

The Absurd Representations of Pinter's Women:
A study into the representation of female characters in the plays of
Harold Pinter

By
Andrew David Clarke

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with analysing the representation of the female characters found in a sample of Harold Pinter's plays. The plays examined are *The Homecoming* (1964), *Betrayal* (1978) and *Celebration* (1999). Through a close reading of the texts and reference to past interpreters this work attempts to locate Harold Pinter within the theatrical topography, concentrating on his convergence with the Absurdist genre.

This research then assesses the extent to which Pinter's characters exhibit the conventions pertinent to the genre and Pinter's unique playwriting style, with particular reference to the dissonance in representation present between male and female characters. To conclude, the project reacts to the inequality present in Pinter's depiction of female characters, which informs the construction of a theatrical play script, titled *Cleanskin*.

A Brief Note on the Format of this Thesis

Seeing as grammar is one of the core aspects of Pinter's plays, with hesitations in speech being denoted by an ellipsis, this thesis will employ a different piece of grammar to show when a section of his plays has been omitted to prevent confusion. In the instances where text has been omitted from the plays of Harold Pinter, rather than the usual ellipsis ("...") an ellipsis that is surrounded by square brackets ("[...]") shall be employed.

Introduction

In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech in 2005, Harold Pinter reflects on the nature of truth within the dramatic form.

The search is your task. More often than not you stumble upon the truth in the dark, colliding with it or just glimpsing an image or a shape which seems to correspond to the truth, often without realising that you have done so. But the real truth is that there never is any such thing as one truth to be found in dramatic art. There are many. These truths challenge each other, recoil from each other, reflect each other, ignore each other, tease each other, are blind to each other (“Harold Pinter: Nobel Lecture: Art, Truth & Politics”).

Perhaps it is the same urge, that same search for truth, which drives academic studies such as this one. Of course, such a high aspiration, that of the acquisition of a unified truth, cannot be found in the following thesis. Rather, what follows is a brief examination of a fraction of the contribution that Pinter has made to the western canon of dramatic literature, refined further by a very specific investigation. One can only hope that there will be a glimpse of that elusive image or shape.

In Robert Gordon’s book, *Harold Pinter: The Theatre of Power*, he proposes that Harold Pinter’s plays are concerned with four primary and recurrent notions. Throughout his playwriting career Pinter shifts focus on core structural elements or calls upon different thematic motifs, yet his main concerns remain reasonably consistent. Gordon classifies these four concerns, or notions, as the following:

1. The territorial imperative
2. The exercise of power through the language of authority
3. Sex, gender, and the construction of identity
4. Questions of time and memory (R. Gordon 2-3).

Whilst these four notions are all interwoven, and this work will address them throughout, it is the third that is most pertinent to this thesis. Gordon expands on this notion:

Sex, gender and the construction of identity: focuses on how the performance of gender is formative in the construction of identity, and how sexuality manifests itself through, between and across gendered identities, manifesting its force in language and behaviour. Exploiting the sophisticated wordplay of the English comedy of manners in a postmodern context, the play challenges realist assumptions about behaviour, revealing character as performance, whose truth is relative to the context and form of enactment (R. Gordon 2-3).

This research is interested in the positioning of the genders within the works of Harold Pinter – specifically the manner in which his female characters are drawn and rendered for an audience.

To investigate this thread of Pinter's works, this thesis shall open with an analysis of Harold Pinter's relationship with the genre movement with which he is most frequently associated with, that of the Theatre of the Absurd. It will analyse how Pinter's dramaturgy, which has remained elusive throughout his entire career, overlaps with specific elements of the Absurdist movement. This analysis will incur a close reading of Pinter's texts, identifying various techniques and characterisations to help formulate an insight into his characters. To manufacture a general view of Harold Pinter's works and his portrayal of female characters this project will employ three plays and use them as case studies. The plays are *The Homecoming* (1964), *Betrayal* (1978) and *Celebration* (1999). The plays have been selected, not only because they are some of the most well recognised and regarded of his works, but also because their writing and original production dates occur at either end of Harold Pinter's career. This will allow the researcher to comment on any changes in how critics, and indeed Pinter himself, have, or have not, altered their commentary in regards to the orientation of female characters in these plays. This thesis will respond to the foundational arguments presented by Pinter's first critics before comparing and contrasting these examinations with present day readings. Through this analysis, I

hope to synthesise a greater understanding of the manner in which Pinter's female characters are represented, whether it can be said that they express complexity and agency, and the manner in which critics have contributed to that understanding.

In amongst the critical evaluation that surrounds the career of Harold Pinter there are essays that have investigated this very same question. Alrene Sykes, whose work delves into the female portraits painted by Pinter, questions rather forcibly,

Does Pinter say anything more about women than that they are mothers, wives and whores? Not, I think, a great deal. His young women characters have a lot in common. They seem to be sophisticated, attractive, highly sexed...for the most part Pinter's women are supremely controlled, supremely enigmatic (106).

The analysis of one of Pinter's most frequent commentators, Martin Esslin, appears to correlate with Sykes'. He extends the observation to outline how this paradigm, an idea which shall be referred to as the mother/wife/whore paradigm, is prevalent throughout, at the very least, Pinter's early works. The reoccurrence of this model appears to point to a restrictive representation of female characters within the plays of Pinter. As has been noted by past critics, Pinter's works continually demand that female characters be shoehorned into one of these three roles, or, when called upon by the male characters of the play, to shift effortlessly between them. If a character is unable to fulfil the role they are often insulted or ostracised by their male counterparts. Such a limited set of archetypes cannot point to truly multi-faceted and complex female characters within Pinter's canon. There is no doubt that female characters should have evolved out of this simplistic system of characterisation. This thesis is concerned with examining whether these claims are valid and present within Pinter's works. It is also interested in tracking any potential change in Pinter's dramaturgy as his canon develops. Can particular stereotypes or archetypes be noted in Pinter's earlier plays that are later banished, disassembled or reinforced?

This thesis is also interested in highlighting critical analysis that draws unflattering, and in some cases even misogynistic, sketches of some of Pinter's female characters. As this project will go on to note, there are many instances, especially in the case of Ruth from *The Homecoming*, in which critics have tarnished

or perverted possible readings of female characters found in his works. Time will be devoted to pointing out critical evaluations that this researcher feels are now out-dated and, in some cases, harmful to the evolution and our understanding of these female characters.

As per the quote above, Gordon postulates that gender as identity can be rooted in specific language conventions and traits; that each gender wields language in a specific manner to assert their status and power. Gordon also states that the construction of a sense of self originates through the use of language. This project is interested in how these traits manifest themselves within Pinter's dramaturgy. Are there examples of particular language traits that, not only lend themselves to greater representation, but also seem to be the sole property of one gender?

This research will also investigate the extent to which Pinter's dramaturgy connects with the Theatre of the Absurd. Genres help to establish form and provide frameworks, rules and conventions through which a critic can analyse the specific works. They also help to provide context and meaning for the actions of each characterisation. This thesis shall operate under the assumption that through an understanding of Pinter's relationship with the Theatre of the Absurd, one will be provided with an insight into how successful his representation of various characters are. As will be examined, Pinter's dramaturgy is hard to locate precisely, as he appears to only make use of a narrow range of Absurdist techniques – thus the invention of the Pinteresque. It is this project's contention that Pinter, as a fringe Absurdist writer, utilises a limited number of conventions and traits and it is through these traits that his characters are given significance, agency and complexity. This thesis argues, and will operate under the assumption that, if playwrights provide the opportunity for their characters to utilise conventions and traits then this can serve as evidence for their more nuanced representation. It is proposed at the outset to this investigation that Pinter's male characters are given full access to the traits that define his dramaturgy, whilst his female characters are frequently denied access, thus hindering their representation.

At the end of this project there can be found a theatrical play script, titled *Cleanskin*, and a brief analysis. The creation of this script was informed by the

findings of this research into Harold Pinter's female characters, with particular emphasis placed on subverting tired tropes present in his dramaturgy. The script endeavours to place a female character within an Absurdist narrative - one that is reminiscent of Pinter's unique style. This female character is designed to express agency and complexity within the play's narrative. It is also constructed to emulate a concept proposed by Michael Y. Bennett titled "The Female Absurd" in his book *Reassessing the Theatre of the Absurd* (102). Through this experiment I hope to extend my own playwriting knowledge by challenging my creative prejudices when it comes to drawing characters of either gender. The outcome of this practical investigation will provide an artistic work that contrasts, and so compliments, the positioning of female characters in Pinter's plays, thus strengthening the researcher's understanding of the topic and contributing an original work to this field of study.

Chapter One - Positioning Pinter within the Theatre of the Absurd.

“That word! These damn words and that word “Pinteresque” particularly – I don’t know what they’re bloody well talking about” (Pinter qtd in Smith 64).

It is a phrase often repeated within the analysis of Harold Pinter, almost to the point of cliché, that his dramaturgy remains elusive. His idiosyncratic style overlaps with two distinct genres – that of a realist mode of theatre and The Theatre of the Absurd – and usually shifts when one attempts to pull focus on any particular element or trait. The phrase from the quote at the heading of this chapter (“Pinteresque”) is a term sometimes glibly used to reference the very unique linguistic traits that populate Pinter's plays. It refers to the “... character’s peculiar mannerisms of verbal repetition and circumlocution” and also used, with specific reference to Pinter's early plays, “to indicate the peculiar – and unresolved – that characterizes each of these fragmented thrillers” (R. Gordon 4-6). This phrase has been employed because, whilst there have been attempts to categorize Pinter's dramaturgy, they have remained just that – attempts. However, they are important to note as they do provide, if only a partial, insight into the workings of a Pinter play. To reiterate, it is this thesis’ contention that through a greater understanding of the intricacies of Pinter’s dramaturgy that one can gain a clearer understanding of how he renders his characters.

Pinter is frequently associated with the dramatic movement titled “The Theatre of the Absurd”. Martin Esslin first coined this term in the 1960’s. Esslin postulated that playwrights such as Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco all shared similar writing styles and conventions, which could be grouped together to form a distinctive theatrical movement. Esslin writes:

The Theatre of the Absurd is a return to old, even archaic, traditions... what may strike the unprepared spectator as iconoclastic and incomprehensible innovation is in fact merely an expansion, revaluation, and development of procedures that are familiar and completely acceptable in only slightly different contexts (“The Theatre of the Absurd” 233).

The Theatre of the Absurd contains many conventions and traits that only seem bizarre or challenging due to western audiences' unconscious misconception that naturalism and realism are the foundational elements of theatrical performance. From the above quote, it becomes clear that trying to place a realistic framework around Absurdist plays, such as Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953) or Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano* (1950), results in an audience or reader feeling alienated.

In his foundational text, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, Esslin expounds upon all the different thematic elements that could possibly characterise a general Absurdist work. Esslin repeatedly refers to the ability of a work, which exists within the Theatre of the Absurd, to examine "...the human condition itself in a world where the decline of religious belief has deprived man of certainties" ("The Theatre of the Absurd" 292). Esslin argues that, like many Greek tragedies, religious mystery plays and baroque allegories, the Absurdist work and playwright is concerned with revealing to the audience the futility of their lives and the bareness of their attempts to avoid that universal truth. It is this uncertainty and incurred search for significance that comes to define these narratives, with the characters creating their own meaning and their own sense of self in an attempt to impose order on the world they are faced with.

... the Theatre of the Absurd merely communicates one poet's most intimate and personal intuition of the human situation, his own *sense of being*, his individual vision of the world. This is the *subject matter* of the Theatre of the Absurd, and it determines its *form*, which must, of necessity, represent a convention on the stage basically different from the "realistic" theatre of our time ("The Theatre of the Absurd" 293).

Such thematic strands appear to be pertinent to Pinter's plays, with his early works being the prime suspects. Pinter's first work, *The Room* (1957), deals extensively with these existential crises, with the characters living in fear of the forces that inhabit the world outside the room they find themselves in. These motifs linger on throughout Pinter's canon, with the world outside remaining an alien and untameable force. In regards to this thesis, *The Homecoming* and *Celebration* both portray worlds in which the characters create their own sense of meaning and ignore

the realm that is on the other side of that particular closed door. The family of *The Homecoming* live in an incredibly insular reality, with some of their actions bordering on the disturbingly Oedipal. *Celebration* describes the inner lives of those who are rich and hedonistic, and who barely acknowledge the society outside the restaurant that they frequent. It is only *Betrayal* that appears to be problematic – existing in a much more realistic mode than either of the other two plays.

However, Guido Almansi and Simon Henderson disagree with these observations, stating they are simply truisms of the society that we live in:

Of course, we emerge from a Pinter play... with a firmer conviction that communication between human beings is difficult and often dangerous; that family ties are loose and often deadly; that memory is unreliable and often treacherous; that others are always a mystery to us and we are to them; that man is alone in this miserable world. Is that all? (15)

Almansi and Henderson propose the idea that Pinter is a playwright who writes in a realistic mode, and that these thematic concerns are due simply to the fact that they are realistic reflections of the lives we lead. They move on to state that these traits cannot be used as evidence for Pinter's positioning within the Theatre of the Absurd and that in fact, whilst Pinter can be considered to have added significantly to theatrical movements associated with "*avant-gardisme*" his works still remain easily recognisable to a generic theatre-going audience (Almansi, Henderson 14).

His plays are conceived for an orthodox proscenium stage; they are conventionally based on speech and dialogue with only a marginal inference of physical action... they are set... in well-defined social milieux, scrupulously avoiding all surrealistic temptations. (Almansi, Henderson 15)

It is clear that there is a great deal of dissent from Esslin's original claim that Pinter belongs to this distinctive movement. Mark Batty describes Esslin's attempts as

“awkward” and outlines how, in relation to some of his potential Absurdist contemporaries:

Pinter seemed, perhaps, to have had a foot in both camps, for his plays offered a surface reality where objects obeyed the laws of physics (unlike in Ionesco) and characters displayed relative consistency of character (unlike Beckett) but manipulated space, character and situation to supply metaphorically charged situations (30).

Overall, as the years have progressed, Pinter appears to have been considered to shift away from the Absurd, possibly rendering Esslin’s original observations null. However, this examination is not futile. There is still an element of Pinter’s dramaturgy that is consistently remarked upon that I believe holds the key to his unique plays. As we investigate Pinter’s positioning further it will become clear exactly what sets Pinter apart from those around him, and makes him such a profound force within the western canon of theatre.

Esslin points to four conventions that are common to Absurdist plays, which in turn separate the works from their more realistic cousins. Esslin outlines how Absurdist plays are defined by their use of “Abstract scenic effects...clowning, verbal nonsense [and] the literature of dream and fantasy...” (“The Theatre of the Absurd” 234). Using these four relatively simplistic elements we can try and place Pinter within the Absurd.

Martin Esslin’s first element of “Abstract scenic effects” is a convention that resonates with Pinter’s dramaturgy (“The Theatre of the Absurd” 318). The concept of pure theatre pertains to the use of scenic devices such as ambiguous or mysterious set pieces that imply a space but do not reference a specific time period. This would imply that, if Pinter’s plays are located in an Absurdist mode, his plays would be set in mysterious and unspecific nowhere lands. James Hollis provides evidence in favour of this reading, writing in *Harold Pinter: The Poetics of Silence*,

One of the central metaphors in Pinter is “the room.” The room is suggestive of the encapsulated environment of modern man, but may also suggest something of his regressive aversion to the hostile world outside. The dogma of regression to the womb is overused, but the events of this century provide ample evidence that there are comparable atavistic effects and motives which insistently demand their expression (19).

However, whilst this may be true of some of Pinter’s earlier plays, *The Room* being the most obvious example, it can be said that the staging of Harold Pinter’s works are usually in generalised living rooms or houses but definitely inhabiting the real world. As has been noted above, Almansí and Henderson claim that Pinter’s work exist in recognisable social settings and not the liminal space of fantasy. To examine the case studies for this thesis, we begin with *The Homecoming*. This play takes place in a lower class house in London. The space is confined to one room, and many critics have argued over whether this particular living room could stand in as a symbol for society as a whole, or conversely how this particular room is seemingly devoid of the usual moral social contracts found in reality. It may be a candidate for Hollis’ metaphor and yet the reference to London and the surrounding areas and countries such as America and Italy do lend themselves to a more realistic representation of space. *Betrayal* takes place in many houses throughout London and a hotel in Italy. Once again the play is confined to rooms, in fact, many rooms, diluting the integrity of Hollis’ metaphor. *Celebration* takes place in a restaurant that Pinter states was based of his dining experiences in the Ritz. However, the character of the Waiter does remark that “This place is like a womb to me. I prefer to stay in my womb. I strongly prefer that to being born” (“Celebration” 469). This reference to a womb of course lends itself to a more symbolic interpretation adding a layer of mysticism to the events staged. It can be concluded that Pinter’s plays do not lend themselves outright to either interpretation – but rather transform in purpose depending on how one chooses to analyse them.

The second element of Esslin’s checklist, that of “clowning”, is equally, if not more, ambiguously located within Pinter’s dramaturgy. Adriane L. Despot describes how the figure of a clown, within the global theatrical universe, is one which:

never change[s], because they stem not from the concerns of a historical period, a particular personality, or the peculiarities of any culture but from the most elemental characteristics of life. Even when the clown line temporarily dies out, the new creature which materializes is essentially the same (661).

This appears to suggest that, rather than being a character that is particular or pertinent to the Absurdist genre, that the clown is simply a character that weaves itself in and out of the various theatrical movements of history. Therefore, it would appear that the inclusion of a clowning character is not unique to the Absurdist genre. Despot describes that: “clowns exploit ambiguous and multiple illusions of identity; they obstruct or divert patterned behaviour, they have magical powers, and they are outcasts” (661). From the outset we can disregard the magical elements of clowning, as there are almost certainly no instances in Pinter’s entire canon in which characters use magical powers or exhibit supernatural tendencies. The characteristic of owning multiple illusions is similarly missing from Pinter’s dramaturgy. Despot describes how the clown, always conscious of the comic role that he embodies in a play, adopts different personas to exploit the positive outcomes of the subsequent dualities. The actor portrays a clown, who in turn is portraying another character. The only “disguise” that one could possibly point to within the case studies of this thesis is the performance of spouse, who is also a lover to another. This “illusion” is very commonplace and on the face of it does not seem to require the conventional scaffolding of a clowning character to appear congruent to the dramaturgy.

It is the final two points of Despot’s list – that of the obstruction or division of patterned behaviour and the positioning as outcasts - that may link into a more obvious mode of clowning. It is easy to see that a great deal of Pinter’s characters are outsiders. Steven Gale writes that many of Pinter’s characters are in fact lonely and live in terror of that feeling. Gale comments that it can be observed that “there is a concurrent need for and absence of psychological stability, and this discrepancy is the source of the terror” (19). To take the case studies of this thesis, the Oedipal household of *The Homecoming* is simply that: Oedipal. The characters hardly ever make references to other people in their social sphere and they all continue to live in

the same house that they occupied when they were younger, in some cases when they were children. The characters of *Betrayal* are similarly outside normal society, however in this case they are moral outsiders, with each committing an affair in an attempt to find acceptance and avoid isolation: “Pinter’s later dramas demonstrate the desperate lengths to which an individual will go to acquire... relationships” (Gale 19). The characters in *Celebration* are less ostracised than perhaps the other two case studies. However, it is still clear that the characters have swapped monetary gain for interpersonal relationships, thus leaving them rich yet isolated and desperate to form some kind of connection in the sealed off world of the restaurant they frequent.

It is Despot’s final point that is the most concurrent with Pinter’s dramaturgy and is also a point through which we can return to Esslin’s original checklist, thus bringing us neatly back to examining Pinter’s positioning within the genre of the Absurd. Despot describes how the clown is concerned with the obstruction or diversion of patterned behaviour: “All writers about clowns describe them as representatives of chaos, adversaries of order, and people perceive this aspect of clowns automatically” (666). He outlines that clowns continually fight the authority figures around them and battle inanimate objects that obstruct their way or refuse to cooperate. But most significantly, Despot explains how clowns can manipulate language and this is where a line can be drawn - linking Pinter in with this language trait and the clowning convention. Despot states that,

Language is a symbolic method of creating and articulating order; it is an elaborate and highly patterned thing, and its use presumes a process. But since its abstraction makes language a fragile thing, it falls victim to great clowns (667).

It is this use of language which can lead us back to the final two points of Esslin’s core elements, those points of “verbal nonsense” and “the literature of dream and fantasy”, and helps us define exactly what makes Pinter such a monumental force within the western canon (“The Theatre of the Absurd” 234). As Gale states “Pinter’s use of language and non-language is probably his most important contribution to the contemporary stage” (256). Whilst this statement may appear to be hyperbolic in tone, it cannot be ignored that critics and academics have devoted many chapters to

analysing Pinter's unique use of rhetoric. It is through Pinter's unique use of language that we shall find the convergence points of Pinter with the Absurd and thus aid our investigation into his representation of women.

As has already been noted above, one of the key characteristics of Absurdist writing is the use of verbal nonsense and so this concept should be something that is common to all Pinter's plays. Discouragingly, Pinter is not noted for his use of verbal nonsense, but rather revered for his use of almost hyper-realistic dialogue. Steven Gale writes, "...although the author does not reproduce common speech exactly, he has captured its essence so perfectly that it seems more real than actual street-corner exchanges" (268). Hanna Scolnicov echoes this thought and extends this idea by stating that "Pinter's dialogue is sometimes compared to a conversation picked up at random by a recording machine. This auditory effect may be compared to the effect of a photorealistic painting" (16). Scolnicov outlines how photorealism manages to reach out beyond the confinements of realism and render the subject almost precisely, yet "holds back from endowing them with meaning" (16). Esslin's remarks on Pinter's language concur with this appraisal: "Pinter is not a naturalistic dramatist. This is the paradox of his artistic personality. The dialogue and the characters are real, but the overall effect is one of mystery, of uncertainty, of poetic ambiguity" ("Pinter A Study of his Plays" 37). This paradox defines Pinter's use of language. The audience recognises the language being employed, even down to sentences they may have used in their own lives. Yet, the true meaning is forever elusive: "It aims at a surface fidelity of detail and does not attempt to present the viewer with a comprehensible view of reality. It avoids the imposition of sense and order on the events depicted, seeing these as a falsification of the imponderable nature of reality" (Scolnicov 16). It may appear that Pinter's dialogue does not resonate with Esslin's verbal nonsense. However, this strand of verbal nonsense should not be disregarded as it is intrinsic to a theory I have constructed, reconciling Pinter with the idea of verbal nonsense and Esslin's final core element of "the literature of dream and fantasy" ("The Theatre of the Absurd" 234).

I suggest that throughout Pinter's canon he repeatedly makes use of a technique that manages to combine elements of Esslin's fantasy/dream literature and Scolnicov's hyper-realistic language. By combining these two elements, Pinter

manages to successfully create a feeling of verbal nonsense, and thus create an overall Absurdist effect to his language.

To take a scene from *The Homecoming*, Ruth and Lenny are talking with one another. Lenny takes the opportunity to impress Ruth by telling her violent stories about his past actions. Lenny tells an elongated story in which he takes it upon himself to help an elderly lady lift an old fashioned mangle up to her house. In the story, the lady simply watches Lenny struggle to lift the heavy mangle. Towards the end of the speech the following interaction takes place,

Lenny: So after a few minutes I said to her, now look here, why don't you stuff this iron mangle up your arse? Anyway they're out of date, you want a spin drier. I had a good mind to give her a workover there and then, but as I was feeling jubilant with the snow clearing I just gave her a short arm jab to the belly and jumped on a bus outside. Excuse me, shall I take this ashtray out of your way?

Ruth: It's not in my way.

Lenny: It seems to be in the way of your glass[...] ("The Homecoming" 49).

The scene continues and Ruth and Lenny continue to discuss the water and the ashtray, leaving behind the shocking revelation that Lenny once assaulted an elderly lady for being unwilling to help lift an iron mangle. These revelations of uncomfortable or morally reprehensible behaviour, which usually appear in the form of speeches or monologues, are frequently met with seeming indifference from the surrounding characters. In these scenarios I suggest that the speech begins in the style of the hyper-realistic language as proposed by Scolnicov: Lenny begins by telling a simple story about a time he took up snow-clearing to occupy himself. However, as the speech progresses the secret emotions or desires that the character holds rises and subsumes the realistic language. The speech transforms into the style of Esslin's "literature of dream and fantasy" ("The Theatre of the Absurd" 234). This fantasy/dream speech derives itself from the inner-monologue of the character and the

secrets that they hold which are usually not uttered in real conversation. It is as if the subtext of the speech becomes the most prominent aspect. Unlike more “realistic” forms of speech, these passages which resonate with Esslin’s fantasy/dream literature reveal uncomfortable truths about the human condition: most commonly, in Pinter’s dramaturgy, its capacity for violence and sexual aggression. The verbal nonsense comes into play when this inner-monologue state is broken and the characters snap back to reality. As can be seen at the end of the example given above, Lenny describes how he assaults an old woman, and there is no textual response given by Ruth that seems appropriate to this revelation. Her response, to comment on the ashtray next to her, is a nonsensical response. This theory can be supported by an observation made by Lahr in his analysis of Pinter’s language:

It is characteristic of Pinter’s mature style that his plays are simultaneously real and surreal: it is precisely this double aspect of events portrayed... which constitutes the strong poetic appeal of this kind of drama, the impossibility, in short, of being able to verify where reality ends and dreams begin (“The Homecoming: An Interpretation” 5).

This lack of a foothold in reality is a characteristic that neatly reconciles Pinter with verbal nonsense.

Austin Quigley, amongst other critics, has pointed out that this use of verbal nonsense and the continual use of fantasy/dream literature leads to audiences being unable to verify what is true or false about characters and their reported personalities and histories.

In other plays, in which truths about the central concerns demonstrably exist independent of an individual's character’s construction of them, it is possible to organise a conversation onstage in which explicit statements will convey the “reliable” version to the audience. But in a Pinter play the dominant interactional function obviates this possibility. We are provided with

a variety of potential truths, each of which is heavily influenced by the needs of the speaker at the moment it is voiced (Quigley 69).

I argue that this investigation into the “truth” of a moment is not as significant as it may first appear. What is important about a character’s representations of themselves or others is not the fidelity of their claims, but rather the fact that in the moment they choose to either lie or tell the truth – thus creating a unique sense of self for that specific moment. In an Absurdist world there is very little chance of finding corroborating evidence for anything that takes place. Any analysis therefore must be concerned with the repercussions of the related representation. To elaborate, in Pinter’s play *Night* (1969), a husband and wife discuss how they met and began their romantic affair. The husband recounts one tale in which he meets a woman at a party and walks her home, eventually having sex with her in a rubbish dump. The wife, on the other hand, recalls walking home with him, stopping on a bridge and gazing lovingly into his eyes. The significance lies not in an audience’s investigation into the truth of either of their memories, but rather the tragedy of the fact that neither character can reconcile their present day relationship with the events of the past. In a speech given at Bristol University Pinter stated that,

A thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false. A character on stage who can present no convincing argument or information as to his past experiences, his present behaviour or his aspirations, nor give a comprehensive analysis of his motives is as legitimate and as worthy of attention as one who, alarmingly, can do all these things (Pinter qtd in Sakellaridou 3).

This reoccurring element of Pinter’s plays, the remaking of the past and the reconstruction of identity, is a concept that we shall return to in depth in subsequent chapters. Suffice to say now that when one investigates a claim made by any character, it is not necessarily whether the revelation is factually true that should be up for scrutiny, but rather that a character chooses to render that construction of their own identity is of significance. As shall be explored later, sometimes it is easier to misremember the past, or to wilfully fabricate significant facets of one’s character, to maintain harmony within their own sense of identity. As Elizabeth Sakellaridou goes

on to point out “The idea that truth and reality are only relative values has always been at the core of [Pinter’s] art and his adherence to this basic belief for such a long time gives that early declaration the status of a real artistic manifesto” (3).

These sections of verbal nonsense and fantasy/dream literature provide a great deal of insight into the characters that Pinter has drawn, as their seemingly paradoxical nature hints at the complexity of the human condition. “The literature of verbal nonsense expresses more than playfulness. In trying to burst the bounds of logic and language, it batters at the enclosing walls of the human condition itself” (“The Theatre of the Absurd” 244). Maybe one could speculate that this is why many people have returned to Pinter over the years, as this convention of his work is an essential truth of all people. We are neither one thing, nor the other - and yet we are both simultaneously. Whilst dark in tone, these sections, where characters reveal the hidden desires of their minds and soul, offer points for relevance and reliability for the audience. This language device - this theory - is something that we shall return to throughout this thesis in an attempt to ascertain the quality of the representation of particular characters.

It is clear from the above investigation that it is Pinter’s use of language that, not only provides the strongest link with the Theatre of the Absurd, but also gives his plays their power. The only common thread throughout all the critical analysis of Harold Pinter’s works is his use of language. It is what makes Pinter unique. If this examination has proved nothing else, I hope it has justified and explained why it is absolutely necessary to close-read these plays when investigating his representation of characters. Pinter’s use of language is the only secure foothold we have, the only firm foundation from which to spring from. If we make the assumption that the above theory does hold water and plays a significant role in the prominence of Pinter in the western canon, surely this language technique is something that should be common to the representation of both genders. These sequences in which Pinter mixes verbal nonsense with the “literature of fantasy and dreams” will be instrumental into discovering whether the positioning and representation of the genders is equal in Pinter’s plays (“The Theatre of the Absurd” 234). However, before we close this short investigation into Pinter and the Absurd, it is important to note some other characteristics of Pinter’s language that will be useful in the following chapters.

Firstly, it is significant to note Pinter's skill in using language as a weapon. Through the use of anecdote, Austin Quigley outlines how Pinter, in his youth, once walked through an alleyway which was filled with aggressive looking people, all of whom were carrying broken milk bottles. Having just emerged from a Jewish club, and this event taking place just at the close of the Second World War, Pinter felt incredibly threatened. Pinter described how there were, as he saw it, two options open to him to allow him to move through the crowd unharmed. The first would be through physical violence, which did not appeal to Pinter's nature. The second was "to talk to them you know, sort of "Are you all right?, "Yes, I'm all right." "Well, that's all right then, isn't it?" and all the time keep walking towards the light of the main road" (Pinter qtd in Quigley 48). Quigley moves on to describe precisely how this use of language was effectively as aggressive as the physical option open to Pinter as he moved through that alleyway – with the seemingly banal conversation the scabbard that hid the sword of potential violence (Quigley 48).

This anecdote helps provide an insight into the ways through which Pinter utilises language. Simple phrases stacked on top of each other, seeming to carry very little information or exposition; however managing to speak to a much greater violence or menace hidden in amongst the subtext. The simplicity, or rather the economy, of Pinter's dialogue is what imbues it with its power. It is what is left unsaid which fuels an audience's imagination. The continuous hinting and insinuation at a character's deeper feelings produces theatrical intrigue and conflict. This use of language perhaps is more pertinent to Pinter's early plays such as *The Room*, *The Birthday Party* (1957), and *The Dumb Waiter* (1957), with *The Homecoming* signalling a farewell to this subsection of Pinter's collected works. These plays are often held up as strong examples of what have been titled Pinter's "Comedies of Menace" defined by "...their exaggeration of the banality of everyday conversation [which] resembles Ionesco's grotesque depiction of the phatic nature of human communication, its lack of meaningful content paradoxically disclosing a substratum of anguish and aggression" (R. Gordon 5).

It is significant to note that menace and acts of evil are very much the bread and butter of Pinter's plays, hence the labelling of a whole sub-category. In regards to

the depiction of various characters throughout Pinter's career this thesis will work under the assumption that a multi-faceted character will own character traits that spring from both positive and negative traits. Just because an action can be considered morally reprehensible or ethically unsound, it does not eliminate it from being an illuminating trait. However, if characters of a particular gender are represented exhibiting solely negative traits, or are frequently represented in particular roles that have negative traits associated with them, then clearly one can infer a deficiency or bias against the representation of the gender.

The final, and perhaps most famous, technique associated with Pinter is his distinctive use of pauses and silences - thus, alongside the phrase "Pinteresque" creating the idea of the "Pinter Pause" (Gale 273). As Hollis describes "Pinter's particular achievement has been to sustain linguistically the sorts of tensions which seem to drive his characters from within. The fragmentary sentence, the phrase left hanging, the awkward pause, become outer manifestations of the inner anxiety, the deeper uncertainty" (123). These pauses become the words unsaid, linking in with the Theatre of the Absurd and the thematic thread of the failure of language to communicate ideas. Sir Peter Hall, director of many of Pinter's debut plays, most notably the first staging of *The Homecoming*, and its subsequent film adaptation, outlines the significance of the grammar in Pinter's plays in the following way:

There is a difference in Pinter between a pause and a silence and three dots. A pause is really a bridge where the audience thinks you're on this side of the river, then when you speak again, you're on the other side. That's a pause. And it's alarming, often. It's a gap, which retrospectively gets filled in. It's not a dead stop - that's a silence, where the confrontation has become so extreme, there is nothing to be said... Three dots is a very tiny hesitation, but it's there, and it's different from a semi colon, which Pinter almost never uses, and it's different from a comma. A comma is something you catch up on, you go through it. And a full stop's just a full stop. You stop (Hall qtd in Bold 26).

Whilst Hall's explanation might be exhaustive, this in-depth analysis of the grammar of Pinter's text will become incredibly important once we begin to analyse the representation of the characters Pinter depicts in his plays. The difference between a pause and a hesitation could help us establish an intended motive behind particular lines and speeches, thus allowing us to dissect the proposed representation of a character within any given stage moment.

Before concluding there are several notable detractors from this assumption that Pinter belongs to the Theatre of the Absurd that should be mentioned. Robert Gordon states that "In the early sixties Esslin's label of Absurdist theatre provided a useful if eventually misleading way to comprehend [Pinter's works]..." (R. Gordon 5). This is a very fleeting reference to Pinter's positioning and Gordon does not go on to suggest a different genre to which Pinter could in fact belong. Lois Gordon on the other hand outright condemns the idea that Pinter belongs to the Theatre of the Absurd: "What is of crucial importance is that Pinter is neither an existentialist nor an Absurdist, for he never portrays the existential dilemma wherein man seeks an order in an unordered universe. Pinter is simply, if a label is necessary, a ruthless realist." (L. Gordon 10) Sir Peter Hall concurs:

...it's a very, very great discipline, to understand that unless you trust Harold Pinter's form and understand why he wants a pause, why he wants a silence, make an emotional decision... can become very empty and pretentious and can look absurd. His characters are never and are not absurd. The idea that he belongs to something called the Theatre of the Absurd is preposterous... all his characters have the most accurate behaviour pattern, but you have to fill the pauses (Hall, "The Homecoming")

This begs the question, why have past academics and I made such a great effort to distil the artistic essence of Harold Pinter. Whilst all of the above can help provide insight into his plays and inform our readings of the events that he describes in his works, in the end does it matter that Pinter's plays exist on the fringe of the Theatre of the Absurd, that he is an absurd Absurdist? I contend that through an Absurdist lens his plays speak to a much greater audience than they would do if they

were grouped alongside their more realistic siblings – and that the preceding investigation does impact on Pinter’s plays. Whilst I have not been able to reach a concrete conclusion as to Pinter’s positioning, I hope that all of the above assessment has re-stated that what makes Pinter so pivotal to western dramaturgy is his command of the English Language. It helps to explain why so much attention has been paid to Pinter as a playwright, as his plays still maintain their artistic integrity whilst still on the page and not simply once in performance. This analysis also helps to justify the intense scrutiny of close reading, as it is his language that is the kernel of his plays. The very essence of Harold Pinter’s works are the words on the page. This straying across the line between Realism and Absurdism, borrowing only the greatest assets of both genres, allows for an analysis that can simultaneously synthesise the symbolic resonances of a moment, whilst questioning their realistic integrity. It is through Pinter’s language that his plays speak to us.

Chapter Two - Ruth's Homecoming. Deconstructing the Dangers of Male Fantasies.

"Max: [...] You know something? Perhaps it's not a bad idea to have a woman in the house. Perhaps it's a good thing. Who knows? Maybe we should keep her" (*"The Homecoming"* 69).

The Homecoming opened in 1965 at the Adlywch Theatre in London to stunned, and somewhat horrified, audiences. In Martin Esslin's assessment of *The Homecoming* he focuses on the following questions as being at the kernel of the critical, and audiences', reception to the piece: "Why should a woman, the mother of three children and wife of an American college professor, calmly accept an offer to have herself set up as a prostitute [and] how could a husband not only consent to such an arrangement but put the proposition to his wife?" (*"Pinter A Study of his Plays"* 149) Ruth - and her role within the narrative - is the focal point of the questions surrounding the play. Whilst the title refers to the homecoming of Ruth's husband Teddy, it is in fact Ruth who becomes the centre of gravity of the play, and the character around whom all actions orbit. It is her presence that drives the conflict of the piece and which upturns the bizarre equilibrium of the household that Pinter creates for us. If Ruth is so integral to the narrative we can hope to find many examples where she is complexly rendered by Pinter and is active within the world of the play.

This chapter will first examine the critical background that surrounds *The Homecoming*, highlighting some of the more problematic, and even misogynistic, readings that have come before. Once completed, the idea that significant male characters appear to be unable to imagine female characters as complex entities, and instead continually position them at one point of a restrictive triangle, will be put under scrutiny. It will go on to describe the key moments of the play in which the male characters attempt to force Ruth to fulfil a stereotypical role, thus denying her the ability to express herself fully. It will also pay particular attention to the moments in which Ruth may appear to be expressing a sense of complexity, but is prevented due to Pinter's positioning of her within the narrative. Finally, this chapter will then wrap up with a proposal that may allow for a much more mosaicked view of Ruth's

role within the play and potentially redeems *The Homecoming* from these misogynistic overtones.

It appears that rather than critics' responding to how Ruth's character is essential to the play, her character has been bent and her positioning distorted over time - casting her as a villainous sociopath. From the very earliest interpretation as set down by Esslin and his contemporaries, the case against Ruth has been cemented and thus any future differing interpretations of Ruth's character and role have been prevented, or at the very least slowed. Ruth genuinely is, as Penelope Prentice states, "the most misunderstood of all of Harold Pinter's characters" ("*Ruth: Pinter's The Homecoming Revisited*" 458). As can be seen from Esslin's statement above, he assumes that Ruth has to choose between three various roles, these roles being the three roles of the mother/wife/whore paradigm, as touched upon in the introduction. He also seemingly ranks them, unfairly positioning prostitution as the lowest of the hierarchy. It does not appear to occur to Esslin that Ruth may occupy a space that is somehow not defined by her relation to male characters or that she need not be positioned as an object, with the potential to be used by the male characters that encircle her. However, this is not the end of Esslin's assessment. In a sentence that is almost humorously short he condemns Ruth's entire character: "... Ruth is obviously a nymphomaniac" ("*The Homecoming: An Interpretation*" 5). As one of Pinter's earliest commentators it appears that this view of Ruth as a sexual deviant and object has been taken up almost unquestioningly and has thus steered any further commentary concerning Ruth's character away from any more complex interpretations.

To expand – Esslin continues his assessment of Ruth as some kind of sexual outsider in the following way: "... Ruth is obviously a nymphomaniac. In his six years as her husband, Teddy must have become all too painfully aware of this - thus his unruffled calm when he discovers her in his brother's arms... if the trip to Venice was a last desperate attempt to save the marriage... one can sympathise with Teddy's relief at not having to take Ruth back to America with him" ("*The Homecoming: An Interpretation*" 5). This assessment is within the context of Esslin exploring the possibility of *The Homecoming* existing as a ruthlessly realist drama (a contention that he eventually refutes). Whilst he uses small indications from the text to back up

his claim the logical leaps and bounds, the assumptions that Esslin has to make to come to this conclusion, are numerous. I disagree that Ruth is a nymphomaniac. She expresses sexual desires and follows through with them within the world of the play, however the same can be said of Lenny. There is no suggestion that Lenny's sexual behaviour is medically abnormal, even though he is objectively more morally reprehensible. Esslin comments that "Ruth was after all, as she herself states, a nude model, and thus not much better than a whore" ("The Homecoming: An Interpretation 5). This statement fails on several levels. Firstly, whilst Ruth does refer to herself as "A photographic model for the body" this in no way is an explicit reference to nude modelling ("The Homecoming" 57). Secondly, I do not believe that we can draw a direct line between nude modelling and prostitution. It appears that Esslin's prejudices concerning Ruth's supposed behaviour have obscured his analytical skills.

Esslin's assessment of Ruth as a sex obsessed whore is a sweeping generalisation that is echoed throughout many other critics interpretations and is the cause of many preconceptions about this play. Quigley states "Ruth is indeed coming home to a former self" (205). Quigley calmly asserts that this "former self" is one in which Ruth employed herself as a prostitute. The word "indeed" is symptomatic of the preconception that Ruth is familiar with a life of prostitution, and is not grounded in known fact. Bernard F. Dukore outlines how Ruth awakens all of the male characters' "animal instincts" and that "her arrival provides a focus; the men try to dominate her and win her favours. Their struggle for power and the woman appear to be part of the mating rite" (237). Whilst not as direct as Esslin or Quigley, the idea that Ruth is some kind of reformed sexual object to be accessed by male characters at will is still pervasive throughout Dukore's commentary. Penelope Prentice attacks both Esslin and Quigley for their seemingly inaccurate analysis of Ruth's character: "Even Austin E. Quigley's otherwise most careful reading of Pinter's plays promotes the unsupportable assumption begun by Martin Esslin that Ruth was a prostitute even before she married Teddy" ("Ruth: Pinter's The Homecoming Revisited" 458). It is important to acknowledge this dissonance within the critical backlog before embarking on a reassessment of Ruth's character. Many critics that initiated the discussion surrounding Ruth's character appear to have tarnished her reputation. As has been alluded to, each one of the critics assumes that Ruth must fulfil one of the following roles: wife, mother or whore. It is somewhat ironic that this criticism

echoes precisely the misconceptions that the male characters of *The Homecoming* hold as well.

Ruth is first introduced half way through Act One. The audience is presented with Teddy and Ruth standing side by side “*at the threshold of the room*” (“The Homecoming” 19). From their introduction these two characters are shown in binary, as husband and wife coupled together, a tidy piece of imagery that resonates with the conclusion of the narrative and their eventual separation. The world into which Ruth enters is a highly competitive, aggressive and most significantly, masculine one. Gordon outlines how “...the characters’ actions are indistinguishable from the marauding habits of jungle animals [which] reveals the concept of the family home as domestic haven to be an illusion” (R. Gordon 74). This idea of a pleasant domestic façade veiling an unchecked and menacing reality is a motif that extends throughout the whole play and can be witnessed within the first few moments of the play. Max enters the living room and demands to know what Lenny has done with a pair of scissors. Lenny ignores his father and continues to read his newspaper.

Max: Do you hear what I’m saying? I’m talking to you! Where’s the scissors?

Lenny: (*looking up, quietly*) Why don’t you shut up, you daft prat?

Max lifts his stick and points it at him.

Max: Don’t talk to me like that. I’m warning you (“The Homecoming” 7).

Within the first few moments of the play we are introduced to the shockingly confrontational attitude of two of its lead protagonists. The appearance of normality, the recognisable living room and banality of an elderly man searching for a pair of scissors, drops away and the audience is exposed to the coarse language of these two characters. Not only does Lenny disrespect his father by first ignoring his inquiry, but then insults him almost with no provocation. Max returns in kind by threatening even greater physical violence in the form of his stick. Here violence is used as shorthand

for masculinity, with power and status being won through insults and threats of injury. “The Homecoming dramatizes Pinter’s thesis, the entire family speak with language turned into a game of survival, where invective takes the place of confrontation” (“Pinter’s Language” 125). It is Ruth who here is positioned as an alien force, not only as the only non-blood related member of this household, but even her gender signals her position as an outsider. As a female, Ruth is excluded from the battle for status through violence. Instead, Ruth is quickly isolated amongst the pack of wolves that surround her. Now, it could be argued that this isolation raises her significance within the play, and it is certainly true that Ruth provides the central conflict of the production by being an unknown quantity. However, the male characters respond to her femininity by attempting to control and assert their dominion over her, thus hindering her representation.

From the outset of Ruth and Teddy’s introduction at the doorway to the living room, there is a strange power play depicted between the two. It is clear that Ruth has reservations about staying in the household, as shown through her reluctance to sit down or to wake any of the other members of the household. What is depicted in this short scene lays the foundation for Teddy and Ruth’s conflict. “They are not quarrelling overtly; but progressively find themselves on the opposing sides of questions that are ultimately transformed into crucial differences” (Hollis 98). Several moments into the scene the following interaction takes place:

Ruth: Do you want to stay?

Teddy: Stay?

Pause

We’ve come to stay. We’re bound to stay... for a few days.

Ruth: I think... the children... might be missing us.

Teddy: Don’t be silly.

Ruth: They might (“The Homecoming” 37-38).

Teddy dismisses the children’s worries and reassures his wife that his family will be pleased to see them. Teddy asks whether Ruth is tired. She responds in the negative. He inquires as to whether she would like to be shown his old room. Ruth declines. Ruth voices her intention to go for a walk outside. Teddy asks her to stay inside and to come to bed with him. Ruth refuses and goes out for a walk.

In this sequence, Teddy is asking Ruth to play the role of a complicit wife. Teddy acts as a carer, offering hot drinks and rest, and Ruth declines at every stage. Ruth on the other hand tries to refer to a different role, a role that she occupies in her American life, that of caring mother. Whilst at this stage the conflict is minor, their argument easily resolvable, as the play progresses the gap becomes wider and eventually becomes irreconcilable. Whilst a simple conversation, it does hint at Teddy’s inability to imagine his wife complexly. Teddy appears to be unable to understand that his wife is either nervous at being in this household, or also worried for her children. Teddy dismisses Ruth’s worries and also demands that she alter her behaviour to suit his requests of her.

In isolation, such a reading may appear to be a stretch. However, Teddy’s attempts to redefine his wife are echoed later in the play and help to prove that Teddy has no insight into his wife’s character. When Teddy describes Ruth to his family during the opening of Act Two:

Teddy: She’s a great help to me over there. She’s a wonderful wife and mother. She’s a very popular woman (“The Homecoming” 50).

The implication is that Ruth is of best use to Teddy when she is fulfilling these two roles. Ruth is most successful as a person when she is either acting as a mother or a wife, roles that Teddy feels he can demand of her at his pleasure. It is significant to note that Pinter does not allow Ruth any dialogue to either agree or disagree with Teddy’s statements. Pinter restricts Ruth’s characterisation in this moment, forcing the audience to build a picture of Ruth solely through the exposition provided by Teddy. Teddy however, continues to define Ruth on his own terms, as either mother

or wife, positioning her as he sees best. There is a certain amount of irony when Teddy eventually realises that he is losing control of his wife towards the end of the piece and tries to summon up her maternal instincts. In a conversation that echoes Ruth's original pleas to go home he states:

Teddy: I think we'll go back. Mmm?

Pause

Shall we go home?

Ruth: Why?

[...]

Teddy: I'd like to go back and see the boys now [...] The boys'll be at the pool... now... swimming. Think of it [...] Look I'll go and pack. You rest a while. Will you? [...] You can help me with my lectures when we get back. I'd love that. I'd be grateful for it, really. [...] You liked Venice, didn't you? It was lovely, wasn't it? You had a good week. I mean... I took you there [...] You just rest. I'll go and pack" ("The Homecoming" 54-55).

The above passage, which actually takes place over several pages, is essentially just one elongated imploring from Teddy, desperately trying to reason with his wife. By this stage of the play it has become apparent that Ruth is considering the role available to her in her husband's household. This role, as matriarch, runs contrary to the role that Teddy wishes Ruth to fulfil. Teddy attempts to remind Ruth of all the joys available to her as mother back in America, summoning up an image of her children, happily playing by the pool, a image which he adds a soft focus to by describing it as "clean" ("The Homecoming" 54). He also calls upon her duties as a wife, describing how much he would love to have her assistance putting together his lectures. Teddy never considers whether this is something she would like to do with her time. Teddy positions this activity as something that Ruth should relish, all the

while basking in the reflected bliss of her husband's success. Teddy even refers to their brief holiday in Venice, evoking a memory that thinly veils an attempt to show Ruth the wealth that she can enjoy as his wife, but will lose if she remains as the matriarch of this family.

It is in this moment that we have a glimpse into a side of Teddy that is not often commented upon. Teddy may actually truly care for his wife. He wants her to come back to America with him. He wants her to be with him and their children. He wants her to be his wife. However, it is this desire that is Teddy's downfall. Teddy doesn't want Ruth for who she is, but rather the role she occupies. Teddy doesn't reference any defining trait of Ruth's character that he wishes to keep, but rather he simply names the roles he wishes her to fulfil. There is nothing special in his offer; there is nothing that points to an understanding of Ruth as a fully realised human being. Not only is Teddy unable to break away from the confrontational games of his family, but also he is unable to imagine Ruth complexly, as anything other than a wife and a mother. If he could truly imagine, and so express a love for Ruth, rather than the role she holds, he might have been able to win her back.

This section also speaks to a potential for Ruth's complex representation. Here, we have a reversal of desires; with Ruth wishing to stay and Teddy wishing to depart, reflecting and contrasting the beginning of the play. This change in intentions should point to a more complex insight into Ruth's character however, Pinter does not provide Ruth with any dialogue to examine this change in motivation. It is Teddy who dominates this scene, with his attempts to get his wife back on his side. Ruth remains silent, only occasionally questioning Teddy on his use of the word "dirty" to describe the household ("The Homecoming" 55). Such silences and unusual responses hint towards a use of Absurdist literature, with the pauses adding to the tension and hinting at the things left unsaid, but they never take off the ground. Ruth does not take flight within this scene, and all significance is given to Teddy's attempts to reposition his wife. Ruth's stubbornness, her refusal to bend to her husband's demands could be read as a strength. However, Pinter does not allow for enough depth to this resistance. There is no joy in its execution - with Ruth remaining enigmatic. As such, the importance of this moment, a moment in which Ruth could be championing elements that support a more three-dimensionally reading of her character, are lost.

To return to Ruth's first appearance in the play, there is a significant moment that Pinter paints that hints at the supposed intended role of the female within the world of *The Homecoming*. After walking around the living room for a moment Ruth asks whether she has permission to sit down, to which Teddy responds that of course she can. Ruth however does not complete the action. Teddy refers to a particular chair in the room, labelling it as Max's chair, yet another ironic moment in hindsight as this is the chair that Ruth will eventually claim as her own, thus literally dethroning Max. Ruth does not sit down. Teddy moves around the room trying to infer the wellbeing of the inhabitants of the house from the state of the house itself. He eventually asks:

Teddy: [...] Are you cold?

Ruth: No.

Teddy: I'll make something to drink, if you'd like. Something hot.

Ruth: No I don't want anything.

Teddy: What do you think of the room? Big isn't it? It is a big house. I mean, it's a fine room, don't you think? Actually there was a wall, across there... with a door. We knocked it down... years ago... to make an open living area. The structure wasn't affected you see. My mother was dead.

Ruth sits" ("The Homecoming" 21).

Ruth finally completes the action that she set in motion several moments ago and, with that, Pinter manages to successfully twin the late Jessie with the present Ruth. There can be no doubt that, whilst the structure of the house was not affected by the removal of a wall, the removal of Jessie, as the family's previous matriarch, would have affected the hierarchy of the family enormously. As Cahn points out "[Teddy's mother] was the foundation of the household...perhaps...without her the structure of the household was no longer the same. In any case, Teddy's insecurity is apparent in

every line, as his rhythms and tone of speech contradict the apparent meaning of his words” (59). Jessie has left a power vacuum in the social hierarchy of the household that currently has been subsumed by Max. Through this simple action, that of Ruth taking her inaugural position in the seat of power, Pinter shows us that it is Ruth who is intended to fill that role - as the new mother of this family.

Jessie is a highly significant character within the narrative of *The Homecoming*, as the previous matriarch of the family and a force that is remembered with both fear and respect by the residence of the household. As has been hinted at above, Pinter goes to great lengths to position femininity as an alien, or outside force, in *The Homecoming*. To the male characters in the play, femininity is something to be feared, misremembered, or manipulated to suit their own very narrow view of what characterises a female. This is acutely highlighted through the use of a convention that reoccurs throughout Pinter’s dramaturgy, perhaps most significantly in *The Homecoming*. This idea is the common occurrence of characters, often highly important to the narrative, who remain offstage and yet wield power over the characters within the performance.

Jessie is portrayed in a very disparaging light. In reference to his late wife Max describes her in the following way:

Mind you, she wasn’t such a bad woman. Even though it made me sick just to look at her rotten stinking face, she wasn’t such a bad bitch. I gave her the best years of my life, anyway (“The Homecoming” 9).

This description, not only of Jessie, but of his feelings towards her are almost comical in the vast amount of bile that Max has for his late wife. Max continually oscillates between expressing admiration for his late wife and her loving attitude towards the children and expressing his utter hatred for a woman he presumably loved. As Cahn comments, “The combination of roughhouse affection and vulgar contempt reflects part of the complex male attitude towards women in this play” (56). Max continues on to describe his late wife as a whore and a prostitute, “Max: I’ve never had a whore under this roof before. Ever since your mother died [...]” (“The Homecoming” 42).

Once again the, potentially accidental, implication that the last whore in the house was Jessie is humorous, but this line of dialogue helps to outline the nub of the problem. Jessie here is positioned not only as a horrible person but it is also hinted that she may have been a whore, however there is no chance for her to represent herself, or the audience form any opinions concerning her character. Instead, the audience must rely on referred information regarding her character. We cannot know for certain whether Max's claims have any validity to them at all. The only sexual incident we can refer to is Sam's revelation that Jessie and MacGregor committed adultery with one another. However, even that piece of information carries very little weight as the revelation is brushed off by the characters and so is in turn brushed off by the audience. It does seem perplexing that Max remembers his wife with such contempt, until you consider the possibility that Max chooses to remember her in such a way because it is easier to do so. It is much neater, much more convenient to misremember her as a whore, rather than the complex woman she must have been.

The idea of Jessie is also used as a weapon throughout the piece, her memory wielded within the confrontations between the male characters. One of the tensest moments between Max and Lenny is when Lenny, deliberately provoking his father into a display of aggression, asks after his parent's sexual relationship.

Lenny: I'll tell you what, Dad, since you're in the mood for a bit of a ... chat, I'll ask you a question [...] That night ... you know ... the night you got me, what was it like? Eh? When I was just a glint in your eye. What was it like? What was the background to it? [...] there's lots of people of my age share that curiosity [...] the night they were made in the image of two people *at it* [...]

Max: You'll drown in your own blood ("The Homecoming" 36).

The conversation continues and eventually Max spits at his son to silence him from mentioning Jessie again. Furthermore, during Lenny and Ruth's first meeting Ruth refers to Lenny as "Leonard" which provokes the following interaction:

Ruth [...] Leonard.

Pause.

Lenny: Don't call me that please.

Ruth: Why not?

Lenny: That's the name my mother gave me ("The Homecoming"
33).

Unbeknownst to Ruth, she stumbles across one of the most powerful weapons in the battlefield of this household, that of the memory of Jessie. Jessie hovers over the family, and indeed over the whole play, as if she were some kind of ghost or a spectre at the feast. Jessie is something both to be repelled from and frightened of. This characterisation can be considered problematic because Jessie, as one of the two female characters mentioned within the play, is never provided with an opportunity to represent herself to the audience. There can be no way of knowing whether these referred characteristics have any grounding in reality, or whether this is how Max and his disturbed family choose to remember her. As I have argued above, perhaps the truth is not significant; however, it cannot be ignored that Jessie is demonised whereas MacGregor, a male offstage character who is purported to act in a similar manner, is vindicated and championed. Jessie is constricted by the dramaturgy, twisted into an archetype and a weapon, a device to be used at will to facilitate the conflict of the play, all the while unable to represent herself as a fully realised character.

Let us now proceed to the third, and most problematic point of the mother/wife/whore paradigm and examine the attempts of the other male members of the household to position Ruth as a whore. To do so, we shall examine Max's interactions with Ruth in an attempt to synthesise an overview of the family.

Max is described by Hollis as "... the primal father, compassionate provider and *pater tyrannus* in one. He constantly seeks devotion from his sons yet continues to assert his autocratic authority" (96). This complex description hints at the role,

which not only Max claims for himself, but also almost all critics have labelled him as. Max is the patriarch of the family – a decaying patriarch, but the head of the household nonetheless. It is that quality, that of Max’s decay, that comes to define him most. Ruth signals a distressing change in the status quo for Max, as Ruth could easily annex his position within the household, thus leaving him obsolete and powerless. The conflict that arises between Ruth and Max is a struggle for positioning. Whilst it is not explicitly stated, one can imagine that Ruth begins to see the rewards, or at least the possibility, of her acting as the mother of this household. Max on the other hand is desperate to position her as the resident whore.

“Max’s misogynistic projection of femininity... is a result of the absence of a woman in the family that is highlighted by the shock of Ruth’s arrival... In Max’s hierarchical view of masculinity the virility implied by his own career as butcher and father of three sons valorises his superior position as patriarch...” (R. Gordon 75-76).

Ruth is a threat to Max’s status within the family and therefore must be quickly assimilated and then controlled. Max goes to great lengths to position any female character as an outsider to the household, aggressively using the phrase “bitch” and occasionally the word “tit”, to insult others (“The Homecoming” 9; “The Homecoming” 40). Linking this with the following statement made by Max after he discovers that Ruth, his sons’ wife, has been sleeping in the house overnight, we can begin to see a pattern emerging:

Max: [...] We’ve had a stinking pox-ridden slut in my house all night.

Teddy: Stop it! What are you talking about?

Max: I haven’t seen the bitch for six years...

Teddy: She’s my wife. We’re married.

Pause

Max: [...] Take that disease away from me (“The Homecoming” 41-42).

Max continually positions femininity as an otherness in this household. Not only are women considered to be whores upon sight, but they are also considered to be unclean and harmful. This positioning is part of Max’s attempts to control. As has been examined in regards to Jessie above, Max finds it easier to imagine a feminine force as something evil, rather than as something with intrinsic complexities.

Max even goes out of his way to re-appropriate the role that Jessie would have played whilst raising their three sons, thus establishing his dominion over them. In a long declamatory speech that Max gives to Ruth at the opening of the second act, he claims to have supported his whole family through his job as a butcher, yet he also claims to have educated himself to tend to his bed-ridden relatives, thus encapsulating Max’s position as bread-winner and carer. Most significantly he claims that he had “A crippled family, three bastard sons, a slutbitch of a wife – don’t talk to me about the pain of childbirth – I suffered through the pain, I’ve still got the pangs, when I give a little cough my back collapses...” (“The Homecoming” 47). Whilst seeming to be entirely bizarre on the face of it, this declaration is carefully pitched. The audience of this speech is Ruth, apparently the only woman that Max has allowed entry into the house in many years. The implication is that Ruth is almost a useless entity in the household. Max claims to be able to fulfil any role a woman could offer. Not only does Max bring home the bacon, but he also cooks and then feeds it to his family. Even one of the most significant elements of Ruth’s biology, that of the ability to bear children, has been annexed by Max. The only role missing from Max’s speech is that of a sexual provider and it is clear that it is this role that Max wishes Ruth to fulfil.

It is this role as a sexual being that is a pressing concern for both critics and the characters alike within *The Homecoming*. One of the most significant moments of the play is during a long conversation between the men of the household on the nature of Teddy’s work. They all begin to discuss the philosophy surrounding reality and the known verses the unknown. After a time, Ruth cuts in with an interesting philosophical suggestion of her own:

Ruth: Don't be too sure though. You've forgotten something. Look at me. I... move my leg. That's all it is. But I wear... underwear... which moves with me... it... captures your attention. Perhaps you misinterpret. The action is simple. It's a leg... moving. My lips move. Why don't you restrict... your observations to that? Perhaps the fact that they move is more significant... than the words which come through them. You must bear that... possibility... in mind ("The Homecoming" 52-53).

Now, such an observation should herald a strong indication of complexity for Ruth's character, and to a certain extent it does. Her observations are cleverly pitched, both adding to the philosophical argument that is taking place, but also diving into the power struggle that is taking place around her. The men, for a change, are using intelligence and wit to do battle with one another, and Ruth proves that she is equal to the men surrounding her. However, this moment stutters and falls under the heavy sexual imagery that Pinter writes for her to deliver her message. Surely, Ruth should be able to prove herself equal to the men without having to refer to her sexuality? Sakellaridou observes that,

On the semantic level it is the dramatic cry of a woman forcefully inviting the males, who are lost in philosophical speculation, to pay attention to her existence as a manifestation of animate reality... Hers is the first solid and coherent female speech which reflects a newly-formulated female ideology Her discourse also throws light on her inexplicable behaviour, proves the complexity of her character and destroys the split female image [mother/wife/whore paradigm] by blending the two polarities of mother and whore into one harmonious whole (108-109).

Whilst Sakellaridou does make some very excellent points within her commentary, I would disagree that this moment heralds Ruth breaking out of a two-dimensional mould into a three-dimensional character. Sakellaridou is right in the fact that this is the first elongated speech we have heard from her, and one that hints at a depth of

complexity of her character, but she fails to note that it is indeed the *only* speech in which we get such an insight. The sexual imagery draws attention to her body, her legs, her underwear and her possibilities as a whore, not her ideas. At such a moment, we should be referring to Esslin's literature of dream and fantasy, in an attempt to assess whether she is complexly rendered by her insights but we cannot ("The Theatre of the Absurd" 316). This moment is a blatant example of Pinter hindering the expression of his female characters. Max, Teddy, Lenny and all the other male characters have opportunity to discuss philosophical concepts, some of which are the core elements of the Absurdist genre. Ruth does not. Ruth – once again – is constricted by the very narrow obsession into her suitability as a sexual object.

As the play closes, the audience is treated to the disintegration of Max's fantasy world – that of a world in which he is still the patriarch and yet is able to use Ruth for his own sexual pleasure. As Teddy, who appears to wash his hands of his wife and the mother of his children, exits the household, Max's final despairing cries echo feebly:

Max: [...] Lenny, do you think she understands...

He begins to stammer.

What...what...what we're getting at? What... we've got in mind?
Do you think she's got it clear?

Pause.

I don't think she's got it clear.

Pause.

You understand what I mean? Listen, I've got a funny idea she'll do the dirty on us, you want to bet? She'll use us, she'll make use of us, I can tell you. I can smell it! You want to bet?

Pause

She won't... be adaptable! ("The Homecoming" 81).

As Gordon points out "...the final scene of *The Homecoming* may be seen to test the potentially sexist representation of women as objects of male fantasy by exposing it at its most extreme" (R. Gordon 82). Max loses control of his fantasy in the final moments of the play and is dethroned, and castrated in front of his entire family. Teddy loses the woman he loves, and most significantly for him, a wife who supports him and a mother to care for his children. Max's attempts to control Ruth fail within the final moments of the play and he is unable to position her as he sees fit, and Teddy must continue his life alone. "As Ruth sits on her parody of a throne, we recognise that even though she will play the roles of wife, mother, whore and mistress that fulfil the desires these men have, as well as those other men will bring her, she is the ultimate figure of authority in this home" (Cahn 72).

Perhaps then this could be read as a victory for Ruth? Ruth does indeed take up the position as head of this household, a role which implies a great deal of power and status within the world portrayed by Pinter and discards a husband who does not imagine her complexly. However, it is this ending and the ambiguities it throws up which has divided critics across the years. As Gordon questions:

Is the play's presentation of Ruth as both mother and whore in itself an endorsement of the sexism of patriarchal society? Does Ruth collude in the homosocial male fantasy of women as sexually available, or does her exploitation of the power of her physical attractiveness over sexually driven men represent a kind of sexual personal liberation? (R. Gordon 79).

Each of these questions can lead to their own set of interpretations concerning Ruth's positioning within the play.

To take Gordon's first question, Pinter himself denies the possibility of the ending being a salute to the sexist attitudes of men. Pinter provides his own analysis

of that final tableau in the following manner,

[Ruth is] misinterpreted and used deliberately by this family. But eventually she comes back with a whip. She says “if you want to play this game I can play it as well as you.” She does not become a harlot. At the end of the play she is in possession of a certain kind of freedom. She can do what she wants, and it is not at all certain she will go off to Greek Street. But even if she did, she would not be a harlot in her own mind (Pinter qtd in “Harold Pinter and the Language of Cultural Power” 77).

Marc Silverstein, after quoting this passage, goes on to comment that this analysis of Pinter’s own play is problematic. Surely a woman who engages in prostitution, but chooses not to acknowledge it in her own mind, is not wielding power, but rather repressing a role she is being forced to play. In regards to this repression Silverstein queries “...might this not serve as the definition of what patriarchy considers an acceptable, unthreatening, even desirable woman?” (“Harold Pinter and the Language of Cultural Power” 78) Pinter’s explanation points to a worrying reframing of her character. Ruth’s position is almost a fantasy for these men. Not only do they get the woman of their dreams, but also Ruth tricks herself into believing that she holds the upper hand in the family dynamic. “If, as Pinter asserts, Ruth would not think of herself as prostitute even as she engages in prostitution, then how could she recognise the exploitation that finally marks her as subject to patriarchal power?” (“Harold Pinter and the Language of Cultural Power” 78) So, it appears that even Pinter’s own suggestions as to the nature of his play are flawed, or at the very least can be challenged.

Perhaps then it is Gordon’s second question through which a viewer can gain a satisfying insight into this final moment. There can be no denying that the male characters all wish Ruth to be sexually available. The only word that one can take issue with is the word “collude.” It is not clear whether or not Ruth explicitly agrees with the proposal that is laid before her, a facet that Penelope Prentice outlines in her essay: “...the best textual evidence indicates that Ruth will neither remain nor agree to their proposal. She deliberately skirts commitment by conducting negotiations in

strictly conditional verbs, using the conditional, or contrafactual, tense throughout” (“Ruth: Pinter's *The Homecoming* Revisited” 458-459). This is also a thought that is echoed by Pinter himself who stated “that the ending of the play provides no guarantee that Ruth intends to meet her part of the bargain” (Pinter qtd in R. Gordon 79). One cannot be sure just how much, or how little, Ruth wishes to engage with the sexual scenario that she finds herself in. It is clear that the male characters view her in that manner, and expect her to behave as if she were a vessel through which sexual pleasure can be given out at anytime. However, it is unknown, almost cannot be known, whether Ruth also views herself in this manner, as Ruth does not communicate her feelings to the audience.

Then perhaps it is Gordon’s final point that explains Ruth’s behaviour in the final moments of the play. The idea that Ruth finds liberation through her new role in the household appears to hold the most water. In her book, Sakellaridou takes the final image of the play and attempts to view it through a lens that positions Ruth, not singly as the victor of some kind of animalistic struggle for power, but rather as some kind of fusion of the various roles of femininity.

By the end of the play she has formed herself a compact personality, synthesising all aspects of the female principle, the mother, the wife and the whore achieving an ‘equilibrium’... she experiences separately the different sides of herself; at an early stage her sexuality, at a later stage her maternal instinct and her role as subservient wife, and now in the final stage she reaches her self completion by bringing all the various elements of her personality together in a harmonious whole (Sakellaridou 111).

However, such an interpretation still does not come without its detractors. Whilst Sakellaridou should be commended in her efforts to remove Ruth from the constant interpretation of a villainous whore, there is still the issue that Ruth is asked to fulfil particular roles as defined by her male counterparts. As Garner rebuts “Second-wave feminist theorists, in attempting to describe women, have, once again, compartmentalized them and post-structural feminists are attempting to subvert these notions that have become ingrained in our society... pigeonholing women into

particular categories is damaging to them” (10-11).

This is the centre of the problem concerning this play. It cannot be escaped that *The Homecoming* is almost entirely concerned with how best to categorise the genders within society as represented through this bizarre household in the east end of London. Its central conceit is focused on how Ruth will act – whether she will agree to the new role of matriarch for this family, or whether she would prefer to return to America and remain the wife of Teddy and mother to her children. However, this fact leads to very disparate readings, with each critics battling to explain which role, for Ruth, is the most plausible and satisfying. Some of Pinter’s earliest critics, particularly Esslin (1971), demonise Ruth’s choices, describing her actions as immoral. Garner singles out Penelope Prentice (1980) as an example of critics who have attempted to reconcile that choice, placing a positive light on the actions or equating her choice to become the matriarch of this family as somehow liberating (Garner 10). It is only the most recent critics (of whom Garner places within the third wave of feminism) who appear to view *The Homecoming* as a kind of cautionary tale of the dangers of being unable to imagine others complexly and demanding that they subscribe to very limited and definite roles and archetypes. Garner outlines that,

Rather than looking at *The Homecoming* as a play in which a domineering mother/whore figure comes to dominate her husband’s family, one can look at the play as though Ruth is an embodiment of our misunderstandings and assumptions about women (11).

It is this observation that resonated most strongly with my own personal reading of the play. Not only does this interpretation allow for the possibly sexist reading of the play, but also provides an escape route through which to highlight the problematic nature of the piece and thus give its lingering misogyny a purpose.

Something which I have stressed in the previous chapters is my belief that Pinter’s dramaturgy references the world of fantasy and dreams to a much greater extent than perhaps has been noted before. I believe that *The Homecoming* can be placed under such scrutiny and that through a slightly more fantastical lens, coupled with Garner’s observations, the *The Homecoming* can be presented as a cautionary

tale. It may seem ironic, but we can actually refer back to Esslin to find evidence for such a reading, “*The Homecoming* also exists on another level: its real, its realistic, action is a metaphor of human desires and aspirations, a myth, a dream image, a projection of archetypal fears and wishes.” (“Pinter, A Study of his Plays” 152-153) It appears that Esslin did not pursue this line of inquiry into the play extensively, however, I would argue that this is the key to understanding *The Homecoming*. Over time the events that are depicted throughout the narrative become more and more dream-like, even nightmarish. The fantasy present in the household reaches such a fever pitch that the absurdity of Harold Pinter’s dramaturgy breaks through its realistic counterparts and we are thrown into a world in which the normal rules of society just do not apply. Is it not the case that with the horrifying dream in which everything appears to be working normally, and one in which the world is familiar, that slowly over time the skin slips off the faces of those you thought you recognised to reveal the monsters beneath? Is that not precisely how Gordon describes the world of the play - that of an “illusion” (R. Gordon 74)?

Such a production that harnesses this element of the fantastical could sidestep the possibly misogynistic overtones of the play, by explicitly demonising the actions of these male characters. I suggest that Garner is correct in her assessment of this play, and it is through this lens of a slowly evolving nightmare through which a production could achieve this reading.

To conclude, Ruth, and by extension *The Homecoming*, is a highly controversial topic to this day. *The Homecoming* concerns itself with the role of women, and yet does not make steps to explore the intricacies of the female character. Pinter draws Ruth in a very mysterious manner. At times there are hints of her complexity, which are usually overshadowed by the action of the male characters surrounding her. She remains a two-dimensional stereotype, and is indeed forced by both character and narrative to fulfil specific and damaging roles. As has been pointed out, she infrequently is provided with Absurdist traits and literature through which to represent herself. Her very few attempts pale in relation to the male characters surrounding her as they are drowned under sexualised imagery. Ruth is by no means liberated by the text that Pinter has crafted for her. *The Homecoming* remains a deeply thought-provoking play, and one that deserves its place within the western canon,

however, it cannot be ignored that Ruth is not positioned as the author of her own narrative within this work. Ruth is lost in a dream, a dream that becomes a nightmare. However, it is not her dream, but rather it is the case that Ruth is the central figure of a male dream – of a male fantasy. She is bent to fit a specific shape and fulfil a specific role, abandoned by her husband to serve as object for his family. The play closes on a hopeless moment, a moment that is truly the material of nightmares.

Chapter Three - Emma's Escape. Striving for self-realisation

“Emma: Well, it's nice, sometimes, to think back. Isn't it?” (“Betrayal” 13)

Betrayal, first presented in 1978, poses a problem within Pinter's canon, as its dramaturgical manifestation is significantly different from those plays that had come before. Pinter stated that he “could no longer stay in the room with this bunch of people who opened doors and came in and out” (Pinter qtd in R. Gordon 89). There is a strong departure from the plays which consisted of “carefully formed innuendoes, the sinister ambiguities, the impending disasters - those elements which led critics to label Pinter plays “comedies of menace”” and, as time passed, his works began to follow a more naturalistic mode of staging (Ben-Zvi 227). Varun Begley describes how “...*Betrayal* appears restrictive and over determined. The naturalistic settings, historically specified characters and location, overabundant plot and familiar erotic triangle saturate the play's temporal, spatial and thematic dimensions” (119). Even Pinter's characteristic trademark that of his use of language appears to be missing from this particular work: “The characters in *Betrayal* speak with a flatness virtually unique in the Pinter canon. Rarely does any character offer a speech of more than a sentence or two, and none offers poetic eloquence” (Cahn 119). *Betrayal* appears to offer the audience a small and painful domestic drama – one that seldom manages to escape into a wider relevance, and instead remains insular and introspective.

However, despite all these criticisms of this work, there is still one element of *Betrayal* that I would argue redeems it from being simply about “a nasty little affair that really doesn't matter very much” (Fehsenfeld 125). Plays such as *Landscape* (1969) and *Old Times* (1971) mark the start of a series of plays that have an increased concern with Gordon's fourth notion: that of memory and time (R. Gordon 3). Critics have labelled this as the beginning of a period of plays titled “Memory Plays” in which Pinter is interested in how the past constructs the characters of the present: “[...] we are what the past has made us, yet we remake the past according to what we are” (Gale 175). These plays are concerned with the construction of identity through the “mistiness of the past” (Gale 175). *Betrayal* explores this notion by adopting a reverse chronology to recount the events. By outlining the relationship from decay to inception, Pinter “facilitates a recognition of causes and motives, endowing events

with a fatalistic inevitability (since on stage the future has already happened), but also turns disillusion inside out, and by revealing its pattern, encourages acceptance and converts anguish into art” (Dohmen 197). The reverse chronology highlights a key facet of the human condition, that of the continued conflict between our recollection of the past and our constructed sense of self.

If, unlike in previous chapters, we can only rely on a very limited amount of Absurdist characteristic traits in Emma’s dialogue, then what can be examined to assess Emma’s representation? This answer can be found through this examination of the form of the play. By dissecting the division between truth and the past we can gain an insight into how Emma chooses to construct her own self-image. By identifying and tracking the convergence and diversions of Emma’s actions against how she chooses to remember past events, we can gain an insight into how Emma chooses to imagine her own sense of self. I argue that fully realised female characters will neither remember the past with complete fidelity, nor will she have a total misunderstanding of the past. She will remember the past complexly – all the while recalling, disremembering and reimagining the past so as best to suit her own sense of self. Such a reading may appear to be obvious in relation to the representation of a male character, however there is no guarantee that this trait is something that a playwright would also gift upon a female character. This quirk of *Betrayal*’s structure also allows us to ask some questions about Pinter’s portrayal of the genders. Is the construction of self through memory an act that is pertinent to all humankind or does Pinter portray a division between the genders and this act of self-realisation?

This capacity for memory is a strand that picks up in the very first scene of the play. Emma and Jerry have met in a dingy pub, many years after their affair has concluded. The scene serves to establish the past, describing the relationship, before the play reverses into the events and embellishing upon them. Emma presses Jerry with several questions, asking him whether he remembers the last time they met:

Emma: [...] Do you know how long it is since we met?

Jerry: Well I came to that private view, when was it - ?

Emma: No, I don’t mean that.

Jerry: Oh you mean alone?

Emma: Yes

Jerry: Uuh ...

Emma: Two years.

Jerry: Yes, I thought it must be. Mmm (“Betrayal” 13-14).

Whilst a simple segment, Emma is positioned here as being the stronger player in this game of memory. Whether Jerry has actually forgotten, or is choosing to remain vague to hide his true feelings is uncertain, but Emma and her superior recollection of the past facilitates her gaining the upper hand of the power dynamic between the two.

This idea is revisited frequently throughout the play, with Emma’s pedantic persistence with the past showing itself again in scene three when she demands Jerry tell her how long it has been since they were both in their shared flat together. When Jerry is unable to remember she reprimands him and gives him the specific date, once again using her memory to gain status with the relationship. Emma can be seen using memory as a weapon within these scenes, correcting and restabilising the past as to suit her sense of self. Emma remembers the past with an unshakable clarity, thus cementing her present character through commanding the past. However, as I have suggested a multi-faceted female character will not always remember the past correctly - as a fully realised character will also be fallible. For this use of memory to be used as evidence we must locate examples when Emma fails to recall the past.

There is a memory that is frequently revisited throughout the play in which Jerry throws Emma’s young daughter, Charlotte, into the air and catches her.

Emma: [...] Do you remember that time... oh god it was... when you picked her up and threw her up and caught her?

Jerry: She was very light.

Emma: She remembers that, you know.

[...]

Jerry: Yes, everyone was there that day, standing around, your husband, my wife, all the kids, I remember.

Emma: What day?

Jerry: When I threw her up. It was in your kitchen.

Emma: It was in your kitchen (“Betrayal” 19-20).

This memory becomes a strange little touchstone within the relationship, an event never depicted, but frequently referenced. It is significant because in the first scene as depicted above, Jerry does not appear to remember the event particularly well.

However, in scene six Jerry recalls the event with much more clarity and fondness, describing the pleasure Charlotte felt from the experience. Nevertheless, he still gets the location incorrect, once again placing the memory in Emma’s kitchen rather than his own. Just as Emma will go on to do so in the pub, she corrects him. This section points to Jerry remembering the past with complexity, it shifting depending on his mood and the relationships surrounding him, thus resulting in him appearing more fully-realised. This is the kind of evidence that we are searching for, an example of Emma’s recollection of the past taking on much more multi-faceted dimensions. There is only one instance in which Emma appears to be unable to recall the past.

In scene five, whilst Robert is slowly applying pressure to Emma to make her confess her affair with Jerry, the following conversation takes place,

Robert: [...] I’ve been trying to remember when I introduced him to you. I simply can’t remember. I take it I *did* introduce him to you?

Yes. But when? Can you remember?

Emma: No

Robert: You can’t?

Emma: No.

Robert: How odd.

Pause

He wasn’t best man at our wedding, was he?

Emma: You know he was.

Robert: Ah yes. Well that's probably when I introduced him to you
("Betrayal" 83).

This short interaction holds a pleasing piece of dramatic irony. It is very telling that Robert is confused at his wife's seeming inability to recall the past, as it has been painstakingly set up that Emma recalls the past with the uttermost clarity. If we accept the cue from Robert, and believe that Emma was introduced to Jerry at her and Robert's wedding, we can assume that Emma would recall that event reasonably clearly. To prove the point, we can refer to the final scene, in which Jerry says,

Jerry: I was best man at your wedding. I saw you in white. I watched
you glide by in white.

Emma: I wasn't in white ("Betrayal" 135).

This short sentence once again illustrates the fact that Jerry is able to remake the past as per his virginal desires for Emma, but significantly for this specific investigation, also proves that Emma has a clear recollection of her wedding. Thus her proclamation that she does not remember meeting Jerry at their wedding might point to Emma's ability to "...remake the past according to what we are" (Gale 175). This scene may also be read as Emma trying to diffuse the situation and draw attention away from Jerry. Emma must be aware that Robert is probing for information concerning the affair and so by pretending to be unable to remember the first meeting between Jerry and herself, she implies that he is not important to her. It certainly is a complicated moment and it is hard to draw any certain conclusions from it. All this sequence does is prove that Emma has the ability to identify when to use her memory within a power struggle. Her tactic, to placate her husband and to evade suspicion, comes at the reported failure of her memory.

Pinter draws Emma in such a way that she continually recalls the past with an uncanny clarity, using her memory within conversation to wield power. She only appears to compromise this ability once within the whole play. It is a problematic facet of her character that Emma is seemingly the only character who recalls the past clearly and so therefore two-dimensionally. However, the instance in which she does not remember does point to her being able to tactically use her memory to attempt to gain the upper hand in a power dynamic which can be used as evidence for her three-

dimensionality. Pinter does set up a divide between the genders in regards to memory with the male characters having a much more pronounced complex relationship with the past. Emma exists on the fringes of this notion, her relationship with the past only gently brushing up against the complex. This image, of Emma battering against a closed door that may lead to her full realisation, is a reoccurring element throughout this play.

It is unmistakable that Emma is a far more skilfully drawn character than Ruth before her, with both Elizabeth Sakellaridou and Linda Ben-Zvi commenting that she is a far greater depiction than previous iterations. Sakellaridou states that “*Betrayal* (1977) re-establishes the feminine theme...and it surely succeeds in its task through the challenging presence of Emma” (13). Ben-Zvi concurs that Emma

“...is wife, mother, lover, and manager of an art gallery. Yet she does not occupy the familiar position that Pinter has assigned to women in other plays. She is not only an object for male conquest [...] She does not vacillate between the two carefully defined poles of female stereotypic behaviour - Madonna/proper lady/mother or temptress/destroyer/whore [...] Instead, in Emma, Pinter has finally created a believable female character whose struggles are depicted not as mere extensions of the more dominant and more central struggles of his male figures, and who is allowed to exist without being forced into any constraining pre-established female stereotype” (228).

Robert Clyman disagrees, stating that Emma is actually a stylised version of a well-known and coded character from realism plays: “Emma, as a woman of intelligence but without work through which to channel it, is coded as someone prone to infidelity” (165). Such a claim borders on insulting as not only does it imply that Emma’s infidelity is something born from boredom, but also knowingly omits the fact that both the other male characters in this play also commit adultery. I raise this point only to outline the fact that, whilst adultery can be considered an evil action, because all the central characters engage in such deceptions it cannot be levelled against any particular character. One can argue that these romantic affairs can be brought forward as evidence for three-dimensionality as infidelity is a complex idea – and the

menacing acts of Pinter's characters are sometimes at the very core of their representations. Clyman makes a misstep in his assumption that Emma is somehow a lesser character due to her infidelity, whereas I would argue that within the context of this play, this facet of her character is a neutral observation.

Katherine H Burkman describes how Emma's trajectory through the play allows the audience to watch her reverse from being an independent character who manages an art museum to become a housewife, dedicated to maintaining a family and a home. Whilst in reverse, the audience can easily reassemble the timeline and follow her liberation away from her male counter-parts. Emma's journey is one of renewal. She moves forwards from a publisher to a literary agent and finally to writer thus highlighting her rise to a more artistically fulfilled character. "Excluded by the men who treat her like an object, Emma manages to liberate herself from the bondage of triangular desire, to bury the past, and unite with Casey" (Burkman 517).

Sakellaridou however claims that Burkman is too optimistic - that even Emma's progression from businessman to artist cannot be used as evidence to discuss her liberation as we have no actual evidence as to whether Casey, her final lover of the play, is a good writer, or whether in fact he is just mediocre. Whilst Casey is reported to profit from his novels, both Robert and Jerry independently state that, to them, the qualities of his works are decreasing. Casey is an offstage character and so we are only informed about his personality through the filters of Jerry and Robert. Much like Jessie from *The Homecoming*, Casey is a force that seemingly exerts an impressive force over Emma, and yet we are hardly treated to any observations from Emma herself on the status of her relationship with him. In my opinion this weakens Emma's choice to continue a love affair with him, as the audience cannot gauge her life satisfaction with a character they do not know. I personally would take this one step further and disagree outrightly with Burkman. Casey does not signal liberation for Emma. Even though she does progress through a series of men that see her ascend a strangely tiered system, she is still attached to these men. Emma cannot be considered a more three-dimensional personality simply because she connected to a more intellectual male counterpart. I would posit that an even greater act of self-realisation would be to achieve liberation from such "bondage of triangular desire" by escaping the entanglement entirely (Burkman 517). Such a reading as presented by Burkman appears impossible.

However, there is one element of Emma's renewal that might provide evidence that she is beginning to actively seek freedom from her male partners. By the end of the chronology, and so the beginning of the play, Emma has taken up the position of manager at an art gallery. The references to her occupation are fleeting but there are no implications that Emma took up this position due to a suggestion or pressure from any of her male counterparts. It can be assumed that Emma herself chooses to take this important position up to fulfil her own sense of artistic expression independently of any male character. As Sakellaridou describes,

Emma reveals conventional feminine domesticity when she appears in an apron cooking a stew in her Kilburn flat and when she says to Jerry characteristically 'I cook and slave for you'... When she realises that this is just an illusion she turns to extra-domestic activities to find fulfilment. Emma is the only one of the three characters who is bold and honest enough to confront the hollowness and falsity of her marriage and her love-affair and step out of them both (188).

As Sakellaridou points out, Emma appears to be the only one of the main characters who is self aware enough to identify the lack of meaning she gains from her romantic entanglements, and so whilst she does move onto a new lover, she also appears to make steps to realise herself through different means.

I would like to propose that, within the play, betrayal is the main action, an action that is continuously revisited over and over again. Betrayal is an act that can irrevocably alter a character's wellbeing and so can be considered a decisive action. If there can be found examples of Emma betraying to an equal, if not greater, amount as any individual male characters, then we can surmise that she has a significant amount of agency within the narrative. I also submit that there must be a significantly high number of instances of betrayal in which Emma is the active participant and sole author of that specific betrayal. To clarify, this would exclude the dominant affair that takes place within the narrative of the play as this betrayal is upheld and continued by two characters. For the betrayal to be significant to Emma's representation the betrayals must be initiated or upheld by Emma alone.

In Bernard F. Dukore's book on Harold Pinter, he painstakingly outlines over several pages each and every betrayal that each character commits. Dukore sets out to prove that the subject of the play is not just the simple romantic betrayal of Jerry, Emma and Robert, but rather that betrayal is a repeated act that applies to many different aspects of a person's life, committed across every person's relationship with one another. Lies and evasions are part of everyday interactions. However, his analysis does not extend to any specific character, but simply draws an overview of the conflict that takes place in each scene. Building off this analysis we can gauge the quality of betrayals with specific reference to Emma's actions and representation.

The first significant betrayal that Emma commits, that she is the sole author of, takes place in the first scene. Emma explains to Jerry that the previous night she had to tell Robert about the affair.

Emma: He told me everything. I told him everything [...]

Jerry: You told him everything?

Emma: I had to.

Jerry: You told him everything... about us?

Emma: I had to ("Betrayal" 29).

Emma is cold and calculating in this moment. As can be observed, this is no simple lie - a simple way of deflecting the truth - but an undeniable betrayal. Emma repeats the phrase "I had to" both convincing Jerry and herself as to the validity of her statement and also within the same breath confirming to the audience that her betrayal is sincere ("Betrayal" 29). Jerry has been presented with information that will redefine his character and govern his actions - all from the hands of Emma. However, as the play proceeds it is soon revealed that the affair actually came to light four years previously. It is confirmed both by Robert in the subsequent scene and represented to the audience in scene five. This extends the significance of this particular betrayal as it implies that Emma has allowed Jerry to live in ignorance for many years. She has withheld this secret from a man she claimed to love and repeatedly betrayed him. This action is complex and so can be viewed as strong material for Emma's representation as a fully realised character. Not only does such a betrayal require continual evasion

and intellectual gauging, but also it is pleasing to note that Emma never breaks down from the strain of such a lie, overwhelmed by the pressure of her mistruth, as a more stereotypical portrayal may do. No, Emma is calm and collected throughout. She is aware of her betrayal and fully realises it as part of her character. Pinter places her in a position where she is able to keep this secret from Jerry as he floats through the following and preceding scenes of the play in blissful ignorance. When Emma finally breaks Jerry's ignorance, in the first scene, Emma remakes the past to suit her own needs, once again strengthening Emma's complexity. By altering the facts, by pretending that Robert only learnt about the affair the night before, Emma feeds Jerry's ignorance about an affair that has defined this portion of his life. Such actions provide strong evidence for Emma's being a multi-faceted character.

The second act of betrayal that I will refer to takes place in scene eight in which Emma reveals that she is pregnant by her husband to Jerry. This scene is beautifully written as it positions the act of lovemaking between a married couple (Emma and Robert) as an act of infidelity.

Emma: Have you ever been unfaithful?

Jerry: To whom?

Emma: To me, of course

Jerry: No

Pause.

Have you to me?

Emma: No ("Betrayal" 129).

Both Jerry and Emma, at this early stage of their affair believe that they are the owners of one another's bodies. However, as Emma goes on to reveal that she is pregnant by her husband, she betrays this contract between the lovers. Emma's free use of her own body to have intercourse with not only her lover but, shockingly, also her husband as well, points to Emma's liberation. Emma is not confined by either her marriage or extra-marital relationship, but rather she considers her body to be her own

property. This act detaches her from either one of her sexual partners and helps to define her.

There is a third significant betrayal that points to a different kind of character development - that of the altering, or perhaps the fluidity, of held beliefs. The following betrayal points to Emma's ability to reassess her own beliefs and shift her character accordingly and so prevents her from being reduced to a static two-dimensional code of morals or ideas. This specific betrayal occurs in the fourth scene. The subject of Casey and the quality of his novels arises. Robert begins to outline the plot of the novel, casting a humorous spin on the synopsis by making each of Casey's novels sound practically identical. Irony is also heaped onto this brief summary, as the subjects of Casey's novels are seemingly always betrayal. Once the subject has been fully raised the following interaction takes place:

Emma: I hope it's better than the last one.

Robert: The last one? Ah, the last one [...]

Jerry (To Emma): Why didn't you like it?

Emma: I've told you actually.

Jerry: I think it's the best thing he's written.

Emma: It may be the best he's *written* but it's still bloody dishonest ("Betrayal" 66).

There are several facets of this sequence that are worth mentioning. Firstly, once again Emma is shown to have an almost perfect memory, with the line "I've told you actually" another gesture towards Emma's perversely two-dimensional recollection of the past ("Betrayal" 66). Secondly, not only is this sequence heavy with irony, seeing as the subject of betrayal is now being discussed on many layers, both meta-theatrically and textually, but the audience is also aware that Emma will betray her own artistic sense by eventually entering into an affair with Casey in the future. Emma criticises the fact that the novel is dishonest - once again fuelling the scene with irony as betrayal is essentially a dishonest act - and yet cannot even seem stick to her own convictions as she couples herself alongside this artistically dishonest man several years later. In the first scene Jerry asks,

Jerry: I thought you didn't admire his work.

Emma: I've changed. Or his work has changed [...] ("Betrayal" 24).

Whilst I have argued above that Emma aligning herself with yet another lover is not specifically an act of self-realisation, the acknowledgement that she can change is very much a powerful indicator that she can analyse and consider her own character. The line "I've changed." is a far greater piece of evidence to the three-dimensionality of Emma's character than her affair with either Jerry or Casey ("Betrayal" 66). Emma seemingly chooses to betray her own sense of self in uniting with Casey which seems self-destructive, but at least is thematically appropriate and points to an understanding of, and seeking for, self-realisation.

There is a very basic piece of evidence that highlights a lacking of representation. In *Betrayal* the audience is never presented with a scene in which Emma is not performing a particular role for one of her lovers/husband. Her interactions take place exclusively between either Robert and/or Jerry and so are continually framed by their presence. Emma is constantly in the submission of her male counterparts. As Jerry points out in the first scene "You remember the form. I ask about your husband, you ask about my wife" ("Betrayal" 15). Even many years after the affair has been terminated there is still the sense that Jerry is attempting to control Emma's language or outlook on their relationship. In the following scene Jerry then drunkenly confronts Robert. In this scene both Robert and Jerry are provided with a cathartic release of emotions, confiding with one another and resolving any shared tensions they might have had. Emma is provided with no such source of release. Naturally she cannot speak to Robert about the nature of their affair and neither can she speak candidly to Jerry as he is also trapped within it. There are no other female characters that Emma can speak with or confide in. Ben-Zvi argues that this isolation of gender draws our attention to it, yet I disagree. Both Jerry and Robert are provided with scenes that explore their on-going betrayal of the other, but also allow them to explore their own sense of masculinity in relation to themselves and to Emma. Emma on the other hand is not provided with that same luxury. There are no scenes where Emma has to confront Judith - the married partner of the man she is having an affair with. There are also no friends to which Emma can turn, but rather she is wedged between the two men she loves as she shuttles back and forth between

betrayals. Perhaps particular audience members do focus more attention to Emma due to her isolation, but the phrase is aptly used. Emma is isolated, not liberated.

As has been alluded to, *Betrayal* poses a problem within Pinter's canon, as the Pinteresque language that so adorned his previous works appears to have vanished. Sakellaridou describes how this play, almost more than any other of Pinter's previous plays, requires the audience to read between the lines of what each character is saying: "The sparse and cryptic language of the play is full of hidden feeling. One has to follow clues, to listen hard and watch intensely to spot what is happening beneath an often glacial surface" (181). This is clearest during the opening scene of the play. Emma and Jerry, although connected by an emotional past, are practically strangers to one another. There is little of the verbal eloquence, or even verbal violence, as seen in *The Homecoming* and this creates a sense that some sections of the dialogue in the play are almost hollow, or perhaps bottomless. Meaning has been stripped away from language. The lovers find themselves unable to express themselves to one another at all. The conclusion of their betrayal leaves them ghosts of their former selves. In contrast to the character crafted by Pinter both before and after this work, Emma has been reduced to a shell, with Pinter not even gifting her with a single extended monologue throughout the whole play. There are no monologues to which we can point, and search for indicators of Esslin's fantasy/dream literature. Such indicators of character are noticeably absent from this work and are detrimental to Emma's ability to become fully realised.

It is only in the final scene of the play in which the audience is presented with language which is lively and full of passion. The declarations of love made by Jerry in the scene where he drunkenly makes a pass at his best friend's wife are rich and romantic,

Jerry: [...] I'm madly in love with you. I can't believe that what anyone is at this moment saying has ever happened has ever happened. Nothing has ever happened. Nothing. This is the only thing that has ever happened. Your eyes kill me. I'm lost. You're wonderful ("Betrayal" 136).

The declaration is beautifully confusing and dizzying. By romantically discussing metaphysics Jerry's feelings are lifted from the mundane into the philosophically grand. The love he is declaring is of cosmic proportions. Ruby Cohn condemns Jerry in this scene describing his language as “verbal rape” a statement that implies that Emma is by no means complicit in the events that are unfolding around her (28). This is further emphasised by Jerry’s statement that he “[...] should have had you, in your white, before the wedding. I would have blackened you, in your white wedding dress [...]” (“Betrayal” 136). Cohn's description of this event leads us to question just how much power Emma has in this relationship. As mentioned above, it is only Jerry's language – heightened by alcohol – that manages to escape the play’s characteristic hollow language that dominates this work. Emma's language is much vaguer. She never explicitly prevents Jerry from making his proclamations of love, yet she never urges him on - silence is not consent. The only solid pieces of information we have from the text are the following stage directions: “*He kisses her. She breaks away. He kisses her. Laughter off. She breaks away [...]*” (“Betrayal” 137). This stage direction clearly points to the fact that Emma is the victim of this sexual situation. Whilst she does go on to betray her husband many times over in the future, Emma did not desire this encounter. Jerry is the aggressor and Emma is positioned as victim as the play closes. If we accept Emma as victim, at the genesis of the relationship, then we can only conclude that Pinter has detrimentally weakened Emma’s character. Emma is acted upon during the final moments of the play rather than being active within her life. It cannot be said that Emma exercises free will or self-realisation because the audience is never shown Emma making the choice to engage with the affair. This final scene, a scene in which Jerry not only makes decisive action and represents Jerry as the sole owner of any poetic language within the play, cuts down Emma’s representation massively.

It is significant to note that Emma is continually positioned as the prize or reward of this love affair, rather than an integral player within the game. The very nature of the secret love affair means that both Robert and Jerry are locked in conflict with one another for her attention and time. Even once Emma has admitted to Robert that she has conducted an affair with Jerry, the two men still agree to meet up and have polite lunches with one another. Jerry does not know that Robert is aware of the affair, but in an act that almost seems sadomasochistic Robert wishes to engage with

Jerry as an old friend. It is almost as if that Emma is not really the focus of these two men's actions, but rather an incidental bonus or afterthought in a game between these two men. Katherine Burkman comments that "Emma... is actually the triangles major victim, a prize or object for which the men vie mostly because of their interest in each other" (509). These two remain great friends throughout the affair. Jerry never makes an attempt to disengage himself from Robert's circle and so therefore lessen the guilt he feels in betraying him, but rather he accepts lunch dates and the two discuss publishing issues. In the second scene of the play, when Jerry finally learns that Robert has known about the affair for years the following conversation takes place:

Jerry: When?

Robert: Oh, a long time ago, Jerry.

Pause

Jerry: But we've seen each other... a great deal... over the last four years. We've had lunch.

Robert: Never played squash though.

Jerry: I was your best friend ("Betrayal" 39).

The mention of the game of squash becomes a reoccurring motif throughout the play. In scene seven both Robert and Jerry discuss meeting up to play a game. Jerry dismisses the idea, protesting that he is feeling too ill to play before moving to condemn it as violent. In the fourth scene Robert goads Jerry by stating that he is a fitter man because he plays squash, and that his current partner Casey is "a brutally honest squash player" ("Betrayal" 68). Squash here is used as a metaphor for general masculinity and worthiness. Robert, currently aware of the affair, appears to be challenging Jerry to play the game properly, to actively engage in the conflict of an affair. Whilst this all could point to a simple display of masculinity, the following statement made by Robert simultaneously adds Emma into the conflict and also condemns her for her femininity:

Robert: Well to be brutally honest, we wouldn't actually want a woman around would we, Jerry? I mean a game of squash isn't simply a game of squash; it's rather more than that. You see, first there's the game. And then there's the shower. And then there's the pint. And then there's lunch. After all you've been at it. You've had your battle [...] You don't want her in the squash court, you don't want her in the shower, or the pub or the restaurant [...] (“Betrayal” 69).

This short passage implies that the conflict between the two men of the affair is the focus of the game and that the presence of a female is almost an annoyance. She is unimportant to the violent expression of a game of squash. She is simply a distraction away from the pure pleasure of a relationship, even a violent or destructive one, with another male. “This is not only an exclusion of Emma from the battle they are engaged in, even though she may be the spoils of that battle, it is a triple put down of her” (Burkman 509). Once again, Emma is reduced to a fringe player in the game of the affair.

This passage also points out an interesting binary between the two male characters and Emma - between supposed masculinity and femininity.

Both men spontaneously exploit misogynistic stereotypes of masculine bonding to assert loyalty to a friendship that each has betrayed. This friendship is sentimentally portrayed as equal or superior in value to heterosexual love in its romantic conjunction of physical and intellectual competition/admiration” (R. Gordon 132).

Jerry and Robert are in conflict over Emma, yet their conflict in some manner still draws them together. This thought is echoed at the beginning of the play when Emma discusses her current affair with the writer Casey. Jerry, the now ex-lover, states that “I couldn't be jealous of Casey. I'm his agent. I advised him about his divorce [...] He's my... he's my boy” (“Betrayal” 24). Once again, male friendship is placed above the connections that men can have with women.

There is one final instance that I would like to touch on that highlights Emma, not only as a reward within this strange male relationship, but again pushes her into the discomforting position of victim. Robert can be read as the most violent of the three main characters, with some of his dialogue being reminiscent of Max from *The Homecoming*. Robert's violent tendencies are revealed to the audience in the second scene. Robert describes how he has hit Emma on occasion: "I wasn't doing it from any kind of moral standpoint. I just felt like giving her a good bashing. The old itch... you understand" ("Betrayal" 41). The audience is shown a sudden insight into the violent possibility of Robert. This junction of the play changes him from a sympathetic character to an angry cuckolded one. Pinter cleverly pitches this change in the audience's perception in Robert, as it prevents the audience feeling any overriding sympathy for any one member of the affair. This focuses the audience's attention on the act of betrayal itself rather than transforming the plot into a morality tale. Uncomfortably, this moment also points towards a strange Absurdist moment that helps to refine Robert's character:

Robert: [...] The old itch...you understand.

Pause

Jerry: But you betrayed her for years, didn't you?

Robert: Oh yes" ("Betrayal" 41 - 42).

Jerry does not respond to Robert's violent suggestion with either agreement or even admonishment. Jerry simply appears to accept this facet of his male friend's behaviour. This positioning of violence against female is distressing because not only does it position Emma as someone who should suffer at the hands of her male counterparts, but also Pinter appears to go out of his way to use this facet to develop Robert's three-dimensionality. Jerry's silence at the end of the speech could indicate an instance where by Esslin's language of fantasy/dreams have converged with the hyper realistic language as proposed by Scolnicov. As has been discussed in Chapter One, this points to strong evidence for three-dimensionality and strong representation, as

Robert here is able to exercise some of the strength of the Absurdist genre. The audience is shown a shaft of insight into Robert's soul, and whilst it is a disturbing sight, he is more complexly rendered by it. This rendering comes at the expense of Emma's character helping to define her as a stereotypical victim; a victim of both this violent relationship and the wider dramaturgical implications of it.

As can be seen from the above analysis there are facets of Pinter's dramaturgy that can be used to provide evidence for Emma's three-dimensionality, but there are also too many elements that comprise the core of *Betrayal* to allow us to champion her representation as a fully realised character. Emma is an isolated figure, lost amongst the complexities of her affair and the male homosocial relationship that even Harold Pinter himself gives precedence: "When asked...about the central theme of *Betrayal*, Pinter answered... that 'the play is about a nine year old relationship between two men who are best friends'" (Pinter qtd in Sakellaridou 186). The genesis of the main conceit of the play, that of the extra-marital affair, has a worryingly misogynistic overtone and can even be read as sexual assault. However, as has been argued by Burkman above, the play does track Emma's progression from a typical housewife from the sixties, to a much more liberated and independent woman in her own right, with a career that provides intellectual fulfilment. I have attempted to argue that not only does Emma engage with the affair, but she is also an active betrayer, both in relation to those around her but also towards her own sense of self. She does act out a course of self-realisation and yet is restricted by the male society exemplified in the play. Just as *Betrayal* is a problematic play with Pinter's canon, Emma' is a problematic characterisation of a female character.

Chapter Four – Celebrating Violent Vixens: Prue, Julie and Suki.

Lambert: And may the best man win!

Julie: The woman always wins.

Prue: Always ("Celebration" 498 - 499).

In an interview given in 1996, the interviewer Mireia Aragay tackles Pinter in relation to his depiction of women in his plays written in the 1960's. Aragay outlines how it is Pinter's male characters who are usually the perpetrators of violence and that, significantly in his latter plays, women are the victims of this violence. Pinter, almost casually, concurs. Aragay continues her attack by pointing out that this is a rather stereotypical depiction - to which again Pinter provides the cool answer "Possibly" (Pinter qtd in "Harold Pinter Various Voices Prose Poetry Politics" 221). Pinter goes on to remark:

I think men are more brutal than women actually. There is a terrible two line poem by Kingsley Amis in which he says "Woman are so much nicer than men/No wonder we like them." My wife considers those lines to be very patronizing and they certainly are, I quite agree. But, nevertheless I just believe that God was in much better trim when He created woman. Which doesn't mean to say I sentimentalize woman. I think women are very tough. But if you look at what has happened in the world since day one, the actual acts of brutality have been dictated by men [...] Nevertheless in my plays woman have always come out in one way or another as the people I feel something toward which I don't feel towards men (Pinter qtd in "Harold Pinter Various Voices Prose Poetry Politics" 222).

Aragay rebuts by stating that that is a very male point of view, to which Pinter responds with the cryptic "Why not?" after which the subject is dropped (Pinter qtd in "Harold Pinter Various voices Prose Poetry Politics" 222). Whilst it would be fanciful to suggest that Pinter's interview with Aragay spurred Pinter to write a play

in which his female characters are far less stereotypical than before and possess many qualities that he gifts his male characters, it is certainly the case that *Celebration* is an unsung example of Pinter's evolved dramaturgical fingerprint. In *Celebration*, written in 1999, there can be found many examples of female brutality and toughness. As has been described in previous chapters, Pinter has an overriding interest in the brutality of the human condition. I posit that in Pinter's works violence and brutality is a trait that Pinter has almost exclusively gifted to his male characters. The fact that this play contains examples of female characters wielding such traits shows the evolution and positive progression of Pinter's dramaturgy. Due to the relatively limited criticism surrounding *Celebration* I will take the opportunity to expand upon this specific work.

Celebration signals a return to an older form of dramaturgy than what was typical of Pinter throughout the final years of his writing career. Plays such as *One for the Road* (1984) and *Mountain Language* (1988) concern themselves with "dramatizing and directly confronting the audience with the oppressive and authoritarian operations of state power" rather than the domestic interiors of private lives that are explored in both *Betrayal* and *The Homecoming* ("*One for the Road*, *Mountain Language* and the Impasse of Politics." 422). *Celebration* however, marks a subtle shift in Pinter's preoccupation with political matters circling home to a more familiar form, and is surprisingly one of Pinter's most Absurdist plays. Whilst the piece describes the lavish and hedonistic lifestyles of several upper-middle class Londoners, and in so doing heavily criticises their lifestyle and self-absorption, it does also take time to investigate the private lives of these individuals. "On one level, *Celebration* is a comic satire on the nerdy nouveau-riche...[Pinter] is writing a quasi-political play in which wealth, greed, vanity and sexual loutishness symbolise both moral emptiness and hermetic isolation from the real world of pain and suffering" (Billington 282). In some ways *Celebration*, as Pinter's final full length play, can be viewed as a tour-de-force, combining many of the successful elements of the Pinteresque that resonate through the plays written in the 60's and the political bite of the plays that typify the latter parts of his career.

It is significant to note that this play, of the limited case study that this thesis investigates, displays Pinter's most savage use of irony and sarcasm. In *Celebration*, unlike *Betrayal* and *The Homecoming*, humour is brandished by Pinter as a weapon, highlighting the hedonistic and immoral world that these characters live in. The

comedy is caustic and throughout the piece the characters refer to one another using a language and rhetoric that bypasses the snide or subtly violent, and lands on the openly insulting and abusive. This play actually highlights my theory of the collision between the literature of fantasy and dreams and hyper-realistic language perfectly - a fact that we shall explore in greater depth later on - as characters openly express the wish to kill or maim their respective partners without any other character seeming to react at all. The Absurd language is at its highest peak in this narrative and provides a great insight into how the genders can relate to one another. Muriel Herzog outlines in her thesis, *Comedy in the Plays of Harold Pinter*, a generalised template of his plays that embody this comedic tone.

Each of the plays begin in seemingly harmless surroundings with ordinary characters sharing seemingly harmless pastimes. Unlike conventional comic characters, however, it is soon evident that they are not enjoying themselves, that the humour they engender is a result of uneasiness and fear, that neither they nor we can say precisely what is going wrong but that whatever potential gaiety, lightness and happiness existed at the start, decisions have been made, encounters have occurred which makes positive resolution impossible (Herzog 2).

This is a perfect outline of the events depicted in *Celebration*. Whilst at first the play appears to depict a simple night out for a number of wealthy Londoners, what transpires is a dark exploration of deep-seated unhappiness and emotional abuse. The two couples at table one, Prue and Julie and their respective husbands Matt and Lambert, are revealed to be twisted narcissists who gain pleasure from abusing and manipulating their partners. Both Matt and Lambert are brothers and Prue and Julie are sisters, which creates a strange incestuous tone, thus complicating every mention of sex and their relationships.

Although they are couples and relatives, in reality each character is lonely, scared of each other and they can be rather cruel and impolite in order to survive in a continual war of words. In that sense, the play's ritzy title, glamorous characters and elegant setting, is

deceptive where in reality the playwright is actually presenting a world of predators and victims... (Inan 101).

Russell and Suki, on table two, battle wittily, with Russell continually positioning Suki as a sexual object. Suki responds to this manipulation by twisting Russell's meaning to suit her own desires: "Suki appears to accept her husband's insults and control her temper only to fight back in a stronger manner than him and hold the power to conquer her husband's vanity in this war of nerves" (Inan 98-99). The wait staff are similarly positioned: "The aim of satisfying the customers degrades the waiters to the level of prostitutes, food and sex apparently being equally available in exchange for money" (R. Gordon 191). The title – *Celebration* - becomes almost a sarcastic insult, pointing to how little almost all of these characters have, and deserve, to celebrate over.

Unlike *Betrayal* before it, there is a wealth of Absurdist conventions to which we can refer to during our investigation into Pinter's female characters. As has been discussed above, it is this work's contention that a fully realised character is one who is provided the opportunity to wield the skills of the genre, so performing in a necessarily Absurdist mode. A female character that can be found wielding Pinter's famous language devices will be a prime example of three-dimensionality, so let us turn to language first.

The rhetoric delivered by Pinter's characters in *Celebration* almost reaches a fevered pitch, with some speeches, thoughts and concepts being stripped of all significance or meaning for the both the speaker and the surrounding characters – thus linking in with the Absurdist technique of verbal nonsense. This becomes most apparent in the fifth vignette set at table one. Lambert and Matt, after concluding their recollections of the dirty songs that they know, begin to relish in the lavishness of the restaurant. With absolutely no apparent cue or provocation Prue turns to her sister and says, "His mother always hated me" to which Julie agrees before concurring that:

Julie: All mother-in-laws are like that. They love their sons. They love their boys. They don't want their sons to be fucked by other girls. Isn't that right?

Prue: Absolutely. All mothers want their sons to be fucked by themselves (“Celebration” 452).

Thus begins an elongated, and highly comedic, discussion between the four members of the table over the Oedipal desires of mothers, with the male characters, perhaps deliberately, misconstruing pronouns so that eventually the characters are discussing the logic of a mother wishing to make love to herself. The conversation ends on series of rather telling lines:

Lambert: No my point is - how old do you have to be?

Julie: To be what?

Lambert: To be fucked by your mother.

Matt: Any age, mate. Any age (“Celebration” 453).

Pausing only to drink the wine that has recently been poured, the characters then quickly return to their original discussion on the quality of the restaurant they are dining at. The blistering speed at which the characters discuss topics and then discard them, without seeming to be altered by their implication, heightens this Absurdist quality of the play. Dialogue and meaning almost become two separate entities. Matt is not perturbed by the revelation that his wife hates his mother, and none of the characters seem to find it strange that they are discussing extraordinarily dark sexual desires whilst out in public. One can infer that this Absurdist trait, the loss of inhibitions and the perception of social norms, is evidence of Pinter exercising his satirical streak. These characters have become so oblivious to the world that actually surrounds them, that their characters have become blunted and artificial. Rather than meaningful conversation, the characters ritually discuss significant matters but exit the conversations unscarred - ready to resume their lives.

These sequences are significant because they display something that has been missing from the two previous case studies, that of a collusion between the genders to create an Absurdist atmosphere. Pinter constructs a scene in which all the characters, regardless of gender, are using Absurdist techniques. Pinter puts all genders on an equal footing. This collusion, and subsequent unity, is something missing from *The Homecoming*, in which it is the men who are objectively Absurd and Ruth is

frequently ostracised. Similarly, it is Robert and Jerry who use the sparse number of Absurdist traits in *Betrayal*, leaving Emma isolated. Prue and Julie, on the other hand, are instrumental players in creating the Absurdist world through which Pinter's plays come to life.

It is finally in the play *Celebration* that we can refer to an objectively successful use of Esslin's literature of dream and fantasy in relation to a female character ("The Theatre of the Absurd" 316). A waiter joins the table and asks whether the families enjoyed their respective meals. The male characters all concur that the meals were excellent whereas Prue leaps to her sister's defence by outlining how Julie did not enjoy her meal, that in fact "[...] she could make a better sauce than the one on that plate if she pissed into it [...]" ("Celebration" 457). The members of her family and the waiter himself meet this remark, seemingly, with silent acknowledgement. Prue continues, insulting the state of the food many times, before raising the subject of her relationship with her sister:

I've known her all my life, all my life, since we were little innocent girls, all our lives, when we were babies, we used to lie in the nursery and hear mummy beating the shit out of daddy. We saw the blood on the sheets the next day – when nanny was in the pantry – my sister and me – when nanny was in the pantry – and the pantry maid was in the larder and the parlour maid was in the laundry room washing the blood out of the sheets. That's how me and my sister were brought up and she could make a better sauce than yours if she pissed into it ("Celebration" 457 - 458).

This startling revelation as to the abusive events of Prue and Julie's childhood, even if they are not revelations to the male members of the table, are certainly new pieces of information for both the visiting waiter and the audience. However, this story is followed immediately - as there is no sign of a characteristic "Pinter Pause" - by Matt saying, "Well, it's lovely to be here, I'll say that" ("Celebration" 458). All the men concur with the above statement, either repeating it or rephrasing in classic Pinter style, before the waiter exits six lines later. The above monologue is met with almost indifference, as if it never actually happened.

I believe this provides strong evidence for its potential as a speech in which there is a collision between Esslin's language of fantasy/dreams and the hyper realistic language as proposed by Scolnicov, a theory outlined in chapter one. What is most significant is that it is a female character that has exhibited this Absurdist technique successfully and utilised one of the core elements of Pinter's distinctive dramaturgy. Sure, the story is horrific and also requires some further examination. But suffice to say that Prue touches on the darkness of her soul before snapping back to reality, a literary device that, up until this point in this research, has not been exhibited by any female characters. Just as has been seen with Robert and Max in previous chapters, Pinter provides us with a great insight into the complex past that Prue owns. Dilek Inan comments, "The characters' stream of language in fact reveals their inherent insecurities" (99). This revelation is not unique to Pinter's canon, but it is one of the first examples that this thesis can point to in which a female character is able to use this device to explore their insecurities. This insecurity points to a fallibility and a multi-faceted nature that has not been highlighted before. Prue has been gifted by Pinter the ability to express herself three-dimensionally within this play through the use of this convention, and clearly shows that she contains a highly complex inner-psyche, something that has only ever been hinted at in the past two case studies.

One of the most significant aspects of the above speech is the subversion of expected domestic violence by positioning the mother as the abuser. This image of the dominant female figure of this particular household "beating the shit out of daddy" is much more significant than if the genders were in reverse ("Celebration" 457). An audience sometimes views such depictions of violence, where the male is the abuser and the female the victim, as devices, with the reality of the situation being lost due to the audience being desensitised to the scenario. By reversing the expected gender, it highlights the brutality of the actions and is clearly elevated to a conscious choice by Pinter. It is pleasing, almost morbidly so, that Pinter has finally gifted his female character with the explicit violence that is part of the personality of Max in *The Homecoming* or Robert in *Betrayal*. This image of the mother figure as abuser in Prue and Julie's childhood, coupled with Prue's abusive language directed at the waiter, creates a strong feeling of the violent woman – an image that is unique in this research so far and so in turn points to an evolution in characterisation. With the

invention of Prue and Julie we are finally presented with female characters that are able to exhibit and rival the, whilst horrific, fully realised menaces that are the male characters of his previous plays. Prue is an active aggressor. This speech provides a greater insight into a female character than many other examples from previous plays. Not only is Prue violating social expectations of behaviour at this restaurant, but also she is revealing a tremendous secret of her personal life. Yet, as has been explored above, no person seemingly responds to her revelations, thus indicating that this monologue may be an example of Esslin's "literature of dream and fantasy" ("The Theatre of the Absurd" 316). In a couple of lines Prue is suddenly elevated to a female character that can really be said to rival her brothers throughout Pinter's canon.

The sequence that follows the speech helps to reinforce the idea of the violent woman, however this time Pinter reuses a much more familiar trope. Prue stands up and, in a bizarre reversal of opinion, wishes to thank the waiter for his hospitality. Her sister joins her and they both promise to thank him personally for putting together such a fine meal. The word "personally" is repeated many times and slowly it becomes apparent that the women are making sexual advances on the waiter, despite the fact that their respective husbands are sitting mere feet away from them ("Celebration" 459).

Prue: Can I thank you? Can I thank you personally? I'd like to thank you myself, in my own way.

Richard: Well thank you.

Prue: No no, I'd really like to thank you in a very personal way.

Julie: She'd like to give you her personal thanks.

Prue: Will you let me kiss you? I'd like to kiss you on the mouth?

Julie: That's funny. I'd like to kiss him on the mouth too.

She stands and goes to him.

Because I've been maligned, I've been misrepresented. I never said I didn't like your sauce. I love your sauce ("Celebration" 459).

Pinter uses this heavily sexual imagery to display one of his oldest tricks, that of the female seductress, with echoes of Ruth reverberating through Prue and Julie. However, there are several factors that heighten the tension of this moment. Firstly, the female characters initiate this sexual confrontation. Unlike Ruth, who simply responds to the sexual demands of men in the household, Prue and Julie actively weaponize their sexuality. Secondly, there is the fact that there are two female characters colluding together to sexually attack the waiter. Their actions border uncomfortably on rape, with no hints from stage directions or dialogue as to how the waiter should respond. The image of this pack of violent women is far more brutal than their male counterparts who sit dumbly at the table, engorged with their own ignorance. Lambert's line "You could tickle his arse with a feather" breaks the spell, and all the characters fall away from the awkward sexual tension of the scene and return to the business of celebrating their wedding anniversary ("Celebration" 459). This menace, which is prevalent throughout the early plays of Pinter, is a defining trait of his dramaturgy. Menace is the force that shapes characters such as Max and, to a certain extent, Robert. However, menacing behaviour is a character trait that is suspiciously limited from his female characters until the characters of Prue and Julie. Whilst the actions may be considered aggressive and morally reprehensible, it is satisfying to note that Pinter has finally gifted his female characters with the menace that energised his earliest works. Pinter has allowed his female characters to evolve and take on a wider range of complex characteristics.

So as can be seen, both Prue and Julie are positioned in such a way that is almost unique to any of the female characters that have come before them within this thesis. They are provided an opportunity to connect directly with the audience through the use of Esslin's "literature of dream and fantasy" ("The Theatre of the Absurd" 316). We also have an example of female collusion, something that has not taken place in either *The Homecoming* or *Betrayal*. Unlike Ruth and Emma before them, Prue and Julie are not isolated, but rather liberated through their connection with one another. Pinter has succeeded in creating two fallible, complex, damaged and aggressive characters that engage the audience, that match his male representations, and that champion the female gender within the context of the play. However, whilst at table one there may be cause for celebration, at table two with Suki and Russell, there are slightly more complex strands to untangle.

Rather than the more forceful and self-assured female characters that are defined at table one, Suki is shown to be a direct descendent of Ruth, with her characterisation having advanced slightly, but still highly sexualised. In order to gain a positive, or complex, reading of her character it is necessary to examine her interactions with Russell. Whilst elements are very reminiscent of the characterisation of Ruth, Pinter provides a different perspective on complexities of this type of character and draws her in a manner that is, by no means, as enigmatic or unreadable.

The second scene acts as an introduction to Suki and Russell's relationship. Russell is eventually revealed to be a banker - linking his character with Matt and Lambert, the "strategy consultants", and so subconsciously fuelling him with the same hedonistic energy that permeates table one ("Celebration" 496). Suki is shown to be an ex-secretary, and is now employed as a schoolteacher. The opening few lines describe Russell bolstering his own sense of importance and, by implication, demanding that Suki follow suit and inflate his ego.

Russell: Yes, they believe in me. They reckon me. They're investing in me. In my nous. They believe in me.

Suki: Listen. I believe you. Honestly I do. No really, honestly. I'm sure they believe in you. And they're right to believe in you [...] ("Celebration" 442).

At no point does Russell respond in kind, validating Suki's position in life. The repetition of the word "believe" is incredibly strong, speaking to a much greater sense of meaning than just an occupation or lifestyle. Russell is actually referring to his entire purpose of being in this speech and is demanding that Suki validate him as a character. It is quickly shown that this is what Russell believes is the key to their relationship. Russell believes that Suki exists to validate him. This thought is echoed by Penelope Prentice who describes the world of this play as "... a world where money is power, and women remain without power except as adjuncts to men" (393 "The Pinter Ethic. The Erotic Aesthetic"). This moment is similar to Teddy's demands of Ruth in *The Homecoming*. Teddy demands Ruth act as an obedient wife. Russell demands Suki act as a caring, even adoring, lover. Once again, a man is being

represented as being unable to imagine the needs and desires of the female character they are connected to.

The speech continues and Suki quickly reveals more problematic elements to her character by stating

Suki: [...] And they're right to believe in you. I mean, listen, I want you to be rich, believe me, I want you to be rich so that you can buy me houses and panties and I'll know you really love me"
("Celebration" 442).

This, almost cringe inducing, importance of materialism as stated by Suki clearly paints her as being of the ranks of the other characters: hedonistic and short sighted, everything that Pinter is so evidently raging against in this piece. Not only that, but there is an element of Pinter's sexualisation of women again present in the line, with Peter Raby observing that the use of the word "panties" is used to titillate Russell and possibly by extension the male members of the audience (Raby 75 – 76; "Celebration" 442). The word also provokes Russell to attempt to defend his extra-marital affair. It is revealed to the audience, that at some point preceding the play Russell had an affair with a secretary, a position that Suki is quick to align herself with. Russell dismisses the possibility that Suki and this other woman are similar by degrading the other woman even further stating that:

Russell: She was a scrubber. A scrubber. They're all the same, these secretaries, these scrubbers. They're like politicians. They love power. They've got a bit of power, they use it ("Celebration" 443).

Pausing only to laugh at the satirical jab at politicians, the audience are presented with a view that secretaries are some how lower class people - and so by extension Suki is degraded by this association. Whilst of course, Russell is by no means an admirable character; he is shown to be a successful character. He is clearly having dinner in a fancy restaurant and is able to flaunt his apparent wealth. Suki does not attempt to defend her past occupation or her character, but rather she goes on to agree with Russell and extend the caricature. She states that she knows all about secretaries, she implies that, whilst as a secretary, she had many sexual encounters

behind filing cabinets. This mention of sex peaks Russell's interest and he demands to know more about Suki's time as a secretary. Suki responds by saying,

Suki: Oh that was when I was a plump young secretary. I would never do all those things now. Never. Out of the question. You see, the trouble was I was so excitable, their excitement made me so excited, but I would never do all those things now I'm a grown up-woman and not a silly young thing, a silly and dizzy young girl, such a naughty, saucy, flirty, giggly young thing [...] ("Celebration" 445).

Suki willingly embraces the overt sexualisation of her own body in this short monologue. The repetition and precise use of words that are loaded with sexual overtones cannot be ignored. Suki is demanding, not only Russell, but also the audience, to sexualise her in this instance.

It would appear that Pinter is simply drawing Suki as a two-dimensional sex object, which would be consistent with his past dramaturgy. However, there is one line that points to a very different motive for this overt sexualisation and sheds light on a much more three-dimensional portrayal. In an attempt to resolve himself from his apparent guilt over the affair, the following interaction takes place:

Russell: [...] Listen to me. I'm being honest. You won't find many like me. I fell for it. I've admitted it. She just twisted me round her little finger.

Suki: That's funny. I thought she twisted you round *your* little finger" ("Celebration" 443).

Whilst Suki's response and reversal of the familiar phrase is humorous, it points to a motivation that has not been explicitly stated in any of the past plays that this thesis has examined. Whilst the subject of the line is the other woman in this relationship, it hints at a truth that Suki both knows and takes advantage of.

It is much more evident in the character of Suki that she is aware how much control and power she can gain from wielding her sexuality as a weapon within such a scenario. Whilst Russell pushes this role upon her, demanding that Suki act as a

sexualised object, it is also clear that Suki accepts this role for its own advantages. To refer backwards, Suki, unlike Ruth, is fully in control her sexualisation and so therefore Russell. As has been described in previous chapters, an argument can be made from either side on the positioning of Ruth. The audience is left in a state of moral uneasiness as we are unsure whether she wishes to remain in her husband's bizarre Oedipal household. Suki on the other hand, explicitly states that she wishes to be with Russell so that she can continue her lifestyle of houses and panties. Suki is knowledgeable of the performance she is staging, and aware of the effects it has. Suki is shown to be manipulating, not only Russell's perception of her, but the audience as well. Everyone is drawn in and misled by her performance. Suki expertly diverts attention to her sexual form and thus she masks her actions to get what she wants. With this in mind, her speech, in which she overtly sexualises her own past and life as a secretary, becomes laced with more three-dimensional facets. Unlike Ruth, who is offered a sexualised position and eventually appears to take up the position, Suki is the author of her sexuality. Rather than responding to the demands of the men around her, Suki demands that her sexuality be paid attention to. She is not the victim of indecent sexual desires, but rather the author- and so therefore controller - of them. Whilst a complicated reading, I believe that this can go some way to provide evidence for her complexity. This definition all hangs on the idea that Suki knows how to wield her self-image to her own advantage rather than at the mercy of another male character. To solidify such a reading we must locate a moment within *Celebration* where Suki alters her sexualised image in response to shifting power dynamics around her.

In the seventh scene, Lambert embarks on an extended monologue in which he describes courting a girl whom he loves, a feeling that she requites. It quickly transpires that this girl is not his wife, Julie, but rather some unknown character from his past. In retaliation, Julie begins to describe the day in which Lambert fell in love with her. It is significant to note that in describing her recollection of the past Julie uses the phrase "Lambert fell in love with me on top of a bus. It was a short journey" ("Celebration" 471). The construction of this sentence, with Lambert being the one who falls in love, in turn positions Julie as some kind of bizarre victor in the scenario. Lambert is the one who falls - Julie is the power. The word "short" also belies the strength of the power that Julie owns - it does not take long for someone to fall under

her control (“Celebration” 471). Both Lambert and Julie are entwined together in a bitter and unloving relationship - with Julie as the spiteful victor. Whilst this appears to be a bizarre, yet humorous, interlude in the ninth vignette this story gains an extra layer of significance when, noticing Suki at the other table, Lambert calls her over to join them:

Lambert: You see that girl at that table? I know her. I fucked her when she was eighteen.

Julie: What, by the banks of the river (“Celebration” 486)?

This brief piece of dialogue seeds the idea that Suki is the girl who Lambert fell in love with many years ago, and thus cements the foundation for the subsequent battle between Julie and Suki for Lambert’s attention.

As soon as Suki joins the table, with her lover Russell in tow, it becomes apparent that Suki redirects her attempts to use her sexuality to attract Lambert, the dominant male of this new group. Julie, as Lambert’s wife, instantly rises to the occasion and the audience is treated with a quick-fire battle of wits over Lambert. It is pleasing to note the gendered reversal of this particular game. Unlike the battle between the men of *The Homecoming* and Ruth, or the men of *Betrayal* and Emma, this is a battle between two, very brutal and canny, female characters over the soul of a crusty old man. Suki enquires after Lambert’s gardening hobby to which Julie responds by belittling Lambert’s efforts: “He adores flowers. The other day I saw him emptying a piss pot into a bowl of lilies” (“Celebration” 490). By insulting Lambert, Julie manages to put both him and Suki in their respective places. She casually ruins any form of credibility Lambert may have in front of Suki - Lambert is not the sensitive gardener he used to be and Julie knows that. However, most significantly, Julie shows that she has a greater knowledge of her husband than Suki does. Suki is ignorant of this Lambert and so therefore does not know him or own him.

Suki attempts to level the playing field by displaying how much control she has over Russell, perhaps in an attempt to save face. Mimicking the strategy of Julie she cuts down Russell’s attempts to ingratiate himself into the conversation.

Russell: My dad was a gardener.

Matt: Not your granddad?

Russell: No my dad.

Suki: That's right, he was. He was always walking around with a lawn mower ("Celebration" 490).

Suki reflects Julie's clever put down of her husband onto Russell, sarcastically implying that the use of a lawn mower qualifies one as a gardener. The two women are twinned in their use of this mirrored put down, both of them exhibiting a brutality that has been suspiciously absent from Pinter's female characters until this case study.

Suki attempts to return on the offensive, trying to solidify her significance to Lambert.

Julie: Funny that when you knew my husband you thought he was obsessed with gardening. I always thought he was obsessed with girls' bums.

Suki: Really?

[...]

Prue: Oh don't get excited. It's all in the past.

[...]

Suki: I sometimes feel that the past is never past.

[...]

Julie: You mean that yesterday is today?

Suki: That's right. You feel the same, do you?

Julie: I do ("Celebration" 491-492).

Julie's remarks are clearly directed at Suki, implying that Lambert would only care for Suki's body, rather than any other facet of her character. Suki attempts to redirect the insult, and imply that even if that were the case then, it would still be the case

now. The past and present have their shared importance. If Suki was important to Lambert in the past, at the riverbanks, then she still can be significant to him now and there is nothing that Julie can do to obfuscate that. Her attempts however, remain unrealised and the conversation drifts onwards, with Julie maintaining her control over her husband.

Whilst Suki's attempts to gain mastery over Lambert are unsuccessful, it is still significant to note that she ignores her lover. Russell is discarded in favour of Lambert, with Russell eventually sulking in the corner. As was outlined above we can assume that Suki is a three-dimensional evolution of the sexualised Ruth if she is seen to knowingly utilise her sexuality as a weapon in her struggle for power. This section above does provide some evidence to support such a reading, and Suki's mentioning of the past, an element that was so central to Pinter's dramaturgy during the period in which he wrote *Betrayal*, points to a characterisation that is much more multi-faceted than has been noted before. There are of course, still problematic elements, however, I would argue that Suki is a significant step forward, a pleasing leap away from the characters such as Ruth that clutter the early years of Pinter's dramaturgy. Suki is clearly self-aware and brutal. It is pleasing to note that Pinter has finally graced his canon with a battle between two resourceful and witty female characters over the soul of a male character, rather than the other way around.

Celebration marks the final play that comprises Pinter's canon, with his death following only a few years later. As has been explored above there is a great deal to celebrate in *Celebration*. The representation of female characters is much more mindful, and the attempts to make them multi-faceted much more prominent and palpable, than either of the two case studies that have come before. Julie and Prue are two fully realised characters, embodying a strong sense of brutality and menace whilst also utilising the strengths of the genre of the play they find themselves in. Suki is still slightly problematic and is required to be read at a particular angle to be considered fully realised, but she still bristles with a complexity that has only been hinted at in previous works. It is sad to note that as the play closes the waiter utters a phrase, a phrase that has been much repeated throughout the work: "[...] I'd like to make one further interjection" (*"Celebration"* 508). However, as Pinter does not have a full-length play to refer to after *Celebration* it is impossible that Pinter will ever make a

further interjection and so we cannot assess how his drawing of his female characters would have evolved.

Conclusion

At the opening of this thesis, I postulated that there would be a significant dissonance between the genders represented in Pinter's plays. The investigation that has been conducted into the representation of female characters has yielded results that, whilst not wholly disheartening, still do not surprise.

One of the main concerns of this project was to investigate the validity of the claim made by Sykes: that of whether or not female characters are continually positioned into three distinct roles – those roles being the triangular mother/wife/whore paradigm. Whilst there is a great deal to celebrate in these positions, they become stereotypical, and more often than not, limiting when the female character is not shown to be willing or active within them.

The Homecoming, far from disproving Sykes' supposition, is primarily focused on the potential role of the female. Pinter positions Ruth as a mother and wife, and then engineers a narrative in which she must choose between these roles, or the role of a whore, dedicated to a bizarre Oedipal household. Ruth is frequently denied access to adding to the conversation concerning her role in the household, remaining mysterious and enigmatic throughout. It is unclear whether Ruth wishes to fulfil any of these roles, whether she wishes to remain adjunct to the male characters' fantasies – but what is clear is that she is not the active participant of this scenario. Regardless of the role she would eventually take up, she is simply responding to the demands that are hurled at her. The male characters openly discuss Ruth as an object and there is no suggestion from Ruth that she may wish to be imagined otherwise. As I have suggested, there are possible readings that could lead to a much more three-dimensional portrayal of her character. However, I have yet to see, or hear reference to, a production that strives to render Ruth as a complex and multi-faceted character.

For a vast majority of the play, *Betrayal* follows a similar rubric – with Emma oscillating between the roles of lover, mother and spouse. We have little insight into any other aspect of her personal life as she does not have any other female friends to which to turn and reveal a separate part of her personality. Just like Ruth before her, Emma is the sole female character, and thus isolated. One could argue that Emma is

an active participant in her role of lover and wife to Jerry and Robert respectively (and eventually lover to Casey). However, the genesis of her relationship with Jerry has overtones of sexual assault, casting her as victim. Nonetheless, there is a pleasing coda at the conclusion of the narrative that indicates Emma possessing a greater level of complexity. Emma appears to evolve out of these three roles and, whilst still remaining as a lover to Casey, finds satisfaction and meaning through managing an art museum.

This coda, that of Pinter's female characters beginning to take on more multi-facet roles within the societies he creates, does not point to a rising exponential trend in Pinter's dramaturgy. In *Celebration*, whilst it can be said that Prue and Julie are not called upon to act in specific roles at the requests of their male counter-parts, neither are there many examples of their lives outside the three roles of the paradigm. Whilst we learn that Prue and Julie work for charities, there is almost no examination into whether these positions provide them with significant meaning. Prue and Julie are best described as the wives of Matt and Lambert. Suki on the other hand appears to be an evolution from the archetypal Ruth. Whilst resonating with the same enigmatic, and sexualised, qualities that so defined Ruth, there is a greater emphasis on Suki being the author of her sense of sexuality rather than responding to the whims of male characters around her. Suki repositions herself to channel her sexuality at the character who displays the most status in the conversation, thus proving her agency.

It appears that Sykes was right to question Pinter's depiction of the roles of women. Whilst there are hints that some of his later characters may exist outside the limited scope of the mother/wife/whore paradigm – within Pinter's theatrical universe his women are frequently constricted by the male characters around them, and only occasionally display agency outside this very specific role set.

One of my main contentions throughout this thesis was that a character that is observed utilising the traits of the genre that a play is located within could be considered a prominent character within a narrative. In relation to Pinter, and his unique Pinteresque dramaturgy, I have focused in on a specific element of his writing style – that of the battle between Scolnicov's proposed photorealistic language and Esslin's literature of dream and fantasy. I have outlined and argued that it is through

this specific technique, and Pinter's language on the whole, that an audience can gather the most meaning and significance from Pinter's characters and plays. It is his language that connects him with the Theatre of the Absurd, and what provides Pinter's plays with their power and significance. I have outlined how these fantasy/dream sections of the narrative, not only provide great insight into the character who is speaking, but also help to comment on the human condition as a whole.

As has been described above, the character of Ruth in *The Homecoming* infrequently has sections that may be read as such passages, and those that can be brought forward are usually obscured by heavy sexualised imagery. In contrast there are many examples of the male characters using this specific language trait. I have alluded to Max's use above, but there are also examples of Lenny and Teddy's use of this trait that have not been touched upon. Similarly, both Robert and Jerry in *Betrayal* have sections that can be read as fantasy/dream sections, whereas Emma has none. In fact, Emma does not even have one extended monologue to which to refer to. In *Celebration*, there are examples of both Prue and Julie wielding this language trait, whereas Suki does not appear to do so, and those that may be considered as candidates are once again smothered by heavy sexualised imagery. It would appear that only two out of the total five female characters examined in this thesis appear to exhibit this trait.

Perhaps then, to explore all possibilities, my contention was incorrect. Perhaps this lack of specific language traits, this inequality between the represented genders, is not a deciding factor in a representation of a character? There are of course characters such as Russell from *Celebration* or Joey from *The Homecoming*, who also do not wield this specific trait. I, of course, do not believe it to be so. In both *The Homecoming* and *Betrayal*, Ruth and Emma are the only emissaries of their gender represented on stage. It would be foolish to suggest that this absence does not point to a severe restriction placed upon these characters by the playwright. They are denied a voice within the conversation of the human condition.

One of the most significant findings of this research has been the extent to which past critics have corrupted potential readings of Pinter's female characters.

Ruth especially appears to have been the most maligned, with many critics painting her as a deviant simply for expressing sexual desire, something that appears not to be a concern when examining the male characters of the play. Perhaps these readings are simply a product of their time, but it cannot be ignored that academic giants such as Esslin have placed unfair double standards on the motivations of some of Pinter's female characters. Esslin's work continues to occupy the shelves of academic libraries, as well they should. However, in amongst the invaluable work that he has added to theatrical studies, are comments that tarnish the representation and realisation of these characters. In this respect, these readings are lacking and should be revisited, revised and, in extreme cases, even disregarded. Such a quest deserves its own academic study. If anything, this thesis hopes to inspire mindfulness in the reader, to advise the researcher to continually re-evaluate what has been said by past scholars.

To speak personally, the dramatic works of Harold Pinter have always fascinated me. His unique dramaturgy has produced some of the greatest works in the western canon. It disheartens me to reach these conclusions as I still believe that there is much to be celebrated about Pinter's plays. His plays still provoke, inspire, warn, unite and, most importantly, entertain audiences to this day. I hope that this investigation has been able to shed light on his works, and also produce a refreshing take on the investigation into how female characters are represented within, not just Pinter's, but potentially other Absurdist works. I would like to believe that these conclusions that have been reached, do not simply cast Pinter as some kind of two-dimensional villain, but rather might inspire another student or academic to investigate a different set of his plays, to draw a more comprehensive picture of his canon. Perhaps such an investigation could render a more complex understanding of Pinter the playwright. Let us continue that search for that elusive truth that Harold Pinter dedicated his life to finding.

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Appendix I - A brief reflection on *Cleanskin*

At the inception of this research, I came across a term titled “The Female Absurd” in Michael Y. Bennett’s book, *Reassessing the Theatre of the Absurd* (102). This is a term that Bennett constructs himself and focuses on female playwrights within the Absurdist genre. Bennett observes that many of the paragons of this genre (Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter) are male playwrights and that there is a scarcity of female playwrights that are recognised, let alone, championed. Not only that, but Bennett posits that in a generic Absurdist work, that the “White male body is the metaphorical default body. Since white male Absurdist do not have to worry about their own subject position, as white masculinity is the hegemonic norm, they have the luxury... to philosophise about universal bodies and problems” whereas female characters are side-lined to contemplating only “what it is to be in a female body, in the local sense” (102). Bennett speaks to this inequality, and briefly attempts to compare the playwright Beth Henley’s work *Crimes of the Heart*, with various other Absurdist works, but eventually leaves the idea hanging. Whilst Bennett appears to be making a salient point, his examination is brief and superficial. Most significantly for me, Bennett does not outline how future playwrights could combat this imbalance in representation of the genders. As my research into Pinter extended, and it became more apparent that Pinter’s female characters were ostracised in precisely the manner which Bennett suggested the significance of his observations, and the inequality it spoke to, caught my interest.

What follows this appendix is a theatrical playscript that attempts to position a female character within an Absurdist play (which is intentionally reminiscent of Pinter’s unique dramaturgy) in which she expresses agency and utilises the traits of the Absurdist genre. This creative project, or experiment, is interested in taking the findings of the research that have been conducted on Pinter’s female characters and reacting against it. The script is concerned with drawing unique representations of female characters that are lacking in Pinter’s dramaturgy, all the while mindfully subverting any tropes or traits that are pertinent to either one of the genders. The script wishes to refute the trend found in the Absurdist genre that female characters are unable to “philosophise about universal bodies and problems” and describe a

female character that is equal to her masculine counterparts found throughout the canon (Bennett 102).

As a male writer, I am naturally excluded from writing under the guise of Bennett's "Female Absurd", and one could easily level criticism at my attempts to explore feminine concerns due to my own gender (Bennett 102). In the face of such criticism I can only acknowledge my limitations. However, I would argue that, whilst great Absurdist works that champion feminist issues and rights have, and will continue to, come from the hands of great female playwrights, there is an inbuilt belief in the philosophies of feminism that men should have an equivalent voice in the conversation of equality. As a male writer perhaps my search for equality is somehow limited. However, I maintain that this experiment – to create a female protagonist in an Absurdist play – is still a worthy pursuit.

For this, the first draft of the work, I deliberately experimented with crafting a play that reflected and/or subverted the elements of Pinter's play that I had analysed over the past year. After shaping the script, I held a couple of read-throughs to assess the quality of the work I had produced. Whilst the feedback I received was positive, I was always mindful that the script required honing to make it more theatrically accessible. The draft that accompanies this thesis is intended more as a blueprint, or foundation from which to spring, rather than a work that is instantly stage-worthy.

In approaching this script I was interested in exploring a decaying romantic relationship between two young characters. I had been inspired when I heard about two friends of mine, who were in a long-term relationship, announcing that they had unexpectedly become pregnant and were planning on starting a family together. In my experience, these two were constantly bickering and never dealt with conflict in a healthy manner. It interested me that a couple who appeared so dysfunctional would wish to bring new life into the world and be connected together for the rest of their lives through this child.

The central conceit of the script concerns itself with the question of whether or not Arianna will accept she is pregnant, or whether she would rather self-abort and kill her child. In approaching this topic I was very aware that not only was this an

extremely sensitive topic, but also that it could be read a stereotypical problem for a female character to be facing. Pregnancy as an issue has been dealt with poorly by particular artistic mediums, with soap dramas and reality television being some of the main culprits. To combat these concerns, I tried to make it clear that Arianna's struggle is not only about her potential role as a mother, but also as to her own perception into her sense of self. Towards the end of the script Arianna describes that she

Arianna: [...] used to have a clean skin. I used to be a blank page. But now... but now there is so much scribbled and scarred and smeared across my skin that I hardly recognise myself. I don't know who I am any more. I am a stranger to myself (46).

Not only has Arianna lost control of her own sense of self, but she also laments the idea that her child cannot be born with the same luxury.

Arianna: I was born with a clean skin. This baby won't... this baby can't be born clean. It will have my mistakes tattooed across its body forever (52).

I hoped that this metaphor (which is simultaneously a reference to a brand of wine – alcohol being another theme of the work) would lift the pregnancy issue away from its stereotypical cousins. Arianna does not know whether she can have this child because she does not know who she really is or whether she is happy with Brenton and the lifestyle that she leads. Arianna battles with the idea that her choices and actions will unavoidably shape her child's future and that she will be held accountable for her child's life. Arianna is conflicted about the choice over the life and death of her child, but also her own life and whether she is, and whether she deserves to be, in control.

In approaching this issue, I also wanted to combat the idea that a man, upon learning that he is to have a child, exerts full ownerships over that life almost instantaneously – taking a significant amount of agency away from the female character. I wrote the following interaction to explore that thought:

Arianna: [...] I've got this now. This...inside of me. And it's mine.

Brenton: It's mine too.

Arianna: Oh no it isn't. This isn't yours. You don't even know anything about it. It doesn't belong to you.

Brenton: You've been fucking someone else?

Arianna: No, of course not. This is what I mean. I speak, but you can't hear me. You've only just found out that I'm... that I'm... and you assume that you can lay claim to it. As if you've earned it. NO! No you haven't. I've carried it for weeks now. You haven't even started (50).

Whilst a complex issue, I wanted to suggest that control over a life is something that is earned. Brenton assumes he has an equal say in his child's life – and whilst personally I do believe that both parents have an equal stake in a child's future - it is Brenton's quick assumption that is the contentious issue here. Arianna, who has known about the child for longer, and will have to go through act of bearing and birthing the child, argues the idea that she has greater agency in the child's wellbeing. I deliberately wanted to shift the responsibility away from Brenton, disarming him of overriding agency in this decision, thus allowing for Arianna to remain active within the story. This issue lies at the centre of the play and with subsequent drafts I would refine her dilemma, allowing Arianna more scope to consider the implications of her actions and more opportunities to display agency within the narrative.

In the character of Arianna I was interested in creating a female character that, like Emma from *Betrayal*, occupied a role that was somehow not secondary to her relationship with a male character. It was important for me to establish her a role that existed outside the household, and give her a measure of independence away from Brenton. Arianna is the breadwinner of the family, managing a restaurant and providing the money to support their lifestyle. Taking a cue from Esslin's "Abstract Scenic Effects" I was determined in setting the entire play in the one room in the flat, mirroring the setting of both *The Homecoming* and *Celebration* ("The Theatre of the

Absurd” 316). I wanted to create a claustrophobic atmosphere, heightening the feeling that Arianna is both trapped by her situation, but also the room around her. Whilst Hollis has suggested that “the dogma of regression to the womb is overused” I was also aware that this reading provided a pleasing piece of resonance in regards to the subject of the script (19). However, this desire to keep the play situated in one room did mean that I would be unable to represent Arianna at work, and so therefore unable to represent her active in a different role. In an attempt to counteract this problem, I made a concerted effort to describe Arianna’s working life and outline some of the problems and dilemmas that she may encounter. Most significantly for this draft I described her contemplating whether or not she should have fired one of her employees. Arianna considers the implications of her actions on another human being, once again linking in with the main subject of the play. Brenton on the other hand seemingly doesn’t provide any kind of financial security to the household, remaining unemployed and choosing to ignore Arianna’s suggestions to seek employment. Brenton clearly does not contemplate how his actions may affect his own situation, let alone those around him. This is a strand I wish to tease out in further drafts, perhaps embellishing Arianna’s occupation, describing how, on good days, she gains a great deal of pleasure and meaning from what she does.

Many critics have commented that the Theatre of the Absurd examines the fragility of language and how it is actually a poor tool for communication, and this thesis has devoted a significant amount of time to explore how language is instrumental in crafting multi-faceted characters. Channelling Pinter’s use of language I engineered a narrative in which one of the central conflicts that Arianna faces is her inability to communicate with her boyfriend. In this draft I allowed Arianna and Brenton to play a game with one another. Brenton chooses not to listen to anything his girlfriend is saying, deliberately ignoring her and being non-committal. Arianna is on the offensive, using a barrage of language to attempt to break through his silence. I wanted to create a scenario that allowed for some of the Absurdist language traits as found in Pinter’s plays, whilst also playing around with some of the ways that romantic partners sometimes speak with one another. In this draft, I believe I played with this particular game for too long, with the effectiveness of the language device being weakened as it stretched out through the front third of the play. In subsequent drafts I hope to play some different language games between Arianna and Brenton to

help add a bit of variety to their discussion. Arianna will start to speak and Brenton will simply repeat the exact words that she has spoken back to her, reminiscent of a young child attempting to annoy their parents or siblings. I also want to create a sequence where they both appear to be arguing, but whereas Arianna is deadly serious about the topic, Brenton takes it all jokingly and does not realise until too late that Arianna is genuinely in a great deal of distress. My hope is to expand on the degree to which this is a dysfunctional relationship, and that despite Arianna's best efforts, neither of the two lovers are able to communicate with one another.

Furthermore, in regards to language devices, there are many specific examples in which I allow both Arianna and Hannah to engage in Esslin's literature of dreams and fantasy ("The Theatre of the Absurd" 316). Arianna contemplates her future and dream lifestyle - owning a boat, which symbolises her desire for independence and freedom. She also contemplates the control and power she has over her own life span, considering suicide, not as an option, but as a choice within all life. Hannah recounts a story from her past in which she watches a family deal with the supposed death of their cat, before commenting on how introspective the family acted. Hannah also refers to a memory that she holds of her and Arianna drinking together on a rooftop. Taking a cue from the role of memory explored in *Betrayal* - Hannah recalls the event with great clarity, intentionally intensifying the importance of the incident whereas Arianna is hesitant, and does not recall the memory as fondly. Hannah and Arianna also engage in a conversation in which neither of them is listening to the other, both too involved in their own lives to really listen to the other - instead focusing on drinking the alcohol in front of them. My intention with these sequences was to help broaden out these two characters by revealing their inner thoughts to the audience. In subsequent drafts I will attempt to make the language much more fantastical, taking it away from the realistic mode and into the more recognisably Pinteresque.

I also wanted to explore female violence, brutality and abuse, something that is explored in *Celebration*. The second scene concerns itself, not only with physical violence, but also emotional abuse from both the female characters. On the surface of the scene, both Hannah and Arianna abuse their own bodies by drinking alcohol to excess - with Hannah drinking to live, and Arianna drinking to destroy. Through this abuse of alcohol I wanted to unsettle the audience, increasing the tension every time

either of the characters took a drink. Disturbing the audience further, I had Hannah express a desire to break the law by driving her car in a reckless and dangerous manner, a desire that is more commonly associated with male stereotypes. Finally, and perhaps the most obvious piece of violence that occurs within the scene, is when Arianna manipulates Hannah into punching her in the stomach – once again, in a bizarre attempt to help destroy the foetus in her womb.

I was keen to evoke the feeling of menace as found in *The Homecoming*, but place it between two female characters. As the second chapter has described, some of the central conflicts and tensions arise from the menacing and violent language employed by Max and the other members of the male household. Ruth occasionally has dialogue that hints at a more menacing subtext, but in this script I wanted to draw that out to a much greater extent. To do so I created a relationship between these two characters in which Hannah was not necessarily sympathetic to Arianna's plight, simply because she was also a female. Hannah is far too caught up in her own out-of-control lifestyle to consider Arianna. This leads to a friction between the two. I wanted to make the audience question why Arianna and Hannah were friends with one another, as a great deal of their interactions involve not listening or insulting one another. This desire led me to create some sequences that hopefully carry the feeling of menace I was striving for.

Arianna: There was actually something I wanted to talk to you about.

Hannah: Where's your drink?

Arianna: Sorry?

Hannah: Your drink. You haven't got a drink.

Arianna: Well you haven't poured me one.

Hannah: You haven't got a glass.

Arianna: You haven't fetched me a glass

Hannah: It's not my house.

Arianna: No, you're right. It's my house.

Silence (21).

Through this menace I wished to isolate Arianna further, forcing her to consider her dilemma alone, and without guidance, thus forcing her to be active.

As an experiment, *Cleanskin* helped me learn a great deal about my own dramatic tendencies. Whilst writing the draft, I was amused to note how much Pinter's dramaturgy has affected my own playwriting style. Whilst I am not claiming that my skill is anywhere near as great as Pinter's own, I was still pleased that I never felt as if I was struggling to mimic or emulate the traits of his work. Pinter is a playwright that has fascinated me and it was a pleasure to write in his shadow. In regards to the drawing of my female characters I was struck by the difficulty I faced in writing a conversation that did not hinge on one or other of the characters' relationships with a male character. I believe that, rather than anything else, this spoke to a subconscious prejudice, reinforced by years of exposure to narratives that are not attentive to their female characters, and fail to write them with the same depth as the male characters. The experience solidified my understanding of Bennett's comments on the Absurdist genre and also reinforced my belief that one cannot be complacent when constructing these characters. There remains room for growth in regards to the depiction of female characters within present day dramaturgy. Even though I have spent the best part of a year focusing in on questions surrounding that representation, I still needed to focus in on how best to represent these characters to an audience. From this exercise I learnt, or perhaps confirmed, that the task is not simple and one must remain mindful.

After revisiting the play, and subjecting it to a read-through, I pitched the show to BATS Theatre in Wellington, New Zealand. The script was commissioned and premiered later in the year. In deference to my desire to create a strong female voice within the piece, I approached a close collaborator of mine to direct the work. My intention was to respond to the criticism and feedback that she offered and attempt to make a stronger second draft, focusing in on the characterisation of both Hannah and Arianna. I believed that there was more subtlety and complexity to be

added to these characters and I wished to hone in on making the fantasy/dream sequences more streamlined within the world of the play. Once these drafts were completed I handed over the script to my director and allowed the play to grow of its own accord. A film copy of the production can be found with this thesis in the university library. I was very proud of the subsequent production and I hope that its merits make it a worthy and entertaining narrative.

CLEANSKIN

Darkness.

The sound of a ticking clock. Slowly the ticking becomes warped - slower then faster. This continues through the dialogue.

The sound of a voice-message tone warps in and out, the robotic voice slowly speeding up, becoming comprehensible.

AUTOMATED VOICEMAIL SERVICE

I'm afraid nobody is available to take your call. If you would like to record a message please leave your name and number after the tone.

NURSE

Hello. This is Wellington General hospital calling concerning your last visit. The tests have been completed and the results have come through. We would advise scheduling a second appointment to give you an opportunity to speak to a medical professional and discuss the options open to you. Thank you.

The tone echoes off into the distance. The ticking reaches a fevered pitch. The sound of wrenching metal cuts through the darkness and then -

Silence.

Lights up.

SCENE ONE

Brenton is sitting in the middle of the floor. He is dressed in his boxer shorts and a singlet. Unwashed, unkempt, unmotivated. He is inspecting the tattoos on his body.

Arianna enters. Dressed in black hospitality work clothes. She has a large bag thrown over her shoulder. She looks exhausted.

ARIANNA

Hello love.

BRENTON

Hmmm.

Glancing around the room, Arianna notices a broken grandfather clock lying on the floor - face down.

ARIANNA
What happened to the clock?

BRENTON
Hmmm?

ARIANNA
Did you break the clock?

BRENTON
Hmmm.

ARIANNA
How are we going to know the time now?

BRENTON
Hmmm?

Silence.

Shaking her head Arianna flings her bag down before collapsing next to Brenton. She drapes herself over him, comically exaggerating her tiredness. She snuggles up into him. He makes a half motion to kiss her.

ARIANNA
How was your day?

BRENTON
Hmmm.

ARIANNA
You won't believe the day I had.
I'm exhausted.

(Pause)

I managed to swap my shift out,
that's why I'm home early.

(Pause)

Do you want a drink?

(Pause)

Sweetie? Do you want a drink?

BRENTON
Hmmm.

Arianna gets up and fetches a bottle of unmarked vodka and two glasses. She places the glasses down on the floor in front of Brenton. She pours out two large glasses before snuggling back down in amongst his body. Neither of them drink from the glasses.

ARIANNA

I feel like getting fucking wasted tonight. Just like back in high school.

(Pause)

Do you remember that?

BRENTON

Hmmm.

ARIANNA

Ha! I'm glad you do, 'cos I fucking don't.

(Pause)

The number of times I woke up in my bed without a fucking clue how I got there. I think I lost more nights than I had - first year out of high school.

(Pause)

Do you remember the night we met?

(Pause)

Sweetie? Do you remember -

BRENTON

- Hmmm.

ARIANNA

You were fucked that night. I wasn't so bad, but you... I thought you'd have to get some kind of ambulance home. Which would have been thoughtless of you. Ambulances aren't really for that.

(Pause)

I said that Ambulances -

BRENTON

- Hmmm.

ARIANNA

You didn't laugh.

BRENTON

Hmmm.

Arianna picks up the glass of vodka that she has poured for herself. She clinks Brenton's glass which is still on the floor, untouched. Arianna swirls the vodka, but does not drink.

Silence.

ARIANNA

I had to fire somebody today.

BRENDON

Hmmm?

ARIANNA

Yeah. I had to tell someone that they didn't have a job anymore.

(Pause)

Usually it's the duty managers that do stuff like that, but because I'm the newest manager they thought it would be good experience for me. Good experience, Jesus. You know how hard it is to tell someone that they're not good enough? That they're shit and they need to get out?

BRENDON

Hmmm.

ARIANNA

After the lunch shift I had to call him up into our office. You've been in the office haven't you? It's so small. I had to shut the door behind him. I couldn't even offer him a seat.

(Pause)

He was just a kid... just a stupid school kid. Just trying to get a bit of cash together so he can buy...fuck I don't know, whatever it is kids think they need at sixteen years old.

(Pause)

I told him that the managers had had a meeting and unfortunately we had decided to make some changes.

(Pause)

I was so close to him, I could feel our breath mingling in the air. I can't remember being so aware of someone else's body in such a long time. Like, of course when I'm with you... when I'm with you I want you there. I feel as if we're together. This kid... I didn't want him there. Fucking hell, he didn't want to be there either. We were two separate people. I could feel his

(MORE)

ARIANNA (CONT'D)

whole body, his stare scratching against me.

(Pause)

I told him that we had decided to let him go. I watched the tears start to form in the pits of his eyes. He asked me why we were letting him go. What could I tell him? The truth was that we just didn't want him. He wasn't right for the job, we couldn't afford to keep him, he took more than he gave, he wasn't passionate, he didn't care. He wasn't right.

(Pause)

How can you tell a kid that you don't want him? I told him that we had unexpectedly had budget cuts and that the newest members, unfortunately, had to have their contracts terminated. I knew he didn't believe me.

(Pause)

Do you think I did the right thing?

BRENTON

Hmmm?

ARIANNA

Do you think I should have lied to him?

BRENTON

Hmmm.

ARIANNA

Surely lying... it's not always bad right? Not if you are doing it for the right reasons. Surely, protecting someone is a good act that overrides a bad one?

BRENTON

Hmmm.

Silence.

ARIANNA

Well, it means that there's a job going at my work now. I could probably get you an interview, now that I've proved myself as a manager.

BRENTON

Hmmm.

ARIANNA

It probably wouldn't be a very good job. Maybe just in the potwash area or something, but it would be better than you sitting on the dole. Wouldn't it, love?

BRENTON

Hmmm.

ARIANNA

I didn't really feel too great after that. Just wanted to get out. And then tonight, I was just standing there on shift and suddenly everything around me felt... I felt like I had been there before, that this was just another cycle in another fucking day. The same people, the same meals, the same conversations, the same stress... and the promise of it all again tomorrow.

(Pause)

Hannah had said she wanted to work a couple more hours that week, so I swapped out with her.

Arianna looks up at Brenton and smiles. She kisses him lightly on the cheek.

ARIANNA (CONT'D)

So I'm home now. You have me all to yourself.

BRENTON

Hmmm.

Brenton half acknowledges the kiss, shrugging.

ARIANNA

I wish you'd speak to me.

BRENTON

Hmmm?

ARIANNA

Nothing.

BRENTON

Hmmm?

ARIANNA

I said Nothing. I didn't say anything.

Silence.

ARIANNA (CONT'D)

Is this it?

(Pause)

Are you just going to sit there?

(Pause)

Are you just going to sit there!?

Silence.

Arianna gets up and starts to move around the flat, tidying, pottering around.

ARIANNA (CONT'D)

Darling? Do you want to go out for dinner or something? We could go and see a movie. Or just grab a beer. I feel as if I haven't seen you in forever. We could even -

Brenton gets up. Arianna stops speaking. Brenton wanders over to the bedroom door and exits. There is the sound of a shower starting to run. Arianna sighs and picks up the two glasses of vodka. She pours one into the other.

ARIANNA (CONT'D)

Hey, just so you know, on the way home I saw some money sticking out of an ATM and I took it. Stole it and ran away. Then on the bus I punched an old woman for getting in my way - she had one of those stupid bags on wheels that only the old and boring seem to have, so it was alright. She had it coming. Oh and I've been fucking your brother for almost fifty years and I love it. He understands me whilst you don't. Can you hear me? HE UNDERSTANDS ME!

Silence.

ARIANNA (CONT'D)
I'm going to drink this you know.

Silence.

ARIANNA (CONT'D)
I'm going to drink all this vodka
in one go. I don't care how fucked
it's going to make me. In one
massive swig. Are you ready!?

Silence.

Arianna does not drink the drink.

Arianna's mobile phone starts to ring. She picks it up.

ARIANNA (CONT'D)
Hello?
(Pause)
Hannah? Is everything alright at -
(Pause)
Oh? Right? Ha, typical. Of course
we'd close early. Hey! I've had an
idea, you should come over. Me and
Brenton are gonna have a few drinks
and maybe hit the town, you should
-
(Pause)
Yeah I suppose, I've got enough.
(Pause)
Sweet, I'll see you soon.

She hangs up.

ARIANNA (CONT'D)
Babe!? Hannah is coming over - Is
that cool?

Silence.

ARIANNA (CONT'D)
Well, you'll know soon enough.

Silence.

ARIANNA (CONT'D)
I feel better from this morning by
the way, thanks for asking.
(Pause)
I wasn't feeling good this morning
remember?
(Pause)
(MORE)

ARIANNA (CONT'D)

I was actually sick once I got to work...Were you listening to me this morning?

(Pause)

I told you I wasn't feeling well. You weren't listening, were you?

(Pause)

Darlin'...

(She sighs)

Some days I wish...

(She sighs)

Never mind... forget it.

(Pause)

Did you pay off the power bill today?

(Pause)

The power bill? It's overdue now, I don't want to be caught out like last time.

Silence. Arianna moves over to a laptop attached to a set of speakers. She scrolls through her collection until she finds some music she likes. It starts to play and she moves back into the centre of the room.

She begins to dance. Slow and melodic. She then turns and acts as if she has just seen a person.

ARIANNA (CONT'D)

Oh! Sorry, I didn't see you there.

(Pause)

What? Oh, of course you can buy me a drink.

She moves over to the bottles of vodka and fills the glass with even more vodka. She does not drink any of it.

ARIANNA (CONT'D)

Cheers!

(She raises the mug into the air and pretends to clink it with another. She does not drink the drink. She continues to dance)

What did you say?

(Pause)

I can't hear you over the music, you'll have to speak up.

(Pause)

Oh? I work at this restaurant down the road. I come here a lot. Clearly you're the stranger here, haha.

(Pause)

I'm just a team leader, nothing special.

(Pause)

Ha! You charmer. I bet you get all the ladies with a tongue as quick as that... oh, look there I go again giving you an easy in... and again! You bring out the worst in me.

(Pause)

What?

(Pause)

Oh, there's a lot more in me, a lot of worse stuff believe me.

(Pause)

Where do you work?

(Pause)

I'm sorry to hear that. Don't worry, new jobs are easy to come by these days. Another one will just drop into your lap.

(Pause)

I said, drop into your lap.

(Pause)

No, not like that.

(She laughs)

Hey, how about we sit down, get away from the music?

Arianna moves away from the laptop and sits down. She leans provocatively across an invisible person - her actions comically heightened.

ARIANNA (CONT'D)

So, who else do you know here? Are you with your mates?

(Pause)

Hey, that's awesome. Which one?

(Pause)

Really? How can he be the one getting married? He's the ugliest of your group.

(She laughs)

Oh sorry! This vodka, it makes me say stupid things. I didn't really mean it.

(Pause)

It's his face, all spotty and shit. Looks like you could set up an oil rig on it. Probably could run a small country off it.

(She laughs again and then stands)

Give me your glass. It's my round.
 Wait, you're not married are you?
 (She laughs)
 Just checking. You never can tell.

Arianna moves over to the vodka bottles and fills her glass a little more. Once again, she does not drink anything. She turns and deliberately moves away from the couch where she has been sitting and goes back to the laptop.

She starts to dance. Once again, slow and melodic.

She turns to face the invisible person on the couch.

ARIANNA (CONT'D)

Come dance with me.
 (She extends her arms)
 Come dance with me. I haven't
 danced properly in ages. Come on.
 (She continues to dance. Her
 dancing becomes slower, more
 trance like)
 Some people say they hate modern
 dancing. They say they hate how
 it's not special anymore, not like
 ballroom or whatever. I think
 they're wrong.
 (Pause)

There are so few times when a
 person's body can be so close to
 another. It's a form of intimacy
 that we still lack in today's
 world. All this talk about us being
 a more open and accepting society
 is bullshit. We still get freaked
 out when two people kiss in the
 street or hold hands. We need to be
 absolutely smashed before we can
 tell one another that we love each
 other. We're still fucked.

(Pause)

I said we're still fucked.

(Pause)

FUCKED! I said FUCKED!

(Pause)

Do you wanna go outside?

She moves to the front of the stage. In her imagination she finds a grassy hill. She collapses down onto it and stares up at the stars.

ARIANNA (CONT'D)

The first time I got drunk I looked up at the stars. It was the first time I had ever realised just how fragile all of this shit is. Just us on the skin of the world spinning round and round the sun at millions and millions of miles per hour. Clinging to the crust of a broken sphere, screaming through space.

(Pause)

I must have looked a right idiot.

(Pause)

How do you know? I could be a complete idiot but just really good at hiding it.

(Pause)

What did you say you did again?
I've forgotten.

(Pause)

Oh yeah... I might be able to find you something at my work... people are always leaving and stuff. What would you want to do? Like, if you had the chance to do anything, what would it be?

(Pause)

How can you not know? That's a boring answer.

(Pause)

Of course I'm not boring. I know what I want.

(Pause)

I'm not going to tell you. Nope. Nope, nope, nope. Not gonna. Never.

(Pause)

Okay I'll tell you!

(Pause)

I think... I think I'd like to buy a boat. Yeah... when... if I manage to get enough money, I'd buy a boat and moor it to the waterfront.

(Pause)

When it was nighttime I would host parties on my boat. I would invite all my friends. On the night of the party they would have to have dinner with their friends or families, but all the time they would be itching to come and see me on my boat. As soon as they had finished their last mouthful or

(MORE)

ARIANNA (CONT'D)

laughed politely at someone else's joke, my friends would say "I'm really sorry, but I have to go now" and race out of the door. We would have so much fun, laughing and being drunk on my boat, that it would rock from side to side, almost capsizing into the water. No one would be scared though, as the boat would be properly fastened to the side of the city, keeping it safe.

(Pause)

And then some nights, I would invite a boy to come and stay with me on my boat. No sorry, not any boy, my best boy. There would only be one boy I would let onto my boat. He would wear his favourite suit and shiniest of smart shoes. We would sit on the edge of the boat, and dip our toes into the water. They would be so numb from the cold, and the alcohol that we were drinking, and the excitement of being together that we wouldn't feel any of the pain. We would sit on the edge of the boat and talk and kiss and touch each other. Then I would take him inside the boat and we would have sex... no... no we would make love together.

(Pause)

It would be beautiful and awkward at the same time. Our faces would be so close to each other that it would seem ridiculous, but of course why would you want to move your own face away from the face that you love? Being so close would be the only stupid, logical thing to do. Our stale breath, due to the alcohol, would mingle and form a new scent that we would both ignore, both of us focusing on making love together. Our motion would rock the boat from side to side, crashing against the side of the city. We would come together, and afterwards he would fall asleep and I would lie there listening to his heart beat. I would stroke his

(MORE)

ARIANNA (CONT'D)

hair. All the time I would try and keep my breathing regular so as not to betray the love and excitement I would feel just lying there with him. Then in the morning he would walk home, his jacket flung over his shoulder, carrying his shoes in his hand. I would stay on my boat and watch him walk away until he became the most lovely dot in the swarm of colours of the city.

(Pause)

And when it became too much... when everything seemed to be closing in around me, I would be able to go to my boat. And... and if I wanted to, I could un-moor my boat, and let it drift into the harbour. I would lie on my boat and let the boat glide out into the water, and then into the sea, and then into the ocean, and eventually into space and nothingness.

(Pause)

But of course I wouldn't actually do that. I'd want to stay. I'd stay for the parties and the boy in his shiniest shoes. I think that's why I'd have the boat... so that I could choose to keep it moored to the city.

(Pause)

You must think I'm crazy.

Brenton enters. Dressed as if for town, rubbing his hair with a towel.

BRENTON

You're fucking right I do.

ARIANNA

I didn't know you were there.

(Pause)

Where are you going?

BRENTON

Out. Down the pub with some mates.

ARIANNA

Oh... I thought we could stay in and have a few drinks... Hannah is

-

BRENTON

- Yeah, maybe I'll meet you in town
or something. Give me a text.

He goes to leave.

ARIANNA

I have a bottle of wine that we
could open.

BRENTON

I don't drink wine.

ARIANNA

I know but...

BRENTON

Open it yourself. Have a nice
night. I might see you.

ARIANNA

I'm going to drink this.

She indicates the glass of vodka.

BRENTON

Then why the fuck are you talking
about wine? Maybe you shouldn't go
out you seem a little...odd.

ARIANNA

I'm going to drink all this.

BRENTON

Good? You'll probably have a great
night then. I'll see you.

Brenton exits.

Silence.

Arianna lifts the glass to her face and drains the entire
glass. There is a long period of time where she breathes
deeply, suppressing the urge to vomit. She grips the table,
floor, her own thighs. She gags a few times, but eventually
the vodka enters her body and she stands up straight.

Silence.

There is a knock at the door.

SCENE TWO

Darkness.

The sound of the ticking clock appears again and is quickly followed by the voicemail service warping in and out. There is a beep.

AUTOMATED VOICEMAIL SERVICE

I'm afraid nobody is available to take your call. If you would like to record a message please leave your name and number after the tone.

NURSE

Hello. This is Wellington General hospital calling concerning your consultation a week ago. As per our last message the tests have been completed. It is very important that you schedule a second appointment to speak to a medical professional and discuss the options open to you. Thank you.

Lights up.

Hannah is lying across the couch. She too is dressed in hospitality black, however each item of clothing has been perfectly selected or altered to produce an alluring and sexy effect. She reclines as if this were her home. Arianna is offstage.

HANNAH

Hurry up. I want to start drinking up on the roof. This pre-drinks thing is bullshit.

Hannah gets up. She wanders around the space energetically, occasionally almost breaking out into a small dance.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

Or we could go for a drive? I've never taken you out for a drive. I'm sure you'd love it.

Hannah stops by the collapsed grandfather clock.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

What happened to your fucking clock?

She kicks it.

HANNAH (CONT'D)
Your clock is fucked.

Hannah moves over to the door near the back, through which is Arianna.

HANNAH (CONT'D)
Seeing as you're busy we should get all the boring stuff out of the way.

ARIANNA (O.S)
The boring stuff?

HANNAH
What were you and Brenton fighting about?

ARIANNA (O.S)
We weren't -

HANNAH
Yes, you were.

ARIANNA
We didn't-

HANNAH
Darling, you're a terrible liar. You always fight with him.
(Pause)
I passed him on the street, he looked dreadful.
(Pause)
Look, we can't have you being all upset with that shit. Not if we're going to have fun tonight. I don't want you crying at the clubs
(Cruelly imitating Arianna)
"But I love him so much!"
(Returning to normal. Pause)
Did you finally tell him his dick was too small.

ARIANNA (O.S)
His dick isn't too small.

HANNAH
Yes, it is. I've seen it. You could pick locks with that thing.
(Pause)
What was it? Sweetie, I know you. I'm like your oldest friend. You two fight more than you talk.

ARIANNA (O.S)

Do we?

HANNAH

Oh yes. I can't begin to count the number of times our nights out have started with, "Me and Brenton just had a huge shouting match on the streets" or "I feel like scratching his eyes out sometimes" or "Maybe if I scream for long enough he'll finally look at me". You two just... I don't know.

Arianna enters. She is dressed as if for town.

ARIANNA

What did he say? When you passed him on the street, what did he say?

HANNAH

Nothing. I don't think he recognised me.

ARIANNA

He didn't recognise you?

HANNAH

Typical. Too wrapped up in his own thoughts to look outwards.

(Pause)

What did you do?

ARIANNA

I didn't do anything.

HANNAH

Oh, I see. So, what did he do?

ARIANNA

He just... he wasn't listening to anything I said. He just sat there, dumbly watching me. I felt like I was a fucking radio or something, on transmit, just screaming out into space.

(Pause)

I mean "HELLO! I'M HERE! YOU CAN SEE ME, I KNOW YOU CAN! JUST FUCKING SPEAK TO ME"

(Pause)

And, when he did speak to me it was worse because he didn't say

(MORE)

ARIANNA (CONT'D)
 anything. He just spat out
 meaningless stuff and trudged off
 into the night.

Silence.

Hannah steps back and looks Arianna up and down.

HANNAH
 Darling? Are you alright?

ARIANNA
 Yes, I'm fine.

HANNAH
 You look dreadful.

ARIANNA
 Thanks.
 (Pause)
 I just had a drink before you
 arrived-

HANNAH
 You were always a lightweight. Come
 on.
 (She pushes past Arianna and
 looks around for the vodka
 bottle and glasses. Spying it
 she moves over to it)
 Let me reach you shot for shot. How
 much did you have?
 (She pours herself a small
 amount)
 This much?

ARIANNA
 No... bit more than that.

HANNAH
 This much?

ARIANNA
 More.

HANNAH
 This much?

ARIANNA
 More.

HANNAH

Well,... it seems I underestimated
you. This much?

(She holds up the glass)

ARIANNA

Yes... that looks about right.

Hannah easily drains the glass. She grabs her bag and shakes
it, clinking the bottles together, showing how much alcohol
she has brought.

HANNAH

Let's go.

ARIANNA

What?

Hannah gestures to the ceiling.

ARIANNA (CONT'D)

Oh right, yeah in a moment. Let's
drink down here for a bit.

Hannah shrugs, pulls a bottle out of her bag before throwing
the bag on the couch. She moves around and lies down on the
floor, leaning across the broken grandfather clock. She
rests the bottle and glass on the clock. Arianna joins her,
resting on the opposite end of the grandfather clock.

HANNAH

I don't know why you get so upset
about him. He's not that special,
is he?

ARIANNA

He's special to me.

HANNAH

He used to be special to you, not
anymore.

ARIANNA

No, he is special to me now.

HANNAH

Is that why you can never see eye
to eye? Is that why you fight over
nothing all the time?

ARIANNA

So, how should we fight then?

HANNAH

I don't know. You should at least fight over something. Pick a topic, anything.

ARIANNA

Like we do?

HANNAH

Precisely.

Silence.

ARIANNA

There was actually something I wanted to talk to you about.

HANNAH

Where's your drink?

ARIANNA

Sorry?

HANNAH

Your drink. You haven't got a drink.

ARIANNA

Well, you haven't poured me one.

HANNAH

You haven't got a glass.

ARIANNA

You haven't fetched me a glass.

HANNAH

It's not my house.

ARIANNA

No, you're right. It's my house.

Silence.

Hannah laughs.

HANNAH

It's not your fault, you know.

ARIANNA

My fault?

HANNAH

Yes. You can't be blamed for how you feel.

Arianna gets up and fetches herself a glass. Hannah calls after her.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

People can be so wrapped up in their own lives it can be hard to see the outside.

(Pause)

When I did my gap year I did some cleaning for a family. I would be asked to go round every day or so to clean, cook and make sure the kids didn't fucking electrocute themselves. Pretty sweet money for very little. The whole family was hella-rich as well. So much money that they didn't know what to do with it. The kind of people who could buy a car without a second thought. Serious money, you know? The Dad was this high flying lawyer or something. He was always dealing with high sums of money wrapped up in small details of contracts. The wife owned a boutique shop in the village nearby. The daughter was heavily devoted to smoking weed and pretending that education was for idiots. They had a son as well who was one of the campest people I have ever met. None of them ever spoke to me properly, just nodded or grunted. I don't think they ever spoke to each other either, just wandered through each others lives, focused on their own circular, introspective existence.

ARIANNA

Can I?

(She gestures towards Hannah's bottle)

HANNAH

Yeah, sure.

(Pause)

Anyway, one day I was absentmindedly sorting something out in the living room when the

(MORE)

HANNAH (CONT'D)

mother came crashing out of the bedroom, hair all-a-frazzle screaming down her phone that she was sorry she was late and that she would be at the shop as soon as possible. I'm sure the shop was doing fine without her by the way, but the mother needed to be there. Expensive scarfs do not sell themselves, you know. I was surprised to see her as I thought everyone had either left for their jobs or school, so I waved at her. She didn't respond... bitch didn't even see me. She just took off into the sunshine in her spotless car. There were a few moments of stillness whilst I decided which movie I was gonna enjoy once I was sure they had disappeared. But then!

(Hannah crashes her hands together)

There was this weird crunch of brakes and a far off scream. Then the mother came rushing back her face in a twisted mess. Apparently she had been in such a rush to get down into the village that she hadn't really been looking where she was driving and she had run over the family cat. Squashed, flattened, fucked under the front of her shiny car that she had probably only bought a few weeks ago.

(Pause)

By Jesus, the fuss that family made. The son and the daughter were called at school and pulled out of classes. The mother wept down the phone "Mr Tibbles is dead!" The son and daughter came home, equally distraught. The son was hyperventilating and kept on claiming he was going to faint. The daughter kept clutching her mother. It was fucking hysterical. Eventually the Dad was called. When he got home, the whole family clutched at him like he was some kind of rock in the middle of their

(MORE)

HANNAH (CONT'D)

ocean of horror. He just stood there, faintly bewildered.

(Pause)

I have never felt so awkward in my entire life. I had suggested to the mother that I should leave and give the family space to grieve, but the mother had told me to stay, as she needed to see a friendly face at this time. So I stood and watched a family disintegrate over the death of their cat and made cups of coffee.

ARIANNA

There was something that I wanted to talk to you about.

HANNAH

About a couple of hours later, whilst sitting on the couch absorbing the horrified blank stares of the family I felt something brush past my leg.

(Pause)

Darling. It was their fucking cat. I looked down and Mr Mother Fucking Tibbles slunk out of whatever hole it had been in and lay down in the sun. The whole family fell upon it and practically almost killed it with affection. The Dad stalked off, back to work. The children took the rest of the day off to celebrate the cats sudden state of life, and the mum buried herself in a box of chocolates. I just... I have never seen anything like that. It's fucking disgusting.

ARIANNA

There was something I wanted to tell you.

HANNAH

I mean, there was still a fucking dead cat under the wheel of the mum's car. But the family didn't give a fuck 'cos it wasn't theirs. They were so tied up in their little performance of "Dead Cat Tragedy" they didn't even go and

(MORE)

HANNAH (CONT'D)
check. Then they just returned to
their normal lives when it was all
over.

(Pause)
Sometimes you're so fucking deep in
the trees you don't even know what
wood is.

ARIANNA
I'm pregnant.

Arianna drains her glass.

Silence.

HANNAH
We should really drink this
upstairs.

She reaches over and refills Arianna's glass.

ARIANNA
I don't know how long I've been
pregnant.

Arianna drains her glass

HANNAH
Do you remember that time we drank
up on the roof?

Hannah fills up Arianna's glass.

ARIANNA
I haven't told Brenton.

Arianna drains her glass.

HANNAH
I think about it a lot, you know?

Hannah fills up Arianna's glass.

ARIANNA
I'm scared to tell him. I don't
know what he'll say. I don't know
what he'll think.

Arianna drains her glass.

HANNAH

It sounds stupid... but I think it was one of the best moments of my life.

Hannah fills up Arianna's glass.

ARIANNA

Hell... I don't even know what I think. I don't know what to do.

Arianna drains her glass.

Silence.

HANNAH

Alright - here's the plan. We go out, we sink a couple of pints... it'll be just like the good old days... do you remember the good old days?

ARIANNA

Yes...?

HANNAH

Well, I'm glad you do, 'cos I fucking don't. Down in one!

The two girls drink copiously from their respective bottles.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

New rule. We don't talk about the boys. We don't need them, fuck the boys... no wait don't fuck the boys: that's the point. Fucking don't fuck the fucking boys. Promise?

ARIANNA

Promise Promise!

They drink.

Silence.

HANNAH

Do you remember when we used to tell each other everything?

ARIANNA

I still try.

HANNAH
We used to be such pals.

ARIANNA
"Pals" is a weird word.

HANNAH
Yeah, I know.

Silence.

HANNAH (CONT'D)
I went out for a drive yesterday.

ARIANNA
You promised you wouldn't do that.

HANNAH
Did I?

ARIANNA
Yes, you did. Last time I saw you.
You said that you weren't going to
do it again.

HANNAH
I doubt I would say that. I love
driving.

ARIANNA
You say that you won't do it again
every time we talk about it.

HANNAH
Well, just goes to show that you
shouldn't trust me.

(Pause)

Shouldn't trust me on that. For
everything else I am completely
reliable.

(Pause)

You should come out for a spin with
me some time.

ARIANNA
It sounds pretty dangerous.

HANNAH
It's only dangerous if you get
caught.

ARIANNA

Tell me about it.

HANNAH

Oh, if you haven't felt it you wouldn't know. It's better than drugs, better than sex. Better than sex and drugs together - at the same time. Better than an affair plus drugs.

ARIANNA

I've never had sex on drugs, so I wouldn't know.

HANNAH

Darling, you're missing out on all the fun shit in life. Sitting here in your little hovel surrounded by... by what? Broken memories and pathetic sentiment?

ARIANNA

I like living here.

HANNAH

You should have come and lived with me when you had the chance. Much more fun. Partying, meeting new people... actually living.

ARIANNA

I like living here.

HANNAH

Only because you're trapped in your comfortable cycle.

ARIANNA

I like living here.

HANNAH

So you keep saying. Don't really see much evidence for it.

(Pause)

We should go for a drive now.

ARIANNA

I'd prefer to stay.

HANNAH

See there you go again. Come on!

(Pause)

(MORE)

HANNAH (CONT'D)

I tell you, there is no feeling like it.

(Pause)

You sit at the traffic lights, say, just waiting patiently for them to go green. You are just an anonymous figure in amongst the ordered chaos of the road. Maybe you are listening to the radio, drumming your fingers on the wheel. You glance behind you in the rearview mirror and you see it. The vague flashing lights or checkered bonnet. All yellow and blue. So safe. They pull up beside you... they're going your way... or maybe you're going theirs, I can never tell. Anyway, the lights change and you pull away.

(Pause)

Slowly you pick up speed, crossing that line from safe and responsible citizen to foolish law breaking idiot. And the cops, the fuzz, the pigs, the shits - they see you. On go their lights, on go their frowns, and you race down the street. They flash their lights at you. Maybe you look in the mirror and mouth "Oh my gosh, officer! I'm so sorry!" You start to slow down. You pull over. You park and you wait.

(Pause)

They get out of their car and start to walk towards you. Every step they take the louder the blood rushes through your ears, your fingers, your eye sockets. There is a particular step that you have to wait for. The one where they are far enough away from their car but far enough away from you. The perfect spot... the sweet spot.

(Pause)

Police officer dickhead crosses that line and you slam down on the accelerator.

(Pause)

That feeling... racing off into the night... speeding away from the police car that is chasing you

(MORE)

HANNAH (CONT'D)

across the streets... that is living. Living right on the edge. Pedestrians dive out of your way, screaming. Other cars swerve to avoid you. You're in control. You're the most important thing that is happening in that moment. You're alive.

(Pause)

You should fucking do it with me sometime.

ARIANNA

Don't you get caught?

HANNAH

Not if you're smart. Change a number on your licence plate with a bit of tape. Know the roads better than them.

(Pause)

It's easy.

Silence.

ARIANNA

Would I be able to borrow your car sometime?

HANNAH

My car?

ARIANNA

Yeah. I want to take it for a drive.

HANNAH

You want to drive in my car?

ARIANNA

Not now, just sometime... sometime in the future.

HANNAH

You want to go for a drive now?

ARIANNA

No.

(Pause)

I was just thinking.

HANNAH

Thinking about what?

ARIANNA

You know how people used to think that the world was flat.

HANNAH

Yeah?

ARIANNA

Well... how do we know it isn't flat?

HANNAH

Because it isn't.

ARIANNA

But why do we know that?

HANNAH

Because... because we've taken pictures of it. Because our satellites work. Because you can do math and shit with triangles in a field and the sun that proves it.

(Pause)

That fucking thing with the boat and the water how it...

(She gestures wildly)

It just fucks off into nothing.

ARIANNA

But how do we know! They could be lying to us. It could be a huge con, everything outside this room could be conspiring against us.

(Pause)

We'd get in your car and drive, we'd drive across the roads, and then across the motorways, and then across the fields, and then across the mountains and then we'd find it. The edge of the fucking world. We'd stand there and look at the edge, all the oceans circling down into oblivion, at the light screaming off into space -reflecting and refracting off all the other stars in the void beneath us, making this colossal rainbow of sounds and sights.

(Pause)

(MORE)

ARIANNA (CONT'D)
And then we'd jump.

HANNAH
We'd jump?

ARIANNA
Yeah - we'd jump. And we would just float away and become nothing. Just fuck off into nothing.

Silence.

ARIANNA (CONT'D)
Can I ask you something?

HANNAH
Yeah, sure. What is it?

ARIANNA
Do you promise you're listening to me?

HANNAH
Of course I'm listening to you. We're friends. Or at least I thought we were.

ARIANNA
What do you mean by that?

HANNAH
Nothing.

ARIANNA
No, tell me - what do you mean by it?

HANNAH
Nothing - you mad girl.

ARIANNA
I may be mad but you love me.

HANNAH
Yes, I do love you.

ARIANNA
Do you promise you're listening to me?

HANNAH

Yes, I'm listening to you. Wait -
do you want another drink?

ARIANNA

No, I'm alright.

HANNAH

I'm going to grab one.

Hannah lifts the bottle and, finding it empty, gets up and starts hunting around for a new bottle.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

What have you got?

ARIANNA

I dunno - some wine, vodka...
couple of beers. Hannah, please.

HANNAH

You don't drink beer.

ARIANNA

Yeah, they might be yours from last
time you were over... or maybe
they're Brenton's. If they're
Brenton's we shouldn't -

HANNAH

Shouldn't? Shouldn't do what?

ARIANNA

Drink them.

HANNAH

"Shouldn't" is one of my least
favourite words.

Hannah jumps up and runs over to the fridge. She yanks it open and starts to search.

ARIANNA

Hannah, don't do it. I don't want
to give him a reason to be angry
again.

HANNAH

Are these them?

(Hannah holds up a couple of
cans of cheap beer)

I don't think I would ever buy
something like this. Must be his
piss water.

ARIANNA
Hannah, please put them down.

HANNAH
Only 5 percent, what a baby. We could easily chuck back a couple in one go, couldn't we?

ARIANNA
Hannah, don't do it.

HANNAH
Where are your glasses?

ARIANNA
Hannah!

Arianna grabs Hannah's arm.

Silence.

HANNAH
You promised not to talk about the boys.

ARIANNA
We've promised each other a lot of things. Broken promises are all we have.

HANNAH
Well, who's fault is that?

ARIANNA
I want you to hit me.

HANNAH
To hit you?

ARIANNA
Yes, I've been wanting you to hit me since you got here.

HANNAH
Hit you?

ARIANNA
You break the law. You live on the fucking edge. You're alive. Hit me.

Silence.

HANNAH
Where is she?

ARIANNA
What?

HANNAH
Nothing.

ARIANNA
No, I don't know what you mean. Who are you talking about?

HANNAH
I'm talking about one of my friends.

ARIANNA
Your friend?

HANNAH
Yeah. I used to have this friend right. Me and her right? We'd do all this shit together. We once stood on top of my roof on New Year's Eve and watched the fire works light up the sky. We stood there, in our dresses and painted faces and held each others hand. We promised each other that we would be friends forever.

(Pause)

And you know. You know, I really thought that meant something. Thought that that was the start of our lives. Everything was before us. Me and my friend verses the world. Fuck the boys, fuck the job, fuck everything. Life wouldn't get better than that.

(Pause)

Now look at us.

ARIANNA
That night is important to me too, alright. It's not like this is the end of the fucking world is it?

HANNAH
Oh really? Sat here in this dump of a flat, listening to you moan on about your fucking boyfriend. Is this why we're here, is this why

(MORE)

HANNAH (CONT'D)
 we're friends? It never got better
 than that night, on that roof top.
 That was it, that was the fucking
 highest point of our lives, and now
 we're here, in this pit!

ARIANNA
 Well, if you don't like it, you can
 leave.

HANNAH
 I don't want to leave.

ARIANNA
 Well, what the fuck do you want
 then?

HANNAH
 I want my friend back! I want to
 hold your hand and run off and
 catch a plane and fly away. Run
 away and never look back!

ARIANNA
 We can't fucking do that. What
 about Brenton?

HANNAH
 Fuck him. You don't even love him.

ARIANNA
 Of course I do.

HANNAH
 And he loves you.

Silence.

HANNAH (CONT'D)
 Look, it's simple. What you have to
 do is ask him whether he loves you
 or not.

ARIANNA
 Of course he loves me.

HANNAH
 And how do you know that?

ARIANNA
 ... he just loves me, alright? It's
 not something that I can point to.

(MORE)

ARIANNA (CONT'D)
It's little things like kisses and
hugs and smiles. All that stuff.

HANNAH
You're an idiot, Arianna.

ARIANNA
No, I'm not - why would you say
that?

HANNAH
When's the last time he said "I
love you"?

ARIANNA
I don't know. It's not something I
make notes about.

HANNAH
Everyone always remembers the last
time. If you don't then there is
something wrong.

ARIANNA
There isn't anything wrong -

HANNAH
Ask him. Ask him whether he loves
you and if he stutters or deflects
then he doesn't love you.
(Pause)
You'll be fucked.

ARIANNA
Why are you saying these things?

HANNAH
Because you shouldn't have to be
with someone who doesn't love you.
You can be yourself, with me. Ask
me what I'm doing this weekend.

ARIANNA
Why?

HANNAH
That isn't the question I asked you
to say.

ARIANNA
What are you doing this weekend?

HANNAH

I don't fucking know! I'm doing anything. I could be anywhere. But you know what? I'll probably drinking myself to death on some shitty pub waiting for you to come back to me.

ARIANNA

I'm not coming back to you.

HANNAH

Why!? Why not!

ARIANNA

Because I don't fucking need you okay! Get out of my house.

HANNAH

What?

ARIANNA

I said get out of my house.

Arianna starts to push Hannah away. Hannah punches her in the stomach and Arianna falls. Hannah, refusing to look at the writhing Arianna grabs her bag and storms off.

HANNAH

I'm leaving. I'm never coming back. I don't fucking need you anymore.

Hannah exits.

Silence.

Arianna sobs.

Blackout.

SCENE THREE

The sound of the ticking clock appears again and is quickly followed by the voicemail service warping in and out. There is a beep.

AUTOMATED VOICEMAIL SERVICE

I'm afraid nobody is available to take your call. If you would like to record a message please leave your name and number after the tone.

NURSE

Hello. This is Wellington General hospital calling concerning your consultation several weeks ago. It is vital that you schedule a second appointment to speak to a medical professional. Thank you.

Brenton is sitting in the middle of the floor. He is dressed in his boxer shorts and a singlet. Unwashed, unkempt, unmotivated. He is inspecting his tattoos on his body.

Arianna enters from the bedroom. She looks pale - almost yellow - and exhausted. The worst hangover ever. She collapses on the floor a few feet away from Brenton, resting on the broken grandfather clock.

BRENTON

Big night?

ARIANNA

Hmmm

BRENTON

I said, was it a big night?

(Pause)

I heard your groans from the bathroom last night. I'm scared to go in there now.

ARIANNA

Hmmm

BRENTON

I know what you need.

Brenton jumps up and starts to search around for a bottle of alcohol.

BRENTON (CONT'D)

Hair of the dog that bit you.

That'll cure you.

(Pause)

What Greg does is he goes for a run until he pukes. Just pushes his body to the limit and makes himself sick. Says that it kinda restarts his body. Pushes all the toxic shit out.

(Pause)

Maybe you should do that.

(Pause)

I said maybe you -

ARIANNA

- Hmmm

BRENTON

I can't find anything in this house. Did you drink our entire supply? Even that sparkling wine we had left over from fucking New Years. My god, that stuff must be so off. It's been in the sun for months. Do you have a death wish or something?

(He continues searching)

I always try to have a couple of panadols before going to bed, that's how I get rid of it. I always - AH HA!

(Brenton straightens up holding onto a bottle)

TA - DA! That cheap Russian vodka we bought when we first moved in together

(He attempts to sound out the Russian)

Zoo-bruff-Ka. Zush-brush-kov?
Zaz-broff-cough?

(He considers)

It's fucking brutal anyway. Will make you feel better in a flash.

Brenton moves over to Arianna and brandishes the bottle near her face.

BRENTON (CONT'D)

Do it! Drink it! Do it!

ARIANNA

Hmmm.

BRENTON

It'll make you feel better.

ARIANNA

Hmm.

Brenton puts the alcohol bottle down. He then crouches next to Arianna's face. He starts to make gagging noises as if he was about to throw up.

BRENTON

Huuuh! Hup! Hurrurr!

ARIANNA

HMMM!

BRENTON

She speaks! Let's go for a complete sentence this time. HUUUUH! HURP! HURK!

ARIANNA

Fuck off!

Silence.

BRENTON

Baby?

ARIANNA

Hmmm

BRENTON

You don't look so good. Do you want me to call you an ambulance or -

ARIANNA

Hmmm

Brenton gets up to fetch his mobile.

ARIANNA (CONT'D)

Hmmm! Hmmm!

BRENTON

Fine! Alright. I was just looking out for you.

Silence.

BRENTON (CONT'D)

So, you had a good night last night did you?

(Pause)

You didn't text me like I thought you were going to.

(Pause)

Me and the lads were absolutely smashed. We went to Boogie Wonderland or wait... was it Electric Avenue? I always get those two mixed up. Anyway, we were in this shit club and David - you know David, right? He's the one who used to work at BK on Manners. Anyway, This absolute squit of a dude ran

(MORE)

BRENTON (CONT'D)

into David. This fuck spilled David's beer. He was too busy dancing to something stupid by ABBA or whatever. So David turns to this fucker and says "What the fuck you think you're playing at mate." This little runt just turned white at the sight of David, I mean he's a big guy and all. I think he was too frightened to say sorry. Anyway, David picked him up by his shirt, which ripped, so David grabbed his arm and sorta threw him from the bar. I mean, nobody wanted him there so why not ditch the bitch, you know?

(Pause)

Problem was, apparently this guy was like the bouncer's brother or cousin or something. This massive Maori dude came over to us and asked us to leave. Now David did not like that and looked like he was about to hit him, so I saved the day by chucking my beer at the bouncer and rushing out the door. We all ran down the street with these bouncers tearing after us. It was fucking hysterical.

(Pause)

Babe?

(Pause)

Babe, you didn't laugh.

(Pause)

Babe I was just trying to -

ARIANNA

Hmmm.

BRENTON

Sometimes, I get the feeling that you don't like listening to my stories.

ARIANNA

Hmmm.

BRENTON

I've started wondering...

(Pause)

So, David says that he likes getting into fights when he's been

(MORE)

BRENTON (CONT'D)

drinking. Says it gives him a rush or something. I've been thinking...

(Pause)

I always feel like getting into a fight when I'm in town, but I always stop myself. But... maybe that's not healthy, you know? If your body tells you to do something you should do it, right?

(Pause)

I mean - we're all just animals, right? Alcohol just heightens that, right? You just react like your body wants to...

(Pause)

I think I'm keen to fight someone next time I'm in town.

(Pause)

I want to fight someone, punch them in the face. Maybe... it would be totally unexpected and they wouldn't know what hit them, literally. For a second his face would be as it was before, just twisted into fear. And then my fist would crack his face and his nose and cheek bones and jaw. Blood would pour out from him and he would fall back onto the concrete, clutching at the parts of his face that he had lost as he rolled around.

(Pause)

His life would never be the same and I would have done that. I would have changed his life forever. He would never go to town ever again. And it would be because of me. I would have done that. I would have done something.

Silence.

BRENTON (CONT'D)

Are you listening to me?

(Pause)

I said, "Are you listening to me!"

(Pause)

I don't think you're fucking -

ARIANNA

Hmm!

BRENTON

Arianna, listen to me!

Silence.

Brenton moves over to Arianna.

BRENTON (CONT'D)

Darling? I really don't think you look good. I want to call the hospital.

ARIANNA

Hmmm

BRENTON

Can I at least get you some painkillers or something?

Silence.

BRENTON (CONT'D)

I'm getting you some painkillers

Brenton starts to move towards the bathroom. Arianna suddenly leaps up off the floor and rushes over to Brenton. This movement is clearly a massive effort.

ARIANNA

Brenton, please don't go in there.

BRENTON

Baby, you look fucking awful.

ARIANNA

Brenton I don't want you to go into the bathroom okay. Do not go in there. I don't need painkillers, I just need to rest on the fucking floor.

Silence

BRENTON

What's in the bathroom?

ARIANNA

Nothing.

BRENTON

Baby, you're freaking me out.

ARIANNA

I'm not trying to freak you out.
I'm just trying... I'm trying...

Silence.

ARIANNA (CONT'D)

I'm so tired.

Arianna collapses into Brenton's arms who awkwardly hugs her.

BRENTON

I was joking before, you know?

ARIANNA

What?

BRENTON

Before, when I said that I wanted to punch someone... I don't really. I don't want to get into a fight. Of course I don't want to punch someone. I just wanted you to listen to me.

(Pause)

Why don't you listen to me anymore?

ARIANNA

Why don't we listen to each other anymore?

BRENTON

I don't know.

They collapse onto the ground and hold one another.

Silence.

ARIANNA

You know, I woke up this morning and I didn't recognise my own skin for a second. My own skin, just hanging off my bones and my muscles and my tears. But then... but then it all came flooding back to me. Who I was, why I was lying on the bathroom floor, my whole life from start to finish.

(Pause)

(MORE)

ARIANNA (CONT'D)

I used to have a clean skin. I used to be a blank page. But now... but now there is so much scribbled and scarred and smeared across my skin that I hardly recognise myself. Don't know who I am any more. I am a stranger to myself.

Silence.

ARIANNA (CONT'D)

Do you love me?

BRENTON

What?

ARIANNA

I'm asking you whether you love me.

BRENTON

Why?

ARIANNA

Because I want to know.

BRENTON

But... but... surely you must know.

ARIANNA

No, I don't know. That's why I'm asking you. Do you love -

BRENTON

Yes! Of course I do. It doesn't need saying.

ARIANNA

It doesn't need saying?

BRENTON

No... it doesn't. Like... we know we love each other. We know that... right?

ARIANNA

I don't know. I just don't know anymore. I've forgotten whether we love each other.

Silence.

Brenton goes to speak. A phone ringing cuts him off.

ARIANNA (CONT'D)
It's mine.

BRENTON
I'll answer it.

ARIANNA
Don't... please.

BRENTON
Hey, you have an unanswered voice
mail.

ARIANNA
No, I don't.

Brenton answers the phone.

BRENTON
Yes, this is her boyfriend. Who
is...?
(Pause)
Do her family know? Why did you...?
(Pause)
I'll pass that on to her. We'll be
over as soon as-

The phone disconnects and Brenton looks down confused at the
phone.

ARIANNA
Who was that?

Silence.

ARIANNA (CONT'D)
Brenton, please. Tell me-

BRENTON
It was the hospital. Hannah...
Babe, Hannah's been in an accident.
She crashed her car on the motorway
out of town. She was three times
over the limit. She's stable but
unresponsive in hospital. When they
found her, she was conscious.
Apparently the paramedics heard her
asking after you, and so after
contacting her parents, they
contacted you... well me...Babe?

Arianna is frozen on the floor.

BRENTON (CONT'D)
Babe? Do you want to go to the
hospital? We can go and see Hannah.
Do you want to go to the hospital?

ARIANNA
No... no I don't want to go.

BRENTON
But... babe. Hannah. She -

ARIANNA
I don't want to go to hospital.

Silence.

BRENTON
Did you know you had an unanswered
voice message?

ARIANNA
I don't have an unanswered voice
message.

BRENTON
Yes, you do.

He dials voicemail.

Pause

BRENTON (CONT'D)
It's the hospital. How come you
didn't answer it...or at least
check to see what it was?

ARIANNA
I don't have an unanswered voice
message... I have some saved voice
messages.

Silence.

Brenton listens to the voice messages

BRENTON
What are these... what tests are
they talking about?
(Pause)
Arianna? Are you...?
(Pause)
Are you?

ARIANNA

I was feeling like shit. My stomach hurt, my head hurt... I fucking hurt. I went to the hospital. They ordered some tests - they said that it was routine to check to see if I was... if I was...

BRENTON

And are you?

ARIANNA

I don't know.

Silence.

BRENTON

Why didn't you tell me?

ARIANNA

I did.

BRENTON

When?

ARIANNA

I tried so many times to tell you.

BRENTON

When did you tell me?

ARIANNA

But you would never listen. Nobody listens to anyone.

BRENTON

When did you tell me?

ARIANNA

Sometimes I feel like I need to catch on fire before someone would notice me. I stand there. In the middle of this room and scream! Fire would scorch this hole and I would escape like a fucking phoenix into the night.

BRENTON

When did you tell me?

ARIANNA

Yesterday.

BRENTON

No, you didn't.

ARIANNA

Yes, I did, but you weren't listening to me.

(Pause)

All I've got is my voice. All I've got is this right here, and it's shrill and scratchy and doesn't do anything. I shout and scream and nothing happens. You don't hear me, Hannah doesn't hear me. I feel alone.

(Pause)

Except, I'm not alone. I've got this now. This... inside of me. And it's mine.

BRENTON

It's mine too.

ARIANNA

Oh no it isn't. This isn't yours. You don't even know anything about it. It doesn't belong to you.

BRENTON

You've been fucking someone else?

ARIANNA

No, of course not. This is what I mean. I speak, but you can't hear me. You've only just found out that I'm... that I'm... and you assume that you can lay claim to it. As if you've earned it. NO! No, you haven't. I've carried it for weeks now. You haven't even started.

BRENTON

So, it is mine?

ARIANNA

Yes. Of course it is. I love you.

BRENON

I love you too.

Silence.

BRENTON

But you... you went out last night.
You went drinking.

ARIANNA

I know I did.

BRENTON

But surely... surely that's bad for
the... for the-

ARIANNA

I know it's bad for the baby.

Silence.

BRENTON

What's in the bathroom, Arianna?

ARIANNA

My blood.

BRENTON

Your blood?

ARIANNA

Yes. I don't know what I've done to
myself.

BRENTON

You need help.

ARIANNA

And I asked you for it.

(Pause)

You think this is easy? You think
it's easy being... being this

(She beats her chest)

There are so many people out there,
so many other people. My mother, my
grandmother, my teachers, my work
friends, the strangers I meet on
the street. They're all out there.
And I have to be as strong as they
are. Do you think this

(She beats her chest again)

is easy? It's not. It's hard. I'm
weak and I'm frightened and I'm
alone. I don't know whether I want
it.

BRENTON

Whether you want it?

ARIANNA

I don't know if I can keep it. I mean... I mean look at me. This is my life right here, right now. How can I have a baby right now?

BRENTON

You could have killed it.

ARIANNA

Isn't that my right? I can kill it if I want. How is this different from having an abortion in some sterile room in a hospital? I'm keeping it alive. I can kill it if I want, alright.

(Pause)

I was born with a clean skin. This baby won't... this baby can't be born clean. It will have my mistakes tattooed across its body forever.

Silence.

BRENTON

I'm here for you.

ARIANNA

No, you're not.

BRENTON

Yes, I am. I'm right here, in front of you. I'm on your side.

ARIANNA

Only by accident. You weren't there for me, you didn't listen.

BRENTON

Let me make it up for you. Let me take you to hospital.

ARIANNA

I don't want to go to hospital. I don't want to see them. I don't want them to tell me how fucked my life is and how everything is broken and wrong in the world. I just want to lie here and burst into flames, okay?

BRENTON

Arianna

ARIANNA

I want you to leave. Please leave
Brenton. Please get out.

BRENTON

Please Arianna.

ARIANNA

Go and see Hannah. Go and hold her
hand. Go and tell her that
everything is going to be alright.
Go and lie to her.

BRENTON

Arianna -

ARIANNA

Go and lie to her, now.

Brenton gets up.

BRENTON

I love you.

ARIANNA

I do too. If I didn't, this would
be easy.

BRENTON

We can sort this out, you know.

ARIANNA

Can we?

BRENTON

Yes.

ARIANNA

I can't hear you.

Silence.

Brenton goes to leave.

ARIANNA (CONT'D)

I might not be here when you get
back.

BRENTON

Okay.

Brenton exits.

Silence.

SCENE FOUR

Darkness

The sound of the ticking clock appears again. It warps in and out of focus. The sound of metal crunching reverses.

A breath.

Lights up.

Brenton is sitting in the middle of the floor. He is dressed in his boxer shorts and a singlet. Unwashed, unkempt, unmotivated. He is inspecting the tattoos on his body. The grandfather clock has righted itself and is on the far wall. It ticks healthily.

Arianna enters. Dressed in black hospitality work clothes. She has a large bag thrown over her shoulder. She looks exhausted.

ARIANNA

Hello love.

BRENTON

Hmmm.

Arianna looks at the clock. She considers it for a moment before moving over to Brenton. She takes his face and guides it to her. She kisses him lovingly.

ARIANNA

I have something to tell you.
Something important. Would you mind listening?

BRENTON

(Pause)
Yeah, what's wrong?

ARIANNA

I'm pregnant.

Silence.

BRENTON

That's great.

ARIANNA

Some things might have to change,
but I think this is going to be the
beginning of something really good
for us.

BRENTON

How long have you known?

ARIANNA

Not long.

(Pause)

I love you.

BRENTON

I love you too.

ARIANNA

It's good to hear you say that.

They kiss again.

Lights down.

Curtain.