

Waiting for Mother: Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming* and *No Man's Land*

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Introduction

The main purpose of this paper is to elucidate the influence of absent mothers on their sons in *The Homecoming* (1965) and *No Man's Land* (1975). The anxieties of some male characters in these plays derive from the oscillation between their desire to acquire psychological independence from mothers and their reluctance to do it. Haunted by doubt on his legitimacy due to his suspicion of his mother's adultery, Lenny in *The Homecoming* is showing hatred towards her. At the same time, he is annoyed that he is not only unable to fulfill her desire but also is abandoned by her. Her absence makes Lenny oscillate perennially between affection and hatred, between his desire to stay in her domain and the intention of the independence from her. Although Hirst in *No Man's Land* makes few references to his mother and few arguments are offered with regard to the mother-son relationship in this play, by reading meticulously I would ascribe his predicament to his repressed anxiety about leaving his mother. Hirst's persistence to immutability can be interpreted as his persistence to his mother, and this is uncovered by Spooner, whom he has met in the pub. Since Spooner can be regarded as the embodiment of Hirst's repressed anxiety and desire, I would argue that Hirst invites Spooner in order to face and resolve his repressed anxiety, and that inability to resolve it leads to the repetition of such trauma.

1.

As has already been noticed, the overt influence of the absent mother on the sons is one of the clues to understand *The Homecoming*, which is considered to be Pinter's early masterpiece. For example, in "Mother and

Whore: The Role of Woman in *The Homecoming*” Anita R. Osherow regards Jessie, the mother of three sons Teddy, Lenny and Joey, as the most important figure of the play:

The family in *The Homecoming* is suffering from an important omission in the basic family unit because of the absence of the mother. However, Jessie, as has often been pointed out, remains the focal point of the play and has an enormous impact upon the family. (423-424)

Manabu Noda also places a great emphasis on the importance of Jessie’s role, in that her absence still persists in the centre of the structure of her family (113). Although Jessie has already died or somehow disappeared before the play begins, her shadowy presence still persists in the house, where Lenny, Joey and their father Max live. Returning home for the first time in several years, Teddy explains to his wife Ruth the reformation of the house:

Actually there was a wall, across there . . . with a door. We knocked it down . . . years ago . . . to make an open living area. The structure wasn’t affected, you see. My mother was dead. (29)

Mark Taylor Batty, referring to Teddy’s words “The structure wasn’t affected,” discusses that “Pinter fuses the exposed domestic interior of the stage space in front of us with Jessie, the absent character rendered ever-present in an internal adjustment of a domestic space” (87), and Varun Begley also focuses on the “familial” as well as “architectural” implications of the structure (65). Noda also points out the implication of the family in the words of the structure (107-108). Regarding absent Jessie as a signifier without a signified, Noda states that family members try in vain to fulfill such absence reiteratively and, in that sense, the structure wasn’t affected (124-125). Therefore, what Teddy tells Ruth (“The structure wasn’t affected, you see. My mother was dead”) can imply that “Although my mother was dead, the structure wasn’t affected.” Such persisting presence of the absent Jessie evokes a plight of her husband, because his doubt that she might have committed adultery can never be resolved. His claim that “I’ve never had a whore under this roof before. Ever since your mother died” (50) covertly implies that “Before your mother died, I had had a

whore under this roof, and that whore was your mother.” His doubt cast seeds of anxiety over his sons’ legitimacy, but he tries to overcome it by undertaking “the pain of childbirth” (55). However, since he assumes the role of cooking at home, his rhetoric does nothing but intensify his “maternal” image, hence the impairment of his masculinity. Bernard F. Dukore, in pointing out Max’s lack of virility, argues in “A Woman’s Place” that it is shown in the opening of the play, as Max inquires about scissors which is “an implement associated with women” (113). Osherow also pays attention to Max as “a mother-substitute,” then discusses that “Being a man yet acting as a woman has made Max devoid of any definable sexual identity” (424-425). Therefore, Jessie’s influence is powerful all the more because she is absent in this play.

2.

The anxiety over the doubtful legitimacy is also evoked in the mind of Lenny, and it is this anxiety that makes him wobble between repulsion towards his mother and desire to stay in her womb. He directly asks Max his background:

I’ve been meaning to ask you for some time. That night . . . you know . . . the night you got me . . . that night with Mum, what was it like? Eh? When I was just a glint in your eye. What was it like? What was the background to it? I mean, I want to know the real facts about my background. (44)

His wish to secure his own identity, however, is bound to remain unachieved by Jessie’s absence, because it is not Max but Jessie who knows the truth, as he admits “I should have asked my dear mother” (45). This indeterminacy leads Lenny to hold both affection and repulsion towards her:

RUTH: Not in mine, Leonard.

Pause.

LENNY: Don’t call me that, please.

RUTH: Why not?

LENNY: That's the name my mother gave me. (41)

The duplicity is clear: he implies that he hates to be called "Leonard" by women except his mother, and that such privilege is based on his affection. At the same time, he implies that he inclines to negate the name given by his mother, and that such negation is based on his repulsion.

Such duplicity is reflected in two episodes told by Lenny. He tells Ruth that by the docks he has met a lady who has been searching for him, and that he has given her two blows because she has caught the pox (38-39). When Ruth asks "How did you know she was diseased?" after he finishes the first episode, he replies "I decided she was" (39). As Guido Almansi admits, we are not supposed to believe literally his words (82). For instance, Deborah A. Sarbin suggests that his phrase itself indicates the arbitrariness of any representation in language (37). Here Lenny seems to display his power of discourse to construct woman's truth. However, it is possible to construe this episode differently. Michael Billington associates the lady and the chauffeur, who is the "old friend of the family" and has brought her to Lenny, with Jessie and Sam, who also works as a chauffeur (170). As Lenny associates the lady with Jessie, he implies some adultery of Jessie by referring to the "pox" that suggests the lasciviousness of the lady. Therefore, his violence towards the lady betrays his hatred for Jessie, who bears both aspects of a "mother" and a "whore." In the second episode, which Billington does not mention in his book, Lenny tells that he has been asked by an old lady to move her iron mangle to the proper room. Irritated by his inability to fulfill her request, he "gave her a short jab" (40-41). Victor Cahn regards this old lady as a "maternal figure," but he associates the violence towards the old lady with the hatred for Ruth, not Jessie (62). Given the fact that the man who has brought the mangle to old lady's house is "her brother-in-law," however, this episode reflects Lenny's jealousy for Sam, who might have some intercourse with Jessie, and his violent feelings towards her. Moreover, Lenny's inability to fulfill her requirement for the transference of her mangle shows his despair at his inability to satisfy the old lady / his mother's desire. He also complains that the old lady has not given him a helping hand, though it is she who has asked him. His sense of being abandoned by her increases his despair.

Now we can give one explanation to the cause of Lenny's insomnia. He

complains to Teddy that “It’s just that something keeps waking me up. Some kind of tick,” and Teddy replies “Well, maybe it’s the clock” (33). In *A Night Out* (1960), Pinter’s drama for television, the clock functions as restraint on Albert, its chief protagonist. He strikes his possessive mother with the clock in order to have himself liberated from her. In *The Homecoming*, Teddy implies by associating the sound with the clock that his brother still has not achieved psychological independence from Jessie. After this conversation with Teddy, however, Lenny confides to Ruth that “The trouble is that I’m not all that convinced it was the clock” (36). As I have mentioned earlier, Lenny tries to display to Ruth his power over women. The fact that he cannot become independent from the maternal domain betrays his fallacy about his power. Thus he is compelled to deny the association of the “tick” with the clock.

For further understanding of Lenny’s mind, it might be helpful to consult Mark Silverstein’s approach. Silverstein focuses on the lack of the authority of Max as well as Lenny’s subjection to leave his mother’s place:

if Lenny cannot identify with the father as possessor of the phallus and all the cultural privileges it signifies, he will remain subject to the mother’s desires, become appropriated by her and marked with her name. (83)

Silverstein also remarks that Lenny “refuses to grant Max the enunciative authority of the ‘symbolic father’ whose speech possesses the monologic power of the law” (84). According to his argument, it is Max’s lack of virility that results in Lenny’s inability to leave his mother’s domain. However, his psychoanalytic approach that places Lenny “on the border between the symbolic and the real” (92) does not take into account Lenny’s sense that he cannot fulfill Jessie’s desire. Commenting on Lacan’s theory, Jacqueline Rose describes that when “prohibition falls on the child’s desire to be what the mother desires,” the child moves from the imaginary to the symbolic (61-62). As the story of the old lady suggests, Jessie does not let Lenny satisfy her desire. But the weakness of Max as the “symbolic father” prevents Lenny from fully entering into the symbolic. So he takes a position on the border not between “the symbolic and the real,” but between the symbolic and the imaginary. Her absence makes Lenny unsettled between affection and hatred, between his desire to stay in her place and the anxiety about the independence

from her.

3.

Lenny's unsettled situation begins to wobble due to the arrival of Ruth. As Lucina Paquet Gabbard suggests, the male characters "all recognize her as Jessie's counterpart, their long-lost mother, wife, and whore" (192). Lenny's mixed feelings of hatred and affection towards Jessie is triggered by Ruth, as it is her whom he tells his episodes.

As to the influence such drastic change exert on Lenny, it is inevitable to take a close look at the last tableau after Teddy's departure, in which silent Lenny stands still beside Ruth, who sits the chair and touches Joey's head lightly. In the film version released in 1973, Ruth played by Pinter's first wife Vivien Merchant sits Max's chair at the last scene¹. This direction strengthens the impression that Ruth deprives Max of his male authority in the house and that Lenny is compelled to face this change. With regard to this scene, critics have different opinions. Elizabeth Sakellaridou argues that "Lenny's standing position may suggest that he is virtually the only survivor of the male world" (113). On the other hand, Billington regards Lenny as "the permanent outsider" and discusses that his "physical isolation" infers his "role of helpless voyeur" (174-175). So Billington's argument is rather pessimistic over Lenny's situation. Gabbard, quoting Freud's *Altruistic Surrender*, says that Lenny "looks forward to the pleasure of seeing Joey enjoy Ruth" and that "Lenny seems to have handed over to Joey the pleasure of fulfilling sexual desire" (193), so that "The tableau is the concretization of wish fulfillment—the wish to have mother" (195).

I would attach much importance to Lenny's silence, because characters' silence or inability to speak in Pinter's plays implies the perilous situation where their subjectivity is lost or deprived. In "Pinter's Language," John Lahr argues during his discussion on *The Homecoming* that "Silence keeps definitions open, unresolved, at the same time, it draws attention and concentration to the words finally articulated" (123). However, silence reflects the danger of a character when he or she has been talkative. In *A Night Out*, Albert's silence after he comes back to the house implies that he is smothered in a sense of helplessness and makes a prediction that he may eternally depend

on his mother. Stanley, the guest of the boarding house in *The Birthday Party* (1958), is deprived of the ability to speak by Goldberg and MacCann, who come to the boarding house to capture him. Deprived of his ability to show his will by his own words, Stanley is taken away compulsorily by Goldberg and MacCann. Therefore, Stanley's silence connotes the forfeiture of his subjectivity. In *One for the Road* (1984), Pinter's late political drama, a family is imprisoned by the totalitarian state. Victor, the father of the family, is tortured verbally and physically, and at the end he is deprived of his voice. He does not show the will of resistance against the torturer Nicolas. On the contrary, talkative characters such as Lenny often try to repress the anxiety about the loss of their subjectivity by continuous utterance. For example, Davies in *The Caretaker* (1960) tries to talk continuously, for he struggles for the meaning of his existence in Aston and Mick's home. It is also important to note that Pinter uses many stage directions of "Pause" and "Silence" in his plays. As for this, Martin Esslin distinguishes between the two:

When Pinter asks for a pause, therefore, he indicates that intense thought processes are continuing, that unspoken tensions are mounting, whereas silences are notations for the end of a movement, the beginning of another, as between the movements of a symphony. (226)

Esslin's definition does not seem to relate "silence" with tensions, but after this remark he continues "Pinter's pauses and silences are thus often the climaxes of his plays, the still centres of the storm, the nuclei of tension around which the whole action is structured." Peter Hall, who has directed many Pinter's plays including *The Homecoming*, describes the disparity among the "three dots," "Pause," and "Silence" from the perspective of direction at the theatre:

There are three very different kinds of pauses in Pinter: Three Dots is a sign of a pressure point, a search for a word, a momentary incoherence. A Pause is a longer interruption to the action, where the lack of speech becomes a form of speech itself. The Pause is a threat, a moment of non-verbal tension. A Silence—the third category—is longer still. It is an extreme crisis point. (163)

Hall also relates “*Pause*” and “*Silence*” with “tension,” but he clearly regards the latter as the more serious. Thus the silence in Pinter’s Plays indicates the increase of tension to the point of the peril or crisis. The characters who are deprived of their voice often resist the silence which their antagonists thrust on them. Stanley in *The Birthday Party*, for instance, groans against Goldberg and MacCann in the Act III. After he is made silent again, however, he is forced out of the boarding house. For such characters the silence implies the perilous situation in that they are compelled to be subjugated to the organisation which they cannot resist anymore.

Therefore, the fact that the talkative Lenny becomes silent after Teddy’s departure suggests that he is at a critical moment. While Lenny is deprived of his subjectivity by the absent Jessie due to his unsettled feeling, Ruth shrewdly pecks at his self-esteem by acquiring the right of the arrangement. Coming up with a scheme for putting Ruth “on the game” (80), Max and Lenny enunciate many proposals in order to keep her as their prostitute. However, Ruth gradually becomes audacious towards them:

LENNY: We’d finance you, to begin with, and then, when you were established, you could pay us back, in instalments.

RUTH: Oh, no, I wouldn’t agree to that.

LENNY: Oh, why not?

RUTH: You would have to regard your original outlay simply as a capital investment.

Pause.

LENNY: I see. All right.

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

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

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

LENNY: You’d have everything.

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

LENNY: Naturally.

RUTH: All aspects of the agreement and conditions of employment would have to be clarified to our mutual satisfaction before we finalized the

contact.

LENNY: Of course. (85)

In the beginning of this dialogue, Lenny proposes that Ruth should pay them back “in instalments,” assuming that it is he who can decide the arrangement with her. However, she answers back “I wouldn’t agree to that,” and instead makes her own proposal. It is obvious that she is accustomed to such arrangements, as her fluent remarks are quite businesslike. As is shown in his answers (“I see. All right” “Naturally” “Of course”), his inability to object against her completely strips him of his right to decide terms. As he is unable to be independent from the absent Jessie, he cannot proclaim his subjectivity against Ruth as his “new mother.” Thus the silence of Lenny at the last tableau is resonant with his despair of the failure to resolve his unsettled situation. By regarding Ruth as a whore serving solely to gratify male sexual desire, Lenny tries to reject her position as his “new mother.” Since the absent Jessie has left the possibility that a “mother” can be a “whore,” Lenny is compelled to recognise Ruth both as his “new mother” and a whore, who drives his sexual desire. As he was unable to satisfy the old lady / his mother’s desire and rejected by her, he is unable to satisfy and rejected by Ruth.

The last tableau does not necessarily indicate, however, Ruth’s absolute triumph over men in the house. On this subject, opinions are divided among critics. Just as in “The Territorial Struggle” Irving Wardle regards Ruth as “the queen bee, not the captive” (44), Osherow at the end of her argument concludes that “Ruth triumphs easily over the men in the household and gains a certain amount of freedom and vitality” (431). This is based on her assumption that Ruth is not forced to become a whore but plays such role in order to establish her dominance (430). Sakellaridou also observes that “Ruth speaks with authority and self-confidence. Hers is the first solid and coherent female speech which reflects a newly-formulated female ideology” (109). Sakellaridou seems to assert Ruth’s self-consciousness and autonomy, but this argument remains controversial because Sakellaridou does not clarify the substance of the “female ideology.” On the contrary, Sarbin concludes that the state at the end “is not a new, female-dominated world,” because “Ruth is still the object of the male gaze” (41). Drew Milne also denies the dominance of Ruth over men and her autonomy:

It is difficult to perform Ruth as a positive image of female self-determination, since her power depends on her recognition and confirmation of the misogynist fantasy within which she is forced to perform. (243)

I would rather agree with his argument, because her determination to stay with the family can be interpreted as a revelation of her inability to assert her independence. When Teddy is about to leave the house, Ruth calls him “Eddie” and entreats him not to “become a stranger” (88). Here she seems to avoid the risk of being abandoned by both families—Max’s family in London and Teddy’s family in the USA. In “Why the Lady Does It” Augusta Walker regards Ruth’s life in the USA as “comfortable, secure, and altogether enviable” (117), but Walker’s recognition is based on Teddy’s uncertain explanation which may be distorted by him. Ruth herself describes it as bleak, as she says “It’s all rock. And sand. It stretches . . . so far . . . everywhere you look. And there’s lots of insects there” (61). Teddy tries to dissuade her from staying with the house. For Ruth to accept Teddy’s persuasion, however, imply that she has to go back to such a bleak life, as Austin E. Quigley correctly indicates in *The Pinter Problem* that “Teddy in this proposal suggests as a solution a continuation of the situation that has for Ruth been the root problem of her American existence” (211). Noticing Ruth’s reluctance to return to the USA, Teddy seems to relinquish the plan without hesitation and decides to leave her. Quigley also acutely suggests in *The Pinter Problem* that “Teddy seeks to integrate in their American life not Ruth’s domestic and extradomestic interests but his own” (211), as his persuasion is based on his intention to have her help him with his lectures. In an interview with Irving Wardle, Peter Hall, who directed the original production of *The Homecoming*, regards Teddy as the most insidious character in the play:

He was the biggest bastard of the lot, as well as being the withdrawn intellectual. He really was. So when he went at the end, leaving his wife, he was not in any way a victim or a martyr. He was the biggest shit of all. He was leaving them with their deserts. He was leaving her with her deserts. And he was the worst of the lot. (“A Director’s Approach” 20)

Despite such repulsion towards life in the USA and the neglect of her interests by Teddy, she cannot abandon the possibility of her return in the future. It is true that her power is based on men's fear and desire, but she is represented as a woman who cannot get independence from such men as Lenny, Max, Joey and Teddy.

4.

While the relationship between Jessie and her family members in *The Homecoming* is frequently focused on by other critics, the influence of the absent mother in *No Man's Land* (1975) is rarely discussed. This inadequacy may be comprehensible, as maternal characters do not appear in this play, and there is little reference to mother. There are only male characters in this play: Hirst, Spooner, Briggs and Foster². The intricacy of *No Man's Land* puzzled many critics when it was first staged. Antonia Fraser, Pinter's second wife, reveals that Milton Shulman, a drama critic of the Evening Standard, had been asleep in the first half because he could not understand the play at all (16-17). So it is difficult to interpret this play overall, still less from the point of mother-son relationship. However, Gabbard acutely suggests that what is presented in this play is "the forbidden wish to have mother" (262). She perceives the setting of this play as "a womb-room" (268) and Hirst's desire as "the wish for oneness with mother" (267). What lacks in her argument, however, is the recognition of Spooner as Hirst's repressed self. Although she points out that "The play is replete with clues to the oneness of Spooner and Hirst" (263), she does not regard their relationship from the point of repression and recurrence. In this section, I would argue that Hirst invites Spooner in order to face and resolve his repressed anxiety, and that inability to resolve it leads to the repetition of such repression and recurrence.

It is obvious that Hirst is deeply preoccupied with his past. In the Act I he says "My true friends look out at me from my album [. . .] We're talking of my youth, which can never leave me. No it existed. It was solid" (351). He clings to the friends who exist only in his album and believes that such past holds him up permanently. In "Time for Change in *No Man's Land*" Austin Quigley refers to Hirst's preoccupation as a kind of his aspiration for some unchangeability and immutability. Hirst sticks to the "No Man's Land" which "does not move

. . . or change . . . or grow old . . . remains . . . forever . . . icy . . . silent” (340). His words “In my day nobody changed. A man was” (382) and “No, no. I’ll stay . . . where I am” (388) also reflect his preference for immutability as well as his preoccupation with the past. On the contrary, Spooner shows stark aspiration towards the change, as Quigley points out in “Time for Change” that “He [Spooner] consistently displays a readiness to change along with change that throws into relief Hirst’s unwillingness to do likewise” (44). Spooner’s mutable aspect is shown from the outset, as he is invited to Hirst’s house and does not tell where he lives. His claim that “I shan’t stay long. I never stay long, with others” (323) also indicates his mutability. In addition, he sometimes tells his experience of locomotion, such as the words “I meandered over to Hampstead Heath” (330), and “I made many trips to Dijion” (367). His recognition of the “Experience” as “a paltry thing” (326) also reflects the stark contrast between Hirst and him. Furthermore, when Spooner tries to push himself into being Hirst’s secretary or friend at the end of the play, he suggests that “Temperamentally I can be what you wish” (393). Spooner’s will to change as Hirst pleases implies that he embodies Hirst’s unconscious desire. In addition to that, Spooner’s appearance shows that Hirst is obviously stimulated by his unconscious desire. He tells Spooner that “Tonight . . . my friend . . . you find me in the last lap of a race . . . I had long forgotten to run” (338). His description implies his preoccupation with his past that is “solid,” and the words “you [Spooner] find me [Hirst] in the last lap of a race” indicate that Spooner can break such preoccupation. Thus Hirst has an underlying attraction towards the change that is embodied as Spooner. But it is important to take heed to the attire of Spooner. We can reasonably infer from the stage direction describing Spooner “*dressed in a very old and shabby suit, dark faded shirt*” (321) that Spooner is unlikely to achieve fame as a successful man. Spooner is the embodiment of not only Hirst’s desire but also the fear of failure that Hirst eagerly represses. Fraser construes *No Man’s Land* as a play “about the creative artist locked in his own world,” and Spooner as a “shabby reality trying to get in” (17). Her interpretation is crucially different from mine in that she considers Spooner to represent a “shabby reality” external to Hirst.

Hirst’s overt demand for immutability can be traced back to more concrete persistence. Firstly, he clings to his prestige as a “famous writer” (390) in his past. Though he is described as a “creative man” (356) and seems to be so

renowned that he is admired by his followers, Foster and Briggs, it is unlikely that he is still a vigorous author. When he is forced to go for a walk by Foster, Hirst resists him because he is “busy. I have too many things to do” (387). But this kind of remark is usually made by those who actually are not occupied with work. He claims that he is currently writing a “critical essay” (387), but he does not mention any specific subjects. On the contrary, Spooner seems to have a strong intention to work as a poet, although he has not been successful. In other words, Spooner embodies what Hirst loses as well as what he fears: vigour as an author and loss of his prestige. After Hirst says “Tonight . . . my friend . . . you find me in the last lap of a race . . . I had long forgotten to run”, Spooner relies “A metaphor. Things are looking up” (338). Since metaphor is what writers use, Spooner implies that Hirst has been recovering his ability as a writer since his arrival.

Moreover, Hirst’s attraction to immutability can also be linked to his persistence to his mother, and it is important to note that Hirst’s repressed anxiety about leaving her is uncovered by Spooner. After talking about his strength, Spooner ascribes it to the hatred of his mother towards him:

SPOONER: I have never been loved. From this I derive my strength. Have you? Ever? Been loved?

HIRST: Oh, I don’t suppose so.

SPOONER: I looked up once into my mother’s face. What I saw there was nothing less than pure malevolence. (332)

After this conversation, however, they begin to talk nonsense:

SPOONER: You will want to know what I had done to provoke such hatred in my own mother.

HIRST: You’d pissed yourself.

SPOONER: Quite right. How old do you think I was at the time?

HIRST: Twenty eight.

SPOONER: Quite right. However, I left home soon after. (332-333)

Although it seems that Hirst meets Spooner for the first time in Act I, he somehow knows Spooner’s experience with his mother. Given the

interpretation of Spooner as an embodiment of Hirst's repressed anxiety and desire, as I have discussed, we can deduce that what Spooner mentions reflects Hirst's past and that Hirst refers to himself in his answer to Spooner. Thus it is Hirst who underwent the separation from his mother at the age of twenty-eight. It follows that he is still anxious about leaving his mother, and that such feelings are stimulated by Spooner.

Spooner's arrival leads Hirst to face his repressed anxiety, but we can deduce that such emotions are repeated in Hirst's mind if we take into account the connotation of "the lake." In the Act I, he recalls the dream in which someone is drowning at the lake and a woman is standing by him:

She looked up. I was staggered. I had never seen anything so beautiful.
That's all poison. We can't be expected to live like that. (352)

Since this landscape is his dream, and Spooner, who embodies Hirst's anxiety and desire, answers that "It was I drowning in your dream" (353), the water of the lake signifies the amniotic fluid, and the figure drowning at the lake / uterus indicates Hirst himself. Given that there is no indication of the correspondence between that figure and the woman looking at Hirst in his memory, we can equate her with his mother. In *The Homecoming*, the lake is also concomitant with the image of mother-son relationship. Lenny kisses Ruth just after she tells her memory to him: "there was a lake, you see...we used to change and walk down towards the lake . . ." (65). Ruth is Lenny's sister-in-law, and she is also recognised by him as the "new mother" of his family. As I have mentioned, Lenny makes an attempt to reject such a role for Ruth by regarding her as a whore. However, foregrounding her lascivious nature can result in the association of her with Jessie. By kissing Ruth after hearing about her episode of the lake, therefore, Lenny paradoxically highlights her as a "new mother." Thus Hirst in *No Man's Land* expresses his desire to stay in the womb when he refers to "the lake," but it is important to note that the word "drowning" also connotes the death. This reflects Hirst's mixed feelings: he prefers immutability, which implies both the will to stay in the womb and the death, but at the same time he wants to resolve such a situation. This is the reason for which he invites Spooner, who enables him to face his repressed anxiety and to resolve it. After this, however, he amends his memory and

says “There’s no water. No-one is drowning” (352). Hirst withdraws his intention to face the anxiety, and represses it again, because the phrase “No-one is drowning” indicates his avoidance of confronting his need to resolve his anxiety. At the end of Act II he repeats the remark, but again he withdraws (399). Thus repression and recurrence is repeated, and this repetition is unresolvable. Like Lenny in *The Homecoming*, Hirst is unsettled between the anxiety about leaving the womb and the desire for leaving.

Hirst’s anxiety about leaving his mother is expressed as the anxiety about being penetrated by external things. Feeling disgusted at the light from the outside, Hirst tells Briggs to close the curtain at Act II. Removed from outside, Hirst sets his mind at rest: “Ah. What relief” “How happy it is” (390). James R. Hollis regards “the room” as “one of the central metaphors” in Pinter’s plays which suggest “the encapsulated environment of modern man” and “something of his regressive aversion to the hostile world outside” (19). Begley associates Hirst’s intention to exclude the outside with “regressive desire for return to the stasis of the womb” (155). As I have mentioned, however, Hirst’s will to stay in the “stasis of the womb” cannot follow a permanent trajectory. Just after the dialogue which shows that the subject can never be changed (396-398), Hirst says “But I hear sounds of birds. Don’t you hear them? Sounds I have never heard before” (398). The “sounds of birds” implies that the outside penetrates into his territory, and “Sounds I have never heard before” reveal his revulsion towards the sameness: namely, his desire for change. We can also confirm his unsettled feelings from this scene.

5.

The Homecoming and *No Man’s Land* are plays which interweave influence of absent mothers, which is a clue to the comprehension of the anxieties of male characters. Both Lenny in *The Homecoming* and Hirst in *No Man’s Land* desire to confine themselves in their absent mothers’ domain, but they wish to leave it at the same time. Such a way of expressing a man’s persistence to his mother as his intention to stay in the specific site is also employed in other plays written by Piner. In *The Caretaker*, for instance, Mick is upset by Davies having slept in Mick’s bed last night:

MICK: (*pointing to Davies' bed.*) That's my bed.

DAVIES: What about that, then?

MICK: That's my mother's bed.

DAVIES: Well she wasn't in it last night!

MICK: (*moving to him.*) Now don't get perky, son, don't get perky. Keep your hands off my old mum.

DAVIES: I ain't...I haven't...

MICK: Don't get out of your depth, friend, don't start taking liberties with my old mother, let's have a bit of respect. (33)

Mick is disgusted at his bed being intruded into by a stranger, because he does not want his mother to be touched by anyone. Here sleeping in his mother's bed implies his desire for return to mother's womb. Like Lenny and Hirst, Mick expressed his desire as his persistence to the specific site. Apparently this expression is parallel with a phrase in *Celebration* (2000), Pinter's last long play, but we could say that Pinter uses an expression the other way round. In this play Waiter utters the preference to continue his work at the restaurant:

RUSSELL: Have you been working here long?

WAITER: Years.

RUSSELL: You going to stay until it changes hands?

WAITER: Are you suggesting that I'm about to get the boot?

SUKI: They wouldn't do that to a nice lad like you.

WAITER: To be brutally honest, I don't think I'd recover if they did a thing like that. This place is like a womb to me. I prefer to stay in my womb. I strongly prefer that to being born. (468-469)

By contrast with Lenny, Hirst and Mick, Waiter reveals his desire for the continuation of his work at the restaurant by comparing it to the desire to stay in the womb. For Waiter, the restaurant is his "womb," and his mother is not mentioned throughout the play.

Moreover, the situation in which coexist the persistence to what is absent and the revulsion towards that can also be seen in Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* (1953), in which Vladimir and Estragon wait at the same place for Godot, who is absent throughout the play. Lenny, Hirst, and these two

characters in *Waiting for Godot* all share dependence on the absent character and anxiety about leaving the place where they belong. Like Lenny and Hirst, Vladimir and Estragon also reveal their desire for leaving at the end of both Act I and Act II:

ESTRAGON: Well, shall we go?

VLADIMIR: Yes, let's go.

They do not move. (59)

VLADIMIR: Well? Shall we go?

ESTRAGON: Yes, let's go.

They do not move. (109)

As the stage directions suggest, however, they do not move in spite of their words. The refrain of the situation indicates that their dependence on the absent character “Godot” is unresolvable. The plays and the observations of Beckett inextricably influenced Pinter, as Pinter himself confesses in the interview by Mel Gussow that since *The Homecoming* he has sent his manuscript to Beckett, whose advice is greatly appreciated by him (28). Billington states that some critics noticed the influence of Beckett on *No Man's Land* when it premiered in 1975 (251). Here Billington does not mention *Waiting for Godot*, but it is not off the mark to indicate that some characters of Lenny and Hirst can be studied in conjunction with Vladimir and Estragon. Lenny, Hirst, Vladimir and Estragon are all subjected to absence and they cannot resolve the situation on their own. In other words, Lenny and Hirst are “waiting for mother.”

Notes

1 When interviewed by John Lahr, John Bury, who was the stage designer of the first production of *The Homecoming*, answered that furniture layout was not indicated in the first script except Max's armchair (“A Designer's Approach” 29). His answer implies that Pinter may require that chair as the key stage setting of the play.

2 The characters are named after the famous cricket players (Billington 245). John Fowles, whose novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) was made into a film

by Pinter, notices that Pinter loved cricket and makes an assumption that the very early training at the game of cricket influenced Pinter as well as Fowles himself (310-311).

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