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Exploration of the Story of Defeated Love in Updike's *Marry Me*

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The novel *Marry Me: A Romance* is a masterpiece of John Updike's wonderful prose style with an acute evolution of human desire and the description of the mental anxiety facing the consequences in the story. Much of the content in this book is related to the typical Updike issues like marital problems, infidelity, inner conflict, obsession with questions of death and God. The novel seems very realistic in exploring the characters' emotions about marriage and infidelity. The traditional struggle of two men for a woman is replaced by the struggle of two women competing for a man. In the novel Updike beautifully communicated nostalgia for Camelot where adultery retains the grace of self-delusion and even a certain pastoral innocence which is led back into his fictional landscape where men and women are confronted with monotony of marriage and domestic turmoil. This is also one of the Updike's plots criticizing upon the domestic instability and its survival. Finally the couples in the novel remained married besides their mutual willingness with partial awareness of the responsibilities towards their family and children.

The novel is the drama of inner mental conflict of Jerry Conant who wants to decide which among these two women will make his life the happiest. This quest of hero for an ontological freedom finds him entangled in the mundane domestic relations from which he wants to relieve. He wants to be free from all the social constraints he has due to being married. Marriage has been summarized by Kerry Ahearn for her excellent argument as:

Marriage is enforced by the ceremonial code and notarized by the contractual law, but confirmation of one's existence requires passion, and passion demands freedom." (P. 62)

The desired freedom from marriage leads him to the freedom of adultery grounding such a sexual dynamics. Updike explicitly denies the connection between freedom and adultery in *Marry Me* though the basic question is left unanswered if adultery implies freedom.

The novel is set in Connecticut in the early 1960s, opens with the traditional triangle of love. The traditional struggle of two men for a woman is replaced by the struggle of two women competing for a man. It is the story of Jerry Conant; an incurable romantic man conducts his affair with Sally Mathias, his neighbor Richard Mathias's wife. He has seen struggling to decide which of two women in his life will make him the happiest. One of the women is his wife Ruth

and the other is his married neighbor Sally. An eminent scholar Dr. Hameed Khan commented on this affair as:

Jerry's romantic affair with Sally epitomizes the moral confusion resulting from the fickleness of a modern consciousness mistaking lust for love, possession for passion and fulfillment for perfection. (p. 184)

Sally had been married ten years and furthermore had had lovers before. They feel it difficult to live without each other besides being married with different spouses.

Both the couples in the novel are successful, wealthy and have three children each. Jerry has reached at the peak discomfort and becomes restless about his family life whereas Sally is also fed up with her adulterous husband, Richard. They come to feel that they must divorce in order to start a new life together. Though Sally is willing enough to leave her husband, Richard, with whom she has been at odds for some time, Jerry finds it painfully difficult, for a mixture of religious and personal reasons, to part from his wife and children. It is the description of the pleasures between Jerry and Sally. Updike here achieves absolutely hypnotic novel of relations and suspense in which man and woman find their perfect match. The couples are in deep confusion about the decision they want to make for the divorce and remarriage with their desired partners because of their doubt of themselves capable of carrying the new responsibilities.

The novel is the drama of inner mental conflict of Jerry to decide which among the two women will make his life the happiest. This quest of hero for an ontological freedom finds him entangled in the mundane domestic relations from which he wants to relieve. He wants to be free from all the social constraints he has due to being married. His marriage puts the burden of responsibilities and restriction on him that he can't bear. The desired freedom from marriage leads him to the freedom of adultery grounding such a sexual dynamics. Updike explicitly denies the connection between freedom and adultery in *Marry Me* though the basic question is left unanswered if adultery implies freedom.

Updike calls this book a valentine, a romance, not a novel. The protagonist Jerry and his mistress Sally satisfactorily but incompletely married to others, are in love. He thinks himself caught into the marriage with Ruth which he confesses before Sally, "*I did very bad thing in marrying Ruth. Much worse, really, than if I'd married for money. I married her because I knew she'd make a good wife*" (p. 12) Sally is a beautiful blonde, read Moravia and Camus and also elicit from her lover over his remark, "you are so intelligent". Jerry Conant wanted to marry his mistress but also think of his own wife Ruth and children. He doesn't want to leave her and his children because he wants to retain illusion of being a perfect husband and father. However he even doesn't want to give Sally up, who believes him so much. He asks Sally, "if they run off together, she will miss her children" and she also would reply, "*you are so wise, Jerry*". He also tells her, "*To live without you is death to me. On the other hand to abandon my family is sin; to do it I'd have to deny God...*" Jerry realizes that he has fallen in love with Sally and wants to marry her and Sally's feelings are reciprocal.

Ruth is devastated by the relations of her husband with another woman. She soothes him not to worry of her for his affair and manages to get Jerry to agree not to see Sally until the end of the summer. The condition was if still he loves Sally then she will free him to marry her and Ruth will give him divorce. Jerry also agrees to her condition not to meet Sally for certain days.

Though Jerry promise Ruth for his isolation from Sally but they are in frequent touch on telephone that irritates Ruth. She also tries to warn Sally for her attachment with Jerry but futile.

The novel experience two ordinary plays. In "The Wait", this is the snippet conversations between the lovers Jerry and Sally. These are the alternates between confusion and empty rhetoric about love and fate. Likewise, in "The Reacting of Ruth" there is brilliant dispute between Jerry and Ruth. Jerry often tries to justify his position and make his point clear with support to his decision. There are many fine sections in the novel where Updike perfectly captures the frantic helplessness of two lovers Jerry and Sally for trying to get on successive planes as a standby. There is the snippet conversation between these lovers and their mutual irritations. Though they are so far from reality they are lovers. Jerry fights between the affair in which he feels his best, and the marriage in which he has to accept who he is. Perhaps subconsciously knowing that Jerry is playing away, Ruth also has a brief affair with Sally's husband, Richard. It has seen that she is more alert about her responsibility towards her family because she got off from her relation immediately. She also told her husband about her boyfriend but she did not tell his name to any one of them.

Richard, the other main character in the novel is Sally's bullnecked husband. He is a Copan-clipping Ivy League dropout who has an undiscovered and less passionate affair with Ruth Conant, Jerry's civilized and competent wife. It is difficult to feel much sympathy for the overweight Richard who clearly thinks he is God's gift to women. He has had a series of affairs, yet is horrified at the thought of his wife having one, particularly with someone that they both know. In the entanglement of these four there are endless telephone calls, visits, the machinations of soap opera. After the great confrontation scene, the two couples withdraw their cozy Connecticut homes and Sally, sleepless and anxious, phones Jerry. He is quick to blame Richard for his shortcomings, without accepting that perhaps he is also partly to blame. Sally is equally selfish and very difficult to like. Her desire to split Jerry and Ruth reflected strongly throughout the book.

The couples in the novel are not only absurd but ordinary too. They are attempting to live out their nearly Jamesian subtleties of traffic snarls and lawn parties and marital chaos. The novel has continuous tensions between desire and enforced conscience that create some of the most finely humorous scenes. There is uniform lightness of touch throughout the book. Jerry fears to God therefore he is continuously trying to find out excuses of avoiding the fact that he is incapable of sustaining a mature relationship. Updike showed love that is viewed through the lens of idealism, love and reality. He juxtaposed the two so that we could see the stark contrast between Jerry in romance and Jerry in reality - and the difference was a shock.

As a reader I dislike Jerry for his way of thinking. He is not ideal for any of the woman in the novel. He cannot give justice to any of them. He would have felt dissatisfied in his marriage, because he wanted to be married to his ideal self. That only could stop his running and accept the truth of his own self. In the other half of the novel it seems that Jerry's wife Ruth may attain a certain stature as the woman scorned, but her ultimate response to the pen is a series of catty maneuver-combined with a growing insensitivity to her children through which she tries desperately to win Jerry back. She is much gentler than the other characters, although her determination to save her marriage does shine through. She also brings a semblance of sanity to the story, with sensible suggestions about how to move forward.

Jerry calls Ruth unhappy in her married life either and tells her that there are so many things common between Sally and her. She accuses him for this comparison and expresses her regret saying, "Everybody expects me to be calm and contented and, damn it, I am." (p.102) There has shown a brilliant dispute between this husband wife and they often tries to justify their perfect position in to the family. She is also blamed for her negligence for the change in her husband's behavior in presence of Sally as well as she didn't mind Jerry's curiosity about Sally when he compares them both. She thinks that change positively and feels guilty for her affair with Richard. Meanwhile she dreamed of Richard and thinks that her blindness is due to her long gaze towards her own guilt she mistook a fresh development in their relations.

Jerry on the other hand, has been planning for his desired divorce with Ruth and he asks her for divorce on Sunday after their Washington trip with his mistress Sally. Ruth could not understand these signals of his separate track of life that he wanted to choose for his future. Jerry seemed destructed after coming back from church. He scolded his son Geoffrey and slapped him on his head. He threw his fork for her interruption to tell him about his sickness. He called her a "frigid bitch" though he apologies them all after sometime and promises her to take for dinner. He tells her that he was upset fit these days. He shows her his contentedness towards children.

She senses some kind of change in his answers those seem confused. She thinks his behavior a temporary and might it be the frustration of anything. She takes it lightly and tries to consult him the reason. She asks him, "Is it really the job that's bothering you?" and asks him to talk about it to her. He feels restless to talk her but with hesitation asked her:

Does it ever seem possible to you, that we made a mistake? When we got married. Ruth were you ever tempted to quit while we're ahead?

Jerry, what are you saying to me?

Baby, I'm just asking you if we aren't making a terrible mistake in staying married forever." (Marry Me109)

The thought of divorce at this stage was literally shocking to her. When Ruth doubts of its knowledge to Sally's husband, he asserts the possibility of his unawareness about their relations. "The news felt like an enemy that had broken through the lines." (p. 117)She offers him her talking to Richard but he advises her not to talk. He tells her "if you tell him, and he divorces her because of me, I'd be obliged to marry her." (118)The threat wouldn't make much impression on Ruth because of her own past with Richard.

On the occasion of their disclosure she too confesses her own affair before him for the first time but denies to disclose her lover. He is so excited to know the person but she refuses to tell him his name. She says him, "I ended it when I realized I love you and not the man" (119) He tries to ask the possibility of the man's coming back in her life if he will divorce her and she is sure that it won't happen in that way. His curiosity towards her future would have his own hidden motive of coming out safely through his marriage with his wife's willing consent. Ruth on the other hand has shown more maturity in their drama of adultery and their responsibilities towards her children. She has sacrificed her own affair for the sake of her family and children but has become the matter to introspect to her decision.

She thought of her children and worried about their future and surprised of Jerry who got ready to divide them so practically. He tried to suggest her to follow her art and busy herself in painting. He expresses the need for another man for her shows his determination of their separation. He persuades her to be out of Greenwood for her future that she can flourish only by getting out of here. She thinks his thought ridiculous that made him to put some offers for her like the house he can leave for her and suggested her to work here and live in town. This episode is the climax of the novel where he for the first time openly talked her about his desire for divorce. It shows the couple for the first time leading to the divorce.

In the chapter ‘The Reacting of Richard’, Richard is blunt and attempts to deal with his wife’s infidelity. The reaction of other character illustrates his aura of delusion and immaturity in which they have clocked themselves all along. At the last part of the book, Ruth became a stronger character and we begin to care about what happens to her. She keeps a strict watch on the lovers. She also tries to tempt Jerry from her treatment and love to him. Though she show him that she is ready to leave him but in reality she is not willing to destroy her marriage. Richard is ready to sue Jerry for his offense of adultery with his wife without marrying her. He leaves Sally alone at home and goes away from the house but visits her frequently to check if she is fine. This becomes too confusing situation that gives three possible ends of the story.

Mack, friend of Ruth who is separated from wife Eleanor but still loves her but remarry to the woman other than Eleanor. He has affair with Ruth in long past but now they live as best friends with mutual understanding. . In his absence Joan and Mack kiss each other and break apart by his arrival sound but he sees them kissing through window of house. He feels sick to get out and speak on this situation:

So they can pollute the air and aggravate my already grievous bronchial condition, and coming down through the back yard, what do I see? The two of them doing the Kama Sutra in my own kitchen. It was like seeing a blue movie and knowing the people in it. (108)

It is surprise for Conants that Mack still loves to Eleanor could marry to any other woman. When Conants meet them at their party, they compare Mack’s new wife with Eleanor, his former wife.

Updike busies reader with his special technique that makes the reader turn pages unconsciously and automatically. The simplicity of language and the attachment of the characters make us to fill that we are in the characters somewhere. This is the major characteristic of Updike’s writing and the works. Updike has used the special style for the description of the houses for the perfect objective correlatives throughout the novel. He describes house to create the actual atmosphere with the description of the scene that help reader to create actual image of the situation too easily. The empty houses he describes to show their empty hearts. They are empty and do not have affections towards each other so they have been seen ready for busting their families. They are empty without sentiments in to the hearts. *“The inverted blur in the side table silently upheld the empty flower vase, and the books in the bookcase maintained against all her doubts of her own existence.”*(p. 112)Updike renews the pleasures in reading by every page he turned. The novel has a page-to-page liveliness and plausibility that makes reading easy for the readers. It is an acute evolution of human desire and the description of the mental angst while facing the consequences in the story.

The study of *Marry Me: A Romance* shows a marriage, if it is lived honestly, holds a mirror to our faces and shows us who we really are and Romance in it shows us who we like to be. Updike shows love as viewed through the lens of idealism, and love viewed through the lens of reality. It is an acute evolution of human desire and description of the mental angst while facing consequences in the story. Updike has focused reality of relations and their need to be united at the end of novel. He dreams of his life with Sally on some occasion and understand the frivolousness of his efforts to marry her.

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