

The Power of Repetition

An Analysis of Repetition Patterns in *The Hothouse* and *The Caretaker* by Harold Pinter

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Abstract

In most of Harold Pinter's plays, underlying relations between characters are a central feature. Through the slight alteration and further development of naturalistic dialogue, and exploiting the features of The Theatre of the Absurd, Pinter perfected his project of turning dramatic dialogue into the equivalent of authentic language, and created for himself a mode of speech where the explicit text can 'hint at' an implicit subtext. One central feature of Pinter's dramatic language is the use of repetition as a way of communicating psychological action within his characters. This thesis explores how Pinter uses repetition patterns in his dramatic dialogues in the two plays *The Hothouse* and *The Caretaker*. Attempting to reveal what is concealed underneath the surface of language, the thesis also discusses the concept of power-play which is exhibited within the examples chosen. Disclosing an inadequacy in using language is often felt by Pinter's characters as a mark of inferiority, and repetition may occur as a means of correcting any perception of the individual as subordinate to others. The main aim of the thesis is thus to examine the significance of repetition in the two plays *The Hothouse* and *The Caretaker* by Harold Pinter, and to explore how repetition may reveal examples of power-play.

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Abbreviations¹

I employ the following abbreviations for reference:

P1 for Harold Pinter. *Plays One*.

P2 for Harold Pinter. *Plays Two*.

CALD for *The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (CD-ROM version).

OED for *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Online version).

¹ For complete references, see Bibliography.

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1 Introduction²

Always, in Pinter's world, personal inadequacy expresses itself in an inadequacy to cope with and to use language. The inability to communicate, and to communicate in the correct terms, is felt by the characters as a mark of inferiority [...]

(Esslin 'Language' 46)

In most of Harold Pinter's plays, underlying relations between characters are a central feature. Through the slight alteration and further development of naturalistic 'oblique' dialogue, as introduced by Anton Chekhov (Kennedy 21; Esslin 'Language' 35), Pinter perfected his project of turning dramatic dialogue into the equivalent of authentic language, and created for himself a mode of speech where the explicit text can 'hint at' an implicit subtext (Esslin 'Language' 35).³ Relevant to this issue are the implications of Pinter's movement away from traditional stage dialogue and what the characteristics of his 'Pinteresque language' really are. One central feature of Pinter's dramatic language is the use of repetition as a way of communicating psychological action within his characters. This thesis will explore how Pinter uses repetition patterns in his dramatic dialogues. Attempting to reveal what is concealed underneath the surface of language, the thesis will also discuss the concept of power-play which is exhibited within the examples chosen. As indicated in the quotation above, disclosing an inadequacy in using language is often felt by Pinter's characters as a mark of inferiority, and repetition may occur as a means of correcting any perception of the individual as subordinate to others. Following this line of thought, I pose these questions: what is the significance of repetition in Harold Pinter's plays? What can we find out about the characters and the plays by analysing repetition patterns? Can the repetitions found reveal power mechanisms which exist in the interpersonal relations between the characters? How and to what extent can the words and sentences, even questions, be reflections of what goes on inside characters? How do the repetitions in Pinter's dramatic dialogue relate to literary theory on repetition? These questions I will pursue in the analyses of the two plays *The Hothouse* and *The Caretaker*.

² This first page is based on my own assignment *Thesis Proposal* submitted as part of the subject 'ENG 4391 Writing a Thesis on a Literary Topic' during the spring term of 2011. The main arguments are the same, but they have been added to and rephrased to suit my purpose.

³ According to Ronald Knowles in the article 'Pinter and Twentieth Century Drama', 'Typical of Chekhov's dialogue is the way that characters will occasionally talk across each other, as if encapsulated in private worlds' (78). According to *The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 'Oblique' in its adjectival meaning describes 'remarks which are not direct, so that the real meaning is not immediately clear' ("Oblique").

1.1 Pinter the dramatist

One of the most influential European writers of the twentieth century, awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2005, Harold Pinter has shown a diversity of authorial scholarship which surpasses many others. Over a time span of 50 years, Pinter not only wrote thirty plays, over a dozen sketches and hundreds of poems (in addition to a novel and short stories),⁴ directed and acted in plays and films; he even had the time to be an active social commentator on a global basis. He first became known as the author of *The Birthday Party*, a play which, after a chill welcome by the London public in 1958, turned out to become one of Pinter's most famous plays.

Following in the footsteps of other writers of the early twentieth century, Harold Pinter is an author who cannot easily be placed into one literary genre. As Ronald Knowles states, in his article 'Pinter and Twentieth Century Drama'; '[...] it is probably safe to say that there is not a single dramatist of the twentieth century with whom Pinter has not been compared or contrasted, from Ibsen to David Mamet' (74).⁵ It follows that an exploration of his authorship will inevitably lead one to explore a variety of possible movements to which he might have contributed, and from which he has benefited. However, there are arguably tendencies in the early period of his authorship which place him in the midst of two main literary directions of the postmodern period; Naturalism on the one hand, and The Theatre of the Absurd on the other.

The Concise Oxford Companion to the Theatre comments thus on The Theatre of the Absurd:⁶ 'The dramatists of the Theatre of the Absurd have in common [...] the basic belief that man's life is basically without meaning or purpose and that human beings cannot communicate. This led to the abandonment of dramatic form and coherent dialogue, the futility of existence being conveyed by illogical and meaningless speeches and ultimately by complete silence' (Hartnoll "Absurd"). Martin Esslin, perhaps the most influential critic of The Theatre of the Absurd, notes that the dramatist Ionesco defined the word 'absurd' as 'that which is devoid of purpose' and continues 'Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless' (Ionesco

⁴ He remarks, in a conversation with Richard Findlater in 1961, re-published in *Plays Two*, that he has already at that time written 'hundreds of poems – about a dozen [...] worth republishing' (P2 viii).

⁵ Pinter has been compared to many writers and literary directions of his time; the social realism of 'The Angry Young Men', Osborne, Wesker and Arden and preceding artists like Strindberg, Pindarello, Eliot and Joyce, to name a few (Knowles 74).

⁶ The term 'The Theatre of the Absurd' was originally coined by Martin Esslin in his essay from 1960 and in his book by the same name from 1962.

quoted in Esslin *Theatre Absurd* 23). Thus, it is not the strict dictionary sense of ‘absurd’; ‘ridiculous’, which is meant by the word when applied to this dramatic genre, although the action sometimes appears ridiculous. One might see Naturalism as a contrast to the absurd, but only on a superficial level: *The Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* defines Naturalism in art as ‘showing people and experiences as they really are, instead of suggesting that they are better than they really are or representing them in a fixed style. Strindberg, Ibsen and Chekhov are a few of the dramatists who were influenced by Naturalism’ (“Naturalism”). Yet we shall see that, in both the dramas to be considered in this thesis, there is a strong sense in which Pinter also shows ‘people and experiences as they really are’.

Thus, the two directions do not necessarily stand in opposition to each other. Pinter’s dramas suggest the contrary. As man will inevitably live in a perceived reality, his inner life may seem absurd. And indeed, sometimes reality, which no man can claim to be fully able to understand, may at times itself seem absurd to the individual. While there are undoubtedly elements of the absurd in Pinter’s plays – for instance in conversations such as in *The Birthday Party*, when Meg, the hostess of the seaside boarding house is perpetually frightened by the thought of a wheelbarrow – it appears the dramas always evolve within a social reality.⁷ Although it may seem absurd that Meg reacts this way to seeing a car outside their home, one suspects there may be something in her past which has caused this fear. Pinter exploited this ‘mode of the past’ introduced largely by Ibsen and his late nineteenth century dramas, where the characters’ past, which only exists in the ambient of the play, influences what happens in the ‘here and now’ performed on stage (Fergusson 149).⁸ The characters in Pinter’s plays often appear to have fully developed psychological backgrounds which they may, or may not, choose to reveal. Thus, his plays are usually anchored in a social context which is not universal the way it is exhibited in Beckett’s plays. Pinter greatly admired Beckett, who undoubtedly influenced Pinter’s style. The two dramatists are not, however, identical in their ways of writing. Pinter, as mentioned above, developed Chekhov’s ‘oblique’ language, and in some ways the Russian dramatist’s influence is as strong as that of Beckett:

Pinter certainly is an innovator, yet it needs to be stressed that what is original in his dialogue is the fusion of the minimal language in naturalism (Chekhov) and the aesthetic expressiveness found in implicit speech from the Symbolists to Beckett. [...] Yet Pinter stands in sharp contrast to Beckett and

⁷ MEG. [...] Did you see what’s outside this morning? \ PETEY. What? \ MEG. That big car [...] It wasn’t there yesterday. Did you... did you have a look inside it? [...] (*coming down tensely, and whispering*) Is there anything in it? [...] PETEY. What sort of thing? MEG. Well, I mean... is there... is there a wheelbarrow in it?’ (P1 63).

⁸ This is especially pertinent to *Ghosts*, Ibsen’s 1881 realistic family drama play where the past comes back to ‘haunt’ the characters, especially Mrs. Alving, who has kept a secret from her son for twenty years (Fergusson 149).

Ionesco. Beckett, who seems to have been present at some latter-day Fall of Babel of literary language – has created his dialogue out of the stylised breakdown of hyper-literary styles. Pinter, to develop the image, has taken the linguistic Babel for granted (perhaps too glibly at times) at the level of everyday-exchanges, talk, chat, verbal games – with an ear for local usage, or rather abuse and verbiage. He seems to carry no literary ‘burden of the past’. (Kennedy 169)

While Beckett takes this literary ‘Fall of Babel’ language as Kennedy calls it, and extends it to encompass entire plays with this feeling of non-action, or a state of paralysis, to a universal level, as he did in *Waiting for Godot* (his tramps ‘belong to nowhere in particular and thus assume universality’ (Lumley 272)), Pinter casually takes these linguistic traits for granted and places them in a realistic context.⁹ Pinter also recognises the fact that he is not dealing with realism: ‘I’m convinced that what happens in my plays could happen anywhere, at any time, in any place, although the events may seem unfamiliar at first glance. I’d say that what goes on in my plays is realistic, but what I’m doing is not realism’ (*P2* ix). As Knowles elaborates: ‘Alternatively, the ambiguity of such plays as *The Birthday Party* and *The Caretaker* prompted comparison with the absurdists’ (Knowles 75), but continues, ‘Pinter’s multi-levelled theatricality thwarts a simple allegorical reading’ (Knowles 76). It is this fusing of different levels within each style that has made it so hard to define Pinter according to established categories of drama. This problem may be the reason why an individual term referring to the language and characterisations of his dramas has proved to be necessary, i.e. ‘Pinteresque’ and ‘Pinterese’, as will be elaborated below.

Starting from a point in history when most of Europe was recovering from the Second World War, Pinter’s plays, and especially his early ones, have not escaped the influence of this tragic chapter in the history of man. However, the author himself rejects any allegorical reading of his plays (Prentice 96). Instead we are left with a handful of characteristics which are typical of Pinter’s dramatic works, and which one may assume have been in part created through the influence of Pinter’s upbringing as a Jewish boy in Hackney, London, in addition to being evacuated in the English country side during the Second World War (Billington 5-6), and in part through the above mentioned literary directions and the historical context altogether. Michael Billington, in his biography *The Life and Work of Harold Pinter*, mentions influences that possibly stem from Pinter’s at times evacuated childhood: ‘His prime memories of evacuation today are of loneliness, bewilderment, separation and loss: themes that recur in all his works’ (6). At the same time, however, these are traits which appear in a variety of postmodern works. Typical entities that recur in Pinter’s dramas are, however, settings imbued with a feeling of uncertainty, characters that at first glance appear to have no

⁹ This aspect becomes especially apparent in *The Caretaker*.

history, closed rooms and the fear of intruders, to name a few. The threat of the unknown is a recurring theme. Power games seem to permeate the lives of his characters, and language often seems to be the sole attribute which either gives or deprives the characters of power. As Victor L. Cahn reflects in *Gender and Power in the Plays of Harold Pinter*:

[...]Pinter's characters proceed tenuously, creating a stage environment in which every word, every hesitation and gesture, demands attention from both actors and audience. The characters often speak minimally, amid frequent pauses, as if wary of revealing a tidbit about themselves or their background that might create a point of vulnerability. The language is therefore dominated by unanswered questions that lead to repeated questions, awkward pauses, silences, and repetitions. To further shelter themselves, the characters rely on colloquialisms, professional jargon, and convoluted word patterns. The result is dialogue that often lacks the coherence and logic of traditional stage language but that in its disjunction reflects the mind and emotions of the speaker. [...]Yet despite its seeming incoherence, the speech is both familiar and realistic [...]. (3)

Cahn is right to stress the power with which language is utilised in Pinter's dramas. As mentioned already, Pinter's unique sense of utilising the quirks of the English vernacular to the extent of creating realistic dialogue has resulted in the terms 'Pinterese', or 'Pinteresque' language (Esslin 'Language' 34). The terms refer to the tendency in Pinter's plays to deal with 'implications of threat and strong feeling produced through colloquial language, apparent triviality, and long pauses' (*OED* "Pinteresque"). Additionally, Andrew K. Kennedy stresses that

Pinter writes a quasi-naturalistic dialogue as if he had linguistically trained aural perception; but the seemingly accurate 'real language' phrasing is consciously patterned to show up the inadequacies – idioms as idiocies – and the failures of language. The technique of pauses and elliptical sayings; the repetitions and circumlocutions; the language-games and cliché-catalogues; [...] all these amount to a linguistic naturalism which has, clearly, grown into something else. Here we have, again, a progression from a limited to a critical language. (Kennedy 21-22)

The usage of pauses and silences is one of the traits often attributed to Pinter's authorial achievements. However, there are many dramatists to whom Pinter owes parts of this linguistic artistry. Preceding authors like Strindberg, Chekhov and Beckett also made use of pauses for dramatic effect in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth century (Knowles 80). But as elaborated above, Pinter has developed his own language out of the techniques of the preceding authors. According to Esslin, Pinter's use of language has, to a large extent, been misunderstood as a language of 'non-communication' ('Language' 38), probably drawing upon the tendencies of absurdist dialogue to emphasise the impossibility of true communication, as exemplified above. The communicativeness of Pinter's language will be further elaborated below. Notably, while separating Pinter from other authors of the twentieth century may be important, it is impressive that Pinter has made a name for himself in the

company of such greatness, and especially that he has managed to emerge from it with such an original and unique style.

1.2 Selection of plays

This thesis places emphasis on the two plays *The Hothouse* and *The Caretaker* by Harold Pinter. I have deliberately chosen one play which is less famous and one which is seen as one of his foremost achievements. This is because I have a wish to explore the less known play, *The Hothouse*, and its repetitions from square one, so to speak. Some of the repetition patterns in *The Caretaker* have been examined by Martin Esslin, as will become apparent in the analysis of the play and the part about Esslin's contribution to the discussion of linguistic devices in Pinter's plays below. The two plays were written close in time, yet they are very different. This fact has also influenced my choice of texts subjected to closer study.

The Hothouse, written and subsequently discarded by the author himself in 1958, marks a shift in Pinter's authorship. In this play he uses a linguistic style which, one may argue, exaggerates the traits of colloquial language. It is thus not a surprise that the tool of repetition is abundantly employed and serves examples that demonstrate several functions of repetition. Esslin stresses that Pinter was wise to initially discard the play as it may be seen as an 'overindulgence in Pinterese' (Esslin 'Language' 35). While he may indeed have been wise to put it aside in 1958, as his career was taking a different turn, it would have been a great shame had it never been produced on a stage after Pinter became a renowned writer. Both plays deal with the theme of power on a large scale. They also to some extent thematise repetition. In comparing the two plays, Martin Esslin writes in *The Peopled Wound*,

The Hothouse also takes place in a kind of psychological research institution or mental home in the country (officially referred to by the staff as a 'rest home') and is written in an idiom of grotesque farce which points in the direction of Ionesco. Yet there are a number of very significant parallels with *The Caretaker* which make it appear likely that this play took shape about the same time as *The Caretaker* and was discarded because the author realized that his future lay within the area of realism – images of the real world which are raised to metaphors of the human condition by the mysteriousness inherent in reality itself and the difficulties of drawing a line between the real, the imagined and the dream – rather than in the direct distortion of grotesque fantasy.
(102)

If on the one hand *The Hothouse* overindulges the characteristics of 'Pinterese' language, and is thus in danger of becoming a parody of Pinter's style, on the other, this is a good starting point for investigating the traits of Pinter's language. The fact that it does exaggerate the language makes it interesting to explore. It is also a play of great entertainment value. The rest home institution presents one of the typical Pinter settings imbued with a feeling of

uncertainty.¹⁰ In a fusing of horror and farce, the characters engage in an ever escalating power struggle, which in the end result in a massacre.¹¹

Following the public failure of *The Birthday Party*, the language and style of which *The Hothouse* continues and to some degree caricatures, the contrasting minimalistic style of *The Caretaker* was possibly more welcome to the public when first produced on stage in 1960. In this play there are only three characters and one room. The characters reveal parts of their psychological backgrounds, some more than others, as will become apparent in the analysis in chapter three. The language style is minimalistic, and in the case of Davies, the tramp, Pinter has applied lower-class speech to emphasise his background. There are elements in this play which may seem absurd, but on the whole, the play remains anchored in a realistic setting.

1.3 Theory

Repetition is inevitable in every-day language, as we repeat certain words continuously to create coherence in our utterances and syntax in sentences. In order for a text or utterance to make sense at all, we need certain *function words*, like *a*, *and*, *is*, or *the* (Salkie 4). When we repeat *content words* such as names, adjectives, active verbs and most importantly: nouns, however, the repetition must be of a more significant usage than the mere grammatical function leads us to expect, and the words which we choose to repeat, or which we repeat by coincidence, must be meaningful in some way or other. In a coherent text, the repetition of content words is necessary for the text to make sense at all. They may not be repeated as frequently as function words, but they are special in that one does not necessarily find the specific words in all texts (Salkie 4). Thus, the repeated content words have special significance to that exact text. And this goes for dialogue as well.

Words (and by this I mean content words from now on) and phrases that are repeated may be important for the topic being discussed and for keeping up the conversation (sticking to the subject), correcting mistakes (to avoid being misunderstood), or reminding ourselves of

¹⁰ The institution is administered by something called 'The Ministry' which immediately brings associations to George Orwell's pessimistic vision of the future in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the idea of a 'big brother' watching the inhabitants at all times. The patients bear numbers instead of names and the members of staff seem more preoccupied with their own, personal pursuits than the people they are supposed to be treating.

¹¹ The term 'farce' (also called 'farce comedy') is applied to plays in which '[...] exaggerated character-types find themselves in ludicrous situations in the course of an improbable plot, but which achieve their comic effect not by broad humor and bustling action, but by the sustained brilliance and wit of the dialogue. Farce is also a frequent comic tactic in the theater of the *absurd*. (Abrams 40). The word 'horror' derives from the Latin *horrere* ('to make the hair stand on end, tremble, shudder') (Cuddon 388).

things (for instance when cramming for an exam). There may be hundreds of other reasons why repetition occurs in our every-day language. However, we are not always aware that we do in fact repeat certain words and phrases, and the words we repeat may also reflect sub-conscious activity. Reading the plays of Harold Pinter, all these aspects appear to be important for the repetition of certain words, and especially when it comes to the last aspect: the sub-conscious.

Dialogue in drama, however natural and realistic it may seem, is *planned*, and we can safely assume that even when characters seem to repeat words out of the sub-conscious or by accident (or even for no reason at all), the author probably has his or her own agenda by letting the characters repeat those exact words. The words may be very important when it comes to the thematics of the play and to the formation of our impression of a given character in it. The importance of repetition does not apply only to drama; in many other forms of art too we see that certain themes are repeated. In prose fiction and in poetry too, words that are repeated create themes within the works. In poetry, for instance, repetition is an important poetic tool. The question is: do the words repeated mean more to us than other words in some way? One thing is certain: repetition is important for emphasising certain aspects of both every day conversations and works of art.

Harold Pinter is well known for his innovative use of language compared to the overtly deliberate and well constructed rhetoric of traditional drama. Martin Esslin posits in his article 'Language and Silence' (1972) that in order to understand Pinter and his use of language one must 'start from an examination of the function of language in stage dialogue generally – and indeed from considerations of the use of language in ordinary human intercourse itself' (35). Esslin further elaborates that Pinter

[...]at least as far as the English language is concerned [...] has given us added insight into – has, in a certain measure, even *discovered* – the fact that traditional stage dialogue has always greatly overestimated the degree of logic that governs the use of language, the information that language is actually able to impart on the stage, as in life. People on the stage, from Sophocles to Shakespeare to Rattlinghan, have always spoken more clearly, more directly, more to the purpose than they would ever have done in real life. ('Language' 35)

Esslin states that this tendency towards deliberate and well-structured dialogue is not only obvious in traditional verse drama, but also in naturalistic drama, where it has persisted even in the finest speeches of Ibsen and Shaw ('Language' 35). Esslin's main point is that this well-structured rhetorical construction of dialogue belongs to a tradition resting on the strict rules of prosody (especially in verse drama) and on the old art of rhetoric. What happened in the aftermaths of authors like Strindberg and Chekhov, however, was the establishment of

other functions of language within the context of drama and stage dialogue. Exploiting new linguistic traits of drama, Pinter developed a use of language commonly mistaken for non-communication (Esslin 'Language' 38). In the abstract below, taken from *The Birthday Party*, for instance, Esslin insists that language has lost its rhetorical, informative element and has become an example of dramatic action instead:

MEG. I was the belle of the ball.
PETEY. Were you?
MEG. Oh yes. They all said I was.
PETEY. I bet you were too.
MEG. Oh, it's true. I was.
(Pause.)
I know I was. (PI 81)

According to Esslin, it is the psychological action which is important in this passage – not the informative exchange between the two characters ('Language' 37). The fact that Meg repeats four times that she 'was' the belle of the ball reflects her wish that everything had gone as planned the night before: the repetition reveals her need to convince herself that everything is still the same. And Petey's affirmative reply merely expresses his wish to aid her in her moment of despair. This Esslin calls *dramatic action* ('Language' 37). Even though there is little verbal communication, Esslin says,

[...] to sum up this state of affairs by labeling such a passage a "dialogue of non-communication" completely misses the point. Pinter is far from wanting to say that language is incapable of establishing true communication between human beings; he merely draws our attention to the fact that in real life human beings rarely make use of language for this purpose, at least so far as spoken language is concerned. ('Language' 38)

Because of Pinter's recurring lack of coherence and logic point-based structure of dramatic dialogue, which was meant to communicate information to the audience in *traditional* drama, Pinter's language was viewed as a project of non-communication. This interpretation of Pinter's dramatic language was largely based on Absurdist principles of a certain breakdown of language itself, at least for communicative purposes, as mentioned earlier. Nevertheless, a frequently cited quotation from Pinter reads like this: 'I feel that instead of any inability to communicate there is a deliberate evasion of communication. Communication itself between people is so frightening that rather than to do that there is continual cross-talk, a continual talking about other things rather than what is at the root of their relationship' (Quoted in Taylor 334). If we look at Meg and Petey's relationship, then, the point Pinter is making is not that the two characters *cannot* communicate. It is rather that they are avoiding verbal communication of *factual* information. It seems that Petey knows that Meg is having a hard time coping with the situation. And Meg probably knows this too. Neither of them say

anything about it, however. On the contrary, there is a strong sense in which they are communicating their feelings by avoiding the subject. It is too frightening to say out loud, so they talk about something else. This is also relevant to repetition.

On the basis of thinking of language and dialogue as action, and as reflecting action within characters, the words that characters repeat are again relevant. A repetition of one word, then, can be an attempt to communicate what is going on inside the character, and sometimes it may even be an attempt on the opposite: to conceal something from the other individual. According to Esslin, repetition is one of Pinter's favourite linguistic and stylistic devices that shed light upon psychological action within the characters. He adds, '[...] superficially similar quirks of language may serve quite different dramatic functions' ('Language' 39). In this case Esslin is not only talking about repetition, but also about other 'devices' in Pinter's authorial armory. Notably, though, he mentions right away an important point about repetition: seemingly similar 'quirks of language' may serve different dramatic functions. Something which is mentioned in one sentence or context and then appears in another is basically repetition. A repetition may only be *similar* to what came before and not an exact 'replica', so to speak. But the word or phrase itself will not be exactly the same as it changes its setting, the way it appears in the sentence, which character is the original utterer of the word or phrase, and so on. Repetition, then, can be a form of change, as we will see shortly when introducing Hillis Miller's account of repetition.

Repetition is never coincidental in Pinter's drama. His characters' repetition may frequently be misunderstood as mere mannerism, but only on a superficial level: 'Each time Pinter's characters repeat themselves, or each other's phrases, the playwright employs the device of repetition to fulfill a definite function in the action [...]' ('Language' 39). One example of a form repetition may take is what Esslin calls 'recurrent tautological repetition' ('Language' 34). Tautological, or tautology rather, means 'the unnecessary and usually unintentional use of two words to express one meaning' (*CALD*), and recurrent and repetition are near synonyms. The expression itself is thus a form of what it is trying to describe, and makes it a curious device to employ. Let us look at an excerpt from *The Hothouse*:

ROOTE. Fairheaded?
GIBBS. Not darkheaded, sir
ROOTE. Tall?
GIBBS. Certainly not small.

Pause

(*PI* 199-200)

In a way, 'fairheaded' and 'not darkheaded' are synonyms with a slight twist, which goes for 'tall' and 'not small' as well. Gibbs is not insisting on the antonym to answer Roote's

question, he is merely modifying what Roote has said with a negation. In a way, Gibbs is agreeing more with Roote by saying: 'not darkheaded,' instead of, for example, 'No, light brown', and is in a way disagreeing more by saying 'Certainly not small' than if he would have said 'Indeed, very tall'. In this extract, the function of the repetition of near synonyms might be attempting to maintain neutrality and behaving correctly. It seems as though Gibbs is trying to mirror Roote as best he can as a strategy. This tautological pattern may not, in this particular case, be 'unintentional'. Gibbs could have agreed with Roote explicitly instead of keeping up his neutral strategy. However, it will become apparent in chapter two why Gibbs applies this strategy in relation to Roote.¹²

In relation to the investigation of power-play, some functions mentioned by Esslin stand out as more relevant than others. For instance, the struggles of inarticulate characters to find the right words, the 'mot juste', may result in repetitive patterns of various sorts.¹³ The fixation which occurs, and at times the enjoyment that characters show in 'tasting' or re-using the correct expressions found, often result in streams of words which appear repetitive. Sometimes these streams of words appear as associative mechanisms, where the connotations of one word leads a character to the next, and refrain-like structures, where an element reappears as a fixation in some later utterance. In addition to poetic structures, which often makes the rhythm and poetic sound of authentic language more visible, the usage of jargon and technical terms to assert authority and confusion are types of repetition which will be elaborated in the analyses.

As intricate and yet simple as Pinter's language really is, sometimes the words which the characters repeat are not necessarily important in content. Often, it is the fact that they are repeated which is important (Esslin 'Language' 49). If we see this in the light of characters and their evasion of communication, what is repeated may sometimes be the only thing the character is *able* to express. In this case, the repeated word is not necessarily that important in content, but rather in *action*. When a character does not speak, however, it is not necessarily without meaning. At times true silence falls, and we are left with a pause in the continual flow of words which cover these silences. As Pinter himself writes, in his speech *Writing for the Theatre* from 1962:

¹² Esslin's example is different: "'He's old. Not young. No, I wouldn't call him young. Not youthful, certainly. Elderly, I'd say. I'd call him old'" ('Language' 34). This example uncovers more of the unintentional, associative mechanism of the language.

¹³ The 'mot juste' is 'The word or phrase that is exactly right in a particular situation' (CALD "Mot juste").

There are two silences. One when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed. This speech is speaking of a language locked beneath it. That is its continual reference. The speech we hear is an indication of that which we don't hear. It is a necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, anguished or mocking smoke screen which keeps the other in its place. When true silence falls we are still left with an echo but are nearer nakedness. One way of looking at speech is to say that it is a constant stratagem to cover nakedness. (*PI* xiii)

The 'torrent' of language which Pinter mentions here can, among other acts of speaking, refer to repetition. Repetition, then, can be this stream of words, and thus one of the ways in which language can cover nakedness. Cahn makes a significant observation in his discussion of Pinter's language and drama. Commenting on the last part of the quote above, attending directly to the silences, he says 'The playwright, too, has commented that speech has ulterior motivations [...] Consequently, the more words his characters utter, the more likely their insecurity' (Cahn 4). This is a valid point. If repetition can be seen as an exaggeration of this 'torrent of language', repetition can signify, as Cahn says, insecurity in the characters. This is often reflected through the characters' employment of diatribes, jargon speeches and various other forms of repetition which occur in Pinter's plays. As Cahn elaborates, talking about verbal games, 'Some games are linguistic, as one character tries to outdo another with wordplay [...]' (Cahn 4-5).¹⁴ Thus, the repetitions can be seen as in their essence linked to power in Pinter's dramas.

The repeated words become weapons of concealment, of distraction, as they cover the silence that could possibly occur if the words remained unspoken. If repetition can be a means of avoiding pauses and silences, which can uncover the 'nakedness', if repetition can be this 'mocking smokescreen which keeps the other in its place' mentioned by Pinter himself, consequently, when the silences and pauses do occur, even they may be seen as types of repetition. They are repetitions which in the end are inevitable, because the streams of words cannot be everlasting. Esslin brilliantly observes the pauses' and silences' near-dependence upon performance: 'To be filled, to be meaningful, Pinter's pauses and silences have to be meticulously *prepared*: only if the audience knows the possible alternative answers that might be given to a question can the absence of a reply acquire meaning and dramatic impact [...]' ('Language' 58). In other kinds of drama, a gesture may be incorporated instead of what would otherwise become a pause, whereas in Pinter's dramas, there is only the silence. The difficulty of interpreting these pauses and silences becomes apparent especially when reading the plays as texts. However, as Esslin's text suggests, these pauses and silences are never

¹⁴ A 'diatribe' is 'an angry speech or piece of writing which severely criticizes something or someone' (*CALD* "Diatribe")

placed at random; they are meticulously planned, and from the language which encapsulates the silences, one can deduce meaning, even if it is by reading alone. This concurs with modern literary theory. Wolfgang Iser stresses that the reader is involved in a convergence with the text, which realises the ‘meaning’ of the work. The reader fills the gaps in the text: ‘[...] no tale can ever be told in its entirety’, Iser says, and goes on: ‘Indeed, it is only through inevitable omissions that a story will gain its dynamisms. Thus whenever the flow is interrupted [...] the opportunity is given to us to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections – for filling in the gaps left by the text itself’ (Iser 299). Consequently, what I deduce from the pauses and silences, even the repetitions that cover these silences, may only be my interpretation, my ‘filling in of the gaps’ that are left there in all their ambiguity.

In his book *Fiction and Repetition*, J. Hillis Miller goes back as far as Plato to see the deeper intentions of repetition in literature. Even though Miller is discussing repetition within the literary genre of novels, covering a wider field than the repetition of words and phrases, his theories are applicable, in my view, to drama as well.¹⁵

One of Miller’s key points about repetition is: ‘In a novel, what is said two or more times may not be true, but the reader is fairly safe in assuming that it is significant’ (2). This point supports this thesis’s sustained focus on repetition. As mentioned already, characters may seem to repeat words or phrases unintentionally, sometimes saying things that are not true or ‘real’, as in the example of Meg being the belle of the ball. It may even appear as though repetition is given too much significance sometimes, especially because what is dealt with in this context is dialogue. In dialogues pertaining to model authentic speech there will inevitably be a density of repetition much more obvious, and thus seemingly more trivial, than in a novel. Nevertheless, I will start from the assumption that what is repeated really *is* significant. All the instances might not be *equally* significant, but they *are* in some way or other. For Meg, for instance, repeating that she was the belle of the ball is the opposite of the truth. However, her repetition is significant because its function is a revelation to the reader or audience of Meg’s desperation in the situation she is in.

Miller presents two forms of repetition, relying heavily on Deleuze’s earlier account on the same topic; one stemming from Plato and one from Nietzsche. Miller’s hypothesis is that ‘all modes of repetition represent one form or another of the contradictory intertwining of

¹⁵ The discussion includes verbal elements as well as events within each novel and also repetition in relations between novels.

the two kinds of repetition [...]’ (4). They are mutually dependent, according to Miller, although the one variant or the other may be more representative for each case in turn, depending on which example of repetition is examined. The first form, stemming from Plato, is based on the notion that all repetitions are recurrences of one ground form: ‘What Deleuze calls “Platonic” repetition is grounded in a solid archetypal model which is untouched by the effects of repetition. All the other examples are copies of this model’ (6), and this is happening in literature as well: ‘[...] The validity of the mimetic copy is established by its truth of correspondence to what it copies’ (6). This form of repetition presupposes an archetypal ‘model’ from which all later repetitions of that element stem. Even though the repeated elements may differ slightly in their realisations, they are, in the end, copies of one and the same initial element. This form is then a medium or a passage for the later examples to reach their realisation. This first form of repetition, according to Miller, has been the dominant way of thinking of repetition in realistic fiction in nineteenth- and twentieth-century England, and seems to still be the norm (6). However, the last part of the quote above suggests that it is the resemblance to the initial elements which will validate whether a repetition really *is* a repetition. It makes the question of whether something which is perceived as a repetition, but slightly changes its form ceases to be a repetition at the moment it is not exactly resembling its initial realisation. Is an altered seemingly similar repetition less of a repetition? This aspect may be the reason why there is a need for a second form of repetition, as presented by Nietzsche.

In the ‘Nitzschean’ (Miller 6) form of repetition, the exemplary archetypal representation is missing completely. It ‘posits a world based on difference’ (Miller 6). This opens up to exploring repetitious elements as a wide field;

Each thing, this other theory would assume, is unique, intrinsically different from every other thing. Similarity arises against the background of this “desparité du fond” [trans: disparity in the background]. It is a world not of copies but of what Deleuze calls “simulacra” or “phantasms”. These are ungrounded doublings which arise from differential interrelations among elements which are all on the same plane. This lack of ground in some paradigm or archetype means that there is something ghostly about the effects of this second kind of repetition. (Miller 6)

One thing repeats another, but not in the same way as in the first form of repetition. This second form of repetition Miller explains further drawing upon Walter Benjamin’s account of experiences of dreams. In a dream, one can encounter people who physically do not resemble the person they symbolise in the dream. One just *knows* it is that person. Benjamin takes this further and presents an example where the dreamer utters; ‘It was a sock, but it was my mother too’, and explains this link between the two as an experience of similarity. The

repetition can simply not be grounded in an archetypal form. The similarity between the two things occurs in a sort of ‘riddling’, an ‘interplay of the opaquely similar things’ (8). The link has been created in the mind of the dreamer because of a notion of similarity, and this ‘riddling’ seems to be something lucid which occurs when humans make connections between two things that are not identical, but similar. This suggests that exploring repetition in a literary work will not necessarily mean limiting oneself to what is identifiable as exactly or directly the same. It opens to a wider field of repetition than the first form, even though the first represents a higher degree of consensus among literary scholars.

In literature, repetitions can, or, according to Miller, *must* be representations of both forms of repetition at once: ‘[...] each form of repetition inevitably calls up the other as its shadow companion. You cannot have one without the other. The difference between one text and another from this point of view is the varying modes of intertwining’ (16). This means that even though the two forms are not represented equally salient in every example, both forms must be there nonetheless. He adds; ‘[...] it seems impossible to have one form of repetition without the other, even though one form or the other might be dominant in a given writer’ (17). We see that for the different examples of repetition found in the texts, as Miller states, one or the other form of repetition might be *dominant* for the mode of repetition being discussed. It is the intertwining of these forms and the balance therein, which is not always apparent, and may be explored.

1.4 Methodology

My choice to focus on repetition draws from the contribution by Esslin in shedding light upon the different possible functions of repetition in Pinter’s dramas. I have chosen to structure the thesis by discussing the two plays in turn, paying close attention to language and structure. Thus, my approach approximates to a close reading of the two plays, divided between two main chapters. I will let the plays keep their autonomy by allowing them to speak for themselves. This means that I explore the plays with an open mind, selecting the examples of repetition which appear relevant to discussing power-play, and focusing on examples which seem relevant to understanding the thematic mechanisms exhibited through repetition.

The chosen method differs slightly between the two analyses, which will become apparent in the individual chapters. The reason for the varying method is that the two plays in turn demand different treatment. In *The Hothouse*, there are many characters, different physical settings and a far greater variety when it comes to plot and sub-plots. In *The Caretaker*, there

are only three characters to focus on and one physical setting. I draw from what I learn in the chapter which discusses *The Hothouse* and use that knowledge to carry out a deeper analysis of *The Caretaker* as a whole. It is necessary for me to go deeper into the repetition patterns of the first play if I am not to rest on Esslin's laurels alone. In other words, on having reached the knowledge attained through chapter two, a more extensive analysis can take place of the play at hand in chapter three.

The thesis will treat repetition as a wide field. This means that it is not only single words and sentences that are repeated verbatim which are of interest. Miller's second form of repetition supports this understanding of repetition. Pinter has exhibited such a rich usage of language that it is difficult state without reserve that any theory will encompass all the types of repetition one might find in a Pinter play. Nevertheless, Esslin has given some directives as to what to look for in exploring repetition in Pinter. I have interpreted his theory to include, for instance, the associative mechanisms, the application of jargon, diatribe speeches, and refrain-like structures mentioned above to encompass what one may define as repetition. This aspect is exemplified in my accounts of repetitive conversations, transtextual elements (i.e. repetitions that expand beyond the limits of each play individually) and repetitive speeches which in turn are possessed of repetitive elements. In addition to this, if a sentence fragment repeats itself, or if a near-synonym appears to be a repetition of something preceding it, it will also be treated as repetition. Sometimes it is the type of utterance, and not the sense meaning of the extracted elements which is repeated, as will become apparent in the discussions on question-sequences and interrogation scenes as well as poetic repetition patterns.¹⁶

It is also necessary to point out that I treat the plays as texts. This means that the aspect of performance will be given little or no emphasis. In some instances hypotheses of audience reactions are presented, but only as supplements to the textual elements discussed. Pauses and silences are also recurring elements in Pinter's dramas, and are largely dependent upon performance. There will be some discussions of pauses and silences as repetition, attempting to reveal what they may signify. However, as they do presuppose performance, it is never easy to say something definite about what pauses and silences signify.

Notably, there are both direct and indirect forms of repetition, from the exact verbatim repetition to the implicated repetitiousness of associative mechanism, sentence fragments and so on. The discussion thus requires an open mind about what repetition may signify and

¹⁶ The focus on repetition presupposes extensive usage of examples from the primary texts. Sometimes the examples must be longer to illustrate the way in which repetition functions within a stretch of dialogue.

demands a close reading on my part allowing for an extensive analysis. As I largely concentrate on interpersonal relations and power-struggle between the characters on a personal level, historical significance of the plays will not be taken into consideration. The attempt is not to read the plays as allegorical or symbolic of what was happening in the world at the time they were written, but rather how the immediate surroundings and other characters influence each character and their inner life. Thus, the focus lies within the selected examples and the interpersonal (power)relations they address.

1.5 Specification of the problem to be investigated

Before embarking on this analysis of repetition patterns in the two plays I am left with a dual focus: first, and most importantly, an exploration of what repetition within the utterances of Pinter's characters can signify, and second, a focus on the power-play which is arguably present within each example. The main issue at hand is thus: in thinking of Pinter's language as communicative utterances imbued with subtext that hints at the psychological mechanisms within each character, what may repetition signify when employed as a linguistic tool? If Pinter's development from a strictly plot-developing dialogue in traditional drama to a stage language that models realistic conversations transforms this language to dramatic action, what are the implications of repetition when it comes to power-play and interpersonal relations between the characters? In short, what is the significance of repetition in the two plays *The Hothouse* and *The Caretaker*?

1.6 Chapter Outline

My thesis is divided into four chapters including this introduction, and two main chapters present the analyses. Chapter two, '*The Hothouse*', is an analysis of repetition patterns in the play *The Hothouse*. Chapter three, '*The Caretaker*', continues the analysis of repetition in the play *The Caretaker*. While the second chapter selects dialogues from which examples are extracted, the third chapter focuses on the entire play and is not restricted to selected dialogues when it comes to extracting examples. This will be further elaborated within the individual chapters. Chapter four, 'Conclusion', presents my concluding points.

2 *The Hothouse*

The Hothouse was written in 1958 but did not meet the public eye until Pinter chose to have it produced in 1980. He first discarded it, because he ‘never began to like any of the characters, they really didn’t live at all’ (Quoted in Prentice 81), but as Martin Esslin pointed out in 1970, the play might be ‘regarded as an overindulgence in Pinterese’ (‘Language’ 34) and that for this reason he might have been wise to discard it in the first place. Moreover, even though Pinter’s initial success as a playwright was partly due to audience reactions to his amusing examples of linguistic errors, which made audiences feel superior to the characters, he showed that he could resist the temptation of exploiting this trait of his authorial skills by discarding certain plays, such as *The Hothouse* (Esslin ‘Language’ 34).

Nevertheless, the play seemed to be significant after all, since Pinter chose to have it produced in the end. In an author’s note to *Plays I*, Pinter writes of the play that he originally put it aside for further deliberation and that in 1979 he ‘re-read *The Hothouse* and decided it was worth presenting on the stage’ (*PI* 186). If on one hand the play was an example of overindulgence in ‘Pinteresque language’, and risked being perceived as a parody of itself and Pinter’s style, it is safe to say that on the other it definitely had influence on some of the content in his later sketches as will become apparent below. As we learned from the introductory chapter, the play also contains a great variety of the very fundamental characteristics of Pinter’s early linguistic style, which makes it particularly relevant to my project.

2.1 Overview

We are brought into one of Pinter’s settings which bring about a feeling of uncertainty; a resting home of some sort for patients known only through assigned numbers, governed by something called The Ministry under the leadership of a retired colonel, Mr. Roote, a man whose authority is constantly put to the test by his staff and what he calls the ‘understaff’, a word which apparently exists as a noun only in Pinter’s universe. It is made known that one of the patients has died, another has given birth to a child, and the search for the father of this child is what one might call the play’s ‘plot’. However, through dialogues between the characters, it is made clear that there is more at stake than one man’s reputation; power, identity and safety seem to be commodities for which the characters strive. In the end, the totality of the staff at the hothouse is massacred, allegedly by the patients. Only two men of the staff survive; Gibbs and Lamb.

I posit that *The Hothouse* is ultimately about power, the fear of losing it, and inevitably, the struggle to gain it. Moreover, there is a general focus on repetition in the sense that the story evolves with a notion that the outcome has already been determined by factors of the past. The power structure, as it exists in the play, seems grounded. It seems it can only be destabilised through drastic measures. As this thesis deals with language on a detailed level, it will not include an extensive analysis of all dialogues in *The Hothouse* as a whole, but rather concentrate on a few selected dialogues and characters that shed light on the way repetition works within the field of power-play and interpersonal relations.

2.2 Focus and selection of dialogues and repetitions

I have chosen to focus mainly on the relation between the characters Gibbs, Roote and Lush. In this two-act play there are four extracts of dialogue that are especially relevant to the relations between these characters, and one which is significant on its own terms. For practical reasons, these will be called *scenes* in my analysis. Readers will notice that *The Hothouse* is not divided into scenes at all, and consequently this distinction is necessary on my part. A *dialogue* will be treated as a continuing bit of conversation untouched by the structural elements of the play. A dialogue *can* be equivalent to a scene, but calling something a scene also tells that it is a structural element. The difference is that a dialogue can continue from its 'status quo position' somewhere else in the play.

There is only one dialogue which is divided between scenes in *The Hothouse*, namely the first one mentioned in the following. In *Harold Pinter: Plays 1*, the extracts are presented accordingly: an ongoing dialogue between Roote and Gibbs is divided between two extracts of conversation, i.e. two scenes, from the opening scene on pages 189 to 205 to the third structural scene belonging to the same dialogue on pages 211 to 222. This first dialogue, Dialogue One, is interrupted by a structural scene; a dialogue between two other characters named Miss Cutts and Lamb. However, Dialogue One continues on page 211 from its 'status quo' position. The three other chosen extracts are thus both scenes in the structural sense, and complete dialogues as they do not continue from their 'status quo' position later in the play. Dialogue Two, then, is the interrogation scene on pages 234 to 254 (structural scene number 6), and Dialogue Three (structural scene number 7), which belongs to Act Two, is between Lush, Roote and Gibbs on pages 255 to 291. The last dialogue, Dialogue Four, (structural scene number 9) is also between Lush, Roote and Gibbs on pages 299 to 313, but does not

continue from the position of the third dialogue, and is thus an individual dialogue, as the following diagram shows:

Dialogues	Structural ‘scenes’
Dialogue One: Roote and Gibbs (Duologue: between two characters)	Scene 1 (p. 189 to 205) Scene 3 (p. 211 to 222)
Dialogue Two: Gibbs, Cutts and Lamb	Scene 6 (p. 234 to 254)
Dialogue Three: Roote, Gibbs and Lush	Scene 7 (p. 255 to 291)
Dialogue Four: Roote, Gibbs and Lush	Scene 9 (p. 299 to 313)

I will from now on refer to the parts of text I have chosen as dialogues for practical purposes. This means that scenes 1 and 3 will be treated as one dialogue, Dialogue One in spite of the interrupting scene 2. As the form illustrates Dialogues Three and Four have the same participants, or characters. These two dialogues do not follow each other in the ‘status quo’ position the way Dialogue One did, and are thus mentioned above as two separate dialogues that are, however, linked because the participants are the same. In that sense, they may be perceived as belonging to the same dialogue and are presented below as connected. From each dialogue I will present extracts which I find especially relevant to this project and analyse the repetition patterns I find. My choice to focus on parts of the play as such does of course exclude some interesting examples of repetition relevant to power-play and interpersonal relations. However, what is gained by such a selection is a focus on language on a fairly detailed level, which allows for a close reading that would otherwise be impossible. Some attention will be paid to the play as a whole, but the point of departure will always lie in the close reading and analysis of repetition patterns in connection to the theme of power and interpersonal relations *within* the chosen dialogues and extracts, with relevant theoretical angling.

A problem of excluding certain scenes is also that some interesting characters will not be dealt with extensively for the benefit of the ones within the dialogues chosen. Thus, I have to pay less attention to two of the main characters, Miss Cutts and Lamb, in order to make room for the others. One of these characters is Miss Cutts, who represents an important fraction within the theme of power: the oppositional aspect of the feminine versus the masculine. This issue will not be dealt with further in this analysis. The dialogues I have chosen to focus on deal with a different kind of power struggle, and at least when it comes to looking at gender roles put up against each other I have chosen to leave gender-related power

play out of the picture. I believe, nevertheless, that my exclusion of certain parts of the play will benefit the close reading of the parts I do include. However, if a repetition does occur in a dialogue which I have not chosen to explore, it will be mentioned in spite of being outside the chosen text if it is relevant enough.

Some of the repetitions I will not explore on a deeper level are important, especially as symbols in the main plot. By symbols I mean objects and phenomena which ‘stand for’ something else, representing it in the play. The precise definition as explained by *The Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, a symbol is ‘a sign, shape or object which is used to represent something else’ (CALD “Symbol”). The name of the play, *The Hothouse*, can be interpreted in many ways. A hothouse can be linked both to plants, as a greenhouse (‘phytotomy’, which means ‘The dissection of plants; plant anatomy’ (OED “Phytotomy”), is repeated at least three times within the play), and suggests that the hothouse is a place where the patients are the plants, guarded and sealed off from the outside world. On another note, hothouse can also be linked to jazz music, hothouse jazz, where the patients may be seen as melodies. Jazz musicians often name their pieces of music by numbers, like the patients at the hothouse are also assigned numbers instead of names. This reference of the name of the play to plants and jazz will not be dealt with extensively. Another very obvious repetition is the recurrence of the interrupting sign, keen and laughter which are heard three times, followed by voices and weird noises between the penultimate and last ‘scene’, presumably the massacre. These I see not as ‘stratagems to cover nakedness’ and reveal no hidden mental activity in the characters, but in my view they serve as foreshadowings of what is about to happen. They contribute to the disturbing atmosphere which exists in the play.

The excerpts chosen are there because they illustrate interesting instances of repetition and shed light on the power relations between the characters and the inner life of the individual characters. Where relevant, the examples will be put into context with Miller’s theory on the two forms of repetition and Esslin’s account of what repetition in Pinter’s plays can signify. Following this line of thought, I now pose these questions in relation to *The Hothouse* in particular: How can repetition be said to demonstrate the characters’ struggle to gain power, their strategies for maintaining it? And, how can repetition contribute to revealing how the characters directly or indirectly express the fear of losing their power in the self-erasing environment which is arguably presented in *The Hothouse*? I now proceed to explore the excerpts from the first dialogue, as defined above, in order to find repetition patterns of interest to the theme of power play and interpersonal relations.

2.3 Act One

2.3.1 Dialogue One: Roote and Gibbs (Exposition)

In the first dialogue we meet Roote and Gibbs discussing the patients at the hothouse, which is the topic of discussion after some debriefing.¹⁷ During the conversation, Roote is told twice by Gibbs that the establishment is slightly out of control, as one patient, patient 6457, has died, and another, patient 6459, has given birth. This is something which Roote has missed and it confuses him, both because his confusion of one patient for the other indicates that he does not seem to have the control of the field of which he is assigned power, and because Gibbs is the one to point it out to him. As the head of the hothouse, Roote has a certain amount of assigned power. However, his power is limited to a particular field and does not truly expand beyond those limits, as will become apparent in the discussions below.

Hierarchy and ways of addressing: ‘Sir’

The first repetition which will be given attention is the word ‘sir’. I focus on this word not only because it is the first one which is repeated, but also because of its seeming hyper-occurrence in the first dialogue which is presented in *The Hothouse*. Moreover, the word ‘sir’ is also closely linked to the theme of power, as will be shown in the following.

As the head of the rest home institution, we can expect Roote to be referred to as ‘sir’ by most of the staff. What stands out in the opening scene, however, is *how many times* Gibbs addresses Roote by the word ‘sir’. Of course, being an equivalent of a name, an honorific as it is called, ‘sir’ is a word which inevitably *must* be repeated in such a setting, and there could be a danger in giving it too much attention. Nevertheless, over a page span of seventeen¹⁸, Gibbs repeats the word ‘sir’ seventy times, which gives the average of a little more than four times per page. Here is an example from the first page of the play to illustrate the density of this word:

¹⁷ When referred to without capital letters, ‘the hothouse’ means the same as ‘the institution’ or ‘the establishment’, i.e. it is not the name of the play which is being discussed.

¹⁸ This page span concludes the whole of structural scene number one, but not the whole of the first dialogue as it is defined above. If we include the second structural scene, the number of repetitions of ‘sir’ is 101 on a page span of 28 (average of 3,6). The density is not as high in the second scene, but maybe this is even more interesting because of the difference. The opening scene is, after all, the first one.

ROOTE: Gibbs.
 GIBBS: Yes, sir?
 ROOTE: Tell me...
 GIBBS: Yes, sir?
 ROOTE: How's 6457 getting on?
 GIBBS: 6457, sir?
 ROOTE: Yes.
 GIBBS: He's dead, sir. (*PI* 189)

This extract represents a very typical 'Pinterese' opening to a play; we are eavesdropping on an ongoing conversation, which does not seem odd at first, and then the surprising line 'He's dead, sir' is dropped, which seems strange. Again this turns our attention to the absurdity typical of Pinter, especially because of its comic effect. Saying someone is dead seems like the most ordinary thing in the world the way it is presented, and brings our thoughts back to the meaninglessness of man's life as presented by Ionesco in relation to the absurd. There does not actually seem to be anything odd, when it comes to the usage of 'sir' in this first extract of conversation. This can merely be a natural way for Gibbs to address his superior. It may also just seem like one of Pinter's tricks to display colloquial language. However, as stated above, what *does* seem odd is the density of the repetition, or the frequency of times Gibbs addresses Roote by the word 'sir'. It seems almost as though Gibbs is *mocking* Roote, exaggerating his politeness. It becomes sarcastic, parodying, perhaps, the norms of polite conversation. As we will see later on, another member of Roote's staff, Lush, is also challenging his authority; Gibbs, it transpires, is the more subtle one as he always sticks to polite jargon when talking to Roote. In other words: Gibbs signals disrespect through a certain duality of language, taking on the pretence of respectful conventional address of his superior. The sense meaning of the word is kept, while its function is distorted by the abundance of its reappearances.

In all the four lines he speaks above, Gibbs repeats the word 'sir' and continues this for most of the first conversation. After some time has passed, however, the usage of 'sir' is actually thematised by Roote, whose picking up of Gibbs's usage makes it even more interesting:

ROOTE: I was standing right where you're standing now. I can tell you that. Saying yes sir, no sir and certainly sir. Just as you are now. I didn't bribe anyone to get where I am. I worked my way up. When my predecessor ... retired ... I was invited to take over his position. And have you any idea why you call me sir now?
 GIBBS: Yes, sir.
 ROOTE: Why?
 GIBBS: Because you called him sir then, sir.
 ROOTE: Right!
Pause (PI 196-197)

This thematisation by Roote, and his fivefold repetition of ‘sir’ renders the word significant in the sense that it is made the subject of the conversation instead of being a word one would normally barely notice. Here, the word ‘sir’ gets linked to rank and formal positions within the establishment of the hothouse, and simultaneously contextualises Roote’s position as its leader historically. Gibbs, in his way, confirms his formal rank by saying that he calls Roote ‘sir’ out of tradition and his place in the hierarchy, while Roote is explicitly *pointing out* his formal rank by making it the topic of conversation and also focusing on tradition. Things are the way they are because they have always been done that way. Notice especially that Gibbs’ reason for addressing Roote as he does is ‘Because you called him sir then, sir’ (*PI* 196). This supports my notion that the power structure is fixated; there is not much room for change in this hierarchy. It repeats itself, so to speak. As Roote says further on; ‘But I sometimes think I have been a bit slow in making changes. Change is in the order of things, after all. I mean, it’s *in* the order of things, it’s not *the* order of things, it’s *in* the order of things’ (*PI* 197), but later concludes, when Gibbs asks him if they should put change on the agenda: ‘You know damn well we can’t. That was one of the rules of procedure laid down in the original constitution’ (*PI* 198). Notably, the reluctance to make any changes, no matter how much it would benefit the establishment, may be a foreshadowing that the ‘revolution’ that takes place in the end will possibly only lead to a new, but similar, power structure mimicking the one they had before. If a new leader takes over, will he or she not be as obsessed with power as any of the ones who preceded the new one? This will be further discussed in the part about mothers and predecessors below.

In short, ‘sir’ is an *important* word for Gibbs, because it is present every day, and confirms his formal rank to him. However, the word may seem insignificant. Gibbs’s usage, if it is not meant sarcastic or to mock Roote, might just be habitual, as is normal when a job or situation requires one to use a word very often. But the number of times he uses it makes it interesting to explore. Furthermore, it might be important to mention that this density of ‘sir’ does not continue throughout the play, and that its hyper-occurrence in the first dialogue may be connected to the fact that this is the exposition of the play, where the ground rules are laid. Gibbs does continue to call Roote ‘sir’, but not as often as in the first dialogue.

The word ‘sir’ is also important to Roote as it represents order and tradition and confirms his formal position which he constantly feels is under threat. By sticking to how things have always been done, Roote finds a source of security, a ‘room’ where things are at least predictable to some extent. As Cahn explains in the introductory chapter of his book

Gender and Power in the Plays of Harold Pinter, '[...] many of Pinter's characters take refuge in a room, a construction of familiar walls and furniture about which they know as much as they can know about anything and in which they feel as safe as they do anywhere' (2).

Although the 'room' as Cahn describes it is concrete, i.e. an actual room, I feel it can be attributed to routine as well, especially when it comes to the establishment of the rest home institution in *The Hothouse*. The rules within the walls of the establishment make up part of the security against intruders and change which may destabilise the everyday life of its inhabitants.

This brings us back to theory. I initially stated that the word 'sir' was chosen to come first because it is the first word in the entire play which is repeated, and for that reason I would see if there was anything significant about it. As we recall, Miller's first form of repetition is the kind where the initial example is the archetypal form of the word, the original from which all the later repetitions stem. If we look at 'sir' in this first dialogue, it can be challenging to see how this form of repetition applies. The first form would imply that all the representations of the word 'sir' are copies to some degree, copies of that initial representation on page 189. Nevertheless, the initial representation does not seem to be of more significance than the rest of the 'sir's repeated. Then, can one really say that all the representations of 'sir' are copies of the first one?

The word 'sir' in this context seems to be more fitting within the second form that Miller presents, namely the one where all repetitions are in themselves unique, and thus different, to a certain degree. They are not unique in the sense that they are very different, but the first representation plays a lesser role, so to speak. There is nothing special about the first representation of the word 'sir' except for the fact that it is *first*. However, it does not seem to change much either, except for the obviousness of its density towards the end of the dialogue, the fact that Gibbs repeats it to the extreme. One may say that it is at the moment when Roote makes the word the topic of conversation that most audiences would even notice that Gibbs is using this polite expression too much. Roote, then, makes 'sir' change; it now bears more significance, as I have shown through my discussion of its pertinence to formal rank, hierarchy and formal power. The topicalisation justifies the word's hyper-occurrence and makes more meaning inhabit this small and at first seemingly insignificant word. Could one say that 'sir' can be more fitting within each of Miller's forms of repetition based on which character we focus on? Seen in the context of Gibbs, the repetition of 'sir' is more fitting within the norms of Miller's second form of repetition, where all repetitions are 'ghostly'

(Miller 6) in their appearance; duplicates, yet individuals, as one is not more significant than the other. Then, seen in the context of Roote, was the first (hypothetical, that is) occurrence of this word more significant? I realise that this first representation is not presented within the play at all, it exists somewhere outside the text along with Roote's predecessor, a made-up past existing only in Roote's fictive memory, a dimension within modern drama which Pinter owes largely to Ibsen and Chekhov (Fergusson 149), as we recall from the Introduction. The obviousness of the usage of 'sir' is further emphasised if we see it in contrast to how Lush acts around Roote, which will be discussed below.

What's the matter with you? Roote's stratagems to cover nakedness

Repeated questions and accusations

Arguably, repetitions within Harold Pinter's plays conceal what is truly going on inside characters or maybe how *little* is going on. As mentioned earlier, Pinter said in his speech *Writing for the Theatre* from 1962; 'One way of looking at speech is to say that it is a constant stratagem to cover nakedness' (*PI* xiii). A character speaks, sometimes, as a way to avoid silence, to avoid disclosing 'the poverty within' (*PI* xiii), avoiding showing the other one's true self. In *The Hothouse*, Roote constantly asks bizarre questions, suspicious questions which may lead one to believe that he is paranoid on some level, and at the same time the questions and accusations seem to be reflections of his confusion and fear of losing power. The repeating questions seem to fill the void and inhibit the silence which would occur in situations where he does not immediately know what to say. The first time he does this is in his dialogue with Gibbs in the first structural scene of the play:

GIBBS. For the sake of accuracy, sir, I'd like, if I may, to point out to you what is apparently another discrepancy.

ROOTE. Another one?

GIBBS. Yes, sir.

ROOTE. You're very keen this morning, aren't you, Gibbs?

GIBBS. I do try to keep my powers of observation well exercised, sir.

ROOTE. Don't stand so close to me. You're right on top of me. What's the matter with you?

GIBBS. I'm so sorry, sir. (*He steps away from the desk.*)

ROOTE. There's plenty of room here, isn't there? What are you breathing down my neck for?

GIBBS. I do apologise, sir.

ROOTE. Nothing's more irritating.

GIBBS. It was thoughtless of me, sir.

Pause.

ROOTE. Well... what was this *other* discrepancy, anyway?

GIBBS (*flatly*). It was not 6457, sir, whom you interviewed on the 17th.

ROOTE. Gibbs.

GIBBS. Sir?

ROOTE. One question.

GIBBS. Sir.

ROOTE. Are you taking the piss out of me?

GIBBS. Most decidedly not, sir.

Slight pause. (PI 192-194)

In this extract, Gibbs is trying, in his best and most polite (or hyper polite) manner, to inform Roote that there has been a misunderstanding. Along with accusations that Gibbs is standing too close to him and being 'very keen', Roote then starts what one might interpret as a defence mechanism, asking questions to avoid the subject Gibbs is addressing. From 'You're very keen this morning, aren't you, Gibbs?', it seems that Roote is trying to avoid the subject, creating what linguists call an 'insertion sequence' or a 'side sequence' (Cook 54), an interrupting conversation within the conversation, where the two characters are not talking about the misunderstanding at all. They have now changed the topic to evolve around Gibbs's manners at the present time. Gibbs does not understand that this is what Roote is doing at first, taking Roote's sarcastic comment as a compliment. Then, it seems, Roote is provoked into accusing Gibbs of standing too close to him, invading his personal space, indirectly suggesting Gibbs has ulterior motives for doing so and asking 'What's the matter with you?' This is a question which he repeats in various forms throughout the play when faced with pressing situations, for instance direct repetition; 'What's the matter with you?' (PI 290) to Tubb, which, in this case, is a pretty justified comment as Tubb has just said that a microphone is hidden in a cake, and indirect repetitions such as 'Who do you think you are?' (PI 265), again commenting on Gibbs' supposed impolite behavior, and 'What the bloody hell do you think you're doing?' (PI 303); an overreaction to Gibbs having moved slightly in the middle of one of his speeches. These, along with strange accusations such as 'You're damn clever, aren't you?' (PI 279), make up parts of Roote's armory of defence, as far as I can see.

Exclaiming various sorts of defence expressions is something Roote does especially when he feels his authority is being undermined. Roote also tends to repeat the importance of *order* and it seems that whenever that order is being threatened (for instance like here, by a *discrepancy*, which is also repeated several times), Roote has to employ a maneuver to distract his 'opponent' by giving him a counterstrike in the form of an accusation or multiple questions. Another such paranoid counterstrike question which repeats itself is 'Are you taking the piss out of me?' (PI 194) which is repeated, again to Gibbs, as 'Between ourselves, man to man, you're not by any chance taking the old wee-wee out of me, are you?' (PI 203). In the long excerpt above it comes as a distraction maneuver from the indication that he has been mistaken, and on page 203, he asks the similar question again because Gibbs points out

yet another misunderstanding in their conversation. This time Gibbs wants to correct the misunderstanding by telling Roote how another patient is doing, patient number 6459, who has had a baby. Roote is not the only character in Pinter's universe to be suspicious of others, defending himself by any means he has available. As Cahn notes:

Pinter's characters live in perpetual suspicion, regarding both familiar figures and strangers with trepidation. His characters are also protective of what they see as their own, objects and territory over which they can assert sovereignty. As a result of this state of mind, his characters are forever on guard against invasion, both physical and psychological. They are always nervous that whatever few rights and possessions they claim may be snatched away, leaving them even more alienated. (Cahn 2)

In one way then, one can see Roote as a hyper 'Pinteresque' character. It does not come as a surprise, especially because the play in its whole has been viewed as an exaggeration of features typical of Pinter's linguistic armory, and also in terms of characters and their fears, the theme of power and the fear of intrusion.

Repeated Sequences of Dialogue

Both times Gibbs points out the discrepancies, as they call it, a sequence of questioning is initiated by Roote, who is trying to figure out which patient the respective numbers are referring to. This obsessive questioning climaxes, one could say, and results in two similar incidents during the first dialogue.¹⁹ The sequences contain pieces of what I defined in the introductory chapter as 'recurrent tautological repetition' (Esslin 'Language' 34):

First 'deciding scene': Patient 6457	Second 'deciding scene': Patient 6459
<p>ROOTE. A death? You say this man has died? GIBBS. 6457, sir? Yes, sir. [...] ROOTE. Well, which one was he, for God's sake? GIBBS. You knew him well, sir. ROOTE. You keep saying that! But I can't remember a damn thing about him. What did he look like? <i>Pause</i> GIBBS. Thinnish ROOTE. Fairheaded? GIBBS (<i>sitting</i>). Not darkheaded, sir. <i>Pause</i> ROOTE. Tall? GIBBS. Certainly not small. <i>Pause</i> ROOTE. Quite sharp sort of face? GIBBS. Quite sharp, yes, sir. ROOTE. Yes. <i>Pause</i> Yes, he had a sharp sort of face, didn't he? GIBBS. I should say it was sharp, sir, yes. ROOTE. Limped a bit? GIBBS. Oh, possibly a trifle, sir.</p>	<p>ROOTE. Which one <i>is</i> 6459? GIBBS. She's a woman in her thirties – ROOTE. That means nothing to me, get on with it, what does she look like? Perhaps I know her. GIBBS. Oh, there's no doubt that you know her, sir. ROOTE. What does she look like? <i>Pause</i> GIBBS. Fattish ROOTE. Darkheaded? GIBBS. Not fairheaded, sir. <i>Pause</i> ROOTE. Small? GIBBS. Certainly not tall. <i>Pause</i> ROOTE. Quite sensual sort of face? GIBBS. Quite sensual, yes, sir. ROOTE. Yes. <i>Pause</i> Yes, she's got a sensual sort of face, hasn't she? GIBBS. I should say it was sensual, sir, yes. ROOTE. Wobbles when she walks? GIBBS. Oh, possibly a trifle, sir. (</p>

¹⁹ This type of conversation also recurs in a third similar episode on page 273 when Roote is asking about Lamb, only with three 'contenders'.

<p>ROOTE. Yes, he limped. He limped on his left leg. GIBBS. His left, sir? ROOTE. Well, one of them. I'm sure of it. GIBBS. Yes, he had a slight limp, sir. ROOTE. Yes, of course he had. <i>Pause</i> He had a slight limp. Whenever he walked anywhere... he limped. Prematurely grey, he was. Prematurely grey. <i>Pause</i> Yes, I remember him very well. <i>Pause</i> He's dead, you say? GIBBS. Yes, sir. (PI 199-201)</p>	<p>ROOTE. Yes, she wobbles. She wobbles in her left buttock. GIBBS. Her left, sir? ROOTE. Well, one of them. I'm sure of it. GIBBS. Yes, she has a slight wobble, sir. ROOTE. Yes, of course she has. <i>Pause</i> She has a slight wobble. Whenever she walks anywhere... she wobbles. Likes eating toffees, too... when she can get any. GIBBS. Quite true, sir. <i>Pause</i> ROOTE. No – I don't think I know her. <i>Pause</i> (PI 216-218)</p>
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When the two extracts are presented this way, readers will notice that almost every bit of the conversation about patient 6457 repeats itself as the *opposite* in the conversation about patient 6459. The conversations, although far apart in structural terms are almost identical in form, and the permutation of one word in the first extract for its antonym in the other is quite obvious when the extracts are juxtaposed in this way. It seems the two characters are engaging in a familiar ritual or a game, where Gibbs knows what to answer to every question and Roote knows he will get his way in the end.

The recurrent tautological repetition, using different words to describe the exact same thing, is not without meaning. As mentioned briefly in chapter one, it seems this is a way for Gibbs to agree with Roote in a more subtle way than if he were to simply say 'Yes' or 'No' or repeat verbatim what Roote says, and further emphasises his politeness and his will to play along. Gibbs nearly always sticks to hyper-polite jargon, and this might be one of the reasons why he is the only real survivor in the end: he is sly without seeming to be.

What also seems evident to me, however, is that in a way, Roote is somehow making these patients up. In the penultimate comment Roote says about both patients, he describes them and seemingly *decides* who they are, the way an author or playwright might describe a character before having fully developed it. It seems like he is 'tasting' the words after having insisted on the limp and the wobble as characteristics, trying them out as he progresses: 'He had a slight limp. Whenever he walked anywhere... he limped. Prematurely grey, he was. Prematurely grey' (PI 201), and 'She has a slight wobble. Whenever she walks anywhere... she wobbles. Likes eating toffees, too... when she can get any' (PI 218). He has not yet clarified whether he knows the patients or not, and the 'deciding' here serves to underline his authoritative position of assigned power, as discussed earlier. He somehow creates his own reality through expressing it.

Esslin writes of a certain associative repetitive pattern characters use for different reasons or purposes depending on who the speakers are and what situation they are in. This is often reflected when the characters struggle for the right words:

In Pinter's dialogue we can watch the desperate struggles of his characters to find the correct expression; we are thus enabled to observe them in the – very dramatic – act of struggling for communication, sometimes succeeding, often failing. And when they have got hold of a formulation, they hold on to it, savour it, and repeat it to enjoy their achievement [...].
(‘Language’ 40)

Esslin mentions this in connection with inarticulate characters at first, and as Roote is not exactly inarticulate, it is more relevant to focus on the last part: the repetition of words and expression for the enjoyment of it, of having found the ‘mot juste’, as Esslin calls it (‘Language’ 40). As we remember from the introductory chapter, the ‘mot juste’ is ‘The word or phrase that is exactly right in a particular situation’ (*CALD* “Mot juste”). Roote is not struggling to find the right words or phrases for this situation, but he is indeed enjoying his ‘deciding’ of who the patients are. Another articulate character who uses this associative speech pattern, according to Esslin, is Harry in *The Collection*. Harry, in the same way as Roote, savours some words of emphasis, to describe someone he does not like, and enjoys ‘hammer[ing] away’ (Esslin ‘Language’ 44) at this person with derogatory descriptions. In the same way, one might see Roote’s repetition of limping, wobbling, prematurely grey and a taste for toffees. These are negative qualities which Roote assigns the patients.

These characterisations may be interpreted as lies. Roote adds to the descriptions two elements for each patient, as seen above. And for both patients the first has to do with walking. For patient 6457 he adds a limp and that he was prematurely grey. Both characteristics seem to come out of nothing, Roote having already discussed the hair colour and not having even mentioned anything about the way the patient carried himself. However, I will argue that they are both characteristics that signify lack of male strength and aging. Roote himself, being a man in his fifties, might find a way to place himself above the patient through this negative characterisation, creating a contrast to himself as a masculine man of power. For character 6459, he adds a wobble and liking ‘eating toffees, too... when she can get any’. These characteristics also seem to come out of nothing, as Gibbs seems to be confused when Roote mentions the wobble, and again: not having mentioned anything about the likes and dislikes of the patient. Here, my assumption is that Roote is pointing out her weaknesses as well, and this time it has to do with self control. A wobble might signify that the patient overeats, that she is a glutton, something which is emphasised further by the

mentioning of the toffees: 'when she can get any' implies that if she had unlimited access, she would eat them all the time. What is slightly disturbing is that this kind of lack of self control when it comes to candy suggests a kind of childishness about the patient, and naughtiness on Roote's part, deciding whether she is allowed toffees or not. It shines through to me as both sexual (especially because of her having a 'sensual face') and a bit sadistic in depriving her of something she wants. Here, the power Roote is implying he has is the dominant master of something wild, something he has the power to tame.

Interestingly, Esslin takes the associative repetitive pattern mentioned earlier further by stating that when characters lie, they also do so by associating different words with one another: 'It is by an analogous associative linguistic structure that Pinter indicates that a character is lying. Here, too, the story is being made up as it goes along, and often merely by the *sound* of the words [...]' ('Language' 45). Following this line of thought, in the characterisation of patient 6457, 'prematurely grey' may not have come to Roote from the *sound* of a word, but rather as an association to the limp. When he then picks up ways of walking again in the characterisation of patient 6459, it might stem from the previous characterisation of patient 6457, starting with a certain way of walking, and then the 'wobble' leading to the association of a tendency towards gluttony in patient 6459.

What Gibbs says in response to Roote's characterisations seems irrelevant, a fact which Gibbs himself may be aware of; Roote shows his ultimate power as the leader of the institution by almost *creating* the patients the way he sees them, holding the key to their existence, their characteristics, even their identities as human beings. It is vital to him to be in control, and the repetition of the entire 'ritual' seems like, in Miller's words, not necessarily true, but important to the individual and thus significant. Ironically enough, he decides, at the end of the passages, that he remembers patient 6457, and does not know patient 6459 at all, even though he has just 'made her up' and Gibbs has said that it is quite evident that they do know each other. The implications here can be interpreted along the lines of the plot: on the one hand, patient 6457, the patient who has died, bears no further threat to Roote as he is in fact dead, he cannot speak or reveal anything; on the other hand patient 6459, the one who has given birth, may serve as his anathema as they are hunting for the member of staff responsible for the pregnancy in the first place and her testimony may bring him down.

As we learned from the Introduction, Esslin writes that dialogue in Pinter often reveals psychological action within his characters ('Language' 37). If we interpret the negative descriptions which Roote ascribes the patients as a type of mirroring of the psychological

action within Roote himself, the descriptions may be reflections of his own self-image; weak, aging, and lacking in self-control (possibly in a sexual situation). Gibbs's accusation that Roote is the father in the last scene of the play after the massacre, in addition to the fact that he recognises patient 6459's night gown in Act Two, put some suspicion on Roote. Significantly, we never find out for certain. As Roote claims not to know this patient, he can consequently not be accused of the violation. All in all, 'deciding' who the patients are seems like the ultimate way for Roote to express his power. He is in charge of their identities, their possibility of life, as the hothouse may be seen as a substitute womb, explained in the following.

Mothers and predecessors: the institution as womb and totalitarian power

The institution presented in *The Hothouse* arguably functions, to a great extent, both as a substitute womb *and* a totalitarian power, for its residents and for the staff alike. References to mothers and predecessors are repeated in several parts of the play, and I have selected a few examples of interest to shed light on this theory. The link between mothers and predecessors may not be obvious. The link, in my view, is that both mothers and predecessors are representations of the past that still exist within the present space and time even when this presence is not physical. They are both representations of something that existed prior to you, laying the ground for the future. The link, then, to a womb seems relevant to mothers. The link to a totalitarian power is more relevant to predecessors. However, the spheres of public and private life seem to be utterly tangled in the universe of *The Hothouse*, and thus, in my opinion, also closely knit together. Pinter's characters, as it is known, tend to fear what is outside the sphere of their immediate surroundings, creating a 'room' for themselves in which they fear invaders, both physically and mentally (Cahn 2). I posit that to some degree, as well as seeming to be a totalitarian power keeping its members on a set of strict rules, the establishment of the hothouse is a source of safety to the patients and staff.

Mothers

In the first dialogue, discussing whether the newborn baby can stay with its mother or not, this conversation takes place between Gibbs and Roote:

GIBBS: What shall I do with the baby, sir?

ROOTE: Get rid of it.

GIBBS: The mother would have to go with it, sir.

ROOTE: Why?

GIBBS: Can't live without the mother.

ROOTE: Why not?

GIBBS: The mother feeds it.

ROOTE: I know that! Do you think I'm an idiot? My mother fed me, didn't she?

GIBBS: Mine fed me.
ROOTE: But mine fed me!
Pause
I remember.
Pause (PI 220-221)

The most absurd element here, in my view, is not the first part where Roote seems to have no understanding of why the mother would have to go with the baby, however odd that may seem. Nevertheless, the first part shows how important an establishment the hothouse seems to be. For the mother, Roote is implying that staying at the hothouse is more important than taking care of her newborn baby. The hothouse provides a whole life for the patients, it seems, and the stay there cannot be interrupted by anything; not even something as significant as childbirth: the patients' stay in the institution is the most important thing of all. In contrast, the newborn is not important, and can be gotten rid of.

What *is* possibly the most absurd element is the struggle between Gibbs and Roote of attaining the care of a mother. It is as though Gibbs touches a button in Roote when he says that his mother fed him; Roote adding '**But** mine fed me!' as if there is a competition going on. Roote seems to somehow try to convince himself that his mother actually fed him, adding 'I remember', which is very unlikely. Has Gibbs struck upon a sore spot in Roote? The two pauses enclosing the phrase 'I remember' also suggest some mental activity in Roote unrevealed to the audience. Pinter's plays appear to stimulate the audience's and reader's imagination since so much is left for us to infer from the often seemingly contentless dialogues. This becomes apparent, among other things, in his usage of pauses and silences and in his economic use of language in general. According to Iser, in his article 'The Reading Process: A phenomenological Approach';

[...] the written text imposes certain limits on its unwritten implications in order to prevent these from becoming too blurred and hazy, but at the same time these implications, worked out by the reader's imagination, set the given situation against a background which endows it with far greater significance than it might have seemed to possess on its own. [...] it is the end product of the interaction between text and reader. (Iser 296)

From the dialogue above, for instance, one could consider the following questions: does Roote miss his mother? Was she not there to care for him as a little boy? These seem like implications that may be worked out by a reader or audience's imagination in an encounter with such pauses and silences, and economics of language as one is faced with in a Pinter play.

As exemplified above, unanswered questions that induce the reader and the audience to read between the lines play a large role in Pinter's plays. Furthermore, it is always the characters who reveal biographical information about themselves. Whether they choose to do

so or not is up to them; if the latter, they are just as worthy of our attention since, in the words of Pinter himself: ‘A character on the stage who can present no convincing argument or information as to his past experience, his present behaviour or his aspirations, nor give a comprehensive analysis of his motives is as legitimate and as worthy of our attention as one who, alarmingly, can do all these things. The more acute the experience the less articulate its expression’ (*PI* ix). Irrespective of the amount of information provided concerning the characters’ past, the mother is arguably important in some way or other. She is a kind of predecessor or at least a person who made you who you are, laid the grounds for who you eventually became, whether she was physically present or not. The absence of a mother can be just as significant, as Roote’s reaction may signify.

If Roote’s mother is a source of wonder to him, the mother of patient 6457 is a source of torment to both Lush and Gibbs. In another dialogue the mother is presented as an intruder:²⁰

LUSH: The mother of 6457 came to see me today.

GIBBS: The mother of 6457?

LUSH: Yes, you know. The one who died. He died last Thursday. From heart failure.

GIBBS: His mother?

LUSH: Yes.

GIBBS: How did she get in?

LUSH: That’s what baffled me. It did. It quite baffled me. How on earth did she get in? I wondered.

How did she do it? Why wasn’t she stopped? Why did no-one demand her credentials? It baffled me.

Then – in a flash! – The answer came. She’d been hiding all night in the shrubbery, waiting for Tubb to leave his cubby-hole and take a leak, which eventually he did, and then she just darted in, like the shot off a shovel. Simple. We simply tend to overlook the simple cunning of the simple. Would you like her description?

GIBBS: No. What did she want?

LUSH: She wanted to know how her son was getting on. She said that when her son came here she was told he needed peace and expert attention and that she would be hearing from us in due course, and that in fact it was now a year since she had seen him and she wanted to know how he was getting on.

(*PI* 230-231)

After this exchange, Lush repeats a diatribe which he supposedly presented to the mother of 6457, explaining in a confusing way that she could have seen him whenever she wanted, baffling both her and the audience:

LUSH. I said – A year? You haven’t seen him for a year? But that’s ridiculous. Didn’t you come down for Mother’s Day, or Thanksgiving Day, or for the annual summer picnic for patients, staff, relatives and friends? Weren’t you invited to the Halloween Feast, the May Dance, the October Revival, the Old Boys and Girls supper and social? Dancing on the lawn, cold buffets on the flat roof, midnight croquet, barbequed boar by the lake? (*PI* 231-232)

Instead of telling the mother that her son has in fact died, he allegedly tells her that her son has been moved to another facility and adds even more confusing jargon talk to his speech.²¹

²⁰ This excerpt is not included in one of the original four selected main dialogues, but it illustrates the relevance of mothers and intruders to the extent that I have chosen to include it.

²¹ My italicization.

So, I continued, you can rest assured that if your son was moved from here to another place it was in his best interests, and only after the most extensive research into his case, the wealth and weight of all the expert opinion in this establishment, where some of the leading brains in this country are concentrated; after a world of time, care, *gathering* and *accumulating* of mass upon mass of relevant *evidence, document, affidavit, tape recordings*, played both backwards and forwards, *deep* into the *depth* of the *night; hours of time*, attention to the most *minute* detail, unstinting *labour, unflagging, effort, scrupulous attachment* to the matter in hand and *meticulous examination* of all aspects of the question had determined the *surest* and *most beneficial* course your son's case might take. The conclusion, after this supreme example of applied dedication, was to send your son to a convalescent home, where we are sure he will be content. (PI 233)

The addressee of this 'diatribe' of confusion remains unclear. On the one hand, Lush claims to have given this speech to the mother of 6457. On the other hand, the recapturing of the speech seems so accurate, associative and immediate that it is hard to imagine how Lush could remember every detail, were it not made up as he went along. The intention may be to annoy Gibbs as much as to confuse the mother of patient 6457. Nevertheless, if we were to take it seriously, such a display of power would render the receiver so without verbal guard that there would hardly be any point in protesting. No matter the intended recipient, the speech illustrates that the hothouse as establishment, as institution, is hardly penetrable by any outsider.

The speech also touches upon the power of language as a confusion device in a deeper sense. As mentioned above, there is an associative mechanism often involved in speeches by Pinter's characters. It seems that this happens in Lush's speech as well. It appears as though he is making the story up as he goes along, going by the sound of the words, in contrast to Roote whose 'making up' of the patients may be said to come from a derivation of each word from the preceding in an associative line of thought. Lush is contributing to the 'analogous associative linguistic structure' (Esslin 'Language' 45) which often indicates that a character is lying, by the '*sound* of the words' (Esslin 'Language' 45), exemplified in my italicization above. Simultaneously, there is an obvious usage of jargon from different fields of language that the mother of patient 6457 may or may not be familiar with, and the function of these words consequently becomes one of exclusion, from the rest home institution and from the language community there alike. It is a powerful rhetoric strategy to employ such language of exclusion. It becomes apparent, by focusing on the italicized words, that the permutation of many words' less formal realization for its formal near-synonym in the next turn, (such as with 'gathering' and 'accumulating', 'evidence, affidavit, tape recordings' and 'labour, unflagging effort, scrupulous attachment' above), that Lush is openly applying a manipulative technique to confuse the intended recipient. On patient 6457's mother, the effect would probably be that she felt unwelcome; on Gibbs, perhaps merely that Lush is exhibiting his

possibility to toy with language and to make his language seen in such a way that it asserts his power as the braggart of comedy, informal and unassigned as it may be:²²

The braggart is a stock figure of comedy and has been from time to time immemorial, and so, of course, have been the braggart's stories and lies. Here Pinter is therefore moving along very traditional lines; where his special talent shines through is in his ability to make the often very pathetic thought-process behind the tall stories utterly transparent to the audience: these liars are carried along, almost passively, by the limited range of their imaginations, the paucity of possible associations that can lead then on from one word to the next. (Esslin 'Language' 45)

The audience and reader may see through this thought process of Lush's, as suggested by Esslin. It makes Lush seem increasingly to inhabit the qualities of the fool; the traditional stage figure often telling truths that the other characters were not allowed to speak out loud (Goldsmith 47-48). I will come back to this aspect of Lush's role below. The point is that as the play progresses, Lush's utterances become increasingly provoking and sly. The speech above is thus both exemplary of the manipulative characteristics of Lush's character and the closed society within the walls of the rest home institution.

Notably, we never know in Pinter's plays whether something is true or false; Pinter even argues that there does not necessarily exist anything 'true' or 'false' (*PI* ix). However, if we take what Lush says to be 'the truth' in the quotes above, it seems the hothouse has taken the place of family life, a substitute 'womb' as I suggested above. Instead of the care of their families, the patients have the rest home institution, and that is all they need seen in the perspective of the staff or The Ministry, as they call it. The mother of 6457 is seen as an intruder and the amazement of both Gibbs and Lush as to how she got in implies that it is almost taken as a criminal offence to enter the hothouse as an outsider. The questions 'How did she do it?' and 'Why wasn't she stopped?' (*PI* 231) add emphasis to this theory. Moreover, the absurd accusation that the mother was hiding in the shrubbery waiting for Tubb to go to the lavatory, gives the whole affair a criminal tone. The hothouse seems an institution closed to the outside world, regarding anyone who is not a part of it as intruders. The 'womb' of the hothouse substitutes real family life.

Predecessors

There is a disturbing undertone in his utterance when Roote touches upon the subject of his predecessor. Once, he states '[...] When my predecessor... retired ... I was invited to take over his position' (*PI* 196). Roote seems to be quite aware of what happened to his predecessor, but does not care to share. There is a pause before he says 'retired' and hints that the 'retirement' might not have been voluntary or very pleasant. When Lamb, another

²² In relation to this quote, Esslin is not referring to Lush, but a different Pinter character from the play *Night School*.

character, ponders about his predecessor the contrast between the two reflections becomes disturbing. Does anyone ever get out of the institution alive? Lamb is a very naïve character who does not seem to know what goes on at the establishment at all, and he is constantly trying to prove himself worthy of his position. The following quote illustrates how the topic of predecessors is continuously repeated.²³

LAMB: And I've never learned who the man was I took over from, and I've never found out why he left, either. Anyway, I'm pretty sure he wasn't doing the job I'm doing. Or if he was doing the same job he wasn't doing it in exactly the same way. The whole rota's been altered since he left, for a start. He couldn't have been doing my rota, and if he wasn't doing my rota he can hardly be said to have been doing the same job. Rotas make all the difference.

Pause

(PI 209-210)

Lamb seems to contemplate who this man was and how he was doing what Lamb is doing. Like a mother laying the grounds for who you are, a predecessor in a work-related field has also laid the ground somehow. It is inherent in the words 'predecessor/apprentice' that one repeats the other. It seems Lamb is trying to convince himself he has something to offer too, that he can contribute in some way that his predecessor did not. This suggests that predecessors are important to the general topic of repetition. A child may arguably be seen, in very rough terms, as a repetition of its mother (or, of course, of both parents). The mother is both a genetic 'map' of her children's physical abilities and has probably influenced some behavioral aspects of the child's personality. Thus the identity which a person develops is in part a consequence of heritage both of genes and position in the world, and in part of upbringing in combination with his/her own life experience independent of the mother. In much the same way, a predecessor has given directive guidelines for an apprentice's future field of action. The gene pool is not present, nor has the predecessor known its apprentice from birth to adulthood. Nevertheless, in the name of progress, an apprentice, or indeed a now grown child, will arguably strive not only to do the job as well, but also to do a better job than his/her predecessor. At the same time the predecessor exerts an authority resting on the values of the past, even if he or she does not exist in the present. This may be why 'predecessors' as a concept shines through as such a strong theme in *The Hothouse*: the past has a strong hold on the present still. In a self-erasing environment such as the one that arguably exists in *The Hothouse*, it seems the characters strive to find their identities. The establishment is, in addition to being a place of strict rules, a room of safety where the staff is constantly being put to the test and compared to an ideal of the past.

²³ This quote is taken from one of the dialogues I did not intend to include, but it is relevant to the discussion and thus added.

The ideal of the past

This last aspect is also reflected in Roote's speeches. He often talks of his 'grand' past in terms which usually belong to a higher level of education, consequently signaling intelligence as will become apparent in the speech about the predecessor of all predecessors below. This way Roote shows he is a master of language, simultaneously elevating himself and his past to a higher level of regard. This kind of application of technical terms and professional jargon to assert oneself is a typical trait of Pinter's characters (Esslin 'Language' 47).

A retired colonel, Roote idealises the values of the military and tries to live up to the standards of the past. In the following, an extract is presented to illustrate words that are repeated and which seem to belong to the same or to similar fields of the language, and how this can be incorporated into an understanding of repetition and predetermination as themes for the play in general.

As my predecessor said, on one unforgettable occasion: 'Order, gentlemen, for God's sake, order!' I remember the silence, row upon row of electrified faces, he with his golden forelock, his briar burning, upright and commanding, a soldier's stance, looking down from the platform. The gymnasium was packed to suffocation, standing room only. The lucky ones were perched on vaulting horses, hanging without movement from the wallbars. 'Order, gentlemen,' he said, 'for the love of Mike!' As one man we looked out of the window at Mike, and gazed at the statue – covered in snow, it so happened, then as now. Mike! The predecessor of my predecessor, the predecessor of us all, the man who laid the foundation stone, the man who introduced the first patient, the man who, after the incredible hordes of patients, or would-be patients, had followed him through town and country, hills and valleys, waited under hedges, lined the bridges and sat six feet deep in the ditch, opened institution after institution up and down the country, rest homes, nursing homes, convalescent homes, sanatoria. He was sanctioned by the Ministry, revered by the populace, subsidized by the State. He had set in motion an activity for humanity, of humanity and by humanity. And the keyword was order.

He turns to GIBBS.

I, Gibbs, have tried to preserve that order. A vocation, in fact. And you choose Christmas morning to come and tell me this. I tell you quite frankly I smell disaster. (*PI* 214)

First of all, this is not an example of the colloquial language we typically find in Pinter plays. However, the characters do tend to utter such monologues or speeches on occasion, and the language sometimes reaches this type of heightened formal ceremonial and elevated speech, especially when the characters talk about the past or try to establish their own identity in relation to other characters. An example of this is the way in which Mick uses jargon to prove himself better than the others in *The Caretaker*, which will become apparent in chapter three. In the case of this monologue by Roote, the solemn and elevated speech has an absurd impression, almost ridiculous and comic, especially in the beginning of the speech where he describes the predecessor as having a golden forelock and a burning briar, very majestic as he looks down upon his 'disciples' (my comparison). The description is comic: while Roote's observations seem very romantic and grand, the audience or reader will understand that this

must be an exaggeration, almost a form of hyperbole,²⁴ as the language seems to be something out of a knight's tale. As Knowles mentions in his article 'Pinter and Twentieth Century Drama', when he compares comic aspects in Pinter's dramas to those of Pirandello: 'We laugh from an "awareness of the opposite"' (82). The band of exaggeration is stretched so far that we simply cannot believe what we hear or read. The fact that we know why Roote is talking in this manner in the first place also emphasises the comic aspect. He gives the speech as an attempt to keep control of the situation while he is about to lose it.

In the above excerpt we find words and phrases which to a certain degree thematise repetition or recurrence of events in the past, something which could possibly suggest a form of deterministic world view on Roote's part. The fourfold mentioning of a predecessor, even a predecessor of a predecessor, and a predecessor of 'us all' is very explicit. It seems inevitable that someone will always follow in the leader's footsteps, an apprentice will always be lurking in the shadows (or waiting in the hedges) to take over. An explicit example of how this feeling evolves is the wording 'it so happened, then as now'. Right now, Roote is the one preserving the *order* instituted in the past as he says himself, which brings us to the next point.

Throughout the play, Roote repeats words which belong to fields of control, chaos, military and power, fields which in my view are linked together. This excerpt is no exception. Four times Roote repeats the word *order*. Order has been upheld under Roote's predecessor within the institution, in 'row upon row of electrified faces', which in itself repeats the word 'row' twice, and further suggests a kind of military or unitary order. The predecessor has commanded, like a soldier, the herds of people beneath him ('gentlemen' as he calls them), some of whom are 'perched on vaulting horses' and later on follow him and sit in 'the ditch', also giving military associations. The keyword, he says, is order, and he is trying to preserve it. In the end, Roote mentions that he smells disaster, a comment intended to reflect the way he feels about the news of the childbirth. For Roote, this is a sign that he is losing control, and the event is the reason why he has this monologue in the first place. The whole speech is a reaction to Roote's feeling of loss of control, in other words: he fears chaos.

The mood set at the beginning of the monologue is not a positive one. The gymnasium is 'packed to suffocation' and people are 'hanging without movement from the wallbars'. This gives associations to death and torture. After this, the linking of God to the predecessor by

²⁴ A hyperbole is '[...] bold overstatement, or the extravagant exaggeration of a fact or possibility. It may be used either for serious or ironic or comic effect' (Abrams 127).

substituting the name Mike in an idiomatic expression which would normally sound ‘for the love of God’, indicates the total power with which the leader of the establishment rules. It seems the patients, or so Roote tries to convince himself, will do anything for their leader, even die; ‘six feet deep’ in ditches. The last part could also give allusions to the military, and in a way it seems that to Roote, the two institutions (religion and the armed forces) of his world are interrelated. As we can see, the different fields of repetition might not always be easy to separate. Some of the examples used in this section have not been repeated in the speech itself, but represent fields of repetition which are recurrent throughout the play in some way or other.

The density of explicit repetition in the last part of the first stanza is quite high. Twice the word ‘institution’ is repeated, followed by different categories of institutions all linked together by somehow being a ‘home’. The types of homes are different in wording, but all in all somehow mean the same: ‘rest’, ‘nursing’, ‘convalescent’, ‘sanatoria’. They are synonyms, or near-synonyms, although the last one may refer more to psychology than the other three. The meaning is similar, but the wording is not. After this, a new row of related near-synonyms occurs; ‘sanctioned’, ‘revered’, ‘subsidized’, all there to describe with what awe and respect Mike, the first predecessor, was welcomed by Ministry, populace and State. This section constitutes the establishment of *The Hothouse* as a well functioning institution appreciated by society, and the weight Roote lays on describing it may reflect his rhetoric ambition of convincing himself, Gibbs (to whom he’s speaking), and maybe even the audience and reader that even if no one really seems to know exactly what goes on in *The Hothouse*, it is indeed something which benefits ‘humanity’. The threefold repetition of that exact word in the end serves as a reassurance of that. And this last section at the end of the first paragraph may be said to bring the whole speech back to ‘reality’, or at least present time, and give the audience and reader a small clue as to what kind of place the establishment is. This impression, however, is arguably a false one.

In this speech containing many examples of professional jargon, the past is elevated as an ideal compared to which the present seems bleak. It emphasises the importance of repetition for the survival of the power structure which exists in the rest home institution; without the conventions of the past, there may come an imbalance to destabilise the present hierarchy. It also further exemplifies my earlier point about Roote’s usage of language as a means of covering nakedness or ‘the poverty within’ (*PI* xiii), as illustrated by Pinter himself. Several of the topics in the speech above hint at the next dialogue which will be commented

on, namely the interrogation sequence in room 1A. In this dialogue, Lamb is taken into a room to be questioned, supposedly to find out if he is the one who has impregnated patient 6459. The topic of predecessors recurs, but the main part of interest is the continuing questioning of Lamb reminiscent of the one executed by Goldberg and McCann in *The Birthday Party* of Stanley, who in the end is left without language (PI 79).

2.3.2 Dialogue Two: Cutts, Gibbs and Lamb

In this dialogue, we meet Miss Cutts, Gibbs and Lamb. They have gathered in Room 1A, giving Lamb no further information than that Gibbs would like to see him. It is clear that the room functions as an examination room as it is described as '*sound proof*' (PI 235). The topic of predecessors, as mentioned above, is repeated in this dialogue. While connecting Lamb to electrodes for the questioning, Gibbs casually mentions Lamb's predecessor. Clearly, Lamb is very interested to know more about this person, but Gibbs and Cutts give him no further information about his or her whereabouts:

GIBBS: By the way, your predecessor used to give us a helping hand occasionally, too, you know. Before you came, of course.

LAMB: My predecessor?

CUTTS: Could you just keep still a second, Mr Lamb, while I plug in the earphones?

LAMB *is still. She plugs.*

Thank you.

GIBBS: Comfortable?

LAMB: Yes, thank you. My predecessor, did you say?

GIBBS: Yes, the chap you took over from.

LAMB: Oh! Did he really? Oh, good. I've often wondered what he... did, exactly. Oh, good, I'm... glad I'm following in a tradition.

They all chuckle.

Have you any idea where he is now?

GIBBS: No, I don't think I do know where he is now. Do you know where he is, Miss Cutts?

CUTTS: No, I'm afraid we don't really know. He's not here, anyway. That's certain. [...]. (PI 242-243)

If we take the other examples about predecessors into consideration, it seems that it is determined beforehand that people eventually just disappear. Gibbs and Cutts must also notice that Lamb is trying to get information from them, but both keep the subject at a distance, treating it like insignificant small-talk. It almost seems cruel that Gibbs first brings it up and then refuses to give Lamb more information, a behaviour which might in fact prepare the ground for what is to come. The naïve, polite Lamb always does what he is told and seems sincere in just being curious of what is really going on and getting better at his job without his only goal being gaining the upper hand in the conversation or gaining more power. He may be the only innocent character in the play, and he pays for it in the end. If Stanley in *The*

Birthday Party knows that his interrogators are out to get him, Lamb seems totally unaware that something unpleasant and potentially dangerous is about to happen to him.

The interrogation scene which follows was partly repeated verbatim in the sketch *Applicant*, where the character Lamb is interrogated by a single individual. The similar scene from *The Birthday Party* has been described, among others, by Jeanette R. Malkin in *Verbal Violence in Contemporary Drama* as ‘the destruction of a apparently innocent character through violent verbal assault; a destruction which, however, results not in death, but rather in an implied rebirth, a “conversion”’ (53). This display of ‘verbal violence’ is also something which Pinter masters to perfection. Stanley goes through a ‘conversion’ as Malkin states, but how about Lamb? He is only again seen in the last scene, sitting in a chair ‘still, staring, as in a catatonic trance’ (*PI* 328), before the curtain falls. I will include only a small part of the scene to illustrate the kind of torment Lamb goes through. Several times during the interrogation, Lamb is described as suddenly jolting rigid, clutching the earphones Gibbs has attached to his head, falling to his knees, twisting from side to side and making high pitched cries while a red light flicks on and off. Between these torture-like attacks, he is asked several contradicting questions without being given a chance to reply fully to any of them. The following exemplifies the rhetoric of language:

CUTTS: Are you often puzzled by women?
LAMB: Women?
GIBBS: Men.
LAMB: Men? Well, I was just going to answer the question about women –
GIBBS: Do you often feel puzzled?
LAMB: Puzzled?
GIBBS: By women.
LAMB: Women?
CUTTS: Men.
LAMB: Uh – now just a minute, I... do you want separate answers or a joint answer?
CUTTS: After your day’s work, do you ever feel tired, edgy?
GIBBS: Fretty? (*P2* 245-246)

As we can see, Lamb never gets to answer a question before his interrogators strike another blow at him; separate, contradictory questions interrupt him when he tries to get a word in. This emphasises the importance of language as *action*. The term ‘verbal violence’ as Malkin uses it, seems very describing, as Gibbs and Cutts do not expect an answer at all; the whole thing seems like a cruel psychological experiment testing how he reacts to stress, reminiscent of many other experiments going on in the 1950s and -60s. In this early part of the interrogation scene, Lamb is still gullible, believing they actually want answers to the questions he is asked. After a while, however, Lamb stops trying to answer completely, until a pause arises. Just as he is about to try and answer, another torture-like strike is shown; the

lamp flickering, his jolting upright and twisting, clutching his earphones and so on. The only question to which it seems they do want an answer is the question ‘Are you virgo intacta?’ (i.e. ‘Are you a virgin?’) (*PI* 249) which he reluctantly replies in the affirmative. This question is so personal and so ridding Lamb of his manhood that it, too, very well can be seen as a verbal blow. This borders on the absurd when they ask if he has always been a virgo intacta; it is in its nature a paradoxical and self confirming question. In the end, after several more contradictory and confusing questions, there is a silence and no more questions are heard. The only thing we hear is Lamb’s confused voice telling them he is ready for another question, a question which never comes: again, Lamb is left in silence. The absence of language is a sudden contrast to the stream of torturous questions Lamb was just exposed to, and the silence appears to be pressing, even loud.

There is a kind of transtextual repetition involved in Pinter’s project. By this I mean that there are topics which recur across the borders of each play, certain repetitious elements that seem to stick in Pinter’s authorship. One of these repetitions is the topic of mental experimentation through verbal violence, as we will also see traces of in chapter three. Through staging such linguistic power games as the above, I posit that Pinter is trying to say something significant about language as power. Strange interrogation scenes such as these recur in several of his plays, like *The Birthday Party*, *The Hothouse* and the sketch *The Applicant*.²⁵

These displays of various forms of linguistic battles can tell us something about repetition: it is not necessarily the sense of the words that are repeated in all instances. Sometimes, the kind of phrase used is vitally important for how the language functions. If, for instance, we take Roote’s suspicious questions into account, we see that repeated questions can have the functions of showing anger, a means of defence, or a way of proving oneself worthy of power. In the interrogation scene, the questions function almost as violent blows, the power of the action of the language is unbearable to the one who cannot get a word in, who cannot explain himself, who cannot *defend* himself, even, against the verbal attack of repeated questions. It is the repetitiveness in itself which is unbearable. A single question may hurt, but it passes if not repeated and will not necessarily be perceived as torture. Thus the repetition, in itself, of questions and accusations, constitutes the torture. If Stanley goes through a ‘conversion’, the conversion Lamb goes through, as he is seen in the last scene of

²⁵ A reference to mental hospitals is also included in Aston’s speech in *The Caretaker*, which will be discussed in chapter three. In *The Caretaker*, however, the interrogation scene at the mental hospital is not shown explicitly on stage. Instead it is referred to in a speech where the character recalls his past.

the play as sitting still ‘as in a catatonic trance’ (*PI* 328) , seems to be similar to lobotomy. In this Pinter play, however, the lobotomy is not executed through surgical measures; rather, it is achieved by the employment of verbal violence. This emphasises more than anything why language is inevitably perceived to be possessed of power.

2.4 Act Two

2.4.1 Dialogues Three and Four: Roote, Lush and Gibbs

In Dialogue Three, we meet Roote and Lush drinking. Lush provokes Roote and he throws whiskey in Lush’s face three times. After each time, Lush seems not to be affected. They discuss Roote’s past as a colonel, Lush flattering him. Gibbs enters and claims to have found the father of the newborn child; Lamb. They discuss Lamb, but Roote appears not to know who he is. After a while, Tubb enters with a cake, and a microphone, which is curiously hidden inside the cake. He insists Roote hold a Christmas speech over the intercom, but Roote is reluctant as he accuses Gibbs of staring at him. In Dialogue Four, Roote and Lush are still drinking, close to midnight. Roote talks about his past, and as he intends to cut the cake he takes out a bayonet. As Roote continues to talk about his past, Gibbs enters. Roote appears to get increasingly intoxicated by the alcohol and has an outburst where he emphasises his right to power while he hits Lush in the stomach. He then decides to accuse Gibbs of wanting to murder him, and Gibbs is offended. An absurd scene occurs as they all draw knives. At the end of the dialogue, Lush offers Roote a cigar, a Christmas present as he calls it, which eventually explodes as Roote lights it.

Manipulative techniques: *the snow has turned to slush*

‘The snow has turned to slush’ is repeated four times in Dialogue Three by the same character, Lush, and once by Roote. It evolves from not seeming to mean much, as with ‘sir’ in the first dialogue, into an explicit provocation by Lush. The first time of its occurrence, Lush utters it as an answer to the question ‘What’s the weather like?’ (*PI* 255) by Roote, and it does not seem like anything out of the ordinary. Like in so many of Pinter’s plays, we are merely eavesdropping on a conversation. In this first instance, one may assume that Lush does not yet know it is going to turn out as a provocation. We do not know why he chooses to focus on the snow instead of just saying it is mild out, but there seems to be nothing strange about it. The second time he utters it, Lush adds a ‘sir’ to the sentence, having just been told

by Roote that he is neglecting to call him 'sir' and that he is supposed to. This time, also, the utterance is an answer to Roote's statement that 'it's like a crematorium in here. Why is it suddenly so hot?' (*PI* 264). Lush adds 'very dangerous' (*PI* 264) when Roote wants a verification that the snow has, in fact, turned to slush. Another repetition is added this second time; Roote starts repeating how hot it is, in various ways of expression. The third time Lush repeats the phrase it gets more interesting:

LUSH *bends to the radiator and touches it.*

LUSH: Scalding, sir.

ROOTE: That's why I'm so hot.

LUSH: The night is warm, Mr. Roote. The snow has turned to slush.

ROOTE: That's about the fifth time you've said the snow has turned to slush!

GIBBS: It's quite true, sir. I noticed it myself.

ROOTE: I don't care whether it's true or not. I don't like to have a thing repeated and repeated and repeated! Anyone would think I was slow in the uptake. The snow has turned to slush. I heard it. I understand it. That's enough.

He pours a drink, drinks.

You think I'm past my job, do you? You think I'm a bit slow? Don't you believe it. I'm as quick as a python.

LUSH: An adder.

ROOTE: What?

LUSH: An adder.

ROOTE: What do you mean, an adder? (*PI* 269)

Again, Roote is referring to heat, which is the reason why Lush touches the radiator. This time, Lush says 'The night is warm, Mr. Roote' before repeating that the snow has turned to slush a third time, and Roote gets annoyed. He has told Lush earlier not to refer to him as Mr. Roote, and it provokes him along with the third repetition of 'The snow has turned to slush'. He thematises the repetition, for our convenience, and explicitly shows why it bothers him that Lush is repeating it. He feels, as usual, his position in this miniature society is being threatened. He addresses this suspicion head on, and denies he is 'slow in the uptake', like an old man, and rather refers to himself as a python. Here, Lush strikes again, confusing Roote by correcting him, saying he is an adder for no apparent reason. The last provocation is never explained, and they go about their business again. It seems Lush cannot control his eagerness to provoke Roote, as he strikes a fourth time:

ROOTE: [...] It's still stifling in here. We'll have to get a hold of Tubb. It's uncommonly warm in here for this time of the year, isn't it?

LUSH: It's warm out too. The snow has turned to slush.

ROOTE *turns, expostulating.*

GIBBS: Shall I call Tubb on the intercom, sir? (*PI* 276)

This time, something different happens. Often, when a provocation like this occurs, one would expect a pause or a silence to tense the situation further. Here, however, Gibbs comes in, and somehow *interrupts* this possible and hypothetical pause or silence where the stage

directions state 'ROOTE *turns, expostulating*'. There is no time for the pause or silence, it has been filled with words; the moment is gone. What Roote's reaction could have been is not easy to say, but one could expect it to be something along the lines of anger or even disappointment, as the word '*expostulating*' suggests. If nothing else, Roote seems discouraged by this fourth repetition after having commanded Lush to stop it. But at the same time, Lush's action does not have a consequence; Roote is helpless. Why Lush is so keen on provoking Roote is also not certain, but as Cahn points out, the struggle for survival which seems to permeate most of Pinter's plays 'is not a declared state of war, nor is it merely a subtle, unspoken hostility' (Cahn 2) He also points out Frederick Lumley's perceptive description: '[...] more than a theater of understatement, it is also one of irrational impulses ever present, which create an atmosphere of nervous tension' (Lumley 270).

It might be this atmosphere of nervous tension which makes so many disturbing impressions on the readers and audiences of Pinter's dramas, and which allows us to interpret extensively from within the simple and economical utterances of his characters. For instance, it is not coincidental that after a while, Lush's repetition of the phrase 'The snow has turned to slush' seems ever more deliberate, and elevated in meaning parallel to Roote's repetitious reference to weather and heat (the link to the name of the play, 'The Hothouse', seems obvious). It seems Lush is consciously applying this response as he sees Roote get more and more tense because of the heat. What started out as a seeming cliché conversation for keeping up good manners and small-talk, turned out, in the end, to be more significant. This is a typical trait of Pinter's cautiously planned but seemingly realistic and random repetition patterns. According to Cahn, this trait has been referred to by F.J. Bernhard as a 'suprarealistic quality' (Quoted in Cahn 3) of Pinter's language, where any part of a play's linguistic realisation can seem like realistic prose. However, if observed from a distance, the language in Pinter's plays will show a rhythmic quality and a 'symbolic charge' that takes the play further than conventional realism (Cahn 3). This, I suppose, is what happens to the phrase 'The now has turned to slush'. It is a comment on the weather, a reason or a consequence, a symbol of heat, and in the end an obvious provocation, as it develops through the conversation. It increasingly defines Lush as a brilliant manipulative master and Pinter as a brilliant puppet-master of language, adding artistry to realistic dialogue. It also furthers the notion of Lush's role as increasingly that of the fool. Shakespeare in particular developed a kind of 'wise fool', and according to Robert Goldsmith, the 'attitude of condescension [...]

was implicit in the relationship of master and fool from the beginning' (Goldsmith 47-48). He continues;

Fools served a double function: to entertain their masters and mistresses and at the same time to minister to their sense of self-importance. Frequently the fool criticized his lord but always from behind a cloak of assumed inferiority. Such were the hierarchical arrangements of medieval and renaissance society. But a mixture of amusement, contempt, and, sometimes, awe often characterized the popular feeling toward the allowed fool. This peculiar and paradoxical status was the price he had to pay for his relative freedom and license to criticize. The wise fool willingly paid the price and enjoyed the paradox. (Goldsmith 48)

The function of 'the snow has turned to slush' may not seem like explicit criticism. On a deeper level, however, it may be interpreted along those lines because Lush seems to be enjoying the fact that he is able to speak this freely, to provoke his superior this openly. He accepts the consequences there are, and 'pays the price' through frequently receiving both verbal and physical blows from Roote, as mentioned in the beginning of this section. At one point, Roote throws whiskey in his face, and at another uses him as the equivalent of a punching-bag. After both episodes, however, Lush seems unaffected.

'The snow has turned to slush' is a repetition where the form is similar in each instance of recurrence; it does not change much in its actual representation, aside adding a 'sir' to the second time it is uttered and additional sentences, such as 'The night is warm, Mr. Roote' (*PI* 269) preceding the third. Its function, however, changes. Between the field of the two repetitions, Miller says, are all repetitions. They are mutually dependent, but repetitions may be more one form than the other, depending on its quality (Miller 16-17). When I explored the form of the repetition of 'sir', I considered the repetition as more fitting within the second form when Gibbs uttered it, and more fitting within the first form when Roote uttered it, adding a hypothetical first 'sir' to Roote's memory, a grounded and archetypal form which he could remember while reminiscing his own past and predecessor. We see that repetitions do not always fit into one category or the other. We are often left with more questions than answers. What is the significance of the snow turning to slush? Sometimes, what is said is not necessarily true, but important to the utterer, the context or to the receiver (Miller 2). It seems, however, that with this phrase, the utterance is both true and important. It is true according to Gibbs, who verifies the statement, and it becomes more and more important through its development as it recurs in the dialogue. Its function is, in the end, a contribution to the undeclared state of war, the unspoken hostility and the atmosphere of nervous tension (Cahn 2; Lumley 270) which is created in the dialogues of Pinter's plays.

The phrase also contributes, in its own way, to the highly rhythmic quality of which so many literary critics and theorists talk; the poetic quality mentioned by Esslin, created by,

among other things, repetition. In the next dialogue, dialogue four, ‘The snow has turned to slush’ is actually repeated a sixth time (when we count Roote’s repetition of it as a reference to what Lush has said on p. 269), it is the first thing Lush says in that dialogue. Roote does not react verbally this time; he instead force feeds Lush cake, a cake which has been given to him as a Christmas present by the so called ‘understaff’²⁶ and which is, in many ways, for Roote something which represents his position in the hierarchy and of his employees’ assumed appreciation of him. Maybe this is the consequence that did not take place when Gibbs ‘interrupted’ the last time, on p.276? Did the interrupted fury build up inside Roote and make him want to display his power physically? If so, the symbol of Roote’s rank is thus thrust into Lush’s mouth as a reaction to his disobedience. Similarly, in *The Homecoming*, Ruth takes over the dominant position in a conversation by means of threatening Lenny to make him sit on her lap and make him drink from her glass (Esslin ‘Language’ 54). In *The Homecoming*, however, this power display is a maternal one, reducing Lenny to a little boy, and even though Ruth does not physically force feed Lenny, the same principle is employed in both plays: the dominance of a parent over a child.

A resonance of ‘the snow has turned to slush’ is heard in the line shortly after Roote and Lush have quarreled about whether or not Lush should have spat out the cake Roote thrust into his mouth:

LUSH: Muck and slush.

ROOTE: Lush! (*PI* 301)

The snow, which was so white and pure, is now linked to slush not in the sense of being melting and unmanageable snow, but rather in the meaning of slime and muck. It *can* signify, if taken as a symbol, that the heat of the hothouse is destroying what is pure and clean. In addition, the heat can be seen as a symbol of the heating tension and an anticipation of what is about to happen, as Roote continues his references to heat. Right after this, he expresses paranoia and a feeling that ‘there’s something going on here that I haven’t quite cottoned on to’ (*PI* 302). Maybe Lush’s little rhyme scheme (connecting ‘The snow has turned to slush’ in its symbolic sense to the rhyme ‘Muck and slush [...] Lush’ (*PI* 301)) is both a comment on what the gift signifies, a cake given not out of affection, but out of duty; the fact that the staff and understaff do not like him at all, and at the same time a foreshadowing of what is to come as an effect of this situation of discontent among the understaff? As usual, the questions stay unanswered and the feeling of uncertainty remains. Other poetic examples follow below.

²⁶ An appellation which in itself is disturbingly similar to the German WWII ‘Untermensch’

Poetic Tools

Sometimes, the way Pinter uses language is poetic to a large degree. This is realised in terms of rhythm, rhymes, assonance and alliteration, and as Esslin points out: the recurrence of a refrain-like structure, where sentences, words, sentence fragments and similar quirks of language are repeated within utterances and reappear multiple times during a play ('Language' 39). Esslin calls this giving 'observed reproduction of genuine speech patterns a musical-poetic structure' ('Language' 44), something which Pinter masters to perfection. *The Hothouse* contains an abundance of examples where this quality is explicit, like the rhyme quality of what I mentioned above; 'The snow has turned to slush', 'Muck and slush', 'Lush'.

In the following example, there is both a kind of thematic recurrence going on and tautological repetition as Esslin calls it, as well as a poetic quality:

ROOTE (*muttering*): No wind, eh? (*He examines the page, then slams it into the desk.*) Can't read a word of this! It's indecipherable. What's the matter with this man Hogg? Why can't he type his reports out like everyone else? I can't read this writing. It's unreadable. (*PI* 256)

The thematic recurrence, if looked upon in poetic terms, follows the pattern ABABAB, as I will illustrate here:

A1: Can't read a word of this!

B1: It's indecipherable.

A2: What's the matter with this man Hogg? (Accusation along the lines of being the cause of Roote being unable to read)

B2: Why can't he type his reports out like everyone else (meaning it is indecipherable)

A3: I can't read his writing (Combination of A1 and A2, as it is *his* writing, not *this*)

B3: It's unreadable. (Combination of B1 and B2: It's indecipherable, and Hogg can't *type* his reports out)

This sort of 'patterning' of repetition is also repeated a page later, but with a different scheme, ABBA²⁷:

ROOTE: (**A1**)That's purely in the line of duty. (**B1**) It's not relaxation. (**B2**)I meant relaxation. (**A2**) I wasn't talking about the line of duty (*PI* 257).

The first example is a continuation of the first conversation where 'The snow has turned to slush' appears, and refers to Roote's activity of reading a handwritten report while he is talking about the weather. Roote is repeating the difficulty of reading and the accusation of making it difficult for him to read. Many places in the play, Roote also stresses the difficulty of *seeing* (examples follow), which I think is closely linked to the difficulty of reading. Not only is Roote not able to read Hogg's handwriting – he claims it is *indecipherable*, like a code of some sort. The ABABAB-pattern intertwines the two fields of not being able to read and

²⁷ My insertion of the pattern within the quote is to save room as it needs less explanation than the former quote.

placing the blame somewhere, in this case on Hogg. There seems to be many obstacles in Roote's world, a kind of blurry fog he does not seem to be able to penetrate. This is more obvious in an example which follows further on.

The second example is a reaction to a correction by Lush after Roote has claimed never to leave the office because he is so devoted to his work, as Lush says he in fact leaves it quite often. The example shows, once again, Roote striving to explain himself, to make his thoughts clear to others, as is very relevant for our next example. Here, the tautology is gone, and two opposing states are put up against each other; the line of duty and relaxation. This example serves as an illustration of how clearly repetition can work as a poetic tool in Pinter's dialogues. The pattern is so transparent that it is almost like reading a poem. However, it does not seem to be unnatural at all, it could easily be an extract of authentic spoken language. This brings us to our next field of research; refrain-like structuring.

There are examples of a certain way of speaking, of a certain 'refrain-like recurrence of the same type of phrase' (Esslin 'Language' 44) more obvious than the more poem-like ABAB and ABBA patterned poetic utterances shown above. In the two quotes below, I claim to see such a refrain-like structure; they are very similar. Roote uses a distinct way of talking when he feels he is not able to express what he really means, and this might be an example of trying to find the 'mot juste', as Esslin describes, but not quite getting there. One of the examples comes, as usual, when Roote feels threatened and needs to emphasise that his employees should not underestimate him: '[...] I've got second sight. I can see through walls. (*He considers.*) I don't mean that that's second sight, seeing through walls. I mean I've got second sight *and* I can see through walls' (*PI* 302). Roote is again referring to sight. Repetition of sight-related sentences can have something to do with the fact that he seems to have no control of what is going on around him, he can't see straight. However, Roote is right, second sight is more of a sixth sense, like intuition, and seeing through walls would be more of a physical ability, having x-ray vision in a different way than one associates with second sight. It seems he is always on guard against criticism, taking caution to prevent being misunderstood, even though no one has yet contradicted him in any way.

As I see it, this last quote is a repetition of a similar pattern from Act One when he and Gibbs are discussing whether to bring some change into the establishment, as mentioned earlier. Here, however, Roote does not feel threatened by his colleague; this seems more like he is adjusting his language while tinkering out loud, even if it is hard for other people to understand what he really means: '[...] Change is in the order of things, after all. I mean, it's

in the order of things, it's not *the* order of things, it's *in* the order of things' (*PI* 197). This quote is very similar in structure to the previous example. Here we can see a contradiction between change and order, which, at least for Roote, seem to be equivalent to oxymoron.²⁸ After all, he does conclude that they cannot change anything because change is not in the original constitution. A certain way of speaking is thus a way for Roote to protect himself from being misunderstood, as illustrated above. Roote seems to try to follow his own rules of not saying anything without thinking first. Once you say something, it is irrevocable, and it seems, in the universe of *The Hothouse*, what you say can and will be used against you. He says this earlier in the play, when talking to Gibbs:

ROOTE: Wait!

He leans forward on the desk.

(*Quietly*) Before you go on, Gibbs, let me say one thing. Be sure what you say is accurate. You are about to quote a question you say I put to you. I don't know what you're going to say, but immediately you've said it I shall know whether I said it, or whether I didn't. I shall know' (*PI* 204).

The refrain-like structure of the two quotes from pages 197 and 302, then, might be a result of Roote's conscious way of expressing himself. However, he does not express himself this way consistently. No more than two times in the whole play does this structure occur, and Roote indeed says things sometimes which he would have been better off not expressing.

Nevertheless, the fact that this structure of expression does occur in such similar ways and seemingly with the same function, makes it significant in my view. Pinter himself has expressed, also in his speech *Writing for the Theatre*, an awareness of the irrevocableness of spoken language, and an emphasis on the notion that there is not necessarily one truth: 'I suggest there can be no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false' (*PI* ix). Pinter continues, 'I am not suggesting that no character in a play can ever say what he in fact means. Not at all. I have found that there invariably does come a moment when this happens, when he says something, perhaps, which he has never said before. And where this happens, what he says is irrevocable, and can never be taken back' (*PI* xiii-xiv). Maybe it is this fear that sometimes drives Roote to be so cautious of what he says? He may even be the most transparent character in the play because his feelings are very easy to interpret when he is not cautious. If we compare Gibbs to Roote, he never 'slips up' in the same way Roote does. Nor do we sense Gibbs's feelings in the same way because he nearly

²⁸'Oxymoron' means 'a figure of speech in which a pair of opposed or markedly contradictory terms are placed in conjunction for emphasis' (*OED* "Oxymoron").

always sticks to polite business jargon, at least when he talks to Roote. Maybe this is also why it is so obvious what Roote is trying to do when his refrain-like structure of trying not to be misinterpreted does occur?

The Last Blows

In Dialogue Four, the scene ends in a peculiar exchange of utterances and action. Gibbs has just stepped in to hear Roote's Christmas speech, upon which Roote, not surprisingly, reacts with contempt. He argues that he is sick to death of patients, staff and understaff, but that he will proceed to make the speech nevertheless. Lush, again, is critical:²⁹

<p>LUSH. Then why do you continue? ROOTE <i>looks at him</i>. ROOTE. Because I'm a delegate. LUSH. A delegate of what? ROOTE <i>calmly</i>. I tell you I'm a delegate. LUSH. A delegate of what? <i>They stare at each other.</i> ROOTE. Not only me. All of us. That bastard there. (To GIBBS.) Aren't you? GIBBS. I am. ROOTE. There you are. LUSH. You haven't explained yourself. ROOTE. Who hasn't? LUSH. You can't explain yourself. ROOTE. I can't? LUSH. Explain yourself. GIBBS. He's drunk. ROOTE (<i>moving to him</i>). Explain yourself, Lush. LUSH. No, you! You explain yourself! ROOTE. Be careful, sonny. LUSH (<i>rising</i>). You're a delegate, are you? ROOTE (<i>facing him squarely</i>). I am. LUSH. On whose authority? With what power are you entrusted? By whom were you appointed? Of <i>what</i> are you a delegate? ROOTE <i>hits him in the stomach</i>. I'm a delegate! (<i>He hits him in the stomach</i>)</p>	<p>I was entrusted! (<i>He hits him in the stomach</i>) I'm a delegate! (<i>He hits him in the stomach</i>) I was appointed! LUSH <i>backs, crouched, slowly across the stage</i>, ROOTE following him. Delegated! (<i>He hits him in the stomach</i>) Appointed! (<i>He hits him in the stomach</i>) Entrusted! <i>He hits him in the stomach. LUSH sinks to the floor.</i> ROOTE <i>stands over him and shouts</i>: I AM AUTHORISED! LUSH <i>remains heaped on the floor</i>. ROOTE <i>goes back to the desk, pours a drink for himself and</i> GIBBS. ROOTE (<i>to GIBBS, sourly</i>). What do you want? GIBBS. I came to hear your Christmas speech, Colonel. ROOTE. You sure you didn't come here to murder me? GIBBS. Murder you? ROOTE. Yes, wasn't that why you came? GIBBS. Certainly not. What an idea. ROOTE. Yes, you did. I can see it in your eyes! Can you see it, Lush, in his eyes? This chap came here to do me in. You can see it in his eyes. GIBBS. I did no such thing. ROOTE: You went cross-eyed, man, don't argue with me. Guilty! It was written all over your face. GIBBS. This is ridiculous. (Pl 304-308)</p>
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It seems obvious that Roote is annoyed that Lush asks why he continues to make the Christmas speech even though he does not want to. The tension accelerates, it seems, as Lush is going increasingly out of his rank and criticises Roote openly. Lush repeats twice 'a delegate of what?' provoking tension and eye-contact with Roote who understands Lush is challenging him. When Roote states they are all delegates, he simultaneously calls Gibbs a bastard, pointing back to the theme of mothers as discussed above. When Lush again steps out

²⁹ This time the dialogue is placed in a form not because there are two different extracts of conversation, but rather to save space. Thus, what is included in the right column follows what is included in the left.

of his rank, pointing out thrice that Roote should explain himself, that he *cannot* explain himself, the tension grows and Roote refers to Lush in the (in this case arguably) derogatory term ‘sonny’. As Gibbs points out, Lush is drunk, and apparently so is Roote. Lush really steps out of line when he, for the first time, and as the single character who dares to do so, addresses the topic of Roote’s authority head on, and this seems too much to handle for Roote who snaps and resorts to physical violence.

An interesting aspect of this quarrel is that it starts out by the pointing out of the fact that Roote cannot explain himself. Being misinterpreted has been an ever recurring topic throughout the play, and at this point it is directly connected to Roote’s assigned power and whether he is qualified for his position. This time, it seems Lush really is playing the role of the fool, and he takes his criticism too far. It results in a combination of physical and verbal violence, Roote spastically shouting out, that he is delegated, entrusted and appointed, ending in the final outburst ‘I AM AUTHORISED!’. Lush is right to question Roote’s authority. One may expect that the reader and audience also would like to know how Roote has been ‘authorised’ and more importantly: by whom? What is The Ministry? What does it mean that he is authorised? Being authorised and in charge appears a fundamental part of Roote’s identity, and in this segment he may not just be defending his formal position. The ‘subtext’ implicates that he is defending his right to be, to exist at all, which may explain why his outburst is such a violent one. Although Lush is left ‘heaped on the floor’ in this segment it does not take long before he gets up and joins Roote in accusing Gibbs of wanting to murder him. It appears, even after such a violent attack, that Lush accepts his paradoxical status as the fool, accepting the consequences and staying faithful to his master. He even presents Roote with a present before his Christmas speech: a cigar which blows up, adding slap-stick tricks to his fool’s armory.

Notably, right after Roote finishes his attack on Lush, he resumes attacking Gibbs, accusing him of wanting to murder him. This is an ironic twist as it may well be Gibbs who initiates the massacre at the end, leaving everyone but himself, the patients and Lamb, dead. Roote’s evidence of Gibbs’s cruel intentions is that it is visible in Gibbs’s eyes, which he first repeats, in various forms, three times. Again, Roote seems preoccupied with sight, as exemplified in the discussion on poetic tools. He continues, saying that Gibbs went ‘cross-eyed’, and then again referring to writing, as it was apparently written all over Gibbs’s face that he is guilty. Interestingly, even during this attack, Gibbs sticks to his polite jargon, his most open opposition being ‘I found it less than funny’ (*PI* 309), probably an exaggerated

understatement on his part, when Roote assures him he was only joking. Whether it really is Gibbs who is responsible for the massacre in the end, we will never find out for certain.

2.5 Conclusion

It seems Pinter has enjoyed working with linguistic qualities often unrecognised by the untrained ear in *The Hothouse*. There is an abundance of interesting examples which display the wealth of a linguistic tool so brilliantly employed by Pinter: repetition. Yet this aspect does not diminish each example's economic quality, that is to say the way in which every word seems to contain meaning. The words' positions within the play appear never to be random or without purpose. Initially I posed the questions of how repetition can be said to demonstrate the characters' struggle to gain power, their strategies for maintaining it. Additionally I asked how repetition can contribute to revealing how the characters directly or indirectly express the fear of losing their power. Moreover, my main thesis question indicates an exploration of the significance of repetition in Pinter's dramas on a higher level; what does repetition contribute to the dialogues?

Repetition seems inevitable in any dialogue with the aim of depicting realistic conversation. Moreover, I have found many different functions of repetition in the selected dialogues. The abundance of examples to choose from presupposes this variety in function. In fact, the very first repetition found displays a variety of functions on its own. 'Sir' is a word which contributes to one of the main issues which the play presents, even though it initially may only serve its expected purpose of displaying formal rank in a work environment. The supposed insignificant word has come to indicate the issue of repetition in history; the fact that one leader will inevitably become a predecessor of an eventual apprentice and that the bonds of tradition seems to permeate the hierarchy in the administrative structure of the rest home institution. The word has also come to display how any repetition can be both forms of repetition, in Miller's theory, depending on context, speaker and purpose. That repetition is significant should thus be implicit.

Some repetitions evolve through the play and are important in that sense; they bear relevance in different situations and for different purposes, as the examples of 'The snow has turned to slush' and Roote's defensive questions and accusations exhibit. Other repetitions are unique in that they are repeated in one situation by one or more characters, as Roote's characterisations of his patients or the torture-like recurrence of absurd questions in the

interrogation scene depict. In both instances, however, one may see a development, a change in the essence of the repetition's function. For instance, 'The snow has turned to slush' has proved to increasingly represent a manipulative technique, an attack on Roote with the sole purpose of annoying him for no apparent reason. The utterance evolved from a seemingly cliché-like conversation and turned it into something beyond conventional realism. The artistic transformation made the utterance applicable to Miller's theory, which can be said for most of the other repetitions as well. Additionally, the interrogation scene may be interpreted as exposing Lamb to ever more accelerating blows of verbal violence, as he is exposed to the torturous effect of repetitive verbal blows in the form of often contradictory questions.

The function of the repeated word as either defence or attack appears to be of significance in *The Hothouse*. This is realised in many different constructions of repetition. As indicated in the discussion of Roote's repetitious questions and accusations, this character tends to repeat questions or accusations when he feels his authority is undermined. The questions and accusations seem to be used as defence and attack simultaneously, and their repetitive appearance can arguably be interpreted as indicative of Roote's fear of losing his power. His repetitions thus serve the function of a weapon. The fact that Roote holds on to his past as a colonel and enjoys applying jargon of military and war-related expressions, serves this interpretation. He is assigned power over a certain field, but the more unstable and interpersonal *social* power structure seems to be for him a source of constant strain. In contrast, Lush's character is not assigned any significant power. He may not be striving to gain the formal power through any means, but appears a master manipulator and a kind of joker or a fool as one may see in a Shakespearean play, however portrayed in a more modern style. It appears it is the social or interpersonal power Lush is struggling to gain. He is confident, but with a 'cloak of assumed inferiority' (Goldsmith 48) which seems only a pretence: we often see the contrary attitude shine through in his repeated speeches of confusion, his deliberate provocations and slap-stick tricks openly disrespecting his superiors. The most brilliant manipulator of all, however, may be Gibbs himself, who is the real winner of the power game at the end. He has kept his head low throughout the entire play and his only repetitions seem to be those of polite gestures and 'correct' replies as exemplified, among other instances, in his tautological replies to Roote's questions. His defence mechanism is thus often seemingly absent; he manipulates Roote to lower his guard by being utterly subtle in most statements. He may know only too well that the spoken word is irrevocable.

Defence is many times also necessary to prevent being misunderstood. Misunderstandings are portrayed as potentially harmful to the ones who cannot make others comprehend the true meaning behind their utterances, and often results in repetitions of the same kinds of statements. For instance, Roote expresses this premise explicitly to Gibbs, and repeats certain patterns when he feels he has not made himself clear. The spoken word, as Gibbs is aware of, can never be taken back and should always be well planned. This brings about an almost poetic sound in some instances, as exemplified in Roote's explanation of what he means by 'second sight' and change being *in* the order of things and not *the* order of things. This poetic quality of repetition is exhibited in many of the realisations of language which I have found, as in the refrain-like structure in some utterances and the associative mechanisms both through associating the meaning and association through the sound of the words. Often, assonance and alliteration appear to come out of nowhere and certainly makes language visible to both the reader and the audience.

The theme of mothers and predecessors is pertinent to repetition in itself, as it thematises repetition within the imagined history in the play. As indicated above, the play evolves with a notion that the future has been determined by factors of the past. The ever-existing apprentice and child cannot escape the path laid by the predecessor or mother: the rules are laid in the constitution, everyone must call Roote 'sir' and no mother is allowed within the gates of the institution because the institution itself has replaced family life. A parent cannot keep its child as she herself is the child of the totalitarian institution. The predecessor of all predecessors is Mike, who appears to have taken the role of God, and the spheres of public and private life are thus tangled as the institution assumes to provide all a human being can need: family, shelter, religion (of rules) and protection from intruders. All in all, the rest home institution seems to be a suffocating environment where the struggle for identity becomes impossible because no change can come about: the past will repeat itself, and even rebellion or revolution may arguably only lead to a new and similar power structure.

3 *The Caretaker*

Written in 1959, *The Caretaker* represents a shift in Pinter's authorship after the initial public failure of *The Birthday Party*. With this play he had his breakthrough in the theatre, and in the first production in 1960, the acknowledged actor Donald Pleasence was cast as Davies, the tramp (P2 3). The play differs from Pinter's earlier ones. He said in an interview with Kenneth Tynan in 1961 that 'I think that in this play I have developed, that I have no need to use cabaret turns and blackouts and screams in the dark to the extent that I enjoyed using them before. I feel that I can deal, without resorting to that kind of thing, with a human situation' (Quoted in Prentice 87). And indeed we can see Pinter's movement away from farcical tricks, which were numerous in *The Hothouse*, towards a plainer style in *The Caretaker*. The 'screams in the dark' certainly do not come from any omnipresent voice,³⁰ the usage of slap-slick tricks is scarce and the humour is more intricate, if even present, in some instances. Based on the knowledge of repetition patterns attained in the preceding chapter, I will now provide an analysis of the rhetorical significance of repetition in *The Caretaker* as a whole.

3.1 Structure and Overview

In this chapter, as in the preceding one, my aim is to let the structure of the play determine the course of the analysis. The difference is that this chapter does not select dialogues. As indicated in chapter one, I will look at repetition related to the question of power through the examples I find in each individual part of the play. The selection of parts is that of Pinter's own structure; Acts One, Two and Three. I will explore the possible indications of the repetition patterns in relation to shifts in the power structure, and further whether these patterns can tell us something about the inability to, or difficulties in, changing the patterns of the characters' lives, which is ultimately linked to the theme of paralysis versus progress. The question then becomes: Has anything changed in the lives of the characters when we have reached the end of the play?

As my overall aim is to explore how the power struggle between the characters in the selected plays is expressed through the mode of repetition, I pose these questions in relation to *The Caretaker* in particular: Do the power relations change or evolve throughout the play? How is the infiltration of the roots of power expressed in this random sample, this sneak peek

³⁰ The screams in the dark are here from the voice of Davies when he is tormented by Mick in Acts One and Two.

into three human lives? What is it that makes power shift? How does the inability to evolve and to progress show itself through repetition?

There may be a risk of repeating oneself when choosing such a structure. Nevertheless, one gains the possibility of following the repeated words, phrases, sentences, types of sentences and conversations through the play and thus see the change that takes place due to the variation in context and characters uttering the different examples. Hopefully, the analysis will lead to a better understanding of the power relations displayed in the play and some light may be shed on the themes of paralysis and progress, a topic which will be explained in the following paragraphs. Readers will notice that this particular play is dealt with in a slightly different way compared to the analysis of *The Hothouse*. The reason is that the latter is a play with several characters, different physical settings and a far greater plot when it comes to action, whereas *The Caretaker* is a minimalistic play in those respects. Here, we have three characters, three acts and one physical setting; in short, a unity of space. Since there are few voices to take into account in this play it is not necessary to exclude larger parts of the play from the close-reading. However, a selection *is*, in the end, a selection, which means that the reader will have to trust that my selection proves the most relevant to the project.

The Caretaker has been associated with Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (Lumley 272), but a significant difference is arguably that the premise for Pinter's play is specific instead of universal. While Beckett introduces two allegorical characters representing universal struggles in a limbo-like dystopia, Pinter's characters in *The Caretaker* are realistically portrayed; Davies is a 'real tramp with a social background and a past' (Lumley, 272-273), and Mick and Aston could be actual brothers living in British post-war society as their struggles are largely realistic and indicative of the time. The human struggles which are shown in *The Caretaker* may be seen as universal in themselves; they are, ultimately, struggles which most humans can sympathise with, or have to some degree dealt with in their own lives. It is, however, the reality of the play which differs from Beckett's project; the social realism which seems to have permeated not only Pinter's career as a writer, but also his personal and public political engagement. In other words, the roots of power in real life have been known to appear in Pinter's plays on a realistic level, illustrating how the world and power structures influence normal human lives. It is remarkable that Pinter himself has said that he would not know a symbol if he saw one (P2 viii), and that he further rejected the interpretations of his plays as allegorical to historical events, such as the Cold War and to

biblical stories. Referring to *The Caratetaker* in particular, Pinter claimed: 'I have never been conscious of allegorical significance in my plays, either while or after writing. I have never intended any specific religious reference or been conscious of using anything else. 'Mankind caught between the Old Testament God and the New Testament God,' makes no sense whatsoever to me in relation to *The Caretaker*' (Quoted in Prentice 96). It is true that Pinter's settings can be seen as microcosms, but it is usually with a realistic premise: The stories happen in this world, the characters are, unlike those of Beckett, not waiting for an imagined God. They do, however, seem to wait for themselves, for their identities to be realised. Many critics have stressed the play's evolvment around the theme of human connections and the difficulties in, and sometimes inability to, form true personal relationships (Esslin *Peopled* 99,109; Prentice 85-86), as in the following quote:

The Caretaker becomes a play about human connection, about friendship, loneliness, isolation, and distantly, about love. Written in the wake of World War II's supposed post-war affluence when the urban homeless were less omnipresently visible than today, the play speaks to that affluence as a veneer disguising the war's destruction and shows how easily, when connection fails, chaos can come again. Because the characters come so close to forming human alliances, when they cannot their loss becomes ours for reasons Pinter details with subtle brilliance. (Prentice 86).

As will become apparent later, the failure to make true human connections seems to be the sole problem of the characters in *The Caretaker*. This may be the reason why, in the end, none of the characters seem to have gained anything from their once friendly exchanges.

Additionally, the characters may be said to experience a universal struggle, something which every human may go thorough in their life: the feeling of being paralysed, the world and other people as physical and psychological barriers overpowering their own progress as human beings. This will become apparent in the examples that follow. As power is a fundamental principle and a basis for all human relationships, the power struggle within each example will be given extra emphasis.

3.2 Act One

Summary

In the exposition of the play, the elder of two brothers, Aston, has brought home Davies, a tramp, saving him from physical violence at work, a fight which is a result of a disagreement over who should take out a bucket of garbage. Davies, to his surprise, is invited to stay in Aston's room, which is crowded by various objects (furniture, kitchen appliances, woodwork, etc.). Davies misunderstands and thinks Aston owns the house they are in (DAVIES. This

your house then, is it? \ (*Pause*). \ ASTON. I'm in charge. \ DAVIES. You the landlord, are you? (*P2 10*)). We get to know that Davies has changed his name and is allegedly trying to recover some identity papers from a man in Sidcup. At the end of Act One, the younger brother Mick steps in to confuse Davies, a power-game which continues in Act Two.

Opening Davies's world: 'Sit down'

The first repetition which occurs in *The Caretaker* is the words 'Sit down' (*P2 5*). It opens up the play's themes, and especially Davies's world; his struggle for identity and maintaining human dignity:

ASTON. Sit down.

DAVIES. Thanks. (*Looking about.*) Uuh...

ASTON. Just a minute.

ASTON looks around for a chair, sees one lying on the side by the rolled carpet at the fireplace, and starts to get it out.

DAVIES. Sit down? Huh... I haven't had a good sit down... I haven't had a proper sit down... Well, I couldn't tell you....

ASTON (*placing the chair*). Here you are.

DAVIES. Ten minutes off for a tea-break in the middle of the night in that place and I couldn't find a seat, not one. All them Greeks had it, Poles, Greeks, Blacks, the lot of them, all them aliens had it. And they had me working there... they had me working...

ASTON sits on the bed, takes out a tobacco tin and papers, and begins to roll himself a cigarette. DAVIES watches him.

All them Blacks had it, Blacks, Greeks, Poles, the lot of them, that's what, doing me out of a seat, treating me like dirt. When he come at me tonight I told him.

Pause.

ASTON. Take a seat. (*P2 5-6*)

Again, this is the exposition of the play; the part from which the premise for the entire play evolves, and thus an important part where no detail is too small or insignificant to explore. 'Sit down' is repeated by both characters, but it probably signifies different things for each of them. It is likely that Aston intends it as a polite gesture to accommodate his guest, an ordinary utterance when inviting someone into one's home. At the end of the extract he extends the invitation to 'Take a seat', which seems more polite. For Davies, however, the words 'sit down' trigger a stream of associations that have to do with his immediate past; the situation which brought him into Aston's household in the first place. The transparency of his associative thinking is inherent in the way he talks: we can follow his chain of thought as though we were in his head. The utterance in itself leads him to think of all the times he has been deprived of the benefit of sitting down, something which he blames on his assumed enemies; immigrants 'Poles, Greeks, Blacks' (*P2 6*), a hatred and fear of whom he expresses repeatedly, with slight variation, throughout the play. This hatred of foreigners Esslin assigns

to his social background as a typical trait of the British workman, along with being 'xenophobic, lazy and ill-tempered' (*Peopled* 96).

The implications might be that we touch upon something deeper from the very start. Davies's associations reveal a feeling of constantly being mistreated, and his tendency towards placing blame somewhere outside himself. We are lead to understand that he feels superior to his co-workers, although they are all in the same situation, and that he furthermore sees himself as cut out for better work and better conditions. His twofold repetition, also within the extract above, of 'And they had me working there... they had me working...' (*P2* 6) places the blame on an anonymous 'they' for having to work with immigrants treating him 'like dirt' (*P2* 6) and doing him out of a seat. The cause of the fight illustrates Davies's underlying discontent with his peers and his sense of rank; the fact that someone without assigned power intended to give him an order: 'Yes, well say I had! Even if I had! Even if I was supposed to take out the bucket, who was this git to come up and give me orders? We got the same standing. He's not my boss. He's nothing superior to me' (*P2* 8). This is repeated later in Act Three, as we shall see, when he says almost the same about Aston.

Davies always tries to distance himself from the foreigners and other workers, giving them animalistic features, such as having the 'manners of pigs' (*P2* 7) and elevating himself and his own past to a higher level: 'I've had dinner with the best', 'I've eaten my dinner off the best plates', 'I'm clean', 'I keep myself up' (*P2* 7), and he stresses his ability to defend himself verbally even though he is an old man 'I told him. Didn't I? You heard me tell him, didn't you?' (*P2* 6). The short examples above show how Davies tries to keep his humanity or his view of himself and his past as something better than what he associates with his real stand in society. In this perspective, one could interpret the repetition of 'sit down' as a hidden offensive order, just as one might order a dog to sit. In the very first utterance of the play, then, Davies is indirectly treated like an animal, even though it is meant as a polite invitation. We will see how, later on, Davies is once again reduced to an animal when Mick finally expels Davies from the house in the last act.

The mistreating of Davies: 'Now look here'

Davies is a tramp, which would suggest that he should be well adapted to surviving hostile environments and tough situations. A sentence, or rather a sentence fragment, which he repeats throughout the play, is 'Now look here' (often preceded with or followed by 'I told him' or 'Listen!') in various forms and contexts. What usually is the case, though, is that he

utters these words when he feels mistreated or misinterpreted somehow and that he has to assert himself. The first time he utters it is in a referred speech regarding the quarrel over who should take out the bucket. In a speech that includes variations of 'I told him' the self-defence function of 'Now look here' becomes quite visible: 'DAVIES. I told him what to do with his bucket. Didn't I? You heard. Look here, I said, I'm an old man, I said, where I was brought up we had some idea how to talk to old people with the proper respect, we was brought up with the right ideas [...] Making too much commotion, he says. Commotion, me! Look here, I said to him, I got my rights. I told him that' (P2 8).

'Look here' and other expressions of defence in their different realisations, are arguably expressions of how Davies is treated on a regular basis, both because he genuinely *is* mistreated if we take into consideration that he is a human being with inalienable human rights, but also because he is a tramp with too much arrogance for his own good. In present society, such stubborn and sometimes unprecedented behaviour does not go down so well for the general public, and, perhaps most of all, with his fellow workmen for whom he bears such hatred and disgust and to whom he assigns the worst descriptions ('manners of pigs', 'toe-rags', etc. (P2 7)).

We all have everyday expressions common to us, words which we have a habit of repeating, often unintentionally. The fact that 'Now look here' is an expression so common to Davies is, in my view, a reflection of the recurrence of bad situations in his life and of how he is generally disrespected by the people around him. It is, at the same time, evidence of his constant struggle to keep his human dignity despite his social rank, adding 'I got my rights' (P2 8) to his defence. Sometimes 'Now look here' and other small fragments of defence are the only words he *can* express, as we will see later on. The fact that the phrase is an expression which Davies utters so readily with all the other expressions he uses on a regular basis says something about his life, all in all. The repetition of it somehow exhibits the near inevitability of Davies ending up in difficult situations.

In Act One, the only instances of 'Now look here' are in *referred* speeches, which means that he does not directly say this to someone in the present, but refers to the past when he has had to defend himself. In Act One, these people exist in the ambient of the play but outside the stage and the immediate representation in front of the audience. In other words; this signals Davies's recollected past. As we remember from chapter one, Ibsen presented this 'mode'; a past existing outside the play which is still ever present with traces within the here and now, in his realistic dramas (Fergusson 149). 'Now look here' is then important, because it

addresses the present within the past (since Davies refers to the present of the context at the time he uttered it in the past), but at the same time it stems from having been repeated in Davies's past so that it has become a common attribute in his every-day vocabulary. In Act Two, however, the utterance occurs not only in referred speeches.

The worldly obstacles and social immobility: *Shoes and other things*

Davies continuously asks for shoes in the course of the play, starting with a story of how he was mistreated by a monk at a monastery who was supposed to give him shoes, but did not. He is offered a pair of shoes by Aston, but does not accept on accord that they are too narrow and will not be any good for him. His feet are too broad, and even though he admits that the shoes Aston offers him are 'Not a bad pair of shoes' (P2 25) he does not accept them. He needs the shoes, he says, so that he can get to Sidcup:

DAVIES (*with great feeling*). If only the weather would break! Then I'd be able to get down to Sidcup!

ASTON. Sidcup?

DAVIES. The weather's so blasted bloody awful, how can I get down to Sidcup in this weather?

ASTON. Why do you want to get down to Sidcup?

DAVIES. I got my papers there!

Pause.

ASTON. Your what?

DAVIES. I got my papers there!

Pause. (P2 17)

We get to know that a man has allegedly got Davies's identity papers and that he is going under an assumed name, Jenkins.³¹ His real name is Mac Davies. He wants to go get his papers back because they prove who he is: 'They prove who I am! I can't move without them papers. They tell you who I am. You see! I'm stuck without them' (P2 18). He also repeats, after talking about the troubles of not having one's own identity: 'If only I could get down to Sidcup! I've been waiting for the weather to break. He's got my papers, this man I left them with, it's got it all down there, I could prove everything' (P2 18).

These examples show how the repeated words and phrases in this play are connected with the general themes: often, the repetitions are small epitomes of a character's fundamental struggles. Here, Davies repeats shoes, Sidcup, papers and weather, which are all symptoms of one and the same thing: the worldly circumstances, or obstacles even, on which Davies places blame for his own inability to evolve as a human being. His project is not necessarily one of 'higher' self-realisation; it is merely that of achieving a normal human life, and in particular;

³¹ The name Jenkins actually appears in *The Hothouse* as well, when Roote says 'One of the purposes of this establishment is to install that confidence in each and every one of them, that confidence which will one day enable them to say 'I am... Jenkins', for example' (Quoted in Esslin *Peopled* 103) but Pinter must have changed it to 'Gubbins' as it appears in my version (P2 198).

proving who he really is. A comfortable job, a place to live, a peaceful environment where he can live his life with dignity, are all things one could imagine that Davies is hoping to attain. In order to achieve these things, however, Davies would have to sort himself out, as he himself admits, but he must overcome some obstacles on the way. It is his reluctance to do these things which eventually becomes his greatest obstacle, as he is always making up excuses not to do them. Davies wants to get his papers, but he does not want to walk in bad weather, and even if it were sunny outside, he would not have the shoes to carry him in the right direction. When he is offered shoes, there is the problem of his broad foot, the shoes being too narrow, or the laces being the wrong colour. Inconveniently, he does not have any decent clothing either, as we will see in Act Two.

The repetition of these words is also exemplary of his general problem of being paralysed: he is 'stuck' (*P2* 18) without them, without them he 'Can't get from one place to another' (*P2* 14). It is both true in the physical sense and in the transferred meaning of climbing the social ladder. Even though there would be no promise of such a ladder for him to climb, the idea of being able to climb it, even just a small step, is ultimately what would improve Davies's situation. One could say that Davies cannot be held responsible for his own paralysis even though he is reluctant to take the necessary steps towards a better life. It is not altogether certain that he would be able to make a better life for himself because of the historical context and the 'supposed post-war affluence' (Prentice 86) which, according to Prentice, in reality is a 'veneer disguising the war's destruction' (Prentice 86), limiting Davies's options as an urban homeless because he is 'less omnipresently visible' (Prentice 86) and that without the help of other people, of a human connection, he does not really stand a chance. On the other hand; Davies is a rude character, and as Esslin points out in his analysis of the play; Davies's loss of his home in the end is a 'direct consequence of his own shortcomings' (*Peopled* 105). This aspect will be discussed further in Act Three.

Aston's shed

One could say that Aston is suffering a similar destiny to that of Davies. An ex-patient at a mental hospital,³² Aston has undergone shock-therapy treatment because he 'talked too much' (*P2* 52), and is currently living a remote life outside society. He is not entirely isolated as he does leave the house on occasion and seems to be able to talk to people on some level. However, from the way he talks we can see reflections of his self-image as an 'outsider'

³² This information we do not learn until the end of Act Two, but it is necessary to include here for the sake of the analysis.

coming to the surface, as we will see in his speech about his stay at the mental hospital in Act Two. Living in his brother's house, he is now trying to build a shed in the garden. Aston thinks he will be able to do something about the rest of the house if only he can get the shed up. Even when offered help, he does not accept, and he is unable to start.

DAVIES. That's a bit rough. (DAVIES *observes the planks.*) You building something?

ASTON. I might build a shed out the back.

DAVIES. Carpenter, eh? (*He turns to the lawn-mower.*) Got a lawn.

ASTON. Have a look.

ASTON *lifts the sack at the window. They look out.*

DAVIES. Looks a bit thick.

ASTON. Overgrown. [...]

DAVIES. Where you going to put your shed?

ASTON (*turning*). I'll have to clear the garden first.

DAVIES. You'll need a tractor, man.

ASTON. I'll get it done.

DAVIES. Carpentry, eh?

ASTON (*standing still*). I like ... working with my hands. (P2 15)

Although there does not seem to be much going on in this conversations, two things are worth mentioning. First, this is the first time Aston mentions his shed. At this point, he has not fully decided that he will build the shed, but as the play progresses this project seems to fixate within Aston's mind. The grass is his first barrier, which they agree is 'thick' and 'overgrown' but he believes he will get it done. Second, it is interesting that Davies insists that building a shed makes Aston a carpenter. He applies this semi-educated word twice in relation to Aston's project without any confirmation from Aston. In addition to calling Aston 'mister' (P2 17, 19, 24) several times during this act, 'man' as we can see from the example above, and 'mate' (P2 22), Davies seems, at this stage, to regard Aston with some respect. It appears he sees Aston as his superior, or maybe rather as a worthy peer, as he has already misunderstood and thinks Aston is the owner of the house. This respect that Davies seems to have for Aston changes in the next act when the misunderstanding of ownership of the house is revealed. It shows the way that ownership and possessions are imperative of power in this play as they arguably are in the real world.

The theme of paralysis versus progress can in its own way be linked to power. Here, it is not about the power between people, but the hold the physical and psychological reality has on the individual. It is Davies's worldly laziness which stands in the way for him to get to Sidcup, and his rough persona and inability to adjust himself to other people which inhibit him from leading a normal life with a steady job, forming relations which could help him on the way. It may also be that the way the world works is a cause of his inability to improve his life. For Aston, the situation may be more complex, as he is allegedly a victim of being

institutionalised by society for not being 'normal'. When he is offered help he does not accept it, living in the illusion that he can do everything on his own.

3.3 Act Two

Summary

Act Two starts where we left off in Act One, with Mick tormenting Davies. It starts 'a few seconds later' (P2 28) with Davies on the floor and Mick interrogating him. After a 'good cop/bad cop' game of Mick alternating between words and action of torment and politeness, Aston steps in and they change topics. When Aston and Davies are alone again, Aston offers Davies the job of caretaker, but he is reluctant to accept the offer, especially because he would have to answer the door and possibly be confronted by people out to get him. When later on he is offered the same job by Mick, he is more willing to accept. At the end of Act Two we find out from a speech by Aston that he has been in a mental hospital and given shock therapy treatment.

The power of the 'mot juste'

Mick is arguably the most dominant character in *The Caretaker*. On several occasions, he invites (or rather forces) the other characters to take part in power games, beginning with the first encounter he has with Davies, and later on tormenting him in the dark with an electrolux, stating at the end, cruelly and sadistically that he was just 'doing some spring cleaning' (P2 43). He also likes toying with Davies's possessions as he in one instance deprives Davies of his trousers and in another snatches his bag; the only possessions Davies has. Since I focus mainly on dialogue when it comes to repetition I will include parts of the many diatribes Mick has in Act Two to give a general idea of the way he behaves in relation to the other characters and to show the functions of his use of language in relation to power. An illustrating comment by Victor L. Cahn reads like this:

Sometimes the characters create stories that are used to establish dominance; therefore the audience, like other characters or the speakers themselves, cannot be sure where reality begins and fantasy takes over. Some games take the form of social maneuvering, as characters choose allies and enemies as a way to stake out territory. Some games are linguistic, as one character tries to outdo another with wordplay [...]. (Cahn 4-5)

The first we hear of Mick speaking is in his interrogation of Davies, asking who Davies is, keeping him on the floor and still stating 'I'm awfully glad. It's awfully nice to meet you' (P2 28) as an absurd contrast to the real situation. He makes Davies state his name three times, the

assumed name Jenkins, and proceeds in repeating the name after each time, ‘Jen...kins’ (P2 28, 29, 31), almost tasting the name as he goes on, and keeping Davies in suspense on the floor. He then starts his speech which Esslin calls a ‘diatribe’ (‘Language’ 44)³³ where ‘the absence of emotion, the determination to avoid saying what ought to be said’ (‘Language’ 44) may be what leads Mick to form a speech that is associative and repetitious, and in which the only goal is to confuse and torment Davies:³⁴

You remind me of my uncle’s brother. He was always on the move, that man. Never without his passport. He had an eye for the girls. Very much your build. Bit of an athlete. Long-jump specialist. He had a habit of demonstrating different run-ups in the drawing-room round about Christmas time. Had a penchant for nuts. That’s what it was. Nothing else but a penchant. Couldn’t get enough of them. Peanuts, walnuts, brazil nuts, monkey nuts, wouldn’t touch a piece of fruit cake. (P2 29)

In the entirety of Mick’s speech on the pages 29 to 34 there is arguably a transparent ‘associative mechanism’ (Esslin ‘Language’ 45) much similar to the ones discussed in chapter two in relation to the juxtaposed sequences of dialogue in *The Hothouse*. In this particular extract, I believe ‘being on the move’ leads Mick to think of travelling and passports, then having ‘an eye for girls’ leads him on to masculine strength and then in the end, his mentioning of Christmas leads him to think of different kinds of nuts, applying his ‘educated’ word penchant, to go on listing different kinds of nuts. What is interesting about this is that the form and function do not cohere. The form is seemingly that of nonsensical babble, but the function is that of torment and confusion on Davies’s part. In other words: What underlies this associative structure is not a wish to inform Davies about his alleged uncle’s brother’s life,³⁵ his success with women or his preferences in food; it is to demonstrate his power, his sovereignty over Davies, also later saying ‘How do you like my room?’ (P2 29), revealing that he is, in fact, the owner of the house even though Davies does not believe him at first. Davies has entered his territory and is liable to get punished for it. This is probably what Cahn means when he reflects the way characters create stories to establish dominance; we do not know, as he claims, where reality begins, and fantasy takes over.

Mick keeps this ‘torrent of language’ (P1 xiii) going for a stretch of four pages, interrupted by some protest from Davies. The twofold repetition of the word ‘penchant’ in the

³³ As we remember, a ‘diatribe’ is ‘an angry speech or piece of writing which severely criticizes something or someone’ (CALD “diatribe”). The function here is that of a diatribe, but the form is seemingly that of associative nonsense. Thus, to the naked eye, what Mick says may not immediately be interpreted as ‘diatribe’ per se, but the function of the speech supports its classification as a diatribe.

³⁴ My extract is not the same as the one Esslin presented, but it is part of the same on-going speech when Davies and Mick first meet on pages 29-34 of *Plays 2*.

³⁵ ‘My uncle’s brother’ should refer to Mick’s father, which is a confusing element in itself.

extract above; 'Had a penchant for nuts. That's what it was. Nothing else but a penchant' (P2 29) is, according to Esslin a way for Mick to emphasise his 'claim to superior general education, intelligence and *savoir-faire*' ('Language' 47), and calls it an act of aggression.³⁶ Encountering this new person, this 'linguistic game' may be a way for Mick to assert himself and claim his own superiority. It could be that he is trying to cover 'the poverty within' (P1 xiii), as his speaking, his torrent of language may be 'a constant stratagem to cover nakedness' (P1 xiii) as we recall from chapter two in relation to Roote's continuous use of attack questions. In the same way, Mick may be avoiding the silence which could possibly occur between the two strangers meeting in a room, and 'the absence of emotion, the determination to avoid saying what ought to be said' (Esslin 'Language' 44) may be his strategy in keeping himself safe from vulnerability.

As we know from chapter two it is a common strategy for Pinter's characters to repeat the educated words they know in order to keep their integrity. Mick is certainly not the only character to do this in *The Caretaker*, but he is the one who does it in the most elaborate and obvious way in terms of displaying sovereignty. He is also the one who does it most frequently.

When Davies, in Act One, talks about the monk who failed to give him proper shoes, he, as the inarticulate tramp he is, repeats a word which he thinks is the right expression. He repeats 'convenience': 'I got this mate at Shepherd's Bush. In the convenience. Well, he was in the convenience. Run about the best convenience they had. (*He watches ASTON.*) Run about the best one' (P2 11). As Davies, in addition to the monk, mentions a mate and it is unclear whether this man is the monk he was referring to earlier, his associating the words 'convent' and 'convenience' is quite likely. Although it seems Davies did have a mate who ran a convenience store of some sort, there is a short way to the word 'convent' and because of the way he talks it is confusing and hard to understand that the mate and the monk are two different people. It is likely that it is the thought of a convent that leads Davies to 'convenience', but he has found a word which he probably sees as educated and is enjoying having found the 'mot juste'³⁷ to express his thought well and that is probably why he keeps repeating it. Even though 'convenience' is probably the right word, it is likely that an audience may hear it as a confusion of words, rendering the utterance comic.

³⁶ 'savoir faire' refers to: 'Tact, address; the instinctive knowledge of the right course of action upon any given emergency' (OED "savoir faire").

³⁷ As mentioned in chapter two, the 'mot juste' refers to 'the word or phrase that is exactly right in a particular situation' (CALD "Mot juste") and is mentioned by Martin Esslin in his article 'Language and Silence' (40).

This repetition of 'right expressions' happens in a slightly different way, also in Act One, when Davies talks about having been married to a slovenly woman who put her unwashed underclothing in a vegetable pan: 'The pan for vegetables, it was. The vegetable pan' (P2 7). As Esslin mentions in relation to this quote;³⁸

Traditional stage dialogue tended to err on the side of assuming that people have the right expression always ready to suit the occasion. In Pinter's dialogue we can watch the desperate struggles of his characters to find the correct expression; we are thus enabled to observe them in the – very dramatic – act of struggling for communication, sometimes succeeding, often failing. And when they have got hold of a formulation, they hold on to it, savour it, and repeat it to enjoy their achievement [...]. ('Language' 40)

This tautological repetition then, with a slight change, of 'the pan for vegetables' to 'the vegetable pan' stems from Davies's wish not to be misinterpreted. It is slightly reminiscent of the way in which Roote, in *The Hothouse*, corrects himself by changing the meaning of having second sight from 'seeing through walls' to saying that he has second sight *and* can see through walls, making sure that the others understand that he does not think that having second sight is the same as being able to see through walls. As quoted in chapter one; 'Always, in Pinter's world, personal inadequacy expresses itself in an inadequacy to cope with and to use language. The inability to communicate, and to *communicate in the correct terms*, is felt by the characters as a mark of inferiority; that is why they tend to dwell upon and to stress the hard or unusual "educated" words they know' (Esslin 'Language' 46).

If Davies, in the first act, enjoys having found his 'mot juste' on several occasions, Mick similarly enjoys the *effect* that his diatribe speech has on Davies. Mick repeats this type of diatribe over the next pages, comparing Davies to other people he claims to have known, and in the last diatribe on page 33 he resumes attacking Davies and calls him an intruder. This is where Mick's manipulative brilliance really shines through for the first time, as he applies more intricate jargon to further assert himself:

You're stinking the place out. You're an old robber, there's no getting away from it. You're an old skate. You don't belong in a nice place like this. You're an old barbarian. [...] Say the word and I'll have my solicitors draft you out a contract. Otherwise I've got the van outside, I can run you to the police station in five minutes, have you in for trespassing, loitering with intent, daylight robbery, filching, thieving and stinking the place out. What do you say? Unless you're really keen on a straightforward purchase [...]. Of course we'd need a signed declaration from your personal medical attendant as insurance that you possess the requisite fitness to carry the can, won't we? Who do you bank with? (*Pause*) Who do you bank with? (P2 34)

In my view it is quite visible in this extract that Mick is toying with Davies. In Esslin's words: 'So transparent is the associative mechanism here that we are also fully aware that Mick is malevolently enjoying himself at Davies' expense' ('Language' 45). First, he employs words

³⁸ Also quoted in chapter two, but in a different context.

from different fields of the language, at first offending Davies by applying negative descriptions to him, even the word 'barbarian', which, interestingly, can mean variations of a 'foreigner, one whose language and customs differ from the speaker's' or a 'rude, wild, uncivilized person' (*OED* "Barbarian"), attributes which Davies detests. He then applies jargon of law and crime, followed by more specific legal terms in relation to possessions, and then in the end, the field of medicine. Additionally, his twofold repetition of the question 'Who do you bank with?' adds to the impression that he is simply playing a game with Davies. Mick probably knows that Davies does not 'bank' with anyone, that he cannot possibly have any 'personal medical attendant' or 'possess the requisite fitness' to carry any can. Davies is an old, poor man, and Mick cannot have overlooked that fact. Second, Mick poses a genuine threat on Davies and suggests he put Davies in his van and drive him to the police station if he does not cooperate, something which we will look at more closely further on. This speech is quite similar to Lush's speech to the mother of the patient who has died in *The Hothouse* (P1 231-233). What is interesting about these kinds of speeches by any character is what they *do* to the other characters and to the atmospheres of the plays. It places emphasis on the function of language in general. Esslin says that Pinter's philosophical attitude towards language lies in a search 'through and in spite of an obsessive preoccupation with language, its nuances, its meaning, its beauty, for the area that lies *behind* the use of language' ('Language' 49). Thus, because of the power these speeches exhibit and because of their repetitive appearance, they show how the possession of language can be the same as possession of power in Pinter's plays, at least when it comes to personal relationships. They also emphasise how important this balance of power is to each individual character. Each struggle for communication is a struggle for self maintenance, for keeping up one's human dignity or sovereignty over others. The last jargon speech also hints at his last speech of hatred against Davies in Act Three, as will become apparent below.

Davies's defence

What is also interesting about these first pages of Act Two is that Davies repeats an utterance discussed above, namely 'Now look here' (P2 29, 31).³⁹ It appears right after the first part of Mick's diatribe as mentioned above. What has changed in this setting, however, is that this time Davies has to defend himself in the present instead of in a referred speech representing

³⁹ There is a time when he utters a variant of 'Now look here' on page 39: Eh, look here, I been thinking. This ain't my bag'. Here, it is not a defence expression, it serves its normal function of getting the attention.

the past. Suddenly, there is someone in his immediate surroundings again who is treating him in a way that makes him feel insecure, and once again, he has to defend himself. Notably, the power-relations have changed in the ‘here and now’ of the play once Mick’s character is introduced. It seems almost inevitable for Davies that he must always end up in situations where he is insecure and in need of defence. When he utters his defence expressions, it might be the result of what Miller calls ‘The “unconscious” human state of illusion’ (13), which he claims is the cause of repetition. He talks about the tendency for Thomas Hardy’s characters to see ‘things and persons not in their substantial uniqueness but as signs pointing back to earlier things or persons “standing for” them. [...] He imposes an interpretation on what he encounters which makes his life take, or seem to take, the form of a series of repetitions’ (Miller 13). Recalling the unpleasant episode from his former workplace or perhaps repeated episodes in his past when he has been mistreated, Davies now sees Mick as a recurring dominant and abusive person who is once again attacking him, making him utter his habitual ‘Now look here’, ‘Now look – ‘ and ‘All right!’ (P2 31).

We can see how Davies is struggling to be understood and to defend himself against Mick’s attacks during the course of the diatribes in the beginning of Act Two. As indicated in Act One, sometimes defence expressions are the only words which Davies seems to be able to express, as he is on several occasions interrupted by Mick’s intentional bombardment of language; of repeated questions. Take, for instance, this example:⁴⁰

MICK. [...] Did you sleep here last night? DAVIES. Yes. MICK. Sleep well? DAVIES. Yes! MICK. Did you have to get up in the night? DAVIES. No! <i>Pause.</i> MICK. What’s your name? DAVIES (<i>shifting, about to rise</i>). Now look here! MICK. What? DAVIES. Jenkins! MICK. Jen...kins. DAVIES <i>makes a sudden move to rise. A violent bellow from MICK sends him back.</i> (<i>A shout.</i>) Sleep here last night? DAVIES. Yes...	→	MICK (<i>continuing at great pace</i>). How’d you sleep? DAVIES. I slept – MICK. Sleep well? DAVIES. Now look – MICK. What bed? DAVIES. That – MICK. Not the other? DAVIES. No! MICK. Choosy. <i>Pause.</i> (<i>Quietly</i>). Choosy. <i>Pause.</i> (<i>Again, amiable.</i>) What sort of sleep did you have in that bed? DAVIES (<i>banging on the floor</i>). All right! MICK. You weren’t uncomfortable? DAVIES (<i>groaning</i>). All right! (P2 30-31)
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In this extract, Mick is applying his repeated questions deliberately and forces Davies to repeat himself. It exhibits how uncomfortable a repeated questions sequence can be for an

⁴⁰ Again, what is included in the right column follows what is included in the left.

individual, even when it is not directly intended as torture, like the sequence depicted in chapter two. Although Davies does not say ‘Now look here’ so many times, as in a verbatim repetition of his previous ones, he is forced to utter ‘All right’ and ‘No!’ which in my view serve as similar defences in this context. He is interrupted all the time intentionally, and is deprived of the possibility to explain himself further. The bombardment-type feeling of the questions is also emphasised through the stage directions, which state that Mick is ‘*continuing at great pace*’, leaving Davies no room to oppose to this treatment. Notably, there are no pauses between Mick’s questions; they appear at Mick’s demand when he allows there to be a pause. He uses the pauses to emphasise his immediate opinion of Davies, that he is ‘choosy’ which he repeats twice.

The power of language also becomes visible when Mick twists Davies’s words. In a different dialogue between the two characters, Mick takes Davies’s statement that he would not exactly call Aston his friend, and alters it into meaning that Aston is not friendly:

MICK. Don’t you find him friendly, then?

DAVIES. Well, I wouldn’t say we was all that friends. I mean, he done me no harm, but I wouldn’t say he was any particular friend of mine. What’s in that sandwich, then?

MICK. Cheese.

DAVIES. That’ll do me.

MICK. Take one.

DAVIES. Thank you, mister.

MICK. I’m sorry to hear my brother’s not very friendly.

DAVIES. He’s friendly, he’s friendly, I didn’t say he wasn’t ...

MICK (*taking a salt-cellar from his pocket*). Salt?

DAVIES. No thanks. (*He munches his sandwich*). I just can’t exactly ... make him out.

MICK (*feeling his pocket*). I forgot the pepper.

DAVIES. I just can’t get the hang of him, that’s all.

MICK. I had a bit of beetroot somewhere. Must have mislaid it.

(*Pause.*) (P2 45-46)

In this extract Davies is, arguably, just saying that he does not know Aston very well yet, and that he does not define him as a friend at this point. He is simply puzzled by Aston, a new person in his life. What Mick is doing, seems, again, more deliberate. While at the same time offering Davies a sandwich as a distraction from the real topic, a ‘side sequence’ (Cook 54) as mentioned in chapter two, he also uses the opportunity to alter Davies’s meaning, something which will become more significant as the play progresses.

In the above paragraphs I have tried to show that the possession of language is often equal to the possession of power in Pinter’s plays. This is exhibited, among other things, through repetition. To further emphasise the power relations between the characters I have chosen to include the below repeated conversations.

Repetitive conversations

In Act Two there are also some interesting examples of similar conversations that take place between the characters. They are not as similar as the ones I picked out in chapter two, but they display each in their own way how differently similar conversations can evolve if one exchanges one character for another:⁴¹

Joker scene: Davies and Aston.	Funny bloke scene: Davies and Mick.
<p>DAVIES. Who was that feller? ASTON. He's my brother DAVIES. Is he? He's a bit of a joker, en'he? ASTON. Uh. DAVIES. Yes ... he's a real joker. ASTON. He's got a sense of humour. DAVIES. Yes, I noticed. <i>Pause</i> He's a real joker, that lad, you can see that. <i>Pause</i> ASTON. Yes, he tends... He tends to see the funny side of things. DAVIES. Well, he's got a sense of humour, en'he? ASTON. Yes. DAVIES. Yes, you could tell that. <i>Pause.</i> I could tell the first time I saw him he had his own way of looking at things. (P2 37-38)</p>	<p>DAVIES. Well... he's a funny bloke, your brother. MICK. What? DAVIES. I was saying, he's ... he's a bit of a funny bloke, your brother. MICK <i>stares at him.</i> MICK. Funny? Why? DAVIES. Well ... he's funny ... <i>Pause</i> Not liking work. MICK. What's funny about that? DAVIES. Nothing. <i>Pause.</i> MICK. I don't call it funny. DAVIES. Nor me. MICK. You don't want to start getting hypercritical. DAVIES. No, no, I wasn't that, I wasn't ... I was only saying ... MICK. Don't get too glib. DAVIES. Look, all I meant was – MICK. Cut it! (<i>Briskly.</i>) Look! I got a proposition to make to you. I'm thinking of taking over the running of this place, you see? I think it could be run a bit more efficiently. I got a lot of ideas, a lot of plans. (<i>He eyes DAVIES.</i>) How would you like to stay on here, as caretaker? DAVIES. What? (P2 47-48)</p>

In the first of the two extracts above, the two characters are talking about Mick. It seems Davies does not know what to make of Mick, and in a way consults Aston to see if his impression can be improved. Davies first repeats twice that Mick must be a joker, that's the only possible explanation he can find to accept Mick's behaviour. After Aston has agreed that his brother has a sense of humour, Davies further emphasises that he is a joker, repeating it a third time. Both confirm that Mick has a sense of humour and that he 'tends to see the funny side of things' and Davies can finally conclude that his interpretation was correct. He can accept Mick's behaviour towards him on the basis that that's the way Mick is, and Davies believes he has read him correctly. It would not be strange if, had this been a play by another author, Davies had said immediately that Mick really confuses him and that he is a bit scared and does not know what to make of what he has just experienced. In this Pinter play,

⁴¹ These are two individual conversations.

however, the confusion can only be expressed through the word 'joker' at first; Davies must repeat it and have it confirmed many times to know that he might be on to something. Either he does not dare to speak his mind because of what he has just experienced, or he is simply unable to express it in decent terms. It could also be a combination of the two. Esslin stresses how Pinter's (and his contemporaries's) way of using language as a form of action gives inarticulate characters a position within twentieth century drama:

Only when it was recognised that the verbal element need not be the dominant aspect of drama, or at least that it was not the content of what was said that mattered most but the action that it embodied, and that inarticulate, incoherent, tautological, and nonsensical speech might be as dramatic as verbal brilliance when it was treated simply as an element of action, only then did it become possible to place inarticulate characters in the centre of the play and make their unspoken emotions transparent. ('Language' 39)

The way in which Pinter lets his characters express themselves allows them to express their feelings if we read between the lines. Reading between the lines is also important in relation to pauses and silences and the economic way Pinter uses language in general. A lot is left to the audience's and the reader's interpretation. Davies seems at first to be afraid to say anything negative about Aston's brother, and not knowing how to express himself, he starts out with the word 'joker'. When he understands that Aston is not offended by his puzzlement, he can repeat it, still not knowing exactly how to do so. After a little help from Aston, in adding that 'he has a sense of humour' and that 'he tends to see the funny side of things' (not direct agreement on the matter, but also not negations of his statement), Davies can take the liberty of adding Aston's expressions to his own confirmations, and be content to have fully understood the situation. We can see how Davies is dependent on Aston's acceptance of what he is saying to fully understand it. Davies waits for his subtle statement to be confirmed before he concludes that 'Yes, you could tell that. *Pause*. I could tell the first time I saw him he had his own way of looking at things.' (P2 38), which is a slightly different conclusion than to merely say that Mick is a joker. It seems that the last characterisation may be what Davies thought of in the first place, but is not able to say it explicitly until he has tested the subject with Aston first. In the words of Esslin: Davies here 'gradually learns to accept a fact that at first he had difficulties taking in' ('Language' 41).

The way this try-and-fail-or-succeed communication works is even more visible if we juxtapose the similar scene between Davies and Mick further on in Act Two (i.e. the second extract above). Here, Davies and Mick are talking about Aston. Mick has just asked Davies's advice on what to do about Aston's supposed laziness, elevating their relationship by asking his qualified opinion. It is obvious that Davies is in no position to disagree with Mick and tries his best to follow Mick's trail of thought and making up his mind about Aston. Davies

agrees to Mick's description of his brother ('MICK. He doesn't like work' (P2 46)) by repeating 'He don't like work' and 'I know that sort' (P2 47) until he finally goes too far when presented with the explicit request for his advice. It seems he has become bold, and states, similar to what he said to Aston, that he is a 'funny bloke' (P2 47). With Mick, however, this description does not go down so well. Davies hesitates, but repeats what he has said and is immediately cut off by Mick who wants an explanation. It is here that Davies's difficulty of expressing himself becomes very transparent. Last time, his characterisation was accepted without question; this time it is different. He is unable to explain why he has characterised Aston as 'a funny bloke', saying only 'not liking work' and is completely dismissed by Mick who can see nothing funny about not liking work. When asked to defend his characterisation Davies can only say 'nothing' and is subsequently defeated. He is no longer allowed to explain himself, as Mick interrupts him and accuses him of being 'hypercritical' (P2 48). After this, Mick decides to play nice again and presents Davies with the second offer of the caretaking job.

Esslin describes Davies's defeat in this situation as 'both abject and complete' ('Language' 48) and adds: 'A disagreement about the meaning of a term has become a fundamental, existential contest of wills. Words are thus of vital importance. And yet, it is not so much the words themselves as the existential situations they conceal and reveal' ('Language' 48-49). While Davies's surrender is complete, I tend, to some extent, to disagree that it is abject. Rather, I believe the experiences Davies has had as a tramp also makes him 'street wise' and that as such this surrender is not necessarily pathetic: it is the best way to deal with a situation that could possibly develop and become hostile. Surrendering is thus a defence mechanism learned from experience of homelessness. Yet, Davies is not always able to apply his 'street wisdom' in all situations, as he can be quite crude and impolite. In both extracts, Davies is trying to conceal the fact that he is puzzled by the whole situation, but tries to do it through repeating something which he sees as harmless, namely 'joker' in the first extract and 'funny bloke' in the second. The existential situations revealed in the extracts are of Davies's struggle to stay on good terms with the people who hold his fate in their hands. He is under the control of the two brothers, what he says or does determines whether the hospitality they have shown him will continue or if he will once again be left out in the cold. In the first instance, with Aston, he is accepted almost without reserve, whereas in the second, the 'contest of wills' is won by the person in power, but Davies is forgiven and given a new chance because he gives in to Mick's opinion: '[...] it matters little whether Mick's or

Davies' interpretation of the word "funny" is the correct one; what is essential and existentially important is that Mick makes Davies accept *his* definition of the word's meaning' (Esslin 'Language' 50). Davies is not willing to surrender completely and give up his own personal preferences until it is too late. Neither Mick nor Aston are able to lower their own demands to accommodate Davies's needs. Consequently, the struggle to stay on good terms is eventually lost by all; none of the characters are really able to compromise to the extent that they can form true and meaningful personal relationships. The one with the least power, the one with the least worldly possessions is the one with the most to lose and is, finally, the one who loses all. The loss of human contact is thus more destructing to the powerless, the ones without property or friends.

Ownership and naming

I have stated earlier that possessions and power are linked in this play, just as it arguably is in the real world. Although this fact is shown through several means in this play (for instance that the room the characters inhabit is filled with an abundance of objects and that the Buddha statue is given extra value for Aston), repetition also plays an important role in displaying this topic in *The Caretaker*. Although Davies does not believe in Mick at first when he states that the room is his, the facts of the matter are confirmed by both Aston and Mick later in Act Two. In both cases, the ownership of the house is linked to Mick's van: the fact that he owns his own van seems highly significant, as it is repeated several times in the course of the play. In fact, Pinter himself said about Mick's character: 'All I know is that whatever he did, he had his own van' (Quoted in Prentice 89). When Davies and Aston are alone in the room again after Mick's session of diatribes against Davies, (in the extension of the conversation they have about Mick being a joker), the following conversation takes place:

ASTON. I'm supposed to be doing up the upper part of the house for him.

DAVIES. What ... You mean ... you mean it's his house?

ASTON. Yes. I'm supposed to be decorating this landing for him. Make a flat out of it.

DAVIES. What does he do, then?

ASTON. He's in the building trade. He's got his own van.

DAVIES. He don't live here, do he? (P2 38)

Davies's confusion is understandable. He misinterpreted Aston in Act One and thought it was his house. Then, having been tormented by a stranger, he finds out that it belongs to the stranger, who Davies fails to get the hang of, and who makes him feel insecure. Additionally, Aston confirms that Mick has a van, a van which he threatened to take Davies to the police station in during his last diatribe. There is no reason, really, why Aston would add that his

brother has his own van. It seems important that he does in fact have one, and it is, to a certain degree, understandable that it is mentioned in connection with Mick's standing, as it was not as usual to own one's own car in the 1950s as it is today. However, it is the repetition of this fact that makes me curious as to what the van represents. We have already established that the van has been a source of threat to Davies when he was treated like an intruder by Mick. Now, when repeated by Aston, it is likely that it has been made a point to Aston that his brother owns the van. It thus seems that the van is proof of Mick's superiority and freedom.

The van becomes more significant when it is repeated by Mick; 'You see, I'm a working man. I'm a tradesman. I've got my own van' (P2 47). The three are compared and presented as proof that Mick is also superior in the world outside the immediate sphere of the house. Of course, it is also possible to link the van to social mobility. Being a tradesman (if we take Mick's word that he genuinely *is* a tradesman), Mick possesses the freedom of money and possessions, and the van is literally a possession which makes him mobile. Thus, Mick is not dependent on shoes or the building of sheds like the two other characters.

Davies experiences a revelation in the course of Act Two. He realises that he has been playing up to the wrong brother in terms of who is really the one in charge and is able to help Davies on his way to a better life. Davies, who in particular has to rely on other people for help, will otherwise become totally excluded from society: he needed shoes from the monk first, a man in Sidcup has allegedly stored his identity papers from him, Aston has offered him shelter, shoes, and has helped him out of a difficult situation. His total dependency upon other people becomes more and more obvious as he continues, in the entirety of the play, to *ask* for shoes, even after having been given some money and the possibility of a job. When Mick comes in, the free man that he is with his possessions and even a van to get him around, Davies changes his strategy, following the one whose friendship will prove most beneficial. This comes to show particularly well in the way Davies addresses the two brothers after his knowledge of the state of the distribution of possessions and power. He starts calling Aston 'boy' (P2 51); a great contrast to his constant use of 'mister' and 'mate' until it is confirmed that Aston is not the owner of the house. Similarly, Mick calls Davies 'son' twice and then 'sonny' (P2 33), during his first diatribe attacks on Davies and repeats it again later on (P2 36), making it quite obvious that naming is a way of exhibiting rank.⁴² The point is that the realisation on Davies's part results in a change of attitude towards the people around him. If he were able to maintain a human bond, recognising Aston's kindness and the value that lies

⁴² Much like the function of 'sir' in *The Hothouse*.

therein, he could probably save his own destiny, as we will see later on. His inability to do this, Esslin maintains, is caused by his being 'weak and beset by terrible feelings of inferiority' (*Peopled* 99), which results in a tendency of disrespecting others. This also has consequences after Aston's revelation that he is a former mental patient.

Davies adds obstacles

As Davies continues his search for shoes in Act Two, Aston tries to assist him. He comes back from one of his trips outside with a bag of clothes for Davies. Davies, however, immediately finds flaws in the garments that are in the bag. Among other things, a check shirt does not serve its purpose in the winter: '[...] Shirts like these, they don't go far in the winter time. [...] No, what I need, is a kind of a shirt with stripes, a good solid shirt, with stripes going down. That's what I want' (*P2* 39). What he notably does accept is a deep-red velvet smoking-jacket, which apparently suits his eye better. His vanity is quite visible as he rejects the check shirt's quality on account that it is not striped, and also because he adds 'That's what I want' instead of 'need' in the end. He seems to be looking for any excuse to stay in his comfortable situation, something which might signify that he is hesitant to change. His reluctance, again, to go to Sidcup is further emphasised in the next dialogue, which occurs after Aston has woken Davies up:

ASTON. You said you were thinking of going to Sidcup.

DAVIES. Ay, that'd be a good thing, if I got there.

ASTON. Doesn't look much of a day.

DAVIES. Ay, well, that's shot it, en't it?

ASTON. I... I didn't have a very good night again.

DAVIES. I slept terrible.

Pause.

ASTON. You were making...

DAVIES. Terrible. Had a bit of rain in the night, didn't I?

ASTON. Just a bit. (*P2* 50)

We can see how Davies gives up with immediate effect once Aston mentions the rain. The obstacles increasingly seem like pretences which he applies to avoid going to Sidcup. Understandably, Davies is comfortable in his current situation, and it is entertaining to see how he is seemingly keeps his inflated self image balanced by pretending to hope for better days. Additionally, Davies does not let Aston tell him about his night. Aston is obviously trying to tell Davies that he has been making noises, but is interrupted by Davies's complaints. These complaints result in a discussion of whether or not to keep the window open at night, upon which Davies transparently utters: 'It isn't me has to change, it's that window' (*P2* 51). This attitude is symptomatic of his general behaviour and becomes comic

as Davies does not seem to realise how it makes him look. As a contrast, it can also be interpreted as indicative of the inability to form human bonds, as he does not let Aston have the word. Similarly, Aston is not ready to accommodate a modest request from Davies; that they keep the window shut during the night so that Davies might have a good night's sleep. The tension grows between the two on account of these deficiencies of character in both.

If Davies is aware of his inhibitions, it does not seem like Aston is to the same extent. He seems to be convinced that he will eventually get the shed up and get working on the house. As he says himself; he likes working with his hands. In the following, Aston's situation will be discussed.

Aston's obstacles: more than material

Again, in Act Two, Aston's shed is a recurring topic in his repertoire. As indicated above, this topic shines through increasingly, as the play progresses, as a fixation for Aston:

ASTON. Once I get that shed up outside ... I'll be able to give a bit more thought to the flat, you see. Perhaps I can knock up one or two things for it. (*He walks to the window.*) I can work with my hands, you see. That's one thing I can do. I never knew I could. But I can do all sorts of things now, with my hands. You know, manual things. When I get that shed up out there... I'll have a workshop, you see. I ... could do a bit of woodwork. Simple woodwork, to start. Working with... good wood.

(*Pause.*) (P2 38)

In the quote above, we see Aston's apparent wish to build the shed as he states 'Once I get that shed up outside' and repeats 'When I get that shed up out there'. This would provide a workshop for him, a place for him to do more to the house and be useful to his brother. The audience or first time readers do not yet know about his past as a mental patient, but it is apparent that Aston now has belief in his physical abilities, repeating that he can work with his hands and further emphasising it through his mentioning of 'manual things'. He proceeds in presenting what he could do to the house until he finally repeats, in different words; 'I could knock them up, you see, if I had a workshop' (P2 39). Once again, the shed works as an obstacle for Aston to find his place in the world, to feel useful. This is shed more light upon when he reveals that he was once a mental patient, as we will see below.

A related aspect of repetition which occurs in the extract above deserves attention. The poetic aspect of repetition is discussed more in depth in chapter two, but may be worth mentioning in connection with this utterance as well. The poetic function of repetition mentioned by Esslin becomes visible through assonance and alliteration in the sentence 'I ... could do a bit of **woodwork**. Simple **woodwork**, to start. **Working with... good wood**'⁴³ (P2 38), a quality which he also repeats, again in dialogue with Davies in Act Three. Pinter uses

⁴³ My highlighting.

poetic tools many times in this play, and it heightens the feeling that even immediate spoken language can have a poetic quality. What the function of it may be is hard to say, but it certainly draws upon the conventions of traditional stage dialogue, except here in a new form. Esslin calls this a fusing of 'psychological realism and a poet's control' ('Language' 42) which is characteristic of Pinter's linguistic armory. It might be that Aston is merely associating the words with one another through the sound of the words. There is also a pause immediately after this utterance, which may signify mental activity in Aston inapprehensible to the audience and the reader. If the poetic aspect of these sentences is not functional in that they provide any information, it certainly makes language in itself more visible, if one can say that about something which is sensed through hearing.

The shed again becomes significant when at the end of Act Two a surprising event occurs. After Davies's mentioning his desire for a cup of tea, Aston recommends a café which causes him to think of his past. Throughout the play he has just one long speech, which is spurred by the association of the café to his stay at the mental hospital. This aspect of Aston's life is revealed to Davies at that point. The speech will not be quoted in full, but it starts out by Aston saying he was sent to the mental hospital since he was labelled by the other regulars at that café as one who 'talked too much' (*P2 52*) even though he thought they understood what he said. He adds 'That was my mistake' (*P2 52*) and continues telling how he talked too much in his workplace at a factory as well and that he used to have hallucinations. Here, an interesting segment of language appears: 'They weren't hallucinations, they... I used to get the feeling I could see things... very clearly... everything... was so clear... everything used... everything used to get very quiet... everything got very quiet... all this... quiet... and... this clear sight... it was... but maybe I was wrong' (*P2 53*).

The above segment reappears in a similar form later on during his speech, as we will see below. He continues telling how they 'got' him in the hospital and how he tried to escape their questioning: 'They asked me questions, in there. Got me in there and asked me all sorts of questions' (*P2 53*), before he says that they wanted to do something to his brain and that they got his mother's permission even though he had written to her to prevent it from happening. When he asked them what they were going to do, he says, the doctor only 'repeated what he'd said' (*P2 53*) without adding further information. He then describes being held by force and being exposed to this shock therapy treatment⁴⁴ while still being on his feet

⁴⁴ He never explicitly says shock therapy treatment, but it can arguably be derived from Aston's description of what happened.

in an attempt to escape, and that he finally got out after that. However, once again his speech is interrupted by small ellipses: 'The trouble was... my thoughts... had become very slow... I couldn't think at all... I couldn't... get... my thoughts... together... uuuhh... I could... never quite get it... together' (P2 55). At the end of the speech he seems relieved and at the same time wistful, as he states:

I used to sit in my room. That was when I lived with my mother. And my brother. He was younger than me. And I laid everything out, in order, in my room, all the things I knew were mine, but I didn't die. The thing is, I should have been dead. I should have died. Anyway, I feel much better now. But I don't talk to people now. I steer clear of places like that café. I never go into them now. I don't talk to anyone... like that. I've often thought of going back and trying to find the man who did that to me. But I want to do something first. I want to build that shed out in the garden. (P2 55)

First, what is surprising here is the level of honesty which seems to be inherent in the speech, the fact that Aston, as opposed to most Pinter characters, reveals something which can potentially render him vulnerable, in this case to Davies. Very often, when a character has a long speech, the function of it may not cohere with the words that are uttered, i.e. the form, as is arguably the case when it comes to Mick's diatribe attacks on Davies. If the form of Mick's speeches are seemingly nonsensical babble built on an associative mechanism, and the function is that of torment and confusion, what can be said about Aston's speech? Can we find a similar ambiguity in his sudden and unexpected revelation of self?

Given this thesis's focus on language, it is relevant that Aston's claimed reason for his conviction to the mental hospital was that he talked too much and that he was misunderstood even though he thought he was making sense. The importance of being able to express oneself is thus stressed once again. In the speech itself, the repetition of two similar, but not identical, segments of language appear (see pages 53 and 55, as quoted above). In the first segment, Aston repeats 'see' and sight', 'clearly and 'clear' and 'quiet' three times. He is referring to his state of mind before being institutionalised as something that he remembers as mysterious and, it seems; positive. In the second segment, where he repeats different variations of not being able to think straight, his thoughts have become slow and chaotic as he is not able to put them together. These segments display a kind of breakdown of language where empty spaces fill the void between the words, making the sentences incoherent. To me, this breakdown, this confusion of words and the spaces between them, indicate Aston's mental activity, his realisations or acceptance of his own inner reality, perhaps? Such a speech signals that the speaker is slowly coming to terms with something, that the mind works separately from the mouth, which in turn only utters fragments of what goes on inside. Notably, the structuring of these two segments differs largely from what comes between; a story told of what happens in

the world. The two segments express how he felt about it all; who he used to be (a boy who saw things clearly without much confusion) and who he became as a consequence of what he was exposed to (a confused slow-minded man not able to think clearly anymore). It also serves as a contrast to his present belief in his *physical* abilities, working with his hands and 'good wood' (P2 38) as discussed above.

Consequently, it is possible to read this whole speech as mental activity spoken out loud. I mentioned earlier that it was surprising that Aston chooses to reveal so much of his past and inner self to Davies, as speech is often used to cover up what moves inside a character's mind instead of actually providing information. May it be that Aston gets so caught up in his emotions, his reminiscence of his traumatic past experience that the fact that he is expressing his thoughts verbally completely escapes his attention? The stage directions could also be interpreted along that line, as they say: '*During ASTON's speech the room grows darker. By the close of the speech only ASTON can be seen clearly. DAVIES and all the other objects are in the shadow. The fade-down of the light must be as gradual, as protracted and as unobtrusive as possible*' (P2 52).⁴⁵ It seems Aston is gradually withdrawing into the depths of his own mind, the secluded character that he is: as a consequence of his institutionalisation, Aston now does not talk to anyone.

He states three times that he should have died; statements that now probably seem ambiguous to the reader or audience. Should he have died because he was standing while he was receiving electro shocks to his brain? Or is there a deeper sense of inferiority which has overpowered him since he was permitted to enter society again? Does he wish he had died or does he think he deserves to? I pose these questions, of course, because I believe one interpretation does not exclude the other. His mentioning of not being supposed to stand upright while receiving the electro shocks speaks for the first interpretation. His general situation, as we now understand it, of not speaking to people anymore and avoiding social events, a ridiculed character both in his private sphere of the café where he used to think he had friends, and in the public sphere of his workplace at the factory, makes it likely that he would feel inferior, and indeed, scared of what might happen if he were to return. He might not have a death wish, but he seems puzzled that he is still alive. He also repeats that he does not talk to anyone anymore 'like that'. Whether that means he does not talk to people socially anymore, or if it means that he does not talk the way he used to before he was institutionalised is not clear, but it is likely that he is too ashamed to talk much now. We understand that there

⁴⁵ Italisation as it appears in the play.

is a desire in him, on some level, to return and make the wrongs right again by confronting the man who ‘did that to’ (P2 55) him,⁴⁶ but in order to do that, his conclusion curiously is that he must build his shed first.

After Aston’s most revealing speech, we can see how important it is for him to build his shed, and simultaneously that he may never accomplish the task. The shed, which used to be quite an explicit obstacle for Aston in the ‘real world’, may now be interpreted as a consequence of another obstacle in his past; his institutionalisation and loss of clear thought. The repetition, one could say, has changed or evolved from one form of repetition, Miller’s first form of being quite the same as an archetype, to the second form which is not identical with the one that came before. The archetype ‘shed’ which was first mentioned as a concrete intention for Aston, and after a while an obstacle, has now evolved once again into something different, only ‘opaquely similar’ (Miller 8) as we gain more information about its importance. The shed is now the only thing that stands in the way for Aston if he wants to accomplish his goal of redecorating Mick’s house, a project he can believe in as he has faith in his physical abilities of working with his hands. Until this speech is over, the audience, or the first time reader will have had no clue of the degree of paralysis which has permeated Aston’s adult life, and thus not known why he has become the man he is. The conversation between Mick and Davies earlier, of Aston’s incompetence in the building trade now seems slightly cruel to us and we have more empathy for Aston. We want justice for Aston, and I believe it would be relieving to see him confront the people who have done him wrong. The shed as an obstacle thus stands out as a very significant repetition in Aston’s repertoire. It is an obstacle; the reluctance to built it a simultaneous consequence. The challenge presented by the shed can then be interpreted as a *symptom* of what really lies beneath Aston’s reluctance to progress, if progress is in fact the ultimate goal.

Concerning the questions I asked initially while comparing this speech to Mick’s speeches, I believe that in this speech, Aston is being honest, and that this speech does not contain elements of wanting to gain any power, or getting the upper hand which is so often the case in Pinter’s dialogues. The probability that the consequence of revealing this information to Davies will be negative for Aston makes lying about it unlikely. The ambiguity of this speech lies not between the form and the function; the ambiguity of it must lie partly in giving factual information in form to the audience and to Davies, and partly in a loudthinking on Aston’s part, of slowly coming to terms with something profound and fundamental for the

⁴⁶ Whether this means the doctor or some man in the café who initiated his institutionalisation is unclear.

way he has evolved as an adult, remembering himself the way he used to be. The form is arguably that of an associative mechanism, a 'loudthickenedness'; the function what I stated above. Thus, there does not seem to be an identical incoherence between form and function to the one found in Mick's speeches, and makes this a different kind of mechanism in the character; a more introvert speech revealing actual information.

As a conclusion to this section I would like to say something about transtextual repetition or repetition between texts, a subject briefly mentioned earlier, which can now be discussed more in depth. There is a repetition, between the texts that I have chosen, of the topic of institutionalisation and experimenting with the human mind. In *The Hothouse* we saw an interrogation sequence happening in the here and now of the play, a tormenting interview with an employee at the rest home institution. In *The Caretaker*, the interrogation at the mental hospital does not occur in the here and now of the play, it is displayed through a character's reminiscence of his past, and we are allowed to see the consequences of this intervention from the public into the private sphere. I am not the first, of course, to notice this connection. As indicated in chapter one, Esslin sheds some light upon this aspect in his analysis of *The Caretaker*.

Esslin calls the treatment of Lamb in *The Hothouse* a 'grotesquely farcical variant on Aston's experience in the mental hospital' (*Peopled* 102). He also elaborates on this by suggesting that 'It is as though Aston's experience in the hospital had been wildly heightened and exaggerated to form the subject matter of an entire play. [...] Lamb's experience in *The Hothouse* is in the form of the wild nightmare of a patient in a mental hospital, Aston's tale in *The Caretaker* is the same experience recollected in sober tranquillity' (Esslin *Peopled* 104). Does this transtextual repetition, which is realised in so different ways in the two plays, work as a repetition which signifies a break in Pinter's style altogether? His movement away from farcical tricks mentioned in the beginning of this chapter now seems evident, as the two plays' dealing with the same topic are juxtaposed by Esslin. In *The Hothouse*, the audience gets to see what happens, a horror image of torture wrapped in small-talk and flirtation between the torturers. In *The Caretaker* the presentation of this image is 'sober' and tranquil, a mere recollected story of the past. The repetition of this topic emphasises Pinter's project of displaying human connections even when these connections seem extreme and exhibits the way in which society can influence the individual.

Another transtextual repetition, which may be a consequence of the already mentioned mental experimentation, is this: Aston, in *The Caretaker*, was betrayed by his mother at a

young age, depriving him of his safety and of his ability to talk freely. In *The Hothouse*, we saw the significance of the mother as a kind of predecessor that the individual may compare him/herself with. The significance, also, of the betrayal by Aston's mother seems evident in that Aston has no option to try to become a better version of his predecessor, or even become a normal human being the way 'a normal person' is defined by society. According to Esslin, Lamb's subjection to the cross-examination by Miss Cutts does not only contain elements of Stan's brainwashing in *The Birthday Party*, as discussed in chapter two, but 'also relates to Aston's fear of women' (*Peopled* 103). In Act One, there is a misunderstanding between Aston and Davies, which I have not previously mentioned. Aston tries to tell Davies about an incident in which a woman asked him if he would like her to have a look at her body, something which Davies interprets as self-praise. In reality, it seems that Aston is merely puzzled by the whole thing as he goes on to say that it struck him as a bit odd. This difficult relation to women could stem from his being betrayed by his mother who gave the doctors permission to subject Aston to shock-therapy treatment, an interpretation which I owe to Esslin (*Peopled* 103). One could also contemplate the possibility that Aston has been subjected to the same kind of interrogation that Lamb, in *The Hothouse*, goes through. The penetrating and emasculating questions of, for instance, 'Are you virgo intacta?' (*PI* 249) would possibly render Aston, too, quite without verbal guard and be just as tormenting to him as it seems it is to Lamb. Characters who are thus subjected to mental experimentation and who extracts from these interrogations a general fear of women, are possibly also ridden of their opportunities of becoming predecessors (or fathers) themselves. The possibility to reproduce is reduced as their contact with women in the future may be minimal if they are not able to cope with the trauma they have been through.

This transtextual repetition mentioned above has implications for the general topic of repetition and power. A mental institution is, arguably, a place where people are put if they do not act according to convention. A convention is arguably something which exists because of repetitions in the past, i.e. of normal behaviour which has created a standard recipe for how to behave. In a society of conventions created by the past, the repetition by individuals in that society is *expected* of them. The expectations of normal behaviour and the repetition of former events are thus linked. Repetition then holds power over the individual in the form of convention. The consequence of not following convention is institutionalisation to change behavioural patterns. In *The Hothouse* this happens through the governing 'Ministry' (or perhaps voluntarily?), in *The Caretaker* through 'concerned citizens', i.e. society itself, and

the ultimate normative governor of any child's life; the mother, who in this case signs the necessary papers for her son's fate.

3.4 Act Three

Summary

When we return in Act 3, two weeks have passed and Davies confesses to Mick that he cannot quite make out Aston after his confession of having been in a mental hospital. It is clear that this knowledge bothers Davies, and he goes too far in criticising Aston. Aston enters with a pair of shoes for Davies. When Aston wakes Davies up after a blackout, he and Davies end up in a verbal fight and Davies is asked to leave. When he returns with Mick a while later, Mick also decides that Davies is not worth having around anymore. When Aston returns, Davies makes a last plea for mercy, but the relations between the characters is now so without trust that his plea is rejected. They are unable to stay on good terms and in the end Davies is again an outcast.

The impossibility of forming true relationships

The repetitions mentioned in relation to the earlier acts are repeated once again in Act Three, and this last part of the analysis will discuss how these repetitions contribute to the breaking up of the bonds between the characters. In risk of being too repetitious in my analysis, I have therefore chosen not to comment on the repetitions so extensively in this last part, but rather show how they connect to form what I have claimed are the general themes of the play, i. e. power, and paralysis versus progress, themes which are ultimately intertwined.

Davies's fear and disrespect towards Aston

Something has happened to the relation between Aston and Davies during the ellipsis of the two weeks that have passed from Act Two to Act Three. Davies enters, as already mentioned, with Mick, to whom he expresses his concerns now that the knowledge about Aston has sunk in. In the first few pages Davies repeats fears that now seem to be fixations within his mind, because he has lost all trust in Aston. A gas stove may or may not be turned on; a direct danger to his life, and, Davies has observed Aston from under his blanket at night, staring at him and smiling. He directly addresses the obliqueness of language, which, as we learned

from chapter one, Pinter developed from Chekhov's dialogues, as he mentions, when he tells Mick about the speech Aston had, that

He went on talking there... I don't know what he was ... he wasn't looking at me, he wasn't talking to me, he don't care about me. He was talking to himself! [...] I mean, we don't have any conversation, you see? You can't live in the same room with someone who... who don't have any conversation with you. \ *Pause*. \ I just can't get the hang of him. \ *Pause*. \ You and me, we could get this place going (P2 57-58).

The subject of *conversation* is thus picked up in direct connection with the quality of being sane, the topic addressed earlier by Aston who cannot talk in 'that way' anymore. Davies is also puzzled because they do not talk to each other. As quoted earlier, Esslin links the ability to express oneself to the right of being human in Pinter's dramas. As a contrast to Mick, Aston does not speak eloquently; he has even confessed that his language is what put him in a mental institution in the first place. Davies has rejected Aston as a companion and now places all his eggs in Mick's basket, as he is the one who is 'straightforward' (P2 59) which they both agree on.

Davies's rejection of Aston's friendship is even more evident when Mick asks him to talk to Aston about getting the place going: 'MICK. Yes. You're a friend of his. \ DAVIES. He's no friend of mine. \ MICK. You're living in the same room with him, en't you? \ DAVIES. He's no friend of mine. You don't know where you are with him. I mean, with a bloke like you, you know where you are' (P2 59). These are all indications that Aston's speech is too much to handle for Davies. He has rejected his friendship before, but then it seemed to be mostly due to the realisation of which brother was truly the owner of the house and thus the one with the power to let Davies stay in his comfortable situation. Esslin points out that the moment of Aston's self-revelation to Davies in reality seals Davies's fate because he is unable to control his reaction to it:

This moment of Aston's self-revelation seals Davies's fate. Weak and beset by terrible feelings of inferiority, he simply cannot resist the temptation to take advantage of Aston's confession; confronted with a man who has been to a mental hospital, who admits his inadequacy, Davies is unable to react with sympathy, with gratitude, for the maimed man's kindness, his offer of friendship. He must enjoy the thrill of treating his benefactor with the superiority of the sane over the lunatic. Transferred to the lower levels of contemporary society, this is the *hybris* of Greek tragedy which becomes the cause of Davies's downfall. (*Peopled* 99)

This aspect will be confirmed through the following paragraphs. There is really no reason why Davies should renounce Aston's friendship based on Aston's previous actions, except that Davies cannot seem to handle the information he is given in an adult way. When Aston enters he has found a pair of shoes for Davies, a much desired possession, should we believe Davies will really go to Sidcup if he gets the right shoes and the weather is better. But Davies is unable to fathom the value of this friendly gesture, and instead of accepting them and

thanking him, he asks for laces. When Aston gives him a pair of laces, he complains because they are the wrong colour. His vanity again comes in and inhibits his sense of reality. However, he says they will 'do, anyway, until I get another pair' (P2 63) and repeats that he will go to Sidcup and sort himself out. This speech develops into a kind of survival speech, emphasising Davies's continuous wish to be perceived as someone with a grand past (reflecting ('I keep myself up' (P2 7) and other claims to superiority and self-preservation from both previous acts) and when he realises Aston is not listening, like he complained about to Mick, he understandably gets very annoyed:

ASTON exits, unnoticed.

Don't know as these shoes'll be much good. It's a hard road, I been down there before. Coming the other way, like. Last time I left there, it was... last time ... getting on a while back... the road was bad, the rain was coming down, lucky I didn't die there on the road, but I got here, I kept going, all along ... yes ... I kept going all along. But all the same, I can't go on like this, what I got to do, I got to get back there, find this man-

He turns and looks about the room.

Christ! That bastard, he ain't even listening to me! (P2 63-64)

Curiously, the last part of the speech is very reminiscent of Aston's mental hospital speech at the end of Act Two, but it does not seem like Davies realises this fact. It seems Davies is repeating elements of Aston's speech without noticing. Like Aston survived when he should have died, Davies counts himself lucky that he did not die either. He also wants to find a man, the man who has his identity papers, but as we already know he has his obstacles: the shoes, the bad weather and no decent clothing; ultimately, himself and his own reluctance to actually do what he says he needs to do. His obstacles shine through as pretence, even though he has the long survival speech.

I believe Aston's and Davies's obstacles are what ultimately destroys what is left of their relationship, as they, after a blackout, resume in using their inhibitions against each other after Aston has abruptly woken Davies up. Aston is accusing him of making noises, upon which Davies responds thrice versions of 'What do you expect me to do, stop breathing?' (P2 64) which reflect his comments in Act One of 'What do you think I am, a dog? Nothing better than a dog. What do you think I am, a wild animal?' (P2 13). Again, Davies is protecting himself under attack. This results in a long speech by Davies, who finally says what he really thinks about Aston now that he knows he is a previous mental patient:

DAVIES. [...] That was the greatest mistake they made, you take my tip, letting you out of that place. Nobody knows what you're at, you go out you come in, nobody knows what you're at! Well, nobody messes me about for long. You think I'm going to do your dirty work? Haaaaahhhh! You better think again! You want me to do all the dirty work all up and down them stairs just so I can sleep in this lousy filthy hole every night? Not me, boy. Not for you, boy. You don't know what you're doing half the time. You're up the creek! You're half off! You can tell it by looking at you. Who ever saw you slip me a few bob? Treating me like a bloody animal! I never been inside a nuthouse!

ASTON *makes a slight move towards him*. DAVIES *takes his knife from his back pocket*.
 Don't come nothing with me, mate. I got this here. I used it. I used it. Don't come it with me.
A pause. They stare at each other.
 Mind what you do now.
Pause.
 Don't you try anything with me.
Pause. (P2 65-66)

Three interesting repetitions occur in this extract. First, Davies reveals his new view of Aston, as he did more indirectly to Mick. Unlike in Act Two, his new feelings towards Aston do not only comprise *less* respect; they have evolved into a combination of *disrespect*, fear and puzzlement. Second, there is the recurrence of the topic from Act One; someone without assigned power, and who Davies looks down upon has attempted to give him orders, to do their 'dirty work'. This time, it is not a foreigner, but a mental patient. The room he has been offered has now become a 'lousy, filthy hole', reflecting the negative adjectives Davies attributed his fellow workmen in the beginning; the inhabitant of this room is not worthy of Davies's company anymore. He accuses Aston of treating him like an animal, distancing himself from Aston through stating that he has never been inside a nuthouse. This personal attack on Aston seems to be symptomatic of his inability to stay in one place for long. His inability to resist the temptation of taking the superior role in relations to his peers must be a provoking feature of his personality and maybe it is inevitable for Davies that he ends up offending the people who can help him. Third, Davies's grand past does not seem very grand, as he draws his knife and repeats 'I used it' twice as a threat to Aston. It seems, as one might have suspected, that Davies has a criminal past, having used his knife before.

The surprising thing about this is that Aston keeps calm even while being threatened with a knife. One would also think that he would become more emotional from being discriminated because of his past as a mental patient. The only consequence, although it is a rather significant one, is that Aston no longer wants him in the house. However, in the continuation of this fight, the two of them touch upon the sorest spots in the other:⁴⁷

⁴⁷ What is included in the left column precedes what is included in the right one.

<p>ASTON. I... I think it's about time you found somewhere else. I don't think we're hitting it off. DAVIES. Find somewhere else? ASTON. Yes. DAVIES. Me? You talking to me? Not me, man! You! ASTON. What? DAVIES. You! You better find somewhere else! ASTON. I live here. You don't. DAVIES. Don't I? Well, I live here. I been offered a job here. ASTON. Yes... well, I don't think you're really suitable. DAVIES. Not suitable? Well, I can tell you, there's someone here thinks I am suitable. And I'll tell you. I'm staying on here as caretaker! Get it! Your brother, he's told me, see, he's told me the job is mine. Mine! So that's where I am. I'm going to be his caretaker. ASTON. My brother? DAVIES. He's staying, he's going to run this place, and I'm staying with him. ASTON. Look. If I give you ... a few bob you can get down to Sidcup. DAVIES. You build your shed first! A few bob! When I can earn a steady wage here! You build your stinking shed first! <i>ASTON stares at him.</i> ASTON. That's not a stinking shed. <i>Silence.</i> <i>ASTON moves to him.</i> It's clean. It's all good wood. I'll get it up. No trouble. DAVIES. Don't come too near! ASTON. You've no reason to call that shed stinking. <i>DAVIES points the knife.</i> You stink.</p>	<p>DAVIES. What! ASTON. You've been stinking the place out. DAVIES. Christ, you say that to me! ASTON. For days. That's one reason I can't sleep. DAVIES. You call me that! You call me stinking! ASTON. You better go. DAVIES. I'LL STINK YOU! <i>He thrusts his arm out, the arm trembling, the knife pointing at ASTON'S stomach. ASTON does not move. Silence. DAVIES' arm moves no further. They stand.</i> I'll stink you ... <i>Pause.</i> ASTON. Get your stuff. <i>DAVIES draws the knife in to his chest, breathing heavily. ASTON goes to DAVIES' bed, collects his bag and puts a few of DAVIES' things into it.</i> DAVIES. You ain't ... you ain't got the right ... Leave that alone, that's mine! <i>DAVIES takes the bag and presses the contents down.</i> All right ... I been offered a job here ... you wait ... <i>(He puts on his smoking-jacket.)</i> .. Your wait ... your brother ... he'll sort you out ... you call me that ... you call me that ... no one's ever called me that ... <i>(He puts on his overcoat.)</i> You'll be sorry you called me that ... you ain't heard the last of this ... <i>(He picks up his bag and goes to the door.)</i> You'll be sorry you called me that ... <i>He opens the door, ASTON watching him.</i> Now I know who I can trust. <i>DAVIES goes out. ASTON stands.</i> (P2 66-68)</p>
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We can see that it is not until Davies mentions Aston's shed and calls it stinking that Aston loses his calm approach. This is, in fact, the first time we hear Aston say anything which seems intentionally hurtful. Interestingly, his shed is what triggers it, as Davies calls it stinking. Knowing, probably, that 'stinking' is one of the worst attributes Davies knows of, having heard him in the past talking negatively of his arch enemies in the black community, he retorts by calling Davies stinking. The word 'stink' goes through a transformation (attaining the meaning 'sting') as Davies, in the heat of the moment, exclaims 'I'LL STINK YOU!', pointing his knife at Aston. As Davies probably realises what he has just done, there is a 'Pause.' before he repeats it a second time, this time not as loudly. I believe what happens here is what Pinter would refer to as the moment when the characters say what they mean: 'I have found that there invariably does come a moment when this happens, when he says

something, perhaps, which he has never said before. And where this happens, what he says is irrevocable, and can never be taken back' (*PI* xiv).⁴⁸ Aston and Davies have now entered the field of honesty; what they really think of each other is out in the open and can never be taken back.

Aston openly provokes Davies for the first time, but why? As discussed above, the shed is significant to Aston. It is an obstacle, a consequence and a symptom, which, until he gets it up, he 'can't get started' (*P2* 74). Curiously, when Davies suggests indirectly that he will not 'get it up', Aston mentions that it is all 'good wood', reflecting his talk of wood earlier in relation to his physical abilities. Wood often being a synonym, in colloquial language, of having an erection, one could also see the shed as something which Aston relates to his masculinity, following the line of thought that he has a fear of women. It is then quite understandable that Aston would attack Davies after this, losing his patience with a man whom he has shown a lot of hospitality.

At the end, however, as Davies is about to leave, he does not seem to realise that he has behaved preposterously towards a person who once cared for him. Instead he obsesses over the fact that someone like Aston, being a nut-job in Davies's eyes, has called him stinking. It may be the inability to see this aspect of his own personality that makes it inevitable for him to build a true human connection with another person. As for Aston, his unwillingness to accommodate Davies's slightest needs when it comes to the general comfort of sleeping (like closing the window to avoid the draught or changing beds), is what has slowly built up as small irritations in Davies, and eventually accumulates into hatred once the words flow freely between them. In Pinter's own words: Aston isn't crazy. It's difficult for him but he makes an attempt to be friendly and it just doesn't work. When he turns his back at the end, you know he'll never try again. The tramp in turn, is too suspicious, too selfish to respond. When he finally realises it's his only chance to escape loneliness, it's too late. You sympathise with both' (Quoted in Prentice 85, 86).⁴⁹

⁴⁸ As readers recall this quote is also included in chapter two.

⁴⁹ In Prentice, the quote is divided between two pages.

Mick's grand present

In addition to owning a van, Mick is supposed to be a tradesman and businessman as indicated in relation to Act Two. He affirms this in the last act, this time also by applying his jargon. He gives Davies a long speech of his plans for the house, a speech which he later talks about as having revealed his inner dreams to Davies. Here is a small extract:

MICK. I'd have teal-blue, copper and parchment linoleum squares. I'd have those colours re-echoed in the walls. [...] Then the bedroom. What is a bedroom? It's a retreat. It's a place to go for rest and peace. So you want quiet decoration. The lighting functional. Furniture...mahogany and rosewood. Deep azure-blue carpet, unglazed blue and white curtains, a bedspread with a pattern of small blue roses on a white ground, dressing table with a lift-up top containing a plastic tray, table lamp of white raffia... (MICK *sits up*.) it wouldn't be a flat, it'd be a palace.

DAVIES. I'd say it would, man.

MICK. A palace.

DAVIES. Who would live there?

MICK. I would. My brother and me.

(*Pause.*)

DAVIES. What about me? (P2 58-59)

In this jargon speech, Mick seems to be overwhelmed by the possibilities of the house he owns and applies interior catalogue-like talk. It seems this image he has of the way the house could turn out is an illusion, reflecting poorly the real condition of the house in the present. Prentice suggests that it is 'postwar consumer values' which keep Mick in thrall (90), and that Mick's 'grandiose illusion to transform the slum dwelling into a "penthouse", even a "palace," allows dreams to displace action in the dreary present where he blames Davies for failure to realize his dreams' (90). His twofold repetition of 'a palace' emphasises this interpretation of the whole speech as an illusion that Mick holds on to. However, I believe we can also see some of the explicit power play in this speech, as in the previous jargon speeches alike. It is probable that Davies does not understand many of the technical terms that Mick applies in this speech either, which makes it even more curious that Mick, after a while, accuses Davies of having portrayed himself as an 'experienced interior decorator' (P2 70):

MICK. I don't want you to pick it up. I want a first-class experienced interior decorator. I thought you were one.

DAVIES. Me? Now wait a minute – wait a minute – you got the wrong man.

MICK. How could I have the wrong man? You're the only one I've told, about my dreams, about my deepest wishes, you're the only one I've told, and I only told you because I understood you were an experienced first-class professional interior and exterior decorator.

DAVIES. Now look here –

MICK. You mean you wouldn't know how to fit a teal-blue, copper and parchment linoleum squares and have those colours re-echoed in the walls?

DAVIES. Now look here, where'd you get - ?

(P2 70)

We can see how Mick repeats his technical terms verbatim from the speech he had before. There is something about this fluidity of language which renders the utterances very elaborate and makes the questions seem like a display of power, as Mick does in reality not have any

reason to believe that Davies is an experienced interior decorator. Notably, Davies repeats 'Now look here' twice in this battle of words as he is probably overthrown by this, once again 'torrent of language', coming at him. Esslin compares the usage of jargon to the way in which groups of people gather in spaces closed to the undeserving outsiders who do not belong:

The use of technical terms and professional jargon [...] establishes the speaker's superiority in his own chosen field and gives him the advantage of belonging to a freemasonry, an inner circle of people who are able to exclude intruders and interlopers. The use of technical jargon thus corresponds to the enclosed rooms and protected spaces that Pinter's characters tend to covet and to defend against outsiders. (Esslin 'Language' 47)

Language is a barrier, a frontier, through which the outsider – in this case the inarticulate Davies – cannot penetrate and is thus left out in the cold. Following this line of thought, the exclusion of Davies from the actual room is reflected in Mick's exclusion of him in his language. The struggle for a home is lost because of an inadequacy in using language; the misunderstanding caused by Mick's jargon, of Davies's alleged pretence of being an 'experienced interior decorator' expels the old man from what could have become his final home. It is this supposed misunderstanding of Davies's experience, along with Davies's tactless reference to Aston as 'nutty' (P2 71) which starts what shines through as Mick's final blow against Davies, when he reduces him to an animal, once again using the very attributes that Davies detests against him:

MICK. [...] Ever since you come into this house there's been nothing but trouble. Honest. I can take nothing you say at face value. Every word you speak is open to any number of different interpretations. Most of what you say is lies. You're violent, you're erratic, you're just completely unpredictable. You're nothing but a wild animal, when you come down to it. You're a barbarian. And to put the old tin lid on it, you stink from arse-hole to breakfast time. [...] You make a long speech about all the references you've got down at Sidcup, I haven't noticed you go down to Sidcup to obtain them.
(P2 71-72)

He continues, after having disrespectfully thrown half a dollar at Davies's feet and breaking Aston's precious Buddha statue, a speech of self-pity, almost mimicking Davies's way of speaking, and especially his speeches of self-maintenance: 'Anyone would think this house was all I got to worry about. I got plenty of other things I can worry about. I've got other things. I've got plenty of other interests. I've got my own business to build up, haven't I? I got to think about expanding ... in all directions. I don't stand still. I'm moving about, all the time. I'm moving... all the time' (P2 72).

The above examples show first Mick's final refusal of Davies's friendship, again reducing Davies to an animal and using the same word as Aston did, namely 'stink' to further distance himself from the tramp. He also touches upon the sore spot in Davies; the fact that he has yet to go to Sidcup to prove his identity. Second, it is curious that his way of speaking, as

he seemingly gives up on the whole house project, is reminiscent of Davies's way of talking about himself, a contrast to Davies's earlier 'Can't get from one place to another' (P2 14) and mirroring 'I keep myself up' (P2 7), in a way convincing himself that he has got some ultimate goal. He also focuses on his mobility, the one important thing in his possession which is not material, but is however, dependent on material things (for instance his van), the things that Davies does not have and consequently cannot move about freely. His twofold repetition of 'I'm moving about, all the time' above seems to be the most important thing: it proves his status as the one who is able to progress, although one could discuss whether he does, in fact, progress or not. The function of this last speech we hear from Mick is, however, slightly ambiguous. Although it is a kind of survival speech, emphasising that Mick has other things of importance to attend to, he seems to somehow give up, as he hands the total responsibility to Aston and stating in the end 'I'm going to chuck it in' (P2 72). Maybe he is realising that his present, like Davies's past, may not be so grand? May his twofold repetition then, of 'I'm moving about, all the time' be his last attempt to convince himself that there is a bright future ahead of him?

The Expulsion of Davies

Mick's future may or may not be grand; we will never find out for certain. Davies, however, is left at the end, in his last attempt to get on Aston's good side again, with the simultaneously existential and realistic questions regarding his own future and echoing fragments of his previous repetitions. When Aston returns Davies goes as far as to say 'You been a good friend to me. You took me in, you didn't ask me no questions, you give me a bed, you been a mate to me' (P2 73), stating the truth, but simultaneously contradicting everything he said before. Now that he knows Aston is his last hope he is suddenly a friend who gave him shelter, and most importantly: he did not ask him painful repetitious questions, like Mick did. When Aston does not accept his pleas for mercy he continues to repeat; 'But you don't understand my meaning!' (P2 74) twice, which may be said to be the epitome of the general challenge that the characters share: the inability to express oneself can have nearly fatal consequences, either because one cannot express oneself in the right terms, or because, as is arguably Mick's case, one simply does not wish to interpret the other's utterance correctly. The linguistic deficiency has finally resulted in the loss of all hope for companionship, of shelter, a steady job, even. Furthermore, the last scene indicates a link between repetitious action and the loss of hope itself; paralysis is the result of repetitious behaviour. In the whole last act, Davies has

displayed a comprised version of what he has been doing all along: following one or the other like a dog, the one who will throw him a bone (or the one in possession of power) is the one he will 'belong' to. For instance he stated in an earlier quote that he would be Mick's caretaker: 'DAVIES. I'm going to be his caretaker. \ ASTON. My brother? \ DAVIES. He's staying, he's going to run this place, and I'm staying with him' (P2 66). After he is rejected by Mick, however, he resumes playing up to Aston. He might be behaving like a dog because he has been treated like one many times before and is still to some extent. This alternating of his faithfulness to one or the other is in itself a repetitious behaviour which becomes too fleeting for anyone to trust him in the end.

The very last words we hear from Davies are also ambiguous in that they are concrete questions regarding the immediate situation, and at the same time very existential in their essence:

DAVIES. [...] what do you say, we'll keep it as it is?

Pause.

ASTON. No.

DAVIES. Why... not?

ASTON *turns to look at him.*

ASTON. You make too much noise.

DAVIES. But ... but ... look ... listen ... listen here ... I mean....

ASTON *turns back to the window.*

What am I going to do?

Pause.

What shall I do?

Pause.

Where am I going to go?

Pause.

If you want me to go ... I'll go. You just say the word.

Pause.

I'll tell you what, though ... them shoes ... them shoes you give me ... they're working out all right ... they're all right. Maybe I could ... get down....

ASTON *remains still, his back to him, at the window.*

Listen ... if I ... got down ... if I was to ... get my papers ... would you ... would you let ... would you ... if I got down ... and got my ...

Long silence.

Curtain. (P2 75-76)

Davies asks 'What am I going to do?', 'What shall I do?' and 'Where am I going to go?' with pauses between them, reflections of mental activity that may signify his despair concerning his uncertain future. He is really asking very existential questions, but the situation renders the questions concrete, he really has nowhere to go in the world, probably not even to Sidcup. It totally erases all traces of human dignity in him. The more he talks the less he has to gain, every selling point he had is gone. It seems nothing will change. He continues his negotiations without attaining any reply from Aston, and in the end, the voids between his words become more and more obvious. These voids may be said to have the same function as pauses in

Aston's speech about the mental hospital, that of mental activity unspoken while the mouth only utters fragments of what goes on inside. Thus, the whole last scene can be interpreted as the breaking down of a single individual until there's nothing left, only fragments of the hope that there might be room for Davies in this world.

At the end, there is a '*Long silence*'. According to Esslin, this silence can be interpreted in two directions. On the one hand, he maintains, it can signify the 'death of hope for the old man' ('Language' 56), which is the way that I have interpreted it to some extent. On the other hand, it could also be that Aston, after the curtain falls, utters some words of forgiveness: 'But as the curtain falls before he is seen to leave, it may also be the long silence before that final word of forgiveness pronounced: the "line with no words in it" thus has all the ambiguity and complexity of true poetry, and it is also a metaphor, an image of overwhelming power' (Esslin 'Language' 56). Consequently, the point of the silence is possibly to leave it to the reader and audience to interpret what will happen next. The silence is then a rhetoric move on Pinter's part and signifies an artistic reference to what the expulsion implies; either death or new hope.

3.5 Conclusion

Repetitions in *The Caretaker* very often correspond to elements which critics have focused on in their analyses of the play. The repetition and general themes are connected in this play the way they would be connected in a novel. By this I mean that the repetitions often seem like embodiments of the main struggles within each character and between the characters, something which will be elaborated below. The close connection between repetition and theme may be a consequence of the minimalistic style applied in *The Caretaker*; the repetitions become more visible in themselves because we are exposed to just a few characters and one physical setting. Thus, the conversation somehow becomes more visible, *is* more the action.

As this chapter has demonstrated, the power structure does shift in the course of the play, and this is exhibited in part by repetitious elements. Arguably, the revelation of who owns the house and most material goods in addition to each character's linguistic skills and mental abilities are fundamentally significant to how the power structures change. The inabilities to progress and form true personal relationships express themselves through the mode of repetition when the characters reveal that they are unable to accommodate each other's needs. The relationships between them could be paraphrased: 'If only you could give

in to *my* preferences and opinions, or if the world would only fall into place and suit *my* particular needs, we could be friends and I could evolve’.

Act One contains key repetitions that are thematically significant and recur in the play as a whole. For instance, the first, small repetition of ‘sit down’ triggers a stream of associations in Davies, revealing characteristics that are fundamental to the understanding of his character throughout the play. Additionally, his exclamations of ‘Now look here’ and utterances he uses to claim self-perseverance are first introduced here, however mostly in referred speeches concerning the past. In large, Act One exhibits how small words and sentences that are repeated can come to embody significant elements to the understanding of the entire play. The worldly obstacles that inhibit Aston and Davies are first repeated in this act and we see how the topic of paralysis versus progress is linked to power: the psychological and physical reality has a strong hold on the characters’ lives.

As for the rest of the play, there is a variety of different kinds of repetitive elements that are interesting. Especially in Act Two, and parts of Act Three, we see how Mick’s diatribes, his flow of words against Davies, changes the power structure in the ‘here and now’ of the play in addition to the new information of who owns the house. Mick also applies repeated jargon expressions to emphasise his claim to superior general education and to further exclude Davies from the realms of both the room they inhabit and, it may be argued, from language itself. Davies continues his repetition of defence strategies, and the repetitive dialogues, where the qualities of being a ‘joker’ and ‘funny bloke’ are discussed, exhibit just how different a conversation may evolve if the participants alternate. A struggle for communication is often the equivalent of struggle for self-maintenance, as misunderstandings can have almost fatal consequences. Often, Davies repeats words with the sole intention of finding the correct expression, and then enjoys having found his ‘*mot juste*’ as exemplified above. Mick often repeats words with different intentions: What his words *do* to the opponent is significant, and he often enjoys the tormenting effects of his jargon expressions, educated words and repeated torrents or streams of words. Furthermore, the power of language is put into focus when it is revealed in a speech by Aston that he has been in a mental hospital, a transtextual repetition of the topic of mental abilities and society’s dealing with breaks of convention. The power of convention, of the past repeating itself, is shown in both plays though their emphasis on mental experimentation and on mothers and predecessors, which will be shed further light upon in the main conclusion to the thesis. Notably, Aston’s

confession is triggered through an associative mechanism, as Davies's first revelation of self in Act One.

Towards the end all the repetitions come together to form the final exclusion of the tramp. Davies addresses the obliqueness of language when he is trying to come to terms with Aston's confession, and renounces Aston's friendship because of it. The topics of sheds, shoes and Sidcup are repeated, but nothing comes out of it. Aston and Davies use their inhibitions against each other, and are from then on unable to stay on good terms. They both go too far in their criticism of each other as they both touch on the sorest spots in the other. Mick again applies his jargon, which leads to the final misunderstanding that will expel Davies from what may be his last hope for a home. When he understands the consequences of the breach with Aston, he attempts a final plea for mercy, but is too late. The bonds are broken.

It does not seem like there is any change in the lives of the characters towards the end of the play. The power structure has indeed shifted, but is in the end the same as it was before. The end is open to interpretation because of the 'long silence' in the end, but it seems a sentence of forgiveness is far from what one may expect after this breaking of bonds in the last act.

4 Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to explore repetition patterns in the dramatic dialogues of the plays *The Hothouse* and *The Caretaker* by Harold Pinter. Repetition as such is treated as a wide field: it includes single words, whole sentences (including sentences with similar form, like questions or sentences with similar function in different contexts), sentence fragments, episodes/conversations, repeated transtextual elements, pauses and silences. This large selection of focus has allowed for the execution of in-depth analyses of several repetitive elements in the above mentioned plays. A premise for the thesis is that repeated elements are in themselves important on the basis of being repeated, as exemplified in the Introduction. A related premise is a focus on the power relations exhibited in the dialogues. This has created a dual focus: first, repetition as a linguistic tool in itself, and second, the concept of power within each example exhibited by the repeated elements.

It is not easy to conclude such a wide field of research. The examples of repetition are never unambiguous; they open up to a variety of interpretations, and are largely presented to the reader or audience to interpret as they wish. The pauses and silences leave voids in the material in which the receiver can fill the blanks. This means that a play invariably means different things to different interpreters. However, some tendencies can arguably be drawn from my analyses of repetition patterns. As exemplified in the analyses of *The Hothouse* and *The Caretaker*, any dialogue alleging to model realistic conversation must necessarily contain elements of repetition in order to be perceived as a qualified display of realistic speech. These repetitions may have different functions and form. I will now present the indications found in the analyses of what significance repetition has for our understanding of the two Pinter plays.

Discussing *The Hothouse*, we saw that even a small and seemingly insignificant word can change and evolve as it is repeated within a work of art. It thus appears that the value of the repeated words in Pinter's plays depend not so much on their size and meaning, but rather on the context and the way in which they are being repeated. The word 'sir' came to be the first hint at one of the major subjects which the play furthers: the theme of historical repetition and recurring power structures. Additionally, this theme demonstrates the way in which any repetition can be said to belong to both forms of repetition in accordance with Miller's theory. It is thus implicit that repetition is significant to the language of Pinter's dramas. Some repetitions recur throughout the play while others are more significant in specific situations. In either case, there is an evolving quality in each example, something

which takes the repetition further, increasing its significance. 'The snow has turned to slush' evolves from being an answer to a simple question about the weather into being a manipulative technique, a provocation demonstrated by a subordinate character to his superior. Another display of repetition is the interrogation scene, where the accelerating stream of questions functions equivalent to torture and in the end leaves the victim in a catatonic trance, non-responsive and without language.

This point takes us to the next: an important function of repetition found in *The Hothouse* is a connection to the view of language as a weapon. The repeated elements are often attributed in order to defend the speaker or attack the 'opponent'. This aspect is realised in many different types of repetitious elements. For instance, Roote, the one assigned most formal power within the institution, appears to have a constant feeling of being under attack, with the ensuing sensation that his position is never safe. He attempts to solve this problem through repetitive questions and accusations which often seem paranoid and exaggerated. Moreover, he asserts his authority by applying military jargon and war-related expressions validated by his past as a colonel. The military past is a part of his self-image and his returning to this kind of talk confirms his status and also seems to convince Roote himself that he is entitled to hold his current position. In Roote's case the battle is fought to maintain the formal power which he is assigned; in Lush's, the battle appears merely to be that of gaining social power. His wits and quick replies in addition to his appliance of diatribes and other types of word-play increasingly represent his ability to manipulate others and showing an enjoyment in doing so. Unlike the two other characters, Gibbs's defence and attack mechanisms seem absent, but only on a superficial level: he preserves his current state by being thoroughly subtle in most statements, and he always sticks to polite jargon.

A related function of repetition to that of displaying language as powerful is the employment of repetition in order to avoid being misunderstood. We have seen that the consequences can be severe for those who fail to express their thoughts clearly. Notably, the premise of the irrevocableness of the spoken word is articulated explicitly by Roote to Gibbs, who appears to know this fact only too well. He has adapted a strategy which seems fool-proof, as exemplified above. For Roote, the premise of avoiding misunderstandings expresses itself through his repetitive sentence patterns, which sometimes result in a poetic quality of language. It makes visible the rhythmic and poetic quality inherent in realistic language.

Repetition serves a thematic role as well. It appears that the power structure within the rest home institution is grounded; it cannot be destabilised, perhaps not even through drastic

measures such as the massacre which occurs in the end. Several elements hint at this interpretation in the play: mothers, predecessors and the perseverance of old rules seem to be significant as they are recurring topics for the characters.⁵⁰ Additionally, mothers and predecessors are representations of the ultimately tangled spheres of public and private life as they appear in *The Hothouse*. This may suggest a view of the rest home institution as a substitute womb and a totalitarian power. Identity becomes impossible because no change can come about: the imagined history within the play holds such strong power over the institution and its inhabitants. There is no reason to develop because the future has already been determined by factors of the past and convention is upheld through these measures.

Similar to the first repeated word in *The Hothouse*, the first repeated element in the analysis of *The Caretaker* came to mean more than it first appeared to. The first words uttered, 'Sit down', results in an associative mechanism revealing much information about Davies, and also hints at what is to come: a struggle between the three characters to stay on good terms and develop true personal bonds. As a result of the minimalistic style, perhaps, the play brings about a clear connection between certain repeated elements and the overall thematics of the play: the repetitions often embody the fundamental struggles which the characters strive to overcome.

The power structure changes in *The Caretaker*. Yet at the end of the play the situation that will perhaps arise after the 'Long silence' (P2 76) is arguably the same as it was before Davies was taken in by Aston.⁵¹ Ownership, linguistic skills and mental abilities are key concepts for the understanding of the changes in power structure. I have paraphrased the characters' inabilities to progress and form meaningful human relationships: 'If only you could give in to *my* preferences and opinions, or if the world would only fall into place and suit *my* particular needs, we could be friends and I could evolve'. Through their repetitive statements and actions, the characters show this incompetence in the human game: Davies cannot, or *will* not, go to Sidcup to get his papers so that he can obtain a steady job, allegedly because he has no shoes and the weather is bad. Nor does he try, after Aston's revelation of his past, to comprehend the value that lies behind Aston's truly friendly gestures. Aston cannot accommodate Davies's most basic needs, for instance the wish to not sleep in the draught from the window at night, and declines Davies's offer to help with regard to Aston's

⁵⁰ A mother will have a child and that child will become a parent who will also have a child. A predecessor will inevitably be replaced by an apprentice and this apprentice will inevitably become a predecessor to a new apprentice. The rules cannot change, as they are written in the constitution.

⁵¹ This is a common interpretation, but the long silence in the end makes the ending open to interpretation, of course.

great obstacle – to build the shed in the garden. It seems Aston does try to form a bond with Davies. However, he does not succeed. We see that the worldly obstacles that permeate the play are repeated. The topic of paralysis versus progress proves to be linked to power: the psychological and physical reality has a strong hold on the characters' lives, reducing their abilities to develop human relationships.

Different tendencies for the functions of repetition can be found in this play as well. Diatribes, jargon and various professional expressions are repeated by Mick, who steps in and changes the power structure in the 'here and now' of the play at the beginning of Act Two. These repetitions sometimes serve as attacks, especially on Davies, who must continuously utter 'Now look here' in various forms of defence. Other times they are employed as a means of self-perseverance. Mick applies the strategies to verify his status as the most superior of the three characters, also by confirming his ownership both of the house and of the van, the ownership of which apparently is of high importance. He also seems to find pleasure in the tormenting and confusing effect that his diatribes have. These diatribe speeches, where professional jargon and technical terms are often included, become a way for him to exclude Davies, in his language and from the house alike. The effect is that of a hypothetical linguistic 'room' where only the few, eloquent members of society are welcome. This aspect can be interpreted along the lines of Davies, the tramp, being excluded on the basis of being inarticulate. When he repeats semi-educated words, or applies tautological structure to his phrases (for instance in the replacement of the pan for vegetables for the vegetable pan) these repetitions display his enjoyment of having found the correct expression, the 'mot juste'. In other words, Davies enjoys finding the correct words and struggles to do so, whereas Mick enjoys the effect his words have and often employs repetition for a variety of effects.

Finding the 'mot juste' is of course also related to the function of repetition as a means of avoiding to be misunderstood, as displayed in *The Hothouse*. The struggle for communication is often the equivalent to a struggle for self-maintenance. Accordingly, the consequences of misunderstandings are again thematised in this play, and the power of language is put into focus once more. It is not coincidental that the reason for Aston's commitment to the mental hospital is that he 'talked too much' and it arises from his most revealing speech that he was probably misunderstood by the people around him: he thought they understood what he was saying (P2 52). Deviating from the language norm seems to be a break of convention, which in this case leads to institutionalisation. A convention, as discussed in chapter three, may represent repetition in history, as it is created by the recurring

behaviours of former societies. Thus, repetition becomes a significant part of the thematics of this play as well.

Towards the end of the play it is obvious that the three characters will not continue as friends. Davies cannot come to terms with the new information about Aston, and consequently treats him with disrespect. The tense situation develops into a fight where the two use their inhibitions, the obstacles they have repeated, against each other and are consequently unable to stay on good terms. Mick appears to intentionally lead Davies into a trap of confusion with another diatribe full of technical expressions and has, in the end, an alleged reason to expel Davies. As a result, none of the characters are able to stay on good terms. The consequences of this loss of a human connection do not, however, weigh equally heavy on all characters. The only character who suffers the true consequence of the loss of human contact is the one who has the most to lose and the least in his possession, Davies. For the other two, the consequence may be the loss of love and friendship, at least in the case of Aston. For the most powerful one, Mick, the one who owns the house and most of the material goods, the loss may merely be that of an employee.

We have seen that in Pinter's dramas, repetition can function both as a linguistic tool and as a recurrent theme, at least when it comes to *The Hothouse* and *The Caretaker*. Repetition often makes the conversations evolve from a seemingly cliché-like point of departure into something beyond conventional realism. Additionally, the artistic transformation makes the repetitions applicable to Miller's theory. When used as a linguistic tool, repetition can be put into the categories employed in my analyses. In the two plays I have found repetition to be used both as attack and as defence – a weapon, accentuating the status of language as extremely powerful. Diatribes, jargon, professional expressions and other 'torrents of language', especially question-sequences, contribute to this interpretation. Additionally, repetition is applied in order to either create or avoid misunderstandings. The spoken word is irrevocable, and when misinterpreted or not spoken clearly, the consequences may be severe. Words can also be used as a means of confirming an individual's authority and status; the assertion of self and exclusion of others is implicit in this category. Language becomes a 'room' for exclusive members, realised, among other strategies, through repetition. Pauses and silences are used in both plays to reveal mental activity within a character beneath the surface of language. The reader and audience are forced to deduce from the silences that often seem to appear out of nowhere. To a certain degree the pauses represent intended mental activity, whereas the silences appear to be more of an artistic twist, as we saw at the end of

The Caretaker. Because of that ‘*Long silence*’ (P2 76) at the end, the outcome is not certain; what is to come may not be grounded even if it seems to be, as my interpretation has shown.

None of the examples above suggest that the approach to Pinter’s language should be that of a language of non-communication. Rather, the opposite conclusion seems evident: repetition in itself shows how the characters strive to be understood, to communicate what they want to communicate. It may not always be the truth they seek to communicate, and they may not always succeed. Nonetheless, they *do* want to communicate something, whether it is to conceal or to reveal what lies beneath the surface of their utterances.

I emphasise that the above categories do not exclude one another; the boundaries between them are often crossed and the fields they represent are often fused. Repetitions may serve different functions within each category, dependent on the interpreter. There may also be categories which I have not thought of that are also relevant. Thus, the categorisation in itself is a result of my close reading and my interpretation of the examples found. Consequently, the categories are not grounded or carved in stone; they are suggestions for how to view some of the functions that repetition presents. This point applies also to the next issue at hand: concluding comments on the thematic significance of repetition in the two plays.

Repetition also serves a thematic function: it is not just a linguistic ‘tool’. Rather, it is something which is left for the reader to infer from the play as a whole. A transtextual repetition mentioned earlier is the recurrence of the topic of the power of convention (which I have translated as the repetition of history, recurring episodes and behaviour which create norms). In both plays it emerges that the breaking of convention, especially a *linguistic* convention will have severe consequences. Additionally, both plays exhibit a theme of mental institutionalisation. While in *The Hothouse* it is the setting, the framework which incorporates the action, in *The Caretaker* it is presented as a memory calmly recollected by the ex-mental patient who broke the norms of linguistic convention.

A very common function of repetition in *authentic* speech is, in fact, the correcting of misunderstandings and making one’s thoughts clear to others. In the real world it is arguably of great value to the individual to be able to express one’s thoughts well, as it is in Pinter’s universe. The way in which language is appropriated is of immense importance: it often determines how an individual is viewed, on the private and public level alike. It is not coincidental that the art of rhetoric has been developed through history and is still an important skill to master. The importance of the well-spoken thought is expressed very clearly

in Pinter, especially through repetition. He has managed to make the link between power and language not only more visible, but also more important. If people are eloquent and precise in their statements, and given the right conditions, they may well end up at the top of the food chain. Given the opposite, you may well end up at the bottom. People in possession of power do not necessarily need to speak the truth as long as they are eloquent. In contrast, one could argue that it is possible to communicate fundamental and significant opinions and thoughts in an inarticulate tongue. Whether such an individual would be taken seriously in the real world is debatable, but Pinter's characters continuously show us that it is possible to have genuine ideas and original thoughts even when the skill of rhetoric is not present. The consequences, in real life as in Pinter's plays, can be loss of power and exposure to social ridicule. In Pinter's plays the consequences are great, even fatal in some instances. The artistic exemplification of the nuances of repetition creates a focal point: language in drama is equivalent to action and often determines the fate of Pinter's characters.

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