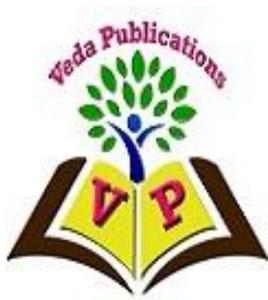


**DIVORCE AND MANHOOD: DISILLUSIONMENT IN 'THE BOSTONIANS'**Neelam Rani*¹, R. P. Singh²^{1*}(Research Scholar Department of English, Singhania University Pachari Bari, Jhunjhunu (Rajasthan) India)²(Professor in English, Govt. College, Nangal Choudhary, Haryana, india)**ABSTRACT**

The Bostonians revolves around Olive Chancellor and Verena Tarrant and Basil Ransom. Basil falls in love with Verena because she is quite different from all the women he knows, —but the irony is that, he is determined about not permitting Verena to continue cultivating the prerogative of independence that gave birth to her originality; hence, this is one of the reasons that James foresees Verena's tears not to be her last. Basil and Olive both attract towards Verena and later on fall in love with her: the rich Olive takes Verena under her security and gives the training for their cause, while Basil very skilfully wins her heart over; Verena eventually disappears in her lover's arms, leaving Olive lonely to tackle her crumbled dreams and unfulfilled causes. This novel tracked the pattern of the new kind of heroine, who represented the shifting role of women in society. An epitome of manhood feels uneasy towards the wayward behaviour of strident women. This paper presents a detailed account of the extreme strong male power over women and over her inner dreams and ambition.

Keywords: *Disillusionment, Acquaintance, Crumbled, Manhood, Uneasy, Domain.***Citation:****APA** Rani, N., & Singh, R.P. (2016) Divorce and Manhood: Disillusionment in '*The Bostonians*'. *Veda's Journal of English Language and Literature- JOELL*, 3(3), 36-40.**MLA** Rani, Neelam and R.P.Singh. "Divorce and Manhood: Disillusionment in '*The Bostonians*.'" *Veda's Journal of English Language and Literature- JOELL* 3.3(2016):36-40.



INTRODUCTION

Postcolonial feminist criticism observes how women are represented in colonial and postcolonial literature. It gives a challenge to various assumptions which are made about women in both literature and society. Postcolonial feminists describe the ways in which women are continuously stereotyped. Women have very different records with respect to their postcolonial inheritance.

The nineteenth-century literature presents ideal of marriage and family life: practical description of houses, servants, dresses, and carriages may be given as a down-to-earth link to the actual world, but still the honour of marriage cannot be disguised; it is made very clear that young women marry. It was World War I that eventually sticks the terminal date for the Victorian mind set. Women were forced to leave their households so that they could enter the workplace, thus gaining economic freedom; they were permitted to seek a higher education, and to even refuse sexual taboos. This is the time when the woman comes to know that she does not have to be dictated, and will not permit others' interference in her own life. Unfortunately woman was deprived of every possibility to gain her own individuality, autonomy, and contentment of her talents.

DETAILED ANALYSIS

The novel, *The Bostonians* is not really about Boston. In fact it deals with two Boston women, Olive Chancellor and Verena Tarrant. James started to think about the novel, *The Bostonians* when he was staying in Boston in 1883. The novel dealt with the feminist movement in Boston. But it was only a short piece of a larger explanation on America. Around a year before *The Bostonians* James had quickly processed towards the cultural spirit of the Boston ladies and the social neglect of American women by the wealthy, aristocratic, influential male sex and in the light of the 1870s Boston, he was very desperate to study them more with great attention. In *The Bostonians* the known history of Boston is supported by every detail both about individuals and society as a whole. *The Bostonians* is full of purity, desire, and love. Verena stands for purity. Everything about her is narrated as pure, her voice, her eyes, her speech. Olive and Basil each has firm faith that they can save

her purity, but in the end they offer a corruptive influence upon her. Therefore, the limits of purity and its pursuit have been explored in *Varieties*. Olive takes care of Verena's purity in as much as she cannot control it, but the plot comes to reveal the dangerous nature of ideological purity that Olive supports, as their relationship becomes unfinished by the material world of desire. Olive's interest is not only in politics but in search for freedom and independence for women. In fact Olive and Basil are like a couple of vultures ready to engulf her purity. Each believes they can save her purity, but can only be a corruptive impression upon her. As a result, the novel explores the limits of purity and its pursuit.

The main character, Basil Ransom, is a Southerner who tries to succeed as a lawyer in New York during the Restoration. When he is welcomed by his cousin Olive to visit her in Boston, he creates a romantic interest in Verena Tarrant, a talented and charming young woman who is quickly becoming a rising star for the feminist movement. Olive follows feminist ideals, a move with obvious lesbian overtones, as a pretext to keep Olive living at her house for the purposes of education. The conventional Ransom will criticize Verena's feminist ideals in ways that the innocent, sheltered young woman had never heard anyone do before, and will ultimately, not without great hesitation on her part along with forebodings of future regret, choose to marry him at the very end of the novel.

Basil Ransom, a very handsome young man from Mississippi, comes to practice law in New York. He goes to Boston to meet two cousins, Mrs. Luna, the elder, dynamic, and experienced widow, and her sister, Miss Olive Chancellor, a hardworking and reliable woman, wholly dedicated to the cause of female "emancipation." Now Basil follows her to the meeting, and there he gets an acquaintance with the girl who gives a speech that day, Verena Tarrant. She is the daughter of a crude charlatan, who gains profit from his daughter's gift of pleasant voice and fluently flowing oration. Basil and Olive both attract towards Verena and later on fall in love with her: the rich Olive takes Verena under her security and gives the training for their cause, while Basil very skilfully wins her heart over; Verena eventually disappears in her



lover's arms, leaving Olive lonely to tackle her crumbled dreams and unfulfilled causes.

Moreover, as the novel was planned just after feminist fiction began to emerge; it tracked the pattern of the new kind of heroine, who represented the shifting role of women in society. According to this role, a woman could now chase a career, have political beliefs, even falling marriage. The new heroine marked a difference from previous literary ones, as she wished to clarify and achieve her own self, rather than to be useful or irreproachable. But these social changes did not provoke any enormous distraction in the milieu for the heroine of the New Woman novels. James's plot in *The Bostonians* presenting a pretty girl torn between marriage and the woman's movement selects marriage is in according to the theme. While telling the old story of a young girl not having been decided between two suitors, James thus avoids presenting his personal perspective –and impartial regard– on the claims of a career for women. Verena's assurance to Olive's domain of ideology might indicate a claim for an exclusive, lesbian relationship, and James suddenly turns his heroine against Olive, because Verena is intended to live a normal life; therefore, the movement's claims on Verena become unconnected to her, as she at last makes her own choice. Hence this dramatic objection is increased by the treatment of the feminist movement as a response to a noticed failure of manhood in the post-war New England and consequently caters as the angry confirmation of the female failure derived by male behaviour. An epitome of male uneasiness towards the wayward behaviour of strident women, Basil changes Verena into a silent domestic by forcing her severely into marriage.

Gender roles are a tool used by society to put proper boundaries and ideals upon the sexes. Men must have realised their falling position because women were no longer solely dependent upon them, and gender roles moved as woman began to take up territory that was conventionally held by men. The "New Woman" denied accepting conventional female gender practise. As woman took on characteristics generally connected with men, men now had to struggle hard with a changing gender identity that often left them bewildered.

It is stated that Basil Ransom is a threat to Verena's liberty –a threat as frightening as Olive's. As the story proceeds he becomes familiar to the readers and thus reveals a sincere character with trivial weaknesses. Basil skilfully attains all the traits and dimension of a Southern gentleman. Basil, a Mississippian and not only a Southerner, however, gain a weak and unreal mask of his origin's culture and progress. Behind his obvious politeness lies his hostile sexuality. This is proved when he exactly seizes Verena in the end. Although he states to Verena his patriarchal and noble— by tradition — views, yet he does so with a vital tone, which discloses his subconscious need to support his validity. In his continuous and unrelenting lectures, Basil very clearly reveals his sexual conceit as well as his social insecurity.

He unlike Olive is never doubtful of his effectiveness, never lacks confidence in his eloquence and very clearly defends his manhood. He never questions the intellectual significance of his words. On the other hand, Basil is attracted towards Verena's originality, her energetic and inspiring qualities that he had not often found in Southern women. Basil falls in love with Verena because she is quite different from all the women he knows, —but the irony is that, he is determined about not permitting Verena to continue cultivating the prerogative of independence that gave birth to her originality; hence, this is one of the reasons that James foresees Verena's tears not to be her last.

Basil Ransom rightly recognises Olive's moral, intellectual and emotional struggle because she chooses to sell Verena's oratorical skills to a large public audience so that the feminist cause may be promoted. At the same time Ransom's distastes for the projected music hall appearance, and his hectic desire to avert Verena from speaking, derives from far more than a distaste for the 'popular'. In addition to this James very subtly admits Basil Ransom's racial identity early in the novel. His chief obsession in the novel is with keeping women, and Verena in particular, out of the public domain, confined to the personal world of domesticity. He wants the public domain of politics to be reserved for him. He has a deep urge to enter the world of speech and newsprint, and made an unsuccessful attempt to get



his own reactionary views on the sex question published.

It is impossible to bear for him that women enter the public domain of political journalism while he, a man, is excluded from it. He notices the public world of letters to be under threat from women writers and speakers, and is rabidly intent on revoking this process. His successful attempt in stopping Verena from speaking at the Music Hall is somewhat undermined by the fact that Olive Chancellor herself then takes to the stage and finds herself able to speak in public. Moreover Basil Ransom links in his mind the rise of the mass media with the feminization of culture.

In *The Bostonians* the rise of the mass media and the commercialisation of culture are connected with women and with a fall in cultural and intellectual standards. Basil Ransom's significant masculinity extends to his role as Baudelaireanflaneur. Ransom belongs to the southern states of the USA and is portrayed very much as an outsider and an observer in the streets of New York and Boston where he wanders. Rather it is he who is presented as the Baudelaireanflaneur than Olive Chancellor or Verena Tarrant. He is the urban spectator while Verena Tarrant is very much the performer who is deeply observed an object of the male gaze at the various meetings she addresses. It is clearly significant that during many walks through the two cities with Verena Ransom tries to dissuade her from the feminist cause and to become his wife. Verena is very uncomfortable during the walks, feels that she is out of her depth and that the walks are not reasonable; and all this is because the streets through which they roam together are Ransom's social space denied to women.

The Bostonians presents the picture of a lesbian relationship, with Olive Chancellor who entraps Verena, who is in turn saved from her lesbian entanglement by Basil Ransom. What is interesting about this general current within twentieth-century readings of the novel is that the relationship between Olive Chancellor and Verena Tarrant is by no means frankly lesbian, and it is only a post-Freudian age that could examine the novel as a study of lesbianism as malady. Henry James' own sister also had a relationship with another woman in the same way as

in *The Bostonians* the friendship between Dr Prance and Miss Birdseye, as well as that between Olive Chancellor and Verena Tarrant. Boston marriages weren't regarded brutal at the time because it was supposed that love between women was asexual. The union between the 'New Woman' and lesbianism is fascinating in that the terms Havelock Ellis, for example, used to explain that the lesbian women were similar to those who used to criticise the spinster feminists of the 1890s, the 'New Women' such as Olive Chancellor in *The Bostonians*.

Though Ransom seems to be one of the most masculine of James' heroes, James skilfully immerses him in a world of women and feminists. Moreover, his endeavours to seduce Verena Tarrant and to steal away her, from Olive Chancellor- taking Olive's place with her-place him in a traditionally male subject position that women have taken over. Ransom's urge to silence Verena and her public speaking into his own private service resembles the ventriloquism. It seems as if he wants to adopt her voice. Possessing Verena in the way that Ransom desires comes deeply close to wanting to be Verena- which makes Ransom the subject and object of lesbian desire. However male lesbianism is not the chief aim of James' representation of Ransom 'subjectivity'. Moreover he seems to be more interested to mark a difference between the subject positions and male subjectivities that Ransom comes to experience. Wherever Ransom tries to position himself in an imaginative way, he finds himself always looking into a kind of magic mirror. He also finds himself as a subject to an unsettled and unsettling gaze of his own that reflects him to be himself as if he were masculine and feminine, hetero- and homo sexual, even white and black.

Basil Ransom clearly resists marginalization. While struggling with Olive over Verena, he wants to reverse his loss of power in the civil war and the Reconstruction. Olive considers him an unattractive man. If he were to think himself attractive to Olive, he would be in Verena's place, recognised with her as a love-object. Moreover by taking Olive's place with Verena he can support his mainly position. But this plan is vexed. It is because the masculine position is already occupied by a woman, leaving Ransom; it would be seen, without any place to be a man.



CONCLUSION

At last when Ransom's visit Verena to Harvard's Memorial Hall makes him enable to respond to his masculinity that appears to him as a desirable type of manhood. He realizes that he and Verena should come closer than before. Even reconstructing Verena as a victim to a man who could imagine himself being whipped by Selah Tarrant, and patronized by Mrs. Luna and even more slapped by Olive. Ransom re-empowers himself to be a fugitive-female catcher—and a woman-breaker. He thinks that his manhood seem to be rendered fake so he resorts to a different currency to validate his masculinity. He brutally enjoys the passivity of both Olive and Verena. Furthermore his reconstruction of manhood demands a confusion of sex and power, a triumph over women and women's friendship. When he proposes Verena both friends feel whipped. Judging Ransom's power upon Olive and Verena , James seems to prove Ransom's constitution of the destabilized sexual and racial hierarchies destroyed by civil war. Ransom sudden success with his writing and Verena's reversion to an assertive feminine role enables Ransom's recovery of an aggressive masculine role. But his manhood is thrown into a dangerous position when Verena repels Ransom during her lecture at the Boston Hall. To recover the manhood that Verena has stolen Ransom rescues her from a homosexual relationship that seems to blow the trumpet calling his sleeping manhood to life again.

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