

Pinter's views on women in the homecoming



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In *The Homecoming*, Harold Pinter suggests that there are two types of women: whores or mothers. The whore, he believes, can have little success in family life; the mother, on the other hand, can create a successful family. Pinter's statement is reinforced by the behavior of characters Teddy and Max toward Ruth, and by that of Ruth herself.

The character Teddy is instrumental to the portrayal of Pinter's views on women and what constitutes an ideal, happy family. He responds passively to Ruth's actions, e. g. "I didn't say I found it dirty here," and is very careful to avoid confrontation; he wants Ruth to believe he is happy to be home and is very considerate to her. He continuously asks Ruth what she would like, if she is tired, etc., almost acting the part of an idealized, caring husband.

When Ruth changes from mother to whore, Teddy acts carefully as he is unwilling to start a fight with Lenny, Joe and Max. During Ruth's transformation there is no indication that Teddy reacts in any way; especially noticeable is the lack of stage direction. He goes along with his family when its members decide Ruth will work as a whore, demonstrating a firm belief in family harmony. Teddy's American family also enters the equation, as that seemingly perfect family contrasts greatly with the problematic English one he visits.

Pinter also uses Max to suggest that women are either whores or mothers. Throughout the play, Max changes his mind about which one Ruth is. At first Max remarks that Teddy has brought "a filthy scrubber off the street," showing that he believes that Ruth is a whore. Later, however, he asks the pivotal question "You a mother?" After establishing that Ruth is a mother of three, Max treats her as a member of the family. He remarks she is "a

charming woman" and must be a " first-rate cook," but this view does not last. Once he thinks of her as a " tart" again, however, he continues to treat her as family - somehow he manages to hold perceptions of both whore and mother, the unlovable and the familial, simultaneously with regard to Ruth.

Ruth is the main vehicle through which Pinter portrays women and family in *The Homecoming*. She is the only woman in the play and is both a whore and a mother, though her attempt to be both fails as she reverts to her old ways. She asks permission to " sit down" which shows her politeness and good manners, which portray the image of the mother. Similarly, on learning of Max, Joey and Lenny's plan to make her a ' working whore' she comments that it is " kind of" them. This consideration towards others points towards the image of the caring mother. On the other hand, Ruth's knowledge of " the rocks" and the " proposal" she makes to Lenny reveal the whore, as does the strange, violent nature of her directive to Lenny, telling him to " Lie on the floor" so that she can " pour it down [his] throat." In another contrast, Ruth tells Teddy " not to become a stranger" - the caring mother - but fails to consider the implications of leaving her children in America - perhaps not whore-like, exactly, but certainly not maternal.

At one point in the play the purported family man Teddy is instructed in stage directions to " look down on" Ruth, suggesting he is disgusted by her role as both mother and whore. This action exemplifies Pinter's view that no woman can be both mother and whore and still have a harmonious family life.