MIMETIC IDENTITY IN THE HOMECOMING

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Abstract

One of the central arguments of this thesis is that Harold Pinter's dramatic language is not used to verify a pre-existing truth about his characters as in realist drama, but instead reveals the "interrelational" process whereby identity is disputed and created in the dramatic interaction. In an effort to delineate some of the determining factors in this process, we apply the work of critic René Girard on imitative or "mimetic" behaviour patterns to Pinter's play The Homecoming, and so continue the work of a "mimetic" analysis of Pinter's Old Times. However, we will also seek to explain the importance of Pinter's experience as a marginalized Jew in Christian culture to his "mimetic discourse." While Girard's germinal study of imitative desire and conflict assumes a Christian world-view, Pinter's experience with anti-semitism and his cultural background shapes his discourse in a different way than the Christian "novelistic" model which has previously been assigned to Pinter's drama.

Résumé

Le langage dramatique de Harold Pinter ne vise pas à vérifier une vérité pré-établie au sujet de l'identité de ses personnages, mais il révèle plutôt le processus relationnel dans lequel cette identité est disputée et créée par le truchement de l'interaction dramatique. Nous nous proposons de démontrer que ce processus se déroule en suivant un cycle imitatif dans The Homecoming, l'identité des personnages évoluant au gré des désirs réciproques, selon la logique imitative ou "mimétique" illustrée par René Girard dans d'autres sources littéraires. Nous souhaitons continuer l'oeuvre de David Savran en ce qui concerne son analyse "mimétique" de la piece de Pinter, Old Times, et prolonger ses observations sur le désir "symétrique" Pintérien. En outre, nous tenterons aussi d'expliquer la façon dont le judaisme de Pinter contribue à son "discours mimétique". Son expérience de l'antisémitisme illustre le dilemme de l'illégitimité du juif au sein de la chrétienté et structure son discours d'une façon qui diffère du cadre romanesque chrétien imposé par Savran.

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INTRODUCTION

Harold Pinter once described the violence that is a prominent ingredient in many of his plays in terms of an alternating dynamic of rivalry, "a very common everyday" battle which is anterior to the various "tools" or positions through which superiority is asserted:

> The violence is really only an expression of the question of dominance and subservience, which is possibly a repeated theme in my plays. I wrote a short story, a long time ago, called The Examination, and my ideas of violence carried on from there ... the question was one who was dominant at that point and how they were going to be dominant and what tools they would try to undermine the other person's dominance. A threat is constantly there: it's got to do with the question of being in the uppermost position, or attempting to be ... I wouldn't call this violence so much a battle for positions, it's a very common everyday thing.[1]

Austin Quigley, in The Pinter Problem, uses a socio-linguistic perspective to examine exactly how such a battle takes place in the characters' linguistic interaction:

> This battle, in the Pinter world, is grounded in the power available in language to promote the responses that a speaker requires and hence the relationship that is desired.... The language of a Pinter play functions primarily as a means of dictating and reinforcing relationships. This use of language is not, of course, exclusive to a Pinter play and is a common component in all drama and in all language; but, in giving this use such

> extensive scope, Pinter has simultaneously achieved his own individual form of stage dialogue and made his work unavailable to any critical analysis based on implicit appeals to the reference theory of meaning.[2]

Much of Pinter criticism, Quigley argues, "is handicapped by an implicit belief that language is primarily referential, and so is incapable of responding adequately to what he terms the foregrounded "interrelational" function of Pinterian dramatic language.[3] Watzlawick et al. comment on how conversational exchanges dictate relationships and identities in their study, The Pragmatics of Human Communication:

> in a communicational sequence, every exchange of messages narrows down the number of possible next moves. ... The manifest messages exchanged become part of the particular interpersonal context and place their restrictions on subsequent interaction.[4]

Quigley states that for Pinter's characters "linguistic battles are not the product of an arbitrary desire for dominance but crucial battles for control of the means by which personality is created in the social systems to which they belong" (emphasis added).[5] It is only with a sensitivity to the interrelational process in Pinterian dramatic language, he argues, that "it will be possible to ... generate further thought and further discovery" regarding these social systems.[6]

This is our project in the following discussion. We intend to build on Quigley's insights into how Pinter's characters use language "in the development of a self-concept" by introducing René Girard's study of "mimetic conflict."[7] Girard provides a link between Pinter's characters' efforts to dictate a desirable self-concept, and the fact that such efforts seem to be directed, most often, towards the propagation of further and greater violence.

An apt generalization with which to describe Pinter criticism is that it has always been a struggle to 'unlock' the logic or reason behind Pinter's characters' outlandish, brutal and often cryptic behaviour. Austin Quigley offers a comprehensive survey of other, previous schools of Pinter criticism, and demonstrates how despite their varied perspectives, there are certain recuring assumptions which inevitably frustrate most efforts to derive order and meaning from the Pinterian dramatic interaction. Using theoretical and textual evidence, Quigley demostrates how the Pinter character's references to external "things" or "objects" are actually efforts to create and impose a specific perception of one's identity. However, having rejected the notion that Pinterian identities are preset, Quigley's methodology is such that he is forced to fall back on a <u>secondary</u> set of intrinsic, discreet truths--the

paradigmatic mythology of "internal needs."

What we will attempt to do in the following discussion is to take Quigley's initial insight into the conspicuously ungrounded nature of 'object-identities' in Pinterian linguistic interaction, and develop it within an orderly, comprehensive theoretical framework which gives us the tools to conclusively demystify the role of all identities, needs and desires in the characters' foregrounded efforts to model themselves and their relations. Using Girard's discussion of imitative desire, we shall be able to sever the last ties to 'object primacy' in our interrelational analysis, and present Pinter's characters' desires and 'self-concepts' in their true light--as a reflection of those desires and identities which are seen to be held, and profited from, by the mimetic model.

In the following chapter we will expand on this concept of "mediated" or "mimetic" desire by offering a fairly thorough summary of Girardian theory, which will encompass both the interpersonal dynamic which we hope to find reproduced in Pinter's text, and the broader cultural and anthropological issues which have shaped drama and ritual in general. This "theoretical overview" will no doubt appear to meander somewhat--taking us back from The Homecoming to the mythic/anti-mythic tension of classical

tragedy, from the ritualistic "sacrificial crisis" and its resolution to the modern conflict and victimization of the Pinterian antagonist--but such is the breadth and impact of mimetic theory. It should be emphasized at this point that what we are about to enter into here is not only an alternative psychological model for Pinterian conflict and identity, but an attempt to situate Pinter's evocation of ritual-like patterns of identity and violence in their broader cultural origins.

As we will see, Katherine Burkman's identification of ritual structures in the conflict and identities of Pinter's drama offer the first opportunity to undertake a broad reconsideration of the logic and patterning of Pinterian interaction. Where this discussion parts ways with Burkman's is in the ontology of the ritual itself, where the Girardian element of symmetrical violence--such a common ingredient in Pinterian interaction--replaces the traditional conception of rites and myths as nature-based. We hope to demonstrate the validity of Girard's assertion of the primacy of imitative violence in ritual and myth both generally, and in our own rereading of the ritual forms which Burkman illustrates in The Homecoming.

Theoretical Overview

The Pinter Problem offers a set of assumptions regarding the interrelational process in Pinter's drama which are, by all appearances, quite reasonable. First, that the "demands of a particular character" are anterior "to the need for external confirmation" of these demands in the subsequent interaction.[1] Secondly, that because characters have these anterior intrinsic needs and ambitions they all wish to realize, the succeeding interrelational process must necessarily involve compromise and negotiation in their mutual efforts to make the best of their private, central urges:

> Relationships thus become major battlegrounds as characters attempt to negotiate a mutual reality. In doing so, they have to cope with a compromise between the ways in which they wish to be regarded and the ways in which their companions are willing to regard them. In an important sense, then, the "personality" of a particular character, the kind of identity with which he can operate, is a function of a compromise negotiated in a particular relationship (emphasis added).[2]

However, there are a couple of problems with these reasonable assumptions, one having to do with the interpretation of events in Pinter's plays, the other, with a thwarting of The Pinter Problem's goal of a full investigation into the extensive role which relational systems have in the development of identity in Pinterian

dramatic interaction. When we get the chance to look at Pinter's drama in detail, we will not find the characters compromising and negotiating to arrive at a common ground where a modicum of demands from both sides of a dispute are safeguarded. Instead, we often find them working to create an environment where what is guaranteed is only greater conflict and upheavals between their contrasting desires. The Pinter Problem rejects the traditional view that "the identities of those participating" in Pinter's relational systems "are given in advance," and observes that the "prominence of developing relationships [in a Pinter play] is in large part dependent on the ways which relationships function in the development of a self-concept" (emphasis added).[3] But it, too, fails to understand the role of conflict itself in the production of opposed desires and subsequently relegates these desires to the realm of the "private" and "internal," to the detriment of any effort to discuss Pinterian identity as a systemic thing. Girard's illustration of the mimetic quality of desire and violence provides, I believe, a valuable contribution to Quigley's insight into the foregrounded use of dramatic language to construct identity in Pinter's violent play-worlds, and further, will shed new light on the system of conflict in Pinter's plays.

For those of us who are not familiar with René Girard's studies of mimesis, this essay will attempt to offer a brief outline of those areas which are pertinent to our discussion: imitative desire, its relationship to violence, ritual and tragedy, and the succeeding 'mimetic discourses' which follow in the antimythical project of tragedy. Ultimately, our goal is to illustrate exactly how Pinter's drama corresponds with Girard's discussion of literary and dramatic works which reveal the presence of the "mediating figure" in desire. Let us, then, turn to Girard and explain show his work sheds light on the Pinter character's need "to be in the uppermost position," and on the production of desire and identity which occurs in this social dynamic.

Girard writes that because of a central human urge to desire imitatively, "violence is always mingled with desire.... Rivalry does not arise because of a fortuitous convergence of two desires on a single subject; rather, the subject desires the object because the rival desires it."[4] The "subject" in Girardian theory feels her/himself to be cursed by a lack of inner worth and purpose, evocative of the shameful "poverty within us" which Pinter once described in a discussion of his characters.[5] Yet, Girard states, this poverty is not shared by all: there are others, termed "models," who

appear to possess the elusive plenitude and self-completeness that the subject has been encouraged to look for and find missing. With the identification of a suitably superior-seeming, self-damning model, the subject's anguish is not diminished in the least. Given that the model's self-completion is necessarily its own, how can it possibly be attained by the subject, who craves it, but 'fundamentally' lacks it? Imitation appears to provide the key:

> If the model, who is apparently already endowed with superior being, desires some object, that object must surely be capable of confering an even greater plenitude of being. It is not through words, therefore, but by the example of his own desire that the model conveys to the subject the supreme desirability of the object.[4]

In the spectrum of interconnections between subjects and their models, the plenitude-confering object is likely to vary greatly; any attitude, relationship or possession might appear to the subject to hold the key to the model's autonomy and power. There is, however, one very strong likelihood in the relationship between subject and model, if these two figures can actually come into contact, and that is the likelihood of <u>conflict</u>. For if the subject is able to <u>act</u> on her/his urge for object appropriation, the implicit invitation which the model extends to the subject will be countered by a contradictory command, as the

imitated, infringed model naturally moves to resist usurpation of its objects and position:

> Man cannot respond to that universal human injunction, "Imitate me!" without almost immediately encountering an inexplicable counterorder: "Don't imitate me!" (which really means, "Do not appropriate my objects"). This second command fills man with despair and turns him into the slave of an involuntary tyrant. Man and his desires thus perpetually transmit contradictory signals to one another. Neither model nor disciple really understands why one constantly thwarts the other because neither perceives that his desire has become the reflection of the other's.[7]

Here we are introduced to a new elaboration in Girard's model of desire: reciprocal nonrecognition of the imitative basis of desire, and hence, reciprocal conflict. In our effort to establish a basic ontology of Girardian desire, we have until now discussed mimesis in its simplest "triangular" configuration: subject to model through object. But as we see here, mimetic desire aptly produces symmetrical opposition, a system of "double mediation" where both sides desire imitatively and antagonistically as mimetic rivals. As this reciprocal struggle for possession intensifies, the intrusion and violence of the rival becomes the most potent characteristic of the conflict, surpassing the initial 'object terms'. Violence itself becomes the generic value-signifying object, and as Girard observes, this development has far-reaching personal and social repercussions:

> Whenever [the disciple] sees himself closest to the supreme goal, he comes into violent conflict

> with a rival. By a mental shortcut that is both eminently logical and self-defeating, he convinces himself that the violence itself is the most distinctive attribute of this supreme goal.... Violent opposition, then, is the signifier of ultimate desire, of divine self-sufficiency, of that "beautiful totality" whose beauty depends on its being inaccessible and impenetrable. The victim of this violence both adores and detests it. He strives to master it by means of a mimetic counterviolence and measures his own status in relation to his failure. If by chance, however, he actually succeeds in asserting his mastery over the model, that latter's prestige vanishes. He must then turn to an even greater violence and seek out an obstacle that promises to be truly insurmountable.[8]

Violence, Girard argues, is a central part of the 'human condition' not because it is itself instinctive, indeed, not because of reasons that have to do uniquely with violence at all, but because of the pervasive influence of mimetic desire. He posits this human propensity for imitation as a fundamental anthropological constant, perhaps the constant, in the ongoing project to organize ourselves into stable, secure societies. For the question arises, how is this violence contained, how is it prevented from spreading, refracting and intensifying until it destroys everyone and everything, if its basis is something so common and deep-rooted as human desire? The fact that we are here at all to conduct this discussion strongly suggests that there is, and has been, some kind of containment of at least the mimetic aspect of violence, as its clear potential for open-ended geometrical escalation and devastation has not been realized. In most

societies--indeed, those which have survived--something has arisen to arrest the epidemic of escalating violence, and reconstruct it in a form which is nonreciprocal.

Girard explains how our modern judicial system, with its legitimized monopoly on punishment and restitution in conflicts, our religions, and their myths of divine judgement and violence, and the broader cultural myths that are the derivations of this tradition, myths of heroes and villains, good triumphing over bad, all have as their common ancestor the sacrificial ritual. The ancient system of projecting guilt onto an object, animal or person, and then destroying or expeling this party as a means of absolving the guilt and sins of the collectivity is the legacy left behind by the earliest successful efforts at placating reciprocal conflicts. Violence and the Sacred seeks--through its investigation of mimetic desire and conflict--to tie our normative-seeming post-ritualistic ideologies and social institutions to these primitive forms.[7]

Girard uses anthropological data, coupled with his analyses of classical tragedy, and later, the Old Testament, to expose the mimetic foundation beneath the ritualistic framework of religious differentiation and sacrifice. While modern social institutions provide the

security to pursue the extremely desirable goal of equality, the urgent danger posed by symmetrical desire in less stable, less effectively 'quarantined' societies leads to the rigorous institutionalization of difference. Filial, biological and social distinctions are enforced so as to safeguard the noncontestability of all potential mimetic objects, and any violation of this principle, any act which has the effect of effacing such differences, no matter how seemingly trivial, is greeted with an anxiety and horror which appears somewhat unreasonable to the modern observer. Yet when violations of this kind do occur, and symmetrical conflicts arise, the potential for devastation in ritualistic society is vast and far-reaching: "impure, contagious, reciprocal violence spreads throughout the community."[10] Accordingly, Girard describes the sacrificial crisis in Greek tragedy as a "crisis of difference." The loss of distinctions in one sphere leads to a break-down in all others, with its central deadly effacement of the distinction between "pure" and "impure" violence. It is at this level -- violence as a collective phenomena which is empirically observed as either safe or not safe -- where the ritualistic society makes its stand. Our contemporary practise of having authoritative third parties intervene in disputes to identify and punish offenders is highly inadvisable this context, for as Girard observes in his analysis of Oedipus

the King, the vainglorious self-vision of oneself as a morally superior arbiter is epidemic in the tragic conflict.[11] All sides claim this mantle, and even the best-intentioned efforts are quickly absorbed into the deadly cycle of claims and counterclaims. Instead, it is the quality of violence itself which is redressed and purified in the sacrificial ritual. A third party is indeed brought into the picture, but it occupies the converse role as victim, not judge; a collectively sanctioned receptical to absorb, conclusively, the free floating violence of crisis. This victim is designedly not identifiable as one antagonistic participant out of many, but has a unique, sacred identity as a divinely-pleasing purgative of the community's collective ills. As such, the sacrificial victimization is at once an immediate response to the crisis and an institution-creating event.

While, on one hand, Girard uses Greek tragedy as an historical record of sacrificial rites and myths, his unique perspective on tragic interaction illustrates how the birth of theatre in Greece is, at the same time, a movement away from ritual. As he points out, the reproduction of mythic violence in tragedy is countered by a revelation of the mimetic universe behind sacrifice. For example, while the central figure in Oedipus the King clearly 'fits the bill' as sacrificial victim by virtue of

his unique, prophesied identity as the blasphemous violator of filial distinctions -- the perpetrator of incest and patricide, and so the purveyor of the impure violence that is at the heart of the city's devastating plague -- Girard demonstrates how, prior to the imposition of the myth of singular guilt, the conflict between tragic antagonists displays an effacement of difference occurring generally.

Discussing the conflict between Oedipus and Tiresias, Girard states that "ultimately there is no difference between the "true" and the "false" prophet.[12] "The statement seems ridiculous," he continues, "even unthinkable, at first glance. For does not Tiresias proclaim the truth about Oedipus at the outset, while Oedipus is vilifying Tiresias with odious calumnies?"[13] The symmetry of the tragic conflict provides his answer to his question, as Oedipus, Tiresias and Creon are all seen to occupy the same position in regard to the conflict:

> At first, each of the protagonists believes that he can quell the violence: at the end each succumbs to it. All are drawn unwittingly into the structure of violent reciprocity -- which they always think they are outside of, because they all initially come from the outside and mistake this positional and temporary advantage for a permanent and fundamental superiority.[14]

Until the intervention of the tragic guilt-myth, the accusations of patricide and incest made against Oedipus

are only somewhat bold and piquant contributions in a "conventional exchange of incivilities" between him and Tiresias:

> the tragedy transforms the murder of Laius, and the patricide and incest themselves, into an exchange of mutual incriminations. Oedipus and Tiresias each attempt to place the blame for the city's plight on the other.... At this stage of the debate there is no reason to assume that either party is more guilty of any crime than the other. Both sides seem equally matched; neither seem able to gain the upper hand. The myth breaks the deadlock, however, and does so unequivocally.[15]

In Girard's definition, tragedy occupies a dialectical position with myth, and undermines the mythical concealment of the mimetic foundation of violence. Out of this very dialectic, western drama is born, and tragedy becomes the first in a succession of discourses which Girard identifies as expositors of mimesis in desire, a company into which we wish to locate Harold Pinter's dramas, and specifically, The Homecoming.

The myth which breaks the deadlock in the tragic discourse is actually the interrelational event of sacrificial substitution made to seem opaque and predetermined in the same way that the conventional realist drama masks the social dynamic of mimetic identity-construction behind the myth of romantique psychology. In this way, both Pinter and the tragic poet offer us a partial vision of the imitative process behind

identity, for the concealing mythical aspect of the tragic dialectic has its counterpart in Pinter's use of the form of the psychological drama, which hides the "mimetic basis for desire," revealing psychological details of autonomous, interior processes, "not, however, the presence of the mediator as the determining factor in desire."[16]

It is on this issue of the sacrifical myth where the differences between the antimythical projects of Pinter and tragedy are no doubt clear, as well. The broad ritual framework of differentiation which Girard demonstrates in the classical tragedy, and its victim-creating role in the sacrificial crisis, are of course conspicuously absent from modern Pinterian mimesis. Of the sacrificial crisis, Girard reports that the escalating alternation of "high" and "low" status between tragic antagonists and their stichomythic exchange of the polarities of good and evil produces a "monstrous" blurring of identity which is at once the destruction and recreation of ritualistic order. To the ritualistic psyche--represented by the alarmed tragic chorus--this breakdown in conflictual identity sparks the catastrophic chain reaction of identity-fusion across the broad spectrum of ritualistic identities and differentiations, producing the kind of systemic 'collapse' which we outlined above. At this moment of "monstrous" polymorphism, however, a new ritual framework is born from

the ashes of the old. The collective horror over this social and psychic breakdown intersects with the shattered system's capacity to absorb any individual in any role to produce, arbitrarily, a single, complementary victim through which to "purify" all violence again.[17] Thus the ritualistic interrelational framework has a built-in arresting mechanism to provide for complementary victimization which is absent from its modern Pinterian counterpart. When we look at mimetic conflict in The Homecoming, we will not find the same sense of anxiety over symmetrical desire and identity, as the critical dimension of mimesis is nowhere near as pronounced in the modern Pinterian micro-society. Accordingly, we will also not find the same severe opposition between complementary victimization or immediate catastrophe. In fact, The Homecoming ends on a rather promising note for the mimetic dyad of the two principal antagonists, as their escalating, desire-instilling conflict/attraction appears unfettered and open-ended at the play's conclusion.

Thus, when we refer to Pinter's antagonists as the creators of identity "myths", we do so not because we imagine that there remains the means to impose such myths conclusively according to the tragic formula, but because this is the clearest way of delineating the mimetic process from its modern mythical counterparts, the realist

psychological tradition, and because the term also reflects the rather naked, unapologetic identity-construction which distinguishes the Pinterian model from the nineteenth-century forms which Girard describes.

What do we mean when we speak of a "succession of mimetic discourses" as we did earlier? The answer is important both in terms of completing our basic overview of Girardian theory, and helping us to understand the relationship between our discussion and the companion view of Pinterian mimesis offered by David Savran, which will be introduced very shortly. The historical transition from ritualistic to modern social structures--in particular the nineteenth-century Christian tradition--is a pivotal event in Girardian theory. In Deceit, Desire and Novel, Girard substitutes for the classical and anthropological data of Violence and Sacred the novels of Cervantes, Proust, Dostoevsky, Stendhal and Flaubert, and illustrates a mimetic (and a mythical) discourse which is uniquely modern and Christian. The nineteenth-century antimythical novelist (and dramatist) faces a vastly different set of dangers when, like his classical counterpart, he attempts to convey the destructiveness of mediated desire.

As was no doubt evident in our brief discussion of tragic ritual and crisis, modern systems of justice seem to

provide an enormously more reliable means of punishing offenders and rewarding victims, so breaking the spiral of escalating claims and counterclaims between symmetrical antagonists. The vainglory of the arbiter/antagonist isn't given much maneuvering room at least within nation-states, where judicial systems and government generally maintain their monopolies on ethics and coercive force. Further, as Girard demonstrates in Deceit, Desire and the Novel, sophisticated religious and economic systems have arisen to replace their comparatively clumsy ritualistic counterparts. Christianity is a powerful means of generating imitative desire, and focusing it safely and expediently onto an external model.[18] And the kind of commodity 'fetishization' which we observe in Remembrance of Things Past aptly demonstrates the genius with which bourgeois capitalism harnesses imitative desire productively by transfering it, triangularly, onto commodities.[19] Since violence can no longer spill and spiral with the same catastrophic expedition in nineteenth-century Christian capitalist Europe, the novelists' emphasis is now refocused away from the tragic poet's concern for communal disaster onto personal or "spiritual" destruction: self-hatred, "metaphysical sickness," the empty legacy of nonexperience and noninquiry. As Girard painstakingly demonstrates, the central focus of the nineteenth-century "novelistic"

discourse ultimately becomes in every case the salvation of the narrator/hero. "Deviated transcendency," the futile search for the divine in the deadly world of imitation and opposition is at last transmuted to its true form--"vertical transcendency"--and through spiritual or real death and rebirth, the imitation of Christ at last rescues the individual from the living death that is the imitation of one's neighbour.[20]

David Savran, in "The Girardian Economy of Desire," investigates mimetic structure in another Pinter play, Old Times. In this play, mimetic rivals -- husband and an interloping "old friend" -- conduct a symmetrical dispute for the possession of the wife, Kate. While their conflict begins as a triangular dispute, Savran notes that the intensifying passions between the two subject/models pushes their relational system towards direct rivalry. "The Girardian Economy of Desire" is quite explicit about the primacy of mimesis in Pinterian interaction:

> ... three characters are trapped in a network of mediated desire which will destroy them all. Deeley and Anna are locked together in a struggle, an agon, in which only symmetrical and reactive movement is possible.... Act one maps out the triangles and explores the basic patterns of rivalry. The second act brings the subject-mediators closer together and exposes the paradoxical and destructive consequences of double mediation, as the focus shifts from the subject-object relationship to that between subject and mediator. The shift reveals the mimetic basis for desire....[21]

Savran states that he uses "the Greek work agon in order to indicate the highly formal and rhetorical nature of the struggle and its division into clearly delineated sequences."[22] Indeed, in several instances he appears to borrow quite extensively from the critical vocabulary of tragedy. When he describes the initiation of mimetic conflict in Old Times, it is in terms which are identical to those used by Girard in Violence and the Sacred to describe the alternating violence of the tragic debate:

> After the stychomythic dialogue between Deeley and Kate, Anna begins with a tirade which jars us with its rhythm and style. She speaks rapidly and with great rhetorical power, nearly overwhelming Deeley.[23]

This thesis will proceed from Quigley's observations of Pinterian interaction (and conflict) as an identity-producing system in The Homecoming to the kind of explicit discussion of mimetic interaction offered by Savran. In doing so, we hope to be able to extend the investigation of Pinterian mimetic interaction initiated by Savran in his analysis Old Times to The Homecoming in a detailed, thorough way. This is no simple task, because of the considerable dissimilarities in the relational systems of the two plays. As Savran points out, the mechanism of symmetrical identity-construction in Old Times is foregrounded and highly visible: "Old Times is remarkable both for purity of the triangular situation (upon which no

outside force intrudes) and the extremely systematic way... in which it works itself out."[24] As the title suggests, the rivalrous object-terms in Old Times are alternating mythologies of the Other's discredited, inferior role in the past. And unlike the tragic conflictual mythologies of 'sin' and 'truth', rivals in Old Times are able to pursue their alternating dynamic of dominance and subservience in a way which is free of such venerable, restrictive requisities. The mediated war of memory in Old Times is explicitly nonfactual. Early in the conflict, one antagonist's possessive 'remembrance' of the contested object and the discredited rival meets with this reply:

> I know what you mean. There are things one remembers even though they never have happened. There are things I remember even though they never have happened but as I recall them so they take place.[25]

'Truth' and 'identity' in Old Times are plainly rooted in the dynamics of the conflict, not in fact, and critics have had little trouble in catagorizing the characters' memory-game as "narratives" or mere "lies."[26] While to my knowledge Savran is the first commentator to place these strategies in their proper perspective, and provide the crucial link between desire and opposition in Pinterian interaction, the systemic nature of identity is rather close to the surface in the narrated mythologies between rivals in Old Times.

By contrast, when we examine The Homecoming and critical reactions to it we will find a rather different situation than the one which Savran is presented with. In The Homecoming, the systemic identity of rivals is an event in the present, where object-roles are 'real' and familiar in a way which Old Times memory-identities cannot be. And because Pinter's dramatic worlds are relentlessly brutal, unpleasant places, the reification of these identities under the dominant critical banner of autonomous psychology is an especially dangerous thing, in the sense that all refusals to consider such behaviour and identities in their social origins and function are dangerous and reactionary. The misapprehension of the systemic nature of the sacrificial victim may well be necessary to provide the path back to order and safety in the primitive crisis of distinction, but there is hardly any such justification for refusing to see the mimetic process at work in The Homecoming, where we can find analogous guilt-myths being advanced by antagonist and critic alike. Quigley's interrelational approach and the mimetic analysis of Girard/Savran provide the means to look beneath the brutal, stigmatizing masks of Pinter's characters and view them in the full light of day, where their kinship to us is suddenly and shockingly evident.

The stated intent of "The Girardian Economy of Desire" is specifically to expose "the deeper points of contact between Pinter's work and the nineteenth century tradition of the well-made play and the psychological drama."[27] Our goal here is to continue with Savran's methods, but not all of his conclusions. If he is correct in the assumption that there is an underlying mimetic structure in Pinter's work, we should, indeed, we must be able to find examples of it elsewhere in Pinter's canon.

However, the reader will find that we do not continue with Savran's "nineteenth-century" bias in our examination of The Homecoming. The play's dyadic rivalry and the absence of the metaphysical salvation outlined earlier will encourage us to look towards a nonChristian model, rather than the nineteenth-century "novelistic" tradition outlined above.

Savran, too, notes "Pinter's failure to reveal a metaphysical basis for mimetic desire" in Old Times, stating that the religious insight and conversion of the novelistic hero is entirely absent from within the text.[28] For his own reasons, Savran choses to circumvent this difficulty by taking full advantage of Girard's dictum that "[t]he title of the hero of a novel must be reserved

for the character who triumphs over metaphysical desire and thus become capable of writing the novel."[29] "The Girardian Economy of Desire" thereby states that:

> Pinter's use of the patterns of mimetic desire to lead his characters toward destruction, his witholding of the reasons for their defeat, and his refusal to ransom them from their isolation are all indications of the irony which suffuses the play uniformally. This irony becomes, in turn, the mark of the playwright's own distance from the action, his detachment... which is like the conversion of the hero of the novel, the product of renunciation.[30]

The very absence of textual data to confirm an hypothesis is recuperated so that it does at last perform the desired function. The novelistic hero's renunciation of past desires is delegated to the playwright, and his inexpressive "irony" is idealized as the formal reproduction of the novelistic hero's triumph.

However, in this discussion of The Homecoming we will find it most useful and natural to examine the rivals' dyadic conflictual system in relation to what Girard identifies in his analysis of the preChristian genre of tragedy, where mimetic conflict, and the artist's own narrative position, are similarly unmarked by the "metaphysical" framework of Christian ideology. It is not merely the textual dissimilarities between the Pinterian

and novelistic discourses which leads us to this decision. Several critics argue that Pinter's drama is fundamentally shaped by his experiences with anti-semitism in East End London. Peter S. Golick states that the characters in Pinter's plays are the product of such experiences:

> The elements of menace and of the closed, safe space reflect, to a large extent, the environment of fear and uncertainty of the Jew. It is hard to overstate the impact on the psyche of a sensitive youngster brought up in London's East End with its ghetto-like enclosures of hostility and poverty. Echoes of these experiences are shared by many of his characters in almost all of his plays.[31]

William Baker and Stephen Ely Tabachnick, in their collaboration, Harold Pinter, offer a similar estimation of the ontology of this 'atmospheric menace' in Pinter's plays. Documenting the particularly overt, brutal anti-semitism of war time London with recollections from Pinter, his friends and contemporaries, they conclude that "[t]he events of the late 1930's left an indelible impression on the minds of those who were a part of them and have become part of the East End Jewish folk memory"--a tradition into which they seek to situate Pinter's dramas.[32]

These cultural and biographical approaches are not immediately compatible with our mimetic perspective. If we

wished to be willfully reductive we could even dismiss them as simply a 'reification of Jewish object - identities'. I do not, because I sense in these perspectives an invaluable contribution to our understanding of the Pinterian mimetic discourse. Golick concludes that Pinter's characters "display a certain bitterness, or even guilt and self-hate," and adds that this "is a trait not unrelated to the experiences of other minority groups or to such American Jewish writers as Philip Roth and Saul Bellow."[33] Baker and Tabachnick, characterizing Pinter as the "Jew from Hackney"--a working-class area of London where the Jews were held "powerless" by economic and racial hardship--accordingly identify a "terrible loss" and "desolation" at the core at his work.[34]

What was it that Pinter said when attempting to explain his characters' fear of communication and of each other? "To disclose to others the poverty within us is too fearsome a possibility."[35] And what is Girard's description of the "mediated subject"? "[T]he subject recognizes in himself an extreme weakness... [t]he subject is ashamed of his life and his mind."[36] What are these, if not expressions of the anguish and doubt which the illegitimized Jew is made to feel in Christian, anti-semitic culture, which both Golick and Baker and Tabachnick claim has permeated Pinter's dramatic form?

Suddenly, it seems possible that everything we are saying about Pinter's dramatic form may be linked to his Jewishness. Anti-semitic violence during his youth taught Pinter to use language in a carefully controlled, cooptive way to forestall an attack. Pinter's description of such an incident is seized upon by Austin Quigley, and credited as a seminal example of Pinter's development of an "interrelational" approach to language function, the very mechanism which we are now attempting to fuse with this other product of Pinter's experience as an alienated, brutalized Jew, his preoccupation with inner shame and mediated desire.[37]

It is Pinter the Jew who suffers the humiliation and alienation which is sadly representative of the treatment afforded to his bretheren across much of the world. But it is Pinter the artist (and if we are to continue with Girard's terminology, the genius) who succeeds in attaining a certain understanding of the cycle of abuse and self-abusive desire. Having known the shame and self-hatred which is the unhappy situation of so many Jews who respond reflexively and self-injuriously to their ostracization in Christian culture, he is then able to systematically expose and explore these impulses in his art, and so achieve his own understanding and mastery over them. Pinter's characters pursue the empty, dismal prize

of mediated opposition with an uncommon, single-minded dedication. They seek to escape their interior "poverty" through the illusory benefits of mimetic rivalry, which is the violence of Christian world against them made internal, holy and generic.

The same critics who claim a specific cultural background of anti-semitic experience for Pinter's characters and their interactive logic are quick to point out the universality of the playwright's message. Like Girard, who attempts to illustrate in the tragic or novelistic discourse an "ontological sickness" of desire occuring generally and constantly, here we are offered a similar broadening of the significance of Pinter's revelations. Citing Baker and Tabachnick's comments on Pinter's concern over "the relationship of the individual to the group,"[38] Golick states that:

> [t]his stems from his sensitivity as the Jew, the stranger seeking to find a place in the wider society by which he is surrounded. This sensitivity starts with a particularized focus but goes beyond Jews and encompasses all outsiders. It is, in a sense, the common heritage of our twentieth century and the threatening nature of the world in which we live.[39]

Accordingly, we will find in our investigation of The Homecoming that the specifically Jewish elements which Golick, Baker and Tabachnick grant priority to are not of

paramount importance within the characters' conflict system. We will see, in fact, how the violence and victimization in this family is based primarily along sexual, not racial lines, and despite the possible Jewish ontology for Pinterian mimetic conflict, it is in this sexual battleground where Pinter's play makes its strongest statement.

If both "The Girardian Economy of Desire" and our discussion attest to Pinter's "mastery" over symmetrical desire and identity, why do I insist on disputing the "novelistic" formula of narratorial victory and resurrection? Simply because this is alien to Pinter's discourse, and is indifferent to the conditions and experience which brought it into being. In applying the "novelistic" framework to Pinter's drama, Savran is apparently acting on Girard's concept that a "[r]epudiation of a human mediator and a renunciation of deviated transcendency inevitably calls for symbols of vertical transcendency whether the author is Christian or not," and that "Christian symbolism is universal."[49] Yet is the predicament of the Christian novelist/hero identical to the dilemma of the Jew in Christian culture, or indeed, to Pinter's characters' experience?

The novelist hero's oppression is evidently self-projected. Girard reports that he has but to renounce the deceptive pride of false divinity to discover joyfully that he is no different from the Others.[41] This is true: with the novelistic hero's spriritual and attitudinal transformation he is validated in his new "humility" and "repose" by his privilege of being Christian. "[T]he law of gravity is annuled for him," he is buoyed in his ascension, and he is now able to enjoy the more enlightened benefits of his faith and class.[42]

But the Jew in anti-semitic culture does not enjoy the same sweeping benefits if s/he attains the same state of "novelistic grace." S/he can, like Pinter himself, come to view the Jew's oppression and shame critically and anti-mythically, but any personal spiritual liberation is in the context of the massive, ongoing humiliation and denial of her/him in Christian culture, which is truly universal and transcendent in this regard, in that it succeeds in establishing itself as the dominant identity-defining voice. Aside from the fact that the symbolism of resurrection is largely alien to Jewish culture (except as a hegemonic concept from without) the personal transformation of the Jewish mediated subject is of uncertain significance and scope. Even with the Jew's

abandonment of shame and despair, the primal Other--which is, again, Christian legitimacy and transcendence--continues to impose, everyday, its own conception of the unfavourable differentiation between it and the Self.

American Christian theologian and critic Franklin H. Littell offers the theoretical means to take our opposition between the Pinterian and the "novelistic" perspective to its ultimate conclusion. Discussing the universality and transcendence which we have seen Girard assign to Christian symbols and values, Littell documents the link between the "supercessionist" doctrine of white Christendom and the anti-semitism which Pinter endures. In Christianity's desire to view itself as universal, Littell argues, there lies a deep contempt for the enduring prescence of Jews, and their links to a particular history and tradition:

> The cornerstone of Christian Antisemitism is the superceding or displacement myth, which clearly rings with the genocidal note. This is the myth that the mission of the Jewish people was finished with the coming of Christ, that the "Old Isreal" was written off with the coming of the "New Isreal." To teach that a people's mission in god's providence is finished, that they have been relegated to the limbo of history, has murderous implications which murderors will in time spell out.[43]

Ultimately, the Jewish mediated subject's oppression is not based on a deviated application of Christian transcendency, as in the case of the "novelistic" hero, but in the violence commited against her/him by this transcendency in its proper, vertical form. Thus we reject the formula imposed in "The Girardian Economy of Desire" for a Christian structure and logic for Pinter's mimetic discourse.

What are we then to make of Pinter's collaboration with Joseph Losey and Barbara Bray on The Proust Screenplay, where the "novelistic" framework of redemption and salvation is expressly preserved? In the preface to the screenplay, Pinter employs the "artistic" terminology which Girard identifies as the veil for the Christian metaphysical process.[44] Describing the "architecture of the film," Pinter states that it

> should be based on two main and contrasting principles: one, a movement, chiefly narrative, toward disillusion, and the other, more intermittent, toward revelation, rising to where time that was lost is found, fixed forever in art.[45]

Indeed, the conclusion of The Proust Screenplay leaves little doubt about the Pinterian Marcel's redemption and spiritual resurrection. After a coda of visual images which juxtapose and synthesize scenic representations of Marcel's desire, despair and hope, Pinter concludes the

screenplay with this final "voice over" from a reborn Marcel, "It was time to begin."[46] Highly unconventional when contrasted with the fates endured by characters of Pinter's unique, personal conception, here the Proustian-Pinterian hero enjoys the same liberation and salvation as its novelistic model. What are we to conclude from this?

Well, of course, our argument is not that Pinter is intellectually incapable of understanding and reproducing the Christian novelistic framework, only that it is manifestly absent from those works which owe their conception to his life and his work. In a brief discussion of Pinter's screenplays, Martin Esslin pays credit to Pinter's talent for infusing other writers' work with "the unmistakeable hallmark of his own personality," while at the same time "respecting the personality and intention" of the original sources.[47] The balance ultimately tips heavily in favour of the initial writer and discourse, however. Esslin begins his discussion with the statement that "[c]learly the adaptation of other writers' work for the screen is an exercise of craftmanship rather than a wholly creative process of shaping themes and images which have entirely spring from the artist's own imagination."[48] Enoch Brater, in his analysis of Proustian and Pinterian narrative structure, remarks on how

the salvation of the protagonist is The Proust Screenplay, is again, absent from the lives and potentialities of Pinter's on characters. "Gone is the security which Proust as still able to find in the temple of his art," Brater states,When he returns his discussion of The Proust Screenplay to original Pinter works like The Homecoming and Old Times.[49]

To recap, the universality of Pinter's 'message' comes, this time, from a Jewish starting point. If the playwright can offer no epiphanic salvation for his mediated subject, it is because no such utopian transformation is possible under the terms of their oppression. Unlike the Christian novelist/hero, who only had to undergo his attitudinal transformation in order to enjoy the "universality" and "repose" which is his ultimate privilege, Pinter and his characters are rather more constrained in their options. Just as the mimetic discourse existed prior to Christianity in tragedy, here we find it existing outside of it, with Pinter the spokesperson for a new, distinct mimetic discourse which is modern, nonChristian, yet, in a negative sense, Christian-defined.

Let us then turn to The Homecoming, and see how the patterns of symmetrical identity and desire are evinced in this work. Our goal in this discussion is to examine

Pinterian identity as a construct of a mimetic system of conflict, and towards this end, we will attempt to demonstrate the "conflictual mythology" of the characters in its many forms. In doing so, we hope to be able to illustrate the very human, generic interrelational process underlying the characters' rather extravagant behaviour and identities. As we will see, this is a particularly urgent project when it comes to the central figure of the play, the woman Ruth. She does indeed adopt a highly stigmatized role in the play as the "whore," yet when all the calumnies of characters and critics against her are measured against our understanding of the mimetic, systemic nature of her identity, we will come to view her and her companions in a radically different light.

The Homecoming

Austin Quigley's "interrelational" perspective on Pinterian language function, René Girard and David Savran's mimetic analyses, indeed, most criticism, proceeds from the implicit or explicit assumption that what is being said significantly adds to or corrects previous critical views. Our discussion here is certainly in keeping with this tradition. So to help illustrate how what we are saying 'fits in' with what has come before us, we will begin our analysis of The Homecoming with a brief discussion of some influential critical interpretations of the play. An effort has been made to select criticism which compares or contrasts well with each other, and with what we are saying here.

Of The Homecoming, Martin Esslin writes that it is a play on several levels: at once a "poetic image of the basic human situation," a "realistic" recreation of "the London half-world" of pimps, prostitutes and gansters, and "dream image" of Oedipal desires.[1] The first level of interpretation is an attempt by Esslin remove the apparent imbalance between the 'realism' and exactitude of Pinter's drama, and its inexpressivity. He suggests that while there is meaning in the play, it must be gleaned from the

action, as in our everyday lives. The playwright is not exempt from this position. Pinter writes as we must read, as an attentive inquiring onlooker:

> Pinter rejects the author's right to know what makes [his character] act, even how they feel. All he can do is render a meticulously accurate portrait of the movement which takes place... He can convey his impression of the structure, the pattern of a situation, the movement of its change as it unfolds, again in a pattern, like the movement of a dance; and, on observing this, the author can also communicate his own sense of mystery, of wonder at this strange world of patterns and structures, of beings that move by mysterious and unpredictable impulses, like fish in a huge aquarium.[3]

Esslin describes a street scene of two people arguing which parallels the kind of unembellished, unnarrated conflict which we find in Pinter's plays. He states that just as the "sensitive bystander" whose eyes are "open" can recognize in this event "something of a poetical validity," and see it "as an expression of the mood, the atmosphere of the time, as a metaphor for all the unhappiness, the tragedy of the human situation," Pinter's cryptic conflicts are susceptible to the same kind of enlightened discovery.[3] According to Esslin, Pinter's narrative technique is not so much unique or new but merely new to drama. Poetry has long made use of the type of story-patterning described above, as so Esslin -- in a move which Quigley strongly rejects as a "critical failure"[4]

assigns the term "poetic" to describe Pinterian language function:

> What else is a poem but a pattern, a structure of images, loosely connected, of glimpses of nature, movements, gestures, flashes of insight, snatches of conversation, juxtaposed not to furnish argument or an explanation, or even a description of the world, but as metaphors for a mood, an intuition of another human being's inner world?[6]

Esslin's second reading of The Homecoming is that it is a realistic depiction of a family "which has always been living on the fringes of the respectable, normal world," a family of hardened gangsters, pimps and prostitutes.[6] This is certainly a natural conclusion to draw, given the character's rather extravagant behaviour. But even with their excesses, Esslin's typification of events seems to err, sometimes, on the side of overzealousness, and in doing so, raises the question of how far one should go in arguing for this comforting 'otherness' of Pinter's playworld. Teddy's stifled response to his wife's desertion is transformed by Esslin to a "casual" acceptance, born of "complacency" of a "family which had been living off prostitution for decades."[7] Of Ruth, he writes that the "country house she so lovingly recalls as the scene for her nude posings by the lake and where there were drinks and a cold buffet sounds like the scene of orgies" (emphasis added).[8] There is an unintentioned

irony in Esslin's statement, for while it is indeed easy to piece together these and other details and deduce that the house is a place for orgies, what this scene actually "sounds like" when Ruth creates it is quite different from Esslin's gloss of her speech as a "loving" recollection of past orgies and prostitution. There is a delicate, desperate quality in her recollection which gets rather trampled by this characterization; there are other aspects of Ruth aside from her identity as a prostitute and these aspects can have influence, too. As A.P. Hinchliffe comments (on a point which we will return to): "[Ruth] has tried wife and mother, daughter-in-law and sister-in-law, but none of these roles is final. The role of the whore must not be regarded as final either" (emphasis added).[9]

The particularization marked by Esslin's "underworld" characterization is reversed in his discussion of the basic and "human" at the "third level" of the play: The Homecoming as a "metaphor of human desires and aspirations, a myth, a dream image, a projection of archetypal fears and wishes."[10] In this model, Ruth is a Mother - figure in the form depicted by the son's "Oedipal desires": "young and beautiful ... available to them as a sexual partner."[11]

Characters and identity are dissolved, then recombined, in this archetypal world. Lenny and Joey are described as "two different aspects of one personality," With Lenny embodying the archetypal Son's "cunning and cleverness," while the slower-witted Joey is allotted his "strength and sexual potency."[12] Max and Teddy are made to undergo a rather more strained transformation and marriage. Teddy, as elder brother, is asked to do double duty as the embodiment of the Father's "superior wisdom" on the basis of his Phd. in philosophy, while Max understandably inherents some rather less elevated qualities, the Father's "senility and ill-temper." This particular model of Esslin's can naturally provide little information about the tension and conflict between Max and Teddy as they compete for Ruth.

Because The Homecoming follows the form of an Oedipal wish-fulfillment dream, Esslin concludes that the play ends with Ruth truly possessed by the sons. She is, after all, "the passive object of desire" because the male dream-fantasy has projected her in this image:

> The more helpless a male, the more he will tend to dream of women as obedient slaves -- prostitutes. Hence the stern inapproachable mother image must, in the sexual dreams of a child, tend to turn into the image of the whore.[13]

Esslin adds that this characterization of Ruth holds true at a psychological level, as well. This is the significance of her description of herself in object-terms when she interrupts Teddy and Lenny's 'philosophical debate', she truly "sees herself--has resigned herself to be seen--as a passive object of desire":

> Having failed in her marriage, Ruth is in a state of existential despair, a deep accidie which is both fully understandable and completely motivates her behaviour. She has tried to fight her own nature, and she has been defeated by it. Now she yields to it, and surrenders beyond caring.[14]

Hinchliffe again comments on Esslin's conclusion by stating that "this hardly describes the woman who conducts the famous contract scene."[15] Indeed, as we will see, Ruth seems to have considerably more fight in her than Esslin allows. Perhaps what is required here is a formula whereby she can be seen to have this considerable power, and yet still, somehow, be unable to free herself from her self-degrading course.

Bert States, in "Pinter's Homecoming: The Shock of Nonrecognition," observes a similar type of foregrounded, vivid, yet inexpressive behaviour-pattern in Pinter's work as Esslin does at his "poetic" level, but States attributes it to a different artistic project entirely. Describing the speech Teddy makes to his family in The Homecoming

about how he operates "on" and not "in" things, States characterizes this as "a genuine idea in a play which contains almost no ideas at all," and argues that Pinter shares in his character's desire to maintain an ironic superiority over all events.[16] Furthermore, the ideals which Teddy describes are shared universally in the play. All characters behave in ways which are designed to advertize their own exclusive "triumph of perspective," their ability to respond to all events with complete ironic detachment. This is why so much of what we observe in The Homecoming is baffling or shocking; Pinter, like his characters, is exploring violence and interaction with the cool, cunning detachment of the ironists.[17]

States, agreeing with Esslin that Teddy casually passes possession of Ruth to the family, attributes this to the Pinter character's goal of becoming, as it were, "a little Pinter, an author of irony, sent... to 'trump' life, to go it one better by going it one worse."[18] The alternately brutal and saccharine Max has an ironic eye on himself as he goes through his paces: when he condemns Ruth as a "pox-ridden slut" he does so because this is a designedly bad imitation of moral indignation, and his following invitation to Teddy for a "nice kiss and cuddle" is "an equally ludicrous imitation of fatherly sentimentality."

Max's behaviour is so outlandish because he wishes to emphasize its artificiality, his goal to prove that he can adopt--but not truly inhabit--any and all perspectives. Even docile Sam has a moment of ironic triumph "so right, so symmetrical," that his aesthetic appreciation of it almost kills him when he blurts out the secret of Jessie and MacGregor and collapses (it is an identical esthétique which causes the family to uniformly ignore his disclosure). Ruth accedes to the family's abusive demands on her as a sign of her own greater detachment and wins a "still greater triumph of perspective." Lenny, of all the characters, comes closest to 'the big Pinter' in tactics and ability. His narratives of violence against women are said to mirror the playwright's own project of manipulating violence for its own aesthetic qualities. The question of whether Lenny has committed or would commit the acts he describes are judged by States to be secondary to "the conception and framing of the possibility, the something done to the brutality."[19] Similarly, by confronting us with violent behaviour which is outlandish and scarcely credible, Pinter is exploring it not as something which is socially based, but conversely, as pure artifice, where the only reference points are the uses and forms of violence elsewhere in Art, "with only a side glance at Nature."[20]

After using a quote from Haakon Chevalier to illustrate Pinter's own "Ironic perspective," States pauses in his argument and cautions:

> Now this fits and doesn't fit, and I am ultimately more interested in the sense in which it fits Pinter's own perspective (and he, in turn, the contemporary perspective) than its application to specific characters.[21]

What this comes to mean for States' discussion is that textual ("character") details are not dealt with in a systematic and organic way, and that, in several instances, important developments in States' theory are not derived from observations of the play at all, but from a remark by Pinter about himself or his craft in interviews. As a result, we never get a clear sense of how all of this ironic one-upsmanship functions as a systemic interaction. The characters and tactics which States outlines in his discussion all run the length of the play, and their combination and evolution seems to produce a certain configuration of victory and defeat. Within the terms of States' perspective, how does this occur? He states that at the conclusion of the play "[w]e anticipate that it will be the woman who now controls the family," and that we know this because she successfully "negotiates a still greater triumph of 'perspective'."[22] But what does all of this mean for all the other 'little Pinters' in the play, and

their respective, exclusive self- and world-visions? The Homecoming seems to conclude with ironiste Max a broken man, and as States points out, with some very palpable control coming from Ruth. But when States defines Max's oenius and ideal as the imitation of "all possible positions," he gives no indication that this sweeping talent does not encompass the old man's final "ludicrous" position. But if this so, Ruth's triumph is, at best, an empty illusion; for in States' terms, Max's groveling is an astonishing tour de force, his greatest farce.

Yet we know that this is not what States wishes us to conclude. His talk of Ruth's "triumph" and "control" make it clear that in his viewpoint some kind of change, some victory and defeat--however unspecified--does indeed occur through the characters' ironic competition. To this end, we are left with the impression that Max is somehow 'bested' by Ruth's superior irony. But there is such a palpable, desperate physical need in his final pleas to her; if Ruth does indeed win something in The Homecoming, her victory comes in a relational system where nonironic, in fact, obsessive desires appear to be at stake.

"The Shock of Nonrecognition" comments on how "psychology and myth seem unsatisfactory as explanations" for the play's conflict. Declaring "the Pinter character's

complete lack of interest in 'things', in obligations, social or moral transactions, past 'sins', future 'goals'," States dismisses the psychological and mythological interpretations of Pinter's plays which elevate this superstructure of "things" to a primary position.[23] Instead, such things "are much closer to being by-products" of the action, like the theme of "crime does not pay," or the "mythic structure" of "tales of victimization." Despite our difficulties with some of his final conclusions, these comments are much admired here. States' rejection of mythological superficies, his deconstruction of the object-"thing", his conception of Pinterian speech-acts as self-aggrandizing weapons; these are some of the basic points of our discussion. It is really States' failure to deal with these elements in an ongoing conflictual system to which we object. The "Ironic" perspective is inherently anti-systemic, in that it discusses characters' behaviour in an isolating, 'frozen' light when in fact there is a clear competitive group aspect to their various strategies.

When the characters lie, when they exaggerate, it is in response an opponent's effort. Their actions betray the systemic 'pressure' of their relations, and they are clearly sensitized to how others' irony has a direct

coercive or attractive quality. We should be, too, so as to be able to probe the interactive logic of their relations.

K.H. Burkman, in her exploration of the ritualistic dimension of Pinter's drama, develops Esslin's discussion of the poetic and archetypal to show how Pinter consciously or unconsciously structures his plays around the cyclical victim/victor dynamic of the sacrificial ritual. Burkman writes:

> at the center of the action of most Pinter plays is the pharmakos, or scapegoat, of ancient ritual and tragedy, the victim whose destruction serves in a special way to reestablish certain basic relationships in the family or community.[24]

In her discussion of The Homecoming, Burkman assigns the scapegoat identity to Ruth, who, in ritual-myth terms, assumes the role of the "fertility goddess... in the ritual renewal of life."[25] Ruth's identity as victim is first suggested by her marriage to Teddy, a "dead man" in spiritual terms, who conceives of her in "empty conventionalized phrases" which testify to the "deadly environment" of their marriage.[26] There is also an "element of victimization" in her prior life as a model for the body, but this is balanced against how such a life "has obviously sustained her in the past." In this way, the

paradoxical victim/victor identity of the scapegoat-king is located in the destructive/sustaining nature of Ruth's role as "whore-mother-wife." The more Ruth is absorbed into the family's exploitive system, the stronger she seems to become. She is the restorative sacrifice for the ailing family--except for Teddy, who has given up the struggle for "salvation"--and in doing so, in offering herself as "the central sacrificial victim of the play, she becomes the central figure of divinity as well."[27]

Francis Fergusson, in The Idea of a Theater, pioneered the study of ritual in drama according to the dominant concepts of the time: the sacrificial ritual as seasonally-based, tied to rites of fertility and natural cycles. Not surprisingly, this is a viewpoint which Girard rejects while arguing for the primacy of violence in the sacrificial ritual:

> In fact, there is nothing in nature that could encourage or even suggest such an atrocious sort of ritual killing as the death of the pharmakos. In my opinion, the sole possible model remains the sacrificial crisis and its resolution. Nature enters the picture later, when the ritualistic mind succeeds in detecting certain similarities between nature's rhythms and the community's alternating pattern of order and disorder.[28]

Our discussion, and The Dramatic World of Harold Pinter: Its Basis in Ritual, proceed from some very different assumptions about the sacrificial ritual and its

ontology. Our task here is to study Pinterian dramatic interaction to see if and how it displays the symmetrical conflict and identity which Girard defines as the source of the sacrificial crisis underlying mythic forms. On the other hand, Burkman's investigation of the "tragi-comic" reproduction of ritual archetypes works from the assumption that nature-based rites and rhythms--however "dark" or "harsh"--control the dramatic action. Again not surprisingly, these two approaches arrive at some different conclusions about the structure of the The Homecoming. Yet it should be emphasized once more how the disagreement between our approaches are centred around the ongoing project of finding better models for understanding the role of ritual. Fergusson, and Frazer in The Golden Bough, made use of the best theories at their disposal. Now Girard (among others) has come forward with an understanding of the human dimension of the sacrificial rite, and it is from this arguably superior analysis from which we proceed. Burkman's "ritualistic" perspective on Pinterian identity-myths is an important event in Pinter criticism, despite Quigley's abrupt dismissal of it.[27] If we can claim any greater insight into the cycles of victimization in The Homecoming, it is simply that there are better models at our disposal.

Burkman presents Ruth's victimization and 'deification' in such a way that the unique, complementary nature of her victim-identity, and so the mythic structure of the ritual, are left intact. Lenny, her chief opponent and counterpart, is made 'nonsymmetrical' in the sense that his dyadic conflict with Ruth is deemphasized and homogenized into the general "struggle within the family unit for salvation." Furthermore, while the parallel, alternating fortunes which Lenny enjoys and suffers with Ruth seem to be recognized in Burkman's pairing of him and her as new male "god" and "fertility goddess," symmetry is again obscured when it is the "brutal brothers"--Lenny and Joey--who are assigned the "power of the emerging god" in relation to Ruth's victimization.[30] So with this mythical framework in place, with the sacrificial rite safeguarded from the possibility of Pinterian symmetrical conflict and desire, Burkman is able to characterize the play's conclusion strictly in the terms described above -- as a successful "ritual renewal."

Interestingly, our mimetic 'rereading' of what is perceived mythically in Burkman's analysis produces disagreement over almost the same issues which Girard contests in his rereading of the tragic myth: revelations of symmetrical desire and conflict, the reappropriation, into this universe, of the sacrificial victim. Almost the

same issues, because while Girard's deconstruction of the sacrificial myth must accept the irrefutable presence of the sacrificial victimization, here we will attempt to prove that no definitive victimization occurs at all in the agon between Lenny and Ruth, and that symmetry is retained at the play's conclusion, with the promise of greater conflict to come.

Now let us turn to Quigley's discussion of The Homecoming as a kind of inroad to our reading of the play. The preceding analyses of Esslin, States and Burkman have all been criticized--for various reasons and to varying degrees--for their inability to provide an adequate picture of the mimetic, interrelational process of identity-construction in the play. Let us return, then, to Quigley's germinal analysis, and use our discussion of its shortcomings to illustrate the need for a mimetic revision.

As we indicated in the introductory chapter, Quigley presents The Pinter Problem as a response to what he sees as a widespread critical failure to meaningfully discuss "what is new" in Pinter's dramatic language.[31] "The language of a Pinter play functions primarily as a means of dictating and reinforcing relationships," and yet, Quigley argues, in almost every case this foregrounded "interrelational" function of language seems to elude the

grasp of critics. The "Pinter problem" in criticism is really a theoretical one, and in documenting its various symptoms--assertions that Pinter's drama is meaningless, or that its meaning is subtextual, or nonsyntactical--he attempts to demonstrate how an invalid conception of linguistic function is at the heart of a diverse spectrum of confused or unrevealing critical interpretations:

> The language of a Pinter play functions primarily as a means of dictating and reinforcing relationships. This use of language is not, of course, exclusive to a Pinter play and is a common component in all drama and in all language; but, in giving this use such extensive scope, Pinter has simultaneously achieved his own individual form of stage dialogue and made his work unavailable to any critical analysis based on implicit appeals to the reference theory of meaning.... The kinds of topic discussed and the kinds of explicitness with which they are discussed [by Pinter's characters] are derived not from a need to establish some kind of objective truth but from the shifting demands of individual characters attempting to give a desired shape and coherence to a relationship (emphasis added).[32]

Rather than revealing a pre-existing "truth," Quigley explains, Pinter's drama reveals the process whereby truth is fought over and created. While it is widely judged that 'character development' is an integral part of a well-told story, Pinter's characters are seen to develop in a different, more fundamental way--a way that exposes the very formation of what comes to be classified afterward as 'personality' or 'inner truth'. Quigley discusses this aspect of Pinter's drama in both literary and linguistic

terms, but it is an anti-mythical event, as well. The "objectivity" of realist drama is like the sacrificial myth in the sense that it is a fabula which seeks to conceal the mechanics of any social process behind the speaker's--the history-writer's--privileged perspective. Pinter's insistence that we witness the hidden process prior to the imposition of a mythology or personal history recalls the poet's revelations of tragic symmetry.

Earlier, we referred to "a couple of problems" with The Pinter Problem's conclusions based on some misreadings of textual evidence, and self-imposed restrictions which Quigley places on his theoretical framework of systemic identity. As we move on from our brief commentary on some Homecoming criticism to Quigley's analysis of the play, it will be, in large part, to illustrate these problem areas. They are, in a major sense, where our own perspective begins.

In an effort to define the characters' central concerns, Quigley begins his analysis of The Homecoming with this discussion:

> As all of the characters can make individual claims on the London "home", there is ample room for disagreement over the issue of control, but the play takes on a further dimension when it relates the issue of control to the much more important issue of the nature of the thing that is to be controlled. It becomes evident that the word "home" is construed in different ways by different characters, and the nature of the

> different constructions becomes manifest in the kinds of social structure that each of the characters seeks to impose on the others. These efforts encounter a variety of obstacles and include a variety of strategies, but all are worked out in terms of the potential social groupings that might embody a particular concept of the nature of the "home" and help it to endure (emphasis added).[33]

The emphasized section in the above excerpt illustrates the bias towards 'object reification' which we discussed briefly in the introduction. Just as we observed earlier that Quigley's approach conceives of characters' goals and desires (though not the relationships formed to realize them) as anterior to the conflict, here we are informed of the primacy "of the nature of the thing that is to be controlled," and the incidental nature of "obstacles" which impede the working out of these goals. Contrary to our conception, what the Pinterian character desires here is nothing other than the uncontested implementation of needs which are, in a unique way, hers or his alone:

> In the process of redefining the situation, the characters seek to redefine themselves and to reconsider, rediscover, or rebury possibilities of self that had become temporarily fixed or latent. And it is in the characters' return to confrontation with these issues that the significance of the title is most clearly revealed. In their various efforts to come home to each other, the characters are forced to struggle once more with what it means to come home to themselves.[34]

While we are attempting to use an interrelational approach to aid us in our investigation of systemic

identity. Quigley is, in fact, using his to present the antithetical argument, where the autonomous psychology of the romantique remains unchallenged. And in the brutal and viciously male play-world, this has some rather unfortunate consequences for certain characters. Lacking the methodology whereby desires and the opposition they inevitably engender can be considered as parts of a single dynamic, Quigley is forced to reproduce the 'mythical' dimension of the characters' desires, and so reproduce some of its mythic violence, as well. When we look at the characters' conflict from a mimetic perspective, we will attempt to pierce the conflict-myth of The Homecoming and see the process by which desire and opposition are transferred, triangularly, into its objects--relationships and identities which are the products of a mimetic interrelational system.

Quigley describes an opposition between "domestic and extra-domestic roles" to explain the central conflict and action of the play.[33] Each character, Quigley argues, is pulled in two opposite directions: towards and away from the home. Each has a kind of career need which can only be satisfied in the home, the place where characters "can be what they wish to be."[34] And so each seeks to modify her/his familial obligations and roles so as to incorporate these suppressed qualities. The Pinter Problem classifies

all the characters' conflictual behaviour according to these paradigms of the domestic and the extra-domestic. This is an ancient dispute in the London family, tying together, in a ritual-like cycle, two generations:

> Just as Max was unable to reconcile the MacGregor within him and the father within him, just as Jessie was unable to reconcile the whore within her and the mother within her, and just as Ruth has been unable to reconcile her career as a nude model with her role as wife and mother, so Teddy has now come to the point of facing up to his inability to reconcile the self that is the successful professor of philosophy and the self who is either a dutiful son in London or a dutiful father and husband in America. The problem with these conflicting roles is that they are of their nature irreconcilable. Each of the characters has contrasting inner needs and each must make his own choice of priorities (emphasis added).[37]

When Ruth and Teddy first enter, Quigley sees their initial scene together in the London home as a clear indication that "[c]onflict over family roles ... is not restricted to the London family alone." Citing the couple's "lack of shared response to the new environment" --Teddy's enthusiasm, Ruth's 'tiredness' and reluctance-- he goes on to detail how the husband "manifests an instinctive subservience to the needs of the London family that is in clear conflict with his duties as husband." In doing so, he triggers his wife's intervention against this potential loss:

> Ironically, his pursuit of continuity in his former home promotes an immediate discontinuity in the role he has adopted in his new home. It may

> be the London family's due not to be disturbed at night by the return of a son, but it is surely Ruth's due to be announced when she makes her first visit to her husband's family home. As she perceives the predominance Teddy gives to his role of son over his role as husband, Ruth switches from indifference to concern.[38]

But it is over such concepts as family "subservience" and "due" where Quigley's framework of domestic and extra-domestic identity begins to lose credibility. He states that in Ruth's "measured response" to Lenny's sexually-expressed aggression, "we also perceive the lack of moral outrage that might not reasonably accompany this excessive familiarity [note: familiarity, not violence] from a comparative stranger. Ruth, it seems, has other abilities in male/female relationships than those demanded of a conventional and dutiful wife."[39] Yet of what value are these prescriptions of normative family relations and "dues" in the face of what we encounter in The Homecoming? Interestingly, while Quigley's interpretive framework requires such a strong set of family principles to contrast against the "extra-domestic," many of his observations on the characters' actual interaction exposes the inapplicability of these same requirements, as characters are seen to be driven towards "individual, rather than family ends (emphasis added).[40] He writes that the London family is "far removed from any abstract idea of a social group with shared needs and reciprocal responsibilities. Instead these are distorted into a

system of mutual exploitation" (emphasis added).[41] If this is so, what are we to make of the distinction which Quigley wishes to impose between domestic and extra-domestic behaviour? Because Ruth is not "a conventional and dutiful wife," she is a whore, and nothing short of the entire play-ritual is said to revolve around this essential extra-family identity. But no one in this family is a conventional or dutiful anything. To admonish Teddy over what is his family's or his wife's "due" upon arriving late seems, really, to miss the point. As Quigley observes elsewhere, both the London and the American family are clearly founded on adversarial principles:

> If the mutual disequilibrium promoted by the two families' interaction has further loosened Max's hold on Lenny and provided him with a new adversary in Ruth, it has likewise loosened Teddy's hold on Ruth and provided him with a new adversary in Lenny.[42]

The "due" owed is the very violence which Teddy exerts, subtly, on his wife when he coerces her into staying in the London home, and it is also her cold rejection of his self-interested pleas, and the more outlandish violence of the Londoners. Violence and exploitation are the lingua franca of the Homecoming-world, and all characters are measured in relation to their success or failure in this system.

But as we contemplate such a system of individual violence and exploitation, is it in any way reasonable to assume that this system is limited to 'home-roles'? How can the play be meaningfully discussed as "a struggle between continuity and change" in the family unit, if that unit is so manifestly subservient to the organizational principles of individual violence which define relations generally, inside and outside the home? By Quigley's own admission, all roles in the play--domestic and extra-domestic, "successful doctor of philosophy" or "whore"--are primarily conflictual and systemic in nature. What these roles and identities then suggest about the characters "themselves" is perhaps less relevant than what they say about the conflictual system in which they are produced, where they derive their power and meaning. When we referred to The Pinter Problem's reproduction in its critical framework of the mythical violence of the family, it was in response to this reification of the object-terms of Pinterian conflict. Just as the tragic antagonists had to conduct their dispute according to certain accepted object-terms of "sin" and "plague," the conflictual system here also apportions certain terms, certain 'truths', between participants, who compete to impose their superiority through them.

As the woman in this profoundly misogynist setting, Ruth will be a whore in the eyes of Max and Lenny, regardless of what she does. What she does (and what some commentators are, in effect, punishing her for) is not noble, but it is identical to what every deluded, brutalized figure does in the play if she or he wishes to succeed and survive. Applying the euphemism of "career need" to Ruth's extraordinary journey into self-exploitation and the exploitation of others actually validates the mythos of the London household, and their efforts to reserve a singular, sexualized guilt-myth for her, as they have done for Jessie. Would we judge nonfictional prostitutes according to this axiom of "career need"? Most certainly not. We would make every effort to consider prostitution as a social phenomenon, tied to the broader oppression and exploitation of women. Why shouldn't we (and here I am supposing a male Pinter critic, such as myself) be able to arrive at a similar perception regarding Ruth's role in The Homecoming? It is the vigourous assertion of this thesis that Pinter supplies us with sufficient textual information to understand Ruth's desires in a critical anti-mythical light, and that both her behaviour in the London home and her intimations of an "underworld" past should be viewed within the terms of the play-world's brutal social system, specifically, the delusions and self-destructive impulses of a system of mimetic rivalry.

The distorton which this mythical bias exerts on The Pinter Problem's interrelational perspective is nowhere more clear than in its discussion of the exchange between Max and Teddy at the conclusion of Act One. Following a slap stick sequence where Max, Joey and Sam trade blows and collapse, Max gets up and asks his son Ted if he'd like "a nice cuddle and kiss" with him.[43] Quigley characterizes the proceedings as an "initial attempt at conciliation" between the two families, and between father and son:

> Max, having ascertained that Ruth is not just a woman but also a mother of three children, is ready to look upon his errant son in a new light. Realizing that Teddy, too, is a father, Max approaches him with a reminder of the continuity of the family tradition that Teddy has come home to rediscover: 'Teddy, why don't we have a nice cuddle, eh?' Teddy, delighted at this confirmation of continuity at home, is oblivious to the possible inconsistency between the self that is operative in this situation and the self that is operative in his American family. He reverts to behaviour that is very different from that of the cool, analytical philosopher who had earlier confronted Lenny.[44]

According to Quigley, Teddy responds to his father's invitation with uncharacteristic warmth. they engage in a "rather excessive male greeting... as the two male heads of the two households kiss and cuddle in the old family room." With this striking action, Quigley states, "Teddy's identification of father and home is complete."[45] And so, it seems, is the schema of domestic and career needs.

restates his cuddle-preparedness, Max begins to gurgle and then "turns to the family and addresses them." "He still loves his father!" Max exclaims, and then, "CURTAIN." That's it. No cuddle, no kiss, the much-proposed act never occurs. The two men square off and issue invitations-to-cuddle like overly cautious wrestlers; the feint, but never clinch. Towards the end, where some momentum-to-cuddle might at last be building, it becomes a scene for public consumption: Max turns away, to address the others. Pinter's directions leave little doubt: like the old man's previous obscene evocations of familial bliss, like his later praise of Ruth as a "woman of quality" after she seemingly assents to their brutal appetites, this nominal display of warmth towards his son is broadly understood by the other characters as yet another of Max's corrupt, unreal moral gestures. Teddy's emotional deadness, which Burkman accurately comments upon, is also not visibly diminished in the least.

In the "cuddle and kiss" scene, we witnessed the two men adopting the forms of family bonds and dues while maintaining an adversarial relationship. This is the clearest example of how The Pinter Problem's stipulation of negotiation and compromise amongst Pinterian antagonists simply is not reflected in their interaction. As well, we have attempted to establish a broader theoretical

discussion of the problems and consequences of 'mythological thinking' in an interrelational analysis, when conflict-objects are granted an undue priority and permanence.

Ruth has occupied a lot of our attention thus far because the shared ethos of sexual guilt and hatred in this family of men produces an image so familiar--as Esslin and Burkman put it, archetypal--that it requires considerable effort and care to be able to discuss this traditional male literary icon in systemic, nonmythical and nonsexist terms. After all, the readiness to 'digest' the woman through her identity as "whore" seems not to be limited to the fictional family. We saw, particularly in Esslin's commentary, how mainstream literary criticism works to reify the mythic process of identity construction on this issue.

It is now time to root these discussions of systemically produced identity in The Homecoming to their proper place. We have asserted throughout that the interrelational process in the play is a mimetic one, based on symmetrical desire and conflict. If this is the case, we should expect to find the pervasive influence of mimetic rivalry, which we suggested earlier was a major ingredient in Pinterian drama. And so while Ruth occupies a special

place both in the play and our discussion of it, we should also be able to find a symmetrical opponent/model for her whose own conflictual identities both motivate and mirror Ruth's own. Let us return to Pinter's text, and examine the mimetic relation which develops between her and Lenny. As we will see, the two quickly develop into a rivalrous dyad, and their double mediation takes precedence over their other relations. They generate a symmetrical escalation in antagonistic proposals and counterproposals which take precedence, in turn, over the family and the play, in the sense that their agon motivates both Ruth's development into the Max-sanctioned role of family whore and house-keeper, and then her and Lenny's escalation beyond what is "adaptable" to the old man's obsolete mythical framework.

We have already mentioned briefly how the two newcomers wage a subtle contest for dominance and subservience in their initial scene in the London home. To fully appreciate the mood and effect of this exchange, we must first recall what precedes it, namely, the extravagant brutality of the Londoners, with their vicious insults and death threats. The audience is just beginning to digest this family's extraordinary behaviour in the play's first blackout when the lights go up to a dim night-time setting, and a quiet, genteel, in every way nice-looking couple

enter this lair unannounced, seemingly in possession of some dangerously inappropriate and naive impressions of their hosts. The immediate audience effect is, of course, the perception of a comic/horrific disparity between these two groups, between what the newcomers know, and what we know as informed spectators. "Well, the key worked," says the "well-dressed" husband (p.35). With Teddy's first words, the playwright creates a tension between him and his family. Teddy is connected to the house, but only tenuously, and the exact terms of his association and knowledge of his family are still very unclear. He should know better, we wonder, as he delivers an assessment of his own family which is both humorous and suspenseful in its utter incongruence:

> They're very warm people, really. Very warm. They're my family. They're not ogres (p.39).

The victimology underlying their appearance seems, at first, clear enough; these folks are in trouble, we know it, and they don't. We know, as we are meant to, that the Londoners are very much indeed like "ogres." However, by the time the audience adjusts to their new position and to this source of tension, it all begins to change, subtly. As we observe Ruth's efforts to leave, Teddy's unrelenting efforts to install his wife in the house on some very specific terms, and his distressed knuckle-chewing reaction

when she frustrates his requisites, we gradually learn that the couple must share, in some way, in our knowledge.

Teddy's stipulations for his wife follow a pattern. His repeated objective that they greet the family together in the morning (p.37), his failure to mention her at all to the lurking nocturnal Lenny (pp. 41-43), and his extreme distress (in fact, his strongest display of emotion in the play) when Max greets her in the morning according to the family's mythical role of the "slut" (pp. 57-58), are all representative of his efforts to safeguard Ruth as his own noncontestable possession, a nonparticipant in the family's voracious system of antagonistic desire. Ruth, in turn, signals early on in the play that she will not be controlled by her husband. She reverses roles and usurps her husband's status when she announces her need for "a breath of air," appropriates the London house-key and ushers him off to the bedroom upstairs where he had sought to install her. Their exchange ends with the kind of gentle behaviour which we initially expected of them: "He puts his arms on her shoulders and kisses her. They look at each other, briefly. She smiles." When she exits, however, Teddy silently discloses his extreme anxiety as he "goes to the window, peers out after her, half turns from the window, stands, suddenly chews his knuckles" (p.40).

The disparity between the newcomers and the Londoners diminishes. Of course, Ruth and Teddy do not traffic in the family's overt violence, but as we see them wage their subtle conflicts, then turn to one another and disingenuously traffic in the forms of civility and affection, they begin to acquire their own distinctive air of menace.

After Teddy and Lenny have their late-night encounter and part ways, agreeing to see one another again in the morning, Lenny exits with his brother and then promptly returns to the room, seemingly to wait for Ruth. She enters, and Lenny is on the offensive immediately, seeking to establish a sexual dimension to their meeting. When Ruth refuses an "aperatif," he responds:

> I'm glad you said that. We haven't got a drink in the house. Mind you, I'd soon get some in, if we had a party or something like that. Some kind of celebration... you know.
>
> Pause.
>
> You must be connected to my brother in some way. The one who's been abroad.
>
> RUTH:
>
> I'm his wife.
>
> LENNY:
>
> Eh listen, I wonder if you can advise me. I've been having a bit of a rough time with this clock (p.44).

Lenny's reply witholds conversational ratification of her statement regarding her married status; it's as if the fact simply doesn't exist. This is a tactic which Lenny

and Max employ quite frequently when it comes to the issue of Ruth and Teddy's marriage. And as time passes, and as new conflictual groupings form, Ruth, then Teddy, will come around to this view.

Lenny decides that she "could do with" a glass of water and gives it to her. As we see in his following narratives of violence against women, where in one case he "decided" that a woman he describes is "diseased," and so should be beaten or killed, he regards his power to decide things for people, for women, as an apt expression of his superiority. Lenny again refuses to register any legitimacy about her marriage, asking her, "you sort of live with him over there do you?" He then raises the initial issue which was at stake in Ruth and Teddy's scene: the violence which she is sure to encounter in this household. He tells her, as did Teddy, that "the old man'll be pleased to see you," but we see by his challenging reply to Ruth's undaunted reaction that, again, the mutually-understood reality is quite different from these nominal assurances of family bonds and dues:

> LENNY:
> Oh, you went to Italy first, did you? And then he brought you over here to meet the family, did he? Well, the old man'll be pleased to see you, I can tell you.
>
> RUTH:
> Good

LENNY:
What did you say?
RUTH:
Good (p.45)

Lenny proposes that he touch her, and relates his first narrative of violence against women when she asks "Why?" This is not a non sequitur, Lenny is answering Ruth's question. Just as he decided the woman was "diseased," here he decides that he can touch her, he will touch her, because he intends to express his supremacist self-ideal through the medium of sexual victimization. He attempts to move certain items--and potential weapons for self-defense--away from Ruth. Lenny's hegemony over her body and will is extensive, and some from of attack seems imminent.

It is here where Ruth acts, and for the first time, reverses the lines of oppression in their exchange. In this first 'counterattack', it is interesting how Ruth is careful to respond in a way which is compatable with an existing conflictual mythology. She refers to him as "Leonard," which he objects to, because it is "the name my mother gave me" (p.49). Is it? Perhaps, but it might well be that Ruth and Lenny are here conspiring to create a rather basic set of conflictual identities. Having noted Lenny's avid interest in dominating women, Ruth responds to him through the identity of the Mother, which is the fundamental "archetype" of female power and domination of

the helpless male, as Esslin noted. Viewed in this perspective, Lenny's counterresponse is a partial ratification and antagonistic modification of her rivalrous identity, reversing the violence inherent in the Mother/Son configuration. 'Yes', he seems to be telling her, 'you are in this respect like the Mother, but Leonard is now Lenny, who despises the Mother, and through her, you and all women'.

The glass of water which was initially an agent, an "object," of Lenny's bid for superiority now becomes an item in a symmetrical dispute. Ruth now decides she wants to keep the glass, indeed, it becomes the concretized expression of her mastery over him. Intriguingly, Ruth has moved on from her initial Mother role to usurp Lenny's own antagonistic position, and in her hands the glass carries the same element of sexualized threat which she had earlier endured:

LENNY:
Just give me the glass.
RUTH:
No.
Pause
LENNY:
I'll take it, then.
RUTH:
If you take the glass... I'll take you.
Pause (p.50)

With Ruth on the offensive, or more specifically, on his offensive, Lenny suddenly wants nothing to do with the

kind of "proposals" he had initiated. He retreats, and Ruth completes her first agon with him by joyfully usurping the status of sexual oppressor and victor. A very important process begins here, as well. Having confronted Lenny with her maddening opposition and object-usurpation, she begins to evolve, in his eyes, away from her initial role as Teddy's "object" to become a fully-fledged rival in her own right, and one who is infinitely more desirable than the rather lame and cringing Teddy.

Ruth next moves to establish herself in the family's system of antagonistic desire early in Act Two. In a move which emphasizes the essential unity of all systemic conflict-roles, Ruth's restatement of her sexualized identity comes on the heels of a failed dyad between Lenny and Teddy, where her husband, characteristically, fails to hold up his end of dispute. For Lenny, Teddy's Phd. in philosophy is a principal conflict-object, at least as long as he remains interested in his uninspiring brother. However, Teddy consistently refuses the offer to do battle on this issue until his final denunciation of them (which States placed so much importance upon), which really comes as a part of his surrender of Ruth to them, as a kind of covering retreat. So with his reluctance to pick up the 'philosophical' issue, Ruth smoothly slips herself into her husband's vacated oppositional space, grasping the extended

conflict-object and aptly melding it to the features of her own rivalrous identity. She interrupts the 'philosophical' debate to counter Lenny on his comically crude and banal discourse, stemming, it seems, from the fleetingest encounter with Platonism. She cautions them:

> 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 (pp. 68-69).

In the "Silence" which follows this tantalizing offer of herself to the family's oppressive desires, Ruth issues a series of statements which, while among the most cryptic in the play, also make clear her rejection of life with Teddy back at his university. Of America, she says:

> It's all rock. And sand. It stretches... so far... everywhere you look. And there's lots of insects there.
> Pause
> And there's lots of insects there (p.69).

Immediately following this, a distressed, but still suppressed, Teddy moves into action. His first words to her are, "I think we'll go back. Mmnn?" But it is now she who wishes to stay, and the two conduct a lengthy exchange about what it is that Teddy now finds so displeasing. He flits across a number of reasons for his sudden urge to

abort their stay which are plainly disingenuous. When he seeks to use their "lovely" trip to Venice as proof of his desirability as a companion, Ruth responds with a rebuke which is especially significant, from a mimetic point of view. Either, when Ruth had mentioned their trip to Venice to Lenny, he'd retorted in the following way:

> LENNY:
> Where'd you go in Italy?
> RUTH:
> Venice.
> LENNY:
> Not dear old Venice? Eh? That's funny. You know, I've always had a feeling that if I'd been a soldier in the last war--say in the Italian campaign--I'd probably have found myself in Venice (pp. 45-46).

Now, as she seeks to demonstrate her superiority to her husband's rather pathetic efforts to impress her, she clearly appropriates her rival's conflictual tactics:

> TEDDY:
> You liked Venice, didn't you? It was lovely, wasn't it? You had a good week. I mean... I took you there. I can speak Italian.
> RUTH:
> But if I'd been a nurse in the Italian campaign I would have been there before (p.71).

Ruth's response illustrates her rather obsessive interest in the violence which her rival 'possesses' and

exerts. Her careful preservation and revival of what was, after all, a dimunition of her own status attests to her evident belief that her rival's violence against her is somehow valuable, something to be appropriated and reflected.

Just as Ruth and Lenny's antagonistic dyad begins to separate itself from the family and Teddy, conflict between the rivals is abruptly suspended. Lenny sits down beside Ruth, and the two, alone, begin an exchange which is striking for its tentative confirming, gentle quality:

LENNY:
Well, the evenings are drawing in.
RUTH:
Yes, it's getting dark
Pause.
LENNY:
Winter'll soon be upon us. Time to renew one's wardrobe.
RUTH:
That's a good thing to do.
LENNY:
What?
Pause.
RUTH:
I always...
Pause.
Do you like clothes?
LENNY:
Oh, yes. Very fond of clothes.
Pause.
RUTH:
I'm fond...
Pause.
What do you think of my shoes?
LENNY:
They're very nice (p.72).

Ruth disagrees for the first time in this exchange, replying that she can't get the shoes she wants in America, but this only further services the unspoken compact that there is something agreeable about their situation. When Ruth reveals that she was a "model," Lenny's newfound gentlemanliness is such that he seems to conclude she means as a models for "hats." She corrects him, reasserting the terms of their double mediation: "No... I was a model for the body. A photographic model for the body" (p.73). She goes on to describe her trips to the country where she and an unnamed figure "did our modelling." Her remembrance is striking in its hesitancy and innocence. The images are simple, dreamlike, mainly nonhuman and noninteractive: the white water tower seen from the train, the big house in the country, the lake, the trees, the path stones. The atmosphere is one of restfulness, and a certain freedom. She concludes her remembrance with this scene:

> Just before we went to America I went down there. I walked from the station to the gate and then I walked up the drive. There were lights on... I stood in the drive... the house was very light (pp.73-74).

I believe that Ruth's remarks here, and the hesitant exchange between her and Lenny, reveal the basis of desire beneath mimetic violence which Girard describes in detail in Deceit, Desire and the Novel. The exchange between Ruth and Lenny, which began as a tentative exploration of the implicit mutuality between these two erstwhile rivals, now

culminates in this tender revelation of the spiritual aspect beneath her desires and brutalized self-image. Tabachnick and Baker write that in this disclosure Ruth reveals how she "yearns... for a better world where she is treated with dignity and nobility."[44] If it seems incongruous for her to "yearn" for such things while acting in the way she does, it is only because one has lost sight of the logic of mediated desire. At the heart of all desire and rivalry is the desire for plenitude and spiritual peace, however contradictory this may seem alongside its destructive, tyrannical expression.

The tenderness and honesty of this truce between antagonists does not last much longer. After Lenny gallantly asks her to dance and they begin kissing, the sexual conflict-object quickly provides a path back to dominance and subservience. Max and Joey enter and watch, and Joey proclaims Ruth's identity as a "tart" (p. 79). Lenny hands her over to his younger brother, who takes her to the sofa, and "lies heavily on her." She submits, silently. They all watch. Lenny caresses her hair. Max, buoyed by her seeming acquiesence to his needs, now voices his praises for her as "a woman of quality" (p. 76). As Ruth and Lenny continue with their strategies for victimization, the eager family here imagines that they will be able to reap the collateral benefits.

Then, again, Ruth acts. She "suddenly pushes Joey away" and "stands up" (p. 76). She demands food and drink, coldly orders the family around, and belittles their comically inept efforts to satisfy her wishes. Once more, Ruth submits to her rival's conception of her as a sexual victim, and then acts to reverse the imbalance of status accorded to her through the object of sexuality. We begin to discern the pattern in their interaction, one which is consistent with what Girard identifies as the logic of mimetic rivalry and alternation. As we discussed earlier on, the mediated subject perceives the model's opposition, and hence, oppression, of desires as a value-signifying act. In Violence and Sacred, Girard explains how this produces in the mimetic rival a masochistic bias. Though the subject's ultimate ideal remains supremacy and autonomy, suffering the rival's violence is an intoxicating and highly-motivating experience, as it connects the subject back to this 'primal' experience of object-denial, assuring her/him that the mediated pathway to 'completeness' is the correct one.[44]

After Ruth and the family inhabit this latest configuration of dominance and subservience, and Teddy, pressed by his wife's needling, delivers his self-exoneration of "intellectual equilibrium," Joey reenters and we learn that he has been upstairs with Ruth

for the last two hours. She sends him down in a highly volatile condition--confused, sexually-frustrated, very enamoured with her, prone to anger--and he is a signal to Lenny of her growing threat and power. When Max--acting on the assumption that her 'adaptability' is still safeguarded--suggests that the Londoners "keep" her, it is Lenny who raises the question, "where's the money going to come from" (p. 86). Max admonishes him for "concentrating too much on the economic considerations," but then Lenny, somewhat expectedly, arrives at a solution to his query which adds to the stakes in his ongoing project of constructing her as sexually sinful and vulnerable. His latest elaboration is his idea of literally setting Ruth up as a prostitute for the family. Joey objects, but Max--mindful, too, of the "economic considerations"--agrees with his son's plan, provided Ruth has enough time and energy left to tend to what he imagines are Ruth's domestic and sexual "obligations" at home. Teddy, in his ineffectual way, attempts to reason with both his family and himself. When Max asks him if he thinks Ruth wants more children, he smiles, and repeats his assertion that "[t]he best thing for her is to come home with me, Dad. Really. We're married, you know" (p. 86). As with Ruth's statements to Lenny early on, Max promptly disregards this utterance and continues eagerly with his plans. Later, when Lenny at last forces Teddy to confront the issue of

his wife's infidelity, he responds with this hollow rationalization: "It was just love play... I suppose... that's all I suppose it was" (p.89). By the time Ruth reenters downstairs, Teddy has sufficiently retreated to the lofty confines of his "intellectual equilibrium" to be able to 'pop' the question of his family's offer to Ruth, although significantly, he does so in a speech broken by the ellipses which Pinter commonly uses to connote emotional distress or confusion on the part of the speaker:

> Ruth... the family have invited you to stay, for a little while longer. As a... as a kind of guest. If you like the idea I don't mind. We can manage very easily at home... until you come back (p.91).

Again expectedly, Ruth agrees to the offer. She seems to sense in this latest proposal an opportunity to increase her hold on Lenny, and on this account she is unmistakeably correct. For as soon as her and Lenny begin what could be termed their "stichomythic" dispute over the terms of her tenure on Greek street, it is clear how this latest escalation will now be made to work to her advantage. Once more, Lenny's desire to punish and oppress her is used, in turn, to punish and oppress him. (It is interesting, too, how well they can sublimate their antagonism in the lexicons of law and commerce.) Each of Lenny's conditions are rebuffed and replaced by her symmetrically opposed, escalated demands. And at last, when a final "workable arrangement" is arrived at, Lenny's initial object-terms

seem far away indeed. From a proposal to have Ruth work as a prostitute a few hours a night as well as service the family domestically and sexually--a scenario which is decidedly disadvantageous for her--she succeeds in negotiating conditions for herself which are, I think, intended to be comical in their scope and grandeur. Ruth concludes her negotiations with "a flat with three rooms and a bath room," a "personal maid," a complete wardrobe and everything she needs which is, she assures them, "an awful lot," as well as a sophisticated legal contract (pp. 92-93).

Why does Lenny agree to all of this? What Ruth demands and receives seems far different from the spirit of victimization in Lenny's initial proposal. There is, indeed, the question of whether he or the family can even afford to maintain Ruth under these conditions. The original rationale that she will simply "bring in a little" money seems to have fallen by the wayside. We find, again, that the various 'object-truths' of the rivalry are secondary to the rivals' need for continued, escalating conflict.

Teddy leaves for home, and the remaining characters begin the final exchange in the play. Max, who can "smell" treachery in a female (horse or human), becomes anxious

over Ruth's cool, supreme behaviour. He has no sense of Lenny's part in the outstripping of his authority and mythical structure--he still speaks of them as "us", as if they were uniformly disadvantaged by Ruth's resistance--but it finally dawns on him that she will not be "adaptable" to his needs. Max doesn't understand the exact nature of Ruth's goal, but he guesses that it doesn't include him, at least in any role he cares to play.

Max reacts very differently to Ruth's 'treachery' than does Lenny. The old man's previous victory was collateral and temporary; outside of the ebb and flow of value-signifying violence between rivals, the period where he could benefit from Ruth and Lenny's symmetrical opposition has passed. Perhaps Max once shared in a similar arrangement with Jessie, there is a lot in the play which could support such an hypothesis, but now he is eclipsed by their rivalrous dyad and is draining, visibly, of his borrowed vitality:

> He begins to groan, clutches his stick, falls to his knees by the side of her chair. His groaning stops. His body straightens. He look at her, still kneeling.
>
> I'm not an old man (p.97).

The play's final tableau is very revealing. Max is on his knees, begging, issuing impotent demands. Joey has his head on Ruth's lap and she strokes him gently, like a pet.

Joey seems unaware of what is happening, as he should be; it is really quite beyond his powers of comprehension. What of Lenny? Pinter reserves the last stage direction in the play for him: "LENNY stands, watching" (p.98).

Watching, and no doubt planning for the next installment. This final tension between the two rivals helps to illustrate a point which Hinchliffe first raises in his comment on the inconclusiveness of Ruth's identity as "whore". It appears that while certain lesser characters have had their identities more or less determined in the violent wake of Ruth and Lenny's dyad, there is clearly no conclusion in the ongoing, upwardly spiraling fascination between Ruth and Lenny.

The Pinter Problem argues that, in coming "home to themselves," Ruth and Lenny (along with the other characters) seek to impose social structures on one another which are designed to "embody a particular concept of the nature of the 'home' and help it to endure" (emphasis added).[47] Yet Quigley admits that "the ending of the play is of uncertain value," and notes, as a "final irony," that "if the London family is confronted once more by the power of a Jessie-figure, so, too, is that Jessie-figure confronted once more by the power of a London family."[48]

The Pinter Problem's critical schema requires it to classify Lenny's rivalrous power as "family" power, but the above observation nevertheless calls to light a factor in Ruth's identities which is highly significant--more than a parting incidental "irony"--as it accurately characterizes how the rivals' systemic identities are designed to sustain nothing other than the promise of further and greater symmetrical conflict.

Austin Quigley's reference to Ruth as a "Jessie-figure" also raises a specific aspect of identity-construction in The Homecoming which has not received the appropriate attention in our discussion thus far. We have attempted to present an "antimythical" perspective on conflict and victimization in the play, so disputing the kinds of rituals and legends which associate Ruth, and before her, Jessie, to some singular mythic guilt. But given the prominence of this mythic association between the two women in the play and in criticism, perhaps we are guilty of not addressing the question of Jessie's family-mediated relation to Ruth in clear enough terms. Let us examine the social significance of the late mother's image in the play.

Much is made of the family's testimony that Jessie was a "whore." Max's statements (and isn't he right about Ruth?) form the major part of this particular

guilt-theory. He frequently refers to her as a "slut or "whore," and further adds to this impression when he claims that it was Jessie who supplied this family of barbarians with "all the morality they know" (p.62). Sam, too, is said to add to the evidence when he blurts out his disclosure that "MacGregor had Jessie in the back of my cab" (p.94), although there is no indication that Jessie acted professionally (or even acted?) in this incident. Yes, we see that the old man expresses much bitterness towards his late wife's purported treachery, but he also holds her in tremendous esteem, in alternate moments, for her "quality" and purity. The widespread critical conclusion which seems to be drawn from The Homecoming is that inasmuch as the play ends with Max's 'betrayal' by a "Jessie-figure," with a concomitant reversion to his darker conception of women, we can therefore rely on this as a true version of past, and indeed, present events. However, having observed that Max's recollection of Jessie varies considerbly according to whether he happens to be pleased or displeased, is it fair to draw from his final defeat an objective history of women in the family, and therefore, Ruth's 'predetermined' mythical role?

This family--like any family--abounds in such mythologies of good and evil, excellence and failure. Because such tales are oral histories and often concern the

deceased, we're perhaps more accustomed to thinking of them as mythological constructs than the 'present-day' reality of Pinterian interaction in The Homecoming and so it is somewhat easier to pierce the veil of ritual and legend.

Max tells us that he was the best horse trainer in London, "the one they used to call for" before a big race, because he could look into the eyes of "unreliable" female horses and judge their character (p.26). All of this seems so clearly geared towards current tensions rather than historical truth. He and the legendary MacGregor "were the two worst hated men in the West End of London," and universally feared (p.24). MacGregor was also both a top-notch driver and butcher, according to whether Max is savaging his brother Sam on, respectively, his driving or butchery. In his other life as a butcher, Max tells us, he entered into business negotiations with some butchers with "continental connections" which he alternately describes as a "top class group" and "a bunch of criminals like everyone else" (p.63). Max's abrupt reversal in his narrative is amusing, but it is also representative of the kind of mythical pattern which Max maintains throughout, particularly when he is speaking of his dead wife. The butchers are a "top class group" when Max is describing the utopic version of his happy, loving family. Yet when Ruth's query of what happened to his continental

butcher-fortune brings him back to the bitter reality of the present day, they become a "bunch of criminals," and the cigar he is smoking -- which he earlier described as "first rate" -- is now judged as "lousy" (p.63).

In an identical fashion, Jessie's qualities undergo a series of reformulations. Early on in the play, Max appears to be somewhat ambivalent in his recollection of his wife:

> Mind you, she wasn't such a bad woman. Even though it made me sick just to look at her rotten stinking face, she wasn't such a bad bitch. I gave her the best bleeding years of my life, anyway (p.25).

When Teddy arrives in the morning with his wife, unannounced, Max's displeasure over being made the "laughing stock" leads him to deliver his horrid denunciations of Ruth as a "slut" in which Jessie, not incidentally, receives a similar treatment (p.58). After the cathartic punch-up sequence, and the 'near-cuddle' at the end of Act One, the second act begins with the three men, sated after lunch, drinking coffee and lighting their cigars. Max is in fine spirits, and it shows in his recollection of Jessie, who is now "a woman... with a will of iron, a heart of gold and a mind" (p. 62). When the spell is broken by Ruth's reminder of his current lot,

Max's family myth twists around completely, and Jessie reverts to her image as "slutbitch" (p.63).

Then, from the point of view of Max, a wonderous thing occurs. Ruth appears to offer herself as the 'sacrificial whore', and as Burkman comments, this promise of sexual exploitation of the woman has an invigourating effect on the old man.[49] Ruth and her dead counterpart undergo yet another transformation. With (he imagines) Ruth's capitulation firmly in his grasp, Max's largesse leads him to again grant the females the highest praise and respect:

> Listen. I'll tell you something. Since poor Jessie died, eh, Sam? We haven't had a woman in the house. Not one. Inside this house. And I'll tell you why. Because their mother's image was so dear any other woman and would have... tarnished it. But you... Ruth... you're not only lovely and beautiful, but you're kith. You're kin. You belong here (p.91).

Despite the association forged between the two women by virtue of their unique, stigmatized identity in this family of men, and despite the kind of ritual-forms which we can construct, after the fact, around a) Ruth's (inconclusive) habitation in the identity of prostitute, and b) Jessie's corresponding mythical image, the most striking aspect of the family's sexually-mediated antipathy towards the late mother is in its use a social mechanism in the present. The mythical role of the female in the play in fact mirrors

a rather commonplace mythical usage of women in society. When Max is happy and fulfilled, women are good and have their nuturing, purifying place in the family. When there is any kind of crisis, however, women become a principle scapegoat, and are instantly transformed into their evil, pernicious incarnations.

Perhaps the best way to leave this discussion of the mother-myth is to compare it with Max's evocation of his father. The references to him are unfailingly laudatory, and even Lenny does not seek to criticize this icon. Max's dispute with his brother brings the following declaration:

> Our father! I remember him. Don't worry. You kid yourself. He used to come over to me and look down at me. My old man did. He'd bend right over me, then he'd pick me up. I was only that big. Then he'd dandle me. Give me the bottle. Wipe me clean. Give me a smile. Pat me on the bum. Pass me around, pass from hand to hand. Toss me up in the air. Catch me coming down. I remember my father (p.35).

Of all the recollections we have discussed thus far, Max's remembrance of his father has a most unmistakeable mythical quality to it. It is at once undefined and devoted; none of the images have the ring of actual experience about them, yet Max is emphatic about the father's disembodied omnipotence. Max's oath that he "learned to carve a carcass" at his father's knee and "commemorate his name in blood" represents something

important about this family, I think. It is my belief that one justifiable light within which to view this family is as a somewhat problematicized partriarchy, whose alienation effect is produced in large part through its foregrounded victimization of women.

As Ruth and Lenny's rivalrous obsession spins off from the family conflict system like a new sun, furiously generating and consuming its own new myths, it carries with it the seed of the founding family system. We recall how it was Lenny who initiated conflict with Ruth through an assault which was both 'typically Lenny' and an outgrowth of the adversarial, misogynistic ethos of the father's family. With sexually-mediated antagonism at the heart of this new unit it seems certain that rivalry will continue to escalate along somewhat familiar lines. However, the exact nature of future systemic roles, and the final outcome of the dispute, remains unknown.

Given the futility and self-destructiveness of mediated desire, we can safely conclude that both the (momentarily) victorious Ruth and the (momentarily) deposed Lenny are destined for an ultimate defeat which is reciprocal and lasting. Here, again, is the bleakness of Pinter's vision. No one escapes the bonds of self-abusive desire in The Homecoming, least of all Teddy, whose flight from

imitative conflict should in no way be interpreted as any kind of mastery over it, despite his declarations to that effect. Teddy always feels the power and value of the Other's violence, his refusal to meet it head on stems from strategic considerations, and from a sense of dread and inadequacy over his capacity to successfully match his family's violence.

Teddy's subjugation to the basic principles of mediated value and desire at last explains the puzzling question of why Teddy willingly brings his wife into this voracious domain if, as we are claiming, he does not intend to "casually" pass possession of her over to his family. It is with the attractive, intelligent Ruth as his triangular possession that he seeks to gain status in the eyes of the others. And if he fails to properly do battle for her, if he refuses to follow to route by which mimetic rivals pursue and augment their mediated desires, it is because Teddy has taken refuge in the identity which Girard describes as the mediated subject's askesis:

> The two partners in mediation copy one and the same desire; therefore this desire cannot suggest anything to one without suggesting it to the other as well. The dissimulation has to be perfect because the mediator's perpicacity is unlimited.... The hypocrite must resist every temptation because they all lie open to the gaze of the god. The model-disciple discerns the slightest movements of his disciple-model.[50]

Teddy's hypocrisy is revealingly imperfect. We see enough of his distress over the loss of his wife to marvel at the disingenuousness of the final "ironic" posture which he adopts and clings to with all the dignity he can muster. Yet given the nature of his family, Teddy's askesis--his refusal to display his urgent desire to keep his wife so that he may indeed keep his wife--is not altogether the wrong approach. Lenny positively lurks after Teddy for most of the play, ever eager to do battle with him over, say, the object-terms of his "philosophical" possession. Any effort by Teddy to vigorously defend his wife from his brother's encroachment would only add to Lenny's appetite for her. Teddy planned to use his wife to passively demonstrate his independence and superiority through askesis, and in this way validate himself according to the family identity-system which still has a hold on his heart and mind. Ruth was in for something of a rough time in this household, but her welfare is not Teddy's greatest concern, and somehow he hoped to manage the situation of his wife in this house through his 'coolness' and new-world respectability which he imagined would protect both him and her. What Teddy did not anticipate, what no one in the family anticipated, is Ruth's aptitude for rivalrous conflict.

When all of Teddy's attempts to rescue his wife and self-image fail, he is left to declare the empty triumphalism of his "intellectual equilibrium," and then respond to Lenny's massive incursion against his object-domain through the comically pathetic thievery of Lenny's "cheese roll." Both of the brothers know very well who has lost and who has won. When Lenny reacts to Teddy's action with a highly ironic "shock" at such a "vindictive" and "naked" act (p. 80), their exchange comes closer than ever to recognizing what has transpired. Lenny ironically rebukes his brother for his lack of family feeling and sharing:

> [...] when you at length return to us, we do expect a bit of grace, a bit of je ne sai quoi, a bit of generosity in mind, a bit of liberality of spirit, to reassure us. We do expect that. But do we get it? Have we got it? Is that what you've given us?
>
> Pause.
>
> TEDDY:
>
> Yes (p. 81).

Teddy has ended up having to give them Ruth; his cowardice, and the stifled, inward perspective of askesis, stops his from expressing his displeasure any more overtly. When Lenny admonishes his brother for having grown "a bit sulky" and "inner," and Burkman comments on Teddy's emotional deadness, they are referring in part to his refusal to openly desire.

Max and Teddy are the obvious 'losers': of all the major characters for we see them conclusively humiliated and defeated. Teddy goes home to his three children, his swimming pool, his volume-lined university office, but we know that his tailored identity as the intellectually secure, superior family member has been destroyed. Max's defeat is the most explicit: once the predominant male in the family, and the benefactor of any mediated value which was to be gained through the victimization of women or patriarchal violence in general, Ruth and Lenny's joint eclipse of his conflict-world ruthlessly illustrates that he is indeed an "old man," at the end of his power.

In this respect, Burkman's identification of the ritual death and birth of the old and new god in Ruth's pivotal influence on the family structure is not without justification. Again, the only area of disagreement between our perspective and The Dramatic World of Harold Pinter: Its Basis in Ritual is on the issue of symmetry vs. myth. Burkman portrays the epoch-making quality of the play's conclusion as a transition from old to new order, which implies a crystallized, complementary mythical structure. We, too, see a generational transition between old and new, but it is change from old to new systems of conflict which Ruth, in part, engineers. One myth-making system is eclipsed by another, but this new form is

presented to us by Pinter in a decidedly anti-mythical light, in that it is not yet conclusive, and is seen to derive its existence from a symmetrical dispute between mimetic rivals.

Which brings us back, again, to the nominal 'winners' in the play, Ruth and Lenny. As we've seen, efforts to characterize the woman's final identity as "whore" as intrinsic and conclusive fail to account for the central role played by the characters' antagonistic relational system in the production of all roles. As well, such efforts invariably come up against the fact that at the end of the play the rivals' dyad appears poised to generate even newer desires and identities. Furthermore, the "domestic and extra-domestic" schema offered in The Pinter Problem fails to be upheld even by Quigley's own textual observations. Once the characters' interrelational process is presented by The Pinter Problem as a "compromise" to confirm various "inner needs," the delineation of home and professional ambitions does indeed seem a likely route to follow. But then Quigley's illustration of the adversarial unity of all relations refutes this option, and brings the focus back to an individual violence which is preeminent and epidemic.

David Savran's insight into the symmetrical nature of desire and identity in Pinter's drama is borne out by what we have observed in The Homecoming. The contest in Old Times to construct alternating antagonistic 'remembrances' of the past has its parallel in the development of conflictual identities in the present in The Homecoming, where the physical, immediate issue of sexual dominance and subservience becomes the object-setting for mimetic opposition. Just as Savran observes the playwright's refusal to rescue his characters from their slide into self-obliteration in his analysis, here we find a similar bleakness regarding the characters' potentialities in The Homecoming. What can we conclude from this?

To return to the points we outlined earlier concerning the inapplicability of Christian symbolism and experience to the Pinterian discourse, let us answer this question by offering one further proposition regarding the relationship between Pinter's characters' unmitigated subjugation to mimetic desire and the apparent salvation of the novelistic hero. From a specifically Jewish point of view, we suggested that the transcendence of Christian symbolism in culture was more a product of its hegemony and privilege than any true universality of Christian experience as Girard and Savran seemed to be suggesting. But with such a critique of Christianity's supercessionism, the following

corollary seems clear: from the point of view of Pinterian drama, shaped as it is by Pinter's experience with a dominant, oppressive Christian culture, the playwright's refusal to offer his characters the spiritual and attitudinal salvation which is the unique privilege of the Christian hero is Pinter's last anti-mythical act. To offer the spiritual self-transformation of the Christian as a solution to the structural oppression and illegitimacy of the Jewish mediated subject would be a final surrender to mythological thinking, a refusal to recognize the interrelational reality of the ongoing, systematic delineation and 'value-chasm' between Jewish Self and Christian Other. Pinter's characters reflect this state of entrapment, and as Golick suggests, perhaps in doing so they are also embodying the alienation and despair that is "the common heritage of our twentieth century and the threatening world in which we live."[81] If so, this is of course a predicament which René Girard is fully aware of. He condemns the atheistic or existentialist "modern lucidity," with its refusal to recognize the true vertical Christian pathway out of false desire and despair.[82] Yet the "pride" and "askesis" of the modern rationalist, who rejects Christian transcendency in favour of his own scientific universality, his intellectual denial of all the myths and prejudices of his time and place, hardly reflects the position of the mediated Jewish subject, who must

constantly suffer the enduring power of myths, and whose anti-mythical realization in Christian culture will forever be secondary to the dominant myth and identity-making voice. If there is indeed a "universal" significance to Pinter's characters' unrelieved entrapment--which Girard would strongly dispute--this universality stems from a particular condition and experience which itself has no legitimacy, no voice, in Girardian theory. Ultimately, it is truly a subjective question, one of personal history and belief. Girard is clearly sincere in his faith in the universality of Christian experience: our rejection of resurrection and grace for the Jewish mediated subject would likely meet with a reaction ranging from polite 'acceptance', to strong disagreement, or indeed, sadness for the jew's failure to find within her/him us the basic human potentiality of Christian salvation. Of the three, the last response is the most galling, the most dangerous, and the most typical Christian response to the spirituality and collective experience of Jews. And it is to this aspect of the Christian supercessionism which I will address my last words. It is not the kind of statement which comes naturally to me, least of all in a thesis on, of all things, literary criticism, but the pervasive Christian spirituality of Girardian mimetic theory makes it necessary. Simply put, Girard has his opinion and as a Jew I have mine. And for all of Christianity's self-proclaimed

transcendence, let me assure everyone who cares to hear it that Jewish experience and suffering does not need the Christian's symbols and values for its meaning: we have our own meaning, and our own destiny. If Harold Pinter's dramatic vision appears rather bleak and unrewarding alongside the "novelistic" model, it is because the concept of Jewish salvation operates on a completely different 'time-scale'. Religious Jews believe that it is yet to be delivered; others, like myself, that it is yet to be made. Whatever the case, Pinter's vision of self-abusive desire and identity provides a 'snapshot' of a people in a time, place, and perhaps, an historical and spiritual process. In investigating mimetic structure in The Homecoming, we tried not to deny this distinctive experience and destiny, and in doing so, rescued ourselves from perpetuating the violence of Other.

Notes

Introduction

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The Homecoming

1. Esslin, p. 154.

2. Esslin, p. 46.

3. Esslin, p. 46.

4. Quigley, pp. 28-29.

5. Esslin, p. 47.

6. Esslin, p. 157.

7. Esslin, pp. 155-156.

8. Esslin, p. 156.

9. Hinchliffe, p. 126.

10. Esslin, p. 157.

11. Esslin, p. 159.

12. Esslin, p. 159.

13. Esslin, p. 160.

14. Esslin, p. 160.

15. Hinchliffe, p. 126.

16. Bert O. States, "Pinter's The Homecoming: The Shock of Nonrecognition," Hudson Review, XXI (Autumn 1968); rpt. in Pinter: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Arthur Ganz (Engleweed, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1972), p. 156.

17. States, p. 156.

18. States, p. 152.

19. States, p. 155.

20. States, p. 158.

21 States, p. 151.

22. States, p. 150.

23. States, p. 149.

24. Katherine H. Burkman, The Dramatic World of Harold Pinter: Its Basis in Ritual (Columbus: University of Ohio Press, 1971), p. 12.

25. Burkman, p. 108.

26. Burkman, pp. 113 and 137.

27. Burkman, p. 113.

28. Girard, Violence, p. 96.

29. Quigley, p. 7.

30. Burkman, pp. 136-139.

31. Quigley, p. 39.

32. Quigley, pp. 52-53.

33. Quigley, pp. 174-175.

34. Quigley, p. 177.

35. Quigley, p. 219.

36. Quigley, p. 176.

37. Quigley, pp. 219-220.

38. Quigley, p. 190.

39. Quigley, p. 196.

40. Quigley, P. 182.

41. Quigley, p. 182.

42. Quigley, P. 208.

43. Harold Pinter, "The Homecoming," in Plays: Three (London: Eyre Methuen, 1987), p. 59. All subsequent references to be noted parenthetically in the text.

44. Quigley, pp. 201-202.

45. Quigley, p. 202.

46. Girard, Violence, pp. 144-149.

47. Quigley, p. 175.

48. Quigley, p. 225.

49. Burkman, p. 113.

50. Girard, Deceit, p. 153.

51. Golick, p. 1.

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