

Hysteria as an Escape for the Female Character in “Ile” by Eugene O’Neil

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Highlights

- The symptoms of hysterical behaviors on the female character gradually appear, from mild to severe symptoms depending on the accumulated unexpressed desires.
- The hysterical behaviors are the way for the female character to relieve her unexpressed desires because her expectation does not match with the harsh reality she must deal with.

Abstract: Hysteria or female madness occurs mostly in women. It happens because according to research the health condition of women is worse than men, significantly related to a mental condition. Women are more likely to have unexpressed desires that lead to stress and develop depression when faced with the reality that does not match their expectations. To understand more about hysteria, this study attempts to examine the symptoms of hysterical behaviors that occur on the female character, Mrs. Keeney, in a play entitled “Ile” written by Eugene O’Neill. This is qualitative research in which the data were in the form of dialogues between the characters, especially related to Mrs. Keeney. The results of this study show that the symptoms of hysterical behaviors gradually appear, from mild to severe symptoms. In addition, they occur mostly because the female character is unable to face the harsh reality that is incompatible with her expectation, and thus she prefers to escape from it.

Keywords: hysterical behaviors, unexpressed desires, escape reality, female character.

Introduction

In the world of Western medicine, hysteria has been fervently studied and explored, if not, talked about. The term ‘hysteria’ is no longer used nowadays, instead, modern medical professionals call it somatization disorder. Hysteria, as explained in a book written by Joseph Breuer and his assistant, Sigmund Freud, is “the result of a traumatic experience, one that cannot be integrated into the person’s understanding of the world. The emotions appropriate to the trauma are not expressed in any direct fashion but do not simply evaporate: They express themselves in behaviors that in a weak, vague way offer a response to the trauma” (Boeree, 2009). These symptoms are, in other words, meaningful. When the client can be made aware of the meanings of his or her symptoms (through hypnosis, for example) then the unexpressed emotions are released and so no longer need to express themselves as symptoms.

In some research, hysteria is frequently addressed as female madness. (Borossa, 2001, p. 5) states that “as an illness, hysteria has had a long-standing association with the feminine. Although male sufferers were, at times, identified and discussed, it has primarily been seen as a woman’s disorder”. Hysteria can victimize both men and women but is more commonly found

among women. An article, (*Female Hysteria during Victorian Era: Its Symptoms, Diagnosis & Treatment/Cures*, n.d.) mentions that “Galen, a prominent physician from the second century, wrote that hysteria was a disease caused by deprivation in particularly passionate women: hysteria was quite often in virgins, nuns, widows and, rarely, in married women.” The question of why this disease happened to most women rather than to men provoked the further investigation. In her article entitled *The Myth of Female Hysteria and Health Disparities among Women*, (Lines, 2018) states that “Women are up to 10 times more likely to receive the diagnosis than men.” She continues that it occurs because women’s health condition is worse than men. “The prevalence of chronic conditions, activity limitations, disability, and chronic pain are all greater among women than men. Depression is diagnosed twice as often among women and women get three times as many migraines as men.” It is because a woman’s desires or wishes are repressed by some conditions as it is believed that, ‘till nowadays, women still become a sexual object that indirectly limited their expression. It is not an uncommon situation for it is undeniable that the majority of the culture around the world is patriarchy. There are various views regarding this practice. (Hooks, 2004) in *Understanding Patriarchy* says that “Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence.” Taking a glance at an article entitled (*What is patriarchy?*, 2020), “Patriarchy is the term used to describe the society in which we live today, characterized by current and historic unequal power relations between women and men whereby women are systematically disadvantaged and oppressed.” To sum up, this practice seems to be featured by superiority and power over weaker ones, especially women. Thus, women struggle for their rights as human beings, among them, are to speak up and to be heard.

Although hysteria can occur to both men and women, it was once associated with women because of several reasons. First, Hippocrates first coined the term hysteria — from ‘hysteria,’ or ‘uterus’ or ‘wandering uterus’ (Pearson, 2017). Its original idea was that a uterus detached in a woman’s body “subsequently rendered her unable to think clearly or manage stressful life situations in a conventionally acceptable manner” (Reyes & Elhai, 2008, p. 340). Second, There were many cases of hysteria among women. The most famous one was the Salem Witch Trials which happened around 1692-1693. “It began when two young girls of the small town of Salem Village began to experience seizures that were not explained by contemporary medical science. Soon more girls were being afflicted and more townspeople (mostly females) were being accused” (MacGowan, 2015). Although it was considered as mass hysteria, most of the victims were females. Another one was a case study of Anna O. published in the book entitled *Studies on Hysteria* by Josef Breuer, in collaboration with Sigmund Freud. This study has given a significant impact on the development of psychoanalysis.

The cases of hysteria among women that have inspired several authors in the Western world is the last reason. Hence, this paper discusses a play entitled “Ile” by Eugene O’Neill in consideration that this literary work represents hysteria on a female character. “Ile” was first performed in 1917 by Provincetown Players and then published in 1919. The play, some say, is based on O’Neill’s life experience as a seaman. He spent several years at sea and had a deep love for the sea. As edited by Horst Frenz in an article (*Eugene O’Neill - Biographical - NobelPrize.org*, n.d.), O’Neill said, “Finished my experience as a sailor as able-bodied seaman

on the American Line of transatlantic liners.” However, an article entitled ‘*Ile by Eugene O’Neill*’ written by (Kennedy, 2007) states that the play is based on a story of Captain John Cook and his wife, Viola, who were residents in Provincetown. Viola took a two-year trip at sea with her husband that she went mad when the husband would only return home with a ship full of whale oil. After returning home, she was then known to have an eccentric behavior in town and her husband kept working at sea until 1916. Whether the story is true or not, it is still a mystery. Nonetheless, as the story, “*Ile*” is set in the sea that the whaling ship under Captain Keeney’s command is trapped in the ice for a year. In this circumstance, O’Neill brings the readers to follow the story and the action of the ship’s crew, the Captain, and the Captain’s wife. Noticing that the Captain’s wife is on board, it conveys a distinct story about this play as the presence of a woman on a whaling voyage in 1895 is indeed unusual.

There are several studies discussing hysteria related to women in the last two decades. The first is research entitled “Female hysteria across cultures and periods in American literature” by (Droogsma, 2008). She focuses her analysis on three American novels that talk about the female characters who “choose mental illness in response to the conflicting role expectations placed upon them”. Secondly is research written by (Little, 2015) entitled “Frailty, thy name is woman: Depictions of Female Madness”. In her study, Little worked on three plays which “themes illuminate women’s mental illness as an extensive problem with many contributing factors”. Although these two research have the same focus which is hysteria on female characters, this study presents different objectives as well as the subject to analyze.

For that matter, this study focuses solely on the condition of the Captain’s wife, Mrs. Keeney, the only female character in a play entitled “*Ile*” by Eugene O’Neill in which the data were taken from an electronic archive of Eugene O’Neill (*Ile*, 2012). Under unsupportive circumstances, she shows certain behaviors that are considered hysteria’s symptoms. Furthermore, taking into account that she lives under an exceptional situation for a woman in 1895, it attempts to figure out whether her hysterical behaviors are her way to escape from reality.

Findings and Discussion

The Symptoms of Hysteria on the Female Character, Mrs. Keeney

To be the only woman in the male-dominated world, the Captain’s wife, Mrs. Keeney is not happy with her life on board. As a whaling wife, she joins her husband on voyages expecting that she will not be lonely and always waits for her husband to come home. However, she does not get what she wants and this condition is frustrating for her. With time this frustration is getting worse and that leads to hysteria. To say that Mrs. Keeney’s behaviors are considered as the symptoms of hysteria, presenting, and analyzing her behaviors are essential. In doing so, the analysis will focus on three parts from the play that show the hysterical condition of Mrs. Keeney.

In the first part, at the beginning of the story, Mrs. Keeney shows a sign of suffering and anxiety.

(The door in rear is opened and Mrs. Keeney stands in the doorway. She is a slight, sweet-faced little woman primly dressed in black. Her eyes are red from weeping and her face drawn and pale. She takes in the cabin with a frightened glance and stands as

if fixed to the spot by some nameless dread, clasping and unclasping her hands nervously. The two men turn and look at her.) (Ile, 2012)

It shows from the text that Mrs. Keeney is suffering and she cries a lot. Moreover, she looks dreadful by the condition around her. For about two years she has been living inside the ship with only walls to see. Furthermore, when she goes outside, Mrs. Keeney only sees ice. For Mrs. Keeney, it unconsciously feels like being trapped in a monotonous life that ultimately makes her suffer.

However, all her anxiety and sufferings suddenly disappear when she sees water, although only behind curtains. She no longer shows any signs of mild hysterical symptoms because she feels happy and excited that there is a change of view after a long time.

MRS. KEENEY—(*dully*) I know. (*She turns away from them and walks slowly to the bench on left. She lifts up one of the curtains and looks through a porthole; then utters an exclamation of joy.*) Ah, water! Clear water! As far as I can see! How good it looks after all these months of ice! (*She turns round to them, her face transfigured with joy.*) Ah, now I must go upon deck and look at it, David. (*Ile, 2012*)

Analyzing from the dialogue, there is a sudden change of behavior which is a complete reversal from anxiety and suffering to joy. It indicates that there is something unusual about Mrs. Keeney's behavior because she usually only presents nervous behavior. This is one of the symptoms of hysteria, although it is still considered an onset. As stated in an online article (*From nerves to neuroses / Science Museum, n.d.*), the symptoms can be seen through both body and mind of a patient, which includes "shortness of breath, heaviness in the abdomen, muscular spasms and fainting as well as anxiety, irritability, and embarrassing or unusual behavior". This sudden change of behavior will also happen later as all of her sufferings are unconsciously accumulated in the end.

The second one is the part in which Mrs. Keeney happens to witness violence on board. All crew is men and Mrs. Keeney is the only woman in the ship which means that it is full of masculinity. As a consequence, they tend to have a fight when there is a problem. This situation cannot be avoided because violence is inseparable from men and "men are responsible for most of the egregious violence in the world because every culture in the world expects their men to be aggressive and capable of extreme violence, just as it expects them to make themselves subject to aggression and extreme violence" (Bonea, 2011).

(As he turns his head to look at the others, Keeney's fist shoots out to the side of his jaw. Joe goes down in a heap and lies there. Mrs. Keeney gives a shriek and hides her face in her hands. The men pull out their sheath knives and start a rush, but stop when they find themselves confronted by the revolvers of Keeney and the Mate.) (Ile, 2012)

Witnessing violence adds the nervousness and suffering felt by Mrs. Keeney. It is obvious from the dialogue that she is in extreme shock as if she never expects that kind of violence happens in the ship. It is another trigger that worsens the symptom of Mrs. Keeney's hysteria. While in the first part her sudden change of behavior is not noticed by people around

her, in this part Mr. Keeney feels that something is not right with his wife's behavior. This happens because Mrs. Keeney can no longer suppress her anxiety and shock that are unconsciously shown in her behavior that in one minute she weeps hysterically then the next minute she abruptly stops.

MRS. KEENEY—(*hysterically*) All this horrible brutality, and these brutes of men, and this terrible ship, and this prison cell of a room, and the ice all around, and the silence. (*After this outburst she calms down and wipes her eyes with her handkerchief.*)
KEENEY—(*after a pause during which he looks down at her with a puzzled frown*) Remember, I warn't hankerin' to have you come on this voyage, Annie. (*Ile, 2012*)

The last part is the climax of the story when Mrs. Keeney hears the news that her husband will continue looking for the *ile* to northward, even after he promises to take her home. The news that the ship is able to go northward conveyed by the Mate and "Mr. Keeney looks at the MATE with terrified eyes" (*Ile, 2012*) when she hears it. In line with the climax of the story, the symptom of hysteria suffered by Mrs. Keeney also reaches the climax in this part. After her husband decides to go northward, Mrs. Keeney starts by laughing hysterically and playing the organ wildly. Moreover, she seems to go blank that "she doesn't answer or seem to know" (*Ile, 2012*) when her husband talks to her. The attempt made by Mr. Keeney to talk to her seems in vain because Mrs. Keeney only "stares up at him with a stupid expression, a vague smile on her lips" and then goes back into playing the organ (*Ile, 2012*). Mrs. Keeney's condition is even worse when Mr. Keeney no longer cares for his wife and determines to get the *ile*. The behaviors indicate that Mrs. Keeney has lost her mind and gone into her own world.

(*He goes out. She cries after him in anguish*) David! (*A pause. She passes her hand across her eyes—then commences to laugh hysterically and goes to the organ. She sits down and starts to play wildly an old hymn.*) (*Ile, 2012*)

(*He turns abruptly and goes out. Mrs. Keeney does not appear to notice his departure. Her whole attention seems centered in the organ. She sits with half-closed eyes, her body swaying a little from side to side to the rhythm of the hymn. Her fingers move faster and faster and she is playing wildly and discordantly as The Curtain Falls*) (*Ile, 2012*)

In this last part, the hysterical behaviors suffered by Mrs. Keeney has reached the climax. It can be considered as severe symptoms because Mrs. Keeney's mind seems to go beyond the present reality. She can no longer control her mind to stay conscious and sane and therefore she unconsciously adds up all of her anxiety, nervousness, suffering, shock, disbelief, and feeling betrayed by her husband into one final blow.

Mrs. Keeney's Hysterical Behaviors to Escape Reality

The most common reason that people try to run away from reality is life is difficult. For some, this difficulty is caused by the expectations that do not match with reality which means that desires cannot be expressed properly and this kind of situation can "create significant stress" (Scott, 2020). To avoid this, people escape reality by doing positive activities, such as

by watching television, reading books, listening to music, etc. (SWNS, 2017). However, when the accumulated amount of stress is not being relieved, it will lead to mental illness.

As stated previously that women are more likely to suffer this stress because most of their desires or wishes are repressed. In the play, Mrs. Keeney suffers the same repression. She is extremely stressed and frustrated because most of her desires are being ignored by her husband and cause her to develop symptoms of hysteria. The daily circumstances she faces while onboard do not match her expectation and slowly weigh her down mentally which is displayed by her hysterical behaviors.

In line with the symptoms of hysteria, there are three significant circumstances faced by Mrs. Keeney while onboard that do not match her expectations and lead to her hysterical behaviors. The first one is monotonous life on the ship with walls and ice surround her. The harsh reality that must be faced by Mrs. Keeney when she joins her husband on the voyage is to live inside the ship surrounded by walls, like a prisoner. Even if she goes outside, all she can see is ice, and it has been two years long, as Mrs. Keeney says “*(monotonously)* I know--ice, ice, ice! But there's nothing to see down here but these walls [*She makes a gesture of loathing.*]” (Ile, 2012). Mrs. Keeney’s loathing gesture indicates that she totally hates the situation. She even asks her husband to grant her wish to go up on deck to have a change of view. Yet, her husband turns down her request.

MRS. KEENEY: *(after a pause, during which she seems to be endeavoring to collect her thoughts)* I thought maybe--I'd go up on deck, David, to get a breath of fresh air. [*She stand's humbly awaiting his permission. He and the MATE exchange a significant glance.*]

KEENEY: It's too cold, Annie. You'd best stay below to-day. There's nothing to look at on deck--but ice. (Ile, 2012)

Examining the situation, it is clear that Mrs. Keeney’s desire is not fulfilled. Although her husband has a good reason for his rejection, it is still upsetting for Mrs. Keeney because her husband does not explain the clear reason or soothes her anxiety. In this part, the wish of Mrs. Keeney to have a change of view is finally granted although through a porthole. In this case, her behavior changes from anxiety or nervousness to being excited even though for a while. It means that the desire is slightly relieved. The reason it is only slightly relieved is her original wish to go up on deck still cannot be accomplished because her husband keeps rejecting her request and all she can do just accept what her husband says. Her hysterical behavior, at first, which is anxiety drives her to keeps asking to go up on deck and see the water. However, after being rejected over and over, she suddenly becomes obedient and answers her husband somehow calmly. This is Mrs. Keeney's attempts to be patient with the condition but unfortunately, this unexpressed desire is another trigger to her insanity at the end of the play.

MRS. KEENEY: *(dully)* I know. *(She turns away from them and walks slowly to the bench on left. She lifts up one of the curtains and looks through a porthole; then utters an exclamation of joy.)* Ah, water! Clear water! As far as I can see! How good it looks after all these months of ice! *(She turns round to them, her face transfigured with joy.)* Ah, now I must go upon deck and look at it, David. (Ile, 2012)

KEENEY: (*frowning*) Best not to-day, Annie. Best wait for a day when the sun shines.

MRS. KEENEY: (*desperately*) But the sun never shines in this terrible place.

KEENEY: (*a tone of command in his voice*) Best not to-day, Annie.

MRS. KEENEY: (*crumbling before this command--abjectly*) Very well, David. (*She stands there staring straight before her as if in a daze.*) (*Ile, 2012*)

Secondly, the circumstance faced by Mrs. Keeney is to live among men and violence. Despite the foreign life that the whaling wives would face at sea, they still preferred to be with their husbands instead of leading a lonely life at home, as Mrs. Keeney says to her husband, “I wanted to be with you, David, don't you see? I didn't want to wait back there in the house all alone” (*Ile, 2012*). Life at sea was hard for men, and it was even harder for their wives. It was an isolated and dangerous world in which they had the same work over and over while waiting for whales to be seen, and it could be for months, even years. In this state of life, everyone would get tired and bored. In an article (*Remembering Long Island Ladies Who Took to Sea, 2017*), the wives, as the only woman on board must face “the hardships they endured, including illness, boredom, violent seasickness, powerful storms, dangerous whaling grounds, frightening mutinies, and death,” therefore they “would fill her days educating her children, reading, washing clothes, sewing, writing in her diary, and cross-stitching while confined in cramped quarters to pass the long hours.” It was tougher because wives who joined on whaling ships were rare as they could not socialize. In that big ship, Mrs. Keeney is the only woman on board which means that she has no friend to talk to unlike when she was back home. In addition to that, she witnesses a terrible incident which is the brutal fight between her husband and his crew that it makes Mrs. Keeney “gives a shriek and hides her face in her hands” (*Ile, 2012*). Although it seems like she can withstand the monotonous life for two years, the violence really breaks her that she becomes hysterical.

MRS. KEENEY: (*shrinking away from, him*) Oh, I can't bear it! I can't bear it any longer!

KEENEY: (*gently*) Can't bear what, Annie?

MRS. KEENEY: (*hysterically*) All this horrible brutality, and these brutes of men, and this terrible ship, and this prison cell of a room, and the ice all around, and the silence. (*Ile, 2012*)

From the dialogue, it can be seen that Mrs. Keeney is in extreme shock and she becomes traumatized. The state of breaking down presented by Mrs. Keeney indicates that she is no longer able to face her reality. The reason is this reality is so much far from the life she has dreamed of before she joined the voyage. It is undeniable that the voyage will be full of masculinity and Mrs. Keeney is supposed to be aware of this condition before she decided to join her husband. But, she never expected to see the horrible brutality. The behavior expressed by her points that she never thought or imagined such a situation. This incident is a much stronger trigger to cause Mrs. Keeney's hysteria.

MRS. KEENEY: ... I used to dream of sailing on the great, wide, glorious ocean. I wanted to be by your side in the danger and vigorous life of it all. I wanted to see you the hero they make you out to be in Homeport. And instead--(*her voice grows tremulous*) all I find is ice--and cold--and brutality!

MRS. KEENEY: (*wearily*) I guess I was dreaming about the old Vikings in the story-books and I thought you were one of them. (*Ile, 2012*)

Analyzing from the circumstance, Mrs. Keeney's desire is definitely unexpressed. She only thought about something sweet and joyful while on the voyage before she joined herself. The reality that she has to deal with is so much different from her desire or wish. Her attempt to hold on fails because she has accumulated her sufferings for two years long. Mr. Keeney who is the only person she can turn to does not seem to help relieve her anxiety and stress. He only cares about his ship and his ambition to fill up the ship with ile. The only effort made by Mr. Keeney to make his wife happy and feel at home is to bring an organ on the ship, but it does not seem to help her much. Therefore, Mrs. Keeney feels alone because there is no one in the ship understands her stress and suffering.

After encountering this circumstance, Mr. Keeney "holds her at arm's length and looks at her face anxiously" and says "best go to bed, Annie. You ain't yourself. You got fever. Your eyes look so strange like. I ain't never seen you look this way before" (*Ile, 2012*). This suggests that Mrs. Keeney's health becomes worse and her husband fully notices it. Yet, Mr. Keeney overlooks the situation and keeps giving excuses to keep going northward and get more ile. To fulfill his own desire, Mr. Keeney puts aside his wife's desire. Unfortunately, it worsens her mental condition and drives her to keep begging because that in Mrs. Keeney's mind, that is the only thing she can do to keep her sanity. It shows that this is her last resort to make her be heard by her husband.

MRS. KEENEY: (*dully*) No--I don't know--I can't understand--(*Intensely*) Oh, I want to be home in the old house once more and see my own kitchen again, and hear a woman's voice talking to me and be able to talk to her. Two years! It seems so long ago--as if I'd been dead and could never go back. (*Ile, 2012*)

MRS. KEENEY: (*wildly*) Then do this, this once, for my sake, for God's sake--take me home! It's killing me, this life--the brutality and cold and horror of it. I'm going mad. I can feel the threat in the air. I can hear the silence threatening me--day after gray day and every day the same. I can't bear it. (*Sobbing*) I'll go mad, I know I will. Take me home, David, if you love me as you say. I'm afraid. For the love of God, take me home! (*Ile, 2012*)

Fortunately, Mrs. Keeney's desperate and intense pleading can melt her husband's heart. As Mr. Keeney says heavily, "I'll do it, Annie--for your sake--if you say it's needful for ye" (*Ile, 2012*), he finally agrees to take the ship home although he seems insincere about this. On the other hand, this is a joyful moment for Mrs. Keeney for she is finally sure she is going home, as she says "(*with wild joy--kissing him*) God bless you for that, David!" (*Ile, 2012*). For someone like Mrs. Keeney who is extremely depressed and frustrated with the situation she

faces, it is like hope, sunshine, an expectation, that there will only be a beautiful, happy life after going home. She thinks she will get that happiness soon for only about two months to return home. She believes with all her heart that her husband will fulfill her wish and turns the ship southward. In this case, it seems Mrs. Keeney tries to give her husband another chance and trusts him fully that he still cares for her. She feels delighted that she finally can express her desire and there is someone to hear it and do something about it.

The third circumstance is built from the second circumstance which is Mr. Keeney's persistence to keep going northward despite his wife's continuous begging to take her home. Mr. Keeney is a man of pride. As a captain, he always comes back home with a full ship. However, because there is only ice along the way of the voyage, the ship is not full yet. So, although the contract of two years' journey is due, Mr. Keeney keeps on going to the north to find more ice. Mr. Keeney's ambition to get more ice collides with his wife's desire to go back home.

Nevertheless, after a short moment of his wife's joy, Mr. Keeney goes back on his word as he hears the Mate excitedly says "the ice is breakin' up to no'th'rd, sir. There's a clear passage through the floe, and clear water beyond, the lookout says" (*Ile*, 2012). This statement means that Mr. Keeney can continue his voyage to have a ship full of ice which indicates that they will not go back home. It is extremely horrible news for Mrs. Keeney that hearing this, she "looks at the MATE with terrified eyes" (*Ile*, 2012). Ignoring his wife's condition, Mr. Keeney excitedly goes on and being persistent to fulfill his own ambition. Noticing earlier that his wife is not healthy, he begins to give attention to his wife, and deep down in his heart he actually knows that his wife is suffering. But, Mr. Keeney acts in denial about his wife's odd behaviors. He needs to keep making excuses so that he can go northward and satisfy his desire to fill the ship with ice.

KEENEY: (*swallowing hard--in a hoarse whisper, as if he had difficulty in speaking*)
You said--you was agoin' mad--God! (*Ile*, 2012)

KEENEY: (*turning to his wife*) Annie! Did you hear him? I'll git the ice. (*She doesn't answer or seem to know he is there. He gives a hard laugh, which is almost a groan.*) I know you're foolin' me, Annie. You ain't out of your mind--(*anxiously*) be you? I'll git the ice now right enough--jest a little while longer, Annie--then we'll turn hom'ard. I can't turn back now, you see that, don't ye? I've got to git the ice. (*In sudden terror*)
Answer me! You ain't mad, be you?
[*KEENEY turns his back on his wife and strides to the doorway, where he stands for a moment and looks back at her in anguish, fighting to control his feelings.*] (*Ile*, 2012)

When Mr. Keeney satisfies his desire, he sacrifices his wife's wish and it becomes a misfortune for his wife. Dealing with this situation, Mrs. Keeney "passes her hand across her eyes--then commences to laugh hysterically and goes to the organ. She sits down and starts to play wildly an old hymn" (*Ile*, 2012). The hysterical behaviors displayed by Mrs. Keeney indicate her mental break down that her desire, her big expectation to come home suddenly vanishes and she cannot deal with the reality that she has to spend more time in that ship.

Therefore, she escapes from reality by preferring to go into her own world (playing the organ wildly).

Conclusion

The play, “Ile” is indeed a tragedy in the life of a married couple. It happens because there are two desires or wishes of the married couple that collide and it brings misfortune to one of them. Under unsupportive circumstances, the female character named Mrs. Keeney struggles to live in a ship that is surrounded by ice and full of men. After the long two years on board, she finds it hard to keep living happily on the ship. As she feels miserable, she thinks that she can no longer withstand the suffering. Therefore, it leads to hysterical behaviors that she unconsciously shows whenever her desire is repressed.

The hysterical behaviors presented gradually appear from mild to severe symptoms. In this matter, the female character that is Mrs. Keeney displays anxiety at the beginning and extreme shock or trauma after that. In both circumstances, there is a similar indication of hysteria that is noticed, which is a sudden change of behavior. After being presenting anxiety, Mrs. Keeney shows sudden joy which is very unusual. Secondly, after in the state of extreme shock, Mrs. Keeney weeps hysterically then abruptly stops which makes this situation is also very odd. The last symptom which is the most severe one is Mrs. Keeney displays many strange behaviors such as smiles vaguely at first, stares blankly, then laughs hysterically and lastly plays organ wildly by swaying her body from side to side. This is considered the most severe symptom because, after this, Mrs. Keeney seems to lose her mind and goes into her own world which is insanity.

It is believed that all of those strange behaviors are the accumulation of repressed desires faced by Mrs. Keeney. To be able to stay sane, she unconsciously tries to escape from the harsh reality she lives in by displaying those behaviors. There are three circumstances that lead to her unexpressed desires. The first one is her husband, Mr. Keeney keeps rejecting her request to have a change of view by asking to go on the deck so that she can see water instead of ice and walls. Next, her imagination and expectation to have a pleasant voyage are not compatible with the reality she deals with which is violence between her husband and the crew. The last one is Mr. Keeney’s persistence to go northward for more ile although Mrs. Keeney desperately begs him to take her home. In this last situation, the hysterical symptoms that occur in Mrs. Keeney’s behaviors are the signs that she can no longer face the reality that she unconsciously needs to run away from it. Therefore, she goes into her own world which is insanity.

Examining the hysterical behavior and the circumstances that trigger those behaviors is significant. The reasons are studying this can give useful information about the hysterical behaviors that may occur in society, especially on women. Furthermore, it also gives valuable understanding about the extreme aftermath of repressing desires for both the victim and the people around. Therefore, great consideration is highly needed while living together in society.

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