

Betrayal of/by Women in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and Pinter's *Ashes to Ashes*

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Abstract

*Both Shakespeare and Pinter expose and condemn the betrayal of/by women in their plays by revealing its causes and tragic consequences. The possibilities for resisting the betrayal of the female in these authors' plays are explored in this paper through a comparative analysis of *The Winter's Tale* and *Ashes to Ashes*. While Shakespeare describes alternatives to wars, destructive powers, and chaos – such as the love, happiness, and cosmic order which are restored at the end of *The Winter's Tale* – Pinter leaves it up to the audience to imagine the alternatives for themselves. *Ashes to Ashes* thus reminds us only of the first half of *The Winter's Tale* – the prevailing feeling is that of jealousy, betrayal and loss; the prevailing imagery is that of mothers losing their children; and the prevailing season is winter. The happy resolution that happens in *The Winter's Tale* is not offered to Pinter's audience; however, there is a possibility to imagine it and hope for it. The theoretical framework of the paper relies on the critical insights of Hughes, Bogoeva-Sedlar, Bloom, Baldwin, Collington, Yenigul, and others.*

Keywords: misrepresentation, patriarchy, the female, private/public, the Holocaust.

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Introduction

In his study *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* (1992), Hughes recognizes that the psychological crisis of Shakespeare's male heroes happens when their "rational

ego's skeptical, independent, autocratic intelligence – the ultimate form of the Goddess-destroyer”, rejects the Goddess and suppresses “the feminine component of his own biological make-up” (Hughes 513). The fact that Shakespeare's romances, such as *The Winter's Tale* (1610/11), end (after a tragic beginning) with a comic resolution accompanied by the revival of the feminine character, as well as the fact that Shakespeare's oeuvre ends with romances (after a series of tragedies), implies that Shakespeare asserts that the female can never be stifled and suppressed. According to Hughes, a tragic hero's crime against the Goddess or the Female, i.e. her rejection, is also a crime against himself and humanity, which has to be “exposed, condemned, punished, corrected, and eventually redeemed” (Sagar 3).

The patriarchal suspicion of women's fidelity – which leads to misrepresentations, mistreatment and betrayal of women, revealed and criticized by Shakespeare in *The Winter's Tale* – is also the subject matter of Pinter's *Ashes to Ashes* (1996). In this play, the struggle between a husband and wife, seemingly a domestic and private event, becomes a public event that the whole of society is responsible for. To be more precise, Pinter compares Devlin's treatment of Rebecca with the treatment of women during the Holocaust.

Both Shakespeare and Pinter expose and condemn the betrayal of/by women in their plays by revealing its causes and tragic consequences. The possibilities for resisting the betrayal of the female in these authors' plays are explored in this paper through a comparative analysis of *The Winter's Tale* and *Ashes to Ashes*.

The Winter's Tale

Before concentrating on a close reading of *The Winter's Tale*, we will first present Shakespeare's perspective, as well as the historical background of the problem of the betrayal of the female. It is interesting to note that Sagar alludes to Shakespeare possessing a gift to detect and successfully reveal “the persistent polarization of the male psyche” (Sagar 2). In Shakespeare's time, this polarization was encouraged by Christianity and Protestantism – and his Protestant male heroes are examples of “the perennial male rejection and desacralization of Nature in the name of some perfection or abstraction assumed to be accessible only to the detached male intellect” (Sagar 2). In the same vein, Hughes claims that Shakespeare is primarily an English poet of the Reformation, whose main hero's tragic flaw is his rejection of the Goddess or “the feminine component of his own biological make-up”:

At one pole is the rational ego, controlling the man's behaviour according to the needs and demands of a self-controlled society. At the other is the totality of this individual's natural, biological and instinctual life. ... From the point of view of the rational ego this totality appears to be female, and since it incorporates not only the divine source of his being, the feminine component of his own biological make-up, as well as the paranormal faculties and mysteries outside his rational ego, and seems to him in many respects continuous with external nature, he calls it the Goddess. Obviously, this is only a manner of speaking, or of thinking, but it is one that has imposed itself on man throughout his history. (Hughes 513)

For Hughes, all Shakespeare's plays are variations on the basic tragic myth (Hughes calls it Shakespeare's Mythic or Tragic Equation), which is actually a "conflict between Goddess religion and Goddess destroyer in all its ramifications" – a conflict which Shakespeare translated "back into psychological terms, or rather back into the psycho-biological human mystery from which the religion and myth spring in the first place" (Hughes 212–213). Hughes notices the psychological crisis of Shakespeare's male heroes not only in his plays but also in two poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* (513). The above-mentioned poems are metaphors of two parallel mythic events which are in turn aspects of each other.

In *Venus and Adonis*, Adonis frequently rejects the goddess Venus, who woos him, because he is disgusted by her lust, which he thinks she feels for him instead of love; to him, "Love to Heaven is fled/ since sweating Lust on earth usurp'd his name" (Shakespeare, *Venus* 1202). He ultimately runs away from Venus, goes hunting and is killed by a boar. Venus goes in search of him and finds his dead body, which is then transformed into a purple flower. Upon seeing Adonis dead, Venus prophesies that love will from then on be attended by jealousy and betrayal.

Sagar rightly notices that for Hughes, Adonis represents "the Protestant attempt to degrade the Queen of Heaven to the Great Whore" (Sagar 8). According to Hughes, he "splits the Goddess into the part that supports and confirms his rational existence, and the part that would disrupt it" (Hughes 513):

He apprehends the truth about the nature of the Goddess, which is that she is herself half (or, strictly speaking, one-third) enigmatic, daemonic animal, but intellectually he rejects the implication that his soul is the same. His intellectual rejection of that unwanted half of the Goddess, and thereby that unwanted half of himself (and of life), is the tragic error from which his (and her) tragic fate explodes. (Hughes 214)

Sagar further points out that Adonis' words "I know not love, [...] nor will not know it, / Unless it be a boar, and then I'll chase it" imply that he treats love as a boar, "a foul and dangerous thing to be fought and killed" (Sagar 6). This actually means that by rejecting what he calls 'lust' in Venus he also rejects her love: "he strikes out at all forms of love, including sympathy, the ability to suffer with those that suffer; he strikes at the feminine in all its forms – woman, Nature, his own anima" (Sagar 7).

Adonis and other versions of him in pre-historic myths "appeared everywhere as the son and consort of the Great Goddess" whose "most typical representative", according to Hughes, is Tiamat – "the monstrous Mother of First Created Things in the Babylonian creation myth", who "in her later forms [...] takes on a double existence as Inanna (Ishtar, Astarte, Arthar, etc.), who is Goddess of Love and Reproduction, and as Ershkigal (Allatu, etc.) who is Goddess of the Underworld" (Hughes 6). The Greek version of this myth (which appeared around 900-700 B.C. in Paphos, Cyprus) has Adonis as the Goddess' son and consort and Aphrodite as the Great Goddess, whose double is Persephone. According to Hughes, this myth "begins where Aphrodite hides the Divine Child [Adonis] in a chest and gives him into the care of Persephone, Goddess of the Underworld. As he grows Persephone falls in love with him and refuses to give him back to Aphrodite [...] Aphrodite

appeals to Zeus for justice, and it is finally arranged that she shall have Adonis for one part of the year, and Persephone shall have him for another part” (Hughes 7). However, when Aphrodite refuses to give Adonis to Persephone, she “emerges in her animal form as a wild boar, and reclaims him by killing him” (Hughes 7).

For Hughes, “the values of the relationship between Venus and Adonis were shifted into the context of Reformation England” (Hughes 14); this is also the case with another of Shakespeare’s poems, *The Rape of Lucrece*, and the second part of his Tragic Equation, where Shakespeare’s male hero is “an uncontrollably enraged Jehovan God, who annihilates, or attempts somehow to annihilate, the Goddess; and his motive, in every case, far from being lust to rape the female, is exactly the opposite: it is abhorrence of what he imagines to be the Goddess’s whorishness, or at least her treachery in love” (Hughes 15). *The Rape of Lucrece* is a story about Tarquin, a Roman prince, who rapes Lucrece, the chaste wife of Collatinus, a Roman commander. After committing the crime, Tarquin flees and Lucrece kills herself after having the Roman nobility hear her account of the crime. It seems that the annihilation of the Goddess in this poem arises from the rejection of the Goddess in the first one: Adonis, who rejects the female, becomes Tarquin, who assaults the Goddess and tries to destroy her.

According to Hughes, most of Shakespeare’s heroes are reincarnations of Adonis and Tarquin, and what Shakespeare goes on to reveal in his plays is that by destroying the Goddess, which is actually the hero’s beloved, he destroys himself. Hughes explains that “when the Puritan eye is opened in Adonis, either by the Female’s real action (Cressida, Hamlet’s mother) or more usually by Adonis becoming deluded (Othello, Macbeth, Lear, Posthumus, Leontes), he splits his beloved into the Sacred Bride/ Divine Mother, on the one hand, and the Queen of Hell, on the other, and rejects the Queen of Hell, absolutely and with loathing (in fear)” (Hughes 215). However, the loved and the loathed woman cannot be separated, because the Queen of Hell is “a part of the ‘divine, complete being’, which is Divine Love” (Hughes 223); hence, her rejection implies the rejection and loss of Divine Love. This rejection and the loss of Divine Love further leads to a tragic hero’s ‘madness’, which is “always directed against the Female, and results directly or indirectly in her death” (Hughes 217).

This is also the case with Leontes, the hero of *The Winter’s Tale*, who becomes suspicious of his wife Hermione’s fidelity and rejects her. A number of critics have noticed that Leontes represents the example of the patriarchal suspicion of women, especially their chastity, and of the fear of becoming a cuckolded husband which was widespread among Renaissance men. It is also worth pointing out that the tragic beginning of *The Winter’s Tale* is caused by jealousy, as Venus from the poem *Venus and Adonis* prophesied after Adonis’s death: “Sorrow on love hereafter shall attend./ It shall be waited on with jealousy./ find sweet beginning, but unsavoury end” (Shakespeare, *Venus* 1205). Furthermore, the transformation that happens to Adonis in the poem – a purple flower springing from his blood – can be linked with the transformation that occurs in Leontes and with the redemption that occurs in *The Winter’s Tale* and other Shakespeare romances. According to Frye, the purple flower symbolizes “Nature as a cycle of birth and death” (Grande, Sherbert 126) or the renewal of life after death, which is the main idea of *The Winter’s Tale*.

The action of *The Winter’s Tale* takes place in two kingdoms, Sicilia and Bohemia,

ruled by Leontes and Polixenes respectively. The two kings have been very good friends since childhood and at the beginning of the play, their conversation about their boyhood familiarizes us with their friendship. During this conversation, we find out that Polixenes has been Leontes' guest for nine months and is about to depart. After failing to persuade him to stay longer, Leontes demands his wife to ask Polixenes to extend his visit. After Hermione succeeds, Leontes momentarily starts thinking that they have cheated on him and finds in their gestures, like "paddling palms and pinching fingers", and "making practiced smiles", signs of adultery (1.2.1103).

Although everybody around him tells him that she is chaste, Leontes refuses to believe that Hermione is faithful. When Camillo tries to defend Hermione, Leontes lists the reasons why he believes Hermione and Polixenes are adulterers:

Is whispering nothing?
Is leaning cheek to cheek? is meeting noses?
Kissing with inside lip? stopping the career
Of laughter with a sigh (a note infallible
Of breaking honesty)? horsing foot on foot?
Skulking in corners? wishing clocks more swift?
Hours, minutes? noon, midnight? and all eyes
Blind with the pin and web but theirs, theirs only,
That would unseen be wicked? Is this nothing?
Why then the world and all that's in't is nothing,
The covering sky is nothing, Bohemia nothing,
My wife is nothing, nor nothing have these nothings,
If this be nothing. (1.2.1105)

Cohen gives an explanation that according to Terry Eagleton, "'nothing' is an Elizabethan euphemism for the vagina. With some overstatement, he perceptively notes that the "woman's nothing is of a peculiarly convoluted kind, a yawning abyss within which man can lose his virile identity... Leontes, obsessively thinking of Hermione as a sexual entity, is himself as caught by the euphemism as those who hear him. Nothing is not merely an absence of matter; it is the material evidence of femaleness, and it is this aspect of femaleness that has come to dominate his vision of the world" (Cohen 219–220). However, Bloom asserts that if "nothing" is a euphemism for the vagina, then it should actually be seen as Shakespeare saw it: "as breeding, a cipher multiplying, being fruitful, the Shakespearean nothing – as noting, as cipher, as naughtiness, as origin – from which everything comes" (Bloom 140)

Leontes is "the justice", as Collington describes him, "concerned with his personal appearance and his position in the community as a representative of authority and order" (65). Collington further notes that Leontes' sore point is his honor, and that after he wrongly perceives that Hermione and Polixenes have ruined his reputation, "he will couch personal revenge in the language of public justice" (242). His "sexual paranoia leads to political paranoia" (253).

As opposed to Polixenes, who manages to escape, Hermione is imprisoned even though she is in the ninth month of pregnancy. Leontes does not believe that the child she is

carrying is his. When Hermione gives birth to their daughter in prison, Leontes orders Antigonus to kill the child, but he leaves her in Bohemia where a shepherd finds and adopts her. Later on, Leontes also loses his son, since after separating him from his mother, Mamillius dies. Clearly, Mamillius' name "stresses a connection to the maternal" and represents the importance of the relationship between mother and son. His death results from "the attendant loss of maternal presence, without which – his death tells us – we cannot live" (Tallon 86).

The betrayal of women in the play starts with the condemnation of female sexuality, seen in a conversation between Leontes and Polixenes describing their friendship; the conversation "focuses on the loss of their innocent childhood bond when they enter the adult world, corrupted by female sexuality" (Tallon 79). Polixenes says that his future wife tempted him and then innocence was lost. Schavrien furthermore adds that Polixenes and Leontes "seem to concede that their own sexual appetite (the "dagger" they were admonished as boys to keep "muzzled" [1.2.156]) might have led them astray as well" (28). With his mistrust of women and his belief that "femaleness is a moral concept" (Cohen 217) and that women betray men, Leontes is a true representative of the patriarchal view of women. He attacks women's honesty and chastity and says that women in general betray men:

...Or I am much deceived, cuckolds ere now;
...Physic for't there is none;
It is a bawdy planet, ...
be it concluded,
No barricado for a belly... (1.2.1104)

Because of their sexuality, women in Shakespeare's plays are paradoxically idealized to the highest level of chastity and at the same time suspected of infidelity by their husbands. This is the case with Hermione, whose husband is a possessive patriarch with high social standing, immensely concerned with his honor and property. Leontes and Polixenes married into secure lineage, and thus Leontes and Hermione are "less passionate than business-like in their relations" and "Polixenes never even mentions his wife, except perhaps to express concern that she is at home unsupervised: 'I am question'd by my fears, of what may chance/ Or breed upon our absence' (1.2.1 1–12)" (Collington 246). Collington further states that "patriarchal marriage predicates a husband's external reputation and his psychological well-being upon his wife's behavior", and cites Gohke who notes that "Shakespearean heroes invest women with the capacity either to organize or to disorganize their psychic universe" (Collington 247). Or, in Hughes' terms, the hero's rejection of the "Female" or the loss of his "soul" brings chaos to his "psychic universe" (Hughes 214). Leontes betrays Hermione and brings about chaos not only to himself, but also to his family and his realm.

Leontes regards his wife as property; he uses degrading imagery when talking about female sexuality, and for him having an unfaithful wife is like having a "pond fish'd by his next neighbour' or a gate 'open'd, against [his] will" (1.2.1104). In addition, when Polixenes notices that Leontes is worried, but he does not know that the cause is Hermione's

presumed infidelity; he (unawares) compares the loss of a wife with a loss of property, because to him Leontes looks like he has lost some “province” or a “region” (1.2.1106). Moreover, in an attempt to comfort himself, Leontes says that “the tenth of mankind” has “revolted”, or unfaithful wives lack “barricado for a belly” thus providing us with a perfect example of “cuckoldry solidarity” (Tallon 83).

Leontes does not believe in his queen’s chastity until the Oracle proclaims that his accusations were false. The Oracle declares that “Hermione is chaste;/Polixenes blameless; Camillo a true subject; Leontes/a jealous tyrant; his innocent babe truly begotten” and that “the king shall live without an heir, if that/ which is lost be not found” (3.2.1114). “That which is lost” is clearly a reference to the infant Perdita (in Latin Perdita means “the lost one”). The tragic consequences of betraying the Female are manifested immediately – Leontes is unable to sleep, loses an heir, abandons his daughter and loses his wife, but he is given sixteen years of repentance during which Paulina is his advisor, and their relation promises the “redemptive rebalancing of Masculine with Feminine” (Schavrien 34).

Leontes destroys himself through his misunderstanding and rejection of Divine Love; thus the first half of *The Winter's Tale* is Mother a classic Tragic Equation. Hermione is a Sacred and Divine Love who, in Leontes’ eyes, turns into the Goddess from Hell, whom Leontes wants to destroy as did all the other distant, Protestant and legalistic Adonises before him. The Feminine, which Leontes expelled from his kingdom, comes back with the return of Perdita and Hermione (who later returns in a resurrecting miracle), according to Schavrien, who concludes that “Shakespeare appears to have advocated the modifying of a hard-core rationalist/rationalizing and authoritarian viewpoint [...] through the virtues of the Feminine” (30).

At the beginning of Act IV of the play, a chorus speaks in the person of Time, announcing that sixteen years have passed and the scene now shifts to Bohemia. Now, the most important action takes place at the sheep-shearing festival during the engagement of Leontes’ daughter Perdita, who has grown up as a shepherd’s daughter, and Polixenes’ son Florizel. Polixenes comes to the festival in disguise, since he was not invited, and only then does he find out about the engagement. When Florizel is asked if his father knows about his engagement and he replies that he does not and will not find out for a good reason, Polixenes reveals his identity and forbids Perdita and Florizel from seeing each other again. Here it becomes clear that Sicilia and Bohemia are governed by equally suspicious and possessive patriarchs who want to keep everything under their control.

Luckily, not all men in Bohemia are like Polixenes. In contrast to him and Leontes Perdita’s foster-father, the old shepherd and Polixenes’ son Florizel are depicted as displaying compassion, love and understanding for women. The difference between Leontes and the shepherd is seen in their treatment both of Perdita and of their respective wives’ hospitality. While Leontes abandons his baby girl whom he proclaims a bastard, the shepherd adopts the same bastard baby. Furthermore, while Leontes becomes jealous after his wife shows kindness to her guest Polixenes, the shepherd praises the kindness his deceased wife showed to their guests and teaches Perdita to follow her example.

Florizel also stands in contrast to Leontes. While Leontes becomes estranged from his wife after Polixenes’ visit, Florizel does not distance himself from Perdita after Polixenes’ disapproval of their marriage. Florizel recognizes that if he rejects the Divine love, he

will lose himself or his “soul”, in Hughes’ terms (513): “For I cannot be / Mine own, nor anything to any, if / I be not thine” (4.3.1119). Furthermore, when Polixenes forbids Florizel from marrying Perdita, Florizel stays true to his love and chooses his relationship with Perdita over inheritance, saying, “From my succession wipe me, father! I / Am heir to my affection” (4.3.1124).

After having disinherited himself, Florizel flees with Perdita to Sicilia, because Camillo promises him that Leontes will warmly welcome them – which he indeed does, and even agrees to be Florizel and Perdita’s advocate before Polixenes, who has come after his son to Sicilia. Immediately the true identity of Perdita is revealed, and her return brings reconciliations and reunions to Leontes’ court, as the Oracle foretold. Florizel reconciles with his father and Leontes reconciles with Polixenes and Camillo. Leontes reunites with his daughter and they both reunite with Hermione. Paulina reveals the statue of Hermione, seemingly dead but hidden and protected by Paulina for sixteen years.

The Winter’s Tale is a diptych (Grande, Sherbert 115), i.e. it consists of two parts differing in their plot and characters as well as their imagery. The first part is the winter’s tale proper, the story of betraying the Female, i.e. the story of a jealous tyrant who slanders his wife and abandons his daughter. The second part, the last two acts, is the story of Florizel’s love, Perdita’s recognition and the revival of Hermione, i.e. the revival of the Female. The imagery of the two parts is also different, perfectly matching the two different stories: the winter, chaos and storm of the first part are contrasted with the spring, revival and fertility of the second part. The triumph of life over the wasteland and death is here embodied in the female figure Hermione. Therefore the first part of *The Winter’s Tale* is “a tragedy of the isolation of consciousness caused by Leontes’ jealousy which, like Lear’s abdication, creates a wasteland that extends from Sicilia into Bohemia and dissolves in the chaos of storm and death and devouring monsters”. In the second part, “the memory of Hermione is cherished so intensely that it becomes a new existence” (Grande and Sherbert 326).

Schavrien insightfully notes that Shakespeare wrote “in the period of great social changes: an age of discovery, when a new cosmology and empirical method were in ascendancy, when the Renaissance had taken hold” (26). What started to penetrate the Western world in the Renaissance (and has continued to the present time) is a rational, mechanistic and fragmented world view. In his plays, Shakespeare “surveyed prospects for a New World” which would be based on the partnership of the Masculine and the Feminine. In *The Winter’s Tale*, Shakespeare shows that the revaluing of the Feminine “brings renewal on multiple levels - psychological, political, natural, and cosmic” (Schavrien 35).

Ashes to Ashes

All Pinter’s plays are political, because he perceives personal relationships as “symbolic microcosms of world politics” (Baldwin 40) – as is shown in *Ashes to Ashes*. More precisely, personal relationships, especially those between husbands and wives, are “symbolic microcosms” of the patriarchal social system, which, in the domestic sphere, is perpetuated by husbands to whom wives show resistance. Their resistance, especially Rebecca’s in *Ashes to Ashes*, is significant because it represents the resistance to all

kinds of oppression, misrepresentation and mistreatment of all subservient people in the patriarchy, not only women. Pinter wrote *Ashes to Ashes* “out of the images and horror of man’s inhumanity to man which have haunted him since the end of the Second World War” (Raby 247). However, the play is not only about Nazism, but also about the contemporary audience and their sense of responsibility towards their actions and the understanding of history as being the result of human actions, as Pinter himself pointed out: “It’s about the images of Nazi Germany; I don’t think anyone can ever get that out of their mind. The Holocaust is probably the worst thing that ever happened, because it was so calculated, deliberate and precise, and so fully documented by the people who actually did it. But it’s not simply the Nazis that I am talking about in *Ashes to Ashes*, because it would be a dereliction on my part to simply concentrate on the Nazis and leave it at that. The word democracy begins to stink. These things, as you can see, are on my mind. So in *Ashes to Ashes*, I’m not simply talking about the Nazis; I’m talking about us and our conception of our past and our history, and what it does to us in the present” (Yenigul, 46).

Through Rebecca, whose distant experience (of the Holocaust) formed by cultural memory emphasizes society’s responsibility for human suffering in the past, Pinter addresses the consciences of his audience “in order to create the same sense of responsibility” in them (Yenigul 2). Thus, “*Ashes to Ashes* points out a social reality – that of brutality, violence, torture and oppression - present throughout the world history, which haunts the conscience of humanity reflected in the character of Rebecca” (Yenigul 1).

Rebecca and Devlin, her husband, are the only characters in the play. Their attitudes towards the images of the Holocaust Rebecca evokes are very different and are primarily gendered; Pinter obviously sides with Rebecca’s compassion and criticizes Devlin’s tendency “to view history as external to himself, occupying a blinkered, empirical, male mind-set” (Baldwin 36). In other words, Rebecca’s compassion for the victims of the Holocaust is juxtaposed with Devlin’s “reliance on order, authority and rationality” (Yenigul 63), which is the cause of their mutual misunderstanding and which lies behind their dysfunctional relationship. During the play a parallel is drawn between Devlin and Rebecca’s ‘ex-lover’, who actually turns out to have been a lover of a woman who witnessed the Holocaust and whose identity Rebecca assumes. We learn that the ‘ex-lover’ was one of Nazi officials or officers who worked in a concentration camp during the Second World War, and the prevailing image of him is that he “used to go to the local railway station and walk down the platform and tear all the babies from the arms of their screaming mothers” (407) and that he made the woman he was dating kiss his fist. Throughout the play, Devlin starts to resemble this lover in some aspects until he finally enacts his behavior described in Rebecca’s story and asks Rebecca to kiss his fist. Both Devlin and the lover are men “with a rigid sense of duty”, cold and authoritative: “Devlin’s desire for authority, order and control over Rebecca in the private sphere parallels with that of the authoritarian states, which impose violence, torture, and suffering on its people. Thus, Pinter, combining the personal with the political, does not distinguish political violence from personal violence” (Yenigul 62-63).

In addition, Pinter’s merging of political and personal, or of world politics and gender politics in this play, and especially his focus on the victimization of women in both spheres, is what makes him Shakespeare’s successor in exposing the betrayal of women or the

“crime” (Hughes 221) against the Female. In *Ashes to Ashes*, women become two-fold victims of the patriarchy, since they are both victimized by men and made their accomplices in separating mothers from their children – which is the case of the woman whose identity Rebecca assumes in the play. However, Rebecca is aware of this woman’s misdeed, and in addition to assuming her identity she also assumes her guilt and the responsibility for her actions – which is in fact the point of the play. Thus, “the drama shows *Rebecca’s* growing awareness and better perception of the true nature of the acts she was led to perform in a patriarchal civilization. At the same time, she feels guilty because of her participation in the destructive system and the loss of a child” (Bogoeva-Sedlar 282).

Devlin cannot understand Rebecca because he “personifies a willed ignorance... His behavior reveals the collusion between an autonomous, bourgeois self and a cultural preference for denying history” (Kane 203). For him, “a man who doesn’t give a shit” is at the same time “a man with a rigid sense of duty” (415), and he is this man who “embodies mental habits that culminate in a ‘plausible deniability’ of moral responsibility to others” (Kane 56). Therefore, he does not understand Rebecca’s compassion for the victims of the Holocaust and her assumption of the responsibility for their suffering, and he wants to make her talk about “something more personal”, “something within *her* own experience” (413). He suggests this after making her agree that she has neither the authority nor the right to “discuss such an atrocity” (413) because it “never happened” (413) to her. And after having used every argument and strategy – appeals to logic, to God, to family, even to Rebecca’s unworthiness because she herself has never suffered – and having failed to restore her to “the ordinary and acceptable”, he falls back on force.

Clearly, there is a mental and emotional gap between Rebecca and Devlin that sets them apart. This is particularly visible in their different attitudes towards the police siren which is heard during the play. When Rebecca hears the siren she feels upset. For her, the police siren is a sign of suffering because it resonates with the Holocaust experience. Obviously, the siren stands for repressive state apparatuses and state oppression. On the other hand, for Devlin it represents security and order. He praises the police for “*taking* care of” everything and “*keeping* their eye on” everything (409). He assures Rebecca that she will “never be without a police siren” (409), i.e. state repression which is very alarming. “Surveillance, discipline, and punishment” were present in concentration camps, and as Pinter warns us in his plays, they are also present in modern states.

It is important to stress the fact that Rebecca was not a witness or a victim of the Holocaust, since at the time the play was written, around 1996, she is forty years old. More importantly, it was not she who gave the child to the Nazi, and who dated a Nazi official/officer, but the woman whose identity she assumes. What is also important is that Rebecca’s exposure of this woman’s wrong decisions actually serves to reveal Rebecca’s and Devlin’s different personalities, and especially Devlin’s coldness, detachment and authoritativeness, which destroys their relationship. In this way Rebecca raises the awareness of the importance of taking responsibility for the Holocaust. On the other hand, Devlin’s identification with the male lover from her story deserves only criticism, since that makes him an authoritative and violent husband who destroys their marriage, as Leontes did before him.

By assuming not only the identity of this woman but also the guilt for her wrong-doings,

Rebecca makes it clear that she herself finds her actions repulsive. The first description of the woman that makes her repulsive is the fact that she may “have achieved sexual fulfillment from a masochistic ritual she played with a lover” (Baldwin 30) and the fact that she interpreted her lover asking her to kiss his fist and gripping her neck as a sign that he “adored” (396) her. Furthermore, she also seems to praise his job although she cannot state clearly what he is doing: “I think it had something to do with a travel agency”; “he was some kind of courier”; “he was quite high up”; “he had a lot of responsibilities”; “he was a guide” (403). When she retells their visit to a factory, she focuses solely on the respect the workers show towards him: “They respected his... purity, his... conviction. They would follow him over a cliff and into the sea, if he asked them” (405). The fact that these people worked in appalling conditions, characterized by dampness, inadequate clothing and the lack of a bathroom (406), is easily dismissed by her as unimportant, as is the fact that her lover used to tear babies away from their mothers (407).

Although there is no mention of the Holocaust in the play, the images of the factory, the railway stations and the separation of children from their mothers clearly point to this historical event. In addition, it is rather easy to notice the connection between the word ‘guide’, used in the play to describe the lover’s occupation, and the German word ‘Führer’; one translation of the German ‘Führer’, besides ‘leader’, is guide, which ironically may refer to his role in deportations. Also, the words “purity” and “conviction” represent euphemisms that call to mind the justification for Nazi genocide – which further stresses the connection between the events described in the play and the Holocaust. Furthermore, according to Baldwin, “it is ‘purity’ and ‘conviction’ that have proved ideologically indispensable to the political rhetoric’ of Fascist governments; regimes who simultaneously don’t ‘give a shit’ yet have a ‘rigid sense of duty’” (Baldwin 30).

“The ‘sense of duty’ that Nazism, Communism, empire, ethnic purity and even democracy have invoked has allowed for countless acts of brutal repression throughout history. It is this powerfully hypnotic language that has enabled us to ignore their consequences” (Baldwin 31). Devlin embodies mental habits that culminate in a “plausible deniability” of moral responsibility to others. The sexual authoritarianism of the male lover, described in the opening anecdote, “appears to be an extension of his public role” (Baldwin 30), which Rebecca exposes and does not admire as Devlin thinks she does – and because of that feels jealous of him. He even emulates the lover’s behavior at the end of the play because he does not know what Rebecca wants; he cannot understand what she is trying to tell him. This, and the analogy already drawn between Devlin and Leontes, prove that he will not be able to save his marriage. This becomes clear at the point in the play when he asks Rebecca to “start again”, to which she replies negatively: “I don’t think we can start again. We started...a long time ago. We started. We can’t start again. We can end again” (425). Then she starts singing a song which illustrates a moment of the final misunderstanding:

REBECCA: (*singing softly*) ‘Ashes to ashes’—

DEVLIN: ‘And dust to dust’—

REBECCA: ‘If the women don’t get you’—

DEVLIN: ‘The liquor must.’ *Pause.* I always knew you loved me.

REBECCA: Why?

DEVLIN: Because we like the same tunes. (69)

Rebecca's understanding of "ashes to ashes" has nothing to do with Devlin's. To Rebecca, obsessed by genocidal imagery, these ashes are the ashes of the Jews. To Devlin they are simply the cue for a popular (and also misogynist) song, worthy of no more thought than one gives to any cliché.

What Devlin does not realize is that the more authority he asserts, the more he compels Rebecca to resist his aggression, and she does that by identifying with and empathizing with oppressed people. Thus their relationship becomes "an allegory of global violence and world politics as Rebecca denies the attempted tyranny and masochism of Devlin in favour of empathetic suffering with the victims of such tyranny" (Baldwin 57). Rebecca declines to kiss Devlin's fist at the end of the play, and while some critics see this as her triumph, the fact that the play ends in silence has led others to say that she loses the battle against authority and becomes "a dissident voice ultimately stilled" (Kane 58). Pinter described Rebecca as "a drowning woman... a lost figure in a drowning landscape, a woman unable to escape the doom that seemed to belong only to others. But as they died, she must die too" (Yenigul 67). It is not clear what happens to her at the end of the play, whether she dies or not, since the play ends with a "long silence". However, before the silence, Rebecca once again reminds us of a lost child, the separation of mothers from their children during the Holocaust, and she warns that if the responsibility for what happened in the past is denied, then what has already happened may be repeated in the future.

Although Rebecca has not experienced any atrocities herself, her story about "mental elephantiasis" suggests that she takes responsibility for them. Through this story she "tries to explain how the acceptance of little bits of evil in the community can metastasize into something virulent and engulfing – 'mental elephantiasis'" (Yenigul 66): "...when you spill an ounce of gravy it immediately expands and becomes a vast sea of gravy which surrounds you on all sides and you suffocate in a voluminous sea of gravy...it's all your own fault. You brought it upon yourself. You are not the victim of it, you are the cause of it. Because it was you who spilt the gravy in the first place, it was you who handed over the bundle" (417). Rebecca's acknowledgement that "it's all your own fault" if you "spill an ounce of gravy" or literally "accept a little bit of evil" suggests that she recognizes that history is a result of human agency, and that turning a blind eye to evil acts such as separating mothers from their children can lead to a repetition of a catastrophe such as the Holocaust.

Obviously, Rebecca cannot distance herself from the victims of the Holocaust, and although she is temporally and spatially separated from them, she can empathize and be close to them thanks to her imagination. Rebecca "tells her stories as a way to test her own moral-imaginative capacity to apprehend history in the present" (Kane 51). Pinter himself said that "intellectual understanding exists alongside emotive or intuitive knowledge" (Kane 51), and Rebecca is capable of both, while Devlin is not. "Pinter uses the character of Devlin, who is apparently a scholar or professor, to introduce one perspective on the theme of knowledge: 'You understand why I'm asking you these questions. Don't you? Put yourself in my place. I'm compelled to ask you questions. There are so many things I don't know. I know nothing...about any of this. Nothing. I'm in the dark. I need light. Or do you think my questions are illegitimate?'" (11). Here the clear knowledge Devlin hopes for, enlightenment in the traditional sense, equates to light and ignorance to darkness"

(Kane 51). Therefore, Devlin is “voicing rational curiosity about Rebecca’s stories” (Kane 51) and cannot relate to them or to their characters in the same way that Rebecca can – emotionally and intuitively. In addition, Devlin cannot connect with Rebecca in any other way except by becoming her “torturer, apparently attempting to suffocate her”. Thus, his “dogmatism and his pursuit of ‘facts’ and ‘truth’ are linked to his psychological and physical brutality” (Raby 290).

While Devlin identifies with the lover because he is jealous of him, and admires his authoritativeness, Rebecca identifies with the woman to reveal her shame. Moreover, Rebecca herself feels shame and shows empathy towards this woman as well as towards all the women who lost their children during the Holocaust. Although she never says that she is ashamed and grieved, this can be easily concluded from the overall tone of her stories and the play as a whole – especially the ending, which is “a poetic refrain of maternal loss and grief” (Baldwin 38). Rebecca has recognized that both the woman she identifies with and she herself are being betrayed by their lovers/husbands – in their relationships they both lack love, compassion and understanding – and that they are doomed to either personal betrayal (which happens to the former when she denies abandoning the baby) or death (which probably happens to the latter). Thus, in Pinter’s plays, women are threatened, especially by their authoritarian and jealous husbands, with the loss of their children and with suffocation (of their voices) – as was also the case with Shakespeare’s Hermione.

Although Pinter’s female characters are often deemed ambiguous, especially Rebecca from *Ashes to Ashes*, the comparisons of these women with their male counterparts show that the women are the ones Pinter sides with. Baldwin adds that “this view of the ‘feminine’ as being carers and nurturers is certainly a stereotypical one, but it may explain why Pinter chooses to have a woman as the centre to this play’s action, as a bodily carrier of world history, atoning for the man’s sins” (37). Rebecca recognizes that the Holocaust and the atrocities which happened during it are rooted in the authoritarian personalities of which the Nazi lover and her husband are perfect examples. They represent the power and tyranny of which many people were (and still are) victims, as is shown by Rebecca’s example; not only by empathetically identifying with the Holocaust victims, but also by being tyrannized by Devlin, she also becomes an innocent victim. In addition, she is also a guilty survivor, since she assumes the guilt of a woman who gives a baby to the Nazis and then denies doing it. Moreover, she feels guilty and responsible not only for what this woman did, but also for what the above-mentioned men (who simultaneously have “a rigid sense of duty” and “don’t give a shit”) did, and still do, i.e. avoid taking responsibility for their actions.

Baldwin recognizes that “the guilt Rebecca feels is the kind of ethical response Pinter suggests is lacking in citizens of democracy” (35). Pinter claims that *Ashes to Ashes* is a play about “us”, and “our conception of our past and our history, and what it does to us in the present” (Pinter 66). He “implies in *Ashes to Ashes* that failing to articulate any ethical response to events in history must force us to ‘acknowledge’ our part in these events; we are implicated in all the crimes against humanity committed in the past since they are still being committed today” (Baldwin 28–29). Pinter also recognizes that the reasons for these “crimes against humanity” today lie in the indifference of the citizens of democratic countries towards the atrocities happening in the world. Rebecca possesses “the ability

to identify with the victims of atrocity”, which “redeems her as a guilty perpetrator” (Baldwin 38). Her refusal to “evade responsibility embodies Pinter’s suggestion that it is only by taking on the implications of a shared, social sense of subjectivity, that any kind of effective resistance may be envisaged” (Baldwin 36).

Conclusion

In *The Winter’s Tale*, Shakespeare shows that love is betrayed by a jealous and insecure man, whose ‘madness’ or jealousy and revenge directed against his beloved woman brings about tragic events. The male protagonist loses trust in his wife because he is an over-protective patriarch, led by cold intellect and concern for honor; when he starts suspecting his wife’s chastity, he splits her into a chaste woman, on the one hand, and a whore, on the other, and he rejects and kills her. Leontes is concerned about his public image; this is the reason why he is very much susceptible to believing that his wife is capable of deceiving and dishonoring him. The fact that Leontes first unfairly and wrongfully accuses his wife, and treats her brutally, but in the end repents for his actions, means that he is a hero with a tragic error or *hamartia* and is also capable of *anagnorisis*. Leontes is given the opportunity to be redeemed. The miraculous return of Leontes’ wife Hermione and the return of his lost daughter Perdita to Leontes’ court bring happiness and life, as opposed to the misery and death which was caused by their expulsion from the court.

The betrayal, misrepresentation and mistreatment of women also represent a common practice of men in Harold Pinter’s *Ashes to Ashes*. When Rebecca assumes the identity of a woman who survived the Holocaust, Pinter has her do that not only to reveal this woman’s mistake and her betrayal of the ‘female’, but also to reveal her own growing awareness of the society she lives in, the society of husbands and lovers who at the same time have a “rigid sense of duty” and “do not give a shit”, who are at the same time dutiful to God, Hitler, etc., and yet who do not take responsibility for their actions – such as, in the worst case, the killings in the name of that same God or Hitler. The play references a follower of Hitler, a Nazi officer/official who both on a private and public level shows a lack of human kindness: in private he grips his lover’s neck and makes her kiss his fist, and in public he tears babies from the arms of screaming mothers. His lover, the woman who admires him and is dependent on him, is unable to save her dignity in his presence: at the beginning of the play she kisses his fist, and at the end she gives him a baby she was supposed to save. Another person who admires this Nazi soldier’s authority is Rebecca’s husband Devlin, who even becomes jealous of him when he misunderstands Rebecca and thinks that the soldier was or is her lover. During the play, he feels that he is losing authority over what Rebecca is saying, and that his own words do not have any authority and significance for Rebecca, so he tries to regain some kind of authority by gripping Rebecca’s neck and asking her to kiss his fist. Therefore, with every attempt to contradict Rebecca, and even display some power over her, he betrays what she represents, or her purpose in the play; this is a criticism of the misuse of power and the betrayal of the female.

Both Shakespeare and Pinter recognize that the cause of wars and dire events, both in the Renaissance and in the modern world, is the betrayal of love and life. However, while Shakespeare includes and describes in his plays (especially romances) alternatives to wars,

destructive powers, and chaos – such as the love, happiness, and cosmic order which are restored at the end of *The Winter's Tale*, Pinter leaves it up to the audience to imagine the alternatives for themselves. *Ashes to Ashes* thus reminds us only of the first half of *The Winter's Tale* – the prevailing feeling is that of jealousy, betrayal and loss; the prevailing imagery is that of mothers losing their children; and the prevailing season is winter. The happy resolution that happens in *The Winter's Tale* is not offered to Pinter's audience; however, there is a possibility to imagine it and hope for it.

Finally, both Shakespeare and Pinter show that the private and the public are connected, that “whether human beings treat one another as equals on the private level may be equally important for survival on all levels” (Prentice 305). In *The Winter's Tale* and *Ashes to Ashes*, men are equally destructive both in private and public: their public image, the image created by the role they have in the patriarchal society, dictates how they will behave towards their wives, and their behavior is destructive. In *Ashes to Ashes*, Pinter clearly points out that “to attempt to dominate another person [e.g. a man's attempt to dominate a woman] is not perhaps, finally, so different from trying to dominate another nation [or race], the results are similarly destructive” (Prentice 305). Baldwin claims that in Pinter's plays the battle between men and women is not just personal, but that “it is symptomatic of the broader power struggle between men (as representatives of the patriarchy) and women represented as ‘Other’ than Man” (Baldwin 2). Both Pinter and Shakespeare seem to notice that as long as men, as the representatives of the patriarchy, refuse to acknowledge the ‘female’ as something not ‘other’ than themselves, but as a very important part of their psycho-biological make-up, there will be betrayal of the values the female is generally associated with: the totality of one's being, peace, creativity, love, life.

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