

Family and Sexuality in Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* and *The Homecoming*



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Abstract

This dissertation seeks to explore the themes of family and sexuality among the characters in Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* (1922) and *The Homecoming* (1965). Harold Pinter is a modern British dramatist (1930-2008) whose works fall under the category of the Comedy of Menace for their dark and disturbing portrayal of human relationships and interactions. They are also famous for absurdist and post-war elements which are commonly discussed by critics and scholars. Instead, I have chosen to look at the elements of family and sexuality in the two plays by Pinter because I have found that less work has been done in this area. I think these topics can prove interesting areas of study which can lead to new findings about Pinter's works. I will do a textual analysis of the plays and, especially, look at the characters and their interactions with each other. In doing so, I will argue how Pinter gives us an illusion of family while hinting at the fragility of traditional family structures which can be easily threatened and broken. Also, I will show how sexuality is used by both genders, male and female, as a tool of power to dominate each other in the false family structures shown in his plays. For my discussion, I will use theoretical references of Freud's and Lacan's psychoanalytic theory as well as feminist criticism.

Introduction

Harold Pinter (1930-2008) is a Nobel Laureate English playwright, screenwriter, director and actor. He is one of the most influential modern British dramatists. His best known plays are *The Birthday Party* (1922), *The Homecoming* (1965) and *The Betrayal* (1978). Pinter was born in Hackney, East London, in 1930. His father was a Jewish tailor. He attended Hackney Downs grammar school and he excelled in English and Drama and sports. Later he joined Royal Academy of Dramatic art but did not finish the course. He also joined Mc Master's Theatre Company. He went to Ireland for a year and acted in eleven plays – seven of which were by Shakespeare. In 1953 he played in Donald Wolfit's company and his life as an actor continued from 1954 to 1959 under the stage name David Baron. In 1956, he married actress Vivien Merchant and they had a son. Pinter's first play, *The Room* was written for a friend Henry Woolf. He directed and acted in it at Bristol University. Pinter started his career as a writer of film scripts in 1963 when he adopted both *The Caretaker* and *The Servant* (Directed by Joseph Losey). *The Homecoming* was first performed in 1966 and after it was first performed he was awarded the CBE in recognition of his playwriting .

His early works are described as Comedy of Menace. Pinter experienced the violence and brutality of World War and it had a permanent scar in his mind. Therefore, the threat of violence is portrayed in some of Pinter's early plays which are called Comedy of Menace. *The Dumb Waiter*, *The Hothouse* and *The Birthday Party* can be seen as metaphors for political aggression against the individual .Pinter is famous for his distinct writing style – use of pauses, silences, repetitions, irony, oxymoron, vagueness, semantic ambiguity, de-contextualization. The most distinguishing factor about Pinter's writing is the way he uses language. Readers can sense that what is happening though it is not stated directly. His writing carries double meaning which confuses the readers and at the same time it arouses reader's interest. Pinter's best known literary device was the pregnant pause. It became so

famous that it was named after him “Pinteresque” and became most distinguished feature of his writing.

The Homecoming is one of the famous works of Harold Pinter. This play was written in 1964 and was first published in 1965. This play had six characters. Max was one of the characters, in his seventies and the head of the family. Besides him in the family there were other members. Sam who was brother of Max was a chauffeur, a man of sixty three. Max had three sons Lenny who was a pimp, Joey who was trying to be a boxer and the eldest son was Teddy who used to live in America and a professor of Philosophy. The name of his wife was Ruth. Teddy and Ruth came to visit Teddy’s family on their way to come back from Europe tour and from then, the struggle to hold power started to become more acute among family members. She was the only female member of the family. We came to know about another female character Jessie from other characters like Max and Sam but this character did not develop that much. When Ruth came to live with Teddy’s family, a sexual tension started from then as she teased Lenny and later provoked Joey and at the end of the play she held the ultimate power and became the center of attraction of all the male members of the family. Pinter inserted subtle indication that she also took the position that Jessie used to hold in the family. Besides, she became financially independent and the last scene of the play indicated that in the end, she overthrew male domination and took the power and control of the family.

Now, I would like to talk about *The Birthday party*. In this play, Stanley was the main character who used to live as a boarder with Petey and Meg and they were the owner of the boarding house. From the beginning of the play, the relationship between Meg and Stanley confused the readers and Pinter like his others plays kept it as a puzzle what was going on. This was a unique feature of his writing. We did not find Petey and Meg to involve in any argument, we did not find them to interact more either. In the absence of Petey, we find Meg to flirt with Stanley.

Everything was fine since the two strangers Goldberg and McCann came to live with them. When Stanley heard about them it made him nervous. Finally, when they came Stanley confronted with them. Stanley told McCann that he knew him though McCann refused to have any connection between them. Furthermore, Goldberg and McCann asked Stanley about his past and accused him of betraying his company and murdering his wife. Besides, in the birthday party of Stanley a significant incident happened when they were playing “Blind man’s Buff”. A blackout took place and Stanley assaulted Lulu sexually who was a guest of the house and Lulu also accused Goldberg of taking advantage of her. After that night McCann and Goldberg took Stanley away from the house of Petey and Meg and petey asked McCann where they were taking Stanley. McCann told that, they were taking him to a doctor. Though it is not stated clearly that they were telling lie but readers can sense that. It remains a mystery till the end whether their accusation was true or not and what happened to Stanley.

However, the effects of world wars such as the economic condition, fear among the people of society and the changes that society witnessed are one of the talked about issues of Pinter’s plays. In *The Birthday Party* and *The Homecoming* we also find these themes but in my paper, I will talk about family and sexuality. I will tend to focus on the idea of family that we find in Pinter’s *The Birthday Party* and *The Homecoming*. I will try to analyze how Pinter developed the theme of family as well as the relationship among the members of the family. Furthermore, sexuality also played an important role in Pinter’s play. Often sexuality portrayed in such a way that it put a question mark on traditional family and social values as it seems in *The Homecoming*. I will try to explore how sexuality dominated the relationships among the members of the family and how it played role in power politics.

Chapter 1: Family and Relationships

In Pinter's plays, family relationships and marriage have emerged as one of the fundamental social units. In his plays, Pinter has explored the relationships among the members of family and while reading Pinter's plays readers can relate themselves to the complexity that Pinter has focused in his plays. The most appealing thing about Pinter's plays I found while reading his plays is Pinter has portrayed the relationships among the members of the family in a very realistic way though Pinter is familiar as one of the most enigmatic writers. Pinter has portrayed his characters in an enigmatic way and has left some mysteries regarding the characters to reader's interpretation. As Pinter has not solved the puzzle regarding the relationship between Meg and Stanley in *The Birthday Party* and the relationship between Ruth and the other male members of the family also confuses readers and Pinter has left the interpretation to the readers to unfold the mystery of the relationships. In this chapter, I will focus on the family and the family relationships of *The Birthday Party* and *The Homecoming*.

Firstly, I will talk about *The Birthday Party* and I will try to explore the concept of family that Pinter portrayed in the play and the relationship among the members of the family. In the play an outsider became a part of the family and the relationship with him was more intimate and warm than the other members. In the play at first we did not get any clue that Stanley was an outsider. The way Meg addressed him we thought that he was a member of the family. Later we came to know that he was a boarder of their boarding house. Stanley used to get love, care, shelter and security from Petey and Meg as a person gets from his family, "I'm going to wake that boy" (P.7). From this line it seems that Meg was addressing her own child. Furthermore, Stanley was dependent on them like everyone depends on family for food and shelter as proved in the following lines:

PETEY. Didn't you take him up his cup of tea?

MEG. I always take him up his cup of tea. But that was a long time ago.

PETEY. Did he drink it?

MEG. I made him. I stood there till he did. (P.7)

This conversation revealed motherly affection of Meg towards Stanley and told us that Stanley was dependent on them.

Furthermore, Meg and Petey provided him security that a family provides. In the play, when Goldberg and Mccann came to their boarding house they did not cause any harm to Stanley or did not reveal the cause of their coming to Meg and Petey. In the end, they took away Stanley with them. We do not know what happened to Stanley but we can assume that something bad might have happened to him. Maybe, they could realize that as long as Stanley was there they won't be able to cause any harm to him and because of this they took him away with them. Moreover, that morning when Goldberg and Mccann decided to take Stanley with them Petey told them to leave Stanley alone. Still, they did not say anything about Stanley. They did not reveal the truth of Stanley to him. Maybe, after coming there they could realize that Stanley was very close to them and they used to trust him a lot. Therefore, if they said anything against him they won't trust them. Otherwise, they could have revealed everything about Stanley the very first day they came and could have taken him away. Stanley got the love, care and security from Petey and Meg like a son. When Stanley was leaving their house Petey said, "Stan, don't let them tell you what to do!" (P.80). It showed his concern regarding Stanley. Petey and Meg both of them bestowed their love and care on him.

Now I will try to dig into the relationship between Petey and Meg. As the play opens, we got the idea of the emptiness of their relationship. Simon O. Lesser in an article named

“Reflections On Pinter’s *The Birthday Party*” has mentioned that, “Still, she feels his lack of love. Her libidinized though mainly maternal love for Stanley is born, we feel, of her desperate loneliness and lack of love” (38). It seems that they were together only because of the bond they shared in the eye of society. Their conversations were meaningless and lifeless like their relationship. Sometimes Meg asked Petey some obvious questions such as:

MEG. Is that you? Petey?

Pause

Petey, is that you?

Pause

Petey?

PETEY.What?

MEG. Is that you?

PETEY.Yes, it’s me.

MEG. What? Are you back?

PETEY. Yes.

MEG. I ’ve got your cornflakes ready. Here’s your cornflakes. (P.3)

Throughout the play most of their conversations were like this. We did not find them to interact much. Their meaningless conversations indicated the hollowness of their relationship. If we compare the relationship of Petey and Meg with Meg and Stanley then we can find that, Meg’s relationship with Stanley was more vibrant than Petey. Steven A. Schwartz in an article named “Pinter’s *The Birthday Party* : A director’s Analysis and Production Process”

has mentioned , “ First, Meg is like a new woman when Stanley is around, much more alive and vibrant” (6). Moreover, in the play, it was not so that Meg was not a caring person. She was very caring about Stanley. She was more concerned about Stanley than her husband Petey. Furthermore, she tried to be physically intimate to Stanley while throughout the play we did not see her to get close to her husband Petey. In addition to that, if we try to explore the character of Petey we can find that, he was also a very caring and sympathetic person. He was also very concerned about Stanley. In the play, he asked Meg several times about Stanley and on the morning Stanley left the house, Petey’s conversation with Goldberg tells us that how much concerned he was about him:

GOLDBERG. We’re taking him to Monty.

PETEY. He can stay here.

GOLDBERG. Don’t be silly.

PETEY. We can look after him here.

GOLDBERG. Why do you want to look after him?

PETEY. He is my guest.

GOLDBERG. He needs special treatment.

PETEY. We’ll find someone. (P.79)

Therefore, both Petey and Meg were caring, sympathetic and loving but their conjugal relationship lacked the charm. If we analyze further we find that, Petey was very polite to Meg. He never complained to her about food while Stanley insulted her for the same matter. Furthermore, when Stanley left the house Meg asked Petey about Stanley. Petey said that he was still sleeping though he knew the truth. Maybe, Petey said so because he knew that it

might shatter her. He was able to understand the grief of Meg. It allowed us to say that, it was not so that Petey did not care about Meg. Therefore, the problem was something else that their relationship was not working or it lost the meaning and the spark.

In my opinion, in this play Pinter portrayed that in order to be happy it does not matter whether a person is related to our blood or the bond is socially recognized. A stranger can also fulfill the emptiness and become a part of family but it is very short lived. Any outside force can break the bond easily. We can connect ourselves to the story line of the play. There are thousands couples in our society like Petey and Meg who are staying together for the sake of the bond they share but the relationship is not working.

Now, I would like to talk about *The Homecoming*. At the very beginning of the play we got the idea of the relationship among the members of the family. At the beginning of the play Max was asking his son Lenny about a scissor. Lenny did not pay any heed to him and that made Max angry and it indicates that the relationship among the members of the family was hostile. Throughout the play there was power struggle among the members of the family and they left no stone unturned whenever they got a single chance to insult others:

MAX. Do you hear what I 'm saying? I'm talking to you! Where's the

Scissors?

LENNY. Why don't you shut up, you daft prat?

Max lifts his stick and points it at him.

MAX. Don't you talk to me like that. I'm warning you. (P.7)

Therefore, from the very beginning of the play we got that idea that the relationship between father and son was not a loving one. When Lenny did not pay any heed to him, Max

tried to control the situation by showing his power and tried to show that still he was the head of the family. After this, when Sam entered and Max tried to offend him by asking him why he never got married Sam was not aggressive in return. Then Sam suddenly started to talk about Jessie and tried to ensure his brother that he was always aware of the fact that she was his brother's wife though he took her out once or twice. This makes us think that whether Jessie was the reason of rivalry between Max and Sam and the reason behind Max's effort to insult Sam. Furthermore, when Joey the youngest member of the family came, Max mentioned that the weakness of Joey as a boxer that, he could not attack and could not defend himself. Therefore, we get the evidence of rivalry among the members of the family.

Now, I would like to talk about Teddy who is the eldest son of Max and his wife Ruth. They came to meet Teddy's family when they were returning after a trip from Europe. When they came to their house, at first, they met Lenny but after so many years they did not interact that much. Teddy just introduced Ruth as a nice person. He was not enthusiastic to talk to his brother. Their awkwardness has been marked by several pauses. Furthermore, when Ruth and Teddy met Max the next day, Max did not welcome them warmly. Maybe, he was threatened by the arrival of Teddy. Maybe, he thought that Teddy might take the authority of the family as the eldest son and he may lose the position of the head of the family. Later his behavior changed with them. The most striking point about the marriage of Teddy and Ruth was, there family did not even know that they got married. This proved that the bond Teddy shared with his family was very distant.

If we try to analyze the relationship of Teddy and Ruth at first it seems that their relationship was based on love and care but as the play unfolds it becomes clear that they were not happy in their relationship. The freedom and power that Ruth longed for she got it after she came to live with Teddy's family and it led them to become distant.

Therefore, the picture of family that Pinter portrayed was a very divergent one in terms of the relationship and bond among the members of the family. Though the family members shared a very distant relationship they did not get separate. They were dependent on one another. As there was no female member in their family, Max used to cook for his family. Lenny and Sam used to provide financial support and when Ruth came they became dependent on her. When Ruth came Teddy introduced her with Lenny that night. After that when Lenny was talking to her he was trying to impress her by telling her different stories. Lenny told her about his violence with a prostitute which should have frightened Ruth but she was not frightened. I found this conversation between Lenny and Ruth very significant because this conversation foreshadows the rest of the play. After Ruth's entry to this house readers become aware of the game and this scene foreshadows this. Firstly, in this scene for the very first time we saw that the family members were engaged in a conversation where they were not insulting each other. Lenny said whatever came to his mind and was trying to impress her. We were not sure whether Lenny had any intention behind that but for the first time readers felt that he was willing to spend time with one of his family members. Secondly, in this scene Ruth called him Leonard and we came to know that his mother used to call him Leonard. We came to know about Jessie from Max and Sam but this was the first time we came to know about her from her children. Furthermore, at the end of the play Ruth's relationship with the members of the family confused readers. Ruth's relationship with Max also became questionable. Therefore, by calling Lenny in that name which his mother used to call was also foreshadowing the relationship between Max and Ruth and the fact that she was going to take the position of their mother in their family. Berlin in an article named "Traffic Of Our Stage: Pinter's *The Homecoming*" has mentioned, "When Ruth calls him Leonard, she becomes the mother who dominates" (390). Moreover, before the arrival of Ruth the male members used to dominate and insult each other to hold their power but in this scene we

found that when Lenny wanted to make her frightened she took the control of the situation. Maybe, the story was made up to discomfort her or to frighten her but Lenny failed to do that. This is an indication that she is going to take control of the family:

RUTH. That was a very good lunch.

MAX. I'm glad you liked it. (To the others). Did you hear that? (To Ruth). Well,

I put my heart and soul into it, I can tell you.(He sips). And this is a
lovely cup of coffee.

RUTH. I am glad.

(...)

MAX. Well, it's a long time since the whole family was together, eh? If only your
mother was alive. (P.45)

The above stated lines are the opening lines of Act 2 which is completely different from Act 1 in terms of the relationship among the members of the family. The whole family was happy. They were having food together and were sharing their happiness and were showing their gratitude to each other. This scene was completely different from that we get in Act 1 where each and every one was fighting with each other and verbally insulting others even there was physical violence. Furthermore, in this scene Max became nostalgic remembering his past memories when his wife was alive. The family picture that we got from Max's description was a very blissful one. He was a hardworking, loving father while Jessie was a caring mother and wife and the children were very happy:

MAX. Well, It's a long time since the whole family was together, eh?

(...)

I tell you, It was like Christmas. (P.42)

This scene holds a great significance. Here, the happy family revived again. Maybe, Pinter did so to delineate female power or dominance. In absence of a female character the whole family was in turmoil. The family revived its happiness again in presence of a female character. Gradually, Ruth took the position of Jessie. The whole family became dependent on her. She became the center of attraction of the male members. She overthrew male dominance and took the control of the family.

Now, I will compare and contrast the family pictures that Pinter has portrayed in *The Birthday party* and in *The Homecoming*. Firstly, I will talk about the similarities. In *The Birthday party* Stanley who was a stranger to Petey and Meg lived with them as a member of their family. Their relationship was so warm that readers did not have any doubt that Stanley was an outsider. Readers came to know about that when it was clearly stated that Stanley was a boarder of their boarding house. Meg's love and care towards him was like a mother. Meg's motherly nature was revealed in several scenes about Stanley several times. She was more close to Stanley than her husband. Therefore, in this play, a stranger became a part of their family and fulfilled all the vacuums of their life. Similarly, in *The Homecoming*, Ruth was also a stranger to Teddy's family who took the position of Jessie and revived the happiness of the family. Both Lenny and Joey got the love and care of mother. Furthermore, Ruth took the position of Jessie in Max's life also. Like Stanley she bridged the whole family her.

However, in *The Birthday Party* Stanley who was a stranger, intruded into the family and at the end of the play, was taken away while in *The Homecoming* Ruth who was a stranger became a member of the family. She established her position in the family and at the end of the play it seems that Teddy who was the son of the play get detached from the family

and became an outsider as he was an outsider at the beginning. Here, Ruth acted as agent of both protection and destruction. As she brought happiness and united the whole family on the other hand, a cold war started among the male members of the family to hook up with her. While, Stanley, who was dear one to Petey and Meg before, remained so even after he left the house. So, in terms of causing destruction Stanley was different than Ruth. Therefore, the emptiness in relationship and life, grief, complexity of relationships were present in both plays but there were some dis-similarities between Ruth and Stanley and the way they acted was also distinct.

Chapter 2: Sexuality and Power Politics

Sexuality is one of the predominant aspects of Pinter's play. Pinter has portrayed sexuality as a weapon to hold power in his plays. Pinter has showed how sexuality dominates a relationship and how a character gains power by it. In this chapter, I will focus on the sexual relationship between characters in *The Birthday party* and *The Homecoming* and I will try to explore the relationship between sexuality and power.

Firstly, I will talk about the sexual relationship between Meg and Stanley in *The Birthday Party*. In this play, we find that Meg's relationship with Stanley was more vibrant than her husband Petey. I have discussed about it in detail in the previous chapter. In the play Meg was a woman in her sixties and Stanley was his late thirties. Both Petey and Meg treated him as their child and Stanley also allowed them to do so. It seems that they tolerated his bad behaviour also like parents do for their children. In the play how Meg calls her, feeds her reveals her motherly affection towards him. The birthday gift that Meg brought for Stanley was a toy drum. It was quite surprising because young children like this kind of toys and Meg gave it to Stanley who was in his thirties. It also reveals that, Meg used to treat him as a child. On the other hand, their behaviour implies sexuality also. R.F. Storch in an article named "Harold Pinter's Happy Families" has said that, "And Meg, his landlady, sustains, more directly than a mother probably could, the ambivalent feeling of a mother towards her son" (705). This relationship can be explained from the theory of Sigmund Freud. Freud has introduced the term "Oedipus Complex" to explain the unconscious desire of a child towards opposite sex parents. Therefore, the relationship between Stanley and Meg can be explained from this theory of Freud as motherly affection and sexual desire both were present in their relationship. In Act 1 when Meg was serving breakfast to Stanley, he uttered the word "succulent". We can understand that he did not say it about food. The word "succulent" has

sexual connotations, referring to a woman who is in her ripe state or prime age, that is physically or sexually developed.

We can easily understand that the word Stanley chose was intentional. Furthermore, if we try to understand this incident distinctly it is important to notice how Meg reacted to it. At first, she said that, he should not say this type of word to a married woman and Stanley behaved in a way that he is too naive to understand what she said and after this Stanley suddenly changed the topic. He asked Meg to give him tea. Therefore, it seems that he was trying to play with her emotion. Meg's reaction to this incident seems coy. She told him to say sorry for the incident and after a while she started playing with his hair and tried to become close to him. This means, she said him to say sorry for the sake of saying. Otherwise, she won't be close with him after that. This seems quite awkward because for Stanley, Meg was his land lady and allowing Stanley to say this type of words implies that maybe, their relationship was closer than the relationship that society expects between a land lady and a boarder. In addition to that, when Meg gave Stanley the birthday present she brought for him, she asked him to kiss her and Stanley did so. This incident reinforces the belief of sexual interaction between them. As we did not find such intimacy of Meg with her husband it puts a question mark on their relationship also. Moreover, in the play Stanley insulted her several times. Therefore, we wonder how he got the audacity to behave so with her as he was a boarder of their house. It implies that, the relationship was something more than a relationship between a boarder and a land lady. Meg allowed him to do so or Stanley could realise that, Meg won't tell him anything or her behaviour with him won't change because of this. In the play, in Act 1 Stanley tried to take Meg's attention by using words like "succulent" and after that when Meg tried to get closer to

him he threw her away. Furthermore, he insulted Meg by saying that she was a bad wife and a bad cook.

Furthermore, Stanley was very sure about the feeling of Meg towards him and maybe for that she took Meg for granted and took advantage of her. He drove the relationship according to his own will. His conversation with Meg revealed his stern attitude as we see by his words, “I want to ask you something. (...) Tell me, Mrs Boles, when you address yourself to me, do you ever ask yourself to me, do you ever ask yourself to me, do you ever ask yourself who exactly you are talking to? Eh?” (P. 15). These lines indicate that Stanley was aware of the feelings of Meg and these lines also put light on their relationship. Maybe, Stanley was indicating those conversations that a lady should not have with her boarder. On that account, this conversation reinforces the belief of their hidden relationship. Moreover, when Stanley asked this question Meg did not say anything about it rather she changed the topic. Maybe, she did not want to confess her feelings to him at that moment. Meg’s sudden change of the topic suggested so.

In the play, Meg was not the only woman who was taken advantage of. Lulu was another woman who was used by Goldberg. When Lulu came, Goldberg started to flirt with her. Lulu thought that he liked her after that she tried to express her feelings for him, “I’ve always liked older men. They can sooth you” (P. 54). When Lulu started to fall for her she asked Goldberg about his personal life and said that she trusts him. She said so to express her love and dependency on him. As Lulu was a young girl, she got attracted to Goldberg very easily. She was so naive to understand that she was taken advantage of by him. She got flattered very easily. For instance, when Goldberg asked Lulu to sit on his lap and said that she was a bouncy girl Lulu sat on his lap. Therefore, by flirting with her, Goldberg took advantage of her or fulfilled his desire. We did not find Lulu and Meg to play with each other’s emotion and Stanley did with Meg. We came to know about the incident that

happened with Lulu when she accused Goldberg of taking advantage of her and when she accused Goldberg he denied it completely and said that, whatever happened between them it happened because Lulu wanted it that way.

As Pinter has not given any description of the incident we are not sure who was right but when Lulu accused him still Goldberg was trying to take advantage of her. He told her to kiss him and she refused to do that. It seems wiser to believe the words of Lulu. Another significant point is, in the play we don't come to know about Lulu's family background. When Lulu was accusing Goldberg of taking advantage of her it strikes our mind why did she do that? Was she scared of her family? Whatever her situation was, she was in more vulnerable position than Goldberg, thus she says, "That's what you did. You quenched your ugly thirst. You taught me things a girl shouldn't know before she's been married at least three times!" (P. 74).

Here, it's very clear why Lulu said so. She is talking about sexual interaction with Goldberg and as she was not married with him, she was trying to say that whatever happened was not right. She should not have this type of experience before her marriage. It seems that she was concerned about her family and society, a family or society teaches girls or puts pressure on them to preserve their virginity before marriage. Therefore, though it is not mentioned directly it seems that she had the pressure of protecting her virginity. Society always puts pressure on a girl and never blames a boy for this neither a society is concerned about the virginity of a boy. Therefore, I think, Lulu's condition is relatable to the condition of girls' in every society.

Sexual exploitation of women by men, this theme dominates the whole play. Most of the time in this play this theme is expressed in a subtle way but this theme has been expressed in

an explicit way while the birthday party was going. Lulu was the victim of Stanley's exploitation. After that night she became the victim of Goldberg's sexual abuse. The next morning Goldberg's dismissive behaviour with her makes it quite clear that he was successful in his motive and that is why, may be, he wanted to get rid of her. Therefore, both female characters were the victim of molestation in this play.

Now, I would like to talk about the play *The Homecoming*. In this play, sexuality is the dominant theme. In the play, Ruth who was dominated by her husband, was casting for freedom and achieved her goal by her sexuality. When her husband Teddy, introduced her to her in laws he gave them an impression that she was a good wife as well as a good mother. As the play moves on, we got the idea that Ruth was someone that Teddy needed to support him, to fulfil his own need. However, this girl who was dominated by her husband became the central focus or gained the power in the new family by her sexuality. At first, when Ruth came no one accepted her positively or warmly. On the other hand, at the end of the play the scenario was totally opposite. Therefore, we can say that she made the strategies in her mind that cast a spell on the mind of the members of Teddy's family. When Ruth first came to this house, at first she got introduced with Lenny and if we analyse their first conversation some important points comes to our mind. When they first talked, Lenny started to talk to her about very trivial matters. Then, he tried to take her attention or tried to make her frightened by telling stories of two prostitutes and told her how he behaved with them. Then suddenly he said her to move the astray what Ruth refused to do and said that it was not in her way so it was not needed to move. Then, Lenny made different excuses to remove the astray and did so. It was his way to dominate her, to impose his own wish on her. Then, Ruth did not tell him anything about it. She was very passive here. It was her strategy. She played the same tricks with other members also. At first she was very submissive. Then she started to dominate them. She seized the power by her sexuality. However, after removing the astray

Lenny wanted to take the glass from her but now Ruth reacted in a different way. Maybe, from the very beginning Lenny wanted to dominate her as he did before with his father and with other family members. When Lenny wanted to remove the glass she said, if he would take the glass she would take her:

LENNY. I 'll take it, then.

RUTH. If you take the glass I'll take you. (P. 34)

After the reply of Ruth, Lenny was still rigid in his point but Ruth became successful in her motive. She wanted to get intimate with him and made him to do so though at first he refused to do:

She picks up the glass and lifts it towards him.

RUTH. Have a sip. Go on. Have a sip from my glass.

He is still.

Sit on my lap. Take a long cool sip.

(...)

LENNY. What are you doing, making me some kind of proposal?

RUTH. Oh, I was thirsty. (P. 35)

If we analyse the conversation then, we can find that, at first Ruth was submissive, she did not tell anything to Lenny but later she refused to do what Lenny said and made him to do what she wanted to do. Later her behaviour with Lenny turned very much sexual. She was kind of provoking him though at first Lenny did not respond positively. Ruth's behaviour was very enigmatic here. It created confusion in Lenny's mind. Later he asked her, was she

making any “proposal” to him? Maybe, by the word “proposal” Lenny was asking, was Ruth proposing him to have sex with her? Lenny was confused about Ruth’s motive because she was his brother’s wife or it was shocking for Lenny that a girl can be that bold to express her sexual desire to a man at the very first day they got introduced. Before this conversation, Lenny tried to impose his authority over her but after a while Ruth took the control of the situation and refused Lenny on his face. Furthermore, she expressed her sexual need to him. When Ruth said that, “Oh, I was thirsty” the words she used was metaphorical. Here, she meant her thirst for sexuality. Before this, she asked him to sit on her lap which also suggests that she was trying to provoke him sexually. Maybe, it was her strategy to overthrow male domination by her sexuality. Normard Berlin in the article “ Traffic Of The Stage : Pinter’s The Homecoming” regarding this scene has said that, “ She seemed to be drinking forever, taking it all in, so to speak, and at that moment the audience realises that, Ruth will be the ultimate winner, in her bout with Lenny and in all her relationships with the family”(390). In my opinion, this was Ruth’s first victory in this house because she didn’t accept what Lenny asked her to do while she made him to do what she wanted. Therefore, this scene foreshadowed what was going to happen. Furthermore, in the play when Lenny tried to embarrass Teddy by asking philosophical questions Ruth tried to turn the attention of Lenny by talking about the existence of her body. The words she used were clear indication of sexual provocation. This was the second time she talked in this way to Lenny. Moreover, while Teddy was packing for leaving, he came to downstairs and found that Lenny was begging to Ruth to dance with her and later Lenny kissed him. This man Lenny, who tried to dominate her when they first met was begging for her company. The scenario was changed. Now, Ruth was the dominating character, she was the person whom Lenny needed.

Furthermore, Ruth’s intimacy with Lenny arises question whether Lenny and Ruth fell in love but if we think about Ruth then she was also engaged with Joey. Joey kissed her in front

of Max and Lenny and fondled her. When Lenny kissed Ruth in front of Joey, Joey told she was a tart and this allowed him to think that he could also exploit Ruth sexually like his brother Lenny. Here, Ruth was submissive. She did not say anything to Joey. She allowed him to do what he wanted. After this, she started to dominate Joey and Lenny. Ruth pushed away Joey and mocked both of them and ordered them to bring food for her. Therefore, it can be said that it was her strategy to use her sexuality to execute domination and power over men.

Moreover, when Ruth came to the house Max insulted Teddy by saying that why did he bring a prostitute in the house and later he started to like her a lot and praised her for her beauty, “Mind you she’s a lovely girl. A beautiful woman. And a mother too” (P.59).

Max who was the head of the house was threatened to lose his power to his sons and from the beginning he was struggling to hold the power but he failed to realise that he lost his power to a woman whom he insulted earlier. Later in the play, he begged her to kiss him and tried to convince her to kiss him by saying that he was not an old man. Like Joey and Lenny, Max also got attracted to her and became dependent on her. It seems that, she took the position of Jessie in Max’s life. Like Jessie, she united the whole family. Furthermore, as Ruth took the position of Jessie in the family, her relationship with Lenny and Joey can also be considered as Oedipus Complex. Moreover, in the play though it is not clearly mentioned that, Jessie had sexual relationship with Sam but there are indications of that and like Jessie’s relationship with Sam, Ruth’s sexual relationship with Lenny and Joey also reinforcing the belief that Ruth was resemblance of Jessie.

Now, I will talk about the relationship between Teddy and Ruth. At first, it seems that they had a very good relationship. Teddy idealised their relationship in front of his family members but later the truth came out regarding their relationship. In the play, we do not find

any kind of sexual relationship between Ruth and Teddy while Ruth sexually provoked other male members. Furthermore, when Lenny and Joey exploited Ruth sexually in front of him he did not raise any voice against it. The picture that Pinter portrayed here is actually very disturbing. Ruth was exploited by her husband's brothers in front of him and he did not utter any word. Besides, when Teddy's family members told him that they wanted to keep Ruth as a prostitute he did not oppose that and was not even got surprised by that proposal. Therefore, a question arises regarding Teddy's motive for bringing Ruth to his family. Maybe, he also wanted to use her in this way.

Now I will try to explore how Ruth used her sexuality to overthrow men's domination. When they proposed Ruth to be a prostitute and to live with them it seems that the male members framed her fate or future but the reality was different. It seems that the male members decided to keep her with them because they wanted to take advantage of her. They wanted to fulfill their sexual desire by her. If we try to dig deep then it does not seem that she stayed there because they wanted. While talking to Lenny, one day Ruth said that, she was a photographic model before she got married to Teddy. This is not stated clearly that she was a prostitute but "a model for the body" was indicating so. Ruth says, "No, I was a model for the body. A photographic model for the body" (P. 57).

Furthermore, when Teddy's family proposed her to be a prostitute she did not refuse and the most important point is that they did not force her. She had choice. She could go back with Teddy but she chose to live with them. Though Teddy did not reveal the hardships of their relationships to his family but from Ruth's words it seems that she was not happy in that relationship. Maybe, Ruth thought that, prostitution was far better than being in a relationship that didn't work. It was not so, that she became a prostitute to fulfil her sexual need. She teased the male members but it is not stated clearly that she had sex with them. When Joey was asked what he did with Ruth while he was with her, he made it very clear that he did not

have sex with her and Teddy mocked him for that. Therefore, it does not make any sense to say that, she stayed there and agreed to become prostitute for getting physical pleasure. We will have to think what she got in return to understand the real motive behind her choice. Here, she exploited her sexuality to get a strong position in the family and she got that. She got the freedom and power and maybe she cherished it for long. Richard Cave in an article named “Pinter At Sixty In The Nineteen Nineties” has mentioned, “She seemed to be consciously playing the fantasy- type, the better to bide her time and gather the necessary strength to reveal the true extent of her freedom of choice to define her own identity” (149). Furthermore, Arthur Ganzin in an article named “A Clue to the Pinter puzzle: The Triple Self in *The Homecoming*” has mentioned, “Driven by them, she must accept the degradation of her role as prostitute to satisfy her thirst for the passionate vitality she finds in her adoptive family” (181).

Moreover, the male members thought that they decided Ruth’s fate but they failed to realise that Ruth won the game which was going on in the family to hold power. All the male members ended up by losing their power to Ruth. They became completely dependent on her. They failed to realise that she entered in the game of power politics and left them behind and took total control. The play closed after the scene where Max was begging Ruth for kiss, both Lenny and Teddy were crazy to get her. Ruth was the one who had the power to seek attention, to dominate and to play with their emotion. Even when they thought that they could impose their wish on her and they could use her for their economic benefit and own benefit, she was in dominating position. She made it very clear what she needed and they agreed to her condition. She was very bold when she was negotiating with them. She demanded a dressing room, a rest room, a bedroom and a personal maid. She demanded all the convenience she needed, “I would naturally want to draw up an inventory of everything I need, which would require your signatures in the presence of witness” (P.77). Therefore, she

got everything here she desired. Economic freedom was also one of her achievements. Ruth said that, she was a model before she got married but it is not stated why she stopped working as a model. It is not impossible that Teddy forced her to sacrifice her career for her family. While Max was appreciating Ruth, she said that before her marriage she was different. This can have several meanings. Maybe, she indicated her profession before her marriage or she talked about her mental state or the freedom she enjoyed before her marriage and she lost it after she hitched with Teddy. From Teddy's response to that it seems that Ruth was talking about something that was unpleasant to Teddy and for this reason he denied that. Perhaps, Ruth thought that staying with Teddy's family was her last chance to regain her freedom, happiness and power that she lost after her marriage.

RUTH. I was...

MAX. What?

Pause

What she say?

They all look at her.

RUTH. I was ... different...when I met Teddy...first.

TEDDY. No you weren't. You were the same. (P. 50)

Now, I will show the comparison between the two plays based on sexuality. Firstly, if we think about power politics then Ruth was far ahead than Meg. She manipulated the male members and snatched the power of the house from them. On the contrary, Meg was manipulated by Stanley. Stanley played with her emotion and by sexually provoking her he made her dedicated to him. It allowed him to behave badly with her while he was a boarder in

their house. This proves that how much power he had in that house that he could use the land lady according to his wish. Therefore, Ruth used her sexuality as a weapon to dominate male members, to grasp power while Meg was being exploited sexually. Furthermore, the character of Ruth was more enigmatic than Meg. If we think about Meg we can understand that Stanley was the man who fulfilled her sexual desire and she was emotionally attached to him also. On the contrary, it became very difficult to get the motive of Ruth or what was going on her mind. Her reason behind staying with Teddy's family, her sexual provocation, her consent to prostitution everything remains a puzzle. Besides, in *The Birthday Party* like Meg another female character Lulu also became the victim of sexual exploitation. The male members had the power to dominate them and to take sexual advantage of them.

Additionally, in *The Homecoming* at the end of the play Ruth became successful to snatch the power but it was not like that she did not face male domination. Albert Wertheim has talked about it in an article named "The Modern British Homecoming Play". In this article he has said that, "Similarly, Ruth subdues the others and compels the family to accept her not as daughter-in-law or sister-in-law but as someone central to the family unit- indeed as its head" (156). Therefore, the difference between Meg and Ruth was that, Ruth could come out of the sphere of male domination what Meg failed to do. Ruth's husband tried to dominate her and the other male members of Teddy's family tried to do so. At first she allowed them to do so and gradually they fell in her trap. However, to some extent, Meg had the power to control the relationship or to dominate. Though there is enough indication in the play that Petey was informed about the relationship of his wife and Stanley, he did not say her anything, he never complained her for being a bad wife or cook. Therefore, she was dominant in that relationship with Petey. Though Meg, to some extent became successful to dominate Petey but at the end of the play Petey kept her in darkness about Stanley. This indicates that, in this play, male domination prevailed. Meg could not overthrow it like Ruth. Lulu also failed to do so.

Most remarkable similarity between the two plays is that sexual relationship between husband and wife was missing in both plays. Neither Meg nor Ruth had sexual relationship with their husband though they had intimate relationships with other male members. Though they had sexual relationship with other male members instead of their husbands, the reason was completely different. In case of Meg, the feelings she had for Stanley was very spontaneous. She did not have any motive in her mind. It was like she used to get pleasure from his company. She wanted to fulfil her sexual desire and emptiness of life. While Ruth used her sexuality as a weapon to hold power in the family and to manipulate them.

To conclude, in both plays *The Birthday party* and *The Homecoming* sexuality was the dominant theme which controlled the relationships among the members of the play and it was the basis of power hierarchy.

Conclusion

In this chapter, at first, I would like to talk about the traditional family structure and the role that family have in our life. In a traditional family, we expect to have a father figure, a mother figure and one or more children. Without this structure we think that a family is incomplete and it fails to fulfil the condition of a traditional family. Family provides us food, security, support, affection as well as it gives us identity and a feeling of belongingness. As humans are social being, we cannot live alone and in order to live in society we have to act according to social norms. The values that society expects from its members such as honesty, integrity, mutual respect are taught by family and without these values a human being turns into a beast. Therefore, family performs a vital role in a human being's life.

Now I will try to explore the family structure that Pinter portrayed in *The Birthday Party* and in *The Homecoming*. Firstly, I will talk about *The Birthday Party*. In this play, Stanley who was an outsider used to live with Petey and Meg like a family member and used to get all the facilities that a person gets from his or her family. He used to get food, safety, affection from them like their child. Like he used to get facilities that a family provides his presence also gave them bliss. He fulfilled the hollowness of their life, gave them the happiness of a complete family what they did not have. By this character, Pinter created an illusion of a complete family but this illusion shattered when Stanley was taken away from them. This incident made us think, is it possible for an outsider to be a part of a family? Maybe as Stanley was an outsider it was easier for Goldberg and Mccann to take him away from them. Therefore, the picture of happy family that was portrayed was very short. Therefore, in my opinion what Pinter tried to depict here was, an outsider can be a part of a family for a short period of time but it does not last long. Though in the play both Petey and Meg were very affectionate to Stanley he was taken away. The significant point here was Petey's effort to save Stanley. From Petey's conversation with Goldberg and Mccann it

seems that Petey could sense that, something bad was going to happen with Stanley. That is why, he told Stanley not to listen to them but it was surprising that why he did not take any step to save Stanley. If Stanley would be his biological son would Petey be able to sit quietly? Here, the difference Pinter portrayed was between an outsider and a member of a family. Petey was affectionate to Stanley but here Petey did not do anything for him. Maybe, it was because he was not his own blood and for this he did not feel the urge to save him. Furthermore, Meg was more affectionate to Stanley than Petey. In the play, Petey did not tell her about Stanley when he was taken away. Meg was unaware of the fact that Stanley was no more in their house. If she would know the fact that he was in trouble what would she do? Would she behave like Petey and let him go with them? Maybe, she would do the same thing like her husband. As long as Stanley was with them they protected him but when an external force came, they failed to protect him. Maybe, here Pinter tried to reinforce the importance of family again. If Stanley was their biological son maybe his fate won't be the same. By taking away Stanley from them, Pinter portrayed the failure of the false family structure that Petey and Meg tried to build.

Now, I will talk about *The Homecoming*. Like *The Birthday Party* in this play also, we find the failure of false family structure. Like the family of Petey and Meg, Max's family was also incomplete. Here, the mother figure was absent but when Ruth came to their house they tried to fulfil the gap they had in their family. After that, there was an illusion of completing the traditional family structure and revival of happiness in the family. All the members were happy, the traditional family picture became complete but it did not last long. Max wanted to replace Ruth in the place of his dead wife Jessie. He got attracted to her. The whole scenario got more complicated. Lenny and Joey got motherly affection from her and at the same time they had sexual interaction with her. When Ruth came Lenny got confused how to interact with her as a friend or as a sister-in-law or as a mother. Same happened to Joey

also. Therefore, it was again the failure of traditional family structure. If Ruth would be their mother Lenny and Joey won't feel the physical attraction to her. In Act 1 after Ruth's arrival when she called Lenny "Leonard", he told him not to call him by this name because his mother used to call him by this name. Therefore, Lenny made it clear that he won't be able to give her the place of his mother. Furthermore, when Ruth provoked him sexually, Lenny did not respond positively to that. Maybe, it was because she was his brother's wife.

In addition to that, Max's sexual attraction to Ruth implies that, he was unable to give her the place of his son's wife. Instead he gave her the position of his wife. All the members of the family tried to fulfil the emptiness of their life through her. As Lenny and Joey both of them were unmarried they tried to fulfil their sexual need and at the same time they wanted to get the care of a mother. (This refers to the idea of Oedipus complex as explained in Chapter 2). However, in the end it seems that Ruth failed to fit in or to perform any role properly. She could neither be their mother or brother's wife. At last she was treated like a whore.

Now, I will talk about sexuality. In both plays, female sexuality was emphasized. In *The Birthday Party* we found that, men used their sexuality to dominate or to oppress them. The opposite happened in *The Homecoming*. Here, though Ruth was sexually exploited by men she could overcome it and later dominated them. Sexuality is often associated with power and strength. In both plays, we found that the person who held the power to dominate others sexually, dominated the relationship also. In *The Birthday Party* both Lulu and Meg were exploited by men. When Lulu was sexually assaulted by Goldberg or Stanley played with Meg's emotion, we did not find them to protest it. Though Lulu complained to Goldberg, he did not pay any heed to her. On the other hand, in *The Homecoming* when Ruth, provoked them sexually the men entitled her tart or whore. They did the same thing with her but she was the one who was blamed. Furthermore, it was not so that she did it to get physical pleasure. She did it to survive there; she used her sexuality to find a place for her in that

house. When she first came she faced Lenny's domination and Max's rejection. By her sexuality she made a place for her. Then why was she blamed for it or got the title of whore or tart? It was so because society allows a man to exercise sexuality as a symbol of power but never allows a female to do that. While male sexuality is associated with strength or power female sexuality is associated with chastity or purity. When a woman loses her chastity or fails to protect that society entitles her as a bad woman or "whore". According to Lacan, phallus is symbolic of the male penis. Lacan avoided the term 'penis' because in Lacan's concept male domination is a cultural construction. Our society is male dominated that is phallogocentric. Phallogocentric society believes that, maleness is normally associated with authority and power (Bertens 161). Therefore, the male dominated society allowed Stanley, Goldberg or Lenny and Max to exercise their sexuality.

Furthermore, in *The Homecoming* Ruth's title of a tart or whore and in *The Birthday Party* Lulu's concern for protecting her chastity can be explained from the theory of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their famous work *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Gilbert and Gubar explained it through the "binary theory". According to this theory, women are viewed either as angel or monster. There is no middle point between these two extremes. This theory can be applied for analysing Ruth's condition in *The Homecoming*. When Ruth was accepted in Teddy's house Max appreciated her a lot. They treated her in a good way but when the situation was out of their control they labelled her as a whore. When Ruth first came to the house, then Max scolded Teddy by saying that why he brought the whore in their house. Furthermore, in the play we come to know about Jessie from Max. Max appreciated his wife by saying that she was a very kind soul, very good wife and mother and also mentioned her as a whore. Therefore, the male dominating society always view or portray women as extreme, either too bad or too good. In the form of mother they worship them and if these women get out of their control they call them whore.

Now, I would like to express my own opinion regarding these two plays and the theme that I chose to explore. Other themes such as war elements, absurdist elements are often explored in Pinter's plays. Less is said about these microscopic or personal relations. That is why I chose this topic. Furthermore, while studying these two plays I found the family structure and sexual representation of Pinter most fascinating, and therefore, I tried to analyse and explore how Pinter talked about social problems regarding family and sexuality. From my study, I came to the conclusion that, Pinter gave a passionate outlook on the traditional concept of family which was threatened and changed in the modern age, in the post war world as the war shattered social structures and religious beliefs.

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