

Dominance of sexual authority in Pinter's *The Homecoming*

Lecturer

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Abstract:

The study aims at pointing out how the only female character in the play *Ruth*, who came from America to live with her husband's London family gained a dominant position in the family. She could change the entire patriarchal structure of the family via dislocating the father *Max* from his own place. All male characters except Sam are in a heterosexual struggle. They seek to satiate their unruly sexual desires using several ways to do so. This infirmity paves the way to Ruth to excite these desires by certain physical and oral behaviors. Moreover, she is being sexually desired and not desiring sex. She uses her shrewdness in yielding the male characters. In fact, what maintained Ruth's sexual dominance is the wild sex drives that all males have, and then to fulfill these drives they should offer some concessions, which enable Ruth to ascend and enjoy the central position inside the family.

Key words: heterosexuality, sexual drives, sex premonition, dominance

Introduction

Pinter's plays fascinate so many people over years for several reasons not least of which is their capacity to resist a large-scale generalization. His plays focus on the diverse and sophisticated local details. This focus makes it very difficult to argue that the plays as a group exemplify the large general truths of any exiting theory about the nature of society, personality, spirituality, culture, anthropology, history and anything in this scope. This is not to say that insight into the plays cannot be derived from all these sources. Indeed they can as



several astute Pinter critics have demonstrated, so the trouble is that these perspectives serve best as ways into the texture of the plays rather than as summations of the implication of that texture and if excessively relied upon, they begin to obscure what they seek to clarify(Quigley,2009:7).

Political aspect of the sexual behavior depicted by all the new dramatists of the fifties and early sixties not by Pinter only was really underestimated in radical magazines and in public press. In many critical accounts of Pinter, the relation between men and women are passed over with no comment. It is with a result that his seemingly ritualized view of sexuality is taken for granted. Pinter's depiction of female experiences go unquestioned and there is an unwillingness confess the same-sex relations which range from sibling royalty in *The Homecoming* to male bonding in *The Dumb Waiter*(Stokes,32: 2009).

The general action of Pinter's family play '*The Homecoming*' is startling and simple: Max is a retired butcher of seventy years old. He shares his house with his sons, Joey and Lenny. Lenny is smooth and shrewd while Joey, on the other hand, is the youngest son and he is amateur boxer who wishes to become a professional boxer. The fourth inhabitant of the house is Max's brother Sam, who is a hire-car driver. Both Lenny and Joey treat their father badly. The old man Max acts as a housewife to his sons; cooking and arranging the daily duties of the house (Esslin, 1982: 141-142).

The ambiguity is the central dilemma of the play. It is not a cohesive play; it lacks clarity and it seems that it wasn't written to expound a certain point of view or idea. The plot is imposed by logical cause and effective progress, but it is seen to riddle with inconsistencies. Its plot is so simple: Teddy brought home his wife Ruth from the United States where they were living. The new place for the wife is more pleasant and familiar than the arid academic world in America. Then a tension has taken a place between Ruth and Teddy's family, his brothers and father. At the end of the play, she decided to stay with the family and refused to go back into America. Despite its simple plot, the play has been seen from several angles(Hooti, 2011:45).

The play shocks the audiences not only by the casual and matter of fact way in which sex and prostitution are discussed, but also by apparently inexplicable motives of the main characters: why a wife of an American college professor quietly accepts the offer of being a whore and how could the husband consent to put the prostitution to his wife(ibid: 153).

The mysteriousness of the title

Pinter's plays have titles which seem neither enigmatic nor evocative. They seem not to merit a second look since they simply abstract a central object, person or event from the context of the play. This is again true of his most recent play 'The Homecoming'. The title would seem at first glance to indicate nothing but the central event around which the action pivots or to put it in the terminology of the well made play. In the first act, the stage is set for the bizarre but logical consequence of the second act. It is a family of two pairs of brothers, a family of a certain routine of daily life. Within this routine, signs of strain and stress are writ large. Max and his son Lenny are involved in a predatory struggle for dominance. Unable to conquer Lenny, Max turns on his brother. Sam a fellow creature less capable of offering direct resistance and impugns his masculinity on one hand while accusing him of being a secret lecher on the other(Nelson, 1980:145).

The title of the play is dominated by Ruth and it is about her coming home; this idea is reinforced by her refusal to go back to America. She justifies her staying in England saying that America as is a kind of desert or wasteland surrounded by insects and not people. This supports her decision to stay in England with the family at the end of the play. So, the play is actually representing her homecoming, not Teddy's. When Ruth says goodbye to her husband, she calls him 'Eddie' suggesting how she is already willing to forget him and move on (Ganz, 1969: 187).

Premonition of sex

The absence of a mother and the dead mother's personality pervades the whole play. Max's inadequacy as a cook is the most

telling symbol of this state of affairs. It is clear that one of young sons, Lenny, sees the mother as a sexual object. When he interrogates his father about the moment of his own conception, the act of sexual intercourse that gives him life. He is above all thinking of his own mother in this erotic context. His violent hatred of his father is clearly motivated by the suffering it causes him to imagine his mother in his father's embrace. Max becomes insistent, pleading and he begins to stammer. He crawls on his knees up to Ruth begging for a kiss, but she remains impassive, stroking Joey's head when Lenny was watching. The mother whom the son wishes in his infancy at the moment of the initial awakening of his sexuality, is not an old woman she is young. It is the image of Ruth which still dominates Lenny's dreams when he grows up. Ruth, is a mother of three sons whose ages should range from one to three years, she represents Lenny and Joey's dreams in that period of their lives. The ultimate image in the play is the climax of their Oedipal dreams: their mother is pretty and young and she becomes available as a sexual partner, as a slut while the defeated father creeps on the floor pleading for some of her sexual favours. This dream is absolute reversal of the real situation that faces a young son: the father is proud of possession and the son is oppressed, rejected and dominated (Esslin: 153).

Sex in *The Homecoming* is a matter of power and domination and it is used as a weapon for getting control. Ruth conspicuously uses sex and Lenny's apparent rear of sex in order to yield him in first encounter. She used this weapon to dominate Lenny while they were dancing and then she began a foreplay with Joey in front of the all family members including her husband, Teddy. Later, she spent two hours in Joey's room seducing him without going all the way and he was enslave by her seduction. The male characters see women as objects used for sex repletion. Lenny runs a string of prostitutes; Max in the first meeting with Ruth, assumes she is a whore; when Joey sees her dancing and brushing her lips with Lenny, says: "she is a tart. Old Lenny's got a tart in here just up my street!"(Cengage, 1965:42).

The dominant character

The action of the play stated when the professor of philosophy Teddy with his wife Ruth arrived home in England. She was introduced to the family of males, so to speak; Max is Teddy's father, Sam his uncle, Lenny and Joey his brothers. Ruth's character is one of the most confusing things in the play *The Homecoming*. She is a character who is difficult to understand, because she is silent and she can dominate others. When she was first introduced she was very quiet and responds in short phrases and sentences. But then she converted abruptly into a much more aggressive role and showed how she was able to over control the whole family. This makes her a very confusing character for the audience to understand. Her choices can be shocking and seemingly inexplicable, particularly her choice at the end to stay in England and not return to her family (Free, 1969: 3).

Ruth is a mother and whore. A whore is the most passive of women, the one who can be treated as a sexual object without any consideration for her own desires or feelings. The more helpless a male, the more he will tend to dream of women as obedient slaves and prostitutes. Hence, the unapproachable mother's image must be in the sexual dreams of a child, tends to turn into the image of the whore and this is why both Ruth and Jessie are mother and whore (Esslin: 160).

Ruth is put in progressive and creative element in the play. She is an image of a modern woman. She belongs to the world of progressive women and her placement within the primitive male family is anachronistic. She is a misfit and she is there as immovable rock asserting her existence and challenging the prevailing male ideology in deeds and words. As a result of her feminist campaign is rather equivocal at the end of the play and what she gained has been unarguable because she clearly escapes victimization. In return, it is doubtful whether the males' attitude has changed at all (Sakellaridou, 1988: 115).

Choosing a woman as a central character, Pinter breaks down the conventional attributes of patriarchal authority and attacks the dominant male order through his play *The Homecoming*. Ruth is the

feminist author who utters the play. She enjoys unique strategies by which she controls all male roles until she dominates them. The play can be interpreted as a feminist challenge to male despotism in which Ruth becomes the agent of change in this male family which is filled with a strange contradiction toward women (Hooti: 53).

Dominance of sexual authority

The claim that Pinter's conceptualization of power tends to reify it disturbingly as a totalizing essence which in invariably resists, suppress or appropriate any form of resistance. Sinfield objects to as the 'entrapment model', accordingly, any resistance form for power ultimately works to reinforce it since the subject radically ensnared with power structures and language can never find a position outside them from which to carry out the task of critical reflection (Sinfield, 1992: 39).

Although, Ruth is the only female character in the play, there is an obvious parallel made between her and the dead Max's wife, Jessie. Ruth occupies Jessie's position in the family and this is obvious when Max says: "Listen, I'll tell you something. Since poor Jessie died, eh, Sam? We haven't had a woman in the house. Not one. Inside this house. And I'll tell you why. Because their mother's image was so dear any other woman would have...tarnished it. But you...Ruth...you're not only lovely and beautiful, but you're kin. You're kith. You belong here"(Quigley: 33).

Some characters in the play find it difficult to understand Ruth. Her husband Teddy demonstrates this in their first scene together when she says that she is not cold he offers to make her a hot drink, and when she says that she is not tired he tells her to go to bed. Also when she meets Lenny, she has to tell him twice that she is married to Teddy, when he says "you must be connected to my brother in some way", she answers "I am his wife", then again when he asks "What, you sort of live with him over there?" she has to say "We're married". Lenny then tries hard to dominate her by telling stories about women he has beaten as a kind of disguised threat and he tries to take away

her glass, but she defends herself: “If you take the glass...I’ll take you”, leaving him confused (Prentice, 1980: 500).

The scene of Lenny and Ruth earlier where she asserts her dominance over him with a glass, saying, “Oh, I was thirsty” which is a proof of her unhappiness and lack of fulfillment while she and her husband were in America. She now feels much more fulfilled in England, giving into the violent, physical and sexual impulses that seem to drive this family. The most confusing actions of her are the kiss and dance with Lenny, when she embraces and rolls off the couch with Joey, and the two hours she spends with Joey upstairs, as well as her decision not to go back with her husband (Ganz: 186).

The play according to the son's point of view is a dream image of the fulfillment of all Oedipal wishes, the sexual conquest of the mother and the utter humiliation of the father. From the point of view of the father, the play is a horrible nightmare of the son's revenge. The easiness in which Ruth is convinced to take up the life of prostitution and to become an available sexual partner for Lenny and Joey seems, if the play seen as a dreamlike myth, the most natural thing of all; it's just the characteristic way in which wishes miraculously come true in dreams. Also the way Lenny encounters Ruth at night when she turned up from nowhere bears all the characteristic features of the manner in which dreams develop from a consciousness of lying in bed and imagining what one would wish to happen. The two stories that Lenny told Ruth at the first encounter and which deal with his brutal treatment of women fall into place like a child's attempt to convince himself that he is strong enough and big enough to impress and conquer a grown woman like his mother. Ruth in episode with glass of water, has no difficulty in asserting her immediate and effortless supremacy(Pinter(a), 1978: 62).

The position of a family calls attention to dual nature of a family home as psychological and physical common ground on one hand, and on another hand physical and psychological battleground. This battle focuses on Teddy's introduction of his wife to the savage London family. One might expect the new wife *Ruth* to be bewildered by the family coexistence tendencies to sentimentalize and to debase

physicality but instead of this she finds it surprisingly conducive ambience, which she decides to head as a matriarch combining totemic aspect of both a mother and prostitute, neglecting her children and her husband. The professional pimp, the most confident and independent son, Lenny spoofs social and dramatic decorum by giving Ruth a cup of water as if it were alcohol. "I bet you could do with this". She refuses that she has taken quite enough water to drink then moreover, she insists on her ability to take Lenny in ritual of erotic subordination. Max initially disrespects and vilifies her as a "stinking pox-ridden" whore. Then he accepts her when knows she is a mother. Accordingly, he could describe his wife Jessie as 'the backbone to his family' with a 'will of iron, a heart of gold' then condemn her as a 'slut'. He was a butcher, so he is flesh trader like his son Lenny and sometimes more extreme in changing veneration and vilification of its properties. However, Ruth proves glamorousness in her sense of how physically can control and captivate:

"Don't be too sure. 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 is 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." (Act II).

Ruth permits a powerfully limited sexual acquiescence to the youngest son whilst Teddy looks on maintaining his own "intellectual equilibrium" which allows him to write academic criticism concerning his family as objects and not getting lost in physicality himself. She accepts and negotiates terms to bring in income as a whore and then she dislocates Max from his own position in the family to his mixed admiration and resentment. Quigley said that the certain sort of freedom Ruth got is also a certain sort of captivity, with a last irony in the repeated suggestion of cycles in the play, for if the London family is confronted once more by the power of Jessie's figure, so is that Jessie's figure confronted once more by the power of London family. However, the play suggests that the freedoms might be

alternately viewed as captivities and vice versa and charges the tension with certain erotic dynamism, suggesting that the avoidance of such tensions constitutes a comparatively arid abstraction (Quigley, 1975: 225).

Ruth adjusts to the challenges of her proffered role with her husband's family, likewise demands that all aspects of the agreement and conditions of employment would have to be clarified to the satisfaction before the contract is finalized; a contract which would of course require signatures in the presence of witnesses(Pinter(a) : 93).

The ambiguity at the end of the play when Ruth actually decides to stay with the family is considered another aspect of dominance in which she will fill the role of mother and prostitute in the family. She doesn't give a real comment in her negotiations; she says things like "I would want", "I would need" and "you would have to" and the closest she comes to actually agreeing is when she says "It might be a workable arrangement" and "it sounds like an attractive idea". She also chooses not to shake on it then, but to "leave it till later". At the end of the play Pinter says "she is in possession of a kind of freedom" (Prentice: 458).

Ruth dislocates Max from his own place as the a centre of the family, Joey lays down at her feet and he put his head in her lap. Lenny is watching them and his father collapses and he submissively moves on bended knees towards her, then her poise is achieved. The action of Ruth in taking centralism of the family has redefined passivity (hitherto expressed in her tranquility feminine elegance) as power and control. She is now as nucleus which the men will move around at her bidding(Cave,2009: 136).

"The ambivalence of our social selves, the coexistence in all of us of the primeval, amoral, instinct-dominated sensual being on one hand and the tamed regulated social conformist on the other hand, is one of the dominant themes of Pinter's writing: above all the oscillation of the image of woman between that of mother/ madonna/ housewife/ and that of the whore/maenad"(Esslin:140).

The play generates different interpretations, not least via the tension between naturalist subtexts and more metaphorical possibilities. Esslin sees that the play achieved the perfect fusion extreme realism with quality of an archetypal dream image of desire fulfillment. Ruth's submissiveness as a sexual provider, mother and a whore for a group of misogynist and sadistic men may fulfill the desires of this dysfunctional family. He claims that the easy way in which Ruth was convinced to be

available sexual partner for both Lenny and Joey seemed, if the play was seen as a dreamlike myth, the most natural of all. Esslin's own account reveals the difficulty in portraying the turn of Ruth with any sense of active, former-feminist agency:

"The character of Ruth must be a passive one. She the object of males desires and being an image in a dream yields to these desires without putting up any resistance. Yet the play must also function on the realistic level; and here Pinter's success in making Ruth a credible character even when seen as a real person and not just the passive object of archetypal desires, is a virtuoso achievement" (Esslin: 160).

By agreeing to fulfill the family men's sexual needs, while driving a hard bargain and remaining a incendiary, Ruth obtains a contradictory independence since by becoming a slut she is able to break free from the straitjacket of the philosopher's lowly wife (Sakellaridou: 69).

The liberty of the whore is unlikely feminist revision of the critique of bourgeois marriage as a property relationship which legalizes the act of prostitution. The centrality of Ruth does not yield just a solid archetypal figure of the earth mother or the bitch Goddess, working on a mythic and ritualistic level alone as many critics believe, but also a very interesting actual female character. She is self-confident and she speaks with an authority to an extent that she blends the two polarities of a mother and slut into a harmonious one (ibid: 107).

It is clear that since the first appearance of Ruth, she will resist the role of passive conduit of the highly-strung and cross-culture within the homosocial family circuit. She undercuts the dominant

cultural order through exposing the discursive, constructed nature of language and hence the arbitrariness of the gender roles engraved in it and the entire patriarchal structure of the family. On her arrival, she instantly starts to labour towards an active subject position by denying Teddy's instructions to stay in the house and go to bed and by securing for herself the key to the house and leaving him without. She intends on providing herself with access to her husband's all males of the family on her terms. She also destabilizes the patriarchal alliance between Teddy and his father Max, depending on jointly constructing her as a supportive wife and mother: 'I was different when I met Teddy first'. So she succeeds in stirring the anxiety of the men and it is evident in Teddy's crucial answer: 'No you weren't. You were the same'(Pinter (b), 1978: 38).

Both limitations and potentiality of Ruth's devastating role became most obvious compared with that of Jessie. Jessie is no more than an offstage, inarticulate figure. Her role in the play is recipient female as Max orally constructs and reconstructs her along the whole dichotomy/ patriarchal mother to suit the shifting requirements of his struggle to reclaim a position of dominance within the male family arrangement. Ruth once more manages to bring the arbitrariness of genders roles encoded in language to the surface. While Max's incongruous juxtapositions reveal the constructability of the mother/slut dualism, they are far from allowing Jessie to escape representation within the patriarchal order to enjoy a position outside that order. Ruth can attempt to resist that dominant order and its attempts to fix and categorize her, famously perhaps in the play decisive contract scene (Sarbin, 35:1989).

Conclusion:

Ruth is an ambiguous character, who is able to wait silently, to assert her dominance and power over this family, and to give up the life where she was unhappy. The men in the play try hard to possess her and place her into roles, but they all fail. Lenny can't intimidate her, Teddy can't make her leave, Joey can't go "whole hog" with her, and Max is left begging her for a kiss at the end of the play. They may think they have convinced her to do what they want, it certainly appears that she has the upper hand.

She is meant to replace Jessie for these men, as they see her in the roles of mother, wife and prostitute. She is the males' desires fulfillment and she is a dream image yields to these desires without any resistance. Yet the play also should function on the realistic level and here, Pinter's success in making Ruth a credible character even when she is seen as a factual person and not just the passive object of archetypal desires, virtuoso achievement.

One of the things maintaining Ruth's dominance is the title of the play '*The Homecoming*' which gives hints to the readers that it is about someone new whom the entire action of the play is about. The absence of a woman paves the way for Ruth to ascend the throne of the male family. Besides, She pursues sex excitement to yield every one even her husband. She uses verbal and physical excitement and motivation to evoke the characters. Finally, a redemption took place when Ruth sat enthroned like a queen among her subjects. Max seemed unpleasantly aware of this transformation. Then, she decides to stay with the family leaving her husband in perplexity.

هيمنة السلطة الجنسية في مسرحية (The Homecoming) للكاتب هارولد بينتر

المدرس

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المستخلص:

يهدف البحث الى توضيح كيف استطاعت راث الشخصية النسوية الوحيدة في المسرحية والتي قدمت من أمريكا لتعيش مع عائلة زوجها اللندنية أن تحصل موقع الهيمنة في العائلة. استطاعت هذه الشخصية أن تغير التركيبة البطريركية للعائلة من خلال إزاحة الأب ماكس من مكانه في العائلة. تتصارع كل الشخصيات الذكرية عدا سام مع الجنس المغاير وتسعى لإشباع رغباتها الجنسية الجارحة من خلال بعض الوسائل. مهد هذا النقص أو العيب الطريق لراث أن تثير تلك الرغبات بتصرفاتها الجسمانية و الشفهية. فهي مرغوب

فيها وليست راغبة للجنس. استخدمت راث فطنتها في إخضاع الشخصيات؛ وما يؤكد هيمنتها الجنسية هو الشهوات الجنسية الجامحة لدى الشخصيات الذكرية ولإشباع هذه الشهوات ينبغي لتلك الشخصيات تقديم بعض التنازلات والتي بدورها مكنت راث من الاعتلاء والتمتع بمركز السيطرة في العائلة

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