
State of Man-Woman relationship in —A Game of Chess|| the second section of T.S. Eliot's 'The Wasteland': An Exegesis

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Paper Received on 01-10-2024, Accepted on 03-11-2024
Published on 04-11-24; DOI:10.36993/RJOE.2024.9.4.107

Abstract:

T.S. Eliot's, —A Game of Chess|| happens to the second section of his *magnum opus*, *The Waste Land*, which depicts how the whole of European civilization has become spiritually bankrupt, leading to gross degeneration in social values and ethics during the post-World War period. In fact —A Game of Chess|| is an unvarnished portrayal of the deterioration that crept into modern-day marital and sexual relationships. Love, sex, and romance, the mantra of a healthy and concrete relationship, are nowhere to be found. Man and woman are under the spell of a typical sexual perversion. There has been a complete erosion of intimate relations between men and women. Love is replaced by lust. Physical gratification remains the prime motif of the hour. The concept of holiness in sexual love has been replaced by vulgarity, obscenity, and bestiality. With the help of allusions and myths, Eliot tries to reveal the bitter truth of fading relationships in intimate personal affairs, giving rise to a faithless, superficial, and sterile world. When one talks of a man-woman relationship, our mind immediately conceives terms like mutual love, trust, and emotional attachment, but in —A Game of Chess||, not a single case of a man-woman relationship depicted by Eliot is guided by the true essence of love. Spousal relationships in upper-class as well as in lower-class societies have been fully defiled and corrupted. Men and women are not true to each other. This paper is an attempt to analyze the state of the man-woman relationship delineated by Eliot in —A Game of Chess||.

Keywords: ethics, sexual perversion, lust, erosion, corrupt.

Introduction:

An American-born British poet, T. S. Eliot emerges as a trendsetter and a much sought-after poet of the 20th century. With the advent of Eliot, modern poetry ventures into the use of innovative techniques like fragmented narrative, multiple voices, and inter-textuality. He not only scans the contemporary milieu of Europe after the First World War but also transpires a realistic vision to save humanity

marching on the path of annihilation. *The Waste Land*, Eliot's most influential and complex work of art, aptly reflects the decadence in Europe, especially London, after the First World War. The whole of Europe, and particularly London, gives a spectacle of morbidity in all walks of life. London is vigorously contaminated by the fire of sexuality. The poet observes that the degeneration of modern society is due to perverted man-woman relationships, violation of the sanctity of sex, lack of spiritual sense among men and women, and overindulgence in bodily pleasures. Sexual union that rejuvenates spousal relationships and paves the way for a concrete and reciprocal relationship is in a state of chaos in London – the wasteland of Eliot. Richard Banden Heusan, opines, Eliot's works are littered with male-female relationships marked by aborted communication and failures to achieve intimacy (quoted from Bellour Leila, p-4).

In —A Game of Chess, the second section of T.S Eliot's long poem *The Waste Land*, Eliot deals with the theme of sterility in marital-sexual relationships prevalent in the higher and lower sections of society. In higher society, women are adulterous and obsessed with glamorous and materialistic lifestyles. These women fail to establish a deep connection with their partners, become bored with their own lives, and turn extremely neurotic. In contrast, the females of the lower section become victims of male dominance in terms of love and sex and lead a frustrated marital life.

Discussion:

The section under study, 'A Game of Chess', has been influenced by Middleton's play, —Women Beware Women (Part II), a quintessential narrative on the theme of sexual corruption. The play is about how the Duke uses the game of Chess to seduce Bianca, the beautiful wife. Taking a cue from it, Eliot, in 'A Game of Chess' affirms that life in modern times has become no less than a game of Chess devoid of any genuine affinity. Traversing on man-woman relationships, Eliot discovers that the union of sexes gives a spectacle of emotional numbness, a matter of fruitless encounter sans intimacy. Sex is treated as a medium of physical exploitation of women's bodies. There exists a strange sense of indifference and aloofness in marital life. Joel Edmund Anderson rightly says, —A Game of Chess, Highlights the strained and damaging relationships between men and women...characterized by madness, isolation, manipulation, and emotional and sexual degradation. To drive home his facts, Eliot draws upon a variety of myths and allusions to show how past sinful sexual activities, unrequited love affairs, and sexual perversion still loom large in present-day society. In fact, it has reached the pinnacle of degeneration.

The reference to those myths and allusions in the walls of the house where the jeweled sophisticated woman resides sets the tone of the poem. The opening line of the poem, 'The Chair she sat in as a burnished throne alludes to Cleopatra, the

ambitious and charming empress of ancient Egypt projected as a tragic heroine of Shakespeare's play *Antony and Cleopatra*. The royal love affair ran into tragic consequences due to Cleopatra's passionate love and Antony's mental imbalance and unresponsiveness to Cleopatra's expectations. The lack of understanding between them not only sabotages their love but also gives a lethal blow to their existence. Eliot's fashionable Belladonna and her lover, whom the readers encounter in the first part of —A Game of Chess, are akin to the above-doomed affair.

The sophisticated lady of —A Game of Chess, though, has God's plenty in terms of her material pleasures but leads a frustrated life with her lover. Eliot here draws the readers to The hollowness of modern man-woman relationships. The present lady waiting for her lover amidst heaps of exotic splendor is haunted by a typical paranoia. When the lover enters, the female partner desperately tells him:

My nerves are bad tonight. Yes,
bad. Stay with me.

Speak to me. Why do you never
speak? Speak: What are you
thinking of? What thinking?

What?

I never know what you are thinking. Think. (—A.G.of Cl in *Waste Land*. P-75)

The above lines echo the terrible suffering she is going through, and perhaps for that reason, she asks her lover to stay with her. She is in search of a soothing touch from her darling to recover from the ailment. But her lover pays no attention to her pleadings and remarks: I think we are in rats' alley

Where the dead men lost their bones. (—A.G.of Cl in *Waste Land*. P-75) This typical conversation between them is indicative of a fractured and diseased relationship, obviously haunted by a sense of boredom and nihilism. The husband's reply that they are in the 'Rat's alley' suggests that love between them has been decayed, and they lead a life of desolation. They live together, but they have no feelings or concerns for each other. The male partner is fading up with her lady love. The charm of love is missing in their life. Later expressions like —hot water at ten / and if it rains, a closed car at four— evidently reflect that they lead a mundane and stereotypical life. Even their conversation is incoherent and fragmentary. This type of life, according to Raj Sharma, depicts, —the hollow and disenchanted nature of modern relationships, reflecting a broader societal malaise where true connection and fulfillment are increasingly elusive

In the second section, Eliot draws us towards the conversation of two women from the lower section of society in a pub. Through their conversation, Eliot unearths the type of love that exists between the two married couple, Lil and her husband, Albert. From the hints, it is evident that Albert is returning from service

after four years, but Lil is not happy because Albert is always concerned with sexual pleasures. Lil has already given birth to five children and undergone an abortion several times by taking pills. She is now not in a condition to satisfy Albert's thirst for sex. Hearing this, Lil's friend tells her:

He has been in the army for four years, and he wants a good time, And if you don't give it to him, there's others will, (—A.G. of Cl in *Waste Land*. P-77). From the above lines, it is clear Albert needs only sensual pleasures from her wife, and now, as he is returning home, Lil is supposed to satisfy him sexually; otherwise, he will turn to others for this. The fear of this type of physical expectation from a husband after a long gap is indicative of his perverted mindset that only knows the business of the body. It not only violets the sanctity of marriage but also hammers the dignity of women. Albert considers the wife a physical commodity to play with for physical enjoyment. Lil has always become a silent prey to Albert's carnal desires, resulting in frequent pregnancy followed by abortion. Leila Bellour remarks that such a relationship between husband and wife, —lacks any sense of love and respect. It is reduced to a mere physical approximation, to an expression of base desires, or to a means of corrupting the *Other* (05).

Towards the end, Eliot wants to convey that the marital relationship between Lil and her husband is on the verge of collapsing due to a lack of understanding and love. The final words of the section, —Good night, ladies, good night sweet ladies, good night, good night! is an allusion to Ophelia, who commits suicide after being deprived of Hamlet's love in Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*.

Conclusion:

To conclude, the Man-Woman relationship lacks intimacy when the lovers and beloveds are unable to connect with each other with the vigor and commitment essential for a healthy state of affairs. The male partners fail to understand their lady love and keep on exploiting them. Physically and emotionally. Female partners are haunted by a sense of hopelessness, leading to emotional breakdown and frustration in life.

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Research Journal Of English (RJOE)

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal Impact Factor: 8.16(SJIF)Vol-9, Issue-4(Oct-Dec),2024
Indexed in: International Citation Indexing (ICI), Cite factor, International Scientific Indexing (ISI),
Directory of Research Journal Indexing (DRJI) Google Scholar, Cosmos and Internet Archives.

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How to cite this article?

Dr. Narayan Surjit Behera, "State of Man-Woman relationship in —A Game of Chess| the second section of T.S. Eliot's,*The Wasteland: An Exegesis.*" Research Journal Of English (RJOE)9(3),PP:103-107,2024, DOI:10.36993/RJOE.2024.9.4.107