



DISPLACEMENT ANXIETY AND PATHOLOGICAL EFFECTS: A BIOREGIONAL READING OF MARY TYRONE IN *LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT*

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Abstract

Bioregionalism, a concept of second-wave of ecocriticism, emphasizes the significance of a place of attachment in shaping the personality of an individual and highlighting how displacement renders psychological and pathological effects on an individual. Ecocriticism underscores the indelible impact an environment, both natural and physical, has on an individual. The aim of this research is to explore the dynamic interaction between environment and an individual, highlighting the effects of displacement. However, the objective of this research is to analyze the character of Mary Tyrone through the ecocritical lens of bioregionalism. Thereby, centering this research upon exploring the physical illness, psychological impacts, morphine addiction, and anxiety of Mary Tyrone induced as a result of being displaced from her place of attachment. The primary tool for this research is Eugene O' Neill's play Long Day's Journey into Night. The secondary resource is the theory of ecocriticism, particularly the idea of bioregionalism purported by Lawrence Buell. It is a qualitative research in nature. The research pivots around the theory of bioregionalism and the ideas of place attachment, place deprivation, and how the individuality as well as the physical anatomy of a person degenerates leaving behind deteriorating bones and derailed sense of identity when displaced from a place of attachment.

Keywords: Eco-criticism, Bioregionalism, Place-attachment, Place-connectedness, Place sense, Place elusiveness, Place deprivation, Displacement anxiety, Pathological effects, Morphine addiction.

1. Introduction

Eugene Gladstone O'Neill is a renowned American playwright and a noble laureate. Son of a theatre actor, he was born in a "hotel room" and spent most of his childhood "on trains", "hotel rooms" and "backstage" ("Eugene Gladstone O'Neill"). As a theatre actor, O'Neill's father was constantly moving, and O'Neill blamed his father for his disturbed family and for his mother's addiction to morphine. He attended a boarding school and went to Princeton University which he left after one year and departed on a journey to learn from "life experience" ("Eugene Gladstone O'Neill"). He led the life of a marine and his voyages at sea left an indelible mark upon his personality. Running away from his disturbed family made him an alcoholic and he attempted suicide at the age of 24. Diagnosed with tuberculosis, he was admitted to a sanatorium where he found refuge in writing and started to write plays ("Eugene Gladstone O'Neill").

O'Neill's plays are written with a personal perspective and most of his characters are derived from his own life and his household. For instance, O'Neill's play *Long Day's Journey into Night* is regarded as an autobiographical play by various critics and reviewers. The characters of this play enjoy a striking resemblance with the family members of O'Neill. James Tyrone of *Long Day's Journey into Night* reminds of O'Neill's father who was also an Irish immigrant and a stage actor. However, Mary Tyrone strikes a resemblance to O'Neill's mother for her morphine addiction and Jamie Tyrone to O'Neill's elder brother for his excessive indulgence in alcohol, while Edmund Tyrone, is a counterpart of O'Neill as both hold romantic views about nature and have sea voyages as a common factor between them. Miriam Novak Jardim in her article "Long Day's Journey into Night: An Autobiographical Work" writes, "In

the process of writing it, he [O'Neill] experienced the agony of reliving his painful past as well as the guilt of disclosing that past" (50).

The play selected for this research is *Long Day's Journey into Night*. This play of O'Neill skillfully portrays the intimate relationship between a body and place/region and how the identity of a body is dependent upon a place/region. Natural environment holds a significant role in these two plays and the elements of nature are in constant interaction with the characters of these plays. A particular place/region plays a crucial part in defining O'Neill's characters particularly the characters of his play *Long Day's Journey into Night*. The characters and their sense of identity, familiarity, belonging and attachment towards a particular place/region springs and matures over a course of period. Therefore, accentuating the concepts of bioregionalism and the significant role of environment/place in shaping the sense of identity of an individual. The journey from day towards night, as mentioned in the title of this play, suggests an active participation of natural environment in this play as well. Thus, reiterating the theory of bioregionalism discussed by Lawrence Buell.

Lawrence Buell is a renowned eco-critic who has written various books, articles and essays highlighting the relationship between man and his environment. His focus is upon the first and second waves of eco-criticism. In his books, he explains in detail the interdependent relationship between body and place/region, and how a place/region has an important role to play in defining a body's identity. Body and place/region are inseparable for Buell and the existence or identity of a body can never be defined without place/region, therefore, Buell writes in his book *Writing for an Endangered World* that there cannot be "is without a where" (55). Moreover, he has explained the concept of "Place elusiveness" (59) that refers to the fluidity of place. The concept of place varies from person to person and it cannot be defined under specific set of boundaries or limits. He also talks about "place-connectedness" (64) which highlights the sense of familiarization one develops towards a specific place and "displacement anxiety" (75) which explain the state of ambiguity one feels after being displaced from a region/place where he/she belongs.

Buell in his article "Ecocriticism: Some Emerging Trends" defines first wave of eco-criticism as "ecocentric", and explains that the first wave of ecocriticism concerns and gives more advantage to "rural and wild spaces" as compared to the "urban" spaces (93). The first wave presents a romantic view of the natural world. However, second wave to Buell is "sociocentric" which aims to shatter the "wall of separation" that exists between man and nature as it is a "historically produced artifact" (93). Second wave insists upon breaking the wall between man and environment and has broadened the definition of environment by including both physical and natural environment to it. Scott Slovic in his article, "The Third Wave of Ecocriticism: North American Reflections on the Current Phase of the Discipline" talks about how the third wave of ecocriticism includes the concepts of "ecofeminism", "eco-masculinism" and the concepts of "animality" (7). It also focuses upon "critiques from within" (7) highlighting the proliferating damage being done to the environment. This wave expresses concerns over man destroying the environment and insists upon devising ways to protect and sustain it. Additionally, Bioregionalism shares its concepts with second wave of eco-criticism as both call attention to removing the wall between man and his environment.

In his book, *Writing for an Endangered World*, Buell has explained the concept of environment and place in detail by quoting various geographers, social constructionists and regionalists and by giving relevant examples to support his claim. Defining "place", Buell writes that place is a "space to which meaning has been ascribed". Explaining the concept of "place elusiveness", he describes place as "infinitely great" and it "can be as small as a spot on a sofa... or as big as a planet" (59-60). According to Buell, the idea of place is relative; the

meaning of a “place” and its importance varies from person to person (60). Quoting geographer John Agnew, Buell writes in his book that “place can be conceived as a matter of (social) locale, (geographical) location, and sense of place. It combines elements of nature (elemental forces), social relations (class, gender and so on), and meaning (the mind, ideas and symbols)” (60). A “place” may not be as simple as it seems to be, and Buell supports this idea by quoting Thoreau who says that the “capabilities of a landscape” even if it lies “within a circle of radius of ten miles” can never be fully known even if a human being struggles for it for a “threescore years and ten” of his life (62). Moreover, in an article titled “Bioregionalism and the History of Place”, William Lang further illustrates the concept of bioregionalism by stating Jim Dodge’s idea that the principle component of bioregionalism is the significance it gives to the “natural systems” which not only provides “physical nutrition” to the body, but also acts as a source of “sustenance” for the “spirits (Lang 416). A man’s identity is relative to the place he is in, therefore William Lang quoting regionalist Wendell Berry in his article writes, “If you don’t know where you are you don’t know who you are” (418).

Although “place-connectedness” can never be fully understood by a man, Buell insists upon viewing it in “concentric areas” (64) and in the form of “scatter-gram of locales” for better understanding (65). For Buell, place does not have a “stable identity”, it keeps on changing both by the “inside and outside” forces. (67). A “sense” towards a place is developed as a result of an “accumulation” of “all the places” that a man finds important to him. (69). A “place sense” in a person is developed by the interaction with all the places he/she has been to. This sense is an aggregate of all the experiences a man has gathered from the places he has come across all his life. Apart from explaining the concept of “place-connectedness” (64), Buell has also stressed upon the affects this “sense” (69) has on human beings. A person suffers a “pathological effect” (75) when he/she is ousted from a place that is familiar to him/her and can experience “displacement anxiety” (75). To strengthen his claim, Buell quotes a regionalist Wendell Berry who writes that without the knowledge of “where you are” one can lose its “soul”, “soil”, “life”, and its “way home (75). Displacement is not the sole reason for pathological illness, but an attachment towards a place can also sometimes make a person “pathological” and can “abet possessiveness, ethnocentrism, xenophobia” (76).

2. The Psychological and Pathological Landscape of Mary Tyrone’s Mind

Long Day’s Journey into Night has been used as primary texts for this study. This play was first published in 1956, and outlines Irish immigrants’ experience in America. The aftermath of industrialization and its adverse impact on individuals as well as on society as a whole has been given great importance in *Long Day’s Journey into Night*. This play consists of four primary characters named James Tyrone, Mary Tyrone, Jamie Tyrone and Edmund Tyrone, and highlights the struggle of Tyrone family in adapting to a new set of environments. It demonstrates how every character suffers when he/she is dislocated from a place he/she feels connected to. Every character has developed a sense of familiarization towards a certain place and is defined by that place. James Tyrone is attached to Ireland, Mary Tyrone to her convent and father’s house, Jamie to barrooms and Edmund to sea, and these places play a significant role in defining each character’s identity and personality. It also highlights the physical as well as psychological turmoil of being an immigrant, and how displacement adversely affects the life of an individual and a family as a whole.

O’Neill himself has always enjoyed an intimate bond with the natural environment, and this is the reason why he was able to portray this relationship masterly in his plays. O’Neill belonged to Ireland and later migrated to America, but Ireland never left him. O’Neill had developed a sense of belonging and a sense of attachment towards Ireland and continued to define himself as Irish even after leaving Ireland. An article titled “O’Neill in Ireland: An

Update” mentions an interview of O’Neill in which he says, “The critics have missed the most important thing about me and my work—the fact that I am Irish” (Shaughnessy 137). The characters of O’Neill project the same plight; his characters in his play *Long Day’s Journey into Night* are defined by a particular place or environment. The characters, like their author have developed a sense of attachment towards a particular place and when displaced from that place they not only lose a sense of identity and belonging, but also suffer pathologically. Hence, this research aims to analyze the intimate bond that body and region share particularly focusing Mary Tyrone’s journey of place attachment and analyzing the psychological and pathological effects of place displacement.

Mary Tyrone, James Tyrone’s wife from *Long Day’s Journey into Night* suffers when she was displaced from her place towards which she has established a sense of attachment and belonging. Her place is her father’s house and her convent school. Lawrence Buell, in his book, *Writing for an Endangered World* talks about “place elusiveness” and describes place as “infinitely great” that “can be as small as a spot on a sofa” or “as big as a planet” (59). Place needs not to be a spacious environment; one can develop a sense of attachment even towards a spot on a sofa as Buell mentions in his book. Mary is introduced as having “convent-girl youthfulness” that “she never lost” (13). Just like her husband who latches onto his Irish identity, Mary persistently associates herself with her convent days. She perpetually remembers her past days and laments over the fact that she is no longer the Mary of her convent days who is so dear to her and who defines her whole existence and personality. Moreover, Mary’s displacement not only affects her psychologically, but also pathologically as she develops an addiction towards morphine which results in her hair turning grey and her hands becoming restless. Throughout the play, Mary is seen to be highly conscious of her looks and constantly worries about her physicality as she is losing the charm and beauty of a “convent-girl” (13). Hence, Mary’s displacement affects her both psychologically and pathologically.

Mary Tyrone belongs to a very well off, “respectable” and “educated” (102) family where all her wants and needs are fulfilled immediately. While growing up she nurtured two dreams; one was to become a nun and the other to become a pianist, but she had to let go of both her dreams when she married a stage actor James Tyrone. Her thoughts, beliefs and manners are influenced by the days she spent in her father’s house and her days at the convent. Additionally, Mary being an Irish also has left an impact upon her personality. While describing Mary, O’Neill writes “Her face is distinctively Irish in type” (12). Having being brought up in a respectable house and a convent where she is constantly surrounded by her loving teachers and friends, she “never felt at home in the theatre” (102). Even the summer home envelops her with the feeling of homelessness and constant loneliness as she is still stuck in her past place towards which she feels familiar and attached. Mary tries hard to feel at home, but she feels “sick and tired of pretending this is a home!” (67). Mary’s sense of place is derived from her father’s home and her convent days, and does not allow her to adjust and accept her new surroundings. She is on a perpetual journey back to her memories where she remembers and compares her past place where she once belonged to the present summer home and finds it impossible to belong here. She addresses her husband and remembers her “home” which she “gave up” (72).

Apart from having an attachment with her father’s home, Mary also feels connected to her convent and her days spent there. While remembering her convent days she says, “At the Convent I had so many friends”. All her friends used to live in “lovely homes” and would pay her a visit regularly at her “father’s home” (86). However, the summer home where she abodes now has engulfed her with loneliness and she misses her friends and family. While recalling her past days with her servant Cathleen, Mary confesses that “I [she] don’t want to be alone”

(99) and questions Mother Mary “Mother of God, why do I feel so lonely” (95). Mary, no matter how much she tries, can never feel at home because her soul is lost somewhere else and she rightly says, “I found I could no longer call my soul my own” (93). Therefore, it proves regionalist Wendell Berry’s claim that without the knowledge of one’s place one loses its “soul”, “soil”, life”, and “way home” (75) which Buell reiterates in his book *Writing for an Endangered World*. Her only hope to find peace and salvation is also connected to her Convent as she believes that one day “Blessed Virgin Mary forgives me and gives me back the faith in Her love and pity I used to have in my convent days” (94).

Additionally, Mary’s displacement not only leaves her with the feeling of loneliness and helplessness, but she also suffers physical as well as psychological illness. Her displacement has a “pathological effect” on her and she also endures “displacement anxiety” (Buell 75). Mary’s anxiety, restlessness and nervousness are quite vivid in her manners. The constant restless movements of her hands, her being self-conscious all the time, and her spells of nervousness; all combine to prove that Mary is under the constant influence of anxiety. Moreover, O’Neill in his stage directions has repeatedly used the word “detached” for Mary, for example, he writes “there is a peculiar detachment in her voice and manner” (58), “she gives a little laugh of detached amusement” (72), and “with detached calm” (84). Mary’s psychological illness has kept her under continuous denial. The psychological need to hide from reality and to run away from it leads Mary to contract physical illness as well. She becomes addicted to morphine and consumes it excessively as there is nothing else that has the power to “stop the pain” (103). Morphine addiction takes a toll on her health as she becomes physically weak and thin, she suffers from rheumatism and her hands flutter restlessly. Mary recalls her once beautiful hair in the “shade of reddish brown” (28) her perfect eyes and hands, and her “fine figure” (103) while talking to Cathleen. In order to stay hidden in her own world, Mary consumes morphine as she denies reality to accept the satisfaction she gets from her illusionary world of morphine. Hence, her displacement affects her pathologically as well as psychologically.

3. Conclusion

The case of Mary Tyrone of *Long Day’s Journey into Night* is an apt demonstration of how one develops a sense of attachment or connectedness towards a certain place. This place not only defines one’s sense of identity, beliefs and ideals, but also renders psychological as well as pathological effects when displaced. Therefore, reiterating Buell’s claims that there cannot be “is without a where” (Buell 55). The term bioregionalism, a defining concept of second wave of eco-criticism, combines two ideas ‘bio’ and ‘region’ in its essence. Life cannot exist in isolation, it has to work in strong tandem with the environment around to ascribe meaning and significance to it. This research aims at exploring the interdependence of life and environment, utilizing Buell’s ideas that “is” (life/personality) cannot be defined or studied without a “where” (Buell 55). Mary Tyrone, in this regard, serves as a great example of exploring the dynamic interaction between a place and identity. Besides, the display of place attachment, Mary Tyrone’s anxiety, fluttering hands, derailed sense of identity and morphine addiction, all combine together to present a strong case for the effects of place deprivation. Hence, this research aims to highlight the significance of the environment around as a living and breathing space, as opposed to being reduced to a mere setting otherwise.

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