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Non-Marital Sex in John Osborne's *Inadmissible Evidence* and *Time Present*

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Abstract:

In the post-war British society, with the advancement in the realms of medical sciences and technology, ideological influences of Darwin and Freud, liberal social legislations and war experiences in the background, long-established traditions and time-tested socio-ethical patterns give place to new patterns and modes of social interaction. As a corollary, a new societal attitude to sex that emphasizes freedom of sexual expression comes to characterize man-woman relationships, debunking suppression of sex instincts under the duress of conventions. The new freedom is considered as a part of general reaction and revolt against the authority in all respects within and without family but the new-found freedom undermines the significance of cardinal virtues of love, commitment and responsibility in man-woman relationships. The present paper seeks to examine the changing attitude to sex through premarital and extramarital relations as dramatized in John Osborne's *Inadmissible Evidence* and *Time Present*. In the dramatic world of Osborne, new sexual morality unshackles young boys and girls from responsibility towards their sex partners. The paper also brings out the point that the relaxed and irresponsible attitude to sex makes them emotionally bankrupt, sexually frustrated and socially alienated. The playwright underscores the view that healthy and wholesome sex is essential for forging lasting and happy man-woman relationships and better social order.

Key Words: Sexual morality, Debunking, Wholesome sex and Cardinal virtues.

In the post-war British society, there begins a tremendous revolt against authority in all domains of human life, pushing to the background the long-established and time-tested traditions and conventions. The conventional sexual morality that emphasizes repression and suppression of sexual instincts is replaced with new one that emphasizes expression of sexual freedom within and without wedlock. It has removed the stigma attached earlier to sex outside the marriage. What was previously considered as sin or bad thing comes to be accepted as a humanistic mode of self-expression. Now it is no longer bad to call a person sexy, rather it has become a complement. Husband and wife no longer feel guilty if they establish pre-marital sexual relations. With the growth of wealth, financially independent young boys and girls find opportunities to chase their natural preferences. This leads to an unprecedented rise in premarital sex. With this, pre-marital sex has become an accepted feature of life, and it is even presumed that it is a duty of parents or elders "to see that their children have proper accommodation in which to pursue their love affairs" (Gummer19). The increased availability of contraceptives seems to have led to an increase in non-marital sexual relations among young boys and girls. "Persons of modest births could keep as many as love affairs, and as many as wives, as Bertrand

Russell had” (Seaman 543). The changed societal attitude to sex and illegitimacy is often linked up with the growth in what has become known as “a relatively free-wheel society” (Punter19) of the late sixties and early seventies. The new society attempts to satisfy some frustrated human needs through the tabooed activities, but it does not necessarily bring human beings nearer to a world in which it is possible for them “to experience feelings of admiration, hope and love” (Robson49). Osborne sensitively responded to these changes and dramatized them faithfully and sensitively in his plays.

In the dramatic world of Osborne, sex loses its pristine character and procreative purpose owing to overindulgence of the sex partners. Sex without wedlock comes to be an accepted feature of social life. The changed societal attitude to sex leads to an unprecedented growth in premarital and extramarital sexual relationships. Not only the unmarried young boys and girls, but also the married persons keep a relaxed attitude to sex. Almost all the lead characters in their sexually active lives indulge in multifarious sexual relations to seek fun or relief from personal or professional frustration. They take recourse to unbridled sex without love, honesty and commitment. In the dramatic world of Osborne, sex has degenerated into lust which mars not only the prospects of lasting man-woman relationships but it also makes inroads into their familial and social life. In the dramatic world of Osborne, sexual relations are characterized by dishonesty, opportunism, selfishness, sordidness and incompatibility. Sex is no longer a binding force in family and social life; rather it has become a destructive energy. In the plays of sixties, Osborne dramatizes the irresponsible and irresistible sex, fracturing inter-personal relationships. The more they indulge in sexual activities, the more they become frustrated, and the more they become alienated, losing sexual potency and interest in human relationships.

In *Inadmissible Evidence*, Bill Maitland, a barrister, suffers from both marital and professional frustration. He moves from one woman to another in search of love and friendship to tide over it. He divorces his first wife, Sheila having failed to get “a complete satisfaction” (*Inadmissible Evidence* 81). Maitland marries another woman, Anna, but with her also his sex relations do not go in the desired way. Sexually frustrated with the second wife, Maitland turns to his mistress, Liz to have comfort and solace from sexual frustration, but finds her more exacting and indifferent to his genuine human needs. Maitland’s one-sided reliance on woman “not only makes him cruel, but also renders him vulnerable” (Gilleman 131). The more he does sex, the more he gets frustrated and the more alienated he becomes. In search of human love and warmth through sex, he, with the passage of time, turns into a wild beast. Maitland’s unquenchable erotic thirst is only a compensatory device for the want of “love and friendship” (*Inadmissible Evidence* 20). As time rolls by, sex for him becomes a commonplace thing like a peg of whiskey. Hudson remarks that some people “seem to use sex, for instance, as a place of escape” (*Inadmissible Evidence* 35). Maitland gets so much obsessed with sex that he does not let slip way any opportunity to abuse his relations with various women.

In the dramatic world of Osborne, non-marital sex is often found without honesty, commitment and involvement. This manifestation of sex is exemplified through Maitland-Shirley relationship. They get involved in extramarital relations, but without any commitment and responsibility towards each other. Maitland takes a cursory view of Shirley’s pregnancy: “I haven’t touched that girl for months...I’ve done no harm to her. If she’s unhappy it’s not my fault. Besides she’s engaged” (*Inadmissible Evidence* 24). It is evident that though Shirley is betrothed, she keeps sexual affairs with Maitland. She is “on the pills” (*Inadmissible Evidence* 46) to avoid pregnancy. It is obvious that the use of contraception in the sixties provides young girls and boys opportunities to establish risk-free sexual relations. Earlier the fear of conception

before marriage had restrained them from going for sexual indiscretions. The Maitland-Shirley affair is not based on genuine feelings of love and commitment; rather it is governed by materialistic considerations. It gets evidenced in the way she leaves him when he ceases to be lucrative in terms of money and manliness. On the other hand, Maitland wants to keep her with him to drown his marital frustration. In fact, their relations are not grounded on genuine feelings of love and loyalty with a view to establish an enduring relationship, which becomes quite clear in Maitland's confession to Shirley: "I don't think I let you think It was an enduring love affair--- in the sense of well of endless, wheedling obligations and summonses of things" (Inadmissible Evidence 49). Healthy and happy sexual relations need reciprocity and responsibility. Sexual relations without the genuine feelings of love and honesty inevitably lead to sexual frustration. The play exemplifies how irresponsible and dishonest sex leads to sexual frustration in life.

In the permissive society, the view that non-marital sex is immoral vanishes quite rapidly and it coincides with a change in the societal attitude to sex. People view sex as an integral component of their humanity. The way sex becomes a means to get freedom from the traditional sexual morality provides a direct assault on sex within wedlock. In the plays of Osborne, the young unmarried girls and boys do not hesitate to exhibit their sexual needs and desire, and they do not feel shy in making their erotic feelings known to the opposite sex. For them sex is a source of fun, not sin or an immoral act. This aspect of new sexual morality is exemplified through the Maitland-Joy relationship. Joy frankly admits: "I want to have sex constantly, I mean, I'm always wanting it" (Inadmissible Evidence 72). The scrappy nature of their sexual relations is conspicuous in the words of Joy: "You don't love me. And I don't love you" (Inadmissible Evidence 72). It is obvious that their sexual relations are not based on genuine feelings of love, commitment and responsibility. Maitland establishes sex relations with various women to tide over his marital frustration, but he succeeds in "inflicting quite certainly...more pain than pleasure" (Inadmissible Evidence 20). Shirley asks him pointedly: "What have you ever done for me? Maitland gives an honest answer: "Nothing. I suppose" (Inadmissible Evidence 39). They get tired of each other because their relationship is devoid of commitment, love and responsibility.

Maitland, with the passage of time, gets so much frustrated that he lets not slip away any opportunity to vent his sexual frustration. He passes indecent remarks against Shirley when he finds her sulky in the morning: "Well, something's made you bad tempered this morning, and I don't believe that languid pipe cleaner of accountant you're engaged to has got that much lead in his pencil!" (Inadmissible Evidence 22). About joy Maitland asks Hudson: "Look at that beautiful bottom. Don't go much on her face. But the way her skirt stretches over that little bum, you could stick a bus ticket in there" (Inadmissible Evidence (31). Maitland's mind is so much obsessed with sex that he fails to understand what sort of thing it is, "But what sort of object is that? Is it an enjoyment, a duty, an obligation, a necessity, or just an effort of fighting off the end, whatever is to come to you" (Inadmissible Evidence 35). Maitland's sexual frustration touches the lowest ebb when he gets infatuated with his own daughter for her youthful body and wishes to enjoy it, "She's got good youth, I'd never use anything if I could help it" (Inadmissible Evidence 61). Martin Banham comments that Maitland's obsession with sex and promiscuity of his life "dominates his existence, the minor triumphs of his conquests offering a transient defense against the major failure of his life, to build true relationship with his family and himself" (60). Maitland's wild sexuality implies a compensatory device which provides him an ineffectual sense of heroism. Loveless lust corrupts not only his entire being, but also ruins his familial relations as well as social life. He fails to keep both his wife and mistress in good mood, as he is

not in position to respond to them in a healthy manner. Now he feels scared of telephonic calls from them, “It is even worse than they ring up. Not that Liz rings very often” (Inadmissible Evidence 34-5). It is Maitland’s extreme sexual frustration that contributes to the final disruption of his family life. He is torn between his wife and mistress, consequently misunderstood by both. His affair with Joy and Shirley still worsen the situation. He seems “to retain very little” (Inadmissible Evidence 18) of what he has achieved in life, as his powers and potentialities decline so much that he “he’s getting less and less any good at it” (Inadmissible Evidence 18). At last, he becomes so much derelict that he loses almost all human communication and becomes an isolated, tortured being nowhere to go.

In the end, Maitland is deserted by all the members of family, staff and colleagues. His wife dislikes to staying with him, his daughter and son wish to get rid of him as and when he happens to be in their company. Maitland admits, “They all pretend to ignore me” (Inadmissible Evidence 102). Towards the end, when he lectures his daughter, she listens to him in an antagonistic way and leaves him without saying a word. Now he is afraid of being in any contact with them. Alan carter comments that, in the end, “his family and mistress desert, and unable to fight on, Bill throws in the towel and admits his obscenity of his existence” (Carter 95). Maitland’s sporty attitude to sex not only spoils his professional life as lawyer, but also frustrates all the prospects of happy family life. Maitland now recognizes the fact that “mistress are less tolerant than wives...they’re also less patronizing but totally without generosity” (Inadmissible Evidence 65). He is now fed up with Liz for her way of looking at him: “I ‘m tired of being watched. I’m tired of being watched by you, and observed and scrutinized and guessed about” (Inadmissible Evidence 111). Having failed to find an honest and trustworthy mate to establish lasting human relationship, he wishes to escape the place: “Far away, as far as possible from this place. There’s no place for me here” (Inadmissible Evidence (113). The telephonic conversation with his wife reinforces his dire need to have human communication, “Sometimes I think you’re only grip left, if you let me go, I’ll disappear, I’ll be made to disappear, Nothing will work, I’ll be like something in a capsule in space, weightless, unable to touch anything or do anything, like a groping baby in a removed, putrefying womb...No I’ll not leave you...you are leaving me” (Inadmissible Evidence 64).

Osborne highlights the unhealthy dimension of sex marring the prospects of marital harmony through the law suits that Maitland takes up. In the petition of Mrs. Maureen Shiela Tonks, he finds a reflection of his own life with his former wife Shiela who seeks divorce on the grounds of excess of sexual demand on the part of her husband. She alleges that he “on many occasions...insisted on having intercourse three times and even four times a day...He refused to cease from having intercourse during the time of the petitioner’s menstrual periods” (Inadmissible Evidence 79). Refuting the charge he deposes that: “There were many times when I failed. Many times I failed to give her a complete satisfaction” (Inadmissible Evidence 81). Another woman, Mrs. Audrey Jane Anderson seeks divorce on the almost similar grounds. Apart from this, she also alleges that he has “got mistresses all over London” (Inadmissible Evidence 84). She admits that he is “a kind man. He can be, and he has been kind to me,” but the problem is that he “found is difficult to say I love you” (Inadmissible Evidence 84).

In the late sixties, the liberal social legislations (such as The Abolishment of Capital Punishment Act, 1965, The Homosexual Act, 1965, The Sexual Offences Act, 1969 and Adultery Act), availability of contraceptives, and relaxed censorship of stage, screen and print inevitably affect the sexual relations. Now it has become easy not only for the married people, but also for the unmarried ones who go by sexual freedom. Sexual morality has weakened in

such a way that the institution of marriage has almost ceased to be a haven of procreation and protection. Marriage is no longer a restrictive force on sex. The unbridled freedom that the youngsters enjoy has led them to treat sex as a casual thing and an open activity. Young boys and girls are no longer afraid of the stigma and legal penalty that premarital sex used to carry, earlier, on the individual in particular and family in general.

In *Time Present*, presently Pamela lives with her divorced friend Constance. Their behaviours have clear lesbian overtones. Constance expresses her desire to Pamela: "Perhaps I've always wanted to be someone like you. To have long legs, and style. Instead of just making efforts. But I suppose what's saddening is that you make it sound like a rejection" (Time Present 36). In the post-war period, lesbianism is one of the manifestations of woman to assert sexual freedom. Pamela frustrated with Constance, establishes sex relations with Murray but gets shocked to find that he is also involved with Constance and other women at the same time, being committed to and responsible to any of them. Pamela becomes pregnant but she gets it terminated without expressing any repentance and displaying any inhibition and hesitation. The Abortion Reform Act of 1968 has enabled women to get their unwanted pregnancies aborted. In this context, Judith Ryder and Harold Silver comment: "The availability of legal abortion-- for some women was a further defense against unwanted pregnancies" (Ryder and Silver 300). Abortion does mean destruction of the results of the indiscretion of sex partners. The abortion Reform Act frees the girls from the unwanted pregnancy, but it puts an insidious impact on their health and sensibility.

In the beginning, Pamela keeps live-in-relationships with Alec, but soon she finds him irresponsible and irresponsible towards her human needs. She leaves him, finding indifferent to her genuine needs. Pamela tells Murray: "When he was making love to me. He never said anything. He was too reticent" (Time Present 65). After that, she establishes sex relations with other men, but denounces all of them, finding opportunist and lusty, "It's probably some man sniffing around. The moment you've been detached, they're on the doorstep seeing what the chances are. Especially for you...married women on the self. Waiting to be taken down and given a bit of what they need" (Time Present 45). Pamela finds a great lack of honesty and responsibility in sex scattered all around. This shows how sex relations sans commitment and responsibility lead to sexual frustration and boredom.

On the other hand, Constance, Pamela's flat-mate, does not have any scruples about having sex with Murray, but is averse to the idea of being tied to him in any lifelong relationship. After divorcing her husband, she does not bother to remarry for sex, as it is available in the social market without marriage. Not only she establishes sex relations with Murray but also creates an atmosphere for Pamela and Edward to have an orgy. Viewing that Constance and Murray are sharing bed, Edward also feels tempted and expresses his desire to have sex with Pamela, but she puts him off and goes out, as she finds him "the greatest knock out a woman had ever laid eyes on" (Time Present 45).

Pamela moves from one man to another in search of healthy and honest sex, but she gets frustrated, finding vulgarity and dishonesty in sex all around. She finds Constance very rough and vulgar in sex matters, and who has no belief in sex within bounds. Pamela tells Murray: "Lust is O.K. by me. But not when it's ambitious and gluttonous, then it's vulgar indeed" (Time Present 66). Pamela does not find herself good at sexual garbage scattered all around: "I don't think I'm probably good at it" (Time Present 40). Being disgusted and disillusioned with sex, Pamela abhors going for sex either with Murray or Edward. She snubs Edward for his adulterous behavior, "Why don't you go to your famous bachelor pad. She'll be in state if she doesn't know

where you are” (Time Present 51). By falsely praising her with words that she “is very sexy kid,” (Time Present 52) he tries to coax her into orgy, but she does not give in to his sugar-coated words. Pamela retorts: “You told me the other day week for about five hours. Well, I’m rather disappointing I believe, and I’m twenty six and I’m no kid” (Time Present 52). But on the other hand, Constance keeps the view that Pamela is not pacing up with the times and expects that she should be well-versed in sex matters at this age. To her astonishment, Pamela is lagging behind the times in sex matters, but the fact is that Pamela gets sickened with the kind of sex in the present time. To her dismay and disillusionment, sex is fraught with life-denying features such as depravity, greed, hypocrisy, treachery and vulgarity. Pamela snubs Murray: “You’re bent on incest or some cosy hysteria. She’s bound to bulb. You’re above it, and we’ll end up on the floor embracing and comforting and rationalizing and rumped and snorting and jammed together and performing autopsies and quite disgusting app of it. You both are. Don’t indulger her. Just she demands it” (Time Present 65).

The foregoing analysis reveals the fact that sex is no longer is a binding force with love, commitment, honesty and responsibility in man-woman relationships, rather it is fraught with dishonesty, deceit, gratification, selfishness, vulgarity, irresponsibility and non-commitment. The way Osborne dramatizes the unbridled sex suggests that he is very critical of dishonest and irresponsible sex. Besides he is equally critical of the conventional sexual mores that emphasize repression of sexuality. He has always been “a lifelong satirist of prigs and puritans, whether of the Left and Right” (Hare 196). He believes in the honesty of feelings, and his plays become a holy sermon on the honesty of sex. In the matters of sex, for Osborne, “Judicious restraint is more becoming than embarrassing exhibitionism” (Gilleman17).Osborne writes: “Art executes a delicate balancing act between veiling and unveiling. To stand absolutely naked is to be artless” (Damn You England 128). Thus Osborne through his plays underscores the view that sane and serious attitude to sex can lead to healthy man-woman relationships.

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