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An Analytical Review of Three Poems Regarding the Biblical Lot and his Wife

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ABSTRACT

Biblical stories are widely read irrespective of gender, racial, communal and various other differences. Some of them are parables, others narrated by the authors of various books. While some stories are awe inspiring others have been scrutinized thoroughly and discussed over time by scholars regarding their approaches which are patriarchal, violent, primitive and contradictory often oppressive in nature. "Lot's wife" is one among many literary works that concerns certain areas which are conveniently ruled out by the authors. Lot's wife is not named and is never remembered by her family once she was turned into a salt pillar. The poets Anna Akhmatova and Kristine Batey dwell upon the thoughts that rule Lot's wife when instructed to evacuate from the City of Sodom in their poems titled "Lot's wife". The poems are compared and contrasted with respect to the language, tone and subject matter. While Akhmatova presents Lot's wife subtly, Batey ventures to voice the realistic concerns of a homemaker who has never been granted a voice of her own. Another poem written by Karen Finneyfrock titled "What Lot's Wife Would Have Said (If She Wasn't a Pillar of Salt)", embarks upon a monologue on what Lot's wife would have said regarding the cold and detached response from Lot.

Keywords: divine command, forgotten, Lot's wife, realistic, thoughts

1. INTRODUCTION

The story about the City of Sodom is frequently narrated to children, teenagers and adults who begin their biblical study. Often, the story is intended to educate the readers about God and his ways of acknowledging those who disobey his commands. Sodom is notoriously famous for its ungodly ways of living in sin. Lord sent two angels to avenge the terrible accusations regarding the place. But he decided to spare Lot and his family, considering his relation with Abraham. Lot was instructed to not look back upon the city of Sodom. Lot and his family departed from the city upon God's command in no time. Once they crossed the valley, "Lord rained burning Sulphur on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and destroyed them and the whole valley, along with all the people there and everything that grew on the land. But Lot's wife looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt." (Good News Bible, Gen 19. 24-27.)

Lot's wife is never again mentioned in the Bible either by Lot or their children. Her loss is neither sympathized nor remembered. The poem's written by Anna Akhmatova and Kristine Batey titled "Lot's wife" is a realistic memorial poem regarding the dilemmas, anxieties and concerns that Lot's wife had before leaving the town and getting salt-pillared. Kenny Finneyfrock, boldly speaks about how Lot's wife would have questioned and shared her disappointment in Lot and his actions.

11. Lot's Wife

An early nineteenth century Russian poet Anna Akhmatova and Kristine Batey, a late nineteenth century poet in Chicago raises serious concerns regarding the plight of Lot's wife. Women around the world might share the same concern because they will be able to relate to the tedious and exhausting process of maintaining the house, let alone packing for a single day trip. Lot's wife is asked to vacate her house which is tediously and exhaustingly managed and tendered by her without any reasoning or regard. Lot is colossally different from his wife concerning the responsibilities of maintaining a house and managing a home.

111. ANNA AKHMATOVA

Anna Akhmatova is regarded as one of the greatest and significant Russian poets. She has experienced both prerevolutionary and Soviet Russia. Her experiences and the turbulent times that she lived in might have created a sense of humanistic reality in her which helped her to commiserate with people who have been forgotten, victimized and bereft of love and a happy life

The speaker of the poem identifies the "wild grief" that occupies Lot's wife. The tone is similar to a gentle whispering using which the wife reasons with herself for taking a look upon her native city of Sodom. She remembers the square where she once sang, the garden which she shall mourn, the tall house where she loved her husband and their babies born.

Even though she does not pronounce her apprehensions and solicitude, her heart is screaming in the loudest voice possible to cherish and take everything in before they leave. Akhmatova's poems portrays a longingness and pride in her homeland despite the circumstances. Likewise, Lot's wife too is desperate to capture a vision of her land and their existence.

This essential difference is seen when Lot is portrayed "as the conscience of a nation / struggling with the Lord" (Batey,1,2) while Lot's wife "struggles with the housework" (Batey,3). With mortal pain her body turned into transparent salt and -her quick feet were rooted in the plain-Just as Akhmatova's poems features a yearning to be in her native country, Lot's wife grew to be a salt pillar overlooking Sodom. The loss of this women, "this unhappy wife" (Akhmatova, 14) is "the least of our losses" (Akhmatova, 14). No one might remember her but Akhmatova confirms that in her heart, "she will not be forgot, who for a single glance gave up her life" (Akhmatova, 15)

In a world where people tend to forget their roots, individuality, integrity and their core being or existence in itself for various reasons; be it political, religious, economical or worldly pleasures, Lot's wife ventured to quench the thirst of soul irrespective of the objections.

1V. KRISTINE BATEY

Batey's portrayal of Lot's wife is intrinsically connected with the plight of woman who struggles hard to satisfy their families needs. The wife in Batey is a courageous woman who voices out her concerns in a tone that resembles a protest against the authority of the divine commander. God and his/her authority is compared with the patronizing tendency of men to give instructions to their wives without consulting them. Women are not intended to think rationally for themselves, but blindly adhere to the ideologies of their husbands.

“Ba'al or Adonai / Whoever is God / The bread must still be made and the doorsill swept” (Batey,6-8). These lines exhorts her strong objection towards God's commands; which is indifferent towards the struggles humans, especially women undergo in their day to day life. Leaving your roots is difficult for a person “drawn to earth” (Batey, 32). Lot's wife rushes to bid goodbye to the herd, patting their heads and smiles at a woman who held her hand at childbed.

The poem ends with the preposition that “Good, to a God, and good in human terms are two different things” (Batey, 34). Lot's wife chooses to be human and she “never regrets the sacrifice”(Batey,38-39). By choosing to be human Lot's wife, who is the poetess herself proclaims her belief in humans. Lot's wife's yearning to look back upon the City of Sodom could also mean to provide an insight to the human race to evaluate and reevaluate their actions before inflicting its consequences upon the world.

V. KENNY FINNEYFROCK

Kenny Finneyfrock is a twenty-first century poet who resembles the modern women who have the ability to question, reason and argue with their counterparts about the injustices meted out to them. Lot's wife in Finneyfrock's poem is appalled with Lot's behavior. She is also concerned about their neighbors who, inspite of having the right to express their freewill is questioned by any authority. She is a worldly women who cherishes their youth and their marriage “when we were young, and blushed with youth like bruised fruit”. (Finneyfrock, 4)

Lot's wife in Finneyfrocks poem has not quite relieved herself from the shock, and disheartening behavior of Lot while God set the City of Sodom on fire. She engages on narrating the whole incident to Lot, in case he has not understood the effect of burning.

“Let me describe for you, Lot
what your city looked like burning
since you never turned around to see it.
Sulfur ran its sticky fingers over the skin
of our countrymen. It smelled like burning hair
and rancid eggs. I watched as our friends pulled
chunks of brimstone from their faces. Is any form
of loving this indecent? (Finneyfrock, 24-30)

Her tone changes from reminiscing their youth and life together to concern and anguish regarding his inaction and finally she pities him for the blind belief in a supreme God and denouncing their friends and neighbors.

“Cover your eyes tight,
husband, until you see stars, convince
yourself you are looking at Heaven.
Because any man weak enough to hide his eyes while his neighbors
are punished for the way they love deserves a vengeful god.” (Finneyfrock, 32-36)

Lot's wife has been pitied upon for her disobedience to God's command. Her final fate of becoming a pillar of salt is also taken for granted by centuries of believers. No one dared to question, argue and reason with God on her state of mind while turning back for one last look. The concluding lines from Fennyfrocs poem makes it clear that Lot's wife has not regretted her decision of turning back. She embraces her verdict with courage and contempt. I will stand here / and I will watch you / run.

VI. CONCLUSION

Anna Akhmatova and Kristine Batey downrightly criticizes the critically distanced and objective way in which people live their lives. The world is moving in a mechanized manner, detaching oneself from the pleasures, pains, love and loss that the world offers us. In both the poems, Lot readily accepts the offer to move far away from everything that has made his life and existence meaningful. He does not want to hold on to any fragments of memories from Sodom. However, Lot's wife finds it difficult to vacate her home and her loved ones. She comprehends the life in Sodom which gave colors and hope and purpose to her life. Apart from her attachment to the meaning or purpose that life offered her in Sodom, the poems decisively speaks about the plight of women struggling with their household chores. It raises the questions about men holding responsibilities in the earthly, household matters too. Fenneyfocks poem too encourages the readers to keep an open mind and exercise their freewill while living their life on earth. Her concern regarding her friends and neighbors and her respect towards their private life is worthy enough to be modelled upon. Only a strong, courageous and responsible person can be kind at heart too. Because any man weak enough to hide his eyes while his neighbors / are punished for the way they love deserves a vengeful god. (Fenneyfrook, 34,35). Owning your responsibilities, revolting for your rights, nurturing and caring one another and being kind to your fellow neighbors are the characteristics of a responsible citizen worthy enough to live on earth. Trusting in the divine should never make you loose your trust in the beauty and aesthetics that the world around us has to offer.

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