

# EROS AND THANATOS IN JULIAN BARNES' *THE SENSE OF AN ENDING* – A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY

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## ***Abstract***

*The novel The Sense of an Ending written by Julian Barnes focused sex and death, through the characters of Anthony Webster and Adrian Finn. This novel runs around the death of four characters. Tony Webster is the narrator of this novel. The title of the novel Eros and Thanatos indicate love and death. It is a Greek terms and Sigmund Freud was the founder of this terms. Eros means love, but in this novel it is mentioned as sex not love. This Sigmund's theory resembled with the characters of Miss. Veronica Ford and Mrs. Sarah Ford. In this novel Julian Barnes clearly depicted the struggle of being woman in the modern society in psychological aspect.*

**Key Words:** *sex and death, Eros and Thanatos, love and death, struggle, psychological aspect.*

## **I. Introduction**

The libido in the individual is part of a more generalized drive which the later Freud called Eros (the Greek word for 'love'), which roughly means the life instinct, the opposite of which is Thanatos (the Greek word for 'death') which roughly means the death instinct a controversial notion (*Beginning Theory*, 93).

British literature refers to literature associated with the United Kingdom, Isle of Man, Channel Islands as well as to literature from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, prior to the formation of the United Kingdom. By far the largest part of British Literature is written in the English Language, but there are bodies of written works in Latin, Welsh, Scottish, Gaelic, Scots, Cornish, Manx, Jerriais, Guernesiasis and other languages. Northern Ireland had a literary tradition in English, Ulster, Scots and Irish. Irish writers have also played an important part in the development of English – language literature.

The English Renaissance was perhaps said to be England's Golden Age. The literary giants during the Renaissance were William Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser, Samuel Johnson, Sir Philip Sidney, Christopher Marlowe, Francis Bacon and John Donne. Hudson says: A history of English literature has a national as well as personal character and interest. It is not only the work done by a number of separate English writers; it is also an account of great body of literature which in its totality is to be regarded as the production of the genius of the English people.

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Everything that for good or evil has entered into the making of their nation's life has also entered into the texture of literature. Ordinary English history is their nation's biography; its literature is its autobiography. In studying English literature according to the chronological method of history, let us always try to think of it as the progressive revelation of the mind and spirit of the English language (*An Outline History of English Literature*, 5-6)

Julian Barnes was one whose contribution to the British Literature was wonderful. He often employs his techniques associated with post modern writing, unreliable narrators, a self-conscious linguistic style, an inter textual blending in different narrative forms, which serve to the process of literary creation, the gap between the experience and language, and the subjectivity of truth and reality. He played with the language, style and form. Barnes' themes are always serious, poignant and heart-felt. He frequently addresses the nature of love, particularly its dark side. Barnes' fictions were grounded in psychological realism. *The Sense of an Ending* is an eleventh novel for Julian Barnes. The title of the novel suggested, this is a subject on which Barnes had not yet written himself out. That might be inevitable. Barnes is sixty five years old man and his former friend name was Martin Amis who also committed suicide. So Barnes might be connected this story with his former friend. This novel focused sex and death, through the characters of Anthony Webster and Adrian Finn. This novel runs around the death of four characters. Tony Webster is the narrator of this novel.

The title of the novel Eros and Thanatos indicate love and death. It is a Greek terms and Sigmund Freud was the founder of this terms. Eros means love, but in this novel it is mentioned as sex not love. Because the main characters in this novel considered love only for their sexual hunger.

Anthony Webster is a protagonist of this novel, who was known as Tony. When the novel began, Tony Webster was in his sixties with a poor memory. Though he had a poor memory, he tried to recollect his childhood days. He first started to describe about his school friends. They were Colin and Alex, Central London. After their holidays, the school opened. The fourth member joined in their group and his name was Adrian Finn. Tony described him as "a tall and shy boy, who initially kept his eyes down and his mind to himself". But the four friends were in the opposite direction. Alex wanted to read Russel and Wittgenstein. Adrian had read Camus and Nietzsche. Tony Webster had read George Orwell and Aldous Huxley. Colin likes to read Baudelaire and Dostoevsky. One afternoon their English master Phil Dixon, handed out a poem with no title, date or author's name and gave them ten minutes to study it, then asked for their responses. First he asked Adrian Finn. He answered "Eros and Thanatos". He continued "Sex and Death..... or love and death, if you prefer... And what ensues from that conflict sir". Then Tony said "I thought it was a poem about a barn owl, sir" (TSOAE, 6). This was the difference between Adrian and other friends.

After the weekend, the headmaster announced, that a student of the same school named Robson was passed away. He said that he committed suicide during the weekend. The four friends went in search for the reason for his suicide. Finally they found out the reason that one girl became pregnant because of Robson in the same school. Robson was unable to accept the responsibilities of that girl and the baby. So Robson had committed suicide. After came to know about the reason, Adrian said "Thanatos wins again". Alex told him that "Robson wasn't exactly Eros-

and – Thanatos material” (TSOAE, 13). After a long analysis of Robson’s death they came to the conclusion, that “it would be considered philosophical in an arithmetical sense of term” (TSOAE, 14).

Tony Webster had a girlfriend called as Veronica Mary Elizabeth Ford. She was reading Spanish. She liked poetry and her father was a civil servant. The narrator described her as “a mid-brown hair to her shoulders, blue-grey eyes behind blue-framed spectacles and a quick yet withholding smile” (TSOAE, 20). One weekend in the vacation, Veronica invited Tony Webster to meet her family. First she introduced her father Mr. Ford and then she introduced her brother Jack who was easier to read. Then she introduced her mother Mrs. Sarah Ford, who always ignored all the by-play around her, she just asked about Tony’s studies and then suddenly she disappeared into the kitchen. A week later, Tony introduced Veronica to his three friends’ gang. He watched how his friends reacted towards Veronica. Veronica felt very happy to be with Adrian. This made Tony very irritated. In the second year of their college days, Veronica was little drunk, and she was with Tony at Chislehurst. Veronica spends her night with Tony on his bed. The next morning they finished their tea, and the narrator described that incident as “Veronica kissed me nearer the corner of my lips than the centre, and the left. In my mind this was the beginning of the end of our relationship” (TSOAE, 35). After their broke up also Veronica slept with Tony. After that Veronica started to argue with Tony about their relationship. Tony replied her “I didn’t have anything to feel guilty about: we were both near-adults, responsible for our own actions, which had freely entered into a relationship which hadn’t worked out. No one had not pregnant, no one had not killed” (TSOAE, 39). Then he left from Chislehurst. In this place Veronica reflects Cecile Sauvage writings in *The Second Sex*: When the woman loves, she must forget her own personality. This is a law of nature. A woman does not exist without a master. Without a master, she is scattered bouquet (*The Second Sex*, 773).

After few days, Tony came to Bristol for his final year. He concentrated only on his work, he didn’t consider about veronica. By that time, Adrian again entered into the story. Tony said “he was writing a letter to ask my permission to go out with Veronica” (TSOAE, 41). He refused to answer the letter. After the exams, Tony suspected Veronica, whether she might have said to Adrian about himself. And then he decided, the two of them were now out of his life forever. Meanwhile, Tony write a letter to Adrian, he wrote that “I wasn’t at all clear myself what I meant by ‘damage’. My mother-in-law didn’t think much of me but was at least candid about it, as she was about most things,...”(TSOAE 44-45). Tony didn’t expect any reply from Adrian and he moved away from Bristol.

After some days Tony heard the news of Adrian’s Death. He Committed suicide. Barnes showed him as coward man. Even though he really loved Sarah, because of his fear he was unable to take the responsibilities of his love and his son. He had a fear on society, because Sarah was 40 years old woman but he was less than half of her age. Perhaps Tony Webster was in the place of Adrian means, he simply moved away from that situation and he will start a new life. This is a difference between Tony Webster and Adrian Finn. Tony was unable to find the reason for the death of Adrian.

Tony realized that his ugly letter urged Adrian to consult Veronica’s mother Mrs. Sarah ford. They started the secret relationship and the child was born to them as a mentally ill child. There is an accumulation. He was unable to take the responsibilities of the child and the mother. He felt unrest. Because of his dread, he was committed suicide. After came to know about this news, Tony felt unrest and he felt guilty. The novel ended here.

This novel ‘The Sense of an Ending’ entirely reflected Simon De Beauvoir’s theory in *The Second Sex*. The man can easily engage in casual sex that at least calms his physical needs and is good for his morale. But a woman proposed creating houses where woman could go and find ‘sexual relief’. The solution of women picking up a partner for a night or an hour assuming that the woman, endowed with a strong temperament and having overcome all her inhibitions, can consider it without disgust – is far more dangerous for her than for the male. A man has little to fear from the woman he takes home; a little vigilance is enough. It is not same for the woman who lets a man into her house (*The Second Sex*, 819 – 820).

This Sigmund’s theory resembled with the characters of Miss. Veronica Ford and Mrs. Sarah Ford. In this novel Julian Barnes clearly depicted psychological struggle of being woman in the modern society.

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