

Theme: Loss of Morality

A Handful of Dust, written by Evelyn Waugh, discusses one of the main consequences of World War I which is the loss of morality. The novel depicts the changes that took place in the English society in the period between the Two World Wars. The emptiness and hollowness of people's minds reflects the way they behave. People accept Brenda's affair naturally as if it is not something strange. Everybody is interested in this affair. No one seems to be bothered by the fact that Beaver belongs to a lower class and Brenda is a married lady. They even think that Tony is the only one who is responsible for this relationship because he has become a great bone.

Keeping up the appearance is the one of the most important things that people care about. Traditions, principles and morals have no place in their lives. All the elements of Victorian traditions are disintegrating. The loss of morality and loose behaviour seem to replace the Victorian traditions and morals.

Brat is also considered to be a symbol of the loose behaviour. The members of this club are themselves symbols of the noticeable changes that take place in the society. Those members show the lack of manly and gentlemanly qualities at that period of time. This is another indication to show that there is a drift away from the Victorian traditions. Hence, the novel focuses on these changes by exposing and dealing with the personal lives of the members of this changing and disintegrating civilization.

Mrs. Beaver appears as a practical saleswoman. She is so materialistic that she cares about nothing except money and business. She only knows people who owe her money. When she has nothing to do, she starts gossiping about people and their personal lives and affairs. She even encourages John Beaver, her son, to have an affair with Brenda. She thinks that Brenda may help him in his life and offers him all the money that he wants. This shows that Mrs. Beaver does not have any morals and principles in her life.

John Beaver, who appears to be nice, is in reality a parasite and good for nothing. He lives on other people's expense. He has nothing to do in his life except waiting by the phone for someone to ask him for dinner. Beaver knows that nobody likes him, however, he does not seem to care about that as long as he is asked to go for a party or a dinner. Beaver is the only one who is responsible for turning Tony's life upside down. Beaver will have an affair with Brenda which makes her hate her husband and asks for divorce. Though Beaver knows that Brenda is a married woman, he agrees to have an affair with her when his mother asks him to do so. After getting bored and after Brenda loses her money, Beaver leaves her and goes to the United States with his mother. He has left

Brenda because she has not got enough money to support him after her separation from Tony. This proves that Beaver lacks all kinds of manly and gentlemanly qualities.

Jock Grant-Menzies is Tony's friend. He is realistic and he knows quite well what is going on around him. Unlike Tony, Jock is not living in the past and he is living his time. Jock knows all about Brenda's love affair, but he does not tell Tony and does not do anything about it either. Despite knowing everything about Brenda's life and her affair, he agrees to marry her. This shows that he does not care about morals, traditions and principles.

Brenda also plays an important role in emphasising the main theme. She betrays her husband only for the sake of fun. She is not interested in anything that is old fashioned. When she goes to London to visit John Beaver, she will have an affair with him. She will even buy a flat in London in order to be close to him. This affair makes her ask Tony for divorce. When Tony refuses to give her divorce, she sends him Jenny Abd AlAkbar in order to have an affair with him so that Brenda can get her divorce easily. Her lack of morality also appears in her reaction when she knows about John Andrew's death. When she knows about her son's death, she feels happy and even says "Thank God". She has first thought that it is John Beaver who has died and not John Andrew. She feels relieved when she knows that John Beaver is not dead as she has got confused between the two names.

On the other hand and unlike all of the others, Tony Last still cares about dignity, morals and traditions. His name is quite symbolic. He is the last one to believe in old morals and old traditions. He still belongs to a world that no longer exists. He seems to be unaware of the changes that are taking place around him. Tony loves Hetton. To him it is symbolic of a certain tradition that he loves and believes in. he does not see it as horrible and ugly as everybody else does. On the contrary, he loves it and enjoys its beauty. Tony is a real gentleman and a respectable person. He feels guilty because of getting drunk and annoying Brenda. He does not see Brenda's faults. He is only aware of the fact that he has not behaved like a gentleman.

Furthermore, the way Tony behaves at John's death reveals how much he is a gentleman. He controls himself despite his grief. The most important thing to him is how to inform Brenda and how she will take the news. He does not want to upset her. He is thinking of others while no body is thinking of him. Tony is the only one who does not know about Brenda's love affair with Beaver. When he knows about this affair, he does not want to believe it. In spite of Brenda's confession, Tony needs time to understand the truth. He refuses to see the reality. He realizes that he has been living in illusions. He cannot easily forget or

get rid of the habit of loving and trusting Brenda. Then Tony goes in search of a city. He has lost his own world with all it stands for. A whole tradition has fallen apart. Suddenly, he opens his eyes to the ugliness of the world around him; the world that lacks morals, principles and glamour.