

The Sense of Home and Memory in John Clare's Asylum Poems

John Clare'in Tımarhane Şiirlerinde Ev Düşüncesi ve Bellek

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Abstract

As a basic human need from past to present, home has been the subject of many disciplines where different perspectives converge and intersect each other in a multidimensional framework. This interdisciplinarity has transformed it into a concept that conveys much more than a visible and tangible reality. John Clare (1793-1864), a 19th century English poet who spent the last twenty-seven years of his life in asylum, also widely used home as a central theme. His sense of home in his asylum poems emerges peculiarly in three dimensions which are the countryside of his childhood and youth, the cottage where he lived, and his first love. In such a perspective, the different meanings of the concept become interwoven, and home gradually transforms from a tangible reality into a mental image and metaphor configured in his memory. The aim of this study is to reveal how the sense of home in Clare's asylum poems can be associated with the poet's countryside, cottage and first love, and to investigate the consistency of this relation through memory. The study is limited to the asylum poems to show how Clare responds to what the concept of home evokes under the influence of his mental disorder.

Keywords: John Clare, English Poetry, Asylum Poems, Sense of Home, Memory

Öz

Geçmişten günümüze temel bir insan gereksinimi olan ev, çok boyutlu bir çerçevede, değişik perspektiflerin bir araya geldiği ve birbirini kestiği birçok disipline konu olmuştur. Bu disiplinlerarasılık onu, görülür ve dokunulur bir gerçeklikten çok daha fazlasını anlatan bir kavrama dönüştürmüştür. Ömrünün son yirmi yedi yılını tımarhanede geçiren bir 19. yüzyıl İngiliz şairi olan John Clare (1793-1864) de evi merkezi bir tema olarak yaygın biçimde kullanmıştır. Onun tımarhane şiirlerindeki ev düşüncesi, çocukluğunun ve gençliğinin geçtiği kırsal, içinde yaşadığı kulübesi ve ilk aşkı olmak üzere alışılmışın dışında üç boyutta ortaya çıkar. Böyle bir bakışta kavramın farklı anlamları birbirine geçer ve ev giderek somut bir gerçeklikten onun belleğinde yapılandırılan ussal bir imgeye ve mecaza dönüşür. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Clare'in tımarhane şiirlerindeki ev düşüncesinin; şairin kırsalı, kulübesi ve ilk aşkı ile nasıl ilişkilendirilebileceğini ortaya koymak ve bu ilişkinin tutarlılığını bellek üzerinden araştırmaktır. Çalışma, Clare'in zihinsel rahatsızlığının etkisinde ev kavramının çağrıştırdıklarına nasıl karşılık verdiğini göstermek için tımarhane şiirleri ile sınırlandırılmıştır.

Keywords: John Clare, İngiliz Şiiri, Tımarhane Şiirleri, Ev Düşüncesi, Bellek

Introduction

John Clare (1793-1864), despite not receiving proper recognition, is widely considered as one of the most authentic poets of the 19th century English poetry. Although he lived and wrote at the crossroads of the Romantic and Victorian

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periods, it is hard to include him in a certain literary category and to identify him with a certain movement (Simpson, 1999: 70). Often being referred as “a peasant poet”, he is also called “a labourer poet” for he drudged on the farm to provide for his family, “a nature poet” for he developed a poetic perspective intertwined with nature, “a descriptive poet” for he conveyed what he saw in that nature into his lines with a painterly eye, and “the poet of the poor” for he gave voice to the disadvantages of rural life and the dreams of the poor of the countryside. As a mostly self-educated poet, Clare wrote successfully enough to attract the attention of literary circles but lost the reputation he gained with his first book, *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* (1820), in his subsequent volumes. His fall in the world of literature, like his rise, was very rapid, and he remained an ignored and neglected poet for a long time.

His local accent unfamiliar to the urban readers and disagreements with the publishers were among the chief reasons in his sudden disappearance from the network of the literary circles of London. However, his spending the last twenty-seven years of his life in asylum had also a significant effect in this fall. In fact, he conspicuously did not break his ties with poetry in the asylum years but increased his creativity even more. Besides, he wrote some great poems, and in some of them, his vision was clearer than ever (Robinson & Summerfield, 1962: 136). During this period, considering poetry as “a therapy for the tedious hours of loneliness” (Storey, 1974: 175), Clare put a ceaseless emphasis on his countryside, cottage and first love, Mary Joyce. Even though he married his wife Patty, he never forgot Mary and transformed her into an imaginary reality and a restful shelter where he could find peace.

For Clare, home is Helpstone, where he spent his childhood, Northborough, an adjacent village where he moved after his marriage, and his cottage there. However, it is Mary Joyce who gives meaning to this notion of home. Due to his mental disorder, Clare thought her to be his wife awaiting his return to their cottage. Therefore, his countryside, cottage and Mary are different facets of a unified entity that enhance and complement one other. The cement and architect of that entity is Clare's memory. Interestingly, this memory is quite robust and dynamic regarding the recollections associated with Helpstone, but it is also partly the area of illusions created by a sick mind concerning Mary. It is often a means of reviving the joy of his childhood, and when it is not possible, of rebuilding the past and designing it according to the needs of the present.

The aim of this study is to reveal how John Clare's sense of home in his asylum poems can be associated with his countryside, cottage, and love, and to investigate the consistency of this relationship. First, the theoretical framework of the subject will be drawn by focusing on the discussions in connection with the multi-dimensional meanings of home as an interdisciplinary concept, and then Clare's sense of home which is gradually transformed in his memory will be exemplified through some selected glimpses of his life. The study is limited to Clare's asylum poems to show how he responds to the evocations of home under the influence of his mental disorder.

Home: Its Meanings, Functions, and Relations with Memory

As a basic human need from past to present, home has been the subject of many disciplines such as culture, art, history, geography, sociology, psychology and architecture in a multidimensional framework where different perspectives come together and intersect with each other. This interdisciplinarity has transformed it into a concept that expresses much more than a visible and tangible reality on the scale of the meanings it is associated with, making it the center of various discussions. In these discussions, the meaning of home is sometimes restricted to a particular fixed frame, and sometimes it is expanded beyond a place. While initially describing a physical structure, it later has acquired abstract, spiritual, and metaphorical meanings.

Hollander writes that home is etymologically derived from Anglo Saxon “ham,” which signifies “village,” “estate” or “town,” while Germanic words that meet home such as “heim,” “ham” and “heem” come from Indo-European “kei”, which means “lying down, a bed or couch, and something dear or beloved” (1991: 44). *Oxford English Dictionary* (n.d.) defines the concept as “the place where a person or animal dwells,” “a dwelling place; a person’s house or abode; the fixed residence of a family or household; the seat of domestic life and interests”, “the place where one lives or was brought up, with reference to the feelings of belonging, comfort, etc., associated with it,” “the domestic setting,” “the family or social unit occupying a house; a household,” “a refuge, a sanctuary; a place or region to which one naturally belongs or where one feels at ease,” “a person’s own country or native land” and “the normal resting place or abode of an animal.” Both the information provided by Hollander and the lexical definitions reveal the basic framework of the meanings of the concept concerning private and public experiences.

Despres, while summarizing the function categories of home given in the mainstream empirical literature on the housing scale, lists the following points for the concept with their explanations: “home as security and control,” “home as reflection of one’s ideas and values,” “home as acting upon and modifying one’s dwelling,” “home as permanence and continuity”, “home as relationships with family and friends”, “home as center of activities,” “home as a shelter from the outside world,” “home as indicator of personal status,” “home as material structure” and “home as a place to own” (1991: 97-98). As understood, these expressions both refer to the meaning of the word as a physical structure and evoke a number of symbolic perspectives. In such a context, home is a safe, fixed and private place where basic needs are met, and a starting point to contact with the outer world. Mallett, in a similar approach, considers home as both a place and a familiar space where family, people, things and belongings inhabit and certain activities and relationships are experienced (2004: 63). The association of home with family which is the most significant part of this familiarity is so firm and profound that they are sometimes used interchangeably. Home, then, is a haven where we retreat from the public gaze, voyeurism and the social and political forces that affect us outside. There, we can safeguard our secrets and privacy and

gain our own self-independence. Accordingly, as Mejia puts it "to be with family is to be at home; to be at home is to be in private" (2014: 9).

In fact, home has a dual reference in many Indo-European languages; on the one hand, it denotes a "house" or "shelter," while on the other it refers to "a lived space" which requires a special emphasis on the individuals in it and the social relations they develop among themselves (Voutira, 2011: 1). Therefore, it can be also considered as a place without walls which manifests itself in a supra-spatial dimension and covers the whole life context of human beings on an emotional and mental ground. Although "house" and "household" are components of home, they lack the complex socio-spatial relations and emotions it hosts. Accepting home is material, Blunt and Dowling are of the opinion that it is more than a place or a site in which we live. According to them, "home is also an idea and an imaginary that is imbued with feelings" (2006: 2). They highlight that feelings, ideas and imaginaries are intrinsically spatial and conclude that home is "a spatial imaginary: a set of intersecting and variable ideas and feelings, which are related to context, and which construct places, extend across spaces and scales, and connect places" (2006: 2). In this context, home exists as an environment where the imaginative and the material are integrated. It is an area that gains value through experiences and the images of the past, an opportunity stored in memory and the source of identity and belonging. Moreover, it is "an abstract state of being" (Moore, 2007: 145), constructed mentally on a space and surviving in a time of its own. Having no boundaries and being not closed, "it is located in space, but it is not necessarily a fixed space" (Douglas, 1991: 289). That is, the coordinates of that space are of no importance other than the effect on shaping the human spirit, mind, thoughts and beliefs. In such a case, home as "an unarticulated sense of belonging, an irreducible phenomenological inner truth" (Carollo, 1999: 1) may exist anywhere.

Giamatti, underlining the subjective ground of home, suggests that it has a meaning beyond visible reality. For him, "home is a concept, not a place; it is a state of mind where self-definition starts" (1998: 99). In a sense, it is a dimension where one comprehends his relations that integrate with a specific space. This dimension which opens to privacy is closely associated with the formation of personality and identity. As for identity, it is already "a question of memory, and memories of 'home' in particular" (Morley, 2002: 90). Experiences and memories are among the chief factors that make a home what it is. To have a home is to have a root, a past, and therefore memories. The home, which is privatised as it is experienced, is therefore also the place of memory.

Known as a mechanism enabling people to keep the information related to the past in mind and to store the past events, memory shapes the present and the future while preserving the past in the present by combining the knowledge obtained from experiences and recollections. McGaugh, who sees memory as "the 'glue' of our personal existence," approaches the point from a parallel perspective (2003: 2). According to him, the experiences of each past moment are memories merging with current momentary experiences to create an uninterrupted impression of

continuity in our lives, which is essentially the integration of past, present, and future (2002: 3).

Emotions that coexist with experiences have a decisive function during the recording of experiences in memory. Therefore, the strong connection between experiences and memory also exists between memory and emotions, albeit in different forms. However, while memories of emotional experiences can be robust and vivid, they might not always be true, because they are rebuilt during recalling processes (LeDoux, 1998). In this context, recalling requires the reconstruction of past events by using the present schemas. To go back in the course of time, to remember and construct the past, and to reproduce it in the present is then to create a distorted image that replaces that memory. Halbwachs emphasizes this point by stating that memory comprehends a large part of bygone things in a new way. For him, this case is similar to that of an object to be seen from a different angle or to be enlightened otherwise. The new distribution of light and shadow changes the values of the parts so much that it is not possible to say that they remain as they are even if we recognize them all (2016: 118).

Although the strong relation between home and memory is seen at every moment of life, it is revealed more intensely in times of separation. In such cases, home which cannot be reached and touched in reality is visited imaginarily and re-created in memory. This is, in fact, the existence of the most cherished in an abstract domain. Dovey asserts that it is not possible to speak about a sense of home unless one moves away from the state of “being at home” and reaches the state of “yearning for home” (1985: 46). The homesickness is at the same time an indication of a sense of belonging. However, it should be noted that home is not only the place where a person develops a sense of belonging, but also where that belonging is accepted by others. On the other hand, as Seiden points out, being separated from place means being separated from time. Homecoming is, then, a return to a new and transformed situation. What the person having such an experience will find is nothing but a transformed place (2009: 196).

Besides, remembering the visual details of past experiences is particularly important in human life. In such cases, imagery which emerges in the working processes of memory evokes a kind of picture memory, and as one of the main components of memory, it “leads to the specific, concrete details that make memories seem more accurate, thoughtful, and believable. People act as if memory for details implies that the central points are remembered correctly” (Rubin, 1995: 3). In a sense, memory needs imagery to perform its functions properly.

The French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, who discusses people’s experiences of space, place and natural environments from a phenomenological point of view and has studies especially on the experiential significance of the house, highlights the “poetic image” as the center of his related thoughts. The poetic image is the essence of the meaning and emotion shaped by the “creative imagination”, which is similar to the archetype but can be accessed independently and spontaneously through dreams. Bachelard finds out the way to reveal the subjectivity of images and to display their meanings in focusing on what he calls “the consideration of the image

in an individual consciousness" (1994: xix). For him, the image can open the doors of the past and enables us to go into the depths of time (1994: xvi). Home, in this context, is a poetic image that gives information about the inner world of the individual.

Bachelard considers home as a philosophical interplay between place, memory, and imagination. He rebuilds images phenomenologically and, by returning to the past, focuses on the space created in memory by means of the house of birth and dreams. For him, the house and its rooms with memories are a sanctuary of the past. When needed, the subconscious comes out through this house. So, the house of birth is more than the embodiment of home; it is also an embodiment of dreams (1994: 15).

Bachelard writes that within the reality of the house one sensitizes the boundaries of that house. Thus, a path from reality to dream is opened on a point where the house covers the center. That house will no longer be experienced as a reality and the opportunities it offers will extend beyond the present moment (1994: 5). In this case, memory will not record concrete duration; the individual is unable to relive the destroyed duration, but just think of it in the line of an abstract time (1994: 9). Within the framework of these places which activate memory, as the dreams deepen, a very old space opens up in front of the dreamer. In this remote space, memory and imagination are intertwined; they contribute to each other's deepening. Now, the house ceases to be lived only in the narrative of our own experience, the different nests in our lives are meshed through dreams and preserve the memories of the past (Bachelard, 1994: 15).

As can be seen from all these discussions, home exists on a scale ranging from a physical place to an imaginary space. It extends from concrete to abstract and opens itself to the metaphors gathering around the imaginary presence of an absence through all sets of experiences around a presence. Almost as a palimpsest, it navigates on a multidimensional and multi-layered network, and manifests in a concept that intersects with emotions. It is both the expression and the result of a kind of emotionally based and meaningful relationship between people and the environment they live in. Many of these interpretations and meanings attributed to home are evident in John Clare's asylum poems.

John Clare: His Poetic Career and Asylum Years

Clare was born in Helpstone, Northamptonshire, into a poor farming family. He did not receive an adequate basic education due to the harsh conditions of rural life. At the age of twelve, he fell in love with Mary Joyce, the daughter of a wealthy farmer, at the local school but could not open his heart to her for he saw the social differences between the two families insurmountable and regarded the girl he loved superior to himself. However, it should be noted that Clare did not forget Mary throughout all his life, placing her at the center of his poetry. Remembering those days many years later he would say that "as the dream never awoke into reality her beauty was always fresh in my memory" (Clare, 1951: 44).

Apart from the turmoil in his inner world, Clare also struggled with the socio-political problems of his period. Particularly, the “Enclosure Acts”, approved at the beginning of the 19th century to improve the traditional agricultural practices which were insufficient to meet the food needs of the increasing population of the country, radically changed the lives of the rural families. The acts created private property rights on the previously commonly used lands and small farmers who were taxed in exchange for the land they cultivated before became dependent on large farms. The Clare family was undoubtedly among the victims of that new policy.

Surviving in such a disadvantaged environment, Clare financially heaved a sigh of relief and gained an unexpected fame after the publication of his first book, *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* (1820), which had four prints in a single year. However, his fame did not last long; the subsequent volumes *The Village Minstrel* (1821), *The Shepherd’s Calender with Village Stories and Other Poems* (1827) and *The Rural Music* (1835) received hardly any attention and Clare gradually became a forgotten literary figure. According to Bush, his disfavour and problems with publishers triggered an intense anxiety in the poet, causing a psychomatic disorder (1971: 173). When his mental condition deteriorated, he was hospitalised to Dr. Matthew Allen’s High Beech Asylum in Epping Forest. Howard states that his disease occurred in the form of physical and intermittent depression and anxiety (1981: 22). Jamison talks about a prolonged inertia and melancholy interspersed among extravagant, violent and frenzied behaviours, and writes that he had hallucinations and was in delusions of persecution and grandeur (1993: 69). While Trick describes his disease as “a major psychotic disorder” (1994: 27), Bate calls it as a “nervous breakdown rather than an eruption of lunacy” (2003: 412). Although sometimes “schizophrenia” is used to tell his mental state, Blackmore opposes to such assertions due to the lack of clear evidence in the light of the criteria widely accepted today and argues that his disorder was “most likely bipolar in nature” (1986: 215).

Spending four years at High Beech, Clare escaped there; sleeping in a barn or open field and eating the roadside grass to quell his hunger, he reached his home in Northborough on foot after an eighty-mile journey that lasted four days and three nights. When his illness became serious in his six months at home, he was taken to the Northampton General Lunatic Asylum on 29 December 1851, this time to complete the remaining twenty-three years of his life.

During his asylum period, Clare sometimes thought himself as Shakespeare, Lord Nelson and the boxer Jack Randal, and wrote the sequels to *Child Harold* and *Don Juan* by impersonating Lord Byron. In explaining his emulation to Byron among the other poets, Attack writes that “he reasoned that if the world would not accept John Clare’s genius – why should he not write in the idiom of an already accepted poet” (2010: 78). In a similar vein, for Faubert his *Child Harold* reflects the Byronic literary identity which Clare chose for himself as an answer for the definitions of insanity (2003: 60). On the other hand, approaching to the poet’s case in terms of exile, Bewell argues that all those things cannot be explained only by a mad

mimicry, and that Clare tried to understand his own position through the writings of the great English poets in exile (2011: 550). Whatever the reason, in his asylum poems his thoughts, feelings and dreams converged on a single point which is no other than "home".

John Clare's Home: An Integration of Countryside, Cottage and Love

Sense of home takes its source mostly from childhood home where memory is first shaped, and develops with present experiences and expectations for the future. In Clare's poems, too, the past and the present come together and seriously affect each other. Such an interaction enables the poet to create his own private time and space. While this space is based on the cottage where he lived, and on the countryside where that cottage was located, it later turns into a metaphor and meets his first love Mary Joyce. He privatises the places of his childhood within the framework of the ideal sense of home he creates in his mind, and reaches his own special image.

Dovey, who sees home as a demarcated territory with both physical and symbolic boundaries, asserts that although it differs distinctly from its surroundings, it is also strongly oriented within it. For him, being at home means knowing where you are, residing in a safe area and being oriented in space. At this point, Dovey draws attention to an ambiguity about home and emphasizes that "home as territory also involves a kind of home range that can include neighbourhood, town, and landscape. Yet this larger home is also a kind of ordered center within which we are oriented and distinguished from the larger and stranger surroundings" (1985: 36). This flow from inside to outside or vice versa is a kind of spiral movement in which home expands itself from a roofed structure to a neighbourhood, landscape, and nature. In such a flow, the landscape which is a humanized version of nature contains a version of home (Holdridge, 2022: 2). Although it is far from human habitation, nature as a wilderness is also home in the broad sense of the term, because man develops a bond of belonging with it. In that case, there is no distinction between what is outside and what is inside; when man in that vast personalised network is inside the house, the house is also inside of him.

Clare's narratives about Helpstone and Northborough fit well into such a context. The details he gives as if he were taking a photo are the indications of how sincere a relationship he has developed with this countryside and how he has integrated himself with its fields, fens, and wildlife. Given the fact that the poet never left his district, apart from his asylum years and a few visits to London, the depth of his belonging to the land he cherished is better understood. Moreover, when he was away, he did not lose his connection with it, and always kept it alive in his memories. Hall defines Clare's this passion, during his years in Northampton General Lunatic Asylum, "as though all his thoughts centred there" (1973: 281). As a matter of fact, upon his last will to go home, he was buried in Helpstone after his demise. He already expressed his desire to be one with his home at the beginning of his career in "Helpstone":

When weary age the grave, a rescue seeks

And prints its image on my wrinkl'd cheeks
 Those charms of youth, that I again may see
 May it be mine to meet my end in thee
 And, as reward for all my troubles past
 Find one hope true to die at home at last (Clare, 1984: 5)

It should be noted that there is no distinctive difference in Clare's descriptions of his countryside before and after the asylum period. However, as the poems in first group describe a landscape he saw with his own eyes and the nature he smelt and touched in person, those in the next reflect an environment he re-created in his imagination through his memory. In both cases, home is the source of innocence and identity, and an intensely emotionalized and internalized territory. As a complex and significant part of life, it is not only a geographical place, but also a feeling and belonging. Clare shares his feelings about this territory in "Home Yearnings" as if drawing a detailed picture:

I loved the winds when I was young,
 When life was dear to me;
 I loved the song which Nature sung,
 Endearing liberty;
 I loved the wood, the vale, the stream,
 For there my boyhood used to dream.

There even toil itself was play;
 'T was pleasure e 'en to weep;
 'T was joy to think of dreams by day,
 The beautiful of sleep.
 When shall I see the wood and plain,
 And dream those happy dreams again? (Clare, 1995: 146)

Clare's sense of home consists of three intertwined circles narrowing from outside to inside or expanding from inside to outside. If Helpstone and Northborough stay in the outer ring as the signifier of broadest meaning of the concept, in the second ring there is his small cottage located in that countryside. As known such cottages were shelters for the local people who witnessed the negative effects of socio-political changes in the first half of the 19th century and became even poorer with the enforcement of the Enclosure laws. They were private sites closed to the chaotic and brutal reality of the outer world and places to be identified with. Therefore, the cottage in Northborough is a symbol of what belongs to the poet, in a world dominated by others. Therefore, home as a physical structure is "a place of self-expression, a vessel of memories, a refuge from the outside world, a cocoon where we can feel nurtured and let down our guard" (Marcus, 1995: 4). In "My Early Home was This", Clare describes a timeless earthly paradise by combining the cottage he was born in Helpstone with the nature that surrounds it. It is clear that the narrative here takes its source from the poet's memory:

The red breast from the sweet briar bush
 Drop't down to pick the worm

On the horse chesnut sang the thrush
O'er the home where I was born
The dew morn like a shower of pearls
Fell o'er this "bower of bliss"
And on the bench sat boys and girls
— My early home was this

The old house stooped just like a cave
Thatched o'er with mosses green
Winter around the walls would rave
But all was calm within
The trees they were as green agen
Where bees the flowers would kiss
But flowers and trees seemed sweeter then
— My early home was this — (Clare, 1984: 366-367)

The past, present and future add different dynamics to this physical structure. These dynamics sometimes intermingle with, contradict to, and create one another. They save man from disintegration and protect him against the turbulence of life as well as the storms outside (Bachelard, 1994: 6-7). This personalised space becomes now a mirror he holds to himself. To be separated from it is to lose his integrity. In asylum poems, home in the context of "cottage" is also based on recollections and images in memory. It is, in a sense, the place where he was dispossessed and exiled from, and a lost nest for him. His escape from High Beech was an attempt to regain this nest, that is, his own privacy and roots. Clare could protect his integrity in returning to his memories when he was separated from his countryside and cottage. In one of such cases, he goes to his past where he achieved happiness once and expresses the sense of home by integrating his countryside with his cottage:

No comfort for me lived in palace or hall
But the cottage that stood in a garden of flowers
Where the vine and the woodbine climb'd up by the wall
Twas there that I lived in my happiest hours
Tis there I shall live when the strife is gone by
For the sun that shines there shines on vally & plain
Where green fields and bushes will gladden my eye
And make me contented and happy again (Clare, 1984: 380)

The cottage mentioned in the poem is a fluid site constantly rebuilt in memories. At its center is not Clare's own wife Patty, but his childhood love Mary Joyce -the poet sometimes believed he was married to both at the same time. In such a mental confusion, his countryside and cottage intersect with Mary's presence, thus completing each other. If Helpstone is an Eden, Mary is the Eve of Clare's vision. In this context, home is not only a shelter, but also an emotional space where personal meanings exist; "it is both material and imaginative, a site and a set of meanings/emotions" (Blunt & Dowling, 2006: 22).

Mary appears at different times in different forms in the asylum poems. For the poet, she is an Eve, his imaginary wife, a paragon of innocence, a symbol of transcendent beauty and a faithful companion to his lonely soul. She is everywhere, even if she is invisible. While no place is home without her, every point associated with her becomes a home. She exists in accordance with the traditional view of the 19th century England which regarded woman as a wife, a mother, and the angel who was supposed to make the home and keep the family together. Nevertheless, in the course of time she evolves from a physical entity into an idealized personality. She merges with home in Clare's mind and shapes his poetry.

In asylum poems, home seems to be a vortex engulfing everything around. This vortex was destroyed when he could not find Mary at his cottage after he escaped from High Beech. Upon hearing of her death, he calls out to Mary in a letter in his notebook as follows:

I have written an account of my journey or rather escape from Essex for your amusement and hope it may divert your leisure hours—I would have told you before now that I got here to Northborough last Friday night but not being able to see you or to hear where you were soon started to feel homeless at home and shall by and by feel nearly hopeless but not so lonely as I did in Essex—for here I can see Ginton church feeling and that Mary is safe if not happy, I shall be the same—I am gratified to believe so—although my home is no home to me my hopes are not entirely hopeless while the memory of Mary lives so near me. (Clare, 1970: 293)

It is seen that Clare is stuck between two kinds of home experience at this point. After living in a state of “yearning for home” for a long time, he fled from asylum to reach a state of “being at home” in his cottage in Northborough. Although he could not find Mary, he discovered that her absence might actually be a presence. In this context, it is observed that Clare once again turns to the past amid his mental illusions and creates his home environment through his past experiences. He tries to solve the absence of the woman he loves with her vision in his memory. Thus, home is no longer a construction or landscape, but an image of Mary. This image is also a means of self-integration for Clare, existing on a plane that transcends time and space. In parallel, in a “Song” in *Child Harold*, which is woven with allusions to his escape from High Beech, he describes the bond he forges between Mary and home in a very simple and striking way:

I've wandered many a weary mile
Love in my heart was burning
To seek a home in Mary[s] smile
But cold is love's returning

The cold ground was a feather bed
Truth never acts contrary
I had no home above my head
My home was love and Mary
[...]

Nor night nor day nor sun nor shade
 Week month nor rolling year
 Repairs the breach wronged love hath made
 There madness—misery here
 Lifes lease was lengthened by her smiles
 — Are truth and love contrary
 No ray of hope my life beguiles
 I've lost love home and Mary (Clare, 1984: 281-282)

As can be clearly understood, Clare is in a state of “not being at home at home” or “not feeling at home while being at home”. The dislocation of home takes him to a state of “being homeless at home”. Emphasising that home is not necessarily always a house, Blunt and Dowling define it as “a series of feelings and attachments, some of which, some of the time, and in some places, become connected to a physical structure that provides shelter” (2006: 10). They point out that although a person lives in a house, he might not feel himself “at home”, and assert that “the spatialities of home are broader and more complex than just housing” (2006: 10). Accordingly, the meanings Clare attributes to home are reshaped by the absence of a presence that holds the center of his emotions and distorted mind. A similar narrative for the state of “homeless at home” he experienced when he arrived at his cottage in Northborough is seen in another “Song” at the end of his *Child Harold*:

In this cold world without a home
 Disconsolate I go
 The summer looks as cold to me
 As winters frost and snow
 Though winters scenes are dull and drear
 A colder lot I prove
 No home had I through all the year
 But Marys honest love...
 [...]
 My love was ne'er so blest as when
 It mingled with her own
 Told often to be told agen
 And every feeling known
 But now loves hopes are all bereft
 A lonely man I roam
 And abscent Mary long hath left
 My heart without a home (Clare, 1984: 306-307)

Crossan draws attention to two important themes that stand out in Clare's poems: “firstly, the sense of belonging to a particular place and the way of life that attaches to it; and secondly, the sense of not belonging, of being, in Clare's own memorable phrase, ‘homeless at home’” (1994: 60). Thus, he is now a person with no home. He understands that in real life he can no longer meet his love for whom he escaped from asylum and recognises the “impossibility of uniting his ideal with his real experience” (Howard, 1981: 18). Although he refuses Mary's death at times, he

eventually finds no other way but to take refuge in her dream. For him, it is only possible to protect the home values of a house which has lost its center by collecting and rebuilding the scattered memories. Thus, Mary will be a signifier of home, and even itself. In other words, in Mary's absence, cottage has lost its function and meanings. This can be associated to Clare's fading desire to return home during his Northampton years. As known, the poet felt a deep disappointment in his first attempt as he found the house devoid of Mary.

When examining the sense of home in asylum poems, it is seen that Clare combines three perspectives and blends them all. They give the poet a unified vision of values which are unchangeable in his own world. Memory has made the most important contribution to the formation of this vision. It is often for him a means of finding reasons to alleviate his suffering, and sometimes to revive the joy of his old days. Therefore, he clings to the memories of his childhood and youth during asylum years, reconstructing them as they fade. In "The Autumn Canto" of *Child Harold*, the poet often travels back in time, wandering in the countryside of Northborough and recalling his happy childhood days in Helpstone. He remembers Mary as long as he remembers the things Mary loves and the places she walks around. In a sense, he transforms her into a part of nature:

I've sought her in the fields and flowers
 I've sought her in the forest groves
 In avenues and shaded bowers
 And every scene that Mary loves
 E'en round her home I seek her here
 But Mary's absent every where (Clare, 1984: 298)

In parallel, in "Stanzas" Clare personifies the entities in nature and communicates with Mary through them; he returns to his childhood and looks for Mary in the mountains, woods, and winds of his countryside (Clare, 1984: 359-361). In "The Invitation", he again goes back to his old days and re-creates the meadows he and Mary ran together (Clare, 1984: 354-355). In "Mary", he watches around in the silence of the evening and hopes that Mary will see the flowers he has gathered for her in the morning (Clare, 1984: 341-342). In "To Mary", he states that the woman he loves fills his whole life even if she is away from him, in that the wind that blows at night, the breeze that wanders in the bushes whisper Mary's name, and the dew on flowers reminds her (Clare, 1984: 342). As understood his memories are all imaginary shelters, if no longer physical, and although they do not protect the body of the poet, they can protect his soul and mind. Clare creates a history of happiness out of the cruel realities of his life through his memory and places home at the center of that happiness and makes it the source of his personal narrative.

Conclusion

The sense of home in Clare's asylum poems can be evaluated under three headings. The first is the Helpstone and Northborough countryside, the place of his childhood and youth where his personality was shaped and opened to social, cultural, historical and psychological influences. In this context, home is fixed in the image,

but the elements it contains are fluid and in constant motion. It is the source of the power that gives him his poetic perspective. The second is the family space where he created his own privacy and cut off his connection with the outer world after crossing its threshold. Although it seems fixed at first glance, it is also dynamic at the metaphorical level, existing in various meanings and intertwined dimensions. Being a concrete structure, it later turns into an image in Clare's mind and takes a poetic direction. The third derives its source from the presence of a real person and sits on a spiritual and dreamy frame after undergoing some transformations. Like the formers, it is poetic and a product of the poet's mind. On the one hand, it is right beside Clare, but too far for him to touch on the other. It was born of Mary Joyce's presence, becomes an image and a metaphor that makes the poet's countryside and cottage a home. All these three representations of home shift from concrete to abstract, from a visible and tangible reality to imaginary, and become one by touching and intertwining with each other.

In the last instance, what Clare describes in his asylum poems is no longer his countryside and cottage nor Mary, but their images. These images have deeper meanings than those of the signified. At the narrative level, home changes, transforms, disappears and re-exists in the privacy of the image; it gains immensity and timelessness in the imagination of the poet. Clare's sense of time emerges in the reconstruction of the past in the present, interwoven but at the same time distant from both. Hence, Clare's home trilogy is not a remembrance and a reflection of what exists, but a recreation of it through memory. Thus, the home at the beginning and at the end are both similar to and different from one another. As for Mary, she is the force that embraces and connects everything. However, in Clare's sense of home, it is not possible to talk about one of them without the others.

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