



RESEARCH ARTICLE

**RACHEL CROTHERS' LITERARY SKILL IN DRAMATIZING THE DEEP SENSE OF LONELINESS, RESTLESSNESS AND DISSATISFACTION CAUSED BY MODERN LOVE AND MARRIAGE AS DEPICTED IN HER PLAYS : A BRIEF APPRAISAL**

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This paper lays focus on the literary skill of Rachel Crothers, who was America's foremost women dramatist, out and out her plays are concerned with the theme of woman's freedom and most of her plays have the deep sense of loneliness, restlessness and dissatisfaction due to modern love and marriage. She has beautifully portrayed the conflict between the idealization of love and marriage and depicted the realities of both the institution.

Keywords: *Marriage, Loneliness, Restlessness, Dissatisfaction, Love, Modern Women.*

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Rachel Crothers was considered as America's foremost woman dramatist and the forerunner of feminism whose plays were perceived as social documents, for her plays reflect an awareness of women's issues regarding sexual freedom, love and marriage, motherhood, double-standard in married life and the problems of career women. In her own words,

“the modern woman wants to enjoy her freedom, to be able to call a spade if she desires, to think her own thoughts, and have the same freedom as her brothers

if she desires, but in 99 cases out of 100, she does not want that freedom to its full extent” (Gottlieb 119).

Her vision of freedom was linked with the hope of a more just society.

Crother's career as a dramatist can be divided into two parts. The first part is her pre-war years as a playwright of social problems and second is her post-war years as a writer of social comedies. In the early part of her career, Crothers was a committed playwright and in a way, a social rebel. Though there were many women dramatists before



Crothers, they did not achieve social or literary recognition. But Crothers entered into the male bastion and achieved recognition in women's progress in the theatre. Though Crothers explores the destiny of modern woman, she holds up a critical but sympathetic mirror to her flaws and foibles. In general, Crothers' women search for a meaningful purpose and a lively spark to life, even though they stray themselves away from their routine or ordinary lives. At the same time, they demand the right to practice their social freedom. But in many cases, they are more misled than liberated by their freedom. Thus, Crothers keeps a steady balance between tradition and modern view point and she never fails to focus her attention on both the strength and shortcomings of the modern woman.

As a feminist playwright, Crothers concerned herself with the theme of woman's freedom. Almost throughout her career, she portrayed women's adventures and tribulations in a country whose changing social and more values deeply affected woman's self-image and aspirations. The early plays of Crothers challenge the relations between the sexes on a personal as well as public level because her early women alter or reject their domestic roles and display a strength and ambition that do contradict the presumed attributes of weakness and self-sacrifice in the feminine nature. She is of the view that woman's desire for freedom should be qualified by her vulnerability to romance, to love and domesticity. However, many of her plays deal with the New Woman's attitude towards 'love' and 'marriage'.

Love and marriage are closely associated, not only in day dreams and in fiction, in folklore and poetry, but also in real life. But marriage is more than the happy ending of a successful courtship. In other words, it is the end of romance. It is also the beginning of a sterner task. Hence, this fact finds an emphatic expression in the laws and regulations of marriage throughout humanity. Marriage is legally and socially sanctioned union between a man and a woman. It is given the hallmark of social approval. The universality of marriage is ascribed to the many basic social and personal functions it performs such as procreation and provision for sexual gratification and regulation, care of children and their education

and socialization. It describes status and relations among parents and children imposing the duties of economic co-operation.

Love tends to sexual intimacy. In turn, this sexual intimacy leads to procreation. Marriage on the whole, is a contract for the production and maintenance of children than an authorization of sexual intercourse. It is the most important form of lawful intercourse and it dominates and determines extra-connubial liberties. Many people are of the view that love is the primary reason to marry. The great majority of Americans continues to put a happy home life of the top of their list of goals. It is obvious that we organize our social lives in terms of couples. Furthermore, we tend to assume that normal people marry and neurotics do not. In spite of the divorce rate, the general belief which prevails everywhere is that people are happier when married. Some marry for sex, because they are lonely and some for married union because they consider marriage as an important symbol of adulthood or a way to get out of their parents' house. The very reason may be due to the fact that marriage is a sexual, economic and usually procreative union which is assumed to be permanent. It is signified by a ceremony which involves larger social fabric of the law and the blood ties of the two families. As the commitment is public and permanent, marriage establishes a healthy legal contract.

Crothers' all such four plays as *As Husbands Go*, *Mary The Third*, *When Ladies Meet* and *He and She*, portray in one way or other Crothers' ideas about love and marriage. Though she lived at the height of great social revolution, she appreciated the formal, legal marriage. As J.R. Smith and L.G. Smith put it, "some forms of feminism have denounced marriage and the traditional family as sick, oppressive, patriarchal, a form of emotional and sexual malnutrition and a condition of sexual deprivation" (32). But Crothers is definitely for traditional marriage which provides companionship and security.

As Husbands Go deals with two families, one a childless couple, another, a widow with a child. The whole story spins around these two families. Lucile, wife of Charles Emmie the widow, both from Dubuque, Iowa are traveling companions



on a summer European trip. There, they develop their new love affair with two different men. For some time, both Lucile and Emmie keep their new lovers Ronnie and Hippalitus Lomi very happy. They are very eager to experience the same thrill, pleasure and emotions of love which they had experienced at the beginning of their married life which had faded away now. The two lovers, Ronnie and Hippie are also zealous in their protests of unquenchable affection. For a time, these two women completely forget their families which they have left. Lucile says,

"We are losing our heads

It's been so sweet, so sweet" (AHG 187).

But towards the end of the play, both the ladies are tight-cornered. Lucile is puzzled to see the love of her own husband. However she tries, she is not able to desert him for her new lover. Emmie too finds it very difficult to leave her daughter unsettled. She is caught between her passion for Hippie, her renewed zest for life and the love for her daughter who has bitter feelings for this new man. This dilemma assails her and she keeps on wavering between her new lover and her daughter. Finally Emmie declares her love for Hippie and wins her daughter's approval as well. An orphaned nephew is also drawn into the childless couple's life to emphasize the reality of their domestic roles.

In her portrayal of Emmie and Lucile, Crothers reveals the fact she could not accept revolutionary modern ideas, regarding love and marriage. Yet at the same time, she supports widow remarriage. Ultimately the play seems to be a clear example of Crothers attitude towards love and marriage. She glorifies the traditional marriage. Though she accepts Emmie's remarriage with the approval of her daughter, Crothers is not in support of divorce as it is seen in the case of Lucie. Despite all their talk, Lucie and Emmie do not hold radical views of love and marriage. Since the influence of feminism and other such movements on society is greater, many people have started thinking about marriage in different ways. Some reject marriage because it traditionally asserts sexual monogamy. They believe that happiness can be acquired only through illicit sexual indulgence with many men. Those who are looking for humanistic self-actualization reject marriage as a commitment which forecloses choice

and tends towards habituations. Some think it quite ridiculous that marriage binds a man and a woman permanently through their lives. Even after many years of togetherness, a couple may drift away from each other. Crothers presents beautifully how the flame of love is extinguished gradually in course of time in *Mary The Third* and *When Ladies Meet*.

Mary the Third's observation on its subject of love, marriage and women's freedom comes from the intergenerational conflicts among the women. Mary the first continues to be manipulative and flirtatious. She is of the view that the dominant male and helpless female are the cornerstone for civilization. Mary II is frustrated by her sense of duty to the old ways, but denouncing the younger generations search for "Beauty and happiness all the time" (MTT 395) as a fruitless quest. For example, when Mary I complains that her grand-daughter is in danger of being 'Contaminated' by the moral revolutions, Mary II quickly replies her "we are all in danger. You are in danger of becoming a fussy old woman. I am in danger of being swamped by the hateful ugliness of respectable everyday life (MTT 396). In another instance, the mother and grandmother clash over the youngest woman's admission that she is unhappy in her marriage, an admission which the grandmother sees as shameful. She says,

"When I was your age, it was the fashion to be happy.

women loved their husbands and appreciated their blessings" (Mary The

Third, 396)

Furthermore, she proposes proudly that modern women could learn a great deal about managing men from her generation. But in reality, they were domineering and twisted their men around their fingers, however they pretended to be under a man's thumb. Mary I's pretention and Mary IIs dissatisfaction in their married life, are some of the reasons which make Mary III, a modern revolutionary girl. She says to Lynn the bean of her choice, "It's because of father and mother, Lynn. I don't believe in marriage. She insists on the frankness between husband and wife because marriage is "the greatest relationship of the world" (P 393).



Love and marriage play an important role in all human lives. It is still being glorified by poets almost all over the world. It is a turning point in the life of every human being. It haunts the imagination of all the young boys and girls. But it proves to be a failure in many cases. In *When Ladies Meet*, Crothers presents the conflict between woman's idealization of love and marriage and realities of both. Mary Howard, a successful and attractive novelist is single in her early thirties. As seen in the previous chapter, she falls in love with her married publisher. With a sense of guilt, she decides to have an affair with him. She selects a country home of her friend to be alone with him. But at the beginning of the weekened, through the intrigue of Mary's jealous friend, Rogers, her publisher is removed from the scene and Claire Woodruff, his wife is brought in within a short time. They both have developed a sort of intimacy between them. Finally when they recognize their identity they are shocked to the core consequently, both of them reject the man Rogers – Woodruff.

What makes them take this drastic measure is that both the ladies are cheated by Rogers Woodruff. In her conversation with Mary, Clair does express her feelings that she is getting tired of her husband. But she has made him her man and built her life around that. Further, she strongly believes that 'he turns back to the old comfortable institution of marriage as naturally as a baby turns to the warm bottle' (*When Ladies Meet* 126). As far Mary, she loves Rogers deeply and truly. She expects that he too will acknowledge his love for her even before his wife. But when Rogers meets both the ladies unexpectedly, he is startled. To top it all, he says to Claire, "you surely have not misunderstood anything Claire – about my friendship for Mary. We are the greatest friends in the world – But Mary insists on him to tell the truth, but he bluntly refuses. Above all, he openly confesses to his wife, "You know I would not give up you up for any woman on earth. That is the point, Claire" (WLM 131). Even though Claire knows her husband's relationships with other women, she had always been glad to get him back before. She had never seen any of the women and thought only of him. Now for the first time, she has seen the woman and understands her whole heart and soul and self. So, though Rogers assures her that

she will be his wife forever, she is not at all glad to get him back as she had been in the past. On the other hand, she frankly tells him that she has stopped loving him.

Though Mary is a genuinely talented, assertive, and independent woman, she suffers from a deep sense of loneliness, a restlessness and dissatisfaction. She has everything that a modern housewife would envy, a beautiful, apartment, social status as a top-drawer women, an interesting profession, success and publicity, independence, yet lot of admiration are from man. In spite of all these, her dissatisfaction is glaring. It is this loneliness that drives her towards Rogers. As the dry land absorbs water, her loneliness welcomes the love of Rogers. Even though it is an welcomes the love of Rogers. Even though it is an illegal one, like most of the Americans, she too wants to possess and to be possessed by someone. She complains to Jimme,

"I have not found anything except to know that I have not got anything that really counts.

Nobody belongs to me – nobody whose very Existence depends on me. I am completely and absolutely alone" (P 107).

When Jimme charges her nature as demanding critical and analytical and she strives too much for perfection, she retorts saying 'Loneliness is something we can't help. If anything comes that completes us – what can we do?' (P 107). He we see the cry of a modern woman who years for love which can be derived from a happy, married life. This pinpoints the fact that marriage, which is the oldest institution of mankind still proves to be an anchor for the wandering souls which long for happy, interdependent life. One can see in Mary's character, an expression of the dilemma of a modern woman. She is said to have acquired from the struggles of previous generations of women. She has "broken her chains, fought with all her might and main, against being possessed, dominated, owned by anything or anybody, she cries out herself for the possession of another human being, for someone to 'belong' to her, someone whose very existence depends on her" (Flexner 108). It is not at all a question; whether Mary has moved back from 'feminine emancipation' or not. But it is certain that Mary reflects the



disappointment of modern women in her independence. At the same time, Crothers exposed the disappointment of married woman through Claire. Married woman also faces loneliness like Claire, however she attempts to live by the man's code in marriage. Through Mary and Claire, Crothers reveals the conflict between the idealization of love and marriage and the realities of both the institutions.

To conclude, it may be said that the theme of loneliness, which is a predominant one in American drama gets a new dimension in the portrayal of the American woman of 1930's by Crothers. Nevertheless, the modern woman finds only dust and ashes at the end of her struggle. Crothers is very conventional in her ideas of marriage. She prefers the happy traditional, legal marriage with its security and permanence. She does idealize marriage, as 'one man for a woman and one woman for a man' as she admires 'love' which is everlasting. She openly declares that modern women finds only dust and ashes after their long struggle for equality crying bitterly out of loneliness and restlessness in life.

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