

## A ROMANTIC JOURNEY INTO EROTIC LOVE

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“Desire shakes me once again  
Here is the melting of my limbs,  
It’s a creeping thing, and its bittersweet  
I can do nothing to resist”

- (Sappho)

The Western philosophy on love as a trope has focussed on a two-dimensional approach one having a positive one where love is found to be elevating, sublime and transcendental whereas the other approach has brought into light its darker side by associating it with all kinds of negative emotions such as pain, melancholy and destitution. Love in the Western Philosophy is a manifestation, that however positive or negative in impact, can be broadly classified into Eros, Philia, Storge and Agape love. Romance or romantic love that has been a trend and a common thread for literature of the western canon, can be considered an amalgamation of the various kinds of love manifestation in differing permutations and combinations. Love is the most popular trope for not only the European literature but in the literary canons of the entire human inscribed existence. However, with the advent of consumerism the romance had achieved a setback and the heightened emphasis of human individualism, feminism and self-dependance, romantic love has achieved newer dynamics amongst lovers and in popular cultural expression such as literature. This article will explore the various manifestation of love evident in Janice Pariat’s *The Nine Chambered Heart*(2017).

**Keywords:** romantic love, eros, philia, storge and agape

In the contemporary cultural expressions and enactments, love has been explored as trope of utmost relevance. Its inevitability and scope amongst consumers has been well established as result the consumers are always provided with entertainment according to their desire. The endless description of pain and ecstasy of love as it is found, challenged, lost, denied, thwarted, only to flare up again, carrying it all before, or else destroying the lovers in a conflagration of desire (Carey, 1969) is the subject of interest for all age groups. According to romantic clichés, love is blind, love overwhelms, a life without love is not worth living, marriage should be for love alone, and anything less is worthless and a sham. Amongst all manifestations the depiction of romantic love has been a profound experience for consumers of all kinds. Romantic love cannot be bought and sold, love cannot be calculated, it is mysterious, true and deep, spontaneous and compelling, it can strike anyone--even most hardened cynic can be paid low by Cupid. However, love has been found in many other combinations amongst lovers and admirer and admired, such as erotic love, philia, storge and agape. This paper will analyse these modes love and affection in Janice Pariat's fictional tale, *The Nine Chambered Heart* (2017).

*The Nine chambered Heart* (2017) is a fictional tale with nine chapters where nine different narrators explore their love for a single girl in times unknown and places unnamed. The same girl who is the love interest for all these nine lovers also remains unnamed throughout the text. The unnamed protagonist, however has been extrapolated in all possibilities by these nine lovers who have lead a part of their life with her and have lost a bit of themselves in losing her. The girl is visualized through these nine lovers who have existed in unknown cities and country's and in times unknown. This brilliant tale which is in the form of nine chapters, each chapter dedicated to the separate lover-narrator is titled after the predominant quality of the lover for example the first chapter is named 'The Saint' referring to the teacher-lover of the girl who was her art teacher in primary school, similarly one of the chapters is named The Butcher after the insensitivity of her second lover and the other lovers are termed as the caretaker, the undertaker, the professor, the florist, the crusader, the lighthouse keeper and finally The Sailor. The beauty of the text lies in the anticipation that whether she is any bit true to any of her narrator-lover, had she ever loved all of these, some of these people or none of these people ever. The unnamed protagonist through the chapters had taken spatial turns to explore herself, with each chapter she grows and through each love-encounter. The unnamed protagonist is on the go and never desires to settle at one place. Her cross-cultural movement into 'the city without a river' to 'a city with a river' and 'to city without a river to sea' provides a glimpse of the trans-cultural spirit that she carried within her. These lovers meet her at different times and experience a different kind of bond with her, some relationships grow into beautiful romantic adventure, some never grow beyond innocent affection, some are time-bound an end without shock or surprise whereas the ones expected to be bonds for a lifetime receive and abrupt ending. Some relationships had all kinds happiness within it, others had numerous instances of pain and heartbreak, some were a combination of the first two. Some relations were lingered for they could not be broken away with and other continued for the sake of sensual pleasure only. Love in its many manifestations and many clours, touched these narrators and altered them for better and worse.

The first narrator named The Saint finds his love for this unnamed girl at a time when she was twelve years of age and he was her art teacher. This human attraction for another is in no way projected in the evil demeanour of pedophilia i.e., sexual desire of an adult for a child. This affection for the child is depicted in the most innocent form as the lover in no way attempts to force his power as a teacher neither does enforce his love on her. The teacher himself is seen to

be dwelling in confusion and in awe of his feelings and attraction for the girl. This lover also names his affection for the girl as the love of a parent. The love of a parent is not all rosy dreams but has various manifestation and expressions and can be comprehended in the words of the teacher as “I have tried it all: threat, coercion, indifference, patience”(Pariat, 06).

This kind of a love can be termed as storge, where the lover is compelled to feel parent like for their beloved. The teacher-Saint in his love-sick adventures never forgets to shower innocent and kind affection to the girl and that is why he is at times loving beyond comprehension and at times reprimands as per situation. This leads to the gap in their understanding or in other words the age gap necessitated a gap in their understanding and perspective as well. The love of a parent and child is considered next to the love of God for its innocence and purity. This relationship between the teacher and the student even though depicted in the desire of a lover for his beloved, yet it could not refrain from expressing the character of agape love, which stands very distinct from romantic love and is considered sublime and the most purest of love kinds due to its selfless nature.

The emotions of the girl(the unnamed protagonist) is not depicted in the text, however the teacher seems to be intermingling his role in his various kind of love that he feels for his student. There is the chiding of lovers, “you are twelve, and you loathe me”(Pariat 03). In spite of the innocent content of the love, the chiding of lovers is evident in their relationship. Then there was the tantrums of the upset beloved describes as “Instead, it was a simmering, furtive mutiny. You did the barest minimum of work. Spending most of class time staring listlessly, excusing yourself to use the loo and not returning until just before the bell”(Pariat 04). And at other times the relationship between a stubborn child and his parent, “From now on, you refuse to pick up a brush. Even on threat of punishment and failure. You are the most stubborn child I know, and make me long for the days of corporal punishment”(Pariat 05). And there are other times when the relationship turns into the bond of a loving parent and child, “you show me test papers and essays, work you have been merited on. I praise you like a parent”(Pariat, 07). The girl outgrows her school days and so does the days where her teacher was her subject of attention and she his. The unnamed protagonist is the universal symbol of love where she is and can be loved by people of any nation or city at any age by admirers of any age. Her art teacher defines his love for her as a love of a parent, having in depth emotions for her and extreme sympathy for her life without the care and concern of her own parents. The teacher, who is mature and sensible when he met the girl ,always knew he could only provide care and concern for her and bring out the best out of her. His fatherly emotions and concern for the well-being of the girl overpowers his attraction for the girl. His love story never reaches the stage of confession for he does admit in the tale his anguish, anxiety and restless with the absence of the girl, nevertheless his protocols of a being a teacher refrain him from pursuing her in any way.

The Caretaker, the third lover-narrator who too is way older than the protagonist, feels fatherly emotions for the girl in spite of his burning sensual desire for her. “You are young enough to be my daughter and it doesn’t bother me, as much as it makes me sometimes feel fatherly towards you. Its strange, a daughter who is also a lover, a lover who is also a daughter”(Pariat, 57). The Caretaker happens to be a married man who could not break away from his terrible marital bond as he confesses not having enough courage to end things. His meeting with the protagonist does not turn into instant love but over time they accept feelings for one another. He leads a separate life with her in his apartment that he allows her to make her own home along with her cats, meanwhile staying in marriage with his wife and in love with the girl. His love for her may be storge at times, but is overpoweringly sensual in nature which can

also be termed as erotic love. The basis of their association was hedonistic pleasure of the body which soon turns into affection for her. Love for sensual love is the most preferred kind of association amongst the lovers of the contemporary age of consumerism, where relationships are continued as long as they benefitted both. These relationships whose primary objective is pleasure could be terminated with mutual consent without any guilt or remorse.

Philosophers on love have claimed of the dual tone of love that is beyond or without marriage even though the conditions and claims of marriage are of varying degrees. The journey of love experienced by the unnamed protagonist ranges from romantic love to sexual desire to agape affection nevertheless the sexual desire is the predominant engagement Schopenhauer believed that sexual desire “appears on the whole as a malevolent demon, striving to pervert, to confuse, and to overthrow everything”. Jean Paul Satre also vehemently criticised the sexual desire in his own words with a Freudian impact when he says it is, ‘desire of itself doomed to failure’.

Hedonistic pleasure is primary objective in the majority of relationships that the girl shares with these lovers and admirers of her, where pleasure was the goal and pain was increasingly an acceptable part of experiences of romantic love. “You are half my age, may be younger, but I see you, I want you. I have felt this before, this kind of want. Its raw and easy and instantly recognizable, like hunger and uncomplicated , mouth to gut”(Pariat, 05), declares the lover named The Caretaker, who was way older than the protagonist. The desire brings them together but a romantic love keeps them lingering the relationship. This married man, who could not leave his unhappy marriage, believed that however painful a relationship, he was not the one to leave, “I am not the kind of person to leave”(Pariat 61). The caretaker was always aware of the transitory nature of the relationship however he wanted to linger the pleasure that had not only revived his sexual life but had also deemed him happy, “”.. Because I know, no matter how much I pretend, this will not, cannot, last. How could it?Me, old and attached, and you, as you are. You hold so much power in the palm of your hand. To walk away from this whenever you wish to. While I watch the bubble, and try so hard, on prayer alone, to keep it afloat(Pariat 57). The characters in the text, *The Nine Chambered Heart* indulge in a love that emphasises on the pleasure principle as the primary goal thereby accepting heartbreaks and melancholy as an inevitable part of it only with the exception of The Sanit. “I LOVE YOU. I almost hit you. You are lodged in a corner, screaming at me, and I raise my hand. I can see your eyes widen, with your mouth round into a silent as the words die in your throat from surprise. And fear(Pariat, 23). The encounter with the Butcher is one such engagement which carried pain and pleasure in equal degree even when they reconcile after a while and try to find the love that was once there but fail inconsolably. Their initial breakup after many painful encounters was immediately forgotten when the got back again and found the commonness of desire for one another. All this while inspite of all the efforts the pain and remorse came back and even the amazing sexual life that they shared could not keep them together. “I am the most disgusting thing in the world. I’m back to that. To feeling I am never good enough for you. That the differences between us are unsurmountable, and not just when it comes to movies or vacations or whatever. And somehow I am placed lower in this hierarchy, always(Pariat 114).

Love for some of these admirers is a disappointment as they could not, for various reasons, keep the relationship from dying a sudden yet often anticipated death nor could they stop the girl from leaving. She had arrived to leave all these men who felt that they were her true and only love in her lifetime. The Florist, however believed otherwise when the girl had found in him a love to last a lifetime. The chapter begins, “ How do I tell you this is not love? It isn’t and

cannot be”(Pariat 119). The protagonist meets this origami artist in one of her assignments and her solo travel to a foreign land. They travel together and provide one another with happiness and excitement, their journeys onsets a romantic and adventure ride for both of them, nevertheless always aware that she will be leaving soon. However, that does not deter them from sharing close sensual relationship. The lover who has fallen in love with the girl highlights the love in the eyes of the girl and about his own love he felt he was providing her with the love that she longed for, “Somewhere in you, I sense, like in all of us, a deep , aching need for love(Pariat 136). The love of the Florist however was afraid of making bonds due to his disturbed childhood, “ There is something in your eyes that terrifies me. You think this is love. I think it is too. But I know its short-lived. And you , I fear, don’t”(Pariat 133). The restlessness of the protagonist is implicated from her constant desire to leave one place for another. Her admirers are filled with desire and hope even though they are sure of the end, “ I know there is no future with you. That we have met, and we will part. This is only here and now, no matter how far our intimacy seems to extend into future...That is the terrible thing I see in you eyes. Hope”(Pariat 137).

The desire for love continues for the protagonist and she grows through few more such relationships and even a failed and abandoned marriage. This tale of her, titled, *The Nine Chambered Heart*, does mention the love felt by nine of the admirers who fell for this unnamed beauty

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