

PORTRAYAL OF LOVE IN LITERATURE

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Which is the most quoted quote in literature? The quote “I love you.” Whenever one comes across these words in a book it brings along with it a tender moment and a warm feeling, endearing the book or making it more special. This is the language of love. Love is the most powerful feeling and most sought after from birth to death till man completes his journey of life on earth. The subject matter of love has been quoted and repeated in the History of literature. Love is a fascinating theme in literature. It is not like other subjects, it may have its ups and downs and various unusual endings. Love has sustained through all ages and times but yet, has an unparalleled ability that stays constant even as it meanders through different centuries. Love is also reflected in other themes in literature such as hatred, sadness, violence, jealousy etc.

The origin of love could be traced in Greek mythology; they perfected the idea that the world was a place of contradictions and conflicts. Myths on love broadened the human mind to endure the contradiction of two fusing emotions, love and hate. Love has been found in the outset of literature especially in the Greek myths. Ares, the God of war and the Goddess of love, Aphrodite had an affair and out of their union came three children named, Eros (Life), Harmonia (Peace) and Anteros (Passion). From the Greek mythology one learns like Ares and Aphrodite one needs to turn to love in place of hate to achieve inner tranquility and to hold on to our passion in the pursuit of life. (Goldberg, 55)

In the West, the old scholars like Socrates and Plato also evaluated love. Plato was a disciple of Socrates and he wrote *The Symposium* one of the earliest manuscripts of love. Socrates gave his opinion on love in this book. He explained, love as a vastly influential notion which was characterized by a chain of elevations, in which animalistic yearning or base lust was replaced by a more intellectual notion of love. Further, he added it may be somewhat understood as a theological experience that rises above sensual magnetism and reciprocity. Later Plato's student, Aristotle elaborated on the theory of love and explained it as ‘two bodies and one soul.’ He further explained, the best character may produce the best kind of friendship and consequently love. A real friend is someone who loves another person, for the sake of the other without wanting anything in return except his goodwill in reciprocity. (Goldberg, 56)

The transition of love from the Greeks to the Chaucerian period is an interesting one. During the Middle Ages romance was combined with courtly love and a show of chivalry. The beginning of “Courtly Love” was supposed to have started in Aquitaine in France in the 12th century and extended to other countries in Europe. In the English court from the 13th century to the 15th century, people engaged in courtly love which had little to do with love. Marriages were arranged and brought material advantages to family involved. As love was clearly not linked to marriage it could be attained outside, so long as the rules to chastity and fidelity were respected. The “courtly love” relationship was shaped on the feudal relationship linking a knight and his

feudal lord. The knight attended to his courtly lady with the equal obedience and devotion which he reposed to his lordship. She was in total command of the love relationship, while he was obliged to her, showed respect and submission. The lady fanned the knight's aspirations for great deeds and he acted accordingly in order to be worthy of her love.

C.S Lewis believes that by the time "courtly love" reached England it had a set of rules. In those days people lived by those rules is not known but it was operative in literature of that time. It is evident in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, *Troilus and Criseyde*, and the *Legend of Good Women*. (Cawsey, 43)

The advent of 16th century brought with it the Shakespearean drama. It is also referred to as the "Elizabethan Age". The brilliance of the age was marking the advent of love in various forms. It was a befitting tribute to the coming centuries. Love was a consistent theme. Love augmented self worth; it rendered the basis for secure and lasting marriage. It formed the virtue of faithfulness and trust which were the foundations of respectable society. (Durst, 181)

Shakespeare was a believer of portraying the magnificence of true love culminating in marriage. He depicted in *The Tempest*, the romantic and beautiful love story of Miranda and Ferdinand. Shakespeare wrote of the tradition of unbreakable friendship that transcended all other considerations which was depicted in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. The central theme of *Othello* spun around a range of emotions; love, jealousy, fidelity and pride. The tragedy of young lover could be experienced in *Romeo and Juliet*. William Shakespeare used love from the context of every angle.

The literature of the 17th century expressed certain dissatisfaction with the lavishness, romance, passion and fervor of the Elizabethan Age. In a broad sense this was a period of melancholy tempered with a sense of disquiet corresponding to the political scenario of the era. A transformed image of man appeared on the lines of an ideal man whose chief virtues apprised of honor, wit, refined manners, articulate speech, spiritual and platonic feelings towards love, intellectual interest, appreciation of the art and the skill to write poetry. The 17th century also brought with it the metaphysical poets who tried to comprehend life's complexities and vastness and shades of love. Some of the poets of this century are John Donne, Ben Johnson, George Herbert, John Milton, etc. (Evans, 179-180)

John Donne ennobled love and immortalized the union of man and woman by heightening it to a spiritual experience. According to him, love was like birth that was miraculous. His poems *The Canonization*, *A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning* and *The Relique* symbolized love to veneration. (Guibbory, 143)

The Bible has been one of chief inspirations for writers and artists describing different aspect of love, platonic, spiritual and even sexual. John Milton in *Paradise Lost* described romantic love of Adam and Eve as mortal beings and illustrates mankind's process of redemption. George Herbert's poem, 'The Search' revealed the defective nature of love relationship between human beings and the divine.

The 18th and the early 19th centuries were marked as a period of Romanticism. It was characterized by a profound effect of European themes and subject, featuring the melancholy, sadness and despair, much related to unobtainable love. The metamorphosis of love could be witnessed as different poets used it in their themes.

William Blake explored the themes of love and the human spirit. In his poem, *Never Seek to Tell Thy Love*, he cautioned against admitting the secret's of the heart or confessing love, as it is an angelic emotion that might flutter away in the wind. (Yeatman, Charles Barbour, et al, 185). In a rather contradicting way, he reflected love as giving and self sacrificing while on the other it

could become selfish and vain, a painful entrapment that had to be endured. In the poem *The Clod and the Pebble*, the distorted form of love can be inferred.

“Love seeketh only self to please,
To bind another to its delight,
Joys in another’s loss of ease,
And builds a hell in heaven’s despite.”

Wordsworth was a lover of nature and worshiped it. He believed the divine spirit pervaded in it. The companionship of nature provided delight to the human heart, acted as a healing force and a great moral preacher. His poetry focused on the necessity of willingness and commitment to experience a sense of love of life in all its manifested form. (Gravil, 66)

Coleridge, another poet of that time spoke of intense love possessing all things. He wrote,

“Sympathy constitutes friendship; but in love
there is a sort of antipathy, or opposing passion.

Each strives to be the other, and both together make up one whole”

Shelley outlined the secret of love in morals, an identification of self with the beautiful that existed in thought, action or person. According to Shelley; it was not passion which brought people together but something more. It changed the character of an individual, transformed coward to brave men, mean to nobility, cruel to merciful. Therefore, love became a political ideology to change people for reconstruction of a society bordering on universal love. Shelly’s notion of love lay in the spirit of his radical views on social justice and political liberty. (Shelley, 82-88)

Keats expressed love of sensuousness and sensation. In all of Keats poetry, love and honor were reflected. Keats’s form of love is the essence with which romantic legends were made off. It had traces and measures of despondency. It seemed as if Keats was seeking to give the world a key message through his poem, *Bright Star*, on eternal love and the everlasting bond of two lovers. Hence Keats staked his claim as a romantic idealist of love and thought. (Keats, 365)

Another novelist, Jane Austen, in her books conceived love as an emotional strength having a personal appeal and genuineness which has an intoxicating sense of liberation. It was a process of realizing one’s own independent identity which had the capability of bringing happiness. All Jane Austen’s female protagonists had the elements of love in them. She had the ability to study the woman’s soul and to depict it just the way it was. For instance, love could last only if one had more than just keenness, more than an appealing voice, more than a charming face, more than having those fleeting meetings, but something which one could hold on to. (Kantor, 262-63)

Walter Scott also left his mark in this period. He identified love with the intense spirit of patriotism and the importance of love of one’s land. Scott reasoned, all the wealth and personal titles one attained in life was unparalleled to the triumph of acquiring an identity in one’s nation or homeland. He believed it was wretched for a man to lack patriotism. It was his love for his own country that inspired his writing. (Baxter, 353)

The beginning of the 20th century ascertained some new definitions to love. It was a start of modernist period in literature, there was disillusionment with the World Wars which was reflected in the literary works. As the society was changing, writers were pushed to depict life in its splendor and also in its ugliness. Love was accepted, recognized, demonstrated, and explored whether it was sexual, non-sexual, filial or divine. It was more on the lines of experimentation. As the social conditions were changing so were the expectations of people in the 20th century.

(Evans, 375) People were more idealistic in the matter of love than ever, in the relationships, their ideas and the nature of love. Men and women wanted more in their love relationship. It was evident in the works of that time. Couples were looking for soul mates, who could share emotional bonding; sexual satisfaction and experience bliss. Some of the prominent writers of that period were W. B. Yeats, Seamus Heaney, Dylan Thomas, Sean O'Casey, John Millington Synge, James Joyce, W. H. Auden, Virginia Woolf, and Wilfred Owen.

Love for William Butler Yeats was a great inspiration; he believed real love was neither perfect nor absolute. Yeats' essence of pure love included something more than pleasant feelings; it was a little gloomy, a bit mysterious and maybe somewhat negative also. Love constantly evoked some kind of transformation within us whenever one permitted it to influence it and take charge. One had to involuntarily go through some sort of change, be it a change of behavior, a modification of perception or adjustment of things or to persons close to us. Love was an inexplicable force that should not be devaluated or underestimated. (Hinterholzer, 7)

D. H. Lawrence, W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot composed poems on the subject of love. They were reckoned the modernist in their approach and expression. They exemplified how love was blended with a sense of frustration and fear. (Pereira, 2)

D.H Lawrence wrote,

“Love is never a fulfillment. Life is never a thing of continuous bliss.

There is no paradise. Fight and laugh and feel bitter and feel bliss:

And fight again. Fight, fight. That is life.”

In the end of the 20th century, an American writer, poet and art critic Frank O'Hara blurred the lines between love and friendship by expressing homosexual love in a new way in his writings, living fairly openly as a homosexual while it was legally and morally prohibited. People were asseverating same gender desires and expressing it too in literature.

Katherine Mansfield is a writer from New Zealand who writes modern short story reveals the struggle of women to attain true equality in intimate and love relationship. She exemplifies the independence of new women of today in personal, sexual, economic issues and her efforts to strive to keep up in marriage. She gave a new aspect to a relationship in the present time where friendship became as important as marriage in the love story which featured her spouse and her lifelong friend. (Priest,7)

The ultimate apotheosis of love is entirely overwhelming in the 21st century. It has colors of all shades. One perceives high ideals of love depicted in novels, soap operas, movies and songs. Yet on the other hand one seems to accept that eternal love may not last but it is powerful for the moment. It reveals to us the complexity that underlines the love relationship in the 21st century. As love is sought to find soul mates, at times experiencing infidelity, rising divorce, married more than once, falling in love with people of the same sex, resisting reconciling to personal liberty, meeting requirements of self, spouse and children, and inconsistency of a love relationship.

Kingsley Amis in *Lucky Jim* depicted the contradictory values that per fused English culture during 1950's. Love and romantic optimism were of immense value in Amis's world. Amis searched diverse manifestations of love and sex in *Take a Girl Like You* and *The Evans Country* in order to shape his artistic predilection for ambiguity and realism. In the majority of his novels the repeated message was constantly, hope surfaces from love. (Shaffer, 11)

Another 21st century writers, Graham Greene depicted love as roving the world without focus by an assorted and uncertain entourage of emotions. Love is depicted as a moving force

beyond the process of normal social constraints. It is an endeavor to visualize love as existing past the commands of physical and biological constraints. (Baldrige, 104)

Yet the writers of the present time have conveyed the beauty, the worth and the overpowering importance of love in a relationship time and time again. As love traces all the ages of human thoughts and its history one sees it in various forms, be it attachment, appreciation, moral qualities, goodness in character or elevating emotions. Nothing at all could be more dominant, more significant or more inspiring to influence the writer's lives. Love is what the writers convey, what urges them and inspires, motivates and sustains them. Writers invariably muse over to expand the boundaries of what love is, as it could be and what they perceive it as. It makes their work ethereal, poignant and practical, heart rendering, truthful, intellectual and intense. Love is reflected in literature in every aspect of life, personal, religious, scientific, political, and cultural or in domestic relations heightening the works of the time.

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