

Metamorphosis from Nurture to Nature in David Malouf's *An Imaginary Life*

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Australian literature that has its traditions from British literature however prefer Australia to be a separate continent in its text during the 18th century. Australian literature flourished with themes of Mateship and Egalitarianism. More than any other country and their literatures, the literature of Australia portrays collective values. Even if the writings describes an individual and his experience, those writings do not include heroism but rather a hero typical, ordinary and representative of the state. Australian literature thus fortifies the concept of mateship rather than individualism where he struggles against all odds. The literature is filled with the sympathy for the struggles of small scale farmers, values of rural life, and is humorous against life's challenges and national pride.

The years of depression in Australia not only stirred the national concepts of mateship but also led to the revisiting of books from travel literature especially in the Australian outback which led to the romantic beliefs of the spirit of the place. Though the Australian outback explained frustrations, it has been incorporated the intimate feeling of a fraternity with the landscape as of the pioneer settlers. The image of bush is one prominent feature in Australian writing irrespective of any period in the literary history. As Marcus Clarke describes the image as 'fear inspiring and gloomy', the literature has been vastly inspired by the feelings of space, its timelessness and the endurance of the landscape.

David Malouf, who is the winner of Australia council award for lifetime achievement in literature ranged his writings from poetry, fiction, plays and libretti. Malouf's language is highly lyrical specially in novels like *An Imaginary Life* and *Remembering Babylon*. *An Imaginary Life*, is a novella that is heightened with the intensity of imagination. The patient detailing of tiny in formations of life and behavior turns to be "a work of unusual intelligence and imagination..." as stated by New York Times Book review. The novella revolves around the Roman poet Ovid, who is banished into a distant land. His encounter with the natives and a wild child from the woods instills in him a wonder of what they represent to him.

The works of Malouf are generally characterized with Memory, spatial relations, where his characters are often left to explore the physical environment, be it a built space or landscape. The spatiotemporal depictions in his novel defines the sensitivity of the environment and its effect of influencing lives. David Malouf in an interview states, “I knew that the world around you is only uninteresting if you can’t see what is really going on. The place you come from is always the most exotic place you’ll ever encounter because it is the only place where you recognize how many secrets and mysteries there are in people's lives” (https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/4216.David_Malouf).

The ability of the environment to sustain life, and teach humans of who they really are where a vital bioregion can be spotted. And thus, region and its role in affecting the consciousness of the characters is analyzed in the paper.

David brings forth distinction between the world of man and nature through the very communication that takes place between them. Ovid in the beginning feels so much alienated, as he misses his Roman empire. However, as the novella progresses one can find that he is only getting back to his roots: Rome, as it carries a long gone history from the east where Ovid has been exiled. However, a borderless expanse is established in the novella endorsing bioregionalism. Though Ovid feels estranged because of the native language of the barbarians in the beginning, he soon realizes that the native language is far better than the sophisticated Latin. He begins to understand how the native language from a particular region which isn't any close to the well composed structure of Latin integrates and connects people with each other, while the all urbane Latin and civilization disintegrates and disorients people. Thus he totally banishes his language which is manmade, thereby delving into nature and environment. “No more civic virtue- since we all know where they lead”(19).Ovid connects with the region intensely, that he finds himself adapting even the ‘barbarous’ tongue of the region, without any conscious efforts. “I woke, cried out. And the word I uttered was not in my own tongue” (17).Thus by integrating the empire with its roots, David integrates man with his region, through Ovid. David with his protagonist establishes a connection between the urban life of experiences and rural life of innocence.

David uses yet another device like regional space to connect Ovid with the natives. Being expelled from his land, Ovid struggles to even communicate, with the natives. However he adapts himself to the local land, welcoming the land's culture beyond the parameters and constraints of his native. Bioregionalism, which in simple terms means, life in correspondence with the region is thus established in the novella as it asserts that expanses and regions are primarily defined and marked by nature and the different landscapes breaking the man made parameters like borders or geographical markings. It is the different landscapes together like deserts, rivers and seas that constitute a region. Ovid who is found to side with bioregionalism, breaks forth his conservative way of living and finds his enlightenment in the primacy of nature. Kirkpatrick Sale says, “It is any part of the earth’s surface whose rough boundaries are determined by natural characteristics rather

than human dictates, distinguishable from other areas by particular attributes of flora, fauna, water, climate, soil, and landforms, and by the human settlements and cultures those attributes have given rise to”(55).

He thus breaks forth the constraints of man-made language and culture that is cultivated in his psyche only to patch with every flower, every little creatures, even slopes, and hills, of the region that is shaped with vim and vigour.

For it is the lack of well embedded society, that hinders people from knowing their bioregion intimately. "What keeps people in the industrial growth society from developing that intimate way of knowing a place is a lack of healthy, locally embedded communities." (web) Larger the political economy, greater is the threat for regional or communal living with nature. "It is the earth as we have made it, clearing, grafting, transplanting, carrying seeds from one place to another, following no plan.. but allowing our bellies to lead us, and some other deeper hunger, till the landscape we have made reveals to us the creature we long for and must become”(23). David in view of that lets his protagonist to find contentment with nature, within a confined space where the landscape lets Ovid find himself. Ovid connects himself with the region as the closed space helped him pay attention to even the littlest of things like colour and shape of flowers. He becomes conscious of the ability of nature to reconcile his mind, with regions, that are capable of comprehending minds of humans. He thus shuns down his "metropolitan" self that actually separated him from the bionetwork, silencing him to an extend of being an alien on earth. "Poppy, you have saved me, you have recovered the earth for me. I know how to work the spring. It is about to begin. All my life till now has been wasted. I had to enter the silence to find password that would release me from my own life” (26).

A bioregion is where life of humans and region go hand in hand. It aids man to pay attention to the surrounding environment, to understand the cycle and the correlation involved, so as to create their own cultural identity. ""The most vital bioregions tend to be those that have, for many centuries, been the life support systems of ethnic groups linked to the land by spiritual affinity, culture and tradition."" (web) It is the ignorance of one's belongingness to a place and its backdrop that isolates humans from the region and the culture that belongs to that region. Unlike sumptuous Rome, Ovid is put in confined region that lets him pay attention to not just the environment and surroundings but also his fellow beings rather than being filled with pride of the self. With no time, Ovid becomes a part and parcel of the Getae community as the expanse kindled in him so much vigour to an extent, where he even performs their ritual cry in the funerary grounds. He understands that man and his cultural identity is only a derivative of nature and as bioregionalism suggests, his psyche has its greatest impact from the region that he is put into. "We are free to transcend ourselves. If we have the imagination for it” (64).Ovid's sense of humanity takes a new emphasis, as he decentralizes his own self with the region.

Bioregionalism being a philosophy that shapes the mind for the betterment of lives, is made unambiguous in the novella through the relationship that is established between the wild child and Ovid. Peter Berg, the acknowledged 'father' of bioregionalism, pointed out, "A bioregion is to a certain extent both a geographical terrain and a terrain of consciousness" (web). The wild child who is one and twined with nature influences Ovid so much that he rediscovers his own self. He realizes the fullness of his being through the child who represent nature. He feels liberated from the chokes of a sophisticated identity bestowed upon him. This pictures how he gets back to square one where he realizes the pastoral innocence and the innocence of life rather than being strangled with civilized experiences.

Past the limits of well-structured language and well-mannered civic sense, Ovid reaches out to the wild child with compassion. The cycle of stewardship is swapped, as Ovid who tried to civilize the untamed child with one of the best civilizations in the world, is struck with the realization that humans cannot always trample over nature with their gluttonous thought and actions. His industrialized mind which now, has been tamed by the region and its flora and fauna, for the first time agrees nature and its language. He consequently lets the child comprehend his world with regard to the expanse he is in, symbolizing how region creates life.

"-who is this child who leads me deeper into the earth, further from the far safe place where I began, the green lands of my father's farm, further from the last inhabited outpost of the known world, further from speech even, into the sighing grasslands that are silence?" (145).

The perfect play of mutuality is bought about when Ovid curbs to ways of the child who is one and same as nature. The synergy that Ovid realizes broadens his way of looking at the 'other', as it prompts a sustainable living where he decentralizes himself with the child instead of looking down on the wild child as a lesser being. "Environmental philosopher Kathleen Dean Moore believes that for us to experience wonder at the sight of crabs or geological features, to find in them strength or reawakening surprise, we must be receptive to the stories they tell, and thus be willing to listen and perceive without human egotism or possessiveness" (Otto 19).

Bioregionalism believes in prioritizing nature, where the conventional world of humans takes a back seat. Beyond being a significant other or a steward, human is seen as one and the same as nature, where he feels what the environment that surrounds him feels. David describes the metamorphosis of his character as the landscape itself unfolding the shedding of the self and paving a way for a sustainable living. "I am growing bodiless. I am turning into the landscape"(146). Thus the regions the human beings live in when paid attention to, can massively guide them into an existence that, has a meaningful and relatable relationship with its environment. An existence where co-living is more understanding and meaningful as the land and human are one and the same. It took Ovid a close attention of his region and space to break the human

superiority of industrialization and become one with nature, resulting in not only a well-shaped environment but also a well-shaped mind in turn.

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