 9 July 1996, showing Pinter’s outrage at the policies of the right-wing governments prevalent in Britain and North America at that time, Pinter highlighted this tendency in a cynical tone:

The general thrust these days is: Oh, come on, it’s all in the past, nobody’s interested anymore, it didn’t work, that’s all, everyone knows what the Americans are like, but stop being naive, this is the world, there’s nothing to be done about it and anyway, fuck it, who cares? Sure, as they say, sure. But let me put it this way – the dead are still looking at us, steadily, waiting for us to acknowledge our part in their murder.23

In the light of statements such as these, about tangibly being haunted by the ghosts of those whom WE have slain, all of Pinter’s memory plays can be seen to be reminders of the strange, and sometimes manipulated workings of memory; they highlight how easily memory can be distorted by changing key facts and events either to erase uncomfortable histories, or to reinforce specific pictures in people’s memories and hence give them new identities based on their act of re-imagined remembrance (actual forgetfulness), which has been recreated according to totalitarian measures. In other words, Pinter emphasises the manipulation of the memory of the individual by certain powers to the extent of re-writing the history from a certain view and forcing people

22 Gauthier, p.11.
to adopt it. Moreover, Pinter highlights not only the individual memory, but also the collective one through his plays that deal with aspects of memory. In *Ashes to Ashes*, Rebecca thus represents not only herself, but also many others who suffer from a delusional picture of both the present and the past in their minds. Or, as Antonia Fraser wrote in her memoirs about Pinter, he once said Rebecca could stand for the artist, trying to mine and rediscover not only the forgotten horror, but its significance to the present: ‘She is the artist who can’t avoid the world’s pain’.  

Always in such matters, identity is key. It is important how we construct ourselves, how we position ourselves in relation to ideology or the statement of hegemonically defined ‘truths’. It is Pinter’s acute sensitivity to this fact that means that we can never pin down any of his own plays to a fixed meaning. As the following quotation reveals, he believed that there are many facets to many things in life:

> There are at least twenty-four possible aspects of any single statement, depending on where you’re standing at the time or on what the weather’s like [...] a categorical statement, I find, will never stay where it is and be finite. It will immediately be subject to modification by the other twenty-three possibilities of it. No statement I make, therefore, should be interpreted as final and definitive. One or two of them may sound final and definite, they may even be almost final and definitive, but I won’t regard them as such tomorrow, and I wouldn’t like you to do so today.

These delusional borders of memory between the present and the past affect not only our memorial reservoir, but our present reality as well. Therefore, the concept of ‘reality’ (or more accurately, how individual characters locate themselves in relation to the events that transpire around them, to them or at their behest, is also presented in poetic images in Pinter plays to reinforce the state of uncertainty of certain situations highlighted in the plays. Henry Woolf, Pinter’s lifelong friend, emphasises this: ‘In Pinterland the frontiers between memory, imagination, and the ‘real’, world we seem to inhabit are fluid’. This is exactly why we can never tell what a Pinter play means on one level, without leaving a space for many other interpretations that might arise at any time. Woolf continues:

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25Prexl.
What took place: what exactly took place? We ask time and again after a Pinter play. Nobody knows for certain and he could not or would not tell us. Far better to let the disturbing possibility of multiple truths invade our precision trained minds.\textsuperscript{27}

It is very hard to verify what has taken place because everybody would have his own construct of ‘truth, which I dare saying is part of many other truths which render the term truth itself as a fluid and hence Pinter’s attempt to undermine any kind of hegemony or totalitarianism based on certain type of fixed truth. Therefore, Pinter is able to strategically problematize hegemony by showing us that the reality or the truth which stands behind the mask of hegemony is in itself the mask which prevents our seeing hegemonic practice as it is.\textsuperscript{28}

One response to this situation would be to throw one’s hands up, as Woolf does, when he states that a partial answer to such questions might be: ‘Pinter’s plays are also often extended prose poems rich in images that offer several meanings at the same time, many of them beyond the reach of rational analyses’.\textsuperscript{29} But no matter how layered Pinter’s plays may be, there is definitely a complicated situation that asks us to look beneath the surface, to find the ways in which Pinter deploys the notions of individual and collective identity in order to emphasise resistance to totalitarianism and the erosion of the human individual. Gauthier highlights this, observing that in Pinter: ‘There is an ethical need to resist political drift towards totalitarianism in all its forms’.\textsuperscript{30}

In order to avoid slipping into totalitarian political quicksand, to have one’s identity formed entirely by one’s oppressors, Pinter has highlighted the fluid characteristic of not only memory, but language as well. Both elements, if manipulated to certain ends, leave people without the agency achieved through developing and forming one’s own, politically aware identity.

Although I have highlighted language and memory in Pinter’s works as key concepts in defining the individual’s identity, there are many other elements that this study has used to investigate the identity constructs such as gender, politics, and sexual and

\textsuperscript{27}Woolf, p.146.
\textsuperscript{28} Meredith Green ‘Problematizing Hegemony: Hyperprivileging, Pain, and Theater’ Association of Student Anthropologists, (Department of Anthropology, University of Arizona, Tucson, 2001), pp.7-24.
\textsuperscript{29} Woolf, p.146.
\textsuperscript{30} Gauthier, p.13.
marital relations. These remaining categories are explained in full details in the reading of the plays themselves. I preferred to highlight language and memory because I believe that they are two highly emphasised elements in Pinter’s rhetoric as a citizen and a playwright.

I am here on familiar ground: Pinter’s social awareness and the elements of his drama have been debated by many critics, and, although Pinter himself emphasised that his work does not embrace any ideology (‘I do not have an ideology in my plays’), many critics have attempted to pin down the themes of power, language, and violence to certain periods in Pinter’s personal life. I’m not establishing a connection between Pinter’s biography and the chronological order of his plays because I believe that highlighting such a connection risk tainting Pinter’s plays and tie them to a certain historical or personal event. Moreover, in the second section of this short introduction, I will not deploy any such criticism—because I believe that the dissertation you are about to read details and highlights such criticism in addition to my own personal perspective of Pinter’s plays. It is a response to Pinter’s plays when taken from the standpoint of the end of the year 2015 and a statement on the appalling situations ravaging our world at the moment; situations that lead, almost always, to oppressing the identity of others on a daily basis and in different ways.

II

Being an Iraqi woman who has lived a large part of her life under a totalitarian regime, and still living with the disastrous aftermath of three almost consecutive wars from the 1980s till the present, I am deeply moved by the images of the erosion of the self of Pinter’s characters in general, and the female characters in particular. The restrictions that Pinter highlights, the double standards, or the smokescreen of doublethink, the manipulation of women by patriarchal figures, and the oppression of others, are all experiences that I have lived with both on personal and public levels. This is exactly why I am focusing on female characters in the case studies selected, as I believe that there are many similar situations for women in other parts of the world who are experiencing similar suffering; although this occurs in different contexts and for

different reasons, what unites all of those women, and what hampers the development of their own free identities are the words ‘violence’ and ‘oppression’.

Besides focusing on the representation of women and the variations of their agency in different situations, the words ‘violence’, ‘power’, and ‘oppression’ are also emphasised to analyse situations in which individuals’ crises do not only revolve around standing up against oppression and facing violence, but also fighting not to belong to a certain group so as to remain faithful to their principles: in other words, fighting conformity, and having an identity of one’s own.

The concept of identity that I’m attempting to highlight here is therefore no longer the theme of belonging but rather the theme of not belonging, not to be mistakenly seen as part of the rest, and not to lose the self while trying to keep detached from the hell of others. In other words still, I believe that the characters that I’m discussing in this study end up with crumbled, eroded selves for two reasons: (i) the direct confrontation with counter-powers (such as happens with Jimmy in *Party Time* (1991)), or (ii) being, on the contrary, escapist characters who prefer to go back into their shell rather than fight outside their comfort zone (such as Deborah in *A Kind of Alaska* (1982) and Rebecca in *Ashes to Ashes* (1996)). Pinter’s characters in this sense go exactly against what Alfred Hitchcock once observed about the difference between the novelist and the playwright: ‘Drama is life with the dull bits cut out’. It is exactly the ‘dull’ parts of life, the normative, repressive, habitually unseen violence that Pinter stages in his plays. The aforementioned characters, and many others displayed in the following chapters, are examples and/or images of a wide spectrum of lived situations and potentially real-life characters that/who we might meet anytime and anywhere in this world. The fact that they have crumbled by the end of their respective plays should ring an alarm bell in our minds as an audience, making us contemplate the thought that we too could be in their situations one day, perhaps today.

Pinter forces us to realise, in other words, that if we really want to be detached from the rest of the world, if we really want our consciousness raised so that we can become different to the rest, we should not be detached as an audience, passively watching, living, and sharing the moments of anger, despair, and oppression.

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32David Hare, ‘Harold Pinter and Film’, in *The Pinter Review*, p.41.
Nevertheless, we should not seek to live ourselves the same despair that the characters are living, for we are citizens of this world, and, as Pinter said, his dramas are only a dramatisation of the state of affairs as it is; they are not messages of despair, for there is always a flicker of hope in every situation. There is always a possibility of imagining what could happen. By the end of his Nobel speech Pinter referred to the possibility of change:

If such a determination [defining the truths of our lives and our societies] is not embodies in our political vision, we have no hope of restoring what is so nearly lost to us—the dignity of man.\footnote{Nobel Prize Speech in 2005. [Accessed 18 January, 2016].}

Being witnesses of such atrocities, whether on social, political, cultural or gendered levels, as well as fighting back against the despair that Pinter characters are living, should be a vivid thought whenever we watch or read a Pinter play. We do not necessarily make change, but to be aware of the atrocities across the world, to put ourselves in each other’s shoes, and to be determined to alleviate the pains of at least the people around us, is a change in itself. Verbalising these ideas Pinter once stated:

There exists today widespread propaganda which asserts that socialism is dead. But if to be a socialist is to be a person convinced that the words ‘the common good,’ and ‘social justice,’ actually mean something; if to be a socialist is to be outraged at the contempt in which millions and millions of people are held by those in power, by ‘market forces,’ by international financial institutions; if to be a socialist is to be a person determined to do everything in his or her power to alleviate these unforgivably degraded lives, then socialism can never be dead because these aspirations will never die.\footnote{Various Voices, p.211-212.}

Therefore, being a witness of my own experiences, and attempting to be in the process of keeping an international awareness of the injustices around the world, besides the struggle to be different and have an identity according to no normative and hegemonically defined rules, I have in what follows decided to read Pinter’s plays closely from a different perspective—by applying different tools, theories, and attitudes, in addition to my own experiences, so as to add on to what has already been said something that I perceive to be useful and original. I am not providing any
criticism in relation to Pinter in this introduction, as this has been already deployed within the text itself, and I am not identifying here with the opinions of any other critics, except inasmuch as I comment on the same specific scenes that they do, in the plays under discussion.

By providing a different reading based on my own perspective and experiences in life as well as the supporting evidence brought from the text, I hope I have added another layer to the scholarship that discusses Pinter’s widely celebrated works.

In the next section, I will briefly outline the methodologies and the structures I have adopted for that purpose.

III

The objective of this study is to bring a new concept of how identity is conceived in Pinter’s plays in such a way that all his characters, ultimately, fail to exist as active members of a society that they are also supposed to help shape. By investigating the reasons that stand behind this lack of secure and functional identity, and by means of deploying theories related to identity formulation and expression, as well as repression and oppression, this study will attempt to draw attention to the inadequacies in society that were Pinter’s ideological focus. I believe that Pinter honed in so intensely on such issues as a way of prompting us, as audiences to his work, to renegotiate such oppressive and repressive systems, to comprehend them, and finally to act upon them. Through different aspects of identity, my study will address the overarching problem in the light of a set of case studies deploying related theories, with a different approach to the issue in each chapter.

Although Pinter, as Michael Billington puts it, enjoyed parallel careers as an actor, screenwriter, director, poet, and vigorous campaigner for human rights in recent years, he is best remembered for his dramas, which are the focus of my study. Aiming to challenge and/or build upon previous studies that have dealt with the development of Pinter’s character’s identities, this dissertation contains six chapters focusing on the process in which the characters struggle to either maintain their

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identities or construct new ones, according to the context in which they are operating. Notions of gender, memory, language, political power, sex, and marriage and the family will all be developed in separate chapters with relevant theories to unpack new ideas, and develop a new conceptual framework for identity; my general thrust is towards articulation of the necessity of fighting for the acceptance of difference, rather than complying with social pressures to belong to a certain pre-defined and controlled lot or group. I present the concept of identity in light of necessary evidence from the texts, and through the support of diverse theories, and it is intended that my deliberate focus on different representations will further scholarship on identity construction. In other words, my reading of Pinter plays is more metaphorical than literal as I believe that the characters and events described in his plays are dramatised in a way to enhance certain images and refresh our minds to make the necessary comparisons or links to social reality in which events of similar nature to the ones staged in the plays might occur in our daily practices. As a vivid example of this is the coma of Deborah in Pinter’s *A Kind of Alaska* (1982), which, if read literally, will be depicting a woman tied to bed for twenty nine years due to the collapse of her corporeal and memorial existence. But, if we attempt to read the play in metaphorical terms, we can imagine a woman caught up in an abusive relationship, a marginalised individual and/or group who are struggling against an oppressive regime that kept them in a state of paralysis for a long time, Deborah also could stand for many situations in life in which we find ourselves caught up in a swirl from which we can’t get out and so on and so forth. Therefore, a line of dialogue, a play title, an image, a scene, a setting or a certain word are all read on my side as a metaphorical enhancement of many other situations in life in which the human identity/freedom is challenged.

As Pinter once told The Guardian, ‘I [...] address the state of the world’;\(^\text{36}\) thus, my study is an attempt to see how Pinter perceived the world through the characters he presents on stage, emphasising the theme of identity in different variations. I believe the concept of identity as presented in Pinter’s works relies heavily on questioning the intervention of hegemonic authorities in everyday life. When presenting Pinter’s works

during the Nobel Prize ceremony, Per Wastberg, the Chairman of the Noble Committee, said:

The early works can be seen as metaphors for authoritarian intervention on several levels: the power of the State, the power of the family, the power of religion – all undermining the individual’s critical questions.\(^{37}\)

Guided by this view, I pose in this dissertation several key questions:

1) How does Pinter’s approach to the linguistic tools/games of his characters provoke thought in his audience to recall certain social realities/situations in which language is hugely used as a tool of power to subdue the individual’s identity?

2) What is at stake in the fact that almost all of Pinter’s characters in the selected plays fail to exist as emotionally and socially balanced characters in a society that they are supposed to shape? How does this provide a comment on the politics of identity in Europe, and many parts of the world between 1957-2000?

3) How does Pinter use differently structured scenes in similar situations and different contexts to point out the identity issue? For example: the interrogation scene is a recurrent theme in his plays that has been manipulated differently in different situations. How does that work to highlight the identity crisis, and reveal that agents of oppression can take different shapes?

4) How does Pinter’s dramas that are limited to the stage they are enacted on, can provide us with a critique of the social reality and its inadequacies?

Through these questions, and the selected paradigms of identity that I have chosen, I hope I can derive a new identity concept according to which people should have enough awareness to see that the oppressor is actually borrowing the story of the oppressed and rewriting it to become his voice.\(^{38}\) A concept of identity that is based on ‘commonality of feelings’\(^{39}\), in bell hooks’s [sic] words, is better, I believe, than associating with specific groups on the basis of gender, nationality, or socially constructed and expected feelings of belonging. To feel that we belong to a world community rather than assigning each other different labels would, I believe, help us

\(^{37}\) Weales, p.605.
imagine ourselves in the position of others. ‘Imagine’ is the key word that I want to deploy here in connection to Pinter’s comment on staging the state of affairs as it is, by borrowing bell hooks’s idea of art. According to hook, ‘It is not enough for art to tell things as they are, the function of art is to do more than tell it like it is – it is to imagine what is possible’.⁴⁰ Therefore, challenging Pinter’s idea of staging things as they are, we should develop a new sense of identity based on imagining what could possibly be achieved if we started thinking outside the box. The sense of identity I am emphasising here is the same one verbalised by Pinter – the citizen – which reveals that ‘A certain anger over oppression and the ideological clouding of issues of justice has never been far from his mind’.⁴¹

Bearing the concept of identity in mind, my study is divided into six chapters to conveniently follow the thematic development and representation of this concept in different categories:

In Chapter One, I explore the concept of identity through the use of gender. The relationship between men and women is highly controversial. As a result, each sex tries to possess the other and, consequently, create a state of oppression. By deploying feminist, linguistic, and psychoanalytic theories, this chapter will try to investigate the shape of gendered relations in Pinter’s A Kind of Alaska (1982), and how Pinter, as an artist, manipulated this problematic relation to address bigger issues and different agencies of power and oppression.

In addition to the use of gender, the focus of chapter one opens another window on the identity construction/fragmentation process as a function of memory. As the leading character, Deborah, is unable to re-enact both her memory and her corporeal being, she fails to exist by belonging to this world. Deborah’s fragile, delusional memory problems (which are also adumbrating my next chapter, in which memory is further closely read) are also read in chapter one through deployment of feminist theories and Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological philosophy. The chapter is therefore an investigation of: (i) the variations of women’s representations in society; (ii) the moulding of the identity of the individual by different power figures, mainly the patriarch; and (iii) what woman, as an oppressed sex, could do to change the state of

⁴⁰ bell hooks, Outlaw Culture, p.237.
⁴¹ Batty, About Pinter, p.67.
affairs. Despite the fact that we live in an almost phallocentric world, women can still be capable of creating a space for themselves to protect their genius.\textsuperscript{42} They should refrain from naming their anger with just one language, that is the language of the oppressed, or the victim, and start discovering other possibilities for themselves. Moreover, men are not always the victimisers in this rather complex equation as they also suffer under the yoke of proving their manhood. Yet, they have still carved out a comfortable space in which they can refrain from competing and oppressing the other under the label of being proper men in society, which is defined through their superiority over women. Gender battles for dominance and the struggle for belonging perceived through memory will be investigated in this chapter to provide a different perspective on the battling characters’ identities in their race for dominance and control.

In Chapter Two, I examine, Pinter’s \textit{Ashes to Ashes} (1996), which stands out among his memory plays as it addresses what Hanna Scolnicov believes to be ‘the most serious ethical breakdown of the twentieth century, the Holocaust’.\textsuperscript{43} Nevertheless, in this chapter, I develop another perspective on memory that is not confined to a certain event. Not having been engaged with a specific historical event, Pinter is successful in re-enacting the atrocity of the event described in the play via the memory of Rebecca, the leading character. He thus emphasises that sometimes, it is not the meticulously pieced together facts in our lives that construct our identities, but our memories. The events that lie in our subconscious are strongly responsible for who we are, as they might change the course of our lives by causing us to adopt a new lens to have a different outlook. Using the necessary tools of memory critique, this chapter investigates the enactment of our identities through memory. It will thus develop the discussion of memory begun in the first chapter; however, while the first chapter focuses mainly on gender, the main focus of the second chapter will be Pinter’s treatment of memory itself.

The amoebic characteristic of memory in this Pinter play makes it difficult to decide whether memory here is treated as a tool for remembering or forgetting, or whether

\textsuperscript{42} bell hooks, \textit{Outlaw Culture}, p.40.

the play itself is about remembrance or forgetfulness. Nevertheless, this absurd inadequacy of any narrative to define the play ‘when pitted against the large situation which audiences grasp more fully than the characters’, as well as the elusive quality of memory, is a rich tool for the artist to confront the audience with the constituents of their identities, as Mark Taylor-Batty suggests:

Memory is elusive and uncapturable. As such it not only serves as a rich source of content for an artist, but also has powerful metaphorical qualities when paralleled with an individual’s confrontation with what constitutes their own identity.

Moreover, Pinter’s greatest artistic challenge was to adapt Marcel Proust’s 3,200-page epic novel *A La Recherche du Temps Perdu*, in which he was fascinated by the character of Marcel, whose ‘memory of the experience [of childhood], is more real, more acute than the experience itself’. Therefore, I have deployed Proust’s theory of involuntary memory (in/of childhood) and its influence on our future memory, and other theories such as Theodor Adorno’s advocacy of pure representation of suffering, so as not to dilute human memory with consumptive, distorted media representations. In other words, Adorno is advocating complete and pure remembrance or confrontation with any past event/memory in order to reach full reconciliation with ourselves. In addition, scientific theories of memory provided by Alan Baddeley are deployed as major tools through which memory, as represented in *Ashes to Ashes*, is viewed, in order to examine how our identities are being manipulated by the reservoir of memories in our minds.

In Chapter Three, Pinter’s talent for the dramatisation of linguistic matters is examined through two of his minimalist works: *One for the Road* (1984) and *Mountain Language* (1988). The authoritarian characters in these two plays, such as Nicolas in the first play and the military officers in the second, are set against the

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45 Batty, *About Pinter*, p.53.
46 Ibid.
people in tense situations in which language itself and the words of which it is derived become amalgamated statements to comment on the current state of affairs. Pinter’s repugnance for the double thinking and the masquerade of language can be clearly traced through the sharp, short snaps of both plays. His urge to change the worldview that hides its nasty intentions in this gimmick of linguistic manipulation is made clear:

I believe it’s because of the way we use language that we have got ourselves into this terrible trap, where words like freedom, democracy, and Christian values are still used to justify barbaric and shameful policies and acts. We are under a serious and urgent obligation to subject such terms to an intense scrutiny. If we fail to do so, both our moral and political engagement will remain fatally impaired.48

As an ardent campaigner for human rights, Pinter’s attack on the Western rhetoric of democracy and freedom is represented through his interrogation scenes in these plays. He used his linguistic twist to show that the freedom, democracy, and liberation advocated by many Western governments actually equal death, destruction, and chaos.49

The chaos, injustice, torture, and violence practised to remould the individuals’ identities are examined in this chapter using analytical philosophy following the linguistic turn. More precisely, I use the theories of J.L. Austin and John Searle, who focused on the twisted meaning of the speech act, and the theme of unfaithfulness in what seem to be the right words, but with fake or bad intentions. The performative aspects of speech acts are also examined through the linguistic philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein, who emphasised the game of words, and how the same words can have different meanings in different contexts. Additionally, I make use of Wittgenstein’s emphasis on the theme of trust in language, ascribing it wholly to the human practice of using language in life; such trust is completely absent in the plays. Thus, investigating both the nature of words, and the performative aspects of language through the plays, chapter three aims to unravel the deeper meanings of the scenes in both plays so as to comment on current politics, and social gimmicks practised

48 Various Voices, p.200.
49 Ibid., p.245.
worldwide to suppress the identity of individuals. Again, gendered use of language will be another focus in this chapter.

In Chapter Four the political identity of the characters in Pinter’s *Party Time* (1991) is examined. Pinter once commented on the dominance of certain figures, who are hiding behind softer social masks:

> I believe that there are extremely powerful people in apartments in capital cities in all countries who are actually controlling events that are happening on the street in a number of very subtle and not so subtle ways. But they don’t really bother to talk about it, because they know it’s happening and they know they have the power. It’s a question of how power operates.50

It is exactly in this setting of an affluent apartment that this play is examined through the luxury, opulence, and abundance of its characters, who are discussing their membership of a new social club. The bureaucracy of repression, hegemonic regimes, and the terror of the State are examined through two lenses: Antonio Gramsci’s hegemonic theory of power and Michel Foucault’s perspective on the workings of power. Pinter voices most of his thoughts through Terry, one of the major characters in the play who verbalises Pinter’s concern about different shapes of terrorism in this world:

> In *Party Time* what is so disturbing is not that Terry tries to justify state terror but that he takes it entirely for granted and that his rhetoric is one that assumes club membership to mean unquestioning and, above all, silent support.51

The politics of this chapter is a continuation of the politics raised in the previous chapter with a stronger shift from the darker recesses of military force and apparently ‘civil’ torturers to purely political systems, and their approaches to people’s lives. The question of whether power is imposed from above in a hegemonic system (as Gramsci proposed), or generated from within (as stated in Foucault’s theory), is a crucial one in the chapter as I attempt to define the aspects of power that keep oppressing the identity of individuals. Foucault provides a very insightful approach to the workings of educational, prison, and psychiatric systems in society in relation to the workings of

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51 Ibid., p.268.
power, and with the proper deployment of his theories, I provide a comment on the workings of each of these systems and their effect on constructing/deconstructing the identity of the individual, as presented in the play. Gauthier makes a valid connection between Pinter and Foucault:

A hermeneutical key to [Pinter’s] work is to be found in the writings of Michel Foucault, who denounces the gearing mechanism in which our education systems, our prison system or our psychiatric system lock up not the individual but the whole next generation.\(^5\)

In addition, the gender issue will be discussed in relation to power, in order to examine women’s position(s) in this hierarchy.

Interestingly, Jimmy, the character that shows up in the end as an oppressed being, whose identity has been so crushed that he doubts even his name, may stand for the crushed, disfigured, and fragmented identities of many others in different contexts. Jimmy, who serves as a witness in this play as he is the only character who reported what has happened to him after being tortured in Pinter plays ('He is the only character who enunciates what has become of him after excessive torture'),\(^5\) stands both as a witness and a flicker of hope. The fact that the truth of what has happened to him has infiltrated all of this oppression to reach out may be the silver lining that Pinter believes is going to remain strong in the face of all powers to mould the human individual to conform to their own oppressive systems.

In Chapter Five, Pinter’s characterisation of women in a common life situation is examined in *Betrayal* (1978). According to his friend Henry Woolf, ‘No one wrote better for women than Harold […] they come alive, they breathe in his plays’.\(^5\) This statement is scrutinised in this chapter as I dig deep into the extramarital relationships that prevail in this work. Emma, the leading character, and the other two males with whom she is involved are represented in a complex love triangle from which none of them comes out without leaving parts of the self behind. In other words, all three characters, by the end of the play are tainted by the experience of their past betrayals. To argue against critics such as Mark Batty, who thinks that despite the

\(^{52}\) Gauthier, p.13.


play’s reversed time structure, Emma moves forward after leaving both men, I deploy the necessary theories to prove the opposite. Focusing on the sexual identity of all characters and owing to the fact that the play itself tells the story of the sexual betrayal of the couples involved, I deploy the theories of Foucault in his *History of Sexuality*, in order to shed light on the sexual identity of both men and women in the play as one of many other variations in real life. The play, basically, is about a ‘game’ of sexual betrayal or, as David Jones puts it in ‘Staging Pauses and Silences’, ‘I think *Betrayal* is an extraordinary road map of the ways in which people do tell lies and cheat on each other’.\(^{55}\) In this chapter, the theme of male bonding is developed in light of Levi Strauss’s anthropological theories on the position of men and women and male kinship ties in many societies. Themes of gender, sexuality, and different models of relations are critiqued as I weave all of these categories into a full structure in the chapter. The sexual identity of each character is tested against the challenges they face up to, eventually coming out with a paralysed existence due to their immature options, and society’s oppressive representation of certain groups of people with regards to their sexual freedoms or orientations.

Chapter Six continues the trajectory of the previous chapter, as I discuss the institutions of marriage and family to a full extent in Pinter’s *Celebration* (2000). The ethics of sexual relationships within the marital institution are examined in light of Hegel’s theory on the standards of ethical marriage and family institutions. Set in a posh restaurant where three couples chat and converse, the play seems to be close to *Party Time*. However, the type of power represented in the play is ‘softer’ than the one discussed in *Party Time*. The discussion, which is focused on the characters’ relationships with their spouses as well as their past life, provides me with a lens through which I can examine such relations to evaluate the quality of the marriage institution as represented in the play. The relationship between men and women within this institution is given further detail in light of bell hooks’ theoretical views on society and images of representation of different races, classes, and genders. Moreover, these relations are all developed within overt policies of social power that shifts and aggravates according to the social class the individuals occupy as staged in the play: ‘Power is seen as arbitrarily held, as up for negotiation, and shifts according

\(^{55}\) David Jones, ‘Staging Pauses and Silences’, quoted in Gauthier, p.57.
to the wit, wiles and aggression of those holding on to it, and those attempting to gain it.\textsuperscript{56} Therefore, the corrupt institutions of marriage and family, together with corrupt power relations, are all teased out to shed light on the implications of such society and the ways in which the play prompts us to negotiate potentially better situations for shaping people’s identities.

The structure of my chapters aims to provide a comment on three major paradigms: i) Language, ii) Memory, iii) Marital Relationships. Therefore, my thesis is divided into three parts. The first part of my thesis in which – \textit{A Kind of Alaska} and \textit{Ashes to Ashes} – are lumped together explore the issue of memory in full detail as staged in both plays. The issue of memory is given a medical dimension in the first play, and social environment situations of multiple dimensions is dealt with in the second, and hence offering multiple space for different readings and a detailed commentary on the individual and collective memory.

The second part of my thesis provides a commentary on the issue of language through Pinter’s \textit{One for the Road}, \textit{Mountain Language}, and \textit{Party Time} because I believe that the language games used in the first two plays continue to their ultimate peak in \textit{Party Time}, in which twisted language of politics is in full-fledged to reflect a vivid ugliness.

In the third part I move my focus to social ills within the institution of marriage and family, commenting on the nature of human conjugal relationships. Both \textit{Betrayal} and \textit{Celebration} offer different variations on the theme of love, faithfulness, and family unit reflecting on the contaminated social relations we are living in society.

Therefore, the selected case studies comment on the development and representation of the individual identity have been connected thematically rather than chronologically, and hence their order. Also, considering the fact that my emphasis is on women rights and freedom issues as a subaltern theme, I have hence decided to open the discussion with one of Pinter’s most fragile characters – Deborah in \textit{A Kind of Alaska} – to lay the ground for the upcoming commentary on other female characters and the variations of their strengths and weaknesses in the plays. Moreover, there is an intertwined relationship between theories and the plays, the plays tackled in this

\textsuperscript{56} Batty, \textit{About Pinter}, p.33.
study aim to be an embodiment of the theories deployed. Keeping in line with Pinter’s political agenda, my thesis does not only provide criticism of Pinter’s plays, but also aim to investigate the concrete agendas of oppression in its different shapes starting with the political ones like hegemony, language games, memory falsification, and ending with the personal agendas of sexual and gender tensions that, combined, control the identity politics in different aspects of our daily routines.
Chapter One

Strong Arm Her: Gendered Identity in Harold Pinter’s A Kind of Alaska

‘Memory is the great criterion of art.’

Charles Baudelaire

This chapter is an attempt to investigate the enactment of identity through memory in a gendered framework. Pinter’s treatment of memory underwent several changes following his early plays. Whilst memory was not the focus in enacting the present in the early plays, such as The Room and The Birthday Party, it is a main focus in A Kind of Alaska, in which Deborah is struggling to explain herself. Her past is differently interpreted by various figures; therefore, the past, to her, is not something that has happened, or is a thing brought into focus in order to express a kind of loss of innocence, as for Pinter’s early characters, but is, rather, something that exists: it is an immediate reality. It is through a consideration of identity and memory that this chapter will attempt to examine wider gender-political issues within Pinter’s dramatic oeuvre. The chapter will touch upon three different areas:

(i) In the first section of the discussion, the conflict between male and female authority will be considered by following the details of Hornby’s and Deborah’s arguments in the play. In this section, I shall answer the following questions: 1) How could Deborah as a female counter Hornby’s assertions and discourse about her past? 2) Who is oppressing whom in this play? 3) How does Hornby’s recourse to Deborah’s recollections reflect the ideological strains inherent in patriarchy, as part of the crisis of masculinity and the male need constantly to reassert dominion? Both sexes’ psychology and discourse will also be discussed as part of answering such questions. This section will mostly be guided by feminist theory.

(ii) The relation between memory (by which I mean awareness of the past in the present) and physical existence will be highlighted through Maurice Merleau-
Ponty’s phenomenological theories. Here, I will give prominence to the following question: How and in what ways is Deborah able to create or re-enact her identity through memory?

(iii) Finally, the political aspect of the play will be reflected on by interpreting the needs and inadequacies of Deborah’s situation, which could represent the needs and inadequacies of many women in different situations around the world—facts that prompt all of us, the audience, to take urgent action and move the world forward. The questions that will illuminate this discussion are: how does Pinter reflect the futility of his female individuals’ attempts to alter hegemonic patriarchy, and how does he deploy rhetorical structures to political ends, thus prompting his audience to social action? With these questions in mind, this chapter will open with a major focus on the formulation and manipulation of identity through memory.

**A Kind of Alaska**

I

*A Kind of Alaska* premiered in the Cottesloe Theatre in London on 14th October 1982. The play opens with a room, which had always been a secure refuge for Pinter’s characters in his early plays. However, Deborah’s room does not appear as: ‘A warm haven’ to us; it is more like a cold, sterile, clinical space, in which Deborah sleeps on all-white sheets and is tied to a bed that proves to be an instrument of torture rather than a place in which to rest. Although Ann C. Hall believes that Pinter used the domestic setting for his later dramas, the setting in this play, uncharacteristically, gives us the impression of formality and coldness rather than domesticity. However, Hall believes in the importance of a domestic setting for female identity:

> For a feminist, this setting is noteworthy because the home and family have been the centres of female oppression both on stage and off.  

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58 In Pinter’s *The Room* (1957), and *The Birthday Party* (1957) both Rose and Stanley considered their refuge as their world, and the concept of the room as a shelter meant real security until this security is disturbed by the presence of other characters.


Contrary to Hall’s assumption in relation to domestic space, Deborah’s oppression is taking place in a small hospital-like room, in which, from the very beginning of the play, Pinter gives us the impression of her being alienated by being tied to the bed almost all of the time. Whilst for the most part women’s subjection through domesticity is central to Pinter’s plays (because it reflects the restriction and constriction of female identity), in this case things are different. Pinter understands that women are relegated to and earn credibility through domestic, private duties, whereas men are positioned as instruments in public domains, such as law, business, and politics. These ideas have gained general cultural acceptance because men’s interests carry more weight. In other words, men control the institutions that sustain all modern and historically dominant ideologies, such as schools, churches, governments, and the media. Men also have the upper hand in families and, therefore, the prevalence of male power has meant that the ideas they have historically supported have been dominant. The ideology of female domesticity thus achieved three goals: (i) it specified enough domestic tasks to keep women busy at home, (ii) it justified the allocation of such responsibilities to women, and (iii) it promised compensatory advantages to women in return for their accepting the domestic role. In short, it gave women work to do at home, and made them feel that this work was virtuous and worthwhile. Thus, for many feminists, the domestic setting is noteworthy, because home and family stand for the centre of female oppression and the elimination of female voices and authority both onstage and off.61

Luce Irigaray outlines the importance of the female role in this context, referring to: ‘Child-rearing, and domestic maintenance in general’ as part of women’s: ‘Responsibility [...] to maintain the social order without intervening so as to change it’.62 Despite the fact that Deborah’s awakening takes place in a non-domestic environment, being tied to her bed articulates more forcefully her subjectivity to male power and her inability to escape it. In addition, in both domestic settings and institutions (hospitals, churches, and schools) safety is taken for granted, as each of these institutions promises a shelter and a haven from outside dangers that in reality

61 Hall, p.7.
62 Luce Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One, trans. by Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985), pp.85-86.
they can never provide.  Although Pinter establishes audience expectations in this sense of protection and healing at the beginning of the play, at the end of it he does not offer us the nurturing ideas that society expects from a social institution. As we soon see, the fact that Deborah’s awakening takes place inside a hospital-like room does not render her safe at all. R.F. Storch writes:

In spite of the clever dislocation of common sense, Pinter’s plays affect us because they are about middle-class family, both as sheltering home longed for and dreamed of, and as many-tentacled monster strangling its victim. It does not, after all, surprise us that there is more menace and irrationality in this dramatic material than in any other.

After awakening her from a twenty-nine-year coma with an injection, the play’s first male figure, Hornby, starts talking to Deborah to make sure that she realises who she is after such a long time:

**Hornby:** Do you recognise me?

**Silence**

Do you know me?

**She doesn’t look at him.**

**Deborah:** Are you speaking?

Deborah’s question sets the boundaries from the very beginning of the play between her world and that of Hornby. To her, Hornby is ‘no one’.

The procedure of administering an injection to wake Deborah may prompt us to pay attention to the invasiveness of this procedure, and its effect on subduing the identity of the patient (in this case, Deborah). Over the past quarter of the twentieth century, feminist criticism has emphasised women’s inability to access the health system.

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63 (a) In a Letter to Tony Blair dated February 17th, 1998 Pinter referred to the brutal assassination of Father Romero in El Salvador which took place while he was inside the church. See [http://www.haroldpinter.org/politics/politics_nato.shtml](http://www.haroldpinter.org/politics/politics_nato.shtml) [Accessed 17 April, 2015]

(b) On another occasion fifty-eight people were killed by a terrorist attack on the 2010 Baghdad church massacre which took place on October 31st, 2010. See [http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/nov/01/baghdad-church-siege-survivors-speak](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/nov/01/baghdad-church-siege-survivors-speak) [Accessed 17 April, 2015]

(c) One of the recent examples of attacks on schools is the Garissa University College in Kenya that took place on April 2nd, 2015 and in which hundred and twenty-five people were killed. See [http://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2015/apr/02/al-shabaab-gunmen-attack-university-kenya-in-pictures](http://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2015/apr/02/al-shabaab-gunmen-attack-university-kenya-in-pictures) [Accessed 17 April, 2015]

(d) In Oklahoma City Hospital, three nurses and a guard were attacked by a belligerent man called Keith Bain on December 9th, 2014. See [http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2014/dec/09/oklahoma-police-patient-attacks-guard-and-nurses-at-hospital](http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2014/dec/09/oklahoma-police-patient-attacks-guard-and-nurses-at-hospital) [Accessed 17 April, 2015] All these examples show that such institutions are not shielded against violence and they are absolutely helpless to provide any security in that sense.


65 *Harold Pinter: Plays Four: A Kind of Alaska* (London: Faber & Faber, 1993), p.149. All subsequent quotations from this play will be taken from this edition.

66 Ibid., p.145.
because of men’s dominion, which causes doctor–patient interactions to be characterised by domination and subordination.\textsuperscript{67} Thus, women’s experience within the health system reflects their place in society, with men’s experience being the norm and women’s deviating from this.\textsuperscript{68} Furthermore, women’s health has been understood in terms of science and medicine (with a focus on illness, not wellness), which have a long male-dominated history that focuses on male experience and interests, and never on those of women themselves.\textsuperscript{69} There is also a need to understand that the women’s health movement arose from community development, and has been based on women’s right to access information and services that they themselves see as appropriate. The movement arose from within the feminist movement, and has been deliberately political from the beginning.\textsuperscript{70} Some feminists argue that male domination of the health system is primarily caused by the influence of old assumptions and conclusions about women’s health, especially the mental component. In Crazy for You,\textsuperscript{71} Jill Astbury cites Freud’s work on the female psyche as a biased example that had great influence until the 1980s. Lois Bryson echoes this by saying: ‘Every day we confront the drag of the past. Old ideas about women’s and men’s roles and ways of behaving still flourish [...] and get in the way’.\textsuperscript{72}

An emphasis on the importance of corporeality in such processes of medicalised subjugation is underlined by Stacey Weber-Feve:

> Historically speaking, women and their socio-political-economic position and status have typically been determined by their bodies—their individual awakenings and action, their pleasure and their pain all competing against representations of the female body in larger social frameworks.\textsuperscript{73}

Although several aspects might have changed, it is deeply disheartening that the original aims of the women’s health movement (objectives of having women’s voices heard, and the granting of women’s right to access the information they need or to


\textsuperscript{68} Clark C. Rogers, ‘Women and Health’. In Women’s Health: A Primary Health Care Approach, ed. by Clark Rogers and A. Smith (Sydney: MacLennon and Petty, 1998), pp.1-18.


\textsuperscript{71} Astbury, ibid.


have control over their choices) are still being pursued by women. Recent consultation with women (in 1998) found that women needed information to make informed choices, but were not receiving it.\textsuperscript{74}

In connection with the play, Hornby’s injection to wake Deborah can thus be interpreted in gender-political terms: he deprives her body of making the choice to wake up (as a result of other, more normal, aural or other non-invasive sensory stimulation), or of taking the time necessary to do so. He thereby strips her of the right to have a choice and voice, eventually crushing her own identity as a human being first and as a woman second.

In such ways, Hornby reveals his power over Deborah from the beginning of the play; he tells her that he is there to take care of her, meaning that he watches over her. In other words, Hornby’s power over Deborah is first revealed as a function of his gaze. The power of the one who watches is discussed by Sartre, in the section on the gaze in \textit{Being and Nothingness} (1943). According to Sartre, the Other—‘The one who looks at me’,\textsuperscript{75}—steals the world from me. The centre of the world moves from me because of the gaze of the other, and I am no longer a subject but have become an object of the gaze. I am there to be judged by he who gazes, from his point of view.

More specifically, in \textit{The Birth of the Clinic} (1973),\textsuperscript{76} Michel Foucault coins the term: ‘Medical gaze’ to denote the dehumanising medical separation of a patient’s body from the patient’s person (identity). Foucault refers to scientific observation in this context:

\begin{quote}
In order to be able to offer each of our patients a course of treatment perfectly adapted to his illness and to himself, we try to obtain a complete, objective idea of his case; we gather together in a file of his own all the information we have about him. We ‘observe’ him in the same way that we observe the stars or a laboratory experiment.\textsuperscript{77}
\end{quote}

Thus, in entering the field of knowledge, the human body has entered the arena of power. It is a world of men. For the nineteenth-century moderns, doctors were equal

\textsuperscript{74}See, for example, the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Women’s Health, \textit{The Victorian Women’s Health Plan. Objectives and Initiatives} (Melbourne: Department of Human Services, 1999). The survey relates to the province of Victoria in Australia, the country’s most densely populated state and its second-most populous state overall.


\textsuperscript{76}Michel Foucault, \textit{The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception} (London, Routledge, 1973), p.xii.

\textsuperscript{77}Ibid.
to clergy; yet physicians save bodies, not souls. Thinking of the human body as the sum of the person, biological reductionism became a powerful tool through which a thorough examination of the body’s symptoms of illness in simply corporeal terms could be carried out. Hence, the medical gaze was believed to penetrate surface illusions, to reach truth.

From such a perspective, Hornby is one who owns the medical gaze that observes Deborah as: ‘A laboratory experiment’, 78 to borrow Foucault’s term. The fact that Hornby owns the gaze presumes that he owns the truth, once he has ascertained the truth of Deborah’s body, he moves towards an invasive intervention of it through the unsolicited penetration of his injection.

On a different level, Hornby’s gaze can also reflect his castration anxiety as part of his attempt to reassert male dominion. In an interesting article entitled ‘Look Back in Anger: Three Gazes in Harold Pinter’s Old Times,’ Kim Jungoo comments on the issue of the gaze in Pinter’s Old Times (1971) in light of Laura Mulvey’s article ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ (1975), 79 he observes that:

The gaze shapes the identity of the one being watched, and in [Old Times], memory works just as the gaze does. As each character iterates his or her memory, they shape the other character’s identity. 80

Mulvey emphasised that the male gaze in most of the sixties and seventies films and theatre is an erotic one, treating the female as an object to be looked at. Although Mulvey’s notion of spectatorship raised as much criticism as interest from feminist and film theorists as the one that is fixed on masculine/feminine polarities, or the one that considers only the masculine or the heterosexual, 81 I believe that Deeley’s gaze as described in Jungsoo’s article 82 is not too far from that of Hornby in terms of looking at the female as an object of desire. The male here is the only owner of the gaze, while all

78 Foucault, p.xii.
79 Mulvey specifies two kinds of male gaze within the context of the gender problem in watching and being watched that is part of the discourse on spectatorship: the gazes are either voyeuristic or fetishistic. By so doing, Mulvey is drawing on Freud’s notion of scopophilia, which is: ‘Taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze.’
82 Deeley is presented as wanting to shape Kate’s identity through his gaze. See Jungso Kim’s ‘Look Back in Anger: Three Gazes in Harold Pinter’s Old Times’, p.128.
the female is entitled to is to be looked at, therefore she will be always coded with to-be-looked-at-ness like in the case of Deborah.

Also, in relation to Mulvey’s binary categorisation of the gaze into a male/female, I would add another layer to that gaze by looking at it from a political point of view in terms of the Eurocentric gaze to the oriental. I will borrow here Edward Said’s (1935-2003) Orientalism theory which states that the Westerners do not understand the Easterners because they always think that they are culturally beneath them and therefore, their gaze is a mix of exotic fascination that does not wish to encounter the Oriental, but to look through it, examine it and solve it as a problem. Said comments: ‘Orientals were rarely seen or looked at; they were seen through, analysed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined’. Therefore, Mulvey’s article as well as Jungsoo’s argument could even be taken further by highlighting another kind of gaze that is still related to the construction of our identity, yet not on a gender level, but on a nationality level. The point that I want to underline here is that Deborah’s suffering as a woman/object below the man in the gender hierarchy, will be worse if she was a woman of a different nationality. Then the pejorative gaze will be double layered. She will be looked at as a lacking human being as a woman and as a citizen. And although Deborah is not in this situation as staged to us, I’m reading the play in a more metaphorical terms than literal to explore further unpacked issues from the social reality of which Deborah’s situation could be a representative.

Against this background, the problem of the male/female gaze in relation to the object of the gaze is, I believe, explored through the first lines of the play. By asking Deborah if she recognises him, Hornby wants to ascertain whether or not she realises that he is watching her. He wants to establish his identity and position of power as a male through his gaze.

Hornby, therefore, is an advanced version of Deeley, for although Deeley is also trying to shape Kate’s identity through his gaze, he is not as domineering and authoritative as Hornby especially that Kate, manages, by the end of the play to asset her identity as a female who owns her own existence.

Hornby’s dominating language prompts Deborah to make stronger statements:

**Hornby:** I would like you to listen to me.

*Pause*

You have been asleep for a very long time. You have now woken up. We are here to care for you.

**Deborah:** I can’t get to sleep. The dog keeps turning about. I think he’s dreaming. He wakes me up, but not himself up.\(^84\)

This is a key moment in the play, as Deborah reveals the Other (any authority figure here) who refuses to wake up. The Other here goes beyond being the agent of gender to being that of society as a whole. Instead of waking up, Hornby is asserting himself strongly through his discourse by treating Deborah as a woman under his control. He inherited the male gaze and the responsibility of dominion through his father-in-law:

**Deborah:** All those dogs are making such a racket. I suppose Daddy’s feeding them.\(^85\)

Deborah’s father and the ‘racket’\(^86\) he helped to preserve raise the subject of male discourse that is discussed in Luce Irigaray’s *This Sex Which is Not One* (1977). Irigaray deploys her critique in light of Freud’s theory, which defines women in terms of deficiency and atrophy. Irigaray writes: ‘Freud does not see two sexes whose differences are articulated in the act of discourse’\(^87\).

Irigaray’s interpretation of male discourse provides us with a way of noticing another tool through which Hornby is subjugating Deborah’s identity: discourse. According to Freud, the female is nothing but a castrated male; therefore, and by accepting this fact of castration, a girl turns away from her mother, because she believes that she does not have the member that she once had. The girl instead turns to her father to try to get what neither she nor any woman has: a phallus. Freud goes further, assuming that even the female’s desire to have a male child is an implied desire to have a power equal to that of the phallus. Irigaray’s contention with Freud, amongst other

\(^{84}\) *A Kind of Alaska*, p.155.  
\(^{85}\) Ibid., p.158.  
\(^{86}\) The term ‘racket’ here has got two meanings: (i) as a derogatory one to refer to women’s speech which is basically looked at as nonsense from a male point of view. (ii) as referring to male’s domineering discourse and manipulative plans to own the other whether that other is a male or female. Therefore, the racket that Deborah’s father helped to preserve is that of his daughters’ by raising them up. In this dialogue, Deborah means the racket of her and her two sisters as a derogatory reference to women’s discourse [explained by Irigaray]. In a later part of the discussion, the term ‘racket’, will be used to refer to men’s domination over women, represented here by Hornby.  
objections, is that he never considers female sexuality, or somatic identity in describing the actual state of affairs of both sexes in society.

Freud asserted that the masculine is the sexual model that no representation of desire can fail to take as standard. However, although Freud’s theory does not provide us with what Irigaray calls the ‘sexualisation of discourse’, because his discussion does not move beyond the difference between the sexes, it does lead us to interpret that point at large. Irigaray believes that the domination of male discourse, in a theory in which the masculine subject is the only representative in Freudian terms, stems from: ‘Its power to eradicate the difference between the sexes’. In a system in which the male is self-representative and the female is defined as a lack, a deficiency, or as an imitation or a negative image of the subject, female discourse would pose a threat to social organisations and orders in which males have never taken part as subjects, but only as masters. Thus, the perceived problem of femininity shows itself here as the question of how, as females, women can show themselves in such a tightly woven systematicity.

Irigaray believes that a woman has two options: either (i) to be an equal to a man, or (ii) to be a potential man, without losing her femininity, which is, again, a role imposed on women by male representations that accrue from the maternal role. As such, women have to remain, as Irigaray puts it, an: ‘infrastructure’, unrecognised by society and culture because they are never identified except by and for the masculine, which is identified with logos (truth), whereas women are not. This is why Irigaray believes that the patriarch needs to recognise women as ‘Others’ and not as equals; hence her disagreement with Simone De Beauvoir, who called for equality.

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88 Irigaray contests Freud’s claim that woman tend to hate other women, including their mother, as she refers to the woman’s need to identify with her husband’s mother to gain his love. ‘For example, woman, in order to correspond to man’s desire, has to identify herself with his mother. This amounts to saying that the man becomes, as it were, his children’s brother, since they have the same love objects. How can the question of the Oedipus complex and its resolution be raised within such a configuration?’ This Sex, p.70.
89 Ibid, p.72.
90 I use the term from philosophy and linguistics to mean the state or quality of being systematic. See http://www.philosophy-dictionary.org/systematicity. [Accessed 20 April, 2015].
91 Irigaray, p.84.
92 In Lived Experience, Volume II of her book The Second Sex (1949), de Beauvoir called for sex equality, a promise that was not delivered by the Soviet Revolution. See The Second Sex, trans. by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (Random House, Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), p.760.
Seen from such a perspective, Hornby, as a representative of the patriarchy, consistently responds to Deborah’s discourse with a counter discourse, either by questioning, suspecting, negating, or denying her words. He considers himself to be the one who has access to the truth. He is the male; he owns logos, whereas Deborah is the female; she is deficient; she lacks an image of him; she cannot, and should not, gain access either to her body or to her discourse, because to do so would shake male dominion.

The argument regarding discourse is further developed by Marc Silverstein, 94 who shows how language is used by male characters in Pinter’s plays as a way of dominating female characters. Hornby asserts himself as the authority on Deborah’s history from the beginning, dictating facts to her:

**Hornby:** You have been asleep. You have awoken. Can you hear me? 95

Hall and Moonyoung Ham believe that Hornby has made sure that he awakens Deborah himself because he will always want to be the powerful force who can: ‘Destroy or redeem her’, 96 due to the fact that he already owns her discourse and ‘Possesses her narrative’. 97 Nevertheless, I believe that Hornby has done so as a preemptive action to maintain the organisation of patriarchy. Through her recollections, we learn that Deborah appears to have been a tough girl, as she used to knock Peter, her male friend, about because she was a tomboy:

**Deborah:** There is a boy called Peter. We play with his trains, we play […] Cowboys and Indians […] I’m a tomboy. I knock him about. 98

Realising that Deborah could mimic a boy and speak as a masculine being, Hornby becomes aware of the imminent danger and decides to nip it in the bud. According to Irigaray, a female who assumes a masculine position confirms male fears of her potential power. Such a female can: ‘Already convert a form of subordination into an affirmation’. 99 Irigaray describes the process as

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95 *A Kind of Alaska*, p.156.
97 Hall, p.85.
99 Irigaray, *This Sex*, p.76.
[meaning] to resubmit herself [...] in particular to ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic [...] so as to make ‘visible’, by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible.  

Therefore, being afraid of her awakening with a rebellious attitude, Hornby ensures that he awakens Deborah using his own tools of oppression. Denying that Deborah has any brothers could also be one of the tools that Hornby uses to counter Deborah’s recollections with a version different to her own, thereby justifying his authority as a father figure:

**Deborah:** Sisters are diabolical. Brothers are worse.  
**Hornby:** I didn’t know you had any brothers.  

As brothers, by virtue of their maleness, are considered the bearers of their father’s name—especially the eldest son—in the patriarchal order, they would have subjugated Deborah had they existed. Hornby’s version of the narrative that denies the existence of any brothers in Deborah’s family accounts for his dominion over the women in that family. Irigaray explains the role of brothers thus:

> For the patriarchal order is indeed the one that functions as the organisation and monopolisation of private property to the benefit of the head of the family. It is his proper name, the name of the father that determines ownership for the family, including the wife and children. And what is required of them – for the wife, monogamy; for the children, the precedence of the male line, and specifically of the eldest son who bears the name – is also required so as to ensure ‘the concentration of considerable wealth in the hands of a single individual – a man.

The wealth that Irigaray has mentioned might account for Hornby’s authority over the family. In the absence of any brothers, and as Jack, Deborah’s boyfriend, is ‘tongue-tied as usual’, Hornby inherited a wealth of women from his father-in-law, acting like a loyal son to his father, for the organisation of patriarchy.

It is useful in dramatic circumstances such as these for us to note the consideration of Lacanian theory made by Irigaray, who contests Lacan’s objectification of women. Lacan (1901-81) believed that women are no more than objects who always occupy an

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100 Irigaray, *This Sex*, p.76.  
102 Irigaray, *This Sex*, p.83.  
103 *A Kind of Alaska*, p.183.
inferior position to that of men: ‘There is only woman as excluded by the nature of things which is the nature of words’.\textsuperscript{104}

Lacan placed women where they have always been – as victims, oppressed – whereas Irigaray dismantles this male–female hierarchy, believing that women are not just: ‘Not men’, but Others. For Irigaray, the female body in and of itself is enough to destabilise any patriarchal organisation. It is enough to: ‘Jam the patriarchal machinery of oppression’.\textsuperscript{105}

Irigaray believes that women’s bodies, unlike men’s, are shaped in such a way that they do not need any external instrument to touch themselves and, therefore, they can easily achieve autoeroticism, something that men cannot do due to their different bodily structure:

\begin{quote}
Woman’s autoeroticism is very different from man’s. In order to touch himself, man needs an instrument: his hand, a woman’s body, language […] and this self-caressing requires at least a minimum of activity. As for woman, she touches herself in and of herself without any need for mediation, and before there is any way to distinguish activity from passivity. Woman ‘touches herself’ all the time, and moreover no one can forbid her to do so, for her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact. Thus, within herself, she is already two-but not divisible into one(s)-that caress each other.\textsuperscript{106}
\end{quote}

Thus, Irigaray’s contestation of Lacan’s theory is clear, for as Lacan insists on the inferiority of women, Irigaray believes that women can ‘jam’ patriarchal organisation by the structure of their own bodies. What I want to emphasise by bringing these contestations together is the power of the female body as a disruptive site that challenges and rejects male-authored conceptions and systems of control; the very concept of corporeality that Deborah is struggling to enact; the act of owning her presence, and being not simply involved in, but rather shaping her environment. This is a mission that she ultimately fails to accomplish, hence her subjugation, which will be discussed further in the next section of this chapter.

Deborah’s very body threatens Hornby’s existence and identity, for if Deborah denies him the right to control her, he will be stripped of his identity, and he will lose the

\textsuperscript{105} Quoted in Hall, p.13.
\textsuperscript{106} Irigaray, This Sex, p.24.
Father position he has maintained for twenty-nine years. If she managed to stop the gaze through which Hornby has constructed his identity, Deborah would shake his whole existence. That is why Deborah does not look at Hornby when she first wakes. Both Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray have raised this issue of the female being objectified by male fantasy. In her ‘Portrait of Dora’, based on an analysis of theatre, Cixous suggests that theatre is shaped to suit the male gaze. She claims that it: ‘is built according to the dictates of male fantasy’. 107

Thus, Cixous believes that theatre has exploited women as objects to satisfy male desire and fantasy. It has immobilised, frozen, and fixed them in the frame of gender. This is the very position that Deborah occupies in this play. 108 Deborah is literally fixed, immobilised, and frozen inside her mental memory. She has served as a source of Hornby’s satisfaction by being an object to be observed, and to make him feel his superiority and dominion.

By obeying that body that Irigaray considers enough in itself to serve as a threatening tool to shake patriarchy, Deborah poses such a threat to patriarchy that she becomes the object of a form of torture, for Hornby has to keep his eyes on her lest she follows another itinerary:

**Hornby:** You kept on the move. And I charted your itinerary. 109

To take the gaze issue further, I will use what Virginia Woolf describes in *A Room of One’s Own*, in which she describes women as looking-glasses to men:

Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size [...] Whatever may be their use in civilised societies, mirrors are essential to all violent and heroic action. That is why Napoleon and Mussolini both insist so emphatically upon the inferiority of women, for if they were not inferior, they would cease to enlarge [...] for if she begins to tell the truth, the figure in the looking-glass shrinks [...] 110

To connect this to the play, it is obvious from what has already been staged for us that Deborah has served all this time as a looking-glass for Hornby. Nevertheless, Deborah

108 Burkman, p.186.
wants to participate in that mirroring, not as a mere reflection of a man’s desire and identity, but as an active element in it:

**Deborah:** The windows are mirrors, you see. And so glass reflects glass. Forever and ever.\textsuperscript{111}

Deborah also imagines that she is lying in bed, in a vast hall in which she cannot control her body enough to say hello because of the mirrors around her:

**Deborah:** I’m lying in bed. People bend over me, speak to me. I want to say hullo [...] But you can’t do that if you’re in a vast hall of glass with a tap dripping.\textsuperscript{112}

Deborah does not have any intention of looking into the mirror, so as not to see the reflection of the Other who controls her (by which I mean any authority that controls Deborah, especially patriarchy). Instead, she wants to have her own reflection in the mirror, the very thing she is struggling to have here:

**Deborah:** I certainly have no intention of looking into a mirror.\textsuperscript{113}

This emphasis on mirrors and seeing prompts further investigation into psychoanalytic theory, which refers to the mirror stage as an important one in constructing the ego. Jacques Lacan, in *Some Reflections on the Ego* (1953),\textsuperscript{114} describes the moment in which the infant looks at himself in the mirror as a turning point in his/her life. This moment, which takes place in the first six months of the child’s lifetime, forms a part of the permanent structure of his subjectivity. Lacan writes:

The mirror stage is a phenomenon to which I assign a twofold value: in the first place, it has historical value as it marks a decisive turning-point in the mental development of the child. In the second place, it typifies an essential libidinal relationship with the body-image.\textsuperscript{115}

Lacan believes that this moment contributes to the formation of the ego that results from the child’s identification with his complete image as reflected in a mirror. Lacan describes that stage as jubilation, as the child feels a sense of mastery over his body. However, this jubilation will not last long, as the child will compare his self-image with

\textsuperscript{111} A Kind of Alaska, p.189.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
that of the mother, who will turn out to be different and thus a sense of depression will accompany jubilation.  

The mirror is, I believe, the perpetual Other through which we construct our identities and realise our differences. According to Lacan, the subject emerges through the advent of the mirror stage (i.e. following the subject’s stage of unity with the mother, the mirror stage functions as an epistemic fulcrum that facilitates the subject’s necessary separateness from her). Lacan describes this process as

A drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency of anticipation- and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic-and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject’s entire mental development.

This Lacanian drama of identity construction is taking place within Deborah’s memory onstage—because Deborah, according to Hall, is the ‘mirror’ through which Hornby is re-enacting his identity. The fact that he stayed by Deborah’s side all those years indicates that he has constructed his identity through his misperceived conception of her image, through his gaze over her, and it is here that the clash between her version and his occurs. Whilst Hornby is trying to give Deborah an identity selected through his own narrative, she counters this with a different version delineated from her own memory. However, it is not only Deborah who provides Hornby with the perfect mirror in Hall’s feminist approach to the play, because Deborah also sees him as her own mirror. Thus, since both Hornby and Deborah mirror each other, Hornby becomes angry when the intact identity that the Lacanian subject sees as a first reflection of its own image in the mirror starts to move away from him, and tries to get it back on track. As Kaja Silverman notes, the subject loves and hates the reflection in the mirror at the same time. She states that the subject: ‘Loves the coherent identity which the mirror provides’. Nonetheless, she continues, ‘Because the image remains external to it, it also hates that image’.  

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118 Hall, p.84.
According to this, the subject both loves and hates what it takes to be its own image reflected in the mirror. In connection with this, Hornby loves to keep his own reflection as it is: flat, and tied to the bed. When it starts deviating from its track, he does not like what he sees, and tries to get it back on track. On the other hand, this may also account for Deborah’s reluctance to look into a mirror, for she does not want to allow Hornby (her mirror) to be the reflection of her identity, and she reveals this by her reluctance to look into the mirror.

A question might impose itself here: what would be at stake if the image through which a male identifies himself is flawed and imperfect? A reading of Billing’s essay ‘The Distorting Mirror: Theatrical Mimesis on the Early Modern Transvestite Stage’ may shed light on this question. Billing cites The Roaring Girl, a Jacobean comedy by Middleton and Dekker (1607-10), as an example of how males define themselves by gazing into the mirror of the Other – women – and build in a picture of themselves to defend a set of assumptions that are, in fact, groundless. The hero is known as Moll Cutpurse, a woman who had gained a reputation as a virago in the early seventeenth century. Her celibacy, autoeroticism, and rejection of a phallic-oriented sexuality render her a threat to patriarchal power. However, the way in which Moll was mirrored in theatre as an: ‘Object of heterosexual male desire’, rather than as an independent woman, intensified her subjectivity rather than her autonomy, by: ‘openly [mocking] not just Moll’s but all women’s supposed autonomy and independence’.

Women like Moll, who provided a distorted picture of what women should be in patriarchal terms, were rendered a source of comedy since they provided a different version of what men were usually accustomed to seeing. Billing writes:

The distortions in a predominantly male public theatre audience’s normative understanding of what women should do in a patriarchal society (an opinion of femininity that subordinates it a priori to masculinity and dictates compliance

121Billing, p.147.
122Ibid.
with their sexual desires) are precisely what allow them to identify ‘Mad Moll’ as a humorous distraction.\footnote{Billing, p.147.}

Therefore, in connection with \textit{A Kind of Alaska}, the reflection that Hornby now sees through Deborah is not the perfect (but distorted) one that she used to provide him with when she was asleep and fully under his control. Hornby therefore decides to set her back on the right track to achieve a reflection of his own identity as a still-domineering masculine one. Deborah is a rebellious woman who needs to be suppressed to keep her in the inferior position always given to women. According to Billing, the intensity of contemporary debate revealed that masculine authority and gender identity were put under considerable strain:

Responses to assertive women in poetry, drama, and pamphlet literature not only reveal the extent of the crisis but also make obvious male recourse to cultural media in their attempts to reassert dominion.\footnote{Ibid., p.152.}

The conflict of asserting male dominion referred to in Billing’s statement in relation to Moll’s character is also a recurring theme that runs through Deborah and Hornby’s conversations in the play. As part of this conflict, Hornby’s attempts take the shape of assertive sentences that always aim to subdue Deborah’s character:

\textbf{Hornby:} You have been asleep for twenty-nine years.\footnote{\textit{A Kind of Alaska}, p.163.}

Deborah, while Hornby is attempting to use this fact to remould her the way he wants, does not want to continue representing herself again to the Other, the Father figure whose position Hornby seems to occupy from the beginning:

\textbf{Hornby:} I would like you to listen to me.\footnote{Ibid., p.155.}

However, Deborah has listened for twenty-nine years because she has been metaphorically? under Hornby’s control during that time, and despite the fact that she was in a coma, she could have been given the freedom to wake up on her own rather than administered to an injection that woke her up to a different situation, and hence Hornby’s control. Moreover, she has now been woken to be told that she needs to listen further. The interrogation that Hornby launches into at the beginning of the play resembles the one that Stanley had to endure in \textit{The Birthday Party} (1957). In a way

\footnote{\textit{A Kind of Alaska}, p.163.}
that is chillingly similar to Stanley’s experience, Deborah cannot understand why she has been denied the right to recognition and to be listened to:

**Deborah:** No one hears what I say. No one is listening to me.\(^{127}\)

According to Ronald Laing, our self-esteem and self-worth can easily be shattered within a family. He recognises how our very sense of reality is at stake in the ways in which our experience is affirmed or invalidated within our relationships. Deborah’s recollections raise many questions in delivering the clarification we crave, and if they are: ‘childish and out of [...] tune’\(^{128}\) we need to know whether we can rely on memory in constructing our identity. The pressure on another person to adopt one’s own fantasy of a situation is what Laing calls: ‘Induction’.\(^{129}\) He illustrates this in his essay *Persons and Experience*:

If Jack succeeds in forgetting something, this is of little use if Jill continues to remind him of it. He must induce her not to do so. The safest way would be not just to make her keep quiet about it, but to induce her to forget it also. Jack may act on Jill in many ways. He may induce her to feel guilty for keeping on ‘bringing it up.’ He may invalidate her experience. This can be done more or less radically. He can indicate merely that it is unimportant or trivial, whereas it is important and significant to her. Finally, he can invalidate not only the significance, modality and content, but her very capacity to remember at all, and make her feel guilty [...]\(^{130}\)

Hornby as an archetypally masculine figure is acting on Deborah’s: ‘Sense of reality’\(^{131}\) by controlling *logos* (truth) and defending himself from the evocation of his own feelings, enacting them on Deborah so as to muddle her, to render her speechless, and to obliterate her memory.\(^{132}\) In short, he seeks to introduce a disorganisation in her personality, an act in which he succeeds.

Moreover, Hornby, in light of what Laing suggests in his account of memory, is also attempting to deconstruct Deborah’s account of her past life by questioning it:

\(^{127}\) *A Kind of Alaska*, p.154.
\(^{128}\) Ibid., p.161.
\(^{130}\) R.D. Laing and Aaron Esterson, p, 216.
\(^{131}\) Ibid.
\(^{132}\) Ibid.
Hornby: Do you remember nothing of where you’ve been? [...] of all that happened to you?¹³³

Instead of being awoken by her mother, who always used to check on her in case she had come home late (another gendered restriction on women only, this time policed by a patriarchally compliant mother), Deborah has been woken by Hornby, who is a perverse echo of Goldberg in his attempts to select an identity for Deborah by waking her:

Hornby: I have woken you up.¹³⁴

While both Deborah and Stanley are exposed to the same process of interrogation, the situation carries many differences. Since I am considering this within a gender-political frame of reference, I will emphasise the ways in which Hornby and Deborah display behaviours that have been acculturated as belonging to two different sexes—a fact that underlies many of the differences between the two characters’ (Deborah’s and Stanley’s) situations. Whilst Hornby represents the power of patriarchy, Goldberg stands for the power of the State, and whereas Hornby is a man interrogating a woman, Goldberg is a man countering another man. Goldberg may accept Stanley in his organisation on one condition: not to think, not to use his ‘unique touch’¹³⁵ to face the State, whereas Hornby cannot accept Deborah in the organisation of patriarch, and hence works to prevent that by all possible means.

As a consequence of this fact, during both Deborah’s and Stanley’s interrogation, the ways in which they are constrained are different. Whilst Deborah has been held tied to a bed for twenty nine years against her will, Stanley willingly accepts being wheel barrowed towards the end of the play.¹³⁶ Hornby did not need to search for his object; Deborah was there under his guardianship for almost three decades, and it was he who decided to wake her up. In the case of Stanley, he was not there all the time, on the contrary, he was on hiding from Goldberg and McCann who had to look for him and manipulate him according to their own rules. The likely outcome of both situations is that Deborah will remain under the dominion of patriarch owing to the fact that she chooses to return to her bed instead of continuing to stand, while Stanley will be brainwashed, and produced as a new citizen in accordance with the standards of

¹³³ A Kind of Alaska, p.166.
¹³⁴ Ibid. p.157.
¹³⁶ Ibid., p.33
Goldberg, or Monty. The bottom line is that, with slightly different situations, both Deborah and Stanley are subdued to different powers that represent hegemonic control in different contexts.

Deborah provides us with a case study of the woman who cannot by any means occupy a position equal to that of her male oppressor, Hornby; she will always take an inferior one. She cannot even enact herself as a complete human being, for she fails to fulfil her bodily presence, needing instead to depend on a mental identity that is even then crumbling. Compared to Deborah’s, Stanley’s chances might be better, as he has the potential of having a conditional identity. In spite of his bodily failure (losing the ability to see when his glasses are broken, as well as being unable to talk by the end), which might be preparation for the brainwashing he is going to endure. Yet he will still be able to have a position and/or a presence, being a male, in the organisation of patriarchy. This is unlike Deborah, who, adding to the corporeal reality of her bodily failure, cannot have even conditional chances of self-assertion.

It is for this reason that Hornby ensures that he wakes Deborah himself; his action, his intervention in Deborah’s mental and physical state is undertaken in order to prevent the stir that Deborah could make in the patriarchal machinery. Hornby is protecting his masculinity by considering Deborah as someone who should always be under his control. Stirring here takes the form of awakening and rising up against the organisation of patriarchy, an interpretation that could also stand for Deborah’s reluctance to act as a mirror to double Hornby’s image, her refusal to reflect an image of his desire, choosing rather to exist in both opposition and addition to it, in the manner of additive somatic resistance that Irigaray outlines, Deborah and Hornby have:

No need to fashion a mirror image to be ‘doubled,’ to repeat ourselves- a second time. Prior to any representation, we are two. Let those two – made for you by your blood, evoked for you by my blood – come together alive.137

In an interesting account of the play, and in connection with Deborah’s doubling of Hornby’s image reflection, Moonyoung C. Ham suggests that Hornby needs to keep Deborah’s body and itinerary under his gaze in order to maintain his identity: ‘By

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137Irigaray, p.216.
keeping her under his gaze, he can confirm and uphold his own male identity’.\textsuperscript{138} Although Ham refers to Hornby’s being a victim, he discusses this in a romantic sense, because he believes that it is because Hornby cannot penetrate Deborah that he has become a victim of desire: ‘In a sense, Hornby is also a victim in the system that is based on the family romance’.\textsuperscript{139} In my opinion, Hornby’s victimisation results from his obsession with keeping the dominion of masculinity in place, and through his medical intervention, these processes are first manifested to us in his act of penetration. In preparation for this act, Hornby’s memory has been occupied for twenty-nine years by keeping that position fixed.

The preoccupation of Hornby’s memorial encounter/struggle with Deborah becomes intense when she starts recalling her old life before her coma; she tacitly admits Hornby’s grip, not only on her, but on her family as well. When she talks about her sister Estelle and Estelle’s ginger boyfriend, she addresses Hornby as an authority over her family:

\textbf{Deborah}: I have given it a good deal of rather more mature thought and I’ve decided she should not marry him. Tell her not to marry him. She will listen to you.\textsuperscript{140}

‘Thought’ is the most important word here, as it confirms both Deborah’s mental identity and her bodily failure to take action. She is locked inside her mind, and as a result of her somatic absence, she hands over the responsibility for actions to Hornby. Therefore, it is Deborah’s reluctance and/or failure to exist as a fully perceptive ontological subject, her inability, in Merleau-Ponty’s terms, to ‘be in the world’, that disempowers her.

Deborah knows that her sister will not listen to her, but she will, definitely, listen to Hornby. To confirm Deborah’s recognition of his grip, Hornby tells her that her sister did not marry her boyfriend; Estelle \textit{did} listen to Hornby. Interestingly, while Deborah asks Hornby to exert his grip over Estelle, she herself refuses to listen to Hornby, and fights back to gain her independent identity. In other words, quite saddeningly, Pinter shows us the way that some women will police their own sex to further tighten the grip of men, or one particular patriarch, over them—even while seeking their own

\textsuperscript{138}Moonyoung C. Ham, ‘Portrait of Deborah: A Kind of Alaska’ in Pinter at Sixty, p.188.
\textsuperscript{139}Ibid, p.189.
\textsuperscript{140}A Kind of Alaska, p.159.
independence. Thus, Deborah although tasks herself with not listening to the Father figure anymore, she capitulates with her society’s expectation that women in general should.

With a focus on ontological absence once more, Deborah’s sexually charged questions confirm again and again her reluctance to experience the world as a living entity:

**Deborah**: Did I ask you to bring me here? Did I make eyes at you? [...] Perhaps I’ve forgotten.141

Deborah therefore stands in striking contrast to Anna in Pinter’s earlier play *Old Times* (1971), which demonstrates a woman who enjoys and accepts Deeley’s gazing at her skirt, yet counters his gaze with her own as she presents herself in a similar way to Deeley, talking about her past times with his wife Kate. Anna comments:

**Anna**: I would choose a position in the room from which I could see her face, although she could not see mine.142

If we follow Mulvey’s line of argument, we could conclude that Anna’s ownership of a gaze similar to that of Deeley leads to her masculinisation. Anna is an observer who turns Kate into an object of observation, and thus occupies a male position. In an Irigaraian reading of the male gaze and her suggested opposition to it through the assertion of female Otherness that is rooted in corporeality, rather than the assumption of abject object status in a Lacanian mirror of male desire, Anna is mimicking the male position in order to assert herself as an Other.143 Anna, therefore, owns her body, and accepts her corporeality in her struggle with Deeley for the ownership of Kate. Deborah, unlike Anna, does not want Hornby to look up her skirt, because she is reluctant to accept the idea of her corporeality in the first place. She is locked inside her mind and her fixation with its memories.

Deborah’s questions, nevertheless, also imply her intention to interrogate Hornby’s right to hold control over her narrative, her life, and her body. In other words, to construct her as his mirror. Although Deborah talks about her family as if she were a dutiful girl who has always listened to her mother’s warnings to keep away from boys, she knows deep inside that such boys are other Hornbys:

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141 *A Kind of Alaska*, p.160.
143 Irigaray, p.76.
Deborah: Did they sacrifice me to you?¹⁴⁴

In comments such as this, the flat, silent, ‘Smooth as sheets’¹⁴⁵ image that provides Hornby with a mirror to enact his identity is moving, and needs to be stopped. The very source that used to provide Hornby with a good reflection of his desired female object, and with which he created a history for her all of his own, has become a source of danger. The same process applies to Deborah, as the very tool (memory) on which she has relied to counter Hornby is failing her through Hornby’s continuous negations and questionings of her history. Lacan’s psychological observations thus provide an apt description for what happens during the course of Deborah’s narration, because we are: ‘Destined’ to suffer the disintegration of our subjectivity through the very force that initially produced it.¹⁴⁶

As Deborah is constructing her identity through her recollections, in which her subjectivity comes to rest for another, these recollections can easily be manipulated, questioned, changed, and appropriated by that ‘[an]Other’. In other words, Deborah’s recollections serve as the site whence images, codes, and language, and hence her identity, are formed. The Other can thus recall those codes and images to interpret them in a way that forces the subject to acknowledge, at least tacitly, that the idealised image he created for himself, and from which he enacted his identity, was imaginary. Or as Lacan puts it, such images are forced to be imagined as merely a: ‘construct in the imaginary’.¹⁴⁷

Hornby finds it easy to manipulate Deborah’s mental identity by simply interpreting and negating it all the time. He listens to her narratives, manipulates them, and reproduces them for her in a way that makes her feel how imaginary her recollections are. Deborah’s mental identity proves to be too weak without a bodily action to escape the clutches of Hornby.

Interestingly also, the power game initiated by the characters could also be instigated through unconscious awareness of biological differences, as Victor L. Cahn insists that

¹⁴⁵ Hall, p.84.
¹⁴⁶ Quoted in Marc Silverstein’s Harold Pinter and the Language of Cultural Power, p.33.
this conflict is: ‘One in which characters function instinctively, propelled by biological forces of which they might not be aware.’

In an Iragaraian sense, Deborah’s physical, as much as her mental, freedom poses a threat to Hornby. Therefore, Hornby makes sure that he keeps this situation under control. Hornby’s fear of Deborah’s freedom might well be justified if we consider that matriarchy in primitive societies was powerful, because women held power over the patriarch. As the father in primitive societies was the chief of the family, he held power over all members. As for daughters, as soon as they grew up, he would take them as his wives, while young boys would be driven out as soon as they reached an age where they became sexually dangerous as rivals. Therefore, promiscuous relations were common and, thus, paternity was disputable, whereas maternity was not; maternity could, then, be traced through the mother. This, according to Friedrich Engels, was connected with the dominance of women over men. Therefore, just as man was driven by unsocial conduct, woman was led by the same conditions to act in an opposite direction, into social conduct. It is very important to remember that changes in power positions are common in social systems and are part of human development, which remains unfixed.

However, discussing the development of patriarchy and matriarchy goes beyond the purpose of this chapter. What I want to draw attention to is the fact that Hornby’s anxiety to assert his manhood is justified given the deep rooted fear of the power a woman can have over the patriarch, and hence the moral and ethical responsibility of being a woman. Being a woman is a responsibility that needs courage in Pinter’s world, for Pinter assigns his female characters the task of reflecting the suffering of others, since he believes that they have enough flexibility to do so. They ‘have a flexibility, a freedom, an imaginative sympathy frequently denied to men who are locked into unyielding power-structures’.

That being said, Deborah asks her sister Pauline – who makes a late appearance in the play – about her breasts, and Hornby asks her to listen to what her sister says:

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149 Friedrich Engels, Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigenthums und des Staates. Im Anschluss an Lewis H. Morgans Forschungen (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1984) (in German).
151 Michael Billington, Harold Pinter (London: Faber & Faber, 2007), p.381.
**Hornby**: Deborah. Listen. You are not listening.
**Deborah**: But where did you get those breasts?
**Pauline**: They came about.152

Upon seeing her sister Pauline, Deborah realises that her sibling is now a woman, and chooses to go back to her bed as she realises what it takes to be one.

While Katherine Burkman in her account of the play likens the three characters to the myth of Demeter and Persephone,153 suggesting that Pauline stands for the grieving mother figure and implying an incestuous relationship, I believe that both Pauline and Deborah have in different ways been victims simply for being women. Their answers to both their father and Hornby did not silence the men, contrary to Hall’s suggestion that it did—‘Deborah’s narrative, albeit limited, silences Hornby’154—because the ‘racket’ of Hornby-in terms of dominating the women in the family- continued.

However, the fact that Deborah touches her breasts in awe reflects an existential dilemma, a:‘Serious ontological and existential problem’,155 as Sakellaridou suggests, since Deborah realises, through her failure to have a bodily existence, that she is suffering an existential problem: to Sakellaridou, this is a problem of belonging to reality and of having consciousness; and I would assert that the opportunities for existence that are offered to her are so gendered that it is her realisation of the responsibility of being a woman, rather than simply a human, that she finally cannot undertake. It is the responsibility of being a woman that frightens Deborah and pushes her to retreat. As Hall suggests, it is the: ‘Complexities and uncertainties of being a woman or rather of becoming a woman’,156 that drive Deborah to retreat.

Thus, Deborah and her sisters have been silenced by the fact of their gender. It is not only Deborah who is being silenced by Hornby, who, being a doctor runs an institution that is mainly a male-dominated one being more like Nicolas in Pinter’s later play One

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152 *A Kind of Alaska*, p.182.
153 In Greek mythology, Persephone (also called Kore) is the daughter of Zeus and the harvest goddess Demeter and queen of the underworld. According to Homer, she is a formidable, venerable queen who carries the curses of living men upon the souls of the dead. Persephone was picking flowers when Hades, Lord of the Underworld, kidnapped her and made her his queen. Demeter, her mother, who causes winter due to her grief over her lost daughter, only allows spring when she gets her back. Persephone, nevertheless, must go back home each year to return to her husband. Persephone is also known as the goddess of the vegetation that shoots forth in spring and withdraws into the earth after harvest. The origins of her cult are uncertain, but it is based on a very old agrarian cult in agricultural communities.
154 Hall, p.86.
156 Hall, p.83.
for the Road (1984), who proclaims ‘God speaks through me’, 157 but Pauline as well. 158 While Deborah indulges in her recollections of dancing while being slammed ‘with a big boot on [her] foot’, 159 the real slamming comes from Pauline. Indeed, Pauline slams Deborah because she herself has been slammed and silenced by Hornby all these years and still is, because Hornby does not like her appearing without being called:

**Hornby:** I didn’t call you. 160

Hornby, in his treatment of Pauline, is like an arbiter who not only decides what she should say, but also ventriloquises her. Pauline has rendered her corporeal existence up to his patriarchal control. She has lost the battle that Deborah is still fighting:

**Hornby:** She has been coming to see you regularly [...]. She has suffered for you. She has never forsaken you. Nor have I. 161

The conversation between Pauline and Hornby is remarkably telling, for it shows that Pauline has not only lost her identity as an individual, but also her ability to self-evaluate. She seems to have been brainwashed into losing her own memory of herself, and given a new memory through which she has constructed a new identity whereby she cannot even evaluate her judgments:

**Pauline:** What shall I say?

**Hornby:** Just talk to her.

**Pauline:** Doesn’t matter what I say?

**Hornby:** No. 162

The conversation between Hornby and Pauline identifies Hornby with reason, through which he can always control and rectify a relationship. In other words, Hornby owns the logos while Pauline does not, which is a primary cause of female passivity.

Nevertheless, Hornby, is also struggling to cling to his identity as a male, a father figure, and a man who has been in charge and who still wants to be in charge of Deborah and Pauline. Hornby is defending patriarchy in the face of Deborah’s invasion of his territory. Whenever Deborah gives him an account of a memory that does not serve this purpose, he counters her with a different one to keep patriarchy in position.

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157 *One for the Road*, p. 225.
158 It is worth mentioning the male-dominated institutions such as churches, hospitals, and schools not only fail to provide protection, but also, in a majority of them, are totalitarian, authoritative establishments that always aim to remould the identity of the individual according to their own hegemonic rules.
159 *A Kind of Alaska*, p. 175.
160 Ibid., p. 176.
161 *A Kind of Alaska*, p. 182.
162 Ibid., p. 177.
However, Hornby keeps mentioning that he is there to take care of Deborah. Hornby’s assumptions about taking care of Deborah even after her family left her and of ‘nourishing’ her seem to be totally altruistic, as Elizabeth Sakellaridou confirms:

> The doctor speaks in simple, short sentences, in a tone which has nothing of oratorical pugnaciousness or the boisterousness behind which many previous Pinter characters tried to hide their immaturity and inadequacy. His statement is a humble confession of simple love, pure kindness and sincere devotion; not a selfish demand for the recognition of his sacrifices.  

Interestingly enough these altruistic motivations as interpreted by Sakellaridou seem to be totally sinister to Hall, who believes that Hornby has deliberately married Pauline, Deborah’s sister, to satisfy his hidden sexual desire to keep close to Deborah:

> ‘Pinter’s play, however, dispels Hornby’s altruism and scientific objectivity when Hornby himself admits that he has married Deborah’s sister, Pauline, then abandoned her to remain with Deborah’.  

In my opinion both critics miss an important point here. Elaborating on this point I believe that owing to the fact that women complain that they cannot gain access to the information they need to make the right choice, which means that the medical institution is fundamentally patriarchal in all its approaches to human bodies, Hornby is more than a familial father figure at home; he extends his role to a more important social one in the hospital (or what looks like a room in a hospital), in which he is a God-like figure making his presence felt everywhere. His omnipresence in the real and imagined dramatic loci of this play means that he has blocked every possibility of Deborah and Pauline’s obtaining a complete existence.

Nevertheless, Hornby is suffering as well, as suggested earlier by Moonyoung Ham, who believes that the fact that Hornby is admitting Pauline’s suffering for Deborah implies his as well: ‘She has never forsaken you. Nor have I’.  

Representing different kinds of authority, Hornby could stand as a perverse echo of Mr. Kidd, the landlord in *The Room* (1957), who ‘had a lot to keep [his] eye on’. Hornby, as an authority on a different level (that of the patriarch at home, in the hospital, and presumably other institutions), has a lot of women to keep an eye on, a

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164 Hall, p.84.
165 A Kind of Alaska, p.183.
166 The Room, p.98.
mission he fulfils perfectly by giving each of them a memory to live with that is against their true nature. Deborah’s recollection of her sisters reveals that they were both witty, sensual, and full of life. Pauline was ‘too witty for [her] own good’ and Estelle was marvellous ‘at crossing her legs. Sen-su-al’.167 The fact that Hornby focuses on the part of Pauline’s and Estelle’s lives in terms of having or not having men (Pauline had to live like a widow and Estelle never married her boyfriend) highlights the control that he exerts upon them to the extent that he sees their existence, and/or happiness only in terms of being connected to men. In this way he believes they have been punished by being denied what he believes to be their ultimate rights. In this case, I believe that Pinter, through the depiction of Hornby’s grip over the three sisters, is highlighting how any hegemonic rule sees what others are entitled to in a framework that suits its own needs, defining the right of others from its own perspective. Hornby’s responsibility is to keep the three women under the rule of patriarchy, not necessarily to satisfy them, or even to keep the male end of the patriarchal contract—the responsibility he inherited from Deborah’s father is to keep watch over them, as the biological father did until he lost his grip after becoming blind. The male gaze is often thought to be a kind of metaphor for – or extension of – the penis. According to Todd W. Reeser,

Male blindness is often taken as a metaphorical castration: to be without the penetrating eye, a vulnerable organ that can be put out, is to be without a symbolic penis [...] to have control over the look is to have the phallus.168

Thus, rule of patriarchy is supported by factors such as the gaze, discourse, memory, and subordination and control of women’s corporeality. By controlling these, patriarchy makes sure that it fortifies itself against any threat that could topple it. This is a theme that carries political seeds, which will be discussed in the following chapters.

Despite Moonyoung C. Ham’s suggestion that Hornby is: ‘Also a victim’,169 which I believe to be true, because he kept watching over Deborah through all those years (an therefore lost significant amounts of his own life, freedom and time), I do not believe that he is as helpless as Ham suggests. Hornby has inherited the male gaze from

167 A Kind of Alaska, p.162.
169 Moonyoung C. Ham, p.189.
Deborah’s father, and managed to remain in control all these years. He penetrates Deborah not only with his injection, but also with his gaze, by ‘[watching] over her’. Towards the end of the play, Deborah expresses her wish to go back ‘home’. Interestingly enough Katherine Burkman makes a connection between Deborah’s wish to go back home and her family, and whilst Sakellaridou believes that Deborah comes from: ‘Warm, happy home before the daughter’s misfortune’, Burkman believes instead that the home to which Deborah wants to return is herself as a woman; in other words, her identity as an independent woman, because Burkman, believes that Deborah was not happy with her sisters, who ‘are diabolical. Brothers are worse.’ Although they were very close to each other, Deborah could not fit in with them. Nevertheless, Deborah’s wish to go back home, in my opinion, is not just to get her own self back, but also a wish for a better home in which to live, a more peaceful world, and a better system, in which she as a woman could feel her completeness rather than living as a fragmented being under the control of others. Her realisation of her trapped position and her need to escape it are revealed when Deborah realises that the windows are acting as walls that will confine her to her bed forever:

Deborah: Let me out. Stop it. Let me out. [...] Shutting the walls on me.

Deborah’s numbing effect that occurs at the end of the play is accompanied by her figure being hunched and, when the numbing effect loosens, she starts hearing a dripping sound. It is a symbol of a society that kept slamming her with a big boot whenever she wanted to break free and dance because she has been restricted to move or remember through Hornby’s control over her. It is the grip of a patriarchy that believes it owns the truth that seems to dominate, not only Deborah’s family, but all public institutions and/or places in which people can be indoctrinated and curbed from taking any further action and hence the metaphorical representation of Deborah’s coma which could stand for any curbing or restricting situation. Deborah’s corporeal and mental crumbling is Hornby’s victory in the battle against freedom represented by the character of Deborah, who stands not only for herself, but for many women, many of both sexes who are tortured, and many people affected by atrocities around the

173 Ibid., p.188.
world. She is the repressed, frustrated and blocked witness; in a characteristic of much of Pinter’s writing, she is a failed and failing individual who hands over her position to us for further action. Therefore, the drip is not her sexual desire, as suggested by Moonyoung C. Ham, who believes that Deborah danced to unleash her sexual desire: ‘Her dance in narrow spaces can be explained as an impassioned dance of her sexual desire’;\textsuperscript{174} it is, rather, her desire to break free from the chains of society. It is the anxiety of: ‘Being a woman’\textsuperscript{175} However, this desire is never fulfilled, with Deborah’s hunched back and her repeated retreat to a bed from which she desires to break free, but lacks the strength and resolution to enact the necessary struggle herself.

II

In this section I will analyse Deborah’s attempts to enact her body in her struggle to have an independent existence and identity in the world. To this end, I am using Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s (1908-61) phenomenological philosophy, in which he claims that the body is the primary site for perceiving the world in which we live. In contrast to the Cartesian \textit{cogito} (rational consciousness, or mind, existing as proof of ontological existence, but operating as part of an existence that holds dual forms: ‘thinking’ and ‘being’), Merleau-Ponty believed that the body and its consciousness are inextricably intertwined as a single vehicle for perceiving the world. Cartesian theory, developed by the French philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650), emphasises the separation of the mind from the body, claiming that any source of knowledge lies in the mind only and that the body is only a physical matter that exists independently. By examining in this section Deborah’s attempts to sustain her body after her previous attempts to protect her mind (i.e., her memories), I will now follow her attempts in this regard and establish whether or not she is able to belong, using Merleau-Ponty’s phrase ‘to be in the world’, and eventually have an identity of her own.

Other than rejecting looking into the Lacanian mirror because she does not want to see Hornby’s reflection as her own identity, Deborah’s reluctance to participate in a series of normative, often unseen patriarchal games can also be accounted for in

\textsuperscript{174} Ham, p.10.
\textsuperscript{175} Hall, p.83.
phenomenological terms. Discussing the body, Merleau-Ponty believed that: ‘When I do concentrate my eyes on it, I become anchored in it’.\(^\text{176}\)

Merleau-Ponty considers the body as an object and: ‘To look at an object is to inhabit it’.\(^\text{177}\) In such terms, Deborah’s body is an object that Hornby has inhabited since she fell into her coma. To counter Hornby’s dominion, Deborah needs to inhabit and enact her body first as an object because, according to Merleau-Ponty, ‘The body is the vehicle of being, and having a body, for a living creature, is to be interwoveled in a definite environment’.\(^\text{178}\)

If Deborah looks into the mirror, she will realise that, after all her attempts to enact her identity through bodily presence, she has, in fact, failed to do so because all she will see is a weak body, almost always tied to that wretched bed of hers. She has neglected her somatic form because her dreams, recollections, and past life have all been attempts on her part to enact identity through memory, in an attempt to free herself from what for her has become a prison of corporeality. In this sense, Deborah is a Cartesian character whose body and mind are not connected and interdependent. According to Cartesian dualism, there are two kinds of substance: mental and material.\(^\text{179}\) The mental does not have an extension in space, and the material does not think. Deborah’s character perfectly delineates such philosophical division of human subjectivity into two entities: her mind cannot be extended into the real world (space), and her body (as a result of its multiple failures to engage with the world) is rendered simply material, it is unable to think. Thus, in phenomenological terms, her failure to exist.

According to Merleau-Ponty, ‘To have a body is to have a present’,\(^\text{180}\) and, since Deborah has no mastery of her body (in a patriarchal world, such gendered language is appropriate), she does not own a present. Therefore, she retreats into the past, memories, recollections, and dreams to enact an identity that counters Hornby’s different versions of her in a struggle of power to assert the self. A battle she, again, loses due to her inability to have either a memorial or corporeal presence.


\(^{177}\)Ibid., p.79.

\(^{178}\)Merleau-Ponty, p.94.


\(^{180}\)Merleau-Ponty, p.91.
Having occupied Hornby’s memory for twenty-nine years means that Deborah has abdicated responsibility for perceiving and enacting her own somatically rooted engagement with the world and rather she has been attempting to keep her corporeality through continuing to preoccupy Hornby’s mind. In other words, she has been able to keep Hornby watching over her body, and has thereby kept her body in existence in a sense. The price of this retreat from somatic obligation has meant that Hornby, has been able to guarantee the dominion of patriarchy for himself. Nevertheless, in phenomenological terms the body is a vehicle of being; a normal person, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, usually has command of his body, which is his means of relating to the world:

I regard my body, which is my point of view upon the world, as one of the objects of that world[...]I cannot understand the function of the living body except by enacting it myself, and except in so far as I’m a body which rises towards the world.181

Thus, in connection with what Merleau-Ponty is suggesting, by enacting the body oneself, Deborah has failed fully to exist while in a coma. The involuntary corporeal movements of her legs that sometimes took Hornby off guard are instances of her honest attempts to have an ontological existence:

**Hornby:** At other times you would suddenly move of your own volition very quickly, [...] spasmodically, for short periods, and as suddenly as you began you would stop.182

Deborah, even subconsciously, attempted to belong to the world through her corporeality, despite being in a coma. Faced with this deep-rooted and persistent need for any human subject to exist and to control their object status through expressions of subjectivity, Hornby used to take her ‘for walks twice a week’,183 to tighten his controlling grip on her bodily existence. The fact that Deborah failed to enact a full corporeal existence during her coma is further explained in phenomenological terms. Merleau-Ponty again:

I know that objects have several facets because I could make a tour of inspection of them, and in that sense I’m conscious of the world through the medium of my body. It is precisely when my

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181 Merleau-Ponty, p.87.
183 Ibid.
Thus, Deborah’s spasmodic movements were the result of her fear of losing the parts that connect her to the world: her limbs. That also, in a sense, accounts for her attempts to walk and dance without Hornby’s help; such movements are attempts to assert her existence—and she fails in them because her retreat from the world has led to a corporal weakening that means she cannot enact a full somatic existence despite her attempts to do so. In other words, her movement during her coma was not enough to constitute a complete attempt to belong; it is a kind of residual trace of the inevitability of corporality. Although such movements helped in some small way to sustain her presence, she technically only existed as property, an object that had always been regarded and controlled by Hornby.

Interestingly, Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological reading of the body supports Irigaray’s notion that the female body is, in itself, enough to ‘jam’ the patriarchal machinery. This may also justify Irigaray’s denunciation of Lacan, who justified female inferiority by creating: ‘a sadistic system of subjectivity’, in which females are only participants who serve as mirrors for male desire and bring about masculine fulfilment. In post-structuralist French thought, the body is the vehicle through which a woman asserts her Otherness, and thus resists patriarchy. In Deborah’s case, such a body does not exist; her retreat from somatic presence is so great that she does not belong to the world, therefore, she cannot resist patriarchy as it is represented by Hornby.

On another level, however despite the fact that Deborah’s attempts to belong have failed (as they are articulated through her involuntary movements while in a coma), she is nevertheless, even in such subconscious and residual ways, fighting the idea of being controlled by Hornby. Although she believes that she has been kidnapped or sacrificed to Hornby, she nonetheless still remembers her sister Pauline’s warnings, deliberately articulated as persistent (‘always’) and in the present as well as the past (‘Pauline [... ] says’):

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184 Merleau-Ponty, pp.94-95.
Deborah: Pauline always says I’ll end up as part of the White Slave Traffic.  

Here, the ‘White Slave Traffic’ of which Deborah believes she will end up a part prompts us to revisit the workings of the body in Merleau-Ponty’s The Phenomenology of Perception:

The system of experience in which they [my body and the world] communicate is no longer spread out in front of me and watched over by constituting consciousness. I have the world as an unfinished individual through my body as a power for this world; I have a position of objects through the position of my body[...] not through a logical implication[...] but rather through a real implication and because my body is a movement toward the world and because the world is my body’s support[...] We must conceive of perspectives and the point of view as our insertion in the world-as-an-individual, and we must no longer conceive of perception as a constitution of a real object, but rather as our inherence in things.

In a way similar to the girl whose mother has forbidden her to see again the young man with whom she fell in love as set out by Merleau-Ponty, Deborah starts losing her appetite for belonging to the world. It might be the case that Deborah was forbidden to remain in contact with Jack, her boyfriend, and, therefore, her corporeality started crumbling. Losing appetite for Deborah starts with bodily functions, mastication and aurality: she complains of the ‘chump chump’ she used to hear when her sisters ate chocolate. They were so lively, so energetic, that they ate chocolate ‘with the paper on’. Deborah’s corporeal collapse starts from that point and continues until she starts to lose her skills in linguistic articulation, ‘The use of speech’; she is unable even to say hello, or ‘to have a chat, to make some inquiries’.

Losing the ability to speak means, according to Merleau-Ponty, a heightened sense of emotion, but also losing the ability to exist:

In so far as the emotion elects to finds its expression in loss of speech, this is because of all bodily functions, speech is the most intimately linked with communal existence, or, as we shall put it,
Deborah’s reluctance to belong to society either by corporeal existence or through speech not only means losing her battle as a woman against Hornby’s patriarchal figure but also renders her as a commodity that can be easily manipulated (i.e., exchanged), as long as it does not resist and fight back. Her commodification in this sense supports Irigaray’s words, ‘The society we know, our own culture, is based upon the exchange of women’. Irigaray maintains that without the exchange of women, society believes we: ‘Would fall back into anarchy of the natural world, the randomness of the animal kingdom’; and to serve such a purpose, women have to give up their bodies to men. To deploy Pinter’s allusion, they become like victims of ‘White Slave Traffic’. Women’s commodification lies in the mirror of value for men, rather than looking at women and perceiving active, corporally engaged, embodied and in-the-world ontological subjects, men see reflections of their own construction of female abjection/objectification: slabs of meat, mannequins to be shaped, twisted and deployed according to the normative roles and structures that have been created for women by males. Hence the role that Deborah plays for Hornby. Irigaray observes: ‘Commodities, women, are a mirror of value of and for men’.

Thus, Deborah, due to her ontological retreat and her refusal to be part of this world by enacting her body, becomes a commodity that has been simply transferred from her parents to Hornby. Hornby’s taking the vase from Deborah’s hands instead of her father thus stands for the payment made to claim Deborah’s ownership as part of the masculine force explained earlier by Irigaray:

The production of women, signs, and commodities is always referred back to men (when a man buys a girl, he ‘pays’ the father or the brother, not the mother [...])), and they always pass from one man to another, from one group of men to another.

Hornby receives the vase, like a dowry, and he ‘pays’ for both this and for Deborah with his obligation to ‘watch over’ her. Her commodification as his property is emphatically reinforced by the fact that, at this moment, both the vase, and Deborah’s

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192 Merleau-Ponty, p.186.
193 Irigaray, This Sex, p.170. This theme is widely discussed in Betrayal.
194 Ibid.
195 Ibid., p.177.
196 Ibid., p.171.
body become objects animated and disposed of according to Hornby’s desires, thereby confirming male ownership of Deborah’s body, removing from it its independent life:

Hornby: It was I who took the vase from your hands. I lifted you onto this bed, like a corpse.  

When Deborah realises that she will be cast away in the end for questioning her situation, and that, now she is metaphorically married to Hornby, it is no longer the role of her parents to shelter her, she is reluctant to prove her existence either through speaking or through corporeal belonging. Deborah’s rejection of her corporeality reminds us of Rose in The Room, who refuses to engage with the outside world by locking herself inside her warm, cosy room—a delusional womb-like surrogate for her own active, embodied and in-the-world control of her sexuality and corporeality. Deborah’s retreat, however, goes even further than Rose’s in that it includes her rejection of the conscious world, and her seclusion not within a space of the world, a ‘room’ (of which even Virginia Woolfe might be proud), but rather into the insubstantiality of dreams and unconsciousness. The difficulty of Deborah’s position is augmented in the brief moments in which she postulates and mentally projects her own animation; such moments indicate, with much pathos, the fact that she wants to move away, the fact that she wants to dance without any ‘ridiculous’ help:

Deborah: Right. I will get up now.

He moves to her.

Deborah: No! Don’t! Don’t be ridiculous.

Deborah realises even through her passive years the importance of the body’s being free and autonomous; but despite the fact that this is something she attempts, it is never achieved. The importance of the body does not only lie in its somatic function, but also its cognitive one, both of which are lacking in Deborah’s case.

Merleau-Ponty emphasises the role of the body in remembering, and converting a certain motor essence into vocal form:

The body’s function in remembering is that same function of projection which we have already met in starting to move: the body converts a certain motor essence into vocal form, spreads out the articulatory style of a word into audible phenomena, and arrays the former attitude, which is resumed, into the panorama of the past, projecting an intention to move into actual

198 Ibid., p.173.
movement, because the body is a power of natural expression.\textsuperscript{199}

Merleau-Ponty is not alone in emphasising the importance of corporeal existence. Both Judith Butler and Luce Irigaray also emphasise the importance of corporeality in order to have one’s identity. Butler believes that our identities are acquired through performative acts and insists on the importance of the body, through which such acts are inscribed:

Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally constructed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means.\textsuperscript{200}

Irigaray’s emphasises reminds us of yet another important aspect of the body, that is sexual pleasure. A pleasure that is not only kept for themselves, but also needed by men:

If there is such a thing—still—as feminine pleasure, then it is because men need it in order to maintain themselves in their own existence. It is useful to them: it helps them bear what is intolerable in their world as speaking beings to have a soul foreign to that world: a fantasmatic [sic] one[...]But it does not suffice, of course, for this soul to remain simply external to their universe. It must also be rearticulated with the ‘body’ of the speaking subject.\textsuperscript{201}

Butler’s and Irigaray’s accounts reveal clearly the importance of corporeality, not only to exist, but also to fulfil sexual pleasure: a pleasure of which Deborah has been deprived due to her failure to enact her corporeality. She once had lust, which Hornby took from her by his dominion, thus preventing her from fulfilling sexual pleasure. He ruined her:

**Deborah:** My lust was my own. I kept it by me. You took it from me. Once open never closed. [...]You have ruined me.\textsuperscript{202}

By occupying Deborah’s body, twisting her memories, and taking away her sexual desire, Hornby has ruined Deborah on all levels. In short, he has mutilated her. To clarify this, I will borrow Merleau-Ponty’s definition of mutilation. According to Merleau-Ponty, when a person loses a leg or an arm and acquires a prosthetic one

\textsuperscript{199}Merleau-Ponty, p. 211.  
\textsuperscript{201}Irigaray, *This Sex*, pp. 96-97.  
\textsuperscript{202}A Kind of Alaska, p. 161.
instead, it means that the phantom arm will keep the door open for the actions that the original arm was supposed to do. Thus we are constantly reminded of how our bodily mutilation cuts us off from the outside world. This is what happens to Deborah. Because her body is under Hornby’s control, she is left like a mutilated person whose only tool she can keep in this world is her memory, which is too weak to be perceived by others. Merleau-Ponty further explains:

To have a phantom arm is to remain open to all the actions of which the arm is capable; it is to retain the practical field which one enjoyed before mutilation [...] my body is the pivot of the world.

Nonetheless, the difference between Deborah and Merleau-Ponty’s mutilated individuals is that the latter was given a prosthetic arm which might be capable of supporting him/her to act almost as an original one would have. Deborah’s mutilation, on the other hand, has not only taken place on a corporeal level, but on memorial, social, and cultural levels as well. Instead of a prosthetic arm, she was given a prosthetic memory that is too disturbed to support her existence. Hence her existential problem. Deborah could not keep the danger of Hornby’s mutilation away. The refusal of mutilation, according to Merleau-Ponty, is:

Only the obverse of our inherence in a world, the implicit negation of what runs counter to the natural momentum which throws us into our tasks, our cares, our situation, our familiar horizons.

Thus, by subjecting herself to this mutilation, Deborah has lost the ability to remain ‘inherent in this world’ and have a normal, or rather normalised, life. The really sad thing, therefore, is that there is no world outside the normative constraints of patriarchy for her to exist.

To expand this point further, I will borrow Judith Grant’s suggestion that in the absence of a theory tracing the history of the construction of feminist categories, women were unified by their common feelings of oppression; that they assumed a universal experience, and a universal patriarchy. Thus, ‘They were captured by the

203 Merleau-Ponty, p.94.
204 Sakellaridou, p.207.
205 Merleau-Ponty, p.94.
very patriarchal ideas they sought to oppose'.

Grant called this ‘False consciousnesses’, and considered women as hapless victims of oppression. However, contemporary feminist understanding has shifted from viewing gender identity as a fixed essence based on biology, psychology, theology, or ontology to seeing identity as a social and historical production: ‘Both male and female subjects are viewed as “discursively constructed,” although they are differently positioned within different discourses according to the cultural context and time period.’

Within this shift, feminist theorists of corporeality have demonstrated the ways in which ontological being is still a vehicle for asserting one’s identity, regardless of sex.

It is this positioning from which Pinter’s women, for example Deborah, are suffering. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler argues:

> When the constructed status of gender is theorised as radically independent of [biological] sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as a female one.

Precisely because she uses this starting point, Butler echoes the philosophical readings of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty that raised the importance of the body as a medium for belonging to the conscious world. Butler believes that the body is not only a vehicle for belonging to the world, but also a medium to explore gender politics, subordination and hierarchy, observing that: ‘The ontological distinction between soul (consciousness, mind) and body invariably supports relations of political and psychic subordination and hierarchy’.

As a result, Butler recommends that any ‘uncritical’ distinction between body and mind needs to be ‘rethought’, as this distinction is our vehicle for realising the gender hierarchy that it has produced, maintained, and rationalised. Therefore, despite the absence of a fully-developed feminist theory in the beginning, and a shift from regarding people’s bodies as having a clear distinctions between different sexed bodies onto and through which performative notions of gender can be inscribed, belonging to

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207 Ibid., p.26
208 Ibid.
209 Grant, p.27.
211 Ibid., p.12.
212 Ibid.
this world is always fulfilled through having a body. Whether it is possible to fix a distinct gender to a body is beyond the boundaries of this discussion, but as long as a relationship between body and mind is going to determine not only our existence but also our social position in society, then such a distinction should be carefully drawn. From such a point of view, Deborah’s chilling attempt to retreat into existence as a Cartesian being with a separate body and mind that do not support each other is the desire for an impossible existence that leads to her subjection to Hornby’s unthoughtful attempts to keep each commodified and controlled part of her as separate and fragile as her own desired being.

This positioning has, I believe, not only affected women, but men as well. Victor Seidler believes that men are control freaks: they assert their masculinity by controlling themselves as well as the world around them, a process assisted by their instrumental use of language, and, I would add, their bodily structure.213 In other words, men use their *logos* and their bodily strength to assert their hegemony. Irigaray:

> Women’s social inferiority is reinforced and complicated by the fact that woman does not have access to language, except through recourse to ‘masculine’ systems of representation which disappropriates her from her relation to herself and to other women.214

Hornby, as part of this oppression process, is not only manipulating his discourse, his version of memory and the past with Deborah for further oppression, he has also manipulated her body by piercing it with a needle to inject the fluid he thinks that she needs; he has tarnished her body without her prior permission, which raises the point of medical interference without the patient’s consent. Such interferences are explained in terms of the benefits to the individual, but they are often intrusive, as in Deborah’s case, as Deborah has been awakened with little regard to her volition. Hornby took enough ‘care’ of Deborah, ironically, to keep his masculinity in the lead. In short, he is using his *logos* against Deborah’s ontological dilemma, thus fulfilling his objective.

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214Irigaray, p.85.
With regard to the control of corporality, Pinter’s use of dancing connotes Deborah’s true free nature, which she wants to keep. It also constitutes a threat to Hornby’s identity, leading him to question the freedom of her body:

**Hornby:** You danced in narrow spaces?\(^{215}\)

Part of Hornby’s responsibility as a male is to keep Deborah mentally and physically under his control. Therefore, when she confirms her ‘laughing nature’ and her passion for dance, he tries to undermine her statements by either questioning or negating them:

**Hornby:** You never laughed.
**Deborah:** Of course I laughed. I have a laughing nature.\(^{216}\)

Although laughing and dancing are both corporeal activities (one the involuntary spasm of mirth, the other a coded expression of corporeal control and emotion), the fact that Hornby accepts the idea of Deborah’s dancing and negates her laughing nature indicates that Hornby, who has tried to curb her bodily freedom, is equally eager to hush her voice. Deborah’s voice, at times in which it expressed itself without recourse to male-authored languages (laughter), and, further, her discourse in opposition to male control, are sources of danger to patriarchy that need to be silenced. If Deborah is denied access to her voice, this will: ‘[disappropriate] her from her relation to herself and to other women’,\(^{217}\) as Irigaray points out. Hornby might feel, at times, that he cannot control Deborah’s body, especially when she attempted to dance (even in an imaginary dance); therefore, he needs to make sure that he curbs Deborah’s voice to keep her incapable of asserting herself as an independent entity.

It is noteworthy, then, that when Pauline enters the room, Hornby’s hands start shaking:

**Pauline:** You are trembling.
**Hornby:** Am I?
**Pauline:** Your hand.\(^{218}\)

To make this connection stronger, I will borrow Merleau-Ponty’s remarks in terms of bodily spatiality. According to Merleau-Ponty, our bodies have spatiality on their own:

> If bodily space and external space form a practical system, the first being the background against which the object as the goal.

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\(^{216}\) Ibid., p.172.

\(^{217}\) Irigaray, *This Sex*, p.85.

\(^{218}\) *A Kind of Alaska*, p.177.
of our action may stand out or the void in front of which it may come to light, it is clearly in action that the spatiality of our body is brought into being.\textsuperscript{219}

Pauline’s bodily presence has posed a temporary threat to Hornby’s body, such that his hands start shaking, but since she has lost her body to him, Pauline will remain a mere avatar. In Merleau-Ponty’s terms: ‘Far from my body’s being for me no more than a fragment of space, there would be no space at all for me at all if I had no body’.\textsuperscript{220}

Pauline has no space for herself, either physically or mentally, for Hornby owns them both; hence his identification with the logos. According to Victor Seidler,

\begin{quote}
The identification of ‘masculinity’ with reason means that men believe that there is always something they can do to better and rectify a relationship[...]The Feminist demands to have their own values recognized in the institutions of society, and for more equal relationships, has forced men to realise the pain that their insensitivity and power have created. This has created something of a ‘crisis’ for men who had never learned to express their feelings outside their relationships with women.\textsuperscript{221}
\end{quote}

Hornby, I believe, suffers from this crisis as he has never given himself the chance to live with Pauline and form proper memories with his wife. Rather, he preferred to live with a dead, flat body for twenty nine years; all his attempts have been a series of different versions of memories used as weapons against the other’s memory to keep him safe, thus being part of a vicious circle of oppression.

Despite Deborah not being physically dead, the fact that she was suspended in a world alienated from the real one renders her dead. Even though she had her body’s spatiality, being tied to a bed and occupying a specific space, that was not enough reason for her to exist. To exist is not to be in space, but to be of it: ‘To be a body is to be tied to a certain world [...] our body is not primarily in space: it is of it’.\textsuperscript{222}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{219}Merleau-Ponty, p.117.  \\
\textsuperscript{220}Ibid.  \\
\textsuperscript{222}Merleau-Ponty, p.171.
\end{flushright}
Pauline, on the other hand, was punished for her energetic, witty tongue by being given a new memory, a bleak one, where she has to live alone and suppress all of her past energy. Like Philomela, her tongue is kept sealed in a jar.\textsuperscript{223}

The fact that Deborah is charged with authoring the story of her sister Pauline as a female stricken by this act of violence renders her a witness to the atrocities implied by this metaphorical act of rape. Deborah, here, as an agent for the sufferings taking place in the world (implied throughout her recollections), is raising the issue of oppression through the oppression of herself and her sisters. The word ‘racket’ is mentioned in the same speech about the tongue, which implies a derogatory meaning of women’s speech and attempted communication that needs to be hushed. Women’s tongues which, presumably, always get them in trouble, need to be taken away from them, so that the Other hears no ‘racket’ but rather the logical discourse of male \textit{logos}. Therefore, Deborah’s speaking in the first person while she is in fact not the one who silenced Pauline refers to the Other, the patriarch that stands as one of the agents of oppression in society:

\begin{quote}
\textbf{Deborah}: I will keep your tongue in a closed jar and you will never ever ever be witty again.\textsuperscript{224}
\end{quote}

Moreover, implying that she is not the one who committed the act leaves us, as the audience, responsible for her suffering:

\begin{quote}
\textbf{Deborah}: She’s all right, really. She just talks too much.\textsuperscript{225}
\end{quote}

In the light of all such evidence, we can see that Deborah has remained a Cartesian being with a split, and too-fragile, body and mind. She has never, despite her continuous attempts, achieved corporeal being.

\textsuperscript{223} In the Greek myth of Philomela, Tereus, King of Thrace, rapes and mutilates his sister-in-law by cutting her tongue to stop her telling about his crime. The story of Philomela, which is narrated in Ovid’s \textit{Metamorphosis}(43BC-AD17/18), is that she wove a tapestry and sent it back to her sister in Thrace, who, in revenge upon her husband, killed her son by him, Itylos, and served him as a meal to her husband. Knowing about his cannibal meal, Tereus chased both women, who then prayed to the gods to change them into birds to escape his clutches. Thus, Philomela was transformed into a nightingale and her sister Procne into a swallow.

\textsuperscript{224} A \textit{Kind of Alaska},p.162.

\textsuperscript{225} Ibid.
In *A Kind of Alaska*, Pinter, although revealing the story of a woman inflicted by a sleeping sickness, is actually touching upon many social questions by weaving them within the conversations in the play. The fact that Deborah has served for twenty-nine years as Hornby’s looking-glass, through which he has kept both his identity and another type of ‘racket’, highlights a number of social problems on different political, cultural, and gendered levels.

The racket that Deborah is talking about is not only related to the noise of the dog as a metaphor for women’s discourse, or that of Hornby. The racket here, I believe, is used metaphorically by Pinter for political ends. Despite Pinter’s ambivalence about the political elements in his plays (as he claimed in 1989, he is: ‘A political playwright of a kind’), political issues can be traced from his early works onwards. The fact that he became a political activist later in his life, and the play he produced following *A Kind of Alaska* (*One for the Road*, 1984), confirm this—as he in that play explicitly showed concern about oppression and the abuse of human rights. Since the situation in *A Kind of Alaska* reflects a power struggle on a personal level, whether through discourse, use and subjection to the gaze, or bodily presence, there is an implied political reference within it. In relation to Hornby, the word ‘racket’ also relates to the State and power.

The term ‘protection racket’ is used to denote a group that provides protection to a business through violence outside the sanction of law. We see that such groups become even more active in places where the police or judicial system are rather weak; examples include the activities of the Mafia in Italy. Pinter, a resident of East London, was influenced by the story of the Kray twins, who ran protection rackets during the fifties and sixties in the East End of London. In political terms, the word ‘racket’ can also refer to governmental corruption, in which officials use confidence tricks to demand bribes from citizens or corporations in return for support. This also includes agreements between parties where not only money, but also lucrative jobs

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226 The play was inspired by neurologist Oliver Sack’s book *Awakenings*, which tells the story of a number of people in the 1920s who had been inflicted by a sleeping sickness known as encephalitis lethargica.


228 The Krays were twin brothers who perpetuated organised crimes in East London during the 1950s and 1960s. With their gang, ‘The Firm’, they were involved in armed robberies, arson, protection rackets, and assaults. As nightclub owners, they were involved with celebrities and politicians and they were much feared in their milieu. In the 1960s, they became celebrities themselves, being interviewed and appearing on television.
could be offered in return for protection, or preventing interference from government agencies.

Moreover, the fact that Deborah’s corporeal and memorial capabilities are failing places further emphasis, not only on the deterioration and corruption of some political entities and/or agendas, but on the importance of memory in keeping a record of such events at least. Let me draw a comparison between Deborah and Rose in The Room in this regard. Whilst Rose continues to avoid her past and fights fiercely any memory that can bring it alive again, Deborah struggles hard to enact her identity through the past. Her memory is the weapon by which she counters Hornby’s attempts to own her narrative and construct a ready-made identity for her. Through memory, Pinter believes, we can know the history of things, how things happened, what happened, and how other people dealt with events; only then can we enact our identities. Deborah therefore paves the way for a more direct statement in relation to this issue by Devlin in Ashes to Ashes (1996):

**Devlin:** Because you don’t know where [the pen] had been. You don’t know how many other hands have held it, how many other hands have written with it, what other people have been doing with it. You know nothing of its history. You know nothing of its parents’ history.

Nonetheless, the disorganisation that Hornby inflicted on Deborah on both corporeal and memorial levels proves to be contagious. By never letting Deborah go, Hornby has also sacrificed twenty nine years of his life, away from his wife, who now calls herself a widow. Why would he do that? The reason is this ‘prosthetic memory’ (by which I mean a social petrifaction that Hornby is trying to instil in Deborah’s mind). This is, I believe, one of Pinter’s rhetorical structures, used to refer to other traumatic histories and memories that are manipulated and hidden by: ‘the duplicitous process of media representations’. Although commenting on Pinter’s next play, Ashes to Ashes (1996), Mark Taylor-Batty makes a valuable reference to Pinter’s technique of raising the audience’s social awareness, with his comment that Pinter is, metaphorically,
‘addressing both the ethics of media representations[...] and the cultural processes by which memories of human abomination are necessarily kept alive’. 232

Hornby’s sacrifice, therefore, might be used by Pinter to highlight the profundity of the human mind and human evil at the same time. It is a painful reminder of the deep-rooted power that manipulates our fate to convince us of the impossibility of changing it. Deborah might be like the Serbian woman who sparked Sarah Kane’s Blasted:

At some point during the first couple of weeks of writing I switched on the television. Srebrenica was under siege. An old woman was looking into the camera, crying. She said, ‘Please, please, somebody help us. Somebody do something’. I knew nobody was going to do a thing. 233

Although ostensibly entirely unrelated, the response of Sarah Kane, a woman so sensitive to the pain and injustice of living in our polluted and corrupted world that she took her own life, echoes Deborah’s responses to Hornby – it acts as an exemplar of all women’s struggle to create an identity for themselves outside the clutches of patriarchal logos. Pinter, talking about Kane, addressed at the same time the relationship between atrocity, the mediation of atrocity, and the attitudes towards atrocity of those comfortably distanced from its experience, if not complicit with it:

What frightened me was the depth of her horror and anguish. Everyone’s aware, to varying degrees, of the cruelty of mankind, but we manage to compromise with it, put it on the shelf and not think about it for a good part of the day. But I don’t think she could do that, I think she had a vision of the world that was extremely accurate, and therefore horrific [...] she wasn’t simply observing mankind; she was part of it. It seems to me she was talking about the violence within herself, the hatred within herself, and the depths of misery that she also suffered. 234

Deborah also cannot take the cruelty of the reality to which she has been awakened. Her mind cannot be ‘absent, indifferent’ 235 anymore. She used to dance in narrow spaces, and she wants to continue:

232 Batty, p.105.
Deborah: I have kept in practice [...]. I’ve been dancing in very narrow spaces. Kept stubbing my toes and bumping my head. Like Alice.\(^{236}\)

The allusion to Lewis Carroll’s novel *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) is not meaningless here, for Alice also experiences an identity crisis during the course of her adventures. Alice’s falling into the rabbit hole may reflect the dilemma that affected Deborah when she had fallen under Hornby’s control. In the novel, Alice keeps growing larger at some times and smaller at others, bumping into ceilings, trees, and animals. Moreover, Alice, in Chapter seven of the novel, attends a tea party where she is asked several riddles related to eating and drinking, which connotes things: ‘entering and leaving her mouth’.\(^{237}\) Therefore, Pinter’s allusion to *Alice in Wonderland* is related to Deborah’s corporeal dilemma, which started with her bumping into Hornby, who entered her body (injection), and left his fluid to drain Deborah’s existence.

Hornby not only asks for self-recognition, but also attempts to silence the women under his control. Pinter, the playwright of dramatic pauses, uses silence in a different way here. The play seems not to be: ‘An act of reconciliation and a message of softened and purified feelings of love and compassion’,\(^{238}\) as Sakellaridou believes; rather, it is a strong and direct message of silence, since Pinter had no answer to today’s moral sensibility either as an artist or as a citizen. He leaves his plays in silence, which reflects uncertainty; only silence holds together the multiplicity of his earlier plays tackled here, and only silence is the answer to the atrocities of the twentieth century: ‘language [...] fails to communicate the truth of traumatic events, leaving silence [...] as the only mode of representing atrocity’.\(^{239}\)

Consequently, silence is necessarily political: it is a common feature of Pinter’s female characters, as they resist bowing to their misshapen misrepresentation by patriarchy. It is a common conclusion to his later plays, whereby the only response possible to the victimisation and torture of his characters, representative of civilians of the world, is silence. As with the end of Shakespeare’s great tragic protagonist, ‘the rest is silence’.\(^{240}\) However, Pinter’s silence (as I will discuss in the chapter on linguistic

\(^{236}\) *A Kind of Alaska*, p.173.


\(^{238}\) Sakellaridou, p.211.


\(^{240}\) Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, V.ii. 300.
identity), is not always the kind that is without words, although it seems as if it is in this play. It is the kind of muteness that says everything that can be said, it prompts consideration of the truth that he wants to highlight, and thus his dialogues always seem to be conversations about other things rather than the thing that his characters want to say; hence the power of the content of his work.

Silence is a technique used by Pinter for multiple purposes. People usually encounter silence in public institutions such as churches, hospitals and police stations; in other words, in any institution where the agents of power are perceived as being superior to the individual. Pinter’s intention as a playwright is to draw a connection between ideology, society, and the individual. The tranquillity of the hospital-like room of the opening scene (and presumably all the institutions mentioned) is cleverly juxtaposed by Pinter to emphasise the cushioning complacency with which other kinds of traumatic experiences such as systematic death, rape, torture, starvation, genocides, and wars are treated. By attempting to express that which is simultaneously articulated as inexpressible, *A Kind of Alaska* adumbrates Pinter’s subsequent plays.

Pinter’s inclusion of events that could be imaginary in Deborah’s recollections might be purposefully crafted to allude to an even greater atrocity that originates from Deborah’s cultural memory, resulting from distorted representation either by media or society itself. Deborah’s last speech in the play, in which she repeats what she has been told earlier, renders her, as the dramatic avatar of Pinter’s play, a witness. By adopting both Hornby’s and Pauline’s accounts of her history, however, Deborah hands her position as witness to us. We, as the audience, accept that position while watching her retreat to her bed again. What is required from us is the knowledge and understanding that such suffering needs to be reconsidered, and, most importantly, that it needs to be acted upon. Deborah’s acceptance implies her complicity with the history that has been tailored for her; she has been denied access to her redemption. The prosthetic memory that Deborah has been given marks the problematised relationship we have with such memories. The process of the inaction and/or silence of the female characters in the play draws moral attention to our complicity in such acts and our inaction against them. This dramatic technique used by Pinter, of shifting the audience from spectators to witnesses, implies that they need to digest, negotiate, and act upon what they have witnessed.
However, one question arises here: Why did Pinter choose a woman to be his focus in the play? Women have always been ‘Othered’ in Pinter’s plays; they are all made outsiders to an all-male club. In *The Homecoming* (1965), Lenny tells Teddy of the ‘empty chair standing in the circle, which is in fact [his]’,\textsuperscript{241} excluding Ruth. Max suggests he meets Richard in *The Lover* (1962) to ‘have a word with him [....] after all, he’s a man like me. We are both men. You are just a bloody woman’.\textsuperscript{242} Pinter chooses women and not men to stand for the suffering of others, even though this suffering is reflected through different aspects that go beyond the gender domain (as we shall see in Pinter’s more political plays). Yet Pinter is more sympathetic towards women than men, because he believes that women are more flexible as characters to carry his message:

> God was in much better trim when He created women. Which does not mean to say I sentimentalise women. I think women are very tough [....] in my plays women have always come out in one way or another as the people I feel something towards which I don’t feel towards men.\textsuperscript{243}

Thus, Deborah, as a woman, and an individual suffering oppression that could just be experienced by many other marginalised people, stands not only as a record of such suffering, but as a witness as well. Nevertheless, she is too weak in keeping her recollections to stand as a reliable witness. Therefore, it is our turn as the audience to take on the responsibility and carry on the struggle for anything that would turn this world into a better place in which to live.

**IV**

The play concludes with a note on a forthcoming birthday party for Deborah, in which she is going to receive many presents that she is concerned about losing, just like her freedom:

Deborah: I don’t want to lose them.

Pauline: They will never be lost. Ever.\textsuperscript{244}


\textsuperscript{244}A *Kind of Alaska*, p.187.
Perhaps this fear of loss reveals Deborah’s fatalistic attitude towards her own freedom.

Deborah’s birthday party is much like Stanley’s, in which he is taken, by Monty’s men, to receive special treatment after losing the ability even to speak. Deborah also wants to speak but cannot: ‘You can’t do that if you are in a vast hall of glass with a tap dripping’. 245

I agree with Hall and Sakellaridou that Deborah’s concerns are existential, but I do not agree with their rather optimistic view of the conclusion of the play that is shared by Katherine Burkman. All three critics believe that the fixed frame in which Deborah has been put: ‘Has some cracks’. 246 Burkman believes that Deborah’s hint at a forthcoming birthday party is: ‘Pinter’s way of celebrating death at the heart of darkness’, 247 while Sakellaridou thinks that: ‘Pinter, at last, mollifies his pessimistic world vision by hinting at some comforting values that can render tragic human fate somewhat more endurable’. 248

In the context of Deborah’s existential dilemma, the resistance that Deborah is offering works on three levels: (i) she tries to avoid Hornby’s gaze, through which he turns her into an object for his desire; (ii) she attempts to enact her mental identity through narrating her past as she remembers it and receives a different version from Hornby all the time; and (iii) she struggles to belong to the world through enacting her corporeal presence, a mission that she fails to accomplish. The fact that Hornby owns the power of language, which serves as an: ‘Ideological instrument for the creation of docile political subjects’, 249 means that the power given to the man in gendered relationships is the power given to patriarchy:

Patriarchy demands that women recognise masculine authority by becoming wives so that they may become mothers, reproducing the dominant culture by physically and ideologically, transmitting the socially legitimised desires and values that will transform their children into appropriate social subjects. 250

245 A Kind of Alaska, p.189.
246 Hall, p.90.
247 Burkman, p.199.
249 Marc Silverstein, Harold Pinter and the Language of Cultural Power, p.146.
250 Ibid., p.50.
Deborah’s memories mean knowledge, and knowledge means power, hence Hornby’s continual attempts to beat Deborah on that level:

Memories arouse rivalry and battles for domination through participation in a past or through one’s ability to persuade another to accept an interpretation of it [...] because knowledge means power, memory is a weapon.  

Deborah’s attempts are all doomed to failure, which may account for Pinter’s frustration and the emergence of powerful moments of silence in most of his plays. Deborah never manages to leave her bed properly, and prefers to stay in it after being told that she is a woman. Her sexual desire as a woman was taken from her as a sign of Hornby’s control over her, and kept open ‘for eternity’. She has been punished for being a ‘tomboy’. Therefore, tomorrow is never ‘another day’ for her.

Although Pinter’s warning that: ‘No statement I make [...] should be interpreted as final and definitive’, may put us on our guard, and despite the fact that Pinter felt more for women than for men, the weapon that Deborah holds here in the face of patriarchy is too fragmented, inconsistent, and is not listened to, which illustrates the power of patriarchy so far. In addition, Deborah has not only failed to have an identity on the level of memory, she has also failed to attain identity on other levels (discourse or corporeality). If matters continue to stand like this in society, all marginalised people and oppressed classes will ultimately become too fragmented and fragile, just like Deborah. However, Deborah hits the nail on the head: she knows that enacting her corporeality, along with other factors, is a way out for her and for other women to be defined, not as mirrors of men, but as defined Others. Yet, she denies her corporeality, thus failing to reach the target. Despite the staged fact of Deborah’s coma, Deborah voluntarily returns to her own bed which attests to her refusal of having a corporeal existence.

Accordingly, Pinter’s play makes us, as an audience, encounter situations that we might not have experienced, only to ring a bell in the back of our minds with regards to the inadequacies he presents. By doing this, he makes us recognise the prosthetic memories we might ourselves have been given. Between the ethical dispute that

253 Ibid., p.169.
254 Ibid., p.167.
255 Sakellariidou, p.211.
prosthetic memory may raise and the inaction that might result from its deliberately stultifying effects, Pinter draws moral attention to our potential inaction. What remains is our role as an audience in digesting unarticulated issues that we may find hard to accept, but which we are invited to address, and to act upon.
Chapter Two
The Indelible Memory: Memorial Identity in Harold
Pinter’s Ashes to Ashes

‘He who controls the past, controls the future’

On 12 September 1996, during the premiere of Ashes to Ashes at the Ambassadors Theatre in London, theatregoers left in the interval: ‘We know all about this. We do not need to be told’. 257 This ‘Rabbit-Duck play’, 258 which shows images of atrocities, and in Pinter’s words, ‘is about images of Nazi Germany’, 259 proved irritating once again to Pinter’s audience. The prism-like nature of the play, the mix of reality and fantasy, and the blurring of boundaries between collective and personal memories have been considered by some critics, such as Jack Tinker, a weakness in the play. 260 On the contrary, Michael Billington believes that it is the best of Pinter’s political plays, 261 as he and Keith Peacock insist on linking Pinter’s on-stage representations with the off-stage reality by reading it against ‘Gitta Sereny’s biography of Albert Speer who was Hitler’s favourite architect, Minister for Armament and Munitions from 1942, and virtually the Fuhrer’s second-in-command’. 262 Other critics such as Ann C. Hall believe that the main theme is the storytelling which is key to one’s personal and social freedom, 263 while Manuela M. Reiter suggests an archetypal interpretation of man’s eternal struggle between good and evil, his fear of death and judgement, as well as the ruins and wasteland of the relationships between men and women. 264 However, rather than wastelands of relationships, I am interested in the ruin and decay of the

264 Reiter, p.176.
characters’ memories – and whether or not memory is a basic prerequisite to the construction of true identities. Can we, as human beings, disassociate ourselves from the past, as is referred to in Robert Gordon’s analysis of the play? Do we owe our present identities to our past recollections? Can we turn a blind eye to atrocities across the world just because they happened before our time, or because they did not affect us? Who is the victim and who is the guilty party? Who is responsible, who is indifferent, who is innocent and who is in denial? Although all of the critics have recognised memory as a basic pillar in the play, nobody has dug deep into the relevant theories on memory in order to look at the symbiotic relationships between our memories and our identities. Considering all these critics together, including some theories of memory by Alan Baddeley, Theodore Adorno, Marcel Proust, and Gary Weissman, this chapter will highlight the dilemma of memory and its relation to the construction of identity through three different perspectives by covering a number of questions:

The Psychological Perspective: 1) How does Devlin’s demand for more information stand as a kind of repression of Rebecca’s memory? Is his intervention aimed purposefully at misleading Rebecca’s memory? 2) To what extent can human memory be distorted by emotional pressures? 3) According to Adorno, non-identity is an experience with existential dimensions; therefore do we really live in a world of non-identity by blinding ourselves to what is going on in the world? 4) What constitutes our identities: is it memory or forgetfulness?

The Social Perspective: 1) Do Rebecca’s and Devlin’s different interpretations of events reflect social, gendered, and cultural differences? 2) Does Rebecca’s complicity render her a challenger or a conniver? 3) Are Rebecca’s and Deborah’s refusals to start over markers of change/awareness? 4) How does Pinter write the performance of memory for social purposes in the play? 5) Does the fact that Rebecca is not a real survivor of atrocity speak to the ways in which memory is crafted purposefully to validate the artistic representation of cultural memory? Consequently, if we accept that the only way to experience is personal authenticity, then the only authentic witnesses are those who have died, so to what extent can we rely on Rebecca’s fallible

266 Susannah Radstone, p.394.
memory as a testament to historical truth? 6) Do we have enough sources to acknowledge/remember enough suffering?

**The Political Perspective:** 1) How does the conviction used by Devlin reflect the permutation of horror and authoritarianism in our intimate lives? 2) How far does collective memory influence the rapidity and frequency of horrific events in the world? 3) Does each re-performance consolidate the authority of this commemorative practice? and therefore does that consolidate the committing of atrocities each time they are performed?

**Ashes to Ashes**

‘It is impossible to deal with [the Holocaust] directly. It is like the sun. You cannot look at the sun’. This is how the survivor-writer Aharon Appelfeld described the atrocity he had survived. Taking Pinter’s words further about *Ashes to Ashes*, which he claimed to be about images of Nazism, this chapter will discuss these images in the modern context, referring to them as atrocities, which is used generally to refer to any kind of atrocity, not particularly the Holocaust. But, if we cannot deal with atrocities directly, then how are we going to remember them? And if we forgot all about them by not getting that close, how are we going to prevent them from happening again? How can we count on our memories not to forget atrocities so as to stop them happening again? Thus, memorial identity, in its personal and collective strains, will be my key phrase in the following pages, in which I analyse its workings in *Ashes to Ashes*.

I

Pinter’s ‘Riddling map’ opens with a woman, Rebecca, sitting on a chair, and a standing man, Devlin, with a drink. Unlike Pinter’s cold, white, basic room in *A Kind of Alaska*, Rebecca’s room overlooks a beautiful summer garden. It is not a ‘horror room’, as referred to by Marc Silverstein; on the contrary, it is a familiar domestic room

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268 Levo, p.137.

with dim lights that intensify over the course of the play. Pinter, in my opinion, is using the light trick in a domestic setting to signal the intensity of atrocities that can permeate and penetrate even the most ordinary, quiet places like this room. In the beginning, Devlin’s attitude seems to be that of an ordinary citizen of the world, as he reflects his obvious compassion and concerns, while Rebecca is recounting her past:

Rebecca: For example [...] he would stand over me and clench his fist. And then he’d put his other hand on my neck and grip it and bring my head towards him [...] And he’d say, ‘Kiss my fist.’

Charlotte Delbo, a French non-Jewish writer, distinguished two kinds of memories in her memoirs as a prisoner in Auschwitz, a concentration camp, to which she was sent for French Resistance activities:

- The Ordinary Memory: That is connected to the thinking process from which one can speak about the trauma.
- The Deep Memory: That preserves sensations, physical imprints, and senses.

The conversation sustained by Rebecca seems to belong to both types of memory, as she is disclosing a personal situation that is recalled due to a stimulus as well as mixing it up with hallucinatory ones looked at from the window of her house in Dorset. The stimulus, in my opinion, is not Devlin, but rather the very room in which Rebecca is sitting – which could be similar to the same place in which Rebecca’s trauma, whatever it was, has occurred. Rebecca’s deep memory, therefore, could be a Proustian involuntary memory, defined by Marcel Proust as ‘the only true one’, a memory recalled by stumbling on things from the past, unlike the imprecise voluntary one ‘of the intelligence and the eyes, [which] yields us only imprecise facsimiles of the past’.

Despite Proust’s assumption that involuntary memory is the only authentic one, Rebecca’s memory seems to be disjointed, fallible, and in many cases fragile. Therefore, Devlin is pushing her to reveal more information:

Devlin: And did he? Did he put his hand round your throat?

271 Radstone, p.394.
272 Quoted in Susannah Radstone, p.111.
273 Ibid.
274 *Ashes to Ashes*, p.396.
Devlin’s innocent, sometimes, melodramatic attitude appeals to us at the beginning as we, also, depend on his questioning to figure out what Rebecca is talking about. Nevertheless, Devlin’s interferences will gradually become a disturbing sign that blocks the flow of memories in Rebecca’s subconscious.

The individual memory, nevertheless, cannot be analysed without essential reference to notions such as ‘society’, ‘community’, and ‘history’. Therefore, Devlin’s interferences cannot be thought of as innocent attempts to cheer Rebecca up or distract her heavily traumatised memory from the painful past, but rather as ways to repress her memory as part of his role of twisting the facts and confusing the audience. Despite Rebecca’s distorted memory, she is telling what she believes to be the truth as she sees it, and this aspect of her integrity persists, despite Devlin’s interferences. Interference of this sort arises from the desires of her interlocutor to impose his own sense of logic onto Rebecca’s recollections, to manipulate them and to construct from them an expected sense of logic or purpose; according to David Middleton, memory is like a machine:

There may be nothing wrong with the machine; [...] the problem may rather lie in the interaction of the machine as it is, the uses its designers anticipated for it, and the uses and methods desired, understood and chosen by the customers.

This interference, as Robert Gordon suggests, comes when Devlin asks Rebecca whether she felt hypnotised, and then assumes the typical role of the rational male who needs to extract the truth, as he is still in the dark, in a melodramatic request:

Devlin: You understand why I’m asking you these questions. [...] Put yourself in my place. I’m compelled to ask you questions. There are so many things I don’t know. I know nothing.

Blocking and possessing Rebecca’s past seems to be Devlin’s technique to twist the course of her dialogue by means of conviction and dependence. In other words, Devlin is trying to repress Rebecca’s flashes of memory by convincing her to say what he wants to hear and by pushing her to depend on the type of memory that is prompted by his questions at the same time. Michael Billington suggests the same:

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276 Middleton & Derek, p.171.
278 Ashes to Ashes, p.399.
Undeniably there are echoes of previous Pinter plays: the male desire to excavate and possess a woman’s past [...] the equivocal relationship between interrogator and victim reminds one of *One for the Road*; the background of barbarism and cruelty suggests *Mountain Language* and *Party Time*.279

I would also add that Devlin’s interrogatory method is a strong reminder of Hornby’s imperative language of expected, desired, and commanded behaviour to Deborah in *A Kind of Alaska* (1982); the difference is that Rebecca’s memory is even more disjointed, more fragmented, and emptier than that of Deborah. Therefore, I would completely disagree with Craig N. Owens’s assumption that Devlin is not an interrogator who attempts to possess Rebecca’s memories: ‘Devlin’s persistent questions disavow his fundamental desire to repress Rebecca’s past and to possess her by means of encouraging the dependence that symptomises that repression’.280

Owens believes that with Pinter, it is the structure, not any dialogue, action or morality that drives individually in his drama, with which I again disagree – because I believe that language, and the image rather than structure, are both crucial to Pinter’s works.281 In *Ashes to Ashes*, it is the language, the images of the past that it conjures, and Rebecca’s recollections that lend us clues to decode the play’s meaning, rather than the disjointed structure of the play.

Devlin, like Hornby, is interrogating Rebecca’s memory for his own ends, but instead of lending Rebecca a distorted memory, as Hornby does with Deborah, he is completely thwarting Rebecca’s memory so that its collective whole becomes something unrelated to her recollections, and hence his repressive force becomes clearer towards the end of the play:

**Rebecca**: [...] It was you who handed over the bundle?
**Devlin**: The What? [...] Look [...] Why don’t we go out and drive into town and take in a movie?282

Owens’s interpretation of Devlin’s questioning method is that he fears the risk of denying the undeniable, because any unfamiliar feeling is mediated by what we

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282 *Ashes to Ashes*, p.417-418.
recognise and know: 283 what is familiar. However, rather than bringing that uncanny feeling home, by making it familiar Devlin is disguising it:

By keeping repressed memories disguised, it attempts to thwart complete recovery, never allowing the origins of neuroses to rise fully to the surface of consciousness, and thereby preventing the neurotic from coming to terms with [the] trauma. 284

Although Owens gives logical reasons for considering Devlin as a repressive power, he does not think that the word ‘Interrogator’ explains his role as Billington suggests. He believes that the interrogator’s mission is to bring the individual’s past to the surface. This is true as far as Devlin’s dialogue is concerned, but the difference between Devlin’s interrogatory dialogue, as well as that of his histrionic counterparts such as Nicolas in One for the Road, or Hornby in A Kind of Alaska, is that while they are trying to bring the truth to the surface and then distort it by putting words into their victims’ mouths (like Nicolas), Devlin is completely repressing Rebecca’s statements of truth as they occur in her memory. In other words, Devlin is a repressive interrogator.

Devlin’s language and attempts to divert the course of the dialogue in his favour continues when he asks Rebecca to describe her lover, who, she has already revealed, was working as a sort of guide in a travel agency:

Devlin: Look. It would mean a great deal to me if you could define him more clearly. 285

According to Gordon, Devlin’s true motivation for such definition is an ‘irrational jealousy’, 286 covered by a pretentious language of scientific objectivity. However, Devlin’s irrationality and jealousy could also be interpreted differently. According to Adorno, memory is a sort of problematic knowledge always threatened by the eclipse of misrepresentation, or forgetfulness. He argues:

That what we can know through memory is threatened with eclipse by certain allegedly more rational forms. That eclipse, though, amounts to an act of forgetting that is [...] equivalent to a ‘destruction of memory’. 287

283 Owens, p.89.
284 Ibid., p.90.
285 Ashes to Ashes, p.399.
286 Gordon, p.183.
287 Quoted in Radstone, p.136. See also Theodore W. Adorno, et. al. The Authoritarian Personality. (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1950)
The word ‘forgetting’ in *Ashes to Ashes* takes two different shapes in Rebecca’s and Devlin’s case. According to a Freudian reading, Rebecca’s forgetfulness could be a defence mechanism that is used to block traumatised memories from disturbing her consciousness and hence her fragile recollections. On the other hand, Devlin’s oppressive and domineering character could be another sign of the destruction of memory that Adorno defines as a mechanism adopted by those who seek to reduce the significance of atrocities by embracing different beliefs, and/or alternative explanations. Adorno claims:

> That modern society determines the criterion by which we evaluate truth claims. In this way it determines the norms of reasonableness, of what counts as a good or sufficient explanation. (For example, in a racist society certain underlying views of relative racial superiority produce a consciousness to which claims consistent with that underlying view seem to be reasonable.)

Therefore, it is a completely different kind of forgetfulness or destruction of memory that both Rebecca and Devlin are suffering from. While Rebecca is torn by her true memories that she cannot get close to due to the horrendous injuries to her mind and which she is trying to grasp all at once, Devlin seems to be suffering from blurring, irrational, and lacking memory. In other words, Devlin stands for modern society, which lacks enough resources to allow for full consciousness of what happened during the period in which the atrocity had occurred. But, since Devlin does not have the required resources, he suffers from the incapacity to acknowledge the fact of suffering which Adorno labels as a sort of irrationality or false consciousness. But if Devlin stands for modern society, does that mean we are living in an entirely irrational period? I believe that the answer to this question lies in another layer of Adorno’s theory.

Devlin, according to my reading of Adorno’s philosophy, belongs to our contemporary society or group who are trying to ‘remove [...] from memory’ murderous acts of unprecedented enormity, having recourse to a variety of ways to exculpate the perpetrators of those acts that limit the society’s capacity to judge them. For Adorno, it is only through the experience of contradiction or the experience of non-identity

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289 Ibid., p.136.
that we can come up against the limitations of our judgement or concepts of event or object. 290 Adorno tells us: ‘Only through that experience [...] might the remembrance of human suffering be possible.’ 291 This experience of contradiction and non-identity, I argue, is not necessarily obtained through a solitary confrontation with the past, though we can reduce it or take it in instalments till we can cope with it, lest we develop, like Rebecca, an aversion to the horrendous facts it brings with it.

But in a society governed by false consciousness, and a dominant criterion of reason that evaluates the truth as it sees it (or wishes to see it) and not as it is, that kind of experience which requires questioning of the systems of power, and scrutinising the knowledge it offers seems to be harder to acquire: ‘because “false consciousness” does not – because it cannot – subject social norms to scrutiny, and the subject is left with limited appreciation of objects (in that objects are reduced to appearances).’ 292

In connection to this, Devlin, by seeking more information, and repressing the digressions that Rebecca’s memory might slip into, is trying to fill in his already limited knowledge of events, and thus is unable to reach the non-identity stage through which he can progress to become a sublime character with only one identity, which is humanity. Thus, Devlin’s assumed identity is deeply entrenched in the false knowledge and consciousness that are subject to and governed by the false norms of reasonableness that belong to contemporary society. Meanwhile, Rebecca’s attempts to reach the non-identity stage always fail because she wants to grasp the whole fact at once, and this is what I’m arguing against in Adorno’s theory: the fact that although we try to reach the stage of complete sublimity, we cannot confront the whole truth so as not to develop the same aversion that Rebecca is showing and thus all we can produce is fragmented representations of facts. Gary Weissman supports the theme of false consciousness by describing some people’s passion (like Devlin’s) to know more as morbid curiosity, which means that they want to watch, as Historian Omer Bartove put it: ‘with extremity and with artificially recreating the most horror-filled situations so as to be able to observe them from the safety of one’s armchair.’ 293

290 Radstone, p.137.
291 Ibid.
292 Ibid., p.139.
293 Weissman, p.23.
Whilst Rebecca is unable to describe the physical appearance of her ex-lover and tries to avoid Devlin’s specific demands to describe his length, breadth, width, hands, and eyes, to which she replies: ‘What colour?’

Rebecca’s sudden answer, which seems to be a complementary sentence to what Devlin is asking for, supports my earlier assumption that she is in a state of reverie or involuntary memory – a reading that Gordon supports: ‘Devlin’s mention of eyes only acts as a prompt to [Rebecca’s] involuntary memory.’ That is why she does not seem to be listening to what Devlin is asking her for, and rather sinks into the world of reveries of her past. Nevertheless, although Rebecca’s memory seems to be, in its disjointed flashes, an honest one, the fact that she is still in her early forties in 1996, as we assume from the facts presented to us on stage, renders her too young to have experienced any kind of atrocity so far. Therefore, the possibility of her being a ‘secondary witness’, or ‘non-witness’, might represent her as a ‘vicarious witness’, a term defined by Weissman as the individual who cannot relate to the story that has not occupied a primary place in his memory, the storehouse of childhood memories; this could be another reason for Rebecca’s fragile memory. Moreover, being a non-witness, Rebecca might be too distant from the reality of the horror implied in the atrocity she is describing because it is too overwhelming to be grasped by real survivors, let alone secondary witnesses. That is why her recollections appear to be fragments of a much bigger image that exists outside the borders of space and time. Dori Laub clarifies further:

The traumatic event, although real, took place outside parameters of ‘normal’ reality, such as causality, sequence, place and time. The trauma is thus an event that has no beginning, no ending, no before, no during and no after.

Thus both Devlin and Rebecca suffer from disturbed memory, albeit in different contexts. In an indirect connection to Alan Baddeley’s analysis of human memory, Rebecca’s is a flashbulb one; the more consequential the event, the greater the possibility of vivid memory. According to Baddeley, there are two memory systems: ‘a temporary short-term system where forgetting results from trace decay, and a long-

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294. Ashes to Ashes, p.400.
296. Weissman, p.20.
297. See Deborah Lipstadt’s story in Weissman, p.6.
term systems where forgetting is the result of interference’. The trace decay theory assumes that forgetting occurs as an automatic result of fading of a certain trace. This can be contrasted with interference theory, which states that forgetting is the result of disruption of the memory trace by other traces, ‘with the degree of interference depending on the similarity of the two mutually interfering memory traces’. This can lend us another interpretation for Rebecca’s failing memory: that it is due to the disruption of her trace memory by the interferences of Devlin. Baddeley supports this interpretation by suggesting that memory tends to be affected by interrogating questions and the use of specific words while questioning (a type of interrogation used by Devlin) that leads the questioned subject to imagine things that do not exist, and thus undermines the whole system of memory.

Endel Tulving gives a different interpretation for the process of forgetfulness, ascribing it to the lack of appropriate retrieving cues, which might be true, but seems too simplistic in Rebecca’s case. Sigmund Freud, his predecessor, offered a better explanation of the process by suggesting that our memory, sometimes, needs the existence of the same factors that caused trauma in the first place to heal itself: ‘The exercise of memory seeks to heal the same traumas whose capacity for disrupting our existence memory itself perversely sustains’. Therefore, it seems that the acts of remembrance and forgetfulness are in such a paradoxical relationship that the core of the problem is irresolvable. In Rebecca’s case, it is even more complicated, because to remember, we need to recognise the measure of the trauma we have been through. Based on Adorno’s assumption of the non-identity limit that everybody needs to reach, to be able to recognise the reality as it is, Rebecca is trying to recognise the measure of the atrocity inflicted on her in order to be capable of remembering it properly. But since she is a secondary witness, and due to the ugliness of the facts she is trying to recall, as well as her attempts to confront the reality all at once, she is not capable of the act of proper remembrance. St. Augustine observed this sort of paradox:

When therefore, memory loses something – and this is what happens whenever we forget something and try to remember it – where are we to look for it except in the memory itself? And

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300 Baddeley, p.32.
301 Ibid.
302 Ibid.
303 See Baddeley for more supporting experiments, pp.248-249.
304 Radstone, p.94.
if the memory offers us something else instead, as may happen, we reject what it offers until the one thing we want is presented. When it is presented to us we say 'This is it,' but we could not say this unless we recognise it, and we could not recognise it unless we remembered it. Thus, we cannot separate human identity from the paradoxes of remembrance and forgetfulness that are both essential to sustaining a healthy memory and clear identity. But the agencies of remembering and forgetting are not just psychological ones or an individual property; although the notion of individual memory is a coherent one, they can also be viewed as social actions. In other words, the contents of our memory cannot be attributed to mental processes alone because they change, develop, and take different shapes according to context of ideology and social action. According to Fredric Bartlette, ‘Memory is not the retrieval of stored information, but the putting together of a claim about past state of affairs by means of a framework of shared cultural understanding’.

306 Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub cite an example of how fallible and changeable memory can be, depending on the social context during which the event has occurred. They mention the testimony of an Auschwitz survivor who testified to having seen four chimneys explode during an act of resistance in the prison camp, while it was documented that only one had exploded. What I want to emphasise here is that it is not only remembrance that we need to emphasise but also forgetfulness as an interdependent factor. The reason Rebecca’s memory is fragile is that she has failed to maintain the reality; this does not mean she needs to grasp reality all at once. The social associations of memory that are relevant to such processes of recollection, therefore, will be expanded in the second section to cover my second set of questions.

II

While being interviewed about an Ashes to Ashes production in Barcelona in 1996, Pinter commented: ‘I have never written from an abstract idea at all. It isn’t so much necessarily specific characters as specific and concrete images, either visual or

306 Quoted in Middleton & Derek, p.46.
These images, in my opinion, sprung out of a society that is made of men and women. Since *Ashes to Ashes* discusses memory that includes both male and female characters, therefore, how would each sex interpret and analyse memory in his/her mind? Is memory gendered?

‘Memory is a monstrous feminine face’, \(^{209}\) says Liza Kharoubi, suggesting a gendered aspect to memory, so how do Rebecca and Devlin react to the atrocity in the play? According to Hanna Scolnicov, owing to the disparity of both their names and genders each perceives the atrocity from a different angle.\(^{210}\) I would take Scolnicov’s assumption further by linking it to Pinter’s attitude towards women: ‘I believe that God was in much better trim when He created woman [...] If you look at what has happened in the world since day one, the actual acts of brutality have been dictated by men’.\(^{211}\) This tacit elision of female agency, and supposition that women are vulnerable objects onto which the atrocities dreamed up by the male mind are mapped by men, with little or no resistance from the female territory that is being mastered, seized and controlled, besides supporting my earlier suggestion of Devlin’s repressive role, has, I believe, been translated into dramatic dialogues in *Ashes to Ashes*. From the very beginning, we realise the tense relationship between Rebecca and Devlin:

   **Devlin:** What do you think of me?
   **Rebecca:** I think you are a fuck pig.\(^{312}\)

No matter what their relation is, this kind of dialogue does not seem to be a normal, healthy kind of conversation between two people living together. Scolnicov ascribes the couple’s difference to their different belongings, starting from their names: she believes Rebecca’s to be Jewish, while Devlin’s is pure Irish. She also assumes that the play is totally about the Holocaust, and this is the core of their difference: ‘It is this perceptual gulf that separates them from each other’.\(^{313}\) However, I do not think that linking the play to the Holocaust only fulfils Pinter’s earlier assumption of the images of Nazism; besides, minimising the piece into a binary opposition in terms of names

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\(^{211}\) Aragay, p.7.

\(^{312}\) *Ashes to Ashes*, p.398.

\(^{313}\) Scolnicov, p.17.
does not really reflect the clear gender difference which I believe to be reflected more
clearly in other parts of the play. Moreover, Scolnicov builds her opinion on the
assumption that Rebecca’s memories are authentic: ‘Rebecca’s harrowing memories
are none the less authentic’, 314 which supposed ‘fact’ I am still debating. Scolnicov’s
account of the gender difference between Devlin and Rebecca is that Rebecca, being a
woman, identifies with the suffering of the victims, unlike Devlin; but I do not think
that Rebecca is totally free from the guilt of being a conniver in the first place. I will
discuss this further in the following sections.

Rebecca’s association with the female victims of atrocity, described in three different
scenes of the play, cannot be a coincidence. The first of those scenes is that in which
Devlin asks Rebecca whether she has been to her sister Kim’s house, and whether she
has seen her sibling and the children:

Devlin: Did you see Kim and the kids? 315

We learn from the context of the conversation that Kim has split up from her partner
and is living alone with her own kids. However, the fact that Rebecca mentions Kim’s
son as saying ‘My name is Ben’, 316 while Betsy, Kim’s daughter, is still crawling,
highlights a gender difference. This could be linked to the same reference made in
Betrayal, and how the male figure should always be the focus of attention vis à vis the
female. When Emma reveals her betrayal to Robert, he immediately asks about his
paternity of his son, while being nonchalant regarding his daughter’s paternity, that
abject object thrown up and down by the very man who betrayed him. In Ashes to
Ashes, Ben is capable of saying his name, he has access to discourse, while Betsy is still
just crawling. Not only this, but even the possibility of her being capable
of saying her
name is being mentioned by Devlin, the male figure who stands in Ashes to Ashes for
the whole institution of the patriarchy:

Rebecca: I think she will be walking before we know where we
are. Honestly.
Devlin: Probably talking too. Saying things like ‘My name is
Betsy.’ 317

314 Scolnicov, p.19.
315 Ashes to Ashes, p.419.
316 Ibid., p.420.
317 Ashes to Ashes, p.420.
Thus, Rebecca’s linking of the well-being of her sister with that of her son, and Devlin’s decisive, authoritative statement about the future of Betsy highlights, once more, the issue of female submissiveness and male dominance: what the male does and says first, the female will copy, simply substituting the markers of femininity that have been given to her (such as the name ‘Betsy’) within the male frameworks of language and ontology that have already been delineated for her. However, Rebecca’s line could be given another social dimension; her statement implies that we will need a long time and enough sources to know the truth. Let me elaborate on this in the light of Adorno’s philosophy before moving to other parts of the play. According to Adorno, forgetting is a failure of reason, an inability to understand the evidence and an incapacity to realise the contradictory nature of one’s belief. It is this modern irrationality that leads to what he calls the Mephistophelean ‘destruction of memory’.318

He further clarifies that our failure to associate with the core of a problem is what leads to memory destruction. He describes this as the concept of reified consciousness, which he defines as follows:

This is a consciousness blinded to all historical past, all insight into one’s own conditionedness, and posits as absolute what exists contingently. If this coercive mechanism were once ruptured, then, I think something would be gained.319

In an indirect connection to Rebecca’s statement that it will be a long time before we will know where we are standing, Adorno sets out to produce a different meaning of reconciliation, which does not promote the representation of harmony or oneness. The very project of reconciliation in this specific aesthetic concept involves negation of reconciliation. He writes: ‘For the sake of reconciliation, authentic works must blot out every trace of reconciliation in memory’.320 In other words, the memory of reconciliation to one’s own harmonious reality must be set aside, and a new condition should be created in which full reconciliation would be achieved.321 Therefore, Rebecca, believing it will take time and resources as well as authentic works and

318 Radstone, p.142.
319 Ibid., p.144.
320 Ibid.
321 Radstone, p.146.
honest individuals to create this condition, predicts a long span of time before fulfilling a true reconciliation.

Rebecca’s identification with the females does not stop at her sister, but goes beyond to touch the heart of the atrocity she is remembering. While Devlin attempts to repress or distract Rebecca’s memory, she seems to be totally surrounded by the memory of men who abused or betrayed their women. After telling the story of her sister, she tells Devlin about a movie which shows a man and a girl sitting in a smart New York restaurant. In the movie the man made the girl smile by telling her jokes; he later takes her on an expedition to the desert in a caravan, where she is forced to learn how to live in a harsh environment. The movie was a comedy but she remembers she could not laugh as she saw a man sitting in front of her. He was motionless, and he completed the list of bad men in her memory as Gordon suggests: ‘Rebecca’s recollections at this point all seem to revolve around men who have hurt or betrayed women.’

To add to Gordon’s suggestion, the man in the comedy, and the man who was sitting in front of her in the cinema, in my opinion, are fragmented pieces of different men responsible for her mental and psychological deterioration.

Rebecca’s remembrance of female characters is repeated in another scene in which she describes watching a man dragging suitcases with his son and then being followed by a lady carrying her little child, a girl:

**Rebecca:** I saw an old man and a little boy walking down the street. They were both dragging suitcases. [...] I suddenly saw a woman following them, carrying a baby in her arms.

According to Janet Walker, the gap between memory and reality might hide the truth of actuality:

[O]f particular interest are psychological explanations of how truth abides in the relationship between real events and their corresponding mental imagery and how these mental images include cases where a gap opens up between memory and actuality.

Linking this to Rebecca’s focus on females, it seems that Pinter sought to highlight the gender issues through Rebecca’s identification with female victims. The word ‘victims’

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322 Gordon, p.187.
323 Ashes to Ashes, p.427.
here takes on a further dimension that transcends the limits of atrocities to refer to victimisation of females in social life. Since the workings of memory are not disassociated from our reality even when what sustains our memory is fragile recollections like Rebecca’s, then in Rebecca’s focus on females who are always left behind or incapable of speaking, such as Kim’s daughter Betsy and Kim herself, who is merely talked about but not summoned to the stage, their silence conveys to the audience a message behind the spoken words. Psychologists have developed a sophisticated vocabulary and concepts acknowledging that ‘[the m]emory of individuals does not just act as a passive ‘storehouse’ of past experience, but changes what is remembered in ways that enhance and transform it according to present circumstances’. 325

David Middleton also identifies the concept of ‘communities of memory’ as those who do not forget their past. But such communities not only keep retelling their constitutive narrative to celebrate their past, but have another aim. They ‘carry a context of meaning “that” turns us towards the future’. 326 I would take Middleton’s concept a little further by linking this community to Rebecca, who not only emphasises the situation of her female counterparts, but also stands as a reminder, through memory of the past, of the present situation of women and their passivity. Manuela Reiter supports this by highlighting Devlin’s unresponsiveness to Rebecca’s statements:

Most of Devlin’s sentences are questions, either functioning as clues for his partner or showing his utter incomprehension of her ideas. He often tries to ‘pin her down,’ to grasp her meaning by arguing on a meta-communicative level, attempting to interpret and summarise her in order to be in possession of her mind. Devlin’s linguistic behaviour thus corresponds with his actions and in line with his male role of penetrator. 327

However, Rebecca’s identification with female issues in the play is overshadowed by other images of the past in which Rebecca is pictured as a conniver. I believe that Pinter has successfully merged women’s submissiveness with the individual’s connivances to address bigger social issues on a larger scale. Rebecca describes her

325 Middleton & Derek, p.6.
326 Ibid., p.5.
327 Reiter, p.186.
former lover as a leader or a guide in a sort of travel agency or a factory. She accompanied him to work one day, and saw how much respect he enjoyed amongst his employees:

Rebecca: They were all wearing caps [...] the workpeople [...] and they took them off when he came in, leading me, when he led me down the alleys between the rows of workpeople. 328

Some critics, such as Scolnicov, have wondered how Rebecca, who was so passionately in love with her former lover, could forget where he used to work unless she is suffering from diminished memory. ‘[Rebecca’s] difficulty in formulating his job definition in relation to the travel agency seems very puzzling’. 329

Moreover, Robert Conklin believes that Rebecca needs ‘a metaphysical leap of faith’ to tell this story. The fact that Rebecca is incapable of remembering her lover well is due to her suffering from what Silverstein describes as a sort of blurred image of the real atrocity of her lover which becomes quite clear when she says: ‘They respected his [...] purity, his [...] conviction’. 331 The statement of Rebecca’s lover, who convinced her that the workers respected him willingly due to his purity and conviction, in such a way that his rhetoric seemed to be completely true, has collapsed in on itself:

What [Rebecca’s] lover described in his workers as voluntary sacrifice out of respect for his ‘purity [and] conviction’, purged of its ‘fascinatingly pernicious’ rhetoric now appears as a mass slaughter. 332

Silverstein believes that the double-layered structure of the play that moves from the personal to the public or from the implicit to the explicit, which Yeal Zarhy-Levo believes lends the play its indeterminacy and ambiguity, is the very thing that is responsible for removing the distinction between the binaries of political/ethical, civilised/barbaric, and democratic/totalitarian that all collapse in the face of the pervasiveness of what Adorno calls ‘the authoritarian personality’. 334

328 Ashes to Ashes, p.405.
329 Scolnicov, p.17.
331 Ashes to Ashes, p.405.
332 Silverstein, p.78.
333 Levo, p.143.
334 Silverstein, p.79.
Thus Rebecca’s blurred memory is very likely to be a by-product of this very pervasiveness of the personality of her former lover, who used to grip her throat as a sign of control and which she took as an intimate and erotic caress. On the other hand, the fact that Rebecca enjoys her lover’s sadomasochistic relationship with her, which she herself encouraged him to practise, opens up another interpretation that implies the victim’s internalisation of the torturer’s rules as will be explained in Chapter Four. Consequently, Rebecca is rendered as both a conniver with and a victim of the very power system that she once encouraged:

**Rebecca:** I said ‘put your hand round my throat.’ I murmured it through his hand, as I was kissing it, but he heard my voice, he heard it through his hand, he felt my voice in his hand, he heard it there.\(^\text{335}\)

The phrase ‘He felt my voice in his hand’ intensifies Rebecca’s submissiveness as shown earlier in the image of Betsy, the young girl who is still unable to speak. It is also interesting here how Rebecca describes the ownership of her voice and/or her language by a male figure, which further confirms her objectification. In other words, Rebecca has turned into an object capable of supplying fricative and vibratory sensation, not logic or emotion. She, by describing her situation as such, is confirming the patriarchal concept of women as being capable of handling emotional functions, besides cooking and bearing children, but not rational or logical actions or even reasonable speech. Thus, Rebecca’s mouth, throat and vocal mechanism simply become a cunt or a hand that can massage and bring pleasure to/for a male body. Her access to language is willingly surrendered as she, nevertheless, enjoys the sadistic act of strangulation by her lover and the idea of being touched by him. Her connection to cognition is effaced. Manuela Reiter draws a very interesting comparison between Pinter’s female characters by likening Rebecca’s situation to Kate’s in *Old Times* (1971), in which both females are craving to unbuckle the male grip:

Deeley’s wife Kate remembers (voluntary) sexual intercourse as dirty and aggressive. Like Rebecca, she succumbed to it first, but like her, she has ever since longed to escape from its influence.\(^\text{336}\)

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\(^{335}\) *Ashes to Ashes*, p.396.

\(^{336}\) Reiter, p.181.
But since Rebecca’s memory is an involuntary one, then according to Proust, it will never accept happiness that is not complete and therefore always longs for unimpaired happiness of childhood – which Proust believes to be completely pure and engaging with the past. This is what Rebecca is doing in this scene; she is creating an idyllic picture of her lover to cover herself or to protect her memory from complete destruction, but that which Owens calls ‘hyporeality’ or ‘the abject’ is always attacking Rebecca’s memory to destroy the very last unimpaired part of it. According to Owens, hyporeality is

Not merely the usual kind of reality, the everyday reality of existence or the internal reality expressed in discourse, displaced to a marginal position; nor is it something that intrudes from the margins. Rather, hyporeality is the potential for that intrusion in the first place; for only as potential, not as objective thing, can hyporeality work as a structuring dynamic.\(^{337}\)

Rebecca’s memory is thus struggling between reconciliation to her harmonious present through the concept of involuntary memory as defined by Proust, and the violation of the traumatic memories stored in her unconscious. In terms of traumatic memories, Freud suggests that not only are there contemporary effects from past memories of trauma, but the memories themselves can become traumatic in their own right, acting as a ‘foreign body’, continuing to produce traumatic effects.\(^{338}\) As part of his attempts to treat such cases, Freud tried to dispose the effect of traumatic memories through putting ‘strangulated effects’ into words and subjecting the memories to ‘associative correction’ by bringing them into consciousness. Thus, hysterics who suffer from traumatic reminiscence could be treated by ‘the work of recollections’.\(^{339}\) But if we applied this theory and therapeutic approach to Rebecca’s situation, we would end up by confronting her with her conformist memories that are trying to adjust her recalled experience to the present, a process which itself is conformist as I have suggested via Adorno’s philosophy. Moreover, when Rebecca tries to get as close as she can to reality in order to reach the non-identity stage recommended by Adorno, she does so by trying to grasp the horrendous facts all at once (which I’m arguing against as a mode of confrontation with/recollection of the

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\(^{337}\) Owens, p.83.

\(^{338}\) Radstone, p.182.

\(^{339}\) Ibid.
traumatic past), and hence fails to sustain an infallible memory. In short: there is no memorial gestalt; memory is always partial, and this fundamental misapprehension relating to the nature of memory is exactly what renders Rebecca as both a conniver and a victim at the same time, because she lacks enough knowledge and memory to enact her past properly.

Maue Reiter supports this by suggesting that Rebecca is trying to picture herself as an innocent, immaculate individual:

Rebecca is driven by a [...] longing for purification; she makes it quite clear throughout the play that she will have nothing to do with Devlin as a lover anymore. She refuses to be called his ‘darling,’ or [...] anybody’s darling at all.340

It has by now become quite clear that Adorno’s earlier suggestion of confronting oneself with the real situation that haunts one’s memory, rather than adapting ourselves to the harmonious present, is what could lend us a happy, sustainable, and well-defined future through a real reconciliation with the past; but this is not what I am emphasising here. The point I am attempting to highlight via Rebecca’s fragile attempts to have proper memory is that although it is necessary to see the reality as it is, it is unnecessary to grasp it all at once, a point that I will clarify later. This is the core of contradiction between Proust and Adorno as the former does not ‘blot out every trace of reconciliation in memory’,341 and his work depends on recollections of reconciled experience, whereas Adorno calls for a complete revolutionary memory to have proper reconciliation with the past.342

Michel Leiris puts this in a proper social context in his notes in Manhood, in which he suggests that the past was reconstructed:

According to my recollections, adding the observation of what I have subsequently become and comparing these later elements with those earlier ones my memory supplies. Such a method has its dangers [...] for who knows if I’m not attributing to these recollections a meaning they never had, charging them after the fact with an affective value which the real events they

340 Reiter, p.182.
341 Proust’s theory of memory depends on innocent childhood recollections that, when involuntarily invoked, would help us to reconcile with our present. Radstone, p.148.
342 Adorno’s theory calls for a complete revolutionary memory to have proper reconciliation with the past. In other words, we need to confront the truth as it is in order to have ultimate reconciliation with the present and therefore he calls for an authentic work of art in which the conformist social norms and rules should be set aside and a full confrontation with the truth should be achieved. Radstone, p.146.
refer to utterly lacked-in short, resuscitating this past in a misleading manner.\textsuperscript{343}

This is why Rebecca’s complicity is considered to be ‘more insidious’\textsuperscript{344} than Gavin’s in \textit{Party Time} (1991). Rebecca’s failure to articulate her ethical responsibility for the catastrophe in the past resulted from her fragmented memory. Bartlett’s research on memory concluded with this fact: ‘Memories are formed as incomplete fragments, completed afterwards as constructs of imagination coupled with prior experience’.\textsuperscript{345} Therefore, while Gavin’s complicity takes the shape of a sin of commission (he instructs, commands, or gives orders for atrocious events to be enacted), Rebecca’s is a sin of omission, as Silverstein suggests:

Rebecca, on the other hand, suggests that complicity can also take the form of a sin of omission: specifically, the failure to articulate an ethical response to the catastrophic events of history that (we pretend) do not personally affect us.\textsuperscript{346}

From another perspective, Rebecca also commits a sin of complicity by submitting to patriarchal authority because she fails to adequately challenge the outrage of her unfaithfulness that is articulated by Devlin. Rebecca is not supposed to give answers if she does not want to be part of the system that Devlin belongs to, to use Batty’s words: ‘It is seemingly out of character for her to offer and direct answer to his probing enquiries, let alone such a complete and ambiguous one’.\textsuperscript{347} He believes he has the right to be angry for being totally in the dark with regard to Rebecca’s lover in her past life. The word ‘unfaithful’ here applies to Rebecca, who is being accused of unfaithfulness to Devlin because she never told him of her lover. She is also being unfaithful as a witness; she is supposed to articulate faithfully all the facts that she is aware of, but she fails, hence her complicity:

\textbf{Devlin:} Why have you never told me about this lover of yours before this? I have the right to be very angry indeed. Do you realise that?\textsuperscript{348}

But Rebecca fails to challenge or overturn this aggressive attempt at ownership and dominion. According to Gordon, Rebecca’s attempt to avoid Devlin’s questions and

\textsuperscript{344} Silverstein, p.81.
\textsuperscript{346} Silverstein, p.81.
\textsuperscript{347} Batty, p.100.
\textsuperscript{348} Ashes to Ashes, p.426.
interferences is a kind of strategy that she adopts: ‘Rebecca adopts her typical strategy of evasion by introducing her recollection of watching an old man and a little boy walking through the middle of town at night’.³⁴⁹ This is one interpretation of Rebecca’s escapist or selective memory, but I would like to push Gordon’s assumption further by linking this to Rebecca’s fragmented memory, which fictionalises its narrative so as to surround itself by, with, and in an artificial veneer via a process of selectivity and evasion, which is why Rebecca’s memory is involuntary; she does not recall her memories because she is totally steeped in them. Proust suggests:

Significant memories don’t come when they are called, and we couldn’t call them anyway, because we don’t know of their existence until they suddenly arrive. We happen on them, they happen on us.³⁵⁰

This is basically why Ann C. Hall believes that storytelling is an act of power:

Telling a story is not an innocent act; it is powerful. [...] in Ashes to Ashes, the ability to tell one’s story is the key to personal and social freedom. [In this play] Pinter illustrates that those who control language and speech have power – whether it be in the personal or political realm.³⁵¹

The moment Rebecca’s lover felt her voice in his hand also marks the moment of control by those in power over our cognitive mechanisms, and hence our memory and language. In other words, the reason why Hall links the power of storytelling to control of language, in my opinion, is because to have the power to tell a story or describe the history of anything is to have the linguistic and cognitive ability to construct the events truthfully and completely. Thus, the fact that Rebecca’s sadistic lover used to strangle her by putting his hands on her throat indicates the power he had over her vocal capabilities, and also over her linguistic access to the narrative of historical events. However, although Rebecca might seem to be telling the story of her past, she is so steeped in her memories that she lacks the capacity to singularise and selects the memories that build up a clear picture. Rebecca’s memory, in my mind, does not only stand for the victims or witnesses of atrocities, but also the perpetrators who

³⁴⁹ Gordon, p.187.
³⁵⁰ Quoted in Radstone, p.113.
deliberately choose to have a selective memory as part of the scheme of power relations, and hence the process of singularisation.\textsuperscript{352}

[Singularisation] is linked to power relations in society as to who may determine what is to be removed from the sphere of exchange (of wear and decay) and declared significant (and permanent).\textsuperscript{353}

I believe the representative ramification and/or the variations to which Rebecca’s fragile memory is subjected reflects the images of violence and power as well as the passivity and complicity. These are the images of Nazi Germany that Pinter aspired to show through the workings of Rebecca’s memory.

Rebecca’s dilemma is that she can neither remember her past properly, nor cope with her present situation, and this is why, I argue, she refuses to start all over again when Devlin asks her to:

\begin{quote}
\textbf{Devlin:} [...] let’s start again.
\textbf{Rebecca:} I don’t think we can start again. We started [...] a long time ago. We started. We can’t start \textit{again}. We can end again.\textsuperscript{354}
\end{quote}

Ann C. Hall draws a very interesting parallel between Rebecca and Deborah in \textit{A Kind of Alaska}, whom Hornby, like Devlin, has asked to start again:

\begin{quote}
\textbf{Hornby:} Come. Rest. Tomorrow [...] is another day.
\textbf{Deborah:} Not it isn’t. Not it isn’t. It is not.
\textit{She smiles.}
Yes, of course it is. [...] Tomorrow is another day.\textsuperscript{355}
\end{quote}

The difference between Deborah and Rebecca is that while the first does not own her narrative because she surrenders quickly to Hornby’s rules, Rebecca does not submit in this way because she refuses to start again, choosing instead to own her own narrative and to play the game according to her own rules and not Devlin’s.\textsuperscript{356} But if this is the case, does that reflect a flicker of hope for growing public awareness by Pinter? The problem is that even after Rebecca argues with Devlin’s assumption, he talks in a patronising tone, still entrenched in his own standpoint:

\textsuperscript{352} What I mean by singularisation is the power of control that some authorities have over the resources of history in terms of cutting what disfigures their image and keeping, or even adding what makes it shiny and clear and hence singling out specific events that are in their interest.
\textsuperscript{353} Middleton & Derek, p.53.
\textsuperscript{354} Ashes to Ashes, p.425.
\textsuperscript{355} \textit{A Kind of Alaska}, p.167.
\textsuperscript{356} Ann. C. Hall, p.274.
Devlin: Aren’t you misusing the word ‘end’? End means end. You can’t end ‘again.’ You can only end once. 357

This indeterminacy, I believe, is the source of Pinter’s concern with how the public would really react towards atrocities if and when they took place. This is why the couple, after undermining each other’s understanding of the word ‘end’, shift into softly singing a line of a song, echoing the title of the play as Yael Zarhy-Levo suggests: 358

Rebecca: ‘Ashes to Ashes.’
Devlin: ‘And dust to dust.’
Rebecca: ‘If women don’t get you.’
Devlin: ‘The liquor must.’ 359

Rebecca’s and Devlin’s indeterminacy might well be interpreted in the light of current memory theories. Their inability to decide upon a shared interpretation of a half-present, half-recent discourse signifies the kind of memory that changes and transforms according to circumstances, and the fact that a person’s integrity is testified to by his/her participation in the practices of his own environment: ‘The claim is that the very integrity of a person’s mentality depends upon participation in an environment which owes its very shape to socio-cultural practices’. 360

If this is the case, however, then our memorial integrity is at stake, since the practices we are supposedly part of are themselves not clear enough for us to build our integrity on them. This, I believe, is what particularly renders Rebecca as both a victim, an accomplice, and a fragmented character who is unable to determine, like Dusty in Party Time, what to believe and what not to believe.

Memory theorists have defined what is called episodic memory, which is the kind of memory associated with time and place. Let me give it a proper definition:

Episodic memory is unique in that memories are associated with a place and a time, an association that even if incorrect gives the memories a sense of personal historical truth, and contributes to the person’s self-identity. 361

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357 Ashes to Ashes, p.425.
358 Levo, p.142.
359 Ashes to Ashes, p.425.
360 Middleton & Derek, p.10.
Moreover, Tulving adds that episodic memory is ‘the only known example of a process where the arrow of time is turned back and the past can be re-experienced’.  

And, Baddeley claims that memory resembles a library that can only operate efficiently when things are catalogued in order:

Memory resembles a vast library, an analogy that has its limitations, but which can be very useful. One way in which memory and a library are closely similar is in the extent to which both will only work efficiently if information is stored in a structured systematic way, with retrieval of information depending on this initial ‘cataloguing’, or encoding.

Is Rebecca’s memory catalogued properly? I believe not. When she tries to tell Devlin about the place in which her ex-lover worked, she believes she had provided him with that information earlier, which he denies:

Rebecca: Did I ever tell you about that place [...] about the time he took me to that place?
Devlin: What place?
Rebecca: I’m sure I told you.
Devlin: No. You never told me.
Rebecca: How funny. I could swear I had. Told you.

This fragmentation in Rebecca’s memory, matched by the fragmentation of her language, is definitely one of Pinter’s techniques to dramatise the social dimension of memory for his audience, who in general by now feel lost, bewildered, and misled by the torrent of information and incidents in Rebecca’s and Devlin’s accounts and are thus struggling to find the truth. Rebecca’s confidence in telling Devlin is a sign of Devlin’s manipulation of her memory, whereas his denial in relation to being informed could show Rebecca’s uncatalogued memory. Mark Taylor-Batty has commented on this:

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362 Everyday Memory, p.6.
363 Baddeley, Human Memory, p.263.
364 Ashes to Ashes, p.404.
365 Some critics such as Hanna Scolnicov believe that both Rebecca’s and Devlin’s recollections are authentic, based on Rebecca’s and Devlin’s different reactions to the events (p.19). Yael Zarhy-Levo, nevertheless, believes that the characters’ narrative of history and truth is divided following Pinter’s development as a playwright; thus Rebecca’s accounts represent Pinter’s earlier fragmented mode, and Devlin’s refer to Pinter’s later mode with its explicit style and interrogational tone (p.139). Jessica Prinz believes that the play is about those who define themselves as standing outside the atrocity to become victims eventually (p.100). On the other hand, Ann C. Hall believes that the narration of events in the play resembles a modern-day Everyman of torture and victimisation (p.271). She also believes that by telling the story of the baby being taken away and Devlin’s silence in the end, Rebecca has owned the narrative and gained the upper hand in the play (p.275). Other critics such as Mark Taylor-Batty believe that Rebecca’s character has her information and memory from the mediatised representation that offers redemption through easy morality, and which Pinter is trying to problematise here (p.105).
The impact of this play resides in the dynamic between the evidence of suffering in Rebecca’s words and the ignorance we have of its source, between the narratives she seemingly appropriates to articulate perhaps her own experience of trauma and their own validity as testimonies of real atrocities.

Mark Taylor-Batty draws a very interesting comparison between Pinter’s *Ashes to Ashes* and Sara Kane’s *Blasted*, in which he questions the validity of associating Kane’s awareness with that of Rebecca’s as both have realised the brutality of their species, but got disturbing images of truth through manipulated representations of events. Batty asks:

Is Rebecca’s suffering, like Sarah Kane’s (as assessed by Pinter), an excessive awareness of the brutality of the species, evinced by real events but hidden by the duplicitous process of media representation?

The reason why Batty compares a playwright with a character in a play, in my opinion, is that Pinter has created Rebecca as a witness to different types of atrocities in our lives. In other words, the torture and starving of victims is not the only atrocity. A further atrocity is the media manipulation that is responsible for shaping the images of the accounts of history we derive from different sources. Not only is our version of history a distorted one, but its falsification is an atrocity in itself. Kane’s *Blasted*, according to Batty, questions such failures and duplicities in the media: ‘Kane unravels a series of critiques on the failure of Western media to capture or communicate the atrocities of war’.

Thus, by representing Rebecca as a fragmented person both mentally, psychologically, and linguistically, Pinter is pointing a finger at the corrupted Western media and politicians at the same time, hence his connection with Kane.

Many media critics have compared several scenes of *Ashes to Ashes* to some earlier cinematic works. For example, Susan Hollis Merritt suggests that the scene in which Rebecca describes witnessing refugees being led down to the sea on the coast of Dorset with their luggage bobbing in the waves is similar to Kenneth Madsen’s film A

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366 Batty, ‘What Remains’, p.100. See also Batty’s article, ‘How to Mourn: Kane, Pinter and Theatre as Monument to Loss in the 1990s’, in *Ethical Speculations in Contemporary British Theatre*, edited by Mireia Aragay and Enric Monforte (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p.59, in which he also compares Pinter’s and Kane’s approaches to atrocities by disassociating them from any material objects outside the theatre and focusing on the aesthetics of atrocities and sorrows, and thus presenting monument plays in which mourning is achieved not through personal associations with the atrocity staged, but by free application and association with contemporary events (p.74).


368 Ibid., p.102.
Day in October (1992). Or she argues that the redemption through easy morality, as recalled in some of Rebecca’s recollections (such as the factory in which Rebecca’s ex-lover hired workers) bears a similarity to Steven Spielberg’s Schindler’s List (1993). However, I am not trying to minimise or reduce Pinter’s work to a series of echoes and allusions to popular images of the Holocaust; what I would like to emphasise instead is that Rebecca, as the audience will be, is offered some mediated representations that short-circuit the connection between awareness of atrocity and the responsibility to respond to it, as Taylor-Batty suggests, and which is, I believe, what Pinter is trying to problematise.

According to Paul Sollier, a French doctor and psychologist who did considerable research on the workings of memory, if we wish to re-experience the feeling of an atrocity, we need to relive the memory that that experience lent to us for the first time:

A memory is an image [...] which reproduces a past impression. Re-experiencing is something more: it is not only the appearance of an image into the field of consciousness, but this appearance is so clear and is accompanied by such a precise and intense reproduction of that state of personality of the subject at the time of the initial impression, that this subject again believes they are going through the same events as before.

Can Pinter’s audience and/or characters re-experience the trauma he is conveying, if they are not first-hand witnesses? I believe Pinter is not emphasising the reliving, as much as the remembrance of such historical atrocities, in order to create our sense of identity. Weissman supports this: ‘[The] more decisive factor is the tendency to privilege and identify with those histories that resonate with one’s own sense of identity.’

The idea of remembrance has also been a source of debate between critics. According to Adorno: ‘[A]fter Auschwitz it is barbaric to write poetry’. This theme is echoed by

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370 Ibid., p.106.
371 Ibid.
373 Weissman, p.7.
Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel, who believes that having no memory is better than having a trivialised image of an atrocity:

[I]f the choice is between a trivialisation of the event and nothing, I prefer nothing. If people know nothing, then one day they will know, but if they know this trivialised, cheapened, or distorted version then surely they will remember the distorted, trivialised view, and ultimately they falsify memory.\textsuperscript{375}

This comment is in reference to William Styron’s novel \textit{Sophie’s Choice} (1979) which has also been made into a film. However, Styron does not share Wiesel’s view; to him, ‘It is better to have a frail and faulty version than to have nothing at all’.\textsuperscript{376}

I will take this dispute a little further by emphasising the dangers of complete disassociation that, as far as I’m concerned, make distorted or fragmented remembrance more important for future generations than complete silence. Weisman has articulated this by talking about the remembrance of atrocities amongst the post-trauma generation: ‘[They would grant] its facticity, even acknowledging its exceptional importance, but feeling no special commitment to commemorating or ‘witnessing’ this part of the distant past’.\textsuperscript{377} Moreover, Wiesel is suggesting that (i) history can survive, despite accounts of it not being made; and (ii) that there is, somehow, a ‘true’ and ‘whole’ version of history that is not trivial: a gestalt version of the past that can be or will be accessible. But isn’t history made up of a series of events experienced differently by different individuals? And remembered by them in different ways? Was there a single ‘Holocaust’, for example? Or weren’t there rather a series of Holocausts (plural) that are each elements of a wider social and historical phenomenon? And can’t even these individual events have been originally perceived and subsequently remembered differently by different subjects? Plus, isn’t there also the tragedy of the political and social climate that allows individuals to be constructed as the kind of perverted individuals who enact these horrors on others? Isn’t the story of Rudolf Höss, the Auschwitz commandant, a tragedy?\textsuperscript{378} Who decides which is the ‘correct’, ‘only’ or ‘untrivialised’ version of events to be remembered?

\textsuperscript{376} Batty, ‘What Remains’, p.106.
\textsuperscript{377} Weisman, p.7.
\textsuperscript{378} One of Höss’s remarks after the Nuremberg Trial reveals the possibility and validity of such an assumption. Rudolf Höss said: ‘I want to emphasise that I personally never hated the Jews. I considered them to be the enemy of
If remembrance is not commitment, then what significance does it have whether it is a strong, correct, and authentic one or a fragile and potentially inauthentic one? Commitment, I believe, is the impetus to articulate historical events in all their complexity and keep them alive for future generations. Pinter raised this issue in an interview after the production of *Ashes to Ashes* in Barcelona, 1996: 'I think what we can do, since we are all men and women of the street, is simply keep it right here (touches his forehead) and try to articulate it'.

Once more, the remembrance of atrocity has been a source of dispute amongst scholars regarding whether or not to accept what Weissman calls the ‘non-witnesses’, as the proper sources; or to confine and limit the theme of ‘witnessing’ to first-hand survivors? For example, filmmaker Claude Lanzmann, talking about the Holocaust, stated that even trying to understand the elements that contributed to it is a highly immoral act, because between the conditions that may have enabled the Holocaust to occur and the gassing of men, children and women there is a gap, and any attempt to bridge this gap is participating in what he calls ‘the obscenity of the project of understanding’. Moreover, much scholarship, whether relating to the Holocaust in particular or atrocities in general, encourages the representation of such atrocities, whether by primary or secondary witnesses. Such is the normal process of historical writing.

But, if we will be considered to commit an ‘obscene act of immorality’ by representing these atrocities, how could subsequent generations remember and thereby help to cure themselves of the mistakes of their predecessors? I believe the answer to my question would be: memory. Historian Kerwin Lee Klein writes in support of memory: ‘We sometimes use memory as a synonym for history to soften our prose, to humanise it, and to make it more accessible. Memory simply sounds less distant.’ Whether one is a primary survivor or secondary one is not, I believe, the crucial point that Pinter wants to highlight; what he is more likely in favour of here is the articulation of the our nation. However, that was precisely the reason to treat them the same way as the other prisoners. Besides, the feeling of hatred is not in me.’ See *Death Dealer: The Memoirs of the SS Kommandant at Auschwitz*, ed. by Steven Paskuly, trans. by Andrew Pollinger (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), p.142.

379 Aragay, p.15.
380 Weissman, p.5.
381 Ibid., p.91.
382 Ibid., p.212.
383 Quoted in Weissman, p.102.
past, and our association with our past through our memory: ‘[...] In Ashes to Ashes I’m not simply talking about the Nazis; I’m talking about us and our conception of our past and our history, and what it does to us in the present.’

Freud highlights the dialectics of memory and its ability to keep both first-hand and secondary memories. This has been seen as a conundrum in Freud’s analytic theory, in which he emphasises the conflict between memory as the absolute reproduction of unchanging contents, and memory as the mobile representation of transformed contents. Pinter, to my mind, has dramatised this in the scene in which Devlin questions Rebecca’s credentials for discussing such an atrocity:

**Devlin:** What authority do you think you yourself possess which would give you the right to discuss such an atrocity?

**Rebecca:** I have no authority. Nothing has ever happened to me.

There are two possible interpretations of this scene. First, it could stand for Rebecca’s feeling of guilt, as suggested by Gordon:

She is haunted – as indeed are many people born after the war – by nightmare images of inhumanity that produce a kind of ‘survivor guilt,’ in those who feel compelled to imagine its horrors.

Second, Lawrence Langer believes that guilt sometimes shifts the whole responsibility onto the very individual who was deprived of moral agency at the time of the atrocity; according to him, this guilt is inappropriate because it supports ‘the idea of the individual as responsible agent for his actions.’

This is why I agree that Devlin’s earlier warning to Rebecca concerning the pen that rolled off the coffee table could, as well, bear both meanings:

**Rebecca:** This pen, this perfectly innocent pen.

**Devlin:** You can’t know it was innocent.

**Rebecca:** Why not?

**Devlin:** Because you don’t know where it had been. You don’t know how many other hands have held it, how many other

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384 Aragay, p.11.
385 Radstone, pp.104-105.
386 Ashes to Ashes, p.413.
387 Gordon, p.185.
hands have written with it, what other people have been doing with it. You know nothing of its history [...] You can’t sit there and say things like that.

**Rebecca:** You think it was guilty?

**Silence**

**Devlin:** I’m letting you off the hook. [...] I’m letting you slip.\(^{389}\)

The pen, in my opinion, is guilty all the time. It is very interesting that Pinter, here, is ascribing the notion of guilt to an inanimate object such as the pen: an object that is incapable of thinking or moving without an external force. Thus, those who are unaware, sometimes purposely, of the atrocities carried out in and by a culture from which they profit are guilty, even if their lack of knowledge or awareness was indirect. Moreover, those who are aware of the atrocities carried out by systems under which they live and do nothing whatsoever to stop them, are even more guilty. Therefore, the responsibility of carrying the pen as non-cognisant object will be directly associated with the carrier, who, even if not directly involved in the atrocity, will be guilty due to inaction. This cleverly takes us back into the intellectual and ethical territory of plays such as *Party Time*, *One for the Road*, and *Mountain Language*, in which even those who were not directly involved, including the audience, are guilty. As Weissman suggests, there is no difference between being guilty and feeling guilty as long as we are all accused of inaction.\(^{390}\) Thus, what we can do as citizens of this world is to know who we are. According to Baddeley, there is one question that is of great importance that our memory should answer and that is: ‘Who am I?’ In order to answer this question, he suggests: ‘The memory box would need to have some form of autobiographical memory, a record of the experiences of a lifetime that go together to create myself as a person’.\(^{391}\) Pinter’s special interest in the power of the pen shows, as Manuela Reiter suggests, that it is with the pen that we send or save others from the gallows:

This transitional passage contains all the imagery that goes with the harassment of people (violence executed by writing, as in censorial papers or death sentences [that] has been Pinter’s concern for the last decades [...] ).\(^{392}\)

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\(^{389}\) Ashes to Ashes, pp.410-412.

\(^{390}\) Weissman, p.115.

\(^{391}\) Baddeley, *Human Memory*, p.6.

\(^{392}\) Reiter, p.190.
In order to know who we are then, we need to have a connection with our past; that is why Weissman peels out another layer of the sense of guilt, by highlighting the sense of the absence of guilt, which fosters my earlier assumption, that connecting to our memory whether strong or fragile is crucial to understanding our present. When Devlin tells Rebecca not to judge whether the pen is innocent or not, while she is sitting in her chair, I believe he is, being Pinter’s dramatic avatar, highlighting the theme of association:

Devlin: You can’t sit there and say things like that.
Rebecca: I can sit here.
Devlin: You can’t sit there and say things like that.  

However, this association is not necessarily judged by its strength or fragility; it could come from any discourse addressing atrocities, because it is difficult fully to grasp or at once fully to digest the horrors of certain forms of atrocities. Some people will need to take them in small doses or to shape them into small sizes to be able to comprehend them. Yehuda Bauer, a distinguished historian of the Holocaust, writes:

The event is of such a tremendous magnitude that an ordinary person’s mind is incapable of absorbing it. There will therefore be a natural tendency to run away from it, deny it, and, mainly, try to reduce it to shapes and sizes we can cope with.

Moreover, when certain emphasis is made on secondary witnesses, or precarious ones as not authentic enough to constitute testimony, we are running the risk of encouraging the masses to identify with the victim – and this may impede any further consideration of one’s potential to occupy the position of a perpetrator, or bystander. As Bauer continues, ‘The warning contained in the Holocaust is surely that the acts of the perpetrator might be repeated, under certain circumstances, by anyone.’

Such unheeded warning can be noticed in Devlin’s vehement denial of Rebecca’s sentiments towards her lover. When she tries to explain that her lover called her darling or that he even loved her, he lashes out:

Devlin: He suffocated you and strangled you. As near as makes no difference. According to your account. Didn’t he?
Rebecca: No, no. He felt compassion for me. He adored me.
Later on, when Devlin metaphorically talks about hairdressing, we can further be reminded of the danger of emphasising one facet of memory rather than another, because recalling past pleasantness does not mean that it is safe to proceed carrying that one facet of pleasantness and neglecting ugly bits. When we trust the hairdresser with our hair, we need to think that it is not just our hair that he will be styling, but he might also decide to style our head and consequently, our lives.

When Rebecca discusses mental elephantiasis, I believe she is not only addressing Devlin, who is one of the potential bystanders, but also the audience through her metaphorical use of the term ‘gravy’:

**Rebecca:** This mental elephantiasis means that when you spill an ounce of gravy, for example, it immediately expands and becomes a vast sea of gravy. [...] But it’s all your fault. You brought it upon yourself. You are not the victim of it, you are the cause of it.  

Gordon believes that it is Rebecca’s unconscious connection to the images of violence that renders her guilty, because she is unable to prevent the atrocity from taking place: ‘Like the gravy adduced in her example, her guilt is suffocating her, to the extent that she herself feels responsible for the atrocities’. I would push this point further by suggesting that Rebecca is actually suffering from a lack of association and, therefore, oscillating between the boundaries of a real witness and a non-witness. Talking about a lady with a baby girl, she switches between pronouns (she,) and (I):

**Rebecca:** She listened to the baby’s heartbeat. The baby’s heart was beating.  
Pause.  
I held her to me. She was breathing. Her heart was beating.

I disagree with Catherine Burkman, Francis Gillen, and Mark Silverstein, to whom Rebecca represents a strong character, and I partially agree with Jessica Prinz, who believes Rebecca is not totally identifying with the victims of the atrocity at the end of the play and thus ends up being a victim herself, because she fluctuates between her complicity and her victimisation. Thus, according to Prinz,

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397 Ibid., p.417.  
398 Gordon, p.186.  
399 *Ashes to Ashes*, pp.827-828.  
400 See Jessica Prinz, ‘You Brought It upon Yourself’, p.97.
Rebecca occupies different and contradictory subject-positions in the play: she is indifferent to atrocity; she is a witness of atrocity; and she is a victim of atrocity. These different subject-positions suggest that we may become victims of the atrocity we allow to happen.  

This implies that there are various versions of atrocities that have taken place: the atrocity of the act itself, the atrocity of being the victim, and the atrocity of having been so damaged by the cultural and social circumstances of one’s society that one becomes the perpetuator. As an Iraqi who has lived a major part of my life under a dictatorial regime from 1983 to 2003, history has been conveyed to me in different versions and from different sources so that, sometimes, I had to look back into written pieces of history which were, again, unreliable, as everything during that period was controlled and filtered. It was like living in George Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four, with the feeling that big brother is always watching everyone. Therefore, I feel I have not been properly introduced to the history of my country, and keep discovering new things every time new information is revealed about the former regime in Iraq, and thus add a new layer to my already distorted memory. In other words, it is the atrocity of living in a culturally and socially damaged climate that led to the reproduction of individuals with damaged memories and identities.

However, Rebecca’s sense of victimisation could also imply her salvation. In other words, we sometimes need both memory and amnesia, to be able to bear our past. According to the British philosopher John Locke, we sometimes need the presence of the very object that blocks our memory to maintain it. He cites the story of a man who learned to dance with the presence of a tree trunk in the hall, and could not perform the same steps when the trunk was missing. In an indirect connection, Rebecca will not be able to completely associate herself with the victims without recalling her ex-lover; therefore, her association does not render her a complete conniver and neither does it leave her as a complete victim, as Prinz suggests: ‘[…] she embraces her ex-lover, she embraces all of the horrifying violence with which he is associated’. I am emphasising here my earlier suggestion that as part of this discussion, Rebecca’s connivance and victimisation are both the result of her fragmented memory. She, at this stage, needs to identify or connive with the memories of her former lover in order

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401 Prinz, p.98.
402 Baddeley, Human Memory, p.268.
403 Prinz, p.99.
to sustain her memory, which is crucial to her awareness. It is an eye-opening process that shows that pure truth is encapsulated in both the fragmentation and the fragility of memory.

According to Liza Kharoubi, ‘[Oblivion] is what menaces [the subject’s] existence but also what invokes his presence.’\footnote{Kharoubi, p.62.} We should not prioritise one over the other, as our rhetoric subsists on both. John Shooter clarifies this further by analysing the early work of the British psychologist Frederick Bartlett, \textit{Psychology and Primitive Culture} (1923).\footnote{F.C. Bartlett, \textit{Psychology and Primitive Culture} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923), quoted in Middleton & Derek, p.15.} Shooter argues

\begin{quote}
That any claims we make about the world, or our past, gain their authority by virtue of being ‘adequate to an already intralinguistically constructed reality, rather than to the nature of extralinguistic world.’ The importance of this for the ‘non-cognitive’ agenda and for remembering and forgetting as collective activities, is that no priority is being claimed for language over the nature of the world or of the nature of the world over the language, ‘but that one must assert both; for they owe their distinct existence to their interdependency’\footnote{Middleton & Derek, p.15.}
\end{quote}

Hence, the role of art is to sustain this interdependency, as Taylor-Batty suggests.\footnote{Batty, p.110.}

However, this should not necessarily take the form of complete confrontation as he and Adorno suggest, because of Rebecca’s fragile memory, though in part this is caused by her incapacity to confront and discern reality as it is, owing to her attempts to grasp it all at once. What Pinter shows us here is that reality can be grasped and broken down into different shapes such as books, memorials, films, and videos. Although Weissman believes that such reduction might threaten to make the atrocity seem distant and sometimes unreal,\footnote{Weissman, p.24.} I disagree with the point that you need to experience the atrocity to empathise with it. It is through memorialising atrocities that took place in a particular place at a particular time that atrocity as both a concept and a lived reality can be transmitted to future generations. Although we cannot fully rely on Rebecca’s fractured memory, she stands as a chain in a relay, a necessary link to remind us of our responsibility to fill in the gaps that she has struggled to fill, not by

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distorting representations of atrocities, but through discernible, yet gradual confrontation with our past mistakes.

In the next and last section, I will highlight the role of controlled memory, and the role of power and politics in dictating memory to the masses.

III

‘The past [is] a timeless mirror to be looked at for accurate reflections of historical events’. In this section, I will push the boundaries of the past – as it is represented by the agency of memory – beyond the concept of individual property towards a consideration of political and social institutions. If remembering the past in some way maintains historical events, then one needs a witness, according to historian Annette Wieviorka: ‘The witness becomes a ‘bearer of history’, an embodiment of memory, attesting to the past and to the continuing presence of the past’. Such individuals present a series of choices/problems/dilemmas, as to how they either resist or become enfolded within the cultural, political, and social institutions that society creates as repositories of historical knowledge.

According to Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, there are two distinctive interpretive uses for witness testimony: one linked to a troubling idiom of uniqueness and exceptionalism, potentially supporting nationalist identity politics; and the other to cosmopolitan or transitional memory cultures that are capable of sustaining efforts towards the global attainment of human rights. This raises an interesting set of questions in relation to Pinter’s play: based on the definition of witness/testimony, is Rebecca’s memory a personal or global one? And if it is either of the two, how far are power and politics intertwined in such recollections?

The image of God in the play, as the representation of the concept of power, is characterised best by the conflict between Rebecca and Devlin. While Devlin insists on decoupling the public from the private, Rebecca, through her repeated use of violent images, insists on confronting Devlin with the vicious nightmare of historical reality:

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409 Middleton & Derek, p.4.
410 Radstone, p.394.
411 Ibid., p.91.
**Devlin:** [...] Do you notice? I’m in a quicksand.

**Rebecca:** Like God.

**Devlin:** God? God? You think God is sinking into a quicksand? That’s what I would call a truly disgusting perception. 412

According to Silverstein, Rebecca’s unchallenging, matter-of-fact answer constitutes a challenge to authority in itself; but additionally, Rebecca’s underestimation of God’s power is a direct threat to Devlin’s identity. Silverstein clarifies:

If the subject needs an object beneath it upon which to project its will, it also needs the ego ideal above and beyond it as the source of its identity, the Master Subject without which, as Lacan and Althusser argue, it cannot take up its position as subject within the symbolic order of culture. As the ultimate Subject, ‘God,’ signifies not only absolute power, but Devlin’s own ability to establish his subjectivity and become a vessel through which that power flows. 413

Let me push Silverstein’s assumption further. According to Middleton, the individual’s integrity depends on participation in an environment that owes its very shape to sociocultural practices. 414 Let us set this idea against another, made by Steven Rose in his ‘Memories are Made of This’, in which he questions the assumption that memory is like computer files that remain unchanged in the act of recall and rather posits that they go through a new experience with every act of remembering:

Memories are stored as in computer files, and remembering would seem to be no more than pulling these files out of deep storage and reopening them. But this mechanical model won’t do. Each act of recall is itself a new experience. Reactivated memories are subtly changed each time we recall them. 415

According to this, Devlin’s integrity is connected to his present, while Rebecca’s is still swinging between her present and the trauma from her past. Therefore, Devlin always attempts to get Rebecca back to the present so that their dialogue will match, while she always tries to resist his repressive, interrogatory attempts by reciting stories from the past. In an indirect connection to this situation, Michael Billig discusses the important role of ideology as a form of collective memory to reproduce power relations and create biases in what is commemorated or ignored from the past. 416

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412 *Ashes to Ashes*, p.412.
413 Silverstein, p.80.
414 Middleton & Derek, p.10.
415 Radstone, p.207.
Middleton gives excellent examples of institutions of forgetfulness and remembrance by highlighting the role of power and authority on our memories. He gives an example of a medical team in a hospital:

If important details about everyday practice, fail to become part of the common knowledge of the medical team, be it in hospitals or in general practice, then the quality of service for any particular patient suffers; the patient’s particular problems are ‘forgotten,’ in that what the doctor deemed to be salient features of the case are not recorded in ways that make them retrievable for others who might have to deal with same patient.\(^1\)

If we compared Devlin’s attitude to Rebecca’s, we will find out that he is comparable to his histrionic counterpart Nicolas in *One for the Road*. Unlike Rebecca, Devlin’s memory belongs to the present; he is scared of any confrontation with the past, which Rebecca is insisting on bringing out through her recollections. Moreover, he does not want to deny the undeniable; hence his purposeful questions and twisted methods that are aimed at influencing Rebecca’s recollections. Rebecca’s sceptical tone on God, imagining him as helpless, as someone struggling to get out of quicksand, intimidates Devlin and pushes him to assert God’s existence strongly:

**Devlin:** He’s the only God we have. If you let him go he won’t come back. He won’t even look back over his shoulder. And then what will you do? You know what it’ll be like? Such a vacuum? It’ll be like England play Brazil at Wembley and not a soul in the stadium.\(^2\)

For Devlin, the existence of God is a strong reason for his own existence and a means to construct his own identity. Silverstein believes that Devlin’s ego is connected to the existence of God:

In *Ashes to Ashes* […], God designates the higher, deeper form of subjectivity seductively promising omnipotent mastery with which Devlin seeks to merge. ‘God’ thus names both the image of the ego ideal external to Devlin and the internal ideal ego he constructs around that image. Challenging the existence of God, as Rebecca does, amounts to challenging the fundamental principle of Devlin’s subjectivity, denying him the recognition

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\(^1\) Billig, p.16.

\(^2\) *Ashes to Ashes*, p.412.
without which he cannot sustain the fantasy of identity – a world lacking God thus equals a world lacking Devlin.419

As I suggested earlier, Devlin stands for the state memory vs. the civil one of Rebecca; and this is exactly what Pinter is trying to make the audience question. According to Shoshana Felman, we inhabit ‘a post-traumatic century, a century that has survived unthinkable historical catastrophes’.420 The word ‘unthinkable’ is the gist of Pinter’s concerns in this play, because he seeks to compel his audience to question the kind of survival they have witnessed, which is traumatic in and by itself. As we, the audience, are incapable of acknowledging the immediacy of such catastrophes or atrocities owing to our lack of appropriate resources, we tend to coexist with and even allow for the proliferation of new atrocities on both the personal and the public levels, as Felman suggests: ‘[...] played out both on the grand stage of geopolitics and the chamber theatre of our most intimate relationships’.421

I would like to push Felman’s suggestion further by shedding light on the Russian semiotician Yuri Lotman’s work in Universe of the Mind (1990), in which he explains the process of meaning-making. According to Lotman, some political systems are not primarily established on the basis of transmitting information; instead, such systems form an internal dialogue to shape the identity of the self, and hence meaning making.422 Lotman believes that the confines of memory transcend individual property to touch upon the capacity to preserve and reproduce information, and thus, he believes that memory is a dialogue between present and past:

Memory is more like a generator, reproducing the past again; it is the ability, given certain impulses, to switch on the process of generating a conceptualised reality which the mind transfers into the past. [...] The interrelationships between cultural memory and its self-reflection is like a constant dialogue: texts from chronologically earlier periods are brought into culture and, interacting with contemporary mechanisms, generate an image of the historical past which culture transfers into the past and which, like an equal partner in a dialogue, affects the present.423

419 Silverstein, p.80.
420 Quoted in Silverstein, p.74.
421 Ibid., p.75.
423 Steedman, p.84.
Therefore, the significance of any notion of institutionalised forgetting and remembering lies in the capacity of a culture to manipulate people’s memory, to forge their identities and integrate them into their communities. It is not just that he who controls the past controls the future, it is that he who controls the past controls who we are. I would disagree, therefore, with Silverstein, who believes that if we look at the play as a blurring image between the present and the past, we undermine its political and even ethical dimensions. He bases this claim on a comment once made by Pinter, that we should recognise the historical veracity of experiences from the perspective of the present; however, if the historical veracity of the texts, through which we get our information, our knowledge, and consequently our memory, are themselves blurred and distorted, how can we neglect the past, and focus on the present only?

David Bakhurst supports this idea by citing two kinds of literature on memory:

First: The collective remembering of the social practices by which the members of a community preserve a conception of their past, and their identities.

Second: The social constitution of individual memory.

Connecting these theories to the play, we can definitely recognise Rebecca’s connection to the past through her wish to possess the siren, which Devlin tells her she will not have again, while offering her the prospect of a simulacrum:

   **Rebecca**: I hate it fading away. I hate it echoing away. I hate it leaving me. I hate losing it. I hate somebody else possessing it. I want it to be mine, all the time.

   **Devlin**: Don’t worry, there’ll always be another one.

Rebecca’s desire to have the siren all to herself is actually driven by the sense of guilt that she carries with her. The siren, which stands for the moment when atrocities take place, had slipped away from Rebecca’s hands, although she was not personally responsible for the atrocity. Rebecca’s ‘Nothing has ever happened to me’ represents the rift in her identity and memory, which is still torn between her present and her past. Wiesel in his Holocaust memoir, entitled *Night*, personified the Holocaust
not only by the systematic extermination of six million Jews, but by the crisis of one surviving Jew.\(^{428}\) In this sense, Rebecca’s crisis and her relation to her traumatic past, is more or less similar to that single survivor who carries the burden of all the victims, as Gordon also claims:

> This bizarre image is an emblem of the key theme elaborated in *Ashes to Ashes* – the relationship between the primary experience of those who suffer and the ambivalent identification of those who did not actually share it.\(^{429}\)

As a single survivor, Rebecca is struggling not only to overcome her feeling of guilt, but also to keep possession of her narrative in the face of Devlin’s counter-narrative that tries to deviate, shift, and block her memory. As an authoritative character, Devlin permeates the most intimate inner recesses of Rebecca’s relationships whether with her lover or her sister, or even the woman she describes as the mother of the lost bundle, so as to subvert her memory, and fill in the gaps of her fragmented consciousness by the institutionally construed, twisted memory of the present that he represents. When Rebecca starts identifying herself with the mother who was carrying a bundle, Devlin tries to mirror her. He, according to Gordon, ‘[...] immediately adopts a parallel strategy of attempting to put himself in the position of her lover, but her refusal to play along denies him the possibility of assuming the role of fascist male’.\(^{430}\) I would like to push Gordon’s assumption beyond the mere adopting of parallel strategies into the more sinister and tacit function of meaning-making. Devlin, in my opinion, is trying to keep Rebecca where he is, in the present; he does not want her, as I mentioned earlier, to identify with anything other than her current situation. When she starts remembering her fascist lover, who used to tear the babies from their mothers’ breasts, it means she is breaking the social veneer of information that blinded her from seeing the truth. By identifying with the victims, Rebecca develops a sense of responsibility that remains incomplete because Devlin continuously attempts to block the flow of her recollections:

> Devlin goes to her. He stands over her and looks down at her. He clenches his fist and holds it in front of her face. He puts his

\(^{428}\) Weissman, p.34.  
\(^{429}\) Gordon, p.184.  
\(^{430}\) Ibid., p.188.
It is not that Rebecca’s memory has been transferred to Devlin as Owens claims, ‘in a re-enactment of her victimisation at the hands of her vaguely remembered former lover [making it seem] as if Rebecca’s traumatic past has somehow possessed Devlin’. Devlin is rather subjecting Rebecca to a new kind of memory or remade memory to keep her position as it is. The process of keeping the memory frozen at a certain point aims to restructure the identity of the individual, not only by external rhetoric, but by an internal one to restructure the self from within. Lotman likens the process to diary jottings:

Diary jottings [...] are made not in order to remember certain things but to elucidate the writer’s inner state [...]. In such jottings the message is reformulated and acquires new meaning, it is qualitatively transformed. A parallel restructuring occurs in the identity of the diary jotter [...]. While communicating with himself, the addresser inwardly reconstructs his essence, since the essence of a personality may be thought of as an individual set of socially significant codes, and this set changes during the act of communication. This restructuring happens by ‘recoding’ the original message according to a ‘second code,’ that rearranges the elements in the original message. [...] Imagine that our diary jotter is undergoing psychoanalysis. On returning to his diary after a session, he would re-present earlier jottings in light of interpretive codes provided by the therapist.

Linking the process of diary jottings to Rebecca and Devlin’s session makes it clear that Devlin’s state (present) memory is trying to restructure Rebecca’s already twisted memory by further deformation, through blocking any flicker of hope that she would re-enact a pure, healthy, and vivid memory and link her present with her past. Thus, Pinter here is not talking about a certain or defined kind of atrocity as some critics, like Scolnicov, have claimed (i.e. that this is a Holocaust play). Rather, it is a play with universal meaning that can happen anywhere, and hence it is a work that deliberately, through metaphor and ambiguity, reveals the State’s fake rhetoric in using people like Devlin and Nicolas, who sanction the rape, murder, and death that they wish to

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431 Ashes to Ashes, p.428.
432 Owens, p.87.
433 Steedman, pp.84-85.
suppress in memory as a very function of their identification with the State, God and religion. Mark Taylor-Batty supports this by suggesting that:

Cultural memory, by definition, does not in itself imply experience of the incidents of history, but instead, implies a subscription to the significance of representations of the past, consumed as contributory to individual and group identity.\textsuperscript{435}

It is this ‘subscription to the representation of the past’ that Pinter is challenging his audience to realise, through the metaphor of the atrocity that Rebecca is reliving. The re-enactment of the most intimate moments between Rebecca and her former lover (which is represented by Devlin’s fist) is an action in which Devlin is not only trying to reshape Rebecca’s personal memories, but also her speech. In addition to imposing his fascist masculinity,\textsuperscript{436} he therefore silences her and objectifies her both as a female and as an individual.

Pinter, as Mark Taylor-Batty suggests, is not only invoking the spirit of the Holocaust as both a shared narrative and a lived experience, he also questions the legitimacy of drama and art in general in representing such atrocities, and this is what lends \textit{Ashes to Ashes} its special power, that is ‘uncharacteristic’ of his other ‘political’ plays.\textsuperscript{437}

Pinter himself has voiced these ideas when in his acceptance lecture for the Nobel Prize for Literature he, as Michael Billington puts it, ‘pinned down the willed indifference of the media to publicly recorded events’. Pinter said, describing the atrocities caused by the right-wing military dictatorship of the West: ‘It never happened. Nothing has ever happened. Even while it was happening, it wasn’t happening. It didn’t matter. It was of no interest’.\textsuperscript{438}

In connection, when Devlin talks about God, and a world without winners, he invokes Goldberg and McCann in \textit{The Birthday Party} (1957), and Nicolas in \textit{One for the Road} (1984), who institutionalised religious beliefs in the same way that our parents and grandmothers used to make out of myths a socially constructed set of facts and a...
faith. A world without a winner for Devlin would be in a state of rigor mortis: ‘Absence. Stalemate. Paralysis’. Moreover, Devlin echoes almost the same sentiments as his previous histrionic counterpart Nicolas, who tortures Victor by telling him stories of his wife. Devlin’s motto of ‘Fuck the best man’ is similar to Nicolas’ views, shared by dictatorial states or systems. Devlin’s lines reflect just how much the State, by means of twisting facts, and practicing power, permeates our intimate relations and business:

Devlin: Only once in a blue moon do you wobble the chambermaid’s bottom, on the assumption there is one – chambermaid not bottom – [...] Which means you never let the best man win.Fuck the best man, that’s always been my motto.

The word ‘wobble’ mirrors one of the officers’ comments in Mountain Language when he tries to use sexual extortion in relation to one of the women in prison, as a means of barter for her husband’s freedom. This is why Pinter is questioning the role of the arts, whether through media (i.e TV and radio) or theatre everywhere in the world, as we get most of our information mediated through media screens and consequently have developed superficial memories that lack enough knowledge and information to question the wrongdoing of oppressive authorities.

Therefore, when atrocities accumulate now that we are living in the age of technology, we are socially and memorially unprepared to question the reasons, the causes, and effects of the atrocities. According to Lotman’s diary jotting example, we cannot get the original message anymore without passing through, or touching upon the supplementary meanings and information that have been added after the psychoanalysis session we have been through:

The jottings themselves take on the quality of signs that refer not only to their own, original semantic content but also to their location within the supplementary code. These signs can be expressed in subsequent jottings by means of shorthand comprehensible only if we have access to the secondary code of the jotter.

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439 Hall, p.273.
440 Ashes to Ashes, p.412.
441 Ibid., p.415.
442 Ibid.
443 Steedman, p.85.
In connection to the ‘echo’ that Rebecca identifies with, and strains to keep hold of, it is an attempt to reach out to past events on her side and/or a metaphor on Pinter’s side to appropriate historical atrocities so that he can call for intervention. Batty claims:

What Pinter crafts in *Ashes to Ashes*, is an appropriation of tropological representations of the Holocaust which, personalised by the troubled Rebecca, convey not only the truth of suffering but the appeal for intervention.\(^{444}\)

I will expand Batty’s assumption a little further by siding with Gordon, who believes that the echoes Rebecca identifies with at the end of the play depict remembering as a ritualistic act that calls for intervention on all levels, because it ‘creates an incantatory effect that transforms the individual act of remembering into a ritual recital provoking associations with universal resonance’.\(^{445}\) Moreover, Pinter, by de-contextualising the atrocity that Rebecca is talking about – be it the Holocaust or any other one – has succeeded, as well, in freeing the suffering of humanity from its nationalist ends; and the field of memory is broadened to include victims from across the world.\(^{446}\)

Devlin’s long speech ends with a very crucial contradiction, which will lead me to comment on the forms of institutionalised remembering and forgetting that are authorised by dictatorial systems:

**Devlin:** A man who doesn’t give a shit.
A man with a rigid sense of duty.\(^{447}\)

As part of highlighting the organised manipulation of people’s memory, Pinter, I believe, is using this metaphor to infer the nasty role of some dictatorships, who believe themselves to be and present themselves outwardly as democracies by manipulating and controlling their subjects. Therefore, controlling people’s memories through media or social communication outlets is one of their main aims. In a comment on the production of *Ashes to Ashes* in Barcelona, Pinter touched upon the role of dictatorships in suppressing and manipulating the memory of the people, with particular reference to the Nicaraguan resistance movement and subsequent revolutionary government:

\(^{444}\) Batty, p.112.
\(^{445}\) Gordon, p.188.
\(^{446}\) Radstone, p.404.
\(^{447}\) *Ashes to Ashes*, p.415.
The Sandinista Revolution, in my opinion and observation, was really serious, responsible, intelligent, thoughtful and concerned action. It was inevitable, it happened; and what they then did was to cultivate and establish social systems in Nicaragua which had never been seen before. I’m talking about health and education, literacy, doing away with disease; actually bringing people back from the dead, giving them life. People who’d been totally poverty-stricken all their lives. This was a really responsible act, and which was then totally destroyed by the United States. And this has gone under the blanket. The point I make in my Guardian article is, it’s as if it never happened, but it did happen. And one has to keep drawing attention [to that fact].

And this is not the only example of the institutionalised coercive forces that work against remembering anything that would budge dictatorships from their comfort zones; there are many other examples, whether in the present or in the past. In The Book of Laughter and Forgetting, Milan Kundera reminds us that

The bloody massacre in Bangladesh quickly covered over the memory of the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, the assassination of Allende drowned out the groans of Bangladesh, the war in Sinai Desert made people forget Allende, the Cambodian massacre made people forget Sinai, and so on and so forth.

Kundera supports the theme of organised forgetting, which he believes to be acute due to the rapidity of events on such a large scale ‘[t]hat they cannot be adequately assimilated into everyday experience’. This is where the drawing of attention comes in. However, some critics such as Middleton push the boundary of performance even further by suggesting that each re-performance can consolidate the authority of the commemorative practice. In other words, with each re-enactment of a play such as Ashes to Ashes, the artist is providing reasons for atrocities to take place in order to be remembered and so on. I would disagree with this, as I believe that if the society’s past memory cannot outlive the present time, then the whole society will decay. David Hume supports this by suggesting that ‘The mind is a kind of theatre, where several

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448 Aragay, p.13-14.
450 Middleton & Derek, Preface.
perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of posture and situations.  

Moreover, Alfred North Whitehead suggests that keeping the memory of the past is a must to save society from anarchy, and thus memory becomes a kind of enterprise to be provided with success factors so as to keep it going, along with society:

Those societies which cannot combine reverence to their symbols with freedom of revision must ultimately decay either from anarchy, or from the slow atrophy of a life stifled by useless shadows.

In connection to the play, critics such as Silverstein and Hall believe that Rebecca is a strong and independent character, who in the end, as Hall suggests, owns her narrative in the play:

Rebecca continues with the story of her baby being taken away as she is about to board the train, and because the play concludes with this story, as well as the silence of Devlin throughout, it suggests that Rebecca has, in fact, achieved the upper hand.

However, I believe that Rebecca is more like her earlier histrionic counterpart Emma, in *Betrayal*, who keeps swinging between her role as an agent and a victim, never being able to condemn or praise her lover, who still overshadows her life. As well as being under the control of Devlin, Rebecca’s denials of her sufferings reflect both a historical guilt and the torture and subjugation of women that will always exist under both an individual male’s and the State’s paternalism.

**IV**

In this chapter, I have tried to unveil the role of memory in terms of memory’s main activities; that is, forgetting and remembering. The activities of memory have been widely invested in *Ashes to Ashes* in such a minimalistic way that it keeps us, as an audience, fidgeting in our seats all the time. I have investigated in the first part of this chapter the workings of memory in a scientific and psychological framework so as to help me to clarify its social and political roles. In addition, rather than focusing on the

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451 Quoted in Magnussen and Helstrup, p.11.
452 Middleton & Derek, p.82.
453 Hall, p.275.
memory of Rebecca, the main character in the play, I have tried to unravel Devlin’s conception of memory and have figured him as a representative of an authoritarian power or State. Rebecca’s dialogue, though it carries a revolutionary spirit that doesn’t take things at their face value, is at the same time twisted, manipulated and controlled by Devlin’s rhetoric and interrogatory questions. However, shunning too much risk lest he gets into the grey area in which he would not be able to nail things down, Devlin tries to disguise Rebecca’s recollections in such a way that his limited knowledge and her fragile memory are mixed in order to produce a jumble of distorted images.

On another level, unlike many critics of this play (who believe that Rebecca is a powerful character who manages to own her narrative against Devlin’s confusing questions), I believe that, although she is assertive in many situations, she still has a long way to go before she can get enough resources and clear recollections of what, according to what she has mentioned in earlier scenes, has really happened. Therefore, I would agree with Scolnicov’s division of Rebecca’s memories into two types: the first is the recollections of a more realistic appeal, and the second is the hallucinatory one that mainly rests in her memory of looking from the window of her house in Dorset. Thus, Scolnicov believes that Pinter, in that sense, is conceptualising memory in a way close to that of Charlotte Delbo, who divided memory into (i) ordinary and (ii) profound, as mentioned earlier in the chapter.454 Hence Pinter’s emphasis that the play is about images of Nazism, and that one need not be a survivor in order to be deeply disturbed by any memory of any atrocity.

Importantly, Pinter has attempted to use the concept of memory in Ashes to Ashes to highlight the importance of the individual’s commitment to keep things in memory regardless of what shape that recollection will take in our minds. In other words, he has emphasised the act of being engaged, rather than detached from whatever atrocities are or have been taking place in the world. Therefore, I have subsequently discussed the notion that memory is a vital activity that feeds on both our personal recollections and the cultural constructs of our societies. Notwithstanding this, I hope also to have demonstrated the fact that it is not necessary for every human subject to have a primary or secondary recollection of such atrocities for us to develop a sense of

454 Scolnicov, ‘Bearing Witness and Ethical Responsibility in Harold Pinter’s Ashes to Ashes’, in Ethical Speculations, p.54.
ethical identification and/or moral attachment regarding them. I believe that the play’s title refers to the ashes that can be scattered so easily, but once scattered all over the place are extremely difficult to re-collect and store again. The workings of memory are similarly difficult to contain in one meaning or one interpretation, and hence the truth and the narrative of history in this play. Because memory is such a complicated system, and due to many distorted versions of history and the past, constructing the essence of our identities has become just like attempting to create one’s complete, truthful, and verified version of scattered ashes. It is just like collecting the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle with one piece always missing.

If recollections of atrocities such as those articulated by Rebecca are frozen in time and space; and if governments and dictatorial systems keep on adopting methods like those of Devlin to manipulate and/or institutionalise such private and personal domains as our memories, the implications would be one of two extremes: either the rise of a nationalistic generation that believes the political rhetoric of their dominant systems is the only reliable source upon which to constitute their memories, or the development of a rootless, completely detached generation that stultifies anything and everything. Both options would be, eventually, disastrous and this is what Pinter is problematising and dramatising in Ashes to Ashes. Thus, what we need, as Francis Gillen suggests, is to get out of the confines of the ‘I’ and move into the realm of the ‘we’, to re-emerge fully as linguistically, emotionally, intellectually, and culturally more human.

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Chapter Three

Eroded Rhetoric: Linguistic Identity in Harold Pinter’s 
One for the Road and Mountain Language

I have so much to say to you.
But I’m quite dead.
What I have to say to you
Will never be said.\textsuperscript{456}

In this chapter, I intend to elaborate on the process of meaning making in two of Pinter’s plays: \textit{One for the Road} (1984) and \textit{Mountain Language} (1988). Despite critics such as Ruben Moi underrating Harold Pinter’s political works as not: ‘[Revealing] great profundity and creativity, [as] they are all unusually short’,\textsuperscript{457} this chapter will attempt to prove the opposite by venturing to analyse these short pieces from a linguistic perspective. In spite of the limited development of the characters in these plays, Pinter has demonstrated the complex social and political interactions of issues through images of linguistic struggle in which the representations of power and moral authority are revealed in different shapes and situations. Therefore, this chapter will focus on linguistic violence, in which power has not been used to restore order and justice to the world but, instead, has brought more chaos, and created further misery.\textsuperscript{458}

Although described as ‘a man of his word’,\textsuperscript{459} Pinter never trusted words in his plays.\textsuperscript{460} He always believed that the language we hear is an indication of that which we do not hear.\textsuperscript{461} Therefore, to dismantle this complex game of words, this chapter will analyse the language of both plays on four different levels.

The first section will focus on the sincerity and truthfulness of language – which Pinter has always doubted. In this part I will deploy linguistic theories developed by J.L. Austin and John Searle to mark the falsity and/or sincerity of characters’ language and

\textsuperscript{456} Harold Pinter, \textit{Plays Four: Family Voices} (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), p.148. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition.


\textsuperscript{459} Mark Taylor-Batty, ‘Harold’, In \textit{The Pinter Review} (The University of Tampa Press, Tampa, Florida, 2011,) p.51.


\textsuperscript{461} Ibid.
reactions. These linguistic philosophers refer to the power of language as a constituter of reality, and argue that such realities are always created by someone else. In the Pinter plays that I have chosen for this chapter, the occupiers of such creative and controlling roles could be people such as Nicolas (One for the Road) and the military officers (Mountain Language), who always try to twist language so as to prove their own points and politics. Therefore, I will explore the concept of linguistic sincerity, and ask whether we have a fixed or fluid meaning of ‘truth’. Also, I will ask whether we are adequately equipped to pass judgements on the sincerity or falsity of each other’s language.

In the second section, I will try to discover the performative aspect of language through a deployment of some of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s linguistic theories. Pinter is more concerned with dramatising the absence of self-determined identity both linguistically and ontologically. This echoes Wittgenstein’s assertion that if something is a language, it cannot be (logically) private; and if something is private, it is not (and cannot be) a language. In other words, Wittgenstein emphasises the performative aspect of language that is necessary for it to fulfil its purpose, rather than mere utterance. To Wittgenstein, language needs to be a radical activity in order to bring about change in the human condition. A game of words does not acquire its full validity without performing the situations described by these words. The reason why I am using Wittgenstein here is that I am dealing with two of Pinter’s political plays, and Wittgenstein believed that politics is nothing but a language game composed of various activities: ‘Beneath and on the surface of these activities are rules and conventions that serve as ‘signposts’ for participants. The only bedrock undergirding political plays is trust’. It is these linguistic games and the absence of trust between the characters that this section explores. Also, this section will be a continuation of the first, as a progression of the question of the validity of language with regards to the reflection of truth.

In the third section the psychology of the characters will be examined through psychological interpretations of the situations provided in both plays. Questions such

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as: how can one represent the absence of language through language? and how does our membership of one society twist our linguistic tools? will be covered in this section.

In the concluding section, the gendered aspect of language will be analysed through feminist theories relating to the position of men and women in the linguistic system. This is because the sexual politics of language is broadly displayed in both plays, in which women are relegated to inferior positions by the power of patriarchy represented by the language of military officers, interrogators and soldiers. Here the question of who is exploiting whom in this vicious circle of power will be posed to discover how men and women can twist language, and eventually identities, to serve their own interests.

**One for the Road & Mountain Language**

In his book *Harold Pinter and the Twilight of Modernism*, Varun Begely claims repeatedly that a fundamental aspect of Pinter’s work is its ‘systematic resistance to meaning making’ and its resistance when confronted with generalisations. Begely’s claim has been confirmed by Marc Silverstein, who believes that the intricacy of Pinter’s use of words exerts an uncanny power that makes us feel as if we are hearing these words for the first time. To unravel part of Pinter’s linguistic intricacy, I will unpack certain situations in this section to add another dimension to Begely and Silverstein’s statement, through the theories of Austin and Searle.

In *One for the Road* and *Mountain Language*, Pinter uses language to reflect what the characters are doing to each other, rather than what they are saying to each other. The language is, therefore, grounded in the demonstration of power, which, in turn, depends on the relationships between characters. Austin Quigley defines this as a battle maintained through language:

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This battle [i.e., the battle for position within a relationship], in the Pinter world, is grounded in the power available in language to promote the responses that a speaker requires and hence the relationship that is desired. It is here that the link between language and the relationships is established, and it is here that we must concentrate our attention.467

One for the Road, which depicts the torture of a family of three, two parents and their only son, opens with a scene between Nicolas, the interrogator, and Victor, the victim whose crime is never revealed. Nicolas’s initiation dialogue with Victor reveals Nicolas’s mastery of language as a device to frighten the victims, and make them doubt themselves:

Nicolas: Let’s not beat about the bush. [..] D’accord? You’re a civilised man, so am I. Sit down.468

Despite Nicolas’s mastery of language, demonstrated here by his seamless slipping from one language to another, his instability can be traced to his steadfast belief that what he is doing is absolutely in the interest of his country. Nevertheless, he sends out messages that he may be a madman, and is quite aware that this could be true:

Nicolas: I can do absolutely anything I like. Do you think I’m mad? My mother did.469

The language game Nicolas is playing with Victor negates the description of a ‘civilised man’470 with which he introduced himself to Victor. He is making what J.L. Austin calls ‘insincere’ assumptions:

Nicolas: You may have noticed I’m the chatty type. You probably think I’m part of a predictable [...] i.e. I chat away [...] No, no. It’s not quite like that.471

According to Austin: ‘The insincerity of an assertion is the same as the insincerity of a promise, since both promising and asserting are procedures intended for use by persons having certain thoughts’.472 Therefore, Nicolas is insincere, yet his words are not void, for he does state what he believes. In other words, although his words do not

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468 Harold Pinter, One for the Road, p.223.
469 Ibid., p.224.
470 Ibid., p.223.
471 Ibid., p.225.
reflect his action, and although we realise that he is a mouthpiece of a regime more powerful than him, hence the possibility of being manipulated, yet they are not completely void of meaning, albeit ridiculous. More precisely, he speaks in bad faith.\textsuperscript{473}

Such is the linguistic product of absolute power in totalitarian systems, and people like Nicolas believe themselves, as they are occupying the position of a mouthpiece to the Other (The State), to speak in a language that Barthes observed was ‘articulated [...] develop[ed...] marked in the light (or the shadow) of Power’.\textsuperscript{474}

Nicolas’s haughtiness drives him to establish himself as the agent through which God speaks:

\begin{quote}
Nicolas: I run the place. God speaks through me.\textsuperscript{475}
\end{quote}

Stanley E. Fish cites the Shakespeare play \textit{Coriolanus}, in which Coriolanus dislikes asking the public for votes to be a consul, and instead accuses voters of incompetence.\textsuperscript{476} His disdain denies them action, and by denying them action, he is denying the State itself and the rules of the game. Fish further clarifies that

In the context of [the] rules, the citizens are the only ones who ‘are able to do An (action);’ and they have that ability by the virtue of their position, and not because they have been certified by some test outside the system of rules. One can complain about their performance, but one cannot challenge their right to perform without challenging the institution that gives them their role.\textsuperscript{477}

Nicolas, likewise, disdains his victims, not only by inflicting more torture on them both physically and verbally, but also by denying them their rights, knowing that they are either too law-abiding due to their sincerity, or lack enough knowledge to challenge their torture or even defend themselves, for they do not even know what the charges against them are, as in Victor’s case. In a free state, citizens like Victor and his family could easily have disregarded Nicolas’s questions, and refused to be summoned for investigation. The charges against them are not made clear, and thus they are free from any obligation. Yet the fact that they are present reflects how fragile civil law is in

\begin{footnotes}
\footnoteref{473}Austin, p.11.
\footnoteref{475}One for the Road, p.225.
\footnoteref{477}Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
societies in which citizens’ bonds can be broken at will. Victor, here, is being confronted by the same situation as the citizens in Coriolanus, who in deciding that they ought to abide by the law and conventions, have bound themselves to the potentially dictatorial powers who create and enforce such laws. The word ‘ought’ here is thus not moral but procedural: both Victor and the citizens in Coriolanus have to abide by the rules, as one of the citizens in Shakespeare’s play explains:

We have power in ourselves to do it, but it is a power that we have no power to do; for if he show us his wounds and tell us his deeds, we are to put our tongues into these wounds and speak for them; so if he tell us his noble deeds, we must also tell him our noble acceptance of them.\(^{478}\)

Victor, through being part of the State, is obliged to abide by its rules. In other words, Victor, by abiding by the rules, is ‘performing certain conventional (speech) acts’.\(^{479}\) Otherwise our intentions would be merely an act of exposing words void of any true meaning other than reporting; in such a case, forms like ‘I am sorry’ and ‘Thank you’ will not be accepted as expressions of regret or gratitude anymore. Fish states:

And were we not responsible for the conventional acts we perform, then one would forever be at the mercy of those who make promises [...] and tell us that they did not mean it.\(^{480}\)

Victor’s commitment and sincerity stands in a striking contradiction to that of Nicolas, whose statements and actions are not only spoken in bad faith, but are void of any true commitment except that of a blind loyalty to the State. Here, Pinter is highlighting the nastiness of language when it is being manipulated to hide the horrible acts of right-wing governments. Michael Billington, in a comment on Pinter’s poem ‘American Football’ confirms this by describing the twists of language during the first Gulf war:

‘When an Iraqi air-raid shelter was hit, American officials quickly went on television and claimed that it was “a command-and-control facility”. Death was smothered in the language of technology and bureaucracy’.\(^{481}\)

Victor’s obedience and silence in the face of Nicolas’s audacity parallels that of the old woman in Mountain Language (a play which tackles the brutal treatment of a group of...
mountain people prevented from speaking in their original language and forced to adopt the State language). This play is another example by Pinter of how the manipulation of the language of power could suppress and outlaw a whole language and community. The woman, astonishingly, keeps silent in the face of the soldiers’ repeated insults. She gets jabbed every time she utters a word in her language:

**Elderly Woman:** I have bread-
*The Guard jabs her with a stick*
**Guard:** Forbidden. Language Forbidden.  

Here again, the obedience of the mountain people is overwhelming; it cannot be accounted for except by the fact that they are being faithful to the legal and moral obligation that connects them to the State, and not to the officers themselves. Austin suggests that reality is cut off from any other procedures that may relate to it:

> At least in terms of legal and moral obligation, reality is a matter of its public specification. In the alternative view, reality is essential and substantial; it exists independently of any identifying procedures which can only relate to it as they are more or less accurate.

To unpack this point, I believe that Austin observes that excess of profundity, or solemnity, at once paves the way for immorality. He believes that one who says: ‘Promising is not merely a matter of uttering words! It is an inward and spiritual act!’ is apt to appear as a ‘solid moralist standing out against a generation of superficial theoisers’. In other words, the honesty of the mountain people has paved the way for the officers or the State representatives to be immoral, as they now feel that they are superior to the mountain people, as Coriolanus felt towards the citizens. They have already set values that exist independently of any conventional formula, believing that their desert validates itself, and that mountain people should acknowledge it just like they acknowledge any natural phenomenon. In other words, they verbalise what Austin believes to be a reality that is cut off from any other associations.

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482 Mountain Language, p.258.
483 Quoted in Fish’s article ‘How to Do Things with Austin and Searle’, p.987.
484 Austin, p.10.
485 Fish, p.987.
It is here that Pinter slips his message to us as an audience to be aware of nasty power schemes:

I believe that the root cause of this state of affairs is that for the last forty years our thought has been trapped in hollow structures of language, a stale, dead but immensely successful rhetoric. This has represented, in my view, a defeat of the intelligence and of the will.⁴⁸⁶

However, this obedience does not continue without acts of resistance, no matter how simple they might seem. In One for the Road, Nicolas's impoliteness extends to Victor's family. By praising Gila's beauty, Nicolas is playing games of words to strip others of their personal belongings/identities:

Nicolas: What a good-looking woman your wife is. You're a very lucky man.⁴⁸⁷

Used as a tool of torture, language here is manipulated by Pinter to reveal Nicolas's racing for linguistic dominance over his victims. Nicolas returns to the word 'respect'. His feeling of being a void, an empty character, is attested to by his regular drinking of whisky. The slightest feeling of disrespect blurs the scene. Victor's denial of ever knowing Nicolas vexes him:

Nicolas: You do respect me, I take it?  
Victor: I don't know you.⁴⁸⁸

Victor's denial of knowing Nicolas is the kind of response that is labelled by Austin as an unhappy utterance,⁴⁸⁹ meaning Victor's opposite response surprises Nicolas, leading to what is known as 'the doctrine of the infelicities'.⁴⁹⁰ Performative utterances, Austin believes, occur when actions such as marrying, betting etc., while they may not be false, might go wrong or fail, and hence create an unhappy situation. Nevertheless, Victor's utterance is still true, because Nicolas's question was uttered inappropriately between two strangers. Austin further clarifies:

[T]he utterance is then, we may say, not indeed false but in general unhappy. And for this reason we call the doctrine of the

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⁴⁸⁶ Harold Pinter, Various Voices: Prose, Poetry & Politics 1948-2005 (London, Faber and Faber, 2005), p.188
⁴⁸⁷ One for the Road, p.225.
⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., p.226.
⁴⁸⁹ Austin, p.20.
⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.
things that can be and go wrong on the occasion of such utterances, the doctrine of infelicities.\textsuperscript{491}

Moreover, owing to the fact that the language employed in this play is part of a game played by Nicolas on his victims, the exchange demonstrates that Victor fails to achieve what Eric Berne defines as a social stroke. According to Berne, ‘Stroking [...] denote[s] any act implying recognition of another’s presence. Hence a stroke may be used as the fundamental unit of social action’.\textsuperscript{492} Linking both Berne’s and Austin’s linguistic interpretations of speech acts, we begin to realise what Pinter meant to communicate in this scene. Nicolas not only uses twisted language to pass his draconian orders, he wants to be recognised as a super power/super identity, or an example of what Pinter used to describe brutal regimes: ‘Founding Fathers’.\textsuperscript{493}

We see another dimension to the play when Nicolas becomes more paranoiac and sadistic towards Victor because of his denials and reluctant answers. The fact that Victor knows nothing of Nicolas potentially means two things: (i) either he does not identify with Nicolas’s allegations about him, or (ii) he does not want to be dragged down to Nicolas’s level, being a different person, and that is the charge he is convicted of and the reality that Pinter wants us to grasp. This minimalistic scene of torture is criticised for not stating clearly the status of those victims, yet the uncertainty contributes to the power of the play. It is Pinter’s way of showing that the abuse of power remains unconditional. Ruben Moi further states: ‘The play condemns all totalitarian regimes – and attacks all forms of abuse of human rights – [a] show case for Amnesty International’.\textsuperscript{494} I would add to Moi’s comment that the plays I am tackling here – \textit{One for the Road} and \textit{Mountain Language} – can both be not only cases for Amnesty International but examples given by Pinter to show how the powerful figures manipulate, twist, and disguise their language to suppress, crush, and exterminate the identity of the powerless in shameful acts of violence practiced on linguistic, psychological, and political levels.

Back to the form of unhappy utterance, the act is repeated in \textit{Mountain Language} when the women, lining up to see their husbands and sons, repeatedly refuse to give

\textsuperscript{491}Austin,p.20.
\textsuperscript{493}Various Voices, p.187.
\textsuperscript{494}Moi, p.29.
their names following the officer’s order. The play opens with a prison sergeant asking a group of women in a line their names in order to allow them in to see their men. The question the officer asks in the beginning misfires, as no one gives a name, thus creating what Austin terms the infelicity of the situation:495

Sergeant: Name!
Young Woman: We've given our names.496

Before the sergeant can get provoked, an officer intervenes, marking a strong difference from One for the Road, in which no one intervenes to shield the victims from confrontations. Moreover, the festivity with which Nicolas treats his victims by offering them whisky, as he does with Victor, contrasts with the dryness of the situation in Mountain Language, in which the women are standing in the freezing cold waiting outside the institution of power to see their men.

The officer, however, intervenes to take any complaints, which is intended as further intimidation, rather than a real intention of taking complaints, echoing once again the empty structures of Nicolas’s bad faith and void words. Though the officer’s words are void of any real intention to take complaints and fix the situation, they are not totally hollow of a deliberate intention to intimidate; the utterance therefore carries a kind of falsehood that Austin believes is ‘not necessarily used of statements only.’497 Thus, the officer creates another unhappy situation for himself because the young woman insists that she and the other women have already given their names; the response therefore botches the officer’s attempt at further, deliberate intimidation.

Later on, the sergeant steps in and denounces the prisoners as ‘shithouses’, drawing a line between local people (implied as outsiders through their definition as enemies) and those in the State:

Sergeant: Your husbands, your sons, your fathers, these men you have been waiting to see, are shithouses [...]498

495See Austin, How To Do Things with Words, p.14. The situation in Mountain Language resembles that of One for the Road when Victor denies knowing Nicolas, and hence the failure to achieve the social stroke, as Berne suggests, is also repeated.
496Mountain Language, p.251.
497Austin, p.11.
498Mountain Language, p.255.
By using language in which boundaries are drawn between the State and the people, Pinter is creating two zones to reflect on oppression. He is dramatising the conflict between the margin and the centre, thus creating a conflict between ‘the officially sanctioned language of the State and the language of the marginalised mountain people’. This very marginalisation is what constitutes their predicament of identity, or specifically, linguistic identity.

The announcement that the officer makes afterwards reflects multiple aspects of the manipulation and the use of language that are cleverly dramatised by Pinter in this play:

**Officer**: Now hear this. You are mountain people.[...] Your language is dead. It is forbidden [...]  

Equating ‘a military decree’ to a ‘law’ reflects the absurd logic by which orders are set in the world. This decree recalls Lenny’s arbitrary decision that the prostitute he met was diseased. She is diseased just because he so decided, and the mountain language is prohibited just because a military-backed State so decrees. This linguistic manipulation which equates the law to a military decree becomes a fact, and the language that is described as dead becomes dead in reality. Nonetheless, Jean-Francois Lyotard believes that ‘There are many different language games – a heterogeneity of elements. They only give rise to local determinism’. In other words, he believes that creating such dialogues between different groups of people contributes to ‘a recognition of the heteromorphic nature of language games’. The struggle that people engage in not only defines the fine line between the oppressor and the oppressed, but also creates the small narratives, or what Lyotard calls ‘Petit récits’, which could also contain areas of resistance and renewal, and hence Pinter’s resisting spirit. Pinter defined the vocabulary of totalitarian regimes as consisting of bombs

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500 *Mountain Language*, p.255.  
502 Ibid., p.169.  
503 Ibid.
only: ‘Bombs are its only vocabulary’.\(^{504}\) However, although he believed that totalitarianism is not only the erasing of the individual’s identity,\(^{505}\) but also the slipperiness of the landmarks of rules and regulations, I believe that despite the gruesome image he depicts in the plays discussed here, the language games referred to by Lyotard could be easily flipped to change the whole picture, and this very slipperiness of language makes room for future change or pave the way for renewal/resistance. Therefore, language is seen as a two-edged sword, through which both oppression and justice are attained if they are manipulated in a certain way. It is this nastiness of the use of language that Pinter is addressing here. And it is also through language that a whole lot of people’s identities are being manipulated and/or annihilated following the regime’s wishes. The sudden change of rules by the end of *Mountain Language* attests to that.

Drawing lines between the citizens and the State takes a different shape in *One for the Road*. While Nicolas is jockeying to impose his power over Victor, he starts speaking in the name of the State, which, according to him, considers that everybody supports its policy as part of proving their patriotism. Nicolas himself is being carved up by identifying with ‘the man who runs this country’,\(^{506}\) denoting a connection to the power of regime – a figure whose authority is spoken through, rather than speaking for himself.\(^{507}\) Both the ironic festivity of Nicolas’s offering of drinks to Victor while investigating and the vacuous language of the demagogue go wrong when Nicolas attempts to show the goodness of the system, speaking through him:

**Nicolas**: Last Friday, I believe – the man who runs this country announced to the country: We are all patriots, we are as one, we all share a common heritage. Except you apparently.\(^{508}\)

Nicolas’s feeling of shared identity with the State shows that, even in totalitarian systems, power can be held by people who occupy the position of subjects of


\(^{505}\) *Viva Pinter: Harold Pinter’s Spirit of Resistance*, ed. by Brigitte Gauthier (Bern, Peter Lang, Switzerland, 2009), p. 11.

\(^{506}\) *One for the Road*, p. 230.


\(^{508}\) *One for the Road*, p. 232.
authority. The fact that Nicolas’s voice is abdicated and dissolved within the hegemonic voice of the Other (The State) has been referred to as a quite disturbing element in the play by Ronald Hayman, who states: ‘One of the most disturbing elements in the play is Nicolas’s phony patriotism’. 509

By identifying himself with the ruling system, Nicolas justifies excluding Victor from belongingness, and the right to be treated as a proper citizen. Exclusion, here, is achieved through the language of inclusion, which is completely the opposite of what happens in Mountain Language.

On another occasion, when Nicolas interrogates Gila in the third part of the play, he echoes the voice of the officers in Mountain Language by insulting those who have chosen to be dissidents or simply disagree with the State policy or regime. When Gila tells him that she met Victor when he was in her father’s room, Nicolas’s annoyance is shown when she mentions her father:

Nicolas: He believed in God. He didn’t think, like you shitbags. He lived [...] He was iron and gold. He would die [...] for his country, for his God. 510

Considering himself a virtual son of Gila’s father, Nicolas loses his temper with Gila, and starts degrading her as a woman by insinuating that she is a drunk, a drug addict, or a streetwalker:

Nicolas: You were drunk.
Pause.
You were drugged.
Pause
You had absconded from your hospital. 511

Austin defines such kinds of verbal insinuation as achieving something by means of verbal action. In other words, sometimes we might be doing something without distinctively stating it. Nicolas is insulting Gila, but instead of saying: ‘I insult you’, he is using a verbal formula to express that insult. 512

510 One for the Road, p.240.
512 Austin, p.66.
Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that the God Nicolas identifies with is the God of the Old Testament (i.e. the God of Judaism). By referring to the idea of Nicholas possibly being Jewish, but living in a culture that defines the Jew from the viewpoint of the Christian, Pinter is encapsulating the status of the ethnic Other within such a totalitarian culture. Nicolas does not only aspire to achieve recognition as God’s agent, he also commands respect, when talking to Victor in the first part:

Nicolas: Everyone respects me here. Including you, I take it? I think that is the correct stance.

Besides using the language of inclusion for further humiliation, Nicolas’s language here reflects the fact that that men, sometimes, drag other men down into such an abyss of humiliation whilst purporting to act righteously. Pinter describes Nicolas as someone who

Has all the power within those walls. He knows this is the case, he believes that it is right, for him, to possess this power, because, as far as he is concerned, he is acting for his country legitimately and properly.

Nicolas identifies himself not only with God, but with the divine powers of God, in a language coloured by intimidation rather than normal speech:

Nicolas: Secondly because if you don’t respect me you’re unique. Everyone else knows the voice of God speaks through me.

Nicolas’s assumption that God speaks through him is the kind of ‘canting religiosity’ described by Ronald Hayman, a misfired statement in terms of linguistic analysis. According to Austin, an utterance is considered a misfire when ‘the procedure invoked is not accepted’. He further elaborates that it is usually persons other than the speaker who do not accept the statement made, if the speaker is speaking seriously. Nicolas’s assumption is thus inapplicable, as it attributes merits to human beings (in this case being the mouthpiece of a God) that are improbable or impossible; they

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514 One for the Road, p.225.
515 Pilar Zozaya, p.125.
517 One for the Road, p.227.
518 Zozaya, p.125.
519 Austin, p.27.
520 Ibid.
certainly would not be accepted by an intellectual such as Victor. Nicolas, being a representative of an oppressive regime as staged in the play, is acting as if this regime stands as ‘the world’s dad’, and that its role is to take care of everybody.

Nicolas further contradicts himself by enacting sham religious rituals. The act of drinking whisky stands for filling himself with a guiding light, which ironically only serves to further reflect Nicolas’s emptiness:

Nicolas: You don’t believe in a guiding light?

Pilar Zozaya believes that by doing this Nicolas ‘extols the righteousness of his words, the advisability of loving and respecting him, and the convenience of following his advice’. Thus, he believes that any dissident who does not believe in him, or in the State he represents, is morally corrupt, and therefore deserves to be humiliated; he expresses this in another example of his crooked use of language.

Nicolas: So [...] morally [...] You flounder in wet shit. You know [...] like when you’ve eaten a rancid omelette.

This crooked way of using language has been described by Pinter as ‘A language standing on its head’.

As if to fulfil Nicolas’s warning, Pinter in *Mountain Language* depicts what happens to the individual if he/she does not obey the State’s words. In an absurd move, the officers in *Mountain Language*, ironically, pretend to be committed to the concept of time when the young woman complains about standing for eight hours since nine o’clock in the morning in the cold, and thus they deny the truth of their dialogue, which is in fact loaded with humiliation:

Sergeant: Right. Quite right. Nine o’clock this morning. Absolutely right.

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521 *Various Voices*, p.208.
522 *One for the Road*, p.227.
523 Zozaya, p.127.
524 *One for the Road*, p.227.
525 *Various Voices*, p.195
526 *Mountain Language*, p.254.
Words like ‘quite right’ and ‘absolutely’ add to the absurdity of the situation and further assert the dehumanisation of the women by the officers through their cynical playing of the language game.

The arbitrary rules that defined the mountain language as ‘prohibited’ and the quite British representation of the soldiers’ sense of fair play, bring up the concept of consensus: a community resolution, in which opposing parties set aside their differences and agree on a statement that is agreeable to all, even if only barely. In consensual democracies, the ‘rule of law’ is seen generally to act equally and it is seen to be decided upon democratically and fairly. In a more oppressive system, those who are in power impose the law on those who are without it. The officers in *Mountain Language* seem to be opposing the concept of consensus, which is supposed to be valid in a nation that preaches to others about rules and fights under the name of human rights. The play is thus representing, amongst other things, the fact that the supposed democracies are, in fact, guilty of abusing their own citizens using the rule of law, perhaps more covertly but in a despicable manner, and also supporting regimes elsewhere who have no respect for the rule of law whatsoever.

To link this to Pinter’s depiction of what could happen to individuals in the case of dissidence, the officers’ dog bites an elderly woman standing in the line. Despite realising the insincerity of the officers in *Mountain Language*, the young woman reports the biting of the old woman to them, expecting them to do something about it; but instead, the officer and the sergeant abuse her statement, and thus turn the tables against her:⁵²⁷

**Officer:** Who? Who’s been bitten?
**Young Woman:** She had. She has a torn hand. Look. Her hand has been bitten. This is blood.⁵²⁸

And to add to the absurdity of the situation the officer asks about the dog’s name, implying that each dog must give his name before biting people, and that if they do not they will get shot right away:

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⁵²⁷ See Austin, p.16.
⁵²⁸ *Mountain Language*, p.252.
Officer: What was his name? [...] If you tell me one of our dogs bit this woman without giving his name I will have that dog shot.\textsuperscript{529}

In a clever dramatisation of the situation, Pinter might seem to be criticising the United Nations’ odd definition of torture that says that torture is not intrinsically wrong in cases in which it was carried out within the rule of law.\textsuperscript{530} This scene not only shows that it is not the fact that dogs are used to terrify others, but the name of the dog that counts for those officers (with this smart use of detail, Pinter criticises the tolerance of torture), it also dramatises, interestingly, the fact that the identity of the mountain people is so totally erased that the officers are fooling them with such language.

When the sergeant attempts to investigate the matter, the officer, using the same language he uses with the women, shuts the sergeant up, and takes over. This gesture between the officer and the sergeant reflects that those who are in power are not only desperate to prove their dominance over their victims,\textsuperscript{531} but also amongst themselves. They not only feel the need to prove their power over the weak, but also believe that their position is indeed the Other’s, from which they could be dislodged easily according to the State’s desire. In other words, they themselves are not sure of their identities and/or positions, which can be easily flipped, reflecting their uncertainty.

Michel Foucault’s thesis on the subject of the individual both as an effect and vehicle of power applies perfectly to the first part of the play. According to Foucault, subjects contribute to the continuity of power by being its effect and its vehicle of articulation:

\begin{quote}
The individual is an effect of power, and at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which it is that effect, it is the \end{quote}

\textsuperscript{529}\textit{Mountain Language}, p.254.

\textsuperscript{530}Mary Luckhurst (ed.), ‘Torture in the Plays of Harold Pinter.’ In \textit{A Companion to British and Irish Drama 1880-2005}. (Oxford, Blackwell, 2006), p.258. According to the United Nations Convention against Torture: ‘For the purposes of this Convention, torture means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions.’ The last phrase is the most controversial one as it implies that certain sanctions are allowed within the limits of International Law which might be interpreted differently by different laws and conventions across the world. For further reading see ‘Conventions against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment’, in which the United Nations articles regarding to torture are all listed. http://www.hrweb.org/legal/cat.html. [Accessed 20 March 2015]

\textsuperscript{531}Silverstein, ‘One for the Road’, p.429.
element of its articulation. The individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle.532

The scene reflects the fact that much of the power of Pinter’s work stems from his ability to dramatise the tension between the subject’s position as an effect of power and the subject’s ability to manipulate that power as the vehicle of its articulation. The officers are officially sanctioned defenders of a particular country, with its values and way of life. The fact that those same officers who are wearing their uniforms (unlike Goldberg and McCann who were working for an unknown organisation) are torturing the women who are waiting for their imprisoned men, implies Pinter’s point of an ideology being practiced within the social system. Pinter evokes a massive trauma in the play; the rule of the jungle and the rule of law are shown to be similar in their function. Therefore, the meaning of ‘truth’ and ‘justice’ in any moral and ethical sense always remains fluid – because every individual identifies with a different ideology according to their beliefs. Those who do not identify with any position will be cast out, as they use their logic to distance themselves from involvement with specific groups or beliefs. This is exactly what Pinter is highlighting through almost all of his works and speeches: the fluidity of the concept of truth and the individual’s lack of tools to discern it, and hence the possibility of moulding people’s identities and deciding their destinies. This is exactly why Pinter urges us to question things or, as Gauthier put it, ‘how to instill doubt’.533

The officers in Mountain Language may thus be seen as not very different from Nicolas’s officers in One for the Road, except that we do not see Nicolas’s officers graphically as in Mountain Language. Masking the dirty acts of the officers/soldiers with a veneer of politeness does not undermine their role as tools for effecting the same power that engulfed them. As God, Nicolas tries to justify the brutal acts of his soldiers with a fake regret and politeness that Austin calls an ‘execrative speech act’ of verbal performance of power:534

533 Gauthier, p.11.
534 Austin, p.151.
Nicolas: I hear you have a lovely house. Lots of books. Someone told me some of my boys kicked around a bit. Pissed on the rugs, that sort of thing.\textsuperscript{535}

Nicolas’s regretful statement that follows, further reflects his void, empty self:

Nicolas: I wish they didn’t do that. I do really. But you know what’s like – they have such responsibilities.\textsuperscript{536}

Nicolas’s violence turns from intimidation to politeness or vice versa, yet he never lets the atmosphere of interrogation stray far from the festive facade. His offers of drink, for his victims to imbibe the fuel for his own inebriated actions, acts as a performance and/or celebration of torture. Thus torture turns into a sacred rite, or sacrament, in which people take or are given a surrogate wine, standing for Christ’s blood. The rite of sacrament is meant to grant the receiver the grace of Christ. Thus, Nicolas’s offers of drinks place an emphasis on his own drinking nature, which is contrary to the formality of the institution he runs, and serves to deepen his brutality, because their drinking of his whisky is actually meant to disgrace his victims and make them obedient to the State in which he stands as God.

To follow Nicolas’s hatred of intellectuals or anybody who thinks, Pinter gives us a dark picture of their treatment as well as the deficiency and absurdity of the systems by which they are debased and humiliated. The young woman in \textit{Mountain Language} keeps trying to enter via language the hegemonic institute of patriarchy – even despite being shut up several times. She attempts to fix what she has already brought upon herself by reporting the dog’s bite, and attempts to fulfil her purpose of seeing her husband. Linguistically speaking, the young woman has realised what Austin calls the misexeceution of her act, a term he defines as an act that is vitiated by a flaw or hitch in the conduct of the ceremony.\textsuperscript{537} She, therefore, announces her own name and asserts her right, unlike other submissive women, an act which also misfires as she puts herself under the spotlight, again, as someone operating on a different level of thinking. Thinking differently, or acting against the wishes of the State, is the very charge for which the husbands of those women are held:

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{535} \textit{One for the Road}, p.228.  
\textsuperscript{536} \textit{Ibid.}  
\textsuperscript{537} Austin, p.17.
**Young Woman**: My name is Sara Johnson. I have come to see my husband. It is my right. Where is he?  

After checking her papers, which reveals the absurdity of a system committed to ‘bureaucratic correctness’ rather than protecting its citizens, the officers discover that she does not come from the mountains; therefore, they conclude that she belongs to a higher class of society, or what they term the ‘fucking intellectual’. Relating this connection to Julia Kristeva’s observation that being an intellectual is a kind of dissidence in itself allows us to observe the fact that by the end of the first part of *Mountain Language*, it has become clear that there is a complex relationship between the various kinds of dissidents that Pinter is addressing. Kristeva divides dissidents into three types: first, the rebel who attacks political power; second, the psychoanalyst who, according to her, ‘transforms the dialectic of law and desire into a contest between death and discourse’; and third, the writer who experiments with the limits of identity: ‘producing texts where the law does not exist outside language’.  

It is Kristeva’s last sentence that proves most illuminating in this part of the play, as the officers, by means of language, include people and exclude them from their system. The scene ends with intellectuals being described by the sergeant as ‘fucking intellectuals’, that is meant for further degradation.

The best way of dealing with those intellectuals is demonstrated by Nicolas in *One for the Road*, who makes sure that they do not beget any similar posterity, so as not to destabilise the intact systems based on religious values and State policies. Pinter has depicted this in part two of *One for the Road*, in which Nicolas talks to Victor’s son Nicky. We see Nicolas standing with a small boy. Nicolas is asking simple questions that any child could immediately grasp. The kind of questions that Nicolas asks little Nicky, Victor’s son, reflects the division of language between the State and the citizen. This  

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538 *Mountain Language*, p.257.  
540 *Mountain Language*, p.257.  
542 *Mountain Language*, p.257.
division, according to Barthes, results from destruction of the continuity on which communication depends.⁵⁴³

The similarity of Nicolas and Nicky’s names is followed by a tense pause, to register a moment of realisation for the audience:

Nicolas: What is your name?
Nicky: Nicky.
Nicolas: Really? How odd.⁵⁴⁴

Pause.

This pause, and the possibility of having a new Nicolas in the image of little Nicky, might drive us to think of the power positions, and how fragile Nicolas’s assertions of absolute power could be. This similarity may also make us think of what could happen if little Nicky occupied a position of power, like the one occupied by Nicolas now.

Nicky’s bright, blossoming character is reflected in his love for aeroplanes. It might stand for freedom, and an agility that plays on Nicolas’s nerves, who feels annoyed by Nicky’s spitting at his soldiers. Therefore, he plays his favourite word-game by asking a question that cuts the continuity of dialogue, as emphasised by Barthes:

Nicolas: Do you like your mummy and daddy?⁵⁴⁵

The agility and speed with which Nicky answers Nicolas’s questions suddenly attenuates in the face of this question; however, he confirms. Nicolas’s crooked language insinuates that Nicky, being a child of a dissident, should never be granted what he likes. This insinuation is further confirmed by Nicolas’s last question about Nicky’s desire to become a soldier, which carries Pinter’s message implied in the unspoken words, yet prompted by the context:

Nicky: I didn’t like your soldiers
Nicolas: They didn’t like you either, my darling.⁵⁴⁶

Nicolas’s last line says it all, and Nicky is finished. This division of language is what Barthes rates as ‘the harshest manifestation of society’s fragmentation’, ⁵⁴⁷ and I would extend the phrase to mean fragmentation for the sake of reshaping it to comply with the mainstream by giving it a new identity that conforms to the State’s norms.

⁵⁴⁴ One for the Road, p.234.
⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., p.235.
⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., p.237.
⁵⁴⁷ Moriarty, p.42.
What happens to Nicky, although not shown on stage, is given more graphic depiction in *Mountain Language*, as if Pinter is predicting what could happen to the dissidents’ children or the dissidents themselves in case they insist on their opposition. When the old woman’s son in part two of *Mountain Language* attempts to defend his mother’s language, ascribing her non-response to the guard’s orders to stop speaking her rural language to her old age, he gives us a clear image of the workings of power. However, the guard is too inconsiderate to accept these things:

**Prisoner:** She’s old. She does not understand.

**Guard:** Whose fault is that?

*He laughs*

The guard, fearing the redrawing of the lines between him as a torturer, and the prisoner as a torture victim, tries to act as an outsider by asking about the wrongdoer in this situation. Luce Irigaray believes that though one class can impose its language on another, such a language is too fragile to continue, because language itself is a ‘superstructure’ that is in continuous evolution:

Language is defined as a superstructure, and is produced by a class. One class can then impose its language on another, and a language can disappear when its corresponding class disappears. This is why there are ‘revolutionary leaps’ in linguistic evolution, languages being subject to rapid mutations, the consequences of social and economic revolutions.

Irigaray echoes Pinter’s analysis of the structures of language, which are deliberately twisted in order not to match the structures of reality, by which she means ‘what actually happens’. Pinter, in a speech that implies resistance, wonders whether we are

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548. Nevertheless, the metaphor here can be in the intensity of violence that speaks its own language. Pinter’s strategies reveal a strong link to the classical Greek drama, in which violence, barbarity, atrocity and horror usually take place off stage, and all we are confronted with is a linguistic construction of abjection, and a metaphorical unpacking of events too horrific to be seen on stage and therefore extremely powerful in imagined and philosophical terms. Pinter, therefore, is a ‘kindred spirit’ to the Greek tragedians despite the difference of time and referentiality of language. See Francis Gillen’s ‘Kindred Spirits: Harold Pinter and Greek Tragedy,’ *The Pinter Review* (Tampa: The University of Tampa Press), 2008.


obliged to accept such language that distorts reality because we fear it. He asks: ‘Are we encouraged to be cowards?’\textsuperscript{551}

Interestingly enough, though Barthes believes that language should not be directed to a particular public, he agrees with the other aspect of Irigaray’s statement that language contributes to the maintenance of social hierarchy.\textsuperscript{552} Therefore, as long as the officers realise that fact, they are in continuous danger of losing the hierarchy imposed by their language. The laugh of the guard that follows his question, and the insult he directs to the prisoner imply both his fragile position and the action that is going to follow. The guard’s insult is, then, a kind of formula that suits the action. He goes further:

\textbf{Guard}: And I will tell you another thing. I’ve got a wife and three kids. And you’re all a pile of shit. \\
\textit{Silence.} \\
\textbf{Prisoner}: I’ve got a wife and three kids.\textsuperscript{553}

The guard’s words, intended as the final silencing of his victim, misfire.\textsuperscript{554} He receives an unexpected answer from the prisoner, who implies a kind of shared identity by repeating his words. The fragility, desperation, and instability of the position of power is reflected in this scene:

\textbf{Guard}: You’ve what? \\
\textit{Silence.} \\
You’ve got what?

\textit{He picks up the telephone and dials one digit.}\textsuperscript{555}

The prisoner’s sentence raises the possibility of a change in power positions, thus provoking the guard’s fear of losing his position of authority. The exchange constitutes a moment in which the Other places himself within the individual’s subjectivity,

\textsuperscript{551} Various Voices, p.199.  
\textsuperscript{552} Moriarty, p.42.  
\textsuperscript{553} Mountain Language, p.260.  
\textsuperscript{554} Austin, p.16.  
\textsuperscript{555} Mountain Language, p.260.
creating an indeterminacy in which neither he nor we can assert our own identity. Silverstein explains that:

The violent reprisal with which the guard responds to the prisoner’s assertion of shared identity [...] suggests how desperately those who occupy positions of power need to differentiate themselves from the powerless.\textsuperscript{556}

As I have suggested in relation to One for the Road, we here have a situation in which individual exemplars of those in power have lost themselves in the identity of the Other (the State), and are revealed to be nothing more than power’s mouthpieces. The instability they feel is triggered every time they see themselves in the eyes of their victims, and that is what happens when the prisoner utters or implies the same meaning as that of the guard. This circle of violence is a vicious one, and it is one in which the victim and the oppressor are equally included. Everyone within the system is a more or less privileged contributor to the reproduction and maintenance of power; consequently, the problem of the mountain people is not theirs alone, but a problem of the majority as well. It is here that Pinter wants us, as an audience, to develop an awareness of the suffering of a minority. It might seem to afflict them alone; but it has, in fact, swept the majority into the stream of violence:

In recent years we have started to realise that so-called minority problems are in fact majority problems, that the Negro problem is the problem of the white that the Jewish problem is the problem of the non-Jew, and so on.\textsuperscript{557}

The guard, in turn, transmits those fears to his institution, so that it can protect itself before it loses the thin line of defence that is standing between inequality (and thus the maintenance of a hegemonic power structure) and the sort of equality that is evoked through simple acts such as considering all people simply as fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters. Both common humanity and tyrannical hegemony are accordingly created by means of their discourse. Brett G. Stoudt further explains the point:

\textsuperscript{556}Silverstein, ‘One for the Road’, p.430.
Discourse is not simply the product of finished thoughts or descriptions of objective reality through language. Instead, language and discourse are political and emergent; they are the ways by which we co-construct meaning and knowledge. On the other hand, they have the ability to limit and oppress [...] they have the ability to transcend boundaries and resist inequality.\textsuperscript{558}

Moreover, the guard’s intimidation is performative,\textsuperscript{559} for he not only violates the prisoner verbally, he also uses physical violence. It is such actions that Austin calls ‘a transition from the use of words as what we may call markers, to performatives’.\textsuperscript{560} Austin observes that part of performing our words is matching the action to the words. He elaborates on examples that provide formulas for such kinds of action: for example, when we say ‘I quote’, it is usually followed by the act of quoting something. The formula then is ‘I define \(x\) as \(y\).’ In doing this, we have transmitted the utterance from a speakable one to a performative utterance so that the action that follows suits the word.\textsuperscript{561} The solider, likewise, follows his verbal act of violence with a physical one, by dialling higher authorities.

After dialling the one digit number by the guard, the elderly woman keeps communicating with her son through voiceover:

Voices over:
- **Elderly Woman’s Voice:** The baby is waiting for you.
- **Prisoner’s Voice:** Your hand has been bitten.
- **Elderly Woman’s Voice:** They are all waiting for you.
- **Prisoner’s Voice:** They have bitten my mother’s hand.\textsuperscript{562}

By using the technique of voiceover, Pinter is stripping the mountain people of their inalienable human possessions, not only their linguistic identities, but also even their


\textsuperscript{559} Stoudt defined four categories of bullying from the most frequent to the least frequent behaviours: ridiculing, intimidation, hazing, and fighting.

\textsuperscript{560} Austin, p.65.

\textsuperscript{561} Austin also adds: ‘There is a transition from the word END at the end of a novel to the expression ‘message ends’ at the end of a signal message, to the expression ‘with that I conclude my case’, as said by Counsel in a law court. There, we may say, are cases of marking the action by the word.’ p.65.

\textsuperscript{562} Mountain Language, p.261.
voices (both literally and metaphorically), thus ultimately their identities. Ann C. Hall explains:

By using this technique, Pinter apparently resolves the paradox created by recent political interests and his prior attitudes towards language. By broadcasting his characters’ speeches over their physical presence, Pinter shows us that the torturers disembodied their victims in more than physical ways. We see that the victims’ voices are not in their possession; they are above and beyond them.  

While the mother and the son are engaged in their disjointed conversation, the guard’s ‘I thought I should report’ materialises as the appearance of real violence when the sergeant breaks in, asking about the reported joker:

**Sergeant:** What joker?  

Part two of the play ends with a blackout. The blackout scene invites us to imagine the culmination of the abject construction of language in an enactment of physical violence on the part of the sergeant against the prisoner. This stagecraft takes us back to Classical Greek Drama, in which violence was not shown on stage, so that the audience could and would not detach themselves from the scenes of horror and physical pain, because they had to imagine for themselves the violence enacted upon the victim—in Pinter’s modern case on the prisoner by the sergeant. In such moments, audience members are rendered complicit because they must themselves create these barbaric acts. Pinter accordingly achieves a much more powerful effect on the audience through his use of a blackout, because his audience have been deprived of a spectacle and they must imagine and create the acts of violence that follow. Such a technique gives the lie to the fact that most people persuade themselves that they are not complicit with the acts of violence that their own states inflict on those it deems must be punished, crushed or destroyed. In imagining the scene that follows, audience members reveal to themselves that in reality they have intimate knowledge of these  

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564 *Mountain Language*, p.260.  
565 Ibid., p.261.
barbarities. Pinter thereby raises their awareness of the supposedly ‘hidden’ violence inherent in their own lives in both social and political terms.

Later on, in part four of *Mountain Language*, we can see that the prisoner has blood on his face, a fulfilment of the sergeant’s ‘what joker!’.

The blood on the prisoner’s face and his trembling testifies to the torture that has taken place offstage. While the prisoner is sitting and trembling in front of his silent mother, the guard announces arbitrarily:

**Guard:** Oh, I forgot to tell you. [...] They’ve changed the rules. She can speak in her own language. Until further notice.

The prisoner, not believing what he hears, attempts to confirm:

**Prisoner:** She can speak?

When he tells his mother that she is now permitted to talk, the mother remains silent:

**Prisoner:** Mother, I’m speaking to you. [...] You can speak to me in our own language.

*She is still.*

The arbitrary, nonchalant tone the guard speaks with reflects that the power apparatus has arbitrary power over every aspect of the individual’s life. The yoke of violent rule, the unjust military decrees, and the oppression that mountain people have been suffering from for all that time, can be changed with a click of a finger. The linguistic oppression the officers have been imposing on the people suddenly turns out to be a hollow and void one, save for its cruelty. It is possible to change at any moment, and it could continue as long as the soldiers and officers want to keep the vicious circle of violence continuing. It is worth mentioning, though, that the formal tone in which the officer at the beginning of the play announced that the mountain

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566 *Mountain Language*, p.261.
567 Ibid., p.265.
568 Ibid.
569 Ibid., p.266.
language is dead, and the nonchalant attitude with which this officer is now announcing the change of rules are good examples, dramatised here by Pinter, to show us the viciousness of language manipulation by oppressive regimes. Nevertheless, the hollowness and emptiness of language is another example of the possibility of change, which Pinter here shows cleverly to highlight this possibility as well as the brutality of the regime. The guard shows this volatile changeability of the system of power, with his statement that the rules have been changed until further notice:

**Guard**: Tell her she can speak in her own language. New rules. Until further notice.  

The prisoner keeps imploring his mother to speak, but in vain. The mother keeps frozen and silent like a statue. The prisoner, then, suddenly, falls off his chair and is on his knees, gasping and shaking violently. When the sergeant comes in, he does not rush in to help the shaking prisoner, but rather, praises the system's efforts to provide a 'helping hand'.

**Sergeant** (*To Guard*): Look at this. You go out of your way to give them a helping hand and they fuck it up.  

The use of the word 'fuck' here not only reflects the degradation and the dehumanisation of the mountain people, but also implies that they are being offered an option to either side with the system, or stand against it and become victims. Moreover, the silence of the elderly woman disturbs the son, who cannot believe that after being granted that right to speak, the mother keeps silent; this is similar in a way to the silence of Victor. Nonetheless, whilst Victor’s silence could be a sign of complete fragmentation and destruction, the elderly woman’s silence could be a sign of resistance: since the language has now been officially recognised, it does not belong to the mountain people anymore. Though her silence remains shrouded in ambiguity, the son’s final collapse renders such possible resistance futile in any event. The power faced by the mountain people is thus not a simple prohibition over the use of their

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570 Mountain Language, p.266.
571 Ibid., p.267.
language, but rather a repressive system – even the ‘intellectual’ Sara Johnson’s resistance is too weak in front of such a power apparatus. By showing such permutations of the impact of power on different individuals, Pinter is showing us the grim reality or, as Gauthier says, ‘Harold Pinter shows us the Real Man, and not Romantic Man’. Nonetheless that does not mean that there is no flicker of hope to change unjust conditions, because the systems that create such conditions are fragile enough to change at any moment, as Mountain Language dramatises.

The dehumanisation of the individual, however, is also depicted in One for the Road, when after the horrible torture Victor asks for death. It is the death that Nicolas adores:

Victor: Kill me.  

Yet, Nicolas is not satisfied with easy death like this. He likes to prolong the torture of his victims, seeking more pleasure. Victor’s pleading for death is an acknowledgement of the State’s power over him. However, his beseeching has been ‘botched’ as Nicolas does not fulfil his wish. He reacts in a self-revealing statement of despair, by belittling Victor’s wish:

Nicolas: You’re probably just hungry. Or thirsty. Let me tell you something. I hate despair. I find it intolerable.

Nicolas’ description of how to get rid of anything that stands in his way reflects the brutality with which he deals with things that cross his path, and sheds light on some of the torturing methods:

Nicolas: Chop the balls off and despair goes out of the window. You’re left with a happy man. Or a happy woman.

Even though Victor showed absolute surrender, and proved that he is really ‘on a losing wicket’, Nicolas is not satisfied with the torture he has inflicted on him. He

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572 Gauthier, p.10.
573 One for the Road, p.232.
574 Austin calls this verbal formula ‘misfire’, p.16.
575 One for the Road, p.233.
576 Ibid., In light of both Austin and Fish theories, Nicolas’ utterance is void because it is not what the masses want; see Fish, p.984. Also, Pinter is referring to the torture methods he has been told of by the intellectual prisoners while in a visit to Turkey.
decides to move a step further by killing Victor’s son and keeping his wife. Despite his brutality, Nicolas is like a cricket player; cool, precise, and in such a context, outrageous.578 According to Michael Billington, Pinter’s passion for cricket and his belief in ‘the hidden violence of cricket’579 offers a revelation of personality. Pinter also believes that cricket is ‘a wonderfully civilised act of warfare’.580 Nevertheless, Nicolas’s coolness, and precision highlight his uncivilised character, and refer to the huge gap between the reality of his victims and his masked language.

The irony here is that whilst cricket is a game of rules that is pioneered by a nation famous for fair play, Nicolas’s game is quite the opposite. Pinter’s linkage of cricket and violence, is obvious: how can a nation of rules, and fair play on the greens of England, do the opposite in other parts of the world? The farce of civility, decorum, and fair play are no more than void words here to crush the identity of the powerless.

II

In this section, I will shed light on Pinter’s plays using the linguistic philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein, in which he demonstrates that the only way a language can have meaning is to be part of a meaningful social interaction. Wittgenstein argued that it is practice that gives words their meaning, and by practice he is referring to the fact that it is use and intention that determine the meaning of a language.581 However, this might raise the question of silence and pauses profusely used in Pinter plays and their relation to the use of language to which Wittgenstein refers. The use of language Wittgenstein is dealing with does not mean an actual use of the words meant to be said; rather it refers to scenes between two characters who are trying to transmit their feelings without saying the actual words meant to be said. This is a meaningful use of language, and this is what Wittgenstein called ‘the praxis of language’ i.e. the

577 One for the Road, p.233.
579 Ibid.
meaningful use of language in a context that marks or transmits the intended meaning.\textsuperscript{582}

This performative aspect of language was defined by Wittgenstein as a language game in which both language and its actions are woven together. In other words, language does not need to be clearly defined in direct connection to reality to be meaningful.\textsuperscript{583} Thus, for Wittgenstein, language remains a moving mosaic that does not have a coherent shape; nonetheless, there remains a linguistic activity in which inhumanity, oppression, and killing, as well as friendship and humanity, stand next to each other.\textsuperscript{584}

When, for example, Nicolas in \textit{One for the Road} testifies to his brutal character by making a malicious reference to Victor’s son:

\textbf{Nicolas:} Is your son all right?\textsuperscript{585}

Linguistically speaking, Nicolas’s speech is a false one. His uttered words are simply inappropriate and not serious; they are a mere outward sign.\textsuperscript{586} Although he asks whether Victor’s son is all right, he knows very well that he is not, yet he pretends that he is concerned. Nicolas, therefore, flips the truthful positions in two ways: (i) he asks Victor about his son, verbally suggesting that he lacks knowledge, when in actual fact Nicolas has the knowledge and Victor does not; and (ii) he sends a wrong message to Victor by demonstrating that he cares for his son, whereas in fact he has killed him. Hence it is the performative part of this speech that Wittgenstein would emphasise. Nicolas’s concern is a false one because, according to Wittgenstein, one cannot talk about pain (concern in Nicolas’s case). Wittgenstein believes that ‘Nothing can be said about the sensation itself – [since] – there is a difference between pain-behaviour accompanied by pain and pain behaviour without any pain.’\textsuperscript{587} It is just like saying that I believe I’m six feet tall, and I’m in pain, because while being six feet tall might prove wrong after measurement, being in pain does entail that somebody is in pain. In other

\textsuperscript{582} See \textit{Betrayal} Scene Three, pp.41-42. The conflict of the characters does not depend on something that has actually been said, but on something that has not been said, yet is meant.
\textsuperscript{583} Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.
\textsuperscript{585} \textit{One for the Road}, p. 228.
\textsuperscript{586} Austin described such utterances as an ‘outward’, and cited a classic example of this idea found in the \textit{Hippolytus}, where Hippolytus says: ‘My tongue swore to, but my heart [...] did not.’ p. 9.
words, Wittgenstein rejected the idea that someone can make a mistake about a private sensation in the same way he could about a public event. D.A. Begelman clarifies:

Wittgenstein held that while believing one is six feet tall did not entail being this height (as when the belief is shown to be false after taking a measurement), believing one is in pain does entail his being in pain.\footnote{D.A. Begelman, ‘Wittgenstein’,\textit{ Cambridge Center for Behavioral Studies (CCBS)}, 4(1976) 201-207, p.205.}

C.W.K. Mundle clarifies further by saying that Wittgenstein argues: ‘What can be shown cannot be said’.\footnote{Mundle, p.175.} According to Wittgenstein’s \textit{Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus} (1921): ‘Language disguises thought. So much so, that from the outward form of the clothing it is impossible to infer the form of the thought beneath it’.\footnote{Ibid., p.168.}

Therefore, in connection to Nicolas’s fake sympathetic attitude towards Victor’s son, his words disguise a completely different thought beneath. Moreover, Nicolas is torturing Victor by creating a gruesome image of soldiers abusing his son because of his misbehaviour. Wittgenstein calls this a pictorial image, where a picture can give us several images, each of which might or might not be intended by the speaker.\footnote{Ibid., p.160.}

To provoke Victor to speak, Nicolas further intensifies the image of death in Victor’s mind by directly asking him if he likes death:

\begin{quote}
\textbf{Nicolas}: Do you love death? Not necessarily your own. Others'.

[...] do you love the death of others as much as I do?\footnote{One for the Road, p.229.}
\end{quote}

Nicolas gets pleasure from death; for him, death surpasses his sexual desires.

When Victor is detached from Nicolas’s conversation, he assumes Victor is enjoying ‘the cut and thrust of debate’.\footnote{Ibid., p.229.} The image of Nicolas as a jailor, and Victor as a prisoner recalls another aspect of Wittgenstein’s theory. According to Wittgenstein, the language of the free man and that of the prisoner are not the same. Prisoners are not permitted to use the same verbal tools because they are debarred from occupying
the same place in the spoken language.\textsuperscript{594} This could be an added reason why Victor cannot counter Nicolas’s trespasses in addition to his being inherently a law-abiding individual. Pinter raised the issue of a free citizen and technically an imprisoned one (by ‘imprisoned’ I do not mean real imprisonment, but the situation of a controlled individual) when he was giving a speech titled ‘Murder is the most brutal form of censorship’ following the execution of fellow playwright Saro-Wiwa in Nigeria on tenth of November 1995. He commented:

When the Czech police use the truncheons in Wenceslas Square, we describe that as an act of brutal repression consistent with the practices of a totalitarian regime. When the English police charge students on horseback on Westminster Bridge we describe this as a maintenance of law and order and are advised that it is a containment of essentially subversive forces.\textsuperscript{595}

Similarly, Nicolas is using the toxin of words to fulfil his goal. He deviates from the investigation to intensify the torture by praising the beauty of Victor’s wife, Gila. Nicolas’s conversation with Victor’s wife implies he has seen her, and enjoyed her beauty. Such kind of conversations Austin terms as the ‘performative’, which implies an action.\textsuperscript{596} In other words, Nicolas’ praise of Gila’s beauty indicates that his words imply an action, and therefore, Pinter is showing us how our positions colour our discourse on actions:

\begin{quote}
Nicolas: You’re probably wondering where your wife is. She’s in another room.
He drinks.
Good-looking woman.\textsuperscript{597}
\end{quote}

Talking about prisoners leads me to refer to the debasing use of language in \textit{Mountain Language} by a means parallel to that of Nicolas for further humiliation of the victims. The language game in the play starts with the dog’s names, the scene I commented on

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{594} Wittgenstein explains that ‘Free men are free to play many language-games; they may and do use verbal tools for intellectually exciting tasks, like explaining, theorizing, problem-solving. The prisoners are not permitted to use verbal tools for some of the most important purposes for which such tools were designed. They are permitted only one monotonous game. They are even debarred from sharpening or redesigning a free man’s tools, for they ‘may in no way interfere with the actual use of language.’ \textit{Philosophical Investigations}, p.163.

\textsuperscript{595} Pinter related a relevant story: ‘In January 1986 a young woman protesting against nuclear weapons [they still do that, you know] had her finger torn off by a security guard as he yanked her from the barbed wire. This didn’t happen in Czechoslovakia. It happened here [UK].’ See Harold Pinter’s official website: \url{http://www.haroldpinter.org/politics/politics_freedom.shtml}. [Accessed 20 March 2015]

\textsuperscript{596} Austin, p.6.

\textsuperscript{597} \textit{One for the Road}, p.224.
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as a reflection of the absurdity of the situation and the deliberate humiliation of the
 torturers. However, the types of language game that Wittgenstein refers to in his
 Philosophical Investigations (1953) can be seen in the officer’s conversation on the
 name of the dog that bit the old woman. According to Wittgenstein,

The central component of language games is that they are uses
 of language, and language is used in multifarious ways. For
 example, in one language-game, a word might be used to stand
 for [...] an object, but in another the same word might be used
 for giving orders, or for asking questions, and so on.598

Wittgenstein does not limit the application of his concept of language games to word-
 meaning. He also applies it to sentence-meaning. It is this meaning that the officer
 here is playing with, to further humiliate the women. Wittgenstein further claims that
 words are not defined by the reference to the object they designate, but by how they
 are used. He leads us through an example that might look like a simple task in the
 beginning. He asks us to give a definition of the word ‘game’,599 then he leads us
 through every possible problem that might arise from the definition of the word. Any
 definition that associates the word with the feeling of amusement might leave us
 unsatisfied and with a feeling of being inaccurate, since the feelings experienced by a
 world class chess player are very different from the feelings of a circle of children
 playing Duck, Duck, Goose.600 Wittgenstein believes that this emerges from what he
 terms ‘form of life’,601 roughly the culture and society in which the words
 are used. This links to Pinter’s depiction of language as a form of violence that takes its source
 from our daily life. He said: ‘We are brought up every day of our lives in this world of
 violence.’602 Therefore, our words will definitely be tainted by torture and violence,
 especially under oppressive regimes and governments, who control not only our daily
 lives, but our whole culture: ‘The health of our literary culture is, in fact, dependent on
 the health of our common culture’.603 Thus, what we need is what Drew Milne labelled

599 Ibid., p.66.
600 A traditional game usually introduced to children in pre-school or kindergarten. The object of this game is to walk
 in a circle tapping on each child’s head, until a new child is chosen to be the new picker.
601 Philosophical Investigations, p.23.
602 Luckhurst, p.359.
as: ‘linguistic hygiene’. Nevertheless, this linguistic hygiene will not be achieved if we live in countries based on what Christopher Robinson calls the ‘politics of order’ to justify their existence as he defines it:

A politics of order that seeks to crush intellectual and artistic liberty has subverted thoroughly its own political reason for being. Its new reason for being is necessitated by its own tactics that efface trust, and can be described in terms of bureaucratic rigidity, militaristic violence, and self-perpetuation ensured by the muted and fearful passivity of its ‘citizens’.

To link back to Wittgenstein’s pictorial theory and to echo the oppression of intellectuals, the third part of Mountain Language depicts an idyllic scene between the young woman and her imprisoned husband. All the young woman can see is a hooded figure in the dark:

**Man’s Voice:** I watch you asleep. And then your eyes open. You look up at me above you and smile.

**Young Woman’s Voice:** You smile. When my eyes open I see you above me and smile.

**Man’s Voice:** We are out on a lake.

**Young Woman’s Voice:** It is spring.

**Man’s Voice:** I hold you. I warm you.

The spell of this loving exchange of thoughts is broken by the officer’s abrupt interference and the young woman’s shrieking of her husband’s name ‘Charley!’ The significance of inserting this scene amidst all this tension is Pinter’s way of opening the audience’s eyes to what may happen in the future if justice is brought, or what might have happened in the past, before the arrival of tyranny. The couple, in romancing each other, are expressing their humble desires of leading a decent life, in which they can love each other peacefully. These dialogues could be desires or could be memories of a beautiful, simple past that has been tarnished by gruesome, tyrannical powers. However, whether these are memories or desires, Pinter has inserted this section at the peak of the play’s tension to provide us with a leap of dramaturgical imagination in

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605 Robinson, p.166.
606 Mountain Language, p.263.
607 Ibid.
which we can imagine the future of our children and/or realise the atrocity of a totalitarian regime. They could also be desires that can be fulfilled by the future generation away from wars, torture, and pain if justice is achieved.

Comparing the tableau of the elderly lady and her son with this one, we can easily trace the non-revolutionary sentiment in the dialogues. We might imagine that such a prisoner would shout at the officers, asking them why they have imprisoned him, or treated him in a humiliating way. The woman could also echo her husband’s concerns, instead of living in the world of fantasies. The characters’ submissive attitude to their oppressors is designed by Pinter to highlight the deconstruction of their identities under the brutal laws of their oppressors. Ann C. Hall supports this view, as she believes that it is Pinter’s method to highlight the political oppression from which these people are suffering despite the fact that they are law-abiding people:

The speeches themselves, moreover, are not filled with revolutionary fervour, nor do the victims even express a coherent understanding of their imprisoned state. Instead, their speeches contain memories and commonplace desires which highlight the pain of political oppression in personal terms.608

Besides, such a leap of dramaturgical imagination is Pinter’s way not only of highlighting oppression in all its forms and shapes, but also of giving us a moment of truth. By truth, I mean a moment in which the spectators are invited to imagine what a peaceful life would look like without atrocities, horrors, and injustices. ‘Truth’ is a very thorny term that is never uncontentious, but it might serve here to reflect the horror and absurdity of the situation in which such simple things are desired by the victims, and that they can only gain these peaceful moments of purity in their fantasies and unconsciousness, but never in reality.

The couple’s exchanges not only suggest such implications, but also serve as good examples of Wittgenstein’s pictorial theory of language.609 Wittgenstein observes that

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608 Hall, p.20.
609 The correspondence theory of truth states that the truth or falsity of a statement is only determined by how it relates or corresponds to the world and whether it accurately describes that world. Edna Daitz ‘The Picture Theory of Meaning.’ Oxford University Press, 62(246) p.184.
some expressions say nothing at all, yet they give us pictures. Such a picture ‘seems to
determine what we have to do, what to look for, and how – but it does not do so, just
because we do not know how it is to be applied’.\footnote{V.C. Aldrich, ‘Pictorial Meaning, Picture-Thinking, And Wittgenstein’s Theory of Aspects’, Oxford University Press on behalf of Mind Association, 67 (1958) 70-79, p.70.} In another example, Wittgenstein
cites a picture of an old man walking up a steep path leaning on a stick, then asks why
we would imagine him with a stick rather than sliding downhill in that position, though
the picture could be applied to both meanings. Wittgenstein’s point, which I want to
highlight here, is that sometimes we tend to attach false meanings to certain pictures
we discover that originate in our inclination to pictorial thought about certain
fundamental matters.\footnote{Jeffrey Thomas Price, Language and Being in Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations (Mouton, The Hague, 1973), p.33.} Christopher Robinson clarifies Wittgenstein’s account of
language: ‘[i]t contains a verticality that ties the fact of language to the usually invisible
and unquestioned forms human life takes. These forms entail both commonalities and
differences’.\footnote{Robinson, p.168.} Supporting my assumption that the couple’s situation is a reflection of
truth in both meaning (the truth of the status quo, and the truth that the couple could
live such an idyllic situation in reality), Wittgenstein’s theory emphasises that truth is
embedded in the relation between an assumption and an actual situation, and this is
why he had a reputation for having an attitude of letting things take their own course,
or what Robert J. Fogelin describes as ‘a laissez-faire attitude toward inconsistencies,
paradoxes, contradictions, and the like’.\footnote{Robert J. Fogelin, Taking Wittgenstein at His Words (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2009), p.139.} Wittgenstein’s attitude is similar to that of
Pinter, who has always emphasised the uncertainties in his plays.\footnote{Gauthier believes that Pinter plays are ’What if formulas’, p.14.} Therefore, this
idyllic scene of the woman and her husband links both to Wittgenstein’s pictorial
theory and Pinter’s depiction of the uncertainties in our world. In other words, the fact
that this scene can be interpreted on so many levels highlights Pinter’s emphasis on
distrusting the meaning of words, the fluidity of language, and the chances to
manipulate the language to oppress others and crush their identities.

Considering language to be a representational system allows us to consider that with
language we make ourselves pictures of facts. Therefore, we need to reduce our
fascination with the false pictures that we assume already, and change our way of
looking at things in order to get the picture that relates to and reflects the situation as
it is. In other words: by romancing each other despite all kinds of torture being inflicted upon them, the couple have reached a state of material unconsciousness that signifies that they have stopped heeding what they are being ordered to do by their tormentors – thus disempowering the guard’s ability to carry out further torture. The theme of the body, and torture as depicted in the young woman’s encounter with her husband, links back to Pinter’s idea of violence as becoming the culture by which we are fed. The body, besides the mind, has become a screen that registers the history of violence practised on it. In his essay ‘The Ecstasy of Communication’, Jean Baudrillard said that the human body could become ‘a pure screen, a pure absorption and resorption surface of the inflectional network’.

This pictorial scene with its cultural, social, political, and corporeal presentation urges us to take the responsibility that Pinter once referred to: ‘I do think we have an obligation to see through the crap that we are fed’.

Pinter, as Drew Milne suggests, is ‘offering something more like a Wittgensteinian interest in disabusing beliefs in the context-free truth of words’. Wittgenstein has found that there is something to grasp in a picture, but it is inseparable from the circumstance in which that picture is imagined or assumed. In other words, Wittgenstein observes that we are introduced to a mental meaning ruled by the circumstances under which our understanding has been achieved. Wittgenstein measures the precision of the picture by the circumstances surrounding our utterances whilst describing a picture. In relation to the romantic scene in part three of Mountain Language, as the circumstances under which the couple’s idyllic desires were evoked are marked as bad ones, their understanding of their own situation is, therefore, blurred, and consequently not achieved.

Nobody can be familiar with circumstances of this sort and feel good, or even get used to it so as to create nice pictures of the past or future feelings for the benefit of theatrical spectators. Besides showing the submissiveness of the mountain people, Pinter, I believe, is showing such pictorial conversation to highlight the cruelty of the

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617 Drew Milne, p.198.
situation, and the blurred image that the oppression is providing for us. In other words, the pure truth Pinter is dramatising in this scene is not the truth in the proper sense of the word, but the truth as the oppressive system wants us to see it; according to Wittgenstein, words are not only responsible for what is real, but also for what has been laid down as real.618 In connection to Pinter’s continuous calls for the truth which can never be grasped, this scene in its pictorial depiction in light of Wittgenstein’s theory highlights two meanings: (i) that a Pinter play is interpreted differently by different people, an aspect that he highlighted by saying: ‘I hope my plays mean something different to everyone who sees them. They should, because there is never one answer’,619 and (ii), the depiction of truth is so fluid that it can mean different things in different situations, hence Pinter’s desire to provide us with such pictorial images to act the situation and not the words. Based on this fluidity of truth Pinter and Wittgenstein meet, in my opinion, over the aspect of trust in language. Since language is being manipulated by the Powers That Be,620 the whole system of language will be manipulated in tandem to serve the fluidity of truth; thus, there won’t be any presence of trust whatsoever, and when we do not trust the other or any truth in this world, we tend to lose the sense of who we are in the end, hence the erosion of our identities in a world based on lies: ‘For Wittgenstein, the relation of trust to language, like the relation of thought to language, is entwined to the point of identity.’621

This relation of language and trust is paralleled with another important binary of dominions: that is, power and knowledge. To give an example of how biopower as described by Michel Foucault is entwined with the twisting of language, he states: ‘The ancient right to take life or let live was replaced by power to foster life or disallow it to the point of death.’622 This twist of words that operates on both our bodies (as we have seen in the idyllic scene), and our mentalities (as in the case of Nicolas’s paranoiac character) creates a huge gap of trust, a space in which victims of what Robinson calls ‘biopolitical injustice’623 reside as tortured, exiled, and dead.624

618 Quoted in Fish, p.1012.
619 Birch, p.29.
620 Batty, About Pinter, p.141.
621 Robinson, p.170.
623 Robinson, p.171.
624 Robinson also claims that the breaking of trust is not easy to restore. He cites the account of a Holocaust survivor: ‘Every morning when I get up [...] I can read the Auschwitz number on my forearm [...] Every day anew I
III

Being responsible for such perverted acts of torture and humiliation, the psychology of the torturers deserves to be contemplated. In *One for the Road*, Nicolas’s disturbed psychology provides an excellent example. When Nicolas investigates Victor, he uses strange images and means to reflect his possession with power. He is so obsessed with power that he asks Victor if he thinks he is mad because his mom thought so too. The fact that Nicolas’s mother thought he was mad reflects on the oscillation of his character between the semiotic and symbolic that are suggested by Julia Kristeva, as stages of linguistic and psychological developments. Nicolas’ preference for perfection and precision in his relations might have been oscillating between the perfect image of himself in the mirror, and that which the world offered him, as well as his being forced to voice the Other, which made him doubt himself, and behave abnormally – an abnormality that is further emphasised by the use of his fingers as a threatening tool used for blinding victims. This takes us back to Pinter’s early plays such as *The Birthday Party* (1957), in which an image of festivity is somehow infected with violence. Contrastingly, *One for the Road* seems to present an opposite image (i.e. violence corrupted by the menace of festivity); yet the idea of blindness echoes through Pinter’s early plays:

Nicolas: What do you think this is! It’s my finger. And this is my little finger. This is my big finger and this is my little finger. I wave my big finger in front of your eyes.

Blindness is a theme that occurs in various plays for Harold Pinter, as with Rose in *The Room* and Stanley in *The Birthday Party*. Nicolas in this play is threatening Victor by waving his fingers in front of his eyes. Pinter’s explanation for that is not the idea of blindness itself, so much as the verbal violence and torture that are intended to make the victims comply with the standards and values of the totalitarian society represented here by Nicolas. Nicolas’s questions to Victor are completely void of any lose my trust in the world [...] Declarations of human rights, democratic constitutions, the free world and the free press, nothing can lull me into the slumber of security from which I awoke in 1935.’ p.175.


626 *One for the Road*, p.223.

meaning, except as a means of further torture. His questions are meant to intimidate and break his victims: ‘[To] destroy the individual or the questioning voice’. However, Nicolas’s obsession with the power of the eye, or more specifically the gaze, is further stretched by him when questioning his victim about the secret of his obsession:

Nicolas: Why am I so obsessed with Other people’s eyes. The eyes of people who are brought to me here. They’re so vulnerable. The soul shines through them. Nicolas’ obsession with eyes is a reflection of his fear of the victim’s gaze, an idea that can be further explained in Sartrian and Lacanian terms. According to Sartre, the gaze of the Other is a threat of annihilation:

Someone is looking at me! [...] It means that I am suddenly affected in my being and that essential modifications appear in my structure [...]. Beyond any knowledge which I can have, I am this self which another knows. And this self which I am – this I am in a world which the Other has made alien to me.

The idea of being watched, according to Sartre, entails the existence of a watcher whose inquisitional gaze threatens to annihilate somebody’s existence.

Victor’s gaze at Nicolas can, then, manifest itself as a phenomenological, as well as physical presence. Lacan further explains:

In the scopic field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture [...]. What determines me, at the most profound level, is the visible, is the gaze that is outside. It is through the gaze that I enter light and it is from the gaze that I receive its effects.

Nicolas fears the gaze of his victims, as that light, in Lacanian terms, shines through that gaze; it threatens to annihilate Nicolas’s existence. Nicolas, in Lacanian terms, is the master of discourse whilst Victor is the university (knowledge) of discourse. The latter statement, if one considers the way terms are positioned, is simply an indication

628 Visser, p.329. Harold Pinter in a BBC interview with Anna Ford.
629 One for the Road, p.224.
631 Ibid.
of the power relation that is involved. Bert Olivier explains this relationship in simpler terms:

Look at the master’s discourse, for instance: The master signifier (S1) ‘commands’ the knowledge (university) signifier (S2), in the sense that in this use of language (the master’s discourse) knowledge is subservient to, or at the disposal of the master. But underneath the master signifier one sees the signifier for the ‘divided subject’ (S), which means, graphically, that the master represses the ‘truth,’ that is, the knowledge of his finitude and fallibility, which he cannot afford to admit, lest he should lose power.\footnote{Bert Olivier: ‘Lacan on the Discourse of Capitalism: Critical Prospects’, \textit{Journal of the South African Society for Greek Philosophy and Humanities}, 10 (2009), 25-42.}

In other words, Nicolas fears the gaze of his victims, which threatens to annihilate his existence or his identity as a power figure. He adopts an attitude of commanding the society in such a way as to have all knowledge – gaining his pleasure from this position. Nicolas, then, is not only a torturer, but a victim of his own torture, speaking from an extralinguistic site fulfilling the desire of the Other. According to Anthony Wilden:

\begin{quote}
The Other is not a person, but a principle; the locus of the ‘law of desire’ [...] the only place from which it is possible to say ‘I am who I am’. [...]. [The Other] puts us in the position of desiring what the Other desire.\footnote{Anthony Wilden, \textit{System and Structure: Essays in Communication and Exchange} (London: Tavistock, 1972), pp.22-23.}
\end{quote}

This theme of the gaze is deliberately employed by Pinter for two purposes: (i) to remind the torturers and despotist systems everywhere in this world and especially the right-wing democracies of the USA and the UK that the dead that they do not even count will always look back at them (in support of such a line of argument, we may remind ourselves of Pinter’s own quotation of General Tommy Franks, from US Central Command: ‘We do not do body counts’)\footnote{Various Voices, p.247.} or it may be there (ii) to remind us that it is our responsibility as well as Pinter’s to speak up and resist any regime that kills others in our name. In his speech ‘Oh Superman’,\footnote{\textit{A broadcast for Opinion}, Channel 4, May 31, 1990. See Harold Pinter \textit{Varied Voices: Prose, Poetry, Politics 1948-2005} (London, Faber and Faber, 2005), p.200.} Pinter highlighted the twisted use of language to kill others in our names:

\begin{quote}
We can’t face the dead. But we must face the dead because they die in our name. I believe it’s because of the way we use language that we have got ourselves into this terrible trap,
\end{quote}
where words like freedom, democracy, and Christian values are still used to justify barbaric and shameful policies and acts. We are under a serious and urgent obligation to subject such terms to an intense scrutiny. If we fail to do so, both our moral and political judgement will remain fatally impaired.637

As a representative of one of the oppressive regimes, Nicolas stands as an example of any perverted regime. Nicolas’s paranoiac character falls into the category described by Jacques Lacan in his *Ecrits* (1977) as someone ‘whose demanding tone [...] sometimes underlies his whole discourse’.638 His unfinished sentences, his hesitations, his inflexions and his slips of the tongue are revealed in his commands to Victor to stand up and sit down in the middle of the conversation, and politely thanking him. Austin describes such performative utterances as a kind of putative contract that leads to nothing – they are void utterances since they are uttered inappropriately by the speaker.639 Robert Gordon, commenting on Nicolas’s contradictory politeness and his violent actions, states: ‘The politeness is a form of humiliation – of the victim – pretence that he has freedom to choose’.640

This disturbed psychology does not always reflect dominance and supreme power; it could also reflect fear. In part two of *Mountain Language* the guard plays multiple roles in terms of linguistic oppression. When he gets irritated at the prisoner for identifying with him when he says he has got a family, he reflects both fearful and disturbed psychology as well. This fear is reflected by his reporting the prisoner to the sergeant, saying that the prisoner has cracked a joke for which he must be punished:

**Guard:** Sergeant? I’m in the Blue Room [...] Yes [...] I thought I should report, Sergeant [...] I think I’ve got a joker here.641

He is the Father figure that we have met in *The Birthday Party* as Goldberg and *A Kind of Alaska* as Hornby, who in the words of Lacan and Althusser ‘is the Law of Culture [...] [the] discourse of the Other’.642 The guard, representing normative authority, but also fearing his own potential categorisation as abject being, sees his ‘essence’643 reflected

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639 Austin, p.137.
640 Gordon, p.164.
643 *Silverstein, Harold Pinter and the Language of Cultural Power*, p.29.
in the image of the prisoner, and hence his provocation and fear. In other words, he fears positions would be replaced and he takes the position of the prisoner. He, like Nicolas, also fears the redrawing of lines between the oppressor and the oppressed because it is his powerful position that lends him his identity as a guard.

The guard’s fears of being located within the subjectivity of the prisoner himself make it hard for both of them to assert their positions. It is worth mentioning, however, that part of the State’s plans to keep the status quo is to convince people that their own good is associated with the plans or the goals of the State, and thus persuade them to maintain the status quo rather than revolting. Relating this connection to the guard’s actions can be seen in his identification with the State he is working for, yet he fears the lines to be redrawn within himself, and this may account for the reason why some individuals become complicit in the oppression of tyrannical regimes. Noam Chomsky gives us an image of the State’s methods of twisting its subject’s mentalities, and the rhetoric deployed in using a crooked language that serves their interests. Commenting on the media, educational systems, and other propaganda means he says:

So what the media do [...] is to take a set of assumptions which express the basic ideas of the propaganda system, whether about the Cold War, or the economic systems or the ‘national interest,’ and so on, and then present a range of debate within that framework – so the debate only enhances the strength of the assumptions, ingraining them in people’s minds as the entire possible spectrum of opinion that there is.

Chomsky here echoes Pinter’s Nobel Prize speech ‘Art, Truth & Politics’, in which he reveals the tapestry of lies politicians weave around individuals’ brains so that they are kept in ignorance, whilst the politicians’ positions and power remain intact. Commenting on the invasion of Iraq, Pinter said: ‘We were told that Iraq threatened

the security of the world. We were assured it was true. It was not true.\textsuperscript{646} The use of
the passive tense here is crucial to intensify the fake veneer of the language of
politicians, and to highlight their power, and control over us as individuals in this
world. As an Iraqi individual, I sometimes share the same delusion and the sense of
confusion that Pinter is referring to in his speech. Living under one totalitarian regime,
and being invaded by another, is too fearful and delusional an idea to deal with here.

Nevertheless, while the guard calls the sergeant to deal with the dissident prisoner,
Nicolas, in the last part of \textit{One for the Road}, prefers to handle his victims according to
his own perverted means that further reflect his rotten psychology. The fears of
torturers like Nicolas, the officers, or the guard lead them to decide to cut off any
possibility of producing or reproducing any disturbing dissidents. In the last part of \textit{One
for the Road}, Victor is shown sitting in front of Nicolas tidily dressed, in a way that
reminds us of Stanley’s smart look after being physically and linguistically shaped to
join the mainstream in \textit{The Birthday Party}. Nicolas’s ironical question about Victor’s
situation is replied to with an even more ironical answer by Victor – whose muttering
dramatises how cruel and merciless reality can be. Nicolas makes this reality even
more bitter by inflicting further pain on Victor when he invites him to drink while
Victor suffers from a mutilated tongue:

\begin{quote}
\textbf{Nicolas:} Drink up. It’ll put lead in your pencil. And then we’ll find someone to take it out.\textsuperscript{647}
\end{quote}

Nicolas’s insinuations imply a hidden threat against any further resistance that Victor
might think of upon release:

\begin{quote}
\textbf{Nicolas:} We have a first-class brothel upstairs, on the sixth floor, chandeliers, the lot. They’ll suck you in and blow you out in little bubbles. All volunteers. Their daddies are in our business.\textsuperscript{648}
\end{quote}

If John Searle’s assumption that ‘Speaking a language is engaging in a rule-governed
form of behaviour’\textsuperscript{649} could be applied here, then Nicolas’s behaviour in this part is the

\textsuperscript{646} See Pinter’s Nobel Prize Speech: ‘Art, Truth, & Politics.’
\textsuperscript{647} \textit{One for the Road}, p.246.
\textsuperscript{648} Ibid.
perfect example. His words refer to his threat against any future resistance by Victor, as well as giving us a zoom in on the dirty world of State power.

The soldiers of God are keeping ‘the world clean for God’ by staining their hands with the blood and suffering of others. They not only rule with a fist of iron, but they themselves and their families become cruel tools for this purpose.

The conversation that Nicolas and Victor had, which is more or less a bunch of commands and an assemblage of void questions rather than a proper conversation, has not ended by ‘both benefit[ting] from [it]’. It has instead ended by destroying one, and keeping the other even more thirsty for more victims.

Though Victor is released with no charges brought against him, and Nicolas ironically parts from him with good words, he has been given the cruellest punishment anyone could get. When Victor asks about his son, he is given a reassuring answer:

Nicolas: Oh, don’t worry about him. He was a little prick.

Only then does Victor straighten and look directly into Nicolas’s eyes. Victor’s stare brings to life Pinter’s comment that ‘It is hopeless, because reason is not going to do anything.’ This moment is Victor’s realisation of the same. Nicolas’s continuous offers of drink on the basis that this ‘[will] put lead in [Victor’s] pencil’, then the implication that Victor’s tongue is cut, stands for a metaphorical castrating of Victor’s sexual capability to have more children. Nicolas has ensured that Nicky has been murdered, or his soldiers have gone too far and the boy has been accidentally killed. Either reality is a deplorable one. Sadistically therefore, in offering drink to a man who cannot drink, whilst alluding to increasing his sperm count by more drinking, Nicolas is lying to and torturing his victim further. The reality is that alcohol decreases sperm count; and with his son murdered and his wife being raped upstairs by Nicholas’ soldiers, Nicolas is not offering kindness and sustenance; he is rather making it absolutely clear to Victor that he is not the victor, he is the vanquished—even to the degree of having his genetic legacy obliterated from the face of the planet. All of this is communicated through a series of lies by Nicolas, manipulating language to highlight his draconian means and his intentions to torture Victor further. According to medical

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650 One for the Road, p.246.
651 Ibid., p.247.
studies, alcohol intake affects both women and men’s fertility. As for the men (since I am talking about Victor here), it reduces their testosterone levels, which leads to loss of libido: ‘Altogether, alcohol has a devastating effect on human reproductivity’. Additionally, it can also damage the movement of the sperm by stopping the liver from properly metabolising vitamin A, which is vital for sperm development. Embedded in Nicolas’ irony, then, is the fact that it is not only Victor’s intellectuality (which formed a crucial part of his identity that has been destroyed), but his more fundamental identity as a man and a human being as well. As a result of the barbarism of the State that Nicolas represents, Victor has been diminished to a mere scrap of human refuse, an object with no identity whatsoever. He is no longer a national subject, an intellectual, a father, a husband, or a son.

On the other hand, the use of the past tense in the last line of the play is chillingly telling, for while Gila has been sexually drained and Victor might have been sexually impaired, their only son has been, as the play implies, killed. The dissidents have been punished by the removal of their future lives through their offspring. Though I disagree with Pinter’s claim that reason is not going to do anything, it seems that it is partly applicable in Victor’s situation as he lost his last hope for a better future – his son. Still, that does not mean we should stop trying to fight injustice, for though Pinter believes the mode of discourse of those in power gives the indication that solving the problem should not involve any change towards solution, yet he adds that ‘Still one can’t stop attempting to try to think and see things as clearly as possible’. Therefore, we should as individuals in society notice any information we read or see, give it a thought, and then act upon it, instead of attaching pictures to things that might already be resting on false assumptions or information. In other words, we should not allow despotic systems like the ones depicted in both plays to formulate, shape or mould our identities in this world. We are this world’s citizens, and it is to this world only, apart from any affiliations to gender, race, religion, nation or class that we belong.

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Talking about the disturbed psychology of the torturers leads me to reflect on their diminished ethics as well. As Pinter once stated, ‘One sometimes forgets that torturers become easily bored. They need a bit of a laugh to keep their spirits up.’

To keep their spirits up, the torturers find pleasure in playing with the women in a sexualised language, aiming to impose their dominance whether on those women or their families. In *One for the Road*, Nicolas charges his words with further implications of violating Victor’s familial relations. Realising Victor’s concern over his wife and son, Nicolas plays the game of words to the full:

Nicolas: Your wife and I had a very nice chat but I couldn’t help noticing she didn’t look her best. She’s probably menstruating. Women do that.

The word ‘menstruating’ is crucial here. According to Robert Gordon, it implies that Victor’s wife has been bleeding as a result of having been sexually assaulted. This is also interpreted as means of deliberately breaking Victor by means of casually referring to his wife’s distress, or personal matters. Such matters might be known of, or spoken about, between a husband and wife, but are intensely private ones that are not normally known of or discussed with others. It is a violation of personal space and female privacy. In that way it is a kind of metaphorical rape even if the rape itself is not literal. Tormenting Victor by implying that his family is being tormented is Nicolas’s special way of ‘carving him up’, so that he surrenders and succumbs to conformity.

In the third part of the play Nicolas interrogates Gila herself. The scene starts with personal questions revolving around Gila’s relationship with her husband and how they met. This scene can be analysed on different levels. From the linguistic point of view, the discourse of woman in itself differs from that of man according to feminist writers. Moreover, Gila’s confrontation with Nicolas might be linked to Nicolas’s

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656 Pinter’s Nobel Speech.
657 *One for the Road*, p. 231.
658 Gordon, p. 165.
659 *The Birthday Party*, p. 33.
660 Julia Kristeva, along with others (Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler, and Hélène Cixous) believes that being a woman means that she does not have access to the word. See *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1986), p. 42.
opening statement about his mother, who always thought of him as mad. Nicolas’s aggressiveness towards Gila is also interpreted in Lacanian terms because:

The failure to become the image with which we identify leads [...] to define self-apprehension as a form of self-alienation, and to posit the subject’s oscillation between love for and aggression towards the image-love because the image serves as an ideal representation [that] resists assimilation.661

Gila’s debasement reaches its peak when Nicolas asks her how many times she has been raped, a reflection of her vulnerability as sex object, which is ‘of no interest to [him]’.662 Nonetheless, the idea of being raped multiple times implies that it is Gila’s responsibility, being such a stubborn dissident, that she met such a destiny.663 It is worth mentioning that Pinter has been accused of being misogynist as Drew Milne states in The Cambridge Companion to Harold Pinter,664 but Milne nonetheless negates this idea, tracing examples of Pinter’s depiction of male-centred relations that focus on male bonding and female exclusion, such as his early novel The Dwarfs (1950), and many of his plays, amongst them one that is tackled in this dissertation, Betrayal (1978). I do agree with Milne that Pinter’s concern here is not a misogynistic approach so much as showing the subservient position of women due to their gender, reproductive bodies, and vulnerability in a male-centred society. Moreover, Pinter might be depicting the human condition, which is not male, but still being manipulated largely by the language and the actions of the male figures, and hence highlighting further how power and dominance force women to subject their agency and/or identity to that of the male’s.

Unlike Ruth in The Homecoming and Sara Johnson in Mountain Language, Gila has been forced into giving her body under duress: therefore, Nicolas’s power has not only taken the shape of words here, but also extended to the bodies of his victims: ‘transforming the body into a text that displays the visible signs of the Other’s power’.665

Nicolas’s nonchalant attitude towards Gila’s femininity is mixed with a destructive tone for her ‘self’ as a woman:

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661 Quoted in Silverstein’s: Harold Pinter and the Language of Cultural Power, p.91.
662 One for the Road, p.244.
663 Gordon, p.166.
665 Silverstein, Harold Pinter and the Language of Cultural Power, p.47.
Nicolas: You’re a lovely woman. Well, you were.666

In addition to Gila’s inaccessibility, Nicolas is further provoked by Gila’s rearing of her son whom she ‘encouraged – to be a little prick’.667 By doing this, she is standing up against the ‘soldiers of God’.668 Nicolas believes that such a generation can only be produced by what he calls ‘academic’ people. The word ‘academic’ or ‘intellectual’ here carries a double meaning; this is because operating on a different level of thinking as an academic or intellectual implies a social exile, and an institutional one. Thus, Gila is both a dissident in the eyes of Nicolas (the State), and in the eyes of her society. Julia Kristeva further explains that ‘Exile is already in itself a form of dissidence, since it involves uprooting oneself from a family, a country or a language’.669 What is crucial here is the idea of thinking. Again Pinter and Chomsky meet here on the same point. For Pinter, language is deliberately employed to suppress thought and thinking: ‘Language is actually employed to keep thought at bay’.670 Chomsky, interestingly enough, highlights a similarly important aspect. When he was asked about the language of the media, he quoted Thomas Jefferson’s notion that ‘traitors in thought but not in deed’ should be punished, meaning: ‘They should be punished if they say things that are treacherous, or even if they think things that are treacherous’.671 Linking this to the plays: all oppressed characters such as Victor, or the mountain people, are punished not for their deeds, but for their thoughts. They, in turn, represent thousands of intellectuals and academics under totalitarian regimes who are imprisoned for their words and thoughts. This is exactly why Nicolas’s soldiers messed around Victor’s house, which is full of books: ‘Pissed on the rugs’,672 and this is also why Sara Johnson in Mountain Language is being sexually harassed by the officers for being an intellectual herself or a wife of an intellectual man. It is this different level of thinking, the sceptical mind which is part of those people’s identity that these despotic regimes are after.

666 One for the Road, p.244.
667 Ibid.
668 Ibid.
669 Moi, Kristeva Reader, p.298.
672 One for the Road, p.228.
Although she is a dissident, Nicolas promises to release Gila who ironically is of ‘no interest’ to him, as he and his soldiers have had their satisfaction by raping her one after another (I do believe this to be the case); but for further pleasure, he decides to keep her for a little longer to enjoy her destruction, and gain further entertainment with his ‘boys’. Keeping Gila for a longer time implies that Nicolas’s promises can never be taken seriously because he will always be a mouthpiece, or an image of the State to which he feels strongly loyal. His promise to release Gila ‘in due course’ is most probably void because it is uttered in a bad faith just like his previous promises.

Gila’s submissive demeanor with Nicolas does not compare to the young woman’s bravery in demanding to see her imprisoned husband in *Mountain Language*. When the officer announces that the mountain language is prohibited, the young woman jumps in to say that she does not speak it, excluding herself linguistically (and therefore socially and politically since language here functions to assign people to a particular class, ethnic, or social group) from the group of women. Language, here, is an aspect of power that lurks in any dialogic situation involving fencing for positions in a pecking order. Therefore, Carey Perloff believes that ‘It is the quality of the language that makes *Mountain Language* interesting. Take that away, and there is no play’.  

By excluding herself, the young woman attracts attention to herself for having an identity different from that of others. The sergeant and the officer circle her and start using both linguistic and physical abuse. The young woman’s utterance thus misfires. To explain this situation in linguistic terms, I will borrow Austin’s definition of the word ‘misfire’, as he believes that an action misfires when the procedure which we purport to accomplish is disallowed or is botched. The sergeant puts his hand on the young woman’s bottom and asks her:

**Sergeant:** What language do you speak? What language do you speak with your arse?  

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673 *One for the Road*, p.244.
674 Ibid.
676 Austin, p.16.
677 *Mountain Language*, p.256.
Thus, in his quick (and deliberately offensive) shift from dominion over language to sexual domination and physical abjection, Pinter reveals that all forms of language are created and deployed within patriarchal power structures that subjugate women to men. According to Irigaray,

All production of discourse, and all constitution of language [is formulated and deployed] according to the necessities of one perspective, one point of view, and one economy: that of men, who supposedly represent the human race.  

The officers, by abusing the young woman, not only expose their linguistic power over her, but also their sexual power as the super sex, and the only sex with only one language. Therefore, they assume that, despite not committing any crime, she is a sinful person by crossing the gender lines. Pinter, I believe, deliberately sets male authority figures against female victims here in order to make this point:

**Officer:** These women, Sergeant, have as yet committed no crime. Remember that.
**Sergeant:** Sir! But you’re not saying they’re without sin!
**Officer:** On, no. Oh, no, I’m not saying that.
**Sergeant:** This one’s full of it. She bounces with it. 

Julia Kristeva supports Irigaray’s assumption that women do not have access to language as much as men, based on her belief that any hegemonic community, such as masculinity, protects itself against dissolution by blocking the development of any productive forces, creating a whole system that:

Requires [...] women be excluded from the single true and legislating principle, namely the Word, as well as from the (always paternal) element that gives procreation a social value: they are excluded from knowledge and power.

However, the young woman, unlike Gila, does not give up, and in the third part of *Mountain Language* she manages to get in. The sexual oppression through language

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678 Irigaray, p. 227. emphasis original.
679 *Mountain Language*, p.256.
680 *Moi, Kristeva Reader*, p.143.
continues in this scene, which commences with the sergeant’s voice coming over from the heart of darkness. With a debasing language, the sergeant uses the word ‘fucking’ three times, just to get to know the identity of the woman standing inside the prison, which is now drowned in darkness:

**Sergeant’s Voice:** Who’s that fucking woman? What’s that fucking woman doing here? Who let that woman through that fucking door?

**Second Guard’s Voice:** She is his wife.\(^{681}\)

Only then do the lights return, and we realise that that woman is Sara Johnson, who defied the officers at the door. The fact that she managed to get inside the prison, before getting the officer’s permission, is a reflection of the fragility of the system and her defiant character.

When the lights are up we see a prisoner being dragged by the guard and the sergeant, while his wife stands at a distance staring at them. The confrontation of the young woman with the officers inside the prison does not only reveal the difference between two classes at the level of language, but also in terms of gender. The sergeant is surprised that this young woman managed to get in, not only because she violated the rules of the institution to which he belongs, but also because she stood up to the rules of the hegemonic institution of masculinity. The ridiculing manner in which he talks to her, which is a kind of verbal intimidation, proves that he ridicules her trespass beyond the geographically inscribed confines of her own gender, and getting into the sealed and defended zone of masculinity:

**Sergeant:** What is this, a reception for Lady Duck Muck? Where’s the bloody Babycham? Who’s got the bloody Babycham [...]?\(^{682}\)

The gender gap is marked through the conversation of the sergeant in the presence of the young woman. The moment may thus be seen to demonstrate an instance of what Kristeva believes to be ‘Monotheistic unity [...] sustained by a radical separation of the

\(^{681}\) *Mountain Language*, p.262.

sexes’ as she also observes: ‘[…] indeed, it is this very separation which is its prerequisite’. 683

Ridiculing the young woman does not only touch upon the gender zone, but transcends it to a cultural one as well. By referring to the ‘Babycham’ drink, the sergeant is disdaining the young woman by referring to a drink that has a particular cultural background in Britain. The Babycham drink is a pear cider that arose from the ashes of WW2 austerity and rationing. Working class women in that society, who could not afford to buy real champagne, a drink usually used by posh women, used to order Babycham in bars because they could do so without feeling like a tart or a crone. Although it was advertised as a glamorous drink that could be drunk as champagne, the drink was in fact generally perceived to be naff. 684 Thus, the sergeant is not merely demeaning the young woman in gender terms, but also in social terms by using pejorative words. Her ‘intellectual’ status is thus also undermined by his tacit identification of her with the aspirational but misguided working classes.

The woman ruptures a fragile state that has been imposed by men in defence of and in order to maintain their supposed superiority. Such a twisted and deliberately exclusive construction of power is only maintainable as a result of female absence. What provokes the sergeant further, then, is not merely the threat that the young woman is posing through the act of her transgressive act of penetration into this male sphere, but also the equality between the two genders that the woman is corporeally drawing attention to by means of her persistent physical presence. The binary opposition of male/language/power, and female/silence/powerlessness is being reversed here and reduced to more fundamental opposition between presence and absence. Teresa de Lauretis believes that it is the discourse of the female itself that frightens the male, the representation of the female by a female form itself, rather than linguistically controllable evocations of the Other that the male of the State constitutes, that is a threat:

683 Moi, Kristeva Reader, p.141.
The representation of gender is its construction [...but] gender, like the real, is not only the effect of representation but also its excess, what remains outside discourse as a potential trauma which can rupture or destabilise, if not contained, any representation.\(^{685}\)

The young woman’s indecipherability is threatening to the sergeant. He, therefore, attempts to create a linguistic frame of reference in which the responsibility for her presence can be attributed to other men, those on his side who should be, perhaps still are, controlling her. Yet by attempting to exclude the woman’s presence and agency as self-determining, the sergeant succeeds only in affirming her status as someone who exists beyond his representation, and thus projects her own voice of power and her identity as a woman into the world of patriarchy.

**Sergeant:** They’ve sent you through the wrong doo. Unbelievable. Someone’ll be done for this.\(^{686}\)

The attempts to smother the voices of women in *Mountain Language* does not stop at the young woman, but extends to the elderly woman. In part four, when the guard attempts to hush the elderly woman up, he, rather than talking to her first, talks to her son, thereby eliminating her existence in two ways: (i) he treats her as a mere voice to be silenced; and (ii) he deals with her not through her own being, but through her son, a male figure like him. From the perspective of Kristeva and Irigaray, the guard stands for the patriarchy that, according to them, is depriving women of their right to have a place in the site of language. Kristeva believes that except for the woman’s function to assure procreation, ‘She has no direct relation with the law of the community and its political and religious unity. God generally speaks only to men.’\(^{687}\)

When the elderly woman does not respond to the guard’s warnings not to speak the rural language of the mountain, the guard turns to her son and asks whether she understands what he is telling her:

**Guard:** Does she understand what I’m saying?


\(^{686}\) *Mountain Language*, p.262.

\(^{687}\) Moi, *Kristeva Reader*, p.140.
Prisoner: No.  

The dialogue between the old woman, her son, and the guard reveals, according to Stephen Gale ‘a series of disembodied voices’, as Pinter uses the method of voiceover to represent the speech uttered by the elderly woman while speaking the rural language of the mountain. This method, in which the characters communicate by eye contact and voiceover, despite their corporeal presence, is the same technique that is used when the young woman engages in an idyllic conversation with her husband, ignoring the commands of the officers to leave the place. Thus, Pinter is reducing the existence of both women to mere voices, and even these are taken from them, so that they end up identityless.

In addition to depriving women of their voices in both plays on the basis of sexualised gender, the torturers are punishing everybody else by crushing both their bodies and voices to reduce them to silent, almost non-existent beings. In her book *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985), Elaine Scarry reached the same conclusion when she argued that the purpose of interrogation is to reduce the body into a voice: ‘The goal of torture is to make the one, the body, emphatically and crushing present by destroying it, and to make the other, the voice, absent by destroying it’.  

In these plays, even the voice that Scarry believes the body to be reduced to is crushed on cultural, political, social, and gender levels.

V

Though the concluding silence with which *One for the Road* and *Mountain Language* end marks the futility of resistance, Pinter still paints a different kind of hope as it is represented by the power of language. Although he distrusted words, as a playwright he also put all of his faith in the power of language and its ability to raise people’s awareness. Many critics have tried to pin down the reasons that pushed Pinter to write

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688 *Mountain Language*, p.259.
One for the Road and Mountain Language,

yet Pinter was always ambiguous about the source of his plays. Nevertheless, when he once was asked whether Mountain Language was about Britain he said: 'Yes, our “Mountain people,” whose language is being suppressed are the homosexuals.' This is obviously due to the fact that the year of writing this play was also the year in which Section 28 of the Local Government Act was enacted (24th of May 1988). This state-authored legislation prohibited local authorities in England and Wales from ‘promoting’ homosexuality. It also labelled gay family relationships as ‘pretend’ and gay groups frequently said that Section 28 was used to silence people and prevent teaching about gay issues in schools. However, the play has wider resonances. Pinter always insisted that torture is always out there: ‘Who knows where these measures may end?’ Therefore, we can never assume that the themes of his plays are connected to a specific country, or a specific cultural moment in this world. Mark Taylor-Batty makes a strong point in relation to this fact:

If One for the Road, Mountain Language or Party Time had been clearly set in Iraq, China, or North Korea where human rights violations were widely acknowledged, then all Pinter would have achieved with such plays would have been to contribute to the climate of threat and fear propagated by home-grown ideologies.

Nevertheless, in these two plays, Pinter preferred to be more direct and explicit about the nature of torture in a pure depiction of the language of power and the reality of state-sponsored and state-enacted terror(ism). He made verbal violence his vehicle to highlight the oppression that some characters impose on others. Because language should be thought of as playing a game, and the use of language is like using a toolkit,
Pinter is playing this game to the full. Both plays convey intelligible messages: there is no different world elsewhere, there are only different speech acts. When Nicolas asks Victor what would happen if he was in his place, he is provoking the audience to imagine themselves as interrogators. Even the officers in charge in

691 Michael Billington remarks that Mountain Language was written to mark the Turkish suppression of the Kurdish language, and the restrictions on speech and thought in Thatcher’s Britain in 1991, while One for the Road was written in anger after Pinter’s visit with Arthur Miller to investigate the allegations of torture against Turkish writers and intellectuals. See: ‘Harold Pinter’ [Accessed 13 February 2015]
692 Batty, About Pinter, p.72.
693 Ibid.
694 Ibid, pp.72-73.
695 Mundle, p.162.
Mountain Language become figures with whom audiences are invited to identify, because Pinter invites spectators to ‘Think of the joy of having absolute power’. 696

Though the joy of having absolute power will perhaps generate new oppressors, this is not necessarily the case, as there are in the field of global politics and societal creation examples of truth and reconciliation or restorative justice in which tormentors and victims are subsequently able to seek forgiveness, express regret, provide compassion and understanding and move forward socially together (such as South Africa, Rwanda, and Northern Ireland). Therefore, if the young woman in Mountain Language or Victor in One for the Road were granted absolute power, I doubt they would/could manipulate power in the same way their tormentors are doing.

The differences in people’s reactions to oppressive systems provide us with a clue to the questions raised at the beginning of this chapter. We only need to look closely at Gila’s behaviour and her father’s, or the mountain people and the officers to get the answer. It is the people themselves who give legitimacy to powerful, oppressive systems, and that is why such systems continue having the upper hand in that vicious circle of power in which both the torturer and the tortured play a role in feeding the fire.

Therefore, if oppressive regimes were given the chance to manipulate language, and if death was always to be smothered in the language of technology and bureaucracy, then as Pinter said: ‘The boot [will keep] itching to squash [...] and very efficient’. 697 It is our task then to shake off that ‘blanket of lies’ 698 we are lying under and consider things that we are either too indifferent or too frightened to question. Though Pinter admitted that theatre could bring a little, and only a little change in the world, he believed: ‘That little is something.’ 699

Pinter’s political writing was more powerful through the poetry with which he started his career and ended it. In his poem ‘Death’, in which he talks about the death of an

697 Various Voices, p.13.
698 Various Voices, p.13.
699 Quoted in Merritt, p.150.
699 Ibid.
unknown body, and which he read during his Nobel prize speech, and in the poem ‘American Football’ (1991), in which he reflected on the first Gulf war in Iraq, Pinter attempted to raise awareness about the cruelty of war in other parts of the world. The language of the latter poem was described by Michael Billington as ‘satirising, through language that is deliberately violent, obscene, sexual, and celebratory’. Though translating his anger more powerfully through poetry, plays such as *Mountain Language*, and *One for the Road* were still written on the playwright’s side as a dialogic exploration of the idea of that there is still (even if it is a little) room for change. As spectators, we are invited in such instances to place ourselves in the victims’ positions, to feel the suffering of others around the world, and to press our governments to change the oppressive policies they are adopting or supporting elsewhere in the world. Thus, saving our identities from being absorbed or annihilated within the stream of oppression. Our refusal to compromise will leave us marginalised, just like Pinter, who was, as Mary Riddell mentions, ‘open to all the winds, some of them icy indeed’.  

700 Quoted In HaroldPinter.org.

Chapter Four
Chic Dictatorship: Power and Political Identity in Harold Pinter's Party Time

‘Power is not a means; it is an end. One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution; one makes the revolution in order to establish the dictatorship.’

George Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four (1949) shows the dangers of totalitarianism and how ‘once ensconced in the state apparatus, it could extend its influence over all public and private life.’ This danger is also echoed in Pinter’s play Party Time (1991). Pinter shares Orwell’s indignation towards totalitarian regimes across the world. The term ‘totalitarianism’ is defined by Todd Cesaratto as: ‘a system of authority that would make over all aspects of society – in its image’. Antonio Gramsci referred to totalitarianism as the ability of the dominant class to project its own way of seeing the world onto those who are subordinated and to have it accepted by them as ‘common sense’, and ‘natural’. The struggle to be at the top of the hierarchy has created an identity problem on both domestic and public levels. The processes of subjection and exclusion are sources of questions such as: to whom and to what are the characters significantly connected in Pinter plays? Such a question illuminates two different categories of identity: identities that are formed through denial of difference, and identities that are heterogeneous and complex, which are constituted through difference and conflict.

However, using the lens of individual freedom and identity, this chapter will investigate the workings of power in political systems. The play is full of implications of oppression through dictatorship. Therefore, I am applying two political theories connected with

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704 Ibid. 77.
power and individual control. For the first part of the chapter, I will be using Foucault’s theory of power to answer questions such as: 1) Does power rely on deepening domination through different relations within society to shape our identities, as suggested by Foucault, and depicted by Pinter in Party Time? And 2) Can power, as employed in the play, be a productive element to free our identities from the shackles of totalitarian regimes?

In the second part of the discussion, I will be guided by Gramsci’s theory of hegemonic power to analyse its workings in the play. The following questions will be covered: 3) Do power and violence go hand in hand, or can they be seen as antithetical in Party Time? And 4) In this Pinter play, does power politics rely on State institutions to win popular consent for State authority, a process defined by Gramsci as hegemony?

In the third part, I will be using feminist theories relating to the gendered nature of power, and its relation to power construction in society, discussing questions such as: 5) Do the psychosexual battles between characters stand as a metaphor for a bigger image represented by State oppression? In other words, how can we define the relation between power and gender? and 6) To what extent is Dusty’s identity, and those of other women in the play, reproduced through such processes?

By borrowing insights from Foucault and Gramsci’s theoretical constructs relating to concepts of power and politics, this chapter will start by analysing the workings of power-political dynamics in Harold Pinter’s Party Time.

**Party Time**

I

Although mainly concerned with the dynamics of power abuse, and the overall concept of violence, Pinter’s political plays, as discussed here, are a cry of anger against the reshaping of human identity under totalitarian regimes by means of power. Pinter’s Party Time, as he once told Mel Gussow, is ‘to do with a hierarchy of power’ in which the characters, given that they are the elite of society, are separated from...
others according to their class. Pinter has expressed this separation in the metaphor of the party:

*Party Time* is not a documentary account of parties I’ve actually been to or people I’ve actually met. It’s the image that remains of the distinction between what happens upstairs at the party and what’s going on down there in the street, and that’s what interested me.\(^{710}\)

Although never revealed, the play’s location is assumed to be London by major Pinter critics such as Michael Billington\(^ {711}\) and Keith Peacock, who believes that the reference to roadblocks in the play connects it to London: ‘Roadblocks are a common feature of life in Northern Ireland and have become so in the City of London after the detonation of bombs there by the IRA’.\(^ {712}\) However, I believe that the themes of the play, written out of anger, as were *One for the Road* and *Mountain Language*, could be applied to any totalitarian institution across the world.\(^ {713}\)

The play’s setting is a typical upper-class party: ‘A large room. Sofas, armchairs, etc’\(^ {714}\). People are sitting, standing, a drinks tray is being offered. The characters in the play are talking about an elite club in which the elite go for health and exercise. The fact that the club is specifically meant for the elite where their health and exercise is taken care of and the fact that the club does not accept anybody who is not ‘elite’, means that only the upper class have got an access to better health and exercise. Terry is telling Gavin about a wonderful private club and its pool and bar:

**Terry:** Real class. I mean, what I mean to say, you play a game of tennis, you have a beautiful swim, they’ve got a bar right there.\(^ {715}\)

While Terry is describing the facilities of the new, exotic club, Pinter, metaphorically, alludes to the oppressive institutions within the society these men are ruling. As Terry goes into the details of the ‘cleansing process’ the customers go through in the club, Gavin asks if the process is similar to what he used to have in the barber shop when he

\(^{710}\) Gussow, pp.152-153.

\(^{711}\) See Michael Billington’s *The Life and Works of Harold Pinter* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), p.333.


\(^{713}\) Pinter told Mel Gussow that ‘*One for the Road*, *Mountain Language* and *Party Time* were all written out of anger’, p.152.


\(^{715}\) *Party Time*, p.282.
was a little boy, giving us a picture of the larger cleansing of opposition members, and a clue to the nature of the torture taking place away from this pampered society. It is the unseen torture that actually makes possible the calm, refined state of the partygoers:

**Gavin**: They used to put a hot towel over your face, you see, over your nose and eyes. I had it done thousands of times. It got rid of all the blackheads, all the blackheads on your face.\(^{716}\)

Words such as ‘thousands of times’, and ‘blackheads’, have a deeper meaning than they have on the surface. In this minimalistic work, Pinter crystallises the confluence of violence and festivity in each line. The setting of the party is a camouflage used by Pinter to hint at the larger image of the unrest down in the street. The luxurious experience Gavin is mentioning is meshed with implications of torture, and this is an example of Pinter’s technique of intertwining festivity with violence to convey the horrific image of oppression across the world.\(^{717}\)

The corporeal torture Gavin is hinting at is one of the three modes of power identified by Michel Foucault in his theory of power and politics. He distinguishes three forms of power:

1) Violence/oppression represented by the police, the law, and the courts.

2) The disciplinary mode of power, which refers to the technologies of the political anatomy of the body. The individual is trained, shaped, and reshaped in the institutions of everyday life such as schools, the armed forces, and factories.

3) Governmental power, a term used to ‘demonstrate that [the State] is the hegemonic effect of series of power practices. Once constituted and reproduced by power technologies, the state itself, as one of those technologies, may produce its own effects’.\(^{718}\)

\(^{716}\)Party Time, p.283. Pinter might be alluding here to the waterboarding torture technique of Guantanamo, in which the detainee is covered with water that blocks his breathing passage to make the individual experience the sensation of drowning.


In the first mode, Foucault claims that power cannot be derived directly from State power or from law. Rather, he is concerned with the technologies of power, which he believes cut across and circulate among the different practices of power constituting the domains of society and State.

The second mode of power is concerned with normalising individuals and their behaviours through ‘spatial structures, temporal rhythms, and body movement’; in other words, individuals are in a process of continuous reproduction, and their behaviours are always measured in terms of their conformity to or deviation from this process.

The third mode of power can be distinguished from the previous one in its focus on likely deviations from the norms. According to Foucault, contingency must be taken seriously, and the government must always be vigilant as to what happens in the State. People may die, migrate, drink too much alcohol, or refuse to work. Moreover, prices may rise or fall, a shortage or surplus of food may occur, and so forth. All of these statistics must be monitored and targeted by the governmental power. It is a collective process targeting ‘the economy’, ‘the society’, ‘health’, ‘the city’, ‘democracy’, ‘the State’, etc. Significantly, all human activities, including people’s lives, the economies in which they can participate, and their political tendencies are also targeted.

Correspondingly, Gavin’s reference to the ‘blackheads’ which go through a cleansing process, relates to Foucault’s third mode of power, in which the government targets any deviation from its norm in order to ensure conformity. In other words, deviation must be punished, removed, cleansed.

Foucault proposes an alternative model in which power relations dissipate through all relational structures of society. In his comment on the function of prisons in different cultures, he emphasises the disciplinary elements of power, which focus on hierarchal observation and normalising judgement. Unlike Louis Althusser’s definition of power as a relation between the oppressor and the oppressed, Foucault suggests that power must be analysed as something that circulates, or something that can only function in the form of a chain: ‘Power is employed and exercised through a netlike organisation

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719 Demirovic, p.8.
720 Ibid.
individuals are the vehicles of power, not its point of application’.\textsuperscript{722} This can be further nuanced, according to Mark G.E. Kelly, who believes that Foucault’s view can be epitomised by the following features: (i) The impersonality or subjectlessness of power, meaning that power is not guided by the will of a certain individual; (ii) the relationality of power, meaning that power is always a case of relations between people; (iii) the decentredness of power, meaning that it is not focused on a certain individual or a class; and (iv) the multidirectionality of power, meaning that power does not flow from the more to the less or from upwards to downwards, but rather comes ‘from below’, even if it is nevertheless ‘nonegalitarian’.\textsuperscript{723} Finally, Kelly explains that Foucault believed in the strategic nature of power, meaning that the fact that ‘it has a dynamic of its own, is intentional’.\textsuperscript{724}

The disciplinary aspect of power reveals powerfully when Pinter zooms in gradually into the personal relationships of the characters in the play. When Terry speaks to his wife Dusty, who is concerned about her brother Jimmy, who seems to be a dissident, he threatens a physical discipline that seems to be a bit childish for a grown woman (apart from its sexual implication). Foucault also believes that the modern exercise of power\textsuperscript{725} depends on corporal punishment more than anything else: ‘It is a mechanism of power which permits time and labour, rather than wealth and commodities, to be extracted from bodies’.\textsuperscript{726} Terry’s threat to spank Dusty is a kind of corporal discipline that Foucault also likens to that of the hospitals, clinics, schools, and even universities which, according to him, share and use various types of power enforcement on individuals. However, Foucault suggests that subjugation of human identity by the enforcement of laws and discipline leads, in turn, to self-surveillance by the individual, who, at this stage, turns into a subject himself:

Bodily posture and functions, sublimation of wishes and immediate emotions [...] all these are effects of the disciplinary


\textsuperscript{724}Mark G.E. Kelly, \textit{The Political Philosophy of Michel Foucault} (London: Routledge, 2009), pp.37-38.

\textsuperscript{725}Foucault contrasts two different kinds of power exercise. He reveals how the monarchic power system is replaced by the democratic one. To better clarify his point, he cites the punishment imagery over these two periods. While the symbol of monarchic power was the public execution by the King who stood for the highest authority, the punishment symbol of democratic power is discipline, and imprisonment away from the public eye. The change of the means of punishment of outlaws is a sign of the change in the power stream running through society. Balan, p.3.

\textsuperscript{726}Ibid.
pressure, but are also actions that, through pressure initially imposed externally, lead to self-discipline for the individual and eventually to the production of the individual himself as a subject.\footnote{Balan, p.4.}

Dusty’s subjection, as described by Foucault, comes in two different forms; (i) it is a physical disciplinary subjection and (ii) a spatial separation of the type that is usually practised in prisons by separating a prisoner from his fellow inmates. The spatial distribution may be obtained in society through segregating individuals in heterogeneous groups (e.g., students separated from workers), or by hierarchal relations (e.g., soldiers and officers living in separate barracks). Subjected to such treatment, individuals come to know their place in the context of the general economy of space associated with disciplinary power.\footnote{Ibid.} Dusty, accordingly, has been subjected due to her ignorance of what is going on, and through disciplinary means practised by Terry, including corporal ones.

Nevertheless, Dusty, although subjected, is not completely powerless. Foucault, unlike Althusser, who defines power relations as between the oppressed and the oppressor, believes that power, conceived as a strategy, cannot be localised or acquired exclusively by certain institutions or individuals. Accordingly, it cannot only be defined by its negative aspect of subjection, as it implies a productive aspect of resistance:

Power is coextensive with resistance; productive, producing positive effects; ubiquitous, being found in every kind of relationship, as a condition of the possibility of any kind of relationship.\footnote{Kelly, p.38.}

In other words, Foucault believes that where there is power there is resistance, without which no power relations can be conceived.

However, Dusty’s identity formation process is further revealed by her indulgence in describing the delights of the club just a few minutes after being reproached by her husband for bringing up the topic of Jimmy:

\begin{quote}
Dusty: People swim at you, you see, while you’re having a drink.
Terry: Lovely girls.
\end{quote}
Dusty: And men.
Terry: Mostly girls.⁷³⁰

The couple’s competitive tone to prove their power is echoed in this conversation in which Dusty insists on ‘men’, while Terry insists on ‘girls’. Each one of them is jockeying for superiority over the other. They illustrate what Pinter believed this play, along with other plays (i.e., One for the Road and Mountain Language) is all about – actual power rather than the ambiguities of power: ‘These plays, all of them, are to do not with ambiguities of power, but actual power. [...] it is crude, that’s the whole point’.⁷³¹ In this context, I would contend to Mufti Mudasir’s suggestion that:

Pinter’s focus is neither on the depiction of torture and other forms of oppression, nor on enlisting audiences/readers’ sympathies for the oppressed, but on exposing how the dominant political groups always appeal to the notions such as morality, religion, consensus, and democracy to legitimise themselves.⁷³²

Although Mudasir’s analysis holds truth in terms of using consensus and democratic approaches to the concept of power, I believe that according to Pinter’s speech, his plays are about actual power with all its brutalities and crudeness. And the fact that almost all of Pinter’s characters are broken by the end of the play; that is not enough indication that Pinter refuses to explore oppositional policies as Mudasir suggests;⁷³³ rather, in my opinion, it is confronting the audience with utter brutality to shake them out of their existence, to show them the real workings of power with no trappings, and to make a statement of what is really happening behind closed doors. Therefore, showing the means of torture is part of the process of exposing those who appeal to religion, morality and rules to legitimise power and torture. Interestingly enough, Robert Gordon seems to be looking at the play along the same lines as Mudasir’s suggestions when he suggests that the conversations like the one between Terry and his wife and other characters about the amenities of the club are fragmented.

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⁷³¹Gussow, p.152.
⁷³³Mudasir,p.62.
narratives that challenge spectators to decipher the identities of the characters. While this might be true to a certain extent, I believe that the characters, even while talking about a detached subject such as the exotic club and spa, shed light on the nature of the relations connecting them. The conversations about the festivity of the club, and then the violence that is happening in the street are juxtaposed to reveal the inner relations of power that creep into the most intimate relations of husbands and wives, and thus they stand as a strong statement on the brutality of power when grafted with festivity. Robert Baker-White agrees that the ‘two intertwined topics of conversation form the dialectical tension that marks Party Time as a telling example of Pinter’s juxtaposition of festivity and violence’.  

Moreover, Gordon believes that the couple, Terry and Dusty, could be lower-class people desperate to prove their worthiness to belong to the upper class, represented by Gavin and other characters who are discussed below. I would contest Gordon’s assumption about Terry and Dusty as working-class (he cites Terry’s working-class London dialect as evidence for this). The point that I wish to stress here is that the couple, although coming from a class different to that of Gavin, are not necessarily working-class. More specifically, Gordon’s assumption may be true as far as Dusty is concerned, but may not apply to Terry who, with other gentlemen, seems to be more in control of both the conversation about the club and what is going on in the street. Terry and others may occupy a lower position in the State, something that is set not by class so much as by the degree of brutality in which they are involved. Terry and others might be the ones who take their orders from ‘the man who runs this country’, who, unlike in One for the Road, is revealed here in Gavin’s presence.

In addition, Gordon’s description of Terry and others as ‘servants’ who are ‘given privileged access to the social rituals of the ruling class in order to do its dirty work’, does not apply to Terry and others who are already attending the party while other underlings are taking care of the street and blocking the road, as we shall see further in the discussion. The hierarchies of power referred to by Pinter are not mirrored by the domination of Gavin, as Gordon suggests; rather, they are reflected in the nature of

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735 Robert Baker-White, p.64.
736 One for the Road, p.230.
737 Gordon, p.175.
hegemony, which is not individually based, as Gramsci would have it, but is a socio-political power that has effects on larger groups of society. The play is about ‘a bunch of shits and a victim’, as stated by Pinter: a group of powerful men, no matter what their jobs are, against powerless people represented by Jimmy. People like Terry and others like him are not directly involved in the ‘dirty jobs’ of the State; they would rather attend parties in which they talk about the amenities of their club, while others (such as the soldiers in the street) take care of the violence against and killing of the powerless. Terry has lost his sense of true identity through being busy undermining fixed social categories of power in order to prove superiority by further brutality. It is his sense of lost identity that makes him seem to be someone below Gavin’s class, and not the class to which he really belongs, as suggested by Gordon. Terry is more concerned with undermining the fixed categories of power rather than social hierarchies by maintaining the balance of brutality and detachment from using direct power, as do most Western countries, which prefer complete detachment rather than direct use of power.

This detachment could be translated through using the power of other means, such as mediation and control. Terry, as a key character in the play, uses not only his connections to other major power figures, but also the power of his discourse; as described by Foucault, ‘Discourse is the power which is to be seized’. Again, Terry’s discourse is used not only to subdue Dusty, but also to change the concepts his superiors use to exercise power over the led. People like Terry could be far more dangerous than the power figures themselves, but they also occupy a precarious position as they could be de-interpellated by a different discourse. Althusser suggests:

The struggle to interpellate individuals into particular groups, and thereby into accepting a particular outlook upon life, society, history, goes on unceasingly. Individuals may be de-interpellated from one group and re-interpellated into another, and the means through which this constitution of the subject takes place is through discourse.
The discourse of Terry is a process opposite to that through which his wife is going. While Dusty is going through a process of reproduction of the self by forces stronger than she is, Terry is going through a self-formation process using the same forces to his benefit. Alan Hunt explains this as a question of ‘making-up people’:

> The interest in moral obligation is part of the important strand of enquiry into ‘making-up people,’ according to which individuals are not natural social beings but agents with specific aptitudes and capacities ‘produced’ in and through social action, including practices of self-formation.  

This difference between the two characters becomes more obvious when Terry cuts off Melissa’s concern about the police action outside to introduce her to Gavin and serve her a glass of wine – Melissa is a seventy year old woman and one of the hawks of power as depicted in the play – while Dusty still does not know what to believe after hearing contradictory news:

> Dusty: I keep hearing all these things. I don’t know what to believe.  

Robert Baker-White analyses this scene as containing Pinter’s ‘familiar structures of violence and festivity’, as he believes that Pinter ‘manipulates multiple conversations so that the next line of dialogue, immediately following this troubled admission, draws the spectator’s attention directly back to the festive occasion’. In addition to considering the cohabitation of violence and festivity as an expression of the depth of pain and tragedy in this play, Baker-White adds another dimension, supported by a number of critics who believe that such a nexus is of fundamental theatrical importance. This importance lies in the belief that such scenes show modern drama functioning in a ritual mode. In other words, the festivity of the party is a preliminary process to further brutality. According to Baker-White, ‘Party Time’ underscores the

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744 Party Time, p.287.
745 Robert Baker-White, p.65.
746 The notion of brutality and festivity as a theatrical element that uncovers ritual modes in drama has been discussed by a number of critics such as Katherine Burkman, René Girard, and Mary Karen Dahl. They all believe that the celebration of violence is connected to the sacrificial festivity of primitive rituals. According to Burkman, ‘Pinter [...] not only uncovers the primitive rhythms which lie below the surface of civilization, but also explores the celebration which accompanies the cruelest rituals of life.’ Katherine Burkman, The Dramatic World of Harold Pinter: Its Basis in Ritual (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1971), p.138. See Baker-White, p.69.
more basic idea that the theatrical event itself is a recreation of the festivity that [...] necessarily includes violence or its immediate threat.\textsuperscript{747}

At such moments, the spectators will be invited to imagine other situations through the creation of metatheatrical ones,

Where the determinants of characters’ behaviour derive at least as strongly from the already-known norms of replicated festival occasion as they do from the prerogative of intentionality imbedded in dramatic language.\textsuperscript{748}

To intensify the juxtaposition and intertwining of festivity and violence so as to highlight the brutality and nonchalance of power figures, Pinter brings – in a clever shift in the play – the image of class domination vividly alive through the conversation of another two characters who seem to be influential parts of the system:

\textbf{Fred}: We’ve got to make it work.
\textbf{Douglas}: What?
\textbf{Fred}: The country.
\textbf{Douglas}: All this fucking-about has to stop.\textsuperscript{749}

As spectators, we can feel we are more in tune now with what Fred and Douglas are talking about as they state that they have got to get the country to work. The idea of extending hegemony by securing the consent of the masses does not seem to be valid here, as the conversation makes implicit references to direct violence that sometimes ‘[bringing] the house down’,\textsuperscript{750} as Douglas states when talking with Fred. The violence referred to in this line is not the normal violence that the State usually practises against its citizens; it is a pure violence that crushes people, kills them if necessary, to keep the State intact.

Hannah Arendt points out that power and violence are two different terms and the presence of one does not necessarily imply that of the other. She believes that power always stands in need of numbers, while violence relies on implements: ‘The extreme form of power is All against One, the extreme form of violence is One against All’.\textsuperscript{751}

She bases her assumption on the notion that politics is about being together, and that it relies on the relationality to which Foucault referred, as well as the necessity of

\textsuperscript{747} Baker-White, p.70.
\textsuperscript{748} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{749} Party Time, p.291.
\textsuperscript{750} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{751} Arendt, p.9.
continuous actualisation or renewal, as Raymond Williams mentions when talking about hegemony.\textsuperscript{752}

However, though Arendt seems to touch upon some of the points raised by both Gramsci and Foucault, I would contest her assumption that violence is not necessary for the existence of power; Pinter’s previous plays contain a considerable amount of torture, sufficient to testify against Arendt’s assumption. Moreover, Pinter himself emphasised that he is ‘writing in the background of a government, which every day passes another law that strangles the life of the country’.\textsuperscript{753}

Fred and Douglas’s talk suggests a military action against a chaotic situation in the country:

Fred: How’s it going tonight?
Douglas: Like clockwork. Let me tell you something. We want peace [...] and we’re going to get it.
Fred: Quite right.
Douglas: [...] But we want that peace to be cast iron. No leaks. No draughts. Cast iron. Tight as a drum.\textsuperscript{754}

Moreover, the clenching of the fists that both men do while discussing the security situation is a gesture of potential (if not actual) violence that can be used against anyone who raises his voice. Baker-White also believes that the gesture is a: ‘Sign of the violent political action beyond the confines of the party’.\textsuperscript{755} The language of both men and the words they use contradict what Arendt believes to be the rules of the political community. Their language seems to be more like imperatives that are imposed than directives that are accepted: ‘The laws of the political community must be thought of as directives that are “accepted,” rather than as imperatives that are “imposed”.’\textsuperscript{756}

Ironically, Douglas is talking about peace, which must be ‘cast iron’, in a language that ‘debase[s] itself’.\textsuperscript{757} As Pinter pointed out, ‘We’re talking about debased language in which the lie is simply automatic and quite persuasive and infinitely pervasive’.\textsuperscript{758} The language in which Douglas is speaking is part of the ‘very successful pattern of lies,

\textsuperscript{753}Gussow, p.76.
\textsuperscript{754}\textit{Party Time}, p 292.
\textsuperscript{755}Baker-White, p.65.
\textsuperscript{756}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{757}Gussow, p.85.
\textsuperscript{758}Ibid.
which government actually tells to its citizens’, because no peace can be cast iron. In addition, peace is usually achieved gradually, step by step. A quick peace like the one Douglas is talking about must involve violence and brutality. It is part of imparting to the masses a false consciousness of the situation, as Pinter also stated: ‘You’re told you’re a happy man, it’s a wonderful society, everything is fine [...] We’re told that other people suffer various ills, various oppressions, of which we are free’. We can imagine that if Pinter had added another scene in which Douglas and Fred gave a speech to the people, they would assume that the people should be satisfied and happy with that kind of peace as long as they are being kept away from any harm. Pinter tells Mel Gussow about Layla Al-Attar, an Iraqi artist, who was killed by American forces; they sent a missile that hit her house, and eventually killed her and her spouse on allegations that she was involved in a plot to assassinate George Bush Sr. in Kuwait during one of his visits. The plot has never been verified and might have never been existed.

Later on when Bill Clinton, who then ordered the missile on June 27th, 1993, was asked on his way to the church, how he felt about it; he commented: ‘I feel good about it, and I’m sure the American people will feel good about it as well’. That kind of doublethink, Pinter believes, is ‘terrible’.

The following scene depicts a new form of power in light of my Foucauldian reading of the concept. The scene focuses on corporeality or what Foucault calls the bio-power of the subject. Dusty praises Melissa’s figure, which is still healthy and trim even at the age of seventy:

**Dusty:** But you do have a really wonderful figure. Honestly. Doesn’t she?

Terry, on the other hand, confirms his wife’s praise, implying Melissa’s determination to keep in shape:

**Terry:** I’ve known this lady for years. [...] And she’s always looked the same.

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759 Gussow, p.84.
760 Ibid., p.85.
762 Ibid.
763 Party Time, p.293.
In the light of Foucault’s analysis, the body as bio-power is one of the instruments that shapes our identities. He described a complicated relationship between power and the human body. According to Foucault, it is through somatic discourse, and discursive practice upon the physical body, that modern power, or what he calls bio-power, came to be constituted and practised. This somatically shaped knowledge of the corporeal aims both at regulating the health of the individuals (through defining and categorising bodies) and at managing and regulating the human population. Foucault also developed another term called bio-politics, derived from the corporeal relation between the body of the individual and the State as a manager of life and survival, and thus with power over people’s morbidity, motility, and longevity. These two poles, Foucault argues, are then conjoined within a series of great mechanisms of power of which sexuality is only one (as will be discussed further in my analysis of the scene).

Unlike many Marxists who believe that subjection is the result of State control over the labour force, usually driven by the working class, Foucault believes that bio-power is a distinct regime of power, and its objects and methods are given a shape within a particular type of rationality. In other words, the body is a target in itself, a whole agency that needs to be subdued to extend power. Foucault touches upon this while explaining the reasons for waging wars. He believes that wars are not waged in the name of the sovereign, but in the name of the survival of everyone:

> Entire populations are mobilised for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity [...] it is as managers of life and survival, of bodies and the race, that so many regimes have been able to wage so many wars, causing so many men to be killed.\(^{764}\)

However, the normalisation of the human body for further discipline and control is always referred to in terms of subduing the weak or those who are inferior to us. Although Foucault did not mention self-discipline in terms of those who are already in control, this is exactly what Melissa, one of the power figures in the play, is trying to keep by joining the club that has saved her life, as she implies:

> Melissa: [...] If I still look all right, it’s probably because I’ve just joined this new club.\(^{765}\)


\(^{765}\)Party Time, p.294.
Melissa’s self-regulation does not imply that she is being watched over as part of conforming her to normalcy, as might be suggested by a Foucauldian reading, but as a practice of self-affirmation. The bourgeoisie, according to Foucault, believe that keeping the health of both body and soul determines who they are physically, mentally, and spiritually, and that is what Melissa is trying to preserve as part of her powerful presence. Nevertheless, the hypocrisy and duplicity of the bourgeoisie is soon revealed in Terry’s reproach to Dusty while they are still discussing the activities they like as part of their luxurious life-style:

Dusty: I love cooking on boats.
Terry: The only thing she doesn’t like on boats is being fucked on boats. That’s what she doesn’t like. 766

While Foucault emphasises the bourgeoisie’s concern with controlling their sex lives as part of preserving their own health and the survival of their lineage, Terry, who is acting as part of the bourgeoisie, is exercising his power over his wife even in the most intimate relations between a husband and wife. Actually, the fact that he mentions this detail as a way to expose his wife’s ‘perverted’ sexual weirdness means that he tried to ‘fuck’ her on a boat, and she did not give him the expected pleasure. Moreover, the methods of torture he will be mentioning later in the play imply sexual torture that could be used against both his wife and those subordinated by him. Terry’s sexual relations are not only exposed to others, but also reflect a deformation presented in the shape of self-affirmation. Terry, in his jockeying for the assertion of power, is sacrificing even the most intimate relation with his wife, turning the whole thing into a battlefield in which he is supposed to subdue the other to prove his own worth.

However, before the next encounter between Terry and Dusty, Liz, another party attendee, gives a speech intensifying the festivity of the party that goes hand in hand with the violence that springs from the heart of this affluence, thus bringing the intertwining of violence and festivity to the surface once again:

Liz: I think this is such a gorgeous party. [...] I mean to be part of the society of beautifully dressed people? [...] elegance, style, grace, taste, don’t these words [...] mean anything anymore? 767

766 Party Time, p.296.
767 Ibid., p.299.
The last line of Liz’s speech is a key part as it implies an unseen majority who do not share the same values as the elite (possibly because they do not have the means to attain and maintain them). It creates a sub-textual Other. Being part of a group of beautifully dressed people intensifies the celebration of torture voiced by Liz, as all she cares for are words such as ‘elegance’, ‘taste’, and ‘style’, while the world is falling apart outside. This kind of celebration is what Elaine Scarry calls the ‘Moral stupidity’ of torture. In other words, this kind of alienating oneself from others, and the insistence on unsharability is part of the set of tools for inflicting pain and cutting others off from belonging to the world: ‘Whatever pain achieves, it achieves through its unsharabaility’. Therefore, Liz’s speech crystallises the idea of unsharability, and thus intensifies the pain and torture of the Other, who, by being cut off from the society of ‘beautifully dressed people’ is made an outcast. This exclusion, as implied by Liz’s speech, is a tool of totalitarian governments to create what they believe to be a perfect society, a mythical state of perfection in which they shrug and say that the ends justify the means when it comes to torture, and in my view it is unacceptable. Exclusion, normalisation as defined by Foucault, obliviousness to the existence of the Other, believing that the evil exists outside, are all cruel means used in totalitarian societies to create, ironically, a ‘clean society’. Pinter, as part of his fascination with totalitarianism, believes that

> We have been encouraged to believe the evil exists on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Being encouraged to look ‘over there,’ we quite obviously draw a blank about what is happening in our lives. [We] have the rhetoric of the free, the Christian, the democratic, but underneath the rhetoric what [we] have is excrement, vomit, urine, blood, mutilation, horror, deprivation, poverty.

In contrast, Liz’s speech abounds in luxury, affluence, and opulence as she ‘love[s] everything that flows’. But, underneath that clean environment of the party, and the ‘incredibly important’ concepts, there is killing, extermination, marginalisation, and equally incredibly important ‘lives’, rather than ‘concepts’.

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769 Ibid, p.4
770 Gussow, p.73.
771 *Party Time*, p.299
772 Ibid.
The killing that Pinter hinted at in Liz’s rather opulent speech is brought to the surface through another character. The audience are introduced to Charlotte, who seems to have lost her husband because he, like Jimmy, was a ‘prick’. Again, discussing such a grave matter at a cocktail party disturbingly plays on the subconscious minds of the spectators, who may start thinking of Charlotte’s last line ‘Quick and slow at the same time’, which implies that her husband was tortured for a long time before being killed. Charlotte’s husband could be another Stanley in *The Birthday Party* (1957), or another Victor in *One for the Road* (1984), someone who refused to trade off his physical well-being for psychic passivity; however, while Stanley was taken away (we presume, given what we actually witness on stage, to be tortured back to normality), Charlotte’s husband has been killed and hushed forever, reflecting Pinter’s accumulated anger over nonchalant governments, which is why he urges his audience to take a step back and think over what they perceive:

> All those things that were done. All those lives that were destroyed, it is as it never happened. It is all in the past and who cares? But to the relatives of those people. It is a never-ending ulcer in their lives.  

Furthermore, when Charlotte expresses her concern about the chaos outside, Fred calms her down, asks her, indirectly, to keep her nose out of it, and keeps her in the dark without any further details:

F**red:** Leave the street to us.  

Ironically, when she asks him the secret of his fitness and gracefulness, he tells her that he keeps fit because he leads a clean life:

F**Charlotte:** You’re still so handsome! [...] What is your diet?  
What is your regime by the way?  
F**red:** I lead a clean life.  

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775 Ibid.
Then, when Douglas joins in the conversation, he approves Fred’s assumption, and confirms the idea:

**Douglas:** I lead an incredibly clean life. It doesn’t make me handsome, but it makes me happy.\(^{776}\)

The idea of keeping fit by following a healthy diet regime, leads me to comment on the policy of importing food from poor countries, who are struggling to feed themselves. But because of structures that where set in these developing nations by their colonial masters, farmers in those countries are forced to plant and export “cash crops” to Western countries who pay next to nothing for these crops. Most of the profits from these crops are siphoned by middlemen who speculate on world food prices in stock markets in New York and London. Western countries who claim that they are doing this because their climate does not allow them to grow such foods, are actually exploiting poor nation’s agricultural sector by not only manipulating the prices of foods in the world market but also use their strong currencies as a tool of devaluing produce from poor nation. Therefore, most of the suffering in the poorer nations have their roots in the colonial economic structures which has created a hostile environment for people of the third world. Instead of creating fair trade, they have created dependency. This is the scenario: Europeans took Africans as slaves to the Americas and they worked in plantations to produce agricultural products that were needed in Europe. When they found that it was not profitable to export Africans to the Americas, the abolished slavery. They replaced slavery with colonialism and started exporting foods and other materials from Africa to Europe; they called this “legitimate trade”. Colonialism was also an expensive venture in terms of man power and administration, so the Europeans granted Africans independence but they made sure their economic products were not affected and that foods kept flowing to Europe.\(^{777}\)

\(^{776}\) *Party Time*, p.308.

\(^{777}\) Not only this, but Western nations desire for biofuels also cause poor countries to export their crops for the use of ethanol. Each year in Europe alone huge amount of corps are used to fuel cars that could feed 100 million people. See [http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2010/feb/15/biofuels-food-production-developing-countries](http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2010/feb/15/biofuels-food-production-developing-countries) [Accessed on May 20th, 2015].
It is another type of torture by exploiting the productive sectors in the least developed countries. Fred and Douglas’s assumptions, therefore, are what Pinter once described as ‘shovel [ling] the shit under the carpet’. They can either deny the glaring truth of their dirty lives by approving each other, or they can be victims of another super-power that controls them. Their talk about leading a clean life and consequently having fit, trim, and healthy bodies recalls Foucault’s view of the relation between the body and disciplinary structures of the State. Foucault suggests that the State extracts time and work from the individual by controlling and disciplining his bodily movements. This can be done either by physical separation from the Other, thus creating different classes, i.e., master and worker, or by the aforementioned structure of self-discipline, according to which each individual begins to monitor and adjust his movements to comply with the delineated activities of his class. As an effect of the powerful regime within which Fred and Douglas work, they both seem to be sucked into this vicious circle of power by internalising its gaze and acting as if someone is watching them even when this is not the case, thus being reshaped according to specific instructions, which keeps them happy, as they suggest. In a sense they are like Melissa, who keeps watching over her bodily fitness to maintain her social fitness as part of the process of internalising the tools of the regime she belongs to. The power to convert people to conformity is described by Althusser as the power of ideology, which:

Resides in its ability to produce subjects who (mis) recognise themselves as ‘centres of initiatives,’ without understanding that their illusory autonomy is merely a sign of their subjection to and through internalisation of [their torturer’s] law.

I believe, in connection to Foucault’s power theory, which includes the seeping of power from within, this internalisation of the State’s tools is a pure example of the workings of power as described by him. The emergence of power from within can be

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778 Billington, The Guardian.
779 Balan, p.4.
780 The idea of exposing the individual to maximum visibility has been described by Foucault as a panopticon, a structure through which each individual is watched by a warden invisible to him/her until the individual himself starts watching his/her own actions even when no warden is watching. See Sergiu Balan, p.5.
realised through individuals who, by being part of a power system, contribute to the circulation of power.

The voice of the barbarian rises again insistently as Terry elaborates once more on the facilities of the new club and its ‘departments’, a word that seems incongruous in relation to a club. As the play moves towards its end, the dialogue becomes clearer and images of fear, luxury, and oppression intrude on the warm ambience of the club in which ‘You won’t find voices raised’.\textsuperscript{782} The rhetoric of the power figures becomes more direct and the ambiguity with which the play started turns into explicitness.

The play ends with three conclusive speeches; the first is Melissa’s monologue about the new club, which has a true moral foundation, unlike the past clubs that she has subscribed to. The imagery of her friends, and the multiple swimming and tennis clubs denote an apparently stable past that has been sullied by the current state of terror. Her friends who have died, and the lack of moral foundation of previous clubs, are decisive evidence of fake rhetoric and an oppressive regime:

\begin{quote}
\textbf{Melissa:} All of them are now dead. Every friend I ever had. [...] but the clubs died too and rightly so. [...] they were based on ideas which had no moral foundation, no moral foundation whatsoever. But our club [...] is a club [...] inspired by moral sense.\textsuperscript{783}
\end{quote}

Melissa’s monologue is exactly the kind of rhetoric Lentricchia described as ‘the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce action in other human agents’.\textsuperscript{784} It is in the name of preserving lives that power is manipulated with incredible cruelty, as when Melissa’s ‘dismissal of her old friends: “they were not my friends anyway”’\textsuperscript{785} is revealed as a ruthlessly self-serving betrayal of old loyalties.\textsuperscript{786}

As Pinter is interested in real people who are in power, Melissa’s words acquire a sense of reality rather than being imaginary symbols behind the metaphor of the club.

With the purpose of bringing to light the horror of State terrorism, Pinter, interestingly, follows Melissa’s monologue with that of Gavin, who is now recognised...

\textsuperscript{782}\textit{Party Time}, p.310.
\textsuperscript{783}Ibid., pp. 310-311.
\textsuperscript{785}\textit{Party Time}, p.311.
\textsuperscript{786}Gordon, p.178.
as a representative of an authoritarian power. Addressing the appropriateness of Melissa’s remarks, Gavin believes that some of the guests have encountered mere ‘traffic problems’,\textsuperscript{787} which are going to be resolved very soon as they have taken a ‘round-up’\textsuperscript{788} to get things back to normal:

\textbf{Gavin: }In fact, normal services will be resumed shortly. That’s all we ask, that the service this country provides will run on normal, secure and legitimate paths and that the ordinary citizen be allowed to pursue his labours and his leisure in peace.\textsuperscript{789}

Gavin ends his talk with a playful pun as he thanks his guests for a ‘quite smashing’,\textsuperscript{790} lovely party.

The third ending speech of the play will be discussed in the following section, which focuses on the workings of power as seen through Gramsci’s hegemonic theory.

\section*{II}

The club that is being discussed at the beginning of the play, as Terry and Gavin’s dialogue shows, may also fall into the category of hegemony described by Antonio Gramsci, who divided society into a civil society and a political society. Civil society is composed of all private organisms such as schools, churches, clubs, journals, and parties. Political society is composed of the public institutions such as the government, courts, army, and police.\textsuperscript{791} Significantly, there is a clear difference between Foucault’s definition of power and Gramsci’s. While Foucault holds, in his \textit{Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison} (1975),\textsuperscript{792} that power is a strategy rather than a possession of certain people, Gramsci believes that power is exerted by the ruling class through different outlets; in other words, power is exerted by the State from above.

The club, which is the focus of Terry and Gavin’s conversation, seems to include members of the bourgeois society who belong to a certain class. This class, to which most of the party attendees belong, is one of the power structures used to oppress

\textsuperscript{787} Party Time, p.312.
\textsuperscript{788} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{789} Ibid., p.313
\textsuperscript{790} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{791} Bates, p. 353.
those who oppose them. However, they seem to represent both aspects of the theories proposed so far. They are a party who belong to the civil society defined by Gramsci, and they are part of the power chain defined by Foucault. Terry’s description of the membership process of this club reveals that people are favoured according to their relations to powerful individuals:

**Terry:** Mind you, there’s a waiting list as long as, I mean you’ve got to be proposed and seconded, and they’ve got to check you out, they don’t let any old spare bugger in there, why should they?\(^{793}\)

The idea that Gavin wants to join the club after hearing about the facilities it provides better clarifies Gramsci’s theory, which I will elaborate on here. Gramsci believes that the civil society is a market place for ideas and contending cultures, and its members are like ‘salesmen’,\(^{794}\) who try to reach the people by extending the world view of the rulers to the ruled. Gramsci calls these ‘salesmen’ intellectuals. If we extend Gramsci’s theory, then we can consider Terry and Gavin as the intellectuals of their society, given that there is no independent class of intellectuals in Gramsci’s view:

An independent class of intellectuals doesn’t exist, but rather every social group has its own intellectuals. However, the intellectuals of the historically progressive class [...] exercise such a power of attraction that they end [...] by subordinating the intellectuals of other social groups and thus create a system of solidarity among all intellectuals.\(^{795}\)

By extending their ideas, the intellectuals secure the free ‘consent’ of the masses to the law and order of the land. Terry and Gavin can fall into this category of intellectuals who are trying to win the people’s consent by exporting their (and consequently the State’s) ideas to the public, creating what he calls hegemony, or the imposition of power by the State over its citizens. However, Gramsci argues that when the intellectuals fail to make people conform, the State resorts to the coercive apparatus, ‘which disciplines those who don’t consent’.\(^{796}\)

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\(^{793}\) Party Time, p.283.

\(^{794}\) Bates, p.353.

\(^{795}\) Ibid.

\(^{796}\) Bates, p.353.
Similarly, the club Terry and Gavin are discussing allows those who conform to come in, providing them with means of ‘pure comfort’, while it disciplines those who do not, and excludes them, for as Terry suggests, why should they let them in?

Nevertheless, Terry assures Gavin his membership in this club is a foregone conclusion:

**Terry**: But of course it goes without saying that someone like yourself would be warmly welcomed – as an honorary member.  

The conversation between both men also implies that Gavin belongs to the older generation, while Terry is still young, which may give us an idea about an ingrained dictatorial system over a long time. When Gavin is asking about the club, he mentions that in his younger days he used to have the same service the club is offering:

**Gavin**: Yes, I believe it was common practice in those days.

This leads us to conclude that Terry succeeded in joining Gavin in his party or class, serving as an excellent salesman. Pinter, here, is zooming in to expose and examine the world of those in power so as to show, through the metaphor of the party, the crooked, and sometimes trivial means they use to reach and conform to each other. In addition, this is a simple example provided by Pinter to show the type and nature of relations connecting those men who, in turn, try to make others conform in the same way to larger political systems.

Whilst Gavin and Terry are discussing the uniqueness of the club, Dusty interrupts to ask about her dissident brother and receives a harsh answer from Terry, who threatens to spank her if she does not keep silent. Terry’s reply to her proves the strange animosity he holds for someone who is his brother-in-law:

**Terry**: Nobody is discussing this [...] Do you follow me? Nothing’s happened to Jimmy. And if you are not a good girl I’ll spank you.

The two lines illuminate the different classes to which Dusty and Terry belong. Let me first elaborate on this point to better clarify the connection. Terry, in this line, reveals the dark side of his true affiliation; he stands for what Karl Marx calls the State in its

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797 *Party Time*, p.283.
798 Ibid., p.284.
799 Ibid., p.283.
800 Ibid., p.284.
two apparatuses: (i) the ideological one, and (ii) the repressive one. Marx divided society into infrastructure – which includes the productive forces and the relations of production, and superstructure – which in turn is divided into political-legal (law and the State), and ideology (the different ideologies whether ethical, religious, legal, political and so forth).

According to Marx, the superstructure cannot float in the air; it has to be erected on a strong foundation, which is, in this case, the infrastructure or the downtrodden classes, i.e. the proletariat, as Gramsci also mentioned in his hegemonic theory. Terry, as a member of the ruling class, is using both ideology and violence to hold on to power and maintain his position. Marx believed that the ideological State apparatus includes private institutions such as schools, parties, trade unions, families and newspapers, while the repressive State apparatus contains courts, police, and the State itself. However, in bourgeois law, such terms become internalised and fused, while the law remains valid only in the subordinate domains ‘in which bourgeois law exercises its “authority”’. The domain of the State escapes this distinction because it is already above law. Therefore, the State is neither public nor private; what matters is how these two apparatuses function.

This distinction leads me to distinguish more clearly between the ideology and the repression the State follows. Gramsci believes that ‘Man is not ruled by force alone, but also by ideas’. However, there is no pure ideology, and no pure violence. The repressive State apparatus functions to a great extent through violence (including physical violence), and secondarily by ideology: for example, the army and police also ensure their continuity through the values they propound externally. In contrast, the ideological State apparatus functions mainly by ideology, and secondarily by repression; for instance, the schools, the churches, and the parties use their own punishments to expel, select, and discipline not only their shepherds, but their flocks as well.

The entire structure of the State needs to ensure its stability by keeping the subjects upon which it is erected. Therefore, Terry, as an exemplar of the State, needs to

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801 Althusser, p.90.
802 Ibid., p.97.
803 Bates, p.351.
804 Althusser, p.98.
ensure the recreation of enough subjects to continue enjoying the same position of authority he is occupying now. Dusty is his target victim, and, while as an intellectual of his class he is promoting his rules to Gavin by activating his ideological power, he uses repression (here, emotional violence) to further subdue Dusty. Here it is worth highlighting Althusser’s comment on the production of the same forces and relations in order to ensure reproduction of the same material. According to Althusser, totalitarian systems, such as capitalism, must reproduce the same circumstances of production to ensure continuity:

It follows that, in order to exist, every social formation must reproduce the conditions of its production at the same time as it produces, and in order to be able to produce. I must therefore reproduce: the productive forces, [and] the existing relations of production.  

Hence, Terry, by subduing his wife through violence, is not doing this for himself only, he is also ensuring the continuity of the regime. Creating suitable subjects (infrastructure) requires creating the appropriate relations and circumstances, and reproaching his wife in public while there is a party going on, and threatening to spank her like a little girl means that the couple’s relation is a power relation. Althusser cites a good example to clarify the reproduction of the means of production:

Mr. X, a capitalist who produces woollen yarn in his spinning-mill, has to ‘reproduce’ his raw material, his machines, etc. But he does not produce them for his own production – other capitalists do: an Australian sheep-farmer, Mr. Y, a heavy engineer producing machine tools, Mr. Z, etc, etc. And Mr. Y and Mr.Z, in order to produce those products which are the condition of the reproduction of Mr. X’s condition, and so on to infinity.

Reproducing the same circumstances to ensure the continuity of production does not only apply to materials, but to human beings, who can also be reshaped to conform to the ruling system. In his *German Ideology*, Marx emphasised this fact:

> We set out from real, active human beings, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process. The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily,

Dusty could fall into the category of reproduced characters in Marx’s theory. Despite the fact that Dusty seems to be a normal attendee at the party, owing to the fact that she has a dissident brother she has already been put in a different category by her husband. Unlike her brother Jimmy, Dusty is not an intellectual of her class in the way that Terry is an intellectual of the ruling class, and Jimmy of the dissidents. She is a divided person, who might have what Marxism calls a false consciousness. She is aware of her brother’s misery, and asking about him is always on her agenda, yet she cannot leave the class she is trying hard to belong to and conform to. To conduct oneself in such a way as to reach the position of an intellectual of one’s class is a long and painful journey, as Lenin suggests:

\begin{quote}
To become ideologists of the working class [...] organic intellectuals of the proletariat [...] intellectuals have to carry out a radical revolution in their ideas: a long, painful and difficult re-education. An endless and internal struggle.\footnote{Althusser, p.2.}
\end{quote}

Lenin further explains the distinction between what he calls class instinct, and class position. To have a class instinct is to have subjective and spontaneous conformity to the reality of the class one belongs to, while a class position is the consciousness and practice that conform to the objective reality of the class struggle. Lenin defines it as ‘objective and rational’.\footnote{Ibid.} Jimmy, Dusty’s brother, has already reached the level of class position as he opted for dissidence, while Dusty has a false consciousness, when compared to the consciousness of the workers who accept the crumbs that fall off the table (or indeed receive handouts to keep them quiet), rather than claiming their rightful place at the table itself. People like Dusty, in order to be elevated to the level of full consciousness, need to be educated: ‘To arrive at proletarian class positions, the class instinct of the proletarian only needs to be educated’.\footnote{Ibid.}

Dusty, who does not know what is going on when she asks about her brother, shifts suddenly from the state of false consciousness to that of total conformity:

\begin{quote}
Dusty: What’s going on?
\end{quote}
**Terry**: Tell him about the new club. I’ve just been telling him about the club. She’s a member.

**Dusty**: Oh, it’s beautiful. It’s got everything. [...] The lighting’s wonderful. Isn’t it?811

Dusty’s identity-reproduction process is being manipulated and reproduced through the shaping of her consciousness in conformity with the State or the authoritative rule represented by her husband, Terry. Both Foucault and Gramsci touched upon this point, albeit with a notable difference. This difference lies in the fact that Foucault believes that the superstructure or power which usually circulates amongst different groups of people plays a more important role and leave individuals with little or no option but to comply with power and live a dogmatic life. Gramsci, nevertheless, although acknowledging the impact of superstructure, maintains that the most important thing is consciousness. I believe that Gramsci was correct, and Pinter echoed the same idea when describing the intimidation that governments practise through lies:

> I think we are intimidated by the countries in which we live. [...] Many, many people live a life of intimidation, even if they don’t realise it. [...] [We] are not only dispossessed but are effectively being disenfranchised as well by various governmental techniques and tactics. They are essentially citizens without a role. [...] This is to do with a very successful pattern of lies, which government actually tells to its citizens.812

Such intimidation is carried out in this play by Terry, who represents Dusty’s childhood figures of authority who act as vehicles or mediums of the ‘hegemonic constitution of consciousness that is carried out more overtly in the educative, legislative, and constabulary levels of the political superstructure through its symbolic authorities and representatives’.813 Such figures, among them parents, doctors, nurses, and schools, are ‘powerful figures of identity formation [...] in the so called pre-political period of childhood’.814

Nevertheless, both Terry and Dusty are being consumed in this hegemonic process which, although based on manipulating the consciousness of the masses, is different from ideology. Terry, while employing his ideology, and consequently the State’s, to

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812 Gussow, p.84.
813 Lentricchia, p.77.
814 Ibid.
subdue Dusty and others, is himself being encapsulated within this hegemonic society. More generally, ideology is the process of applying ‘abstract ways to the actual consciousness of both dominant and subordinated classes’. The concept of hegemony, however, goes beyond ideology in that it decides the ‘whole lived social process as practically organised by specific and dominant meanings and values’; this is unlike ideology, which mainly decides the conscious system of ideas and beliefs. The dominant class, composed of people such as Terry and Gavin, although enclosed within the violent system, will have a pure and simple form of this ideology, while the subordinated classes, such as Dusty, will have nothing but this ideology as their consciousness. Given the fact that the means of producing such ideologies is in the hands of the ruling class, the ideology will be imposed on the consciousness of the dominated classes (e.g., Dusty and her brother), who either live by their given consciousness, or have a different one (as Jimmy does), which will, then, have to struggle to be sustained or develop against the ‘ruling-class ideology’. Terry, who is part of the whole body of practices and beliefs that shapes our perception of ourselves and our world, considers Jimmy a ‘prick’, and all the stories that Dusty brings up are spread by other ‘pricks’ who, simply because they possess a different consciousness to his, are excluded and singled out:

**Terry**: You keep hearing all these things spread by pricks about pricks.818

Dusty’s reaction and challenge to Terry not only threatens his authority as a male but also as a man of the State who needs to reassert himself and tighten his grip on his subject. When he tells her that her brother is not on his agenda, and she counters him by saying it is on hers, he feels that she is a pervert mouth that needs to be taken care of. However, such rupturing rhetoric on behalf of the dissidents (if Dusty is one of them) will further marginalise them as it further isolates them from the evils of all other political discourse. According to Frank Lentricchia, such rhetoric:

Would not succeed in bringing the new society to birth ex nihilo but would only cut itself off from potentially sympathetic

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815 Williams, p.109.
816 Ibid.
817 Ibid.
818 Party Time, p.288.
819 Lentricchia, p.33.
reception as it created not dialogue, but narcissistic reflection.\textsuperscript{820}

The freedom of expression that Dusty mirrors in her claim of having an agenda of her own is emphasised by Pinter himself, who believes that ‘We still say we live in free countries, but we damn well better be able to speak freely. And it’s our responsibility to say precisely what we think’.\textsuperscript{821} However, the way Dusty expresses her opposition to Terry is ill-advised as it will alienate her to an even greater extent than previously. Paul de Man reflects this in suggesting that ‘The lesson is that radical rupture, not progressive change, is impossible’.\textsuperscript{822} Fredric Jameson agrees as he believes that: ‘There can be no qualitative change [...] without beforehand a total revolutionary and systematic transformation’.\textsuperscript{823} This indirect rupture of power is a term used by Gramsci to denote a passive revolution, which he defined as a war of positions in which change does not take the shape of a violent shift, but a slow and gradual metamorphosis which could take years of organisation, such as protests and strikes, to accomplish. By using the same tools and values of the ruling system, Gramsci believes that transformations of the political and institutional structures could be achieved without strong social processes. This kind of revolution, according to Gramsci, takes place on the level of civil society; it therefore needs to manipulate education, religion, language, media etc.\textsuperscript{824}

As a result of the social and political truths outlined so far, direct confrontation is not the way to guide Dusty through the dark tunnel of oppression; what she should do is to work her way through the tunnel to reach the other end. In this respect Lentricchia claims that: ‘The way out, if there is a way out, can only be the way through’.\textsuperscript{825} He quotes Kenneth Burke who confirms:

\begin{quote}
One cannot extend the doctrine of revolutionary thought among the lower middle class without using middle-class values—just as the Church invariably converted pagans by making the local deities into saints.\textsuperscript{826}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{820} Lentricchia, p.33.
\textsuperscript{821} Gussow, pp.71-72.
\textsuperscript{823} Jameson, p.48
\textsuperscript{825} Lentricchia, p.33.
Nevertheless, Dusty’s divided character, that is, a dissident and a conniver at the same time, makes it difficult for her to have a solid ground and defend a clear position.

The power of totalitarian regimes is fully displayed in the scene between Terry and Dusty as they are standing in a hidden corner at the party. Terry verbally lashes out at Dusty for having broached the subject of Jimmy in front of the party host, Gavin:

**Terry:** Are you mad? Do you know what that man is?

**Dusty:** Perhaps you will kill me when we get home? Do you think you will? Do you think you’ll put an end to it? Do you think there is an end to it? [...] Do you think if you put an end to me that would be the end of everything for everyone? Will everything and everyone die with me?  

Although this verbal clash is not the first in the play between the couple, this time it zooms closely in on the nature of Terry’s position, and the means the State uses against those who refuse to conform. Again, Dusty’s direct challenge to an authority like Terry will incite further violence in which authority will be the winner and the ruled will be crushed. A direct clash with a superior power is fruitless, and will only be doomed to failure. Gramsci echoes this idea when talking about the revolution of the working class against authority. John Fulton interprets Gramsci’s words as he suggests: ‘For Gramsci there is no point in inciting the working classes to revolt in modern Western democracies. They can only end up being crushed’.  

However, Dusty, who seems to be one of those who wear ‘their chains willingly’, has now realised the miserable situation she has opted for in the past, yet her resistance is neither passive nor active; she is divided between complying or rejecting, and therefore Terry can always find a chance to hit out at her, and subdue her fragile, undefined resistance:

**Terry:** Yes, you’re all going to die together, you and all your lot.

**Dusty:** How are you going to do it? Tell me.

**Terry:** Easy. We’ve got dozens of options. We could suffocate every single one of you at a given signal or we could shove a broomstick up each individual arse at another given signal or

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827 *Party Time*, p.302.
we could poison all the mother’s milk in the world so that every baby would drop dead before opened its perverted mouth.830

Terry’s sadomasochistic description of methods of torture and murder highlights Althusser’s interpretation of Marx’s view of the State, in which every ideology includes violence and all violence must be done according to an ideology. Pinter realised that, in order to confront the audience with the workings of violence and torture in this play, the aim of political theatre is ‘to produce plays that arouse a wider and deeper awareness of the necessity and of the possibility to change the present society’.831 Therefore, he stated in an interview with Sylvie Drake that ‘Everyone has a quite essential obligation to subject the society in which we live to moral scrutiny’.832 Subjecting the audience to moral scrutiny is fulfilled, in my opinion, through presenting to them the brutalities of power as in One for the Road and Mountain Language, which emphasises my point that Pinter actually was not reluctant to discover oppositional forces as much as he was interested in revealing the schemes of power and its workings.

Another horrific image wrapped in the party atmosphere is introduced to us in the meeting between Charlotte and Fred, who seem to have had a relationship before she married her deceased husband. Although I mentioned that Charlotte’s husband could be another Stanley, more light now needs to be shed on why he was a disturbance to the State. Charlotte, who has been married to one of the ‘pricks’, as Terry describes anyone opposing the regime, is now in confrontation with one of the power figures who killed her husband. Although Robert Gordon describes Charlotte’s husband as having been finished in what he calls a ‘political execution’,833 he does not elaborate on the reason. Charlotte’s husband seems to have had what Gramsci defined as ‘contradictory consciousness.834 Gramsci elaborates on this:

One might almost say that [a man in the mass] has two theoretical consciousnesses: one which is implicit in his activity

830 Party Time, p.302.
832 Sylvie Drake, ‘Acting Is Just like “Old Times” for Pinter’, Los Angeles Times, 29 Oct. 1985, Sec.6:1, p.6
833 Gordon, p.176.
834 Femia, p.43.
and which truly unites him with all his [fellows] in the practical transformation of reality; and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically accepted.\textsuperscript{835}

Charlotte’s husband could have been recognised by the State, to which he showed a low level of commitment as a potential non-conformist, and threatened with severe deprivation or death. In other words, the ‘elements of intellectual and moral approbation coexist in unsteady equilibrium with elements of apathy, resignation, and even hostility’\textsuperscript{836} in his mind. He may have expressed agreement with the dominant conception of the world, but he definitely showed animosity to the ethos of the bourgeoisie. Therefore, he was listed as a ‘dissident’ who had to be hushed, as we learn from his wife:

\begin{quote}
**Charlotte**: Oh my husband. [...] That’s right, he died.
**Fred**: Was it a long illness?
**Charlotte**: Short.
**Fred**: Quick then?

**Charlotte**: [...] I’ll bet it can be quick and slow at the same time. I bet it can. I bet death can be both things at the same time. Oh by the way, he wasn’t ill.\textsuperscript{837}
\end{quote}

Although Charlotte talks about her husband’s death, she never describes how he was killed. She rather gives us the impression that he suffered, which could be another tool inserted by Pinter here to confront the audience with different facets of power and that might push them to recall similar situations.

This detachment from direct use of power is further deployed by Pinter through Dame Melissa, who, when she arrives, gives us more information on what is going on in the street. The ambiguity of identities is diminished a little here, and the spectators may have a clearer understanding of the figures of power in this play. Dame Mellissa describes the unrest as ‘Black Death’:

\begin{quote}
**Mellissa**: What on earth’s going on out there? It’s like the Black Death. [...] The town’s dead. There’s nobody on the streets, there’s not a soul in sight, apart from some [...] soldiers.\textsuperscript{838}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{835} Femia, p.43.
\textsuperscript{836} Ibid., p.45.
\textsuperscript{837} Party Time, pp.305-306.
But instead of clarifying the situation, Terry cuts into Melissa’s observations and belittles them by saying of the unrest that there is ‘nothing in it’, and introduces her to Gavin to carry on the same conversation about the amenities of the party and the club. Terry, as an intellectual of his class, is acting like a priest in the Church, which is another layer of the civil society. Terry is not only exercising his control over Dusty, but also over those at the party by directing the conversation in his favour. He could stand for the Church or the school as components of civil society by manipulating the ethical content of their thoughts, a practice that is not to be found in the sphere of socio-political institutions. The term ‘organic intellectual’ coined by Gramsci seems to reflect the role Terry takes at the party. According to Gramsci, organic intellectuals are those who help to maintain the coercion of the State, and they are defined by the type of their relations, not by the quality of their labour. The term ‘coercion’ has been paired by Gramsci with hegemony to express control and power. Hegemony and coercion are paired, alongside State and society, further to clarify the process of mediating power and domination to the ruling class. Gramsci believes that the civil society and the State are structures, amalgams of institutions, beliefs and practices that mediate the power and control of the dominant class or group. Although they place obstacles in the way of unlimited exploitation of the masses, they make sure, on the other hand, to keep reproducing the exploitative conditions: ‘These structures also place obstacles and limitations on the unbridled exploitation of the subordinate classes, but these structures encourage rather than impede the essential procedures of the mode of production’.

Interestingly, Pinter’s juxtaposition of Melissa’s ‘What a lovely party’, with Terry’s reproach to Dusty as she declares that she does not know what to believe anymore takes us to a different dimension in the play:

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838 Party Time, p.286.
839 Ibid., p.287.
840 Fulton, p.204.
841 Gramsci’s use of paired terms to describe power and control is well known. He also paired force and consent, coercion and persuasion, Church and State, politics and morality, law and freedom, violence and civility, agitation and propaganda, tactics and strategy, etc. See John Fulton, p.204.
842 Ibid., p.204.
843 Ibid.
844 Party Time, p.289.
Terry: You don’t have to believe anything. You just have to shut up and mind your own business, how many times do I have to tell you?  

This line reflects Kenneth Burke’s idea of an educative process, which he parallels with Gramsci’s theory of hegemony. According to this process, described by Burke as working silently at subterranean levels, we tend to be influenced to assent to the structures or property relations authorised by ‘rules, courts, parliaments, laws, educators, constabulary, and the moral slogans linked with each’. These constituents, which Gramsci calls ‘traditional intellectuals’, and Burke calls ‘priests’, of the pulpits, schools, press, radio, TV, and popular arts educate the socially dispossessed individual to believe that he has a share in the authoritative structure that dispossesses him, and that his only hope of reposssession lies in his allegiance to this structure: ‘The dispossessed give their hopes to the dispossessing structure because they have been hegemonically educated to believe that there is no other, no alternative, no better structure.’

Interestingly enough, whilst the bourgeoisie attempt to impose what Gramsci calls moral regulation on the working classes in order to maximise productivity, which contributes to the process of self-formation, and consequently further control, they themselves do not abide by the rules they set. Alan Hunt explains that the agents who rule need to demonstrate, not only to themselves, but also to those being ruled by them, that they are entitled and able to rule, and I believe that Terry, by breaking the rules that he himself rebukes Dusty for breaking, is trying to prove his power through forcing his manhood on her. In other words, there are situations in the play proving that Terry is not the ideal husband for Dusty, starting from her wish that a man sends her flowers to her door, and ending with Gavin’s comment about uncontrollable wives and Terry’s threat to have a good talk with her when they get back home. This harsh treatment would have definitely found its way to their bed. Being unable to control his sexual instincts, Terry falls into the category that Gramsci mentioned in discussing moral regulation. Terry is not the type of man required for a better society:

\[845\] Party Time, pp.287-288.
\[847\] Lentricchia, p.77.
The truth is that the new type of man demanded by the rationalisation of production and work can’t be developed until the sexual instinct has been suitably regulated and until it has been rationalised.\(^848\)

His inadequacy as a rational individual is further affirmed in Melissa’s comment on Terry’s indignation with his wife for not liking being fucked on the boat:

**Melissa:** That’s funny. I thought everyone liked that.\(^849\)

The word ‘everyone’ is crucial here as it sheds light on the means of torture to subdue others. Terry’s wish of ‘fucking’ his wife with the expected pleasure on the boat or elsewhere might be practised with others as part of both self-affirmation and extending power through sexuality.\(^850\)

The idea of mentioning others is brought to the surface again through Dusty’s question about her brother, whose appearance at the end gives a ‘smashing’ end to the play, just as Gavin describes the party. When Jimmy appears suddenly from out of the light of the room, shabbily dressed in sharp contrast to the smartly-dressed guests, Pinter is making what I believe is the strongest comment in the play, juxtaposing violence and festivity in their strongest revelation. Jimmy, unlike Victor in *One for the Road*, who had his tongue hurt, does not carry any signs of torture except for his emptiness, which intensifies pain that has gone beyond physical abuse.

Jimmy, who is one of the dissidents, fulfils the prophecy of Gramsci, who believes in the futility of revolution and supports a gradual change of the status quo. Jimmy, who seems to have stood against the ruling regime, not only got excluded, but had his identity literally stripped from him as he even lost the sense of who he is:

**Jimmy:** I had a name. It was Jimmy. People called me Jimmy. That was my name.\(^851\)

From his monologue, with all his allusions to the noises, blindness, and the banging of the doors, Jimmy seems to have been imprisoned. Though contextually different, the shutting of the doors and the closing up seem to be similar to Deborah’s experience in *A Kind of Alaska*. Both Jimmy and Deborah are outcasts who had ‘[Their] identities

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\(^848\) Hunt, p.284.

\(^849\) *Party Time*, p.296.


\(^851\) Ibid.
negated by [their] isolation from human society’. However, while Deborah’s exclusion is mainly a gendered issue, Jimmy’s is on social, political, cultural, and corporeal levels. Jimmy’s alienation could be the end of any strong and direct opposition, no matter who the rebel is (i.e., Dusty has already been excluded both as a woman and as an individual). By depicting wretched Jimmy at the end of the play, Pinter, I believe, is not preaching the uselessness of change or freedom of speech, but he is inviting us to accept gradual rather than revolutionary change.

Jimmy’s appearance, with his shabby clothes and exhausted body, is a reminder of the philosophy of Affect that Pinter might have employed here. According to Gilles Deleuze the Affect is ‘a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act’. To free this phrase from its abstract content, let me give a simple example: when someone runs into A, towards whom he feels hostility, and then meets B, who is very charming, one feels, according to Baruch Spinoza, ‘a variation […] on the force of existing, the power of acting, […] and these variations are perpetual’. However, when this process is reversed, such as when we meet the pleasing character first and then the displeasing character, we move from a state of joy to sadness; our power of acting is inhibited or obstructed. Jimmy’s appearance, then, after the affluent party may exercise the same Affect on the audience, who will then be exposed to variations in the mode of their existence, and thus, the power of their actions.

When asked whether he was filled with darkness himself, Pinter replied: ‘No, I’m not filled with darkness […] I think we all have […] a little bit of darkness within us’. This confirms what Pinter had said previously, that there is still room for change. However, rather than ‘end[ing] up being crushed’, because an old order will not vanish through our simply pointing out its evils, what we need is to manoeuvre, and

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852 Gordon, p.178.
854 Cours Vincennes, ‘Gilles Deleuze, Lecture Transcripts on Spinoza’s Concept of Affect’, See online: http://www.webdeleuze.com/php/sommaire.html . p.3. Deleuze’s definition is explicitly derived from Spinoza’s, although he (Deleuze) tends to distinguish more sharply than Spinoza does between affect and emotions.
855 Gussow, p.93.
856 Merritt, p.150.
857 Fulton, p.198.
858 Ibid., p.356.
to use politics for more gains because ‘If the wretched of the earth have always been on the wrong end of the stick, it is because someone else knew which was the right end’. Jimmy, as a young man, suffers from the ‘radicalism of youth’, and the generation that was supposed to educate him (i.e., his elders who have been inducted into the bourgeoisie) is the same one that oppressed him; therefore, any political interference on their part to cut any communication off and get him back to the right track will backfire, as it has done. However, it is our responsibility as well as Jimmy’s to restore things back into balance, not by counter-attack and ‘cast iron’ peace, as the figures of power declare in the play, but by gradual reformation to bring things back on track.

III

I will elaborate here on the implications of both gender and resistance in relation to the process of creating norms and identities in society. According to Allison Weir, not all identities are produced through power and subjection. The meanings of one’s gender, race, and sexual orientation are produced through multiple logics and relations of power. In other words, our identities are not only the result of power relations, but material relations of reproduction. José Madina agrees with this to some extent, as he believes that ‘All identity categories are intrinsically heterogeneous, and necessarily unstable’.

Madina draws on Ludwig Wittgenstein’s later philosophy, in which he states that all of the concepts we use to describe things and the world around us are not fixed to a strict identity. For example, we might refer to different kinds of activities as games, and many different kinds of artefacts as chairs. In other words, we tend to treat different kinds of things as the same, although they are not strictly identical in any respect. Wittgenstein suggests that these concepts are like families whose family members might resemble one another in many different ways. However, families are composed of heterogeneous aspects. Although they might share a family resemblance

\[\text{\^{\text{\footnotesize 859}}}: \text{Fulton, p.356.} \]
\[\text{\^{\text{\footnotesize 860}}}: \text{iid., p.361.} \]
in certain physical features, there is no set feature that they all must have that determines membership of the family. As Wittgenstein puts it:

We extend our concept [...] as in spinning a thread we twist fibre on fibre. And the strength of the thread doesn’t reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres.\textsuperscript{862}

Wittgenstein’s philosophy implies that identities are not produced through a specific relationship (i.e., power), but through many complicated networks. The question that might arise here in relation to the play is how Dusty, being a divided personality, could be considered and accepted as part of the club to which her husband belongs. Wittgenstein’s answer to this question is that membership of certain categories (families, groups, parties, etc.), is not determined by certain facts; although historical, biological, or social facts cannot be denied, they do not speak for themselves — or rather, we speak for them. We can do this by following the fundamental elements of Wittgenstein’s view: contextuality, performativity, and normativity. José Madina further clarifies these points:

Only in specific contexts, through chains of performances, and through the norms constantly re-enacted in them, can the membership of particular thing in particular families be decided [...] if we abstract from context, practices, and norms, the question of membership becomes indeterminate and cannot be answered. [...] but the question of membership is not indeterminate and arbitrary when it is properly conceptualised as something context-dependent, action-based, and normatively regulated.\textsuperscript{863}

According to this, our similarities and differences to certain familial relations are set by our practices and behaviours, but what are the mechanisms that determine our similarities to and differences from certain familial resemblances? There are two factors that seem to correspond to the perception of similarities and differences: (i) identification and (ii) counter-identification; for example, we can ascribe certain characteristics to someone by identifying her with certain members of this or that family. In other words, we can construct the identity of someone by connecting her to the network of similarities that link that family; thus we can say someone is a woman

\textsuperscript{862} Madina, p.959.
\textsuperscript{863} Ibid., p.662.
by stressing her similarities to other women. However, one can also acquire identity by looking at the network of differences that distinguishes one family from another, and thus we can say someone is a woman by stressing her difference from men. Identity problems can occur due to these two factors of identification and counter-identification. The source of this issue is our blindness to either our similarities to or differences from certain familial groups of relations—which may lead to either inclusion or exclusion from certain groups. This blindness hides the structural disorder that is embedded in the very core of familial identity, and which may come to the surface at any given time. This disorder can emerge when our sight is restored, and we are no longer blind to either our similarities to or differences from certain familial relations. This is what feminist theories have termed ‘disidentification’. Judith Butler describes it as the ‘experience of misrecognition, this uneasy sense of standing under a sign to which one does and does not belong’.  

Interestingly, the process of disidentification highlights the process of identity formation, which cannot be reduced to mere identification and counter-identification. The mechanism of disidentification confounds the similarities and differences upon which familial relation is built, and creates difficulties for the already established network of relations. Butler further clarifies the subversive aspects of disidentification. In her view, ‘to be constituted’ by a signifier of identity is ‘to be compelled to cite or repeat or mime’ the signifier itself, whose future depends on a ‘citational chain’, a chain that operates through an insistent citation of the signifier of identity. Butler believes that this performance of consistent citation involves resignification: ‘A repetition that fails to repeat loyally, a reciting of the signifier that must commit disloyalty against identity [...] in order to secure its future’. Butler, however, believes that disidentification is a source of resistance to the sedimentation of signifiers and as a ‘site of rearticulation’, it offers ‘a discursive occasion for hope’.  

Butler emphasises the political importance of disidentification as ‘the point of departure for a more democratising affirmation of internal difference’. While repeated disidentification can lead to greater opportunities for creating different
groups of diversity, it is important to note that the disidentification process remains an unfinished one, as ‘There can be no final or complete inclusivity’. In connection to Dusty’s identity formation and reproduction, my reading of both Foucault and Butler shows an agreement between the two that self-creation is practised not only through resistance to norms, but through aspiration to norms, or inhabiting norms. This implies one’s relationship to social values, to oneself, and to other people, and opens up the possibility of multiple kinds of power and multiple relations that constitute the self. In other words, Foucault’s view is that when we go looking for ourselves, we will find ready identity categories that have been produced through power regimes, and which serve to delineate boundaries between normalcy and deviance, then police these boundaries by the mechanism of self-surveillance.

Therefore, not only our social categories (e.g., black vs. white, gay vs. straight), but also our deep selves, are produced as binary categories and human beings must struggle to live up to and resist their terms. Thus, for Foucault the ideal of authenticity, rather than the undermining of fixed social categories, effectively elevates us to the essential truth of the self. Interestingly enough, Butler agrees with this by implying that this very identification with social categories would inhibit any call for freedom. Resistance is then understood as ‘the dual possibility of being both constituted by the law and an effect of resistance to the law’. Butler thus implies that our subjection is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which freedom is sought:

As a form of power, subjection is paradoxical. To be dominated by a power external to oneself is a familiar and agonising form power takes. To find, however, that what ‘one’ is, one’s very formation as a subject, is in some sense dependent on that very power is quite another [...] subjection consists precisely in this fundamental dependency on a discourse we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustain our agency.

Significantly, Dusty, who is a divided personality, lacks the feeling of uniqueness of self, as do many others; the authenticity that Foucault insisted on, and one’s own particularity. Hence, lacking this, Dusty is subject to the power of Terry; yet,
paradoxically, Butler suggests that law might turn against itself and the very system that offers us the identity it constructed through power might enable our own agency.

However, although the women in this play have an agency, theirs has been exploited by totalitarian regimes to be moulded according to their own needs and ends. The notion of manipulating the consciousness of the population is expressed differently in the conversation between Liz and Charlotte, which is rooted in gendered implications in relation to power. Liz and Charlotte, other female characters attending the party, talk about another woman who has stolen Liz’s male object; then the scene develops into violent imagery up to the point at which Charlotte tells Liz that the third woman has ‘raped the man you love’. 872

This imagery of power in the hands of women can be analysed from different angles. Liz and Charlotte are pictured as powerful women, enjoying a considerable amount of freedom to decide on their relations with the opposite sex, and even jump from one man to another in the journey of looking for the right partner. The idea of investing in a ‘subject [that] is too brutally excluded from the socio-symbolic stratum, [or] brutally ignored by existing discourse or power’, 873 is sometimes promoted by totalitarian regimes to fend off criticism. This counter-society of women created by feminists who refuse to identify with any existing power is exploited by totalitarian regimes by investing this counter-society through promoting it, fabricating a few female ‘chiefs’ amongst the group, and implementing their decisions, giving decision-making institutions more flexibility.

Also, woman, being brutally excluded from society (from her family and social institutions) may perpetuate this violence she has endured, ‘mak[ing] of herself a ‘possessed’ agent of this violence in order to combat what was experienced as frustration’. 874 In both cases, women are being a scapegoat for a society that has charged them with an evil ‘of which the community duly constituted can then purge itself, a purge which will finally exonerate that community of any further criticism’. 875

872 Party Time, p.290.
874 Ibid., p.203.
In a strong connection, Liz’s and Charlotte’s identification with the power system that itself exploits them contributes to consolidating it. By using the same means of brutality that Terry employs to make what he calls the ‘pricks’ conform, Liz and Charlotte are giving us a smaller-scale image of the violence that takes place on a large scale. Liz and Charlotte, hereafter, are shields being placed in the front line to safeguard the identity of the system, as Julia Kristeva further clarifies:

The exploitation of women is still too great and the traditional prejudices against them too violent for one to be able to envision this phenomenon with sufficient distance. It can, however, be said from now on that this is the inevitable product of what we have called a denial of the socio-symbolic contract and its counter-investment as the only means of self-defence in the struggle to safeguard an identity. This paranoid-type mechanism is at the base of any political involvement. 876

If we were to look at the act of rape that both women are talking about in terms of action, then Kenneth Burke’s analysis would better explain Kristeva’s point about women’s exploitation. Burke believes that action is synonymous with rational consciousness,877 and since women are, according to the traditional philosophy,878 incapable of rational action, they can only be acted upon. The fact that the scene is reflecting an action carried out by two women against one man supports Kristeva’s suggestion that women are sometimes given the lead to intensify their exploitation and protect ‘the lucidity and rationality of the male subject’.879 When Liz projects her feelings as being caused by falling in love, which made her incapable of sleeping all night, she is asserting her female agency, which is always ‘undermined by feeling’.880 Interestingly, when she swears that her lover looked at her like a ‘wounded deer’, before going away with another woman, she asserts the man’s superiority over the woman – that he, out of love, weakened and was moved by his feelings, which is not always the norm for the male subject who is always identified with rationality:

876 The Kristeva Reader, p.203.
877 Lentricchia, p.114.
878 Traditional philosophy, as Plato obliges us to conclude that the rational subject is male. Lentricchia, p.114.
879 Lentricchia, p.114.
880 Ibid.
Liz: I swear it. As he was being lugged out he looked back, [...] at me, like a wounded deer.\textsuperscript{881}

This gendered difference between the male and female characters in the play is significantly linked to their political identity. I agree with Fredric Jameson, who believes that the subjection of women by men has a broader effect if looked at in terms of class struggle. If men are capable of deconstructing and disintegrating woman’s power by looking at them as mere objects and manipulating their existence for their own purposes, then they are capable of doing the same towards classes defined as lower than theirs. Thus, Liz and Charlotte, by discussing their sexual relations to other men, are giving us an image of the practices of the oppressor, men in general, towards what Jameson calls ‘the class enemy’.\textsuperscript{882}

However, women’s identification with the powers that constantly exploit their own being continues to be demonstrated in its purest form when Melissa involves herself in the conversation about being ‘fucked’ on the boat, as Terry puts it. The word ‘fucked’ gives us another image of the way the enemies of the ruling class are being treated. Gender, power, and politics are inseparably related here, particularly when there are different layers of subjugation to be addressed. Melissa, who is supposed to be one of the hawks of power, as she implies in one of her conversations, is also subjugated owing to the fact of her gender. Being a female, Melissa already identifies with male desires, and sees being ‘fucked’ on the boat as a source of pleasure that she considers it funny not to like, as Terry says his wife does not. Foucault, although omitting reference to the female body, discussed the importance of the body in extending power that is concomitant to disciplines, regulations, and State control. The Foucauldian focus on sexuality in that sense came from his belief that the discipline of the body constitutes the organisation of power over life, and hence his coinage of the term ‘bio-power’. According to Foucault, sexuality was a key element in the development of capitalism in the nineteenth century:

Therefore the history of sexuality becomes a history of our discourses about sexuality and the deployment of sexuality

\textsuperscript{881} Party Time, p.289.
\textsuperscript{882} Jameson, p.67.
discourse is one part of a complex growth of control over individuals through the apparatus of sexuality.\textsuperscript{883}

Melissa’s concern about exercise and keeping a trim body is part of the self-discipline that locks her in her own gender as a pleasure provider rather than a pleasure seeker. Women are always seen, to a large extent, through their bodies, which are, in effect, ‘a site for political struggle [being] shaped and trained by the networks of social and political power in which they exist’.\textsuperscript{884} Accordingly, and as part of self-surveillance, Melissa is practising power over and self-discipline of her body through exercising, and sports in the club. Melissa, although part of the power system, occupies a lower position than men, who are always seen as superior in that sense. She is another example of the positioning of Pinter’s women. What is also interesting about Melissa is that, being 70, she is post-sexual to most of the men present in the party. Being no longer fecund means that she has become a masculinised version of femininity who has internalised the idea that the masculine way of perceiving the world is the correct one.

Both Butler and Foucault believe in the agency of the body as a power in itself, as they both believe that our bodies are socially constructed. Butler in \textit{Gender Trouble} emphasises the fact that gender is discursively and materially constructed through repetitive words, performances, acts, gestures, and desires.\textsuperscript{885}

The body suffers a certain cultural construction, not only through conventions that sanction and proscribe how one acts one’s body, the “act”, or performance that one’s body is, but also in the tacit conventions that structure the way the body is culturally perceived.\textsuperscript{886}

Butler, together with Foucault, is inviting us to consider sexual identities as part of a network of regular practices and draws our attention to unfixed sexual categories which traditional feminist movements neglected to examine. Despite biological differences which should always be considered, gender is a socially constructed concept that does not disregard women’s victimisation of women, but rather

\textsuperscript{883}Wijitbusaba Marome, \textit{Foucault’s Work for the Analysis of Gender Relations: Theoretical Reviews, Journal of Architectural/Planning Research and Studies}, Thammasat University (3) 2005, p.120.
\textsuperscript{884}Ibid.
emphasises it as part of women’s practices in oppressing their own gender; this might be reflected in Melissa’s adoption of a masculine view of the world, transcending her biological difference as a woman who should accept herself as she is.

The gender issue is further highlighted in one of Dusty and Terry’s confrontations on the subject of Dusty’s brother Jimmy. When Dusty repeats the same question over and over, and Terry replies: ‘It’s not on anyone’s agenda’, Dusty challenges him that it is on hers. However, Terry’s denial of the validity of Dusty’s concern, and his reference to her having no agenda, may have two implications; it could be: (i) Pinter’s way of categorising Dusty as an oppositional figure, or a dissident like her brother; or, (ii) it might imply the oppression of the male patriarch represented by Terry. In both cases, Terry is subduing Dusty both as a woman and as a citizen who has the right to ask questions. Terry’s action towards his wife reflects his behaviour towards those who speak up to defend their rights. It recalls Foucault’s analysis of the social force of normalisation. According to Foucault, normalisation rests on ‘a settled, monolithic foundation’. Terry’s violent reaction in a luxurious party, this nexus of festivity and violence is, according to Robert Baker-White, Pinter’s technique of emphasising the erosion of one’s sense of self: ‘The turn from festivity to violence becomes an agency for delivering the “theme,” or the “meaning,” of eroding identity’.

Gavin’s comment on the encounter between Terry and Dusty underscores the relation between gender, power, and social problems:

Gavin: So odd, the number of men who can’t control their wives. [...]It’s the root of so many ills, you know. Uncontrollable wives.

Gavin’s terms ‘ills’, and ‘uncontrollable’ could be expanded to include political taboos on certain performances of individuals in life. According to Butler, performance of gender not only accounts for patriarchal oppression within the confines of already existing directives, but also stands for political oppression and authority included in the meaning of social performance. In other words, the confrontation between Dusty and Terry not only underscores male authority over the female body and discourse, but also provokes us to think of the bigger picture in which political authority guides our
social performance ‘According to political sanctions and taboos under which that performance may and may not occur within the public sphere free of punitive consequences’.

The circle of victimisation on gender levels is brought again as Douglas starts telling of the start of his relationship with Liz, his wife. Liz, who was crying over her ‘raped’ beloved, participates in her victimisation as she shares her husband’s claims of happiness:

**Liz:** And it makes me happy too. So happy.

This illusion of happiness started when Douglas was travelling as a ‘salesman’, leaving Liz with twins, to take care of their life. Being a traveller and working as a salesman, and leaving his family for considerable periods of time implies that Douglas is one of the major members of the State who is either used to convince people of the State’s world view, or might have worked as an enforcer to smother those voices raised against the State:

**Douglas:** I was a traveller, a commercial traveller, a salesman.

While Douglas was busy destroying other people’s families, he left his wife to take care of the house. Liz, left with twins, had to take care of their upbringing without help from anyone. She had to keep the house clean, tuck the children up in bed, and keep everything beautiful for her husband’s return:

**Douglas:** And when I got back from my travelling I would find the flat immaculate, the twins bathed and in bed [...] my wife looking beautiful and my dinner in the oven.

All of these things are Douglas’s reason for staying with his wife, which leads me to draw a connection to Butler’s assumption of gender as a performance. Had Liz not

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892 Party Time, p.308.
893 Ibid.
894 Ibid., p.309.
performed the role of a submissive woman, she would not have been incarcerated at home while her husband was busy building his career. Moreover, although I entirely agree with Foucault’s (and Butler’s) views on the social construction of gender, I would also subscribe to Adrienne Rich’s view that womanhood is always tainted by the tight control of patriarchy due to our physical differences, and reproductive power:

I have come to believe [...] that female biology [...] has far more radical implications than we have yet come to appreciate. Patriarchal thought has limited female biology to its own narrow specification. The feminist vision has recoiled from female biology for these reasons; it will, I believe, come to view our physicality as a resource, rather than a destiny. In order to live a fully human life we require not only control of our bodies [...] we must touch the unity and resonance of our physicality, our bond with the natural order, the corporeal ground of our intelligence.\textsuperscript{895}

Douglas’s control over his wife does not only imply men’s fear of women’s power due to their different biological differences: ‘For we are rooted, as are animals and trees, wind and seas, in the Earth’s substance. Our origins are in her elements’,\textsuperscript{896} but also denotes a masculine hegemony, which refers to a social organisation by means of which a social group extends, and sustains its dominion over another in a social hierarchy. In other words, Douglas’s control over Liz invites us to consider the cultural representation of certain classes in society in terms of formulating certain ideals and issues in such a way that social institutions adopt them as natural, ordinary, and normal. It is through the punishment of non-conformity that the State is crucially involved in this negotiation and enforcement of its worldview.

Significantly, Liz’s happiness is more than what Gramsci called ‘wear[ing] [...] chains willingly’,\textsuperscript{897} as she is ‘unable to recognise the nature of her servitude’.\textsuperscript{898} She is condemned to see reality through the vision of Douglas, who here represents the ruling class. Douglas has extended his power over Liz not only within the realms of work, sexuality and fatherhood, but also by directing the patterns of conduct and

\textsuperscript{896}Mary Daly, Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy (London: Women’s Press, 1984), p.4.
\textsuperscript{897}Femia, p.31.
\textsuperscript{898}Ibid.
emotion involved in men’s activity in a patriarchal system in such a way that Liz is convinced that she is ‘so happy’.\footnote{\textit{Party Time}, p.308.} The masculine hegemony in this scene lurks beneath a deeper hegemony, in which political techniques are constituted to reflect a social patriarchy embodied in the idea of Big Brother.\footnote{‘Big Brother’ is a term coined by George Orwell in his novel \textit{Nineteen Eighty-Four} to refer to the totalitarian state which wields power over its inhabitants. They are always reminded that ‘Big Brother is watching you’ as a metaphor for the system and the state.}

Thus, through these different layers of power, the workings of State control and terrorism were reflected in their purest images to bring us as close as possible to the reality of the dirt that is being shovelled under the carpet, as Pinter once remarked.

\textbf{IV}

Although many Pinter scholars, such as Susan Hollis Merritt, Michael Billington, and Robert Gordon have extensively addressed Pinter’s \textit{Party Time}, few of them have touched upon the theme of power in relation to shaping individual identity in gendered, social, political, and cultural frameworks. Analysing the play in the light of Marxist theory sheds light on the dynamics of power in the play. While Gramsci and Foucault, the major theorists discussed in this chapter, differ in their conception of power, both seem to illuminate our understanding of the power tools employed in the play. Although Gramsci considers power as a quantifiable entity that comes in different forms and quantities, Foucault believes that power is unquantifiable. The measurement of power and its effect on the formation and reproduction of identity is reliant on the relations network and on gender to a large extent in the play. Women in this play are identified with powerlessness (in need of protection), while men are powerful (would-be protectors).\footnote{William Baker, \textit{Harold Pinter} (London, Continuum, 2008), p.115.} Nevertheless, the would-be protectors in this play are the victimisers of women, masking their victimisation under the name of happiness (e.g., Douglas and Liz). More importantly, both Gramsci and Foucault, despite their different perspectives of power, were opposed to the notion of revolution, as Gramsci believed it would crush revolts and Foucault described it as fracturing people and regrouping them. This, interestingly, is Pinter’s invitation to us as responsible spectators: to enhance our understanding of the significance of the democratic...
exercise of micro-powers, the decentralisation of power, and the urgent need to
reconstruct our identities in accordance with a new liberating process—which implies
pluricentric socialism, in a democratic and pure tradition of awareness, growing
towards a true constitution of the self and identity.

The theme of political oppression, in my opinion, has grown bigger and bigger in recent
years as the oppression of the right-wing governments affects not only the citizens of
their own countries, but also those of the world. Issues of immigration and political
persecution (whether in Western or Eastern countries), opposed to the growing sense
of nationalism in the right-wing governments, is consequently leading to draconian
measures being taken by such governments against individuals who attempt to escape
their countries seeking a better life or escaping far more dangerous, life-threatening
situations such as war and political unrest. Over forty-six minutes in his 2005 Nobel
speech, which I believe is strongly related to what is happening in *Party Time* and
other political plays, Harold Pinter attacked and condemned all right-wing
governments and especially those of the United States and the United Kingdom,
describing the crimes of the United States in particular as:

> Systematic, constant, vicious, remorseless, but very few people
> have actually talked about them. You have to hand it to
> America. It has exercised a quite clinical manipulation of power
> worldwide while masquerading as a force for universal good.
> It’s a brilliant, even witty, highly successful act of hypnosis.⁹⁰²

In a paragraph that defines a ‘salesman’ as the person who sells, and then imposes, his
totalitarian policies, Pinter described the United States as a brilliant salesman on the
road: ‘As a salesman it [United States] is out on its own and its most saleable
commodity is self-love. It’s a winner’.⁹⁰³

In another comment on the invalidity of most of the wars waged by the United States
and backed by the United Kingdom, Pinter made a strong statement on the invasion of
Iraq when he said that there was a photograph published on the front page of a British
newspaper of Tony Blair holding a little Iraqi boy and kissing his cheek, with a caption
saying: ‘A grateful child’. A few days later there was another picture of another four-

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⁹⁰³ Ibid.
year-old child with no arms as the war missiles had mutilated him as well as blowing up all of his family members. The caption this time said: ‘When do I get my arms back?’ The story was dropped and Blair was not holding him or any other mutilated child or person and Pinter’s ironical comment was ‘Blood is dirty, it dirties your shirt and tie when you’re making a sincere speech on television’. ⁹⁰⁴

My point in bringing up these examples of Pinter’s political stand is to join him in asking the same question he had asked in the speech: ‘What has happened to our moral sensibility? Did we ever have any? Do they refer to a term very rarely employed these days – conscience?’ ⁹⁰⁵

Nevertheless, Andrew Goodspeed states in his comment on Pinter’s Nobel speech, such political specificity is seen as a danger, as it can recede quickly into the past and become irrelevant. ⁹⁰⁶ I, too, share Goodspeed’s concern that such acts might be forgotten in the present and the future; as he himself notes, the Iraq invasion has, officially, and militarily, come to an end, and both Blair and Bush have left their elective offices. ⁹⁰⁷

This is exactly why I believe that Party Time is one of Pinter’s most important comments on the political injustice in the world, because if such political oppression continues to be carried out by right-wing governments or any other totalitarian governments, and forgotten by the masses when no longer deemed to be relevant, the consequences would be wars, constant unrest, deaths, suffering, torture, starvation, and many other social, cultural, and human ills that will continue to ravage the world with the worst of atrocities. The whole world will be turned into a big jungle in which Darwin’s ‘survival of the fittest’ will hold sway.

Another significant point that has been presented in the play is the masking of the language of torture, war, and killing with terms like the public good, or keeping the danger away, no matter what the definition of that danger is. The description of the supposed ‘entertainment’ club where, as Terry suggests, no voices are heard is a crucial moment in the play in which Pinter is highlighting the game of political

⁹⁰⁴ The Nobel Prize Speech.
⁹⁰⁵ Ibid.
⁹⁰⁷ Ibid., p.52.
language. The brutal, sharp, and horrendous images of torture that ultimately culminate in the character of Jimmy, are all territories that the political language of the hawks never venture into.\footnote{Nobel Prize Speech.} Holding on to and extending their power is all that politicians care for, and to achieve that they need to keep the masses in ignorance. *Party Time*, therefore, is a cry and/or invitation by Pinter to the masses to wake up and raise awareness, to question, and protest any politically twisted action against humanity anywhere in this world. It is an invitation better to cultivate our sense of humanity, our moral sensibility, and our conscience.
Chapter Five

The Ethics and Aesthetics of Existence: Sexual Identity in Harold Pinter’s Betrayal

‘All men enjoy in some way or another both savoury foods and wines and sexual intercourse, but not all men do so as they ought.’

If there is a crack in a building, one can try to fix the damage and fill in the gaps, or bring it down to build anew, and this is metaphorically what Pinter has depicted in his work Betrayal (1978). Unfortunately, the characters in this play do not realise that they have gone too far until everything is ‘all all over’. The theme of the work and its plot revolve around a woman, Emma, who cheats on her husband, Robert, with his best friend, Jerry. This, ‘Pinter’s most conventional play’, has been the subject of many critical analyses following the play’s first production by the National Theatre in London on November 15, 1978. Despite the numerous analyses, there is still disagreement as to who the real victim is. This subject of intertwining sexuality and ethics has never been settled. Some critics, such as Michael Billington, believe that moral dilemma is Pinter’s focus in this play, while others, such as Penelope Prentice, hold that both love and friendship are at the heart of the play. Hanna Scolnicov, nevertheless, emphasises the egocentricity of the characters ‘that acts as an antidote to love’, while Katherine Burkman believes that the two men’s competition for Emma can be interpreted in archetypal terms. This chapter is an attempt to push the boundaries that have already been set by these critics by proposing a number of theories to help in the deciphering of the mysteries surrounding its characters. Guided by Michel Foucault and Claude Levi-Strauss, two influential thinkers who have contributed to the

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910 Harold Pinter, Plays: Four, Betrayal (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), p.23. All subsequent references will be quoted from this edition.
development of materialist feminist criticism, this chapter will use three different approaches:

I: A broad-spectrum feminist critique, that is intended to reflect on the situation of women in the institution of marriage and its gendered, economic, social, and political implications.

II: A Foucauldian analysis, prompted by *The History of Sexuality*, in order to follow the characters’ sexual relations.

III: Structural anthropological analysis, which will emphasise the bonds between male characters.

This chapter will, therefore, attempt to answer a set of questions: 1) Why do we hide our sexual relations? 2) Does Pinter’s portrayal of sex in *Betrayal* represent a metaphor for social hypocrisy on a grander scale? 3) Can our sexual relations be a mechanism of power, by which we suppress the identity of others? 4) How far does the rivalry of two males over a female, together with the institution of marriage, represent a patriarchal society’s suppression of women’s personhood? 5) Does Emma’s loss of the sense of a real ‘home’ stand as a metaphor for her disintegrated identity as a woman in society? 6) To what extent does the theme of betrayal overshadow marriage as an economic institution? 7) How does Pinter use the rule-encoded metaphor of the game of squash to depict the waning of sexual relations in the play?

*Betrayal*

In addition to Pinter’s fascination with the past, that is ‘Never – past’, Pinter’s interest in personal relations between men and women might have given *Betrayal* another dimension; as Mark Taylor-Batty suggests, ‘It is this attempt at masculine union via feminine intermediary and the precarious application of psychosexual impulses in resolving insurmountable desire that may have captured Pinter’s imagination’.  

The enigmatic game of betrayal begins in reverse chronological order, starting with the conclusion of the story. This backward-unfolding of events is seen by some critics, such
as Hanna Scolnicov, as being responsible for ‘the play’s unique aesthetic’. Batty supports Scolnicov’s opinion by suggesting that the reverse chronological order has shifted the focus from an ordinary female and male betrayal, to one of two males bonding, in which Robert’s and Emma’s behaviour towards Jerry after the revelation of their betrayal creates moral ambiguity. Pinter himself has expressed his excitement over this reverse chronology:

You have two people in a pub and you wonder when they first met. Where was it? When I realised what was going on, this movement in time, I was very excited by it.

The reversed narrative technique has been approached from the perspective of the audience by both Keith Peacock and Peter Raby. Peacock believes the play would attract a Brechtian-like audience who focus more on the intellectual issues raised by the deliberately restructured and episodic progress of the affair. Raby, on the contrary, believes that the audience ‘goes through the emotion on [the characters’] behalf’. Despite the fact that by approaching the play from its narrative conclusion, he might strip it of the element of suspense because the audience will know, at some points, what has taken place earlier, Pinter, I believe, holds our breaths in collective suspense, by unfolding the relationship history of the trio. In other words, it is an account of the sexual history of a threesome that could represent any one(s) of us. In Robert Gordon’s words, ‘[it is] a palimpsest of betrayals built upon the foundation of secrets and lies’.

The play opens in the spring of 1977, two years after the end of Emma and Jerry’s relationship. The dialogue that takes place unravels part of the story:

**Emma:** Do you know how long it is since we met?

**Jerry:** Well, I came to that private view, when was it?

**Emma:** No, I don’t mean that.

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918 Scolnicov, *The Experimental Plays of Harold Pinter* P.105.
919 Batty, p.139.
920 Gussow, p.51.
Jerry: Oh, you mean alone?  

From the conversation, it seems that Jerry understands very well what Emma is talking about. While she is trying to push the conversation to remind him of their intimate relationship, he remembers a public occasion when he visited her gallery. The difference in their recollections sheds light on their true feelings and how they extracted themselves from their affair. Jerry, as a male, knows the rules of the game played here, while Emma seems to be more influenced by her emotions—emphasising her role as a toy tossed between the two males. Let me move to the beginning of the relationship to clarify my point. Emma and Jerry first met in the winter of 1968 at a party held in Robert’s and Emma’s house, where Jerry hid in Emma’s bedroom to confess his love:

Jerry: You’re lovely. I’m crazy about you.

This encounter between Emma and Jerry has been interpreted by various critics as a narcissistic need on Jerry’s part to see his reflection in someone else’s eyes; contrastingly, Burkman categorises the whole play as an Oedipal competition in which Robert is the father publisher, Jerry the son agent, and Emma the mother. However, I do not think that Jerry is in need of another woman to complete him, because he is married to Judith; neither do I believe that he and Robert are like father and son because they are both on a par, despite Robert’s authoritative character, as Emma told him of her betrayal behind Jerry’s back. Nevertheless, I do believe that Jerry’s attempts to woo Emma reflect a sort of abiding by rules: not the regular rules that are normally limited to socially demarcated and sanctioned events such as games, but rather the sort of rules that mark out another category of games that are more to do with the psychology that underpins many human encounters. In the beginning, Jerry transgresses the rules by entering Emma’s bedroom, and tries to woo her despite the presence of her husband on the other side of the door. His presence in the bedroom

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924 Betrayal, p.5.
925 Ibid., p.115.
927 Burkman, p.512.
928 The concept of social and psychological game playing of this sort was first introduced by Eric Berne in his book Games People Play: The Psychology of Human Relationships (London: Penguin Books, 1964). This theory became the foundational concept of transactional analysis in modern psychology and psychotherapy.
symbolises an actual penetration – as the bedroom stands for the woman’s individuality and a form of her identity not outwardly on show to the world. It is the place in which she opens up herself, she gets dressed, prepared, and expresses her sexual desires. By transgressing all of these, Jerry was fulfilling his desires, as a male, to quench his never-ending thirst for the hunt.\textsuperscript{929} The fact that Emma is a married woman does not hold him back, even when she reminds him of this moral tie:

\begin{center}
\textbf{Emma}: My husband’s best man.
\textbf{Jerry}: No. Your best man.\textsuperscript{930}
\end{center}

It is this innate male desire, which is ‘like a great river crashing down to the sea’,\textsuperscript{931} that propels Jerry to find his way to Emma, who brushes him off gently. Robert Gordon believes that Robert’s confidence in Emma’s fidelity is what incites Jerry’s competitiveness, which had earlier been established when both were editing magazines in their rival universities of Cambridge and Oxford. They both abandoned the higher art of editing poetry magazines for the buying and selling of novels, a higher level of betrayal, which Gordon describes as a ‘pragmatic choice of earning [a] living’.\textsuperscript{932} In his discussions, Gordon focuses on the theme of betrayal and neglects Emma’s commodification, which I’m highlighting here.

Pinter’s description of the play as ‘a nine-year relation between two men who are best friends’\textsuperscript{933} is expressed fully by Robert’s tolerance of the situation when he finds his wife and his best friend alone in his marital bedroom. It is in this moment that Robert has decided to play the game with Jerry. In this game, men, knowing that other men will be willing to hunt their wives, have three standard options. They may: (i) be the suspicious kind who treat the wife as a possession; (ii) be the phallic, strong, masculine kind who are so sure of themselves that they are willing to allow their wives to move to another man, believing that they will eventually come back; or (iii) realise that their wives are prone to take lovers, and therefore be willing to be part of the game. When Robert sees Jerry and Emma in an intimate situation, I believe he, in the beginning, is

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{929} The theme of love as a hunting game runs through literature. See, for example, Shakespeare’s \textit{Twelfth Night} when Duke Orsino responds to his servant’s invitation to hunt a hart (male deer); the hunt is a metaphor reflecting his hunt for Olivia’s heart.
\textsuperscript{930}\textit{Betrayal}, p.114.
\textsuperscript{932} Gordon, p.126.
\textsuperscript{933} Burkman, p.508.
\end{footnotesize}
supremely confident that Emma would come back to him; but, when he realises that she is prone to take lovers, he decides to be part of the game. Greek mythology recognises four kinds of love (i) *agape* (unconditional love); (ii) *eros* (romantic love); (iii) *philos* (enjoyment, fondness, friendship), and (iv) *storge* (family loyalty). To better understand the nature of the relationship between Robert and Jerry, I am going to highlight the love represented by *philos*, as described in Aristotle’s *Nichomachean Ethics* Book VIII, as the love relationship between males who are ‘more able [...] to think and to act’. In other words, it is the love relationship where companionship is built around some form of benefit or pleasure that is sought by both parties. *Philos* is stronger when the source of pleasure is similar for both men; however, this kind of love changes quickly or fades when the object is found unpleasant, unless both parties like each other and their bonds are much stronger. In reference to Robert and Jerry’s relationship, the *philos* between them, in my opinion, is stronger compared to their individual *eros* towards Emma. The Greeks describe *philos* as more rational and structural than erotic love. Nevertheless, Aristotle believed that there are two kinds of men within this variation of love: (i) the good men who like each other for their own sake: i.e. in virtue of their goodness, whose friendship is likely to last longer, and, (ii) the bad men who will be friends for the sake of pleasure or utility, whose friendship quickly fades after the change in the sources of pleasure. Robert and Jerry seek pleasure from one source, Emma, but that source of pleasure will soon change, and hence weaken their bonds of friendship, although not killing it altogether.

The door (a symbol of woman’s imprisonment, as depicted by Scolnicov) is locked after Robert’s departure, with Emma and Jerry inside. I would like to refute both Billington’s and Burkman’s assumptions that Emma, by moving on to Casey, her lover after Jerry, has managed to liberate herself. Emma’s complaint of being left alone with an inebriate Jerry, ‘Your best friend is drunk’, falls on deaf ears and is therefore to me a sign of a woman willingly sacrificed by her husband. Thus, both men reinforce

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934 See Alan Soble’s *Eros, Agape, and Philia: Readings in the Philosophy of Love* for more information on the meaning of the other kinds of love (United States: Paragon House, 1989).
935 Ibid., p.57.
936 Ibid., p.61.
937 Ibid.
938 Scolnicov, *Woman’s Theatrical Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.100. The door/house is considered a safe sanctuary where women should always stay, while leaving this sanctuary is considered unwarranted and immoral. This has been given a completely different meaning in Emma’s case.
939 Burkman, p.517. See Billington p.264.
940 Betrayal, p.116.
their bondage through an exchange system that merely figures women as objects of exchange, rivalry and gift-bonds between men, as suggested by Claude Levi-Strauss: ‘As soon as I’m forbidden a woman, she thereby becomes available to another man’. 

Jerry’s confidence, and the sexual freedom granted to him by a society which blames adultery to a great extent on women, is one source of Emma’s dilemma in the play. Emma’s avoidance of Jerry’s advances in the beginning might have arisen from her awareness of her situation as a woman in a society which, according to a Foucauldian reading, justified men’s adultery while at the same time burdening the female with all of its consequences: ‘For while the wife belonged to the husband, the husband belonged only to himself’. This disparity sheds light on the whole institution of marriage and heterosexual relationships in society. While Emma relates to Jerry on an emotional and physical level, he nevertheless, is more concerned with the social veneer, despite the fact that it was he who broke the rules in the first place. Although some female spectators would consider Emma’s conversation and past relations with someone other than her husband as freedom in itself, this sexual freedom is a lie: ‘The sexuality that has been freed is a male sexuality which is fixated on penetration’. 

This is a penetration that Jerry carries out on both levels, as an individual (when he penetrates Emma’s body during intercourse) and as a social transgression (when he penetrates Emma’s room at the party). Therefore, Emma does not extract herself ‘remarkably unscathed’ as Peacock suggests, because she remains an object that is consistently passed between Jerry and Robert. However, Emma’s representation in this play is atypical of Pinter’s women. Emma, by holding all the keys to the relationships, feels in control, and by waging a war on the men she likes, she believes she is winning; but she is not.

The waging of wars on each other is part of the rules of the game. When Emma asks Jerry about his son, he immediately corrects her, reminding her of the form:

Emma: [...] How’s Sam?
Jerry: You mean Judith.
Emma: Do I?

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943 Greer, p.6.
944 Peacock, p.120.
Jerry: You remember the form. I ask you about your husband, you ask about my wife.  

Even after the affair is over, the characters are still obliging each other to abide by the rules of the game. This goes to the heart of Pinter’s point that if our life is based on games, then we will never be our true selves. The game that we play at one point will gradually become the model of our behaviour at another. Peter Hall, the director of the play’s first production, highlighted this point:

[...] The sleight of hand that Harold has performed is that, while dealing with a triangular relationship, he’s talking about something else. He seems to be saying that if you start with self-betrayal, it gradually infects everything like a dreadful, destructive virus.

In order to play this game, women need to know the rules to be on a par with men, but since they fail to grasp the gist of it, they end up being victims. As Simone de Beauvoir claims, they are not players, but objects used in the game:

Woman may fail to lay claim to the status of subject because she lacks definite resources, because she feels the necessary bond that ties her to man regardless of reciprocity, and because she is often very pleased with her role as the Other.

Thus, the sexual form that Jerry is asking Emma to abide by is another social game which ‘disqualifies any spontaneity in the behaviour of the characters’, and supports de Beauvoir’s claims.

The social formality game intensifies when Emma and Jerry ask about each other’s children. They reach a point where Emma reminds Jerry of a day when he picked up Charlotte, her daughter, and threw her in the air:

Emma: Do you remember that time [...] when you picked her up and threw her up and caught her?

Jerry: She was very light.

Burkman highlights this scene as a central image in the play, because it alludes to Emma’s precarious position, being ‘thrown up by someone who in the long run was

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945 Betrayal, pp.7-8.
946 Billington, p.259.
948 Scolnicov, The Experimental Plays of Harold Pinter, p.110.
949 Betrayal, p.11.
not to be trusted’.\textsuperscript{950} But Burkman’s archetypal analysis that refers to the theme of competition and renewal in the play has missed another important point. In Scene Five, in which Emma and Robert are on vacation in Venice in 1973, the whole story comes to light when Robert presses Emma in conversation because he has found a letter from Jerry to Emma at the American Express office. He keeps sending signals:

Robert: That’s what stopped me taking it. [...] they thought that I could very easily be a total stranger.\textsuperscript{951}

While pretending to be incensed at the Italians in the Post Office, who did not know that he is her husband, and mistook him for a stranger, Robert is actually hinting at another point. He is, indirectly, telling Emma, by using the word ‘stranger’ metaphorically, that he knows about the other man, and that he has, thus, become a stranger to her as she is fancying someone else. Only then does Emma confess to her affair with Jerry. Robert ironically reminds her that he knew Jerry long before he knew her, and it was he who introduced them to each other. Robert’s reaction is very composed and rational. In a question described as ‘very Strindbergian’,\textsuperscript{952} by Billington, Robert asks about the duration of the affair, to which Emma replies that it has been going on for five years. He immediately asks her about the paternity of their little boy, Ned.

Robert: Ned is one year old.\textsuperscript{953}

Robert’s questioning of his son’s paternity, and his cool manner towards his wife’s betrayal, emphasises the theme of the game in a gendered framework. Moreover, the fact that Robert’s main concern is focused on the proof of Ned’s paternity, without acknowledging Emma’s motherly instincts (as Teddy does with Ruth in The Homecoming), proves that Emma is ‘less real, [...] and a mere object to the men’.\textsuperscript{954}

\textsuperscript{950}Burkman, Ibid., p.511.
\textsuperscript{951}Betrayal, p.65.
\textsuperscript{952}Billington, p.262.
\textsuperscript{953}Betrayal, p.71.
\textsuperscript{954}Burkman, ‘Harold Pinter’s Betrayal’, p.509.
Although writers such as Scolnicov believe that Ruth is liberated from the grip of Teddy by being liberated from her domestic and motherly duties, I believe that when domesticity means denial of any woman’s motherly instincts, it reflects a disregard for her existence in the first place, which is a sign of substantive loss, and not minor gain.

Connecting the throwing of Charlotte up in the air and its gendered implications shows that while the girl, who is a young version of Emma, is being thrown and tossed around between the men, including her own father Robert, the boy, Ned, is not. Asking Emma about the paternity of Ned means that, as a boy, he stands higher than Charlotte in the gender hierarchy. Ned is important as he will be the legitimate son who will produce a whole male or female line that belongs to Robert, and thus will be another owner of female lines and a partner in the game of exchange of women.

Emma is not unaware of being commodified at the end of this game, and that is why, awakened by feelings of indignation for losing an irreplaceable part of herself, she reopens old wounds with Jerry while at the bar in the first scene. Even though she has moved to another man (Casey), Emma in this ‘elegant disappointment’ cannot forget being tossed around like her daughter. While driving past their love-nest in Kilburn, she is suddenly possessed by old memories, and she wonders if Jerry still remembers their ‘home’.

When Emma says that she has seen ‘young people’ coming out of the place, the word ‘young’ might be synonymous with their affair during their youth. According to Beata Rybka, both Emma and Jerry have changed, and this change affects many things: their tastes, their desires, their ambitions, and even their choices. Both Emma and Jerry were younger when they loved each other; from their conversation it can be deduced that their meeting takes place nine years after their initial love affair began: ‘They have not felt how they used to feel, they have changed, they have aged. Perhaps that is why Emma has taken a new lover – Casey – [...]’. 

955 Scolnicov, Woman’s Theatrical Space, p.132.
This change that has occurred in both Emma and Jerry’s life, and which had led to the failure of their affair is not the result of the ‘menace of autonomy’, or ‘narcissism of love’,⁹⁵⁹ which Linda S. Wells believes is a reflection of their self-emptiness; on the contrary, it is because the characters are quite confident in what they are doing that they are very self-assured. I might agree that human beings in general are selfish and narcissistic, as proposed by Wells; but in this play, their selfishness does not result from the fear of alienation, or need of partners. Their selfishness, I would argue, stems from their confidence and their independence to choose whomever they like to have in their lives. It is the game of self-betrayal that Peter Hall mentioned in the earlier quotation. The change in the life goals and perceived needs of both Emma and Jerry leads me to elaborate on the philosophy of desire.

According to Lacan, what we want is not so much the object of our desire, but the fantasy and the thrill of getting it. Hence, such fantasies continue to be unrealistic and the objects of desire to be perpetually absent.⁹⁶⁰ If I use Lacan’s sentence: ‘What is important is to teach the subject to name, to articulate, to bring this desire into existence’,⁹⁶¹ then I would conclude that Jerry could not name his object of desire as he oscillates between Judith, his wife, and Emma, his object of desire. According to Lacan, we, as human beings, have no clue about our desires but that does not mean we are ignorant of them. Losing someone we love and subsequently loving someone else does not mean that the one who has lost someone he/she loves cannot accept the reality of his/her loss; rather it means that he confuses, or misrecognises the nature of his new love with a different living being. In other words, our ignorance of our desires is not simple and pure, it is often misrecognition of our true desires. In relation to the play, when Emma and Jerry fell in love while still young they misrecognised their desires. They fell prey to their fancy which gave them a thrill in the moment; but when they got older, they both changed and moved on to somebody else (the fact that Jerry is still with Judith does not mean he is not cheating on her). It is this misrecognition of our true desires, and our inability to name them that keeps the game going. Jerry, after

⁹⁵⁹ Wells, p.30.
getting his desire, or what he thought to be his desire at that moment, has moved on, leaving Emma with that sense of being juggled like a toy.

On another level of interpretation, Burkman, supporting my assumption of Emma being commodified, believes that the rivals need to come out of this battle with minor injuries or losses. Moreover, Burkman agrees that both men are totally oblivious to Emma’s existence as they are busy settling scores with each other. She explains the situation in René Girard’s words: ‘The impulse toward the object is ultimately an impulse toward the mediator’. The object in this case is Emma, and the mediator is Robert, whom Jerry uses as a conduit of his desire for Emma, thus desiring the same object as his mediator. Robert, the mediator, is trying to impose his domination over Jerry through conversation by acquiring more knowledge. The strong, silent, solemn, and authoritative character of Robert is another sexual variation of domination being imposed by stronger men over weaker ones. According to Greer, ‘The process of masculinisation is often described as hardening or toughening, words that have their own phallic colouring’. This can be seen in the military or prisons, all-male institutions where sodomy of subordinates is carried out by their superiors. In an indirect connection, Robert is using the same masculine culture to subordinate Jerry, not only by inflicting the same pain (assuming, Jerry’s relation to Emma is a symbolic penetration of Robert himself) but also by effecting his silence: ‘Silence on matters of sexual activity is one powerful mechanism through which hegemonic sexualities […] can retain dominant positions within the hierarchy of forms of sexual expression’. To take this point further, and to confute Burkman’s suggestions of a homosexual relationship between Robert and Jerry in reference to Pinter’s previous play The Collection (1961), I would agree with Eve Sedgwick’s analysis of Rene Girard’s erotic triangle to highlight my point. To defend her argument, Sedgwick uses the term ‘homosocial relations’ which she defines as social bonds between persons of the same

963 Greer, p.269.
964 Ibid.
966 Burkman, p.509.
sex.\textsuperscript{967} She believes that one of the forms of oppression against men is the sexually overloaded meaning of homosocial relationships of men in opposition to those between women:

It is clear [...] that there is an asymmetry in our present society between, on the one hand, the relatively continuous relation of female homosocial and homosexual bonds, and on the other hand, the radically discontinuous relation of male homosocial and homosexual bonds.\textsuperscript{968}

The reason that Sedgwick gives to justify natural strong bonds between men is rooted in gender difference. She quotes Coppelia Kahn, who believes that ‘While the boy’s sense of self begins in union with the feminine [mother], his sense of masculinity arises against it’.\textsuperscript{969} Therefore, while I do not completely reject Girard’s theory of rivalry (which presupposes that any kind of rivalry between people of the same sex must include a third party of the opposite sex) as I believe that there is rivalry between both men to outdo each other, I do also believe in Sedgwick’s homosocial argument: that male bonding, which might imply rivalry for a different reason, would have still been strong between both men, either with or without Emma, especially in cases where people of the same sex, such as Casey and Spinks, are used by them for profit.

The theme of desiring what the other has is part of the problem of human interaction, which is what pushes people to play games, keep secrets, and betray each other. Being inhibited from being themselves on social, political, and economic levels is one source of this behaviour model. Part of the problem is that heterosexual marriage has been, until very recently, the only type of marriage acceptable for individuals in society. Apart from certain feminists who consider marriage to be an unjust institution in itself, as the ‘wife’s legal personality [is] erased in marriage’,\textsuperscript{970} marriage has, despite the recent emergence of same-sex marriage in a small number of countries, primarily been seen in cultural and anthropological terms as a heterosexual relationship, in and with which the individual is obliged to engage in order to gain access to full citizenship.

\textsuperscript{968}Ibid., p.699.
Simone de Beauvoir believed that ‘Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society’,\textsuperscript{971} while Jyl Josephson pushes the boundaries further by proposing that heterosexual relations are imposed by the state to shape the economic and political rights it grants to us, stating that ‘LGBT families, even in civil unions, lack access to the economic benefits of marriage, legal rights with respect to children, and many other rights and benefits attached by law to heterosexual marriage’.\textsuperscript{972} The word ‘families’ is crucial here, as the state mandates marriage and families as a duty for men and women so that the state’s interests may continue to be served. In other words, having small units such as families creates a capitalist institution out of each family, as they will be culturally inculcated into the normative model of having their own house and resources: cars, washing machines, televisions and the like (which might be ten times the economic cost of access to the same resources if there was access in society to different modes of social relations). According to Margaret Thatcher, ‘There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families’.\textsuperscript{973}

Even if women obtained economic parity and the institution of marriage was considered transformative rather than static, it would still be politically controlled ‘to make the economic and sexual union of men and women serve the interests of society’.\textsuperscript{974}

My point here is not the acceptability or unacceptability of homosexuality, but the suppression of all but conservative normative values; which is, I believe, what concerns Pinter: ‘Something that could be described as uncommon or slightly out of the norm is regarded as an alien force, something to be suppressed and disciplined’.\textsuperscript{975} Ultimately, the question is not whether or not same-sex couples should be permitted to enter the institution of marriage, but how the state is already treating this institution per se. In connection to Emma and Jerry’s relationship, I believe that one of the reasons for their distorted dialogue and relationship is the suppression imposed on them from different levels in order to maintain social acceptance, the status quo, and to protect themselves as recognised members of society.

\textsuperscript{971}Bergoffen, p.20
\textsuperscript{973}Epitaph for the Eighties? ‘There is No Such Thing as Society’, P.M. Margaret Thatcher talking to Women’s Own Magazine on 31 October 1987. See online: http://briandeer.com/social/thatcher-society.htm [Accessed 14 April,2014]
\textsuperscript{974}Bergoffen, p.20. Read Nicola Barker’s Not the Marrying Kind pp.129-162, for further information.
\textsuperscript{975}Gussow, p.69.
Nevertheless, it seems that this game is not gender-free, since Emma seems to receive the lion’s share of oppression by having limited options because she is a woman, as suggested by Nicola Barker, who observes: ‘It is not, however, nature or biology themselves that oppresses women, but the ways in which these biological differences are exploited by patriarchal ideology to justify or support male domination’.

The burden of Emma’s gender takes a larger dimension in Scene Three (set in the winter of 1975), through which Pinter reveals the sexual history of this relationship with all its implications of changeability, desire, and betrayal. The scene depicts the relationship at its end, when Emma comes to realise that she has always been a mistress, and never a wife. Although critics such as Peacock and Burkman believe she ‘manages to liberate herself from the bondage of triangular desire’, simply because she has moved on to another man, she will never unburden herself of any of these relations, and even if her extrication from ‘triangular relations’ is true, the idea of being commodified is unjust in itself.

Jerry, nonetheless, never thought of moving any further with Emma. To him, the place where they trysted was not more than ‘A flat’, and Emma was not more than a mistress or concubine in his harem.

While Emma and Jerry are discussing what to do with the furniture of their flat, these thoughts are brought forward by Pinter through different techniques. When Emma and Jerry were discussing their availability to meet in the flat, each one of them was available at the time when the other was not. Not being able to coordinate a specific time for a last rendezvous gives their relationship a disorganised shape, and consequently a disturbed sexuality. This disorganisation has been reflected onto their inner selves, which have started to suffer from the same disturbance. Emma verbalises this dynamic when she tells Jerry that

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977 Burkman, p. 517.
978 Betrayal, p.44.
979 See Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p.143.
**Emma:** You see, in the past [...] we were inventive, we were determined, it was [...] it seems impossible to meet [...] and yet we did.\(^{980}\)

At a time when both Emma and Jerry sought each other, they were not available to fulfil each other’s desires since sex is a mutual act:

> Sex can never be experienced alone, because it is only through the projection of the alien part of the self into the other and seeing it there that the individual can make full contact with their true constitutional self state of excitement.\(^{981}\)

When I say ‘alone’, I do not mean the unavailability of a partner, but of the person onto whom one can project oneself. At a time when Emma and Jerry felt this want, they could not be there for each other. This sparks the discussion about the whole institution of marriage. According to de Beauvoir and other feminists, marriage is a social, political, and economic contract in which men ‘become women’s guardians’.\(^{982}\)

> a contract that is never equal as women are bound to be sexually available to their husbands and serve as reproduction vessels, and their desires, therefore, can never be reciprocal. Moreover, in countries where arranged marriage is the norm, the institution has become even more perverted:

> To hold and proclaim that a man and a woman, who may not even have chosen each other, are in duty bound to satisfy each other in every way throughout their lives is a monstrosity that necessarily gives rise to hypocrisy, lying, hostility, and unhappiness.\(^{983}\)

The falling apart of Jerry and Emma’s relationship could be one of Pinter’s statements on this unhappiness. Pinter uses furniture as one of his theatrical props in order to reflect the disintegration of the affair:

> **Jerry:** [...] Wasn’t the bed here?\(^{984}\)

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\(^{980}\) *Betrayal*, p.41.


\(^{982}\) *Bergoffen*, p.20.

\(^{983}\) Ibid.

\(^{984}\) *Betrayal*, p.45.
Alluding to the possibility that the bed has been (re)moved means that a vital part of the relationship is already dead, and hence parts of their inner selves have been erased as well. Scolnicov confirms that

The possible permutations in the relative arrangements of the furniture are matched by their combinations with the characters [...] Zooming in into the private spatial interior of the home goes along with probing sexual intimacy on the one hand and the inner self on the other. 985

‘The home’ that Scolnicov is discussing is what Emma sought from Jerry. Scolnicov believes that ‘The articulation of the theatrical space is an expression of woman’s position in society’ 986 In this light, then, Emma’s trysts with Jerry in a house other than hers means that her house with Robert is collapsing. Scolnicov indicates this by quoting de Beauvoir’s words: ‘Man is but mildly interested in his immediate surroundings because he can find self-expression in projects; whereas for a woman, the house is the centre of the world’. 987

When Emma bitterly tells Jerry that their place is ‘an empty home’, 988 he replies: ‘It’s not a home’, 989 verbalising all her unfulfilled wishes. However, the theme of having another house for Emma to fulfil her forbidden pleasures is another technique deployed by Pinter on order to express her unfaithfulness, which reflects her disintegrated identity as a woman. Depending on a study by Scolnicov that highlights women’s role within the institution of patriarchy, I would venture here to compare Emma to Ibsen’s Hedda Gabbler, who betrays her husband with a man who could enter her house at any moment, but at the same time upholds her wifely duties by not withholding sex from her husband. Scolnicov’s study partly emphasises the role of closed doors to indicate women’s oppression. Taking Scolnicov’s study to another dimension, I would suggest that Emma has developed from a woman who gently brushed Jerry off in the last scene (beginning of the story) to someone who takes the

985 Scolnicov, Woman’s Theatrical Space, pp.141-143.
986 Ibid., p.1.
988 Betrayal, p.43.
989 Ibid.
initiative, and then into another who flings doors wide open to her lover Jerry, without withholding sex from her husband. This could be another technique to avoid direct confrontation, as a way of emphasising the depth of people’s ironic ways of betraying each other.

When Emma presses Jerry to meet her for lunches, he reminds her that he cannot be available because he has got a family. Emma, answering with the same bravado, emphasises the game’s rules: ‘I have a family too’.990 Here, Jerry replies with another harsh reminder that ‘[her] husband is [his] oldest friend’.991 Jerry camouflages his passion for Emma by expressing concern about himself and his relation with Robert – which highlights the bonds between the two men as being more important than his relationship with Emma, confirming her situation as a mere object.

Emma’s vulnerability is shown again by her emphasising the word ‘cash’,992 that Jerry offered after selling the furniture, and by her preferring to spend her day off discussing their relationship, which testifies to her need of him, sending him signals that what she wants from him goes beyond cash. Realising that he is more concerned about Robert than her, she asks him to take her key off the ring in a symbolic move that marks the end of their relationship.

This vulnerability is further emphasised in Scene Four (which is set in the autumn of 1974) at her and Robert’s house. While Jerry, their guest, is taking part in a heated debate with Robert about gender differences, Emma comes in. The synchronising of Emma’s entrance when both men were talking about the difference between the sexes might serve to highlight the link between the discussed subject and female commodification. The domesticity of Emma’s situation (in which she is depicted as being busy with tucking her baby boy into bed, and the discussion about the anxiety of baby boys) calls to mind Gayle Rubin’s theory of the sex-gender system. Rubin examines the domestication of women, showing that women are treated as a raw material for the social production of more women ‘through the exchange systems of

990 Betrayal, p.41.
991 Ibid., p.42.
992 Ibid., p.46.
kinship controlled by men in the institution of human culture’. Rubin believes that the sexualisation of both desire and labour vests men with rights over women that they do not have in themselves; therefore, she calls for a ‘revolution in kinship’:

If the sexual property system were reorganised in such a way that men did not have overriding rights in women (if there was no exchange of women) and if there were no gender, the entire Oedipal drama would be a relic. In short, feminism must call for a revolution in kinship.

Sexual difference goes beyond kinship bonds, however, to touch upon vital aspects of life such as employment. Greer puts it simply: ‘Women always did the shit work; now that the only work there is is shit work, men are unemployed’. Moreover, it is statistically more frequently women workers who accept zero-hours contracts to support themselves, which means they are called upon for their labour only if business is brisk and are paid hourly.

Mentioning zero-hours contracts brings to mind Judith’s absence from this theoretically quadrilateral but dramaturgically triangular relationship. Despite the fact that she is asserted to have a successful job as a doctor – given what we are told as an audience – she is completely absent from her husband’s relationship with another woman. She is never summoned by Pinter to action, she is rather frozen under a zero-hours theatrical requirement of being talked about as existing off stage, but never given the chance actually to show up on stage and defend herself. Judith is accused of having an ‘admirer’, yet she is never there to defend both herself and her husband. This might suggest that any of the four partners may betray the other as he or she has been betrayed, as suggested by Gordon, but Gordon omits to mention that Judith’s state of inertia is further evidence of the lie of sexual freedom, because she, in spite of her successful career, is still under male authority, particularly that of a playwright who never needs or wants her to appear.

994 Ibid.
996 Ibid.
998 Gordon, p.139.
Emma’s realisation of this fact about women in thrall to men is shown at different stages in her relationship with Jerry. In the same scene, Robert as a publisher, and Jerry as a literary agent discuss Casey’s novel. When Emma joins the discussion she describes Casey’s novel as ‘dishonest’, as he writes about a man who lives with his family and writes novels. However, she will soon change her mind when Casey writes about abandoning the family and goes to live alone. She might see her betrayal reflected in his novels, or it might be a projection of her wish to live with Jerry if he ever decides to leave his family. Nevertheless, after Jerry leaves giving her short notice of his trip to New York with Casey, and when she realises that she cannot stay with either man, she breaks into sobs. I believe that Emma, who can see the end of her relation with Robert looming and no flicker of hope of being with Jerry, feels defeated and therefore decides to move on to another man despite her passionate response to Robert’s kisses at the end of Scene Four; her subconscious at this stage is still swinging in different directions.

The swinging of Emma’s emotions comes to its fullest expression when she and Jerry meet in their flat in Scene Six in 1973 (after Emma’s return from her vacation in Venice with Robert). Emma’s emotional confusion is again expressed through literary references when she shows interest in another writer, Spinks, who is another author exploited by Robert and Jerry in order to make profit. By showing an interest in Spinks, Emma is sending a message to Jerry saying ‘I can easily move to someone else’. This will materialise later in the play when Emma couples with Casey. Emma’s response in this scene highlights two points. First, using literary figures as a metaphor to express physical attraction confirms Pinter’s earlier representation of the crooked ways people use in dealing with others. Second, Emma’s sending of an implied message of her inclination to take lovers despite being a married woman is another contribution to her commodification and a boost to strengthen the bonds between Robert and Jerry.

Jerry: He’s a very thin bloke. About fifty. [...] He lives alone, in a furnished room.
Emma: Furnished rooms suit him?
Jerry: Yes.
Emma: They suit me too.  

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999 Betrayal, p.54.
1000 Ibid., p.81.
Nevertheless, the female oppression is further emphasised when Emma asks Jerry what he thinks of their home:

Jerry: It’s marvellous not to have a telephone.1001

The telephone is another source of giving away information; and being reluctant to have it means that Jerry is reluctant to reveal information. The fact that both Jerry and Emma are not their real characters inside and outside their home, as Emma ironically calls it, intensifies the game, and reflects their lack of a coherent character and identity that relies more on the constructive power of discourse to build their characters. Scolnicov clarifies this:

Pinter’s special analysis of the theatrical space has enabled him to create synthetic rooms that express his basic view of man as verbal construct, lacking a coherent, definable character.1002

Moreover, the reluctance to have a telephone could be also interpreted on a gender basis as part of Jerry’s assertion of his male authority over Emma. Emma as a woman is considered to be a leaky vessel, because the weaker female sex is thought to lack control of the body. This leakiness is expressed in the female’s material expressiveness of producing fluids to a shameful extent. Moreover, a woman’s leakiness not only reflects the constant drip of a woman’s menstruation, lactation, or urination, but also her level of deviance.1003 Gail Kern Paster claims: ‘A woman who leaves her house is a woman who talks is a woman who drinks is a woman who leaks’.1004 Thus, owing to Jerry’s inferior view of Emma as a leaking vessel and, I would add, as a chatterbox, he is happy about the absence of the telephone as it serves his purpose of isolating Emma from leaking any information to anyone over the phone and thereby helps him to create a sealed-off harem out of their flat.

1001 Betrayal, p. 81.
1002 Scolnicov, Woman’s Theatrical Space, p. 145.
1003 Female characters ‘are generally seen to be deviant in some way’. For more information see Christian M. Billing: Masculinity, Corporality, and the English Stage 1850-1635 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p.182.
Emma, nonetheless, is happy about her domesticity, which is reflected in her gift of a tablecloth she brought from Venice for her home with Jerry. Emma’s craving for a sense of a real home is, I believe, what pushed her to do this. The tablecloth might be an expression ‘of the domesticity she wishes to preserve’, after losing that sense with Robert. Nevertheless, by expressing her longing for domesticity, Emma is once more taking part in her commodification.

Emma’s participation in her own oppression is reflected in her conversation with Jerry:

**Emma:** I cook and slave for you.
**Jerry:** You do.  

The fact that Emma separates the words ‘cook’ and ‘slave’ means that beside her domesticity – primarily oriented towards attending to the house – she is serving as a sex slave for Jerry who fulfils his sexual desires in that abode or Harem.

Emma’s domesticity is further intensified in Scene Eight back in the summer of 1971 showing her and Jerry in ‘their flat’. Emma is cooking in the kitchen and Jerry comes in through the front door. Showing Emma in the kitchen of her love nest, wearing an apron and cooking lunch for her lover, means that she is ‘willingly coupling her daring role as lover with the traditional function of homemaker’. Scolnicov, interestingly, links the kitchen motif in Pinter’s plays with ancient Greek plays in which woman’s domesticity is intensified through her tending of the hearth. However, while kitchens are referred to in plays tackling extramarital relationships, such a place ironically links domesticity and eroticism: ‘In *Betrayal*, a play devoted to an extramarital love affair, the erotic impulse becomes ironically intertwined with domesticity’. This ironic intertwining of domesticity and eroticism might mirror woman’s participation in their own oppression, as they, even when they go out of their way to become ‘lovers’, keep returning to the socially appropriate role of housewives. Luce Irigaray calls this a

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1005 Billington, p.265.
1006 *Betrayal*, p.81.
1007 Scolnicov, *Woman’s Theatrical Space*, p.143.
1008 According to Scolnicov, ‘Woman’s role in the kitchen stretches all the way back to the tending of the hearth or Hestia’s fire in the Greek Oikos [house]’, *Woman’s Theatrical Space*, p.143. See examples of the kitchen motif in Pinter’s plays such as *The Room, The Homecoming, The Lover, Old Times, and The Birthday Party.*
1009 Scolnicov, *Woman’s Theatrical Space*, p.143.
masquerade, which, she claims, ‘is what women do [...] in order to participate in man’s
desire, but at the cost of giving up their own’. The only space, she suggests, is ‘a male
space. Women may “participate”, but there is no cultural and semiotic space for a
desire that is women’s’.1010

A different perspective of the illicit affair of Emma and Jerry is revealed when Emma,
while preparing the stew in the kitchen, asks Jerry about the park he walked through
to get to the flat:

Jerry: It was very quiet. I just looked at the Serpentine.1011

In connection to the issue of morality in this play, the reference to the Serpentine
serves as a metaphor for an imminent danger looming on the horizon. The danger
could be looked upon through various lenses: first, the Serpentine is a metaphor for
Emma and Jerry’s betrayal, in which ‘Jerry, in gaining one paradise, discarded
another’,1012 in reference to his breaking of the male bond with Robert. Second,
although women figure as mere objects in the male ethos, men should always stay
away from women who are not under their power, particularly if they ‘were under the
power of someone else (i.e a father, husband or tutor)’.1013 According to Foucault,
although the sexual fidelity of the husband has never been required either by law or
custom, ‘It was nevertheless a question that people raised and a form of austerity on
which some moralists set a high value’.1014 In the upcoming section, I will investigate
the history of sexuality in question here to unveil the implications of the relationships
in this play.

II

As Pinter relied on reverse chronological order in order to strip away time, and thereby
reveal the history of the sexual relations of this betrayal, let me also use Foucault’s

1010 Tamsin Wilton, Sexual (Dis) Orientation: Gender, Sex, Desire, and Self-fashioning (London: Palgrave Macmillan,
1011 Betrayal, p.102. 
1012 Billington, The Life and Work of Harold Pinter, p.263. 
1013 Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, p.22. 
1014 Ibid., p.18. Foucault is guided by Aristotle’s ideal city, in which, he believed ‘[The] sexual relations of a husband
with other woman, or the wife with another man [are] considered ‘dishonourable, [...] in any circumstances
whatsoever’. 

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accounts of The History of Sexuality and The Sources of Pleasure in this section as tools to help me anatomise the sexual relations Pinter depicts.

According to Foucault, the psychoanalytical obsession of trying to determine the reality of our sexuality as a vehicle to our inner selves is a trap. In his works on sexuality Foucault demonstrates that sexuality is something that we create ourselves, it is our own fabrication and much more than the discovery of a secret side of our desires. Therefore, if we wish to understand the process through which the construction of our identities formulates, we have to understand that process through desire itself: ‘We have to understand [sexuality] with our desires, through our desires, go new forms of relationships, new forms of love, new forms of creation’.

But the question that might arise here is: why sex? What has sex got to do with discovering ourselves in general, and the identities of the characters in Betrayal in particular? Foucault has elaborated on the question of sex by suggesting that sex is a discourse that connotes power. In further detail, Foucault believed that sex, more than any other activity, has been the object of fundamental prohibitions, ‘whose transgression is considered deadly serious’. Moreover, the body/sex is a political field upon which different power relations conflict to shape our identities and in which ‘the body and its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and their submission’ become the focus.

The problematisation of sexual behaviour in this play arises from the characters’ recognition of themselves as desiring beings; however, instead of attempting to repent as prescribed by their Christian morality, they still attempt to use their powers to control each other, instead of controlling themselves by using the techniques of self-

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1019 The morality system for the Greeks was associated with the individual exerting self-discipline, or self-domination over self, while in Christianity morality resided in recognising oneself as a desiring subject in need of purification. See Barry Smart, Michel Foucault for further details (London: Ellis Horwood, 1985), p.112.
discipline upon which Foucault grounded his theory. When Emma in Scene One (1977) reveals Robert’s betrayal to her lover Jerry, she shows a sense of anger for being kept in the dark, rather than expressing regret for her own betrayal of him, which might have been the reason for his betrayal in the first place:

**Emma:** You know what I found out ...last night? He’s betrayed me for years.
**Jerry:** But we betrayed him for years.
**Emma:** And he betrayed me for years. 1020

Emma’s fury is grounded in another parameter of this triangular relationship. The third parameter to Emma’s, Robert’s, and Jerry’s relationship besides power and sex is knowledge. Linking this parameter to sex, Foucault believed that the body is one of the parameters of knowledge, a corporeal testimony that bears the marks, ‘[the] Stigmata of past experience’, 1021 upon its surface.

Knowledge, is based upon the history of our sexual relations, which carries the imprints of the past experiences, as suggested by Foucault, in order to create a system of morality in which modern individuals either respect or disregard a given set of rules and values. A dramatised translation of knowing the history of the individual’s relation comes early in Betrayal when, in Scene One, Jerry seeks more information upon hearing that Emma coupled with Casey:

**Jerry:** Anyway, What’s all this about you and Casey? 1022

Jerry’s anxiety over Emma’s sexual relations leads me to the second layer of Foucault’s theory of the modern individual’s morality, a major concern in this chapter. Foucault approaches morality in two different ways: first, as imposed rules and prohibitions, and second, as real behaviours in relation to values recommended to individuals. 1023 As to the second understanding of morality, Foucault identifies four principal ways of examining how individuals might regard or disregard rules:

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1020 Betrayal, p.18.
1022 Betrayal, p.16.
1023 McNay, p.51.
1) **Determination of Ethical Substance**: when an individual is committed to a given set of rules originating from an inherent behaviour of mastering its internal desires, and not because of the existence of external rules to which the individual conforms.

2) **Mode of Subjection**: when the individual establishes his/her relation to a set of rules as part of a commitment that needs to be put into practice.

3) **Forms of Elaboration of Ethical Work**: when the individual practices sexual austerity through a long process of learning, memorisation, and assimilation.

4) **Telos of the Ethical Subject**: In which the individual practices for example conjugal fidelity by virtue of the place it occupies, in which such fidelity could be part of a schema of moral conduct towards full mastery of the self.1024

In relation to Emma’s and Jerry’s encounter in particular, and to the play in general, the characters have completely disregarded all of these modes of behaviour for the sake of the game in which their self-betrayal developed into a virus that has infected all their behaviours in society, as is evidenced by Pinter’s earlier quoted comment on the play.

This disregard for any behavioural or personal ethics is reflected by Emma when dealing with her conjugal relationship as an institution not to be cherished, but to be brandished as a trophy within a game of power, competition, secrecy, and mutual infidelity:

**Emma**: He told me everything. I told him everything.1025

Emma’s bravado comes as a shock to Jerry, who is even more surprised that Robert has been privy from the outset to his and Emma’s affair. In another episode that reflects the moral decay of the characters, Jerry expresses concern about his friendship with Robert rather than the woman he is supposed to be in love with:

**Jerry**: But he’s my oldest friend.1026

1024 McNay, p.51.
1025 *Betrayal*, p.22
1026 Ibid.
When Jerry emphasises the depth of his friendship with Robert, and his shock at Emma’s revelation of everything about them without his consent or even his knowledge, he reveals two things: first, his fears of being vulnerable, now that Emma and Robert have taken the advantage by gaining more knowledge about his relationship. Second, he feels that Emma has breached the rules of the game between him and Robert. Now that Emma has exposed the secrecy of this game, he feels ashamed of himself, and of his friend.

However, the sexual act is not the determinant, but rather the process that leads to sex. In this respect, let me peel off yet another layer of Foucault’s theory of sexuality by elaborating on the implications of the history of sexuality in terms of domination. Since all of the parameters of sex, power, and knowledge are interdependent, *The History of Sexuality* reflects a constant struggle between all three of them. It takes the shape of different power blocks, each attempting to impose their own system of domination through a process described by Foucault as installing ‘violence in a system of rules and thus proceeding from domination to domination’. Therefore, Foucault believes that these powers are always in the process of being displaced, overthrown, and superseded. However, Foucault’s theory of power entails that in order for a power relationship to exist, the individual should be free: ‘The subject on whom that ‘conduct’ or governance is exercised must be a *free* subject’. And whenever there is power, there is resistance and hence the productive aspect of power. Although Foucault’s suggestion might be true in other situations, but in connection to my analysis of the characters, I disagree with Foucault’s definition of power, as I believe that Emma is still not a free individual owing to her biological sex as a woman. Despite the freedom she enjoys to resist the games played by both men, she cannot fulfil the Foucauldian sense of freedom. Nevertheless, I still believe that Emma enjoys an advanced level of freedom when it comes to choosing her men; but that does not mean that whenever there is slight evidence of resistance, the freedom of the individuals upon whom power is being practised is implicit.

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1028 Deveaux, p.233.
Moreover, what hampers Emma’s realisation of her full individuality is the internalisation of the codes of oppression practised on her by Robert and Jerry. This is an internalisation that is reflected in her taking part in the game played on her by moving from one man to another, and thus intensifying her commodification. Foucault termed this internalisation as the gaze: ‘a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer’.  

Whilst these codes of oppression in Betrayal take the shape of social violence practised through games of secrecy using crooked ways and rules to beat the (particularly female) other, these same gendered games are manifested when Robert reveals to Jerry that he had the knowledge of Jerry and Emma’s relationship for the past four years, not recently as Emma had untruthfully told him:

Jerry: Why didn’t you tell me?
Robert: Tell you what?

Here it can be seen that the sexual behaviour of the characters in Betrayal does not simply revolve around imposing certain sexual desires, or permissive/restrictive rules or laws that dictate what they should or should not do. Rather the sexual behaviour of the characters is also a function of their level of consciousness as to what they are doing, what they make of their experiences, and the values they attach to such experiences. In Scene Six when Jerry and Emma meet in their flat, Emma is resisting the games played by the two men in order to commodify her by pressing for more information and therefore to know the gist of their upcoming meeting. When Jerry tells her that there is no specific point for the meeting, he shows that he cares for both himself and his friend Robert, while treating Emma as the Other at the same time. Pushing at the delineating boundaries of sexual relations, I would link Jerry’s reaction to Foucault’s observation that the intensification of the care for oneself necessarily involves a decreased valorisation of the other. Caring for oneself carries the risk of absolutisation of oneself, which can become a form of domination. Thus, if

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1029 Deveaux, p.225.
1030 Betrayal, p.32.
1031 Rabinow, p.142.
1032 McNay, p.58.
one becomes a slave to one’s own desires, one will end up abusing oneself, disregarding the rights of others, and hence dominating them. In connection to the play, Jerry’s caring to protect the secrecy of his relation with Robert (even though there is honestly no specific point to their meeting), reflects a caring for both himself and Robert that is reflected in the shape of both men dominating Emma or oppressing her, while she, although enjoying some freedom to resist, is unable to shun her commodification as a woman; and hence her freedom is diminished as an individual.

When Jerry tells her that he is meeting Robert just because they are used to taking turns to invite each other, this is in fact a time at which Robert possibly could or ethically should have confronted Jerry for betraying him with his wife; instead, he is intensifying the theme of Emma’s commodification through his apparent emotional control and reliance on social form:

Jerry: Because it’s my turn. Last time he took me to lunch.\textsuperscript{1033}

The men’s insistence on keeping the habit of taking turns for lunch even after Robert’s unveiling of his friend’s betrayal confirms the strong homosocial bond I referred to earlier. However, Emma’s pressing for more information continues:

Emma: You haven’t discovered any new writers while I’ve been away?\textsuperscript{1034}

Emma’s dialogue shows how an intimate conversation can be shaped by a playwright so that it serves as an archetypal discourse in and through which our identities are revealed. By pressing Jerry for more information, Emma is trying to protect her sexual relations with both men, and her social connections to the world outside their circle, especially after her confession of her betrayal in the previous scene and her fears that Robert will confront Jerry about the affair. Her pressing for more information is one of the modalities of her sexual identity and a reflection of a sense of insecurity at being

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{1033} \textit{Betrayal}, p.78.
\item \textsuperscript{1034} Ibid., p.79.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
left without enough information. In the strategic relations of power defined by Foucault, it is sometimes purely social relations that are involved:

> It is your social being that is involved; while in the other case, it is your body that is involved. And it is this transfer of strategic relations from the court (ship) to sex that is very interesting.  

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In *Betrayal*, both the characters’ corporeal and social beings are involved in the development of their identities through interaction on both social and somatic levels. In Scene Eight, this multifaceted interaction comes to the surface when Emma tells Jerry that she has become pregnant during his absence:

> **Emma**: I’m pregnant. It was when you were in America.  

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As a pre-emptive move to test Jerry’s feeling towards their relationship, Emma asks him if Judith knows about their relationship, Jerry confirms that Judith does not ‘go in for speculations’:

> **Jerry**: She is too busy. [...] She doesn’t go in for [...] speculations.  

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However, Jerry is himself not beyond speculations when it comes to his wife’s admirer, a fact that irritates him because ‘[he] doesn’t know exactly what’s going on’.  

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The situation of both Emma and Judith seems to be quite bizarre in this context. According to Foucault, women have always been treated as men’s exclusive property and prevented from too much contact with other men: ‘Women were restricted to social contact with other women and more tolerance was exercised with regard to the physical rapport between women’.  

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In connection to the situation of both women in the play, exactly the opposite is true, because both Emma and Judith have been exposed to men more than to each other (Judith is not even summoned to action), while being treated as personal possessions at the same time. This leads me to connect

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1035 Rabinow, p.170.
1036 *Betrayal*, p.109.
1037 Ibid., p.106.
1038 Ibid., p.107.
1039 Rabinow, p.152.
the characters’ perception of their identities in terms of their sexual relations which are, in turn, built on a network of lies, secrecy, and power relations; thus the process of constructing true identities is always diminished due to their decayed codes of morality. Foucault claims:

> If identity becomes the problem of sexual existence, and if people think that they have to ‘uncover’ their ‘own identity,’ and that their own identity has to become the law, the principle, the code of their existence[...] then, I think, they will turn back to a kind of ethics very close to the old heterosexual virility. If we are asked to relate to the question of identity, it must be an identity to our unique selves.\(^{1040}\)

The disintegration of the characters’ identities is revealed when it emerges that Jerry, who is supposed to express more than mere irritation over his wife’s admirer, believes that it is impossible to change his life with Judith, and yet is betraying her with Emma. When Emma, in her pre-emptive move to test Jerry, asks him if he ever thought of changing his life if his wife was unfaithful to him, he replies ‘It’s impossible’.\(^{1041}\) Here, I completely agree with Robert Gordon, who believes that Jerry provokes the audience to reflect on the reasons why people conduct clandestine affairs rather than honest monogamous relations.\(^{1042}\) Foucault supports this interpretation by suggesting:

> What is peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadowy existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it \textit{ad infinitum}, while exploiting it as the secret.\(^{1043}\)

The reverse situations in this play seem to follow its reverse chronological order, because both men and women seem to be constantly floundering in search of their ontological needs. According to Foucault’s theory regarding the construction of people’s sexual identities as a function of their gender, sexual austerity has been interpreted differently between wife and husband. For a wife, having a sexual relation only with her husband is because she is under his control. For the husband, having a sexual relation with only his own wife is an elegant exercise of his self-control.

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\(^{1040}\) Rabinow, p.166.  
\(^{1041}\) Betrayal, p.108.  
\(^{1042}\) Gordon, p.139.  
\(^{1043}\) Mark Cousins and Athar Hussain, Michel Foucault (London: Macmillan, 1984), p.204.
Therefore, according to Foucault, though such permutations seem to be symmetrical and just, they are actually asymmetrical because ‘The restriction which was analogous in what it allowed or forbade the two spouses, did not cover the same manner of “conducting the self”’. In an indirect connection to the play, the terms of sexual austerity seem to be taking chaotic shapes as both husbands and one wife here have lost control over their sexual austerity and thereby lost their connection with themselves; hence their diminished identities.

On another level of judging people’s sexual austerity, Foucault links the physical fitness of men to rationality and sexual moderation. Foucault refers to the different diets, exercises, and sports that men were recommended to engage in regularly as part of their ‘physical regimen’, a discipline linked to moral firmness and moderation. Interestingly, earlier in Scene Four (set in autumn of 1974) at Emma’s and Robert’s house, Robert and Jerry are engaged in a sort of competition, originating in Robert’s remembrance of Emma’s account of Casey’s novel. Robert, unlike Jerry, remembers correctly and hence acquires more power. The memory competition changes into a fitness one when Robert, in his ironic dialogue, reminds Jerry that he is fitter than him because he plays squash (a subtle reminder of Jerry’s betrayal). Nevertheless, despite both men’s physical fitness, neither is blamed for lacking sexual austerity as both have used their sexual desires as tools to manipulate the other. Both men’s intermittent friendship peels off another layer of Foucault’s theory in which he criticises the way society rejects male friendship even without implying a homosexual relationship, a point highlighted by Sedgwick’s question in her book Between Men, supporting her analysis referred to earlier: ‘Doesn’t the continuum between ‘men-loving-men,’ and men-promoting-the interest-of-men have the same intuitive force that it has for women [?]’ The continuity of both men’s relationship (though intermittent) is, in my opinion, further proof of their strong homosocial bond, and a statement that Pinter might have wanted to deliver in order to highlight and critique any form of sexual oppression.

1044 Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, p.151.
1045 Ibid., p.103.
1046 Prentice, p. xxii.
1047 Sedgwick, Between Men, p.698.
1048 See Mel Gussow’s Conversations with Pinter, p.69.
Foucault problematises issues of homosexuality by suggesting that in antiquity, friendship was a very important kind of social relation, a relation within which people had a certain freedom of choice, but later on (by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries), friendship had become dangerous because ‘The army, bureaucracy, administration, universities, schools, and so on – in the modern senses of these words – cannot function with such intense friendships’.\footnote{Rabinow, p.170.} Once the concept of friendship as a structural social model disappeared, people started to question every friendship with individuals from the same sex. In connection to Robert’s and Jerry’s situation, then, the fact that their friendship had continued, although not quite in the same way as Pinter once mentioned, further confirms the strength of the homosocial bond which both Foucault and Sedgwick are defending in their treatises.\footnote{Gussow, p.52} What I would like to emphasise here is that the disappearance of the acceptance of friendship on cultural and social levels amongst people of the same sex is another restriction imposed by society on the sexual freedom of individuals to choose their partners or friends. Foucault reaffirms ‘That the disappearance of friendship as a social relation and the declaration of homosexuality as a social/political/medical problem are the same processes’.\footnote{Todd W. Reeser, \textit{Moderating Masculinity in Early Modern Culture}, (Chapel Hill, the University of North Carolina, 2006) p.204.}

Nevertheless, the sexual incontinence of the characters as a reflection of moral decay continues to develop in every scene. In Scene Nine (marking the beginning of the story), Jerry’s feelings of loss in the penultimate scene drastically change into chivalrous feelings of courtly love. The scene goes back to winter 1968 in Emma’s conjugal room. Jerry hides there to confess his love:

\textbf{Jerry:} I can’t wait for you, I’m bowled over.\footnote{Betrayal, p.115.}

Jerry’s sexual incontinency in this scene reflects a pure passion of bodily pleasures, which does not reflect a narcissistic need as much as ‘a sexual [desire] […] associated with a force, and energia [sic], that was itself liable to be excessive’.\footnote{Foucault, \textit{The Use of Pleasure}, p.50.} It is worth
emphasising here that Jerry’s corporeal decay shifted into a spiritual and/or social
decay in Scene One when he refused to surrender to Emma’s sexual allurement and
innuendos to keep the social veneer that wraps his social corruption. This shift marks
the emergence of a new form of power through, by, and in which the body was not
liberated from the grip of power, but rather displaced into a secondary and mediatory
position by the emergence of the power of discipline. This shift affected many aspects
of the individuals’ personalities, as Barry Smart comments:

The shift of focus [...] from the body as the immediate and
direct object of the exercise of power to punish to the ‘soul,’
[...] conceptualised in terms of psyche, subjectivity, personality,
consciousness, and individuality.1054

Discipline and power are crucial words here to weave the relations of the characters
through the agency of the body. When Pinter was asked to draw a distinctive line
between his political and apolitical plays, he replied:

I cannot say that every work I’ve written is political. There’s
nothing political in Landscape. What the hell is political about
Old Times? I would say, nothing. But I feel the question of how
power is used and how violence is used, how you terrorise
somebody, how you subjugate somebody, has always been
alive in my work.1055

The power I am concerned with here is that which subjugates somebody. Although
Emma is the one who allowed Jerry through her door, she is not the one who made
the first move, without which nothing would have ever happened. I suggest that Emma
could be a modern version of Shakespeare’s Portia and Launcelot Gobbo in The
Merchant of Venice, who both represent the marginalised Other and provide a means
of interrogating the prevailing system’s inequitable distribution of power1056 through
their roles in the play. According to Karen Newman,

Portia and Launcelot Gobbo, woman and servant [...] represent
the ‘other’ in the play, those marginal groups that are

1054 Smart, p.81.
1055 Gussow, p.73.
oppressed under the Elizabethan class/gender system, but whose presence paradoxically is needed to ensure its existence.\textsuperscript{1057}

If we link Scene Nine of \textit{Betrayal} to the opening dialogue in the first scene, we can trace the oppression Newman is mentioning through the rules that both males have set for themselves when they started bouncing the ball (Emma) according to their own wills and desires. The act of seeking more knowledge, information gained and kept on both men’s sides, is an act of getting more power and supremacy over the ‘Other’ (representing Emma in this case). No matter how hard she attempted to be part of the male bond, she would always be cast out with nothing left other than moving to another man. She is like the ball left waiting on the court for another pair of men to pick up as they begin their new game of squash.

III

In the following section, I will discuss further the male bond between Jerry and Robert. The strength of this bond is crystallised through a nexus of sexual relationships that prove male supremacy and clarify Pinter’s statement that this play is about a nine-year relationship between two men. Claude Levi-Strauss’s anthropological study \textit{The Elementary Structures of Kinship} (1949) will be crucial to my analysis. Strauss’s treatise proposes that human society is primarily a masculine society, and women (just like food, animals, and gifts) circulate like pawns amongst men to strengthen their bonds and kinship.

Evidence of a bond between the play’s two male protagonists emerges very early in the play – indeed from the first scene (in which Emma tells Jerry of Robert’s betrayal of her). Jerry’s feelings of sorrow and his pain give the impression of someone who had a strong bond with Robert. That Jerry himself feels betrayed by the fact that he does not know about Robert’s own betrayals of Emma, brings into sharper focus my earlier point of men bonding through marriage. The bond that ties Robert to Jerry was established long before Robert either met or married Emma; therefore, I suggest that this primordial bond is akin to marriage. The strength of this bond is further

\textsuperscript{1057}Ibid.
crystallised through the agony reflected in Jerry’s long comment relating to his relationship with Robert:

Jerry: [...] We were such close friends, weren’t we? [...] even though I haven’t seen him for a few months, but through all those years, [...] I never suspected [...] that there was anyone else [...] in his life but you.1058

Although Robert’s betrayal is mentioned in his own confession to Emma, it is never confirmed. I would disagree with Gordon, who believes that Robert’s silence and staying with Emma might be due to his own feeling of betraying her; rather I believe that it is a mere camouflage so that he can stay in the game. Ronald Knowles supports this interpretation: ‘When precisely Robert started his affairs is never made clear, but there are no indications that it was before Emma’s confession’.1059 Gordon himself confirms that Robert actually feels more pain for Jerry’s betrayal rather than Emma’s, which might account for his silence: ‘Robert may indeed be more wounded by Jerry’s betrayal of their friendship than by Emma’s infidelity’,1060 a statement that further confirms both men’s homosocial bond. However, whether Robert’s betrayal is real or not, it hits the target in this game because it causes pain and agony to both Jerry and Emma, who had both believed that they were more valuable to him than the other way around.

This bond is shown quite strongly in the second scene, in which Jerry invites Robert to his house to talk with him. Jerry feels strongly obligated to Robert, and the fact that Robert knows everything about his betrayal pushes him to save their bond before it breaks. When Robert meets Jerry, he affects extreme nonchalance that drives Jerry to feel the guilt of betrayal even more:

Robert: You look quite rough.1061

Robert’s demeanour and his standing up to a certain point in the dialogue means that he now holds the keys to power in his hands, and Jerry is the one who needs to

1058 Betrayal, p.19.
1060 Gordon, p.134.
1061 Betrayal, p.25.
struggle to explain himself. The game of holding and revealing secrets will start all over again, but it will take place between the two men rather than Emma. Robert is using all of his skills of discourse to send signals to Jerry that he is no longer his ‘best man’. In light of Strauss’s theory, if women are the gift, then men are the exchange partners: ‘It is the partners, not the presents, upon whom reciprocal exchange confers its quasi-mystical power of social linkage’.  

Robert’s reserved anger, I believe, therefore resides in Jerry’s betrayal of their friendship, rather than the conjugal infidelity, which intensifies male bonding. Moreover, to enter into a gift exchange as a partner, one must have something to give, and both Jerry and Robert are ready to let go of their wives to continue the gift-giving.

Now that Robert knows all about the relationship, he starts to tease out the information drop by drop. Only when Robert asks Jerry whether the subject relates to his relationship with Emma does the latter, in my view, take off the mask he was wearing for all those years. Jerry is in an indefensible position as he has transgressed the limits of the virtual kinship between himself and Robert. Given the strength of the relationship between them, which transcends a normal friendship to become a bond of kinship, Jerry, indeed, has breached the bonds of this kinship by having an affair with a woman supposedly forbidden to him.

The confrontation scene can be understood through Strauss’s exchange theory of women. According to the marriage rules amongst clans, ‘Theoretically [...] a man should not marry a woman belonging to a clan into which a man of his own group has married within a living memory’. If one pushes the boundaries of this quotation, one ends up with a society in which males are either fathers or brothers (every marriage, then, will imply incest), which is of course not the case. What Strauss is highlighting here is, therefore, the theme of male hierarchy that rules the relationships in society. A man who marries off his daughter or sister to another man does not only conceive of the marriage as a bond between a man and a woman, but between himself and the other man – considering the social, cultural, and political levels of the relationship that will be consummated by the production of children who will,

1063 Ibid.
1064 Strauss, p.xxxvii.
subsequently, also belong to him. The point that I wish to emphasise here is the fact that male hierarchy governs all relationships which place females in an inferior position.

Now, if we place Jerry and Emma’s relationship within a modern framework, their affair could be considered a virtual marriage, and hence a breach of the rules of kinship between men.

However, when Jerry discovers that Robert’s silence over his betrayal lasted for four years rather than taking place ‘last night’, as Emma told him, he completely collapses. Robert’s silence can be interpreted in psychological terms, as Susan Isaacs notes. She relates a brief story about two children who quarrelled over a tricycle, and because they were equally matched in power and persistence, neither of them was willing to accept arbitration. The problem was only solved when both children made sure that neither was going to gain more than the other, and thus their fears were assuaged, as the following interpretation explains:

If my enjoyment has to suffer limitations for someone else’s pleasure, then I must have at least as much as he. If I cannot be supreme, we must all be equal. My wish for exclusive possession is tamed by my fear of his encroachment and the hope that if I admit to equal rights, he will take no more.

According to this text, Robert’s silence could be interpreted as a defence mechanism against Jerry and Emma. Perhaps he also thinks of saving face as well as self-identity lest he ends up like his former histrionic counterpart, Edward, who is completely displaced by the Match Seller by the end of A Slight Ache. Although things ‘will never quite be the same’ after this ‘emotional havoc’, as Pinter stated, Robert makes sure to come out of this relationship at least on a par with his rival.

1065 Betrayal, p.28.
1066 Strauss, p.85.
1067 In Pinter’s A Slight Ache, a married couple discuss their desires and dreams, when the husband, Edward, starts developing a fear of the unknown, and the Other. Edward’s fears are embodied in the appearance of a match seller, who displaces him by the end of this tragiomic play.
1068 Mel Gussow, p.52.
1069 Billingon, The Life and Work of Harold Pinter, p.264.
Nevertheless, the male characters still hope to win each other back and revive the old male bond, as shown in Jerry’s imploring of Robert:

Jerry: I was your best friend.1070

Robert reminds Jerry of his engagement in the betrayal game by reminding him of their lack of a history of playing squash: ‘Never played squash though’.1071

The squash game, it seems, is a metaphor for Robert’s knowing of his wife’s lover. Pinter’s youthful interest in sports1072 seems to have given the play another set of rules on a different level. Robert, now feeling empowered by the information transmitted to him via Emma, is playing a different type of squash with his wife’s lovers. According to the rules of squash, if at any time one of the players hits the other or interferes with play, the opponent can either accept and continue playing or stop play, which is preferable to avoid colliding. If the return is not good, the striker loses the game. Now, I do not want to reduce Pinter’s play to a squash metaphor, but it seems that a different kind of squash, a social squash, is being played amongst the characters. Jerry (striker) has hit Robert (opponent) with the ball (Emma). Robert has accepted the interference in silence and has not stopped the play (which is preferable), therefore the possibility of colliding with the opponent has been dramatised in this conversation.

Interestingly, since the return in this game was not good, all of the players have lost. In other words, all three characters have lost parts of themselves in their rally to save face through self-deception. Burkman believes that Emma is the play’s major victim,1073 and Pinter did not blame everything on her either, believing that ‘The men also make certain betrayals. I wouldn’t want it all to come down to the lady’.1074 I believe that all of the characters have been victimised in one way or another—as they all have self-defeated themselves, which is ‘the most shameful [defeat]’.1075

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1070 Betrayal, p.30.
1071 Ibid.
1073 Burkman, p.509.
1074 Gussow, p.52.
1075 Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, p.69.
Nevertheless, Emma, being a woman, carries most of that shameful burden because her loss is double; she has been denied by both her husband and her lover.

Robert’s nonchalance, and the suspicion that he discovered his wife’s infidelity even earlier than he alleges, are highlighted as he shares his suspicions about Casey having an affair with his wife, while at the same time twisting the ironical knife in Jerry. The fact that he stopped playing squash with Casey confirms the rules he is using to play with every lover of his wife:

**Robert:** We haven’t played squash for years, Casey and me.  

The ironical dialogue between Jerry and Robert, although Emma is mentioned, is actually all focused on the two males’ relationship. When Robert tells Jerry that ‘[He does not] give a shit about any of this’, he seems to confirm Scolnicov’s suggestion that human sexuality is completely dissociated from morality in Pinter’s ‘cool handling of the sexual wrangling among his characters [which] is meant to create explosive effect’. However, in a play that does not only talk about self-betrayal but other kinds of betrayals that ‘spread like a bacillus through the whole human relations’, the word ‘betrayal’, therefore, must touch upon the diminished morality of modern society on different levels.

When Jerry discusses his and Emma’s relationship, he states: ‘We used to like each other’ and Robert replies: ‘We still do’, referring to their male bond. Moreover, when both of them discuss Casey, who ‘still sells’, though he is ‘over the hill’, in a reference to his relation with Emma, Robert suggests that he and Jerry made the most of him – which means that Robert does not mind working with Jerry even after what had happened. Even after Jerry, in an attempt to encounter Robert, reminds him that he too betrayed Emma for years, Robert tells Jerry that he ‘did not know much about

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1076 *Betrayal*, p.35.
1078 *Scolnicov, Woman’s Theatrical Space*, p.135.
1079 *Billington, Betrayal*, though, is not a moralistic play as Harold Hobson once suggested. See Michael Billington’s *The Life and Work of Harold Pinter*, p.264.
1080 *Betrayal*, p.34.
1081 *Ibid*.
1082 *Ibid*, p.35.

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anything’. This leads me to emphasise my earlier assertion that despite Robert’s confirmation of betraying Emma, I believe it is part of the game to save face and to keep his composure. In this scene, Scene Two, Robert, I believe, is not blaming Jerry for betraying him with his wife, but for drifting away from him. Jerry could not even realise that Robert is pretending about the betrayal so as to keep up appearances, thereby fulfilling Greer’s assumption that a man ‘owes no loyalty to the women whatsoever’. Gordon here supplies another interesting reading in relation to the theme of male bonds and betrayal. He believes that when Robert tells Jerry that Casey is indeed his new wife’s lover, he is implicitly telling Jerry that he has indeed been a victim of Emma’s deception for years. Apart from Emma’s not telling him that her husband discovered their relationship, she might equally have been betraying Jerry with others while she was with him. In addition, the fact that both males are discussing how they have made full use of other males emphasises not only male bonds, but the depth of betrayal and Pinter’s emphasis on the impossibility of their attaining information.

Mark Taylor-Batty suggests that Casey represents another bond between the two men through their professional associations as writer, agent, and publisher. This relationship adopts the same shape as the one between them and Emma – which confirms the structure of their relationship as one that is formed and defined by intermediaries. In both cases, Robert and Jerry aim to make full use of their object to increase their profit and strengthen their bond. Batty’s suggestion further confirms my point that although rivalry between both men is there according to Girard’s erotic trio, the object of the triangle is not necessarily always someone of the opposite sex.

Robert’s inquiry as to whether Jerry has read any good books recently confirms his attempts to get Jerry back to their male club, and maybe continue working in their publishing business together. Exchanging Emma might have marked a new stage in their friendship. In his anthropological study, Levi-Strauss mentions that the exchange of women enhances bonds between the same sex, explaining that the exchange of

1083 Ibid., p.33.
1084 Greer, p.292.
1085 Gordon, p.129.
1086 Batty, p.134.
women does not unfold in economic benefit only, but also marks a period of transition ‘from hostility to alliance, from anxiety to confidence, and from fear to friendship’.  

The male bond intensifies in Scene Four when Jerry and Robert discuss gender difference, at which point Robert comes up with an assumption about the sexes:

**Robert**: They say boys are worse than girls.  

Although Batty describes this dialogue as ‘vacuous small talk’, I believe that Robert’s assumption can be interpreted on two levels: first, this could be Pinter’s device to raise the question of gender once more in terms of relationships; second, it could be a foreshadowing of the next scene, in which Robert supposedly discovers the infidelity of his wife.

When Jerry tells Robert that he thinks that baby boys are more anxious about leaving the womb than girls, Robert asks: ‘What the hell are they anxious about [...] at their age?’ Robert might be talking about men’s stronger tendency towards overt sexuality, or he might just be ironic towards Jerry, by referring to his relation with Emma given the fact that he is already a married man, as if Robert is asking him: ‘What are you so anxious about with Emma?’

The strength of this male bond and the distancing of Emma is strongly verbalised when Robert and Jerry plan to revive their squash games together and she attempts to join them. Robert’s rather harsh outburst of excluding Emma confirms this bond:

**Robert**: You really don’t want a woman buying you lunch. [...] You don’t want her in the squash court.

Sports, action, and fitness are all factors that Greer refers to that men use to achieve ‘a measure of respect from other men’. Nevertheless, as well as Scolnicov’s
interpretation, suggesting a distancing of Emma by her husband ‘To get rid of [her] sexually threatening presence’,\textsuperscript{1093} I would agree with that of Gordon, who believes that Robert’s exclusion of Emma (on the surface due to sexist attitudes relating to female presence in male sporting events, but in reality also to uphold his pretended ignorance of her betrayal) was an act that is mistakenly colluded with by Jerry in order to prevent Robert from harbouring any suspicion of his affair. Consequently, both men assert loyalty to a friendship that they both betray.\textsuperscript{1094}

Robert feels empowered by the information transmitted to him in Venice in Scene Five; thus, his invitation to Emma to have lunch with him and Jerry has now changed into reluctance to have her and consequently shutting the door in her face. After he has made sure that Ned is his son in Venice, he metaphorically twists the knife by suggesting her double betrayal:

**Robert:** Did you tell him that Ned was conceived?\textsuperscript{1095}

Later on, to hurt Emma and to emphasise the male bond, Robert openly confesses his preference for Jerry over her: ‘To be honest, I’ve always liked him rather more than I’ve liked you’.\textsuperscript{1096}

While Billington agrees with Burkman that Robert’s reaction is an expression of imitative desire,\textsuperscript{1097} which could be partly true in terms of the commodification of women, there is another interesting interpretation that can be deduced from Levi-Strauss’s anthropological study. Given the fact that Robert and Jerry were best friends before they got married, and that Jerry was best man at Robert’s wedding, the relationship has virtually taken the form of ‘brothers-in-law’. The social connections, close relations, and the merging of both families enhances this relation and gives it further dimensions. According to Strauss, such alliances increase the potential of homosexual activities, ‘which will always leave their mark in the mutually and

\textsuperscript{1093} Scolnicov, ‘Pinter’s Game of Betrayal’.
\textsuperscript{1094} Gordon, p.132.
\textsuperscript{1095} Betrayal, p.72.
\textsuperscript{1096} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1097} Burkman defines this term as a situation in which two men desire to possess the same woman for the sake of competition. See Burkman, ‘Harold Pinter’s Betrayal’, pp.508-509.
affectionate behaviour of the adults’. Greer supports this by suggesting that ‘If [a man] spends time with women it is partly, or even mostly, because he wants to demonstrate his prowess to his mates’. Moreover, Levi-Strauss frames such relations as brotherhood; when a fight occurs between non-kinsmen they will cry: ‘Savage, you are no longer my brother!’ The male bond, then, could fall into any of these categories.

Owing to this male bond, I strongly disagree with Scolnicov’s assumption that everybody is equal in this betrayal (which she considers as a bourgeois institution that affects all human relations): ‘Betrayal seems to infect and undermine the fabric of human relations [...] The woman’s betrayal is not regarded as different from that of the two men’, because Emma is further burdened by a double rejection by both men.

The development of the male bond makes a strong presence in almost every scene. When Emma meets Jerry in Scene Six after coming back from Venice, she appears with a basket of food, which intensifies both her domesticity and her commodification because distributing food is associated with women, goods, and animals exchange. Nevertheless, while Emma is romancing Jerry, he is preoccupied with his relationship to Robert, as he seems to be hesitant to meet him for lunch. Jerry is prioritising his male bond over his relationship to Emma:

Jerry: You don’t think I should see Robert for lunch on Thursday, or on Friday for that matter?

Then he starts narrating several incidents that reflect, again, the strength of the male bond:

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1098 Strauss, p.484.
1099 Greer, p.292.
1100 Strauss, p.484.
1101 Scolnicov, ‘Pinter’s Game of Betrayal’.
1102 Strauss, p.66.
1103 Betrayal, p.82.
Jerry: [...] Do you remember, all the kids were running about and suddenly I picked Charlotte up and lifted her high up.\textsuperscript{1104}

As I said, Jerry and Robert are virtually brothers-in-law due to their closeness on a personal and public level. Emma’s conversation about her trip to Venice with Robert awakens a sense of loyalty in Jerry, who believes he has breached his bond with Robert as he not only had an affair with Emma, but betrayed everyone in both families who were standing in his kitchen watching him playing with his best friend’s daughter:

Jerry: She was so light. And there was your husband and my wife and all the kids. [...] I can’t get rid of it.\textsuperscript{1105}

Therefore, by having an affair with Emma, Jerry has realised the burden of his betrayal. Nevertheless, Emma, at this stage, is still pinning her hopes on her lover by allowing him to manipulate her: ‘Why shouldn’t you throw her up?’\textsuperscript{1106} However, her hopes will be ephemeral because they will prove to be as fragile as her daughter.

When both Robert and Jerry meet in Scene Seven (after the betrayal confession in Venice), the impact of Jerry’s betrayal becomes obvious. The setting is an Italian restaurant in the summer of 1973, where Robert is waiting for Jerry for lunch. Though it is Jerry’s turn, the stage directions show that it is Robert who is playing the host.\textsuperscript{1107}

Supporting my claim that a pivotal part of the game is knowledge, Alan Varley confirms: ‘It is certain that in Betrayal the states of affairs that really count are states of knowledge’.\textsuperscript{1108} Robert, after the vacation in Venice, is empowered with knowledge of the betrayal, while Jerry, on the contrary, seems narrowly to escape every time he asks Robert about Venice.

In this scene, the confrontation between Robert and Jerry does not take place immediately but rather goes through a minefield of tense stories, in which Jerry seems

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{1104} Ibid., p.84.  
\textsuperscript{1105} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{1106} Ibid., p.85.  
\textsuperscript{1108} Varley, p.103.  
\end{flushright}
like a sleepwalker who is ‘persistently heading for danger only to escape it by inches thanks to the last minute chance’.\textsuperscript{1109}

The conversation starts with their ordering of food. The variety of dishes ordered is another indication of both men’s sexual appetites. Strauss links the appetite for women with the abundance of food and gluttony for different dishes: ‘The more women [are] available the more food’.\textsuperscript{1110}

\textbf{Jerry}: I’ll have melone. And piccata al limone with a green salad.
\textbf{Robert}: I’ll have prosciutto and melone. Fried scampi. And spinach.\textsuperscript{1111}

Jerry’s unheeded conversation leads him to ask about the Italian waiter’s identity:

\textbf{Jerry}: Is he the one who’s always been here or is it his son?\textsuperscript{1112}

Robert’s trivial answer reflects tension and drives the audience into more speculation: ‘He’s the one who speaks wonderful Italian’.\textsuperscript{1113} Such small details might link many threads together. First, the setting is an Italian restaurant, representing a cultural locus that is still vivid in Robert’s memory as the one in which he discovered his wife’s adultery. Moreover, it was on their Venice vacation that he started developing suspicions about his little boy’s paternity. Jerry, whom Robert now recognises as his wife’s lover, is sitting with him in an Italian restaurant in which there is a big painting of Venice on the wall, and they inadvertently discuss the issue of fatherhood. The answer to the question of whether the choice of setting was Robert’s or Pinter’s is irrelevant, as the result will always be the same. Pinter has thus hit the bulls eye by bringing up such small details with a subtle significance, playing his own game of knowledge and signification again with the audience. Although the author always has the prerogative of deciding the twists and turns of his text, Varley believes that Pinter’s ‘playing of games’\textsuperscript{1114} is still different from that of others, as his authorial manipulation

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{1109} Ibid., p.107.
\bibitem{1110} Strauss, p.39.
\bibitem{1111} Betrayal, p.89.
\bibitem{1112} Ibid., p.90.
\bibitem{1113} Betrayal, p.90.
\bibitem{1114} Varley, p.104.
\end{thebibliography}
can be felt on the largest scale, such as the chronological arrangement of the scenes, and the handling of the discourse that is filled with small details, reconstructing a linear sequence of cause and effect.\textsuperscript{1115}

To decrease tension, Jerry changes the subject and asks Robert about Venice again. Robert gives Jerry a different version of the Torcello trip, and tells Jerry that he read Yeats alone on the boat:

\begin{quote}
Robert: Yes, I sat on the grass and read Yeats.
Jerry: Yeats on Torcello?\textsuperscript{1116}
\end{quote}

Peter Raby discusses a very interesting point in relation to the reading of Yeats, which has been mentioned earlier in Scene Five (in Venice). Given the fact that Pinter was a serious reader of Yeats, he knew that Yeats was the poet of sexual betrayal. Raby mentions that Yeats wrote to Lady Gregory\textsuperscript{1117} just one month after his marriage to Georgie Hyde-Less in 1917: ‘I have betrayed three people’.\textsuperscript{1118} Yeats, who wrote poems on his hopeless, idealised love to Maud Gonne, was not only referring to his new wife, but to Maud and her daughter Iseult as well. He proposed to both mother and daughter and was rejected in the months prior to his marriage. Interestingly, Yeats described a closely relevant topic in his sexually explicit poems. Raby remarks of Yeats’s writing that:

\begin{quote}
The encounter of a man and a woman in the act of love is likely to be troubled by the presence of a third: either a lover from a past life or the projection of an idealised counter-self to the beloved.\textsuperscript{1119}
\end{quote}

Moreover, Raby believes that Yeats’s significance in the play goes beyond Robert’s choice in Torcello to touch upon the structure of the whole chronological plot of

\textsuperscript{1115}Ibid.; A.E. Quigley has diagnosed this Pinteresque technique as a parallel between micro and macro structures in the play. See A.E. Quigley, The Modern Stage and Other Worlds (New York: Methuen, 1985), p.237.

\textsuperscript{1116}Betrayal, p.95.

\textsuperscript{1117}An Irish folklorist, dramatist, and theatre manager. She co-founded the Irish Library Theatre and Abbey Theatre with W.B. Yeats and Edward Martyn.


Pinter’s piece. Raby argues that it is the reference to Yeats in Scene Five that initiates the reversal of time, making use of Yeats’s technique of vision.\textsuperscript{1120} However, I would disagree with this assumption, as Pinter stated that the idea came to him after he had depicted a scene of two people in the bar talking about the past.\textsuperscript{1121}

Nevertheless, Raby makes one very interesting point. Emma, ‘who seems to be doing the most betraying’,\textsuperscript{1122} is more likely to be cheated on, given the male bond between Robert and Jerry. In other words, Pinter has turned Yeats’s betrayal of three females into two males betraying one female, taking into consideration their strong homosocial bond which has remained even after the revelation of the betrayal. Moreover, according to Yeats, the Unity of Being, as he calls it, is to be realised through sex. In his poem ‘A Woman Young and Old’, he traces the sexual cycle of a woman from her younger years to her elderly ones. Yeats believed that we wear sex as a mask, and only through many sexual experiences can we ultimately reach the ‘calming revelation of an eternal transcendence’.\textsuperscript{1123} The cycle of sex, and the sexual comfort that Yeats referred to, heavily colours the relationships in \textit{Betrayal}. The betrayal has occurred when all characters were younger; now that they have aged, they need to experience different masks of sex to fulfil that Unity of Being. Yeats’s poem on the sexual cycles of the female was balanced with another poem entitled ‘A Man Young and Old’ in a commentary on the everlasting struggle between femininity and masculinity, perhaps the strongest theme in \textit{Betrayal}.

The poem is divided into eleven stanzas, and each stanza follows a certain stage of female sexuality. In the section ‘Before the World Was Made’, Yeats comments on the spirituality of a young girl who knows nothing yet about sex. Later on, she will dabble in cosmetics as she grows up to attract the attention of males. In ‘A First Confession’, the spiritual self starts to lose its battle with bodily desire, tainting the pure self that was there before the world was made, and hence the tussle between male and female

\textsuperscript{1120}Raby refers to Yeats’s ‘dreaming back’ prose philosophy in which ‘The scenario of the “dreaming back” envisages people who are forced to relive the details of their life, bathed in the retrospective light of everything that has occurred since and with the moral burden of much greater knowledge than the ignorance they could claim at the time.’ Raby, p.186.

\textsuperscript{1121}In his interview with Mel Gussow, Pinter commented when asked about the theme of \textit{Betrayal}, ‘They were talking about the past. So, I thought I’d better go back there and see what happened’. Gussow, p.51.

\textsuperscript{1122}Burkman, p.509.

starts. This tussle is symbolised by the metaphor of day and night interplaying in the Zodiac that represents the conflict of masculinity and femininity (day and night). As the sun rises and sets so does love, which entails joy, pain, possession, and dispossession. In ‘Parting’, Yeats nods to *Romeo and Juliet* after their night of love in Act Three, Scene Five of the play when they sleep together to be awaken by the daybreak. The darkness (femininity) is trying to hold the sun (masculinity) from leaving – alluding to the male’s objectivity, which can be trusted because it is based on facts, and the female’s subjectivity, undaunted by mere matters of fact. However, in Yeats, female sexuality wins in the end. When both male and female get old in ‘Meeting’, in which they meet to ‘displace onto one another the bitterness of their age and the resentment of their parted ways’, they discover that each has started hating what the other loved, in a reference to their changing desires towards each other and their ability to ignore the incompatibility in the heat of their emotions. While the poem ends with translated lines from Sophocles’ *Antigone*, the parallel poem ‘A Man Young and Old’ ends with a note on *Oedipus*, with the difference that Yeats’s commentary on man is that of stoic resignation while his commentary on women is that of existential rebellion, however futile in the end:

*A Woman Young and Old*  
Pray I will and sing I must,  
And yet I weep – Oedipus’ child  
Descends into the loveless dust.  

*A Man Young and Old*  
From ‘Oedipus at Colonus’  
Endure what life God gives and ask no longer span;  
Cease to remember the delights of youth, travel-wearied aged man.

These two poems are the two opposite poles of Yeats’ response to what he considered the crime of being born. In a strong literary parallel to Pinter’s play, then, we can trace many similar threads: first the characters’ spiritual loss, the masks they wear to attract or trap each other, and then their changing of temperaments which leads,

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1125 Vopat, p.43.
1127 Ross, p.294.
eventually, to their parting. And finally, the female sexuality of Emma which, unlike the woman in Yeat’s poem, fails to hold on to both men. Thus, it seems that Pinter has had a similar vision to that of Yeats in connection to the development of the sexual selves and identities of characters. In short, it is another account of the history of sexuality.

In further examinations of literary themes and merits, Robert tells Jerry that Emma loved Spinks’ book, to which Jerry replies:

**Jerry:** Oh Spinks. Yes. The one you didn’t like.

**Robert:** The one I wouldn’t publish.

Robert then starts making insinuations about Jerry’s illicit relationship through the metaphor of Spinks’ book:

**Robert:** You like it yourself, do you?

**Jerry:** I do.

**Robert:** Tell me, do you think that makes me a publisher of unique critical judgment or a foolish publisher?

**Jerry:** A foolish publisher.

If Robert was meant to speak explicitly, he would have said that that makes him a foolish (impotent) husband instead of a foolish publisher, as he is implicitly telling Jerry that he and his wife are reading the book that he rejected: the book that talks about betrayal, ‘implying that they have moved past feeling any sort of remorse for Robert’.

When Robert supported Casey’s first novel, Emma considered it dishonest, projecting her own feelings onto the text, and when Jerry recommended Spinks’s novel, she fell in love with it even though it talks about betrayal. In other words, Robert is referring to the harmony between Emma and Jerry as a metaphor for their betrayal. When Robert tells Jerry that literature ‘Gives you both a thrill’ in a sentence that carries more of a sexual meaning than anything else, Jerry avoids confrontation by saying that Emma is

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1128 Betrayal, p.96.
1129 Ibid., p.97.
1130 Rybka, p.13.
1131 Betrayal, p.97.
Robert’s wife, not his. It seems, then, that the literary preferences of the characters could be seen as another mask through which they reveal their own sexual desires. Robert’s assumption that Jerry and Emma have the same literary taste could stand for their sexual harmony that renders him a ‘foolish’ publisher.

However, Robert’s near breakdown in the restaurant is metaphorically expressed by the sentence ‘This place is going to pot’, in a reference to the collapse of all relations. To save face, Robert ends the scene by congratulating Jerry for being such a good literary agent and friend in a sentence that carries absolutely the opposite meaning: ‘You’ve got a good nose and you care and I respect that in you. So does Emma’.

Considering the developments of Robert and Jerry’s relationship, it seems that both males have been concerned with the betrayal of their own bond rather than Emma’s commodification by both of them. Emma’s comment on her daughter’s tossing up in the air has become a reality by the end of the play. Levi-Strauss highlights the theme:

The relationship of exchange which constitutes marriage is not established between a man and a woman [...] but between two groups of men, and the woman figures only as one of the objects in the exchange, not as one of the partners.

This is exactly why Emma remembers Charlotte being thrown up in the air and caught; by implication, this is reflective of her situation of being tossed between two men.

Nevertheless, Levi-Strauss’s emphasis on the exchange of women being at the origin of social life has been countered by another interpretation from the French feminist, Luce Irigaray, who postulates that if, as Levi-Strauss claims, ‘The exchanges which organise patriarchal societies take place exclusively between men’, then ‘The very possibility of the socio-cultural order would entail homosexuality. Homosexuality would be the law that regulates the socio-cultural economy’.

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1132 Ibid., p.98.
1133 Ibid., p.100.
1134 Strauss, p.115.
Accordingly, Irigaray does not deny Levi-Strauss’ claims that women are being commodified, but instead eroticises the ties between men as described by Levi-Strauss, who defines the world as homosexual. This definition has been appropriated recently by Eve Sedgwick and relabelled ‘homosocial’. The reason for Irigaray’s change of heart regarding Levi-Strauss’ proposal is that she polemically suggests that by discarding women as mere commodities in a project aimed at strengthening male ties, Levi-Strauss is risking short-circuiting ‘the very systems of exchange that produce male bonds’.\textsuperscript{1136} Therefore, by using the word ‘homosocial’, with its eroticised connotations, Irigaray is suggesting a logical continuum.

However, despite the exchange scheme, the lack of appropriate decisive actions vis-à-vis the betrayal and the numerous acts of betrayal themselves have not created the expected hostility amongst the characters; they remain friends, although taking different paths. On the contrary, it is this very lack of hostility that is responsible for the characters’ sense of lost identity. Sally Alexander, in her reading of Lacan, concludes: ‘Antagonism between the sexes is an unavoidable aspect of the acquisition of sexual identity’.\textsuperscript{1137} Therefore, the lack of any kind of hostility emphasises two themes: (i) that the entire act of betrayal is a game, and a metaphor that could be applied to any aspect of life, and (ii) that the characters, immersed in playing this game, have lost the sense of awareness of their true identities as a result of a web of deceitful sexual relationships that eventually taints their future lives.

\textbf{IV}

In this chapter I have demonstrated several things: that the key characters in this play use subterfuge and duplicity in their sexual relations; that variations of subject and object status exist between men and women in any sexualised relationship and that this fact is written large in the construction of female identity as a form of sexual oppression in society. The commodification of women represented by Emma in \textit{Betrayal} and the stronger homosocial bond between the male characters are the key issues in this Pinter play. Although Pinter stated that his play is about a nine-year relationship between two men, he, in my opinion, also delivers a strong message on a prevailing social misconception regarding sexual freedom. I have here argued that the

\textsuperscript{1136} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1137} Parker, p.69.
male bond in this play is a purely homosocial one, and that it is based on concepts of honour, trust and integrity that are not as relevant to the male relationships with women that are depicted in this case. This is perhaps how the relationship between Emma and Judith would have been had they been close friends; but such a narrative is missing from the play, and a male world is thereby privileged. This homosocial bond comes at a price, however, and Pinter makes it clear that it has been nurtured at the expense of Emma’s individuality; she is objectified and becomes like a ball tossed between both men, as proof of their manhood. This lack of recognition of all humans’ rights to subject status, individual authority and self-authorship leads to a loss for all characters, and the disintegration of their identities.

It is worth mentioning that the playwright does not always have an ideological bent, or particular gender-political or sociological projects in his portrayal of characters in a play; however, the mimetic nature of the small, realistic dialogues of characters in Pinter’s work can frequently cast them as representatives of any real individuals we come across in life – a unique shift that has been excellently deployed by Pinter to expose further political implications representing the oppression practised by oligarchic systems against marginalised people (the patriarchal oppression of women in general, represented by Emma in Betrayal). I would therefore assert that Pinter has tried to show us that the social masks we wear every day (thinking that modern life has freed us from the fetters of the past) are themselves fetters of the present that, left unexamined, contaminate the texture of our lives. Betrayal must therefore be seen as Pinter’s call on us to realise that relations are most often not what they seem, that people play games, that the playing field is not level in gender-political terms and that all relationships need to be reconsidered by an active sense of responsibility towards every single aspect of life.

If human relations in reality are similar to those portrayed in the play, the implications are that we live in a chaotic and superficial society in which men will ultimately enjoy the lion’s share of freedom, both having more freedom than women and consuming them. The male characters in this play are enjoying freedom granted to them because of their sex, hence their juggling of Emma. If Pinter had decided to add a few more scenes to the play, both Robert and Jerry would have ended up with new women,
considering the fact that Robert was already filing for divorce and given Jerry’s overtly flirtatious character. Nonetheless, despite Emma’s ending up with a new man (Casey) which reflects a potential space of freedom, it is ultimately superficial because Emma domesticises her erotic desires by being submissive to the men she ends up with. From another perspective, the absence of Judith confirms the idea of women’s oppression.

This missing female voice and the somatic presence of another female actor could have and perhaps should have been there to defend both herself against the accusations of having an admirer and to confront her husband, who is involved in an affair with Emma. On yet another level, the play touches on aspects of sexual history and freedom, highlighting social and political issues in relation to love and friendship that can be traced back to philosophical attempts to explain human relationships in antiquity. The source of all people’s oppression, and their lack of true sexual freedom, is thus inextricably bound up with the reality of female oppression in society, with different variations and factors in each case merely being variants of the same theme. As has been argued by Gayle Rubin: ‘The suppression of the homosexual is [...] a product of the same system whose rules and relations oppress women’. If society keeps curbing sexual freedoms by using the same social veneer that the characters in this play use to cover up their selfishness and transgressions, we will end up with a society and a sexual history for humanity that is as crooked as the crooked actions and characters offered by Pinter in this bleak play.

Chapter Six
Crumbling Families: Familial and Marital Identity in Harold Pinter’s *Celebration*

Ethical life is the idea of freedom as the living good which has its knowledge and volition in self consciousness, and its actuality through self-conscious action.\(^{1139}\)

According to G.W.F. Hegel, the most appropriate place to start any analysis of ethical life is the family. He considered family as the basic nucleus of a civil society. To further expand Hegel’s assumption, I will try to shed more light on this unit called family in this chapter, taking Pinter’s *Celebration* (2000) as a case study. Described as Pinter’s funniest play by Sheridan Morley, who claims that ‘[Celebration] is [Pinter’s] funniest and also perhaps his most accessible script’,\(^{1140}\) I believe that *Celebration* has much to say about the family unit beyond just entertaining us with banter. Most of the characters represented in the play are couples belonging to a certain social class and standing for what are supposed to be settled conjugal relationships. However, harkening carefully to their words, we can discover rotten patterns of marital relationships amongst all of them. Their conversations have been constructed in such a way that characters unveil their inner selves, which are revealed in their battles of wits.\(^{1141}\) The celebration, which is supposed to reflect a merry occasion, has been manipulated by Pinter in order to comment on distorted marital relations in particular, and social relations in general – thereby rendering the title of the play ironic. Although many critics such as Mark Taylor-Batty, Penelope Prentice, Dilek Inan, and Katherine H. Burkman have discussed the play’s meaning as being the opposite to everything that happens on stage, none of them has focused on the marital model in this play; instead they have lumped it in with other plays dealing with family models. Burkman believes that *Celebration* carries a sense of desperation felt at the turn of the century: ‘In


\(^{1140}\)Sheridan Morley, ‘Pinter Double’, *The Spectator*, 1 April 2000.

Celebration, Pinter offers us a desperate hope in Lambert’s claim of a memory of something valuable that has been lost. Nonetheless, she does not raise the issue of distorted families and crumbled marital relations in enough detail. In this chapter, I will flesh out such discussions by using different questions designed to bring up issues of marital identity and the family unit. It is worth mentioning that the families I will be looking at in this chapter are basically heterosexual ones in which I will be focusing on the position of women as basic partners in the relationship. Nevertheless, I am quite aware of other forms or alternative family models that are completely entitled to be considered as family units. Therefore, the questions raised in this chapter specifically deal with heterosexual families as follows:

The first portion of this chapter will discuss the family/marital unit in terms of the social representation of this unit in society by spotting situations in the play that best exemplify this concept. Relying on critiques provided by Hegel, and other critics, the first part will attempt to answer the following questions:

1) How can belonging to one group, i.e. family, affect our existence as citizens in society?
2) How has the concept of identity been reconceptualised to indicate one’s uniqueness rather than what is shared?
3) Is family an institution of affections and emotions? Or is it an institution of economic interdependence?
4) What are the social expectations between families and the state?
5) Are individuals safer within a family unit?
6) How does Pinter view the identities of individuals within the realm of ethical/social status?
7) Are families in this play ideological, or affectional units?

The second section will focus on relationships between men and women in families, as represented in the play, to answer the following questions:

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1) Is violence against women and conventional sexism the only violence experienced in gendered relations? or are there other kinds of masked sexism?
2) How can positionalities, a term coined by bell hooks [sic], change our identities in general and in marital contexts in particular?
3) Does the marital institution help individuals to self-actualise?
4) How does the separation between private and public spaces contribute to domination within the marital institution?
5) Does marital institution help women wipe out their ‘Otherness’ or are they subsumed into another form of patriarchy?
6) Do men and women in Celebration operate on the same social level? and has marriage vested them with a better social status in this play?
7) How do Suki and the sisters on one hand, and Sonia on the other, depict fragmented ethical standards, marking the crumbling of the marital institution and social/mental impoverishment?

The third section of this chapter will look at the power relations that obtain between the characters staged in the play; therefore, the following questions will be a key starting point:

1) Does financial stability count as a major parameter for marital continuity in the play?
2) Does the power-driven nature of marital relationships render all marital institutions unequal?
3) Do the interjections by the waiter in the play render him a reminder or a conniver in keeping power relations fresh?
4) What are the manifestations of contradiction in this play? How are they expressed?
5) What is the difference between the waiter’s grandfather and Richard’s father?
The play begins with a group of people who seem to be gathering to celebrate the wedding anniversary of Julie and Lambert, one of the three couples in the play. The couples are divided into two groups. The bigger group occupies table one and includes two couples, two brothers married to two sisters, all in their forties: Lambert and Julie, and Matt and Prue. Table two is occupied by Russell and Suki, a younger couple who are going to join the rest later in the play. The setting is an upscale restaurant brimming with luxury; however, the conversations taking place are completely the opposite. Indeed, the reason for the gathering – the wedding anniversary – indicates a commitment to marriage framed in a completely fragmented relation, as Penelope Prentice indicates: ‘Celebration, ostensibly celebrating a wedding anniversary as commitment to marriage, reveals human relationships to be a sham commitment to community, country, even to self’. Dilek Inan further highlights the nastiness of their talk, referring to the deception of their fake civilisations created by the social class each protagonist belongs to: ‘Indeed in Celebration we can investigate into verbal abuse buried under a civilized language’. The question that might arise from this account is: if their interpersonal and inter-societal relationships, as revealed by their conversations, are wrapped up in such a fake, loveless, and rotten social veneer, how about their marital relationships?

Before answering this question, let me first prepare the ground regarding what family is and whether or not it is conditioned by marriage. According to Hegel, family is an ethical unit in which the individuality of the members is not annulled:

The disposition appropriate to the family is to have self-consciousness of one’s individuality within this unity as essentiality which has being in and for itself, so that one is present in it not as an independent person but as a member.

Moreover, besides feeling one’s individuality amongst family members, Hegel believes that the constitution of the family should be based on love, as well as ethical bonds:

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1144 Inan, p.97.
1145 Hegel, p.158.
Love means in general the consciousness of my unity with another, so that I’m not isolated on my own, but gain my self-consciousness only through the renunciation of my independent existence and through knowing myself as the unity of myself with another and the other with me.\textsuperscript{1146}

Although family to Hegel is based on love and ethical bonds, he differentiates it from marriage, which he believes to be based on an erotic desire rather than the self-conscious love that he has shown as the foundation of the family: ‘Marriage originates in erotic desire (eros), a desire that manifests itself in a substantial relationship – sexual intercourse – that naturally leads to procreation, and therefore to the family’.\textsuperscript{1147} But if marriage simply guarantees a socially sanctioned sexual satisfaction for individuals, then why has the institution of marriage emerged? Why not just sex? Hegel believes that love in the sense of mere physical contact in itself is open in all respects to contingency, and this is a condition which the ethical may not assume: ‘Marriage should therefore be defined more precisely as rightfully ethical love, so that the transient, capricious and purely subjective aspects of love are excluded from it.’\textsuperscript{1148}

Thus, as long as the eros does not transform into storge,\textsuperscript{1149} love in itself is not enough for establishing a proper marriage and consequently a family. Hegel, in my opinion, is ignoring another important fact about marriage. Marriage and family are both conventions that exist to develop further relations. It is through the birth of children, and the marriage of those children to each other that marriage and family expand to create kinship relations. Such relations eventually act as a glue that holds societies together. Kinship relations are among the other factors that hold people together such as nationhood, language, geographical areas, and language. This point is even more important in \textit{Celebration} as we have two brothers married to sisters, which implies that their marriages, besides their unethical conditions, are actually based on kinship relations, and shared interests.

Now, if both marriage and family are based in one way or another on love, how about the families and couples presented in \textit{Celebration}? From the very beginning, the

\textsuperscript{1146} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1149} Familial love.
crumbling of such ethics and feelings is reflected in Lambert’s and Julie’s feelings towards each other. Julie, indeed, does not care at all about her husband’s feelings or welfare:

**Waiter:** Who’s having the duck?  
**Lambert:** The duck’s for me.  
**Julie:** No it isn’t.  
**Lambert:** No it isn’t. Who’s it for?  
**Julie:** Me.  
**Lambert:** And for me. I mean what about me? [...] I haven’t the faintest idea.  
**Julie:** Who cares?\

Evidently, this kind of talk reflects a different kind of marriage, not the kind of ethical bonds explained by Hegel. It takes the shape of a transaction or a confrontational game in Lambert and Julie’s case. One famous definition of marriage as a transaction is provided by W.H. Goodenough, who defines marriage in these terms:

Marriage is a transaction and resulting contract in which a person (male or female, corporate or individual, in person or by proxy) establishes a continuing claim to the right of sexual access to a woman – [...]until the contract resulting from the transaction is terminated, and in which the woman involved is eligible to bear children.\(^{1151}\)

Supporting the idea of relations as transactions and/or games in general, and marriage in particular, Eric Berne believed that everything in life is based on a game in the shape of a transaction: ‘Family life and married life, as well as life in organisations of various kinds, may year after year be based on variations of the same game’.\(^{1152}\)

Based on these accounts, the depth of these transactions and games will be revealed as the play moves through the chit-chat in the restaurant.

Although the scene between Lambert and Julie has been taken as evidence of a loveless marriage by Burkman,\(^{1153}\) and hence the essence of their crumbling marriage which lacks any affection, I would like to provide another interpretation using Berne’s account of the three types of human ego. Given the fact that Burkman describes

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\(^{1153}\)Burkman, ‘Desperation in Harold Pinter’s Celebration’.
Lambert’s ignorance of his order as ‘childish’, I will take that a little further in light of Berne’s division. According to Berne, every human being has three types of ego:

1). Ego states which resemble those of parental figures
2). Ego states which are automatically directed towards objective appraisal of reality and
3). Those which represent archaic relics, still-active ego states which were fixated in early childhood.

Berne provides social terms for these divisions by calling them Parent, Adult, and Child. Lambert’s childish behaviour around food provides enough evidence of his emptiness as an individual, his uncontrollable behaviour as a mature man, and finally his failings as a husband. However, calling his behaviour ‘childish’ devalues the importance of its effect on the individual’s personality (by means of a diminishing and obfuscatory comparator: the suffix ‘ish’), thus making it harder to stop. Such a behavioural stance is more appropriately called the Child, which, according to Berne, is more ideological and less prejudicial. Moreover, Berne reveals the importance of this part of the personality and its influence on the whole character when he states:

Actually the Child is in many ways is the most valuable part of the personality, and can contribute to the individual’s life exactly what an actual child can contribute to family life [...] if the Child in the individual is confused and unhealthy, then the consequence may be unfortunate.

Therefore, instead of the pessimistic picture of the characters drawn by Burkman, Berne’s analysis of the three states of ego provides a glimmer of hope. According to Berne, although demonstrating the behavioural attributes and cognitive patters of the Child may lead to a borrowing of inappropriate and unproductive human behaviours, the individual is still, nonetheless, a complete and well-structured Adult, who, according to Berne, can be uncovered and activated. Thus, although Lambert may provide a gloomy picture of a crumbling individual and husband (hence the sense of desperation illustrated by Burkman), one must take another line of approach in order

1154 Burkman, ibid.
1155 Berne, p.23.
1156 Ibid., p.24.
1157 Ibid., p.25.
1158 Ibid.
to see other realities – to frame the picture in a different manner in order to see things more clearly, or as Pinter once put it, ‘Still one can’t stop attempting to try to think and see things as clearly as possible’.

Lambert’s fuss, however, could also be ascribed merely to the dominant Child engaging in a transaction that is aimed at winning against the will of an adult. It therefore takes dominance over the passive Adult in him and is testimony to his failure to win the game and fulfil the first transaction with his wife. Berne uses the term ‘stroking’ to denote the recognition of another’s presence in any social exchange; thus, having failed to get his wife’s acknowledgement as an Adult, Lambert might be feeling ignored, and therefore decides to make a fuss, adopting the Child in order to seek at least recognition. Berne explains further: ‘A stroke may be used as the fundamental unit of social action. An exchange of strokes constitutes a transaction, which is the unit of social intercourse’.

If it is the case with Lambert and Julie that they cannot interact through ‘stroking’ and engaging in useful, completed transactions as two Adults, why do they stay together? The answer lies in a development beyond Hegel’s notions of marriage and the family. There are many reasons to keep Lambert and Julie together other than just love and affection. According to Alison Didcuk and Felicity Kaganas, in their book *Family Law, Gender, and the State: Text, Cases and Materials*, marriage is intended to ‘endow men with a better lifestyle, greater freedom and more power, while it has the opposite effect on women, limiting, impoverishing and rendering them vulnerable to abuses of power by their husbands’. However, relying on the work of French sociologist Emile Dorkheim, it is suggested that marriage offers a state in which the individual is protected from *anomie* (in societies or individuals, a condition of instability resulting from a breakdown of standards and values or from a lack of purpose or ideals; a state of alienation from the anxiety about what is perceived as an ailing society).

David Hume supports this idea by suggesting that the human mind, when left alone, will perish: ‘[The mind] when left to itself immediately languishes’, therefore, it always

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1160 Berne, p.15.
1162 Ibid.
seeks companionship: ‘[The mind] naturally seeks after foreign objects which may produce a lively sensation and agitate the spirits’. Thus marriage has become both an essential social structure, and a fulfilment of every human’s need for interlocution and interdependent cognition. Nevertheless, Lambe and Julie’s, as well as Matt and Prue’s marriage, might not have been built upon the noble and spiritual aims that underlie such systems, but rather on more structurally taxonomic social and economic reasons. Besides endowing people with family prestige, social standing, and bodily integrity, marriage, as Fredric Engels suggested, guarantees a proper structure for the reproduction of legal heirs and the safe transfer of property. Such economic considerations ultimately extend and dominate over other feelings of love, interdependent thought, and affection. Therefore, I disagree with Daniel Mendelsohn, who believes that the characters in Celebration are all working-class families beneath their posh suits (he compares them to Bert and Rose in Pinter’s first play, The Room): ‘Those four [Lambert and Julie & Matt and Prue] may be wearing expensive [...] togs, but they are essentially working class – not all that different – beneath their suits and cocktail dresses, from the grim couple in The Room’. The fact that the two couples care for keeping social status despite their rotten marital and familial relationships renders them typically upper-middle class, in my opinion, with a wealth that they want to maintain and pass on to their offspring through the institution of marriage. As Engels maintains,

For the bourgeoisie, considerations of maintaining and extending property dominate over considerations related to freedom and love. In that sense, the family is a more important structure for the bourgeoisie than for the proletariat. Inheritance, female chastity, non-employed wives and the reproduction of legitimate heirs, all became important for the bourgeoisie.

Based on this statement, and other factors explained above regarding the families and couples as presented to us in Celebration, the play does not represent a series of nuclear families of love and affection in which the household is perceived as a refuge, a

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1164 Berry, p.88.
1166 Celebration premiered in a double bill with Pinter’s first play The Room at Almeida Theatre in London 2000.
1168 Source found online: http://uregina.ca/~gingrich/o402.htm [accessed 24 November 2014].
‘haven in a heartless world’, but rather the family is seen as an ideological rather than a functional unit. To explain the difference between ideological and functional families, I will once again borrow Hegel’s perspective; according to the philosopher, the basic role for the family is that it is a place of emotional and physical nourishment for its individuals. Hegel believes that the family is a substantial whole whose task is to provide means and skills of living for the individual. However, owing to Hegel’s belief that members of the family should not lose their individuality within the family unit, society is still required to recognise the family members as self-sufficient persons. In other words, the welfare of the individual is interwoven on a familial level with bonds of kinship, but on a social level with that of society as a whole. An individual therefore cannot fulfil his or her ambitions without mediating them through the universal (society): ‘[individuals] can attain their end only in so far as they themselves determine their knowledge, volition and action in a universal way and make themselves links in the chain of this continuum’. Thus the individual, although belonging to his or her family, becomes the son or daughter of the civil society in and through which s/he can attain his or her goals. Thus, the entire family is subordinated to civil society. Civil society, moreover, is required to provide means of support to families, in recompense for the fact that it obtains immense power over its members by drawing them all into it and requiring them to work for it. Thus, as a member of society, a person both has obligations to society and gains rights from it: ‘Civil society must protect its members and defend their rights, just as the individual owes a duty to the rights of civil society’, and also to the familial units of which larger society is comprised.

Hegel’s utilitarian and authoritarian attitude culminates in his belief that only when both individuals and society know their rights and duties towards each other can it be described as a truly flourishing relationship:

Thus, the universal must be activated, but subjectivity on the other hand must be developed as a living whole. Only when both moments are present in full can the state be regarded as articulated and truly organised.

1170 Houlgate, p.362.
1171 Ibid., p.373.
1172 Ibid., p.382.
Although Hegel emphasises that love is a necessary component of ethical families and marriages, nevertheless, his authoritarian approach and utilitarian perspective on the relationship of individuals towards society seem to transform units that are based on love into ideological forms that are mainly linked to nation states – which act as father figures in one big family unit. Thus the true groups of affection and interdependence are not necessarily a group of people who are biologically related in blood relationships as Hegel suggests, 1173 but rather groups of people who require bonds with each other, in social and economic terms, in order to exist and to assert economic, social and political advantage over other, less well connected and successfully interdependent groups. In principle, such a system could contain notions of individual freedom, self-determined identity, economic power, and the exercise of legitimate authority within macro and micro units. The problem exists, however, that these basic units of society – marriage and family – habitually operate according to taxonomies of gender and biological sex identity that subordinate women to men.

The definition of the family, in my opinion, has different variations depending on the amount of emotional and other support (both economic support and support through the application of labour and effort) that people get from it: ‘Still someone [...] who describes a group of friends as ‘my real family’, is identifying those who give significant emotional and personal support’. 1174 What is most problematic here is the fact that people’s minds are programmed in such a way that they believe that a nuclear family, a male and a female couple living with their children, with all of the attendant taxonomies and conventional stereotypes of normative gendered behaviour, is the only form of a family unit. Any other form of family relations that does not reflect this ‘norm’ is looked down upon and is seen as immoral or inferior: ‘For many people, the pattern of marriage and nuclear families is so taken for granted, it is difficult to question’. 1175 Therefore, the family as a supposedly ‘natural’ unit must be interrogated. Linking this to the characters in this play, we can obviously see the fake principles upon which most families are based. In the scene in which Lambert is being reproached by his sister-in-law, Prue, for not listening to his wife, we can see what kind of family unit they have:

1173 Bessette, p.7
1175 Ibid., p.20.
Prue: Why don’t you listen to your wife? [...] You’ve got a loyal wife there and never forget it.

Lambert: I’ve got a loyal wife where?

Prue: Here! At this table.

Lambert: I’ve got one under the table, take my tip. He looks under the table.¹¹⁷⁶

This scene shows the corrupt and perverted relationship between Lambert and Julie. Lambert’s act of looking under the table for his loyal wife carries multiple meanings: (i) it suggests the extramarital relationships that she might be having outside their marriage; (ii) it may also indicate his extramarital relationships; or (iii) it might mean that he is actually engaged in bigamous affairs and that his other, real or imaginary wife is actually under the table performing fellatio on him. This indeed might imply that the real position of woman should be under the table on her knees performing sex acts and hidden away from society. Lambert is not even ashamed of mentioning this on his anniversary: that even when his real wife is sitting next to him, her real place should actually be under the table. In all cases the marriage has been reduced to mere physical contact and even that they cannot keep within the institution of marriage.

Relating this back to Hegel’s concept of family ties and the institution of marriage, it seems that the families in Celebration, although corrupt from inside, still want to keep the necessary social veneer by celebrating their anniversary amongst others, just to maintain their ties with the ideological frame upon which families are based. They, in my opinion, are actually trying to keep the shiny image of what is on the table rather than reveal the corruption of what is under the table. The idea of Lambert talking about a wife under the table, and the corruption of what lies under it, is actually connected to what Pinter once said of what lying under the table means. When he was asked about his teenage years he commented: ‘We all used to get under the table when the air raids were going on and I found myself under the table with the girl from the next door’.¹¹⁷⁷ This quote reveals Pinter’s continuous attempts to talk about the social classes who are actually under the table or the corruption that lies under the table, as in Celebration. Moreover, linking this to the fact that he used to take refuge under the table during the war gives his speech the further political meaning of the atrocities that are carried out by the people who sit around the table against those

¹¹⁷⁶Celebration, p.446.
who are sitting under it. Thus he presents the whole institution of marriage, supposed to be based on ethical love and mutual respect, as a corrupt, distorted unit, not only amongst its members, but also in its relationship to the State. This distortion does not only make its presence felt at the emotional level, but also on an economic level. When Julie vents her anger against Lambert, she asks him to drive his car into a brick wall:

**Julie:** Why don’t you go and buy a new car and drive it into a brick wall.
**Lambert:** She loves me.
**Matt:** No, she loves new cars.\(^{1178}\)

Not only is their marriage emotionally corrupt, the reason that keeps them together, in addition to keeping up social appearances, is the security provided by money and wealth. Thus, what connects Lambert and Julie as well as Prue and Matt is mutual benefit:

Many women simply are dependent on finding a man for economic security [...] While marriage connects women to men’s market earning, it simultaneously connects men to women, and thus ensures their own daily maintenance via women’s domestic, sexual and emotional services.\(^{1179}\)

This dependence of both sisters on their husbands is more revealed in their answer to Suki when she asks them what they do:

**Suki:** What about you?
**Prue:** Oh, Julie and me – we run charities. We do charities.\(^{1180}\)

Running charities while marrying a strategy consultant (who ironically works on keeping peace worldwide) means that both sisters are actually doing nothing except finding something to keep them busy, as well as supporting their husbands in their worldwide charitable missions. There is a tapestry of multiple hues of oppression and complicity here: both Julie and Prue continue to be part of a crumbling marital institution that lacks any of the required ethics. Male supremacist ideology is one possible reason why they are still married, an ideology that considers uncoupled women as lacking in certain social status because of not having spouses; as bell hooks suggests, ‘Male supremacist ideology encourages women to believe we are valueless

\(^{1178}\) *Celebration*, p.447.
\(^{1179}\) *Fox*, p.24.
\(^{1180}\) *Celebration*, p.494.
and obtain value only by relating to or bonding with men’.\textsuperscript{1181} Moreover, despite being part of a system already oppressing them, both sisters are complicit in their own oppression, as they support the corrupted careers of their husbands despite and in full knowledge of the fact that providing such support forces them to neglect building their own careers. In other words, they are vesting men with the historically dominant role of protectors:

The role of ‘protector’ does not exist unless there is someone who requires protection, and men’s structural power is facilitated if they remain free to pursue high economic status without having to devote time to domestic chores or child rearing. Thus men who hold conventional careers are likely to evaluate women who fulfill support roles favorably, for such women enable men to maintain a sense of power and status while fulfilling their needs for sex and intimacy. Women who ‘buy into’ the system help to support and validate it.\textsuperscript{1182}

To complete the circle of women who buy into the system, and to further reflect on the distortion of the family and the institution of marriage, Pinter stages another couple, Suki and Russell, sitting at table two. Suki, a former secretary in her twenties, seems to have married Russell, a man in his thirties, to gain social status through the institution of marriage. Russell, one of the ‘powerbrokers’\textsuperscript{1183} in Penelope Prentice’s words, is another corrupted, wealthy man, who constantly seeks recognition from Suki as he seems to be lacking self-confidence.\textsuperscript{1184}

\textbf{Russell:} All right. Tell me. Do you think I have a nice character?
\textbf{Suki.} Yes I think you do [...] I think you could have quite a nice character but the trouble is when you come down to it you haven’t actually got any character to begin with.\textsuperscript{1185}

Suki is different from Julie and Prue; unlike them, she has a good career; but she is, nevertheless, seen as socially inferior to Russell, because her career promotions were a product of sexual exploitation by her bosses:

\textbf{Suki:} I have been behind a few filing cabinets.
\textbf{Russell:} What?
\textbf{Suki:} In my time. When I was a plump young secretary. I know what the back of a filing cabinet looks like.\textsuperscript{1186}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{1181} bell hooks, \textit{Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre} (US: South End Press, 1984), p.43.
\textsuperscript{1182} Ferree, p.384.
\textsuperscript{1183} Prentice, p.389.
\textsuperscript{1184} Ibid., p.389.
\textsuperscript{1185} Celebration, p.449.
\end{flushright}
Although seen as holding a social status lower than that of her husband, Suki’s attitude towards Russell is still remarkable because she does not submit as is expected of women of her position and with her past. Instead she keeps her temper in check, and fights back calmly:

Suki appears to accept her husband’s insults and control her temper only to fight back in a stronger manner than him and hold the power to conquer her husband’s vanity in this war of nerves.  

Suki might resemble her histrionic counterpart Dusty in *Party Time* (1991), because both of them, unlike Julie and Prue, are aware of their husband’s distorted schemes; nevertheless, Suki is not as close to powerful figures as Dusty is. Yet, despite her attempts to counter her husband’s insults, she is complicit in her own oppression by marrying Russell. The question that may arise here is: why would Suki want to marry someone with a shallow character like Russell, and why would he, with all of his privileges, want to marry someone whom he considers a whore? Part of the answer may lie in the fact that Suki and Russell’s marriage is a game; because their dialogue starts with Russell seeking reassurance from Suki and it ends with insulting her – and hence manoeuvres are constantly being carried out by both parties. Berne states:

> If someone asks for reassurance, and after it is given turns it in some way to the disadvantage of the giver that is a game. Superficially, then, a game looks like a set of operations, but after the payoff it becomes apparent that these ‘operations’ were really *manoeuvres*; not honest requests but moves in the game.  

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that Suki does not completely give in to Russell by giving him the assurance that he seeks. She cleverly wraps up her contempt for him in such a way that it comes out very politely, and thus carries out a double manoeuvre. This is exactly why, by the end of the scene, he starts insulting her, to which she shows extreme tolerance:

**Russell:** You’re a whore.  
**Suki:** A whore in the wind.  

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1186 Ibid., p.444.  
1187 Inan, p.99.  
1188 Berne, p.44  
1189 Celebration, p.449.
For people like Suki, being part of the institution of marriage is a way to gain respectability in society and also gain social status, better privileges, and most importantly, acknowledgement of her utility and worth from people of the upper-middle class. In other words, she is seeking respect, and believes that marrying someone like Russell will guarantee her actualising such a desire:

Suki: [...] when you introduce me to them, they’ll treat me with respect, won’t they? They won’t want to fuck me behind a filing cabinet.  

The irony is that while she marries Russell seeking respect, he himself is uncertain of his worthiness:

Russell’s declaration of confidence, like Pinter’s earlier character’s self-referential assertions, refute what’s asserted by dramatising the opposite: his desperate need to be believed in by others because he does not believe in himself.  

A person’s economic status is defined according to his/her marital status and defined in relation to his/her living in a nuclear family unit. In relation to the play, Suki has actually been in an unfortunate position, being a woman who fell into the trap of sexual exploitation in the workplace. Therefore, due to all the advantages awarded by society to the institution of marriage, she decided to be part of the institution as a means of escaping her inferiority. What she fails to notice is that her new position is remarkably similar to her old. Nevertheless, people like Suki, although complicit in one way or another in their oppression, are still better than Julie and Prue because Suki, like Dusty, fights back from within the system by adopting the oppressor’s tools and deploying them against her oppressor. To use Adrienne Rich’s words: ‘This is the oppressor’s language, yet I need it to talk to you’. Suki’s character is therefore not altogether hopeless, and she might lend us the hope we need for further changes in the system.

According to Margrit Eichler, the problem is that the state has shifted its responsibility for people’s welfare onto families; therefore, the only corrective solution would be to allow individuals access to the privileges normally accorded to family units. Although this solution has been seen as advocating further isolation and the

1190 Celebration, p.462.
1191 Prentice, p.392.
1192 Quoted in bell hooks, Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics (Boston: South End Press, 1990), p.146.
1193 Fox, p.27.
emergence of an ethics of individualism against community, I believe that such openness and flexibility in the system would alleviate the problem. What we have in Suki and Russell, then, are individuals who have mistaken their desire for sex, power and status for a desire for marriage. To illustrate my point, I will list the probable reasons that attracted Russell to Suki: he, being a young, wealthy man was not, I believe, looking for a stable marriage. He was looking instead for social status that could secure him certain privileges, thus accruing credit to himself. Suki, was seeking a shield from the predatory sexual appetites of men in her workplace. The title of ‘wife’ accorded her such protection, for it is an unwritten law of patriarchal societies that men do not seek relationships with their friends’, neighbours’, or colleagues’ wives (or daughters) without the express permission of patriarch or husband. Transgression of such ‘rules’ is a strong social taboo. The marriage between Russell and Suki was therefore a calculated strategy by both participants to gain the social benefit that the matrimonial institution provides. My reasons for claiming this are in part informed by their dialogue, which does not reflect, even for a second, a serious, logical discussion between a husband and wife meeting for dinner. Each of them is holding a metaphorical gun to the other’s head: during the dinner Russell continuously insults Suki, and she cleverly retorts. Thus, their marriage is a hollow unit with the ethics discarded, and all they care for is the benefit they get from each other, thereby making their marriage a transaction or a game which must, in one way or the other, include some form of exploitation, ‘since by definition games are based on ulterior transactions [and] they must all have some element of exploitation’.\[1194\]

The irony here is that the very institution that Suki believes is going to provide her with the necessary security and safety is the one that further oppresses her, as well as Julie and Prue. When Lambert notices Suki’s presence a few tables away, he waves to her and Russell to come over and join him:

**Lambert:** Sit down. Squeeze in. Have a drink.\[1195\]

The reason why Lambert asks Suki and Russell to join him is because of a past relationship between him and Suki, when he was still young and felt real love for her:

\[1194\] Berne, p.143.
\[1195\] Celebration, p.489.
Lambert: I fell in love once and this girl I fell in love with loved me back. I know she did.1196

And when Julie asks Lambert if that girl was her, he, surprisingly, denies it in reply to Matt’s similar question:

Lambert: Her? No, not her. A girl. I used to take her for walks along the river.1197

In this scene, the depth of the ruin of these marital relationships is reflected even further as Lambert reveals that the love of his life is actually not his wife Julie, but somebody else. Lambert’s story reveals two things which both show, on all levels, how distorted the institution of marriage and familial identity is. First, to reveal during an anniversary dedicated to and designed for celebrating your spouse that she is not your true love is an act of violence on many levels: Julie has been threatened by the virtual presence of another woman in her husband’s mind, let alone her physical presence, and Lambert’s acknowledgement of this could be considered a violation of her womanhood. The legal definition of domestic violence against both men and women is ‘Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse [psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional] between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality’;1198 hence Julie’s oppression. Second, Lambert, by mentioning a story that is shared by many other men like him, including his own brother Matt, flips the concept of identity from one of shared stereotypes to a unique labelling, thereby reinforcing these stereotypes in the process of trying to be unique. In other words, he made his love story to Suki, which is a normal thing that can happen to every man, a unique story in his history. In this process of trying to create something unique from his history, he reinforces a category made by society about men’s amorous adventures before marriage: ‘The concept of identity has increasingly been used, not to name a box into which society puts us, but to name claims made by individuals about who or what they are’.1199

Thus Lambert has provided a new concept of identity, going from naming what is shared by all men to pointing out what is unique to him: an objectified Suki.1200

1196Ibid., p.470.
1197Celebration, p.471.
1198Diduck & Kaganas, p.548.emphasis original.
1199Ferree, p.458.
1200Ibid.
Moreover, Lambert’s falling in love with one woman and marrying another reflects his inconsistency. He feels safer moving between extremes and proving his uniqueness every time. That is exactly why he expresses a wish to be born again and have a second round at life, so as to be a better person, as we shall see later on in the play, which, in turn, reinforces his patriarchal position in society. Let me clarify this approach, borrowed from bell hooks. According to this American author, feminist and social activist, some people are one-dimensional, they associate with only one group in their life, which is frightening, because what if we discover that what we really need is over there in the other group? Or is in another location? Lambert, in this case, is allowing himself to grow and expand to have the things he is passionate about, which is not completely wrong, because having fixed boundaries, according to hooks, reinforces separatism or exclusionism, which in turn reinforces patriarchal systems. Nevertheless, Lambert has a penchant for moving between extremes; to him this tendency is safer than being balanced. The crucial word here is ‘balance’; never completely letting go, nor transgressing, but also never containing or repressing oneself. According to bell hooks, ‘There is always some liminal space in between.’ In relation to this, Lambert, could have been in between, but what he is doing instead is either letting go, or painting himself into a corner, thus transgressing in relation to both Julie’s and Suki’s feelings; hence his need to retract the possibility that his love is here now, real and present. It is a form of denial.

Moreover, Lambert’s bragging about his real past love can be construed as a phallic function solely attributed to men rather than women, or to put it in specific terms, to those with a biological penis. However, in retaliation to such phallic posturing, Julie and Prue tease their husbands by flirting with the restaurant manager, as we will see later in the play. Nevertheless, the balance of power within the confines of the institution of marriage is most often tilted to favour the male over the female. Thus, until the women are able not simply to frustrate and tease their husbands, but rather to tip the balance of power and prevent any abuse against them, their condition will not improve: ‘Until woman has the power to intervene to defend her interests

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1202 Ibid., p.211.
1203 Ibid., p.82.
wherever they are at stake, any change in the economic or political condition of society will not ameliorate her condition.\textsuperscript{1204}

What is perceived or interpreted as female power will be discussed in the following section by looking more closely at relations between men and women in the play.

II

The maitresse d’hôtel, Sonia, joins the other characters to complete the circle of ladies making their presence in this play. Sonia’s presence, and later that of the owner of the restaurant, Richard, is not a complementary element of the play, because, as Burkman suggests, ‘The interjections of Richard and Sonia [...] only serve to enhance the emptiness of the restaurant experience’.\textsuperscript{1205} In my opinion, Sonia’s presence sheds light on how patriarchy sometimes covers up discrimination against women, by representing itself as benevolent. In other words, Sonia’s position is presented to her as a privilege, an achievement, in an attempt to contain women in the patriarchal system. Sonia and other women have bought into the idea that she has achieved something that seemed unattainable:

\textbf{Russell}: What was your upbringing:
\textbf{Sonia}: [...] What you really mean of course is how did I arrive at the position I hold now – maitresse d’hôtel – isn’t that right?\textsuperscript{1206}

Sonia’s beauty is a double-edged sword; it brought her success and promotion in the restaurant business, but at the same time, exposed her to sexual exploitation and commodification:

In [some] jobs female sexuality as sexuality on display is part of the use value of the commodity labour power itself. For some secretaries, receptionists, boutique assistants, it is essential to be attractively feminine as well as to serve.\textsuperscript{1207}

This is what Myra M. Ferree and others call ‘benevolent sexism’, which they define as follows:

\textsuperscript{1204}\textsuperscript{1205}\textsuperscript{1206}\textsuperscript{1207}
Benevolent sexism is also a sexist ideology that supports and justifies conventional gender roles and status difference, but characterises these arrangements as being in women’s best interests and imputes favourable traits to women.\textsuperscript{1208}

Although Sonia might seem privileged compared to Julie and Prue, because of her successful career, she has still been co-opted like most women into the patriarchal system. Moreover, she is not only representing benevolent sexism, she is helping and supporting it by being part of it, and thus helping men in maintaining the status quo.

Some women can attain higher positions within a patriarchal system but this does not imply women are gaining power or are progressing. To maintain the status quo, sometimes the male superstructure allows certain women into higher positions within the system, allowing for a veneer of change while things still stay the same; bell hooks believes that men are willing to cooperate only if women promise to keep within the status quo. To make it clearer hooks cites a valid example:

Ronald Reagan’s appointment of Sandra Day O’Connor to the Supreme Court is a case in point. O’Connor is not supportive of most reforms that would enable women to have greater control over their lives, yet she wholeheartedly endorses policy decisions that maintain the status quo. Her appointment shows women [...] that individual women can gain power and prestige in the existing structure if they support that structure. [...] These women validate the concept of power as domination and control and exercise it, while assuring men that their ‘masculinity’ is in no way diminished.\textsuperscript{1209}

Therefore, our aim should not be to focus only on the fight against sexism, but to stand up against all forms of violence practised against people, whether males or females. In other words, the crucial word here is ‘violence’ in all its forms. To take this point even further, I will say Sonia and Suki’s situation in the play represents male dominating power both in the public and the private spheres. Sonia and Suki’s potential power is being curbed or re-moulded in a way that strips both women of any form of freedom, as they are only able to operate within a male-dominated system. In Sonia’s case, the public patriarchy present in society replaces the private patriarchy representing the father she did not have:

\textsuperscript{1208} Ferree, p.376.
\textsuperscript{1209} hooks, \textit{From Margin to Centre}, p.88.
**Sonia:** My mother was a chiropodist. I had no father.¹²¹⁰

Such comments curb Sonia’s and Suki’s potential power to overreach the microcosm of the private sphere to the macrocosm of the public sphere. Jeff Hearn explains:

The generative, nurturing potential of women is controlled by men privately in the family, and publicly through the professions and the state; the destructive potential of women is controlled in all these institutions, privately confined, and publicly overarched, indeed overtaken, by the state. The appropriation of women’s potential violence by men to form the massive amalgamation of male private and public violence can be understood as both an autonomous control, and a means of control of other labour-powers, including productive labour-power. Thus men’s control of destructive labour-power, and the appropriation of its ‘products,’ and other products, is probably a fundamental dialectic of patriarchy.¹²¹¹

In relation to such an argument, Sonia and Suki need to be given what are inherently their rights, rather than representing their rights as a kind of favour, so they can rightfully gain control of their identities as fully-fledged members of the human race: ‘Rights confer not only specific social identities, but a more general recognition of humanity.’¹²¹² P.J. Williams supports this by suggesting that rights elevate the individual from just being a mere human body to developing as a social being:

For the historically disempowered, the conferring of rights is symbolic of all the denied aspects of their humanity: rights imply a respect that places one in the referential range of self and others that elevates one’s status from human body to social being.¹²¹³

Now that I have discussed the fact that rights are not conferred even within the marital institution, I will return to my discussions of the two sisters and their husbands so as to shed more light on the meanings of their interactions. When Lambert asks Julie if she had enjoyed her dinner, she, surprisingly, shows her indifference:

**Lambert:** How did you enjoy your dinner, darling?

**Julie:** I wasn’t impressed.¹²¹⁴

¹²¹⁰ *Celebration,* p.464.
¹²¹¹ Hearn, p.87.
¹²¹² Ferree, p.87.
¹²¹⁴ *Celebration,* p.454.
Julie’s reaction completely throws Lambert; he expected to hear nice compliments from his wife. Julie’s answer is a sign of anger towards her husband because of the story of his first love; her reaction can also be considered a form of violence, because ‘Violence could be any action, use of words or structure that diminishes another human being whether or not force is involved’.\footnote{\text{Diduck & Kaganas, p.146.}}

Julie’s violent answer, in what is supposed to be a celebration of their wedding anniversary, shows the poor quality of her marriage to Lambert, who has to be reminded that this is his anniversary:

*Lambert*: I bring her to the best caff in town – spending a fortune – and she’s not impressed.

*Matt*: Don’t forget this is your anniversary. That’s why you are here.

*Lambert*: What anniversary?

*Prue*: It’s your wedding anniversary.

*Lambert*: All I know is this is the most expensive fucking restaurant in town and she’s not impressed.\footnote{\text{Celebration, p.454.}}

Lambert’s last sentence reflects how nonchalantly men deal with even the most intimate moments and occasions in life. According to Francesca Cancian there are affectionate behaviours and instrumental behaviours within the marital institution and life in general, and the results show that women are prone to affections more than instrumentality in life:

The results show that women prefer to talk about their personal experiences, especially their fears and troubles, and want to feel emotionally close and secure. Men prefer to show their love by instrumental help, doing activities together, and sex.\footnote{\text{Francesca Cancian, ‘Gender Politics: Love and Power in the Private and Public Spheres’. Quoted in Fox, p.206.}}

In connection to the play, Lambert and Julie each approach their relation in completely different ways. When Julie needs to talk, or confide in Lambert about her fears or future plans, he makes the situation worse, threatening their relationship by mentioning another woman and describing her as his first love. Moreover, when he tries to prove to Julie that he does care, all he does is to bring her to a luxurious restaurant and keep bragging about how much money he spent on this dinner. He seems oblivious to emotional need and fixated on economic power. So much so, that
for a moment he even forgets that he is there to celebrate his anniversary, because all that remains in his mind is the fact that she is not impressed even though he is capable of taking her to the most expensive restaurant.

Julie, nevertheless, suppresses her anger in the restaurant and is able to counter in retaliation to Lambert’s remarks about Suki. Julie’s composure is part of the game, and her reaction pays off; thus her element of the transaction has been successful: she manages to get Lambert angry. Berne clarifies further:

The essential characteristic of human play is not that emotions are spurious, but they are regulated. This is revealed when sanctions are imposed on an illegitimate emotional display. Play may be grimly serious, or even fatally serious, but the social sanctions are serious only if the rules are broken.\(^{1218}\)

Although Julie might be thinking that it is better not to show her emotions when Lambert is not respecting the occasion, and he keeps underestimating his relationship with her, both of them are actually undermining their marriage in this frame. My point here is that Julie is not even safe within the confines of the marital institution. Thus, the social veneer of marriage has not provided any security for either Lambert or Julie as they are both still threatened from the same source, albeit differently. Lambert is threatened by the presence of the past in the form of Suki, while Julie’s present is threatened by the presence of Lambert’s past in her life.

The crumbling of Julie’s and Lambert’s marriage does not only reveal their tense, loveless relationship, but occurs in what seems to be a barren, impotent sexual relation as well. While in the restaurant Julie shows her liking for one of the waiters:

Julie: I liked the waiter.
Richard: Which one?
Julie: The one with the fur-lined jockstrap.
Lambert: He takes it off for breakfast.
Julie: Which is more than you do.\(^{1219}\)

Julie’s sexual innuendo regarding the waiter’s jockstrap indicates that: (i) she is completely oblivious to her surroundings and her remarks are deliberately distorting the civilised and luxurious atmosphere of the upscale restaurant: (ii) she reduces men to sex tools and equates her liking to sexual pleasure, which reveals her shallowness.
and ignorance; (iii) she highlights to us her sexual relations with her husband, who seems to be neglecting her through either his amorous exploits, or his impotence, which in turn reflects Pinter’s vision of the modern individual as impotent on social, political, and cultural levels.

The theme of social impotence and compliance leads me to shed light on another interesting character in the play: the manager of the restaurant, Richard. His appearance underlines an important aspect of the play: the differences in male social classes and positions within society. In analysing the process of construction of male identities, Antony Rowland and others quote Peter Middleton, who believes that the process of constructing masculine identity is capricious and changes significantly based on different forces:

More significantly, its [masculinity’s] meaning changes chameleonlike [sic] as it is applied to different contexts; it can be linked to sexuality, social codes, performativity and representation. This collection testifies to the diversities of masculine identity explored in a range of literary and cultural texts, locating it within the shifting ‘assumptions about subjectivity and society’.

Richard appears and comes to greet the special guests, in order to ask them if everything is all right. However, this does not come without showing further signs of ignorance and superficiality on the part of the guests:

Richard: Good evening.
Lambert: Good evening, Richard. How you been?
Richard: Very, very well. Been to a play?
Matt: No. The ballet.
Richard: Oh the ballet? What was it?
Lambert: That’s a fucking good question.
Matt: It’s unanswerable.

Richard’s special treatment of the guests reflects not only the class difference between them, but also his submissiveness and their superiority. The guests’ answer when asked about the ballet reflects their sheer ignorance of such aesthetic art.

However, Richard’s demeanour never registers any astonishment at his guests’ stupid answer. Instead, he behaves as if nothing happened:

1221 Celebration, p.455.
Richard: Good, was it?\(^{1222}\)

Richard’s submissiveness does not just reflect humility or modesty, given his position as a businessman who needs to promote his restaurant. It goes beyond that; this is evident from the ‘kiss on the mouth’ requests from both Julie and Prue:

Prue: Will you let me kiss you? I’d like to kiss you on the mouth?
Julie: How funny. I’d like to kiss him on the mouth too.\(^{1223}\)

The women’s desire instigates Lambert to reveal his anger as he, ironically, shows them how to excite Richard further:

Lambert: You could tickle his arse with a feather.\(^{1224}\)

Moreover, Richard’s submissiveness, besides being generated by his desire to promote his business, recalls Pinter’s *Party Time*, in which there are characters such as Terry who completely support the system despite its vulgarity and corruption. This theme becomes clearer when Lambert praises the high standard of the restaurant, reminding us of Terry’s speech on the high standards of their club:

Lambert: Because he insists upon proper standards [...] That standards are maintained up to the highest standards, up to the very highest fucking standards.

Matt: He does not jib.\(^{1225}\)

However, although Richard responds to the women with ‘Well, I’m so glad. I’m really glad. See you later I hope’,\(^{1226}\) he makes a move so that what Burkman describes as ‘What seems uncomfortably like a rape cannot go any further’.\(^{1227}\)

Although Burkman believes that the sisters’ move reflects their hostility towards men,\(^{1228}\) I believe that Pinter is rather trying to attack the cultural deterioration from a different angle. First of all, Pinter, as Robert Gordon suggests, is dramatising cultural deterioration through deteriorating social codes and the prevalence of the capitalist consumerist culture:

\(^{1222}\)Ibid., p.456.
\(^{1223}\)Celebration, p.459.
\(^{1224}\)Ibid.
\(^{1225}\)Ibid., p.460.
\(^{1226}\)Ibid.
\(^{1227}\)Burkman, ‘Desperation’.
\(^{1228}\)Ibid.
Its [the play's] darkly comic representation of the duplicity, violence, and banal sexualisation that characterises the culture produced by the global system of consumer capitalism revealed Pinter at the age of seventy to be as finely attuned to the changing language and values of English society as always.  

I totally agree with Gordon, because of Richard’s reaction to the women’s sexual transgression and what it reveals. There are two interpretations of this scene. First, Richard is representing the shallow values of capitalist society by showing implied consent to the women’s demands. In other words, he might have enjoyed the women’s sexual moves, but decided not to take it further, in order not to risk losing his customers (Lambert and Matt). If this is Richard’s real motivation and feeling, it reflects a sordid submissiveness that has reached the lowest point, the nadir, as pointed out by Penelope Prentice, because ‘For Harold Pinter, being subservient is not a noble manifestation of modesty or humility, but unthinking, unconscious endorsement of authoritarianism that both Pinter and Albee everywhere vehemently oppose’.  

Second, owing to Richard’s position as the manager of the restaurant, and as the men hold superior social positions to his, he could not show any strong reaction to their wives’ transgressions. John Tosh argues that masculinity is a ‘relational construct, incomprehensible apart from the totality of gender relations’; he calls for an ‘understanding of mutations of male dominance over time and their relation to other structures of social power, such as class, race, nation, and creed’.  

Tosh has stressed that the relationship between men and women is a by-product of the construction of male identity. In connection to the play, the sisters’ position as wives in this scene gives them an ethical privilege that they themselves do not respect. According to Diduck, ‘The husband’s status gave him more economic, public and legal power, and the wife’s status gave her moral superiority in society and responsibility for the family’. This is a problematic quotation for me, as I believe that there are two contradictory things merging here. First, it is not Richard’s manhood that makes him inferior to both women, but on the contrary, it is his economic and social position that

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1232 Diduck & Kaganas, p.273.
places him in an inferior position to the rest of the characters, and second the fact that men, according to Diduck, are given economic and legal power over women, and women are given ethical and social power within the institution of the family implies that women are placed in a lower position than men. However, in connection to this scene, it seems that the ethical power given to women within the family institution has given them a powerful social veneer and protection instead of putting them in an inferior position. In my opinion, Pinter, by giving us such contradictions and variations in relationships, is highlighting the fragility of relationships built on sham foundations that change according to relations and not values, because they are without ideals or principles. It is to whom one is related that counts, not who one is.

The mutation of positions continues in this darkly comic play, or to use Gordon’s words, ‘scabrous social comedy’. When Richard asks if everything is all right with his guests, Lambert tells him that his wife, Julie, was not impressed, to which Prue gives a long speech on the sisters’ abusive childhood, and how their mother used to beat their father:

**Prue:** [...] She’s my sister, I’ve known her all my life,... when we were babies, when we used to lie in the nursery and hear mummy beating the shit out of daddy. We saw the blood on the sheets the next day [...]. That’s how my little sister and I were brought up and she could make a better sauce than yours if she pissed into it.

Mark Taylor-Batty also raises the issue of role inversion in Prue’s talk, associating this scene with female empowerment, especially when placed side by side with Julie’s remark about being unimpressed by the restaurant: ‘This inversion of the usual target of domestic violence sits alongside a number of references to women and power’. Nevertheless, Batty does not give further details about women’s association with empowerment. I would like to push the boundaries here by borrowing bell hooks’ comments relating to positionality. According to hooks, any moment of confession is a moment of transformation, or a moment of performance in which the individual steps out of his fixed identity, or the identity in which he is seen, to reveal other aspects of the self, ‘as part of an overall project of more fully becoming who you are’. As for

1233 Gordon, p.191.
1234 Celebration, p.457-458.
Prue, the capability to reveal that aspect of her and her sister’s childhood is a confessional act that breaks down all the power and social structures that she is supposed to inhabit as part of this pampered society. However, for a moment she carries out a radical act by telling the truth in a society based on lies, hence the fluctuation of her positionality.  

In relation to Prue and Julie’s mother, by positioning her identity within the stereotypically male realm – through the inversion of victim and oppressor in physical domestic violence roles – she has, indeed, emptied out herself and associated with those whom she considers the Other. hooks explains: ‘Understanding comes through our capacity to empty out the self and identify with that person who we normally make the Other’. That, however, would have worked perfectly had the mother not associated herself with violence and treated her husband in other, peaceful ways, or had she found a better way of displaying her capability to inhabit the position of the Other. Instead, the fact that she emptied herself to the extent of associating with the tools of the Other, and dealing with him using the same violence that he used against her, means that she has shaken the whole foundation, and brought the whole family down – hence Prue’s painful recollections. To justify such a position of anger and violence, rather than passive acceptance, hooks mentions a line from Toni Morrison’s novel *The Bluest Eye*, in which a little girl, a victim of rape, tries to provoke her friend to be angry: ‘Anger [here violence] is better, there is a presence in anger’.

If I connect Prue’s anger with her telling recollection of her childhood, and her anger against men, it will show that she is already taking the side of her mother, and thus she could not wipe out her Otherness, just like her mother. In other words, although wiping out a sense of Otherness does not mean that one is subsequently obliged to inhabit the oppressor’s side, it is a trap into which it is all too easy to fall. Clearly, it is not necessarily advantageous to identify with the victim, or the victimiser, because identification is not the crucial word here; what is crucial here is *victimisation*. In Prue and Julie’s case, the victim is their father and the victimiser is their mother, and this proves that what we need to overcome is not the act of violence, but rather the polarising idea that men are always victimisers, and women are always the victims.

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1238 Ibid., p.219.
1239 Ibid., p.213.
Instead we need to realise that equality and liberation are not about being a man or a woman, or inhabiting a specific normative role – because men can be just as crippled as women in certain situations (as in Prue and Julie’s father’s case). What is more liberating here is the potential that human beings can disassociate themselves from the notion of victimisation itself; to use hooks’ words, ‘that there could be an empowerment if [one] would just feel that rage, instead of merely shutting down and being victimised’.  

Nevertheless, Prue and Julie are not only expressing their anger, but they are trying to inhabit the position of the oppressor as they believe it is safer to do that. hooks explains that some people do that as a kind of defence: ‘It’s a kind of defense to imitate those who have wounded you, because, to the degree that you become them, you imagine you are safe’. hooks believes that this is a form of assimilation that the individual uses as a kind of mask or amulet, whereby s/he feels: ‘I can ward off the evil of this by becoming it, or by appearing to be it, it’s a kind of camouflage’. Thus the assumption of the role of the aggressor is merely an apotropaic device, deployed in order to ward off the otherwise inevitable hostility and violence that is routinely used against women.

The talk about positionality does not end here, but goes on when the couples start talking about mothers and their sons. According to Burkman, this obvious allusion to incest which is embodied first in the brothers married to sisters, and later in the conversation about the Oedipal situation suggested by Prue, Julie and Suki, is a sign of both ignorance and despair:

If one adds ignorance to incest, the desperation grows slightly deeper, and there is certainly a suggestion of such incest, not only in the sisters married to brothers, but also in conversation at both tables about the Oedipal situation the three women claim is present.

I would like to push Burkman’s analysis a bit further here by connecting this to the marital relations offered to us in the play. According to the Freudian theory, men and women differ in the process of growing up. While women shift their attachment from

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1240 hooks, *Outlaw Culture*, p.213.
1241 Ibid., p.215.
1242 Ibid.
1243 Burkman, ‘Desperation’.
their mothers to their fathers due to gender difference, men do not. They, instead, repress their attraction to their mothers, and the desire is transferred and embedded into the first women they encounter sexually in their lives. Wendy Hollway sheds further light on this:

According to Freudian theory, the passages of boys’ and girls’ entry into culture and to gender creates a difference not only in the object of [the] desire but in the intensity of that desire. Girls supposedly transfer their desire onto the father, and in doing so displace their desire for the mother, who none the less remains the primary giver of love and caring. Boys repress their desire for the mother but do not normally displace it from one gender to the other, it is usually relocated with full force in the first sexual relationship that a boy has.1244

Julie is actually verbalising this when she says:

**Julie**: All mothers-in-law are like that. They love their sons. [...] They don’t want their sons to be fucked by other girls. Isn’t that right?

**Prue**: Absolutely. All mothers want their sons to be fucked by themselves.1245

Considering the relationships in the play, let me clarify why men relocate their attraction of their mothers to the women they first sexually encounter. According to Hollway, there is a strong relationship between mother’s womb and wife’s vagina.1246 During the process of growing up, men always try to break free of their mothers and disassociate from them, hence their repression. When they first meet women in their lives, and want to develop a relationship, making love, in most cases, will be involved. When men have sex with women, they literally enter them, and while they are doing that, the vagina will represent going back to the womb, which is associated with protection and security, the antithesis of separation. Thus, they will feel engulfed in the love of the Other/mother. Therefore, women’s vaginas can be a different place, because men’s identity depends on separation from their mothers, and when they feel they are sucked in by their women’s vaginas/wombs, they will go through that feeling of being attracted to their mothers again – a feeling they repress throughout their lives. They will therefore subconsciously feel they are vulnerable to the Other; that

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1244 Wendy Hollway, ‘Heterosexual Sex: Power and Desire for the Other’. Quoted in Fox, p.200.
1245 Celebration, p.452.
1246 Hollway, p.200.
Other which stands now for their wives is associated with their mothers, and hence their dissatisfaction.\textsuperscript{1247} Hollway explains further:

Women’s vaginas thus can be very dangerous because men’s identity depends on separation from the mother; a maintenance of fragile ego boundaries which are most vulnerable [...] when attraction to a woman heralds desire for the Other/mother.\textsuperscript{1248}

Moreover, men feel more insecure around women who are financially independent and powerful, because when women become men’s equals or superiors, it is a tacit challenge to their manhood as it has been constructed in psychological terms; as Hollway suggests:

When men are attracted to women who occupy all the same positions in the world as men do, women end up having a ‘double power’: there is no site of resistance for men, no place where they are incontestably in power.\textsuperscript{1249}

In connection to the crumbling marital relationships in this play, I believe, therefore, that when the two sisters and the two brothers use the word ‘mother’, they give it two opposite meanings. While the sisters mean their mothers-in-law, I believe the brothers mean their wives, and this is why Lambert picks up the conversation between the two sisters, commenting:

\textbf{Lambert:} [...] How old do you have to be?  
\textbf{Julie:} To be what?  
\textbf{Lambert:} To be fucked by your mother.  
\textbf{Matt:} Any age mate. Any age.\textsuperscript{1250}

Despite the obvious comic interpretation of ‘fucked’ meaning ‘messed up’ or ‘destroyed’, Lambert, in my opinion, actually means being fucked by his wife; but he uses the metaphor of the mother instead, both for its shock value as a taboo and because it intensifies the connection between his wife and his mother. However, men like Lambert and Matt are attracted to needy women, and not independent ones, so that they won’t feel vulnerable whenever they are sucked in while making love to them. According to Hollway:

\textsuperscript{1247}Hollway, p.200.  
\textsuperscript{1248}Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{1249}Ibid., p.202.  
\textsuperscript{1250}Celebration, p.453.
I think many men get into relationships with women who are less experienced and less confident [...] than they are and, by retaining this power inequality, never experience the vulnerability. Yet they don’t feel entirely satisfied and will be the ones who pull away from the relationship.\footnote{Hollway, p.203.}

From a different perspective, Lambert and Matt, might both be, to use Berne’s word ‘a Sulk’. According to Berne, a Sulk is a man who is annoyed with his mother from infancy: ‘The Sulk is a man who is angry at his mother. On investigation it emerges that he has been angry at her since early childhood’.\footnote{Berne, p.153.} Such a Sulk has childish reasons for being angry, and his anger is usually linked to his mother’s desertion during childhood, or her trying to get rid of him in order for her to remarry. However, the fact that such men start hating women does not mean they are not also womanisers. Trying to change a Sulk, or prohibit his worst indulgences, can be achieved by letting him always save face, or by offering him something worthwhile for the privilege of sulking, as Berne suggests.\footnote{Ibid.} If I may go back to the beginning of the play, I will refer to the fuss that Lambert made over food; this can be comparable to the temper tantrums he used to display during dinner as a child. Looking at Berne’s description in juxtaposition with Lambert’s amorous exploits, we can realise that Lambert is simply always looking to satisfy his sexual desire for needy, fragile, and dependent women. He might have found that in his wife, Julie, but she is not a great help when it comes to saving face, and hence his adventures, or what he calls ‘real’ love for Suki could be true; but she is too strong for a Sulk, who always needs to prove his power, and hides his vulnerability; hence the dissatisfaction that Hollway mentions.

Between Lambert’s sulkiness and Julie’s sometimes frustrating, reckless answers, their marriage offers us an unhealthy marital situation which low social, cultural, and economic standards contribute to worsening. Rather than showing a healthy marriage in which individuals are always allowed a space for their individuality to be expressed (the ideal naively suggested by Hegel), the marriage models provided in Pinter’s play are tainted and deteriorated by such factors. Mentioning such factors, I would like to shed light on the State’s role in such a deterioration. Unlike Hegel, I believe the State should not be the absolute guardian of the family institution, because it sometimes uses the family as a tool to control society, as Bonnie J. Fox suggests:
Personal identity also became an issue, and ‘family’ came to embody and symbolise people’s identity. A symbol of personal identity, ‘family,’ has also been a conduit of social control – as the church, the state, the marketplace, and the politicians attempt to shape the world to suit their own ends.\(^\text{1254}\)

The Oedipal situations, and sexual allusions, however, continue on table two, at which Russell and Suki are sitting. When Russell describes his mother’s bread-and-butter pudding to Suki, his language alludes to sexual innuendos:

**Russell:** It was like drowning in an ocean of richness.

**Suki:** How beautiful. You’re a poet.\(^\text{1255}\)

Russell tells Suki that he always wanted to be a poet, but his father thought that he was stupid.

**Russell:** I wanted to be a poet once. But I got no encouragement from my dad. He thought I was an arsehole.\(^\text{1256}\)

When Suki tells Russell that his father might have been jealous of him, and might have been afraid that he was going to steal his wife, Russell shows signs of astonishment, particularly when Suki conflates the word ‘wife’ with ‘mother’:

**Suki:** He was jealous of you, that’s all. He saw you as a threat. He thought you wanted to steal his wife.

**Russell:** His wife?\(^\text{1257}\)

There are two things to highlight in this scene in relation to Russell’s character. First, his astonishment at Suki’s use of the word ‘wife’ in place of ‘mother’ suggests that his father has always been afraid that somebody, even his son, will steal his wife. This being said, Russell is not different from Lambert; he too is a Sulky man, a by-product of an abusive childhood, and a hatred of women, hence his lack of confidence and constant attempts to seek reassurance from Suki. Second, Russell’s father calls him an ‘arsehole’ and he fulfils his father’s prophesy by becoming one, at least metaphorically. This echoes bell hooks’ description of the process of assimilation, in which a person imitates those who have wounded them to the degree of becoming them, or becoming the person that the oppressor said the victim was or should be.\(^\text{1258}\) Therefore, Russell has lived up to his father’s expectations: by embodying this caricature of himself, he

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\(^{1254}\) Fox, p.148.

\(^{1255}\) Celebration, p.465.

\(^{1256}\) Ibid.

\(^{1257}\) Ibid., p.466.

\(^{1258}\) hooks, p.215.
has imitated the oppressor, whoever that may be; hence his troubled character as well as his disturbed relations.

Russell’s disturbed relations, whether with his wife, Suki, or at work, can be clearly seen in his other conversations. In one of the discussions with Suki, Russell seems to be living in his own ivory tower. To make it worse, Suki, although she sometimes irritates him by revealing the emptiness of his character, nevertheless does not seriously confront him by laying bare his true nature. Dilek Inan compares Suki to Ruth in *The Homecoming* and Anna in *Old Times*, saying that she is someone clever enough to mask her emotions, as long as she gets what she wants: ‘As in the earlier plays like Ruth in *The Homecoming*, and Anna in *Old Times*, Suki is cunning enough to hide her displeasure and plays the games of words rather competitively’.\(^{1259}\) Not only is this true, but like Ruth, Suki is ready to sacrifice everything for materialistic gain. I would say that her marriage to Russell seems more like a Mephistophelean deal with the devil than a real marriage:

Russell: Yes, they believe in me. [...] They’re investing in me. In my nous.
Suki: [...] I believe you. [...] I’m sure they believe in you. [...] I want you to be rich so that you can buy me houses and panties, and I’ll know that you really love me.\(^{1260}\)

According to this conversation, it seems that both Russell and Suki are benefiting from each other, and that their marital relationship is based on mutual benefit rather than love and affection, as with the other couples. Each conversation between them reveals a relationship of power, cheap sexual innuendos, and fragile bonds. However, Suki seems to have the upper hand in every conversation. Inan says:

Suki always defends herself by the power of words and becomes triumphant over her husband by controlling her serenity, whereas the husband suffers defeat because of his inability to control his temper.\(^{1261}\)

Thus, each and every word in their marriage is used as a means in the transaction to fulfil what Berne described as ‘the stroke’, or the paying off of any such deal. Berne further explains: ‘Experience has shown that it is more useful and enlightening to

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\(^{1259}\) Inan, p.98.
\(^{1260}\) Celebration, p.442.
\(^{1261}\) Inan, p.99.
investigate social transactions from the point of view of the advantages gained than to treat them as defensive operations’.\textsuperscript{1262}

If we compared Suki’s and the sisters’ position within the marriage institution, and Sonia’s outside the same institution, we will conclude that belonging to an ethical institution as Hegel described the marriage unit to be, or not belonging to it, is not crucial when the individual’s ethics himself/herself are fragmented. If we consider belonging to the marital institution as the crucial concept here, we will be looking at: (i) two sisters who are running charities, yet encouraging their husbands to destroy the world, as both Lambert and Matt work as strategic consultants, through which, their conversation implies, they are dealing with nasty work and politics by using the power of their positions; (ii) Suki, a woman who we assumed fulfilled herself through having an independent job, but who turns out to be no more than a materialistic individual ready to give herself to someone like Russell for the sake of trivial pleasures; (iii) Sonia, who, being the only unmarried woman in the play, is not different to those who already belong to the marital and familial institution. She is also a woman who, having joined the hotel and the restaurant, has accepted being a sexual tool to attract more and more costumers without any consideration for any values, adapting to the ambience she lives in. Therefore, married or unmarried, all the female characters in this play are valueless, fragmented, and cheap on ethical, social, linguistic, and cultural levels.

On a larger scale, none of the characters have really self-actualised themselves. By self-actualisation I mean reconstructing their lives in the sense of reconsidering their lifestyle or diminished ethics. Gordon confirms: ‘The aspiration towards high cultural value is continually undermined by the characters’ gross materialism, represented in dialogue as a lack of sophistication’.\textsuperscript{1263}

If we take a look at the conversation that follows Suki’s and Russell’s joining in with table one, we can feel that the characters have actually hit rock bottom, and they cannot be any worse. As Penelope Prentice describes the play, ‘Celebration shares Restoration comedy’s guiding trinity of power, sex, and money conjoined on the

\textsuperscript{1262} Berne, p.18.  
\textsuperscript{1263} Gordon, p.191.
marriage market, a comedy that exposes lies, disguises and deception by dissolving them in laughter.\textsuperscript{1264}

Linking this to the play, we can spot these cheap transactions made by the characters within the private sphere of their lives, which have eventually shaped their public interaction. One would think that people can be quite strict at work, and reserve love for family at home, but this does not seem to be the case here. When Julie shows emotion over Lambert’s gesture of raising a glass to his wife and anniversary, he shuts her up cruelly:

\textbf{Julie}: I’m so touched by this, honestly. I mean I have to say-
\textbf{Lambert}: Raise your fucking glass and shut up.\textsuperscript{1265}

However, Julie, in a rare movement in Pinter plays, counters her husband’s aggression immediately:

\textbf{Julie}: But darling, that’s naked aggression. He doesn’t normally go in for naked aggression. He usually disguises it under honeyed words.\textsuperscript{1266}

Although Julie shows signs of bravery by countering her husband as Prentice suggests: ‘Julie in one of the rarest calls from a Pinter character, acknowledges another character’s point-blank attack’,\textsuperscript{1267} nevertheless, she is in that moment of bravery trying to find excuses for her husband’s dominion, as if it is normal to be violent if one disguises it under ‘honeyed words’. bell hooks suggests that the problem goes beyond male violence to that of women’s beliefs and positions: ‘The problem [of domination and abuse] was often exacerbated by the fact that women also believed that the person in authority has the right to use force to maintain authority’.\textsuperscript{1268}

This belief makes a stronger presence when Lambert describes his marriage ceremony:

\textbf{Lambert}: I was just about to fuck her at the altar when somebody stopped me.
\textbf{Matt}: I stopped him. His zip went down and I kicked him up the arse. It would have been a scandal. The world’s press was on the doorstep.

\textsuperscript{1264} Prentice, p.395.
\textsuperscript{1265}\textit{Celebration}, p.478.
\textsuperscript{1266}ibid.
\textsuperscript{1267}Prentice, p.401.
\textsuperscript{1268} hooks, \textit{From Margin to Centre}, p.119.
**Julie:** He was always impetuous.\(^{1269}\)

There are two things to be revealed in this conversation: (i) Julie’s complete submission and approval of male violence against her; and (ii) the fact that people such as Lambert seem to be world famous and get their weddings broadcasted on the media, and social networks – which confirms the idea that such institutions are actually a crucial force for promoting and validating this violence. bell hooks further explains:

> It needs to be emphasised that the idea that it is correct to use abuse to maintain authority is taught to individuals by church, school and other institutions. Love and violence have become so intertwined in this society that many people, especially women, fear that eliminating violence will lead to the loss of love.\(^{1270}\)

Another interpretation is provided by Prentice: that Lambert and Matt, involved in a dirty job like theirs, are not seeking world fame but subterfuge to pass a different image to people outside: ‘Here, in what these men really do in their clandestine work, they seek not notoriety but subterfuge, like the U.S.’s National Security Agency, the NSA, known as No Such Agency’.\(^{1271}\)

Lambert’s diminished ethics do not only reveal his disrespect for a place that is supposed to be sacred, and for a moment in which an individual’s ethics are most important – a marriage ceremony – he also crosses the lines at the restaurant when he sees Suki and calls her to join them in a very private family celebration, while all he remembers about her is that he managed to fuck her at the age of eighteen, reducing her to a mere sex object:

**Lambert:** You see that girl at the table? I know her. I fucked her when she was eighteen.\(^{1272}\)

It is not only Lambert who crosses lines here, but also Suki, who is supposed to be having a private dinner with her husband. This is another transaction in her life; Suki, just like Sonia, is introducing Russell to more of those men who have already fucked her. Berne believes that some women play this game of making two men fight for them, with a promise to surrender to the winner. Berne believes that this transaction

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\(^{1269}\) *Celebration*, p.482.

\(^{1270}\) bell hooks, *From Margin to Centre*, p.123-124.

\(^{1271}\) Prentice, p.402.

\(^{1272}\) *Celebration*, p.486.
is honest on the woman’s side; however, Suki does not seem to be honest with either Russell or Lambert.\textsuperscript{1273} Suki’s behaviour confirms that family is not a social unit of a group of people, but an elective relationship: ‘The family is becoming more of an elective relationship, and association of individual persons, who each bring to it their own interests, experiences and plans’.\textsuperscript{1274}

When Suki asks if Lambert is still interested in gardening, his pissed-off wife quickly reveals his corrupted mentality not only outside his family, but inside as well:

\textbf{Julie:} Funny that when you knew my husband you thought he was obsessed with gardening. I always thought he was obsessed with girls’ bums.

\textbf{Suki:} Really?

\textbf{Prue:} Oh yes, he was always a keen wobbler.\textsuperscript{1275}

The fact that it is Prue, and not Julie, who is the one to describe Lambert as a ‘wobbler’, indicates that she may also be describing her husband and that both her and her sister’s family have no privacy whatsoever. Matt’s reaction confirms this:

\textbf{Matt:} What do you mean? How do you know?

\textbf{Prue:} Oh don’t get excited. It’s all in the past.\textsuperscript{1276}

To make it worse, recalling Kate in \textit{Old Times}, Suki adds:

\textbf{Suki:} I sometimes feel that the past is never past.\textsuperscript{1277}

This allusion reveals that marriage betrayals that include sex could be some of the most dangerous actions, are capable of demolishing the whole institution. The fact that Prue still remembers her husband’s betrayal, and Suki’s feeling that the past is never past, means that such betrayals can still happen or are still happening. Moreover, Matt’s reaction, ‘Bollocks’,\textsuperscript{1278} indicates that the male’s biological make-up may serve to normalise the use of violence against women, and diminish the male’s culpability.\textsuperscript{1279} Prue’s comment on her brother-in-law’s amorous exploits thus reveals Matt’s violence and Prue’s vulnerability.

\textsuperscript{1273}Berne, p.108.
\textsuperscript{1274}Diduck & Kaganas, p.9.
\textsuperscript{1275}Celebration, p.491.
\textsuperscript{1276}Ibid., p.491.
\textsuperscript{1277}Ibid., p.492.
\textsuperscript{1278}Celebration, p.492.
\textsuperscript{1279}Diduck & Kaganas, p.562.
Following Suki’s talk about the past, Lambert has a confessional moment in which he reveals that he would like to live one more time, a wish that Julie dismisses as impossible:

**Julie:** I wouldn’t like to live again though, would you? Once is more than enough.

**Lambert:** I’d like to live again. In fact I’m going to make it my job to live again. I’m going to come back as a better person, a more civilised person, a gentler person, a nicer person.

**Julie:** Impossible.\(^{1280}\)

I disagree with Burkman’s interpretation, in which she suggests that although Lambert’s wish for a new life carries signs of hope, it is an ironical one: ‘Despite the ironical tone that he uses here, Lambert is at least wistful about the possibility of a different kind of life, one that might include love this time’.\(^{1281}\)

I would like to push the boundaries in the opposite way here, as I believe that Lambert, of all the characters, could be Pinter’s mouthpiece for a better future and a better change. According to hooks, it would be better not to look at our accomplishments in life, but what we have desired. In other words, we need to change our biography from what has been achieved to what we really desire or have desired to achieve. She quotes Eunic Lipton, a female art historian, who said: ‘What would it mean for us to look at biography not from the standpoint of people’s accomplishments, but from what people desired’.\(^{1282}\)

In connection to the play, Lambert, in his confessional moments both when he reveals his love for Suki, and in the scene under discussion, is actually aspiring to a new life, a chance to reconstruct his identity, and to better actualise himself, unlike the rest. However, the contradiction between Lambert’s wishes and other characters’ behaviour is crucial. When Prue wonders how Lambert and Suki met, Russell volunteers an answer:

**Russell:** Behind a filing cabinet.\(^{1283}\)

\(^{1280}\) *Celebration*, p.492.

\(^{1281}\) Burkman, ‘Desperation’.

\(^{1282}\) Quoted in hooks: *Outlaw Culture*, p.217.

\(^{1283}\) *Celebration*, p.493.
The contradiction here is that Russell is disrespecting the very person he sought for recognition, and self-assurance. To further disrespect Suki, he makes a sexual remark, reminding her of her past in front of others:

Russell: I know the ideal restaurant. All the waitresses have big tits.
Suki: Aren’t you pushing the tits bit a bit further.
Russell: Me? I thought you did that.\textsuperscript{1284}

The biggest contradiction comes from the brothers when they, being unfaithful to their wives and disrespectful all the time themselves, speak in a threatening tone to Russell urging him to show more respect to his wife:

Lambert: Be careful. You’re talking to your wife.
Matt: Have some respect, mate.\textsuperscript{1285}

Thus, while Lambert might show a flicker of hope for change despite his imperfections, others, such as Russell, show no such hope whatsoever. However, images of fragmented culture keep floating to the surface of this play. One of the most powerful ones is when Lambert complains of the distancing and fragmentation of personal relationships:

Lambert: [...] People normally are so distant from each other. That’s what I’ve found. Take a given bloke – this given bloke does not know that another given bloke exists. It goes down through history, doesn’t it?\textsuperscript{1286}

What is more disheartening is that Lambert gives this statement when he believes he feels intimacy and cosiness in the restaurant, which would not have treated him and his family like that without his money. The claims that Richard and Sonia make about caring are based on lies:

Sonia: Well, we do care.
Richard: [...] We care about the welfare of our clientele. I will say that.\textsuperscript{1287}

Feelings of alienation in Lambert’s speech and hypocrisy in Sonia’s and Richard’s speech merge to give us an unflattering picture of the values of the society in which we live. The danger of such values does not stop at alienating people, but goes further to

\textsuperscript{1284} Celebration, p.497.\textsuperscript{1285} Ibid., p.497.\textsuperscript{1286} Ibid., p.500.\textsuperscript{1287} Ibid., p.499.
create a domineering culture in which people are divided, hiding behind the mask of privacy. The issue here is not to keep the boundaries between private and public spheres, but to smash them to undermine all the forces that combine to create a domineering culture, and this is exactly why bell hooks places emphasis on the confessional as a transformative moment in undermining the power structure.\textsuperscript{1288}

hooks gives a brilliant definition of loneliness in society, in which she states that authentic privacy in a society based on solid values means the capability to be alone with oneself without having to have means of communication such as TV or telephones. Demanding such paraphernalia means we are incapable of facing our true selves: ‘Because to be alone with the self is to possibly have to see all the stuff we spend so much of our time trying not to face’.\textsuperscript{1289}

To connect this to the play, I believe that the characters are suffering from the same kind of alienation, which I would call a morbid one, as they are living in constant denial and hiding from their real selves; hence the impossibility of reconciliation with the self and others. hooks quotes from Gershen Kaufman’s book \textit{Shame: The Power of Caring}: ‘But we can never be reconciled as long as we exist in the realm of denial, because denial is always about insanity. And sanity is so tied to our capacity to face reality’.\textsuperscript{1290}

Feelings of alienation seem to have been seeping through, not only in the characters’ public life, but in their very private relations. When Julie ridicules the absence of her children from her wedding anniversary, Prue reveals a very crucial point in the conversation:

\textbf{Prue}: They always loved me much more than they loved him.
\textbf{Julie}: [...]They loved me to distraction. I was their mother.\textsuperscript{1291}

As Prue and Julie are trying to prove their worthiness as faithful mothers to their children, and good citizens in society, they are actually oblivious to the fact that they are contributing to their own oppression within the family institution because they confirm the stereotype of linking womanhood to motherhood. In other words, they are reinforcing what hooks calls

\textsuperscript{1288} hooks, \textit{Outlaw Culture}, p.224.
\textsuperscript{1289} Ibid., p.225.
\textsuperscript{1290} Quoted in hooks, \textit{Outlaw Culture}, p.225.
\textsuperscript{1291} Celebration, p.480.
The stereotypical sexist notion that women are inherently better suited to parent, that men who parent in the same way as women are imitating the real thing rather than acting as a parent should act. However, Matt’s interjection undermines the sisters’ self-confidence by highlighting the diminished memory of children and reinforcing the theme of alienation:

**Matt:** Children. They have no memory. They remember nothing. They don’t remember who their father was or who their mother was. It’s all a hole in the wall for them. They don’t remember their own life.

According to Batty, Matt’s statement is completely contradictory with the childhood recollections offered by the sisters, which carry an awful amount of abuse: ‘The childhood memories they themselves offer are vivid recollections of abuse’.

I totally agree with Batty’s point as not only do the sisters provide vivid memories of their childhood, but other characters, such as Richard and the waiter, do the same, as we will see in the third section of the discussion. However, that does not undermine the theme of disintegrated generations within a family and flimsy attachments to past experiences or familial belongingness.

Sonia gives another dimension to this alienation by showing excitement over Julie’s and Prue’s sisterhood, while she reveals complete disconnection from her own sister:

**Sonia:** *(To Julie and Prue):* I’m so touched that you’re sisters. I had a sister. But she married a foreigner and I haven’t seen her since.

The most contradictory move comes from Lambert who, upon leaving, insists on paying Suki’s and Russell’s bill, and thus killing two birds with one stone: (i) he outdoes Russell and (ii) he reveals a benevolent sexism towards Suki. In other words, he wouldn’t have paid the bill if he had met Russell as Suki’s husband alone, and moreover, he wouldn’t have paid Suki’s bill if they had not had an affair in the first place; such behaviour illustrates the shaping of our identities according to our relationships and connections, a kind of behaviour that Ferree calls ‘prosocial’.

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1292 hooks, *From Margin to Centre*, p.139.
1293 Celebration, p.480.
1294 Batty, p.157.
1295 Celebration, p.500.
1296 Ferree, p.387.
Nevertheless, the whole encounter between the characters in this play is a kind of series of transactions in which everybody wants to outdo each other to gain self-esteem. This may be because ‘Psychological theory and research suggest that individuals gain self-esteem when they view themselves as outperforming other persons in areas that are relevant or important to them’.  

The real outdoing of others, and power relations in this context, will therefore be the theme of the following section.

III

According to Francesca Cancian, power is the ability to impose one’s opinion on others: ‘I define power as the ability to impose one’s will on others despite resistance or the ability to prevail when decisions are made’.  

In this section, I will add another layer to Cancian’s definition within the marital and familial institution as not only imposing one’s will on others, but determining one’s position, value, and sometimes career in life. The first thing to notice in the play is the men’s careers and jobs in comparison with those of the women. Not only this, but there are variations within these relations of power depending on the position in the hierarchy one occupies. When Suki asks Lambert and Matt about their job, their tone reflects the nature of the power they own:

**Suki:** What about you two?
**Lambert:** Well, we’re consultants. Matt and me. Strategy Consultants.

And when Lambert attempts to further clarify the nature of his and his brother’s job, he implies references to power such as guns, and peace:

**Lambert:** It means we don’t carry guns. [...] We don’t have to!
**Matt:** We’re peaceful strategy consultants.
**Lambert:** Worldwide. Keeping the peace.

Penelope Prentice believes that the characters in the play are just following the route of power blindly, as they are seeking power for power’s sake: ‘These characters play by
rote the power plays, driven neither an overriding desire nor by social conscience; they seek simply power for power’s sake. Prentice compares the characters here to characters like Nicolas in One for the Road or the soldiers in Mountain Language who believe that their desire for power is driven by a duty to God and their country. However, I disagree with Prentice on this point as I believe that the characters here have enough awareness to know what they are doing and why they are doing it. They might even be more aware than duty-driven characters in the previous plays such as Nicolas and the soldiers, as some of them, such as Lambert and Russell, have their own confessional moments in which the first declares that he wants to be reborn in order to come out a better person, and the second confesses being a psychopath, as we will see later in this section. What Pinter is highlighting here, in my opinion, is how power can permeate our personal life just as much as it does our public one.

Let me highlight this point a little further here. According to Francesca Cancian, contemporary views of human nature perpetuate the ideology of separate spheres. By separate spheres I mean the personal and the public spheres. Thus, feelings such as affection, love, care, would be reserved for wife and kids, while practicality, strictness, and roughness would be the key behaviours that one should adopt while at work. The issue I am trying to highlight here is that sometimes the borders between these spheres get blurred, and things seem to be entangled. Cancian explains this ideology further:

For example, this ideology suggests that it is acceptable for a manager to underpay his workers or for the faculty at a university to ignore an assistant professor who has been fired. Their behaviour is not unloving or immoral; they are being business-like or are respecting individual privacy. From this perspective, it is natural to treat people like objects at work; personal relationships, morality, and love are reserved for the private sphere [...].

However, this does not seem to be the case in the play, as the characters here are just hard in both spheres. When Russell gets angry at Suki for telling him that he has got no character, he describes her as a prick and a whore:

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Cancian makes a very interesting reference to Daniel Levinson’s concept of meritocracy in which he advocates the idea of achieving the ‘Dream’ for the man regardless of his familial relations, and ignores man’s dependence on others in his life such as his wife, mother, or even other people who worked with him and for him. This concept also condemns other men without a job, whether in the middle or working class. In short, Levinson’s concept, as Cancian suggests, is reinstating the concept of self-made man or meritocracy which in turn, emphasises inequality (p.210).
Russell: You’re a whore.
Suki: A whore in the wind.
Russell: You’re a prick.\footnote{Celebration, p.449-450.}

The word ‘prick’ here reminds us of Nicolas’s description of Victor’s son as a ‘prick’, who was later killed (as is implied at the end of One for the Road). However, Nicolas’s obsession with killing ‘rebels’ is driven by his godly duty to protect his country. There is no substantive difference between Russell’s and Nicolas’s use of the word ‘prick’; both are threats, one directed to a wife and the other to someone else’s son. Russell’s job as a banker ensures his position in society, even though he always talks about violence against people working for him, and killings. When he talks to Richard, things seem to be taking a different shape:

Russell: I’m basically a totally disordered personality, some people would describe me as a psychopath (To Suki) am I right?
Suki: Yes.
Russell: But when I’m sitting in this restaurant I suddenly find I have no psychopathic tendencies at all. I don’t feel like killing everyone in sight, I don’t feel like putting a bomb under everyone’s arse. [...] Now this is very unusual for me.\footnote{Ibid., p.475.}

Thus, when Russell tells Suki that she is being a prick, he means it. In other words, Russell’s position and Suki’s are unequal in society, for while he is already occupying a high position in society with unlimited powers to kill and subdue people, like his histrionic counterpart Terry in Party Time, Suki, nevertheless, has been that of a mere secretary (or now a school teacher) being exploited by others; she occupies a disadvantageous position in society, to counterbalance Russell’s position of power.

Moreover, linking this scene to what I have already suggested regarding public and private spheres, it seems that Russell has lost control over his powers when it comes to both work and home. Prentice suggests that the characters have ‘no real power over the self’.\footnote{Prentice, The Pinter Ethic, p.389.} Nevertheless, I do not support the idea of the separation of the two spheres here, as much as I am highlighting the use of power amongst the characters. It does not matter whether power is used in private or in public spheres; the crucial word here is ‘violence’ that should be abandoned in all spheres and at all levels.
Inequality that is propelled by those in positions of power continues to be highlighted in the play. Prentice suggests that Pinter is inspired to show his anger and exasperation with modern democracies: ‘Martin Luther King addressed the silence of the private citizen. Pinter dramatised its source, revealing that the private is public’.\textsuperscript{1306} This dramatisation occurs on stage when Russell confesses his infidelity to Suki, revealing that he cheated on her with a secretary:

\textbf{Russell:} She was a scrubber [...] They’re all the same, these secretaries, these scrubbers. They are like politicians. They love power. They’ve got a bit of power, they use it.\textsuperscript{1307}

Once again, Russell’s position and power over others led the secretary, or the scrubber as he may call such women, to fall for him. However, although he has enough power to manipulate people, he is angry that this one has managed to manipulate him, as Suki reveals:

\textbf{Russell:} She just twisted me round her little finger.
\textbf{Suki:} That’s funny. I thought she twisted you round your little finger.\textsuperscript{1308}

With Suki’s sexual innuendoes, not only is their corrupt marital relationship revealed, but, also how power, sex, and positions can all weave a nasty tapestry of oppression and despicable corruption that permeates the lives of those in power, as well as those oppressed under their rule. It is worth mentioning here that Pinter’s juxtaposition of politicians and secretaries in this scene, in my opinion, is deliberately crafted to highlight the lives of those in power, as well as those surrounding them, and hence the fact that it dramatises the lives of voiceless people, displaying that there is a fine line between the public and the private lives of both classes. Moreover, by implying that these secretaries are women, he sheds more light on the double exploitation that women from lower classes go through, for they are being taken advantage of on two levels: as poor people, and as women. hooks gives the bigger picture of this situation by focusing more on the patriarchal exploitation of women regardless of their social and economic position: ‘Poor or rich, we are all wounded in the service of the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[1306] Prentice, ‘Transcendence in Drama’, p.34.
\item[1307] Celebration, p.443.
\item[1308] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
patriarchy, although our scars are different’. Although she uses the word ‘patriarchy’ here to refer to men’s domination over women, I believe that the word could be expanded to include anyone, man or woman, who occupies an advantageous position in life.

This idea is picked up, I believe, when both Lambert and Matt use a threatening tone when asking Russell to show respect to his wife:

**Matt**: It’s not much to ask.  
**Lambert**: But it’s crucial.

Owing to the position that both Lambert and Matt occupy (which seems to be higher than that occupied by Russell), they speak in threatening tones, which dramatises human violence at different levels and in different situations. Prentice acclaims Pinter over Shakespeare, in that ‘No other playwright better understands or dramatises causes of human violence better than him including Shakespeare’.

Russell, in an ironical twist, reinforces Pinter’s view, by acknowledging their power and wishes the world had more people like Lambert and Matt:

**Russell**: We need more people like you. Taking responsibility. Taking charge. Keeping the peace. Enforcing the peace.

Lambert and Matt recall their earlier histrionic counterparts Fred and Douglas in *Party Time* (1991); however, the major difference between them is that *Party Time* characters such as Gavin occupy more advanced positions in the power hierarchy and are closer to power figures. In *Celebration*, the brothers’ power seems to be less, as they are not fighting dissidence or uprooting opposition like Terry and Gavin in *Party Time*, but rather are involved in Mafia type corruption, as Lambert implies: ‘We’re at the receiving end of some of the best tea in China’.

The conflict and variations of power make a strong presence in both the waiter’s and Richard’s speeches about their families and their relationships to power figures in the play. When the young waiter approaches table two, at which Russell and Suki are

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1309 hooks, *From Margin to Centre*, p.59.  
1310 *Celebration*, p.497.  
1312 *Celebration*, p.497.  
1313 Ibid., p.498.
sitting, he claims to have heard them talking about T.S. Eliot a while ago, and says he
would like to tell them something they might find interesting:

**Waiter:** [...] I thought you might be interested to know that my
grandfather knew T.S. Eliot quite well.\textsuperscript{1314}

When Russell asks him how long he had been working here, the waiter understands
what lies behind Russell’s words, as he replies:

**Waiter:** Are you suggesting that I’m about to get the boot?\textsuperscript{1315}

The waiter, in one of the most crucial moments in the play, talks about the restaurant
as a womb for him, rather than as a mere place of work:

**Waiter:** To be brutally honest, I don’t think I’d recover if they
did a thing like that. This place is like a womb to me. I prefer to
stay in my womb. I strongly prefer that to being born.\textsuperscript{1316}

Katherine Burkman links this moment to the theme of life and death, as she believes
that the waiter’s desire to stay in the restaurant is an expression of his desire to return
to the womb of his mother and stay there forever. In other words, the restaurant has
become like the womb of the waiter’s mother; he prefers never to be born. Burkman
further explains: ‘In each play, as in Celebration, there is a pre-Oedipal desire to return
to the womb or to hide out from life, as well as a terrible fear of death, which is as
fearful as life’.\textsuperscript{1317} However, I would rather link the waiter’s fear to the policies of the
capitalist system, through which he is trying to highlight his grandfather’s intellectual
and cultural heritage, as well as his own understanding of the mysteries of life, as
introduced to him by his grandfather. It is not just the fear of facing life outside the
restaurant that has become a sort of an abode to the waiter, but it is also a fear of the
policies of the capitalist system to which the powerful figures in the play belong,
including Richard, who always tries to manipulate people like the waiter by offering
them crumbs from the table. Moreover, Pinter, in my opinion, has deliberately chosen
to make the waiter the youngest in the group, to highlight this idea of manipulation of
the younger generation, who are made to feel they are privileged to work in such
prestigious places and that they will be marooned if they are cut off by the system. It is
the idea of power and domination that is crucial here, rather than images of life and

\textsuperscript{1314}Celebration, p.467.
\textsuperscript{1315}Ibid., p.468.
\textsuperscript{1316}Ibid., p.469.
\textsuperscript{1317}Burkman, ‘Desperation’.
death. The waiter here could be another Stanley, presented earlier in Pinter’s *The Birthday Party* (1957), who is being manipulated, brainwashed, re-moulded and reproduced according to the rules of the patriarchal system that controls everyone by reinforcing fake values. This is exactly why Russell feels he has freedom by virtue of his position to threaten other human beings, such as the waiter, just because they occupy a lower position in the hierarchy of power. Robert Gordon also makes such an association: ‘What is remarkable is the naive desire to assert [the waiter’s] literary-cultural credentials in the face of the barbarity of global capitalism’. 1318

It is noteworthy, though, that the fragile memory of the children that Matt referred to earlier in the play does not seem to be materialised in the relationship between the waiter and his grandfather, as it seems that he has strong connections to his grandfather, who left him this treasure trove of knowledge. There are two interpretations for this relationship: (i) it could be Pinter setting a comparison between the children of Matt and Lambert, who belong to a different, higher social class, and the waiter, who is below them in the class system; or (ii) it could carry a flicker of hope that children do not forget, but learn from their parents, and if their parents are as ignorant as Lambert, Matt, and the rest of the people in this restaurant, then we will end up with children without responsibility or enough consciousness of their surroundings. Burkman believes that the reference to lost memory is a reference to all celebrants, who are suspended in life in a gesture of complete desperation: ‘surely [Matt] could be talking about all the celebrators, suspended in the life of the restaurant, but unable to remember or claim a life’. 1319 I would like to contest her suggestion here, as I do believe that Pinter made a deliberate mention of children in order to refer to the variations of consciousness amongst the younger generation, and also to give a glimmer of hope so as to create room for change.

The continuous attempts of the system to buy the loyalty of people, represented first by the waiter, seems to have paid off when Richard reveals how the image of the restaurant reminds him of a country pub that he was taken to by his father:

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1318 Gordon, p.192.
1319 Burkman, ‘Desperation’.
Richard: [...] And my father once took me to our village pub. I was only that high. Too young to join him for his pint of course. But I did look in.\textsuperscript{1320}

Although Richard’s position on the hierarchy of power is much higher than that of the waiter, being the restauranteur, it is still much lower than that of the other power figures in the play. Although he too remembers his father and all the old traditions he had introduced him to, he, nevertheless, has not put any effort into keeping them. Instead, he has modernised them to compete with the demands of time by finding a place amongst the power figures:

Richard: I do hope you noticed that you have complimentary gherkins as soon as you take your seats.\textsuperscript{1321}

Richard’s cheese rolls and gherkins in a restaurant patronised by power figures are, according to Taylor-Batty, not enough for him to be a full member of the consumerist culture; he has added a whole list of strange names to his menu to attract more classy clientele but such moves fail to meet the currency value because of their phoniness. I totally agree with Taylor-Batty, who believes that even the new names are not enough to meet the currency value of things:

By extrapolating from the cheese rolls and gherkins available in a traditional, oak-beamed pub in a rural village, to the duck in sauce and Osso Bucco provided now for wealthy and unappreciative clients, Pinter is signalling the contemporary appropriation of ‘tradition,’ as a consumed, integrated simulacrum. Simultaneously, he suggests the loss or distancing of an authentic experience that, in itself, fails to meet the currency value that its simulacrum promises.\textsuperscript{1322}

Richard, who has inherited anti-class memories from his father, goes completely against childhood experience compared to the waiter’s stance. He has bought into the system, by providing it with energy and ambience, and is forced to keep the system alive. The provision of the ambience is highlighted by Russell, who finds it weird that he feels comfortable in this particular restaurant:

Russell: [...] Normally I feel [...] absolutely malice and hatred towards everyone within spitting distance – but here I feel love.\textsuperscript{1323}

\textsuperscript{1320}Celebration, p.477.
\textsuperscript{1321}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1322}Batty, p.158.
\textsuperscript{1323}Celebration, p.475.
It is not only the ambience that Russell mentioned that keeps Richard completely within the system he is struggling to get into, but his insistence on keeping the ‘highest fucking standards’,\textsuperscript{1324} as Lambert says, which is what helps him to prove his utter loyalty to the system. In a restaurant that patronises and is patronised by such corrupted figures, one can only imagine what kind of standards are being kept. Richard has not only appropriated what he imagines are the values of the country pub his father made him wait outside, with an insistence on keeping up to its standards; he has also sold his conscience, self, and humanity altogether, and this is exactly why he does not jib, as Matt suggests, because it is going to cost him more than his life is worth, as is implied in Lambert’s sugar-coated threats.

Nonetheless, that does not render the waiter completely innocent, as he is also a conniver by partaking in this process of distancing or disassociating culture and values from the present. His plea to be kept in the restaurant when Russell threatens to fire him means that he wants to remain there out of neediness; he is too weak to clash with the system or even sacrifice his small job for the sake of his own freedom. Unlike Jemmy in \textit{Party Time}, the waiter is not a dissident, neither does he dare to be one. However, the cultural knowledge that he inherited from his grandfather carries signs of hope and the possibility of change.

The variations of the hierarchy of power, with all its contradictions and ironies, keep bubbling to the surface. Richard, who has less power than others, has other people below him in the hierarchical system. Although Sonia is not as weak as the waiter, she is not as strong as Richard, as she occupies a supportive role in the restaurant. However, she has some power over the clients who come to her seeking sexual favours, and hence even her power is gendered as it is associated with her sexual allurement:

\begin{quote}
Sonia: We get so many different kinds of people in here, people from all walks of life.\textsuperscript{1325}
\end{quote}

Sonia, who tempts men from all walks of life as a result of her sexual powers, is nevertheless subdued by the capitalist ambitions of Richard, who has already turned her into a sex slave by controlling not only her destiny but her body as well. However,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[1324] \textit{Celebration}, p.460
\item[1325] Ibid., p.482.
\end{footnotes}
Sonia has memories of her mother, but her recollections are not much help to her in creating an independent character, neither do they support her to establish enough values of her own, as she is disconnected from them and from her childhood. She never knew her father, and she was raised by a mother who did not have as good a job as Sonia has now. Nevertheless, what Sonia is lacking is not a glorious heritage as much as an awareness that she has enough power to reject the reality offered to her by Richard. bell hooks explains:

Women need to know that they can reject the powerful’s definition of their reality – that they can do so even if they are poor, exploited, or trapped in oppressive circumstances. They need to know that the exercise of this basic personal power is an act of resistance and strength.\textsuperscript{1326}

Thus, the power variations offered to us in \textit{Celebration} are a set of contradictions offered by Pinter to shed more light on the workings of power, authority, and money that seem to permeate even the most intimate relationships: the familial and the marital. The last two scenes in the play almost summarise these themes.

At the end of the party, Lambert prepares for the last showing off by offering not only to pay his own bill and that of Russell and Suki, but also by tipping the workers starting from the highest, Richard, who of course gets the biggest chunk of everything, to the lowest, the waiter, who does not go empty-handed. Even the way money is paid shows the crooked ways of capitalism in buying people’s loyalty. For the males, Richard and the waiter, it fills their pockets, and for Sonia, it validates her beauty, the source of her survival in the restaurant. This is why Lambert dangles the money near her breast cleavage.

The other scene is the final interjection of the waiter, after a series of highly intellectual ones on his side which he, unfortunately, is unable to make. The last interjection reveals his grandfather’s lost love – his grandmother – which Prentice links to Rebecca’s lost baby girl.\textsuperscript{1327} I will push the boundaries here further to suggest that by alluding to the lost grandmother, Pinter might be implying the loss of the source of begetting, of reproducing posterity, just as he did in \textit{One for the Road}, when he implied the killing of Victor’s little son in reference to cutting off the roots and posterity of

\textsuperscript{1326}hooks, \textit{From Margin to Centre}, p.90. \textsuperscript{1327}Prentice, \textit{The Pinter Ethic}, p.408.
dissidence. However, the waiter, although a conniver and a participant in carrying the guilt of propelling the continuity of the system, is also a reminder of a lost past, its values and traditions, as Gordon suggests:

Although the young waiter’s attempts to interpellate himself into the cultural history of the twentieth century is never explained, it forms a wonderfully witty reminder of the cultural value system that a postmodern environment such as the restaurant has eradicated.\textsuperscript{1328}

On the note of the waiter’s incapacity to make further interjections, Pinter offers us further reminders that the waiter’s inability to make further interjections marks our responsibility for taking action against invasive forces of capitalism, diminished values that permeated not only our public lives, but our familial and marital ones as well. The waiter is no different from Rebecca in \textit{Ashes to Ashes}, and Deborah in \textit{A Kind of Alaska}, who was in a kind of Alaska, frozen, and stuck in the vicious tentacles of the system but still a valuable witness, and a strong reminder to awaken us from our frozen state. From such a perspective, the waiter might have failed to detach himself from the system, and hence we can detect his connivance with it; but he also, through his interjections, does not fail to act as a recurrent reminder of this fact to us as an audience, and hence re-addresses the problem, creating space for change, and inviting us to act on the shortfalls of our time, as they are now revealed to us.

\textbf{IV}

In this chapter, I have tried to shed light on the familial and marital institutions through different perspectives. The standards by which I have measured the validity of such relations are through consideration of: (i) the family as an ethical unit; (ii) the equality of men and women in relationships; and (iii) the power relations (often gendered) between characters. Alongside the corrupted relations highlighted in this chapter, the ethical mode of the family or marital relations suggested by Hegel does not seem to be quite practical in light of the examples of modern-day families offered in \textit{Celebration}. Despite Hegel’s rather advanced interpretation of the rights of the individual within the family, he still advocates the authoritarianism of the State – a force that he sees as

\textsuperscript{1328}Gordon, p.192.
largely benign – over the individual. I only partially agree with him. As I do believe that every family should be based on certain ethical standards in order for it to constitute a successful unit, I am against this tacit acceptance of any authoritarian standards. Individuals, in my opinion, have to be given full freedom to decide their destiny away from any sort of pressure from authority. Nevertheless, individuals cannot operate on their own or even get their rights if they do not unite with other individuals with the same demands. This does not, of course, mean setting an authoritarian standard to rule everybody similarly. Individuals, in my opinion, should unite in collective effort in order to gain their rights, if such collective struggle is the best option to do so. However, at the same time, people’s individuality should be respected and people should not be pressured to join groups; every individual should have a right to associate with or disassociate themselves from groups. The point here is that every individual should be given full freedom to be what they want to be.

On another level, the marital and familial relationships offered in the play seem to be unequal owing to sets of different reasons and forces such as gender, social position, and power. If we were living in a society that was equal and people were treated the same, without any other considerations such as gender or social status, Pinter would have not had the need to address such inequality in his plays. But, as this is not the case, I believe that the family unit, marital relations, and other relationships create an atmosphere of oppression, which is not always beneficial to the individuals who participate in it in terms of getting their civil rights. In other words, the point of having a family is to bring people together, to have somebody to rely on, and achieve reproduction within a unit that can sustain and nourish new life; but this does not seem to be the case in our modern times, as the meaning of the word ‘family’ has been emptied of its original value, from being a source of virtue to an outlet for vice; it has become an institution in and through which some people get more rights and privileges at the expense of others. Moreover, the term itself might be an obstacle for some people, who are already excluded from this institution due to sexual orientation, which is seen as a deficiency and inadequacy because of the rigidity of the institution. Some people are more comfortable associating with strangers who know exactly what their wishes are, rather than their own family members, who they are barely in contact with, except during emergencies in which family members come together as a result of
the fact that things are seriously wrong and decisions of life and death are being taken. Such examples are enshrined within the everyday practices of modern society: for example, health institutions reinforce the need for familial ties by allowing only family members to take decisions in connection to their patients. Thus, significant medical decisions are made in the name of ‘family’ while friends who might have been providing daily support are excluded. The point that I want to highlight throughout this chapter is that there are significant drawbacks to personal freedom and autonomy that arise out of the normative assumptions that are attendant upon familial or marital institutions. How these institutions actually work is as tools for inclusion and exclusion. The family does not, therefore, seem to be working towards guaranteeing full freedom for all of the individuals of which it is comprised.

The fragile, distorted memory of the progeny, the appropriation of traditional values into corrupted modern ones, the fragility of familial ties, and the corrupted, exploitative family setting in a restaurant scene are some of the variations found in Celebration for the term ‘family’. Richard’s ordering around of Sonia and the waiter is part of a wider system of hierarchical exploitation. He himself is being exploited by powerful figures who remain behind the scenes. The play therefore deliberately creates a distorted image of families from the inside, and reveals a world in which all talks, all relations, all behaviours towards each other, and even all ‘celebrations’ are mere transactions to enable another materialistic exploitation of the Other.


In this thesis I have conceptualised five different identity paradigms in Harold Pinter’s work. To fulfil this purpose, I have deployed different theories and methodologies to give further dimensions to each identity category examined. The concluding paragraphs that follow will briefly revisit and summarise the most significant arguments presented throughout the thesis. In moving through each category, I aim to underline the fact that the term ‘identity’ is both comprehensive and specific and it is the slipperiness of its markers that makes possible the subjugation of the Other. It is comprehensive in that I have developed it in different categories that touch on almost every aspect of life, and it is specific in the sense that any difference in our tendencies, behaviours, physical appearance, language, or even thinking may render us vulnerable to any form of totalitarian regime and power. The categories that I have developed touch upon three main paradigms of identity: (i) Memory, (ii) Language, and (iii) Marital Relations.

A) Memory

To prepare the ground for the theme of women’s subaltern position in Pinter’s dramas in my thesis, I have focused, in chapter one - gendered identity-, on the development of a woman’s identity under the shackles of patriarchy by analysing two of her manipulated agencies: corporeal being and memorial being. According to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, any human being cannot belong without having a valid corporeal being that enables him/her to belong to the present and be part of this world. Unfortunately, Pinter’s Deborah in *A Kind of Alaska*, who is not only a woman but a disabled woman, in the sense of not being able to bring into action either her body or memory, has failed to construct a valid identity as she is lacking the basic elements of belonging. To the question of how Pinter’s dialogic approach provokes awareness, on our part, of the social structures of oppression, Deborah’s character is a valid answer. One of the most

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important social structures of oppression is patriarchy, and male discourse is still considered more valid than female. The theme of disabled memory is further nuanced in the second chapter, which reveals another agency that empowers/disempowers the individual’s identity through their circumstances.

In chapter two-memorial identity, I have continued to analyse one of the most important tools through which, in my opinion, the identity of human beings could be subdued. The agency of memory is one of the most crucial and sensitive elements that Rebecca, in *Ashes to Ashes*, has lost control over. As a marooned woman, who can neither live in the present due to her disturbing past memories, nor identify completely with the past as she has not been part of it, yet carrying its guilt, Rebecca represents the ordeal of many people in her position. Devlin, her husband, nevertheless, is represented as a deviating or oppressive power in the play. This reveals another sensitive issue: the same totalitarian regimes that have deformed the memory of the likes of Rebecca, have, in a similar way, exploited the likes of Devlin, who can be seen as victims that once occupied the position of victimisers. Rebecca and Devlin stand as an excellent example of the evolution of social structures in which the agency of the individual could be a double-edged sword that empowers and disempowers at the same time. The theories on memory that I have deployed throughout the chapter reveal this critical point and provide various situations in which the memory of different nations has been scarred due to totalitarian measures and regimes.

B) Language

The dialogical paradigm through which the identity of the individual has been examined in both *One for the Road* and *Mountain Language* in chapter three-linguistic identity- revealed that linguistic manipulation is one of the major factors in creating hegemonic systems in society. By using the relevant theories of J.L. Austin and John Searle, and the pictorial theory of Ludwig Wittgenstein, we can see that both the meaning of the dialogue and the images it conjures have proved to be a unique subduing instrument to invade, break, and shatter the identity of the Other. The slippery regulations of oppressive regimes, who use the technique of dialogue and the
power of words to implement their Draconian measures, sometimes backfire on the oppressors themselves, as they find themselves on the verge of being destroyed by the same measures they used to subject the Other. It is through this very dialogic diversity of the language of the oppressor and the oppressed that the two-pronged aspect of language provides a strong statement on the politics of language that both breaks and builds the individual, depending on how it is applied. A good example of this is the interrogation scene, applied differently by Pinter to show the slipperiness of the oppressor’s regulations; the oppressor sometimes appears to be unsure of the validity of these regulations, which renders them totally irrelevant. By juxtaposing the same scenes in different functions and situations, I was able to draw a clear picture of how Pinter viewed the double standards of oppression agents that can take different shapes. Moreover, this offered the audience and my reader a chance to imagine being in different places to see both the temptations and the evils of power.

Suppressing the thoughts of the Other is the worst kind of hegemonic rule, to subdue the identity of people. This kind of hegemony is fully revealed in Pinter’s *Party Time* in chapter four-political identity, in which people are respected only when they show a remarkable capacity to kill, torture, and suppress the thought of others. The political identity of the individual is part and parcel of his linguistic one. Therefore, I set these two next to each other as a continuation of the manipulation of language, which reveals the individual’s thought only to be silenced by unknown functionaries, or functionaries that are sometimes known but too powerful to be confronted or pointed out. Throughout this chapter, I have highlighted the current political evils that shape the world according to their own strategic interests. The subdued character, Jimmy, in this unique Pinter play represents not only the marginalised Other, but the dead as well, because their voices are still waiting to be heard from their ashes to retell the story of their lives: lives that have been silenced for ever just because they stood against that powers that be. This chapter has offered a valid critique of the politics in Europe and, I would claim, almost everywhere in the world. It remains for us to determine: what is at stake here? To which I would answer: it is our identity. So, either stand up for our thoughts and opinions or join the crowd who are unwilling to solve problems without resorting to violence.
C) Marital Relations

Telling lies and cheating on each other is what Pinter’s *Betrayal* stages. In chapter five - sexual identity- the kind of cheating staged in the play is not the cheating that Pinter aims at. It is the betrayal of the trust and kinship between the two men in the play that Pinter is interested in, rather than the wife’s cheating on her husband with his best friend. By stretching this idea, I was able to highlight Pinter’s statements on male bonding across the world, a bond that serves as an agency for men to use against women to further subdue them on all levels. The marriage pattern that Pinter offered opened the door for me to elaborate on the current marriage patterns and how our sexual orientation, if different to the normative heterosexual model that is preferred by a majority of nations, belief groups and states, plays a big role in painting a whole different identity for us that will, as a result, prevent us from attaining our rights as citizens of this world. In this chapter, I was able to nuance different identity categories within the category of sexual relations with a major focus on male bonding. Although many people might not have been in this situation, the staging of the theme of betrayal highlights many other social ills that go to the heart of our social and marital lives; hence, it invites us to reflect upon and maybe reconsider some of them.

The three couples in Pinter’s *Celebration* continue the theme of sexual patterns and relations. In chapter six-marital and familial identity, I took the concept of identity to the heart of the nuclear family as a basic social unit and I provided a commentary on the transformation of social structures. I followed each situation and examined how the very same structure that helps to raise one individual demeans another, depending on position, social class, gender, and power. The themes of betrayal and cheating, although continuous, are given a completely different frame in which the cheating goes beyond sexual relations to penetrate the heart of family relations. (The term ‘family’ in this chapter draws upon all family relations, and not only the basic unit of parents and their children.) Our familial identities are thus deformed, and the very nuclear family that should provide a secure refuge is the place in which our deformation occurs.

By providing snapshots of every chapter, I wanted to reveal how my chapters formed a clear cycle to tie in the beginning of my thesis with its end, through answering the questions posed in the introduction. Developing the term ‘identity’ through these main
categories, I aimed to reveal that identity does not necessarily, as many would assume, mean belonging to a certain nationality, country, group, movement, place, political philosophy, sect, religion, ethnicity, race, or dogma, but it means being human. We therefore need, as Pinter mentioned in his Nobel prize speech of 2005, to activate our moral sensibility to be alert to whatever injustice occurs across the world.

Life is a big game, and unfortunately, it is for whoever plays that game successfully, rather than fairly, that the world functions. ‘Game’ is another running theme that I have employed in every case study to show that Pinter is, as Brigitte Gauthier describes him, ‘a true gambler’. He weaves his stories around sports, families, and historical events (such as Ashes to Ashes, in which he uses the background of many atrocities throughout history) to reveal our inner evils and guilt, and thus plays cleverly on our subconscious feelings.

The word ‘game’ leads me to peel yet another layer off one of the main misconceptions of the term ‘identity’, and thus the current confusion. If I try to pin down a fixed identity definition for anything in this world, I will definitely run out of words before reaching a valid one, because the word ‘identity’ is a very complex and confusing term, to the extent of creating a crisis on both personal and social levels. First of all, there are two paradigms in which the word ‘identity’ is relevant, and they are pretty much intertwined: (i) the personal, and (ii) the social. By personal, I mean our affiliations, families, names, ancestors, and the like, and by social, I mean our tendencies, interests, behaviours, principles, and beliefs. Both these paradigms open the door to others to label us with different kinds of names, adjectives that are linked either to who we are, or how we are. It is between these two constructions that the term ‘identity’ flourishes and sometimes gets confused with other things. To borrow Wittgenstein’s pictorial theory, suppose that one is talking about a specific table when others mistakenly believe one to be talking about a whole kitchen set of tables and chairs, assuming that the table must include chairs and vice versa. Or they would immediately imagine the chairs once one starts talking about tables. These abstract examples could be given more flesh in daily life practices, when people throw stereotypes at others on every occasion and in all aspects of life, to label those individuals or tinge their characters with whatever caricature they think is suitable for

\[1330\] Gauthier, p.219.
them, while the truth is a completely different story. This is exactly the ‘game’ that Pinter is trying to reveal to us. In Pinter’s plays, the truth is a chipped mirror that everybody sees from a different angle; hence the failure of his characters, by the end of almost every play, to enact their identities.

This failure is not simply a theatrical one, it is a real failure in our existences as human beings living in this vast world. The reason, in my opinion, is our inability to detach ourselves from our sense of belonging to certain categories in life. We take pride because we belong to a certain place, or because we support the political thought of a certain group, or because we are rich or of noble descent. We might even be proud of simpler things like our colour, race, or background. We never ask ourselves whether we achieved these things or got them by coincidence. We are just proud, whether we achieved the things we are proud of or not. We are comfortable on our own sofas watching news of killing, suffering, starvation, torture, and violence rampaging constantly in the world, while still proud of not being part of that suffering. This sense of both holding on strongly to a belonging that we unwillingly and effortlessly found ourselves part of, and at the same time abhorring the idea of belonging to any other social unit outside of our own is a direct reason why we fail over and again to enact or define any concept of identity.

To add to this failure is the language with which we deal with this very complex social construct of identity. In a world ironically connected by the blessing of technology, the language that we use for the individual has reduced the human entity to a bunch of numbers, hashtags, tweets, computerised profiles, social insurance numbers, IDs, and so on and so forth. But the reality, is none of these technologies is able to rid people of their real dilemmas, suffering, or stigmas—a theme that has been highlighted by bell hooks. Technology that was created to facilitate certain activities in life has become both the mask behind which we hide our evil intentions and a tool to twist the language of violence. Pinter referred to this kind of twisting of facts when he mentioned the replacement of the words ‘invasion of other countries’ by the words ‘lower intensity conflict’.1331 Twisting the facts through twisting language leads to the creation of another crack in the concept of our identities. It allows the powerful to have an advantage over disempowered people, hence creating a hierarchy of power in

1331 See Pinter’s Nobel Prize Speech.
which our social structure is turned into a ladder on which the superior stands at the top and the inferior at the bottom, as Pinter once dramatised in one of the scenes of *The Servant* (1963).

The majority of such disenfranchised people are women, to whom I have given a major focus in my thesis so as to shed light on their continuous suffering in different social contexts. Women, due to their gender roles/restrictions, are always the powerless, even when they are shown as powerful, independent, and free individuals. Women are still dismissed, made redundant, or denied a promotion in workplaces due to their biological structure and their body’s reproductive function, especially when they get pregnant. They are still denied equal pay to their male peers because they are assumed to have husbands who will definitely provide them with a secure living; therefore, it is believed, they do not need equal pay given that the male is the main provider and the woman’s work is a bonus. Women are stalked, battered, raped, tortured, and killed by males in different relationships, but in the end, they are asked to keep their complaints quiet to prevent embarrassment to the very institutions that are supposed to protect them. Women are thus the main victims, but the hierarchy goes on and on to include other marginalised individuals who could be anybody, men or women, who happen to lack certain tools to be equal to their powerful counterpart. They might lack enough resources, exposure to have their voices heard, or simply the power to stand up against their opponents.

The question of power will take me to another important question; what if somebody does have the power to stand up against those who want to strip him of it? From what perspective would the term ‘identity’ be seen? And would entrenching oneself in one’s own identity be an act of extremism and/or chauvinism? The answer to these questions, in my opinion, would be: no. Sometimes people, countries, places, or any other entities exposed to the threats of any geopolitical powers threatening to control, subdue, or invade them in order to take over certain benefits, need to take action by defending their identities, not on the basis of nationalism so much as on the basis of preventing any totalitarian, hegemonic powers from subverting their lands. Interferences of such kinds, based on terrorising others, despoiling their lands, and exploiting their riches will definitely need to be countered by defending the identity of
the land and people in terms of protecting one’s existence as a free individual, regardless of any belonging.

By juxtaposing these two different concepts of identity, (i) of depersonalising oneself from any belonging, and (ii) of sticking to one’s belonging to protect one’s freedom, I want to highlight that the concept includes the antinomy of exclusion and inclusion at the same time. This paradox does not necessarily mean that we should stick to one side of the meaning of the concept, but to be reasonable individuals with enough awareness and flexibility to know how to treat and read the word ‘identity’, in light of its contradictions, to protect what is more important: our humanity. And writing this thesis, as a personal statement derived from my own reading of Pinter’s plays, is, in my opinion, an act of contribution to this avail.

My future projects will try to find effects of such contradictions in an extension of my research in the concept of identity in areas where dictatorship has been deposed and a vacuum is left where secular and religious groups fight to fill the gap. This project aims to develop further the analytical strategies deployed in this dissertation in order to assess related topics. The challenges that individuals face in war zones change a lot of postulates and the balance of power, the ways in which individuals struggle for self-affirmation will alter due to the impact of different cultural dispositions. To this purpose, I aim to adapt Pinter’s plays and dramatic strategies to reflect on the socio-political situation in Arab countries in light of the continuous violence, and drastic social changes that came along with the mobocracy that ensued following the Arab spring.

The second part of this future project is to investigate the lives of Iraqi women in Hull in which the concept of identity still suffers from many misconceptions. Drawing on the insights of feminists theories of identity together with a philosophical approach on the concept of identity, this research examines the life and images of Iraqi women diaspora in the city of Hull, U.K. I approach the formation of the diasporic community in light of their present life in the city to measure the impact of the cultural resettlement on redefining their values in society. What are they still holding on to, and what have they changed to adapt to their new ‘homes’? Do they consider the U.K. as their permanent home or is it just a modus vivendi with the host country? What are the reasons that pushed them to leave home, and why did they choose the U.K. to
settle down in? Do those women use any strategies of Othering given the fact they come from different ethnic backgrounds? By taking a small slice of Iraqi society in Hull, I attempt to conceptualise the identities of those women in terms of their relationships, memories of their past, and the reality of their present in the City of Hull.

The project also aims to establish a research network of scholars dealing with such approaches to the topic, to organise colloquia and to publish the results of the study upon completion.
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Two visits have been made on May 26, and June 19, 2015 to the British Library during which I have listened to twenty-five records of Harold Pinter interviews. Therefore, Pinter’s opinions, and his comments on the politics of Europe for the period of 1957-2000 that I have expressed in this thesis are mainly derived from these records.