

# Feminine Melancholia in Harold Pinter's *Ashes to Ashes*

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**Abstract**—Harold Pinter's *Ashes to Ashes* (1996) addresses different notions such as gender, politics, masculinity and language. Julia Kristeva's theory of melancholia and depression, as one of the most important psychological theories, strives to elaborate the condition of melancholic subject. She remarks that the melancholic subject, unable to share her / his melancholia with others, suffers from an unsigned sense of loss which causes her / his psyche to be wounded. *Ashes to Ashes* explores the melancholic condition of the female protagonist who suffers from an unsigned sense of loss. This study is an attempt to trace the signs of melancholia — regarding Kristeva's theory of melancholia — which reveal through Rebecca's fragmented dialogues, dream-like memories and tense monologues.

**Index Terms**—Harold Pinter, *Ashes to Ashes*, Julia Kristeva, the melancholic subject, loss, language

## I. INTRODUCTION

Widespread interest in Julia Kristeva, a professor of linguistics, stems from her concerns with different disciplines such as linguistics, psychology, feminism and politics. Kristeva is a prolific writer and a complex thinker whose theory of melancholia and depression has won her lasting fame among psychoanalytic theorists. Her psychoanalysis proposes a loss theory of melancholia in the tradition of Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia". The significance of Kristeva's theory lies in making a connection between melancholia and the lost mother (other). She asserts that the early separation of the infant from the mother results in a sadness of depression with a mourning for the lost mother. Moreover, Kristeva adapts Freud's theory of death wish to formulate the notion of a kind of depression that is narcissistic. Thus, melancholia, Kristeva claims, is a form of mourning for the lost mother as well as for the lost self. In Harold Pinter's *Ashes to Ashes*, the female protagonist suffers from an unsigned sense of loss which has caused her psychological collapse. This mental instability is recognizable through her fragmented dialogues, dream-like memories and tense monologues. The very sense of loss from which she suffers has rendered her melancholic ego wounded and has reduced her to a living dead as far as it places her in the state of seemingly enduring hallucination at the end of the play. Therefore, the protagonist is left in her depression without any suggestive resolution which may spread the melancholic condition of the play to the readers.

To project the development of an infant from a non-differentiated to a speaking subject, Kristeva makes a distinction between "the semiotic" and "the symbolic". The semiotic, in Kristeva's words, goes back to "the pre-linguistic states of childhood" in which the child "babbles the sounds s/he hears, or where s/he articulates rhythms, alliterations, or stresses" (Rice and Waugh, 1989, p.129). The child's imitation of the rhythm of her parents' speech distinguishes this stage as a kind of "extra-verbal" in which "bodily energy and affects make their way into language" (McAfee, 2004, p.17). But the semiotic, including both the subject's drives and articulation, is not subject to the rules of syntax. The concept of the semiotic, Kristeva proposes, is "asymbolic" in which "cries, laughter, sound and touch and gesture indicate ... a pre-symbolic dimension" that lacks "the defining structure, coherence and spatial fixity" (Becker-Leckrone, 2005, p.28). Thus, there is no meaning in the linguistic sense in the semiotic. In the semiotic stage the so-called symbiotic interaction between mother and child sets up a psychic space which Kristeva calls "the semiotic chora".

Discrete quantities of energy move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such and, in the course of his development, they are arranged according to the various constraints imposed on this body – always already involved in a semiotic process – by family and social structures. In this way the drives, which are "energy" charges as well as "psychical" marks, articulate what we call a *chora*: a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated. (Kristeva, 1998, p.453)

The concept of chora signifies this semiotic relationship to maternal space. In this psychic space, all the child's needs are satisfied without any delay, there is not yet any differentiation between the child and the mother or surroundings; through this imaginary union, the child identifies herself / himself with her mother as one object.

In the symbolic, where the speaking being acquires language, the separation of the child from her mother takes place. Entering the symbolic is accompanied with a lifelong sense of loss. The child undergoes this sense of loss before the ability to articulate and name it; therefore, later in life, as a result of trauma, she falls down into a deep depression

making her apathetic and reticent. The occurrence of loss in the primary process — chora — brings about narcissistic depression.

The child king becomes irredeemably sad before uttering his first words; this is because he has been irrevocably, desperately separated from the mother, a loss that causes him to try to find her again, along with other objects of love, first in imagination, then in words. (Kristeva, 1989, p.6)

Therefore, from Kristeva's standpoint, the symbolic depends on "language as a sign system complete with its grammar and syntax" (McAfee, 2004, p.17). The symbolic stage for Kristeva means "orderly communication"; the use of normal rules of "syntax and semantics" to carry meaning which results in losing the mother (ibid. P.22). Therefore, the symbolic order is necessary in getting a unified subjectivity; to resist entering the symbolic order results in disjointed subjectivity.

The early ego lacks cohesion, and a tendency towards integration alternates with a tendency towards disintegration, a falling into bits... the anxiety of being destroyed from within remains active. It seems to me in keeping with the lack of cohesiveness that under the pressure of this threat the ego tends to fall into pieces. (Kristeva, 1989, p.19)

In Kristeva's view melancholia results from denial of separation from the mother — a denial of the "matricide" which is our vital necessity to gain individuation: "For man and for woman the loss of the mother is a biological and psychic necessity, the first step on the way to becoming autonomous. Matricide is our vital necessity" (ibid. p.27).

In *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, Kristeva strives to analyze some poets and novelists such as Nerval, Duras and Dostoyevsky in terms of melancholic representation in language. She suggests that the melancholic "sadness would be rather the most archaic expression of an unsymbolizable, unnamable narcissistic wound, so precocious that no outside agent (subject or agent) can be used as referent" (ibid. p.12). Then, the loss would never be an object for the depressed narcissist, but an unnamable *thing*: "The depressed narcissist mourns not an Object but the Thing ... [and] the 'Thing' ... does not lend itself to signification ... [it is] a light without representation: the Thing is an imagined sun, bright and black at the same time" (ibid. p.13).

The child mourns for the lost mother; the depressed feels incomplete and empty since s/he has internalized this sense of loss. As the child has lost her / his mother before acquiring the ability to use language, later in life s / he encounters difficulty in using language. Kristeva believes that the language of melancholia is the dead language: "the depressed speak of nothing, they have nothing to speak of: glued to the Thing, they are without objects. The total and unsignifiable Thing is insignificant — it is a mere Nothing, their Nothing, Death" (ibid. p.51).

Kristeva establishes a mutual relation between artistic creativity and melancholia; in her view melancholia, on the one hand, is a source of literary creation; and on the other hand, works of art are able to provide a sublimatory means in overcoming melancholia.

Literary creation is that adventure of the body and signs that bears witness to the affect — to sadness as imprint of separation and beginning of the symbol's sway; to joy as imprint [*marque*] of the triumph that settles me in the universe of artifice and symbol, which I try to harmonize in the best possible way with my experience of reality. (as cited in Oliver and Keltner, 2009, p.146)

Storytelling is the one means that can be used by the melancholic subject, caught in a death embrace, to master or minimize the pain of loss and abandonment. The artistic creation should produce sublimation; otherwise, like Duras', it spreads its suffering and infects the readers. This lack of catharsis and resolution, Kristeva claims, "produce[s] an eerie depressive silence", then it should be kept away from sensitive readers (ibid. p.151).

## II. DISCUSSION

Harold Pinter (1930-2008), Noble Prize-winning English playwright, screenwriter, director and actor, is the product of a post-war generation whose gift in evoking the dead voice within silence has made him one of the most influential dramatists of "the theater of the absurd". His plays are mostly noted for their use of verbal minimalism, understatement, reticence, elliptical language and even silence to expose the hidden emotions and veiled motivations of characters, which often lie several layers beneath their speech. His style is distinctive in its "mixture of the real and the surreal, its exact portrayal of life on the surface, and its powerful evocation of that life which lies beneath the surface" (Burkman, 1971, pp.3-4). The mysterious atmosphere in Pinter's plays, the unnamed terror which threatens his heroes, dialogues full of banality and existential absurdity without any ultimate resolution almost always keep the audience in a state of puzzlement (ibid. pp.4-6).

Although Harold Pinter's artistic endeavor has been labeled as absurd, mysterious and enigmatic, he mostly deals with mental landscapes to explore man's existential alienation in a world deplete with violence and oppression. His emphasis is not on "existential defiance (demonstrating the human capacity to redefine and renew one's self on one's own terms) but on existential *nausea* (demonstrating the often fatal vulnerability of the individual's own terms under pressure of repression from without and regression from within)" (Rabey, 1940, p.53). Therefore, most of his plays end in the "virtual annihilation of an individual" who wriggles for existence (Cohn, 1962, p.55). Defenseless victims emerge from a vague past to go to their unavoidable destruction. Defeated in search of self-expression, characters mostly enclose themselves in a dark and womb-like world which is the indicator of man's desperate attempt to survive.

[Pinter's world] is a picture of contemporary man beaten down by the social forces around him. It is a picture of man without identity and without individuality, of man crushed into a rigid social mold. It is a horrifying picture of

contemporary life. It is a picture of the powerlessness of modern man, and the plays are frightening. It is a picture of the absurdity of the human condition in our world, and the plays are comic. But beneath the laughter and overpowering the laughter, there is a cry of despair from a well of human hopelessness (Dukor, 1962, p.54)

Dealing with such a grave matter as human suffering has made his drama so obscure and challenging to the extent that "each piece of knowledge is a half-knowledge, [and] each answer a springboard to new questions" (ibid. p.44). The meanings of his plays largely depend on what is not said but is implied from the tense and cryptical dialogues, which make the border line between truth and falsity blurred. In his noble prize lecture, Pinter declares that:

Truth in drama is forever elusive. You never quite find it but the search for it is compulsive. The search is clearly what drives the endeavour. The search is your task. More often than not you stumble upon the truth in the dark, colliding with it or just glimpsing an image or a shape which seems to correspond to the truth, often without realizing that you have done so. But the real truth is that there never is any such thing as one truth to be found in dramatic art (2006, p.811).

Thus, the provoking ambiguity and polysemy of his plays perplex the readers in directing them to every possible meaning and simultaneously to nothing. In fact, the significance of Pinter's plays lies in their capacity "to resist large-scale generalization ... [or] any existing theory about the nature of society, personality, culture, spirituality, anthropology, history or anything else of similar scope" (Quigley, 2009, p.7). As Christopher Innes notes, Pinter's plays are "variations on the subjects of dominance, control, exploitation, subjugation and victimization. They are models of power structures" (as cited in Coppa, 2009, p.43). Martin Esslin asserts that "recurring figures of terrorists, torturers, and executioners" are located at the centre of Pinter's work, making him a playwright who has a particular resonance for the modern age, an era of mass destruction (Lukhurst, 2006, p.359). Therefore, violence is the permanent theme of his plays: "Violence has always been in my plays, from the very beginning [...] We are brought up every day of our lives in this world of violence" (as cited in ibid.).

Pinter is mostly compared with Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco, as the English exponent of what Martin Esslin termed "the theater of the absurd". Harold Bloom calls Pinter the legitimate son of Samuel Beckett: "Aesthetically considered, the shadow of the object that falls upon Pinter's authorial ego is Beckett, who is for Pinter very much the ego ideal" (Bloom, 2005, p.268). But unlike Beckett's works in which man is explored in relation to a world devoid of meaning, Pinter's plays center largely on man "without reference to the spiritual void" (Scott, 1986, p.11). He tries to express man in his fear, joy, humor, stupidity and ambition. In this respect, Pinter is mostly associated with Ionesco where the themes of "menace, fear, the clutter of daily living, the concentration on trivial possessions, the focus on the banality of language" form a common denominator between these two dramatists (ibid.).

Harold Pinter's great achievement is based upon his special use of language. Language is one of the most contested preoccupations of critics regarding Pinter's plays; "I'm Pretty well obsessed with words when they get going", Pinter claims (as cited in Kennedy, 1986, p.61). Known as "verbal marksman", Pinter pitch "telling phrases with deadly accuracy" to produce a language loaded with potential energies (Cohn, 1995, p.58). The words on the page are the artistic means of Harold Pinter to compel the reader to follow them in search of meaning. But words gain an almost "hypnotic hold on ear or mind [of readers], even though they do not inform [and] have no emotional charge..." (Kennedy, 1986, p.62). Many critics have discussed the absurdity and irrationality of Pinter's language; the terms such as "Pinterish" or "Pinteresque", Ronald Hayman states, denote the irrationality of everyday conversation, its "bad syntax, tautologies, pleonasm, repetitions, *non sequiturs* and self-contradictions" (ibid. p.63). J. H. Hollis declares that Pinter "employs language to describe the failure of language; he details in forms abundant the poverty of man's communication; he assembles words to remind us that we live in the space between words" (as cited in Silverstein, 1989, p.1). Such usage of language reveals the essential apartness of man from man. Thus, Pinter mostly utilizes language for purposes other than expression or informativity, and instead of communication, language becomes a means of alienation. This hyperrealistic quality of Pinter's language draws attention to the language itself rather than the message it conveys.

Silence and pause as integral parts in Pinter's plays demonstrate his interest in "the spatial and visual" dimension of the play as much as in the text (Scott, 1986, p.14). The dominance of silence and pause in Pinter's plays are as important as tense dialogue since they are pregnant with strong unstated feelings. Pinter believes that "the more intense the feeling, the less articulate its expression" (as cited in Cohn, 1995, p.63); thus, Pinter's silences are organized, "lengthening from comma and dash, to period, to three dots, to *Pause*, and to relatively rare *Silence* and even rarer *Long silence*" (ibid.). All these three signs — three dots (a pressure point), the pause (a moment of non-verbal tension), the silence (extreme crisis point) — indicate moments of turbulence and crisis (Hall, 2009, p.163). Therefore, the use of silence and pauses gives his dramatic speech an emotional power to the extent that "the unsaid becomes sometimes more terrifying and more eloquent than the said" (ibid.).

However, on the arrival of his first major play *The Birthday Party* (1958), Harold Hobson, the influential critic of the *Sunday Times*, proclaims "that Mr. Pinter, on the evidence of this work, possesses the most original, disturbing, and arresting talent in theatrical London" (as cited in Scott, 1986, p.10).

Pinter's latest play, *Ashes to Ashes* (1996), based on verbal minimalism, tries to rouse the voices of the dead recurrent in the comedies of menace of the 1960s. The play interweaves political and personal concerns to fully explore the suffering of man from terrible self-alienation. The dialogues goes from one image to another without any explicit connection between them which makes the play surreal and thereby more ambiguous. However, as the play progresses

and more images are added, new horizons and perspectives are opened to readers. In their conversations, Devlin and Rebecca allude to unnamed violence which remains a mystery to readers toward the end of the play. Through the recall of Rebecca's memory, the readers perceive that Rebecca has been subjected to an unspecified atrocity. Although the text exhausts the interpretation of Rebecca's story as the Jewish Holocaust story, there is no explicit reference to World War II. On the other hand, the time of the play determined as "Now", i.e. 1996 precludes any possibility of experiencing the Holocaust genocide. Performed in a house in the country, this unknown terror can be taken into the realm of domesticity in which the struggle for domination and individual emotional needs center on male / female relationship. Moreover, Silverstein believes that the focus of the play is on the "mechanisms of domination and marginalization, the social construction of gender and sexuality, and the ideological status of such 'state apparatus' as the family" (as cited in Baldwin, 2009, p.27). Then, Pinter knits tightly political atrocity with domestic brutality in which masculine power is trying to silence the feminine other. This atrocity reduces the female protagonist to a melancholic subject and a lost figure that at the end is left in a constant state of hallucination.

For Pinter, *Ashes to Ashes* brings to mind an image of a drowning woman in the ashes of a past trauma who tries to claw at a helping hand, but no one is there:

*Ashes to Ashes* [...] seems to me to be taking place under water. A drowning woman, her hand reaching up through the waves, dropping down out of sight, reaching for others, but finding nobody there, either above or under the water, finding only shadows, reflections, floating; the 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 (2006, p.813).

The one-act play opens with Rebecca and Devlin, described as "*Both in their forties*", talking of mysterious and dream-like experiences (1). The focus of the scenario from the start is on a man's hands trying to suffocate the female protagonist.

REBECCA Well ... for example ... he would stand over me and clench his fist. And then he'd put his other hand on my neck and grip it and bring my head towards him. His fist ... grazed my mouth. And he'd say, 'Kiss my fist' (3).

Rebecca responds to questions of an interlocutor, Devlin, who enacts as a psychotherapist trying to elicit the cause of Rebecca's terrible sadness. This graphic opening image suggests the display of male brutality dominant in the binary of the male/female relation. Rebecca narrates how she kisses the man's fist and then the palm of his opened hand: "Oh yes. I kissed his fist. The knuckles. And then he'd open his hand and give me the palm of his hand ... to kiss ... which I kissed" (3). This power-erotic image conveys, on the one hand, the brutality of the man and on the other, discloses Rebecca's desire for compassion. As she continues:

REBECCA I said, "Put your hand round my throat." I murmured it through his hand, as I was kissing it, but he heard my voice, he heard it through his hand, he felt my voice in his hand, he heard it there.

*Silence*

DEVLIN And did he? Did he put his hand round your throat?

REBECCA Oh yes. He did. He did. And he held it there, very gently, very gently, so gently. He adored me, you see. (3-5)

The readers are baffled by these opposing images; the first image is informed by the savagery of a man who tries to strangle her, but instead of struggling and resistance, Rebecca requests his hand to be put around her throat and finds the same clenched fist "very gentle". This almost opposing force of violence and love tacitly informs the reader of the lack of love and longing for compassion on the part of Rebecca. Of course, throughout the play, Rebecca's ex-lover remains a physical absence; thereby, his very existence outside of Rebecca's mind is often questioned. In fact, the whole play is the conversation between two persons about a third, but an absent figure. Whether it is illusory or real is indeterminate, but what is significant is the effect of this lover-torturer on Rebecca's mind. On the other hand, the interrogatory position of Devlin determined in the stage direction reaffirms the dominance / subservient relationships: "*Devlin standing with drink. Rebecca sitting*" (3). The names are also suggestive; the name of Devlin is anagram of *devil* signifying "fierceness", the man who tries to delve into Rebecca's dark past by rummaging around her psyche, while Rebecca's name is biblical means "healer" (Prentice, 2000, p.371). The names, thus, form a binary opposition in which the empowered and the victimized are identifiable. The more Rebecca explains, the more it becomes ambiguous and critical until the end of the play that Devlin repeats the opening gestures which are shocking to the spectators. Devlin clenches his fist and asks Rebecca to kiss his fist, but she remains still while he is commanding her: "Speak. Say it. Say 'Put your hand round my throat'" (75). This almost the same opening and closing scene act as "metaphorical, offering an image of dramatic power that can be understood as a metonymy of the more general meditation of power in society" (Milne, 2009, p.245). The beginning and end of the play with almost the same image reinforces the presence of violence and masculine power that place Rebecca in a state of "*Long silence*", a symptom of depression, at the end of the play. The phantom figure, physically absent but mentally present, can stand for masculinity that puts Rebecca in a state of an ambivalent feeling. This sadomasochist memory of clenched fist represents the force of masculine power and implicitly acknowledges the repressive ideological form of violence exercised by "a Symbolic Father" to bind the subjects to the Law (Silverstein, 2004, pp.22-23). Therefore, the phantom figure as a Symbolic Father embodies the patriarchal force at work in the society. The incarnation of the phantom figure in Devlin at the end takes the patriarchal repression to the domestic realm by which Pinter makes a parallel between social and domestic domination.

Moreover, the wail of the police siren as the reminder of patriarchal force, breaking the peace and tranquility, makes Rebecca "terribly insecure" (31). This disturbing moment is marked by Devlin's remark that "you'll never be without a police siren" (33). By making such a promise, Devlin guarantees that Rebecca will always be under patriarchal power. The masculinity for which the siren metonymically stands, Silverstein asserts, functions as "Rebecca's *objet petit a*", Lacan's term for the object that promises (but fails to deliver) the plenitude freeing us from lacks" (Silverstein, 2004, pp.22). On the other hand, Rebecca is frightened to lose it, as if her subjectivity is melting away within the siren's fading echo: "I hate it fading away. I hate it echoing away. I hate it leaving me. I hate losing it. I hate somebody else possessing it. I want it to be mine, all the time. It's such a beautiful sound" (31). Since the subjectivity of the speaking being is acquired through breaking into the symbolic order, characterized by the Name of the Father, Rebecca is frightened to lose it even though it makes her feel insecure and disturbed. As Lacan clarifies the symbolic order is identified in "the *name of the father* that we must recognize the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of the law" (1998, p.186). Lacan classifies the symbolic order as the first and foremost stage in making subjectivity and selfhood. This stage constitutes one's most important experience of loss which haunts the rest of one's life. Therefore, entering the symbolic order — the world of language — equals entering a world of lack and loss (Tyson, 2006, pp.28-30). The siren sound metonymically stands for the symbolic order that is recognizable with the Name of the Father and in its turn is the epitome of masculinity and dominance and contributes to the production of female melancholia. As Rebecca continues, the police siren as a patriarchal power gains a universal extension.

REBECCA ... It just hit me so hard. You see... as the siren faded away in my ears I knew it was becoming louder and louder for someone else.

DEVLIN You mean that it's always being heard by somebody, somewhere? Is that what you're saying?

REBECCA Yes. Always. Forever. (29-31)

But Devlin's reaction to the police siren is in drastic opposition to Rebecca's. It shows that, in spite of their closeness, they dwell in totally distinct inner worlds. Devlin finds the sound secure and necessary for order. But the subjection of women to the patriarchal symbolic order, Kristeva claims, leaves women in the state of "oceanic void" where they feel pain and empty: "In the midst of its lethal ocean, the melancholy woman is the dead one that has always been abandoned ..." (1989, pp.29-30). This idea is reinforced by Rebecca's statement about the police forces tearing the babies from their mothers' arms: "... [they] tear all the babies from the arms of their screaming mothers" (27).

In response to Devlin's further inquiries about her fascist-like lover, Rebecca tells Devlin that the unknown man works as a "guide" for a "travel agency" (19). She goes on to ask, "Did I ever tell you about that place... about the time he took me to that place?" Unexpectedly, this place turns out to be "a kind of factory" occupied by his "workpeople" who "respected his ... purity, his ... conviction" (23-25). But then she tells Devlin, "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" (27). She goes from one image to another in a way that is confusing; the readers cannot make a clear understanding of Rebecca's memory about the man's occupation or his actual existence. After a "Silence", Rebecca changes the subject with: "By the way, I'm terribly upset" (27). This abrupt shift after a silence makes readers aware of Rebecca's disjointed and inarticulate psyche resulting from a repressed sense of deprivation. It demonstrates that the presence of male physical violence has reduced Rebecca to a sufferer and caused her melancholic ego to be wounded. She confesses to Devlin that "I'm terribly upset" without mentioning any absolute cause; as is the case with melancholia, there is no clear cause. Kristeva describes melancholia as "an abyssal suffering that does not succeed in signifying itself and, having lost meaning, loses life" (1989, p.89). Kristeva suggests that the melancholic being is unable to signify the pain of loss because it cannot be adjusted to the signs; it "does not lend itself to signification", since it is unconscious (ibid. p.13).

Since the protagonist is a woman, her experience of language is even more complex. Kristeva believes women experience language "as something secondary, cold, foreign to their lives ... as if language were a foreign body" (Rice and Waugh, 1989, p.131). They attempt to escape the "logical communication" (determined by the Father Figure) to a sort of mystical state, "an archaic experience", in which the delight of the maternal body (semiotic chora) is experienced (ibid.). "The semiotic forms within language is repressed, thrown into confusion, and the fact of not hearing it, of not giving it room, exposes us to depression, to a feeling of strangeness" (ibid.). Rebecca's inability to form a meaningful and coherent communication with Devlin demonstrates another symptom of the melancholic condition. In fact, no real communication takes place as if Rebecca was talking through an alienated language. Rebecca constantly interrupts the consistency of conversation by using phrases such as "oh yes, there is something I've forgotten to tell you," "there is something I'm dying to tell you" or "don't you want to know why? Well, I'm going to tell you anyhow". As Martin Esslin states Pinter's language enacts "the complete contradiction between the words that are spoken and the emotional and psychological action which underlies them ... the language has almost totally lost its rhetorical, its informative elements" (as cited in Silverstein, 1989, p.2). Rebecca's inability to explain her thoughts, feelings and emotions leads to misunderstanding and repetition of the same questions and answers which Ramos calls the "what-do-you-mean syndrome" (1998, p.90).

REBECCA Oh by the way somebody told me the other day that there is a condition known as mental elephantiasis.

DEVLIN What do you mean, 'somebody told you'? What do you mean, 'the other day'? What are you talking about? (49).

While Devlin insists on talking about that man, Rebecca evades and makes strange transitions; she shifts into an unrelated topic such as her statement about her pen rolling off "onto the carpet" (35). In some parts Rebecca just repeats the words of Devlin which leads to no meaning. When Devlin asks her "Do you feel you're being hypnotized?" (7) Rebecca gives irrelevant answers that ultimately end in Devlin's humiliation:

REBECCA I think you are a fuckpig.

DEVLIN Me a fuckpig? Me! You must be joking.

*Rebecca smiles*

REBECCA Me joking? You must be joking (9-11).

Devlin asks Rebecca to define the man but she cannot understand his meaning: "Define him? What do you mean, define him?" which again by shift of subject the question is left unanswered (11). While Devlin desperately tries to communicate to Rebecca, her answers are distant and disconnected. In fact, the pointlessness of Rebecca's statement is the point of the play. Kristeva declares that melancholia is "an abyss of sorrow, a *noncommunicable grief* ... to the extent of having us lose all interest in words, actions and even life itself" (italics added, 1989, p.3). Throughout the play, Rebecca repeats Devlin's words and phrases or talks of irrelevant topics that signify her anguished psyche. Rebecca resists rationalization in her conversation and all these passages expose the fact that language has become an alien skin for Rebecca who illustrates the "dead language" of a melancholic subject (ibid. p.53).

As the conversation progresses the already dead relationship between Devlin and Rebecca is more revealed; Devlin calls Rebecca "Darling" (15) but she protests and rejects being called darling by him:

REBECCA Oh yes, You called me darling. How funny.

DEVLIN Funny? Why?

REBECCA Well, how can you possibly call me darling? I'm not your darling.

DEVLIN Yes you are.

REBECCA Well I don't want to be your darling. *It's the last thing I want to be. I'm nobody's darling* (italics added, 15-17).

In a hostile tone Rebecca requests oblivion and renunciation. She seeks seclusion, as Kristeva states the traumatic events "thrust" the depressed one "into a state of withdrawal" (1989, p.133). By avoiding communication, Rebecca prefers isolation and remoteness; she wants to live in a womb-like environment where nobody can disturb her. Holding a "devitalized existence", the melancholic subject is ready at any moment for "a plunge into death"; "an avenging death or a liberating death..." (ibid. p.4). Rebecca goes a step further and desires for the end which is viewed as one of the most important signs of the melancholic condition.

REBECCA 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.

DEVLIN But we've never ended.

REBECCA Oh, we have. Again and again and again. And we can end again. And again and again. And again.

DEVLIN Aren't you misusing the word 'end'? End means end. You can't end 'again'. You can only end once.

REBECCA No. You can end once and then you can end again (67).

The melancholic subject recognizes the lost object not as an actual object but as "an internal object" with which the subject identifies (McAfee, 2004, p.60). The desire of death is regarded as a way of killing this internal object, a way to get rid of it. Then Rebecca begins to sing a funeral song to bury their already dead relation; Rebecca "*(singing softly)* 'Ashes to Ashes'—" and Devlin carries on "Dust to dust" (69). The song highlights the funerary association of the title; it is the ashes of a dead relation, a dead memory and a dead desire.

In order to diminish her pain of this dead relation, Rebecca takes refuge to the realm of dream, which according to Kristeva is closer to the chora. Devlin asks Rebecca why she has never told him about her ex-lover and says how he has "the right to be very angry indeed" to which Rebecca is oblivious; then, Devlin strives to draw her attention by repeating the same statement: "Do you realize that? I have the right to be angry indeed. Do you understand that?" (69–71). But after a "*Silence*" (71), instead of responding, Rebecca describes a very strange dream-like event, where she is standing at the top of a building and observes a man and a boy walking down the street, dragging big suitcases; then, she sees a woman with a child in her arms on an icy, star-lit night following them. By describing this lyrical maternal moment, Rebecca gradually brings to her conscious what she has suppressed long ago.

REBECCA ... I saw an old man and a little boy walking down the street. They were both dragging suitcases. The little boy's suitcase was bigger than he was. It was a very bright night. Because of the stars. The old man and the little boy were walking down the street. They were holding each other's free hand. I wondered where they were going. Anyway, i was about to close the curtains but then i suddenly saw a woman following them, carrying a baby in her arms.

*Pause.*

She stood still. She kisses her baby. The baby was a girl.

*Pause.*

She kisses her.

*Pause.*

She listens to the baby's heartbeat. The baby's heart was beating.

*The light in the room has darkened. The lamps are very bright.*

*Rebecca sits very still.*

The baby was breathing.

*Pause. (71-73)*

In her monologue, she shifts suddenly from the third-person "she" to the first-person "I", and Rebecca as a child is held in Rebecca's own arms: "I held her to me, she was breathing. Her heart was breathing" (73). Rebecca totally identifies herself with the image of a mother holding her child and sinks totally into her dream. According to the semiotic chora principles, being apart from the maternal embrace results in an unnamable narcissistic wound which in its turn leads to psychic instability. The risk of losing a woman's very identity is what Kristeva calls "feminine castration"; a woman risks losing herself when losing her mother (Oliver, 1993, p.54). This sense of self-loss is clear through Rebecca's oscillation between being a baby girl and a mother in her frenzied state at the end of the play. The closing scene of *Ashes to Ashes* adopts an echo effect of where "a disembodied voice repeats crucial words from Rebecca's speeches as if it were the ghost of an abandoned child speaking within her unconscious" (Cave, 2009, p.144). The last scene is the summit of the play; no punctuation in the last monologue indicates that time has been stopped and the female protagonist has drowned in her collapsed psyche as if she were never able to survive into reality. The awakened echoes of old trauma, which "are not repressed but constantly evoked", pushes Rebecca to a state of stagnation (Kristeva, 1989, p.46). These lyrical echoes seem as a lullaby to a lost child. In fact, the whole play is the process of anamnesis in which the suppressed trauma gradually emerges into Rebecca's consciousness even though she is in search of comfort to avoid the pain of her past trauma. This last monologue uncovers that Rebecca has probably lost her baby even though the readers are not sure of it.

REBECCA They took us to the trains

ECHO the trains

*He takes his hand from her throat.*

REBECCA They were taking the babies away

ECHO the babies away

*Pause.*

REBECCA I took my baby and wrapped it in my shawl

ECHO my shawl

REBECCA And I made it into a bundle

ECHO a bundle

REBECCA And I held it under my left arm

ECHO my left arm

*Pause.*

REBECCA And I went through with my baby

ECHO my baby

*Pause.*

REBECCA But the baby cried out

ECHO cried out

REBECCA And the man called me back

ECHO called me back

REBECCA And he said what do what do you have there

ECHO have there

REBECCA He stretched out his hand for the bundle

ECHO for the bundle

REBECCA And I gave him the bundle

ECHO the bundle

REBECCA And that's the last time I held the bundle

ECHO the bundle

*Silence.*

REBECCA And we got on the train

ECHO the train

REBECCA And we arrived at this place

ECHO this place

REBECCA And I met a woman I knew

ECHO I knew

REBECCA And she said what happened to your baby

ECHO your baby

REBECCA Where is your baby

ECHO your baby

REBECCA And I said what baby

ECHO what baby

REBECCA I don't have a baby  
 ECHO a baby  
 REBECCA I don't know of any baby  
 ECHO of any baby  
*Pause*  
 REBECCA I don't know of any baby  
*Long silence (75-85)*

These echoed words become the key words in bringing to light the repressed content which in an expressionistic way accompany the waning light of the setting. The setting leaves the audience in darkness that indicates the impossibility of enlightenment. Pinter writes "*The room darkens during the course of the play. The lamplight intensifies*". He insists on this contradiction: "*By the end of the play .... The lamplight has become very bright but does not illuminate the room*" (1). The ability of darkness to overcome light suggests that "darkness is not just an absence of light but an encroaching, positive force in itself, phenomenologically prior to light" (Grimes, 2004, p.51). The symbolism of light and darkness signifies the symbolic illustration of the victory of evil (darkness) over goodness (light); thereby, tacitly indicating the defeat of any relief from emotional distress.

The repetition of the final line: "I don't know of any baby" demonstrates the disjunction of Rebecca's psyche and her internal anxiety, and after a "*Long silence*" the play ends (83). This statement leaves the readers in a constant state of confusion; nothing is determined and every statement brings new questions; then, readers should decipher meanings because the "depressive speech avoids sentential *signification*; its *meaning* has not completely run dry" (Kristeva, 1989, p.55). Rebecca even stops her repetitive and monotonous speeches and plunges into a long silence; as Kristeva maintains:

They utter sentences that are interrupted, exhausted, come to stand still. Even phrases they cannot formulate. A repetitive rhythm, a monotonous melody emerges and dominates the broken logical sequences, changing them into recurring, obsessive litanies. Finally, when that frugal musicality becomes exhausted in its turn, or simply does not succeed in becoming established on account of the pressure of silence, the melancholy person appears to stop cognizing as well as uttering, sinking into the blankness as asymbolia or the excess on unorderable cognitive chaos. (ibid. p.33)

The "*Long silence*" plays both as signifier and signified. The dominance of silence and many pauses in the play reinforce the depressed ambiance of the play as the melancholic language "is monotonous and weighed down with silences" (ibid. p.55). The start of the play with silence also points out the crisis of representation and signification in the modern era. The melancholic subject cannot make sense because the language is a failed sign system; thus, in this mysterious, sinister and hypnotic journey, Rebecca terribly suffers from a non-determined sense of loss that results in her melancholy psychosis. Moreover, no solution or catharsis is offered at the end of the play; thereby, increasing the possibility of spreading melancholia to readers.

### III. CONCLUSION

As it is mentioned, the image of dramatic power and patriarchal violence in the play reduce Rebecca to a melancholic subject who takes refuge in her dream-like memories to alleviate the pain of her past loss. Kristeva maintains that the lost Thing, resisting language and meaning, is at the center of melancholia and Nervalian metaphor of "black sun", which refers to an intense affect escaping conscious articulation, is the best term in describing the unrepresentable "Thing" (1989, p.13). Rebecca's inability to put her melancholia into a sign system brings readers to the edge of depression, offering only a dismal and bleak psychic landscape, with no catharsis at the end. As Kristeva writes, "there is no purification in store for us at the conclusion of those novels written on the brink of illness, no promise of a beyond ... that might provide a bonus of pleasure in addition to the revealed evil" (ibid. pp.227-28). Therefore, Rebecca's inability to rise above her inner desolation results in her psychological collapse and further more in her "passion for death" which in its turn can transfer melancholia to the readers (ibid. p.221).

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