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Professor Watts

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All Is Fair in Love in "War"

Love has always been a complicated concept. The battlefield of love is difficult, and heartbreaking to navigate. Members of the Bloomsbury Circle in the 1900s would have felt the complications that come along with love. The Bloomsbury Circle was a literary group known for its promiscuity along with some of its well-known members such as Virginia Woolf (Shone). Mary Hutchinson was an honorary part of the Bloomsbury Circle and entered into an affair with Clive Bell (Beechey). Her short story "War," published in a 1917 edition of *The Egoist* follows a woman named Jane who is taking part in an extramarital affair, mirroring Hutchinson's own life. This story uses the idea of appearance versus reality to explore the convoluted nature of love, and everyone's search desire for a love that is real.

Jane wants to know whether or not she really is in love with Mr. Givener, or if it is all in her head. At the beginning of the novel, there is this fixation on the way things appear. The word 'looked' used fifteen times throughout the story, eleven of these occurring at the beginning of the story. She describes the way Mr. Givener looks, and how things seem when they are together. However, she doesn't trust herself, and instead writes to her friend Sabine in order to find the truth. The catalyst for this questioning of her love for Mr. Givener seems to stem from the conversation they have. When asked if he was "in love with himself," Mr. Givener replies: "I have never been in love with any one in any grand sense—but I suppose you and I are

civilized enough not to believe in a such a thing?” (Hutchinson 170). This brings up the question of whether or not love is a real thing, and if Jane is even experiencing love in this situation. A question that Hutchinson tries to answer throughout the story. Is it possible to be truly in love with someone, or is love just a figment of our imagination?

The last half of the story contains very few uses of ‘looked’ or any other variation on look. It would seem that she stopped basing her ideas solely off of how things appear, and is supposedly seeing things as they really are. This comes after Sabine comes to visit her. They talk about her emotions, and Sabine tells her Giniver is just using her and it doesn’t mean anything. Since Jane doesn’t trust her own emotions, she believes her. Presumably already in a loveless marriage, it would make sense that she is searching for love and doesn’t want to waste her time on someone who isn’t going to give that to her. It is no longer enough for her to go off of how things appear. Everything appears to be fine, and going well. Now she needs to *know* for sure.

When talking to Sabine, Jane repeats the phrase “what I want to know...” or a slight variation of that question multiple times (Hutchinson 171). This causes ‘know’ to be the most frequently used word in the story, besides the characters names. On top of this, ‘know’ is used more frequently in the last half of the story, directly opposing ‘looked’. This shows her shift from basing her love off of how things appear, and now needing to know for sure whether what she is feeling is real. It goes back to the idea of whether it is even possible to be in love. She says to Sabine, “Do we make of intimacy a melodrama out of our toppling imaginations? All that the poets have said about love, is it a reality or a dream, an invention, because we become after all a little blasé?” (Hutchinson 171). Wondering if it is even possible to feel the way she is

feeling, or if she has imagined the whole thing. Having only the appearance of love to go off of, she does not trust herself and goes to Sabine who she sees as all-knowing in the realm of love.

Sabine is a complicated character in herself. She has remained unattached and swears that this is the life to live by. She lives in Paris and goes from one love to another, just coming and going as she pleases. This is why Jane would see her as such a knowledgeable source when it comes to love. However, when Jane is telling her the experiences she's had with Mr. Giniver, and the way she feels when she is with him, Sabine doesn't know what that feels like. She describes them as "frivolities," where "never entered this fastidious intellectualism" (Hutchinson 171). It is as she is pondering this that her feelings for Jane manifest themselves. In all her relationships, Sabine has never experienced more than a superficial connection. When she looks at Jane, she suddenly sees the capacity for such a relationship wondering "what sort of experience it would be to tap her moods" (Hutchinson 171). This leads to a "sharp physical thrill" and her sudden desire to have Jane come to Paris with her (Hutchinson 171). Sabine also desires this connection that Jane is supposedly feeling with Mr. Giniver, and she believes that she could feel it with Jane. It is for this reason that she tells Jane that this love is all in her head, and Giniver is just using her.

It is unclear whether any of this is actually true, but Jane believes her. It is at this point that the word 'looked' drops in usage and is only used occasionally to describe the way Mr. Giniver looks on their next meeting. Taking Sabine's word to heart, Jane is cold to him. She has this hope that she will find the love that she is looking for in Paris with Sabine. The desire for this love is still there, and she is still searching for it, but she realizes that she will not find it with Giniver and decides not to waste her time. The only reason she believed this was because of

what Sabine told her. Knowing that Sabine was motivated by jealousy and her own desire for such a connection, begs the question was she telling the truth about Mr. Giniver?

Evidence from the text would suggest that Mr. Giniver did actually have a genuine interest if perhaps, not love for Jane. When he comes to see her, he is extremely appalled by Jane's sudden change in behavior and was rendered speechless. However, it is important to note that he began the whole conversation by saying they were "too civilized ever to be in love" (Hutchinson 170). Therefore, it is actually quite possible that Giniver's motivations were purely selfish, and he was only upset that he would no longer be getting what he wanted. The point is, the reader doesn't know, and Jane does not know either. She is wholeheartedly putting her trust in someone with questionable motivations. All this for the pursuit of a real love that is lasting. Regardless of Giniver's true intentions, the fact is that Jane did not find the love that she was searching for. She did in fact believe that this love was an illusion, "a sort of pent-up desire to love and to be loved" (Hutchinson 171). The way things 'looked', did not follow the truth. What she now 'knew' was that he was only using her.

The idea that she did not find real love is telling. Going back to the question of if love was an illusion, it appears that Hutchinson's answer is yes. Considering Mary Hutchinson's own life, this is not surprising. In a presumably unhappy marriage herself, Hutchinson begins her long standing affair with Clive Bell. Together, they go to Paris, and are fairly open with their relationship though they are both already married (Beechey). It can be said that she also had this desire for love that she was unable to find with her husband, and instead found it with Clive Bell in Paris. Sabine's commentary on how Paris was the place to find love, would then ring true for Hutchinson as well.

However, there is still the dilemma of Sabine, though in Paris, had yet to find a love that even resembled what Jane spoke of. It appeared to her that she would be able to get that with Jane, which is why she wanted her to come to Paris with her in the first place. As the city of love, Paris holds all the appeal and appearance of a place that will fulfill their desire for a real love. The problem is, it can hold all the appearance of love, and yet still not have it. Just like her relationship with Giniver. Sabine could fall into the same trap of believing that she is in love with Jane. It seems in their desire to find this true love, it is their own imagination that creates it. It is just as Jane asks, "is it a reality or do I spin the whole thing out of my head because I want some form of self-expression?" (Hutchinson).

Hutchinson seems to be saying that often times, we do just create the illusion of love. The idea of love is not real, which is why Giniver believes that they are too civilized to believe in love. Everyone is searching for this idea of what love is, and they only find it when they believe they have found it. It is ultimately all in their head, but that doesn't make it less real. Once the illusion of love leaves, you see things as they really are. Loving someone creates this illusion that everything is better and more wonderful than it really is. Therefore, Jane was right. It was an illusion she created in her head, but that is because she truly believed she was in love. Had Sabine not changed her mind and told her any differently, she would still be believing that she was in love with Giniver, and would just be as happy.

What Hutchinson is trying to say, is that love is something we all desire and are looking for. If we do not find it in our own fulfilling marriage, we will search for it elsewhere. There will always be this desire to love and be loved in return. That is human nature. Love in itself though, is a fickle thing. It is our own concept of love that makes it so. Believing you love someone can

make it real. Jane did perhaps truly love Givner, but it was this idea that she did love him, that made all their experiences together more profound. Once the illusion was disintegrated, she decided, "his manners are extraordinarily bad," just as Sabine had told her (Hutchinson 172). Sabine who had never been in love, had never experienced this illusion. That may have also factored into her telling Jane it was all in her head.

Mary Hutchinson crafts an ambiguous story about the illusions of love. She highlights the desire everyone has to find a love that is real, and not just the appearance of something wonderful. One of the other most common words found in the story was 'love' showing up thirteen times. The concept of love was significant in how it related to appearance and reality which she showed using the words 'know' and 'looked'. Ultimately, "War" is a story that shows the powerful affect the mind has in creating the illusion of love, and how quickly one can overcome it. It shows the complicated nature of knowing when something is real, and when it is not. It also shows that everyone has an innate desire to love and beloved and that is what drives us to the illusion of love.