

RESTLESSNESS AND RESISTANCE IN E. M. FORSTER'S "THE ROAD FROM COLONUS"

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ABSTRACT

Most critics believe that Mr. Lucas in "The Road from Colonus" resembles the role of Oedipus in his old age. Some researchers regard Mr. Lucas as the modern Oedipus at Colonus in terms of emotional detachment. However, restlessness and resistance in Mr. Lucas's mind are not theoretically analyzed. An aim of my study is to explore the uneasy mental state of Mr. Lucas when he grows old. This study attempts to exemplify restlessness and resistance in Mr. Lucas's mind as he struggles against the convention of people's attitudes toward old age through an exploration of Mr. Lucas's spiritual agitation when resisting demands for his behaviour as an old man. Moreover, Mr. Lucas desires to realize his dream by going to Greece where he finds the water of youth coming from a tree. He believes that "Greece is the land for young people." Greece arouses his desire to "die fighting" against being "breaking away from the younger members" in England. This study claims that Mr. Lucas attempts to escape from Colonus, a symbol of inaction at old age, and he resists all the social restrictions on the elderly. His resistance shown in his behaviour is supported by his restless pursuit of youth and happiness. In conclusion, the elderly should not be marginalized as a group living a quiet and boring life until death.

KEYWORDS: Restlessness, Resistance, Colonus, Mr. Lucas, and the Elderly

INTRODUCTION

Restlessness and resistance exist in the young mind of Mr. Lucas's old body. When people grow old, their minds may not get old at the same pace. Physically, people become more and more dependent on others in old age. Some people, like Mr. Lucas, resist depending on others psychologically and physically. "The Road from Colonus" depicts the mindset of those people who want to be independent throughout their lives. Mr. Lucas epitomizes the elderly who desire rejuvenation. This desire is restless in Mr. Lucas's mind and gradually embodied as a trip to Greece. The "sound of running water" (110) is a symbol in this novella for Mr. Lucas to find the source of rejuvenation. Mr. Lucas "sees a little pool formed at the foot of the plane tree, creating a mysterious legendary fountain of youth" (Kumral11). The running water symbolizes the restless desire for rejuvenation in Mr. Lucas's mind.

This study attempts to deal with restlessness and resistance in "The Road from Colonus." The protagonist in this novella, Mr. Lucas, struggles against the convention of people's attitudes toward old age. Inez Martinez claims that the main character of "The Road from Colonus," Mr. Lucas, is not inflated but depressed (6). As an old man, Mr. Lucas is eager to retrieve independence when his daughter is worried about him and takes care of him. In reality, his youth is gone and he moves slowly simply because of body aging. He, however, has a restless mind, trying to overcome the inconvenience when he moves and resist his daughter's improper control of his free will. Mr. Lucas asserts that he has the right to keep his free will and dignity. No one shall deprive other people's free will and dignity no matter how old they are. One's old age

doesn't entitle his young relatives to invade his freedom. Mr. Lucas's mind is restless because he strongly feels he is losing his liberty and he chooses to resist the loss of his freedom.

To regain his gradually-losing freedom, Mr. Lucas begins to resist his daughter's providing excessive care for him. His daughter, Ethel, doesn't know how to balance her care for her father and her invading his freedom. She fails to respect her father's decision and aggressively wants him to do things as she plans, treating him as a rival. In this regard, Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel declares that "in considering Freud's article 'Female Sexuality,' it is suggested that the girl's positive Oedipus complex may simply not exist"(94). "If it exists, it is usually an exact replica of her relationship to her mother" (Chasseguet-Smirgel 94). In contrast, Jeanne Lampl de Groot "considers the castration complex in girls to be a secondary formation that succeeds an earlier 'negative Oedipus complex' in which the girl's mother is her love object and the father her rival" (159). Mr. Lucas feels this dominance and tries to resist and regain patriarchal power as he is referred to as Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus*; he "had this in common with Oedipus" (111). Jill Scott explicates, "The myth of Oedipus stages the son as hero who usurps power and privilege from the father and inherits the authority of the ancestral patriarchal lineage" (1). Mr. Lucas endeavours to move towards a better situation from Colonus. He resists being treated as an old man, restlessly pursues youth, and feels the ecstasy of finding the water of youth he imagines. Even though he demonstrates the agitating anxiety of getting older and older, which can be found in the elderly, he strives to seek a balance of power between his daughter as a younger family member and himself as an older family member.

Restlessness

Restlessness is shown by several examples that reveal the uneasy mental state of Mr. Lucas when he grows old. The first paragraph precisely depicts how eagerly Mr. Lucas desires to get rid of unwanted dependence and retrieve independence when he steps on the land of Greece. NecatKumral declares that "When he (Mr. Lucas) loses his youth, he knows perfectly that he also loses his independence" (11). Mr. Lucas is old when he travels to Greece where he wants to get away from younger members and becomes independent. In this way he thinks that he may regain youth and this idea lingers on his restless mind.

For no very intelligible reason, Mr. Lucas had hurried ahead of his party. He was perhaps reaching the age at which independence becomes valuable, because it is so soon to be lost. Tired of attention and consideration, he liked breaking away from the younger members, to ride by himself, and to dismount unassisted. Perhaps he also relished that more subtle pleasure of being kept waiting for lunch, and of telling the others on their arrival that it was of no consequence. (110)

He longs to become independent by riding by himself and dismounting unassisted. If an old man can do these two things without any help, he must be in a very good physical condition. However, what Mr. Lucas wants to do may not be what he can do.

Mr. Lucas mentally believes that he can take care of himself, but obviously his strength gradually becomes less and less when he gets older and older. He cannot really walk well. He may stumble on uneven roads. He refuses Mr. Graham's help and then his foot slips when coming out the tree from which water is running. Mr. Graham is depicted as a young man who is a contrast of the old man, Mr. Lucas. The author makes a contrast between the old and the young, showing the unavoidable loss of strength at old age.

"Allow me to give you a hand," said Mr. Graham, a young man who was always polite to his elders. Mr. Lucas felt annoyed. "Thank you, I can manage perfectly well by myself," he replied. His foot slipped as he stepped out of the tree, and went into the spring. (114)

Mr. Graham is "always polite to his elders" (114), however, Mr. Lucas is unable to feel the young man's good will. His restless mind is filled with a strong aspiration to be young again. He feels annoyed when the young man offers help because he is envious of Mr. Graham's youth.

Mr. Lucas's restless desire for going to Greece can be exemplified by his monologue. He visualizes Greece as a symbol of youth and he wants to possess it. In his monologue, he also talks about how a vision of youth was like forty years ago.

"Greece is the land for young people," he said to himself as he stood under the plane trees, "but I will enter into it, I will possess it. Leaves shall be green again, water shall be sweet, the sky shall be blue. They were so forty years ago, and I will win them back. I do mind being old, and I will pretend no longer." (112)

In Mr. Lucas's vision of youth, leaves are green. The colour, green, also means not experienced. Moreover, the sky is blue rather than sunset orange. Being old bothers Mr. Lucas, and he doesn't want to hide any more his disgust at aging physically. He is young mentally and he is restless about not being treated as an old man who needs care and help.

The running water from a tree in Greece excites Mr. Lucas's restless mind. He is in an ecstasy of joy when seeing the water running from an old hollow tree. The shape of the tree is a symbol of penis from which the semen comes. Semen signifies fertility which is the quality of being able to produce the young. Maria Torok argues, "In every woman's analysis, there is inevitably a period in which appears a feeling of envy and covetousness for both the male sex organ and its symbolic equivalents" (135). The flow of water epitomizes being active as a young man, so the running water from the old tree enlivens Mr. Lucas and sparkles his longing for rejuvenation.

He took two steps forward, and immediately cold waters were gurgling over his ankle. "Where does the water come from?" he asked himself. "I do not even know that." He remembered that all the hill sides were dry; yet here the road was suddenly covered with flowing streams.

He stopped still in amazement, saying: "Water out of a tree—out of a hollow tree? I never saw nor thought of that before." (112)

He is amazed by the flowing water. The adjective, flowing, means moving continuously and easily. This is a contrast of Mr. Lucas's current physical condition. He, on the contrary, is not able to move as easily and smoothly as a young man. No one shall be blamed for this. The author relates and explains objectively, "he had led a healthy, active life, had worked steadily, made money, educated his children" (111). "There was nothing and no one to blame: he was simply growing old" (111). The old age is unavoidable and death is inevitable. Mr. Lucas's body grows old, but his mind stays young and active.

To possess is to have or to own something. Active minds tend to possess, while inactive minds have no impulse to possess. The hollow tree, in Mr. Lucas's imagination, is a shrine where the precious youth dwells, so he is motivated by the running water to enter the shrine and possess it.

“I never saw anything so marvellous before,” said Mr. Lucas. “I could even step inside the trunk and see where the water comes from.”

For a moment he hesitated to violate the shrine. Then he remembered with a smile his own thought—“the place shall be mine; I will enter it and possess it”—and leapt almost aggressively on to a stone within. (113)

When Mr. Lucas remembers his own thought, he smiles. What is his thought? What thought makes him smile? For how long has that thought been lingering on his mind? That thought popping up on his mind explicates that it has been staying on his mind. This proves that his mind is restlessly filled with the thought that he wants a shrine which can rejuvenate him. He, in an ecstasy of joy, leaps aggressively onto a stone within the shrine-like hollow tree.

Resistance

Colonus in *Oedipus at Colonus* is the place where Oedipus is buried after he dies, while “The Road from Colonus” indicates there is a road from Colonus. In this regard, Colonus signifies old age and death in *Oedipus at Colonus*. It, however, has a road “The Road from Colonus” that the protagonist can get away from it. The protagonist, Mr. Lucas, struggles to resist old age. NecatKumral points out that “Mr. Lucas does mind getting old as he becomes more dependent on others, his daughter Ethel for instance, losing his free will to take his own decisions and put them into practice the way he likes” (11). Moreover, Mr. Lucas resists being dependent on others. He strongly resists being depriving of the right to make his own decisions. The title of this story, “The Road from Colonus,” implies a possibility or an attempt to leave Colonus and depart for another destination. In this story, the destination is Greece.

As an incarnation of Oedipus from Colonus, Mr. Lucas is not like Oedipus at Colonus. The blind Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus* is accompanied by his daughters Antigone and Ismene. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus was born with a tragic prophecy that he would kill his father, Laius, and marry his mother, Jocasta, so he was sent away to a city called Corinth and brought up there. He runs into a group of men at the crossroads, unaware of his father among these men, he kills them. To save Thebans from a plague, he solves the riddle of the Sphinx and marries the widow of Thebes’ former king. At the end of the play, after Jocasta and Oedipus find out the truth, Jocasta hangs herself and Oedipus gouges out his own eyes. Unlike Oedipus, Mr. Lucas neither kills his father nor marries his mother. Unlike Oedipus, Mr. Lucas chooses not to live in despair. Instead, he wants to fight against other people’s interference in his own decisions.

The reason why Mr. Lucas is unhappy and annoyed when he becomes old is partly her daughter’s excessive care. As Mr. Lucas’s youngest daughter, Ethel is unmarried when she is in Greece. She is unselfish and affectionate, and her friends generally understand that she decides “to devote her life to her father, and be the comfort of his old age” (110). Her excessive care of her father, however, intervenes in her father’s liberty in an improper way.

He is fed up with the sort of attention they pretend to be paying to him to show how considerate they are. Ethel follows him everywhere to control his movements, Mr. Forman is always at his elbow ready to forestall his opinions, and Mr. Graham tries to display superficial courtesy while offering help that implies every minute he is not capable physically to do anything without their unconditional help. This turns him into a helpless agent; a feeble character too old to act out his role as properly as possible. (Kumral 11)

Moreover, Mrs. Forman tries to draw a parallel between Mr. Lucas and Oedipus and another parallel between

Ethel and Oedipus's daughter, Antigone. "Mrs. Forman always referred to her as Antigone, and Mr. Lucas tried to settle down to the role of Oedipus, which seemed the only one that public opinion allowed him" (110). These parallels make a mockery of Mr. Lucas because public opinion only allows him to "settle down to the role of Oedipus" (110). However, he "had this in common with Oedipus, that he was growing old" (110). Growing old is a natural course. No one shall be blamed for growing old. The rights of the aged shall not be deprived. Age-related discrimination, however, is pervasive and unavoidable. Mr. Lucas can feel it and endeavour to resist it.

In "The Road from Colonus," Mr. Lucas is depicted as a victim in a world of young people. As a representative of elderly people, Mr. Lucas feels that he is marginalized in the circle of his friends and relatives who expect him to live a quiet and boring life until death.

They came back in ecstasies, in which Mr. Lucas tried to join. But he found them intolerable. Their enthusiasm was superficial, commonplace, and spasmodic. They had no perception of the coherent beauty that was flowering around them. (113)

This marginalization is not tangible but intangible. Young people seem to treat Mr. Lucas well and solve his problem of physical inconvenience caused by aging. Mr. Graham annoys Mr. Lucas by signalling his aging conditions when he tries to help him. "'Allow me to give you a hand,' said Mr. Graham, a young man who was always polite to his elders" (114).

"Oh papa, my papa!" said Ethel, "what are you doing? Thank goodness I have got a change for you on the mule." She tended him carefully, giving him clean socks and dry boots, and then sat him down on the rug beside the lunch basket, while she went with the others to explore the grove.

His daughter, Ethel, doesn't know how to balance her care for her father and respecting his free will. She fails to notice how her father feels when she abruptly arranges everything for him. Mr. Lucas regards these young people's care as annoyance rather than a heartfelt benefit. He, therefore, resists the annoyance.

There is an intense confrontation between Mr. Lucas and his daughter about his decision to stay at the Khan. Considering her father's old age, Ethel does not allow him to travel alone. Mr. Lucas feels uncomfortable with his daughter's asserting dominance over his decision, so he resists persistently.

"My dear papa, I will do all I can for you, but stop in that Khan—no."

"Are there—fleas?" asked Mrs. Forman.

Ethel intimated that "fleas" was not the word.

"Well, I am afraid that settles it," said Mrs. Forman, "I know how particular Mr. Lucas is."

"It does not settle it," said Mr. Lucas. "Ethel, you go on. I do not want you. I don't know why I ever consulted you. I shall stop here alone."

"That is absolute nonsense," said Ethel, losing her temper. "How can you be left alone at your age? How would you get your meals or your bath? All your letters are waiting for you at Patras. You'll miss the boat. That means missing the London operas, and upsetting all your engagements for the month. And as if you could travel by yourself!" (120)

It is really irritating, impolite, and disrespectful as Ethel asks her father this question, “How would you get your meals or your bath?” This question gives a sign of highlighting Mr. Lucas’s aging and slow walking. Even though this is a fact, it is improper to say it in this straightforward way. How can an adult daughter make decisions about her old father without his agreement? Mr. Lucas’s resistance to his daughter’s travel arrangements is a normal reaction to rude, disrespectful requirements. Jeanne Lampl de Groot “considers the castration complex in girls to be a secondary formation that succeeds an earlier ‘negative Oedipus complex’ in which the girl’s mother is her love object and the father her rival” (159). In several confrontations between Ethel and her father, Ethel tries to gain a triumph over their decision-making competition.

CONCLUSIONS

The restless minds of the aged can be eased and their resistance to the care offered by those who care about them can be reduced. Everyone is doomed to become old. No one can get away from death eventually. Old age discrimination shall be avoided because it is inevitable. The old Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus* represents old age and Colonus in this play is emblematic of death. Oedipus is buried in Colonus after his death. Although Mr. Lucas in “The Road from Colonus” is referred to as Oedipus, he is depicted as a reversible figure. As an old man, he is not satisfied with his physical condition and he believes that his daughter’s excessive care of him is unnecessary and it harms his ego. He, therefore, has to resist the control which is a derivative of kind care. He is eager to get away from the younger group and leave them behind him at the beginning of their trip to Greece, and he rushes to embrace Greece, saying to himself, “Greece is the land for young people, [...], “but I will enter into it, I will possess it”(111). Possessing Greece means possessing youth because it is for young people; when “he (Mr. Lucas) was in Greece, and one of the dreams of his life was realized” (111). As a symbol of youth, Greece is one of Mr. Lucas’s dreams and he has been restlessly in pursuit of it. Ethel and her young friends are, however, unable to understand how Mr. Lucas feels when facing the physical changes in his body as he ages. Obviously, there is a generation gap between the way young people think and the way senior citizens think. Aging care consultation and a lot of patience can help minimize the gap.

There are two main reasons for resistance. First, people don’t feel comfortable with how others treat them. Mr. Lucas feels uncomfortable with the superficial courtesy and care that his daughter and her young friends extend to him. He, therefore, resists them. Second, people upset if decisions are being made about them without them, and they feel they are losing control of making decisions for themselves. This is how Mr. Lucas feels and what makes him disgust, so he resists Ethel’s dominant instruction to force him to leave the Khan. Ethel is Mr. Lucas’s daughter, not his boss. Mr. Lucas feels annoyed when Ethel tells him the triumphal news about a large tree blew down on the night they leave and “crushed to death the five occupants of the little Khan there” (124). Mr. Lucas responds “with a faint expression of trouble on his vacant face” (124). This is Mr. Lucas’s final silent resistance at the end of this story.

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