

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

Eros Demythologized in John Updike's *Couples*

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Approval Letter

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Letter of Recommendation

Mr. Rajan Pokhrel has completed his thesis entitled "Eros Demythologized in John Updike's *Couples*" under my supervision. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for viva voce.

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Abstract

This research makes an intensive study of John Updike's *Couples* through the Psychological discourse with the light of Myth and Religion. Piet, the protagonist, attempts to quench his infinite Eros by sleeping with many Tarbox wives. He praises the beloved body with those of heavenly connotation. By divorcing to Angela and marrying to Elizabeth Foxy, he continues to celebrate his infinite Eros. But at last, turns in to demythologization of Eros on the state of passion, and his state of searching new sex partner goes on eternally till his death that the researcher can imagine. He always seems to avoid the chapters of death and tries to bask in the warmth of married women. He is trying to hide from death with the warmth of others' wives. His erotic worship has just become the demythologization of sexual state which is after all futile and worthless. The newness and change he seeks in his life goes eternally which only ends in death that we can suppose.

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I. Introduction

The research critically analyses John Updike's *Couples* from the perspective of Psychology with the reference of Christianity and the Myth of Eros. In the novel, the basic relationships of the major couples are distracted and deformed affecting the conjugal lives which contradict the old myth that marriage is made in heaven. The tendency of separation, deformation and fragmentation can be analyzed from the perspective of Psychoanalysis mainly concerning on the periphery of Eros. The researcher attempts to dig out this issue to finally reveal the turmoil of the relationship. The research takes the relationship of extra-marital affairs as a weapon to support Eros Demythologized in John Updike's *Couples*. Unlike the normal marriage, which inclines towards reconciliation, Updike has featured the tendency of separation inside the main characters. This research tends to exploit the relationship of Piet and Foxy and their respective legal wife and husband to prove the thesis.

The entire story of *Couples* mainly circles around the periphery of two characters: Piet Hanema and Foxy Whitman. Piet seems here a representative of ultra-modern people who takes love and sex as a means of entertainment and time pass, violating the traditional rituals and norms as he compares prayer to masturbation: "Prayer and masturbation had so been mingled in Piet's habits that in hearing the benediction he pictured his mistress naked, a reflected sun pooled between her breasts, her prim chin set, her slightly bulging green eyes gazing cleared" (29). It clearly shows the demoralization of religion and God when celebrating his erotic desire. Piet celebrates with Tarbox wives and seeks to conquer many women and thus exploits the secret of the infinite hidden Eros. A part from his wife and mistress, he

sleeps with other Tarbox wives. The glimpse of Don Juan is found in him who loves women under the guise of many women.

On the contrary to Piet, his wife Angela seems passive in sexuality and physical romance. She really presents herself as an angel on the matter of passion and sex. She seems fed up with the worthless repeating activity of sex. When Piet tries to persuade her by saying, “Angel, your nipples are hard let me make you come with my mouth” (22). She replies, “I don’t see that it’s that sad. We’ll all be here another night” (22). Angela really seems angelic in quality that inferiorizes such petty thing and becomes ideal in front of the immoral and corrupted society. Being like an angel, she even becomes indifference to her husband’s desire.

For the fulfillment of his erotic desire, Piet becomes compelled to pursue and adopt third person. He even does not let his mistress Foxy to advance inside the bathroom during the party at night. Foxy, though being pregnant seems connotative to vixen- always allures Piet to sleep and caress her. Ken, the husband of Foxy, on the other hand, seems a practical man who mostly engages in business-oriented activities and after money rather than the happiness and desire of his wife, “I was never his wife, I was his once-a week whore for all those years” (227). This paves the way for Foxy to lead towards Piet. Both of them found themselves as two unquenched wanderers and made a heaven of pleasure and satisfaction by themselves.

Updike has always touched, aroused and entertained the readers with his tales of American family and community. The poignant issues on family, marriage, sex and religion are always being deep-rooted in the literary genre. His skills to portray a story from real event reveals his understanding and interest in society and literature, which always make him and his works immortal. As for religion, Updike’s early exposure to the Christian faith in its Lutheran expression had an effect, which was, as he said,

“surprising and permanent”. His fiction is also permeated with Christian imagery. For instance, he says that this is a period when “God has killed the churches” (243).

Updike's novel *Couples* portrays the degraded couples of American postwar society. Ten couples described here are wildly passionate and away from social code and conducts. They are confused by the complexity of marriage in secular world. Lacking real purpose, the ten couples spend themselves in copulation ignoring morality; they also shun the outside world. If one accepts the moral irregularity of the characters without prejudging them, one could say that the couples of Tarbox indeed learn to see world in a different way and are thus educated towards a new kind of wholeness and satisfaction. But if one views the adulterous liaisons as a departure from the old set of ideals, then the destruction of two marriages and the precarious survival of some others is evidence of a resulting disillusionment.

Couples of this novel, *Couples*, talk in mythical words and compare themselves to the mythical characters evoking sexual memories and ultimately reach over transient salvation, which is after all worthless. The characters here are highly ultra-modern who try to match their characteristics with archetypal characters from ancient religion and myth; but after all they are abusing myth and religion rather than being resembled.

The novel has been observed from different major theoretical outlooks based on existential, spiritual and feminist studies. Some critics have even seen the novel in the light of conflict between traditional belief and contemporary American reality but it has not yet dug out from the perspective of Psychoanalysis with the light of myth and sex.

Updike's fictions are complained as non-violent and bland in taste. Many critics charge Updike's fiction with lack of brevity and valorization of the

protagonists. Readers who look for crowd and excitement will get a disappointment for there is so little of it in his novels. He has no intention of bringing us to where the action is, or of painting the scene in psychedelic coloring. Updike defends this complain by saying, “There has been so little in my life. I have fought no wars, and engaged in few fist fighting. I do not think a man pacifist in his life should pretend to violence in fiction; I feel a tenderness towards my characters that forbids making violent use of them” (51).

Infidelity and broken relationship is reinserted in Updike’s *Couples*. It describes the suburban marriage and its now conventional adulteries. It is a long and detailed account of multiple adulteries ending with remarriage of two principal characters by divorcing their respective partners and abandoning their families. It also goes some way to exploring the whole problem of relationship in contemporary America. The ending is quite ambiguous. Piet has broken out of his marriage and the Tarbox trap, but only in to another marriage and another suburb, “Where gradually, among people like themselves, they have been accepted, as another couple” (506). So *Couples* ends, echoing and suggesting the circularity of the whole process. It is quite absurd to consider the divorce of Piet and Angela and the remarriage of Piet and Foxy as a happy ending. Yet it is the circularity of the whole process, which justifies the cause. The couples are like two halves of a coin and their search to find the other half of the coin or the right partner continues.

One striking features of his fiction is the omnipresence of sex and religion in his writings. These are mysteries with every human being must come to terms, as they play a vital role in his existence. To deny their full seriousness is to defy life. In *Couples*, he focuses his interest on the nature of marriage, where the social, ethical and religious dimensions of sex demand to be faced with honesty and realism.

As for religion, Updike's early exposure to the Christian faith in its Lutheran expression had an effect, which was surpassing and permanent. "How did the patently rapid and drearily business like teachings succeed in brandishing me with a cross?", he asks. His fiction is also permeated with christen imagery. For instance, he says that this is a period when "God had killed the churches" (316).

Robert Detweiler has commented on this book. He appreciates this novel as:

A big novel about love and death, free flowing and clever (but not intellectual) and socially significant enough to inspire a time cover story in American morals. My own experience of *Couples* was remarkably different. It was one of the few novels I read in recent years to involve me in its 'sense of life' and I felt curiously at home with its setting and action. I was intrigued by the familiarity that it inspired and attempted to discover the reasons for it. (236)

Couples had received comments on sex and religion from different critics. Rand Richards Cooper says, "His fiction is also permeated with Christian imagery" (124). For instance, he says that this is a period when "God had killed the churches."

The challenge facing America is reflected in David William's comment, "America is presented by the local situation existing in Tarbox. Updike has chosen a selected part or representative of American society to analyze the direction in which the American society is moving" (125).

Loss of tradition and instability in American life is reflected in Fredrick R. Karl's remarks:

These three problems – the need to achieve largeness, the uncertainty about one's traditions with the full on set of European modernism, and the fantasies rapidity and

instability of American life cause the novelist to lose his fictional bearings and in many cases, lose the sense of his own career. (348)

Diana Tilling, objecting *Couples* not only as a lusty novel with garden variety of adultery and decent dialogues, says, “*Couples* does more than brim with desire, temptation and unhappy marriages. After all, the people in the book are not all adults. There are children present. Oddly enough, some of the best parts of his novel revolve around the off-spring of our desperate housewives and desperate husbands” (115).

BJ Fraser reviews *Couples* by stating that graphic modes of sex talks in Piet’s description. He has a satirical mode that he does not want his kids to read this novel. Most probably because of its erotic narration:

I could have done without the stream of consciousness writing that cropped in many scenes involving Piet. [. . .] it just gave the narrative a sort of choppy, manic feel at times. The sex talk by today's standards isn't too graphic, but it's still not something you probably want your kids reading. The writing style is challenging, but if you can muddle through you will feel better about yourself. (203)

Although the research does have some psychoanalytical description, yet it is by no means a research on Psychoanalysis with the reference of sex and religion; and is not researched by a proficient and professional student of Psychology. It is a comparison of the basic features of myth and sex to the characters, Piet, Foxy etc. Therefore, the present researcher is going to analyze the lives of Piet, Foxy and others from the shadow of sex and religion. Thus, to simply prove that their lives are the resemblance of mythical pattern but in modern sense just to demoralize and demythologize of Eros. Hence, the research is unique and researchable.

II. Eros as an Important Component in Psychoanalysis

Sigmund Freud introduced two fundamental forces: Eros and Thanatos. These terms are derived from Greek mythology for the first time to denote the force of life and death respectively.

The instinct of Eros is better known as love or sex or life instinct. Human body seeks to fulfill psychological needs such as hunger, thirst, breathing and defecation. In Freudian psychoanalysis, the most motivating force of life is libido. It means the energy of sex motive. Sex energy is the creative source of life instinct. Freud used sex in a broad sense, it is not only coition, and it represents love, tenderness, and sympathy that bring all human beings in close physical contact. Freud writes, “The concept of sexuality and at the same time of sexual instinct had, it is true to be extended so as to cover many things which could not be classed under the reproductive function” (45).

Freud opined that the energy generation by human body changes in to various life forces, and these forces create tension in search of outlet. The painful feelings forced human body to engage in tension reducing activities. This tension can be reduced in amorous activity but social and moral norms inhibit the normal outlet of sex energy, and it creates a suppression of sex energy. Pleasures Principle has entirely associated with life instinct. It tries to avoid pain and inclines to pleasure for immediate gratifications of emotional urges without caring the consequence. Libido is particularly dominated by pleasure principle. Eros is the principle of life and growth.

Death instinct – Thanatos is a vital force of living organism. Every organism shall follow its own path to death. The feeling of behaviors of human being therefore, somehow, reveals the death instinct. The aggressive behavior, destructive will and

hostility motive manifest the death instinct. Freud had given more emphasis on hostility and aggressiveness of human behavior.

Life and death instincts are closely attached with each other. Some traits of death instinct and life instincts are interrelated and inseparable. Pleasure and pain, love and hate, tenderness and hostility are the motives of life and death instinct which seem mutually antagonistic but often these two are inseparably fused in human activities. It is called the ambivalence of instincts. It is seen often quarrelling and hurting in courtship. When the motive of life instinct dominates the death instinct, there is love, courtship, happy and prosperous life. On the contrary, when death instinct dominates the life instinct, there is aggression, hostility, pain and hate that lead life towards death. In this context Freud presents his view:

Another striking fact is that the life instincts have so much more contact without internal perception – emerging as breakers of the peace and constantly producing tension whose release is felt as pleasure- while the death instincts seem to do their work unobtrusively. The pleasure principle seems actually to serve the death instincts. It is true that it keeps watch upon stimuli form without which are regarded as dangers by both kinds of instincts, but it is more specially on guard against increase of stimulation from, within, which would make the task of living more difficult. (57)

It becomes clear that the opposing action of the two basic instincts provide the different kinds of ebbs and flows of life. In fact, human nature is a bundle of contradictory principle, which always affects the normal life of common human beings.

Since the time of Homer who has also addressed Eros as the Greek god of love and sexual desire as we can refer *Iliad* in which Eros has been the topic of hot issue. If we refer mythology there are many more evidences, which say that Eros is the god of fertility and he carries a bow to strike people with the arrow to arouse sexual desire in them. According to Robert Whites, Eros was the ancient name of Cupid. He says, "Eros is a young winged boy, with his bow and arrows at ready, to either shot in to the hearts of gods or mortals, which would rouse them desire" (423). Another mythologist Soren Williams in his *Eros, Aphrodite and Ares* says, "Eros is the offspring of Aphrodite and Ares though legend says that he was the son of Iris and Zephyrus" (224).

From the early legend of Eros it is said that he was responsible for the embraces of Uranus and Gela, and from their union were born many off springs. It was also written that Eros hatched our race and made it appear first in to the light. Although one of the oldest gods, he was a latecomer to Greek religion. He was worshipped in many religions of Greek at Thespieae there was an ancient fertility cult, and in Athens he and Aphrodite had a joint cult.

Eros: Defining Factor of Personality

In 1912, Freud introduced the structure of human personality into psychoanalytical theory. He makes three major divisions of personality: the Id, the Ego and the Superego. Each portion of personality has its own development history. The Id is the source of all psychic energies and the Ego and Superego develop out of Id.

The Id is a container of unconscious wishes and desires. In Freud's words the Id stands for Untamed Passions and cauldron of seething excitement. The Id works in keeping with the pleasure principle, which can be understood as a demand to take care

of needs immediately. It just knows that it wants it and it wants it now. The infant, in the Freudian view, is pure or nearly pure Id. Although a wish for food, such as the image of a juicy steak might be enough to satisfy the Id, it is not enough to satisfy the organism. The need only gets stronger and the wishes just keep coming. The Id is the representative of primary process or mode of thinking. It manifests itself in dreams and intoxication. It has no concern with logic, time sequence, morality and social norm; it has only desire for immediate wish fulfillment. It is entirely guided by pleasure principle and avoidance of pain. It is a reservoir for Libido. Unconscious sexual and aggressive ideas are originated in Id. It lacks ethical judgment and social values. It seeks immediate gratification of primitive irrational and pleasure seeking impulses.

The ego, unlike the Id, functions according to the reality principle. It represents reality and, to a considerable extent, reason. Ego is ordinary social self that thinks, decides, feels and wills. It maintains all the worldly functions and makes them as realistic and rational as possible. It creates a balance between inner demands and outer reality. It is executive director of personality whose functions are perceptions, memory, learning, choice, judgment and actions. It is mainly conscious and partly unconscious in contact with superego and Id respectively.

The ego is the rational governing agent of the psyche. Though the ego lacks the strong vitality of the Id, it regulates the instinctual drives of the Id so that they may be released in nondestructive behavioral pattern. And though a large portion of the ego is unconscious, the ego nevertheless comprises what we ordinarily think of as the conscious mind. As Freud points out, "In popular language we may say that the ego stands for reason and circumspection, while the Id stands for the untamed passions" (148). Where the Id is governed solely by the pleasure principle; the ego is

governed by the reality principle. Consequently, the ego serves as intermediary between the world within and the world without.

The superego primarily functions to protest society. The superego is the moral censoring agency. Freud attributes the development of the superego to the parental influence that manifests in terms of punishment of what society considers bad behavior and reward for what society considers good behavior. An attractive superego creates an unconscious sense of guilt. The superego is a censor, which classifies all the functions of human personality on the basis of social values and moral codes.

About the functions of superego Blum expresses his view:

When the superego prohibits expression of sexual or aggressive drives, the ego typically joins the superego in opposition to the Id. Submission to superego forces enhances a person's self-esteem. Resistance to them usually results in feelings of remorse and unworthiness. It is possible, though rare, for the superego and the Id to be allied against the ego. In such a case ego struggle against a feeling of pervasive guilt generated by the Superego, and the personality may be overwhelmed by severe depressive reactions. (6)

It is the superego, which prohibits Id and Ego to operate wish fulfillment and sometimes it struggles against both. Thus, superego is the norm and value-oriented judge of the human psychic personality.

Narcissism, Sadism and Masochism

A male or female who obtains sexual gratification from admiring and caressing one's own body in a mirror as if it is another person is called narcissistic person. Usually it refers to self-love or sexual desire for one's own body. Freud views the libido depends upon somatic source and always seeks an outlet but narcissistic is

damned up within self-love. Narcissism is a conscious perversion of sexual impulse. Narcissistic approach will be developed by the disappointment or disillusionment in love and one's love centers on oneself. Indeed the ego is the original home of libido and the narcissistic libido turns towards object and thus becomes object-libido. In extreme narcissism the object-libido is dismissed and self-libido is increased that shows some abnormal behaviors and psychotic in a person.

Sadism is sexual perversion in which gratification is obtained by the infliction of physical or mental pain on others, especially on the love object. One whose sexual activity is an aggressive or destructive is called sadistic person. A sadist gets sexual pleasure in giving pain biting and wounding sex partner or loving object. The sadist often makes brutal attacks on sex partner that provides him sexual pleasure. Exclusive sadism sometimes leads to murder. Freud remarks:

Sadism was clearly a part of sexual life, in the activities of which action could be replaced by cruelty. Neurosis was regarded as the outcome of a struggle between the interest of self – preservation and the demands of the Libido, a struggle in which the ego had been victorious but at the price of severe sufferings and renunciations. (54)

Masochism indicates a sexual perversion characterized by pleasure in being subjected to pain or humiliation especially by a love object. A masochist gets sexual pleasure by receiving pain or hurt from one's sex partner. Without being hurt or wounded or tortured, the masochist does not feel sexually excited. Thus, sadist and masochist are said to be very good friends because of giving and receiving pain. In the case of sadist, sex instinct or life instinct or pleasure principle can be obtained through giving pain or wound or hurt or destruction of loving object, while in masochism, the union

between sex instinct and destructive instinct is directed inwards to oneself by receiving pain and hurt for sexual pleasure.

Division of Personality

Freud is the exponent of the most systematic mental theory. He divides mind into three levels: the conscious, the subconscious and the unconscious. However, Freud didn't exactly invent the idea of the conscious versus unconscious mind, but he certainly was responsible for making it popular. The conscious is that part of mind which provides immediate awareness, perceptions, thoughts or feelings of the mental events or memories. Consciousness is also a process or sequence of events. William James mentions it as a stream of consciousness that means continuity of the process. It refers to the experience of an object or event at the present moment. The preconscious mind is the storehouse of memories and wishes, which can be recalled into consciousness. Those memories and desires, which are dimly conscious, constitute preconscious mind. It is recalling process to consciousness.

Unconscious mind, according to him, is a reservoir of buried thoughts, emotions, feelings, wishes and impulses, which are not allowed to come into conscious mind. It includes all the things that are not easily available to awareness, including many things that have their origins there, such as our drives or instincts, and things that are put there because we can't bear to look at them, such as the memories and emotions associated with trauma. The contents of unconscious come from two sources: animalistic feelings and strivings, which have never been conscious, and wishes and thoughts, which are once conscious. The nature of the unconscious is, according to Freud, dynamic. It consists of repressed childhood wishes, which are ever striving to express themselves. The energy that strives for expression is sexual energy. Freud calls it Libido. The sexuality of the unconscious is, however, perverse

sexuality. The unconscious wishes are extremely powerful and dynamic. Freud believes that the inhibited feeling and wishes of childhood remain influential as a part of active unconscious. Freud takes sex energy as the driving force of human life. The theory of unconscious motivation plays a significant role in theory of psychoanalytical technique.

Psychosexual Development of Personality

Freud postulated five stages of psychosexual development of personality of a child from birth to puberty: oral, anal, phallic, latency and genital. Freud noted that, at different times in our lives, different parts of our skin give us greatest pleasure. Late theorists would call these areas 'erogenous zones'. It appeared to Freud that the infant finds its greatest pleasure in sucking, especially the breast. A bit later in life, the child focuses on an anal pleasure of holding it in and letting go. By three or four, the child may discover the pleasure of touching or rubbing against his or her genitalia. Contrary to traditional beliefs, Freud found infancy and childhood a period of intense sexual experience, sexual in a sense much broader than what is commonly attached to the term. According to him, the sexual attitude sets out from the very beginning of childhood though the sex drive of infant is not intensified because of immature sex glands hormones. In his view, mouth, anus and genital organs are the three principal erogenic zones of the human body that give sexual pleasure.

The oral stage lasts from birth to about 18 months. The focus of pleasure is, of course, the mouth. The oral stage is divided into two sub-stages: oral sucking and oral biting. From birth to 8 months the child expresses his sexual impulses through sucking. At this stage, the autocratic drive is localized in the mouth, lips and tongue. In the same way, at oral biting stage, the infant gets pleasure through biting, destroying and swallowing and its sources are teeth and jaws.

The anal stage lasts from about 18 months to three or four years old. The focus of pleasure is the anus. During this stage, according to Freud, the child obtains pleasure through holding and expelling the bodily waste.

The phallic stage lasts from three or four to five, six or seven years. The focus of pleasure is the genitalia. The phallic stage is very important from psychoanalytical point of view in the development of adult personality. At this stage, sex energy is centralized in the genital organs and children get pleasure in manipulating and stroking it. The boy in demanding sexual love from his mother comes into rivalry with his father and the girl becomes a rival of her mother for the father's love. Freud derives the term Oedipus complex from Greek tragedy to mention the psychosexual development of child. This is called Electra complex in girl's case. According to Freud, the child's object of love is opposite-sex parent at this stage. In phallic stage the boy is proud of having penis, which his sister lacks and suffer with fear of losing or damaging it, that is called castration anxiety. The girl finds that she has no penis and develops a strong desire to get penis, which is called penis envy. To Freud at the end of phallic stage every child identifies him/herself with the same-sex parent. If they are deviated from this normal course, they tend to be homosexual, anti-social and immoral.

The latent stage lasts from five, six, or seven to puberty, that is, some where around 12 years old. During this stage, Freud believes that the sexual impulse is suppressed in the service of learning. At this stage, boys and girls play and study together and basically children involve in their educational activities.

At the genital stage, boys or girls enter the puberty and they become enthusiastic in sexual union with opposite sex. The Libido is reawakened in this stage and the interests or desires are directed towards the sexual relationship.

The psychosexual development of childhood experience plays a vital role to form adult personality traits. When the normal process of psychosexual development is blocked, the personality is also deviated from normal course. The oral character is extremely dependent on other for the maintenance of his or her self-esteem. If Libido stays fixed at any stage, oral personality results. It involves in excessive eating, drinking, smoking and kissing. Likewise, the anal personality results from difficulty in toilet training and adult behaviors are marked by stinginess, excessive orderliness and cleanliness and unusual rigidity. The phallic character is overconfidence, extremely courageous and most aggressive. The phallic male is hostile towards women and incapable of feeling love. The phallic female is motivated by penis envy to assume a masculine role and strives for superiority over men. The genital character is marked by sexual and psychological maturity that makes possibility mutually fulfilling relationship with opposite sex.

Dream Interpretation

Sigmund Freud's another great contribution to psychoanalytical theory is the systematic study and analysis of dreams. In his classic book, *The Interpretation of Dream (1900)*, he explored the dynamic role of the unconscious mind and he described dreams as "the royal road to the unconsciousness". To Freud, dreams represent disguised desire; wish fulfilling expression of unconscious and unacceptable thoughts. According to Freud dream represents those wishes, demands and desires, which are repressed into unconscious and their instinctual gratification, is fettered in conscious state of mind.

Freud views that dream is also a mental process like others and it is meaningful, purposeful and symbolic. In his early stage of dream analysis, he believed that dream is simply wish fulfillment of those wishes of the Id and superego,

which could not be gratified in real life and they are fulfilled in the sleeping stage when the ego is in relax. Those dreams create violent inner conflict for the gratification of unconscious Id. The unacceptable thoughts and wishes appear in symbolic form in dreams.

Psychoanalysis also deals with a type of emotional disturbance, which is termed as Neurosis. We say any character is neurotic when we refer someone who is frequently depressed and is somehow inefficient in social terms and conditions. Freud says:

Neurosis or psychoneurosis is a minor mental disorder characterized by inner struggles and discordant social relationship. It is the initial stage of any other psychic stage. But essential features of psychoneuroses are that they are precipitated by emotional stress, conflict and frustration. They are not produced by physical disorder and do not respond to routine medical treatment. Psychoneuroses are such that compulsory hospitalization or segregation is unnecessary.

(90)

Although neurosis is seen as a minor mental disturbance, a neurotic may exhibit some certain symptoms of anxiety, irritability, doubts, irrational fears, insomnia and disease resembling that of a bad conscience. Freud has mainly focused upon human conscience to explore one's characteristics in a complex society.

A neurotic may be aggressive. Aggression is generally elicited by intense frustration and leads an individual to hostile or destructive behaviors (Fromm 450). Psychologists like John Dollard and his followers argue that human being is not naturally aggressive but only becomes so as a result of frustration, "so aggression is

reaction to frustration of primary needs” (36). So some psychologists believe that aggression is just a result of acute frustration.

Frustration has two dimensions. If we analyze from psychoanalytical point of view; sex can be the cause of frustration and sex can be the outlet of frustration. As sex is related to Eros, therefore Eros is related to frustration at one level. Characters like Piet and Foxy are the representatives of mass who take sex as companion to thrust off their frustration.

As psychoanalysis deals with a mental condition of human personality, it has been chosen to analyze the text *Couples*. Freud says that man is driven by unconscious mind rather than the conscious mind. Every man or woman has erotic desire, but he/she cannot express it directly because of superego. Due to family, society, ethics and morality, rules and regulations etc, he or she has to suppress and repress his/her sexual desire. As a result, a person suffers from mental illness and becomes neurotic. In the text, *Couples*, the main protagonist Piet Hanema also seems to suffer from sexual unfulfillment. Piet, all the time, is driven by his instincts and impulses. He does not want to face the reality because reality is very bitter and harsh. So, Piet goes to different women with the intention of fulfilling his sexual desire. Piet also feels pleasant in the presence of other women but feels sad and depressed with Angela who does not seem to meet his high sex-drive. Reason does not work in the life of Piet because it is the instinctive drive that comes first and leads him to fulfill his desire.

In *Couples*, symbols and images have also been used to express his unfulfilled erotic desire in so many mythological expressions driven by the erotic instincts and impulses; Piet tends to fulfill his personal desires, neglecting his responsibilities to others. As there is much celebration of erotic desire rather than being neutral and

leading a normal sex life, the researcher has chosen Psychoanalysis, especially Eros and Thanatos, as an appropriate theoretical tool to analyze the text, *Couples*.

III. Eros Demythologized in John Updike's *Couples*

The novel *Couples* opens up with a whole new world on the aspects of life and sex. We note that there is a tendency in everyone to consider the decisions relating to the life of the society to which he belongs to as a matter of fate, on which he has no influence. In some way or other, everyone is bound within the society. In Updike's *Couples*, the major characters Piet, Angela and Foxy seem to move around in a big circle searching for their desires but the circle has no start point and the end point. The research takes the relationship of extra marital affairs as a weapon to support Eros Demythologized in John Updike's *Couples*. Unlike the normal marriage, which inclines towards reconciliation, Updike has featured the tendency of separation inside the main characters. This research tends to exploit the relationship of Piet and Foxy and their respective legal wife and husband to prove the thesis.

Mythical patterns are exploited by Updike to create something new as if to demythologize it. There are certain things, which every human being must come to term with, as they play a vital role in his/her existence. To deny their full seriousness is to deny life itself.

The omnipresence of sex, religion and death is striking features in Updike's fictions and *Couples* cannot be an exception. So the researcher must proceed by analyzing and defining these in terms of these terms with the references of the text one by one.

Updike has always sung the praises of heterosexual love. He has described the physical act with erotic and voluptuous languages. In fact his vivid description of the sexual act and his use of slang, dirty words have drawn a great deal of criticism and comments. Here, we must remember that sexuality and obscenity are different things, although they deal in the same area of human experience. Updike does not ignore the

fact that obscenity often disguises itself as sexual frankness. Using the direct style, Updike simply arouses the feeling of completeness inside the sensitive readers.

Updike has recorded how present day American society thinks, speaks and acts in relation to sex in *Couples*. Sex is both central to man's existence and is one of the best things in life. Still even a good thing in a widely perverted, fallen world may appear as obscene. Due to the achievement of the sexual revolution, Updike has taken liberty to speak all aspects of sexuality without any restriction in *Couples*. It is also glimmered with sexual imagery and symbols, "I love to sleep. Just delicious nothing sleep" (233). Sexuality and obscenity function in *Couples* as vehicles of truth.

Detailed descriptions of sexual intercourse unlike to many similar passages in *Couples* are not merely included for their own sake. Rather everything that exists is good. The sex act is described as a welling up of innocent joy and as an occasion when the weights of guilt make itself known. Sexuality in *Couples* is demythologized. It is kept there as a part of everyday prayer and service to God which every human being must come to term with.

The language used in Tarbox is the language dedicated to truth and fun. In *Couples*, there is the constant use of four-lettered obscene word, "To fuck is human, to be blown, Devine" (167). Also, sex and candy have become assimilated to each other in Tarbox. After the abortion, as Freddy drives away taking Foxy home, Piet looks downwards and sees, "A condom and candy wrapper lay paired in the exposed gutter" (419). It is quite symbolic and it has the implication that sex like a candy or food is a necessary biological need of human beings. When Foxy finds that she is pregnant, she remarks to Piet that adultery is silly and so much trouble. He replies that it is a way of seeking knowledge. The perverse and desperate sexuality of Tarbox is the result of the illusion that man is embarked on the quest to discover an original

sexual wholeness lost by the fall in to the flesh. After making love to foxy Piet cries, “I am in the pit” (437). Life is the pits of sadness out of which there can be no escape except death, though people try to recover their lost innocence wither by pretending they can enter post pill paradise or by traveling to the Virgin Islands. When Angela finds Piet too much indulged with women, she asks, “When you flirt with every woman in sight?” Piet says, “In sight? Do I?” then Angela explains, “Of course, you do. You know you do. Big or little, old or young, you eat them up. Even the yellow ones, Bernadette Ong. Even poor little soused Bea Guerin, who has enough trouble” (13).

As sex demands us to engage at one level with the ultimate of love and death, religion poses the question of how these ultimates are to be understood at every moments of our existence. Religion plays a crucial role in *Couples* as it is key to prove the research. Any consideration of religious system without God is antithetical. God is present even in negation, “For even when a man denies God, he may in fact be affirming the existence of God” (244).

Couples displays the catastrophic social effect when disorder is regarded as the norm because man has usurped the place of the divine. When faith is absent and the responsibility for good and evil in the public is not recognized, then fate and chance become the sole gods. For instance, when Georgene invites Piet to make love to her on the sun porch, he asks, “Won’t we embarrass god?” (64). She replies, “God is a woman and that nothing embarrasses her” (64). Also as the congregational church burns, Piet explains to the minister that even if they save the shell, the walls are so weakened that they will have to tear it down anyway. The minister replies, “Christianity isn’t dollars and cents. This church isn’t that old stump of building. The church is people, my friend, people. Human being” (492). The minister’s humanistic

emphasis misses Piet's awareness that we are God's temple in which the spirit dwells. The burning of the temple signifies the end of prevailing culture. The carpentry work of this edifice can not be duplicated. In other words, the original building can not be erected, although a different building may be built.

Closely associated with sex and religion is death. In *Couples*, we can clearly see a progressive delineation of how death triumphs over life whenever there is disorder in the universe. Also the characters in the novel defy death, they are shown as being no longer afraid of death. We see how the social groups ignore morality and spend them in copulation and shun the outside world, "Not even death has much power over their hearts" (22). On the night of President Kennedy's death, when the whole nation mourns, the couples celebrate it by holding a party. Piet Hanema, the antique loving craftsman, hides his fear of death in the act of love. There seems to be a subconscious symbolic desire in Piet to get back to the womb. Piet once remarks, "The death of another always a secret relief" (288). Foxy Whitman, Piet's mistress who carries his child, is depicted as a soulless, sexless and scientific, while Freddy Throne, the dentist, who keeps aborting the child, is atheistic, death worshipping, and sterile. John Ong, the Korean nuclear physicist who dies in the book, is a symbol of the fate of backward cultures exposed to a western technology, that they can master readily enough, but only at the cost of self-destruction. Death pervades Tarbox, "Death no longer seemed dreadful" (372).

Couples begins in April, the season of life's renewal in nature and for mankind the season of mocking images blending life and death. Either man finds the way of resurrection through death as given in the bible, or else Freddy Throne's vision of death ruling life remains, "You're born to get laid and die, and the sooner the better" (45). If a whole nation loses its understanding of the Earth being ruled by the Heaven

then, like Piet Hanema, its soul is given over to death. Updike analyses the direction in which American society is moving in *Couples*. Tarbox society is shown as to be the conscious articulation of American values, and thus a microcosm of the whole western civilization. Tarbox is depicted as a fallen world. Foxy remarks, “Women have no conscience. Never their fault. The serpent beguiled me” (264). As so far as *Couples* is basically the story of Piet Hanema, it is the story of the temptation and fall of an individual soul which represents the soul of the nation. Conversation with Freddy, Piet says, “Unhappiness is us. From Eden on, we’ve voted for it. We manufactured misery, and feed ourselves on poison” (270). In answer, Freddy throne says, “Stop fighting it, Piet baby. We’re losers. To live is to lose” (270). It shows the basic assumption of common people and their way of living with the guilt of falling from the antique paradise.

Updike tells his readers he is presenting the weakness of western civilization which like the Roman Civilization fall before the barbaric invader. The challenge facing contemporary America is presented by the local situation existing in Tarbox. The picture of the suburban life is indeed tormenting. Lacking purpose, the ten couples spend themselves in copulation, ignoring morality; they also sun the outside world. Their lives are arranged in an intricate pattern, each involving all the rest and portrayed as parts of one incestuous organism. Not even death has much power over their hearts, “Death no longer seemed dreadful” (372). They celebrate a party on the night of President Kennedy’s death. Here, we can see how this group of ten couples representing the western society have become corrupted and in the extremity of fall. It is a decaying and diseased society which has rejected the traditional mores and broken off all family ties and norms of moral behaviors. They have totally forgotten the thanatic aspect of life. The perverse sexuality –making love inside a bathroom during

a party, the adultery, the infidelity in marriage relationships, so easily described by Updike is meant morally to be judged adversely. Just as Rabbit tries to seek transcendence through a woman's body, so does Piet Hanema. When he makes love to other men's wives, he justifies it by saying that it is a way of seeking knowledge. The perverse and desperate sexuality of Tarbox is the result of the concept that man has embarked on the search to discover an original sexual wholeness which was lost by the fall in to the flesh. If we become fascinated by Piet's multiple adulteries, we will overlook the fact that the really important question in the unfaithfulness of the soul of America to the god of righteousness. In fact, here the couples feel as if they are not responsible for their actions, although according to the concept of the original sin, man was made to suffer because of his fall after the temptation. In support of this assumption, Piet remarks, "Unhappiness is us. From Eden on, we've voted for it. We manufactured misery, and feel ourselves on poison" (270).

On the other hand, Tarbox depicts a sterile type of culture where the women had stopped having babies, and men had no careers. This shows the barrenness both in physicality and spirituality. What was left was the liquor and love. Piet's relationship with Georgene Thorne at the first part of the novel illustrates the current assumption among the couples that they have escaped from the consequences of fall and have found a way back to Eden. When Piet worried about contraception after undressing, Georgene says, "Well come to the post-pill paradise" (106). So this belief that we can re-enter paradise is equivalent to saying that our actions bear no consequences and that the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil can not mix, yet they can co-exist. In other words, in the quest to restore humanity to paradise, men and women can simply be partners, to help or to hinder. Thus in Foxy's letter to Piet towards the end, she remarks, "They are a very silky people . . . people must go in pairs, one can

not go alone” (451). The implication here is that in the western society lonely halves go around seeking the other half to make a complete self. Another reason is that there is no understanding of the essential coupling of flesh and spirit in each individual. Therefore, in his quest, Piet goes on coupling with all the women he meets and novel ends with his union with Foxy, but we get a kind of feeling that even this relationship might not be long-lasting.

At the last part of the novel, the town church is burned by lightning leaving intact only the emblem of God. There is left only a colonial golden weathercock. Piet realizes the burning of the building signifies the end of the old sets of social values and norms. He thinks the carpentry wall of this edifice can not be duplicated, we are God's building and the temple in which God's spirit dwells.

Couples begins in April, the season of life's renewal in nature, and for mankind the season of mocking images blending life and death as in *The Wasteland*. Either man responds to the Christian message of the way of resurrection through death, or else. Freddy Thornes atheistic, death-worshipping vision remains the vision of death ruling over life, “You're born to get laid and die, and the sooner the better” (45). So in *Couples*, the human have usurped the place of the divine and celebrate their Eros by matching their activities with the divine one. There is catastrophic social effect because disorder is regarded as the norm. For instance, Freddy says, “People are the only thing people have since God packed up” (145).

We can say that *Couples* displays the spiritual shallowness and man's fall in to the flesh. Updike stresses man's lack of a spiritual understanding of the universe where in lies the ultimate meaning and value of life. The modern scientific and materialistic period lays stress on the physical dimension of life while neglecting the spiritual and moral dimension. As scientific technology progresses, our age which is

developing swiftly will feel itself to be a totally new world, and even past will not be able to guide us. Our hopes, aspirations and conceptions will have to keep up with the times, changing with the continually changing world. As Piet confesses once:

Like a middle-aged wife whose husband brings home a present after every trip because he's been unfaithful to her. When they were newly married he never had to give presents. Who is the husband? God. Obviously. God doesn't love us anymore. He loves Russia. He loves Uganda. We're fat and full of pimples and always whining for more candy. We've fallen from grace. (224)

It shows the American people's fear of not getting blessing and favour of the God because of their sinful activities. Does not that mean that the world will become spiritually sterile and make way for evil? That is not necessarily so, although no matter how advanced we may be in science, we do not get a step nearer to Heaven. We may press forward in to the future or we may fall back to the distant past, but regarding the spiritual aspect, we are back to the starting point where our forefathers began the quest. Why is this so? May be we can attribute this to the fact that we do not know Heaven unless we know the Earth. If as in *The Wasteland* men immodestly challenges creation, then he will fall. But if he views himself as a child of God, he can attain salvation as a fulfillment to his desire.

Mythologization of Eros Turned into Demythologization

After analyzing the three essential things to lead a meaningful life, let's begin with the process of mythologization from the very beginning of the text. The interior of Piet and Angela's room is described as if a pilgrim describes a popular temple with a lot of enthusiasm and excitement, "Their bed chamber was low-ceilinged colonial room whose woodwork was painted the shade of off –white commercially called

eggshell. A spring midnight pressed on the cold windows” (9). After bed chamber, there is the description of the main character, Piet Hanema. He is a red haired and a person with a close-set body; no taller than his wife, Angela. Angela is described as a delicate and charming wife who has a different freshness born of aristocratic self-possession. As they talk about Freddy Thorne, Angela said, “He thinks we’re a circle. A magic circle of heads to keep the night out. He told me he gets frightened if he doesn’t see us over a weekend. He thinks we’ve made church of each other” (14). Here, Angela is trying to prove their relation, which is much more protective. To do so, she brings the reference of church. As church is a holy and protective place, so their love to bound each other. Love and attachment is compared with the church and people’s dedication towards it. As we know from the next line that Piet never go to a real church nowadays. He tries to console his distracted heart by comparing erotic relevance with God like activities. When he sees the nakedness of Angela, he compares her with Eve, “Her throat wrists, and triangular bush appeared the pivots for some undeniable effort of flight, but like Eve on a portal she crouched in shame, stone” (16). What Piet concepts about Christ is, “Jesus was crucified on x-shaped cross which the church had to falsify because of the immodesty of the position. Christ had a groin. Not much made of His virginity: mentioned in the Bible at all” (29). In this way, he even doubts about the dead condition of Christ, bringing the reference of his physical position and his appetite for sex. Piet thinks masturbation and prayer as a similar activity as we don’t get god in front of as in prayer so to in masturbation. So he remembers his mistress’s naked breasts when he sits for prayer, “Prayer and masturbation had so been mingled in Piet’s habit that in hearing the benediction he pictured his mistress naked, a reflected sun pooled between her breasts, her prim chin

set, her slightly bulging green eyes gazing cleared” (29). Here, we can see how his activities are celebrating for his erotic desire.

When some of the couples celebrate a party to welcome one of their new neighbors, Freddy shouts, “The godamn gauges start spinning, the fucking pipes begin to break, and –what? Mother? The flag? Jesu christo? The last piece of ass you had?” (41). He positions the mother, national flag and Jesus Christ on similar stage with ass of a geisha. So here too, we are clear about the tendency of Tarbox people from their speech and activities. There are similar pages of lovemaking between couples and out of them there is a scene between the love making of Piet and Georgene that is quite erotic in reading as it says:

All love is a betrayal in that it flatters life. The love less man is best armed. A jealous god. She opened wide her mouth and drew his tongue in to a shapeless wet space; fluttering melted in to a forgetful encompassing; he felt lost and pulled back, alarmed. Her lips looked blurred and torn. The green of her eyes was deepened by his shadow [. . .]. (58)

Piet is here described as a ‘Dandy’. He compares each and every part of Georgene’s body with his own wife, Angela. He finds similar sunken paler nipples and uncovered, seemed to cry for protection. He finds more bone in her than Angela. The series of extra-marital affair goes on for several times where Georgene was in extremity of satisfaction which she missed from her husband, Freddy. When Piet worried about contraception once, she replied, “Didn’t Angela use Envoid yet? Welcome, to the post-pill paradise” (164). Here too, sex becomes paradise, which is now freer because they do not have to worry about conception as there was newly discovered system of using contraception before sex. This is the realistic touch of late Seventies when

people enjoyed the means of family planning. On the book self of Freddy, Piet sees the books written by Sigmund Freud, *Our Lady of the Flowers* and *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*. It shows how Freddy is conscious about the theories of Freud and adopts one of the theories of homosexuality. While Georgene asks for changing the position by going outdoors in the porch, Piet says, “Won’t we embarrass God? In reply Georgene says, “Haven’t you heard, God’s woman? Nothing embarrasses her” (64). After that there are many images of physical intercourse like, ships with a single destination, the little eclipsing clouds, burned gold in its tendrils masts and stern, a cannon discharge of iridescence, the new shoots coral in the birches etc.” (64).

As the whole novel goes around the periphery of Piet’s life, let’s dig out some of the secrets of his family life and its relevance to his eroticism. Piet’s parents were died in a highway accident the week before the Christmas of 1949 who were driving home to Grand Rapids from a Grange meeting. Piet has witnessed the shattered glass strewn across the road, which was at that time studying architects certificate. After the accident he felt unable to continue his study because of financial problem, “There was shuddering in his head he could not eliminate. Since this accident the world wore a slippery for Piet; he stood on the skin of things in a posture of a man testing newly formed ice., his head cocked for the warning crack, his spine curved to make himself light” (26). After that he brought up in a church where he met Angela. He could not console himself inside the church and left it after sometimes, “Prayer was an unsteady state of mind for him [. . .] He took church as an exciting, too full of light and music. He used to divert his mind and skimmed across several pieces of property that concerned him. “Grazed faces and limbs of women he knew, and darted from the image of his daughters to the memory of his parents, so unjustly and continuingly dead” (25). In this way, later too, he tries to fulfill the parental love by seeking the

outlet from the frustrate mentality. Sex becomes the only outlet for him to console himself from the nightmare of his parents' death. Even in sex, he seeks the maternity of his mother and says, "I only liked married women. They reminded me of my mother" (466). Here we get Oedipus complex in him. Just like Oedipus, he tries to find his dead mother in the guise of many married women. He even defines ego when he talks with Angela:

The ego tries to mediate between external reality and the id, which is our appetites. The ego carries all this bad news back and forth, but the id refuses to listen, and keeps trying to do whatever it wanted to do, even though the ego has turned its back. I do not explain it very well, because I don't understand it, but dreams are a way of letting out these suppressions, which mostly have to do with sex, which has to do with your parents, who have become superego and keep tormenting the ego from the other side. (231)

Piet, here, expresses how he indulged in sexual activities, as he does not get superego to control his id, means he lost his parents early. He describes how a frustrated person can adopt a way of sex to lead a normal life. As the researcher defines frustration and already said sex can both be a cause and outlet from frustration. The latter one works here in the context of Piet and his frustration. Piet always feels an orphan and lacks the care of his elders as he says, "I'm dying. I'm thirty-four-years old fly-by-night contractor. I have no sons, my wife snubs me, my friends are all my wife's freineds, I'm an orphan, a pariah" (230). Piet frequently reads Sigmund Freud as he has shown reading "*The Interpretation of Dreams*". On the basis of his reading, he has adopted sex as a proper way to thrust off his feeling of being alone. As he is shown as regular party-goer, we can say that he is easing himself on the gathering and purgates his

frustration of being alone. When Angela asks him, “Don’t I give you enough sex?” in answer he says, “there is no such implication, I gave you more than you want” (232). This shows they have misunderstanding to each other as one needs more where as other already thinks it is too much. Angela never enjoys in sex as she says, “I know. But I don’t enjoy knowing it. I don’t want to go to bed with anybody. I don’t feel I’m woman really. I’m a kind of cheerful neuter with this sex appeal tacked on as a kind of joke” (233). It proves that Angela has no interest in sexual activities and Piet is always in accelerating mode of it. So, they are heading towards two opposite horizons and widening the chasm of misunderstanding. Angela has a strange behavior, she even does not see a dream but just like to sleep by saying she just need delicious sleep. What it indicates sleeping without dream is, death. She wants to rest for an eternal slumber, “I love sleep, just delicious nothing sleep. I’d love not to wake up” (233). What does she mean by not to wake up means she need calmness and uniformity in life just after death. The more Piet indulges with Tarbox wives, the more passive nesses come to Angela. It shows that she is introvert. She suppresses her anxiety of infidelity of her husband and tries to be aloof from it. Is it a strange psychological upset or what else? Once she confesses that she is being jealous as Piet engaged with other women. Does frustration bring passiveness in sex just opposite to Piet for Angela? Yes, of course, it is proved that frustration has two dimension related with sex. Frustration makes Angela suppress her desire and be calm in sexuality to punish her dandy husband.

Piet and Angela have two daughters but no son. Ruth and Nancy both have great respect and attachment with their father. On her birthday, Piet had given a hamster to Ruth which used to sleep all day and ran in its exercise wheel at night. It has quite symbolic meaning. Piet liked such an animal which is similar to his

activities i.e. being active at night. Nancy always sucks her thumb which symbolizes her desire of phallus which she lacks. Piet always seems conscious about the life of his daughters and cares much about their desire and satisfaction. When Nancy heard about the death of Kennedy baby, she brings the reference of earlier died hamster and says both of them will go to heaven. But Piet always seems escapist whenever there is the reference of death. When Ruth asks, “When will he go to heaven?” Piet does not know what to answer as he himself remains blindfolded from this aspect of life, “Nancy’s anxious curiosity searched out something he had buried in himself and he disliked the child for seeking it” (90). It means he only celebrates life-enhancing force by forgetting the thanatic force of life which is too quite essential and indispensable from one’s life. There are many references in text where Piet feels satisfaction and lightness whenever he hears the news of death to other.

John Updike’s *Couples* is a story of the angst of a young man. Piet has multiple women to play with; Foxy Whitman is one of them. She is sexually voluptuous who always lures Piet to embrace her. Piet, too, cannot control his passion and tries to manage their union by any hooks or crooks. Foxy has come from a reputed family, who has wealthy husband, Ken. She married to Ken as a result of her first romance with him which ended in a flurry of misery. Foxy accuses Ken as not a loving husband who cares much to his business than her. She says Ken used her as a loving object but not as a wife. Ken cares her as an owner cares his object, “I’m once a week whore for all these years” (227). It proves that her way of adopting Piet as a lover is not unfair as every human being has freedom of life for happiness and satisfaction. She is too passionate who does not even let behind to copulate inside a bathroom during a party with her lover.

After analyzing the relationship between Ken and Foxy, let's dig out more about the extra-marital affairs between Piet and Foxy to prove the mythologization of Eros in *Couples*. As Piet frequently makes love to Foxy, he makes different excuses to depart from Angela. Once he reached to Foxy in hurry and says, "I wanted to bring you a flower but it seemed too urgent so I just brought you myself" (251). Foxy answers, "Of course. What a nice present" (251). Foxy was just passing one month of having conception. The child in her womb just developing which is liked by Piet so much and remarks, "I love your maternity cloths. I love the way your belly is so hard and pushes at me" (249). Further she expresses her erotic desire "I am getting veins in my legs" (249). When she asks, does she look attractive in big belly? Piet answers quite wisely by saying she is the earth which is similar to goddess. Here too, he worships the eroticism by bringing the reference of earth and goddess and the quality of sprouting seed within herself for the sake of humanity. In this way, the unfaithfulness to Angela and closeness to Foxy is going on in rapid pace. Piet and Angela have coldness in relation as Piet is so much narcissistic. What he desires is ass. As Updike explaining his features writes, "His mind plunged unresisted in to this truth: nothing matters but ass. Nothing is so good. He said "A sleeping woman" why sleeping? Because when she is sleeping, he added, she becomes all women" (267). Piet likes to have a sleeping woman who he finds perfect to play. We can similarise his dead mother whom he wants to remember as he has the visual of dead mother lying in the bed of the City Hospital in his mind. Piet confesses his deep attachment with his dead parents, especially with his mother. Once as he had a nightmare the narrator murmurs, "Parents were twin flecks of mica squeezed in granite. No light touched them into light. The eternal loss of light. Bite down on death. Hope of Heaven drains the sky. Patient parents thumbing home seeds in Piet had planted a tree

whose fruit he had fed to women. The voracious despair of women had swallowed God” (287). It shows that the ultimate truth and god he views in women, means, he is praying to the god whenever he loves a woman. He is consoling his heavy heart of losing his parents with the healing medicine of physical warmth. From the above lines, we can not say Piet is totally unaware about his duty and his dream of his parents; rather we can guess he has adopted a wrong way to achieve his goal in life. As there is the theory of adopting one of the ways to console us from frustration, Piet has chosen sex as a reservoir to get out the anxiety.

When Foxy went far from the city to meet his parents, she frequently sent letter to Piet by mentioning the difficulties of not being together and with the desire of union. She mentions the relationship with Ken as just a showy one which lacks unity and warmth though they are together. In one of her letters she writes, “My whole house breathes of you – the smell of planed wood is you, and the salt wind is you, and the rumpled sheets whose scent is sweetest and subtlest- of –us-is you” (291). This shows she wants to be near to Piet forever. Piet, too, by reading the series of letters, seems changed and seen profound about the new mode in life. The latest letter is quite emotive and serious to Piet as it says:

May be men like new women while women perform best with men they know. There is something of trust in this- there really is, whenever you spread your legs, the flitting fear you are going to hurt- and something of sad fact that with women personality counts for less in sex than with men. In actual sex as opposed to all the preamble. A dull familiar trustworthy tool is all we ask. Female genital are extremely stupid, which gets us in to many a fix our heads would let us out of.

(294)

Foxy was too much obsessed with Piet that even she mistakes nearly to call her husband 'Piet' rather than 'Ken'. Ken knows that he has not made his wife pregnant and rarely makes love to her. As Foxy says, "Of course, I am so safe. He pierces me saying, you can't impregnate the pregnant, you can't kill the dead. Compared to you it is mechanical but then Ken's career is to demonstrate how mechanical life is" (295). As Piet always used to bring reference of God during love making, Foxy too brings the reference of god on her letter. She writes:

Do you really think we bore god? You once told me God was bored with America, which is to say, you despise the faith your fear of death thrusts upon me. You should be a woman. The woman is the newspaper holding a dead child in her arms knows god has struck her. Life is a game of lost and found. Unapologetic love. Love. (295)

These lines clear that the concept of God they have is not similar. Piet always thinks America is disgraced by God as it has lots of difficulties relating family and social mutualism where as Foxy feels God all around and in each and every activity. It proves that for Piet God is already dead who shows no reaction at present to release the tension. He became atheist when he faced the merciless death of his parents in a road accident.

In reunion after a long separation, Foxy comes with agreement of her mother to divorce and be near to Piet. She worked hard to pursue her mother for this act. Here too, Foxy said Piet only can be a perfect God to her who fulfills her all dreams and desires. Once in a party at night, they cannot control themselves and make love inside a bathroom. At that time Foxy's breasts are described as, "Her bare breasts giant circles. A Christian slave stripped to be tortured" (347). The moment of bending for easiness for Piet is compared with a Christian slave ready to get punished. Why there

are always such references of god and Christianity during sex? Of course, to hide their cry for God and Christianity which was casting aside because of newly developed science and technology in late 1970's. As they have the psychology of prayer for god imprinted, people enchant Christian hymn during their sexual acts. At the last part of the novel Piet and Foxy again celebrates their Eros. At this scene, foxy sucks the genital of Piet. Updike remarks here as:

Mouths, it came to Piet, are noble. They move in the brain's court. We set out genitals mating down below like peasants, but when the mouth condescends, mind and body marry. To eat another is sacred. I love thee, Elizabeth, thy petalled rankles, thy priceless casket of nothing lined with slippery buds. (482)

This proves the tendency of psychosexual development and oral stage which a child lacks and prefers to have even he/she has grown up. Foxy remembers all the incidents and confesses as, "I am a ruined woman" but Piet tries to console her, "sex is like money, only too much is enough" (482). On the continuation of the relationship, Piet once expresses, "We are all exiles who need to bathe in the irrational" (485). It means since the fall of humanity from paradise, people feel themselves irrational and problem of having a harmonious life. What they are doing now, is nothing but acting to be there on the distant past where was harmony and peace as Adam and Eve enjoyed. The thirst of mind and body is just to fulfill what a person lacks after fall. In this way, Piet defines the lost of bucolic paradise with full of virtues and tries to fulfill it during his life through sex.

Couples echoes the voice of Modern American tendencies through the different couples. Now the researcher goes through another set of couples to dig out the eroticism and its celebration. In this set too, Piet comes as a protagonist and the

company of celebration to him is Georgene Thorne. As we know that there is no serious relationship except sleeping for couples of minutes, there is the touch of religion with the reference to love. As we know that Georgene's husband Freddy Throne, a dentist, is a homosexual and has no care for his wife, Piet searches the right partner to quench his abundant physical thirst. Georgene explains the freedom of sex as there is the recent access of pills at that time. As Piet asks her of abusing the god in open sex. Her reply is strange as she says, "God's a woman. Nothing embarrasses her" (64). Piet really enjoys the company of her as there is no barrier in their relationship. When both of them become ready, Piet says, "I'm Jesus. But... Shouldn't we do something about making a little boy?"(105). The preference of floor rather than bed and comparison to Jesus proves the erotic celebration in *Couples*.

Updike has the people of Tarbox to act in *Couples* as if this were not complex enough. Here, Piet is the lead player where he searches for the ideal woman who will allay his fear of death and his longing for the infinite to conquer many women and violate the secret of the infinite hidden in Eros. Apart from Foxy and Angela he sleeps with many Tarbox women. Foxy writes Piet in a letter from the Caribbean, "when you desire to be the world's husband, what right do I have to make you my own?" (497). Even Angela assigns the role to him when, after a rare lovemaking between them, rejects he compliments with the remarks, "I am sure [. . .] we're all alike down there" (218). The interchangeability of the characters that observed in terms of scientific models and aesthetic strategy becomes promiscuity and shows how the couples together as composite protagonist seek to force meaning from existence through indiscriminate and cumulative sexuality.

Angela as the inaccessible goal of passion is light, Foxy is "lit [. . .] from within, like the ashen mantle of a lamp by adultery" (228). The moments in which

people are merely together often described in terms of a special light. Only times of loneliness and death are dark. The writer allows his characters to believe reconcile spirit and flesh, good and evil, as a substitute for the incarnation. Piet quoting Freddie Thorne articulates the compulsive togetherness of the couples, "He thinks we're a circle. A magic circle of heads to keep the light out [. . .]. He thinks we made a church of each other" (14).

All of Piet's women are mothers; Angela and Foxy are endowed with an eternal wisdom that Piet fears and respects. For example, "Piet still felt with Angela a superior power seeking through her to employ him" (488). Sleeping with Foxy during her pregnancy brings Piet close to this wise maternal force. He is comforted, she is substitute for his own death mother, and sexually satisfied at the same time and receives thereby a double defense against loneliness and the thought of death.

In one facet of his being, Piet is a courtesy lover, he is a secret dandy, he and Georgene and later he and Foxy develop a ritual courtesy that replaces marriage. Foxy writes him after their affair is found out, "Your virtue is obsolete. I can imagine you as somebody's squire" (125). It seems narcissism that mistake for love. It is apparent in the Hanema marriage; even though they are husband and wife, Angela's aloofness and Piet's blunt advances create artificial obstacles that are attempts to prolong the passion. They do not comprehend the basis of a sound union. Piet and Foxy have the hindrances that are a part of any affair. They are kept apart by a necessary secrecy and caution; and their passion thrives on the desire caused by separation. Both of them indulge the narcissistic pleasures of the affair. It has an excitement lacking in the marriage of both. After the affairs come to light and Piet is alone he finds, "what he felt, remembering Foxy was nostalgia for adultery itself its adventure, the tension of its hidden strings the new landscapes it make us master" (475). Even Freddie Thorne

shows a gross caricature of the narcissistic pattern. He lusts for Angela and convinces her to sleep with him, but when he finally has the chance, he is impotent. He is fascinated by the concept of passion but cannot share in an authentic love relationship. When Angela falls asleep and Freddie masturbates in bed beside her, he embodies the narcissistic absurdity that Eros can become.

Narcissism leads to another phenomenon, the sensation of self-identity found in Eros. The writer puts his view that a man in love, confronting his beloved, seems to be in the presence of his own spirit his self translated into another mode of being. This effect is the weakest in *Couples* but it is frequently implied in the light imagery. Piet's lovemaking with Georgene early in the text is tinged with the sense of self-identity. Updike later accents the familiarity Piet experiences with Foxy, a feeling that give him confidence in himself. In many scenes he frames Piet's homecomings to her in angles and diffusion of light. Yet after the affair is uncovered, Piet confesses to Angela, "Being with you is heaven" and later he begs, "Don't make me leave you. You're the guards of my soul. I will be damned eternally" (450).

It is already shown how the Eros and Thanatos are reflected in *Couples*. Piet seeks to avoid death by losing himself in the passionate love of a woman because it has the fight from death as its objects and not the true encounter with another being. He only betrays the continuing intensity of the death wish. Piet attempts to overcome death by the conquest of many women. But the variety and exhausting athleticism of his seductions are in themselves death-dealing. For example, when he makes love to Bea Guerin, "He experienced orgasm strangely, as a crisis less osmosis, an ebbing of light above the snow-shrouded roofs. Death no longer seemed dreadful" (372). But certainly the stress upon death in the novel as a whole is as strong as the concentration upon sex. In fact, one is tempted to sensationalize its sexual aspects that *Couples* is

really a death-ridden novel, and the sexuality assumes relevance only in its relationship to death. Piet tries to break his nightmare that magnificently written five page passages culminating in the catalogue of ways to die, evoking sexual memories and at last reaches over his sleeping wife for relief. Scene after scene throughout the novel establishes the connection of sex and death: John F. Kennedy's assassination followed by a typically risqué Tarbox party, Foxy's abortion of the baby conceived with Piet, John Ong's slow death by cancer accompanied by his wife's insistent sexual urges. It is most vulgarly expressed by Freddie Throne, who is aroused by thoughts of dying and tells Angela, "Death is screwed by God. It will be delicious" (409).

The frequent and wild love-making between Piet and Foxy toward the last part of the novel in the Tarbox apartment is crucial event in *Couples*. Considering it in the light of myth, the scene is so important because it represents a final stage of demythologizing and at once the emergence of a new reality. First their weekend of intense sex is a kind of catharsis. Through the emotional and physical exhaustion, Piet and Foxy purge themselves of the effect of suffering that their earlier passion and guilt have caused. Updike comments, "We are all exiles who need to bathe in the irrational" (485). Our fundamental anxiety is that we do not exist or will cease to exist in such a mood of being exile and lack of the grace of God.

Piet and Foxy are different from other couples. After all, they marry and settle down in Lexington, where Piet becomes a building inspector. At this stage the writer describes, "Where gradually, among people like themselves, they have been accepted, as another couple" (522). One would like a more forceful and decisive denouement than this. But Updike is known for his conclusion and this one is artistically and morally apt. Piet and Foxy are different because their sexuality has broken the mold of common adultery and promiscuity. However sinfully and playfully they have found

their way to each other to a relationship that seems a configuration of celebrating infinite Eros. They are now free to enjoy without any obstacles and pretension, but how long it will last is the profound question as we know that our thought and feeling change immediately.

Finally, Piet and Foxy, as post-archetypal figures are distinctive because they are uniquely protestant. Its essence is with conviction not the kind projected by the rumored plan for the new congregational church of Tarbox, "The new building will not be a restoration but a modern edifice, a parabolic poured-concrete tent-shaped peaked like breaking wave" (505). It clears that as the new building can not restore the ancient values so does in their relation too, old family values and attachment is lost forever.

We meet it in the intuition and knowledge that there is no security anywhere, not even in the church, not in marriage, not in any world views or political structures; and yet in spite of all this, the protestant escapes despair by believing in a sacred structure of reality. This attitude of faith is not identical with the autonomous secularism that otherwise informs the novel.

In *Couples*, other minor characters also demoralize and demythologize their hidden Eros during their celebration. While Marcia and Harold make illicit relation to each other, Marcia says, "My breasts are so small" (130). In reply Harold praises, "You have lovely breasts. Like Greek statues. Venus always has little breasts" (130). Here Harold feels playing with the Goddess of beauty while playing with Marcia. Does not it Demythologize Eros? Of course yes, otherwise how there can be a comparison to the breasts of goddess with the small breast of a woman, rather than comparing to a teen age girl. At that time, there should be the tendency of resembling religion in each and every activity as they have God deeply imprinted inside their

psyche that has just overcome by sex. While talking about man's first preference to woman's breasts, Harold says, "Our first loving object is the mother's breast" (130). It proves that the detachment from mother's breasts always remain in the unconscious mind of man which he tries to fulfill through any woman he gets to exploit.

While Freddy talks to Marcia by referring to his likeness to Angela, he compares Angela with heavenly creature. So ideal and perfect in herself whom he always desires to have "she's my ideal. I idolize her. I look at her ass and I think heaven" (167). Is not it demythologizing of Eros to compare a female ass to the heaven? When Marcia questions about his desire of having woman being impotence, he says, "To fuck is human, to be blown, divine" (167). That means Freddy wants to be divine by adopting newness in sex. He prefers to read sex novels and watch pornography for the outlet of his hidden Eros. In doing so, he feels superior in sexuality in comparison to his friends. He finds himself divine in his activity. Freddy talking with Marcia says, "In the western world there are only two comical things: the Christian church and naked women" (165). While Marcia asks, "Why Christian church?" He replies that worship is all for deception or for purgation of our sinful acts. There is no devotion in doing so. So it is comical just like to caricature and make fun to others. He applies such comical logic in his life as he always utter "Jesus", "For Fuck's sweet sake" while speaking.

Symbol and Imagery

Updike has always sung the praises of heterosexual love. He has described the physical act with a rapturous and voluptuous language. In fact his explicit descriptions of the sexual act and his use of the slang, dirty words have drawn a great deal of criticism and comments. Here we must remember that sexuality and obscenity often disguises itself as sexual frankness. The moral dimension is consistently emphasized.

Using the direct approach, Updike has recorded how present day American society thinks, speaks and acts in relation to sex. Sex is both central to man's existence and is one of the better things of life.

Couples is full of sexual imagery and symbols. Sexuality and obscenity function in the novel as vehicle of truth. Detailed descriptions of sexual intercourses unlike so many similar passages in *Couples* are not included merely for their own sake. Rather everything that exists is good. The sex act is described as a welling up of innocent joy and as an occasion when the weight of guilt make itself known. Sexuality in this novel is neither downgraded nor idealized. It is kept there as a part of everyday life which every human being must come to term with but indirectly supports to demythologize the Eros.

The language used in *Tarbox* is the language dedicated to truth and fun. In *Couples*, there is the constant use of the four lettered obscene words. Sex and candy have become assimilated to each other in *Tarbox*. After the abortion, as Freddy drives away taking Foxy home, Piet looks downwards and sees, "A condom and candy wrapper lay paired in the exposed gutter" (422). It is quite symbolic and it has the implication that sex like a candy or food is a necessary biological need of human beings. When Foxy finds that she is pregnant, she remarks that it is a way of seeking knowledge. The perverse and desperate sexuality of *Tarbox* is the results of the illusion that man is embarked on the quest to discover an original sexual wholeness lost by the fall in to the flesh. After making love to Foxy, Piet cries, "I'm in the pit" (305). Life is a pit of sadness out of which there can be no escape except through death, though people try to recover their lost innocence wither by pretending they can enter post-pill paradise or by traveling to the Virgin islands.

Couples displays the catastrophic social effect when disorder is regarded as the norm because man has usurped the place of the divine. When faith is absent and the responsibility for good and evil in the public is not recognized, then fate and chance become the sole gods. For instance when Georgene invites Piet to make love to her on the sun porch, he asks, “Won’t we embarrass God?” Her reply is that God is a woman and that nothing embarrasses her. (64) Also, as the congregational church burns, Piet explains to the minister that even if they save the shell, the walls are so weakened that will have to tear it down anyway. The minister insists that the church is people, human beings and not just a building. The minister’s humanistic emphasis misses Piet’s awareness that we are God’s temple in which the spirit dwells. The burning of the church signifies the end of his life. The carpentry work of this edifice cannot be erected, although a different building may be built.

Closely associated with sex and religion is death. In *Couples*, the researcher views a progressive delineation of how death triumphs over life whenever there is disorder in the universe. Also, the characters in *Couples* defy death—they are shown as being no longer afraid of death. We also see how the social groups ignore morality and spend them in copulation and shun the outside world. Not even death has much power over their hearts. On the night of President Kennedy’s death when the whole nation is mourning, the couples celebrate it by holding a party. Piet Hanema, the antique loving craftsman, assuages his fear of death in the act of love. There seems to be a subconscious symbolic desire in the Piet to get back to the womb. Foxy Whitman, Piet’s mistress, who carries his child, is depicted as soulless, sexless and scientific, while Freddy Throne, the dentist, who helps to abort the child, is atheistic, death –worshipping, and sterile. John Ong, the Korean nuclear physicist who dies in the book, is the symbol of the fate of background cultures exposed to a western

technology, that they can master readily enough, but only at the cost of self-destruction.

Death pervades Tarbox. *Couples* begins in April, the season of renewal in nature as to the renewal in the relationship of Piet, Angela, Ken and Foxy. But the renewal in the relationship between and among the couples is not like resurrection through death as given in the Bible rather it is a constant change in relation. In this way the state of relationship goes on changing with the change of the likes and dislikes to a person.

IV. Conclusion

John Updike in *Couples* renders the vivid characteristics of demythologized Eros through the medium of specific characters like Piet, Foxy, Georgene, Angela, Harold, Freddy Throne and Marcia. These characters play with the sensitive parts of life which are: sex, lust, physical appeal and unplanned erotic desires. Updike describes a world where God is lacking, a community without devotion to the partner. The adulterous affairs among a group of indifferent suburban couples mirror the image of ultra-modern society where morality lacks desperately. In one way or the other, the narrative techniques and the characteristics of the major or minor characters show that Eros is demythologized in John Updike's *Couples*.

The entire story of the novel circles around the periphery of Piet Hanema. He seems here a true representative of ultra modern American people who takes love and sex as a means of entertainment and time pass, violating the traditional rituals and norms. He celebrates with Tarbox wives and seeks to conquer many women and thus exploits the secret of infinite hidden Eros.

Just contrarily, Piet's wife Angela seems passive in sexuality and physical urges. She really presents herself as an angel, who inferiorizes the minor act of sex. She seems fed up with the worthless repeating activity of sexuality. Presenting herself like an angelic character, she even discards the desire of her husband. For the fulfillment of his erotic desire, Piet is forced to pursue and adopt third person. He even does not let Foxy to advance inside a bathroom during a party at night.

Foxy, a pregnant woman, seems connotative of vixen-always lures Piet to sleep and caress her. Ken, the husband of Foxy, seems a practical man who is mostly engages in business-oriented activities and after money rather than to the desires and happiness of his wife. This paves the way for Foxy to lead through Piet. Both of them found

themselves as two unquenched wanderers and made the heaven of pleasure by indulging in sexual activities.

Couples describes a modern purgatory, a world from which God has withdrawn, a community without grace or light or love. It is a story of various adulterous affairs among a group of affluent suburban couples. The prosperous young couples of Tarbox find the comforts that religion used to provide the alleviation of one's fear of death, the sense of community, the transfiguration of the world not in the Church, but in their relations with each other.

Their word games, their parties, are the new rituals and ceremonies. They find their sacrament is adultery. The binding force of the new religion is not love but sex. The community is united not by faith or the Host, but by the orifices of the body.

In this way, these all relevancies and references to Death, God and Church here are just to resemble the present futile sex act with the divine one to celebrate their infinite Eros. The characters in the novel, the images used in their conversation, the discussion of goddess and myths, Christ, Adam and Eve and all in all the upside down of myth perception these all create in readers mind prove that Eros is demythologized in Updike's *Couples*.

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