

Repressive Mothers and Subjected Sons in Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* and *A Night Out*

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Introduction: “mothers” and “sons” in Pinter’s early plays

In this paper, I would examine the mother-son relationship in Pinter’s early plays. In some of his early plays, Pinter depicts female characters who are possessive of younger male characters. In *The Birthday Party* (1958), the landlady Meg shows over-maternal feeling towards Stanley, who is the only lodger in her boarding house. He sometimes threatens her with violent demeanour, but he cannot go away from her house, and it is not until the menacing intruders Goldberg and MacCann appear that he is compelled to leave his surrogate mother. Mother in *A Night Out* (1960) also desperately intends to keep her son Albert under the eyes of her, and he tries in vain to emancipate himself. Such maternal characters have proclivities towards replacing the signified of the male characters with the rewritten one. Moreover, such demeanour of the maternal characters has an analogy with characters who are subjected to totalitarian organisations. The rhetoric of such characters is also important in that it functions both to respect the individualities of the male characters and to subjugate them.

Critics often vindicate such “mothers”, and consider them to be pitiful victims of desperate situations triggered by others. Victor L. Cahn, for example, argues in favour of Mother in *A Night Out*:

Yet at the start Pinter does not portray Mrs. Stokes as evil or as consciously throttling Albert. Rather, she is desperate for love, and her son is the only possible source. Hence she may be regarded as the victim of instinctual needs. (*Gender and Power in the Plays of Harold Pinter*, 21)

Cahn denies Mother's malicious intent, and concludes that the absence of love caused by her husband's death makes her suffocate Albert. Elizabeth Sakellaridou also regards Meg in *The Birthday Party* as the victim of the dreary marital life:

Additionally, the relative indifference and frequent absence from home of Petey, the husband, could account for her pressing need for lover, whom she finds in person of her male lodger. Besides, her incessant questions about the quality of her cooking and the high standard of her boarding house could be seen as a reflection not of her anxiety to serve the males but of her inner need to prove her merit and thus justify her existence. (*Pinter's Female Portraits*, 39)

Citing Nancy Chodorow's argument, Sakellaridou extends her sympathy to Meg by referring to the possibility that the lack of love in the conjugal relationship and the desire to secure the meaning of existence lead Meg to keep Stanley as her "son". Unlike Cahn, however, Sakellaridou points out that the text itself leads the readers to turn away from such sympathetic interpretation of Meg's character.

Even though such "mothers" in Pinter's early plays deserve our sympathy, it is indispensable to remark that the very words in which "mothers" seem to have a high regard for "sons" attenuate their individualities. In *The Birthday Party* and *A Night Out*, we also have to pay attention to the fact that not only "mothers" in their home but also people outside their house deprive "sons" of their individualities. In addition, it should be noted that such mothers do not reflect Pinter's own experience with his mother. Michael Billington states in discussing *A Night Out* that "Pinter himself had a basically harmonious relationship with his own mum" (*Harold Pinter*, 112). Billington records Pinter's another biographical fact that the characterisation of Stanley and Meg are based on Pinter's experience in the boarding house, where the landlady excessively petted the lodger, who introduced himself as a pianist like Stanley. Taking such facts into consideration, we can infer that Pinter intends to weave up the totalitarian aspects of the structures of societies, including family and much wider organisation such as companies, by delineating the analogy between the behaviour of mothers and that of people outside the

home. In the following sections, I would like to take a closer look at such relationships in both plays.

1. Distorted signified in the words of “mothers”

Meg in *The Birthday Party* shows blatant affection towards Stanley, but she also represents him against his will and without his approval by modifying the meaning of what he says. It is true that her words “Don’t go away again, Stan. You stay here. You’ll be better off. You stay with your old Meg” (17), shows her affection, but such words also implies her desire to control him at her mercy. We can reinforce that inference by paying attention to the word “tip” in this play. Stanley explains to Meg that he used to be a pianist:

I had a unique touch. Absolutely unique. They came up to me. They came up to me and said they were grateful. Champagne we had that night, the lot. (*Pause.*) My father nearly came down to hear me. Well, I dropped him a card anyway. But I don’t think he could make it. No, I—I lost the address, that was it. (*Pause.*) Yes. Lower Edmonton. Then after that, you know what they did? They carved me up. Carved me up. It was all arranged, it was all worked out. My next concert. Somewhere else it was. In winter. I went down there to play. Then, when I got there, the hall was closed, the place was shuttered up, not even a caretaker. They’d locked it up. (*Take off his glasses and wipes them on his pyjama jacket.*) A fast one. They pulled a fast one. I’d like to know who was responsible for that. (*Bitterly.*) All right, Jack, I can take a tip. They want me to crawl down on my bended knees. Well I can take a tip. (*The Birthday Party*, 16-17)

“I can take a tip” in his explanation means that “I can receive advice”, so “tip” in this case is the same as “advice”. He is presumed to have been forced to accept the organisation to which he as well as Goldberg and MacCann belong. When we read the lines in which Meg explains Stanley’s experience to Goldberg and MacCann, however, the meaning of “tip” turns out to be distorted by her:

In...a big hall. His father gave him champagne. But then they locked the

place up and he couldn't get out. The caretaker had gone home. So he had to wait until the morning before he could get out. (With confidence.) They were very grateful. (Pause.) And then they all wanted to give him a tip. And so he took the tip. And then he got a fast train and he came down here. (The Birthday Party, 26)

Meg ostensibly does not remember what Stanley relates about his experience. While he explains that he could not enter the hall because it was closed, Meg explains to Goldberg and MacCann that he could not “get out”. Given that she aspires to keep Stanley, her image that he is confined and cannot move away reflects her desire to nurse him in her womb, so that he is attached to her permanently. Moreover, the “tip” in her words does not mean “advice” but “gratuity”. Even though it is likely that she merely forgets the details of his story, the discrepancy of meaning tells us that she rewrites his story as she pleases by speaking instead of him. Such verbal distortion leads to the repression of the original meaning.

Like Meg, Albert's Mother in *A Night Out* persistently pleads with him to stay with her. Although he is already twenty-eight years old, she repeatedly complains of his going out at night, such as “You leave me in the house all alone...” (*A Night Out*, 359). She also grumbles at his association with girls, for she fears that he schemes out “messaging about girls” (*A Night Out*, 355). It is not difficult to figure out the similarity between Meg's discourse and that of Albert's mother:

MOTHER: Where are you going?

ALBERT: Mum, I've told you, honestly, three times. Honestly, I've told you three times I had to go out tonight.

MOTHER: No, you didn't.

ALBERT *exclaims and knots the tie.*

MOTHER: I thought you were joking. (*A Night Out*, 333)

The fact that she pretends not to have heard that he is participating in the party indicates that Mother ignores her son's words as if they are undesirable for her. Furthermore, she distorts his description into her own pleasant story and keeps it in her mind. Although he speaks in earnest, she regards it as a joke, and she

reforms his story by attaching the pleasant signified to it. Her distortion causes her to breed the misunderstanding that he tells her “lies about going to the firm’s party” (361), and turn his earnest explanation into fraud. Whether conscious or not, Albert’s mother as well as Meg represses the original story by rewriting it, and the signifiers given by the son are separated from the original signified. In other words, such mothers construct another truth by words.

This recognition seems to be slightly different from the one shared by the playwrights of “The Theatre of the Absurd”, even though Pinter is usually included in this group. The critic Martin Esslin, who invented the term “The Theatre of the Absurd”, notes that The Theatre of the Absurd “tends toward a radical devaluation of language”, and that “what *happens* on the stage transcends, and often contradicts the words spoken by the characters” (*The Theatre of the Absurd*, 26). In Samuel Beckett’s play *Happy Days* (1961), for example, the old woman Winnie talks about the repeated “happy days” and does routine work, such as brushing her teeth. What is considerably odd, however, is that she is “*Embedded up to above her waist in exact centre of mound*” (*Happy Days*, 5), so she cannot move to the other places on the stage. This is one of the typical absurd plays in which “what happens on the stage” make the audience change their recognition of what is said by characters. Winnie herself repeats that she is skeptical about the effect of language, such as “Words fail, there are times when even they fail” (14), “they are all empty words” (22). In his speech “Writing for the Theatre” delivered in 1962, Pinter also cast a skeptical eye on the kind of playwright who “clearly trusts words absolutely” (xi)¹. At the same time, his characters frequently narrate so as to build up “their” own truth. While discussing Deeley in *Old Times* (1971) in the interview by Mel Gussow, Pinter observes that “it is actually taking place before your very eye—by the words he [Deeley] is using” (*Conversations with Pinter*, 17). I consider the importance of such a function of words in Pinter’s plays in the following sections.

2. The analogy between “mothers” and repressive societies

Meg’s inability to recollect Stanley’s description and her desire to confine him invite her to render his original story, and such modification of the meaning of

the “tip” illustrates that language can arbitrarily represent a person without that person’s approval. In addition, such violent representation deprives the subject of words, turns the subject into the object, and creates another truth around it. In “Harold Pinter’s *The Birthday Party*: Menace reconsidered”, Francis Gillen argues that he has already been objectified by Meg before Goldberg’s sudden arrival (39). Meg shows maternal love towards Stanley, but at the same time such maternal love turns him into the object represented by the maternal subject, and then attached to the truth created by her. Even though he denies that it is his birthday, Meg forces him to acknowledge it. She implies that he was born of her by claiming that she can decide his birthday. Moreover, giving a boy’s drum to him although he is an adult indicates Meg’s implication that he is still a child who is unable to live away from his mother. Mark Taylor-Batty regards Stanley’s “giggling demeanour” at the birthday party as “a pathetic regression to an infantile state” (27), but by Meg he has already been made to regress to the “infantile state” before Goldberg and MacCann arrives.

It is important to note that the feature of Meg’s words that rewrite Stanley’s story has some analogy with that of Goldberg. As for this point, It is helpful to cite Mark Silverstein’s argument:

Like Goldberg, Meg structures and effectually creates Stanley’s desire by channeling it through the language model she imposes...The kind of socialization we see enacted in the exchange about the tea authorizes and is itself an integral part of the more overtly pernicious form of socialization and cultural programming carried out by Goldberg and MacCann. (38)

Silverstein also points out that Goldberg and MacCann’s insults “You contaminate womankind” “Mother difiler” (*The Birthday Party*, 45) form the behaviour of Stanley during the party (trying to suffocate Meg, and to rape Lulu), so it follows that this kind of language forms Stanley’s desire and that his autonomy is an illusion (37-38). Silverstein’s acute argument, however, is inadequate in providing analysis of the details of the text. Besides, he does not refer to *A Night Out* at all. It is essential to analyse both *The Birthday Party* and *A Night Out* so that we can figure out how the subject of “sons” is in peril owing to both “mothers” and larger organisations to which they belong.

What must be noted is that not only Meg but also Goldberg replaces Stanley's truth with his own by speaking instead of him. When Petey inquires what has happened to his sole lodger in the Act III, Goldberg does not allow Stanley to answer with his own words, and instead replies "The birthday party was too much for him" (*The Birthday Party*, 65). Later, when he enters the room accompanied by MacCann, it turns out that he has become unable to speak due to some measure against him by Goldberg and MacCann. Like Meg, Goldberg not only speaks instead of Stanley but also twists the truth about him. In order to restrain Stanley, both Meg and Goldberg have to be "intruders" into his private territory. When Stanley does not come down for the breakfast in the morning, she enters the guest's room without permission:

MEG: I always take him up his cup of tea . But that was a long time ago.

PETEY: Did he drink it?

MEG: I made him. I stood there till he did. I'm going to call him. (*She goes to the door.*) Stan! Stanny! (*She listens.*) Stan! I'm coming up to fetch you if you don't come down! (*The Birthday Party*, 7)

In order to eat breakfast together, she intends to "fetch" Stanley against his will, and needless to say Goldberg comes to the boarding house in order to "fetch" him regardless of his intent. Meg and Goldberg are both "intruders" who come to Stanley in order to "fetch" him.

Meg the surrogate mother breaks into her son's private territory by attaching much importance to "the familial bond", and not only Goldberg but also Mother in *A Night Out* foregrounds that bond recursively. Goldberg tells his memories several times, and most of them are about his families. His reminiscence of Uncle Barney, who "taught me that the word of a gentleman is enough. That's why, when I had to go away on business I never carried any money." (*The Birthday Party*, 22), make us presume that he conceives such maxims taught by families to be mental pabulum for his life. He recollects his father's last words emphasising the importance of the familial bond:

Never, never forget your family, for they are the rock, the constitution and the core! If you're ever in any difficulties Uncle Barney will see you in the clear. I knelt down. (*He kneels, facing MacCann.*) I swore on the good

book, And I knew the word I had to remember—Respect! Because MacCann—(*Gently.*) Seamus—who came before your father? His father. And Who came before him? Before him?... (*Vacant—triumphant.*) Who came before your father’s father but your father’s father’s mother! Your great-gran-granny. (*The Birthday Party, 72*)

Goldberg keeps in mind that he is not on his own but in a long family line, and that when he is in trouble not his own strength but “Uncle Barney” can lead him. He implicitly mentions that his self is not structured by himself but by his family, and that his individuality and his independence are made precarious by that familial order. The stage direction in his words “*Vacant-triumphant*” implies that even though his self is “vacant”, he can be “triumphant” when he feels the familial bond. In other words, the family bond that enables him to feel “triumphant” makes his self “vacant”. Again it is helpful to pay attention to the word “tip”. Goldberg reiterates “take my tip” (21, 64), so he gives the “tip”. On the contrary, Stanley does not give but take the “tip”. To take the “tip” means to be subjugated to it, so the word “tip” reflects the power structure in this play. Besides, Goldberg advises “What is old is good, take my tip” (64), so the “tip” in this scene conveys the superiority of the past over the present. The “tip” succeeded from the family or the past to the individual or the present shows that the individuality of the self is encroached by the family or the past. So Goldberg as well as Meg attaches much importance to the family bond, which cuts off Stanley’s individuality and structures his identity.

Mother in *A Night Out* also restricts her son’s individuality by confining him in the familial bond. Clinging to the dead Albert’s father, Mother demands that Albert behave like his father. Her rebuke that “Your father would turn in his grave if he heard you raise your voice to me” (334) attempts to subjugate Albert to the dead father’s will, and her demand that “You’ve got to be properly dressed. Your father was always properly dressed” (341) orders him to become like his father. Mother’s demand that Albert do like his father includes an implication that his self should be structured according to the family, so that the individuality of Albert become indistinguishable from that of his dead father. In this sense, his dead father is still alive. Mother also tells Albert to change the bulb in his grandmother’s room although she is already dead and that room has not been used since then. She is indignant at Albert

treating his grandmother as a dead person. Here the dead family members are still alive in that they regulate Albert, and the family, which is one of the organisations in the society, is regarded as far more important than his individuality. Like the organisation to which Goldberg belongs, Mother tries to efface his individuality and to modify his self at her mercy by referring to the familial bond. In other words, she treats her son's personality as exchangeable for her dead husband.

Such a threat can be seen in the firm at which Albert works. Albert's boss King believes that firm's football team and cricket team can give "a sense of belonging", and that if members "Work together and play together", their "Office work can become so impersonal" (350). It is natural that the firm should require employees' "sense of belonging", but the menace lies in his rhetoric that such "sense of belonging" can make the office work "impersonal". "Sense of belonging" stands on the same basis as the subjection to the organisation or Mother's will, in that it deprives employees of the personal aspects when they work and therefore no room remains for their individuality. When Albert plays a game, Gidney converts him from the position of left half to left back. Here the circumstance of the team predominates over the will of the members.

Emphasis on the family bond and suffocation of individualities which we have seen in the words of Meg, Goldberg, Mother, and King are likely to happen in the totalitarian societies. Here Robert Gordon's observation that in *The Birthday Party* Pinter "implies that the behavior of officers of state authority is indistinguishable from that of agents of organized crime" (*Harold Pinter*, 42) is much to the point, but he does not include Meg's behaviour. Pinter wrote several political plays, in which totalitarian regimes tyrannise over both those who uphold the system and those who are oppressed. In *One for the Road* (1984), the torturer Nicolas shouts "I feel a link, you see, a bond. I share a commonwealth of interest. I am not alone. I am not alone!" (232). The totalitarian regime which he supports emphasises "link", "bond" and "commonwealth" more strongly than individualities. Such totalitarian emphasis resonates through the words of Goldberg, Mother, and King. Mother says to her son that in the firm "Mr. King would have his eye on you" (361). We may associate this expression with "Big Brother is watching you" in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), in which mass surveillance is

dominant. An ideal person in that system is a person who does not think, does not doubt, and does not express one's own opinion. When Nicolas shows admiration for Gila's father, he says that he respects her father because Gila's father "didn't think" (240). Ben and Gus in *The Dumb Waiter* (1960) talk about the suspicions against the organisation to which they belong:

BEN: You never used to ask me so many damn questions. What's come over you?

GUS: No, I was just wondering.

BEN: Stop wondering. You've got a job to do. Why don't you just do it and shut up? (127)

In the last scene the organisation decides to eliminate Gus. The difference between Ben and Gus is that the former stops "wondering", while the latter continues "wondering". On this point, Robert Gordon argues that "*The Dumb Waiter* can be viewed as a post-modern play, and the man who believes he has a consciousness must die" (210). The prohibition on wondering can be seen in *The Birthday Party*. Goldberg's denial of being a "self-made man" and manifestation that "I sat where I was told to sit" (71) erase his autonomy. He emphasises his execution of the order without wondering. When he and MacCann continuously interrogate Stanley, they seem to focus on depriving him of his identity, such as "Who do you think you are?" (42) "Webber, you're a fake" (43) "What makes you think you exist?" "You're dead" (46). In addition, the continuous interrogation itself deprives him of the chance to speak. To deprive someone of the opportunity to speak is to deprive him or her of declaring thoughts to others. Stanley is compelled to stop expressing his thought by the "totalitarian" organisation, as well as his surrogate mother.

3. "for you own good"—rhetoric of "mothers" and totalitarian organisations

"Totalitarian mothers", Goldberg in *The Birthday Party*, and King in *A Night Out* employ the same rhetoric to subjugate individuals and to pretend to respect their individuality at the same time. Their speech shares the same feature, although "mothers" and Goldberg / King differ in that the former are

to some degree unconscious of using that rhetoric and the latter are insidious and deliberate. It is quite useful to contemplate such devices in Pinter's plays, because he himself urges readers and the audience to probe the deeper meaning of character's lines. His speech "Writing for the Theatre", which I have already mentioned, tells us to concentrate our attention on the words in which "under what is said, another thing is being said" (xii). Guido Almansi, taking heed to such feature of Pinter's language, argues that his language is "hide-and-seek" (80). The rhetoric we will consider in this section reflects Pinter's principle of writing in that it has double meanings.

Meg in *The Birthday Party* seems to dedicate herself to Stanley, but she always disguises her desire to control him. When she is asked to make a speech at Stanley's "birthday party", she says:

Well—it's very, very nice to be here tonight, in my house, and I want to propose a toast to Stanley, because it's his birthday, and he's lived here for a long while now, and he's my Stanley now. And I think he's a good boy, although sometimes he's bad. (*An appreciative laugh from GOLDBERG.*) And he's the only Stanley I know, and I know him better than all the world, although he doesn't think so. ("*Hear—hear*" from GOLDBERG.) Well, I could cry because I'm so happy, having him here and not gone away, on his birthday, and there isn't anything I wouldn't do for him, and all you good people here tonight... (*She sobs.*) (49)

Her words "there isn't anything I wouldn't do for him" denotatively means "I can do everything for him", so she apparently respects his will. Given that just before she also says "having him here and not gone away, on his birthday", however, we have to amend our recognition of that meaning. She desires to keep Stanley and decides his "birthday", although he denies it. Under the word "there isn't anything I wouldn't do for him" lies her intention "there isn't anything I wouldn't do to keep him, regardless of his will".

Goldberg and MacCann use the same rhetoric. After they enervate Stanley, they "expect" him to become a successful man:

GOLDBERG: You'll be re-orientated.

MACCANN: You'll be rich.

GOLDBERG: You'll be adjusted.
MACCANN: You'll be our pride and joy.
GOLDBERG: You'll be a mensch.
MACCANN: You'll be a success.
GOLDBERG: You'll be integrated.
MACCANN: You'll give orders.
GOLDBERG: You'll make decisions.
MACCANN: You'll be a magnate.
GOLDBERG: A statesman.
MACCANN: You'll own yachts.
GOLDBERG: Animals.
MACCANN: Animals. (77-78)

It is obvious that they “emasculate” Stanley in order to subjugate him to their organisation. Varun Begley’s explanation that what they do to him is “the fragmentary, mechanical adaptation inflicted on the modern personality” (45) lacks sufficient attention to their rhetoric. Their expectation “You’ll be re-orientated” “You’ll be adjusted” clearly means that Stanley has to conform to the organisation, but it contradicts “You’ll give orders” and “You’ll make decisions”, which apparently allows him to do according to his will. They seem to endow him with the authority of a subject, but the one which is constructed by the organisation.

We can see the same rhetoric in *A Night Out*. After Albert comes back from a whore’s room, Mother inquires “Aren’t I a good mother to you? Everything I do is...is for your own good” (375). It is remarkable that she uses the word “good” twice in this short line, and that each “good” modifies a different person. The latter words “for your own good” are obtrusive declaration of her intention to dedicate herself to him, so the “good” is Albert’s “good”. However, the former “good” modifies “mother” and operates to justify herself. Therefore, Mother’s “good” resonates through the latter Albert’s “good”, so this rhetoric gives rise to the impression that Mother’s will overshadows his self. Her seemingly cordial words form Stanley as a subject, but that subject must confirm to Mother’s control. Having made him silent by continuing her words, she repeats “You’re a good boy” (375), and those words can be converted into “You’re good mother’s boy”. In discussing *A Night Out*,

Bernard F. Dukore points out that one of the Pinter's "comic techniques" is "repetition" (48), but "repetition" is also used in this play as a kind of menace, like the "good" in Mother's lines.

In *A Night Out*, Albert's boss King employs the same rhetoric, but he uses it more deliberately and insidiously. He invites Horne and Barrow to go sailing, and he assures them that "You're quite welcome to come down to my boat at Poole any weekend—do a bit of sailing along the coast" (351). He endows them with the privilege of using his boat whenever they want, and superficially holds their intentions in high esteem. Assuming that their intentions are respected, they are likely to confirm to the firm.

As Silverstein argues, such rhetoric has an analogy with Louis Althusser's ideology apparatus. He supports his theory on *The Birthday Party* by quoting Althusser:

Althusser's equation of subjectivity and subjection and his sense of the thoroughly ideological nature of the rhetoric of "free subjectivity" provide the necessary theoretical groundwork for a discussion of *The Birthday Party*'s dramatization of the process through which the Other integrates its subjects. (27)

One of Althusser's famous theses in "On Ideology" is that "*all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*" (190). On this thesis he continues:

We shall go on to suggest that ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way as to 'recruit' subjects among individuals (it recruits them all) or 'transforms' individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) through the very precise operation that we call *interpellation or hailing*. (*On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, 190)

Like Goldberg hailing Stanley "You'll make decisions", or Mother's "Everything I do is...is for your own good", ideology constructs "subject", but such a "subject" is subjected to the ideology. Althusser explains "religious ideology" as an example. God "interpellates His subject, the individual subjected to Him by His very interpellation" (195). The subject is subjected to

the ideology in the very act of responding to such hailing. It follows that Albert in *A Night Out* cannot ward off his possessive mother as long as he responds to her. Thus we can articulate that the relationships of those people, both in the “family” and in the society, are ideological. However, we cannot yet decide how effectively the ideology functions in these “totalitarian” relationships in both plays.

4. Free choice of “Subjected sons”

Francesca Coppa argues “Orton’s plays are closest to Pinter’s in terms of structure” (51); therefore it is important to read Joe Orton’s plays to examine some motifs taken from Pinter. Especially Orton wrote *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* (1964) based on Pinter’s *The Birthday Party*. In that play of Orton’s, the landlady Kath shows sexual and maternal love towards the strange lodger Sloane, and becomes quite possessive of him, like Meg of Stanley:

SLOANE: You’re attempting to run my life.

KATH: Is baby cross?

SLOANE: You’re developing distinctly possessive tendencies.

KATH: You can get into trouble saying that.

SLOANE: A possessive woman.

KATH: A mamma can’t be possessive.

SLOANE: Can’t she?

KATH: You know she can’t. You’re being naughty. (*Entertaining Mr. Sloane*. 98)

Even though Kath shows her maternal love towards Sloane more overtly than Meg, as Coppa roughly describes, it can be safely said that Kath and Meg are analogical to some degree (“The Sacred Joke”, 52). On the contrary, Sloane is unlikely to treat her as his surrogate mother. Later in this play, Sloane turns out to be the murderer who has killed Kath’s father Kemp’s boss, and he also kills Kemp because the murder is revealed. Surprisingly, Kath, and her brother Ed, who is homosexual, decide to hide the murder. Instead they “share” Sloane like a slave who fills their sexual and maternal desire. Unable to resist their decision, Sloane is forced to stay with Kath and Ed against his will.

Unlike Sloane, it is doubtful that Stanley and Albert truly desire to leave “mothers”. It is true that Stanley sometimes expresses violent feelings towards Meg; at the end of Act I, given boy’s drum, at first he beats normally, but then gradually becomes violent; during the party, he irrationally pounces on Meg so as to suffocate her. However, he himself is not anxious for complete independence from her, but is forced to be separated from his “mother” by Goldberg and MacCann against his will. Albert also employs violence on his mother, and leaves his home. But he ends up by failing to separate himself from his mother and comes back at the last scene. Esslin penetratingly indicates the similarity between *The Birthday Party* and *A Night Out* and the Albert and Stanley’s dependence on their “mothers” (Pinter, 93). Cahn’s argument that “his attachment to his mother, the instinctual bond between two people, as well as his need to belong somewhere and to thereby confirm his identity, is stronger than any desires for escape he may harbor” (24-25) is rather similar to that of Esslin. Their proper comments, however, lack the concrete analysis of the text. In the beginning of the play, Albert asks his mother to bring his tie, because he cannot find it. His ignorance of the places where he puts his possessions reveals that he does not control his life, and depends on his mother for management. His behaviour in his firm also betrays his reluctance to leave his mother. During the party at his firm, Albert is annoyed by Gidney, who somehow despises him. Gidney repetitively calls him “Albert”, and Albert replies “I told you my name is Stokes” (*A Night Out*, 357). He persists in being called by his family name, but that reveals his unconscious intention to bind himself with his family. Just after Gidney teases Albert “You’re a mother’s boy. That’s what you are. That’s your trouble. You’re a mother’s boy” (358), Albert finally loses his temper and hits Gidney.

Before Albert comes back to his mother not under compulsion but on his own determination, we find the same kind of lines spoken by characters at the firm. Joyce and Eileen, who are female workers there, talk to Albert about the work:

JOYCE: Come on, tell us, what are you tired about?

ALBERT: Oh, just work, I suppose.

JOYCE: I’ve been working, too. I’m not tired. I love work.

Don’t you, Eileen? [*She leans across him to speak.*]

EILEEN: Oh yes, I love work. (*A Night Out*, 352)

It is true that whether they truly love her work or not is ambiguous considering that they cannot easily insult their firm at the party, but Joyce does not have to assert “I love work”, because she has only to declare “I’m not tired” for the reply to Albert. The fact that Joyce adds “I love work” to “I’m not tired” implies that she works at the firm on her own decision, so wants to secure the sense of belonging to the firm. In other words, her tiny but gratuitous addition “I love work” discloses that she works spontaneously, if not passionately.

According to Althusser, the very thought of acting by one’s free will, such as Joyce, leads to the stabilization of ideology:

From first to last in this schema, we observe that the ideological representation of ideology is itself forced to recognize that every subject endowed with consciousness / a conscience and believing in the ideas that it inspires in her or freely accepts should ‘act in accordance with her ideas’ and therefore inscribe her own ideas as free subject in the acts of her material practice. If she fails to, ‘that is not good.’ (*On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, 185)

To function ideology perfectly, one has to look on himself / herself as “free subject”, and to recognise that he or she acts “in accordance with” his or “her ideas”. Althusser also stresses that the ideological “state apparatuses are not reducible to the repressive apparatus alone; and that individuals do not have their own personal ‘cop’ behind them or in their heads” (179-180). So, in order to function ideology apparatuses perfectly, states must not make individuals feel repressed. He goes on to say that “When nothing is happening, the Ideological State Apparatuses have worked to perfection” (206). In this respect, the ideological apparatuses in the relationships between “mothers” and “sons” in both plays function to some extent, but not perfectly. Feeling repressed by and using violence on their “mothers”, both “sons” do not apply to the condition “nothing is happening”. However, Stanley does not leave Meg on his own will, and Albert finally returns to his mother. Even though “sons” are not forced to stay with “totalitarian mothers”, who are prone to rewriting sons’ stories and deprive them of their individuality as I have discussed in the

previous sections, they cannot leave mothers' place.

Notes

1 This speech is published as "Introduction" in *Plays One*.

2 The "tea" mentioned by Silverstein ("the exchange about the tea") is not the "tea" in this scene. He refers to the dialogue between Stanley and Meg (11-12).

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