

Affiliation Between The Inner-Self And The Outer Landscape In Mayra Montero's *The Last Night I Spent With You*

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Abstract: *The framework of the novel *The Last Night I Spent with You*, proceeds with Fernando and Celia, a middle-aged couple going on a trip to the Islands of the Caribbean after their only daughter- Elena has got married. This paper deals with the relationship between the outside landscape and the inner-self; and the changes occurring in the inner self of the characters with the subsequent change in the environment. It evaluates the various ways of landscapes altering the inner conscious of the characters during their cruise. The ambience along with the environment, changes the feelings of the individuals. The Caribbean landscape, islands and the places are depicted so vividly with much significance. The various landscapes of Caribbean Islands bringing changes in the protagonists psyche have been delineated intensively. Landscapes acting as an influencer in altering the actions of the character are brought out in an evaluative manner.*

Keywords: *Caribbean Islands, Interior and Exterior Landscapes, Environment, Transformation.*

“Nature always wears the colours of the spirit” (Emerson)

The framework of the novel *The Last Night I Spent with You* (LISY), proceeds with Fernando and Celia, a middle-aged couple going on a trip to the Islands of the Caribbean after their only daughter- Elena has got married. Bermudez, Fernando's friend has warned him to be careful as women have the habit of losing their inhibition on ship. During the cruise, Celia makes friendship with Julieta, who spoils the couples union by urging Fernando to indulge in illicit affair with her.

Barry Lopez, a nature writer talks about the exterior and interior landscape, “I think of two landscapes... the external landscape the one we see... an interior one, a kind of projections within a person of a part of the exterior landscape... the shape of the individual is affected by land as it is by genes (Philips 11). This quotation forms the outline of the discussion of this paper. To put it precisely, it deals vehemently with the relationship between the outside landscape and the inner-self; and changes occurring in the inner self of the characters with the subsequent change in the environment. This particular segment evaluates the various ways of landscapes altering the inner conscious of the characters during their cruise. The ambience along with the environment, changes the feelings of the individuals. The Caribbean landscape, islands and the places are depicted so vividly with much significance.

The place called Charlotte Amalie is clearly visible with houses red roofed and gleaming. The sea seems calm and clear with no trace of storm. After seeing these sights, Celia wishes that she could be one of the black women living in those houses, “...I would have been more than happy to exchange the cold American lounge chair for the passionate shelter of an island cot” (LISY 33).

While contemplating about all these sights it begins to drizzle as if the rain welcomes her entry into the island. Inwardly, she feels a kind of relief. Though the place is getting too cold, she decides to stay on the deck so that her contemplation will not end and she can dream about the things she wants to be. Henceforth, the environment in the Port of St. Thomas makes her feel so relieved and quenches her soul by its serenity and makes her dream of the life which she wants to live. One can call it as a kind of fantasy land where one desires to be. The ambience of the place makes her think of her past memories and brings back to light the illicit affair she had with Agustin Conejo, when she happened to take care of her dying father. And the environment makes her realise the mistake she has committed. She has betrayed her husband and baby Elena. She regrets that, “Half an hour later I felt like the worst mother in the world locked away with Agustin Conejo...” (LISY 38). Hence she feels that she has been the worst and the cruel mother ever in the world. The atmosphere brings a kind of revelation and she repents now for the sin which she has committed years ago. Hence, the ambience of this place takes up the role of a teacher to teach Celia about the ethics and virtues of life along with the value of motherhood. This role of Nature is evidently marked by Paul Klee who once gave his advice to a fellow art teacher, “Head your students to nature, into nature! Let them learn by experience how a bud is formed, how a tree grows, how a butterfly opens its wings, so that they will become as rich as variable, as capricious, as Nature herself. Follow the ways of natural creation, the becoming, the functioning of forms. That is the best school” (Coupe 225).

After returning from the deck there is copious change in the attitude of Celia. She has become a very sombre figure as she recollects how she has betrayed her family. Fernando explains that the look in her eyes is peculiar, which he has never seen before, especially at that hour of the morning. Celia becomes more animated and dejected.

The landscape of Charlotte Amalie has changed her mind. In Charlotte Amalie, the sun is brightly shining, which has its impact on Celia. Fernando observes through his inner eyes as he exemplifies that the light in this particular part of the Caribbean holds a consistency that is quite different from all the others. The light makes its entry into the people through the pores and shines from inside like an inner light. This light is special in one way as it reveals every truth from the people that is concealed in their heart. Hence the novelist calls the light as a betrayer as it reveals the secret of one's heart. Fernando sees Celia now in that light. She presently has come out with her secrets which she has buried within her for many years. "I was seeing Celia..." (LISY 45). All these revelations happen due to the impact of the place. The light of the Caribbean Island cleanses their soul as soon as they set foot in the land, influencing them. After leaving the place called Antigua, Fernando regrets about his relationship with Julieta. He realises that he is an old man and feels his accordance is wrong. After Fernando comes to know that the ship is arriving into the Island of Marie Galante, his behaviour seems to change completely as he confesses in his mind that "I'll never be horny again.... the ship would be bringing us to... Island of Marie Galante" (LISY 75). This particular island alters his perception and makes him decide to be loyal towards his wife.

Fernando then starts confessing of the changes the trip has bought on him. For the moment, he doesn't feel good or bad and is completely plunged into a kind of spiritual and physical limbo. He has lost his fear for the heart attack which always pierced on and scared him. The couple's trip to the islands filled with forests and waters have made them to contemplate their deeds and tranquil their inner self by altering into a changed person relating to Jennifer Wenzel's role of wild Nature's provisions to mankind, "Once domesticated the forest remains a site of contemplation: in the third of the four stages of ideal Hindu life, the vanaprastha renounces material attachment for a life of meditation in the forest" (Postcolonial Ecologies140). He is no more afraid of dying of myocardial infarction. And he himself concludes that the trip had done him so much of good.

Fernando feels that all his passion is going to reach its end and he feels that he is leaving himself in his place called Martinique and going to transform into a different person. Thereby the Martinique Island had changed him and washed away all his passions in the state of catharsis by undergoing purgation and purifying his soul. This is the condition Althusser calls as, "imaginary relationship of individuals to real conditions of existence" (qtd.in Postcolonial Ecologies140) in his definition of ideology. In Shakespeare's *As You Like it*, Nature in the Forest of Arden transforms and heals the evil into good person vis-à-vis Orland's brother and the brother of Duke Senior. Hence here Nature's attitude is kindness which paves way for noble behaviour. In the same way, in his novel, the Island of Martinique changes the evil nature of the protagonists and brings into their mind transcended nobility by taking away their infidelity.

Finally they have a quiet supper and Fernando extolls that there has been so many days of heat, blistering. At last the night is so cool and it is the first cool night after many nights packed with hotness. The last night being cool without any hotness may be to mention the relief he has in his soul after the end of his extra-marital affairs. Thus, the place depicts the inner self of the characters, "... for our instinctive tendency to see our emotions reflected in our environments, which seems to be another form of the habit of seeing everything as centred upon ourselves..." (Barry 262). Nature sets everything right towards the end of the plot as the couple becomes united at last without any illicit affair to disturb their union. Finally the couple gets united by ending up their extra marital affairs to which the ambience has played sufficient part.

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