A study of hegemonic masculinity in select plays by Harold Pinter

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Declaration of Original Authorship

Declaration: I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

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Abstract

This thesis expands existing scholarship on Harold Pinter by integrating perspectives from gender studies, sociolinguistics, and performance analysis. It investigates how Pinter's characters contribute to and perpetuate hegemonic masculinities, exploring the consequences of challenging or maintaining gender hierarchies. Through the lens of prototypicality threats in Pinter's text, the analysis reveals specific linguistic tools characters employ to reinforce gender hegemonies.

In performance, Pinter's depiction of gender inequality becomes much more overt, and this thesis aims to recognise how contemporary audiences perceive gender and hegemony in productions of Pinter's plays. Utilising semiotics, this study identifies dominant characteristics of Pinter's dramatic language and how they are realised on stage. The spectator's role in meaning production is considered by acknowledging the impact of a political unconscious on the reception of hegemonic masculinity in contemporary productions.

This thesis presents an original and provocative examination of Pinter's work, contributing to previous research on gender, language, and performance. I identify distinct hegemonies in each play and highlight consistent behaviours across Pinter's work. The exploration of prototypicality offers an original lens for understanding gender and power dynamics in Pinter's plays. Additionally, the study engages with contemporary productions and their reception, shedding light on how British theatre contributes to perceptions of gender inequality, violence, and misogyny.

Reflecting on the impact of this research, the thesis has taken Pinter scholarship in a new direction, critically examining hegemonic masculinity and its portrayal of female oppression. Future scholars are encouraged to maintain a critical perspective, addressing the problematic aspects of gender hegemony in Pinter's work and exploring the intersections with racial and xenophobic prejudice. The identification of prototypicality threats is proposed as a valuable tool for analysing Pinter's text and aiding scholars in understanding fluid gendered power dynamics between characters.

Introduction

Overview

It is not enough to acknowledge the systems of power that work to undermine, subjugate, and oppress the individual, but to work to change it. In recognising the structures and hierarchies that are seemingly essential to the means through which we are controlled, we become one step closer to challenging and undermining those pervasive systems of inequality. The pervasion of inequality and the individual desperation for power are some of the most striking and profound aspects of Harold Pinter's writing. Whether it be in the domestic, professional, or more abstract settings of his plays, Pinter's ability to embed themes of oppression, violence and domination in both subtle and overt ways suggests how he repeatedly criticises the systems of power that perpetuate inequality. One of the most striking examples of inequality in Pinter's plays can be observed in the relationships between men, and between men and women. The male characters continually undermine, threaten, and supplant other men and women in the desperate pursuit of power, and such desperation not only perpetuates gender inequality but also establishes pervasive hegemonic masculinities. Recent and historical scholarship surrounding Pinter's work often considers the power imbalance between men, and between men and women, but I believe that purely acknowledging that imbalance does nothing to challenge inequality. I believe more can be done to consider how Pinter's work can critique hegemony, and my research is concerned with identifying how Pinter's work depicts violent, manipulative, and dominant masculinities. The focus of this thesis is to explore how Pinter's men and women formulate, reinforce, and challenge such hegemonic masculinities through linguistic tactics of threat. By understanding the hegemonic behaviours found in the text, I use these findings to analyse how contemporary performances of Pinter's work on stage contribute to the wider discourse on gender inequality. Ultimately, this thesis aims to use Pinter's work as a critique of the harmful systemic behaviours of hegemonic masculinity by addressing how the texts and productions depict the methods and consequences of challenging such hegemonies.

It is important to understand the significance of the relationship between power and gender, and R.W. Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity is largely accepted as a term to connect the two. Connell outlines the definition of hegemonic masculinity as follows: "Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which

embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell, 2005: 77). Connell's definition of the term is fundamental to understanding the rationale for this thesis. Within the context of my research, hegemony is understood to indicate a hierarchy that relies on a set of ideal (i.e. hegemonic) characteristics and behaviours, which therefore suggests that characteristics that are not included are consequently problematic (i.e. non-hegemonic). By extension, hegemonic masculinity is the notion that certain behaviours performed by men become hegemonic, offering significant power over men who fail to consistently perform those hegemonic behaviours. The vital component of such a hierarchy is that it not just affects men, but also women, and the purpose of hegemonic masculinity is to reinforce unequal gender relations, therefore alongside hegemonic masculinity exists a complementary femininity that supports masculine domination. The arguments of this thesis rely on such a conceptualisation of hegemony and gender as tied to the notion of gender inequality. I believe there is much work to be done to address and challenge systemic gender inequality, and that contemporary theatre can be a vital part of that process. For me, the work of Harold Pinter exists as a provocative and profound example of the various ways in which men and women reinforce gender inequality and the damaging impact that hegemony can have on those who fail to comply.

The intention of this thesis is to examine the consistencies and differences in Pinter's approach to gender inequality through a selection of plays from across his *oeuvre* and their interpretation and reception in notable productions of his work. Over the course of five chapters, I engage with seven case studies taken from Pinter's plays which include Pinter's first produced play to his last, from *The Room* to *Celebration*. Each play has been produced in London's West End within the last eleven years, and it is these popular productions that have provided more material to engage with regarding critical responses. Five of these productions were produced as part of the 'Pinter at the Pinter' season in 2018/19 by the Jamie Lloyd Company at the Harold Pinter Theatre. The remaining three productions were produced earlier than this season, though are connected to the season either by being directed by Jamie Lloyd, or by being produced at the Harold Pinter Theatre. The focus of my thesis will be on these contemporary productions; however, I will also be referring to the London premiere productions of the same plays. The intention of this comparison is to offer insight into the similarities and differences in reception to Pinter's work over time, specifically within the context of his plays in London productions, with contemporary case studies also

being performed in London theatres. examination of these productions is supported by their critical reception, as well as my own performance analysis for each production as a spectator, particularly in terms of reading these hegemonic masculinities in performance. Together, the intention of these analyses is to consider the varying impact the productions have on the individual and wider critical perception of hegemony on stage. This offers an interesting insight into how each play is connected thematically and/or aesthetically, and how the reception of Pinter's work changed during that time. Throughout each chapter, my engagement with these productions will discuss how much the reception of Pinter's plays in performance has been focused on his depiction of gender. I will also be expanding on existing scholarship surrounding the analysis of historical productions in considering how interpretations of these plays have changed over sixty years since the first production, specifically within the context of masculinity.

Recent scholarship surrounding Pinter's work has included more frequent consideration of his screenplays, and the decision to omit Pinter's screenplays in my research is to ensure a more focused approach to engaging with contemporary performances of his work. With *Sleuth*, Pinter's final produced screenplay in 2007, the screenplays offer limited impact on the discourse surrounding gender inequality within the last ten years. On stage, however, Pinter is a much more established voice, with his work continually being produced both in the West End and nationally. This then allows for a richer opportunity to explore how Pinter's work impacts how hegemonic masculinity is received by contemporary audiences and critics. To summarise, my intention for this thesis is to contribute to and expand on recent scholarship surrounding the plays of Harold Pinter, his work in performance, gender studies, hegemony, and sociolinguistics. The subsequent sections of this introduction will outline the research questions, contexts and critical framework that forms the foundation for the arguments presented in this thesis.

Research Questions

The foundation of this thesis is built on three essential research questions which I aim to answer in each subsequent chapter.

1. How do Harold Pinter's characters establish, reinforce and challenge hegemonic masculinities in his plays?

2. In what ways can the application of prototypicality threats provide new contexts for understanding hegemony in Pinter's plays?

3. To what extent do contemporary productions of Harold Pinter's plays impact how hegemonic masculinities can be received?

As mentioned above, the rationale for this thesis is motivated by an understanding of the relationship between gender inequality and systems of power, as well as expanding on existing scholarship surrounding theatre studies and sociolinguistics. As such, the research questions highlighted here are dedicated to the three main aspects of my research for this thesis. In approaching the first question, I intend to use in-depth analysis of Pinter's texts to uncover the specific characteristics and behaviours performed by his characters that promote gender inequality. This is then tied to the second question, for the use of prototypicality threats is fundamental to the formation and subversion of gender hegemony, and as such becomes a consistent tool which both men and women use to obtain and maintain power. Although the application of sociolinguistic theory has been applied to the analysis of Pinter's plays, the use of the term 'prototypicality threats' has not been applied to Pinter's work in previous scholarship. As such, my intention for this thesis is to investigate whether the application of the term can provide valuable new insights into Pinter's presentation of gender and power. In approaching the final question, I relate these findings to each case study in contemporary performance, and how interpretations of Pinter's text impact the reception of gender inequality. By analysing critical reviews of the productions, as well as my own interpretations, I aim to explore the personal and critical perspectives on hegemony for each case study.

Research Methods

Elaine Aston and George Savona's work on theatre semiotics outlines the ways in which drama may be realised and interpreted both through the written text, and the performance act. Their book titled *Theatre as Sign System: A Semiotics of Text and Performance* (2013) promotes a rationale for approaching text and performance as of equal importance to the production of meaning. In applying this approach to identify the dominant functions of Pinter's dialogue, it draws comparisons to the critical framework of Ludwig Wittgenstein about the ways in which meaning is produced through language. This is covered later in the introduction, however, the theoretical foundation for the semiotics of Pinter's language is intrinsically linked to the analysis of dominance and power. For Aston and Savona, this also applies to the analysis of performance, and their conceptualisation of semiotics is to explore the various aspects of the drama on stage, including objects, actor's bodies, and the space itself.

Peggy Phelan, in her conceptualisation of the performative aspect of performance analysis in her book *Unmarked: The Politics of the Performative* (1993), argues that the raw performance event is singular, visceral, and then lost over time. It is then that this suggestion of the futility of such a method of analysis that she argues that "the labor to write about performance (and thus to "preserve" it) is also a labor that fundamentally alters the event. It does no good, however, to simply refuse to write about performance because of this inescapable transformation" (Phelan 2005: 148). Phelan's optimistic sentiment here offers a perspective that suggests how the writing about performance is at once an altered recreation – if not a continuation – of the performance event. The power of performance is arguably in its fluidity, and I feel I must recognise that my engagement with the analysis of Pinter's work in performance ultimately fails to accurately document the event as of that moment of witnessing it. However, this alteration of that original event is both freeing and daunting in recognising the responsibility of a researcher in attempting to document and critique the productions. I understand that I am not capable of conveying an accurate account of each performance event, and yet I am emboldened by Phelan's conceptualisation, which has allowed me to remain confident in approaching the analysis of performance in this thesis. I would also like to acknowledge how Phelan's arguments regarding the feminisation of this process, through the traditional understanding of 'reproduction' as inherently feminine, are not lost as I consider the impact of gender and power in the process of analysing performance.

In expanding on the methodologies of Aston and Savona, and Phelan, it is clear how semiotics may help identify the ways in which meaning is produced in the reading of performance, and the work of Ric Knowles, particularly his book titled *Reading the Material Theatre* (2004), has been fundamental in forming a rationale for engaging with Pinter's work in performance. The way that Knowles describes the mediation and negotiation of meaning through semiotics is a provocative approach to the reading of what he deems 'material theatre'. As such, the rationale for the analysis of this material is reliant on the understanding of the specific contexts in which the performance takes place and the positioning of both performers and spectators within that space. For Knowles, the performance 'text' is merely the presentation through which meaning can be produced, depending on "the material conditions, both theatrical and cultural, within and through which it is produced and received, conditions which function as its political unconscious, speaking through the performance text whatever its manifest content or intent" (Knowles 2004: 10). Where I find the most profound observations of Knowles's method is in the recognition of the 'political

unconscious', which implies an uncontrollable transference of political commentary embedded within – and merely suggested through – the performance text. This commentary then becomes an essential part of the reading of the text, but Knowles argues that the political unconscious is not a product of any one sign in isolation, but rather an accumulation of multiple elements realised through the production of meaning. As such, my research considers these signs, including Knowles's conceptualisation of the conditions of production and reception and the consequent negotiation to produce meaning, to explore the ways in which each case study presents hegemonic masculinity.

To summarise, my methodologies in engaging with the research for this thesis include textual analysis, performance analysis, reading the material theatre, and semiotics. Knowles's methodology suggests approaching text and performance through semiotics to consider how the performers and spectators are positioned in both the production and the reception of meaning. The focus of this thesis is to consider the conditions in which the performance event can be received, and as such, the culmination of these four approaches has been crucial to forming the arguments presented in the later chapters.

Critical Framework

Fixated with the ways in which language could be manipulated and misinterpreted, I found the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein useful as a lens through which text and speech rely on learnt patterns, as established in his book titled *Philosophical Investigations*, first published in 1953. Wittgenstein's philosophy of the interpretation and meaning(s) of language – specifically his delineation of the term 'language-games' – became increasingly relevant to my approach to Pinter's work at the time. For Wittgenstein, the fluidity of language was essential to his philosophy, arguing how "There are countless kinds [of sentence]: countless different kinds of use of all the things we call "signs", "words", "sentences". And this diversity is not something fixed, given once and for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten" (Wittgenstein, 2009: 23). Through this understanding of language as something that is both changeable and vulnerable to exploitation had a profound connection to the themes of Harold Pinter's plays. The character's relationship with language is often to weaponise it, to use it to gain and maintain power, but when contextualising this within Wittgenstein's philosophy, it positions the characters as ultimately tragic. The power that they seek is reliant on their control of language, but where language is not fixed or determined, their control is constantly under threat. Not only are they repeatedly undermined by other characters, but

their reliance on language is largely futile, and a failure to adapt often leads to their own isolation.

I found that Wittgenstein's philosophy had become increasingly restrictive, seemingly applicable solely to the depiction of masculinity seen in the text, but upon revisiting *Philosophical Investigations* at the time, I found that his philosophy considered how "The term 'language-game' is used here to emphasize the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life" (Wittgenstein, 2009: 23). The performative aspect of spoken language suggested by Wittgenstein made for a pivotal shift in my research and allowed me to draw connections not only to Pinter's use of language in performance but also in the interdisciplinary definitions of performativity, particularly in the scholarship surrounding gender studies. It would be important to highlight the impact of Judith Butler's conceptualisation of gender performativity – first realised in her 1990 book *Gender Trouble* – to not only this research but also my own personal understanding of gender identity. The arguments presented in that book and then developed throughout her later work suggest that "[w]ithin the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative, that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be" (Butler, 2010: 24-5). Here, Butler argues that the performativity of gender is reliant on the 'discourse' of its construction, and so the relationship between gender and language is fundamental to Butler's conceptualisation of performativity. The use of language is but one crucial tool through which one may embody masculinity and femininity. The interconnectivity of established philosophical, theoretical, and ideological understandings of language is likewise tied to the performative aspect of gender and where the two are so fundamental to the dramatic action of Pinter's work, they become pivotal to understanding the formation of hegemony within his plays. Although Butler's research is not widely referred to in this thesis, it still provides an ideological and theoretical foundation for the ways in which gender and performance are interconnected. This layer allows for an opportunity to study how the embodiment of language and gender can be realised on stage beyond the restrictions of the text, in particular how performances of Pinter's work reframe and depict hegemonic masculinity.

The intersection of power, gender and language is crucial to understanding how hegemony is formed and challenged, but also its fluidity, therefore it is important to highlight the key texts that relate to systems of power and gender, specifically masculinities. My arguments in this thesis often refer to 'masculinities', suggesting that each case study establishes a separate, singular 'masculinity'. Pinter's writing does include some thematic and conceptual similarities in how it presents masculinity, but I proceed with the

understanding of hegemony as fluid, influenced by the work of R.W. Connell, whose work became essential to the understanding of hegemonic masculinities as fluid, as well as the ways in which it can be challenged. In *Masculinities* (2005), Connell contextualises their framework for understanding how masculinities are constructed in men's interaction with women and each other. This relationship is dependent on a hierarchy of men which then allows them to rank men's appropriation and performance of normative masculine behaviours that enforce unequal gender relations. Connell argues that there is a "patriarchal dividend" (2005: 79) which is then appropriated by men, reinforcing masculine hegemony which serves both as reality and as wish-fulfilment as they try to embody it or intellectualise it. This process is, however, fluid, as men attempt to redefine it and in the process of doing so, establish oppositional masculinities. It is important to understand that Connell's arguments are reliant on the idea that masculinity, as a fluid 'norm' of the male person, is changeable throughout local contexts, changed in turn by men's behaviour, interaction, and experience.

Connell's conceptualisation of hegemony is largely influenced by the social and cultural theory of Antonio Gramsci, who formulated the concept of hegemony in his contributions to Marxist ideology in the early-20th Century (Gramsci, 2013). For Gramsci, hegemony "was ultimately about the exercising and maintenance of power" (Pass, 2019: 80), linked to the ways in which the ruling class justify the social, political, and economic status quo as natural, inevitable, and beneficial to all social classes. Gramsci's conceptualisation of hegemony centres on the notion that dominant social groups maintain power through 'domination' and 'coercion', and that:

> Social control, in other words, takes two basic forms: besides influencing behaviour and choice externally, through rewards and punishments, it also affects them internally, by moulding personal convictions into a replica of prevailing norms. Such 'internal control' is based on hegemony, which refers to an order in which a common social-moral language is spoken, in which one concept of reality is dominant, informing with its spirit all modes of thought and behaviour.

> (Femia, 1987: 24)

Gramsci's theory suggests that by outlining a necessary, inevitable and collective language, the state would enforce the adoption of that language, reinforcing their dominant position within the cultural, social and political hierarchy. By situating Gramsci's conceptualisation within the research of hegemonic masculinity, Connell stimulates a fundamentally political

sentiment within their criticism of dominant, violent forms of masculinities. Where Gramsci's concept is linked to the bourgeoisie and the maintenance of political and cultural power over the proletariat, Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity is linked to a criticism of patriarchy and the subsequent inequality between men and women.

Connell's work outlines varied rewards and punishments within different cultures that reveal hegemonic masculinities and the ways in which they are reinforced. Recalling a previous term, such rewards are directly connected to the notion of a patriarchal dividend, suggesting the ways in which men benefit from the inequality of men and women. In this way, Connell's conceptualisation of hegemony becomes more focused, expanding on Gramsci's theory. Connell describes three main forms of contemporary masculinity: 'hegemonic', 'complicit' and 'protest' masculinity, indicating the three related processes of dominance, complicity, and subordination/protest which then make up the hierarchy. Connell also argues how the fourth process, one of deviancy is similarly vital to the construction of the gendered hierarchy. With this idea of deviancy, Connell argues how men may be robbed of masculinity altogether, existing at risk of a threat of rejection. Once again, the dynamic of reward and punishment that Gramsci had outlined in his original conceptualisation is realised in Connell's arguments. Where men receive a patriarchal dividend for their embodiment of hegemonic masculine behaviours, they are likewise under threat of rejection and isolation upon failing to conform.

The balance between dominance and coercion is directly connected to Gramsci's original concept of hegemony, and Connell's argument expands on Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony to provide a framework for understanding men's behaviour and experiences as interlinked through a combination of social, cultural, and psychological processes which perpetuates gender inequality. Connell also highlights how there is an intrinsic process of gender devaluation where men abuse the relationship between dominant and subordinate masculine behaviours as a means of weaponising such a power imbalance. It is in this way that Connell's masculinities approach works best when understood that power and gender do in fact overlap, ultimately acknowledging that gender is also power. Collectively, Connell argues men's outward perception as patriarchs, addressing a concern that only as individuals can they support women, since their common, collective masculinity and the oppression of women are inherently linked. To summarise, Connell's contributions are most valuable when the open, societal perspective and the focus on the framework for the hegemonic model is present. On that basis, their work on *Masculinities* and later

reconceptualisations stands as a formative foundation from which contemporary masculinities studies may evolve, and from which my research has been formulated.

It is important to acknowledge that Connell's original formulation of hegemonic masculinity has been developed and expanded through multiple revisions, including by J.W. Messerschmidt, who worked with Connell in an article aptly titled *Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept* (2005). This reconceptualisation proceeded to investigate the term with a more in-depth post-colonialist lens, promoting the value of future research into the impact of hegemonic masculinity on race, class, and international case studies. Mimi Schippers also expands on Connell's concept in her article *Recovering the Feminine Other: Masculinity, Femininity, and Gender Hegemony* (2007). Schippers similarly expands on post-colonial sentiments but instead focuses primarily on the impact of hegemonic masculinity on a complicit and subordinate femininity, arguing that hegemony is intrinsically tied to the relationship between masculinity and femininity. Schippers provides a rationale for investigating the behaviours of hegemonic masculinities and femininities (2007: 100) which will inform my own analysis of these concepts in Pinter's plays. Through the introduction of the term 'pariah femininities', Schippers argues how women's embodiment of masculine behaviours not only positions them as subordinate but in the very act of performing the masculine, a new subsect of subordinate femininities is formed. Rather than affording women the approval associated with hegemonic men, pariah femininities indicate the extent to which such hegemonic structures necessitate dominance over women. In the chapter focused on the case study of Pinter's *The Homecoming* in this thesis, pariah femininities become fundamental to understanding Ruth's transition throughout the play, whose embodiment of hegemonic masculinity is the driving force of the narrative. These expanded concepts strengthen the significance of Connell's work in relation to understanding hegemonic masculinities and thereby remain invaluable to my research.

My research concentrates on the formation of hegemonic masculinity, which has been more recently expanded beyond Connell and Messerschmidt's initial conceptualisation (Duncanson 2015: Jewkes & Morrell 2018; Messerschmidt 2018) but behaviours that are outlined in these constructions of hegemonic masculinity are also explored in my research. There have been minor focuses on violence (McCann et al. 2010; Messerschmidt 2017; Gottzen 2019), ageism (Thompson & Langendoefer 2016; Apesoa-Varano 2018; Devine et al. 2019) and homophobia (De Boise 2015; Rivera 2018) which are discussed in more detail throughout the later chapters, when relevant. Only one instance can be found in existing scholarship on Pinter that relates to hegemony, in the article titled

'Hegemony and resistance in Harold Pinter's *Mountain Language*' (Behera, 2012) The critical essay discusses very briefly the ways in which political oppression determines a hegemony, but there is no consideration by Behera of any ways in which that is gendered. As such, there is no existing scholarship that directly refers to gender hegemony or hegemonic masculinity. The relationship between masculinity and femininity is likewise crucial to understanding hegemony in Pinter's plays, therefore considerations regarding feminine power and femininity will also form crucial arguments throughout my research and established criticism about the role of women in the gender hierarchy have contributed to those arguments (Conlin 2017; Barton & Huebner 2020)

Although Pinter's use of language has become a keen area of scholarship surrounding not only his plays but also his prose, poetry and screenplays, there has been relatively limited consideration of the relationship between identity and the specific facets of his writing style. My research is a continuation of the arguments that are presented in this arena (Silverstein 2011; Vargas 2012; Uchman 2017; Gale 2003) though more specific considerations have been made regarding sociological perspectives on the linguistic theory of Brown & Levinson (Behnam et al. 2014; Tutas & Azak 2014; Mostoufi 2014) which is connected to wider research in the field of linguistics. It is only when engaging with the scholarship surrounding masculinity and gender more widely that I encountered the intersection of gender and sociolinguistics. Although the application of quantitative studies within sociolinguistics would initially appear conceptually oppositional from the more qualitative research that I engage with, it quickly became clear that exploring the relationship between gender, language and Pinter's plays would provide provocative new material to engage with. It is through these lenses that my research provides an original approach to Pinter's use of language and his depiction of hegemonic masculinity, highlighting the specific ways in which a power structure is established through repeated threats to identity.

The arguments that will be present in my research are also a continuation of discussions presented in the field of sociolinguistics as separate from Pinter studies. Scholarship surrounding identity threat has been crucial to the development of my research (Branscombe et al. 1999; Schmitt & Branscombe 2001; Hunt 2014; Glick et al. 2018) in particular, considerations of prototypicality and distinctiveness threat (Ellemers et al. 1999; Jetten 1997; Petriglieri 2011). The discourse on power is fundamental to the area of social identity threat and as such, I rely on such terminology to highlight the connection between such linguistic tactics of threat in relation to gender. Anne Maass, for instance, focuses on the application of social identity threat in relation to sexual harassment, and as such, the

relationship between hierarchies of power and sexual violence and abuse is closely linked to the use of such language of dominance (Maass 2003). However, there has been much more focused attention on the sociological study of language and masculinity studies which has also been useful to the arguments in my own research. A wider study of language and masculinities disassociated with social identity threat has also been impactful on my research, in that it offers a qualitative approach to studying masculinity, which has been useful in grounding my own research within a similar qualitative, subjective approach (Milani 2011; Benwell & Ehrlich 2014; Milani 2015; Kiesling 2018).

In 'Playing to Win: Male–Male Sex-Based Harassment and the Masculinity Contest', Natalya Alonso provides a useful insight into lived examples of dealing with hegemonic masculinity through her studies on male-male sex-based harassment (or MM-SBH) in workplace environments. Through her research, she quantifies how men respond to threatened masculinities, introducing two concepts exemplifying what forms those threats take; prototypicality threats and distinctiveness threats, expanding on the research surrounding identity threats such as Maass et al. (2003) and Branscombe et al. (1999). Alonso establishes her research as the first to consider the association between such identity threats and hegemonic masculinity, beginning by establishing the foundation of theory from which she has formed her hypotheses, considering how and why these threats take place and framing her arguments within the work of Connell and Messerschmidt (2005). Alonso provides and argues a concept surrounding identity threat that cements her argument that MM-SBH is driven by a desire to reassert threatened masculinity. By understanding the in-group dynamics and normative behaviours associated with masculinity within those groups, it would be possible to understand the impact hegemonic masculinity has on male-male relationships. This article is crucial in understanding the value of my own research, as Alonso's arguments are a clear indication of the impact such linguistic tactics have on the relationships between men, but also in the formation of a hegemonic masculinity. By approaching Pinter's work to highlight his use of prototypicality threats, we can understand specific moments of shifting power dynamics and the fluidity of both the character's gendered performance but also the fluidity of the multiple hegemonies in his plays.

For Alonso, the concept of prototypicality threats is used to rationalise the discourse of power between men, and I develop this concept in this thesis to likewise locate and rationalise the ways Pinter's characters undermine and threaten one another. Referring to earlier definitions of hegemony, men's performance of hegemonic behaviours is fundamental

to their maintenance of power. A prototypicality threat is an example of how a character may question or challenge another's performance of those hegemonic behaviours. Alonso's work is focused on the ways in which men use these tactics to maintain power, but in each chapter, I provide examples of the ways in which both men and women in Pinter's plays use such threats to reinforce hegemonic masculinity. Like with Connell and Schipper's arguments surrounding femininities, it is also important to understand how such linguistic tactics affect and are utilised by women in each play. Alonso's framework is not limited in its application to men alone, and my work explores how women adopt prototypicality threats to undermine masculine domination and instead present alternative constructions of masculinity and femininity. As such, the concepts of prototypicality and prototypicality threats are fundamental to my research within this thesis and often serve to bridge the analysis of the text to a clear construction of hegemony in each play. By drawing on specific moments within each case study that suggest a character's desire for power, I argue how that affects their position within the gender hierarchy. The relationships between men are crucial when attempting to understand the formation of a hegemonic masculinity, and Alonso's work offers a method to quantify and measure such interactions and the use of prototypicality threats. However, it is through the understanding of the significance of femininity in reinforcing hegemonic masculinity that my research also allows for new and original interpretations of Pinter's plays and his depiction of masculine power and resistant femininity.

Research Context

Throughout the research process, I engaged with the wider scholarship surrounding Pinter and gender, most notably the writing of Mark Taylor-Batty, Penelope Prentice, as well as Andrew Wyllie and Catherine Rees, all of whom wrote extensively on both Pinter's approach to gender in his plays, as well as the ideas of gender and power in specific case studies. In Mark Taylor-Batty's *The Theatre of Harold Pinter* (2014), there is an extensive exploration of several interpretations of both women and men in Pinter's work. In the chapter, 'The Company of Men and the Place of Women', Taylor-Batty notes how the relationships that are formed between his characters indicate criticism of the gender structures in various social contexts, and how the shifting representation of women provides in-text conflict on existing gender constructions. Discussing several crucial aspects of the gender relations presented in Pinter's work, Taylor-Batty provides an in-depth understanding that follows Pinter's early career chronologically, all the while establishing arguments that utilise the interpretations of texts throughout Pinter's career. Taylor-Batty charts how Pinter's

characters use sexuality as a weapon and in doing so allows his characters to manipulate and control the identities of those who deny their desires or are incapable of acknowledging them. In this book, Taylor-Batty provides a thorough, clear, and insightful discussion of the political, social, and biographical elements that influenced and informed Pinter's writing. Taylor-Batty does identify the relationship between gender and power in Pinter's plays, including infrequent references to gender inequality and subjugation, but does not refer directly to the concept of hegemonic masculinity. As such, my work expands on Taylor-Batty's writing, offering a more in-depth analysis of gender through the lens of hegemony. Taylor-Batty's discussion on the state of gender relations in Pinter's work became an essential piece of writing that not only furthered my understanding of gender and power but became a key text that I have used as a foundation for the original arguments presented throughout this thesis.

In Penelope Prentice's book *The Pinter Ethic: The Erotic Aesthetic* (2000), Prentice ties Pinter's political ethic to what she calls the 'erotic aesthetic', as per the title. Prentice uses such a comparison between the political and the erotic to imply how Pinter changes his depiction of men and women throughout his playwriting career. Although neither Taylor-Batty nor Prentice refer directly to hegemonic masculinity, their arguments consistently rely on understandings of the relationship between gender and power in their case studies and as such, mark the significance of the connection between hegemony and Pinter scholarship. Prentice provides some critical reading on each major work by Pinter, and although her focus is inconsistent across his plays, she offers astute observations later in the work regarding the preservation of identity, complicity, and the reinforcement of systems of power. Prentice refers infrequently to notions of power and dominance, however, there is a clear connection in her arguments that suggests the relationship between men, and between men and women is dependent on the shared understanding of dominance. Ideologically, Prentice appears to sympathise with the struggle of Pinter's characters in what she calls "the terrible paradox" that is at the heart of Pinter's writing, that it "dramatizes how the very impulse to survive, when unchecked and driven by a quest for dominance that equates identity with position, maybe the very impulse which may destroy all" (Prentice, 2000: 8). It is this sympathy that I myself align with, that such status is temporarily empowering, and yet such a system of dominance only necessitates its own survival, and as such, becomes a fundamental perspective through which to analyse and understand hegemony in Pinter's plays. Prentice continues with this notion of the erotic to all plays across every key moment of the dramatist's career, often referring to the ideas of dominance and survival. In this way,

Prentice's work offers a valuable consideration of all case studies that I engage with in this thesis, and where other scholars neglect certain texts, Prentice's in-depth analysis provides a foundation with which I expand in this thesis. Again, however, Prentice's work appears to refer to essential terminology associated with hegemony and yet fails to use the term directly. As such, much like with Taylor-Batty's writing, my research focuses specifically on hegemony, progressing scholarship in the field towards an arguably inevitable direction.

Unlike Taylor-Batty and Prentice, where their focus lends more to the individual interpretations of each text and their thematic similarities, Andrew Wyllie and Catherine Rees's book *The Plays of Harold Pinter* (2017) focuses on past scholarship surrounding Pinter's plays and gender studies. Their work covers various sub-themes, such as Pinter's women, masculinity on stage, and heteropower. Much like his earlier book *Sex on Stage: Gender and Sexuality in Post-War British Theatre* (2009), Wyllie dedicates a significant section of the book to the depiction of masculinity and men in Pinter's work. It is here that Wyllie presents arguments surrounding how insecurity, fragility, and desperation for power become more closely linked to Pinter's men. He argues that the relationship between power and masculinity is fundamental to understanding the relationships between the characters in Pinter's plays, not just between men, but between men and women. In fact, he argues that the 'crisis' of masculinity should be considered in relation to a parallel crisis of femininity which becomes exacerbated by existing within male-structured institutions (Wyllie, 2017: 95-6). Although such arguments surrounding gender and power are at the forefront of Wyllie's arguments, there is a continued omission of hegemony as a term, and this is largely concerning as a repeated element of Pinter scholarship. Such pivotal research in relating Pinter's work to ideas around gender and power fails to consider the significance of hegemony, and later in this introduction, I comment on my own contribution to the field in addressing this omission. Although Wyllie's approach to understanding the unequal gender relations in Pinter's plays is sympathetic to feminine oppression, and his readings of the plays reinforce that lens, he also remarks how Pinter's depiction of gendered power positions him as similarly sympathetic. In one chapter, 'Pinter, Gender and Sexuality' Wyllie begins by stating that Pinter has overall been a positive force within the changing perspectives surrounding gender politics, whilst referring specifically to the shift in attitudes in the post-war era. Pinter's approach to gender, specifically the depiction of misogyny and abuse of women in his plays has often come under scrutiny within scholarship of his work, so Wyllie's observation is provocative in how it presents Pinter's writing as not exploitative, but rather tentatively feminist.

It is important to recognise the polarising positioning of Pinter's work and life and his approach to gender in his plays. Graham Saunder's recent book, *Harold Pinter* (2023), charts how Pinter shifts from a dependency on the overt sexualisation of women in his early plays to the relative empowerment of women seen in his later work. In the book, Saunders addresses Pinter's fixation with an iconography of sexualisation bordering on the exploitative and associates such observations with examples from Pinter's own life, in particular his relationship with Vivien Merchant both on and off the stage (2023: 57). A further strength of Saunders' book is its engagement with material relating to historical productions of *The Birthday Party* and *The Homecoming*. In approaching these productions, Saunders offers brief but insightful observations about the historical attitudes towards gender and sexuality, and although Saunders seems reluctant to offer a position on these findings, such observations do provoke questions on the legitimacy of Pinter's depiction of feminine empowerment that Wyllie argues is inherently feminist. This positioning of Pinter's writing is crucial to define, for assuming that Pinter's plays remain sympathetic to gender equality and the power structures that reinforce female and homosexual subjugation, Pinter's own life exposes a certain hypocrisy. I believe Pinter's work still serves as a revelatory depiction of violent, desperate, and insecure masculinities as well as rebellious and resistant femininities and as such, I chose to use Pinter's work as a lens through which we can criticise the inequality legitimised by hegemony, rather than relying on Pinter's transparency of his own motivations, progressive or otherwise. In the interest of remaining true to the ideological standpoint of my research in how it remains critical of gender inequality, throughout this thesis, I occasionally acknowledge the tension between Pinter's real life and the drama he writes. Having only been inferred by Saunders, I believe there is reason enough not to applaud Pinter's position as inherently feminist, or largely sympathetic to feminine empowerment. This is especially important due to recent discourse that resulted from the #MeToo movement, that such male figures should be more widely scrutinised in their contribution to depicting masculine power and the oppression of women. Therefore, when relevant, I highlight instances of Pinter's hypocrisy, recognising the problematic relationship between his real life and his drama, ultimately to better understand how such depictions of gender and power are presented in his work.

Pinter's career spanned several decades, and critical interpretations of his work have been prevalent for a similarly long time, with research continuing after his death in 2008. Much like the texts expanded on previously, more work has been done to analyse Pinter's presentation of masculinity, femininity and gender more widely (Burkman 1971; Hall

2014; Chattopadhyay 2019; Saunders 2023). Aside from the key texts that have been discussed above, the following texts have also informed my research and readings of each case study in this thesis. Historical reflections on his life and career, including biographical information, have been a key consideration (Taylor-Batty 2005; Billington 2007; Devine 2012; Chiasson 2017) though few elements of Pinter's life will be included in my research. Although such writing is significant in revealing the motivations and influences of Pinter's work, it does little to provide answers for the research questions of this thesis, which aims to analyse Pinter's dramatic output and the reception of his writing rather than exploring the process and reasons for its creation. As mentioned previously, some instances where Pinter's life reveals a concerning implication of hypocrisy in his approach to masculine domination and feminine empowerment are included in my arguments. However, my aim for this thesis is to expand upon existing scholarship by exploring the contemporary impact of his writing, as I feel that has more application to developing the field than returning to a more biographical perspective.

There are several examples of critical scholarship surrounding the analysis of Pinter's plays that have also informed the research that I will be presenting, offering focused analyses of particular plays which are not directly concerned with gender and power. Since Pinter's early career, scholars have analysed his plays, establishing central arguments regarding the depiction of menace, power, and silence. (Dukore 1962; Cohn 1962) Understandably, since these early examples, Pinter's career and oeuvre has regularly been subject to scholarly studies, expanding and diverging as Pinter's own work did the same, engaging with his screenplays (Gale 2003), detailed analysis of particular case studies (Brewer 2009), or how his work relates to wider genres and themes (Begley 2005; Diamond 1985; Batty 2001). There have been notable edited volumes dedicated to the study of Pinter's life and work in the 21st Century, which have provided insightful and provocative observations in further case studies of Pinter's plays, including Lois Gordon's edited volume at the turn of the century titled *Pinter at 70: A Casebook* (2001), and *The Cambridge Companion to Harold Pinter* (2009), edited by Peter Raby, and published not long after Pinter's death. Most recently, Basil Chiasson and Catriona Fallow published an edited volume titled *Harold Pinter: Stages, Networks, Collaborations* (2021), which not only included a collection of chapters that contained analysis of Pinter's work, but also included interviews with notable collaborators and creatives behind the production of his plays such as Jamie Lloyd and Soutra Gilmour. These interviews have been valuable in providing context for the creative decisions behind several of the productions discussed in this thesis.

Together, these case studies provide refreshing ideas and interpretations of specific exchanges and characters which I then relate to the concepts and ideas around gender and hegemony (Davituliani 2019; Wells 1983; Cahn 2011). It is important to focus briefly on the work of Victor L. Cahn, whose book titled *Gender and Power in the Plays of Harold Pinter* (2011) would immediately suggest tremendous value to the arguments presented in this thesis. However, although Cahn's arguments do introduce ideas that would later be developed and expanded by Taylor-Batty, Prentice and Wyllie, Cahn's position on ideas of misogyny and feminine oppression is both distant and unsympathetic. His arguments, though relevant to the content of this thesis, suffer from an archaic, arguably traditional view of masculine dominance, and as such become ideologically oppositional to my own. I refer to Cahn's work briefly in this thesis, often referencing contrasting interpretations of Pinter's work, but ultimately, I aim to distance my own work from his due to such seemingly antithetical positions.

Where Cahn's arguments present a conflicting, traditional view of masculinity in Pinter's plays, Elizabeth Sakellaridou offers a criticism of Pinter's depiction of male-female relationships twenty years previous in her monograph titled *Pinter's Female Portraits* (1988). Sakellaridou argues that Pinter's depiction of men reflects a broader commentary on their incompatibility in the modern world, in contrast with the increasingly sympathetic and refined presentation of women throughout Pinter's body of work. She argues that while women pursue self-fulfilment independently, men retreat into male bonds, underscoring the difficulty of achieving any form of gender equality. This largely sympathetic reading of men's struggles and eventual isolation has strong links to the arguments presented in this thesis, and Sakellaridou was fundamental to the increased feminist readings of Pinter's plays. Overall, Sakellaridou illustrates Pinter's complex and evolving portrayal of women, as he shifts from stereotypical representations signifying an overt, masculine perspective to more nuanced, independent, androgynous female characters. However, despite these developments, Sakellaridou observes that male hostility and unequal gender relations remain central themes in Pinter's work.

Since Sakellaridou, discourse surrounding Pinter's depiction of male-female relationships also features more overt criticism. In 'Pinter's sexual politics' (2009), Drew Milne's contribution to *The Cambridge Companion to Harold Pinter*, he argues how Pinter's plays critique the abuse of power, especially through language, but that they reinforce the same misogynist structures they depict, where the portrayal of male dominance often overshadows a deeper political critique. Milne recalls Wittgenstein in his analysis of how

language games are deeply intertwined with the power dynamics of each play. Pinter's plays challenge the idea of words having a context-free truth, instead revealing how language is often used to assert and abuse power, particularly in male-female relationships. However, Milne argues that misogyny is portrayed as a structural element within these power dynamics, and this is reflected in the persistent themes of rape, prostitution, and female submission. He provides examples of how women in Pinter's plays are often depicted as objects of abuse, fear, and desire, and their agency is limited by the misogynist fantasies within which they are forced to perform. Unlike Sakellaridou, Milne's arguments suggest how such a reading complicates any interpretation of his female characters as symbols of self-determination. Milne's analysis conveys how Pinter's plays expose the violence of power and authoritarian desire but fail to offer a fully articulated political critique, where the persistent misogyny in Pinter's work highlights hypocrisies in his critique of power. Both scholars criticise Pinter's depiction of gender inequality and the sympathetic portrayals of men and women, but where Sakellaridou finds an increasingly progressive depiction of womanhood, Milne's criticism suggests that Pinter's reliance on misogynistic language undermines his attempts to present such misogyny as deplorable. Throughout this thesis, I consider both perspectives, observing how Pinter navigates a sympathy towards misogyny and feminine empowerment in each case study.

As with the arguments presented by Milne, the use of language in Pinter's work has also been a widely discussed topic within the field and my research is a continuation of the arguments that are presented in this arena (Silverstein 2011; Vargas 2012; Uchman 2017) though more specific considerations have been made regarding sociological perspectives on the linguistic theory of Brown & Levinson (Behnam et al. 2014; Tutas & Azak 2014; Mostoufi 2014) which are connected to wider research in the field of linguistics. Examples of discourse that brings together ideas surrounding Pinter's use of language and gender can be found in the *Harold Pinter Review*, a publication dedicated towards the study of Pinter's life, work, and influences. In particular, those notable for approaching his work through a feminist perspective observe the connection between gender and language (Roof 2019; Saunders 2019). Recent scholarship in the *Pinter Review* has explored the salience of violence and victimisation in Pinter's work (Watt 2021; Roberts 2023), thereby indicating the extent to which my research is situated amongst the work of other scholars of Pinter's work as I explore similar ideas in the following chapters. Early on in my research, I myself produced an article which began as the foundation for one of my chapters that is included in this thesis, which was subsequently published in the *Harold Pinter Review*. The article,

titled '"A Damn Good Game": Hegemonic masculinity in Harold Pinter's *Betrayal*' (Burbridge, 2022), is concerned with the focused attempts to isolate instances of prototypicality threats in Pinter's play *Betrayal*, and how that shapes the hegemony in the play. The arguments in that article stand as the first example of scholarship that combines the various concepts that remain fundamental to my research, including hegemony and Pinter, as well as sociolinguistics, and my work since aims to expand on that solid foundation. Although the article does offer an in-depth analysis of the text, it does little to suggest how the reception of the production in 2019 is impacted by the presentation of hegemony. As such, it serves as a useful, but limited retrospective on my early research in this area.

To continue the discussion on research contexts, I also must refer to the literature and discourse on Pinter's work in performance. Although the beginning of my research for this thesis was concerned solely with the analysis of the texts, I believe that Pinter's work is at its most provocative in its performance, both for the performer and the spectator. To accentuate the relevance to contemporary discourse on gender in theatre studies, I found the most provocative arguments were attuned to exploring how the relationships between men could be realised on stage and the ways in which new interpretations of his work could manifest from witnessing those relationships change. Referring to Wittgenstein's concept of a 'language-game', and even Connell's arguments surrounding the fluidity of masculinities, performativity is fundamental to my understanding of gender, language, and theatrical performance. In this way, performance offers something new, a culmination of various learned behaviours, experiences, and gestures to embody a character that is in constant reaction to the events and environment around them.

It is because of this fascination with the richness of performance that my research explores the ways in which Pinter's work has been interpreted in contemporary productions. The 'Pinter at the Pinter' (PatP) season in 2018/19 was a rare opportunity to see both established and less popular plays connected through either a shared cast or director in a series of performances dedicated to showing the range of Pinter's theatrical work. Led by Jamie Lloyd under the Jamie Lloyd Company at the Harold Pinter Theatre, the season began as a way to commemorate a decade since Pinter's death, but continued over the course of several months, starting with *Pinter One* in September 2018 and ending with *Betrayal* in June 2019. Productions often overlapped, with nineteen plays and several sketches, poetry and prose being performed, with recurring and singular directing credits throughout the season. Of the seven case studies covered in this thesis, Jamie Lloyd had directed five, and choosing to focus almost exclusively on Lloyd's work allows for an in-depth criticism of his

recurring approaches and styles as representative of a popular, contemporary interpretation of Pinter's work. It also offers an opportunity to analyse Lloyd's approach to the display of masculine power and their reception in terms of hegemonic masculinities with contemporary critics. As artistic director for the PatP season, Lloyd's contribution to the ways in which Pinter's work has been presented in the last decade is significant. His success in popularising classic drama such as Rodstand, Chekhov and Pinter is indicative of a desire to bring out an intimate, emotionally driven performance which largely appeals to contemporary audiences.

My intention in this thesis is to provide a wider scope for the styles and approaches of other directors, including Patrick Marber who directed the production of *The Room* in the PatP season, and Ian Rickson who directed a production of *The Birthday Party* at the Harold Pinter Theatre only a few months earlier in 2018. It is important to note that women directors such as Lyndsey Turner and Lia Williams also had directing credits in the PatP season, and there is scope to consider the ways in which gender is presented by women's voices in theatre. However, my research considers the impact of male voices in the contemporary presentation of Pinter's work, and I remain critical of the ways in which male directors reinforce or challenge Pinter's depiction of hegemonic masculinity through their productions. As such, the work of these male directors is influential in presenting popular productions of Pinter's work, and throughout the later chapters, the analysis of the performance case studies provides an opportunity to see the ways in which gender hegemony in Pinter's plays is presented by men in power. It is also important to address how there is currently limited scholarship surrounding the analysis of the PatP season, as well as the other productions featured within this thesis. The singular example of such scholarship is in Catriona Fallow's article titled '"These People in This House": Intermedial Approaches to Decentring the Domestic in Harold Pinter's *A Slight Ache* and *The Homecoming*' (2022), in which Fallow explores the contrasting aesthetic and intermedial presentation of each play. There currently exists no scholarship that refers directly to the productions discussed within this thesis, offering an opportunity to provide new interpretations of such work.

In contrast, my research will expand on existing scholarship regarding the interpretation and analysis of historical productions of Pinter's plays. Across the thesis, I will be engaging with the following early London productions: the premiere of *The Dumb Waiter*, which was presented as a double-bill with *The Room* at the Royal Court Theatre in 1960; the premiere production of *The Birthday Party* in 1958 at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith; the premiere of *The Homecoming* in 1965 at the Aldwych Theatre; the premiere of *Betrayal*

in 1978 at the National's Lyttelton Theatre; as well as the premiere productions of *Party Time* and *Celebration* which were produced at the Almeida Theatre, in 1991 and 2000 respectively. My intention in engaging with these productions is to explore the ways in which critics of his work have responded to – or ignored – the various themes and behaviours depicted in Pinter's plays, including gender, sexuality, space, oppression, and violence. In an effort to explore the ways in which key case studies have received a more varied presentation through their production history and to provide more nuanced connections between the original and more recent productions, I will also be engaging with the following two London productions both produced by the National Theatre at the Lyttleton: the 1994 production of *The Birthday Party*, directed by Sam Mendes; and the 1997 production of *The Homecoming*, directed by Roger Michell. The analysis of these two productions in their respective chapters allows for a more thorough understanding of the varied aesthetic and thematic interpretations that Pinter's work allows for, in particular how they are situated within 1990s, where discourse surrounding gender and women's empowerment was becoming more overt in the wake of third-wave feminism. Unlike the contemporary productions where I was present for the performances, and as such, able to recall many aspects of the production from my lived experience, it is not the case for the historical productions of the plays discussed in this thesis. I instead rely on archival material and secondary sources such as the British Library Newspaper Archive and *Theatre Record* to locate records of the critical reception of these productions, which ultimately serve to offer a wider context for understanding how the reception of Pinter's plays engages with hegemonic masculinity and gender inequality. My research therefore expands on decades of scholarship in the field of Pinter studies that discusses such notable productions of Pinter's work, such as Michael Billington, Ann C. Hall, Graham Saunders, Katherine Burkman, Ronald Knowles, and many others.

The final aspect of the research context for the performance analysis within the thesis is related to the concept of spectatorship. Often with Pinter's work, the production of meaning has been a tentatively hostile one, with Pinter himself rarely divulging any insight into his characters beyond what is seen on the page. This distance between the playwright and the text allowed for a frightening freedom for performers and for audiences. As a result, there is an empowerment gifted to the individual interpretation of the spectator, where the relationship between stage action and the spectator's experience of that action becomes a battleground in the search for absolute truth. Scholarship surrounding spectatorship has informed the arguments that will be presented in my research (Ginters 2010; Bleeker &

Germano 2014; Babbage 2016; Fischer-Lichte 2016) This scholarship argues the value of the spectator in the production of meaning in dramatic work, arguably even more so than the performers and creative team, where meaning is produced through the spectator's experience of the event. Having been in the audience for each production used as case studies in this thesis, I will instead rely on my own individual interpretation of the action on stage, not because I see my views as representative of every spectator, but as a pivotal part of the production of meaning and ultimately the performance event itself.

In an effort to consider the impact of Pinter's work in performance beyond my own individual interpretation, my analysis of the case studies will also refer to critical reviews of each production. As noted previously, the intention of introducing the performance analysis is to understand the ways in which Pinter's work is received by contemporary audiences, and referring to critical reviews offers a consistent record of a range of perspectives from other spectators. As such, in each chapter I explore the ways in which gender is presented through the performance, referring to examples within each production and how performers and directors interpret Pinter's text to realise hegemony on stage. Alongside this, I refer to my own interpretation of the action on stage and the emotional impact of specific moments that include violence, misogyny, and abuse. Finally, to explore the reception of these productions, I introduce critical reviews to provide further insight into the ways in which gender is perceived by contemporary audiences.

Original Contribution to Knowledge

Understanding the contexts in which my research is situated, begins to indicate how this thesis aims to provide new knowledge that develops several fields of research. The first instance is the development of theatre studies, specifically the study of Harold Pinter's plays and performances. As with the article that I have published for the *Harold Pinter Review*, my research exists as the first example of scholarship that applies the concepts of gender hegemony and prototypicality to the analysis of Pinter's work. The connection between gender and power and Pinter's plays is widely acknowledged, as evidenced by the research contexts noted above, and yet there is no existing scholarship that directly discusses the notion of hegemony. I feel this is an opportunity to fill a void within Pinter scholarship and make that connection explicit, expanding on the work on gender by Taylor-Batty, Wyllie and Prentice to directly utilise the concept of hegemonic masculinity when discussing gender and power.

The relationship between hegemonic masculinity and prototypicality has been much more widely discussed, with scholarship analysing the use of prototypicality threats as a

means to quantify and measure hierarchies between men, and between men and women. It is limited however in its existing application to the work of Pinter, with the only articles that refer to social identity threats (though not including prototypicality) being within the context of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (Behnam et al. 2014) This secondary omission within Pinter scholarship is again another opportunity to explore the ways in which language, power and gender can provide new observations about his plays. As such, this thesis will be the first example of scholarship that intersects the three discourses: Pinter studies, gender studies and sociolinguistics. Beyond this, the thesis also provides new perspectives that relate to the reception of contemporary productions of Pinter's work. Although modern productions are often subject to significant marketing and reception, there are still limited examples of critical scholarship regarding more recent productions outside of reviews. This then offers scope for setting a precedent in critiquing the ways in which contemporary productions of Pinter's work present hegemony and gender inequality. Through such an analysis, I aim to provide a new perspective on contemporary Pinter productions, and the depiction of masculinity and femininity on stage.

Chapter by Chapter Outline

This thesis is structured chronologically in relation to the date of the first production to offer a clear retrospective on how Pinter's approaches to hegemony changed over the course of his career. Chapter One focuses on *The Room* (1957) and *The Dumb Waiter* (1960), Chapter Two explores *The Birthday Party* (1958), Chapter Three on *The Homecoming* (1965), Chapter Four on *Betrayal* (1978) and the final chapter is on *Party Time* (1990) and *Celebration* (2000). I feel I must acknowledge the inclusion of chapters that consider two case studies, both with *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter*, and with *Party Time* and *Celebration*. These two chapters consider the interpretation of two plays as thematically linked, such as *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter* for their depiction of anxiety, fear, and violence, and with *Party Time* and *Celebration*, ideas of social inequality, elitism, and control.

In the first chapter, I open with a discussion on the connections between *The Dumb Waiter* (1960) and *The Room* (1957). The two plays, although not part of a double bill, were both produced as part of the 'Pinter at the Pinter' season, with Jamie Lloyd and Patrick Marber directing respectively. Starting with two of Pinter's earliest plays, the chapter offers a perspective on how Pinter establishes themes and behaviours that not only are representative of an historical masculinity but are also tied to the period setting of the 1960s, complemented by Soutra Gilmour's set design. Placing the action in a period setting serves to distance us from the abusive, misogynistic masculinity presented in the plays but also

provides a sharp criticism of the contemporary power structures that reinforce a gender and power imbalance. The intimacy and isolation symptomatic of post-war Britain at the time the plays were produced also suggest the significance of interior spaces and the potential threat of external invasion, which become pivotal themes to other of Pinter's earliest works. The plays offer depictions of feminine oppression, racial discrimination as well as social hypocrisy and ignorance. In this chapter, I explore how fear of the external provides a precedent for a violent and paranoid masculinity and femininity that represents the wider social attitudes that existed as the fallout of the Second World War. The insecurities surrounding the consequent weakened masculinity indicated a shift in the portrayal of men in post-war British plays and Pinter's presentation of the abuse, violence and destruction of male bonds offers a historical depiction of a fragile masculinity.

In the second chapter, I discuss another one of Pinter's earliest works, *The Birthday Party* (1958). The play stands as pivotal to Pinter's presentation of masculinity, and much like his other earlier works, offers an insight into the foundation from which he continued the criticism of gender relations throughout his career. Pinter's writing continues to explore similar fears of external threat, invasion, and oppression but begins to focus on the ways in which characters manipulate information and fabricate memory to resist that oppression. Through the character of Stanley, Pinter presents a masculinity built upon insecurity, abuse, and fear which is reduced to nothing at the hands of an external agitator. Stanley's dissimilation offers an opportunity to explore how masculinity and identity can be both destroyed and rebuilt. In the production of the play directed by Ian Rickson in 2018 at the Harold Pinter Theatre, the conflicting portrayal of Stanley as both abuser and victim indicated how the character reinforces the violent, manipulative hegemonic masculinity that he ultimately falls prey to. Through the analysis of Meg and Lulu, this chapter introduces fundamental arguments regarding the depiction of feminine power within a hegemonic masculinity both through female adaptation and oppression. The chapter also includes discussions surrounding the masculine performances of both Goldberg and McCann and how they contribute to Pinter's ongoing criticism of conformity and violence, including male-female sexual violence.

The third chapter will continue the analysis of masculine domination through an exploration of *The Homecoming* (1965). The play exists as possibly Pinter's most overt demonstration of gender relations, particularly female resistance in male-dominated spaces. Many consider the character of Ruth to exemplify a dramatic shift in the approach to female oppression and rebellion not only in Pinter's career but in the wider realm of British

playwriting. This chapter offers a new perspective on not only Ruth's shift in power throughout the play but also the presentation of masculinity amongst the male members of the family. Pinter shifts from a larger social commentary on complicity and systems of power to instead focus on the intimacy and emotional toll of hegemony, including paternal relationships, the embodiment of the maternal, vulnerability and ageing, and the fabrication of memory. Ideas surrounding female subjugation/ownership are the most explicit and this informs the shift in power between the men and Ruth, suggesting how the power dynamics are continually impacted by the use of prototypicality threats. Ruth undermines the violent, manipulative, and oppressive behaviours that men embody in the play which is then indicative of Pinter's criticism of masculine domination. Although not a part of the Pinter at the Pinter season, Jamie Lloyd directed a production of the play in 2015 and it is this production that will provide an insight into the performance of the hegemony of the play. In the chapter, I analyse how the relationship between the spectator and Ruth is a sympathetic one, as representative of the contemporary attitudes towards women in male-dominated spaces. We rejoice in Ruth's latent empowerment and her transition to a position of power within the play, allowing us to recognise similar hegemonies that seek to undermine and oppress women.

In the fourth chapter, I return to the emotional intimacies and domestic settings of Pinter's work in the analysis of *Betrayal* (1978). The intention of the chapter is to highlight the specific ways in which a hegemony can be formed and shaped through a much more in-depth analysis of the characters' use of prototypicality threats. Using several exchanges throughout the play, the chapter will offer a perspective on the ways in which characters establish normative 'ideal' behaviours through such threats. With reference to male competition, the weaponisation of knowledge, and the fabrication of memory, several aspects of Pinter's previous writing are still prevalent in the play. Lloyd's production of the play at the end of the Pinter at the Pinter season focused on the emotional trauma and isolation of each character and I critique how this cultivated a problematic sympathy for the misogynistic, violent, and manipulative men. When considered against Emma – the sole woman seen in the play – and how she is objectified and abused by both men, she adapts and much like other Pinter women before her, rebels against her subordinate position within the hierarchy of the play. In establishing sympathy for Emma, the production fails to take a side, and I remain critical of Lloyd's direction and the ways in which it has contributed to contemporary discourse on the abuse of women and masculine power. The intimately personal and emotional approach to Lloyd's production however offered a provocative

depiction of the ways in which men and women must adapt to a fluid hegemony, without suppressing the trauma and loss felt by conforming to it.

In the final chapter of the thesis, I discuss *Party Time* (1991) and *Celebration* (2000), which explores the ways in which Pinter's approach to gender changed by the end of his career. As part of the 'Pinter at the Pinter' season, the two plays were produced and performed together, directed by Lloyd, and utilised the same cast for both plays. The significance of this decision to couple the two plays in this production suggests the similar ways in which they depict a certain social class. As with Pinter's much more explicit dedication to political activism in his later life, the plays criticise those in positions of power. The intention of this chapter is to explore the ways in which Pinter's writing develops ideas and themes prevalent throughout his work, whether that be female resistance, fabrication of memory, violence and misogyny, as well as the fear of the external threat. The parallels between the relationships of Terry/Dusty and Russell/Suki are used as examples to highlight the various linguistic tactics used by both men and women to assert control and expose masculine insecurity and female rebellion. Lloyd's production of the plays also introduces a new component of Pinter's depiction of power, through the casting of Abraham Popoola as a man of colour as Jimmy and the Waiter, the notion of 'otherness' and the imbalance of racial power becomes all the more relevant to the depiction of gendered power. Much like Pinter's earliest play, *The Room*, racial discrimination and violence become much more explicit indications of black masculinity as the two characters remain isolated and alienated from the rest of the characters. Together, the two plays suggest a much more pronounced depiction of a hegemonic masculinity associated with privilege, 'whiteness', and domination.

My fascination with language, masculinity and power is influenced by scholarship across several different disciplines ranging from theatre studies, philosophy, gender studies, sociolinguistics, and spectatorship. The intention of this thesis is to use the work of Harold Pinter to criticise systems of power that seek to undermine efforts to establish equality, fairness, and compassion. Pinter's work provides a seemingly endless opportunity to expose and criticise harmful attitudes towards masculinity. Men in his plays are driven to obtain a sense of comfort afforded to them by a hegemony that necessitates a cycle of temporary victory and inevitable failure. Both men and women are forced to adapt to a fluid, yet unwavering power structure that feeds on oppression and subjugation to sustain itself. Ultimately, this is the system that I feel compelled to acknowledge, criticise and challenge. This thesis is a means through which I can expose the ways in which men and women use

language to support hegemonic masculinity, but also how contemporary theatre can impact the ways in which audiences view systemic inequality.

The Room & The Dumb Waiter

In Pinter's early career, he provides a foundation of gender dynamics in his plays that become fundamental to the ways in which men and women are represented throughout his work. In his first play, *The Room* (1957), Pinter provided characters from whose desperate attempts for intimacy, control and power emerged a sharp reflection of the post-war fear of invasion, the manipulation of information, and the fluid power dynamics of male-female relationships. In another of Pinter's earliest plays, *The Dumb Waiter* (1960), he provides a solely male-male dynamic which offers a criticism of complicity to systemic power, conformity to the demands of authority, and the fear of an unseen external threat. It is my intention in this chapter to explore these dynamics by identifying the characters' use of prototypicality threats, and how they serve as examples of the ways in which the characters establish hegemonic masculinities. What is significant in the comparison between these two plays is not only in their context as plays written at the beginning of Pinter's long career, but also how each play depicts the fear of external threat, and in particular, the characters' use of physical space to compensate for their feelings of anxiety and paranoia. This is crucial to the presentation of each play in performance, as it is important to note that several of Pinter's earlier texts – such as the two discussed in this chapter – include detailed descriptions of physical stage direction, as well as the detailing of the environments in which the dramatic action would take place on stage. In the first section of this chapter, I will consider how the characters' use of space in the written text and in performance impacts the hegemonic masculinity of each play.

Over the course of Pinter's career, such detailed descriptions of the stage space would be all but discarded, allowing for interpretations of space that would become more intangible – if not abstract – in their depiction. What is distinct in *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter* is the need for characters to know, understand and challenge any possible threat to the safety and stability of their localised space. The two plays were both produced as part of the 'Pinter at the Pinter' season in 2019 by the Jamie Lloyd Company at the Harold Pinter Theatre. Although the two plays were not produced as part of a double bill and also were directed by Patrick Marber and Jamie Lloyd respectively, the two productions offered a similar commentary in relation to their presentation of space and paranoia. In this chapter, I will be considering the similarities and differences in the approaches to design for each

play, as well as how each director's interpretation impacted the ways in which the themes and dynamics were realised on stage. The chapter will also discuss an early production of the two plays when they were produced as a double-bill in 1960, an event that also marked the premiere of *The Dumb Waiter*. With *The Room* directed by James Roose Evans, and *The Dumb Waiter* directed by Pinter himself (and later Anthony Page), the production was first staged at the Hampstead Theatre Club, before subsequently transferred to the Royal Court Theatre. Much like with the responses to Marber and Lloyd's contemporary interpretation, I will be engaging with the critical reception of the two plays in this earlier production to offer insight into how space in Pinter's work has been interpreted, and its relationship to the characters' identity.

The relationship between space and power is explored through the two plays, and the characters that consistently rationalise the events that unfold around them are afforded power and authority. In comparison, those who present contradicting accounts of the external space or admit their lack of control of the space around them often appear powerless and fragile. This power dynamic between characters that vie for control of the space around them impacts the established gender dynamics of each play, where masculinity and femininity are dependent on the presentation of such control. As Andrew Wyllie states, "Verbal and visual evocations of exterior settings are deployed as a means of establishing a hierarchy in which outside knowledge and experience equate with tokens of power" (Wyllie, 2017: 69). It is these tokens of power that Wyllie describes that inform the gendered dynamics between the characters in both plays, and the evocation of space is a tool with which the characters can undermine, challenge, and usurp one another. As such, in this chapter, I aim to address the importance of space in the contest of gendered power in each play. It is important to recognise that such interpretations of space are more overt when depicted in performance, and as such, this chapter establishes a method of analysing the written and performance text, using semiotics in the first section of the chapter to outline the ways in which performers interact with and change the stage space to assert control. Furthermore, I will introduce arguments that feature throughout the chapter that rely on Ric Knowles' method of reading the material theatre to engage with the critical reception of Marber and Lloyd's productions, but also with the production in 1960.

As with the other plays discussed in later chapters, challenges to masculinity can often result in desperate displays of violence. In performance, the spectating of violence creates an uncomfortable relationship between audience and character where not only are the characters complicit in acts of violence, but calls attention to the inaction of the

audience, positioning them as similarly complicit. Mark Taylor-Batty argues that in the performance of these violent acts, the two plays present a "challenge to an audience not through narrative, plot or character, but through a sudden, immediate contact with unsettling action" (Taylor-Batty, 2014: 22). This relationship between action and inaction that Taylor-Batty highlights here is a thread that runs through both *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Room*. Whether it be Rose's fear of a possible external threat, or Bert and Gus's attempts to comply with orders from an unknown external authority, the characters are often conflicted in their responses to new and unsettling dangers. Not only are such threats key to the paranoia, anxiety, and fear that the characters feel throughout each play, but they culminate in violent climaxes, rejecting singular interpretations and inciting action from the spectator. In this chapter, I will investigate the extent to which the two productions interpret such violence and the impact this has on the audience's perception of the gender hegemony of each play.

Space, Invasion, and Dominance

In the opening moments of *The Room*, the contrast in how Rose and Bert use space is perhaps the most immediately noticeable difference between them. What is noticeable is Rose's interaction and movement throughout the space, who in her opening speech moves repeatedly between places, whether that be to serve Bert at the table, sitting in a rocking-chair, peering out of the window, or preparing food at the kitchenette. The image of the two characters in the opening is then immediately gendered, with even the initial interaction demonstrating a stereotypical male-female dynamic: one which establishes Rose, a woman serving, cooking, and providing for her husband, whilst Bert remains static, silent, and seemingly expectant of her service. In Rose's first speech, there is a clear dynamic being presented that reinforces a male-female dynamic which at worst displays feminine characteristics of servitude and compliance, or at best, a co-dependency that both characters are seemingly reluctant to change. Altogether, before Mr. Kidd arrives later in the scene, Rose moves a total of thirteen times to these various locations within the room, all while Bert remains silent and static in his position sat at the table. This imagery of feminine domesticity and servitude immediately invites interpretations of an assumed imbalance in the power dynamic between Rose and her husband, firmly suggesting that gendered power is fundamental to their survival within the space. This erratic physical action from Rose also suggests a burgeoning sense of unease or discomfort that she feels within the space. Her repeated movement demonstrates her attempt to compensate for this unsettling feeling by taking control of the space around her. Not only do Rose's movements indicate a reason to

be uneasy, which is supported by the contents of her speech, but also establish such discomfort and erratic behaviour as firmly feminine, contrasted with Bert's masculinity as controlled and unmoving.

These ideas of feminine discomfort and masculine control only support the earlier impression of their relationship as one reliant on feminine subservience and masculine dominance. This also establishes a theme that resonates throughout the play: the unknown, external threat. For critics of the 1960 Royal Court production, when the play was produced alongside *The Dumb Waiter*, there was a general sentiment of confusion and alienation from Pinter's so-called 'experimental' new work, however, even amongst this apparent alienation, there was already a recognition of the significance of the separation between internal and external space. In a review of the production for *The Scotsman*, one critic saw the connection as representative of the distinction between the character's internal and external identities, describing how they "sensed that the comings and goings of people in rooms, in both cases, was an allegory on the human relationship between inner and outer life." (*The Scotsman*, 1960). This distinction is crucial to understanding Rose's attitude towards the external space of the play, as her unease comes from her desire to present the safety and comfort of the room as both relational to – and yet oppositional to – the unseen space outside. This interpretation suggests Rose exists as a representation of our own fears of the unknown and implies a level of sympathy for her position. She is afraid of confronting that external self, and we begin to share that fear over the course of the play. Rose states in one of her opening lines, "Still, the room keeps warm. It's better than the basement, anyway." (Pinter, 2000: 79), reassuring herself about the comfort of the room, and the first mention of 'the basement' implies some unease or unknown reason for her enmity of the external space. She continues, "I don't know how they live down there. It's asking for trouble." (2000: 80) which not only continues to highlight her negative associations towards the basement itself but also towards anyone that would choose to reside within, even suggesting that doing so incites violence or danger towards them.

Slowly, it is becoming clearer how Rose's attitude towards the external space, and her assumption of the danger it provokes, may explain her dependence on the internal space and its security, comfort, and familiarity. Soutra Gilmour, set designer for Patrick Marber's production of the play in 2019 as part of the Pinter at the Pinter season, relied heavily on an aesthetic of mid-century banality. Though the stage space stayed in keeping with Pinter's initial description of the room, Gilmour presented a space which appeared almost barren in its warmth, comfort, and light. The eponymous room was a space which

would neither be described as homely nor inviting and yet, such a decision was fundamental in reframing Rose's desperation to remain there. Paul Taylor, in his review of the production for *The Independent*, noted how "Gilmour's excellent set, with its thin walls in battleship grey and lemon-striped unlined curtains, suggests the hard, joyless battle to maintain respectability" (Taylor, 2019). For Taylor, Gilmour's design was able to convey the extent to which Rose relies on the space to fight for that sense of approval. Even in the first moments, Marber's production accentuated Rose's desire for comfort in the space, and how she may manipulate it to outwardly present the respectability and validation she craves. For Rose, the space – no matter its condition – remains a refuge from some unknown danger, a space for her to control and to defend, and Gilmour's decrepit, dark design of the space only made her desperation for control ever more prominent.

Penelope Prentice, in her book titled *The Pinter Ethic: The Erotic Aesthetic* (2000), argues how Rose's desire for control of the space is not only tied to her vulnerable, submissive femininity but is also linked to the audience's sympathy for her inferior position:

> Without assigning blame, Pinter evokes in the audience a clear sympathy for Rose as a woman fighting, as it were, for her life: the hermetically sealed room allows her to act with seeming plausibility as if there are no alternatives to that room but also registers the complicity between Rose and Bert as he acts to fulfil her explicit desire: to ensure the safety and safekeeping of their lodgings.

(Prentice, 2000: 53)

Prentice's observations here about Pinter's ability to evoke sympathy from the audience through Rose's desperation are relevant to the contemporary attitudes towards female empowerment. The explicit domesticity of Rose's role, though largely traditional, establishes a level of sympathy for the restrictions and confinement she experiences as a woman in the play. But where Prentice's arguments offer a crucial insight is how she acknowledges the relational aspect of the dynamic between Rose and Bert, recognising that he is similarly responsible for ensuring their shared safety and security in their space. I argue this shared responsibility makes their isolation from one another largely tragic, as Rose's desire for comfort and reassurance is neither acknowledged nor provided by her husband who maintains his dominant position unwaveringly. This relationship strengthens our sympathy for Jane Horrocks's Rose in the Marber production, as Dominic Cavendish summarises in his review for *The Telegraph*. He notes how Rose's speech serves "as much a means of staving off anxiety about what lies in the basement, and out there in the darkness, as it is

about securing her spouse's interest" (Cavendish, 2019). Cavendish's acknowledgement of the connection between Rose's fear of the external space is thereby linked to the admonishment by her husband, and the desperate desire to regain control and obtain his affection. Yet, this effect ultimately positions the audience as sympathetic as she remains representative of a traditional, subordinate femininity.

The anxiety surrounding the dangers of the outside space is presented as solely a feminine behaviour at this stage of the play, for Rose's apparent need for reassurance is neither responded to nor shared by Bert, who even when questioned by Rose directly, continues to remain silent. This serves to support the established hegemony as reliant on Rose's subjugation and paranoia, but also Bert's silent, unwavering resolve in the face of that same possible danger. Gradually, Bert's refusal to answer questions, or even speak at all, becomes threatening in and of itself, for when Rose asks "What about the rasher? Was it all right? It was a good one, I know, but not as good as the last lot I got in. It's the weather." (Pinter, 2000: 81), she looks for validation and compliments from her husband, yet he refuses to do so. He continually declines to offer the reassurance Rose seeks, and though it may initially appear that Rose's incessant speech is symptomatic of a stereotypical overbearing wife, Bert's silence and refusal to give allowances to his wife reinforces a sense of subdued hostility towards her. This relationship draws comparisons to that between Stanley and Meg in *The Birthday Party*, where the overbearing pseudo-mother-son relationship leads to outward hostility from the infantilised man. Unlike Stanley's repeated abuses and challenges to Meg, however, Bert remains docile against Rose's seemingly unending opening monologue, which suggests he is either comfortable and content in his position or rather waiting for his chance to strike back. This leaves Rose in a position where she must find within herself the reassurance she seeks, which is a behaviour that she demonstrates consistently throughout these opening exchanges.

When questioning Bert on the quality of the 'rasher', she doesn't wait for his reply and instead answers it herself, thereby providing the reassurance she seeks, albeit temporarily. Soon after, Rose's desperation for control of her space evolves into a direct fabrication of Bert's emotions and opinions, as she states, "If they ever ask you, Bert, I'm quite happy where I am. We're quiet, we're all right. You're happy up here. It's not far up either when you come in from outside. And we're not bothered. And nobody bothers us" (2000: 82). This brief speech implies how Rose's anxiety leads to her telling Bert that he's content, without him ever confirming her assumption, and puts Bert's commitment to her and the space they reside in as similarly tenuous. Surrounded by uncertainty, Rose

desperately clings to any semblance of truth, often relying on a fabricated narrative to offer the reassurance she seeks, whether that be around the comfort offered by the room or her relationship with her husband, and it is only when Mr. Kidd arrives that that narrative is undermined and challenged. It is important to recognise that Pinter chooses to distance himself from the intricate descriptions of the stage space in his later plays. Arguably, this shift in approach more closely links to ideas of the abstraction of space and the lack of control as the characters attempt to define it. Wyllie argues that Pinter's work shifts from physical attempts to control space in his earlier work to a focus on narrative control over the course of his career, arguing how Pinter's work changes "from the stage as the arena within which a physical contest for territory is staged, to a kind of rather literal psychogeography – a contest for supremacy based on narrative" (Wyllie, 2017: 77). While this shift in focus that Wyllie describes is largely apparent in his later plays, as discussed in later chapters, I argue narrative control is still a crucial tactic to exercise and reinforce power within these two plays. Such control is also intrinsically linked to the characters' attempts to depict personal evocations of space as indisputable truth.

When relegated to a position of subservience and relative vulnerability, Rose's relationship with the space around her is fundamental to her sense of control and power. She has already established her anxiety surrounding the danger outside of the safety of her room and those that reside within, and at this point, it is unclear whether those feelings are justified or not. When Mr. Kidd arrives, it is immediately unsettling, as the repeated knocks on the door and his lack of responses serve to heighten the sense of tension and anxiety already established by Rose's earlier speech. Once Kidd eventually enters, there is a brief release of tension before the dialogue continues, establishing a clear difficulty for the two characters to communicate clearly:

Kidd   Hallo, Mr. Hudd, how are you, all right? I've been looking at the pipes.

Rose   Are they all right?

Kidd   Eh?

(Pinter, 2000: 85)

Kidd addresses Bert, already undermining Rose's power by prioritising the well-being of the only other man in the room and choosing not to extend that courtesy to her. He also mentions a possible issue with 'pipes', which immediately threatens Rose's sense of control over the space, leading her to seek reassurance from Kidd. Instead of answering her and

offering that reassurance, he appears to not hear her which, whether intentional or not, Kidd's inability to communicate effectively serves to undermine Rose's sense of control and comfort within the space. This conflict continues throughout their exchange, as Rose questions him on his need for help from 'a woman'. Not only does this draw parallels between the subservient relationship she has with Bert, suggesting her complicity in the hegemonic structure, but also indicates one of the first instances of a prototypicality threat in the play. Bert's dominant position is reliant on Rose's subservient position, and Kidd's admission that he does not have such a woman to help him serves to highlight his failure to embody the hegemonic ideal. In this first exchange, Pinter indicates the hierarchy of power between the three characters, with Bert's domination seemingly uncontested, and yet Kidd and Rose vie for his approval and challenge each other's status to gain power.

Though independence would usually suggest strong individual power, the established masculinity of Bert is empowered by the complementary subservient femininity of Rose and as such, without that same complementary relationship, Kidd fails to align himself with that ideal. The continued suggestion from Rose that Kidd does or previously had such a relationship serves to undermine him further. Without evidence of complementary femininity, Kidd fails to present himself as similarly masculine, yet it is important to understand his dynamic in relation to Rose. Much like other women in Pinter's plays, Rose is complicit in her own subordination and ultimately reinforces the dominance of men, which Mimi Schippers describes as 'hegemonic femininity'; "Hegemonic femininity consists of the characteristics defined as womanly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Schippers, 2007: 94). This understanding of how Rose presents herself as complicit in her own subjugation offers another layer to her subordination. Schippers' arguments indicate the extent to which women legitimate inequality by conforming to hegemony, and Rose's desire for acceptance, reassurance, and validation from the men around her ultimately heightens her sense of fear and anxiety, supporting the continued dominance of the men that surround her. In later chapters, there will be arguments for how Pinter's presentation of femininity changes through relative states of empowerment and subordination. It is clear however that Pinter's first play serves as a clear depiction of a fragile and subordinate femininity that when considered against Schippers' rationale, serves to highlight the ways in which women remain complicit to the unequal gender relations of the play.

As the conversation with Kidd continues, Rose's desire for clarity is continually undermined. Andrew Wyllie explores the ideas of space and psychogeography in the book *The Plays of Harold Pinter* and argues that in the external space there remains a continual battle for supremacy, where the narrative of the individual becomes the asserted truth. He specifically highlights that "the evocation of place is dependent on memory, and on conflicting memories, whether real or imagined" (Wyllie, 2017: 82). Kidd's inability to recall accurate information about the building, including how many floors the property has, who also takes tenancy within the property and even where he himself lives implies his memory is largely unreliable. And yet, his refusal or inability to provide the reassurance Rose seeks not only indicates Kidd's incompetence but also reinforces the intangible nature of the external space. The only place that appears reliable, indisputable, and tangible, is the room they are all present in at that moment, and it is this room which offers the comfort they seek. For critics of the 1960 production, the intangibility of the space was a result of the characters' inability to express themselves, ultimately engaging us in their search for a definitive reality. In a review for *The Stage*, one critic noted how Pinter's "ability to reproduce the futilities of conversation between people who cannot express themselves is astonishingly accurate. Here is reality presented in such a way that we know it is true. Then comes a tiny incident which propels the characters onto a plane of unreality" (*The Stage*, 1960). This suggestion that the character's inability to communicate exacerbates the abstraction of both the internal and external space is fundamental to how we relate to the characters' experience of terror.

Once again, there is an implied sympathy for the characters in the play who, in their struggle to define the space around them, perpetuate an environment which borders on the unreal. Where Marber's production relied heavily on recognisable features of the internal space that depicted a clear, period setting, it is evident that critics of the earlier production were unable to rely on such explicit impressions of space. Although audiences of the Marber production remained sympathetic to Rose's desperate desire for control, the period setting allows us to distance ourselves from her experience. Yet, with the Roose Evans production, her search for meaning much more closely mirrored that of the audience of the time as they shared in that desperate desire to define the space. Wyllie's arguments focus on the relationship between memory and space that Pinter would later go on to develop more explicitly in the abstract, undefined spaces of *Moonlight* and *Old Times*. However, it is evident that even in Pinter's earliest productions, the depiction of the unreal, undefined, uncontrollable spaces that his characters exist in resonated with audiences, allowing them

to share in the desperate search for meaning. In this shared experience, the productions allow for a much more nuanced connection between audience and character, and as such, provide an opportunity to strengthen the sympathetic relationship between the audience and the character's suffering. However, contemporary critics were more likely to view this suffering as also indicative of gender inequality, whereas responses to the historical production had limited vocabulary to engage with these ideas.

The characters in the play rely on their memory and awareness of space to frame their sense of identity as well as establish dominance over one another. Their personal evocation of the space – whether seen or unseen – results in the shifting of their power dynamic. But while Wyllie's arguments about the real or imagined spaces offer context for the source of conflict, they fail to consider the impact such control has on the presentation of gender. For Pinter's characters, the weaponisation of memory and space are all tools to reinforce individual status, and the ability of Rose to define the space she exists in is crucial to her status within the hegemony. This conflict reaches a climax as Rose's ownership and control of their room is threatened by Kidd, as he states, "This was my bedroom" (Pinter, 2000: 90). No longer is the room solely controlled by Rose, and her attempts to establish that control through physical movement around the space is threatened by this direct contest of ownership by Kidd. When asked about where his bedroom currently is, Kidd continually avoids a definitive answer, and his response "Me? I can take my pick." (2000: 95) reinforces his earlier indication that the room Rose so desperately relies on for a sense of control and safety from external threat, could ultimately be taken from her. This shows that even considering Kidd's earlier incompetence and his relative weakness compared to the stoicism of Bert's dominant masculinity, he is still capable of undermining Rose's sense of security, and by extension, enforcing dominance over her. At this point in the play, Rose is continually subjected to dominant masculinity, and her fear of the outside world motivates her desire to remain in a position of suppressed hegemonic femininity.

In the opening moments of *The Dumb Waiter*, the use of space is likely to be the most immediate similarity between the two plays. Both plays utilise just one room for the dramatic action, and though characters may exit and enter the space, there is a clear separation between what takes place on stage and the action that takes place outside. Like the opening imagery of *The Room*, there is one character that remains still, a static presence compared to the relative animation of their partner. One stark contrast between the two plays is in the silence of the initial physical action, for Gus's movements, whether that be the removal of his shoe, the glances between him and his partner Ben, or his casual exit of

the space offers a tensely comic introduction to the two characters. The dynamic between them is not one of compliant servitude or of expectant domination that is seen between Rose and Bert, but indicates Gus's child-like unease, and Ben's authoritative frustration. Even in these opening moments, lacking any conversation between them, the physical action implies the dynamic that is explored throughout the play. Though this indicates a contrasting relationship to that seen between Rose and Bert, the use of space is crucial in understanding Ben and Gus's relationship. Like Rose, Gus's initial action is an immediate indication of a need to exercise control, whether that be to combat a growing sense of anxiety or fear, or as a way of challenging his confinement. As Gus exits for the first time, there is a sound of a lavatory chain being pulled that doesn't flush, and this is the first instance where there is a suggestion that the space the two men occupy resists their control. We later learn that the room they occupy has been provided for them by an unknown organisation, and it is a space that is both temporary and one they are not familiar with. This places them both into a position of weakened power, for like the characters in *The Room*, such familiarity and knowledge of the spaces they reside in is crucial in providing them with a sense of control.

Much like Rose, Gus's movements imply someone uneasy or uncomfortable within the space and a need for reassurance and control. His frequent entrances and exits either demonstrate his curiosity about the space itself or his impatience with having to wait for further instructions about the job they intend to do. Gus's relationship with the space is made much more explicit when framed within the decisions made by Soutra Gilmour and Jamie Lloyd in the construction and design of the stage space in the 2019 production at the Harold Pinter Theatre. In keeping with similarly staged productions during the season which were also designed by Gilmour, including *The Room*, the atmosphere was one of a cold detachment, where bright unfeeling lights and exposed pipes increased a sense of discomfort. The compact and restrictive room that took up only a small part of the stage itself added to the restrictive containment that resonated with imagery of imprisonment, control, and oppression. Quentin Letts, in his review of the production for the *Daily Mail*, noted how "Gilmour's set offers a high-ceilinged room with a mass of drainpipes, accompanied by distant clangings" (Letts, 2019), whereas Matt Trueman described how "the symmetry of Soutra Gilmour's pipelined design gives it the gloss of a graphic novel, more unreal than it is uncanny" (Trueman, 2019) in his review for *Variety*. Together these two critics provide context for understanding the relationship between the interior and exterior spaces that Lloyd and Gilmour conveyed. For Letts, the interior space was

understood through its distance from the external space, as source-less noises served as reminders of the looming, abstract presence judging the two men. Trueman however notes that the interior space of the production is likewise 'unreal', inferring how the characters are fighting over a space that is both uncontrollable and yet ephemeral. The abstraction noted by both critics summarises how Gilmour and Lloyd offered an interpretation of the external space that is ever-present, abstract, and threatening, but suggests that the internal space the characters occupy also provides little comfort and security.

When framed in relation to the design of the space, these opening moments of attempted control seemingly suggest that the conflict goes beyond the interpersonal, as both characters must fight against the room itself and the oppression it represents. For Soutra Gilmour, this distinction between the internal and external spaces is also intrinsic to the relationship between the stage and the theatre space itself – the auditorium, the corridors, the entryways. In an interview with Catriona Fallow, Gilmour described how she aimed to focus on "The relationship between the industrial part of the theatre – the making place – and the threshold between that and the audience and the auditorium, the tensions between those things." (Chiasson & Fallow, 2021: 211) Gilmour's acknowledgement of the tension between the dramatic space and the auditorium infers the similar tension between the internal, seemingly safe spaces of the characters and those of the unseen spectator, silently observing and judging them. Referring to the Harold Pinter Theatre where the production was taking place, Gilmour acknowledged the contrasting aesthetic elements between the stage space and the auditorium, describing how "There's this juxtaposition of this rough working space and this aesthetically beautiful, classy auditorium with its gilt and its posh plush seats and all of that." (2021: 212) This distinction between the two spaces underlines the tension that Gilmour described earlier, and her inclusion of industrial elements such as pipes and lights to the design of the basement suggests there was a clear attempt to blur the lines between the dramatic space and that of the auditorium. In doing so, she provided a subtle added layer to the production, where the internal and external spaces are no longer contained within the dramatic action, but are connected to the internal performance space and the external audience space. Much like the unseen forces controlling the dumb waiter, we are silent observers of Ben and Gus's failure, and through her design choices, Gilmour was able to bring that juxtaposition to the centre of the presentation of the play. For the two men in the play, without the female presence to complement their attempts to establish dominance, as the tension between them and the spaces around them increases, they rely on a clear power dynamic between them. Where

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hegemonic masculinity relies on oppositional feminisation to establish an inequality between men and women, male-male relationships rely on similar attempts at inequality. Men who fail to adopt the established behaviours of the hegemony are feminised and isolated, such as Jerry in *Betrayal*, the Waiter in *Celebration* or Sam in *The Homecoming*. However, in *The Dumb Waiter*, both men rely on each other to maintain the status quo, for just as feminisation comes from highlighting non-hegemonic characteristics, it may also motivate the feminised men to adopt hegemonic behaviours to regain favour. As Natalya Alonso argues, "Men may harass nonconforming men by mocking their masculine shortcomings, encouraging them to fall in line" (Alonso, 2018: 482) and it is this practice of encouragement that indicates how both men may maintain compliance to the organisation that they belong to. Alonso's arguments here suggest how men depend on conformity to such systems of power in their performance of hegemonic masculinity, and this is what can be observed in the dynamic between Ben and Gus. What is clear throughout the opening exchanges between the two men is the established authority of Ben who, as the older member of the organisation, is afforded power over Gus. Much like Rose and Bert, Gus relies on reassurance from Ben, yet where they differ is compared to Bert's unwavering silence, Ben does attempt to pacify Gus's curiosity. In the following exchange, Gus asks for information about the malfunctioning lavatory:

> Gus   What do you think's the matter with it?
>
> Ben   Nothing.
>
> Gus   Nothing?
>
> Ben   It's got a deficient ballcock, that's all.
>
> Gus   A deficient what?
>
> Ben   Ballcock.
>
> Gus   No? Really?
>
> Ben   That's what I should say.
>
> Gus   Go on! That didn't occur to me.

(Pinter, 1991: 117)

The banality in this exchange subtly indicates how Ben attempts to pacify Gus's line of enquiry, dismissing the implication that anything may be wrong. After continued questioning

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by Gus, Ben resorts to using technical language to assert his authority through familiarity and knowledge, thereby reinforcing his own position and eventually pacifying Gus. This is not the only time this kind of interaction occurs, for Ben appears to be capable of withholding information from Gus, or at least manipulating such information to either dismiss or placate his curiosity. In this way, Ben is able to reinforce the established hierarchy between the two men and not only maintain a position of respect and authority but, through that dominance, present himself as closer to the hegemonic masculine ideal.

Penelope Prentice also argues that this relationship between the two men is indicative of dominance and subservience but goes further by suggesting they are also mutually dependent on one another: "Within a dominant/subservient relationship, characters are by definition symbiotically dependent upon each other, and equally, the tension between the two inextricably links to the threat from above. Gus submits to Ben's authority, which largely derives from having someone to dominate" (Prentice, 2000: 13). This symbiosis is crucial to the formation of a hegemony in the play, as Ben's maintenance of power is likewise dependent on Gus's complicity. There is a possibility for the two men to remain in that symbiosis of inequality, but Pinter does not allow for such a dynamic, instead showing through Gus's insistence to challenge his superior, that the relationship is constantly under threat. Prentice also highlights the added layer to their perpetual fracturing, and that is in its connection to the unseen power that subjugates them both. Both men are in servitude to an unseen power, and Prentice's observation arguably provides an indirect criticism of hegemony in the play: that the conflict between the two men only exists due to the conflicting pressures of domination. Both men must remain compliant in their respective subservience for their relationship to function and as such, this implies that Pinter's presentation of systemic power in the play also indicates the inevitability of the destruction of the two men's relationship. This destruction, leads to their eventual isolation, as is the case with many who are subjected to the overwhelming pressures of hegemonic masculinity in Pinter's plays.

The decline of their relationship can provide an opportunity to establish a connection between the audience and Gus and Ben, allowing for moments of sympathy as we witness their isolation, and their inability to challenge the authority they belong to. This is heightened by the restrictive stage space from the Lloyd production, where the two men are forced to exist within a space that is neither their own nor comfortable. Much like with Rose, our inaction mirrors theirs, and in our shared experience, the spectator becomes similarly confined; a silent empathetic witness to the struggle of these two men against the

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oppression of the forces neither they nor the spectator are privileged enough to see. Matt Trueman comments on this aspect of Lloyd's production, noting how "Just as Pinter's hitmen become targets, his acquiescent insiders are eventually pushed out. Lloyd suggests that we become our own worst enemies and nightmares" (Trueman, 2019). This reflective aspect of the production closed the divide between character and spectator as if the shared experience of dread and fear was realised on stage. This was arguably the most profound moment of the production, allowing for a sharp reflection of the ways in which we experience the anxiety of oppression and the abstraction of hierarchy.

In recalling the responses to the 1960 production, we can see how the connection between audience and character allows for a richer understanding of Pinter's depiction of vulnerability and isolation. The characters' difficulty in expressing themselves is fundamental to how we relate to their suffering. One critic, in their review for *The Stage*, noted how the characters' reactions "have a terrifying logic and acceptance which serves to create a wonderful sense of tension without our really knowing what it is all about" (*The Stage*, 1960). Although there is reason to dispute the characters' acceptance of their situation – as Gus's resistance shows – we can see how that tense relationship between the known and the unknown allows us to become part of their desperate search for intimacy and understanding. Trueman's earlier recognition of this indicates the extent to which the Lloyd production heightened the level of sympathy between the spectator and both men on stage. This has the effect of positioning the spectator not only as sympathetic witnesses to their search for meaning, but also allowing us to recognise the pressures of the hegemonic masculinity established in the play, where conformity is applauded, and rebellion is thwarted. For the audiences of the Lloyd production, our connection to the characters' search for meaning allows us to remain critical of hegemony as we observe the consequences of the two men who fail to embody those ideals. It is important to remember, however, that Ben continues to hold a position of authority between them, and if Ben is assumed to be the senior representative of the organisation they both belong to, he has a responsibility to ensure the values of that organisation are upheld and justified. Gus's criticisms of the space, whether that be deficient ballcocks, a disappointing bed, or lack of a window, represent his resistance against Ben's authority, and that of the organisation. The indication that the space they occupy is not their own, not suitable for them, and also temporary, runs parallel with the concerns Rose has after Kidd's suggestion that he may seek to remove her. Kidd becomes an invader of Rose's territory in his physical movements throughout the space, but *The Dumb Waiter* features no other characters.

Pinter introduces ambiguity and threat in the form of multiple objects, including the eponymous dumb waiter. The first 'invader', however, arrives in the form of an envelope containing twelve matches, whose origin and courier are both unseen and unheard. This is the beginning of a slow subversion of the power dynamic in the play, for Ben's position of authority and holder of information is undermined by the arrival of the envelope. Ben's ability to control information is crucial to the maintenance of power, and his repeated questions surrounding the envelope and its origin serve to highlight his failure to maintain that level of certainty. Ben's inability to control information is utilised here to suggest his waning sense of authority, fracturing a façade of power that he has attempted to uphold until this point in the play. With the reversal of questions and answers between the two men, it is left up to Gus to provide answers. The arrival of the envelope – like Kidd's arrival in *The Room* – becomes a device which undermines the power of the characters present in the space, and heightens the sense of uncertainty. Upon the arrival of the dumb waiter, the uncertainty reaches a climax, and the question of ownership comes to the forefront. Unlike the envelope, the motivation of the forces that control the dumb waiter is made clearer, as it contains a piece of paper asking for several food items. Once again, the banality of the requests contrasts with our expectations and plays not only for comic effect but also establishes a precedent for making increasingly unobtainable and unrealistic demands. In an attempt to maintain his position of authority, Ben tries to rationalise the arrival of the dumb waiter, stating how "It probably used to be a café here, that's all. Upstairs. These places change hands very quickly" (Pinter, 1991: 132). Quickly, the two men feel an obligation to follow the orders received from this unseen authority and attempt to deliver whatever items they have to satisfy their demands. The repercussions of failing are also unknown and yet, Ben's insistence that they "better send something up." (1991: 133) once again indicates his need to not only exert authority but also to comply with whatever orders he may receive. In doing so, Ben attempts to regain control of the situation, exerting his influence and maintaining power through the presentation of established masculine tactics of compliance with authority.

Such conformity is a repeated characteristic of masculinity that appears in Pinter's later plays, including both *The Hothouse* as well as *Party Time*, where conformity to the established procedures and institutions affords characters with individual power. Though the dumb waiter's origin and the motivations of those who control it are obscured, Ben's need to comply stems from his desire to present himself as authoritative and masculine. Like the envelope, the dumb waiter represents the expectation and authority that looms

over the two men, and their respective responses to its arrival are indicative of their differing attitudes towards authority. Ben's need to rationalise and Gus's consistent questioning and challenging of their motivations and origin is the sharpest contrast between them, and their interpersonal dynamic is often impacted by those behaviours. Yet only one of them is consistently embodying the ideals of hegemonic masculinity. As Connell argues, "Hegemonic masculinity is culturally linked to both authority and rationality, key themes in the legitimation of patriarchy" (Connell, 2000: 90). This legitimation that Connell describes is exactly what Ben attempts to enforce throughout the play. Ideals of authority and rationality are those that align with not only the assumed expectations of the organisation they belong to but are also symptomatic of the established gender hierarchy. As such, Gus's increased questioning of those same values indicates a naivety about the consequences of such resistance.

The dumb waiter is an invader into the space shared by the two men and through its repeated entrances, exists as a consistent threat to their shared power. This threat is not only manifested through the looming danger and judgement of an external force, but situates that external force as an amorphous entity which is an undefined spectator to the action of the play. Judith Roof, in an article for *The Harold Pinter Review*, argues that such a force is realised through not only the physical dumb waiter, but also through Ben's reading of their orders, where "On-stage bullying always links to a power situated in an imaginary off-stage force, a larger world somewhere else that evades staging but sends its signifiers, the voice itself, that speak for it as it observes and controls, as if it were yet another audience" (Roof, 2019: 62) Roof's argument for a second audience, situated both outside of the character's space, but between them and the audience sat in the auditorium, provides context for understanding the spatial relationships in the play. The ethereality of this external, judgemental force inhabits a similar position to us, and yet it is ultimately more powerful, impacting and controlling the actions of the characters on stage. As Ben reads out their demands, their will is enacted and embodied through his speech, providing him with authority, and yet reinforcing the power of the unseen, dangerous, threatening second audience. Their failure to meet the demands of the unseen forces upstairs demonstrates a failure to meet the demands of the hegemony. With Gus, his continued resistance against authority and refusal to comply with the hegemonic behaviours results in his loss of power and consequent feminisation. For both Gus and Rose, the obscurity of the danger that is embodied by the unseen forces that seemingly work against them is a looming threat

throughout each play, but as they fail to conform, they are distanced from those in positions of power.

Both characters' lack of knowledge about what they must obey is arguably the most significant contributor to their ongoing paranoia. For Charles Grimes, this relationship between the individual and their perception of the external threat is much more closely indicative of political oppression, as he argues that the unseen force is "built on repressive, continual observation and disciplinary coercion, a surveillance that is subsumed into a system of impersonalized authority perceived as inevitable, unexceptional, even beneficial" (Grimes, 2005: 50). Although I would argue that Grimes's use of the term 'beneficial' is largely contradicted by the character's fears and the eventual embodiment of those fears, I would agree that the anxiety imposed by such surveillance is a consequence of the inevitability of such forces. The unknown, unseen force is ambiguous in its intent but is yet an unquestionable presence within the narrative. Both Rose and Gus are subjected to its will or continually rebel against it. But their respective journeys throughout each play bring them no closer to understanding it. As such, each play presents us with the objective, unquestionable, yet unfathomable authority that necessitates compliance whilst failing to relinquish power. It is this need for conformity that motivates Ben and is what Gus feels he must rebel against.

Later in the play, the two men introduce the figure of 'Wilson', who the two characters agree is responsible for locating the spaces for them to carry out their business. The attempt to personalise the organisation through the figure of Wilson alleviates some concern about the motivations of those higher up the organisational hierarchy, and yet it also adds more ambiguity surrounding the ownership of the space. Ben declares how "He's probably only rented it. It doesn't have to be his place." (Pinter, 1991: 129) and Gus responds, "I know it's his place. I bet the whole house is. He's not even laying on any gas now either" (1991: 129). This conversation between the two men provides a clear indication of how Ben is failing to maintain his authoritative position, for as he attempts to provide a justification for Wilson's ownership, Gus discards that narrative for his own. Like Rose and her own self-reliance, Gus is no longer satisfied with the assurances offered by Ben and as such, finds consolation in his own version of events. The introduction of Wilson allows Gus to shift responsibility and even blame him for his dissatisfaction with the space is crucial in demonstrating his growing resistance against the expectations of the organisation. As a result, Ben's position of power is undermined through his failure to provide clarity, and Gus's continued challenge and resistance against authority similarly undermines the existing

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hegemonic structure. The masculinisation of the organisation through the male character of Wilson also serves to indicate a shift in the gender dynamic between the two men. With Gus's challenging or even dismissal of Ben's attempts to explain the events around them, Gus also manages to challenge his own previously weakened masculinity. By utilising prototypicality threats to criticise Wilson's lack of consideration for them, Gus demonstrates resistance to that authority.

Where such authority is closely interwoven into the performance of masculinity and power, Gus manages to subvert his own position within the hegemony. He is provided with opportunities to resist his feminisation, and not only undermine the power of the only other character in the play but also defend against the threat of the organisation they both belong to. It is important to recognise that this resistance is something which Rose shows very little ability or willingness to do during the early stages of *The Room* but is arguably indicative of the extent to which men are more capable of regaining power in a hegemony that supports them. Where Gus shows a keenness for criticising aspects of the space that dissatisfy him, Rose is incapable of acknowledging such faults and solely relies on any comfort and sense of stability offered by those around her. As such, Rose's compliance with her own subordination leads her to support the existing gendered power dynamic, whereas Gus has presented himself as a threat to the established hegemony of the play. Even in the earliest production of these two plays, we can see how audiences related to the characters' experiences of confusion, terror, and the unreal. For them, the relationship between the internal and external spaces revealed the characters' fear of the unknown, and this created a sympathetic relationship to their suffering. The responses to the Marber/Lloyd productions engage in much more depth about the relationships between the characters and their attitudes to space, demonstrating the extent to which Pinter's work is viewed much more clearly as a criticism of social/political issues for contemporary audiences. As such, we see in these characters a relatability in their desperate search for power, meaning and understanding. Our sympathy for Rose's victimisation increases as she appears powerless to defend against potential threats from both Kidd and Bert, as well as the danger of the unseen forces in the external space. Our sympathy for Gus is linked to his repeated moments of resistance, as we also contest the lack of clarity and information that Ben presents. Together, we now see these characters as indicative of not only the struggles of the past but representative of the issues of the present, including gendered power, conformity and violence.

Threat, Conformity, and Violence

In *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter*, there are elements of Pinter's writing that establish a precedent for the ways in which his characters grasp at power to combat any admission of weakness, insecurity, or discomfort. For the characters in these two plays, their attempts at control rely on their familiarity with the space around them, as well as information about any perceived external threat or danger. Rose's consistent position of fear and dependency throughout *The Room* exists in sharp contrast to other of Pinter's women who would go on to utilise masculine behaviours to oppose their assumed subordinate femininity. There is however hope for Rose, as the play continues to explore how she subverts her marginalised position, and such subversion of feminine subjugation can be seen as a foundation from which a lineage of women in Pinter's work also utilises these same tactics, such as Ruth in *The Homecoming*, Emma in *Betrayal* or even as far as Pinter's last original play, Suki in *Celebration*. Although Rose's position does not appear to hold as much power as the women in these later plays, it indicates that Pinter's approach to depicting feminine empowerment does improve over the course of his career. For Gus, his masculinity is much more overtly defined by his rebellion against authority, but much like Rose, his resistance is eventually thwarted by an overbearing masculine dominance. It is important to recognise how both characters' possible empowerment at the end of the play is undermined by acts of violence perpetrated by men. The following section will include observations about the ways in which the characters respond to the external threats they fear and the consequences of their eventual rebellion.

For Penelope Prentice, the relationship between dominance and violence is intrinsic to the ways in which gender and power are presented in both plays and in understanding why it occurs. She argues that violent acts in Pinter's writing stem from a reaction to a perceived threat, remarking how "It is important to note violence in Pinter's work ensues when a character attempts to maintain rather than to gain dominance. As in nearly all Pinter's work, much of the violence which at first appears mysterious […] is linked to the struggle to maintain dominance" (Prentice, 2000: 12). It is important to acknowledge how Prentice's argument supports the acknowledgement of prototypicality threats in both plays, which often motivate others to violence. For men, the resort to violence stems from suffering wounds to their masculine performance, and the overt physical display of dominance is one way to combat that perceived weakness. In doing so, the hierarchy of masculine power, and therefore the hegemony is maintained through such acts of violence. With Rose, the closing moments of the play reveal a possibility for her to leave the space she so desperately

clings to, resulting in a visceral display of physical violence. In *The Dumb Waiter*, Gus and Ben's roles are directly associated with violence. As hitmen, they are quickly established as members of an organisation which relies on their complicity to the needs of the organisation, including committing acts of violence. Prentice's acknowledgement of the relationship between violence and domination is key to my engagement with hegemony in the following section, while also beginning to address the ways in which such acts of violence affect the spectator.

In *The Room*, the arrival of the Sands couple presents a similar dynamic to that previously seen between Rose and Kidd, where the two sides often struggle to communicate clearly. This results in either conflicting information, or more importantly, the suggestion that Rose's narrative is entirely wrong. However, where she was offered some safety from Bert's presence during her initial interaction with Kidd, Rose is no longer protected from the dominant force of her husband. As such, she must fend off these invaders through her own defences. After some initial pleasantries, the Sands and Rose immediately engage in a conflict of information, as they argue over the name of the landlord of the building. Not only does this interaction show how the Sands' dismiss Rose's information through the consistent use of prototypicality threats, but also reveals Rose's repeated insistence that her version of events is indeed true. In this brief interaction, Rose demonstrates a conviction which has only been implied in the play so far, revealing her ability to defend her power and resist the Sands' attempts to undermine her. Without Bert to assert a dominant presence over his wife, Rose has the freedom to subvert expectations, instead adopting the language of dominance herself. She capably establishes her own control, providing a curious contradiction in her own gender performance as we witness her previous vulnerability make way for inner strength.

As if a vague image of dynamics seen in later plays such as Ruth and Teddy, or Terry and Dusty, the relationship between the Sands couple is fuelled by conflict. Unlike that seen between Rose and Bert, this sudden conflict shows a male-female relationship which signifies the contrasting effect of how male attempts at domination are combatted by women who refuse to comply. On a few occasions, Mrs. Sands appears to display sympathy for Rose, supporting her version of events, and it is only due to the contradictions set down by Mr. Sands that leads to the dismissal of her narrative. This rare moment of unity between women would strengthen their individual empowerment, and yet they both remain passive in the face of Mr. Sands' tirades. Prentice notes how this dynamic of domination exercised by Mr. Sands in these exchanges is representative of the conflicts that appear throughout

the play: "Mr. Sands's comic denial reveals refusal to admit any loss of power to his wife and discloses that inner tension that marks the entire play— a desire to remain comfortable, safe, and in one place, pitted against the equally powerful desire to remain free, to go out into the world, even to seek and confront danger" (Prentice, 2000: 54). Prentice's acknowledgement of the connection between freedom and restriction, comfort and oppression is linked to the ways in which Mr. Sands reinforces his position of dominance over his wife. Although this connection is not made explicit by Prentice, Mr. Sand's maintenance of power is reliant on the control and subjugation of his wife but is also symptomatic of his fear of change. This dichotomy is fundamental to understanding the gender hierarchy presented in Pinter's plays, and it is indeed remarkable that it is established so clearly in his very first work. Later in this thesis, I engage with these ideas of desire and intimacy in more detail regarding Pinter's final plays, including *Betrayal*, *Party Time,* and *Celebration*, which is evidence that such themes and behaviours resonate throughout his career.

As the Sands leave, they offer no reassurance or consolation to Rose of their intentions to claim the room for themselves, suddenly leaving with the ominous suggestion that she should not be alone. In this moment, Rose is left in the room, alone, once again choosing to move around the space to regain a sense of control and safety. In the Marber production, this moment of isolation for Rose became a key moment in showing the increasing sense of unease. With the audience positioned in a sympathetic relationship at this point in the play, we are similarly gripped by the feelings of discomfort, confusion, and tension. It is this moment that marks a shift in the play's power, as we no longer remain safe in our beliefs that the room belongs to Rose, and our control – much like hers – is gradually fracturing. Several critics remarked on the play's potency, and how it serves as an appropriate reflection of the themes and ideas that permeate throughout Pinter's later plays. Sarah Hemming, for the *Financial Times*, notes how *The Room* "contains many components that would recur throughout [Pinter's] work: the claustrophobic space; the smooth bullying; the territorial struggle; the mysterious visitors; the simmering violence" (Hemming, 2019). Susannah Clapp also summarises a similar observation in her review for *The Observer*, that the play serves as "a fascinating template for the later plays: an isolated couple; unexplained visitors; claustrophobia; bullying" (Clapp, 2019). It is important to recognise that both reviews remark on not only Pinter's throughline of repeated themes and ideas in his work but also suggest the extent to which these still resonate with modern audiences. Both in Gilmour's period set design, and the somewhat outdated references that appear throughout

the play, there is a clear attempt to situate the production as representative of a moment in recent history, possibly even the original context of the play's first production in the late 1950s. It is arguable then, that the presentation of violence, racism and xenophobia is also placed at a reassuring distance from the audience, and that Marber seeks to position the work as largely of its time. As such, this lessens the impact of this moment of silence as the Sands leave, and distances us from other moments of severe isolation for Rose. Even when considering the awareness of the critics of the thematic links of Pinter's work, it does nothing to suggest how Marber's production resonates with contemporary ideas of femininity and terror. Rose instead becomes more a figure representative of historical oppression than a character in which we may share in our experience of fear and suffering.

After the couple leaves, Kidd returns, insisting that the man in the basement needs to see Rose, however, he infers that he is doing so under threat of violence, declaring how "I don't know what'll happen if you don't see him" (Pinter, 2000: 123). This inference of violence is the first example of such danger in the play, but it becomes even more revealing when he follows the statement by saying "If you don't see him now, there'll be nothing else for it, he'll come up on his own bat, when your husband's here, that's what he'll do" (2000: 123). Unlike other verbal evocations of danger that are mentioned in the play, Rose is initially reluctant to allow this man to see her. However, the suggestion that the man would eventually meet with her in the presence of her husband implies that not only is he personally associated with her, but also represents a hidden part of her past that she wishes to hide from Bert. The threat of violence brings to the surface the connection between the two spaces, and how Rose perceives the danger as a conflict not only between the internal and external spaces but also between her past and present. Thus, the external threat she has been fearful of from the opening moments of the play is now realised in the form of this unknown man. Much like *The Dumb Waiter* and the figure of Wilson, this serves to masculinise the external, creating a relationship between the feminine 'seen' space, and the threatening masculinity of the 'unseen'. Where the envelope and the dumb waiter themselves become object-representatives of such authority and threat for Ben and Gus, it is only upon the arrival of Riley – the man from the basement – that the dread of the unseen, dangerous masculinity is fully represented before Rose.

Riley's entrance presents us with an immediate contradiction in the imagination of the audience, where the descriptions and imagery associated with him until this point are linked to dread, fear, and dominance, and yet Riley appears as a blind, black man. The contrast between the power and threat he has been associated with so far in the play

immediately contrasts with the stereotypical connotations of inferiority and vulnerability associated with his race and disability. It is important to acknowledge the significance of such aspects of his character in relation to the presentation of gender, for racial difference is often a characteristic used to enforce unequal gender relations. As Lucas Gottzen states, hegemony seeks to "differentiate white middle-class men from a range of other groups of men in different societies, such as working-class, black, and immigrant men who are considered unable to control their sexuality and therefore prone to sexual violence" (Gottzen, 2017: 288). Gottzen's distinction about the perception of black men in the context of white hegemony immediately positions Riley as subordinate, and along with his disability, both are crucial in understanding how the contradictions present in the character of Riley affect his masculine presentation. So far in the play, to represent the hegemonic ideal, men must assert dominance over women, regain control of their environment and manipulate information about the internal and external space for their own benefit. Riley's disability hinders his knowledge of the environment, and within the context of hegemonic masculinity, his race becomes a disadvantage when attempting to present dominant masculine characteristics. It is important then to understand how Riley attempts to regain power.

Up until Riley's introduction, Rose's terror and anxiety had reached a climax, having been forced into facing this unknown man, who represents everything she had been so adamant about avoiding so far in the play. Yet Rose's attitude shifts from ineffectual defiance to instead a much more virulent display of hostility, using explicit insults towards Riley. Critics of the Marber production remarked on this moment as representative of historical attitudes towards race and nationality but also found it affecting in its relevance to modern discourse on racism and xenophobia. Sarah Hemming noted how "The play's action is deliberately opaque and the fine cast maintain a nagging sense of dread, drawing out a grimly topical streak of xenophobia" (Hemming, 2019). Paul Taylor found Rose's outbursts as forcing a severe breakdown in sympathy for the character, stating how she "captures pungently the horribly reflex xenophobia with which she reacts to anything foreign as a threat" (Taylor, 2019). The significance of this reaction reveals how Marber introduces a conflict in how the audience remains sympathetic to Rose's anxiety, for in doing so, they are also complicit to her abuse and xenophobia. It is important that Hemming notes it is 'topical', suggesting that Rose's sentiments are not solely indicative of historical attitudes, but also resonate with contemporary discourse surrounding race and foreign cultures. Much like the earlier moment of isolation, the temporal dissonance between the play's action and the audience ultimately diminishes the impact of witnessing such abuse. It is much easier to excuse

Rose's behaviour as another product of the period setting, rather than engaging with it in the context of contemporary discourse, and as such Marber's production does not do enough to critique current forms of oppression and abuse.

Where the production remains consistent, however, is in its depiction of a silent, unwavering, hegemonic masculinity. Much like Bert in the opening moments of the play, Riley remains static, calm, and composed against the virulent tirade from Rose. It is only when he confesses his reason for seeing her, to convey a message that Rose's "father wants you to come home." (Pinter, 2000: 128) that confirms his connection to her hidden past. More importantly, it also indicates a personal connection to Rose and her family, even referring to her by an alternative name; 'Sal'. Although she initially rejects the name, Rose's demeanour becomes less aggressive, almost reluctantly soft, eventually sitting on his lap and touching various parts of his face. Pinter refuses to provide more context to their relationship, and yet this gradual shift in tone signifies a shift in their dynamic. We witness Rose's initial aggression and abuse, and Riley's silent endurance, to reveal a relationship that is more indicative of Rose as a victim and Riley as her saviour. Riley's confession of being connected to Rose's past surprisingly softens her, eventually culminating in an image of physical intimacy not shared between any other character in the play, including between her and her husband. It is this act of physical intimacy that serves to offer Rose a respite from the apparent loneliness she had been subjected to by her silent partner, and an opportunity to return 'home': a possible refuge from the discomfort, anxiety, and terror she has lived through being confined in her room. For Riley, this intimacy indicates a sense of empowerment, as if suggesting his mission has been completed, and the mystery uncovered. His appearance as a saviour affords him power, as Rose submits to him and his request to bring her home. Although Riley's outward performance of masculinity initially positions him as subordinate, through this dominance and control over Rose he has gained power and more closely represents the hegemonic masculine ideal throughout this exchange.

This moment is soon interrupted by Bert's return, who enters and silently draws the curtains, immediately demonstrating control of the space and heightening a sense of dread in his continued silence. His opening speech quickly becomes euphemistic, as he anthropomorphises and feminises his van, using short, sharp language, mixing sexual inferences with subtle violent imagery, such as "He wouldn't move. I bumped him." and "I use my hand. Like that. I get hold of her" (Pinter, 2000: 134). It is this speech that also heightens the sense of dread, as the two other characters remain silent, until Riley speaks

up, to which Bert immediately interrupts him, knocking him to the floor and kicking his head several times, presumably killing him. After a moment of silence between them, Rose's final words – and the last line of the play – declare that she "Can't see. I can't see. I can't see" (2000: 135). The sudden shift from a moment of calm during the intimate moment between Rose and Riley, to the violent act perpetrated by Bert and the sudden blinding of Rose is almost jarring in its contrast. Yet, this quick succession of key moments reveals a crucial aspect of the hegemony during the climax of the play.

From his earliest moments, Bert's dominance was undisputed, all the while supported by Rose's seemingly willing subjugation, and yet, upon returning to the space, sees his wife intimately touching another man. Not only does this apparent jealousy motivate retaliation, but Riley's outward presentation as a man who due to his race and disability, represents the weakness and inferiority of a non-hegemonic man, this exacerbates the threat he poses to Bert's dominant masculinity. This is one of the few instances in Pinter's work where physical action serves as a prototypicality threat, where the intimacy of Rose and Riley threatens Bert's domination of his wife, and as such, results in an act of violence. In the context of hegemonic masculinity, violence often becomes a vital component to the maintenance of power, for as Connell states, "many members of the privileged group use violence to sustain their dominance" (Connell, 2005: 83). It is clear how such a threat may force Bert – who strongly identifies with the dominance and control that forms the hegemonic masculinity of the play – to utilise such violent acts to regain control and defend against threat to his gender presentation. Unlike Max's outburst in *The Homecoming*, Bert's violence results in the assumed death of another man, and such severity in his action indicates his commitment to the values of hegemonic masculinity established within the play and the extent to which he is compelled to maintain dominance.

This extremely violent act is indicative of Bert's prejudice, and there are definitive aspects of Riley's character that would encourage a hegemonic man such as Bert to resort to violence to maintain his dominance. In performance, such moments of severe violence become some of the most effective ways to engage the spectator in the action and to challenge them in moments of shared discomfort. In the Marber production, Bert's dragging of Riley's helpless body and the subsequent stomping of his head was a moment that provoked a visceral reaction from the audience, as arguably the most overt display of physical violence that appears in Pinter's work. For the spectator, being present at this moment and witnessing such violence serves to unsettle and threaten the safety of spectating. Much like the moments of violence seen in later plays, bearing witness to

violence places the spectator into an uncomfortable position, one where inaction implies complicity to violence. As Bryoni Trezise states in her research on affect in theatre spectatorship, such moments of inaction "works to empathically bind spectator subjectivities through relations of power to images of suffering others. This generates a form of spectatorship that hurts morally, emotionally, and physically" (Trezise, 2012: 205). This dynamic between witnessing violence and the emotional affect that Trezise describes complements the arguments for Pinter's writing as morally and emotionally provocative in its presentation of violence. It is even more interesting to understand such a relationship between action and inaction, and the role of Rose, whose witnessing of the same violent act established a shared experience between spectator and character.

Rose briefly became as close to salvation as any moment previously, and yet that refuge suddenly being taken from her in a brief moment of severe violence binds the spectator to her experience, and with her, we experience that pain. In the climax of the play, Pinter offers a sharp portent of the consequences of inaction, for in Rose's sudden blindness, her inaction in witnessing such an act of violence forces her into a position of dependence and vulnerability, one which we, the spectator, must not follow. Prentice recognises how this provoking of the audience is also carried throughout Pinter's later plays, as "Pinter's work from the outset to the present awakens an audience to the importance of understanding the source of the desire for dominance in the private level of self if it is to be confronted and acted upon" (Prentice, 2000: 21). This relationship between the outward vulnerability of the characters, and our constantly shifting sympathy with their experience, is then used to provoke us to action. But where we are incapable of changing the events presented to us inside the theatre, we must then be motivated to challenge such violence and dominance outside of it. Prentice's reasoning here is what I feel is the most profound sentiment in relation to the impact of Pinter's work. Our sympathy for the character's suffering, including that of the oppressed positions of women and black men, allows us to remain critical of masculine domination. In performance, this is manifested through the emotional and moral affect of witnessing violence. It is important then to recognise that Pinter's approach to such moments of violence is largely critical of their intent, and we must remain engaged to allow ourselves to confront our own moral and emotional conflicts.

In *The Dumb Waiter*, the climax does not stem from inaction but rather the challenge and provocation of authority. An interesting contrast between the two plays is that Gus and Ben begin the play in positions of complicity towards acts of violence, compared to Rose's fear and avoidance of them. The very reason for their presence in this room is for the

purpose of killing an unknown victim. As the play approaches the climax, the two men methodically outline their routine as they prepare for their victim's arrival, which highlights how the two men aim to detach themselves from their calculated methods of violence. Not only does this exchange indicate how the dynamic between them is still of Ben's authority and Gus's relative compliance, but also how they ultimately remain conformant to the needs of the organisation. Their completion of the orders they have been given is indicative of their return to a performance of hegemonic masculinity. It is important then to understand how their differing approaches to violence against women impact that dynamic, exemplified in the following exchange:

> **Gus**   What do we do if it's a girl?
>
> **Ben**   We do the same.
>
> **Gus**   Exactly the same?
>
> **Ben**   Exactly.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> **Gus**   We don't do anything different?
>
> **Ben**   We do exactly the same.
>
> **Gus**   Oh.

(Pinter, 1991: 144)

Not only does this exchange indicate how Gus needs reassurance from Ben to outline what is expected of him, but also implies an attitude of gender bias. The assumption that they are to receive a male victim has little-to-no impact on their willingness to comply with such acts of violence, and yet, the suggestion that the victim would be a 'girl' appears to deter or discomfort Gus.

The linguistic choices here also add to the contrasting imagery of the two possible victims: one of familiarity and masculinity associated with the earlier description of a 'bloke', compared to the relative innocence and child-like description associated with the use of the word 'girl'. By suggesting that violent acts against men are not only condoned but familiar and that Gus's concern against that same violence against women is similarly disregarded is important in understanding how such violence is framed within the hegemony of the play. The conflict between men in the hegemony supports violence between them at various

levels, from repeated prototypicality threats to overt physical violence. However, in these two plays, there is a reluctance to perpetrate violence against women, and yet they are victims of subtle, indirect violence. Ben and Gus's exchange regarding the 'girl' serves to infantilise her, positioning her as less of a threat compared to a possible male victim. In an edited collection dedicated to *The Dumb Waiter*, Jonathan Shandell suggests such an imbalance in the assumed power of men and women indicates the inequality of the gender hierarchy of the play. He argues that the woman victim:

> suffers triple marginalization; being female, ugly and a target is decidedly worse than simply being a target. As this is the only woman and the only of Ben and Gus' past victims to which direct reference is made, in essence Pinter equates disempowerment and victimization with femininity within the social order of the play.

(Shandell, 2009: 161)

For Shandell, Ben and Gus's attitudes towards the woman victim suggest the inherent subjugation of women, positioning them as inherent victims of violence in contrast with men. Not only are they objectified, but much like Rose in *The Room*, Pinter's depiction of women in *The Dumb Waiter* are regarded as complicit to their marginalisation, ultimately becoming victims to men's violent assertions of power and dominance over them. This indicates the level of danger men and women pose to them, with a male victim arguably deserving death, whereas a woman is innocent. This contrast in the perception of men and women strengthens the hegemony, as men are continually seen as rivals, and women are seen as helpless, fragile, easily dominated victims.

Once again, the oppressive organisation will only tolerate complicity, and Ben and Gus are seemingly powerless to dispute the legitimation of violent acts against men and women. In the closing moments of the play, Gus exits the stage, in much of a way as he has done many times previously, though this time seemingly resigned to his inferior position. With Gus's exit, Ben receives his final orders through the speaking-tube, to commit to the 'normal method'. After attempting to call Gus in – to no reply – the door opens and in stumbles Gus, stripped of his jacket and his weapon, and the two men stand in silence. It is this moment that serves as the final test of Ben's commitment to the needs of the organisation and ultimately his complicity to authority. This final image of the play positions Gus as helpless, speechless and desperate, and for Shandell, this acts as an example of Gus's last failure to uphold masculinity, as "he stands emasculated before his partner and the audience -- with his skin exposed and his revolver (a phallic instrument of power) forcibly

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removed, awaiting extermination from a ruthless and mostly invisible patriarchy." (Shandell, 2009: 161) Shandell's observation provides a context for understanding Gus's disruption of the gender hierarchy of the play, where his repeated failures to embody hegemonic masculinity, constantly challenging his weakened position, ultimately emasculates him. Powerless, he stands as potential victim of the unseen forces that expect complicity, as a test of Ben's own complicity. Much like the woman victim described earlier in the play, Gus is now resigned to his violent end, and through his victimisation, he represents the unacceptable, effeminate man.

To return to Prentice's earlier arguments regarding the two men's mutual dependence, she argues that this climactic moment of the play serves to recontextualise the two men's earlier attempts at dominance as ineffectual and futile:

> Although Ben's violence culminates in his holding a gun on Gus, if he pulls the trigger, he destroys his own position, which depends upon having someone to dominate. Despite their numerous apparent differences, the obvious irony in this con game is there can be no real winner and possibly nothing to win.

(Prentice, 2000: 19)

This observation by Prentice is crucial to understanding not only this one moment in the play but also provides an insight into the construction of hegemony throughout Pinter's work. As both men threaten, abuse, and violate one another, they search for dominance and victory at any cost. But the play stands as its most prescient in its depiction of a hegemony that ultimately appoints no victor. Ben and Gus's inability to find common ground, in a perpetual cycle of dominance and rebellion, results in the destruction of their bond. Without Gus, Ben is no longer capable of dominating another, and without Ben, Gus has no one to rebel against. This final moment forces them to confront their dependence momentarily before darkness consumes them. In the Lloyd production, this climactic moment remained in a prolonged, agonising silence as the two men stared at each other, accentuating the tension. This also heightened the connection between the audience and the characters, for much like in *The Room*, we are invited to confront our own inaction. Neither able to stop Ben, or to defend Gus, we are positioned as passive spectators to their conflict, and just like them, are seemingly powerless to alter their situation.

Ben's continued attempts to justify and rationalise the events that have unfolded over the course of the play, and the increasingly absurd demands of the establishment he has so adamantly followed, have been unwavering. Like Bert, he relies on the maintenance

of his own dominance and, consequently, the dominance of the authority he stands for. Yet, where Bert's final violent act is a clear display of masculine power, Ben's inaction is more in parallel with Rose's. Her response to violence is inaction, and where Ben's need for dominance could easily result in shooting Gus, he is made to question his responsibility. We are made to consider how he has been affected by Gus's continued challenging of such authority, and Pinter's decision to avoid resolution forces us to consider whether change is possible for them. For the spectator, we are encouraged to find sympathy for Gus. His resistance against authority and his frustration with the increasingly unobtainable desires of the unseen forces that control the dumb waiter, allows us to share in his continual need for explanation. The obscurity of the events of the play places significant emphasis on a desire for clarity, which Gus also attempts to obtain, so it is in these final moments that the connection between the spectator and the character becomes more provocative. Where *The Room* offers an explicit display of violence to unsettle to spectator and challenge inaction, *The Dumb Waiter* almost encourages inaction, for action in this final moment results in the commitment to the violent act, Ben's completion of his duty, the maintenance of power for the organisation, and Gus's death. Much like Gus, we are left trying to rationalise the events that have unfolded, grasping for clarity, and yet the open-endedness of the climax indicates the power of authority and the powerlessness of those who attempt to resist. Ultimately, it presents us with the sacrifices the individual must make to remain complicit and maintain power within the established hegemonic masculinity.

In these two plays, Pinter introduces several key themes and behaviours that appear frequently in the hegemonic masculinities of his work: control of the internal and external space, manipulation of information, complicity to violence and obedience to authority. All these characteristics are utilised by the characters in these plays to establish masculine dominance, or at least to ensure their own survival within that hegemony. The paranoia regarding the motives and desires of the unseen forces in both plays indicates a sharp, yet comparatively subtle political criticism, and Pinter continues to develop this throughout his later work. What remains poignant in the contemporary productions of both of these plays is how Soutra Gilmour's design of the space served to heighten the looming presence of those unseen forces, and how the banality and discomfort of the set can intensify both the characters' and the spectator's experience of terror and dread. It is important to also recognise the ways in which contemporary productions undermine the impact of the play's resonance with contemporary gender roles, and Marber's production reveals how period settings can provide a problematic depiction of femininity that fails to challenge the

underlying issues of racism and xenophobia. The responses to the 1960 production offered little insight into the ways in which gender was received, and yet the obfuscation of meaning established a connection between character and spectator experience. The search for clarity and understanding allowed for a sympathetic relationship between the audience and the characters in the historical production, which is in surprising contrast to that seen in the reaction to Marber's production. It could be argued that the two plays now stand as a snapshot of the misogyny, violence, racism, and xenophobia of the 1950s, but this seems rather severe. The way in which a modern audience distances themselves from the violence and abuse in the stage action representative of a historical setting suggests that Pinter's earlier work has suffered from the passing of time.

Penelope Prentice argues that the affective quality of these two plays allows the audience to confront and engage with issues of violence, dominance, and injustice. The maintenance of masculine power is benefitted by environments that nurture oppression, restrict rebellion and ultimately reinforce feelings of insecurity and inadequacy, and yet those spaces are often the only places where characters find refuge, for the relative comfort of the seen is far less daunting to face that which is unseen. It is only when those unseen forces enter their comforting space that the characters reveal their true selves. Both plays lead to the external threat being physically realised by their respective climaxes. In *The Dumb Waiter*, we see how the authority of an unseen organisation is embodied through objects such as the envelope or the eponymous dumb waiter. In *The Room*, Riley subverts the established narrative of dread and terror to instead offer a refuge from the dominant, oppressive masculinity enforced by Bert. Both plays utilise space to establish notions of assumed safety and seclusion, but in the final moments of each play, both Rose and Gus are punished for their attempts to question the hegemonic structure, and as such, they face the consequences of their rebellion. It is important to note, however, that Pinter refuses to offer any satisfying resolution, as ultimately their fates are left unanswered. The destruction of identity, acts of violence, and confrontation of unknown fates continue in another of Pinter's earliest plays: *The Birthday Party*.

The Birthday Party

As discussed in the previous chapter, Pinter's early plays offer a perspective on the fundamental themes and ideas that he establishes throughout his body of work. For *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter*, Pinter expresses themes surrounding anxiety, violence, and spatial control. When framing these themes within the lens of hegemonic masculinity, Pinter depicts men as desperate, fragile, and dependent on the systems of dominance that they seek to reinforce. In *The Birthday Party*, first produced in 1958, the character of Stanley represents the desperation, insecurity, and violence associated with a failure to conform to such a hegemony. His dependency on others for reassurance conflicts with his desire for freedom and independence, as Pinter begins to develop various elements of dominant masculinity seen in *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter*. Through Stanley, Pinter establishes a foundation of masculine insecurity, weakness, and violence which he then evolves through the men in his later plays. I argue that outlining Stanley's use of prototypicality threats allows for new understandings about the ways in which he responds to the overwhelming pressures of hegemonic masculinity, and how that serves to position him as weak, ineffectual, and isolated. Stanley's behaviour is therefore a continuation of Rose's paranoia and dread of the external spaces, Gus's resistance to authority, but also reveals the extent to which men refuse to acknowledge their vulnerabilities and punish those whom they perceive as a threat to their masculinity.

The other characters in *The Birthday Party* often utilise prototypicality threats that ultimately expedite Stanley's degradation and eventual assimilation. Pinter expands on those behaviours of Rose in *The Room* to show how feminine resistance becomes crucial to the understanding of Stanley's downfall. This is shown both through Meg's maternal smothering and Lulu's teasing and eventual rejection, ultimately motivating Stanley to resort to acts of sexual violence. In this way, Stanley's attempts to manipulate, seduce or subjugate women are tactics he uses to either gain their validation or assert his dominance, and his failure to do so has a noticeable impact on his masculinity throughout the play. This failure to make romantic and/or sexual connections with the women in the play indicates a clear link between Stanley's masculine performance and his repeated attempts at female subjugation and attempted sexual violence. The importance of recognising Stanley's attempts to dominate both other men and women requires a thorough engagement with the

written and performance text, and as such, my analysis for this chapter continues the use of semiotics. In the first section of the chapter, it is used to outline the ways in which women use verbal and physical signs to assert control and subvert their subjugation. For both the second and the final sections, the same method will be used to outline the signs of men's reliance on violence and aggression to mask their vulnerability in the written and performance texts. I will also be expanding on arguments that have been established in the previous chapter that rely on Ric Knowles' method of reading the material theatre to engage with the critical reception of the premiere production by Peter Wood in 1958, the 1994 National Theatre production directed by Sam Mendes, and the Ian Rickson production of the play in 2018.

Other themes that are prevalent in Pinter's early plays can also be seen in *The Birthday Party*, for Goldberg and McCann's embodiment of systemic vengeance and hierarchical conformity draws parallels to many of Pinter's later plays, establishing a clear political throughline in his work. But even these two men display characteristics that contradict their initial confident dominance, eventually presenting similarly non-hegemonic behaviours such as insecurity, dependence, and paranoia. Such layers of political inconsistency are more prevalent in this play, for the ideology of bureaucratic punishment and wilful ignorance of hypocrisy are embedded within the masculine performances of these two men. In performance, the act of torture and violence positions the audience as complicit to such acts, and the severity of Stanley's resort to sexual violence forces the spectator into extreme discomfort. The production of the play in 2018, directed by Ian Rickson at the Harold Pinter Theatre, offered a provocative perspective on the drab domesticity of the play, and the discomfort brought on by fear, inadequacy, and violence. By exploring this discomfort and the reaction to such violence on stage, I continue to explore how the relationship between stage action and the spectator provides scope for understanding the perception of hegemony in the play. The Rickson production was marketed to audiences as recognition of the 60th anniversary of the play's premiere production at the Lyric, Hammersmith, directed by Peter Wood, and throughout this chapter, I will be referring to this infamous production to consider the differing responses to the gendered power of the play between the two productions. The critical reception of the premiere is notable for its negative reviews, forcing the production to close after just one week, indicating a significant shift in audience sentiment towards Pinter's work over sixty years. Such a comparison is then further contextualised with the 1994 Sam Mendes production at the Lyttelton Theatre to offer a more nuanced reflection of the different creative decisions and critical responses

to the play in the last sixty years. The arguments in this chapter will include a consideration of the critical response of both productions, offering new perspectives into the contemporary contexts of *The Birthday Party* regarding masculine power, systemic power, and feminine resistance.

Meg and Lulu: Vulnerability & Empowerment

In the opening moments of the play, Pinter establishes key elements that illustrate the gendered interpersonal relationships between Meg and Stanley. As Meg and Petey – the maternal housekeeper of the boarding house the play is set in and her stoic husband – begin their opening exchange, there exists a difficult yet mundane routine of communication between them. This relationship initially suggests a banality which much like *The Room*, disguises a depth of insecurity and danger between the couple. But where Rose's constant questioning and answering to herself is an attempt at establishing control – compensating for Bert's silence by reassuring herself – there is an implied co-dependency between Meg and Petey. The conversation between them begins with a balanced back-and-forth, with both exchanging similarly brief questions and replies about mundane topics – ranging from breakfast to Petey's job setting up deckchairs on the nearby beachfront. However, in this opening dialogue, Meg establishes a need for validation from Petey, and he appears perfectly willing to provide it. Although a quaint, pleasant presentation of the routine between the couple, this highlights the fundamental dynamic between the two characters. Meg's initial behaviour presents a femininity which is both as a doting provider for Petey, intertwined with a level of anxiety which leads to a dependence on validation from him. All these behaviours suggest a stereotypically subordinate femininity, complementing a hegemonic masculinity reliant on the subjugation of women. But Petey's behaviour is not indicative of such a need for dominance, and although he has no issue with Meg's seemingly subordinate position, he has an unfaltering willingness to reassure his wife. His answers to her questions – albeit blunt at times – suggest a more relaxed, routine affirmation of Meg's curiosity, whether that be out of a need to pacify her or more out of a desire to offer the reassurance that she needs. In either case, this opening exchange suggests a dynamic of surprising equality between the husband and wife, indicating a relationship built on mutual dependency, rarely seen in Pinter's work. This makes it even more impactful when the events of the play slowly begin to unravel such a familiar routine, and Pinter's choice to mirror the opening and ending of the play with contrasting exchanges between Meg and Petey indicates that the events of the play have had a significant impact on their relationship.

What is also revealing in this opening exchange is the establishment of one of the more noticeable themes within the play: the relationship between the maternal and the filial. In an image that is strikingly similar to the opening exchange of another of Pinter's early plays, *The Dumb Waiter*, Meg and Petey discuss a recent event in the newspaper he is reading. Petey refers to a celebrity – the comically named 'Lady Splatt' – having given birth to a new child. Meg is immediately disappointed to find out that it was a girl and repeatedly states, quite callously, that she would "much rather have a little boy" (Pinter, 1991: 11). This admission is one of the most subtly revealing lines spoken by Meg throughout the play as it provides a richer context for her behaviour towards Stanley. Her comment indicates how he represents for her a surrogate son who not only can be lost but also how his presence in the house provides the ultimate validation and fulfilment of her desire. Her use of the phrase 'little boy' in this exchange not only cements her desire for a filial relationship but also her infantilisation of whoever fills that role. To some extent, her care for Petey also positions him in an infantile role as his dependence on her nurturing of him affirms her adoption of a pseudo-maternal role within their marriage. Elizabeth Sakellaridou offers a further context for Meg's comment in her book *Pinter's Female Portraits*, arguing that Meg's desire for a boy also reinforces the patriarchal dynamic of the play. She remarks that "This female wish ironically reflects the principle of the superiority of the male, which is a masculine value. It simply echoes the ideology of a patriarchal society, which Meg has unconsciously internalised." (Sakellaridou, 1988: 37) As Sakellaridou underlines, this brief moment not only reveals fundamental interpersonal beliefs and attitudes Meg has towards Stanley and Petey, but also provides a context for understanding their oppression, and her own. However, this performance and validation of her maternal role are empowering for Meg, whose femininity could initially be perceived as outwardly subordinate to the men around her, but their dependence on her and her consequent infantilisation of them serves to strengthen Meg's power.

In the 2018 production of the play at the Harold Pinter Theatre, directed by Ian Rickson, Zoe Wanamaker's Meg embodied an explicitly maternal persona, but also suggested how the maternal role she craved offered a lightly comic but provocative performance of fragile femininity. For critics of the production, there was a vocal majority that praised Wanamaker's performance, commenting on the actor's capable balancing of the maternal and the sensual, with Neil Norman of the *Daily Express* referring to how she "vacillates between maternal coddling and suppressed lust" (Norman, 2018). The recognition of these behaviours in the reviews suggests just how fundamental they are to

Meg's character but does little to suggest the richness of her feminine presentation. Michael Billington – notable theatre critic and biographer of Pinter – in his review of the production for the *Guardian* claims that "Pinter went on to write much more complex women" (Billington, 2018). This reductive attitude towards the women in *The Birthday Party* appears to dismiss any discourse on the capability of these characters to present provocative ideas on femininity compared to Pinter's other plays. When compared to the reviews of the premiere production in 1958, directed by Peter Wood, these responses to Meg's character offer a surprising echo of reviews from sixty years before. J.C. Trewin, in his review for the *Illustrated London News*, offered a commentary on Beatrix Lehmann's performance of Meg that parallels that seen sixty years later in Norman's review of Wanamaker. He begins by praising Lehmann's depiction of "a gentle, wistful simpleton", which is then balanced with her "expression of a frustrated maternal instinct" (Trewin, 1958). Although there is a recognition of Meg's overt maternal presentation, much like with the reviews of Rickson's production, there is a clear dismissal of her power. For the 1994 Sam Mendes production, high praise was given by critics towards the performance of Dora Bryan, complimenting her balance of a maternal femininity with comic vulnerability. Paul Taylor remarked on Bryan's Meg in his review in the *Independent*, where she "conducts herself when striving to endear, with a grotesque geriatric girlishness. To respond to her overtures would feel simultaneously like cradle-snatching and necrophilia." (Taylor, 1994) For Taylor, Bryan's Meg embodied the maternal, yet is combined with a discomforting childishness, suggesting an immaturity that fails to gain sympathy. Her treatment of Stanley is not relatable or tolerable, instead inappropriate, and Taylor places that responsibility directly onto Meg. Trewin's interpretation of Lehmann's Meg as a mere 'simpleton' once again does nothing to consider her ability to undermine hegemonic power in the play. Taylor's implication that the immaturity and childishness of Bryan's Meg thirty years later also fails to show her empowerment suggests a similar sentiment to Trewin's. It is important to see that the critical reception since the premiere production towards Meg as a character has failed to acknowledge her empowered role in the play, seeing her as either deserving victim or ineffectual simpleton. Trewin's interpretation is, much more indicative of the comparatively limited cultural awareness of feminine power in the middle of the century, but the same cannot be said for Norman's review of the Rickson production.

The dismissal of Meg's power by contemporary critics is indicative of a reluctance to consider how women in Pinter's plays can undermine and subvert their subordinate positions. It is unfortunate that such sentiments seem to echo those outdated and archaic

attitudes towards feminine power that were prevalent at the time of the premiere production. To dispute both Norman and Billington's remarks on Meg's power, I argue that the opening exchange of Wanamaker's Meg demonstrated an empowered femininity that instead subverted the assumed stereotypical feminine behaviours, using infantilisation to undermine the power of the men around her. However, when compared to the women in Pinter's later plays, Meg does ultimately remain in a subordinate position, and when observing her journey throughout the play, some concession may be given to justify Billington's interpretation that women such as Ruth in *The Homecoming* more closely represent feminine power and resilience. Throughout the play, Meg's implied naivety – if not delusion – in recognising the events around her suggests a complicity to a hegemonic structure that places her femininity as purely complementary to the maintenance of masculine domination. Yet, her inability to acknowledge the inherent power dynamics is one of the most potent challenges to the hegemonic structure. Within the hegemony, such a subversion of the assumed feminine role positions any future attempt to reassert masculine power at a disadvantage. It is in this way that Meg's adoption of the maternal role, and her ability to balance this with that of overt sensuality directly undermines the hegemonic system so far in the play, indicating much more than the reductive criticism may suggest.

The Rickson production did however cultivate a level of empathy for the character of Meg, whose desperation for the filial bond appeared as a moment of hope in the surrounding decrepit room. Framed within the dark, dreary, if not oppressively large stage of The Quay Brothers's set design, the peeling wallpaper and musty atmosphere suggested a space of unwelcoming disrepair. Basil Chiasson, in a review of the play for the Pinter Legacies project, noted how the design of the production moved away from a realistic set in favour of a larger, almost surrealistic impression. With dark colours, peeling wallpaper and stretching walls, the design implied that "'elements from the real world, the overall pattern was unreal and grotesque' and that the work presents an 'unreal reality'" (Chiasson, 2018). It is here that we are able to see the similarities between Pinter's other earlier plays, where – as discussed in the previous chapter – the response to the 1960 production of *The Room* also noted the unreality of Pinter's spaces. For the premiere production of *The Birthday Party* in 1958, the design of Hutchinson Scott was intended to also rely on this aesthetic of the unreal, as Pinter himself notes, the set resembled "an enormous conservatory which never existed in anyone's mind or anyone's house" (Billington, 1996: 86). However, this was not entirely successful, as critics of the production seemed to find some comfort and familiarity in the space, with the reviewer for *The Stage* noting how "the

set is fitting, and very amusing to look at." (*The Stage*, 1958), and a similar sentiment from a critic in the *Reading Mercury*, finding that "The setting—the living room of a house in a seaside town —designed by Hutchinson Scott, is suitable and pleasing" (*Reading Mercury*, 1958). It is therefore interesting to observe how the success of productions of *The Birthday Party* is seemingly tied to its ability to convey the unreality of the stage space. Noting how the premiere was ultimately poorly received, it reveals how an audience may find a stronger connection to Pinter's work when finding themselves uneasy, mirroring the experience of the characters on stage.

Tom Piper's design for the Mendes production had a similar issue to that of the Rickson production, specifically how they would be able to create the intimacy of the Bowles's dining room on the vast Lyttelton stage. The decision to set the dramatic action at the back of the stage, far from the audience, was ultimately well-received by critics. In *The Times*, Jeremy Kingston wrote of Piper's design, "when the front curtain goes up, the bright little, tight little living room is way back at the rear of the stage, surrounded, top, bottom and sides, by inky dark." (Kingston, 1994) This inky darkness would complement the themes of the play itself, where "In any or every such place, we are left to suppose, fear, guilt and deception are present, and exposure may come." (Kingston, 1994) Unlike the design of the other two productions, the impact of Piper's design in 1994 was dependent on its depiction of an unknown, but relatable reality. In the *Financial Times*, Alistair Macaulay described the resonance of the final image of the production, where "Tom Piper's designs not only create an effectively realistic 1950s interior, but also introduce it with a drop-curtain of this town's sandy seaside beach (where Petey works) and frames this particular house against a background of other identical houses. This is just one house among many." (Macaulay, 1994) Together, the reality of the set design is provided another layer, where action of the play could be replicated amongst other identical buildings. The terror associated with exposing an unseen threat, experienced by all characters over the course of the play, is fully realised. It is in this disquieting environment that we may recall Chiasson's interpretation of the Rickson production, describing how it is this unreal space that the couple make their home. And yet, the impact of the plays imagery of terror and violence can also be brought to the forefront of the production through a realistic approach to design, as seen in the Mendes production. Meg's ability to find comfort in this large, mostly vacant space frames her performance of an overbearing, yet caring, femininity with the obvious dreariness and neglected state of the space around her. Like Rose in *The Room*, Meg's dominance of the space allows her to remain in control, and it is this understanding of a tenuous, grotesque

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reality presented in the Quay Brothers' design for the Rickson production that serves to suggest a fundamental flaw in Meg and Petey's routine. Their world is fragile, and in disrepair and they are incapable, or unwilling to notice. The worn floorboards and stained tablecloth suggest that Meg's distracted mind may be the cause of such disrepair, instead finding comfort in such a boarding house being "on the list" (Pinter, 1991: 12). These observations suggest a connection between spectator and character that allows for a more poignant engagement with the action of the play and as such can later be subverted and undermined.

As the topic of discussion in this opening exchange between Meg and Petey shifts onto Stanley, Meg's performance of the maternal role continues, this time indicating an overt dismissal of boundaries and an almost childlike joy from Stanley's discomfort, as can be seen in the following passage:

> I made him. I stood there till he did. I'm going to call him. (*She goes to the door.*) Stan! Stanny! (*She listens.*) Stan! I'm coming up to fetch you if you don't come down! I'm coming up! I'm going to count three! One! Two! Three! I'm coming to get you! (*She exits and goes upstairs. In a moment, shouts from STANLEY, wild laughter from MEG. PETEY takes his plate to the hatch. Shouts. Laughter. PETEY sits at the table. Silence. She returns.*) He's coming down. (*She is panting and arranges her hair.*) I told him if he didn't hurry up he'd get no breakfast.

> (Pinter, 1991: 13-14)

It is clear from Meg's behaviour at this moment that she derives pleasure from this release. With a sudden burst of energy, her maternal role is one reliant on a certain childlike game-playing, yet such a performance is balanced with an implicitly sexual game of teasing and punishment, to the extent that she clearly overwhelms him. Much like a mother playing with her child, she outlines an expectation to be followed, and punishment if it is not obeyed. Though the stakes for such a loss are comparatively low at this point, it indicates either a lack of awareness of boundaries or just an unapologetic disregard for Stanley's feelings. This dismissal of his request to be left alone is a further display of her power, this time establishing her physical dominance over him and creating an image of a smothering mother and a reluctant son. In other of Pinter's early plays, men often rely on physical domination to establish their masculine superiority such as Bert's brutal attack on Riley, or Ben's strangling of Gus. But here this behaviour is subverted through Meg's forceful rejection of boundaries, and though the action takes place off-stage, it results in an implied physical punishment against Stanley. It is suggested that Meg's need to satisfy her maternal

urges is so severe that she is unaware of Stanley's protests, or if she is, it is entirely dismissed in favour of maintaining the impression of a consensual mother/son relationship she so clearly seeks.

In another of Pinter's earlier plays, *The Room*, Rose's need for comfort and validation is so severely overlooked by her husband that she must rely on her own reassurances, but in *The Birthday Party*, Meg obtains such comfort even when the source of that comfort is openly hostile. Stanley's responses to Meg's need for validation juxtapose with Petey's earlier wilful passivity, for as she asks, "Did you sleep well?", he replies "I didn't sleep at all" (1999: 14). Whereas Petey chooses to pacify Meg through his admissions of approval and affirmation, Stanley openly undermines Meg through such hostile remarks. Meg's delusion about Stanley's affection is so rooted within her identity that the exchange between them reinforces their bond instead of fracturing it. It is unclear at this point whether Stanley is aware of Meg's need for validation, and as such may only be a spiteful attempt at vengeance for his rude awakening. But his reaction in this exchange reveals a childishness in him – one which complements his perceived role as 'son' to Meg. It is important to note that due to the suggested ages of the characters, with Meg being in her sixties, and Stanley in his late thirties, the implication of a mother/son relationship is inferred by the casting of the performers. In Rickson's production, however, this dynamic became less explicit, for the decision to cast Toby Jones as Stanley alongside Zoë Wanamaker's Meg affected the realism of that maternal/filial dynamic. Jones's virulent and aggressive Stanley offered an energetic, though inescapably withering lodger alongside Wanamaker's youthful, tenderly naive landlady. This had the unfortunate effect of diminishing the impact of this filial role Stanley clearly occupies within the text and though critics of the production acknowledged Meg's wistful desire to reclaim some unknown loss, the casting did little to highlight this interpretation.

The contrasting approaches of Petey and Stanley towards Meg reinforce her gendered performance of maternal femininity, but as the scene continues, Stanley's need for retaliation becomes more pronounced. At every opportunity, Stanley rebuffs Meg's request for validation and compliments, as if resorting to some immature, child-like defiance. These repeated attempts at undermining Meg are indicative of a need to contest her dominant femininity, for Stanley's innately subordinate position in his performance of the 'son' role heightens his sense of threatened power. As such, in an attempt to regain some semblance of control, he responds with overt challenges to Meg's empowered femininity. Stanley's oppositions become prototypicality threats intended to regain a position of

masculine domination over Meg, where his declarations that her cornflakes are "Horrible" or "The milk's off" (1991: 14) serve to not only undermine her need to care and nurture but also her dominant position over him. Stanley's suggestion that she is incapable or inept in providing a satisfying meal is a threat to her established maternal and nurturing femininity and as such, aims to assert control and diminish her sense of empowerment. It has become clear at this point that Stanley is aware of Meg's need for validation, and his constant refusal to give that same validation acts as a rejection of her power. He seeks to undermine her position of power and strengthen his own, thereby indicating his reliance on a hegemony supported by masculine domination and Meg's subjugated femininity.

For Penelope Prentice, Stanley's need to dominate is not only irrational but also comes from a failure to address inner weaknesses, as she argues, "Stanley's impulsive action to assert his freedom, which ironically costs him his liberty, results from a classic combination of pride and lack of self-knowledge" (2002: 31). Prentice's suggestion of freedom is closely linked to the notion of control, for Stanley's need to exercise any semblance of power over Meg stems from his refusal to change, instead choosing to avoid confronting his insecurities. His almost pathetic rebellion against Meg's power strengthens the impression of child-like immaturity and frustration. The exchange culminates in Stanley's final prototypicality threat, stating "I can see I'll have to go down to one of those smart hotels on the front" to which Meg reacts, "You won't get a better breakfast there than here" (1991: 15). This suggestion that Stanley will find better lodging is double-pronged in its threat to Meg's power. Having made it clear in the earlier exchange that Meg prides herself on the quality lodging she provides, this comment from Stanley implies that not only is her boarding house not up to standard, but also his threat to leave implies she may lose him as her surrogate son. This threat reveals Meg's almost tragic dependence on Stanley – or at least what he represents to her – and her attempts to convince him to stay serve to highlight her fear of abandonment. But their combative relationship is one of mutual dependence, for Meg's need to maintain a maternal performance is also facilitating Stanley's desire for seclusion and safety. Much like Prentice argues, his dependence on Meg also supports his refusal to acknowledge his weaknesses and as such, her overbearing nature must be endured if he is to remain hidden from himself, and those that would seek him out.

The maternal/filial relationship is perhaps no more obvious than in the imagery which serves as the climax of the first act. Meg and Stanley are once again alone, as she ignores his comments that it is not his birthday, instead gifting him a toy drum. Arguably one of Pinter's most overtly absurd exchanges, this moment offers a culmination of the dynamic

which has been established in their opening exchanges. The very act of giving once again brings with it connotations of maternal care and affection by Meg, but for Stanley, the drum represents a tragic reminder of loss, forcing him to briefly confront his past. Not only does the drum itself serve as a reminder of his lost connection to his artistic past, but also in accepting Meg's gift, it solidifies his embodiment of his filial role. In the Rickson production, Jones's Stanley presented a noticeable shift in his vocal and physical performance which indicated a sharp contrast to his earlier outbursts. As if caught in a trap, he was forced to recall that which he so desperately fought to hide. Though Wanamaker's Meg seemed initially innocent and sincere, this is then contrasted as she follows with a request for him to kiss her. Their dynamic blurs once again into the sexual, heightening the uncomfortable position seemingly felt by the now silent Stanley, who reluctantly approaches Meg. In a moment of uncomfortable tension, Jones lingered over the expectant Wanamaker, creating an anxious feeling about the significance of Stanley's decision. He chose to kiss her on the cheek, offering a brief release of the tension. As if a warning of what is to come, Stanley is incapable of resisting any attempt to subjugate him, and the innocence of Meg's gift serves to position Stanley into child-like submission. His final words of the act seem to indicate his acceptance of his subjugated role, asking "Shall I put it round my neck?" (Pinter, 1991: 36). Pinter's choice of language at this moment, evokes imagery of hanging as well as suicide, seems to suggest how such submission is a precursor to death. Therefore, Stanley's choice to submit to Meg here not only becomes another clear example of Meg's ability to undermine Stanley's power but also how Pinter frames the relinquishing of individual freedom as both regressive and weak.

Not only is Meg capable of deflecting Stanley's abuse through her attachment to her maternal role, but in her naivety, she also demonstrates an ability to disarm the new arrivals in the form of Goldberg and McCann. After Meg returns to the house, seeing the two strangers sitting at the dining table unannounced, she comically drops her bags of shopping in shock. In an almost instant switch in tone from the previous exchange between the two men, Goldberg rises and exchanges confident, reassuring pleasantries with the stunned Meg. This introduction immediately positions Meg on the back foot, as she takes time to recover and eventually welcomes the two men, allowing Goldberg the opportunity to establish control through his flattery and outwardly sincere demeanour. He continues to validate her through compliments and introducing the idea of a party which – though seemingly sincere and helpful – ultimately furthers his own agenda. In this way, Meg's complicity reinforces Goldberg's power and his attempts to manipulate her, leaving her

subordinate to his continued empowerment. There is, however, an indication that Meg's naivety can disarm the confident Goldberg, seen in the following exchange:

Goldberg   Madam, you'll look like a tulip.

Meg   What colour?

Goldberg   Er—well, I'll have to see the dress first.

(1991: 33)

In this brief exchange above, she indicates that she is not entirely powerless and has the effect of temporarily fracturing Goldberg's performance. This is the first instance where Goldberg's typically unshakeable manipulation is undermined, as he is caught off guard. Andrew Wyllie comments on this aspect of Meg's character as defensive rather than offensive, arguing that "Meg's may be a negative capability, but her lack of a rational response to Goldberg's conversation provides her with a large measure of protection from the threat he represents. Whether the women in the play represent, in their turn, a threat to the men, however, is another matter" (2009: 72). This is a largely sympathetic reading of the two women's agency; however, Wyllie fails to consider the extent to which such a subversion of expected behaviour from Meg serves as a direct threat to Goldberg's control. Wyllie's suggestion that the women's ability to undermine their subordination is unfortunate in its dismissal of their power, and yet Meg demonstrates here a likely unintentional disruption of Goldberg's confident façade. As the play continues, Meg remains somewhat resistant to the questionable charms of her new guests and their attempts at domination, but her naivety is not enough to maintain a position of continued rebellion against them, and their ability to establish an oppressive hegemony which ultimately keeps her subjugated.

The introduction of Lulu provides an opportunity for Pinter to present a contrasting femininity to that seen in Meg, as her gendered performance comes not from a need to nurture or a dependence on others. In her opening exchange with Stanley, she reveals a willingness to both provoke and undermine his attempts at domination and control by exposing his insecurities. When Lulu arrives, Stanley's performance shifts from one of hostility and frustration to one of bravado and feigned nonchalance in an inelegant attempt to impress her. As soon as she enters, she crosses the space, places a package, and opens the back door, claiming that the room is 'stuffy'. In the Rickson production, Pearl Mackie's Lulu demonstrated a confident, vibrant woman through both her costume and her use of space. Entering in a bright pink blouse which immediately disrupted the dim, dank dining

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room, Lulu moved through the space with elegance and confidence, showing a keen familiarity with the space and establishing control over the room. This had the added effect of implying a dominance over Stanley who, almost windswept, remains inert, sat at the table as she moved past him. As established in *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter*, exercising control over the internal space affords characters power, and the fight for such control is an oft-used tactic by any character attempting to dominate others within the space. As such, Lulu's confidence and swift movement expose Stanley's stale rigidity, and his status is almost immediately undermined. So, in an attempt to regain control, he begins to refute Lulu's claims, stating how he "disinfected the place this morning" (Pinter, 1991: 25). Where Stanley's attempts to display superiority with Meg were outwardly hostile, he now utilises such statements to not only defend against Lulu's domination of the space but also to impress her and demonstrate value. Whether because of Meg's physical invasion of Stanley's off-stage space, or in Lulu's immediately confident control of the room, both women begin in a position of relative power.

Stanley's differing attitudes towards the two women in the play are no clearer than in this opening exchange. His need to establish superiority over Meg comes in the form of teasing, which somewhat obfuscates his constant challenges, manipulations, and abuse towards her. With Lulu, however, the teasing appears more playful between the two, as if flirting, until she begins to threaten his masculinity. The exchange continues to a point where they compete for dominance, both resorting to prototypicality threats, but where Lulu highlights faults with Stanley's physical appearance and hygiene, he must repeatedly challenge her to stay in the game:

> **Stanley**   I think it's going to rain to-day. What do you think?
>
> **Lulu**   I hope so. You could do with it.
>
> **Stanley**   Me! I was in the sea at half past six.
>
> **Lulu**   Were you?
>
> **Stanley**   I went right out to the headland and back before breakfast. Don't you believe me!

(1991: 25)

Stanley's refusal to back down and his lies about his activity that morning serves as an immature response to Lulu's repeated comments on his poor hygiene. He clearly wants to impress her as he disputes any suggestion that he fails to live up to her expectations, but

by relying on lies, he ends up appearing more desperate and pathetic. This constant threat to his power allows Lulu to maintain a position of power over him, where his pitiable attempts to gain her approval end in her catastrophic rejection of his advances. Stanley's variably weakened status places him at a disadvantage when attempting to regain power, and it is in these early moments of the play that Lulu's dominance serves to undermine any attempt by him to assert the supremacy of his masculinity. Returning to Wyllie, he once again dismisses the importance of Lulu's role in undermining Stanley's power, arguing that "the anxiety that Pinter is deploying in *The Birthday Party* is less about the impact of women on men than about the destructive reaction of men to that impact" (2009: 72). This clearly intentional dismissal of feminine power by Wyllie is rather problematic in his suggestion that Pinter's priority in the play is to showcase the reaction of men rather than the effect of women's power. I would argue that they are not mutually exclusive and that Stanley's later reaction to his inferior position is a direct consequence of Lulu and Meg's dominance over him. As such, women's impact on men is the catalyst for Stanley's eventual decline throughout the play and is a product of both women's ability to temporarily subvert masculine domination.

In the Rickson production of the play, this exchange revealed how desperately Stanley relied on such pathetic attempts to impress Lulu. As Toby Jones's Stanley moved cautiously closer to Mackie's Lulu, she produced a slight chuckle during her last question, serving as an almost patronising opportunity for him to back out of the lie – to admit defeat. Jones's response not only conveyed a desperate attempt to avoid confessing his constant lies but also served as a defiant test, to see if she would challenge him further. The physicality of Mackie's Lulu also implied her superiority over him, as she stood tall, with self-assured confidence, wearing a pink blouse which immediately contrasted against Jones's pale, baggy, stained clothes. Jones's Stanley being much shorter and older added to the sense of desperation, looking up to Mackie, both through a perceived affection which also conveyed her physical dominance over him. Although this moment in the performance relied on the objectification of Mackie's Lulu to convey ideas of feminine dominance, this was contrasted by Mackie's calm control, suggesting a much richer portrayal of feminine power. Yet, even in this subtle implication of a power imbalance, the dynamic between the two performers offered a surprising chemistry throughout the exchange, as the two engaged in a similar playful game-playing to that seen in the earlier exchanges between Meg and Stanley.

Much like what would later be expanded in the character of Ruth in *The Homecoming*, Lulu is subjected to objectification by both Stanley and Goldberg, which would typically serve to position her in a comparatively subordinate role. However, she utilises the desires of the men in an attempt to subvert their domination and instead strengthen her feminine power. Both Meg and Lulu repeatedly resist masculine domination, but once Goldberg and McCann arrive, the hierarchy of the play becomes much more reliant on hegemonic masculinity, and unfortunately, both women fall victim to the men's abuse of power. During the party, Lulu becomes enthralled by the flattery and wistful fabrications of Goldberg, and Pinter takes this opportunity to present an unnerving mirror of the maternal and sexual relationship like that seen between Meg and Stanley to instead show one of paternal power and abstract memory in the relationship between Goldberg and Lulu. Lulu's change in behaviour, from her confident teasing seen in her earlier exchange with Stanley, is subverted in her quick adoration of Goldberg. Much like Stanley and Meg, Lulu also relies on fantasy to maintain a sense of control, assigning Goldberg as an almost paternal figure through their joint references to playing 'piggy-back' and 'pop goes the weasel'. Their exchange in which they discuss whether she was a "good little girl" (Pinter, 1991: 60) heightens a sense of discomfort in the blurring of the paternal/filial and the sexual dynamic between the two characters. Lulu's almost childlike fantasy in this exchange seems to show her relinquishing her previous position of power in an attempt to gain favour with Goldberg. Not only does this undermine her own empowered femininity, but in her attempts to impress and comply with Goldberg's suggestions, he is able to manipulate her, thereby supporting his dominant position within the hegemony.

It is important to note that the reversal of Lulu's empowered position impacts the ways in which the audience may sympathise with her new subordinate position. In a review of the Rickson production by Andrzej Lukowski in *TimeOut*, the response to Lulu's subjugated position within the play was largely impacted by the prominence of voices of victims of sexual violence as part of the #MeToo movement. He wrote how "Mackie's likeable Lulu becomes collateral in the masculine powerplay has a queasy resonance in the post-Weinstein era" (Lukowski, 2018). This overt reference to the discourse surrounding sexual violence against women at the time of the production – specifically by men in positions of power – indicates the significance of the audience's relationship to the violence that takes place on stage. This is in sharp contrast to the reception of Wendy Hutchinson's Lulu in the premiere production in 1958, where critics praised Hutchinson's performance but ultimately reduced her character to being physically appealing, ineffectual, and

unnecessary. In a review for *The Stage*, one critic noted how "Wendy Hutchinson gives a well characterised performance in an attractive but not very important part" (*The Stage*, 1958), and in the *Reading Mercury*, one other critic felt that "One did not care much for the character of Lulu, but this did not detract front Miss Hutchinson's acting" (*Reading Mercury*, 1958). Even in 1994, such limiting perspectives and quick objectification of Emma Amos's Lulu underlines the persistent sexist attitudes towards women in public discourse before the turn of the century. Between comments about Amos's "stupendous, rocket-shaped frontage" (Paton, 1994), and her presentation as "the cockney bimbo with the 1950s hairdo. ("Curvaceous" seems the appropriate 1950s word for her.)" (Gross, 1994), such objectification is remarkably more pervasive than that seen in reviews in 1958. The contrast between these two opposing attitudes towards Lulu's character clearly outlines the ways in which contemporary critics are more considerate of the victimisation of women in Pinter's plays. However, recalling earlier arguments in this section about contemporary critics' dismissal of feminine power reveals how there are still issues that remain in how we respond to Pinter's presentation of feminine power. Lukowski's view of Lulu's victimisation does reveal how we still remain sympathetic to her subordinate position throughout the play, much like what was observed in the reception of Marber's production of *The Room*. As an audience who has become more informed of gender inequality compared to the 1950s, we are positioned as sympathetic towards women who are subjected to direct and indirect acts of violence perpetrated by men, and this informs our sympathetic relationship to both Meg and Lulu.

As they themselves are victims of violence at the hands of both Stanley and Goldberg, this then, understandably, impacts the level to which a modern audience empathises with the men in the play, and as a spectator, removes any inclination towards sympathy towards Stanley, Goldberg, and McCann as seemingly unapologetic abusers of both women. Meg's loss of memory about the events of the previous evening motivates her to continue her nurturing of Stanley, whereas Lulu's implied sexual activity with Goldberg positions herself as one more victim of the dominant masculine power, where her consent and involvement in their shared night is similarly obfuscated. Much like in Pinter's other plays, women capably undermine the power of inferior men, and in *The Birthday Party*, Meg and Lulu remain complicit in their subordination and are incapable of undermining the men who seek to enforce the system that relies on it. The effect of Rickson's interpretation of violence in performance ensures that the production positions the spectator as oppositional to the men's struggle for dominance. It is arguable then, that Rickson's production also

allowed us to remain inimical to their behaviour and the hegemony they so desperately attempt to conform to. In the next section, there will be a closer look at Stanley's development throughout the play and how his behaviour and actions affect that hegemony, ultimately revealing a fragile masculinity dependent on a sense of power.

Stanley: Insecurity & Vengeance

The relationship between Stanley's inferior masculinity and the women's empowered femininity is crucial to his eventual downfall. His behaviour towards the women in the play is arguably one of the reasons why Goldberg and McCann initiate their slow interrogation and torture of him – if not the very cause of their arrival. Stanley's attempts at control and his desperate desire to assert a dominant masculinity often result in revealing his own insecurities and as with Meg and Lulu, their provocative, disarming femininity reveals a dissonance in Stanley's masculine presentation. They undermine his need for dominance and over the course of the play, threaten his performance of the hegemonic masculinity. Stanley's attempts to abuse and manipulate Meg, and his acts of sexual violence against Lulu, are then a response to being confronted with his own inadequacy. The women are neither responsible nor culpable in Stanley's abject failure to present the hegemonic masculinity, but through his desperation to avoid confronting his shame, he attempts to punish those who shamed him. Simon Cottee's writing about masculinity and shame helps with understanding Stanley's behaviour, where the act of punishment "is rooted in shame, where chronic sexual rejection at the hands of women is experienced as a grave personal insult that must be avenged to restore a sense of male honor" (Cottee, 2020: 109). This vengeance that Cottee describes becomes an attempt to strengthen weakened masculinity, and offers a new perspective on Stanley's journey, his gendered performance, as well as his relationships with the women around him. This section will offer a thorough analysis of Stanley's journey throughout the play, his use of violence, and terror, and how the Rickson and premiere productions of the play aim to balance sympathy and criticism of his behaviour.

With Meg, Stanley introduces an aspect of their relationship which contrasts with their established maternal/filial dynamic. In one of their opening exchanges, Stanley's use of the word 'succulent' introduces an implied sexual element to their relationship. Whether or not it is because of Meg's reaction of indignation that Stanley continues to tease her, Meg's initial reaction shifts to one of coy interest – once again finding some validation in his surprisingly flirtatious comments towards her. Pinter reveals how such subdued hostility from Stanley stems from a need to punish Meg for her earlier intrusion, eventually chastising

Meg by arguing "It isn't your place to come into a man's bedroom and—wake him up" (1991: 18). This brief hesitation from Stanley suggests that their earlier scuffle off stage perhaps included an unspoken – likely unwanted – sexual interaction between them which heightens the growing unnerving sexual tension in their dynamic. In the Rickson production, Meg's offstage invasion became one of uncomfortable comedy, with the sole character on stage being Peter Wight's Petey, whose disinterested scoffing of his cornflakes not only contrasts with the highly energetic and rowdy action off-stage but also implies how such behaviour is seemingly typical between them. It is important to note that Petey, as an almost-silent witness to this exchange is complicit in their uncomfortable behaviour. Though he does not actively encourage Meg's invasion, he seems to accept the futility of stopping her, either because he sees their relationship as harmless or healthy, or because he feels helpless to challenge it. Much like his later inability to challenge Stanley's assimilation by Goldberg and McCann, Petey's silence throughout this exchange indicates a complicity to Meg's smothering, unable to defend Stanley from her unwanted advances. The absurdity of such a moment, heightened by Wanamaker's Meg returning into the room proudly adjusting her skirt and neatening up her hair, also implies an almost sexual satisfaction. This moment reveals how Meg's innocent and naïve – but ultimately smothering – behaviour towards Stanley in these early moments sets up an empathetic link with him before he even arrives on stage. Although this empathy between spectator and character shifts throughout the play, this initial dynamic is reliant on Stanley's position as reluctantly submissive.

The relationship between Meg and Stanley in these opening moments is closely embedded in not only their individual sexual desires but also the fundamental power dynamic that shifts as each one seeks to control. Such a connection is richer than a solely psychoanalytical reading would suggest, for their identities, fears and desires are rooted within a mutual dependency which – though outwardly hostile – serves to comfort them both, and ultimately shields them from external danger. It is important then to acknowledge previous scholarship surrounding this sexual dynamic and the interpretation of Oedipal resonances between the two characters, famously stemming from the work of Martin Esslin in his book *The Theatre of the Absurd* (Esslin, 2014), but other scholars have discussed this aspect of their relationship for decades (Burkman, 1982; Ali, 2018; Ravanpak & Pourjafari, 2020) The scholarship mentioned here suggests that our understanding of the relationship between Meg and Stanley, in particular the maternal/filial and sexual aspects, is enhanced by a solely Oedipal interpretation. Though it is valuable to consider the impact of such an interpretation in the context of this sequence, I would argue that the depth of the relationship

is arguably more attributed to the intricacies of their gendered performances in the context of hegemony.

As Meg mentions the potential arrival of two mysterious gentlemen, it comes with the implication that Stanley's private isolation as the sole guest in the boarding house is under threat. Though Meg's information comes from a casual remark, it serves to undermine Stanley's position of power within the house. Within the context of the play so far, Stanley's masculinity is one of dependence, isolation, and hostility, but his dependence is not solely on Meg as the caregiver and the victim of his repeated derogation, it is on the very space itself. Much like other characters in Pinter's plays, the space they occupy offers sometimes temporary but necessary security from a potential threat. Like Rose's eponymous room, or the Waiter's comforting 'womb' embodied by the restaurant he works in *Celebration*, spaces in Pinter's plays are vital not only to the feeling of security and comfort but can be an asset to maintaining power. When such an environment is threatened or invaded, as in *The Dumb Waiter*, or even when such spaces deteriorate over time, as in the lover's flat in *Betrayal*, it can often be the catalyst for violence and isolation. For both Stanley and Meg, the dependency they have established is not impenetrable, and is open to assault, for as Nazan Tutaş & Nihal Demirkol Azak argue, that dependency is closely linked to their need for validation:

> Stanley lets Meg interfere with his life because she reinforces his positive face by fulfilling his 'needs to be appreciated, liked or approved'. Likewise, Meg's needs to be recognised and approved are met through the dominance she asserts over Petey and Stanley as well. Any interference to this interdependency relationship between Stanley and Meg would be perceived as a threat.

(Tutaş & Azak, 2014: 373)

Such interference can easily be attributed to the arrival of Goldberg and McCann later in the play, and even the suggestion of such invaders is enough to cause panic in Stanley. He begins by interrogating Meg to ascertain information on the new guests, indicating a close link between information and power. The idea that his safety in the space is at risk motivates Stanley to enact retribution on Meg and like her earlier intrusion of his room off-stage, her information (or lack thereof) about the potential new arrivals threatens his safe isolation causing him to launch into an assault of blame against Meg. His repetition of variations of the phrase "Who do you think you're talking to?" (Pinter, 1991: 21) is a display of power rooted in a feeling of entitlement, suggesting a superiority over Meg, and his demands that

she move towards him also indicates his need to dominate her use of space. This exchange presents a strikingly different tone to those observed earlier in the scene, for the familiar game they had been playing before now shifts to one of implied threat of violence and menace.

In the Rickson production, this tonal shift stood as a remarkably powerful moment that moved beyond the thinly veiled hostility that is conveyed in the earlier exchanges. Jones's Stanley relied on an overt attempt to terrorise Wanamaker's Meg that seemed to go beyond an acceptable, unspoken boundary, where the supposed game-playing transitioned to a moment of significant discomfort. Jones's lecherous encircling of Wanamaker conveyed the overt attempt to terrorise her, as he leaned across the table, filling the auditorium with an atmosphere of menace which was recognised by critics of the production. Paul Taylor, in a review of the production in the *Independent*, noted how Jones's Stanley "selfishly resents and relies on [Meg's] pampering and who deflects his own fears by ruthlessly stoking hers" (Taylor, 2018). This direct acknowledgement of Stanley's transparent tactics to deflect his insecurities onto Meg not only indicates how his methods of manipulation and abuse are instantly recognisable to the audience but also suggests how our sympathies shift towards the terrorised Meg. Her earlier intrusions and dismissal of Stanley's desire for isolation are positioned as somewhat justified when witnessing Stanley's unapologetic interrogation and manipulation of Meg's fears. It is important to recognise however that as Taylor remarks, it is in this terrorism that reveals just how desperate Stanley is to avoid being positioned as the powerless victim. Arguably, this is the first instance of such a moment in the play, where the spectator is placed in silent terror, mirroring Meg's experience, appearing powerless against the very suggestion of unknown invaders to her drab – yet comfortable – space. Much like with Rose in *The Room*, a character's response to a threat of invasion varies from paranoia, violence, or silence, and Stanley's retaliation to this possible invasion is to assert his masculinity, attempting to dominate and control Meg. By exercising a display of power that upsets their mutual dependency, he continues to undermine Meg's power and establishes fundamental characteristics that introduce a hegemonic masculinity reliant on female subordination. However, after Stanley's attempt at superiority, Meg is seemingly unfazed, returning once more to her maternal, nurturing role as she refers to his piano playing. This reference offers Stanley an opportunity to divert from his tactic of verbal assault and entitlement, but also to regain control through nostalgia and reminiscing.

Like characters that appear in Pinter's later plays, such as Gavin in *Party Time*, Lambert in *Celebration* or even Jerry in *Betrayal*, the nostalgia offered by reflections on the past is a tactic to maintain control and ultimately avoid confronting their insecurities in the present. Stanley's description of a likely fictional account of an international job offer is an example of how he relies on the comfort and reassurance offered by fabrications. As he continues, we see a glimpse of his past as he recalls a concert he had once given. How much truth it has is debatable, yet it is the timing of such a reflection that reveals how such fabrications indicate his attempts to gain power. As a continuation of his attempts to regain control after the threat of invasion, Stanley recalls a story which not only provides tenuous connections to Goldberg and McCann but also how Stanley's masculine performance is dependent on the manipulation of his past. Though spurious, Stanley's past is both a source of comfort as well as shame. It is seemingly the reason why he seeks isolation in the boarding house, yet it offers a source of escapism for him and as such, provides a complex, fragmented reminder of victories, misdeeds, and failures. For critics of the premiere production in 1958, Stanley's avoidance was seen as an example of his ignorance, receiving pitiful rather than sympathetic responses. In a review for *The Stage*, one critic saw the play as a perspective "Into a household of reality-dodgers, who are peacefully engaged in avoiding all issues without a thought in their tiny minds" (*The Stage*, 1958). Like the critics of the Rickson production, there is a clear recognition of Stanley's ineffectual – if not futile – desire to avoid confronting his weaknesses. The implied lack of sympathy for Stanley and the other characters was fundamental to how critics at the time felt alienated by the play, with Stanley's apparent stupidity or closemindedness contributing to that alienation. For critics of the Mendes production, there was also a similar disdain for Stanley's actions, however, John Gross, in his review for the Sunday Telegraph made a provocative distinction in response to Anton Lesser's performance. He remarked how Stanley "is not a particularly pleasant individual all round. But his fate is, of course, monstrously in excess of whatever wrongs he has committed." (Gross, 1994) This distinction offers an insight into the extent to which audience members may excuse or justify Stanley's violent, abusive behaviours when considering his eventual dissimilation. Although this sentiment is not shared by other critics for any of the three productions, it does provide some context for how audiences of historical productions are more likely to dismiss men's abuses if they themselves are presented as victims. For critics of the Rickson production, a lack of sympathy became crucial to the relationship between the audience and Stanley moving forward, and the alienation felt by critics of the premiere production would be echoed in the response to the Rickson production.

Stanley's insecurity is embedded within his masculine performance, but it is also an avoidance of his own identity. After Lulu's first appearance, his attempts to impress her are entirely fabricated as he is either afraid or unwilling to find within himself sufficient qualities that would impress her. This version of a vulnerable, frustrated masculinity is one which is remarkably transparent in its depiction of paranoia and insecurity, but by framing Stanley's masculinity through his relationship with Lulu, Pinter continues to offer a subtle indication of the shifting of gendered power in the play. Stanley's inadequacy is crucial in understanding his relationship with Lulu at this point in the play, for Lulu's constant criticism of his appearance serves as repeated prototypicality threats that not only undermine his attempts to impress her but also reinforce his feeling of worthlessness. At this point, Stanley's desperation for validation stems from a desire for escapism and fantasy, which reaches a climax in his abrupt invitation "How would you like to go away with me?" (Pinter, 1991: 26). For Stanley, Lulu represents the freedom and independence he craves but is afraid to seek out, and with her confident display of control and successful undermining of Stanley's power, this last act of desperate recklessness is a means of clinging onto that brief hope that he might join her in that freedom. But as with his earlier attempts at control through the reminiscing of his past, he falls back to reality: he argues, "There's nowhere to go. So we could just go. It wouldn't matter" (1991: 26). The implication that in his desperation, Stanley's inability to commit to the fantasy – or to offer any specifics of the external space – results in a gradual realisation of his inadequacy. He then confesses a resigned realisation that he must remain in the protective isolation of the boarding house, and even when Lulu almost pitifully offers him one final opportunity to go with her, he refuses. Lulu's final comment "You're a bit of a washout, aren't you?" (1991: 26) serves as a final prototypicality threat as she uses one last casual, degrading remark, rejecting his advances, as if punishing him for his failure to impress.

For Stanley, this rejection is much more severe, for his need for validation is fundamental to his maintenance of power, and his masculinity derives itself from his ability to dominate the women around him. Incapable of winning her favour or effectively dominating her, he remains powerless, now a victim of his own inadequacies. Victor Cahn, in his exploration of the themes of gender and power in the play also refers to Stanley's need to dominate both women in the play, arguing that "Here is a man tormented by a hostile world that has […] denied him freedom and identity. Stanley's only recourse is the release of sexual and emotional aggression at the most assailable targets, the women around him" (Cahn, 1993: 29). What Cahn suggests is that the women in the play are both necessary

for Stanley's attempts to regain control but are also powerless to resist. Cahn's problematic interpretation of female agency does nothing to recognise the positions of power that Meg and Lulu have over the vulnerable Stanley and the ways in which they seek to maintain them. The implication that Stanley's only way out from emotional and gendered subjugation is to retaliate against the women who reject him is largely accurate, but they are far from assailable, and what Lulu capably shows in this exchange is an ability to resist Stanley's attempts to manipulate her, effectively reversing his domination and empowering her own dominant femininity. With Meg, Stanley is somewhat successful in his attempts to retaliate, capitalising on her fears and insecurities, but with Lulu, her unquestionable control over the situation and her eventual rejection of his advances leaves him in a subordinate position. When contextualised against the arguments of Simon Cottee, this powerlessness manifests itself into a need to enact vengeance, where Stanley reveals an unspoken desire to punish Lulu for exposing his shame, and to challenge her position of power over him. It is important to recognise how Stanley's previous moments of weakness result in a desperate attempt at retaliation, but where his earlier assaults are purely verbal, he eventually resorts to physical and sexual violence in his attempt to exact vengeance on both women.

Whether it is an intentional rebuff or purely out of genuine interest and attraction, Lulu's flirtation and assumed sexual activity with Goldberg during and after the party has an almost tortuous effect on Stanley. In a noticeable contrast to the distance between her and Stanley in their previous exchange, Lulu displays significant physical affection towards Goldberg during the party, as Stanley looks on silently. Just as his teasing with Meg escalated to abuse and terrorism, he perpetrates more severe acts of violence in a desperate attempt to regain power and enact vengeance. The first instance is during the game of blind man's buff, as Stanley finds Meg and almost instinctively begins to strangle her. Whether or not Stanley is aware that the person he has found is indeed Meg, this quick escalation to violence can be understood within the context of Stanley's need for control, and such an act of violence against her frames his need for control as inherently gendered. Stanley's desire for vengeance against Meg is unsurprising given his previous treatment of her, but resorting to such violence is indicative of his desperation. This moment is quickly interrupted by a darkness caused by an unknown force, in which the characters seem to scuttle around helplessly until there is a scream. As McCann finds a torch, bringing light to the room, Pinter provides an image of the following: "*LULU is lying spreadeagled on the table, STANLEY bent over her. STANLEY, as soon as the torchlight hits him, begins to giggle*" (Pinter, 1991: 65). This image not only strongly indicates an act of attempted rape

but is jarring as a severe escalation of violence. As Stanley giggles, he is eventually overwhelmed by the dimly lit silhouettes of Goldberg and McCann.

For Stanley, this act is motivated by two urges: to enact vengeance on Lulu for rejecting him, and to dominate a woman through physical violence, both of which serve to assert his masculine dominance through the subordination of women. At various points within the play, Stanley's overt desire for a romantic/sexual intimacy with Lulu and a maternal/sexual intimacy with Meg motivated him to act on those desires. Observing his behaviour in previous exchanges, it is clear that his attempts to impress or control them have ultimately failed. Also, both women have exercised to various degrees of success an ability to subordinate and weaken him, and this has severely damaged his performance of the hegemonic masculine behaviours of dominance and control. Having been subjected to torture at the hands of Goldberg and McCann, Stanley's desperation to combat his weakened position forces him to assert himself through violent acts against these women who have undermined him. In their formulation of hegemonic masculinity, R.W. Connell argues that violence is linked to an individual's need to reinforce masculine supremacy: "Difference/ dominance means not logical separation but intimate supremacy. It involves immediate social relations as well as broad cultural themes. It can be realized violently in body practices such as rape and domestic assault" (2005: 231-2). Connell's arguments here outline the motivations of a rejected, inferior man to engage in violence to accentuate the gendered 'difference', and as such, the desire for domination is then realised through such acts of violence against women. In this way, Stanley's attempted rape of Lulu is motivated by his desire to contest his weakened performance of the established hegemonic masculinity.

It is important to recognise the ways in which gendered violence is realised on stage, for as with the violence that serves as the climax to *The Room*'s depiction of racial and gendered power, witnessing violence in performance can impact our engagement with the action on stage. Witnessing violence provokes emotive responses in the spectator, and acts of sexual violence on stage are perhaps most striking in evoking that response. At this point in the play, the audience has witnessed mental torture, assault, and attempted rape, but it is important when understanding the impact such moments on stage have on our empathic connection to the characters involved. As Taylor-Batty argues, Stanley's perpetration of such severe acts of violence has a powerful impact on our empathy towards him, where "his assault on female targets in this way is a disproportionate moral breach that weakens our empathic links with him. His giggling demeanour might be read as a pathetic regression

to an infantile state or as helpless, fractured nerves. Either way, it assists our dismissal of him" (2014: 27). It is this break of empathy that Taylor-Batty describes that results in the disconnect between the spectator and Stanley, but like the other characters in the scene, we remain similarly passive – unable, or unwilling to intervene. We witness his downfall, conflicted in our empathy for his suffering, yet longing for his punishment through his eventual assimilation. Within the context of hegemony, Stanley is positioned as comparatively marginal, and inadequate, and subsequently punished by the men of higher status. Cemented by his inability to redeem his masculine performance, he instead gives in to his fate. The continued dominance of men in the play serves to benefit both Goldberg and McCann and yet Stanley's failure to adopt the accepted behaviours of the hegemonic masculinity solidifies his weakened position.

For critics of the premiere production in 1958, Stanley's embodiment of inadequacy also established a lack of sympathy for his actions throughout the play. Much like with Beatrix Lehmann's Meg, Richard Pearson's performance as Stanley was applauded by critics, and yet it revealed how there is a consistent detachment from his weakened, ineffectual position in the play. J.C. Trewin, in the *Illustrated London News,* praised "Mr. Pearson's boorishness and terror," (Trewin, 1958) whilst Alan Dent in the *News Chronicle* focused on Stanley's child-like qualities, observing how he was "a lodger of retarded development, a large young man who plays a toy drum" (Dent, 1958). This interpretation was repeated in a review for the Mendes production decades later, where Anton Lesser's Stanley was described by John Peter in the *Sunday Times*, as "a lean, frustrated, whippet-like predator, is like a semi-retarded adult living in the womb-like shelter of a rented room." (Peter, 1994). Both critics' implication of Stanley's stunted development highlights once again how the critics of earlier productions seemed to pity the characters rather than sympathise with them. It is important to acknowledge critics also contested this ableist language. For example, Irving Wardle argued that Stanley "is in a permanent rage, and treats the doting Meg abominably. But he is not a retarded fool, and when the destroyers close in, he has something to lose." (Wardle, 1994) Wardle's observation of Lesser's Stanley in the Mendes production not only saw his violence as inexcusable, but as a fundamental characteristic of his need to excise his rage.

Although the critics at the time of the premiere production failed to acknowledge Stanley's acts of violence, in a review for *The Stage*, one critic observed Stanley's desire to terrorise – if not harm – the other characters to compensate for his own inadequacies, noting how "Richard Pearson as Stanley, the oaf who, though hiding from life, cannot refrain from

trying to bring to others some of the terror from which he has fled" (*The Stage*, 1958). This is a rather prescient observation, where the critic offered a much richer interpretation of Stanley's actions and in doing so, rather acutely aligns with the interpretations of both Taylor-Batty and Cahn. Stanley's choice to isolate himself from the outside world, seemingly to avoid confronting his past and present behaviour, seeks to terrorise those within. It is clear that the productions of the play often rely on the disconnect between the audience and Stanley, allowing us to remain critical of his behaviours. It is only when Stanley is faced with his own punishment at the hands of other men that this lack of sympathy becomes difficult to maintain.

The second act reveals how Stanley reacts to the overwhelming dominance of other men, in the form of Goldberg and McCann. In the opening moments, as Stanley enters, witnessing the slow tearing of the newspaper of the silent McCann, there is a gradual increase in tension between the two men. Even before he enters, McCann's actions are provocative in their seemingly meaningless monotony, but importantly the very act of tearing already brings with it associations with violence, and it is this suggestion of violence that remains as a lingering, menacing undertone throughout the scene. Only moments after he enters, Stanley seems to sense the unusual atmosphere within the space and attempts to exit briskly. McCann's sudden retaliation by blocking his exit then is a clear escalation and begins to initiate a much more sinister game, where the use of physical space once again becomes a tool for dominance. With the imagery of the confident and energetic use of the space still lingering from Lulu's first entrance, McCann's contradictory approach in restricting Stanley's movement in this exchange shows a much more noticeable attempt to establish control. In response to McCann's interception, Stanley attempts to remain civil and tries to leave, and yet McCann's refusal to move indicates his power and control of the situation. Unlike Goldberg's reliance on verbal manipulation to reinforce his power, McCann makes use of his physicality, showing a stark contrast between the two men which is no less effective. In the Rickson production, the use of physicality becomes much more pronounced, with Jones's Stanley as the smaller man compared to the wiry, unmoving McCann portrayed by Tom Vaughan-Lawlor. Although Vaughan-Lawlor in no way implied an indisputable physical dominance over Jones, the use of space became a tool with which the two men fought for control. As if relying on his stature to stealthily escape the predatory McCann, Jones attempted to move around the space, while the menacing efficiency with which Vaughan-Lawlor stretched throughout the space seemed to cut off all exits with only a phrase, looming over Jones's Stanley. This sequence does reveal Stanley's ability to resist

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his adversary's control of the space, but instead of overpowering physically, he relied instead on brief, unpredictable bursts of movement and gesture to unsettle McCann. As such, Vaughan-Lawlor's tense rigidity and Stanley's erratic aggression served to highlight the fight for control between the two men.

Within the context of the hegemony, such acts of physical dominance serve as a threat to Stanley's power, and his inability or unwillingness to resort to physical retaliation indicates how powerless he is to fight back. As he begins to question McCann, he reveals how he has chosen not to attend the party organised for him, and where he is unable to challenge McCann physically, he instead changes tactics to ascertain information about their motives and their past. His interrogation of McCann about Maidenhead, and the specifics about the teashop and the library are all tactics to break down McCann's resolve and probe him for information, threatening his integrity. But, by his repeated refusal to relinquish that information, McCann maintains control, bolstering his power and keeping Stanley in the dark. It is only when Stanley threatens his control of the space by touching and moving his torn newspaper that McCann displays a somewhat panicked moment of discomfort. Stanley takes advantage of this moment of weakness to escalate things further, now slandering Meg in her absence. As he grabs McCann's arm, this escalation of physical contact between the two men results in McCann's first display of physical violence towards Stanley. Though it is not severe, McCann hits Stanley in the arm, fracturing his previously calm and unfaltering demeanour in a moment of savage retaliation. Although both men begin the scene in positions of relative subordinance, there is an immediate display of power that positions McCann as the dominant man, introducing the use of physical control as a crucial characteristic of his power and therefore his masculinity. As Stanley's desperation reaches its peak, even resorting to similar acts of physical control, McCann resists such threats to his power, demonstrating a resilience that allows him to remain in higher status. Through his brief act of violence, he maintains his position of power over the inept, inferior Stanley.

After Petey and Goldberg's arrival, and Goldberg's subsequent dominance of the conversation, Petey eventually leaves Stanley alone with the two mysterious figures. In a position of relative vulnerability, without any indication of their shared history or familiarity, Stanley falls victim to the overwhelming manipulation and control of the two men, and his ineptitude and desperation become increasingly futile. Just as with Lulu in their earlier exchange, Stanley attempts to challenge the other two men by utilising tactics of superiority and authority, announcing himself as the manager of the boarding house and insisting that

they leave. With Goldberg and McCann, such an attempt to gain control is borderline pathetic, but as if sensing that by giving in to these two men he relinquishes all his power, Stanley appears determined to resist their attempts at control. Once again using space to establish control, Goldberg and McCann insist that Stanley be sat down, which he vehemently refuses to do. As Goldberg remains sat, establishing superiority over McCann by nonchalantly ordering him to "ask him to sit down." (Pinter, 1991: 46), Stanley continually refuses until he tricks McCann into sitting down before him. This image of the two men sitting in their chairs and Stanley remaining standing is a powerful one, indicating – albeit temporary – a victory against his oppressors. McCann's reaction, "That's a dirty trick! I'll kick the shite out of him!" (1991: 47) is a dramatically virulent outburst which serves as a brief escalation of his earlier inclination for violence, which is then juxtaposed with Goldberg's attempts to soothe and deescalate, the two men eventually convince Stanley to sit. As if with a sense of pride and confidence, whistling the tune to 'The Mountains of Mourne', Stanley finally chooses to sit down, but in doing so, unknowingly relinquishes the power he had worked hard to obtain, and as the two men loom over him, they almost mechanically initiate their interrogation.

In the Rickson production, much like in earlier moments, the rise in tension throughout this exchange positioned the audience within a moment of temporary, almost silent stillness. Stanley took his place on the chair, and sat downstage, facing away from the audience as Goldberg and McCann began their interrogation, looming over him. With this staging, every gesture and every line spoken was as if it was directed at not only the helpless Stanley but also at the audience, effectively positioning us in the same helpless state as inert, silent witnesses to the torturous interrogation. This intentional decision to position us as joint victims of the abstract onslaught sustained by Stanley not only encourages us to empathise with his situation but also heightens the spectator's sense of terror and dehumanisation. Ultimately, the production forces us into an uncomfortable alliance with Stanley, where we are to question the legitimacy of Stanley's narratives, but also the methods of torture and violence used to oppress, dehumanise, and destroy him. The result of the interrogation is Stanley's temporary loss of language, capable only of making indecipherable guttural sounds. For the audience, bearing witness to this interrogation creates a tenuous connection to Stanley, for his later assaults against Meg and Lulu have not occurred, so the witnessing of this torture serves to establish an attachment to his experience. As Taylor-Batty argues, this also has a detrimental impact on the spectator, for "While this rapid, seemingly random and bizarre accumulation of charges

and questions is deployed to terrify and destabilise Stanley, it also disorients us in the audience, leaving us no time to process what is being said" (2014: 26). The staging of Rickson's production accentuates the disorienting feeling that Taylor-Batty describes, for the positioning of the audience was to heighten the sense of connection between Stanley and the audience as victims of a shared experience of torture. This uneasy connection between the events on stage and those who witness it is once again indicative of a discomforting passivity to the act of violence, and through the spectating of such a moment in the performance, Rickson provoked the audience into introspection. As the scene continues, however, any semblance of defiant power that Stanley had gained only moments ago is but a faint memory.

From the early moments of the play, Stanley's inability to dominate Meg and Lulu, and his failure to embody the behaviours of the established hegemonic masculinity, he is ultimately confronted and punished for his insecurity and weakness. The failure to adopt hegemonic behaviours stems from Stanley's refusal to look inward, indicating a desperate desire to contest his weakened position, whether that be through abuse, lies, or violence. His dependency on Meg and Lulu conflicts with his need to dominate them, and his inability to assert dominance – whether physically or verbally – serves to heighten his paranoia. But his need to avoid responsibility or confront his vulnerability is so ingrained within his increasingly fractured identity that he resorts to baser methods of control. Incapable of repelling the force of Goldberg and McCann's dominant masculinity, he relies on methods of domination against women. The physical assaults against Meg and Lulu reveal how desperate he is to enact revenge on those who reject him and his subordinate masculinity. As such, the Rickson production accentuates the desperation and inadequacy of Toby Jones's Stanley, highlighting his physical inferiority and his quick resort to violence. And yet, the production also forces us to confront our inaction, and our shifting alliance as Stanley's performance of ineffectual masculinity becomes both sympathetic and detestable. The premiere production in 1958 also offered an explicit depiction of Stanley's childlike, terrorising behaviour, resulting in a similar disconnect between the character and the audience. *The Birthday Party* is therefore provocative in its ability to force audiences to navigate such tenuous alliances, and the nuanced results of torture, victimisation, and violence. In the next section of the chapter, there will be further exploration of the dynamic between the two invaders, and how Goldberg and McCann capably enforce their own agenda. Through the two men, Pinter develops the ideas and theme seen in *The Dumb Waiter*, criticising their agenda as representative of institutional power, and how the disparity

between their masculine performances creates situations of conflict, empowerment, and disillusionment.

Goldberg and McCann: Complicity & Control

For Goldberg and McCann, Stanley appears to embody everything that they seek to eradicate and throughout the play they manipulate, threaten, and abuse any individual who hinders the completion of their task. Just like Stanley, their masculinity is often overtly hostile, but in contrast, they successfully manipulate others, exert control of the space, and establish their dominance. In the play, they most clearly represent the hegemonic masculinity, and in this section, I observe how the two men establish dominance, reinforcing a hierarchy which prioritises complicity to an unseen organisation, subjugating women, and assimilating men who fail to adhere to their values. Through Goldberg and McCann, Pinter continues to explore themes of invasion, domination, and hierarchical power like that seen in both *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter*. Even though such themes were relevant to Pinter's writing in the 1950s, the Rickson production engaged with these ideas in subtly gendered ways, allowing for connections between systemic power and gender in the play.

Immediately, we recognise that the two men are not equals, for as soon as they begin their first exchange, there is a clear hierarchy between them. McCann's unease and discomfort positions him as submissive, relying on the dominant Goldberg's calm confidence and reassurance. This dynamic initially appears to mirror that seen between Gus and Ben in *The Dumb Waiter*; one member is the rational, informed man and one remains uneasy in their ignorance. But, where the relationship differs is in Goldberg's willingness to reassure and advise the paranoid McCann, as he says "The secret is breathing. Take my tip. It's a well-known fact. Breathe in, breathe out, take a chance, let yourself go, what can you lose? Look at me. When I was an apprentice yet, McCann, every second Friday of the month my Uncle Barney used to take me to the seaside, regular as clockwork" (Pinter, 1991: 27). It is in this speech that Goldberg first utilises a tactic that he repeatedly uses throughout the play, establishing several fundamental aspects of his masculine performance. He begins by presenting himself as an advisor or a mentor, someone with valuable experience – even benevolence – which establishes a sense of superiority over McCann. Secondly, in describing his work as an apprentice, he presents himself as diligent, suggesting a superiority when contrasted with his companion's unease. Lastly, the most recognisable aspect of his similar speeches throughout the play is his nostalgic references to his past, here conveyed by his wistful pleasantries. All these facets reveal how Goldberg attempts to establish control through his domination of the conversation in these relatively

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lengthy speeches, using emotive and nostalgic imagery to reassure McCann. By presenting himself as a good man who works hard and has a positive familial bond, it is through this speech that Goldberg firmly establishes a hegemonic masculinity based on his own masculine performance. Being in such a position of power, Goldberg cements his own behaviours into the hegemonic masculinity of the play, not only supporting his own legitimacy but also admonishing any inferior alternatives.

Although neither of the men have revealed their intentions or their connection to any organisation, the masculine characteristics presented by Goldberg become representative of the values of that organisation. Like Ben in *The Dumb Waiter,* those in a position of authority and/or superiority must strongly identify with the accepted behaviours of the organisation they belong to to maintain power. When other men fail to adhere to those values, they often chastise or denounce them to maintain the integrity of the organisation. But what is different about the dynamic between Goldberg and McCann is that even though McCann threatens the integrity of the mission by repeatedly displaying unease or confusion, Goldberg chooses instead to consistently reassure him. This attempt to support and compliment one another is rarely seen between men in Pinter's plays, but Goldberg's admission that "You're a capable man, McCann" (Pinter, 19991: 29) and McCann's later comment that "You've always been a true Christian" (1991: 29) indicates a willingness for both men to sincerely bolster the other. For Goldberg, such a compliment serves to prioritise the efficiency of the mission, for just like Gus's constant questioning and challenging of Ben's orders, McCann's discomfort jeopardises the integrity of the job. It is this interaction that reveals how integral the success of the mission is to Goldberg, and how his need to conform is a fundamental characteristic of his masculine performance. In a study on the source and legitimacy of conformity, Cialdini & Goldstein argue that "people are frequently motivated to conform to others' beliefs and behaviors to enhance, protect, or repair their self-esteems" (2004: 611). When considering how Goldberg and McCann seek validation from each other, or how they attempt to disguise or hide their insecurity, it is pertinent then that the conformity that Cialdini and Goldstein describe is so clearly presented here between the two men, and how that conformity provides the affirmation that they both desire.

Men in Pinter's plays often rely on the unquestionable authority of systems and organisations – whether seen or unseen – to bolster their own individual authority. Even when they may not immediately adhere to such values, by altering their behaviour to fall in line and remain in favour. The performance of hegemonic behaviours enables the men in the play to embody the ideals of the organisation and as such, reinforces their dominant

masculinity. Much like Stanley, McCann threatens the stability of their dominant positions through his desperation, paranoia, and dependency, and as such, Goldberg attempts to manipulate him to keep him in line. Michael Mangan, in his book *Staging Masculinities*, recognises the contradicting effects of how men perceive themselves when failing to embody hegemonic behaviours, arguing that "To the extent that the individual can recognise his conformity to gender requirements, it offers reassurance. To the extent that he sees his shortcomings, it is a source of unease" (2007: 209). This effect of simultaneous discomfort and reassurance that Mangan describes once again suggests how important it is for men to conform to the hegemonic ideal. The failure to do so results in not only a loss of power but also individual discomfort, suggesting that – like Stanley – one may spiral downwards into self-pity, loathing, and a need for vengeance. However, Goldberg's position of authority within the organisation and his higher status within the hegemony support McCann, allowing him to regain control and remain conformant. This process of acknowledging weakness and encouraging conformity to both the needs of the hegemony and their unknown organisation is a theme that becomes more layered as the play continues.

Upon Meg's arrival, Goldberg's tactics of flattery continue, where each compliment paid towards her is again layered with an understanding that such pleasantries serve to ensure the success of the mission. His outward performance of respect, consideration, and compliments towards Meg appears to bolster her status but is purely to give her the impression of power. Goldberg's manipulation is successful, for in this position of comfort and temporary power, Meg reveals information about Stanley, including his somewhat recent arrival at the boarding house and his desire for isolation. Goldberg's competent manipulation of Meg increases our suspicion of his intentions, and our sympathy with Meg serves to heighten our hostility towards him. For critics of the Rickson production, Stephen Mangan's Goldberg divided opinions, with some commenting on his capable balancing of terror and charm, and others who felt that he was unable to lean into the more reflective moments. But what is clear in their responses is the recognition of how Goldberg positions himself within the group: a man who is both an adept manipulator, but also one of intense menace and threat. Christopher Hart of the *Sunday Times* frames these observations within the context of masculine power, remarking how Mangan "holds forth, fires questions laughs, all alpha-male manspreading swagger, tinged with the promise of extreme and joyful violence" (Hart, 2018). Hart's interpretation of Mangan's performance refers to contemporary discourse on masculinity, where the idea of an 'alpha-male' becomes one of

a primal, overbearing, and misogynistic authority. Critics of the Mendes production were similarly conflicted on the quality of Bob Peck's performances as Goldberg, but there was a clear recognition of his masculinity and sexuality. In a review which bordered on the vulgar, Louise Doherty wrote in the *Mail on Sunday*, describing how "Peck has always combined brooding sensuality with a hint of the sinister" (Doherty, 1994) Such qualities clearly cover the essentials of Goldberg's character, and his ability to use those attributes to manipulate those around him provides the foundation for his masculine performance. The relationship between Goldberg's dominant position and his masculinity is clearly recognised here and suggests the extent to which Rickson and Mangan critique such overt, hostile masculinity in the production. It is important to also acknowledge Hart's implication that Goldberg enjoys perpetrating the acts of violence in the play, which brings with it a much darker interpretation of their task. Their actions go beyond unwavering conformity but in doing so, take an almost sadistic pleasure in their oppression of others. As such, both Goldberg and McCann are situated as firmly unsympathetic allowing us to remain critical of not only their violent actions but the hegemony that they represent.

The interrogation scene that appears in the second act – notable amongst Pinter's work for its escalating tension and abstraction – serves to highlight how Stanley's failure to adhere to the values or the hegemony relies on imagery and associations surrounding torture, political prisoners, oppression, non-conformity, and assimilation. For Alex Watson, in his chapter titled 'Pinterian Violence and the Problem of Affirmation' in *The Theatre of Harold Pinter* (2014), the interrogation of Stanley establishes the fundamental desire to enforce violence through language and not just through physical action. The assault by Goldberg and McCann represents the oppression manifested through language that appears in many of Pinter's plays, where "just as he presents the perpetuators of systemic violence in his plays as the most effective communicators, so too does he prove that the power of systemic violence lies mainly in language." (Watson, 2014: 153) Watson's argument that those who are adept at communication is tied to their positions of power is no clearer than in this scene, with Goldberg and McCann's efficient and unrelenting tirade positioning them as undeniably dominant over the hapless Stanley. Michael Billington, longtime friend and critic of Pinter's work, argues in his biography of the playwright that Goldberg and McCann's interrogation represents more than just conformity and linguistic domination, but the personal religious pressures Pinter himself rejected in his early life. He expresses that the play "is a much more complex work about a defiant rebel who exposes the insecurity upon which adherence to orthodoxy and tradition actually rests" (Billington,

2007: 80). Billington's interpretation acknowledges the ways in which Pinter's criticism of conformity is linked to his own rejection of those pressures, but also recognises how Stanley's rebellion threatens the assumed dominance of Goldberg and McCann. For a moment, their participation in the torture of Stanley both provides a sense of enjoyment but also instigates a fracturing of their commitment to the cause. Having subjected Stanley to more unknown abuse overnight, the two men engage in an unsettling exchange, mirroring their introductory scene, as they appear unusually fragile. McCann continues his characteristic unease and dependence, but Goldberg instead remains silent, unable to offer his partner the reassurance he needs. This introspection shown by Goldberg is an overt contrast to his previous confidence and eloquence of the previous day, suggesting how their unseen violence against Stanley throughout the night has impacted him.

The most poignant display of insecurity comes as McCann questions the unresponsive Goldberg, referring to him by different names until Goldberg sharply rises, throttling McCann. This violent outburst not only disrupts the sense of partnership and control they had established until this point but also echoes Stanley's own violence in their earlier interrogation. Goldberg's masculine presentation is reliant on the sanctity of his connection to his past, for his nostalgia and reminiscing are fundamental to the formation of his identity. McCann invades that sense of control and by referring to him as 'Simey', Goldberg responds with uncharacteristic force. It cannot be ignored that the significance of this name is also suggestive of gendered power, for Goldberg's use of the name was always in association with his mother. Once again, Pinter highlights the significance of the maternal role for these men, which would be developed in much more depth in the conflicting feminine roles of the maternal and sexual seen in Pinter's later plays such as *The Homecoming*. However, Goldberg's sudden resort to violence comes from McCann's use of the name his mother used to call him, suggesting that his seemingly sacred bond between mother and son is threatened. The similarities between Goldberg and Stanley become strikingly apparent in this exchange, for their dependence on the maternal bond is so fundamental to their identity that when it is threatened, it necessitates such violence. Just like Stanley, Goldberg relies on the hegemonic behaviour of physical violence to punish McCann, regain control, and assert his power.

As the conversation continues, Goldberg attempts to return to his earlier confidence, but he struggles to make his point, flustering and making illogical remarks. In the performance, Stephen Mangan's Goldberg in this moment presented such a tired, fragile, and conflicted man – one whose allegiance to the institution appears to fracture. The

confidence he exudes is often unwavering, yet here Goldberg is confronted with a shocking break in that persona. For Billington, in his review for the *Guardian*, Mangan's performance conveyed Goldberg as "a figure whose toothily smiling bonhomie conceals a profound insecurity" (Billington, 2018). Once again, Billington recognises the link between Goldberg's fracturing identity and the instability of the system he represents. Much like with Stanley, this insecurity places the spectator in a position of awkward allegiance, where a sudden, discomforting empathy towards the two invaders becomes possible. Mangan's slouched, slow, uneasy physicality at this moment offered a stark contrast to the earlier bravado, revealing an almost tragic, exhausted man who refuses to back down and look within himself. For both Goldberg and McCann, this profound moment of weakness suggests that such blind authority and compliance has begun to take its toll on the two men, with McCann's paranoia and insistence that they leave indicating once again a dependence on the reflective, fragile Goldberg.

The connection between Goldberg's moment of introspection and Stanley's victimisation at his hands exposes the hypocrisy of his character. What is arguably the strength of Pinter's writing in this play is how the obfuscation of victim and abuser reveals more than a simple binary may imply. For Penelope Prentice, this blurring of the two positions allows us to remain critical of Goldberg's change in behaviour, arguing how it "reawakens us to the consciousness that in a human relationship there is no winner and no loser; together both win or both lose. Once the easy labels are removed, it is obvious, on both sides, how dangerous is a little insecurity" (Prentice, 2002: 41). The implication in Prentice's argument here reveals how both 'sides' fall into the trap of insecurity, for much like Stanley, Goldberg's weakness serves to undermine his own power and threaten his position of power. Where Stanley's actions at this point in the play present him as both a victim and perpetrator of violence, stemming from an exposed insecurity, it is this same insecurity that contaminates the typically resolute Goldberg. His unwavering commitment to his given task motivated him to acts of violence against Stanley, and yet this scene exposes the toll of such an act and arguably reframes Goldberg's initial loyalty as one which comes with its own trauma. It is through Goldberg's reliance – if not dependence – on McCann that provides him comfort and the encouragement to complete their mission. It is only when he requests McCann to blow into his mouth that he appears to recover from this fragile state, not only as McCann's very obedience allows him to retain a position of dominance, but also how this rare moment of intimacy appears to rejuvenate him. It is significant that this surprising moment of homoerotic closeness between the two men has

such positive effects on them both, for in the context of hegemonic masculinity, the dominance of other men affords power. But, like previous moments in the play, Goldberg and McCann demonstrate a willingness to support, compliment and be intimate with one another.

In the second interrogation, as McCann brings Stanley back into the room, Goldberg and McCann's previous tactic of blame and abstract rhetoric is instead juxtaposed with gentle reassurances, words of comfort, and flattery. Goldberg and McCann seem to double down on their attempt to destroy the silent Stanley, reducing him to guttural sounds, and once again stimulating a sense of joy and satisfaction from the completion of their mission. Prentice suggests such action is necessary for Goldberg to maintain a sense of control, arguing that "asserting dominance over another remains the primary means characters not only establish identity but survive in a world where to allow oneself to assume a subservient position, for even a moment, can result in annihilation— physical, psychological, or both" (2000: 28). Like with many aspects of Pinter's writing, survival is dependent on the domination of others, and the image of victim and oppressors is no clearer than in this final exchange between the three men. Goldberg's position of power has been repaired, choosing to avoid responsibility and dismiss his earlier weakness, strengthening his dependence on the organisation he serves. Any other lapse in his ability to achieve his goal cannot even be acknowledged for his blind obedience comes at the cost of self-reflection, individual responsibility, and empathy. It is with this new tactic that the two men can reinforce Stanley's assimilation, embracing him as one of their own, as he sits between them once more, only capable of producing guttural utterances. Even with their final question, "What's your opinion of the prospect?" (1991: 85) they invite him to offer any final resistance or defiance, but Stanley's silence acts as proof of the successful destruction of his will.

Judith Roof argues in relation to the power of Goldberg and McCann's linguistic dominance over Stanley that the two men disguise their oppressive language through feigned compassion, where "two voices describe, assault, repeat, reinforce, agree, and nearly incant their captured audience's characteristics and suggestions of his immanent doom coats their voicing over with the niceties of a pleasurable exchange between the two speakers." (Roof, 2019: 61) Here, Roof captures the essential requirements of Goldberg and McCann's menacing double-act, where only through their union can they be successful in assimilating Stanley. It is here that Pinter provides arguably one of his most remarkable examples of male unity, where although their methods are violent and abusive, and their aims are destructive and manipulative, they remain united throughout the play, and this final

exchange allows them one last moment to show their capabilities together. Through their own capable manipulating and oppression of their victim, Goldberg and McCann maintain the integrity of not only their organisation but the hegemony they conform to. It is in this way that Stanley's subordinance is cemented, so when Petey enters, feigning his challenge of Stanley's treatment, Goldberg's sinister suggestion that he should accompany them continues this menacing need for the mission to succeed at any cost. For Petey, this final act of defiance, though inconsequential, serves to embolden Goldberg and McCann, and abandon Stanley to his fate.

In *The Birthday Party*, Pinter continues to explore the themes of complicity, violence, oppression, and victimisation that were established in his other earlier works. Much like those other plays, the power dynamics established by a clear hierarchy in the play support a hegemonic masculinity that is similarly reliant on violence, torture, and terror. Meg and Lulu navigate this world of terror through their temporary empowerment, subverting Stanley's attempts to dominate them yet ultimately submitting to the will of Goldberg and McCann. Rickson's production heightened the sexuality of the female characters and how they use it to undermine their subjugation, but also how it exposes them to manipulation by more powerful men. Stanley's frequently contradictory masculine performance – desperately clinging to any semblance of power and control – is often ineffectual in enforcing his domination on others. Both the other men and the women in the play force him to confront his ineffective and weak masculinity either through filial roleplay or through overt interrogation and torture. Ultimately, this has the effect of destroying his identity so that he can be assimilated and rebuilt in the eyes of the unknown forces that sought him out. Through Stanley's journey, we realise the catastrophic effects of the pressures of hegemonic masculinity, and how that hierarchy necessitates not only complicity but the embodiment of domination. In the Rickson production, the audience was situated alongside Stanley, sharing his experience of terror and anxiety. In doing so, the production encouraged our alliance with him, and yet when confronted by his violent actions, our own inaction serves to highlight our complicity in his behaviour. For critics of the premiere production, there was little sympathy for Stanley, whose infantile displays of violence resulted in a sense of alienation. It is therefore significant that Rickson's production was provocative in its overt attempts to address the audience's conflicting sympathies and judgment towards the ineffectual, vulnerable masculinity of Stanley. Finally, Goldberg and McCann pose a much greater threat to the order of the household as they enforce their will – and that of the organisation they belong to – on the other characters. Their clear

domination of the men and women supports their performance of the hegemonic masculinity, but when they recognise their own part in the violence of their mission, they become momentarily fragile. It is this moment that reveals the vulnerability that is embedded not only within subordinate men like Stanley but also within complicit, overtly hegemonic men like Goldberg. Once again, the pressures of the hegemony reveal the insecurities underneath the façade of conformity. As with *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter*, *The Birthday Party* offers a criticism of hegemonic masculinity through its depiction of violence, oppression, and terror. In the next chapter on *The Homecoming*, I will explore how Pinter shifts his focus from the terror of invasion to a much more intimate contest for control between dominant masculinity and resistant femininity.

The Homecoming

Hegemonic masculinities encourage men to establish themselves as representatives of an oppressive, destructive, and egoistic form of masculinity and nowhere are those ideals better presented in Pinter's plays than in *The Homecoming* (1965). The overt displays of a violent, manipulative, and insidious masculinity force the characters into conflicts that range from the banal to the appalling, and in so doing, assert their dominance. As with Stanley in *The Birthday Party*, attempts to dominate others often stem from insecurities and vulnerabilities and yet ultimately lead to isolation, violence, and the loss of identity. In *The Homecoming*, the rivalries seen between the male characters in the play often exist due to the pressure to adopt established hegemonic behaviours. Much like his earlier plays, Pinter offers a hegemonic masculinity that is dependent on violence, control of memory and the manipulation of information. The male-dominated family have established these behaviours to align with a destructive hegemonic masculinity, but it is through the act of challenging those behaviours that the men are able to gain power. The patriarch of the household, Max, plays a pivotal role in the hierarchy throughout the play, and his displays of authority, violence, and abuse are often attempts to strengthen his place in the hegemony. Yet, Max's role is also significant in that it highlights the various flaws of the dominant masculinity, where his old age, fictionalisation of memory and the adoption of typically maternal behaviours reveal a layer of insecurity. Much like Stanley in The Birthday Party, Max refuses to acknowledge these insecurities and as such, resorts to violence, threats and abuse to reassert his dominance. As with previous chapters, I will be outlining the characters' usage of prototypicality threats to suggest the fluidity of the hegemonic masculinity formed over the course of the play. The other men also adapt to the shifting dynamics throughout the play and this chapter will include observations about how Max responds to challenges from his family, how the hegemony is formed, and how each of the men attempts to control their rivals through specific, targeted linguistic choices.

By establishing such a violent male-dominated environment, Pinter's introduction of Ruth provides an opportunity to expose how the men respond to an ambitious femininity, and how the subversion of the assumed feminine role serves to undermine the established hegemony. Much like Meg and Lulu in *The Birthday Party*, Ruth's empowered femininity threatens the power of the men who seek to undermine her, but where the other women fail

to maintain power, Ruth's masterful adoption of masculine tactics of oppression and manipulation allows her to assume control in the male-dominated space. By displaying behaviours that do not conform to the gender hegemony, she openly challenges her assumed complicity to male privilege. Ruth's possible place as representative of a feminist ideal is, however, complex. By remaining complicit to her objectification by the men around her, Ruth navigates a dangerous route to acceptance within the hegemonic masculinity. To successfully subvert it and establish permanent equality in the gender hierarchy, this acceptance must lead to explicit change. My intention in this chapter is to highlight the shifts in the gender hierarchy that allow Ruth to gain power, observing how she presents contrasting feminine behaviours indicative of both feminine ambition and those complementary to hegemonic masculinity. It is in the relationship between subversive femininity and insecure masculinity that Pinter exposes gender inequality throughout the play. Exploring how each character operates within the constraints of the hegemony allows for further understanding of the flaws of this dominant, destructive masculinity. This chapter will include an analysis of the 2015 production at Trafalgar Studios, directed by Jamie Lloyd, whose presentation of Pinter's work offered insight into the power of a resistant femininity, and how contemporary audiences respond to a violent, misogynistic hegemony. By comparing the Lloyd production to the premiere production by the Royal Shakespeare Company at the Aldwych Theatre, directed by Peter Hall in 1965, and the 1997 National Theatre production at the Lyttelton Theatre, directed by Roger Michell, I aim to outline both similarities and differences in reception between the three productions. The focus will be on the reception of Ruth's empowerment throughout the play, as well as recognising changes in attitudes towards male-male violence.

It is only through a detailed analysis of both the written and performance texts that can provide new insights into Ruth's transition throughout the play, and as such, my analysis for this chapter continues the use of semiotics. In the first section of the chapter, it is used to outline the ways in which Max and the other men use verbal and physical signs to establish dominance and counter threats in their avoidance of their insecurities. For the second section, the same method will be used to explore how Ruth's empowerment is a product of the verbal and physical signs of dominance used by men in the written and performance texts. Additionally, I will expand on arguments that have been established in the previous chapters that use Ric Knowles' method of reading the material theatre to engage with the critical reception of Jamie Lloyd's production of the play in 2015 and the

premiere production by Peter Hall in 1965. It is the culmination of all these elements that will allow for continued exploration into Pinter's presentation of hegemonic masculinity.

Aging Men: Patriarchy and Vulnerability

For the characters in Pinter's plays, challenges to other's power are a characteristic necessary for survival in environments where masculinity feels threatened. It is this desire for power that is at the forefront of *The Homecoming*, and the men in the play exist in a constant battleground where any false start or hesitation can result in rejection, isolation and even a complete loss of identity. As with Stanley in *The Birthday Party*, fragile and insecure men exist in a precarious position in relation to their masculine performance. Pinter develops this insecurity through Max, the ageing patriarch, whose repeated outbursts of abuse, intimidation, and vulgarity demand respect from the family around him. Yet, as early as the opening moments of the play, Max's insistence and dependence on superiority merely invite conflict and challenge. The play's opening exchange introduces one of Pinter's characters' most widely utilised prototypicality threats: the desire for information. Much like the deceit and manipulation seen as tactics used by Goldberg and McCann in *The Birthday Party* – and later developed in plays such as *Betrayal* and *Party Time* – characters in *The Homecoming* use prototypicality threats to gain information, and when successful, they are rewarded with power. So, when a challenge is uttered in the first line of the play by none other than Max, "What have you done with the scissors?" (Pinter, 1999: 3), he is forcing his son, Lenny, to relinquish both information and power. For Max to be successful, however, Lenny must willingly provide the answer Max requires, but he chooses instead to ignore his father. It is this silent, almost child-like refusal to respond that establishes a conflict between them that resonates throughout the play.

For these two men, any sign of weakness must be hidden from their rival and so, Max continues his questioning to penetrate Lenny's silence, eventually succeeding in provoking him to respond. His response, "Why don't you shut up, you daft prat?" (Pinter, 1999: 4) is clearly not the answer to Max's original question, itself acting as his own defensive prototypicality threat. This indicates Lenny's refusal to give in to his father's challenge, whilst his verbal abuse also demonstrates a lack of respect for Max's paternal authority and dismissing his presence as nothing more than a minor irritation. Lenny's escalation to verbal abuse is met with an even more severe retaliation, as Max's failure forces him to resort to a threat of physical force. By raising his walking stick, and cautioning, "Don't you talk to me like that. I'm warning you" (1999: 4), Max establishes his willingness to resort to physical violence to resolve threats against his status, which, by Lenny's silent

refusal to counter, appears successful. Within this first exchange, these two men establish behaviours intended to assert their dominance over the other, and in doing so they display hegemonic masculine practices. Both Max and Lenny combat any potential display of weakness, primarily in response to the original prototypicality threat, either through Max's persistent questioning or Lenny's constant refusal to divulge the information Max seeks.

In these opening moments of the play, the two men introduce a hegemonic masculinity, establishing a conflicting sympathy for Max's presentation of violence and insecurity. Critical reviews of the Jamie Lloyd production in 2015 often commented on the virulent, yet darkly comic performance of Ron Cook's Max. There was a consistent recognition of Max's savage patriarchal peacocking, but critics recognised the relationship between his overt assertiveness and his seemingly more subtle insecurity. Paul Taylor of the *Independent* commented on how "Cook is a snider Max than usual, a nasal mixture of aggrievedness, aggression and weakness" (Taylor, 2015). This acknowledgement of the frailty of the ageing Max draws attention to how his acts of aggression are attempts to assert control over his sons. This constant process of challenge and counter-challenge is indicative of each character's refusal to admit weakness, and how they refuse to acknowledge their failure to embody the hegemonic ideal. For Douglas Schrock & Michael Schwalbe, such an act of establishing and fortifying control is crucial to the representation of hegemonic masculinity:

> the essential element is a capacity to exert control or to resist being controlled. To elicit the attribution of possessing a masculine self thus requires signifying with or without conscious awareness that one possesses the capacities to make things happen and to resist being dominated by others.

(2009: 280)

This desperate desire for control is innately hegemonic, for the ability to dominate other men not only their own individual power but also their empowered masculinity. Unlike the exchanges between Goldberg and Stanley which show a clear victim, Max and Lenny show proficiency in exerting control and resisting such challenges, and yet neither Max nor Lenny are clearly dominant over the other. This refusal to be controlled is precisely what Schrock & Schwalbe highlight in their approach to hegemony, and the uncertain hierarchy between Max and Lenny encourages further conflict, creating an underlying tension in their continued conversations as each one attempts to dominate and control the other.

The recognition of this desire for domination is not exclusive to the contemporary production, for critics of the National Theatre's 1997 production, directed by Roger Michell, recognised Max's unwavering need for authority through the bestial, animalistic masculinity of David Bradley's portrayal. In *The Observer*, Michael Coveney remarks how such animalistic qualities were embodied by all men in Michell's production, though Bradley's Max epitomised such characteristics; "At those moments, which are many, where the menfolk assume shapes of anthropomorphic bestiality, Bradley looms large like some wildly disturbed orang-utan." (Coveney, 1997) Such exaggerated physical expression was far from distracting for critics, instead encapsulating the same refusal to admit defeat, insecurity and aggression that would later be observed in Cook's performance. Shaun Usher, in his review for the *Daily Mail*, noted how "David Bradley, with his hawk face, voice rasping like a buzz-saw gnawing knotty timber, makes the squalid head of the family formidable yet hollow and even pitiable" (Usher, 1997) It is interesting to see how Usher's unflattering comparison does allow for a semblance of sympathy, which would also be reflected in the critical responses to the Lloyd production. This sense of pity stands as markedly different to the attitudes audiences had towards other violent men in Pinter's plays, as seen in the varied responses to Stanley in *The Birthday Party*. Max's desperation is therefore not only a sign of his weak embodiment of hegemonic masculinity but is also the central characteristic through which audiences can sympathise with, or at least pity in him.

Critics of the premiere production of the play by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1965 also noted how the relationships of the men in the play were not only tied to their desire for dominance but were dependent on such a hierarchy of power. In a review of the production in *The Scotsman*, Montague Haltrecht viewed the men's desire for intimacy as one which had manifested in their consistent attempts to dominate one another, arguing that "The relationships are established on a base of hostility; the characters relate to each other in terms not of love but of domination-subjection" (Haltrecht, 1965). It is clear even at this stage that the men are empowered by the domination of another, and yet Haltrecht's argument suggests that this is instead a display of intimacy and that they ultimately desire connection to one another. This sentiment was echoed by Paul Rogers, who performed the role of Max in the premiere production, who felt that "despite their deep-seated resentments and rivalries, *The Homecoming* was equally about the bonds that unite this particular family" (Saunders, 2023: 129). Rogers' interpretation suggests how Max's desire for dominance can be rooted in his desire to connect with his sons and this creates a tragic element to the men's relationships in the play. Though they desire connection, they rely on verbal assault,

abuse, and violence to maintain that connection, which ultimately undermines any chance for a positive male-male relationship in the play. The hegemony of the play, shown in all three productions, necessitates a hierarchy of power between the men, forcing them to sacrifice their desire for intimacy. The opening exchange between Max and Lenny quickly reverts to the banal with a conversation about flannel vests, highlighting how commonplace such confrontations have become in their relationship, but the earlier conflict reveals how their actions reinforce their dominant positions and the hegemonic masculinity.

The characters' attempts at control are not exclusive to the banal enquiries about scissors, vests or horses seen in the earlier exchange, but can also stem from a desire to weaponise memory. Chris Megson suggests that such an intentional manipulation of memory is crucial to the construction of each character's identity, arguing that "Rather, identity is performative, constituted in shadowy processes of interlocution. Intrinsic to this fluid notion of identity is memory, which is conceived as a complex mode of self-presentation where emotions and expedients intersect, moment by moment, to exert control of the present" (2014: 218). Megson argues here that the performative elements of character's identities such as the weaponisation of memory aid the characters in their desperate desire for control. Much of Pinter's work demonstrates characters' manipulation of their pasts to compensate for insecurities, seen most notably in Stanley's changing responses about his hometown, or Rose being confronted by her past in the violent climax of *The Room*. These desperate attempts to control their own past often serve as a way to protect themselves from a violent or oppressive present, where what is unknown becomes both the root of fear and a source of comfort. Often, characters will appear unaware of the fictionalisation of their past, so when confronted with challenges to their fantasy they often overtly reject or ignore any alternatives to maintain a feeling of control.

When Lenny fails to respond to Max's threat of physical violence, or to his consequent orders to "give [him] a fag" (Pinter, 1999: 4), Max resorts to reflections on his past; "You think I wasn't a tearaway? I could have taken care of you, twice over. I'm still strong. You ask your Uncle Sam what I was. But at the same time I always had a kind heart" (1999: 5). It is in this short admission that Max reveals the contradictory characteristics that he is attempting to balance physical strength and an aptitude for violence, and compassion. Without any instigation from Lenny, Max's compulsion to demonstrate his willingness and past skill for violence reveals how his reliance on his past is to maintain a feeling of control in the present. Older men are a representation of masculinity that is seen in only a handful of Pinter's plays, and in *The Homecoming*, Max represents the fragile masculinity associated

with being confronted with his ageing body. As Thompson and Langendoerfer argue in their examination of shame in older men, the gradual decline of power and the vulnerability associated with the loss of value to the hegemonic masculinity forces men to construct new identities. Yet, their adaptation still relies on previous models of masculinity, where they "typically present narrative identities in keeping with the hegemonic young man model of masculinity and, most likely, their former selves. They live by the mandates to acquire and retain others' respect, to project an aura of toughness and independence" (Thompson & Langendoerfer, 2016: 136). Thompson and Langendoerfer's version of masculinity – that of toughness and independence – is fundamental to Max's own masculine presentation in the play. The importance of ageing men's attempts to embody the hegemonic ideal through their association with their former selves directly connects to Max's fantasy of the past, and the comfort it offers. When faced with threats to his masculinity, Max often finds comfort in the reflections on his past, yet this withdrawal from the memory of his youth offers him artificial security. Keeping him connected to the strong associations with the masculinity of his past, provides him with temporary comfort, but for the other men it serves as a reminder of his declining authority and his deteriorating masculinity.

The attempt to balance his tendency for violence with his proclamation of compassion creates a tenuous, conflicting account of his past and becomes an indication of the extent to which he has fictionalised his memory. When he mentions his wife Jessie, it reveals a juxtaposition between his reluctant admiration of her and the offensive, vulgar language he uses to describe her, as he tells Lenny, "Mind you, she wasn't such a bad woman. Even though it made me sick just to look at her rotten stinking face, she wasn't such a bad bitch. I gave her the best bleeding years of my life, anyway" (Pinter, 1999: 6). This speech by Max once again indicates the contrasting narratives he has constructed for himself. It reveals how he sees himself as a dutiful husband whose selfless acts allowed his wife to succeed. This implication towards the traditional heterosexual marital roles supports his constructed narrative of compassion, yet also serves to identify his attitudes towards male-female interpersonal relationships as similarly traditional. By juxtaposing the implied admiration for his deceased wife with his use of language, calling her a 'bitch' and that she 'made [him] sick', he unapologetically displays his misogynist attitude. The overt objectification of the first female character mentioned in the play is a clear attempt to establish dominance by Max, and though his actions betray his supposed 'good heart', they also establish the subjugation of women as a tolerated behaviour within the hegemony of the play. In response, Lenny neither comments on Max's past nor defends his mother,

instead only expressing his irritation at Max's invasive rambling. By choosing not to acknowledge the content of Max's preceding speech, Lenny dismisses Max's attempt at dominance, disregarding any significance of his fantastical past and refusing to engage in the defence of his mother, ultimately remaining complicit to Max's misogynist attitudes towards women.

In the Lloyd production, misogyny was presented unapologetically, and through that brutal, unrelenting presentation of antiquated attitudes towards gender, Lloyd provided an opportunity for his audience to reflect. Placing the characters' misogyny at the forefront of their performance allowed us to remain critical of their behaviour, confronting us with the abuse and aggression that appears frequently in Pinter's work. In his review of the production for the *Sunday Times*, Christopher Hart remarked on the relationship between misogyny and Pinter, observing how the characters "spend their time threatening and shouting at each other, and being awesomely misogynistic, in the usual unlovable Pinter manner" (Hart, 2015). This reflection appears to admire Pinter's depiction of misogyny as a staple of his work, as if such attitudes and behaviours provide some supposed catharsis in witnessing its presentation. In an opposing view, Lloyd Evans in the *Spectator* mentioned how "Waves of hostility surged through the crowd at its more blatant passages of misogyny" (Evans, 2015), suggesting how such explicit displays of misogyny motivated the audience to hostility – whether that be towards the characters or one another. This clear relationship between Pinter's text and his reputation for an unapologetic depiction of misogyny is provocative in its impact on contemporary audiences. While Lloyd's intentions remain unclear, his direction allowed for a similarly unapologetic presentation of such outdated attitudes, ultimately allowing the audience to consider how to respond to such hostile, intense, uncomfortable masculinity.

In the premiere production in 1965, some critics saw Max's outbursts not as misogynistic but responded with sympathy for his ineffectual authority. In a review for the *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, John Gardner viewed Max's aggression as symptomatic of his inability to find comfort and reassurance within himself, arguing how "Max is that frightful paradox, the clan chieftain whom nobody – not even himself – respects. His threats and curses, invective hurled at his dead wife, Jessie, and his living sons, alternate with cloaked cries of love and silent screams for help" (Gardner, 1965). Gardner's interpretation goes beyond a feeling of pity that other critics expressed in their reviews of the production to instead suggest sympathy for how the other men continually disrespect him. Gardner however does not seem intent on apologising or dismissing Max's aggression, but rather to

see him as representative of the hostility that is rooted within each individual, himself included:

> In the end it is a play about you and me: about our inability to escape from the circumstances of our past, of our constant relationships which waver explosively between love and hate, of the fact that we all take part in a kind of tribal cannibalism – rending the flesh of those closest to us.

(Gardner, 1965)

Gardner's argument for an innate hostility within us all that we must navigate implies a level of sympathy for not just Max, but all the characters who continually rely on dominance over others to find reassurance. He is therefore representative of the kind of cannibalism that affects all the other people in the house, and in doing so, fails to connect. It is clear that this tendency for an audience to sympathise with Max's vulnerability was not present in the response to the Lloyd production. This indicates how contemporary audiences are much more likely to condemn his explicit, unapologetic misogyny, but are seemingly less likely to find nuance in Max's masculine presentation.

For audiences of the Lloyd production, witnessing the men in the play normalise this misogyny, Lloyd firmly establishes Max and Lenny as unsympathetic and – more importantly – creates a distance between the character and the audience. Much like Lenny's silent complicity to Max's sexist outbursts, our silent spectating serves to support his misogyny. We then exist in a continual feeling of turmoil, resistant to the offensive views of the characters and yet unable to challenge them, resulting in an uncomfortable symbiosis that persists throughout the performance. Bryoni Trezise argues that this affective relationship between performance and spectator "works to empathically bind spectator subjectivities through relations of power to images of suffering others. This generates a form of spectatorship that hurts morally, emotionally and physically" (2012: 205). As an audience, we witness the unapologetic displays of misogyny and by framing our own understandings of offensive language as a reaction to that behaviour, we sustain injury. When applying Trezise's understanding of such injury, our inability to confront or challenge the aggressors on stage serves to highlight the separation between audience and character. Like the characters in the play, as an audience we must navigate this balance between resistance and compliance, desiring both resolution and change towards a positive future. Lloyd's production confronts us with those realities and motivates us to fight for any recognition of our own suffering.

With the introduction of Sam, another potential challenger arrives, and his contrasting approach to the misogyny and hostility between Max and Lenny offers a moment of relief for the audience. This exchange between the three men creates a temporary alliance with the new arrival, as Sam represents an opportunity to challenge the established violent, toxic status quo. Lenny takes the opportunity to assert control, making conversation with Sam, giving the impression of an eager, sympathetic nephew, asking him "How are you, Uncle?" and comforting him, "Well, I think you're entitled to be tired, Uncle" (Pinter, 1999: 10). This may seem like genuine compassion, but Lenny's sympathy towards Sam serves as a subtle challenge to Max's authority. By conversing with Sam in a manner which presents itself in stark contrast to the hostile behaviour he shows Max, Lenny both isolates Max from their interaction and once again highlights his disrespect for Max's assumed authority. Max himself acknowledges this, and attempts to include himself back into the conversation, stating "I'm here, too, you know" (1999: 11). After being ignored at first, Max repeats, and it is not Lenny that engages with him, but Sam. For Pinter's characters, a fear of isolation often derives from a fragility of identity, as Andrew Wyllie argues, characters such as Max, are "desperately seeking reassurance that they exist" (2017: 90). This constant desire to conceal vulnerabilities stems also from the established hegemonic masculinity, where dominance over others offers temporary protection from challenges. However, they may also receive the reassurance that Wyllie describes from other men. Sam's response, "I know you're here" (Pinter, 1999: 11) offers Max a rare opportunity for validation, and unlike Lenny, Sam is more willing to include him, saving him from isolation. Max's gratitude is similarly temporary and his desire for dominance supersedes any alliance, and as such, with Lenny's absence, Sam is the only option for him to exert dominance. It is at this moment that our alliance with Sam is strengthened, positioning us and him as oppositional to Max's tendency towards violence and misogyny, and the following exchange reveals how Sam competently defends against his brother's threats.

Sam's professional success and his subsequent pride in his work offer an opportunity for him to establish power over his brother through subtle challenges to Max's authority. Employment can be a source of power for ageing men, as staying in work allows them to maintain the image of the 'breadwinner', a version of masculinity tied to financial success and dependence. As Thompson and Langendoefer argue, "After reaching retirement age, masculine identities begin to shift from paid work and draw on 'doing something useful' and 'being active'" (2016: 127). Much like Max, Sam's age distances him

from the hegemonic ideal and yet, Sam's continued employment and his success at work serve as a connection to this youthful presentation of masculinity. Using Thomson and Langendoerfer's arguments, Sam's ability to delay that seemingly inevitable shift to inadequacy allows him to not only maintain power over Max but also align himself with the expected behaviours of the hegemonic masculinity. All characters in the play, including Ruth and Teddy, begin with or gain paid employment by the end, except for Max. It is this overt disconnect from the masculine norms that further strengthens the sense of isolation for Max, and Sam's repeated reference to his work serves as a threat to Max's status and masculinity. For Penelope Prentice, this brings attention to the relationship between the internal and external spaces, where "The struggle to win dominance over another which provides the moment-to-moment dramatic tension […] remains the primary means by which characters gain identity. These characters assert identity only one other way—by claiming the right of title conferred by work outside the house" (2000: 141). Unlike Rose in *The Room*, whose control over the external space is both limited and desperate, the men in *The Homecoming* refer to their lives outside of the visible space as a similar method of control. In the context of Prentice's argument, each man's employment offers a way of establishing a hierarchy of power, where unemployment becomes weakness and indicative of inferior masculinity. Where Max is reliant on his dominance of the internal, domestic space, clinging onto his past employment as a butcher offers limited defence.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the desire for validation and reassurance motivates the men in the play, but where instead of recalling memories and gaining power indirectly from the association with a previous masculinity, Sam receives validation from his success at work. His boasts about the compliments from clients, his receipt of a box of cigars and his declaration of supremacy at work, draw parallels with Max's boasting of his youthful dominance. Both men desire validation, and they achieve that through similar means, yet where Sam is willing to support his brother in moments of weakness, Max denies him that privilege, repeatedly taking any opportunity to assert dominance. In an environment where domination is the expectation, Sam's willingness to support his rivals never offers any long-term gain in status and is often taken advantage of, often undermining his own power. In the Lloyd production, Sam's weakness becomes connected to his implied sexuality, and Max's attempts to position him as inferior often come in the form of challenging his heterosexuality. For critics of the production in 2015, there were repeated acknowledgements of the 'campness' of Keith Allen's Sam. This revealed a problematic similarity in the positions of such reviewers and Max's own attitudes to Sam's questionable

sexuality. Christopher Hart, for the *Sunday Times*, notes how "Allen gives one of his customarily pleasing turns as camp Uncle Sam, appearing at one point in a knitted yellow. cardie and a silky yellow cravat, flopping his hands about just enough to be comical" (Hart, 2015). This reference to costume choices implies an intentional directorial and performance choice to highlight Sam's effeminate presentation, and directly refers to such choices as 'comical'. In the *Mail on Sunday*, Georgina Brown, as if repeating Max's own language, describes how Sam is "(evidently not the marrying kind, as played by a wonderfully camp Keith Allen)" (Brown, 2015). These outdated and problematic stereotypes imply that they were intentional decisions made by Lloyd to give value to Max's abuse of his brother – something which ultimately reinforces ideas of effeminate men as inherently inferior. It also draws attention to the way in which critics of the production also positioned themselves in alliance with Max, in their dismissal of Sam's position of power in the play. Pinter rarely introduces overt homosexual characters in his plays – a notable exception being Harry and Bill in *The Collection* – and yet Sam's sexuality becomes a focal point of how Max attempts to undermine his power. Lloyd's production not only fails to challenge these ideals but appears to reinforce negative depictions of homosexuality as either justifiably inferior to heterosexual men, or purely limited to comic relief.

Max's role as both husband and father supports a stronger connection with the values of the hegemonic masculinity and exposes Sam's failure to adopt those same roles. Max's repeated accusations of Sam's homosexuality, such as "You'd bend over for half a dollar on Blackfriars Bridge" (Pinter, 1999: 76), aim to belittle his status and masculinity. When considered in relation to the other men in the house who declare – often with some exaggeration – their own romantic/sexual accomplishments, Sam's inability to present that same evidence further weakens his status, and therefore distances him from the hegemonic ideal. In the second Act, when confronting Sam about his lack of value to the family, Max challenges him by declaring, "This man didn't even fight in the bloody war!" (1999: 76), to which Sam instantly corrects him. This apparent need to have fought in war is attributed to the dominant form of masculinity presented in the play, that military service supports 'strong' men, and establishes physical force and violence as a valuable behaviour amongst the men in the play. Ben Griffin notes that dominant forms of masculinity for men who had fought in World War Two believed that "they were superior men by virtue of their military experience" (2018: 389) and this supports Max's apparent resentment towards Sam as one that stems from his lack of experience in military action. Sam has made it clear that he had fought in the war in earlier exchanges, yet Max's narrative of Sam as useless and emasculated

dismisses facts in favour of behaviours that align with that narrative. This is when Max ends with a prototypicality threat, "Who did you kill?" (Pinter, 1999: 76), forcing Sam to admit his complicity to violence. This directly challenges Sam's representation of the hegemonic ideal and suggests that the ideal masculinity is one which is not only complicit towards extreme acts of violence but encourages men to perform those acts themselves. It is not clear whether Max himself has killed during wartime, but Sam's subsequent silence and departure is poetic in its timing, as indicative of Sam's inability to defend himself, retreating from the house. This continual hostile rapport between the two brothers is representative of the conflicting narratives each one tries to convey, unwilling to confront their insecurities and navigating their conflicting masculine behaviours.

When Joey enters for the first time, he announces that he's hungry, introducing us to the primitive, childlike behaviours Joey continues to display. Sam agrees, utilising a prototypicality threat to argue that Max is responsible for cooking for them, which suggests how he represents the traditional maternal role within the house. Max responds to this threat, asking them, "Who do you think I am, your mother?" (Pinter, 1999: 20). Not only does this indicate, once again, a misogynistic attitude towards maternal responsibilities, but also how Max's defensive response suggests an insecurity about his embodiment of these maternal, feminine characteristics. Having shown how vital the subordination of women is to the established hegemony of the play, Max's embodiment of the traditional maternal role is incredibly damaging. For men to benefit from the subjugation of women, there must be a clear indication of feminine behaviours that, if embodied by men, are undesirable. Mimi Schippers engages with these ideas in her feminist approach to femininity and hegemony, arguing that "It is cultural insurance for male dominance that anybody who enacts or embodies hegemonic characteristics that do not align with their gender category is stigmatized as problematic and feminine" (2007: 96). It is this stigmatisation that Schippers describes that provides a context for understanding Max's perception of himself as a victim due to his adoption of traditional maternal – i.e., feminine – characteristics. Joey and Sam's assumption that Max will cook for them indicates Max's role as 'mother' and 'housewife', which damages his status and his representation of the hegemonic ideal. It is this stigma that Max ultimately resists confronting, and much like Stanley in *The Birthday Party*, instead, he relies on violence and abuse to compensate for his sense of shame.

The need to defend his threatened authority and masculinity drives Max to counter with his own attempt at emasculation. Much like his conflict with Lenny, Max refers to Sam as a 'bitch' and this attempt at feminising his opponent is a common defensive tactic for

Max to use to retaliate against threats. This attempt at domination is temporary however as Max is now significantly outnumbered, and the continued exchange reveals how Lenny seemingly adopts the role of apparent spokesperson for Joey and Sam. Lenny's responses show how confidently he can regain control, once again suggesting Max's adoption of the maternal role, stating, "What the boys want, Dad, is your own special brand of cooking, Dad. That's what the boys look forward to" (Pinter, 1999: 20). The combination of Lenny's repeated use of the title 'Dad' and the imagery implied by the term 'boys' subverts Max's sense of control and comfort, weaponising Max's comforting association with the past, using it against him to expose his insecurity. For Prentice, this revelation of Max's vulnerabilities helps to establish sympathy for Max's weakened position:

> Max, the aging patriarch, struggles to retain his position, to maintain the household, and the fact that he struggles in a worthy purpose is significant and evidence of an admirable vigor. He does keep the family together, and though he does not foster dependency, his two sons and brother require his shelter, and Teddy, his approval. His vitality and mind are remarkable, and he reveals his strength when he takes over from the others.

(2000: 139)

This contrasting view of Max as a sympathetic symbol of patriarchal power and resolve does nothing to criticise the methods with which Max terrorises and undermines the men around him. Prentice's willingness to praise Max's position in the household leads to complacent and dismissive observations about the harmful behaviours he performs to support hegemony, and her analysis in this instance is problematic in its admiration of such hostile masculinity. However, there is value in Prentice's argument here, in particular, her acknowledgement of how the other men in the play choose to remain in the space, and in doing so, offers Max a semblance of control. Max is seemingly irredeemable, and his desperate desire to reinforce the pressures to embody hegemonic masculinity does nothing to create sympathy for him. However, there is a deeper insecurity that Prentice describes, which all the men possess. Even after their seemingly endless conflicts, they choose to remain in the environment, perhaps out of some desperation for power or some inner desire for intimacy but ultimately, a fear of isolation.

Any semblance of sympathy for Max becomes increasingly difficult, as Lenny implies Max's physical abuse of his sons in their past, expressing how Max "used to like tucking up his sons" (Pinter, 1999: 21). Though this comment is somewhat oblique, it provides more

evidence to suggest Max's tendency towards violence. The exchange between the father and son mirrors Lenny's earlier challenge in the opening of the play, but instead of surrendering, Max refuses to sit in silence. The possible exposure of his insecurities, his increasing sense of isolation, and the rejection of his attempts to regain control culminates in Max's resort to an explicit threat of physical violence, "I'll give you a proper tuck up one of these days" (1999: 21). Max's use of the same innuendo as Lenny ('tuck up') all but confirms his account and serves as a sinister reminder of Max's willingness to resort to physical force when threatened. Such threats of violence contribute to the continual sense of unease for the audience, and once again the discomfort of witnessing this conflict reinforces the separation between spectator and performance. The constant threat of violence is felt throughout the play, and we have seen how routine these threats between them have become.

In the Lloyd production, the disgust with which Ron Cook's Max threatens his sons created an uncomfortable, unavoidable tension. For critics of the production, the suggestion of Max's abuse of his sons became a common thread in their interpretation of Lloyd's direction. Sarah Hemming of the *Financial Times* noted how "There's more than a hint of sexual abuse here, in the sickening way Cook's Max lingers over recollections of the "fun" he and his boys had in the bath" (Hemming, 2015), and Dominic Cavendish made similar observations in the *Daily Telegraph*, commenting on how Lloyd "interpolates stylised tableaux of anguish, rams home the insinuation that these men haven't recovered from child-abuse" (Cavendish, 2015). These observations frame Max's threats as deeply discomforting, as if positioning an audience's silence as indicative of their complicity to the abuse and violence the men face. But it also reveals how audiences for the production are faced with an opportunity to rationalise the behaviour of the victims of that abuse in a way that creates sympathy with them. Lenny's response of silence is mirrored by our own, as if we were also the victims of Max's virile threat, and the affective nature of such a moment provokes us to remain critical of his behaviour. Our inaction connects us with Sam and Joey, who remain silent observers of the conflict, and this indicates how the tenuous allegiances we have with the characters on stage offer temporary opportunities for connection. Much like the characters in the play, we desire connection, and these moments of shared inaction act as a respite from the discomfort and unease that persists throughout the play.

Violence has long been synonymous with patriarchal oppression; therefore, violent behaviour has been crucial in the formation of hegemonic masculinities. The research of R. W. Connell has been fundamental in engaging with the subject of hegemonic masculinities,

arguing that violent acts reinforce hegemonic structures: "It is the successful claim to authority, more than direct violence, that is the mark of hegemony (though violence often underpins or supports authority)" (2005: 77). Connell's recognition of the ways in which men use violence to support the maintenance of their dominant status offers a provocative context for understanding why the men in *The Homecoming* feel compelled to resort to violence. For these men, violence is often a way to assert authority and dominate other men as well as women, yet not all violent acts are successful in establishing that dominance. Much like the conversations between Jerry and Robert in *Betrayal*, even the discussion of sport serves as an opportunity to establish superiority, but in *The Homecoming* the men go further, perpetrating acts of violence to assert dominance. As mentioned previously, Max's attempts at violence come as a direct response to a threat to his masculinity, and earlier exchanges lead to oblique threats rather than direct force. It is only later in the first act, when threatened in the presence of Ruth, that Max's desperation to establish authority necessitates violence. In the exchanges before Teddy and Ruth come downstairs, Max is continually losing control, and it is Joey's refusal to obey his father's order to "Chuck them out" (Pinter, 1999: 67) that serves as the final rejection of Max's authority. Joey challenges this control through the prototypicality threat of "You're an old man… He's an old man" (1999: 67). As a man of lower status, Joey's dismissal of his father is severely damaging to his authority, exposing Max's earlier insecurity about his ageing body.

For the premiere production in 1965, Peter Hall worked with the performers in rehearsals to ensure that they maintained a level of composure so as to not reveal their true feelings. In his book titled *Harold Pinter*, Graham Saunders offers a comprehensive collation of interviews and critical responses to the production, including that of Peter Hall himself, where he summarises Hall's intention for his performer's use of their bodies: "Hall also concentrated on stillness and the maintenance of a highly controlled composure, with the actors expressing an outwardly neutral mask when interacting with other family members, especially when subjected to verbal attack" (Saunders, 2023: 128). This feigned neutrality that Saunders describes is then indicative of the extent to which the characters in the play attempt to hide their feelings and motivations. Critics of the production recognised how the outbursts of violence seemed equally emotionless, as J.C. Trewin argued in the *Birmingham Post*, "For me the play is technically well made now and then funny, often violent, often just brutal. Throughout it treats the horrible as matter-of-fact" (Trewin, 1965). Trewin's implication of the gratuitousness of the violence is combined with what he sees as Hall's straightforward, unemotional presentation of violence. Hall's decision to enforce the

neutrality of the performers' bodies appeared to affect the way in which the audience responded to violence, where the lack of emotional impact hindered their ability to connect to or criticise their dependency on violent acts. It is when this façade of composure is broken that fractures the characters' sense of control and power over others, revealing their true selves to the audience.

The tension between the inner self and the one characters work so hard to display to others was also the focus of the 1997 Michell production, where large portions of William Dudley's set included extraneous spaces such as bedrooms and a kitchen – spaces that an audience would typically be deprived of accessing. Michael Coveney's review for the *Observer* highlights the contrast between Michell and Hall's productions, where "William Dudley's imposing beige and brown design, with lino, plastic light switches and a visible upper level of bedrooms, is a complete break into realism from the Peter Hall/John Bury chill grey 'high art' mausoleum in their legendary 1965 and 1991 versions." (Coveney, 1997) This dedication to realism was central to Michell's approach, both in design and direction, where the intimacy of each character's lives was laid bare for the audience to observe and scrutinise. Graham Hassell, in his review for *What's On*, argued that such a space was not only cultivating an atmosphere of darkness and dampness, but also central to the stifling masculinity of the play, where "Dudley's naturalistic set suggests a domestic mausoleum, with every room of the large north London house visible through gauze drapes, which in tum add a fusty light redolent of a reign of stultifying maleness." (Hassell, 1997) It is important to recognise how such a large, oppressive space in Michell's production made for a fascinating reflection of the inner lives of the characters, where their violent, aggressive, manipulative actions are reframed within moments that show their hidden selves, but also their restrictive masculinity. Whether it be hiding a magazine, or cleaning dishes, these moments in Michell's production provide a further context for understanding the isolation and suffering of the men in the play.

It is interesting to note that almost twenty years later, Jamie Lloyd's direction also focused on the separation between the internal and external lives of the characters in the play. Much like Hall, the physical and emotional neutrality in the actor's performances remained a central aspect of his direction, and yet this was contrasted intermittently with moments of emotional explosion when characters found themselves alone. We would witness John Simms' Lenny strangle a clock in a desperate rage, and Gemma Chan's Ruth exit the house not long after her arrival, head in her hands and sobbing. It is through these rare glimpses of emotional release that Lloyd offered a complete subversion of both Michell

and Hall's direction from the previous productions, but more importantly, provided the audience with a moment of relief. It is through these moments of emotional release that the audience sees the effects of the pressure the characters are under to remain neutral in front of others. This is arguably Lloyd's intention, as we remain critical of such social pressures that force us to remain docile, inert, and silent in the face of such a hostile environment. It is then that Max's outburst of violence against Joey provides one more moment of emotional release. But what is arguably the most significant component of Max's resort to violence, is that Ruth is a silent witness to this challenge to his masculinity.

Motivated by a desire to impress Ruth or to avoid appearing weak before her, Max resorts to violence, hitting both Joey and Sam, yet seemingly sustaining injury himself. Ruth's presence indicates that a failure to counter a challenge in view of women has significant consequences on the impression of masculine value for Max. With Joey injured, Max incapacitated, and Sam punished for trying to intervene, this display of violence serves more as a pathetic demonstration of desperation and weakness rather than suggesting higher status. Prentice argues that Max's violent outbursts are not only sympathetic but effective, stating how:

> Max, like all in Pinter's work who fight most fiercely, is trying to maintain rather than gain a position of dominance. Max's abuse of patriarchal authority is an attempt to maintain his patriarchal position, and his overbearing delivery does momentarily stun, rendering all of the others ineffectual.

(2000: 131)

Prentice's reference to a momentary disruption is largely accurate, seeing how Max's outburst created a brief silence, as the three men recovered, but her arguments once again fail to consider Max's ineptitude and desperation. Critics of the Michell production found such violent outbursts symptomatic of the very same desperation that Prentice fails to acknowledge. In the *Sunday Times*, John Peter argued how Max's violent actions stem from his desire to reinforce his masculine performance, where his "violence is not a matter of purposeful attack, still less defence, but a show of superiority and a reassurance of male status. You have to be seen to be a man." (Peter, 1997) This need to be seen embodying such violent masculinity is fundamental to understanding the desperation of Max's actions. The performativity of his masculine presentation is not only trying to show others his undeniable authority, but also to convince himself of his own power. Peter's observation is the only example of critical reception across all three productions that directly

acknowledges the compulsion the men in the play feel to maintain power through their performance of dominant masculinity. The other men, though temporarily incapacitated, quickly recover from Max's violence, with Max himself seemingly overexerting himself in a desperate attempt to maintain power. Once again, the need to maintain control as a response to any threat often leads to no clear victor and this moment is an indication of the futility of Max's attempts to gain power through violence.

Such an overt display of weakness could provide Max a moment of introspection and allow him to confront his insecurities, and yet the pressures to conform to the aggressive, abusive, manipulative hegemony motivates him to continue defending himself through violence. Much like with Stanley in *The Birthday Party*, Max's debilitating need for power results in consistent failures to embody the hegemonic masculine behaviours, or at least to utilise them in ways which allow him to maintain power. Peter does expand on the initial observations of the oppressive masculinity shown in the Michell production:

> *The Homecoming* is about the family as predator. More specifically, it is about men dependent on their macho image for self-assurance and even more dependent on a powerful woman for social and emotional security. Remove that woman and the men are lost: they can only express themselves in brutality and hunger.

> (Peter, 1997)

Where other critics of the production focused on the overt misogyny, seemingly dismissive of the nuances of Pinter's depiction of masculinity in the play, Peter's recognition of the desperation and fragility of the men in the play is remarkably profound. Alistair Macaulay, in his review for the *Financial Times*, similarly contests other critics' dismissal of *The Homecoming*. He argues that "Quite wrongly, *The Homecoming* has been called a misogynist play. It is, in part, obviously about misogyny.", before acknowledging Ruth's ability to contest her inferiority, where "She sees these men's deep fear of (and need of) women, and their own massive insecurity too." (Macaulay, 1997) Although Macaulay recognises the overt misogyny in the play, he uses the example of Ruth's empowerment to challenge other critics' interpretations, finally acknowledging each man's insecurity, which becomes the fundamental characteristic of the men's need for power. For both critics, the Michell production offered a provocative, if not progressive depiction of gendered power, contrasting with that seen in the reception of the Lloyd production. It is arguable then that contemporary critics have regressed to a more dismissive perception of *The Homecoming* as a play which ultimately criticises misogyny, compared to that seen in 1997.

For all three productions, Max's desire for control becomes crucial to the maintenance of his masculine performance and though he is often the victim of threats to his authority, he also displays an aptitude for gaining power through counter-threats. His reliance on memory to provide a comforting connection to the masculinity of his past self, his misogynist attitudes towards the objectification and subjugation of women, and the threats and acts of violence all reinforce the established hegemonic masculinity. For many of the men in the play, though they may challenge their opponents' attempts to establish control, they remain complicit to the same system which advocates – if not necessitates – dominance at any cost. For Connell, such behaviours are fundamental to the maintenance of dominance, but they are "at the same time a measure of its imperfection. A thoroughly legitimate hierarchy would have less need to intimidate" (2005: 84). This highlights how Pinter presents a hegemony that is innately flawed, and each man's dependence on abuse and violence serves to reinforce their own insecurities. In other plays, characters who resist such oppressive and corrosive systems are often marginalised, or their attempts to challenge the hegemony reinforce existing behaviours. In the Lloyd production, this hegemony is heightened to involve the spectator, forcing us to experience the misogyny and violence through the shared discomfort and desire for connection. However, where the men in the play are willing participants in the formation of the hegemony and consequent power struggles, as an audience, we are restricted in our ability to pursue change and challenge our oppression. In the production, we sustain suffering with the hope that the misogynistic, violent behaviours will be undermined and challenged for us, and Pinter offers a possible alternative to such a destructive, violent masculinity through the character of Ruth.

Femininity, Control & Rebellion

In *The Homecoming*, each threat to another man's power and masculinity reinforces a hierarchy where weakness and insecurity cannot be tolerated, but this hierarchy is also dependent on the subjugation of women. As Mimi Schippers argues, "the significance of masculinity and femininity in gender hegemony is that they establish symbolic meanings for the relationship between women and men that provide the legitimating rationale for social relations ensuring the ascendancy and dominance of men" (2007: 91). The legitimation of this unequal relationship that Schippers argues exists between masculinity and femininity is crucial to the maintenance of the hegemony in the play, where the male-dominated environment is reliant on a misogynistic hegemony, and femininity is restricted to a marginalised position. Schippers highlights how the maintenance of the subservient role

that women are often forced to adopt reinforces an expectation that they must tolerate emotional, physical, and sexual abuse to support a system constructed solely to benefit men. In previous chapters, key relationships between women and the established hegemony have highlighted different approaches to resisting and conforming to this oppressive system. Rose's fear and anxiety in *The Room* and Meg and Lulu's eventual submission to masculine power in *The Birthday Party* reveal how these women all fall victim to the abuses and violence of the men around them, ultimately supporting the systems in place that aim to undermine their power. Pinter's approach to feminine rebellion changes in *The Homecoming*, as Ruth's journey becomes central to the narrative of the play. Ruth offers a much more nuanced depiction of empowered femininity from Pinter and one which not only dismisses any attempt to subjugate and violate her but also embodies a subversion of established feminine norms for her rise in status among men. Where women in Pinter's plays both before and after fail to maintain an alternative, empowered femininity, Ruth does not remain complicit to their own domination, and her masterful subversion of masculine practices has significant consequences on the established hegemony.

Scholars have often debated the conflicting interpretation of misogyny in Pinter's work, arguing that it is purely an overt criticism or is instead evidence of Pinter's own misogynistic biases. Drew Milnes discusses this dichotomy in his thorough analysis of both Pinter's text, and scholarship of his work, but firmly argues that Pinter fails to present misogyny with a rigid political criticism. He summarises his arguments with the following sentiment: "However resourceful, Pinter's plays remain complicit with the misogynist structures of sexual difference through which power is reproduced." (Milne, 2009: 247) Milne's reading is convincing and provides a context for how Pinter's plays can be interpreted by readers and audiences, even justifying responses to the Lloyd production which denied any semblance of sympathy for overtly misogynistic men. In contrast, and thirty years earlier, Elizabeth Sakellaridou argued for a largely sympathetic view of Pinter's depiction of misogyny in her book titled *Pinter's Female Portraits* (1988), even praising Pinter's depiction of women and his journey towards more fluid portrayals of both men and women. Sakellaridou argued that:

> As a result the delineation of his female characters as dramatis personae and their role as theatrical functionaries are dictated by a prevailing masculine discourse, which produces collective - archetypal or stereotypic - female figures in the models set by patriarchal society. This initial biased sexist attitude follows a steady, though

often uneven, evolution, until it eventually crystallises into a gentler, totally androgynous vision.

(Sakellaridou, 1988: 11)

Sakellaridou's analysis became central to the feminist readings of Pinter's work, including *The Homecoming*, where Ruth stood as a fundamental turning point in the more sympathetic and empowered femininity from his earliest work to that seen in the 1980s. Where Milne argues that characters such as Ruth ultimately uphold the values of the patriarchal systems in which she exists, Sakellaridou argues that through Ruth, Pinter presents a nuanced, layered femininity than that seen in *The Birthday Party* or *The Room*, where "Every new female creation shows the artist attaching fresh attributes to various aspects of the feminine." (1988: 11) For the men in *The Homecoming*, their desire for control is challenged and their positions of power are supplanted by Ruth's dominant femininity, and throughout the play, she is neither offended by or remains victim to their misogyny. It is important then to observe whether she then chooses to challenge, or embody the misogynistic hegemonic masculinity that the men seek to maintain. As early as her first appearance, Ruth's rejection of masculine control is made apparent. Though it is established later that Teddy's absence from his home has lasted for six years, his desire for control is as acute as the other men. This indicates that the pressures of the hegemony established in his childhood home have remained with him, and Teddy's masculine performance is still reliant on the same abusive and manipulative behaviours adopted by the rest of his family. As discussed earlier in the chapter, all men in the play attempt to maintain control over both their environment and the other people in it. Where Max does so through his nostalgic reflections and sudden bursts of violence, Teddy's desperate attempts to regain control are more subdued. Frequently throughout their opening exchange, Teddy ignores Ruth's answers to his questions:

Teddy   Why don't you go to bed? I'll find some sheets. I feel… wide awake, isn't it odd? I think I'll stay up for a bit. Are you tired?

Ruth   No.

Teddy   Go to bed. I'll show you the room.

Ruth   No, I don't want to.

Teddy   You'll be perfectly all right up there without me.

(Pinter, 1999: 31)

This exchange clearly indicates Teddy's desperation for control over Ruth, insisting that she does as he demands, feigning concern for her welfare whilst attempting to dominate her. In attempting to make the decision about her feelings he visibly attempts to suppress her autonomy. These overt displays of misogynist, abusive behaviours have already been established by the men in the play, yet it is through Teddy's attempts to undermine Ruth's power that solidifies the subordination of women as an expectation within the hegemony. Even after Ruth repeats her dissent, Teddy remains persistent, shifting to a different tactic to also reinforce his domination, this time through an assurance of sympathy and protection. Teddy's consolation of "You'll be perfectly all right up there without me" (1999: 31) continues his insistence that Ruth is supposedly dependent on him, and how she relies on him for protection. For Schippers, such overt attempts to control women are crucial to the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity, where a dominant masculinity and subservient femininity "provide the hegemonic scaffolding for relationships between men and women as 'naturally' and inevitably a relationship of dominance and submission" (2007: 91). The performance of such a 'natural' dominant masculinity that Schippers describes is essential to Teddy's self-identification, and much like Max, any challenge to his status must be countered to not expose his insecurities. However, this opening exchange reveals how confidently Ruth can dismiss Teddy's attempts to dominate her, refusing to submit to his will and maintaining a position of resistance, as if mirroring the relationship between Lenny and Max in the opening scenes of the play.

Teddy's treatment of Ruth offers audiences a representation of the pressures to conform to the hegemony, but our sympathy is not focused on him. Until this point, we must remain withdrawn, isolated in our disdain for the actions and behaviours of the men on stage. Ruth's repeated challenges through her use of prototypicality threats to Teddy's attempts at controlling her serve to resist her subjugation and we immediately begin to sympathise with her as a victim of not only an abusive relationship, but a victim of the oppressive hegemony. For Ketu Katrak, presentations of such oppression on stage often lead to significant responses from audiences, as she argues, "Affective responses such as hope, social consciousness of injustice and outrage, among other emotions, are elicited by the transformative potential of powerful theatrical representations of violence" (2014: 32). This affective response to violence that Katrak describes mirrors that of Bryoni Trezise, providing a richer context for understanding how Ruth's position of empowerment also empowers us to challenge injustice. Through her attempts to subvert the hegemonic masculinity of the play, we remain critical of such unequal power structures and in Lloyd's

production, a desire for understanding and connection benefits both the spectator and Ruth. For critics of the production, Gemma Chan's depiction of Ruth's rejection of male authority is an attempt to compensate for her concealed vulnerability. In the review for the *Sunday Times*, Christopher Hart remarks how "It's a testament to Chan's memorable performance, with all its sphinx-like composure, its unsettling mix of vulnerability and control, that the dramatic uncertainty persists" (Hart, 2015). Much like the men in the play, this grasping at power stems from some unknown insecurity, but where the men rely on violence and manipulation, Ruth's subdued, almost elegant rebellion positions her as a sympathetic symbol of resistance against toxic men.

The level of composure that Hart mentions once again recalls the similarities in direction between Lloyd and Peter Hall, the director of the premiere production in 1965, and this emotional neutrality became significant to how Ruth is portrayed on stage. For Hart, it revealed a balance of vulnerability and control, but for critics of the Hall production, the composure of Vivien Merchant's Ruth was tied to her femininity, for as Doreen Tanner remarked in her review for the *Liverpool Daily Post*, "Vivien Merchant is passively ladylike – until one extraordinary scene where she suddenly becomes anything but. Again, suggestion is everything; the calm way in which she accepts the family's plans for her is more effective than any noise would be" (Tanner, 1965). For Tanner, Ruth's composure was viewed as a passivity that was intrinsically feminine, although she gives no indication of when that is subverted. She goes on to recognise Ruth's autonomy, referring to her 'accepting' the men's terms, but this is not acknowledged by other critics of the production. John Gardner, in his review for the *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, viewed Ruth as "professionally randy, with the chilling sensuality of a tart" (Gardner, 1965). Although Gardner's language carries with it a tone of misogyny that mirrors that of the men in the play, he focused on what Tanner merely hinted at: the subversion of Ruth's composure and her apparent 'lady-like' qualities. Gardner continues, noting how "Vivien Merchant builds Ruth into a figure of sensual callousness which will haunt for a long time" (Gardner, 1965), once again acknowledging the affective, haunting performance of Merchant, and yet there remains a fixation on her sensuality.

Even in the critical responses to the Michell production, there were references to the lingering effects of Merchant's Ruth. Shaun Usher makes the comparison in his review in the *Daily Mail*, where he recalls how he was "spoilt by recollections of the original Ruth, Vivien Merchant, who could endow the blandest dialogue with a sort of erotic St Elmo's Fire. Played by Lindsay Duncan, Ruth is coolly passive, still as Nembutal, a blonde enigma—and

that works well, too." (Usher, 1997) Although the comparison between Lindsay Duncan's Ruth and that of Merchant appears unfavourable, it is clear that Duncan's performance still captured the sense of eroticism and emotional passivity first formed in Merchant's original potrayal. Together, these reviews suggest how audiences of the premiere production were disquieted by the overt sexuality and emotional neutrality of Merchant's Ruth, and how her subversion of expected gender roles became crucial to their perception of her femininity, even necessitating reference in the critical discourse of productions over thirty years later. Unlike Hart's interpretation of the Lloyd production, there is little recognition of the emotional impact of her façade of emotional neutrality, which suggests how contemporary audiences are more likely to consider Ruth's empowerment throughout the play.

In this opening scene, Teddy's decline as a representative of the masculine ideal is almost jarringly quick, and his failure to maintain the performance of the established hegemonic practices affords Ruth the opportunity to undermine him. When Ruth declares that she is going to have "a breath of air" (Pinter, 1999: 33), Teddy's responses indicate a complete subversion of his previous attempts at hostility and domination, instead suggesting his insecurity and dependence on Ruth. This failure to enforce his dominance indicates Teddy's inept performance of masculine behaviours, which is then epitomised by his question, "But what am I going to do?" (1999: 34). To align themselves with the hegemonic ideal established in the play so far, men must establish power over women by exercising their control over them and consequently restricting their autonomy, so Teddy's inability to establish that control – even confessing his dependence on her – results in the exposure of his insecurities. This dependence is not mutual as Ruth confidently resists and rejects any opportunity to submit to his will, allowing her to establish that same control over him in a complete subversion of the dominant masculinity presented between the men in earlier scenes. So, not only does Ruth immediately challenge her own subjugation from her husband, but in just this opening scene, Ruth takes advantage of her husband's weakness, utilising the established hegemonic behaviours of dominance and manipulation for her own gain. When Ruth returns, she is presented with another opportunity to establish control, however, she faces a much more competent rival in Lenny. As discussed earlier in the chapter, Lenny has shown confidence and ease in countering threats against his power, and he has maintained a position of notable status amongst the men in the play. However, when faced with an opportunity to enforce the subjugation of women, his potential dominance of Ruth could strengthen his superior position within the hegemony.

Initially, Lenny's domination is established through his control of the conversation, as he is often responsible for changes in subject, even refusing to acknowledge Ruth's relationship with Teddy. This dismissal of Ruth's marriage implies Lenny's assumption that women are objectively available to him, and Mark Taylor-Batty argues this is indicative of Lenny's reliance on the narrative which enables him to "define, construct and own women" (2014: 88). Taylor-Batty's suggestion of men's attempts to 'define' women allows for a more layered understanding of the hegemony of the play. For Lenny, his embodiment of hegemonic masculinity is so closely tied to his sense of control that it forces him to reject any information that challenges that narrative of masculine supremacy. Much like Max, whose misogynistic and insensitive description of Jessie undermines feminine power, Lenny's refusal to acknowledge Ruth's marriage is similarly oppressive in its misogyny. Not only does this allow Lenny to maintain control over Ruth, but also stands as a threat to Teddy's status, as he usurps Teddy's own 'ownership' of her. This need for supremacy continues in his repeated sexual suggestions, such as "Isn't it funny? I've got my pyjamas on and you're fully dressed" (Pinter, 1999: 44), as well as another dismissal of Ruth and Teddy's marriage, both of which increase the tension between the two characters. So far, Lenny has not made any explicit advances towards Ruth until we see the jarring contrast between his argument on the Second World War and his closing question, "Do you mind if I hold your hand?" (1999: 46). Not only is this speech another direct reference to the value of violence and war in the formation of the hegemonic masculinity of the play, but the contrast indicates Lenny's attempt to unsettle Ruth. As jarring as the subject change is, Ruth is not fazed, and more interestingly she challenges his attempt to connect with her. His response, "Just a touch…Just a tickle" (1999: 46) is a playful – if not childlike – attempt at connection with Ruth, to which she answers with a similarly childlike provocation, "Why?" (1999: 46). Her refusal to accept or decline Lenny's request continues the feeling of uncertainty and tension between the two characters, and her lack of a definitive answer is an indication of Ruth's controlled response to his attempts to unsettle her.

Lenny's following excessive speech once again establishes how linguistic domination is a tactic for the maintenance of control, this time used to undermine Ruth's composure. The visceral description of his violence against what is implied to be a female sex worker is not only an attempt to solidify such mistreatment as a tolerated behaviour within the hegemony, but the implied threat of violence is another tactic to undermine Ruth's stability. Ruth remains unfazed and continues to challenge Lenny's narrative, referring to the sex worker's 'pox', she uses a prototypicality threat to provoke him, asking "How did

you know she was diseased?", to which Lenny counters, stating "I decided she was" (Pinter, 1999: 48). This once again demonstrates Lenny's reliance on a narrative of domination – regardless of the legitimacy of the events he describes – but also how he continues to control women in his description and in his supposed acts of violence against them. The speech highlights how, much like the other men in the play, Lenny must counter challenges to his power to maintain dominance. He does so through his overt displays of control over women, suggesting how Ruth's continued resistance to his control could end in violence. As with Stanley in *The Birthday Party*, Lenny feels compelled to punish rebellious women with violence, adding to the sense of risk for Ruth. Yet, regardless of this perceived danger, she remains determined to resist her subjugation and continues to challenge him. Ruth's relative silence is not an indication of weakness for, when necessary, she can undermine the authority of Lenny in a similar way to that seen with Teddy.

In the Lloyd production, the parallels between the two scenes became strikingly apparent, as each time the two characters became silhouetted within the large, red, steel frames of Soutra Gilmour's set design, making each gesture and movement a tense representation of the battle between them. In a review of the production in the *Observer* by Susannah Clapp, she remarks how the set design creates a sense of shifts in time, how it began "enclosing the men's frowsy sitting room in a red steel frame like scarlet veins. Director Jamie Lloyd stresses it, making a play that is a great simmerer keep coming to the boil. Each crisis is spelt out, with floods of red light, bursts of music, characters frozen or quivering in their bad moments" (Clapp, 2015). Gilmour's design aided in establishing a sense of discomfort in the prolonged pauses, and the stillness in each performance set up jarring moments of exaggerated movement and gesture as if revealing the characters' own discomfort in the space. No clearer is this contrast than as the couple arrived home, with Chan's Ruth remaining still, Gary Kemp's Teddy stood beside her as she slowly began taking in the space, as if looking desperately for an opportunity to escape. This contrasted with the much more confident stillness of John Simms's Lenny as she sat on a chair, encapsulating both a coldness and an undefinable longing as he insidiously recounted his acts of violence against women. Ruth's shifts from the insecurity seen between her and Teddy to the overpowering sexual allusions of her conversation with Lenny added to the rise in tension. As if highlighting the sense of unity, the light from the stage began to bleed into the audience, creating a space where we continued to share in Ruth's empowerment, rejoicing in witnessing her increasingly subversive femininity. No longer victims to the bursts of

outrage and vitriol between Max and the other men, the audience remained in a moment of both tension and release, enraptured by the mystery of Ruth's journey to empowerment.

Ruth repeats the same tactic she used with Teddy to similarly expose Lenny's insecurities, whose requests to remove her glass of water are challenged and then denied. Having advanced from the playful teasing from his request to hold her hand, Ruth's refusal to allow Lenny to remove the glass is a direct challenge to his authority, specifically in her line, "Not in mine, Leonard" (1999: 51). This line highlights Ruth's adoption of maternal language to challenge his authority through emasculation and infantilisation. Lenny acknowledges the association, and being discomforted by it, motivates him to remove the calm, confident façade. Instead of polite requests, the comparison between the two men becomes much clearer, as Lenny resorts to Teddy's tactic of direct orders. Ruth's ability to dismantle the assumed gender hierarchy has now been successful on both men and yet, with Lenny, she goes further in her attempts to undermine his dominance. Until this point, Lenny has initiated every sexual suggestion or reference, and Ruth not only utilises the same behaviour at this moment but also heightens it, threatening "If you take the glass… I'll take you" (1999: 52). This threat indicates Ruth's ability to utilise Lenny's tactics for dominance against him, whilst also implying her own sexual autonomy. When considered in contrast with the maternal language used moments before, her performance of both sexual desire and maternal chastising serves to unsettle Lenny, damaging his hegemonic presentation. Ruth's suggestion carries implications of both violence and seduction as a direct counter to Lenny's reliance on those same behaviours. In this brief moment, Ruth's challenge directly threatens his expectation of female subservience, sexual availability, and incapacity for violence. When Lenny responds with "What are you doing, making me some kind of proposal?" (1999: 53), much like Teddy's "But what am I going to do?" (1999: 34), it highlights his discomfort, confusion, and lack of power. By Lenny's own admission, such a proposal would typically afford violent correction, yet his authority and control have been undermined and shattered by Ruth, and any threat of violence is now impotent. Throughout both exchanges, each man establishes a need for control, and by the time Ruth exits, she has successfully subverted their attempts at dominance, exposing their insecurities and asserting dominance herself. Ruth's behaviours are not entirely dependent on adopting masculine tactics of domination, however, as Ruth's femininity is similarly constructed to take advantage of the desires and insecurities of the men around her.

Through the embodiment of both sexual autonomy and maternal authority, she continues the subversion of her assumed feminine role and takes advantage of masculine

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weakness to gain power over the men around her. When Ruth is introduced to the rest of the family, Max's immediate assumption is that she is a sex worker, inspiring a tirade of misogynistic abuse, calling her a 'tart', 'scrubber' and a 'whore' which indicates a violent disgust of this feminine role. Arguably this creates a parallel to the sex worker of Lenny's story, who is subjected to violence as a consequence of her rebellion against him. For critics of the premiere production in 1965, this tirade from Max was recognised as overtly misogynistic, but his accusations also added to Ruth's mystery. Montague Haltrecht, in his review for *The Scotsman*, felt that this mystery surrounding Ruth contributed to a sense of abnormality that was a consistent element of Pinter's writing at the time, arguing how "Misogyny gives a further element of strangeness to the plays of Pinter's which, like this one, have a girl in them. She is not characterised; she is coldly lecherous and otherwise entirely enigmatic, as mysterious to the author and the audience as to the other characters in the play" (Haltrecht, 1965). Haltrecht's attitude towards misogyny suggests that it does little more than elevate the sense of strangeness in the play, before dismissing Ruth's characterisation as non-existent. Although this interpretation carries with it misogynistic sentiment in itself, it suggests that Pinter's depiction of women relies on their subjection to misogynistic treatment. Catherine Rees and Andrew Wyllie discuss this early reception of Ruth in their book *The Plays of Harold Pinter* (2017), arguing that the play was ahead of its time in its depiction of feminine empowerment. They speculate that "Perhaps the problem with *The Homecoming* was that the play's feminist gender-awareness could only become widely visible to an audience/readership after the critiques of conventional marriage that emanated in the later 1960s from the feminist movement in general" (Wyllie, Rees: 2017: 11). Rees and Wyllie's view that critics of the original production – such as Haltrecht – were unprepared for Pinter's progressive depiction of feminine power appears to dismiss the significance of the vehemence of the early reception to the play. Although their argument is largely speculative, it calls into question how critics have responded to Pinter's presentation of women as one of sympathy, indifference, or prejudice.

The attitudes towards Ruth and her empowered feminine performance have been called into question in much later productions. Michell's 1997 production was divisive in its depiction of Ruth's feminine power, with critics offering contrasting interpretations, many of which retained the same dismissive sentiment that surrounded the premiere in 1965. Charles Spencer commented directly on the conflicting discourse surrounding the production, noting that "Some critics have ludicrously suggested that the play is a study of a woman's "empowerment". It's true that Ruth gains control, but only by playing the men's

game and descending to their own level. Far from being a feminist play, *The Homecoming* strikes me as being a male fantasy which sees woman as both mother and whore." (Spencer, 1997) Once again, Spencer's response to Ruth's character is to limit her to two, archetypal feminine roles, which suggests a similarly limiting perspective of her development and empowerment over the course of the play. The then-recent publication of Michael Billington's biography of Pinter was similarly criticised by such critics as it offered complementary, largely progressive interpretations of Ruth. In the *Evening Standard*, Nicholas De Jongh's review of the Michell production included criticisms of Billington's reading of the play, questioning how "Pinter's authorised biographer bizarrely claims that in fact the woman is acquiring freedom and power for herself. Free as a Greek Street tart and sexual plaything to her brothers-in-law?" (De Jongh, 1997) Such conflicting attitudes towards Ruth could be viewed as symptomatic of the conflicting attitudes towards women in the late 1990s as a result of third-wave feminism. Georgina Brown offers a much more balanced perspective:

> While this is female emancipation at its most unlikely extreme, there is something undeniably impressive in her desire for total control over this bad company of men. Her choice may be repellent to us, particularly as it involves abandoning her three small boys without a murmur, but what matters is that she has proved herself to be the master manipulator and a free spirit, albeit one with a corrupt sense of her own self-worth.

> (Brown, 1997)

While Brown acknowledges the 'repellent' circumstances surrounding Ruth's choice to remain in the household, there is a clear recognition of her inherent ability to manipulate and control the men around her. Such a subversion is tied to her journey towards empowerment, though Brown sees Ruth's decision as evidence of some internal corruption, arguably resulting from some hidden trauma, or purely exists due to her subjugation as a woman in this oppressively masculine space. Much like the critical response to Hall's production, Duncan's Ruth remained an enigma, and critics remained conflicted, where a limited number were willing to explore the nuances of Ruth's empowerment.

The conflicting discourse surrounding Michell's production provides some context for the changing attitudes towards women since the premiere production, and contemporary scholarship continues to explore such oppositional interpretations. There has been continued discussion about Pinter's approach to abuse against women in his play,

with some contention regarding his arguably misogynistic presentation of women. Rees and Wyllie argue that this criticism of Pinter's approach stems from a lack of clarity about his intention when writing his plays, where "critics were unsure about how best to interpret his attitude to women, and this lack of certainty, and the willingness to question his integrity in this matter, led to a critical tendency to read his plays with a feminist agenda and to find him wanting" (Wyllie, Rees, 2017: 16). Even contemporary critics, including those of the Lloyd production, felt that the play was still indicative of Pinter's misogynistic writing. In his review for the *Sunday Express*, Michael Arditti argued that the play showed how "an ugly streak of misogyny is revealed in both the characters and their author" (Arditti, 2015). Together, Haltrecht and Arditti's review of their respective productions argue that Pinter's problematic depiction of women is unsympathetic and harmful, and yet the arguments of this thesis suggest how Pinter's writing depicts misogyny and feminine oppression as largely reprehensible. Graham Saunders argues that the strength of the play is in its enigmatic aspects, as he recalls the final image of the play, he writes that "Ruth's occupation of Max's chair could equally be seen as either a confirmation of her dominance or a passive acceptance of the twin roles she might occupy as domestic career in the home and professional horse in the Greek Street flat" (Saunders, 2023: 129). Saunder's acknowledgement of just two – of many – interpretations of the final image of the play suggests the varied impact of viewing Ruth's increased power. The freedom of interpretation is the strongest and most rewarding aspect of Pinter's writing, and Ruth's journey throughout the play indicates a tense balance of her feminine power with her subjection to misogynistic abuse from the men around her.

After Max's aggressive outburst, we see the extent to which she must remain composed, undeterred by their misogyny, and remaining in control. So, when Max acknowledges Teddy's admission that she is his wife, Max's attitude changes directly addressing her and enquiring about her motherhood. The contrasting attitudes towards her suggest how the embodiment of the maternal is a much more acceptable femininity than that which represents sexual autonomy and freedom. The expectation for women to conform to the traditional feminine responsibilities of motherhood supports the domination of men, where behaviours such as sexual autonomy and self-empowerment are directly oppositional and as such challenge the established hegemony. Returning once again to Mimi Schippers, she argues that women's performance of such non-hegemonic practices establishes 'pariah' femininities, embodying behaviours including "desire for the feminine object (lesbian), authority (bitch), being physically violent ("badass" girl), taking charge and

not being compliant (bitch, but also "cock-teaser" and slut)" (2007: 95). It is through an embodiment of Schipper's conceptualisation of pariah femininities that challenges the dominance of men and the marginalisation of women. Unlike Rose, or Meg and Lulu, who all reluctantly or unknowingly embody the behaviours that reinforce their subjugation, Ruth is the first of Pinter's women who capably subvert hegemonic masculinity.

Ruth's utilisation of masculine tactics of domination shows how her performance is dependent on navigating both hegemonic and pariah femininities. She has established an association with motherhood and in the opening of the second Act, both Max and Teddy affirm that association through the following exchange:

> **Max**   I've got the feeling you're a first-rate cook.
>
> **Ruth**   I'm not bad.
>
> **Max**   No, I've got the feeling you're a number one cook. Am I right, Teddy?
>
> **Teddy** Yes, she's a very good cook.

<div align="right">(Pinter, 1999: 71-72)</div>

Even though Ruth provides a mediocre affirmation, both Max and Teddy's desire for Ruth to present a complicit, subservient femininity is indicated through their suggestion that she is a 'good cook', that strongly relates to the traditional roles of wife/mother. Once again, in recalling Taylor-Batty's arguments, it is clear that both men attempt to assert dominance by defining Ruth's femininity. Max's later line, "I've been begging my two youngsters for years to find a nice feminine girl with proper credentials – it makes life worth living" (1999: 78) confirms his association with such traditional feminine roles as the expected performance for Ruth. This identification with the expected subservient role does nothing to support Ruth's maintenance of power, and as the exchange continues, she resists their attempts to define her by reflecting on her past identity and disassociating herself from their control.

Michael Billington's interpretation of Ruth acknowledges her embodiment of different feminine roles, and how the adoption of the maternal and the sexual becomes fundamentally empowering. He posits, "what if these categories co-exist in the same woman? Does it not explode all the traditional male assumptions and at the same time give women a new power and authority?" (Billington, 1996: 170– 1). Billington's rather optimistic view on Ruth's ability to undermine hegemonic structures is reassuring, but it is important to understand how exactly Ruth is able to adopt such supposedly opposing behaviours to maintain power. Having observed Max's stories of his past, Ruth utilises these masculine

behaviours to reinforce her own power, finding protection in the reflection on her own past. When recalling memories of her life before her marriage, such as "I was… different… when I met Teddy… first" (Pinter, 1999: 80), Ruth offers the first example of such a threat to Teddy's control of her identity. She utilises the masculine behaviour of the weaponisation of memory to connect to the independence embodied by her past self. Teddy's response of "No you weren't. You were the same" (1999: 80) is a clear indication of his need to define Ruth's identity to align more favourably with his narrative of control.

Pinter continues to use this to similar effect in later plays which often deal with the intangibility and uncertainty of memory, such as through the respective threesomes in *Betrayal* and *Old Times*. The desire for men to define women is explicit in this play, and this theme becomes central to Pinter's later work, revealing how Pinter continues to explore the provocative positioning of femininity. Ruth's connection to the independence of her past offers a presentation of femininity separate from that of the wife/mother and her disclosure that she "was a model for the body. A photographic model for the body" (Pinter, 1999: 92) further distances her from the performance of a complicit femininity. Billington's earlier questions about Ruth's embodiment of the differing – supposedly oppositional – feminine roles become answered here. Ruth has shown an ability to represent a complicit femininity through her performance of the maternal which is then balanced with her performance of a sexually autonomous, provocative femininity. Regardless of the possible explicit nature of the photography she describes, this suggestion of previous sexual/bodily autonomy offers a reconnection with her previous performances of pariah femininity and a rejection of the assumed maternal role. This now initiates Ruth's unification of both tolerated and pariah femininities, and from this moment on Ruth actively displays sexually provocative behaviours, which through her rise in status, are accepted within the hegemony.

During Lenny and Ruth's dance, Max and Joey's contrasting comments validate Ruth's performance of a consolidated femininity, Joey stating, "She's a tart" (1999: 95) and Max's description to Teddy:

Mind you, she's a lovely girl. A beautiful woman. And a mother too. A mother of three. You've made a happy woman out of her. It's something to be proud of. I mean, we're talking about a woman of quality. We're talking about a woman of feeling.

(1999: 96)

Through the reactions of both men, Ruth successfully navigates a balance between the accepted behaviours of maternal authority and the performance of a pariah femininity; one

that demonstrates sexual availability and autonomy, and infidelity. The men's acceptance of her as a 'woman of quality' in her new unified role indicates Ruth's ability to enforce change in the gender relations of the play. She has utilised masculine behaviours to undermine her subjugation and through her connection with the agency of her past, she has demonstrated skill in subverting her assumed subservient femininity. In performance, Chan's Ruth shifted from an almost silent resistance to a more confident, cool-headed woman who masterfully aligned both complicit and resistant femininities. It is then through her performance that offers the audience an outlet for their desire for change. Our continued support of Ruth's increasing authority against the men around her not only offered a rewarding cathexis but also solidified our vindication for her empowered position. We relied on her to undermine the misogynistic and abusive behaviours that we could not challenge ourselves and so, our attachment to her position became stronger as she continued to subvert the oppressive environment around her. Ruth's gender performance enabled her to regain control within an environment designed to subjugate her and through our attachment to that performance, we are similarly empowered. Ruth's ability to unify the audience against her oppressors also resulted from her empowered femininity, and we observed how she could utilise such performances of opposing femininities to undermine the hegemony.

It is crucial to note that in these key moments of control for Ruth, all men but Teddy are willing supporters to her developing power and her more dominant status. Ruth's decision to abandon Teddy and her children can be attributed to the freedom and independence offered by the men in the household. Moments before her dance with Lenny, Teddy is incapable of adapting to Ruth's changing allegiances, resorting once again to futile attempts to control her, but more interestingly, he is still unable to accept her autonomy in her decision to choose the other men over him. His initial reaction when attempting to leave with Ruth is to blame Lenny for manipulating her, asking "What have you been saying to her?" (Pinter, 1999: 94), indicating that Teddy is so reliant on his perception of Ruth as subservient to him that he is incapable of acknowledging his wife's independent agency. He continues with his futile tactic of ordering her to leave with him, yet Lenny's request, "What about one dance before you go?" (1999: 94) supports Ruth's autonomy, and in contrast to Teddy, offers her a choice. Providing her with the choice is a surprisingly considerate decision by Lenny, but it demonstrates his awareness of Ruth's changing allegiances and how he adapts his tactics to appeal to Ruth's newfound authority. This moment marks a key shift in Ruth's position as she refuses to return to her subservient position with Teddy, establishing a dominant femininity which has been accepted by the other men. Unlike

Billington's earlier, optimistic view of Ruth's consolidation of contrasting femininities, Andrew Wyllie argues that her embodiment continues to support hegemonic definitions of femininity, suggesting that "while the conjoining in one woman of two kinds of male icon might give her new power and authority, it might equally serve to enmesh her all the more thoroughly in an essentially masculine view of appropriate female role play" (2009: 74). Wyllie's more grounded interpretation of Ruth's empowerment suggests that although her empowerment is to be commended, she still benefits from the unequal gender hierarchy of the play. To agree with Wyllie, the process of negotiation in the play demonstrates how the men react and ally with Ruth's rising status still positions masculine perspectives and approval as vital to her continued empowerment. This negotiation allows Ruth's feminine performance to dominate the men around her, and yet it is negotiated through compliant and acceptance from those same men, excluding Teddy, who in his continued refusal to adapt, presents an isolated, weakened masculinity.

By this point in the play, Ruth's shift in power is almost complete, but the men continue their attempts to regain control. With Teddy's status amongst the group becoming almost insignificant, the other men openly discuss keeping her with them, with Max considering, "Maybe we'll ask her if she wants to stay" (Pinter, 1999: 114). Teddy's immediate response is a desperate continuation of his attempts to control Ruth, dismissing her agency but answering, "I'm afraid not, Dad. She's not well, and we've got to get home to the children" (1999: 114). Not only does this resonate with the earlier exchanges where he answers for Ruth, but he also highlights two interesting aspects; firstly, that he still views her in her role as wife/mother; and also, that he sees how her recent actions indicate ill-health. This constant denial of Ruth's agency is misogynistic, manipulative, and abusive, suggesting that his attitude towards women is so reliant on their subjugation that any deviance from that narrative cannot be tolerated. For Teddy, his desire to comply with the hegemony is so extreme that it must be enforced at any cost, and this leads him to say, "She's not well" (1999: 114) which, as well as being a significant example of gaslighting, suggests that female strength and agency is physiologically and/or mentally abnormal. He implies that this process of healing can only be offered by him, and acts as a clear attempt to regain control from the other men whilst also seemingly justifying her returning to America with him. It is only after he witnesses Max, Lenny and Joey negotiate terms for prostituting Ruth that he finally regresses from his desperate attempts at control.

Teddy's failure to maintain power amongst the other men comes from his failure to acknowledge and adapt to Ruth's developing sense of autonomy, and when she returns

downstairs, he finally submits to the new hierarchy, being the first to introduce the idea of staying with the family, "Ruth… the family have invited you to stay, for a little while longer. As a… as a kind of guest. If you like the idea I don't mind. We can manage very easily at home… until you come back" (1999: 125). This indicates Teddy's admission of defeat, and that his persistent disregard for her agency has now developed into not only recognition but also acceptance of her dominant position. For Prentice, Ruth's empowerment at the end of the play is both pertinent and yet remarkably uncertain, as she argues that "Although Ruth's position at the end is ambiguous, the text suggests, without didactically affirming it, that her assertion of power wins her a highly qualified freedom" (2000: 148). Again, Prentice relies on the romanticised notion of feminine empowerment as synonymous with freedom from the restraints of masculine domination. Though this is an arguably valuable interpretation of the moments leading up to the final image of the play, it fails to consider the deceptively oppressive hegemonic system still at work. Her apparent 'freedom' exists only with permission and acceptance of the men she negotiates with. Although she is firm and unwavering in her diplomatic handling of the transaction of her possible sex work, the very suggestion of a contract does not align with Prentice's notion of freedom that she describes. Ruth continues as a defiant, yet submissive role within the confines of a hegemony which seeks to position her as ultimately subservient to masculine domination.

It is within the context of male support and negotiation that implies just how desperately the other men still attempt to maintain any sense of control over Ruth, and through their earlier negotiations, they are once again reinforcing masculine domination. The negotiations at the end of the play highlight how the men embody a subservient role to Ruth, and that their willingness to satisfy her needs has resulted in a collective acceptance of her dominance. It is in reaction to this dominance that Teddy accepts Ruth's new allegiance, choosing to abandon his wife and return without her. His masculine performance has been dependent on establishing power over his wife, and even as early as their introductory scene, her ability to challenge and undermine his authority has been a catalyst for her eventual domination over the household. For Teddy, this subversion of his masculinity forces him into isolation, and her final line towards him acts as a powerful prototypicality threat against his very identity. Her line, "Eddie… Don't become a stranger" (1999: 135-6) indicates his failure not just in his performance of masculinity but his wider identity, with Ruth's transition to a position of dominance all but complete. Regardless of whether such a misnaming is intentional by Ruth, it serves as an incredibly damaging indication of his insignificance. Much like with Stanley in *The Birthday Party*, Teddy's forced

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acceptance of his weakened masculinity serves to isolate him, and his exit from the space echoes the loss sustained by other men who are unable to confront their insecurity and establish their place in the hegemony.

The other men, however, choose to remain in their submissive state, and Max's final speech serves as one final grasp at control. As if his body is slowly degrading, he crumbles to Ruth's side, where his declarations that "She won't… be adaptable!" and "I'm not an old man" (1999: 138) highlights his final attempt to challenge Ruth's dominance, exposing once more his insecurities about his ageing body. The last line of the play serves as one final reminder of the futility of masculine control, with Max's order, "Kiss me" (1999: 138). Once again, Ruth does not submit, remaining silent, and resolute in her dominance. In response to the premiere production in 1965, Ruth's empowerment by the end of the play was often met with severe criticism, relying on sexist, misogynistic arguments that failed to recognise the depth of her subversion of hegemony. For Montague Haltrecht, in his review for *The Scotsman*, he felt that Ruth's power was tied both to her desirability by men, but also to her embodiment of feminine domesticity:

> Her power lies partly in the fact that she is irresistibly desirable, and partly in the fact that according to the Jewish ethic the home is the centre of life and the woman the centre of the home. As Pinter shows her, she is hardly a fit receptacle for such power, and small wonder that dependence on her is loathed – she is uniquely an object of hatred.

(Haltrecht, 1965)

Haltrecht's interpretation encapsulates a level of misogyny that is seemingly in keeping with the attitudes of the men in the play. His overt, unapologetic objectification of Merchant's Ruth suggests the extent to which audiences at the time responded to feminine empowerment. Ruth's refusal to abide by established feminine gender roles necessitates hatred towards her, as if audiences shared in the supposed loathing felt by the men on stage.

Although critics of the Michell production were conflicted in their interpretations, none went so far as to describe hatred or loathing towards Ruth's final moment of empowerment. Georgina Brown offered a limiting perspective of Ruth's feminine role in the final moments of the play, where "In the final tableau, when Joey rests his head in her lap and she cradles Max in one arm, she becomes the ultimate male fantasy figure, the pitiless, heartless tart and the compassionate madonna." (Brown, 1997) Although Brown's earlier

sentiments provided a more progressive image of Ruth's position, even while suggesting feelings of compassion towards her, Brown's choice to recall limiting archetypes does result in an ultimately restrictive interpretation. In contrast, Lyn Gardner provides a brief perspective on Ruth's desire for control, where "[Ruth] eventually discovers, as she cradles the heads of Joey and Max, a temporary salvation and peace." (Gardner, 1997) Gardner suggests that having achieved supremacy, Ruth has found peace, that which all the men around her desire yet cannot obtain. In a similar vein, John Peter, in his review for the *Sunday Times*, offers an eloquent reflection on Ruth's achievement:

> mesmerised by her own almost forgotten and newly rediscovered self: the woman who could give pleasure without needing any, and who had the power to make men feel masculine while regarding them, indulgently but remorselessly, as necessary objects. And so Duncan's Ruth finds herself again and relaxes into her own kind of womanliness, which is expected of her and which she desires: a combination of servitude and command

(Peter, 1997)

The process of rediscovery that Peter refers to is the central narrative of the play, but such an interpretation suggests the extent to which Ruth embodies the hegemony. Ruth's objectification of the men around her, her ability to command and manipulate them serves as evidence of her ability to use masculine tactics of domination to reform her empowered feminine position. For critics of the Michell production, conflicting, limiting perspectives still surround the interpretation of Ruth, but there are signs of progress. Peter's review serves as an example of the way in which complementary and progressive interpretations of Ruth had started to become more visible in public discourse.

Critics of Lloyd's production saw the final image of the play not as one of hatred, or limited to archetypes, but as a symbol of feminine power, unconstrained by masculine control and domination. As Michael Billington wrote in his review for the *Guardian*, "The final image of Pinter's play remains open to endless possibilities, but Chan implies Ruth is a woman who has rediscovered herself rather than one who is surrendering to male fantasies" (Billington, 2015). In this interpretation, Billington returns to his observations about Ruth's empowerment from twenty years prior, arguing that the final composition of her body – surrounded by men who seemingly both desire her and want to control her – creates an image of femininity that surpasses the restrictions of the hegemony. It is reassuring then that contemporary critics of *The Homecoming* in performance are able to view Ruth's

empowerment as representative of a positive subversion of masculine power, rather than one deserving of loathing and hatred. Although Billington's ideal of Ruth as a woman who surpasses the restrictions put up on her is admirable, the final image continues to frame femininity in negotiation with a hegemonic masculinity that supports her position of power. Sakellaridou also voices the same concerns, questioning men's objectification of Ruth, and their willingness to rescind some power to her:

> It may have been modified in a way but only through fear and necessity, not through conviction. Male ideology does not seem to have altered its prejudices about women in the least. It curiously reverts to earlier stages of human history rather than advance toward maturity and integration.

> (Sakellaridou, 1988: 115)

For the men in the play, they are not motivated to view Ruth as anything more than an embodiment of the same violent, manipulative authority that Max had attempted to present since its first moments. Sakellaridou's argument is convincing, and ultimately provides one final criticism of Pinter's depiction of empowered femininity, where without integration, she still remains isolated from those around her, failing to achieve the intimacy she desires. She has adopted the contrasting behaviours of hegemonic masculinity and empowered femininity to offer a singular, pariah femininity. Yet this only reinforces the established hegemony, rather than subvert it. In this way, Ruth's rebellion is accepted and assimilated into the ideals of the hegemony, but in her adoption of masculine behaviours, she ultimately fails to present new, equal representations of gender relations in the play.

For the men in *The Homecoming*, exerting control over one another is an expected behaviour in reinforcing the hegemonic masculinity. This can take the form of narrative control, where connection to the gender performances of the past can offer protection from injury in the present, or violent actions or threats are tactics for embodying traditional masculine values. Those same traditional values are reproduced in the attitudes towards femininity through the implication of abuse and assumed subservience. Ruth's presence in the play, however, offers a subversion of those values and attitudes. By observing male weakness and challenging her own subjugation, she exposes the futility of such a violent, misogynist hegemony. Through the adoption of established masculine behaviours, she competently gains and maintains control of the men around her. Where Pinter's previous women offer representations of resistance that offer positive yet temporary insight into the capabilities of feminine rebellion, Ruth remains a much more notable example of women's

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strength and resilience. Through the embodiment of both accepted, hegemonic femininities like the traditional wife/mother role, and those of pariah femininities, her displays of sexual autonomy, agency and authority subvert the subordinate feminine role. For critics of the Lloyd production, there was a recognition of the audience's complicity to the violence and misogyny of the hegemonic masculinity, seeing men compete for power, unable to challenge the violent language and actions. Critics of the Michell production were divided in terms of their sympathies towards the men and Ruth, however, there were signs of progress, marking clear distinctions from the discourse surrounding the Hall production. The critical response to the premiere production remained sympathetic to such overt displays of male violence, seeing in the men a desire for unity and connection. With regards to Ruth, there was a reluctance to view her transition throughout the play as sympathetic, with her empowerment seemingly a product of unruly sexuality rather than being a sign of justified rebellion. As such, the vocabulary surrounding feminine power was limited at the time of the play's first production but indicates how modern audiences have become largely sympathetic to her pursuit of power. Much like the characters in the play, we look for respite in any temporary alliances and shared silences. With the introduction of Ruth, she becomes a persistent representation of resistance, and we begin to sympathise and attach to Ruth's journey throughout the play as she regains control and undermines the violent, destructive hegemony. The final image of the play remains a powerful demonstration of feminine power, and through Ruth, Pinter offers a paramount example of female resistance and dominance in an environment designed solely to benefit men. The next chapter focuses on *Betrayal*, as Pinter continues to explore the dynamic of feminine power and objectification, its damaging impact on the integrity of hegemonic masculinity and the disruption of the male bond.

Betrayal

In *Betrayal* (1978), Harold Pinter offers a narrative which had been intricately composed as a reaction to events in his own life. Pinter's own infidelity informs the play's striking depiction of misogyny, abuse and adultery whilst also suggesting how the inevitable destruction of the love between partners, and that between male friends leads to an unrecoverable loss. It is with such a personal understanding of the risk, loss, and deception of an affair that *Betrayal* exists. With *Betrayal*, Pinter offers a much more intimate narrative, a continuation of themes and settings seen in plays such as *Old Times* (1970) and *No Man's Land* (1974) that depict similar ideas on memory, companionship and, of course, power. The intricacies of the male rivalry between Jerry and Robert provide a significant opportunity to explore how a hegemony is formed through the intimate game of power between men. With due consideration to the often-misogynistic treatment of Emma – the sole female character seen in the play – the desire to conform to the hegemonic masculinity does not only result in the subjugation of women, but also the destruction of the male bond. It is important, then, to understand how the established normative behaviours that form the basis of the dominant masculinities are challenged throughout the play and how these have significant consequences on the interpersonal relationships between both the two men and Emma.

The events of the play are ordered in a near-reverse-chronological structure and in doing so, Pinter offers a fascinating deconstruction of the hegemony. As the narrative slowly reveals the past, we observe significant exchanges that reveal the normative behaviours within the hegemony, as well as how they are scrutinised and undermined. To understand the changes in that hegemony, the analysis will focus on the chronological events of the play through two lenses. The first section will be dedicated to masculine power and an exploration of the relationship between Jerry and Robert, with the second section investigating a transition of femininity in the play, exploring Emma's shifting power from passivity to resistance. Such significant shifts take place within the mundane conversations about a tablecloth or prosciutto, and as such, the analysis of *Betrayal* lends itself to a more in-depth exploration of the characters' use of prototypicality threats, as conceptualised by Natalya Alonso's work on social identity threat (2018). In using Alonso's rationale in this chapter, I will directly address the specific linguistic tactics used by all three major

characters in the play and how they offer a way to understand the intricacies through which the characters in the play manipulate and control the hegemony.

This depiction of gendered power serves as an opportunity to explore contemporary reactions to the play in performance. The 2019 production of the play served as the culmination of the 'Pinter at the Pinter' season at the Harold Pinter Theatre, with Jamie Lloyd directing. The strength of feminine resistance has since become a widespread conversation not only within theatrical discourse, but with the '#MeToo' movement dominating conversations about masculine power and abuse, productions of Pinter's work offer substantial opportunities for exploring gender relations on stage. It would be difficult to ignore the significance of Lloyd's production of *Betrayal*, like the larger 'Pinter at the Pinter' season, offering audiences the opportunity to observe connections between the different presentations of gender dynamics throughout Pinter's work. With *Betrayal*, Lloyd considered a sympathetic, emotional approach, and explored how the events of the play affect the characters on a psychological level. This chapter will also include considerations of the premiere production of the play by the National Theatre in 1978, directed by Peter Hall at the Lyttelton Theatre. Critics at the time viewed *Betrayal* largely as a worrying deviation from the expected quality of Pinter's then-recent work, both in its subject and themes. In this chapter, I will be considering the reception of both productions in relation to not only the depiction of gender in the play but also how contemporary attitudes towards the play are in contrast to those of the original production.

The thorough analysis of the ways in which men and women use dominant gendered behaviours to cope with loss and manipulate others is fundamental to a consistent approach to the research for this chapter. As such, my analysis for this chapter continues the use of semiotics to explore such dominant verbal and physical signs of dominance. In the first section of the chapter, my engagement with semiotics allows for an outline of the ways in which Robert and Jerry attempt to manipulate the other, and how Robert's consistent threats manifest through his performance of masculinity. For the second section, the same method will be used to explore how Emma's empowerment is a result of her formation of a subversive femininity, realised through her use of both verbal and physical signs in the written and performance texts. Furthermore, I will be expanding on arguments that have been consistent throughout previous chapters that make use of Ric Knowles' method of reading the material theatre to engage with the critical reception of productions, this time with Jamie Lloyd's production of the play in 2019, and the premiere production by Peter Hall in 1978.

Masculinity, Competition and Insecurity

The desire for intimacy and connection with others becomes a driving force in the motivations of the characters in *Betrayal*, and their adoption of hegemonic behaviours affords them not only power but also the comfort and stability they crave. Like Rose's desire for control of the internal and the external spaces, or Max's attempts to control the past, the characters in *Betrayal* adopt behaviours that allow them to defend themselves from threat, and yet the play opens with a scene that reveals how isolated they have become from one another. As such, Pinter's depiction of the brutal, inevitable isolation of betrayal provides a sharp criticism of how each character's reliance on a hegemony may provide them that sense of control, yet it is at the cost of their connection to others. Jamie Lloyd gave an interview for *The Guardian* during his 2019 production's transfer to Broadway in which he described his interpretation of the characters' desire for intimacy and understanding, arguing that "Awful loneliness unites all of the characters. They're frequently horrible to each other because, actually, they want to connect" (Williams*, 2019). It is this desire for connection that acted as a foundation for Lloyd's interpretation of the play in his production at the Harold Pinter Theatre. And yet this desire for connection permeates not just through *Betrayal* but has been a fundamental aspect of Pinter's writing since *The Room*. As explored in previous chapters, the adoption of hegemonic behaviours offers characters the security and safety they desire whilst isolating themselves from one another. It is only through the oppression of one another that the characters in *Betrayal* are able to determine their own qualities as the ideal for others to conform to. Andrew Wyllie argues that this conflict is both inevitable and futile, recognising that "there is a continuing resonance to the effect that masculine identity is always in process of being defined and redefined by relationships with other men. It follows that a perpetual power struggle is in place, as men contend to be the definer rather than the defined" (2017: 96). Wyllie's notion of the fluidity of gendered power is fundamental to the ways in which the characters vie for control in *Betrayal*, as the men rely on the adoption of hegemonic masculine behaviours in their desperate search for a sense of belonging and security. In doing so, the two men open themselves up to scrutiny and risk exposing their weakness, culminating in a tense conflict where vulnerability cannot be tolerated and those who successfully hide it are rewarded with power, however temporary.

For the men in *Betrayal*, the first opportunity for superiority – chronologically – is in the final scene of the play. Jerry is making his whirlwind confession of love to Emma before being interrupted by Robert. The interaction between them is short but it establishes an

important insight into the relationship between the two men. Jerry's repeated reference to his friendship with Robert is balanced with his declaration of affection for Emma, as if searching for approval from Robert that his feelings are valid. In doing so, Jerry gains Robert's unknowing consent for his actions, obtaining the validation he seeks from him whilst simultaneously betraying him. Though unequivocally hypocritical in its sentiment, Jerry's explicit reference to friendship is the first indication of the inner conflict of the characters, where Jerry's desire for validation from his friend conflicts with his desire to seduce Emma. It is in this first interaction between the two men that Pinter introduces arguably the fundamental betrayal of the play, as Jerry's actions irrevocably fracture his friendship with Robert. Earlier in the play, in the third scene, as Jerry and Emma end the affair, Jerry attempts to maintain power by referring to his positive relationship with Robert, stating, "I might remind you that your husband is my oldest friend" (Pinter, 1991: 52). By referring to his friendship, he not only attempts to gain superiority by implying his relationship with Robert is more positive than Emma's, but he shakes off any responsibility when suggesting how she was taking advantage of that friendship when they instigated the affair. The indication here suggests how Jerry's need to avoid responsibility for the breakdown of his friendship reveals a child-like ignorance and a refusal to take ownership of his harmful behaviour.

As it is revealed later, in the final scene, that Jerry is in fact responsible for instigating their affair, Pinter therefore highlights the hypocrisy of his manipulative refusal to admit he damaged his friendship with Robert. This provides a strikingly prescient depiction of masculine power and abuse that resonates with contemporary examples of men who can deny their role in the abuse of women, as seen in the ongoing #MeToo movement. This depiction of male abuse offers an opportunity to explore how the play criticises masculine power, and in Jamie Lloyd's production of the play in 2019, critics of the production recognised these subtle aspects of Lloyd's direction and Charlie Cox's performance as Jerry. Sarah Hemming, who reviewed the production for the *Financial Times*, acknowledges the sense of empowerment seen in Jerry, commenting on how he "wields the bright smile of a charming man used to getting away with stuff" (Hemming, 2019). Henry Hitchings followed a similar thread in their review for the *Evening Standard*, remarking how "In the hands of Charlie Cox he's likeable — and good at seeming guileless when in fact he's slippery" (Hitchings, 2019). It is this clear awareness of the familiar narrative of the men who balance seemingly conflicting behaviours of charm, likeability, manipulation, and abuse that resonated with critics of Lloyd's production. For them, Jerry utilises behaviours that seem

outwardly innocent and carefree, when his actions demonstrate a keen willingness to undermine Robert and manipulate Emma, and in doing so, introduces a hegemonic masculinity that supports his own power at the expense of Robert and Emma's. As early as this first exchange between the three characters in the final scene, reveals a hierarchy of power where Emma's silence and complicity serve to empower the two men as they compete for her affection. Jerry succeeds in hiding his seduction of Emma from Robert, supported by Emma's choice to remain silent which also suggests her compliance to Jerry's manipulation of her husband. Between them, they eventually force Robert to unknowingly submit to Jerry's seduction of his wife. Even within this small exchange, Pinter highlights the significance of how obtaining or withholding knowledge affects the power dynamics between the two men in the play. Having confessed his admiration and love for Emma and being successful in undermining the power of Robert, Jerry's acquisition and manipulation of information allows him to maintain power.

For all characters in *Betrayal*, the manipulation and acquisition of knowledge is a crucial aspect of the search for power. It is epitomised by the next scene between the two men – Scene Seven (1973, Later) – as they meet in a restaurant for their regular encounter. At this stage in the play, Robert is aware of the affair, whereas Jerry is unaware of this revelation, and the scene provides opportunities to explore how the two men attempt to manipulate their knowledge to gain power. The two men's attempts to manipulate or withhold information often materialise in the form of prototypicality threats, thereby suggesting one is atypical of the established gender norms (Alonso, 2018). As Jerry and Robert attempt to embody hegemonic masculinity by withholding information from one another, they unknowingly undermine their shared desire for security and intimacy and instead, push each other closer to their inevitable isolation. This contest of information continues throughout the scene, revealing how Robert continually corrects Jerry's information about the waiter and his ability to speak Italian. Although the exchange is seemingly banal, it suggests Robert's need to dominate Jerry, exercising skill in controlling the conversation, continually dismissing or correcting Jerry's information, and in doing so, reinforcing his own power. Robert supports his status by also referencing Emma, as if attempting to provoke Jerry into confessing information about their relationship. The exchange ends with a distinctly weak statement from Jerry, and in the context of the power of information, his admission of his lack of knowledge results in the first noticeable shift in the power dynamic between the two men.

Robert has successfully managed to dominate Jerry in the conflict of information by directly contradicting Jerry's knowledge about two things important to him – his friend and his lover. As Robert repeatedly dominates his opponent, he much more closely identifies with the hegemonic masculinity established so far in the play, and Jerry has failed to maintain his own previously dominant position. Having previously succeeded in stealing Emma's affection from Robert and withholding information from him, he now is incapable of withstanding the constant threats from his friend. Not only does this indicate a lower status in their relationship, but also reveals Jerry's increasingly fragile masculinity. Mark Taylor-Batty argues that this scene - much like the final scene – serves as a brokerage of an understanding between the two men, where "The scene closes with [Robert] inviting Jerry to come around to see them, and here we recognise his effective condoning of their infidelities as a means of maintaining and sustaining their friendship" (2014: 140). Taylor-Batty's argument reminds us of the two men's continued desire for intimacy and companionship, and even as the power shifts, they avoid the breakdown of their friendship. Without revealing his knowledge about their affair, and choosing not to confront Jerry directly, Robert effectively consents to Jerry and Emma's ongoing affair. This would undermine his own power, but Jerry's lack of awareness proceeds to balance that, continuing to avoid facing the consequences of his actions. For the two men, the need to comply with the hegemony and the domination of their opponent conflicts with their desire for intimacy. They share temporary moments of bonding, and yet in their persistent attempts to gain power, they continue to push each other away.

The restaurant scene is also important in how it reveals both men's desire for male competition, and the expression of that competition through sport. Robert is the first to mention squash in the play and he initiates every future conversation about the game going forward, indicating just how highly he values the competition between them. The game has overt associations with their masculine performance, and Linda Wells argues in her analysis of the play in 1983, the formation of an honor-bound routine between the two men becomes sacred in its repetition. Wells is one of the first scholars to have recognised the association between sport and masculinity in the play, describing how the routine established between the two men is fundamental to the performance of masculinity as they adopt a "masculine ritual of sport in which each will demonstrate his manliness and then follow through with the code of honor-drinking, eating, discussing intellectual subjects, or even women" (1983: 29). Wells implies the performative aspect of the 'ritual'; that through adoption and performance, sport becomes not only a method with which both men reinforce their masculinity, but also

strengthen their bond. Robert places significant value on such overt displays of masculine performance, suggesting his overt desire to comply to the established hegemony and reap its benefits. It is clear, however, that Jerry does not share the same enthusiasm or desire for the competition as Robert, repeatedly failing to follow through on commitments to arrange a game and providing excuses not to play. It is implied that Robert has repeated victories over Jerry in their previous games of squash, and this likely feeds into Jerry's disinterest, either due to his general lack of enthusiasm for the game or his weaker physical fitness compared to his rival. The exchange in Scene Four directly refers to this conflict, once again establishing Robert's attempts to associate physical game-playing with the masculine rivalry between the two men.

The beginning of this scene starts with a word game which establishes once again that Robert is in control of the situation. Securing power through the manipulation of Jerry in the almost interrogation-like exchange about the distinction between girl and boy babies echoes the interactions found between Goldberg and Stanley in *The Birthday Party*. Both of these examples establish a clear agitator exercising masterful linguistic skill and a victim who is either incapable or unwilling to fight back. In this exchange, Robert is committed to forcing Jerry to form opinions that he almost instantly contradicts or disputes, with Jerry eventually unable to even recall what it was he initially said. This clear dominance over his opponent advances Robert's standing, though his verbal onslaught does not end there. To further distance himself from his inferior rival – and to secure his position as the dominant man in the scene – Robert continues the interrogative subordination of Jerry in another reference to squash. Jerry initially attempts to regain status by affirming Robert's declaration that he is physically superior and even degrading his own, stating "You're too good" (Pinter: 1991: 67). Not only does this comment from Jerry imply Robert's physical superiority, but the implication that Robert is unbeatable reinforces his powerful status in the hierarchy. It is clear that Robert's perception of masculinity aligns closely with largely stereotypical masculine characteristics of physical dominance as his belittling of Jerry also relies on prototypicality threats that infer his physical weakness. As the exchange continues, Robert introduces his games of squash with Casey as a way to further undermine Jerry's inferior position, another example of a prototypicality threat, but also suggests Jerry's failure to meet Robert's own expectations of him as a friend. Michael Mangan discusses the value of sport in male-male relations in *Staging Masculinities*, arguing that "one of the key plots of the masculine mythology [is] not necessarily about winning, it's about going the distance, proving you have the heart" (2003: 217). Pinter's depiction of masculine competition in the

relationship between Robert and Jerry does nothing to suggest such a gentle and romantic ideal. For Robert, it is not about 'having the heart', it is about the victory and the comfort afforded by remaining complicit to the established hegemony, even at the expense of his relationship with his friend. And yet, Mangan's suggestion of 'going the distance' is arguably exactly what Robert desires from Jerry; not to push him away, but to embrace the masculine ritual they perform as proof of each other's commitment to their friendship.

In this scene, Robert provokes Jerry's commitment to their friendship and Jerry fails him, unable to commit to a game of squash and unwilling to defend himself against Robert's repeated threats. In this way, Robert is confronted with the possibility of a second loss; no longer just that of his marriage to Emma, but arguably that which is more important to him – his friendship with Jerry. As such, the desire for intimacy and companionship becomes a clear indication of Robert's motivation throughout the play, as even when he seemingly pushes Jerry away through his persistent threats, he ultimately desires Jerry's continued, untainted, friendship. Michael Billington's reading of this desire for connection is fundamental to Pinter's depiction of the bond between men, arguing that the play:

> …also touches lightly on a very English kind of masculine intimacy that occupies a great hinterland between friendship and sex. In the end, this is what gives the work its emotional impetus. In a play littered with manifold forms of betrayal, the most profound is that of some Edenic notion of male friendship based on shared intellectual passions and youthful idealism.

(2005: 263)

Billington's arguments provide a context for understanding the rarity of healthy relationships between men in Pinter's work, and *Betrayal* provides a similar criticism of hostile masculinity to that seen in his earlier plays. Pinter himself saw the play as first and foremost a story "about a nine-year relationship between two men who are best friends" (2005: 263). Together, Billington and Pinter's interpretation of the play suggests how the fracturing of the relationship between the two men is both tragic and yet inevitable. It is arguably evidence of Pinter's criticism of such hostile masculinity in the play, where Robert's actions continually undermine his attempts to connect to his friend, where the desire for power comes at any cost. Much like his desire for literal victory in a game of squash, he must be the winner of the game, and he achieves this through the domination of his opponent. The prize he is awarded is not only the opportunity to maintain superiority over Jerry but also allows him to establish physical fitness and game-playing as integral behaviours of the hegemonic

masculinity. Adding these to the existing behaviours such as male competition and the manipulation of information, Robert has presented himself as an indomitable force within the hegemony thereby securing him in the dominant position at this point in the play, and yet he remains incapable of maintaining their friendship.

Robert's desire to assert his masculinity leads not only to his domination over Jerry, but also manifests itself in the subjugation of Emma. Unable to form the connection he desires with his friend, there is a clear distinction in his treatment of Jerry and Emma, and in Scene Five, she becomes another victim of Robert's interrogation. Although it is revealed that Jerry was the instigator for the affair between him and Emma, Robert's clear feeling of betrayal from his wife manifests in much more overt challenges to her power than those against Jerry. Much like the tactics of dominance used by Lenny in *The Homecoming*, Robert exercises control through his ability to disorientate and overwhelm, evidenced by his speech regarding his trip to American Express and rambling about Italian negligence. Discomforted by her husband's behaviour, Emma begins to respond in only brief remarks, seemingly noticing how he is subtly testing and provoking her. It is only when the topic shifts to Jerry and the letter she had received that Emma ultimately confesses to their affair, leading to the closing exchange of the scene as Robert urges Emma for confirmation on his paternity to their son Ned. Robert's priority is therefore revealed to be on affirming his masculinity through the assertion of fatherhood, but also in establishing ownership over Emma's body. It is significant that the impact of Emma's infidelity becomes more severe when it threatens the legitimacy of Robert's self-identification as a father. Unlike the paternal/filial relationship seen in *The Homecoming*, where the divide between father and son is far from sacred, Robert's almost immediate fixation on the legitimacy of his relationship with his son suggests how much he fixates on the male-male bond. This is strengthened when his closing remarks serve as a declaration of his closer connection to Jerry: "To be honest, I've always liked him rather more than I've liked you. Maybe I should have had an affair with him myself" (1991: 87). Whether this confession is a sincere admission of Robert's homoerotic relationship to Jerry, or merely a way to undermine his relationship with Emma, this reveals again how Robert places his relationship with men as one which is much more fulfilling and affirming. This distinction also reveals the differing attitudes Robert has towards his own power and masculinity when it is challenged by a woman, where he is unable to relinquish any power to his wife and instead fixates on finding comfort in his relationship with Jerry and Ned.

In Jamie Lloyd's interpretation of Scene Five, his direction focused on the emotional impact of Emma's betrayal and brought the vulnerability of both characters to the surface. Lloyd's decision to focus on the emotional impact of each characters' actions came as a result of such an intense engagement with Pinter's work over the course of the PatP season. In an interview with Catriona Fallow, Lloyd described how:

> I don't think you could really appreciate something like that without doing it day in, day out and moving swiftly from one piece to the next and understanding what all the characters share collectively underneath the surface of this entire body of work – which I think is this desperate need for connection.

(Chiasson & Fallow, 2021: 208-9)

For Lloyd, the resonances of Pinter's body of work allowed for a much more intimate and emotional interpretation of *Betrayal*, the final play in the season, and no clearer is this approach shown than in a scene which results in the emotional isolation of a husband and wife. Robert's interrogation of Emma in the scene can often be presented as invasive and overtly manipulative – the clearly dominant figure. However, Lloyd provided a much more poignant interpretation of the character, and Tom Hiddleston's performance depicted a concerned, withdrawn character, where his need for answers seemingly resulted from a desire for honesty rather than purely a desire to dominate his wife. Zawe Ashton's Emma remained almost antagonistic to Robert's inquisition, refusing to give him the information he seeks and maintaining a noticeable power over him. It was only until Robert's desperation for answers became clear that she confessed her affair with Jerry, as if unable to witness his suffering any longer. After Emma's confession, the two characters sat in a seemingly unending silence, highlighting the sense of shock for Robert, yet allowing us to focus on their isolation from one another, undermining their desperate desire for connection.

Soutra Gilmour's design of the space accentuated the coldness and vacuity between the two characters, with pale grey marbling covering the walls and floor, with the two performers relying on just two chairs to convey the hotel room in Venice. The notion of absence then became crucial to Lloyd's interpretation of the play, as Robert and Emma sat motionless in the silence, surrounded by a large, empty space, representative of the same absence of love between them. For Alison Porter, in her review of the production for *Cherwell*, she felt that Lloyd's presentation of the emotional impact of such loss allowed us to relate to their experience, for "Despite the play's setting of affluence […] Lloyd's stripped back and starkly minimalist production emphasises the universality of these human

experiences. The set, consisting of a mostly blank white wall and a few chairs, acts as a canvas upon which we the audience can project ourselves" (Porter, 2019). The minimalism of Soutra Gilmour's design invites us to fill it with our own biases and interpretations, further accentuating the connection between the characters' lives and our own. In their desperate desire for intimacy, Lloyd's production presents characters that suffer the consequences of the failure of sustaining that same intimacy, and whilst they are seemingly aware of the shifting power dynamics between them, Lloyd's focus on the personal cost created a much more provocative depiction of how both characters become victims of loss.

The premiere production of the play in 1978 offered a naturalistic design that was in stark contrast to the minimalism of Lloyd's production several decades later. John Bury's design for the original production dedicated more attention to scenery and props, such as condiments and beer pumps in the pub scene, or other objects such as a clock and tablecloths which would be largely missing from Gilmour's design (Cole, 2020: 57). The distinction between the differing approaches to the stage design suggests how John Bury's design more closely depicted the realism of the spaces outlined within Pinter's text. Although not as detailed as much of his earliest work which relied on precise descriptions of the stage space, including doorways, furniture and comments on more specific aesthetic elements, Pinter's choice to situate the characters' lives within clearly domestic spaces when writing *Betrayal* suggests the significance of the places in the narrative of the play. Bury's naturalistic approach in the original production to the stage design not only highlighted this domesticity, but also the characters bourgeois lives and professions that critics went on to criticise in their responses to the production, yet there was also an acknowledgement of the temporality of the characters' lives in the play. Jack Kroll, in his review of the production for *Newsweek*, noted how "John Bury's sets and lighting seem to hold the characters suspended in a luminous fatality." (Kroll, 1978) Kroll's interpretation offers a possible connection between the two productions in their depiction of the characters' suffering, loss, and isolation. The fatality that Kroll describes brings attention to the inevitability of the characters' isolation from one another, and how Bury's design – much like Gilmour's – conveyed the separation between them, even when approaching the design vastly differently.

Pinter's choice to provide limited description of the settings in the play allows for an open interpretation for designers and directors. The aesthetic differences between Bury and Gilmour's approaches would suggest that they seek to expose contrasting aspects of the narrative themes, however, the way both designers provide a space which relies on the

interrelationship between audience and stage action became a clear connection between the two productions. Jack Kroll's review of the original production directly addresses the connection between the character and audience experience, in how the subtle signs of love between the characters "weaves a labyrinth of betrayals that extend beyond the relationship and touch something at the heart of every living creature" (Kroll, 1978). Sarah Hemming, in her review of Lloyd's production for the *Financial Times*, remarks how his focus on the emotional impact on the characters goes beyond traditional presentations of the play, arguing how "there's an unnerving edge of misogyny to their shared possession of Emma. That quality is still present in Lloyd's staging, but he digs deeper, finding in the play something more basic about identity, need and certainty" (Hemming, 2019). Hemming's observation suggests how Lloyd brought out a much richer layer of the play in performance, not shying away from the overt misandry and abuse between men and women, yet also drawing out the deeper philosophical ideas on the human experience, which is then complemented by Gilmour's stage design. In an interview with Catriona Fallow in *Harold Pinter: Stages, Networks, Collaborations*, Gilmour directly refers to her attempts to make the relationship between audience and stage action central to her approach to the design of *Betrayal* and the Pinter at the Pinter season, warning audiences, "Don't just get dragged into some kind of fantasy moment. This is a conversation. You're here. You're an audience. […] It keeps the audience implicated. It keeps the space unreal in a really useful way, I think." (Chiasson & Fallow, 2022: 212) This sense of unreality can be observed in productions of Pinter's work since the beginning of his career, and it is arguable that Gilmour's awareness of Pinter's contradictory resonances of simultaneous obscurity and relatability had been captured in both productions.

It is clear that both Kroll and Hemming's sentiments are largely similar in their view that the play allows for a deeper engagement with the characters' suffering and desperation for connection. But where Kroll argues that our sympathy extends to both men and women, Hemming acknowledges how such sympathy in the Lloyd production is at least in part a recognition of Emma's individual suffering. Ultimately, *Betrayal* is arguably unique amongst Pinter's *oeuvre* in its ability to provide an audience a space in which they may project their experiences onto the characters, even if we are made to consider the extent to which we sympathise with the overt manipulation of all three characters. It is this connection between misogyny and the construction of gender and identity that continues the exploration of Pinter's depiction of gender inequality in *The Homecoming*, as masculine domination once again motivates the conflict between men. In this scene, Robert's inquisition of Emma does

threaten her status, yet Lloyd not only recognised the imbalance of power but also clearly presented the emotional cost of each character's actions in a relatable and visceral form. Sakellaridou argues that the way in which the audience has been provided with the information also implies the emotional emptiness of the character's relationships, where "Emotion has become impossible because Pinter's exposition looks at the unfolding of events from a standpoint of spent feeling, that of an emotional no-man's-land." (Sakellaridou, 1988: 179) Sakellaridou's suggestion that Pinter's manipulation of time in the play supports the vacuity of their intimacy, undermining any attempt for each character to address or understand each other's feelings. Through this lens, the play presents loss and betrayal in a way which is impossible to change, both for the audience and for the characters. In this way, Lloyd's interpretation of this scene avoids suggesting the violence embedded within the hegemonic masculinity is neither positive nor necessary but offers a perspective on how the characters are constrained by the pressures to conform to the normative behaviours. Here, Lloyd suggests the emphasis is on the emotional cost of the events on Robert: the collapse of his relationship with his wife, and his friend. Later in the play, we see how Robert's reaction to her confession also manifests through much more overt misogyny and abuse, seemingly unashamed of his attempts to subjugate and isolate Emma.

In Scene Four, Robert once again refers to a game of squash, but the sanctity of the masculine ritual becomes threatened not only by Jerry's refusal to participate but also by Emma's insistence that she involve herself in the process. Robert takes offence at the suggestion from Emma that she not only be a spectator to the event but also offer to "take you both to lunch?" (Pinter, 1991: 69). For Robert, this seemingly blasphemous suggestion that Emma may spectate the sacred male ritual between him and Jerry causes him to launch an indirect assault against her, attempting to establish a boundary between her and the two men. Even after his repeated attempts to undermine Jerry, he now uses the union of the two men to dismiss Emma's involvement in the game, suggesting an innate superiority the two men possess over her. Robert's declaration is a clear attempt to distance Emma from the bond he has with Jerry, saying how "After all, you've been at it. You've had your battle. What you want is your pint and your lunch. You really don't want a woman buying you lunch. You don't actually want a woman within a mile of the place, any of the places, really" (1991: 69). The importance of squash as a physical embodiment of the male competition between himself and Jerry becomes almost comical in its obsessive language, heightened by his use of the term 'battle' to describe the game. This crucial moment between the three characters

shows how Robert establishes the strength of the male union, and though Jerry does not directly participate in the verbal assault himself, his refusal to challenge his friend serves to display a silent conformity to the subjugation and abuse of Emma. For Mark Taylor-Batty, this moment is an indication of Robert's feelings of betrayal, as his speech ultimately serves to isolate him from Jerry and Emma, as he argues:

> Certainly, Robert's anti-woman speech presents him as isolated, not just from his wife in the unloving manner in which he addresses and excludes her, but in effect from Jerry too […] Robert's over-emphasis on the value of his time spent with Jerry is effectively undermined by Jerry's deficient attitude to finding that time.

(2014: 137)

It is important to highlight how Taylor-Batty notes that in Robert's attempts to exclude Emma, he is incapable of sabotaging the relationship between her and Jerry. His dependence on overt displays of misogyny and abuse against his wife affords him power within the established hegemony, but as Taylor-Batty argues, ultimately results in the alienation of Jerry. This speech establishes the misogynistic treatment of women, particularly through humiliation, as a normative behaviour, yet it is Jerry who has validated this addition by his refusal to challenge Robert's abuse of Emma. It is important to acknowledge that Jerry's refusal to defend Emma is even more revealing in that both of them are still actively engaged in the affair, and as such, suggests how Jerry benefits from Robert's abuse of Emma. By remaining complicit to Robert's misogyny, he avoids any further damage to his relationship with his friend, but also presents himself as supportive of Emma in his refusal to join in. He has managed to maintain what little power he had previously held, though it is at the cost of appearing weak to both Robert and Emma; he is unable to share in the Robert's attitudes and the values of hegemonic masculinity but also refuses to support Emma's moments of resistance.

Jerry's inability to explicitly choose a side becomes a sign of the almost child-like ignorance he displays throughout the play, but through his comparative silence, it serves to perpetuate an environment where both men condone the abuse against Emma. In the Lloyd production, this portrayal of domestic abuse conflicts with the earlier somewhat sympathetic examples of Hiddleston and Cox's depiction of vulnerable men. Although it is present, the production's focus on the internal conflict arguably undermines the depiction of domestic violence seen throughout the play, with the casting choices suggesting a dismissal of the attitudes the two men embody. The choice to cast Tom Hiddleston as Robert in the

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production was widely regarded by critics as the 'big draw' for audiences, and his persona off-stage impacted the critical response to domestic violence in the play. Several reviews of the production refer to Hiddleston's recent work, commenting on his acting skill, his decision to perform in the production, and even his appearance, which often is unapologetically objectifying. This attitude towards Hiddleston in the production establishes a clear bias in the discourse surrounding his performance in the play, with many critics praising him for his ability to capture the visceral emotion of the character. Henry Hitchings for the *Evening Standard* wrote that "it's Hiddleston's poise and sensitivity that impress the most" (Hitchings, 2019), with Dominic Cavendish describing a similar interpretation of how Hiddleston "displays a hypnotic sensitivity" (Cavendish, 2019) in his review for the *Daily Telegraph*. This framing of Hiddleston as 'sensitive' suggests a relationship between the audience and the character where there is a seemingly acceptable sympathy for Robert as a character. Due to Lloyd's focus on the personal impact on the characters, this amplifies a sense of sympathy for Robert's suffering and loss but risks undermining our criticism of his abusive behaviour. Only one review acknowledges the repeated reference to domestic abuse in the play; as Robert Gore-Langton describes how the men's "regular manly squash fixture – game, shower, pint – is verboten territory for women. Robert even admits to abusing Emma – 'bashing her up a bit' – revealing a nasty, dated streak of misogyny that's a Pinter trademark" (Gore-Langton, 2019). Gore-Langton's perspective echoes previous arguments regarding Pinter's depiction of violent, abusive men being indicative of Pinter's own misogyny. Much like with *The Homecoming*, contemporary critics remain critical of Pinter's depiction of misogyny, and yet when considering the context of contemporary discourse surrounding domestic violence against women, the critical reception of the Lloyd production offers little comment on the abuse in the play. The conflicting portrayal of sympathetic, vulnerable men, headed by Hiddleston's Robert, is on the surface largely progressive, and yet that sympathy positions an audience where they are more likely to dismiss instances of explicit misogyny and violence.

Where the audience is unable to defend or challenge the men's complicity in unequal gender relations and the abuse of Emma, the play does consider how domestic violence can be challenged. Robert's inability to tolerate any deviation from the established hegemony forces Jerry to challenge it. However, Jerry's adoption of a persistent non-interventionist attitude does offer a position of noticeable advantage if the opportunity were to arise. By successfully identifying and challenging the normative behaviours, Jerry is capable of making positive changes to the unequal gender relations in the play. In Scene

Two – the final chronological scene of the play – Jerry and Robert meet for the final time as Jerry has recently found out that Robert knows about his and Emma's affair. Robert's nonchalant confession of his own infidelity is revelatory in how it undermines any remaining sympathy for his behaviour, and Pinter's decision to position the scene near the beginning of the play contextualises the remaining events that reveal his hypocrisy. However, this does nothing to deter Robert from his attitude towards abuse, and an opportunity arises for Jerry to challenge this behaviour when Robert describes his motivation for domestic violence against Emma:

> It's true I've hit Emma once or twice. But that wasn't to defend a principle. I wasn't inspired to do it from any kind of moral standpoint. I just felt like giving her a good bashing. The old itch… you understand.

(1991: 41)

Robert states that this abuse against his wife is almost instinctive and he attempts to justify his actions by implying it as a necessary aspect of his relationship with women. This highlights how the subjugation and violence against women is a tolerated – if not encouraged – behaviour in Robert's masculine performance. Due to their bond of friendship – albeit fractured – Jerry can challenge these behaviours and promote a positive change in the inequality of the gender hierarchy. Instead of disputing the subjugation of Emma explicitly, however, he chooses to ignore the violence against her and instead focuses on how he was unaware of Robert's infidelity against Emma. Like Robert's focus on his relationship with Jerry after Emma's earlier confession, Jerry's reference to how Robert chose not to tell him that he knew about their affair is both comical in its hypocrisy and yet reveals how both men feel the deepest sense of betrayal when their friendship is damaged. Jerry's sense of loss comes not from his actions in seducing his friend's wife, but in this moment where Robert reveals he has kept a secret from him. All the while, Jerry ignores once again Robert's admission of violence against Emma, indicating how his priority has always been his relationship with his friend. It is in this ignorance that reinforces the misogynistic treatment of Emma by both men, even as they cling to the remains of their broken bond of friendship.

The revelation that Robert has kept his knowledge of the affair from Jerry severely damages his status as he faces the consequences of his actions. To avoid confronting his vulnerabilities, Jerry makes a desperate attempt to regain power, through the prototypicality threat of another male character – Casey. Casey is never seen but mentioned throughout

the play and presents an uneasy third position within the friendship of Robert and Jerry. By Scene Two, Casey has already been presented as a direct rival to Jerry's position, seemingly replacing Jerry as Emma's lover, but also as a closer friend and adversary for Robert evidenced by their regular games of squash. This threat to Jerry's role in both relationships provokes him into retaliation, shown in an exchange in Scene Two, where Jerry attempts to undermine Casey's status in the male hierarchy. When Robert implies that Jerry has been replaced by Casey, Jerry responds with a remark about Casey's physical fitness and his artistic expression. Linda Wells explores this rivalry between Jerry and Casey as indicative of the behaviours that both Robert and Jerry value, arguing that "Professional success functions in much the same way as sports for the men in that both are means by which each can prove his superiority over the other, when they cannot prove their superiority as lovers" (1983: 29). For the two men, their relationship is not solely based on friendship, they also have a professional relationship that must be maintained. They desire admiration and validation from one another in their professional lives, and throughout the play, both men comment on their proficiency in their respective roles. Wells' argument reveals how their professional success also signifies their relative power and that their aptitude in their profession becomes one more way to establish dominance over the other. It is interesting then that such rivalry is also connected to their dependency on each other in their respective roles, as with Jerry as literary agent and Robert as publisher, they benefit one another in a transactional yet mutually beneficial relationship. So, Robert's implication that Casey has replaced him in their friendship leads Jerry to challenge Casey's professional value, and it is indicative of Jerry's desperation to regain some power that he is willing to threaten another man without possibility of retaliation, showing once more his sly attempts at power.

In the Lloyd production, Charlie Cox's Jerry offered an idealistic albeit fragile man whose moments of honesty appeared genuine and confident but compensated for a fear of loss through desperate attempts to connect. Through Jerry, Lloyd offers a depiction of a subservient and eventually weakened man, where the realisation that refusing to commit to his friendship or his relationship with Emma leaves him isolated. In the review for the *Daily Telegraph*, Dominic Cavendish describes that same realisation, in how Cox's Jerry displays a "cat that got the cream smile and an awful sheepishness as it dawns on him that the others have played him for a fool" (Cavendish, 2019). It is this transition that provides a pivotal insight into the damaging consequences of Jerry's failure to perform the expected masculine behaviours, and his non-committal attitude towards both Robert and Emma

serves to distance them from him. The decision from Lloyd to highlight that feeling of loss is one that ties in with his interpretation of the text as a whole, in how the emotional damage caused by infidelity, dishonesty and manipulation ultimately severs the connection between the three characters. It is through these discoveries of personal loss that Lloyd allows the audience to understand how in the chronological end of the play, Jerry is presented as isolated and desperate, unable to contest his minimal status within the hegemony. Jerry's gradual decline is then reminiscent of Pinter's repeated depiction of vulnerable yet abusive men. Whether it be Stanley's slow assimilation in *The Birthday Party*, or Teddy's eventual resignation in *The Homecoming*, Jerry's loss of value in the eyes of both Robert and Emma results in a similarly isolated position. It is this diminished position that highlights a crucial aspect of Jerry's status within the hegemony, where his isolation results from his poor representation of the hegemonic ideal. In this way, Jerry's behaviour serves to threaten masculine dominance and forces him into a position of comparative marginalisation. In his consistent inability to align with the established hegemony, he must be cast out, and both Robert and Emma eventually decide to remove him from their lives. The cost of his actions as having been replaced by Casey as Emma's lover, as well as the dismantling of his friendship with Robert has a detrimental impact on his identity and masculinity.

This analysis outlines how the men in the play establish and enforce hegemonic masculinity and explores the conflict the men endure when expected to conform to an abusive, manipulative hegemony. Both men rely on behaviours of dominance to reinforce their performance of hegemonic masculinity: asserting control of information, engaging in competition, perpetrating violence against women, as well as ensuring professional and financial success. Although beginning in a powerful position, Jerry ends with a significant loss of status and this results in constant conflict, having been incapable of conforming to the expectations of Robert. For Robert, having gained power in the early interactions, and having encountered difficult situations, his ability to manipulate Jerry through withholding information and the subjugation of Emma through violence ensured that he maintained his higher status throughout the play. However, in Lloyd's production, the focus on recognising the emotional impact of their suffering and loss indicates how both men are exposed when they no longer conform to the expectations of the hegemony. Soutra Gilmour's sparse design provided an opportunity to project our own experiences of loss onto the stage action, but in encouraging a sympathetic approach to the men's vulnerability, Lloyd undermined any attempt to remain critical of the misogynistic hegemony of the play. Much like with the case studies explored in previous chapters, the analysis of a complimentary or resistant

femininity can reveal fundamental aspects of Pinter's presentation of hegemony. The following section is dedicated to exploring the ways in which Emma continues a lineage of women in Pinter's plays that undermine and subvert expected performances of femininity. Like the men of the play, Emma's desire for intimacy is crucial to the construction of a complimentary femininity, and yet it is by observing Emma's transition throughout the narrative that reveals moments of complicity and rebellion.

Femininity, Desire and Strength

Throughout Pinter's work, women repeatedly disrupt the male-dominated environments they reside in. Ruth in *The Homecoming* epitomises how the hierarchy of a household can be dramatically shifted when presented with a dominant female presence, and Meg in *The Birthday Party* unknowingly subverts her subjugation through her ignorance to the severity of the events around her. More so than men, women are subjugated, objectified, and marginalised for the benefit of maintaining hegemonic masculinity and the very nature of these dominant forms of masculinity is the legitimation of unequal gender relations (Messerschmidt, 2019). It is this inequality that allows men to take advantage of a hierarchy where women are assumed to remain subservient as they compete for the ownership of their bodies and lives. Being the only woman seen in *Betrayal*, Emma is immediately positioned as a minority, and when considering her appearances are exclusively tied to the relationships she has with Jerry and Robert, Pinter presents a limited perspective of femininity in the play. In her analysis of Pinter's plays up to the late 1980s, Sakellaridou argues that Emma, and women in other of Pinter's plays in this period, are depicted in a largely sympathetic manner, where "The woman is seen in constant movement, breaking empty relationships and taking up others, in a continuous quest for meaning. The two men are more static." (Sakellaridou, 1988: 187) It is important to note that although Sakellaridou's arguments suggest a largely positive interpretation of the Emma's character, she does not begin in such an empowered position. However, over the course of the narrative, Emma becomes a formidable presence in the shifting power hierarchy and subverts established feminine behaviours and, in some cases, demonstrates significant skill in embodying normative masculine behaviours to gain higher status. The following section explores how Emma navigates her marginalisation throughout the play, outlining particular moments of rebellion and subversion of the hegemony. These moments are then considered against the Lloyd production to contextualise these moments in relation to contemporary reception and attitudes towards feminine empowerment.

Originally produced in 1978 by the National Theatre, directed by Peter Hall at the Lyttelton Theatre, *Betrayal* came at a time when women were also continuing to subvert expectations and were rewarded with both romantic, sexual, and personal freedoms previously dismissed or prohibited. The original production received a "guarded, even downright hostile, critical reception" (Billington, 2005: 258), where Pinter's presentation of a middle-class, affluent – even bourgeois – love triangle was a seemingly alarming departure from his recent writing in *Old Times* (1970) and *No Man's Land* (1974). In his biography of Pinter, Michael Billington recognises how the most significant change in his response to Pinter's plays has been in the years since the original production of *Betrayal* – in particular his interpretation of Emma. He remarks how "Repeated viewing of the play has convinced me that Emma survives this network of deceit with great style, while the two men are spiritually annihilated by it. As so often in the past, Pinter, while prizing male companionship in almost Hemingwayesque fashion, seems awed by women's infinite capacity to adapt and survive" (2005: 260). It is this shift in attitudes not only to the play, but to Pinter's depiction of feminine power that offers a clear indication of how contemporary readings of his work has allowed for more sympathetic attitudes towards women in Pinter's plays. Much like with Ruth in *The Homecoming*, Emma's transition in *Betrayal* offers a clear sense of women's strength and resilience that Billington now recognises as a repeated theme in Pinter's work.

The social and academic conversations surrounding the notion of femininity and patriarchal privilege were becoming more pronounced in the 1970s, with the rise of second-wave feminism. It is not clear whether such context served as a motivation for Pinter's depiction of femininity in *Betrayal*, but it is widely acknowledged that the play was inspired at least in part by Pinter's several-year-long affair with Joan Bakewell. It is important to recognise how Pinter's personal connection to the events of the play allows for a much richer study of loss and power, but also one where feminine subjugation at the expense of masculine domination deserves further scrutiny. Although Pinter's work had already displayed both sympathetic and provocative criticisms of feminine oppression in earlier plays – especially in male-dominated spaces – *Betrayal* offered a reflection of the intimacies of feminine adaptation and their adoption of masculine behaviours. For Katherine Burkman, such adaptation is fundamental to Emma's transformation throughout the play, arguing how "Emma, however, is not only the play's major victim, she is its only victor as well. Excluded by the men who treat her like an object, Emma manages to liberate herself from the bondage of triangular desire, to bury the past, and to unite with Casey" (1982: 517). Such a liberation, as Burkman describes, is one which is exclusive to Emma, and through her adoption of

masculine behaviours, she subverts Robert and Jerry's attempts to dominate her, remaining the singular 'victor' and in a position of empowered femininity. Emma's transition from dependency to relative strength over the course of the play demonstrates once again how women resist blind complicity to a hegemony which exists to subjugate them.

In the first chronological scene – Scene Nine – Emma is at first resistant to Jerry's words of adoration, and initially remains firm against his attempts to seduce her. Jerry's persistence conflicts with his romanticised language and his dismissal of her attempts to resist once again demonstrates how he uses his power to manipulate her for his own pleasure. Such a dynamic becomes all the more problematic when considered against the contemporary discourse of abuse against women, where Jerry's emphatic, unrelenting manipulation of Emma in the scene stimulates imagery of men's sexual abuse against women. It is important to note that Emma repeatedly rejects or refutes Jerry's advances in the scene, and though it is implied that Emma later consents to their affair, this scene explicitly shows Jerry continually dismissing her objections. This abuse of power does eventually force her to comply, and at the moment of Robert's entrance into the scene, she chooses to withhold what had happened from her husband, thereby presenting herself as both subordinate to Jerry's power and complicit to his deceit of Robert. This initial scene therefore establishes a significant behaviour that Emma adopts throughout the play; the manipulation and withholding of information. It is also clear, even at this stage, how willing Jerry is to fabricate his memory to create a more idyllic version, indicated by his statement "I was best man at your wedding. I saw you in white. I watched you glide by in white" and Emma's response "I wasn't in white" (Pinter, 1991: 135). This obvious contradiction of Jerry's memory is a prototypicality threat by Emma, suggesting that Jerry's information is incorrect and undermining his power. By declaring how she "wasn't in white" (1991: 135), she not only contradicts Jerry's fantastical version but also subtly implies that she does not conform to the stereotypical imagery of virginal, innocent femininity. Even when overwhelmed by Jerry's unrelenting confession of adoration, Emma is not powerless, and throughout the scene, she takes the opportunity to challenge him and assert her own version of events as correct. Emma also uses this threat to challenge her role as representative of the traditionally feminine, by suggesting her own sexual freedom and experience.

Emma continually deflects Jerry's fantasy, revealing her keen awareness of his attempts to manipulate her. In the Lloyd production, Zawe Ashton's performance as Emma immediately subverted any suggestion of Emma's silent complicity by focusing on these

moments of rebellion, providing a portrayal of female empowerment that resonated throughout. Susannah Clapp, in her review for the *Observer*, remarked on how Emma's awareness of the men's attempts to use and objectify her becomes a fundamental characteristic of Ashton's performance, where "Magnetic Ashton is by turns uneasy – rubbing her shoulders, laughing nervously – mysterious and powerful. She never allows the lurking threat of this play to take hold: that it's about men using a woman as the occasion for conversation and secrets" (Clapp, 2019). The mystery that Clapp describes is often ignored by the men, they seek not to understand her but instead to use her to fulfil their own desires. The similarities between other women in Pinter's plays become clearer, as Emma's subversion of her subjugated position echoes the rebellion of Ruth in *The Homecoming*, and both women must adapt to men's attempts to define and control their femininity. For Jerry, Emma provides a vessel with which he can project his fantasy, and for Robert, she is used as a complicit victim of his abuse, validating his position of power. For both men, she exists solely to provide pleasure and affirm their masculinity. But where Charlie Cox's Jerry and Tom Hiddleston's Robert repeatedly showed their vulnerability, Zawe Ashton's performance showed Emma's composure. This distinction between the emotional stability of men and women in the play suggests how Lloyd's production offers a complimentary interpretation of feminine power in response to dominant masculinity. In his biography on Pinter's life and work, Michael Billington views Emma's strength in the play as indicative of Pinter's consistently sympathetic depiction of feminine empowerment across all of his work, arguing that:

> Repeated viewing of the play has convinced me that Emma survives this network of deceit with great style, while the two men are spiritually annihilated by it. As so often in the past, Pinter, whilst prizing male companionship in almost Hemingwayesque fashion, seems awed by women's infinite capacity to adapt and survive.

> (Billington, 2005: 260)

Although there is justification to be critical of such a generalised statement about Pinter's positive depiction of women in his plays, Billington's argument is ultimately an encouraging one. When compared with men's overt vulnerability and their dependence on their performance of hegemonic masculinity, Emma displays a consistent ability to subvert their attempts to restrict her power, allowing her subtle opportunities to challenge her marginalisation.

In Scene Eight – three years later and with the affair in motion, Emma's manipulation of Jerry's relationship with his wife Judith allows her to obtain power within their relationship. Emma initiates an exchange surrounding Judith, where she gradually reveals information about seeing her in Fortnum and Mason's, repeatedly implying Judith's own infidelity through prototypicality threats that expose Jerry's lack of knowledge. Emma's question "She didn't tell you?" (Pinter, 1991: 124) is an example of such a threat, immediately raising suspicion about Judith's withholding of information from Jerry. Jerry's comment that "Fortnum and Mason's is a long way from the hospital" (1991: 24) demonstrates how Emma's provocation is already having the desired effect, as he becomes increasingly suspicious of his wife's behaviour. As the exchange continues, Jerry's suspicion reaches a climax as he begins to speculate about Judith's possible infidelity with a doctor at the hospital, calling him her "admirer" (1991: 125). Emma takes this opportunity to make the parallel between them explicit, calling Jerry her own 'admirer' and even suggesting that Judith's infidelity should be permitted. Her successful planting of suspicion for Jerry and her repeated challenging of his knowledge allows her to undermine his status but also indicates how Emma seeks to undermine Jerry's marriage to supplant Judith. By implying Judith's infidelity, she subtly manipulates Jerry into considering abandoning his wife and his children for a life with Emma, though this is altogether unsuccessful. She asks Jerry "Tell me…have you ever thought…of changing your life?", subtly revealing her own desire to abandon her life with Robert, so when Jerry responds, "It's impossible" (1991: 127), this is a clear rejection of her attempt to convince Jerry to commit to her. When considering Emma's own marital instability, being a victim of domestic abuse and Robert's later confession of his own infidelity, it becomes clear there are several motivations for abandoning that life for one with Jerry.

By revealing this inner desire to abandon her life, Emma leaves herself vulnerable and though she has manipulated Jerry into considering it, she is trusting him with making what she believes to be the right decision. It is only after Jerry refuses to commit to their relationship that Emma chooses to punish him. Emma has lost her hope of finding a replacement for Robert in Jerry, and the final exchange of the scene begins with Emma's announcement that she's pregnant with Robert's child. As if punishment for Jerry's choice not to commit to their relationship, Emma's disclosure of this information acts as a prototypicality threat that challenges Jerry's status in multiple ways. It exposes Jerry's lack of information – as he was unaware of the pregnancy – but also implies a failure to embody hegemonic masculinity and implying his weakened position in the competition between him

and Robert. Robert's successful impregnation not only indicates his ownership of Emma's body, but also his performance of the paternal role, affirming his masculinity and severely impacting Jerry's attempts to do the same. Emma's decision to reveal this information after Jerry has failed to commit to their relationship indicates the extent to which she is willing to punish him for failing her. In doing so, Emma presents herself as an active and powerful force capable of challenging the status of the men in the gender hierarchy.

In the following scene between the two lovers – Scene Six – the recurring issues of suspicion and deception have escalated and there are clear signs of fracturing in their relationship. This is the first interaction between the couple since Robert has discovered the affair, and when questioned about their trip to Torcello, Emma chooses not to inform Jerry of Robert's knowledge and instead immediately lies to Jerry. In doing this, Emma demonstrates a consistent and skilful manipulation of information, successfully withholding information from both men and employing the same masculine tactics of domination that they had previously used to subjugate her. At this point in the play, Emma's empowerment allows her to establish dominance over Robert and Jerry, demonstrating the strength and stability that Pinter introduced in his earlier plays, as she competently defends herself against Jerry's futile attempts to gain knowledge and power. The most significant impact of Emma's manipulation is how it results in the breakdown of the friendship between the two men: Jerry is unaware that Robert knows about the affair, and Robert mistakenly believes that Jerry is aware that he knows about the affair, which has a detrimental impact on their friendship from this moment. Billington argues that this aptitude for women's ability to adapt in Pinter's plays is crucial to their femininity, arguing that such women deal "with the duality and the strength of the female psyche, as against the sexual and emotional insecurity of the average male. Pinter doesn't work to a preconceived programme; but the same themes recur in play after play, particularly the notion that women are more easily able to reconcile their sexual and social selves" (2007: 133). Although the argument made by Billington here is awkward in its generalisation of Pinter's depiction of gender, there is value in considering how Pinter's approach to portraying women is one which appears to contrast male insecurity with feminine adaptability. The ways in which Emma recognises the tactics used by men allow her to defend against threats, but also to use those same behaviours for her own empowerment. In this exchange, she has utilised the power of information as a behaviour of masculinity for her own gain and this continues to have a significant impact on the relationship between the two men. Jerry and Robert's relationship is left to dissolve naturally as a result of their own actions, and by withholding information, she allows the two

men to continue their conflict without intervention, indicating that the hegemony they created is leading them to their eventual isolation.

The following scene between the two lovers – Scene Three – reveals the final moments of the affair, and we observe how Emma's further embodiment of the behaviours associated with masculinity distances her from Jerry. At this stage, there is value placed on professional success and the two characters have disagreed about who is willing to sacrifice that success for the benefit of their relationship. It is Jerry who initially acknowledges Emma's recent professional success at the gallery and implies that that success is the cause of the affair's failure – once again refusing to take responsibility for his role in the breakdown of the affair. Where the success of the men in the play – including Casey – is used to bolster their presentation of masculinity, Jerry's desire to blame Emma reveals another layer to his hypocrisy, unable to accept her recent professional success. This suggests how the men in the play are unwilling to recognise Emma's power and autonomy, especially when she more closely aligns with the hegemonic masculinity. It is arguable then, that Jerry and Emma's loss of affection or lack of commitment is due to a subversion of the expected masculine/feminine roles. At this point in the play, Jerry's inept, insecure masculinity has been exposed by Robert's repeated attempts to dominate him, and Emma's embodiment of hegemonic masculine behaviours such as manipulating information, professional success, and her relationship with Robert positions her as comparatively dominant over Jerry. Emma's ability to adopt the behaviours associated with hegemonic masculinity distances her from her relationship with Jerry, yet it exists in conflict with her desire for a separate life to the one with Robert and her children.

In previous scenes, Emma is often seen adopting stereotypical feminine behaviours as a cook, cleaner and decorator of the flat she shares with Jerry and these behaviours served to distance her from the status associated with the hegemonic masculinity. In refusing to conform to those behaviours, as well as the adoption of professional success, she procures a higher status within the gender hierarchy, however this is at the cost of fulfilling her desire to abandon her life for one with Jerry. The distance between them grows as Emma questions Jerry's initial motivations for engaging in the affair, "You didn't ever see it as a home, in any sense, did you?" (1991: 55). The word 'home' infers her desire to maintain the space as a separate, more positive life than the one with Robert, yet Jerry's response indicates a more casual motivation for their meetings: "No, I saw it as a flat… you know" with Emma recognising his implication by promptly remarking, "For fucking" (1991: 55). This contrast in motivation becomes the justification for their separation and there is a

clear shift in Emma's attitude for the rest of the scene as she uses brief, formal language, indicating that the purely romantic aspect of their relationship has ceased. For Sakellaridou, this rejection of Jerry is crucial to Emma's empowerment, as her desire for equality, understanding and compassion is now central to the way in which Pinter establishes sympathy from the audience. She argues that "If all this unhappiness and disorder is caused by the woman's awakening consciousness as a human being equal to man, Pinter does not accuse her as a trouble-maker. He simply records the fact of male-female incompatibility in the modem world, showing the same sympathy to all parties involved." (Sakellaridou, 1988: 191) Where women in Pinter's previous plays have to achieve domination or independence through adopting masculine behaviours, Sakellaridou's sentiment implies that Pinter's presentation of gender in *Betrayal* is also tied to an understanding of equal experiences of loss. It is important to note that this scene does support the increased agency of Emma, ultimately rejecting Jerry's noncommittal and entitled attitude towards her, it does result in the loss of intimacy for both of them. As such, as Sakellaridou argues, their incompatibility is tied to their gendered performances, and yet sympathetic. Emma's transition from a compliant, traditional femininity does, however, rely on her embodiment of established masculine behaviours, and the noticeable shift in language and behaviour is one that marks the end of her relationship with Jerry, as he has been confronted with the loss of his fantasy.

In the Lloyd production, this transition was made apparent by the physical distance between the two characters, with Cox's Jerry remaining seated and the implied dominance of Ashton's Emma standing firm across from him. The clear physical separation in the proximity between them created an image of separation that preceded their own eventual separation. The moment however did convey the almost silent shift in Emma's attitude towards the end of the scene, indicating her cold empowerment was also at the cost of her relationship with Jerry. Critics of the production remarked on Ashton's confident, yet vulnerable femininity, like Dominic Cavendish, who noted, "Striking, ardent, confident, Ashton's Emma could do with more enigma and less underlined brittleness but catches the character's ache and discontent well" (Cavendish, 2019). Sarah Hemming related such a shift to her realisation of loss, observing how "Ashton's Emma, whose rueful pensiveness when alone suggests she knows she is chasing a happiness that can't be found with either man" (Hemming, 2019). No clearer is such a realisation depicted than in this scene between her and Jerry, in the final moments of an affair that was deeply rooted in manipulation, fantasy and dishonesty. Although such a moment appears almost tragic in its depiction of failed love, it offers little opportunity for sympathy, as both characters' inability to commit to

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each other suggests how incapable they are of obtaining the intimacy they so desperately seek. In his review for *Time Out*, Andrzej Lukowski offered a counterpoint, describing how he felt such moments revealed the ways in which the characters remain entwined, "there is a point in 'Betrayal' where we see something utopian – a relationship between three people that is beautiful and blissful and transcendent of the individual, even if those involved will never know it" (Lukowski, 2019). Lukowski points out an interesting observation here, and to take it a step further, it is implied that such moments of apparent distance between the two characters are arguably where they are the most united. Although far from utopian, both Emma and Jerry's feelings of loss and sacrifice in this scene united them in shared feelings, and yet their refusal to acknowledge this leaves them unaware of their bond. Their final opportunity for the intimacy and validation they each crave is lost.

All facets of the relationship between Emma and Jerry are explored in their final interaction – the first scene of the play – and Jerry is the first to address Emma's professional success through her work at the gallery. Not only does this indicate Jerry's acknowledgement of her dominant behaviour, but also demonstrates a subtle prototypicality threat to assess whether she has been capable of maintaining that success. The following exchange then reveals that Emma's desire for intimacy remains, and her inquiries of "Ever think of me?" and "You think of me sometimes?" (Pinter, 1991: 17-18) indicate that she still not only desires that intimacy and validation, but also that she still values Jerry's feelings towards her. However, Jerry's consistently unreliable memory is once again addressed through an almost identical exchange to that seen earlier in the play surrounding him throwing Charlotte up, and Emma continues to challenge his version of the event. It is in this vulnerable position that Jerry attempts to regain status by revealing that he suspects a romantic association between Emma and Casey, and whilst Emma appears frustrated at how the information has been made public, she does not explicitly deny the accusation (1991: 22-24). Having now gained confirmation after a successful prototypicality threat, with evidence of being replaced by Casey as Emma's romantic interest, Jerry is compelled to defend his status. As this is unprovoked, the inference that he has been replaced has had a detrimental impact on his status within the male hierarchy and therefore his masculinity. Like his relationship with Robert, Jerry's lack of information now prevents him from making considerable advances in his status. His weakened position is reinforced as Emma discloses that Robert knows about the affair and offers a cathartic moment that indicates Emma's ability to withhold information, as Jerry is still not aware that Robert has known for four years. R.W. Connell argues how the significance of a femininity that can

adapt to the restrictions of masculine power allows women to gain power, such as those defined "by complex strategic combinations of compliance, resistance and co-operation" (1987: 297). Throughout the play, Emma demonstrates a clear aptitude for embodying Connell's notion of empowered femininity, navigating her assumed subordination to subvert Jerry's position of dominance. This final scene between these two characters highlights the significance of Jerry's inability to maintain power through information but also demonstrates Emma's transition from a passive conformer to a capable and formidable opponent. To gain such power and status, Emma successfully balances her desire for intimacy, having distanced herself from her relationship with both Jerry and Robert, she then continues to search for a positive, equal relationship with Casey.

Based on the interpretations of the two male characters, Emma presents a determined, powerful woman, capable of maintaining power in her relationships, even when faced with significant loss on her own part. Her desire for intimacy, as discussed above, encourages her to exploit her relationship with Jerry and Casey to form a positive alternative to her marriage to Robert. It is important to note that Emma's final moments do reveal her relative dominance over the men around her, but Pinter's decision to introduce Emma's relationship with Casey ensures that her position of empowered femininity remains dependent on her relationships with men. Much like the women in Pinter's earlier plays, there is a continued restriction of Pinter's depiction of women as those who must navigate men's desire to define and control them. In Ashton's performance as Emma, however, there appears to be a provocative antagonism surrounding her apparent control over her environment. Though she delights in adopting stereotypical feminine behaviours, there are elements of her performance that challenge her perception as the embodiment of the normative feminine behaviours.

More so than the men, she adopts the necessary behaviours associated with hegemonic masculinity for her own benefit, and although she is subjugated by Robert, her skilful manipulation of Jerry allows her to control information and challenge the hegemonic performances of the two men and as a result, assists in the deconstruction of their relationship. The conflicts between Emma and the men around her are often a consequence of, as Mark Taylor-Batty argues, "the male presumption of a right to define, construct and own women, and female strategies of resistance that include taking control of the vocabulary of that male discourse" (2014: 88). For Taylor-Batty, men's attempts at control are intrinsically linked to tactics of domination, which reveals the fundamental problem of women who adopt those tactics as doing so reinforces hegemonic values. Emma's strength

is a consequence of her subjugation and appropriation of that same discourse, and as such, has the effect of supporting the inequality present in the play. However, Lloyd's production offers a contemporary perspective of feminine antagonism and resistance which serves to portray Emma as ruthlessly independent, and her wielding of established masculine tactics enables her to seek more positive, healthy relationships. Much like Ruth's rejection of Teddy's suggestion of motherly subservience or 'captivity', Emma abandons familial responsibility in search of romantic and sexual freedom. It is Ashton's performance of an independent, strong-willed femininity which employs established masculine tactics that Lloyd offers in his production. The appearance of subservience is intertwined with overt displays of control, and Emma is a clear representation of the resistance of women against the dominant masculine hegemony.

Emma is emotionally vulnerable, but she presents a positive representation of persistence in the face of subjugation. It is in this display of feminine strength against oppression that is indicative of the shifting social perception of women in the 1970s, and Pinter's almost decade-long narrative provides a reflection of how Emma's role within the hegemony is impacted by the desire to resist. Much like with Ruth in *The Homecoming*, Emma challenges, manipulates, and bargains with the men in the play for her own benefit. Sakellaridou provides a similarly sympathetic interpretation of Emma's empowerment, where she marks a shift in Pinter's work towards a more progressive, empathetic approach to women in his work. As she argues, "If Emma attains self-fulfilment, she does so by herself, without the assistance of the two men, who defend themselves by strengthening their male bond." (Sakellaridou, 1988: 191) This relative independence that Emma gains over the course of the play is fundamental not only to her own individual power, as she becomes able to search for the life she craves, but also in providing a much more nuanced depiction of empowered femininity. Faced with objectification, and attempts to own and oppress her, Emma begins to observe and resist. Initially complicit to Jerry's attempts to seduce her, and the apparent exchange between the two men for her affection, she demonstrates a capability to undermine their fantasies and disrupt their friendship. Emma's decision to seize her romantic and sexual freedom provides a positive representation of feminine rebellion, and one which contributes to contemporary discourse on survivors of domestic abuse, as well as female victims of violence. Although such an interpretation on its own would suggest Emma's transition from complicity to domination is one of assumed positive empowerment, her relationship to hegemonic masculinity is troubling. Emma represents a capacity for women to gain power in male-dominated spaces, however, she does so by adopting the

destructive masculine tactics set down by Robert, and therein lies a crucial issue. By employing these tactics, she merely serves to reinforce their oppressive essence, reaping the dividends of their ability to subjugate others with no intention of equalising the gender order.

Lloyd highlights how Emma's control serves as a reaction to her isolation and abuse, and how she represents a dominant female presence. Although she suffers in similar ways to the two men, she distances herself from their destructive conflicts and maintains a higher status within the hierarchy. Lloyd explored how the characters' motivations, behaviours and relationships change because of this loss, and presented an accurate reflection of the shifting dynamics within the hegemony of the play. He exposed the weaknesses of all three major characters, acknowledging a unified fear of isolation, and addresses the sense of fragility that derives from the pressure to embody normative gendered roles. As an audience, we were able to observe both the significant and subtle efforts made by the characters in the battle for dominance over one another and Lloyd's production posed engaging and challenging interpretations to explore the justification and emotional cost of existing in a restrictive, violent, and destructive hegemony. The responses to the premiere were largely critical of the setting of affluence in the play, however there were some interpretations that acknowledged a relatability to the characters' suffering and desperate attempts to connect. The limited similarities in response to the two productions provide some insight into the ways in which *Betrayal* offers a relatable sense of loss in its characters, but how modern audiences have been more likely to view Emma's journey as both sympathetic and representative of feminine strength and resilience when faced with domestic violence and misogyny.

The desire for intimacy manifests itself in the multitude of conflicts throughout *Betrayal*, and through our understanding of the character's shifting positions within the hegemonic masculinity, we can observe how each character attempts to conform or protest the established behaviours. However, in the desperate search for validation and connection, the characters fail to disrupt the existing hegemony. Though characters such as Emma are capable of utilising the behaviours associated with the dominant position within the hierarchy, they serve to reinforce the inequality embedded within the hegemonic structure. Through the consistent use of prototypicality threats such as the manipulation of information, professional success, and defining and controlling women, the characters' reliance on the oppression of others merely strengthens the existing hegemony. It is through productions, such as those by Jamie Lloyd, that physical representations of these conflicts

can be framed alongside a relatable, emotional consequence of failure, deceit, and manipulation. The domestic lives of Pinter's characters offer a subtle depiction of political and social issues, however his approach to his writing shifted in the latter half of his career and in the next chapter on *Party Time* and *Celebration*, I will outline how Pinter's more overtly political plays navigate themes of intimacy, suffering and oppression in their depiction of gender inequality.

Party Time & Celebration

Over the course of Harold Pinter's life, his plays become more overtly political, with plays and sketches openly criticising political regimes and figures, systems of power, and oppression throughout the world. Although it is widely agreed that such themes and ideas are still present in his earlier work, it is arguably more provocative to observe how Pinter's criticism of such structures became more explicit in his writing. In *Party Time* (1991), Pinter criticises the elitism and violence encouraged by patriarchy, and the exclusivity and privilege afforded to those men and women who maintain power through the oppression of others. In *Celebration* (2000), acts of manipulation and ignorance are embedded in a largely comic representation of romance, sexuality, and class, in which the characters consistently struggle for power within a hierarchy built on discrimination and subjugation. Both plays continue the overt political criticism seen in other plays written by Pinter at this stage in his career such as *Mountain Language* (1988) and *Ashes to Ashes* (1996). Pinter's criticism of political and social injustices in *Party Time* and *Celebration* provides a commentary on oppression, violence, the abuse of power, elitism, and discrimination. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the ways in which Pinter's criticism of such themes is presented through the depiction of hegemonic masculinity and the conflicts between men and women. Much like with previous chapters, the analysis of hegemonic masculinities in each play will be reliant on outlining the characters' use of prototypicality threats to establish unequal gender relations. The relationship between romance and power is also linked to the formation of hegemonic masculinities and is likewise crucial to the conflicts presented between the men and women of these plays. The failure to conform to the established normative behaviours in the hegemony not only has a detrimental impact on the power of individual characters but also exposes their fear of losing their position of privilege.

In Jamie Lloyd's production of the plays, as part of a double-bill during the 'Pinter at the Pinter' season at the Harold Pinter Theatre in 2019, the connection between oppression and prejudice became fundamental to the way in which the plays were presented. In Lloyd's production of both plays, the ideas which he would later develop in his production of *Betrayal* regarding emotional intimacy were not yet developed and instead more closely links to established approaches of farcical comedy and satire seen in his production of *The Hothouse* several years earlier in 2013. This chapter will reveal how these intimate

relationships between men and women establish and support a hegemony in each play, both in the written text and the performance, as they rely on behaviours such as the need for external validation, the subjugation of women, and fantasies of violence. The focus of this chapter will be on Lloyd's production; however, the critical reception of Lloyd's production will be considered against the reception of the premiere productions of both plays, both directed by Pinter at the Almeida Theatre, with *Party Time* being presented alongside *Mountain Language* in 1991, and *Celebration* also being part of a double-bill alongside *The Room* in 2000. In comparing these productions, I aim to provide insights into the reception of Pinter's depiction of political violence, oppression, and elitism, whilst also considering the impact of the more subtle themes of gender inequality and hegemony in both plays.

In *Betrayal*, characters are motivated by a desire for connection and intimacy, however, such desperate attempts to connect often result in feelings of isolation. In *Party Time* and *Celebration*, Pinter suggests how a fear of isolation is indicative of the characters' compulsion to remain complicit to established systems of power. R.W. Connell argues that this fear of isolation is paramount to the maintenance of hegemonies, where "Terror is used as a means of drawing boundaries and making exclusions" (2005: 83). Such exclusions are not only used as justifications for the characters' use of violence, but also how it serves to isolate and oppress groups of people who are deemed non-hegemonic. The first section of this chapter outlines how the characters' exclusion from privilege leads to discrimination, violence and even death. For Lloyd's production, such attempts to exclude are linked to race, and this chapter explores the ways in which the production presents these ideals of violence, terror, and prejudice. The second section will explore how partnerships between men and women also necessitate subtle and overt displays of violence, where complicity towards such violent acts becomes essential to a sense of connection between them. This includes observations on how both plays depict feminine strength, for the two plays continue Pinter's depiction of female rebellion, rivalry, and conformity, thereby indicating the significance of femininity in the formation and subversion of hegemonies. In the third and final section of the chapter, I will offer arguments that suggest the similarities between Pinter's depiction of space in both plays to those of his earlier works. The ways in which the internal spaces provide a sense of comfort and reassurance allows the characters to remain complicit to a hierarchy of power that benefits those in privileged positions, and as such, offers a criticism of not just systemic inequality but also gender inequality.

In this final chapter, the comprehensive analysis of systemic and individual oppression in both plays is once again reliant on the use of semiotics. The intention is to explore the characters' use of physical and verbal signs to perpetuate indirect violence that is arguably more nuanced than that which appears in the case studies previously discussed. In the first section of the chapter, the study of semiotics provides a way to outline how men and women in both plays reinforce hegemonic masculinity in their private settings, but also how such hierarchies also necessitate oppression on a larger scale. For the second section, the same method will be used to explore how forms of violence are realised in both plays through both verbal and physical signs in the written and performance texts. Lastly, the final section will explore the recurring themes in Pinter's later work regarding the fragility of memory in his writing and in staged productions. Furthermore, I will be offering closing arguments that make use of Ric Knowles' method of reading the material theatre to engage with the critical reception of productions, this time with Jamie Lloyd's double-bill production of both plays in 2018/19, and the premiere productions directed by Pinter himself in 1991 and 2000.

Intimacy, Otherness and Oppression

The connection between intimacy and the formation of a power dynamic was fundamental to the relationships seen in *Betrayal*, and as political criticism became more overt in Pinter's plays, the desire for intimacy became more politicised as a result. But where *Betrayal* explored the ways in which loss and manipulation between partners and friends can disrupt that feeling of intimacy, *Party Time* and *Celebration* presents us with an opportunity to see how the search for intimacy reinforces oppression. As discussed in previous chapters, the link between domination and hegemony is undeniable, and both plays indicate the levels to which the hegemony is reliant on the domination of women, but also of the 'other'. Penelope Prentice, in her book titled *The Pinter Ethic: The Erotic Aesthetic* (2000), argues that these plays are most overt in their presentation of domination at the expense of intimacy.

> To attempt to dominate another person is not perhaps, finally, so different from trying to dominate another nation, and the results, are not surprisingly, similarly destructive. *Party Time* explicitly draws attention to such destruction from the private to the public and global levels and, for the first time, simultaneously offers focus and insight on all three levels— into the blindness, the lack of consciousness, which abets injustice and advances destruction.

> (Prentice, 2000: 305)

Prentice's language in these examples captures imagery associated with Pinter's earliest work, whether it be Rose's blindness in *The Room*, or Stanley's assimilation in *The Birthday Party*, however, Prentice argues that Pinter's later plays offer a more specific criticism of global narratives of dominance. I argue against Prentice's implication of the character's unconscious complicity as it suggests the characters' powerlessness to resist such oppression as if it is somehow inevitable. Pinter's criticism of systemic oppression is far more provocative when recognising how the characters in each play rely on repeated, intentional decisions to reinforce inequality, prejudice, and violence.

The significance of presenting this oppression in performance cannot be understated, and as part of the 'Pinter at the Pinter' season, directed by Jamie Lloyd, the two plays were produced as companion pieces and performed by the same cast, though titled 'Pinter Six' (for being the sixth production in the season). Lloyd addressed the issues of discrimination, class, and oppression, and provided audiences with an opportunity to observe the thematic connections between the two plays. Lloyd would later approach the production of *Betrayal* with an empathetic, emotional approach to the performances, and yet with *Pinter Six*, the plays relied on a much more heightened style. In *Party Time*, the effect was to distance the audience from the action on stage, as the men and women stood in a straight, horizontal line, distant from one another and yet conveying an almost militaristic display of power as if forming an unwavering defensive wall. In an interview with Catriona Fallow, Lloyd outlines his approach to each play in the PatP season, where "It's about stripping away the performance history – all the old-fashioned baggage, the traditional ways of approaching these famous plays – and discovering their absolute essence." (Chiasson & Fallow, 2021: 206) In a contrast to the naturalistic designs of earlier productions, this immediate image Lloyd presented to the audience is the realisation of his intention to highlight the larger themes and ideas of the plays at the expense of emotional intimacy. It is also the realisation of Prentice's argument, where the distance between characters created an image of dominance at the cost of intimacy. There was a clear sense of the separation and seclusion implied by the dark, overbearing space on stage, as various mentions of conflict and militarisation outside of the security offered by their private, controlled space.

The exact details of the events outside are not discussed, though the implication of violence is clear, specifically in the exchange between Fred and Douglas as they share in their convictions about the need for peace. The brief exchange between the two men infers an unknown force enacting violence to establish 'peace', with Douglas declaring "We want peace and we're going to get it. But we want that peace to be cast iron" (Pinter, 1993: 17).

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This subtle implication of the unrelenting forces at work beyond the stage to enforce the will of those present is but one example of the ways in which the characters rely on politicised language to celebrate violence and oppression. The use of 'we' suggests a unified attitude amongst the group, and Fred's later admiration of Douglas's speech establishes a comradery – if not complicity – between the men which encourages and celebrates such indirect violence against the unseen victims. The contrasting imagery of peace and violence is heavily implied in this speech, and the repetition of 'peace' suggests the linguistic tactics used in political statements, indicating how Douglas attempts to justify their violent actions, though he is either ignorant of the hypocrisy implied in their convictions or he is actively refusing to confront it. These perceived justifications allow others to remain complicit towards violence, and through that complicity, they maintain power. As Fred admits his admiration for Douglas' conviction, we observe the bond between the two men being strengthened by the inference of violence, yet its effect is not seen until the final moments of the play.

Throughout the play, there is reference to the unseen forces outside of the events on stage, and yet little is said of the supposed victims of the group's unrelenting domination. There is, however, one victim revealed at the end of the play, Dusty's brother Jimmy. Speaking in brief, abstract sentences, Jimmy's speech serves as an isolated final moment in the play, and his language is in stark contrast to the formal, unemotional exchanges seen earlier in the play. In Lloyd's production, the decision to cast black actor Abraham Popoola as Jimmy, whilst the guests of the party consist of an all-white cast, suggests how the club's continued discrimination and oppression of Jimmy is representative of the marginalisation of people of colour. The impact of this decision had immediate ramifications on the perception of the character, and his appearance at the end of the play, covered by rags and held in chains stimulated explicit images of slavery and the historical oppression of people of colour. It is important to acknowledge that the production was on stage almost a year before the international discourse surrounding black oppression and violence surged in the wake of the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd and the subsequent rise in publicity regarding the Black Lives Matter movement. Although the production preceded these events, it is still important to recognise the impact of Lloyd's directorial choice, as through this interpretation Lloyd presented an argument for Jimmy as representative not just of the consequence of violence and militaristic regimes but also of racial discrimination and marginalisation. Jimmy's entrance is tied to the imagery of opposites, of black suffering and violence, with Popoola standing centred in a large door, silhouetted by bright white light

which drowned the space. As he slumped forward slowly, the remaining guests stood still, facing away, unapologetic in their ignorance. Natasha Tripney, in her review of the production for *The Stage*, remarked on Lloyd's prescience of the cultural moment, saying how "The ending is a bit heavy-handed, as Jimmy finally comes bursting in, wearing an ankle-tag and a hoodie, his face bloody, but Lloyd makes the play seem queasily prescient" (Tripney, 2019). Although Tripney's observations here imply how the production's lack of subtlety undermined the impact of the moment, the relationship between oppression and black masculinity was made clear by Lloyd's direction and Popoola's performance.

Jamie Lloyd has discussed the ways in which he sees Pinter as undeniably relevant to the socio-political issues of modern society. Lloyd argues that "[Pinter's] words are more important and visceral than ever. His passionate interrogation of the truth in politics and society, his call for honesty and authenticity, is a vital lesson for us all." (Chiasson & Fallow 2021: 208) Whether it is true that Pinter's work can be viewed as prescient of contemporary issues is rather optimistic, Lloyd's perspective here does underpin the overt political commentary in his direction of *Party Time*. The play offers much clearer imagery to support such criticism of racial oppression and Lloyd's direction similarly focuses on this aspect to allow Pinter's work to remain relevant to the discourse around such issues. This approach is also supported by the stage design of the production, with Lloyd's repeated collaborator Soutra Gilmour also being vocal about her desire for authenticity in engaging the audience. She underlines the theatricality of Pinter's work, as if advising her audiences: "'Never forget this is a conversation. Don't just get dragged into some kind of fantasy moment. This is a conversation. You're here. You're an audience. These are performers.' And that feels really right and truthful and honest when you're doing a Pinter play." (2021: 212) For Gilmour, much like her approach to other productions in the Pinter at the Pinter season, she focuses on the interplay between audience and the performance, encouraging audiences to remain aware of the theatricality of the event and therefore remain critical of the political and social commentary of the play. The shocking arrival of Popoola's Jimmy in the final moments of the play suggests the creative decision by Lloyd and Gilmour to apply a heavy-handed approach, accentuating the juxtaposition between the character and the rest of the cast, allowing the audience to focus on interpreting the moment and its meaning. Returning to an earlier statement by R.W. Connell, the inference of violence is closely linked to the maintenance of power, and "Terror is used as a means of drawing boundaries and making exclusions…Violence can become a way of claiming or asserting masculinity in group struggles" (Connell, 2005: 83). Connell's arguments suggest that the oppression of

marginalised groups – including racial minorities – is also tied to hegemonic masculinity. In the context of the play, Lloyd's production clearly indicates the separation between white men as the dominant members of the hegemony, able to enforce and commit acts of violence to support their own agenda. Likewise, black men, as represented by Jimmy, are the excluded, isolated victims of violence and detainment. When considered as part of the established hegemony of the play, Lloyd reinforces the interpretation of a hierarchy reliant on the subjugation of non-hegemonic men and women, including people of colour, whilst enforcing the dominance of white, predominantly male control. For Jimmy, his exclusion from the party and his linguistic difference suggest how he exists as a distinct outsider with no ability or opportunity to engage in active resistance to his marginalisation, and therefore stands as a criticism of an impenetrable societal structure of white oppression.

Prentice's remarks on domination in these two plays suggest that such exclusion is symptomatic of the ways in which the characters support injustice. None of the guests are willing to relinquish power to challenge the established hierarchy, and therefore remain complicit to oppression. Basil Chiasson relates such ideas of oppression directly to how Pinter's recurring criticism of inequality is inherently, undeniably political:

> Across the political oeuvre one can discern the dramatisation of the material reality of a suffering victim in a way that unleashes the violence of that image onto parallel performances in the dramas where political discourse is employed to dehumanise the victims of power or to legitimate or refract their plight. In tandem with the subject matter and representational content relating to specific political realities herein, lies the politics of the work.

(Chiasson, 2014: 265)

Chiasson's argument here is convincing in its connection to the much more overt political edge to these two plays, and yet it is in the confrontation of the visual realisation of oppression that allows for the greatest impact on the spectator. The 'suffering victim' that Chiasson describes is exemplified in Jimmy's entrance, and as such, confronts the spectator with violence. Much like with previous characters, the use of violence in performance aids the positioning of sympathy from the spectator, and Jimmy is likewise situated to benefit from that sympathy. His marginalised position within the hegemony and his isolated speech at the end of the play offer a lasting impression on the audience as a sympathetic victim, as if Pinter is indeed provoking the audience to action. It is, however, obfuscated through Jimmy's abstract language, and our attempt to relate to his experience

is undermined. When he states "I had a name. It was Jimmy. People called me Jimmy. That was my name" (Pinter, 1993: 47), the connection between the events outside is made clear, and yet his use of the past tense here implies a removal of his name, as if it no longer belongs to him. Again, the connection to black oppression and violence becomes subtly suggested, with the implication of black identity being taken away. And yet, this depersonalisation of Jimmy detracts from our attempt to relate to him, for without a name, the comfort of an identity is not shared, and the sense of 'otherness' becomes more explicit. Alienated and isolated from the sympathetic yet distant spectator, Jimmy exists in a singular space, representative of a powerless minority, unable to know or connect to his oppressors. Lloyd continues to pose questions about exclusion to the audience in *Celebration*, this time through the character of the Waiter.

With *Pinter Six* combining the two plays into one evening, the cast performed both plays, and Lloyd's decision to cast Popoola as the Waiter presents similar arguments to those in *Party Time*, but as the character has more interaction with the others, there is more opportunity to explore how Lloyd was responding to these issues of identity and oppression. For Drew Milne, in a chapter for *The Cambridge Companion to Harold Pinter*, both plays provide an opportunity to discomfort the audience, forcing them to engage with the dramatic action and analyse their own biases. He argues that "These plays seem designed to make admirers of Pinter's work uncomfortable by confronting audiences and readers with the politics of complacency and cynicism that coexist with the global realities of torture and oppression." (Milne, 2009: 238) Milne's implication that the plays exist to challenge the perception of his work suggests the extent to which Pinter was making intentional choices to criticise oppression in a much more overt way than he had in his earlier work. For the Lloyd production, the relationship between the white diners and the Waiter as inherently subservient to them was indicative of oppression and the imbalance in racial power. As he navigates his role and the dynamic between the guests, the Waiter has notable repeated interjections into their conversations, and though his interjections often appear harmless, they represent an invasion of the diners' space. Lloyd interpreted this as a much more literal invasion, as Popoola would often reach over and force his way into the conversation physically. Not only did this highlight the desperate desire for inclusion but also the lack of awareness of social etiquette and acceptable behaviour. This heightened, almost farcical presentation was in noticeable contrast to the slow, painful movements of Jimmy, and yet Popoola never reached the point of clowning, remaining comparatively grounded. However, the physicality and use of space was used to isolate and highlight the Waiter's desperation

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for inclusion, which ultimately served to indicate his difference. Again, Lloyd's interpretation of the character suggested the extent to which the Waiter is regarded as 'other', and though not necessarily a victim of violence, he is constantly dismissed, thereby positioning him as subordinate amongst the group. For Lloyd, both Jimmy and the Waiter's isolation offers a connection between them, and their powerlessness to challenge that hierarchy is representative of the marginalisation of black masculinity. It is also important to acknowledge that the Waiter's desire was seemingly not to establish a separate, empowered black masculinity, but instead to connect to and align himself with the white, hegemonic masculinity. With each speech, his attempts to connect with his oppressors became increasingly desperate, yet his absurdly comic references to his grandfather's interactions with the most influential and recognisable names of the twentieth century continued to fall on deaf ears.

Much like the fantastical creations from Liz and Lambert respectively, the Waiter's interjections provide him with a comforting fantasy that briefly shields him from the reality of his oppression, yet in Lloyd's interpretation, the Waiter's connection with his grandfather provides a more poignant connection. The absurd stories of his grandfather provided him – as a person of colour – with a connection to the prejudices withstood by previous generations, and through the boasting of his grandfather's life, challenged the ignorance and superiority exemplified by the guests present at each table. In the review for *The Times*, Ann Treneman commented on the intellectual divide between the guests and the Waiter, stating that "It is the waiter […] who provides the intellectual depth here" (Treneman, 2019). This observation by Treneman infers the unjust hierarchy between the two groups and that the Waiter's knowledge of these historical figures should be enough to subvert the status quo. However, the Waiter's isolation is not enough to undermine the concerted efforts of both the men and women to support the established hegemony. This desire for intimacy, connection and power is again indicative of Prentice's notion of domination, but where *Party Time* presents the outcome of oppression and violence, *Celebration* suggests the futile search for power amongst those who reinforce that oppression. The Waiter continuously fails to attain that level of intimacy and acceptance from the diners, as the disruptions are clearly unwanted, and they are often dismissed or ignored entirely, forcing the Waiter back into his subordinate role at each attempt to reach out. By the end of the play, much like Jimmy's final speech at the end of *Party Time*, the Waiter is left isolated on stage and continues to reminisce about his grandfather. When considered under the interpretation of racial oppression, the final speech describes how he is unable to fight against the embedded

marginalisation that surrounds him, stating "I can't find the door to get out" (Pinter, 2000: 72). Once again, reminiscing about his grandfather provides him comfort and hope, as he describes how he was able to resist and break away from oppression, as he describes how "My grandfather got out of it. He got right out of it" (2000: 72). But in Lloyd's production, we were left unsure as to whether to believe this is a reliable memory of successful resistance, or whether it was a continuation of his earlier fantasies. The Waiter's subsequent reliance on the manipulation of memory provides comfort against his failure to connect with those around him, again a victim of a hegemony that benefits from his oppression. As such, Lloyd's positioning of Jimmy and the Waiter was one that succeeded in presenting a sympathetic and provocative depiction of racial injustice beyond white hegemonic masculinity but retained the impact of Pinter's writing that criticises such systems of power.

Violence, Partnerships and Fantasy

Much like in previous plays, there are recurring behaviours and characteristics that constitute the hegemonic masculinity, and in *Party Time* and *Celebration*, Pinter revisits those seen in his earliest work: the comfort of personal fantasy, and the perpetration of violence. This section focuses on how Pinter has developed his approach to these characteristics in his writing, and how these behaviours impact the formation of a hegemonic masculinity in each play. In *Party Time*, the characters are seen mingling amongst each other, secure in their isolation from the events outside. As we see them discussing various topics from the mundane to the malicious, there are opportunities for those who gain and maintain power throughout the course of the play to establish accepted behaviours within the hegemony.

In the opening scene, Terry is seen promoting his club to Gavin, where his almost salesman-like description of the facilities available in his club is an attempt to appeal to the superior man. Even in this opening exchange, there are two important aspects of the hegemony that are established, firstly that Gavin – as the host – is immediately associated with power through his ownership of the space, and secondly, the significance of the 'club'. Terry appeals to Gavin through his descriptions of this 'club' as representative of comfort, exclusivity, and privilege. Already, Pinter suggests the hierarchy of power between the two men as tied to the notion of influence and exclusivity, and this exchange demonstrates Terry's desire for influence but also establishes how membership in such a club and the privilege that it brings, becomes crucial to hegemony between the men. However, there is initially a separation between Terry's attempts to promote his club and Gavin's sense of nostalgia and fantasy. Terry is interrupted twice by Gavin, who latches onto his description

of 'hot towels' and instantly takes control of the conversation, leading to his preferred topic – his childhood past. Gavin's reminiscences about his past serve to distance himself from Terry and indicates Terry's inability to relate to that fantasy, exposing his lack of control as he continually tries to discuss his club once again. In Lloyd's production, this exchange took place as the two men stood separated, blocked by other performers as if representing the lack of connection between them. Stood in dark black suits, covered by a bleached white light in the dark void of the stage space, we could observe how both men seem both distant from one another, and yet as the other performers look at them, we are reminded that their exchange is far from private. This lack of privacy is connected to Terry's desperate attempts to relate to Gavin, and through this small exchange, the significance of understanding how each character attempts to maintain control of the conversation and how that affects the power dynamics within the play can be clearly seen. Terry's inability to penetrate Gavin's fantasy positions him as comparatively ineffectual in gaining his favour, and this leads to the first instances of hostility between him and his wife Dusty. It is because of his lack of control, and threatened masculinity, that Terry attempts to regain his status through threats against Dusty.

Much like in other of Pinter's plays, the hegemonic masculinity of the play functions because it is dependent on the complicity and/or subordination of women, and behaviours that reinforce that hierarchy are encouraged. This is particularly pivotal in the relationships between partners, as the notion of male control of their wife/partner provides a clear demonstration of the male performance of the established behaviours of dominance. Throughout the play, successful attempts to dominate women allow men to maintain power and reinforce hegemonic masculinity. These challenges often materialise in the form of prototypicality threats: suggesting one is atypical of the established gender norms (Alonso, 2018). Clear examples of prototypicality threats can be found in the relationship between Terry and his wife Dusty. Much like Emma and Robert in *Betrayal*, Terry's ability to adopt the established normative masculine behaviours and Dusty's performance of a subversive femininity demonstrates a clear conflict in their partnership. Dusty's opening line outlines her concern for her brother Jimmy, which contradicts the subtle approach of the men when discussing the violence outside of their private space. She openly questions Terry and refuses to conform to the accepted topic of conversation, even challenging his status in front of Gavin. Dusty's behaviour in this exchange either conveys a naivety to the expectations of the group, or it is an intentional subversion of their dominance. In both instances, she threatens not only Terry's status within their group by rejecting the expected

feminine behaviours of complicity and subservience, but also threatens his masculinity. In attempting to further her own agenda, Dusty's uses a prototypicality threat against Terry, challenging him to provide information and relinquish power to her. Terry refuses to disclose the information she desires and provides a clear counter-threat, stating "Nobody is discussing this. Nobody's discussing it, sweetie. Do you follow me? Nothing's happened to Jimmy. And if you're not a good girl I'll spank you" (Pinter, 1993: 5). Terry attempts to regain control by supressing Dusty's rebellion, isolating her from Gavin and Melissa, and further establishes the importance of controlling the conversation to Terry's masculine performance. In using words such as 'sweetie' and 'girl', Terry attempts to portray himself as the affectionate husband, but it also serves to accentuate the patronising and oppressive linguistic tactics he adopts throughout the play.

In the production, this distance between Terry and Dusty became much more apparent as she sat on a chair furthest from the centre, representing her isolation from the rest of the group, including her husband. This physical representation of her marginalisation suggests the extent to which Dusty's voice is belittled and undermined by others in the group, and that her moments of resistance are likewise ineffectual. For Natasha Tripney, who reviewed the production for *The Stage*, this sense of isolation became increasingly uncomfortable, and remarked on how Lloyd failed to remain sympathetic to feminine oppression:

> The way that women are repeatedly belittled in both plays is also awkward. While it's part of the landscape being satirised, it does feel as if Pinter was less interested in interrogating this particular power imbalance and, though the characters played by Kingsley [Suki] and Matsuura [Dusty] reveal their unease and contempt through little gestures, it still strikes a sour note.

(Tripney, 2019)

Tripney's specific focus on Dusty suggests how Lloyd highlighted the isolation and unease felt by the character in such moments of subjugation. The production succeeded in accurately presenting the experience of the character, establishing a level of sympathy for Dusty, as we remain critical of the language and methods of the other guests. However, Tripney argues this sympathy is yet undermined by the uncomfortable reliance Pinter has on the abuse and marginalisation of women to show masculine power, suggesting once more an awkward relationship between his criticism of domination and his presentation of feminine empowerment. Lloyd focused on this relationship in the production and did allow

for a level of sympathy for each woman as victims of the hegemony, and yet it is clear that critics of the production were concerned about how he presented Pinter's arguably restrictive depiction of femininity.

In the premiere production of the play at the Almeida Theatre in 1991, directed by Pinter, critics saw Pinter's depiction of women in the play as largely sympathetic. The relationship between Terry and Dusty was indicative of how Pinter's writing continued to indicate women's power over men, much like that seen in *Betrayal* and *The Homecoming*. Maureen Paton, in her review of the production for the *Daily Express*, saw their relationship as indicative of a positive change in Pinter's approach to women, arguing that "Terry is the perfect Pinter hero, full of brittle chit-chat with a brutal talent for the calculated insult. […] Pinter's plays harass women as part of the art of urban alienation. It is an unexpected pleasure to find that the 61-year-old playwright has mellowed sufficiently to let them challenge the men" (Paton, 1991). Paton's response acknowledges how Terry seemingly represents the archetypical Pinter man, even indirectly recognising his proficiency with linguistic threat. It is important to note that Paton also argues that Pinter's depiction of women's suffering is indicative of an intent to alienate his audience, but how *Party Time* – in particular the character of Dusty – demonstrates a change in Pinter's approach, showing a willingness to allow women to undermine men in the play. I argue that this approach has been consistent throughout his writing, though some examples of Pinter's women have been more effective in presenting a sympathetic presentation of feminine empowerment, and yet Paton's response suggests how critics of these productions demonstrated a positive change in their awareness of the impact of Pinter's depiction of women compared to the reception of his earlier work.

As the play continues, the victimisation of Dusty becomes more apparent, as not only does Terry successfully maintain power in response to Dusty's prototypicality threats, but in doing so, he also establishes the subordination of women as a normative behaviour within the hegemony. The rewards of enforcing this dominance over Dusty strengthens the feeling of superiority for Terry, and the depiction of this oppression is much more subtle than that seen in Jimmy's later entrance. Yet, such moments of masculine domination are no less vital in allowing us to remain critical of the hegemonic masculinity in the play, positioning the spectator as sympathetic to Dusty's attempts at resistance. For the couple, their desire for control undermines their intimacy with one another, and this becomes more extreme as the play continues, as Terry's reliance on much more overt displays of dominance are realised through threats of violence. This dependence on violence by men relates to Connell's

arguments surrounding the maintenance of hegemony, as she states "Most men do not attack or harass women; but those who do are unlikely to think themselves deviant. On the contrary they usually feel they are entirely justified, that they are exercising a right. They are authorized by an ideology of supremacy" (Connell, 2005: 83). It is this feeling of supremacy that stands as a foundation from which the violence and oppression is realised in the play through the adoption of threatening behaviours associated with domestic violence. But Connell's argument here also indicates how we can realise a wider criticism of supremacy in the play, by understanding that masculine domination is reinforced by violence against women both within oppressed and privileged groups.

Terry's subordination of Dusty occurs throughout the play, as in a later exchange, the couple discuss "being fucked on boats" (Pinter, 1993: 21) with Gavin and Melissa, and it is then that Terry threatens Dusty's status, not just as his wife, but as a woman within the established hegemony. He states, "she doesn't like being fucked on boats" which indicates her unwillingness for sex, and Melissa's contribution of "I thought everyone liked that" (1993: 21) supports sexual availability as a complimentary feminine behaviour. The combined prototypicality threats of Terry and Melissa successfully undermine Dusty's power, portraying her as both an unacceptable wife and a failure as a woman. This exchange demonstrates that Dusty's femininity is exposed to challenge by not only men, but by women as well, as Melissa's overt complicity in the subordination of other women allows her to gain acceptance by men, thereby gaining power within the hegemony. It is in this exchange that the play depicts a hostile hegemony that goes beyond the relationships seen in previous plays, where women were often reliant on shared feelings of oppression to resist masculine domination. In *Party Time*, this hostility between women solidifies how the desperate desire for power between the characters in the play forces both men and women to conform to ruthless tactics to attain and maintain that power. However, Dusty's severely weakened position does not hinder her attempts to undermine those around her, as she continues to ask, "Does anyone know what's happened to my brother Jimmy?" (1993: 22). Although she lacks the information she seeks, which would also serve to position her in a lower status, she remains defiant, and her refusal to comply with the desires of her husband as well as other women, positions her as isolated, and yet tenuously empowered.

The following exchange between Terry and Dusty demonstrates their conflict of agenda, and once again, Terry's use of passive-aggressive threats shows how he tries to maintain face in front of the others whilst also attempting to undermine Dusty's status. Dusty's power comes from her awareness that by rebelling against Terry's authority and

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exposing his inability to maintain control over her, she can undermine and damage his status. Dusty's persistence in pursuing her agenda, even in the face of possible physical retribution from Terry, demonstrates a resistance against oppression that resonates throughout the play. Terry's desire for control is consistently undermined by his wife and any display of resistance from Dusty impacts on his own image in relation to hegemonic masculinity. So, it is to be expected that Gavin's subsequent prototypicality threat against Terry comes in the form of his suggestion that Terry cannot control his wife. In the same exchange, the couple are both ignored by Gavin and Melissa, as Terry becomes a victim of the same treatment experienced by Dusty, and his attempts to gain Gavin's favour are dismissed. It is in this way that Dusty's undermining of her husband sabotages his desire for power, and in sharing their isolation from Gavin and Melissa, positions him as ineffectual and emasculated.

It is only later that we observe the couple removed from the other guests and that they reveal that beneath their desire for control, they expose a shared bond over fantasies of violence and sex. Penelope Prentice's arguments help to contextualise this dynamic, where the relationship between desire, intimacy and justice is crucial to the ways in which men and women in Pinter's plays reinforce domination even when sacrificing their connection to others (2000: 305). Terry and Dusty's relationship is representative of that conflict, as both characters undermine one another, they fail to understand and listen to each other, and in their attempts to dominate they are isolated from the rest of the group. It is in this severely weakened state that the couple breaks away, and Pinter takes this opportunity to show the two in a rare moment of intimacy, yet still reliant on a dynamic of domination and violence. Terry is the first to make an overt association between violence and sex, explicitly threatening Dusty, "And if you're not a good girl I'll spank you" (Pinter, 1993: 5). This multi-layered line shows Terry's proficiency in softening his threats of violence, suggesting how Dusty must remain compliant to his demands, both patronising and infantilising his wife. However, this is then textured by an implication of sexual gratification and punishment, as the use of the word 'spank' connotes ideas of paternal domination through violence. Such a line is inherently hegemonic, as it reveals how Terry attempts to position Dusty as unquestionably feminine, compliant, and subordinate. It is in this exchange that we may draw parallels to Pinter's earliest work, specifically in the relationship between Meg and Stanley in *The Birthday Party*, as their relationship often relies on infantilisation and subtle threats of violence. However, Stanley's apparent rejection of Meg's maternal treatment of him contrasts with Terry and Dusty's seemingly consensual

dynamic of dominance and subordination. Even in the premiere production of the play, critics recognised the connection between sex and violence in the play, with Jane Edwardes' review in *Time Out* offering the most explicit observation. She argued that "Pock marks of violence erupt the room as the only woman to question what is happening is supressed by her oikish, get-rich-quick husband. As so often with Pinter, sex and violence seem inextricably linked" (Edwardes, 1991). For Edwardes, the connection between sex and violence was seemingly symptomatic of his writing until this point, and as discussed in previous chapters, men and women's relationships in Pinter's plays often rely on such overt displays of power to maintain dominance.

As mentioned in previous chapters, there has been continuous debate about the legitimacy of Pinter's sympathetic depiction of feminine empowerment, where violence against women stems from a misogynist bias in the later plays. Drew Milne has criticised Pinter's depiction of misogyny in *Party Time*, repeating concerns about his plays adopting an inherently misogynist perspective. Milne argues that "Where the structure of Pinter's plays excludes a political understanding of women's agency then the status of women as objects of abuse, fear and desire is not simply objective." (Milne, 2009: 240) For Milne, Pinter's presentation of women – including Dusty – not only conveys a limiting perspective on her agency but in doing so, suggests Pinter's misogynistic bias. If, as Milne suggests, the play excludes a political understanding of women's agency, meaning they do not fully explore or acknowledge women's perspectives and actions, then women are not merely portrayed objectively, and thus, suggests a complexity to their opportunity for empowerment. The continued reference to violence and abuse against her, especially when considering Terry's repeated attempts to objectify and silence her, exposes Pinter's restrictive perspective of Dusty's agency. Much like the discourse surrounding the earlier plays, scholarship remains critical of Pinter's sympathetic depiction of abuse of women, and *Party Time* continues to present situations in which women are restricted in similar ways to that seen in *The Homecoming*, *The Birthday Party*, and *Betrayal*.

Milne's analysis is ironically limiting in itself, however, for without recognising particular moments of women's empowerment, he is similarly unable to see the ways in which women subvert and challenge a misogynistic reading of the play. Dusty's ability to use the connection between sex and violence to undermine her husband challenges Milne's interpretation and provides evidence against a possible misogynistic reading of the couple's interplay. Ann C. Hall, in contrast with Milne, argues that Pinter's depiction of women in the play is empowering, and yet they are only able to do so when they adopt the same

oppressive behaviours as men, where "With *Party Time*, Pinter presents a brave new world, a world in which a woman is just as tyrannical and oppressive as the men. She, too, participates in patriarchal oppression" (Hall, 2014: 248) When Dusty is threatened by Terry, unsurprisingly, Dusty does not comply, instead teasing Terry about Gavin's possible attraction towards her through the implication of her possible unfaithfulness. Here, we begin to see the evidence to support Hall's argument, as Dusty adopts the behaviours of hegemony to regain power. Immediately, Dusty's reaction is to suggest how she not only is wanted by other men, but also how her sexual autonomy cannot be restricted, completely subverting Terry's expectation. However true the relationship between Dusty and Gavin may be is of no significance to their dynamic, as the mere threat of infidelity is a clear prototypicality threat to Terry, whose almost petulant response, "No he bloody won't. Oh no he bloody won't" (1993: 29) demonstrates how aware Dusty is of the weaknesses of her husband and how much control she can have over him. There is then a clear shift in her approach, as she begins feigning submission to him, commenting on how she has let him down, before eventually revealing her violent fantasies. She begins with repeatedly questioning Terry about him killing her, as she asks "Do you think that if you put an end to me that would be the end of everything for everyone? Will everything and everyone die with me?" (1993: 30). This almost child-like curiosity suggests Dusty's narcissistic desire for death at the hands of her husband, and as Terry proceeds to engage with her, it indicates a consensual sexual fantasy based on not just violence but her own death. Terry directly refers to the sexual element of their fantasy, saying how "You'll love it. But I'm not going to tell you which method we'll use. I just want you to have a lot of sexual anticipation" (1993: 31). In this exchange, the connection between violence, death and sexual gratification is made explicit, and is linked to the gendered power dynamic between the couple.

Terry's desire for control and ownership is conveyed through his complicity for violence against Dusty through punishment and his withholding of information from her. Dusty's desire to rebel against her subordination, and the successful undermining of Terry's power is then contrasted with her desire to be a victim of violence and the eventual relinquishing of her body to him. Within the context of the hegemony, the relationship between Dusty and Terry reveals the contrasting aspects of masculinity and femininity, for Terry's attempts to gain power is reliant on his domination of his wife, and while he fails in front of others, Dusty's confession that she enjoys such violence against her indicates her submission to his power, ultimately supporting his hegemonic status. For Dusty, that relinquishing of power only happens once she has successfully undermined Terry's power,

and as such her empowerment precedes her subjugation. Dusty's nuanced position of feminine resistance does provide her with notable autonomy, and this freedom becomes a means to which she ultimately chooses to submit to masculine domination for her own pleasure.

This exchange recontextualises their earlier conflicts, as Dusty's rebellion and Terry's subsequent threats are arguably part of an ongoing sexual roleplay in which they receive gratification from such a dynamic. Each character's moments of intimacy are reliant on the association with violence, whether that is against the self or others. This offers an incredibly problematic critique on the positioning of violence within the play, as Dusty and Terry's eventual complicity to violence is the most damning aspect of their relationship. Once again, the actions of the guests necessitate and reinforce violence as an essential component of their partnership, and the gratification both Terry and Dusty receive from their shared fantasy of violence is indicative of their ignorance of the assumed violence off-stage. For Prentice, Dusty's rebellion in the face of powerlessness throughout the play is tied to her relationship with Jimmy's suffering:

> To praise Dusty in *Party Time* for fearlessly confronting perpetrators of atrocity and torture is not to praise her superior imagination or greater emotional depth but to ignore that what propels her is her close-hand experience with it— her brother Jimmy is the one being tortured and is about to die at the hands of her host and his other guests. She has no power to save him.

> (2000: cxi)

This argument by Prentice suggests how Dusty's desire to undermine the power of the other guests is because of wanting to save Jimmy. However, I disagree that Dusty's awareness of her brother's suffering is enough to position her as unquestionably sympathetic. I argue that Dusty's own complicity for violence undermines any ineffectual challenge she makes to that system of power. Though she may share somewhat in the feelings of isolation and subjugation that Jimmy is subjected to, her protest ultimately fails to make any noticeable change, and Jimmy's reveal at the end of the play is a final indication of Dusty's powerlessness. As a victim to the subordination at the hands of both men and women, Dusty chooses not to comply with the feminine norms and through her challenges to Terry she presents a resistance to the oppression embedded within the hegemony. Yet, by being removed from power, her resistance fails to make significant changes, and she therefore remains a victim of the oppression that reinforces hegemonic masculinity. *Party Time* is

arguably one of Pinter's most overt criticisms of privilege and power, but it is also indicative of the ways in which hegemonic masculinity can be maintained through the personal and communal desire for violence.

Terry and Dusty are not alone in their fantasising over violence and sex, for in both plays Pinter exposes how characters can rely on such fantasies to provide comfort. The desperate need for external validation is a response to compensate for a fragile sense of self, yet when confronted with their inadequacies, the characters will often search for security through the fabrication of their own lives. When faced with potential threats, it appears almost instinctive that these characters counter with aggression or violence, as Prentice argues, "Once conflict is ignited, all Pinter's characters fight blindly to assert dominance to preserve identity" (Prentice, 2000: 306). This preservation that Prentice describes is fundamental to the relationships in both plays, where violence is so crucial to the maintenance of power. Much like with Stanley in *The Birthday Party*, or Gus in *The Dumb Waiter*, preservation of identity is crucial to the preservation of life, and where violence is enforced, death becomes an inevitable result of failing to conform. In *Party Time* and *Celebration*, the characters' ability to control their self-narrative, their connection with past truths or fabrication of entire fantasies strengthens their identities and allows them to resist marginalisation. The apparent fictionalisation of memory and the association with sexual fantasy is at its most explicit in the exchange between Liz and Charlotte in *Party Time*. Liz begins by discussing a man's most attractive features, which immediately subverts the typical masculine behaviour of objectifying women, with both women gaining power through the feminisation of the unknown man. The romanticism of her description however then conflicts with a following line, "But that bitch had her legs all over him" (Pinter, 1993: 10). Liz's ongoing description of the woman portrays her as a rival, adopting a derogatory vocabulary – typically used by men – to discriminate against the other woman. Much like with Melissa and Dusty, there is a clear rivalry between women when attempting to conform to the established hegemony, and the desire for women to be accepted by men suggests how Liz and Charlotte have accepted their positions of subordination.

The contrast between the romanticism of Liz's attraction for the man and her description of the woman becomes more prevalent as the exchange continues, as Liz's account begins to victimise the man. With her fantasy validated by Charlotte, Liz accentuates the distinction between the man and woman, as her characterisation of the man as "a wounded deer" (1993: 12) further presents him as weak and vulnerable, whilst she describes how she could have "cut [her rival's] throat" and calls her a "nymphomaniac

slut" (1993: 12). The explicit sexualisation of the woman contrasts with the romanticism of the man, and Liz's fantasy allows her to depict herself as his potential saviour and the deserving recipient of his affection. It is also important to acknowledge the overt threat of violence by Liz, once again adopting hegemonic masculine behaviours to assert dominance. The imagery of a 'wounded deer' also implies an almost beast-like, untamed quality of the man, which also supports an animalistic, primal quality to her fantasy of masculinity. Charlotte continues to support Liz's fantasy by introducing the notion of 'love', which not only adds to the romanticism of Liz's fantasy relationship with the man but also portrays her as a victim, providing comfort and reinforcing her account of the event. Liz's failure to win the man through sexual gratification forces her to regain control through the fictionalisation of her account, portraying the man as victim and the other woman as manipulator.

The characterisation of the woman reaches a climax at the end of the exchange, as Charlotte tells Liz that the woman "raped the man you love" (1993: 13). In describing the act as 'rape', she associates the sex between them with violence, but also continues to imply how the woman's dominance over the unknowing man is appalling to both women in the exchange. Drew Milne identifies such language as fundamental to the relationship between power and sexual violence in the play, where "The dominant currency of violence in these plays is misogynist abuse and connections between rape, prostitution and female submission." (Milne, 2009: 239) In this way, Liz and Charlotte's use of language in this exchange replicates the misogynistic language used by the men in the play, affording them power, however, positions them as complicit to their own subjugation. Such language is not limited to *Party Time*, and Milne discusses the continued efforts by Pinter to implement such misogynistic language in other plays of the time such as *Mountain Language* and *One for the Road*. For Liz and Charlotte, the exchange between them indicates a desire for control, and like Terry and Dusty, their shared fantasy is reliant on violence and sex. As women who much more closely represent the established hegemony, Liz and Charlotte must adopt typically masculine positions and conform to the discrimination of another woman to maintain that control. The truth about the events they discuss is inconsequential, yet they demonstrate an ability to manipulate it to validate their identity, notably through the objectification and emasculation of the man, and the overt sexualisation of the woman. All these tactics indicate that both women can utilise the established hegemonic masculine behaviours for the maintenance of power, both through supporting one another's narratives, and the reinforcing of violence against women. Yet, these acts serve to demonstrate a

complicit engagement with the existing hegemony, and although they participate in the subjugation of both man and woman, it merely reinforces the unequal gender relations of the play.

In *Celebration*, the power struggles between partners continue to dominate the play, and the desire for control still resonates throughout, particularly in the relationship between Russell and Suki. In their opening exchange, the similarities between the couple and Terry and Dusty are clear. Russell's first line, "They believe in me" (Pinter, 2000: 6), displays an interesting similarity to Terry's desire for external validation, but where Gavin represents the target of Terry's attempts to gain favour, Russell's benefactors are largely abstract. The introduction of an unknown, judgemental force provides a thematic connection between this play and Pinter's earliest work, offering parallels to the unseen forces in *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Birthday Party*. Much like Ben and Goldberg in those two plays, Russell attempts to reassure himself about his aptitude and value to an unknown, unseen external power, which motivates his behaviour throughout the play. In Lloyd's production, he utilised very similar imagery to that seen between Terry and Dusty to convey the distance between the two characters here, as they each sat on either end of a long dining table, forced to speak over the other guests. Such a separation between the two also heightened the performances, forcing the performers to carry their voices across the stage to one another, and yet it conveyed a layer of sympathy for the characters, as their inability to close the distance and achieve the closeness they desire was restricted from the outset. This sympathy established by the spectator is indicative of the ways in which Pinter's work can resonate and challenge its audiences. As Basil Chiasson argues, "Because Pinter's dramas have a significant capacity to affect, and because they do enable spectators to enter into striking relations with the playworld, one finds various arguments in Pinter's scholarship for bonds of empathy and sympathy" (2017: 7). It is this sentiment by Chiasson that aligns with my own interpretation of the power of Pinter's writing, for the ability to provoke the spectator through contrasting positions of sympathy, discomfort and judgement is where performances of Pinter's work thrive.

Compared to the reception of Pinter's production of *Party Time* in 1991, who saw Pinter's depiction of feminine empowerment as a positive shift in approach to that of his earlier plays, his production of *Celebration* at the Almeida Theatre in 2000 received some criticism for his consistent misogynistic approach. For Charles Spencer, who reviewed the production for the *Daily Telegraph*, the depiction of almost caricature-like women whose exaggerated sexuality did little to convey a sympathetic approach to feminine power,

arguing that "The men are familiar Pinter types – thugs with a strong line in fake smiles and heavy menace – and there is a suggestion that they may be involved in crime or arms dealing. The women are the tarty variety who appear with such monotonous and misogynistic regularity in the playwright's work" (Spencer, 2000). Spencer's distinction between men and women in the play suggests how Pinter's exaggerated presentation of privilege and power was representative of his own misogyny. However, Spencer's interpretation was not shared by many, as other critics such as David Benedict, felt that Pinter's depiction of women in the play revealed women's superiority over the men. In his review of the production in the *Independent*, Benedict argued that "In *Celebration* the wideboy-made-good men may preen like peacocks, it is the women who run rings around them to glorious comic effect" (Benedict, 2000). It is evident that critics of the earlier productions were conflicted about Pinter's depiction of the inequality between men and women in the play, and yet it is arguably Pinter's strength in his writing that allows for such conflicting interpretations. The critics' responses to the original production exemplify the arguments of Chiasson, demonstrating how Pinter's writing can provoke audiences to both judgement and sympathy for the character's actions.

In brief moments of vulnerability, as shown by Russell's confession of dependence on the external force that he attempts to impress, Lloyd's production also provided an opportunity for audiences to sympathise with the characters, as if they were confessing their secrets to a crowd of strangers. Paul Taylor, in his review of the production for *The Independent*, saw this vulnerability as contrasting to the play's otherwise critical perspective on its characters, saying how Pinter "allows them moments of stray vulnerability and these make their squiffy sentimentality about its complimentary gherkins not wholly despicable" (Taylor, 2019). These moments that Taylor describes position the spectator as having to navigate a tenuous sympathy for the characters' underlying insecurities, and yet it contrasts with their unapologetic misogyny, threat, and abuse. This position has arguably become synonymous with how Pinter's plays challenge the spectator, forcing them to recognise and work through their discomfort, much like the characters. We crave moments of reassurance and comfort in this uneasy journey with the characters on stage, and we continue to witness how characters navigate that relationship as Suki begins providing the reassurance that Russell seeks. However, her intentions are not entirely selfless, as she goes on to describe how she benefits from his power and wealth. Suki expresses how she wishes he can be rich, so she can be rewarded with material possessions such as "houses and panties" (Pinter, 2000: 6), which serves to introduce a dynamic of co-dependence between the

couple. Suki offers validation and emotional security to Russell, and he provides material possessions in return, which then depicts her as a stereotype of the feminine; one whose apparent ignorance, lack of ambition and reliance on financial support from her male partner implies her lack of power and autonomy. Suki initially presents herself as complicit to her own subordination, however, the following exchange quickly highlights her ability to control the narrative as she undermines Russell's attempts to maintain power, and the focus of our sympathy shifts towards her.

Russell takes the opportunity to admit fault, with reference to a particular transgression with a secretary, attempting to appeal to Suki whilst diminishing the significance of the event and portraying himself as remorseful. Already the relationship begins to fracture as Russell admits to betraying Suki's fidelity, and after Suki's initial challenges to his narrative, his attempts to regain control appear more desperate, stating "She was a scrubber. A scrubber. They're all the same, these secretaries, these scrubbers" (Pinter, 2000: 7). Russell's repeated use of the word 'scrubber' provides a parallel to Liz's description of the rival women in *Party Time*, indicating a clear attempt to derogate the unknown secretary and to portray her as both manipulative and sexually exploitative. This continued attempt to maintain power through the subjugation of women is a repeated behaviour within Pinter's hegemonies, and Russell's language also echoes that of Lenny in *The Homecoming* and his violent treatment of sex workers. Russell's following lines, "I'm being honest. You won't find many like me. I fell for it. I've admitted it. She just twisted me round her little finger" (2000: 7) aim to depict himself as the victim; remorseful and penitent. For Charles Grimes, this attempt at sympathy is tied to an inherent self-pitying political criticism, as he argues, "Here Pinter shows how empowered elites see themselves: not as secure but as constantly imperiled by those below them. Not only do these people want to control the world; they want us to pity them for the difficulty of being who they are" (Grimes, 2005: 130). This self-victimisation that Grimes highlights is indicative of the perpetuation of the hierarchy of power in the play and suggests how Russell's admission is largely insincere and merely serves as a way to dismiss responsibility and maintain power. So far, Russell has successfully maintained power and has established several key hegemonic behaviours: narrative control, the subordination of women, and the desire for external validation, all of which can be found in the relationship between Terry and Dusty. Like Dusty, Suki reveals how capable she is in challenging her marginalisation and regaining power through the manipulation of her partner.

For Suki, her latent empowerment stems from her awareness and exploitation of Russell's insecurities and weaknesses, manipulating him and threatening his masculinity. This intimate understanding of her partner suggests a surprisingly healthy dynamic between the two, however, much like with other partnerships in Pinter's work, such intimate knowledge can be weaponised. She begins by directly challenging him, stating, "I thought she twisted you round *your* little finger" (2000: 7), using the obvious sexual innuendo as a prototypicality threat against Russell's masculine anxiety, indicating his inferiority and challenging his narrative. She continues by refusing to conform to his account of events and begins to imply her own past sexual exploits through another innuendo, "I've been behind a few filing cabinets" (2000: 8). Once again, Suki's use of innuendo masterfully suggests her previous sexual experiences whilst also withholding a detailed account, forcing Russell to desperately search for answers which cannot be found. Much like in *Party Time*, the domination of women strengthens the performance of hegemonic masculinity, and when that is undermined by Suki, Russell's status and masculinity is threatened. In her final speech of the scene, Suki demonstrates how she can adopt the patronising vocabulary that is often used by men to reinforce the subordination of women, to challenge the hegemony.

As Mark Taylor-Batty argues, Suki is able to subvert "the male presumption of a right to define, construct and own women" and adopts "female strategies of resistance that include taking control of the vocabulary of that male discourse" (Taylor-Batty, 2014: 88). This argument by Taylor-Batty succinctly contextualises the resistant position in Suki operates, and much like the women of earlier Pinter plays, her subversion of masculine tactics of domination allows her to supplant Russell. However, this relationship of conflict and domination is one which again undermines the level of intimacy that the characters desire. As both Russell and Suki respond to threats by manipulation, ignorance, and insincerity, they only become more distant. Unlike Dusty and Terry, there is no shared fantasy that bridges the couple, there is a shallow competition between them that perpetuates a hegemony reliant on domination. Suki's capable subversion of his desire for affirmation allows her to maintain a dominant position over him. Similar to Terry's childlike response to Dusty's threats, Russell resorts to name-calling, referring to Suki as a 'whore', and in doing so attempts to regain control through the use of the established derogatory vocabulary to suppress her power whilst referring to her past sexual exploits. Yet, once again, Suki demonstrates her skill at nullifying her partner's threats, accepting herself as a 'whore', thereby adopting and subverting the language that reinforces her subjugation. She then continues with repeated prototypicality threats, implying his knowledge of exclusively

feminine experiences as distinctly separate from the masculine, stating "I didn't think men could possibly know what it was like when the wind blows up a girl's skirt. Because men don't wear skirts" (2000: 14). This implication of inherently masculine and feminine experiences not only suggests the separation between the two genders, but in doing so, suggests the futility of each character's desire for connection. Their inability to relate widens the divide between them, and their desire for intimacy is also undermined by their continued isolation from one another. Russell's emasculation at Suki's hands forces him into repetitive responses of petty name-calling, even after his failure to regain control with his previous attempts, and Suki repeatedly ignores them and proceeds to gain the upper hand.

The partnerships of Dusty and Terry, and Suki and Russell, clearly demonstrate the power struggles that represent the unequal gender relations in the two plays, and their awareness of the established hegemonic behaviours allow them to obtain and maintain power between each other as well as within their respective groups. For Terry and Russell, their overt desire for external validation often indicates a desire for male approval as they attempt to conform to the expectations of dominant members within the hegemony. As Taylor-Batty argues, "In both cases, the men read the women's dissimilation as suspect, as a reason to distrust and fear manipulation, due to the consequent magnification of their own inadequacies" (Taylor-Batty, 2014: 60), and it is these inadequacies that feed their desire for power. The maintenance of that power is often at the expense of their respective partners, and Taylor-Batty suggests that the subjugation of women is necessary for men's dominance, and as such, the abuse both men perpetuate becomes essential to the maintenance of hegemony in both plays. Dusty and Suki continually challenge their partners' behaviours, however, and their responses to prototypicality threats, whether they take the form of explicit physical threats or more subtle attempts to gain power, allow them to resist their marginalisation. Much like other Pinter women, epitomised by Ruth in *The Homecoming*, Dusty's determined pursuit of her agenda, and the reference to shared violent sexual fantasies allows her to manipulate her husband's desires for control to regain power in an oppressively masculine environment. For Suki, her ability to manipulate their exchanges, adopting and subverting Russell's tactics for derogating her status, and tempting Russell through the withholding of information reveals his vulnerabilities and in doing so, grants her the advantage.

Where Taylor-Batty argues that this subversion of masculine tactics of domination is indicative of female empowerment, Penelope Prentice sees this is a concern for Pinter's depiction of female autonomy and control. She argues that "No one seems to notice his

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women are largely ineffectual: ineffective in gaining what they want for themselves, any agency over what seems important to their lives or the future of their own families, children or community. Nor is anyone asking, Why not?" (Prentice, cx). It is this dichotomy regarding Pinter's approach to women in his plays that causes a divide in Pinter scholars, but Taylor-Batty's admission that women such as Suki utilise linguistic tactics of domination implies that they do indeed reinforce a desire for domination. As such, Prentice's concerns more accurately capture the essential arguments of both couples' relationships: that the women's subversion and manipulation only offer temporary empowerment, and yet hegemonic masculinity ultimately necessitates their subordination. Through each couple's legitimation of the unequal gender relations upon which the hegemony relies, Pinter suggests how those in positions of privilege allow a destructive hegemonic structure that marginalises women and pressures men to continue.

Memory, Comfort and Reassurance

Celebration marks the final produced stage play written by Pinter, and as such, he provides a final insight into the themes and characteristics prevalent throughout all of his plays. As discussed in previous chapters, the ageing bodies of men often present an outward display of vulnerability and inadequacy. For Max in *The Homecoming*, this is combatted by explicit threats and acts of violence, but also a consistent dependence on fantasy. In *Celebration*, the comedy often derives from the characters' almost farcical ignorance as they dismiss, forget, and question each other in the present. However, it is through the character of Lambert that Pinter draws parallels to his previous characters who similarly rely on the fabrication of the past. When exposing his vulnerability, Lambert begins to reassure himself about how much he is liked by those around him, echoing the need for validation that we observe in Russell. Lambert's focus shifts, suggesting how he relies on his own tenuous reassurance, as he proceeds to confess his love for a 'girl'. However, this girl is not a nostalgic reflection on his past with his wife Julie but refers to another past love, and the romanticism with which he describes his time with her contrasts with his aggressive treatment of Julie throughout the play. Like Liz in *Party Time*, Lambert's desire for control forces him to reflect on memories, and though it may not appear fictionalised, it indicates how he dismisses the reality around him in favour of a more romanticised, peaceful fantasy.

These remarks by Lambert indicate the extent of his hypocritical idealisation and resentment towards women. This girl of his past that he remembers fondly – strongly associated with ideas of love, romance, and happiness – contrasts with his vulgar, aggressive, and abusive treatment of Julie in the present, and yet both resonate with a

hegemony that positions them both as powerless. As Prentice argues, this is a fundamental aspect of how Pinter's characters maintain power, and that "Pinter's characters seem to wander through a past equally invented and remembered, but additionally here used in the present as an arsenal: weaponry to inflict wounds and nearly destroy others" (Prentice, 2000: 402). This destruction described by Prentice is not as explicit as the violence against Jimmy in *Party Time*, but much like that between Dusty and Terry, Lambert's reliance on fantasy and the sense of control offered by the fabrication of the past is indicative of the ways in which the subjugation of women is reinforced. Lambert's desire for control is fully realised in this fiction of the girl, as she remains subject to his will. It is perhaps why Lambert returns to this fantasy of the girl, as unlike Julie – who repeatedly challenges him – she represents a complicit, loving, and subservient femininity. In comparison, Julie's position is threatened by this fantasy and the weaponisation of the past is used by Lambert to undermine her. Lambert's dismissal of his relationship with Julie then serves as a prototypicality threat intended to highlight the insignificance of their love, thereby undermining, and challenging her power.

In response, Julie attempts to regain her lost power through her own reflections of the past, challenging Lambert's romanticism with her own, as she describes how Lambert fell in love with her. She searches for validation of her account from Prue, and through that verification she would be able to strengthen her narrative. The divide between each character's recollection of the past expands as Matt states he "never knew anything" (2000: 35) about Lambert's love for the 'girl', indicating how he has now begun to question his knowledge of his brother's life. Lambert's fixation on the child-like romanticism of his time with the 'girl' further distances him from the rest of the group, and like Julie, Matt attempts to connect with Lambert by relying on his own memory, stating how he saw Lambert on the day he was born. The rest of the exchange consists of several attempts by each character to connect with each other, yet questions are dismissed or ignored entirely, with their attempts to engage with each other ultimately failing. Andrew Wyllie discusses these conflicting narratives, arguing that they are once again indicative of the ways in which men and women engage in a contest for power, where "Memory and the recuperation of the past are the grounds on which a battle for preferred and gender-based versions of the past and present reality is fought" (2017: 93). However, much like in the isolation and sense of loss seen in Pinter's earlier plays such as *Betrayal*, it is these battles that serve to further isolate them from one another. Wyllie's observation is pivotal to understanding how the

characters' fantasies reinforce hegemonic masculinity, suggesting how such conflicts are also inherently gendered.

For Lambert, the fantasy of the girl serves to undermine Julie's status; for Matt, his desire to maintain the male bond with his brother is fractured; and for Julie, she looks for a connection with Prue, attempting to regain control through the shared feminine experience. As such, resorting to fantasy comes as a reaction to being threatened in the present, and in doing so, not only demonstrates a desire for intimacy and connection that they are unable to achieve with those around them but also how it impacts the gender hierarchy of the play. In response to Lambert's initial prototypicality threat in the exchange, Julie not only uses memory as a comfort against his dismissal of their relationship, but through Prue's validation and the eventual fracturing of the male bond between Matt and Lambert, she is able to take advantage of the men's weakness to manipulate them and regain control. The display of female unity between Julie and Prue enables them to not only resist potential prototypicality threats but also to undermine the authority of the men and thus gain power. The hegemony of the play has been established as one which is reliant on the subordination of women, and yet the two sisters demonstrate an ability to challenge their oppression through female bonding and shared experiences. The first instance of female bonding between them is their shared memory of discrimination by their mother-in-law, which indicates a connection once again with female rivalry for sexual ownership of a man. The following exchange consists of Julie and Prue explaining that "All mothers want to be fucked by their sons" (Pinter, 2000: 17), and through Lambert and Matt's repeated misunderstandings – similar to their later conversation – the two women maintain power through unity.

The men at the table are not the only ones who are undermined by the women's control of information as we see in the later exchange with Richard, the owner of the restaurant. Prue's knowledge of her sister and their shared history allows her to threaten Richard's status, as she describes how Julie "said she could make a better sauce than the one on that plate if she pissed into it" (2000: 21). Prue's following speech exemplifies the female unity established in earlier exchanges and by threatening Richard they reinforce the power structure. Much like the Waiter, Richard's position in the restaurant is representative of subservience, and provides an opportunity for the women to regain control. They take advantage of Richard's weakened state to further subjugate him, whilst also threatening Lambert and Matt in their overt attempts at sexual domination. The exchange begins with Prue asking Richard, "Can I thank you? Can I thank you personally? I'd like to thank you myself, in my own way" (2000: 22) and the subtle suggestion of innuendo seeps through,

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which then continues to more overt indications of a sexualised transaction being made. Both women indicate either ignorance or willing rebellion against social etiquette and indicate their desire to "kiss him on the mouth" (2000: 23). It is only after Lambert's interjection of levity that Richard is offered an opportunity to escape, which he immediately utilises, with no acknowledgement of the women's offer. The staff of the restaurant represent an important element of the hegemonic structure in the play, as the restrictions of their profession force them to remain complicit to the actions and requests of the patrons on each table.

In the Lloyd production, this sense of separation between the guests and staff was heightened due to the garish, golden sparkle of the set design and costuming. The guests, all sat along a singular table, creating an almost Last Supper-esque tableau of excess and shallow figures. Much like the fear of exclusion established within *Party Time*, the staff are unable (or unwilling) to challenge the established hegemonic behaviours, which serves to reinforce their own subjugation. As the staff's position of subservience offers little opportunity to challenge their status, they must remain complicit to maintain what power they have. The Waiter acknowledges this fear of exclusion in his response to an implication of dismissal, saying "To be brutally honest, I don't think I'd recover if they did a thing like that. This place is like a womb to me. I prefer to stay in my womb" (2000: 33). The use of the word 'womb' here implies a safety and comfort associated with femininity and motherhood, but also suggests the feminisation of the space itself. When considered in the context of Lloyd's production, the set design by Soutra Gilmour suggests the femininity of the space is as unapologetically garish and bold as the characters themselves. However, in doing so, suggests a connection between space and gender that is not often so overt in Pinter's writing. For critics of the premiere production in 2000, the use of space was crucial in highlighting a much more universal desire for comfort and safety. In John Peter's review of the production for the *Sunday Times*, he argued that "The writing suggests that the words hide more than they display: that behind the public cocksureness there is a private uncertainty, even fear. The posh restaurant is a place of reassurance where you can be what you would like to be" (Peter, 2000). This private sense of fear is arguably a direct connection between *Celebration* and Pinter's earlier plays such as *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter*. As discussed in the previous chapter on those two plays, the significance of space in provoking a sense of control but also a sense of dread was crucial to the formation of a hegemony in those plays. It is interesting then that Pinter's choice to produce *The Room* alongside the debut of *Celebration* is a clear recognition of such a connection. For Peter,

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his interpretation of the premiere production supports the notion that space in Pinter's plays can provide the assurance and comfort desired by the characters within.

Pinter's earlier plays, such as *The Room*, often show the speculation and subsequent fear of the external space as abstract, leading to characters relying on control of the internal space for safety and security. As Andrew Wyllie argues, the reliance on the internal space as comforting and secure comes from the relationship between the character's suffering and the desire for control, as "existential angst in the plays produces not only the need for a reassuringly secure physical space but is itself both the cause and the product of the invasion of that reassuring space by the ever-present psychic threat" (Wyllie, 2017: 87). I argue this relationship is not only indicative of the sense of fear and a desire for belonging inherent in all of Pinter's characters but is also inherently gendered. In *Celebration*, the same comfort and safety is realised through the internal space, as implied by the Waiter, but he then associates it with imagery of femininity. Arguably, this offers an insight into how Pinter's characters also view the space as gendered, where the fear of an unknown, masculine force is often realised through an external threat to the safe, comforting femininity of the internal space they occupy. This then offers a retrospective into the perception of space across Pinter's plays, where the fear of masculine domination is realised through the act of invasion of the feminine internal space, for much like Rose in *The Room*, or Stanley in *The Birthday Party*, ideas surrounding the maternal relationships they desire can be better understood through their desperate desire to remain in the feminised, internal space. So is it with the Waiter in this play, whose preference to remain in his subordinate position in the feminine space provides comfort, but little authority amongst the guests.

With Richard's departure, the group returns to a primarily male/female conflict, with Lambert complimenting Richard on maintaining composure in the face of assertive sexual advances by the two women. By taking advantage of male weakness through the demonstration of female unity, Prue and Julie – much like Suki – represent women whose experience of hegemonic masculinity allows them to utilise sex to combat the aggressive and dismissive men around them. As Lambert's misogynistic treatment of his wife continually threatens her status, Julie must find security and reassurance in Prue. In both *Party Time* and *Celebration*, women adapt to their marginalisation and undermine the authority of men through the weaponisation of shared memory. Yet both plays fail to present a femininity which successfully undermines their oppression and establishes a new order. Their challenges and threats afford them temporary power, and as Bernadette Barton & Lisa Huebner argue in their work on feminine power and success, the use of dominant

masculine behaviours "allows women short-lived access so long as they enact the values, behaviours, and attitudes of hegemonic masculinity" (2020: 2). It is here that Barton and Huebner remind us of the immense difficulty with which the women in Pinter's plays face to challenge their subjugation. Charles Grimes reacts despondently to this realisation, arguing that "despite the power assumed by women at local levels of social interaction— marriage, the family, business— there is an overarching form of male power whose existence suggests that power has been redistributed only superficially" (2005: 129). This superficiality is then indicative of how Pinter presents the limited capability of women to establish a gender hierarchy based on equality rather than domination. It is important to recognise that Pinter's final depiction of women in his plays does nothing to suggest the ways in which such hegemony can be subverted or changed. It is perhaps more profound that we rely on Pinter's depiction as a criticism of these hegemonies rather than remain defeated by the relentlessness of masculine domination. But as Grimes states, the challenges of the women in the play only offer temporary, superficial empowerment. Their use of established masculine tactics serves to reinforce the hegemony and their display of unity signifies the continued conflict between men and women and perpetuates femininity as oppositional to masculinity in the gender dynamics.

Much like Liz's hostility towards the unknown woman and Melissa's disregard for Dusty's attempts at resistance, there are clear conflicts between women as conformant to the hegemony and those who aim to challenge it. Complicit female characters who reinforce the hegemony through the discrimination and subordination of potential female rivals are rewarded with a higher status. The potential for acceptance by the other women as well as men serves as a significant force of motivation for the women in both plays, especially as the consequences of rejection and isolation are so fully realised through Jimmy and the Waiter. As such, the women must navigate a balance between complicity and resistance, which is no clearer demonstrated than in the final scene of *Celebration*, as Russell and Suki join the other table. Russell initially attempts to establish control by insisting that he choose Suki's drink for her, which indicates a need to display strength in front of Lambert and Matt – his potential rivals. Suki counters Russell's attempt at control through her own tactic, using her knowledge of Lambert's past to infer her previous transgressions with him, asking "Are you still obsessed with gardening?" (Pinter, 2000: 53). This knowledge strengthens her bond with Lambert, threatening Julie's place as sole receiver of his romantic affection, as well as threatening Russell by indicating his lack of control. Julie responds to this threat with an implied reference to the sexual nature of Lambert and Suki's relationship whilst also

challenging Suki's version of events, stating "Funny that when you knew my husband you thought he was obsessed with gardening. I always thought he was obsessed with girls' bums" (2000: 55). Prue acknowledges Julie's attempt at control and supports her by utilising a previously successful tactic; the validation of Julie's account by revealing how she herself knows of Lambert's attraction. In doing so she suggests her own previous sexual activity with Lambert, inciting Matt's jealousy but by refusing to reveal more information she maintains power and, like Julie, threatens his perceived control over her. No sooner is the bond between the two women outlined than it is fractured, as Julie and Prue both offer reassurance whilst also openly undermining one another.

Suki's constant rebuttal of attempted threats forces Russell to take more desperate action, as he connects Lambert and Suki's relationship with her previous declaration of sexual experiences. When asked where the two of them met, Russell responds with "Behind a filing cabinet" (2000: 57). Not only is this intended as a threat to Lambert and Suki by showing his apparent knowledge of their past, but he challenges them to deny or verify the connection in front of the group. Lambert's skill in countering potential threats to his power is clearly shown in his instant declaration "I agree with my wife. I don't even know what a filing cabinet looks like" (2000: 57). This is a rare example of a character showing strength by admitting their lack of knowledge, and whether his admission is true, Lambert successfully counters Russell's threat by feigning ignorance. This is also the first instance where Lambert's unity with Julie allows him to maintain power, and by agreeing with her, he reconciles any potential suspicion she may have. Lambert and Suki appear impenetrable in their ability to manipulate and successfully counter any threats to their power, establishing a unique dynamic in the play of male/female unity as they repeatedly support each other's narratives. Much like Julie and Prue, Lambert and Suki form an instant partnership, demonstrating their ability to unite over a shared version of their past, and in doing so, assert their dominance over the other characters. For Russell, Lambert's familiarity and knowledge about Suki's past surpasses his own, suggesting how he has almost replaced his position as partner to Suki. It is significant then that Russell's continued desperation to regain control comes as a reaction to his weakened masculinity.

The pressure for Russell to be perceived as representing the masculine ideal forces him to rely on established masculine behaviours as he attempts to bond with the other men through his blatant objectification of women. This overt presentation of dominant masculinity is also matched by his demonstration of wealth and status, indicated by his offer to take them to lunch. Much like the power struggle between Jerry and Robert in *Betrayal*, the

invitation to lunch is indicative of a challenge to other men as to who can more accurately conform to the masculine ideal. But unlike Robert, Russell's overt display of masculinity is in a moment of weakness and Suki chooses to take advantage by acknowledging his increased desperation, challenging his objectification of the waitresses in the restaurant, asking "Aren't you pushing the tits bit a bit far?" (Pinter, 2000: 61). Russell responds by directly referring to Suki's sexual provocativeness, stating "Me? I thought you did that" (2000: 61), once again attempting to regain control. However, instead of uniting with Russell, Matt and Lambert choose to defend Suki, thereby disregarding his attempt to bond with them, severely weakening his position and further isolating him from the other men. As if echoing Stanley in *The Birthday Party*, Russell's desperation is exposed through his attempts to challenge and undermine feminine power and is also similarly unsuccessful. This exchange has the added effect of consolidating Suki's power amongst the men. She has been welcomed and accepted by Matt and Lambert, and through her use of prototypicality threats, she more closely represents the hegemonic masculine ideal than Russell in this moment. However, her reliance on the protection by Lambert and Matt comes with a cost; she concedes to her repeated objectification as Lambert's sexual trophy, thereby complying with the embedded discrimination of women as part of the established hegemony. It is only through unity and validation from others that enables characters to maintain power in both plays, and when memory is weaponised in such a way that it isolates both men and women, it indicates how such weaponisation becomes a powerful tool that ultimately reinforces the established hegemony.

Whenever there is unity amongst the characters in both plays, it comes at the expense of others, whether they are seen or unseen; the man and woman described in Liz and Charlotte's fantasy, Julie and Prue's refusal to listen to Lambert's romantic musings, and Russell's isolation at the hands of Suki, Matt and Lambert. Those who are victimised are often discriminated against, ignored, or isolated entirely. In agreement with Prentice, I find that in their desperate search for intimacy, the characters often dismiss opportunities to challenge and/or change the inherent inequality of the plays, and as such, they reinforce oppression. The characters' self-obsession stems from insecurity and a fear of isolation and abandonment, and characters often rely on established hegemonic behaviours to provide temporary comfort against that fear. The desire for power resonates throughout both plays, and each exchange relies on prototypicality threats to support and maintain those in dominant positions. In *Party Time*, the need for recognition, authority and conformity is indicative of a hegemonic masculinity that actively discriminates against non-hegemonic

characters such as Dusty and Jimmy. Women such as Melissa who remain complicit to the subordination of both men and women are offered power, and the male bonding over dominance from Fred and Douglas presents a ruthless elitism that rewards manipulation, subjugation and even destruction of any potential resistance. In *Celebration*, ignorance and intolerance resonate throughout, exemplified by the aggression and vulgarity of Lambert, and the pressures to conform to masculine ideals result in Russell's exclusion. Women are forced to maintain power through their shared memories, though female rivalry often exposes the fragility with which they exist in the male-dominated hierarchy.

In both *Celebration* and *Party Time*, there are those who withstand oppression yet receive little to no opportunity to challenge their place within the established hegemony. As interpreted by Jamie Lloyd, these issues extend to much wider communities, indicative of more contemporary injustices regarding race and gender, proving that Pinter's criticism of the maintenance of power still resonates with modern audiences whilst also providing critical insight into hegemonic masculinities. Pinter's commentary on such power structures in both plays is a more overt demonstration of the political criticisms apparent in his earliest work. Pinter's overt presentation of gender inequality, violence, and injustice in *Party Time* and *Celebration* aligns more closely with his political criticism at the end of his career. However, both plays provide more examples of how Pinter presents hegemonic masculinity as a toxic, violent and seemingly impenetrable hierarchy that relies on the marginalisation of both men and women, but also supports the oppression and marginalisation of undesirable groups and individuals.

Conclusion

In this conclusion, I will follow a methodical approach to evidence the results of the three research questions which have been the focus of this thesis. The first section will review the ways in which Pinter's characters establish, reinforce and challenge hegemonic masculinities in the case studies discussed. The second section will review the value of prototypicality threats as a tool with which to analyse Pinter's plays. The third section will respond to the third and final question of this thesis, which will summarise how contemporary productions of Pinter's plays explored the relationship between gender and power and the critical responses to those interpretations.

1. How do Harold Pinter's characters establish, reinforce and challenge hegemonic masculinities in his plays?

The most consistent thread throughout the case studies is the ways in which Pinter criticises systems of power, and the consequences of conformity and defiance of those systems. Unquestioning loyalty to institutions and power structures that support gender inequality, as well as racial, sexual, and economic inequality, is repeatedly explored to establish conflict between characters in Pinter's work. As early as *The Dumb Waiter*, Pinter establishes a hierarchy of power represented by the eponymous dumb waiter as both a literal and metaphorical depiction of the ways in which unseen forces are to be obeyed, as ridiculous and seemingly impossible as their demands may be. The effect of Pinter's writing here is to suggest how such systems of power are maintained and supported by those who remain complicit to the established order, so when characters seek to undermine and threaten that order, that resistance must be appropriately quelled. My research aims to investigate the extent to which Pinter's depiction of violent, destructive, oppressive hegemonic masculinities, and how these depictions allow for criticisms of gender inequality. From Pinter's earliest work, these themes of oppression and domination are linked to the concept of hegemony, where conformity and obedience is not only expected, but punishable if not followed. In *The Birthday Party*, Stanley's torture at the hands of Goldberg and McCann exemplifies such punishment, where his final moments of relative silence, loss of language and identity is representative of the consequences that await any man who fails to adhere

to the expectations of the hegemony. Much like the final image of Gus, who remains stood in the doorway, dishevelled and vulnerable in his resignation of his fate, both men become representative of the destruction and assimilation of those characters who remain non-compliant.

It is important to reiterate that both men do not submit willingly to their destruction, for they continually challenge the men who more closely adhere to the values of the hegemony. Stanley's reliance on abuse and manipulation – particularly against women – is symptomatic of his refusal to submit to their attempts to weaken him. Gus's challenges to Ben's power stem from his need to question such a strict adherence to the requirements of the organisation. Both men seem aware of their failure to conform, and as such, they compensate by using prototypicality threats to undermine the masculine performances of other men and regain power. It is then down to hegemonic men to reinforce the dominant masculinity through a counter-threat, or they rely on their consistent masculine performance to assert their dominance. This constant conflict between men is indicative of Pinter's depiction of men's desire for power, but also their desperate need for validation and intimacy. Stanley's desperate desire to impress Lulu exemplifies this need for validation, though it also reveals his need to create a façade which more closely represents the values of hegemonic masculinity. He lies and attempts to manipulate her to present a more confident, clean and active version of himself, though Lulu sees through the façade and as such, forces him to confront his true, inadequate, non-hegemonic self. Unable to face it, he subjects other men and also women to terrorism, abuse, and violence in an attempt to regain a sense of control. Stanley is but one example of the ways in which men in Pinter's plays feel a compulsion to assert dominance to avoid confronting their insecurities.

The ways in which men find comfort in the domination of others to avoid confronting their weakness signifies how hegemonic masculinity is suggested in Pinter's plays. For Max in *The Homecoming*, his attempts to fight against his isolation comes from finding comfort in his fabrication of his past. This reliance on fantasy acts a shield against present threats, where Max's continued boasts about his violent past with 'Mac', his paternal treatment of his sons, and his relationship with his wife Jessie serve as ways to reinforce his power in the present. Even when his fabricated past comes under scrutiny, he denies or dismisses their version of events in favour of his own. Once again, Max shows how Pinter presents men who feel compelled to defend against any threat to their masculine performance, as they find any way to prove their dominance, whether that be in the past or in the present, true or fabricated. In *Celebration*, Lambert also relies on similar fictions, reminiscing about his life

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with Julie and his past with other women, and this reinforces his position of power over those same women. Much like with Max, any attempt to challenge or dispute Lambert's version of events has little impact, as he continually dismisses Julie's alternative, conflicting narratives. Such comforting fabrications are seemingly linked to older men, whose diminished physicality is representative of an aged, fragile masculinity, and their past offers a way to deny their weakened position in the hegemony. This unrelenting dependence on their supposed fictions is but one way both Max and Lambert defend their positions of power amongst the other men, offering them temporary comfort against continual threats.

The strength of Pinter's depiction of masculinity is in his revelation of masculine fragility and desire. In *Betrayal*, the almost symbiotic relationship between Robert and Jerry demonstrates how men's attempts at intimacy are repeatedly undermined by their desire for power. Jerry's seduction of Emma provides the initial betrayal of his friend, and throughout the play, Robert's desire to punish and test Jerry's commitment to their friendship affords him power, but distances him from his friend. Robert's consistent performance of hegemonic masculine behaviours such as physical supremacy, professional and financial success, and violence against women positions him as the dominant man in the play. However, his dominant position continually hinders his connection to Jerry, pushing him away and fracturing their relationship seemingly beyond repair. I argue this is Pinter's criticism of the personal impact of hegemony, where the men strive for intimacy, for understanding and for validation, and yet both men's need to dominate the other results in their isolation. This dichotomy between supporting hegemony and forming any intimate connection with other men is symptomatic of the damage hegemonic masculinity has on healthy, positive relationships between men.

Pinter's depiction of masculinity is not limited to men who fail to uphold hegemonic masculine values, but also those whose dominance is often undeniable. In Pinter's first play, *The Room*, he offers an example of stoic, silent, violent masculinity in the form of Bert. Although offering limited verbal prototypicality threats – and largely absent throughout the play – Bert's masculine performance indicates not only dominance over his wife, but also in the climax of the play, suggests the extent to which men feel compelled to defend their territory against perceived threat. Bert's sudden, extremely violent act against Riley at the end of the play offers a rare depiction of explicit violence across Pinter's work, and yet it solidifies Bert's position of dominance. Only two years later, Pinter then offered an almost opposite form of dominant masculinity in Goldberg in *The Birthday Party*. Goldberg arrives in the space with an eloquence that appears in stark contrast to Bert's relative silence, and

the competence with which he manipulates Meg, Lulu and even McCann to follow his orders or comply with his desires is another overt example of masculine domination. Much like Max and Lambert, Golberg's relaxed, albeit conflicting accounts of his past indicate a confidence and awareness of the self. So, when he later becomes paranoid and markedly concerned with his inability to recall certain information, this domination comes under threat. This fracturing of his confident performance is only temporary, however, as he himself relies on violence to reassert his control of the space, this time the destruction of Stanley's identity. Both Goldberg and Bert's dominant positions rely on violence to achieve a similar effect – the silencing of other men. The act of silencing those who fail to adhere to hegemonic values is a repeated image in Pinter's work, and by the end of his career, his more overtly political work relies on similar imagery. The exclusivity and privilege seen in the guests in the eponymous party in *Party Time* is also reliant on the silencing of an undesirable 'other'. For Fred and Douglas, the remarks on the events happening off stage refer directly to the control of an unseen force, and they continually refrain from divulging the specifics, reassured by their subtle suggestions of violence. The final moment of the play once again reveals the extent of men's domination, as Jimmy's entrance and subsequent speech is representative of the suffering masses outside of the guests' exclusive, privileged space. Pinter's reliance on such overt and subdued implications of control is tied to the maintenance of power for the characters in his plays. As such, the manipulation of information becomes a crucial element to intimate and much wider depictions of violence and oppression that hegemonic masculinity necessitates.

Hegemonic masculinity does not solely affect men, and just as men are engaged in a battle to define masculinity, they are also attempting to define a complementary, hegemonic femininity. In line with Mimi Schippers's rationale for investigating the formation of hegemonic masculinities and femininities, my research approaches feminine empowerment and rebellion with an understanding that the relationship between masculinity and femininity is fundamental to the analysis of hegemony (2007: 100). Some of Pinter's most provocative writing has been surrounding the presentation of women who resist their position of assumed subordination, and the arguments in this thesis have considered the significant role women play in the undermining and challenging of hegemonic masculinity. As early as *The Room*, Pinter's female characters become victims of an oppressive hegemonic masculinity, for Rose's subservience and anxiety stems from the treatment she receives from the men around her. She receives no reassurances from her husband or her landlord and as such, she creates ways to comfort herself when faced with threats to the safety and

security of her room. Her blinding at the end of the play suggests the extent to which Pinter heightens the sense of terror for women who exist in such oppressive environments. In *The Birthday Party*, Meg and Lulu are initially empowered by their ability to defend themselves against Stanley's ineffectual attempts to dominate them. However, both women once again fall victim to physical and even sexual abuse by Stanley and Goldberg. Stanley's threatened masculinity results in a need to punish the women who shame him, and as such, he strangles Meg and attempts to rape Lulu. Between this and Goldberg's manipulation of both women, the actions of the men in the play indicate the ways in which Pinter's men repeatedly use women to assert their dominant masculinity. In Pinter's earliest work, he presents women who remain dependent on men, limited to either adopting a largely maternal or sexual role, and who ultimately have limited ability to resist their oppression and subvert hegemonic masculinity.

In *The Homecoming*, Pinter's approach to female empowerment becomes more provocative in his depiction of Ruth; a woman who navigates the dichotomy of a maternal and sexual femininity tolerated by hegemonic masculinity while also utilising masculine behaviours to challenge masculine domination. Much like the women in his earlier plays, Ruth balances her presentation of a complicit and resistant femininity, and Mimi Schipper's research – in particular her concept of pariah femininities – was crucial in understanding the ways in which Ruth establishes an alternative non-hegemonic femininity. Throughout the play, Ruth adopts an overtly sexualised role, seemingly complicit to the demands and expectations of men, and yet she subverts their attempts to control and define her. Her ability to expose the vulnerabilities and insecurities of men through successful prototypicality threats allows her to use the masculine tactics of domination to gain power. When considering the notion of female agency and autonomy, Ruth is clearly an excellent example, and Pinter continued to explore this in his later plays, including *Celebration*. For Suki, her constant rejection and dismissal of Russell's attempts to objectify and control indicates her ability to subvert her assumed position of subordination. Suki's ability to take ownership of her sexuality, much like Ruth, exemplifies her agency in the play: a calm and joyful example of pariah femininity. As such, Suki's resistance to hegemonic masculinity in *Celebration* illustrates a genealogy of non-hegemonic women in Pinter's plays since *The Homecoming*.

Hegemony in Pinter's plays is not, however, limited to the contest between men, as women also navigate a process of unity and hostility towards other women. In *Party Time*, Liz and Charlotte are united in their discussion of the competition between themselves and

other women for men's affection. Resorting to explicit threats, Liz adopts the language of objectification and violence used by men to assert her dominance over other women, thus reinforcing a hierarchy of acceptable and unacceptable femininities. In *Celebration*, Prue and Julie represent a different sense of unity between women; bonded not just by blood but by a shared history of pain and pleasure. Their connection is one which offers them protection against the onslaught of misogyny and vulgarity from their respective partners. There is a comic delight in the sisterly comradery, seeing them wage words with the men, and much like with Suki, they counter with their own subdued threats. When the two tables join, that hostility extends to Suki, whose overt sexualisation no longer undermines just Russell's weak masculinity, but also threatens Julie's relationship with Lambert. In the two plays, Pinter shows how unity between women can strengthen their position of power, and yet also shows how women's reliance on a hierarchy of femininities reinforces their subjugation as a group.

Throughout Pinter's plays, violence against women provides an explicit image of women's victimisation and oppression at the hands of men. As mentioned earlier, from Pinter's earliest plays, physical and sexual violence becomes fundamental to the ways in which men feel entitled to women's bodies and to punish them for resisting their subordination. For Emma in *Betrayal*, the acts of violence do not take place on stage but rather are unseen, only referred to by Robert, whose unapologetic, unemotional declaration of domestic abuse against his wife is used to establish superiority over both her and Jerry. This attitude towards masculine power and violence against women reveals the casual nature of such violence in the play and reinforces the notion of an unquestionable gender inequality in the play. It is interesting then that Emma's transition over the course of the play indicates the level with which she rejects the hegemony, ultimately distancing herself from Robert and Jerry in pursuit of a better life with Casey. The play's impact is still provocative through its depiction of domestic abuse in this way, and Emma's escape from the abusive and manipulative relationships with the two men is one that shows a strengthened femininity, able to undermine and reject men's attempts to control and oppress her. The relationship between Terry and Dusty in *Party Time* is much more nuanced example of the ways in which men and women respond to violence in Pinter's plays. Terry and Dusty represent a singular example in these case studies of how both characters bond over a shared fantasy of violence against one another. For the two characters, they derive pleasure from the threat and abuse of one another, with the two even relishing the thought of Dusty's death. Although the dynamic between them throughout the play is much more explicitly abusive, with Terry

often undermining and belittling his wife, Dusty's continued persistent and pleasure from antagonising him suggests a dynamic of equal hostility. Although Dusty's portrayal of feminine rebellion is largely unimpactful to the wider hegemony of the play, she continues a precedent set by other of Pinter's women in how they take opportunities to undermine their oppression and find ways to combat against the repeated acts of violence against them, whether that be through compliance, resistance, unity, or self-indulgence.

Through the adoption and subversion of established masculine tactics of control, objectification and manipulation, women in Pinter's plays often resist their oppression and maintain powerful positions within their respective gender hegemonies. Now, I feel it crucial to state that such hostile and harmful hegemonic behaviours are still reliant on gender inequality, but positioning women as capable of positive change is still indicative of the extent to which Pinter portrays feminine empowerment. Together, both men and women are capable of challenging hegemonic masculinity in each play, however, their desire for connection and understanding motivates them to remain complicit. The rare instances of subversion often come from women as men repeatedly rely on prototypicality threats to reinforce their dominant positions. Adopting behaviours that support their dominance, such as the manipulation of information, violence against men and women, complicity to an organisation, fabrication of the past, and the control of space allows both men and women to sustain positions of power, though this ultimately reinforces hegemonic masculinity.

2. In what ways can the application of prototypicality threats provide new contexts for understanding hegemony in Pinter's plays?

Gender hegemony is formed through the relationship of dominance and subservience, and prototypicality threats are specific examples of speech that reinforce hegemonic behaviours in relationships between people. In Pinter's plays, men and women use prototypicality threats to not only reinforce their presentation of hegemonic gendered behaviours but to challenge others. Several key aspects of hegemonic masculinity are established, and the suggestion that men are unable to embody those behaviours through prototypicality threats remains crucial to how the gender hierarchy of each play changes. My research aims to provide an in-depth analysis of not only what behaviours are considered hegemonic and non-hegemonic, but also how those particular behaviours are reinforced through the use of prototypicality threats. The concept of prototypicality threats used in my research is rooted in the field of sociology and sociolinguistics, specifically in the work of Natalya Alonso, and

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I recognise that the term has not been applied in the textual analysis of Pinter's work in previous scholarship. Yet, throughout this thesis, the term has been valuable in the process of identifying hegemonic behaviours and how the hegemonies are reinforced.

Scholars in the field of Pinter studies, such as Mark Taylor-Batty, Andrew Wyllie, and Penelope Prentice, have been able to identify moments of tension and conflict that are inherently gendered in Pinter's work, however, the concept of prototypicality allows for a much more rigorous analysis of such hierarchies. One of the earliest examples of prototypicality threats stems from a desire for men to conform to systems of power, and in doing so, they present themselves as masculine. In *The Dumb Waiter*, Ben's obedience to the organisation that he and Gus both belong to allows him to sustain a performance of dominant masculinity, however, when Gus continually provokes him to reveal information, these challenges take the form of prototypicality threats that – intentionally or no – puts Ben's allegiance to the organisation into question, and as such, threatens his masculine performance. A similar result occurs in *The Birthday Party*, where Stanley's embodiment of an insecure, agitated, and aggressive masculinity becomes exposed when he attempts to seduce Lulu. As he lies about his whereabouts, Lulu responds with prototypicality threats that indicate his undesirability, thus undermining his embodiment of hegemonic masculinity. When Goldberg arrives later, his successful seduction of Lulu heightens this sense of failure and solidifies the appeal to women as crucial to both men's performance of masculinity, even when Stanley is unsuccessful. Desperate in his hostility and relying on prototypicality threats as well as actions of violence and abuse, Stanley's unsuccessful countering of prototypicality threats himself ensures he remains subordinate to other men and his inability to embody the normative behaviours established by more powerful men only expedites his eventual decline. In identifying prototypicality threats in these two plays, we are able to recognise the specific shifts in the hierarchy of each play, recognising the specific ways in which non-hegemonic men desperately attempt to cling to any semblance of power.

The conflict of information is the most consistent example of a prototypicality threat in Pinter's plays, and no clearer is this than in *Betrayal*. The first chronological scene of the play establishes how crucial manipulating information can be in allowing men to gain a position of dominance, as Jerry hides his successful seduction of Emma from Robert. The characters' use of prototypicality threats in the play do rely on more overt challenges to each man's masculine performance – such as the playing of sport or violence against women. However, the challenge to one another's knowledge, whether it be of the affair, the likelihood of boy babies' cries, or the nationality of a waiter, suggests how the two men

compete for information. The result is often the same, as Robert maintains a position of dominance over Jerry throughout the play, reinforced by his consistent, successful use of prototypicality threats against his friend's knowledge. Such a conflict of information is not exclusive to the two men, however, as over the course of the play, Emma adopts the same prototypicality threats to assert her own power over Jerry. Jerry's weakened status at the end of the play is due to the combined threats of both Robret and Emma, suggesting how Emma's position within the hegemony is arguably one of dominance over Jerry and thus more closely aligning with hegemonic masculinity. Such a subversion of hegemonic gender roles continues throughout Pinter's work, as in *Party Time*, the conflict of information has much more extreme consequences. The men in the play often discuss the events that take place outside of the party and Dusty's repeated questioning of those events takes the form of prototypicality threats. Her direct challenging of the men's attempts to withhold information from her is arguably unsuccessful in that she is not provided with the answers she seeks; however, such resistance serves to threaten her husband Terry's position of power. As such, her challenges are in fact a prototypicality threat that suggests Terry's inability to control his wife and threatens his masculine performance. For both plays, the identification of such explicit prototypicality threats allows for a more in-depth understanding of the similarities between the two plays, even when their form and tone are largely different from one another.

In Pinter's plays, men's adoption of prototypicality threats continually reinforces hegemonic masculinity, and the failure to use or counter such threats leads to the exposure of individual weakness and often isolation. Women's adoption of prototypicality threats is also fundamental to the ways in which the hegemony is reinforced, but also how it can be subverted. For the analysis of Pinter's written text, the concept of prototypicality threats allows for a thorough identification of the ways in which hegemonies are formed and how a gender hierarchy in each play changes as a result of individual threats.

3. To what extent do contemporary productions of Harold Pinter's plays impact how hegemonic masculinities can be received?

An important aspect of seeing a production of Pinter's plays is arguably the connection between the audience and the characters on stage. The desire for any definitive truth or essential meaning to the action and behaviours presented by those characters is often a futile ambition when approaching Pinter's writing. As such, any meaning to his plays is

formed within the audience's interpretation, informed by the interpretation of director, designer, performers etc. In relation to the depiction of gender in productions of Pinter's plays, the subjectivity of the experience can often obfuscate any consistent responses, however, critics of the high-profile London productions by Jamie Lloyd, Ian Rickson and Patrick Marber have been able to recognise the significance of the ways in which men and women in Pinter's plays navigate the gender hierarchy of each play. These mainstream productions have been significant in allowing new audiences the opportunity to engage with Pinter's work for the first time, and as such, the significance of recognising how Pinter's depiction of gender inequality is presented in these productions cannot be overstated. The aim of this thesis has been to outline the ways in which critical responses of each production respond to the presentation of gender inequality and the extent to which those productions criticised or supported Pinter's depiction of inequality between men, misogyny, violence, and abuse against women. The arguments have also benefitted from a comparison to historical productions of each case study, revealing how responses to gender and hegemony have changed over the sixty years that Pinter's work has been produced on stage.

In the Lloyd production of *The Homecoming* in 2015, the men's overt misogyny created a clear divide between audience and character as critics remarked on how Pinter's largely dated depiction of male power allowed the audience to remain distant and unsympathetic towards such abuses. In comparison, the critical responses to the premiere production of the play in 1965 often sympathised with the misogyny of Max and Lenny, indicating a distinct shift in the ways hegemony and gender inequality have been interpreted in the fifty years between the two productions. This is further evidenced by the Michell production in 1997, which indicated some more progressive responses from critics in their attitudes towards Ruth's empowered femininity and the overt misogyny of the men around her. I argue that the provocative way in which Pinter presents misogyny can be used as a way to criticise such prejudice for contemporary audiences, and the critical responses to Lloyd's production suggest how it has been successful in establishing sympathy for victims of gender inequality. For critics of Ian Rickson's production of *The Birthday Party* in 2018, the responses suggested the extent to which modern audiences are impacted by witnessing violence against women. Stanley's attempted rape of Lulu and assault of Meg were seen by critics as representative of contemporary abuses against women. As Meg and Lulu are abused by the men, the lack of control and ineffectual position of both the women as victims and the spectator as passive witnesses to such violence forms a bond between spectator

and character. In this way, the spectator is positioned as a participator in the violence, engaged in an emotional tie to the female victims of abuse, and as such, incites them to challenge the system of oppression that seeks to dominate women. The significance of such acts on stage became more impactful when considered as part of contemporary discourse on female empowerment and the #MeToo movement, where Rickson's production established a sympathy towards both women and their victimisation. For both Rickson and Lloyd's productions, the significance of Pinter's writing allows for a more sympathetic relationship between the audience and women who become victims of hegemony. In this way, my research has been able to establish a unique insight into the reception and interpretation of Pinter's plays, indicating the extent to which his writing has become more relevant in its depiction of gender in its ability to provoke audiences to remain critical of gender inequality and hegemony.

In Lloyd's production of *Betrayal* in 2019, Emma represented a much more positive depiction of resistance through her subversion and escape from the abuse and violence from Robert and Jerry. For critics of the production, this transition throughout the play signified a level of empowerment which was both relatable and therefore positive in its indication of women's autonomy compared to that seen in the fates of characters such as Meg and Lulu. It is then more provocative that a character such as Ruth in *The Homecoming* represents a reprieve from the shared experience of violence. These acts of violence against women are not just representative of the ways in which women in Pinter's plays are undermined and oppressed, but also have a visceral and emotional impact on spectators of productions of Pinter's work. The relationship between victims of the hegemony and the spectator is one that reveals the extent to which displays of violence establish sympathy with non-hegemonic men and women. Unlike earlier plays, whose depiction of violence against women was able to create a level of sympathy for the victims in the spectator, these productions suggested how Pinter's work presented a successful subversion of feminine oppression in male-dominated spaces. However, where the witnessing of violence created a tense but unambiguous sympathy for both Emma and Ruth, it was not enough to suggest the ways in which the systemic abuse can be changed. Again, the relationship between the spectator and witnessing female empowerment in male-dominated spaces on stage is relevant to contemporary discourse in the #MeToo era. Although the Lloyd production of *The Homecoming* was pre-#MeToo, it has been provocative in its prescience, with critics remarking on the ways in which Ruth's power utilises and undermines masculine behaviours of dominance. The transaction between Ruth and the other men during the final exchange

of the play solidifies that dynamic, where Ruth's empowerment stems from her agency and autonomy. This is a markedly different approach to Ruth than the responses in the premiere production in 1965, where critics saw her emotional neutrality and overt sexuality as indicative of an offensive, incomprehensible femininity. The difference in responses to both productions suggests once again how Pinter's writing of women is now seen as a prescient depiction of feminine strength, capable of subverting masculine domination.

It is difficult, however, when productions of Pinter's work undermine the positive representation of female empowerment, and previous chapters have investigated the extent to which the directors and performers of different productions create problematic presentations of a play's gender hegemony. One such example is seen in Lloyd's production of *Betrayal*, where the performances of the star-studded cast created an uncomfortable sympathy for Robert and Jerry's abuse. Lloyd's direction of the play was reliant on a deeper emotional connection, showing each character as a victim of manipulation and loss, and as such, established a level of sympathy for the three main characters. This grounded, emotional approach to the characters then diminished any attempt by Lloyd to confront the overt misogyny and domestic abuse displayed by Tom Hiddleston's Robert. This downplaying of such a violent masculinity disrupts any attempt to criticise the characters' actions and undermines Zawe Ashton's comparatively progressive depiction of female empowerment as Emma. Such a confused and conflicting approach to portraying masculinity impacts the ways in which the spectator views hegemony, where we are expected to tolerate misogyny and domestic abuse because the men are also victims. Though impactful in exploring the weakness of men and their feelings of loss, Lloyd's sympathetic interpretation of masculine vulnerability in the production was uneasy in its tolerance of masculine domination, and as such, promotes a problematic alliance between misogyny and the spectator.

Through the depiction of violent, abusive men, Pinter presents us with a damaging critique of hegemonic masculinity that exposes the ways in which men adopt and reinforce behaviours of oppression and domination. Historical productions of his plays have been varied in provoking a critical response to gender inequality, with critics remaining sympathetic to the misogynistic behaviours of Pinter's men and uneasy when confronted with empowered women. For contemporary productions, however, there has been a positive change in the attitudes towards Pinter's depiction of hegemony, where critics are more likely to see his writing as a criticism of such oppressive and violent men. There has also been a significant shift in the approach to women in Pinter's plays, with critics remaining

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critical of misogyny and sympathetic to women's resistance against oppression, objectification, and victimisation. I argue is Pinter's strength in his writing of empowered femininity is how it shows that through struggle, there can be success in women's ability to impact and change the hegemony. This then can have a markedly positive impact on the ways in which the spectator can view femininity and hegemony in contemporary productions, particularly through the portrayal of empowered female characters such as Ruth and Emma, whose struggle is eventually rewarded with a renewed agency. Ultimately, the recent productions of Pinter's plays that have been discussed in this thesis have ensured that audiences are able to see the tremendous power of Pinter's work in its provocative presentation of hegemonic masculinity.

Summary

My research is a continuation of arguments that have been present in scholarship surrounding the work of Harold Pinter, theatre studies, gender, and sociolinguistics for decades. However, my research is the first instance of scholarship that combines these fields, and my intention has been to present a new way of engaging with Pinter's plays through the analysis of prototypicality threats in the written text, and the depiction of hegemony in performance texts. The case studies included in this thesis have provided examples of the ways in which men and women form and shape gendered behaviours, revealing insecurities, weaknesses, and fears. Pinter's plays indicate a pressure to perform dominant gender norms which is representative of the same pressures many of us navigate in our daily lives. I argue that the strength of Pinter's work is how it reveals the intricacies of gendered power between people, and how we all feel compelled to ignore or avoid being vulnerable when we fail to adhere to those rules. As such, the plays of Harold Pinter provide a way to recognise and ultimately criticise oppressive, destructive, and violent hegemonic masculinities.

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