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An analysis of the unsatisfactory male-female relationship in the plays of Harold Pinter

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An analysis of the unsatisfactory male-female relationship in the plays of Harold Pinter

by

Leena Nanda

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MASTER OF ARTS

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INTRODUCTION

Born in the year 1930, in Hackney, East London, Harold Pinter is undeniably one of the leading dramatists of today. The earlier plays of Pinter like The Room, The Dumb Waiter, and The Birthday Party reveal the playwright's preoccupation with the impact of menace in the lives of people. But then there is a progression in his plays, when we become increasingly aware of the fact that the menace that threatens the lives and happiness of his characters is not external, but internal, an aspect of their personalities which emerges on certain kinds of provocation. For instance, "In The Birthday Party, menace is derived from Goldberg and McCann's actual pursuit of their quarry. In A Slight Ache, the unfulfilled emotional needs of the man and woman are the source of menace."¹

Not only in A Slight Ache, but in most of the plays of Pinter, we perceive a woeful lack of love and harmony in male-female (especially marital) relationships. In a world where there is no stability, where uncertainty hangs threateningly like a dark cloud over our heads, where ambiguity is an inherent aspect of every personality, Pinter's characters fail to achieve a meaningful and lasting relationship, especially with the opposite sex. Some of his characters like Rose in The Room, Meg in The Birthday Party, and Mrs. Stokes in A Night Out chatter incessantly in order to conceal their fears, their feelings of insecurity, and the emptiness within them, which
apparently stems from the absence of love in their lives, while others like Bert in *The Room* and Stanley in *The Birthday Party* are silent, because they are afraid to reveal their innermost feelings. At times Pinter's characters like Flora in *A Slight Ache* and Ruth in *The Homecoming* take a daring step in life, in an effort to disentangle themselves from their previous unsatisfactory marital commitments, while others like Sarah and Richard in *The Lover* invent games to sustain the excitement in their relationship. Then we are presented with characters like Jane in *The Basement* (who flits from one man to another), Disson in *Tea Party* (who has an extra-marital affair with his secretary), and Robert, Emma, and Jerry in *Betrayal* who deceive their spouses (only to realize that they have tired of their lovers after a certain span of time has lapsed), and also characters like Beth in *Landscape*, and Ellen in *Silence* who cut themselves off from the harsh realities of life, and choose to live in a world of dreams and past memories.

Undoubtedly, as Arnold P. Hinchcliffe remarks, "Pinter is concerned with humanity, love, necessity and contingency - not in the lunar landscape but in the slum-dwelling next door." But through his realistic portrayal of characters and the interaction between them, Pinter shatters any illusion of love and devotion, understanding and commitment in a male-female relationship that we might have, and gives us some insight into their true feelings, by stripping them naked in their raw
emotions before us. We can never be sure why Pinter's characters act or react in the way they do. We can only guess. And so, in this work, I have made an effort to analyze the unsatisfactory male-female relationship in Pinter's plays, and have made certain arbitrary divisions, taking into account different aspects of these relationships.
THE ABSENCE OF COMMUNICATION

It is not the impossibility of communication, but the avoidance of it that marks the plays of Pinter. "Pinter's people do not fail to communicate: they avoid communicating. They are afraid of exposing themselves, afraid of revealing themselves. Some are afraid of revealing their individuality; some are afraid of revealing their loss of individuality." So whether they talk or remain silent, they are constantly making an effort to conceal their deep-seated feelings of fear or guilt, constantly striving to shut themselves off in their own little worlds, where they feel safest. The void in their lives, and the gap in their relationships could be bridged by communication, and communication could lead to love and understanding. But then, it would also lead to involvement and commitment, and perhaps, this is what they are afraid of, this is what they would like to avoid.

In The Room, Rose and Bert are married to each other, and live under the same roof. But emotionally they seem to be far removed from each other because, there is practically no dialogue between them. Karen F. Stein comments that in absurd drama, "In marked contrast to the silent ones, the speaking characters talk with desperate fervor." In this play too, while Bert reads a magazine silently, Rose chatters incessantly, fussing over him:
Here you are. This'll keep the cold out.

She places bacon and eggs on a plate, turns off the gas and takes the plate to the table.

It's very cold out, I can tell you. It's murder.

She returns to the stove and pours water from the kettle into the teapot, turns off the gas and brings the teapot to the table, pours salt and sauce on the plate and cuts two slices of bread. BERT begins to eat.

That's right. You eat that. You'll need it. You can feel it in here. Still, the room keeps warm. It's better than the basement, anyway.

She butters the bread.

I don't know how they live down there. It's asking for trouble. Go on. Eat it up. It'll do you good (p. 91).

Then she talks about the basement, revealing an unnatural degree of curiosity about the people who live there, finally declaring, "But whoever it is, it can't be too cosy" (p. 92).

All this time Bert is silently eating, not responding to a single remark made by Rose. Quigley believes:

By refusing to make the responses that would meet the demands of Rose's language, Bert is refusing to confirm that their relationship is as Rose would wish it to be.... But there is a second component to their relationship. Not only does Bert refuse to acknowledge Rose's demands, Rose also refuses to acknowledge Bert's silence. She continues to talk as if he were participating in her conversation on the terms she is dictating. 5

Rocking on a chair Rose declares, "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" (p. 93). But by verbalizing this, Rose is not only trying to convince herself that she is happy and contented, she is trying to reassure herself, that Bert is happy too. However, we have no way of knowing how Bert feels because, he says nothing. Rose's fear of the cold dark night, her unnatural curiosity about the basement, her pathetic efforts to convince herself that everything is all right in the presence of a man who utters not a single word, makes us wonder if everything is really all right, if Rose, so smug, is truly as contented as she would have us believe. James R. Hollis remarks about Bert:

Bert's reticence is superficially humorous to the audience, but it is horrifying to Rose. His silence is the silence of one who has nothing to say while her loquacity is the silence of one who is trying desperately but failing to say what she really wants to say. She really wants to say that she is afraid of the cold, of the night, and of the tenebrific forces that may lurk in the basement. She is asking Bert to respond to her needs, to bring her warmth, and to accept her hesitant overtures of love. But Bert is silent. 6

Even when Mr. Kidd, the landlord comes in and makes an effort to converse, Bert sits quietly, and Rose answers for him:

MR. KIDD. You going out today, Mr. Hudd? I went out. I came straight in again. Only to the corner, of course.
ROSE. Not many people about today, Mr. Kidd (p. 96).

Even Rose and Mr. Kidd fail to communicate:

ROSE. What about your sister, Mr. Kidd?
MR. KIDD. What about her?
ROSE. Did she have any babies?
MR. KIDD. Yes, she had a resemblance to my old mum, I think. Taller, of course (p. 99).
James T. Boulton remarks that there is a breakdown of logic here, when "both speakers ignore what the other is saying, then for a moment we glimpse a world where communication is at an end and the chaos which is never far below the surface has become actual." 7

Apart from Rose and Bert in *The Room*, we also meet another couple, Mr. and Mrs. Sands, who come looking for the landlord. Between them too we detect tension and disharmony. Mrs. Sands appears to be a dominating wife, and her husband obviously resents it:

MRS. SANDS. Well, why don't you sit down?
MR. SANDS. Why should I?
MRS. SANDS. You must be cold.
MR. SANDS. I'm not.
MRS. SANDS. You must be. Bring over a chair and sit down.
MR. SANDS. I'm all right standing up, thanks
(p. 102).

A little later Mr. Sands commits the blunder of "perching" on the table, and, seizing this opportunity, his wife attacks him immediately:

MRS. SANDS. You're sitting down!
MR. SANDS. (jumping up). Who is?
MRS. SANDS. You were.
MR. SANDS. Don't be silly. I perched.
MRS. SANDS. I saw you sit down.
MR. SANDS. You did not see me sit down because I did not sit bloody well down. I perched!
MRS. SANDS. Do you think I can't perceive when someone's sitting down?
MR. SANDS. Perceive! That's all you do. Perceive
(p. 106).

The difference in relationship between the older couple, Rose and Bert, and the younger couple, Mr. and Mrs. Sands, is
that, while Mr. Sands makes no secret of his resentment towards his wife's assertive nature, between Rose and Bert there is no explicit acknowledgement of friction. "He never tells her to be quiet, and she never demands that he reply. We are faced with a relationship that has reached a fixed point of discord, a discord that is not acknowledged by either character but is manifest in every facet of their relationship." So, despite the fact that the two men react differently, it is obvious that there is an woeful lack of harmony and understanding in their marital relationships.

In the meantime, Bert, who is a lorry driver, has driven his van into the night. When he returns from the trip, he is a changed man. For the first time we hear him speak. He addresses Rose even before she speaks to him:

BERT. I got back all right.
ROSE (going towards him). Yes.
BERT. I got back all right (p. 115).

And to our surprise, it is Bert who is asserting himself now, describing his prowess over his van, "I caned her along. She was good. . . . She went with me. She don't mix with me. I use my hand. Like that. I get hold of her. I go where I go. She took me there. She brought me back" (p. 116). "The erotic overtones of this impassioned outburst about the van, always referred to in the feminine gender, are unmistakable." It gives us the impression that so far as Bert is concerned, the van holds priority over Rose. He appears to be emotionally
involved with it, and feels great pride in having total control over it. In fact, Bert seems to be communicating with the vehicle better than with his wife. Esslin remarks that Bert's "sexual energy is no longer focused on Rose; the van, which Bert treats as a 'she', has ousted her from his affections. The journey into the winter night becomes an act of intercourse with its own triumphant orgasm. No wonder Rose is totally annihilated as the play ends." 10

Unlike Bert and Rose, however, Meg and Petey in The Birthday Party do engage in some conversation. But it does not take us long to realize that talking does not necessarily imply communicating, that Meg and Petey are not really communicating, only talking trivia. Petey alternates between an effort to reply politely to Meg's questions, and a feeling of irritation because of her nagging:

MEG. Is that you Petey?
Pause.
Petey, is that you?
Pause.
Petey?
PETEY. What?
MEG. Is that you?
PETEY. Yes, it's me (p. 9).

She then asks him if the cornflakes were "nice," if he had been working that morning, what was in papers, and if somebody had a boy or a girl. Though it is realistic, their conversation
smacks of superficiality and insincerity, especially when we realize that it is not Petey, but Stanley, a boarder in their house, who is the focus of Meg's attention. Her complete absorption in him, and her smothering possessiveness towards him reveals to us that Meg derives greater satisfaction from tending to Stanley than she gets from being a wife to Petey. But this unnatural devotion of Meg for a man, other than her husband, must also stem from the absence of love and warmth that we perceive in Stanley, as a result of which, Meg, feeling the need to love and be loved, attaches herself to Stanley. Stanley thus fills the void in Meg's life, and gives it meaning and purpose.

Even as Meg serves Petey breakfast, she reveals her concern for Stanley. She is anxious that he has not come down for breakfast as yet. Finally, when Stanley shows up, Meg is eager to get his approval for every item that she serves him. But when she asks him, "What are the cornflakes like, Stan?" he replies bluntly, "Horrible" (p. 14). Stanley is aware that this would hurt Meg deeply, and upset her. But he always goes out of his way to be rude to her:

STANLEY. You're a bad wife.
MEG. I'm not. Who said I am?
STANLEY. Not to make your husband a cup of tea.
   Terrible.
MEG. He knows I'm not a bad wife.
STANLEY. Giving him sour milk instead.
MEG. It wasn't sour.
STANLEY. Disgraceful (p. 16).
Later, Stanley even calls her a "succulent old washing bag" (p. 18). But in her limited imagination, Meg accepts the word "succulent" as a compliment, and asks him "shyly," "Am I really succulent?" (p. 19).

When Meg strokes his arm sensually, Stanley recoils from her. When she tickles him, he pushes her away. Gabbard remarks that, "At the same time that Stanley clings to Meg's protection, he is revolted by her." At one moment he tells her "I don't know what I'd do without you," whereas the next moment he hurls insults at her (p. 18). But despite this love-hate relationship we get the feeling that Meg and Stanley communicate better than Meg and Petey, because while Petey's calculated polite remarks smack of indifference and detachment, Stanley's deliberate rudeness reveals strong feelings for Meg. So, despite the fact that Stanley proposes to Lulu (a young girl), to run away with her (out of fear of the expected visitors Goldberg and McCann), it is Meg who means something to him, and whose attentions he obviously enjoys.

In A Slight Ache, the absence of love, understanding and communication between Edward and Flora is evident from the very beginning. In fact, "their dialogue about trivial matters shows - as does the dialogue between Ben and Gus at the opening of The Dumb Waiter - that there is considerable tension between them."
EDWARD. Did you say - that the convolvulus was in flower?
FLORA. Yes.
EDWARD. But good God, you just denied there was any.
FLORA. I was talking about the honeysuckle.
EDWARD. About the what?
FLORA [calmly]. Edward - you know that shrub outside the toolshed . . .
EDWARD. Yes, yes.
FLORA. That's convolvulus.
EDWARD. That?
FLORA. Yes.
EDWARD. Oh.
[Pause.]
I thought it was japonica.
FLORA. Oh, good Lord no (pp. 10-11).

"On the surface the scene is merely amusing. It captures the small-talk of people who are not really communicating, who are only going through a breakfast ritual."¹³ But as Edward and Flora argue about insignificant matters, a wasp falls into the marmalade jar and gets trapped. Edward wants to "bring it out on the spoon and squash it on a plate," while Flora hopes that if they waited "long enough" it would eventually "suffocate in the marmalade" and "choke to death" (p. 13). But finally Edward pours hot water down the spoon hole and derives immense satisfaction from having blinded and killed the "monster." The inherent cruelty in the couple, the pleasure and sense of achievement Edward feels at having tortured the wasp surprises us. Esslin comments that "the episode around the wasp shows the depth of bitterness, hatred, and cruelty which lurks behind the polite voices and formal manners in this marriage."¹⁴
We soon discover that not only is Edward ignorant of what grows in his garden, but Flora is equally unaware of what her husband is working on. She discovers him in the scullery and asks him:

FLORA: What are you doing in here?
EDWARD: Nothing. I was digging out some notes, that's all.
FLORA: Notes?
EDWARD: For my essay.
FLORA: Which essay?
EDWARD: My essay on space and time.
FLORA: But ... I've never ... I don't know that one.
EDWARD: You don't know it?
FLORA: I thought you were writing one about the Belgian Congo.
EDWARD: I've been engaged on the dimensionality and continuity of space ... and time ... for years.
FLORA: And the Belgian Congo?
EDWARD [shortly]: Never mind about the Belgian Congo. [Pause.]
FLORA: But you don't keep notes in the scullery.
EDWARD: You'd be surprised. You'd be highly surprised (p. 17).

Edward's shift of interest from something down to earth like the "Belgian Congo" to abstract and nebulous speculations about "the dimensionality and continuity of space ... and time...." reveals his inability to face reality and handle it. The slight ache that he feels in his eyes thus might result from his inadequacy as a husband and his feelings of insecurity.

It does not take us long to realize that the subconscious fears and anxieties of Edward have been suddenly triggered by the presence of an old matchseller who has been standing at their garden gate for two months. While Flora sees him as a
"harmless old man," Edward feels disturbed and threatened by him. In fact, when Flora had discovered Edward in the scullery, he had lied to her by telling her that he was looking for notes, while he was there because he wanted to watch the matchseller's activities through the scullery window.

Edward's feeling of insecurity and irrational fear of the matchseller seems absurd to us. But when Flora accuses him of being afraid of the matchseller, instead of confiding in his wife, and trying to rationalize and do away with his fears and anxieties, Edward retorts condescendingly:

EDWARD: Frightened of him? Of him? Have you seen him?
[Pause.]
He's like jelly. A great bullockfat of jelly. He can't see straight. I think as a matter of fact he wears a glass eye. He's almost stone deaf . . . almost . . . not quite. He's very nearly dead on his feet. Why should he frighten me? No, you're a woman, you know nothing (p. 29).

Edward has made an effort to communicate with the matchseller, but has failed miserably because of the lack of response and complete silence of the other man. As a result of this, his fears and suspicions start to mount. Not only is he derogatory of Flora, but he also suspects her intentions when she tries to convince him that she would "find out all" about the matchseller:

EDWARD [hissing]: What are you plotting?
FLORA: I know what exactly what I shall -
EDWARD: What are you plotting?
He seizes her arm.

FLORA: Edward you're hurting me (pp. 29-30).

Having failed to satisfy Flora and establish a meaningful relationship with her. Edward tries to control her physically. Flora too must feel empty because of the absence of love and passion in her marital life. In her efforts to keep the line of communication open between them, she has also resorted to infantilizing Edward. But apparently she has failed in every single way. Gabbard remarks about the symbolism of the title of the play:

Its major reference is to the interlocking illnesses of Edward and Flora. He suffers from impotence and she from emptiness. In her emptiness, she aches for the fulfillment that he can not give because of his impotence. In his impotence he aches for youth and vigor, but she who would share it emasculates him by her smothering love. Thus, each one aches with mutual pains and longings."15

Thus, having failed to communicate with her husband, Flora sheds her inhibitions and for once makes a more honest approach to communicate with the matchseller in an elemental way. She tells him that he reminds her of a poacher who had raped her in her youth. Having described the "ghastly rape," Flora reveals her curiosity about his sex life. She asks him "intimately," "Tell me, have you a woman? Do you like women? Do you ever . . . think about women?" (p. 31). Then the mother in Flora surfaces:
Hmmnn, you're a solid old boy, I must say. Not at all like a jelly. All you need is a bath. A lovely lathery bath. And a good scrub. A lovely lathery scrub. [Pause.] Don't you? It will be a pleasure. [She throws her arms around him.] I'm going to keep you, you dreadful chap, and call you Barnabas .... Your eyes, your eyes, your great big eyes (p. 32).

When Edward enters, Flora tries to deceive him by telling him that the matchseller is dying, whereupon Edward rages:

EDWARD: Dying? He's not dying.
FLORA: I tell you, he's very ill.
EDWARD: He's not dying! Nowhere near. He'll see you cremated.
FLORA: The man is desperately ill!
EDWARD: Ill? You lying slut. Get back to your trough!
FLORA: Edward ...
EDWARD [violently]: To your trough! (p. 33).

But aggression is the most terrible form of communication, and physical violence is the fastest means to end a relationship. (We are reminded of Edward Albee's *Zoo Story* where Jerry in an effort to communicate with Peter has to give his life, in order to reach him.) At the end of the play, Flora hands Edward the tray of matches and leaves with the matchseller. Whether it was the excessively passionate nature of Flora coupled with her strong, maternal instincts, or Edward's sexual passivity and aggressive nature that had estranged the couple we do not know. But (though Flora's decision shocks us), we can only hope that she will be able to make her next relationship more meaningful.

The absence of communication which is a recurring theme in Pinter's plays, comes up also in *Tea Party*, where Disson,
having married the cold and distant Diana, feels unable to get close to her because of his deep sense of guilt and inadequacy. He must have perceived the superior quality in his wife who was reared to be "a woman of taste, discernment, sensibility and imagination" (p. 49), even before he married her, as a result of which on the eve of his wedding he hires a new secretary "Wendy, the lusty, willing, social inferior" who becomes "a kind of haven of rest and assurance for Disson." 16

Hence, it is evident right from the beginning of the play, when we see Disson's attraction towards Wendy that his marriage to Diana would never be a success. Disson's "feeling of embarrassment and inferiority" towards his wife and her family creates a gulf between the couple that could never be bridged because of the simple fact that, while Diana (the chaste moon goddess) is incapable of giving all of herself to her husband, Disson entertains himself with his new secretary. 17 Their cool exchange of dialogue which lacks the warmth and passion of newly weds reveals the absence of love and emotional exchange between them. Anxious to please her and to be reassured that she is happy, (that she does not find him inadequate in comparison to any other man), Disson asks Diana:

DISSON. Have you ever been happier? With any other man?
DIANA. Never.
Pause.
DISSON. I make you happy, don't I? Happier than you've ever been . . . with any other man.
DIANA. Yes. You do.
Pause.
Yes.
Silence (p. 50).

She does not even confide in her husband her desire to work as her brother's secretary. When Willy suggests this to Disson, he asks:

DISSON. Your sister? You mean, my wife?
WILLY. She told me she'd love to do it.
DISSON. She hasn't told me.
WILLY. She's shy.
DISSON. But she doesn't need to work. Why should she want to work?
WILLY. To be close to you (p. 54).

Willy's logic prevents Disson from presenting any other further arguments, but it is obvious that he does not approve of it. Later he makes an effort to dissuade Diana:

DISSON. I don't think it's a good idea for you to work.
DIANA. Me? Why not? I love it.
DISSON. I never see you. If you were home I could take the occasional afternoon off . . . to see you. As it is I never see you. In day-time.
DIANA. You mean I'm so near and yet so far?
Pause.
DISSON. Yes (p. 62).

Diana's question and Disson's assent suffice in describing without any further explanation her relationship with her husband.

Not only Diana's unemotional nature, but also Disson's philandering, his disloyalty to his wife, and his deep sense of guilt are responsible for the failure in their relationship. Disson even projects his own feelings of guilt to Willy and
suspects him of having an incestuous relationship with Diana. Simultaneously as his suspicions continue to grow he has problems with his vision, though Disley, his friend and doctor, declares that there is nothing wrong with his eyes. Finally one day, when Disson (feeling a need for reassurance) asks his wife categorically why she had married him, she answers him evasively:

DIANA. I admired you. You were so positive.
DISSON. You loved me.
DIANA. You were kind.
DISSON. You loved me for that?
DIANA. I found you admirable in your clarity of mind, your surety of purpose, your will, the strength your achievements had given you -
DISSON. And you adored me for it? (p. 75).

But even when Disson tries to put words into Diana's mouth, she avoids answering his questions directly by repeating that it was admiration for Disson's "clarity of mind," "surety of purpose," and "will," and "the strength of his achievements," that had been motivating factors for her when she consented to marry him. Hence, this marriage which was based on awe and admiration, not love and understanding was doomed from the very beginning.

It is his play Landscape, however, which epitomizes a complete breakdown in communication because, in this play, for the first time, Pinter reduces all dialogue to monologue.

Beth and Duff are a middle aged couple. They sit in two different chairs and talk into space. At times Duff makes an effort to talk to Beth, though he "does not appear
to hear her voice." But Beth who "never looks at Duff, and does not appear to hear his voice," continues to reminisce, either being unaware of Duff's presence (because of her self-absorption), or refusing to acknowledge it (p. 7).

Beth's monologue reveals that she had experienced an ecstasy that is now past; she had loved and had been loved. By speaking of her experiences Beth is trying to relive those moments of indescribable joy to her. Thus, completely wrapped up in herself and a past she wishes to cherish, Beth appears to have no need for present human contact. Duff, however, apparently feels the need to talk to her and also expects a response from her:

DUFF

Do you like me to talk to you?

Pause

Do you like me to tell to you about all the things I've been doing?

Pause

About all the things I've been thinking?

Pause.

Mmmm?

Pause

I think you do.

BETH

And cuddled me.

Silence (p. 21).
Like other times, Duff has made an effort to reach Beth, but has failed. Prior to this Duff had tried to remind Beth of the day he came home from a trip and had confessed to her of his infidelity, when he had expected Beth to react strongly, but she had not even cried:

But I had something to say to you, didn't I? I waited, I didn't say it then, but I'd made up my mind to say it, I'd decided I would say it, and I did say it, the next morning. Didn't I?

Pause

I told you that I'd let you down. I'd been unfaithful to you.

Pause

You didn't cry ... (p. 19).

It seems to us that Duff had at least cared enough for Beth to be honest with her (in fact he tells her later that he had considered the girl "unimportant"), but Beth's reaction (she put her hands on his face and kissed him), reveals that she had either forgiven him, or that she did not care for him deeply enough to be devastated by his confession.

Throughout the play Beth remembers the gentleness of her lover, but we do not know whether she is talking about Duff when he was younger, Mr. Sykes, the landlord, or some other man. It is, however, difficult to conceive of Duff as the gentle lover (whose tenderness Beth treasures), because now he seems to be devoid of softness. Esslin remarks:
Thus the play's main image is one of contrast; the contrast between the tenderness and delicacy of the woman's memory of her past love, and the man's brutal coarseness, whether he is talking about the duckshit that lay on the paths after the rain, whether he uses the strongest of taboo words, or dreams of sex in terms of banging a gong, bringing home the bacon, and slamming, beating, bashing.18

We are not sure if it is the disparity in the needs of Beth and Duff, the disloyalty of Duff, or Beth's love for another man that has alienated the couple. However, we see before us two people who have ceased to communicate; and thus, "The play presents a picture of present loneliness and past longings. Two unfulfilled souls live out their emptiness - together but isolated."19

In Silence, Pinter again explores the absence of communication in love-relationships. In this play we have three characters; Rumsey is in his forties, Bates is in his thirties, and Ellen is in her twenties. But there is no substantive communication between any two of them (either Bates and Ellen, or Rumsey and Ellen), because, "Bates wants Ellen, Ellen wants Rumsey, and Rumsey wants his freedom . . . ."20 As a result of this, their loves instead of converging, run parallel, leaving us with no hope of a possible development in their relationships.

Like Duff in Landscape, Bates lacks refinement, and seems incapable of gentleness. But both men feel the need to communicate. When Bates feels suffocated, unable to "get out of
the walls, into a wind," he believes that Ellen is the only person who can comfort him and help him to find his peace of mind (p. 39). But when he tries to communicate with her, she rejects him; when he tries to confide in her she pretends she cannot hear him, "I didn't. I didn't hear you," she said. "I didn't hear what you said" (p. 44). But, ironically, just as Ellen refuses to listen to Bates when he wants to open his heart to her, so also Rumsey refuses to listen to Ellen. He admits to her that he "couldn't hear what she said" (p. 43). And when she moves to him, he tells her to "Find a young man" (p. 44):

In the play, then, we have three human beings desperately trying to establish a true relationship with another human being. All three of them have existential problems, and they, more or less, overtly realize that only with the help of this other person, with whom they attempt to communicate, can they find a solution to their problems. Yet, since each of them is preoccupied with putting his concerns over to the other, they are unable to lend an ear to the other's words . . . . Ellen's, Rumsey's, and Bates' loneliness and inability to communicate are still further stressed by the fact that Pinter makes a love affair the background of the play. Even people in love are unable to establish any mutual understanding.21

Thus, in the whole body of Pinter's works we see that the absence of communication is a major factor which operates in male-female relationships. But, whether it is the evasion of communication that is conducive to an unhappy relationship, or a shaky and tottering relationship based on the incompatibility of the partners, or absence of love between them that results in a breakdown of communication, we are not sure.
Fantasy plays a significant role in most male-female (especially marital) relationships, where two people are bound to each other as partners. When the novelty of marital relationships wears out, when love ceases to excite two people, and sex turns into habit, couples often indulge in wild sexual fantasies, which carry them, even if for a few fleeting moments, into a more erotic and desirable world.

This element (fantasy) appears in quite a few of Pinter's plays. In The Lover, Pinter makes it more explicit, while in some of his earlier plays he subtly suggests this possibility or hints at it through stage directions, or through the presentation of strange and absurd situations. We can never be sure of Pinter's real intentions, but in some of his plays, we can surmise that what is taking place might possibly be the enactment of the fantasies of one, or more than one of the characters appearing on the stage.

In A Slight Ache, the silent matchseller might just be the projection of the fears and insecurity of Edward, and the embodiment of the fantasies of Flora, apparently created because of the absence of marital love in her life, and her sexual inhibitions. He is dirty with a "vile smell" and animal-like. Flora sees him as a "bullock," and "projects on him the strength and virility which she misses in Edward."
The fact that makes us doubt his physical reality, however, is that though both Edward and Flora speak to him, he never utters a single word. Pinter has portrayed quite a few silent characters in his plays, but none of them is as quiet throughout the play as the matchseller. Even Bert speaks at the end of the play. James R. Hollis remarks:

> Whether or not the matchseller exists seems immaterial . . . . It is vacancy that the play explores and the matchseller only serves as an objective correlative for the emotions of Edward and Flora.²³

In *The Collection*, the actions of James and Stella right from the beginning of the play prove to us that they do not have a very compatible and happy marital relationship. Thus, when Stella tells her husband that she had slept with a man named Bill Lloyd in a motel in Leeds, she might have fantasized the whole affair to jolt James from his complacency, and to arouse his jealousy.

When James accuses Bill of this, he denies it at first and then gives him a different version of the incident every time. Bill obviously has a homosexual relationship with a man called Harry. But they are having problems in their relationship too. So Bill might have gone along with Stella's story for the same reason that Stella concocted it in the first place; that is, to arouse the jealousy of his partner in love. We can never be certain of what ensued or what did not ensue between Stella and Bill in Leeds, but as Gale comments:
Apparently relationships within the two pairings have not been completely satisfying, and the action in the drama results from the dissatisfaction of the two characters. . . . What happens in the play grows out of a need for love as the four people attempt to protect, solidify, or simply redefine the bonds between themselves and their partners.24

In The Basement, Law is reading in his room, while Stott and Jane are seen standing at his front door. The situation and the atmosphere (Law is lying in an arm chair reading a Persian manual of love by the fireside, on a cold winter night), and the bizarre actions of Stott and Jane (they get into bed naked, and start making love in the presence of Law), make us wonder if the incidents that take place are not the fantasies of Law, products of his fertile imagination at work. After all, he has been reading a Persian manual of love!

In the course of the play, Jane reminds Law of the wonderful time they had before. This leads us to presume that Jane had left Law for another man (possibly Stott), which is why Law is alone in his apartment at the beginning of the play. Having failed to sustain a love-relationship, Law might be fantasizing what it would be like to win his girl back from the other man, because at the end of the play Stott is alone in the apartment while Law is seen standing outside with Jane. While discussing the play, Gabbard remarks, "When it is viewed as a conscious fantasy it reveals man's strange dissatisfaction with peace and quiet. Law has both of these, but he dreams of excitement - love and danger."25
In Landscape, Beth's reminiscence about the blissful love-experience that she had in the past with a gentle lover could also be her fantasy, in which she indulges to escape from the reality of the coarse and insensitive Duff. Her refusal to speak to him or answer him shows her rejection of him. She has apparently been living in a dream world of her own making since she has been disillusioned in love. But as she sits as if she is in a trance, recalling the moments of the love and tenderness that she had experienced, Beth might be painting her past with colors that had never been there.

In Old Times, while Deeley and Kate discuss Anna (Kate's roommate of twenty years ago), she is revealed in the "dim light at the window" (p. 7). Then, suddenly, without a formal entry, she "moves down to them, eventually sitting on the second sofa" (p. 17). These stage directions raise doubts in our minds regarding Anna's real presence in the play. Ronald Hayman comments:

One interpretation is that Kate and Anna are two different sides of the same woman, Anna representing whatever survives of that part of the girlish self which seems to be put aside on marrying. Another is that Anna is really dead but lives on in the memories of the other two.26

If Anna is just another aspect of Kate's personality that she would like to be (sensual, erotic), and that Deeley finds attractive, both of them have created an imaginary Anna and together engage in this fantasy. So when Kate is distant and
aloof, Deeley talks to Anna. This would reveal that the couple have never been thoroughly honest and direct with each other, or articulated their real feelings to each other.

But Anna could also have been a real person who is either dead, or just not present there. We know that even if Kate had been emotionally attached to her once, she had also felt threatened by her, because she admits that she remembered her as dead. In fact, it seems that Kate wanted her to be dead because she resented her for the qualities Anna had, and she herself did not. Perhaps she even knew of her relationship with Deeley. Deeley, too, like Kate, suffers from emotional instability. He must feel rejected by both women because just before the end of the play we see him sobbing. So it would not be absurd to interpret that the couple who obviously do not share a well-blended and harmonious relationship indulge in fantasy, and conjure up mental pictures of the woman whose memory exists as a constant threat to their marriage.

It is in The Lover, however, that Pinter explores in depth, the element of fantasy in a marital relationship, where a couple do not repress their erotic feelings, but instead, act out their fantasies in order to keep their relationship vital. The play opens with Richard asking his wife Sarah "amiably" if her "lover" was visiting her that day. Later that evening he asks her if she had a "pleasant afternoon," and if she had shown her "lover" the hollyhocks. The detached and
apparently cool manner in which Richard and Sarah discuss her "lover," as if it is not unnatural or immoral for a married woman to entertain a lover, surprises us. But gradually we detect resentment creeping into Richard's voice when he asks his wife:

RICHARD. Does it ever occur to you that while you're spending the afternoon being unfaithful to me I'm sitting at a desk going through balance sheets and graphs?

....

SARAH. Well, of course it occurs to me.

....

RICHARD. What's your attitude to that, then?
SARAH. It makes it all the more piquant (p. 9).

Later, we get better insight into their marital relationship when we are enlightened to the fact that even Richard has a mistress. When Sarah reminds him of this, he replies:

RICHARD. But I haven't got a mistress. I'm very well acquainted with a whore, but I haven't got a mistress. There's a world of difference.
SARAH. A whore?
RICHARD (taking an olive). Yes. Just a common or garden slut. Not worth talking about. Handy between trains, nothing more (p. 11).

As he himself admits, Richard is not looking for a woman he could respect, admire and love. He finds all the virtues he admires in a woman in his wife. He just needs "someone who could express and engender lust with all lust's cunning" (p. 13).
When Richard leaves, Sarah prepares herself to entertain her "lover." "She wears a very tight, low-cut black dress" and "high-heeled shoes" (p. 18). Someone rings the door bell. It is only John, the milkman. The door bell rings for a second time. We wait in anticipation for the arrival of the much-discussed "lover." Sarah greets him, "Hello, Max." But it is only Richard in a different dress. The suspense is over. We realize that Max is after all Richard, Sarah's fantasy.

The least we can expect in this situation is for Sarah to be in high spirits when she entertains her "lover." On the contrary we find her in an irritable, uncooperative mood. She asks Max to leave because she says she is waiting for her husband. Then she plays a game, pretending to resist Max's advances, upon which Max comes to her rescue in the guise of the park-keeper. He calls Sarah different names like "Dolores" and "Mary." After a while Max/Richard switches back to his role of the lover, and now it is his turn to be edgy and uncompromising. He declares that he had deceived his wife long enough, he had his children to consider, and that he had played his last game. All of Sarah's entreaties fail before his cold determination. He even appears sadistic when he tells Sarah that she is "skin and bone" and that he liked "enormous women." We now realize that Max/Richard has now tired of this particular game as a result of which he has become rude and fault-finding.
In the evening Richard, dressed in a sober suit and back to his role as a husband, returns home and inquires about Sarah's lover:

RICHARD. Did your lover come?
SARAH. Oh yes. He came.
RICHARD. In good shape?

... . . . . . . . . .
SARAH. We all have our off days.
RICHARD. He too? I thought the whole point of being a lover is that one didn't (p. 30).

A little later Richard, very different from the liberated, broad-minded man that we saw at the beginning of the play, asserts his authority over his wife. He declares that he has reached a decision and that Sarah's "life of depravity" and "path of illegitimate lust" must stop (p. 33). Sarah gets very upset about his, and once again, just as she had tried to coax and convince Max, she pleads with Richard to change his mind. But failing to do so, she tries to aggravate Richard by retorting:

SARAH. You stupid . . . ! (She looks at him coolly.) Do you think he's the only one who comes! Do you? Do you think he's the only one I entertain? Mmmn? Don't be silly. I have other visitors, other visitors, all the time, I receive all the time. Other afternoons, all the time. When neither of you know, neither of you. I give them strawberries in season. With cream. Strangers, total strangers. But not to me, not while they're here. They come to see the hollyhocks and then they stay for tea. Always. Always (p. 37).

After this Richard moves towards her, tapping the drum. Sarah retreats playing another game, giggling and saying:
SARAH. I'm trapped.

Pause.

What will my husband say?

Pause (p. 39).

The play ends with Richard telling her to change:

RICHARD. Yes.

Pause.

Change.

Pause.

Change.

Pause.

Change your clothes.

Pause.

You lovely whore (p. 40).

Thus, "change" seems to be the key to make their marriage successful. Simon Trussler comments that "Like Osborne's Under Plain Cover, the play is very much concerned with the place of fantasy in marital relationship."27 Sarah and Richard have worked out a "modus operandi" to add zest and piquancy to their marriage, where Sarah becomes a combined figure: lover, whore and wife; and Richard as Max, her lover in the afternoon, and her husband at other times. Fantasy thus becomes a substitute when their marital relationship loses its charm and glamor. But then, after a while the games that they play turn stale too, upon which they try to
invent new games, try new approaches, play other roles. However, we cannot help contemplating that, pathetically enough, a day would inevitably come, when all games would cease to work, and then the couple would have to face each other and the stark reality in front of them before they could decide what they really want from each other and from life.
In her dissertation "An Analysis of Dominance and Subservience As Technique and Theme in the Plays of Harold Pinter," Penelope Ann Prentice says:

Like sight and blindness, friendship and love are intimately bound up with dominance and subservience; what appears to be friendship or love is generally characterized by a failure to make any commitment or to achieve any lasting bond that is commonly associated with close relationships; and the failure is primarily due to the character's attempts to gain or to maintain dominance over the other.²⁸

But in Pinter's plays while men express dominance through verbal or physical aggression, women often dominate the men they love by stifling them with their possessive maternal love.

In The Room, the relationship between Bert and Rose does not strike us as being a very compatible one. The manner in which Rose hovers around Bert, fussing over him as she serves him breakfast, as if she was pampering a child to eat his meal, strikes us as unnatural. As she places bacon and eggs in front of him, she coaxes him to eat it, to keep the cold out. Then she gives him bread and tea, talking all the time, telling him that the food will do him good. But all this while Bert "just sits there, reads his paper, and allows himself to be pampered. And he never utters a word."²⁹

This appears strange to us. Rose's anxiety to please Bert, her apparent concern for him (that he will be driving on a cold night like this), as opposed to the complete silence of
the man is baffling. Is Bert silent because he is so full of contempt for Rose, that he does not even deem it necessary to answer her questions, is he silently basking in her loving care, is he resentful of her presence and irritated by her chattering (though he says nothing), or is he afraid that if he speaks he might open up the floodgates of his suppressed emotions which could possibly end their relationship? Quigley believes that Rose "casts him in the role of one dependent on her motherly supervision, and he simply refuses to participate in a conversation that defines their relationship in this way." But we wonder if it is Rose's maternalizing that has destroyed their relationship, or if Rose has turned into a chatterbox because of an unhappy relationship, and is constantly chattering to drown the pain and fear that she feels within her.

In The Birthday Party, as Meg serves breakfast to her husband Petey, she reminds us of Rose in her garrulity. Petey, however, is a slight improvement on Bert, because he at least makes an effort to answer Meg's questions. But it is easy to perceive that there is no real interaction between them, that Petey is only making half-hearted attempts to be polite to Meg. She asks him if the cornflakes that she served him were "nice:"

PETEY. Very nice.
MEG. I thought they'd be nice. (She sits at the table.) You got your paper?
PETEY. Yes
MEG. Is it good?
PETEY. Not bad.
MEG. What does it say?
PETEY. Nothing much (pp. 9-10).
Simon O. Lesser comments that though Meg is not very intelligent, and is contented if her husband reads her "a juicy item or two" from the newspaper, "Still, she feels his lack of love," and "Her libidinized though mainly maternal love for Stanley is born . . . of her desperate loneliness and lack of love." 31

Quite early in the play we realize from Meg's remarks to Petey that she would rather have a male child, "a little boy" than a little girl. So when Stanley enters her life she showers him with all her love and attention. Even while she is attending to her husband, Meg is completely engrossed in her concern for Stanley. She is worried that Stanley has not come down for breakfast and tells Petey that she would go and call "that boy":

PETEY. Didn't you take him up his cup of tea?
MEG. I always take him up his cup of tea. But that was long time ago.
PETEY. Did he drink it?
MEG. 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 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.
PETEY. That did it, eh? (pp. 13-14).

She calls him by infantile names - "little monkey," "Stanny," "good boy." 32 But even while Stanley basks in the
warmth of Meg's affection, he resents her domineering, and deliberately offends her by telling her the cornflakes are "horrible," the milk is "sour," and that the tea is like "gravy." Despite his insults, however, Meg is anxious to gain his approval, and even when he calls her a "succulent old, washing bag," she asks him coyly:

MEG. Stan?
STANLEY. What?
MEG (shyly). Am I really succulent? (p. 19).

This reveals the ambivalence with which Meg regards Stanley, and the absence of love (both marital and maternal), in her life with Petey which drives her to seek it elsewhere.

Meg is therefore mortally afraid of losing Stanley, because without him her life would be lonely and empty. She projects her own feelings to Stanley:

MEG. Are you going out?
STANLEY. Not with you.
MEG. But I'm going shopping in a minute.
STANLEY. Go.
MEG. You'll be lonely, all by yourself.
STANLEY. Will I?
MEG. Without your old Meg (p. 19).

Later, when Stanley tells her that he is considering taking a job playing the piano in a night club in Berlin, Meg tells him: "Don't you go away again, Stan. You stay here. You'll be better off. You stay with your old Meg" (p. 23). Then she asks him with motherly concern if he isn't feeling well. But by this time Stanley is frightened by Meg's latest news that two gentlemen will be coming to her boarding house, and in his
turn he tries to scare Meg. He tells her that "They're coming today," and "They're looking for someone" (p. 24). Whoever "they" are, Meg too is obviously terrified of them, and we get the impression that Meg is not afraid for herself, but for Stanley, afraid that she might lose the person she cares for deeply.

When the two gentlemen, Goldberg and McCann arrive, Meg tells them that it is Stanley's birthday, whereupon Goldberg suggests that they could have a party for Stanley. The idea appeals immensely to Meg who has already bought a gift for Stanley. In the meantime, after seeing Goldberg and McCann, Stanley has disappeared. When he returns, Meg gives him the parcel, which turns out to contain a boy's drum. "At first Stanley is stupefied. But, then, he puts the drum around his neck and begins to beat it, in a normal rhythm at first, but then more and more wildly and uncontrolled. It is clear Meg has succeeded in making him regress to the status of a little boy, a child."33

That evening with everybody (Goldberg, McCann, Lulu and Stanley), except Petey present at the party, Meg makes a moving speech:

Well— it's very, very nice to be here tonight, in my house, and I want to propose a toast to Stanley, because it's his birthday, and he's lived here for a long while now, and he's my Stanley now. And I think he's a good boy, although sometimes he's bad. (An appreciative laugh from Goldberg.) And he's the only Stanley
I know, and I know him better than all the world, although he does not think so. ("Hear—hear" from GOLDBERG.) Well, I could cry because I'm so happy, having him here and not gone away, on his birthday, and there isn't anything I wouldn't do for him, and all you good people here tonight . . . (She sobs.) (p. 55).

Then Meg declares that she would like to play a game and Lulu suggests "Blind man's buff." When Stanley is blindfolded, he falls over the drum, and moving towards Meg, reaches for her throat, and tries to strangle her. But it is surprising that even this episode does not arouse Meg's hatred for Stanley. In fact, she is as anxious and worried about Stanley as before. Therefore, it is pathetic when she returns from shopping, ignorant of the fact that Stanley had been snatched away from her, and that she had lost her "boy" forever.

Meg's desire to be appreciated and flattered (time and again she asks if the food she served was "nice," and if her dress was "pretty"), reveals her emotional insecurity, and her need for reassurance that she is a good housewife and an attractive woman. Her intense emotional involvement with Stanley, whom she smothers with her maternal love (which also has sexual overtones), reveals the absence of love in her marital life. And since propriety would not allow Meg to be involved sexually with Stanley, she may be disguising her real feelings, and substituting her yearning by resorting to mothering him.

Again in A Slight Ache, Pinter creates Flora, who (like Rose in The Room (and Meg in The Birthday Party), reduces the
man she loves into a child. But whereas Bert accepts Rose's mothering in silence, and Petey puts up with Meg's maternalizing, Edward resents Flora's maternal overtures, and makes no secret of it.

Flora (whose very name is suggestive of flowers and hence fertility), must feel the absence of love in Edward. But Edward (feeling insecure because of the threatening presence of the matchseller at their back gate) is irritable and rude to her when Flora (discovering him in the scullery) asks him a simple question about the essay he is writing:

FLORA: What about your essay? You don't intend to stay in the scullery all day, do you?
EDWARD: Get out. Leave me alone.
A slight pause.
FLORA: Really Edward. You've never spoken to me like that in all your life.
EDWARD: Yes, I have.
EDWARD: Do not call me that!
FLORA: Your eyes are bloodshot.
EDWARD: Damn it.
. . .
FLORA: You're frightened of a poor old man. Why?
EDWARD: I am not.
FLORA: He's a poor, harmless old man.
EDWARD: Aahh my eyes.
FLORA: Let me bathe them.
EDWARD: Keep away (p. 18).

Edward's rudeness hurts Flora deeply, and only when he rejects her concern for him as a wife does she resort to mothering him by calling him infantile names like "Beddie-Weddie," but that irritates Edward even more. Being an aggressive and garrulous person himself, Edward refuses to accept any form of domineering from Flora. But to our surprise, even when Flora calls
him later by his name, Edward reacts violently saying, "And stop calling me Edward" (p. 29). Then as his fear of the matchseller and suspicion of his wife intensifies, he resorts to physical aggression:

**EDWARD:** What are you plotting?

He seizes her arms.

**FLORA:** Edward, you're hurting me!

Pause.

[With dignity.] . . . I shall get to the truth of it, I assure you. You're much too heavy-handed, in every way. You should trust your wife more, Edward. You should trust her judgement, and have a greater insight into her capabilities. A woman . . . a woman will often succeed, you know, where a man must invariably fail (p. 30).

It is ironical that the words with which Flora reassures Edward prove to be fatal as far as their marital relationship is concerned, because it seems to us that at this point Flora is determined to assert herself. She goes to the matchseller, and instantly the caring aspect of her character emerges. She asks him if he is comfortable, and if he would prefer sitting in the shade, rather than in the sun. She tells him that he reminds her of a poacher who had raped her once when she was young, and was riding out "unchaperoned." Then she sees him perspiring and asks him:

I say, you are perspiring, aren't you? Shall I mop your brow? With my chiffon? Is it the heat? Or the closeness? Or confined space? Or . . . ? [She goes over to him.] Actually, the day is cooling. It'll soon be dusk. Perhaps it is dusk. May I? You don't mind?

[Pause. She mops his brow.]

Ah, there, that's better. And your cheeks. It is
a woman's job, isn't it? And I am the only woman on hand. There.

Pause. She leans on the arm of the chair.

[Intimately.] Tell me, have you a woman? Do you like women? Do you ever . . . think about women?

[Pause.] Have you ever . . . stopped a woman? (pp. 31-32).

Flora thus alternates between her maternal feelings for the matchseller, and her curiosity regarding his sex life. She believes that all he needs is "lovely lathery bath. And a good scrub" (p. 32). Then she calls him "Barnabas," and tells him, "Poor Barnabas. I'm going to put you to bed and watch over you. But first you must have a good whacking great bath. And I'll buy you pretty little things that will suit you. And little toys to play with. On your deathbed. Why shouldn't you die happy?" (pp. 32-33).

Lois G. Gordon remarks, "To be sure, although Flora wants a man, she will infantilize and emasculate him just as she has her husband." Gabbard also says that, "Consciously or unconsciously she makes her men into things and dominates them." But, my feeling is that Flora resorts to mothering Edward, only when she fails to reason with him sensibly (she tries to tell him that the matchseller is a harmless old man and that there is no reason to fear him), or to reach him emotionally (she calls him to sit under the canopy but he tells her to leave him alone). I feel that if Edward had treated her with love and understanding, Flora might not have felt the need for
emotional satisfaction (maternal, if not sexual), from the old matchseller. Hence, her desire to reduce the matchseller into a child that she could possess and love might also stem from the apparently impenetrable wall of silence that the man has surrounded himself with. Thus, in my opinion, Flora's maternal concerns are only a substitute for an unsatisfactory love-relationship.

Just as in _The Birthday Party_ Stanley becomes the focus of Meg's attention, or rather the emotional prop she needs to make her life meaningful, Albert Stokes in _A Night Out_ is the center around whom his mother's whole life revolves. One big difference, however, lies in the fact, that while Stanley is only a boarder in Meg's house, Mrs. Stokes is indeed Albert's natural mother.

The play begins with Mrs. Stokes reprimanding Albert for not answering her when she called. Then she demands that he should change the bulb in Grandma's room:

MOTHER: You've got five minutes. Go down to the cellar, Albert, get a bulb and put it in Grandma's room, go on.
ALBERT [irritably]: I don't know why you keep calling that room Grandma's room, she's been dead ten years.
MOTHER: Albert!
ALBERT: I mean, it's just a junk room, that's all it is.
MOTHER: Albert, that's no way to speak about your Grandma, you know that as well as I do (p. 4).

Then, Albert again upsets her when he declares that he will be going out for dinner to Mr. King's place, to attend Mr. Ryan's
farewell party. But though Albert resents his mother's domineering, the fact that he also cares for her is revealed when with his arm round her he consoles her, "I won't be late. I don't want to go. I'd much rather stay with you" (p. 6).

This pacifies Mrs. Stokes for a moment, but the next minute she continues her complaining about there being no light in the cellar upon which Albert (unable to control his temper), reacts a little impatiently:

ALBERT: I don't know why, we keep bulbs in the cellar!

[Pause.]
MOTHER: Your father would turn in his grave, if he heard you raise your voice to me. You're all I've got, Albert. I want you to remember that. I haven't got anyone else. I want you . . . I want you to bear that in mind.

ALBERT: I'm sorry . . . I raised my voice (p. 6).

But even after Albert apologizes, Mrs. Stokes refuses to drop her nagging questions:

MOTHER: You're not messing about with girls, are you?

... ...
ALBERT: Don't be ridiculous.
MOTHER: Answer me, Albert. I'm your mother.
ALBERT: I don't know any girls.
MOTHER: If you're going to the firm's party, there'll be girls there, won't there? Girls from the office?
ALBERT: I don't like them, any of them.
MOTHER: You promise?
ALBERT: Promise what?
MOTHER: That . . . that you won't upset your father.

ALBERT: My father? How can I upset my father? You're always talking about upsetting people who are dead!
MOTHER: Oh, Albert, you don't know, how you hurt me, you don't know the hurtful way you've got, speaking of your poor father like that.
ALBERT: But he is dead.
MOTHER: He's not! He's living! [Touching her breast.] In here! And this is his house! (p. 7).

Mrs. Stokes' pathetic efforts to cling to the past, the memories of people who might have been dear to her once, but are dead now, her desire to get untainted love and allegiance from her son, reveal her emotional insecurity. She has lost her husband whom she now idealizes. So her fear that she might lose her son's affection manifests itself in a demonic need to control the object of her love. She considers Albert's possible interest in girls "messing," which proves that she might have been a prim and puritanical wife who considered sex "dirty." This fact coupled with her possessive nature, gives us some insight into the possible nature of the marital relationship between Mrs. Stokes and her husband, and we feel that it may not have been a very ideal one. But now that her husband is no more she cherishes his memory, and insists to Albert that his father is alive in her heart.

When Albert is ready to leave for Mr. Ryan's farewell party, his mother fusses over him, telling him that he should be properly dressed. Despite his irritation, Albert puts up with her interference. But, when he goes to the coffee stall, and his friend Kedge asks him how his mother is, Albert reacts instantly in a negative manner proving what Kedge had said earlier about his being "touchy" whenever his mother is mentioned.
At the party we perceive Albert's discomfort and embarrassment in the presence of young girls. This abnormal response can only be traced to an oedipal complex because of his attachment to his mother. So later, when Eileen, one of the office girls accuses Albert of "touching" her, he is deeply shocked. And when Gidney calls him a "mother's boy," unable to take it any more, Albert strikes him and leaves.

But getting away from the party provides no relief for him, because he only returns home (humiliated and embittered), to a nagging mother who asks him repeatedly if he had been "mucking about with girls" (p. 31). Then she sulks, telling him, "But one thing hurts me, Albert, and I'll tell you what it is. Not for years, not for years, have you come up to me and said, Mum, I love you, like you did when you were a little boy" (p. 33). By now Albert has had his fill of accusations. Driven to the very brink of his capacity for endurance, he raises a clock to hit his mother. With this scene, the act ends.

In The Birthday Party, Stanley had tried to strangle Meg, "In A Slight Ache the Matchseller's silence had provoked Edward to violence: here it is Albert, silent but simmering, who can no longer endure the flow of maternal monologue."36

Unhappy with the world at large, and guilt-ridden, Albert goes to the coffee stall, where he meets a prostitute. She invites him to her room where her whole demeanor changes from
seductiveness to nervousness. She tells Albert that she is a "respectable mother, . . . with a child at boarding school" (p. 41). She also has a picture of a girl on the mantelpiece who, she claims, is her daughter, when it is really a picture of her younger days. But Albert sees through the phony image that she projects. This however, reveals the girl's feeling of insecurity, her dissatisfaction with her profession, and her intense desire to be a respectable mother, as a result of which she creates a daughter in her imagination.

But her constant criticism of Albert's every action and her endless chatter irritate him. He looks round and spots a clock. Finally, "When the girl nags him about having dropped some cigarette ash on to the carpet, he becomes violent; she too has now recalled the image of the dominant female in his life . . . ."³⁷ In his rage he seizes the clock and threatens to kill her, so that the girl, frightened to death, cowers in the face of his fierce masculinity. Feeling a great sense of power and achievement, Albert returns home to find that his mother is alive, and that she has forgiven him. She tells him:

Listen, Albert, I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to forget it. You see? I'm going to forget all about it. We'll have your holiday in a fortnight. We can go away.

She strokes his hand.

We'll go away . . . together.

[Pause.] It's not as if you're a bad boy . . . You're a good boy . . . I know you are . . . (p. 47).
But the fact that she brings up the subject proves that Mrs. Stokes hasn't really forgotten the incident. She only pretends to be tender and forgiving because of her fear of losing Albert. As she keeps reminding him, "you're the only one I've got . . ." (p. 33).

By overdosing Albert with her excessive maternal love, his mother has crippled him emotionally to such an extent that he cannot even take a healthy interest in girls. In the absence of marital love in her life, Mrs. Stokes is perhaps unconsciously substituting her son for her husband. And though Albert resents his mother's authoritativeness, and her stifling possessiveness, he is hopelessly entangled in the web of maternal love. Unlike Tom Wingfield (in Tennessee Williams play *The Glass Menagerie*), who leaves his home to escape his nagging and overbearing mother, Albert will never be able to cut the silver cord.

From *The Room*, in which Pinter concerns himself with simple forms of maternalizing, he moves on to more complex forms of this aspect of a woman's personality, and its sometimes strange manifestations. Then, finally, he presents Ruth in *The Homecoming* whom Katherine Burkman considers "the most complex and moving of Pinter's tragicomic heroines, . . . who combines the roles of wife, mother, and whore . . . ." 38

"The family in *The Homecoming* is suffering from an important omission in the basic family unit." 39 This is
because Max's wife Jessie has been dead for a long time, leaving him with three sons to take care of. The mother's presence, however, is strongly felt in the play, because Max makes frequent references to her. Just as the spirit of the mother of Eben hovers in Eugene O'Neill's play Desire Under the Elms, Jessie's spirit pervades in this all-male household.

When we meet Max we realize that since the death of Jessie, he has assumed the additional role of mother in this house. He has not only raised his three sons, but has been doing the cooking as well. In fact, he has an ambivalence towards his role of both father and mother because he speaks of having suffered the pangs of childbirth. One moment he is the tyrannical father, the next moment he assumes the role of a concerned mother. He snaps at Joey (his youngest son), and even at Sam (his brother), when they declare that they are hungry, saying "Who do you think I am, your mother? Eh? . . . Go and find yourself a mother" (p. 16). But Lenny (his second son) remembers how Max used to tuck them all in the bed, and that he liked "tucking up his sons" (p. 17). But despite the substitute mother role that Max plays in the absence of one, all the men apparently miss the touch of woman in their lives.

Teddy, Max's eldest son (a professor of Philosophy in an American university), brings his wife, Ruth, home for the first time after six years to meet his family. Very soon after we are introduced to Ruth, we become aware of her poise, her
composure, and her silently assertive nature, when she refuses to comply with her husband's wishes to come to bed. (In contrast to her calmness, Teddy, who should be relaxed, is nervous and excitable.) Thus, the absence of rapport in their marital relationship, and the tension between them can easily be detected in their conversation, and by their actions.

When Ruth returns after taking a walk, she meets Lenny, who, after trying to make a pass at her (to which she responds coldly), tries to impress and intimidate her by relating to her his encounters with two women, a prostitute and an old lady. (On both these occasions Lenny acting in an aggressive and violent manner reveals his inability to establish a meaningful relationship with women, as a result of which he has to resort to violence.) But Lenny's strategy to dominate Ruth fails because she treats him like a child and acts authoritatively towards him:

LENNY. And now perhaps I'll relieve you of your glass.
RUTH. I haven't quite finished.
LENNY. You've consumed quite enough, in my opinion.
RUTH. No, I haven't.
LENNY. Quite sufficient, in my opinion.
RUTH. Not in mine, Leonard.

Pause.

LENNY. Don't call me that, please.
RUTH. Why not?
LENNY. That's the name my mother gave me.

Pause.
Just give me the glass.
RUTH. No.

Pause.

LENNY. I'll take it then.
RUTH. If you take the glass . . . I'll take you.

Pause.

LENNY. How about me taking the glass without you taking me?
RUTH. Why don't I just take you? (pp. 33-34).

"Ruth, clearly victorious, disappears upstairs, but her authoritarian treatment of Lenny has struck chords in his memory of a previous relationship in the same house with another woman - his mother Jessie."40 Now that his initial plan to intimidate Ruth has boomeranged, he backs off saying, "What are you doing, making me some kind of proposal?" (p. 34).

Then Ruth is confronted with the most overbearing personality in the house - Max. When he sees her he erupts violently and attacks Teddy:

MAX. Who asked you to bring tarts in here?
TEDDY. Tarts?

. . . .
MAX. We've had a smelly scrubber in my house all night. We've had a stinking pox-ridden slut in my house all night.

. . . .
TEDDY. She's my wife! We're married!

Pause.

MAX. I've never had a whore under this roof before. Ever since your mother died. My word of honour . . . . Take that disease away from me. Get her away from me.
TEDDY. She is my wife.
MAX (to JOEY). Chuck them out (pp. 41-42).
A while later Max asks Ruth:

MAX. Miss.

RUTH walks towards him.

RUTH. Yes.

He looks at her.

MAX. You a mother?

RUTH. Yes.

MAX. How many you got?

RUTH. Three.

He turns to TEDDY.

MAX. All yours, Ted.

Pause.

Teddy, why don't we have a nice cuddle and kiss, eh? Like the old days? (p. 43).

Now there is a dramatic transformation in Max's attitude towards Ruth. She is a mother, a "charming woman," and Teddy has made a "wonderful choice" (p. 49).

Just as Max makes Jessie a paradoxical figure by referring to her sometimes as a "slut bitch of a wife" with "a rotten stinking face," and at other times eulogizing her as the backbone of the family, a mother who taught her sons "all the morality they know," so also he admires Ruth in one breath and villifies her in the next. But right from the moment he sets eyes on her, he "sees her resemblance to Jessie as a mother-figure," and her "resemblance to Jessie as a whore."41

Joey's attitude towards Ruth is evident from the beginning, from the doting adoring manner with which he gazes at her. When
he goes upstairs with her but does not succeed in "going the whole hog" with her, he is not upset or frustrated, because he is basically mother-oriented, and quite content to take on the role of the child with her.

Now that she has established her supremacy, in the house of pathetic, emasculated, love-starved men, Ruth agrees to remain with them to function as a wife, mother and whore. When Max makes this proposal to her, Teddy protests ineffectually. Sam (representing the sentiment of the audience), is shocked and protests fervently against this preposterous overture. But Ruth accepts graciously:

RUTH. I think I'd be too much trouble.
MAX. Trouble? What are you talking about?
Listen, I'll tell you something since poor Jessie died, eh, Sam? We haven't had a woman in the house. Not one. Inside this house. And I'll tell you why. Because their mother's image was so dear any other woman would have . . . Ruth . . . you're not only lovely and beautiful, but you're kin. You're kith. You belong here.

Pause.

RUTH. I'm very touched (p. 75).

The play ends with Joey's head in Ruth's lap, and with Max whimpering for her attention:

I'm not an old man.

He looks up at her.

Do you hear me?

He raises his face to her.

Kiss me.
She continues to touch JOEY's head, lightly.
LENNY stands, watching (p. 82).

Why Ruth makes such a decision, forfeiting her life of prestige and dignity is a question that baffles everyone. One seemingly logical explanation, however, could be that having led the life of a model, Ruth probably found no charm and excitement (and could not derive satisfaction) in being a wife to a professor, or from mothering his three sons. She must believe that Teddy can take care of the children in her absence. And that it is here, in this home which is falling apart that she is needed, to bring love and warmth into the lives of three love-starved men, simultaneously satisfying her unfulfilled physical and emotional needs.
PHYSICAL SECURITY AS A SUBSTITUTE

Many of Pinter's characters experience a deep sense of insecurity which appears to stem from an unsatisfactory relationship, especially with the opposite sex. And despite their efforts to conceal it, they reveal a constant fear of losing something or someone that gives them identity, and confers some meaning to their existence. So, when they feel the sand slipping away from under their feet, when they realize that they are losing, or have lost the love of the person, without whom their life is a meaningless void, they desperately try to hold on to some thing more tangible, and less elusive.

In The Room, Rose constantly harps on the safety and warmth of her room, as opposed to the damp basement below them, and the cold winter night outside, as if trying to convince not only her husband Bert, but also herself, that she is free from danger, free from menace, in this room where nobody bothers them. She declares, "No, this room's all right for me. I mean, you know where you are. When it's cold, for instance" (p. 92). Later, as she rocks on a chair, she says:

ROSE. This is a good room. You've got a chance in a place like this. I look after you, don't I, Bert? Like when they offered us the basement here I said no straight off. I knew that'd be no good. The ceiling right on top of you. No, you've got a window here, you can move yourself, you can come home at night, if you have to go out, you can do your job, you can come home, you're all right. And I'm here. You stand a chance (p. 95).
Then, without waiting for Bert to reply or comment, she resumes her talking, revealing a great deal of curiosity about the basement, "I wonder who has got it now. I've never seen them, or heard of them. But I think someone's down there. Whoever's got it can keep it" (p. 95).

But as she prattles on (except for the pregnant pauses in between her speeches), fussing over Bert, advising him to eat well, commenting time and again on the terrible weather outside, and repeating about how fortunate they were to get such a cosy room, Bert utters not a single word. As a result of this, we get the feeling that there is something vitally wrong with their relationship because, not only Bert does not respond to her question, Rose also does not expect any response from him. So, "By talking in the way she does, she's giving herself the reassurance he refuses her."42

After Bert leaves in his van, a young couple, Mr. and Mrs. Sands come looking for the landlord because they need a room. Someone in the basement has told them that there was a vacant room in the apartment. When Rose hears this she is upset because she is afraid of being ousted from her room (her only solace now), as she has been ousted from Bert's favor. When Mr. Kidd, the landlord comes in a little later to tell Rose about the man that was waiting for her in the basement, he finds Rose completely distraught after what Mr. and Mrs. Sands had told her. Hollis remarks that Rose's conversation with
Mr. Kidd "betrays her anxiety." She does not say what she would really like to say: "She does not express her fears of being rooted out, of being supplanted from her cosy, womb-like room." 43

When Riley enters, Rose gets more and more agitated and turns from an ostensibly concerned, caring lady into an aggressive one. She insults him by telling him "They say I know you. That's an insult, for a start. Because I can tell you, I wouldn't know you to spit on, not from a mile off" (p. 113). She realizes that her security is threatened by Riley's presence, and "her fear manifests itself in pre-emptive hostility. A passive desire for security becomes an active agent of evil, and all the ambiguity and evasive dialogue becomes not an amusing stylistic mannerism but an effect - and in its turn a cause - of the fear of the dark outside." 44

Whereas Rose needs the room to give her a feeling of security, in The Birthday Party, Meg in her quest for emotional security (which she fails to get from her taciturn husband, Petey), finds Stanley, a boarder in her house, and smothers him with her loving concern. Stanley, who is himself a nervous and insecure person also needs the security of Meg's home to hide himself from whatever he fears, and is therefore, "reluctant to leave the warm, though seedy, nest which Meg has built for him." 45
When Meg mentions to Stanley that she is expecting two gentlemen, he "slowly raises his head" and "speaks without turning":

STANLEY. What two gentlemen?  
MEG. I'm expecting visitors.

He turns.

STANLEY. What?  
MEG. You didn't know that, did you?  
STANLEY. What are you talking about?

... ... ...  
STANLEY. I don't believe it.  
MEG. It's true.  
STANLEY (moving to her). You're saying it on purpose (p. 20).

It is difficult for us to understand why the mention of two men would upset Stanley to such an extent. He is anxious to know their names, and gets more and more agitated. But finally (being the escapist we know he is), Stanley dismisses the whole thing as being a "false alarm," and asks Meg for his tea.

But that Meg is as afraid of losing Stanley as he is of losing his security and her attentions, is evident, when she tells him, "Don't you go away again, Stan. You stay here. You'll be better off. You stay with your old Meg" (p. 23). But later, Stanley frightens her to death by telling her:

STANLEY. They're looking for someone.  
MEG. They're not.  
STANLEY. They're looking for someone.  
A certain person.  
MEG (hoarsely). No, they're not!  
STANLEY. Shall I tell you who they're looking for?  
MEG. No!  
STANLEY. You don't want me to tell you?  
MEG. You're a liar! (p. 24).
Though it is difficult to decipher from this ambiguous conversation who Stanley is referring to, we get the definitive feeling that Meg is not afraid for her own safety, but for Stanley's, and panics at the possibility of losing him.

When Lulu, a young girl comes to deliver a parcel to Meg, Stanley (frightened by the news Meg had recently given him) feels a sudden urge to run away and asks her:

STANLEY (abruptly). How would you like to go away with me?
LULU. Where.
STANLEY. Nowhere. Still, we could go (p. 26).

But, when Lulu asks him if he would like to go for a walk, he refuses to do so, upon which Lulu tells him, "You're a bit of a washout, aren't you?" (p. 26). This conversation, plus the fact that at the end of the birthday party Stanley picks her up and places her on the table, apparently with the desire to rape her, but is discovered bending over her, giggling, convinces us that Stanley is incapable of having a meaningful sexual relationship with a woman. We do not know if one of Goldberg and McCann's accusations that Stanley had killed his wife, and another that he had never showed up at his wedding have any validity (pp. 49-50). But Stanley's weird actions make us wonder if there could be some truth in them.

At the end of the play, however, Stanley loses the security of Meg's home, because Goldberg and McCann take him away in their black car, and Meg, pathetically unaware that she has lost Stanley (the only person that made life worth
living for her), declares to Petey:

MEG. I was the belle of the ball.
PETEY. Were you?
MEG. Oh yes. They all said I was.
PETEY. I bet you were, too.
MEG. Oh, it's true. I was.

Pause.
I know I was (p. 87).

In A Slight Ache, Edward experiences a deep sense of emotional insecurity because of an apparently unsatisfactory marital relationship. So unstable is the ground on which his marriage to Flora is based that just the presence of an old matchseller is sufficient to unnerve him, and crash the veneer of his self-composure. But it does not take us long to realize that it is Edward's lack of confidence in himself that sparks his distrust of Flora.

Flora is surprised that a silent old man could shake and disturb Edward to such an extent. When Edward complains petulantly, "It used to give me a great pleasure, such pleasure to stroll along through the long grass, out through the back gate, pass into the lane. That pleasure is now denied me. It's my own house, isn't it? It's my own gate," we get the feeling that Edward is trying to reassure himself that the house and the gate really do belong to him (pp. 15-16). His statements also remind us of a child who is afraid that he might lose his toys and go to prove that Edward not only feels emotionally insecure, but that he is also afraid of losing his home and his physical security.
Edward has a slight ache in his eyes which is aggravated every time the matchseller is mentioned:

FLORA: Your eyes are bloodshot.
EDWARD: Damn it.
FLORA: It's too dark in here to peer . . .
EDWARD: Damn.
FLORA: It's so bright outside.
EDWARD: Damn.
FLORA: And it's dark in here.

[Pause.]

EDWARD: Christ blast it!
FLORA: You're frightened of him.
EDWARD: I'm not.
FLORA: You're frightened of a poor old man.
   Why?
EDWARD: I am not!
FLORA: He's poor, harmless old man.
EDWARD: Aaah my eyes (p. 18).

It is curious to note that a failure in vision has symbolical significance in Pinter's plays, because blindness seems to connote death or total annihilation in The Room, a blurred vision and a bad eyesight are the result of fear, insecurity, and guilt in The Birthday Party and Tea Party. So the ache in Edward's eyes symbolizes a deep-seated feeling of insecurity, suspicion, and also sexual inadequacy in A Slight Ache.

When Flora gets over her initial astonishment (at Edward's resentment of the matchseller), she taunts him saying that he is afraid of the man, upon which Edward decides to confront the intruder. He tells Flora to fetch the man. When the matchseller arrives, Edward acts the part of a polite host exceedingly well. He asks the old man a number of questions. But though he is unable to elicit any answer from him, Edward
continues to talk. He tries to impress the matchseller by informing him that he writes "theological and philosophical essays." His remarks have a hollow ring to them when he tells him, "Africa's always been my happy hunting ground. Fascinating country," and then admits that he has never been there, only studied the continent in maps (p. 23). A little later, sounding a trifle embarrassed, Edward apologizes to the matchseller for his garrulity confessing, "We have few visitors this time of the year. All our friends summer abroad. I'm a home bird myself" (p. 24). Here again Edward clearly expresses his disinclination to leave the security that his home provides him.

We know that Edward's intention behind inviting the matchseller into the house is to study the motives of the man who has so deeply disturbed him. But he tries to convince him that he is not frightened of him:

>You may think I was alarmed by the look of you. You would be quite mistaken. I was not alarmed by the look of you. I did not find you at all alarming. No, no. Nothing outside this room has ever alarmed me (p. 27).

We are baffled by this outburst of Edward. Is Edward protesting so vehemently that he is not alarmed by the matchseller because (as we believe) he really is? But then why would he say that "Nothing outside this room has ever alarmed me," unless he is trying to say that he is afraid of his own wife Flora, afraid that the passion lurking in her might erupt some
day, and that he would be left all alone in the world? Just as Rose, who was clinging to the physical security of her room, was rendered helpless and blind in the same room, so also at the end of the play Edward collapses from the ache in his eyes and from the nausea and horror that overwhelms him. In his effort to attack the silent threat, Edward has lost not only his wife and his home but has also destroyed himself.

In Night School, Walter (a forger and a petty thief) who has just been released from prison returns home to his two aunts, Annie and Milly, to find that his room has been let out to a schoolteacher called Sally Gibbs. At first Walter is shocked and devastated when he learns that his room no longer belongs to him. But after he meets Sally, his obsession for the room shifts to an obsession to impress Sally, and also to find out her true identity. He tries to impress her by telling her that he is a gunman, and that he is married to three women. But he himself admits later:

I don't know why I made such a fuss about this room. It's just an ordinary room, there's nothing to it. I mean if you weren't here. If you weren't in it, there'd be nothing to it.

Pause.

Why don't you stay in it? It's not true that I'm married. I just said that. I'm not attached. To tell you the truth . . . to tell you the truth, I'm still looking for Miss Right (p. 77).
Walter's statements reveal that so far he has been unable to establish a meaningful love-relationship with any woman which would account for his obsession for the security of his room as a substitute for emotional insecurity. But when he orders Sally to sit down, cross her legs, uncross them, stand up, turn around, he reveals an aggressive nature in his need to assert himself, and his desire to control the woman he loves. We feel that this aspect of Walter's character could be responsible for his failure so far as male-female relationships are concerned. At the end of the play Sally disappears leaving him a farewell note: "So Walter has his room back; but he has also lost what might have been the only chance in his life to find a human being who could become a real partner for him."  

In The Basement, Pinter adheres to the subject of the room as a symbol of security, and the transitory nature of this security, but there is a progression in this concept. The play opens with Law in the room, Jane and Stott outside it. At the end of the play we find Stott in the room, and Law and Jane outside. Why Law had been ousted by Stott, and why he had agreed to leave what we thought was his apartment, remains a mystery. But we get the impression that this process is cyclical. When one of the two men leaves the room, he takes the girl with him. In other words, the man who possesses the room, loses the girl. Is Pinter trying to say that you cannot have both love and security at the same time, that love should
be an unconditional surrender, not so constricting that it must include security in its grasp? But whatever Pinter's message might be, one thing that emerges from the play is that the room represents some kind of security and stability that the male-female relationship fails to give the three of them, as a result of which, though Law, Jane and Stott leave it, they do so briefly, only to return to it after some period of time.

In Old Times, Anna leaves her husband in Sicily to visit her friend Kate and Deeley after a long period of time. She finds Kate's home a haven of peace and rest:

ANNA
Listen. What silence. Is it always as silent?

DEELEY
It's quite silent here, yes. Normally.

Pause.

You can hear the sea sometimes if you listen very carefully.

ANNA
How wise you were to choose this part of the world, and how sensible and courageous of you both to stay permanently in such a silence.

DEELEY
My work takes me away quite often, of course. But Kate stays here.

ANNA
No one who lived here would want to go far. I would not want to go far, I would be afraid of going far, lest when I returned the house would be gone (p. 19).
Later when Kate suggests that they could take a walk across the park, Anna does not think it is a good idea:

**ANNA**

The path is dirty at night, all sorts of horrible people, men hiding behind trees and women with terrible voices, they scream at you as you go past, and people come out suddenly from behind trees and bushes and there are shadows everywhere . . .

Pause.

You'll only want to come home if you go out. You'll want to run home . . . and into your room . . . .

Pause (pp. 43-44).

Anna associates the room with security and is afraid of the dark, unknown world outside. But it seems curious to us that if she could come from Sicily to London in order to visit her friend, why she would be afraid of leaving the room; she even offers to keep Kate company while Deeley is away, upon which Deeley asks her if her husband would not miss her, and Anna replies, "Of course. But he would understand" (p. 39).

Apparently, Anna had felt the need to return to her friend with whom she had shared an apartment twenty years ago. But it seems incredible to us that she could possibly leave her husband in Sicily, unless, of course, either there was something vitally wrong in their relationship, or she does not have a husband and is only making him up. This would then explain her fear of the outside world, her feeling of insecurity, and her wish to remain in the warmth of the room.
Thus, as we have seen, Pinter has stressed in quite a few of his plays, the human need for physical security. In his recent play *Betrayal*, Emma and Jerry not only have an extra-marital affair, but also rent a flat and decorate it to give them the feeling of home. Only when this need appears irrational and gets to be an obsession does it signal emotional dissatisfaction, hidden stress, and reveals the individual's fear of being rooted out.
SECURITY VERSUS A VITAL MODE OF LIFE

After we are introduced to characters like Rose in The Room and Meg and Stanley in The Birthday Party, who reveal an intense fear of losing their security, we are surprised when we meet Flora in A Slight Ache, and Ruth in The Homecoming, who relinquish their security to pursue a more vital mode of life. Therefore, we feel that Pinter's presentation of the universal need for physical and emotional security so far, has only been one facet of his interpretation of human nature.

A Slight Ache is the first of Pinter's plays which is based on a middle-class idiom: Edward and Flora are an affluent middle-class couple who live in a large country house surrounded by gardens. Edward used to be in business, now he regards himself as something of an intellectual; he mentions that he is engaged on writing a book on Space and Time; on another occasion he refers to his plans for a work on the Belgian Congo.47

It is evident from the beginning of the play that Edward and Flora do not share an ideal love-relationship, and are far from leading what would be called a blissful marital life. The absence of communication between them which is obvious from their argument about what grows in their garden, the tension that we perceive in their relationship, and the deliberate rudeness with which Edward treats Flora bear ample testimony to this inference. Also the sadistic pleasure that both of them derive from destroying the unfortunate wasp that falls into their marmalade reveals the lives of desperation that they must themselves lead.
Despite his intellectual pretensions, and his efforts to maintain a veneer of being contented, Edward is mortally afraid of being displaced in his wife's affections. As a result of his insecurity, Edward feels threatened by the presence of an old matchseller who has been standing at their gate for two months. He gives vent to his resentment by acting in an aggressive and petulant manner towards his wife, and grumbles because his routine has been disrupted:

EDWARD (to himself). It used to give me great pleasure, such pleasure, to stroll along through the grass, out through the back gate, pass into the lane. That pleasure is now denied me. It's my own house, isn't it? It's my own gate (pp. 15-16).

"The Matchseller denied him that pleasure." When Flora tries to calm him by saying that the man is "harmless," Edward replies, as if to convince himself, "I didn't say he wasn't harmless. Of course he's harmless. How could he be other than harmless?" (p. 16). But Edward's inexplicable fear of the matchseller manifests physically in a slight ache in his eyes which is aggravated every time the matchseller is mentioned.

Flora, however, is amazed that Edward should be so upset by the mere presence of a "harmless" old man who stands silently doing nothing. So we feel that Edward's unnatural and uncalled for irritation, and his baseless suspicions of the matchseller's intentions have triggered Flora's strange
fascination for the "scruffy" old man! Gabbard also believes that:

In Flora's eyes, the Matchseller has been only a harmless old man at first. She has seen him realistically, for what he is. When she views him through the scullery window, however, she sees him through Edward's eyes - a bullock, a large full-grown castrated ox. It was easy to see him thus, after Edward's slights and rejections. As these slights grow in her, her emptiness and aching grow. Finally, when she is alone with the Matchseller, she sees him through her own desires. He becomes first the embodiment of her sexual fantasies - the poacher.

She tells him, "Do you know, I've got a feeling I've seen you before, somewhere. Long before the flood. You were much younger. Yes, I'm really sure of it. Between ourselves, were you ever a poacher? I had an encounter with a poacher once. It was a ghastly rape, the brute" (pp. 30-31).

The matchseller arouses simultaneous attraction and repulsion in Flora. At one moment her tenderness and maternal instincts take precedence in her feelings for him (she sees him perspiring, and mops his brow), whereas the next moment she is drawn to his animal magnetism and reveals her curiosity about his sex life:

I'm sure you must have been quite attractive once. [She sits.] Not any more, of course. You've got a vile smell. Vile. Quite repellent, in fact. [Pause.] Sex, I suppose, means nothing to you. Does it ever occur to you that sex is a very vital experience for other people? Really, I think you'd amuse me if you weren't so hideous.
You're probably quite amusing in your own way. [Seductively.] Tell me all about love. Speak to me of love (p. 32).

She wants him to speak to her "of love," but again her desire to take care of him surfaces. She tells him that all he needed was a "lovely lathery bath. And a good scrub." She christens him "Barnabas" and whispers to him:

My husband would never have guessed your name. Never. [She kneels at his feet. Whispering.] It's me you are waiting for, wasn't it? You've been standing waiting for me. You've seen me in the woods, picking daisies, in my apron, pretty daisy apron, and you came and stood, poor creature, at my gate, till death us do part. Poor Barnabas. I'm going to put you to bed and watch over you (pp. 32-33).

When Edward asks Flora to invite the matchseller into the house, he is making an effort to confront the object of his fears in order to do away with them. But faced with the silence of the man, Edward's fears mount. He tries to impress the matchseller that he is an intellectual, that he writes theological and philosophical essays, that he is a happily married man. He has a "Charming" wife who stood by him "through thick and thin" when he was struggling to make his way in the world (p. 24). (Ironically he advises the matchseller to get a good woman to stick by him.) He was also an athlete. He used to play cricket in his youth. All this time the matchseller is silent. In his fear and confusion Edward is not certain if the matchseller is grinning at him or crying out of pity for him. Edward's mask falls off and his anger and
resentment erupt to the surface. The pain in his eyes comes back. He gasps with pain and almost collapses. All of a sudden the matchseller looks "extraordinarily youthful" to him. Flora enters and handing Edward the matchseller's tray goes out with her new mate.

Now we realize that Edward's initial fear and distrust of the intruder was justified. Edward must have been intensely aware of his own impotence, the suppressed passion in Flora, and his failure to satisfy her needs. Perhaps because of his feelings of inadequacy, he used to resent Flora's mothering:

FLORA: Oh, Weddie. Beddie - Weddie ....
EDWARD: Do not call me that! (p. 18).

Later, when she had offered to bathe his blood-shot eyes, Edward had replied irritably "keep away," thus hurting her feelings, and making her feel rebuffed and humiliated. So, feeling unwanted and unloved, Flora tries to fill the emptiness in her life by accepting a decrepit matchseller, with the belief that he can satisfy her physical and emotional needs better than Edward. She sees him as a "bullock," and later, as a "solid old boy,... Not at all like a jelly" (p. 32). She must also realize that at least the matchseller does not snap at her when she mops his brow. And though he utters not a single word, the matchseller complies with all her wishes when she makes an effort to communicate with him. But we know that she has failed to reach Edward in every single way.
By accepting the matchseller, and rejecting Edward, Flora is rejecting the cerebral element in her life for something basic and elemental. Hollis remarks, "The image of the 'bullock', for example is indicative. Flora describes the matchseller as a bullock and projects on him the strength and virility which she misses in Edward." By giving up her marriage and her life of security, Flora is also taking a bold step in her life, but, at least, like Rose in The Room, and Meg in The Birthday Party, she has not given in to a complacent acceptance of her lot.

It is Ruth in The Homecoming, however, who epitomizes Pinter's concept that neither social status nor security is necessarily conducive to happiness, nor a guarantee of a blissful marital life. As Flora's actions baffle us in A Slight Ache, so also do Ruth's, when she leaves her husband, her three sons, and her status as the wife of a professor of philosophy to live as a mother-cum-whore in a male household.

Teddy brings his wife Ruth to London to meet his father, Max, his uncle, Sam, and his two brothers, Lenny and Joey. But, as soon as we meet her we detect tension between Teddy and Ruth from her refusal to comply with her husband's wishes, and the biting sarcasm that she directs at him:

RUTH. I'm tired.

Pause.

TEDDY. Then sit down.

She does not move.
That's my father's chair.
RUTH. That one?
TEDDY (smiling). Yes, that's it. Shall I go up and see if my room's still there?
RUTH. It can't have moved (p. 20).

Despite Teddy's fascination and wonder at surveying his old home and realizing that nothing has changed, he is not callous towards his wife. He tries to make her feel at home; he asks her if she is tired, if she is cold, and if she would like to drink something. But whether he does all this out of love and concern for her, anxiety to please her, or he is merely being courteous, we do not know. But when he proposes that they both should go to bed, Ruth replies that she would like to take a "stroll":

RUTH. I just feel like some air.
TEDDY. But I'm going to bed.
RUTH. That's all right.
TEDDY. But what am I going to do?

Pause.

The last thing I want is a breath of fresh air. Why do you want a breath of fresh air?
RUTH. I just do.
TEDDY. But it's late.
RUTH. I won't go far. I'll come back.

Pause.

TEDDY. I'll wait up for you.
RUTH. Why? (p. 24).

What emerges from the above argument is that when Teddy expresses his need for Ruth, she rejects him gently, but firmly, thereby, proving her control over her husband.
Lenny, Teddy's brother, is the first person whom Ruth meets after arriving in the house. But we are surprised when after a brief introduction Lenny asks Ruth if he could hold her hand:

RUTH. Why?
LENNY. Just a touch.

He stands and goes to her.

Just a tickle.
RUTH. Why? (p. 30).

Lenny is evidently nonplussed by his failure to shake Ruth, and, for the audience, Ruth's calm assurance in this situation is a notable indication of her ability to function within this family. But in her measured response, we also perceive the lack of moral outrage that might not unreasonably accompany this excessive familiarity from a comparative stranger. Ruth, it seems, has other abilities in male/female relationships than those demanded of a conventional and dutiful wife. 52

Max, upon seeing Ruth next morning upbraids Teddy for bringing "dirty tarts" into the house:

MAX. Who asked you to bring dirty tarts into this house?
TEDDY. Listen, don't be silly -
MAX. You been here all night?
TEDDY. Yes, we arrived from Venice -
MAX. We've had a smelly scrubber in my house all night. We've had a stinking pox-ridden slut in my house all night (p. 41).

When Teddy declares in exasperation, "She's my wife! We're married," Max retorts, "I've never had a whore under this roof before. Ever since your mother died . . . (To Teddy.) Take that disease away from me. Get her away from me" (p. 32). However, when he learns later that Ruth is not only Teddy's wife,
but also the mother of three sons, Max is impressed, and there is a complete transformation in his attitude towards her. He even compliments his son on his "wonderful choice" (p. 49).

What amazes us is that instead of being revolted by Max's crude manner of speech and sudden reversals of temper, Ruth takes it calmly. Katherine Burkman says that, "Perhaps she understands her father-in-law's crude bluster as the true welcome it soon becomes. Jessie, whom he hated, loved, and needed, is alternately idealized as an angel and berated as a bitch and whore by Max; and Ruth is more than willing to play the double role in which he correctly casts her."\(^53\)

By now Teddy realizes that "he may lose the precarious stability of his ordered life with Ruth, ..." and proposes to her that they should return home to their three sons.\(^54\) But though Ruth does not spell it out, we can easily see her disinclination to return with her husband. She asks him:

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RUTH. Don't you like your family?
TEDDY. Which family?
RUTH. Your family here.
TEDDY. Of course I like them. What are you talking about? (p. 54).
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Having failed to arouse her maternal instincts for their sons, Teddy tries to remind Ruth how clean America is, how much he needs her help to prepare his lectures, how exciting their trip to Venice was. He asks her, "You liked Venice, didn't you? It was lovely, wasn't it? You had a good week. I mean ... I took you there. I can speak Italian," whereupon Ruth
argues, "But if I'd been a nurse in the Italian campaign I would have been there before" (p. 55). Here we feel that Ruth is revealing the absence of love and passion in their marriage, that though they both had gone together, their trip to Venice had been barren and unfulfilling. But then, Ruth, being a "photographic model for the body," before she married Teddy could also be looking for a more exciting life (spiced with variety) that Teddy could never offer her.

When Teddy comes downstairs with their suitcases, ready to leave, Lenny asks Ruth for just one dance. "Ruth dances with Lenny, kisses him, and lapses off-handedly into a sort of mini-orgy with the two brothers, Joey embracing and Lenny caressing her inert body - whilst Max simultaneously swops friendly common-places with Teddy." Then, all of a sudden, Max embarks upon a novel idea. They would ask Ruth to stay. Sam and Teddy protest, and try to point out the absurdity of the proposition:

SAM. Don't be silly.
MAX. What's silly?
SAM. You're talking rubbish.
MAX. Me?
SAM. She's got three children.
MAX. She can have more! Here. If she's so keen.
TEDDY. She doesn't want any more.
MAX. What do you know what she wants, eh, Ted?
TEDDY (smiling). The best thing for her is to come home with me, Dad. Really. We're married, you know (p. 70).

But Max proves to be right about his assessment that Teddy is indeed ignorant of his wife's needs. When Ruth comes down the stairs, Teddy tells her that the family wanted her to stay
with them, "As a . . . as a kind of guest. If you like the idea I don't mind" (p. 75). Max adds that it is an offer from their hearts. And Ruth not only accepts saying that she is "touched," she also lays down conditions in which she would be willing to live with them.

The only thing that she has to say to her husband, who is leaving her to join their three children in another continent is laconically, "Don't become a stranger" (p. 80). Katherine Burkman comments that, Teddy "is a dead man; and Ruth has experienced a near death in her relationship with him." Teddy operates, he explains, "on things and not in things" (p. 61). So he has never made the effort to understand the true needs of his wife and tried to fulfill them. By forsaking her career as a nude model, and marrying Teddy six years ago, Ruth has made an effort to attain respectability. She had also known motherhood by bearing him three sons. But then, she must have experienced a clawing dissatisfaction within her, and realized that that was not what she wanted from life. Neither Flora (who suggests to Edward that they could call the police or the vicar to get rid of the intruder), nor Ruth (who tells Teddy, just after their arrival that they should leave soon because their children must be missing them), had planned on abandoning their families. But when they are offered another chance in life, which appeals to them better than the prospect of a lifetime of emptiness and yearning, they accept it with alarming alacrity.
THE ABSENCE OF A STRONG ROMANTIC COMMITMENT

When we consider the whole corpus of Pinter's work we realize that there is no binding moral law dictating the lives of his characters. In fact, at times we are reminded of the plays of the Restoration period, when love was fickle and lovers changed partners to add excitement and variety to life. In this respect the only difference that separates Pinter's plays from the Restoration Comedy of Manners is that, Pinter's message is basically a pessimistic one. There is hardly any overt flaunting of emotions, exhilaration, or flamboyance. We also feel that Pinter's characters usually change partners to fill some void, or remove certain deep-seated feelings of dissatisfaction that exist in their lives. At the end of most of the plays, however, we get the impression that somewhere along the line these people had failed, that their quest for a more meaningful relationship had not been very successful.

In The Birthday Party, Meg who openly flirts with Stanley, reveals greater concern for him than for her husband, Petey. In A Slight Ache, Flora abandons her husband Edward, and accepts an old matchseller into her life; and in The Homecoming Ruth prefers to live with three men rather than with her husband and children, as the wife of a respectable professor of Philosophy.
In The Collection, Pinter presents four insecure people; a married couple, James and Stella, and two men, Harry and Bill, who obviously have a homosexual relationship. The play begins in an atmosphere of mystery, when a strange "voice" asks for Bill. Very soon, however, our curiosity is dispelled when we learn that the menacing voice is only a jealous husband who is trying to track down the man with whom his wife had an affair in Leeds.

When James challenges Bill, the latter tries to evade him, and denies any knowledge of Stella, upon which James proceeds to describe in minute detail the incident that took place in the motel in Leeds:

BILL. What was I doing there?
JAMES (casually). My wife was in there.
That's where you slept with her (p. 53).

Apparently the affair could not have meant anything to Bill, because he appears to be bored and wants to get rid of James:

BILL. Look, do you mind ... just going off now. You're giving me a bit of a headache.
JAMES. You knew she was married ... why did you feel it necessary ... to do that?
BILL. She must have known she was married too.
Why did she feel it necessary ... to do that? (p. 55).

The sarcasm in Bill's logic is obvious, but it is even more biting when Bill remarks later, "You've got a devoted wife, haven't you? Keeps you very well informed, right up to the minutest detail ..." (p. 55).
What puzzles us is the fact that Stella should make a confession of her infidelity to her husband, putting both her marriage and her happiness at stake, unless, as Augusta Walker remarks, between Stella and James "desire has cooled off to the well-known point where the wife feels she must stir her husband to jealousy." 57

As the play proceeds, we hear so many versions of what had ensued between Stella and Bill in Leeds that we do not know what to believe. But every single version reveals the lax morals of Stella, who is being unfaithful to her husband, and Bill, who is disloyal to Harry. Gabbard calls Stella, "a dreamer who seems willing to compromise her respectability with extramarital affairs." 58

James, however, is obsessed with thoughts of Bill and wishes to see him again:

JAMES. I want to know what his attitude is.

Pause.

STELLA. He doesn't matter.
JAMES. What do you mean?
STELLA. He's not important.
JAMES. Do you mean anyone would have done?
You mean it just happened to be him, but it might as well have been anyone? (p. 64).

Though Stella denies it, we understand that only after two years of marriage she had felt the necessity or the urge to have an extramarital affair, possibly to satisfy her physical needs, or to arouse the jealousy of her husband. But ironically, in doing so, Stella has also aroused a homosexual streak that
was latent in James. He tells her, "after two years of marriage it looks, as though, by accident, you've opened up a whole new world for me" (p. 67). Referring to this, Gabbard remarks that "The audience have been amused and delighted with the subtle interconnecting relationships and deceptions. They can even go away pondering the effect of James's self-discovery on his marriage to Stella." 59

At the end of the play, James' anxious inquiry, and Stella's enigmatic smile reveal that between the couple trust has broken down, and even though they continue to live together, they will do so with an awakened knowledge of themselves, in the process of which they have lost something vital.

In The Basement we are presented with three characters, two men, Law and Stott have apparently been romantically involved with Jane, who seems to be not only fickle and unpredictable, but also treacherous. When Law admits Stott and Jane into his apartment, they undress and get into bed naked, while Law sits close by reading a Persian love manual. Later, when Law asks Jane on the beach if she had known Stott for long, she admits that she had not:

LAW. You don't know him very well?  
JANE. No (pp. 97-98).

This not only reveals Jane's passionate nature, but also that she is a girl who has no qualms about going to bed with a man she admits she does not know "very well." She even shocks us by smiling at Law while she is in bed with Stott.
One summer evening Jane whispers to Law on the beach:

JANE. Why don't you tell him to go? We had such a lovely home. We had such a cosy home. It was so warm. Tell him to go. It's your place. Then we could be happy again. Like we used to. Like we used to. In our first blush of love. Then we could be happy again, like we used to. We could be happy again. Like we used to (p. 105).

It appears from Jane's appeal to Law that they had been lovers before, and that Jane had possibly rejected Law for Stott, or for some other man, either searching for more excitement, or a happiness which we feel she will never find. Law could also have ousted Stott and Jane for being unfaithful to him. We have no way of knowing.

When Jane makes this proposal to Law, we are unaware of his reaction. But later, he warns Stott that she is treacherous, and is betraying him:

LAW (whispering very deliberately). She betrays you. She betrays you. She has no loyalty. After all you've done for her. Shown her the world. Given her faith. You've been deluded. She's a savage. A viper. She sullies this room. She dirties this room. All this beautiful Scandinavian furniture. She dirties it. She sullies the room (p. 106).

However, after arousing suspicion in Stott's mind, Law and Jane are seen in a corner "snuffling each other like animals" (p. 107). The play ends with Law and Jane standing outside the apartment and Stott greeting and welcoming them. Law has thus lost the apartment, but gotten the girl. This process seems
cyclical because, the man who possesses the apartment loses the girl. Gabbard remarks that, "This play also restresses one of The Collection's themes: love is disruptive and ever-changing." 60 Jane is romantically attracted to both men, but it is a fleeting and transitory attraction which lacks stability and denies permanence, because she only desires variety and sexual gratification, without the willingness to sacrifice anything in return.

In Tea Party we are first introduced to the object of Disson's lust, his new secretary Wendy. It is the eve of Disson's marriage to Diana, when one could expect complete, untainted loyalty to one's fiancée. Hence, we cannot help feeling surprised when we perceive the germination of what would later become a full-fledged affair between Disson and Wendy. He expresses to her that he needs a "very private secretary," which makes us wonder how "private" a secretary is supposed to be with her employer (p. 44). Wendy's crossing her legs from right to left and left to right a number of times, and Pinter's deliberate intention to draw our attention to her physical movements arouse our curiosity. Then, when Wendy tells Disson that she left her previous job because her employer "never stopped touching" her, it gives us the feeling that she is trying to plant this idea in Disson's mind, and we are convinced that this relationship is starting on a more intimate footing than would be expected between employer and employee.
Having met Disson's seductive secretary, we meet his wife Diana, whose "name likens her to the chaste moon-goddess who punishes all violations of chastity." Her brother describes her as a paragon of perfection, "a woman of taste, discernment, sensibility and imagination. An excellent swimmer who, in all probability has the beating of her husband in the two hundred meters breast stroke" (p. 49). It is obvious that though Disson is a successful businessman, the head of the "most advanced sanitary engineers in the country, "he is marrying above his status, to a supposedly flawless woman, who excels him in every respect (p. 44). Therefore, one would expect him to feel proud and privileged, but, on the contrary we discern in him a nagging sense of inadequacy and need for reassurance:

DISSON. Are you happy?
DIANA. Yes.
DISSON. Very happy?
DIANA. Yes
DISSON. Have you ever been happier?
   With any other man?
DIANA. Never.
   Pause.
DISSON. I make you happy, don't I? Happier than you've ever been . . . with any other man.
DIANA. Yes. You do.
   Pause.
   Yes. Yes.
   Silence (p. 50).

Disson's feeling of inferiority towards his wife, his suspicions of an incestuous relationship between his wife and her brother Willy, and perhaps his own feelings of guilt manifest, "as Rose's in The Room, as Edward's in A Slight Ache -
through a failure of his vision: he sees double or blurred images, and suffers from fits of temporary blindness.\(^{62}\) He projects his feelings of guilt (because of his uncontrollable passion for Wendy) to Willy, and in his imagination sees him making love to both Diana and Wendy (his wife and mistress), at the same time. In the last scene, blinded by guilt, fear, suspicion and jealousy, Disson collapses on the stage.

We cannot deny that perhaps it is the cold and unemotional nature of Diana that has sent Disson to the warmth and passion of Wendy. (Gabbard believes that, "When Disson marries this vision of purity and beauty, he develops a great need for a debased love object, Wendy."\(^{63}\) But then, one can argue that even before his marriage to her, Disson was drawn to Wendy, which goes to prove that either Disson felt no love for his wife-to-be, or that in his mind he has elevated her to a place where he feels he cannot reach her. This, added to the aloof nature of Diana makes it impossible for the couple to have a strong and binding romantic commitment.

Though no women actually appear in No Man's Land, Hirst and Spooner's references to the past reveal their involvement with a number of women, whom both of them knew. Spooner now claims that he has a wife and two daughters; Hirst apparently also had a wife. We do not know what became of her, but when Spooner says, "Tell me then about your wife," Hirst refusing to acknowledge her existence, asks, "What wife" (p. 30). "Then
Spooner becomes accusatory: he suggests Hirst never loved his wife; he salutes Hirst's impotence:

SPOONER

I begin to wonder whether you do in fact truly remember her, whether you truly did love her, truly caressed her, truly did cradle her, truly did husband her, falsely dreamed or did truly adore her. I have seriously questioned these propositions and find them threadbare.

Silence.

Her eyes, I take it, were hazel?

Hirst stands, carefully. He moves, with a slight stagger, to the cabinet, pours whisky, drinks.

HIRST

Hazel shit.

SPOONER

Good Lord, good lord, do I detect a touch of the maudlin?

Pause.

Hazel shit? I ask myself: Have I ever seen hazel shit? Or hazel eyes, for that matter?

HIRST throws his glass at him, ineffectually. It bounces on the carpet.

Do I detect a touch of the hostile? Do I detect - with respect - a touch of too many glasses of ale followed by the great malt which wounds? Which wounds? (pp. 31-32).

By reminding Hirst of his wife, Spooner has aroused his anger and antagonism. But in the second act, Hirst retaliates by enquiring about Spooner's wife Emily, then makes a revelation:
HIRST

Have to tell you I fell in love with her once upon a time. Have to confess it to you. Took her out to tea, in Dorchester. Told her of my yearning. Decided to take the bull by the horns. Proposed that she betray you. Admitted you were a damn fine chap, but pointed out I would be taking nothing that belonged to you, simply that portion of herself all women keep in reserve for a rainy day. Had an infernal job persuading her. Said she adored you, her life would be meaningless were she to be false. Plied her with buttered scones. Wiltshire cream, crumpets and strawberries. Eventually she succumbed (p. 69).

The fact that Emily's love and adoration for her husband could be bought with "buttered scones, Wiltshire cream, crumpets and strawberries," proves the sincerity and depth of her affections! Hirst even confesses that when Spooner was on a trip to France with his wife, Hirst was on the same boat, in a different cabin when Emily's ardor was, in his experience, unparalleled (p. 70).

Hirst's conquests, however, did not end with Spooner's wife alone, because a little later Spooner reminds him of Stella Winstanley whom Hirst had seduced, as a result of which her brother Bunty wanted to punch Hirst's nose. Then Hirst himself admits that he was very fond of Arabella, Bunty's wife. But when Spooner agrees with Hirst that "Arabella was a girl of the most refined and organised sensibilities," and that he himself had a sort of an affair with her, Hirst is enraged:
HIRST

I'm beginning to believe you're a scoundrel. How dare you speak of Arabella Hinscott in such a fashion? I'll have you blackballed from your club!

SPOONER

Oh my dear sir, may I remind you that you betrayed Stella Winstanley with Emily Spooner, my own wife, throughout a long and soiled summer, a fact known at the time throughout the Home Counties? May I further remind you that Muriel Blackwood and Doreen Busby have never recovered from your insane and corrosive sexual absolutism? (p. 76).

So, if Spooner's accusations have any validity, Hirst, in the past, was not only a failure as a husband, but was also a philanderer who flirted with one woman after another, breaking many a heart in the process.

Hirst is now an alcoholic, and is most of the time in a state of drunken stupor. But we wonder if his unsuccessful marital life, or his inability to establish a meaningful and lasting relationship with any woman, could have been responsible in turning him into an alcoholic. Thus, he could be drinking heavily either to drown his past sorrows, or to escape the painful loneliness that confronts him now.

Again, in Betrayal, Pinter reveals as he had done in many of his previous plays, the transitory nature of most love-relationships. The play begins in the year 1977 (when Robert and Emma, who have been married for fifteen years are about to get a divorce), and traces back the incidents that created a rift between them and led them to make such a decision.
It all begins one winter night in 1968, five years after the couple have been married, when Jerry, Robert's best friend, professes to Emma at a party that he loves her with a burning, all-consuming passion. Emma, after making a slight effort to discourage him, succumbs to his ardor when at the end of the scene, "they stand still, looking at each other" (p. 138).

Jerry is married to Judith and has two children; Robert and Emma also have two children of their own, and, moreover, the couples claim to be good friends. But, friendship, and betrayal of it do not seem strong enough grounds to compel Emma and Jerry to curb the passion that they feel for each other.

In 1973, five years after the beginning of their affair, when Robert and Emma are on a trip to Venice, Emma abruptly declares to Robert that Jerry and she have been lovers. But the matter of fact and calm manner with which Robert receives his wife's confession takes us by surprise. In fact, he casually remarks, "I've always liked 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" (p. 87).

It is in 1975, about seven years since the budding of their affair that Emma and Jerry begin to bicker, accusing each other like many married couples, proving that no love-relationship is pleasant and unclouded for an extended period of time, that when the romantic haze wears off it eventually becomes stale and unpleasant. "Contrasting past and present in Betrayal,
Pinter also emphasizes the inexorability of time, its capacity to erode and distort human relationships. In fact, we get the impression that Emma's and Jerry's affair has lasted for seven years because it was extramarital, so that they must have had added excitement of keeping it concealed. But, in due course, as the novelty of their passion dulls they blame each other for a coldness and boredom that they both experience. They are in the love nest that they have built for themselves, but the fire that once kindled their hearts has died down:

JERRY

We're here now.

EMMA

Not really (pp. 50-51).

Bereft of the love and passion that was once enacted in it, the flat is now only "an empty home" (p. 54).

However, we can feel no sympathy for Robert (the supposedly exploited husband), because we find out that while Emma had at least been honest with him when they were on their trip, and revealed to him that Jerry and she were lovers, Robert had concealed from his wife for fifteen years that he had also been having affairs with other women. When they meet in a pub Emma tells Jerry that Robert and she are "going to separate":

EMMA

We had a long talk . . . last night.
Jerry's wife Judith, who is a doctor, also has an admirer. Jerry is suspicious of their relationship and feels irritated on account of it. Though we never learn definitely if Judith had been sexually and emotionally involved with her admirer, by throwing this piece of information at us, Pinter implies that there is every possibility that even Judith is betraying Jerry. So "All of the marital partners are thus betrayers and betrayed." 66

It appears that Pinter's view on love is a pessimistic one. He seems to believe that in a world where people are only motivated by selfish drives, seeking satisfaction of self without the willingness to give of themselves, happiness cannot be lasting, cannot be permanent. Perhaps he feels that something is wrong with contemporary society where there is no spontaneity
or exhuberance, no zest for love, no desire to establish a meaningful love-relationship and no strong romantic commitment. As Linda Ben-Zvi rightly comments, "In the society Pinter investigates, not even lovers retain a faith shaped by their passion; dissembling mars their relations just as it undermines marriage."67
CONCLUSION

In his article "Pinter's Night: A Stroll Down Memory Lane," Thomas P. Adler says that Pinter's Night "is perhaps the only time in the whole range of Pinter's dramatic output that we find portrayed a completely satisfactory and mutually satisfying relationship between a husband and wife."68

In this short play of seven pages, Pinter depicts a Man and a Woman, who are together recollecting the time they first met at a party given by a man called Doughty. Like Beth in Landscape, the Woman remembers the tender, romantic moments of that day, while the Man, like Duff recollects the sensual gestures that he had made to her. They disagree on the details of that first meeting, but there seems to exist between them a concordance, a harmony. As the Woman recollects, "You took my face in your hands, standing by the railings. You were very gentle, you were very caring. You cared" (p. 56). Alder therefore refers to this play as being the only play by Pinter in which male and female unite in love and understanding.

But the question that rises in my mind is, why would Pinter not give names to his couple in Night? And the only conclusion I can draw from this is that, the Man and Woman, "embodiments of the masculine and feminine principles," are, perhaps, Pinter's ideal couple, and share Pinter's conception of an ideal marital relationship.69 Therefore, the Man and Woman in Night have no name or identity for Pinter.
As we have seen, except for this short play (and of course, the plays where no women appear, like The Dumb Waiter, The Caretaker, and The Dwarfs), the unsatisfactory relationship between men and women is a recurring concern in Pinter's plays, and is interwoven through all his major works. We cannot deny that Pinter projects a depressing facet of life and human relationship in his plays, and we feel that Pinter does not entertain very much hope for an untainted, meaningful and permanent love-relationship. However, I disagree with the critics who believe that the failure in male-female relationship is owing to clear-cut emasculation by the woman, in her desire to dominate and smother the man she loves. No relationship is comparable to another, and each one has a different reason for being successful or for failing. But at times, in Pinter's plays the initial failure can possibly be attributed to the failure of the man to satisfy the physical and emotional needs of the woman, who sets up compensatory mechanisms in the woman, as a result of which she either resorts to mothering him, or takes an alternative course of action which might prove to be more satisfying.

But regardless of the depressing gallery of failures in male-female relationships in Pinter's plays, one can emerge from them with the feeling that some of these failures could have been ameliorated and a measure of harmony achieved if his characters were able to perceive and face the problems that
confronted them. For example, if Rose in The Room had revealed her reason for her insecurity instead of skirting the issues facing her, and had been more open with Bert; and Bert had paid more attention to his wife's needs by directing his attention towards her, instead of being wrapped up in himself and his van, it is conceivable that they could have achieved a better understanding of each other. If Petey in The Birthday Party had not been so oblivious of his wife's needs, by realizing that Meg being childless needed an outlet, and Edward in A Slight Ache had shed his middle-class inhibitions and responded to Flora's efforts to transmit to him her needs, both their marriages might not have turned into pathetic failures. Again, if Teddy in The Homecoming had not taken refuge in academic pursuits and surrounded Ruth with a polite, genteel, suffocating existence, she might not have opted for a vital, though shocking mode of life. In The Lover we feel that Sarah and Richard have reached an absurd, temporarily satisfying resolution, where instead of trying to unite in love they split their personalities to derive sexual gratification, while in Tea Party Disson has chosen a wife whom he puts on a pedestal, and making no effort to reach out to her, squirms out of his predicament by hiring a sensual secretary. In The Collection, if Stella, instead of resorting to a series of subterfuges and lies in order to get James' attention, had made an effort to communicate with him in an open and honest manner, she might
have been able to establish an understanding with her husband. Then finally, in *Betrayal* we realize that if Robert, Emma, and Jerry could have understood that betraying love and friendship, and hankering for novelty is not a solution to their problems, and that seeking out satisfaction through extra-marital relationships is not an answer to fill the void in their marital relationship, all of them might not have ended as losers, and Robert and Emma could possibly have saved their marriage and enriched their own lives with love and understanding.

Yet, no matter the varying reasons for the failures, which statistically overwhelm the successes, Pinter is not the ultimate pessimist, even though he presents a rather bleak view of male-female relationships as he sees them. And although he asserts that we cannot completely understand human action and human motivation, even in the failures, Pinter has, it seems to me, an underlying implication that there are possibilities for some success if and when the human psyches together with their social casts of mind could realistically comprehend their own misapprehensions about themselves and their mates. Although many of his characters suffer earlier traumas which they can or cannot understand or which they can or cannot verbalize, Pinter dramatizes for his audience the possibilities of better rational and emotional responses in their own lives.
NOTES

All the quotations from the individual plays of Pinter in this thesis are taken from the editions cited in the bibliography.


7 James T. Boulton, "Harold Pinter: The Caretaker and Other Plays," Modern Drama 6 (Sept., 1963), 137.

8 Quigley, 80.

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10 Esslin, Pinter, 69.


12 Esslin, Pinter, 88.


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16 Esslin, Pinter, 158.
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18 Ibid., 173.
19 Gabbard, 221.
20 Ibid., 224.
22 Hollis, 58.
23 Ibid., 58.
24 Gale, 121.
25 Gabbard, 172.
26 Ronald Hayman, Harold Pinter (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1973), 146.
28 Penelope Ann Prentice, "An Analysis of Dominance and Subservience as Technique and Theme in the Plays of Harold Pinter," (Diss., Loyola University of Chicago, 1972), 12.
29 Esslin, Pinter, 61.
30 Quigley, 80.
32 Gabbard, 50.
33 Esslin, Pinter, 78.
35 Gabbard, 74.
36 Trussler, 64-65.
37 Esslin, Pinter, 92-93.
38 Katherine H. Burkman, *The Dramatic World of Harold Pinter* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University, 1971), 108.


40 Quigley, 197.

41 Osherow, 429.

42 Hayman, 19.

43 Hollis, 24.

44 Trussler, 36.

45 Esslin, *Pinter*, 84.

46 Ibid., 115.

47 Ibid., 87-88.

48 Gabbard, 79.

49 Trussler, 58.

50 Gabbard, 80.

51 Hollis, 58.

52 Quigley, 196.


54 Gordon, 59.

55 Trussler, 129.


58 Gabbard, 145-146.

59 Ibid., 147.

60 Ibid., 171.

61 Ibid., 177.
62 Esslin, *Pinter*, 159.
63 Gabbard, 179.
64 Ibid., 254.
65 Elin F. Diamond, "Pinter's Betrayal and the Comedy of Manners," *Modern Drama* 23 (Sept., 1980), 243-244.
67 Ibid., 229.
69 Ibid., 461.
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<tr>
<th>Plays</th>
<th>Year of writing</th>
<th>First performance</th>
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<td>1957</td>
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<td>Betrayal</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>November 15, 1978</td>
</tr>
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</table>
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