CHAPTER THREE

STRUGGLE BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE

Throughout its history, theatre has been a contentious space – one in which society has projected its anxieties, calming or fomenting crises, thus fostering progressive or reactionary alterations in the prevailing ideology. Changes in cultural attitudes have affected the nature of theatre, resulting in a continuing dialectical relationship between theatre and the society in which it operates. The theatre has also been a platform in which gender conflict stages itself, consciously or unconsciously. As Hanna Scolnicov puts it:

… the representation of the theatrical space within as the outdoors, the male space, lends itself naturally to a plot, the goal of which is man’s conquest of the house. Reversing the scene so that it represents the female indoors tends to change the drift of the action in the opposite direction, to woman’s struggle to sever her bonds and abandon the house. (8)

Thus theatre is essentially a public space, which is generally subject to masculine dominance. As a public arena, then, the stage has conventionally been a space in which male actors have performed under the aegis of male directors working with scripts written by male playwrights. Yet from Aeschylus to Arnold Wesker, the concerns dealt with on stage have not excluded gender. In exploring matters associated with their own identity, male playwrights and their characters have necessarily had to explore the nature of the other – the female.
Since World War II, gender identity and relations constitute a central and continuing preoccupation unparalleled in the history of theatre. The post-war period has been a time of great turmoil as regards gender identity and relations (though such times of turmoil recur periodically). Great strides have been taken over the past fifty years or so in ameliorating the most oppressive effects of a very longstanding patriarchal tradition. The absence and silence of female power has been shattered with the rise of feminism, the questioning of conventional gender roles and an almost riotous efflorescence of cultural – perhaps especially theatrical – output, which exposed patriarchy and celebrated challenges to its entrenched power.

The experience of working in industry and agriculture during the war years, and the new group identity that this engendered, transformed the outlook of many women who went through it. However, the very different ways in which World War II was experienced by women, on the one hand, and by men, on the other, would have militated against the expression of any very turbulent feminism in the immediate post-war era. For women had experienced the exhaustion and loss of war, without fully participating in it as men had done. Martin Pugh cites evidence of this difference: ‘Wartime surveys of morale showed women to be fairly consistently more dispirited and resigned than men’ (266). According to conventional wisdom, men were returning as heroes, ready to vote for a welfare-state paradise in pursuit of a brave new world. Women had gone through years of struggle to make ends meet in a wartime economy, holding families together while dealing with the fear of bombing, working a full week, and all the while enduring the fear of bereavement. Exhausted, many women, understandably, did not protest at the prospect of a return to a more normal, less stressful life. But the balance of power within the home had changed radically since the 1930s. Housewives of the late 1940s who had been part of an industrial workforce, had come to realize their own ability to be a breadwinner, and had experienced the
camaraderie of the workplace. The return to the domestic scene was clearly marked by those experiences. If this situation did not take the form of a public articulation of feminine discontent, it did result in a domestic atmosphere in which men began to feel that their former status was under threat.

Furthermore, those post-war years were infused with a general sense of disempowerment in society at large. The Labour victory of 1945 has often been attributed to the votes of returning soldiers, enthusiastic to establish a new society in which their voices would be heard. Instead, what they got was a welfare state that treated them as outsider rather than participants. Lynne Segal describes a feeling among men in the 1950s of ‘the system trying to trap, tame and emasculate men,’ and men ‘turn[ing] their anger against the ideals of hearth and home… against women, against the powerful mother in the home…with all the hatred and resentment they felt towards what they called “the establishment”’ (80). Indeed, the whole propaganda effort of the late 1940s to bring about an increased level of domesticity might be seen as an attempt to defuse the possibility of real socialism coming to the fore. These masculine anxieties, which were eventually given literary expression through the ‘angry young men’, had their roots in the presence of women at home – and now, to an increasing extent, in the workplace as well. Disillusion with public policy was also a factor here, and may have had a gendered component, as indicated, by the derogatory use of the expression ‘the nanny state’, which was particularly prominent from the mid-1960s onwards.

While these changes have been occurring in the theatre, the past fifty years have also seen profound changes in the scope and nature of debates about gender. The publication of the English translation of Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* in 1953 was a particularly significant event. For perhaps the first time in English, the notion of gender as a social
construct was promoted, bringing the entire question of gender identity more into the public domain than previously. While the extent to which de Beauvoir’s book directly influenced writing for the theatre is unclear, it nonetheless opened up a debate in which theatre came to play a major role.

Entwined with the discussion of gender was sexuality – a topic more and more openly debated in the theatre. This debate was partly a product of women’s consciousness-raising, a process which, arguably, had been catalyzed by the involvement of women in traditionally masculine areas of work during World War II. Increased awareness of the unfair constraints which women’s lives were subject to, naturally led to an attempt to reclaim female sexuality from patriarchal control.

One of several parallel phenomena that manifested itself in this cultural environment was that a new generation of men, too young to have attained a sense of fulfillment, glamour or heroism by participating in the war, and too hidebound to see the emergence of the questioning of conventional gender roles as anything other than a threat, found satisfaction in raging against what they saw as the dying of patriarchy’s light. Another factor may have been the impact of men returning at the end of the war to employment and home. Lynne Segal describes a ‘political campaign in the late 1940s to return women to the home and increase the population of Britain’ (80), and goes on to depict a Britain in which a stifling domesticity was both women and men.

Pinter perhaps represents a more individually theatrical tradition than Wesker, influenced by Beckett rather than Osborne, and achieving an idiosyncratic view of gender politics. Foucauldian power transactions fall precisely within the power play which has come to be regarded as characteristic of Pinter’s work.
In her book *The Pinter Ethic: The Erotic Aesthetic*, Penelope Prentice argues that Pinter’s plays fly in the face of the previously prevailing idea that humans are essentially powerless beings awaiting their fate (xvii). Thus the theme of the paralysis of the human psyche, widely discussed in modernist literature, is now attacked with Pinter’s recurring power plays between individuals (xviii). Power, where it comes from and how it is gained, is essentially Pinter’s most prominent subject. When this war of power is fought between individuals of different gender, the fight inevitably becomes sexual and political at the same time.

Harold Pinter’s sexual politics is a widely discussed subject and for good reason since he is both controversial and ambiguous in his sexual politics as in other aspects of his work. Looking through his body of work there are two obvious recurring themes concerning sexual politics; the woman as the alien other and the idolization of male bonding. From his novel *The Dwarfs*, written early in his career, (begun in 1952), which focused on the relationship between three men and one woman, the theme of the duality of the woman emerged. This dual portrait usually includes one role of the woman being or alluding to that of the prostitute, such as Virginia in *The Dwarfs*. Another recurring female portrait is that of the oppressive mother figure such as Meg in *The Birthday Party* and Albert’s mother in *A Night Out*. The latter group is usually less sympathetic and more alien than the whore, even in the earlier plays when the whore lacks the dignity and sophistication of later plays. In *A Night Out*, written in 1959, those characters are juxtaposed against Albert, who gains the audience’s sympathy in dialogues with his mother due to her extremely manipulating and unappealing nature. But with his violent and anti-social behavior, in his dialogue with the more sympathetic whore, Albert is portrayed as a dangerous and unpredictable character. In their struggle to overpower the woman, the men are rendered vulnerable and powerless. Albert in
this case is a grown up man, feebly attempting to free himself from his mother’s oppression, but is immature enough to resort to verbal and physical abuse. During the early 1960s, Pinter further explored the duality of the woman in his plays, and all of the six plays written from 1960-64 concern this split female character in one way or another. That is not to say that this is the only type of female character created by Pinter in this period, but it is undeniably a theme belonging to this decade and which occurs in very similar form again and again (Billington 135).

According to Elizabeth Sakellaridou in her book *Pinter’s Female Portraits*, there is an obvious tendency in Pinter’s men to view the female as threatening or malevolent, as beings they must reject and be rid of from their social surroundings (18). This is evident in the ongoing struggle of men and women in his plays and the constant verbal assaults to gain power and victory over the other. The desire for power comes from the male characters and the battle is usually initiated by them. Although their women counterparts enter into these battles, they have no desire for power and do not seem to experience lack of it. They are the enigma that the men try to resolve. Their role in the life of men and their part within the patriarchy is what needs to be asserted and even though their roles are not necessarily clearer by the end of the play, it is evident that the women are empowered to assign their own roles, whatever those roles may be. Their personal strength and confidence will ensure them their independence.

The 1960s witnessed a rise of feminism around the world, culminating in what is usually called the second wave of feminism (“women’s movement”). Women’s rights and social standing became a hot topic of discussion during this time. The accepted identity of the 1950s housewife underwent ideological attacks and the attitude towards women was
subsequently undergoing radical change (Nicholson 1-2). The idea of a clearly defined role of the woman within the home was torn down and new roles were coming into existence. If the ideal woman wasn’t a dedicated housewife with a calling limited to housekeeping and raising children, then who was she? Considering the questions that surfaced due to this upsurge of feminism, the new role of woman seems a natural topic for a contemporary playwright to explore. Or as Linda Nicholson put it in her book *The Second Wave* “Something happened in the 1960s in ways of thinking about gender that continues to shape public and private life” (1). The ’60s and ’70s were also a time that saw revisions of British legislation concerning the social status of women from being protective to permissive (Storry and Childs 121). Thus laws such as the Divorce Reform Act, Equal Pay and the Sex Discrimination Act were all passed during this time (Storry and Childs 131). The literal and symbolic role of women in Pinter’s plays of the ’60s often relates closely to the male characters’ attempts to harmonize with the image of ideal woman. The male struggle to distinguish the lustful mistress from the respectable housewife was a recurring theme during this time.

The fact that Pinter chose to explore men’s attempts towards harmonizing the multiple identities of women characters may have been due to a more personal issue in his life (Billington 133). Many have pondered over the importance of their marriage on his writings and the relevance of his wife at the time, Vivien Merchant, the actress, being typecast as the typical Pinter-female. The writer has firmly denied any link between these elements on his work but it is hard to overlook the fact that a married playwright continuously wrote plays where an attempt is made to explore the duality of the woman within a domestic setting, and that these parts all seemed tailored for Merchant. The decline in their marriage also coincides with the rise in this exploration of female characters in Pinter’s plays and in 1962, the same year that he wrote *The Lover*, Pinter began an affair with another woman (Billington 133).
Contemporary culture of the 1960s was relatively focused in the feminist zeitgeist of its time and brought up numerous valid questions on the topic of equal rights. Socio-political work, aimed at stirring up a discussion or looking at things in a new perspective usually comes across as shocking. But what seemed shocking in the 1960s rarely retains that characteristic half a century later. Why then do Pinter’s almost fifty year old plays about gender power struggles and women’s roles, still leave audiences bewildered and uncomfortable and even more often shocked and outraged? It seems to be the moral and ethical ambiguity with which he explores these themes. Although he refrains from being judgmental about his characters, they are often engaged in socially unacceptable activities. Pinter seems to stroll through the social minefield of domestic violence, criminal behavior, verbal abuse and promiscuity without the pre-existent ethical ruler of his time. After observing something morally wrong and extremely uncomfortable, the audience is never afforded the pleasure of condemnation and punishment of the characters involved. Instead, many turn to the playwright that offered such a vague portrayal of unacceptable activity with their need for a resolution and assertion of moral values. Some even went so far as to write about Pinter’s personal morals, such as historian Geoffrey Alderman in his editorial for Current View Point:

Whatever his merit as a writer, actor and director, on an ethical plane Harold Pinter seems to me to have been intensely flawed, and his moral compass deeply fractured. For the sake of posterity someone had better say this, and if no-one else will, then it had better be me. (Alderman)

Until fairly late in his career, Pinter claimed his plays were not political and that they had no embedded message for the masses (Pinter Plays 2 ix-x). In an interview with Mireia
Aragay and Ramon Simon in 1996 he revised this assertion and stated that his early plays might have had a political message but added that it was never his initial aim or intention (90-93). Intentional or not, they do provoke audiences to think about their own moral judgments and the need for their own moral clarity.

In the aforementioned interview, Pinter was asked about the recurring characters in his plays where his men are brutal and violent and the women are enigmatic and mysterious. Asked if they were not rather stereotypical he replied in true Pinteresque fashion, “Possibly” (93). He then went on to claim that as patronizing as it might sound, he believed women to be created in better form than men but that he did not sentimentalize them for it, adding “I think women are very tough” (94). After acknowledging the fact that women had exercised brutality in the German camps for example, he then said: “Nevertheless, 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” (94).

He thus admits to his own benevolence towards women and even to favoring them in his writing. For a writer who victimizes his women characters and subjects them to domestic violence and brutality in play after play this is a very insightful statement. His view of women as tough might also explain why they are subjected to torment or struggles of various kinds yet usually prevail and come out victorious.

In an interview with Lawrence M. Bensky in 1966 Pinter stated that curtain lines were very important to him and stressed the importance of writing them properly (57). His plays like Night School, The Lover and The Homecoming award the male characters the curtain lines and all three plays give them much weight in that final moment of the play. Night School ends with Walter’s words “That’s what it looks like” ambiguously accepting that
Sally is gone for good (Pinter Plays 2 221). *The Lover* ends with Richard’s unforgettable words “You lovely whore” framing in the idea that Richard is unable to accept his wife as a sexually liberated being (Pinter Plays 2 184). *The Homecoming* ends with Max’s pathetic rambling culminating in him asking Ruth to kiss him, leaving no doubt as to who is in complete control and power at the end of that play. The fact that these plays end with the words of the male characters is further evidence that the battle for power belongs to them, even though they have all seemingly lost it in the end.

Michael Billington goes as far as to call Pinter a feminist in his analysis of *Night School*, *The Lover* and *The Homecoming* in his biography on Pinter. He claims that *Night School* is more of “a mixture of sexual fantasy and feminist statement” than “Freudian battle” (136-137). Where *The Lover* is concerned, Billington claims Pinter “shows himself to be an instinctive feminist avant la lettre” (143). When it comes to *The Homecoming* Billington says “I see the *Homecoming* as an implicitly feminist play” which is immediately followed by the acknowledgement of other possible interpretations, indicating that this statement is rather provocative which it indeed is, seeing as a feminist reading of Pinter would be considered impossible by many (175). There is something very intriguing about a playwright who can be called both a feminist and a misogynist by people reading and analyzing the same play. To label Pinter a feminist through the reading of his ’60s plays is valid but it is a line of interpretation that works best within the limits of that decade. The woman in his previous plays was not as comfortable in her dichotomy, and neither did she possess the sophistication of the woman character of the ’60s and did not yield her power as easily. She was weaker and more of an outcast and the portrayal of an oppressive mother figure was much more common. Although Pinter would develop his woman characters further and beyond fundamental dichotomy in plays like *Old Times* in the ’70s and *A Kind of Alaska* in the ’80s which view
the woman very sympathetically, he would move to the area of political plays like *One for the Road, Mountain Language* and *Ashes to Ashes* introducing victimization and torture on a more general basis than his previous domestic arena.

**The Homecoming**

*The Homecoming*, one of the most controversial plays written by Harold Pinter, was first presented by the Royal Shakespeare Co. at the Aldwych Theatre on June 3, 1965, directed by Peter Hall. Since its premiere the play drew attention of the critics for its controversial theme and treatment of the subject matter that left audiences in a state of shock. This new enigmatic parable has been apparently shocking owing to the moral vacuum it maintained all along, earning notoriety for its explicit depiction of an amoral claustrophobic family, and also for its portrayal of the female character Ruth who seems absurdly transformed into a professional whore. The reaction of the characters to one another is often strangely and inexplicably casual. The play has unexpected turns and surprises bearing a close connection to the subconscious thoughts and dreams where suppressed desires and fear are lodged. Even Harold Hobson found Pinter “misleadingly clever” and was “troubled by the complete absence … of any moral comment whatsoever” (63). Ironically, Hobson’s prophecy, made in 1958 after the initial disaster of *The Birthday Party*, again proved to be correct because *The Homecoming* also showed Pinter as possessing “the most original, disturbing and arresting talent” (Hobson 63) in the field of theatre.

Despite the wide range of negative criticism was launched on the play, terming it from “pornographic” to “vile and irresponsible art”, many critics have showered accolades for this play for its brilliant and innovative treatment and it remains the most popular work in the canon. Steven Gale calls it Pinter’s “most representative, his best, and his most important
drama” (136). The Homecoming also represents the culmination of the phase in Pinter’s writing only, finally properly exorcised with Old Times, in which he had been concerned with territorial struggles, undefinable external menace and male anxiety in confrontation with femininity. Mark Taylor Batty in his book Harold Pinter comments on the play:

An audacious play that never ceases to shock audiences, The Homecoming is considered one of Pinter’s finest. Though the play does not address sexual politics from any moral standpoint, it generates all of its drama by examining the interaction of a set of established attitudes to women with a woman who challenges those attitudes by taking control of the factors (male physical and emotional needs) which inform them. (39).

This is the first of Pinter’s plays where a woman, initially a subservient character, is attacked from all sides, becomes dominant and wins something positive—her freedom and power. The play remains fascinating particularly regarding the relationship between power and identity, as characters struggle to gain authority within the family structure. One front of the war is fought between the men, but the key conflict is between these men and the lone woman who invades their home.

The dramatic action of The Homecoming revolves around Teddy, a university professor working in America, who returns home with his wife of five years to his working class North London family. As his wife Ruth, a native of London, returns, she begins to rediscover herself, her sexuality, and her relationship to the world. Teddy’s two brothers, Lenny and Joey still live with their father Max and their Uncle Sam. Their mother Jessie has passed away. As Teddy and Ruth become more integrated in their surroundings, the audience is slowly made aware of a very complex, sex game going on with the couple. Not only the
complex sex game but the play also revolves around the game of power and dominance where each character tries to wield their power over other characters. This game of power and dominance is not only between male and female but also among the male characters. From the very beginning of the play this conflict for the dominance of the power is visible between male characters and later on this power struggle becomes more prominent and direct between male and female after the arrival of Ruth in the family.

Before the arrival of Teddy and Ruth, the *mise en scène* is set with Max half demented, is rummaging about, asking in a hostile manner what Lenny, who is reading the newspaper, has done with the scissors. The antagonism between father and son is apparent from the very first scene. The familiar Pinteresque technique of unanswered, then repeated questions separated by pauses soon reveal that Max is the weaker figure in the play. He asks for a cigarette, only to be ignored, then takes out a cigarette from his own pocket. Max, in his decrepit state, is still trying to wield his patriarchal power. Perhaps Max’s question is a cry for attention or the act of a father seeking to ensure that his son continues to follow his orders. Lenny, though in forced subservience to Max, wields the financial power within the family with his “career” as a pimp. He actually refuses to be submissive and tries to establish his dominance with brief, sharp replies. Max bullies and threatens, but his stick is a cruel reminder of his age and fading masculine authority. As he himself admits, “I’m getting old, my word of honour.” (Pinter Plays 3 16). Thus from the very beginning the family is shown in disorder where the control of power becomes the main motive.

Max is the symbol of patriarchy in the play. His reminiscences show that his experiences since his early childhood shaped him to assume the role of a gendered male. His
early remembrance of his father attests to the traumatic nature of his initiation into the mysteries of manhood:

Our father! I remember him. Don't worry. You kid yourself. He used to come over to me and look down at me. My old man did. He'd bend right over me, then he'd pick me up. I was only that big. Then he'd dandle me. Give me the bottle. Wipe me clean. Give me a smile. Pat me on the bum. Pass me around, pass me from hand to hand. Toss me up in the air. Catch me coming down. I remember my father. (Pinter Plays 3 27)

What Max stresses in his reminiscence is how his relationship with his father was little more than a constant exercise in life's lessons and schooling in the art of becoming a masculine subject. The lesson in this particular instance is based on the masculine assumption that dependency of any kind, but most acutely bodily dependency, is associated with helplessness and vulnerability and a loss of control. Thus, in Max's remembrance of his father, we find his trauma coded in his narrative in terms of a series of contrasts: the contrast between the size of the man and the size of the child ("I was only that big"); between the purposeful activity of the man and the passivity of the boy ("He'd bend right over me, then he'd pick me up"); and between the man's status as a masculine subject and the child's status as the object of his attention/intentions ("He used to come over to me and look down at me").

Most significantly, however, we find the contrast between the father's apparent gentle affection for his son and what seems to be his callous indifference to his son's security and safety. One moment, the father showers his child with attention and affection: "Then he'd dandle me. Give me the bottle. Wipe me clean. Give me a smile. Pat me on the bum." (Pinter Plays 3 27). In the next instant, however, the young Max finds himself helplessly and
powerlessly passed around from "hand to hand" and then unceremoniously tossed into the air and then caught at the last possible moment. Thus, his childish comfort in knowing that his father is there to handle his physical and emotional needs is suddenly challenged by the realization that his need and dependency leaves him at the mercy of people and circumstances. Bodily comfort gives way to a fear of its implications, a lesson learnt rather terrifyingly by his inability to do anything to help himself in the face of other peoples' ability to overpower him physically. Thus, like other Pinter males, the site of wound is Max’s body, because in it he reads his own contingency and futility. Here he recalls his victimization at the hands of his father and how powerless he felt as a young child trapped in the infirmity of his own skin, so helpless and dependent, when handled in such a forceful and frightening way.

Max never forgot this experience and the understanding it gave him about his need to rise above a childlike state of physical and emotional dependency, a fact that is evident in his association with the family business which dealt, symbolically enough, with the butchering of dead animals. Critics have often commented on *The Homecoming*'s animal imagery. According to Margaret Croyden, "The family's continual reference to animals confirms their primitive world view, and primitive self-image" (46). Croyden goes on to suggest that: "The homecoming [the event in the play] is a gathering of the clan to settle old differences, and that the male community is analogous "to the ancient tribe - symbol of rejuvenated animality" (49). Bernard Dukore suggests that:

While *The Homecoming* dramatizes a struggle for power and for sexual mastery in what might be called a "civilized jungle," the adjective "civilized" does not wholly modify the noun's implication of primitive and elemental
urges-urges that underlie the characters' behavior. The "natural" state, as opposed to the "civilized" state, is emphasized by references to animals. (109)

What these critics have overlooked, however, is the link between these animal images, Max's chosen profession, and the male characters' fear of the body in the play and their corresponding need to rise above their own animal (read physical) natures. Max makes two pertinent references to his occupation as a butcher. The first occurs in the First Act when he is engaged in the task of berating his brother Sam's inefficiency in order to show the difference between their nature and personality:

What kind of a son were you, you wet wick? You spent half your time doing crossword puzzles! We took you into the butcher shop, you couldn't even sweep the dust off the floor. Well, I'll tell you one thing. I respected my father not only as a man but as a number one butcher! And to prove it I followed him into the shop. I learned to carve the carcass at his knee. I commemorated his name in blood. (Pinter Plays 3 47)

Max alludes a second time to his career as a butcher in the Second Act. Significantly, his decision to raise this subject is again a response to his need to denigrate his brother's manhood, this time in front of Ruth, and corresponds with his need to celebrate the legendary nature of his own: "I worked as a butcher all my life, using the chopper and the slab, the slab, you know what I mean, the chopper and the slab" (Pinter Plays 3 55).

Max's decision to make a career as a butcher is a symbolic extension of his masculine project. It represents his commitment to rise above his physical and emotional dependencies. In the first reference, he records with reverence entering behind his father (number one
butcher cum high priest of the sacrificial rites of masculinity) as an initiate into his father's butcher shop (temple). Here young Max learned how to "carve the carcass at his knee." In the symbolic schema of this masculine rite of passage the "carcass" represents at once the dead animal before him and the animalistic nature of human beings that he was learning at the time to kill and carve up in response to his new calling. In the second reference, Max's masculine triumph over death is more violently represented in his image of "the chopper" which possesses the ability to cut through the flesh and bone before it on "the slab." In this instance, the combination of the chopper (an image of masculine power) with the slab (an image of death) alludes to the manner in which all who did not live up to his standards of masculinity were metaphorically slaughtered and then cut up into pieces by him with an instrument of his own masculine power. In other words, those who retained their humanity and who happened to get in his way were disposed of with the same cool detachment and efficiency with which he carved up their animal counterparts in the butcher shop.

The two previous examples, the first, in which Max learned the art of immunizing himself emotionally and physically against the world, and the second, in which he describes how he learned his lessons and put them into practice, are summed up rather nicely in Max's remembrance of MacGregor at the beginning of the play. After an amusing yet threatening conflict over scissors and paper, Max tries to assert his strength and power as a 'tearaway' by reflecting on his past exploits with Macgregor:

MAX: I used to knock about with a man called MacGregor. I called him Mac.

You remember Mac? Eh?

Pause.
Huhh! We were two of the most hated men in the West End of London, I tell you, I still got the scars. We'd walk into a place, the whole room'd stand up, they'd make way to let you pass. You never heard such silence. (Pinter *Plays* 3 16)

As fully pledged members of the masculine community, Mac and Max drank and fought their way to a demi-god status in the outside world as men who knew their turf and whose turf was well known and never trespassed on by lesser men. Together they accepted and brandished their scars as testaments to their fearlessness and invincibility: that is, as signs of their ability to rise above the heartaches and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to. Max describes a past in which he and Mac gained respect for the brute force they could wield over others. He prides himself on the scars he carries into the present as proof of his virility. Max defines and defends himself by means of the past. His memory of Mac, however, starts a train of recollections of Mac’s fondness for Jessie, which in turn develops into a coarse and negative comment about his dead wife. At the end of this narrative there is a hint about the clandestine liaisons between Mac and Jessie and the nonchalant Lenny listens to insults about his mother.

As evidenced in Pete's relationship with Virginia, Bert's with Rose, and Edward's with Flora, every masculine subject must have his women/wise suitably adjusted and adapted; and it was in keeping with this idea that Max found and married Jessie, who gave him three sons, Teddy, Lenny, Joey. As just evidenced, a number of Max's narratives are concerned with chronicling the formation and the history of his masculine self. A number of additional narratives are devoted to representing the story of his life with Jessie. One such narrative is at the beginning of the Second Act. Having just completed a paean to his dead wife, a woman
who, he claims, possessed "a will of iron, a heart of gold, and a mind" (Pinter *Plays 3* 54), Max immediately launches into an account of his "negotiations with a top class group of butchers with continental connections" (Pinter *Plays 3* 54):

MAX: I was going into association with them. I remember the night I came home, I kept quiet. First of all I gave Lenny a bath, then Teddy a bath, then Joey a bath. What fun we used to have in the bath, eh, boys? Then I came downstairs and I made Jessie put her feet up on the pouffe – what happened to that pouffe, I haven't seen it for years – she put her feet up on the pouffe and I said to her, Jessie, I think our ship is going to come home, I'm going to treat you to a couple of items, I'm going to buy you a dress in pale corded blue silk, heavily encrusted in pearls, and for casual wear, a pair of pantaloons in lilac flowered taffeta. Then I gave her a drop of cherry brandy. I remember the boys came down, in their pyjamas, all their hair shining, their faces pink, it was before they started shaving, and they knelt down at our feet, Jessie's and mine. (Pinter *Plays 3* 54)

Whether or not any part of this account of the past is true - the level of idealization in it strongly suggests that it is not - is unimportant. What is significant, however, is the light that Max's masculine fantasy sheds on his socially acquired ideology of the home as the bastion of male. Similar to the relationship shared by Bert and Rose in *The Room*, Max is the one who has the responsibility to deal with the world, a task that he seems cut out for, as suggested by his rubbing shoulders "with a top-class group of butchers" with whom he planned to go "into association." Max's freedom of movement, his ability to travel all over the country, is contrasted with Jessie's lack of mobility within the parameters of Max's house. In
Pinter’s world houses, and the rooms within them, are coded masculine. In short, they represent in architectural terms the masculine rage for order and permanence writ large inside (psyche) and outside (society) the male mind in defiance of the physical facts of life and death. In this respect, Max's image of his wife's permanent positioning within the precincts of his house is intimately connected with the way in which he sees his wife and his children reinforcing his vision of how he wants the world to be. Thus, Jessie and the three kids in his narrative are like mirrors for him, in which he can see himself safely and comfortably in accordance with his image of the magically powerful and invulnerable man he wants to be.

In his next narrative, Max continues to contrast Lenny’s “paper” knowledge of the horse races to his own “instinctive understanding of animals”:

He talks to me about horses. You only read their names in the papers. But I’ve stroked their manes, I’ve held them, I’ve calmed them down before a big race. I was the one they used to call for. Max, they’d say, there’s a horse here, he’s highly strung, you’re the only man on the course who can calm him. It was true. I had a … I had an instinctive understanding of animals. I should have been a trainer. Many times I was offered the job—you know, a proper post, by the Duke of … I forget his name … one of the Dukes. But I had family obligations, my family needed me at home.

Pause.

The times I’ve watched those animals thundering past the post. What an experience. Mind you, I didn’t lose, I made a few bob out of it, and you know why? Because I always had the smell of a good horse. I could smell him. And not only the colts but the fillies. Because the fillies are more highly strung than
the colts, they’re more vulnerable, did you know that? No, what do you know?
Nothing. But I was always able to tell you a good filly by one particular trick.
I’d look her in the eye. You see? I’d stand in front of her and look her straight
in the eye, it was a kind of hypnotism, and by the look deep down in her eye I
could tell whether she was a stayer or not. It was a gift. I had a gift.

Pause.

And he talks to me about horses. (Pinter Plays 3 18)

Lenny’s present experiences of betting on the horses is perceived as nothing
compared to Max’s “open-air life” of the past on which he carried the horses as though they
were his children. Yet Max also expresses an unfulfilled wish to become a trainer, a position
of dominance and command. He blames his family and his domestic obligations for
preventing him from taking such a job. Reminded of his concessions to the “soft side” of his
life, Max now emphasizes the power and control he asserted over the horses, especially the
fillies. Ironically, his ability to recognize a filly as a “stayer” or not did not carry over to his
relationship with his wife, Jessie. The use of the word “trick” also implies prostitution and
this usage reveals Max’s attitude towards women. Lenny’s only response to Max’s potential
as a trainer is his mockery of his father’s cooking as though he were “cooking for a lot of
dogs”( Pinter Plays 3 19). This is one of Lenny’s assaults on his father’s masculinity in the
absence of his mother Jessie.

Max's tendency is to shift between his need to proclaim his status as a man and to
punish himself for failing to live up to his own manly standards. Therefore, his speech
alternates uneasily between a celebration of his greatest masculine triumphs and his greatest
masculine failure that is his inability to keep Jessie in her gendered place. In keeping with his
masculine persona, he holds and grips, points and employs his walking stick as a weapon. Through it he still continues to wage war on the body, for there is no place in the masculine world of this house for any sign of fleshly weakness. His message is clear: avoid the skin, avoid the stick, and avoid the pain. Max's stick, then, is a vestigial sign of his masculine authority that he brandishes as his chosen method of intimidation. That he uses it to intimidate his grown up sons into following his command with respect to the lessons he taught them years before is suggested by Lenny's derisive reaction to his father's attempt to threaten him. When Lenny questions Max’s cooking, satirizing his father's role as the woman of the house, and when Max talks about physical retaliation, Lenny mocks at the feebleness of his threat:

LENNY: You'll go before me, Dad, if you talk to me in that tone of voice.

MAX: Will I, you bitch?

MAX grips his stick.

Lenny: Oh, Daddy, you’re not going to use your stick on me, are you? Eh?
Don’t use your stick on me Daddy. No, please. It wasn’t my fault, it was one of the others. I haven’t done anything wrong, Dad, honest. Don’t clout me with that stick, Dad.

Silence.

MAX sits hunched. (Pinter Plays 3 19).

Lenny mimics what must have been the cries of fear he uttered when he was younger and suffered Max’s beating him with that stick. Now Lenny is dominant, and like a younger primate standing over a defeated older male, he revels in power. Max’s only response is silence. The final stage direction here serves as a good segue into the second way in which
Max's stick does not resonate in the play. Max's attempt to discipline and punish Lenny for his insubordination culminates in his subsequent disempowerment as a man and as a father.

It becomes apparent that Max functions as the patriarch symbolically. Actually he is the weaker figure. He is forced to assume the duties of the woman in the house and is sexually exhausted. Max’s counterbalance is his asexual brother Sam, who functions as a stoic non-entity within the household. Sam is both the chauffeur for the family’s prostitution business and he also acts as the family’s moral center. He is the weakest member in the family structure. Also, he exhibits no outward sexuality and is even assaulted verbally by Max:

When you find the right girl, Sam, let your family know, don’t forget we’ll give you a number one send-off, I promise you. You can bring her here, she can keep us all happy. We’d take it in turns to give her a walk around the park.

(Pinter Plays 3 23)

In this dialogue, Max is asserting the family’s pecking order over Sam, who is the character with the least sexual energy. Sam’s comments about “getting a bit peckish” (Pinter Plays 3 23) refer not just to himself physically in regards to his hunger and irritation, but to the state of the family and his place in it. The family is waiting desperately for a change in the power structure. Sam cannot compete in the game of “take the piss” with the other dominant males. Sam is “a childless bachelor, outside the squabble for social dominance. In social units throughout the animal kingdom, a male who does not father children forfeits his most fundamental masculine prerogative, and such creatures are outcasts. So too, is Sam mocked by the others for his noncombatant status” (Cahn 57).
Moreover, like Max, he exhibits the same tendency to reenact his role in the family. Sam's masculine identity is directly connected to his job as a chauffeur. Driving is the means through which Sam attempts to forge a prosthetic relationship with the world. In this respect, his situation is quite akin to Bert's in *The Room*. In that play an essential part of Bert's masculine character was forged through the relationship that he shared with his van, with his ability to look after it and to drive it and himself to the absolute limit. What is of further interest in terms of Sam's connection with Bert is the extent to which Bert's driving is linked to his sexual relationship - perhaps, more correctly, his seeming lack of a sexual relationship with his wife, Rose. In other words, one reading of Bert's relationship with his van is to suggest that he has tried to make up for his sexual, hence bodily, inadequacies (impotence) in the art and the act of driving. Indeed, Kidd's description of Bert's masterful handling of his vehicle, "Yes, I was hearing you go off, when was it, the other morning, yes. Very smooth. I can tell a good gear change" (Pinter *Plays 1* 91), serves to reinforce this interpretation if we equate "go off” with orgasm. In much the same manner, Sam equates his masculine virility with the act of driving:

SAM: After all, I'm experienced. I was driving a dust cart at the age of nineteen. Then I was in long distance haulage. I had ten years as a taxi driver and I've had five years as a private chauffeur.

To which Max ironically responds:

MAX. It's funny you never got married, isn't it? A man with all your gifts.

*Pause.*

Isn't it? A man like you. (Pinter *Plays 3* 22)
Max discerns that Sam's driving is linked to an urgent need to establish his masculine status, and that the urgency suggests Sam's sexual impotence. Indeed, it is quite possible to read Sam's vehicle as a phallic, armor-plated extension of his weak and vulnerable body, in which he penetrates the world with control and ease and power. Thus, Sam's need to constantly announce that he is "... the best chauffeur in the firm" (Pinter Plays 3 21) is a sign of his need to compensate for his own creaturely limitations in the best tradition of Pinter males.

Joey, the youngest son who works as a demolition man during the day and trains to be a boxer at night, is physically the strongest in the household, but shows a boyish, almost tender side throughout the play. He has almost an unformed, golem like quality, and is somewhat slow of speech. Joey gains power in the family through his brute strength and money making potential as a demolition man, but Max keeps him in his place by treating him like a child, by denying his full sexual growth. Joey has a virginal quality, even though he may have had sexual intercourse. Throughout this play, the absence of Jessie weighs on the family, especially for Joey who has had no mother figure. As Joey enters he asks for food, which shows an animalistic trait. Even Max draws attention to this, “They walk in here every time of the day and night like bloody animals. Go and find yourself a mother” (Pinter Plays 3 24).

Indeed references to animals dominate the language of the play as a consequence of which there is an ever present irony built on the contrast between images of familial affection and animal imagery. For example, Lenny taunts the feminized role of his father: “What the boys want, Dad, is your special brand of cooking, Dad. That’s what the boys look forward to. The special understanding of food, you know, that you’ve got.” (Pinter Plays 3 25)
Max’s resistance to the label “Dad” (as if he is ashamed of being a parent) and his anger imply that he is uncertain that he is their true father. This suspicion becomes clear when Sam comments about his escorting Jessie: “You wouldn’t have trusted any of your other brothers. You wouldn’t have trusted Mac, would you? But you trusted me, I want to remind you.” (Pinter Plays 3 26)

Further Sam adds: “Mind you, he was a good friend of yours.” (26.) Perhaps Sam wants to imply that Max and Mac share a common thing, which is just not the similarity of name, but the affection of Jessie. The scene also clarifies Max’s resentment of Joey:

I’ll tell you what you’ve got to do. What you’ve got to do is you’ve got to learn how to defend yourself and you’ve got to learn how to attack. That’s your only trouble as a boxer. You don’t know how to defend yourself, and you don’t know how to attack. (Pinter Plays 3 25)

The derogation of Joey’s skills hints at the frustration of an old man who has lost his youthful vigor and is reduced to mocking at the efforts of others. Max regards his son's attempt to carry favor as a sign of Joey's continuing weakness. His constant repetition of the phrase "you've got to" is at once suggesting that Joey is still too sensitive, too yielding and uncertain, and that he still has lots of work to do if he wants to become a full-fledged member of this masculine household and that he needs to get a move on. Joey leaves this scene like a wounded little child whose father has just ridiculed his attempt to show him what he can do. Max’s derogatory remark has still another purpose. Max wants to remind his sons that they are still dependent on him. Like Pinter’s smothering mother figure, he wants to keep his sons as children to maintain his dominant position in the family. And in some ways he succeeds in
keeping them as his children despite the fact that they are all grown up men. Max’s contempt for Sam also serves a similar end: to keep Sam in a subordinate position.

In regard to the missing mother figure and the anxiety within the remaining male members of the family, the play also seems to mirror archetypes such as that of Oedipus the King, with the consciousness of that character inherent in all the three sons and including the father. Marc Silverstein says in his book *Harold Pinter and the Language of Cultural Power*:

While the play clearly manifests Oedipal tensions, I would argue that these tensions indicate a scenario more Lacanian than Freudian. Lacan’s conceptualization of the Oedipus complex emphasizes the family’s status as a network of symbolic relations that must generate appropriate subjects to occupy the positions these relations designate, and thus provides an useful theoretical lens through which to view *The Homecoming*. The complexities of the Lacanian Oedipal scenario demand an excursus into the realm of theory that, while somewhat lengthy, will help clarify Jessie’s role in the crisis of family structure Pinter dramatizes.

For Lacan, “father” and “mother” are signifying spaces, symbolic positions that function as linguistic categories, drawing their meaning from the play of difference that defines their relationship within the closed signifying system formed by the family. The mother’s recognition of the father’s word promotes the elaboration of difference within the family. Recognizing the father’s discursive power, the mother proclaims her own inadequacy—her “lack” thus defines his “potency,” and his “potency” constitutes bother her necessary “lack” and her desire for plentitude that will complete it. (88-89)
Through the non-realism of the stage, Pinter sets the scene for a ritual in which a family of psychically depleted men gain power (or in Sam and Max’s case, wither away) with Ruth as a surrogate mother-figure, who through her own ritualized initiation into the role of the goddess, gains her signified potency as the ancient archetype of Lilith. Silverstein asserts that the Lacanian Oedipal drives are a subconscious construct of every family, that they are natural, and that they are perfectly illustrated in each character and their relationships to women. Here, Pinter makes tangible in the stage reality and the characters, the subconscious, and much of this is what drives the play’s heightened realism that borders on the surreal. This drama’s absent character is Jessie, who defines herself and her overbearing presence in Max’s dominating discourse. Ruth is Jessie and Teddy is a composite of all the other male characters in the play, each signifying a different element of the male consciousness.

At the end of the first scene, Sam and Max get into an argument about MacGregor. Sam makes it clear to Max that he took good care of Jessie, but that MacGregor was a “lousy stinking rotten loudmouth. A bastard uncouth sodding runt.” (Pinter Plays 3 26) Here Sam once again insinuates that MacGregor had a clandestine relationship with Jessie. Max ignores what he says and starts insulting Sam, telling him he will be kicked out when he’s too old to make a financial contribution, attacking the last vestige of his strength which is his money-making potential. Without the presence of the feminine, the unchecked male violence seems likely to the family. As Max hated his father’s taunting and waited for an opportunity to gain his authority in the family and finally took it when the opportunity came, he now fears a similar situation of vulnerability with his own son Lenny, who is gradually usurping his father’s position of authority in the family. “Thus the conflict between generations of males continues. Sam and Max, older and physically weaker, still possess certain of age. Lenny and Joey are challenging their elders, but Joey lacks the intellect to use his strength and therefore
functions only as an extension of Lenny’s mind. At this point the battle has taken on a kind of inevitability, as the irresistible decline of one generation is accompanied by the equally irresistible rise of another. The cycle is interrupted with the entrance of one female, now instead of fighting strictly over territory, the males begin to fight additionally for possession of her.” (Cahn 59)

When Teddy and Ruth enter the home, the power dynamics in the family shift radically. It is clear that she will become the main focus of the male characters, and their pursuit of power, becomes enhanced to a much greater degree. Now the power-play is focused on the sole female as the men try to assert their authority over her in various ways. Surprisingly, Ruth enters this pursuit with her own character and personal values at stake. Individual confrontations with each of the male characters ensue and the battle for power is fought through action and dialogue. The scene introducing Teddy and Ruth into the story conveys a married couple’s mundane power struggle as they order each other around, each claiming they know what is best for the other. Teddy at first acts as the typical domesticated male character of the 50s, expressing concern for his wife’s well being, and showing tactical moves in his attempts to control her. At the end of the play he represents a husband more in line with what men of the 60s could identify with when he is forced to grant her complete autonomy in her affairs.

After a trip to Venice, Teddy returns home with his wife. They arrive in the middle of the night. From the beginning, we become aware that a game has been going on between the couple, an erotic game that will include and destabilize the entire family. “The presence of Ruth becomes a “nexus and a “pivot” of The Homecoming” (Sakellaridou 107). Ruth, through her rediscovery of herself, the multiplicity of her sexuality, and her power through
male attention “does not yield only a strong archetypal figure of the Earth Mother or the
Bitch-Goddess, operating on a mythic and ritualistic level alone- as many critics wrongly
believe- but also a very interesting realistic female character.” (Sakellaridou 107)

As Teddy gets re-acclimated to his surroundings, Ruth begins to get into a mild
argument with her husband about going to bed. Teddy seems cold and distant. This banter
goes on, reminiscent of Beckett’s absurdist exchanges:

RUTH: I think I’ll have a breath of air.
TEDDY: Air?
Pause.
What do you mean?
RUTH: (standing) Just a stroll.
TEDDY: At this time of night? But we’ve ...only just got here. We’ve got to go to bed.
RUTH: I just feel like some air.
TEDDY: But I’m going to bed.
RUTH: That’s alright.
TEDDY: But what am I going to do?
Pause.
The last thing I want is the breath of air. Why do you want a breath of air?
RUTH: I just do.
TEDDY: But it’s late.
RUTH: I won’t go far. I’ll come back.
Pause.
TEDDY: I’ll wait up for you.

RUTH: Why?

TEDDY: I’m not going to bed without you.

RUTH: Can I have the key?

He gives it to her.

Why don’t you go to bed? (Pinter Plays 3 31-32)

Ruth seems detached from Teddy and is already challenging his authority, by demanding autonomy upon entrance to her father-in-law’s house. It is obvious that Teddy exhibits a controlling attitude toward her. Ruth wins the battle as she leaves the house for a “breath of air” leaving the more insecure Teddy behind. Symbolically, she takes the key to the house with her. According to Bert O. States, Teddy represents a “totally withdrawn libido” troubled by a basic hatred for women and a tendency toward homosexuality (a family problem;) he therefore substitutes intellectual equilibrium for a proper sex life” (148).

Throughout the scene Teddy attempts to dominate Ruth, to project her image as a dependent wife and points out insecurities she simply does not demonstrate. He comforts her despite the fact that she has indicated no need for it: “Look, it’s all right, really. I’m here. I mean … I’m with you” (Pinter Plays 3 31). Elin Diamond observes that Teddy’s “security in the house seems linked to controlling Ruth’s movements in it” (144); certainly he seems to want very badly for Ruth to leave him alone in the family’s living room. Teddy nervously and repeatedly assures Ruth about going to bed; indeed, he seems preoccupied with having her do just that. At this point, the struggle for control over Ruth’s identity takes the form of a struggle for control of the room. “Why don’t you go to bed?” Teddy suggests, and despite
Ruth’s telling him that she is not tired, he continues to press her: “Go to bed, I’ll show you the room. […] You’ll be perfectly all right up there without me” (Pinter Plays 3 30).

While insisting that she must be tired, Teddy declares himself “wide awake”. “I just want to… walk about for a few minutes” (Pinter Plays 3 31), he explains, urging her to retire. Undoubtedly sensing what Diamond does, Ruth does not move, declining to surrender the room to Teddy or to withdraw to his bed. When he finally decides to go upstairs with Ruth, she suddenly announces, “I think I’ll have a breath of air” (Pinter Plays 3 31). Ruth is implacable in this scene, impervious to Teddy’s manipulations and indifferent to his desires. When she finally agrees to leave the room to him, she does so in a manner that specifically thwarts his efforts to control her by suggesting that she leave the house entirely. As Teddy’s wife, Ruth behaves independently of his interests and desires; as her husband, seems to have no authority over her. Ruth’s behavior constitutes a rejection of any visible relationship between them. The enthusiasm Teddy displays over his family home upon their arrival intimates the depth of Ruth’s indifference at this point. Like a proud child, Teddy giddily introduces Ruth to the home of his childhood. He looks to see if his bed is still upstairs: “It’s still there. My room” (Pinter Plays 3 29), he announces after investigating. He asks for Ruth’s admiration of the house: “What do you think of the room? Big, isn’t it? It’s a big house. I mean, it’s a fine room, don’t you think?” (Pinter Plays 3 29) Ruth says nothing, just sits impassively. In fact, she displays no enthusiasm whatever for her husband’s home, so when she refuses to go upstairs to his old bedroom and leaves the house instead, Ruth rejects not just Teddy’s manipulations but Teddy himself. Teddy’s dim response to her desire to take a walk—“Air? Pause. What do you mean?” (Pinter Plays 3 31)—demonstrates how unnerving for him is Ruth’s resistance to his desires and how invisible that resistance has been to him up
to this point. Teddy entreats with Ruth one last time, “I’m not going to bed without you” (Pinter Plays 3 32), and stands helplessly chewing his knuckles as she leaves without him.

It is even suspected at the beginning of this scene whether Ruth is actually Teddy’s wife. Whether she is or not, the couple overtly plays power games with each other that are sexual in nature. Teddy, hides behind a stoic intellectual façade, which later in the play he calls “intellectual equilibrium.” (Pinter Plays 3 70) It is obvious that Ruth wishes to get away from Teddy. He keeps telling her to “sit down” in his father’s chair. (Pinter Plays 3 28) It is obvious from the first exchange between Teddy and Ruth that Teddy dominates her in the relationship, or at least is playing a game of domination. “Ruth’s decision not to follow her husband’s obvious advice points to a more general refusal on her part to oblige Teddy. It contributes to the ‘edginess’ of the situation, to the sense the audience quickly receives a lack of ease between them, and indicates Ruth’s uncertainty about whether she has done right to accompany her husband on this visit to his family home. In fact the play- with its final image of Ruth as matriarch sitting relaxed in Max’s chair, here originally proffered her by Teddy- may eventually be seen as her homecoming.” (Thompson 103)

As Teddy goes to bed and Ruth leaves, Lenny encounters Teddy downstairs and they engage in an amiable conversation. Lenny remarks that he is being kept awake by a tick. Teddy remarks that it’s probably the clock in his room. Their brief meeting reflects their animosity towards each other. As Teddy says: “I’ve … just come back for a few days”, to which Lenny sharply replies, “Oh yes? Have you?” (Pinter Plays 3 34). There is an internal conflict going on between them which comes to the fore when Lenny tries to dominate Teddy.
When Ruth returns to the house after her solitary walk, she meets Lenny, and a struggle for domination starts at once, a situation through which she easily becomes aware of his technique of using insults and sexual provocations. Therefore, by not revealing her mind she ends up achieving a position of power. Ruth encounters him with a quiet grace. Despite her telling Lenny that she is Teddy’s wife, he speaks to her as though she is an object to be had. Lenny then asks to touch her. Ruth asks why, and Lenny responds with a story about almost murdering a prostitute who propositioned him, down by the docks:

One night, not too long ago, one night down by the docks, I was standing alone under an arch, watching wall the men jibbing the boom, out in the harbor, and playing about with the yardarm, when a certain lady came up to me and made me a certain proposal. This lady has been searching for me for days. She’d lost track of my whereabouts. However the fact was she eventually caught up with me, and when she caught up with me she made me this certain proposal. Well, this proposal wasn’t entirely out of order and normally I would have subscribed to it. I mean, I would have subscribed to it in the normal course of events. The only trouble was she was falling apart with the pox. So I turned it down. Well, this lady was very insistent and started taking liberties with me down under this arch, liberties which by any criterion I couldn't be expected to tolerate, the facts being what they were, so I clumped her one. It was on my mind at the time to do away with her, you know, to kill her, and the fact is, that as killings go, it would have been a simple matter, nothing to it. Her chauffeur, who had located me for her, he’d popped round the corner to have a drink, which just left this lady and myself, you see, alone, standing underneath this arch, watching all the steamers steaming up, no one
about, all quiet on the Western Front, and there she was up against this wall? Well, just sliding down the wall, following the blow I'd given her. Well, to sum up, everything was in my favour, for a killing. Don't worry about the chauffeur. The chauffeur would never have spoken. He was an old friend of the family. But ... in the end I thought ... Aaah, why go to all the bother ... you know, getting rid of the corpse and all that, getting yourself into a state of tension. So I just gave her another belt in the nose and a couple of turns of the boot and sort of left it at that. (Pinter Plays 3 38-39)

Here, in a story that seems as though it is a fabrication, Lenny attempts to convey to Ruth, the violence he is supposedly capable of. Here, he asserts himself as a man of the shadows, his dark “pimp” persona, which is but a façade for his deep sense of masculine failure. “Now there is a serious question here as to whether Lenny really did this at all, much less with such terrifying indifference; but that is besides the point, just as it is besides the point to inquire whether the family is capable of having sex with Ruth. The main thing is the conception and framing of the possibility, the something done to the brutality that counts” (States 155).

Unlike Max, who uses the coarse language of the butcher, Lenny couches his story of gratuitous violence in words expressing nonchalance and dark humor. Lenny is applying his own kind of manipulative violence in this story: “The very fact of telling the story to Ruth constitutes an act of psychological violence against her, an attempt at intimidation and control that is clear despite its displacement into story” (Morrison 183). Lenny’s story may not explain why Ruth should hold his hand, but it certainly reveals a threat for Ruth (Morrison 183). When Ruth responds simply by asking how he knew the girl was diseased, Lenny’s fiction making is obvious: “I decided she was.” (Pinter Plays 3 39) This statement also implies his patriarchal attitude and authoritarian behaviour. Victor L. Cahn says:
“The boast is more likely, however, a confession that the entire incident has been concocted, or that Lenny has related his own version of such a meeting. Furthermore, that Lenny chooses to demonstrate his manhood with a narrative in which he does not conquer a woman sexually, but instead beats and kicks her, implies that he is impotent.” (61-62)

Lenny is aware of Ruth’s power to replace Jessie, if only subconsciously. He is also aware that she is different from the women he normally surrounds himself with as part of his profession. Also, he is aware that she is a gentile, and is a threat to the family’s social order. Here, Lenny uses language and control of the discourse to maintain his position in the family. He also uses it as a form of dominance over his brother Joey and his burgeoning sexuality, and now over Ruth whose sexuality will later come to dominate the entire family.

Lenny shares another story which reflects his latent brutality but this time against an old woman:

So after a few minutes I said to her, now look here, why don’t you stuff this iron mangle up your arse? Anyway, I said, they’re out of date, you want a spin drier. I had a good mind to give her a workover there and then, but as I was feeling jubilant with the snow-clearing I just gave her a short-arm jab to the belly and jumped on a bus outside (Pinter Plays 3 41).

In the context of a more domestic scene, and with a helpless old lady rather than a diseased young woman, Lenny continues to act-out in story his tendencies toward violence. With these two stories, “Lenny attempts to demonstrate to Ruth that he is all powerful day and night, against both whore and homemaker” (Thompson 179). Victor L. Cahn again comments here:
The first story depicts violence against a younger woman, a prostitute. This second relates the violence taken against an older woman, a maternal figure. Through narrative, therefore, Lenny attacks both aspects of Ruth’s personality, and also he demonstrates savagery. Yet he fails to prove his sexual capacity, especially as he recalls running away after striking the old woman.” (62).

Lenny’s stories of violence toward women lead directly to the power play between Ruth and Lenny in the action that follows. From his stories, Ruth realizes the weaknesses of Lenny and finally dares him to live up to his stories. Ruth engages Lenny in a sexually flirtatious exchange regarding a glass of water. She openly makes sexual suggestions to him in order to disarm his come-ons of violence. She refuses his request for the glass and calls him as “Leonard” (Pinter Plays 3 41) to which Lenny objects as his mother used to call him “Leonard”:

RUTH: I haven’t quite finished.
LENNY: You’ve consumed quite enough in my opinion.
RUTH: No, I haven’t.
LENNY: Quite sufficient, in my own opinion.
RUTH: Not in mine, Leonard.
Pause.
LENNY: Don’t call me that, please.
RUTH: Why not?
LENNY: That’s the name my mother gave me.
Pause.
Just give me the glass.
RUTH: No.

Pause.

LENNY: I’ll take it then.

RUTH: If you take the glass...I’ll take you.

Pause.

LENNY: You’re joking. (Pinter Plays 3 41-42)

Here, Ruth disarms Lenny’s advances and makes her first attack on the family’s structure by assuming the archetype of the whore or femme fatale. She makes it clear to Lenny that she is not just another “whore” nor is she just a simple mother and housewife married to a college professor. Also, when Ruth calls him “Leonard” she refers to his Jewish heritage, and Ruth, a gentile, moves in as the femme fatale to make an assault on Lenny’s constructed self. This self is in denial of heritage and tradition and consumed with an affected cosmopolitanism. Ruth is a femme fatale and a gentile temptress. This archetype of the femme fatale illustrates the power behind the mystery of female sexuality. What becomes clear from this first confrontation of Ruth with one of the members of Teddy's family is that she is not naïve, as she is aware of the specialized vocabulary used by a pimp, and that she is perfectly capable of making use of her personal attributes in order to achieve her goals. Furthermore, the scene, filled with several hints of erotic overtones, may express the existence of a lack of sexual satisfaction in her life, when she says: "Oh, I was thirsty" (Pinter Plays 3 43). She sounds very much like a man making a pass at a woman; her proposition even contains the hints of possible sexual violence. Ruth’s increasingly suggestive invitation ends abruptly when Lenny asks, “What are you doing, making me some kind of proposal?” (Pinter Plays 3 42) and reacts not by beating Ruth, but by sitting speechlessly watching her. Ruth’s femaleness, her identity as a woman, wife, mother, and most likely, whore, leaves Lenny helpless. As her
advances become more blatant, his blusters make his fears both more desperate and more comic. Penelope Prentice in her book *The Pinter Ethic: The Erotic Aesthetic* sums up this encounter in the following words:

> To maintain self-respect and to gain Lenny's she must avoid slipping into subservience, which in Pinter's work requires gaining dominance. Ruth does so by topping each of Lenny's threat/proposals with a counterproposal/attack that finally calls his bluff: "If you take the glass ... I'll take you". Ruth's wit which wins her the dominant position baffles Lenny, who shouts after her as she goes upstairs: "What's that supposed to be? Some kind of proposal?" (Prentice 130-131).

The profound impression Ruth makes upon Lenny is clear from the question he later asks his father:

> That night … you know … the night you got me … that night with Mum, what was it like? Eh? When I was just a glint in your eye. What was it like? What was the background to it? I mean, I want to know the real facts about my background. I mean, for instance, is it a fact that you had me in mind all the time, or is it a fact that I was the last thing you had in mind? (Pinter *Plays 3* 44)

Ruth’s presence and attitude have spurred these conflicting questions in Lenny’s mind and compel him to think about Jessie, his mother. His questions suggest his sexual desire for both women, but his earlier behavior with Ruth communicated apprehension. These conflicting
instincts recur in all the male characters in the play. They are attracted to women, yet fearful of them, contemptuous, yet submissive.

Max’s reminiscence of Jessie displays the ambiguity of his shifting views of women: either they are objects of worship or objects of abuse. Max says:

Well, it’s a long time since the whole family was together, eh? If only your mother was alive. Eh, what do you say, Sam? What would Jessie say if she was alive? Sitting here with her three sons. Three fine grown-up lads. And a lovely daughter-in-law. The only shame is her grandchildren aren’t here. She’d have petted them and cooed over them, wouldn’t she, Sam? She’d have fussed over them and played with them, told them stories, tickled them—I tell you she’d have been hysterical. (To Ruth.) Mind you, she taught those boys everything they know. She taught them all the morality they know. I’m telling you. Every single bit of the moral code they live by—was taught to them by their mother. And she had a heart to go with it. What a heart, Eh, Sam? Listen what’s the use of beating round the bush? That woman was the backbone to this family. I mean, I was busy working twenty-four hours a day in the shop, I was going all over the country to find meat, I was making my way in the world, but I left a woman at home with a will of iron, a heart of gold and a mind. Right Sam? (Pinter Plays 3 53-54)

Max begins by envisioning an ideal fiction of motherhood, with Jessie as the doting grandmother. Undercutting this image, however are his overused clichés: “she taught them everything they know”; “she had a heart to go with it”; and she was the “backbone of the family”. Irony is also apparent in the comment that she taught morality to his obvious amoral
sons. Max goes on to reflect on a moment in time when Jessie, surrounded by her boys, was enthroned in a scene of domestic harmony, next to her husband of course. Whether any of Max’s reflections are related to fact does not matter; this is one of those situations “where fantasy has the weight of fact, and fact has the metaphoric potential of fantasy” (Lahr 187). Max describes this scene as memory and in doing so projects Jessie as a type of Madonna-figure.

Just as real, however is a baser image of hers when his idyllic narrative of the past turns sour:

I worked as a butcher all my life, using the chopper and the slab, the slab, you know what I mean, the chopper and the slab! To keep my family in luxury. Two families! My mother was bedridden, my brothers were all invalids, I had to earn the money for the leading psychiatrists. I had to read books! I had to study the disease, so that I could cope with an emergency at every stage. A crippled family, three bastard sons, a slutbitch of a wife…” (Pinter Plays 3 55)

Instead of grandchildren, the second family includes a bedridden mother and invalid brothers. No “ship is going to come home” here; instead Max uses the chopper and the slab to keep his family in luxury. The final vignette of pink-faced boys with shiny hair at the feet of their parents becomes a “crippled family, three bastard sons, a slutbitch of wife”.

Max’s treatment of Ruth may be compared to his treatment of Jessie in the past. When Teddy introduces Ruth to the rest of the family he pushes both the ritual and the family conflict forward. Max immediately reacts to Ruth’s position by calling her names, and telling
Lenny and Joey to remove Teddy and Ruth from the household. Max is immediately threatened, seeing Ruth as taking the place of Jessie. “They come back from America, they bring the slopbucket with them, they bring the bedpan with them.” (Pinter *Plays 3* 50) says Max in disgust. Ignoring Teddy’s that Ruth is his wife he calls her “a dirty tart”, a “smelly scrubber” and a “sinking pox ridden slut” and even a “disease”. Ruth remains silent. His agitated response grows out of his suspicion that is son has “shack(ed) up” (Pinter *Plays 3* 50) with Ruth under his roof and without his knowledge. His reactions become more aggressive when he says: “I’ve never had a whore under this roof before. Ever since your mother died.” (Pinter *Plays 3* 50) This remark leaves an open assumption that he has never brought a whore into the house, or perhaps Jessie was the last he allowed, thereby bringing Jessie and Ruth in a linear connection of supposed prostitution in the family. The couple confronts Max with his own lack of control over the event within the house, and in his fury to retain his position of authority Max lashes out at his son through Ruth. “The inadequacy of the males in *The Homecoming* is strongly suggested by their tendency to see themselves as fragments of a whole, in contrast to Ruth’s struggle for wholeness and integration. They are bound to choose between intellect and instinct because they are unable to reconcile and fuse the two aspects of their personality.” (Sakellaridou 116)

Max follows his verbal attack on Ruth with a physical attack on the men who have witnessed his alleged humiliation when Joey declines to “chuck [Teddy and Ruth] out,” (Pinter *Plays 3* 50) and calls Max “an old man” (Pinter *Plays 3* 50). Max punches Joey in the stomach to assert his authority within the household in front of the woman. He also hits Sam on the head with his cane when Sam goes to help him up, thus keeping Sam, once again, confined to his role as the outsider and the eunuch. Re-energized by his exhibition of patriarchal authority over the men of the family, Max then addresses Ruth and she walks
towards him, obviously unmoved by his fit of violence, but not openly contesting his position. Max asks her if she is a mother and how many children she has, to which Ruth replies “three” (Pinter Plays 3 51). He then asks Teddy whether the kids are all his, reflecting his own concern regarding the paternity of his children. It is here, in this scene when Ruth first begins her unconscious assault on Max, for she reminds him of his wife Jessie. It is interesting that Jessie also had three sons. On learning this fact, he clearly sees the possibility of her taking Jessie’s place as mother in the family when he asks, “Eh, tell me, do you think that the children are missing their mother?” (Pinter Plays 3 59) The ambiguity of the question lies in the fact that though it refers to the children of Teddy and Ruth back in America, but it also implies the need of a mother for his own sons. To Max, Ruth will not only fill the vacuum of Jessie but she can also be an asset to him. He is sure that her presence will help him regain his waning power in the family. As the curtain falls, Max beckons Teddy to cuddle him. Holding out his arms Teddy remarks sarcastically, “I’m ready for the cuddle” (Pinter Plays 3 52).

At the beginning of Act Two, Max, Lenny, Teddy, and Sam stand on the stage lighting cigarettes, this being a representation of phallic power of “masculine contentment” (Cahn 64). The only male character not involved in this ritual is Joey. All the antagonism, the attacks, the game of “take the piss”—all of it exists, to show that the men have problems with their own masculinity, possibly due to issues regarding social class, but also due to the lack of a strong committed female in the family. Cahn goes on to say: “Max devotes himself to womanly activities: cooking and tucking the boys into bed. He even talks about his own pangs of childbirth. Lenny runs away when Ruth offers herself to him, and Sam is virtually sexless, while Joey later fails to go “the whole hog” with Ruth, and Teddy retreats behind an intellectual barrier” (Cahn 64).
Ruth understands her strength from the start as she has experienced with all kinds of men in the family. Thus she is never out of control. She compliments Max on the quality of the meal and Max praises her for her role as cook and mother to his grandsons. From either perspective, Max can treat Ruth only as an object. Ironically, by the end of the play, Ruth refuses to accept the subservient role, and Max kneels to her, begging for a kiss.

The nature of the family business is emphasized when Max recalls negotiating with “a top-class group of butchers with continental connections” (Pinter *Plays 3* 54), a meeting so promising that he promised an assortment of garish gifts for his wife:

“[…] I’m going to treat you to a couple of items, I’m going to buy you a dress in pale corded blue silk, heavily encrusted in pearls, and for casual wear, a pair of pantaloons in lilac flowered taffeta. Then I gave her a drop of cherry brandy”. (Pinter *Plays 3* 54)

Here, the phrase “for casual wear” calls to mind an advertisement as if Max were promoting a new style of clothes rather than offering a present to the Jessie. Here is the charming side of Max that invited women to work for him, as he “sold them a line” before he literally “sold them”. Max remembers his sons in their childhood and thinks of how Jessie would have been happy to see Ruth in the family in this way. Max takes comfort in the image of the boys before they were old enough to be rivals. Whether this incident had ever happened or not cannot be known but the purpose of narrating this story is to let Ruth know the potential warmth of the family into which she has stepped. However, Ruth does not allow him to maintain this illusion, as she brushes aside surface action and language by posing a question that brings everyone down to the primitive level: “What happened to the group of butchers?” (Pinter *Plays 3* 55). Max confirms that they turned out to be a bunch of criminals like
everyone else” (Pinter Plays 3 55). Cahn says on this, “This rambling reflects the romantic side of Max’s personality, his affection for women and family” (Cahn 65).

In the presence of Ruth, Max once again tries to dominate over Sam as he is late for his work. Max begins to prod him to go and picks up his clients. Max is angry over diminishing power and all he can do is to insult Sam: “You’d bend over for half a dollar on Blackfriar’s bridge” (Pinter Plays 3 56). His insinuation of homosexuality is an attempt to make Sam even less of a man than Max. He insults Sam further by comparing his own responsibility towards the family and what Sam does for the family: “[…] don’t talk to me about the pain of childbirth—I suffered the pain, I have still got the pangs—when I give a little cough my back collapses—and here I’ve got a lazy idle bugger of a brother won’t even get to work on time.” (Pinter Plays 3 55)

Max then turns to Teddy and casually asks him why he didn’t inform him about his marriage to which he gives a lame excuse: “You were busy at the time. I didn’t want to bother you” (Pinter Plays 3 57). At this stage one is unable to comprehend the real reason. Despite the entire power struggle, Max tries to convince Teddy that had he informed him about his marriage, Max would have thrown a grand party. After making his wishes clear, Max turns to Ruth, and offers his blessings on the marriage. Ruth expresses her own: “I’m sure Teddy’s very happy … to know that you’re pleased with me. Pause. I think he wondered whether you would be pleased with me” (Pinter Plays 3 57). Anticipating the course of events, Teddy rises to defend his way of life back in America:

“She's a great help to me over there. She's a wonderful wife and mother. She's a very popular woman. She's got lots of friends. It's a great life, at the University . . . you know . . . it's a very good life. We've got a lovely house . . .
we've got all . . . we've got everything we want. It's a very stimulating environment.” (Pinter Plays 3 58)

It becomes clear from Teddy's words that he regards his wife as a mere complement to his own life, someone who is there to serve him, take care of his children, and be displayed to his friends and family. This becomes even more evident when he tries to convince her that it is time to return to America: "You can help me with my lectures when we get back. I'd love that. I'd be so grateful for it really" (Pinter Plays 3 63). His description of Ruth's role reveals of his self-centeredness and ignorance of his wife's needs. Cahn goes on to say:

“The passage is another in which the literal meaning is undercut by the tone and rhythm with which the words are uttered. Teddy's lack of passion implies first that his life is the opposite of what he claims and second that Ruth is probable unhappy. Therefore, Teddy's statement is a plea that Ruth be allowed to remain with him. Moreover, the suggestion that Ruth is popular on campus has ironic undertones about the reasons why.” (Cahn 65-66).

That Ruth has not been happy with Teddy in America is clear from the contradictory view of Ruth about America: “It’s all rock. And sand. It stretches … so far … everywhere you look. And there's lots of insects there” (Pinter Plays 3 61), and it is symbolic of Teddy’s sterile world. It is clear that Ruth refuses to assume the roles Teddy attributed to her. She rejects the superficial social conventions and respectability of the professors’ wife, and, unlike Jessie, she chooses not to conceal sexuality or pretend piety. Ruth’s story becomes one of practical assertion and control and her homecoming, an opportunity to challenge the stories of the past. The picture she presents is clearly that of loneliness, of a life devoid of any future prospects as expressed by the barren environment which surrounds her. Steven H. Gale goes straight to
the point when he says: "...since marriage and the family have failed to satisfy Ruth's primary appetites, they are not fulfilling their functions and may be discarded." (153). The moment this is fully understood, then Ruth's decision to stay can be accepted.

Ruth’s presence in the house is overwhelming. It is clear by now in the play that she is in complete control of her surroundings, and that her presence within the animalistic household will push the conflict ahead as the entire family begins their slow assault on Teddy. Gabbard quotes director Peter Hall in an explanation in regards to his take on the play:

The mainspring of the play...is that the entire family put on the elder brother to see if he’ll crack. They suggest keeping his wife in order to crack him. He is actually the biggest bastard in a lot of bastards, and he won’t be cracked. He would sooner see the destruction of his own wife, and of his own marriage, which, in a sense he does, except you could argue that where the woman ends up in the end is where she always been and where she wants to be. (Gabbard 187).

Later in the play, the family begins to “take the piss” out of Teddy. Lenny, bored with idle chatter, takes his first potshot when he reminds Teddy, “Your cigar’s gone out” (Pinter Plays 3 59). Apparently innocuous, this line implies that Teddy has lost his power. Lenny retorts in a different vein, by commenting sarcastically and questioning Teddy on the inadequacy of his abstract thinking, begins to assert himself as the true philosopher in the room. Lenny pulls apart Teddy’s facade—the discourses on being and not being, and strips him of his comfortable bourgeois existence. Lenny makes an assault on Teddy’s intelligence and manhood by an attack on his Doctorate of Philosophy. “Lenny’s philosophical burst
contrasting with the usual squalor of his mind and surroundings strikes the realistic note of
the intellectual Jew denied his chance for formal education by a concatenation of
circumstances” (Baker and Tabachnik 121). Here, Lenny asserts that Teddy is not the only
one with the acute mind, that his bourgeois existence does not take him away from his roots.
Teddy coolly refuses to rise to the bait on any of these issues, in a way that prefigures the
calm with which he accedes to the family’s arrangements for Ruth. His recipe for
circumventing all major issues of faith and emotion is to deny that they fall within his
research area. In that way he endeavors to maintain what he calls an ‘intellectual equilibrium’
(Pinter Plays 3 70).

Max and Joey join in making fun of Teddy’s pretentiousness and emasculating him in
front of his wife. At a crucial point in the ritual, Lenny questions Teddy sarcastically on the
nature of reality in regard to tables and their function, pointing out the absurdities in the
philosophical questioning on the nature of reality. Richard Dutton suggests that these
questions reflect Lenny’s cynicism: “It is the absence of faith, the absence of such certainties,
in respect of the lost mother, Jessie, which lies at the heart of the odd behavior within the
family” (Dutton 132).

Teddy has cultivated a sort of indifference which makes him an outsider in the family
and an object of resentment particularly to Lenny. This emerges in the incident of the cheese
roll, which Teddy admits to having eaten, just before the family’s proposal to Ruth: “To
pinch your younger brother’s specially made cheese roll when he’s out doing a spot of work,
that’s not equivocal, it’s unequivocal” (Pinter Plays 3 72). Teddy proclaims that there was no
ulterior motive, that he did it simply because he was hungry, but Lenny is determined to
construe this as an act of spite, ‘unequivocal and certainly not outside his province. The
antagonism between the brothers becomes obvious but once again Teddy remains calm against this provocation.

Once Teddy has been one-upped, Ruth draws the men’s eyes away from Teddy and takes the game to a different level. She beats the men at their own game and seizes the power with this monologue:

“Don’t be too sure though. You’ve forgotten something. Look at me. I...move my leg. That’s all it is. But I wear...underwear...which moves with me...it captures your attention. Perhaps you misinterpret. The action is simple. It’s a leg...moving. My lips move. Why don’t you restrict...your observations to that? Perhaps the fact that they move is more significant...than the words which come through them. You must bear that...possibility...in mind.”

(Pinter Plays 3 60-61)

Although her remarks lack philosophical sophistication and serve more to reveal her dominant sexuality, they do demonstrate a practical and vital concern in such questions that her husband lacks. Her analysis of meaning and interpretation is sexually charged both in the teasing deliberation with which it is conducted and in its suggestive choice of examples. Ruth’s monologue about her body is the moment where she begins to fully assert her power over Teddy in the game. She tells Teddy, in the subtext of this monologue, that she is now free, that their relationship and his idea of her doesn’t matter, that she is back in her own environment. Cahn says:

“On one level she suggests that language itself, the words an individual uses, may not be the key to that individual’s meaning. On another level, she
insinuates that although she married to Teddy and to all appearances committed to him, legalities do not constrain her. Her instincts, her very nature as a woman, are more important. Thus she is free to act as she wants.” (Cahn 66).

Martin Esslin comments:

“The association of ideas in Ruth's mind seems to be: if a table, philosophically speaking, is more than just a table, if there is another plane of reality behind its appearance, this to her is analogous to the contrast between the outward appearance of a woman, and what is beneath that appearance: the underwear, the flesh, the sex.” (Esslin 144)

That is precisely what Teddy fails to understand, or refuses to and the differences between the two gradually deepen.

Teddy doesn’t even fight back as she joins his family in their assault against him. This is also the point in the ritual where the mother and whore archetypes are unified. “Ruth speaks with authority and self-confidence. Hers is the first solid and coherent female speech, which reflects a newly formulated ideology. Her discourse also throws light on her often inexplicable behavior, proves the complexity of her character and destroys the split female image by blending the two polarities of mother and whore into one harmonious whole.” (Sakellaridou 109).

According to Marc Silverstein:
“Ruth's comments foreground the female body's capacity to escape the (masculine) systems of representation that attempt to produce an appropriate - ie., unthreatening - femininity. ... When Ruth suggests that men "misinterpret" the female body, she emphasizes that the representational fashioning and coding of the body remains quite distinct from the body's actual existence, even as the author(izer)s of such codings attempt to deny the distinction by forcing the body to live out its representation in a socially palpable form.”

(Silverstein Harold Pinter and the Language of Cultural Power 94)

Ruth's homecoming, then, to the extent that it suggests her rejection of masculine control over her body, implies that she is not ready to sacrifice herself on the altar of Teddy’s masculine needs. The discourse of the men is pure aggression. Ruth on the other hand, wields both intellect and instinct, knowing that her body, and her presence, makes everything around her tangible. Without the presence of Jessie, the male organization of the family cannot hold without a powerful feminine center, because of the impersonal way the men deal with their environment and the lack of responsibility toward themselves and the home. Bardwick writes:

“Although men and women can and do agree on what is good and bad, possible and impossible their experiences of self and other space and time, constancy and change may be very different. Men live in an impersonal world, women in their domestic role, live in a very personal world. The female world is autocentric, which Gutmann defines as one where the individual has recurrent experiences of being the focus, the center, of communal events and ties. In the allocentric world of men, the individual has the feeling that the
centers and sources of organization, social bonds, and initiatives are separate from him. In the perceptual world of women there is the feeling that she is a part of all that is worth being a part of, and the sense of self includes all of those others that persistently evoke action and affect from oneself. Whereas for men success depends upon ability to perceive the world objectively, women can personalize the world, perceiving it without boundary.” (164)

It is clear by this point that Ruth is playing a game with Teddy, one that has reached its peak. Teddy, with his cold rationalism, can’t satisfy Ruth’s need for sexual and emotional closeness. She has pushed him into a weakened position, for she is dissatisfied with the life she has been leading, and her behavior is representative of changing attitudes toward women, family, and society. Ruth is not a prostitute, but rather “playing at” the role as part of the game between herself and Teddy. These characters are representative of the new form of liberation for women and couples in general during the time period, but the archetypes are deeper. They are fundamentally prehistoric. Ruth, like many female characters who represent the One, is the earth priestess, or Hecate, the goddess of the moon. Sakellaridou continues,

“Ruth forces her way into (the debate), demanding her rights, setting up her terms, speaking her own language, establishing her real self. Her intellectual independence has taken her well beyond social criticism. Her free admission of whoredom as an essential part of her nature has made her impervious to the males’ intended humiliation of her.” (109.)

After her famous sexually charged comment, Ruth declares that: “I was born quite near here” (Pinter Plays 3 61), implying that it is her homecoming rather than Teddy’s. She is in effect a reincarnation of the dead mother, the structure of the house, and she speaks the family’s
language in a way that Teddy does not. “You are just objects”, he insists. “You just … move about. I can observe it. I can see what you do. It’s the same as I do. But you’re lost in it. You won’t get me being … I won’t be lost in it” (Pinter Plays 3 70). Richard Dutton comments, “[…] Ruth speaks for something more basic and intuitive within us, which is more intrigued and tantalised than offended: she voices the part of ourselves that recognises itself in these primitive emotions” (133).

Next, Teddy wants to leave to go back and be with the children, in a plea for domesticity, but Ruth, now completely immersed and in control of her environment refuses to concede. Teddy remarks upon the filthiness of the flat and wants to go back to the supposed cleanliness of his life back in America: “Here, there’s nowhere to bathe, except the swimming bath down the road. You know what it’s like? It’s like a urinal. A filthy urinal!” (Pinter Plays 3 63). This is a desperate attempt to control Ruth. Ruth’s limited freedom results from her perfectly justified revolt against the family’s desperate attempts to control her.

As Teddy leaves to pack, Lenny enters and talks to Ruth about clothing and America. At this juncture in the play, Ruth is open to Lenny’s advances. Ruth’s power and self-actualization within the dramatic conflict draws the men in the family into her circle in a weakened position. She reveals to Lenny that she was once a “photographic model for the body” (Pinter Plays 3 65). Then she continues with the pivotal monologue in the play:

RUTH: That was before I had...all my children.

Pause.

No, not always indoors.

Pause.
Once or twice we went to a place in the country, by train. Oh, six or seven times. We used to pass a...a large white water tower. This place...this house...was very big...the trees...there was a lake, you see...we used to change and walk down toward the lake...we went down a path...on stones...there were...on this path. Oh, just...wait...yes...when we changed in the house we had a drink. There was a cold buffet.

*Pause.*

Sometimes we stayed in the house but...most often...we walked down to the lake...and did our modeling there.

*Pause.*

Just before we went to America I went down there. I walked from the station to the gate and then I walked up the drive. There were lights on...I stood in the drive...the house was very light.” (Pinter Plays 3 65-66)

This passage suggests her confidence in her identity as a woman. After this exchange, Ruth and Lenny kiss. It is here that she has completely given herself over to her new freedom and autonomy. Ruth’s monologue is her assertion of her sexuality and feminine power. When Lenny mockingly calls her a model of hats, attacking her body image as a mother, she responds by asserting her power as the unified mother/whore archetype. Referring to herself as a nude model of the body creates an iconographic image of Venus emerging from the sea-foam in Greek mythology. Lenny cannot resist the Lilith archetype presented by Ruth.

As Ruth and Lenny kiss, Joey and the rest of the family come down and see them in this position. Joey takes her and kisses her on the couch in front of Lenny, Max, and Teddy, who do not intervene. Here, Ruth becomes the most powerful one in the house, and is
preparing for her new place in it. Meanwhile Max praises her for her qualities: “A mother of three. You’ve made a happy woman out of her. It’s something to be proud of. I mean, we’re talking about a woman of quality. We’re talking about a woman of feeling.” (Pinter Plays 3 68). Max’s sense of “quality is equated with a whore. Thus, he sees the possibility of setting her up as a prostitute as feasible. The outlandishness of the action on stage, in juxtaposition with the double entendre of Max’s commentary, is set off even more by Teddy’s silence, which amounts to complicity. “When the audition is over, Ruth stands. She has proven herself by demonstrating her skill at manipulating men sexually. Furthermore, these men need her for emotional, financial, and sexual reasons.” (Cahn 68).

Thus the power in the house and in the business is hers and she knows that too. When she orders food and drink, her manner is terse, her sentences are short: “Well, get it.” Then: “What’s this glass? I can’t drink out of this. Haven’t you got a tumbler?” (Pinter Plays 3 68) By ordering such things for herself, Ruth accepts her place within the family organization and her severe tone reaffirms that she expects compliance.

As the family become more and more outrageous, Teddy’s retreat becomes more obvious. When Joey returns after a session with Ruth, without having gone “the whole hog” (Pinter Plays 3 74), Teddy replies: “Perhaps he hasn’t got the right touch” (Pinter Plays 3 74). When Lenny and Joey purposefully start narrating how they raped two girls near Wormwood Scrubs to exert their male prowess, Teddy sits silently and helplessly as he understands the future course of events. When Max returns and shouts: “Where’s the whore? Still in bed? She’ll make us all animals?” (Pinter Plays 3 76) intuitively he blurts out the truth as he also realizes the power of Ruth over the male members of the family. On learning of the encounter between Ruth and Teddy, he seems genuinely worried that Joey has suffered psychic wounds.
Max also may be revealing his antagonism toward Ruth and the control that she as a woman has over male sexual fulfillment. He blames her for taunting his son, but Max is also jealous of her power and in his last attempt to control Ruth he uses slang which is reminiscent of derogatory remarks in the first Act.

At last Max proposes what has been apparent for some time: “You know something? Perhaps it’s not a bad idea to have a woman in the home. Perhaps it’s a good thing. Who knows? Maybe we should keep her” (Pinter Plays 3 77). From this point the proposition is debated with a dispassion which is both horrifying and shocking. The most revolting aspect is Teddy’s refusal to be perturbed: “The best thing for her is to come home with me, Dad. Really. We’re married, you know” (Pinter Plays 3 78). Despite Teddy’s pretending to be superior to others in the family, he actually, sinks lower than they do, for he refuses to acknowledge the outrage taking place.

The men start weighing details of their scheme, the financial, domestic, and sexual arrangements. As Max says to Lenny: “But I think you’re concentrating too much on the economic considerations. There are other considerations. There are the human considerations. You understand what I mean? There are the human considerations. Don’t forget them.” (Pinter Plays 3 79)

To this Lenny politely answers that he won’t forget. Max’s tone shifts to the lower pitch when he says, “Well don’t” (Pinter Plays 3 79). This shift in tone reflects the internal conflict of Max. He is talking about a mother but at the same time he is also talking about a whore. While his polite and reverential manner is appropriate to one, it’s not the same for the other. Cahn says, “[…] to Max, Lenny is a filial figure, to be treated kindly, but also a sexual competitor, who must be dispatched if Max is to maintain status and power. In one moment
Max speaks from his identity as father; in the next he speaks from his instinct as sexual predator.” (70)

Lenny, “sensitive” to the “economic considerations,” recommends “putting her on the game” (Pinter Plays 3 80) as a prostitute on Greek Street. They imagine new “high-class” names for her like Dolores, Cynthia, or Gillian (Pinter Plays 3 82). And they even ask Teddy to be their “representative in the States,” (Pinter Plays 3 82) who can provide enough American visitors for her that they might receive discounts from Pan-American. Cahn comments:

“[…] Lenny’s scheme suggests that sex is merely a biological process, divorced from emotion. Underlying this entire play is a vision of human beings as no more than beasts, creatures of instinct and sensual pleasure, for whom morality and societal standards are shackles to be discarded.” (71)

When Ruth enters, Teddy is the first one who proffers the family’s scheme in a very cold manner. Ruth seizes the proposal and treats it as no more than a cold financial arrangement. But she has her own conditions:

“I would want at least three rooms and a bathroom. (…) I’d want a dressing-room, a rest-room, and a bedroom. (…) A personal maid? (…) You would have to regard your original outlay simply as a capital investment. (…) You'd supply my wardrobe, of course? (…) I'd need an awful lot. Otherwise I wouldn't be content. (…) I would naturally want to draw up an inventory of everything I would need, which would require your signatures in the presence of witnesses. (…) All aspects of the agreement and conditions of employment would have to
be clarified to our mutual satisfaction before we finalized the contract.” (Pinter

*Plays 3* 84-85)

The businesslike manner in which she settles the details of her contract and place of work with Teddy's family clearly demonstrates that anything which gives her satisfaction regarding her repressed desires will be acceptable to her. In a very businesslike manner she decides to leave behind a life of frustration as mother and housewife and take up what seems to be a more rewarding job: that of a prostitute. This will possibly give her a better financial standing and independence, as well as the opportunity to fulfill her erotic fantasies and have a more rewarding sexual life, not only with prospective customers but also with the family members. Between two jobs, she chooses the one which seems to her to be the more advantageous. If Lenny and the family regard sex as business, Ruth sees it as a source of strength. Not only is she capable of fulfilling male needs, Ruth also understands that these needs are biologically compelling. Hence, in her identity as a woman, with her sexual instincts under control, Ruth has power that the men cannot challenge. Therefore she dictates the terms. As Guido Almansi and Simon Henderson remark:

> By agreeing to satisfy the household's sexual needs (while driving a hard bargain and remaining a 'tease'), Ruth also gains a paradoxical independence, since by becoming a whore she is able to break free from the academic straitjacket of the philosopher's lowly life. (Almansi and Henderson 69)

At the climax of the play, Ruth is given a place in the household as a paid whore. This shocking element has confounded audiences since the play’s first runs in the 1960’s. Many layers of meaning, none specific, show a family of archetypal Jewish working class Hackney slum dwellers who allow a gentile woman into their house to take the place of the dead
matron and act as whore at the same time. Max, the patriarch in mental and physical decline has taken on the role of the female as well. His sons Lenny and Joey, prior to Ruth’s entrance were in control of the household, and each character, including Sam, was lost in a violent atmosphere that is like a jungle but in danger of imploding at any moment. Teddy, the most detached yet psychologically the most violent son of them all, allows his wife to be given over, as part of an elaborate sex game between himself and her, as a prostitute for the family business. According to Gabbard, Teddy “returns home from his new sterile life to confront the many facets of himself that he has tried to purge” (201) Ruth who before her entrance, has no identity self due to her role in the patriarchal structure, follows Teddy as he reconstructs his past selves. She is the protagonist who pushes the action forward, finding herself and her sexual life and energy through the ritual of adopting archetypes.

Upon analyzing the play, one can easily create a back-story involving an elaborate sex-game between Teddy and Ruth, which had probably, began around the time of their excursions in Venice. As Teddy returns to his home, to assert his place in the family structure as the educated eldest son, thus ready to take Max’s place at the head of the household, this game takes on new dimensions as Teddy’s self-discovery pushes forward that of Ruth’s. This is an elaborate ritual involving death and rebirth and the graduation from patriarchy to matriarchy. Once Teddy returns home he “encounters all his old discarded selves and their wellsprings” (Gabbard 201). These old “selves” are Lenny being the aggressive, manipulative social climber and Joey the violent brute. Ruth, as a counterpoint, becomes the archetypes of mother, whore, and goddess.

Ruth, now at the peak of the ritual, assumes her place as the all-powerful ruler of the household. She begins to set up demands for her stay as the house prostitute. She is perfectly
willing to take care of the household duties and offer sexual relations to the men in the family. She has upset the family structure completely, taking all the power away from Max, and she is even offered a flat off the premises. Teddy barely flinches as all these business arrangements are made. “At the end of the play then, what Max latently feared has taken place as a direct result of the introduction of Ruth into the home. The tough dictatorial figure of a father dreaming of Judaic morality has given way to a crippled old man lying on the floor pleading for a shiksa’s kiss.” (Baker and Tacbachnick 114)

Sam collapses at the end of the play after shouting to Ruth “MacGregor had Jessie in the back of my cab as I drove them along” (Pinter Plays 386). Here, Sam, weakened to the point of being a non-entity, has this final act of revolt and collapses, seemingly from a heart attack, though upon Lenny’s inspection, he is found still breathing. Again, this is another instance in the play where a character “plays at” an action in the process of “taking the piss.” He cannot stop what he views as atrocity, so the only thing he can do is draw attention to it by sacrificing his body. He is the sexually neutered male, the virgin that is, as part of the fertility ritual, sacrificed to the gods. “This outcry is his way of protesting, but he is also telling Teddy that neither one of them belongs as part of the family” (Cahn 71). Sam and Teddy were always the closest in the family because both believed they were above the moral debauchery of the others. According to Bert Cardullo, “it is Sam with whom Teddy is most identified throughout the play and whose physical breakdown can therefore be viewed as signifying his nephew’s moral breakdown, as opposed to moral self-preservation.” (Cardullo 1)

As the curtain falls, Ruth has replaced both Max and Jessie as the mother, whore, and goddess. Teddy has left. She responds to his leaving by saying “Eddie. Don’t become a
stranger” (Pinter Plays 3 88). It is unclear as to whether even Ruth is staying, due to the almost nonchalant way Teddy exits. One begins to realize that the entire role of Ruth as prostitute is all part of an elaborate, erotic role-play on the part of Ruth and Teddy to “spice up” their marriage. During the final scenes of the play, Teddy, in his cruel sarcastic way, “takes the piss” out of his entire family. Ruth, however, remains independent, cold, yet nurturing while she sits in the chair with Joey’s head in her lap and Max kneeling beside her, trembling for a kiss. Lenny just stands, watching. “Ruth stays, but she retreats into silence and a faint smile, her new stoic attitude to a male world which, despite her efforts, will never be able to conceive her actual reality” (Sakellaridou 118). Here, Ruth becomes the queen of the household who offers bounties for the sustenance of a new generation.

Elin Diamond suggests that “in this unstable stage tableau, no one can be called victorious” (157). Yet as Ruth sits on her supposed throne, it can be understood that even though she will play the roles of wife, mother, whore and mistress that fulfill all the desires these men have, as well as those that other men will bring her, she is the ultimate figure of authority in this home. Almansi and Henderson also suggest that The Homecoming can be seen as a powerful plea for feminine and feminist independence (69). Steven Gale also supports this perspective: “She fulfills different needs for the various men in her family in order to fulfill her own needs” (155).

For critics like Gabbard and Gale, Ruth is a victimizer of men who uses her sexuality to gain control. More often critics view her as an enigmatic combination of the “mother-whore” character who inspires a mixture of sympathy and antipathy. The complexity of her character does not deny that, unlike the men who turn to words and their fictions for their
expressions of power, Ruth acts. In the end she begins a new story for this family as a woman who is not the victim of their fantasies, but one who asserts her own identity.

Ruth is one of the most misunderstood and misinterpreted characters in Pinter's world. Most critics see Ruth's triumph as tainted and is she generally condemned as a shocking, licentious woman, even a nymphomaniac, who in the end decides to become a prostitute. Hugh Nelson feels that Ruth becomes a whore for the family in order to truly belong (Nelson 156). Austin E Quigley even goes a step ahead to accuse her that Ruth was a prostitute even before she married Teddy: “Ruth is indeed coming home to her former self...” (Quigley 225). The text, however, establishes what Pinter himself affirms: “She does not become a harlot” (Hewes 58). The most perceptive reading proves to be Pinter’s own as he concludes: “At the end of the play she is in possession of a certain kind of freedom. She can do what she wants, and it is not at all certain she will go off to Greek Street. But even if she did, she would not be a harlot in her own mind” (Hewes 57).

Textual evidences indicate that Ruth will neither remain nor agree to their proposal. And her actions with the family may be seen as re-emergence of her sexual intensity and as a ploy for power. She deliberately evades commitment by conducting negotiations. Ruth only conditionally concludes, "Well, it might prove a workable arrangement" (Pinter Plays 3 85), and when Lenny asks if she wants "to shake on it now or later," she avoids finalizing the agreement: "Oh, we'll leave it till later" (Pinter Plays 3 86).

Ruth's actions with Lenny and Joey, along with her approval of their plan, "Yes, it sounds a very attractive idea" (Pinter Plays 3 86), suggest that she might consent to their proposal. But nothing she says or does commits her to agreement, and sufficiently convincing evidence raises doubt that she will remain with the family. Max, who at the outset claims that
he could "smell" whether a filly in a horse race was a "stayer" or not, in the end "smells" that
Ruth will not stay: "Listen, I've got a funny idea she'll do the dirty on us, you want to bet?
She'll make use of us, I can tell! I can smell it. You want to bet?" (Pinter Plays 3 89). Max's
suspicion that she will leave, together with Ruth's command of herself and the family at the
end (she makes Lenny bring her a proper glass for water and demands food from Joey) all
produce the impact that Ruth is in charge of her life and may exercise the option to leave.

Ruth's self control at the end, and her seeming silence prior to her take-over, have
drawn nearly as much critical opposition as the shocked response to the possibility of her
becoming a prostitute. Because Ruth expresses no recognitions, no faked or genuine moral
outrage, when the family springs their plan she is often deemed immoral. Pinter suspends her
felt reaction, and instead Ruth acts. Like Diana in The Tea Party, Flora in A Slight Ache,
Sally in Night School, Beth in Landscape, Ellen in Silence, Kate in Old Times, Emma in
Betrayal, and all of Pinter's women whom men cannot dominate, Ruth, once she understands
what is at stake, silently waits for the best moment to defend herself, then takes control.

Although her command is often viewed as evidence that she is "using" the family, just
the opposite occurs. The family's actions which culminate in the invitation are all aimed
precisely at using her. Not one of the men understands Ruth or perhaps understands women at
all, including the dead mother Jessie, whereas Ruth does understand them, and seeks to assert
her superiority which leaves them defeated and baffled. Her command, as Pinter observes, is
simply her defense against their attack: "She's misinterpreted deliberately and used by this
family. But eventually she comes back at them with a whip: she says 'If you want to play this
game I can play it as well as you" (Hewes 143).
Ruth's most shocking behavior begins when she accepts Lenny's invitation to dance, his kiss, and then a roll on the couch with Joey that concludes in an upstairs bedroom two hours later where, however, they "didn't go the whole hog" (Pinter Plays 3 74). While of course only Ruth, not Lenny or Joey, is condemned, it is also here that Pinter's jovial endorsement of Ruth's behavior runs counter to almost all critical response:

“As for rolling on the couch, there are thousands of women in this very country who at this very moment are rolling off couches with their brothers, or cousins, or their next-door neighbors. The most respectable women do this. It's a splendid activity. It's a little curious, certainly, when your husband is looking on, but it doesn't mean you're a harlot.” (Hewes 57-58)

Pinter's response, which rightly cautions against issuing Ruth the easy label "harlot," or "whore," on the basis of an isolated action, also explicitly discloses an attitude toward sex as one of the basic instincts of human being which is, however, circumscribed by a morality that cannot always justify restricting its expression. One of the significant dramatic ironies of the play is that this family, which contains and uncritically tolerates Lenny as a pimp, at the outset condemns Ruth, without evidence, as a "slut" and a "whore." It is one of the failures of the criticism surrounding this play not to recognize that irony and how it functions to reduce "wife" to a mere label and to annul the very term "marriage" in this relationship without any visible bonds.

When Sam, the outraged representative of traditional morality, cries out against the family's proposal to keep Ruth, "She's his lawful wife" (Pinter Plays 3 77), the label "wife" has become meaningless, and the marriage dramatically devalued by the family's attack on it. As Pinter points out, Ruth's actions with Lenny and Joey originate not in lust but in despair:
In *The Homecoming*, the woman is not a nymphomaniac, as some critics claimed. In fact she's not very sexy. She's in a kind of despair which gives her a kind of freedom. Certain facts, like marriage and family, for this woman have clearly ceased to have meaning. (Tynan 8)

Much has been written about Pinter’s aesthetics and contribution to Western drama. In his early career he was considered misogynistic, and always remained ambiguous about any political views being present in his plays. Biographer Michael Billington, when describing *The Homecoming* as part of a pivotal change in his works, writes: “He had defined his own particular world: one to do with power, territory, dominance and subservience, resistance to authority, the politics of private relationships, the magic and mystery of women” (180). This “magic and mystery” inherent in his work, from analysis shows a deep respect for women as they navigate through the harsh jungle of masculine brutality, forcing to change shape and identity and to survive on instinct and intellect.

Looking for a moral stance in Pinter’s work is difficult because he consistently moves his characters through a non-realistic sea of ambiguities. Characters are constantly saying one thing, but mean something else completely different in subtext. A Character such as Ruth moves through the play making seemingly irrational decisions until the game is revealed. “Pinter is not a naturalistic dramatist. This is the paradox of his artistic personality. The dialogue and the characters are real, but the overall effect is one of mystery, of uncertainty, of poetic ambiguity” (Esslin, *The Peopled Wound* 30). Within this non-realistic framework, oftentimes characters are not fully psychologically motivated, such as Ruth’s behavior upon her first entry into the house, but the audience is slowly given clues regarding the nature of her relationship with her interior self and others. The moral framework is an interesting one,
where power is gained through ritual and intelligence. Harold Bloom, Professor of literature at Yale University, writes:

“Implicit in the world of Pinter’s dramas, however remote, however hopelessly inaccessible, are the normative values of the Jewish tradition: rational, human, trusting in justice and the Covenant, naturalistic without being idolatrous, and at the last hopeful, above all hopeful.” (2)

Ruth doesn’t view love as a possession of the other, she views it as something more free, more dangerous and exciting. In reference to the *The Homecoming*, Penelope Prentice writes of Ruth:

“No one in the play can equal or match her strength, wit, or wisdom. She returns attack with understanding and tempers assertions of power with compassion and some affection. Drawing attention to Ruth’s virtue does not negate her already well mapped darker side but points to strengths which have been ignored and to the final ambiguity which has been overlooked. If Ruth fails to achieve dominance and complies with the family’s proposal, as is commonly assumed, then she cannot be admired, and the power and complexity of the play is greatly diminished.” (148)

Here, it could be speculated that Pinter’s plays are the illustration of a breakdown in the Jewish family traditional structure where women are allowed greater autonomy. Ruth finds autonomy and power by testing the sexual bounds of their relationship.

In the 1960s more opportunities for women were emerging and traditional roles were being questioned. Feminism, civil rights, anti-war protests were at the forefront in the
Western world. Also, due to changing economic conditions, women like Ruth would have to bring home monetary income for the household. The 1960s were also the time of the sexual revolution and the cavalier attitude displayed by Ruth to sex, and the lack of shame that accompanies their fantasies and their actions are indicative of changing attitudes that tended toward more liberality in those regards. Sakellaridou observes:

“There is an overt dramatic clash between the male and the female principles in *The Homecoming* as a result of Ruth’s drastic moves for the recognition of her feminine existence. Pinter makes her into a creative and progressive element in the play. She is the image of the modern woman, which was tentatively and sketchily conceived in Virginia, Flora, Sally, Stella and Sarah in his earlier works. Ruth belongs to those women’s progressive world”. (115)

In line with the contemporary social landscape of the ’60s, and Harold Pinter’s own personal issues of the time, the pursuit of the new woman image and the conflicts of gender within the home and family shines through most of his plays. The resulting statement is that women possess individual strength and the ability to achieve equilibrium in their diversity, whilst facing adversity. Above and beyond social or sexual politics, Harold Pinter was an artist and his plays are works of art, brought on by a need to create, not mediate meaning. That part is left to the reader. At the same time it can be safely assumed that as an artist he was influenced by his contemporary discourse on issues that ended up in his plays and during the 60s, Pinter contemplated the power struggle of gender in domesticity through his benevolent approach to the women.

Ruth is the modern woman who defies social taboos and all societal construction of gender. She can use men as she wants, and she slowly finds her sense of identity and power
within the family and social structure. “The results of Ruth’s feminist campaign are rather equivocal at the end of The Homecoming. Her own gain has been unarguable because she obviously escapes victimization” (Sakellaridou 115). To make a firm commitment to an overtly feminist message in the play would limit its power to audience, but instead Ruth’s rise to power works in ambiguities that provide a disturbing upset to the viewer. Ruth’s character carries a brutality within her that is primal and stronger than the males around her. She defies description and categorization and in this is where her power lies. She beats those men by remaining within the phallic order of the household.