

Application of Althusser's Ideology on "CLAY"

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An appalling-looking man enters and looks at himself in a mirror.

"Why do you look at yourself in the glass, since the sight of your reflection can only be painful to you?" The appalling-looking man replies: "Sir, according to the immortal principles of '89, all men are equal before the law; therefore I have the right to look at myself in the glass; with pleasure or pain that is an entirely personal matter."

In respect to common sense, I was certainly right; but from the point of view of the law, he was not wrong [1].

Abstract: James Joyce the great Anglo-Irish writer wrote *Dubliners* that has fifteen short stories. "Clay" is the story that represents Maria, an aging catholic virgin who is paralyzed by the dominant ideology of Ireland. She masks the pain of living in a male-dominated city and is not strong enough to escape the rules of convention. Maria is a pious catholic follower of the norms and rituals of Irish ideology. This paper aimed to apply Althusser's principles of Ideology on "Clay".

Ideology in "Clay"

The social position of human being as an alienated creature has been discussed. In every capitalist society, individuals are merely alienated subjects; therefore, studying the effects of social relations on human nature is of significant importance [2]. Therefore, the capitalist society makes the alienated worker turn to be an instrument rather than a free human being. Discussing abstract entities such as humanity, independence, or

anything else to which man has to spend his time or powers, is a proof of the fact that man is dominated as a "serving man" [2]. Hence, gaining a free will or removing signs of alienation are not possible.

It is necessary to introduce some definitions of ideology. Ideology is a "false consciousness, "that affects" the connection of the social and political structure with production" [3] Therefore, for Marx ideology has a spiritual and imaginary existence. For Louis Althusser ideology is "the expression of the relation between men and their world" [4]. Thus, ideology is "a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" [5]. This means individuals and their beliefs are affected by their experiences. It is also claimed that "for Marx, ideologies were mere illusions; but for Althusser ideologies, with a history of their own, were a systematic element of every society" [6]. It is declared that Althusser's ideology is "eternal,... timeless and universal"; ideology is the essence of communities, in addition, people make homes in the "structure of ideology" that determines "the nature and limits of their subjectivity" within which "individuals enjoy the illusion of free will or choice as they enact ideologies" [7]. People are unconsciously obeying the rules predetermined by an ideology. The function of an ideology is not easily visible, as it does not force its subjects directly. Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) refers to "a certain number of realities" which present themselves to in "the form of specialized institutions" such as:

The religious ISA (the system of the different churches), the educational ISA (the system of the different public and private 'schools'), the family ISA, the legal ISA, the political ISA (the

political system, including the different parties), the trade-union ISA, the communications ISA (press, radio and television, etc.) and the cultural ISA [5].

For Althusser all ISAs end in a parallel result: "capitalist relation of exploitation" [5]. Through the ISAs, all ideologies interpellate people into defined subject positions. Interpellation for Althusser is explained by how ISAs interpellate subjects into ideologically defined figures [5]. So individuals are hailed into subject positions. Althusser's theory of interpellation suggests that "an individual's limited agency finds expression only in answering the call of ideology" [7]. It is also debated that like Marx, "Althusser treats individuals as functionaries or supports for the class struggle, rather than active agents in history within a humanist explanation" [8]. In ideology "before birth, the child is always-already a subject" and a subject's will and action is merely limited to be a social function that is to work in a way that the dominant power of the society determines or expects; whether directly or indirectly [5]. Therefore, all human deeds are controlled and examined by ideological structures of the community they live in. In other words, in the drama of life, individuals are plain puppets. Finally, there is no way out of ideology because it determines for its subjects [5].

Maria, the protagonist of "Clay" is an aging catholic virgin working as a laundry woman among former prostitutes. She has a tender heart and has no argument with anyone. Since she has no family, she has to work in order to survive. Maria is known for being a peace maker. Different dominant ideologies of Ireland along with her witch like face affect her life and her choices as a childless woman. Joyce views men and women in a patriarchal society and sees them from patriarchal view of the world, in other words for him "women represent the body, men spirit" [9]. The ISA of society teaches Maria to be a good-hearted Irish spinster. She has a witch like face and during the story we read about her long nose and long chin, her body is little, but she is simple and big-hearted. She is taught not to protest for being ignored and is thankful. She has to be proud of working in a laundry and her too little independence and insufficient wages because she is able to raise her own charges. Maria is also pleading for love from the ignorant family of Donnelly by spending her low wage to buy cakes or sweets for their children who later on will make fun of her. Maria

is an interpellated subject that does not resist the ISA of Ireland. In her patriarchal Ireland men are allowed to be violent or drunk but they are the dominant rulers any way. It signifies that Maria's surface kind keenness and troubleshooting role envelops the "hollowness" within conventional family relations along with "male violence and drunkenness, family feuding, mawkish nostalgia and the dismal prospects for women in Ireland" [9]. Joe is always drunk but as he is masculine characteristic, that's sensible. But Maria's virginity or being a fine Catholic is ignored. There is no social reward for her. In Irish patriarchal society, unmarried women are doomed subjects. Within the story we learn the messages through Maria's internal voice. Even her internal voice is not strong enough to show the paralyzing fact behind the dominant patriarchal ideology of her time. Interestingly, this voice hides her weak points, either physical or emotional; naturally the ones that are not preferred by men. It is the narrator of the story that describes her little body and ugly face not Maria, rather she describes her body with more passion "and she looked with quaint affection at the diminutive body which she had so often adorned, in spite of its years she found it a nice tidy little body" [10]. O'Neil claims that "the internal voice of Maria helps her exclude anything that might endanger her fragile idea of who she is" [11]. Even her internal voice does not complain and this way proves her mechanical obeying of the patriarchal ideology. In contrast, we see Joe with many weak points; he does not need an internal voice because he is a man capable of deciding for his life in the patriarchal society. Whatever he says or wants is uttered clearly and since he is a man in a male-dominated society, it is part of his rights and all women around him must obey. In ISA of a patriarchal society, Maria is a fine subject seemingly satisfied by her repression who even tries to reassure herself of being an obedient subject by repeating phrases such as: the Matron's peacemaker note on her; Ginger Mooney's comment saying that if it wasn't for Maria's sake she would not do anything for ironing women; or Joe's "Mamma is mamma but Maria is my proper mother" [10]. She does not blame the regularity and cruelty of life and moves in line with it. When women talk about Maria's winning the ring, we read: "Maria had to laugh and say she didn't want any ring or man either; and when she laughed with disappointed shyness" [10]. In *Dubliners'* ISAs men are to colonize women and Maria is not strong enough to escape it. So being colonized is a part of a

male dominated ideology that women cannot resist. In "Clay", women need men to have identity or a label, whether they are married and carry the name of a wife or are misused by men as prostitutes; they are in fact colonized by men. She has to act despite her desires. In patriarchal society, she has to wait to be offered a ring. Maria's kind heart but witch-like face does not attract men and this is problematic; she has very limited place and is disempowered in ISA of Ireland. "Colonial disempowerment" aims "to paralyze the power" and influence of an individual in order "to dysfunction him and avoid rebelling" [7]. The male-dominated society makes women behave in a way to attract the attention of men. For virgin Maria, being noticed by men is so important that whoever seems to spot her is called "the gentleman". For instance, when an old man makes room for Maria on the tram, she calls him "elderly gentleman", "stout gentleman", or "colonel-looking gentleman"[10]. It is conveyed that the old man is drunk and Maria knows it but she maintains to remember him as "the gentleman" or her internal voice says "she thought how easy it was to know a gentleman even when he has a drop taken"[10]. It is as if she misses the opportunity of attracting his notice because whenever she remembers him she is disappointed. Any Irish woman must follow the ideological notion of the fact that "a woman's life is complete" and "her definition established only if there is a man in it" [12]. This notion interpellates any Irish woman into a nice wife in order to have identity. Therefore, Maria convinces herself that even this drunk man has taken a drop and is still a gentleman. In ideology of Irish women, men must notice women and poor Maria is hopeful to be noticed by a man. In other words, she confirms the authority of the male world. Some critics criticize her true trust on men by saying maybe "the old colonel looking gentleman takes Maria's cake on the tram" [13].

It is possible to mainly blame Maria's ugly face or her strong Catholic belief that oblige her to be "a victim" of male-centered Ireland and become "a spinster" rather than an identified wife or mistress [7]. As Maria is childless and has no family she has no way except working in a Protestant institution for former women prostitutes. Again she is not strong enough to rebel because she works in order to survive. This Catholic maid is to change her view toward Protestants and says "but now she thought they were very nice people" [10]. Cultural ISA has bent her to accept the irresistible facts of life. Maria is criticized for being "a mature figure" who does not

willfully long to "escape from her life of servitude" rather she paradoxically accepts "a stable identity within the fractured colonial totality" [7]. For instance, she insists on attending the Mass, or after these long years she disappointedly is waiting to be noticed by men, she desires to be dominated by a man. In contrast, as a subject of ideology, Maria hides the reality of being repressed by men for her ugly face and little body, behind the imposed kindness and goodness by repeatedly saying "yes dear, no dear" or agrees every one by "demure nods and hems" [7]. Althusser's theory of interpellation defines the process whereby ideology hails subjects into subjective positions so that they might participate in rituals. Maria is an already-subject interpellated in ideological formation of Ireland. She submits to the call of ideology by deforming her feelings and attitudes to remain a catholic virgin. Her overtly peacemaking attitude is criticized as a foolish behavior, it is said that she is "pressed into service ... as jester and fool" [14]. Cultural ideology interpellates women to be mothers in order to be more precious. Therefore, Maria tries to imagine herself close to Joe by reassuring herself with the memory of Joe's saying "Mamma is mamma but Maria is my proper mother" [10].

Actually these roles do not secure the identity and love she is seeking for and the only gift of ideology is her suppression. In other words, since Maria does not have an ideologically defined role such as a nun, wife, mother, mistress, or even prostitute then she seems to be no longer in circulation of ideology. However, neither is she rewarded for obeying Catholicism, nor are the prostitutes condemned for anything. She is an aging woman along with old prostitutes that are useless for men; therefore, being ignored is natural.

As a childless woman, she has not much to worry about; as a result trivial objects such as her purse or plum cakes are of high importance. After five years, Maria is still delighted with her purse and calls this trivial object her most important property. In fact it might be the only present she has received from Joe that is a symbol of being loved and valued "She took out her purse ... and read again the words A Present from Belfast. She was very fond of that purse because Joe had brought it to her five years before" [10]. Critics assert that "unlike her purse" she suffers from the "fate of being imprecisely labeled" so she is "incongruously placed in a laundry for reformed prostitutes" [15]. In fact, Joe has bought a purse for her just once as the only gift she has received from a

man but Maria, as an older one, has to buy presents for them every year. Although Maria earns too little in laundry life to fill the purse, the dominant ideology makes her buy something for Joe's family. She is interpellated to act the role of the mother that she has never really been. Still, buying something for them is everything for Maria. ISA of family teaches her to love or to be loved. When she arrives at the Donnelly's home and cannot find her special plum cake, Maria is disappointed and "colored with shame" [10]. Maybe she is afraid of losing the attention and love she desires or cannot afford "the two and four pence she had thrown away for nothing" [10]. The cake is a sign of her love and the desire to be loved but she loses it; Joe is the one who tries to console her and Maria is finally noticed by a man "Joe said it didn't matter and made her sit down by the fire. He was very nice with her" [10]. Therefore, Maria accepts Joe's offer to drink to relieve and forget her problem of Maria. A person like Maria even is not able to resist drinking offer from a man.

The name Maria in "Clay" appears so close to the name of the "Blessed Virgin Mary" in Latin [16]. Probably subjective to this fact, Maria remains a believer in God and the Catholic Church; therefore, the ISA of religion dooms her to remain a catholic virgin. "Clay" has some examples of Catholic piety and Maria is the only character that tries to follow them very carefully. She never misses six o'clock mass or keeps her piety, does not drink etc. In fact, compared to other figures that do not care for religious rituals, Maria is paralyzed by the Catholic Church. Maria's religiously bound paralysis is attacked by some critics who call her "unwittingly a servant of Church and State" or criticize her working to survive with low wages by describing her as "a corporal asset of the State" [17]. According Mannock, in Catechism or Christian doctrine "Blessed are the peacemakers" who "Harbor above all the love of God" who "keep peace with all" and "seek peace with God: Keep it with all man and strive to reconcile" [18]. ISA of religion teaches her to be a peacemaker that will be rewarded in the next world. Maria tries to console her hopeless marital desire by believing in such doctrines but she still is waiting patiently to be noticed and win the ring. Defined by the beauty principles of the dominant ideology, Maria is an ugly subject, therefore; she is excluded from the "marriage market, while her church ... promises much in the way of ultimate consolation" and promises being empowered in the next life [12].

She still prefers to be noticed by a man to gain social empowerment in this life. As an interpellated subject, Maria is "unable to confront the gap between her own deformed self and the romantic ideal of love" she has been expecting [12]. Maria is obviously repressed by the dominant ISA of religion by suppressing her sexual desires except for the purposes of marriage and child creation; the ones that are allowed by the Church. It is claimed that Maria has attempted to "uproot the sexual motive from her life" [13]. In ISA of religion it is worthy. However, later on we see that her declining sexuality is mocked by children through the saucer game. Her attempt to be noticed by men is unfulfilled so she tries to replace such feeling by creating a kind of mother-son love with Joe. Being proud of Joe's calling her "proper mama" [10], Maria tries to keep love of a man. Unwillingly, she has to move her sexual desire to the remotest parts of her interests and consequently she is excluded from sexual market and therefore of notice of male-dominated society.

Maria's low social position has no gift for her except being neglected either by men, community, or even by Donnelly's children. Games play an important role in signifying that women are interpellated by ISAs and especially with ISA of culture. It is interesting that women are subject to Hallows' Eve game in "Clay". It is highlighted that "this fortune-telling device" of saucers with hidden objects proves "the power of patriarchy" because unmarried women and girls are the only participants [19]. The hidden objects under saucers are mainly ring, prayer's book and clay foretelling about good news of marriage that is regarded the best chance, or paving the way to a Covent, or the worst choice that is a signifier of death. Hence, in ISA of Irish Catholicism, women are either to marry or become a nun, if not they are doomed to wait for death. However, Maria lets children blindfold her and lead her "up to the table amid laughing and joking and she put her hand out in the air as she was told to do" [10]. The ideology of family relations says that (as the gentleman on the tram tells Maria) "it was only right that the youngsters should enjoy themselves while they were young" [10] or in ISA of culture, "Maria was delighted to see the children so merry and Joe and his wife in such good spirits" [10]. So again Maria is repressed because children are even allowed to mock an old unmarried woman. Although they neglect her or make fun of her, Maria notes that "they were all very good to her" [10]. Maria has no way except being kind. Being mocked but

having to obey children, Maria innocently selects the saucer with clay; the ideology of tradition interprets it as the symbol of death. In the dominant ideology neither marriage nor the Covent is proper for Maria's age, but death is the most proper one. Maria's past life is dominated by ideology lessons and significantly, the game in which Maria chooses the clay is

a traditional one that influences her future too. Neither her witch like face, nor the church let her live the life she really desires. Maria is supposed to remain "childless" who is not very far from the day of her death, is "despised a little by the children" [20]. It is also stated that "the neighbor's children know that neither marriage, nor fruitfulness, nor retirement to a convent are in Maria's future" so her "only way of escape dished up to her is death" [21].

In ISA of communication each class has its own language, structure and lexicon. Some characters, like Maria in "Clay" are truly on the "margins of language" doomed not to progress beyond the "low level of linguistic achievement" [12]. For example the word good is repeated 6 times, nice 12 times, gentleman 6 times and Joe 22 times. It may illustrate how her world is confined to a small number of values, especially to Joe. In "Clay" Maria would like nothing more than agreeing with everyone and accepting whatever offered to her:

"Often he had wanted her to go and live with them; but . . . she had become accustomed to the life of the laundry [10].

"She used to have such a bad opinion of Protestants but now she thought they were very nice people [10]"

"There was one thing she didn't like and that was the tracts on the walls; but the matron was such a nice person to deal with, so genteel.. [10]"

"She was sure they would [have a nice evening] but she could not help thinking what a pity it was Alphy and Joe were not speaking. . . . but such was life [10]"

"Maria thought she would put in a good word for Alphy. But Joe cried that God might strike him stone dead if he ever spoke a word to his brother again. . . . But Joe said he would not lose his temper on account of the night . . . and soon everything was merry again [10]"

"Youngsters should enjoy themselves while they were young" [10].

A woman like Maria confronts affirmative sentences and she attempts to offer no resistance to the speech of others: "She talked a little through her nose, always soothingly: Yes, *my dear* and No, *my dear*" [10].

The story is haunted by the past events and memories, probably because as an unmarried and childless woman she has no certain future. The ISA of tradition is very stable for her. As a repressed subject by the dominant ISAs she is all the time recalling the past and maybe the possible past changes. She joins Joe's family for Hallow Eve, as she probably does for most holiday celebrations. As she dresses herself she recalls dressing for Mass on Sunday mornings when she was a girl or sings "one of the old songs" [10] and Joe observes that "there was no time like the long ago" [10]. Almost certainly, when Maria sings the old song to Joe, she feels as if she is in her real family. She tries to act as a mother to young Joe and remembers his brother Alphy who has separated from them. It seems that only Maria remembers him and her feelings to Joe is one sided. Maria desires to be a family member of Joe that gives her more value because he is both male and dominant. When Maria sings her song, her internal voice explicates her suppressed desires by the ISA of Irish society and conventions:

*I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls
With vassals and serfs at my side
And of all who assembled within those walls
That I was the hope and the pride.
I had riches too great to count, could boast
Of a high ancestral name,
But I also dreamt, which pleased me most,
That you loved me still the same. [10]*

She dreams of dwelling with strong vassals, lots of riches, proud and above all with a defined ancestral name. It is also debated that surrounded by the "vassals and serfs who assemble in the walls of the institution for fallen women" Maria thinks that "everyone was so fond of" her [7]. It is possible to interpret that for poor Maria love, wealth, pride, a respectable name, identity and dignity remain just within a song because she neither is able to take meaningful action to resist what the church and society teach her nor protests to the reality of her ordinary life. Maria has learned to obey commands

and be "in service of others, complying with their wishes and always succeeding" in being a peacemaker [7]. It is also maintained that Maria's "dream of marble halls is a dream of an impossible return to the natural place in the family that she never truly possessed" [13].

It is interesting to note that Maria does not dare to sing the original song to the end that is:

*I dreamt that suitors sought my hand;
That knights upon bended knee,*

*And with vows no maiden heart could
withstand,
They pledg'd their faith to me;
And I dreamt that one of that noble host
Came forth my hand to claim.
But I also dreamt, which charmed me most,
That you lov'd me still the same...*

*That you lov'd me, you lov'd me still the same,
That you lov'd me, you lov'd me still the same*
[22]

She dares to talk of Joe's love but is not strong enough to continue the song to the end and explicate her other desires. And this is what she as a subject of Ideology is forced to do and wish. Even her worthiest property is a purse that is a present from a man who is a son-like figure for her. Critics read "I Dreamt that I Dwelt" as a representation of Maria's repressed sexual feeling: it starts to show Maria's growth from "utopian childhood" up to "introduction of sexual relations" that is never fulfilled but Maria's choice of clay shows she is predestined to death without reaching his wishes [13]. Her farfetched dreams are conveyed by every word of her song that is against the dominant ideology and she does not dare to continue the song.

Finally, as a repressed subject of the dominant ideology, Maria has less to say and the sentences she utters are mainly short and very conservative. Maria appears to be either naive, or childish. "Clay" is a shadow of affirmative policy of a patriarchal society. As a woman she is one step inferior and being of the working class who is sexually inactive moves her two steps inferior. Irish Ideology interpellates Maria into a defined obeying subject position that is in fact paralyzed. ISAs of culture, religion, patriarchy, communication etc. command her. Just as she allows Joe to succeed in forcing a drink upon her who a pious catholic, all people

around are successful in affirming whatever they want to her. ISAs of Ireland whether the society or the religion force to deform and paralyze her nature, personality and will.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I'd like to thank the kind efforts of my professor Mukdder Erkan in Ataturk University.

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