



HAL
open science

Veering from an Object at the Periphery to a Subject at the Center: Women's Sexual Power and the Collapse of Masculinity in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* and Pinter's *The Homecoming*

Eugene Ngezem

► **To cite this version:**

Eugene Ngezem. Veering from an Object at the Periphery to a Subject at the Center: Women's Sexual Power and the Collapse of Masculinity in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* and Pinter's *The Homecoming*. *Alizés : Revue angliciste de La Réunion*, 2010, *Old Days, New Days*, 33, pp.49-68. hal-02341422

HAL Id: hal-02341422

<https://hal.univ-reunion.fr/hal-02341422>

Submitted on 31 Oct 2019

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Veering from an Object at the Periphery to a Subject at the Center: Women's Sexual Power and the Collapse of Masculinity in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* and Pinter's *The Homecoming*

Predicated on the premise that Aristophanes, an iconic classical dramatist, and Harold Pinter, the winner of the 2005 Nobel Prize in literature, deal with the abrupt rise of women to power and the disintegration of the firmly rooted patriarchy in their plays, this essay wrestles with dominion dynamics. As the title intimates, the essay grapples with women's painful, humiliating journey from servitude to the pinnacle of power in Aristophanes' comic play *Lysistrata* (411 B C E), and Pinter's *The Homecoming* (1965). Hailing from different countries and separated by fifteen centuries, Aristophanes and Pinter use downtrodden women as springboards for the attainment of women's power in pre- and postwar societies. While sawing their way from the margin to the center, Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* and Pinter's *Ruth*, in *Lysistrata* and *Homecoming* respectively, subdue bossy, brutal, overzealous, insolent, and arrogant men in societies that are insidiously hostile to women's progress and independence. These young ladies extricate themselves from almost always being objects (receivers of action) and assert themselves as subjects (those who effect the action) in societies fenced on all sides by strong walls of patriarchal hegemony, societies in which, to use the words of Andrew Tolson in "The Limits of Masculinity," "men remain 'subjects,' in dominance, of a patriarchal culture" (69). Using

sex as bait, Lysistrata and Ruth quickly initiate arduous tasks of harnessing men in their societies as the latter intently strive to have a slice of their love. Aristophanes hinges the acquisition of women's power on steadfast, sacrificial and risk-taking Greek women who suppress their sexual urges while arousing and withholding sex from their male counterparts. Notwithstanding Bert States's accusation that "Pinter is callously producing vile art, art which presents immoral acts irresponsibly" (150), Pinter seems to suggest that although some will perceive Ruth as a whore, sex is indisputably an effective tool for survival and upward mobility in a harsh, thwarting post-war patriarchal society.

To properly situate this essay, one must, perforce, take a bird's-eye-view at power and masculinity variedly defined by scholars. In "The Forms of Power," Bertrand Russell defines power as "the production of intended effect" (19). To Max Weber, "Power is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which the probability rests" (39). He further associates power with domination: "Domination constitutes a special case of power" (28). In *Money, Sex and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism*, Nancy Hartsock says, "Power can be defined as a relation between struggles and practices (those of the exploiters and the exploited, the rulers and the ruled)" (128). But in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, Michel Foucault insists, "Power is essentially that which represses. Power represses nature, the instincts, a class, individuals" (90). Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz simply state in "Two Faces of Power" as follows: "Of course power is exercised when A participates in the making of decisions that affect B" (121). Whatever may be the different shades of opin-

ions between these definitions, the essence of power is the exercise of authority and fulfillment of set goals. Power, therefore, is synonymous with control, influence, steadfastness, and command as Lysistrata and Ruth suddenly exhibit in the plays in question. To succeed, they must overcome masculinity or manhood.

With respect to masculinity, Michael S. Kimmel, in "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity" states, "historically and developmentally, masculinity has been defined as the flight from women, the repudiation of femininity" (185). He further says, "feminist women have theorized that masculinity is about the drive for domination, the drive for power, for conquest" and that "manhood is equated with power-over women...." (193). Kenneth Clatterbaugh insists in "What is Problematic about Masculinities?" that "while some think that masculinities are biologically grounded, it is generally agreed that they are socially and historically constructed" (200). The challenge for women to change the status quo by moving from the margin to the center of institutions perennially controlled by men rests on such belief systems.

"Produced in the 21st year of the war, and only two years after the miserable Sicilian Expedition (in which Athens lost 200 warships and 35000 men), *Lysistrata* revolves around a suit for peace that is also a plot for love" (Aristophanes v). In the Vth century, Greeks have been involved in the Peloponnesian War for twenty-one years, a war that has inflicted both psychological and physical pain on everyone. Tired of and upset by the war, Greek women, under the leadership of Lysistrata (the symbol of antiwar sentiments), unanimously agree to withhold sex from the men until they sign a treaty that stops this prolonged, brutal and costly war. Women must "re-

frain from the male altogether” (Aristophanes 7). That is, “until the fighting between Athens and Sparta ceases, there will be no sex” (Aristophanes v).

The play opens with Athenian women who have no rights, their primary duties being to work at home and to unquestionably fulfill the sexual pleasures of their husbands. In response to Lysistrata’s frustration that women lack punctuality, Calonice succinctly summarizes the domestic duties of women as follows: “Oh! They will come, my dear; but ‘tis not easy, you know, for women to leave the house. One is busy pottering about her husband; another is getting the servant up; a third is putting her child asleep or washing the brat or feeding it” (1). Besides being glued to domestic duties, women further share their helplessness at the hands of their husbands as Lysistrata urges the former to seduce and withhold sex from the latter:

LAMPITO: Yes, just as Menelaus, when he saw Helen’s naked bosom, threw away his sword, they say.

CALONICE: But, poor devils, suppose our husbands go away and leave us.

LYSISTRATA: Then, as Pherecrates says, we must “flay a skinned dog,” that’s all.

CALONICE: Bah! these proverbs are all idle talk.... But if our husbands drag us by main force into the bedchamber?

LYSISTRATA: Hold on to the door posts.

CALONICE: But if they beat us?

LYSISTRATA: Then yield to their wishes, but with a bad grace; there is no pleasure for them, when they do it by force.... (9)

The foregoing dialogue shows the dilemmas confronting women, who, from time immemorial, have been used to servitude roles. Challenging their husbands or men is unheard of in their societies, but women are steadfast in using sex as an

antiwar weapon. The old women whom some may perceive as not being effective in sex strikes are assigned to the Acropolis and they seize it. The Acropolis is the seat of power in ancient Greek cities because of its strong build and because it holds the treasury. By seizing the Acropolis, the women are effectively holding the city, and by default, the men and the war hostage.

On the surface, it seems the old women are given the task of attacking the Acropolis because they are sexually undesirable, but an understanding of ancient Athenian culture reveals that the old women are symbolically withholding sex from the men, as well. The old women who may no longer be sexually attractive symbolically use their sexuality to seize political and economic power from the men. In the play, the men have torches, and the women have water. It is quite ironic that the men have torches in the text because women in ancient Athens generally carried torches to symbolize sexuality and seduction. In *Lysistrata*, women attempt to derive power in the male dominated fields of politics and economics. Men carry the torches in an attempt to obtain revenge by usurping control of traditionally female activities. Although the women succeed in the masculine world of politics, the men fail in women's duties because they cannot use the torches, the light provided by fire, and the smell of smoke to successfully seduce the women.

The torch is one of the first tools that the Chorus of Old Men uses to express desire and sensuality. In "Lighting the World of Women: Lamps and Torches in the Hands of Women in the Late Archaic and Class," Eva Parisinou notes that the purpose of torches is to "serve as symbols of legitimate sexual union" (35). In the play, the Chorus of Old Men wonders why they have not applied the heat of the torch to the Chorus of

Women: "I don't know what prevents me from roasting you with this torch" (17). This statement suggests that carrying the torch validates sexual relations between partners because the men cannot find a reason not to touch the women with the torch's heat. It is interesting that the men associate the torch with roasting, an act of food preparation. Food is often symbolic of desire. In Freud's essay, "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego," he says, "the object that we long for and prize is assimilated by eating" (439). Stated differently, the Chorus of Men want to roast the women because the men "long for and prize" the women. In addition, the men want to roast the women to assimilate them into the men's culture. The men's desire to want the women assimilated into the masculine culture is a desire for the women to symbolically penetrate and linger in masculine arenas. While the men's desire to roast the women initially seems violent, the men are really expressing desire to have a sexual relationship with the women.

The light from fire is also a symbol of sensuality and sex. According to Parisinou, Aristophanes associates a fire's light "with some of the most private aspects of the life of women, notably sex" (19). The second Chorus of Women certainly realizes the connection between the light of a fire and sexuality. In a prayer to Athena, the women plead to help the other women extinguish the men's fire "if any man hurl against them lighted fire brands, aid us to carry water to extinguish them" (16). The women do not like the light from fire because they realize the connotations of sensuality and sexuality. Even the herald associates the light from fire with sex. The herald complains that all of the men are "at our wits end; we walk bent double, just as if we were carrying lanterns in the wind. The jades have sworn we shall not so much as touch them" (45).

In this instance, erections are associated with lanterns, a source of light from fire.

The light from fire symbolizes sexuality, and the fire itself and the smoke are symbols of sensuality and desire. For instance, Lysistrata associates fire with love: "A man! A man! I see him approaching all afire with the flames of love" (35). This is not the only instance when Lysistrata associates fire with love. She uses terms associated with fire to describe acts of seduction: "Be it your task to inflame and torture and torment him. Seductions, caresses, provocations...set his passions aflame" (36). Lysistrata links the terms "inflame" and "aflame" with sexual acts. In addition, Lysistrata wants Cinesias, Myrrhine's husband, to be inflamed. She wants the heat of fire, or sexuality, to torment Cinesias while leaving the woman unscathed.

Since the Chorus of Old Men recognizes that fire is associated with sex, they use fire to try to persuade or compel the women to end the strike. Lysistrata is one of the first women to recognize that the men are using fire as a method to force the women to have sex. She pledges that she will not have sex with them no matter how much fire the men use: "Neither threats nor flames shall force our doors; they shall only open on the conditions I have named" (14). Lysistrata is referring to the Acropolis, but on a symbolic level, Lysistrata is talking about rape. Doors are an entrance, and the women's genitalia is an entrance into her body. Lysistrata declares that the men will not be able to use fire to force themselves into her. She insists, she will open the doors, her legs, only on her own volition. The men attempt to use fire to force the women to have sex with them, but they are unsuccessful. Therefore, Women, contrary to tradition, are no longer men's sex objects at whim.

Fire is simultaneously associated with sexuality and unsuccessful sexual attempts. No wonder, the Chorus of Old Men exclaims, “blow up our fire and see it does not go out just as we reach our destination” (15). Because fire is a symbol for sensuality and sex, the men are attempting to develop an erection that will not go away until they are ready to reach the climax; however, the men are not allowed to reach climax because the smoke stops them. The Chorus of Old Men complains, “Oh! Dear! What a dreadful smoke. It is Lemnos fire for sure” (15). Lemnos is associated with calamity, therefore, the fire, or sex, is a calamity for the men because they cannot achieve sexual climax.

In addition to fire, smoke is also associated with sensuality and unsuccessful sexual goals. Smoke is used as a symbol for sexuality because the Chorus of Women worry that some women have been “stifled in the smoke raised by these accursed old men” (15). The women associate smoke with sexuality because they say that the men “raise” smoke. One can interpret the smoke as a sexual metaphor for the phallus. The women fear that the raised phallus will stifle them, consequently, the women flee from the phallus. The phallus, or masculinity, fails at its sexual attempt.

While the phallus, or masculinity, fails at its attempt at sensuality, the women’s sexual power allows them to triumph over the men, thus fitting in with Bob Lamm’s view in “Learning from Women” that “the notion that men are indispensable to women is the worst kind of a lie” (54). The bowl of wine that the women sacrifice is one of the greatest symbols of their asserting power through abstinence. The bowl is a phallic symbol that represents the virginity of women. The bowl is chosen instead of a buckler and horse because of its symbolic value. Lysistrata tells the women to “bring me a bowl and a

skin of wine” (11). A bowl is a vessel that is used to contain things. The genitalia of a woman is also a vessel. Furthermore, virgin women have a skin, the hymen, which releases blood when broken. The wine represents the blood that will flow if the skin is broken. In fact, Calonice refers to the wine as blood: “Oh! The fine red blood! How well it flows!” (11). The women take an oath over a bowl of wine to symbolically renew their purity and strengthen their status in a hegemonic male society.

Beyond wine and blood that symbolize women’s purity, the women also use water as a symbol that they will save Greece from the men. In his article, “Salvation and Female Heroics in the Parodos of Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata*,” Christopher A. Faraone argues that Aristophanes’ plays generally “evoke the theme of salvation by water” (5). In *Lysistrata*, the women use water to quench the men’s fire and save Greece. For example, the Chorus of Old Women asks the men if they are going to use their fire to self-destruct: “And, you... with your fire? Is it to cremate yourself” (17). The women believe that if the men use their fire, or sexuality, they will destroy themselves. While the women appear to throw water on the men to keep the latter from burning them, the women really throw water on the men to help them avoid self-destruction. *Lysistrata* even states, “Greece [is] saved by the women” (2). Certainly, the theme of salvation through water extends beyond physical salvation from war, for the women use water to cleanse the men and prepare them for peace.

The Chorus of Women tells the men that they are getting “you a bath ready to clean off the filth” (17). The women clean the men in order to promote peaceful relationships between citizens and other nations. *Lysistrata* compares a nation’s political well-being with cleanliness: “First we wash the yarn to

separate the grease and the filth; do the same with all bad citizens” (27). Lysistrata and the women use water to save the men from war, purify their politics, and to symbolically nurture women’s growth from servitude to the pinnacle of power. Aristophanes is able to reverse the usual order of society, making the “men [...] emotional and weak-willed, while [the] women are (comparatively) rational and firm” (Katha Pollitt, 2). Lysistrata tells Myrrhine to arouse and torment her husband, Cinesias: “Be it your task to inflame and torture and torment him. Seductions, caresses, provocations, refusals, try every means! Grant every favour—always excepting what is forbidden by our oath on the wine-bowl” (36). This strategy works, for Cinesias states, “I stand, stiff with desire,” (38) “I tell you our friend [penis] here is ready!,” (41) “we can lie on the ground” (40).

When Cinesias swears by his life to trade war for sex as “he stands stiff and rigid, and there’s never a wench to help him!” (43), Myrrhine runs away, thus causing Cinesias to lament as follows: “I’m a dead man, she is killing me! She has gone, and left me in torment! I must have someone to love, I must! Ah me! The loveliest of women has choused and cheated me. Poor little lad [male phallus], how am I to give you what you want so badly? Where is Cynalopex? Quick, man, get him a nurse, do” (43). To arouse the men more and to seal his peace deal with them, Lysistrata exposes a naked female statue (Peace) to Laconian and Athenian men, and reminds them, “I am but a woman; but I have good common sense; nature has dowered me with discriminating judgment. [...] you celebrate before the same altars ceremonies common to all... yet you go cutting each other’s throats and sacking Hellenic cities” (49). By taking such a firm and successful stance, Lysistrata shatters “the prevailing school(s) of thought that the

low status of Athenian women was particularly marked by their confinement to their homes, their exclusion from social, public, and economic life” (Cohen 1-2). As Lysistrata’s beauty further entices the men who declare, “what lovely thighs she has!,” “I have never seen a woman with a finer body (50), she gives back their wives, but warns them: “be heedful to avoid like mistakes for the future” (54). Greek women have, indeed, empowered themselves; they have shifted from the periphery to the center of power in an avid patriarchal society.

Fifteen centuries after Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata*, Pinter’s *Ruth* wrestles with a lethal male counterpart as she maps her way from the periphery to the center. She arms herself with sex and wisdom as a former butcher (Max), a boxer (Joey), a murderer (Lenny), a war veteran (Sam), and a professor of philosophy (Teddy) surround her. Ruth sets out to crack all hegemonic barriers that have ensnared, dominated, and battered her female predecessors. Prior to Ruth’s arrival on the scene, Jessie, the late wife of Max, has experienced the bluntness of the males around her, including her husband, Max. Max declares, “mind you, she [Jessie] wasn’t such a bad woman. Even though it made me sick just to look at her rotten stinking face, she wasn’t such a bad bitch. I gave her the best bleeding years of my life, anyway” (9). The arrival of Ruth suggests the return of Jessie to challenge the men who made her life miserable. Like the late Jessie, Ruth has three sons and is the target of the abuse that broke, ruined Jessie and several other women mentioned in the play. Ruth is, however, different in her unflinching determination to reverse the status quo.

Immediately she sets foot on Max’s home, a home of abuse, she is determined to fight the butcher, the boxer, and the murderer who have beset and menaced women. Con-

scious that “too many men have ruined too many women’s lives” (Lamm 56), Ruth steps into the Lion’s den with zeal to conquer. While her husband, Teddy with whom she visits her in-laws in London does not seem an abuser of women, Ruth’s defiance towards him seems a rehearsal aimed at conquering the brutal men she will soon confront. Ruth negates nearly everything Teddy asks her to do as soon as they step into the home of her in-laws. Ruth uses the word “no” more than eight times as Teddy tries, in vain, to convince her to go to bed and not to go for a walk late at night. (20-21; 22-23). Defying her husband and going for a walk late at night and without the company or protection of a male is her first victory before she confronts Lenny, a woman beater and a murderer.

Having a premonition that there may be a threat to his masculinity, Lenny tells Teddy early in the morning and without knowing that Ruth is around, “It’s just that something keeps waking me up. Some kind of a thing” (25), a thing that is considered “common place” (28). Metaphorically, Ruth is this “common place” “something” that troubles Lenny. Lenny’s fears quickly become a reality as Ruth corrects him the very first time she meets him:

LENNY: Good evening.

RUTH: Good morning, I think.

LENNY: You’re right there.

As if to corroborate Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* who tells the Magistrate (symbol of authority and power in Athens) and other men, “open your ears to our wise counsels and hold your tongues, and we may yet put things on a better footing” (24), Bob Lamm, in his article, “Learning from Women,” insists, “if we sincerely want to learn and change, we’ve got to try to shut

up and listen to women (55), and infers, “I wish I could live in a society where women truly were free, where male supremacy seemed so perverse as to be totally unimaginable, where this kind of masculine sickness that still shapes my personality didn’t exist” (55). After Ruth corrects Lenny, the latter rapidly attempts to assert his brutal masculinity, and to coerce Ruth into submission, by boasting of having killed a woman:

I clumped her one...on my mind...to kill her...as killings go, it would have been a simple matter...this lady...just sliding the wall, following the blow I ‘d given her...why go to all the bother...getting rid of the corpse...so I just gave her another belt in the nose and a couple of turns of the boot and sort of left it at that. (31)

Referring to a different woman, he further tells Ruth, “I just gave her a short-arm jab to the belly and jumped on a bus outside” for not giving “ [me] a helping hand” (33). As soon as Lenny finishes narrating his brutal and cruel actions toward women, Ruth continues to challenge him and to take charge:

LENNY: Excuse me, shall I take this ashtray out of your way?

RUTH: It’s not in my way.

LENNY: It seems to be in the way of your glass...and now perhaps I’ll relieve you of your glass.

RUTH: I haven’t quite finished.

LENNY: You’ve consumed quite enough, in my opinion.

RUTH: No, I haven’t.

LENNY: Quite sufficient, in my own opinion.

RUTH: Not in mine, Leonard.

Realizing the stubbornness of Lenny toward taking the glass, she warns, “if you take the glass [...] I’ll take you” (34). Ruth uses her sexual power to subdue Lenny: “*She picks up the glass and lifts it towards him. Have a sip. Go on. Have a sip from my glass [...]. Sit on my lap. Take a long cool sip. She*

parts her lap. [...] moves to him with the glass” (34). She uses her sexuality to win over Lenny and Joey as well:

Lenny bends to her
Madam?

Ruth stands. They dance, slowly. Teddy stands, with Ruth's coat. Max and Joey come in the front door and into the room. They stand. Lenny kisses Ruth. They stand, kissing.

JOEY: Christ, she's wide open. Dad look at that.

(Pause) (Old Lenny's got a tart in here. Joey goes to them. He takes Ruth's arm. He smiles at Lenny. He sits with Ruth on the sofa, embraces and kisses her. He looks up at Lenny. Just up my street. He leans her back until she lies beneath him. He kisses her. He looks up at Teddy and Max. It's better than a rubdown, this. Lenny sits on the arm of the sofa. He caresses Ruth's hair as Joey embraces her. Max comes forward, looks at the cases.

MAX: You going, Teddy? All ready...?

Joey lies heavily on Ruth. They are almost still. Lenny caresses her hair. (58-59)

Using her body as a weapon, Ruth defeats Lenny's interest in taking the glass from her. Once more, she prevails over a domineering man to the point that her own husband, Teddy, "just sits there while all the other characters are speculating about his wife's qualities in bed" (Hall, 20). After her victory over this murderer (Lenny), Ruth sexually teases Joey, a boxer, for two hours. While this passage presents Ruth as an unfaithful woman who audaciously flirts with her in-laws in the presence of her husband, suggesting, as it were, the extent to which modern marriages have collapsed, it, nevertheless, shows Ruth's passion towards having dominion over her male world at all cost.

Ruth's sexual power holds male characters hostage, and even reduces them to animals. Although Max, the oldest per-

son in the family, seems embarrassed by Ruth's sexual passion and its impact on the family, he, too, is crushed by Ruth's sex weapon. He asks, "where's the whore [Ruth]? Still in Bed? She'll make us all animals" (68), but ends up on his knees, moaning and sobbing as he earnestly begs Ruth for a scrap of her love, "I'm not an old man.... Do you hear me? ...kiss me" (82). Max, a brutal man who insists, "I worked as a butcher all my life, using the chopper and the slab" (47), yearns for sex with Ruth after styling her a "smelly scrubber," "stinking pox-ridden slut," "filthy scrubber" and "disease" (41-42). The prevalence of words such as "knock," "tuck," "hit," "jab," and "box" in this play suggests the violent behavior of characters, a behavior that Ruth easily overcomes with her sexuality. After holding Joey, the youngest, the strongest and the only boxer in the family "on a string [sexually teasing Joey] [...] for two hours" (68), Ruth has more control over the four men as they acquiesce to Joey's idea that Ruth's provisions should be their responsibility:

RUTH: No. Two wouldn't be enough.... I'd want a dressing-room, a rest-room, and Bedroom....

LENNY: All right, we'll get you a flat with three rooms and a bathroom.

RUTH: With what kind of conveniences?

LENNY: All conveniences.

RUTH: A personal maid?

LENNY: Of course...

RUTH: You'd supply my wardrobe, of course?

LENNY: We'd supply everything. Everything you need.

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

LENNY: You'd have everything.

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

LENNEY: Naturally. (77-78)

Although Christopher C. Hidgin views Ruth as the “cool somewhat unsympathetic wife, the aggressive sexual woman, the warm domestic wife, the sexually compliant female, apparently yielding herself up to male visions of dominance,” (110) Ruth successfully hawks her sexuality to acquire both political and economic power in the midst of brutal misogynists. In “Displaying the Phallus: Masculinity and the Performance of Sexuality on the Internet,” Marjorie Kibby and Brigid Costello state, men compete “for women’s attention, giving women the power to manipulate the sexual exchange to cater to their own desires” (217). Ruth complements her sexuality with her wisdom. By insisting on a legal-binding contract, Ruth shifts the focus from her sexuality to her sagacity.

Beyond using sex as a weapon, Ruth also displays her superiority through knowledge, as the following dialogue demonstrates:

LENNY: Eh, Teddy, you haven’t told us much about your Doctorship of Philosophy. What do you teach?

TEDDY: Philosophy.

LENNY: ... you don’t mind my asking you some questions, do you?

TEDDY: If they fall within my province.

LENNY: How can the unknown merit reverence?...

TEDDY: I’m afraid I’m the wrong person to ask.

LENNY: But you are a philosopher. Come on, be frank. What do you make of all this business of being and not-being?

TEDDY: What do you make of it?

LENNY: Well, for instance, take a table. Philosophically speaking. What is it?

TEDDY: A table.

LENNY: Ah. You mean it’s nothing else but a table....

MAX: You’d probably sell it.

LENNY: You wouldn't get much for it.

JOEY: Chop it up for firewood.

RUTH: Don't be too sure though. You've forgotten something. Look at me. I ... move my leg. That's all it is. But I wear...underwear...which moves with me... it... captures your attention. Perhaps you misinterpret. The action is simple. It's a leg... moving. My lips move. Why don't you restrict...your observation to that? Perhaps the fact that they move is more significant... than the words which come through them. You must bear that... possibility... in mind.

Silence. Teddy stands. (51-53)

Embarrassed by his intellectual inaptitude, Teddy quickly switches the discussion in question: "I was born quite near here" (53). The wisdom of Ruth in this response throws all characters off, and compels Teddy to seek her help in teaching his philosophy classes: "You can help me with my lectures when we get back. I'd love that. I'd be so grateful for it, really" (55). Teddy ends up returning to the U.S without his wife, Ruth, not because "he willingly gives up his own wife" (629) as Oscar G. Bockett and Robert R. Findlay claim, but because Ruth is beyond the control or domination of all male characters in the play. Furthermore, even if "Teddy cheerfully returns to America without her [Ruth]" (104) as James R. Hollis states, Teddy is cheerful because he is happy to lose a wife who has suddenly acquired so much power and can no longer be contained in the system that has beset her for too long. This sudden acquisition of power shocks Teddy, especially as men often associate women with weakness, thus deciding their identities. In *Feminism & Masculinities*, John Stoltenberg in his article, "Toward Gender Justice," says:

Under patriarchy, men are the arbiters of identity for both males and females, because the cultural norm of human identity is, by definition, male identity-*masculinity*. And, under patriarchy, the cul-

tural norm of male identity consists in power, prestige, privilege, and prerogative as over and against the gender class women. (41)

At the crux of this essay was the argument that the oppressed women in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* and Pinter's *The Homecoming* use sex to map their way from the margin to the center or to shift from objects to subjects. Given the preponderance of details and views of scholars dealt with in this essay, one can safely infer that sex, at least in these plays, is indisputably an overwhelming tool for the acquisition of power in patriarchal societies. "Lysistrata introduces the notion of women holding political power, and suggests that they would wield it more wisely and more judiciously than men have ever done" (Murphy, 1). Aristophanes' women use their sexual prowess to influence and purify the male dominated arenas of war and finances. His women move beyond the societal limitations of domesticity into traditionally masculine spheres such as politics and economics. Some may view Pinter's Ruth as a whore, but her sexual power and wisdom catapult her to the acme of power in the midst of brutal men in a hostile society. The men in *Homecoming* lose their control over women as they display intellectual flaws and cannot control their sexual passion. Using sex as a prime springboard, both Aristophanes' women and Pinter's Ruth blur and transcend the power gulf that has perennially beset and menaced them in patriarchal hegemonies.

Eugene Ngezem¹

¹ Dr. Eugene Ngezem, Department of English, Clayton State University, 2000 Clayton State Blvd, Morrow, GA 30260, U.S.A. E-mail: eugenengezem@clayton.edu

Works Cited

- Aristophanes. *Lysistrata*. New York: Dover, 1994.
- Brockett, G. Oscar & Robert R. Findlay. *Century of Innovation: A History of European and American Theatre and Drama Since 1870*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1973.
- Bachrach, Peter & Baratz, Morton S.. "Two Faces of Power." *Power*. Ed. John R. Champlin. New York: Atherton Press, 1971, 121-28.
- Cohen, David. "Seclusion, Separation, and the Status of Women in Classical Athens." *Greece and Rome*, 36, 1989, 3-15.
- Clatterbaugh, Kenneth. "What is Problematic about Masculinities." *Feminism & Masculinities*. Ed. Peter F. Murphy. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, 200-13.
- Faraone, Christopher. "Salvation and Female Heroics in the Parodos of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*." *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 34, 1997, 38-59.
- Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. Ed. Colin Gordon, New York: Pantheon, 1980.
- Freud, Sigmund. "Group Psychology and Analysis of the Ego." *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. Ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. 2nd ed. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2009, 438-40.
- Hall, Peter. "Directing Pinter," *Harold Pinter: You Never Heard Such Silence*. London: Vision Press Ltd., 1984, 20.
- Hartsock, Nancy. *Money, Sex and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism*. New York & London: Longman, 1983.
- Hollis, R. James. *Harold Pinter: The Poetics of Silence*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970.
- Hudgins, C. Christopher. "Intended Audience Reponse: The Homecoming, and the Ironic Mode of Identification." *Harold Pinter: Critical Approaches*. London: Association University Press, 1986, 110.
- Kibby, Marjorie and Brigid Costello. "Displaying the Phallus: Masculinity and the Performance of Sexuality on the Internet." *Feminism & Masculinities*. Ed. Peter F. Murphy, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. 214-27.
- Kimmel, S. Michael. "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity." *Feminism & Masculini-*

- ties. Ed. Peter F. Murphy, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. 182-99.
- Murphy, F. Peter, *Feminism and Masculinities*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Lamm, Bob, "Learning from Women," *Feminism & Masculinities*, Ed. Peter F. Murphy, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. 50-56.
- Parisinou, Eva. "'Lighting' the World of Women: Lamps and Torches in the Hands of Women in the Late Archaic and Classical Periods," *Greece and Rome*, 47, 2000, 19-43.
- Pinter, Harold. *The Homecoming*. New York: Grove Press, 1965.
- Pollitt, Katha. "Phallic Balloons Against the War." *Nation*, March 23, 2003, 9-9.
- States, O. Bert. "Pinter's Homecoming: The Shock of Non-recognition." *Pinter: A Collection of Critical Essays*, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1972, 150-57.
- Stoltenberg, John. "Toward Gender Justice." *Feminism & Masculinities*. Ed. Peter F. Murphy, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, 41-49.
- Tolson, Andrew. "The Limits of Masculinity," *Feminism & Masculinities*. Ed. Peter F. Murphy, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, 69-79.
- Russell, Bertrand. "The Forms of Power." *Power*. Ed. Steven Lukes, New York: New York University Press, 1986, 19-27.
- Weber, Max, qtd. in Robert Dahl's "Power as the Control of Behavior," *Power*, ed. Steven Lukes, New York: New York University Press, 1986, 39.
-