

STRATEGIC QUEST: *NOT MEETING MR. RIGHT* AND *AVOIDING MR. RIGHT*

Dr. Raju Bollavarapu., Associate Professor of English., Andhra Loyola College, Vijayawada

Although women may have been undervalued in the Australian society; and their concerns pushed to the margins of public attention, women's writing has been important since the time of the gold-rushes. The place of woman has been of substantial interest to both men and women writers. By contrast, the Aboriginal people have been pushed beyond the margins of society. Aboriginal writers have been almost unknown, and Aboriginal writers have appeared in fiction and popular culture mainly as figures of fun or menace.

In the present generation, however, Aborigines have been asserting their right to determine their own condition, and emerged to speak both for and to their own people. If literature is the battlefield of Aboriginal women writers, protest is their weapon and resistance their strategy. Anita Heiss is the most prolific and well-known Aboriginal writer in the contemporary period. Born and bred in Sydney, She is measured to be the first Aboriginal to graduate with Ph.D from the University of Western Sydney. She continues to be an academician, besides being an author, poet, social commentator. She is a member of Wiradjuri nation of central New South Wales. She has an initiation for Indigenous Literary project and was an ambassador for Indigenous literacy day. Among all her novels *Manhattan, Dreaming, Avoiding Mr. Right, Yirra and Her Deadly Dog Demon, who Am I? The Dairy of Mary Talence, Not Meeting Mr. Right* (2007) is the most renowned and popular novel that catapulted her position as the promising potential Aboriginal writer. She has examined the predicament of Aboriginal women's lives confronted with the contemporary culture.

Taking a sudden leap from examining the practical realization of the basic necessities of life in the lives of Aboriginal women, she examines the contemporary cultural issue of an Aboriginal woman finding a better husband from the wretched cultural circumstances. For achieving her purpose she adopts the newly emerging movement of Chick-Lit with a difference. The very formation of Aboriginal identity is seen completely from the perspective of Aboriginal women's experience. The Post-colonial propositions of First world Feminism, Second world Feminism, Third World Feminism and Subaltern Feminism become inapplicable and pave the way for the emergence of Fourth World Feminism. Fourth world Feminism finds its appropriate relevance and resonance in elucidating the theme of *Not Meeting Mr. Right*.

Gearing Up Literary Ethics through Chick-Lit

“Chick” is an American slang term for a young woman and “lit” is a short for “literature.” The phrase “*chick lit*” is analogous to the term *chick flick*. According to professor Suzanne Ferris, chick lit often features hip, stylish, career-driven female protagonists, usually in their twenties and thirties. To define the genre in the most general way, chick lit features a female protagonist whose womanhood is heavily thematized in the plot. Though most often set in a contemporary world, such as in *Waiting to Exhale*, there is also historical chick lit. The issues dealt with are often more serious than consumerism. Marian Keyes's *Watermelon*, for instance, features a protagonist who wrestles with how to be mother in a modern world, and there is a growing protagonist for religious chick lit. As with other types of genre fiction, authors and publishers target many niche markets. Protagonists vary widely in ethnicity, age, social status, marital status, career, and religion edit. Chicklit also moves beyond the idea of Feminism. It didn't accept feminism. It creates the impression that men are not responsible for the downfall of women in social fabric.

But Chick lit throws the impression that women also should held responsible for her doom.

The problem this study addresses is two-fold. First, because the genre is so new, there has not been much serious analytical research done yet. Since *chick lit* is such a well-read and highly-marketed genre, it is easy to see the potential impact it could have on its readers. By literally judging these books *Not Meeting Mr. Right* and *Avoiding Mr. Right* by their pastel covers, many critics are tossing off the latest female voices, some very influential, to a corner of the literary world as fluff. It is important to determine whether this type of fiction is reflective of women today. *Chick lit* may be offering women the opportunity to connect with characters that are truly having the same experiences they are, for better or worse; the light tone of the books may even make it easier to digest the idea that women, like everyone else, are unavoidably swayed by popular culture. If we consider why it is so relatable, especially when critics are tossing it off as irrelevant, we are forced to consider the popular theories of post feminism. The question this research intends to answer is 'How does chick lit portray the notion of post feminism?' Romance literature reflects certain elements such as hunger for romance, cheap thrills, and escape from reality, some are concerned that their popularity indicates “a reactionary return to definitions of women's happiness as realizable only through men” and that they maintain traditional and stereotyped gender roles.

Women are not interested in representing a movement or speaking for women everywhere; they are out to find their own voice and good time. This deviates from feminist discourse focusing on sisterhood and the idea of only engaging in 'good for the cause' social activism. This allows women to reemphasize “lifestyle choices and personal consumer pleasures” (Braithwaite, 2004). Also, by not being confined to spokesperson status, it allows contemporary women the room to explore other avenues that they may not have otherwise considered, particularly being true to their own desires instead of prescribing to others' notions of womanhood.

Women feel unprepared, unequipped, and often pressured to “buy into [the] ideologies [of domestic advice manuals and purchasing household goods and yet] are skeptical about how fitting these models are” to their lives (Smith, 2005, 675). However, these women are not really concerned with the acts of cooking, organizing or decorating, but with the feelings invoked by them. Also, they desire the security and warmth that the notion of home encompasses, but are unsure how to reconcile that with their untraditional life choices. Reactions to women's literature are generally divided into two camps: those who would rather have literature by and about woman to promote feminist thought and to depict, inspiring and strong female characters and those that want it to portray the reality of young women “grappling with modern life” (Manby, 2006.193). The big question is whether or not Chick-Lit actually satisfies either of these desires. To begin contemplating this question, one must understand Chick-Lit's place in the history of women's writing.

The novel *Not Meeting Mr. Right* is a witty chick creative writing in which a well educated and sophisticated feminist heroine is all but native. Heiss' narrative sets up a fashionable motif of a girl who after a long run finds her love. Alice is an indigenous history teacher who stands for truth in Australian education. The heroine is independent and mindful of her position within various social groups. This choice of writing novel is also unique in its absolute assertiveness with English. It is a clear signal for the readers and onlookers to understand the fact that the language which once was a tool of oppression serves as an important role of strengthening the cultural and artistic autonomy of the Indigenous people. *Not Meeting Mr. Right* is not well-knit organic plot in terms of taking serious aboriginal issues. The theme of the novel is not unfurled in a traditional development. It is in black and white with the sole purpose of giving some amusement to the readers of Australian Koori community and promotes nominal aid to Indigenous contemporary society. The central character Alice Aigner initially viewed marriage as a trapping remembering her own hopes and subsequently disappointments that marriage life will bring in. Settling down with husband, kids and so on is surprisingly not on her agenda. She is not like the traditional

woman and therefore preferred to go alone and lonely. But later on, she has developed a cherishing inclination of finding right partner. Having nice husband, kinds and leading family life is her enchanting dream. For this, she adopts a strategy and methodology in promoting and fulfilling her wish. She executes her plan inhabiting the dating culture that prevails in Australia in the contemporary circumstances. The execution of her strategy is explained through various subheadings, while sustaining the ironical stance in the title of the novel.

Alice considers marriage as a fun. She believes initially that marriage fails to provide holistic approach to life. She is pragmatic and close to the reality admits candidly that 'love at first sight' often turns to 'lust at first sight.' It is very much true in the eyes of young men. Despite her professional background as aboriginal history teacher and a practicing aboriginal Roman Catholic, she has her own values that negate with the ideas of marriage and domestic life. She is brought up under idealistic marriage setup. She observes: "We'd always been taught no sex before marriage and kids out of wedlock. Even as times changed, the morals of the church were upheld, at least in the Aigner house. Christian values worked for me is a very general sense do unto others and so on. But I'd had to work out my own beliefs when I left schools and started to live the life, I thought best for me and the world I tried to love by the Aboriginal values system of the past-community benefits over individual gain, cooperation, over competition responsibilities over rights" (26). Sharing the experiences from married women, understanding the mortgaged conditions of motherly classmates she loses faith in the institution of marriage. She resolves not to marry and decides to lead a lonely life. Alice views on marriage system expressed like this: "All married women can talk about is honeymoons, anniversaries, pregnancies, Lamaze classes, sore nipples, breast milk, school fees, nits, mortgage repayments" (26).

Alice Aigner, the vital character of *Not Meeting Mr. Right* is an independent, successful and trouble free person. She develops an unexpected change at her ten-year school reunion. Having understood the need and underlining value in marriage, mortgaged and influenced by her former classmates, she decides to establish the fact that a woman can have it all a man, marriage, career, kids and employment of her own. She decides and sets a goal in her life to meet the perfect man and marry him before her thirtieth birthday, just under two years away. Prior to her decision, she believed in short term relationships. Alice draws ten-point formula with the assistance of her best friends Dannie, Liza and Peta which are quite interesting and fully utopian. Dannie a pragmatic white woman works for the Aboriginal Legal Service underscores Alice line of thinking. She is married to Mr. All Right George and leads contended life. George is gorgeous with no romance. Yet, Dannie and George lead a smooth life with kids. Alice in her inquisitive inquiry finds that Dannie and George share a kind of inseparable amenity. Explaining the intimacy with her husband Dannie says: "I have Mr. All Right . . . there's hardly any more romance. George and I didn't even kiss properly any more unless we are having sex. . . we fall into bed every night exhausted, look at each other and smile, then agree to wait until we have more energy" (28).

Peta who hails from Italian White background is an unmarried woman. She is the prettiest woman of the group. She is good at policy making. She works at Indigenous education and helps Indigenous women to look at their welfare. Liza is another blossom friend of Alice. Coming from Italian culture, she also works in Aboriginal legal service. She is a woman of confidentiality with genuine thirst learning and helping the Aboriginals. In spite of her white background, she has holistic approach towards Aboriginals. She is a committed woman with passion for social justice. She believes in helping the people will make the world a better place to live in.

Being a history teacher, Alice prefers organized implementation of her decision and calls it 'research.' She strongly feels that even single girls will have bridal dreams once in a blue moon. She is of the view women who say they've never thought about a fancy wedding are lying. Alice feels that to inquire about the consequences of wedding is the sign of indignity. With these perceptions, Alice sets to find Mr.

Right with the help of her parents, brothers, colleagues and her neighbours. Unfortunately, this search for finding Mr. Right proves to be complicated and arduous process.

The essential criteria for the selection of Mr. Right are: “1. Must be single and straight. 2. Must think I am the most gorgeous woman on the planet. 3. Must be romantic and able to show affection in public. 4. Must only be addicted to me (no alcoholics, no smokes). 5. Must be non-resultant and non-homophobic. 6. Must be punctual (although I am allowed to be on Koori times). 7. Must be good to be mother and like children. 8. Must love his job (don't want him lingering every night about). 9. Must be debt free (mortgage will be accepted). 10. Must be loyal and hair desirable, compatible star sign a definite plus.”

When all the friends Mickey, Gabrielle, Dannie, Liza, Peta fail to find Mr. Right for Alice, Liza comes with a new proposal. She views that developing strategies with her friends and making use of friendships to set the deadline is an incorrect technique. She comments that finding a husband by thirtieth birthday of Alice is a mistaken plan. The observations of Liza prove to be right and show that Alice is under absorption. Alice realizes the difficulty in finding Mr. Right either from Aboriginal community or white community. She decides not to be carried away by any utopian dreams or expectations.

The next experiment with Tufu proved to be good but eventually fails. Tufu looked perfect and too good to be true. He hails from Coogee region. He was around thirty, single, employed gorgeous and brown. Believing his attitude Alice accepts to date with him. Tufu never had a girlfriend and looked really waiting for Ms. Right. The physical advance in the first meeting makes him disqualified: “He leaned and kissed me. It was swift move and it was all fast, but it was honestly felt perfect” (116). Understanding that Tufu considers her as marriage material, Alice rejects him firmly. Alice experiences the same lustful attitude in the company of Malcom son of her mother's old friend working in the Aboriginal Medical services as a project manager. When they meet at the Koori crafts stall, Malcom makes physical advance to Alice. Alice reacts with disappointment: “I looked up into his black eyes and suddenly knew what love at first sight was or lust at first sight, anyway” (117). In rejecting the relationship with Malcom, Alice brother plays a crucial role. He calls Alice and brings her into the world of consciousness. Having gone through bitter dating experiences, she loses faith on her strategies and decides not to have any dating. But she meets Simon and thinks that he might be her Mr. Right. After putting up date in China town, she concludes that he was not Mr. Right rather Mr. All Wrong.

Finally, Peta comes out with a proposal of making Alice to meet her friend Paul. Paul is black fellow hailing from Aboriginal community. He is gorgeous and well settled in life as an engineer. Posing as a sound perfect partner to Alice, he invites Alice to dinner. Dinner invitations are serious for dating people. A date on Friday is really serious than dinner on a Tuesday or Wednesday. On the proposed date, Alice and Paul move very close and experience sex. Alice finds Paul the most apt person while compared to previous men whom she comes across. When he says that he wanted some time to think about marriage, Alice experiences total disappointment. Recollecting old customary mantra 'Try anything twice,' Alice refuses to give up and tries to check her luck with another man called Jack. Jack was a philanthropist from Sydney, living in Bronte. Alice makes sex with Jack and considers her potential for holiday romance. But as she finds the relationship slipping out of her control, she breaks this relationship too.

Towards the end of the novel all her dating experiences, research results and strategies turn to be futile. She loses faith in men. She just has to wonder as to why it is not possible to find Mr. Perfect without sex before marriage. She observes specimens of her experience to be dissected, studied and analyses them in an effort to understand them. All she wanted to know was: 'Why they made it so damned hard to like them, love them, be with them or marry them why it was so hard to find one worthy to be called Mr. Right’ (330).

The novel presents lots of social commentary, brilliant satire, heaps of black and white politics and revisionist history. The novel has vivacity and presents a pleasing language. Heiss observes: “I have

written and published about politics of identity, the stolen generations and indigenous issues generally. But I also want to write with humour and make people laugh. And sometimes, I just want to lie on the beach, read, and smile, so I write a book the chuckle and nod in agreement over how hard it can be to meet a decent man!” (341). Many critics have observed that the entire novel is based on concepts: 'love' 'sex' 'marriage' and 'morality.' But at the same time the novel poses many questions related to human values. The novel conveys the view that the society will have to evolve a code of conduct to be followed by itself in a given set of circumstances, basing on the relative principle of morality.

Sex is natural in all living beings and species. Of all the living beings, humans possess an intelligence of their own. Because of this distinguishing quality only human beings have to uphold restraint in the matters of sexual relationships. Humans have to keep the natural instincts and impulses under control. Any society has to subscribe to these idealistic functioning under any circumstances without exemption. Alice who is presented morally good in the beginning of the novel looked as if she has compromised with the ethical standards involved in 'sex' and 'marriage.' The society disapproves the theft of a hungry man and punishes him as the theft is socially wrong. Similarly, humans starving from sexual desires will be prevented by the society if they indulge in free sexual relations. As long as man or woman lives in the society and depends on the familial and friendly relations he or she cannot enjoy absolute freedom in any sphere of life including the sphere of sex. The social and cultural set up that exists and continues to prevail make the moralists to question 'Should Sex be restrained'? Anita Heiss conveys as long as enjoyment of sex by an individual is harmful, it has to be kept under surveillance and in restraint. This misconception prevails in all the regions across Australia. But the primary concern of Heiss is to provide pleasure to her readers through this novel and experiences alienation from the traditional practice of writing fiction in Australia: “Was sex with oneself not only the safest form of sex in the twenty first century, but something that was now considered an after-dinner activity? Was it the male equivalent of woman telling me she had sore nipples? She is probably just adjusting himself, I thought, Yes that was it” (340).

Every individual thinks that sex is an aspect related to another individual. In what way others get affected by these acts. But this is not as simple as people feel. If it were so, nobody would find fault, much less the society. Unfortunately, sexual actions have wider ramifications. Suppose a man has sexual intercourse with woman and the woman conceives and the man denies his sexual intercourse with woman and the woman conceives and the man denies his sexual intimacy with her or in the case of sexual intimacy, woman conceives and man disowns his parentage. Or in another case if a young man refuses to marry a young woman after sexual intimacy, what should the woman do in those circumstances? When the society fails to prevent the unwanted sexual relations, the host of vexing problems will breed issues like 'self-identity,' 'alienation,' 'insecure feeling' 'the failure of matrimonial relations' etc. Australian culture and other culture across the world are subjected to such kind of problems. The novel *Not Meeting Mr. Right* examines these aspects as its theme. The theme of the novel is interwoven with various issues. As an answer to the cultural breakdown in Australia, the novel draws our attention to the ethical values of sex and marriage almost on the scale of action-packed novel through Chicklist form.

Avoiding Mr. Right

Chronologically *Avoiding Mr. Right* is the first novel. The very idea and attempt of Alice to search for perfect match and man originates in *Avoiding Mr. Right* and inflates into practical realization in *Not Meeting Mr. Right*. The novel explores the alternative perspective of Peta in marrying Mr. Right. When Mr. Right a man with all bright ideas and materialistic interest comes forward to marry Peta, she gives importance to settle down. Coming from Italian background with Aboriginal culture, she explains how she avoids Mr. Right in spite of his readiness to marry. The novel introduces the same four female friends of *Not Meeting Mr. Right* Peta, Dannie, Liza and Alice. Alice Aigner as the main character of the novel makes a long journey to meet her cherished dream with the help of her three friends. Peta the main protagonist of

the novel comes out with a new slogan in this novel. Dedicating herself to work on committed issues throughout her career; she likes to lead life with shopping and heavy boozing.

The theme of the novel *Avoiding Mr. Right* is simple. Unlike Alice in *Not Meeting Mr. Right*, Peta does not have to desperately search for Mr. Right. James is always ready to strike and respond to the undying relationship with her. He is a lovely bloke, caring, wonderful, funny and sexy. He is kind, generous, mature, sensible, patient and even romantic. He is considered as great and perfect match to her life mate. James loves Peta sincerely and is possessive about Peta. His love, concern and possessive nature for Peta make her unhealthy and inconvenience. James sincerely decides to marry Peta and settle in life with children very soon. Peta is in complete contradiction to James character. Her primary concern is not to settle down with marriage without forming a niche of her own. For her, career is important and she is deeply involved in autonomous thinking. Along with James, she turns to interview seeking a potential husband. Finding a potential and fitting husband is an adventurous task yet Peta is not willing to sacrifice her career to become a mother for kids. To her marriage is secondary. Her primary concern is to sort out her life and then share her life with others. She is obsessed in carving a beautiful career but reserves her opinion in avoiding Mr. Right. Her dream is to work in Melbourne which is considered as the centre for encouraging and breeding free culture. She worries that if she does not take her career, she will be missing her career boat. She is more concerned with her own life than standing up to sexism in the name of finding Mr. Right. Battling with the idea of marriage, she still likes to maintain hale and hearty relationship with James. But James with a serious perspective in life wants to marry, beget children and settle in life by thirty-five. Peta loves him, desires his friendship but dislikes marriage. For her accepting a job in Melbourne is more important to her than marriage. For her the professional satisfaction is much concern than the personal satisfaction that comes through marriage. With this kind of perception, she doubts the viewpoint of James and presents her views before all her friends. She explains how stubborn she is in taking decisions and implementing them. She establishes that in the short span of time she wanted to set up the team and oversee the introduction of some new systems. She wishes to formulate new policies and implement ground breaking cultural projects and programs. She works on genuine local issues. Wishing to stay away from the local Black politics and identifying the segregation of blacks and whites, she decides to address the ground realities in the lives of Aborigines. She is unable to digest the reasons as to why her mother married thrice and divorced thrice. She is frightened that she will be like her. Therefore, she decides to avoid Mr. Right ready for marriage and prepares to accept one year contract in Melbourne: "I had finally worked it out; my best relationship to date been with my job, not men" (3). Post-colonial feminist criticism and its limitations in circumscribing the women who continue to suffer from Aboriginality as a colonial weapon. So, these two novels of Anita Heiss that carry the issues of Aboriginality, the survival of Aboriginal women, Dating and Surfing cultures, lesbian and gay relationships and the failure of white culture in accommodating the Aborigines can only be deciphered from the perspective of Fourth World Feminist literary criticism.

References:

1. McCarthy, Greg. "Australian Cinema and the Specters of Post-Coloniality: *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, *Australian Rules*, *The Tracker* and *Beneath Clouds*." London Papers in Australian Studies, 2004.
2. McGregor, Russel. *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory*, Melbourne. Magabala Books, 2001.
3. Anita Heiss, *Not Meeting Mr. Right*, Prestige Publications.
4. Anita Heiss, *Avoiding Mr. Right*, Prestige Publications.