

DOMINATION, SERVITUDE AND COMMODITY FETISHISM IN HAROLD PINTER'S *THE HOMECOMING*

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Abstract: The struggle for domination clearly persists in *The Homecoming* as it does in almost all of Pinter's works. Because of the vague atmosphere, enigmatic characters, and dark, tragicomic dialogue and action, a single decisive meaning for the play cannot be identified. Many character analyses have been carried out on the play, frequently focusing on Ruth and her decision at the end. Moreover, critics have sought to read the play in the light of psychoanalysis, centering on the characters' past and complexes. By adding a sociopolitical dimension to purely realistic or symbolic readings, this article attempts to analyze the relationships of domination and servitude between characters at the micro-level of the family structure through Marx's notions of fetishism in relations between individuals, and commodity fetishism as expounded by Slavoj Žižek. With the help of Žižek's ideas on ideology, a new layer of sociopolitical signification to the relationships held between characters is added, particularly that between Ruth and the men, which is seen as a parallel to the macro-level fetishized relationships in pre-capitalist societies and commodity fetishism in a capitalist one.

Keywords: *The Homecoming*, Harold Pinter, relations of domination and servitude, commodity fetishism, ideology, Žižek

Introduction

The Homecoming centers on the eldest son of the family, Teddy, paying a visit to his family and home in London with his wife whom they have never met. This introduction has been postponed for more than six years and is even delayed at the night that they arrive at home. After several struggles, chaotic and shocking conversations and happenings throughout the next day between all characters, Ruth agrees to a somewhat inexplicit contract to stay with the family and Teddy goes to return to their children and academic life in America.

In *Pinter A Study of His Plays* (1976), Martin Esslin presents two layers of readings for the play:

It is my conviction that *The Homecoming*, while being a poetic image of a basic human situation, can also stand up to the most meticulous examination as a piece of realistic theatre, and that, indeed, its achievement is the perfect fusion of extreme realism with the quality of an archetypal dream image of wish fulfilment. (149)

He elaborates on both levels starting with the realistic one. He argues that in their youth, Max and Mac were working as pimps, Sam may have also been the driver for them. Jessie may have been a prostitute (since Lenny asks about his conception and Max is enraged). Moreover, Ruth might have been “a prostitute or near-prostitute” (Esslin 151) before her new life. In this regard, they become accountable to behave as they do in the play. However, a realistic reading of the play is very problematic since all of the suggestions come with a condition: if that is the situation. This is because the past remains ambiguous even when characters talk of it as they just reproduce narratives of the experiences which do not provide solid information. As Anita R. Osherow points out similarly, there is no hard proof for definite images of what they may have been in the past as we merely come to know of it through the tales of the characters themselves. In an article centering on Ruth’s character, Penelope Prentice questions the realistic readings of Esslin and Quigley arguing they presuppose that the model for the body stands for being a “nude photographic model” or a “euphemism for prostitute” (Osherow 462). Hugo Bowles argues that the narrative of the characters are not in the traditional format of adding information to the overall plot. He addresses the sense of oddness in the stories told by characters suggesting the oddness to be “interactional”: “a mismatch between audience expectations of *the way stories are conventionally told* and the way the story is told on the stage” (Bowles p. 47). Moreover, analyzing several narratives by the characters, he points that for example through the way Max tells the story of his father’s deathbed and silences Sam, he asserts his “ownership of the family discourse” (Bowles 52). Comparing Lenny’s way of storytelling with Max’s, Bowles contends that “his stories are as self-aggrandizing as Max’s are but, unlike Max, he needs the stories to be taken seriously because they seem to be targeted at the new arrivals in the house” (Bowles 54).

On another level, Esslin suggests that the play can be a “metaphor of human desires and aspirations, a myth, a dream image, a projection of archetypal fears and wishes” (Esslin 153). In light of psychoanalysis,

he explores the play like a dream of the characters' oedipal desires. The sons take back their mother young and beautiful as a sexual partner and the father is defeated on his knees on the ground. Although this analysis of the latent content of the dream may be congruent in terms of psychological ground, it ignores the form of the dream or dream-work itself. Borrowing Habermas's formula, Slavoj Žižek maintains that the structure of interpreting dreams is always triple. These elements include "the manifest dream-text, the latent dream-content or thought and the unconscious desire articulated in a dream" (Žižek 6). Therefore, the real subject matter of the dream or the unconscious desire is elaborated in the form of the dream or dream-work.

One of the most crucial and puzzling aspects of the play remains the motive for Ruth's decision. Osherow explores the role of woman in the play arguing that Ruth, regardless of the role she takes, "is placed in a position of dominance at the center of power, establishing her command and reigning in full control of the situation at the end of the play" (423). At the end, she is "both victim and victimizer" (Osherow 431). By explaining the significance of the knocked down wall on the set, she proposes that the family is in search of filling the role of Jessie, the mother, and the lack of her presence determines the action of the play. Furthermore, this points out how Max's dual role as mother-father figure "has made Max devoid of any definable sexual identity" (Osherow 425). When Max learns that Ruth is a mother, he is assured that her presence will help him regain his power and retain "an emasculated household" (Osherow 427).

Highlighting the parallel myths and biblical stories in the play, Katherine H. Burkman suggests, "civilization is seen at its most cynical when Ruth closes the deal on her new relationship with the "contract ritual" of modern life," which is in opposition with the "primitive ritual movement" in the content of the contract (Burkman 111). She asserts that thus parallel to the opposition, Ruth is "both victim and victor" in a combined role of "mother, wife, and whore". By suggesting the mixed role, Burkman contends that it is not clear "who will be most exploited in the new family arrangements" (21). The "contract ritual" that she points to could imply a political side to the new situation she is put. This "contract" will be further discussed in light of commodity fetishism in this article.

In an essay, Austin Quigley pinpoints the political side of Pinter's plays by discussing that the issues are not raised from defined "institutional base" with a clear political program, rather it requires the audience "to explore the complexities of local social exchange in terms of local social contracts, both those invoked by the characters and those

emerging from their interaction” (Quigley p. 15). In this respect, he notes the “contractual” relationship between the characters which often combines personal, family, and professional concerns, for example in *The Lover*, *Tea Party*, *The Homecoming*, *The Dwarfs*, and *A Dumb Waiter*. In addition, he argues that these “abstract” relations between “the governing and governed” leads to “local community organisation” instead of “larger social governance” (Quigley 17). However, by drawing a parallel connection between the social contracts in micro-level and macro-level, one could argue that there may be resemblances between the two orders which may have affected Pinter’s writing in his political unconscious. The small-scale representation of social contracts in Pinter could be aligned with larger context ideological contracts. Additionally, it should be highlighted that drawing a connection between Pinter’s local social space and a larger social system is not to reduce it to that mere link as interpretation proliferates in Pinter’s work.

Richard M. Coe suggests that in *The Homecoming*, “Ruth makes a choice which moves her from one situation to another and the dominance relations of the characters are modified accordingly” (489). Consequently, Coe proposes that there are three layers of communication between the characters: first, information transmission to produce a change; second, the layer for “successful conscious transmission of trivial information” (489); and third and the most important one, communication on the level of “relationship”. He argues that by refusing to let Lenny take her glass, Ruth “is concerned not with the *use-value* of the glass, but with its *exchange value* as a signifier of power” (Coe 489). Taking Gregory Bateson’s distinction between the report and command aspects of any communication, he notes that “in the bulk of human (as, for that matter, in all mammalian) communications we are more concerned with how people relate to us than with the truth-value of their information” (Coe 490). Thus the content or the message becomes subordinate to the context and form. Coe’s argument could be developed more in order to add a link with the relations of power in the shift from a feudal society to a capitalist one.

As suggested by Penelope Prentice “the struggle to win dominance over another... is also the primary means by which characters gain identity” (469). This points out a significant issue that in Lacanian sense of a master and slave relationship, the parties gain and define their identity in relation to another. The one who dominates can be the master only in case of determining one in the position of slave to him. Žižek suggests that Marx’s notion of fetishism of relations parallels both

this Lacanian Master and Slave relation and Hegelian Lordship and Bondage.

Commodity Fetishism

In *The Sublime Object of Ideology* first published in 1989, Žižek maintains that Marx adapted the notions in viewing the passage of a feudal society to a capitalist one. Parallel to Lacan's idea of mirror stage, Žižek quotes from Marx's *Capital*, "Man first sees and recognizes himself in other men." (19). As Lacan holds that after a child recognizes their self in the projected image in the mother or a mirror and then with the introduction of the symbolic order, the mother becomes the Other ((m)Other) whom the child now understands is not totally in their service and has desires of her own. This could indicate both a feeling of insufficiency and anxiety of losing domination with the "symbolic castration", something repeatedly evident in Max in *The Homecoming*. Žižek takes up the constructed or fictional quality of the big Other, the symbolic order, when he notes that being the object of the Other's gaze satisfies the subject as it reaffirms its existence and identity while it is itself based on the void of the ego and the lack in symbolic order. Furthermore, pointing out the Lacanian formula of fantasy with the barred subject "trapped by the Other", Žižek approaches the reality-structuring of ideological fantasy. He argues that "ideology is not a dreamlike illusion that we build to escape insupportable reality; in its basic dimension it is a fantasy-construction which serves as a support for our 'reality' itself: an 'illusion' which structures our effective, real social relations and thereby masks some insupportable, real, impossible kernel" (45). The Other is always there and the feeling of lack of a *jouissance* or the *objet petite a* being taken from the subject is attributed to the other. On a similar note, Žižek asserts that Marx continues the homology to commodities: "the other commodity (B) is an equivalent only in so far as A relates to it as to the form-of-appearance of its own value, only within this relationship" (Žižek 20). The example of Marx for "reflexive determination" is given again from *Capital* in the relation between a king and his subjects: "For instance, one man is king only because other men stand in the relation of subjects to him. They, on the contrary, imagine that they are subjects because he is king" (Žižek 20). This shows the fetishistic misrecognition which includes an inverse appearance for the participants in the social bond. As a result, the subjects do not realize that without them being in the role of subjects the king would not be a king; the misrecognition makes them think that "being-a-king were a natural property of the person of the king" (Žižek 20).

Žižek continues with the notion of commodity fetishism in capitalist societies, arguing that in capitalism “relations between men are definitely not ‘fetishized’; what we have here are relations between ‘free’ people, each following his or her egoistic interest” (21). In contrast with pre-capitalistic societies, in which natural production, “not production for the market”, predominates, in capitalism the form of interrelations between people “is not domination and servitude, but a *contract* between free people who are equal in the eyes of the law” (Žižek 21). He concludes that “it is as if the retreat of the Master in capitalism was only a *displacement*” (Žižek 22). Therefore, the place of fetishism shifts from inter-subjective relations to relations between things in the passage from feudalism to capitalism. In other words, as Žižek points out, it becomes disguised under the relations between commodities. Accordingly, prostitution allures both parties, namely Ruth and the men, and becomes a commodity that is fetishized. The very significant point lies here in that this shift could parallel Ruth’s decision when she accepts to stay, as they agree on a “contract” with a “capital investment” turning the fetishism of prostitution to between things rather than between the characters’ interrelations.

A Closer Look at *The Homecoming*

In the following, first, the struggle of dominance in the relations of the characters will be analyzed and then put to parallel application with Marx’s notions of fetishized relations between men or relations of domination and servitude (corresponding with feudal societies) and commodity fetishism (corresponding with capitalist societies), as elaborated by Žižek.

Before their arrival, the hostile environment of the house is established in the relation between Max, the fading patriarch father, and his two sons and brother. It should be noted that all the information Pinter gives us in the characters list is just their ages like his other plays. Lenny’s reaction “why don’t you shut up, you daft prat?” (Pinter 7) to the simple inquiry of Max is shocking to audience who are starting to guess their relation. Max is aware of his getting old and losing his traditional influence, yet he denies facing the reality and seeks to force his dominance by resorting to anecdotes of the past and projecting himself through his friend, Mac. He jumps from talking about Mac to remembering his wife with a pause. As considered by many critics, his oscillating stance and words for Jessie between angel/whore binary comes up throughout the play. Thus he is unsure of his desire for a woman figure which complicates his character. Yet his obsession with the woman figure, and the way he defines it, indicates the point that the

role he assigns to a woman and how he relates to that is fetishized which comes with a misrecognition.

Max's relation with all of the members of family is that of casting dominion which ironically rises from his lack of or losing domination. In every conversation he has with others, he turns it toward himself and twists it to belittle the other person finding "lacks" even unrelated to the topic. In this respect, Hugo Bowles scrutinizes the narratives Max incorporates in his conversations and argues that his purpose is self-aggrandizing and emphasizing his ownership of the family discourse. For example, when Sam talks of his being the best in his business as a chauffeur, Max tries to work on what he considers to be privileges, or in other words fetishizes, such as being youthful and having a wife or rather a woman figure in life and directs that to Sam in order to secure his role in power:

Max. It's funny you never got married, isn't it? A man with all your gifts.

Pause.

Isn't it? A man like you?

Sam. There's still time.

Max. Is there? (Pinter 14)

Nonetheless, Žižek comments on this supposed "distortion of reality" observable in Max's ideological behavior that gives it existence: Ideology is not simply a 'false consciousness', an illusory representation of reality, it is rather this reality itself which is already to be conceived as ideological – 'ideological' is a social reality whose very existence implies the non-knowledge of its participants as to its essence – that is, the social effectivity, the very production of which implies that the individuals 'do not know what they are doing'. 'Ideological' is not the false consciousness of a (social) being but this being itself so far as it is supported by 'false consciousness' (12, 13).

The family keeps up this struggle for domination until they meet Ruth who subtly comes to destabilize their ways. As they arrive at home, Ruth resists all of the suggestions Teddy offers despite that none seems forceful or abusive. Her cold, powerful, non-reactionary stance is in opposition with Max's who reacts immediately to any kind of threat to his role. Likewise, she keeps up this behavior when she meets Lenny, who has told anecdotes of his being harsh toward women to establish his dominion, in the famous struggle to take away her glass: "If you take the glass... I'll take you." (Pinter 34). Lenny's ideological position is

similar to that of Max's. Nonetheless, it should be noted that Lenny rationalizes his acts of domination such as saying that "it seems to be in the way of your glass" (Pinter 33) when he wants to take away the ashtray before the glass struggle. Even when his excuse is rejected by Ruth he seeks another and projects it to that as in "The glass was about to fall. Or the ashtray. I'm rather worried about the carpet" (Pinter 33). In this regard, Lenny's struggle of domination is undercover and unlike the stories he tells of the past not brutal. Additionally, as the tension intensifies between Ruth and Lenny, she becomes more intrusive as she suggests him to "Have a sip from my glass" and "Sit on my lap. Take long cool sip" (Pinter 34) or more extremely "Lie on the floor. Go on. I'll pour it down your throat" (Pinter 34). As a result, Lenny is baffled since his image of women, on whom he has always forced dominion, his ideological perception which makes up his reality is shattered and he withdraws quickly. Lenny's view is not obstructed by an ideological lens, rather it is Ruth that lends him her lenses. He feels a touch of the real situation not his misrecognized and fetishized one. He can only think of the sexual innuendos in Ruth's words and actions which do not seem congruent with her solid character. He then projects his bafflement by asking his father about the night of his conception. In this way he tries to recover the image of women he has always had by insinuating that Jessie was a prostitute. Accordingly, he resists defetishization of the role he defines in relation with women.

The same non-reactionary stance continues when Max meets Ruth and instantly labels her as a "dirty tart" or "pox-ridden slut". Similar to Lenny, his image of women, his ideological perception that enables him to define his reality, includes merely "whores" and he demands Joey to throw them out. He cracks when Joey blurts out "he's an old man" (Pinter 42); again his insecurity about losing his domination and getting old is stirred. She does not utter a single word about the offending phrases and his overreaction. Conversely, her mere presence destabilizes the relations between the men and a chaotic scene is drawn as Max hits Joey in the stomach and Sam with his stick and he himself collapses. In their relation, Ruth does not do anything yet; Max's endangered fetishized perception of a woman figure in the household and the way relations are rendered through it cause all the chaos. It could be argued that this non-verbal reaction is to avoid the symbolic order or reality governed or rather constructed through ideology. Shattering the order or dissolution of it would result in non-existence of reality when the reality of the ideological subject is constructed through ideology. Subsequently, he is calmed when he gets to know that Ruth is a mother and has three children which probably leads him to relate her

to Jessie and evokes her figure in his mind. As Anita R. Osherow suggests that they are in search of filling the role of Jessie, probably a new way opens up in front of Max's eyes in order to fill in the role of Jessie and relieve the situation and relation this time more dominantly. Therefore, his reality is again saved from disintegration.

In the beginning of Act Two after the family has had lunch, Max is rebuilding his past with Jessie through recounting his memories and his fetishistic view. He is reproducing the past leaving out unwanted parts such as when he talks of his "negotiations with a top-class group of butchers with continental connections" (Pinter 46). However, Ruth disrupts his fine narrative with a simple question "What happened to the group of butchers?" (Pinter 46). To recover his stance, Max again turns or rather projects his dominion by trying to belittle Sam and compare his job with his supposedly successful life: "All his life he's sat in the front seat giving lovely hand signals. You call that work? This man doesn't know his gearbox from his arse" (Pinter 47). But how Max reconstructs the past through the stories he tells is probably in fact how he wants it to be for which he sees an opportunity with Ruth, hence the fetishism in the relations intensifies with an exacerbated self-blindness. Considering Marx's notion of ideology, Max does not know this, but he is doing it. However, as Žižek notes, according to Frankfurt School, the main point is "how the reality itself cannot reproduce itself without this so-called ideological mystification" (25). Thus the ideological distortion is "written into its essence". To see his behavior under Žižek's view, Max is not misrecognizing the reality but the illusion which is constructing that reality. Žižek raises the concept of "ideological fantasy" discussing the double effect of this illusion. He further develops the Marxian notion of ideological illusion in "knowing", suggesting, with the example of money, that people are "fetishists in practice".

As Max tries to establish his domination over the family with his stories of the past, Lenny, having tried a similar strategy the other night, turns to challenge Teddy's knowledge in philosophy. He presents his ideas and questions on Christianity, existence or "all this business of being and not-being" (Pinter 52) to undermine his supposedly authentic knowledge and gain dominance over him. Perhaps, he also takes into consideration that Ruth is present and hearing. Teddy evades the questions, but Ruth takes over his position and negates Lenny's discussion and clearly points to the medium and form of existence rather than its meaning or content with examples including her leg and lips.

RUTH. Don't be too sure though. You've forgotten something. Look at me. I ... move my leg. That's all it is. But I wear ... underwear ...

which moves with me ... it ... captures your attention. Perhaps you misinterpret. The action is simple. It's a leg ... moving. My lips move. Why don't you restrict ... your observations to that? Perhaps the fact that they move is more significant ... than the words which come through them. You must bear that ... possibility ... in mind. (Pinter 52, 53)

Next, Teddy becomes overwhelmed and suggests they cut their trip short. Similar to how he evades the struggles in conversations, he wants to depart quickly to prevent the situation from worsening, specifically since Ruth has just told that America is a barren place filled with insects. Kenneth Bernard notes the implied opposition between America, the Promised Land, and England in the play arguing that "one is ideality; the other reality" (Bernard, p. 116). Bernard suggests that the family expect Teddy, who is returning from the Promised Land that is America, to "redeem them from the meanness of their lives", but he brings another "Eve" with him (Bernard 117). Ruth tries to make Teddy face the real feeling he has towards his family and home, hence defetishize the misrecognized image of family relations he had held, yet he again evades and resists. After he goes up to pack, Lenny and Ruth, having talked about her being a model before her life with Teddy, dance and kiss. Teddy is passive, subordinated, and helpless as Ruth starts to take control and orders food and drink. Her last move in the scene is to bring up Teddy's critical works causing him to give them a piece of his mind. His comments before the blackout in a way both recall the past and foreshadow what is going to happen to the family with Ruth, which is passing their fetishism in relations, which he shares, to commodity fetishism: "It's nothing to do with the question of intelligence. It's a way of being able to look at the world. It's a question of how far you can operate on things and not in things. I mean it's a question of your capacity to ally the two, to relate the two, to balance the two" (Pinter 61, 62). To operate in things resonates what takes place in commodity fetishism where relations between things take over the place of individuals.

In the evening, Sam has a little chat with Teddy. He seems to share his feelings as it prefigures Sam's declaration about Jessie and Mac in the following. He suggests to him to stay so they "could have a few laughs" (Pinter 63), something Sam is not able to have with other members. Both of them cannot stand where the family is going; Teddy is forced to go away and Sam will collapse with his last sentence of revelation. Nonetheless, as brief as it is, the relation between Sam and

Teddy appears different from prevailing conversations between characters that are of domination and subordination.

The next occasion where Lenny comes in and notices his cheese roll gone includes monologues of him trying to clear Teddy's spite against the family. However, Teddy has taken it "deliberately" to recover from his subordination when the members are present. His wife is upstairs with his younger brother and this is the least he can do to satisfy himself that he has taken action against them in the struggle of domination, even though it was in absence of them. Joey comes down and tells Lenny he "didn't get all the way" (Pinter 66). Lenny accuses Ruth of being a "tease" and proves Joey's competence by citing the story of their experience with two girls "in the rubble" where he did not even care about any "contraceptive protection". As Teddy is overcome by the power of his father and brothers, Sam tries to restore sense to the family: "He's her lawful husband. She is his lawful wife" (Pinter 69).

Max's following suggestion "You know something? Perhaps it's not a bad idea to have a woman in the house. Perhaps it's a good thing. Who knows? Maybe we should keep her" (Pinter 69) intensifies the situation. Ruth is not present among them yet and Sam and Teddy cannot resist their domination; every issue they raise is absurdly undermined by Max by means of talking terms in "democratic" sense. This is the initiation of commodity fetishism as they are valuing her in terms of money, that is another commodity, and in the process hold them as equal. According to Žižek, the value of a commodity assumes the form of another thing-commodity: money. Nevertheless, it is not replacement of "men with things", rather "it consists of a certain misrecognition which concerns a relation between a structured network and one of its elements: what is really an structural effect, an effect of the network of relations between elements, appears as an immediate property of one of the elements, as if this property also belongs to it outside its relation with other elements" (Žižek 19). Therefore, the misrecognition could happen both in relation between things and between individuals.

MAX. Well, how much is she worth? What we talking about, three figures?

LENNY. I asked you where the money's going to come from. It'll be an extra mouth to feed. It'll be an extra body to clothe. You realize that?

JOEY. I'll buy her clothes.

LENNY. What with?

JOEY. I'll put in a certain amount out of my wages.

MAX. That's it. We'll pass the hat round. We'll make a donation. We're all grown-up people, we've got a sense of responsibility. We'll all put a little in the hat. It's democratic. (Pinter 70, 71)

Subsequently, Lenny claims he has a better idea. He can put her into prostitution business. Max replies "We'll put her on the game. That's a stroke of genius, that's a marvellous idea. You mean she can earn the money herself – on her back?" (Pinter 72); now they keep talking terms for the new situation. She will be put on the market for prostitution which is all benefit for the one controlling the "means of production". However, the idea is not complete yet. There will be added a "surplus value" in her labor as Max says that "She's going to have her obligations this end as well" (Pinter 72). Accordingly, Žižek points out that the use of this commodity, the labor force, produces surplus-value and the capitalist appropriates this surplus "over the value of the labour force itself" (17). Max brings up the issue again when he sees their party losing in the deal in the following. Lenny takes their capital investment in the market as he proposes to develop their business and advertisement in "international terms":

Listen, Teddy, you could help us, actually. If I were to send you some cards, over to America . . . you know, very nice ones, with a name on, and a telephone number, very discreet, well, you could distribute them . . . to various parties, who might be making a trip over here. Of course, you'd get a little percentage out of it (Pinter 74).

They even talk about the health system, in other sense, insurance, to get the maximum benefit from her. Finally, Ruth joins them and Teddy surprisingly presents her the family's proposal. When she hears that she has to support herself financially, Lenny puts up the suggestion of getting her a flat. The idea of the capital, of having a flat of her own, interests Ruth who simply ignores Teddy's other option which is to return with him to America. She explains the details she requires from the flat and having a personal maid. When Lenny states that "We'd finance you, to begin with, and then, when you were established, you could pay us back, in instalments", Ruth rejects the idea saying it should be considered "simply as a capital investment" (Pinter 77). Then, the commodity fetishism is official as she suggests finalizing a contract completing the shift from the individual relations to the relation between things. However, this seems in opposition with the initial idea of exploiting her because now she is asking for a lot and they are accepting any terms. The reversal of domination is visible in the new arrangements again as it was in the relations they held between themselves before.

RUTH. I'd need an awful lot. Otherwise I wouldn't be content.

LENNY. You'd have everything.

RUTH. I would naturally want to draw up an inventory of everything I would need, which would require your signatures in the presence of witnesses.

LENNY. Naturally.

RUTH. All aspects of the agreement and conditions of employment would have to be clarified to our mutual satisfaction before we finalized the contract.

LENNY. Of course. (Pinter 77, 78)

Max who senses that their exploitive plan is endangered with Ruth requiring a larger investment brings up again the “surplus value” accommodating her labor; others follow him as well. This is to regain the feeling of domination which is sought implicitly in the form of commodity fetishism. It is interesting to note how he states that she will be free at the daytime, yet gives her duties to fulfill in that very “free” time.

MAX. And you'd have the whole of your daytime free, of course. You could do a bit of cooking here if you wanted to.

LENNY. Make the beds.

MAX. Scrub the place out a bit.

TEDDY. Keep everyone company. (Pinter 78)

Ruth's decision seems normal to the family as commodity appears ordinary in a capitalist society in Žižek's sense. Sam cannot take this shift anymore and collapses as he reveals “MacGregor had Jessie in the back of my cab as I drove them along” (Pinter 78). Similarly, Teddy, powerless, emotionless, and lifeless, leaves the family to return to his life in America without Ruth. Although they have not shaken on the contract yet, Max senses the reversal of domination overwhelmingly and feels himself overthrown. With the panic of realizing there is no escape from his old age and losing his authority, he senses the failure of his replacing Jessie, the collapse of their capitalist and fetishistic adventure. Thus he casts his doubt: “Listen, I've got a funny idea she'll do the dirty on us, you want to bet? She'll use us, she'll make use of us, I can tell you! I can smell it! You want to bet?” (Pinter 81). Kneeling, he begs Ruth for a kiss knowing it is too late. Ruth has taken over this time not through the direct relations between them, but through their failed endeavor by the fetishism in relations disguised in the form of commodity fetishism.

Conclusion

Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming* continues to motivate new readings after more than half a century. Several studies have analyzed the play in terms of psychological concepts, character studies, and familial issues. However, given the ambiguous nature of the play including the way audience comes to know about characters' past, a definite meaning may not be possible. One of the aspects less noted by critics have been the dimension considering the political overtones of *The Homecoming*. Although not explicitly political as Pinter's later plays may be, there could be added a parallel sociopolitical layer to the abundant readings. This study examined the relations of domination and servitude using previous works on the play and made a comparative analysis with the concepts of fetishistic misrecognition and commodity fetishism discussed by Marx in viewing the shift from a feudal society to a capitalist one as elaborated by Slavoj Žižek through his Lacanian and Hegelian lens. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that viewing the contractual relationship between the play's characters with a link to larger sociopolitical relations is not to reduce the meaning audience may extract from the play to one side, rather it is to add a layer to the various interpretations of the play. The struggle for domination persists throughout the play in the conversations and action, in how the characters deal with the return of Teddy and the desire to restate the female figure of the family through their misrecognized and fetishized view of women. However, Ruth's non-reactionary and confident stance in confronting the efforts of the family in the relations between the individuals resists their fetishized view. Moreover, seeing the play in parallel with Marx's notions, the family attempts to turn the fetishism in relations to commodity fetishism in their shift of strategy towards Ruth through the "contract" which is apparently between "free" individuals as Žižek puts it. According to him, this "retreat" is just a "displacement" of the fetishism in capitalism; similarly, in *The Homecoming* the fetishized view of women is to be disguised under the commodity fetishism established by the capital investment suggested by the characters and the terms of which are negotiated. Therefore, although masked under a less plain format, the fetishism remains and merely shifts from the interrelations between the characters to commodity fetishism.

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**ДОМИНАЦИЈА, ПОДАНИШТВО И РОБНИ ФЕТИШИЗАМ У ПОВРАТКУ КУЋИ
ХАРОЛДА ПИНТЕРА**

Борба за доминацију је недвосмислено присутна у *Повратку*, као и у скоро свим Пинтеровим делима. Због нејасне атмосфере, загонетних ликова и мрачних, трагикомичних дијалога и радње, не може се идентификовати једно значење пресудно за комад. Урађене су многе анализе карактера у представи, често усредсређене на Рут и њену одлуку на крају. Штавише, критичари су настојали да представу читају у светлу психоанализе, усредсређујући се на прошлост и комплексе ликова. Додавањем социополитичке димензије чисто реалистичким или симболичким читањима, овај чланак покушава да анализира односе доминације и подаништва између ликова на микронивоу породичне структуре кроз Марксове представе о фетишизму у односима између појединаца и робном фетишизму, како их тумачи Славој Жижек. Уз помоћ Жижекових идеја о идеологији, додаје се нови слој социополитичког значења односима између ликова, посебно оном између Рут и мушкараца, што се да разумети као паралела са фетишизираним односима на макро нивоу у преткапиталистичким и као робни фетишизам у капиталистичким друштвима.

Кључне речи: *Повратак кући*, Харолд Пинтер, односи доминације и подаништва, робни фетишизам, идеологија, Жижек