

The power in harold pinter's 'the homecoming'



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Everyone in The Homecoming Thinks they Have ' the Power'. But who does have it? Clearly no one in the house has ' the power'. The rivalry caused by the lack of a dominant force is the only reason the ' family' is able to function at all. Max considers himself the dominant member of the family at the beginning of the play. At the beginning of act one he accuses Lenny of having the scissors, " what have you done with the scissors?" in a very predatory, offensive way. He is wearing a cap and carrying a stick as a sign to others in the house of his claim in the family as the physically powerful male. However Max is clearly unsure about his power as he talks at Lenny, rather than with him, continuing his next sentence before Lenny decides to reply. He also later has to remind Lenny, and himself that " I could have taken care of you, twice over. I'm still strong" reinforcing to himself and attempting to persuade Lenny that he is the most powerful physical force in the house. On the otherhand, in this confrontation Lenny thinks he is the dominant force, because he considers that he is powerful because his pimping business means he is the primary breadwinner in the house. This is backed up by his insistence on wearing a suit in his own lounge and his stories later to Ruth, where he is keen to mention that he was not " financially embarrassed". Both Max's and Lenny's insistence on proving how powerful they are undermine their credibility. Max in the opening minutes almost makes the audience cringe with his exaggerated tales of " a man called McGregor" who he used to " knock about with" where McGregor is clearly the one who caused the " silence" in the rooms they went into and his insistence he still has " the scars" although he does not show them adds to the lack of credibility in Max's stories. Lenny, later, when threatened by Ruth's assertiveness feels the need to reel off stories of his past about old

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women he punched and prostitutes he considered killing which threatens his credibility and instantly make the audience see that neither Max or Lenny have 'the power'. However both Max and Lenny give the impression they have the power in the house and until the threat of Teddy and Ruth turns up Lenny and Max appear to the audience as the two who have the power in the household. In contrast to Max's attempts at physical power to gain overall 'power' and Lenny's power gained through his business Sam has a much more subtle, yet unsuccessful, type of power to gain control of the household. His secret that "McGregor had Jessie in the back of my cab as I drove them along." Gives him with a power over Teddy, Lenny and Joey and particularly Max. Max does not want the secret out in the open, because he refuses to talk with Sam when Sam repeatedly pauses during his monologue about his chauffeuring of Jessie in the West End. Even when Sam mentions that Max "wouldn't have trusted Mac" Max remains submissive because he does not want Sam to elaborate on the subject. This is highlighted to a greater extent once the conversation has steered away from Jessie and Sam begins to subtly comment on Max's poor judgment of character by claiming Mac, who was a "stinking rotten loudmouth" was "a good friend" of Max's. Max immediately bites back calling Sam "an old grub" showing that Sam's power over Max lies only in his knowledge of Mac and Jessie's affair. Although it appears to the audience that Sam has some amount of power through his aloof nature and his 'secret' throughout the play we clearly realise he has little power over the household once his secret is let out. They leave Sam lying on the floor and pay little attention to him, Teddy even whines that he was going to ask Sam for a lift to the airport and Max's indifference to whether Sam is dead, shown by his blasé handling of whether Sam "had" or

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"has" a "diseased imagination" prove how little power Sam has over the family unit. Max is keen to assert his physical power over Sam. He makes Sam acknowledge that "I'm here, too you know" and the territorial nature of Max's attempt at gaining power is shown through Max's annoyance of Sam doing the washing up. Max, even after Sam offers to let Max finish the washing up, calls him a "tit", which is an attempt to feminise Sam in his mind and he calls Sam a "maggot" and a "grub", since both have little physical power Max is clearly trying to highlight Sam's physical weakness and therefore dominate him physically. Lenny clearly feels threatened by Sam's title of "the best driver". When Sam is showing off his cigars to Max, Lenny clearly feels threatened and although on the surface appears to be making general conversation about the "colonel, or something in the American Air Force" he is actually trying to belittle Sam's success by showing him that "he knows the kind of man you're talking about", implying he is one of them, not a servant for them like Sam. Once again Lenny is projecting the image that he is successful and therefore powerful in the house. Because no one severely threatens him in his position, the falseness of his stories do not appear. Teddy and Ruth clearly have a great deal of potential power because they can both escape the family and live a life outside the claustrophobic environment the audience is experiencing. As a member of the audience we know they both realise their power to some extent because they both, at separate occasions acknowledge that they should go home. First Ruth at the beginning of the stay, and later Teddy at the end of the stay. Teddy's power lies in his intellect and his life outside the family. He has already broken free of the restraints of the family and feels superior because he is outside their insular world. His lack of dialogue when

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the other brothers are discussing how they can turn Ruth back into a whore suggests he wants this to happen and that his trip home was simply to rid himself of Ruth. He insists he can "observe" what the others do and that they are just objects. This gives the audience the impression that the events are happening according to an agenda set by Teddy and almost, in the way he speaks, "you are just objects", gives him a God-like status above all the other members of the family. The fact he is not bound by their world also heightens this feeling. Furthermore, he recognises his own intellectual superiority, "you wouldn't understand my works, you wouldn't have the faintest idea what they are about" and he clearly treats Lenny like a child in their conversation at the beginning of act two. When Lenny questions him about a table and tries to engage him in a philosophical argument, Teddy simply sees this as a trivial conversation and he chooses to give Lenny the simplest answers, "a table". However, Teddy does not have the power in the house. Because he does not allow himself to be confined to the house he cannot take control within it and therefore he does not achieve the status he deserves in the house. He does, on the other hand, have 'the power' over himself and all the other members of the family in the outside world and he knows this therefore he does not want 'the power' in the house and he chooses not to try to gain 'the power.' This is highlighted by his submissiveness in terms of Ruth when Joey is trying to sleep with her and his lack of dialogue when discussing how they are going to fund Ruth as a prostitute. Unlike Teddy, Ruth is keen to attempt to try and assert her position as the dominant member of the family. She demonstrates that she thinks she has power over men in her encounter with Lenny, when she confidently tells him "I'll take you". This shows that she thinks she has 'the

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power' over all men through her feminine qualities. She asks Lenny to sit on her lap, which is both sexual, reminding the audience of a lapdancer and perhaps motherly. She also overtly sexual with him to "put your head back and open your mouth." She makes them all coffee at the start of act two, and considering it is not her house this is a particularly motherly thing to do and her sexually charged speech, when she tells them about if she moves her leg, "but I wear underwear" shows that she realises she has the potential to gain 'the power' in the house. By the end of the play, if someone had to be designated the owner of "the power" in the room it would most definitely be Ruth although Lenny is not completely submissive to her, respecting that they have "a deal". Clearly Ruth is beginning to gain more power in the house. Without any outside interference Ruth will soon become the most dominant power. Ruth's emergence as a potential leader in the pack suggests she is beginning to have 'the power' over the other members in the household. This is why the play has such a dramatic ending for me because it is a complete shake up of the hierarchical make-up of the family, which will create an even more dislocated family, where she is the dominant force with 'the power'