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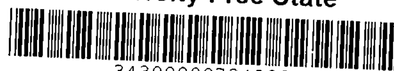
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THE DISCOURSE OF THE OPPRESSED AND THE LANGUAGE OF THE ABANDONED IN SELECTED PLAYS OF HAROLD PINTER

Edwena Jacobs

THE DISCOURSE OF THE OPPRESSED AND THE LANGUAGE OF THE ABANDONED IN SELECTED PLAYS OF HAROLD PINTER

by

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in the

Department of English

at the

University of the Free State

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October 2000

Universiteit van die
Oranje-Vrystaat
BLOEMFONTEIN

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I express my gratitude to the following people:

Professor R. Muller: for accepting my request to transfer this degree from the Drama and Theatre Department to the English Department.

My Supervisor, *Ms. M. Brooks:* for all her support and constant assistance during this task. Because of the long distance involved in this study your additional administrative support and keen interest is very appreciated.

My co-supervisor, *Professor A. MacDonald-Smythe:* your incredible wisdom and insight have guided my understanding beyond the scope of this dissertation.

My friend, *Althea Johnson*: for her formatting this dissertation, and for her patience with the endless footnotes that never seem to stay on the correct page.

My dear friend and mentor, *Dr. Robert Blanc*: a master teacher who indulged in conversation about the essence of language and silence at a French coffee shop in Grenada, and who, when waiting in line at the ticket office, Times Square (New York) patiently listened for two hours whilst I rambled on about Harold Pinter.

My sage, *Dr. Deanna Martin*: for her love and emotional encouragement when I was overwhelmed by the magnitude of this study.

My best 'omego', *Elaine*: because you have never failed in 16 years of friendship to offer me support, and again you were there, even though it opened wounds, you put that aside to enlighten me.

My two gifts of love and goodness, *Keagan and James:* who willingly offered their hugs and kisses to make my gray days brighter and who sacrificed our shared enjoyment of bed-time stories. I am blessed and grateful.

My husband, *Glen*: for inspiring me - with his exceptional love and encouragement – to believe in myself through the numerous frustrations and tears. I am also thankful for your unconditional love and care for the children. Again, I am blessed and grateful.

Lastly to the makers of 555 cigarettes and Nescafé coffee for without which, this journey would have been a lot tougher.

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INTRODUCTION

Teddy: You wouldn't understand my works. You wouldn't have the faintest idea of what they were about [...]. It's nothing to do with intelligence. It's a way of being able to look at the world. It's a question of how far you can operate on things and not in things. I mean it's a question of your capacity to ally the two, to relate the two. To balance the two"
(*The Homecoming,* Pinter, 1978:78).

As an opening statement to the study of Pinter, it is difficult to think of anything more appropriate than Quigley's (1996:1) remark, "Not understanding Harold Pinter has become one of the great pleasures of contemporary literature". This is reinforced by the volume of scholarship available on the writings of Harold Pinter. However, Pinter is not unaware of the critics' difficulties in deciphering the meaning of his plays for he offers the following enigmatic suggestion through his character Teddy (see epigraph): "You wouldn't understand my works. You wouldn't have the faintest idea of what they were about [...]. It's nothing to do with intelligence. It's a way of being able to look at the world" (Pinter, 1978:78).

By looking at the world through Pinter's plays, the audience is faced with a complex and multifaceted society: a world to which the critics and audience cannot ascribe one possible set of meanings. Pinter's landscape is intriguing and evocative, thus audiences continue to approach this world as his writing technique makes one confront oneself, and the society that one is positioned in. Pinter's plays reveal his keen interest in the effect

that the social world has on the individual. His character portrayal exposes the deepest psychological and emotional situations that one is subjected to when oppressed by a tyrannical social world. In the Pinterian landscape, the audience witnesses the horror of oppression and its lasting result: abandonment.

It is significant that Pinter was an actor before he became a dramatist and screenwriter and therefore his experience as an actor on stage offered him an insight into the emotional intensity that a character is able to portray. It is by means of this experienced perception that Pinter as dramatist exposes his intense understanding of the human psyche and its struggle for identity in an oppressed social environment.

Pinter highlights his use of discourse and language through his characters' desires to remain individuals as well as their desires for power in the social sphere. In order to survive in the realm of the social world, the characters obtain power by manipulating language. However, language and discourse do not move along parallel lines for Pinter. Neither does language express the fulfilment of desires nor the acknowledgment of individual rights. Instead, language is equated with the restrictions of the social world and the alienation of individual desires. In order to survive in the social world and speak the language of the social Other, the characters must forfeit their personal relationships with their lovers and abandon their own desires. Therefore, language remains separate and

alien from desire, which is equated with discourse.

Discourse, on the other hand, breaks down the logical linguistic structure of language. It contains deliberate ellipses and a defiant silence against the Other – the social world of hierarchical power. When the characters use discourse they are in perpetual conflict with terminating official power and resurrecting their individual desires. During their moments of insight, the characters refuse to be willing collaborators in a demoralised social world. This highlights their discourse: their rebellion against abusive games and/or political control. However, the social world is too powerful for the characters and threatens to abandon them should they not conform to the Other's laws. For fear of alienation, the characters therefore repress their desires and live in a world of oppression. This internal conflict, namely the need to belong to the social world in order to escape isolation (as noted in their language) and the need to fulfil their individual desires (as noted in their discourse), is the method Pinter uses to expose the horror of oppression. Thus the characters' discourse speaks to their oppression and their resistance. Their language betrays the abandonment of their individualities and their co-option in social conformity.

However, Pinter's plays offer no simple answers to the internal conflict that his characters are subjected to. When watching or reading a Pinter play the audience or reader is left with many unanswered questions to which Pinter provides no answer. By

not clarifying many details in his plays, Pinter makes the audience confront themselves with the notion of the power of the Other versus their own individual desires. Thus the dramatist allows his audience to find answers based on their own realities and worldviews so as to reach depth and meaning. This is confirmed by the vast range of critical responses dedicated to the interpretation of Pinter's corpus.

The Guardian theatre critic, Michael Billington[1], recently published an insightful and extensively researched book: *The Life and Works of Harold Pinter*. In this biography, Billington highlights the way in which many of Pinter's plays are based on the dramatist's life experiences. Billington's approach to Pinter adds an interesting slant to the understanding of his plays. He draws many parallels between Pinter's political vision as presented in his plays and his personal life. Furthermore, the knowledge that Billington offers in his book increases one's admiration for the way Pinter transforms his personal memories into art.

Pinter's works have also been described by Arnold Hinchliffe (1967:38) as a comedy that "frightens and causes pain". In his book *Harold Pinter,* Hinchliffe locates Pinter's works as 'comedies of menace'. While the dramatist's plays evoke laughter, the element of comedy ceases when the horror of the situation becomes eminent. Martin Esslin, a prominent Pinter critic, has categorised the dramatist as an Absurdist playwright. In his

book, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, Esslin (1991:235) states, "[a]mong the younger generation of playwrights who followed in the footsteps of the pioneers of the Theatre of the Absurd, Harold Pinter [...] has achieved the status". Crucial to the concept of the Theatre of the Absurd is "the sense of metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of the human condition, [the] senselessness of life [...] in a world that has lost its meaning, [thus] language also becomes a meaningless buzzing" (1991:23, 24 and 84). The notion of language being meaningless serves to suggest that the process of communication has failed. However, Pinter (1991a:xiii) expresses that the phase "'the failure of communication' [...] has been fixed to my work quite consistently. I believe the contrary. I think that we communicate only too well". The scope of communication is one of the key elements to the understanding of Pinter's works, and therefore this study examines the ways in which the characters sadistically control language as a means to enact power, dominance and victimisation.

The Lacanian Symbolic realm of language (cf. Lacan, 1988:188), as it depicts the notion of the social tie – the Other –, maintains the surface of order at the expense of dehumanising the individual. The language of the Other, which controls the oppressive and dominant cultural laws, cannot be ignored in the lives of the characters because it inhabits their utterances. The Other speaks through the characters in the form of verbal violence: the characters' adoption of sadistic qualities. However, the aspects of *discourse*

are characterised not by the Symbolic realm, but rather by the omnipresence of the characters' unconscious fears and desires.

Discourse institutes a realm of floating signifiers, random connections, Freudian slips and metaphors. These incursions which constantly destabilise linguistic structures (thus language), result in a certain impenetrability of Pinter's work and cause his critics to complain about the absence of meaning in his plays. But there is meaning – a meaning that follows a Pinterian logic. Pinter (1991b:ix) himself claims, "What I am doing in my plays is realistic, but what I'm doing is not realism". His plays are not 'realism' as the characters' discourse gestures beyond itself, beyond logical communication. In Pinter's world 'realism' is not determined. However, his plays are 'realistic' and we are faced with characters with which we, as social beings, can identify. The characters find themselves in a hostile and unsympathetic society and hence in relationships that are so dysfunctional that the pursuit of the 'real' in their lives turns out to be a fruitless quest.

As Pinter (1991a:ix) so accurately suggests, "there can be no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false". Thus the characters are positioned in situations where language can be both true and false. More importantly, they are forced into situations of denial where they do not explore the 'real', but instead

retreat into fantasy. Therefore the characters recreate reality by entering into worlds of fantasy and illusion in order to survive in their oppressed existences. However, when the audience looks beyond the characters' illusions and fantasies, they see repressed desires displayed in unconscious discourse. Words, in Lacanian terms, are presented as signifiers that refuse to restrict themselves to meaning. Words, and thus meaning, exceed finite representation in that the characters' discourse can never be fully expressed through available signifiers. MacCannell (1986:47) writing on Lacan, sums up the situation succinctly:

> Power consists in the ability to restrict and limit meaning. It is the quashing of multiple meanings, not simply their elimination that the hegemonic signifier operates. By imposing or implying 'significance' at the expense of meaning, the word becomes the basis of social life, the form of the social tie.

Ultimately, meaning becomes a network of differences and accordingly creates a communication problem in the relationships of Pinter's characters. As Pinter (1991a:xiii) highlights, "communication is too alarming. To enter into someone else's life is too frightening. To disclose to others the poverty within us is too fearsome a possibility". Thus the characters abandon constructive language and, in doing so, they repress their desires and their commitment to their partners and relationships. The abandonment of communication has a dual function. Firstly, the characters (mis)communicate. During their conversations, they speak through and around their insecurities and aspirations, as

the signifiers needed to express their desires are too painful to utter. Thus they avoid communication as they attempt to control language, rather than being controlled by it, in choosing words other than those they want to say. Secondly, they abandon language as a means of control. This is discernible in Pinter's frequent inserts of *pause* and *silence* in his texts. During their silence, the characters re-negotiate language and therefore, for a moment, reality is re-negotiated too. At that point they are free, there are no words, no restrictive language of the Other. This slight pause from their chaotic worlds, this moment of freedom in silence, cuts through the oppressive boundaries of language and creates a space for the expression of the inexpressible and "true" communication.

Silence is a means of recapturing their individual desires that are constructed in privacy. In these private moments the characters are faced with revelations, truths and fears. Pinter (1991:ix) explains that "the more accurate the experience the less articulate its expression". Indeed the individual constantly seeks to articulate his/her desires – his/her natural expression – in a tyrannical society that does not allow individuality. Therefore the characters seek individual expression in worlds of fantasy and illusion. However, if society did relinquish its oppressive control, then the characters could define their individuality in the larger community. Pinter's central argument revolves around the individual's need to belong, and be part of the social world. As Teddy, in Pinter's play *The Homecoming,* insightfully expresses, "It's a way of being able to look at the world.

It's a question of how far you can operate *on* things and not *in* things. I mean, it's a question of your capacity to ally the two, to relate the two. To balance the two" (Pinter, 1978:78, added emphasis). Terrifyingly, Pinter's characters cannot "operate on things" (1978:78), in the sense that they do not resist the demands of the social system, thus they operate "in things" (1978:78). Instead of operating '*on* things' by rebelling against their oppressors and insisting on their individual rights, they rather operate *in* their restrictive worlds. They conform to the laws of the Other when they accept the patriarchal system. Thus they exist in a confined society where they attempt to find their individual expression in an oppressive world.

The three plays selected for this study, namely *A Slight Ache* (published in 1961), *The Lover (*published in 1963) and *The Hothouse* (published in 1980), clearly demonstrate Pinter's concern with oppression. Furthermore, the sequence in which the plays are examined illustrates the way in which Pinter equates men's behaviour towards women with the way society behaves towards the oppressed. Consequently the characters are subjected to major psychological trauma in their quest to identify themselves in a hierarchical social world.

Chapter One focuses on the works of three psychoanalysts, namely Erich Fromm, Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan: key figures in psychoanalytic theories. A reading of

Fromm is appropriate as he highlights the position of the individual in an oppressive social world. Fromm's theory exposes ways in which the individual appropriates sadistic and masochistic qualities in order to avoid abandonment. The Freudian terms, *id*, *ego* and *super-ego*, are explored to facilitate an understanding of Freud's discussion on the genesis of the unconscious. The concept of the unconscious provides an understanding of Pinter's characters' repressed desires. Jacques Lacan's theory of the subjects' position in the Symbolic register – the world of language – offers an engaging analysis on the notion of 'Other'.

The discussion in Chapter Two, 'Embodying Desires: A study of *A Slight Ache*', revolves around Pinter's widespread theme of individual desires being beaten down by inhibiting social laws. The result of this oppression is projected as a Matchseller who becomes an embodied manifestation of the characters' psychological disturbances. The external Matchseller symbolises the internal neuroses and fear of sensuality. This becomes evident as the protagonists reveal their unconscious need to control each other as a displacement of libidinal desires.

Chapter Three, 'A Rival's discourse: A study of *The Lover*', considers the characters' concerns with their identities as viewed in relation to society's demands for required conduct. This conduct instills the patriarchal law of the Other. Accordingly, the

characters are forced to operate in two distinct worlds: an oppressive reality world that restricts sexual activity and a fantasy world that enables the couple to escape oppression and fulfil their desires. However, their fantasy world begins to overpower their reality world, and the characters are then faced with abandonment from the 'respectable' social realm.

The final Chapter 'Dehumanisation! It is verified in the name of Science': A study of *The Hothouse*', embodies the major themes of *A Slight Ache* and *The Lover*. The characters of *The Hothouse* are shown to be the mouthpiece of the Other, verbalising the horror of victimisation, dehumanisation, and finally abandonment. In this play, Pinter creates what he labels, "cardboard characters" (Gale, 1977:229), who epitomise the result of oppression. These characters have lost their capacity to trust their own judgement and therefore they are destroyed as individuals.

The conclusion focuses on Pinter's presentation of society's total control over individuals, as articulated in the discussion of his plays. However, no final and conclusive opinion is offered to the understanding of Pinter's meanings. Like the infinite meaning of words, Pinter's plays exceed finite representation[2].

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1. The *Harold Pinter Society* held a conference in June 2000. Keynote speakers included (amongst others): Harold Pinter, Michael Billington and Francis Gillen, editor of the *Harold Pinter Review*.

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2. Before proceeding it is important to note that Pinter includes numerous ellipses in his texts. These inserts indicate various understandings of the characters' discourse (as will be illustrated in this study). For the necessity of defining between Pinter's ellipses and the editing of an inserted quote, this study will read as follows: omitted text in a quote is indicated as [...], whereas Pinter's ellipses are presented as read in his texts. There are no brackets to define the 'dots'.

CHAPTER 1

'AN APPROACH TO PSYCHOANALYSIS': Fromm, Freud and Lacan

Delvin: Shall we talk more intimately? Let's talk about more intimate things, let's talk about something more personal, about something within your own immediate experience.
Rebecca: It's terrible. You are the victim of it. You are the cause of it.
(*Ashes to Ashes*, Pinter, 1997: 41 and 51).

In her monumental study, *The Dream Structure of Pinter's Plays: A Psychoanalytic Approach,* Gabbard attempts to unlock the obscurities that surround Pinter's writings and draws a parallel between Freud's dream-analysis and Pinter's plays. She states that "the ambiguity [in Pinter's plays] can be understood as the result of the overdetermination so typical of dreams. The interrelationships can be viewed in terms of grouping patterns of dream series" (1976:16). The notion of interpreting Pinter's plays as dreams, while insightful, also tends to focus predominantly on the characters' unconscious fears and illusions. Thus reality as represented by the characters' unconscious states of being seems somewhat reductive and its power easily diffused as non-real. Neither does it take account of the characters' response to their reality. Thus Gabbard's analysis tends to leave these issues underexposed.

In this study's psychoanalytic approach, the focus is on the characters' unconscious desires that are oppressed in reality. Therefore, it is important to highlight not just Freud's

theory of the unconscious, but also Lacan's notion of the Symbolic register – the social world of language and lastly, Fromm's theory of wo/man's position in that social world. Although Pinter's characters are clearly consumed by their private unconscious desires, they also operate in the social world: the abode of reality and restrictions. Accordingly this chapter focuses on selected readings of *three* psychoanalysts, namely Sigmund Freud, Erich Fromm and Jacques Lacan. Selections of their theories are explored to support the relevant themes in Pinter's plays.

In the discussion of Pinter's plays (chapters two, three and four), political violence and power are relevant concepts in many forms. Whenever Pinter has two or more characters interacting, politics are situated at the centre of their alliances. They bring power and control into their relationships by means of manipulating language. This becomes an important political theme or motif. In *Theory of Sexual Politics* Millet (1969:1) explains that "the term 'politics' [refers] to power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another". The discourse of the oppressive command that runs through Pinter's plays operates on two levels. Firstly, it introduces the technique that Pinter uses in highlighting the external political social power, and secondly, it illustrates the ways in which this corrupt structure is interwoven into interpersonal politics. In his plays Pinter demonstrates that political social power serves to manipulate and corrupt victims in their structural culture. "Pinter [...] increasingly sees private life as

a form of power-politics full of invasion, retreats, subjugations and deceptions. Conversely, when he comes to deal quite overtly with the machinery of the state, Pinter describes it in terms of individual power and powerlessness" (Billington, 1996:89). This representation corresponds with Foucault's (1992:1140) reference to the power of the State:

> the State is superstructural in relation to a whole series of power networks [meta-power] that invests the body, sexuality, the family, kinship, knowledge, technology and so forth [...] but this meta-power can only take hold and secure its footing where it is rooted in a whole series of multiple and indefinite power relations that supply the necessary basis for the great negative forms of power.

The negative power that originates in the State is thus extended to personal relationships as the broader transition of State political network zooms into a tunnel of intimate political liaisons.

In Pinter's plays, while an initial reading may suggest that one character is the oppressor and another the victim, a second reading reveals that the victim too is an oppressor, not just of other characters but of him/herself as well. This paradox adds an interesting slant to Pinter's corpus, as the characters would rather submit to oppression than face isolation.

Fromm (1942:15), a prominent psychoanalyst whose works are concerned with the individual in the social world, suggests that people dread being alone in the sense that:

> not being able to relate to the world outside oneself, [is] the need to avoid aloneness. [...] This relatedness to others is not identical with physical contact. An individual may be alone in a physical sense for many years and yet he may be related to ideas, values, or at least social patterns that give him a feeling of communion and 'belonging'.

Because of this fear of isolation, "in our effort to escape from aloneness and powerlessness, we are ready to get rid of our individual self either by submission to [...] forms of authority or by a compulsive conforming to accepted patterns" (Fromm, 1942:116). Hence the structure of Pinter's plays forms a vicious circle as the characters enter into relationships in order to escape isolation, only to find themselves in situations that are more isolating than before.

Disturbingly, Pinter's social world produces patterns of dehumanisation and demoralisation. On entering this conforming world, his characters are forced to abandon not only their victims but their own desires as well. Henceforth, the obvious question to be asked is, "if the characters' fear of isolation is so overwhelming, and if they are more isolated *in* relationships, why then do they not leave their abusive relationships?"

Fromm (1942:4) reformulates the latter into another question, "Is there not, [...] perhaps, besides an innate desire for freedom, an instinctive wish for submission? If there is not, how can we account for the attraction which submission to a leader has for so many today?"

To answer the question, a reading of Freud, who examines the individual as s/he relates to themselves and others, is substantive. Freud bases his theory on people's mental or psychic energies within the personality as they shape and determine it. Thorton (1997:5) explains that Freud predominantly refers to two major instincts:

> The instincts for Freud are the principal motivating forces in the mental realm, and as such they 'energise' the mind in all of its functions. There are, he held, an indefinitely large number of such instincts, but these can be reduced to a small number of basic ones, which he grouped into two broad generic categories. *Eros* (the life instinct), which covers all the self-preserving and erotic instincts, and *Thanatos* (the death instinct), which covers all the instincts towards aggression, self-destruction and cruelty.

These instincts are part of what contributes to the sadist and masochist personalities. A reading of Freud's definition of sadism and masochism supports not only Fromm's notion of man's most dreaded fear of being isolated, but also how this fear presides in Pinter's characters as they strive for submission and domination as an escape from seclusion.

Freud (1964:92) sees sadism occurring "when sexual satisfaction is linked to the condition of the sexual object's suffering pain, ill-treatment and humiliation, and masochism when the need is felt of being the ill-treated object oneself".

Fromm (1942:122) defines the masochist as one who has:

> feelings of inferiority, powerlessness, individual insignificance. [...]. [Q]uite regularly these people show a marked dependence on powers outside themselves, on

> other people, institutions or nature. They tend not to assert themselves, not to do .. what they want, but to submit to the factual or alleged orders of these outside forces.

Sadistic tendencies are found in the same kind of character as the masochist. The character that fears isolation thus incorporates sadistic tendencies in order to prevent isolation from society. Fromm (1942:123) explains the sadistic personality as having the following characteristics:

> one is to make others dependent on oneself and to have absolute and unrestricted power over them, so as to make of them nothing but instruments. [...]. Another consists of the impulse not only to rule over others in this absolute fashion, but to exploit them, to use them, to steal from them, to disembowel them and so to speak, to incorporate anything eatable in them. [...]. The third kind of sadistic tendency is the wish to make others suffer or to see them suffer. This suffering can be physical, but more often it is mental suffering.

This study sets out to examine the way in which Pinter's characters conform to Fromm's definitions of sadistic and masochist qualities. However, the characters also display sado-masochistic tendencies. Freud (1964:93) explains that:

> sadism is the destructive instinct directed outwards, thus acquiring the characteristic of aggressiveness. A certain amount of the original destructive instinct may still remain in the interior. It seems that we can only perceive it under two conditions: if it is combined with erotic instincts into masochism or if - with a greater or lesser erotic addition - it is directed against the external world as aggressiveness [there is] now a possibility that the aggressiveness may not be able to find satisfaction in the external world because it comes up against real obstacles. If this happens, it will

perhaps retreat and increase the amount of self-destructiveness holding sway in the .. -
interior.

Pinter's characters are faced with obstacles in their world as their oppressors' powers take full control over the victims' thoughts, actions and language. The sway of the masochist and sadistic pendulum finds anchorage in the interior of the characters and manifests itself in their self-destruction. The characters exploit themselves through their discourse of violent utterances, resulting in intense suffering. They smother each other with the notion of need for recognition and belonging. The consequence of this oppression is the victim's withdrawal from the suffocating oppressor who then retaliates by punishing the oppressor. This mode of punishment expresses itself in the lack of communication as well as the retraction of love in relationships, which further enhances isolation in both of the involved parties.

In order to protect themselves from their oppressors the victims retreat into a world of narcissism[1], a realm that allows them to now become their own oppressors as well as the oppressors of others.. Thus they choose to remain in abusive relationships, because any relationship, no matter how damaging, is better than being isolated and banished from society. Therefore the sadist will never leave the relationship as he "needs the person over whom he rules, he needs him very badly, since his own feeling of strength is rooted in the fact that he is master over someone" (Fromm, 1942:125).

The notion that Pinter's characters have both sadistic and masochistic trends is acceptable in psychoanalysis as Freud stresses that despite the seeming contradiction, sadistic and masochistic tendencies are intermixed. Freud (1964:93 and 98) explains that "it is our opinion then, that in sadism and in masochism we have before us two excellent examples of a mixture of the two classes in instinct, of Eros and aggressiveness. [...]. Luckily the aggressive instincts are never alone but always alloyed with the erotic ones".

The aggressive and libido instincts are biological drives, with the aggressive instinct having the will to destroy that which can be directed either against others or against the self. The aggressive instinct needs the amalgamation of the libido, as one of its goals is to preserve.

The aforementioned characteristics of the sadistic and masochist personalities are driven by what Fromm believes is people's innate fear of isolation. The instincts that govern personality types belong to what Freud has labelled as 'the unconscious'. Pervin (1980:39) states that "although Freud was not the first to pay attention to the importance of the unconscious, he was the first to explore in detail the qualities of unconscious life and attribute major importance to them in our daily lives".

Hall (1954:54) explains that "the structural distinction between consciousness and unconsciousness was replaced by the three-part organisation of id, ego and superego". These are also known in psychoanalytic terms as the mental processes, as they are the

determining agents of human behaviour. Freud's (1932:1) description of the unconscious is "any mental process [that] we have to assume was *active* [conscious] *at a certain time*".

Freud (1964:65 and 66) 'places' the biological/instinctual drives in what he labels as the *id*:

> [The id] is the dark, inaccessible part of our personality [...] and can be described only in contrast to the ego [...]. It is filled with energy reaching it from the instincts, but it has no organisation, produces no collective will, but only a striving to bring about the satisfaction of the instinctual needs [...]. [T]he id of course, knows no judgement of value: no good and evil morality [...] instinctual cathexes seeking discharge - that, in our view, is all there is in the id.

Brenner (1974:18) explains that the "accurate definition of 'cathexes' is the amount of psychic energy which is directed toward or attached to the mental representative of a person or thing".

The *ego* is presented as functioning differently to the id. Partly conscious, it attempts to organise memories and thoughts into a pattern that seems logical and at the same time seeks to find a compromise between what the id desires (the satisfaction of the instinctual drives) and what is realistically attainable. It is through the ego that the individual views the world, perceives his or her relationships with others and makes judgements. Freud (1964:67 and 68) explains that:

> the relation to the external world has become the decisive factor for the ego, it has taken the task of presenting the external world to the id - fortunately for the id, which could not escape destruction if, in its blind efforts for the satisfaction of its instincts, it disregarded that supreme external power. [...]. The ego controls the approaches to motility under the id's orders; but between a need and an action it has interposed a postponement in the form of the activity of thought, [...] the ego develops from perceiving the instincts to controlling them. [...]. The ego stands for reason and good sense while the id stands for the untamed passions.

However, the ego does not always successfully control the id's instincts and by serving 'three masters', namely the id, the super-ego and the external world, the ego is placed in a difficult situation which leads to repression. Freud (1964: 69) highlights that:

> the ego serves three masters and does what it can to bring their claims and demands into harmony with one another. These claims are always divergent and often seen incompatible. No wonder that the ego so often fails in its task. Its three tyrannical masters are the external world, the super-ego and the id. [...]. [I]t feels hemmed in on three sides and if it is hard pressed, it reacts by generating repression.

The *super-ego* is the mental mechanism that provides people with a conscience. It prevents the ego from fulfilling the id's desires if these needs are socially unacceptable. Freud (1964:69) describes this process as follows:

> on the other hand it [the ego] is observed at every step it takes by the strict super-ego, which lays down definite standards for its conduct, without taking any account of its difficulties from the direction of the id and the external world, and which, if those standards are not obeyed, punishes it with tense feelings of inferiority and of guilt. Thus the ego [serving three masters] struggles to master its economic task of

> bringing about harmony among the forces and influences working in and upon it [...]. If the ego is obliged to admit its weakness, it breaks out in anxiety - realistic anxiety regarding the external world, moral anxiety regarding the super-ego and neurotic anxiety regarding the strength of the passions in the id.

The conflicts between the id-wishes, the ego and the superego demands are often complex. This conflict is referred to as the experience of *Angst*, "while this has been translated as "anxiety", it conveys perhaps a more pervasive sense of fear and anguish" (Stevens, 1995:68). In the psychoanalytic tradition the term 'repression' denotes the way the ego copes with anxieties and conflicts. When repression takes place, the person excludes from his/her conscious mind any knowledge related to this conflict which s/he finds difficult to deal with. Freud (1964:76) explains that "the three main species of anxiety, realistic, neurotic and moral, can be easily connected with the ego's three dependent relations - to the external world, to the id and to the super-ego". Furthermore, Hall (1954:86) states that "repression operates upon memories that are associated with a traumatic experience".

In Freud's theory, when the repressed traumatic experience enters the unconscious it does not remain there forgotten. There is, Freud (1910:2) states, a "connection between the forgotten pathogenic scenes and the symptoms which they have left behind". However, these symptoms are expressed in the conscious mind as unrecognisable. Freud (1910:4) explains, "in the unconscious the suppressed wish still exists, only waiting for its chance

to become fully active, and finally succeeds in sending into the consciousness, instead of the repressed idea, a disguised and unrecognisable surrogate-creation".

Pinter's characters display sadistic and masochistic qualities when their "suppressed wish (becomes) fully active" (Freud, 1910:4). Thus their wishes and desires are manifested in "disguised and unrecognisable surrogate-creations" (1910:4). Henceforth, Pinter has been charged by his critics and audiences alike of obscurity in his characters' thoughts, actions and language. However, a psychoanalytic reading of his plays brings to light why Pinter's technique appears to be unclear. In the Pinter world the audience encounter characters that are consumed with repressed fears and desires. These repressions find a disguised and unrecognisable voice in the discourse that moves the plot. Rey (1982:319 and 320) states that:

> ... in literature we find an articulation and stratification of themes at work, themes that resemble to the point of confusion the conscious - unconscious relation such as Freud continually discovers or rediscovers it elsewhere - in the "discourse" of his patients.

As the character's conscious-unconscious discourse shapes the structures of the plays, so the characters use language to represent their ontological probing. Pinter states, "I am dealing with people at the extreme edge of their living" (Gussow, 1994:37). This extreme edge on which Pinter's people find themselves has been created by a society which Pinter

prefers to leave unnamed. In this way the dramatist has depicted a universal theme giving the plays substance to be performed in any given cultural context.

Fromm (1942:7) describes Freud's theory of society being the governing body over individuals as, "society must domesticate him [sic], must allow some direct satisfaction of biological - and hence, ineradicable -drives; but for the most part society must refine and adroitly check man's basic impulses". Thus the social process of society's rules creates people's personas as it requires that the individual suppresses his/her anti-social instinctual drives and replaces them with another more civilised one and this is what Freud calls 'sublimation'. Freud (1964:86) articulates this as:

> the relations of an instinct to its aim and object are also open to alterations; both can be exchanged for other ones [...]. A certain kind of modification of the aim and change of the object, in which our social valuation is taken into account, is described as 'sublimation'.

Pinter's characters are drawn in a fashion that supports Freud's theory. In their oppressed world, when they fight a system that does not allow any rope on their tight reign, they display symptoms of neurotic disturbances. Cutts, Gibbs and Roote, in *The Hothouse*, are murderers. Edward and Flora in *A Slight Ache*, as well as Richard and Sarah in *The Lover*, opt for a fantasised lifestyle where society's demands are null and void. In Pinter's society, the established code of conduct is so corrupt that the characters who are moulded

by this society feel abandoned in a world of oppressive demands – a world that leaves no room for individualisation, freedom of speech nor freedom of thought.

Fromm (1942:7) aptly states that:

> if the amount of suppression is greater than the capacity of sublimation, individuals become neurotic and it is necessary to allow the lessening of suppression. Generally however, there is a reverse relation between satisfaction of man's drives and culture: the more suppression, the more culture (and the more danger of neurotic disturbances).

Similarly, the frequent call for silence during dialogue that Pinter inscribes in his scripts is highlighted as the moment that the character *has* freedom of thought and expression. But, this moment of discernment is locked into their privatised silence thus verbally excluding the audience from their flash of insight. However, the symbolic value of the Pinter silence is so effective, it needs no literal explanation as it can also function dramatically as a 'time out' for the audience, a moment of reflection, a way of being, that the audience can use or interpret as it relates to their own lives.

Contrasted to this momentary silence is the frequent use of clichés and repetitions which signifies how the characters manipulate language to hide their repressed desires and inner pain. Language then *appears* to lack meaning. But on a closer reading the reader realises that language *is* meaningful because Pinter uses words as weapons which the characters utter to hurt and destroy each other and in defence to conceal their own emotions. By

using words as weapons, rather than as finite signifiers, the characters enhance their communication gap. They cannot communicate nor relate to shared values and ideals, and are consequently isolated. Thus they are subjected to traumatic and depressive situations when they try to decipher the meaning of their lives. Maccoby (1999:1) explains that:

> the need for meaning is distinctly human. Without meaning [...] people become depressed. [...]. [G]roups of people who share values and a strong sense of meaning have proved best able to survive, but only when ideals, conscious values and ideology, connect with the social character and motivate behaviour.

Because the characters find themselves in a Pinterian landscape of oppression and thus abandonment, their innate fear of isolation and congenital desires to feel at one with the world in which they exist are amplified. Furthermore, the characters feel not only isolated from their external world, but in their interpersonal relationships as well. Pinter's characters are victims of the social codes and thus victims in their personal liaisons. They have no conscious understanding of their own desires nor mutual understanding of each other's need for freedom. Therefore positive participation in relationships from both parties is absent and as the plot unravels so does it become obvious that the sado-masochist position is continually sliding between them. De Beauvoir's (1949:576) analysis of the criteria of relationships is particularly relevant here. In her book, *The Second Sex*, she writes that:

> through eroticism, love, friendship, and their alternatives, deception, hate and rivalry, the relation is a struggle between conscious beings each of whom wishes to be essential, it is the mutual recognition of free beings who confirm one another's freedom, it is the transition from aversion to participation.

Aversion rather than participation is what Pinter's characters opt for. Their personal battle to prove themselves essential is harder than the struggle with what De Beauvoir explains is necessary to maintain a constructive relationship and at the same time satisfy both parties' wish to be essential and free. Freedom, in the sense of not participating in the same ideals in a given society and/or relationship, ushers one to isolation and "to feel completely alone and isolated leads to mental disintegration just as physical starvation leads to death" (Fromm, 1942:15). Pinter adopts this approach, but also takes it further. Not only do his characters suffer from complete aloneness and thus mental disintegration, but their isolated condition also leads them to mental and physical deaths.

In order to study the reasons people enter abusive relationships, a combined reading of Fromm and Freud is essential. Fromm's theory places the subject into the social world, whereas Freud's analysis highlights the psychological effects that the subject experiences as an individual as well as social being. Fromm (1942:12) asks the question, "what is it that forces man to adapt himself to almost any conceivable condition of life, and what are the limits of his adaptability?" Freud's (cf. 1964:52) explanation of the self being "split"

between the conscious and unconscious, reasons that the person's actions, thoughts and beliefs are shaped by the unconscious drives and desires (Eros and Thanatos). The ego [self] represses the id's drives, forcing the individual to adapt to certain external circumstances resulting in anxieties and neuroses. These anxieties are presented in Pinter's characters as strong destructive and sado-masochist impulses that prove to be irrational and thus harmful to themselves and their fellow characters.

However, the appearance of the destructive and sado-masochist impulses is presented in numerous forms. Freud (1964:86) states that "the instincts are noticeable to us for their plasticity, their capability for altering their aims, [...] which admits of one instinctual satisfaction being replaced by another". Fromm's depiction of the various ways that people adapt their instincts to conform with social demands is fitting as a description for Pinter's characters' individual features which determine why they remain in abusive situations. Fromm (1942:12, 13 and 14) notes that:

> there are certain sectors in man's nature that are more flexible and adaptable than others. Those strivings and character traits by which men differ from each other show a great amount of elasticity and malleability: love, destructiveness, sadism, the tendency to submit, the lust for power, detachment, the desire for self-aggrandisement, the passion for thrift, the enjoyment of sensual pleasure and the fear of sensuality. These [...] develop as a reaction to certain life conditions [...] as it is determined for the individual by the peculiarity of a system, [and] because of the imperative need for self-preservation [the system] forces him to accept the

> conditions under which he has to live.

The system that is portrayed in Pinter's plays is the system of social conditions as well as the system that operates individual relationships. By having to conform to this system, no matter how debased and degrading, the characters adapt their strivings and instinctual desires according to the system's patterns. Therefore they prefer to remain in their relationships rather than face isolation. The irony, as mentioned earlier, is that by staying in this absurd situation, the characters are isolated for they realise that they are completely alone. However, this notion of isolation is not a conscious one. They live in a world of illusions in which they fool themselves into believing that they have other people around them, and are therefore not alone.

Fromm (1988:28 and 29) makes an insightful comparison between illusions and having knowledge as he expresses that:

> knowing begins with the awareness of the deceptiveness of our common sense perceptions, in the sense that our picture of physical reality does not correspond to what is "really real" and mainly that most people [...] are unaware that most of what they hold to be true and self-evident is illusion produced by the suggestive influence of the social world in which they live. Knowing then, begins with the shattering of illusions, with *dis*illusionment. [...]. [K]nowing does not mean to be in the possession of the truth; it means to penetrate the surface and to strive critically and actively in order to approach the truth. [...]. Freud's concept of self-knowledge is based on the idea of destroying illusions ("rationalizations") in order to become

aware of the unconscious reality[2].

In the characters' confused worlds, their unconscious desires and the denial of their repressed wishes become obvious in their interactions. As already noted, Freud pictures the unconscious as a chaotic realm of constantly shifting drives and desires. During his research, Freud noticed that these chaotic drives and desires can be expressed in the conscious mind through the means of the discourse of the unconscious as it reveals itself in language as vocalised by the self, or the ego. He makes a famous declaration about the relation between the unconscious and conscious, saying that, "Where id was, there ego shall be" (Freud, 1964:71). Freud hoped that by bringing the unconscious into the conscious he could minimise his patients' repression and neurosis, and this he believed was possible as the id's desires are "capable of discharge [through] displacements and condensation" (Freud, 1964:66).

Freud was particularly interested in condensation and displacement during his investigations of dream content. However, these components are not exclusively characteristic of dreaming but are illustrative of the psychic process of the awake state. Freud (1911:15), on citing Wachen, an author who has admitted to be in great ideological agreement with Freud, affirms that "man is always the same person whether he wakes or dreams". The notion of displacement is the transference of psychic energy from one

element to another. Freud (1911:15) explains that "in a psychic process of normal life, one idea has been selected from a number of others [which] attaches to the victorious idea". Thus the significant unconscious wish is able to transfer its intensity or meaning to an indifferent term.

On the other hand the term 'condensation' is used as a representation of several ideas or images by a single word or image. Freud (1911:4 and 9) defines condensation in his dream analysis as:

> starting from an element of the dream, the path of the association leads to a number of dream-thoughts; and form a single dream-thought to several elements of the dreams. [...]. [T]he condensation-work of dreams becomes most palpable when it takes words and means as its objects. [...]. Words are often treated in dreams as things, and therefore undergo the same combinations as the ideas of things.

Abrams (1985:228) states that "[condensation is] the omission of parts of the unconscious material and the fusion of several unconscious elements into a single word". To illustrate these definitions, a brief turning to Pinter's play *The Room* articulates its relevance. The very title, *The Room*, stresses the enclosed space that haunts many Pinter plays. The room is a single signifier that brings to mind numerous affinities. The concept of a room then represents a space that includes images of areas that can house something else. As Gabbard (1976:22) points out, "a room, a vagina, a womb, a tomb, a conscious mind - are all open spaces that can house what enters, even if it is only thoughts, as in the case of the

mind [...] no one meaning is any more accurate than the other".

In accordance with the Freudian notion of displacement and condensation, the chapters which follow expose the way Pinter's characters displace their libidinal desires. This displacement is noted in condensation, as the characters' unconscious discourse has no finite signification.

The Oedipal Theory as it marks the subject's entry into the world of language: the Symbolic realm of Other

For the purpose of focusing on relevant areas in Pinter's plays, it is necessary to discuss not only Freud's Oedipal theory, but Lacan's as well. Predominantly for these psychoanalysts, the child's discovery of itself as a separate being (an individual) occurs during the Oedipal phase. Once this discovery takes place, it sets into motion the ceaseless interplay between the individual and Others. However, Freud and Lacan's theories differ significantly. Freud's Oedipal theory is based on desire which is governed by the instinctual primal scene, whereas Lacan's reiteration of the Oedipus complex marks the child's entry into language and desire. Lacan replaces Freud's "symbolisation of unconscious desire [...] by an 'acting out' within language" (Minsky, 1996:8).

Whichever theory is taken, be it Freud's biological desires as they are expressed in the unconscious, or Lacan's (1998:12) "relation of desire to language", the essence of it remains the same: that sexual desire is the impulse and energy that steers the human psyche. As Yeats writes reflecting on Freud, "the passions when [...] they do not find fulfilment, become 'vision': the visions of the poet, like the visions of the dream, represent 'sublimation' - the sublime transfiguration of the shackled cravings of the flesh" (Ellmann, 1994:12).

Freud's Oedipal Theory

Freud derived his Oedipal theory from Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, where a son, Oedipus, unknowingly murders his father, namely Laius, and marries his mother, Jocasta. This, according to Freudian thought, is "the complex that constitutes the nuclear complex of every neurosis" (Simon and Blass, 1991:163). Furthermore, the Oedipal complex is considered a "universal event in early childhood" (Izenberg, 1991:41). Jocasta, Oedipus' mother, sides with Freud when she proclaims to Oedipus:

> Nor need this mother-marrying frighten you;
> Many a man has dreamt as much. Such things
> Must be forgotten, if life is to be endured (Sophocles, 1983:52).

Freud proclaims that a child is born into desire in the sense that Eros is an instinctual drive. At the beginning of life, in what Freud (1964:87) labels as "the oral stage," the

child is in a state of bliss at the mother's breast receiving nourishment. Freud (1964:87) notes that this is "the erotogenic zone of the mouth [dominating] what may be called the sexual activity of that period". It is important to note that at this stage of the infant's life (the pre-oedipal), s/he is in a sexual object relationship with not only the mother, but with the whole world as well (cf. Klages, 1997:2). Therefore the infant has not as yet established her/himself as separate from the mother nor the mother as separate from the universe.

As the child grows older, s/he is weaned away from the oral stage and enters what Freud (1964:87 and 88) calls the "phallic phase, in which in both sexes the male organ (and what corresponds to it in girls) attains an importance which can no longer be overlooked". This marks the start of the Oedipal *complex* as the child has sexual yearnings for the mother and desires to be her only love object. The problem that occurs is the father as he prevents the child from returning to that blissful union with the mother. The child then unconsciously wishes to annihilate his/her rival, the father, and fulfil his/her instinctual desires with the mother. However, "these jealous, murderous wishes arouse severe conflicts within the child [...] fearing both retaliation and loss of love as consequences of its jealous wishes" (Brenner, 1974:108).

The distinction between males and females now makes its mark in Freud's (1974:108) theory as he states that "the retaliation which the little boy fears as the consequence of his

oedipal wishes for his mother is the loss of his own penis". Boys become aware that they have penises and assume that the father has castrated the girls. Freud (1964:110) labels this as the castration complex and describes it as follows:

> the castration complex arises after [boys] have learnt from the sight of the female genitals that the organ which they value so highly need not necessarily accompany the body. At this the boy recalls to mind the threats he brought on himself by his doings with that organ, he begins to give credence to them and falls under the influence of fear of castration, which will be the most powerful motive force in his subsequent development.

Fear of castration by the father is what prevents the male child from establishing a sexual relationship with the mother, and thus "give up his attitude" (Freud, 1964:114). Freud (1964:10) further explains that the Oedipal complex is repressed and that a "severe super-ego is set up as its heir". However, failure to negotiate this transition successfully is viewed as the primary cause of neurosis. Therefore, the discovery of 'self' is primarily a sexual one, as the child has intense libidinal object-cathexes that s/he must "renounce" and find "compensation for the loss of objects [through] a strong intensification of the identifications with his parents" (Freud, 1964:57).

Lacan's Oedipal Theory

Jacques Lacan, a French psychoanalyst, used Freud as a precursor to the development of

his theories. Where Freud was concerned with the moment of identification of the self/ego and further with defining the self's desires by bringing the unconscious [id] into the conscious [ego] mind, Lacan believed that the ego could never take the place of the unconscious as the ego or "I" /self is only an illusion. In this way, Lacanian thought focuses on the unconscious as it projects:

> a realm of linguistic mechanisms, a text requiring deciphering [since] the patient spoke "empty words", words whose absences were indication of the unconscious, [t]he role of therapy was to restore the "full word" to the patient, which meant that the patient would recognise himself in his unconscious without eliminating the unconscious or making it conscious (Poster, 1988: 88 and 89).

Whereas the Freudian thought is based on the unconscious being a submerged consciousness that may become 'visible' during the 'talking cure', Lacan's belief is that the unconscious is an entirely *other* form of reason and logic. For Lacan, the unconscious is not available to consciousness. Lacan (1977:49) explains that "the unconscious [...] is not at the disposal of the subject in re-establishing the continuity of his conscious discourse".

Lacan's theory of human developmental stages is based on how the infant undergoes three concepts, namely: need, demand and desire and these concepts roughly correspond to the phases of development, the real, the imaginary and the symbolic. When the infant is born, s/he experiences *need*. The infant needs nourishment, love, warmth, shelter and so

on. Like Freud, Lacan's belief is that the infant assumes that it is part of the mother, and therefore part of the universe. S/he has not distinguished itself as a 'subject'[3] but rather as a "fragmented body" (Lacan, 1977:4). In order for the infant to form a separate identity from the mother and enter into civilisation, the child must distinguish itself as detached from the mother. Once this realisation takes place the infant entails a *loss* or a *lack*.

Klages (1997:8) highlights this as a tragedy:

> when the child knows the difference between itself and its mother [...] it loses that primal sense of unity (and safety/ security) that it originally had. This is the element of the tragic built into psychoanalytic theory (whether Freudian or Lacanian); to become a civilised "adult" always entails the profound loss of an original unity, [...] (particularly the mother).

Whilst the infant has all its needs met, it exists in the realm of the Real[4] where there is the original unity with the mother. Klages (1997:3) explains further:

> Because of [the original unity], there is no absence or loss or lack; the Real is all fullness and completeness, where there's no need that can't be satisfied. And because there is no absence or loss of lack, there is no language in the Real. [...] Hence the Real is always beyond language, unrepresentable in language.

In Pinter's play, *The Lover* (discussed in Chapter Three), the notion of Lacan's 'Real' phase highlights the characters' desire to experience 'fullness' and 'completeness'. The characters live in an oppressive society that restricts individual desire and this further

enhances their feeling of lack and loss. Thus the characters' desire – as a means to fill their lack – the security that the initial, motherly body contact (during the phase of the Real) gave them. However, because the 'Real' is unrepresentable in 'language', it is the characters' *discourse* (which depicts their *unconscious* desires) that utters their repressed desire for fullness and completeness.

According to Lacan (1998:206), once the child realises that the mother is not under its full control because she is a separate *Other,* the child experiences lack as "the relation of the subject to the Other is entirely produced in a process of gap". From now on this lack will be the mode of being. Lacan (1998:206) explains that "without [the gap] anything could be there. The relations between the things in the real [...] might be produced in terms of inversely reciprocal relations". Grosz (1990:35) provides an insightful explanation of this procedure:

> [the child] will attempt to fill its (impossible, unfillable) lack. Its recognition of lack signals an ontological rift with nature or the Real. This gap will propel it into seeking an identificatory image of its own stability and permanence (the imaginary), and eventually language (the symbolic) by which it hopes to fill the lack.

Lacan uses Freud's *Fort! Da!* game to reinforce his notion of 'lack'. Lacan (1998:63) states that "It is aimed at what, essentially, is not there [...], [the mother's] outline made up of the brush strokes and gouaches of desire – will be lacking". Therefore, the child

experiences lack which results in his/her 'loss' of the mother. Coinciding with this loss (thus lack), is the child's entry into the Symbolic register. In a case study about Freud's grandson Hans, who at the time was around eighteen months old, Freud notes the first attempt of a child verbalising its needs. These correspond to a child's realisation "of the mother's departure" (Lacan, 1998:63). Sheridan, as cited in Lacan (1998:xxvii), highlights the event:

> Turning to the *fort-da* game [...] a child in a cot repeatedly drops and then retrieves a cotton reel, uttering phases corresponding to the German words *fort* (gone) and *da* (here). The repetitive gesture and alternating syllables allow the absence of the child's mother to be mastered or controlled in a symbolic and linguistic manner.

Lacan associates the realm of the Symbolic with Hans' game because it connects with the structure of metaphorical language. Lacan (1977:103 and 104) explains that:

> ... his action destroys the object that it causes to appear and disappear in the anticipating provocation of its absence and its presence. His action thus negatives the field of forces of desire in order to become its own object to itself. And this object, being immediately embodied in the symbolic dyad of two elementary exclamations, announces in the subject the diachronic integration of the dichotomy of the phonemes, whose synchronic structure existing language offers to his assimilation; moreover, the child begins to become engaged in the system of the concrete discourse of the environment, by reproducing more or less approximately in his *Fort!* and in his *Da*! the vocables that he receives from it.

This illustrates that the juncture at which the child disassociates itself from the mother is

when the subject becomes "culturally specific" (Grosz, 1990:81). To clarify, when a child is introduced to the Symbolic register of language, and hence positioned within the larger social environment, it is exposed to 'specific' cultural laws. Parallel to this notion is the Lacanian Oedipal theory, whereas for Freud the authority of (a single) father determined the barring of incest. For Lacan this prohibition is an effect of a cultural law, as he works with the notion of kinship as opposed to Freud dealing with the family. Lacan (1977:66) explains this as follows:

> The primordial law is therefore that which in regulating marriage ties superimposes the kingdom of culture and that of a nature abandoned to the law of mating. The prohibition of incest is merely its subjective pivot [...]. This law is [...] revealed clearly enough as identical with an order. For without kinship nominations, no power is capable of instituting the order of preferences and taboos that bind and weave the yarn of lineage through succeeding generations.

Herewith, the realm of the Symbolic with its introduction of the child to language marks the beginning of socialisation. The social world has prohibitions and restraints which Lacan associates with the father figure/the Law of the Father. Thus, language (bound to the Symbolic register, and the Law of the Father) is associated with orders, authority, repression and control. Like Freud's Oedipal theory, the Lacanian father triangulates the dual relationship of mother and child. The father represents the Law of the Father (the cultural laws), which prohibits the child's desire for the mother. Lacan (1977:103) states that "the moment in which desire becomes human is also that in which the child is born

into language". Therefore, the law that the Father introduces is the hierarchical, authoritarian law that oppresses the original libidinal desire. The latter is also known as the law of the Other: the social world's command, as language is established by society's cultural laws.

Furthermore, the Lacanian thought is that language is the site of the unconscious[5] as biological needs are repressed[6] into language as desire. Thus oedipalisation coheres with desire as well as the notions of loss, lack, the Real and the Symbolic realms. Therefore Lacanian concepts can be observed as follows: desire is constituted at the time the child experiences lack (separation from the mother) and thus shifts from having needs to having demands. The child demands to be filled by the mother to the sense of original unity or completeness, hoping that she will 'stop up' (fulfil) the lack it is experiencing. However, its lack can never be 'filled' as the Law of the Father prohibits the desired union with the mother.

Sheridan, as cited in Lacan (1998:278), explains how Lacan links the concept of desire with need, demand and language:

> the human individual sets out with a particular organism, with certain biological needs, which are satisfied by certain objects. What does the acquisition of language have on these needs? All speech is demand; it presupposes the Other to whom it is addressed, whose very signifiers it takes over in its formulation. [...]. There is no

> adequation between need and the demand that conveys it; indeed, it is the gap between them that constitutes desire [...]. Desire (fundamentally in the singular) is a perpetual effect of symbolic articulation. It is not an appetite: it is essentially eccentric and insatiable. That is why Lacan co-ordinates it not with the object that would seem to satisfy it, but with the object that causes it .

Desire for Lacan then, is the equivalent of need and demand, as it originates from a lack or an absence which "constitutes in the subject the eternalization of his desire" (Lacan, 1977:104). In her thesis, *The Needs Trap and the Possibilities of Desire,* Rumboll (1998:39) highlights the necessity of lack as it is imperative for the subject to experience desire:

> it would seem for desire to arise there would already have to be some feeling of lack experienced within the subject. [...]. With lack, desire would then emerge. Without lack, there would be [...] by implication, no desire.

Therefore, being the fundamental lack, desire can only be satisfied through another's desire. Lacan (1998:38) states that "man's desire is the desire for the other" and furthermore, "man can recognise his desire as the desire of the Other" (1998:235). The Other represents the social world and being Other, the subject already possesses the language of the Symbolic realm.

The Symbolic overlaps the mirror phase[7] in that when the child (mis)identifies itself in the mirror and begins to conceive of itself as a unified being, it enters into a language

system which is concerned with lack and separation. The alienation of the biological needs involves repression, thus it moves along metonymical and metaphorical chains. Lacan (1998:188) explains that this alienation and lack causes the subject to have feelings of "uncertain[y] because he is divided by the effects of language [...]. He will simply find his desire ever more divided, pulverised, in the circumscribable metonymy of speech". In making metaphor and metonymy the two main poles of language, Lacan recognises a basic unity between the structure of language and the structure of the unconscious. The unconscious, like language, does not have a fixed content, but continuously slides between one signifier and the other.

> In that sense, Lacan transforms Freud's understanding of primary repression. What is being repressed is not the forbidden oedipal yearning but rather the signifiers that mark the psychic separation from the maternal realm. These signifiers in turn do not have a fixed meaning; they slide according to the rules of metonymy and metaphor that Lacan compares to the processes at work in dreams, namely [Freud's definitions of] condensation and displacement (Guervich, 1999:5).

The repression of the Oedipal complex is aimed at adapting the ego to social conditions as they exist. This process is made possible, according to Freud, by obedience to the super-ego, as the libidinal desire is projected onto another object. For Lacan it is the entry into the Symbolic Order, where the child represses its drive[8] at the moment when the child identifies itself as a subject through a medium of metaphorical laws of language. Lacan (1998:188) explains that, "the effects of language are always mixed with the fact, which is

the basis of the analytic experience, that the subject is subject only from being subjected to the field of the Other, the subject proceeds from his synchronic subjection in the field of the Other". In both Freud and Lacan then:

> The identification of oneself with another being is the very process by which a continuing sense of selfhood becomes possible, and it is from successive assimilations of other people's attributes that what is familiarly called the ego or the personality is constructed (Bowie, 1991:30 and 31).

What is apparent is that although Freud and Lacan arrived at the same conclusions through different methods, they both perceive that: (a) the subject which emerges from the Oedipal complex is torn between the conscious and unconscious as it is forbidden to fulfil its initial desire: so must repress that desire and create substitute paths and objects of desire; (b) "it is by means of repression of sexual drives that the unconscious is formed, the unconscious being the residue of repressed and renounced pre-oedipal drives" (Grosz, 1990:81); and (c) that the law which governs the rules of the society urges one to conform, to repress sexuality "as what is repressed is what is taboo, and what is taboo is culturally formulated, the forces of suppression are cultural and the way in which the symbols under which the repression occurs are cultural" (Sliverman, 1999:2). Therefore the conforming laws of society position people in an oppressed situation and they are controlled in every way: be it through language, sexual desires or establishing an identity in the social world where they have to repress their instinctual and individual desires. As

Fromm (1988:66) so accurately states:

> the growing person is forced to give up most of his or her autonomous, genuine desires and interests, and his or her own will, and to adopt a will and desires and feelings that are not autonomous but superimposed by the social patterns of thought and feeling.

To highlight Pinter's structuring of the way in which the conforming laws of society oppress one's "autonomous" (1988:66) desire, a brief turning to *The Hothouse* is necessary. In this play the characters are situated in an oppressive government-run institution. They are forced to comply to every law that is stipulated, regardless of how debased the laws are. Consequently, the characters' language and desires are totally controlled by the system. Their individual rights and freedom of expression are oppressed, and therefore the characters' feeling of 'lack' is further enhanced, producing a sense of alienation. However, in an attempt to fill their lack, and avoid isolation, the characters repeatedly[9] refer to their mothers. The reason for bringing one's mother into the conversation operates on two levels. Firstly the characters insist that they were *breastfed* by their mothers (cf. Pinter, 1991a:280). This is their discourse as it signifies their unconscious desire to fill their lack by recalling their initial bodily contact with a mother who provides a sense of love, security and wholeness. Lacan (1982:12) states that, "the first demand [...] must be related back to the mother." Secondly, the insistence of verifying that they have mothers, as Lush in *The Hothouse* says, "I had one myself"

(Pinter, 1991a:280), authenticates their being born and their credibility of belonging to a social world. However, that social world requires total submission and repression of desire. To do otherwise is to be punished with abandonment.

In subsequent chapters parallels will be drawn between theory, as discussed in this chapter, and Pinter's characters that are subjected to situations where they are forced to repress their libidinal desires by an oppressive society, namely the Other. Like the Lacanian social world that uses language to enforce authority and repression, Pinter's controlling linguistic landscape forces the characters to repress their libidinal desires. This constitutes neurotic complexes, as the characters abandon their inherent and instinctual desires and thus their individualities.

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1. Fromm (1942:100) defines narcissism as "the person who is not fond of himself, who does not approve of himself, is in constant anxiety concerning his own self (because of this) he must be concerned about himself, since basically he lacks security and satisfaction."

2. Fromm's use of the word '*dis*illusionment' is derived from Freud's definition of Ent-tauschung.

3. In Lacan's theory, the child only becomes a 'subject' once it is subjected to the field of the Symbolic register: the Other. (cf. Lacan, 1998:188).

4. Lacan's concept of the real is separate from "reality", whereas Bowie (1991:94) believes that Freud's reality, "is the world external to the human mind, and the 'reality principle' lies in the individual's recognition that this world places limitations upon him as he pursues his pleasures."

5. Lacan (1998:149) states that "the unconscious is constituted by the effects of speech on the subject, it is the dimension in which the subject is determined in the development of the effects of speech, consequently the unconscious is structured like a language."

6. Libidinal repression is a result of the Law of the Father prohibiting "incest" (Lacan, 1998:xxv), during the Oedipal phase.

7. Lacan (1997:4) states that "the mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation-and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of 'phantasies' that extends from a fragmented body-image to form its totality that I shall call orthopaedic-and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development." Important to define is that in their original texts both Freud and Lacan use the spelling "phatasies" as opposed to "fantasies".

8. Lacan (1998: 189 and 166) states "the genital drive is subjected to the circulation of the Oedipus complex, to the elementary and other structures of kinship. This is what is designated as the field of culture [...] if I refer to the drive, it is in so far as it is at the level of the drive that the state of satisfaction is to be rectified."

9. In both Freud and Lacan's Theories, 'repetition' marks the discourse of the unconscious.

CHAPTER 2

'EMBODYING DESIRES': A study of *A Slight Ache*

"I've been wrong".
(Edward, *A Slight Ache*, Pinter, 1991a:181)

A Slight Ache exposes the ideals of perfected societies as they oppress the instinctual desires of humankind. Customary to Pinter's technique, the plot is centered around an external menace that controls the characters' actions. In *The Room,* a play written not long before *A Slight Ache*, the menace, although unverified, is an external threat which the characters try to *avoid.* In *The Room*, Rose remains inside her room, not wanting to leave. She repeatedly refers to the outside as, "cold" (Pinter, 1991a:85) and "It's murder" (1991:85). Pinter juxtaposes the cold, murderous, menacing outside with the security that Rose finds in her room: "Still, the room keeps warm. It's better than the basement anyway [...]. No, this room's alright for me. I mean you know where you are. When it's cold for instance" (1991a:85, 86). The audience becomes aware that Rose equates the basement with the outside. Henceforth, the basement, like the outside, is a threatening menace which she tries to avoid by not leaving her safe haven, her room.

In *A Slight Ache* however, the menace becomes an *embodied manifestation* of psychological disturbances. This play, like the others, revolves around a central theme of the need to fulfil a lack. The terror however, is more frightening in *A Slight Ache* than it

is in *The Room*. In the latter play the menace remains outside Rose's domain· thus creating a spatial and protective gap between her and this threat. On the other hand, in *A Slight Ache*, the characters *invite* the menace as an outward symptom of their repressed internal neurosis[1] into their lives. Gale (1977:75) illustrates this point:

> the supposed threat [menace] is brought *inside* and examined and it becomes evident that it is nothing to fear; the danger is *internal*, in the minds and actions of the players. Instead of something external posing a threat because it is trying to get at the individual, the peril exists because there is some *need* within the individual which is not fulfilled.

At the start of *A Slight Ache*, Pinter presents Edward and Flora, characters who have climbed the social ladder to an opulent, courteous world. Their backdrop is a "well kept garden [...] with flower beds, trimmed hedges etc." (Pinter 1991a:153), which surrounds a country home. Seemingly this is a happy, balanced couple, enjoying their breakfast in the flowering garden. The dialogue of the play commences with an argument between the two characters. Clearly, they are not the ideal, gratified, cheerful, agreeable couple, but rather two people bound to a disintegrating marriage. The first of many disputes revolves around the naming of the flowers in their garden:

> Edward: Is that honeysuckle? I thought it was ... convolvulus, or something.
> Flora: But you know it's honeysuckle.
> Edward: I tell you I thought it was convolvulus.
> [...]
> Flora: The whole garden's in flower this morning. The clematis. The convolvulus.

Everything. I was out at seven. I stood by the pool.

Edward: Did you say - that the convolvulus was in flower?

Flora: Yes.

Edward: But good God, you just denied there was any.

Flora: I was talking about the honeysuckle. (Pinter, 1991a:153 and 154).

Edward and Flora's disagreement about the names of the flowers creates between them an aura of contradiction and alienation. In addition, the power play of challenging signifiers, where each is eager to foreground their superior intellect, reveals their unconscious need to control and oppress each other as a displacement of libidinal desires. They manipulate language to (mis)communicate, to speak past each other and the meaning of what is being said is lost in its essence, but not in its intention. They intend to argue, to stress their self-centered desires. Thus, they have ceased to hear each other, as they are too self absorbed in their own angst, focusing only on their egocentric desires. This is the realm of the masochist where "feelings of powerlessness and individual insignificance" (Fromm, 1942:122) are experienced.

Morels (1995:1) states that, "oppressions and oppressors exist internally and externally" and this theory proves true with regard to Edward and Flora's sado-masochistic tendencies. Their use of language, which denotes the play for power, highlights their fears of alienation, which they are experiencing as a result of their unfulfilled desires. This is the driving force that produces sadistic attributes to both Edward and Flora.

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According to Freud (1964:93):

> sadism is the destructive instinct directed outwards, thus acquiring the characteristic of aggressiveness. A certain amount of the original destructive instinct may still remain in the interior. It seems that we can only perceive it under two conditions: if it is combined erotic addition – it is directed against the external world as aggressiveness.

In *A Slight Ache*, the wasp scene introduces two important themes. Firstly, it positions Edward in the locus of the Other and secondly highlights the differences between him and his wife:

> Flora: [the wasp] will bite me.
> Edward: It will not bite you! Wasps don't bite.
> [...]
> Flora: It'll fly away. It'll bite.
> Edward: If you don't stop saying that word I shall leave this table.
> Flora: But wasps do bite.
> Edward: They don't bite. They sting. It's snakes [...] that bite (Pinter 1991a: 157).

This exchange enacts the process through which the spokesperson of the Other, Edward, instructs Flora to be an 'appropriate' cultural subject. He insists she uses the right terminology and threatens her with abandonment if she continues to defy the patriarchal Other. Accordingly, Malkin (1992:74) points out that "linguistic control [...] is the ultimate power. To control what someone is able to say is to control to a considerable extent what they are able to do". The second significant aspect of the wasp scene is noted in the killing of the wasp. Pinter juxtaposes Edward and Flora and the former is the

metaphorical figure that defines existence in compliance to the law of social conditioning. Flora, true to her name, represents existence as it pertains to nature: natural, instinctual desire.

Edward metaphorically expresses his alienation from the natural world: "I don't see why I should be expected to distinguish between these plants. It's not my job" (Pinter, 1991a:154). He then further exposes his aversion to whatever the natural order represents as he sadistically kills the wasp by scalding it, then squashing it on a plate, declaring it a "monster" (1991a:158). Flora characterises this incident as "an awful experience" (1991a:158) and "a horrible death" (1991a:156) to which Edward responds, "On the contrary" (1991a:156). He does not specify contrary to what, but we can assume, given his doctrines about denying sexual passions in favour of social expectancy, that nature, which signifies inherent libidinal desires, has no place in the ideal society. Pinter juxtaposes individual repression and social demands. Thus he portrays Edward as the mouthpiece of society, and also as the character who displays neurotic anxiety as he represses his libido.

Lacan (1977:7) highlights this notion in stating that "the sufferings of neurosis [...] provides us with an indication of the deadening of passions in society". For Edward then, the killing of the wasp is not an awful experience, a horrible death, but on the contrary,

quite appropriate to the law of the social Other. Edward has done what is expected of him in the social world, he has repressed his inherent, instinctual desires. He finds nature, which he parallels to sexual needs, "treacherous" (1991a:154) and "vicious" (1991a:157). Edward believes that instinctual drives are too primitive, and thus do not belong in his courteous world. Therefore, he represses his own libidinal desires in order to belong to the social world. This social world is a communal regime in which society is the Other, the governing body that restricts an individual's erotic instincts. It is the law of the Other that "domesticates [the individual by] refining and adroitly checking man's basic impulses" (Fromm, 1942:7). Edward is a victim in this society – a circumstance which indicates the reason that the events will occur as they do. Horrifically, Edward is so totally conditioned by the Other's demand for culture that he has repressed his libidinal desires to the point where he suffers from impotence and neurosis. Fromm (1942:7) points out that the more society suppresses the individual's drives, the more culture is achieved, "and the more danger of neurotic disturbances".

However, Edward's impotence is twofold. Conventional to Pinter's early plays, his female characters are portrayed as mothering-wives, (Rose in *The Room* and Meg in *The Birthday Party*). In *A Slight Ache*, Flora echoes Pinter's first female portraits, as she smothers Edward with maternal care. She wants to put up the canopy to shade him from the sun. As she tells him, "it's the height of summer today" (Pinter, 1991a:135) and later,

she expresses her need to bathe his aching eyes (cf. 1991a:162). Flora's desire to mother Edward is a displacement of her sexual desires. Edward, suffering from impotence as a result of his fear of sensuality which develops as a reaction to social life conditions, cannot fulfil his marital responsibilities. Thus Flora moves from being a frustrated wife to being a mother as she buries her libidinal desires in mothering Edward. Not only does she mother him with maternal protection, but she also labels him with childlike language "Weddie. Beddie-Weddie" (1991a:162). These words signify how Flora unconsciously redirects her instinctual desires when she treats Edward like her child. Edward in turn suffers from an Oedipus complex, as he views Flora not as a wife, but as a surrogate mother. Thus to have a sexual relationship with her, is to be punished by the pervasive Other – the society to which he pays allegiance.

According to Freud, when the Oedipus complex is dealt with normally, the repressed instinctual impulse (desiring the mother), is totally destroyed. This allows the libido to be "permanently diverted along other paths" (1964:81), a theory which Freud (1964:86) labels as "sublimation".

However,

> in many cases, instead of the customary result of repression, a degradation of the libido takes place - a regression of the libidinal organisation to an earlier stage. This [...] only occurs in the id, and if it occurs it will be under the influence of the same

> conflict which was introduced by the signal of anxiety. The most striking example of this kind is provided by the obsessional neurosis, in which libidinal regression operate together (Freud, 1964:82).

As was illustrated, Edward suffers from neurosis, which is made clear in his libidinal regression: his impotence. Flora, in Freudian terms, is the signal of Edward's anxiety, and in his unconscious mind, she has replaced his mother. This results in Edward facing "a regression of the libidinal organisation to an earlier stage" (1964:82), the Oedipal phase. Freud (1964:83) states that "this only occurs in the id, and if it occurs it will be under the same conflict" that was once experienced during the Oedipal complex. The conflict is between the id's instinctual desires and the ego "with its face turned towards reality" (1964:82). Although the ego is the id's "loyal servant, eager [...] to fill its desires" (1964:82) it can also bear its reality influence on the processes in the id. "The ego exercises this influence by putting into action the almost omnipotent pleasure-unpleasure principle by means of the signal of anxiety" (Freud, 1964:82). However, there is a downside to this if the signal (Flora) reminds the subject (Edward) of his repressed anxiety. Freud (1964:82) explains that the ego "shows its weakness again immediately afterwards, for by the act of repression it renounces a portion of its organisation and has to allow the repressed instinctual impulse to remain permanently withdrawn".

Edward's withdrawal from his repressed instinctual impulse is interwoven with his compliance to the Lacanian law of the Other. This law prohibits sexual contact with the

mother, and for Edward, that signifies no sexual interaction with Flora, the woman who mothers him. This has caused the breakdown of their marriage, and thus, their fear of total isolation. The latter results in their striving for submission (masochism) and dominance (sadism) in order to prevent alienation (cf. Fromm, 1942:122 and 123).

Flora, as a masochist, casts herself as a victim in her husband's power. By accepting Edward's sexual neglect, Flora is socialised into submission, where she denies herself any pleasure in love, and instead comforts Edward's desires by mothering him. Blake's (1794:1) first stanza of *The Clod and the Pebble* highlights the way in which the masochist experiences love:

> Love seeketh not Itself to please,
> Nor for itself hath any care;
> But for another gives its ease,
> And builds a Heaven in Hell's despair.

However, Flora's building of a "Heaven" (1794:1) for Edward and a despairing "Hell" (1794:1) for herself, does not last for long. Her sexual desires are not as deeply buried as Edward's are, as they keep erupting during the course of the play. This is revealed in her sadistic tendencies: her means of retaliation. Thus Flora uses language to hurt Edward as a symbol of her resistance to his oppressive nature. Like the last stanza of Blake's (1794:1) poem, Flora as a sadist, desires love only as an egocentric fulfilment:

> Love seeketh only Self to please,
> To bind another to Its delight:

Joys in another's loss of ease
And builds a Hell in Heaven's despite.

Besides using language to contradict Edward during an argument, Flora also uses it to entice him to face his fears, which leads to his "loss of ease" (Blake, 1794:1) and total destruction. She encourages him to go outside, as this is where he will be forced to deal with his neurotic disturbances as these are embodied in the Matchseller who stands at the bottom of their garden:

Flora: It's too dark in here to peer. ...
Edward: Damn.
Flora: It's so bright outside.
Edward: Damn.
Flora: And it's dark in here.
Pause.
Edward: Christ blast it!
Flora: You're frightened of him.
Edward: I am not!
Flora: He's a poor harmless man.
Edward: Aaah my eyes (1991a:162).

The symbolism of eyes is widespread in this play. It starts with Edward complaining about a slight ache in his eyes, "as if I haven't slept" (1991a:156). Flora then asks him if he did sleep. He answers, "Of course I slept. Uninterrupted. As always" (1991a, 156). This further highlights the disintegration of Edward and Flora's relationship, as Edward sleeps well, with no sexual 'interruptions'. However, the *slight* ache in his eyes

progressively worsens as the play proceeds. Edward's move towards metaphorical blindness suggests his trying to erase the outside world. "Edward's physical ache is a manifestation of his psychological ache as he deteriorates to the point of helplessness" (Dukore, 1982:42). These themes of blindness and helplessness echo Sophocles' *King Oedipus*, where Oedipus blinds himself as a symbolic act of castration for now his eyes will not be able to see "his shame, his guilt" (Sophocles, 1983:61). However, Oedipus' act of blinding himself also highlights the moment the character achieves insight. Likewise, Edward's blindness confirms his insight, for, the more he complains about the ache in his eyes, the more he unconsciously realises that the antagonisms between him and his wife are caused because of his inadequacies and her desires. The symbol of the slight ache, as is noted in the title, *A Slight Ache*, is the extended metaphor of the interlocking painful desires of both Edward and Flora. Because she aches for fulfilment and he, as a result of his impotence, aches for youth and vigour, their inner desires are outwardly projected where they manifest in an imagined symbol, the Matchseller who can provide "light" and "fire" needed to rejuvenate their relationship.

Pinter originally wrote *A Slight Ache* as a radio play, although it has been successfully performed on stage, without the dramatist having to adapt the script. In *The Theatre of The Absurd,* Esslin (1970:87) makes an important comment on this original form:

> in its radio form the play is bound to be more effective, because then it can remain open whether the central character, the Matchseller, who never speaks, actually exists or is no more than a projection of the two other characters' fears.

Traditional to Pinter's corpus, the lack of verification causes much confusion for his readers and audience. In *A Slight Ache*, Pinter does not clarify whether or not the Matchseller is an actual third character or just an imagined portrayal of the couple's fears. This unverified appearance creates an aura of mystery. Pinter states that "so much is imagined and that imagining is as true as real" (Kreps, 1987:76). In accordance with Pinter's statement, the concept of the Matchseller is discussed in this study as an imagined projection of Edward and Flora's fears and desires. For them the projected Matchseller is as true as the reality of the inner pain they are experiencing. They are so deeply situated in dread that their minds are capable of believing in his existence. Edward and Flora interact with him as a 'real' third character, hoping that he might endow them with a power to live a happier life. Brenner (1974:91) explains that "projection [...] results in the individual attributing a wish or impulse of his own to some other person, or for that matter, to some nonpersonal object of the outside world". Thus, the couple projects the imagined character, the nonpersonal object of the outside world, and invite him into their home as a wishful attempt to stop their aching lack and to fill their desires.

The fact that the Matchseller has no language suggests that he is not a subject. Lacan (1998:188) explains that "the subject is subject only from being subjected to the field of the Other". The field of the Other is the symbolic register where the child is positioned as a subject in a world of language. Lacan (1988:188) states that " the subject determined by language and speech [...] begins in the locus of the Other, in so far as it is there that the first signifier emerges". Thus, in Lacanian theory, the Matchseller cannot be an actual third character or a subject in the play, due to the fact that he does not speak. In fact, he does not show any signs of life during the whole script. It is then possible to say he is only a projected image.

Furthermore, as Pinter has drawn a resemblance between the Matchseller and Edward, it is also possible to presume that the Matchseller is a metaphorical figure that occupies the position of Edward's unconscious. It is only during the moments that Edward interacts with the Matchseller that he uses speech to signify the discourse of his unconscious. This initiates an inward journey where Edward comes to face his neurotic repression. When he converses with Flora, Edward uses the language of the Other. But during his cathartic confessions to his other/the Matchseller, Edward maps the events of his life, revealing the effect it has had on his mental psyche, namely, his id, ego and super-ego.

In her essay *Death and the Double in Three Plays by Harold Pinter*, Burkman (1984:133)

refers to the term *"Doppelganger"*. She defines this term as, "people who see themselves" in a projected image, a "double" (1984:133). Applied to *A Slight Ache*, the disintegrating Edward sees himself in his projected double, the Matchseller. Burkman (1984:133) explains that "the double process [...] often involves the decomposition of a whole character so that one may think of each character as a double of the other or part of a whole". However, Edward does not initially recognise the Matchseller as his double, but gradually comes to see this projection as himself.

By employing the Matchseller as Edward's double, Pinter exposes the process of Edward's insight and growth in self-knowledge. However, if the Matchseller is a symbolic double of only Edward's unconscious, why then does Flora project him too? Why is he a shared projection and not just Edward's? There are two possible reasons. Firstly, the Matchseller *must* be a shared projection as this notion highlights the structural technique that Pinter uses to express his themes. Pinter structures *A Slight Ache* around a plot that allows *both* characters moments – however few – to express their fears and desires to the Matchseller. If he were only Edward's projection, the Matchseller would not be able to interact with Flora alone on stage, without the presence of his double. But since he is Flora's projection too, Pinter explores the theme of instinctual desires versus the system.

This brings us to the second reason why the Matchseller is a shared projection. Flora is the symbol of the instinctual world. She needs to remind Edward, who is so victimised by the system, about the pleasure of fulfilled desires. Thus she too must interact with Edward's double, for this is when she is given the opportunity to express her own frustrations and desires. She tells the Matchseller, "Sex, I suppose means nothing to you. Does it ever occur to you that sex is a very vital experience for other people?" (1991a:176). In this statement she highlights the theme of the instinctual drives versus the system, the Law of the Other. Flora has failed to reach Edward as conscious super-ego, when he is the mouthpiece of the patriarchal Other. Therefore she also projects the Matchseller, because she desires to reposition Edward into the inherent, instinctual world, where he will acknowledge his libidinal desires. If Edward is repositioned, Flora will fulfil her desires. Bowie (1991:83) explains the difference between the world of the Other and the natural world:

> where natural analogies, and symbolism based upon them, offer the promise of completion, fullness, symmetry, and response at the end of the signifying process, the Other keeps the signifier perpetually on the move.

Edward first notices the Matchseller standing outside their gate on "a lane, leading to a monastery" (Pinter 1991a:160). He wonders why the Matchseller chooses that spot as it is "off everybody's route. Even the monks take a short cut to the village, when they want to go ... to the village" (1991a:160). The three dots (ellipses) signify that the monks are going to the village, via a shortcut, on an illicit adventure, perchance to see their lovers.

The word, *lovers*, and all that it signifies, is one that the neurotic, conditioned Edward refuses to utter. Edward is more alienated than he thinks. It seems as if libidinal desires are carried out, even by the monks! The symbolism of Edward's projected other, the Matchseller standing at the gate "for two months" (1991a:158), is interwoven with the symbolic value of the Matchseller positioned on the road that leads to the monastery. Edward has been restricted from being "able to step outside the back gate" (1991a:159) for two months. For *two months* he has been excluded from the Other world, living a life of a hermit. As he notes, "we have few visitors this time of the year" (1991a:168).

The projected Matchseller has prohibited Edward from leaving his home at a time when he has few visitors. Thus he is forced to face his pain and anguish. This is the time he has unconsciously given himself to remain at home. If he were to leave, he would be influenced more through interacting with the social Other. Furthermore, the symbolic significance of the Matchseller standing at their back gate, in the lane that leads to the monastery, suggests that Edward is confronted with two choices. Burkman (1984:135) states that "protagonists' encounters with their doubles become [...] confrontations that involve the ultimate question of their salvation or damnation". Edward then must either realise that his unconscious desires, embodied in the Matchseller, are blocking his exit into the social world, forcing him to deal with his instinctual desires. Or, he can ignore the Matchseller restricting his egress, and walk down the lane that leads to the monastery:

a house of order which negates sexual desire and an institution where individuality is doomed.

When Flora notices the Matchseller she thinks he is a "bullock" (Pinter, 1991a:161). Edward decides to invite the Matchseller into his home, believing that he is not a seller of matches, but rather "an impostor" (1991a:163). Edward intends to "get to the bottom of it" and can then "get rid of him [...] instead of [his] standing like a bullock ... a bullock outside my back gate" (1991a:163). Chetwynd (1982:65) explains the symbolism of bulls as "the creative poser of Spring". Edward and Flora refer to the Matchseller as a bullock. Hence he symbolically represents a young bull, which highlights Chetwynd's symbolic use of "spring". Being Edward's double, his unconscious other, the Matchseller thus represents a young Edward – a youthful Edward that once enjoyed the passions of his inherent libido.

Another interesting symbolism of the bullock is the parallel between animal instinctual behaviour and that of the cultured, socialised human being. In the animal kingdom, there is no cultural language to verbalise laws that instinctual desires are not to be fulfilled. Thus when an animal is aroused, it does not refrain from consummating its desires. Henceforth, it is fitting to equate the Matchseller, representing a young bullock, with a passionate younger Edward.

Before Flora acts on Edward's instruction to "call him in" (Pinter, 1991a:163), Edward asks Flora, "why doesn't [the Matchseller] find shelter from the storm?" (1991a:165). Flora reminds him that "there's no storm" (1991a:165). Clearly, there is no actual storm, but only Edward's inner storm that signifies his inability to see which parallels the ache in his eyes. This is the first indication that the Matchseller is Edward's double, for it is Edward who is trying to escape, to find shelter from his neurotic and stormy anxiety.

Later in the play, when Edward interacts with the Matchseller, it becomes more obvious that he projects his own psychological discomfort onto his other/the Matchseller[2]. He states, "What is it damn you. You're shivering. You're sagging" (1991a:171). These verbs are mainly attributed to one who suffers from pain and anxiety. It is Edward who is physically sagging and shivering, because his ego has weakened and broken out into anxiety (cf. Freud, 1964:69). Edward is thus positioned in an incredibly difficult situation – there is a constant tug of war between his id's sexual desires, and his strict super-ego, "which lays down definite standards" (Freud, 1964:69). Therefore Edward's ego, which Freud explains as the mental process that allows the subject to make judgements, is impaired. Edward's "personified" (1964:69) ego feels "hemmed in" (1964:69) by serving "three masters [namely], the external world, the super-ego and the id" (1964:69).

Pinter structures Edward's psychological journey by exposing the course his ego takes in

serving firstly the external world, and his super-ego, and secondly his id's desires. Thus the scenes in which Edward interacts with the Matchseller are divided into two separate episodes with an interlude when Flora has her turn to interact with their shared projection.

Before commenting on the couple's interactive scenes with the Matchseller, it is important to note the underlying aura of tragedy that occurs during Edward's psychological journey. This quest for insight begins when he approaches his unconscious, the Matchseller. Edward's discourse is what Freud terms 'the talking cure'. Freud's belief is that the analyst gains insight to the patient's mental health by listening to his unconscious speech. Tragedy that results from obeying the Other is noted when Edward acknowledges his repressed trauma/desires. In these tragic moments, which occur often, Edward is forced to cope with reality. According to Freud, repression is a coping mechanism whereby the person excludes from his/her conscious mind any knowledge related to this conflict which s/he finds difficult to deal with. However, the repressed traumatic experience enters the unconscious but does not remain there forgotten. There is, Freud states, "[a] connection between the forgotten pathogenic scenes and the symptoms which they have left behind" (1910:2).

Moments of tragedy are noted when Edward comes face to face with his "symptoms"

(1910:2). By acknowledging his conflict, he releases his coping mechanism, and is forced to deal with his trauma. This is a moment, which is typical of tragedies, where the character faces terrifying moments.

In his essay, *The Balance of Reconciliation of Opposite and Discordant Qualities*, Richards (1942:145) adds an interesting psychoanalytic slant to his in-depth definition of tragedy. However, he uses the term 'suppression', whereas Freud refers to 'repression' when explaining sublimation (see Freud, 1964:84-87)[3]. Richards (1942:145) comments in an explanation worth quoting at some length:

> It is essential to recognise that in the full tragic experience there is no suppression. The mind does not shy away from anything, it does not protect itself with any illusion, it stands uncomforted, unintimidated, alone and self-reliant. The test of its success is whether it can face what is before it and respond to it without any of the innumerable subterfuges by which it ordinarily dodges the full development of the experience. Suppressions and sublimations alike are devices by which we endeavour to avoid issues which might bewilder us. The essence of Tragedy is that it forces us to live for a moment without them. When we succeed we find, as usual, that there is no difficulty; the difficulty came from the suppressions and sublimations.

Edward's first encounter with his double: *ego in combat with superego and external world*

During this first meeting with the Matchseller, Edward asserts himself as the mouthpiece of the social world. His language denotes an upper-class bias as he maps the experiences

of his life in the world of the Other. He utters, "there's a good chap" (1991a:169); "take your ease" (1991a:169) and "well now, before the good lady sounds the gong for petit dejeuner will you join me in an aperitif?" (1991a:169). Edward is the respected man who pays his dues to society: he tells the Matchseller, "I entertain the villagers annually as a matter of fact" (1991a:166). Furthermore, Edward asserts himself as a man of power for he has gained respect from society, "I'm not the squire, but they look upon me with some regard" (1991a:166). Although Edward is not the squire, a position he clearly desires, he has acquired recognition from the villagers in a scheming move on his behalf. He substituted his lust for power by marrying one of the squire's daughters.

Seemingly, Edward courted each one of the squire's daughters, and eventually chose the "best of the bunch" (1991a:167). Not because he was in love with her, but rather, being the "best of the bunch", she represented the ideal prestigious wife. By bracketing Flora into a "bunch" suggests that Edward has, like the rest of society, dehumanised and demoralised individuality. It is not the individual that matters in the social world, but rather the significance of the status symbol. To reinforce the lack of love and the greed for power, Edward forgets the name of his wife. He starts off by calling her Sally, then realises he has guessed incorrectly, "No, no, wait a minute, no, it wasn't Sally, it was ... Fanny. Fanny. A Flower" (1991a:167). He still gets it wrong. Pinter tells us that her name is Flora. However, Edward does remember the metaphor of her name, a flower.

The pertinence of the former, Edward forgetting his wife's name, reveals how he dismisses his wife's originality, and thus her desires as an individual. The significance of the latter, Edward remembering the metaphor of his wife's name, is a Freudian slip, revealing the disturbance and guilt in his unconscious. Because he only has a slight remembrance of her name, this memory loss reinforces that he has abandoned his wife. He expresses how long it has been since he has thought of his wife as a flower, and therefore thought of his libidinal desires. He tells the projected instinctual and younger Edward "you must be a stranger here" (1991a:167). This indicates that Edward's id libidinal desires are estranged in his conscious mind, and thus his daily life.

The "here" signifies the space in his unconscious desires. "Here" is where the older Edward is a stranger, having long last experienced passion which he so frequently indulged in before he joined the patriarchal Other. Edward exposes that his libidinal drive was filled with sexual energy in his youth. He recalls his younger days when he went to Africa. He reminds his double/himself, "if my memory serves me right" (1991a:167), that "Africa's always been my happy hunting ground. [...]. Most extraordinary diversity of flora and fauna. Especially fauna" (1991a:167). Flora, as we have established, is his wife, but as a signifier, flora also represents the libidinal drive. Edward stating that he was happily "hunting" (sadistic tendency) in Africa, having a particular preference to "fauna", suggests that he had submitted to libidinal desires.

However, his affairs did not last long. His super-ego (conscience) lays guilt on his ego. Thus Edward projects the Matchseller to stand at his back gate, restricting him from leaving, from going to fauna. Directly after he relates his memory of his trip to Africa, he asks his unconscious other, "[...] are you passing through? [...] Well I can tell you, in my opinion you won't find many prettier parts than here" (1991a:167). He is wanting his unconscious to remain (after all he invited him in) in his projected mirror image, for this is where he can 'see' it, have access to it. This is where he is forced to deal with his neurosis, which he hopes will comfort him (Barnabas, the Son of Consolation)[4] from his angst. Edward hopes that his unconscious 'Barnabas' will remind him that he "won't find many prettier parts" (women) than here, in his own home.

Edward proceeds to describe his wife as passionate[5], a quality he once admired: "Fine figure of a woman she was, too, in her youth. Wonderful carriage, flaming red hair. [*He stops abruptly*] [*Pause*]" (Pinter, 1991a:168) . The pause denotes a moment during which Edward is preoccupied with his thoughts. He has stumbled upon an awareness of his past, remembering how passionate his wife was and still is, and how he has neglected her as well as his own desires. Edward's advice to his other/Matchseller carries a torrent of insight, "Let me advise you. Get a good woman to stick by you. *Never mind what the world says.* Keep at it" (1991a:168, added emphasis). Clearly Edward's internal battle is a result of his being torn between his own desires and that of the Other's command. In his

moment of awareness, he realises that he has been wrong in listening to "what the world says" (1991a:168) and this conditioning has forced him to neglect his "charming woman" (1991a:168) who has "stood by [him] through thick and thin" (1991a:168).

Edward's insight extends as he acknowledges, "can't stand uniformity" (1991a:167) and "but then I've always been one for freedom of movement" (1991a:169). This is the discourse of Edward's desires. He is stating that he is not happy as a social member in a restricting system. He feels trapped because he has lived his life by "what the world says" (1991a:168). The world's/society's principles allow no room for individual freedom and sexual expression.

This is a tragic moment, a moment when Edward stands alone with no repression to help him cope. He is facing the naked truth of his desires. He asks his double, "why don't you sit down?" Edward realises that he has to take a position, whether it is in the world of the Other or in his own individual world. Yet, he is terrified. He does not know what to do. He can't decide as he feels helpless, telling his double "you're not being terribly helpful" (1991a:170). Pinter calls for a pause here (see 1991a:170), a moment of silent anguish, when Edward realises that without repressing his desires, he has to face them, but he cannot cope. He feels alienated standing on 'no man's land', where there is no ruling laws, when he discards his masochistic tendencies[6]. Now Edward has to make his own

rules. He has to be the master of his own life, the one who will control his decisions and desires as opposed to the system he has always relied upon to decide for him. It has been so long since Edward has controlled his own life that, when he is faced with this possibility to do so again, he does not know how to go about it. He instructs his double to "take off that balaclava", insisting that his unconscious reveal itself totally in his ego, as the ego has the power to make decisions.

However, the Matchseller does not remove his balaclava, and Edward's internal heated tension increases. He begins to sweat as he notices his double is sweating, "You're sweating. The sweat's pouring out of you" (1991a:170). His fear of isolation is burning inside, making him sweat.

He has to belong somewhere, he has to assert himself somewhere, and if it is not in the realm of the masochist then it will be in the scope of the sadist. He asserts control on his unconscious, repressing his desires once more, "Go into the corner then. Into the corner. Go on. [...] Back. Backward [...] *Pause*. Ah, now you understand me" (1991a:170). Now Edward's super-ego has full control again for this is the language of the Other: control and dominance. Edward finds safety here in the scope of his super-ego and the external world's requirements. He now takes a stand in the world of the Other, as he continues to repress his individual libidinal desires, and (re)displaces them with repulsion. He tells the

Matchseller/his younger other, "You disgust me, quite forcibly, if you want to know the truth [...] you're no more disgusting than Fanny, the squire's daughter, after all. In appearance you differ but not in essence" (1991a:171).

However, Edward's position of safety, in the realm of the Other (which is depicted in the latter quote), is threatened again. For the first time, Edward recognises that the Matchseller is, in actuality, a projection of his younger self. He states, "When I was a younger man. You too, perhaps. You too, perhaps. [*Pause*] At the same time, perhaps!" (1991a:171). The realisation that he and the Matchseller are one, stifles him. He says, "[*muttering*] I must get some air. I must get a breath of fresh air" (1991a:171). Edward goes out for his breath of fresh air and sits under a canopy in the garden with Flora. He is distraught, confused and alienated in his private awareness.

As opposed to the opening scene, when he expressed his dislike of nature (the symbol for libidinal desire), he now finds peace in the garden: "The peace. The peace out here" (1991a:172). Flora tells him that the birds are "singing high up and flapping" (1991a:172), to which Edward responds, "Good. Let them flap" (1991a:172). Clearly this is not the Edward we first saw who killed the wasp as an expression of his repressed libidinal desires. Rather this is a reforming Edward. The birds flapping, as an extended

metaphor of natural instincts, indicates that Edward is starting to accept his own inherent desires – he is going to let the birds flap and not kill them as he did the wasp.

Furthermore, Edward tells Flora "and stop calling me Edward" (1991a:173)[7], indicating that he wants a change in his uniformed life. By demanding a change of name, Edward is requesting a new signifier, a new persona. His unconscious wish is to destroy the older Edward and return to the younger Edward/Matchseller. Flora is aware of the internal battle that Edward is going through. After all, she projected the Matchseller too. She realises that Edward is presently situated between two worlds, the world of the Other's demands and his own individual desires. In order to assist Edward in his transition from a preconditioned social man to a younger passionate Edward, Flora states, "I shall go in and have a word with him now. I shall get to the bottom of it" (1991a: 173). She realises that Edward's Freudian "ego" has to find a new identity.

Feeling vulnerable to and suspicious of Flora's manipulation of the situation, Edward "*seizes her arm* [*hissing*] what are you plotting?" (1991a:174). Flora is determined to have passion in her life again, henceforth, she is "plotting" (1991a:174) to remind Edward's other/the Matchseller about "love" (1991a:176). She knows that Edward is "much too heavy-handed, in every way" (1991a:174), the sadistic tendency of the patriarchal Other. Thus he is denying "the truth" (1991a:174) of his desires. Juxtaposing

Edward, Flora is filled with desire and therefore she believes she will succeed where Edward "must invariably fail" (1991a:174) . Controlling the events that will now follow she tells Edward:

> I shall get to the truth of it, I assure you. You're much too heavy-handed in every way. You should trust your wife more, Edward. You should trust her judgement, and have greater insight into her capabilities. A Woman ... a woman will often succeed, you know, where a man must invariably fail. *Silence. She goes into the study.* (1991a:174)[8].

Flora's response to Barnabas

Flora's interaction with the Matchseller differs considerably from Edward's first meeting with his double. Unafraid to express her desire, Flora begins her liaison with the Matchseller by reminding him of their passionate younger days:

> Do you know, I've got a feeling I've seen you before, somewhere. [...] You were much younger. Yes, I'm really sure of it. Between ourselves, were you ever a poacher? I had an encounter with a poacher once. It was a ghastly rape, the brute. [...] Early spring. I was out riding on my pony. And there on the verge a man lay - ostensibly injured, lying on his front, [...] I dismounted, I went to him, he rose, I fell, my pony took off, down to the valley. I saw the sky through the trees, blue. Up to my ears in mud. It was a desperate battle (1991a:174).

Flora's "Laurentian rape speech is so wittily told it might be a fantasy" (Hinchliffe, 1976:69). Thus, Flora's retelling of the event of her "rape" is not to be taken as a

"ghastly" event but rather as a means to introduce sex into the conversation. Her attitude towards sex is more implied in, "Of course, life was perilous in those days. It was my first canter unchaperoned" (1991a:175). She later admits that when she had an opportunity to punish her rapist she "acquitted him", not much of a condemnation of the man, considering what had happened. She relates, "Years later, I was a Justice of the Peace for the country, I had him in front of the bench. He was there for poaching. [...]. I acquitted him, letting him off with a caution. He'd grown a red beard" (1991a:175).

As mentioned previously, Pinter's use of the colour red in *A Slight Ache* is symbolic of passion, not a "ghastly rape". The fact that Flora acquitted her 'rapist' because he had a "red beard" (1991a:175), insinuates that she did not experience her first[9] sexual encounter as "a desperate battle" (1991a:175), but rather as one filled with passion. The unrelated events of her story are parallel to the Freudian notion of the unconscious memory expressing itself in the conscious mind as a distortion of the actual events that took place. Henceforth, Flora's recollection of how she remembered her 'rape' is not to be taken as a real event, but rather as a fantasy expressed as a rape.

In Freudian theory "unconscious memories carry no index of the veracity or truth of their contents. A memory may have originated either as a perception or as a wish. The unconscious cannot distinguish between fantasies and 'real events' in so far as wishes

have as much force as 'real' events in the subject's physical life" (Grosz, 1990:54). This quote applies to Flora and suggests that her unconscious memory of her 'rape' carries no truth in its content. Her memory of her first sexual encounter originated as a wish. A wish to have a "solid" (1991a:176), youthful and more daring man as a lover. This is highlighted as she equates the 'rapist' with the man who has a "red beard" (1991a:175), namely the passionate younger Edward.

Before proceeding, it is important to note the omnipresence of the restricting Other for this reinforces the theme of the conditioned social human versus the passionate individual. Flora indicates that her first sexual encounter was experienced during her "first cantor unchaperoned" (1991a:175). This suggests that when she went out riding her pony, she always had a chaperone with her. A person who 'protected' her as a young unmarried lady and thus would restrict her sexual activity. Therefore, the chaperone is one who could enforce the law of the Other. However, since there was no member of the Other with her that day, she could fulfil her passions and desires as an individual. But from that day she again had a chaperone. Not a literal chaperone, but one disguised as an oppressive Other. This disguised chaperone oppresses Edward's individual desire, and in turn Flora's libidinal needs because Edward's suffering from impotency restricts their sexual relationship.

Flora reinforces that her life is passionless as she reminds Edward's double how vital sex is to her, and how it should be to him. She "*seductively*" (1991a:176) approaches him with, "tell me about love. Speak to me about love" (1991a:176). As Flora gets closer to the Matchseller, she realises that he has "got a vile smell" (1991a:176) and therefore she will give him "a lovely bath. And a good scrub. A lovely lathery bath. [...]. It will be a pleasure. (*She throws her arms round him*). I'm going to keep you. I'm going to keep you, you dreadful chap, and call you Barnabas" (1991a:176). Barnabas, the one who will console her anguish and satisfy her desire, but also the one she will destroy as she says "I'll buy you pretty little things that will suit you. And little toys to play with. On your deathbed. Why shouldn't you die happy?" (1991a:177). Flora knows that her mothering of the younger Edward/the Matchseller, will smother his sexual desire, "on [his] deathbed" (1991a:177) as it has done to the older Edward.

The irony is that she is now given a second chance to fulfil her desire as a sexual woman, yet she will again displace her libidinal desire in mothering Barnabas. Edward and Flora have gone through so much trauma to reach the point where Edward will acknowledge his desires and institute them into his marriage. Why then would Flora destroy what she so desperately desires? Pinter's play, *Mountain Language*, might provide a possible answer. In *Mountain Language* the plot revolves around a prison setting. The cast consists of the prisoners and their visitors (who are regarded as the Mountain people); as

well as guards, a sergeant and an officer (the people of the Capital). During the second scene, one of the prisoners has his mother visiting him. Every time the mother speaks, to offer her son food, "I have apples [...] I have bread" (Pinter, 1988:10), "*the guard jabs her with a stick*" (1988:10) and commands, "Forbidden. Language forbidden. Tell her to speak the language of the Capital" (1988:10). However, the mother cannot speak the language of the Capital. Her son explains to the guard, "She can't speak it [...] she doesn't speak it" (1988:10).

During the fourth scene, the guard announces to the prisoner, "Oh, I've forgot to tell you. They've changed the rules. She can speak. She can speak her own language" (1988:14). But, the mother does not speak, she never speaks again. She is too afraid to speak her own language for fear of being tortured again, and because she does not know the language of the Capital, she remains silent. The Sergeant then delivers the last line of the play as he tells the Guard, "Look at this. You go out of your way to give them a helping hand and they fuck it up" (1988:14). The mother will not take the "helping hand" (1988:14). She will not speak because she was tortured when she did speak and the physical pain forced her to repress language as a means of self-preservation. She now cannot speak, she has forgotten language as a result of her being oppressed by the Capital/the Other.

In *A Slight Ache*, Flora, like the mother in *Mountain Language*, does not know what to do with her second chance. She does not know how to experience passion again. Like the mother in *Mountain Language*, who remained silent after having been given a chance to speak, Flora, given a chance to fulfil her desires with sexual passion, will continue to displace her desire in mothering Edward because she knows no alternative. Flora highlights how long it has been since she has experienced passion: "Do you know when I was a girl I loved ... I loved ... I simply adored ..." (1991a:176). She does not say what it is that she "loved" [and] "simply adored" (1991a:176) because she cannot remember. Like the mother in *Mountain Language*, Flora has forgotten the words (noted in the ellipses) that she needs to describe her passion. She cannot even recall the sensations of passion because it has been so long.

Edward's second encounter: *ego finds safety in the id*

At the beginning of Edward's second meeting with the Matchseller, he "pulls the blinds [and] "closes the curtains" (1991a:177). This action serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it allows Edward to convert his study into a confessional room. Secondly, by closing the curtains and pulling the blinds, he blocks out the external world, making himself 'invisible' to the eyes and ears of the Other. Henceforth, he can feel free to confess to admit "I've been wrong" (1991a:181).

During this insightful moment Edward begins to cry, he utters to his double, "you're crying ... [Pause.] [...] You're weeping. You're shaking with grief. For me. I can't believe it. For my plight" (1991a:181). Edward's plight has brought him to his cathartic moment[10]. A moment wherein he experiences, "a release of ideas, thoughts and repressed materials from [his] unconscious" (Freedman, Kaplan & Sadock, 1976:1288). Henceforth Edward recalls how he, "lay on my side in my polo shorts, my fingers lightly in contact with the blades of grass, the earthflowers" (1991a:182). The symbolism of the natural world, "the blades of grass, the earthflowers" signifies that Edward once enjoyed his inherent libidinal desires. However, his passion and individual expression did not last long as "the foliage" changed and became "dark" (1991a:182) and "the petals" started "flaking, then I said nothing, I remarked nothing, things happened upon me, and in my times of shelter, [...] the petals carried themselves" (1991a:182). The metaphorical use in the latter quote is widespread as it embellishes crucial awareness of the brutality of the oppressive Other. The image of the petals flaking and the foliage becoming dark suggests that Edward has oppressed Flora as a result of his being oppressed by the Other. Edward's oppression is noted in "then I said nothing, I remarked nothing" (1991a:182).

Again we are reminded of Pinter's play, *Mountain Language*, as this play clearly demonstrates that oppression leads to a lack of freedom of speech, resulting in silence. Furthermore, in his cathartic moment, Edward is undoubtedly aware that his being

oppressed by the Other forced him to abandon his wife, as "the petals" had to then "carry themselves" (1991a:182). This suggests that Flora receives no love and care from Edward and she thus exists in isolation[11].

As Edward continues with his confessional discourse, his language starts to deteriorate, signifying his mental and physical disintegration. He notices that his double is laughing at him and he says, "You're laughing. Your face. Your body. [*Overwhelming nausea and horror.*] Rocking ... gasping ... rocking ... shaking ... rocking ... heaving ... rocking ... You're laughing at me! Aaaaahhhh!" (1991a:183). While Edward becomes "weaker" (1991a:193), the Matchseller gains strength as he "rises" (1991a:193). This suggests that the old patriarchal Edward is slowly fragmenting in order to be 'reborn' into the younger, passionate Edward, the Matchseller. As Edward states, "You look younger. You look extraordinarily ... youthful" (1991a:183). Eventually Edward utters his last line "[*with great, final effort - a whisper.*] Who are you?" (1991a:183).

At that moment Flora calls from offstage, "Barnabas?" (1991a:183). Ironically, her call to Barnabas answers Edward's question and therefore indicates that a role exchange, which has already been prepared for when Edward began to identify himself in his double, has taken place. However, the effect of the role exchange should not be viewed as a metamorphosis but rather the completion of a journey: an internal quest for the

acknowledgement of libidinal desire. Lacan states that "by naming (desire) the subject creates, gives rise to something new, makes something new present in the world" (Felman, 1987:131) and for Edward the 'something new' is his exchange of roles.

The shift in roles produces the move towards the inevitable conclusion. Pinter ends the play with Flora taking her 'new' passionate Edward into the garden. Like Edward, she accepts the role change that took place when Edward positioned himself in Barnabas when he identified himself with his double. The play shows us that we need to go back to a time before – a time when we did not conform to remember what life was like when desires were met, and there was no oppression. Then only will we see the absurdity of the living hell we are in when we conform to the law of the Other. While we are in this realm, we acknowledge it to be normal. We stop questioning and we are influenced by the Other all the time, blinded by its conceptions. We need to be removed from this world, or to be presented with an alternative as Edward was, to be able to see the absurdity of oppression. We need time out from society so that our individual unconscious can speak, so that we can remember what it was like to be an individual before we became conformed. The Matchseller offers this possibility to both Edward and Flora. In *A Slight Ache* Pinter similarly offers this dispute to his audience – the chance to evade the discourse of the Other and to create a new language – one that does not position the individual as oppressed or abandoned.

The following chapter explores the way in which the characters try to avoid oppression: not in creating a new language, but rather by creating a new world. A private world in which the characters play their own games – games that are not superimposed by the social world's ideologies.

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1. What is responsible for the anxiety in neuroses is the process of repression. Neurotic anxiety evidently causes one to be afraid of his/her own libido. "The difference between this situation and that of realistic anxiety lies in two points: that the danger is an internal instead of an external one and that it is not consciously recognised" (Freud,1961:75).

2. During his scenes with the Matchseller, Edward's use of pronouns, "I" and "you" are not merely personal (to depict two separate subjects), but rather allegorical. This is realised when Edward describes the Matchseller's physical attributes (sagging, sweating, laughing, crying etc.) for these descriptions are actually Edward's attributes. *He* is the one sagging, sweating, crying, laughing etc. As Lacan (1977:165) states, "it is not a question of knowing whether I speak of myself in a way that conforms to what I am, but rather of knowing whether I am the same as that of which I speak".

3. Fromm also uses the term 'suppression' instead of 'repression.'

4. During Flora's scene with the Matchseller, she names him "Barnabas" (1991a:176). "Barnabas is the name of an apostle, "the Son of Consolation", Acts 4.36 (Gale, 1977:78). Therefore, the Matchseller as Barnabas is a symbol of one who comforts and consoles.

5. Important to note is the way Edward describes Flora, "flaming red hair" (1991a:168). The colour red symbolises passion, suggesting that Flora is a woman of passion, and Edward did recognise this in her once. Later in the play Flora describes her first sexual encounter with a poacher who had a "red beard" (1991a:175). It becomes clear that the poacher is a younger Edward. Thus he too, having had a "red beard" (1991a:175), was once filled with passion. Hence, during their youth, libidinal desires were not repressed as they are now.

6. Fromm states that a masochist, "quite regularly [...] shows a marked dependence on powers outside themselves, on other people or institutions, or nature. They tend not to assert themselves, nor to do what they want, but to submit to the factual or alleged orders of these outside forces" (1942:122).

7. Flora abides by Edward's demands, "and stop calling me Edward" (1991a:173) as she later renames him "Barnabas" (1991a:176).

8. The pun in Flora's line, "a woman will often succeed, you know, where a man must invariably fail" refers to Edward's impotency. Unlike a man, a woman can fulfil her desires as she lacks the phallus that can fail in its performance.

9. During her 'rape' speech, Flora relates that it was "early spring" (1991a:175). Spring is symbolic of a new beginning, thus it is appropriate to presume that this was Flora's first sexual experience.

10. Freedman, Kaplan & Saddock (1976:1288) define catharsis as "a release of ideas, thoughts and repressed

materials from the unconscious, accompanied by an effective emotional response and release".

11. As highlighted in Chapter Two, Pinter's characters enter into relationships in order to escape alienation. However, they are more isolated *in* their relationships, as their partners abandon them.

CHAPTER 3

'A RIVAL'S DISCOURSE': A study of *The Lover*

"Understanding is so rare, so dear".
(Sarah, in *The Lover*, Pinter, 1991b:178)

In *The Lover*, Pinter explores two different worlds, namely a fantasy world and a reality world. The characters in this play, Richard and Sarah, enter their world of fantasy as a means to escape the oppressions of their reality world. In *A Slight Ache* Edward had no outlet, no escape from the superimposed social limitations, and thus he mentally and physically disintegrated under society's oppressive command. However, in *The Lover*, Richard's fantasy world offers an outlet for self-expression, and this prevents him from following the same route as Edward.

In *The Lover* Richard and Sarah integrate the conflict between the desire of the Other, the conformed, tamed, socialised instincts and their own individual needs: the wild, erotic instincts. In this manner, the couple accept their social roles as respectable stereotypes, and at the same time fulfil their individual desires in their fantasy world, where they role-play the lover and the whore. They depend on their own private and passionate fantasy as a means to maintain their individual desires in a world that is dominated by the doctrines and beliefs of the Other. However, their solution to the eminent problem, individual

desires versus the uniformed social world, becomes uncontrollable. They cannot maintain their erotic fantasy as it breaks through its confinement and spills into the reality of their relationship as husband and wife. Thus their fantasy world overpowers their reality world and begins to destroy the couple's lives as respectable suburbanites.

As in his other plays, Pinter uses language as the medium that reinforces his themes of dominance, control and victimisation. However, in *The Lover* Pinter also adds visual symbolism as a reminder of the omnipresent Other, and the way in which it exerts its oppressive power in Richard and Sarah's intimate relationship. This visual technique is noted in the characters' attire. Richard, as a man of social respectability, is dressed at the opening of the play in a business suit, a briefcase and a bowler hat (cf. Pinter, 1991b:149). He is now the conformist Other. However, when he appears as Sarah's erotic lover, Max, "he is wearing a suede jacket and no tie" (1991b:163) and presumably no briefcase. This indicates that as a representative of the outside world, dressed in the business suit, bowler hat and briefcase, Richard does not indulge in his libidinal pleasures. This notion is reinforced when he leaves for work, to enter the social Other world, and he kisses his wife "on the cheek" (1991b:150), as opposed to the more sensual mouth.

Likewise, Sarah, as the subservient wife, is dressed in a "crisp, demure dress" (1991b:150) as she goes about her daily expected chores, "dusting" (1991b:150). Important to note is the adjective "crisp" as it signifies fresh, clean, unspoiled. As a social wife Sarah is also not allowed to indulge in the pleasures of her desires. She is thus the ideal *virgin* wife, whose only pleasure in life is derived from serving her husband, "whiskey" (1991b:150) and "Boeuf bourgignon" (1991b:180) for dinner. Similar to Richard, once Sarah changes from her domesticated, dutiful clothing into her seductive "very tight low-cut black dress [and] high heel shoes" (1991b:162), she can participate in the sexual seduction game.

In his earlier plays[1], Pinter explored the split-female image: the Madonna/whore theme[2]. However, this theme is played out as an activity that occurs predominantly in the unconscious minds of male characters. In contrast, in *The Lover*, Richard explicitly articulates the patriarchal Other's view of the split-female image when he describes the social stereotypes of wife and whore. He exclaims that a whore is "a functionary who either pleases or displeases" (1991b:156). She is also not a mistress, for Richard states "there is a world of difference" (1991b:155) between a mistress and a whore, as the latter is "just a common garden slut [...] handy between trains [or] while they're checking the oil and water" (1991b:155). In other words, the whore is very convenient to the world of the Other, namely the social economic world. The whore demands no time and she does

not command a committed relationship. Therefore, the businessman is free to operate in the business world and to add to the economic structure of the Other – to be faithful to the laws of the Other. Richard further explores the distinction between wife and whore when he tells Sarah:

> I wasn't looking for your double was I? I wasn't looking for a woman I could respect, as you, whom I could admire and love as I do you. Was I? All I wanted was ... how shall I put it ... someone who could express and engender lust with all lust's cunning. Nothing more (1991b:157).

This indicates that there is a difference between respectable, dutiful 'love' as the social world demands it, and sexual desire as the individual seeks it. Lust is opposed to respectability and therefore cannot be desired in a refined social contract, namely marriage. Undoubtedly Richard and Sarah are totally preconditioned by the patriarchal Other. Correspondingly, Richard's language displays dominance whereas Sarah's actions reveal her submitting to his commands.

One of Richard's rules is that their two worlds, fantasy and reality, remain separate. As a patriarchal husband Richard expects his wife to be socially conditioned: to cook, to clean and to appropriately hide her desires in "crisp demure" (1991b:150) dresses. As a masochist Sarah obliges because she, like Rose in *The Room* and Flora in *A Slight Ache*, fears isolation. When Richard comes home after Sarah has spent an afternoon with her lover (Max/Richard's alter ego), he notices that Sarah is still wearing her high-heeled

shoes, "those shoes. They're unfamiliar" (1991b:154). They're not unfamiliar to him as a lover. In fact they are exactly what he orders as a lover, but as a husband, he refuses to let her wear them. The shoes belong to their fantasy world which may not enter the reality world. Sarah, as a masochist, apologises "(*muttering*) mistake, sorry" (1991b:154) and obligingly removes her high-heeled shoes, and puts them "into [the] cupboard" (199b:154). The symbol of her sexuality, her high-heeled shoes, is now where it belongs: out of sight, in the dark cupboard, symbolically repressed in the unconscious.

When Richard is home as the businessman, Pinter highlights the intense oppression of the social world. Traditional to Pinter's plays, his characters are subjected to a life of rituals. This symbolises their acceptance of a habitual, unchanging and corrupted world. In *The Lover*, when Richard returns home from work and partakes in a ritual that evidently happens every evening, he dutifully "kisses [Sarah] on the cheek" (1991b:150), and expectantly "takes the glass" (199b:150) of whiskey that his socially programmed wife has ready for him. Richard then "hands her the evening paper" (1991b:150), a symbolic act of (a) bringing the outside world into their personal relationship and (b) reinforcing the omnipresence of the Other.[3] Continuing his evening ritual, Richard then sips from his drink, "sits back [on the chaise longue] and sighs with contentment" (1991b:150). Is his contented sigh an expression of ritualised habit too? A possible answer can be found in

Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* when Vladimir expresses "habit is a great deadener" (Beckett, 1955:91). [4]

Richard and Sarah, as husband and wife, are so habitually programmed to patriarchal stereotype ritual, that they are 'dead' as individuals. Richard's comment, "It was warm in the City [...] pretty stifling" (1991b:152), signifies that he is being suffocated by the Other ("the City"), and the only way he can save himself from this 'deadening' and "stifling" reality is through his fantasies. Freud (1910:1) explains why people turn away from reality "with the high claims of [...] civilisation" and enter a life of fantasy:

> we [wo/]men, with the high claims of civilisation and under the pressure of our repressions, find reality generally quite unsatisfactory and so keep up a life of fancy in which we love to compensate for what is lacking in the sphere of reality by the production of wish-fulfilments. In these phantasies is often contained very much of the particular constitutional essence of personality and of its tendencies, repressed in real life.

In accordance with Freud's theory, Richard and Sarah's "lack in the sphere of reality" (1910:1) has led them to a fantasy world which contains what they have "repressed in real life" (1910:1), the fulfilment of their libidinal desires as husband and wife.

However, their fantasy world, like their reality world, begins to show signs of deterioration. From the opening line of the play, the audience is made aware that Sarah has a lover. Richard asks Sarah, "(*amiably*) Is your lover coming today?" (1991b:149).

Pinter's use of the word "amiably" indicates that Richard is not at all perturbed about the fact that his wife is having an affair. When he returns from work the conversation moves around the lover's visit with great ease. Richard asks, "what about this afternoon? Pleasant afternoon?" (1991b:151) and Sarah replies freely, "Oh yes. Quite marvellous" (1991b:151). Neither husband nor wife seems to be affected by what would normally seem to be an unendurable situation. Sarah even "think[s] things are beautifully balanced" (1991b:161). However, things do not stay "perfectly balanced" for much longer. Sarah announces that she did not have time to cook anything because she had spent the afternoon with her lover so "it's a cold supper" (1991b:153). Then she dutifully asks Richard, "do you mind?" (1991b:153) because if he did mind, she would probably cook him another dinner. Richard replies in a socially polite fashion, "Not in the least" (1991b:153). Clearly Richard is lying as it is unlikely that he would accept a "cold supper" (1991b:153). Richard, supposedly the hardworking businessman, would believe that his wife should be appreciative of the financial rewards that she would enjoy from his hours spent at the office. She should therefore reciprocate accordingly by ensuring that his comforts are met when he gets home instead of "spending the afternoon being unfaithful" (1991b:153).

The subtext of Richard's (the mouthpiece of the Other) lie displays Pinter's technique of exposing the fraudulence of governing systems. "Pinter has repeatedly proclaimed his

distrust of establishment politics of all kinds, left or right, and his contempt for politicians" (Esslin, 1993:28). These oppressive structures lure people into believing that everything is done in their best interest but then sadistically attack once they have gained their victim's trust.

Accordingly, Richard begins to manipulate the conversation to his advantage as he instils the fear of abandonment in Sarah. Directly after Richard's lie that he does not "in the least" (1991b:153) mind a cold supper, he sadistically begins to tread on forbidden ground. He opens the gateway to their fantasy life, whilst still dressed in his business suit, a symbol of the reality world. Thus he starts the chain of events that could destroy their relationship as husband and wife, lover and whore as well as sadist and masochist:

> Richard: Does it ever occur to you that while you're spending the afternoon being unfaithful to me I'm sitting at a desk going through balance sheets and graphs?
>
> Sarah: What a funny question.
>
> Richard: No, I'm curious.
>
> Sarah: You've never asked me that before.
>
> Richard: I've always wanted to know. (1991b:153).

Richard demands an answer to assure himself that *he* will not be abandoned. A few lines later he highlights his fear, "Mmnn. But in fact, I'm not completely forgotten?" (1991b:154). Fromm (1942:123) states that "like the masochist, the sadist too fears

isolation in an alienated world". Richard, who commutes to the City everyday, is aware of his alienation in an oppressive system, and therefore seeks a sense of credibility and belonging in his fantasy life. However, he is also destroying the "fine balance" (Pinter, 1991b:161) of his life as he, like Edward in *A Slight Ache,* is beginning to feel torn between the demands of the social world and his own libidinal desires. Unlike Edward, Richard is still overtly subjected to the influence of the outside world as he goes to his office every morning, whereas Edward had not left his house for two months. Thus Richard's desires are twofold. He desires to fulfil his own libidinal needs in a wild, animalistic manner (which is totally against the tamed and refined society), when he states, "You know what I like. I like enormous women. Like bullocks with udders. Vast great uddered bullocks" (1991b:172).

Richard's second desire is in direct contrast to his first desire, and this causes him to feel torn between two worlds, namely the reality and fantasy spheres. This is also why Richard takes on a new persona, Max, as it exposes his 'split-ego', his other/alter ego (which is manifested in his libidinal desire).

His second desire is the desire for the Other[5]. When the subject is positioned in the Symbolic register of language, the idea of self is formed. The subject thus builds his/her own image on the image of the Other. It is therefore possible to state that people validate

themselves from the perception of others. Lacan (1998:218) asserts that the subject's desire is "offered to the mapping of the subject in the experience of the discourse of the Other". Richard's desire then, is the desire of the Other (see endnote 5) in so much as he feels a need to belong to the Other in order to escape isolation. He speaks the language of the Other, therefore he desires to participate in the social system. Furthermore, his conduct has been shaped in the image of the Other and therefore he validates himself in the perception of the Other. Henceforth, Richard desires what the Other stipulates that he should desire. In other words, he desires to live the life of the respectable socialised businessman, and to come home to cooked dinners because this is the desire/law of the Other. To be part of the social world, Richard and Sarah must be the dignified and sensible couple. Richard tells his wife, "The dignity is in my marriage [...] the sensibility likewise" (1991b:157). Then, remembering his alter-ego, he adds that he "wasn't looking for such attributes" (1991b:157) like dignity and sensibility in his whore, as he already has them in his marriage, "I find them in you" (1991b:157).

Richard is thus clearly split between two worlds, and between two desiring selves. The reality world is the social world, and to be a member of the social status club Richard wants a wife who has love, and no "lust" (1991b:157). A wife with "grace, elegance, wit, imagination" (1991b:170), so that the narcissistic Richard can "have great pride in being seen with [her] when out to dinner or at the Theatre" (1991b:175). Or, when he takes her

to the "Hunt Ball" (1991b:175), to "feel the envy of others, their attempts to gain favour with you, by fair means or foul, your austere grace confounding them. And to know you are my wife. It's a source of profound satisfaction to me" (1991b:175). This is what Richard desires from the Other world – that he may be elevated to a position of power when he becomes the object of others' envy. However, he cannot acquire a position of power unless he has a pawn. This pawn is his wife, but she must be a respectable wife and not a whore. Consequently, Richard oppresses Flora into submission as the dutiful, pure, innocent wife in order to fulfil his own egocentric lust for power, and experience "profound satisfaction"(1991b:173).

Pinter intensifies the personal relationship to expose the greed and lust for power in the macrocosm: the world of social and work relations that Richard inhabits. Through the subtext of the play, the playwright focuses on the competitive nature of the social world, their "envy of others, their attempts to gain favour" (1991b:175) of unsuspecting victims "by fair means or foul" (1991b175). Richard names the Ball that he and Sarah go to the "Hunt Ball" (1991b:175,) and for added emphasis, the dramatist makes Sarah repeat it "Yes, the *Hunt* Ball" (1991b:175, my emphasis). The concept of hunting relates to the "envy of others" when the hunter (Richard) displays his trophy piece (Sarah) with a sense of pride. The Freudian notion of 'condensation' with regards to the signifier *hunt* highlights Pinter's widespread themes of victimisation, oppression and control. In *A*

Slight Ache, Pinter (1991a:167) introduces the sadistic essence of hunting as a "happy hunting ground" and in *The Lover* the dramatist explicitly expands this concept. Hunting is regarded as a sport, a game, a means to gain power over one's target and this highlights (a) the games of power that people play in the world which Richard occupies, and (b) the way one gains power over people, namely through oppression and control.

The horror of oppression is that it perpetuates itself. If one is tortured or oppressed, one in turn unconsciously oppresses and tortures others. Thus Richard, who abuses Sarah, is a victim too. Sarah desires to be a wife in the fullest sense, both as libidinal subject and Richard's companion. However, Richard oppresses Sarah's desires and thereby represses his own desires as well. This is the result of his being conformed into believing that victimisation, as it is practised in the system, is an appropriate law. Why should he believe otherwise? How *could* he believe otherwise? His individuality and freedom of thought have been oppressed by the system, thus he has ceased to be independent and is therefore forced to be dependent on the Other. As a result, he is dehumanised as he becomes an "expendable cog in the machine" (Fromm, 1956:77). However, as is highlighted in Pinter's political play *The Hothouse* (discussed in Chapter Five), the system manipulates its victims by luring them into believing that whatever law is stipulated is in their (the victims') own interest. Therefore the victims willingly enter into the system blinded to the actual horror of dehumanisation.

Likewise, Richard is *unaware* that he is victimised in the system. On the other hand, Sarah is aware the she is the victim of Richard's oppression. She (when role-playing the whore) attempts to change the situation by bringing sex into her marriage and she asks Richard's alter ego, Max: "Darling. You don't really think you could have what we have with your wife, do you?" (1991b:170). Sarah then utters the most important line of the play, "Understanding is so *rare*, so dear" (1991b:178, my emphasis). It is clear to her that Richard does not understand that one can rebel against the controlling system, that one can enjoy the pleasures of the flesh as husband and wife, and not only as lover and whore. However, Richard will not comprehend that love and sex are compatible. He is so conditioned by the law of the Other that even in his fantasy game, during the time of his individual expression, he speaks the language of the Other:

> Sarah: (*gazing at him*) You seem so mature, so … appreciative.
> Max: Of course.
> Sarah: So gentle. So …Perhaps it was all for the best.
> […]
> *Her fingers trace his thigh. He stares at them, lifts them off.*
> Max: Now look, I'm sorry. I'm married.
> *She takes his hand and puts it on her knee.*
> Sarah: You're so sweet you mustn't worry.
> Max: (*snatching his hand away*) No. I really am. My wife's waiting for me.
> Sarah: Can't you speak to strange girls?
> Max: No.
> Sarah: Oh, how sickening you are. How tepid.
> Max: I'm sorry.

Sarah: You men are all alike. Give me a cigarette.
Max: I bloody well won't.
Sarah: I beg your pardon?
Max: Come here, Dolores. (1991b:166)

On a first reading of the quoted passage, the scene seems to be just part of their whole fantasised game technique. However, on a closer reading one realises that when Sarah attempts to seduce her lover with loving and complimentary words, "so mature [...] so gentle [...] so sweet" (1991b:166), Richard retreats from the seduction game by lifting her fingers off his thigh and snatching his hand away when she puts it on her knee. This suggests that Richard cannot equate love and gentleness with sexual activity.

However, when she adopts a more aggressive and dominating tone, "Oh, how sickening you are, How tepid. [...]. You men are all alike" (1991b:166), this is when Richard responds with "come here Dolores" (1991b:166) and the two of them disappear "under the velvet cloth" (1991b:167). Richard's reaction to Sarah (only once she assumes a sadistic approach), signifies his acceptance of aggression and violence, that which falls in the scope of the Other. It is clear that Richard cannot respond sexually to signifiers that denote any concept of love. This reinforces the fact that he has made a clear distinction, both as Richard and as Max, between love and lust. In an earlier scene, when he, as a husband, questions his wife about her lover, Sarah explains that her lover is "very loving. His whole body emanates love" (1991b:160). Richard's reaction is one of disgust and he

replies, "how nauseating" (1991b:160), for being considerate is not acceptable behaviour in the realm of the Other.

It is therefore obviously Richard who has a problem of equating sex with love and not Sarah as Gale (1977:135) suggests in his critique of *The Lover*: "Sarah's problem will not allow this married couple to accept sex as part of marriage". However, the problem intensifies when Richard decides to exterminate the relationship between the lover and the whore. This further reinforces the idea that it is Richard who will not allow lust to be equated with respectability. As Max, Richard tells Sarah:

> It's got to stop. It can't go on. [...]. I can't deceive my wife any longer [...] she'd mind if she knew that, in fact ... I've got a full-time mistress, two or three times a week, a woman of grace, elegance, wit, imagination" (1991b:169 and 170).

Later on, during their fantasy scene, Richard makes a second implication that Sarah the whore resembles Sarah the wife. He tells her that she is "too bony" (1991b:172) and walks away uttering, "That's what it is, you see. I could put up with everything if it wasn't for that. You're too bony. [...]. You were plump once. You're not plump any more. [...]. You know what I like. I like enormous women" (199b:172). This statement relates to Richard's fondness of bullocks, "vast great uddered bullocks" (1991b:172). The symbolism of "uddered bullocks" suggests that Richard is referring to a female 'bullock', with milk secreting breasts (udder). The signifiers, 'plump, enormous, vast, and great' create an image of a woman cloaked in an opulence of

flesh. Consequently, the conclusion drawn is that Richard's love for "enormous women" and "vast great uddered bullocks" refers to a metaphorical mother figure. Dinnerstein explains that one wishes to relive some of the body contact with the mother (the original flesh). The mother figure is equated with love, security and comfort: she evokes what Dinnerstein (1976:147) describes as "Our joy in the flesh and the capacity we still have to feel the kind of contact of life that the flesh originally carried". Thus Richard's desire for "enormous women [with] vast great uddered bullocks" (Pinter, 1991b:172), symbolises his demand for love, comfort and security. These are concepts which he now lacks, because he does not enjoy Sarah's flesh anymore since she has become too "bony" (1991b:172).

In Lacanian thought the realm of the Real, the original unity with the mother, depicts no absence or lack, but rather the child experiences all fullness and completeness. However, once the child is separated from his/her unity with the mother's body in order to enter into civilisation, the subject experiences lack, which manifests as a demand for love. "This is the element of [tragedy]: to become a "civilised adult" always entails the profound loss of an original unity, a non-differentiation, a merging with Other (Klages,1997:3).

In a Pinterian landscape, the scope of the Other offers no love, joy, completeness or security. And since Richard is part of that realm, he experiences a profound loss as well as a lack of original unity in his reality world. He thus turns to his fantasy world and to his plump, enormous mistress, symbolic of the maternal sphere, to satisfy this lack. He desires to experience again the love, joy and comfort in the body contact that he is searching for. However, since Sarah combines their two worlds by being too "bony" (Pinter,1991b:172) and not "plump" (1991b:172) enough to offer body contact, she is no longer useful to Richard. Thus, Richard's need to abolish the fantasy game is purely a self-centred and sadistic move. During an earlier scene, Richard emphasises, "the pleasure is mine" (1991b:158) and this selfish attitude continues until the end of the play.

Sarah, on the other hand, wants to fuse their two worlds. She expresses that the notion of husband and wife versus lover and whore is "silly" (1991b:171). She wants Richard to love *and* desire her as a whole woman, instead of splitting her into two roles. The role-play suggests that Sarah is just a functional object for Richard as she serves a dual purpose. As a dutiful wife, she is to ensure that Richard has a clean abode, a cooked dinner and a drink of whiskey when he gets home from a "hard day ... at the office" (1991b:178). Her second function as Richard's claimed object is to pose as a whore, not as a woman of her own desire, but rather as a "functionary who either pleases or

displeases" (1996:196) him. Ideally she should please, as Richard states that pleasure "wasn't intended" (1991b:158) for Sarah, but only, as Richard expresses it, for his sole enjoyment.

However, Sarah makes a detrimental mistake as she subtly suggests to Richard that she has no dividing line between love and sex. She admits that her lover's "whole body emanates love" (199b:160), suggesting that she too derives pleasure from her desires. Richard, the sadist, has to stop this as her pleasures are interfering with his pleasures. She gains pleasure from bringing love into their fantasy world whereas Richard experiences displeasure as a result of it. Richard wants to keep the dividing line between love and sex – between the Other's oppressive law and individual desire – but Sarah is not willing to abide by this law anymore. She wants to be a total woman, one who can love and express her love sexually and not merely as a dutiful function. She is the one to whom Pinter attributes "understanding" (1991b:178) with a "dear" (1991b:178) quality that is "so rare" (1991b:178) in Richard. Sarah is (for a moment only)[6] the epitome of an ideal individual who rebels against the laws and who fights for her desires.

The sado-masochist pendulum swings, due to the fact that Sarah begins to assert her desires by retaliating against Richard's oppressive laws. She ceases to provide what he expects of her as a wife and as a whore. When Richard returns from work on the second

day, the first indication that Sarah is not the submissive and dutiful wife is noted in their evening ritual. Richard comes home to find that Sarah is not waiting at the door to greet him with a glass of whiskey, so Richard "picks up a bottle" (1991b:173) as he has to pour his own drink. He then proceeds to tell her that his day at the office was "terribly fatiguing" (1991b:173), signifiers that Sarah will use later, holding a mirror to him.

Richard knows that Sarah knows that his afternoon was not spent in the office, but rather with her, so the insult that his day was "terribly fatiguing" is aimed at Sarah and not at his day at the office. What follows is a scene where the characters manipulate language. Instead of addressing their eminent quandary, the collapse of their relationship as lover and whore, they talk around their fears which initiates another game, but this time a game in their reality world. This becomes a game of power, as each tries to outsmart and hurt the other:

> Sarah: How's your whore?
> Richard: Splendid.
> Sarah: Fatter or thinner?
> Richard: I beg your pardon?
> Sarah: Is she fatter or thinner?
> Richard: She gets thinner everyday.
> Sarah: That must displease you.
> Richard: Not at all. I'm fond of thin ladies.
> Sarah: I thought on the contrary.
> Richard: Really? Why would you have thought that? (1991b:176).

Richard's intention is to confuse Sarah and to force her into a new role when he manipulates this scene with language. Earlier that afternoon during their fantasy game, Richard in his role as Max, told Sarah that he "can't go on" (1991b:169) with their relationship. The reason he gave her was that he did not like "bony" (1991b:172) women. Then Richard the husband tells her that things are "splendid" (1991b: 176) between him and his whore and that he is "fond of thin ladies" (1991b:176). This confusion is Richard's direct intent to hurt Sarah. To support this suggestion it is important to highlight Pinter's use of names as indicated in the stage directions.

The stage directions signify which character is speaking. When Richard is playing Max, Pinter inserts "Max" as the speaker. Pinter thus gives Richard a different name when he plays the role of the lover, and therefore Richard takes on a new identity, suggesting that Richard's other is Max, his alter-ego. When playing Max the lover, Richard believes that he *is* Max. For him, there is a distinct boundary between his two worlds. Whereas for Sarah's character, Pinter does not stipulate in the stage directions that she is to take on a new identity. When Sarah plays the whore, Pinter does not give her a new name, and she thus remains Sarah throughout the play. However, to Richard her identity is constantly shifting. During their fantasy games as lover and whore, Richard calls her "Dolores" (1991b:166) and "Mary" (1991b:167). This indicates that Sarah is the object of his desires, as he names her whatever he pleases, thus robbing her

of her essential identity. The fact that Richard renames her means that Sarah remains at the level of an object, and is therefore not a subject in her own right.

On the other hand, Sarah is certain about who she is. As indicated in the stage directions, her identity remains the same. Thus Sarah cannot distinguish between her two worlds. When she is Richard's wife she loves him and when she is his whore she loves him too. She tells Richard that when she is with her lover she does not forget him, "how could I forget you? [...] it's you I love" (1991b:154). Henceforth, when Richard insults her as his whore (when he calls her 'bony'), Sarah is deeply hurt, as she takes this insult into their reality world as well. Furthermore, when Richard expresses his wish to terminate the lover - whore relationship, Sarah fears total alienation for she believes that Richard will leave her too.

In order to prevent abandonment, Sarah changes from the masochistic wife to the sadist wife. She is playing her own game now, in her own favour. The patriarchal Richard comes home and asks, "What's for dinner?" (1991b:175). There is no dinner. Sarah the sadist borrows from Richard's sadistic vocabulary[7] and replies, "I find the thought of dinner *fatiguing*. I prefer not to think about it" (1991b:176, added emphasis). Richard had found his afternoon with his whore "terribly *fatiguing*" (1991b:173, added emphasis), and decided to terminate that relationship. He thus chooses to reject Sarah's libidinal desires

as these are only fulfilled in their fantasy world. Furthermore, by terminating the fantasy game, Richard puts an end to Sarah's sexuality. In retaliation, Sarah uses the same signifier (fatiguing) as Richard when she proclaims that there is no dinner. She chooses to terminate her wifely duties (as Richard chooses to terminate their sexual relationship), and she thus rejects Richard's survival needs (as Richard rejects her libidinal desires).

The larger point that Pinter makes here is noted in the emphasis (by means of repetition) of the signifier "fatigue" (1991b:173 and 176). Both Richard and Sarah use the word 'fatigue' to signify their states of mind. They are tired, fatigued. This highlights the extent of the Other's oppression. Richard, being a servant to the Other, always co-opts his will in the service of the Other. In his unconscious resistance, he fights the Other by means of his fantasy world. This results in a considerable amount of exhausting pressure on and tension in his marriage. Thus, the couple are tired, fatigued, and drained of energy because their means of surviving in an oppressive world is their game playing. Henceforth, a new game, namely the game of power and tyranny, replaces the old sexual game. Richard uses language to attack Sarah, whereas she uses language in order to dominate the situation. She either laughs at him, or ignores his verbal violence by directing the conversation into a different area:

> Sarah: I find the thought of dinner fatiguing. I prefer not to think about it.
> Richard: That's rather unfortunate. I'm hungry.
> *Slight pause.*

Richard: You hardly expect me to embark on dinner after a day spent sifting matters of high finance in the City.

She laughs.

Richard: One could even suggest you were falling down on your wifely duties.

Sarah: Oh dear.

[...]

Richard: Of course, your failure to have dinner on the table is quite consistent with the life you've been leading for some time, isn't it?

Sarah: Is it?

Richard: Entirely. [...]. I came to a decision. [...]. That it has to stop.

Sarah: What?

Richard: Your debauchery. [...]. Your life of depravity. Your path of illegitimate lust.

Sarah: Would you like some cold ham?

Richard: Do you understand me?

Sarah: Not at all. I have some in the fridge (1991b:176 and 177).

Sarah ignores Richard's command by not giving cognisance to his conversation, thoughts and feelings. Having chosen to operate in the world of the Other, it is essential for Sarah to be sadistic as the reality world requires that sort of behaviour in order to survive in its competitiveness. Firstly, she selects her words as weapons when she states, "Would you like some *cold* ham" (1991a:109, my emphasis). The signifier "cold" signifies a lack of passion and simultaneously highlights the symbolic metaphor of the ended relationship between the lover (Richard) and the whore (Sarah). Secondly, when Richard states, "one could even suggest you were falling down in your wifely duties" (1991b:176), Sarah dismisses him with an apathetic and indifferent "oh dear" (1991b:176). Her way of

exercising power over him is by deliberately ignoring him. When he tells her that she "has to stop [...] her debauchery" (1991b:176) she does not enter into his discourse as she replies with, "would you like some cold ham?" (1991b:174), using signifiers that lie outside the scope of his conversation.

Sarah is not prepared to partake in a discussion that draws a distinct line between their two worlds. She wants these worlds to unite so that she can be a whole woman. The boundary is now permeable as it allows contact between the two worlds. The activities of the fantasy world are affecting their reality world. Sarah allows one world to infiltrate into the other when she does not prepare dinner for Richard. This is a symbol of her retaliation (which takes place in their reality world) against Max's insistence that they end their affair (which happened in their fantasy world). Thus Sarah causes the permeability because she does not keep their two worlds apart. Therefore the conversation (quoted above) between the couple carries a sadistic tone. This is marked in Richard's struggle to keep their two worlds *distinctly separate* and Sarah's resistance to this attempt.

Sarah continues to ignore Richard's command until he insists that she terminates the relationship with her lover and threatens her with, "if I find him on these premises I'll kick his teeth out [...] I'll kick his head in" (1991b:179). Richard is now asserting

himself as a controlling Other. His language is that of the Other for he uses words as a tyrannical weapon of dominance and destruction.

Sarah cannot ignore Richard's threats of abandonment any longer. She expresses her importance to his life as an attempt to reposition herself there, "But it's silly, it's so silly, to talk like this. I'm *here*. For *you*." (1991b:178, my emphasis). Richard recognises her masochism, and therefore increases his sadism. Fromm (1942:124) highlights that a typical characteristic of a sadist is when s/he hides his/her intention by "reaction formations of over-goodness or over-concerns for others". Likewise, Richard *hides* his sadistic intention by displaying an over-goodness and over-concern for Sarah when he tells her, "[your lover's] entry into this house is now barred. I'm trying to be helpful, darling, because of my love for you" (Pinter,1991b:179). Richard's sadistic scheme is disclosed by the fact that he *intends* to hurt Sarah by barring her lover when, in actuality, it is just another of his private games. Sarah's lover can never be barred as it would stop the sexual game. And Richard the lover is committed to it. Thus to bar the lover would be to hurt himself, – a pathway he is not going to take.[8]

In *The Lover,* Richard and Sarah abuse the fear of abandonment as a means of gaining power over their own fears. Sarah abandons Richard by becoming a non-compliant wife when she stops cooking for him. However, Sarah stops playing their new power game

when she assumes that Richard will leave her because she too is "bony" and that is the reason why he left his whore. Pinter's writing style needs to be mentioned here. He shortens the lines in order to quicken the tempo of speech, thus intensifying Sarah's increasing anxieties:

> Sarah: What about your own bloody whore?
> Richard: I've paid her off.
> Sarah: Have you? Why?
> Richard: She was too bony (1991b:179).

Pinter lengthens Sarah's next few lines through the repeated insertion of ellipses. This technique effectively highlights her fear of abandonment and her feeling of desperation as she battles for words:

> Sarah: But you liked ... you said you liked ... Richard ... but you love me ...
> Richard: Of course.
> Sarah: Yes ... you love me ... you don't mind him ... you understand him ... don't you? ...I mean, you know better than I do ... darling ... all's well ... the evenings ... and the afternoons ... do you see? Listen, I do have dinner for you. It's ready. I wasn't serious. It's Boeuf bourgignon. And tomorrow I'll have Chicken Chasseur. Would you like it? (1991b:182).

The last section of Sarah's speech contains no ellipses and thus quickens in tempo. When she speaks faster, the audience senses her urgency as she tries everything to make Richard stay. She even promises to prepare and serve him a variety of exotic dinners. The "Boeuf bourgignon" and "Chicken Chasseur" (1991b:182) symbolise the extent to which

Sarah will succumb to her duties as a socially conditioned wife. She will fulfil his most elaborate orders, no matter how demanding, if it prevents her alienation. Richard, concluding that Sarah will now be the dutiful and masochistic wife again, initiates a return to their fantasy world. He "*opens the hall cupboard and takes out the bongo drum*" (1991b:180). This is same cupboard that Sarah uses to save her high-heeled shoes (the symbol of her sexuality) and thus the same cupboard that symbolises Sarah's psyche.

Pinter first introduced the bongo drum[9] in *The Lover* during the scene where Richard and Sarah play at being lover and whore. When Richard enters his house as Max, he "moves toward the hall cupboard, brings out a bongo drum [...]. He moves below chaise longue. They sit at either end. He begins to tap the drum. Her forefinger moves along drum towards his hand [...]. His legs tauten. His hand clasps hers [...] wild beats of their fingers tangling" (1991b:164). It is important to note that Pinter's use of language adds to the sexual atmosphere by describing that Richard's "legs tauten".

In the Lacanian mode of thought, Pinter uses the drum as "a material signifier against a verbal one" (MacCannell, 1986:112). Richard is the character who initiates the beginning of their fantasy game through the means of a "material' signifier" (1986:112). He starts to tap the bongo drum, and the sound becomes a signifier, signifying the arousal of their sexual pleasures. "People communicate through sound: the origin of language is

Emotion, grunts rather than intellectual concepts" (Chetwynd, 1982:274). Thus the signifying sound of the drum symbolises an instinctual grunting sound indicating an awakening of emotions. This instinctual pattern echoes a phase of life before one is forced to give up autonomous desires (animal instincts) and to adapt to the social world's restrictions. Furthermore, the rhythm of the drumbeat also symbolises the natural rhythmic beating of the heart (the house of emotions) and this is parallel to natural libidinal impulses.

Towards the end of the play, Richard takes the drum out of the cupboard for the second time. It becomes clear to the audience that he is about to start their lover-whore game, but Sarah is still in a state of confusion. She is not sure what Richard's intentions are. She has promised to be the dutiful wife again by cooking him dinner and by keeping their two worlds apart, which is why she cannot understand Richard bringing their fantasy world into their reality world.

As a husband, Richard calls her "adulteress" (1991b:180), a signifier that belongs in their fantasy game. He continues to taunt her as a means to reposition himself as the patriarchal husband, suggesting that Sarah should never again forget her obedience to the imperative Other. Holding the drum Richard asks, "what function does this fulfil? It's not just an ornament, I take it? What do you do with it? (1991b:180). Sarah replies "(*with*

quiet anguish) You've no right to question me. No right at all. It was our arrangement. No questions of this kind. Please. Don't, don't. It was our arrangement" (1991b:181).

Sarah is attempting to re-establish what they have had in the last "ten years" (1991b:177), a "beautiful balance" (1991b:161), a dividing line between their reality and fantasy worlds. Although she attempted to break that "beautiful balance" when she expressed her desires to unite their two worlds,[10] she now realises that she has no other alternative but to keep them apart. She knows she will be isolated if she breaks the patriarchal law, and she cannot risk that.

However, Richard continues to tap the drum, the signifier of their fantasy world, even though he is wearing his business suit and she is dressed in her "*sober dress*" (1991b:173), signifying that they are in their reality world. *Richard* is now combining their two worlds. Sarah may not combine their two worlds, but Richard can because he knows that he would not walk out on his relationship, and therefore *he* would not have to face isolation. However, Sarah still believes that Richard is intending to abandon her. Hence, Richard the sadist has the upper hand, enjoying his new found game, which he knows is making Sarah feel more and more vulnerable. "*She closes her eyes*" (1991b:181) and pleads again, "*Don't...*" (1991b:181) but Richard, holding the drum, taunts her further, "Do you both play it? Mmmmnn? Do you both play it? Together?"

(1991b:181). A comment which Richard uttered earlier in the play namely, "the pleasure is mine" (199b:158), is perfectly enforced now for he knows that his threat to abandon her has been a game all along – a spiteful game in which he intended to make her realise that she will face isolation if she breaks the patriarchal law. If this were not a game for Richard as well, then he would face alienation too.

Richard continues with their fantasy game when he approaches Sarah and asks her, "Have you got a light?" (1991b:182). This is the opening line that Max used earlier when he approached his whore. Richard then tells her, "I've locked up.[...]. You can't get out, darling. You're trapped" (1991b:182 and 183). Sarah is trapped, literally and figuratively. Literally, since Richard has locked the doors and figuratively since she is not allowed to be an individual and express her needs as a 'whole' woman.

Comprehending her situation, Sarah replies "I'm trapped. *Pause*" (1991b:183). Pinter's insertion of a pause after Sarah's line is important to note. During an interview with Gussow (1994:36) Pinter explained the significance of a pause, "A pause is a pause because of what has just happened in the mind and the guts of the characters". What has just happened in "the mind and guts" of Sarah is that she realises that she can only be part of Richard's world, and thus the social world, if she plays the game according to the Other's rules. With this knowledge, she approaches Richard and "*takes his hands. He*

sinks to his knees, with her. They are kneeling together, close. She strokes his face" (1991b:183) and aptly asks him, "Would you like me to change? Would you like me to change my clothes? I'll change for you, darling. Shall I? Would you like that?" (1991b:184). Richard does not answer immediately due to the fact that Pinter inserts a "*silence. She is very close to him*" (1991b:184). What will Richard answer? During the call for a silence Richard is now given a chance to rethink his past and his future. His wife, still dressed in her "sober dress" (1991b:173), is "*very close to him*" (1991b:184) and he can sense her desire as a woman and not a whore. Will he continue to abide by the oppressive laws of the Other? Will he continue to dismiss his individual desires, and thus dismiss his wife's individuality too? Or will he release himself and his wife from the pressure of conformity and live his life as he desires to do? Eventually he answers, "Change. *Pause.* Change your clothes. *Pause.* You lovely whore" (1991b:184). And with this line Pinter ends the play.

Richard's answer is most appropriate in a Pinterian landscape. He, like Sarah, is bound to the chains of conformity. Richard is committed to keeping their fantasy world in place because it is only the existence of such a world that makes it possible for him to cope with the pressures in the world of the Other. His fantasy world allows him to sustain the Other world. As a result, Richard can survive where Edward in *A Slight Ache* could not. Richard's survival is due to the fact that he has a fantasy world to fall back on. Sarah

however, is not caught in the Other world. However, realising that if she did allow the one world to infiltrate into the other, she would face alienation. Thus she, like Richard, accepts that the fantasy world must remain apart from the real world. The Other does not allow for any form of merging. The oppression continues but the oppressed find relief in fantasy. The menace of the Other is partially mitigated.

In the discussion of *The Hothouse* (Chapter Four), Pinter examines the notion of total conformity to the Other. The menace is not partially mitigated as it is in *The Lover,* but is rather a whole series of negative power networks that controls the characters' language and actions. Whereas the abuse of power focuses on intimate liaisons in *A Slight Ache* and *The Lover,* in *The Hothouse* the explored themes of the latter plays are re-mapped to expose the larger social system and the political social power that serves to manipulate and corrupt its victims.

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1. *The Room, The Slight Ache, The Homecoming, A Birthday Party.*

2. Pervin (1980:49) explains the Madonna-whore complex, "where a man separates women into two categories, one with whom there is love but no sex, and the other with whom there is sex but no love".

3. In his earlier play, *The Birthday Party,* Pinter originally introduced the newspaper as a symbolic act of bringing the outside world into the personal lives of the characters.

4. Harold Pinter was a very good friend of the late Samuel Beckett. Pinter often asked Beckett his opinion on his own plays, as he states, "When I wrote the play, I sent [it], as I always do, to Samuel Beckett, whose opinion, to put it mildly, I respect. And ... I know him" (Gussow, 1994:144).

5. Lacan uses both 'of' and 'for' desire. The reader comes across Lacan stating, "man's desire is the desire *of* the Other" and "man's desire is the desire *for* the Other".

6. Like Pinter's other characters who rebel against the system, Sarah will lose the battle, as the powerful Other will oppress her again at the end of the play.

7. As highlighted earlier in this chapter, Richard says that he found his afternoon (with his whore), "terribly fatiguing" (1991b:173).

8. Fromm (cf.1942:124) also notes that a sadist, like a masochist, fears isolation.

9. In Pinter's play, *The Birthday Party*, Meg gives a drum to Stanley as a gift. Meg is a mixture of motherliness and sexuality, and Stanley is the dual subject. He represents the child that Meg is longing for as well as the lover she desires.

10. Sarah asks Max, "Darling. You don't think you could have what we have with your wife, do you?" (1991b:170).

CHAPTER 4

'DEHUMANISATION! IT IS VERIFIED IN THE NAME OF SCIENCE': A study of *The Hothouse*

"Nobody approves but you have no alternative, have you?"
(Roote, in *The Hothouse*, Pinter, 1991a:265)

Whereas in *A Slight Ache* and *The Lover* the focus is narrowly on interpersonal relationships and the impact of the outside is presented as a lurking menace, the menace in *The Hothouse* becomes the now, the immediate. This play revolves around the events that occur inside an institution. The plot involves (a) the visible people on stage, namely the power-heads that run the organisation, (b) the invisible patients (as they do not appear on stage), but are obviously present in the institution and (c) the omnipresence of the Other.

In this play Pinter introduces the Other as rampantly exposing the horror of what Pinter calls "barbaric acts" (Ross, 1999:23). Billington (1996:286) notes that "the way Pinter introduces the political tones into the plays is by presenting a conflict between the individual conscience and the arbitrary nature of authority". This statement proves to be accurate in its concept. However, I take exception to the use of "arbitrary". For Pinter, the nature of authority is not "arbitrary" but rather conspicuously overpowering. It is the very aspect that carries the plot and the themes that motivate the use of *langue* and *parole*[1]

Discussing the relationship between *langue* and *parole*, Silverstein (1993:18) points out that "[it] is the system of language [the Other] that both allows for *and* places certain constraints upon the individual utterance".

On reading *The Hothouse* one realises that it is Roote's *speech* (*parole*) that expresses the absurdity of the dehumanisation and demoralisation in the fact that patients are assigned numbers instead of names. Roote tells us, "I often think it must depress them [...] somewhat [...] to have a number rapped at them all the time" (Pinter, 1991a:197). However, contrary to his revelations, Roote continues to use the same language *(langue)* that exposes victimisation techniques because he abides by the system and continues to refer to the patients as numbers (despite feeling that it is morally wrong).

By incorporating the system of *langue*, the Other, as it refers to "the symbolic order, the locus of language as a system encoding the dominant cultural values" (Silverstein, 1993:20), the presence of a speaking subject and a definite other is thus not confined to a interpersonal relationship. Rather, language expands to a macrocosmic political atmosphere. The laws of the Other speak through the characters, and thereby highlight that they are conditioned to the paraphrases of the Other. What we are faced with now are not two people conversing but rather three: the orator, the listener and the symbolic Other, for this play is dominated by the bureaucratic system as Other.

When reading *The Hothouse*, the nature of the institution is not verifiable. 'The Ministry' is mentioned often enough to suggest that the action occurs in a government-run institution, which could be a prison or a mental institution. However, the supposed inmates are referred to as *patients*, and the staff refers to it as a *rest home*, and *convalescent home*. Experiments also take place in a sound proof room. The conclusion drawn, on reading the play, would be to suggest that the institution is a 'government run psychological research institution'. However, the exact naming of the hothouse does not undermine the omnipresence of the Other or the dominant cultural laws that terrorise the society involved. Pinter highlights the horror of violence and oppression in the play when he states "I'm haunted. I'm haunted by barbaric acts around me. *The Hothouse* is about the idiocy and savagery of people in power. Wherever I go, I'm haunted by it. [...]. The play is saying we're all encouraged to pretend that the killings are not happening. [...]. It's about an authoritarian system. The image is a convalescent home, but actually it's a prison, a world of violence and killing" (Ross, 1999:22 and 23).

Nightingale's (1980:18) critique on *The Hothouse* depicts a true atmosphere of the play's major themes, "walk warily through the play's chambers, peeping into its corners [...] and finding infantile longings, sadistic urges, lust, misogyny, sudden and unpredictable violence, suspicion, paranoia, dread, and more dread".

From the very title of the play, *The Hothouse*, Pinter begins his extended metaphor of the sweltering corruption that continues to burn until it climaxes when the boiling pressure exceeds control and all but one are scalded. Roote, who is in charge of the corrupt system, refers to the heat of the day, even though it is snowing outside, as the heated pressure builds in the action. When things start to get out of his control and death is lurking around every corner, Roote says, "God, the heat of this place. It's damn hot, isn't it? It's like a crematorium in here. Why is it suddenly so hot?" (Pinter, 1991a:264). The metaphoric effect of the signifier, 'crematorium', suggests that this hothouse is an institution where life is extinguished both figuratively, as the individuals are dehumanised, and literally, in the mass slaughter that takes place at the end of the play. Here fires erupt and burn, here the heat cannot be regulated.

Satirically written, *The Hothouse* in all its violence and dread evokes laughter at what Pinter calls his cardboard characters[2]: "The characters [are] so purely cardboard. I was intentionally trying to make a point, that these were nasty people and I disapproved of them. And therefore they didn't begin to live" (Gale, 1977:229). Ironically though, they *do* live, they exist because they have desires which are expressed in their speech (*parole*) and they have language (*langue*) of the Other, which 'makes them nasty'. Thus the relationship between *parole* and *langue* constitutes their desires and reinforces the idea

that they are already living, that they endure as subjects, and not as Pinter wished to create them as characters that "didn't begin to live" (1977:229).

Intense heat builds up in the hothouse as the characters find themselves under pressure for trying to define their desires as both individual subjects and as subjects positioned in the realm of the Other. Roote highlights this when he says:

> to spend years and years, winter after winter, trying to perfect the working of an institution so fragile in its conception and execution, so fragile the boundary between the achievement of one's aspirations and their collapse (Pinter, 1991a:213).

The play opens the morning of Christmas day and ends very late that same night. The fact that one of the patients gives birth during the morning centres the plot around a search for the mysterious, unknown father, who Roote labels as a "culprit" (Pinter, 1991a:215). This word signifies that a crime has taken place, but since words have infinite meanings, "a language, where under what is said another is being said" (Pinter, 1991a: xii), the word *culprit* not only signifies the crime of fathering a child but also signifies that birth, and by implication a new life, is not permitted in the hothouse. Birth is a crime and is against the law. The hothouse confines those who have conformed to the system by either being in positions of power, as are Roote, Cutts, and Gibbs; or by being locked into their rooms as metaphorical patients – who *need* to *treated*, until such time that they are well, in other words metaphorically conformed. The baby, who has not yet acquired language is not yet

in the system, and cannot be placed in the control room to be questioned until it is exhausted, can therefore not live in the hothouse. Besides fathering a child, which is regarded as a crime, the birth of the baby is also seen as a crime. Roote's comment on the birth of the child is, "It's nothing short of criminal" (Pinter, 1991a:224). Hence it is appropriate to state that two crimes have been committed by two different people. The first person is the father because he fathered a child, and the second is the child as it was born, and the penalty for both crimes is death. Roote instructs Gibbs to "get rid of [the baby]" (Pinter, 1991a:220), but the mother who feeds the child may not go with it. Metaphorically then the child will not receive the nourishment it needs and it will die.

This does not seem to be morally wrong to Gibbs or Roote for they decide that *they* won't miss the baby. Roote asks, "then why should the mother miss it?" (1991a:222). This question signifies that the mother is not entitled to individual desires and that she is only to desire what the Other enforces on her, which is submission in totality. After Roote asks Gibbs if he has asked the patient/mother who the "culprit" is that fathered the child, Gibbs answers, "She was ... noncommittal, sir. She said she couldn't be entirely sure since most of the staff have had relations with her in this last year" (Pinter, 1991a:216).

Not only do the patients have to conform to the debased regulations of the system, but they also have to succumb to the demeaning sexual desires of those in authority. This

indicates that the patients have been dehumanised and demoralised, which is further reinforced by the fact that they have been assigned numbers instead of names. In her essay *The Hothouse: A Parable of the Holocaust*, Lamont (1993:41) makes an interesting observation with regards to Pinter's replacing patient names with numbers. She equates the happenings that took place at Auschwitz (during World War II) with the happenings in Pinter's hothouse. She observes that "the disappearance of names and personal identities and their replacement by numbers, were of course, practised at Auschwitz" and of Pinter's characters she stresses, "deprived of their individuality, their humanity, these people are elements of statistical facts" (1993:41).

During a moment of insight Roote exposes the impact of the signifying numbers, "After some of them have been here a few years they're liable to forget what names their fathers gave them. Or their mothers. *Pause.* [...] .We lose sight of their names and they lose sight of their names" (Pinter 1991a:198). The metaphoric significance in losing sight of one's name is that one then loses total identity, because one loses sight of one's own credibility and this is exactly what the system is aiming for. The Other does not want a society that expresses individual thoughts, but only thoughts that follow the pattern of the governing debased laws. Thus the patients become numbered bodies lost in a prison of empty definition.

Pinter's play on number identification is twofold. Firstly, it introduces a mixture of comedy and tragedy, as Roote continues to confuse the patients' numbers (which evokes laughter in the audience) and by extension the patients' identities, thus enforcing the tragic disregard of individualism and human dignity. In the technique of mixing tragedy and comedy there lies the horror of what is revealed under the words. Secondly, because Roote continues to confuse the patients' numbers (apart from other indications which are revealed later on), this highlights his unprofessional abilities as a leader. Consequently, if Roote is lacking in competence and therefore ill-equipped to perform duties that reflect back to the state's professionalism and expertise, why then was he placed in this status position by the state?

Fromm's (1988:26 and 27) comments on the formations of societies based on a hierarchical order provide an illuminating explanation:

> authority by competence yields to authority by social status [meaning] that competence is not an essential element of authority. [...]. If the authority wears the proper uniform or has the proper title, this external sign of competence replaces the real competence and its qualities. The king – to use this title as a symbol for this type of authority – can be stupid, vicious, evil, i.e., utterly incompetent to *be* an authority, yet he *has* authority. As long as he has a title, he is supposed to have the qualities of competence.

Roote's character is portrayed with intense tragic irony. He is the leader who was chosen as a figure of authority in the hothouse, and therefore the horror of the happenings inside

the hothouse reflects on him as well. However, this institution is based on a hierarchical order, which means that Roote has to obey the workings of the system. During his moments of insight, Roote disapproves of the system's laws – laws that he believes are morally wrong. But they still are his commands which he has to obligingly execute and he thus "falls"[3]as a leader. However, in order to survive in the scope of the Other, Roote displays sadistic tendencies and yet he also has moralistic moments of insight.

Although these moments do not happen often in the play, they need to be highlighted to enforce the impact of the horror of abusive hierarchical patterns as well as the individual's resistance to the system. Roote says,

> But I sometimes think I've been a bit slow in making changes. Change is the order of things, after all. I mean it's *in* the order of things, it's not *the* order of things, it's *in* the order of things (Pinter, 1991a:197).

Roote is aware that things have to change, he knows that "it is *in* the order of things," yet he also knows that he cannot change anything that "is not *the* order of things". This does not suggest that Roote has *total* competence as a leader, because if he had, he would bring about a change. Although Roote displays some knowledge of what is wrong, he remains an incompetent leader because he fails to implement change. This further highlights the destructiveness of the system. Seeing that Roote does not have substantial authoritative characteristics, he should then not have been appointed to run the institution.

Ironically, the government would not appoint a leader who had proficient skills and knowledge, as s/he would then not follow their devaluing orders, but rather change the system.

To expose Roote's unprofessional leadership and at the same time his flashes of insight, Pinter opens the play with a conversation between Gibbs and Roote. The dialogue commences when Gibbs tells Roote that 6457 had died on Thursday. What follows is a comical scene in which Roote insists that he had a conversation with the deceased patient the day before, which was Friday, so how could Gibbs insist that the patient is dead and buried? Once they realise that they are referring to different patients, as Roote mistook 6457 for 6459, Roote says:

> That's funny. I wonder why I thought it was a seven. [...]. The whole thing's ridiculous! The system's wrong. [...]. We shouldn't use these stupid numbers at all. Only confuses things. Why don't we use their names for God's sake? They have got names haven't they? [...]. It would make things so much simpler if we called them by their names. [...]. After all, they're not criminals. They're only people in need of help, which we try to give, in one why or another, to the best of our discretion, to the best of our judgement, to help them regain their confidence, confidence in themselves, confidence in others, confidence in ... the world" (Pinter, 1991a:195 and 197).

Verbal irony is inescapable in Roote's speech. As has been established, he is not a competent leader, and this is the very reason why he was appointed to assist in helping

the patients 'regain their confidence'. The ambiguity is important as it stresses that the system's oppressive leaders do not want the patients to gain confidence in themselves or in others, and by employing Roote, whose discretion and judgement are impaired, the government knew that they would be able to keep the patients in a mode of submission and lack of confidence. Fromm (1988:25 and 26) emphasises the result of collapsing leadership as he states, "when the qualities on which the authority rests disappear or weaken, the authority itself ends". This reinforces that Roote, whose authority has disappeared, can therefore not implement any authority, and he cannot "help them to regain their confidence" (1991a:197).

Another indication that Roote's authority is weakening and therefore his own confidence as well, is signified in the ellipsis that appear before the signifier 'world.' (Roote, "to help them regain their confidence, confidence in themselves, confidence in others, confidence in ... the world" [1991a:195 and 197]). The ellipsis allows for a pause in speech and the effect of pausing before a word highlights its significance when it is spoken. By taking into consideration that speech (and not *langue*), reveals the unconscious and its fears and desires through condensation, wherein one word signifies infinite meaning, it is plausible to state that Roote is unconsciously referring to the bureaucratic system when he utters the word 'world'. It also signifies that the oppressive system does not only control the hothouse institution, but that the whole world is controlled by systems.

Roote has now lost confidence in this 'world', in the system that operates and governs the society. He "has lost touch with any sense of substance behind the rules that he supervises" (Gillen, 1991:59) and in his moments of insights he gains the knowledge that the rules carry a substance which is detrimental to others. His "tragic recognition involves a passing from ignorance to knowledge" (Wright, 1996:177), and Roote begins to lose faith in the very system which once gave him security and confidence and fulfilled his "need to be related to the world outside [him]self, the need to avoid aloneness" (Fromm, 1942:15). Roote knows that he cannot change the system for he says, "that was one of the rules of procedure laid down in the original constitution [...] and that's how it's got to remain" (Pinter, 1991a:198).

In order to avoid aloneness, Roote must abide to the laws that he believes are wrong and therefore must repress his own morals and divert his desires. Freud believes that one of our defence mechanisms is to be in denial (cf. Brenner, 1974:95) and this is where Roote finds himself. In his conscious mind he will not acknowledge his repressions and he will not implement change where it is so obviously needed. Instead he consciously states, "Still, I sometimes think I could have instituted a few more changes – if I had the time" (Pinter, 1991a:197).

However, instead of avoiding isolation (as an earlier Frommian quote suggests that one

needs to be related to the social world to avoid aloneness) by complying with the system, the reverse of this procedure is what affects Roote, because in effect, he *is* isolated. He feels totally alone in that he does not share the same ideals of the system, and has, at the same time, repressed his own values and ideals. He thus feels isolated from the world as well as from himself. Unconsciously, his very essence of being is faltering and causing him to experience alienation, a condition which coincides with the Lacanian notion of lack.

Lacan (1998:29) explains that "as the structuring function of a lack [...] I have designated a 'want-to-be'". Roote 'wants-to-be' a character who can define his space in the system because this would prevent his isolation. However, Roote needs time to perform his duties as his time is otherwise preoccupied in his unconscious quest to fill, by means of desire, the lack, void and the aloneness that he is experiencing. Lacanian thought is that desire is a direct result from lack and "not an appetite: it is essentially eccentric and insatiable. That is why Lacan relates it not with the object that would seem to satisfy it, but with the object that causes it" (Sheridan, as cited in Lacan, 1998:278).

Lacan (1998:235) also states that "man's desire is the desire of the Other". Interpreting this in terms of Roote's desire, one realises that Roote experiences lack and therefore functions as a masochist. He seeks fulfilment of his desires through displacement by

having two lovers, one is the patient (who gave birth that morning), and the other is one of his staff members, Miss Cutts. Because of the lack of self esteem that he is experiencing due to his lack of power in the system, he needs to boost his self esteem and needs to empower the other/himself in an act which he believes will reinstate his credibility. He therefore takes on lovers, and he becomes the sadist, as opposed to the masochist in the Other, in these relationships. He dominates and exerts his power in what Cutts describes as, "brutal, demanding desire. Bestial, ruthless, remorseless" (1991a:317).

However, what becomes obvious towards the end of the play is that Roote is no longer interested in fulfilling his desires through sexual relations as he realises that even though he has had lovers, the lack is still eminent and his desire is still insatiable. Referring back to Lacan paralleling desire not with the object that would seem to satisfy it, but rather with the object that causes it, it would be apt to state that Roote's desire, which was instituted by a lack, thus lies with the object that caused it. This 'object' is the system that invokes its laws through *langue* – the Other. As defined earlier, it is Roote's separation from the system, the Other's demoralising ideals, which creates an inner gap as he then becomes separated from his own ideals as well. This results in his encountering lack and insatiable desire.

Roote's desire could never be satisfied because his desire is the desires of the Other in so

much as it will give him a sense of belonging and prevent the feeling of isolation and lack. This all seems to be contradictory in terms of implying firstly that during his moment of insight Roote rejects the Other's laws of *langue*, but then secondly insinuating that Roote unconsciously desires the desires of the Other: in other words, desiring or believing in the system's debased laws. However, when a parallel is made between Lacanian interpretation of desire and Fromm's theory of relatedness to the world, it is plausible that Roote's *unconscious* desire is then the desire of the Other. Fromm (1942:15) states:

> The kind of relatedness to the world may be noble or trivial, but even being related to the basest kind of pattern is immensely preferable to being alone [...] as any custom and any belief however absurd and degrading, if it only connects the individual with others, are refuges for what man most dreads: isolation (Fromm, 1942:15).

Even though his last moments of insight are more private and to his own benefit and more pertinent to fulfilling his own desire than the desires and benefits of the patients, Roote's final announcement to the members of the hothouse further reinforces his unconscious fear of freedom. Freedom would bring with it isolation, so instead he desires to desire the desires of the Other:

> We have had our little difficulties, in the year that is about to die, our little troubles, our little sorrows as well as our little joys, but through working together, through each and every one of us pulling his weight, no matter how lowly or apparently

> trivial his job, by working, by living, by pulling together as one great family, we stand undaunted. *Pause*. [...]. Some of you [...] may sometimes find yourselves wondering whether the little daily hardships, the little daily disappointments, the trails and tribulations which seem continually to dog you are, in the end worth it. To you I would say one simple thing. Have faith. *Pause*. Yes, I think if I were asked to convey to you a special message this Christmas it should be that: Have faith (Pinter, 1991a:318 and 319).

This message to "have faith" would suggest that Roote is speaking the *langue* of the Other, as faith:

> consists of formulations created by others, which one accepts because one submits to those others - usually a bureaucracy. It carries the feeling of certainty because of the real (or only imagined) power of the bureaucracy. It is the entry ticket to join a large group of people. It relieves one of the hard task of thinking for oneself and making decisions [...]. Indeed, who would not choose certainty, if all it requires is to surrender one's independence? (Fromm, 1988:30).

Roote's final choice is to choose faith in the system and thereby surrender his independence. This is because the bureaucracy is too overpowering for him.

Besides the symbolic value that is applied to the patients being identified by numbers, Pinter also uses symbolism to depict the personalities of the staff at the hothouse. Chetwynd (1982:344) states that "naming is always a symbol of becoming conscious of the exact nature of whatever is named". Roote is named as such. As the leader of the organisation he paves the *route* for his staff and hence the patients. The horror of this lies

in the concept that Roote is an incompetent authoritative figure and his disintegrating character is built on alienation and self-deception. Besides paving the *route* for his staff and patients, Roote also signifies the *root* of the system, like the root of a plant that conveys the nourishment to the life it feeds. Compared to this parallel, Roote (root), who should convey 'nourishment' to those in his care, cannot meet this responsibility as his character is weak and disintegrating.

The name 'Miss Cutts' brings to mind images of pain and ruthlessness – a cut results in a gaping wound. The image of the hothouse is a rest home, where the walking wounded come for help, but Miss Cutts only helps to cut deeper into the wounds as her corrupt behaviour is displayed in her sexual arousement at the cost of a victim's pain.

Lamb, the new worker at the institution, becomes the sacrificial lamb. He is to be sacrificed as an experiment in the control room where the Other's language becomes the sadistic force that questions and questions until it receives total submission. The fact that Lamb is new suggests that he is the outsider, the foreigner, the one that cannot speak the *langue* of the Other and therefore must become the victim of torture until he conforms to have blinding faith in the bureaucracy like the others.

Interestingly, Gibbs' name is not symbolic. He remains outside representation and the

end of the play reveals his true corruption. Gibbs, carrying out his orders to find the culprit that fathered the child, decides without any given leads or evidence that Lamb is the guilty one, even though Lamb confesses that he is "virgo intacta" (1991a:249). The focus is clearly on the abuse of power because Gibbs, being second in charge, selects anyone as a scapegoat in order to declare Roote innocent (as he fathered the child). It is exceptionally important that a father, any father, be found, for as Roote says, "the good name of the establishment depends on it" (1991a:220). Gibbs has decided that Lamb should be the scapegoat because this bureaucratic error would slander the institution if Roote was discovered to be having sex with the patients. In this incident, Pinter exposes the way in which society 'sweeps things under the carpet'. Acknowledgement would require dealing with the problem whereas a cover up would allow one to pretend that there is no corruption. This cover up ensures that the authority will continue to be trusted by all the sacrificial lambs who believe that their best interests are being well cared for.

Gibbs instructs Cutts to bring Lamb to "1A control room" (Pinter, 1991a:234). As Lamb and Cutts enter the control room, it is obvious that Lamb is brought here under false pretences. He believes that Gibbs has summoned him with regards to his promotion. What he does not know is that electrical shock experiments are carried out in the control room. The pun on the word 'control' is necessary to highlight, as this is precisely what happens in the soundproof, conforming territory. Cutts and Gibbs take total control over

Lamb's defenceless situation as they place electrodes on his wrists and headphones on his ears. Gibbs informs Lamb that, "The leads go right through the wall and up to the control room [...]. We're plugged in the other end. [...]. Plugged in at the socket on your head, plugged in at the other end at our control room" (1991a:241/2). The interrogation starts with:

> A light which is red, flickers on and off. Silence. Suddenly LAMB jolts rigid, his hands go to his earphones, he is propelled from the chair, falls to his knees, twisting from side to side, still clutching his earphones, emitting high-pitched cries. [...]. The red light stops. The voice of MISS CUTTS is heard" (1991a:244).

With penetrating insight Pinter creates a scene that connects power and sexuality and the interrogation proceeds metaphorically like an erotic adventure. Miss Cutts, Roote's lover, is also Gibbs' sexual partner. As the sadists Miss Cutts and Gibbs interrogate their victim, in the *langue* of the Other, they become aroused by the sexually orientated questions asked to Lamb during the cross-examination. Even before he has a chance to answer and to express his rights and his individuality, the next question is asked.

Lamb is not given any time to answer their questions unless his answer shows total submission to the power of a hierarchical system. When he is asked, "What is the law of the Wolf cub pack?" (Pinter, 1991a:250), he answers "The cub gives in to the Old Wolf, the cub does not give into himself" (1991a:250). This is the *langue* of the Other which

represents total rejection of individuality, and therefore Lamb is allowed to answer the question. As for the other questions, Lamb's attempt to answer is interrupted by yet another question. This implies that the Other's law insists that no language be allowed except for the *langue* of the system.

Pinter expresses this clearly in his play *Mountain Language*. The Guard, who signifies the mouthpiece of the Other, tells the prisoner "Forbidden. Language forbidden. Tell her to speak the language of the capital" (Pinter, 1988:10). In *The Hothouse*, if Lamb, who has not yet conformed to the system, were allowed to answer the questions without using the language required of him, he would be breaking the law. He first has to conform, and the best place do this in is the torture chamber, the "1A *control* room" (Pinter, 1991a:234). The final question put to Lamb is, "Do you ever feel you would like to join a group of people in which group common assumptions are shared and common principles observed?" (1991a:252). This time, Lamb is given an opportunity to answer:

> Lamb: Well, I am a member of such a group, here in this establishment.
> Gibbs: Which establishment?
> Lamb: This one.
> Gibbs: Which establishment?
> Lamb: This one.
> Gibbs: You are a member of this establishment?
> Lamb: Of course.
> *Silence* (Pinter, 1991a:253).

Lamb believes that his answer proves that he is a member of the "establishment" (1991a:253), and thus he has conformed to the Other. This then should entitle him to play the power game of sexual questioning. As a masochist he begs for more, "Any more questions? I'm quite ready for another question" (1991a:253). Lamb is so contaminated by this form of interrogation that his final lines, "I'm rather enjoying this you know. [...]. I'm ready whenever you are" (1991a:253 and 254), highlight his masochistic tendencies. His feelings of inferiority, powerlessness and individual insignificance are evident for he does not want to be left alone or be alienated. He wants to submit to the orders of the system and by participating in the interrogating questions, he shows a "marked dependence on the powers outside himself" (Fromm, 1942:123) as a means of preventing alienation. Because the questions have been so sexually intimate their metaphorical value is extended in the notion that sexual desire and satisfaction are displaced during the interrogation.

By asking for more questions, Lamb is unconsciously signifying that he has a desire to consummate his relationship with his surrogate mother[4], Miss Cutts. But like Freud's Oedipal theory, this consummation does not take place because the law of the father threatens castration. Unlike Freud's theory in which castration is a metaphorical threat, a symbolic castration takes place in *The Hothouse*. Gibbs, who is the symbolic figure for the Law of the Father[5], *switches Lamb's microphone off* thereby metaphorically

deadening his speech as he begs for more questions and castrating his desire as he desires the desire of his surrogate mother, Miss Cutts. He cannot 'have' Miss Cutts because she is already in a sexual relationship with the threatening father, Gibbs. Once the microphone has been switched off, the scene ends in horror as "the red light gradually grows in strength, until it consumes the room" (1991a:254).

The red light signifies that the power supply has been turned on, and Lamb is still connected to it by the electrodes that are placed on his wrists. The image of the red light *consuming* the room suggests that the power has been turned on to its total capacity and Lamb will thus be electrocuted. It is interesting to note that the colour red is also the symbol of desire. As this colour increases in light and overpowers Lamb, one is reminded of Gibbs' and Cutts' desire to castrate and destroy him.

Pinter portrays Miss Cutts as a particularly deceptive figure. She, in speaking the langue of the Other, is one of the major symbolic figures that exposes the corruption that takes place in the macrocosm. "In the second act, Pinter explicitly shows how the orgasmic fever of torture is transferred to [Miss Cutts'] own private life" (Billington, 1996:103). The sadistic pleasure she derives from tormenting her victim, Lamb, is part of the sexual game that she plays with Gibbs. Cutts seductively tells him:

> It's such fun in room 1A. I think it's my favourite room in the whole place. It's such an intimate room. I love your questions. They're so intimate themselves...Your sense of timing is perfect, you know when the questions must stop, those questions, and you must start asking me questions, other questions, and I must start asking you questions, and it's question time, question time, question time, forever and forever and forever (Pinter, 1991a:294).

As is evident in the interrogation scene, questions and torture are interrelated. Torture is a characteristic of a sadistic personality and exposes Cutts as a sadist who uses her sexuality to lure her victims to their deaths through her wicked seductions of power which she uses to torture Lamb, Gibbs and Roote. She realises that *the* patient is Roote's other lover when he comments, "she's [the patient] always been feminine" (1991a:225). This comment is threatening to Cutts as she wants to be the only feminine woman in the hothouse. Being a sadist, she wants sole control which she gains by using her femininity to undermine and destroy male authority. In order to gain control, Cutts manipulates her relationships by a crude pretence of displaying love and comfort to her lovers. When Roote tells her he has had "the most wearing morning" (1991a:226), Cutts replies with, "Oh my poor sweet, [...] let me massage you. Come into the bedroom. Let me do your neck" (1991a:227). Sakellaridou (1988:49) points out that:

> [Cutts'] anxiety to please the men [...] springs from her avidity to satisfy her feminine vanity and satiate her sexual hunger. Her constant 'I think I am not feminine enough for you' is a double talk. The 'for you' is altogether misleading because her real concern is for herself; it is not subservience to others.

Once Cutts realises that Roote is the father of the child she takes advantage of this situation as she intends on totally crushing the already mentally disintegrating Roote. She enters his office wearing the patient's nightie, knowing that Roote will recognise it as his other lover's nightie. When Roote asks her for the first time where she got the nightie from she replies tauntingly:

> Cutts: It's a gift. Who do I remind you of?
>
> Roote: Where did you get it?
>
> Cutts: From a friend. Do you like it? She just gave it to me. I had tea with her today. She's a nursing mother. She doesn't need it. She's so sweet and she's got such a bonny baby. I said to her, now we're friends, I can't go on calling you 6459, can I? What's your name? Do you know she wouldn't tell me? Well, what does your lover call you? I said, what little nickname? She blushed to the roots of her hair. I must say I'm very curious. What could he have called her? She's sweet, but she said the baby misses his Daddy. Babies do miss Daddy, you know. Archie, can't the baby see his Daddy, just for a little while, just to say hello?
>
> Roote: (*quietly*) No. daddy will stay where he is. (1991a:314).

Not only does Cutts revile Roote's relationship with the patient, but she also reminds him of his guilt when referring to the numbering system, cutting him to the core. Furthermore, she maliciously uses Roote's first name, as an access to intimacy, where she knows she has full control. Knowles (1984:116) comments that:

> Access to intimacy by the familiar usage of a fist name clearly fascinates Pinter. .. [...]. It is as if knowledge [that Roote has fathered the patient's child] and the use of a name form is a kind of articulated power. Miss Cutts indirectly declares her superiority over her rival by using the familiar version of Roote's christian name for the first and only time here [...]. She is reappropriating her lover by reappropriating the name in evoking and triumphing over the rival situation.

Besides playing the cunning, sexy female, Cutts also plays the part of being the surrogate mother in her relationship with Lamb. During their conversation over a cup of coffee, it becomes clear that they have just enjoyed a game of Ping-Pong together. It is obvious that Lamb sees her as a mother figure for he trusts her completely and confides in her all his ideas and plans when he tells her, "I wouldn't say this to anyone else but you, of course" (1991a:209). Contrary to this trust is Miss Cutts' underlying plan to use him for her experiments. However, by being cunning she knows that it is important to show a friendly interest in him and thus win his confidence. Her pretence at playing his surrogate mother is grossly highlighted as she betrays him by taking him to the torture chamber, the interrogation laboratory, which she admits is "my favourite room in the whole place" (Pinter, 1991a:294).

Surrogate mothering, and the reference to one's own mother, is a theme that Pinter uses frequently in his writings. The importance of these insertions stresses Pinter's other major themes: alienation as a result from the lack of shared love, the need for verification of

one's existence and the characters' desires to reassure themselves of their actualities. The text of *The Hothouse* is focused on the violation of human rights and on the dehumanisation of not just the patients, but the staff too, as they are "isolated and immured, they have become victims of the bureaucratic machine they are supposedly operating [...] they too have sacrificed part of their identity to the institution" (Billington, 1996:103). Because of this sacrifice, they reside in a world of alienation where there is a subtraction of love, and the need for verification of their existence is expressed in their narratives of a metaphorical homecoming. This is symbolised in the confirmation of having a mother in an effort to reach an assertion of origin:

> Roote: How do you know what mothers look like?
> Lush: I had one myself.
> Roote: Do you think I didn't?
> Lush: *(pointing at Gibbs)* He didn't.
> Gibbs: Oh yes! I did, damn you!
> Roote: I was fed, Mister Cleverboots, at my mother's breast.
> Gibbs: So was I.
> Lush: Me too.
> *Sudden silence.*
> Roote: WELL? AND WHAT ABOUT IT? (Pinter, 1991a:280 and 281).

Lacan (1982:12) answers Roote's question in the following statement: "The omnipotence of which we are always speaking in psychoanalysis is first of all the omnipotence of the

subject as subject of the first demand[6], and this omnipotence must be related back to the Mother".

Freud's theory of the 'talking cure' involves bringing the unconscious to the conscious mind by repetition. This forces one to work through any repressed desires. However, "instead of the repressed idea, a disguised and unrecognisable surrogate-creation" (Freud, 1910:4) is presented. In the dialogue quoted above, the characters' repeated discourse signifies not just the verification of having a mother, but how this chain of signifiers leads to authenticating their being born so that their significance may survive the passage of time. Brooks (1982:280) points out that "repetition, remembering and re-enactment are the ways in which we replay time, so that it may not be lost".

The focus on the loss of identities brings about awareness that the system affects the whole body of the organisation, and not just what we initially perceive as the patients being the only victims. During another insightful moment, Roote exposes the fine line between staff and patients, and how the system cancels all their hopes, when he "takes a pair of glasses out of his pocket, puts them on" (Pinter, 1991a:213). The symbolism of sight intrigues the playwright (as highlighted in the discussion on *A Slight Ache*) and his characters are predominantly blinded by the system. In order for the absurdity of the situation to come to the fore, Pinter makes symbolic use of glasses when the character

experiences insight or remembrance of the altruistic days before they were indoctrinated[7]. When Roote puts on his glasses, his unconscious discourse expresses itself:

> To spend years and years, winter after winter, trying to perfect the workings of an institution so fragile in its conception and execution, so fragile the boundary between the achievement of one's aspirations; rather the aspirations of a whole community, a tradition, an ideal; *such a delicately wrought concept of participation between him who is to be treated and him who is to treat that it defies analysis;* trying to sustain this fine, fine balance, finer than a ... finer than a .... far, far finer. Year after year, and so refined the operation that the softest breath, the breath of a... feather...can send the whole thing tottering into chaos, into ignominy, to the death and cancellation of all our hopes. Goodness gracious" (1991a:213, added emphasis).

What is more frightening is that no one can do anything about it and no one can leave. Roote states, "Nobody approves! But you've no alternative, have you?" (1991a:265). Before proceeding, it is necessary to note that Roote says, "year after year, winter after winter" (1991a:265). The significance of these words is the omission of autumn, spring and summer. Winter signifies no new life and permanent death, reinforcing the hothouse being a crematorium. Had there been an autumn, the shedding of leaves, as this parallels disposing of rusted edicts, it would have enabled Roote to establish new policies. In the spring time, as nature's fresh growth begins to sprout, so would Roote's ideals have started to show progression towards positive changes, and in the summer all would reap the benefits of the new life. The tragedy though is that this would never happen. Through

the symbolism of the birth of the baby Pinter stresses that new life – fresh ideas and changes – is to be terminated before it germinates.

By exposing all this dread, Pinter is able to focus on the horror it creates. It is injustice that haunts the dramatist as he witnesses power-heads trying to brainwash people into believing that what they are doing is in society's best interests. In *The Hothouse*, torturous acts are excused as they are carried out "in the interests of science" (1991a:219), a refrain that Roote uses to "verify" (1991a:219) the rape of patients. "It's in the interests of science if a member of the staff decides that for the good of a female patient some degree of copulation is necessary" (1991a:219). However he warns that for future rapes, "Never ride bareback" (1991a:219) in order to prevent any more unwanted babies, and therefore any more unwanted bureaucratic mistakes. "[A]nd always send in a report. After all, the reactions of the patient*s* have to be tabulated, compared with other*s*, filed, stamped and if possible *verified!"* (1991a:219, added emphasis). In this way, the lusts and desires of the Other, no matter how destructive, will be carried out regardless, and covered up in any way possible even if it means leading innocent lambs to their deaths.

Endemic to Pinter's corpus is the interplay of betrayal and revenge and the equation of greed for power with sexual greed. Cutts, feeling betrayed by Roote, urges Gibbs to

murder her lover, "just to satisfy [her own] personal whim" (1991a:298):

> Cutts: I know what's going to happen. You're going to kill him.
>
> Gibbs: What?
>
> Cutts: Aren't you? You promised. You promised you would. Didn't you? Do it now. Now. Before he makes his Christmas speech (1991a:296).

The intensifying heat is now soaring to its suffocating climax as it becomes more apparent that Gibbs has had, from the start of the play when he "takes the piss" (1991a:194) out of Roote, every intention to murder him. Pinter has juxtaposed the totally conditioned Gibbs, with his continual, "yes Sir, no Sir and certainly Sir" (1991a:1986) with the questioning Roote. Gibbs symbolises the "keyword [for] order" (1991:a214), the echo of the Other. Because Roote violates the order when he questions the moral validity of the Ministry, he must be punished by death. The best candidate to ensure that this punishment eventuates is the power seeking Gibbs.

What is terrifying is the malicious conspiracy that Gibbs employs to fulfil his ruthless desire for power. When he orders Lamb to the control room, Gibbs is aware that he was supposed to be on duty, locking the patients' cells. Because Lamb was conveniently forgotten in the torture chamber, the patients were free to walk out of their unlocked cells and commit the massacre. All the staff and authority personnel, except miraculously for Gibbs, were "slaughtered" (1991a:322). Gibbs cunningly explains to Lobb, the official from the Ministry, that he survived because he was "engaged in some research"

(1991a:326), and therefore awake "so was able to take measures" (1991a:326) to protect himself. To further assist his pretence of innocence, Gibbs explains to Lobb, "you see, the lockster who should have been on duty - we always had a lockster on duty [...] was absent from duty [...] He's ......not to be found, sir" (1991a:325).

Pinter ends the play with the forgotten victim as the "lights rise on the sound-proof room. Lamb in chair. He sits still, staring, as in a catatonic trance. Curtain" (1991a:328). The colour of the light, which Pinter states should be red (cf. Pinter, 1991a:254), is important to note as it structures the play in a circular motion. Chetwynd (1992:93) explains that "Red, like blood and dawn [symbolises] outer worldly activity and existence." This symbolisation holds true for *The Hothouse* in numerous ways: (a) the red like blood, signifies the torture and killings that occur as a result for desired power, (b) red like dawn, underlines that corruption will continue for as long as there are new days, because Gibbs, whose keyword is order, is now placed in the authoritative position (circular structure of horror) and (c) the outer worldly activity is controlled by the Other who demoralises existence. Furthermore, red as the colour of blood relates to birth (dawn), but in an anti-life and negative sense.

Pinter's circular structure emphasises that for as long as dawn appears in her red glow, one is reminded of the daily bloody torture of power, which is eminent in a Pinterian

landscape of dehumanised 'cardboard characters'. This suggests that those who submit to the law of the Other inevitably become 'cardboard' as their minds are lulled into submission through the *langue* of the Other. Furthermore, in submitting to the Other, 'cardboard' people lose their capacity to trust their own judgement, and thus abandon their individuality. This reinforces the tyranny in society as it forces the individual to struggle against all its threatening and menacing demands.

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1. Saussure (as cited in Silverstein, 1993:18) calls *parole* "the individual speech act" and *langue* - "language as a codified system."

2. The characters in *The Hothouse* frequently use clichés and repetitions, which suggests that their critical judgement as individuals is destroyed. Fromm (1976:27) highlights that, "the mind is lulled into submission by clichés [...] people are made dumb because they become dependent and lose their capacity to trust their [...] judgement." According to this description, one can understand why Pinter calls his characters "cardboard" (Gale, 1977:229).

3. Frye (1957: 159) states that "Tragedy [...] the fiction or the fall of a leader (he has to fall because that is the only way in which a leader can be isolated from his society)".

4. Lamb views Miss Cutts as a surrogate mother. This notion is highlighted further on in the chapter.

5. The law of the Father falls into the symbolic realm of language, and since Gibbs speaks the langue of the Other, he holds the position of symbolic father.

6. The first demand, as Lacan explains it (see chapter one of this dissertation), is the demand for love.

7. It is possible for Roote to remember the altruistic days, before indoctrination, as the Freudian thought is that any unconscious thought was at one time active/conscious (cf. Freud, 1932:1)

CONCLUSION

Max: There are other considerations. There are human considerations.
You understand what I mean? There are human considerations. Don't forget them.
(*The Homecoming*, Pinter, 1978:78)

As was mentioned previously, Pinter is concerned with the transformation of the human spirit as his characters attempt to define themselves in an oppressive social system. His plays represent the universal struggle to find and maintain individual desires in a world controlled by the Other: the Other's power, the Other's language, and the Other's assumption of sexual and moral superiority. Thus the common denominator in *A Slight Ache, The Lover* and *The Hothouse* is the terror of power, torture, control, violence and abandonment.

In the first two plays discussed in this study, namely *A Slight Ache* and *The Lover,* alienation from the social world is evident from the onset. In these two plays, Pinter focuses on small casts, suggesting that the characters are already separated from the larger community[1]. This signifies the characters' first abandonment. Paradoxically, although the social world in Pinter's plays is displayed as a tyrannical one, the characters still have a need to belong to that world. According to Fromm (1942:15), one's position in the social world assures a "feeling of communion and belonging". This 'feeling' is important as it establishes an affinity with other people whereby one attempts to escape alienation. The final scenes in *A Slight Ache* and *The Lover* suggest that the characters opt

for recognition in the social world when they comply with its laws by repressing their individual desires. When the curtain closes on Flora and the Matchseller in *A Slight Ache*, it is evident that she will transfer her libidinal desire to mother the younger Edward/the Matchseller, as opposed to fulfilling her desire in a more sensual and sexual manner, one which appropriates a 'whole' woman. But in order to exist in Pinter's social world, Flora, like Sarah in *The Lover*, must abide by the law of the Other which stipulates that a woman cannot be a wife and a lover. She is either to be a whore and a lover, or a woman who embodies the love of a mother, and remains frustrated as a regimented wife. This notion further reinforces that the characters abandon their own desires in favour of positioning themselves in an oppressive social world.

Although the latter paragraph focuses on the female characters, the male characters are included in submitting to the Other as Pinter's whole cast suffers the loss of instinctual desires and individual expression. To highlight the lack of sexuality, the dramatist focuses on the loss of senses for people who are both sensual and sexual beings. In *The Homecoming* Pinter clearly accents the impact of oppression when Lenny says, "I tend to get desensitised, if you know what I mean, when people make unreasonable demands on me" (Pinter, 1974:48). Likewise, the characters in *A Slight Ache*, *The Lover* and *The Hothouse* are desensitised and this reinforces their lack of sensuality and, therefore, their sexuality. According to Freud our libidinal sexuality is our first psychic energy/drive right from infancy and remains there throughout our lives. Therefore it is the core of our

beings. Because we are inherently sensual beings, oppressing and desensitising our desires destroy our human vivacity, as Pinter emphasises in his plays.

In *A Slight Ache*, Edward suffers from a blinding eye ache and as the play progresses he begins to lose his sense of hearing. He tells Flora that he cannot hear the birds in the trees. Pinter highlights the sight theme in *The Hothouse* when it becomes evident that Roote has lost his insight, which is parallel to his sense of sight. In order to 'see', Roote needs to put his glasses on. The 'desensitising' theme is extended in *The Lover* when Richard declares that "the venetian blinds are down [as] the light was terribly strong [...] blinding" (Pinter, 1991b:152). Richard's statement intertwines the themes of sight, blindness and light that refer to the omnipresence of the controlling Other. By closing the blinds during the afternoons of sexual games, Richard symbolically shuts out the penetrating and menacing gaze of the outside world. Thus the metaphorical value of light, in *The Lover*, is not a positive light that enhances insight, but rather a light used to interrogate and indoctrinate. The light of the Other is "blinding" (1991b:152) as it destroys the characters' insights and desensitises their sensuality. Thus it blinds them to other aspects of life, resulting in their lack of individuality as well as their repression of desires. This absence of vision enables the Other to have total control over its victims.

Ironically the Pinterian social world is so damaging that it self-destructs. By oppressing libidinal desire, which Freud (cf. Thorton, 1997:5) stipulates as being allocated in the

Eros (self-preserving) instinct, the Other restricts the continuity of humanity. *The Hothouse* clearly provides the most dramatic illustration of this. When Roote discovers that a baby has been born he commands, "get rid of it" (199a:220) as an increase in the population, which can only be achieved through the expression of libidinal fulfillment, is perceived as a crime.

Henceforth, Pinter presents the situation of the oppressed individual by means of the dominant metaphor of his plays, namely the struggle for control as well as the control the social world has over the characters who attempt to defend themselves from tyranny and torture. As desire is reinvented, this defiant attempt is noted in their discourse through signifiers that float outside the *langue* of the Other, which remains separate and alien from the Other's gaze. Thus discourse is removed from language as it is not textured with the prohibitions and restraints associated with the Other's *langue.* Power therefore operates on two levels, namely through manipulation of *both* language and discourse. When the characters use discourse to express their desires, Pinter inserts numerous ellipses. These incursions suggest that the characters are searching and groping for another language, one that no longer speaks of loyalty to the controlling Other. The characters hope that the possibility of this new language will give them the words to enable them to speak of their individual desires. Pinter's vision is thus not nihilistic because it offers the prospect of a new language, one that acts as a counterdiscourse of

the abandoned sensual language. This proposition exposes new formulae to study Pinter's use of language. However, it also lies beyond the scope of *this* study's illustration of understanding Pinter.

This study has focused on society's total control over the characters, as the Other threatens to annihilate them should they not conform. Thus, as the title suggests, language is that of the abandoned and speaking the language of the Other forces the characters to abandon their individual desires. Therefore it is through the characters' unconscious discourse that Pinter makes us aware of oppression. To clarify, when the characters adopt sadistic qualities, their language is well versed in the brutality of the Other's demands. Fromm (cf. Fromm, 1942:15) suggests that we are social people who fear isolation and so too Pinter's characters fear alienation. They therefore conform to the Other and the social world as a means to avoid isolation.

However, in order to belong to that social world, the characters have to make a sacrifice: they must abandon their individualities. Pinter highlights this in his plays through his use of language. Once the characters have conformed, their language contains no ellipses, no infinite signifiers of desire and their flow of speech is not broken by the incursions of ellipses. This reinforces the idea that their language is associated with orders, authority and oppression because to have control, one is not restricted by the loss of words

(ellipses). Thus Pinter uses the notion of discourse to expose the characters' repressed desires that manifest in anxieties. Therefore, the characters' discourse institutes a realm of floating signifiers that highlight the infinite psychological trauma of the oppressed and the abandoned.

Thus Pinter's artistic triumph in language magnifies his theme of the terror of oppression and gives us an understanding of our age of violence, thereby enabling us to confront ourselves and call attention to the abusers of human rights. As the epigraph highlights, "there are human considerations" (Pinter, 1978:78). Hence, I am in concurrence with Augusto Boal (1992:247), the founder of the *Theater of the Oppressed,* when he states that:

> Now [...], when so many certainties have become so many doubts, when so many dreams have withered to exposure to sunlight, and so many hopes have become many deceptions – now that we are living through times and situations of great perplexity, full of doubts and uncertainties, now more than ever I believe it is the time for the theatre which, at its best, will ask the right questions at the right times. Let us be democratic and ask our audiences to tell us their desires, and let us show them alternatives. Let us hope that one day – please, not too far in the future – we'll be able to convince or force our governments, or leaders, to do the same: to ask their audiences - US – what they should do, so as to make this world a place to live and be happy in – yes, it is possible – rather than just a vast market in which we sell our goods and our souls. Let's hope. Let's work for it!

Finally, Pinter's message to us is one that he emphatically states he has lived by all his life[2] and is taken from his second play, *A Birthday Party.* "Stan, don't let them tell you what to do" (1991a:80). It is only when we stop submitting to the oppressive demands of the Other that we will find our language, and thus our own desires.

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1. In *The Hothouse*, a play that exposes the larger social system, the cast consists of seven characters.

2. Gussow (1994:9) states that in a conversation with Harold Pinter, the playwright admitted that he has lived this line all his life, "Stan, don't let them tell you what to do".

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this study is to explore the notions of oppression and abandonment and language and discourse as it pertains to the works of Harold Pinter. A selected reading of three psychoanalysts: Erich Fromm, Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan facilitates an explanation of the psychological effects of oppression, violence, victimisation and alienation. According to Fromm, isolation is wo/man's most prodigious fear as being abandoned from society institutes psychological disturbances. In the Pinterian landscape, the characters are subjected to isolation and abandonment due to the oppressive society in which they are positioned. The Freudian concept of unconscious discourse offers an engaging explanation of the way in which Pinter's characters use discourse to signify their ontological fears and repressed desires. Freud's theory on the mechanisms of the id, ego and super-ego, and how these concepts correspond to repression and thus anxiety, highlights the significant themes in Pinter's plays. The Lacanian notion of Other as it relates to the laws and restrictive demands of society is manifested in Pinter's plays as an omnipresent menace. Thus the characters attempt to retreat from society as it threatens to annihilate them, should they not conform. Ironically the tyrannical society is too powerful for the characters, and consequently destroys them when they endeavour to defy the laws of the Other. Accordingly Pinter's plays end with this final image of oppressed and abandoned characters struggling in vain against the oppressive Other.

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